

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

Thief's
PUNISHMENT

ALVANIA
SCARBOROUGH

ELLORA'S CAVE *Quickies*

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

Thief's Punishment

ISBN 9781419918353

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Thief's Punishment Copyright © 2008 Alvania Scarborough

Edited by Helen Woodall

Cover art by Syneca.

Electronic book Publication September 2008

With the exception of quotes used in reviews, this book may not be reproduced or used in whole or in part by any means existing without written permission from the publisher, Ellora's Cave Publishing, Inc.® 1056 Home Avenue, Akron OH 44310-3502.

Warning: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. No part of this book may be scanned, uploaded or distributed via the Internet or any other means, electronic or print, without the publisher's permission. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000. (<http://www.fbi.gov/ipr/>). Please purchase only authorized electronic or print editions and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted material. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

This book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places, events or locales is purely coincidental. The characters are productions of the author's imagination and used fictitiously.

THIEF'S PUNISHMENT

Alvania Scarborough

Dedication

Thanks, Scarlett. You know why.

Chapter One

"Tell me, which do you value more...your jewels or mine?"

Marcus froze as the sharp edge of a blade slid between his legs and nudged his balls. He swallowed as the blade pressed a little harder, causing them to try to crawl up inside his body.

"Well, thief? Which are more valuable to you? Or does your silence mean the choice is mine?" Dark amusement laced the deep tone.

He nearly swallowed his tongue as hard knuckles brushed the back of his sac. Once, twice, three times.

His cock twitched.

Marcus rushed into speech. "I hold my jewels very dear, my lord."

"So dear that you'd risk them to the Raven's wrath?" Those hard knuckles wedged tight against the base of his sac.

Merciful God. It was the Raven himself. Marcus closed his fist around the handful of jewels until the diamonds, rubies and sapphires cut into his palm. He squeezed his eyes shut.

He was dead.

A master thief *because* he refused to take unnecessary chances, he'd felt it safe to sneak into Ravenswood with the baron occupied hunting the outlaws harassing his people and stealing his livestock.

Duncan, Baron St. Gyre, said to be the new king's personal assassin, was the sword that quelled even the slightest sign of rebellion or disloyalty. A man brutal by even William the Bastard's standards.

Whispered rumors swore the man had sold his soul to Lucifer. That he bathed in the blood of his enemies and ate of their flesh. In return, he was rewarded with Ravenswood and an unnatural life.

The Raven could not die.

He lived to kill.

And fool that he, Marcus, was, he had signed his own death warrant when he had listened to the drunken muttering of a disgruntled knight in the alehouse. Bitter jealousy had sounded in the man's voice as he spoke of jewels, gold coins and exotic spices kept in a trunk in the Raven's bedchamber. Wealth stolen from wellborn knights by a bastard-born warrior willing to kill his way into power.

That same bastard-born warrior now stood at his back, so close that his breath ruffled the hair at the nape of Marcus' neck. His first mistake, and it had to be with the Raven.

A tiny sigh of relief slipped past his control when the blade was removed, only to have his breath stall in his throat as a hard, warm palm cupped his balls.

"These now belong to me."

"Saint Paul's merciful bones, *no*." Marcus' throat burned with the need to scream the denial. Instead it came out a strangled breath of air.

"Don't look to heaven for mercy. A thief forfeits that right. The only mercy you can expect comes from me." He leaned closer, until Marcus could feel the rough scrape of a day's beard. "Unfortunately for you, I have none." A hard squeeze emphasized his words.

Marcus shot to the tips of his toes to try to ease the excruciating pressure. "Please, my lord—" What could he ask? Please kill him quickly, don't torture him?

"Please what?" Hot breath sent shivers down his spine and somehow lodged in his cock. It swelled against his brēcs, unmindful of the danger it was in.

"P-please, if you allow me to live, I will serve you any way you wish. My life will be yours." The hard grip eased. Words poured out of Marcus. "I will spy on your enemies, be your fool. I will be your swineherd if you will but allow me to keep my wretched life." He began to shake.

Abruptly, the warmth at his back was gone. "Turn around."

Marcus, who always prided himself on his grace and stealth, tripped over his own feet as he hurried to obey the hard command.

"How old are you, thief?"

"One and thirty, my lord." He couldn't quite bring himself to lift his gaze and look upon the man standing in front of him. He stared at the rushes in front of his feet instead.

"Hmm. You look younger."

"Yes, my lord." It was the simple truth. A truth Marcus traded upon to lull his marks.

"You say you will serve me any way I wish?"

"Oh, yes, my lord." Marcus bit his lip, terrified to hope but unable to stop a tiny tendril from unfurling deep inside.

"Your life belonged to me the moment you stepped on my land."

His erection withered.

"Look at me, thief."

Despite his reluctance, the midnight voice commanded his obedience. He lifted his gaze from the rushes, up muscular legs clad in brēcs of the softest doeskin to massive shoulders covered in a white linen shirt. Duncan of Ravenswood towered over his most respectable five foot seven by more than two handspans. The fine, almost sheer, linen shirt clung to biceps near as big as his own thighs.

He was the most powerful man Marcus had ever laid eyes to but for all that power, he radiated pure masculine grace.

His cock twitched back to life. Mortified by his reaction to another male, Marcus crossed his hands over his groin and hoped his erection had escaped the sharp notice of the Raven.

He chanced a quick glance at the Raven's face. Marcus felt his burn. Eyes the color of moonlit fog were looking straight at his groin. A small smile turned up one corner of the other man's mouth.

Even as his cock tried to poke its way out of the top of his brëcs, Marcus felt his nipples harden and rub against the rough material of his shirt. He gave an almost silent groan at the erotic abrasion.

A muscle in the Raven's jaw flexed once. Marcus couldn't tear his gaze from the harsh, utterly masculine, beauty of the other man's features. Pitch-black hair feathered the baron's forehead but didn't in the slightest soften his mien. Marcus felt bewildered. Never, never in his life had he been drawn to another man. Mouth dry, he admitted to himself that describing what was coursing through his body as "drawn to" was bloodless nigh onto death.

He'd nearly come in his brëcs by the power of the man's voice alone.

Ensorcelled.

His knees buckled. The rumors were true! The Raven's power was unnatural.

The fog and mist gaze pinned him, the sheer force of it keeping him upright. "I offer you a choice—serve my needs, in all ways, for one month or take fifty lashes and walk out of here with nothing, not even the clothes you have on your back."

A choice? The Raven was giving him a choice? Words bubbled up in Marcus' throat. He would live! He almost threw himself on the floor at the baron's feet before a thread of caution stilled his eager agreement.

No mercy. The Raven never showed mercy.

There had to be a trick here. Would the man be so cruel as to offer life only to mete out death?

"For one month, my lord, and then you'll give me my freedom?" he asked, proud there was only the slightest quaver to his voice.

"For one month," the baron confirmed, crossing his arms across his chest. The move drew Marcus' gaze to the well-defined muscles. A hot blush scalded his cheeks when he noticed the tip of the jewel-encrusted dagger pointed toward one dark areola faintly visible beneath the thin material. It was hardened into a small nub. His gaze dropped in an involuntary movement to the baron's groin.

Marcus gasped.

The leather outlined a huge erection.

"One month as my leman." The voice was firm and oh-so soft, leaving no room for doubt. "To serve me sexually any way I see fit."

Sheer shock loosened Marcus' tongue before he could censor it. "But 'tis a sin!"

The baron shrugged one massive shoulder. "What is one more sin to me?"

Good point. When one owed their soul to Lucifer, what was one more black mark against it? But what of his own soul? Marcus knew the church already condemned him because he was a thief but was he really ready to flout such a sin before the Lord above?

The instinct to survive answered before his rational mind had a chance to formulate a reply.

"I agree." A huge lump blocked his throat. 'Twas done. Too late now to change his mind. He licked parched lips. "Will you hurt me?"

"Yes."

No, no, no. He could not do this.

"But you will leave here with no permanent damage."

As reassurances went, it was sorely lacking.

"Put your hands behind your neck and lace your fingers."

Marcus hesitated, his mind still struggling with the enormity of the agreement.

The baron's voice lashed him. "You've earned a punishment. Hands behind your head, *now*."

Without conscious thought, Marcus found his hands behind his head, fingers laced.

"You will obey me without question or hesitation or you will be punished." The baron strolled forward. Marcus had to tip his head back to meet his eyes. "Normally, I would instruct you to keep your gaze lowered unless instructed otherwise." One large but surprisingly elegant finger beneath his chin kept Marcus' head at the awkward angle. "I find I like seeing your eyes. Brown, with just a hint of gold, like ancient amber. I can see each and every emotion. Nothing hidden in the depths."

That thrice-damned heat filled his face again. No one need tell Marcus that it was dangerous to be so easily read.

He lowered his lashes.

"Look at me."

Despite his fervent desire to ignore the demand, he couldn't. Against his will, he opened his eyes. Only to feel a wave of weakness almost loosen his bowels. The Raven was smiling at him. A savage, feral grin.

"Good. You are not going to be too obedient. I enjoy a challenge."

The tip of the dagger found the laces of his brêcs. The rasp of each loop parting reverberated in his ears. He forgot to breathe as cold steel made a relentless path up the length of his cock. His foolish cock perked up as it scented freedom, waving and jerking for attention. When the next to the last tie parted, his cock almost leaped out of the opening, the flared cap flushed a dark red.

Marcus had always been proud of his cock. Long, thick, roped with veins, more than one wench—and even a few ladies—had told him it was beautiful. Always ready for a good poke, or two, or three, he now wanted nothing more than for it to wilt and retreat into hiding.

The sharp edge of the dagger slid from tip to base, the threat of true damage there, but unfulfilled.

The idiotic thing leaked a drop of pre-cum.

"Remove your shoes."

It was harder than it appeared to take his shoes off with his hands behind his head but somehow he managed it.

A protest formed on his lips when the Raven slit his brēcs up the inner seams in two quick moves. It died, unspoken, when the dagger grazed his balls. Marcus was acutely aware that beneath the loose material he wasn't wearing small clothes. His brēcs still managed to protect his modesty but only the tie at the top held them up.

The last tie parted under the tip of the dagger.

His brēcs dropped to the floor.

"Step out."

He did. The tails of his shirt reached mid-thigh but Marcus still felt naked.

"Put your hands on the wall, shoulder height."

A lump in his throat, his mouth as dry as dust, Marcus faced the wall and placed his hands on the whitewashed stone.

Large, warm hands grasped his hips.

He jumped.

"Do not move unless I command it." Lips nibbled at his ear, sending chills over his entire body. Facing away from the Raven, unable to see those gray eyes, Marcus was surrounded by the clean, wild scent of the Raven. It was such an appealing scent, comprised of leather, fresh sweat and rain, that he couldn't help but inhale, drawing it deep into his lungs. So deep that it permeated each cell, imprinting the memory forever so that even years from now, Marcus knew he would recognize the Raven by his scent alone.

His waist was grasped in one hand while the other was planted between his shoulder blades. "Move back but keep your hands on the wall. Good. Now spread your legs." One booted foot tapped his ankle. "Further. Just like that."

May lightning strike him dead. Or may he crawl into the wall and block it up behind him. Marcus felt the veriest whore, ass stuck out, legs spread.

He whimpered.

A calloused palm wrapped around his erection as it bobbed in front.

"Your mind may rebel but your body wants what I offer." The Raven's free hand slid under his shirt and shaped one buttock. Fingers squeezed, with just a bite of pain.

His traitor of a cock leaked another pearly string of pre-cum.

Marcus didn't know whether to curse or count his blessings when the Raven removed his hand from his cock. A shudder was wrenched out of him when it shaped the other buttock. Cool air brushed his nether passage. He dug his fingers into the ungiving stone, fighting for control.

He tensed his ass, trying to clench his cheeks together.

A hard palm landed on his right cheek. He gritted his teeth at the sharp sting.

"Your second punishment. This belongs to me for the next month. You have no say."

He felt his cheeks spread again. To his complete mortification, the tiny hole fluttered.

The Raven chuckled.

A stream of warm air caressed the forbidden area. He moaned.

"Not yet, thief. First your punishment."

Marcus' mind went blank. This wasn't part of his punishment? His knees quivered.

He never heard the Raven move. One moment he was behind him, the next his voice came from across the room.

"Come here, little thief."

Though his legs felt as sound as those of a spavined mare, Marcus made his way to where the Raven sat in a high-backed chair.

He grabbed Marcus by the arm and, before he could blink, had him across his lap. "You have earned two punishments. This is the first. You may yell, you may plead, you may not get off my lap. If you do, the punishment starts afresh and is doubled. Are we clear?"

Stunned, Marcus lay there, staring at the rushes.

A stinging slap reminded him the Raven had asked a question. "Uh, yes, m'lord. I understand."

His shirt was pushed up to his shoulders, leaving his ass bare. If he had felt naked before, Marcus now felt completely vulnerable. His palms and feet just touched the floor, enough to keep from falling but not to give a sense of security. Though why in seven hells he would think being over another man's lap, ass lifted and bared to said man and the heavens themselves, would ever feel secure, was beyond him.

He'd gone mad.

That was the only explanation. Marcus took some comfort from the notion. If he was mad, then whatever followed was out of his hands.

He relaxed.

A warm, calloused palm rested on his ass. "What is your name?"

The question pulled him out of the cocoon of safety he'd found. "Marcus of Leeds, m'lord."

Smack.

Marcus jerked. His buttocks clenched at the deep burn. God's bones. He hadn't expected a barehanded spanking to hurt so much. Not even his father's leather strap when he'd been a child and defiant young man had burned so hot.

Smack.

Another open-handed slap, this time to his already abused right cheek. He gritted his back teeth, determined to retain what dignity he had left.

Smack. Smack. Smack.

The burn became an open fire. A tiny groan escaped. The blows continued, unabated. The groan became a small yelp, the yelp a plea.

"Please. Stop." He would not cry. He would not.

To Marcus' utter amazement, the Raven did.

That punishing hand rested across his ass, hard, calloused, large. So large it almost covered both cheeks.

A soft moan slipped free.

His ass was hot, so hot he was amazed the man holding him across his lap wasn't scorched by its heat. Marcus let his head drop, just now recognizing the strain of holding it upright put on his neck. The muscles in his shoulders unknotted.

"You do not tell me when you've had enough punishment. Do you understand me, thief?" A sharp smack reinforced the command.

His head shot up. "Yes, m'lord!"

"I." *Smack.* "Will." *Smack.* "Decide." *Smack, smack.* "When." *Smack.* "It." *Smack.* "Is." *Smack, smack, smack.* "Enough!"

"Yes, m'lord! I'm sorry, m'lord!"

It was as if the Raven did not hear. The blows continued to rain down on his poor, unprotected rear. Despite his promise to himself not to cry, Marcus felt tears streaming down his cheeks. He begged, he pleaded, he whimpered, still the large hand rose and fell, not seeming to tire one bit.

Unable to bear any more, Marcus kicked out, rocking back and forth, trying to throw himself off the devil's lap. Anything to stop the fiery rain of blows.

The Raven's left arm wrapped around his waist. Far from stopping, the Raven turned his attention to the backs of Marcus' thighs.

Marcus kicked harder, a strangled yell echoing in the chamber. Each time he kicked, that wicked hand found the vulnerable inside of his thigh, robbing him of breath to even moan.

Tears poured from his eyes and his breath hitched in his throat when he realized the steady rain of blows had stopped. He lay there, limp, worn out, his ass and legs blazing like the fires of Hell, just waiting.

He found himself on his feet, facing the Raven. His nose streamed with snot, his eyes leaked like a child wanting a teat and he still had not found enough air to pull into his lungs. A piece of white linen appeared under his nose. Grabbing it, he wiped his eyes, then blew his nose.

He couldn't meet the Raven's gaze.

"Look at me."

Marcus shook his head, deeply ashamed that he, a man of one and thirty, had been reduced to nothing more than a naughty child.

"Do not make me repeat my words or it will go the worse for you." Despite the open threat, it was the hint of gentleness in the dark voice that gave Marcus the strength to lift his head.

His head felt heavy and his eyes gritty. He fully expected to see arrogant cruelty in the fog and mist gaze. After all, the man had demonstrated exactly how powerless and weak Marcus was.

Instead, those eyes glowed with heat and pure male satisfaction.

His erection, which had flagged shortly into the spanking, sprang back to life, tenting his shirt. Marcus hissed as the coarse weave of his shirt brushed against the abused flesh of his backside.

A true smile, small though it was, tugged at the Raven's mouth.

Marcus felt his face flame as hot as his ass.

"Turn around."

Marcus wanted to refuse. Oh, he wanted to refuse so much but the taut, sore skin over both cheeks reminded him of the penalty for disobedience. So, instead of the protest he wished he had the courage to utter, Marcus turned slowly until his back was to the Raven. He was acutely conscious that his shirt did nothing whatsoever to hide the blazing color in his thighs.

For a long moment, the baron did not move. Then cool air touched his ass as the baron—why could he not think of him as the Raven anymore?—lifted the rough material away from his skin. One large hand held the bunched shirt against the nape of his neck, baring him from shoulder to foot. In front, his unruly cock lurched, seeking attention.

With exquisite care, the baron cupped one cheek of his ass. Even that touch, light though it was, shot a shaft of pain through him. His cock, that ever-selfish part of him, lifted with interest.

“Mmm. Bit sore, little thief?”

“Yes, m’lord.” Sore? Sore was saying you had a scraped shin when your leg was broken. He had long since passed the realm of sore.

Marcus caught his breath as the baron moved his hand, the calloused flesh rasping over the sensitive skin of his hip and then his stomach, until he could fold it around his cock. The baron gave a twist that sent pleasure curling through his balls.

“This doesn’t seem to mind a bit of pain, though, does it?” A slow stroke, from base to just behind the flared head of his cock, accompanied the question.

Marcus wet his lips. “N-no, m’lord, it doesn’t.” Then, as always, his mouth got ahead of his brain. “But then it doesn’t have the wit God gave a goose.” Marcus wanted to swallow his tongue. *Please, just let me choke on it now, before the baron can put me over his lap again.* The heartfelt plea went unanswered.

A low rumble sounded behind him. It took a moment for Marcus to realize the baron was chuckling.

His knees went weak.

Hot breath wafted against his ear. "Or mayhap, it means it has more wit than its master, that it knows what it wants and is not afraid to ask for it?" The baron snaked his tongue inside his ear. He flicked it, tasting him. "What think you?" Hot. Moist. Chills washed down Marcus' spine and his cock flexed in the baron's grip.

"I think my ass and my cock are in disaccord." Oh, when would he learn to keep his mouth closed?

"Then I shall have to see about bringing them into agreement," the baron said and squeezed the fingers on his cheek, sending shards of pain through Marcus.

His traitorous cock jumped, eliciting another chuckle from the baron.

Give him a knife and he'd slice out his own tongue.

Chapter Two

Duncan couldn't prevent a grin. The little thief had spirit. He had one month. One month to goad him into showing that spirit time and again. One month to make the taut, rounded globes of his ass flex and glow. To see the hot flush creep up his neck and darken his cheeks, making his eyes gleam like fresh autumn leaves.

He loved the sound of the small, stifled groan that followed each time the thief's tongue ran before thought. Loved the small moans and yelps as his flesh reddened and burned beneath his palm. Loved the way he pushed his cock into his hand, begging for his touch even as the little thief—*Marcus*—quivered with the need to bolt.

He ached to taste and touch that tight little hole. To sink into its hot depths. Even more than he wanted those lips wrapped around his cock.

Duncan settled back down in the chair. Arms crossed, one thumb stroking his lower lip, he contemplated what to do next. Ahh, the possibilities. He studied the nearly naked form in front of him. The breadth in the shoulders proved Marcus was no stranger to hard work but the strength was different from that of a warrior's. His legs were those of a man who walked rather than rode a horse.

A slow smile curved his lips.

"Remove your shirt." He saw the sudden tension grip the slender but muscular form and wondered if the man would disobey. He almost hoped he did. Instead, Marcus clenched his hands on the bottom of the shirt and drew it slowly over his head. The unintentional performance caused Duncan's cock to push uncomfortably against his brēcs.

Marcus held the shirt bunched in front of his groin.

Umm. That wouldn't do at all. "Drop it."

A strangled *"please"* caused Duncan to drop his hand to his lap. "Are you disobeying me?"

"No, m'lord." The words were thick. The shirt fell to the floor.

"Go to the chest next to the window and retrieve the white jar with the blue lid. Then return to me." Those red cheeks were firm and flexed with each step. Duncan wished his bedchamber was twice its size so he could admire the view longer. When Marcus reached the chest and darted a look over his shoulder, Duncan knew exactly what dilemma Marcus faced. The chest was deep—too deep to kneel and reach the jar. No, he'd have to bend over the edge of the chest, presenting his ass to Duncan in order to do as commanded. Quick as a fox, the thief leaned over and snatched up the jar.

Duncan saw realization flash across the mobile face.

To return to Duncan, he'd have to walk with his cock and balls leading the way.

A deep painful red seared the high cheeks and even, white teeth sunk into the full bottom lip. A deep breath lifted his chest as Marcus tilted his chin up and started in his direction.

Beautiful. His little thief was beautiful. A thick cock, roped with veins, the helmet a deep, angry red, swayed with each step, bobbing and weaving in an erotic dance. A large, plump sac, perfect for his mouth, nestled in thick, golden brown curls that were one shade darker than the hair on his head. Even as he watched, the balls drew up tighter to Marcus' body.

When the thief stopped in front of his chair, Duncan remained silent, allowing the tension to creep another notch higher.

Marcus held out the jar, a slight tremor in his hand.

His gaze, Duncan noted, was aimed somewhere past his left ear.

Taking the jar, making sure his fingers touched Marcus', Duncan growled, "Touch your nipples."

A shocked gaze shot toward Duncan's and Marcus opened his mouth in protest, only to snap it shut just as fast.

"Rub them with your thumbs." As if the nipples were connected by an invisible thread to Duncan's voice, the flat, brown discs hardened, puckering into hard, little points that stuck out and begged for a tongue or fingers to stroke them.

Marcus brushed the nubs with his thumbs and gooseflesh raced over his stomach. He moaned before catching his lower lip between his teeth again.

"Now pinch them. Hard. And don't let go until I tell you."

Long lashes drifted down, hiding the warm brown gaze. Those long, nimble fingers plucked at his nipples, clamping down on them. Marcus arched his head back and the muscles in his throat worked.

Fire swept through Duncan's blood. Wonder of wonders, his little thief was a natural-born wanton.

"Harder. That's it. Now pull on them. Rub them between your fingers. Let go." Duncan noted the immediate compliance. Taut, swollen, dark with the flush of blood. Sensitive then, very sensitive.

Good.

"Walk over and kneel on the bed." Eyes dark and dazed, Marcus did as commanded.

What a pretty sight, those pale limbs on the dark blue silk of his sheets. Duncan studied at him with a critical eye, then put his hands on the slender waist and pulled Marcus closer toward the edge of the bed. Satisfied that he was positioned exactly where he wanted him, Duncan gave a light swat to that tempting ass.

The small gasp was music to his ears.

"Lean forward, on your elbows, until your forehead touches your forearms." The position left Marcus' ass completely open to anything Duncan might want to do. And Duncan knew that his thief was well aware of that fact. Nerves rippled the muscles of

the little thief's back, his ass cheeks flexed and his thighs quivered. Duncan savored the sense of utter vulnerability, of helplessness emanating from his prisoner.

He tapped the inside of Marcus' thighs, silently directing him to spread them as far as they would comfortably go...and then a little farther.

Duncan stepped back to admire his captive, nay, semi-willing slave. Willing, at least, for the next month.

Bright red cheeks framed the dark crevice that split that lovely ass. The tiny hole nestled there clenching and unclenching in mute protest. Between his legs, the heavy balls hung and he could see the tip of Marcus' cock. A thin line of pre-cum strung between the hard flesh and the cool sheets.

Whatever the little thief might protest, his body was willing—nay, eager—to serve.

Duncan opened the jar and scooped a healthy glob of the soothing unguent onto two fingers. Not warming it, he smoothed it over the still-hot cheeks, stifling a grin when the slave hissed at the cold salve. He took his time, rubbing the salve over every square inch of flesh on the burning backside and thighs.

His goal wasn't to damage his new slave but to provide just enough pain to enhance the pleasure to come. And to mete out enough pain in punishment that his slave wouldn't step too far over the boundaries.

Keen anticipation, the likes he hadn't felt in years, sharpened his senses. He could smell the warm musk of his thief's skin, the even stronger musk from his ass and the lingering hint of fear in his sweat.

He hadn't wanted anyone this much since he first discovered the freedom in sinking his cock into another man, if then.

Duncan reached for a vial of oil and touched the small, winking muscle with the tip of his index finger.

Marcus jumped, barely remembering to stay in position as he felt the tip of a finger touch, then dip just inside his asshole. He swung between wanting to leap off the bed and take his chance at eluding the baron, and needing to push back against that invading finger.

Before he could make up his mind, the finger was gone, replaced with a sharp swat to his right cheek.

"Stay there and do not move."

Marcus strained his ears, trying to hear what the baron was doing. All he could hear was a muted rustling behind him. Just as his nerves were about to break, a large calloused hand rested on his lower back.

"Do you know what a beautiful sight you are, my thief? Ass reddened by my hand, balls hanging free between your legs, your dusky asshole winking at me in trepidation? To know that my cock will breach that virgin hole? That I will watch it stretch and swallow my length even as your body fights to decide which is the stronger—the burn of the invasion or the pleasure it brings? Have you any idea how beautiful that is?"

Beautiful? Marcus wanted to run, screaming, into the night at the thought of taking the baron's cock up his ass for, unless his luck had at last changed, it was bound to be in the same mold as its master. The thought dried his mouth, making it almost impossible to swallow.

"You—" He licked his lips. "You promised not to damage me."

One large finger played with the tender hole, dancing around it, rubbing it, threatening to breach it only to stop. "Beyond repair. I promised you no permanent damage. I also promised to hurt you." Those firm, elegant lips touched the dip in his spine as the baron spoke in a low, dark whisper. "I now promise you pleasure to go with your pain."

By all the saints, he could not do this. Marcus clutched the cool silk beneath his fingers. He opened his mouth, to say...what? He still wasn't sure, when one slick finger

slid inside without warning. His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. His small hole burned as it was forced to accept the large intruder.

"That's it, let me in. You're so hot inside, hotter than the cheeks of your ass. Ah, little thief, so tight. You hold me so tightly, like you will never let me go. Beautiful."

Marcus tensed, the low, intimate words wrapping around him along with the scent of sandalwood. Not giving his body chance to adjust, the finger began moving. In. Out. A slow, sure rhythm. Almost without realizing it, Marcus began rocking in counterpoint.

"That's it, sweet. Move for me."

More oil dribbled down his crease, making the steady motion of the baron's finger easier. Heat began building. A warm friction that was different from the initial burn. His thoughts sputtered to a halt as another finger joined the first. Only the arm that was suddenly wrapped around his hips held Marcus in place.

"Hurts. M'lord. Please."

"Relax, don't fight me." The baron found his cock and began stroking it, from base to tip, twisting his hand on the downward stroke. On the next return trip, he caught the pre-cum gathered on the tip, using it to lubricate the sensitive flesh.

His ass muscles relaxed and Marcus found, to his surprise, the pain faded, his body able—nay, more than that, eager—to accept both fingers. His heart pounded in his chest, he felt that tingle in the base of his spine that heralded a climax.

The baron withdrew his fingers from Marcus' body and cock.

"No," he groaned. So close. He was so close. His hole spasmed, looking for something to fill it, to ease the emptiness.

A blunt object, much larger than the baron's fingers, nudged against his opening. For one heart-stopping moment, Marcus thought it was the baron's cock, then realized that while smooth and hard, it didn't have the warmth and give of human flesh. He lurched forward.

“Shh, sweet thief. This is to open you, prepare you for me. You are so small, so tight. Relax. Push against the phallos.”

He couldn't escape. It was too late. Not even to himself could Marcus admit he needed, craved, the slow glide of the oiled wood as it slid inside him. The burn returned, sharper, hotter, as, relentless as the tide against the shore, the phallos continued to push against his resistant flesh.

He moaned.

“That's it. Open for me. Almost home.” The baron's words flowed over him like dark water over stone.

Marcus wanted to give himself over to that voice, to the warm, roughened hand tracing smooth circles on his stomach just as much as he wanted to expel the invader in his ass. Blood pounded in his veins, sweat broke out on his body. God's bones. That voice. The voice of an archangel. Or a devil. It coaxed, lured, commanded things of his body that he couldn't wrap his mind around. Things that were surely wrong. Things that he wanted more than he wanted the next breath in his lungs.

Marcus gritted his teeth and bore down.

The phallos slipped in to the hilt. He felt overfull, the sharp burn of untried muscle bringing tears to his eyes. He swallowed, panting lightly, frozen, unable to move forward or back. Caught on the cusp of agonizing pain and unbearable pleasure.

The hand on his stomach urged Marcus upright. The baron's free hand caught his chin and turned Marcus' face to his.

“Mine. Mine to claim.”

“For one month,” Marcus dared, fighting to ignore his rampant erection waving in front of him and the slab of wood impaling his ass.

Something flashed in the baron's eyes. Fury? Respect? Marcus couldn't tell. Instinct told him it was important. He forgot that glimpse of emotion as the baron's mouth latched on to his.

The slick, rough tongue pushed inside without any preliminaries. Stroking, exploring, conquering. Marcus began trembling, overwhelmed by the dominating expertise.

He shivered as the baron explored his palate with the tip of his tongue. Without conscious thought, Marcus raised his arms and buried his fingers in the black hair. Thick, silky and soft. Marcus couldn't get over how soft it was. The last thing he expected on a hardened warrior.

Fingers played with his nipples. Marcus' gasp was swallowed by another assault on his mouth. Tugging, pulling, pinching. He couldn't catch his breath, couldn't even begin to anticipate what the baron would do next. His arms tightened around the baron's neck. He tried to catch the baron's tongue, to engage it in a duel. Frustrated at his inability to take control of the kiss, he began sucking on the soft muscle.

Against his hip, the rigid length of the baron's cock pressed. His trembling increased, his nipples swollen, aching, burning. His cock dribbled pre-cum in a steady stream. If he could just catch his breath, take a moment to regain some control...

The baron slid his mouth to his neck. A pinch of pain from even, white teeth and strong suction. Marcus pushed his chest into those strong, clever fingers. Needing... Wanting... He shook so hard that he knew he'd fall if the baron wasn't supporting him.

Hot, so hot. His hands clenched on the thick, dark silky hair, seeking something, anything to ground him.

All at once, he was free, only the hands at his waist supporting, steadying him.

Marcus felt an acute sense of abandonment.

"Easy, little thief, easy."

Was the baron's voice a little deeper? Had the kiss affected him at all? Surely that thick rod that had rubbed against his hip meant the baron wanted him as much as he wanted the baron? Marcus closed his eyes, unable to look in case he was wrong.

The hands left his waist. Even though a fire blazed merrily in the huge hearth, Marcus felt cold when the baron stepped back, taking the furnace heat of his body with him.

Marcus shivered.

“Turn around and come to me.” The command grazed over senses made raw by the influx of sensation.

Marcus started to back off the bed, only to stop as a shaft of pleasure-pain shot through him from the wooden phallos. Over his shoulder, his gaze shot to the baron’s.

Amusement lightened the gray eyes. The baron crossed his arms over his chest. “Do not let the phallos slip out of your body and do not use your hands to keep it in.” A knowing grin lifted one corner of the firm mouth.

“But how?” Marcus could have sworn his whole body flushed. If he couldn’t use his hands, there was only way to keep that thrice-damned thing in his ass.

The untried muscles of his pucker clenched involuntarily.

Slowly—it was a long way to the floor—he eased one leg off the bed and then the other and slid awkwardly until his feet touched the rushes. The baron wouldn’t have to kill him. Marcus tightened his cheeks, fighting to keep the oiled wood inside as he, a tiny bit at a time, straightened. Oh no, the baron wouldn’t have to bloody his hands. He’d save the man the bother by dying of sheer embarrassment.

“Walk to me.”

Marcus eyed the distance between himself and the baron. It loomed, becoming longer and longer the more he stared. It had to be at least ten good steps. Ten steps he would have to make without allowing the phallos to fall to the floor.

Heart pounding, hands sweating, Marcus took the first step. Panic hit him when he felt the phallos shift. At once, he stopped, clenching his buttocks together so hard they began to cramp.

He licked his lips, his gaze locked with the baron's. He tried again, this time a small step while clamping down with his hole and buttocks. More heat flooded his face at the picture he made as he crossed the expanse between them.

Limbs trembling, sweat prickling the small of his back, he finally stopped in front of the huge man. A sense of victory swelled his chest. He'd done it. He'd actually done as commanded.

The baron moved, reaching out to brush his thumb across Marcus' bottom lip, freeing it from his teeth. He held his hand in front of Marcus' eyes. Dazed, lip tingling from the slight contact, Marcus focused, his gaze sharpening at the tiny drop of blood on the broad thumb. He lifted his gaze back to the baron's.

Hot, intense, enthralling. How could gray eyes, eyes the color of fog and mist, be so molten?

The baron licked off the drop, taking his time to clean his calloused skin of all traces of blood.

Marcus gasped.

He wanted to take that thumb into his own mouth, swirl his tongue around the ridges and valleys. He wanted to thrust his tongue into the baron's mouth, taste his own blood mingled with the heat and maleness of the other man's captivating flavor.

Before he could do either of those things, the baron sat in the same chair he'd used to punish him.

"Undress me. Start with my boots." He steepled his fingers under his chin. The smile on the baron's face made him uneasy. "Remember to keep the phallos in place."

Could a man actually die of embarrassment? Marcus hoped so.

The baron held out one long leg, clearly expecting Marcus to straddle it in order to remove the leather riding boot. But to do that, he'd have to turn around, his ass right in front of the baron's face, giving the man a perfect view of the wooden phallos stretching his hole. He gnawed at his bottom lip.

A trickle of sweat ran between his shoulder blades, down to the dip at his lower spine, then into the dark, forbidden crease.

The baron waited, leg extended.

Marcus rushed to swing a leg over the muscular calf, only to shoot upright as the phallos moved, slipping out just a bit. Frantically, he clenched his aching muscles, trying to pull the thing back inside his body. The phallos nudged something inside him. A lightning bolt of pleasure weakened Marcus' knees. Mouth open, he gulped air.

"Problem?"

The dark tone rumbled over and through him, sending fresh quakes of pleasure throughout Marcus' entire body.

Hands clenched into fists, he swallowed, seeking to find his voice. "No, m'lord." Marcus was proud of how steady his words were.

"Then do not keep me waiting."

Midnight sin. His voice was pure midnight sin. Dark, deep, a lure for the foolish.

Before this night, Marcus would not have counted himself among that rank. His nipples ached, his cock jerked and his ass spasmed. He dropped his head forward. He was damned. Not only was he a fool, he was a fool hurrying to his own doom.

It took a bit of doing but Marcus removed the boots without displacing the phallos. Before this night, he hadn't even known the word, much less knew what one was used for.

Marcus couldn't decide whether to mourn for his lost innocence or not.

He took an involuntary step back when the baron stood.

"Next, my shirt."

Marcus had never counted himself a small man. In fact, he knew he was taller than many others and strong. Strength was a benefit in his profession. The baron dwarfed him. Not only did the top of his head barely reach the baron's chin but the breadth of the baron's shoulders made two of his. His legs were like tree trunks, heavy with muscle

and well-made. Massive, both in size and muscle, he should have looked like a lumbering wagon. Instead, the baron was graceful and utterly masculine. A warhorse instead of a workhorse.

A warrior.

An odd warmth curled in the pit of Marcus' stomach.

A fine tremor in his hands, he took hold of the hem of the linen shirt and pulled it over the baron's head. He had to stand on tiptoe and stretch to get the material free. This close, he could smell the baron's appealing scent, feel the heat from his body. The tip of his cock rubbed against the baron's brēcs. Marcus had to stifle a groan at the contact.

He couldn't take his eyes from the broad chest. Swelling muscle covered with a light coating of dark hair arrowed down to a lean waist. Muscles rippled on the hard stomach. A thin line of hair bisected his abdomen before it was hidden by the top of his brēcs.

His body was far from unmarked—a long scar curved over his ribs and snaked around to his back. Another disappeared under his arm. A V-shaped scar just missed bisecting his right nipple. A silver tracery marred his collarbone. Marcus picked out more marks of battle, noting each one. None detracted from the baron's beauty. In fact, in some odd way, they made the man more appealing.

Marcus wanted to trail his mouth from the small nipple peeking out from the dark hair, down to that line of hair. Chase it, find out where it went. Taste, nip, lick and soothe each and every mark on the massive body.

Shocked at his runaway thoughts, he stood still as a statue, the shirt dangling from his hands.

"My brēcs."

His voice was even deeper and, in the hollow of the baron's throat, his pulse throbbed a little too quickly.

Marcus felt a spurt of satisfaction.

Feeling more confident, he made short work of the ties holding up the brēcs. All that was left were the baron's small clothes.

They pooled on the floor.

Marcus backpedaled so fast he nearly wound up on his ass. No. No way in seven hells was that monster going in his ass.

The baron's cock indeed matched the rest of the man.

It would split him asunder.

He reached out and touched it with one finger.

It jerked.

The plum-shaped head was almost as thick as his wrist. Even as he watched, it grew longer, larger, stretching almost to the baron's bellybutton. The base of the cock...

Marcus' mouth went dry. So dry, he couldn't even swallow.

Still, it was beautiful. Veins pulsed with life and energy. Marcus wanted to touch it again, to see if the dark golden skin was as velvety as it looked.

He snatched his hand behind his back, appalled at the train of his thoughts. What was he thinking? That thing would kill him. He did not want to touch it, test its weight, hold it. He *could not* want such.

But he did.

"Take me in your mouth."

"I-I. M'lord, please." Even though he knew doing so would lead to things that just contemplating made his knees shake and his ass pucker in fear, Marcus wanted to so badly his mouth watered. The baron probably thought he was protesting but that wasn't it at all. He didn't know *how*.

His chin dropped to his chest in defeat.

The silence stretched out, straining his nerves nigh to breaking.

Punishment.

He'd disobeyed the baron. Fine shivers played over his skin.

"Have you ever taken a man's cock between your lips?"

The baron didn't sound mad, just faintly curious. Still, Marcus didn't dare raise his gaze. Just in case he was wrong. He shook his head. "No, m'lord. Never."

"Do you want to?"

Behind his back, his fingers twisted in knots.

A note of sternness entered the deep voice. "Do you want to take me in your mouth?"

He couldn't. He just couldn't admit the truth aloud. He'd rather take a mace to the gut. "I agreed to be your leman."

Again, that silence. "Look at me."

Pure command. Against his will, Marcus met that fog and mist gaze.

"Do you want to take me in your mouth?"

Marcus felt his head jerk up and down. The tips of his fingers went numb as he shut off the blood flow in his distress.

"Then come here, little thief." Soft. So soft.

One step. Two. Hard, calloused hands settled on his shoulders and pushed down. Marcus sank to his knees. The huge erection was a breath away.

Marcus licked his lips.

The baron's cock twitched in response. Without instruction, he reached out and wrapped both hands around the base.

Hot, smooth, iron-hard. Marcus ran his tentative palms up, then down the thick length. The skin was so soft, smooth. Like the silk sheets on the bed wrapped around a heated length of iron. The skin moved and shifted with each twist of his hand. He pressed one finger on a ropy vein. He felt the baron's heartbeat.

Awed, he did it again.

A drop of pre-cum glistened in the slit. Marcus leaned forward, catching it on the tip of his tongue.

Salty, sweet, male.

Marcus moaned at the taste. Opening his mouth, he took the head of the cock in his mouth, savoring the taste, the weight, the heat.

The baron groaned and buried his fingers in Marcus' hair.

He swirled his tongue around the spongy flesh before sucking lightly.

Another groan.

Marcus forgot his fear, forgot that soon he'd have this cock up his ass, a pain sure to make his spanking seem inconsequential. All his attention was on the baron, in his mouth, surrounding him with his scent, his taste, his power. Marcus moved his head up and down, loving the feel of the baron's fingers flexing on his scalp. The tip of the cock hit the back of his throat, making him gag.

His head was pulled back until his watering eyes could meet the baron's.

"No one has ever been able to take me fully. I don't expect you to. Use your hands as well as your mouth." He rubbed the tips of his fingers through Marcus' hair. "You are doing well."

Marcus' embarrassment faded as warmth filled him. Spreading his knees, he scooted closer. Desire coiled low in his stomach but Marcus ignored it, focusing instead on pulling another one of those fascinating sounds from the back of the baron's throat.

He nibbled and licked on the underside of the thick cock. Down, down, until he was touching the heavy sac. He grazed it with his tongue, then returned his attention to the baron's cock. Retracing his path, he stopped to nip just behind the flared head.

The hands in his hair tightened his hands to the point of pain as a dark sound escaped the baron's throat.

So Marcus did it again.

"Yes," he groaned. "Suck me, sweet. Love your mouth."

Naked, on his knees, ass still red and a wooden phallos stretching his hole, a sense of power filled Marcus. He, a thief, had the ability to move a powerful warlord.

Taking as much of him in his mouth as he could, Marcus cupped the full balls in one hand, squeezing, tugging, teasing. When the powerful thighs quivered, he grew bolder, running a finger over the perineum to the small, clenched hole. Not quite daring to penetrate, he circled and rubbed.

The baron began thrusting. In and out. His erection swelled, grew hotter and harder against his tongue. Marcus could feel the swollen balls draw tighter.

Hands clamped down on his head.

Thick spurts of semen filled his mouth. Marcus swallowed quickly, trying to keep up with the flow.

He was disappointed when the baron withdrew from his mouth.

Chapter Three

Christ! His knees felt weak. Duncan didn't dare let go of Marcus, not wanting to end in a heap at his feet.

Would that not be something — the Raven at the feet of a common thief?

His breath bellowed in and out of his lungs. He concentrated on getting it under control.

By damn. He'd never reacted like that before. And he couldn't use the length of time between encounters as an excuse. He'd gone longer than a year without sex before. He glanced down, bracing himself for the smug triumph sure to fill the gold-brown eyes.

A bemused amber gaze blinked back. As he watched, his thief ran the tip of his tongue over his bottom lip, catching an errant drop of semen. He closed his eyes as if savoring the taste.

A hard jolt hit Duncan in the chest.

Sated, limp, his cock tried to stir with interest.

When he'd made the bargain with the thief, Duncan had no interest in the man other than as a way to sate his needs for a month. It was his manner to go without and then glut himself for the next long fast. He didn't want friendship, a long-term union or, God forbid, love. He wanted to fuck.

He craved the feel of his hand on a man's ass, the tightness and heat around his cock as he fucked in and out of a tight hole. He didn't want to know the man under him, outside what he liked in bed. Which is why he never used a man under his command or in his keep.

Duncan wasn't an entirely unfeeling partner. He didn't cause lasting pain to the men he used. Nay, he chose men who craved the same experience that he did and then left without a backward glance or thought when it was over. He never lost control and he never gave more than he wanted.

His little thief proved an exception.

From the moment he'd spied the man stealing his jewels, his cock had ruled his head.

To know he was not an experienced whore, that Duncan would be the first one in that tight hole, the first one to bend him over his lap and redden his ass...

He thought his desire couldn't get any stronger...until his little thief had taken him between his lips.

Duncan had never felt the like.

What would happen when he actually fucked his ass?

His heart hitched a beat at the thought.

He closed his eyes. Control. Somehow, he had to find some control. He could not let anyone, much less a thief, exert that much influence over him.

To be honest that is why he fucked Marcus' mouth first—to gain some control. For once, he'd actually had the best of intentions. Duncan knew he was a large man. Even experienced whores oftentimes had trouble taking him. Some called him unnatural. Duncan shoved aside a small pang that remembrance caused. His so-called peers had said worse. As excited and ready as he was, he'd been afraid he'd truly damage the other man. He'd thought to take the edge off by having an orgasm first.

He opened his eyes and looked down. Marcus, hands on the tops of his thighs, gave a tentative smile and his eyes reflected shy pleasure.

Lord above, the man was going to be the ruin of him.

Time to regain his normal control.

Intending to make his voice harsh, Duncan winced when praise came out instead. "You pleased me."

His reward was a brilliant smile curving the swollen lips. His little thief ducked his head and a lock of gold-brown hair fell over his eyes.

Duncan gave a silent groan. Oh, he was so lost.

It made him churlish. "Get up. Time for your second punishment."

The glowing smile dimmed. Acute loss knotted Duncan's stomach. He cleared his throat and pointed to a saddle tree in one corner of the chamber.

The saddle tree had been fashioned to his exacting specifications, the sanded wood padded and covered in soft, oiled leather. Each leg sported sheepskin-lined cuffs.

Feet dragging, Marcus crossed to the device and draped himself over it without being told.

"M'lord!" Pure panic sounded in his voice.

Duncan was beside him in an instant, hand on the base of the phallos preventing it from slipping out any farther. "Easy, sweet." His other hand went to the intriguing curve where spine met the swell of buttock. His touch immediately soothed Marcus. Duncan was absurdly pleased.

"We need to get your punishment out of the way," he said as he fastened the cuffs then, unable to resist, put his hand back in the same spot.

"Faith, m'lord, I'd lief we'd forget all about it."

Duncan couldn't see his face but he'd wager his biggest ruby that his little thief was again gnawing on his bottom lip. Amused, he retorted, "Spare the rod, spoil the child."

"I do not think of you as my father and my ass is already too sore to be spoiled!"

"Ah, but the Raven always honors his word. I said two punishments." He petted Marcus, not really paying attention, just liking the feel of his skin.

"I think I'd rather suck your cock again."

Whap!

Marcus yelped.

"Keep this lesson in mind in the future and perhaps you'll taste more of my cock and less of my hand." Then again, perhaps not. Desire rose as a dark red streak bloomed on the already warmed rear.

The paddle was another toy Duncan had made to his specifications. Long as his forearm, wide as his palm, grooves were carved lengthwise in the well-sanded and oiled wood. Each groove added to the considerable sting.

He took careful aim and swung again.

The firm, rounded globes jiggled under the force of the blow. Duncan took care not to strike too hard. He frowned at the overly cautious restraint. He raised his hand again, intending to strike with his usual vigor.

Marcus' entire body tensed. Duncan eyed the clenched cheeks and found himself again staying the strength of his arm.

The ass cheeks went white, then scarlet.

A loud yell echoed in the large chamber. "Please, m'lord. I have learned my lesson!"

Duncan swung three times in rapid succession before answering. "I warned you before that I decide when punishment is enough. You have earned four additional strokes."

"M'lord! I apologize!" The word ended on a yell as the paddle struck again. Marcus tried to kick but the cuffs held.

"Seven more strokes and you are done."

Duncan paused to admire the marks and color. He had to remember his little thief was a novice to this play. From the yells and apologies pouring from those full lips, it was obvious Marcus did not believe he was getting off easily.

Whapwhapwhapwhapwhapwhapwhap!

By the time Duncan finished, his little thief could only gasp. He didn't even seem to notice when Duncan kissed one particularly raw spot. Even when the cuffs were

loosened, he remained limp over the saddle tree. With an arm around Marcus' waist, Duncan helped him upright.

"You did well." He wiped the tears away, placing a small kiss at the corner of his eye. Marcus snuggled into his body, rubbing his cheeks on Duncan's chest.

"I cried like a swaddling babe." He sounded worn out and disgusted.

Above his head, Duncan grinned. "So you did. Still, I've known men unable to withstand your punishment." And in the past, Duncan had paid them and walked away. Instinct told him he would not have walked away from Marcus in the same circumstances.

A muscle in his hard jaw twitched. He had not counted on it, had not even looked for it but he wanted more than pain and anonymous sex from his little thief. What that more was, he could not say, but he did want more.

He had one month to work this...this...aberration out of his mind.

Marcus began rubbing against Duncan's groin. Startled, Duncan glanced down. The long lashes brushed his high cheeks. A hard flush colored his cheekbones. As Duncan watched, he took his full bottom lip between his teeth. A small moan escaped as he wiggled again. The wet tip of Marcus' cock dragged along Duncan's thigh.

He didn't even realize what he was doing!

Arousal, sharp and instant, hit Duncan.

A slow grin curved his mouth as he noticed his little thief's eyes were open and staring at his full cock as if it were a serpent about to strike.

Leading him over to the bed, Duncan settled him in the center of the huge expanse. He chuckled as Marcus yelped when his well-warmed rear met the cool silk sheets.

"My ass hurts!"

Palms flat on each side of his head, Duncan leaned down and kissed the pout off his lips, sucking the slightly fuller bottom lip between his teeth before giving it a

remonstrating nip. "Are you in a hurry for more discipline?" He tasted the tender spot beneath his ear.

"No, m'lord!" Marcus wriggled, then groaned in pain. "Can I not lie on my side? Please, m'lord?" Even as he pleaded, he turned his head, chasing Duncan's mouth.

Sweat, male musk and arousal filled Duncan's nostrils. The heady mix went straight to his groin. His tongue teased the parted lips, before slipping inside for a deep kiss.

Damn, the thief went to his head quicker than *usquebaugh*, the little-known spirit of the Scots.

The thought disturbed Duncan, bringing him out of his sexual haze.

He knew his was a strongly sexual nature, a nature he kept under tight control. Not even with his occasional liaisons did he give his needs full rein. A part of him feared revealing any weakness, letting another see to the very core of him.

He spanked, he toyed, he tormented, he had sex with but he never made love to the men he bedded.

What would it be like to have that freedom? Not only to spank and bring a man to the edge of madness with his cock, but to make love to him until he was incapable of thinking, of anything but feeling?

In one month, his little thief would walk out of the keep. No doubt he'd hie himself as far from Ravenswood as his legs would carry him. No one need know his lapse...

Duncan used the tip of his tongue to catch the bead of sweat in the hollow of Marcus' throat. He trailed his mouth to his collarbone, tracing its hard line, before going lower, over the swell of muscle to one tightly furled nipple. Marcus arched his back. Duncan bit down hard enough to cause the other man to groan, before soothing the sting with his tongue. One hand sought out the other nipple, teasing, twisting and pinching it.

"Yes! More, please, more."

Duncan slid his free hand between the restless thighs, searching for and finding the end of the phallos. He nudged it at the same time as he latched on to the nipple and sucked.

"By God's bones!" Marcus dug his heels into the sheets, his entire body bowing.

"Have you ever had someone make love to you?" he asked, releasing his nipple and kissing his way down his belly. He raked his teeth over the muscled abdomen. It contracted under the gentle assault.

"N-no. I-I prefer —"

Duncan dipped his tongue into the intriguing dimple. To his satisfaction, it was obvious Marcus forgot what he was saying.

"Prefer what?" In. Out. In. Out. He played with the small indentation the same way he would later play with his little thief's ass. The untutored response was an unexpected joy.

"Huh?"

"You said you'd never been made love to," he reminded Marcus, his tongue going on another wicked foray. "That you prefer, what?"

"Uh, prefer to be the one..." He arched again as Duncan slid the phallos partway out and then back in slowly. "I, uh, prefer to be the one, uh, making love—m'lord!" Fingers scrabbled for a hold on Duncan's shoulders as Duncan slid one finger in beside the phallos. Marcus began panting.

"Then we have that in common." He wiggled his finger, stretching the small hole, stimulating the nerves in the nether ring.

Shifting, Duncan found a spot on Marcus' hipbone and sucked the sensitive skin between his teeth. He wanted to mark his thief, so that even when he left him, he would know to whom he belonged.

"Put your hands over your head and don't move them."

The trembling hands on his shoulders dug in and the amber eyes, glazed with passion, slowly focused on him. "I need." He licked his lips. "Please, m'lord, I need to hold on to you."

Temptation licked along his spine. Never did he allow touch, wary of the yearning, buried so deep inside he could almost forget it existed, that wished for more. That wondered what it would be like to be held, to be loved. Could he trust his little thief that far? Almost as soon as the question formed, Duncan shoved it violently away. Instead he allowed the primitive desire to make this man submit hold complete sway.

"Now."

Fear vied with passion as Marcus complied. Slowly, so slowly as if he had to force his arms to move, he raised them above his head. Duncan caught his breath. Long, pale body stretched out against the dark blue sheets, cheeks flushed with desire, nipples wet and swollen and cock leaking, he was a feast for a hungry man.

Starving. Not until this moment had Duncan realized he was starving.

"Beautiful," he grated against the soft skin of Marcus' inner thigh. "So beautiful." He strung small, stinging kissing to his knees, laving the small hurt with his tongue. He pushed one leg to the side, revealing the vulnerable bend, then stopped to taste right behind the knee. Marcus shuddered, his legs spreading wide.

Hands rough, he turned Marcus onto his stomach, growling out against the back of his thigh, "Keep your hands above your head." Such long, graceful muscles. He moved between the spread thighs, pausing to admire the view. As he stared, one leg drew up slightly, an unconscious offering.

One that he had no intention of declining.

Not an inch of the luscious body went untouched. Only when Marcus was begging, pleading incoherently, did Duncan relent.

A hand on each hip, he drew Marcus up until he was on all fours. He smoothed a hand down the rounded globes, reveling in the heat still there.

His chest against the well-made back, his mouth against his ear, Duncan whispered, "Do you want me?" One thigh jostled the phallos.

Marcus fell forward, catching himself on his elbows. "More than I want my next breath."

For one second, Duncan could have sworn his heart stopped. Then warmth flooded him, heating his blood, erasing any thought but that to get inside Marcus. "Then you shall have me." He abruptly removed the phallos and reached for the scented oil in a single motion. Coating his cock, he grabbed Marcus' hips, his hard length at his hole.

Despite the overwhelming urge to plunge forward, he forced himself to ease the head of his cock inside. He gritted his teeth, throwing his head back as his cock was enveloped in heat. God, he was hot. Inch by inch, he forged inside. The untried muscles clamped down.

"Relax," he grated. His fingers dug into Marcus' flesh, leaving fresh bruises, as Duncan fought the need to come. "Bear down. It will make it easier on you."

"M'lord," pain sounded in his voice, "I do not think you'll fit."

He pried one hand free and stroked the length of the damp spine. "I'll fit. Breathe. A deep breath in, then out." Marcus was made for him. He flexed his hips, pushing a little deeper.

"Hurts." A deep breath shuddered out of him. "Burns."

"It will get better. Bear down." All at once, the head of his cock popped through the resistant ring of muscle. Dear God, if it got any better than this, it'd kill him. He eased in a few more inches, then slowly slid partway out. He worked his way in again until his balls slapped Marcus' ass.

Lungs heaving for air, he stopped, giving Marcus time to adjust to his length and girth. Still he petted the sweaty back, soothing the other man.

"M'lord?"

"Yes?" Was that his voice, so rough and winded?

"You may move now."

A bark of surprised laughter escaped. He slapped the other man's flank lightly. "I think you begin to forget who is master and who is slave." He should have felt anger but he didn't. The other man's spirit amused and pleased him.

Not giving Marcus a chance to answer, he began thrusting, still taking care not to harm him. Harder, faster but not as hard or as fast as he wanted. He realized Marcus was pushing back, meeting, encouraging his thrusts.

"Am I still hurting you?"

"Yes," he moaned.

Duncan stilled. "In a bad way?"

"No." His head dropped to the sheet. "Please, m'lord, *move*."

In midst of the passion, Duncan suddenly felt lighthearted. It was an unusual, even unique, experience. The smell of male arousal, sweat and the scented oil filled his nostrils. Need exploded. Grasping Marcus' hips in both hands, he began slamming his cock in the other man's nether passage. His balls drew up tight to his body. Knowing his orgasm was too close to last much longer, he reached around and took Marcus' erection in his hand. Working the hard flesh in short, sharp motions, he continued to thrust. Head thrown back, neck straining with the effort to wait, he groaned in relief as he felt the other man's cock begin to jerk. Unable to wait any longer, his orgasm boiled up and hot jets of semen shot from his cock.

Duncan collapsed onto his side, his cock still inside the other man as he dragged him down with him.

Marcus didn't think he'd ever catch a full breath again. He was all too aware of the heavy arm across his middle as he lay there, trying to recover.

By Lucifer's cock, had he ever thought sex with a woman was wonderful? He shook his head in disbelief. Every encounter before this one was but a pale imitation. He

shifted and his ass twinged. Color bloomed on his cheeks as it sank in that the baron was still inside him. He started to move away. The arm around his middle tightened.

“Go to sleep, little thief.” The baron’s breath evened out as he slipped into slumber.

Even relaxed, that massive cock still threatened to split him asunder. Marcus felt warm breath caress the back of his neck. His head on the same pillow as the baron’s, the hard arm around his waist, the heat of his body the length of his, Marcus had never felt so conscious of another person.

He shifted, trying to get comfortable. Having the baron’s cock in him now somehow seemed more intimate than the act of sex. He moved again. The baron hauled him up tight to that magnificent body.

His ass hurt, his hole, still fluttering and clenching occasionally, sending streaks of sensation to his balls, felt like a log had been rammed up it. Fiery heat scalded his cheeks at the mere thought of why it felt that way. The wiry hair of the baron’s groin brushed his rear. Marcus flinched away as even that light touch brought to vivid life his punishment and he muffled a groan. If there was a muscle in his body that didn’t ache, he could not find it.

Never had he been more content.

His eyes closed as he pondered that dichotomy.

* * * * *

The feel of a hard, hot body blanketing his back and a harder, hotter cock sliding inside him woke Marcus. The first thing that met his gaze was a forearm, well muscled and marred by myriad scars. His breath ruffled the light coating of dark hair. A pleased smile tugged at his mouth when he saw the trail of gooseflesh that followed.

Knees nudged his thighs farther apart. Still half-asleep, he complied. The sharp bite of pain woke him completely as the large crown of the baron’s cock popped through the reluctant ring of muscle. Impaled, his rosette, sore and overused, clamped down on the invader.

Marcus shuddered and groaned at the overload of sensation. Pain and pleasure raced along nerve endings, twisting and twining in a dance that swung first from one extreme to the other.

Catching his lower lip between his teeth, Marcus bit down, not sure which sensation was stronger. Another inch of cock slid inside.

"M'lord, I-I cannot." The coppery taste of blood filled his mouth. Pain. Pain was stronger. He focused on a silvery, crescent-shaped scar. "I am too sore." His words were little more than a whisper.

A calloused palm closed on his cock. To his shock, Marcus realized he was erect.

"This says differently."

"I believe we established last night that he has no wit." Warm breath blew in his ear before a tongue followed. This time his shudder had nothing to do with pain.

A deep chuckle vibrated along his spine. "Or, as I said last night, perhaps he knows what he wants and does not fear to ask for it, hmm?"

That cock slid a little deeper. His neck arched back at the burn and stretch. He began panting lightly. Teeth nipped at his earlobe. He shuddered again, heat enveloping him. His nipples pulled taut.

Another sharp nip. The cock slid in another inch. A tongue soothed the small bite of pain. Stretch and burn. The nip of sharp teeth. The soothing warmth of a tongue. Again and again. By the time the baron rested his hips against the swell of his ass, Marcus couldn't catch his breath and small shivers that had nothing to do with a chill and everything to do with heat coursed up and down his spine.

"Do you still wish me to stop?" The question, whispered against the sensitive skin right below his ear and accompanied by a slow stroke of a tongue along the cords of his neck, made Marcus struggle to pull his thoughts from a molten haze.

Mouth open to reply, Marcus froze at the sharp clang of metal on metal and the sound of water being poured.

He turned his head on the pillow and saw two people, a man and a woman, filling a massive copper tub.

Sweet mercy. If there was any grace in the world, a hole would open up and swallow him.

His cheeks flamed.

A deep rumble filled the chamber as the baron laughed. The two stopped, buckets in midair and stared.

The baron touched his cheek, a fleeting, barely there skim of fingertips. His tone still rich with amusement, he said, "If you blush any harder, you'll set fire to the bedsheets!"

"M'lord!" Marcus couldn't prevent the scandalized protest.

"Do not worry, little thief. Eric and Mairi are well accustomed to my ways and know how to hold their tongues." He turned toward the pair in question. "Is that not so, my friends?"

Their expressions still arrested, they both nodded. Then, as one, they stared directly at Marcus, gazes full of speculation.

"As they will for you. Is this also not so?"

The man, Eric, spoke first. "Aye, my lord. Mairi and I see no need to carry tales."

Mairi spoke up. She met the baron's gaze, a hint of reprimand in her pale blue eyes. "Be sure to use the oil." She gestured toward a small bottle on the chair next to the drying cloth. "It will ease him. You forget yourself, sometimes, Duncan."

A gurgle of noise escaped from Marcus and his eyes slid closed for an instant. A part of him expected Duncan to clamp the woman in the dungeon for her forwardness.

"I will, Mairi."

The quiet agreement caught him by surprise.

The woman gave a short nod. Her expression warmed when she looked at Marcus. "You tell me if he forgets."

Not even if hell froze over.

Buckets in hand, they left the room to get more water. Duncan was moving before the door closed, sliding slowly out of him.

"Please do not take me in front of them."

"Hush, now. There is no need for embarrassment." Marcus felt the edge of his teeth against his shoulder. "They will not judge you."

"I will do whatever you want. Everything but this." His stomach tightened as Duncan let him feel a hint of his teeth again, this time on the back of his neck. Heat unfurled, heating his blood until it was molten.

"You will not even notice them." It sounded like a vow. Before he could respond, Duncan wrapped an arm about his waist and pulled Marcus up as he sat back on his heels.

He found himself sitting on Duncan's lap, his legs folded along the outside of the baron's. Marcus didn't think that massive cock could go any deeper but it did. The stretched skin of his sphincter protested the move. The sharp burn seemed somehow connected to his cock and nipples. Both throbbed.

Duncan held him as if he weighed next to nothing. Arm across his waist, chin on his shoulder, he spoke in Marcus' ear. "You have the prettiest nipples." His free hand came up and pinched one.

Marcus moaned, leaning his head back.

"No, sweet. Watch what I do. Watch my fingers pluck and pull at these lovely bits of flesh. Watch how they darken for me."

Eyes heavy, Marcus couldn't take his gaze from those elegant, powerful fingers as they played with him. Each tug, each squeeze sent bolts of fiery sensation shooting through him. He gripped the powerful forearms, his nails biting deep as he held on for dear life, needing the contact to anchor him.

"Look, sweet. See how they plump, strain for my touch." He flicked a thumbnail over Marcus' left nipple. His voice lowered, becoming deeper, more roughened. "I have the perfect adornment for this."

Marcus licked his lips. "Adornment?" Was that his voice, so broken, so dazed?

"Mmm. Had a goldsmith fashion them two years ago but have yet to use them." He held the hard nub between his thumb and index finger. "A clincher with two amber-tipped screws that allows it to be tightened until the pain is exquisite."

His cock, that always traitorous organ, jumped and slapped his belly.

"Ah, I see he likes the thought." There was a wealth of amused satisfaction in the dark voice. "What about you, my little thief? Would you like to wear them for me? The jewels match your eyes perfectly."

Heart beating so hard in his chest that Marcus thought it would fight its way out, he croaked, "Y-yes, m'lord." His nipple, so swollen, so red, so deliciously tender, was given a sharp twist. "Oh!" He threw his head back, his hands flying back to wrap around Duncan's neck. "Please!" he begged on a soft, breathy moan. "Please, baron, more!"

"Ride me, sweet thief, and I'll give you what you need." Hot, moist, deep, the command was whispered into his ear.

Dazed, Marcus tried to understand what the baron wanted. He really did but he didn't have the slightest idea what the baron was talking about. Frustrated, he wiggled on the baron's lap, gasping at the shaft of pleasure the move elicited. He thrust his chest into that large hand, not even sure what he was begging for anymore.

Seeming to realize Marcus wasn't disobeying him but just didn't know what to do, the baron gripped Marcus' hips in both hands.

Marcus almost sobbed as he felt the bruising strength of those long, elegant fingers biting into his flesh. A shiver rippled the length of his spine as the baron opened his mouth on the side of his neck.

"Say my name."

Marcus blinked, unable to focus on anything but the heat at his back, the hot, iron-hard length inside him, the feel of lips moving on his neck. "W-what, m'lord?"

"My name." The words, a deep rumble from deep inside the baron, vibrated against Marcus' spine. He almost came, then and there.

"Duncan. Say it." At the same time, those powerful hands lifted Marcus until just the tip of that huge cock was inside him. "Duncan," he repeated and slammed Marcus back down on his lap.

"Duncan!" Marcus screamed.

"That's it, my sweet," the midnight voice crooned in his ear. "Again. Say it again."

That hot, silken length slid from him as he was lifted, until it just nudged his entrance. Empty, so empty. Sobbing, panting, he fought Duncan, wanting, needing to slam himself back down, to fill that scalding emptiness. Implacable hands held him still.

"Duncan."

Marcus latched on to the whispered command like a drowning man. Hands buried in the silky dark depths of the baron's hair, back arched and swollen nipples pointing straight up, Marcus gave himself to Duncan, body and soul.

"Duncan." He tasted the name on his tongue. His passage spasmed. "Duncan, please!"

"Always, little thief. I'll always give you what you need." A sharp nip punctuated the promise.

To Marcus' relief, Duncan set a steady rhythm that he soon caught. The muscles in his thighs burned, sweat sheened his chest and belly as he quickened his pace, chasing the climax only Duncan could give him. "Pleasepleasepleaseplease." Lungs heaving for air, balls pulled tight against his body, it eluded him.

"Duncan, help me!" His body was taut, straining for the release that continued to evade him. Oh, God. He was going to shatter, fly apart in all directions.

And then he did.

Shudder after shudder ripped through him when Duncan wrapped a roughened, calloused palm around his erection and began milking him in short, hard jerks that were just shy of actual pain. At the same time, he pinched Marcus' nipple, hard.

Hot jets of semen landed on his chest and stomach, coated Duncan's hands, even as Duncan's seed filled him in thick, scalding bursts.

He was barely aware of Duncan easing out of his sore body. He snuggled into the pillow as the covers were tucked around him. The lingering scent of Duncan, rain and male musk, soothed him.

"Duncan," he whispered drowsily, just to hear the other man's name. He didn't hear the wealth of wonder that husked his voice.

The other man did.

A soft kiss brushed over the point of his shoulder.

"Rest now, sweet."

Marcus smiled. Duncan would take care of him. He was safe in Duncan's hands.

* * * * *

"I thought you'd be down." Mairi kneaded the huge mound of dough as she pinned Duncan with a pale blue gaze.

"I erred in keeping him here." Eric and Mairi were more than friends. They were Duncan's only family. Oh, not by blood. Their ties were closer than that. They chose to stay with Duncan, to look after him. To love him. Eric had been a knight in William's service when he'd found Duncan, beaten nearly to death by his mother's new husband, and had taken him in. Mairi had become his mother and Eric his father. They would die for Duncan. And he for them.

"Did you? Or did you do the first smart thing you've done since you saved King William's life?"

Duncan slashed a hand through the air. "You know what I'm like." He met her calm gaze with a glare that dared her to deny the truth. "You know my taste. I like to beat men as a part of sex. It arouses me to hurt and humiliate my lovers."

"I know." She pushed the heels of her hands into the thick, brown lump.

"You saw what I did to him!" Why couldn't she understand? He was sick, twisted.

"I saw the marks on his body." She crossed to Duncan and took both cheeks in her hands. "I also saw something else. Something I've never seen before. You love him, Duncan. More, you need him."

Shock widened his eyes. Immediately, he denied her claim. "I can't love him. You don't hurt what you love."

Understanding gleamed out of her eyes. Mairi had seen him near death, held him after his mother refused to have him back in her home, made him understand the flaw was not his but his mother's. "Love comes in many forms, Duncan. Answer me this. Would you bloody your thief?"

"Never!" He didn't have to consider his answer. Bloody that beautiful body? The notion was unthinkable.

"What if he were to leave here and the bandits harassing your shire killed him? What then?"

"I'd track down every one of them and leave their guts for the birds. Even if I had to burn the forest to the ground to do it." Icy cold and deadly, his vow rang to the kitchen rafters.

"Sounds like love to me."

Bitter regret soured Duncan's belly. "I forced him to stay. I made him my leman. Why should he believe me? Hell, why would he want the love a man who would bruise his ass before taking it as if he owned it?"

"Why would a man who hated what you did to him beg for more? Ask yourself that, Duncan, my love."

* * * * *

"Marcus?"

"Hmm?" He didn't want to wake. He wanted to stay where he was—cozy, warm, surrounded by Duncan's scent.

"Wake, sweet."

Marcus opened his eyes reluctantly and turned over, wincing as his ass protested the move. He looked at the man sitting on the side of the bed. Duncan wouldn't meet his eyes. Unease slid through Marcus' contentment. Duncan looked almost afraid. He'd never seen the man anything other than confident, even arrogant.

"I have something to tell you."

The unease became a rock-solid lump in the pit of his stomach.

"You may leave Ravenswood."

Duncan no longer wanted him. Tears burned Marcus' eyes. Somehow, in less than one day, he'd fallen in love with the Raven. And now he was being told to go. The pain nigh onto killed him.

His teeth pierced his bottom lip as he bit down to keep his cry of hurt inside. Marcus fiddled with the edge of the sheet. He heard Duncan take a deep breath.

"Or you may stay, here, with me. Of your own free will."

Marcus jerked his head upright, certain he'd misheard. "Here? With you?" he asked cautiously. At Duncan's nod, a tiny bubble of happiness lightened his earlier despair. Careful, he warned himself. Maybe he does not mean what you think he means. "As your leman?"

Duncan was already shaking his head. "No."

The bubble burst. One lone tear snaked down his cheek. Marcus didn't care. His entire world had just collapsed.

"As my love."

Now he was certain he was hearing things. The Raven, the man without a soul, had just said he loved him. Him, Marcus. A thief. "This is not a cruel trick, is it?"

"No, sweet." Another deep breath. The hand that touched Marcus' face was shaking. "I want you to stay with me. Without coercion."

"Why?" Bewildered, Marcus fell into the fog and mist eyes. To his shock, they were moist.

"Because I love you." Duncan's hand cupped his cheek.

Marcus launched himself at Duncan, laughing and crying. "Oh, God, Duncan. I love you too. I thought you were tired of me. That you didn't want me anymore. I know I'm a novice but I want you so much." Marcus couldn't stop the babble of words. "I thought I was too much trouble."

Duncan's mouth covering his stopped the flow. Marcus sank into the kiss. He could live on Duncan's taste.

Duncan placed small, nibbling kisses at the corner of his mouth. "I won't spank you," he promised, catching Marcus' upper lip between his teeth and tugging.

Marcus pulled back and almost melted at the tender look in the gray eyes. "Don't you want to?"

The fog and mist gaze flickered to the side and then back. It was so fast, Marcus almost missed it. "No. Not as long as I have you."

He was lying. Duncan craved the feel of his hand warming his ass as much as Marcus loved the way it felt. That he was willing to give it up told Marcus how deep Duncan's love ran. "I do."

He smiled at the startlement on Duncan's face. "You do?"

"Um-hmm. You taught me the power in surrender. Why would I want to give that up? I love what you do to me." His lips twisted in a wry grin. "Though a little less force in your swing wouldn't come amiss." He rubbed his bottom.

A huge grin split the handsome face. His large hand covered the one on Marcus' bottom. "We'll negotiate." He scooped Marcus out of bed. "Come. The water will get cold if we don't hurry." Duncan strode across the rushes and stopped beside the huge tub.

Marcus couldn't take his eyes off the water in the tub. His face went scarlet. "I... They... When?"

A sexy, wicked grin slanted his way. "I told you that you wouldn't notice."

About the Author

Tall, willowy and drop-dead gorgeous, that's me. Hey, it's my fantasy! Actually, I'm a short, mumble-ty something, Southern girl. From the Outer Banks of North Carolina, where ghost and pirate tales reign, an over-active imagination is bred into my genes. When not writing, you can find me reading, riding my Arab or lost in a daydream.

The author welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

Tell Us What You Think

We appreciate hearing reader opinions about our books. You can email us at Comments@EllorasCave.com.

Also by Alvania Scarborough

Tapestry of the Past



Discover for yourself why readers can't get enough of the multiple award-winning publisher Ellora's Cave. Whether you prefer e-books or paperbacks, be sure to visit EC on the web at www.ellorascave.com for an erotic reading experience that will leave you breathless.

www.ellorascave.com