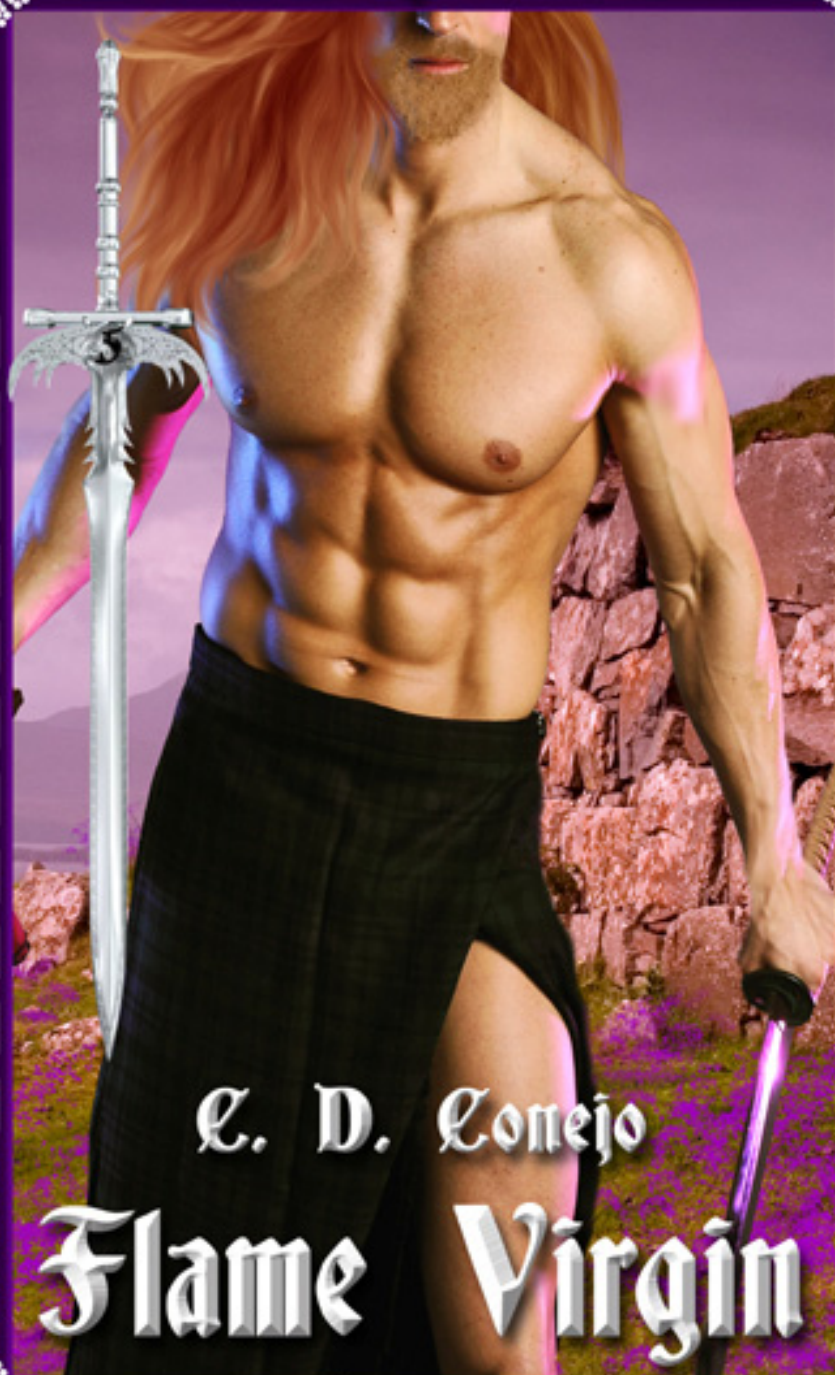


V



E. D. Conejo

Flame Virgin

Swords

FLAME VIRGIN

TAROT: FIVE OF SWORDS

BY

C. D. CONEJO

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THE FIVE OF SWORDS

The Five of Swords is the card of defeat. You may be wrong, or you may be right. Your opponent may be cruel or unjust, but you are going to lose to your enemy. Can you fight back? You could, but you would only lose more. The only hope is in dignified surrender. You must move on, and not look back. There is a lesson to be learned, and at the end, there is the ray of sunlight that is hope. Because with dignity and strength, this card will temper you, make you stronger.

Juna can't fight the powerful forces aligned against her, degrading and mocking her in her struggle. It takes all her strength to keep her inner dignity, but love, in its infinite capacity to heal, rewards her.

To Clyde...

ONE

Juna pulled her shawl tight around her body, if only to stop her shivering. She huddled on the pounded earth floor in the corner of her dank cell, seeking warmth from the unyielding stone walls. A thin stream of sunlight struggled through the casement high above her, illuminating the cobwebs blanketing the ceiling, and little more. She was grateful for the dim light; it somehow, unreasonably, gave her hope.

It was a most unreasonable hope, she knew, since there was no bright lining to the darkness in her heart. She had failed, she had been caught, and she would be punished. She heard the boots on the stone floor outside her cell. She curled closer to the wall, a cold sweat running down her back. Someone was coming back, and there would be no mercy for her.

The door creaked open, and warm air rushed in with it. Juna's curious mind wondered at the oddness of the temperature. She had no idea why it was so, but every time she entered the cell, it was colder, and every time she left it, the world was warmer. Yet her cell was her refuge, her only refuge, so why would it be so cold?

Juna marveled that she could be thinking about temperature in the face of her doomed fate, the onslaught of the opening door. But she knew the

workings of the mind, she had made a lifetime study of that, and she knew that by letting her mind ponder such things she was sheltering herself from the truth of what was to come.

A lifetime of study was no understatement, for Juna was a keeper of Bridget's flame. This awesome responsibility was handed down from woman to woman for almost five hundred years, since the days when Bridget had walked this earth. She was the symbol of fire, forges, and femininity. She had embodied, at first, motherhood, strength, and love.

The legends said that Bridget mated with and married Bres, and had three sons. Bres was a brave and dark force, a force of war and power, and when he was united to Bridget's fire, their progeny were the power of life itself.

In the old days, it was said, Bridget's fire never went out. Keepers, brave and sage women, were called to tend that fire, give solace and counsel to seekers, and keep the fire of remembrance going. Twenty days they kept the flame, and on the twenty-first night, for hundreds of years, Bridget herself was seen keeping the flame going.

In those days, the keepers of the flame celebrated their womanhood, and did not fear or disdain lusty coupling. In some places, young, virile men were specially brought in to ensure the joyful regeneration. Never were women chattel either forced into or denied sexuality.

When the Romans came, and brave Vercengetorix had been defeated, changes were wrought on Bridget's legacy. They had taken her fecund, loving nature and

chilled it. Her keepers became virgins, sacrificing their sexuality to a supposed sanctity. Women became items of property, and love and joyful lust were subverted. But the keepers of the flame kept on, because even at the cost of their freedom, Bridget's flame, her name, and her hope had to be kept going.

Juna's reverie came to an abrupt end.

"Get up," the guard said, and prodded her with the toe of his boot. The prod became a small but sharp kick when her cold bones didn't move her fast enough. She let out a little cry, and scrambled to her feet. "Oh, for heaven's sake," said the guard, "if this little poke bothers you, you'll be no amusement at all in the punishment room."

The words sent another chill down her spine. The fortress was the center of the County, and its punishment room was renowned. The lasciviousness of the current government was a topic of salacious and titillating gossip throughout the land. It was amusing to talk about orgies, mysterious drinks and well-oiled slaves when you weren't facing punishment yourself, Juna thought. She had lived such a pure life, and now to be even contemplating such topics was an assault on her sensibilities.

Juna drew in her breath and stood as tall and strong as she could. Hiding would not work. She made herself look at the guard who had come to fetch her. He was the one who had brought her to her cell, but she had been so angry, so frightened, and struggling so hard against his grip that she had not looked at him directly.

The guards had come for her in the dark, after Bres had left. She was sleeping, clad in her thin white shift,

in the warm summer night, with the shawl lightly over her. She had been dreaming of Bres' kiss, on her lips, on her body. She'd moved in her sleep, remembering his tongue as it worked its way down her belly. Then she had startled awake, horrified to see three men in her tiny room.

She pulled the shawl closer when the men reached for her. One lifted her shift, pulling it up to her waist, and another wrapped her shawl around her face. Hands held her down, others grabbing and pulling the golden curls that shielded her femininity. "Come on, whore, move like that again!" a rough voice laughed, and hands pulled her legs wide.

"Stop!" one said. "Leave her to judgment!" The others groaned with annoyance.

"Let us have a little amusement first!" one complained. "The tribunal need never know." Hard fingers found their way into her. They had not let go of her spread legs, nor lowered her shift. She lay there, frozen with fear, displayed before these strangers, unable to fight, see, or move.

"The tribunal will decide her fate," said her alleged champion. "I am sure we will all have our chance to enjoy her favors in the punishment room."

The men laughed in agreement. To Juna, the words were worse than the hands. But there was no remedy.

She was hauled to her feet, and tossed onto the front of the leader's horse. She clutched her shawl to herself with one hand, as she was forced to grip the pommel of the saddle with the other to keep from falling. Again her shift was lifted, to taunting laughter, to mount her on the horse, her now-tender sex pressed into the

leather saddle.

The guard's strong arm held her through the ride, his hand gripping her arm with such force that a clear outline of his fingers was imprinted as his brand on her upper arm.

He had tossed her into the cell like so much old clothing, and all she knew about him was that his hands could leave finger-marks on her pale skin.

Now she assessed him, in what she hoped was a confident, bold look. He was not remarkably tall or big, but he was well muscled. His red hair was standard issue; his reddish gold beard was as commonplace as the earth itself. His eyes, however, were the color of summer sky, and rare in their intelligence and sparkle. But looks, Juna knew, could be misleading.

"Where are we going?" she asked. The guard looked down at her. His eyes traveled from the shawl that covered Juna's own red hair, past her dark brown eyes, to her body. The shawl held her breasts tightly wrapped, and kept them from his appraising eyes, but the closely woven white shift that she wore clearly outlined the curve of her bottom, the movement of her thighs as she stood before him. She recalled how much he had already seen, and she squirmed under his gaze. He shook his head.

"To the tribunal, Juna. You know that. Now stop quivering, coward. If you had been fearful enough of the tribunal to stop your lusts before, you wouldn't need to fear it now."

Juna bowed her head. He was right, of course. She should have resisted more. She knew the consequences of surrender, and yet she had done so. Now, she would

pay, and he was right. She was a coward. In fact, she was terrified. She shivered again, and the guard turned away in obvious disgust. "Let's go," he said, his voice contemptuous. He pulled her in front of him, pushed her forward. "Just keep walking until I tell you to stop."

She took a step out of her cell, and stumbled in the sudden brightness. His hard hand reached out to catch her, grabbing her arm in a tight grip. Then, as she steadied, the hand slipped from her arm and slapped her sharply across her buttocks. The guard laughed softly. "Watch where you're walking. We wouldn't want you to show up lame for the tribunal."

Juna's bare feet padded along the stone walk, forward, ever forward, with the guard close behind her. She felt the heat from his body, heard the clank of his swords against the metal belt he wore. She could smell his sharp male aroma, sweat and dirt and manliness, and she hated it. It was the odor that had seduced her, betrayed her, and brought her to this hideous captivity. She walked more quickly, to get away from him.

"Turn down here," he said, and she entered a dark, forbidding corridor. She hesitated, and again felt the hard hand on her arm. This time it lingered, only a moment, and she wrenched herself away from its strangely comforting grasp. "Vixen," he said with a chuckle.

She came to a door, heavy wood with wrought iron designs strengthening it. She stopped before the door, waiting for his order. He stood very close behind her. She felt his breath in her hair. "Don't be proud, Juna. Don't confuse bravery with pride. You failed in your solemn oath, and you need to be punished. But don't

make it harder on yourself with pride.” His voice, deep and clear, was soft in her ear. “Now open the door, and face the tribunal.”

With an icy hand she turned the big iron lever, and the door swung open. She stood motionless, unable to step in. Her guard shoved her hard through the door, so she stumbled into the room. Her hands flew out for balance, dropping her shawl to the ground. When she regained her footing, furious and shaking, she stood clad only in her tight shift.

She stopped herself from turning to glare at the treacherous guard, whose gentle voice had calmed her instants before he pushed her. Couldn't he have let her walk into the room, to face her accusers with the shreds of her dignity, and her shawl around her? But she held herself still. Greater forces were upon her.

The room was beautifully appointed, large enough for the judges' table, several chairs, and some ornamental vases. Wall hangings in rich red and gold cloth warmed the room, as did a crackling fire in the hearth at the far end. The chairs were covered in creamy damask, and the stones on the floor were polished a gleaming earthen red.

Arrayed before her, at a sumptuous table covered in gold cloth, were five judges. The chief judge, with his high red hat, sat in the center. His white mustache drooped over once-full lips, his eyes narrowed and watered, but he seemed alert to Juna's terrified presence.

Next to the chief judge, on his right, was a young, handsome version of the same, his deep blue hat accenting his cornflower eyes. A smile played on his

lips, but it was not kindly.

To his right, to Juna's surprise, was a woman. Women, under current law, could not be judges. But this was not an ordinary woman, but a beautiful, otherworldly woman with a sculpted face. She was dressed all in white, modestly gowned, like the keeper of Bridget's flame. Juna's heart sank. She would be judged by one of her own.

Seated to the other side of the chief was a slim man with a thick, grey mane of hair, with a quill and ink, and a large parchment before him. A law-keeper, she knew. And next to him, another woman, gowned in deep rose. Her blonde hair was swept back from her aristocratic brow, and she would have been pretty but her little eyes gave her a piggish look. She looked familiar, though Juna's brain couldn't unscramble the image enough to place her.

They did not invite Juna to sit. Behind her, at the door, the guard also stood.

Juna pulled herself to her full height. She was tall for a woman, and stately. Her hair, freed from the shawl, cascaded in a red river past her shoulders. Her dark brown eyes glittered. She faced her judges. She would be brave.

"Juna," the head judge said. His voice was raspy. "You know why you stand accused. Answer."

"I failed to keep my virginity as a keeper of the flame," she said, looking at him in the face.

"Do you regret your transgression?"

"No."

The other judges' collective intake of breath sounded like the hiss of steam escaping a pressure cauldron.

“Read us the law,” the chief said dryly. Any earlier kindness had disappeared from his voice in the face of Juna’s proud intransigence.

The law-keeper unrolled his parchment. “The keepers of the flame shall remain virgins for the term of their devotion. Ten years, they shall learn. Ten they shall keep. Ten they shall teach. Then, they may marry.”

“And the penalty for failure?” the younger judge asked, his smile curling falsely. He was stunningly handsome, Juna thought, if you could disregard the cruelty in his look. He trailed his eyes along Juna’s body, resting on her breasts, until she felt her nipples harden under his gaze.

“The penalty? We have choices, depending on the transgressor’s humble repentance. There is, of course, death. But there is also entry into service and freedom if she gives satisfaction in service, if her repentance is deemed complete.”

“Juna, your life is at stake. Do you repent?”

Juna swallowed hard. “No, my judge, I do not repent. I served long and well, and kept myself pure, for twenty-five years. I was nine when the keepers came to me. I prayed for hours, days, before I knew I could be a keeper too. I learned, and I kept, and I taught.

“When Bres came to me, he came in the form of a stallion. He galloped to the temple, and stood waiting for me. When I first saw him, my heart took flight. My limbs turned to powdered gold, light, airy and free. I knew, I knew immediately, that he had come for me. I had no choice, no desire to choose.

“That night, at the temple, I waited. I wore my white

gown, as the judge here does, but beneath my gown, I brought only myself. All day I prepared for this moment. I sang a joyous song. I had purified my body, anointed it with oils, combed the hair above my mound until it glistened gold. I had rubbed my nipples with rose powder, and scented myself with lavender.”

As she spoke, Juna could feel her body warm with the memory. She smiled, remembering the wonderful sensations of preparation. For the first time in the three days since she had been brought to the fortress, she wasn’t cold.

“I was a virgin. I had never been touched by a man, and yet I knew this was right. My center was liquid, waiting for him.

“I heard the hooves of the stallion, caught sight of his golden mane as he clattered into the courtyard. I ran out to him, and wrapped my arms around his long neck. He was warm, and smelled of sweat, and grass, and freedom. I inhaled the wonderful aroma, and I was flying through the fields on the wind. My hair was streaming behind me. And then...” Juna paused.

She brought her eyes back to the present. Her listeners were spellbound, lips moistened, eyes glazed. “Continue,” said the chief judge harshly.

“Then, he was a man. He wore a rough kilt, and carried a sword on each hip, and daggers, and a small knife tucked into his woolen boot. He wore no shirt, and his chest was forested with thick hair. He pulled me to him, and kissed me. My first kiss.

“I poured myself into his lips. They tasted of raspberries; his tongue was like spring water. I stroked his chest, ran my fingers through the dense covering of

tangled hair.

“His hands tore my gown off. I stood before him, naked and glowing. I was afraid, I was amazed. In the shadows of the courtyard, there under the full moon, he took my body in his hands. He touched every part of me, sparing nothing. He laid me on the stones, and opened me. I longed to close my legs to his eyes, his hands, but he forbade it. At the same time, I longed to open fully to him, to inhale him, overwhelm him. And then, he lifted his kilt.

“His manhood was everything I had imagined; large, long, hard as the stones I lay on. He lifted my legs and spread me wide. Then, using his fingers, he opened my lower lips, and plunged his fingers in. When he took them out, they were wet. He ran that wetness over my nipples, and I laughed into the sky as I felt the liquid of my own desire.

“Without more, he pulled my thighs wider, and with one painful thrust, broke through my maidenhood, tearing at the fabric of my body, and plundering my waiting flesh without relent. He repeated his thrusts, searing me, filling me, and I cried out. ‘It begins this way for every woman,’ he said, ‘because it ends this way for every man.’”

Juna felt the trickle of moisture run down her leg as her body remembered the arrival of Bres. She ran her hand over her thigh. “He drove and drove, and soon the pain had lessened, and the burning turned to heat. When he thrust, I parried. He shouted, finally, and I felt as though he would break through me. And then, he rested on top of me.

“When he had his breath again, he pulled out. He

stood, still dressed and armed, and pulled me to my feet. Blood ran down my leg, and he wiped it with his kilt. 'This is my bounty,' he said.

"I was hot with my first arousal, but I didn't know how to proceed. He did. 'Take me to your pallet,' he said, "and bring me wine." I bent to retrieve my gown, but he stayed my hand. Nude, I walked before him, taking him to my little room. As I walked, I felt his eyes on me, but he did not touch me. I fetched the wine, and two goblets. He filled them both, and we drank.

"Now, Juna, let me enjoy you again,' he said. This time, he took wine and poured it between my legs. It stung a little, then its warmth began to tingle. He stroked me long, touching my intimate body knowingly, as I began to dance with delight under his hand. Then he took my nipple into his mouth, and after the initial sensation wore off, he bit softly, then harder, sending waves of intensity into my core.

"He lowered his mouth to my mound, and touching the sensitive button with his tongue, his lips, his teeth, he drove me into a frenzy he would not release. His fingers entered me, and I writhed around them. Again he retreated, and returned to my other nipple.

"When I felt I could no longer stand it, he rose. 'Get on your hands and knees,' he commanded. I obeyed. Kneeling behind me, he entered me once more. This time the pain was slight, the pleasure great. His hands came around the front of me, one hand on the pleasure center, the other grasping my breast. As he thrust, he pressed into my body from either side.

"I cried out, tried to escape the mounting pressure of pleasure, and he pressed harder. He pinched my nipple,

and countered each movement of mine with a harder one of his. Finally, I could bear it no longer. My bottom rose, my legs clenched around his thighs, and I arched into his body as the trembling, throbbing release rushed through me.

“I thought he would stop then, but he didn’t. He continued, hard and firm, though I begged him to cease, to let me breathe. And then it started again, this time from within, until I could not control the bucking, arching power of my own pleasure.

“He responded in kind, and slammed into me, until his own release came. Finally, finally, we rested.”

Juna stopped, breathless and stunned. What on earth had made her tell this tribunal the intimate details of her first night of love? How had she been stripped of that memory by that sharing, allowing her enemies to enjoy her most powerful, personal moment? Tears came into her eyes, but not so that she couldn’t see the obvious arousal on the faces of her judges.

No one spoke. The chief judge took a ragged breath. “Juna, you claim you were visited by Bres. How do you know it was he?”

“I know. I know he was Bridget’s husband, I have lived her life, tended her fire for twenty-five years. I know.”

“Are you with child?” the law-keeper asked.

She shook her head. “I wasn’t blessed.”

“Liar!” The woman in the rose-colored gown’s voice rent the air. “If it had been Bres, you would be pregnant. You lie, either way.” The blond woman’s face was suffused with the same color as her dress, her small eyes burning with hate.

It came to Juna in a flash. The woman was Maia, mother of Callet, the girl Juna could not teach. Callet was mulish, uncooperative and jealous of the other girls, and Juna had finally dismissed her from training as a flame-keeper. It was Callet who had seen her with Bres, the last night that he had come to her.

Bres had come to her every night for a week, his lovemaking tender and pure. She had known he wouldn't stay, this was not a permanent liaison, but she was prepared to be satisfied with his love, where and how he gave it. After all, he was not of this time, and could not be bound by earthly needs.

On the last night, their love had been particularly tender. He had kissed Juna, held her close. A shadow had flitted across the flames. Juna turned, but it had vanished. In its place, there was a card, a picture of a man, arms raised in victory. At his feet were the swords of his adversaries, five men kneeling behind their weapons.

She had picked up the card and studied it. It meant nothing to her, she did not understand the cards, but looking at it made her sick in her stomach. She tossed it in the fire, and watched it burn.

When she turned to Bres, he was gone. She could hear, in the distance, the pounding of hooves. Next to her was a bouquet of flowers, and she heard his voice in her ear. "I will return for you. Be strong, be brave, submit, and wait."

"She isn't with child," said the flame-tender softly, interrupting her memory. "I know this by looking at her. But she has dishonored her sacred trust, whether she was, as she claims, visited by a spirit, or by an

ordinary man. Either she is true to her vow, or she dies.” Her beautiful face looked so sad, as if the sentence were out of her hands.

The men nodded. Coming from such a beautiful, devout woman, the sentence seemed reasonable. And Juna showed no remorse.

“But in olden times, when Bridget lived, she, as well as her peers, mated freely,” Juna said. “A union between a man and a woman was a joyful event. Why not now?”

“This is now, in today’s era, and not the ancient times,” the flame-keeper answered. “If you disagree with the law, you are by that very act unworthy of your post.”

“By today’s laws, you should not even be speaking!” Juna snapped back.

“Quiet, whore!” said the chief. “I have heard enough from you. You hold your life lightly. I would not do so. Let her live,” he said, to the others on the tribunal. “Let her live to rue her belligerence, her arrogance, her immorality. I sentence you,” he said to Juna, and paused. He whispered to the law-keeper, who shook his head.

“I sentence you to service for the remaining time of your vow, five years. And your service will be first, for your initiation, to Maia.” He looked at the woman in the rose dress, whose piggish eyes looked at him with delight. “When you have given Maia satisfaction, you will be released to the commanding officer of the guards. Guard!” he said to the man who had brought her in. “Are you prepared to take charge of Juna, have her serve you and your officers for the time left of her

sentence?”

The guard nodded. “Judge, as the Commander of the guards, I undertake full responsibility for this woman, as soon as she gives satisfactory service to Maia. Though I fear I may be long in waiting for the day I take her, given her pride and lack of humility. Maia may find her initiation training arduous. If so, I will offer to take her early.”

“No,” said Maia, sweeping back her blonde hair, “I think I will find a way to break this pride. And I will enjoy every moment of it. Juna!” she said, turning to her new slave. Juna shivered. Once again, she was cold. “Remove that ugly shift.”

Juna stood still. She had to obey, to strip in front of everyone, at Maia’s command.

The young, handsome judge licked his full lips, and smiled at Juna. “You couldn’t wait five more years to spread your legs, you trollop!” He laughed. “Well, your impatience is well coupled with your arrogance, isn’t it? You could have served me,” he said, “if you had been a bit more humble. I could certainly have harnessed the fire from that heated little furnace between your thighs.”

Maia preened at the young judge. “I am vindicated, I told you I would be!” she said. “I am victorious. Seamus, she is mine, not yours.”

“I will certainly enjoy her initiation, even if I cannot script it,” the young judge drawled. Turning back to Juna he added, “Maia, I think, will be a far harsher taskmistress.”

“You will see how much more inventive I can be!” Maia smirked to him. “Now, Juna! Strip!” she added

harshly.

The meaning of Bres' warning came clear. Juna closed her eyes, reached for her hem, and pulled her shift over her head.

TWO

The walk back to her cell was long. She was handcuffed now, bare, with her hands behind her, and the guard clearly felt no need to watch her, as he let her walk behind him. She followed, eyes cast to the ground, unable to think, care, or even suffer. Her shift had been left in the tribunal room, unneeded now that her sentence had been pronounced and she had entered service. A slave was dressed by her mistress, as and when she saw fit. Maia did not see fit to dress Juna at all.

“You will stay here until I get you,” the guard said, opening the cell door for her. “When I come for you, it will be to take you to the punishment room for your initiation. And Juna,” he said, his hand on her shoulder as he guided her into the cell, “think on your pride. There are times when you cannot argue, times when you cannot win. If you can accept your punishment humbly, you will be mine sooner than later. You will suffer less, I assure you, as my slave, than as Maia’s.”

“Take these handcuffs off,” Juna said. “I can’t go anywhere, so why do we need these?”

“Maia has ordered you naked and cuffed until she

chooses otherwise. Please, Juna, stop arguing.”

“Why are you being kind? Why were you kind before, then pushed me into the tribunal room?” Juna demanded.

The guard shook his head. “You have a lot to learn, Juna. You have been given vision to see and feel Bres, when others can only see a man, but you are blind to all but your own mind. Look, look into yourself, and look around you. I will be back for you. Be ready.”

Juna watched the door close. She sank to the dirt floor, cold and miserable. The cuffs were uncomfortable, and her inability to use her hands to wipe her tears, to hold herself close, to defend herself, made her helplessness intolerable. She would scream, she would curse, she would howl invective at those who brought her down, before she would submit to this outrage.

Juna sobbed, alone and cold, until she fell asleep. When the guard returned for her, it was night. “Get up, Juna, it’s time,” he said. She looked up at him, her hair tangled, her face dirty from crying and lying on the ground, her body sore from being handcuffed. He reached down and pulled her up by an arm.

“You look properly chastened,” he said. “Maybe you can get through this.”

“I’m not chastened!” Juna answered. “I’m right, they’re wrong. Maia is getting revenge because I rejected her spoiled daughter. Callet could never keep Bridget’s flame!”

“No. But you didn’t keep your vow; you let yourself be betrayed. Now you must go through the fire, to be tested. Don’t argue. Submit and be made stronger.”

“Bridget was a Celtic priestess,” Juna said. “Only when the vile Romans came was she converted. They were the ones who tarnished her history, made her chattel. She was a proud woman, in her own right. She mated, not just with Bres, but with whomever she chose.

“Her keepers of the flame were joyful, lusty creatures. Only the Romans made them virgins. I am a Celt. You are a Celt. I will not be subverted!”

“Juna, for the last time, submit. There are times when you can’t win. Only your submission will save you.” The guard stroked her cheek. “I am trying to save you.”

And then Juna saw it. The guard slowly took on the shape of a golden horse, with a flowing red mane, his eyes wild. And then he was the guard again. He put his hands on her shoulders, kneaded the soreness there, his callused, warm palms gently taking the pain away.

His hands lowered to her breasts. He rubbed them, warmed them, teased her nipples erect. She felt his warmth, his hard fingers, sending tiny, almost imperceptible hope into her body. She could smell the grass, the fields, the open sunny sky, for a moment, before the reality of the cell closed around her.

She pulled away. He would only betray her, as he had earlier. “No, Juna, don’t pull away. You are helpless, and I can do with you what I will. Trust me instead.”

To prove his point, his hands dropped to her mound, in front, and her buttocks behind, and he pushed his hands between her thighs until they met at her sex. Fingers from both front and back plunged into her slit,

then out. And again, until in spite of the ice in her heart, her labia were hot and wet. She could not stop him, direct him, or in any way control what he chose to do. He pulled his hands away. “Yield when you can’t fight. You will fight better that way.”

He moved to the door of the cell. His many weapons clanged around him. Again he stopped. “Juna, you must yield. I will not help you learn this lesson, but when you have learned it, you will be mine forever.”

He put her in front of him, as he had done the first time he had led her out, and pressed her lightly forward. When she was a few steps ahead of him, he ran his fingers lightly across her curving cheeks.

THREE

Juna heard the sounds before she reached the door. There was music, the sounds of goblets clinking against each other, laughter. She stood before the closed door. “Maia ordered you brought as I found you. She did not ask that you be cleaned, oiled, or decorated for your initiation. She is a cruel woman, Maia.”

“Thank you for such encouragement,” Juna said to the guard, her voice cold. “Your words give so much confidence; they make me feel so ready for my punishment.”

The guard smiled at her. “You are incorrigible. Your spirit is compelling, but you will pay for your arrogance. Get through it, Juna. When you are brought to serve me and my officers your service will be unrelenting, but I promise you beautiful clothing, oils, scents and powders. But for now, I am only an eager audience to your trials. Get through it.”

He opened the door to a large room full of people. The air was thick with smoke from burning candles, the aromas of sweat, wine, and scents. There were tables of food, vessels of wine and mead, chairs, lounges, and a platform stage at one end of the room. It was a shocking

scene of depredation and debauchery. Juna recoiled at the sight of so many people engaged in drinking, singing, and fondling the naked slaves that mingled with the crowd.

Three men, finely dressed, held large goblets of wine in one hand, while swinging crops against the writhing bottom of a naked woman. She was held down on a table by other slaves. The male slaves were in loincloths, with oiled chests and heavy gold collars with chains that attached to their ankles, hobbling them while leaving their hands free to serve. Their loincloths did little to disguise the pleasure they took in their service.

A well-oiled male slave was bent over behind a woman set up as his table. She was on her knees, her face on the ground, and rump up high, and she was naked but for the manacles that bound each of her hands to an ankle. Her knees were spread. His penis, erect and throbbing, rubbed between the slave-woman's buttocks, but did not enter her. Behind him, a woman in a gown of sparkling silver laughed as she wielded a matching silver dildo in the male's bottom. He was not manacled or bound, and he moaned as he grasped the breasts of the woman beneath him, and thrust between her cheeks as the dildo thrust into him.

In a far corner, Juna was amazed to see a well-dressed woman lift her voluminous skirts over her head, and several finely arrayed men crawl beneath them. The woman then dropped her skirts over them, and reached for a goblet of wine. Other women in finery cheered her on as she drank her cup down, and handed her another. A third stood waiting, cup in hand, as the woman began

to wriggle with what was going on under her dress.

Juna looked away, disgusted. Ten days ago, she had been a virgin. Now she was faced with such degradation as she had never imagined. And she was naked, cuffed, and about to become the object of these horrifying displays.

The guard bent to Juna's ear. "Maia is at the farthest end of the room. See her?" His breath in her ear made her shiver, and her nipples became erect.

Juna was tall, and could see across the room easily. She looked, and nodded. Maia stood as far from the door as possible, a wine goblet in her hand, her fair cheeks flushed. Her blonde hair was coiffed with jewels, her gown a glorious blue with silver stars. She was talking with Seamus, the young male judge. Her body moved coquettishly against the cruel-looking man with the blue hat who had lasciviously suggested that Juna be his slave. He in turn touched Maia's breasts, his fingers trailing over her nipples with a look of haughty amusement, while his eyes strayed around the room.

His eyes met Juna's and he smiled his rapacious smile. He said something to Maia, who glared at him. In response, he dropped his hand and pinched Maia's bottom. She jumped, and he laughed out loud, his eyes still on Juna. Maia's withering look at the judge spoke volumes of fury, and bode ill for Juna's treatment at her hands.

Maia raised her hand, and signaled to the guard to send Juna to her. Her lip curled as she watched her victim approach. At the same time, the young judge climbed to a platform. He banged a large gong and the room fell silent.

“Ladies, Gentlemen, silence please. For tonight’s entertainment I am delighted to announce that Maia has acquired the rights to punish a rebellious, lustful flame keeper, and bring her to humble repentance. If you will look to the door, the Commander of the guards has brought Juna, former virgin keeper of Bridget’s flame,” he laughed, with heavy emphasis on the word “former,” and the crowd laughed with him, “to be initiated by her mistress.”

“And anyone else who wants to help,” he added as all eyes turned to Juna.

“Come here,” Maia said imperiously. “What are you waiting for?” she demanded. “Are you timid, now, you who were so bold?” She turned to Seamus at his platform, but his eyes were on Juna.

Juna tried to make her way across the room to her mistress, but was hindered by hands, male and female, free and slave, who reached out to stroke her, pinch her, and one bold man even inserting his hand between her buttocks. Her hands cuffed behind her, Juna could not fend these offenses off, but kicked at her tormentors with her bare feet to push them away. This only heightened their desire to taunt her, though, and further delayed her progress.

“I see you have learned nothing so far,” said the young judge, from his platform. “We will have a long way to go with your initiation.” The crowd applauded.

Juna finally reached Maia. It was almost like reaching a safe haven, she thought, as she moved into the protected circle of her mistress. Here, at least, only Maia could command her. “Finally,” Maia said. “You must enjoy the attention, gathering it any way you can.”

Juna did not answer. She made sure she stood at her full height, taller than Maia, and looked down at her. She would stay in control; keep her dignity at all costs. “Arrogant bitch,” Maia said, and smiled. “Let’s see how arrogant you are in about an hour.” She reached directly for Juna’s nipples, gave them a hard tweak. Juna flinched but did not speak. “You like that, I see,” Maia said, and did it again.

Juna kicked her. Maia staggered back then regained her footing. Juna waited for the retaliation, but none was immediately forthcoming. Maia just stood there, looking her over with her small eyes. Then, without warning, she dashed the wine in her cup in Juna’s face. “Seamus,” she said to the young judge, “I think we’re ready to start.”

She turned to Juna, speaking in a loud voice for the crowd to hear. “Kneel before me, and kiss my feet. From this moment, you will obey my every command until I am satisfied. Then, I will turn you over to the Commander of the guards, for the remainder of your service. I assure you that your service under him will be preferable to serving me. I am known for my imagination! Now kneel!”

Juna knew she would die before she knelt to this horrible woman. Juna had been right in dismissing Callet, and right, within the bounds of history, to give herself to Bres. She would not submit. But she forced herself not to answer, working hard against her nature. The wine dripped into her eyes, down around her neck and shoulders, but she stared directly at Maia and stood tall.

“Kneel! Kneel!” The crowd took up the chant. She

felt herself shaking, felt sick in her stomach. She wanted to fight them, let them beat her to the ground. Then rough hands were on her arms, forcing her down. The Commander of the guards was pushing her to the ground.

“No!” said Maia. He let her go. “She must do it on her own. Clearly, she needs to be further instructed. Seamus!” she called. The judge nodded. “Bring her to the platform,” she told the guard. He took her by the arm.

“Come on,” he said. She glared at him. “Go!” He pulled her roughly along. “Juna, please,” he muttered. “You have to do this!”

She stumbled up the stairs to the platform where Seamus awaited her. Seamus nodded to the guard, handing him a small cup. The guard held it to Juna’s lips and nodded. She looked up at him, her eyes pleading. “Drink,” he said. Juna sighed, and drank.

“Now, Juna. Why don’t you tell the assembly what you told the tribunal? All about Bres, and how he touched you, licked you, entered you...” Seamus taunted.

Juna felt herself flush. She would not speak. The strong strange drink coursed through her body, and the room began to recede.

“Tongue tied?” Seamus said. He grazed his fingers lightly over her breasts. Her nipples, still stinging from Maia’s pinches, thrust forward. He smiled, and caressed her belly, so gently, and then her thighs. He insinuated his finger onto her clit, touching lightly, tickling and teasing, and his other hand softly traced the division of her nether cheeks.

“Enough!” said Maia. “Begin the initiation!”

Seamus chuckled. “We were just getting started, my dear,” he said. He pressed Juna against him, and she could feel him hard under his pants. “Closer, Juna, show me what you gave Bres!” She arched away from him. “Unwilling, still?” Seamus slapped her bottom. “Maia, you are right, she must be taught respect!

“Slaves! I need two slaves!” he called. Two strong young men hopped up on the platform. “Bend her over this,” Seamus said, indicating a small padded table. The slaves grabbed Juna and pulled her over the table. Her hands were still cuffed behind her. They spread her legs, so her buttocks and labia were open and facing the crowd. Each slave took one leg to hold, fondling her thighs as they did so. The crowd cheered.

Seamus ran his hands over her exposed parts. “Nice,” he said. Juna willed herself not to squirm. The hands were close but the voice seemed so far, so far away.

“I want to see her face,” Maia said.

“Turn the table,” Seamus ordered, and the slaves rotated the table so that Maia, standing below the platform, could see Juna’s face, as she lay face down, her head hanging off the table. Juna felt dizzy and disoriented.

Juna’s field of vision was full of Maia’s face, and the forms of the crowd around the platform. She shut her eyes. She had never imagined such a scene could take place. And here she was; the main attraction in this hideous orgy. She felt present but distant.

Then, without warning, a stinging pain shattered across her buttocks. She cried out, her eyes flying open

in surprise, brought harshly back to reality. Maia's mocking smile greeted her.

Then another sting, as Seamus brought the crop down again. The third, lower, crossed her labia; she tried to close her legs. The slaves laughed as they held her open, fighting her strong muscles. Their fingers dug into her thighs, pulling her wide, as the crop came down again.

To her horror, Juna felt the tears run down her face. Maia laughed. "We're just getting started, you proud little slut," she said. "Anyone else want to take a swat at her?" The roar of the crowd told Juna that she was going to be whipped beyond consciousness. Then the roar seemed to fade.

To her surprise, Maia spoke again. "No, Seamus. You have had your turn. I choose you." Juna heard steps, and saw the woolen tops of a man's boots. Then she felt the crop again, but lightly, almost a caress. "One more," Maia said, and the again the crop came down, whistling through the air, but no blow came across her now raw skin. The fear and anticipation of the whip twisted in Juna, playing her like a marionette. "Juna," Maia said, "how many more would you like?"

Juna knew the answer. She swallowed hard. "As many as you would like to give me," she said quietly. She heard Seamus laugh.

"Maia, she's smarter than we thought. Let me test her resolve." Juna saw Seamus' feet go around, until she knew he stood behind her. Somewhere in the distance of her mind, she braced herself for more whipping.

Instead, she felt oil poured on her seared buttocks,

felt it being massaged into her pained skin. She smelled rose and lavender. The sensation traveled down her legs, warm and soothing. Hands, many, many hands, rubbed her, soothed her. Her pleasure point was teased, stroked, gently touched as warm, fragrant oil was poured all around her tender skin. Again, experienced fingers returned to her clit, knowing exactly how much, how firmly, how softly to entice. She felt herself arch and become aroused and cursed herself silently. This was worse than pain.

“Leave her!” Maia said, and she heard Seamus laugh.

“Jealous?” he asked. Several men laughed, and one took up the taunt. “Maia’s jealous of her slave!” he called out. “Get up on the table, Maia!” another said. “Let’s see you move like Juna!” From her limited vantage point, Juna could only see that Maia had turned away.

Then those hands left her, and she felt strangely abandoned. Only a pair on each side held her wide. There was total silence in the room. The air tingled with knowing anticipation, as the crowd could see what Juna couldn’t. She felt herself floating, the warmth of her thighs moving to her tunnel, moistening her. At the same time the fear and anticipation of the unknown next torture fought with the arousal that had been forced on her by the strange drink and the oiled touch.

That short-lived silence was replaced with the lightning sting of the crop, in a lash that was harder than any other had been and the worse for being unexpected. She bucked, crying out. The crowd roared.

Her legs were quickly pulled wider than she had ever

been opened, and her feminine slit was invaded by an ice-cold metal dildo, penetrating deep within her body. Her nether cheeks were opened, and another cold, oiled dildo caressed, then invaded her behind. She squirmed and writhed, trying to fight against the hands that held her, but they were strong and relentless.

The sounds from the room cheered the assault in rhythm. She felt a distant ache, as the pace of the plundering increased. But the pressure of the table, the insistent hands plunging the tools into her, and the shifting clouds in her mind changed that pain to crazed desire.

Suddenly, standing before her, like a vision of terror, were the legs and swords of the guard. She could see the knife, the two daggers, and the two long swords, and as he lifted his kilt, she saw the weapon she knew and feared and longed for most.

His cock was thick and red. Fiery red curls surrounded it, and his balls were large and potent. The head of his manhood was gleaming, as he allowed Juna to see and smell his arousal. She knew the aroma, the male and wild scent of this man.

He approached her, and she licked her lips. He teased her mouth with his cock, around and around, without entering. She licked out with her tongue, moistening his tip. He put his hand to her face.

The hands of her tormentors did not let up. The metal dildos jammed her, she could feel them crash against each other with only the thin membrane of her body to separate them. Other hands pinched and fondled her, pressing her, teasing her, as their frenzy increased.

She was streaming moisture below, the speed and force were mounting, but before her, the guard played with her open mouth. The world swam in her eyes. She feared she would faint. Her breath came shorter, and she started to buck with the lower thrusts.

Then the guard entered her mouth. With his hands on her head, he plunged deep, filling her remaining opening with his hard flesh.

The crowd cheered gleefully at her final penetration. "Juna! Juna!" they chanted. "Free her!" came a voice. Then another shouted, "Put Maia up there!" "Get them both going!" Juna could not see around the guard, but she had a glimpse of a silver and blue dress rush by, and heard the squeals of angry frustration from Maia as she tried unsuccessfully to escape the pressing crowd. Then the voices changed to breathing as they pleased themselves and each other while enjoying her torture.

Juna's breathing became labored as the thrusts increased, and with what remained of her intelligent mind she realized that she was about to climax before all these horrible people. Unable to stop herself she felt the throbbing begin, and as the guard thrust faster and harder, she rode out the orgasm while the crowd came right with her.

His movements became fierce, and he drove his cock into her throat, coming with full force in her mouth. She swallowed so she wouldn't choke, as he came again. Finally, with a last thrust, he rested. He pulled out, and held her head against him, stroking her hair softly, softly, gently.

As if from a dream, she felt the cuffs being removed. Then the dream ended as the blood flowed to her hands,

in agonizing pain. She felt her wrists being rubbed tenderly, and then she was lifted, and carried down off the platform. A glass of wine was held out to her, and she sipped gratefully from her trembling hand.

She looked around for Maia, and found her leaning back against the wall. Maia's face was red and blotched, her dress was torn down the middle, and stained with semen. Her breasts were exposed, and the rest of her had been clearly well used. Seamus was standing next to her, a smirk on his unkind face, casually fingering her breast. His pants were haphazardly closed, but he seemed not to care.

The guard lifted Juna, and placed her, staggering, on her feet before Maia. Maia pulled her dress shut around her, but could not meet Juna's eyes.

"Kneel," said the guard, and she looked up into his summer blue eyes. She saw a golden field in them. She knelt at Maia's feet. "Kiss her feet." She obeyed. "Stand up." She did, and as she rose, she felt herself strong and powerful. She looked at Maia.

"Command me, mistress," she said evenly.

Maia swallowed hard. "You are free to go with the Commander of the guard," Maia answered, in a choked voice.

"You demanded her punishment," said Seamus, laughingly. "You chose to accuse, and sit at the judge's table. You were, as you said, vindicated and victorious. Now you must comply with the letter of the decree. Say it," he ordered Maia uncharitably. Juna saw that he would clearly enjoy Maia's humiliation as much as he had enjoyed hers.

"I am well satisfied," Maia croaked.

Juna looked around. The crowd, free and slave, were either asleep or drinking quietly. Some were tangled, naked, with one another. There were pools of drink, semen stains, clothes all around.

“What happened?” Juna asked the Commander of the guard, as he led her away.

“You happened. You took them all with you. In your submission you proved yourself stronger than they were, stronger than Maia. She could not keep you when you showed you could withstand far more than she could imagine, and not fight demons. She was so much less than you, so far beneath you, that your submission terrified her.”

Juna shook her head. It was still cobwebbed, but her mind was working again. “Why did she let me go?”

“You overcame her with your humility, your dignity, your beauty. She wanted Seamus, but he couldn’t keep his eyes, or his hands, off of you. Maybe he was doing it just to taunt Maia, but she was crushed. She knew that she could only master you with the crowd here, and if you were given to her, she, alone, could never best you. If she kept you, she would remain in fear of you. She had to free you while she still had the power. And now, you are mine.”

He picked up a cast aside shawl, wrapped it around her and guided her out of the room. “Are you cold?” he asked. She nodded her head. “Hungry?”

“Yes.”

He led her into a small room where a fire blazed, and a table held fruit, bread and wine. He poured wine for her, still holding her. She drank, then he handed her a piece of bread. She ate it quickly. Then another, and the

fruit, and more wine. She realized that she had not eaten in two days, and except for the strange drink he had given her, she had not had anything to drink either.

Gratefully she partook of it all, still wrapped only in the shawl. Then, when she had eaten and drank, he led her to a cushion before the fire. He stroked her legs, and ran his fingers between them. She winced.

“Do you hurt?” She nodded, looking away as the memory of the humiliation she had suffered overcame her. “Put it behind you,” he said. And he stroked her face. Then, pulling her close, he touched her intimately.

Juna pulled away. She did not want to be touched again. But he pulled her back. He stroked her gently, but insistently. She remembered; she was his slave now. He would be kind, but she still belonged to him. She did not resist.

“Good, Juna. You understand now.” He pulled a velvet rope, and a servant came in. “Bring water for a bath.” In minutes, a large tub was brought in, followed by ewers of warm and fragrant water. The guard motioned Juna into the tub, and poured the water over her. She felt the pleasure of the water, breathed the scent of the flowers, as he poured another pitcher over her hair.

When she was warm and clean, he helped her stand, and wrapped her with a large, soft cloth. He dried her skin and her hair, then took a bottle of scented oil to rub her with.

The scent made her recoil, as it brought forth the scent of the oil that had been poured on her in the punishment room. “It’s the same oil,” he said. It will remind you of both pleasure and of submission.”

And he touched her more boldly, playing with her pleasure button, entering her slit, moving his hands where he pleased. She tried to suffer his touch in passive silence, but her body wouldn't let her.

She grew moist as he entered her with his fingers, and he rubbed the moisture on her thigh. "Touch me too," he said. She stroked his gold-covered muscles with long, loving caresses. She felt the rippling beneath his skin as he moved his own hands across her body. She pressed her face against his furred chest, inhaling him deeply, and allowing the fullness of the feeling of safety, security, to enter her heart.

Her hands traveled lower, and she felt his erection under the rough kilt. She lifted the kilt, and ran a finger along the vein on the back of his cock. Her fingers traveled around the head, making it swell. The Commander of the guards shuddered lightly, as Juna took command of his pleasure. Juna felt for the first time the power of arousing, and with that power to please came the desire to please, and Juna gave herself over to that desire.

He stood, and removed his armaments. The five sharp weapons clattered to the ground. "I don't need these now," he said. He took off his kilt, and his woolen boots, and stood before her in his nakedness. She cupped his heavy balls in her hand, then took one to her lips. She kissed it, then ran the tip of her tongue around it, and when she heard his breath quicken, she took the orb into her mouth. She sucked gently, and felt his hands tighten on her shoulders. She released that ball, and gave equal attention to the other.

He pushed her away gently, and smiled down at her.

“You’ll drive me to the brink too fast,” he laughed, “and what will be left for you?” His sparkling blue eyes danced with pleasure and desire. Then he knelt in front of her on the cushions and kissed her breasts. She felt the shock of desire permeate her again. And again, she smelled the sweet scent of submission as he rubbed more oil into her with his hand as he suckled and nipped at her nipples.

When he lowered his lips to her mound, she opened for him without reserve, bringing her own hands to his head to guide him. But he needed no guidance as he explored her with his tongue, his lips, his fingers, all at once. She moved with anticipation, spreading wider and pulling him into her as she felt her need come to a crest.

He pulled back, and kneeled between her legs. She was writhing on the brink, and he delayed no longer. Lifting her feet to his shoulders, he opened her labia and with a single, hard thrust delved deep into her core, deeper than anyone or anything had ever gone.

She felt his cock hit the end of her vagina, way up and deep in her center, and she bucked with the impact. He pulled back slightly, and again drove in, holding her bottom cheeks with his hands. She reached for him, and pulled him into her, and they thrust and responded in unison.

As she approached her climax he put his finger over her pleasure spot, pressing hard into it. With the thrusting below it and the pressure above, Juna lost all sense of time, place, past and future. The world swirled around her, and deep inside her entire body tensed, coiled, and shattered with a sparkling crash of throbbing stars.

Laughter welled up in her, and tears streamed down Juna's face as she laughed, cried, and came at once. He thrust twice more, then reared back and drove a final time into her, with a shout of triumphant release that echoed through the halls of the fortress.

He carefully took Juna's feet from his shoulders, and lay on top of her, between her legs, and she felt his weight on her. She closed her eyes kissed his shoulder, then his jaw where it rested near her face.

Their arms wrapped around each other.

"Do you have a name?" she asked the guard.

"I do. But you can call me Commander."

The Commander took Juna in his arms. "You will be my slave for five years. Tomorrow you will begin your service. But tonight, you will spend it with me as my wife." And the Commander kissed Juna's lips.

"And Juna, I will be your slave too. As your Commander, as your lover, as your husband and as your slave." Their lips met, their eyes locked.

Outside the breeze began to blow, sweet warm wind from the south, carrying with it the scents of flowers, hay, milk and honey. The stars glimmered faintly, and in the east, at the very limits of the horizon, the sun extended its first tentative tendrils into the sky. Around her, the walls melted away, and Juna felt the stirrings of hope and life within her.

The Commander of the Guard arose. He stretched his thickly muscled arms, arched his muscular neck into the breeze, and before Juna's eyes he slowly turned into the golden horse with the red mane she had seen earlier. He pawed the ground powerfully, and a cloud of gold dust kicked up around him. Then he reared up on his

back legs, kicking his front legs out and bellowing his cry of love and war.

The smell of freedom surrounded her. She mounted the horse, her red hair trailing behind her, and together they galloped into the starlit dawn.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ms. Conejo has been a coach's wife for 15 seasons of youth sports, is an active member of her local bar association, and an upstanding member of her community.

Cloaked in this veneer of respectability, she has writes erotica for the soccer mom, the professional woman, and all of us out there who really know what these guys are thinking.

Other books by Ms. Conejo available at eXtasy Books:

Coaches' Wives
Golden Briefs

Coming soon:

A Sword in the Sky - Tarot: Knight of Swords