



Bound by Love

A CAROLYN FAULKNER
TRILOGY

Bound by Love

ANGEL OF SUDDEN HILL

CENTURION

AND A SPECIAL BONUS STORY:
SOLD!

A Carolyn Faulkner Trilogy

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TABLE OF CONTENTS:

ANGEL OF SUDDEN HILL
.....9

CENTURION39

SOLD!141

ANGEL OF SUDDEN
HILL

By Carolyn Faulkner

CHAPTER ONE

Irina came to beneath a pile of furs that was so heavy it nearly prevented her from moving; then she realized that her hands were bound in front of her, making it doubly hard to maneuver. Try as she might, no amount of pulling loosened the stiff leather bonds. Naked and vulnerable, she tried to hurry; deep, male voices drifted into the tent from just outside and she knew she didn't have long before . . . before . . . Struggling frantically, she could not complete that thought. That ending was just too unbearable to think about.

Oh, why hadn't she listened to her mother when she said not to stray to far from the Keep? That there were dangerous marauders in the area who would think nothing of kidnapping her and selling her into slavery? She always lost her head when she was in the forest, gathering the herbs she used in many of the healing potions she was famous for. Her reputation as a healer was known all over the Southern Province, and it was well deserved – some of her successes still sent annual tributes that contributed to the family coffers that had dwindled alarmingly since Papa's death.

But no healing powers were going to help her to escape. And it was too late to lament her pitiful lack of attention while her brother Brian was trying to show her the finer points of swordsmanship he'd learned while training to be a knight.

She'd just rolled onto her stomach, trying to shinny out from under the primitive covers, when the tent flap opened.

He'd waited all day for this – knowing she'd be helpless in his tent when he got to her. Even if she'd recovered and somehow managed to get as far as the door, the guards he'd posted there would have made sure she stayed put. He'd wanted her for longer than he'd ever wanted any woman; females were ripe for the pickin' and he took them whenever he felt the urge – which was frequently - but not this one. This one was special for her extraordinary medicinal abilities.

Bryce de Keive wasted no time in divesting himself of his leather jerkin, swordbelt, and breeches as his eyes settled on the makeshift bed. He couldn't see "the angel of Sudden Hill" under the furs, but he knew she was there, every softly rounded inch of her. Six-foot-three and gloriously naked, his heavily muscled body still glistening with sweat from the recent raid, Bryce watched avidly as the pile writhed, and soon one pink toe peeked out into the cold air. He smiled to himself. She was obviously trying to get up. This would be fun.

Her back to him, she levered herself off the bed, standing unsteadily, then hunching over when she realized that she was naked for all to see. There was no one but him to notice and he was nothing but appreciative of the site of her creamy white skin, sleek, slim back, and amply rounded bottom. When Irina turned to try to make her way out of the tent, she walked right into his bare, broad chest and found herself trapped not only by her bound arms but against the immovable mountain of huge, naked male.

Before she knew it, she was flat on her back beneath him on the bed, her wrists held above her head, out of the way, useless. A hot, wet mouth descended on hers before she could utter her first plea for mercy, his tongue violating her mouth boldly as his hands helped themselves to her high, full breasts. Shrieking, Irina rocked herself back and forth, trying in vain to avoid that rough hand, but there was nowhere to go. His grip on her wrists left no doubt that his strength was triple hers, and she could see the play of muscles beneath his skin as his bicep flexed and strangely tender fingers cupped a virginal breast, squeezing gently but firmly.

When he left her mouth to kiss wetly down the side of her neck, Irina breathed, "Please, please don't – I'll do anything you like – I have healing powers – I'll cook for you – cleeeeeaaahhhhhh!" His mouth

had captured a ripe pink berry of a nipple, taut and proud in the cool night air, suckling it strongly into his mouth, flicking it relentlessly with his strong tongue.

“Please- no!” Although she knew her struggles were useless, she couldn’t seem to stop, not that he was paying any attention to her at all. That dark black head moved from swollen tip to swollen tip, leaving a trail of wet kisses between, strong fingers plumping each breast in turn so that it presented itself to him as if she was begging for his sensual attentions rather than desperately trying to avoid them. To her deep, eternal shame, Irina felt her body blush pink from his ministrations, then flush hot and prickly at the strong tugging. He wasn’t hurting her, but her body pulsed with an unfamiliar ache that built with every brush of his lips over those tender bits of flesh, and it added to her fear of being manhandled by this behemoth of a man, a man whose name she didn’t even know.

Two huge, tree-trunk sized legs worked their way between hers, forcing her to spread beneath him, his swollen maleness pressed intimately against her feminine secrets. He let go of her hands and, despite the deep confusion within her body, Irina was going to take advantage of every possible opportunity to escape. She was a good girl, and this man seemed bent on doing exactly what her mother had warned her about. With every bit of strength she possessed, she brought her wrists down on his head, but her action had the opposite effect from what she’d intended. The giant wasn’t even phased by her attempt to hurt him. He merely reached under the bed a little, barely shifting his embarrassing position at all, collected her wrists again in a humiliatingly easy move, and tied them with a leather thong to the top of the bed. Irina was well and truly bound, her hands secured well above her head, entirely at the mercy of a man she was sure didn’t possess any of that noble intent.

And she was right.

Once he had her pesky hands and arms out of his way, she watched in terror as an evil smile spread over his face. Those platter-sized hands, rough with calluses, teased their way down the insides of her arms and down her sides till his palms covered her breasts, then began to squeeze firmly, making her arch and struggle to get away from his deliberately painful grip. Fingertips found swollen, almost sore nipples – “Ahhhh – aiiiiieeee – noooo!” and pinched, at first almost carefully, then harder, pulling at the same time, lifting her breasts away from her body using just her tenderized teats, rolling them slightly back and forth between the pads of his index fingers and thumbs. “Noooo – plleeeaaassee – that hurrrrrrrrts meeeeee!”

As he held her hefty globes up by their most sensitive points, Bryce leaned forward and licked around them, gently nipping at the vulnerable undersides that rarely received any attention at all. “Do as I say, woman, or it’ll go a lot harder than this for you.”

“P-please don’t hurt me!” Irina fairly sobbed, pulling uselessly at her bonds, feeling ashamed and afraid, but strangely achy at the same time.

Her nipples were beginning to burn from the weight of her breast pulling them down as he held them aloft, wiggling and jiggling his captives occasionally. Every once in a while, Bryce pinched a little tighter, or shifted his fingers a bit, making the pain take a fresh bite out of her, enjoying the way she caught her breath and moaned each time, arching to try to find some sort of relief.

But he didn’t allow that. He controlled the pain, and the pleasure. He controlled his women, until he decided whether or not to let them go, or, more often than not, pass them on to one or more of his men as a reward for their loyalty and bravery.

“Quiet, wench,” he whispered, the threat of retaliation should she disobey inherent in the soft command. Bryce enjoyed watching her struggling to suppress her natural need to vent her pain and frustration at him. “I like to see you like this. You’re naked and bound, as you were meant to be to keep you out of trouble, and beneath a man who will be your master, learning both pleasure and pain at his hands. What could be more natural for a woman of childbearing years? Soon you will find yourself spread wide

and full of me, pleasuring me as woman has been meant to pleasure a man since the dawn of time. You'll take all of me, every inch deep into your body, and what's more, you'll like it, too. I'll haul your legs over my arms to get into every part of you before I spew myself deep inside you. I'll do that to you any time I want, any way I want, and you'll learn to crave it, I promise you."

When he let go of her titties all at once, the blood flowing back into what had been tightly compressed areas brought her sobbing to a renewed level of pain, while he was free to do explore other interesting areas. Bryce scrunched a little down the bed, his lips level with her belly button. Irina saw another opportunity – however dismal – at escape, and tried for it, bringing her legs up quickly to twist over onto her stomach. But she still couldn't get anywhere with her wrists tied to the bed. Bryce took advantage of her position, though, to give her a lesson she would never forget, laying a big arm across the small of her back.

He emphasized each word with a powerful smack to her upturned bottom, making her yelp with each one. "Naughty, naughty. I didn't tell you to turn over. Disobedience, you'll find, will always be swiftly punished." Irina's father was the only person who had ever spanked her, until now. This man's hand was making her father's belt feel like a feather in comparison. He reduced her to tears within the first three swats, and never acknowledged either her tears or her screams of pain. He stopped only when he thought she had learned her lesson, and not before. If she hadn't been crying so hard, Irina would have been surprised at the unusual gentleness with which he positioned her on her back again.

But that instant of tenderness didn't last. Bryce watched her yelp and hitch her hips up in the air when her roasted bottom touched the rough skins, then he settled himself low on her, forcing the issue, enjoying her futile attempts to buck him off, letting her exhaust herself against him, rubbing her prickly private hair against him. "Pleaseletmego! Pleaseletmego!" she chanted.

Bryce reached up and pinched a bruised nipple tightly, warning, "Be quiet, or I'll strap your bottom well and truly, little girl, instead of those little love pats I just gave you."

If those were lovepats, Irina didn't want to think what he'd do to her with a strap – she knew she wouldn't survive it. It was hard, but she closed her mouth, her eyes wide with fright as they pleaded with him silently.

Since her hands were out of the way, he leaned a little to the side, keeping those milky white thighs apart by the breadth of his body, but Irina kept her legs as tightly together as she could, despite him. Bryce touched her knee. "Open."

She defied him, remaining still. His palm cracked rhythmically against her upper thigh, snapping down as hard as he could against her soft flesh. "By God, you will learn to do as you are told, woman –"

Sobbing, defeated and humiliated, Irina's left thigh inched its way outward slowly. Still his punishing hand fell, until her leg was so far spread she thought she would come apart from it. Her privates were on lewd display for his eager eyes, and Irina thought she would die of shame. She had been raised gently, modestly, and nothing in her young life had prepared her for this degradation.

Bryce drew in a deep breath of her woman's scent, reveling in it. A thought struck him – had she been aroused by his rough handling of her? Some women were, he knew. She'd been found wandering the forest all alone, unescorted, and the men he'd sent to kidnap her said she was known by some in the village as a witch because of her unique abilities. That scent was unmistakable – he knew a hot, wanton filly when he saw one, and this one was practically begging to be mounted and ridden – fast and hard, just the way he liked it and she needed it.

His sword hand traveled possessively down her body, squeezing here, pinching there, deliberately making her squeal, then reminding her to be quiet or feel his belt across her backside. He was only too eager to see that tempting bottom reddened further as she danced to his painful tune. His hand was so big he could measure the width of her hipbones between his thumb and the tip of his smallest

finger. When his fingers descended below her bellybutton she began to keen wildly behind a clenched jaw, bucking and writhing with renewed strength when he cupped her hair covered mound. Bryce let her tire herself out, just as he'd let a wild mare expend all of her energies trying to avoid the saddle, only to find herself bridled and mounted and following the commands of her master's hands and knees perfectly hours later, when she realized there was no choice. It was much the same with a recalcitrant woman.

This little one was no different – he'd break her to his hand just as easily. She was no match for him. To add to her shame and because he knew he could do it, he would make sure she thoroughly enjoyed it, every painful, pleasurable step of the way. She would learn to do exactly as she was told, or suffer the consequences.

His middle finger delved boldly between those exposed lips to the very heart of her, grinning broadly when he found himself baptized in her juices. "Ah, wench, your words lie but your body speaks the truth." Bryce dragged his finger up, just a little ways, to discover an extremely swollen, fleshy button. That teasing finger rubbed with excruciating slowness up the side of that throbbing bundle of nerves, making her whimper and cry out unintelligibly, too tired anymore to struggle much, even as a second digit joined the fray on the other side, both sliding up and down and up again –

"God in Heaven have mercy on me please nooooooo!" Irina didn't think she could survive the feelings that were building inside her. Every thought in her head, every nerve in her body seemed to be concentrated right where his hand was, right where his breath drifted hotly over the area that he was deliberately agitating.

Instantly, his hand was removed, only to smack down hard against the heart of her desire. Pain exploded where only pleasure had existed before, then again and again. Bryce spanked her pussy five times total, not going easy on her despite the loud screams each slap elicited. "When I say quiet, girl," he whispered, his mouth near the top of her bruised delta, "I mean quiet." In direct contrast to the now throbbing pain between her legs, his mouth was soft and gentle, the warm wetness soothing her well-punished flesh. As she was trying to recover from the horrifying feeling of being spanked in a place no one had ever touched in her life, he slid his lips and hands between her legs, his broad-as-a-barn shoulders naturally keeping her spread wide for him. Mouth opened as far as possible, he settled it over that puffy nubbin, holding her down as she arched up violently, a mindless moaning cry springing from her lips at the explosive pleasure.

Bryce brought his right hand to join his mouth at the juncture of her thighs, pressing an eager finger to the entrance of her womanhood, circling round and round, watching his captive grow more and more frantic – but carefully quiet except for the occasional whimper of frustration. Slowly, he advanced his fingertip into her moist cavern, watching her response avidly . . . watching her mouth form a rounded "o" of surprise . . . seeing her breath catch . . .

Then his fingers met an entirely unexpected, fleshy barrier.

He pressed again, a little harder. He wasn't getting anywhere. Bryce added a finger, probing and pressing up into his little witch's pussy, but the barrier held.

His mind could barely wrap itself around the thought, but there was no denying it: his little witch-healer was a virgin.

CHAPTER TWO

“What’s your name?” The gruff question in the middle of her imminent defloration startled Irina, especially when she’d been punished several times for speaking.

“M-my name?”

“Yes. Answer me.” Bryce was trying to keep his head all the while her intoxicating scent and the feel of her warm wetness called to him like a bewitching siren, enticing him to take her regardless of the consequences, whispering that she was his, that he needed to bury himself inside her, take her innocence as his due and tame her to his hand as he’d planned. That was probably what he was going to end up doing anyway.

“I-Irina. Irina Montessori.”

Just as he was going to back to the delightful oral task he’d set for himself, slipping his upper lip over that wet bump, then his lower lip back up it – over and over - while she shuddered beneath his tender ministrations - his head shot up. “And your father was – “

“Jacques de Montessori, Duke of Auberne.”

A flood of the worst kind of language poured from his mouth as his mind raced. He was well and truly caught. The young woman who was tied to his bed, spread out on it like a two-bit whore, who was just about to be impaled on his fingers and then his cock - was a lady of rank. If he took her – and his body assumed that was a foregone conclusion – he would end up marrying her, no matter how assiduously he’d avoided that sanctified state in the past. It was the only thing he could do. Any son gotten on this woman would be a fine addition to his family and could not be born on the wrong side of the blanket. He watched his carefree bachelor days meet an ignominious end, and it did nothing to dampen his temper.

But, marriage did have its . . . compensations. He wiggled his fingers against her natural protection from him, making her draw a frightened breath. “Do you know what a man does to a woman in the marriage bed, Irina de Montessori?”

Considering her circumstances, trussed up like a Yule pheasant, delectably nude and half-aroused, with a fully capable mountain of a man between her thighs who was contemplating the myriad ways he could breach her body’s defenses, her answer was absurdly prim. “Such vulgar information would never be made available to me.”

Bryce chuckled. “Well, you’re about to find out, woman. But before that, I intend to indulge myself a little.” And indulge he did. Bryce went back to doing something that he adored – loving a woman with his mouth. It was the pursuit of power in the guise of lust, but it only worked if the woman enjoyed his attentions. Judging by the size of Irina’s love button, the fact that her pouting pink nipples were still taut despite having been punished hard – or maybe because of that fact – and the copious evidence of her natural juices just awaiting to adorn his first plunge . . . oh, she was definitely enjoying this, despite her protestations to the contrary.

At least he was starting out on the right foot, keeping her where she belonged – in his bed, naked, presented for his pleasure. Every wife should be so trained. He was going to revel in training her – making sure she obeyed his every command, raping her little cunny at will, punishing her severely on the least little excuse. He would be firm and strict, just as a man should be with his wife and his children. Moreso with his wife, as children would never stray.

Bryce suckled at the swollen nub, laving it with his broad tongue, over and over, listening for the increase in her irrepressible moans, backing off each time she got too close. He wouldn’t make it easy on her, taking the opportunity at the height of her pleasure to press his fingers against her barred opening,

making her squeal with pain. Soon she would have to choose between the pleasure and the pain, or he would choose for her. Her body relaxed a little, settled against his fingers, loosening up around him very gradually. He resumed his teasing kisses, reaching his free hand up to tweak an abandoned nipple, making her cry out as he plucked it in a deliberately cruel fashion. A new flood of honey christened his fingers as he made her breast hurt but pleased her woman's nest. She loved what he was doing to her and would never be able to hide that fact from him. Bryce advanced his fingers a little, applying pressure judiciously, pushing, prodding, demanding entry from her virginal little body. Eventually he was going to storm her gates, but he liked the idea of forcing her to surrender to him as he brought her body to the heights of pleasure for the first time and impaled her on his fingers at the exact same moment.

Irina didn't think she could tolerate much more of this. She didn't know what he was doing to her, didn't know if there would ever be an end to the relentless rounds of pain and pleasure he subjected her to. His mouth was doing unspeakably vulgar things to her, yet she would weep if he stopped. Every once in a while, he reached up and pulled one of her nipples, almost treating it as a teat and milking her hard. It hurt badly, but it also felt good, and she couldn't reconcile the conflicting feelings. His broad, insistent fingers – they were trying to get inside her, for goodness sake, hurting her more with each foray, never backing off, applying constant, uncomfortable pressure between her legs until she felt like she was going to split wide open . . . and yet that, somehow, inspired pleasure in her also, despite the true pain.

Once again, Bryce reached up to capture another tortured tip, alternating every time. He watched her for a moment, seeing and feeling her breasts rise and fall, watching her swallow hard to try to catch her breath and accustom herself to the stabbing ache, seeing the flush all over her slender body as he brought it to life, even against her will. This time, he determined, would be the last time. He wanted to be inside her – indeed, he'd been fully capable since he'd entered the room. Taking her for the first time on his hand, while bringing her to climax with his mouth made a powerful statement – both her pleasure and her pain was in his hands alone. He owned her – whether or not he married her. He would be her master, her lord, her protector, her disciplinarian. She would bend to him, one way or the other.

With renewed determination, Bryce lay the broad, flat back of his tongue over her most vulnerable point, feeling it pulsing with each surge of hot blood through its swollen depths. His lips settled about the fleshy bump, creating a seal that trapped her in the hot wetness of his mouth. Applying a careful pressure, he barely moved his tongue, rubbing incessantly, demanding. He wanted her to surrender her pleasure and her body to him, and he wanted it now. At the same time, he crossed his middle finger over his index finger and pushed up, hard, into her, not letting up for a second, taking full advantage of every time her body tried to relax and stretch around him.

Irina didn't know what to do – she felt as if she was going to fly apart. Her nipple was being pinched and pulled painfully, and she couldn't get away from it. That newly discovered area between her legs was being slowly invaded by his other hand, hurting her more and more as he made headway into her body. But his mouth – his mouth was going to be the death of her. She knew she was going to die as she felt him drag his rough, wet tongue over and over her, and there was nothing she could do but endure it all.

Just as her internal storm broke, and every muscle she owned spasmed uncontrollably in delight, Bryce's fingers ripped the veil of her innocence away, making her shriek in a violent combination of pleasure and pain. He made her ride his fingers until the last of her contractions melted away and she was left shuddering and mindless in the aftermath, then Bryce rose above her, snagging a taut, abused nipple between his teeth as he positioned himself at the entrance to her body, joining them together with a single, powerful, merciless stroke.

Irina thought he would come out through her throat, screaming as he forced her passage open for only the second time, requiring that her body accommodate the breadth and width of his considerable

member. Bryce gave her no time to adjust to his possession, beginning a rhythmic internal battering that she wanted to hate, but that instantly regenerated the ache that she would have sworn had been extinguished by what he'd done to her seconds before. She was small and tight, and every retreat and advance scraped her insides, rubbing her raw with each new layer of sensation. And, through it all, he kept a tight bite on her nipples, alternating from one to the other, making her breasts bounce with his strong strokes, which pulled unavoidably on her poor nipple.

Bryce was aware of every nuance of her response, as he had been with no other woman, and when he plunged the hardest, making her titty hurt the worst, her breathing changed, grew harder. She loved it, as he had known she would. His teeth closed more tightly around the next nipple as he rammed himself into her, taking her hard and fast and intending on putting her away wet – to be used over and over again that night.

At that thought, he reared back and sprayed his essence within the walls of her folds, coming uncontrollably and wildly and with absolutely no thought for anyone or anything else until he collapsed on top of her, practically unconscious. Bryce repeated that scene multiple times that night – taking her whenever the mood struck him, and in any way he wanted. He left her bound, and, to her complete embarrassment, pressed a crockery chamber pot beneath her not long after he'd deflowered her. "You must need to pee."

She did, but she didn't want to do it in front of him. Stubbornly, she refused.

It took him a minute as he pattered around the room, then he noticed that he hadn't heard the sound of any tinkling, and the pot, when he pulled it out from under her, was dry as a bone. Bryce's teeth set awry as he considered what to do. He settled it quietly for her. "I can't promise you that I'll remember to offer this convenience again. If you pee in my bed, I can assure you that you'll regret it." He replaced the pot beneath her hips, and deliberately stood there and watched her urinate. Another valuable lesson for his soon-to-be-wife. He meant what he said, and he would not tolerate any missishness. "Good girl," he patted her when she'd finished, like a dog who'd performed on command.

A choking sob rose up in Irina's throat, coming out as a heartrending wail that died out to childish, hiccupping sobs until he sat down beside her with a wet cloth over his hand and pulled her legs roughly apart. Irina immediately clamped them back together. Just as quickly, Bryce dropped the cloth on the bed, grabbing a nipple between each thumb and forefinger, pinching and rolling them mercilessly while he commanded in a husky, no-nonsense voice, "Spread your legs."

Irina sobbed piteously, but there was no pity in him. Resigned to her fate, she began inching her legs apart, but he wouldn't let her stop until she had quite literally put herself on display for him. "Don't move." Irina turned her head away from him, flinching once when she felt the rough caress of the cloth on her privates, but remaining silent and still through the rest of it. Bryce cleaned her up, noting a small amount of blood on her thighs and on the cloth, but that she otherwise seemed to have survived it well.

When he was done, she asked with a good dose of sarcasm in her voice, "Can I move now?"

Impudent little cuss! Bryce thought, almost chuckling at her pluck. "No, you may not, although you are right to ask my permission to do such things. Keep your legs well spread – I like looking at that beautiful little pussy of yours."

Despite her outraged squeal, she obeyed him, all the while fervently praying to God that he take her now, so that she would not be subject to any more of this unbearable humiliation. But the Almighty had more important things on his mind, apparently, because after giving her several gulps of cheap wine and sharing his meager dinner of bread, fruit, and cheese, she saw Bryce ogling her lewdly. Irina couldn't keep herself from whimpering at the idea that she might be subjected to more of the same from him.

And she was. Determined to flaunt his mastery of her body, Bryce indulged his love of the female form to its fullest extent. He played with her already brutalized breasts, making her cry with both pain and

pleasure when he slapped her plumped out nipples, hard, again and again. He turned her over onto her tummy and spanked her bottom, watching with detached interest as the imprint of his hand appeared all over those lovely hillocks, then up and down the backs of her thighs. "Eventually," he lectured in a painfully soft voice, "you will learn to obey me without question." The pain became rapidly intolerable for Irina, who was doing everything she could to avoid the blows with no success. Bryce merely threw a leg over hers, trapping her with one easy move so that all she could do was endure her punishment until he decided to end it.

By the time that point came, her bottom was a ripe, sore red. Experimentally, he reached between her legs, wondering if, even in the face of such a severe session that had her sobbing her heart out, her body had betrayed her and readied itself for his possession, drawing pleasure even from the most arduous pain. And he was right.

Any doubts he had about his need to marry this woman fled in that moment. She needed him, needed his firm, disciplinary hand – among other things – on her bottom, needed his raging cock buried deep inside her on a regular basis, needed to be constantly reminded of the place she occupied in his world – beneath him, receiving him, clenching around him as he drove into her.

Within seconds he had put thought into action. When Irina woke this time, she recognized her own bed, her own things around her; just the smell of her big room in the castle comforting her until she shifted against the wonderfully lumpy feather mattress and yelped loudly.

It hadn't been a dream – nightmare! She slipped out of bed and walked to the small mirror on her wardrobe, lifting her cotton nightgown to reveal fading bruises on her derriere. How long had she been asleep? What had happened? The last thing she remembered, that awful man was forcing her to do unspeakable things to him while he did equally vulgar things to her – and her body adored every single second of it –

"Irina?" Her beloved mother appeared in front of her as if by magic, hugging her tightly. "Irina, my babygirl. I am so sorry! I'm so sorry!"

Elena brought her wayward daughter to the edge of the bed and sat down, still holding the young woman tightly as if she'd never let her go, stroking the long hair that fell in a golden wave down her back. "If I could take away the pain of what happened, my darling, I would. I know you were . . . hurt badly." There was a wealth of meaning in the way her mother uttered that phrase. It was on the tip of Elena's tongue to chide her daughter about wandering so far away, about not having gotten married long ago, but that would be cruel. Irina had learned of the folly of her actions in the most brutal way imaginable.

Hopefully, there was something they could salvage from the situation. Elena would do whatever she thought was best for her daughter. There was ample evidence that Irina had been ruined, and now there was no longer a choice as to whether or not she accepted a suitor. She had to, at a suitably fattened bride price due to the possibility of pregnancy. Money had made many a gallant young prospective bridegroom turn a blind eye to his bride's unfortunate lack of virginity. It certainly wouldn't be easy to come up with, but Elena'd do whatever was needed to find a man for her girl so that tongues wouldn't wag if an unexpected bundle of joy arrived nine months from now, she explained. Irina said nothing, taking the news much better than Elena had thought she would.

There was no time to lose, and, as fortune would have it, there was an eligible, highly regarded, recently knighted gentleman who had taken over the dilapidated castle several leagues away. An invitation to supper would be dispatched forthwith, Elena mused out loud while she tucked her little girl back into bed. "You must rest, my darling. Sleep as best you can. It's what you need most right now."

Later that afternoon, while Irina was slept, a huge man accompanied by twenty well-turned out men at arms – obviously a soldier by trade judging by his dress and demeanor – entered the Keep at

Sudden Hill, demanding to see the man of the house. He was escorted by a household servant into the sunny room where the mistress of the house was busily working on a tapestry. The man swept a gallant, respectful bow, then came right to the point.

“Madame, it is rumored that you have a daughter of good repute who is of marriageable age. I find myself newly bestowed the honor of a knighthood, and charged with beginning a new lineage. There is a veritable dearth of young women of rank in the area. Might your daughter still be available? I would be interested in meeting her, perhaps paying court . . .” He let the fine looking older woman come to her own conclusion as he sized up the place with a discreet eye. It was genteely poor, although there were still a few beautiful pieces left from what had obviously been better times.

Elena felt as if the Almighty had just dropped the answer to all their problems smack in her lap – or at least as close as her parlor. They had a short, sweet discussion, one that normally would have been handled by her husband, but as there was no gentleman of rank available, she conducted it as best she could. The most important thing in her mind was securing a safe, comfortable home for her babygirl, and this man – who was constructing a huge new fortress in the name of the King and dressed in blatantly expensive attire, was the first, best candidate at hand. And he was looking for a bride! How much more of a sign did she need?

After seeing to his comfort and excusing herself with obsequious politeness, she fairly ran to her daughter’s room, barely bothering to wake Irina before stuffing her into a baby blue silk gown that emphasized her pale beauty. Maude, Irina’s maid, made a quick swipe at her hair, arranging cornflower blue blossoms around her temples, with a pretty silk ribbon, but leaving it flowing down her back as befitted a maiden. No one but those closest to the family knew of her sad fate.

Just before Elena shoved her daughter into the day room with the broad-shouldered, brooding, dark-haired man, she stopped her, making her explanation now when Irina was a little more awake. “The Lord has seen fit to provide us with exactly what we need, and I will not have you being a disobedient, ungrateful daughter. Your father let you have your way for too long. I have accepted his offer for your hand in marriage.” She flung open the doors, grabbed Irina’s hand and fairly dragged her into the parlor, announcing loudly to all and sundry, “My lord, this is my daughter and your betrothed, Irina Montessori, known hereabouts as the Angel of Sudden Hill.”

Still fuzzy from sleep, Irina’s gaze settled gently on the back of the man silhouetted at the real glass window . . . until he turned around and Irina found herself staring into the eyes of the man who had ravaged her not two days hence.

Oblivious to the undercurrents, Elena turned to her daughter and continued with the introductions. “Irina, my love, this is your betrothed, my lord Bryce de –”

She found herself talking to the air as Irina crumpled into a dead faint.

CHAPTER THREE

When Irina awoke this time, she again was somewhere she didn't recognize, although her current surroundings were considerably more opulent than her own room. She heaved a sigh of relief – at least she wasn't where she had been afraid she might end up: in that God-forsaken tent on a bed of rough furs . . . Sitting up, she swung her legs off the side of the high, soft mattress and nearly kicked Bryce de – Bryce de -whatever his name was. It was not a name she cared to learn. Ever.

He was sitting in a comfortable, tapestried chair less than a foot from the side of her bed, looking – if she had to put a description to it – almost worried. Before those small feet could hit the ground, he swung her legs back onto the bed, then stretched out beside her. Irina tried valiantly to crawl off the other side of the bed, but he forcibly restrained her. Bryce caught both of her wrists in one strong hand, drawing them inexorably above her head. When Irina immediately flashed back to the night she'd spent at his mercy, she began to struggle frantically, but he wasn't about to let her go. All she succeeded in doing was exhausting herself against his strength, as usual.

"Calm down, wife." Bryce enjoyed the shock value of that word as he watched it registered with her.

Irina's head whipped toward him between her arms, her eyes wide and frightened. "I am not your wife, Sir," her tone made it clear that she used the title loosely.

Bryce reveled in informing her, "We were married by proxy an hour ago while you were still quite . . . indisposed. Your dear, put-upon Mother was more than eager to stand in for you. Such a delightful, helpful woman. And so distraught over the fate of her willful little girl . . . she was more than happy to practically sell you to me." Bryce dragged a hand across her collarbone, then down into the bodice of her gown to firmly cup the bounty he found there. "I assured her that I was more than willing to overlook your lack of innocence – "

"My lack of innocence is your fault!" Irina yelled, regretting her outburst immediately when he pulled her breasts from behind the confining material, stretching and pulling first one tender tip and then the other.

"Did you learn nothing from your time with me? Hold your tongue, woman!" he scolded. "You will remain silent unless asked a direct question."

Trying to cope with the aching soreness he was causing made Irina moan softly, her legs shifting restlessly on the bed.

"The proper, wifely response is: Yes, Sir," Bryce prompted, his lips tender on the side of her face while still torturing her breasts.

Irina desperately wanted to defy him, but she also desperately wanted the hurt to stop. "N-nnnnnn - yes, yes, Sir."

Bryce tipped up her chin and kissed her gently, which only served to confuse her. Just when she was thinking he might have a heart after all, his free hand groped under her skirt, seeking then finding the slit in her drawers. Those same two aggressive fingers that had claimed her virginity not two days prior opened her nether lips firmly, his forearm across her hip ruthlessly preventing much struggle about it, pressing their way to her little honey pot. It was dripping with her body's clear acceptance of both pain and pleasure from him. "That's better." Bryce shifted his position a little, so that he had a better angle to get at her from, using the leverage he created to roughly shove those probing fingers into her unprepared body with no warning, holding her still when she yelped and tried to arch away from him. He continued to talk to her as he raped her casually. "Your mother told me some other interesting things about you: that

your father spoiled you terribly. That you're headstrong and disobedient and that's why my men were able to kidnap you from the woods. That you need a strong man who's not afraid to discipline you."

Irina was only half listening to him – her mind and body were much more interested in concentrating on what he was doing to her with those firm, nasty digits. She couldn't keep herself from moaning each time they invaded her, reaching deep inside, twisting and turning. Eventually, her breathing grew heavy and loud – oh, God, would he never stop? She was going to shame herself if he continued like this!

Abruptly, he stopped, moving away from her to stand next to the bed, commanding her to strip. Her reluctance obvious in her slow movements, Rina kept her eyes on the bedcovers when her fingers reached for the buttons down the back of her dress. Bryce picked her up and stood her in the middle of the bedroom floor, facing away from him, making short work of the buttons and hooks she could not reach. The heavy dress fell to the floor in a pile of blue silk, and Irina stood there in her shift, stockings, corset, and petticoats. "Turn around."

Frightened, she nonetheless straightened her back and turned to face him, staring diligently at the floor.

"Look at me." Bryce was sitting on the edge of the bed, impressively muscled arms folded over his massive chest. "Don't take your eyes off me until you're nude." He watched a lovely blush descend over her creamy flesh. It reminded him of the sex flush she got when she was near orgasm.

Irina bit her lip, but did as she was told – it was one of the hardest things she'd ever done in her life. Bryce watch greedily as each new part of her body was revealed. Rina started with the less vital areas – legs, jewelry, noting the big new diamond and gold wedding band on her third finger - as a delaying tactic, continuing to move as slowly as was humanly possible.

"Irina Mary Elena de Keive, I will not give you all night to finish this." He stood and put his hands to his thick leather belt. "Do you need a taste of this to inspire you?"

Her eyes wide, Irina shook her head.

"No, Sir –" he prompted.

"No, Sir," she parroted back in her quiet little voice.

"Very well. Get on with it." He settled himself back on the bed, looking like a pasha watching a particularly fetching slave girl perform for him.

"Y-yes, Sir."

She was learning, he thought with a small smile to himself.

It was not easy to undress yourself; Irina had always had lady's maids to do that for her, and now she had to learn how to do it when she couldn't look down at what she was doing. The multiple petticoats were next to hit the Aubusson carpet, until she stood in front of him in her corset, undergown and drawers. Bryce rose and untied the laces of the whalebone contraption, enjoying the show enormously as she had to drop it down her body and shimmy out of it. Irina didn't want to go any further – either of the last two garments she removed would leave her embarrassingly exposed.

He knew she was having a terrible time with her choice. "Shall I tell you which should be next, sweetie?" he asked, watching her blush rise till she looked like she'd been sun kissed for too long. Almost eager, Irina nodded her head.

"Yes, Sir, please."

"Very good," he complimented her on her submissive demeanor. "The drawers next, Irina."

The undergown was long enough that most of her would still be covered, to the very tops of the columns of her thighs. The drawers fell and she stepped out of them, closer to him but not by design. "Come here." He made Irina stand between his legs, putting his hands on her legs at the back, near the place where thigh became buttock. "Take off your gown for your husband, wife."

With an almost silent whimper of shame, the young woman reached down to the hem of her gown and pulled it up over her face, while her husband followed its climb with his big, rough hands, claiming every part of her as she exposed it, standing up and over her when she released the cotton chemise to float to the floor. Bryce captured her hands in his and folded her arms behind her as he bent his wife back and took her mouth with his – hot and wild, stamping her with his possession. Wiggling against him only abraded her soft skin so she stood still, liking his kisses but not wanting to like them. Bryce kissed wetly down her throat to her prominent collarbone, noting its frail delicacy en route to more enticing fare. “Keep your hands behind your back,” he ordered, devoting both of his own paws to those wonderful, almost too full breasts, lifting and kneading them hard, making her stand on her tiptoes and lean against him to try to relieve the ache he created. But that just made him clench her poor titties harder until she cried out.

Bryce chuckled, noting that although she was obviously uncomfortable, she had been a good girl and not moved her hands. He wanted to reward her a little, so he captured an already hard nipple and suckled strongly, playing gently with its mate. The combination of feelings ignited the area between Irina’s legs with a surge of feeling that she thought was going to make her collapse. It was somehow worse that he was unexpectedly being careful with her, making her worry what might be coming next. She moaned loudly as he made his way across the sweetly scented valley to her other teat, not leaving either tip untouched for more than a second, knowing that this was what she needed and that it was making her hot.

He left her breasts and took her mouth with his, slanting his lips over hers and raping her with his tongue until he couldn’t stand it any longer. He had to be inside her. Bryce reached down and moved his codpiece to the side, releasing his enormously swollen organ. “Keep your eyes open, and on mine. Kneel and suck me. I know you remember how to do it – don’t make me have to remind you with my belt across your backside.”

For a virgin, he’d discovered that she was a quick learner, and unusually good with her mouth, making him want to ignore the Church’s teachings and shoot his load down the back of her throat if only to feel those wonderful contractions as she was required to swallow his ample seed. That tiny tongue washed him quickly all over, darting here and there; until she opened her jaw wide and he looked down to see his rampant manhood disappearing between those two pale pink lips. He loved making her watch him while she serviced him this way – Bryce felt it reinforced her wifely submission to him.

Surprisingly, he found it hard to control himself when her small mouth was full to bursting with him, and all too soon he had to stop her. “Get on all fours on the bed, with your pretty little bottom facing me.” Irina looked pained at his command, but she obeyed, scrambling awkwardly into the position he requested while wishing desperately that she could cover herself somehow. Bryce reached down and dragged her closer to the edge of the bed. Ahhhhh, he’d though this would be just the right height, and it was. Her tight little cunny was at just the right level for the good hard fucking he was about to give it. “Fold your arms on the bed and put your head down on your arms. And don’t move.”

Sweet Jesus, the position he had ordered her to assume would leave her bottom and her privates wide open, displayed for his disgusting, nasty purposes. He’d plainly see that she was wet down there . . . he’d violate her with that huge weapon he carried between his legs or with his fingers . . . or both! Unconsciously doing exactly as he asked, Irina buried her head in her arms.

But Bryce was not contented with that. His brusque, low voice carried to her ears. “Arch your back and stick your bottom well out, Irina-mine.” She began to sob at this new humiliation, but Bryce merely chuckled, his hands always touching her intimately while she struggled to do his bidding. “Good girl, arch a bit more, push your bottom out. Now spread your knees wide apart, that’s a girl.”

Irina was beside herself with shame. How could her husband require this of her?

When she had finally attained the grotesquely displayed position he wanted, Bryce stroked and patted her hair as if she was a well-trained pet. For a long moment, he merely stood behind her, glorying in the site before him, noting how her skin was flushed with embarrassment, but also how her honey was practically dripping from her pussy. He could hear her soft sobs in the background, but, where her breasts hung down beneath her, the tips were rock hard. Bryce fancied he could see both her pussy and her tits throbbing with unrequited pleasure. His wife protested her position quietly and respectfully, as he expected.

But her body adored it.

Bryce noted the fading bruises on her upturned bottom cheeks. Well, he was sure there would soon be fresh replacements for those, if he knew his wife. This was his house, and he had some unique punishment implements that she would soon become quite well acquainted with – a school cane, a tawse he collected in Scotland, a birch rod, a solid oak paddle from America, and a sturdy rubber thong. Bryce ran his hand possessively over those creamy hillocks, teasing himself with the thought of making them glow a sore, painful red, of making her scream and beg wordlessly as he required, of the years of ownership he would spend reprimanding and fucking her at will, which was exactly what every woman – especially this one – needed.

Bryce positioned himself directly behind her, still fully clothed as a man should be, only his cock – the instrument of her instruction, of her submission – the huge head already seeping liquid was exposed, but only until he drove it into her in one stroke with no preamble.

Irina's head jerked up automatically as a cry was torn from her throat, filled to overflowing as she was with her husband's thick, hard organ. "Did I say you could look up, woman?" Bryce fairly snarled, reaching under her to grab two handfuls of young, tender breast and hold on tightly. "That'll cost you when I'm done, Irina. It'll cost you in stripes across your barely healed bottom." His powerful hips snapped feverishly up against hers in a deliberately savage, awkward rhythm that made her breasts try to sway in his iron grip. Each pounding stroke brought horrible pain to that tender flesh, and exponentially increased the unbearable ache between her legs as that dominating pole forced its way into and out of her pussy. He scolded her throughout the brutal rape. "Your mother was right. You need a strong, hard man to keep you in line. To discipline you often, and unfailingly, to the necessary degree of severity. To fuck you long and hard and make you come with it, despite your shame. To keep your belly full of his seed and his babies, and to remind you that you have no better place in this life than beneath him, taking him into your body as you were born to do."

A few short, sharp thrusts later, Bryce spent himself deep in her womb, fingers gripping and digging into that titty flesh throughout the lessening of his spasms. With a final groan, he withdrew to casually readjust himself. Seconds later, it was as if the incident had never happened for him.

But Irina was trying to recover, trying to deal with her still throbbing private area, which was pleasantly sore from his battering, and the distinct pain in each abused breast. Her head came up and her arms unfolded as if she was going to change positions.

"Stop. Did I say you could move?" When she didn't answer him instantaneously, he smacked the outside of her thigh with all his might.

"No, Sir. No, Sir," she babbled, immediately pulling herself back into place.

"Did you even ask if you could move?"

"No, Sir," her voice tinier, smaller, as if to make him overlook her indiscretion.

"I am very disappointed in you." He emphasized each word with another jolt to her bottom. "I thought I had made myself perfectly clear."

"Yes, Sir."

"Then you were being deliberately defiant, weren't you?"

She was caught between a rock and a hard place. “Uh- I - uh - “

He let lose with a storm of extremely hard spanks, two at a time, each set delivered to exactly the same spot. “Answer me!” he roared in a frighteningly quiet tone.

“I wasn’t trying to be!” she sobbed.

The spanking stopped abruptly. “Well, regardless of what you were trying for, you ended up flaunting my authority as your husband and disobeying me. And neither of those traits can ever go unpunished.” The same hand that had just been roasting her bottom horribly cupped her womanhood with exceptional care. The broad pad of his middle finger found her swollen woman’s bud and stroked slowly, almost casually as he listened to her sobs die out and her breathing change. Small whimpers escaped her lips, most especially when his other hand joined the fray and two work-roughened fingers were pressed to the hilt into her waiting, well-used pussy.

Irina was overwhelmed by the sensations he created within her. She wanted to hate him, she wanted to remain detached and cold, but she couldn’t when he did this to her. He commanded her body, overruling her mind completely, her whole being concentrated on the approaching, consuming pleasure.

She was close, so close, the tingling had begun and all of her muscles were gathering, contracting, gripping, reaching . . .

And then nothing. Bryce withdrew and stepped back, giving her room. “Get up and get the hairbrush from the vanity.”

When Irina failed to comply immediately, she felt the abrupt, shocking crack of his palm to the center of her being. Bryce slipped an arm around her slender waist, holding her tight as he administered another three tremendous swats, right where she lived, her screams and cries of abject pain as much music to his ears as her moans of intense pleasure.

“Do not make me repeat myself,” he warned, letting her go abruptly.

Naked and defeated, Irina slid off the bed and walked to the vanity. A hefty mahogany brush, shaped like an oven paddle, lay atop it. Knowing that he planned to use it on her poor defenseless bottom, Irina bit her lip as she brought it to him. “Good girl. Now assume the same position.”

Oh, God help her, she had to arrange herself again in that debasing manner, and he made the same critiquing comments, nudging her legs wider apart, pressing her head further down onto her arms, making her arch her back and present her bottom in the lewdest fashion possible . . . but the best targeting position.

A hand lay on the small of her back, and then she felt the business end of that brush against her backside seconds before it rose and fell with a vicious temper. Irina bawled loudly from the first stroke, barely able to catch her breath for the duration. Bryce peppered the whole area – bottom and the backs of her thighs – with crisp, hard swats, then fell back to what he had done with his hand – two unbearable slaps in a row, in the same spot. He knew himself how much that hurt. Judging by the crescendo of her wails, she was feeling it, too.

But she held her place throughout it, although he’d reduced her to a blubbing mass by the end. When he’d put the brush on her nightstand, Bryce turned and rolled her onto her back, lifting her legs over his shoulders and carefully placing his mouth over a juicy feminine morsel that hadn’t shrunk one iota, even with his dedicated roasting of her bottom. He leaned back a little and slipped two, then three fingers into her young pussy, opening her wide, stretching her good.

Irina hadn’t paid any attention to what he was doing until he commandeered all of her pleasure centers at once. She was still sobbing, hiccupping like a well-chastised little girl who’d had her first mind-blowing taste of her father’s belt and realized that that was what she was going to be subject to whenever she stepped out of line from that point on.

CENTURION

By Carolyn Faulkner

CHAPTER ONE

The acrid smell of dung and feces filled Brietta Driscoll's nose when she awoke slowly, the back of her head pounding fit to burst. She couldn't reach back to feel the size of the lump, but she knew it was there. Her worst fear had been realized: she'd been captured. Her heart began to try to hammer its way out of her chest. The only things that were a certainty in her life now were repeated rape and death.

She had to get out of here.

At first her eyes wouldn't focus in the pitch black, and she wasn't sure that that wasn't a good thing, considering where she was – the temporary jail the Centurion had had erected when he marched into her small town to suppress their puny rebellion. Once she'd oriented herself a little, and waited for the atrocious pounding in her head to abate some, Brietta pulled experimentally against the bonds that held her hands behind her back. There was no give. None at all. It was as if she, herself, had tied them, dammit. She could hear her brother, Dirce, cackling at her dilemma in that annoying manner of his. Of course, if he knew of her situation he would have already mounted a rescue attempt, however foolhardy. Dirce was the bravest warrior in the region – too bad he didn't quite have the brains to back up all that brawn and bravado.

That was where Brietta had always come in. Although her father certainly wished she hadn't been encouraged in such things, she could glance at a battle map and not only recall it immediately in intimate detail within her mind, but she could also see potential enemy weaknesses and make intelligent suggestions about how to exploit them, all thanks to a meddling grandfather who had ignored his son's wishes and educated his granddaughter right along with his grandson in most things. Unfortunately, she was too small to do much of the physical stuff, although her grandfather had insisted that she learn to defend herself in the best manner possible, so she learned – because Cedric the Hearty didn't believe in using snubbed swords in training – to be quick on her feet. She had several serious scars as reminders when she'd lost her concentration and forgotten to duck and dodge.

Luckily, though, her training – such as it was – hadn't really had to be done in secret, either, because Camlin was always gone on one campaign or another against the neighboring tribes. There was always some sort of rebellion to put down, and Camlin was never happier then when he was away from home – and away from his annoying children who always seemed to get into one scrape after another from dawn to dusk, most of them designed specifically to shame him and their name, he was quite sure.

Despite the fact that her head throbbed with even the smallest of movements, Brietta nonetheless began to pull against her bonds, and explore the small cell she was in as best she could. It was nothing but a hole – badly dug at that – with a heavy grate over the top. She struggled to her feet – falling several times in the process until she found her footing on the sloping floor – but she was much too short to reach the grate even if she managed to get her hands freed, somehow.

Settling back onto the floor in what must have been a more orderly fashion than she had arrived there originally, Brietta set her mind to concentrating on two things: regaining the use of her hands and remembering as much as she could about how she had gotten into this position.

Working her wrists and hands within the tight ropes rubbed her tender flesh raw in spots, but it would be more than worth it if she could manage to escape. It took her a long while but she was patient and eventually the already fraying ropes gave way. The first thing she did when her hands were free was to capture the long, lush fall of her hair in one of the remains of the rope, hiding her femininity – unsuccessfully, it had turned out – under her rough boy's cap. In the dense darkness, she got on all fours and felt around, gaining a physical knowledge of her surroundings. Her jail was less than three feet in

circumference and probably seven feet deep and . . . was apparently quite a busy place: her fingers encountered spongy, rotting flesh covered bones just under her nose.

Unable to control the reflex – not knowing whether she was desecrating the resting place of a man or an animal – Brietta turned and wretched. She didn't try to fight it, just live through it and go on. Her only real hope was to get out of this place and back to Hallobert Keep. When the spasms were over, she steeled herself and put her hands right back into the mess they had been in, rooting around for anything that could assist her escape.

After many long moments and several more instances doubled over, she had what she wanted: two long, strong bones. Leg bones, her mind wandered and imagined, and her gorge rose again but she fought it back. She had to keep a cool head, and ignore her weak stomach as much as was possible. Besides her puny stature – she barely reached most men's shoulders – it was her one true weakness, although usually it assailed her afterwards. She was a skilled healer – her garden at Hallobert Keep flourished with herbs and flowers meant to heal warriors after battle and assist women in childbirth. Brietta could keep a cool, calm head during the heart of the crisis – she'd sawed off bones and stitched up holes in chests and heads that made the stomachs of the huge men who had carried the poor victim in empty right in front of her.

But afterwards she could always be found hunched over her chamber pot, or letting fly out the nearest window.

But this was the here and now.

It took her what was probably several hours, but she managed to claw her way to the top of the hole using the bones to lift herself. The grate at the top – which weighed more than she did – was another obstacle she tackled patiently, inching it further and further to one side until, on her final attempt, she could shimmy her way out of that blasted hole. But she didn't spend time resting on her laurels – she tucked herself into a dark corner behind a tent and let her eyes adjust to the torchlight, clutching the remnants of her ragged shift as close to closed as she could get. No sense tempting fate any more than she had to – she'd already narrowly escaped rape before being thrown into the pit.

And five seconds later, a big, hard hand clamped down onto her shoulder. "What have we here?" boomed a loud, baritone voice.

Caught. She'd been caught not more than three minutes after she'd escaped. Brietta was terrified – not wanting to be thrown back into that dank hole in the ground – but more so she was mortified. Had all of her grandfather's training gone for naught with her? Was she, as a woman, somehow inherently stupid, like everyone else – besides her grandfather and her brother – thought?

She found herself roughly turned to face her captor – an optio, judging by his uniform and the way he carried himself. The centurion's second in command. Brietta cursed her small size. This man was huge – as all of the Romans seemed, and she had no real defense against such brawn. Grandfather had taught her to recognize opportunities for escape, to be cunning and smart against her enemy, but there was little he could do about the fact that she took after her delicate mother in regards to her size.

But that could be turned to her advantage, also, because men never expected a woman to think much.

They just wanted them to cook, bear children, and keep quiet. At least, that was what her father wanted of a woman, anyway.

"Well, what have we here?" He was speaking Latin and obviously had no idea that she understood him. Cedric had always said that one of the best ways to defeat an enemy was to know him inside and out – and that included learning their language. It was one of the areas Brietta had excelled at, much to the embarrassment of her less learned brother. She could speak most of the tribal dialects from

the regions around them, as well as that of the Franks and even quite a bit of the more guttural musings of the Jutes.

He frowned down at her. “Why, you’re the one we threw into the pit, aren’t you? The daughter of the local chieftain?” He didn’t wait for her response; not that Brie would have deigned to give him one anyway, but began to drag her away, past the richly decorated tent of the tribune with its colorful flags flying, across the camp to a modest tent with no flags of rank whatsoever.

Brietta steeled herself, knowing what was likely to happen next – he was probably throwing her into a tent full of lustful soldiers who would sate themselves with her before tearing her limb from limb. Her grandfather hadn’t been able to speak to her of this, but Ula, the old housekeeper who had been her maid and surrogate mother, had told her in a perversely gleeful tone, of the horrors she could expect to endure before she died in captivity, hoping it would convince her not to continue to go on raids with the band of rebels she led. Since she was still a virgin, and despite her unusual upbringing still sheltered from some things, she didn’t understand a lot of what she’d been told, but whatever it meant, it didn’t sound good. Not that it had had its desired effect and stopped her from risking her life.

But she knew that this tent was that of someone important, not by banners of rank, but rather those of heralds and crests. One of them looked very familiar and heralded the Dionisius family . . . there was something about that family and one of its warriors that stood out from all of the lectures her Grandfather had droned on about, but she was too addled by her current situation to recall it.

Still, just as she was tucked under the flap and shoved into the tent, Brie straightened her back. Whatever her fate, she would meet it head on, as honorable as she – a mere woman – could.

The inside was dimly lit, and as simple as the outside. There was a long table with a few crude chairs, a pile of furs over a bedraggled couch in one corner that must’ve been used as a bed for the occupant, and a fire in a brazier that barely managed to take the chill off the damp evening air. Most of his armor was hung carefully from a wooden rack in one corner, the mark of his rank – his helmet – resting atop it. A centurion commanded eighty men within a legion, and during the heat of battle he needed to be easily recognizable. Unlike the rest of the men, the pale horsehair crest on his helmet went side to side instead of front to back. This was a man who had probably been fighting so-called barbarians for the Romans for more than fifteen years. He would have been pulled from the ranks and elevated to his lofty status because of his success and bravery in many battles. His staff – almost as thick around as a man’s wrist and nearly as tall, with what looked to be a gold phinial at the top – was propped next to the ensemble. She shuddered, having recently seen many such vine sticks in use – all in exceedingly unpleasant ways.

For the first time since she’d awakened, Brietta became aware that she was cold. Very cold. Gooseflesh rose on her arms and her nipples peaked painfully against the rough fabric of her tunic. At first she thought she was alone, but then a deep masculine voice rumbled into her ear from a point to her right that was almost close enough to touch her. “What’s this?” before the owner of the voice moved around in front of her, giving her a good look at the man who held her life in his hands.

If she hadn’t been alert prior to being shepherded into this place, she was now. Just looking at the man with the booming voice made every inch of her body, from her hair to her toes tingle. The nipples that were already pinched tight rose just that much more, as if blatantly trying to attract his attention, offering their hard, fleshy selves to him. He was a huge man. Bigger than anyone she’d ever seen before. Dirce was the largest of their warriors, the largest one she’d ever seen . . . until now. The Romans completely dwarfed the Anglo-Saxon warriors. This man had to be at least a head taller than Dirce, and almost twice as wide at the shoulders. His bare arms were tanned and massively muscled, rippling with veins and criss-crossing scars from previous battles. He was a walking, breathing testament to the strength and success of the Roman war machine.

Brietta had never reacted to any man this way before, and she certainly didn't want to react to this one. Especially now that she was in a severely disadvantaged position. She wanted to present him with a strong front. Brietta was quite alarmed to realize that that was the least of what she wanted at this point. She wanted to kiss him - to run just her fingertips over that broad chest and watch his eyes eagerly for any sign of reaction . . .

Startled and dismayed at her own thoughts, Brie consciously reined herself in, ducking her head immediately and trying to appear as meek as possible.

But apparently she was too late. The giant's curiosity was already caught, and to her complete and utter horror, he stepped even closer, coming into the dim light of the brazier, shadows falling on tanned flesh and carelessly highlighting the jet black locks and his sheer, masculine width.

It was all she could do to keep her eyes on those huge, leather booted feet as severe disappointment in herself flooded her stomach. She had always considered that she was nearly as good as Dirce. She would never hope to match his raw strength, of course, but she could - and did whenever challenged - meet or exceed it sometimes - always with intelligence and cunning.

Although it was unlikely, she'd learned as she'd grown up, her grandfather had filled her head with tales of past Celtic Queens and embellishing on the accomplishments of current, regional female rulers, hinting broadly that if she worked hard enough she might just join their exalted ranks . . . and Brietta had believed, foolishly, it seemed, as one by one those she'd held in high esteem had fallen, overcome - usually, and even more humiliatingly by her own father - either by use of brute force or out and out seduction. Far be it for her Father to do more work than was necessary when he could manage to accomplish his goal by tipping some wench onto her back - queen or no.

Brietta had seen the violence with which Camlin often took his women - granted, they were usually slaves or household help, but still. The sounds of the helpless girls' screams had often drifted into her chamber on any given night - and even sometimes during the day . . . it confused her if she thought about it too much, because those niggling sounds often resembled moans of pleasure rather than screams of pain. But she'd also accidentally walked into her father's chamber and that scene - two naked bodies writhing, her father groping the serving girl's ample, rounded breasts hard as he worked his hips back and forth from where he lay between her outspread legs.

A small shudder ran through Brietta at the thought. She had resolved long ago that she would never let any man do anything like that to her, and had confessed her feelings of disgust to her maid, Ula, who had merely cackled at her.

"Aye, you'll do it - once you're married it'll be your husband's right to crawl between your legs any time he likes. And if you're a good wife, you'll not say nay to him."

Brietta, who was all of eleven at the time, and not yet betrothed due to her grandfather's machinations, had squared her shoulders and shook her head vehemently. "Then I shan't get married."

Ula, who was busily trying to dry her charge's long mane of hair at the time, yanked the impudent girl's head back sharply as she rubbed at the wet scalp with a rough cloth fit to leave the girl bald in patches. "You'll marry who your father chooses, girl - old, young, fat, slim - you're your father's to give away to any man who'll make him a good allegiance."

"Marcus - our guest here is cold." That sharp, humiliatingly suggestive tone snapped her rudely out of her reverie as his blatantly insulting gaze swept down her body, and suddenly Brietta was reminded that most of her body was exposed . . . and that she really *was* cold. " - stoke the fire."

"This is the girl that was captured with that rag-tag band of Anglos. She's been enjoying the unique hospitality of the pit. I just happened to have the pleasure of running into her just as she was trying to make her escape." The eager optio did exactly as he was told as he spoke, a knowing smirk on his face that disappeared as soon as the bigger man began to speak again.

“Who were the guards that should have been watching her?” The question was asked in a deceptively off-hand manner, as he was crossing the room to gather a rough blanket.

A shiver ran down Brietta’s spine, and she was suddenly extremely glad that she wasn’t one of those men.

“Gaius and Antonio,” came the snapped back information. “Lucius, they –
“Deal with them.”

Unconsciously, Brietta’s eyebrow rose at the absolute command in his voice. This was a man who was used to being obeyed and would never tolerate either being questioned or – Gods forbid, being out and out disobeyed. And he and the smaller man obviously had a fairly close relationship of long standing, or he would have had to explain himself further. They knew each other well enough that few words were necessary.

She had studied the constructs of the Roman army at her grand father’s behest – as well as Latin - and knew that the chances were that these two men had seen a lot of hard battles together, and that as a centurion – the undisputed commander of eighty Roman soldiers who would live and die by his word – he would have been given the right to choose his own second-hand-man – his optio.

She filed away the part of his name she had learned, struggling to recall why that name sounded

Having been an assignment, Marcus departed through the tent flap, leaving Brietta with a big smirk, as if he knew what awaited her in the clutches of this giant of a man.

But what he did then amazed and surprised him when she found the blanket wrapped around her shaking shoulders. It was a gallant gesture that almost made her smile, until he moved in front of her to pull the flaps around her, reaching under the blanket to cup a taut breast, lightly pinching the already peaked nipple.

When her fist hit his shoulder, she automatically shifted a little to bring her leg around behind his while he was off balance from the blow so that she would have the leverage she would need to push him onto the floor – and from there, hopefully, flee this forsaken place with her hide – and her virginity – still firmly intact.

But he was bigger and stronger than any other man she’d ever encountered, and for a moment, when she realized that what had been a full-force, total-body punch to her was barely noticeable to him, her mouth hung open carelessly. He wasn’t knocked off balance in the least.

In fact, the bastard was grinning down at her, his huge paw still cupping her intimately, his fingers pinching a little harder until she could barely subdue a squeal. “Well, it seems we have a fighter on our hands. Perhaps I should take you to Rome and see how you’d do in the arena.”

Every ounce of blood left her face at his words. Until then, she had been living in her own little fantasy world, where she inevitably fight her way out of the huge Roman encampment and back safely to her home – to Dirce and Ula and Grandfather and her menagerie of pets, where her Grandfather would scold her for getting captured in the first place and drill her from morning till evening until she nearly dropped from exhaustion.

The man in front of her, touching her in a place where no other man had ever dared, and doing it as if he had every right and expectation of doing so, was the true reality of her situation. She was his – and, considering some of the other possible options, he was the lesser of any evils.

It was impossible, however, considering his sheer size, to think of him as the lesser of anything. Especially when his second hand came up to claim her other breast and squeeze it as he kneaded it, not unlike how Siobhan, the cook, kneaded the day’s bread.

He was being deliberately hurtful, watching her eyes and her face closely for every nuance of her reaction to what he was doing. Brietta drew a deep breath and expelled it slowly, closing her eyes and trying to divorce herself from what he was doing, but he wasn’t about to have any of that. Her eyes flew

open and she stared right into his as he wrapped the long length of her hair along his thick forearm and grasped it close to her skull with his fist, prying back her head, but keeping her eyes as he bent towards her breast. Brietta hadn't given up, but nothing she did – none of the attempted kicks or quick moves was met with anything other than an annoyingly amused chuckle. His mouth descended lower and lower until his lips encircled her still upright nipple.

It was a flash that lasted only seconds, but he bared his teeth just slightly before they sank into that tender flesh.

She could no more control the guttural scream that erupted from her throat than she could stop him from doing whatever he wanted to her. Pain was only part of its impetus, however – the rest of it was pure unadulterated anger. Brietta had never been forced to submit to much of anyone. Oh, her Father when he bothered to pay attention to her, she supposed, but not often enough that she couldn't slough it off. She did submit to her Grandfather, but then she wanted to do that – she wanted to learn anything the old man could teach her. Even though he was older than she was, she'd never really bowed to her brother – even though he could overpower her easily once he grew up, and she was often on the receiving end of a cuff from him when her mouth ran amok with her, she always found a way to get even for anything she considered to be a slight.

But this – she had no idea how to deal with this. She was entirely at her enemy's mercy. And he was thoroughly enjoying every second of it. To think she had wondered what it would be like to kiss this monster! Although his teeth were clamped so tightly on that bud that she thought it might come off entirely, his lips were drawn back into a grimacing grin – and not just to show the horror of what he was doing. Their eyes were as locked together as his teeth and her nipple, and, once she'd come down from the scream and was trying desperately to remain as still as possible so as not to jostle herself in his mouth, he gave her a slow, deliberate wink.

Brietta's teeth – which were one of her crowning glories since they were all healthy and fairly white – were grinding together so violently that if she had been in her right mind she would have worried about breaking them. But all of her attention was focused on this horror of a man, just as he intended, she was sure. She could no more look away from what he was doing to her – from the pain he was causing her – than she could have defeated him in the Arena.

Finally, she couldn't stand still and take it one second longer – Brietta tried to wrench away from him, from the source of her pain, but thought better of it when she began to think her nipple was being torn off.

Still keeping that tidbit between his teeth, he managed to growl, "Stand still, little bird. All of your frantic movement is just making it worse."

She hated that he was right, and that she had already decided in her own mind to do as he was commanding, but now it would look like she was obeying him, and Brietta couldn't have that, so she did exactly the opposite and began to fight him for all she was worth. He ended up letting go of his precious captive, but only long enough to get a better hold on her. As hard as Brietta tried – and she knew her life as she knew it was on the line here, that if this man was able to overpower her, which seemed depressingly inevitable, that nothing she knew would ever be the same – and despite all of her training, she ended up being defeated by the basest of methods – brute force. With those arms wrapped around her there was no place she could go – certainly not towards the barbarian, and not backwards, either. As he tightened his embrace, moving became less of a concern and breathing replaced it. The man was atrociously strong, and he kept her bound against him, waiting with apparent infinite patience while she struggled futilely, reduced, really to only being able to move her feet, and that just the barest of bits.

At one point, he lifted her entirely off her feet, so that she had no choice but to lean against him for support. She kicked at his shins almost dutifully, because she knew that was what she should be doing, but with no real heart in it.

She was well and truly caught, and chances were that she wasn't going anywhere until he decided to let her.

If he didn't kill her first, or sell or give her to someone else.

Like his men.

All eighty of them.

CHAPTER TWO

He waited. Like the hunter warrior he was. His patience seemed infinite while she strove to look anywhere but at him. Eventually, though, her ribs started to ache, and there was nowhere else to look. Brie didn't want to give him the advantage of closing her eyes, so she looked at him.

The triumph she saw reflected there felt like he had kicked her in the gut with those huge Roman boots. She saw her own defeat in those deceptively calm brown eyes.

She had met her match. More than her match.

Not that she would ever give up. He'd have to kill her. In the long run, she knew she'd prefer it to what he probably had planned for her.

Once he finally set her down, though, he managed to shock her again – although, in retrospect she wondered why she was surprised at what he'd done – by removing the tattered rags of her shift entirely by grabbing the collar and ripping what had been a carefully stitched seam in sturdy – if rough – fabric, proving to her again, silently, just how strong he was. The beleaguered garment fell away from her and she was forced to stand there in front of him in all her naked glory. When Brietta's hands and arms came up automatically to cover herself, her eyes wide and shocked, she found them slapped away in an almost matter of fact manner, as if he had anticipated that move from her – and had dealt with it expertly before, no doubt, in other situations just like this.

“By the Gods, what bounty you were hiding under those rags!” he breathed, taking in every inch of exposed, rapidly rosy flesh. He spoke in Latin, as if it was an uncontrollable utterance that just had to come out in his native tongue. And Brietta was doing nothing to disabuse him of the notion that she didn't understand Latin.

Brietta tried again to shield herself from his lascivious view, but found her hands knocked away with more force this time.

“Hands by your sides – if you move them again, I'll bind them behind you.” He issued the threat – in her native language – with a carelessness that shouldn't have surprised her, but it did. He must've been used to situations just like this, probably having looked over many a prisoner – in just such a humiliating manner – in his time.

She didn't think she could possibly be any more mortified than she already was, but then he proceeded to prove her wrong. He took a few small steps away from her – not too far, but far enough that he could really look at her. He even stepped away shortly to bring the brazier closer, so that he could get a better look at her, as if she was some sort of oddity or freak that he needed to examine in minute detail. He even went around behind her, cupping her bottom with those rough-palmed hands and making her start. “Stand still!” he barked. “I won't tell you again, woman.”

From that point on during the humiliating inspection, he never stopped touching her – his fingertips – callused of course – were dragged up her back and across the small width of her shoulders, then, as he moved around to face her again, fluttering over her collarbone then around to the back of her head.

Lucius regarded the woman carefully, not quite believing the rumors about how hard she had fought when captured, and how many men it had taken to throw her into the pit – which, he now admitted to himself, was a mistake of the highest order. He gathered her hair – which was, despite the inevitable dirt, incredibly soft and silky in his palm – close to her scalp and wrenched her head back, hard enough to hurt her. Regardless of what was true about her – chieftain's warrior daughter be damned – it

never hurt to make sure a prisoner – or any woman – knew her true place in the world. Preferably on her knees in front of him, giving the ultimate pleasure.

Her eyes widened for a second in fear, but she quickly conquered it – he liked that. He liked women who still had the fight in them. It was a sweet distraction from his duties to tame them, as he always did. He wanted to kiss her, and wasn't about to deny himself anything about this woman, so he slowly lowered his head towards hers, mouth slightly open, taking her reluctant mouth and twisting it open with his lips and tongue like a particularly sweet fruit.

Lucius yelped and jumped a few inches back when her teeth clamped down efficiently on his tongue. Annoyed at himself – as well as her – he swiped at the offended part, and seeing no blood, turned his narrow eyed attention back to the baggage at hand.

Spunk he didn't mind. Out and out attack, he would not tolerate. It was time she began to learn that she was no longer the cosseted daughter of whatever local head of state there was. She was his to do with entirely as he pleased.

There was fear in her eyes, but she quickly conquered it. She was brave, he had to give her that. Most female prisoners would be groveling at his feet by now – but not this one. But then, most women would not have earned lodging in the pit – nor have found a way to escape from it, he admitted with grudging respect.

She was in bad need of being taught a lesson, and he was just the man to do it – so that she'd remember it, but without marring that delicate, milky skin of hers. Lucius moved around behind her again, bending down quickly to catch up a leather thong from the nearby table. Her wrists were roughly yanked behind her, and, within second, they'd been quickly and efficiently immobilized.

Apparently, the princess didn't like this turn of events at all – she struggled for quite some time, trying to loosen the bonds, but he'd tied them well. Meanwhile, he stood, entranced, in front of her as her breasts swayed provocatively back and forth, as if she was trying to entice him with her feminine attributes, which were quite considerable, hidden as they'd been under those disreputable garments - full, heavy breasts with their dusky mauve tips already at attention – just where he wanted them.

Reaching around behind her, he grabbed hold of her hands, fingers looping around her wrists as surely as the leather, pulling her side against him, but forcing her hands down and forcing her to arch her back, presenting those lovely titties to him as if they were begging for some attention that he was only too happy to give them.

Brietta's head was forced back along with her shoulders as he tugged on her arms relentlessly, and she couldn't see what he was doing – but she felt it all right. His open palmed hand slapped her left breast, laying into it with a resounding crack, then doing the same to the other, although it wasn't quite as effective because that luscious mound was partly trapped against him. So he craned her further back and more away from him and did it again – harder.

Brietta couldn't stifle a yelp of pure fear and pain.

An evil smile spread across Lucius' face. That little song was so completely satisfying to him he almost disgraced himself before the game was done. He slapped each wobbling knoll again, and then fell into a natural rhythm, just as he did when he used his vine stick on a shirker, back and forth, covering the entire tantalizing area as she tried to dodge the blows but was held fast. Another jerk on her wrists and she even appeared to be offering herself up for even more abuse, but her wails and cries belied that idea.

The next area to gain his punishing attentions was those impudent nipples, so he began to use just the last couple of inches of his hard fingers, whacking those sensitive nubs mercilessly while growing harder and harder at the sounds of her agonized screams.

After thirty or so more hard volleys that were sure to leave her breasts bruised all over, he caught her mouth and turned her head to him, watching the tears as they slipped from her eyes, her chest heaving

against him. “That should learn even an ignorant barbarian female not to bite her betters.” He deliberately kissed her, using lots of his injured tongue within her shrinking mouth, as if to prove his mastery over her.

Brietta was seconds away from biting him again – abuse be damned – but then he withdrew and cautioned, “If you ever try something like that again, I’ll have all of your teeth knocked right out of your head.” He grinned again at her horrified expression. “A soft, toothless mouth makes some things even more pleasurable for a man than they already are.”

Either she was playing dumb or she didn’t know what he meant. Either way, it really didn’t make much difference to him.

Lifting and holding her flattened against him, he moved towards what looked like a pile of furs, but when one of his arms reached down and swept the piles away, he revealed a disreputable looking couch. Brietta couldn’t help thinking that it was probably the scene of many such assaults as what he was going to subject her to. Tears came unbidden to her eyes, but she ruthlessly drove them back. He could do whatever he wanted – the Gods knew he would, regardless – but she vowed within her own mind that he would never make her cry, and that, through it all, she would try to remain as quiet as possible, so as not to shame herself or her family in life or in death.

The mustiness of the couch assailed her senses – it stank of previous like encounters as well as the sweat and dirt and dust of what had undoubtedly been a long march – as he lowered the both of them none too gently onto it. Brietta longed for the scented rushes of home, and her own bed, but instead what lay in front of her – on top of her – was an oafish lout of a Roman soldier, who was busily divesting her of what little clothing she had left in her possession.

But there was a more pressing concern than even that: he was so heavy she could barely breathe. The room began to swim around her, and Brietta realized that that might just be her saving grace – she could pass out. It appeared that there was no denying the fact that she was going to be raped, but it would be considerably more bearable if she was unconscious during it. And, if he decided to do away with her entirely, she would simply never come around again.

She was so tired of fighting that that solution sounded wonderful to her – however cowardly. To just go to sleep, let the fading, swirling world go away and welcome sweet oblivion.

But the centurion wasn’t about to let her get away from him so easily. He shifted to one side, and suddenly she could take a deep breath, and the tingling in her fingers and teeth slowly subsided – especially when she took a huge breath and screamed as a huge, rudely prodding hand made its way down her soft, bare skin to the juncture of her thighs.

A scream from her within her own house would have brought all the servants and everyone else running – well, maybe not her father. It would depend on what he was doing at the time. But Dirce would have broken down any door to get to her. Here, it just put that degrading and demeaning smirk on the big man’s face.

“Did you really think that any one in this camp would pay attention to a woman’s scream? Granted, they’re more used to hearing moans of pleasure when I have a woman in my tent, but cries of pain aren’t uncommon enough to cause any sort of concern.”

Pleasure? Brietta thought scornfully. That was not a likely prospect, as far as what she knew went on between a man and a woman. She considered herself to be as ready as possible for the pain she was about to endure, although she wasn’t necessarily all that sure what it would involve. Ula’s taunt about her husband having the right to crawl between her legs had shocked her at the time, more because she had no idea that there could be any sort of pain – or pleasure – involved in that area of her body. Granted, she’d had the usual cramps during her cycle, but those were in her lower belly, not her crotch.

She couldn’t imagine what kind of discomfort could be involved, although Camlin’s women certainly hadn’t looked like they were having a very good time. There wasn’t much down there, as far as

she knew – not that she'd spent any time looking or exploring that part of her body, and she certainly hadn't let anyone else have anything to do with it either. Oh, some of the young men in the area – those who had thought incorrectly that she could be subdued or taken at their will – had tried, of course. Most of them had gone away hunched over, clutching their balls after a most lethal jerk of her knee into those precious family jewels.

One unlucky would-be suitor ended up practically withdrawing a bloody stump when he made bold enough to reach for her down there as they were dancing. His family had been most unhappy when he emitted a blood curdling scream and held up his arm for all to see, dripping with blood as it was and barely hanging on by a thread of skin, thanks to the ultra-sharp dirk she always kept beneath her serviceable shift.

If only she had that knife now, the Centurion would be singing a different tune, she thought nastily. He was too damned big for her to use any of her usual moves on him – his one leg trapped both of hers and considering its weight she had no hope of ever moving it.

Without warning, he insinuated that thick leg between her much smaller ones, forcing her naked body to open to him, to reveal her most private area. She was truly mortified – naked and held still by his superior strength, yanked and held open, nothing barred from his eager, heated gaze. Brietta did try to struggle against him, but stopped quickly when she realized how humiliatingly easily he held her still – a mere contraction of the arm that held her rendered her unable to move a muscle of her upper body, while his hands and legs were in complete control of the most intimate parts of her.

And, within seconds, he had those virgin lips pried wide apart by the strategic placement of his pinky finger and thumb. Brietta wanted to crawl under the ancient, well worn couch with complete embarrassment. Nothing she had been told had prepared her for this reality – for the fact that her skin felt too tight for her body, that she was completely flushed hot and her face felt like it was going to explode from the humiliation of having a total stranger not only looking at her intimate treasures, but fondling them as if he owned them.

And, she supposed, to his mind, he did.

His unoccupied fingers amused themselves by tickling her gently, learning her curves and valleys and particularly delighting at that extremely sensitive bundle of flesh at the top of her mons. His middle finger slipped down that soft valley to the opening of her body through which her menstrual fluids flowed, trying to press upwards into her, but something was preventing him – it was nothing she was actively doing, but rather some sort of defense system her body already had.

With his leg between hers, Brietta had a little more room to move, and she took advantage of it, making a desperate attempt to crawl out from under him. But he took care of that in a way that made her wish she had just stayed still: by the time he was through with the small leather thongs he produced from beside the couch, her legs were yanked back and apart, so that she was completely exposed to him, and unbelievably helpless in the face of whatever he decided he wanted to do with her.

“Much better,” he murmured, more to himself than to her. That low rumble and his hot breath melted over her nether lips, and much to Brietta's horror, she shuddered less with the humiliation of it than with another, even more uncomfortable feeling, that was worse both for its new, frightening intensity as who was causing it within her.

He was using something – probably the tip of a finger – to manipulate that fleshy nub, wetting his fingers in his mouth for a second, making that swollen bit come to attention, as if reaching out for him and his continued caresses. Since both his hands were free, the fingers of his second hand were also busy trying to press up into her, but they weren't getting very far.

Her untried state gave Lucius pause for thought. She was a virgin. By all rights, considering her beauty and chastity, he should save her for the slave markets in Rome, where she'd fetch a pretty penny -

perhaps even enough to become legate, with his pay as centurion and if the emperor deigned to supplement everyone's pay with the traditional, bonus donativa, although one could never tell with emperors.

But, there was more than one way to skin a barbarian, and he was not adverse to using the back door when necessary. He knew many a soldier who actually preferred that method of taking a slave or prisoner, especially, enjoying the exceptional tightness and not having to worry about impregnating the bitch or marring her worth.

He wanted to have a bit of fun with this haughty tidbit before he put her in with the rest of the human stock – under guard, he reminded himself of her wiles.

Maybe she'd be worth keeping, after all . . . he'd have to see what she yielded . . . which he intended to be close to everything.

Oblivious to everything, including what the man who was holding her was thinking, Brietta's mind was buried deep in the mortification she felt at his manhandling of her most intimate parts. No one had ever touched her there. She barely did it herself, and only when necessity dictated – yet there he was fondling and examining her minutely. Why, he'd even craned himself down there so that he could get a better look at her! She thought she was going to die of the humiliation.

Then he did the most curious thing – he brought his fingers up to his mouth and licked them, wetting them for some unknown purpose. They returned to her crease and he began to manipulate her in the most annoyingly pleasant way.

He already had control over enough of her – she had never thought that her body itself would turn on her. And she certainly didn't want to derive any pleasure from whatever he was doing to her. But it seemed she had little choice in the matter. Her body seemed to both recognize and welcome his attentions, even though her mind railed at him in disgust.

Brietta's whole body seemed to flush hot, and those abused nipples tightened and tautened again, jutting out as if hoping to catch his eye, while the area his hand had claimed and was abusing in this unusual way began to weep in welcome. The brute dipped his hand down to press uncomfortably up into her again, respecting the barrier there but gathering her dew to bring it back up to the now swollen bit, which he proceeded to pinch and worry, all the while never taking his eyes off her.

His groin swelled to uncomfortable proportions. He knew his barbarian women! These Anglo-Saxons had a tendency to be cold fish – he hadn't met one yet that he'd had any particular interest in. The Franc's women – ahhhhhhhhh, there was a sensuous lot, that, Lucius thought to himself. But the females on these tiny islands were cold and sharp and unusually dirty.

This one was quite a prize. Lucius' sensual tastes were varied when he indulged them, which was not too often. His personal philosophy was that lying with too many women weakened a man, and he had his eyes set on better things than ending his moderately illustrious sixteen year career with the Army as a centurion. He wanted a senatorial seat, but didn't have the family background to slip easily into one, like some he could mention – generals and legates in the army who had rank but no military experience whatsoever. As far as Lucius was concerned, any soldier with any skills in battle at all should naturally question the orders that came from such as they, but that was the Army.

He enjoyed bringing a woman to the ultimate pleasure – willing or unwilling. Preferably unwilling, frankly. He liked being in control of a woman. Roman women – of whom he'd had few, granted, since he spent so much time out on campaign – were too passive. They – the middle and upper class ones, anyway, were taught from birth to submit to their men. He liked some fight in his women, and this one was playing right into his hands – and his body was sitting up and taking notice – painfully so.

It was amazing how a woman could be lead around by that small scrap of flesh. Of course, some men could be steered wrong by their own more considerable scrap, too. Never him, of course. She was a

virgin, and no one else had probably ever touched her there, and he was giving her her very first taste of sexual pleasure – and she was enjoying it, entirely against her will. How delicious!

Brietta hated what he was doing to her with so casually, as if he was flicking a speck of dirt off her shift, he was flicking that place she'd never dreamed existed, making her leg muscles contract as if cramping, causing her hips to arch like some willing wanton, when that couldn't possibly be further from the truth.

Her one saving grace was the pain in her shoulders from the way her wrists were still bound behind her back. It kept her closer to grounded than she would have been, and when she realized that fact, she concentrated everything she had on that niggling, sharp ache, until she was able to immerse herself in it and ignore what he was doing to her.

The wench's reluctant moans and begging hips died, slowly, but they did die out, and, for a moment, Lucius could only look at her carefully, trying to consider what he might have done that precipitated that lack of response. He couldn't come up with anything until he saw her wince when she moved her shoulders, and then he had it. She was hurting, and it was cutting into her pleasure. Well, he could solve that, and he proceeded to do just that – not releasing her hands entirely, but rather resecuring them above her head, so that she wasn't lying on them. It was no wonder she wasn't enjoying herself – he'd been pretty much on top of her, and all their weight must've put quite a strain on her arms.

Brietta was cursing her need to move to alleviate the ache she'd felt in her shoulders – now there was nothing for her to think about other than what he was doing to her body – driving it crazy – driving her beyond her natural reticence about such things.

His sandpaper fingers were rubbing over and over her, dipping down occasionally to grab more of her own lubricant – reinforcing the fact that she was participating in her own humiliation. In fact, Brietta couldn't keep herself from moving her hips wantonly or arching as if she was asking for the humiliation he was putting her through – bound and naked as she was. Her head whipped back and forth between the white columns of her arms, and small, unbidden – and completely unwanted – moans of what sounded depressingly like pleasure kept escaping her lips. But when she closed her mouth, they became even more throaty and sensuous sounding. Since she was also breathing hard, she gave up and chose the less embarrassing of the two, although the whole experience was making her want to crawl back in the pit from whence she'd come.

He seemed wholly incapable of leaving her be – touching her everywhere with his free hand, making use of it as he continued to manipulate her privates, pinching each still hurting nipple into staunch, aching attention, cupping here, fondling there, and there was precious little she could do but hope to live through it and not shame herself too badly. She had to live to get back to her duties . . . and her family.

The feelings he was eliciting from her – forcing her to succumb to – were making her mad. They built, one upon the other, but seemed to have no where to go. He pressed the heel of his hand against the top of her mound and, with slow, firm deliberation dragged the tips of his ring, middle and index fingers over and over that straining peak, fingers almost vibrating slightly as it went, driving her absolutely mad with an incredibly intense pleasure she didn't want to feel.

Worse yet, he began to talk to her and encourage her to surrender to him. To give herself up to him, to whatever goal it was that he was trying to bring her to. That was the last thing she wanted, but her body had completely opposite ideas. It was definitely enjoying what he was doing – even though he had no right to do it, and he was her sworn mortal enemy merely by virtue of the fact that he was Roman. Her body had never betrayed her like this before – oh, it had been a weak, woman's body to be sure – but to so gleefully defect just for transient pleasure –

The tingling that had suffused her lower body was concentrating more and more – as he was evilly encouraging it to – in that tender spot he was molesting, and all of a sudden she thought she was going to faint from the sheer intensity of the feelings, until her entire body, it seemed, began these long, blissful contractions. She was ashamed to admit that if her hands had been free, she would have reached down and grabbed his wrist to make sure he kept his hand right where it was. As it was, she couldn't keep herself from moaning and writhing in the throes of whatever it was that he had done to her. She kept contracting and contracting and contracting – and there seemed to be no way she could stop it, once she'd recovered her senses enough to want to.

“Centurion!” A deep masculine voice interrupted whatever the horrid man had planned for her.

The Roman scum looked highly disappointed at the interruption, and his voice reflected his feelings. “What?” he asked sharply, switching to Latin.

“Watch command wanted to see you, Sir.”

Brietta, who had closed her eyes, could feel his low growl against her skin. “I'll be there.”

“Yes, Sir.”

Lucius scrambled off the luscious tidbit that had dropped into his lap through some unknown workings of the Gods. Seeing her lying there, bathed in the afterglow of what was undoubtedly her first orgasm, he completely shunned the idea of selling her in Rome. He wanted her all to himself. She was the first female he'd had any whiff of interest in since Gaul, and it was well past the time he found someone on which to indulge his baser needs. The Gods knew he detested the camp followers that trundled – rag tag – after the Army wherever it went. Those women were a little too practiced, a little too blasé.

He wanted someone fresh and impressionable and shockable, like this one, who was still blushing from head to toe from what he'd done to her, although she'd wailed like a regular banshee during her pleasure. Lucius adored being able to force a woman to such ecstasy against her will. It was a nice complement to the pain he also adored inflicting . . .

He let his big hand reach down to caress that flat, white tummy. Soon she would be his in all manner of ways that he enjoyed. She might get some pleasure from it, under his strict tutelage, but he would control whether or not it – ever – came to fruition. She'd have to be extraordinarily good, his new slave, and a quick learner, to earn such pleasure again for a while. But he would get just as much excitement – if not more – from her screams of agony.

“I will return shortly. Stay where you are – not that you have much choice.” His tone sounded like he was grinning evilly at her predicament, and he was.

All in all, it had been a fine morning.

For him.

CHAPTER THREE

For long moments after he'd left, Brietta merely lay there, awash in mortification truer than she'd ever imagined existed. Her whole world had been turned upside down. She'd never even considered the possibility of being captured – not really. Oh, Grandfather had tried to prepare her for it as best he could, although he didn't really know what it would entail, either. All anyone had was rumors about the tortures the Romans inflicted on those who resisted, and the reality of the fact that they had a habit of draining those conquered towns – and the conquering was really a foregone conclusion as no one had been able to truly fight off the world's most skilled and efficient army for any length of time – of their former inhabitants either by wholesale slaughter or shipping the population off to the slave markets in Rome.

So she had become a part of the local resistance cell, and eventually, despite several members' misgivings, its leader. Tredan of Kilt was one of her most vehement detractors, and he had actually stormed out in protest when she was voted in. He was also the man her father was angling to betroth her to – and she was angling to slip away from. He made a little too free with his hands for her comfort. That wasn't going to be a concern any longer, she thought bitterly, either his hands or the betrothal, after this.

If she lived.

They were a secret society that had enjoyed a modicum of success in crippling certain elements of their oppressors' army by stealth and craftiness, decimating a store of supplies here, a small hunting party there . . . picking anyone off that looked vulnerable. Indeed, their methods, at times, could be mere passive aggression – giving incorrect directions and names to things in hopes of confusing things while appearing to acquiesce as best they could.

Brietta's father's keep was one of the few left standing in the Bath area, but then he had been cooperating in hopes of keeping his title and general officiousness. The Roman's needed leaders in the area to show their support for the invasion, and Camlin was only too happy to do so, as long as it meant he got to keep what he considered to be rightfully his.

Grandfather Cedric, however, spat into the dirt every time he made mention of the Romans – or his recalcitrant offspring, for that matter – and fully supported Brietta's foray into trying to slowly, steadily oust this foreign cancer from their lands.

Tears welled into her eyes at the thought of her crusty old grandfather, and even her father, who never had much good to say about her. His thoughts and attention had all been for Dirce, not his worthless girl child. She missed Dirce so much she could barely stand it.

Chances were, though, that, after this, he wouldn't even want to look at her. She'd be damaged goods from now on, and, although it was something she had always avowed she didn't want, no man would have her once she'd been defiled by Roman scum – and she wouldn't want any man who'd take her in her disgraced condition.

But she had to get away from here. She had to try to save herself, and get back to her brother with the, granted, small amount of information she'd been able to glean about the Roman numbers and intentions. It wouldn't be much, but perhaps there could be a last stand . . .

Brietta sighed, knowing she was grasping at straws. It was all but over. Her father would strike his bargain with the devil and she would be lucky to escape being stoned to death. All because she let herself get captured. No difference that the small tribe of them had been ambushed as well as hopelessly outnumbered.

So here she was, naked, stretched out on a Roman Centurion's couch as if an offering to their Gods. The Gods might have been more merciful than he was. Brietta thought that she would have much

preferred if he had tortured her. She was mentally prepared for that. As it was, he had snuck around all of her defenses against him and had brought her to a howling pleasure that shook the very foundations of her self. She'd been shown a part of her body she'd never known existed, by a man who felt he owned her, as well as the very air she breathed, and the land they stood on, even though she knew the family who had owned the land the encampment was on, and he definitely wasn't from it.

There was nothing – save whatever rank and power he wielded here – took keep bands of soldiers from taking full advantage of what they found, should they bother to peek in the flap. Not that she would have wanted to have been one of them if he found out, but still. She was a prize to him. A bauble. And not of much value, considering the way he was displaying her.

Brietta drew a deep, slow breath in through her nose to try to calm herself, but all she got was an odorous reminder of him – the pervasive smells of leather and sweat and dirt. She needed to concentrate, and not let her fear and loathing and deep, deep shame run away with her common sense. The first thing she needed to concentrate on was that she needed to escape from here, somehow. She began to try to twist her wrists within their bonds. Tying them together had been an amateur's mistake, but then he probably wasn't expecting much of a fight from a woman, although he should have learned from the fact that she'd gotten out of the pit when, she would imagine, few others had.

It took time – and that wore on her nerves because she had no idea when he'd be back. By the time she was able to get free, both wrists were raw and bleeding, but she was free! Mindful of her state of undress, she grabbed a blanket from the pile on the floor and wrapped it around herself several times, securing it fairly well with the thongs.

She had actually made it to the tent flap before he came in and found her. Brietta crouched and faced him, assuming a fighting stance, but when he came at her he was able to thwart every attempt she made to avoid him. Nothing worked with him – he was too seasoned and well trained a fighter, and her estimation of her fighting abilities – along with most of her other abilities that had suffered in this situation – was adjusted several notches down.

Before she knew it, she found herself flopped unceremoniously over his shoulder, after which she ended up right back where she started, with him scolding her like a child who's disobeyed her father. Only this time he didn't tie her down – he was busy looking at her wrists and frowning fiercely.

"I can see that you're going to be a handful. Perhaps I need to make sure a guard is posted outside, just incase you decide again that you don't like my company?" He pulled her up none too gently then set her down on his lap while he almost tenderly dressed her wounds, cleaning them carefully then wrapping them with a soft fabric secured by more leather thongs.

Then, without another word, he bound her again, standing against the heavy wooden frame that held his armor, her arms over her head, ankles secured well apart. Naked and exposed, and waiting for whatever ill fate would befall her at his hands.

He stood behind her, and she couldn't crane her head around far enough to see what he was doing. She had no clue as to what was going to happen until she felt the first searing crack against the tender flesh of her bottom. Brietta had been swatted as a child for childish nonsense, but she'd never been beaten like this.

"I will not have you trying to escape every time I turn my back. So I'm going to give you your first lesson in how I expect you to behave."

Brietta was soon in too much agony to try to consider what he'd said. He was striping her raw, from the beginning swells of her buttocks all the way down to her ankles. She was being slowly driven out of her mind by each thwack as it branded a line of fire over other previous such assaults. Desperately, she tried to crane her head back and forth – for some reason, she felt like she had to actually see him doing this, that somehow it might soothe the stark fear and unrelenting sting she felt. But although she could

see the large bulk of him behind her, he was angled in a way that she couldn't even see his arm as it rose for each stroke. Brietta tried ineffectually to dance away from him, but she was held fast. The only parts of her that seemed capable of movement were the ones that made her gyrations incredibly obscene as her hips tried bucked and writhed in a manner that mimicked her reaction to the torture he'd subjected her to before. All of that frantic motion of her lower body made her overly ample breasts jiggle and bob against the wood, bruising and rubbing them almost raw in some places. Luckily for her, though, the wood had been sanded smooth – at least she wasn't ending up with splinters in such a delicate area.

Before he put the implement down, whatever it was, her backside had been most thoroughly decorated, and she was hanging limp against her bonds. Brietta, who was not usually given to being overly dramatic, was surprised to see that there wasn't any blood around her feet. It certainly felt like she'd been ripped to shreds.

Brietta thought she'd felt the worst pain she'd ever experienced in her life, but that was nothing compared to when he untied her and moved her back to the couch, depositing her on that flaming red back and resecuring her hands over her shoulders before she had a chance to jump up.

It didn't matter to him in the least that she screamed bloody murder when he put her down, her cries growing louder as he joined her and lay deliberately between her legs, adjusting his already rampant length easily so that it fit into the notch between her legs.

As he pressed himself into her extraordinarily tight channel, he chided himself for being much too eager – why, he hadn't even removed his greaves, he realized as his shins clanked noisily against the frame of the couch. He closed his eyes, knowing he was pressing up against the proof of her virginity. She'd known no other man, this fiery Anglo, and, if he had anything to say about it – and he had everything to say about it – she never would.

As he drove himself past that stubborn barrier, eliciting yet another full lunged protest from her, he adjust his arms next to her so that he could also grab a nipple between his thumb and forefingers, adding insult to injury as he pulled them each high and jiggled each breast.

Brietta had never experienced pain where he was hurting her, and, surprisingly, it almost eclipsed the agony of her poor bottom and legs as they were rubbed against the rough texture of the couch fabric. Almost. He was forcing some private place of hers open, ramming a part of himself against her insistently, until, all at once, she felt something inside her rip and she found herself uncomfortably stretched and full of him.

He was hurting her in so many ways, she felt overwhelmed: her nipples were being pinched and pulled, rolled tightly between those fingers, and he was using his man part to plunge in and out of her quickly, making her sting and ache there with even the smallest of movements, to say nothing of the way he was grinding her abused back into the couch. There was no sign of the tenderness with which he had dressed her wounds. That was apparently an aberration for him.

She truly could not absorb what was happening to her – what had been happening to her since she'd gotten into this situation, but this assault even more so. She wanted to leave him, just go away in her mind to some place pleasant, but he kept changing what he did, changing his rhythm and finding new ways to torture her, squeezing the globe of each breast hard, as if he was trying to milk her, his fingers leaving instantaneous bruises in their wake.

Lucius could not believe how wonderful it felt to be inside her. It had been a long time, granted, and even longer since he'd tasted a girl's virginity, but this was unbelievable. This grubby slip of a girl stimulated him like no other had, continuing to fight even after he'd breached her and there was nothing left to fight for. He couldn't believe he'd actually given even a fleeting thought to letting someone else have her – money be damned. By the Gods she was tight – gripping and almost suckling at him with her small cunnie.

His pleasure was building quickly – more quickly than he would have liked. He wanted to savor her, to revel in his dominance, but his body was too eager to find its release. He was embarrassed by how quickly he arched and threw back his head with a deep, satisfied moan, spilling himself into her at the same time, and then collapsing on top of her.

That was all Brietta could take. It was just too much for her. She wasn't weepy like a lot of women, such as her cousin Ellette, who burst into tears at the slightest prompting. But this was just more than she could stand. Her voice was hoarse from screaming and that was just one of the bodily aches that were, by now, too numerous to list. Tears slipped from behind her closed lids in a steady stream. He was already up and divesting himself of his uniform, pulling a soft white tunic over his head. She could hear him say something low to whoever was outside the tent and seconds later he was untying her hands.

But Brietta didn't get up. She couldn't. She was still trying to cope, still trying – unsuccessfully – to get her emotions under control, knowing they really did her no good, anyway. Crying had never solved anything for her in her life, and she couldn't imagine that it would do anything but anger him in this situation. If it would keep him from doing what he'd just done to her, she thought she'd debase herself in any way to avoid that again.

“Come here.”

It was not a tone that brooked refusal or disobedience, and she had to admit to herself that she did not want another taste of what he had done to her already, so Brietta swung herself up into a sitting position, then realized to her horror that she was having her period, right here and now, probably staining the upholstery. Usually she had cramps as a warning of its impending arrival, but perhaps her unusual situation had upset her system.

She stood quickly, looking behind her at the couch and seeing a small red spot. Blushing profusely, and knowing because of her nudity that it wasn't just her face that was reddening, she looked at him with an almost helpless expression on her face.

“What is it?” he asked, popping a dried fig into his mouth from the tray that had been brought in by a highly interested soldier, who did nothing to conceal his curiosity about the nude woman his centurion had bound in the corner of the tent, her abundant charms on tantalizing display.

Brietta swallowed hard, but answered hoarsely, “Blood.”

He was up and next to her in a second, looking her over like a prized mare. Lucius looked at the couch and saw the small stain, but no corresponding wound on her body. Her backside was red and angry, but he'd been careful not to do anything that might result in a marring scar on that perfect skin of hers. Suddenly, her hand drifted down to cover that downy mound, and he smiled, knowing what the problem was. Lucius reached over and grabbed a clean rag. “Here. It's the blood of your virginity. Wipe it away and it'll be fine.”

She just stood there for a long moment, looking at him and then at the rag, her whole body flushing even redder.

Lucius took a step closer. “Unless you'd like me to do it – “

Brietta skittered away from him as far as she dared and, turning her back, assumed a sort of squatting position to clean herself.

“Turn around.”

She stopped in mid-action, not quite believing that he was going to make her complete such a personal function in front of him.

“Turn around, or I'll assume you want me to clean you up. I won't say it again.”

Brietta did as she was told, wanting to melt into the dirty rug beneath her feet as she did so. As it was, she tried to stare down the whole time, but he brought her eyes to his with a sharp command.

“Eyes on mine, slave.”

Mortification washed over her, and she thought she was going to be sick, swallowing hard several times before she was able to assure herself that she was not going to disgrace herself, at least not in that way. Brietta finished the odious task quickly, straightening from that horridly embarrassing squat.

“I don’t think you’re quite clean yet. Do it again.”

She was seconds away from throwing the dirty rag at that smug smirk, but he merely raised one eyebrow, and somehow she knew that he would thoroughly relish giving her a second taste of whatever that awful implement was that he’d used on her before. He was using this as a way to reinforce the lowliness of her status, letting her know that he could command her to do anything . . . or else.

Brie assumed a weak copy of her former position and made a few quick swipes at herself.

“No, no, no. Squat more deeply – spread those legs, and hold that beautiful cunt open with your fingers so I can see your little clitty.”

Her legs were weakening and she started to feel faint – something she’d never done in her life, again, unlike her weak-willed cousin. But Brietta took a deep breath and steadied herself. She would live through this. She had to.

“Clean yourself. Slowly,” he commanded, “and keep your eyes on mine.”

She raised her gaze to his, and concentrated on wiping her mind clean of any thoughts about where she was or what she was doing.

“Open yourself up there, girl. Throw the rag down and touch yourself. I know you’ll like it.”

She blinked, once, for as long as she dared, then complied. And hated herself for the fact that he was right – she did enjoy it. So much so that her legs started to wobble dangerously from the muscular contractions her fingers were causing as they barely grazed over that sensitive spot.

Lucius could see how shaky she was. “That’s enough. Get over here.”

He was sitting on a smaller couch, and when she got there, he pulled her down onto his knee, and began to hand feed her small bits of food off the tray – a bit of pear here, a small piece of ham, a crust of bread, as if she was a cosseted hound begging at his dinner table. When she shifted, because his hard thigh was anything but comfortable under her sore bottom, the huge, muscled arm around her slim waist contracted as if he thought she was going to run from him.

Not that she would have gotten far with him right there. With his long legs, she probably wouldn’t make it more than two steps before he had her – and trying to escape again, and failing to do so, would probably just make him mad again.

No, she would just have to put up with whatever he did to her until she could get away from him – tonight would be the best time to attempt that.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Gods favored her, in that he left her late that afternoon, dressed in full uniform. Brietta assumed that he was probably going to be gone for some time. The problem was that he left her bound, again, more tightly this time, although he was quite surprisingly careful of her wrists, which had made Brie's eyebrow rise that he would be so concerned about her wrists considering what he'd done to her back.

He'd shown her what he'd used – it was a small thin length of leather. Not thin enough to be a whip, really, but thin for something he'd used as a strap. No wonder it'd hurt her so!

The worst part of what he'd done because he'd discovered her aborted escape attempt was to place a guard – inside the tent, to watch her. Just when she thought he'd completely humiliated her, he came up with something else.

So she ended up staying exactly where she was – alternating between fuming and shame as the guard did exactly as one would expect – raped her with his eyes. The centurion, however, had made it abundantly clear to him that he could look all he wanted – from the tent flap where he was stationed. But he wasn't allowed to touch unless she made a move to escape . . . and he then stopped and told the guard outside the tent to keep an eye on the first man.

Brietta could see a world of abuses in those orders, and all of them would be directed towards her. But the inside guard had gulped hard and issued a high-pitched "Yes, Sir," and, aside from ogling her to the point where his man part was making the skirt of his uniform tent out from his legs, he hadn't done a thing.

He looked younger than she was, and judging by the lack of decorations or medals on his uniform, he had probably just joined, or been conscripted.

She was just to the point where she was going to try to entice him into letting her go – she'd promise him a big reward from her father, which would never be forth coming since she was a mere woman – and her bladder was near to bursting when her captor returned, dismissing guards as he walked in.

The first thing he did, thankfully, was release her and offer her a chamber pot. She tried to take it behind the uniform rack to use, but he wouldn't allow it. The man was merciless.

When she was done, Brietta noticed that he had put a blanket on the couch where she'd been tied most of the evening, and had also formed a makeshift bed right next to it. He picked her up bodily and brought her to the blankets and furs on the floor, and retied her, both to him by a fairly short leash and to two of the legs of the bed.

"Go to sleep."

Bound. She was expected to sleep bound. Brietta wasn't sure she could – she'd been awake since he'd left – since she'd been captured, really. Her rear end and the backs of her legs hurt, her ankles hurt where he'd tied them together, her breasts hurt where he'd slapped them, and her wrists hurt where she'd rubbed them raw. She refused to think of the deep ache between her legs. It was too mortifying to consider.

But she was exhausted by the unsettling events of the past day or so, and before she knew it, she'd dropped off and was completely oblivious to anything and everything until she felt herself being lifted sometime the next morning. Apparently he'd untied her, freeing her ankles and releasing her from himself and the couch. She was plopped on top of him, and he was as naked as she was. His stiff length prodded her insistently, and he immediately adjusted her so that when he pressed down on her hips she had no say

in the fact that he slid up inside her, stretching her open for the second time in less than a day. Once he opened his eyes and saw her there, impaled on himself, he retied her hands behind her back and then held them down, pulling her shoulders back so that as he moved her up and down those wonderful titties bounced and wobbled and swayed. His palms itched to cup them, and as he thought it he did it, squeezing hard and reveling in the way she tried to writhe unsuccessfully away from him. Lucius grabbed a hold of each nipple between his thumb and forefinger, and lifted her breasts by them, holding them just as high when she rose from the movements of his hips as he did when she was lowered by them, so that each time she sank her breasts were both pinched and pulled tight. Her shoulders were forcibly thrown back and her back was arched, her hips grinding down on him because of it, as if she was thoroughly enjoying herself.

The image of her before him drove him over the edge, and again he lost control of his own ecstasy well before he should have. The woman was a witch – she had to be – that had never happened to him. His sexual appetites were considerable and varied, but he had always been able to last as long as he wanted to.

Not with this wench. She was pure fire, whether she wanted to be or not.

He was glad he'd decided to keep her. She would, undoubtedly, be quite entertaining, and since the majority of the fighting was done – except some small pockets of resistance – there wasn't really a lot for him to do. He'd been annoyed by the orders he'd received to come here in the first place – he'd been here before at the beginning of the fighting, but had been called away with his men to join the forces putting down multiple rebellions in Gaul. He was a soldier – it was all he really knew in life. He'd joined practically the minute he was sixteen, and had risen through the ranks to be the first sword – or *primus pilus* – of the First Cohort. Although he retained his own century of loyal soldiers, he was in command of over four hundred and fifty men, as well as the other five centurions.

The Army was not an easy life, but it suited Lucius to a T. He needed to fight just like he needed to fuck. It was in his blood. His father had been an *optio* and his mother a camp follower. He was destined to follow in his father's footsteps, and in deed had quite literally among some of the Roman roads into the formerly barbarian held territories.

As a centurion, he was allowed to marry, but he'd never taken advantage of that right, preferring instead to make use of the occasional pretty captive, or raping any unfortunate barbarian female he found in the aftermath of a battle. He'd never had a long standing relationship with a woman, and never really expected to – and never felt the lack, either. Oh, he'd accepted the idea that he'd have to do it eventually, especially if he wanted to rise to the rank of *tribune*, or, when he dared to really dream, *senator*. Upper-class Romans were expected to marry and have children, but his distaste for bland, boring Roman women had made him resist his friends' attempts to marry him off to their sisters or daughters.

He sighed, his body still tingling in the aftermath of one of the strongest orgasms he'd ever had. His mouth quirked at the idea that this little scrap of a girl – who was certainly not worthy of his attentions – seemed to have captured him as surely as he'd captured her. He had to laugh when he discovered himself how she'd gotten out of the pit – she was resourceful, he had to admit, but he'd had the bones removed in case someone else who was thrown in there was as smart as she was.

"What are you called?" he asked suddenly, wanting to know her name.

She looked down at him incredulously, amazed that he would care. "Brietta."

He frowned up at her, and reached around behind her to remove the bonds. "Not now it's not. Your name is Valeria."

Brietta was surprised at this. Slaves were generally not given their own names, and when they did have need of a name it was a bastardization of their owner's. Where he'd come up with Valeria, she didn't

know, but she also didn't like it. She did not want to lose her identity. She refused to. She was going to get out of here, she was. If it killed her then so be it. She would become a martyr to her cause.

The thought suddenly struck her that her family might well have already assumed just that. Tears filled her eyes at the thought of Dirce thinking she was dead. She wished she could get some sort of message to him, at least. And to Ula, but more so Dirce. She didn't want him giving up hope – giving up on her.

The next week or so went very much the same every day: Lucius arose and untied her, only to rape her in one of many different ways, fed her something and allowed her to relieve herself, always in front of him and looking him in the eye at the time. He would pull her onto his lap and feed her from his own hand, and his own breakfast tray, then would retie her and go off and do whatever it was that he did. He would reappear at various times during the day, usually to rape her again, or torture her in some way. The guards remained inside and outside the tent, but were circulated, so that it was never the same person twice. Brietta was beginning to think that most of the century was getting to see her complete humiliation, and she knew that there was a method to her madness – that she would never be able to befriend anyone who was watching over her.

Lucius knew he could break this one, and using her and forcing her to behave in the most embarrassing manner possible was just one of his methods of doing so. She was proud – at first she completely refused to respond to the name he'd chosen for her. The beating that had followed had been a horrid one for a man – it was almost unthinkable for a woman he didn't plan to kill outright. But he'd finally gotten her to admit to him that her name was Valeria. Her stubborn pride almost made him wonder who she was – who she had been before the Romans trounced the island natives into submission – not that it mattered much now. She had the heart of a ruler, which was unusual in a woman. She was strong and smart and unbelievably beautiful, and he didn't seem to be tiring of her, which was very surprising. This was the longest time he'd spent with one female in his life. He preferred variety, usually.

But she was different, and he wanted to know how and why he was so attracted to her. It irked him that she was able to intrigue him so, and that made him alternately incredibly cruel and incredibly kind to her. She had learned with a quickness that was unfortunate for her, that any response she gave encouraged him, and although he made sure that she experienced the utmost in satisfaction every time he wanted her to, she would not participate in that pleasurable activity with him, and it appeared – since he'd tried – that no amount of beating her could entice her. She'd so angered him with the way she could remove herself from him and be there physically but not mentally that he had beaten her quite badly several nights ago, and had had to consciously reign himself in so that he didn't cause any permanent damage to her.

Even after the beating, Valeria remained entirely passive with him. She would do just exactly what she was told to do – nothing more, nothing less, and what she did was accomplished with a blaring lack of interest. Lucius was probably even madder at himself that this behavior mattered to him in any way. Why should he care what she felt or didn't feel, as long as she obeyed him? That had always been quite enough for him before – before her.

Frankly, he hadn't felt like he could trust her to do what he really wanted her to do – take him in her mouth. She was only too happy to flash those sharp, white teeth at him in a snarl every once in a while, and he wasn't at all sure that he wanted to trust his manhood to her tender ministrations with those fangs of hers being all too close to a delicate area during that particular activity.

Luckily, he thought he had a solution for his problem that would get her to be considerably more cooperative than she had been.

He'd stopped tying her when he left, but still made sure that there were guards both inside and outside the tent. Once again he blessed his mentor and benefactor, Gaius Drusus Cicero, who, when he

had retired from the Army to go raise chickens with his wife and children, gave Lucius the tent he had inherited from an old soldier before him. It kept him from having to live in the barracks and gave him more privacy than he'd ever had in his life, which was coming in handy with this situation.

She was still nude, however – he had confiscated every blanket and rag so that she never had anything that would work as a covering. He liked the idea of her being nude and waiting for him – however reluctantly – while he plowed through his boring administrative duties, rather than being able to take out his frustrations by cracking a few heads. Sometimes he wondered if all of his promotions were really the way to go, when he was truly at his best in the middle of a blood battle.

But when he saw her, standing there about as far away from him as she could get, arms crossed defiantly over her chest, eyeing him like he was some sort of particularly odious bug, every thought left his mind except getting control over her elusiveness, and getting as close to her as possible. And he would do whatever he needed to do to achieve that goal.

He put down something he had rapped in a rag, and turned to her. “Lie down on the couch and spread your legs.”

Her eyes flared with fear, and his cock rose instantaneously. He could see that she was debating as to whether or not to obey him, which wasn't the smartest thing to do, especially after multiple lessons in obedience this week, but then that was another thing that he liked about her: she wasn't easy to cow. She hadn't given in, hadn't really submitted to him. Oh, she usually did what he wanted, eventually, but he always knew that it was her decision to do so and not fight it out.

Valeria had surprised and amazed him with her fighting skills. He'd never met a woman who expected that she might be able to take him in a fight. Every other woman he'd known had simply submitted, acquiesced to everything he asked of them, knowing that he held their lives in his hands. Not so with this one. He never knew what she was going to choose to fight about, and for a female she was an excellent fighter. If this were several thousand years ago, he might have thought that she was one of the fabled Amazonian female warriors.

As it was, she had shown him a move or two, until his superior strength and her nudity – a complete lack of protection against his fight-ending grasp between her legs that wrenched an annoyed squeal from her – rendered her neutral.

This time, though, she seemed to capitulate a little easier than other times, and did exactly as she was told. For a long moment, all he could do was look at her. She was exactly what he preferred physically – well endowed, pale skin as translucent as a baby's, slim waist and hips – deceptively small but quick and well able to handle herself. And passionate – especially for a virgin who was being taken against her will. He could bring her to completion any time he wanted to.

“Touch yourself.” He had had to teach her how to do this – she had had no idea of doing so herself, and having him command her to do so was obviously irksome to her, so he liked to make her do it whenever possible.

Lucius saw her mouth open as if she was going to protest, but one raised eyebrow and her hands began to creep down towards the juncture of her legs.

“You know better than to start there . . .” he warned, beginning to disassemble his uniform, trying not to appear to be too eager about it. He made sure that every piece went where it was supposed to, all the while his eyes were glued to her. His optio – thank the Gods – had gotten someone to take over the care and polishing of his uniform or it would have been in a sorry state, since he had no interest in much beyond this woman since she'd been brought to him. She was the only thought in his mind, and he was slowly recognizing the fact that it was a good thing that he wasn't on the battlefield – she had him so addled that he would have ended up among the dead within the first few minutes, he was so distracted by her.

She knew she wasn't allowed to close her eyes, in fact she was expected to keep her eyes on him at all times, and on his eyes if possible as she pulled the twisted those chewy, round nipples. Naked himself by now, he sighed, realizing that although she was following his instructions exactly, she was making it clear that she wasn't enjoying it. And he knew from experience by now that there would be no soft whimpers or moans of pleasure – or pain – if she could prevent them, and she could. At least until the end, when he'd driven her past her resistance and her body took over.

And even then, he knew that she was stifling herself as much as possible.

Well, this time he hoped to drive her beyond that.

CHAPTER FIVE

When he came towards her, he made sure to grab up the thing he had bundled and unwrapped it as she watched him, her eyes growing rounded and more wary as he revealed something he'd had an artisan who was part of the smithies who worked for the Army make for him using a chunk of marble he'd bought for another purpose. It was not too much bigger than he was, but it was solid and continually hard. And he intended to use it – along with his lips and tongue – to bring her to a screaming, throbbing end.

Brietta desperately wanted to ask him what that thing was, but she was afraid she knew already. "Give me your hands."

She hated being tied, and he didn't do it that often any more. But she knew she didn't have any choice but to obey him. He'd bested her in every fight they'd had – in fact, he'd made her puny attempts to best him physically another embarrassing point against her. She hadn't seen any opportunities in which she might have escaped – he had either his own eagle eyes on her or those of the guards. Brietta was beginning to think that the situation was hopeless – that she truly was going to be this man's slave for the rest of her life, and that she'd never see her brother or her grandfather again in this lifetime.

Not only did he tie her hands above her head this time, but he also pulled each leg back individually and tied her knees so far back that they were practically level with her ears, and spread abominably wide, far enough back to tilt her bottom off the bed, as if she was offering herself to him as some sort of unholy sacrifice. Although her position was making a nervous tingle creep up her spine, Brietta became even more worried when she saw what he had in his hand.

At first she thought it was something he was going to use to beat her with, and her automatic response was to try to cringe away from him as far as she could – which wasn't far, considering how tightly he'd restrained her. She never wanted to pull at her bonds as much as when she began to recognize what that obscene thing was: it was a marble phallus that was probably half again the size of Lucius' own in width and length, and was exquisitely detailed, swollen at the end, with a ring just big enough for a man's finger to slip through.

Lucius watched her eyes, enjoying the uncontrolled reaction he was getting from her. Sometimes, despite the fact that he owned her, body and soul, and he could do with her as he pleased, he sometimes felt that she wasn't really with him; she was so reserved. He knew she repressed her responses to him – all of them, anger, fear, and pain, but most especially the sexual – and he tried not to let her get away with it, especially when she was so obviously aroused by what he was doing, despite her silent protests.

Valeria only spoke when she had to. And she did her level best never to scream, even when he was beating her. Last week he had used the thick, wide leather belt from his uniform on her backside, and although she had moaned and cried and danced to its cruel tune, she'd never let herself come to an out and out scream.

He promised himself that he'd make her overcome that reluctance – in pleasure and in pain.

Lucius took his time arranging himself on the couch, brandishing the dildo menacingly at every opportunity. He rubbed it against her face, making her rock her head back and forth in much the same way as she did when she was nearing her ecstasy. Finally, he grabbed her jaw in his fingers and held her still, pressing the head to her full lips, saying, "Open."

Brietta was so outraged by the demand that her jaw dropped a little, and he took full advantage, slipping the thick penis well into her mouth.

“Suck it. Suck it hard.” His voice came out hoarse. Seeing her lips surrounding even a lifeless representation of a cock made him at least as hard as what she was now holding in her small hands. The lust Lucius felt at the sight of her plump pink lips – however reluctant – wrapped around that stiff length almost scared him with its intensity. What was this woman doing to him? Just the idea that he was on his way back to his tent where she awaited him was enough for him to almost disgrace himself.

And this sight was almost more than he could take, even though she was obeying him in only the most perfunctory fashion. He practically grabbed it away from her, startling her back to that wary look of hers.

He wanted her wary of him. He’d certainly given her enough reason to be. He didn’t want her to have soft feelings for him . . . he didn’t. Lucius worried that he had to keep reminding himself of that fact, but it was true that he did. Sometimes he wanted more than anything something that scared the life out of him – he wanted her to enjoy what he was doing to her. He wanted her to make love with him . . . to want to touch him, and to be touched by him, to welcome the release he gave her rather than fight against it, as he knew she did.

And wanting just that made him question his own sanity.

But right now, she was spread out before him like the most delectable of banquets, all delicate mauve and shades of pink – partly because of embarrassment, he was sure. She still hadn’t gotten over the fact that he preferred her bare, and often, when her hands weren’t otherwise occupied, assumed the usual virginal position covering her breasts and her pussy, which was now wonderfully bare. Valeria was wholly and completely shocked when he’d done that to her – tying her down much as he had now, so that there was nothing she could hide from him from her stem to her stern, and then took the straight edge he used on his own face, as well as the finely milled soap he’d brought with him from Rome, and rendered her completely slick.

At the time he remembered thinking that he was spoiling her – using the best soap and sharpest blade he could get his hands on, because he’d known of some of his soldiers who had taken Valeria’s contemporaries and done the same thing to them, only not in as nearly as gentle a manner. He knew for a fact of two of his soldiers who had Anglo-Saxon captives, were also as whistle clean as Valeria, because those soldiers were using their captives as they were intended – as slaves to slake their desires on, yes, but also in a serving capacity, to do all the scutt work that, otherwise, they would have to do themselves. And those girls – he knew direct from their owners who were only too happy to brag about it – were scraped clean. In one case, the girl had slightly rebelled the night before, and Claudius had pulled her pubic hairs out by the handful, then rubbed the already stinging area with camphor oil.

He smiled to himself as he moved into position between her legs, his face within inches of the already moist, warm heart of her. She was spoiled, but he was sure that none of those girls could hold a candle to his passionate Valeria. “Ahhhh, you are already dripping, my girl. That’s the way I love to see you.”

It was a never ending source of shame to Brietta that her body heeded his lecherous call. It seemed that all he had to do was enter the tent and that heretofore undiscovered part of her body began to cream – most probably at the remembered pleasure of his fingers on and inside her, rubbing her until her whole body convulsed shamefully, as it did each and every time he set out to pleasure her. Brietta had never once been able to successfully deny him that response, no matter how she tried.

Lucius decided that he wanted to watch how she accepted this invasion of her self, so he did not immediately set his mouth over the already straining bud as he wanted to. Instead he leaned a little away from her and touched and cupped her almost gently at first, simply reinforcing to her the fact of his ownership of her body. She could think what she wanted, but she *was* his. There was nothing for her any

more but this – his hands on her whenever he wanted, being put on display to him like this, all of her secrets bare and available for his use and pleasure.

And it pleased him to hear her scream with the ultimate in ecstasy.

Now.

He presented the large head of the marble cock to the quivering, engorged lips of her pussy, and there was no mistaking what he was doing. Lucius drank in her stifled moan like the sweetest of wines as he began to force the dildo inside her, past the naturally resisting, still extremely tight muscles of her opening, seeing her try to wiggle away from what was happening to her but getting nowhere. In fact, her frantic movements served only to wedge the instrument of her violation further inside her without any help from him at all.

“Wonderful, Valeria.” Lucius was all but drooling on her.

Any praise from him was sure to make her do the contrary. Her hips stilled instantaneously, but those delicious little squeaks still issued from the back of her throat. For a moment he considered what she’d look like if he gagged her, but he didn’t want to mar the beautiful line of her lips. Sometime soon, very soon, considering the luck he’d stumbled into this morning, he’d have that mouth on something much better than a cold marble phallus, he promised himself. And with no sign of reluctance on her side, either, if he knew his little captive as well as he thought he did.

He could see how it was stretching her, and hear the resulting moans she couldn’t suppress as a result. Lucius knew her body could accept something much wider, so he didn’t back off from the insistent pressure he was applying, pushing that unforgiving symbol up inside her by slow increments, using only her body’s own lubricant to ease the way, and although she generally produced amounts that were more than ample when his need was simply to create a slippery finger, he knew she didn’t really have enough to truly ease the large implement into her.

He wanted her to feel it violating her – and he wanted her to feel his mastery of her through it. He could easily have coated it with something that would have had her howling by how from the pain and heat of it, but Lucius’ concentration right now was her pleasure.

He wanted to hear her scream from pleasure, and everything he did this time would be totally devoted to that goal. If asked, she would disavow any delight in the sexual torture he indulged in with her. But her body told the ultimate truth when it never failed to weep its tribute onto his fingers or his cock.

Finally, after much involuntary contracting and partially stifled contorting on her part, only the somewhat flared end showed outside her. Lucius leaned carefully against her pubic area, using his presence there to hold the dildo deep inside her while his hands reached up to cup her breasts. He could feel her still contracting and trying to adjust to how violently she was invaded, and that distraction made her less able to concentrate on being quiet and unresponsive.

She tried desperately to avoid his hands, but merely managed to again move the unforgiving presence within her, wrenching a guttural groan from her that had been fading until he rudely wrenched each titty’s tip with his thumb and forefinger.

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhnnnnnnnnnnnn!”

He could see that he needed to do this much more often. That was much more of a reaction than he usually got from her. The presence of that hard length within her had been just what she’d needed to break her concentration. Lucius loved playing with her luscious breasts, most especially pinching and pulling her nipples, which he likened to hardened raspberries that he kept trying to squish between his fingers, but they always rebounded nicely, as if eager for more.

One of his favorite things – and one he knew she detested because of the way she scrunched up her face when he did it – was what he did to her nearly every time he indulged himself with her – jiggling each weighty breast violently while holding it aloft merely by its pink tip.

When he grew bored with that, and her cries died down, he began to squeeze those abused globes hard, forcing the flesh into unnatural and painful shapes. More whimpers arose from behind her stubbornly closed lips, but when his curiosity got the best of him he reached down to where she was forced open and found her tribute oozing out around the base of the phallus.

She was loving it! He had yet to find anything – besides the most severe of punishments – that didn't arouse her body, and he was going to use that to his advantage tonight.

Lucius took his time with her, wanting to build her desire to a fever pitch. He was careful not to be too predictable. Not everything he did was painful. He stroked his fingertips over the downy softness of the milky white skin of her arms and torso, sometimes massaging gently where he knew it would feel best – on the backs of her arms and thighs where they were strained up and back so rudely.

When he felt she was ready, and when he could stand it no longer himself, he maneuvered his body down hers, slowly, so that his face was dead level with that exquisitely engorged bud, and slipped his finger through the ring at the base of the dildo as it stuck obscene out of her hairless cunnie.

Just those slight movements as he adjusted his hand over the end of the marble cock made her hips move restlessly as her body's slickness pooled around its base. Oh, this was going to be fun, he thought, leaning forward on his elbow, mouth as open as possible, to envelope her most sensitive spot all at once in his hot moistness.

Brietta couldn't believe how easily he had breached her carefully erected defenses. She wanted that thing out of her . . . she thought . . . he'd always managed to disgrace her by bringing her to a shaking, uncontrolled and uncontrollable end, but this time – it was a thousand times worse. She had no will – but his. Her body was outmaneuvering her at every turn, rising up to meet even his more torturous caresses, weeping its pleasure at her woman's sheath being filled to overflowing, even though it pinched and ached every time she made any movement at all.

And, dear Gods, his mouth – his mouth as it surrounded her obscenely exposed and impaled femininity made her actually want to explode as soon as possible. But her mind fought that capitulation tooth and nail, although her body was only partially under her own control any more. More and more he was the master of it, and she had begun to hate herself with every failure to deny him that response – and this time she was losing herself to him almost completely.

The soft, wet flat of his tongue had engulfed her as completely as she was filled and opened by that awful thing he'd pressed up between her legs.

When he began to move it in and out of her with excruciating slowness, so that it dragged against every fiber of every nerve in that very sensitive area, then started to press and circle his tongue over her, as if he was a cat lapping delicately at a particularly satisfying bowl of cream.

It was happening again this time, that undeniable tingle, only it was happening more quickly than usual – embarrassingly so. It was bad enough that he could call to her body like this any time he wanted to – that her body obeyed him so much more readily than the rest of her, as if it was in a constant state of semi-arousal around him, and he had but to crook his finger at her to get her near to her own explosion.

She had never fought her bonds so furiously, not that it did her any good. He never tied her any way but tightly – even when he was being considerate of the wounds she'd caused her own wrists. It was the way her legs were back that annoyed her most – she had no wiggle room, no way to avoid either the invasion of her body nor the way he was eagerly, and oh so pleurably, devouring it.

“Ahhhhhhh, not so quickly, Valeria,” he chided, withdrawing the dildo completely in one quick slide, removing his mouth from her at the same time. Lucius put the implement to one side, and returned

to his spot between those beautiful legs of hers, the spot she called to him whenever he was away from her. He reached up and amused himself for a short while by torturing her breasts – pinching and pulling and hurtfully massaging, all while he could feel her growing wetter and wetter against his stomach, literally dripping onto him.

He did this repeatedly – brought her to the barest edge, almost falling over, with his lips and tongue and that unfailingly erect penis, getting harder and harder himself as he watched her desperation to avoid the end he was inevitably forcing her towards. But then he would withdraw at the last possible moment and haul her rudely away from paradise by bruising and tormenting her breasts, until the unbearable pain and the incredible pleasure merged insidiously into one, and even what he did to her poor nipples couldn't bring her down from the precipice he'd brought her to.

It was time, Lucius thought to himself, not wanting her to know anything about it. He could see that by now she was even enjoying how he was digging his fingernails into her erect nipples, and grinding his fingers into the flesh of her tits.

For the last time, he settled himself at her front, resolved to push her to the limit this time. And that was exactly what he did. He was slow and methodical about it, not letting her rush to an end that would be both premature and wholly unsatisfying. Instead, it ripped her apart, and nearly took him with it.

He was prepared for a scream of ecstasy – it was what he'd been trying to drive her to for the past week. What he got was a primal call from the depths of her being that made the small hairs at the back of his neck stand up. When she began to convulse – and it was much closer to the convulsions he'd seen in the throes of death than any languid sexual contractions – he stayed connected to her as long as he could, drawing it out as much as possible, but her frantic movements made him nervous and he immediately began to move to untie her before she managed to do herself damage. Valeria's eyes were wide open and unblinking, her mouth frozen in that soul-deep wail, body stiff as if in rigor.

She had expelled all of her breath in that one shuddering cry, and Lucius didn't see her draw a new breath for an alarmingly long time. When she did, it was dragged into her lungs slowly, with great effort. At the same time, Valeria had curled away from him as far as she could on the small couch, which wasn't far, but by her body language she was making it readily apparent that she didn't want to be touched.

And then she started to cry.

Not quiet, genteel sobs, the soft mewling he might have been as prepared for as any man was for a woman's tears. This was a keening, a bereaved cry of a deep, painful loss. Lucius couldn't understand what he had done that would have engendered this type of a reaction, and he found himself in the unenviable position of wanting to comfort her, but never having learned such delicate skills. He'd been a hard-hearted warrior for the majority of his life and had stared death down on a nearly daily basis, but this slip of a woman had put him in his ear. She was supposed to have been the captured, cowed, submissive woman he expected, not someone who challenged him silently, and with the strength of will greater than most men, and with a minimal amount of tears.

But there she was, abjectly curled around herself, wailing as if he'd killed her family in front of her when he'd brought her a level of delight many women never experienced, and few slave owners would ever bother to bring to a slave. It was his pleasure that was important in this relationship, not hers.

With that thought fortifying him mentally, he turned her roughly over onto her back and spread her legs with his, settling himself onto and into her in one rough, rude stroke.

But she was incredibly wet around him, engulfing him and closing around him like a soft, wet leaf clings to a tree branch. For once, she wasn't actively fighting him – she was still too stunned by her own culmination to much register what he was doing, although he did note with not a little satisfaction that

she had moaned softly as he entered her, raising herself up to meet him for the first time instead of cringing away as she usually did. He knew he was going to last an even shorter time than he usually did with her, but he tried to prolong it as much as possible, especially when her hips began to meet his. Valeria was relaxed beneath him, and almost seemed to be enjoying it – not forcibly, but naturally.

It was that thought that ended it almost immediately for him with a deep, guttural cry that came up from his toes as he slammed into her several times very hard while bathing her insides with his essence.

Lucius collapsed on top of Valeria, gasping for breath and trying to get a hold of himself. His whole body was tingling, his penis twitching in the last strains of ecstasy, straining to expel every last ounce of seed into the slight woman beneath him.

Brietta lay there, just trying to survive until she was allowed to sleep on the blankets on the floor, away from him, where she could cry herself to sleep. But, to her horror, she couldn't seem to control that aching need to cry, and found herself bawling within seconds of his finish.

Lucius did his level best to give her what comfort he could, but like a usual, contrary woman, she made it clear she didn't want that from him, not that that stopped his meager efforts. He ended up spooning her from behind on the couch and just holding her while her body shook and she wailed and keened for a very long while, shaking and shuddering and at times gasping for breath from the force of her grief.

He had no idea why she was crying now. Hadn't she just experienced the ultimate – again? Hadn't he spent time planning and then implementing her pleasure – and she just a lowly slave? Why wasn't she groveling at his feet in appreciation instead of weeping like her heart was to be cut out?

Finally, he let himself become angry at her behavior. After all, who was the master and who was the slave here? What if his men knew how he was behaving towards her – thinking of her all the time, wanting her at the most inappropriate times during his day, making every effort to see that she attained her woman's culmination every time he took her? They'd think he was weak, and he was beginning to agree with him.

With those thoughts, he dumped her unceremoniously onto her makeshift bed without another word, and turned away from her to sleep. Not that he did. His mind kept him stubbornly awake long enough to hear the stifled, choking sobs that came from the floor at least until he fell asleep – and most likely afterwards, too.

CHAPTER SIX

Early the next morning, Lucius, who hadn't slept at all well for some reason and had been awake for a while, reached down and pulled her slave up by her hair. She scrambled to get into a comfortable position, but he didn't make it easy for her. He kept her neck cruelly craned back by his grip on her hair while he groped and pinched and poked her all over, deliberately rubbing her nipples raw with his morning bristle. When he let her go abruptly, it surprised her so that she stumbled a few steps away from him. She would have sworn she was in for another rape this morning – he was pressed closely enough against her that she could feel how hard he was, how eager to sink himself into her.

The thought flashed into her mind that she might be able to play his undeniable interest in her to her advantage, but then he was binding her hands behind her back and throwing one blanket around her shoulders and another over her head, and she didn't have time to consider it.

He'd hadn't allowed her out of his tent in quite a while, and she desperately wished he hadn't covered her head – she wanted to get an idea of the numbers and layout of the camp. As it was, she had no sense of orientation and had no idea where he was taking her. That set her heart to thumping uncomfortably in her chest.

Finally, after what seemed like an hour or so, she was led to a very foul smelling place, and the blanket was whisked away from her head. She had to shake her hair out of her eyes before she could look around, but she seemed to be in some sort of makeshift prison – but there was only one person there, and he looked to be in very bad shape. Lucius pushed her towards the bed of straw where the bloodied and dirty man was literally staked out, his arms spread and above his head and practically nailed into the ground, legs bound the same way. There was a guard next to him, not that the poor man was going anywhere in that condition.

As she drew closer, though, the grubby prisoner began to look more and more familiar. Brietta clutched the blanket more tightly around her as she ran the last few steps and fell to the floor next to him, her hand automatically reaching out to cup his bruised and swollen cheek. "Dirce!"

Her voice startled him, and he turned towards it. "Brietta! You are alive! I knew you would be!"

"Oh, Dirce!" They both spoke in their native tongue, but knew they had to be very careful about what was said in front of her one captor in particular. He had no idea who she really was, and Brietta wanted to keep it that way.

"I came back to get you after the raid –"

Brietta put her finger over his lips gently, trying not to cause any more hurts than he already had, whispering, "Shhhhhh. Now is not the time." She leaned forward and stroked his brow, keeping her eyes locked on his.

Luckily, they had always been close enough to communicate well even silently. Dirce may not have understood why Brietta didn't want him to talk too much, but he trusted her to have made the right decision about that.

He looked like death – his normally tanned, brawny body was pasty white, and she could see that one of the arms he was being forced to hold over his head was disfigured so severely that there was no doubt it was broken. Luckily, it was not his sword arm, but still it must've been excruciatingly painful to hold at that angle.

Every inch of him was covered either in blood or dirt, it seemed. The tears that never seemed very far beneath the surface rose to spill onto her cheeks. She could handle being in the enemy's hands herself, but the idea that her brother might suffer as she had was untenable to her. In fact, he was likely to have it

much worse than she did. They would beat and torture him, and, in all likelihood, kill him outright when they were done. If it was lucky, they'd do it quickly.

If not, they'd crucify him, and that was a horrid, slow death.

"He's your brother, isn't he?" Lucius interrupted their moment together, finding himself jealous at her outpouring of obvious love for her sibling, and then viciously angry at himself for having that emotion – or any emotion at all – towards either of them.

Brietta didn't think that – given her unbridled reaction to seeing him – that it would be wise to lie to the Centurion in this situation. "Yes, he is," she barely choked out, her hands trying to both pat and massage Dirce at the same time. She just wanted to help him – she had to. She couldn't bear him being in such pain. She would do nearly anything to stop it.

And that was what Lucius was counting on.

"Looks like a pretty uncomfortable position to me," he commented neutrally from right behind her.

To her shame, all Brietta could do was weep louder at that pronouncement, laying her head down on her brother's chest and dissolving into tears.

Lucius had had enough of seeing her weeping over another man, brother or not, so he grabbed her arm and pulled her away from the prisoner, who, seeing his sister being treated that way by the Centurion tried valiantly to rise, but was prevented from doing so by his bonds. Just that slight movement must've been agony for the young man, judging by the blood curdling scream he let loose with.

Valeria immediately tried to run back to him, but Lucius continued to drag her away, although she never gave up trying to get back to him until he picked her up bodily and held her against him until they got back to his tent. As soon as he set her down, she tried to run for the door, but the guards barred her way. She turned from the tent flap and began pacing furiously.

Lucius just leaned back against a table and watched her, massive arms folded across his chest. He could see the wheels turning in that head of hers – he would have bet a year's pay that she was planning how to get back to her brother – and probably how to get the two of them out of camp. It's what he'd be thinking about in her place.

She was going to wear a rut in the dirt at that pace, and she was gnawing on her thumbnail, which was a sure sign she was plotting something.

"Sit down," he said firmly.

Valeria didn't stop until she threw him a glance, then, based on the steel in his eyes, she wandered over to the couch with severe reluctance. Even then, her anxiety showed – her knee bounced up and down so fast it looked like it would fly off, although her eyes were on the floor, as if the dirt held the answers to her problems.

"I can see to it that your brother is better taken care of." Valeria's head shot up and she looked at him as if seeing him for the first time. Lucius' lips tipped wryly. It was the first time he'd had anything she wanted. "Washed up, seen by my personal physician, arm set, clean clothes . . ."

Valeria's eyes narrowed. He knew she wasn't going to assume he was doing this out of the goodness of his heart. "And what do you want in exchange?"

Brietta knew that it was something she wasn't going to like having to do, and it was probably going to involve all those excruciatingly intimate things he did to her every chance he got.

Lucius closed the distance between them with several long strides, reaching out to lift a lock of hair from her breast and rub it between his fingers. "You."

"You own me. How much more of me do you need?"

It was on the tip of his tongue to say "all of you – every last shred of your being", but he thought that that sounded much too desperate and pleading, although it was definitely the way he felt. He really

didn't want her to know exactly how badly she was affecting him. It was interesting to hear her say the words, though, that she was owned by him, since she never really acted the part – and of course that was one of the things he liked about her. That she wasn't cowed by him.

But he wanted more from her. Not love, certainly, that was a woman's fallacy. But enough trust that he didn't feel he had to guard his genitals around her. But how to put that to her. "I want you to stop acting as if my touch disgusts you. I want you to participate when I bed you, and touch me back – and more. I don't want any cringing from me unless I'm punishing you. I don't want to see the reluctance and willfulness that's always in your eyes when I'm with you. I want you to surrender to me – you've lost. You're mine. Accept it, and behave as you should have been all along, and I'll make things easier on your brother."

Her eyebrow rose dramatically. "And if I don't?"

Lucius' jaw tightened. "One can never tell what's going to happen to someone who is in the delicate hands of the prison guards . . ." He left it at that, letting her own imagination fill in the gory details, and watching her swallow hard. "You can take some time –"

He had been going to say that she could take a little while to decide, but apparently she didn't need it. Valeria stood in front of him, as proud and strong as ever. Again he was struck by how beautiful she was beneath that layer of grime she'd worn when he'd first met her. Her long blonde hair fell just past her shoulders, her skin was clear and free of pock marks, her green eyes bright and sometimes fiery when she was attempting to defy him. She interrupted his reverie. "Fine. Whatever you want, as long as my brother is well taken care of." She looked him straight in the eye. "Do I have your word on it?"

Lucius had never had his honor questioned by a woman. Leave it to her. "Yes," he answered gravely.

"I want to be able to see him."

It was his turn to have his eyebrow meet his hairline. "You don't trust me?" He couldn't believe her gall.

"No, I want to see my brother."

He looked at her hard, trying to discern whether she was being honest or not, but he didn't see any deceit in her eyes, or hear it in her tone. Jealousy flashed through him when he realized she was being completely true with him. He knew that if he was the one lying there broken, she'd probably throw the first stone and do it with a broad smile on her face. Given a half a chance, she'd want nothing to do with him. Luckily, he didn't have to give her half a choice. And if getting her brother healthy made her easier to deal with – especially in the bedroom – then he was more than willing to bear the questioning looks he was going to get from both his men and his superiors in order to do so.

He hadn't said a thing about whether the man was going to be put to death or not, had he? Lucius had no problems with the idea of fattening up the prisoner before killing him. Fat or skinny made no difference whatsoever to him.

But her compliance in bed – now that was priceless. And he was sure that – somehow – he'd be able to get her to truly become his, and if her brother died in prison, well, who was to say at whose hand that might happen? Prisoners died every day from all sorts of ailments . . .

Especially those who lead raids against the Roman Army.

"You can see him once a day. No more."

At first he thought she was going to try to argue with him – not that it would have done her any good. He wasn't going to have her spending all day every day in the muck and the dung of that makeshift prison. But then she acquiesced suddenly, apparently having thought better of pushing him. "All right."

She offered him her hand then, as a soldier would offer a soldier. Amused, he took it and they shook. He had never shaken hands with a woman, either. She was full of surprises, this one.

Lucius suddenly realized what she'd agreed to, and his body was clamoring for him to take full advantage of it, but just as he was about to reach for her, a deep voice drifted into them from the outside. "Centurion, the legate wants you."

With a long suffering sigh, he left, giving Valeria one last, longing look before he ducked out of the tent.

He had left her in the blanket, and Brietta kept it around her as she continued to pace a little, then finally collapsed onto the couch. What had she agreed to? How had Dirce gotten captured? Why had he been coming back for her, against her express orders? If she was the cause of his injuries – directly or indirectly – she would never get over it.

Although she was alone, she snorted at her own quick acceptance of yet another level of degradation at the hands of the centurion. But what did she have of value any more, anyway? She was already ruined, and if changing her behavior could help Dirce out in any way at all, then she would do it. Tears filled her eyes that she dashed away angrily. He was going to rape her anyway, and usually force that awful pleasure on her, so why shouldn't someone gain something from it?

It was an excruciatingly long time before he got back, a time Brietta spent agonizing over his return, dreading it so much so that she was as close to being sick as she'd ever been – and Brietta didn't get sick; she was impressively healthy and rarely laid low by the various stomach or chest ailments that seemed to beset everyone else around the keep.

When he did finally make an appearance, her eyes flared, and Lucius flashed back to the fear in her eyes he'd seen when they first encountered each other. She looked like she was wound tight as a bowstring, and he sighed. It certainly hadn't been his preference to leave her – he'd have much rather spent the rest of the day testing out her new attitude, but duty called at the most inopportune times, it seemed.

"I want to go see my brother," she announced, as if she were a queen rather than a slave, rising as if she fully expected that he would do her bidding.

He would have thought she'd known him better than that by now, and, even if he had intended to take her to see him again, he wouldn't have followed her as she stalked to the tent flap. "You saw your brother already today. You won't see him again until tomorrow." Instead he began removing the various parts of his uniform and very deliberately putting each away in its rightful place.

When he was naked, Lucius said, "Come here." He hadn't realized how tense he was until he found himself staring at her, narrow eyed, his weight on the balls of his feet just in case she decided to do something foolish.

Valeria stood stock still, and he saw her draw a full breath as her body tensed, as if she was really going to try to bolt through two of his best guards. He didn't say a word, and he wouldn't go and collect her, either, regardless of what happened he'd let the guards fetch her for him. He expected her to honor her word, just as she expected him to honor his. And he intended to – to enough of an extent to get her to do what he wanted.

He watched, unable to deny his own interest in this outcome, as her shoulders slumped and she hung her head. Seconds later, she was before him. Lucius reached out and lifted her chin. "No sullenness, no resentment, or the deal's off."

Brietta found it very hard not to roll her eyes at him, but she managed somehow. It took a huge strength of will, but she did it.

And managed to get through the rest of the next few extremely denigrating hours. And the worst thing was that he wasn't really doing anything to her that was anywhere near as humiliating as he had done. It was just the idea that she was going to be expected to paste a smile on her face and act as if she

was enjoying it. He made her suck his nipples, and run her hands over him as if he was her lover, he'd said, and then he'd added the magic phrases, "as if your brother's comfort depends on it. And it does."

He'd chided her severely when her nipples had popped out at him in welcome, and her nether parts had become wet, but she lay there silent and stiff. "I want to see movement in those hips. I want you to show me how much you want me, slave."

Scarlet faced, Brietta lifted her hips and ground them against the big masculine hand that was probing and teasing her. It was something she had often wanted to do, if she admitted it to herself, which she rarely did, but had always stifled ruthlessly in favor of appearing as untouched by his groping as possible.

Having to participate like this in her own shame made her want to wail out loud, but she would do anything for Dirce, even this.

He even made her ask him to fuck her, forcing her to say it over and over until she got the pleading tone he wanted just right. The most mortifying thing, however, was that although she was moving beneath him and holding him to her only because he required it, it was starting to feel good to her to do that, to stretch up and make her hips collide with his on the down stroke, pressing him further up inside her than he'd ever been, making him fuck her hard, scratching his back with her nails, and coming so loudly she could hear the soldiers outside chuckling at her moans.

When it was over, and she was sliding down onto the nest of blankets on the floor, he caught her around waist and pulled her back up to sleep with him, surrounding her from behind, his muscled arm tight around her waist. She could feel his male part nestled against her bottom cheeks, and his breath as he fell into a deep sleep stirred the hair at her nape.

It was almost cozy and warm and comfortable.

Everything she never wanted it to be.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Lucius had to admit, Valeria was doing exactly what he expected of her – almost always without question. He rarely had to raise his eyebrow, which he did in place of reminding her of her brother's precarious position. He accompanied her personally every time she went to see the young man, even though seeing them together, and their obvious love for each other, made him feel like a sword was being driven through his gut, even though he knew they were just siblings.

He would never have that with her, in any capacity. He would never – could never – be anything to her other than an enemy. Knowing that, and seeing how she could be with someone she loved, made Lucius bitter and cruel. He took to beating Valeria severely if she showed any miniscule sign of reluctance in doing as he bade her. And sometimes he beat her just on a whim, because it made him feel better when she was cringing under his strap, her backside welted and bruised even before he started, doubly so when he finished and cut her down, only to rape her as soon as he'd helped her to the couch.

And the pleasure he'd gained in making this bargain with her . . . it was immeasurable. The first time she knelt before him and took his manhood into her hot, wet mouth – he almost unmanned himself before things had even begun. He taught her small fingers, slightly callused as they were, to rub and cup him in just the way he liked, his own fingers winding their way into the hair at the back of her skull so that he could control the rhythm and depth of her mouth on him. Just thinking of it could bring him to full erectness at the most inopportune times.

Brietta didn't know how she was going to get through the next minute of her life, much less a whole day. But she did see considerable improvement in Dirce's conditions. Her time with him was the only thing that was keeping her even halfway sane. The centurion was getting more and more unpredictable, more and more out of control. He had walked in on the two of them hugging once, and from that point on she no longer allowed to touch her brother. They sat across a table from each other, but they could not kiss hello or good by, or touch in any way.

That afternoon, after he'd caught her in Dirce's arms, Lucius had been wild with rage. Valeria had never seen him like this before, and she feared not only for her own life, but for her brother's. If he killed her, there would be no one around for Dirce.

But he hadn't touched her. He'd knocked over maps and broken his vine stick – one of his badges of office as a Centurion, and an implement with which he beat his own troops, when necessary – and almost hacked apart the couch they had been sleeping on. But he hadn't turned his rage on her. Yet.

After a while, however, he seemed to calm down, and came to stand in front of her, breathing heavily, his eyes searching hers almost pleadingly. Then, just as abruptly, he turned and left her.

Lucius didn't return to the tent that night, or the next few days.

Brietta grew more and more worried with each hour. She had no idea if, in his murderous rage, he returned to the prison and killed Dirce outright, or commissioned someone else to do it. Or if he was going to come back here and kill her. As scared as she was, Brietta decided that he wasn't going to find her cowering in the corner, even if, on his return, he had a sword in his hand. She would meet her fate with her head held high. She was Brietta, daughter of Camlin the Brave, granddaughter of Cedric the Hearty, and she would not bow down before anyone, even in the face off her own doom.

When he finally did part the tent flap, he was carrying something in his hand, but it wasn't a sword – it was a long, thin rod of some kind. His face was drawn into harder lines than she had ever seen it. "Get to the frame," he commanded, barely sparing her a glance.

Brietta did as she was told, knowing what was coming and trying to prepare herself as best she could as he immobilized her against that staunch wooden apparatus.

But there was no way that she could prepared herself for the severity of the beating he administered. That awful rod was thin and flexible, and it whistled through the air before each stroke hit her, giving her time to realize that another stroke was going to fall, allowing just enough time for her to agonize and dread the inevitable. Occasionally, he would pause in his unbearable rhythm only long enough to make it sing several times, so that she would never really know when the beating would begin again, when the rod's next scream would initiate her own as it bit unforgivingly into her tender flesh.

Sometimes, he would follow his pauses by molesting her, pressing himself up against her welted back and reaching around to milk and pinch her breasts obscenely and rubbing his engorged self against her tortured bottom, as if in promise of things to come.

By the time he was through, there was barely an inch of her backside that wasn't covered in raise, angry red weals, some of which were rapidly turning purple and black. Without another word, he cut her down and lay her on the blanketed ground on which she usually slept, forcing her legs apart and himself inside her in nearly the same motion. Brietta's unbound hands came up to try to push him away, but his hissed, "Think of your brother before you do that" made her clenched her fists as he drove into her, grinding her bottom into the rough fabric beneath her.

She lay there beneath him, praying that she could close her eyes and all of this would go away.

"You're not living up to your end of the bargain, wench. If I wanted to fuck a corpse I would. Do you really value your brother's life so little?"

Brietta opened her tear filled eyes and read the savageness in his. It took everything in her to wrap her arms around him and lift her hips to his, to pretend that she was enjoying this brutal rape. She kept Dirce alive in her mind the entire time, hoping against hope that he was still alive.

In Brietta's mind, it took him forever to cry out his release and spill his seed into her unwilling body. For Lucius, the end came – as it always seemed to with her alone – embarrassingly quickly. He lay atop her for a long while, trying to get his breathing – as well as his recently unruly emotions – under control.

He hadn't intended on reacting that way to seeing her in her brother's embrace. He didn't doubt that they were siblings – they looked very much alike – but regardless of their familial connection, he hated seeing Valeria in any man's arms. He'd never been seized but such jealousy in his life – he'd never felt about a woman the way he felt about Valeria, and he didn't like it. She made him feel both weak and strong at the same time, and Lucius wasn't used to being confused by his own feelings. Women had their place in his life – to ease his sexual needs. He'd never wanted any woman to be anything else to him.

Except her. A woman who was – by birth – beneath him. A barbarian. Willful, strong, and brave, to be sure, but a barbarian none the less. Not really worthy of anything besides a quick toss onto her backside. Yet he wanted so much more from Valeria – he wanted more from her than he could admit to himself. Even his little bargain with her didn't really bring him what he wanted – he knew her motivation was purely love of her brother. That when her arms slipped around his neck when he was pumping in and out of her, that she was only doing it to save a man she loved. Not because she had any feelings for him other than fear and loathing.

Lucius stiffened his back and rolled off her, standing to don a flowing robe and say something to the guards outside. Seconds later, a new couch had replaced the old one, and Valeria hadn't so much as moved to cover herself from the curious and lusty stares of his men. She lay there on her side, looking for all the world like a Greek statue of the ultimate in womanhood come alive – except for the vivid, raise welts that covered her from hips to mid-calf.

She was his. He owned her. She was nothing but a slave, would never be anything but he made of her. That was her lot in life – and his. The sooner he accepted it, the better.

Recent intelligence reports suggested that Hallobert's Keep – from whence both his prisoner and his slave hailed – was a hotbed of rebellion, that it was the origin of all of the raids that the camp and Army had been suffering. Lucius' commander had tasked him with the job of routing the rebels, and he had decided yesterday exactly how he was going to do it.

Lucius had discerned that Dirce was the head of the rebels by studying him and the other prisoners. Whenever Dirce was taken anywhere, the other prisoners called to him in their tongue, asking him for orders and directions. They deferred to him and sought his counsel about what they should be doing – escaping, complying, lying elaborately when questioned – in the evenings, when no one else was around except Lucius' guards, who had been taught the crude Anglo-Saxon tongue for just such situations.

He knew that Valeria's father and grandfather lived at the keep, and that Dirce was the heir apparent to his father's holdings. He also knew from other sources that both the son and daughter of Camlin were held in very high esteem by both the villagers and the castle inhabitants. He hoped that what he had planned would show the Saxon dogs once and for all that they were well and truly defeated. And he intended to drive that point home in the most humiliating, degrading manner possible for everyone involved. The entire population needed to be shown who its master was, and Lucius believed he just the manner in which to do so.

Dirce was more than well enough to travel, as was Valeria.

It was past time to get this thing settled, once and for all.

The next morning, Brietta found herself awakened before dawn and given a crude robe that was really just a large piece of rough fabric with a neck hole cut out of the middle. Her wrists were bound in front of her, but a length of rope was left as a lead. Lucius, of course, held the other end of this leash from his flashy white mount. He hadn't said a word to her since last night, his eyes narrowing at her stiff gait as he jerked her along behind him.

Brietta had no idea what was going on, until she saw Dirce, his arm still wrapped between two splints, being dragged behind another soldier. Lucius and the other soldier were at the head of a huge group of battle-dressed soldiers. They had no choice but to follow behind the horses, who were walking at a fairly fast pace. She and Dirce had to trot to keep up, and even then they were barely able to do maintain the speed necessary, but they both knew that if they stumbled or fell, they just be dragged over the rubble. There was going to be no stopping this army. They were more than prepared for war.

The trek was a long, dirty, and disheartening one. They both knew the paths they were taking – they were going home. As bound – and in Brietta's case nearly naked – prisoners. Lucius knew what he was doing, and how this would undercut the heart of the rebels – seeing two of their finest young people – the heir apparent and his sister – bent under the yoke of Roman dominance. He knew that this would go a long way to making the rebels realize that anyone – even their fabled leaders – could and would be overrun by Rome's superior might and intelligence.

It was a ten mile jaunt to the Keep and by the time they were near the village outskirts, near enough that they could hear the warning horns blowing the alarm for the villagers to gather in the castle's open courtyard, both of the prisoners were worn and dirty, barely managing to stay on their feet. Lucius didn't care whether they were walked or dragged into their former home. Either way, that was where they were going to end up.

But he had something up his sleeve for Valeria. Something she probably hadn't considered. With a nod to the guard at his left, she found herself devoid of the robe that had covered her and protected her from some of the journey's roughness. When the men behind her saw her hindquarters, they drew a

collective breath. Valeria's cheeks turned bright red, and Lucius smiled cruelly. The effect on his men was exactly what he wanted – they were both entranced by her beauty and lustful at the sight of her punishment, wishing they had been the ones to dole it out, he was sure.

The village was nigh onto deserted when they got there – no one offered any resistance at all. Brietta breathed a sigh of relief, but she knew her embarrassment was going to get worse before it got better – if it got better.

The main castle gate was shut, but yielded with depressing ease to the huge Roman battering ram, and before she knew it Brietta was being pulled along into the courtyard, where nearly everywhere she looked was a familiar face wearing a shocked and startled expression. She didn't think that he could humiliate her any more each time he did so, but this was unbelievable. In that moment, with all of her friends – young and old – and acquaintances staring at her nakedness, she truly wanted to die. Not only could they see all of her charms, but also the extent to which she'd been beaten.

Lucius dismounted and tugged Brietta along behind him as he entered the great hall where her father sat atop his throne as if nothing untoward was happening and her grandfather sat to one side, almost in the shadows.

Suddenly, she found herself pulled close to the Centurion, who proceeded to force her backwards over his arm as he fondled her breasts, pinching her nipples so tightly and grinding them over his fingers until she could hold back the moan of excruciating pain no longer.

Then he threw her down on her belly onto the floor, practically at her father's feet. Seconds later, Dirce joined her.

"As you can see, I have your whelps in my possession. I've found the girl, in particular, to be most entertaining. Her cunny's just about as sweet as any I've had."

Tears pressed against Brietta's lids at his words, but she refused to shed them and add to her own shame. She could see, though, that her father hadn't so much as flinched at the centurion's revelation, whereas her grandfather had cringed for her and reached to his side.

It was good to know that at least some of the populace was armed. She'd been surprised when they'd met absolutely no resistance at all. Grandfather wasn't the type to just lie down and let anyone take over his property without a considerable fight.

If she looked carefully, and she did – partly because it gave her something else to concentrate on besides her own complete humiliation – she could see discreet bulges which were probably dirks and swords. Hopefully Lucius wasn't looking as carefully.

"Take your filthy Roman scum off my property," her grandfather yelled, and some of the villagers mumbled their agreement, although not loudly enough to draw the centurion's wrath, they hoped. Grandfather had no such concerns. "And turn my grandchildren loose, before I run you off here myself."

Lucius chuckled. This was the best they had to offer? An old man who was overly fond of his grandchildren to face more than a legion of trained soldiers? "Bold words, old man." Lucius' gaze fell on the man who thought he was still a king. "Shouldn't you be the one who's willing to fight for his children's lives?"

Camlin's silent shrug was telling.

"Somehow, having met your children I wouldn't have thought that their father was a coward."

Up to this point, he had spoken in their language, but then he issued a curt order in Latin to the soldier holding Dirce's lead. "Kill him."

Even bound and tethered, there was no way Brietta was going to allow that to happen. Before the young Roman even managed to get his sword out of its scabbard, Brietta was on the ground, swinging her leg around and tripping him up. That movement was a catalyst – the assembled audience

suddenly had knives and swords in their hands, and, despite the fact that they were out numbered, the battle was over quickly due mostly to the element of surprised.

Dirce himself held Lucius in front of him, the blade of his sword at the other man's neck.

"Don't do it, Dirce," Brietta commanded in a deceptively low voice.

Lucius' eyes widened. Perhaps she did feel something for him.

But her next words disabused him of that fanciful notion. "He's worth more to us alive. We may be able to negotiate retaining our lands to a certain extent, if we agree to be their proxy government."

Her grandfather nearly had an apoplectic fit at Brietta's speech. "Have you lost your mind, girl? We do not have to negotiate with them - they are the invaders! They are - "

Brietta cut him off. "They are the victors, grandfather, and as such they can dictate the terms of our surrender. I have spent enough time in the Roman camp to know what they're capable of, and they won't stop until they've ground us under their feet one way or another. We need to recognize defeat and get as much out of it as we can instead of dying needlessly for a lost cause."

"But - "

"No," she said staunchly. "We will not continue this fight. Too many lives have been lost - or ruined," she said, the irony of it bitter in her mouth. Still gloriously naked, she met everyone's eyes as she commanded, "We will no longer fight this occupation. We will, instead, prosper as best we can through it. As long as we pay the tribute they demand, we can live as we always have. We don't need to let them kill off generation after generation of us. And," she turned to Lucius, "with a centurion and most of a legion in captivity, we are in a reasonable bargaining position." She threw the sword she'd lifted off of one of the Romans and glanced at her father. "If you value your lands, that'll become your new strength, father - negotiation. I have no doubt that you'll do everything in your power to retain the only thing that's ever meant anything to you - this keep."

She turned to leave, and Lucius' couldn't bear to see her go, knowing he had truly lost her. "Valeria! It was you all the time - you were the leader of the rebels! I thought it was your brother."

Brietta turned slowly and walked back to Lucius, standing up on her tiptoes so that they were as close to nose to nose as possible. "That should teach you, Roman, not to underestimate my people." She almost left him then, then thought better of it, saying fiercely, "And my name is Brietta." To get a little of her own back, she moved suddenly, and kned his privates hard, making him squeal and moan in a most satisfactory manner that made every woman around them titter and giggle, and every man cringe in involuntary sympathy.

Her face as blank and cold as stone, she turned away from him for the last time, and made it out of the hall to the grand staircase before she began to falter. Someone's strong hand was at her elbow, and she expected that it was Ula, or even her grandfather, as she felt a silky blanket surrounding her shoulders, covering her to her feet.

But the voice at her side was distinctively masculine, and nowhere near as thready as Cedric's. "Here. Let me help you." It was Tredan of Kilth - the one who had been so adamantly opposed to having a woman head up the rebels - the one her father dearly wanted her to marry.

Well, Brietta's mouth quirked unhappily, there wasn't going to be a betrothal now that she was damaged goods. All she could hope for was to live out her life in quiet obscurity, the shame of her loss of innocence dying alone with her so as to cause as little harm as possible to the family. Dirce would never breathe a word to anyone to confirm or deny her deflowerment, but it would be correctly assumed by everyone. No decent man would have her now, and she certainly didn't want any man - decent or not.

She'd had quite enough of men and their atrocious sex games. Brietta heartily hoped that no one ever touched her in an intimate way again. She would be very happy to live alone or at least unmarried for the rest of her days. She intended to make quite sure she did.

Her thoughts prompted her to gently dislodge her arm from his hold and continue up the stairs. "Thank you, Tredan of Kilth, but I'll make it on my own."

Tredan watched her ascend the stairs, her back and posture stiff. She couldn't have made it any clearer that she had been abused in that Roman's hands than if she'd screamed it at him. He had to admit, however grudgingly, that she was a tough girl. She'd gotten out from under that sadistic bastard's thumb. She'd lived. He knew how everyone was going to treat her now, and it caused an unfamiliar ache in his chest. He would have to see what he could do about making things as easy on her as possible.

Brie entered her own room for the first time in more than a month, and yet it felt strange to her, as if someone else lived there now instead of her. The first thing she did was put on clothes – more clothes than were dictated by the weather, but she wanted to be covered completely. If she could arrange it, no one would ever see her naked again.

Then she stretched out on her bed, eyes wide open, her mind racing. The future was unsettled; it was not a given that the Romans would accept the deal her father offered. She could, possibly, end up back in their gentle hands. She aimed to make sure that that never happened, one way or the other. She fingered the blade that lay next to her on the bed. She'd been unable – due to the bruises – to strap to her calf where it usually lived.

When Ula came in, she was in much the same position. "You need to get ready for dinner – your father wants you in the great hall at his side this evening."

Brietta snorted derisively. "I was held captive, raped, and beaten. Yet my dear father still commands that I dance attendance on him."

Ula saw her wince as she moved. "Take your clothes off, girl; I've brought some salve for that back of yours. He certainly did do a fine job on you, didn't he? What did you do to provoke this?"

She stood, but remained silent. No one who knew her was going to believe that she hadn't done something blatantly disrespectful to deserve such a beating. Having just found the comfort of clothing again, she also wasn't about to abandon it. Instead she pulled her robe up enough that the older woman could get to the parts she needed. The salve stung as it was applied, but it did help relieve some of her pain.

Ula was watching her charge carefully. She knew what was going to happen at dinner tonight, but her mistress was thankfully oblivious to it. She fully intended to be a fly on the wall during that scene. It would be very interesting to see who survived the uproar.

CHAPTER EIGHT

That evening the head table bulged. Cedric and Camlin were there, along with Dirce and Brietta, as well as Tredan and two people she recognized vaguely as his parents. That particular group of people would have set off alarms in her head if this had been more usual circumstances. But Brietta was very numb right now, and wasn't catching all the subtle nuances she would have normally.

She ate very little of the dinner, although it was all of her and Dirce's favorites. Tredan noticed how little she was eating, but said nothing, not wanting to badger her.

At the end of the meal, her father stood and lifted his mug, toasting to their safe return from the invading hoards, most of whom were now enjoying the hospitality of an Anglo-Saxon dungeon. "We do have something else to celebrate here, though. Oswulf of Kilt and I have agreed on a betrothal for our children – and we could not see any reason for a delay of any sort. Tredan and Brietta will be married this evening."

Brietta couldn't process what he was saying – she certainly couldn't believe it. She had no intentions of marrying anyone. She couldn't! Amidst all of the cheers of "hear, hear" and the eager congratulations of what seemed to be the entire village, she stood and ran out of the room, into the dimly lit garden that had often been her sanctuary. She just wanted to get away from everyone who seemed doggedly determined to act as if nothing untoward had happened to her while she was being held captive. She didn't even want to argue with her father about getting married, because it would be so hard to admit something so shameful to him, especially when he already disliked the mere fact of her womanhood.

For a long, soothing time, she merely wandered the meandering paths, drinking in the healing scent of the herbs, vegetables and flowers. She was so lost in thought that she didn't hear the soft footsteps behind her – that was a true testament to just how distraught she was. A few mere weeks ago, such carelessness would have resulted in ending up – where she did end up.

"I brought some dinner," he said quietly so as not to startle her.

Despite the care he'd taken, she jumped and whirled on him as if she expected him to put a knife to her throat.

"Easy, easy, there. I'm not going to hurt you," he put his hands up, palms towards her, so she could see his hands were weaponless. The fact that he carried a sword around his waist at all times was not a consideration – most people, men and women – were armed. He waved a truncheon towards her that was heaped with food.

Brietta's eyebrows rose. "That's enough food to feed the entire hall."

He had the grace to blush, which only made him better looking, which Brietta hated. She didn't want to like him. He'd never been anything but a thorn in her side, and just because their parents wanted them to marry tonight didn't mean that she had to revise her opinion one bit.

"Well, I had hopes that you might be willing to share with a poor, honest lad."

"And where would I be finding one of those around here?"

He glared at her in a manner that probably made most people cringe. But not her. She was amazing. Tredan had always admired her, and her captivity had not lessened that admiration one bit. In fact, he was awestruck that she'd managed to stay alive at all, even though he figured he knew exactly how she'd managed to do it.

While she was in her room trying to recover from having been put on such obscene display in front of her kinfolk, he'd gone down to where the prisoners were held beneath the keep. The one who had been dragging Brietta was by himself, bound wrist and ankle to the rough stone wall. And naked. He

had heard Dirce say that this man should not be allowed to keep his clothing under any circumstances – and Tredan wholeheartedly agreed with that decision.

The haughty Roman had definitely been taken down several pegs by the time Tredan got to him – he could see the bruises from others who felt just as he did were already forming along the man's ribs. Tredan had his own shot at him, and even when he'd left the man hanging bloody from his bonds, he still didn't feel as if he'd really gotten Brietta any of her own back. But it had still felt pretty good to sink his fists into that man's midsection. He could feel ribs breaking beneath the impact of his blows, and it was one of the most satisfying snaps he'd ever heard in his life.

"Why don't we sit down over here?" he asked, trying not to order her around. Tredan figured she'd had quite enough of that for a while.

She surprised him by doing it without a word, but he couldn't get her to eat anything no matter how many different temptations he offered her. He ended up polishing off the contents of the wooden platter himself. "Wonderful food. Your father's cook is worth her weight in gold."

"Siobhan has declined many offers to leave my father's hearth. But still she stays."

"She's a freedwoman?"

Brietta nodded, saying sarcastically, "Yes. My father pays her well – in several different types of currencies."

Tredan nodded back as if he completely understood. "He's her lover?"

She could no more stop the snort she emitted than she could stop the sun from rising. "That is an entirely inept word to describe the situation, but yes."

"He doesn't love her?"

"Love doesn't enter into the situation between a man and a woman. The man wants, the woman submits. That's the extent of it."

Tredan sighed. She'd never been receptive to the idea of a marriage between them, but now, after her experiences with the Roman, she was going to be completely adamant about it.

"You realize that our parents mean for us to marry tonight." He decided that avoiding the topic that was lying heavy in the air between them wasn't a good idea. They needed face the fact that, by bedtime this evening, they were going to be husband and wife.

"Yes, but I am free to say no."

Tredan's chin lowered, and his eyebrow rose. "If you're willing to leave your father's lands and become an outcast, yes, that is a pleasant possibility."

"My father –" Brietta had to stop because she wasn't in the habit of lying. She was going to say that her father would never do that to her, but he most certainly would. He'd do it for a lark, much less to join his lands to Oswulf's, which would give him that much more power. Her heart sank and she sighed rather than ending the sentence.

"Your father would sell you away in an instant. I've watched how disgracefully he treats you."

If she allowed herself, she would almost be impressed by his words. But it would take a lot more than that to get her to soften towards him in any way. She chose to remain silent rather than confirm his opinion.

"It would be disrespectful of both of us not to do as our parents command."

Brietta snorted again, completely unconcerned about how unladylike she sounded. "I don't think I've followed one of my father's commands in my life."

His jaw set at that admission. "Well, then it's about time you start. Our parents will no doubt strike a bargain with the Romans and we could rule both regions for them. Doesn't that interest you at all?"

She had to admit to herself that the idea definitely intrigued her. She'd always wanted to rule, although her father was not about to allow it to come to that, even though he'd never been much enamored of Dirce, either. She did despise the idea of surrendering in any way to the Romans, after having been so staunch in her resistance of them when she was in their gentle hands.

But the writing was on the wall. The Romans outnumbered and outfought them at every turn. They had the might and what's more the money to continue to fight until the last Anglo-Saxon man, woman, and child was obliterated from these lands – and they had done so in other places they'd invaded.

“You're sure it would be that horrid to be married to me?”

“Are you looking for a compliment?” Brietta's tone was deliberately derisive.

He admitted to himself that it would have been nice to hear one, but he certainly wasn't going to let her know that. She needed a strong man – because she was a strong woman – and he intended to be that man. “Not hardly. But considering the alternative, marrying me is the lesser of the evils.” He didn't add that it truly was her only choice, knowing how boxed in that would make her feel. It would help her get through it if she felt that it was her own decision, but, if needs be, he would lay down his law, even on that very sore bottom of hers.

Truth be told, he would much rather help her learn that relations between a man and a woman didn't always have to be horrible and hurtful, as she undoubtedly thought they did.

Brietta just wished he – and everyone else – would leave her alone. She couldn't believe that after almost a month in captivity, constantly being forced to do things she didn't want to do, she came home and was put right back into a position where she had no choice but to do something she desperately didn't want to do.

But she was smart enough to see the writing on the wall. The Romans would come after the men they'd lost here, and the small allegiance that her wedding would form would have to count themselves very lucky if they were able to talk the Roman commander into allowing the two families to stay in power. But at least they would be bargaining from a position of strength. Alone, neither of them stood a chance.

She stood and began to pace. She found that pacing helped her think things through on occasion. “What about my brother? If we don't unite, he stands to inherit all of my father's lands – “

“If we don't unite, there won't be any lands to inherit – the Romans will occupy them all.”

Point taken. Brietta didn't like being wrong. “Then what would he do?”

Having already anticipated this question, Tredan answered unhesitatingly, “He would be my first sword – the hand of my law.”

Brietta was impressed with this. That position would be wonderful for Dirce. But then another thought struck her. “Would I be able to continue my training with my grandfather?” Cedric was going to be another consideration in all of this, but he would have to be dealt with later.

Tredan's jaw tightened. He had never much liked the idea of a woman training as a warrior, despite the fact that he'd seen Brietta in action and knew that she could largely take care of herself. His first impulse was to protect her, which is one of the reasons he'd voted against her when the rebels proposed that she become their leader.

“I will consider it,” he said, not wanting to make a precedent of giving in to her too easily in their marriage. There would be no doubt in anyone's mind as to who was in charge within their relationship, and it wasn't going to be her under any circumstances.

Brietta also knew that he was right – that if she defied her father and declined to marry Tredan, then she would be expected to leave Camlin's lands immediately – daughter or not. She had nowhere else to go and no money.

Her intellect was telling her to acquiesce gracefully and do her best to put up with the big oaf that was looking at her all too eagerly. He wasn't too bad looking, really – very broad in the chest and tall, and

his teeth looked almost as healthy as hers, which was highly unusual. No trips to the smithy for her, yet. He had a full head of hair that fell in loose blonde-brown curls down to his shoulders, and if he was going to lose his hair that would have already started. Brietta frowned. She was beginning to think like that insipid Ellette.

More importantly, he could fight. She'd seen him both in training – although he'd completely ignored her – and in battle, and he was magnificent. Her mouth quirked. She should get him to train her instead of Grandfather.

She stuck out her hand, and Tredan looked at it disdainfully for a moment. “As long as you will allow me to continue training, then I suppose I will marry you.”

A sharp retort was stuck in his throat. He'd certainly heard more eloquent acceptances. But the main thing was that she had agreed. She would be in his bed tonight, like it or not, and he would do his best to make sure she more than liked it.

Tredan shook her hand solemnly, then tucked it into his elbow to steer her back towards the hall. But Brietta stopped him in his tracks, pulling on his arm. Her eyes were downcast, her face pale when she said in a soft, defeated voice, “There's something I must tell you, though, that may change your mind about wanting to marry me.”

He reckoned he knew what she was going to say, but stayed quiet. It was obviously very hard for her to tell him, and he didn't want to make it even harder. “I'm ruined. I'm no longer pure. That Roman –”

Tredan cut her off with a callused finger over her lips. “Enough. Despite what you might think, plenty of brides go to their marriage beds having known a man before. And what he did to you is not what happens between a husband and wife. I will show you that myself.”

“But –”

He drew her close, being very careful when he wrapped his arms around her not to hurt her back. “No. I know he raped you. That's his wrong, not yours.”

She wanted to believe that herself, but certainly never expected to hear him agree with it. Her father and grandfather no doubt considered her damaged goods, although what happened to her was no fault of her own.

“Now, let's go settle our parents' stomachs and tell them that we've agreed to being wed tonight. I'm sure there's all sorts of preparations that need to be made beforehand.”

He took care of everything – the announcement and getting most things arranged. Brietta decided that, in this situation, she liked the way he took charge. Even her father and grandfather deferred to him, after all, he would eventually be the ultimate ruler.

Brietta found herself bustled up to her room and put into what had been her mother's wedding finery – a soft, chemise of soft blue and gold, with a matching gold chain belt from which a good sized ruby hung at the end. Ula put jeweled bobs on her ears, and a fine net veil on her head, held in place by a gold flowered circlet. “You're beautiful.”

“I am not,” she protested, blushing.

Ula wasn't going to have any of that. She took the young girl's chin in her fingers, saying firmly, “Yes, you are. And Tredan sees that. I think he'll be a very good match for you, if you'll let him.”

Her last words rang in Brietta's ears as she was escorted down to the hall. Mere minutes later, she had pledged her troth to Tredan of Kilth, and the revelry began.

Brietta, however, did not join in the celebrations as heartily as she might have. She stayed to herself as much as possible, receiving everyone's congratulations as graciously as she could. Even her grandfather gave her a hug with tears in his eyes, saying as he left her, “It was the only thing you could do.”

That would be as close to an endorsement of her marriage as she would ever get from that old man. Despite his age and rickety old bones, he wasn't the least addled. He, too, knew which way the wind was blowing.

Later that night, though, she was escorted to her bridal chamber by all the women of the keep, who proceeded to undress her and put her into her nightclothes, then tuck her under the covers of their marriage bed. The bridegroom was conveyed to the chamber door on the shoulders of his comrades, who didn't bother to knock before they opened the door and threw him in, singing bawdy songs of sexual conquest at the top of their collective, drunken lungs.

Brietta was quite sure that Tredan would also be completely soused, but she was wrong. He appeared completely sober – not bobbing or weaving once – as he divested himself of his clothes and joined her under the warm skins.

She had already determined that she wasn't going to stop him from claiming his husbandly rights. What difference did it make now? She would lie there, as she had under the Centurion's heaving, sweating body, and endure it as her penalty in this life for having been born female.

But Tredan had his own ideas on the subject of their wedding night. He scooted over close to her and pulled her to his side, positioning her head on his shoulder as if she was a doll, and keeping his arm loose around her back. With an almost fatherly kiss on the top of her head, he whispered, "Go to sleep."

Brietta was stunned, and she couldn't stop herself from asking incredulously, "Don't you want to – to –" but she couldn't quite finish the sentence.

"To kiss you? To touch your breasts and the rest of your body and have you touch mine? To eventually slide gently into you and bring you to the heights of ecstasy?" His voice had just a touch of a hard edge to it, and his body was stiff, as if he was trying to control himself and keep himself from doing exactly what he'd described to her. "Yes, I do. But you're not ready for it. You need some time to recover from what happened to you that our parents didn't see fit to give you. But I'm going to let you get used to us before we come together that way."

She lay her head back down on his shoulders, and despite her surprise, she was asleep in seconds, the events of the day having exhausted her.

He was as good as his word. Tredan didn't touch her in a sexual manner at all for the first four weeks they were married. He did touch her, in a husbandly and intimate manner. But he wanted to win her over, and he was going to do everything in his power that he could to get her to accept him as more than just her husband. He wanted to be her love.

The first thing he did the next morning was what no one had been expecting – least of all Brietta. When he saw she was awake, he pulled the rough blanket out from under them then pricked his finger with the knife he always kept close to him, bleeding red droplets onto the blanket.

Brietta's cheeks became rosy as she realized what he was doing for her.

When the stain was of what he considered to be a reasonable size, he hung the blanket out the window. He was faking proof of her virginity, trying to help her save face.

When he met her inquiring eyes, he shrugged. "I hate gossip. This'll make 'em wonder," he grinned at her devilishly.

Brietta didn't know quite what to do with the way her new husband was behaving. He was taking part in the negotiations with the Romans, such as they were, and was gone all day almost every day. But when he was home, he was with her. Sometimes he caught the tail end of her training with her Grandfather, who, although he grumbled a lot about why she bothered to continue doing it, still managed to make it to the field where she practiced almost every day. He often put his hand on hers at dinner, or

his arm around her waist while they were walking, employing very small, casual intimacies to tame her to his hand.

One habit he had developed a distinct taste for was attending her weekly bath, which was an unusual tendency in itself – the villagers considered that the Lady Brietta spent entirely too much time on her own cleanliness, especially considering how dirty she got when she was doing the outrageous – sword fighting with the men. But Brietta had adopted the habit young, spurred on by Ula who had fastidious personal habits.

Three men had to lift the specially made oak cask to their room and then turn around and drag up a cauldron of heated water, to which Ula would pour room temperature water from the cistern until it reached a reasonable temperature. Tredan liked to stretch out in a chair in front of the fireplace and watch her from beneath lowered lids, grimacing at the sight – every time – of her backside as it healed.

In bed at night, when the only light for miles was that of their fire, he would always hold her to him at first, talking quietly about how things were going. He marveled at the fact that he bothered to do that – most women in his experience wouldn't understand, nor would they even want to hear about anything that didn't directly affect them. But he knew Brietta would understand, and she even became a valuable resource, since she had actually been in one of their camps.

Sometimes he let his hands drift over her in a completely undemanding manner – sometimes almost in a friendly way. Occasionally, when she appeared sore from the day's work, he massaged her, and she allowed it, which he considered to be a small victory. The welts on her bottom and legs had faded, but he would always remember them. There wasn't much left of the Centurion by the time they handed him back to his people after finally reaching an agreement about becoming the proxy government for Rome. As far as Tredan was concerned, it was less than he deserved.

One night after they had been married almost two months, and he had kept his hands largely to himself the whole time – although sometimes he had to sit on them to keep from reaching out to touch her in a way he knew she might find disturbing – he had finished massaging her, and Brietta was just about as liquid as she would ever be in her lifetime. She was utterly relaxed, but not quite asleep yet. Her skin was tingling and flushed from the digging work of his fingers, and she felt truly happy for the first time in a long time.

Tredan could tell that she was more relaxed than he'd ever seen her, and he thought that this would be the best time to make a move towards normalizing their relationship. He'd tried to show her for the past two months that he wasn't like the man who hurt her. He could only hope that she'd absorbed that into her head somehow.

He rolled her onto her back from her stomach, where he'd been working down those strong legs. He allowed her to wear her nightclothes to bed, and he moved them around as need be to get to where he wanted to rub. His first move was to pull the cloth up and over her head. Brietta immediately clutched her arms to her breasts and brought her legs up to hide her womanhood, but she didn't cringe from him.

"Brietta?" He wanted her to look at him, but it took her a little while to feel strong enough within herself to do so. "I'm not going to hurt you. And I'll stop when you say stop, all right?" he promised rashly, hoping he could keep his word. "But I want to be closer to you. I want to feel that beautiful skin against mine."

He'd never worn anything to bed, which she had found somewhat upsetting at first, but had settled down about since he hadn't tried to grab at her, or force her to touch him. Tredan arranged himself to her side, with one leg over hers, his head on her shoulder, and just held her. He didn't try to grope or grab, but kept her close to him. Her arm lay limply on his shoulders, and he counted it a victory that she hadn't removed it from contact with him entirely.

"Do you know the first time I knew I loved you?" he whispered in the dark.

Brietta was stunned. He loved her? “You – you love me?”

“Of course. I always have. That’s why it drove me crazy when everyone was so damned accepting of you being this warrior princess. I wanted to wrap you up and carry you away and make love to you all day somewhere where you’d always be safe.” His fingers began to trail slowly down her arm as he spoke in a deep, soothing tone. “You were arguing with your brother at one of the regional fairs. You were a little slip of a thing – like you still are – and all of about eight or eleven or so. I watched you go after him as if he was the little girl and you were the older boy. You never gave up. You were badgering him mercilessly about something you wanted, and you weren’t going to settle for him putting you off.” Tredan leaned down and kissed her temple. “And I thought now there’s a mate to be proud of!”

Brietta snorted. “No much to be proud of now.”

Tredan leaned further over her, so that he was almost on top of her, holding her chin up so that she had to look at him. “If I hear you say anything like that again I’m going to put you over my knee.”

She frowned, but was kind flattered at the way he was defending her.

“That Roman’s sins are not yours. Don’t give him the power to ruin your life – to ruin one of the best parts of life – the coming together of a man and a woman is beautiful and wondrous and incredibly pleasurable. It’s meant to be sacred, and I believe that, between you and I, it can be.”

Brietta had never thought about how she had been letting her experiences with Lucius had colored her view of herself. But Tredan was right. And he was her husband. And he was willing to help.

“He – he – “ she wanted to tell him what had happened, but she didn’t know if she could.

Tredan pressed his finger to her lips. “Unless you really want to talk about it, it’s okay. You don’t have to. I’m already assuming the worst. I just want you to see if you can relax enough to let me love you. I know you don’t have any feelings for me yet, but I love you enough for the both of us . . . and eventually, there’ll be our children – “

“Children?” she whispered, not having considered that idea. “All that time he – and – I – could well be barren – I didn’t – in all that time – I’m not “ She’d had her woman’s time as regularly as always, she was not pregnant.

He chuckled lightly. “You will be, if you’ll let me.”

She wanted to have children, but had put away the idea once she was captured. But she didn’t know how to give him the permission he was asking for. So Brietta leaned forward and kissed him, slowly and gently, hoping he would realize that she would putting herself – her highly delicate self in this instance – in his strong, capable hands.

Tredan did, indeed, recognize what she was trying to tell him, and he was both honored and a little bit nervous. This night meant everything to him – to them. He wanted to show her how he felt, and the wonder of sex, when all she’d seen was the brutality that could be associated with it.

The uppermost thought in his mind was that he had to keep a gentle hand throughout it all – no matter how much he might want to bend her to his will, she’d had enough of that for a long while. Instead, he touched her all over with just his fingertips, roughened though they were, she didn’t object, although she was shaking a little in the beginning. By the time he’d explored the calluses on her feet – from too much time spent barefooted in the fields – and memorized every bump and scar, she was relaxed again. He took a very long time just kissing her, long enough that he thought he was going to go mad from it, but she was beginning to kiss him back.

He never touched her any way but with complete reverence, with total concern for what she was feeling, or not feeling. When Tredan’s mouth covered a nipple for the first time, she started and bucked against him a little. He lifted his head immediately and soothed her with his low, hypnotic voice, promising that he would never hurt her there, or anywhere else, and that she had nothing to fear from him. That he just wanted to worship her.

Eventually, with the utmost in patience, she allowed him the freedom of the intimate areas of her body – although she was stiff as a board when his finger delved between her nether lips, separating them with every possible care. He mouthed a nipple the entire time, hoping to distract her some, inwardly pleased to realize that both of her rosebud nipples were peaked and hard.

He merely cupped her gently for a while, letting her get used to his touch, reinforcing the fact that he was going to take it slow. Then his middle finger, which had parted those folds, began to move inquisitively, as if exploring uncharted territories with every caution. Her legs were not spread, and he had not required or requested that they be, preferring to let her find some pleasure and perhaps nature would take its course and she would open up to him naturally.

But when his finger brushed over her bud, dryly, as she was not yet very aroused, she reached down and grabbed his wrist. “No, please. Don’t. I don’t want that.”

He was instantly intrigued. “What do you mean?”

Tredan could hear her swallow nervously, and her body was tense beneath his again.

“Brietta, you must always tell me the truth – especially in this room, in our marriage bed. Honesty is necessary. We must be able to trust each other. There’s nothing you can tell me about that time that would make me want or love you any less than I do.”

Her eyes filled with tears; she so wanted to believe what he was saying. “He – he pleased me. Again and again. He forced me to respond to him, even though that was the last thing I wanted to do. I didn’t have any control. He made me, and I couldn’t keep my body from responding.”

He held her tight, rocking slightly, and kissing the top of her head. “Shhhhhh. That’s okay. What he did wasn’t good, but it’s wonderful that your body can feel pleasure – even if it’s in a bad situation. There are a lot of women who can’t.”

“I wished that I couldn’t – he – it – was awful!”

His arms wrapped around her tight. “I’m sure it was. But I’m not him, and you have full control here. If you want me to stop, I will. I’m not going to force you into anything that you don’t want. And feeling that ecstasy is a true blessing, most especially between a husband and a wife. I want that for you. I want you to feel that pleasure when it’s given in love – not forced on you for someone’s amusement, or to degrade you.” He caught her eyes. “Will you let me do that for you?”

Slowly, very slowly, Brietta relaxed her grip on Tredan’s wrist. She wasn’t at all sure about what he said, but he seemed to believe very strongly in it. Brietta wasn’t sure she ever wanted to feel that kind of pleasure again.

But her body had other ideas, and Tredan’s soft, gently stroking finger – lubricated after he’d popped it into his mouth – had no further problems coaxing it to life. He could see her starting to move with him, and could hear the beginnings of moans, but then she’d squelch each of them, tamping them down along with her own desires.

“No, my love, relax and let the moans out. They’re the music of our love. If you want to move your hips, move them. No one here will ever ridicule you for enjoying what we can bring to each other. It’s the way we’re supposed to be.”

Eventually very close to her time, she was able to let herself go and not worry about whether or not she was acting disgracefully. He was making her feel so good she couldn’t believe that such paradise could be had without guilt.

And when she convulsed on his hand, grabbing at him and holding him tight to her while that finger relentlessly continued its rhythmic stroking, she began to cry at the tenderness of his ministrations, and how hard it had been for her to accept them, and him.

While kissing her face all over and washing away her tears with his lips, Tredan positioned himself between her legs and sank into her very slowly and very carefully, watching and feeling her for any signs of bad memories.

When he'd filled her to the hilt, he leaned on his elbows to look down on her. "You are my love, whether you recognize it quite yet or not. You will." He brushed her hair away from her forehead with the side of his hand while his hips called out to him greedily to move, and he had to do so or die. "And I am your love. And we will raise kings and queens together on this plot of land we own, Rome and everyone else be damned."

With that he exploded inside her, his heart warming when he felt those small arms creeping around his back, holding him tightly to her.

And he, alone, knew he had had the greatest victory of all over the Romans.

Her.

SOLD!

By Carolyn Faulkner

CHAPTER ONE

Carolyn tugged against the rough, dirty bonds that held her wrists together. Despite the fact that the rope was also only loosely looped around the saddle horn, but there was no give in them at all. They were leaving angry, scratchy red marks in her formerly pristine skin.

They'd been riding for what had seemed like forever for her – and she fancied herself somewhat of a horsewoman. Of course, it didn't help that he was forcing her to ride astride like some hoyden, the stiff leather rubbing obscenely between her legs. She'd tried to loop her leg over the horn to approximate the proper sidesaddle position as closely as she could on this barbaric Western saddle, but he'd pushed her leg back over every time, the last time slapping his palm down hard onto her thigh, even reaching beneath the skirt of the dress she'd insisted on wearing over these scandalous breeches he'd forced her into so that he she had less protection against the sharp sting of his hand as it cracked down onto her leg.

"Stop wiggling," he growled against her ear.

It was abominable how close this gauche, dirty fur trader was to her. He didn't deserve the honor of being ground under her heels, much less hoisting himself up behind her on his horse, his thighs cradling hers, his crotch pressing shamelessly up against her buttocks, because he'd insisted on bunching her skirt up between them. She could feel the animal warmth of him plastered against her back – and she knew it literally was animal warmth, since his entire ensemble seemed to be comprised of various furs of various animals.

If it wasn't so blasted cold – already, and it was only September – she wouldn't have been wearing the coat he'd given her that was made of much the same materials. He'd discarded the gorgeously fashionable one her father had presented her with two years ago, and slapped it out of her hands when she'd tried to rescue it from the pile that was obviously going to be left behind.

She was still trying to deal with her stepfather's betrayal. She'd known that the business hadn't been doing as well as it should have – it was hard to miss, considering that since her mother had died he'd spent the majority of his time either drunk or sleeping. Carolyn had done as much as she could, but since her mother hadn't allowed her to learn anything about Kenneth's business, she was pretty much at a loss.

But she'd never thought he'd sell her into slavery! And at such a shamefully low price! When he'd asked her to accompany him to the town square – such as it was – last night, she was surprised. No woman interested in retaining her virtue ventured outside in Shepherdstown at night, especially not during their pale equivalent of the Rendezvous that happened further east. Once a year, the town was even more overrun with insolent and ill mannered but armed to the teeth traders, drunk on the riches of their labors and unbelievable quantities of alcohol.

But she had assumed that Kenneth would protect her, and he had. Right up to the time he finished squabbling with who she now knew was the slave trader that was going to be conducting the auction that concluded the town's Founder's Day festivities. Carolyn had assumed that he was bargaining for some sort of goods the man had that the store needed.

She had rapidly learn to stop assuming when the smelly man grabbed a hold of her arms, bound them together behind her and threw her into a rickety wagon to await her fate. No amount of calling after Kenneth brought him back to her – in fact, she watched through tears as he walked directly into the saloon to drink away the tidy profit he'd just made.

The slave trader was barely understandable and paid even less attention to her ranting than Kenneth had. Finally, swollen eyed and hoarse to the point of whispering from screaming, Carolyn

quieted, huddling in on herself and eventually caving in and using one of the disgusting blankets she found there.

The next day, not a lot past the crack of dawn, which she had never seen before in her life, the auction began, and she had to wait through the whole thing. Apparently, the auctioneer/owner had some small amount of business savvy, because saved the best for last. All of the other women – and the few men – had trudged up the steps and onto the makeshift stage – which also doubled as a gallows, when necessary – without much fuss. But Carolyn threw such a fit she had to be carried on, and all the crowd did was laugh. She knew most of the people there, and wished she could have melted into the floor or at least dropped dead on the spot, but instead her wrists, that were bound behind her, were anchored by a long tether to a bolt in the wooden floor made just for that purpose, and her legs were fitted into the rusty iron shackles that were used for every slave presented there.

Unfortunately, instead of dying outright or at least fainting out of the most mortifying situation of her life, Carolyn blushed so hard she thought she was going to faint and then she realized, to her horror, that she wasn't going to, and the situation just kept getting worse. The owner was doing his little almost unintelligible patter, as he did about every poor wretch he put on the block. "Female. Nineteen." He squeezed her arms, just below the shoulder. "Do a good day's work for ya.'" Then laid a hand on each hip. "Got breeders' hips." He paused for emphasis and grinned lasciviously at the crowd. "Virgin, too, her Poppa said." He put the emphasis on the wrong syllable, but apparently everyone knew what he'd was saying by the murmur that rippled through the crowd.

Before she could say or do anything, he had taken out a wicked looking knife and slit the seams of her dress and chemise together, letting the front of it fall to her waist, completely exposing her breasts to the crowd. Then he'd reached over and hefted one of them, squeezing tightly until she cried out. Carolyn was fighting her bonds with everything in her, until she realized that all that did was incite the rabble by making her firm breasts dance before them.

So she stood stock still, but refused to look down at her feet, as the others had. She kept her head high, and, while her cheeks burned with shame, she stared daggers through every man who dared place a bid, constantly trying the strength of the knots at her wrists. She had fed some of them in her own – well, her mother's and Kenneth's – fine parlor. Why, Bud Smith, who was old enough to be her father, put in one bid, and so did Lance Gautier, who was only a few years older than she was and had been her suitor until Kenneth had begun losing money, and she'd begun losing status in the community, despite the fact that they still inhabited the largest house in the community.

Carolyn might have sunk as low she could at this point, but her glare could still set some men back on their heels. The auctioneer wasn't at all happy – he wasn't getting anywhere near the price for her that he wanted – just barely above what he'd paid the old sot for her. She was worth a lot more than that. Thinking the men in the crowd might like a little more of a show, he pinched her nipples sharply, hard enough to make her scream and lean over to sink her teeth into him, drawing an outraged yell from him as well as a quick, ruthless backhand that caught the side of her cheek, leaving both a smudge and an ugly bruise there for all to see.

"That'll learn ya' for bitin' me, girl, and 'ere's more whir that came from."

Dizzy now, her head buzzing strangely in a way it never had before, she thought he was a mirage of sorts at first, until the crowd began to part as he made his way through it, hefting a small leather purse in his hand that jingled with coins.

"Fifty silver dollars," the man said, throwing the bag onto the stage at her feet, quite confident that he'd bought and paid for her several times over.

And he had.

“Sold!” cried the auctioneer, still rubbing the spot where she’d nipped him. He couldn’t wait to be rid of the bitch, and untied her wrists from the bolt to hand the rope over to the obviously wealthy man, who immediately used a fur to cover the young woman’s nakedness. Her former owner cracked a black toothed smile, cackling to himself that he wouldn’t want anyone else getting a good look at her either, if he’d bought the baggage himself.

Carolyn found herself tugged along behind a man who was near big enough to blot out the sun, especially from her. She only topped five feet by an inch or two, and barely weighed more than a hundred and ten pounds – she’d used the big grain scale in the mercantile to weigh herself once, when she was wondering. This man was at least three times her size – maybe more. He was broad as a barn and so muscled that she could see them rippling beneath his shirt and coat, both of which he wore completely open, as if it was the middle of July instead of coming on to what promised to be a very nasty winter. And that didn’t take into consideration how indecent it was that every time he turned to her, she saw a flash of light chest hair covering a very muscular, tanned chest.

She’d never so much as seen a man’s ankle, much less his chest hair! It was downright shocking, and she’d had enough shocks for one lifetime in the past two days.

“Would you please button your shirt?” she asked as he dragged her along behind him; his strides covered three of hers, especially in her skirt.

He did not deign to reply to her query, no matter how often she repeated it; apparently he was too busy trying to run her into the ground getting to what must have been his horse and mule that were tethered outside the saloon. Carolyn’s head was down just because she was trying to make sure she didn’t trip and kill herself being force marched across the muddy, rutted street, and all of a sudden she came up short against the back of him, and felt as if she’d run into a brick wall. No wonder none all of her struggles had gotten her nowhere, except almost face down in the mud on occasion when she stumbled. But he’d always caught her, wrenching her shoulders none too gently until she was upright again and fit to drag some more.

Until he’d stopped dead in his tracks nearly in the middle of the street. It wasn’t until she peeped around his broad back, and spying someone she’d never expected to see again. Kenneth, shoving one of her bags at him. “Here. They’re hers. Or they were.” He didn’t so much as look in her direction, as if she was beneath him now, when he was the one who’d married up by marrying her mother.

The man gave Kenneth, who was small and slight, a curt once over and an even more curt response. “Merci.”

Kenneth turned and left without a second glance.

She didn’t know why that exact moment struck her so, but Carolyn burst into tears, which were, of course, completely ignored by her captor, who rummaged through her things, leaving most of them in the bag. She spied the small, silver framed picture of her mother that had graced her nightstand in the only home she’d ever known, and cried even harder, especially when she realized that he intended to leave anything he hadn’t selected behind for whoever wanted them.

“Please – please – could I have the picture?” she asked, never having heard herself sound so cowed in her life. How the mighty had fallen. She knew she wasn’t going to get it – he hadn’t so much as spoken to her or acknowledge her or any of her requests, but was delighted when, after physically lifting her up into the saddle and retying her hands in front of her, he did find the picture and tuck it into one of his already bulging saddle bags. She couldn’t help but repeat her thanks hoarsely over and over. “Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.”

It was one of the few things she’d have to remind her of who she had been at one time, along with a very few of her dresses.

But now, after riding in front of him for so long, she thought her legs were going to fall off. "Can't we stop?" she whined for the thousandth time.

He didn't answer, as usual.

She had to admit she was somewhat surprised by him, though. The few mountain men she'd had the misfortune to run into in town announced themselves loudly by royally offending the noses of anyone within a five mile radius. But he didn't – thankfully. And she was looking for reasons to hate him. She'd always thought that it was only the lowest of the low who would pay for a human being. Carolyn had kept her mother from contracting for an indentured servant from Ireland, in favor of just hiring someone in town because she thought the practice totally barbaric.

Now here she was.

Because of his refusal to stop some time later, her right thigh began to cramp, and she found herself literally screaming in pain. He still didn't slow the horse one iota, but he did reach under her billowing skirts to rub her leg, which felt at once horrid and wonderful – more shamefully wonderful than anything. She liked the way his strong, sure fingers massaged away the pain. But she didn't like the way they then proceeded to find their way up her flanks to her bare right breast, which bobbed gently against his palm from the movement, as if it was pressing into it then back out again.

He stopped that movement by cupping first one, then the other of them from behind, holding them tightly but not painfully.

Carolyn twisted one way, and then the other, almost falling off the horse several times, but never accomplishing her goal of dislodging those hard, possessive hands. Until this morning, no one had ever seen so much as her ankle in all her life, and now, within the space of less than a day, she'd been stripped to the waist and had her nipples pinched, and now this man – who probably thought he owned her but from whom she was going to run at the first opportunity – was making free with his hands, and there was literally nothing she could do about it.

In fact, because of the way her wrists were bound in front of her, she was actually forced to present her breasts to him, her arms framing the two generous mounds and squeezing them into greater prominence. She supposed that she should be thankful that at least he wasn't hurting her, but that seemed like small consolation. She almost wished he would hurt her – it would be another invective she could heap upon his head as she screamed at him for taking such liberties with her body.

"Get your hands off of me, or I shall scream!"

She craned her head around and leaned over enough that she could see the nasty grin that settled over his face. "Please do."

Although the fact that he was so eager for her to do it should have given her a hint, Carolyn did, only she had little voice left from screaming all night in her jail at the auctioneer's. Try as she might, she couldn't even come up with a decent croak, and all she accomplished for her troubles was to give him a good belly laugh. And he continued to hold her breasts in his callused palms as if he owned them.

Try as she might – and she exhausted herself trying – she could neither get away from nor dislodge his big paws.

Only when he'd felt her relax back against him – all the fight gone out of her and limp with the exertion – did his fingers reach for her nipples and begin rolling them with excruciating gentleness.

"No – No! You mustn't!" she whispered raggedly, putting her hands over his to try one last time to pry them off.

"That's right," he whispered in his lilting French accent, "cup your hands over mine so I'll hold you that much tighter, cheri . . ."

His suggestion had the expected – and opposite – response, of course, as Carolyn's hands dropped to her lap as if she'd been scalded, and he chuckled softly into her ear, his lips making lazy trails

up and down her slender neck. “That’s it. There’s nothing you can do about it. You’re mine, and I will have you in whatever way I please. And it pleases me – some times – to please you.” His fingers plucked her nipples somewhat less than gently, tugging them with just the right pressure, making them feel horribly good as he hurt them just a bit.

He’d lied. It didn’t please him only sometimes. He’d known from the moment he’d seen her, standing straight and proud on the block, rather than cowed and cowering like the others – that he had to have her. He spent more than he should on her, but then, he intended to get more than his money’s worth from her, if only by indulging his every sexual whim. He had been too long without a woman. It had been at least two of their Founders’ Days since he’d been willing to part with enough money to buy a whore. He had more important things to spend his hard earned silver on.

But he could no more ignore her than he could the raging hard on he’d gotten a soon as he’d seen her – and the glimpse at her breasts had more than clinched it. He would have paid four times the amount the old geezer was asking to have full ownership of this one, despite the grubby face, and the bruise the man had lain on her cheek, which had darkened rapidly into a purple blotch on an otherwise pristine face. Her hair was still up, and her dress was immaculate, and he had a good idea that she was a patrician who was down on her luck, and that was confirmed when that older man brought her a box of her things.

He’d seen the man in the saloon last night, drinking himself into oblivion quietly in the corner, and he knew that whatever money he’d gotten selling this young woman into slavery was going to be spent the same way.

But none of that was his problem. In fact, he considered himself extremely lucky to have found such a rare gem among the usual rubbish, squeezing her breasts along with her nipples, as if proving to himself that she really was there, really was his, and wasn’t just a product of his feverish need.

“Ow! Stop that immediately!”

He could tell, though, that she was starting to like it. Her nipples stayed hard between his fingers, despite the way his calluses rasped across and around them as he twisted and pulled. Her breathing was very erratic, and he knew he’d caught the beginnings of moans she’d managed to stifle.

If she was truly a virgin – and he tended to think she was – then she wouldn’t have any idea of what was happening to her. Or what was going to happen to her. Or any of the things wonderfully degrading things he could do to her body. But he intended on enlightening her. Slowly, so that he could enjoy more than just her body’s helpless reactions, but could enjoy the true and complete satisfaction of awakening her, and, of course, training her to his own, personal tastes.

“I’m going to make you do more than just scream,” he whispered. “When we get back to my cabin, I’m going to take away your clothes, and keep you naked so that I can sate myself on your beautiful body any time I want to. I’m going to lick and touch every inch of your body, and I’m going to suckle at these beautiful titties until they’re ruby red and raw. I’m going to spank you until you think you’re going to faint, then I’m going to revive you and do it all again. And I’m going to fuck you, here,” he grabbed her between the legs with both hands, groping and squeezing while she tried to jump up and away, but couldn’t get any purchase with which to raise herself, so she kept settling that very private part of herself back down into those eager hands.

Carolyn gulped hard. “No, you don’t have to do this. I – I have cousins – my mother’s cousins – they’ll pay money. They’ll pay a ransom, I promise. A big one. Lots of gold. Just for you, for my s-safe return. Untouched.”

He laughed cruelly, dashing her hopes for the idea that had flitted into her brain in desperation. She wasn’t at all sure her Mother’s cousins would pay anything for her, but it sounded good. “I don’t need their money. I bought what I want. And you’re not going to be untouched for long, that I can promise you, woman.”

CHAPTER TWO

It took them almost a week to get to his cabin, trekking through woods and over mountains and getting progressively colder as they rode. And Carolyn had ridden every inch of the way in abject fear that she was going to be raped.

And she was, she knew it. She could sometimes almost come to terms with it, because he could be almost nice to her. He made sure she had warm boots and mittens to wear – and she hated the mittens because she had no dexterity in them. They made her even clumsier than the cold did. He fed her first before himself, and made sure that she ate what he gave her of the strange, jerky like stuff and, if they stopped quickly enough, rabbit roasted over the small fire. He laid down with her every night, with a blanket of furs over them, but hadn't molested her much after that first day, although he did insist on sleeping with his arm around her waist, because, during the evening, he unbound her wrists, and even put some sort of salve on the redness there.

What he did, though, was talk to her about what he was going to do when they finally arrived at the cabin, and if she hadn't been plotting to leave him by then, she would have started immediately. She knew that this would be the best time to do it – before they got his house, such as it was. But there never seemed to be a time when he wasn't with her, or at the very least watching her like a hawk. Even when he hunted, he took her with him, on a long rope tether.

She almost found it a relief when the small cabin in a tiny clearing came into view. He made her stay in place, still bound to the saddle, until he unloaded the mule and was ready to go inside. Then he helped her down from the horse and into the one room cabin, locking the door behind them with a heavy, solid wood bar that she knew she would probably never be able to lift. He must've known it too, because the next thing he did was untie her.

He immediately crossed to start a fire, and she could see that there was more than enough firewood next to the fire for quite some time. She stood by the doorway, clutching the furs he'd given her to keep warm, and trying to stare at nothing.

"It will be warm in here in a minute, woman."

On one of those long nights on the way here, Carolyn had asked him his name, and he had smiled at her. She was beginning to hate it when he smiled – she wasn't used to being such a constant source of amusement to a man. She was used to them trying to court her favor – even though she had turned down every one of the men who had come calling.

"You may know my name, but you may never use it. My name is Nicolas Laurent Saber. But you will call me Master, and I will call you woman, because that's what you are. My woman." He did not ask her what her name was – as if he had no care for it whatsoever.

Carolyn hadn't known how to respond to that. She'd felt out of her element for some time now, but never more than now, when she was standing in the room where he was going to force himself on her.

"Sit," he commanded, putting a straight backed chair in front of the almost roaring fire for her. "Warm yourself." He surprised her by bending down on one knee and removing her boots - her fancy but impractical leather slippers having long since been left by the side of the trail – then setting them opening first by the fire to dry out.

He pattered around the place, setting a pot over the fire and cooking something with potatoes and onions that smelled wonderful. It turned out to be a stew, and she literally gulped it down, all of the nice manners her mother had drilled into her flew out the window in the face of true hunger.

“I’ll have to make another chair, eh? And perhaps a table to eat at.” He wiggled his heavy eyebrows at her as he shoveled food in from his own rough, wooden bowl. “But I already have the important thing – the bed. I made it myself,” he added proudly.

Patently ignoring him, and the absolutely scandalously huge bed that was easily twice the size of any normal bed, Carolyn concentrated on finishing her dinner, practically licking the bowl, but not quite succumbing to that animalistic tendency.

After dinner, he produced a small tub, and filled it with water heated over the fire, then proceeded to strip down and bath himself as best he could. He couldn’t really fit into the tub himself, but he did the best he could using an obviously homemade bar of lye soap. Eventually, he took the tub outside, and in those few seconds, Carolyn scoured the place for a second door, knowing in her heart that there wasn’t one to be found.

But he caught her up when he came back with the empty, shallow tub. He glanced at her, and said just one word. “Strip.” It came out like “streeep” but Carolyn knew what he meant, and it chilled her to the bone more so than any wind.

As he set about warming more water, she backed herself up as far as she could go, finding the edge of her bed with the backs of her legs and practically falling backwards onto it. He turned at her startled cry and grinned again. “It’s not quite time for that, woman. All in good time. I did not realize you were quite that eager for me.”

“I’m not eager for you, and you know it.” She didn’t want debase herself, but she had to, “Please. You don’t have to do this. You could turn me loose and I’d never tell anyone. Please!”

Ignoring her pleas, he took her hand and forced her to stand up, then reached for the fur she’d been clutching around herself, throwing it onto the bed in one motion. Carolyn had her hands splayed over the drooping front of her dress, trying to keep him from seeing anything he shouldn’t.

“Drop your hands,” he ordered softly, and she looked up into his eyes for one of the few times. They were clear and gray, but without a drop of mercy.

Carolyn didn’t know if she was more afraid of what she knew he was going to do to her, or what she didn’t know if he would do to her – if he’d backhand her like the slave trader had, or if he’d take a stick to her, or worse, just kill her outright.

She knew she wasn’t willing to risk being killed, so she lowered her hands very slowly.

“Put your hands behind you, woman, and keep them there. I don’t want to have to punish you tonight. Tonight is for pleasure. But I will bind them there if you give me any more trouble.” He walked forward, standing directly in front of her, and ripped the rest of the dress down the front, ripping it completely away from her body. Then he did the same to her petticoats and bloomers, until she was standing there in nothing but her bow topped stockings, trying to cover all of herself at once and not able to cover any of herself very well, despite his order.

Nico didn’t say a thing. He just reached out with his huge hand and smacked it down on the front of her thigh, leaving a very hot, very red mark in the shape of his hand. Carolyn was already mortified, but she became even more so when tears burst from her eyes to run down her face as she locked her hands behind her as he’d said to in the first place, nearly dancing in place from the shame of being bared in front of him, with no rescue possible. No one was going to rush in and save her from him. She was his to do with as he pleased.

And he pleased to put her into naturally humiliating positions such as this, with her back forced to arch and present her breasts to him so beautifully. He literally couldn’t resist cupping their perfection, bathed as they were in the light of the fire. He was so hard he could have split a log with his erection. But he hadn’t kept himself from her on the trail only to jump her when they first got home. He was going to indulge himself as much as possible, especially this first time.

He brought her over to the tub, and bent down to remove her stockings like his mother's ladies' maid used to do for her and hanging them over the chair, then helping her into the tub, and ordering her to sit. Instead of the common lye soap he'd used on himself, he produced several small rosettes of soap that smelled wonderfully like their namesake. It was a pleasure she hadn't expected to encounter in the middle of the woods.

Carolyn wanted desperately to reach for those soaps. If she was going to have to bathe at his behest, she wanted to do it herself – preferably with him several miles away. But that was not to be. Instead, he reached his hand with the soap down into the wonderfully warm water and brought it back up to her breasts, watching the suds sluice down her naked body as he diligently washed every inch of that enticing territory, concentrating, of course, on those nipples that peaked as soon as he began to tease them.

The only sound in the room besides the crackling of the fire was her increasingly ragged breath. Carolyn squirmed, but he'd moved the tub up against a wall of the cabin, and he formed the other wall that she was caught between. There was nowhere for her to go. She had to sit there and endure his molestation.

And it didn't hurt, she thought resentfully. In fact, it was starting to feel disgustingly good in the basest of ways. She was beginning to like his hands on her breasts and the way he was fondling her nipples, and she knew that made her just as bad as a common whore, who did something naughty that she knew nothing about, but that men paid her for. She and her girlfriend, Letty, had giggled about the whores that hung around the saloon, but they had no idea what it was that the women did for men.

If this was a part of it, Carolyn was beginning to think she couldn't blame the women too much. But she didn't want to feel like this! It was wrong – this man wasn't her husband and he never would be! It would never be right for her to enjoy his hands on her.

She tried her best to ignore the feelings he was creating within her, but they wouldn't die. And her captor seemed to know exactly what he was doing to her.

He did see to the rest of her, much to her shame. He washed her as thoroughly as her mother used to – even more so, because he forced her to stand and brace her hands on the rough log wall of the cabin and spread her legs as far as the tub would allow.

No amount of protesting would sway him. In fact, he turned her around himself, and bent her over his arm to put her into the position he wanted, then arranged her ankles well apart, until the sides of her feet were against the edge of the tub. Then he gave her a tremendous swat on the bottom that nearly drove her into the wall. "If you move, you'll get fifty more like that."

Her legs were washed from stem to stern. He even made her lift each leg and balance while he washed each foot carefully, as if she was his blasted horse. But then he brought the chair from in front of the fire and sat down in it right in front of where her bottom was displayed so obscenely. She couldn't imagine why he was doing that, until she felt him part her bottom cheeks and started, nearly out of position. But the memory of that tremendous swat made her bend down again, tears of embarrassment dropping unheeded into her bathwater below as she danced nervously in place, bending and unbending her knees.

"No, no, no, no, no, no," she chanted under her breath.

"I've got to make sure that you're clean everywhere, now, don't I?" he asked patronizingly.

"No, no, please!"

She might as well have saved her breath. His fingers were making free with that entire area – she could feel the slickness of the suds and water. But then he went a shocking step further and she felt the tip of his finger pressing against an opening that had only ever had things coming out of it, and before she knew it, he had slipped that burly finger had ground its way up inside her.

“Take it out! Take it out this minute!” she sobbed. She stopped popping her knees and stood stock still, in hopes that that feeling of being invaded, of being unusually, unnaturally stretched in a place she barely acknowledged as a part of her own body would go away.

But it didn't.

Especially since he began moving as soon as she stopped, drawing that finger all the way out, then pressing it all the way in. Out and in, out and in. Always slowly and carefully, so that she felt every single inch of it as it took possession of her very insides, squirming in there and twisting and writhing inside her like a worm, until he finally took it out and went to wash it with the lye soap, ladling some of the hot water into a bowl in which he washed carefully.

Then he returned to his spot behind her, but this time his hand cupped the front of her from behind, venturing into different virgin territory, splicing those generous lips with his even thicker but dry middle finger, bending it a little to try to discover if her body had done any reacting against her will – and it had. Copious amounts of her love juices anointed the broad tip of that finger, and he chuckled softly, laying his cheek against her bottom as he continued to explore her most private areas, pressing up inside her just enough to discover what he really already knew – she was pure as the day she was born.

His fingers moved up to surround the nub he found at the top of her slit, and he dragged them all slowly over it, enjoying the way she drew in a deep breath and held it while he petted her.

“Dear God, you must stop that, please! Pleeaaaaassee!”

Nico loved to hear her beg! There was something even more titillating about making a high class woman – and there was no doubt that this one – with her nose in the air and her icy glares at the men who had leered at her from the crowd – beg. It was just that much more of a feather in his cap to bring a woman such as she was – one who would definitely have looked down her patrician nose at him if they had met on the street, and kept her skirts away from them as they passed, too – to her knees, as he intended to with this one.

And he intended to keep her there as often as he could. Or bent over in front of him, or spread eagled on the bed, or any number of other positions he intended to inflict on her.

But right now, he had what he wanted right in his palm. Eventually, he let his middle finger take precedence over the rest of them, and rubbed it slickly over that slowly rising bud. She didn't want to be within fifty feet of him, and she most definitely didn't want him to be doing this to her – bent over as she was, spread wide for him, his face still pressed against her bottom with his hand between her legs, pleasuring her entirely against her will.

Hell, she probably didn't even know that this kind of pleasure existed before he'd bought her. It only added to his excitement that he knew for sure that he was the only man who'd ever touched her here. He would be the one to introduce her to the carnal delights – at least those he was interested in, anyway.

She was going to be the perfect woman for him.

“Please! Please!”

The more she responded to him, the less control she had over her body – the more he wrested it away from her – the louder and more frequent her pleas. Carolyn had absolutely no shame left. She didn't want him touching her there, no matter how incredible it felt, and it did. She was scared and excited at the same time. She had no idea where this was going, if anywhere, and her heart was pounding so hard in her chest that she thought she might faint if he didn't stop, and she knew he wasn't going to.

Surprisingly, he did stop a few minutes later, when her knees were collapsing around him. “Let's finish getting you washed.”

He scrubbed every inch of her, except her hair, not wanting it to get the bed wet. He told her she could do it the next morning if she wanted to. Then he moved the chair and lifted her out of the tub and

onto his lap in front of the fire, using a length of cotton to dry her as thoroughly as he washed her, forcing her to open her legs for him so that he could dry her there.

Carolyn was just about at the point where she was going to give up. Already. She was so ashamed of herself on so many levels – and that was just another one, wanting to give up so quickly after no really even trying much to resist him. She'd never been walloped as a child. Her mother wouldn't allow her father to do it. She was sent to her room – where she had tons of dolls and toys to play with – instead. She was afraid of being spanked – especially by this man. She wasn't at all sure that it wouldn't be better to just go along with him until she could find a way to escape.

But by then she'd be disgraced, and her life wouldn't be worth living. Would it?

She wasn't given much time to think about it. When he had her well dried, Nico thought that he had teased himself almost enough. He picked her up and brought her to the bed, putting her down well past the middle of it, so that he'd have room for himself and, when she was lying down, she would be up against the wall, like she had been in the tub. Nowhere to go but into his welcoming arms.

He didn't give her time to scramble away from him, but turned her onto her tummy then dragged her up on her knees, putting her on all fours, then forcing her to put her cheek on the thick feather mattress, and spread her legs as far as she could, which put her bottom well up in the air and displayed her beautifully framed pussy as if it was begging him for some attention that it most definitely was going to get.

“Oh, please, no, I can't stay like this.” Carolyn gripped the surprisingly sweet smelling quilt rhythmically with her cold, stiff fingers.

“If you move,” he growled tightly, “I'll make you regret it.”

She believed him. God help her, she believed him, and she didn't want to be punished by this stranger, this strange man who seemed bent on humiliating her to the very bone. Carolyn couldn't even comprehend the position he'd arranged her in; she only knew that she was being forced to present him with parts of herself that had never – unless she was bathing – been so much as uncovered before, and here she was presenting them to him as if she was trying to put herself on some sort of display. She had never even been nude with herself - her mother had required that she bathe in an old nightgown, and that she put her clothing on piece by piece and in a fashion that exposed as little of her flesh as possible.

Nico was practically salivating at the sight of her. He preferred this position over almost any other. He felt that it reinforced the female's inherently submissive position even more so than the favored one with the man on top. And it also gave him easy access to another area of considerable interest that he intended to get to later.

But right now, he concentrated on her. He loved to pleasure women, especially against their will. Especially virgins, against their will, and he intended to revel in this one, because she was never going to get away from him. He was going to fuck her at will, any time, anywhere, any way he preferred at that given moment, and there was absolutely nothing she could do that was going to deter him.

And she knew it, and that made it even more delicious to him.

“Put your hands behind your back.”

CHAPTER THREE

Carolyn already felt helpless enough – she didn't want to obey him and become even more so, but, hoping to deter his wrath, she began to move her arms just a little.

But it wasn't nearly enough. He let go with a flurry of incredibly hard smacks to that upturned rump of hers, thoroughly enjoying the way they echoed off the walls of the small room. It was like spanking her twice at once. And she began to moan and whimper and beg immediately, but he didn't stop until those hands were clenched on her back. Nico stepped to one side and grabbed the rope that had held her wrists on the horse, reapplying it over the red marks that were already there.

"If you'd obeyed me quickly, as you should have, I wouldn't have to do this. And you deserve so much more for being a deliberately slow, naughty slave." When he finished he leaned over her, rubbing his rough, homespun covered front against her splayed genitals as he did it, whispering into her ear, "And I shall see that you get it, too. A well punished slave is a happy slave."

Carolyn's sobs and keening grew to epic proportions, and he chuckled at her softly as he undid his crude rope belt and let his pants fall to the floor, kicking them carelessly out of his way. He didn't need to fondle himself to hardness – he'd been diamond hard since he'd first seen her. "Please. Cry out. Plead. Whine. Moan. Scream – I told you I was going to make you scream, didn't I? Well, I am. And worse. Much worse. I'm going to make you like what I do to you. Every single time I do it, and no matter what perverse thing I do, you're going to be made to enjoy it. Over and over. I'm going to take you in places you didn't know you owned, and you're going to beg me for it. And you can scream all you like – there's no one around for a five day ride. You are truly alone, and you belong to me. Most especially here," he cupped her, fingering her lazily, making sure that little button was still hard and she was still wet – and he was gratified to note that she still was. Even more so than before. "And I'm going to prove that in just a minute."

He leaned over her again, placing his length up against her, where he'd soon spike himself up inside her as he grabbed those beautiful titties and rolled and pinched the nipples hard, hurting her, making her squirm against him, pleasuring him unknowingly. "That's it, move against me," he let loose with a groan of his own, and felt her immediately stop moving, no matter how hard he squeezed and pulled and twisted and twirled those nipples of hers.

She learned fast, this one. He smiled against her ear, flexing his hips just a little. "Move with me, woman, or I'll find my leather strap."

Carolyn had only ever heard about a strap once, from Letty, and she'd been terrified of even the thought of it since then. Closing her eyes, and trying to pretend this wasn't happening to her, she did as she was told and moved her hips up against his, making him moan in a guttural, animalistic fashion.

Eventually, she felt him shudder and stand up quickly with that ever present, degrading chuckle of his. "You are too good, woman. You'll make me come before I have a chance to take your virginity."

"Please. No," she whispered, but he heard it anyway.

"Yes. And I promise you, you're going to love it." He stepped away for a moment, but only long enough to bring the chair next to the bed, like he'd done by the tub.

Then his fingers were there again, at that spot on her body that only he seemed to know about, slick from something he'd gathered from herself, which she found entirely unacceptable, and making free with her body as usual. She cried out when he lent his second hand to the task, dipping two of his fingers into that font of wetness between her legs, his index and middle, then dragging them slowly back to her bottom hole, making her squirm and writhe and try to get away. She did not want him doing that to her

again. It was against nature for him to put anything up inside her. It didn't belong there, and she didn't like it one bit.

"Stop moving."

She tried. She did try, but his fingers were right there, at the entrance to her rear end, and she knew what was going to happen. She knew it, and she couldn't quite keep her hips still.

Casually, as if he was offering her a canapé, he whispered, "If you don't stop moving, I'll bind you so that you can't move." He didn't tell her that he didn't want to do that – that the idea that her fear of punishment, her fear of him, made him want to keep her as free as he could. Eventually, she would submit to him of her own free will, he vowed to himself as he drove his index finger well into that reluctantly receptive derrière.

She groaned loudly and tried to arch away, but he used his free hand to reach beneath her and grab a nipple, forcing her back down into the position he preferred, with the side of her face pressed into the mattress as he fucked his finger in and out of her, carefully at first, then much less so. When she was back where she belonged, he removed his pinching fingers from that cringing nipple and brought them to her clit instead – consciously not dipping them into her juices this time, but applying them dry to her clit in order to pinch it tightly.

Her scream – hoarse as it was – washed over him like the best kind of aphrodisiac. He wanted to hear it over and over, and he did, as he raped her hard with that one stiff finger, making her cry and sob and wail.

But not beg.

Then he brought his finger all the way out of her and wrapped his even bigger middle finger over it, dipped himself in her wetness, and pressed them against her entrance.

Carolyn could feel the difference in the size of whatever it was that he was trying to push into her, and she was afraid. Very afraid.

"Perhaps this is a very good punishment for you, woman. Since you seem to dislike this so. It is very embarrassing, isn't it? To have me invade your little bottom hole like this while you waggle it at me so enticingly? You don't like to feel my finger up inside you there, do you?"

She was caught. She couldn't say that she did, or he was going to do it more. She couldn't say that she didn't – that she hated it – or he'd do it more. She was damned either way.

"NO, I DON'T!" she yelled as loud as she could, very near the end of her rope.

"Ahhh, that's too bad. Because I'm going to fuck you like this every day." His fingertips pressed past that incredibly tight sphincter, forcing themselves into her, forcibly stretching her around him, and using her own moisture to aid in her violation.

He stopped at his knuckles for just a moment as she wailed and keened, wiggling just slightly on occasion, and also, occasionally, pressing back against him, then jerking forward a little, as if she'd realized what she'd done. His other fingers were very busy with that hot, hard nub of hers, constantly keeping it slick and rubbing it endlessly.

"I'm going to teach you to enjoy this, just because you hate it so much right now. I'm going to do this to you at least once a day – maybe twice – and I'm always going to pleasure you when I do it, woman, so that you'll associate my fingers up your ass with the ultimate in pleasure."

As he worked his fingers the rest of the way inside her, all the way up to his last knuckles, he kept telling her of the obscene, degrading things he was going to subject her to on a daily basis, all while rubbing his fingers almost delicately over her most tender, sensitive area.

Then he pulled his fingers out slowly, and heard her sigh of relief, felt her relax some, but only until he drove them back into her again, and began to fuck her with them as vigorously as he had just one finger a few minutes ago.

And she liked it. He could tell. She didn't want to, but she did. She was arching her hips into him more than she had, and that couldn't be an accident every time. Her eyes were closed, and her breath was coming very heavily. Her reluctant bottom hole was clenching him tightly every time he drove into her again, so that it almost became harder and harder to get past that tight ring of muscle, and she moaned with a much more sensual edge when he succeeded despite her.

It was time. She was ready. He was going to make her scream with a pleasure she'd never known before. It would be her first little death, and she would experience it while she was completely under his control. He stepped up the pace of his fingers, not drawing them quite all the way out before plunging back in as hard as he could, but getting his other fingers very wet, then laying the pad of his middle finger on top of that hard, fleshy bud and worrying it relentlessly, over the top, along the sides then over the top again.

He could feel the storm rising in her, feel her muscles tensing, and her moans had become very low almost growls. He knew it wouldn't be long now.

Carolyn didn't know what was happening to her, but she did know she didn't like any of it, even the pleasure he was conjuring. Her body clearly loved every disgusting, degrading thing he did to her, and she'd never had to deal with a betrayal that was quite that personal. She'd never thought she'd lose complete control of her body, but she had. It was dancing to his tune now, and she knew she was going to get dragged down with it. The pleasure was overwhelming, seeping into her mind and clouding it, so that she was having trouble remembering how ashamed she felt, or the fact that a total stranger was doing these disgusting things to her.

She could only feel the wave after wave of incredible ecstasy that was washing over her, building and building to some end she didn't know, but was too swept away to be afraid of at this point. His fingers were teasing her, rubbing and gently flicking and she knew he was never going to stop. She was going to die of it. She was sure.

Instead of dying, she screamed, just as he'd said she would, when her pinnacle was reached and her body began those devastating, involuntary contractions. She was even clenching those awful invading fingers, completely against her will, and, to her complete mortification, it only made the feeling that much more intense. Her screams died down as the contractions did, and all she could hear was his soft chuckle.

"Magnificent," he said, patting her on the haunch before reaching to the small bowl of water and lye soap he'd put next to the bed and washing his hands again carefully, "I'm going to make you do that as many times tonight as I can before I fall asleep."

Nico stood behind her, finding her slit easily with his generous manhood, that was easily much thicker than the column his two fingers had formed as he'd fucked her bottom hard, and placed the end of his cock between those virginal lips. His woman was still somewhat slumped, trying to come to terms with what had just happened to her. What he could see of her face, as well as the rest of her body, was bright red with the humiliation of it all, and he thought she might even be close to a faint, which he would have considered to have been the ultimate compliment – especially as she would have arrived at it against her will.

"It's not over, woman, not by a long shot," he said cruelly, grabbing her wrists and pulling back on them forcing her to impale herself on his swollen rod. But she was well defended, and it took several sharp stabs to make it all the way inside her, while she struggled and ended up inadvertently riding him teasingly while he took her.

When he was finally buried inside her to the hilt, he held her there by her wrists, letting her wiggle and writhe against him, not stopping her at all or even reproaching her because it felt so damned good, reaching around at one point to spread those very moist lips and begin fingering her clit again.

She tried, unsuccessfully to start away from him, but he brought her up short by her wrists and held her in the exact position he wanted – her rounded bum tight up against him, where she couldn't get away from his short sharp thrusts. He knelt on the bed between her legs, so that she couldn't close them if she wanted to, holding them well apart and splitting her wide with his length up inside her.

And then he fucked her. Hard, and without a thought – beyond his fingers rasping naturally over and over the very tip of her nub, moved by his snapping hips. He knew that that was all he needed to do to make sure she would come uncontrollably, and he was right. Despite the fact that he had been raping her and she'd been a virgin – he'd heard her scream as he'd broken through that firmly seated maidenhead of hers – she was panting and writhing beneath him, and not in pain. He knew she was struggling even more against herself than she was against him, and there was no doubt as to who was going to win that struggle. He was.

And he was right. Carolyn was so angry she could have spit at the way he'd hurt her when he'd carelessly backed her onto whatever it was that he was shoving up inside her rhythmically. It had really hurt. But then it had started to turn into something else – something very much like when he'd been molesting her earlier and had had his fingers inside a part of her body where they definitely didn't belong.

He had compounded her shame by doing the same thing he had before – reaching around her helplessly splayed body to invade and plunder her mons, fingering that spot that had been horribly sensitive the first time he'd touched it, and now, since that strange internal explosion had happened, it was even more so. And he was just as determined, but just as casual about that, as if he was just kissing her hand in a proper salon rather than thrusting obscenely in and out of her and forcing her to enjoy it.

Her body just went right along with him, and before she knew it, before she could marshal her defenses against it, she found herself on the edge of that precipice again. And that was where he stopped.

He withdrew his hand from her privates in favor of grabbing her hips and jerking them back against them, thrusting into her violently, striving for his own end and not worrying about hers at the moment. He knew he had her – he knew she was dangling, that a breath of air on her pussy would hurl her into the abyss of unbelievable ecstasy, and he wasn't going to do it, right now.

Nico had other plans for her, once he'd spewed himself inside her, which only took about five more strokes. He groaned loudly as he came, clenching her hips so hard he knew he'd leave bruises. Before he had a chance to think about it, before he started to feel himself descending into that twilight of after sex bliss and sleep, he untied her wrists and turned her over quickly, rebinding her wrists each to one of the rough cut logs that formed a post for the bed.

Then he grinned evilly at her and sank down on his knees before her. She had closed her legs, but he pried them open easily. He liked proving to her that he had enough brute strength to make her do whatever he wanted her to. And without further ado, he placed his mouth over the spot that his fingers had been diddling all night, wanting to taste the sweet scent of her on his tongue, washing her most thoroughly with his broad, flat tongue.

Carolyn began to buck at this new degradation. She would never in a million years have thought that a man might put his mouth down there! Why, a decent person spent as little time dealing with situations down there as she possible could, and here he was positively feasting himself on her, as if she was some sort of fleshly banquet!

She could not abide this, but soon found that her only remaining method of moment – bucking her hips up – only drove her privates even further against his mouth.

At once point, he even stopped and looked up at her, growling huskily, “I knew you'd come to love it, woman,” then returning to his awful task.

So she lay there, which was the only thing she could do, with no escape from the way his marauding mouth took possession of her, forcing that horribly pleasant tension into her body that she was

becoming depressingly familiar with. She knew that the fact that she had responded to him, despite the fact that he was a stranger with no right to do what he was doing to her, meant that she wasn't the lady she'd thought she was. A real, true lady wouldn't have feelings like she was having, especially not for a man of such obvious low breeding.

But there was no way to deny what her body craved, and it seemed the more he forced her, the more she craved it. It didn't take him very long at all to make her scream and cry and contract beneath his mouth, and Carolyn decided she wanted to die rather than let him do any of this to her again.

When he freed her arms, she just lay there, not moving at all, eyes closed. Nico didn't worry, though. He knew she was trying to come to grips with what was happening to her, so he didn't bother her at all, didn't force her to talk. He didn't think women should talk much anyway, and the upper class ones needed to talk even less than the lower class ones. Nico felt that women were getting to be too big for their britches; that they all needed to be reminded what their place was – behind the man, several paces back, and ready to do whatever their man bid them.

That was how he was going to train this woman to be. The right way. She was going to defer to him in all things, or face a swift and brutal punishment that would not always be some sort of spanking. There were other things he could do to her that she wouldn't like, and he would do whatever needed to be done to make sure that she obeyed him without question.

One of the first things he did was very much like what he did when he'd roped a wild mustang not too many years ago – the same mustang that they had ridden here on. He bound her to the bed. He controlled everything about her life – especially the things that were the most basic: when and whether she ate, when and whether she was blindfolded, whether she experienced pain or pleasure at his hands – and he made sure she was never really comfortable with which one it was going to be, even down to controlling when and whether she could go to the outhouse. In fact, he didn't allow her outhouse privileges. He didn't even have one, although he did intend on building one eventually.

Instead, he had modified an old chamber pot he'd found so that it could be slipped beneath her – at first, she wasn't even allowed to get up for that, and he limited the number of times he would allow her to go, too, and found a very effective method of punishing her that didn't require any effort on his part whatsoever. This woman had almost no bladder capacity and was in pain from needing to empty that bladder – especially when she'd had anything to drink.

Carolyn quickly lost track of the days she was held in that one room cabin, bound to the bed, rarely allowed to get up. He did have the decency to move how her hands were bound fairly regularly, so that her shoulders didn't get too sore. Sometimes they were bound at her sides, sometimes above her head, and, of course, sometimes she was spread eagled, usually when he was planning on molesting her.

The only time she was ever allowed to be covered was when she started shivering, but he did keep the cabin at a nice temperature for her. He walked around naked, too, and sometimes sweaty. He was obviously not used to keeping the place at such a warm temperature. Sometimes he went outside completely naked too. Carolyn wasn't at all sure why she was ever shocked by what he did any more. She always thought he had done the most outrageous thing possible, and then he managed to top it.

Eventually, he began to leave her on occasion- he had taken enough time away from his traps, and needed to check them. Not for long – he did the ones closes to the cabin first, until he figured he could trust her not to leave right after he did once he left her loose, which he knew he was going to have to do, eventually.

CHAPTER FOUR

She gathered as much of her stuff as she could into one of the blankets on the bed, knotting it loosely at the top like a On the first day that he did leave her loose in the house, with orders and supplies to have made dinner by the time he got home, Carolyn did what she felt she had to do. She had to make some sort of effort to escape. She couldn't just accept what had happened to her. All she wanted was to get away from him – she hadn't thought much further than that. She didn't even know what direction to travel in, but figured that Shepherdstown was roughly due East of where she was.

She hoped. hobo's bag. She'd find a stick to carry it over her shoulder when she could. She was smart enough not to have gotten into any trouble when he'd taken short trips away, and now that he was apparently going to be gone all day, she waited several hours, so that he wouldn't be anywhere around when she made her exit into the forest that surrounded the small cabin.

But she was wrong. Nico had figured that she'd had something up her sleeve, and had patiently waited until she crossed the clearing and almost disappeared into the forest before beginning to follow her. She didn't get very far on foot at all, and the snow, which had deepened over the weeks, was practically impassible for someone as small as she.

He let her stumble and fall and make her way as best as she could though, knowing it would wear her out and she'd be less likely to give him trouble when he finally descended on her. When she finally collapsed in the snow and didn't stir, he show shoed easily up to where she lay flat on her back, and then she sprang up clumsily, his own knife from the hearth in her hand.

Nico was not happy. He wasn't mad that she'd taken the knife – if he had been in her situation, he would have done the same thing. He was angry with himself for having left it there to fall into the hands of a woman who had no idea how to use it, and was much more likely to get herself hurt than to achieve her goal of injuring him in any way.

Still, he was able to get it away from her without too much trouble, and without even so much as nicking either one of them. Once he'd disarmed her and put the knife away where she wouldn't be able to get at it, he noted how cold she was and how badly she was shivering, and knew the first thing he needed to do was get her back to the cabin.

Once there, he stripped her of all of her wet clothes and tucked her under the covers of the bed, moving it to right in front of the fire he had roaring in a minute. Then he reached under the blankets and furs and began to rub her feet and hands, which were the coldest parts of her, cursing himself for wanting to teach her a well deserved lesson. He should have caught her as soon as she'd exited the cabin and taught her a lesson on her bottom, rather than putting her through this.

Carolyn slept for a long while, and when she awoke, he was sitting on the edge of the bed, staring down at her. She sighed in defeat. "You have to let me go. This isn't right."

"I will never let you go. You'd better come to grips with that quickly, woman. You are mine, and you belong here with me. You could have died out there."

She turned her face away from him. "So much the better. I shouldn't be alive after – after what you've done to me."

He put a big paw over her stomach. "And if you're with child? Should you just give up and die then, too? Kill your baby?"

Shocked, she whipped her head back to pin him with her glare. "I'm not with child."

"You don't know that, do you?"

The bald truth was that she didn't.

"If that's what it takes to keep you here with me, then I will do everything I can to make you pregnant. But in the mean time," he said, rising to move the heavy bed easily back up against the wall, even with her in it, then binding her to it again, but on her stomach this time. Carolyn figured this was not a good sign. "I'm not going to trust you to behave while I'm gone. It's going to take me longer this way, but I'm going to only do day trips out to my traps. Some of them will go unchecked, and we might be out of food by the end of the winter. Once you're heavy with the bebe, you're not going to go anywhere."

"But first, before I bring you to pleasure again, as I always will, I'm going to punish you for leaving, for putting my property in jeopardy. You could have died out there, woman," he growled.

Carolyn saw him reach for the razor strop that hung from the wall. It was about three feet long and maybe three inches wide, and it looked like it would take great chunks of flesh off her body, and she was more terrified at that moment than she had ever been in her life.

Nico wound the thing well around his fist – he didn't want it to mark her anywhere but her backside. Bottoms and backs of thighs were made for just this purpose, but not stomachs or breasts, as far as he was concerned. And it was only his opinion that mattered here.

She was keening and whimpering already, and he hadn't even touched her, but he had absolutely no sympathy for her whatsoever, swinging the loose length of it down onto her bottom as hard as he could, not bothering to count, just to lay down as many welts as he could fit into that relatively small area from stem to stern. He did not intend to have paid a huge sum for her and then lose her – to her own stupidity or the pneumonia thereafter. The next time she took a step towards the door, he was going to make sure that she thought twice about where she was going.

When he finished, she was sobbing inconsolably, but Nico staunchly ignored her in favor of wrenching her legs up high and well spread, while she was still on her tummy, but moving her arms out to her sides, bound to the middle legs of the bed on either side. That bright red bottom was ripe for him now, and he was going to take this opportunity to let her know that there was more than one way to punish a woman.

He reached into a satchel that was hung by the bed, and pulled out something special that he'd been saving to use on the woman he found eventually, and this was definitely the right time for it. He brought it over to the bed and put it down right by his woman's face, practically under her nose.

It was a thick, solid marble dildo that he'd procured from one of the ladies of the evening he'd ended up visiting a long time ago, when he was in Dodge City. He'd kept it tucked away until he had use of it.

The way her eyes bloomed anxiously had his cock rising stiffly in his pants. "You're right," he teased evilly, leaning down so that he was close to her face and could see every reaction, "that's going up inside you, woman. Right alongside me. I haven't yet decided where I'll be and where it'll be, but you can bet the both of us'll be just as deep inside you as we can get."

He took a breath and stood, removing every stitch of clothing before joining her on the bed, lying on his back beneath her spread privates and washing her from stem to stern with an indecent thoroughness.

Carolyn hated it when he used his mouth on her. He seemed to know how much she hated it, and did it at any given opportunity. Not only was just the bare fact that he did it completely mortifying to her, but then he would also force her to enjoy it – really enjoy it – each and every time, and it was happening even more easily and more frequently than she wanted it to – which was never. She had had to come to grips with the idea that she could no longer control her body.

To say nothing of the fact that her bottom had been thoroughly roasted by his bulging arm and that God awful strop. Carolyn hadn't had much pain in her life, but she guessed she was making up for it

now. And then he'd wrenched her legs up – stretching the swollen skin of her backside even further – in order to put her privates on display for more of his molesting.

She closed her eyes and heartily wished to die, but then what he'd said about her escape attempt ran through her mind. What if she was pregnant? What if she was already carrying a baby – her baby! She hadn't even considered the possibility. She couldn't give up, she couldn't die. She had to live for her child.

But there that thing was, lying right in front of her face. It was big and a kind of grayish white with gold flecks and veins in it. And it looked . . . well, it looked like that portion of his anatomy that he enjoyed raping her with. It was just about the same size as he was, too – huge – and was probably just about as unyielding as he was while using it, too.

And he'd said he wasn't sure where he was going to put either of them.

If there was one part of this awful experience that she hated the most, it was when he invaded her bottom, which he seemed to enjoy doing almost as much as mouthing that pleasure point between her legs, and it seemed it was going to happen again. And again, her body betrayed her. It seemed as if there wasn't anything he could do that would make her not like his hands on her, and that was the most disturbing thought of all.

She knew that, no matter what he did to her now, even with her bottom throbbing atrociously, her body would become damp and aid him in her own repeated violations.

He was already reaching between her legs to see if she was wet – and it really wasn't a question of whether or not, Carolyn realized as her face flamed red even worse than her bottom. It was a question of how much.

"Ahhhhhhhhh," he sighed loudly. "You're the most responsive woman I've ever seen." He worked two fingers up inside her pussy, stretching her forcibly and fucking her rhythmically as his other hand found her clit and flicked it hard – just enough to be a bit more painful than it was pleasurable.

When she began acting as if she was enjoying even that a bit too much, he withdrew and reached for the dildo, watching her eyes flare nervously and chuckling. "That's right. You're going to take all of this big boy up inside you. And I think that, since I'm trying to get you pregnant, we'll put it where it will do the most good – into your bottom!"

He dipped his fingers into the font of her juices and lavished them on the long, thick marble penis, then presented it to her cringing rosebud.

Hating herself for doing it, she nonetheless couldn't stop from begging, "Please, please, no. Don't do that!"

"Don't do what, woman? Ask for what you want or you definitely won't receive it," he teased, working the head around her sphincter in small circles.

Carolyn was sobbing again, and not from her stropping. "Uh – oh – no – I can't –" she couldn't say the words she knew he wanted to hear.

"Okay, then, I'll just –" Nico put a small amount of pressure on the dildo, as if he was going to slide it up inside her.

"NO! No, please. I – I'll say it." She gulped hard then began, "Please –"

"Ah ah ah. What do you call me, woman?" He slapped his hand down hard on the part of her bottom that had been hit the most.

Carolyn wailed, but got herself under control as quickly as possible. "M-Master, p-please don't – don't r-rape me."

"Rape you where, woman? You have to tell me where."

"I- in my bottom."

"Your bottom?" he asked, deliberately playing dumb.

"In my – my a-ass!" she blurted out on a sob.

“Stop crying and put it all together, and maybe I’ll stop,” he ordered, knowing he wasn’t going to. He liked to hear such prurient things coming from such a delicate, patrician mouth.

“M-master, please, please d-don’t rape me in m-my ass,” she said with incredible control.

“Very good. But, unfortunately, since this is what I want to do . . .” he proceeded to put a small amount of pressure on the dildo, forcing the massive head pass that tight ring of muscle, nearly exploding in his pants as she threw her head back and struggled against her bonds to no avail, having to lie there on her tummy and be raped by that big marble phallus.

He stopped pushing when the head was in, and reached between her legs to find her clit and finger it furiously for several long moments, until she was panting from it again, then he removed the phallus completely, only to push it up inside her again, less gently this time, less forgivingly, and advance it another inch or so inside her.

And so the rape went, with him advancing and retreating and teasing and pleasuring her body along the way, until he had worked it all the way in, up to its well carved balls. Only then did he take it all the way out and put it all the way in, every single time, his hands not on her clit any longer, just fucking her bottom roughly, knowing that, although she’d never ever admit it, this was the way her body liked it – hard and fast and rough.

He’d had an inkling that she might be able to climax just from this kind of stimulation, and now he’d decided that he wanted to see if his theory was true, so he pumped that thing in and out of her almost violently, all the way out and all the way in each and every time, listening intently to her reactions, and knowing he was on the right track.

Even though she knew that it was only delaying the inevitable, Carolyn fought against the pleasure he was forcing her to. She couldn’t help it. It was by far the most humiliating thing he’d done to her – so far. To make her climax only through the feelings that having something shoved up her bottom created in her. It was beyond mortifying, and yet her body was gathering that storm, building that wave, until it crashed over her in hard, tight clenches that hurt her as she tried to grip the huge thing that had invaded her body, and yet that only made the ecstasy that much sweeter.

He didn’t stop until he’d wrung every last contraction out of her, wanting to prolong her degradation as long as possible. And when he did stop, it was with the dildo fully seated within her, so that when he covered her and inserted his raging erection into her drenched pussy, he would naturally keep that horrid thing deep inside her, and fuck her doubly with each thrust.

He took her slowly but forcefully, making sure that each plunge was powerful and hard for her to accept. But accept it she did – she had no other choice, strung up high and wide as she was. He didn’t touch her little nub this time, either, and he didn’t need to. She came right along with him on the ride, and exploded again just seconds before he did. He was true to her word and kept her bound almost all of the time, until they had become virtually snowbound and there was nowhere for her to go. It was obvious that she was pregnant – and it would have been virtually impossible for her not to be, considering how often he indulged himself in her, and her pregnancy only made him even hotter for her. He loved how the pregnancy had filled her out, how lush her already generous breasts became, how her stomach rounded over the winter months.

Her pregnancy didn’t keep him from his most favorite pursuits, either. He took her whenever and wherever he wanted to. The only thing he cut back on where the physical punishments – and Nico didn’t feel that there was any problem there, because he could do other things to punish her – bind her and refuse to let her empty her bladder, or rape her with that big dildo he loved to use on her, but only did so infrequently, so that it would always be something she had a hard time accepting. If it just slipped right in and she barely noticed, that was no fun at all. He took her right up till the day she delivered in any way that interested him at the time. When she grew too big in front, he took her from behind – which was his

favorite position anyway. He loved the way her big belly and full breasts hung beneath her, and would often massage them both as he emptied himself inside her.

Carolyn had become more serene with the pregnancy and the enforced hibernation that the snow cased. Nico had watched her change and had decided that, as the spring returned and he was able to get out of the house, that she was safe to leave alone, and he was right. She was much too clumsy to get very far – she was lucky if she could heft herself out of bed.

Carolyn had slowly come to terms with her captivity. She knew she was never going to get away from this man who owned her, who took her for his own – and, shamefully, her own pleasure – whenever he wanted to, and now she would have a baby who would be dependant on them both to live. She might have been able to get away when she was alone, but even that had fallen through miserably.

Now she knew that she would never leave this place, that she was his, and was strangely calm about it all. She didn't want to leave. Instead, she wanted to nest, and started to clean up the place – as much as one could pick up a dirt floor. He fashioned a cradle, and gave her cotton cloth with which to make diapers.

And when the baby came, and she saw him, she knew with surety that all hope of escape or rescue was lost.

She'd been sold away from anyone and everyone she loved, and in so, she'd lost herself, only to have that love reborn in her child.

She would make damned sure that no one ever sold him.

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