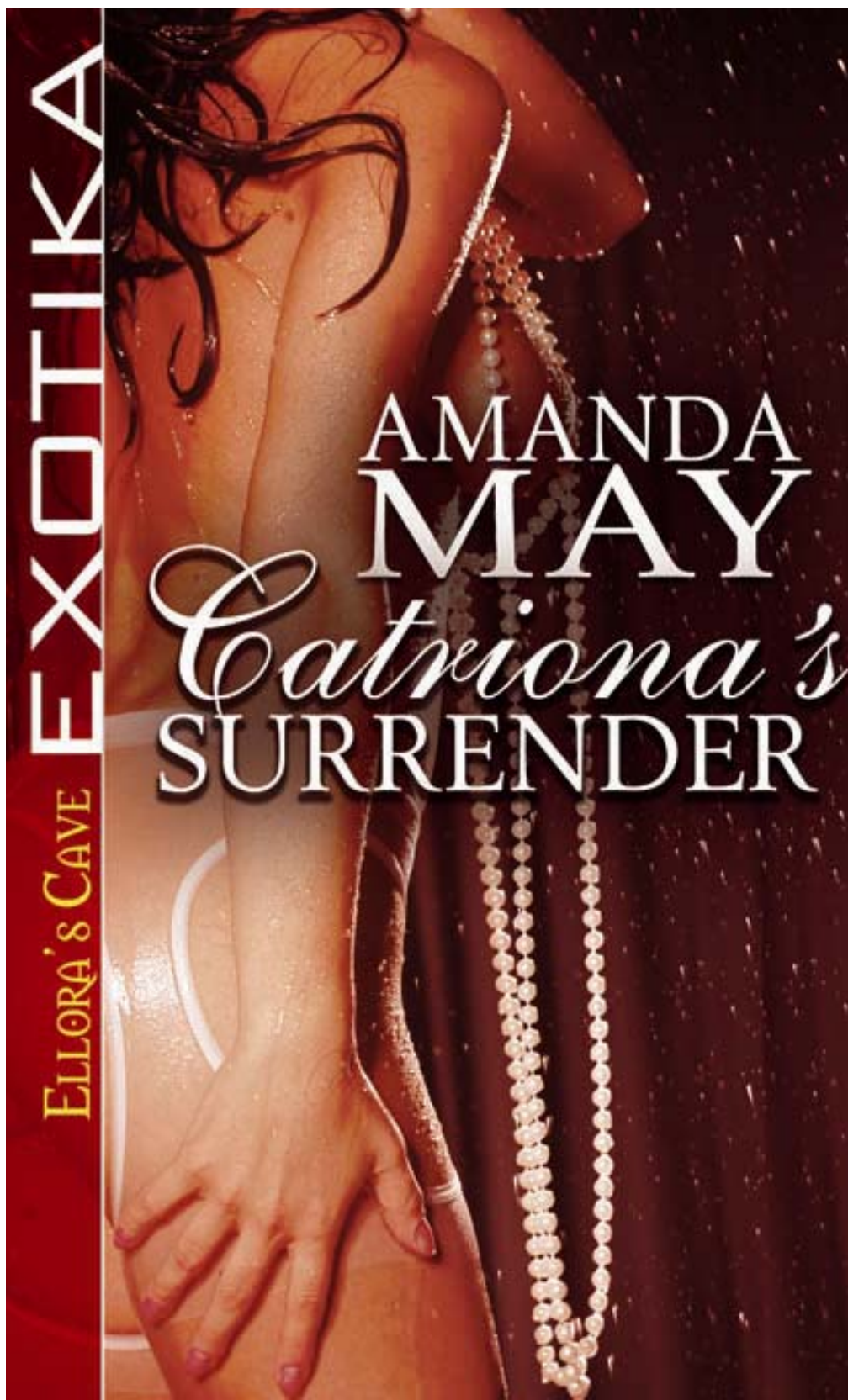


EXOTIKA

ELLORA'S CAVE

AMANDA  
MAY  
*Catriona's*  
SURRENDER



An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Catriona's Surrender

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# *CATRIONA'S SURRENDER*

Amanda May

## **Chapter One**

Catriona knew she was not the most pious of Isolyte's instruments. She was more like a tender new plant, pale and apt to be crushed underfoot by her lovers. It took coaxing for her to flower. Only careful touching—though it need not always be gentle—made her petals unfurl. Some did it well. Others did not. Yet, as a devout priestess of Isolyte, Catriona was tasked to surrender herself to all without question or protest.

No, she was not the most pious of instruments.

She curled her hands around the balustrade and looked down over the arriving guests, her thoughts catching on that first time she'd shed her blood in ritual ceremony. Her memories so often wandered there, every time she saw the man who'd deflowered her, and that was nearly every day.

Stephen stood by the opal-encrusted entryway to the room of the moon and stars. He wore a black doublet, which matched his hair, and a dark blue sash, which matched his eyes. Stephen was but five years her senior, but had a wealth of experience she had not. Back then, that was.

He was the one who'd taught her to love the touch of rope against her skin. He was the one who'd taught her to take pleasure from pain.

Catriona was nineteen years old when she lost her maidenhood, a year older than most Priestesses of Isolyte, although she'd been no stranger to the secrets of physical love. Her academic training had begun at the age of seventeen, the year her foster parents had suffered one too many winters filled with moldy potatoes and boiled river water and could not afford to keep all their hungry mouths for another season.

She could still remember how cold it had been that day, how the wind had ripped back her threadbare hood as she'd knelt before the Head Matron of Isolyte in the House

of Midnight. She'd been so scrawny, her red hair cropped unfavorably close to her head and her flesh paler than marble.

The Midnight Temple had almost not wanted her. She'd been old, much older than they normally dedicated priests and priestesses into the service of Isolyte. She had curled her hands into fists and bowed her head, praying, praying to her Mandan gods that she would be found unsuited. If they accepted her, she'd planned to run as far as she could.

Who was this Isolyte that She required Catriona's body, her obedience, her submission? Catriona hadn't been born in the Great Isles under this Goddess' strange laws. She had been born in the south, in an entirely different country.

The Head Matron had laid a wrinkled hand on her head. It had felt warm and oddly comforting. "Come into the light of Isolyte, my child. Give your body to Her service in sacrifice," she had intoned. Bitter tears had run down Catriona's cheeks when she raised Catriona's head and the Head Matron had wiped them away.

Catriona had stayed long enough to be bathed, fed and clothed, though it made her feel guilty. She could've walked right out the front door back then, but she'd been too meek for that. Instead, in the dead of that first night, she'd opened a window and been halfway out when Stephen had put a hand on her shoulder. "It is not so bad as all that, girl," he'd said. "If you leave you'll be whoring on the street within a fortnight. Here your work is sacred. Here your body is a holy instrument."

He'd been right. She was no highborn young lady. She had no way to make her way in life other than on her back. Catriona had stayed. She had learned to love the Goddess Isolyte, though she'd never quite felt the devout submission in her heart that the other priests and priestesses seemed to feel. Her Mandan blood prevented this, perhaps. Perhaps it was the fact that here in the Great Isles the sexual act was something ennobling and uplifting, especially when done in the temples. In the place of Catriona's birth, it was a thing done behind closed doors, quickly, and only for getting a child on a woman. To take pleasure from sex was to sin, especially for women.

Catriona took pleasure.

In this, she did nothing wrong in the eyes of those here in the Great Isles. It was encouraged that the priests and priestesses should lose themselves to the act. Catriona almost always did...especially if she felt the kiss of a rope against her skin, *especially* if she was bound for the enjoyment of the one who wanted her.

In Mandan she would be considered the worst of sinners, evil and wanton. Mandan law would put her to death for what she did in the Great Isles out of religious commitment.

The guests, the clients of the Temple of Midnight, had begun arriving an hour ago. Every year for the Festival of Isolyte, the temples held soirées in celebration, and to ensure their patrons' continued worship of the Goddess. The air smelled of expensive spices—cloves and nutmeg and saffron. The entryway to the House of Midnight was bedecked in the richest of silks and brocades, all in dark midnight blue. From the room of the moon and stars spilled music, flutes and lutes playing softly.

Burgundy-robed matrons roamed the throng, greeting guests. Priests and priestesses mingled as well, dressed in richer finery.

Catriona wore ivory silk to match her pale skin; Priestess Lauria had whispered that when she'd helped her dress. It draped her closely, leaving her arms bare and sheathing her narrow hips. Her breasts were small enough to go unbound and her nipples pebbled under the material, both from the cold and the way the fabric of the gown rasped over them. They were barely visible beneath the material, pale and puckered. Catriona's dark red hair was unbound and hung to the middle of her back.

She wore only a little makeup, a bit of powder to cover the freckles that speckled the bridge of her nose and some black cosmetic to lengthen her eyelashes. No jewelry adorned her. The priestesses left such to the nobles and were content with the natural beauty the Goddess had given them.

A stern glance from wizened Matron Mariam put an end to her stalling.

Choice, she had so little.

She was expected to attend the guests, expected to smile, to laugh and to make bright conversation. If a patron made a donation to the temple and fancied her for the night, it was expected she oblige as a sacred instrument of Isolyte.

Catriona descended the stairs and allowed herself to be absorbed into the throng. The voices from a hundred conversations, the clink of glasses and soft spill of music muted the sound of her heels on the marble floor.

There were old faces and new. To her left stood Etenne ni Hermene. He was an older gentleman, portly with reddened cheeks. He had made a donation and selected her twice. He enjoyed it when she took him against her tongue, she recalled. He was not beautiful to look upon but he was gentle.

A little too gentle for her tastes.

He'd loved her body, however. Had called her exquisite and insisted she was the prettiest woman he'd ever bedded. Catriona knew he was simply being kind. She was far from the prettiest of the priestesses in House Midnight. Some of the more attractive women of the Great Isles served in House of Midnight or House of Rose, though it was true that the most beautiful and best-educated women in the Isles were *a'dalisque*.

Men paid mountains of gold to have *a'dalisques* in their beds or on their arm for an evening. The *a'dalisques* set their own price and kept the money. They hired their own swords to protect them, swords that worked for *them*. They were able to choose whom they took between their sheets and what sort of play they engaged in.

Freedom of sexuality. Isolyte said it was due all men and women. That to pleasure and be pleased in return honored her, honored life itself.

Catriona had always found it odd that Her priestesses did not have true freedom. They were required to submit and surrender to the whims of their partners. However, she supposed even what she did was born from freedom. After all, no one had forced her to stay in the Temple of Midnight; she'd chosen that for herself in the end, knowing all that it entailed.

There were many here whom Catriona did not know, but she did catch sight of Eleonor ni'Artine, who stood talking to Matron Mariam near the arched entrance that led to the marble foyer of the temple. Eleonor was one of the very few women she'd ever pleased. The slender older woman chatted with several of the other patrons but cast a smile in Catriona's direction as Catriona stepped off the stairs and passed by. Eleonor preferred to lie with women, Catriona knew. The merchant's wife had been ill used by her husband before he died. It had made her wary of men in general.

Women were not Catriona's first choice, though there was arousal and excitement to be found in female arms, a different kind of love than a man provided, softer and more focused. Sometimes it was a good thing to experience. Some nights it was just what Catriona wished for. A woman knew best what pleased another woman, after all. Unless the man was like Stephen and was trained to know what best pleased the opposite sex.

There were not many men like Stephen around, but there were some who were unselfish enough to please, or who were selfish in a manner that brought pleasure to a woman by fluke.

Just over in the corner was Etenne ni Renault, who'd come to her the first time nervous as an untried boy, though he was easily in his forties, and spilled his seed upon her inner thigh as she'd guided him within her. It had taken them three tries before he was able to penetrate her without spilling himself prematurely, though even now their sessions were quite short.

Catriona was careful to keep her smile on her face, all the while yearning for the solitude of her chambers. She tried to keep the mantra of the priestesses in her mind—*submission is freedom, surrender is peace*.

Eventually, she worked her way over to stand near Stephen in a circle of other guests. Even at a distance and with the people around her, she could scent his cologne on the air if she concentrated hard enough. Beside him stood Matron Annia, who,



Catriona would hazard a guess, was over the age of fifty. She'd served as a priestess for thirty years before becoming a matron.

Near her stood a man, dressed richly. He wasn't remarkable physically. Short cropped brown hair, square jaw, broad shoulders. Perhaps of middle age, though it was clear his body was well fit.

He turned and caught her gaze and she went still and silent as deer. His keen green eyes possessed a cold glint. Here was a man who would enjoy tying her. Catriona had come to recognize them. Her body quickened at the mere thought.

He was dressed in expensive finery. A black dress coat sheathed broad shoulders. Gray linen pants encased his long legs. He was dressed simply, in a way that clearly demonstrated that he was of the upper classes and felt no need to flaunt his wealth in other people's faces. Old gold, as people said. Likely he was titled, not of the merchant class.

"Good evening and blessings of the goddess to you," Catriona greeted with a smile and nod of her head. Stephen and the man bowed, as was proper when meeting a priestess.

"Catriona, my dear. We're fortunate you have finally graced us with your presence." Matron Annia's rebuke was gentled with a smile and a pat on her arm. The matron signaled for a servant to bring Catriona a glass of wine. "This is Catriona e'Leris, priestess here at the Temple of Midnight for three years now," she introduced.

"A Mandan surname," said the man. "Although I would've guessed your heritage from your beautiful coloring."

The man took her hand and kissed the inside of her wrist in greeting. His lips lingered. Her gaze caught and held on hers, his interest clear. For one wild moment, Catriona wanted to pull her hand away. *Submission is freedom, surrender is peace*, she recited in her mind. She forced herself to relax and accept his lips on her flesh. By the look in his eyes Catriona judged that his lips might be on her flesh much more thoroughly sometime in the future.

"May the blessings of the goddess be upon you," he intoned as he released her hand.

"I am Lord Adrian ni Berivalle. I hail from Linden Lake and have never visited the Temple of Midnight before now. It's a beautiful campus."

"Linden Lake," commented Stephen. "That is far from here. The Temple of the Rose is much closer to your home than the Midnight."

The servant brought her wine and Catriona took a fortifying sip. "Temple Rose is every bit as fine as ours," Catriona put in.

"I have been there and found it a lovely place, but I have a special need that could not be filled there," answered Adrian. He motioned with his glass toward the Head Matron, who stood a distance away. "We have found Temple Midnight to be more accommodating." He took a drink of his wine and said no more.

Catriona longed to ask him what his special need was exactly, but that was not her place. She contented herself with a questioning glance at Stephen, who returned it. Catriona felt herself flush and looked away, only to find Adrian studying her over the rim of his glass. The man made her uneasy and she began to mouth an excuse to separate herself from the group, but he interrupted her just as she uttered the first syllable.

"How did you come to reside here?" Adrian commented. "Mandan's ways are so different than ours. I find it curious a native has found being a priestess to her liking. Though you have little in the way of an accent. You have come young to the Great Isles, I hazard."

The last thing Catriona wanted to do was talk about her past. She smiled tightly. *Surrender. Submission.* That extended to all aspects of her life. She was expected to answer any question put to her.

"I've been in the Isles since I was seven, my lord. My mother traveled here looking for better fortune after the death of my father. That fortune she never saw. My mother

contracted the same fever that killed my father and she died once we were past the border. A kindly family took me in after that."

"How is it you came to be here?" inquired Lissa.

"Poverty drove my foster family to dedicate me to Temple Midnight," Catriona answered politely. She turned her gaze to Adrian. "And on the contrary, my lord. Despite my Mandan heritage, I have found my place here greatly to my liking. Service to Isolyte has freed me in many ways."

Again she glanced at Stephen, who stood regarding her intently. She remembered the night she'd tried to leave and would have waged two gold crowns that he was remembering the same thing.

Then she remembered the night he'd deflowered her. For a moment she was back there, with his hands on her aroused body, his breath in her ear. He'd been so gentle, slowly, night after night, teaching her to love the rope.

She'd learned her lessons well. But then apparently she'd had an aptitude for it.

Again she flushed, looked away and found Adrian's gaze a great deal too inquisitive.

"If you'll excuse me," Catriona said. "I see someone I have a need to talk with."

It was a lie, and it dishonored Isolyte, but she needed to get away. Clutching her wineglass, she courteously separated herself from the group and made her way through the crowd toward the room of the moon and stars.

Even years later, she'd never been able to be near Stephen for long before she feared she'd do something to embarrass herself. Memories of the ceremony that had made her a priestess crowded her mind. It was the only time she'd ever had leave to touch Stephen.

She'd always been shy and, on the day of her nineteenth birthday, knowing what was to come, she was far more skittish than usual. The Temple had feted her with a

feast and brought musicians in to play. The room of the moon and stars had been decorated with draped silk. There had been raisin pudding for dessert, her favorite.

She had not chosen Stephen, the Head Matron had done that. Stephen was not the only eligible priest in the temple. Perhaps her crush had been obvious enough for all to see. Catriona had hardly been able to eat for the closeness of him beside her. His scent had teased her all evening. The warmth of his body next to hers was a memory she could clearly conjure even today.

After the festivities had come to a close, the priestesses had escorted her to her chambers. They had bathed her in rosewater, lightly oiled her skin and brushed her hair. They'd swathed her in soft silk, transparent and alluring. After the priests had prepared Stephen, they'd led him into her room and left them alone.

Stephen had simply held her at first, stroking her hair and gentling her nerves. Soon he'd stroked other places, far more intimate ones. He'd kissed her and caressed her until her breath had come fast, until she'd become wet between her thighs and her breasts had felt swollen and sensitive, until all her nervousness had transformed to need, intense and bright. He had not taken her maidenhood until she'd begged him to do it, until she'd needed to feel him filling her so badly she'd thought she'd die.

When he'd mounted her, the pain had been slight, the pleasure much greater. Stephen had seen to that with the skills he'd learned over the years. He'd eased himself in and out of her body with a methodical slowness and patience that had set her nails to the flesh of his back.

Climaxes she'd had before. The priestesses in their baths often brought each other with fingers and mouths. It was simple play in the temple. But this had been different, far more intense.

By morning Stephen had shown her repeatedly that she could indeed lose herself to the sexual act, she could surrender, she could submit. Above all, that she could love doing it. Over the next weeks, as he'd trained her, he'd taught her that she could love

many things. Though for the longest time, in her youth, she'd convinced herself that she could love them only with Stephen.

Others had shown her that it wasn't true.

In the morning the Head Matron had inspected the sheet, finding her blood and their combined fluids, proving that Stephen had initiated her. That day brought another ceremony, the one that made her a priestess.

Someone grasped her arm. It startled her. She'd been so engrossed in her memories. She turned to find Dimitri ni Celestin beside her. Every priestess had men and women who enjoyed them more than the others. Dimitri was one of the men who asked for her more than any of the other priestesses. He had cause. She was one of the only priestesses who enjoyed his kind of play.

"Blessings of Isolyte upon you," said Dimitri.

"And you, my lord."

His voice lowered huskily. "There is but one way I would like to celebrate this eve. I have made my donation to the temple...and I have made my choice."

He had a choice. She, on the other hand....

"I have tired of this fete already, my lord. I beg two quarters of an hour to make necessary pleasantries and shall meet you in my chambers."

His gaze held hers for one long moment. His blue eyes were dark, the pupils dilated in arousal already. Dimitri enjoyed her best when she was bound. All of which he wished to do to her lay in his gaze now. "Two quarters of an hour. No more."

She nodded and he released her arm.

Dimitri was a younger man, in his mid-thirties, dark of hair and eyes. It was the typical coloring of a native of the Great Isles. He was attractive, not one with whom she preferred to be blindfolded. Sometimes it was best to be blinded, when the man she serviced was older or less attractive. Then a priestess could lose herself to sensation

without the hindrance of sight. Blindfolded, she could imagine they were anyone—Stephen, for example. Many a man had transformed to Stephen in her mind's eye.

Catriona had tried so very hard to shed these shallow feelings, but it was difficult. Piousness, it seemed, did not come easily to her.

She and Dimitri were well suited. He enjoyed binding her and she enjoyed being bound. No sex act was considered vile in the Isles, as was not the case in her homeland. Not so as long as the act was consensual. The priests and priestesses of Isolyte were sacred. Harm that came to one of them during their service meant death to the one who harmed them.

While she was tired and did not feel like serving this night, Catriona had no choice. She made the rounds of the room, greeting those she had an obligation to greet, and then quietly slipped out and stole her way upstairs.

As she ascended, she noted Stephen resting against a wall in the crowd, his gaze upon her as she turned the corner to head down the corridor. She held his gaze until the wall broke it, then lowered her head and hurried to her chamber.

"You're late," said Dimitri as soon as she entered.

He'd seated himself in one of the brocade chairs by the hearth. He'd slumped down a bit, as though he'd been there waiting for a time. The maids had folded down the bedding, lit the tapers and started a fire in the hearth at her behest. For a moment she wished to command him from her chamber so that she could spend the evening alone, reading. But there would be no dinner or leisurely bath this night. No good book read by the fire. This evening belonged solely to Dimitri's lusts.

And her own, most likely.

It was true that Dimitri nearly never failed to please her.

Catriona slipped off her slippers at the door, closed the distance between them and knelt, bowing her head. "Forgive me, my lord."

He rose from his chair and crossed the blue and burgundy carpet that covered the wooden floor of her room. She heard only his approaching footfalls, saw only his shoes as he stood before her. Long moments passed before Dimitri reached down and fisted his hand on her hair, bringing her to her feet.

It hurt but only a little. Just enough to moisten her cunt, just enough to make her heart beat a little faster. Dimitri slipped his hand to her nape, where he gripped just hard enough so she understood that he was in control. Dimitri enjoyed seeing that knowledge reflected in her eyes. He enjoyed taking control as much as she enjoyed giving it.

“By tomorrow morning, if you please me well enough, I may have forgiven you.” He bent his head and took her in an open-mouthed kiss. His tongue was aggressive where it speared against hers. She could taste his excitement, his eagerness.

Dimitri slid his hands down and under the skirt of her gown, raising it to her waist. He gripped her thin silk panties and pushed them down impatiently. Catriona kicked them away and his hands were there, delving between her thighs, pushing her to where he wanted her to be – wet and wanting him.

He pressed his body against hers and the material rasped against the sensitive flesh of her nipples, making them hard, like two little ruby pebbles. Dimitri found her bodice and tore. Her breasts, small as they were, spilled out into his hands. He lowered his head and laved over a nipple with his tongue. He could draw nearly her whole breast into his mouth.

Catriona heard her gown rip further as Dimitri sank to his knees. He cupped her buttocks and yanked her forward, sliding his tongue between her parted thighs to lap at her swollen bud. It had drawn from its protective hood the moment Dimitri had fisted his hand in her hair.

She tipped her head back as Dimitri eased the tip of his tongue over her labia and as he sucked her bud between his lips. Slowly, he eased his hand up her thighs and

penetrated her with his fingers. Slack-jawed, he rested on his haunches and he watched them ease in and out of her body, glistening with her fluid already.

He lifted his head. "On the bed," he commanded in a low voice. "Take this off and get on the bed now."

Catriona stepped back away from him and doffed what was left of her gown. She could hear the sounds of him disrobing behind her as she slid onto the bed, feeling the soft, cool coverlet against her skin. She knew how he wanted her, how he liked her best for the first time.

Indeed, the manacles were already in place. Likely Dimitri had placed them there while he'd waited for her. She knelt on the bed, facing the ornately carved headboard. There were eyebolts screwed into the heavy piece of furniture—two on either side, one in the middle. It was to the middle bolt that the silk-lined manacles were attached. There were bolts on the end of her bed also, as well as other methods for bondage discreetly placed around her chambers. They were there for those who wanted them and knew where they were, hidden for those who might take offense.

The bedsprings creaked under Dimitri's weight. Slowly, he came toward her to press his warm body against her back. She could feel the hard ridge of his erect cock against her buttocks, could feel the rasp of his dark pubic hair where it rubbed her tender flesh.

He nipped her earlobe and Catriona closed her eyes, her nipples tightening. Was it wrong that Stephen's face was the only one she saw when she closed her eyes? Wrong, perhaps, but honest.

Dimitri reached around and cupped her breasts, toying with her nipples, pinching them until she felt herself grow hotter and wetter. "Bend over, hands together," he commanded.

Catriona lowered her head, wrists extended before her. The metal felt cold against her skin through the silk lining and the snap of the locks sounded loud in her ears.



Dimitri ran his hands over her breasts as they lay brushing the coverlet, over the ridge of her spine to her buttocks.

Catriona tried the cuffs, but they were locked tightly. She could go nowhere until Dimitri allowed her freedom. Her thighs spread, buttocks offered up to him. She felt vulnerable, exactly the way Dimitri wanted her to feel. She had been with Dimitri enough to trust him and so she let herself go.

Surrender. Submission.

Catriona felt herself make the slide to that place inside where the here and now were the only things that existed. All that remained of her was her cunt, offered up to this man to do with as he wished. Dimitri had control over her now. Her eyes glazed over as he stroked her bud gently. Her jaw went slack as she surrendered all she was to him.

"In the name of Isolyte," Dimitri whispered behind her.

She barely could form the words now. "In the name of Isolyte. I am her instrument."

"Separate your knees," he said.

Catriona did it and felt him ease a pillow beneath her stomach. He played with her then, taking his time, stroking and teasing her until she could hardly see straight. By the time he mounted her from behind, sliding his cock within her to bring them both to completion, Catriona bucked and moaned beneath him. He took her fast and hard, his hips slapping against her flesh with every inward thrust. Their groans of pleasure mingled in the cool air of the chamber.

Though the bed remained heated for most of the night, it was cold and empty by the time Catriona woke the next morning. Her body ached, both her wrists and her sex. Dimitri had taken her hard and fast twice before he'd left for the night.

She rolled over, enjoying the sensation of the sheets against her bare body. The maid had brought in her breakfast and they were beginning to fill her tub for a bath. The remnants of her gown and panties had disappeared from the floor. She held her

wrists up to the morning light streaming in through the window. Thin red weals marked her where she'd pulled against the cuffs.

Catriona pushed the blankets away, rose and crossed the floor to her wardrobe. The morning air felt cool against her flesh. After she'd donned her robe, she sat down to partake of the sliced apples and cheese they'd brought her. There was honeyed tea as well, laced with the powder of the moonflower to keep her from conceiving. As she ate the tangy apple and the soft cheese, she watched the servants fill her bath. With any luck today would be a quiet day. After Dimitri's ardent attentions, a day of inactivity would be welcome.

She could take a walk in the nearby park if the weather wasn't too cool, or she could read. Reading was one of her favorite pastimes. Right now she was halfway through the *History of the Isles*, a ponderous tome that detailed the history of the Great Isles since the Great War, the one Mandan had begun so long ago over a territorial dispute. Dry reading for some, Catriona suspected, but she enjoyed gaining new knowledge.

When Matron Annia hobbled into her chamber, Catriona suspected she would have no peace this day. "Blessings of Isolyte, Matron Annia," Catriona said, rising and bowing.

"Blessings, daughter," answered Annia as she took the chair opposite Catriona in front of the remains of her morning meal.

"I trust you had a good evening, matron?" inquired Catriona, settling back into her chair.

"It was success on all counts, I believe. Isolyte should be well pleased. However I have not come to speak of yesterday evening's celebration, but of a man who attended."

"Ni Berivalle," Catriona guessed.

"Indeed." Annia nodded. "He seeks a priest and priestess." There was worry in her voice.

Catriona frowned. "There is nothing unusual of this, matron. Why is it I hear concern in your voice?" Catriona sipped the dregs of her tea as the matron answered.

"What he wished is highly irregular. He wants the priest and priestess to accompany him to his home in Linden Lake for a period of three weeks."

"I grant that it is an oddly long length of time, but there is precedence for such, is there not?"

"Not for so long, not so far away."

"Do you fear ni Berivalle mean the priest and priestess harm?"

She shook her head. "We sent a pigeon to Temple Rose asking what they knew of the man. The ni Berivalles are a well-known family, well respected. Adrian ni Berivalle has donated for priestesses before now, but never to bring to his home." She pursed her lips. "And never has he expressed interest in a priest."

"What have you told him?"

"The Head Matron made the decision. She decided to grant his request, but on one condition. The priest and priestess they select must be willing to go."

Catriona stilled, stunned. *Choice*. For the first time ever, a priest and priestess were being granted leave to *choose* for themselves. "And why are you in my chamber telling me all this, Matron Annia?"

"He has named you his first choice for priestess." She paused. "His *only* choice."

"And may I ask which priest he has selected?"

Annia hesitated before speaking. "I should not say. I suspect it will sway your decision, though in which direction I'm not sure."

"Stephen," she answered for her.

Annia nodded. "He has consented."

"May – may I ask...did Stephen know which priestess ni Berivalle had chosen?"

Annia pursed her lips together. "You know well the rules constricting priests and priestesses. I dislike the feelings you obviously hold for Stephen. That is all I will say. Do you have a decision?"

There was a world to ponder in Annia's words, in the decision itself. Did Annia mean that she disliked the fact that Stephen had chosen to go with ni Berivalle because Catriona was chosen as priestess? No. She hoped for far too much. Stephen had never indicated he felt anything for her beyond friendship.

But...what if.

She bit her lip. If she went could she bear to watch Stephen with another woman? Could she stand the sight of some woman's milk-white legs wrapped about his waist? For surely he was being commissioned to pleasure someone. Even though it should not be, the thought was painful to her. Even though she knew Stephen often lay with women, seeing it would be somehow worse.

Or could it be that ni Berivalle derived pleasure from watching other couples have sex? Could it be possible she would once again have leave to touch Stephen? The chance for such was a heady one.

"May I have a little time to consider it?" asked Catriona.

Had those words ever sounded so sweet? She had the opportunity to make a decision.

Annia stood. "Of course. I will return to you later."

After Annia had taken her leave, she rose from her breakfast table and allowed a maid to take off her robe. Then she sank down into her bath gratefully, closing her eyes in contentment at the warmth of the water.

Memories of the past crowded her mind, quickening her body under the water. For the chance to be with Stephen, she would risk the rest and more.

Her decision would be yes.

## **Chapter Two**

The passage to Linden Lake was long and arduous. They took a carriage to Harris Town where they caught passage on a boat down the Black River. Once in the village of Linden Lake, they caught yet another carriage to the ni Berivalle estate.

The road was full of potholes this far out in the country and ni Berivalle's fine gilded onyx carriage jolted them hard every five feet. Though they'd begun their journey early that morning, it was well past dusk now.

They spoke lightly about their lives and the history of the ni Berivalle family on their trip. Adrian had sat next to her the entire way, so close she could smell the scent of his cologne and feel the heat of his body, but he hadn't initiated anything during the journey. As instruments of Isolyte, she and Stephen had no leave to deny sexual overture of any kind, so Catriona was pleased Adrian did not make any.

On the contrary, they traveled as if all of them were nobles on their way to some country house for the weekend, instead of priest and priestess accompanying him to their estate to play whatever erotic games Adrian had in mind.

The moon had risen swollen and silver in the sky by the time they reached the gates of the ni Berivalle estate. The house was enormous and sat on a lush expanse of green grass and carefully manicured flower beds. The carriage made its way down the tree-lined path and Catriona could not help but gape past the curtains at the beauty of the place. They pulled up in front of the house and servants arrived in short order to take their bags and then to drive the carriage to the stable or the carriage house or wherever it was the wealthy kept such possessions.

"Come, we will show you to your chambers," said Adrian, holding out his hand to her.

Catriona took it and they walked up the marble stairs and into the well-lit, sumptuously decorated foyer. Catriona was certain she would get lost in the maze of stairways and corridors that Adrian led her through to get to her room. To her dismay, a servant had led Stephen in another direction, to another wing of the mansion.

She and Stephen had been able to talk a little on the journey to the mansion and for that Catriona was grateful. She did not know how much contact with him she would be allowed. That was up to Adrian.

Adrian opened one door off a long corridor and Catriona found herself in a room decorated in an almost innocent fashion, with cream draperies, a canopied bed and rich, brown carpeting. Someone had set a fire in the hearth and it was busy driving the autumn chill from the room.

She set her bags down and inspected her surroundings. "It's lovely, my lord."

"I will have them send up a bit of dinner and a bath for you."

"Thank you, my lord."

"You may call me Adrian."

She inclined her head. "Adrian."

"A woman will also come to help you bathe. She will prepare your body the way I most prefer. Tomorrow morning you will find clothing laid out for you. Wear this and *only* this. Do you understand?"

"I do."

He turned to leave and this surprised Catriona. He'd seemed eager for her all day, if not outright then quietly. Did he mean to leave her alone this evening, or would he return during or after her bath? She did not know many men to have so much patience when presented with a new toy, especially one they could command to do absolutely anything he desired. "Adrian, may I ask you a question?"

He turned toward her from the doorway. "Of course."

"Why did you select me, if I may inquire? I was told I was the only choice you made for priestess." By rights, she shouldn't ask, but Adrian seemed the friendlier sort.

He placed a hand on the doorframe. His eyes were dark and a little cold as he watched her. After a moment he closed the distance between them, his black boots clicking on the wooden floor. He took her wrists in his and backed her up against one of the bed pillars. Catriona was taller than most women, so when he raised her hands above her head and pinned them there, they were nearly looking each other in the eye.

He stood there, staring into her eyes for a long moment.

Immediately, what she termed *the veil* closed over her. It happened whenever she was restrained. It was Stephen's doing, her highly sexual reaction to being restrained. For weeks he'd trained her to take ultimate pleasure at being bound or tied. Her body would come easily if stimulated.

Her breath sounded suddenly harsh in the quiet room, labored. Her chest rose and fell, pressing the swell of her breasts up against her décolleté neckline. Her cunt became heated and slick, her clit swollen, aching to be touched. She licked her lips and felt her body quicken. If he spread her legs now and entered her, she would come.

She held his gaze with heavy-lidded eyes, mouth slack.

"Because of this," Adrian said in a low voice. "Because you love this." Adrian leaned forward, his lips barely brushing hers. "And because I will love to watch you loving this."

Still holding her gaze and pinning her wrists with one massive hand, he reached down and lifted her skirts, tearing her panties away. Her eyelids grew heavy and her lips parted as he slid his hand between her thighs and touched her creaming cunt. He rubbed her clit and slid two fingers deep within her.

"Fuck my fingers, pretty," he murmured. "Make yourself come."

Catriona let out a tortured sound and moved her thighs, rubbing her clit more thoroughly against his hand and forcing his thick digits in and out of her pussy. Her

face flushed and her hips snapping with the frenzied need to climax, she pushed herself farther and farther toward release.

"That's it, pretty," Adrian whispered. "Bring yourself for me." His lips barely brushed hers.

Her climax rushed over her body with the force of an explosion and she cried out. Slowly, with one last caress to her spent clit, he withdrew his hand and licked his fingers one by one. She stared, breathing heavy, cheeks flushed.

After a moment, he released her, turned and walked out. He paused in the doorway. "Get your rest tonight. You will need it."

Catriona sat down on the bed, her sex throbbing from the encounter. She pursed her lips, contemplating Adrian. She'd thought she'd encountered every kind of man there was.

Perhaps she'd been wrong.

It was not long after Catriona had eaten that a woman knocked on her door and asked for admittance. Behind her stood men holding buckets of steaming water in each hand. Catriona stood back and allowed them entrance.

The servant was a short, slender woman with thick curly dark hair and intense blue eyes. She set some items on a nearby table and smiled shyly at her while the men filled the bathtub with hot water. Once they were finished, she sent the men away and turned to her. "Adrian has sent me to bathe you. Please remove your clothes."

Catriona let her dress slide off her shoulders and stepped out of her slippers. The woman gazed at her for a moment long enough for Catriona to understand. The woman added some drops of pungent-smelling oil to the water. "This is passionflower. Adrian only wishes your skin be scented of this, nothing else."

"All right. Do you know why?" She shouldn't pry, but she couldn't help herself. Adrian had become very intriguing to her within the last hour.



"I don't know, miss." She nodded at the tub and Catriona gratefully entered the water.

"What is your name?" Catriona asked as the woman lathered her hands with passionflower soap.

"Emma. Your name is Catriona. That's what Mr. Adrian told me."

"Yes."

"He said you came from the Temple."

"Yes."

"Lean forward, my lady."

Catriona grasped the sides of the wide tub and leaned forward. Emma's soaped hands slicked over her shoulders and down her back. "Have you had many priests and priestesses from the Temple here?"

"No, miss. You're the first. You and the man."

"Stephen, that's his name. Have you seen him?"

"No, but the servants, they talk, miss. The women say he's very attractive, dark of hair and light of eye, handsome and well built."

Catriona licked her lips and her cheeks grew warm. "They are correct."

Emma washed her everywhere, making Catriona shiver as her small hands slipped over her breasts and down her legs. She still remembered the clasp of Adrian's hands around her wrists. The mere memory of being restrained that way made her body quicken anew.

Emma rinsed her hands and took a razor from the table. "Mr. Adrian prefers his women shaved. He told me to make sure you had not a bit of hair on you and to keep you that way always."

Catriona nodded her agreement and allowed Emma to run the razor over her legs and under her arms.

Finally Emma leaned back. "Everywhere," she said meaningfully.

Catriona nodded in understanding and rose out of the water. Many men preferred her cunt smooth. She sat on the wide edge of the tub. Catriona felt her nipples pebble hard in the cold air. She spread her thighs at Emma's urging. Emma soaped her pubic area and gently set the razor to her flesh.

Catriona watched Emma's delicate fingers work the razor and her red pubic hair drop into the water between her thighs. The only sounds in the room were their combined breathing and the scrape of the razor over her skin. Each swipe made her naked in a different way – naked and sensitive.

Emma deliberately brushed her knuckles gently and slowly over Catriona's labia. Catriona let out a sharp breath of air.

Emma glanced up at her and licked her lips. "They say a woman knows best how to touch another woman. What do you think?"

"Sleeping with a woman is nice sometimes. They are different than men."

"I think you're pretty," Emma said in a tone of fascination.

"I think you're pretty as well, Emma," Catriona answered.

Emma pressed two fingers to either side of Catriona's clit and gently pushed. Her clit popped out and Emma gently stroked it with a soaped finger. Catriona closed her eyes, surrendering to it. She would not turn Emma away from this play, though Catriona suspected she was disobeying her master. Emma stroked her again and Catriona's breath hissed out of her as her clit swelled and pleasure shot through her body.

Catriona looked down and saw that Emma was fascinated. Perhaps this was the first time she'd ever touched a woman. It was clear she was curious. "You may," she said simply. "I am dedicated for all, lord, lady or serving girl."

Emma glanced up at her and they locked eyes for a moment. Then Emma looked back down at her soaped, hairless sex and licked her lips. Softly, surely, she stroked Catriona's clit with her thumb.

Catriona's body tensed and her head fell back as Emma pushed her toward an orgasm with every sure caress of the pad of her finger. Emma's touch grew harder and faster and Catriona shuddered as pleasure crested and flowed over her. She grabbed Emma's hand and pressed it against her sex, rubbing herself against the woman's palm as she came. Emma's fingers slid inside her convulsing cunt.

When Catriona opened her eyes, it was to find Emma's face flushed and her eyes dark with lust. She stood, fumbled at a side table and grasped a vial of lotion. "Please get out of the bath."

Catriona stood, noticing the heavy breath of the woman. Some man would be lucky tonight...or woman. Emma was nervous now, but clearly highly aroused.

Emma stroked the towel over Catriona's body and slicked the lotion over her body. It was a common lotion, meant to soften the skin and prevent rashes from shaving.

Once that was done, the serving woman went to leave, hesitated and then turned back. She rose to her tiptoes, pressed her mouth to Catriona's and kissed her. "Thank you, my lady," she murmured before she fled.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the morning, Catriona awoke to the sound of a closing door. She sat up, letting the soft sheets and heavy blankets fall away from her nude body. The priestesses were taught to sleep in the nude, unless instructed otherwise. Better to be ready for their master's or mistress's visit in the early morning.

She looked around at the cause of the sound and instantly glimpsed her breakfast on the small table near the fireplace. Perhaps it was Emma who had brought it.

Catriona rose to find black bread and honey lying on a delicate blue and white plate. A carafe of hot tea also stood on the table, along with a matching teacup. She ate only a little because her stomach felt fluttery with nerves. When she finished, she spotted the clothing that the serving woman had left for her.

Draped over a chair was a long gown of pale peach material. Catriona gathered the material and slipped it over her head. The back was bare, only draping her front and that loosely. The skirt, starting only at the small of her back, was split along each leg. The material was sheer. Her nipples were clearly outlined against the fabric and when she moved it abraded them nicely.

On the table were also five cuffs with O rings attached via small peach-colored jewels. Simply snapping them onto her wrists, ankles and around her throat made her cunt begin to ache with need and her breath come faster.

She sat down for a moment, her hand going to her pussy. Catriona closed her eyes, remembering how Stephen had trained her so long ago. He'd coupled rope and chains with pleasures so intense that it had created an unbreakable link in her mind and body.

To feel a cuff against her skin was to feel pleasure. To feel rope around her limbs was to bring her to the brink of a climax before a single hand had even touched her.

A knock on the door jarred her from her memories. She rose and answered it. Stephen stood on the other side. He inclined his head. "Catriona."

So formal. Ever they were to remain formal, unless bade by patrons not to be. Would Adrian bid them? Seeing Stephen now, his sleek, muscled body bared from the waist up, Catriona hoped.

No, she was not pious.

"You look as beautiful as ever," he said. His gaze was a bit too heated for decorum as it slipped down her body.

"Thank you." She inclined her head.

He held out his arm. "I am to escort you to the receiving room."

She took his arm and they made their way through the elegantly furnished house to the room where Adrian had instructed them to go. "How do you know the way?"

"A servant showed me the layout of the house last night."

"Did they instruct you in any way?" she fished, wanting to know what Adrian was planning.

He shrugged a shoulder. "I am as much in the dark as you, Catriona."

But not for long, most likely.

They reached the receiving room and Catriona didn't miss a step, even though she was surprised to find it filled with people. Nobles, by the moneyed, bored look of them, lined the room talking and laughing. All of them fell silent and gazed at them when she and Stephen entered.

Her mask slid into place. Beside her, so did Stephen's. They knew each other's masks well. All priests and priestesses had to carefully construct one over the years.

She and Stephen stopped at the edge of the room and surveyed those who surveyed them.

Adrian walked to them, his boots loud in the silent room. He separated her hand from Stephen's arm and jerked his head, indicating that he should move away, and Stephen did. Adrian turned to Catriona. "From this morning on, I am your master. You will not be concerned about what is happening with Stephen, unless it directly involves you. Do you understand?"

"I do."

"You must never disobey me. *Never*. No matter what I may ask of you. Or you will be punished. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Adrian." She could feel Stephen's eyes on her, but she resisted the urge to look at him. "That is what the priestesses are for. That is our calling." She bowed her head. "We surrender in all things. I will never disobey."

"That means should I have the urge to stop you during the day to touch you or command you, at any time, for any reason, I have that right. Understood?"

"It is."

He smiled disarmingly. "Good. Come with me."

Catriona closed the short space between them and Adrian dragged his hand from her elbow, up her arm to the nape of her neck. Strong fingers massaged the muscles there, which were tighter than she'd realized from having Stephen watching her.

"You will sometimes be bound physically, but you will constantly be bound mentally. You wear chains around your will from here on out. What you *want* matters naught. It is only what I require of you that matters."

Her breath came quicker at the words and the clasp of his hand on her nape. Catriona stared up into his light blue eyes. "Yes, Adrian."

Adrian compelled her face toward his and brushed his lips across hers in a gentle, undemanding kiss. Catriona realized she likely felt stiff in his arms, so she relaxed her body, fitting herself into the strong curve of him, and eased an arm around his waist. He flicked his lips against her lips, coaxing her to part for him. She opened her mouth and allowed him to ease his tongue within to play against hers.

She felt his cock stiffen against her lower abdomen. He broke the kiss and stared at her, his breath warming her lips. "Raise your arms above your head, Catriona."

She raised her arms up and Adrian clasped her wrists. He brought his hands down slowly, staring into her eyes. Her breath hitched as he reached her shoulders and continued down. She felt the warmth of his palms as they passed over her breasts through the fabric of her gown. All eyes were on them. There were approximately twenty people present.

So Adrian liked to watch. He liked to have others watch. He would bind her. Probably would have sex with her while she was bound and while others watched. That much was becoming clear.

Maybe he would have other men and women touch her, have sex with her. Perhaps he would watch and allow others to watch. She supposed it made him feel powerful, though she did not often stop to ponder the kinks of her masters. She was made to do as they wished, nothing more. Catriona did not concern herself overmuch with the whys and hows, she only surrendered.

The room was furnished richly. Rugs lay over the stone floor and tapestries hung on the walls. Holding the nape of her neck in a strong grip, Adrian led her to the center of the room and clapped his hands. The lords and ladies turned to regard her. "May I present the Priestess Catriona. She has come to serve us and will be with us for some time. Is she not beautiful?"

There were murmurings of agreement throughout the crowd.

"Do you not wish to touch her? Lords, do you not wish to take your pleasure in the silken clasp of her pussy? Ladies, do you not wish to savor the weight and texture of her lovely breasts? Taste her pretty cunt, her lovely hardened nipples?"

More murmurings of assent.

"Know that this is only permitted with my leave. I alone control this woman and her beautiful cunt." He jerked his head at Stephen, who stood near a wall watching with dark, solemn eyes. His face was a perfect mask showing nothing of his thoughts. Catriona knew his eyes did though; his eyes were never something Stephen could completely master. "That man also is *not to be touched without my express instruction*. If anyone so much as breathes on them with my permission, I will exact a cost from them." He paused. "It will be quite high."

She jolted a little, remembering her experience with Emma. She hoped the servant wouldn't be punished for touching her. Catriona would never tell, that was for certain.

"We wish a demonstration!" called a man at the edge of the crowd. The other murmured.

"Marc!"

A tall man with short sandy-colored hair stepped forward. He was not handsome by Catriona's standards, but there was something appealing in the fullness of his mouth and the dark brown slant of his eyes. His body was that of a blacksmith's or a farmer's, someone who used it for his living. It was the body of a man who outweighed her by half again and could command her physically in anything he chose.

Marc approached and grasped her wrists, yanking them to the small of her back. She gasped at the abruptness of the action and that familiar veil slipped over her, making her breath come faster and her eyelids droop.

Adrian studied her reaction, reached out and stroked his fingertips down her cheek. "Amazing," he murmured. Then he turned. "The slightest restraint and her body readies itself for sex," he said to the room. Adrian turned and pointed at Stephen. "His doing, I am told. A man who likes to restrain as much as Catriona loves it."

"I like to restrain women too," growled Marc.

"Marc, I grant you freedom with this woman for now. You can do with her as you wish, but you must do so within my sight."

"Thank you, my lord." Marc's hand spread flat on her stomach, his strong fingers splayed. "I want to fuck her."

Adrian gave only the barest of nods. Marc took her by the upper arm and led her to a long table. He turned her roughly to face him and stared down into her eyes as he gathered her skirt and dragged it upward, baring her cunt to the crowd.

"Hands flat behind you, on the table," he ordered roughly. "Don't think to move them until you're told."

She pressed her palms on the tabletop behind her. At the edge of her vision, she caught sight of Stephen, watching with serious eyes. Marc pushed her thighs apart roughly and slid his hand between them. He rubbed her clit, which responded to his touch immediately. She felt her cheeks flush and heard her breath thicken.

Marc took her clit between two fingers and rubbed it until she moaned. The watchers grew closer, their eyes on Marc's hand, where he worked her cunt. He slid two thick fingers deep inside her and she answered him with a rush of fluid. In and out he thrust, bumping her against the table behind her with his movements.

"Spread farther," he growled at her.



Catriona parted her legs farther and he added a third thick digit, making her gasp with the way he stretched her intimate muscles. Marc grumbled his approval, grasped her wrists, pinning them to the table, and increased the thrust of his hand into her.

"See how she enjoys the touch of a man—any man?" said Adrian from the edge of the room. His boots clicked as he approached. The people around him made way. He held her gaze as Marc fucked her with his fingers. "She will come almost instantly if you bind her. She is...lovely." His pupils were dilated with arousal, but he made no move to touch her himself.

Marc withdrew his fingers and turned her roughly so her back was to him. He pushed her flat down on the table and Stephen walked to the other side. Their eyes met for a moment, then he took her wrists and pulled her arms straight out in front of her, pinning them down.

Behind her, she heard the button of Marc's pants unsnap and the zipper being lowered. Then he grabbed her hips and thrust inside her. Catriona cried out as he filled her. He was very large and he had entered her roughly. Stephen answered only by more forcefully pinning her. She twisted her hands up and clasped Stephen's wrists, holding on.

Marc began to move, grunting as he thrust in and out of her. Faster and harder he took her, hips pistoning, until Catriona was lost in one long, endless come. She moaned and sighed, her cunt pulsing with pleasure. Finally, she felt Marc shudder and go deep inside her, filling her with his seed.

She lay panting for a moment. Stephen released her wrists. She looked up and stared into his eyes as Marc pulled out of her pussy. Then Marc was pulling her up to face him. His semen trailed down her inner thigh. His long cock still hung from his pants, glistening with their combined come. He pulled her roughly to him and kissed her, his tongue tangling with hers.

Adrian stepped forward and pushed Marc aside. The man's eyes were dilated and dark. Catriona wondered for a moment if he would take her too, but he did not. He

only barked a man's name harshly. Once she was up, he lifted her skirt and forced her thighs apart, giving the crowd a good look at her recently well-orgasmed cunt.

Darian, the man Adrian had called to the front, was a young, good-looking nobleman. "Is she not exquisite?" Adrian asked him.

Darian gave him a long look of contempt and challenge and Catriona wondered what sort of politics lay in this exchange. He did not answer. Adrian grabbed her by her long hair and yanked her head back, thrusting her chest outward and making her yelp with surprise.

Behind her, she heard Stephen move, perhaps worried for her safety. Adrian quelled him with a look.

Adrian cupped her breast with his free hand and rubbed the nipple to a stiff peak. Come dribbled from her cunt anew. He dropped his hand between her legs and caressed her until she moaned and panted. "Is she not exquisite?" he asked again, his voice rougher.

Darian's gaze skated over her form. "You know she is exactly my type."

Adrian smiled confidently. "Yes. A beautiful redhead who enjoys all manner of touch. One who will not say no to any act, no matter how base. A woman who loves being restrained while men fuck her. She is like candy to you, isn't she, Darian? How long will you be able to resist her, I wonder?"

Darian watched Adrian's fingers as they tunneled in and out of her cunt. The air between the two men seemed tense and she understood that she was being used as a pawn in a power struggle between them. "I can resist her," said Darian. Even Catriona could hear the note of uncertainty in his voice.

Adrian laughed. "I am going to give you complete leave to touch her, to fuck her whenever you wish. I give you complete and unfettered dominion over her body, just as Marc possesses. You may do anything to her short of hurt her. As an added incentive, I am going to bind her spread-eagle on her bed each and every night and leave her door open." He paused, his dark eyes glittering. "She'll be in the position for

you and you alone, Darian. Think of her as you go to sleep tonight. Think of her waiting just for you."

Catriona's body chose that moment to come against Adrian's hand. She gasped as her cunt muscles pulsed and quivered and her juices rushed out over his fingers.

"There's a good, responsive girl, Catriona," crooned Adrian as he removed his hand and patted her pussy. "Most excellent performance indeed. Marc, you and Stephen may take her back to her room now." He glanced at Marc and Stephen.

Marc stepped forward and took her by the arm, leading her out of the room and away from Darian's speculative gaze and the murmurings and stares of the gathered crowd. Stephen followed.

Once they were farther away from the chamber, Stephen spoke. "Who was that man, Darian?" Ah, so he was curious too.

Marc didn't answer for a moment, and then said, "Lord Adrian's nephew and heir. Darian disagrees with practices of the Temples. It has long been a point of contention between them since Adrian avails himself of Temple priestesses often."

They reached Catriona's room and Marc let her in then called for a bath to be drawn. Stephen settled himself in a chair near her, obviously with no intention to leave her until he was ordered to do so.

Marc leaned against her bed and watched the servants fill her tub. "Does it not bother you sometimes," he said in a low voice, "to be so used?"

Catriona frowned. "Used? I don't feel that I am. I was...made for this. Dedicated to the goddess for this purpose when I was eighteen."

Stephen spoke from across the room. "Catriona is well suited to being a priestess. She takes joy in the sexual act. I have never seen another priestess who comes so easily as she...she gives herself over in such perfect submission." A note of awe had entered his voice. "It is admirable, if sometimes hard to watch."

She frowned and turned her head to Stephen. "What do you mean? Why is it hard to watch?"

Stephen stared stonily at her. He did not respond.

Marc laughed low. There was a little cruelty in that laugh. Marc seemed to teeter on the edge of brutal often. "If you haven't figured it out yet, little bird, I don't know anyone more blind."

"What do you mean?"

Marc pushed off and stalked toward her. "Take off your gown."

She pulled her dress over her head and tossed it to the ground.

Emma entered the room, presumably to bathe her. Marc barked, "Out!" The serving woman turned and scurried away. He jerked his head to the now filled tub. "I will bathe you tonight. I will bathe you, and then I will play with you." He paused and let his mouth curve into a smile that had an edge of bitterness to it. "And Stephen will watch."

She glanced at Stephen, still confused. Stephen gripped the arms of the chair he sat in until his hands were white.

"In," ordered Marc.

She climbed into the hot water and sank down gratefully. Once her body was wet, she stood and allowed Marc to soap his hands and run them over her. She kept her gaze centered on Stephen's face, even as her body quickened for the man who touched her. Did Stephen care for her the way she sometimes imagined she cared for him? Could it be possible? But such sentiments were anathema to the priests and priestesses of the Temple of Midnight. They were not allowed under any circumstances and those who were found guilty of the sin of love were banished.

Marc's hand dug into her hip. Her gaze flew to his. "You are not paying attention to me, Catriona," he said harshly. "I guess I have competition for your regard while Stephen is in the room."

Stephen looked away, guilty. It was a grave charge Marc had laid at their feet.

"I will have to break of you of it," said Marc. He twisted her nipple until her breath caught and moisture surged between her thighs. "Get out of the tub. Do not dry yourself."

She climbed out of the tub, dripping, and shivered as she waited for her next command. Marc gathered a bottle of lubricant and a large dildo then sat down on the bed. "Across my lap," he ordered.

She nodded her assent and draped herself face down across Marc's broad lap. "Spread your thighs and keep them spread. If you close them at all, expect harsher punishment than this."

Catriona spread her thighs until Marc said it was far enough. Then, without warning, his open palm came down on her bare behind. She gasped and jerked on his lap, only at the last moment remembering not to close her thighs. The smack was painful at first, but quickly melted into pleasure. Her cunt warmed from the spanking and grew wet. Again and again Marc's palm came down on her ass until it was hot and aching, same as her cunt.

He slipped his fingers between her thighs and groaned. "She likes this, Stephen," he said, working his fingers up inside her. "She likes a man to take her in hand."

"Catriona likes everything," Stephen answered, his voice strained.

"Do you want to touch her?" Marc asked. There was a bit of a teasing lilt to his voice.

"Of course I do," answered Stephen instantly.

Marc stroked her burning ass. The pain and pleasure had morphed into one by now in Catriona's mind. All she could do was pant and wish to be fucked. "You cannot. Not unless Adrian says you can."

"I know that," Stephen snapped. The vehemence in his voice was not well suited to his role in this place, yet Stephen had never done well in roles of submission.

Marc only laughed. "Do you want Stephen to touch you, Catriona?"

"With everything I am," she answered quickly and without thought. She heard Stephen's quick intake of air across the room.

"Hmmm... Let me make you forget Stephen for now. I know I can." Marc reached over and squeezed some of the lube onto his fingers. Then he spread the cheeks of her ass and worked two fingers deep inside her nether hole. At the same time, he eased the dildo into her cunt. Both orifices filled and stimulated made Catriona nearly incoherent with pleasure. Marc fucked both places at once. She clawed at the bedclothes within her reach and orgasmed.

"Mmm, so pretty," Marc murmured. "So pretty when you come, my sweet."

He pulled the dildo from her cunt and helped her to stand. Then he led her to the bed, threw back the blankets and made her lie down. Her wrist cuffs clicked into two locks on either side of her head, in the headboard. The ankle cuffs clicked into loops of rope strategically sewn into the mattress and which were drawn through slits in the sheets.

Catriona lay spread, her thighs apart, arms over her head and cunt bared. Her chest rose quickly from the position and her pussy tingled from her recent come. Ready for Darian, she presumed.

Marc stood back and admired his handiwork, his gaze flicking over her aroused cunt. He frowned. "I was instructed to do this, but will you not be in agony by morning?"

Ah, so Marc did have a soul.

Stephen stood, his gaze also taking her in. "Do you not think we haven't been trained for this?" He raised his eyes to hers. "You will be all right, won't you, Catriona?"

She nodded.

They left, turning out the light and leaving the door ajar.

Sleep came eventually, but she awoke in the night to find a man near her bed, staring down at her. His face was shadowed and he never touched her. Catriona knew it wasn't Marc.

Was it Darian?

Or Stephen?

### **Chapter Three**

In the morning she awoke to a soft suckling at her cunt, tentative tongue swipes and the soft fluttering of a pair of lips. Catriona gasped, coming awake to an orgasm and the sight of a small dark head bobbing between her spread thighs.

"Emma!" she moaned. "Dear Isolyte!" She glanced at the door. "Please take care. I understand your curiosity and I am not averse to entertaining it, but please do not let yourself be caught."

The woman raised her head from her work between Catriona's legs. "I'm sorry, miss. I am curious." She lowered her voice conspiratorially. "There is a woman here, in the employ of Lord Adrian. She has...made overtures to me, but I was not certain I should return them. I was not sure women were for me. I decided to try it on you."

"And your conclusion?"

"I like touching you, miss. I like making you come. One day, I would like you to touch me as well." Emma undid her cuffs, one by one, her cheeks coloring.

Catriona stretched her muscles and then drew the woman close to her, stroking her hair and placing Emma's hand over her breast. "I shall. One night, when it's safe and I know we won't be caught, I will show you what it is to lie with a woman. Now please, you take too many risks."

Emma rose and bowed her head. "I am in your debt, miss."

Catriona rose. "Now what does Adrian wish of me this morning?"

"That after you eat, I bathe you, dress you and you come to him in his library."

Twenty minutes later she was at Adrian's doorway. He sat in a wingback chair, his booted feet the only part of him visible. She entered the room and went to stand in his line of vision.



Adrian set aside the book he was reading. "Did Darian come to you in the night?"

She shook her head. There was no sense in mentioning the figure standing near her bedside since she had no idea who it had been.

His gaze flicked over her. "Take off your gown."

She slid it over her head and let it float to the floor.

"Sit on that table behind you, Catriona, and spread your legs."

Nipples hard from the cool air of the room, she did as he requested, spreading her legs so he could have a full view of her pouting, ruby red cunt.

His nostrils flared and his pupils went dark. "You are perhaps one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen."

"Thank you, Adrian."

"Marc tells me that last night he fucked your cunt and your ass at the same time and you liked it. Did you enjoy it, Catriona?"

"I am trained to enjoy all things."

"Yes, I see that. Even talking about it has caused your cunt to respond. I can see it from here. Do you like men to fuck you with things that aren't their cocks?"

Her fingers gripped the table. "As I said, I am trained to surrender to all. I have been trained to respond to all manner of sexual activity."

Adrian rose and came near enough that she could smell his aftershave. He reached out and rubbed her nipple with his knuckles, making it go harder and more erect. Then he gave the other the same thorough treatment.

"Hands behind you." His voice had grown thick.

She did so, causing her breasts to be thrust out. Behind her, Adrian locked her cuffs. This house was obviously made for such play and these implements appeared commonplace.

Adrian turned and opened a small wooden box. From it, he took a pair of tiny silver nipple clamps. Bells adorned each of them and a small silver chain connected them. Her cunt tingled and pulsed at the mere sight of them.

He placed one on each of her nipples, hard enough to draw a gasp that was part agony, part pure pleasure from her. It hurt, oh-so gloriously. Hurt and also gave her ecstasy. The chain fell against her skin, cold now, but soon it would be warmed by her flesh.

Adrian stood back and stared at her, his fingers working at the button of his trousers. Would he fuck her now? Finally?

Then Stephen appeared in the doorway. He stopped short, taking in the sight, before he stepped over the threshold. "You requested my presence?"

Adrian nodded once, tersely, his gaze never leaving Catriona's body. Then he reached to a table near his chair and showed her a large, thick toy, studded with small objects that looked like jewels. "I would guess that you're already so aroused, I will not need to lube this. I would also guess that I will not have to touch your clit. I think if I fuck your cunt with this alone, you will come for us, Catriona."

Her eyes were heavy lidded and it was hard to form words. "Do as you wish to me, my lord. I surrender in all ways."

"Fetch Marc," Adrian commanded Stephen.

Stephen left the room and Adrian walked to her, rubbing the toy up her thigh to her cunt. He pushed the head of it inside her and she bit her lip. It was huge, larger than even Marc's cock. Inch by inch, he pushed it inside her until she was completely filled and whimpering with pleasure.

Her head fell back as he pulled it out and thrust again. Harder, faster. Harder and faster. Until her body rocked on the table and all she knew was the penetration of the object into her cunt, and the long, endless climax that gripped her and wouldn't let go. She soaked the toy Adrian used like a piston on her, soaked his hand. Tears spilled down her cheek and she came and came.

All the while Adrian praised her for coming around the toy, what a good girl she was for climaxing for them all.

Limp and shaking, Adrian pulled the object from her cunt and uncuffed her. She found herself on her hands and knees on the floor of the library with Marc's huge cock stuffed between her lips. He gripped her hair and fucked her mouth, while from behind Adrian used the toy on her once more, plunging it in and out of her and rubbing her clit at the same time until she was helpless against the endless orgasm that held her in its power.

Her mouth worked over Marc's cock, knowing best how to please a man with her lips and tongue. He came easily, quickly, spilling his come down her throat.

She fell back after it was over, muscles limp and nearly incoherent. All the while Stephen had been there, watching.

Adrian shifted his gaze, still fingering the button of his trousers but never freeing his cock. Marc was his cock, apparently.

What Stephen was in this strange household and in Adrian's twisted mind, Catriona could not fathom.

\* \* \* \* \*

The man returned that night. This time he stood a few steps closer to her bed. Catriona watched him, trying to discern his face, but a swath of shadow hid it.

"Why do you not touch me?" she asked. "I'm here for you."

He said nothing, did not move for several long moments. Finally he came near, reached down and touched her splayed cunt. He wore a glove over his hand and the smooth, cold leather on her warm pussy made her shudder.

Did he wear the glove so that he could still believe, in his mind, that he hadn't truly touched her?

He smoothed his encased hand down her inner thigh and slid a single leather-clad finger deep inside her cunt. Bound as she was, having the natural reaction she had to

such that she had, the digit went in easily. Her breath caught as he pulled it out and thrust again, setting up an easy rhythm that made her crazy for some sort of stimulation to her clit.

He didn't give it.

The man only fucked her with his finger slow enough to make her see stars, to pull against her bonds, to beg for his cock.

Then he took a step back, leaving her cunt to tingle and pulse bereft of sexual release. He turned and walked from the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

Emma didn't appear in the morning for her bath. Instead, it was Stephen. He released her from her bonds, slowly, his hands slipping over her flesh much more deliberately than they needed to. Catriona noticed it and it made her breath hitch painfully in her chest.

How was it so many men could touch her, bring her pleasure, but she truly wanted only one? She would give anything to have Stephen's hands on her once more. Would give away all the touches from all the other men in the world.

Stephen commanded the servants to fill her tub and watched as she ate her breakfast.

"Why did he send you to me instead of the serving girl?" she asked, picking at her food.

Stephen studied her for a moment before speaking, his gaze running over her breasts where they pressed against the sheer fabric of the morning gown she wore. "I don't understand anything that one does, but he has his reasons. He instructed me not to engage in any sexual activity with you, but to watch you bathe. I'm not even supposed to touch you, save for untying your bonds."

She looked down at her plate, suddenly no longer hungry. "It's strange, this game he plays."

"It is his prerogative. His desire. He uses me for no one's pleasure. Here I am only a watcher. Your watcher. And so I will be. It isn't our place to question or wonder about it. It's only our place to allow it."

Catriona said nothing. She did wonder. She did question. And Stephen knew it.

"Are you all right?" he asked softly. "No one has hurt you, have they? No one has committed *altensi gravitas* against you?" *Altensi gravitas* was when a patron hurt an unwilling priest or priestess in some way—through rape or play that was strenuously objected against. "If they have, we leave now." His voice had gone hard.

She shook her head.

"You seem to enjoy what they're doing to you." His voice sounded flat, unnaturally so.

Catriona looked up at him. "You made me that way, Stephen. Do you remember? All of those days and nights you spent teaching me to love the rope, to love just a little pain? It was you who made this way. You taught me to love sex, no matter the person who touched me."

His lips tightened into a thin line and he looked away. "I know. I remember, Catriona."

Her name on his lips sent a tremor of pure emotion through her. He said it so rarely. "I would have you touch me again one day." The words slipped from her so suddenly and softly. Even if she'd wanted to, she'd never have been able to stop them.

"What is the difference, one man or another?" His voice held the faintest shimmer of...something. A deep feeling, but what kind Catriona didn't know.

She looked up at him, unable in this moment to dissemble at all. "The men who touch me in this place touch my body. There are some men—one man—who is able to touch my soul as well."

He stared at her, seemingly bereft of words. "You cannot say such things, Catriona. That is forbidden us."

Catriona tore her gaze from his, feeling a tear slip down her cheek. He didn't care for her after all—nothing more than how a fellow priest would care for a sister priestess. "You're right," she answered, her voice rough and low. "I went too far. I revealed too much. Damn my heart. I wear it on my sleeve. So unbecoming a priestess of Isolyte." Bitterness tinged her words.

"Catriona—"

She stood. "Come, let's continue this charade. I will bathe and you will watch." She turned to him, hands clasped primly against her stomach, priestess's mask once more firmly in place. "What does Stephen require of me afterward?"

"Please, Catriona, I—"

She held up a hand. "I want to speak no more of this." She turned and walked to the bathtub. Shedding her gown, she knotted her heavy hair on top of her head—Emma had washed it just the night before. Stephen required her to bathe morning and night to wash her skin free of sexual fluids and to douse her body in the passionflower scent he loved so much.

Standing, she let the warm water roll down her body. Stephen had come to stand near her, his gaze roving her body, just like any red-blooded man's gaze would wander her body. She picked up the bar of passionflower soap and lathered her hands. She slipped them down her body, over her breasts. Her nipples, red and puckered from the cool air of the room, peeked from the soap bubbles. She drew her hands over her buttocks, between her thighs, where her fingers slipped wetly over her smooth, slick shaven cunt.

It wasn't until she finished and rinsed her body free of the lather that she noticed Stephen's body had gone taut. His cock, wide and long, she remembered well, strained against his trews. His shoulders were hunched just a little, his hands curling into loose fists. His lids dropped to half mast over his dark blue, serious eyes.

She turned and bent over to retrieve her towel, deliberately showing him her pussy with its pink, swollen lips and pouting clit. Stephen wanted to touch her, just as all men wanted to touch her. For her body, not her soul.

Damn him.

In the moment she wanted nothing more than to punish him for rejecting her. She wanted to make him pay for breaking her heart, but she was nude and defenseless. The only weapon she possessed was her body.

She stepped from the bath, raised her gaze to his in challenge as she toweled herself dry. He held her gaze in silence. Tossing the towel away, she pulled the knot in her hair free, allowing it to cascade around her shoulders. "Instruct me."

He walked to the bedside table and picked up an ornate box she hadn't seen he'd laid there. "Sit on the bed, the very edge. Spread your thighs."

Catriona did and he came to stand in front of her. From the box, he produced nipple clamps, like she'd worn the day before. These were heavier and lacked the bells attached to the clamps. Her mouth went dry at the mere sight of them in Stephen's hands. The reaction he'd taught her to have to such items was even more powerful when coupled with the man himself.

"I thought you weren't supposed to touch me?" Her voice had gone ragged once more.

"In this, I can. But only to apply the clamps. Hands on your thighs. Do not move them."

She rested her palms on her legs as he knelt before her. One flick of his finger across her nipple and it went erect. She had to stifle the whimper rising from her throat. The clamp bit into her flesh and her cunt took notice. She sank her teeth into her lower lip.

Flicking her other nipple to attention, he similarly adorned that one. The chain hung cold and heavy between them, weighting her nipples down.

Then he took another chain from the box. More clamps with weights. This time for her nether lips.

"If you so much as touch my cunt, Stephen, I will come. You know I will. You made it so it was true."

He gazed up at her. "Catriona, if you come under my hand, Adrian will punish you. It will be a fierce punishment. Something just short of *altensi gravitas*." His voice was a whip and she responded to it. "Hands flat behind you on the bed. Do not climax, Catriona. Do you understand me?"

Stephen's command skittered through her, making her obey him. He knew what he did now. By commanding her this way, he counteracted the sexual reaction she had to his touch. A command to deny the command he'd settled over her body so long ago.

She licked her lips and slid her hands to the bed. The back of his hand brushed her inner thigh and she whimpered. He went still, breathing against her cunt. Then he stroked her labia with the pad of his finger and she sank her teeth into her lower lip hard enough to taste blood.

"Easy, my little Cat," he purred at her. "Easy now." He clipped the weight to her lip, the sharp pain making her moan.

Her cunt pouted under the weight, a trickle of cream running down her thigh. Her clit pulled from its hood, plump and begging to be touched, wanting to be stroked to climax. Stephen did the same to her other nether lip and the chain hung heavy between her thighs, slight pain zinging through her and awakening all her nerves.

He helped her to stand. The chain hung to her knees, sparkling in the light of the room. Without warning, Stephen turned her toward him and stared down into her eyes. He reached out and stroked the pad of his thumb over the pouting jut of her nipple through the clamp.

Her knees went weak, but he caught her before she collapsed. He swore under his breath and turned, leading her from the room. The floor was cold against her bare flesh and under her unshod feet.



He led her to the large receiving room again, though there weren't as many people as the first time she and Stephen had entered it.

Adrian turned from where he talked with a slim young woman. "Catriona, Stephen."

He walked to her and immediately put his hand between her thighs. "You haven't climaxed." Was that a note of regret in his voice? He gathered the chain between her legs and pulled her gently forward. The pull on her cunt sent skitters of pleasure through her.

He led her to the center of the room. "Kneel. Hands flat on the floor."

She got down on all fours, the chains pooling on the cold wooden floor. He circled her, his gaze hot on her flesh. "Some here in the house have complained that I only allow Marc to touch you. They too would like to put their hands on your flesh. I have a yen to allow them that, but with limitations. What do you say, Catriona?"

"I surrender in all ways, Adrian."

He leaned at her side and dragged his fingers over her exposed cunt. "You are aroused. I wonder if it was the chains that did it." He paused. "Or Stephen. The two in tandem, perhaps."

"It was the chains," she answered, lying.

He slipped his index finger into her to the second knuckle and she dropped her head, sighing. "Do you want me to stroke you now and make you come, sweet Catriona? To give you the relief you so clearly need?"

"Yes, Adrian."

He brushed the sensitive spot inside her, the only place other than her clit that could make her orgasm. Then he retreated. "I will allow others to do that for me today. I would like to see how many times you can come, Catriona. Shall we see?"

Adrian didn't wait for her answer. He hooked a finger through the nipple chain, drew her up and led her to the same long table where Marc had fucked her the first day.

Marc himself stood at the edge of the room, watching her with a smoldering expression on his face.

She lay down on the warm wood of the table and allowed herself to be attached by her wrists and ankles. Her breath came faster, her chest rising and falling in her excitement, and her body quivered nearly imperceptibly. Though Adrian probably noticed it. Adrian noticed everything.

Adrian stood over her with a blindfold in hand. "Would you know Stephen's touch blindfolded, Catriona?"

Her lips parted in surprise at the question and the malicious glint in Adrian's eyes. "Yes," she answered steadily. She would know the touch of his bare skin to hers anywhere, any time.

He gazed down speculatively a moment longer, then covered her eyes with the blindfold, tying it at the back of her head.

Around her, she heard people move in to stand on either side of her. The rustle of clothing, the sound of boot heels on the floor. Then nothing. Silence.

Adrian removed the nipple clamps. The rush of blood and accompanying pain made her rise from the table, gasping and pulling against the rope that bound her down. He removed the labia clamps as well, the stroke of his hand over her cunt settling her from the sharp, delicious rush of pain.

Someone brushed a hand over her collarbone, down her breasts. Another caressed her nipple to a hard point, then gently drew it between his fingertips. A woman's hand petted her thigh, softly, surely. A man dragged his fingers over her cunt between her splayed thighs, then slipped one, then two fingers within to thrust. Another pressed the flesh on either side of her clit, then petted the exposed, aching bud.

Catriona moved restlessly on the table as myriad hands caressed her breasts, nipples, stomach, thighs and cunt. It was an endless pleasure, mind-blowing in its intensity.

Then, when all hands were at their climax, when the man—Marc, she suspected—tunneled his fingers in and out of her harder, faster, *he* touched her. Stephen's hand came first to her thigh, then her breast, then...

Catriona shattered. Her orgasm rocketed through her, making her arch off the table, making her scream. The hands were relentless. They would not stop. Again and again they rode her through a climax, only to drag her to another. They rubbed her clit, suckled at her nipples, slid fingers within her cunt, her ass. Again and again, Catriona came.

Just as she felt ready to black out from the constant cycle of orgasm, rest, buildup, orgasm, the hands retreated. Her nipples and cunt ached, her body felt warm and flushed. Her juices glistened on her thighs.

Someone unhooked her, made her kneel on hands and knees on the table, while around her she heard the sounds of couples coming together. Arousal hung in the air and the sounds of it filled her ears. She had done that for them. At her job as priestess, as walking aphrodisiac, she had succeeded.

Marc, she knew the feel of his cock, climbed onto the table and mounted her from behind. His hands grasped her hips and he impaled her on his cock to the root in one powerful thrust. Her head snapped back and she moaned at the sensation of feeling her cunt so deliciously filled. He pulled out to his tip and then slammed back in over and over until he exploded inside her with a guttural groan of satisfaction and his seed ran down her inner thigh.

Hands grasped her. Marc pulled away from her.

Another man, another cock. Hands grasped her wrists, her knees, pinned her to the table, spread for the next man who mounted her. It was not Marc, nor was it Stephen. It was not Adrian, who stood at her head, murmuring encouragement. The unknown male slid his cock deep, fucked her relentlessly on the table for all to see. His cock slammed home again and again as the other stroked her clit and nipples and Catriona came again, howling her release.

The unknown male pulled free and Catriona nearly collapsed to the table.

"Enough." Stephen's voice. "I declare *val indictas* on Catriona's behalf." *Val indictas* was a step below *altensi gravitas*. It meant there had been enough play and for the well-being of the priest or priestess, it needed to end.

"Jealous, Stephen?" Adrian drawled.

He didn't answer for a moment. "Concerned for the priestess is all."

The sound of Adrian's boots marked his progress toward her. Catriona lay breathing heavily on the table. "And do you declare *val indictas*, Catriona?"

She licked dry lips. Nodded.

"Very well."

Hands lifted her. Marc's hands, Marc's arms. Silently, he carried her back to her room and laid her on her bed. She heard him order another bath and for Emma to come to her chamber, then lifted off her blindfold. She blinked into the light until Marc's face came into view.

Marc looked concerned. "How do you fare?"

She pushed up against the pillows. "Well, only fatigued."

He petted her breast until she sighed. "No doubt of that." He licked his lips as he gently pet her nipple. "Do you ever not wish to be touched, Catriona?"

She considered his question. "Sometimes too much all at once can be troublesome. I think Stephen feared Adrian would keep me on the table all day and have half a dozen men fuck me, one after another."

"He would have." Marc swallowed hard, let his hand fall away. "All here want you."

She nodded. "Priestesses and priests have a special pheromone that make us attractive to others. It's a part of who we are and what we do. It develops in us over the years and makes us irresistible to some."

He stroked her breast again. "I am one. You are irresistible to me. So I'm lucky that Adrian chose me as his body."

She dropped her hand to his belt, undid the button and pulled his cock free. Gently, she stroked him to erectness. Then she climbed his body and sank down on it. Grasping his wide shoulders, she rode his shaft, squeezing the muscles of her cunt until they both came to a long, slow, shuddering climax. Then she laid a soft kiss to his lips. "You're not such a bad man, after all."

He pushed her back onto the pillows, cheeks coloring a little at the compliment. It belied his gruff demeanor. "Rest," he ordered roughly, doing up his breeches. "Adrian isn't through with you by half and neither am I."

## Chapter Four

"Catriona."

She turned from her place near a window, where she'd been leaning against the wall and gazing down into the courtyard below. The manor house, despite its erotic exploits, functioned much as any other house of nobility. Deliveries and serving people came and went. Guests arrived and they left. The courtyard was a busy place and distracted her from unwelcome thoughts of Stephen.

Of course, now he stood directly behind her.

She closed her eyes and turned to face him. For reasons she could not grasp Adrian had kept them separated for the last day. "Yes, Stephen."

He opened his mouth, then closed it. "How are you?"

She glanced away, into the courtyard. "Fine. Enjoying a short, quiet respite. They have kept you away." She tried to keep the curiosity from her voice and failed.

"Confined to my chambers until now. I think Adrian meant to punish me somehow for declaring *val indictas* and ruining his fun."

"Well, you may have ruined his fun yesterday, but he has made up for it in the past twenty-four hours." She paused. "Adrian is one of the more demanding masters I have ever had."

Catriona—" He started, stopped, then started again. "I had time to think during the last twenty-four hours." He halted and glanced away. "There are things that I want to tell you."

"Tell me?"

"Yes. Catriona, I—"

Boots sounding down the corridor cut him off. He'd been standing close to her and now he took a step backward.

Adrian stepped from the shadowed corridor. "Catriona, have you enjoyed your afternoon to wander the house?" His gaze flicked over her from head to toe, restlessly, hungrily.

She inclined her head. "I have, my lord."

He turned to Stephen. "I'm sorry for your confinement. I simply thought it was best Catriona was spared your presence for a time."

Stephen blinked once, shifted and clasped his hand behind his back. "Why would you think that, my lord?"

Adrian's eyes glinted. He shrugged a shoulder. "I don't know, really. Intuition, I suppose." He took Catriona by the arm and drew her close, against his body. "She is beautiful, don't you think, Stephen?"

Stephen dropped his gaze. "All of the priestesses of the House of Midnight are beautiful."

Adrian gave a harsh laugh and spread his hand over Catriona's lower stomach. "I'm not speaking of priestesses, I'm speaking of Catriona." Slowly, he drew her gown upward, gaze fastened on Stephen. Catriona's breath hitched in her throat. "Do you think *Catriona* is beautiful, Stephen?"

Stephen raised his gaze to Adrian and held it steadily. "More beautiful than any woman I have ever seen."

Catriona swallowed hard at the vehemence in his voice. Stephen's gaze fastened on hers and held. There seemed to be a world unspoken between them.

Or maybe it was just her imagination.

Adrian hooked her wrists at the small of her back with one broad, strong hand. The veil took over immediately. She relaxed against him, her nipples growing hard and her

cunt creaming. Adrian slid his other hand down her stomach between her thighs to brush her clit.

"I think she's beautiful too," Adrian said near her ear. "I can hardly keep my hands from her. She looks so much like a woman I once knew."

The last sentence was flavored with deep sorrow. Heavy and low, it nearly brought Catriona back from the edge of the sexual abyss the capture of her wrists had catapulted her toward. It was a glimpse into the cold man who currently controlled her and it piqued her curiosity.

But then Adrian dragged his finger over her cunt, spreading her so that Stephen could see what he did to her, and all intrigue over Adrian's comment melted into base, sexual need. He slid a finger inside her and her pussy clenched around it.

"You always touch her," said Stephen in a tight voice. "You touch her. You tie her. You adorn her body with chains and you make her climax. You fuck her cunt with objects, but never your cock. Why is that, Adrian?"

It was a bold question coming from a contracted priest. So bold, it punched like ice water through her sexual haze, but Adrian quickly drew her under again.

"Do you want to see me fuck her? Is that it? Can you not wait to see my cock sliding in and out of her perfect, pretty little slit?"

"I just wonder why. You say she's beautiful and I agree. You say you cannot keep your hands from her, and I see that. Yet she is yours for the taking, any way you choose, and you never take her for your own."

"Any way I choose. It's true. You made her that way, didn't you, Stephen?"

"She had the seed of submission in her already."

"Ah, maybe, but you made it bloom." His grip on her wrists tightened and pulled down, making her breasts thrust forward. She gasped and her clit grew painfully swollen. His booted foot forced hers apart so that he could better leverage his arm,



thrusting slowly into her cunt until she whimpered. "Bloom so that any man besides you could do this to her."

"Yes." Stephen's voice held a note of regret.

Adrian increased the pace of his thrusts and she ground himself down on his hand, moaning. "Don't you wish you could touch her, Stephen?"

Stephen's reply came out clipped and cold. "If you command me to touch her, I will do so and enjoy it."

"No!" Adrian replied harshly. "Not under command. Not as priest to priestess, but as man and woman." He paused, his voice calming. "You cannot tell me you don't want that. I've seen the way you look at her."

Stephen said nothing for a moment and then said quietly, "What you are suggesting is forbidden. *Sacrilege*."

"It's spiritual law that we can love as we wish. Why not for Isolyte's priests and priestesses too?"

Adrian ground his hand against her clit and Catriona's climax washed over her, bowing her knees and making her cry out. As soon as the waves of it had passed, he pushed her forward, into Stephen's arms. "I feel badly for you, Stephen. So bound you are to your perceived laws."

Catriona crumpled to the floor in Stephen's arms as Adrian strode away. Stephen coaxed her to put her head on his shoulder and she did, breathing the heady scent of him—clean lemon sage soap and man—the distinctive smell of Stephen.

Once she could, she raised her head. "The man is a mystery."

Stephen stared down at her. "No more than we all are."

Her lips parted a little as his head lowered a bit. Her eyes widened as he leaned in. Was he really going to...? Stephen's lips brushed hers. It was just the lightest of touches, but it sent shivers up her spine.

"Catriona," he murmured against her mouth.

Her hands curled into the fabric of his shirt at his shoulders, feeling the bunch and play of his muscles beneath the garment he wore. Her breath caught. Was she dreaming? She had to be dreaming to be sitting here on the floor in Stephen's arms, his breath warming her lips.

He leaned in once more and slanted his mouth across hers. Fire ignited through her body the likes of which she'd never experienced. Not only did her body heat with a sexual longing, something warmed through her chest and brought tears of wistful joy to her eyes. His tongue touched hers, gently, softly, and her tears slipped down her cheeks. Her body trembled and her soul sighed in relief.

He pulled away to look at her and she gazed up at him in wonder, reaching up to touch his cheek. "I never knew," she murmured.

"Knew what?"

"What it was to truly be kissed."

Stephen's lips curved in a slight smile and he did it again.

\* \* \* \* \*

The interlude had not lasted.

They had just moments together before Marc had shown up and they'd had to separate quickly. Marc had led her away with a sour, suspicious look on his face and a manner even more gruff than usual.

And Catriona could not help but feel guilty for her stolen moments with Stephen. She'd wanted them, there was no doubt about that. However, Stephen was right that it was forbidden. Even though she wanted it, the notion of it being wrong was so ingrained that their kiss dwelt in her mind like a dull ache.

Catriona thought it odd that Adrian had left them alone together at all. In fact, he'd *pushed* Catriona at Stephen, literally. Perhaps it was one of his many games. Perhaps the idea of her and Stephen excited him. He liked to watch her with other men and maybe

the forbidden aspect of it was thrilling for him. Catriona couldn't even begin to imagine what was happening in Adrian ni Berivalle's mind.

Marc brought her to one of Adrian's private rooms off a long corridor where Adrian sat in a leather wing-backed chair. The room was devoid of almost all furniture but a settee. A plush carpet covered the floor and a large stone fireplace dominated one wall.

Adrian motioned to a man standing beside him. "This is Aaron."

The young man with dark red hair stepped forward. His gaze lit on Catriona and infused with heat before darting away. He looked to be in his early twenties, perhaps. He wasn't ugly, but not handsome either and appeared to be a bit on the shy side, if his body language was to be trusted.

"Aaron is a virgin, are you not?"

His head bobbed. "I am, Lord Adrian."

Adrian smiled broadly, his dark eyes flaring with the light of impending erotic play. "Catriona will ensure that Aaron does not leave this room a virgin, but there is a twist." Adrian turned and stared at Stephen for a moment. "Stephen will instruct Aaron in all ways. Aaron will do nothing that Stephen does not tell him to do." He paused. "It will be Aaron's body that fucks Catriona, but with Stephen's words—his intent."

Catriona shivered. Oh gods. This would kill her. To have Stephen's voice surrounding her while another man took her....it was one step shy of Stephen actually making love to her himself. She wasn't sure she could get through the experience without coming prematurely, crying or both.

She swallowed hard and raised her gaze to Adrian. He watched her hungrily—hungry not for her body but for her reaction to this game. Hungry for her slip of emotion, for her to reveal her feelings for Stephen, perhaps.

Suddenly Catriona felt completely naked. Not physically, she'd long become used to being naked in that way in front of others. Now she felt stripped emotionally.

Adrian looked away, commanding Aaron to her. Aaron hesitated and then approached.

Catriona shook off the uncomfortable sensation of complete and utter nakedness and took Aaron into her arms. "Be at ease, Aaron. I will ensure your first time is a positive one." His stiff limbs relaxed a little.

Stephen moved toward them, indicating the settee behind them. His dark blue eyes swirled with unease, though his mask was perfectly in place. "Aaron, move her back there and remove her clothes." His voice caught on the words *clothes*. "Catriona, undress him in turn."

Aaron drew her back and began to yank her gown over her head.

"Slowly!" Stephen snapped. "Slowly, Aaron. Move with care, savor her. Concentrate on the paleness of her skin, the softness of her breast. Watch how her nipples pebble when the cool air of the room touches them." His voice had lowered, become smooth and velvety. "Stroke the curve of her hip, the nip of her waist. Make it last. Undressing a woman is foreplay. It excites you both."

Catriona closed her eyes as Aaron fumbled her gown, drawing it slowly over her head and letting it drop to the floor. His hand touched her breast, brushed her stomach. She was already wet from Stephen's voice, from his gaze on her.

She opened her eyes and undressed Aaron, finally pulling his cock into her hand and stroking it from base to tip. He was hard as rock and pre-come pearled the tip. She thought of licking it away, as she would do with any other man, but it would probably make Aaron come.

"Push her back onto the settee and spread her thighs. Ah, that's it. You see her sweet cunt," Stephen purred. "See the folds and secret valleys? Touch her."

Catriona sank her teeth into her bottom lip as Aaron ran his fingers over her pussy. "It's beautiful," he murmured in awe.

"Yes," answered Stephen. "Do you see her clit? It should be aroused by now, pouting and pulling from its hood. Stroke it."

Catriona shuddered as Aaron petted it, his touch tentative at first but rapidly growing surer.

"The clit is an important key in pleasuring a woman, Aaron. Remember that." He paused. "Catriona's is especially responsive. Do you see the mouth of her slit? See the lips, how engorged with blood they are? She is creaming right now, readying herself to receive your cock. Touch her there. Stroke your fingers into her slit and thrust deep."

Catriona cried out in pleasure as Aaron followed Stephen's instructions.

"There you go. Now thrust in and out, slowly...slowly. See your fingers on the withdraw? See how they're coated with her juice? Catriona has such a pretty cunt, so warm and soft."

"Her muscles are tight. They clamp down when I thrust inside," answered Aaron, his voice shaking.

"Just think how it will feel around your cock. Now look above the mouth of her slit. Do you see her clit? It should be pulling from its hood by now, plump and eager to be caressed."

"I see it."

"Good. Now lower your mouth to it. Lick it, Aaron. Suck her clit into your mouth and play your tongue around it. We want to make her come, don't we? To make her so full of pleasure that when you thrust your cock deep inside her, she's more than ready for a good fucking."

Aaron stared at her clit then lowered his mouth to it. Catriona closed her eyes and tipped her head back as his eager, inexperienced mouth closed over her clit, licking, suckling with enthusiasm.

"Continue to thrust your fingers in and out of her slit," murmured Stephen. His hands were fisted tightly at his sides. "Deep within you will feel a rough spot, a place where many nerve endings gather. Caress it, pay special attention to it."

Catriona moaned as Aaron fumbled for a moment and then found that sensitive spot deep within her cunt. Her hands clenched on the settee as his head bobbed between her spread thighs and Stephen's gaze held hers. Adrian lounged in a nearby chair, watching Aaron please her. Her orgasm exploded over her, making her arch her back, making her toes curl. Between her thighs, Aaron continued to suck at her clit, riding her through it with an erotic knowingness that seemed intuitive.

"Ah, that's it," Stephen praised. His voice was rough and broken sounding. "Good, Aaron, very good. You have pleased her well and made her eager for more. Mount her now, slide your cock deep inside her slit and ride her until she comes again."

Aaron maneuvered himself eagerly between her thighs and slid his cock deep within her. He closed his eyes and groaned as her muscles clasped his shaft. It didn't take Aaron long to find his rhythm. His strokes became long and sure, harder and faster at Stephen's urging.

She closed her eyes and sank her teeth into her bottom lip. Unbidden, it was Stephen's face that filled her mind. She imagined it was Stephen's cock tunneling in and out of her. Pleasure flickered, flared, exploded, making her cry out.

Aaron emitted a low groan and spilled his seed deep inside her. Immediately, he slumped forward, burying his face in the curve of her neck. "Amazing," he breathed.

Catriona smiled and embraced him. "It is, I agree." She opened her eyes and found Stephen's turbulent gaze. His expression shifted, just for a moment, his mask slipping. Agony stole over his features and then was gone, like so many clouds crossing the sky under a hard wind.

Adrian looked pleased with himself.

\* \* \* \* \*

For two days afterward, Adrian confined Stephen to his chambers. Catriona did not see him at all. The loss of his presence made something in her chest ache, but she continued in her duties as if she wasn't missing a vital part of herself. On the afternoon

of the second day, Marc sought her in her room and told her Adrian had summoned her. Together they walked to Adrian's library and entered.

Adrian motioned them in and Catriona caught a glimpse of two men standing near the doorway. They were both tall and broadly built, both dark of hair and eye. One had a handsome face with light eyes and hair. The other was less than handsome and had a long, thin white scar on his cheek.

"Catriona, please meet Evan." The handsome man inclined his head. "Please also meet his friend Paolo. They have come to me to ask me for you this night. They wish you, for the entire night. Together." Adrian paused. "I have been asked by many here for the same, however I am inclined to grant Evan and Paolo's wishes."

She inclined her head. "Why do you allow these men what they wish and not the others?"

Adrian's mouth twitched. "The idea of you with these two particular men pleases me."

Marc made a grunting sound that drew her eyes. It might please Adrian, but not Marc. Was it just jealousy, or was there another reason?

"May I inquire as to why, my lord Adrian?"

"Yes, but I decline to tell you."

She inclined her head again. "Will you be watching?"

Adrian reached over and took a pipe from the table beside him, struck a match and lit it. Then he settled back to regard her coolly, smoke curling around his head. "I have not yet decided. I may."

Evan stepped forward and Marc made a growling sound deep in his throat.

"Now, now, Marc. You've had lots of time with Catriona. It's time you learned to share."

Marc hesitated, then took a step back.

Evan and Paolo stepped forward. Evan took her hand and raised it to his lips. Holding her gaze, he kissed the inside of her wrist, just below her bracelet. "It's a pleasure to be granted your company for this night." His voice was low and filled with melliflence.

Paolo took her other hand and kissed the inside of her other wrist, giving it a little tongue swipe in addition. "You are beautiful." His voice was as rough as his friend's was silky and there was a dark glint in his eyes not present in Evan's. "I'm impatient to get you alone."

She let a smile play over her mouth. Paolo's hand was hot on her skin. There was something special about both these men, but Catriona did not sense it was anything particularly dark or twisted. Both of them made her feel safe. "Well, then let's not delay. Shall we leave?"

They led her out of the library and to one of the opulently furnished guest rooms in the house. She went to stand in the center of the room, noting coiled rope on the massive bed's night table, while Evan closed the door.

She turned. "Do you often share women?"

"We are good friends," answered Paolo. "We don't share the ones we love, but for a night of sex for the sake of pleasure, yes."

"Have you ever shared a priestess of Isolyte?"

"Yes," said Evan, taking a step forward. "But none with such a special predilection."

Ah, the rope. Her gaze flicked to it, coiled in promise near the bed, and Evan smiled.

"Come here," commanded Paolo.

She walked to him and he pulled her gown over her head, running his fingers over the bracelets on her wrists each in turn. He pulled her against him and kissed her while Evan came behind her, running his hands over her body.



Catriona had been with two men at the same time before. She'd been with two women too. For that matter, she'd been with more than two men and women at once. She knew how the sensations began to blend. Soon their motions blurred together—hands, lips, tongues, teeth. Catriona just lost herself to it, not keeping track of who touched her where. She knew it was futile against the rising tide of heat sweeping through her body.

The two men eventually disrobed and they made it over to the bed. Their cocks were beautiful and hard for her. Evan's mouth found her breasts and sucked her nipple to a hard little point. Pleasure coursed through her, settling heavily in her cunt.

If she closed her eyes, she could imagine it was Stephen. Catriona shuddered and concentrated harder.

While Evan laved each of her nipples to exquisite perfection, Paolo spread her thighs and licked her cunt. His tongue found her clit and he coaxed it from its hood, teased it until she moaned.

"Ah, you taste so good," he murmured.

Her fingers curled into his thick dark hair and she shuddered as he sucked her clit into a bloom of eagerness. Her breathing caught as lust filled her, making her limbs grow heavy.

Catriona turned and managed to maneuver Evan's cock into her mouth. Paolo's dark head still moved between her thighs, his fingers thrusting deep within her cunt while she sucked Evan's thick member between her lips and laved the sensitive ridge of nerves just below the smooth crown. In her mind it was Stephen's cock she licked. In her ears, it was Stephen—not Evan—whom she heard groan in ecstasy.

She came at almost the same moment Evan did, his semen shooting deep down her throat. Her orgasm shook her and left her limbs slack, but they were far from done with her.

Evan took her by the wrists then and forced her to her back. He pinned her hands to the bed while Paolo mounted her, sliding his thick cock deep into her cunt. Above her

was a large mirror, reflecting all they did. While Paolo leaned back, she could see clearly the way his cock gleamed wetly on every outward stroke and how her eager cunt ate up every last long inch of his shaft when he thrust into her. She saw how his muscles flexed as he fucked her, his hips stabbing forward with every deep jab into her cunt.

Evan sought the rope and tied it fast around her wrists. The rough sensation of it against her skin brought the veil over her. Made her moan. Made her eyes go heavy lidded. After he'd finished tying her, Evan licked his finger and stroked her clit above where Paolo's cock penetrated her. Harder and faster with the pad of his thumb until she bucked and moaned, pulling at the rope binding her wrists, until she came again.

Paolo pulled free of her cunt and forced Evan's head down to his cock. Evan took Paolo's shaft—glistening with her juice—into his mouth and groaned around it. Panting, Catriona lay and watched Evan suck Paolo to a shuddering climax above her body.

The two men collapsed on either side of her when it was all over, but their hands did not go idle. They stroked and petted her breasts, teasing her nipples. They played with her cunt, each alternating sliding their fingers deep inside her. They nibbled and sucked over her body until she was once again quivering with desire.

"I don't know how you do it," murmured Paolo around her breast. His hand brushed Evan's on her stomach, they lingered for a moment, touching, before moving on. "Are priests and priestesses of Isolyte completely denied love?"

Oh goddess, they meant for her to have a serious discussion about philosophy while they drove her to another orgasm? Catriona closed her eyes and concentrated on an answer. "We love the goddess."

Evan nipped her waist while he slid three long, skillful fingers in and out of her aching cunt. "That's an automatic response, not a real answer. Paolo refers to earthly love, the kind between two people. What happens if you fall in love, sweet Catriona, and wish to only share intimacy with one person?"

She frowned as an image of Stephen crowded her mind, forcing everything else out for a moment. "It is not allowed," she answered in a soft voice.

"Have you ever known a priest or a priestess who fell in love?"

She paused, considering. "There are stories, rumors whispered in dark corners. I have never known any personally."

"And you, Catriona," Paolo purred, kissing her throat. "Do you think you will ever give your heart to just one other?"

Something in her chest squeezed. That deed was already done, apparently. Stephen had stolen her love long ago. She'd only been enduring since then. Accepting. Perhaps more and more she was realizing she was not content to merely *accept* that they couldn't be together. "It's an impossible question to answer." Because she couldn't answer it. Not honestly.

Evan laid a kiss to her hip. "And the pretty one whom Adrian makes to watch so often, the man with the sad dark eyes. You know, Catriona, that his face does not hide much."

Catriona jerked.

"Hush," Evan cooed, letting his fingers drift seductively over the flesh of her inner thigh. "It is only clear to those who are observant or those who appreciate the male form. Paolo and I both appreciate the male form and therefore noticed this priest. For whatever reason, Adrian wishes him untouched." Evan glanced at Paolo. "A pity."

Paolo rolled to the side, his big hand stroking his erect cock. He sought a small bottle in a nearby trunk and handed it to Evan. "So we shall touch you, Catriona," he replied.

Evan popped the top of the container and poured some of the liquid within into his palm. He stroked Paolo's cock with it over and over, from base to tip, and Paolo's head fell back as he groaned. Then Paolo took the bottle and did the same to Evan, his mouth closing over the other man's as he lubricated his cock.

After a minute, Evan mounted the bed and nipped at her nipple. "I'm going to fuck your sweet ass now, Catriona," he murmured. "Are you ready?"

Her hands curled and she pulled against her bounds. Her cunt was already wet with anticipation. "I am yours."

He looked at the rope pointedly. "Yes, you are. We can do anything to you and you have nothing to say."

Paolo handed Evan a short, thick glass dildo. Evan coated it with the lubricant and set it to the mouth of her cunt. It was cold and smooth. He shoved it inside her, all the way in. Catriona moaned and shuddered in pleasure at the way it stretched her pussy. Then Evan set the head of his cock to her ass and thrust the head within.

Catriona cried out as he fed her the length of his well-lubricated cock inch by slow, agonizing inch. It hurt just a little, just enough to play delicious counterpoint to the pain. Catriona writhed beneath him as he filled her—both her cunt and ass. It was indescribable bliss, a pleasure too complete to adequately express with words. Her teeth sank into her lower lip as the sensations of having both her orifices filled at the same time blended together in one long unstoppable hum of pleasure.

Once Evan was seated base deep inside her ass and he'd pulled her legs up and spread them as far as they would go, Paolo mounted Evan from behind, sliding deep within his ass.

They moved.

Like one animal, they pleased each other—thrusting hips, writhing bodies. Moans of pleasure filled the air. Evan, his cock deep inside Catriona and his ass filled by Paolo, looked tortured by the ecstasy of it.

Catriona raised her gaze to the mirror and watched them fuck each other. The sight made her climax long and hard. Once it would stutter to a halt, it would only build once more and explode.

Once they'd all found release, they fell to the mattress in a tangle of exhaustion. A while later there came a knock at the door. Catriona expected Adrian, but it was

servants bringing water and dinner. The three of them bathed and ate, then slept together in the big bed. It was the most pleasurable night Catriona had spent at Linden Lake.

In the morning she woke to hands stroking her flesh—her nipples and her cunt. Catriona came awake locked between the two of them, body aching with unfilled need. She stretched and moaned in contentment, reaching out to take Evan's cock in her hand and Paolo's in her mouth. Evan spread her thighs and ran his fingers over her pussy.

"Catriona."

She froze and lifted her head, releasing Paolo's cock. Adrian and Stephen stood near the door. Adrian looked pleased with himself and Stephen wore his mask firmly in place, though his eyes teemed with emotion and hunger.

"I see you enjoyed your night with these men."

She sat up. "I did. They are both accomplished lovers."

This was who she was, what she did. She wouldn't flush in the face of Stephen's gaze. By the eyes of Isolyte, it was *Stephen* who had made her this way.

Adrian walked toward her. His cock strained against his pants. "Lean back and spread your thighs." Both Paolo and Evan moved away from her.

She did as he requested.

"Stephen, secure her wrists and press them to the mattress."

Stephen got onto the bed and she shuddered from merely his proximity. He gathered her wrists and pushed them onto the mattress above her head. Her breath came faster.

Adrian's voice lowered. "Paolo and Evan, each of you secure a leg. Hold her down for me."

The two men each grasped a knee, pulled it out and pressed down. Now three men held her spread-eagle for Adrian. Strong hands bracing her securely. If she had wanted to get away from them, there would have been no way she could have freed herself. The

veil slipped over her, her eyelids growing heavy. Her nipples went stiff and her cunt reacted – growing hot and wet.

Adrian studied her pussy at his leisure, hands behind his back. “So fucking pretty you are, Catriona,” he murmured. He pulled a box from behind his back, set it on the bed and knelt between her spread thighs.

His breath wafted over her cunt and she moaned. His finger touched her clit and she jolted. The men held her down as Adrian toyed with it – barely touching the swollen knot of nerves. With the pad of his finger he petted her over and over, teasing her. Her juices ran down her inner thighs and pleasure flirted with her body, just out of reach. She moaned and moved on the bed, fighting against the men who held her down.

Her gaze skated to the mirror, seeing the three males pinning her down as Adrian’s fingertip grazed her clit, petting her so very lightly over and over.

Adrian stood, his hand going to the button of his trousers. He played with it, his cock straining against the material as he stared down at her bared, vulnerable cunt. Then he shook his head and opened the box instead, taking out the heavy chains for her cunt and nipples.

“You want me to fuck you and that pleases me, Catriona,” Adrian said. “But I wish you to remain aroused and unfulfilled.”

He attached the chain to her nipples, the bite of pain sending a wave of pleasure through her body. The chain sat cold on her skin. Then he carefully clipped the chain to her labia. She felt the heaviness of it. With one last teasing brush to her clit, he bade her stand. Red marks were clearly displayed on her wrists and knees.

Adrian gathered the chain between her legs and pulled her forward. She felt the tug on her nether lips and her juice slid down her inner thigh. “Come with me.”

He led her out of the room and to the general receiving chamber where Marc had fucked her publicly the first day. Stephen followed behind. The long table, except for one part, was set for a meal.

Once there, he helped her up onto the table, ass almost off the edge, legs spread wide. He secured her wrists behind her back, to the table and also secured her ankles. The result was that she was on full display, spread completely, vulnerable to anyone who wished to touch her. Her chains hung down, pulling on her nether lips and nipples. The bottom of the nipple chain brushed her clit in this position, if she moved just so.

Catriona whimpered.

Adrian laughed. "So eager, pretty? Are you that excited?" He took a small toy from a drawer nearby. "You will have to stay thus, I'm afraid, until after we're done dining. Then I shall allow someone to dine upon you." Adrian slid the toy into her cunt and lodged it there. Catriona gasped.

Adrian clapped his hands and servants appeared. They opened a set of doors at the far end of the room and the noblemen and women poured in. They all looked at her curiously, coming close and examining her bared, filled cunt and pouting clit, her nipples clasped so tightly in their clamps. They did not touch, though some looked like they wanted to ignore Adrian's orders. They sat and ate, ignoring her.

Across the room, Stephen's gaze never left her. His dark blue eyes were filled with anger and lust. In Catriona's mind, she imagined what it would be like to lie with him again—to feel his skin against her, his lips on her flesh. She closed her eyes, flushing, her body responding. Ah goddess, what she would give to be with him just one more time.

Once the guests were finished eating, Adrian bade them watch Marc have dessert. Marc strode to her and knelt between her spread thighs, roughly pushing at her soft skin with his calloused hands. He was impatient. He unhooked the clamps and she cried out at the rush of blood to her breasts and pussy.

Then his mouth was there, over her cunt, suckling, licking and nipping. His dark head bobbed eagerly between her secured, spread legs as he ate her cunt, making sounds like she was the best thing he'd ever had in his life. The noble people looked on,

hands straying to masturbate themselves within the folds of their dress—or to touch each other.

Marc pulled at the flesh of her thighs as he ate her, hands leaving red marks on her pale skin. He pulled her clit between his lips and suckled. Sometimes he would thrust his tongue deep within her cunt. When Catriona came, he licked up every bit of her cream and continued eating her reddened, well-climaxed cunt until she came again and then again. His face was slick with her juice, his groans declaring him insatiable for more of the taste of her.

All around her, the noble people had shed their clothing and were fucking each other on the floor, up against the wall, in chairs. One of the women was fucking herself with her fingers, one leg thrown over an armrest. Two of the men were taking turns sucking each other off in one corner. Catriona watched it all in a daze of orgasmic bliss.

Only Stephen and Adrian remained unmoving, their gazes fixed on her.

Finally Marc stood and freed his cock, pushing it roughly inside her cunt. Grunting, he fucked her, buttocks flexing on every inward thrust. He took her fast and hard, coming quickly. His seed filled her and ran down her thighs once he'd finished.

Catriona remembered little afterward, only Stephen gathering her up, carrying her to her room. There he rinsed the dried juices and seed from her skin and tucked her into bed—no ropes to bind her. She thought she remembered his lips touching her forehead right before she dropped into an exhausted slumber, but perhaps she'd only dreamed it.



## **Chapter Five**

When she woke in the morning, having slept through all of the previous afternoon, Stephen was slumped in a chair near her bed and still wearing the clothes he'd worn the previous day.

She rose and touched his arm, waking him slowly. A hot bath sat in the center of the room and places had been set with food. Emma was nowhere in sight. "Stephen? What are you doing here? Did you not sleep last night?"

He looked up at her groggily. "I was told I could stay and watch over you."

She smiled. "Watch over me? What does anyone think to protect me from?"

His face darkened. "Those who take advantage of your willing nature. You give and give until there's nothing left, Catriona. Have you ever wondered how long we can do this before we lose our souls?"

Concerned, she sank to her knees near him and placed her palm on his thigh. He shifted and his body grew stiff. "You sound as if you doubt the lifestyle, Stephen, when you most of all have seemed best able to accept your calling. I have many questions about how we are called to serve, but I do my best to take them in hand. If you doubt your position at the Temple, doubt your life there, then there is certainly no hope for me."

He stared at her for a long moment, his blue eyes clouded with trouble. Then he reached out and cupped her cheek. "Catriona, it's you who makes me doubt, makes me want...more."

She held his gaze and felt herself falling deeper under his spell, emotion washing through her. Catriona reached up and gripped his wrist. Gods, she wanted him to lean forward and kiss her the way he had in the corridor that day.

Catriona licked her lips before she spoke, nervousness clenching in her stomach. "Stephen, I have always—"

A sound at the doorway made them jerk apart. Emma stood meekly framed in the doorway, a fluffy towel draped over one arm. "My Lord Adrian wishes to see you after you've bathed and eaten."

Catriona rose and went to the bath. Afterward, she ate a tense breakfast with Stephen. Their gazes collided and parted several times, each of them clearly with much to say and no way to say it, not with Emma bustling around the room.

After she'd eaten and was dressed, she and Stephen met Adrian in his library, where he reclined in his wing-backed chair. His head was bowed. Stephen stayed at the edge of the room while Catriona inched closer to stand in front of him.

Finally Adrian raised his head. His face was pale. Catriona's brows knitted. Was he ill? Or was that grief making him appear ten years older than he had the day before?

Adrian tented his fingers and cleared his throat. "Don't look at me that way," he snapped. "I'm fine. I'm as fine as one can be on the darkest of all anniversaries."

Catriona wanted to inquire further, but something in the set of Adrian's shoulders and the lines of his face warned her away from it.

Adrian stood. "I am going away, Catriona. I have left specific instructions to my houseguests as to my wishes where you are concerned. Go as you will, do as you wish. The only two who have my permission to touch you are Darian and Marc. If you can avoid them," he paused, "if you want to avoid them, do so. You will live out the rest of your time here unmolested if you choose." Without another word, he walked to the door. There he stopped and stared first at Stephen and then at her. "Take the happiness the world has given you, Catriona. Take it even if others tell you it is forbidden. Life is too short to live by other people's rules."

And then he was gone.

Catriona stood in shock, staring at Stephen. "How odd."

Stephen frowned. "Adrian was never not odd. This is hardly out of character. We leave in three days. I don't think that's a bad thing." He reached a hand out to her. "You need to relax. You need rest. Come. I'll keep Marc from you if you'd like to take some time to repose yourself."

She stared a moment longer at the doorway that Adrian had gone through before stepping to Stephen and taking his offered hand. His heat bled into her skin and made her shiver. She loved the touch of him, no matter how slight. "Thank you."

"It will be my pleasure."

\* \* \* \* \*

That evening Emma came to draw her bath. As the serving woman worked, her hands shook.

Catriona went to her, her bathrobe tightened around her body, and took Emma's hands into hers. "What is bothering you?"

Emma looked up into her face. "It's only that I— I—" The serving woman sighed and then kissed her.

She stiffened at first only because she was surprised. Then she drew Emma close to her, letting her body melt against hers. Emma's kiss was desperate and eager. Catriona gentled her, guiding her lips into relaxing and taking their time. Their tongues met and meshed in a gentle erotic entanglement.

Emma's hands fumbled at the ties of Catriona's robe and Catriona helped her, guiding her robe off and down and then placing Emma's hand on her breast.

The serving woman shuddered. "I told you about my friend, the woman here who has made overtures to me."

"Yes, I remember."

Emma licked her lips and glanced away. "I think I want her back. I think I...love her."

Catriona smiled and tangled her fingers through Emma's hair. She leaned and kissed her head. "That's wonderful. If you love her, Emma, why are you here with me?"

Emma jolted. She removed her hand from Catriona's breast. "I don't know."

Catriona kissed Emma's lips. "If you love this woman, you should lie with her, not me. Go kiss her, touch her, show her physically what you mean to her."

"You're right, I should." Emma took a step backward and glanced at the half filled tub. "But your bath—"

"Is something I'm quite able to accomplish myself. Go and discover the love of a woman with the woman *you love*, Emma."

She smiled unsteadily, fear lighting her caramel-colored eyes. She feared now, yes, but she would get over that. "All right."

"All right." Catriona smiled. "If you wish, tell me about your lover in the morning. I would like to know more about her."

Emma's smile widened. "I will."

"Now go."

Emma bobbed her head, started to leave and then stopped short. "Thank you."

Catriona smiled and watched Emma leave.

Once the serving woman was gone, she turned and stared at the tub. Why couldn't she take the advice she'd just given—go show the one she loved how much she cared about him? She looked at the door. Stephen had kissed her, but what did that mean? How would he react to her if she showed up in his room right this minute?

Catriona bit her lip, her feet cemented in place. Fear spread through her body like a sickness until tears stung her eyes.

What if he rejected her? Her heart couldn't bear it.

Did Stephen want her body or more? Did he want the whole her—heart, mind and body?

Catriona just didn't know and that made going to him now far too big a risk.

\* \* \* \* \*

She never went to Stephen's room that night, but it wasn't long before she came face-to-face with him anyway. The next day she turned a corner within the house and met him unexpectedly.

He stared at her for a long moment. Catriona's heart pounded and her pulse raced. Then Stephen hustled her back forcefully against the wall and dragged her skirts up to her waist. He said nothing, not a word. He only stared into her eyes as he unbuckled his pants, freed his cock and slid up inside her.

Her eyelids fluttered shut as his wide, long cock penetrated her. She remembered this cock, loved this cock. "Stephen," she sighed.

He forced her head to his. "Look at me," he ordered.

She forced her eyes open and stared into his. He pulled out and pushed back inside her, so slowly she could feel every solid inch of him, every vein. It was glorious. Tears touched her eyes.

"Quiet now, so we're not discovered," he whispered.

She nodded. This was the most cardinal of sins they were committing. This, unpermitted congress between a priest and priestess, was the gravest of offenses.

Catriona didn't care.

"Ah goddess," whispered Stephen. He held her face in his hands and thrust slowly in and out of her. "I want you to myself. Please, all that is holy, I want you to be mine. Isolyte help me, I love you." He shuddered against her. "Catriona, I love you."

Shock rippled through her body. He leaned and kissed her before she could answer. His lips skated over hers slowly, so tenderly that it sent tears down her cheeks. She pushed her tongue between his lips and caressed his tongue. He groaned and sealed his mouth over hers, deepening their kiss.

She raised her leg, draping it over his hip and allowing him a deeper penetration. He broke the kiss, panting, and slid his hand to her ass, holding her there as he pushed in and out of her slowly and skillfully.

Catriona pushed his hair to the side of his face and laid a gentle kiss to his lips. It was heaven to be so connected with him. It was more fulfilling than any of the couplings she'd had since she'd arrived at Linden Lake. It was more fulfilling and pleasurable than any of the sex she'd had since Stephen had taken her maidenhead so many years ago because it seemed they not only joined bodies, they joined souls.

Stephen's breath shuddered out of him and he buried his face in the curve of her neck, his lips skating over her sensitive skin and making her shiver.

"I wish we could be alone and nude," she whispered. "In a bed, just you and I. I want to feel your bare skin against mine. I want to be able to take our time, Stephen, to savor each other." Another tear slipped down her cheek and Stephen kissed it away. "I want only you."

"I love you," he whispered.

"I love you too," she whispered back. "I didn't know how you felt, I didn't know if it was lust that I saw in your eyes or something more."

"More." He paused. "So much more. What are we going to do?"

Tears flowed freely now. "I don't know."

He kissed her deeply again and continued to slowly make love to her there in the dark alcove, away from prying eyes. Eventually, her cunt pulsed and spasmed and she came around his pistoning cock.

Stephen muffled her cries and moans with his mouth and tongue and came right after her, filling her with his seed.

For the first time in her entire life, aside from when she'd lost her maidenhead, she welcomed it completely. They stayed that way for a long moment, connected at the sex, panting and staring into each other's eyes.

She smiled, suddenly filled with the most intense joy she'd ever felt. "Stephen," she said his name in wonder.

He smiled back. "I will find a way for us to be together. Mark my words."

"Catriona!"

She jumped and stiffened in Stephen's arms at the bark of Marc's voice.

"Catriona! Where are you?"

Stephen pushed her back to the farthest part of the alcove and pulled from her body. She wanted to weep at the loss of him. Her skirts fell into place and he buttoned up his pants. Then he stood, shielding her body from the storm that loomed on the horizon.

"Catriona!"

His voice was nearer now. Catriona squeezed her eyes shut and buried her face in the curve of Stephen's neck as Marc's footfalls grew closer and closer.

"No," she breathed against Stephen's skin. "Not him. Not now. I couldn't bear the touch of another right now, not after this."

Stephen took her hand and quickly led her down the corridor. "Come with me."

Together they raced away from Marc and his bellowing voice, around corners and down stairs. Finally they came to stand before a heavy wooden door. Stephen hesitated, then turned the knob and opened it. The room was dark within, but Stephen found an oil lamp and lit it. It was a well-appointed room, with a large bed and heavy carved furniture. She shivered. It was also chilly.

Stephen closed the door and went to the hearth. "I'll start a fire."

"Thank you. Where are we?"

Stephen looked up from laying kindling on the grate. "Adrian's chamber."

"What?" she breathed.

"He's gone, remember? This is the last place Marc would look for you. We'll have peace here, time." A fire ignited, caught and roared to life. Stephen stood. "We need some time alone, don't you think?"

She blinked and glanced away from him. For the first time in her life, she felt shy.

"Come here to me."

Catriona walked to him and he embraced her, his arms sliding around her like they belonged there. Closing her eyes, she sighed. Now she was warm.

His strong hands skated over her back, massaging her muscles. "I have dreamed about holding you this way for a long time, Catriona."

"As I have also dreamed of it."

"It took me a long time to realize that my love for you surmounted Isolyte's laws for her priests and priestesses, that it was stronger than the traditions I'd grown up believing." He paused, sighing. "I want you to be mine. I don't care how, or who we offend. I just want you."

A tear welled in her eye and slid down her cheek. Catriona couldn't even respond, too much emotion welled in her throat. All her dreams had come true in the blink of an eye. Tonight she had everything she'd dreamed of—Stephen's love.

He lifted her smoothly into his arms and laid her on the bed. One by one, he removed her cuffs from her ankles and wrists, then tucked her into the protective curve of her body. "Sleep now, Catriona. When we wake we can decide what we'll do."

A small painting sat on the bedside table just at her eye level. It was of a woman. Unable to stop herself, she reached out and took it. The woman was dark of hair and eye, beautiful, smiling... Catriona frowned. "Stephen? Isn't this the dress of a priestess of Rose Temple?"

Stephen studied the painting for a moment. "It is. What is Adrian doing with a painting of a priestess of Rose Temple on his bedside table?" He paused and traced his finger over the name of the artist on the bottom—it was Adrian. "And he painted it?"



"This is very odd." She flipped the painting around and saw an inscription. *I will always love you, sweet Elisabeth. Avril 4, 1202 – Mai 16, 1236.*

"Mai 16? Today is Mai 17, isn't it?" she murmured.

"Yes." A world of thought lay in that word.

"So yesterday was the anniversary of this woman's death." She sucked in a breath. "Adrian loved a priestess from Rose Temple who died five years ago yesterday."

"Sweet Isolyte."

With reverence, she set the painting back on the table. "Things make more sense now."

Stephen tucked her against him once more. "Do you think all this time he was trying to bring us together? Making me watch you... Was he trying to show me how much I cared for you?"

"Perhaps."

"It worked."

Catriona closed her eyes and smiled. The mystery of Adrian ni Beriville was lessened. Did she even have him to thank?

Eventually, they slept. It was the best and deepest Catriona could remember ever having, with especially sweet dreams laced through. When she awoke, it was to Stephen's lips skating down her throat and over her collarbone. She sighed and shifted, feeling herself grow wet and eager for the touch of him.

He cupped her breast and kissed her nipple through the fabric of her gown. "I want to make love to you, Catriona."

She bit her lower lip and then laughed. "Please hurry."

He smiled and lifted her gown over her head, letting it fall to the floor by the bed. She undressed him slowly, exploring every hard muscle, every glorious plane and valley of his body with a leisurely intentness.

Stephen planed her inner thigh with his palm and parted her thighs, the dying fire in the hearth flickering over the walls and casting shadows on the bed. It licked his skin the way she wanted to lick him – with long, easy laps that never stopped.

He entered her and took her so slowly she could feel every ridge and vein of his cock sliding in and out of her. Tears rolled down her cheek from the sensation of being so filled up with him, not only her body but her heart as well.

Stephen came down over her, his lips finding hers. He murmured words of love and then kissed her deeply, his cock tunneling so slowly in and out of her.

They came together, bodies arching in unison, their cries filling the room.

And after they'd collapsed together, breathing hard, and rested for a while, they rose, dressed and left.

Left the house at Linden Lake, walking down the cobblestone path that led away toward a nearby town. Left to begin a new life together.

## **About the Author**

Amanda May is the pseudonym for an award-winning and nationally bestselling author. She writes across many romantic subgenres and, once in a while, likes letting loose by writing pure erotica. Amanda hopes you enjoy her stories as much as she enjoys writing them.

The author welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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