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FORWARD: THE ORIGINS OF THE WONDERS BY CIAR CULLEN

Psychology, the occult and numerology aside, we can possibly blame the ancient Greek mathematician Pythagoras for some of this affinity for things in quantities of seven, the prime number he favored and considered 'not too big and not too small'. The number was firmly established in Greek literature by the time the historian Herodotus (484 BC-425 BC) listed seven great ancient 'sites' in his *magnum opus*. (Some scholars attribute this list to a mechanic named Philo of Byzantium.).

So what's so wonderful about these wonders? Did they all really exist? Who built them, and why? For one thing, all seven wonders are big—really big by ancient standards—and opulent, each requiring years, even decades of labor and unfathomable financial resources. Thus they represent the pinnacle of human achievement at the time Herodotus listed them.

Two are tombs, two are statues of gods, one is a temple, one a lighthouse and finally, a fantastic garden. Two are in Egypt, two in modern Turkey, two in Greece, and one in modern Iraq. Ironically, the oldest of the wonders – the Great Pyramid of Giza – is the sole survivor of the ages. But researchers have

unearthed fairly convincing evidence for the rest of the structures either in ancient literature or through archaeological investigations. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon remain the most shrouded in mystery.

One interesting note: the oldest, the Great Pyramid, was already about two thousand years old when the next oldest (likely the Temple of Artemis) was erected, and already nearly three thousand years old at the birth of Christ. The Pharos Lighthouse was constructed not much longer ago than two thousand years. The wonder, magnificence, mystery and sheer romance of these great works of art and architecture increase with each passing century.

Within this series are seven tales of love and wonder. Perhaps by reading these stories you'll now be able to remember the names of the wonders, and become a believer in the magical power of the number seven. If you still have trouble, try this visualization: You are an ancient sailor, traveling the Mediterranean. You spot a lighthouse (1) and head for port. You steer your ship between the legs of the great Colossus of Rhodes (2). You disembark and head down the paved road. You are flanked by two tombs – a great mausoleum on the left (3) and a huge pyramid (4) on the right. You proceed up the hill and encounter two gods. On the left, Artemis (5) resides in her temple. On your right is a massive enthroned Zeus in his temple (6). You rest from your long hike under a flowering fig tree in the luxurious gardens of Babylon (7), where you await the arrival of your true love.

THE SEVEN WONDERS OF THE WORLD - THE TEMPLE OF ARTEMIS AT EPHESUS

The city of Ephesus in modern Turkey drew throngs tourists, kings, merchants, and pilgrims of in antiquity because of the magnificent temple dedicated to the Huntress Goddess, Artemis. King Croesus commissioned the temple, built around 550 BC. Bronze statues created by the most famous sculptors of the era graced the interior of the marble pillared building. Herostratus intentionally burned the temple to the ground on the same night that Alexander the Great was born-July 21, 356 BC. When St. Paul preached Christianity in Ephesus during the First Century AD, a large number of Artemis' cult members still worshipped at the temple, which had been rebuilt. By the Fourth Century, most Ephesians had converted to Christianity, and the temple was finally torn down in 401.

DEDICATION:

I want to give a big thanks to my critique group for helping me improve my writing skills and my story lines. You are the best!

PHYLLIS CAMPBELL

CHAPTER ONE

TURKEY, 1870

Thieves came in many different forms.

Captain Barrington Winston had traveled the world enough times to spot a thief, and the pretty ones were the most dangerous. Just like the one he studied now. Slim, dressed in the plain brown rags the ruffians wore in Selcuk, the slip of a girl's face held a look of innocence as she watched his shop.

The evening's light didn't allow him to see the color of her eyes, but they were wide and curious as they darted from person to person standing at his tent. Her shiny hair spilled over her shoulders, her veil hiding only the top of her head. Why she didn't cover the lower part of her face as most women in this country did, he had no idea. Perhaps the lower class were allowed more freedom.

She moved away from the steps of the Temple of Artemis and approached his shop. Her stare was fixed on his first mate, Jeffrey Smithers, as he explained to another buyer where they had purchased the Oriental vases and other rugs being sold.

Barry waited for her to make her move, anticipating the moment she'd try to be sneaky—yet she still acted as if she were enthralled with his first mate's tale.

The girl stepped closer. Not more than three feet away was a golden statue of Pegasus. Did she mean to steal that expensive artifact?

Slowly, he moved away from the crates, nearing the girl just in case she slipped it beneath her long skirt.

A few more buyers gathered around Jeffrey, listening to his first mate's extravagant storytelling. But the girl continued coming closer. Was it her purpose to knock the statue over and break it?

He wouldn't let her carry on with her innocence any longer. His costly statue was at stake. The girl was within reach, so he grasped her by the upper arm and pulled her away from the canvas tent that secured his artifacts.

She gasped and looked up at him. Her head veil slipped down to her neck, displaying her glorious mane of silver-blonde hair. Her eyes were wide, frightened.

"Girl? Are you addled? Can you not see where you're going?"

She remained silent; only her quick breath was heard. Her gaze traveled over his face, his eyes, his nose, then down to his groomed mustache and beard before her cheeks reddened. Her throat lurched in a swallow when she continued her exploration down to

his chest. Her scrutiny then wandered further, slipping down to his lower torso and lower still to his trousers.

Women had checked him out like a prize steer before, but none so young. Perhaps she didn't speak English. "Answer me," he demanded in her country's own language. "Or are you indeed addled?"

A spark of awareness snapped into her eyes before she blinked a couple of times, lifting her gaze to his.

She shook her head. "I'm not addled, sir. I can hear you," she said in English.

It wasn't very often he ran across a slave who could speak two languages. "Then why are you staring at me like a person gone daft?"

She lifted her chin in defiance. With a tug of her arm, she tried pulling away, but he refused to let go.

"I assure you, sir, I am not daft. You took me by surprise."

"You could have knocked over that expensive statue." He pointed to the object. "And I'm certain you don't have the funds to pay for it." He looked back over her slave's attire, then added, "In fact, I'm certain your master cannot even afford anything that I sell."

"I'm sorry. I did not see – "

"Obviously."

"I said I was sorry."

"Next time, watch where you're going. Just stick to the shops your master can afford."

She scrunched her face in a scowl. He pulled her forward, bringing his face closer to hers. It was then

when he detected her rose scent. *What's this?* A sweetsmelling thief? Impossible!

"Unless, of course, you were not going to pay for the item you were planning on taking."

She gasped again, her eyes widened. "How dare you insinuate—"

"I just want you to be aware I'm watching you very closely. You'll not steal from me. Go wander someplace else."

Since he'd said what he'd wanted, he released her with a shove. She stumbled backward, but thankfully, not enough to cause destruction to other close shops.

Feeling victorious, he turned to leave but was surprised when there was a tap on his shoulder. He swung around and met the stubborn stance of the girl, arms folded across her chest, chin raised higher than before.

"I beg your pardon, but it's none of your concern where I choose to wander."

He wanted to grin. The tiny thing was brave to challenge a man of his height and strength. But he'd play her game.

"Indeed?"

"Yes. And it's none of your concern how much or how little you *think* my master has."

Could his eyes open any wider? This girl amazed him. Usually women in this country didn't speak what was on their mind, especially in front of a man. He waited for her to say more, curious to what would roll off her tongue next.

She tilted her head, keeping her gaze fixed on him.

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"Are you now the one who's addled? Is your voice not working?" She gave him a victorious grin.

He shook his head. "As a matter of fact," he said, taking a step closer to her, "I would have to say my voice did numb for a moment. I'm not accustomed to women slaves talking to me as if I'm beneath them. I thought women in this country were meek and obedient." He grasped her arms, tightening his grip to make certain the little hellcat didn't escape. "Why don't you take me to your master, so I can tell him about your rudeness to those above your station?"

Color left her face, leaving it ashen. She struggled in his hold. "Please, unhand me. I'm not your property." Her demand had a quake to it.

"Not until I talk to your master."

"Please...let me go." Her words came soft, pleading. "I promise to be good from now on."

He wanted to laugh over her expression this time. Her eyes begged him to obey her wishes, her long, sooty eyelashes batting in rhythm. She was good at this. Very good. But he would not relent.

When she lowered her head and her shoulders wilted, he grinned. The battle was over. He almost wished she hadn't given in so soon. But just as he loosened his grip, her tiny foot snaked out from underneath her long skirt and kicked him in the shin. The runt had more power to her than he'd expected, and he yelped. Releasing her to cradle his injured leg, the girl darted past him and raced through the crowd.

He cursed, testing his leg to start out after her, but his blasted limp slowed him down. With each step

she ran further and further away, darting in and out of tents, dodging carts of fruit and vegetables being sold in marketplace.

He followed her path, but soon couldn't see her or any sign of where she'd disappeared.

"Bloody Hell." Leaning down, he rubbed the spot still smarting from her kick. The woman had done this before, he was most certain of it. And what an attitude she had.

Without meaning to, he chuckled. The little minx. He'd get her next time...hoping there would be a next time. He and his crew would be leaving for England tomorrow, so perhaps he wouldn't have the good fortune to see her again.

He turned and made his way back to his shop, shaking his head. He had to admit, chasing the imp had been the most enjoyment he'd had so far this trip, but it was time to return home to his duties as Marquis of Cantbury. Time to give up his one true love of sailing and become like his father, wearing fancy clothes and hob-knobbing with the old chaps. Although he wasn't exactly looking forward to attending balls and soirées and participating in an English bumpkin's lifestyle.

He sighed. But he had no other choice. His father was dying. Barry had to take over once his father passed on.

As he walked up to his shop, Jeffrey stood with two of Turkey's soldiers. His heart dropped. Had something happened? Was the girl a decoy for the true thief?

When he neared, Jeffrey grinned and pointed to him, telling the soldiers, "This is the man you're looking for."

Barry stopped abruptly. *They're looking for me?*

One of soldiers stepped forward. "Excuse me, Sir, but is your name Lord Barrington Winston? Are you the Duke of Hawkstone's son?'

"Yes, I am he."

The bowed slightly in greeting. "We have come to issue you an invitation from the governor of Turkey, Christian Alphius."

"An invitation?"

"The governor would like to invite you to his home to dine with him this evening."

Barry's breath caught in his throat. *Dine with the governor?* "Yes. Certainly. I would be honored."

"The governor wishes us to escort you to the castle."

"If you don't mind, I'd like to go back to my ship and clean up."

The soldier nodded. "We will return in an hour."

"Thank you. I'll be ready."

The soldiers retreated to their horses, mounted and rode away. Why did the governor request his presence? Hopefully, he hadn't done something wrong. Barry shook his head. If he'd broken a law, he certainly wouldn't be going to dine with the man. So what was important enough to get invited for supper?

The questions swam through his head, but he'd discover the answers in an hour. Too bad he was an impatient man, because the wait would drive him

mad.

* * * *

Phoebe Alphius crouched behind a stack of baskets. Through the spaces between them, she kept watch for the captain's brawny frame to reappear. He couldn't have given up that easily—could he? Holding her breath, she prayed he wouldn't discover her hiding place.

She couldn't be found. Not looking like a servant. Her father would have her hide for certain this time, reminding her that this kind of episode goes against her very purpose of existence.

Arguing with him would be a waste of time, although she didn't believe his theory.

A shadow moved in front of her and she squeezed her eyes closed, wishing her body to become smaller than she was. Unfortunately she couldn't predict the future, or she wouldn't have ventured out into the marketplace this afternoon.

She concentrated on the footsteps, but they weren't heavy. Instead, they were softer than she figured his to be—and with no limp. Perhaps this wasn't her injured Englishman? She peeked through one eye. As the shadow passed, she blew out a gush of air from between her lips, relief washing over her.

Too close. Maybe the marketplace shouldn't have been the location to go on her first outing out of the manor.

With shaky hands, she moved the baskets away,

and crawled out of her corner. Her head bumped into a pair of legs, and she snapped her attention up. The angry face of her maid stared back.

"Mistress Phoebe? What do you think you're doing?"

"Oh, it's just you," Phoebe said, placing her hand on her chest to keep her heart from jumping out. "You scared me nearly to death."

"And what do you think your father is going to do when he finds you're out here...looking like a slave?"

Phoebe leaped to her feet and grabbed Tanya's hands. "No, you can't tell him. Please?"

Tanya's scowl relaxed. "The governor won't hear it from my lips."

"Thank you." She wrapped her arms around the maid to give her a hug.

"Be thankful I'm the one who discovered you and not that ship's Captain."

Phoebe pulled back. "Are you talking about that man who was chasing me?"

"Yes. He owns a ship."

"Indeed?"

"He's from England."

"From England?"

Tanya huffed and folded her arms. "I don't have all night to play guesses with you. We must get you home before your family discovers your disappearance."

Phoebe nodded. "Then let's be off."

Sneaking back into the manor was more difficult than escaping. Thankfully, Tanya knew the way

better than she did. Once they were in Phoebe's room, Tanya hurried and stripped off the slave's garments, ushering her into the tub.

"Must I remind you again how dangerous that was for you to go into the marketplace? Do you not know what kind of people go there? And if they knew who you are..." She shook her head.

Phoebe relaxed her head against the back of the tub. Closing her eyes, she pictured one person—the captain. A tall, strong man he was—and so handsome. He had the bluest eyes imaginable, even when angered. His long raven hair had been pulled away from his face and tied with a leather strap, showing the muscles in his neck. He wore a beige shirt with billowy sleeves, snug enough to emphasize his broad chest. His trousers...as indecent as she'd ever seen, and the way they hugged his lean legs made her want to touch him, to feel the muscles underneath the fabric.

She grinned. It'd be nice to run into him again.

"Mistress? Are you listening to me?"

Phoebe blinked open her eyes and looked across the room at her maid, who set out her clothes for the evening. "Yes, I hear you."

"You must never do that again."

"I understand your worries, but I'm exhausted of being locked behind doors. My nineteenth year quickly approaches, and I've never been outside the manor's grounds without a member of my family to guard me."

Tanya walked over to the tub and knelt. Picking up

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a sponge, she dipped it in the water and slid it over Phoebe's arm.

"Your father must keep you protected. You're too special to be treated like the others."

Phoebe balled her hands into fists and pounded them on the tub. "Oh, phooey. I'm so tired of this." She glared at her maid. "How many times do I have to tell you, I'm *not* the goddess Artemis. I have *not* been reincarnated like my father is telling everyone." She rolled her eyes. "He is an old man, and is losing his mind."

Tanya gasped and pulled back. "But Phoebe, when you are at the temple, there's a glow about you. I've seen it, and so has others, which is why it was easy for your father to convince everyone of your very purpose on this earth. You have been honored by your true father, Zeus, to come to this very time and guard the temple. I would be honored to have such a responsibility—"

"Then I give it to you, because I don't want it." She grasped her maid's hands. "Can't you understand? I don't feel like Artemis."

Tanya snickered. "But all the signs are there. The glow about you when you're in the temple. Your stubborn feminine streak, which no other women possess, not to mention your hair."

She flipped her hand, spraying water through the air. "So I was born with silvery hair. So what?"

"So was the goddess Artemis."

She shook her head. "I think if the King searched again through our country, he'd find another woman

with similar features."

"What about your ability to hunt so well? Your oldest brother, Nikolaus, is even jealous of your accomplishments. You are a true huntress."

She sighed heavy and sank into the cooling tub of water. "I just wish my father wouldn't keep me living like a prisoner. I want to see what the world is like." Tears pooled in her eyes. "I want to live the life the goddess Artemis didn't have."

Tanya gave her a weak smile. "Perhaps someday you will."

Phoebe shrugged. "Not in this lifetime." She sighed and sat up. "Let's end this drab conversation. It depresses me. Besides, my skin looks like prunes. I need to get out of the water."

Tanya helped her out of the tub and toweled her body dry, and then dressed her. Phoebe was glad to be rid of the servant's garment. The silks and scarves she wore were much softer upon her skin compared to the drab woolen material—like her skin was being kissed by the gods and goddesses from the ancient worlds.

Her maid fixed her hair, winding it up lock by lock into a bun at the back of her head. String-pearls decorated her hair over the silver veil covering the lower half of her face. Long silky sleeves billowed away from Phoebe's arms, and full silk skirts showed only a hint of her shape from underneath. The bodice of her attire fit tight around her chest, lifting her bosom.

She ran her hands over her curves and frowned.

Would she ever feel a lover's touch? Would she ever have a man worship her body?

Using black kohl, Tanya highlighted Phoebe's eyes—eyes her father said were given to her by the gods. The eyes her mother had before she died two years ago. They changed color with Phoebe's mood. Tonight they looked almost as silver as her attire.

Phoebe's mother had once called her eyes *bedroom eyes*. A look that could cause a man to lose himself in passion.

A strange warmth fluttered in her stomach when she thought about the intimacies in the bedroom between two lovers. Although she'd never experienced this firsthand, she had caught her sisters in the act a few times.

But she would never feel the caress of a man's hand on her body. According to her father, if Artemis were to bed with a man, the temple would crumble to the ground and be destroyed forever.

She rolled her eyes. Too bad the opportunity wouldn't arise to prove her father wrong.

Reluctantly, she left her bedchambers and walked to the dining hall. The room filled with her brother and sisters—siblings that didn't communicate with her unless instructed by the *high and mighty* governor.

They all thought she was Father's favorite child, but she disagreed. Father punished her because he claimed he was shown a vision from the gods that his daughter, Phoebe, was the goddess Artemis. Since the age of ten, her life drastically changed.

Just because she was the only girl with silver-

blonde hair.

From the entryway into the grand room, she spotted her father. Beside him stood a man dressed different than her country's custom. She couldn't see his face, but his body seemed oddly familiar.

Her father clapped his hand on the man's shoulder as they both turned. Her breath lodged in her throat and stuck. *It's him...the handsome Captain of the ship*.

Would he recognize her?

PHYLLIS CAMPBELL

CHAPTER TWO

"Are you the son of Frank Winston, the Duke of Hawkstone?"

Barry arched his brown at Governor Alphius. The man stood almost as tall as he, but lacked in build. Instead of muscles, it appeared as if the older man had more flab, especially around his middle. Even his cheeks sagged a bit.

He nodded to the governor. "I'm the duke's son."

Governor Alphius laughed, his double chin shaking in rhythm. The medals on his jacket rattled together as he slapped his hand on Barry's shoulder and squeezed. "Your father and I are friends. In his younger days, he was a Captain just like you, which is how we met. When he came here to do his trading, we became friends."

Barry chuckled and shook his head. "I want to tell you that you have the wrong man, yet you know his name and title. But as far as I know, my father has never been a sailor."

"Oh, he was."

The older man led Barry over to a cluster of pillows

and cushions, designed to look like a sofa. They sat and remarkably, it was more comfortable than he'd expected.

As the governor rambled on about his acquaintance with Barry's father, he let his gaze wander around the spacious room. Besides the governor, there was only one other man dressed in the Turkish custom. He suspected this was the older man's son. They both had the same eyes and brown hair.

The women, however, were plentiful. Whether they were all the governor's daughters he didn't know, but all he could see were layers upon layers of colorful silks and scarves. They all wore veils over their hair and the lower half of their faces. Most of the women were tall and big-boned. But one sat alone, tinier than the others, and her attention was directed on him.

He smiled and gave a small nod. She quickly pulled her gaze away.

"I haven't spoken to your father for many years. In fact, I didn't think he would settle down and marry. He was a very audacious man in his youth."

Barry withdrew his focus on the pretty woman and looked back at Governor Alphius. He chuckled. "It's good to know my father wasn't as stuffy as I first figured."

"No. Frank Winston was quite the adventurous type, and a real ladies' man." He paused while a slave served him a glass of wine, along with Barry.

His gaze wandered once again to the petite

woman, and once again, her focus was upon him. He smiled, but this time she didn't turn away. Her lashes batted, but not in a flirtatious manner. It surprised him to see her staring so openly when the other women in the room wouldn't even give him a sideways glance.

Dinner was announced, and the governor led Barry into the formal dining room. Thankfully they wouldn't be sitting on the floor, but at a long dining table instead. The women joined them, but still refrained from speaking or even looking at him except for the pretty girl dressed in silver from her headdress to her sandals. In the better light, he could see the color of her eyes, and was surprised to see they almost matched her dress. *Silver eyes?* Yet they *were* gray, with a touch of magnificent light.

During the meal, which consisted of cuisines he'd never tasted before, the governor kept up the conversation about Barry's father and their adventures as young men. Finally, the meal was over. Barry followed the governor when he left the table, the women following. He glanced over his shoulder to see if the woman in silver still looked his way, and she was.

After they entered the spacious room again, the governor bumped his elbow next to Barry's bringing back his attention. "Do you find my daughters lovely?"

Embarrassment washed over him. Usually he didn't get caught gawking, especially by the father of the lady. The truth was, not all the women were

lovely, just one.

He smiled. "Yes. Your daughters are certainly a vision."

Governor Alphius rubbed his jaw. "Are you, by chance, in the market for a wife?"

Barry almost choked on his gasp. He cleared his throat before coughing. "Unfortunately, I'm not looking for a wife right now. I'm not ready to settle down. My trading business is going so well, I'm afraid I'm not thinking of marriage at this particular time."

Alphius nodded. "I was just wondering. My daughter, Josephine, is looking for a husband."

Barry glanced at the group of women the governor had indicated with his hand. "Which one is she?"

"She's wearing the orange veil."

He tried not to cringe at the unattractive sight. The woman had a nose too large for her face, and was as tall as she was wide. "Oh, I see. Have you found the fortunate man yet?"

"No, not yet, but we haven't given up."

He arched an eyebrow, keeping his head turned so the older man wouldn't see. Perhaps they needed to give up. Inwardly, he scolded himself for thinking this way. He looked at the governor. "What about your other daughters? Are they in the market for a husband?"

Alphius laughed. "No. Although they think they should be, they have to wait until Josephine marries. After Josephine finds a husband, then the sister just younger is allowed to court. After she is wed, then it's

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the next youngest sister's turn, and so on. Do you understand?"

He did, but didn't think it was fair to the other sisters, especially for the youngest. *Which sister was the one in silver*?

"Yes, I understand, Governor."

After one more hour of visiting, Barry had to make his excuses. There was so much needing to be done before they sail.

"Before I leave," he said, "is it permissible to wander your grounds? They're so beautiful and I'd like to see as much as I can to take back to my father."

The governor swept his hand in front of him. "The grounds are yours, my boy. Let my guards know when you're ready to return to your ship."

The place was immaculate, especially the middle courtyard. Opened wide, the yard was very spacious and green with many trees and plants. Even the flower garden would have pleased the Queen of England. Many fountains littered the area, and only a few lanterns were lit. The half moon helped add glimmer to the water in the fountains, making his walk breathtaking and very relaxing.

He walked around the courtyard alone, yet shivers ran up his spine, convincing him he wasn't. Eyes followed him, he could feel it.

As he passed some hedges on his way to the gate, the feeling became stronger. Yes, someone was definitely keeping him company — if only they'd make their presence known.

Around a cluster of tall hedges he made a sharp

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turn, and in the shadows, bumped into another person, almost knocking them down. He grabbed hold of their arms to keep them from landing on the ground.

Silk slid underneath his fingers, and when his eyes adjusted to the shadows, silver appeared. So did wide, beautiful grey eyes.

"I'm sorry for running into you," he said. "I didn't see you standing there."

"It's not your fault...I mean, because this spot is not lit very well; it was bound to happen to someone."

Her soft voice and the warmth from her body so close to his stirred desire in his loins. Instead of keeping her eyes on his as she'd done inside, she kept her gaze downcast. He didn't like that. He wanted to look into her beautiful eyes.

"You're one of the governor's daughters," he stated, taking his hands off her arms, but remaining close.

"Yes."

"Where are you in line to get married?"

Her eyes lifted to his for a brief moment then lowered as she answered, "I'm the youngest."

"So, how many sisters are waiting to find a husband before it's your turn?"

Her head came up and a smile touched her eyes. He assumed she was smiling, but still couldn't see her mouth because of the veil.

"My father has told you about our custom?"

"Yes."

"Did he proposition you? He's desperately trying

to wed Josephine because a prince has asked for the hand of one of his other daughters."

Barry chuckled. "Yes, he did proposition me, but I'm not in the marriage market." He shrugged. "I can tell your father cares deeply for his daughters."

"No, not really. He's very old fashioned, and it doesn't matter to him that Josephine will be forty years old before she's married, which means all of his daughters will be old maids, also."

He grinned. She definitely had a sense of humor that surprised him but then again, since she'd been so open with her inspection of him earlier, he should have assumed she'd be a little more forward than her other sisters.

"That doesn't sound fair." He scanned over her small frame, liking what he saw...liking it a lot. His libido climbed a notch, and his hands itched to touch her again. He wanted to yank the veil away from her face and gaze upon her beauty. He wanted to rip off her headdress and bury his face in her hair, breathing in her scent.

She reminded him of someone—but he couldn't figure out who. He'd seen so many women with veils over their faces, it was no wonder he couldn't recall.

Her gaze dropped to his mouth and his arousal jumped to life. He bunched his hands into fists to keep from touching her.

"No, my father's custom isn't fair. But that's the way it's been done in his family for many years."

"Can't you go against customs?"

Her eyes widened. "Oh, no, Mr. Winston. That's

unthinkable." She lowered her gaze again, turning her head slightly as she added, "Although it's crossed my mind a time or two."

Barry laughed. "So, do I detect a little defiance in the youngest daughter?"

As her gaze lifted and met his, she gripped his arm. "Shh, you mustn't say that too loud. I don't want it getting back to my father."

"I won't tell." He removed her hand and cradled it in his. "I also won't tell your father about our little talk. I'm certain you'd get in trouble if he knew you were alone with a man out here in the shadows."

"You have no idea the trouble I'd be in if he knew."

Her eyes kept dropping to his mouth, and through her palm he could feel the erratic beat of her heart. His matched the rhythm perfectly.

She tried to tug her arm away, but he held onto it tighter.

"Can't you just stay a little while longer?" He took a step closer. "I wouldn't mind getting to know you a little better. I'm leaving tomorrow to sail back to England, and I don't know when I'll return." He brushed his fingers across her cheek, the silkiness of the veil caressing his skin.

Once again, her gaze dropped to his mouth, but this time it stayed. On impulse, he licked his lips.

"Mr. Winston. You're making it extremely hard for me to leave."

He slid his arm around her small waist and pulled her quivering body against his. She gasped and placed her other hand between their bodies on his chest.

"And you're making it hard for me to leave, also. Just one little kiss," he said softly. "I think you'd like it as much as I would." He paused, then added, "And I really would like to see you without your veil."

She shook her head. "Impossible."

"But we're alone. Nobody would know."

She pushed against his chest. "I cannot. Please, Mr. Winston – "

"Call me Barry first."

She hitched a breath, then whispered, "Barry."

He smiled, enjoying the way his name rolled off her tongue. He lowered his head and brushed his lips across her forehead.

A small sigh escaped her mouth and she tilted her face, her eyes closed. His heart thundered against his ribs, his erection pounding just as hard in his trousers.

He placed a small kiss on her perky nose as he touched the edge of the veil, ready to pull it from her face. But before he could do anymore, voices echoed from the house and grew louder.

She let out a small squeak and pushed away. Her hand flew up to her mouth as if he'd kissed her, her eyes wide and laced with panic. "It was nice to meet you, Barry Winston."

Turning, she fled through the hedges and disappeared. He sighed heavily and cursed the unexpected visitors, but when he entered the courtyard and recognized the governor's guards, he wondered if the older man had sent them to look for him.

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He ran his fingers through his hair and straightened his shoulders. Too bad he couldn't get to know her better, but he'd be sailing tomorrow and didn't have time. Of course, she wouldn't have allowed a quick affair, anyhow.

The woman fascinated him and was very mysterious, but he had to put her out of his mind and concentrate on sailing bright and early tomorrow morning. He couldn't let anything distract him from that now.

Especially not a pretty woman.

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CHAPTER THREE

The *Marquis Quest* didn't sail as Barry had planned. Things went wrong, and in the end he threw his hands in the air and gave up trying to fight everything to make it work. His first mate, Jeffrey, talked him into setting up shop in the marketplace once more, so he relented.

The day proved very profitable. Many people were about and the crowd around the shop was almost nonstop since they'd set it up later this morning. Now as the sun dipped into the horizon, Barry breathed a sigh of relief. He was ready to go home. He'd been away from England too long, and it would take a few more months before he stepped back onto his home soil.

The crowd had diminished to just the curious onlookers, so he was able to sit back and watch the Turkish people walk by while Jeffrey helped those in need. As he scanned the sparse crowd, he came across a familiar figure that stood back, almost as if she were trying to hide. The slave girl from yesterday.

When his gaze met hers, her eyes widened, so he

acted as if he didn't see her by sweeping his gaze further along. If he made a move toward her now, she'd certainly run. He couldn't have that. He'd have to sneak up on her.

He waited a few minutes and stood, walking the opposite way around the shop. Peeking around the corner, he could see she still crouched in her corner behind a crate. Slowly, he made his way around the tents, ducking behind the next shop. Within minutes, the back of her came in view. The slave's head moved from side to side, as if she were looking for someone. He grinned. Probably trying to find him.

She rose as if to flee, so he grasped her shoulders. Her body stiffened and her head swung around, her eyes clashing with his.

"I've got you now."

Her face lost all color and her lips parted. But before he could enjoy his capture, a hand grabbed his arm and gave him a hard yank until he faced an older man.

"Where do you think you're going, Mister? I've caught you red-handed now, so don't even think about trying to escape."

Barry blinked, not believing what he heard. He understood their language enough to know what the man was saying, but nothing made sense.

"Excuse me, but I think you have the wrong man." He shook his head. "What do you think you've caught me doing?"

The very large shopkeeper's face flamed, his lips curled into a snarl. He lifted his stubborn chin and

said, "I've been warned about men like you from different countries. You're part of those who steal our women and sell them in other places, and I won't let you do it again!"

Barry stared at the man, dumbfounded. Why would the shopkeeper think that...but then, he still held the girl's arm in a tight grip. He chuckled. "Oh, no, sir. This is not what you think -"

"Yes, it is, and you're going to jail, Mister. I'll see to it that you are hung for your crimes."

* * * *

Phoebe gasped and covered her mouth. Should she say something? Obviously, the shopkeeper thought he was doing the right thing...but she couldn't let Mr. Winston get taken away when he was not at fault. She was the handsome sea Captain's only hope.

She took a deep breath and cleared her throat, but both men ignored her.

"Look here," Barry said, his lips tight with anger.

The other man shook his head and interrupted. "I've already sent my son to fetch the guards, and you'll be behind bars very soon. We'll stop your kidnapping attempts and there'll be no more slave selling."

She cleared her voice again. "Excuse me." Her voice boomed through the air louder than she'd anticipated, but at least she received both men's attention. She looked at the shopkeeper. "You have this all wrong. He's not kidnapping me."

The man glared. "Quit trying to defend him. I don't know what he's promised you, but men like him won't follow through with their promises. Would you rather me not do anything and have him steal more of our country's women?"

"No, but this man isn't the man you're looking for, I assure you. He wasn't kidnapping me. He was...uhm..." She scrambled for an intelligent idea, something to make the shopkeeper believe her.

"He was what?" the man demanded.

"As humorous as it seems, this man is...my fiancé." She glanced at Barry, his eyes widened before a smile graced his mouth.

The angry man shook his head. "If this is your fiancée, then why was he grabbing hold of your arm as if he expected you to run?"

Phoebe darted her attention back and forth between the men. Although the sea Captain had wide, shocked eyes, they still pleaded for her help. She would help him, only because she needed to get out of this situation and return home before someone noticed her gone.

Barry finally smiled and gave her a wink. "Sir, the girl is my fiancée, but she was running from me because she didn't want me to take her back to her father." He shrugged. "She prefers my company over his."

She could have laughed out loud. Did he know how close to the truth that statement was?

Barry continued. "We are to be wed in a few days, and I'm trying to convince her she needs to stay with

her father until that time." He shook his head. "She's being very defiant."

The very handsome sea Captain's arms snaked around her and pulled her close. She gasped from the suddenness at first, but then wanted to sigh with pleasure once her body fit against the hard contours of his. Automatically, she placed her hand on his chest and stared up into his eyes.

He smiled at her and a flutter happened in her chest. Those blue eyes of his could melt even an old maid's heart.

The shopkeeper scratched his head, anger lines slowly disappearing around his eyes and mouth. "Well, all right," he grumbled. "If the girl says she's marrying you, then I believe it."

She kept her gaze locked with Barry's as she replied to the other man, "Yes. I'm going to marry him." Her heart leapt to her throat. If only she wasn't the youngest...if only someone would marry Josephine...if only her father didn't think she was a reincarnated goddess...

She didn't see the shopkeeper leave, but his boots crunched on the gravel announced his departure. The captain's gaze roamed over her face, void of the veil she detested, his smile widening. Did he recognize the woman he'd held this way last night?

He swept his fingers along her hairline. "What's your name?"

"Phoebe."

He nodded. "Such a beautiful name for a beautiful woman."

Heat consumed her face, but she couldn't look away. His gaze had her hypnotized.

"I'm Barry Winston."

She sighed as her body melted against his. "That's a very nice name."

"Thank you for helping me just now. I don't know how I would have convinced him I'm not kidnapping the women in this country."

She chuckled. "And thank you for helping me when I needed you the most. I knew you weren't that type of man, which is why I had to help."

He stared at her for a few earth-shattering minutes more, then gradually loosened his hold and stepped away. The warmth from his body disappeared, making emptiness form in her soul. She wanted him back and in her arms.

He let out a sigh. "So, Phoebe, now I want to know why you ran away from me yesterday, and why you were trying to keep yourself hidden from me today. If you're not a thief, then why do you act like one?"

Fear gripped her chest as her throat dried. "Do I really have to answer that?"

He chuckled. "Yes."

"What if I don't want to?"

"Phoebe? Are you afraid I might follow through with my threat and take you to your master?"

"Yes."

"Fine. What if I promise I won't?"

The corner of her mouth tugged into a grin. "Then maybe I'll tell you."

"What made you decide to kick me and then run?"

"You frightened me. I wasn't doing anything wrong, and you acted as if I needed to be punished for some reason."

He nodded. "So, you don't think your behavior was rude?"

She arched her brow. "Not any ruder than yours."

Laughing, he shook his head. His eyes sparkled like a calm sea.

"But you were raised in a different country than I, and if I remember correctly, the women in Turkey aren't supposed to be outspoken."

Her grin left her face and fear consumed her again. "Do you mean we're not supposed to have our own opinions, speak our own minds?"

"Yes. Isn't that the way it is around here?"

She shrugged. "If you ask me, I think that's a foolish custom. Because I <u>do</u> have my own opinion and speak my own mind.

"Do you talk like that around your master?"

"Well...no." Her father would skin her alive if he caught her speaking like this. She might even be banished from the family. No...she was supposed to be Artemis. He had to keep her around.

"Then why are you speaking that way to me? Is it because I'm not from your country?"

"Possibly."

His gaze moved over her attire again, down the plain brown servants' dress she wore. "So tell me, Phoebe. Are you running away from your master?"

Nervously, she swallowed, swiping a lock of hair behind her ear. "No."

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"Then what are you still doing at the marketplace when it's almost evening? Don't you know the servants leave by now?"

She hitched a breath and scanned the area. Night was almost upon them, and men were lighting lanterns along the streets. Tanya would be looking for her by now. She must leave.

"You're correct. I need to go." She turned to run, but then stopped and looked at him. "Will you be here tomorrow?"

He laughed. "Why? Do you come to the marketplace to shop or watch me?"

Her cheeks flushed with the answer; there was no way he could miss the glow she knew came from her face. "Well...to be honest...I came yesterday to look around, but when I saw you, I couldn't stop myself from returning."

He cupped her chin. "I'm not going to be here tomorrow. I'll be sailing to England in the morning."

Her heart dropped. It wasn't fair she found a man to make her heart pitter-patter and cause her knees to weaken – only to lose him so quickly.

"Oh." Her voice was low. "Then I suppose I'll just say it was a pleasure meeting you and I hope you have a safe journey home."

With a heavy heart, she turned to leave, but he stopped her by taking her arm. When she faced him, he moved closer and wrapped her in an embrace.

"Would you like to spend some time with me tonight?" he asked, his voice deep and sensual. "You could give me something to remember you by, and I can pretty much promise I'll never forget it."

He has no idea how tempting that sounds. She'd love nothing better than to prove her father wrong. Prove that a man's loving hand could stroke passion into her body—and the Temple of Artemis would still stand.

He bent his head, his lips hovering just above hers. "Stay the night with me, Phoebe. I'll give you a night you'll never forget."

Her knees weakened, and she was grateful he held her up. His offer was so tempting, especially when she wouldn't get this offer again—ever. If she wasn't supposed to be Artemis...

But tonight she wasn't the goddess. Tonight, she was a slave girl.

"Barry," she whispered and closed her eyes, tilting her face to his.

His warm mouth settled over hers, and tingles spread through her. Her heart beat madly, and liquid flowed through her body and awakening areas she'd never known existed – until he came along.

His lips moved over hers in a gentle caress, then nipped at her bottom lip. When her mouth opened, he slipped his hot tongue inside. Tingles erupted inside her and she wanted more. She moaned, sliding her arms around his shoulders and tightening her hold.

He slanted his head and swept his velvety tongue inside her mouth. She copied the actions with her own tongue and was privileged to hear him groan.

Her bosom ached with an unknown emotion, her nipples hardened. The sensations were pleasant.

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Between her legs even throbbed, making her want more.

But she couldn't. A kiss wouldn't be enough to make the temple crumble, but no matter what, she was responsible for that pile of stones. She also couldn't shame her father.

She pressed her hands against his chest and pushed away. She took one last look of his handsome face. His lips were swollen, tempting her to taste them again. Confusion creased his forehead, and his dark eyes were laced with passion.

"I'm sorry, Barry." She whirled around, running as fast as she could before she changed her mind and hurried back into his arms.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Darkness spread through the streets, making it harder to find her way back home. It also made searching for Tanya that much more difficult. Blast! What if her maid didn't even know she was missing? What if nobody knew?

Phoebe couldn't very well go up to the front gates and ring the bell cord. Her disobedience would spread like wildfire through the manor and she'd bring shame to her family.

Growling inwardly, she gritted her teeth. There was only one solution. She had to go back to the marketplace, find Barry and tell him the truth. He would be able to help her back into the manor without being caught. Or he could call for her maid to come help.

Yes. That's what she'd do.

Lifting her skirt to her ankles, she ran as fast as she could to the market—to Barry's shop. With each step, her heart sank that much further. Night had crept upon her and she was certain the shop-owners were dismounting their tents and packing it up for the

night.

Please, Barry, be there.

When she reached the spot, only a few men were loading merchandise into a wagon. Barry wasn't one of the men, but the other man she'd seen with him was. Her heart clenched. What should she do now?

The men strapped the canvas over the wagon, then climbed up front. Without another thought, she ran to the end of the wagon and hopped on the back. One way or another, she'd be taken to Barry—even if it went all the way to the ship.

The closer they came to the waterfront, the cooler the air grew. Turkey wasn't so cold during this summer, but then she'd never been this close to the ocean, either. Tanya's thin dress wasn't providing much covering for her right now.

They reached the ship and she curled up on the end, holding tight to the ropes as it boarded. The swaying of the ship made her dizzy and she closed her eyes, willing herself not to empty her stomach. Good thing there wasn't anything in her stomach to lose.

The wagon bumped and swayed until it finally reached its destination. Phoebe opened her eyes and jumped off. The rocking from the wagon and the ship caused her to fall, the ground spinning all around her. She groaned and clutched her head.

"We have a stowaway," someone yelled.

She snapped her eyes open just in time to see several men run up to her. Barry's friend was in the lead. When he neared, his eyes widened and he gasped. "It's you."

A sob rose to her throat. "I need to see Barry...Mr. Winston. Please."

A wave of dizziness rolled through Phoebe's head and she closed her eyes again. Then her world turned dark.

* * * *

Barry gazed down at the beautiful seductress lying on his bed. It didn't matter if she was a slave; she kissed like an angel and ignited a flame in him that no other woman had. And to think they'd just met. It didn't make sense, but he wasn't going to figure it out. All he cared about right now was the unconscious woman on his bed—the woman who'd come back to be with him tonight.

He grinned. She wanted him, just as he wanted her. Their attraction was undeniable, and it relieved him to think she'd returned to seek his company tonight. He certainly wouldn't disappoint her.

Sitting on the corner of the bed, he caressed her pale cheek. A wet rag had been placed over her forehead, but she'd yet to stir to awareness. He moved his gaze from her face down her body. The brown servants' dress clung to her, damp from the moist air outside. He grinned. If he'd known her body had been this perfect when he first saw her yesterday, he'd have been chasing her for a different reason entirely.

He moved his hand from her face down her neck,

stroking her skin as if he touched a delicate flower. So soft. So tempting.

When he touched the gentle curve of her breast, he couldn't stop from wanting more. He cupped her. Perfect size for his hand. He ran his thumb over her nipple and it hardened.

His arousal grew, reminding him how long it had been since he'd been with a woman. Keeping his hand on her body, he shifted on the bed to make his growing erection more comfortable.

Although he wanted to continue to rub against her nipple, he kept his hand moving, over her flat stomach to the juncture between her legs. He pressed his hand there, and a moan came from her.

His gaze snapped to her face, but her eyes remained closed. He smiled. He affected her even in her subconscious.

He drew his thumb over her small mound, adding a little pressure as he slipped down further. Another moan escaped her and her legs widened. His throat turned dry and he wanted to rip her clothes off this very minute. But he'd never taken advantage of an unconscious woman before, and he wouldn't start now.

He moved his hand again, continuing it down her body, stroking her leg all the way to her ankle. The hem of the dress was damp and he slipped his hand underneath to touch her bare leg. Cold. He rubbed both hands on her thighs, trying to warm her. In return, his body was building with heat.

She moaned again, the pleasurable sound ripping

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through his body like lightning. He moved his hands up her legs just a little further, convincing himself he was keeping her warm. He scooted closer to her, which made his location more accessible.

At her thighs, he stopped. *What am I doing?* He must wake her. He couldn't enjoy this without her participation, also.

Removing one hand from under her dress, he brought it up to caress her cheek. "Phoebe, my sweet. Wake up."

She moaned and cuddled her face against his palm, then kissed his skin. A grin stretched across his mouth. She would be ready when she awakened.

He leaned over and brushed his lips across her delicate mouth. "Phoebe, my sweetness. I want to make love to you, but you have to wake up first."

"Hmmm..." she mumbled and snuggled against his hand again.

"My sweet, if you don't wake up soon, I'm not going to able to control myself." He pecked at her lips. "Please open your eyes and tell me you want me inside you."

Her eyelids fluttered open and she met his stare. Awareness focused in her eyes and she smiled.

"How do you feel?" He rubbed his fingers over her thigh and goose bumps rose on her skin. Beneath his chest, her nipples hardened, rising against his shirt to remind him how ready she was for him.

She licked her lips. "I think I'm ill." She swallowed. "My body is on fire."

He drew his finger down her cheek, then over to

her ear. "It's called passion." He brushed a kiss on her nose. "Enjoy it, my sweet. It will get better, I promise."

Under her dress, his hand slipped between her thighs. She gasped and clenched her legs together, her breathing quickening.

He shook his head, keeping his eyes locked with hers. "It's all right. What I do will only bring you more pleasure."

He kept stroking her thigh and soon her body relaxed. As his hand neared the heat coming between her legs, she reached out, grasped his shirt and held her breath. He trailed his fingers over her wiry curls, then followed the path of moisture until it grew slicker.

"Open your legs just a little more," he coaxed with a deep voice.

When she let out a breath, it was ragged, but she nodded and spread her legs just as he'd asked. His thumb found her nub and caressed it. Little moans came from her throat, but she didn't tell him to stop. Her eyes darkened, and her breaths rushed out faster than before. Even the juices between her legs thickened.

God, if he didn't take her soon...

"Oh, Phoebe," he muttered before placing his mouth over hers.

She moaned again and linked her hands around his neck. Her mouth opened immediately and her tongue met with his. This kiss was different from the last — more wild, more pleasurable.

The stroking of his finger quickened as it circled her. Her body quivered. He couldn't take anymore he had to make her orgasm. Slipping his fingers around her entryway, he teased her and him, that much more.

Her heavy breathing turned into panting. The kiss had somehow stopped, their mouths barely touching now. He concentrated on her body.

He slid his finger inside and she hitched a breath. Pulling back slightly, he looked into her face. Her eyes were closed, the corners of her mouth lifted. Pleasure was written all over her expression.

"Phoebe, look at me."

When her gaze met his, he pushed his finger up further. She sighed and her eyes turned darker.

"You're beautiful," he said. "Passion looks good on you."

He bent his head and kissed her again while he started a rhythm with his fingers, trading one and then the other. When he pushed two inside, her whole body quivered, but her hips kept the rhythm.

Traveling his lips down her neck, he unlatched the buttons on her bodice. Between his teeth and his fingers, he pulled it apart. Creamy breasts came into view, her raspberry nipples already hard.

He licked at a point before drawing it into his mouth and sucking. She moaned and arched, giving him more to partake. Her hands clutched his head and held him to her chest.

While his fingers slipped easily in and out of her, his mouth moved from one breast to the other,

lapping, nibbling and sucking to his greatest delight. Her moans of passion grew higher, exciting him that much more.

But he didn't want her to climax. Now was not the time.

He sat up and at the same time, lifted her dress. She must have understood what he wanted because she helped him yank it off her body. She even assisted in removing her underclothes until she lay before him naked.

God, he wanted to kiss every inch of her body. And he would before the night was over.

Without caring about his shirt, he ripped it off his back and flung it to the floor. Her gaze dropped to his chest and she gasped. Her hands touched him from his neck all the way down to his abdomen in a tender caress.

He closed his eyes and sighed. Her stroke stirred fire in his loins that had never been created before. His erection leapt in his trousers, reminding him again what he really wanted.

He looked at her again. Her eyes were darker—so gray they were almost black—beautiful and very aroused. He leaned over her and cupped her breasts as his mouth covered hers.

Threading her fingers through his hair, she held his head as her tongue met his demanding kisses. When he pulled away, she groaned in protest, until he latched his mouth to her breast. A ragged sigh escaped her throat and she arched into him once again.

He suckled her breasts a few more times before trailing his kisses further down, his hands stroking her body as his mouth followed. When he reached the juncture of her legs, his fingers parted her thighs.

Her breathing grew ragged until his mouth hovered over her sweet, moist slickness—then she held her breath.

He spread her legs wider as he lowered his face. When his lips touched her delicate petals, a deep moan rattled through her chest. He matched hers with his own sigh of approval.

He brushed his lips across her flesh, then dipped his tongue in her wetness. She let out a joyful cry and held his head in place. Circling his hands underneath her buttocks, he dove his tongue in deeper. She tasted so sweet, he wanted more. But the continuing throb in his trousers begged for a release, also.

He tore away and unfastened his trousers and slid them off. Her gaze strayed to that erect area on him and she gasped.

"Barry. You're magnificent."

Climbing on the bed, he purposely slid his body over her and he covered her lengthy. "You are the one who's magnificent." He kissed her lips. "I've never seen a more perfect body."

"I never imagined it could feel this wonderful." She clutched his shoulders, pulling him down upon her more.

He narrowed his gaze. "This is your first time?" "Yes."

He groaned. "God, Phoebe ... "

"Shhh..." She kissed his lips. "There are no regrets. I make this choice willingly." She smiled. "Please, finish making love to me."

He buried his face in her neck, fighting his conscience. He'd never taken a virgin. Never had the desire to be the woman's first. But Phoebe was different. His chest tightened with an unfamiliar feeling—yet the feeling intoxicated him, making the burning in his loins grow to a deeper ache.

He slipped his hands down her body, then underneath her, cupping her buttocks. "Spread your legs."

She did and his body fit perfectly between her legs. He hooked her legs over his hips and positioned his moist tip at the apex of her heat.

Raising his head, he looked down at her. "It's going to hurt, but the pain will subside quickly."

"I trust you."

Taking it slow, he slid into her until he was stopped by her virginity. He covered her mouth with his and pushed inside her.

His kiss covered her gasp and he stilled, yet his tongue moved seductively over her mouth. Within minutes, her body relaxed and she pushed her hips against his.

He started the rhythm and she followed. Before too long, their bodies moved together in wild abandonment. He lifted on his hands and pushed deeper into her. She arched her head back on the pillow, her hips rising to meet his deep thrusts.

Gleaming breasts, perfect for his mouth, tempted

him. He bent his head over one and licked the puckered tip.

"Oh, Barry..." Her breaths quickened, meeting the fast pace of his.

He suckled one into his mouth and she cried out. "Yes!"

Her hands slid over his back and further down his body, her fingers digging into his buttocks as she released a loud joyful cry.

The sound of ecstasy was like angels singing. He couldn't hold his release back any longer. In one more deep thrust, he spilled his seed into her.

Gathering her in his arms, he rolled them on the bed, lying on their sides. She let out a deep purr, sounding like a satisfied kitten.

The ache in his chest burst with happiness. From this moment on, his life would not be the same. And for once—he didn't mind the change at all.

HUNTRESS OF MY HEART

CHAPTER FIVE

Phoebe awoke with a smile. Cuddling next to a hard male body was the best thrill in the world. What made their coupling even better was knowing she *wasn't* the goddess, as her father had predicted. If she were the huntress Artemis, there would have been an earthquake—or something to make the temple crumble to the ground. Since she didn't feel the earth shaking, she knew that hadn't happened. She was as mortal as the very passionate man who lay next her.

Of course, now she had to convince her father. That would be torture in itself. But it must be done.

She wanted Barry Winston more than anything...more than her father's wealth, more than her family's shame, and especially, more than being responsible for the temple.

Now she must tell Barry the truth. He hadn't made love to a mere servant girl, but the daughter of the governor instead.

She took an uneven breath. Would he be upset? She hoped he'd felt the same burst of love that started in her chest and covered her body...but what if he

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didn't? Would she be able to go on with life without him?

Running the tip of her finger down his chest, she marveled again at his muscular body. Heaven's above – he could be an ancient god.

She leaned up and kissed his chest, then trailed over to his nipple before licking the tip. A groan sprang from his throat and his arms tightened around her. Looking up, she met her warm gaze. He smiled.

"Good morning, my love."

Her heart flipped with excitement. "Good morning." She kissed his chest again. "Did you feel the earth move last night?"

He chuckled. "That's a good way to explain what happened."

She peeked at him beneath her lashes. "So you *did* feel the earth shake?"

"All I could feel last night was the bed moving in passion's rhythm."

She sighed. Good. She could rest assured, knowing the temple still stood.

Cupping his hand on her face, he stroked his thumb across her bottom lip. "And I believe we need to put the bed in yet another rhythm. Faster and more aggressive, in fact. Do you not agree?"

She smiled, her heart swelling with love. "I do agree, but before we do, there's something I need to tell you."

As she adjusted herself to where she was practically laying on top of him with her breasts pressed against his hard chest, he circled his arms around her, his palms sliding up and down her back.

"What do you need to say, my lovely?"

"I need to tell you about myself."

He took a lock of her hair and caressed it. "Don't I know enough? You're a servant girl who'd rather spend time with me than her master."

She chuckled and shook her head. "Oh, Barry, there's more to it than that."

Taking a deep breath, she collected the courage to confess her true identity, but just as she opened her mouth, a loud ruckus came from outside the bedroom door. Angry voices grew louder as they came from the corridor.

Barry straightened and wrapped the sheet around them to cover their nakedness. "What in the hell-"

A familiar voice boomed through the air, turning her blood to ice. *Father*. She groaned and slipped further under the cover to hide her face. Within seconds, the bedroom door was kicked open.

"Good Lord man, have you no shame?" Barry snapped.

"Where is my daughter?"

Her body shook as she clasped the sheet tighter.

"What are you talking about, Governor Alphius? I am not with your daughter, but a slave girl."

The loud footsteps of her father boomed closer to the bed. She squeezed her eyes closed and held her breath, but that didn't stop the inevitable. Within seconds, the sheet was ripped off her. She gasped and snuggled closer to Barry to hide her naked body.

She peeked over her shoulder at the steely eyes of

her father. He pointed his finger at her. "That is Pheobe Alphius, the reincarnated goddess Artemis."

Her father directed his narrowed gaze to Barry. "You have destroyed her very reason for being here. You have tested the gods of the ancient worlds and now you must pay."

Cursing under her breath, she rolled her eyes. Would he ever stop?

She pulled the sheet up to cover herself before sitting up. Barry's forehead creased, his eyes wavered and lips thinned.

"What's going on, Pheobe?"

She shrugged. "What he said is true. I am his daughter." Snapping her attention to her father, she scowled. "But I am *not* the goddess Artemis. I have bedded with a man, Father, and still the temple stands. Your reasons for my very existence are false."

"Nay. The temple has crumbled this morning, which is why I came looking for my daughter. And thanks to your maid, I have found you."

Tightness consumed her chest, her breath cut off. The room swam around her and her stomach lurched. No! He couldn't be right. She wasn't the goddess.

"Now get dressed and I'll take you back to the palace before the gods destroy something else." Her father glared at Barry. "And I'll deal with you later."

Her head pounded, threatening to crack her skull as her father and his guards left the room. But her heart grew heavy, knowing she'd never be with Barry as she'd wanted.

Scooting over to the side of the bed, she held back

the tears building each second.

"Phoebe." Barry touched her shoulder. "Why didn't you tell me?"

She glanced over her shoulder. "Tell you what? That my father is insane?"

"No. Why didn't you tell me you were the lovely woman I'd held by the fountains the other night?"

"Would you have believed me?"

He shrugged. "Perhaps not."

A tear slid down her cheek and he brushed it away with his finger.

"I...I really don't want you to go," he said in a whisper.

"I don't wish to leave, either. But my father is convinced I'm Artemis."

He pulled her back in his arms and held her against his hard body. "I don't believe you're Artemis, either. Although you're certainly a goddess." He kissed her forehead.

Her chest clenched, and she lost her breath again. Why did he have to be so wonderful? Pulling away, she wiped her eyes. "Barry, I must go. Father will create another scene if I don't."

With shaky hands she dressed back into the slavegirl's clothes. She didn't dare look up at Barry. It was bad enough she felt his stare like a fiery caress all over her body. Remembering the way he'd touched her, kissed her, and made love to her sent shivers of delight dancing over her skin.

At least she'd experienced love with a man. But now that she'd tasted the forbidden fruit, could she sustain from partaking again?

Her father would make certain she didn't.

Once she was dressed, she stepped to the door, but Barry hurried around the bed and stopped her. The white sheet had been tied around his waist, making him look more desirable. She balled her hands into fists to keep from touching him.

"Phoebe." He stroked her cheek, then bent and placed a kiss on her mouth.

She leaned into him, but fought against her body to keep from enjoying the kiss like she'd wanted. Turning her face away, she broke the kiss and hiccupped a sob. "We can't."

"What can I do to make you mine?"

Through teary eyes, she gazed into his hypnotizing stare. "Convince my father I'm not Artemis."

"Then can I make you mine?"

She smiled, although weak. "I want to be yours, too."

"It's happened so fast, but I know in my heart I can't let you leave."

Emotion caught in her throat and she wanted to ball her eyes out again. She shook her head. "You have no other choice. My father could have you killed for disobeying his command."

Wrapping his arms around her, he pulled her close. "I know, my love." He kissed her lips again, more tender this time. "I promise to try to make him believe you're not a goddess."

"Best of luck. I'll be praying you can."

She threw her arms around his neck and kissed

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him deeply before yanking away and hurrying out of the bedroom. If she wasn't the goddess Artemis, then why were the gods treating her like this?

* * * *

Cursing under his breath, Barry pulled on his clothes. The governor was mad, and he must find a way to prove it.

If the Temple of Artemis had crumbled, he needed to find the culprit. How else would her father believe?

As he headed for the plank to move from his ship to the shore, one of Alphius' guards stopped him. Standing at the bottom of the plank, the burly man held out his hand.

"By the governor's orders, you are not allowed on our soil. You must sail to whence you came immediately."

Barry's chest grew tight, as did his throat. No! This couldn't be it. He must have Phoebe beside him...forever.

Blowing out a frustrated breath, he ran his fingers through his hair. Behind him, someone tapped on his back.

"Captain?"

Barry glanced over his shoulder. "Yes, Jeffrey."

"There's a rowboat waiting for you on the other side of the ship."

A grin tugged on his mouth and he quickly covered it with his hand. Although the guard might be too far away to see, he didn't need anything to keep him from his mission now.

"Well done, Jeffrey."

He turned and stormed to the other side of the ship, way out of the guard's line of vision. Climbing down the side of the ship, he hurried as fast as he could, his heart pounding with anticipation.

He would have Phoebe back in his life...and hopefully, he didn't get killed in the process.

It didn't take him long to make it to the shore. Ducking behind crates, he dodged the man standing watch over his ship from the docks. Thankfully nobody spotted him, especially when he took the guard's horse by the reins, flung himself on top and rode away.

Wind whipped through his unbound hair as he leaned over the horse, riding faster toward the temple. Images passed through his mind of Phoebe lying naked on his bed while his mouth and hands worshiped her body. He loved the way she arched and moaned, the way she writhed with a smile of satisfaction on her face. He loved how the sweet taste of her woman's juices lingered on his tongue and how she sighed his name over and over again while he brought her to orgasm.

There was no way he could let such a desirable woman slip away. He must do all he can to try and win her back.

As he approached the temple, he noticed the governor's carriage had stopped in front. Governor Alphius and Phoebe stood on the steps. Her face was pinched in anger as she pointed to the still-standing building.

What? Why had Alphius said the temple crumbled when it still stood proud and erect?

He pulled his horse to a stop and jumped down. Both pair of eyes locked on him, but it was Phoebe's wide eyes and her growing smile that made his heart hammer.

"Barry," she called out in a joyful cry as she ran toward him.

He held out his arms until she snuggled against his body, her face buried in his chest. Her father wasn't the same powerful man he'd been a little while ago. Instead, his frown and wilted shoulders made him pathetic.

"Governor? What is the meaning of this? Why did you say the temple had crumbled when it's still standing tall?"

The older man heaved a sigh and ran his pudgy fingers through his receding hair. "I wanted to believe my daughter had been sent to me from the ancient gods. I'd told the king and convinced him my daughter was Artemis reincarnated." He shook his head. "Now I fear my title will be stripped from me and my lands and wealth will be removed."

"But why would the king do that when you have proven your worth to him time and time again?"

"Young Barry Winston." He scrubbed his hand over his face. "You do not know the ways of our customs. You cannot possibly understand."

Phoebe lifted her head and looked at her father. "Then tell the king the gods have other plans for me."

She glanced up at Barry and smiled. "Tell them you received a vision that I was to give my heart and soul to a man instead of living the life the ancient Artemis had lived." Her eyes softened. "Tell the king it's time Artemis loved a man, and was loved in return."

Barry cupped her face in his large hand. "God, Phoebe, I do love you."

"As do I, you," she whispered.

After several earth-moving moments of staring into her heated eyes, the joyous laugh of her father snapped his out of his dream-like state. Both he and Phoebe looked at Alphius.

The older man clapped his hands. "Yes! That's exactly what I'll do." He wobbled over to Phoebe and kissed her forehead. "Daughter, forgive me for keeping you prisoner all these years. You certainly have the right—just as all your sisters—to fall in love and marry." He arched an eyebrow and looked at Barry. "As long as that's what this young man has in mind."

Barry chuckled and tightened his hold on Phoebe. "Oh, yes, sir. That's exactly what I have in mind." He looked at the beautiful woman in his arms and his heart melted. "Although she's not the goddess Artemis, she is definitely the huntress of my heart."

She smiled wide. "And like the goddess, I keep what I catch...forever."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Phyllis Campbell does what she loves best – writing love stories. Since she wrote her first play at the age of seventeen, she's devoted her life to finding that 'happy ending'. She's been an avid reader of romance since the first year of her marriage in 1985, and she still can't get enough of a great story. She's continued her love for the art of performing by writing six more plays for her community. Now she's excited about expanding her stories into novels. Phyllis Campbell is a member of several romance writers groups including Romance Writers of America, and online critique groups.