

The Rebellious Slave 1: Rowan's Key

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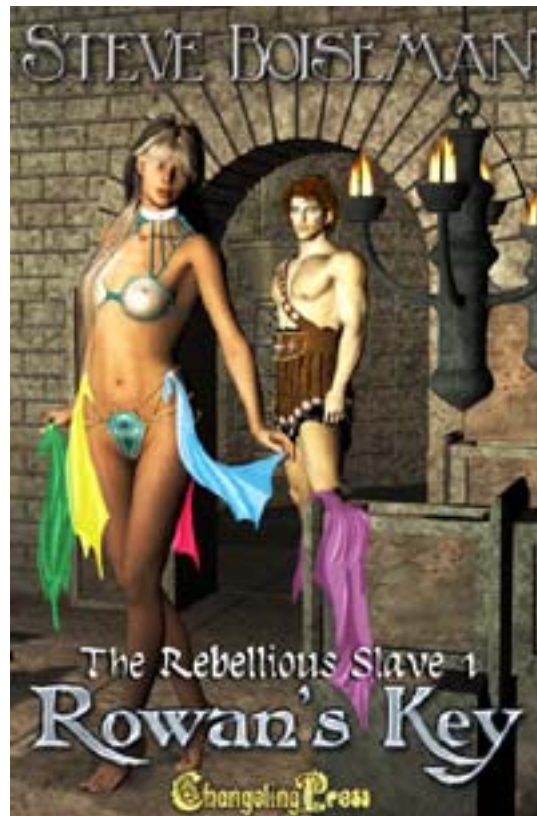
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Chapter One

As Rowan and Chin Lau stood naked before their owners, Rowan had a sudden urge to ask someone, anyone, who she was. The idea of speaking out of turn sent a shiver of anxiety through her body. Rowan nervously fingered her slave collar and was rewarded with a soothing sense of well-being.

"Suck his cock," Master ordered, licking his lips in anticipation. "I want to see you swallow that monster prick!"

Rowan instantly dropped to her knees and addressed the rampant organ of her fellow slave. She bent her neck to bring her head forward so her full lips touched the swollen purple head. The massive cock jerked and she opened her mouth wide to catch it and hold it firmly between her lips.

"Hold her head," Mistress instructed as she began caressing her husband's erect organ with long languid strokes.

Obediently Chin Lau buried his hands into Rowan's lustrous blonde hair.

"Open your eyes," Mistress said. "Look at him."

Rowan's almond eyes glowed jade in the flickering firelight.

"Open your mouth wide," Mistress instructed. "Take his cock slowly into your throat. I want to see you lick his ball sac."

Chin Lau pushed his heavily veined cock slowly into her mouth. She reached up and held the backs of his muscled thighs for balance and drew herself closer. His cock was thick, very thick, and she stretched her mouth wide to accommodate it. She explored the underside with her tongue, marveling at how something rock hard could feel so velvety smooth and soft.

Wrapping her lips tight about the shaft, she sensed the rhythmic pulse of his heart as his cock slid deeper into her mouth. The swollen head glided effortlessly over

her tongue before striking her uvula, initiating her gag reflex. Rowan adjusted her throat to accommodate it, a useful trick she had learned... where?

This transitory question was overtaken by more urgent issues. Chin Lau groaned as he pushed the head of his cock against the back of her throat and his balls nudged her chin. His fingers clenched the bundles of hair at her temples as the muscles of his thighs began to quiver.

"Fuck her throat," Master directed.

"Lick his ball sac," Mistress ordered.

Chin Lau gently withdrew his cock a centimeter and prepared to thrust it into her throat again. Rowan extended her tongue, ready to lick his sac as he reached the end of his thrust. He completed the inward stroke and the tip of her agile tongue speared one of his eggs nestled inside the thin membrane. As he held his cock for a moment deep inside her throat she chased the ball with her tongue as it retreated from the heat of her mouth.

He groaned softly and withdrew a centimeter.

"All the way out and all the way in," Master ordered in a thickening voice.

Chin Lau groaned again, as if willing himself not to come, and withdrew his cock so its head was outside her wide-stretched mouth. Using his hands he drew her head onto his cock once more and slid all the way in.

Rowan easily fought the gag reflex and managed to lick the underside of his balls, delighted she could almost reach far enough behind the sac to lick the smooth patch of skin between balls and anus.

Rowan's consciousness swam in a thick cloying ocean of sensuality; the feel of his cock, the warmth of his body, his musky scent and the tight hold he had of her hair all combined to submerge her in a sea of sensation. Her pussy dripped honey onto the cold slate tiles and her engorged nipples ached for a touch. She imagined she was a firebrand aflame with lust.

Chin Lau opened his eyes and looked down at her face and, she guessed, her heaving breasts beneath. His facial expression changed for a moment and she fancied

she saw a shadow of recognition, but it faded into a grimace as he fought his imminent orgasm. Master didn't like Chin Lau to come too quickly, beat him for it, and she could see he denied the inevitable orgasm with all his being.

Rowan didn't want him to be beaten either, so she widened her mouth further to reduce the friction of her lips against the silky shaft of his cock. The hinge of her jaw screamed in pain but it did the trick. The muscles of his legs relaxed, his orgasm delayed. But he was close, very close. She could taste the thick, salty pre-cum dribbling onto the flat of her tongue as he withdrew for the next onslaught.

From the bed Rowan heard quiet fumbling as Master and Mistress shucked off their robes and started their frantic coupling. They enjoyed fucking while they watched their slaves perform.

Not that Rowan minded. She enjoyed fucking Chin Lau and didn't care who watched. She was always surprised at how well they made love. It was as if their bodies knew each other inside and out, though she had no intimate memory of Chin Lau outside the Master's bedchamber.

"Don't stop," Mistress urged and grunted as Master did something interesting to her.

Chin Lau, fingers flexing at her temples, resumed his gentle thrusting. She settled into the rhythm and watched his face and tried to remember something of him from the *before* time. She wanted him to look at her and recognize her and tell her who she was, but his eyes were resolutely closed as he thought of who knows what to prevent his orgasm.

Mistress moaned and then groaned as she came and Chin Lau's thighs tensed. It was almost over and he hadn't come. Rowan shared his fear of losing it at the last moment when he had lasted so well. On the bed Mistress subsided into purrs of pleasure.

"Stop!" Master commanded. "Fuck her from behind."

Chin Lau instantly removed his cock from her mouth, threads of thick, sticky saliva trailing behind it. He stood silently with his chest heaving and his hard cock

pulsing. She looked up, smiling encouragement. He had been so close to blowing, yet had successfully held back. Rowan let go of his thigh and with her hand brushed away the strands of saliva which joined them like a spider's web.

Rowan's pussy was throbbing as well. It was sopping wet and rivers of honey flowed down the insides of her legs. She turned around and stretched out on all fours. With an inviting wiggle she presented her firm buttocks to Chin Lau.

Rowan risked a glance and saw, up on the bed, Master similarly positioning himself behind Mistress's attractive behind and threading his long thin cock into her slaving pussy. Mistress moaned from deep within as the pink head was threaded between the fleshy curtains of her pussy lips.

Rowan waited in anticipation as Chin Lau teased her pussy by rubbing the swollen head of his cock near her clit. She whimpered as the touch of his cock sent jolts of stabbing heat through her quivering body. At last she felt him push aside the slippery folds of her slit and slide effortlessly within. Even though she was shamelessly wet, Rowan's pussy was tight and she frowned in glorious pain as it accommodated itself to his girth. She knew he wouldn't last long inside her, and she wouldn't last much longer.

Chin Lau ploughed into her as deep as he could so his balls slapped against her aching clit. The impacts sent shivers of electric pleasure up her spine and into the centre of her brain.

Rowan grunted, to her ears it sounded like something a low-based animal of the forest would make. She frowned, but what did she know of the forest, indeed, what did she know of the world outside the Hold?

He thrust once, twice, three times, and on the fourth he stopped deep inside her. Rowan knew he was holding back the flood. His big hands gripped her buttocks, holding her firmly pressed into his groin so she couldn't move.

And then he lowered his torso until his firm chest settled onto her back, his hot breath in her ear. He reached down and found her aching breasts and caressed her nipples which all but exploded from her breasts. Then he reached down further, his

fingers finding the warm folds of flesh protecting her clit, and gently caressed her throbbing bud.

Rowan sighed as waves of white-hot pleasure coursed through her body. She couldn't last much longer. She tried to think of anything but the warm mass of cock inside her, or the busy fingers at her clit. She tried to think about the tasteless mush they served for breakfast, the dank and smelly cell they threw her in at night, or the mites that lived in her bedding, anything but the glorious sensations rippling from her pussy as his cock nestled large and warm inside her.

She couldn't help but hear the sensual sounds emanating from the bed. Master was grunting, his legs slapping against Mistress's buttocks. She groaned with each thrust. Rowan tried not to concentrate on those carnal tones lest they send her over the edge.

"Faster," Mistress ordered.

Chin Lau rose from the soft bed of Rowan's back and for several minutes resumed the firm but gentle thrusts of his cock, withdrawing his shaft so the head was just outside Rowan's pussy lips and then thrusting it in, hard and smooth. He soon recovered his composure and began to thrust more quickly, building to a staccato rhythm that rocked Rowan violently back and forth on her knees.

Rowan bit down on her lip, she was so close. She'd soon have no control at all and feared she would fall in helpless ecstasy to the floor. She resisted her body's screaming desire for release. She couldn't let herself come, not yet.

Chin Lau was gathering momentum and she felt his quivering thighs against the back of her legs and, as her pussy clenched around his cock, could feel the pulsations rippling along her fleshy tunnel.

"Don't stop! Don't stop!" Mistress pleaded with her husband and finally she let out an ear-piercing scream. Rowan looked up and saw Mistress collapsing onto the bed, her husband's glistening cock slipping out. Master turned his lusty eyes toward his slaves.

"Make her come," he ordered.

Chin Lau increased his frantic thrusting and Rowan closed her eyes and let the sensations overtake her; the thick length of his shaft sliding in, the ridge of his cock head and the ropey veins rubbing against that sensitive spot just inside her pussy, the hard head pounding into her ovaries, the lips of her pussy folding in with every thrust and pulling on the base of her throbbing clit. She felt her nipples graze the cold tiles, sending delightful ripples of pleasure that collided with the wanton pulsations of raw hard sex emanating from her cunt.

She focused on all these things, and while he maintained a rough raw rhythm with his cock Chin Lau reached down and stroked with his finger the sensitive puckered skin around her anus. He knew her so well and the gentle pressure against her hole was enough to send her over the edge and into the abyss; the oblivion where all thought ceased.

"Stop!" Master ordered as she and Chin Lau collapsed. Rowan's body was out of control, contorting with great heaving spasms of delirious excitement.

"Fuck your Mistress now."

Chin Lau slowly withdrew his rampant prick from Rowan's clenching pussy and crawled along the floor to the bed.

Rowan lay face down on the floor catching her breath as the orgasmic waves rolled over her. She struggled to gather her thoughts. Eventually she rolled onto her side to watch and marvel at Chin Lau's staying power.

Mistress had turned over on her back and spread her thin but shapely thighs as wide as she could, planting her feet on the edge of the bed. Chin Lau stood up and approached his Mistress, his cock standing proud and firm.

"Come," Master said to Rowan. He positioned himself beside his wife with his legs draped over the side of the bed.

Rowan rose on quivering legs and stepped as seductively as she could over to her Master. His eyes devoured her, taking in her oval face, halo of shiny blonde hair, rosy lips, glowing green eyes and the silver slave collar encircling her slender neck. She felt her firm round breasts jiggle invitingly as she slinked toward him. She knew he

liked her legs, her firm thighs, curvy calves and tight ankles, but he particularly liked what was at the juncture of her thighs; her wet pussy and her firm ass.

Mistress gasped as Chin Lau pushed his horse cock into her tight pussy. She was a small woman and his cock was thicker than her upper arm. Rowan was envious of her; Chin Lau's cock would feel magnificent in such a tiny hole.

Master's long thin cock was standing proud, its pink head quivering, still slick from his wife's juices. Rowan knew what he wanted. She knelt on the bed, splaying her legs to either side of his thin thighs. She positioned herself so the head of his cock inched its way into her pussy lips just enough to get a good coating of her own slippery juices. She lifted herself and positioned his cock head against her sphincter and slowly, but surely, lowered herself down upon his shaft.

Thankfully, his cock was thin and she could accommodate him easily. She remembered thinking Chin Lau would split her in two when he had first fucked her in her asshole... but wait, only the Master had fucked her ass here at the Hold. Even without a clear memory, Rowan was sure Chin Lau had done it to her as well, only somewhere else. But where?

"Don't stop!" Master ordered.

She sank heavily onto his groin. With his cock wedged far up her ass, any fragmentary memories of Chin Lau were soon washed away in raw sensation.

Beside her, Chin Lau was thrusting madly into Mistress's little pink slit, his cock so brown and large beside her pale thin thighs it was as if she had, indeed, three legs. Engrossed, Rowan watched his cock disappear inside her Mistress as she, in her turn, rose and fell on Master's rapier. She saw Master glance lovingly at his wife's face and react with a satisfied smile to what he saw. With each thrust of Chin Lau's magic cock Mistress groaned from deep within her belly.

The first of a series of rolling orgasms had Mistress thrashing her head from side to side in wild abandon. Finally it was too much and she raised her thin arms and splayed her hands across Chin Lau's chest.

"Stop!"

Chin Lau ceased his thrusting to give her time to recover but left his cock firmly embedded in her. Mistress opened her eyes and contentedly watched Rowan rise and fall on her husband's cock. Rowan saw a fleeting thought pass across her pale face.

"Rowan and Chin Lau, kiss each other," she commanded.

Rowan's heart leapt at the thought and she gasped in anticipation. Though this would be their first kiss at the Hold she already *knew* how his lips would feel. She turned to Chin Lau who was smiling also. Clearly he wanted to kiss her as well.

Rowan's smile widened and, as she fucked her Master, she leaned over and closed her eyes as Chin Lau's warm firm lips closed on hers. Master's hands were on her breasts, tweaking her throbbing nipples, but she was lost in Chin Lau's sweet kiss, opening her lips to his questing tongue, gently wrestling with it as it explored the warm cavern of her mouth.

As she kissed Chin Lau she ground down on Master's cock so her clit rubbed vigorously against his pelvic bone. Her thoughts, however, were with Chin Lau; how his tongue felt so familiar in her mouth and how safe she felt with him so close.

Her climax surprised her. It seemed to come from nowhere. She moaned deeply as the series of orgasms punched through her body like the thunder of a summer storm... summer storms? Where had she seen summer storms?

As she was tossed about on the crest of passion, Master's cock began spurting a glut of hot viscous liquid deep inside her ass.

Master grunted in satisfaction and grasped her by the hips to hold her in place as his pulsing cock subsided.

"Has he come?" he asked his wife.

"Not yet, husband."

"I want to see his seed dripping off your face, off both your faces."

Chin Lau disengaged his lips. His eyes were locked on hers and his smile was warm. She searched his face for any sign of recognition but all she saw in his eyes was the glaze of lust. Disappointed, she climbed off Master's cock, allowing his hot seed to trickle down the insides of her thighs.

Master made way for her so she could lie next to Mistress, their faces side by side. Master climbed over her body, watching Chin Lau fuck his wife close up.

"Get on the bed," he commanded.

Chin Lau climbed up and positioned his cock next to Mistress's face. Mistress immediately gobbled his massive cock and sucked its bulging purple head though it hardly fit within her tiny mouth.

Chin Lau stroked his shaft. His cock was quivering and Rowan knew he was close. Then, as he had done in the past, Master reached over, taking Chin Lau's cock between thumb and forefinger, lifting it from his wife's sucking mouth. He stroked it gently, almost reverently. Chin Lau closed his eyes and groaned as long spurts of cum arced toward their faces. Most of it landed on Mistress, covering her face and leaving it glistening with pearly drops. Master groaned in vicarious satisfaction and bent down and kissed his wife with a savage passion.

Several drops had reached Rowan, and with her eyes locked onto Chin Lau's dark grey eyes she stretched out her tongue and licked them up.

Chapter Two

"Go to the kitchens," Mistress said to Rowan as she surfaced from her husband's kiss, her face smeared with the silvery glaze of Chin Lau's cum. "Bring us wine."

"Yes, Mistress."

Rowan climbed off the bed and padded across the chamber's cold floor. At the door she picked up her coarse rust-colored tunic and dropped it over her shoulders. She glanced back at the bed. Master had his head buried in Chin Lau's groin and Mistress was climbing onto her slave's willing face.

Rowan's pussy pulsed with desire, knowing what Chin Lau's tongue was capable of. She frowned. How did she know that?

Here at the Hold he hadn't used his tongue on her yet and she had no memory at all of the time before. So how did she know he licked her pussy so well she would go into spasms of ecstasy with every touch of his agile tongue?

Apart from the obvious fact that there must have been a time before the Hold, she had no awareness of her life before the cold and rainy day she had been pushed off the slave cart in the Hold's dank courtyard.

As she made her way downstairs to the kitchens she puzzled over this overwhelming sense she and Chin Lau had known each other in the past. They must have, she reasoned. Why else would her pussy warm and her honey flow every time he came near and when they had sex their bodies seemed to know each other so well.

Every night for the last six terms Master and Mistress ordered them to perform. The scenarios were similar to the one in which they had just been engaged. Master was keen to get his new wife with child, his or Chin Lau's he didn't seem to care, and he believed that to do so she had to be as aroused as humanly possible.

Yet every time they made love Chin Lau did something that sparked a trace of a memory. He knew her body too well to be a stranger. He would touch her in a dozen different ways with a confident familiarity and knowledge. He knew how to make her come with just a touch and, conversely, how to delay her orgasm until just the right time. On her side, she also knew when he was close to coming. She too knew how to make him come or hold back as the case demanded. She was certain this intimate knowledge meant they knew each other from before and *knew* each other well.

But what was before? Her memories began suddenly with her arrival at the Hold. It was as if her consciousness had been switched on when the cart's door slid open and the Overseer pushed her and the other dozen slaves out into the cold wet courtyard. Before that cruel awakening there was only darkness.

The stimuli... what a curious word... which elicited those memory traces, such as the feel of Chin Lau's cock on her tongue or the sight of him eating Mistress's pussy, were all sexual... stimuli.

Rowan thought it strange that nothing else of her past would emerge from the darkness except sexual memories and strange unfamiliar words.

The wall of darkness in her memory troubled her and she instinctively felt for the silver collar at her neck. The slave collar was a surgically implanted device, which could not be removed except by the Master's Key. An organo-metallic thread was looped around her jugular vein so any unauthorized removal would instantly kill her. Not that she had ever thought to remove it. To do so was simply unthinkable. She stroked the silvery metal and felt a perverse sense of tranquility descend over her. She felt that same strange calmness every time she touched it.

Rowan wondered why she found it so hard to remember the past. Generally, as soon as she started thinking about her and Chin Lau she'd get distracted. Granted, they were usually fucking each other senseless at the time so it was no surprise she'd be distracted, but all the same...

She needed to see Chin Lau alone and ask him if he had the same strange thoughts. Immediately she felt distressed at the idea.

It was expressly forbidden for sex slaves to be alone together. She caressed her collar to calm herself.

Arranging a meeting would be difficult. Master and Mistress didn't allow them to talk while they fucked and after they were finished they were taken separately back to their quarters where, after a full day of chores and a couple hours of hard sex, she sank into a deep sleep as soon as her head hit the pallet.

Male and female slaves were housed on different levels of the slave quarters and only came together to perform their duties. They were not allowed to fraternize. The Overseers made sure there was no socializing at any time and enforced the rule with strict punishments, Overseer Owun being the worst. She shuddered at the thought of him. He seemed to actually enjoy meting out cruel beatings and laughed as he inflicted the most dreadful and demeaning pain.

As she tried to figure out a way of engineering a meeting with Chin Lau she rounded a corner and thudded into the tall muscular frame of Ky, one of the Overseers.

"Rowan," he said in surprise and grasped her around the shoulders.

Rowan was tall, and yet he towered over her. His had been the first face she had seen when she had been pushed off the slave cart and had the blindfold removed. At the time she'd thought him the most handsome man she'd ever seen and her opinion hadn't changed.

Naked to the waist, he was broad-shouldered and possessed a deep barrel chest with powerful arms and bulging biceps. His flat stomach was rippled with bands of muscle, which, because they were so perfect and symmetrical, appeared to have been sculpted onto his body. He had narrow hips and powerful thighs and she often wondered about the size of the organ that lurked beneath his short kilt. She'd dream herself to sleep imagining him fucking her in every possible way and masturbated every morning fantasizing a situation just like this one; the two of them alone, his arms around her, lifting her off her feet as he kissed her...

"Rowan?" he repeated. "What are you doing here?"

Rowan blinked her eyes and lowered her face from the open up-tilted pose she had adopted in anticipation of that fanciful kiss. "Mistress requested refreshment, Overseer Ky."

"I see."

She almost swooned beneath his unwavering gaze. Those dark eyes seemed to pierce her innermost being. "Are you serving Master and Mistress again tonight?"

"Yes, Overseer Ky."

His austere expression changed minutely and she wondered what he was thinking. He sniffed the air loudly, detecting the miasma of sex that surrounded her. "Thirsty work it seems."

Was he ridiculing her? She thought not, for his voice had a sad resigned quality to it.

"Mistress is thirsty," she muttered, her eyes locked into his.

"Then you must get her something."

She nodded obediently. It was a moment before she realized he was still holding her in his strong grasp. He frowned strangely, as if he couldn't understand why his hands would not obey his thoughts and release her.

He was a powerful man, but gentle with it. Rowan knew he could snap her like a twig if he so desired but she felt no fear. She had never seen him strike any of the slaves, unlike the other Overseers who were quick to temper and sudden violence. Ky was fair and somehow Rowan knew he could be trusted, and if anyone would help her find out who she was it would be Ky.

Speaking freely to an Overseer was something Rowan had never done before and she took a deep breath. "Overseer Ky?"

"Yes, pretty one?"

Her heart thrilled to hear him call her that. "Where did I come from?"

The slight smile on his handsome face faded at once. "Now don't be asking questions like that, pretty one. You know it is not permitted."

"Why?"

"Now you're just being impertinent."

Though his expression had hardened slightly Rowan still felt safe to continue. "It's just that I think I remember things from before I came to the Hold."

His face became even stonier. "There is nothing for you in the past. It is not good to think of such things, pretty one, and best not to say these things to anyone else." He smiled slightly. "Now go, before I lose my patience with you."

Rowan grinned mischievously, still feeling relaxed with him despite his reaction. "You wouldn't hurt me. You are too nice, Overseer Ky."

He gave a bellow of a laugh. "Nice? Just because I don't lash you slaves for sneezing like Overseer Owun doesn't make me nice. Now go and get refreshment for our Mistress or she'll make me lash you and I wouldn't like that duty at all."

Impulsively she kissed him on the cheek and he released her with a laugh. She skipped away from his mock slap and, with her heart beating wildly, raced to the kitchen.

Cook was, as usual, watching her kitchen slaves like a hawk, cursing and yelling at each imagined infraction. She took her cooking very seriously.

Rowan waited in silence for Cook to notice her.

"Well?"

"Mistress requested wine."

"There's a bottle in the refrigerator," she said shortly. "Tray and glasses in the cabinet." Rowan went to the refrigerator and, as she opened the door, stopped dead. It was a large industrial refrigerator, an ISO 400, half as efficient as the 600A, the biochemical units she was most familiar with. She paused with the door open and wondered at that stray piece of knowledge.

Close behind her Cook growled and Rowan quickly pulled out a bottle of wine and closed the door. She went to the cabinet as if in a trance and extracted a tray and two glasses. All the while, Cook watched her with suspicious little eyes, apparently waiting for her to break something.

She tried as hard as she could to remember anything at all about those refrigerators but could not. The effort made her temples throb and she desperately wanted to caress her collar and feel its soothing warmth but her hands were full, so she took a deep breath and tried not to think at all.

She hurried back to the bedchamber. Master and Mistress were lying naked on the bed. She was gagging on her husband's cock, trying unsuccessfully to deep throat him. Chin Lau was nowhere to be seen and Rowan hoped he had been sent on a short errand and would return soon.

"Ah, drinks." The Master sat up.

Mistress took her lips from his cock and stretched languorously out on the bed beside her husband. "Rowan, how do you take cock so far down your throat?"

Rowan put down the tray and poured two glasses of wine. "I don't know, Mistress. I just can."

"Do you have a special technique to relax your throat?"

Rowan took the glasses to the bed and carefully handed them to her owners. "I haven't thought about it, Mistress."

"It is an admirable skill. To take a cock such as Chin Lau's and not choke is something I would like to be able to do."

Master leaned over to his wife and kissed the nearest part of her body, her knee. "You do admirably, my dear."

"Thank you, my husband, but I wish I could please you as Rowan does."

"Speaking of which, my cock demands just the kind of attention you have been discussing. Rowan, if you please."

"Yes, Master."

Rowan climbed onto the bed and positioned herself between Master's thighs. His thin rapier cock was hard, the pink head glistening with his wife's saliva. Rowan took it between her lips and wondered again where Chin Lau had gone.

She took Master's cock further into her mouth, aware Mistress was watching her closely. She slowly inched her way down his shaft. Master was easier to deep throat than Chin Lau as his cock was much slimmer and she could breathe around it.

Mistress watched and nodded encouragingly. "I can't help but gag when my husband's cock touches the back of my throat. How do you stop gagging?"

Rowan took her mouth away from his cock. "If I may speak, Master."

"By all means, Rowan."

"Mistress, I can't describe what I do because I do not have the words. I just relax the back of my throat." Rowan took Master's cock in her mouth once again and stopped when his head tickled her soft palate. She lifted her head and withdrew his cock. "Mistress, at this point your husband's beautiful cock was hitting the back of my throat. The gag reflex is starting. I just relax my throat. I find it easy but I'm sure it was a skill I had to learn. I try to remember where I learnt these skills, Mistress, but..."

The slap surprised her more than hurt. With her cheek stinging she went back to sucking the head of Master's cock.

"Never think of the past, Rowan," Master warned. "Never! You belong here. You have always belonged here. You always will."

"Yes, Master." She mumbled the lie around his cock.

"Now make me come down your throat."

With her cheek still stinging from the slap she set about making him come. This would be his second or third ejaculation and so would take him longer. She knew from experience the Master had a sensitive anus so, as she lowered her head over his cock, she massaged his balls with her fingers, letting her nails tease the space between the ball sac and anus.

Mistress moved her fingers to caress Rowan's cheek and she silently thanked her for trying to soothe the stinging flesh. Then Mistress reached for her breasts, finding her sensitive nipples, and softly teased them, tracing the aureoles and making the nipples engorge and ache. Rowan's pussy liquefied and once again the honey began to flow.

As she deep throat her Master she tried once again to reach back further into the past and discover what had come before. Certainly Master didn't want her to dwell on such things but why did he react so severely? It had been the first time he had ever struck her. What was it about her past that angered him so?

But then she was distracted by Mistress's tongue tracing her inner thigh until it found her dewy slit. Mistress had an active tongue and she found her throbbing nub easily and after a few moments of direct stimulation Rowan was coming.

Rowan forced herself to focus on Master or earn another slap. She slipped her finger into her mouth beside his cock to wet it and then traced it down to his anus. His asshole was tight but once his sphincter relaxed and her finger was inside he groaned and his cock erupted in a flood of cum.

Third ejaculation or no, his balls produced prodigious amounts of seed and it flooded hotly down her throat. This time Rowan had to do her best not to gag.

As Master arched his back in absolute pleasure, Mistress was busy drinking Rowan's honey from her pussy and, Rowan noted, she was squirming in orgasm as well. No doubt her husband's fingers had been very busy in her pussy.

After his spasms had stilled, Master grasped her by the hair and pulled her face up to his. "Let there be no more talk of the past, Rowan. Otherwise you'll find yourself on the slave block and I'll sell you to the roughest man I can find. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Master."

Chapter Three

Next day Rowan rushed through her kitchen chores as quickly as she could while not earning the wrath of Cook, who double-checked the vegetables she'd chopped and the pastry she'd rolled with a close and discerning eye. Cook was satisfied and was looking for another task for Rowan to complete when she was distracted by Sarah, a young slave girl, who'd dropped one of the gleaming pans and received a cuff about the ear for her trouble.

Rowan, her fingers caressing her collar in anxiety, quietly snuck away in search of Chin Lau.

Apart from his almost instinctive knowledge of her body he had never given any sign that he remembered anything of the past. The need to ask him if he remembered things as she did gnawed at her every thought. She had to find out the truth from him though she feared the past was completely closed to him. She clung to the hope that perhaps by asking him she might unlock some thin thread of remembrance.

Talking to him would be risky. The rules expressly forbid it and she'd not only be risking punishment for herself but for Chin Lau as well. Did she have the right to risk that for him? It was a question which had kept her awake all night.

When they had first been brought to the Hold the rules were explained by Overseer Ky as the group of new slaves, she and Chin Lau among them, stood shivering in the courtyard, the pouring rain drenching their clothes and drowning whatever spirit they may have had.

She had been mesmerized by Ky. He stood in the rain as they did and she had watched the rivulets of water run along his clearly defined musculature. His wet kilt had molded itself to his groin and she had stared at the impressive outline of his cock.

Ky spoke with authority, his deep voice echoing off the stone walls of the courtyard making her shiver with respect.

"Slaves do not talk to each other outside of the requirements of their duties," he began. "If slaves are caught talking they are whipped. Twenty-five lashes with the stinger. Slaves do not fuck each other, with or without talking, unless ordered to by the Master. If they are caught they are whipped; twenty-five lashes. Slaves do not touch anyone unless ordered by their Master, Mistress or any of the Overseers; twenty-five lashes. Slaves do not speak until spoken to; five lashes. Slaves must do their chores to the high standards of the Hold; five lashes for each infringement. Slaves are to keep their cells clean and tidy; five lashes. Slaves will attend to their duties on time; five lashes for each minute they are late. Slaves will not rest unless instructed by Master, Mistress or one of the Overseers; five lashes..."

The litany of rules and punishments had gone on and on and despite being distracted by Ky's magnetic manhood Rowan remembered each and every rule, as if she was especially attuned to their meaning and intent, but she was sure she had never heard them spoken before.

Attuned? What sort of word was that for a slave to use?

Chin Lau's non-sexual duties included working in the carpentry workshop maintaining the Hold's extensive collection of antique furniture. Rowan went from workshop to workshop with her head down and eyes averted lest she attract attention. Chin Lau was nowhere to be seen and, unable to ask the other slaves where he was, Rowan had to continue a blind search. Luckily she had not run into any of the Overseers who were probably amusing themselves with tormenting some hapless lower level slave.

She wondered if Chin Lau was with the Master or Mistress and was heading along the passageway outside the Master's library when she heard the Master's voice. "It is getting dangerous, wife. We'll need to do something."

"What can we do? They'll kill us for certain." The Mistress's voice was thin, edgy and very afraid.

"Only if they are found..." Master let the sentence hang in the air like a blade and Rowan felt the sword slice through her belly. Somehow, she knew they were talking about her and Chin Lau.

Rowan wanted to hear more but she had the strongest of urges to flee the door and return to the kitchen. She was battling her fear when Master said something that made her stop short. "She remembers."

"She cannot remember much."

"I've watched her. I've seen her face. She remembers something of before. When you asked her about her cock sucking skills she tried to remember. That is too dangerous for us."

"I am sorry, husband, for making her try to remember. It is possible she may know she has forgotten something but what it is she cannot know. You saw she was unable to remember her technique."

"But even that may be enough to condemn us."

"Then what shall we do?"

"Get rid of them," the Master said decisively.

"I knew we should not have accepted them in the first place." The Mistress's fear had turned to anger. "We were mad to do this. It was better not to tempt fate like this."

"I agreed to keep them but it was not my idea to put them together. But I agreed with you and so I share the blame."

"I am sorry, my husband." Her voice became meek. "I know it is my fault. But we must think of what to do."

"They can't be found here."

"What if we separate them? Perhaps it is their proximity to each other which is prompting her memories."

A pause and Rowan could imagine him considering his wife's suggestion. "Which one would we sell?"

Fear burst through Rowan's chest like a lance.

"They are both a danger to us."

"She is the one who remembers."

I am to be sold? Rowan could imagine no other life than the one she lived here. As hard as the work was, it was familiar. Master had said he would take her to the slave block and sell her to the roughest man he could find. Rowan shuddered.

"It would be better if we kept her with us," the Master said. "Keep a close watch and stop her from remembering. If she is away from us and remembers then we will be in greater danger."

"Yes. That is so," she said reluctantly. "We must send him away. He has shown no sign of remembering."

"It is a pity, for he gives you so much pleasure but I'll do so immediately. Don't fear, my love. We will be safe. I will not let them endanger us."

"It is too late, I fear. We have only a day before..."

They were going to send Chin Lau away! Rowan could not believe it. And it was all her fault! She could not let this happen. She pushed at the door, determined to barge into their room and beg them not to send Chin Lau away and to banish her instead when Overseer Owun's meaty hand clamped down on hers.

"What are you doing here?"

Rowan jumped and twisted away from his bulk. "I must speak to Master," she cried, looking into his scarred and twisted face.

"I think you were listening at their door! This deserves punishment!"

He wrenched her away from the door and, grabbing a handful of hair, dragged her down the corridor toward the stairs.

"I must talk to Master," she pleaded.

"Silence! You'll do as you're told."

Rowan tripped over her own feet trying to keep up with him. She fell but Owun did not stop and the pain in her scalp where he fisted her hair was excruciating. He did not slacken his pace as he dragged her down toward the slave quarters.

She screamed in pain and tried desperately to regain her feet. He only slowed when they reached the stone steps and she managed to pull herself up the tree trunks of his legs. Tears streamed down her face.

"Come on," he said and pulled her after him.

Instead of going into the level where the slave punishment cell was, he continued on down the stairs to where Rowan had never been. The walls radiated a deep chill as they descended two more levels into the bowels of the Hold. He pushed open a heavy door and pulled her along a dark passageway and stopped at the barred door of a cell. He lifted the iron latch and pushed the heavy door aside.

The cell was small. The only piece of furniture was a pallet covered with a grimy blanket. A glow ring hung from the ceiling and cast a faint yellowy light over the damp mold-covered walls.

He pushed her down on the pallet and her tunic rose up her hips, exposing her naked sex. He smiled, his crooked face breaking into a lopsided grin showing blackened teeth and an anxious tongue.

He undid the belt around his filthy kilt and it dropped to the floor. His long thin prick was rampant, pointed at the ceiling in a throbbing forty-five degree angle. The warty head glistened with anticipation.

The import of what he was doing struck Rowan like a fist. "I belong to the Master," she shouted.

"You are a slave! You belong to anyone," he replied. "And from what I heard, you are not his favorite any longer."

"You were listening too!"

He laughed and began stroking his cock. "To see what you were doing... and now that I know you are disfavored, then you are mine."

She scrambled across the pallet to slip beside him and run to the door, but with a neat sidestep his massive thighs blocked her path. She backed away across the pallet until her back hit the rough rock wall.

He hawked and spat into his hand and transferred the yellow spit to his cock and stroked it, his eyes glinting from the overhead lamp.

"I'll scream and the Master will... will..." She faltered. She'd never seen an Overseer punished, if indeed they ever were. She didn't know what Master would do. "He'll beat you," she warned finally, sounding unconvincing even to her own ears.

He laughed. "The Master will not touch me. Knowing what I know I am safe enough. More safe than you, my pretty one."

"Don't call me that!" She couldn't bear him using Ky's nickname for her.

He laughed. "I'll call you what I like. Now take off that sack and show me your melons."

"Never, you bastard!"

He advanced toward her. "I like it when they fight back. Fight all you want, pretty one. It's all the same to me. My seed will be in your belly either way."

She pulled her slave tunic down over her thighs to hide herself. He laughed and reached down and grabbed her hand, twisting it cruelly. Stars burst in her head and she screamed with the pain.

With his other hand he reached down and, grasping the neck of her tunic, ripped it away, exposing her breasts. "I can see why Ky wets his pants every time you're in his sight. You have the best titties in the Hold." He held one in the palm of his hand as if weighing it. Rowan pulled back but he wrenched her by the hair so that she fell forward and her breast was once again nestled in his palm.

"Heavy," he grunted and gave her breast a cruel squeeze. "With child, are we? Have the Master's little bastard in our belly, do we?"

"No!"

"My cock will be giving him a headache in a minute. Now suck me," he commanded.

The urge to obey was overpowering. She felt her head bending toward his gristly cock, her lips opening involuntarily. It was as if she was under some sort of spell which

forced obedience despite her thoughts that screamed at her that there was no time for this. She had to warn Chin Lau. She had to rescue him.

The Overseer's cock brushed her bottom lip as it entered her mouth. With one hand tugging at her hair forcing her head further down over his cock, he squeezed her breast and flicked her nipples with the other. Her gorge rose in revulsion.

"Suck it!"

The shouted order made her flinch.

"You must learn to act like a slave. You only exist to give pleasure to men. You have no purpose but pleasure. You were born with a hole and that is all you are. A hole! You must get used to being a hole which any man may empty his seed into. It is your destiny. Your purpose."

The words were familiar. Where she had heard them before she couldn't say but they resonated deep within her consciousness. What Owun said was true. She knew it. She was a slave, a plaything for her Master and any man who had control of her. She bore the collar of the slave, which could only be removed with the Master's Key and then only to be swapped for another Master's collar.

Owun's cock head touched the back of her throat and she gagged.

"Pay attention."

She focused on his cock and let it pass deeper down her throat. As he withdrew she thought about his words. Why was it true? Why was she the plaything of a man? How had this happened? Why wasn't she like the Mistress, a free woman?

His cock left her mouth and, reasserting his grip on her hair, he bucked his hips and his cock plunged once again between her lips. This time she was ready and didn't gag as his thin penis slid down her throat. Her face was pushed deeply into his gut.

He held his cock there, embedded in her throat, forcing her to breathe around his cock, an almost impossible task. He laughed as he pinched her nose, making it so much harder.

"You will learn. You forfeited everything when you became a slave. You are nothing else. You are a hole."

She was fighting for air now, beating her fists against his thighs, groaning soundlessly, but still he held her.

Her chest demanded air. She was going to die if he didn't let her up soon. His cock was so far down her throat she couldn't work her jaw. She wanted to bite his cock, bite it off as the last action before she died.

Blackness swirled around her as she slid into a darkening whirlpool. She became lightheaded, she was falling. She was dying.

Then he released her.

"Say it! Say I am a hole!"

She gulped air, fighting to keep conscious. Her eyes refocused on his throbbing cock swaying in front of her eyes.

"Say it!"

She brought up bile as she mumbled his hateful words.

"This is what it is to be a slave," he taunted.

She could not respond. She was gulping in air, letting her aching chest relax.

He released his grip on her hair and thrust her back onto the pallet. She fell heavily and she was aware only of her burning scalp and aching chest. He grasped her by the legs and cruelly splayed them apart.

His eyes locked onto her gaping slit. He smiled and let go of her leg so he could stroke his throbbing cock.

He didn't see the scissor kick coming.

Her foot caught him on the side of his block-shaped head. She twisted herself so her other foot served as a pivot for her body and her free foot struck him again, making him lose his balance and topple off the bed.

She was on him in a moment, straddling his barrel chest, and though he flayed vigorously he was stunned and his fists missed the mark. Only once did they strike her aching jaw. With single-minded focus and determination she accepted the blow and grasped his head in both hands and twisted it with all her strength until she heard a strangely satisfying pop.

His fists fell to the floor with a thud. Rowan wrenched his head to the other side to make sure and when she let it go it lolled loosely, coming to rest so his glazed eyes fixed on hers.

Rowan looked down at the dead body, her naked chest heaving in exertion. She had killed him. She had taken a life. How had she done that? How had she bested a man five times her weight?

The expression on his face was sheer surprise. He hadn't expected her to fight back at all, and, as a slave, she hadn't either. Her fear for Chin Lau, her need to warn him about being sent away... those thoughts had given her strength and skill she didn't know she possessed. But for what purpose? Why should she warn him? To run away? Unthinkable. Slaves did not run away. Why did she believe it was even possible?

And there was another thing. Owun had said, "You forfeited everything when you became a slave." This meant she hadn't always been a slave. She had once been free! But where and when?

That meant Chin Lau must have been free too! What had happened to them? Why were they here? What were the Master and Mistress so afraid of?

Rowan straightened her tattered tunic. Answers were not important now. She had to find Chin Lau. Somehow they had to get out of the Hold. The Master was afraid of someone and she and Chin Lau were part of it. She had to warn him.

The door burst open and she dropped into a defensive crouch. She had little time to be surprised by this almost instinctual movement. In the shadowy doorway she recognized the muscular frame of Ky.

"What's going on here?" He was staring at her, a strange expression on his shadowed face. His stinger was at the ready, pointed not at her but at the bed. His gaze slid across the room, taking in Owun's lifeless body. Incongruously, the dead Overseer's cock was still semi-erect and cast a declining shadow on his belly.

"What have you done?"

"He tried to rape me," Rowan replied. "I defended myself." She was surprised at how forceful her voice was.

"Defended yourself?" Ky replied incredulously. "Slaves can't defend themselves against their lawful Overseer. You'll be impaled for this."

"I defended myself," she repeated, savoring the words, luxuriating in the warmth the words generated in this dim dank cell.

Ky leant heavily against the doorframe and shook his head. "I knew you'd be nothing but trouble."

"What do you mean?"

"There was something about you. Something willful."

She couldn't help but smile at him.

He gave her a stern look in reply. "And I was right."

"What will you do?"

"There is nothing that can be done. The law says you are a Rebellious Slave. That has only one punishment. A public impaling. They'll have to make a show of it too. They can't have slaves rebelling. Their whole world would collapse. You'll have to be made an example of to deter others from doing the same."

She knew what he said was true. She had the words already in her head. *Rebellious Slave*. Ky's voice, though, was soft and sad. She was suddenly hopeful. "You will help me?"

He sighed. "How can I help? This is bad, very bad."

"No one knows I am here."

He shook his head. "Everyone is looking for you. Why do you think I'm down here? The Master is beside himself."

"There is something wrong with the Master?"

"Never you mind about him. You are not where you are supposed to be and Owun here is dead. Even the bluntest sword in the armory could tell you were the culprit." He looked at her, appraising her as if he had never seen her before. He shook his head and his eyes returned to the dead Overseer. "No one liked Owun. He was a prick. But he was a tough prick and no one would go up against him. Even the Master was afraid of him."

"Then no one will believe that I, a puny woman, could break his neck."

Rowan watched expectantly as he considered her words. "Perhaps. Maybe I could convince them Owun tripped and fell while he was fucking you, that it was indeed an accident."

She smiled. "See. I can be saved."

Ky nodded slowly. "It will still mean lashes. Many lashes."

Now that her own situation was more hopeful her thoughts returned to Chin Lau. She still had to warn him. "Where is Chin Lau?"

Ky raised his eyebrows, startled by the question. "Why? What has that got to do with anything?"

"I must find him. Warn him."

"Warn him? What of?"

"The Master is going to sell him."

Ky shook his head. "Already done, my pretty. Chin Lau has gone."

Chapter Four

They made their way by pale moonlight. Rowan's knees hurt. She'd fallen several times during their headlong rush down the mountainside. In the sable sky the trio of moons were in half phase and shed a soft creamy light across the mountainside.

Since her arrival Rowan had never been outside the Hold and had no sense of the local geography. She'd never even been to the Hold's battlements and looked out. She knew only its stone corridors and halls and the pebbled courtyard.

She looked back up the mountainside at the great shadow of the Hold and saw the ancient battlements silhouetted against the star-studded heavens. In other circumstances, she thought incongruously, it would have been pretty.

"Chin Lau has gone."

Rowan's stomach had dropped at those words. She asked Ky to repeat them. When they sunk in she realized things were moving too rapidly for her to bother trying to talk her way out of killing Owun. She had to escape. She had to find Chin Lau. Outside! "I have to leave," she'd announced.

Ky had nodded. "I agree. There is no way to escape impalement. No one will believe Owun simply fell over. They will believe you tricked him and pushed him."

"No, I mean I have to find Chin Lau."

"Oh," Ky had muttered.

Ky quickly decided on a plan. She'd helped him carry Owun's body down deeper into the bowels of the Hold to a hidden door which opened up to the garbage and sewer channel. There they had pushed Owun's body into the stinking cesspit. They watched for a moment as the dead Overseer slowly broke through the putrid scum that covered the surface of the pit and sank from sight amid the slow bursting of foul smelling bubbles.

Then they themselves had slithered through a narrow muck-filled hole cut through the side of the mountain into the fresh air outside. Rowan had never known such a stink. Resolutely, she kept her mouth shut, knowing disease was everywhere about them. She hoped her broad-spectrum shots would protect her. The fact that she had no idea what broad-spectrum shots actually were amused her and brought a tight grim smile to her lips.

Perhaps she possessed great knowledge. The idea drove her forward with a determination she did not know she possessed. She had to find out who she truly was. She wanted to know it all!

As soon as they were out of the tunnel they rushed down the boulder-strewn mountainside toward the dim lights of the village far below.

As she followed Ky's athletic form she wondered why he was helping her. He was a good man certainly, but even a good man would not put himself at risk like this for anyone, let alone a slave.

The more she thought about him, the more of an enigma he became. He was an intelligent and thoughtful man, the most humane of the Overseers -- fair and just, and understanding. She had never seen him mistreat a slave.

His caring personality was hard to reconcile with his vocation and she wondered why he had chosen this career and if he had a choice at all. She wondered if circumstances had forced him into it. Family perhaps? She wondered why the thought that Ky had a wife and family suddenly and profoundly disappointed her.

"We stink," he said over his shoulder.

"We need to wash. We will get sick otherwise."

"Follow me."

He led her along an even narrower goat track for a few minutes and paused beside a great boulder. Rowan could hear the rush of falling water.

"Clean yourself," Ky instructed.

Obediently she followed the track further on until she came to a small waterfall which seemed to erupt from the sheer rock face. The water fell a couple of meters into a rock pool upon which the pale reflection of the three moons rippled and vibrated.

Knowing the water would be cold, she was questioning her need for a bath when she caught a whiff of herself and decided washing was her number one priority.

She stepped up to the plume of water and stuck in her hand. She gasped at the icy cold water. It was a mountain stream and after the recent rains was running strong. The water was clean and fresh. Closing her eyes against the shock she took a single step and was under it. It took her breath away.

As she scrubbed her face she thought of something to take her mind off the numbing chill of the water. She wondered why she obeyed men's commands so easily.

Ever since he had found her with Owun's body she had obeyed every one of Ky's orders. The irritating thing was she obeyed his commands even before she was aware of what she was doing. It was not something she could control and it annoyed the hell out of her. She gave her collar a fleeting touch.

The cold water refreshed her aching limbs and she was acutely aware of her nipples standing erect. She started to shiver uncontrollably and knew she couldn't stand it much longer.

Stripping off her tunic in the semi darkness, she washed and rinsed it. As she scrubbed the tattered cloth she thought more of Ky. Her pussy warmed and pulsed. Unlike the rest of her body, which was adorned with goose pimples, her pussy radiated waves of comforting warmth and as she dipped the tunic under the water she wondered what it would be like to feel his thick cock inside her.

Suddenly there was a splash and Ky was standing next to her in the water, completely naked. He ignored her as he washed his kilt, scrubbing away the dirty muck of the cesspit.

Rowan couldn't help but watch him. The pulses of warmth from her pussy quickened and swept over her, and her shivering ceased. The moonlight lent his muscular body a shimmering silver sheen. Rowan considered him closely and decided

he was, by all possible measures, a handsome man, though in a slightly rough manner, and she couldn't help but look down at his cock.

She knew that men's sexual organs shrank when cold, but not Ky's. Though flaccid it still hung thick and heavy between his legs. She had always thought Chin Lau's cock was impressive, but it didn't compare to Ky's.

Once again she wondered what it would be like to feel its girth slide between her pussy lips. Her pussy warmed and her clit tingled. She knew if Ky commanded her, she'd fuck him here and now without a second thought, and she'd enjoy it.

He took her by the shoulders so she faced him squarely and looked up into his slightly rough though handsome face. Instead of commanding her to take his cock into her mouth and make him come he simply stared into her eyes. A drop of water clung to the end of his nose and she fought the urge to lick it off.

"Killing an Overseer means death to you," he said solemnly, apparently unaware of the effect he was having on her. "Helping you escape means death to me. You have to swear to me that you will do everything I tell you to do. Otherwise we'll be impaled together."

The seriousness of his tone made her feel ashamed of herself. This was no time for erotic thoughts, she chided herself. This was a matter of life and death -- theirs.

She looked up at him, judging his shadowy face in the moonlight, and decided she had been right to trust him, and she was suddenly sorry she had put him in peril. "I swear." She reached out and gripped his hand. "Thank you for helping me. Believe me, I didn't want to put you in danger."

She saw the glint of his teeth as he smiled. "I never liked Owun. He deserved what you gave him. You shouldn't be punished for doing what everyone in the Hold wanted to do."

"Even you?"

He led her out from under the mountain water and into the warm air. "Even I. But I am a professional. We professionals don't go killing each other when it suits us. We do have standards, you know."

She couldn't help but laugh, hoping he wasn't serious. But he was. "But I only protected myself!" she retorted and the ease with which she had snapped his neck still surprised her.

He shook his head. "Don't be silly. Slaves can't protect themselves from free men for any reason. You have no rights; only free men have rights. Don't you know anything?"

Apparently not.

He held her firmly by the shoulders and even in the dark she knew his eyes were locked onto hers, and her pussy warmed as she wondered what he would do next.

Hoping he would kiss her she closed her eyes and tilted her head, parting her lips expectantly.

"Come on. I have to get you settled and get back to the Hold before they miss Owun. If we are both missing when they find his body they'll think I did it."

She opened her eyes abruptly. "I don't understand. Why would they think you did it?"

He didn't answer.

She remembered what Owun had said while he had groped her breasts, about Ky wetting his pants every time he saw her. "Well?"

He took a deep breath. "You are very beautiful, Rowan..."

"... and..."

"They make jokes about you and I."

"They do? Who?"

"The whole household."

"What do they say?"

"Stupid things that don't matter. But now that this has happened their jokes will become evidence."

"And..."

"They know I have liked you from the start. I let you get away with things -- little faults that went unpunished. They will think I killed him to stop him having you."

"And would you have?"

He looked at her for a moment. "Oh, yes. Yes indeed."

He grabbed her hand before she had time to respond and dragged her back onto the path down toward the village. She protested and he stopped while she dropped her tunic over her head. Though it was wet, at least it afforded some protection from the spindly branches of trees, which bordered the path.

The track was steep and roughly cut into the side of the rocky mountain. Several times Rowan stumbled and Ky caught her in his strong arms. Her heart jumped each time, hoping he would kiss her, but he quickly released her and carried on.

Eventually the path leveled out and they walked through a sloping plain of low bushes. The village, a collection of a few dozen two-story buildings, showed few lights and was silhouetted against the final remnants of the sunset's pink glow.

Ky explained that they had to be quiet. The village was patrolled by the Watch, rough local men given the job of enforcing the curfew. Whoever they caught out of doors without permission received harsh penalties at their sadistic hands. In her case, as an escaped slave, she'd be lucky to survive the night.

"Why a curfew?" she asked.

"It's the law. Every village in the land has to obey."

Ky led her to a head-high fence made of crooked poles threaded together by what felt like horsehair rope. Between the poles she could make out pale chinks of light slipping weakly from the slatted windows of a two-story dwelling.

"What place is this?" she asked as Ky pulled several of the poles aside to create a temporary gate. She ducked through the gap and held it open for Ky to follow into a dingy courtyard.

"Sssh. There are dogs."

Ky led her by the hand through shadowy objects which littered the courtyard. Rowan chose not to think about what her feet were walking through except it was slimy and things wriggled beneath her toes.

Eventually they settled behind some timbers leaning against a small outhouse. "These are friends of mine," Ky explained. "I am hoping they will help us and hide you."

"Remember I have to find Chin Lau!"

"There is time for that. First you must hide."

"Chin Lau is in danger."

"We are in danger!" he snapped and then added softly, "Trust me. I'll find out where they sent him."

"What will you do?"

"Return to the Hold and report to the Master what really happened."

"Do you think he will believe you?"

"I have always found him to be a just man."

Rowan remembered the sting of his slap and doubted Ky's judgment of men. She faced him squarely. "You are a good man, Ky."

"I am mad. You are a slave. Why I should do this I do not know."

In the darkness she saw him shake his head and immediately she needed to convince him there was a reason -- an important reason. "Because you are my friend," she whispered. "I have always known it to be so."

He sighed as if disappointed. "It is more than friendship."

Her heart thudded inside her chest so hard she thought she heard it burst free of her body. She touched his cheek and softly stroked his firm jaw. "I know now."

He pulled her hand away. "And I know your heart is with Chin Lau."

A door opened, sending a shaft of light spilling out onto the courtyard. Rowan could make out a collection of barrels and boxes amid the scraps of decaying food that littered the ground. Ky pulled Rowan closer to him. He smelled fresh and clean after the impromptu shower in the waterfall. His skin was warm as well and she felt a familiar pulse in her groin.

A pretty young girl about eighteen years of age stood silhouetted against the yellow light filtering from indoors. She was tall and slim and Rowan could see the

generous curves of her breasts. "Who's there?" The girl's voice was confident and assertive.

"Maria," Ky whispered. "It is Ky. I must speak to your mother."

Ky leant over to Rowan and her pussy pulsed with lust. He whispered in her ear, "Wait here. I'll be back."

Ky stood and Rowan watched his silhouette walk toward the girl. Rowan squirmed as she admired his powerful legs and trim waist, imagining what it would feel like to have him between her thighs, her nails raking his broad back as he pounded into her.

There was a rustle behind her and she froze. Hot breath blew on her neck then a large wet tongue slid across her neck. She jumped. Beside her was a large hound, its canines glistening in the light from the doorway. Huge dark eyes seemed to swallow the darkness and blinked at her excitedly.

"Some watchdog you are," she whispered. She held out her hand, below its mouth so it could smell her before she patted it on the head. Within a minute she was ruffling its ears and it had rolled onto its back so she could scratch its stomach.

The door opened again and the dog ran to the doorway. Ky bent down and gave the dog a good-natured rub on the head. "Hati, you old useless hound," he laughed. "Stand guard next time why don't you? Rowan. It's safe to come in."

She climbed to her feet and went to him, picking her way between small piles of fragrant but unidentifiable rubbish.

"Zara says you are welcome."

"Zara?"

"A friend. She is busy with a customer but she welcomes you. Come in."

She followed him into the kitchen. It was a simple affair, a rough-hewn table and six wooden chairs. On the wall hung various copper pots and pans as well as metal tongs and spoons. String bags of various types of vegetables from which the kitchen derived a thick dry bouquet hung from the rafters. Though it was primitive, Rowan felt certain Cook would've felt very much at home in this kitchen. There was an open

fireplace with a stovetop on which a pot of cinder was fuming, sending wisps of aromatic steam into the air.

Standing beside the oven was the curvaceous young woman, Maria. Rowan was surprised at the girl's beauty. She was tall and solidly built, dressed in a low cut blouse revealing firm and very full breasts. Her long dark hair formed a halo around her face before cascading over her shoulders. Her oval face was dominated by high cheekbones and full sensual lips, and her long-lashed eyes were dark and penetrating. Those eyes were fixed on Ky and Rowan could clearly see the girl was besotted with him.

"Maria, can you get us something to drink?" he asked. "We are wet too. Is there anything warm and dry you can get Rowan to wear?"

Rowan noticed the young girl's suspicious glare and, not wishing to attract the girl's animosity any more than she had already done, shook her head. "No, Ky. I'm OK."

"Maria?"

Maria pursed her lips, obviously torn between her desire to serve Ky and her complete distrust of Rowan. The girl fetched two cups of cinder. She dropped Rowan's onto the table but handed the second one to Ky, her hand lingering over his as she gave it to him. He smiled and nodded and Rowan felt a pang of jealousy slice through her chest.

Could Ky be interested in such a girl, she wondered, and how did he know Zara and her willful daughter in the first place? Rowan sat at the table and took a sip of the steaming cinder, closing her eyes in bliss as the liquid warmed her whole body.

It had been a strange day. So much had been turned upside down. There was so much she needed to know. "Tell me, Ky. Where did Chin Lau and I come from?"

"I suppose it doesn't matter now, does it? That you ask questions is no longer the issue, is it? Well, you come from the slave market, where else?"

"Before that?"

He shrugged. "Master brought you home from Logis. He said he'd bought you and a dozen others."

"Logis?"

"It's a city on the coast."

"What is there?"

"Where Master does his business." He looked at her, surprised, she guessed, at her asking so many questions. She touched her collar involuntarily. It wasn't natural to ask questions.

"And slave markets of course," he added.

"What is Master's business?"

He looked at her quizzically as if he was deciding if the Master's business was any concern of a slave. "Why do you care?"

She looked back at him. Why did she care? Why did she ask so many questions? No one else in the Hold seemed to be as inquisitive as her. Even Chin Lau seemed blissful in his ignorance. "I just need to know."

He shrugged in resignation. "Spices."

"What does he do?"

Impatience swept over his face. "Listen, I don't have time for this right now. I must get back to the Hold, otherwise they'll start hunting me down as well."

"Find out about Chin Lau for me."

"I will." He stood up and placed his empty cup carefully on the table. He lingered there, seeming unable to leave.

She reached out to take his arm. "What is happening tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow? Nothing. Why?"

"The Master thought he had only a day to get Chin Lau away, perhaps to the city you mentioned."

He shrugged. "I don't know what he meant but I'll try and find out." He smiled down at her. "I'll do what I can."

"Please be careful."

"I will."

He looked at Maria who stared at the pair of them with rancorous eyes. "Maria. Look after Rowan for me. I'll be back tomorrow night, or at least I'll send word."

And with that he was gone.

Rowan settled back in front of the fire to sip her cinder.

"Why don't you just go back to your palace," Maria spat. "Leave us alone."

"I won't be here long."

"And keep your hands off Milan. He's mine."

"Milan?" Then she realized she meant Ky. Ky actually had a first name. "Ky... Milan, is only a friend, believe me. Only a friend and he is helping me find my friend."

Maria clearly didn't believe her. "He's mine," she repeated, flicking her long hair over her shoulder as she left the room.

Rowan couldn't suppress her smile at the display of petulance but it soon hardened and she shivered. Maria had taken her at her word and not found her something dry to wear. She edged to the fireplace and warmed her hands by the glowing coals.

The kitchen door swung open and an older woman, slim and attractive, walked in. She had a wide mouth with full lips. Rowan thought she wore a perpetual smile. "I am Zara. Milan told me you'll be staying here for a while."

"Only till I..."

"You'll have to work if you want to stay here."

"Of course. What do you want me to do?"

Zara pulled up a chair by the fire. "What did you do at the Hold?"

"Kitchen and cleaning."

"You'll do both here but that's not enough. Tell me, did the Master have his fun with you?"

"Of course... but..."

"Good. Then you know what's expected. Every man who comes here wants his own private little slave to do his bidding. You're used to that and you are certainly pleasing enough to the male eye as well."

Rowan didn't like the way this was heading. "I don't..."

"You'll do as you're told, or I'll set the Watch onto you. Is that clear?"

Chapter Five

Rowan barked her knuckle on the stove's metal door. She'd only been with Zara and Maria for two hours and she had already scrubbed the accumulated dirt and grime of a century from the kitchen. Meanwhile the mother and daughter were at work upstairs with the seemingly never-ending stream of customers.

While Rowan had no direct memories of brothels or the nature of brothel life she had an understanding of their operation. She felt strangely comfortable here and she wondered if she had herself come from a brothel life. Perhaps both she and Chin Lau were prostitutes in the city.

Zara hadn't yet asked her to service a 'customer' and she hoped Ky... she couldn't yet call him Milan... would return soon and save her from the awkward situation. She had too much to think about, too much to do if she was to be reunited with Chin Lau to pander to the sexual needs of strangers.

The door from the front rooms burst open and Maria stumbled into the kitchen crying. Her tear-streaked cheek was a livid red. A slap, Rowan guessed, or worse.

"Maria," she said as she rushed to the young woman, taking her into her arms. Maria squirmed at first and then let herself be held, finally resting her head against Rowan's shoulder as she cried. "Who did this?" Rowan demanded.

"It doesn't matter."

"Of course it does. You are a free woman. You should never be beaten. Let me look at it."

Maria shook her head violently and pushed her away. "It's all right! Keep away from me."

Rowan released her and returned to stand by the stove. "Suit yourself."

An upstairs door slammed and a few moments later the front door opened and closed. Muffled voices came from the front rooms and then Zara came into the kitchen, her dress askew, exposing the swell of her high set breasts. She'd been with a customer, Rowan guessed, as her makeup was smeared across her smiling face.

She was weighing the coins in her hands but stopped short at the sight of Maria sobbing at the kitchen table. "What happened to you?"

"That prick, Anton."

Zara went to her daughter, draping an arm on her shoulder, which Maria promptly shrugged away. Zara turned to Rowan. "I'd ban him if his father wasn't a regular. I can't risk losing two good customers."

"She shouldn't be beaten," Rowan said bluntly.

"What can she do?"

"Defend herself. She is a free woman. Only slaves are allowed to be beaten."

Zara rounded on her. "What is allowed and what actually happens are two different things, slave."

Rowan recoiled at the tone of Zara's voice. She processed this information and accepted she was at fault. She was surprised at her own boldness, speaking without permission and so adamantly to the free women. Yesterday she would not have dared speak, let alone raise her voice. Much had changed since the death of Owun.

Zara pursed her lips. "I have a trader from Logis out front. He doesn't want a bruised piece of fruit."

Logis! Rowan became excited and at first missed the implication in what Zara was saying. If Chin Lau had been sent to Logis she had to follow him there. It made sense to her that the more she knew of the place the better. She wondered at how easily the idea of servicing a stranger came to her and how easily it sat with her conscience.

"All right," she said. "What do you want me to do?"

Zara's face creased in a relieved smile. She'd obviously expected Rowan to put up more of a fight. "Just what comes naturally."

"No!" Maria stood up abruptly, sending the wooden stool flying. "I can do it."

"Don't be stupid, girl. Your eye is blue already. You'll be no use for a week."

"It's all right," Rowan said to Maria. "Believe me."

Zara went to the door and waited impatiently. "Come on, Rowan. He won't wait forever."

Rowan automatically followed her to the door. "Don't call me Rowan," she said suddenly. Ky had made it clear to her she was to remain in hiding. The last thing she wanted was to have her name known by half the menfolk of the village.

Zara stopped short. "What name do you want me to use?"

"Sen," Rowan answered immediately and wondered where the name came from.

"Sen it is."

Rowan followed her through a narrow hallway to a front room. Lounging on a low bench seat was a blue-eyed man in his forties. He was expensively dressed, with golden rings on his fingers and a gold thread scarf draped around his neck. His florid cheeks peeked above a luxurious moustache and the pepper and salt beard reached halfway down his grey shirtfront.

"This is Sen," Zara said as she sat opposite the man.

Rowan remained standing at a respectful distance. She kept her eyes directed to the floor, and peeking through her eyelashes she considered the nature of the man. He was kindly, she thought. A soft and gentle face despite the whiskers he used, she thought, to give himself a more wild and aggressive appearance.

The trader's eyes were wide with interest as he undressed her in his imagination. "She is beautiful. Is she really a slave?"

Rowan's hands went involuntarily to her throat. She had forgotten her collar. She considered the metal band to be part of her body and rarely thought of it as one never gives much thought to one's little toe.

The problem it caused her was now obvious. The collar would mark her as a slave wherever she went. To be a free woman she needed to get rid of the collar and for that she needed Master's Key.

She had ever seen the Key, though she knew it existed. Again how she knew she couldn't say. But the Master had the Key somewhere and she had to get it.

The trader's expectant expression prompted her to answer his question herself but she remembered her place as a slave and remained silent until she was spoken to. This trader would expect her to continue in that subservient role.

Her desire to speak puzzled her. As a slave she should not think of such things. Obviously she no longer considered herself a slave. But if not a slave, then what was she?

Zara faltered and Rowan guessed why. She had no slave papers. If the trader demanded to see them and she could not present them he would report them to the Watch. The penalty for falsely claiming to own a slave was impalement. "She is really a slave," Zara replied finally, her voice clear and confident. She was a skilled liar. "My business partner bought her only last week."

"She would have cost a pretty penny."

"She did. She is worth it, we think. She has many skills of an erotic nature."

"Really? What are they?"

"Tell him, Sen."

The words came naturally to Rowan, though from where she knew not. "I am a slave, Master. I have been trained to serve a man in the erotic delights. My specialty is the Five Kisses of Eros; the mouth, the nipples, the cock, the balls and the sphinc. I am fluent in the Four Poses of Submission and the Three Poses of Dominance. My specialty is the Dance of the Six Veils."

The trader leant forward in interest. "The Six Veils?" he said, licking his lips in excitement. "You are an exponent of the art?"

Rowan bowed her head. "Yes, Master."

He turned to Zara. "I want the Dance."

Zara's face was impassive. "One hundred clits."

The trader raised his eyebrows in feigned shock. "That is expensive."

"As you said, she is a beauty."

The trader nodded. "Better quality than I would have expected in this backwater. But one hundred clits is very expensive. Throw in the Five Kisses and you have a deal."

Zara remained firm. A tough negotiator. "One twenty-five for the Dance and the Kisses."

The trader laughed. His eyes slid over Rowan's body, taking in the generous swell of her breasts inside the slave tunic, her slim hips and the gentle flare of her hips. His eyes lingered on the juncture of her firm well-sculpted thighs. He licked his lips again and raised his eyes, catching her secretive glance from under her lashes. He smiled. "You have a deal if I can have her for the night. I haven't found lodgings yet and I would stay in your rooms."

"It will cost you more. I can't release her for the whole night. I will have other customers who may wish to have her pleasure them."

"It is late. The Watch are about policing the curfew. I'm sure to be your last customer this evening."

"The Watch themselves visit my establishment," Zara countered.

"No doubt. You have other girls and, if need be, I'll wager you yourself would be a good tumble. The Watch are here every night. They can enjoy her tomorrow. I am here but once a term and I will recommend you to my trader's guild if you accede to my wishes."

Zara almost choked in excitement. "You would do that? Recommend me to your guild?"

"For such a beauty for the whole night I'll shout your name from the battlements of Logis itself."

Zara smiled. "In the morning, what would you have to break your fast?"

The trader clapped his hands in delight. "Eggs and rashes. And wine."

"Your wish is my command," Zara said greedily.

"Sen's obedience is more on my mind at the moment," the trader said, stroking his cock, which had tented his expensive britches.

Zara held out her hand. "Make your payment and I will show you to your room."

The trader fished out a money purse from the deep folds of his coat and counted out the coins. He counted out an extra coin. "I like my rashes crispy."

Zara's eyes glistened as she counted the money. "A double helping of crispy rashes," she agreed.

"And wine for tonight."

"It shall be done."

The trader stood, and after replacing the moneybag into his coat he held out his hands. "Come to me, slave."

"Yes, Master," she said automatically and stepped into his arms.

He moved to plant a kiss on her mouth and she automatically stepped away from him.

"What's this?" the trader roared.

"Row... Sen? What are you doing?" Zara demanded.

"the Dance ends with a kiss, Mistress. I did not wish to spoil it for Master. I only serve to please Master. A kiss would preempt Master's ultimate pleasure."

The trader relaxed, no longer suspicious he was being cheated. "I have heard the Dance is about anticipation of the act of love."

Rowan bowed her head. "This is so, Master."

"And the Dance is so sensuous that the act of love itself can be an anticlimax."

"This has also been said."

Rowan knew this to be true. The best practitioners of the Dance could make a man spend his seed without being touched. How she knew this to be true, like so many other things, she did not know. She had the confidence of someone who could actually perform the Dance. It was as if she had danced it a hundred times. How could that be, when Rowan could not remember ever actually performing it?

"Then let us begin. I am eager to see you perform."

"Have you seen it performed before?" Zara asked him.

"Yes, once in the city, years ago. I was in the back row of a large audience and so the Dance had little effect on me. Being the sole object of the performance I expect it to have more of an impact." He winked at Rowan. "Much more impact."

"Come with me," Zara said, taking his hand. "I will show you to the room and pour your wine while Sen prepares."

The trader smiled at Rowan again. "I look forward to seeing you."

Rowan bowed her head in respect. "Master."

"Go to Maria," Zara instructed, easily adopting the role of Mistress. "She will supply you with what you need."

Rowan returned to the kitchen. Maria was tending her swollen eye with a damp cloth.

"Maria. Your mother has instructed me to service a customer with the Dance of the Six Veils. I need six silken veils. Do you have them?"

"You can dance the Six Veils?" Maria was incredulous and respectful at the same time.

"Yes. But I can hardly call it that if I don't have any veils."

Maria chuckled at her joke. "I shall help you."

Rowan liked the young woman. She reminded her of someone and Rowan decided she would like to make her a friend. She understood the young girl's reticence and jealousy. She had felt the same about her. "Would you like to learn the Dance?" she asked, suddenly hitting on a plan.

Maria's young face brightened. "Oh, yes. Could you teach me?"

"I would like it very much."

Maria ran excitedly from the kitchen and returned a minute later dragging a large chest behind her. She dropped it on the floor in front of the fire and threw back the lid. Inside was a jumbled collection of bright outrageously colored cloth.

"I'm sure we have some silk cloth... here's some."

She tossed Rowan a slip of transparent saffron silk. "Do the colors mean anything?"

Rowan shook her head. "I only need six different colors, but any color will do."

Rowan stripped off her slave tunic and stood naked, waiting for more silk. As Maria threw her strips of cloth she began instinctively to fasten them together with ceremonial knots which would undo with the slightest secret touch and draped the joined cloth around her body; between her legs nestling against the delicate folds of her pussy, fanning out over her stomach and buttocks and back, up to her breasts. The last veil she attached by means of a headband around her face so her eyes peeked seductively over the top.

"Each veil has a special meaning," she explained to an attentive Maria. "As I remove each one it tells the watcher a story. It is a tale of my lust for him, my desire to feel his manliness next to my feminine flesh. Each movement I make tells of my chaste desire for his experienced sensual knowledge, begging him to arouse me and unlock the passion within. Passion I yet know nothing of. I am the innocent."

"Men are such idiots," Maria said.

Rowan smiled. "Perhaps, but once you learn the Dance, you will want to show your man these things, expose your flesh to his eyes, his tongue, his cock. You will dance this dance on your wedding night and it will lock you both in an eternity of love."

"But the customer is not your love."

Rowan laughed. "No. He is not, so I will refrain from removing the last veil in the way only my husband may see on our wedding night. The customer will see a different move and he will be none the wiser. He will still have his pleasure."

"May I watch?"

"If Zara will permit. Tell her you wish to learn and that I need music. Do you have a drum?"

"Yes. A small hand drum."

"Good. Then you can provide a timing beat for me. Just a slow rhythmic beat is sufficient." She patted the tabletop with her hands to show Maria the beat. "When I

look at you and nod my head, increase the speed till I nod again for you to take it back to a slow beat." She demonstrated the change she required. "Can you do this for me?"

Maria nodded her head enthusiastically. "Yes. Yes I can."

"Good. I'm sure the customer will enjoy the prospect of having a female to watch with him. But do not touch his cock. Touch him anywhere else and if he moves to touch his cock himself, take his hand and place it on your breast or your cleft. The art of the Dance is to bring him to climax without direct touch. Once you have achieved this goal that man is in your thrall for life."

Maria looked at her in awe. "With the Dance I can bewitch a man?"

Rowan laughed. "There is no witchcraft. Just the lust of men. But the Dance will enslave him. Of that there is no doubt." But like so many other things she remembered in the past few days, Rowan knew not how she had such wide and detailed knowledge.

"Why do you frown?"

Rowan forced a smile. "No reason."

Maria applied some rouge to her swollen cheek to hide the bruising around her eye and ran upstairs to ask her mother's permission.

Rowan made some final adjustments to the veils, all the time wondering at the extent of her knowledge of the arcane arts of sensual dancing.

Zara was waiting for her at the top of the stairs. "Are you sure you can do this?" she asked nervously. Rowan guessed a disappointed trader could mean a visit from the Watch and the discovery of a runaway slave. That would end in a public impalement in the village square.

"Of course," Rowan said.

Zara took a deep breath. "Then go."

The trader was lying on the wide bed, naked.

He had a muscular body, denoting hard work, though his half erect cock was small and buried in a thick bush of greying pubic hair. In fact, even in the half-light from the glow lamp Rowan could see his whole body was covered in a fine mat of hair.

He had a glass of wine in his right hand and Maria was sitting naked beside him with his left hand draped across her lap.

She had a small hand drum sitting in her lap. At Rowan's signal she started a slow rhythmic beating of the drum.

Rowan focused on the sound. She took a deep breath and stepped into the halo of light Zara had contrived in the center of the room.

She was surprised at how easily the rhythmic movements came naturally to her and she instantly dropped into the philosophy of the Dance.

the Dance of the Six Veils is about innocence, seduction and wantonness, the three stages of womanhood. It begins with the rapid and chaotic movements of youth, and the veils are maneuvered around the body, always concealing, always suggesting but never revealing, at least not until the desired moment.

Rowan was so involved with the rhythm, she was hardly aware of the trader's rapt expression. His hungry eyes devoured her every move, watching closely as the light played through the transparent veils, hinting at her voluptuousness hidden in their folds. The shadows of her breasts, the shadow between her thighs, the bulge of her mound of Venus; his eyes devoured all these as she danced through the ages of womanhood.

As she danced she alternately approached him and then, when she was within reach, withdrew, signifying the desire women have for men but which social restrictions prevented them from proclaiming.

It is not until a woman is collared as a slave that her true nature is revealed and slowly, the veil which covers her face, and more importantly her neck, is pulled away to reveal the mark of slavery.

The trader, also knowledgeable, as all men are about the meaning of the collar, gasped when it came into plain view. Though he had clearly seen her collar downstairs, the rhythm of the Dance and hypnotic beat of the drum dramatically returned it to his consciousness and magnified its significance. His cock was already hard, standing erect and throbbing in anticipation. He kept his hands tightly wrapped around his cup and

firmly imbedded in Maria's lap so he would not touch his cock. He obviously wanted the ultimate pleasure; to come without touch, succumbing instead to the sensuality of the Dance.

the Dance slowed and became even more sensuous, now suggesting the seduction of man by woman and the fulfillment of her destiny to be the object of men, for that was the purpose of slavery.

As she removed each veil she danced with it as one would a lover, then approached the trader and lightly caressed him with the veil, touching first his face, then his hairy chest, then his stomach and upper thighs but never his cock, which pulsed and quivered in anticipation.

Twice he reached for her but she danced out of reach. Three times he succumbed to desire and reached for his cock, but Maria intercepted him, placing his hand on her breast the first time and between her legs the second and third times, squirming as his busy fingers found her center. Remarkably, she kept the beat of the drum regular as he fingered her pussy. His eyes stayed locked on Rowan and she couldn't help but feel the power she had over him.

He was entranced, his eager eyes locked onto hers.

After she'd removed a veil and teased him with it she would drape it on a part of his body. His feet were the first to receive such attention to show her subservience to him. When she placed the first veil on his left foot he groaned pitifully and she knew she could give him the ultimate pleasure.

When Rowan draped the second veil over his right foot his cock pulsed strongly as if it was ready to spurt. She smiled knowingly as she nimbly stepped away. Rowan knew every time she came close the breeze she created would stir the veils and caress his skin. His excitement would rise to higher and higher levels. Each pass would take him closer to the brink.

The third veil went over his left breast and the fourth over his right. She danced away as Maria prevented his hand going to his cock once again.

He licked his lips in anticipation as she removed the fifth veil from her breasts and his eyes widened at the sight of her. She caressed her breasts with the veil, letting her movements jiggle them seductively. She approached him again, draping the veil over his face, trailing it down the middle of his chest between the two veils which covered his nipples and down his belly toward his throbbing cock.

She held the cloth above him and let it fall. It floated down, coming to rest on his flat belly. He groaned again, this time with deep desire.

Still keeping to Maria's beat on the drum Rowan swirled about the room as if in a frenzy, until finally she came before him and stopped, her hips gently swaying, and with the signal, Maria's rhythm slowed. Rowan began to unwind the veil from her hips. The trader's eyes were locked onto her groin. As she removed the sixth veil she turned away so the trader could only see her back, sliding the veil between her legs and up over her creamy buttocks.

Then in a swift and deliberate movement she turned and released the veil above his throbbing cock.

His cock jerked and a plume of white cum arced into the air. Rowan had released the veil so that as it fell it caught some of the cum before settling down over his pulsating cock. The trader collapsed back onto the bed in sheer exhaustion and Maria clapped in the pure joy of it.

Naked, Rowan slowly climbed onto the bed and lay down beside him. She brought her face close to his and as promised, ended the Dance with a kiss.

Looking over his rapidly declining cock now covered in the veil, she winked at Maria who smiled knowingly back.

"I've never been to the city," Rowan whispered after settling in beside the trader's body. "What is it like?"

With his eyes still closed the trader draped his arm about her shoulder. "The city is a beautiful place, houses and palaces of immense wealth. The arts are encouraged and the people cultured and wise."

"Tell me more," Rowan encouraged and relaxed in the crook of his arm.

An hour later the trader's voice became slow and eventually he stopped talking and his breathing relaxed until he was silent. Rowan looked into his face to be rewarded by the sound of his snores.

Maria, too, was asleep, a gentle smile on her lips.

Rowan sighed and settled back to process what she had learned and decide the best way to use her new knowledge.

Chapter Six

Zara dropped the breakfast dishes into the bucket. "You did well last night," she said to Rowan.

"Thank you."

"You have a talent for the Dance. Our city trader was well pleased."

"That he was." Rowan recalled the frantic coupling of Maria and the trader following her first lesson in the Dance.

As the sun had peaked over the mountains the trader had been a willing volunteer and had completely forgotten about the Five Kisses he had purchased. He enjoyed watching the naked Rowan instruct the veiled Maria in the basics of the Dance.

Though this time he hadn't come unaided when Maria released the last veil, his cock was suitably hard and throbbing and Maria herself was so aroused she pounced on his cock and rode him into a powerful orgasm. His groans brought an anxious Zara rushing upstairs, thinking the man had died in her house. She had been visibly relieved to see the trader recumbent under Maria's naked body.

"I think he enjoyed Maria's company more than my dance."

Zara nodded. "He was well serviced. And if he tells his guild friends of my house we will be well rewarded. Where did you work in the city?"

"I cannot remember."

"You have the skills of an experienced sex slave. Though you are young you are well trained. Dancing such as yours is rare. Wherever you came from has lost something truly valuable."

Is this what all this is about? Rowan wondered. *I am a good dancer? Could that be all it is?* "I have no knowledge of my life before the Hold."

"You obey men instinctively, the mark of a true slave. You speak strangely. You do not sound like any city folk I have talked with."

"I wish I knew where I came from." The memory of the fight and her easy dispatch of Overseer Owun flashed through her mind. "I know things, but I do not know where or how I learned them."

"What sort of things?"

She touched her collar. "Things a slave does not know."

From the corner Maria gave a loud yawn. "Once our chores are done, can we practice the Dance again?"

"Oh, Maria," she laughed. "I need sleep, but later."

Maria yawned again. "After we get some sleep."

Rowan laughed. "Let's get busy then and finish quickly because I need some sleep if I am to go and see what has happened at the Hold."

"Is that safe?"

"Probably not. But I am worried about Ky. I hope they will not blame him for Overseer Owun's death. But if they have I want to surrender myself and save him from trouble."

Maria's eyes were wide open. "You really killed an Overseer?"

"I defended myself, but I cannot let Ky be blamed for it."

"You would sacrifice yourself for Marin?"

"He is a friend. I cannot let him suffer for something I have done. That is not the way to reward friendship."

Maria paused to absorb this. "You are wise."

Rowan frowned and balled up a washcloth and threw it at her. "Come on, you. The quicker we start the sooner we finish."

Rowan waited until the sun fell below the western mountains and the village was plunged into darkness. The three moons were pale crescents and their light was weak and not very useful. She gave Hati the dog one last pat, waved to Zara and Maria

and pushed the fencepost to one side and scrambled out into the bush land behind the houses.

In the distance the mountain rose up to meet the blackness of the sky. The flagpoles of the Hold caught the last rays of the dying sun and for a moment shone like jewels in the sky.

Rowan tried her best to retrace their steps of the previous evening. She remembered some of the rock outcrops and would stop every few hundred meters to look back to the village to keep her bearings. She was confident she was on the right track.

It was hot work. Though the evening air was cool she had quickly worked up a sweat and occasionally a rivulet of perspiration would slip down the middle of her back.

Rowan stopped by a boulder to catch her breath. She looked around, trying to see through the darkness.

There was a something, a faint sound at the edge of hearing.

She tensed and held her breath. She could sense something but what she didn't know. The only sounds were the chirping of insects and the constant rush of the waterfall where she and Ky had bathed only the night before.

She wished she had worn something warmer than her slave tunic but figured that if she was going to crawl through the cesspit again she didn't want to be burdened with too much clothing.

She waited another moment then took a step.

From out of nowhere a hand clamped about her mouth.

"Ssh."

It was Ky. Instinctively she knew it was he who was holding her tight and whispering in her ear. Her body warmed at the thought of his muscular arms wrapped around her. She felt her pussy pulse and liquefy. He was wet and she guessed he had just bathed under the waterfall.

"What are you doing here?"

"Looking for you," she replied, angered by his question.

"I was coming to find you."

"I must have Master's collar Key," she said bluntly.

"What?"

"I can never be a free woman while I wear this collar. And if we search for Chin Lau in the city I can't ask questions if I am a slave."

"This is impossible. Master would no more give you his Key than you would slap him."

"I would if he commanded me," she retorted.

"Don't get smart. The Master will not give you the collar Key."

"I must have it. You will get it for me."

"What?"

"Please, Ky. I must have the Key. Otherwise how can I be a free woman?"

He considered her argument for a moment. "This is madness."

She gripped his arm. "Ky."

He looked down at where she touched him.

"See. I am not a slave."

"Let go of my arm."

She released him immediately, automatically, before her conscious command to keep hold of him could intervene.

"See," he countered. "You obey me without thought. You are still a slave."

She wanted to touch his arm again but could not. Not so soon after his command. She scowled in frustration.

"But I want you," she admitted in a whisper.

"And I want you."

She looked up at him with a questioning look, not comprehending his dilemma. "Why can't we?"

"If I command you to lie with me," he explained, "it would be as a slave. I want you to freely give yourself to me. For this to happen I must be silent."

"But as a slave I cannot touch you unless you command it."

"And if I command it you are no more than a slave. I cannot have that."

She wanted him so much. She wanted to feel his lips upon hers, the warmth of his tongue, the caress of his fingers, the thrust of his manhood. Anger grew within her at his reluctance to do the obvious. She knew he wanted her, why didn't he just take her! "Can't I just say I want to lie with you and... we do?"

He shook his head. "But I will ask you to do things while you make love to me and that would be as an Overseer and you will obey. I will not take you as a slave."

How obtuse could a man be? "I can't help it. I have to obey. If a free man says I must fuck him, I will. Other men will take me. How do you feel about that?"

She sensed his body tensing. He didn't answer for a moment and she hoped his jealousy would make him do what both of them wanted. "But they will not have you as a free woman, as I hope to have you."

"What do you think will happen? That one day I'll wake up and not obey a free man who wants to fuck me?"

"You are changing. You know this, don't you? You killed Owun, a free man, an Overseer. That wasn't the action of a slave."

"But why do I still obey?"

He shrugged impatiently. "I don't know, but you are changing."

"But not fast enough. I'm arguing with you now. Isn't this enough for you to know that I'm not fucking you because I have to obey? I'd be fucking you because I want to?"

"As a slave you seek to pleasure men. How do I know you are not saying these things simply to have me satisfy that urge?"

She lost her patience. "You don't, damn it! But can't you just enjoy it until you are sure?"

"No."

"Why not, for God's sake?"

"Because I will not *enjoy* it."

"Why not?"

"Because..." He stopped himself.

"Well?" she prompted.

"Because you love Chin Lau."

Everything stopped as if she had been hit in the head by a rock. Chin Lau. How had she forgotten Chin Lau? Why did she want to fuck Ky with such desire when all she could think about for the last two days was Chin Lau? What was wrong with her?

"Chin Lau is... I don't know what he is."

"You came to the Hold together."

"With other slaves," she corrected.

"Yes. But you speak the same. Your voices are like no others."

She nodded. "We have the same accent."

"I have never heard such speech before. You are both from the same place far from here. Before you came to the Hold you were together. You think of him always. I can tell. This desire you have for me... this is your slave self talking... your instinct to serve a man. But you love Chin Lau. Only when you are not a slave can you choose me. Only when you are free of Chin Lau."

"Oh, Ky. I'm so sorry."

"Enough of this," he said, changing the subject which was clearly hurting both of them. "We are exposed here. There is danger."

"Are they after me?"

"Overseer Owun has not been found yet. They have missed you but that's of no concern now. The Skolls are coming and the Master was waiting for them. He hopes to convince them that you and Chin Lau have been sold in the city. He asked me to find you and escape with you."

"He asked you?"

"He is a frightened man. The Skolls terrify him."

"Who are the Skolls?"

Ky spat on the ground in disgust. "Wolves in black cloaks. Private soldiers. Men of the worst kind. They kill without thinking. Life to them is nothing. Master received a communication from the city telling him they were coming to the Hold."

"Why?"

"For you."

"And will they believe him when he says we have gone to the city?"

Ky shrugged. "Who can say? He was not very convincing when he told me of his plan."

"Then we must rescue him."

He was speechless for a full minute, staring into her eyes, as if he was trying to fathom her and discover the source of her foolishness.

"We cannot rescue him."

"Why not?"

He was speechless again. Rowan tried to see it from his point of view. There was just the two of them against these inhuman Skolls. But she had killed before and he knew it. "I can handle myself," she added.

"I know it. But I cannot put you in danger. I will go and get the Master and Mistress... and the Key."

She shook her head in the negative. "Treat me as a slave if you must," she hissed. "But I am going back to the Hold to get the Key. With or without you!"

"You become less of a slave every moment," he muttered.

Chapter Seven

Amidst the wreckage of the Hold's kitchen Rowan sank to her knees into a pool of bright red blood. It was as if she'd had her spine ripped out of her body and her insides sucked out. She couldn't breathe, she couldn't think.

Cook's pale face looked up at her, eyes staring uncomprehendingly, her throat gaping open. Rowan reached out with trembling fingers and closed those unseeing eyes.

"Everyone is dead," Ky reported in a close whisper.

"All dead?" Rowan looked over to little Sarah's body. Ky had placed a kitchen towel over her bloodied face.

"All the lower levels, yes."

Rowan couldn't believe it. All these people, a hundred strong, all gone. She found it impossible to comprehend. She had lived and worked with them for six terms. They couldn't all be dead.

"Everyone," Ky repeated and grasped her arm. "Some tortured as well."

Rowan shook her head in disbelief.

Ky squeezed her arm tightly and lifted her to her feet. "The Skolls are still here in the Hold, searching for you," he warned.

"Why me?" she mumbled in confusion.

"You are important to them. But why I cannot say."

Still in shock, Rowan wiped her hands on her slave tunic and stared at the trail of gore she left behind. She couldn't believe she could be the reason for so much death, so much barbarism. Could it all be because of her? "I should give myself up," she said, surprised at how steady her voice was. "So they don't go down to the village and kill everyone down there as well."

Ky shook his head vigorously. "No. They won't go down to the village."

"How do you know?"

"Master told them you were on your way to the city. They'll be searching the roads."

"Then why all this?"

"Because we'd all seen you and knew you were here. They will not believe the village knows anything about you. You are a slave after all."

"But when they don't find me, when they just find Chin Lau, they'll come back because the village may know something."

His expression became uncertain. "Perhaps that will be the case."

"Then I must give myself up. I can't let this happen to Zara or Maria."

Ky gripped her arms and pulled her close to him. "I won't let you."

"You cannot stop me."

"Rowan. No. If you give yourself up then all these people died for nothing. You must stay free and discover the cause of this catastrophe. Believe me, together we'll make them pay."

Rowan searched Ky's face. His expression was fixed in a way she had never seen before. He was angry. His eyes fixed hers in an unwavering gaze. "You will do as I say."

Rowan nodded in obedience before she could think of resisting. "You bastard," she whispered, realizing what he was doing. Taking advantage of her slave mentality, diminishing as it may be, was a low trick.

Ky made no response. His eyes were still boring into hers, totally unrepentant.

Rowan nodded and resigned herself to the task of bringing the perpetrators to justice. A task she knew to be too much for a mere slave girl. "If I don't give myself up we must warn the villagers. Warn the Watch. So they may protect themselves."

Ky nodded in agreement. "That will be sufficient. The Skolls will not attack a prepared village. I'll get word to Master's brother so he will return and claim the Hold and bring normality back to the people."

"If everyone is dead, where is the Master?"

Ky looked down as if ashamed. "They were questioning him in his rooms."

"The Mistress?"

He looked up. "I did not see her."

"Then we must find her. We cannot leave her to these barbarians."

"Where would she hide? You think like a woman. Where would you hide?"

"Just start searching."

"Where?"

"How would I know?" she said helplessly and then added bitterly, "I'm just a slave."

The lower levels held only death, she knew. The Skolls had systematically tortured and killed everyone they had come across. Rowan closed her mind to the awful carnage, knowing that if she didn't she wouldn't be able to go on.

"The Master's apartments then," Ky said and they rushed to the upper levels, leaping over dead bodies of slave and Overseer alike.

"I want to check the armory," Ky said at the top of the stairs.

"I'll check the Master's rooms."

Ky held up his hand for her to be quiet. A deep silence descended on them and Rowan was keenly aware of the beating of her heart. Along the corridor all the doors were shut tight.

Ky nodded. "I'll only be a moment. Just check the bedroom."

Ky brushed past her and she watched him step lightly down the corridor to a nondescript door, which he opened with one of his Keys. Rowan had not been aware there was an armory here.

Stepping quietly Rowan went to the Master's bedroom door and listened. In between the pounding of the blood rushing through her veins she could hear nothing from within. Taking a deep breath she gently pushed open the door.

The Master was sitting in the center of the room, bound to a chair by his dressing gown belt. His head lolled lifelessly against his naked chest, which was matted with thick red arterial blood.

She rushed to his side. "Master?"

There was no answer.

"Master?" she repeated and gasped as she looked down to his groin. It was a pool of blood, which was still slowly filling and running over his thighs. She dreaded to think what atrocity the Skolls had committed to his manhood.

She lifted his chin so she could look into his eyes. "Master?" she whispered.

His face was bloody and bruised, his eyes swollen shut. He had been beaten mercilessly. She saw a muscle move. "Master!"

The mouth opened and a gob of blood-speckled white with broken teeth dribbled gore across his chin.

"Ejar..."

"Master?"

"Ejar," the Master gurgled through his ruined mouth.

Rowan heard footsteps behind her. She turned defensively and was relieved to see Ky entering the room. He was carrying a pair of stingers.

She turned back to the Master. "Who is Ejar?"

"A friend of Master's," Ky answered for the Master. "It is to Ejar that Chin Lau was sent."

She turned back to him. "How do you know?"

"I asked the stable Overseer before he died. He instructed the driver where to take the slave."

"Do you think the stable Overseer told the Skolls?"

"They used hot pokers on him so I assume he did."

"Then we must leave immediately."

Ky glanced significantly at the Master. His throat was gurgling blood.

"What can we do for him?" she asked.

"He will not live beyond the hour."

"Master? Where is Mistress?"

There was a distant scream.

"I think they found her," Ky said. "Take this." He handed her the extra stinger and ran out the room.

"We will protect her," Rowan said to the Master.

His head nodded lightly. "Lee," he mumbled his wife's name and then he gave a final sigh before he died.

Gripping the stinger tightly, she followed Ky out into the corridor. She saw him at the far end of the corridor standing outside the door of the library. He motioned to her to hurry and she ran as quietly as she could and leant against the wall beside him.

From within they could hear Mistress sobbing and the amused laughter of men. "There are three," Ky whispered after a moment of concentrated listening.

A man shouted and Mistress screamed. More laughter followed.

"We go in quick," Ky explained. "I take the right and you the left." He motioned to the stinger. "Do you know how it works?"

Rowan looked blankly at the stinger. She had no idea what to do with it. Obviously using weapons was not part of her former life.

"Point the barrel at the Skolls and push the red stud in the stock. This one is lethal setting. Shoot high, over their heads so you don't hit Mistress. They'll duck and I'll shoot them. Grab Mistress as soon as you can and take her to the cesspit. I'll follow."

She nodded her understanding and was glad he knew what he was doing.

"On the count of three."

She nodded.

Ky looked at her and smiled. Suddenly he kissed her on the lips. His mouth was like a searing flame against her face.

"Ky..."

"Three!"

He crashed through the door with a screeching yell, firing the stinger as he did. Rowan followed him and in the confusion glimpsed the tall cloaked figures standing around the couch. Mistress was spread-eagled on the couch, one Skoll each holding her legs and arms splayed apart while the third stood between her legs, cock in hand, about to rape her.

Ky took advantage of the Skolls' stunned surprise at their sudden entrance and cut down the man holding the Mistress's right arm. Rowan fired at the ceiling as instructed and plaster fell in a thick cloud of smoke and dust.

The remaining two Skolls let go of Mistress and drew their weapons. Ky was rolling on the floor firing, his laser bolt striking the rapist in the shoulder. Rowan fell to the floor as well, firing at the ceiling still. She couldn't see clearly but heard glass shattering and a yelp of pain.

Ky was grappling with the third Skoll over a fallen stinger. She ran to his aid and without hesitation put the stinger to the side of the leather helmet and pressed the stud. The Skoll's head exploded in a red mist as her legs were swept from under her. The wounded Skoll had her by the left leg. The next thing she felt was a knife at her throat.

She screamed for Ky but it was all over in a moment. Ky had fired and she felt the sear of heat as the beam cut through the air beside her face. The Skoll grunted and fell back, a hole drilled neatly through his forehead.

"Rowan! Are you hurt?"

She did a quick inventory of her limbs. "I'm fine," she said, amazed at the calmness of her voice.

"You did well, my little warrior." He grinned as he offered his hand for her to rise.

The Mistress was still on the couch, whimpering softly and trembling in fear. "Let's go," Ky ordered as he helped the stunned and barely conscious woman to her feet.

"Wait!" Rowan cried.

"What is it now?"

"Where does Master keep the Keys?"

"No! We don't have time to search for it."

"Ky!" she insisted. "Where does he keep his Keys to the Hold?"

In frustration Ky grasped her by the hand and led them both at a run down the corridor. Mistress followed in a stumbling manner and would have fallen had Rowen not held her up. Ky took them to the Master's private office. It too had been ransacked.

The Skolls had been looking for something as well. Searching for what, she didn't know, though she had a sinking feeling in her gut.

Ky went to a wall cabinet. Its door had been ripped off its hinges and below it on the floor had been strewn dozens of numbered electronic Keys. Ky knelt and rummaged through them.

"I can't see yours," he said.

"Chin Lau's?"

"Missing as well."

Her hopes fell. "Are you sure?"

He shot her a baleful look and, grabbing a bag from within the ruined cabinet, swept up all the Keys. "We'll check them all later. Come on. We must leave. As soon as those dead Skolls are found we'll be lucky if they don't torch the whole valley."

Rowan was devastated. The Skolls had her Key. Why had they taken her Key? And Chin Lau's as well. What was so special about their slavery that would cause all of this?

"Come on!"

Rowan was alone staring at the cabinet. She turned to find him. He was at the door waiting with Mistress. The woman was leaning rigidly against him as if in a trance. Her torn dress was covered in gore and her whole body trembled uncontrollably.

"To the cesspit," Ky said urgently. He looked at her expectantly.

"No," she said decisively and ran back to the library. A quick search of the bodies of the Skolls revealed no Keys. She returned to find Ky and the Mistress waiting for her at the far end of the corridor.

"The cesspit?" he asked. She could only nod in agreement. There was nothing else here for them.

Taking one hand each, Rowan and Ky dragged the mindless Mistress behind them down flight after flight of stairs. They reached the cesspit and pushed and pulled Mistress into the tunnel. Dragging her dead weight through the narrow space took all their strength but they eventually emerged into the clean fresh air.

After ensuring there were no Skolls in the vicinity Ky led them to the path down the mountain.

"Where did Master want you to take me?" she asked Ky as they paused for breath beside the rock pool.

"Anywhere," he said, washing his hand in the water and then taking a drink. "He just wanted you away from here. They were going to send you both away but when they couldn't find you they sent Chin Lau by himself."

Rowan cursed her impulsiveness. Had she not been listening outside their door Overseer Owun would not have found her. She would have been where she should have been and she would be with Chin Lau now and all those people would still be alive. "But they said they were going to keep me here."

"How do you know?"

"I heard them talking."

He started to say something but stopped.

"Don't look at me like that."

He rolled his eyes. "Then they must have changed their mind."

"Perhaps," she mused. They had still been trying to decide what they were going to do when Overseer Owun grabbed her. It was plausible they simply became too scared and decided to remove both of them. In the end their fear had been well placed.

Regardless, she and Chin Lau were separated and she had to get to him and save him from those butchers. "None of this matters now," she said decisively. "We must get to the city."

Ky looked to Mistress. The woman was slumped on the ground, trembling with shock and fear. "We cannot leave her here. They will kill her."

"Then she comes with us."

She looked at the woman and went to order her up off her feet. But she couldn't. She was the Mistress. There was still a barrier in her mind where she couldn't order her owner. She looked to Ky and he seemed to understand her plight.

"Here, Mistress," he said gently as he reached down and grasped her by the arm. Mistress made no response, her eyes piteously blank. "Come with us. All will be well."

Zara was not impressed as the filthy trio fell panting into her kitchen. Ky explained the situation to her and she cursed him for involving her and Maria in this, fearing the Skolls would descend on them with sword and flame.

"Zara, I am sorry for placing you in this situation, but you are our only hope. Believe me. But the Skolls are heading to the city."

"But you have drawn them to the village."

"Zara. They have Rowan's friend, or at least they will have him shortly. He is only on the road on a normal cart without protection. They will capture him and take him to the city. He will be bait for Rowan."

"Then you are walking into a trap! Why?"

"There is nothing else for me. I am wanted by the Skolls just as Rowan is. My fate is tied to hers."

Rowan knelt by the Mistress. "Mistress," Rowan said softly, fingering her collar. "Why was I at the Hold?"

Mistress looked blankly into the flames of the kitchen fire. Maria had given her a quick wash and now she was naked with only a coarse blanket hanging loosely on her shoulders. She hadn't the awareness even to hold it close.

"Who is Ejar?"

"She is in shock, Rowan," Ky said.

"Why did he send me and Chin Lau to you?"

Rowan looked into her owner's eyes but they were blank. Mistress was not there. Fear had ruined her senses and destroyed her mind.

"Rowan, she is shattered. Peace and quiet is the only thing that can help her now."

"Zara," Ky said. "Keep the Mistress here until the Master's brother arrives to claim the Hold. He will reward you for keeping her safe. But anyone else will kill her and kill you for being a witness. Is that clear? Keep her as a housekeeper, out of sight and out of mind. Call her Bridget. Understand?"

Zara nodded.

"I don't want to put you in danger," Ky said. "But Master's brother will reward you when he comes. But that may be many terms from now."

Zara looked at the broken woman and Rowan saw a flash of pity cross the brothel keeper's face. "All will be well, Milan. I will protect her. No one will know she is here. No one will recognize her as the Mistress of the Hold."

"That is good."

Rowan stood before Ky. "We will travel to the city and find this Ejar."

Maria rushed to Ky, clutching him by the arm, tears flowing freely down her cheeks. "I will come too!"

"Maria. No!" Zara cried.

Ky's face softened as he looked down at the young woman. He put his arm on her shoulder. "Thank you, Maria. But your mother needs you. You must stay. Help her hide Mistress. We will all return safely."

Zara gathered her daughter up in her arms. "I need you," she whispered.

Maria looked at Rowan. "You will come back too?"

"Yes," she replied gently. "Of course I will. I have the Dance to teach you, don't I?"

Ky turned to Rowan. "I do not know anyone in the city," he said. "We need somewhere safe to hide. As a slave without a master you will stand out like a prick in a nunnery. Without papers we'll both be impaled by the first afternoon."

Rowan was thinking furiously. "Just get us to the city," she said with the beginning of a smile. "I know a man of some importance who will certainly help us."

"You do? And how did you come to gain this benefactor?"

She kissed him impulsively. "Never you mind about that."

Rowan laughed as Ky touched his lips with an expression of stunned stupefaction. "See," she said. "I am becoming less like a slave every minute."

To be continued...

Steve W. Boisman

Steve lives in New South Wales, Australia, with his favourite cat Jones (named after the Nostromo's cat in the Alien movie series) and at every opportunity scuba dives, walks and swims along the beautiful Australian coastline's many beaches. An amateur underwater photographer, Steve's diving forays have taken him to the U.S., Fiji, the Philippines, Malaysia and Vanuatu.

Steve grew up on a healthy diet of Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke and Robert Heinlein. Today, Steve is considered a rising star among short story writers. An avid romance reader as well as contributor, Steve is a member of Romance Writers of Australia, and has had his work selected for inclusion in several of the group's short story competition anthologies. Steve is also a Book Reviewer for a major Australian regional newspaper and is a regular contributor of stories for several adult magazines.