



Island Oasis

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Chapter One

760 B.C.

“Better to die than live as a slave.” Princess Otilia jumped over the ship’s railing and sank beneath the surface. The weight of the wet peasant’s clothes that she had been forced to wear pulled her deeper into the dark depths of the Mediterranean. She struggled to reach the surface. Her chest burned with the need to breathe.

Her head broke the surface; she managed a quick gasp of breath before she was dragged under again. Otilia frantically ripped at her clothes. If she didn’t get rid of them, she would never reach the island. She refused to give up without a fight.

Otilia freed herself from the last of her garments and kicked with her long, powerful legs upwards towards the surface. She closed her eyes against the pain. Her arms grew heavy. She felt like she was swimming in sand.

I am not going to make it, but at least I’ll die free.

Her need to breathe overcame her ability to hold her breath and she inhaled—cool air filled her chest. Otilia opened her eyes, got her bearings and started swimming toward the island.

From the ship, it had appeared so close, but now it seemed so very far away. The sky blazed with pink, red and gold. Sea birds cried out noisily overhead. All too quickly the last rays of the dying sun faded from the heavens, leaving the island a shadow against a black, starlit canopy.

* * * *

Cycophalis cast the large fishing net out over the water. It fanned out and settled on the surface with a soft splash. He watched with misgivings and deep regret as the person swam towards his island.

People made him feel—uneasy.

His island provided peace and solitude. Cycophalis had learned a long time ago to deal with the loneliness.

Visitors were not welcome.

He sighed and shook his head. The man still had a long way to swim.

The black of night settled around him as he hauled in his net for the last time. He smiled while pulling the heavy net filled with fish towards him. It was a good catch.

Cycophalis sat down on the rocks and drew the net closer. He sorted the fish quickly — gently releasing the smaller ones back into the sea. Over the noise of the waves softly breaking on the rocks, he heard the faint, steady slap of the swimmer's hands on the water.

He raised his arm and threw a fish into the water. "Of all the islands, why pick mine?"

The noise from the swimmer stopped.

Cycophalis cocked his head as he strained to listen. He shrugged his shoulders, stood and picked up his heavy net. His admiration for the man's courage and determination had been growing. It mattered little to him if the man lived or died. He turned to leave.

The sound of a choking cough reached his ears and the man resumed swimming. Cycophalis sat back down on the rocks and waited. The man's gasps for air and the unsteady rhythm of his hands hitting the surface grew louder.

A hand clutched the edge of the rock. Cycophalis reached down and with one mighty pull, lifted the man out of the water.

"Thank you." The low, husky voice trembled with exhaustion.

As he steadied the tired swimmer with his other hand, his fingers curled around a large, soft mound of flesh.

A woman! The revelation was beyond his reasoning.

Her legs gave out. She began to fall.

Cycophalis grabbed her, tossed her over his left shoulder and picked up his net full of fish. He started up the mountain trail.

* * * *

Otillia wanted to scream out in protest for being tossed over the man's shoulder like a sack of grain, but it was that very act that kept her quiet. She did not know of many men who could carry her sixteen stone weight, and none who could do it with such ease.

"Put me down." She put her hands on his back and pushed.

He stopped suddenly.

"Ouch!" The cheeks of her ass burned with a sharp, stinging heat.

"Be still."

"How dare you strike me? Put me down this instant," she demanded.

"You are tired, your feet are tender, and when you fall you will get a broken arm or leg. I will carry you, for now."

Otillia swayed back and forth with each step he took. The net full of fish bumped and smacked into her.

"Where are you taking me?"

"To my dwelling on the other side of the mountain. You talk too much. Ask too many questions."

"I don't want to go with you." She pounded her fists on his back.

With the quickness of an adder, his hand landed on her ass.

She gasped in shock before exclaiming, "What was that for?"

"You are no longer a little child," he chided, with a chuckle. "Stop acting like one."

"Is this how you treat other women on this island?" Queasiness began to fill her belly as she continued to be jostled while hanging upside-down over the brute's shoulder.

"There are no other women here." Cycophalis put her down. "You can walk from here. Path is downhill and not hard to follow if you stay behind me."

Otillia reached up and placed her hand on his shoulder. She felt dwarfed beside this giant of a man who stood a head above her own four and half cubits.

"Hold on to this." He took her hand and placed it on the leather belt of his loincloth. "The night is too dark for you to see the path."

She swallowed nervously when her fingers found the top of his butt crack. "Why are there

no other women on the island? Why do you wear only a loincloth? Who are you?"

He laughed loud and long. "Why do you ask so many questions?"

"Because I don't know the answers."

"I am Cycophalis. This is my island, where I live alone. Why do you wear nothing?"

"I had clothes, but I couldn't swim with their weight. Why do you live alone?"

"Because I want to," he snapped.

"If this is an example of the way you treat women, I am sure the feeling is mutual."

His butt muscles tightened and trembled. He growled.

Had she pushed him too far?

Cycophalis spun around. His free hand grasped her hair and pulled her close to him.

"You know nothing about me, yet you presume to cast judgment. I do not want you here. Be careful that I don't throw you back to the sea."

Otillia could not think straight with her breasts flattened against his chest and his cock pressed hard against her belly.

His fingers loosened their grip on her hair and gently smoothed out her long, tangled tresses. "You are the only woman who has ever been on this island."

Cycophalis' words were softer, lower, lulling her in an exotic, hypnotic trance. For some strange reason, she wanted him to kiss her. She felt cheated when he released her and continued down the path.

Lightning flashed across the sky in a long, jagged streak that momentarily lit up the mountain. "We must hurry. A storm is coming."

Thunder shook the mountain beneath their feet. She hurried to catch up with Cycophalis.

Lightning arced through the sky and struck the mountain near where they stood. The air around them filled with the foul stench of sulfur. Cycophalis dropped the net, picked her up in his arms and started running.

The heavens opened up and dropped a deluge upon them. Hard, stinging pellets of wind driven rain stung her skin. Otillia hid her face in the hollow of his shoulder while praying to the gods they wouldn't be struck by lightning.

He ran with the speed of a gazelle and the agility of a lion. Otillia marveled yet again over the man who carried her. She felt safe in his arms, protected against the storm that raged around them.

The rain stopped punishing her skin. They entered some sort of shelter. He lowered her feet to the ground. The low embers of a fire glowed in a hearth. A table, chair and the largest bed she had ever seen were the only furniture.

"I am sorry." Cycophalis looked around the room but kept his face turned from her. "I am a man of simple means." He knelt before the fire, poking the embers to life with a long stick. "I do not have much to offer you, other than what you see."

"I do not require much." She moved toward the hearth.

"I have a blanket if you wish to cover yourself?"

"Does my body offend you?"

"No." He added wood to the fire and the flames leapt to touch the dry fuel. "You may cover yourself or not, it makes little difference to me.

"If you are hungry, there is wine in the urn and dried fish in the basket. You may help yourself."

"Thank you." The rich aroma of the grapes made her mouth water. She dipped a gourd pitcher into the wine and lifted it to her lips. "I am from Kush. Various caravans have graced our table with the finest wines, and yet I find this one equals any of those."

"Your family is rich?"

"I am Princess Otilia. My Grandfather is the king." She reached out and touched his shoulder. "Why do you hide your face from me?"

"Because I am not pleasant to look at," he answered, bitterness lacing his tone.

"Did you become this way in battle?"

"No." He continued to prod the fire avoiding her gaze. "I am a joke, sent from the gods to curse my parents to a life of shame."

"I do not believe the gods are so cruel." Otilia ran her hand through his thick, dark curls.

"Oh, *no*?" He whipped his head around and looked up at her.

She clamped her mouth shut before a sound of surprise could escape. One eye, filled with loathing and pain, glared unblinking at her, but where there should've been its mate was scarred, puckered skin.

"I see revulsion in your eyes. Take a good look." His fingers clamped around her wrist and pulled her to her knees. "The great Greek physicians did this. I was born with one eye, but they decided in their wisdom to make me another. As you can see, they failed."

Compassion welled up inside her while considering all he suffered.

“Mothers hid their children from me when I walked down the street, or they’d threaten that if the children were bad, they would send them to me and I would *eat* them.”

“I am sorry you had to live with that.”

“The older children—” He went on as though she had not spoken. “—and even adults would throw stones, calling me *Cyclops*.”

Otillia lifted a thumb to his cheek, wiping away a tear. She leaned closer to this tortured man. His hot breath caressed her face. Her lips touched his scarred flesh in a tender kiss.

Chapter Two

Cycophalis felt stunned. No woman, not even his mother, had ever kissed him since the butchers disfigured him for life.

The black, ivory-smooth skinned princess stood taller than any woman he had ever seen. Her hair flowed like beaten flax across her shoulders. Her firm breasts stirred his blood, but also brought back bitter memories.

He ignored the sheen of moisture in her eyes and her tender caress. "I do not want your pity." Cycophalis turned his back to her.

Otillia placed her hand on his shoulder. "It was not my intent to give any."

"Then why did you kiss me?"

She waited several long moments before she answered. "Maybe to show you that your scar means nothing to me. That I understand some of the anguish you feel."

"You!" Cycophalis spun around. "What could you understand? When you leave here, you can go back to your boat and sail anywhere you please."

She snorted in disgust, "I escaped from an Egyptian trader. When I refused to take the king's choice for a husband, I brought shame on the family of Kashta. Father was forced to sell me as a slave."

He scratched at an itch underneath his loincloth. "Why did you refuse to marry?"

"I did not care for him. He was a small runt twice my age, had rotten teeth, and stunk of camel dung."

"You could bathe him."

Otillia puffed out her chest. "I would rather have bathed his camel."

He laughed so hard he fell over backwards onto the hard packed dirt floor, his loincloth shifted. Before he could move, his cock twitched at the sudden freedom.

Her eyes opened wide in surprise.

"Have you never before seen a man without clothes, Otillia?"

"Of course I have." Her eyes shifted to his face. "The fishermen never wore clothes, and

the men on the trader boat would take the women, bedding them while the rest of us were forced to watch.”

Her words piqued his curiosity. “The men on the ship did not bed you?”

“No,” her gaze dropped back to his loincloth. “They were told I would bring more if still a virgin, but in every other way, I was treated as the other women.”

“Am I different from those men?” With his upper body supported by his outstretched arm, he removed his loincloth and lay naked before her.

Again, her eyes grew large. “Yes, it is our custom to pluck the hair from our bodies.”

“Is that the only difference?”

“No.” Her eyes slowly traveled up his body.

“Have you ever been with a woman?”

“I was with one who overcame her revulsion by the amount of money I offered,” he lowered his gaze down to the floor. “I caused her great pain. She bled much.”

“Was she a small woman?”

He heard compassion in her voice. He thought with sadness on the unforgettable nightmare. “Yes, she was.”

She reached out, touched his face and lifted his chin. “Do not blame yourself.”

“Why should you care about a worn out prostitute?” His gaze bore into hers as he waited for an answer.

“I care not a fig for the woman.” Her fingers gently traced the scars on his face and continued downwards, her touch burning his skin with something akin of desire. “We are like ships cast upon the rocks. Should we not find comfort and pleasure in each other’s arms?”

He found it incredible that she willingly offered herself to him. Cycophalis allowed himself to wonder what it would be like to bed her without repercussions like that one time.

“Oh! My!” Her eyes beheld his hardening cock in wonder. “May I touch it?”

“No!” A vision of a grave slammed the door on his fantasy. He sprang to his feet and headed toward the door.

“Wait,” she pleaded. “Is it something I said? Is it because I am not beautiful enough?”

He stopped and turned around.

“I know I am not pretty. I am too tall, too big boned, and as strong as many men. I refused to have the hair on my head plucked out, as is the custom of my people...”

“Otilia, you are a beautiful woman.”

“Then...why will you not bed me?” She stretched out her arm, lifting her hand to him.

“The prostitute died.” Cycophalis turned, fleeing into the storm-ravaged night.

Otilia jumped to her feet and ran to the door. She shielded her eyes from the rain and peered into the darkness. Lightning flashed across the sky and in the brief moment of illumination, she saw—nothing. It was as if the earth swallowed him.

There was a sudden lull in the storm. She made her way along the path in search of Cycophalis and nearly tripped over his net. With a grunt, Otilia hoisted it over her shoulder and retraced her steps to his cabin.

The wind-driven rain returned with a howling vengeance that forced her to walk with her head down and her other arm lifted across her face. She wondered if Cycophalis had found shelter, or was he standing on top a mountain, daring the gods to strike him with a lightening bolt.

Otilia walked into a solid wall that closed around her. Hands grasped at her hair. Before she could react, her arms and legs were bound with ropes, and then she was hoisted across the shoulders of several men.

“Cycoph—” One of the men stuck a foul tasting cloth in her mouth, stopping her cry.

“She cries for Cyclops to save her.”

The men laughed and carried her back up the mountain. The ropes cut into her arms and legs. Rain slashed at her face and ran down her nose. With every breath, she felt she was drowning.

Cycophalis slammed into them with the force of a war chariot. He plucked her from mid-air and placed her on a nearby rock. Relief flooded her now that he was beside her, yet a touch of fear lingered that the men would overpower him and kill them both.

His roar sounded like the thunder as he charged back into the midst of the men from the slave trader. Death cries rent the night.

No amount of pulling, straining or twisting against the ropes brought her any closer to being free. *I have no knife or sword, but if I could get fingers around just one scrawny neck...*

“Otilia,” Cycophalis gently cradled her into his arms. “It is over. You are safe now.” He removed the gag and then untied the ropes.

She gagged while spitting as she tried to remove the foul taste. “Are they dead?”

“All but one. He ran away before I could take care of him.” He placed a hand behind her legs and lifted her.

“He will leave the island then.” Otilia relaxed against his broad chest. “That is good. He will tell the others that the gods attacked them and they will flee for their lives.”

She kissed the side of his neck and felt the strong, steady beat of his heart beneath her lips. With a bold, daring move, Otilia licked his skin.

Cycophalis stumbled and almost dropped her.

A warm feeling of joy and excitement flowed through her. She smiled and licked him again. *Of a certainty, he cares something for me. Why else would he risk his life to save me from the traders?*

His huge body trembled. Like a ship's sail catching a favorable wind, his chest swelled and pushed against her breasts. Cycophalis gripped her tighter. His arms, that a few moments ago wielded death and fear, shook.

He carried her into his home and tenderly placed her on his bed. By the light of the fire, she noticed his fully aroused cock. The men on the boat, in comparison, possessed shriveled up little worms between their legs.

While on the trader, she learned much from the prostitutes in ways to please a man. She longed to show Cycophalis she could please him.

He knelt on the floor beside the bed.

Otilia lifted her arm. “Thank you, for saving me.” Her fingers moved slowly along his jaw then drifted downward across his chest then dipped to his waist. She saw desire burning within his eyes.

“I could not bear the thought of you suffering at their cruel hands.”

“And I would not have wanted to go on living had you been killed.” She placed her other hand behind his neck and gently pulled his face closer.

The muscles in his neck tightened into thick cords.

“Do not fear, my Cycophalis.” She wrapped her fingers around his massive cock.

His eye slammed shut. He gasped.

“I will not die being bedded by you.”

His eyelid fluttered open and she saw years of longing and need calling to her. She pulled him closer. Their lips met in a sweet, tender embrace.

“Can you...be sure?”

Otillia moved her hand along the length of his cock. Her fingers rubbed the large, smooth tip. His body shuddered against her, like a slender reed when caressed a soft breeze.

“Place your hand upon my breast. Feel how my heart beats with the same desire I see within your eye.”

Cycophalis took her lips in a wild, savage kiss. She opened her mouth and welcomed the invasion of his tongue.

She had won the battle. Now, she would be the vanquished. She, Princess Otillia, would be his willing slave.

Cycophalis crawled onto the bed, placing himself between her legs. She guided the tip of his cock and placed it inside her. He plunged his shaft into her flesh.

The burning took her by surprise. She gasped. The prostitutes had not mentioned any pain. Her body stretched to accommodate his size and length.

“I have hurt you.” He started to pull out.

“No, Cycophalis.” She smiled, stroking his face with care. “It is nothing. Even now the pain leaves me.”

“You are sure?” Doubt edged his voice.

“Yes.” She kissed him. Delicious warmth spread upward, filled her belly, then inflamed her breasts. “I like you being inside me.”

Cycophalis had all but given up hope of ever finding a woman. All his life, he cursed the gods for his huge body. Now, he gave up a silent prayer to all the gods he could remember from his childhood. He thanked her gods for sending Otillia to his island.

He looked into her eyes for any sign of pain or fear, and found none.

She shifted her hips from side-to-side. “Mmm.”

Her soft moan of pleasure surprised him. He didn’t think women were supposed to enjoy bedding. *Maybe there is more to this than I thought.*

“What should I do now?” He realized that he had spoken his thought.

“Nothing...Anything...Ahh!” Otillia moved her hips up and down, caressing his cock with her tight inner muscles. She gazed at him with dreamy eyes. “Whatever *you* want.”

The tip of her tongue traced her parted lips, leaving a dark sheen. Excitement surged

through him. He kissed her open mouth. Their tongues touched simultaneously as she lifted her hips off the bed, meeting the hard thrust of his cock.

Otillia's tongue probed his mouth and her sensuous moans filled his head. She carried him to the top of the mountain and beyond the clouds.

Every muscle in his body went taut. He shuddered. With one final thrust into Otillia, Cycophalis collapsed on top of her, trembling and gasping for breath.

Her fingers glided over his hair and then down his back in slow, comforting strokes. He felt—whole—normal for the first time in his life. Yet, something was missing.

Otillia brought him pleasure. So why did he feel cheated out of something even greater?

The fire had burned down, leaving a bed of low burning coals in the fireplace. Cycophalis climbed off the bed and pushed the coals into a pile at the back of the fireplace.

"I need to wash."

"Come, I have a surprise for you." He held out his hand.

She smiled and took his hand as he pulled her from his bed. They left the cabin, making their way down a path that led toward a small lake. The storm had passed and the water sparkled under the light of a full moon.

"It is beautiful. I understand why you live here," she whispered in an almost reverent awe.

He stopped some distance from the lake. Steam rose from a small pool. "Careful when you step in, the rocks are slippery.

She stuck her foot in the water only to pull it out quickly. "Ohh!" she squealed in delight. "The water is hot!"

Cycophalis smiled. "Your bath awaits you, Princess Otillia."

She slowly stepped into the pool. "I am no longer a Princess." A happy sigh escaped from her parted lips as the hot water reached her hips. "I feel like a Queen."

He joined her in the water. "Then I shall be your humble servant and protector. Tell me," he whispered in her ear. "What wish does my Queen desire?"

A feeling of tranquility settled over her. Otillia rested her arms and shoulders on the rocks. "That you should bathe me."

"I have no scented oils or softly woven towels befitting a queen."

"I require not of such frivolous toiletries. Only those things that the gods have prepared."

"They have given us very little."

A thick layer of fine sand covered the bottom of the shallow pool. She used her foot to lift some to the surface. "Behold, a gift of the gods from within the deepest earth. What Queen has so fine a pumice with which to clean her skin?"

"None, for only a queen with the fairest of skin is worthy of such gifts." He took the sand, kissed her toes, then began scrubbing her.

Seldom had she experienced the luxury of personal servants who administered to her with such loving, tender care. It seemed as if they had enjoyed removing her skin. Complaining did little good, and often made things worse.

Her skin tingled in pure sensuous delight. "Ahh."

"I am not used to bathing a woman." His palm covered her breast. "Perhaps you should do it?"

"No!" she whispered in a shaky voice. "If you stop now, the gods will be angry. Touch me." She took his other hand, placing it between her legs. "Here."

"The gods wish this?" His finger stroked her soft inner flesh.

Otillia gasped. "I wish it," she breathed in a half-sigh, half-moan, "very much."

She spread her legs and dug her toes into the sand. Her fingers clutched the rocks. "Ohh!"

Otillia flung her arms around his neck and hung on as she shook uncontrollably. The sky lit up with a blaze of light that shot across the heavens.

"Look, a sign from the gods," Cycophalis spoke with wonder and fear.

"A very good sign." She turned her head and kissed his cheek. "The gods are pleased."

He picked her up and stepped from the pool. "Come, it is time you rest."

Chapter Three

Cycophalis woke with Otilia partially on top of him. Her right breast was pressed against his chest and her leg draped over his. He had a pain in his groin, and raised his head from the bed to discover one of the hardest erections he could remember. A smile spread across his face.

Last night had not been a dream.

A loud banging at the door turned his face to a scowl.

Cycophalis rolled Otilia none too gently from off him and she woke. He bolted from the bed.

The knocking continued.

“Be careful,” she sat up in the bed. “It may be the rest of the ship’s crew.”

He threw open the door, only to find a young maiden with her hand poised to knock again. She stood there naked, trembling, and staring open mouthed as his cock.

“What do you want?” he bellowed.

“Au...Au...Otilia,” she stuttered. “Is she—alive?”

Otilia got out of bed, crossed the room and wrapped her arm around his waist. “I’m very much alive. Why are you here, Qalhata?”

“I was sent as a sacrifice to appease the giant who killed the crew.”

“Go away,” Cycophalis started to close the door.

“We can’t.” Qalhata looked pleading to Otilia, and then to him. “The Master is dead. There is not enough crew left to make sail unless the women help and they refused to work without Otilia on the boat.”

“Is there some reason I should care?”

Otilia stepped in front of him, lifted her hand and gently brushed her fingers along his cheek. “The women are slaves and the men had little love for the Master. The island is big enough. They could live here too.”

“This would please you?” He took her hand and kissed it.

“Yes,” she placed her head on his chest, “it would.”

Cycophalis looked down at Qalhata. “Tell those on the ship, I will show mercy. If they

wish to remain on my island, they must pledge their loyalty, lives and service. We will be down to the ship later to hear the decision. Be on your way, I have things to do.”

Qalhata bowed. A look of relief spread across her face.

“Thank you.” She turned and ran up the path.

“I think,” Otilia, laughed, “she feared of being eaten.”

“She was too skinny.” He kissed her, tossed her over his shoulder and carried her back to bed.

“I thought you had things to do.” Otilia kicked her feet.

Smack.

Her flesh tingled as Cycophalis dumped her onto the bed.

She scooted over and patted the space beside her, but he grabbed her ankle, pulling her back into the center of the bed. Otilia twisted out of his hold and scooted to the far corner of the bed.

“I’m going to bed my Queen.” Cycophalis knelt on the bed.

“Not if I bed you first,” she teased.

A warm sensuous gleam sparkled in his eye. “You make a game of it. I will win.”

“It might be more fun to lose,” she crouched, waiting. Her heart pounded hard in anticipation. She watched his gaze follow the rise and fall of her breasts.

He slowly lifted his arm to touch her.

She grasped his wrist and jerked. The move caught him off balance and he landed face down on the bed.

Otilia’s muscles coiled, she leapt, twisted in midair and landed on his back.

He laughed. “Does my Queen know of a way to bed me like this?”

She rubbed her nipples across his back and nibbled on his ear.

Cycophalis wrapped his fingers around her wrist, rolled and they fell off the bed. He landed on his back and she straddled his chest.

“Now, I have you right where I want you.” She wiggled lower, leaned over and slapped his cheeks with her breasts.

A pair of dancing nipples proved too much temptation for Cycophalis and he captured one with his teeth.

“Ahh!” Her back arched. Pleasure and pain filled her body at the same time.

He let go of her nipple, "I am sorry..."

She stopped him with an open mouthed kiss. "Never apologize for bringing me pleasure."

Otillia kissed his chin and his throat. She left a trail of kisses on his skin as she worked her way down his broad chest. His cock entered the valley between her breasts. With short up and down movements of her body, she caressed his hard shaft.

His breathing quickened.

She rose up, tipped her chin and placed a light kiss on the tip of his erect cock.

Cycophalis jerked. Stomach muscles tightened. His hips lifted off the ground.

Otillia spun around and sat on his chest. She leaned over, brushing her long hair across his groin.

She tilted her head to the left—then to the right. *No wonder I felt like a stuffed peacock.*

Ever so lightly, she placed a finger on the tip of his cock and slowly lowered it.

"Ahh!" His body shook.

Her fingers touched and then gently cradled his sac. Each stone felt as big as a baby's fist.

Do not squeeze the stones. She reminded herself.

She wasn't about to make the same mistake twice. Onboard the trader she had grabbed a man's stone sack and squeezed, bringing him to his knees as he howled in pain. There had been no place to run or hide from his revenge. She had fought, kicked and scratched, much to the crew's delight, but with the help of two other men to hold her down, she had been severely punished.

She lowered her head, kissed each stone and then teased him with her tongue as she licked her way up his thick shaft.

He trembled. "Ahh! Ohh!" His back arched off the hard packed floor.

She smiled and opened her mouth to cover the tip of his cock.

If he gets any louder, they will hear him on the ship.

All through childhood, she had been reminded how unsuitable her features were for a woman of nobility. *First time in my life, my mouth is too small.*

Otillia knew only one way to silence his loud moans of passion.

She sat on his face.

His hands stilled. His fingers clamped tighter around her hips.

Otillia rubbed against his face and went back to licking his huge cock.

“Ahh!” Her fingers dug into his legs.

With each thrust of his tongue, he brought her closer to the joy and wonder she experienced in the pool.

Otillia pulled out of his grasp, turned around and straddled his hips. She placed his throbbing cock between her legs. “Ahh!”

She felt her body stretch to allow his full length.

His calloused hands covered her breasts and rubbed across her sensitive nipples.

“Mmm! Don’t stop.” Her back arched. She moved her hips in a rocking, circular motion.

He lifted his hips, plunging his shaft deeper inside her.

“Oh! Yes!” she gasped.

Cycophalis smiled as passion swirled in her eyes like black storm clouds. Her hair danced and swayed to the music of her low, husky moans.

Sweat dampened his face. Muscles tensed. His chest burned.

Her image blurred.

With a hard, savage thrust, he felt the fire of his seed filling her.

“Ahh!” Her inner flesh tightened around his cock. Her back arched. She flung herself onto his chest.

Otillia’s loud cry of passion surprised and pleased him. He smiled against her hair and gently kissed her ear.

She purred and kissed his neck.

“That was...” He paused, trying to think of a word to describe his feelings.

“Yes, it was.” She giggled and kissed him again.

“We should see what the others have decided.” Otillia started to move.

He tightened his arms around her. “They can wait. I want to hold you.”

She relaxed. Her breath bathed his skin like a warm sea breeze.

The mention of the ship gave him troubling thoughts. Suppose the women decided to help the crew and they set sail for the mainland? Would Otillia decide to go with them now that the chains of slavery had been removed?

She deserved more than he could give her. Cycophalis sighed. *It might be best if she did go.*

He removed his arms from around her and kissed the top of her head. “You are right, we

should find out their decision.”

She moved off him and they stood. “The ship's hold is full of trade goods from the east. The things we do not need can be sold in Athens.”

They left the house and started up the path.

“You have this all thought out.” He smiled and cocked an eyebrow.

The path widened. She took his hand and walked beside him. “Just because I am a woman, doesn't mean I do not have a brain.”

“Suppose the women decide to help the men?” He grew silent.

“If they decide not to stay, do you want me to go with them?”

A sharp, knife like pain cut through his heart. He stopped at the top of the path, turned around and swept his hand out over the island. “This is all I have. It can be harsh and lonely.”

“You did not answer my question. Do you want me to leave?”

“What I want,” Cycophalis lifted his hand and brushed her cheek with his fingers, “is not important.”

Otillia kissed his palm. “It is to me.”

Her tenderness touched him. He leaned over and kissed her lips. “I want you to be happy.”

She fell in behind him as they started down the path. “Something else is troubling you.”

“The young woman who came this morning is but a child.” He stopped, turning to face her. “Did the traders bed her also?”

“No,” she said, and then laughed, “They were scared to touch Qalhata.”

“Really! Did the captain forbid it?”

“Yes and no. I threatened that if any man bedded her, I would sever his cock with my teeth and feed it to the fish.”

Cycophalis laughed so hard the corded muscles of his stomach shook. He wiped a tear from his eye. “Come then.” He started down the path. “I must rescue the crew from such a horrid fate.”

They reached the water. He dove in and started swimming toward the ship. She looked over at a small boat tied to the rocks and shook her head. “Men!”

She untied the rope, stepped into the boat and started rowing. Otillia strained at the oars, but could not catch him before he reached the ship.

On board, the crew cowered before him on bended knees.

Otillia observed one of the prostitutes sneak a peek at Cycophalis. The woman's eyes widened as she nudged the woman next to her. "He's hung like a camel," she whispered in awe.

Otillia smiled. "Have you reached a decision?"

Qalhata rose, stepped in front of Cycophalis with her head bowed. "We have. If you will spare our lives we will be your servants."

"There will be no servants—or slaves," Otillia spoke quickly, "but the word of Cycophalis is law. How say you? Do you still vow your loyalty?"

"We do." Every head bobbed like a cork fishing buoy.

"Then off your knees," Cycophalis bellowed. "We move the ship to safe harbor."

With his massive strength, he did the work of three men. A short time later, the ship entered a small, sheltered cove and dropped anchor

"You must choose among you whom you will live with." Otillia smiled, "Hopefully with as few fights as possible."

The women put their heads together. Every few minutes one would look up at the crew, shake her head and their discussion would continue. The crew looked around somewhat confused.

Cycophalis winked at her.

She had about given up hope of them agreeing on anything when they turned and made their choice of a husband known.

"What about me?" Qalhata asked.

"For now, you will live with us," she placed her arm around the girl's shoulders. "When we sail, I will take you back to your parents."

"No! I do not wish to see them ever again. They will only sell me to the next trader who comes by."

Otillia looked at Qalhata with a critical eye. She was a beautiful young girl, good bone structure and the right coloring. "If I teach you the customs of my people and take you to my mother, will you be an obedient daughter?"

"Yes. Your mother will be my mother and I will honor her in your stead."

"Then, the gods willing, you shall take my place in my father's house as Princess Qalhata."

Her eyes lit up with excitement. "And when I am older, I will marry a rich man with many

camels and great horses.”

“My dear...” Otillia brushed her fingers across the girl’s cheeks, “when you grow up, you shall be a Queen.”

Chapter Four

Six months later...

A bright full moon cast a silver swath across the small lake. Laughter floated on the night air as two lovers frolicked in the water.

Otillia rested against Cycophalis' broad chest as the heated water lapped sensuously across her breasts.

"The men seem happy with their new life." The breath from his lips blew gently over her ear.

"The women too, and they have shown remarkable ability in helping with the ship." She turned her head and kissed his cheek. "You have shown more patience with them than most men would have."

Cycophalis laughed. "I have learned patience from watching you turn a strong willed child into a refined young woman worthy of the position that is rightly yours."

"Why should I want for more than the gods have willed for my life?" She adjusted herself between his legs. "When, they have given me more than all the riches of Egypt."

"What greater treasure could there be on this tiny island?"

"Your love," Otillia whispered before pressing her lips against his.

* * * *

The next morning the boat rode high in the water as they sailed out of the cove. The eastern sky blazed red, smeared with dark purple as a ball of fire slowly lifted from the sea.

Otillia stood on the bow watching three dolphins race beside the ship. Their shiny gray bodies leapt and dove beneath the waves. She loved the feel of the wind in her hair and the salt spray as it covered her body.

Cycophalis came up behind her and wrapped his arms around her. "We have a favorable wind."

She leaned against his chest.

“For now.”

“Just look at the day. The sun is shining with the wind to our backs.” She pointed to the water as the dolphins broke the surface and sailed through the air. “The gods have sent us the fish to keep us company on our journey.”

All three dolphins turned, cut across the bow and disappeared beneath the waves.

“Maybe they were sent to warn us to turn back.” His chest heaved in a troubled sigh. “I fear their leaving foretells of a perilous journey for us.”

His arms dropped from around her.

Otillia laughed. “My Cycophalis, afraid?” She turned, but he was walking away.

Her eyes scanned the surface but the dolphins did not return. She looked at Cycophalis, where he stood with the tiller in hand. Over his shoulder, a black cloud no bigger than a man’s fist rose from the sea.

Otillia watched it for a few minutes, shrugged her shoulders and turned away. She found Qalhata below deck. “We are headed for Egypt. There is one last thing to be done.”

The girl approached her with a hesitant step. “This—will please my new parents?”

“Yes, very much so.” She sat on a small cask of wine. “Sit here so that I may begin.”

Qalhata sat between her legs and she patiently plucked the long brown strands from the girl’s head.

Half the child’s hair lay in a pile beside her when the ship shook as if a giant hand picked it up and threw it back into the sea. Startled screams filled the air as they and several of the crew flew across the wooden deck of the hold.

Otillia fought her way up the ladder. She caught a glimpse of Cycophalis tied to the tiller when another wave slammed into the ship and she fell back into the hold. The ship lurched, rolled and slowly righted.

“The gods have turned against us!” a crewman screamed above the howl of the storm.

“We are going to perish!” another yelled.

“Stop acting like frightened children!” Qalhata stood with her legs spread and held onto a beam for support. “Lash a rope about you and get on deck to help Cycophalis, or of a truth we shall all perish.”

Otillia marveled at Qalhata’s calm and the wisdom of her words. They gave the crew

courage and direction.

She tied a rope around her waist, clawed her way up the swaying ladder and charged onto the rolling and pitching deck.

Cycophalis yelled at her, but the wind ripped the words from his mouth. Another wave slammed into the ship and she went tumbling down the deck. He grabbed her arm and pulled her to him.

The muscles in his arms and shoulders bulged and rippled. His white knuckled fingers gripped the tiller. He turned his head, looked at her and winked.

Otillia braced her feet to help. If they ever got sideways to one of those waves, the ship would roll for sure.

Over the howl of the storm, she heard the sickening sound of the main sail as it ripped and flapped wildly in the wind.

Cycophalis stood white faced, staring out to sea.

She looked out at the towering waves and knew for certain the gods had condemned them to die. A demon from the deep lifted its twisting, churning tail, stretching it towards the black, turbulent sky.

The wind swirled about them with ever growing force. Rain lashed at them from every direction. Ice fell from the sky and tore at their skin. As the demon drew closer, the boat began to turn. The tiller was useless.

They were at the mercy of the beast.

She felt her feet lift from the deck, "Cycophalis!"

Water filled her mouth and blinded her eyes. The deafening roar from a thousand war chariots surrounded her.

This is the end!

Otillia slammed back onto the deck. She gasped for breath and tried to move. "Ohh!" she groaned.

The sea calmed as the wind died. Blue sky and sunshine peeked through the broken clouds.

Stunned, she looked about the ship. The main sails were gone, the mast twisted like a green tree, but by some miracle of the gods—they were still alive.

Cycophalis untied the rope holding him to the tiller, rushed to her and knelt by her side.

She threw her arms around his neck. The sheer magnitude of the storm and her battle with the sea demon caused her to realize just how close she came to never again feeling the solid security of his arms around her.

Otillia wept.

"I thought I had lost you," he whispered against her hair. "Are you hurt?"

"Just some bruises, I think." She dried her tears against his chest and slowly gained her feet.

"Good, I am glad." He surveyed the damage. "But I do not think all were as fortunate."

"I will see to the crew." Still feeling a bit dazed, Otillia gazed out over the empty sea. "Do you know where we are?"

Cycophalis shook his head. "Until we sight land—no."

Otillia bound up the cuts of the crew, then watched as Cycophalis carefully set a man's broken leg.

For the rest of the day, they sat waiting for a breeze to fill their two remaining small, tattered sails. It didn't matter which way the wind blew, as long as it carried them along with it. The sun beat unmercifully upon them. Heat waves danced across the deck. The crew rested under whatever offered shade.

The night winds failed to arrive and the crew grew more restless.

Qalhata sat quietly off by herself.

Otillia pulled herself to her feet and went over to her. "Are you well, child?"

"Yes." She opened her eyes and smiled. "I have been praying for a favorable wind and safe passage."

"To which god have you been praying?" She brushed her fingers through what hair Qalhata had left.

"To whichever one will hear a plea for mercy."

Otillia felt a faint breath of air kiss her cheek. Another ruffled her hair. The canvas sails puffed out, fell limp and then stretched tight.

The ship slowly moved forward over the calm water.

"From which direction does it blow?" She held her breath as Cycophalis looked to the stars.

"From Mount Olympus, the gods have given us a favorable wind."

Otillia had begun to question the sanity of the Greek gods. They seemed more like disobedient, mischievous children than deity.

* * * *

“Land!”

The cry brought everyone awake and scrambling to see the still distant shore. They had been without food for three days and emptied the last water skin the morning before. Excitement bubbled through the crew like a desert spring.

Qalhata stood beside her and lifted her hand to shield her eyes from the sun’s glare. “Cycophalis thinks the storm blew us to the south of Crete.”

“It matters not.” Otillia kept her eyes on the land.

“He said that he could eat a whole sheep—wool and all.”

Otillia laughed, “I would fight him for half.”

“That would be good.”

She looked at Qalhata. “Why would our fighting be good?”

“Whenever you fight, you end up bedding.” She smiled mischievously. “The rest of the crew would have more food.”

She drew the girl to her breast. “You have seen and learned more than a child your age should ever see. I wish I could have protected you.”

“You did, Otillia,” Qalhata hugged her. “You taught me much and showed kindness, and for that I will always be grateful.”

Otillia kissed the top of the young woman’s head and then gazed back toward the land. Her heart began to beat wildly beneath her breast. She spun Qalhata around.

“Look!” She pointed. “See that break in the land? It is the river Nile! Run, get dressed while I tell the others.”

By the time they pulled into port, the men had dressed in loincloths and the women had wrapped linen around their waists.

“We need supplies, a new mast and sail before we go up river, but how shall we pay for them?”

Cycophalis pulled a small leather sack from his loincloth and handed it to her. “These

should more than pay for the things we require.”

She opened the sack to find it full of pearls.

“Will it be enough?”

“Enough?” She quickly removed three pearls and thrust the sack back in his hand. “Hide these lest thieves learn of your wealth and make our journey on the river more perilous than the sea.”

* * * *

Travel up the River Nile tended to be slow, even on the best of days, but with the wind blowing in her face, today wasn't one of them.

Otillia took her turn at the tiller as the crew rowed.

Cycophalis sat between two oars doing the work of four men. Muscles rippled and strained across his chest and shoulders. He had been rowing without a break since long before the sun had reached its zenith, but seemed undaunted.

The rest of the crew appeared ready to drop.

She pushed against the tiller and the ship's bow slowly swung across the river. Otillia moved them in closer to shore. “Drop anchor! We rest here tonight. Perhaps tomorrow we will have the wind with *us*.”

One of the crew wearily pushed himself to his feet and released the anchor.

Qalhata carried water to each person. As she gave Cycophalis a drink, she started giggling. She set the bucket down and walked quickly to Otillia.

“What is it child?”

“Cycophalis,” she snickered, “has an extra oar.”

“What are you talking about?” Otillia lowered her gaze and joined Qalhata in a smothered giggle. “Tis not an *oar* you see, but the spare mast.”

Qalhata whispered in her ear, “Do you think it is big enough?”

The question gave her pause... “The mast?”

“No.” Qalhata looked up at the furled canvas and laughed. “The sail.”

“Off with you.” She playfully smacked Qalhata on the ass.

The crew, with the exception of a couple who crawled over to the side of the ship, seemed

content to lie where they sat at the oars.

Otillia's arms, shoulders and back ached from relieving first one person and then another at the oars. She sank to the deck, leaned her back against the railing and breathed a long, tired sigh.

"Rough day?" Cycophalis sat beside her and stretched his long legs out beside hers.

She slowly turned her head. He pulled her into his lap and Otillia rested her head in the hollow of his shoulder. The sounds and smells of the river and the gentle rocking of the boat pulled at her eyes.

* * * * *

In the haze of predawn gray, the sudden silence of the crickets and frogs alerted Cycophalis to approaching danger. He heard the faint slap of an oar on the water and the murmur of muffled voices. The hair on the back of his neck stirred.

He gently placed his hand over Otillia's mouth. "Shh, we have company," he whispered. "Wake the crew. Tell the men to make no noise, arm themselves and be ready."

She moved off his lap where she had fallen asleep and crept silently across the deck.

Cycophalis crawled to the ladder, reached into the pitch black hole and removed his sword from its hiding place under the deck. He watched the men as they quietly moved into place. Otillia, with a sword in hand, crept toward him.

"What do you think you are doing?" He grasped her arm and felt her flinch.

"I am going to watch your blind side," she hissed. "Don't worry; I know how to use this."

"I see more with one eye than most men do with two. They are the blind ones—stay out of the way."

The approaching boat bumped into theirs.

Cycophalis pulled her to him and gave her a hard, crushing kiss. He jumped to his feet, ran across the deck and with a wide sweep of his blade drew first blood as he leapt over the side. His sword drew blood again before he landed on the deck of the smaller ship. He continued his wide swing and a third man died before the second one's head splashed in the water.

Panic broke out among the thieves. Unable to stand against the power and force of his blows, they scrambled onto the larger ship where they met his waiting men. The ringing of iron against iron mingled with the cries of the dying and spread across the water. The clamor woke

the ancient guardians of the river.

Those who jumped over the side to escape the blade added their terrified and dying cries to the fleeting night as the crocodiles pursued their prey.

“What shall we do with the dead?” Otilia called down to him.

“Over the side with them. The crocs are still hungry.” He grabbed hold of a rope and pulled himself up the side of the ship.

Otilia, splattered with blood, stood in the midst of the carnage. She lifted the still dripping blade to the sky and the crew yelled with the rush of victory.

He slumped onto the railing and scowled. “Were you always this obedient as a child?”

She gave him a wide smile before lowering her sword. “Most of the time.”

Qalhata stuck her head up out of the hold where the women had taken shelter. “What shall we do with their boat?”

“It will slow us down,” he answered without taking his gaze away from Otilia. “You decide.”

Cycophalis stood, stepped over a pool of blood and in three long slow strides reached Otilia. He lifted his hand to her chin and tilted her head up. “I had no reason to live before...” He dropped his sword. “If you had been killed...” His lips met hers in a frenzied, explosive embrace as he pulled her into his arms.

“Cut it loose and burn it!” Qalhata ordered. “Prepare to set sail!”

Cycophalis chuckled. “She will make a good Queen.”

Otilia gave him a soft tender kiss. “Yes, I believe she will.”

Chapter Five

Otillia approached her father's home with mixed emotions. Her parents had obeyed the king and sent her away. Now she wondered if returning home had been a good idea.

Neighbors and friends greeted her with an expression of surprise before turning their backs to her. One woman smirked. Another spit on the ground.

It felt strange knocking on a door that had always been open for her to enter at will.

A servant opened the door. A broad smile flashed across her face and her eyes lit up. Forgetting her place and position, she hugged Otillia.

Peksater stood a few feet away. A small pot of flowers fell from her hand and crashed to the floor.

"Hello, Mother." She stepped into the house and hurried into her arms.

"I have missed you, my child." Her mother wept.

"And I, you." She kissed her mother's cheeks and then wiped away her own tears.

"You should not have returned, Otillia. Kashta will not be pleased that you have defied him *again*."

"I hope to appease his anger and yours with a gift." She stepped away from her mother. "I have someone I wish you to meet."

She went to the door.

Cycophalis had killed five men with his bare hands, bravely taken their ship through a storm and faced a demon of the sea, but as she took his hand, he appeared nervous and ready to run all the way back to his island.

"Mother, I would like you to meet Cycophalis and Qalhata. She is the reason I returned. I want her to live here."

"A very charming young woman." Peksater cast a quick glance over Qalhata. "But I have no need for another serving girl."

"Cycophalis...you are a Greek. Does my daughter obey you and serve you well?"

"Otillia is not my slave. I have chosen her to be my wife...if she will have me."

“Why do you say if, my love? We have been living together as man and wife for these past months.”

Her mother clutched her hand over her breast. A servant girl ran over and started fanning her.

Peksater turned to her. “He certainly is—big.”

Cycophalis bowed and kissed her mother’s fingers. “An honor to meet you. I see now where Otilia came by her beauty.”

His compliment flustered her mother even more.

“Mother, I did not bring Qalhata to be a servant.” She reached over, took Cycophalis’ hand and felt him squeeze her hand reassuringly. “I have trained her in the ways of our people to be your daughter.”

Peksater’s complexion paled.

The servant girl waved the fan harder.

Another girl brought a cool wet cloth to bathe her mistress’ forehead.

A male servant carried a divan over for her to sit on.

“I’m sorry.” She sank onto the divan. Peksater’s gaze held Otilia’s in a blank confused stare. “For a moment I thought you said...”

“Qalhata will make you a fine daughter.” She knelt beside the divan.

Peksater brushed the cloth aside. “What you suggest is impossible.”

Otilia took her mother’s hand. “Not if the King decrees it as law.”

“Why should he, after the way you scorned his choice of a husband for you?”

“By decreeing Qalhata as your daughter, it will remove the shame I caused. Qalhata is obedient. She has shown courage in the face of danger. I have come to love her like a sister. I know she will bring you joy and happiness.”

“She *is* a beautiful child. I’m sure she is all that you say, but it is...”

“Otilia!” Her father threw open a curtain and stood looking at her with a heavy scowl. “Did you think that Kashta would not hear of your return?”

She fell to the floor, prostrate before him.

“Even now the King’s guard stands outside the gate. We are summoned to appear before him at once.”

“Father...” She scrambled to her feet.

“Silence!”

Piankhy seemed to finally notice Cycophalis. He walked past her and stopped. “Greek, return to your ship immediately and wait.”

In her father’s customary manner, he dismissed Cycophalis much as he would any servant and turned his attention back on her.

“No!”

Her father whirled around.

She ran to stand beside Cycophalis.

He put his arm around her shoulders. “If Otilia is to see the king, then I go with her.”

“King Kashta lies on his death bed and will see none but family and...”

“Dear.” Peksater stood. “Say hello to Otilia’s *husband*.”

“I don’t care if he’s her—her...” Piankhy quickly shifted his eyes toward Peksater and then back. “*Husband?*”

Her mother skewed her mouth into a lopsided smile and nodded. “Husband.”

Otilia smiled happily.

Cycophalis hugged her. “Wife.”

Piankhy groaned. “Well, come along then. The king awaits.”

Qalhata stood silently off to the side.

“Who are you?” He held up his hand. “No, don’t answer that. If you are with my daughter and her...” He cast another side-glance at Cycophalis. “...Husband.” Piankhy shook his head. “...I don’t think I want to know.”

His sandals made a flopping noise as he crossed the stone floor. “You might as well come, too. Maybe the king will see some humor in all this.”

Their procession through the city streets received a lot of attention. Otilia felt sorry for Cycophalis. People gawked openly, pointed fingers, and children ran when they approached.

She held onto his hand, returning his earlier squeeze with one of her own.

They arrived at the King’s residence and were shown immediately into his bedroom.

Her grandfather, King Kashta, lay on his bed. His cheeks were sunken, hollow. He slowly turned his face toward her.

Otilia knelt with head bowed. “My Lord, it grieves my heart to see you like this. Please do not be angry at my return.”

“Who is this one-eyed giant?” her grandfather wheezed.

“This is my husband, Cycophalis, he is a Greek.”

“I can see he is a Greek. I’m dying, not blind.” He laughed. Several deep coughs wracked his body while sweat beaded on his forehead.

“Grandfather...”

His hand trembled as he lifted it. “While I take pleasure in your presence...I am also saddened. Why have you yet again disobeyed me?”

“I come to petition My Lord for mercy, not for myself,” she added hurriedly, “but for my mother, Peksater.”

His eyebrow arched. “Why does my son’s wife require mercy? What grievance has she committed?”

“None, My Lord—it is all mine, but my mother has also born the burden.”

“How do you suggest I relieve this burden from Peksater?” Kashta scowled. He pushed himself up off the bed, supported his weight with his arm and leaned closer. “By forgiving her daughter and allowing her to return to live in the house of her father?”

“No My Lord...by giving her a new daughter.”

A thick silence hung over the room.

Otillia felt every eye focused on her. With every beat of her heart, tension grew. She closed her eyes and saw in her mind’s eye the shadow of the executioner as he lifted the mighty blade. The crowd, thirsty for blood, chanted for her death. Cold steel gently kissed the back of her neck as the executioner prepared for the final swing that would sever her head and spill her blood into the dry greedy earth.

King Kashta chuckled softly and then burst into laughter, which caused another bout of coughing.

Otillia opened her eyes and watched as he fell back onto the bed. The white cloth he held to his lips turned crimson.

Attendants rushed to his side, but he brushed them away.

“I can no longer make water—much less babies.”

“That—that was not my meaning,” she stammered. She felt heat creep up her neck. “If I may explain?”

She motioned Qalhata forward without waiting for the king’s permission.

Qalhata came, dropped to her knees and bowed before King Kashta.

“This is Qalhata. I have trained her in all the ways of our people. She is strong, courageous and *obedient*. Let the king decree Qalhata as the daughter of Peksater—” She swallowed the sudden lump in her throat. “—and let my name, and the shame I have caused...be forever removed from the House of Kush.”

He struggled to sit up and two of his physicians hurried to help.

“You have given much thought to this request?”

“Yes,” she whispered.

His eyes shifted to Qalhata. “Stand and let me look at you,” he commanded in a weak, scratchy voice.

Qalhata rose gracefully to her feet.

“You say she is *obedient*.”

“Yes,” she answered hastily.

“I am sure that would be a welcome change within your father’s house.” King Kashta chuckled.

“Piankhy—this would be acceptable?”

Her father hurried to stand beside the king. “Otillia’s request is a surprise to me. This is the first I have heard of it.”

“Would it be acceptable?”

Piankhy looked over to where Peksater stood and then back to Qalhata. “She is a beautiful woman.”

“Would you have this woman as your daughter?” King Kashta’s voice held a resonance of irritation.

“Any man would be honored to have her as a daughter.” Piankhy shifted his eyes back to Peksater.

“I did not ask any *man*!” He coughed and wiped a smear of blood from his lips. “I asked if *you* and Peksater would take her.”

“If this will please Otillia, and Qalhata is willing...yes, we will.”

Otillia breathed a sigh of relief.

“This is the decree of King Kashta, that today as the sun sets, Qalhata shall be known henceforth as the daughter of Peksater, wife of Piankhy. From this day forth, from the time of

the setting sun, let the name of Otilia be no longer spoken and let her name be removed from all writings, tablets and monuments of the kingdom.”

The King tired quickly and his attendants helped him lie down. He motioned them closer with a feeble moving of his fingers.

“Otilia,” he whispered. “You have made your choice. Leave today with my blessing, but never return.”

She leaned over and kissed his forehead. “As King Kashta has decreed, we will leave before nightfall. Good-bye, Grandfather.”

Otilia gave Qalhata a hug. “Remember what you have been given this day and use it wisely.”

She turned, went to her parents and gave each a final embrace. “I shall always love and miss you, and I pray Qalhata will fill the emptiness within your life.

Piankhy hugged her. “Whatever you need for your journey, take from my warehouse.”

He took the hand of Cycophalis with both of his. “Go with our blessings.”

Peksater gave her one last embrace. “You shall always be my daughter,” she whispered. “Find a way to send word.”

Otilia stepped away.

Her mother smiled affectionately, lowered her gaze to Otilia’s stomach and a lone tear rolled down her cheeks.

“Come,” Cycophalis took her hand. “There is much to do before the sun sets.”

With one final glance at her grandfather, she hurried out the door.

* * * *

Otilia stood on the bow. The sky blazed with vibrant shades of red and orange as the earth began to swallow up the sun. She gently placed her hand on her still flat stomach and smiled. With the wind at their back, they sailed down the river Nile toward the sea, her island oasis and their future together.