



*Louisa Trent*

The book cover features a woman with long, flowing red hair in a white dress, embracing a large, hooded figure. The background is a dark, moody landscape with a castle silhouette and a full moon. The title 'THYME' is prominently displayed at the bottom in a stylized, metallic font, with a blue ink-like splash behind it. The author's name 'Louisa Trent' is at the top in a white script font.

Loose Id

**THYME**

*Blooming:  
Thyme*

*Louisa Trent*



**Blooming: Thyme**

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## Prologue

*Spring, the year 1078*

“Damnation!” Bertran de Rely muttered and slid back onto his haunches. “Will those interminable squawks never cease?”

His hips pumping, Girout thrust his cock between the strumpet's ruby red lips. “Do as I do, my lord, and pay the birds no heed.”

Bertran shook his head in consternation. Would that he could disregard the raucous pests as easily as his swordsman had managed to do! Alas, keeping his attention on the matter at hand proved impossible with the birds' carping. Try as he might, his mind strayed from the task before him.

And rutting had become that—a task, no more meaningful than any other duty he performed.

Such was not always the case. His man-at-arms and he had often gone awenching together in France, finding release in brief lulls between sieges of warfare.

Sharing whores was their common practice. But lately, since the Battle of Hastings here in England, actually, those occasions had grown scarce. So scarce, the vassals in Bertan's command had started to speculate about the whys of their leader's sudden abstinence.

To put the rumors to rest, Bertran had arranged a ménage a trois tonight in the military barracks. But he could not seem to concentrate.

Or grow aroused.

Even tonguing between the peasant wench's splayed thighs failed to excite him. His cock remained as lamentably limp now as when he first walked through the portal.

"Pardon the interruption," he apologized to the Saxon female who reclined naked on her back in the middle of the narrow coistrel cot. Dormitory bedding for Norman armsmen was spartan at best, and this tick was no exception.

Bertran turned his head to the persistent noise. "The arrow loops block out the light but allow in the quorks and wing thrashings of the resident birds. Ravens and their screechy vocalizations and mating displays." He grimaced. "You understand."

Whether or not she did comprehend was anybody's guess. At any rate, the strumpet could make him no answer, an understandable breach in civility given the circumstances. Performing fellatio on Girout occupied her mobile lips at the moment. With her head dropped over the edge of the straw tick and her throat strenuously working to accommodate his man-at-arms's member, she could hardly breathe, never mind reply.

Talking would not be usual, anyway. The language barrier curtailed all but the most rudimentary of conversation with the native population. But what he would give to have something, anything, distract him from the ravens, especially a woman's pleasant chatter.

Holding his palms to his ears, Bertran sought to muffle the discordant sounds. And failed.

'Twas already too late. The trembling had commenced. His hands in particular shook. Sweat of apprehension sluiced down his body in clammy streams. His belly had gone to knots. His heart no longer pounded but shuddered, a beat missing here and there. As to his breathing, he wished he had the whore's excuse. He wished he could blame his airless gasping on a cock lodged in his mouth. Better a sodomite than a craven coward.

Bloody ravens. The birds triggered his mindless episodes of fear.

Lest the army of vassals under his command at the Tower lose all respect for him, he spent his days since his return from battling hiding his malady. Fortunately here, Girout rutted with his eyes lidded. As to the strumpet, Bertran had paid her well to keep her mouth closed—well, figuratively, speaking—and so she would say naught about her lord's strange fit. But the barrack's makeshift walls were thin, and eavesdropping was a coistrel's favorite pastime. The very reason for holding the rendezvous here might very well destroy him. The very act meant to quiet rumors would now substantiate them.

He could no longer perform with a woman.

But Christ Jesus, what could he do?

He could hardly keep from rolling into a ball, never mind fuck. The ravens tormented him so.

No choice but to, he would need to pretend.

Leaning forward, Bertran listlessly nibbled at the prostitute's brown nipples before mouthing his way back down to her bushy pelt, a slow and reluctant return to duty.

He rarely ejaculated anymore, not even in his sleep. He had stopped enjoying the show of a woman's wares months ago. Carnal hunger had long since departed. But Girout had grunted, a telltale sign his armsman would soon climax, and so Bertran forced himself to do what must be done.

To no avail. How could he penetrate with a flaccid cock?

Bertran jumped from the bed. “Continue on without me whilst I endeavor to persuade the ravens to seek shelter elsewhere.”

He would oust the unwanted tenants even if 'twas the last thing he ever did.

Fully garbed, his weaponry sheathed but within easy reach at his side, he left the military dormitory at a run, his destination the northeastern turret where the pair of noisy ravens nested. A toss over the side would soon rid the stone ledge of the raucous pests. Ravens were naught but harbingers of death, and he'd had a

bellyful of that at Hastings without the constant reminder. Their every strident call spelled doom.

And there 'twas now, the loathsome bird lair, formed of sticks and twigs, and lined inside with grass. Within, a clutch of seven eggs waited to hatch.

Not here. Christ help him, not here.

As he reached for the nest, second thoughts besieged him.

Instead of evicting the unwanted residents by flinging the brood over the side, why not simply relocate the expectant family elsewhere? Surely they could avail themselves of hospitality outside the Tower's gates, somewhere beyond his sight and earshot. A tall oak tree perchance, or a mighty timber beam left standing at the old motte and bailey.

As he gently lifted the nest, the raspy voice of old age croaked, "You dare harm my pets!"

Before Bertran could pull his blade, a craggy-faced wysard appeared.

The Saxon Wise One held his hands skyward. "He who tampers with my ravens pays the ultimate price."

As a Christian, Bertran believed in neither sorcerers nor any other practitioners of magic, but when a lightning bolt lit up the dark sky, he took notice.

He faced his judge and jury. "You unjustly accuse me, Wise One. I meant no harm to the birds. I thought only to convince them to leave by moving their nest. Their noisy presence plays havoc with my—"

"Rutting."

"Aye, there is that," Bertran admitted. But there was more. So much more. But a warlord does not explain his failings, especially not to a wysard.

The Wise One lowered his arms. "As ignorance motivated your behavior, not malevolence, I shall allow you to learn of ravens' habits by living as they do. So long as you both remain within the Tower's stone walls till death do you depart, your



new Norman England will prosper. If either my pets or you leave for even a wink, this land and its present and future kings will perish.”

“William had naught do with any of this. Be there a transgression at all committed, 'tis all my doing. I alone should pay the penalty.”

“And so you will. But take heart. Your punishment is not without compensation. Whenever you feel the need, you may go a-roaming.”

“You speak in contradictions, Wise One. Your curse denies me the ability to travel.”

“Each spring, during the raven's mating season, you may go where you will. But only in the time of this tower's existence. Should you not return before summer begins, you must stay put until the following year.”

“Travel in time but not location? What you describe is...is...the handiwork of the devil. Blasphemy. At the very least, 'tis impossible.”

The wysard banged his staff on the stone walkway. “So have I spoken, and so 'twill be.”

## Chapter One

Regina Perry slid a glance to the side.

The same guy who'd dogged her footsteps since she'd entered the Tower of London still followed her, lagging a few paces behind, a menacing blip on her peripheral vision.

The causeway that led to the grassed-over moat lay up ahead. Ratcheting up the speed, she crossed into the sprawling fortress.

Upping his game, the guy lengthened his stride, closing the distance between them. No doubt afraid of losing her in the mob of tourists, he shadowed her.

Persistent creep. He weirded her out.

Not that he'd hit on her and then refused to take no for an answer, or approached her, or tried to speak to her, or rubbed up against her like a perv. He hadn't done anything lame to get chummy or that smacked of harassment.

So what?

The creep didn't need a "stalker" tat for her to catch a clue—he'd singled her out from the rest of camera-toting crowd.

Why her?

Why had he targeted her?

She hadn't done anything to ask for it. Granted, she did have full figure, the voluptuous kind not appreciated as much now as in prior times, especially not by a certain ex-boyfriend. With that said, the white sundress she wore today, though pretty, was loose. No fuck-me vibe there. Because of her generous curves, she was always careful about that. In fact, resisting the urge to go free-form while on

vacation, she'd hooked herself into a bra, same as usual, as a deterrent against the jiggles. In an outfit designed for its wearer to go without, she went with, even though that meant her straps showed. Conservative *white* straps, not vixen black or ballsy red, attached to a rigidly structured white bra that prevented even a hint of a bounce. So, unless the creep had a fetish for bare feet in sandals, she'd done nothing outrageous to attract his attention.

Yet every time she looked over her shoulder or threw a peek around a corner, she found him staring back at her from the depths of his ratty hooded sweatshirt.

Um. About that—what was up with the hoodie?

With temps up in the 90-degree range, England had broken some heat records this late June, yet the creep had his head totally covered.

Her mommy always said, “Regina, dear, never, but never, trust a man who deliberately hides his eyes.”

Behind dark sunglasses. Beneath a cap's brim. Under a hooded sweatshirt.

Eyes were the windows to the soul. This soulless creep was checking her out, and not harmlessly, not like construction hardhats made a sport of ogling every female under eighty. More like he intended to eat her alive.

No way was she overreacting. This was not some stupid case of woman-traveling-alone paranoia kicking in. Her radar had gone to full alert. Something was not right here. And furthermore, he...

Frig it. Screw justification. She had a feeling about him. Not exactly a bad feeling, just a feeling. And that was enough. Her instincts were always right-on.

Then again, if her instincts were so accurate, why had she just wasted five years of her life on a man who couldn't reciprocate her love?

*Do not go there. Not here. Not now.*

She took a deep breath, tried to remain calm, tried not to give in to panic. It was imperative for her to concentrate on getting the details straight. This thing could come down to a police lineup later.

Regina deliberately loosened her clenched hand, straightening out her bent fingers, one by one. The glossy brochure given to her at the ticket-admission window sailed to the ground.

Oops.

After counting to three—to give the creep chance to catch up—she retrieved the fallen booklet, allowing her sights to stray behind her to the weirdo before she straightened back up and walked briskly away again.

Whoa. Bad call on the hoodie. She'd really screwed up that part of the description.

Sweatshirts weren't nubby like that. What was that crazy fabric anyway?

Not synthetic. Not cotton, either. Some natural, raw fiber. Possibly homespun, the coarse weave dyed a muddy earthen tone.

The style was off too. Some punks wore sweatshirts long on the leg, but belting them with a wide leather strap just wasn't done.

And the sleeves. They flowed bell-shaped over his hands rather than tightening at the wrist.

Besides, whether legitimately strung out on drugs or emulating fashionable heroin chic, street kids had that hollow-faced, emaciated thing going on. If she had to classify the creep's build, she'd put him down as muscular, as if he bulked up at the gym and then shot up a staggering amount of steroids or HGH. As in a shitload, enough to cause brain rot. No one got his kind of big naturally.

He could hurt her.

Best not dwell on that. Back to the clothes.

His black pants hugged his thick thighs like a tourniquet; strips of rawhide crisscrossed his calves.

What the hell were they? Not jeans. Tights?

Maybe. But the creep was no ballerina. Too big. Too burly. Too everything male. When it came to dance moves, hip-hop would be more the creep's forte. Even in his stiff clunky boots, he moved with surprising agility.

There. That oughta do it. She had formed a clear and concise description of her stalker for those nice Bobbies who patrolled the city...

Though not evidently here, inside this overcrowded tourist trap.

Wait a minute. This was the Tower of London, home of the crown jewels. Someone had to be guarding the bling. Who?

She didn't know. Although she'd been here before, years ago with her family, she couldn't remember a thing about the historical monument. An only child and at fifteen traveling with her overprotective, stodgy parents, she'd basically pouted her whole first time in England, which went to explain her lack of knowledge now.

Her sweaty palms had turned the brochure into a messy, smudged pulp. Its fall to the dirty ground hadn't helped. After brushing it off and straightening it out, she started flipping through the booklet's crumpled pages for a mention of security, scanning the usual information dump on the location of gardens and toilets. And, oh yeah, that legend-of-the-ravens thingie. The whole tale was promotional bullshit, of course, pure sensationalism to entice superstitious tourists to pay for a ticket to yet another dry English historical site, a naive group that—*gulp*—had to include her because, hey, that idiotic legend had drawn her back to the Tower a second time, hadn't it? After all, she could've visited plenty of other dry historically relevant places instead for the first time. But no, not her. A million other places to go and stand in lines, and she came here again. The legend had an eerie effect on her all around, because here she was, stressing out over a potentially deranged stalker, not knowing what the hell she was supposed to do next, and she took the time to read over the piece about stupid birds. Twice. Finally, but only after wasting more valuable time mulling over the raven story (What was it with this strange compulsion of hers? She didn't feed pigeons in the park or any of that other weirdo

bird stuff, and she wasn't superstitious either, so why had this legend captured her interest?) she bumped into something called Yeoman Warders.

She snorted. Leave it to the Brits to do cute when she was thinking stun guns.

As they said in the UK, she was gobsmacked. So those men in blue and red uniforms weren't tour guides, after all. Turned out, they were elite members of the corps of Her Majesty's Royal Palace.

Beefeaters! Hey, she'd heard of them. The retired senior officers of the British Armed Forces had medals and everything, and could possibly save her ass.

She craned her neck. Now to find one in this throng...

Everyone always said there was safety in numbers. Irony of ironies, in the middle of this tourist crush, she'd never felt so alone. What was that reason again for leaving her laptop and cell phone back in Boston along with her trusty can of pepper spray? Something about connections to civilization putting a damper on her great adventure, wasn't it?

If this was adventure, she was taking up knitting. But first, to find a way out of this fix.

To throw the creep off her course, she zigzagged a while and then ducked into the four-story White Tower. Inside, à la rude American, she cut into lines rather than queue up like a polite Brit and wait her turn to view the various displays. Passing the boring medieval weaponry exhibits, she went straight for the sexy suits of armor—more places in that room to hide.

Although it was definitely uncool for a visitor in a foreign—albeit decidedly English-speaking—country to bring undue notice to herself, she wasn't about to go down quietly. If the creep thought he'd found himself an easy mark, man, he'd thought wrong. Move in on her, and he wouldn't walk away without personal injuries. She always knew that about herself—if jumped, she would fight back.

But that was worst-case scenario.

Best-case scenario was to create a diversion and then lose herself in the resultant mayhem. Short of causing a public scene, what else could she do?

The creep was still hot on her heels, parting the mob with the width of his massive shoulders and catching up with her fast. Screaming “Fire!” and making a run for it in the ensuing pandemonium seemed like her best available option.

On second thought—bad, *bad* idea.

According to the pamphlet clutched in her hand, William the Conqueror had started the construction of the historic fortress in Norman times, circa 1078. Four turrets soared high above battlements located within a thick curtain wall—all made of non-flammable rock. Screaming “Fire!” might work in a crowded theater, but not in this glorified stone jail.

Time to launch her backup strategy.

Who was she kidding? Unless she involved one of these school-age kids or enlisted the aid of their frazzled parents, she had no Plan B.

The mass of tourists surged forward, the sheer force of numbers sucking her along with them. When she looked around, the hooded creep was gone, presumably dragged in the opposite direction.

Whew. Before her window of opportunity slammed shut, she plowed through the milling mob, hunting down a way out. Once she'd escaped the Tower, she'd hop the first bus back to the youth hostel.

If she could only find the exit. Where the hell was the damn door?

She paused to get her bearings.

*Swish. Swish. Swish.*

The creep swooped in and pounced like some predatory bird of prey.

God, he perched right next to her. Crowding her. Violating her space. And the place was so jammed, no one even noticed.

How could this be happening to her?

She stared straight ahead, refusing to make eye contact, doing her best to ignore his lurking, hulking, intimidating presence, but ready to knee him in the balls if things got ugly.



## Chapter Two

Someone—had to be the creep—pulled a strand of Regina's hair.

A deep baritone croaked, “You have such beauteous tresses.”

And there it went, whizzing by her ear. Another bad come-on let loose on an unsuspecting world. Normally, she would have laughed her plump ass off at the honking cheesiness of that pickup line.

Not this time.

The whack job had spoken, and a fatalistic calm fell over her.

Great. Just great. Another joker with a redhead fixation.

This was getting so old.

As soon as she got back to the youth hostel, she was hacking off all her hair and coloring it something unobtrusive yet edgy, black maybe, and then getting out the mousse and spiking the ends. So what, she'd resemble a porcupine—those little dudes were pretty hip. Testy too. Maybe then, men like him would get the message.

*Stay away!*

No one had long hair anymore, especially not down-to-the-hips long hair. Despite taunts all through school and catty remarks thereafter, she'd never cut her wild mane. Not once, not even in childhood, not even a trim. She'd always cried—otherwise known as throwing a hissy fit, temper tantrum—when her mom suggested an easy-to-care-for “pixie do.”

Even as a kid, she knew she'd never pull off the cute gamine style. Pixie just wasn't her. And surer than Rita Hayworth was a risqué, redheaded siren from Hollywood's Golden Age, she'd grown into a va-va-va-voom flaming-haired sexpot.

A lot of good it did her with men. Her 36D cups intimidated most nice men and drew creeps out of the woodwork.

This idiot was the last straw. The curves were staying, but as of today, she'd officially lost her battle with the scissors. The overused cliché about redheads being fiery tempered and hot in bed was a burden and too much to live up to.

She turned to him. "A word to the wise. If you're looking for a challenge, go climb a mountain. Mount Everest would be way easier to scale than me."

"I do not wish to scale you. I wish to bed you, and I shall before the night is through. Your fulsome shape and fiery locks please me."

Another case of the wrong man saying all the right things. Story of her life. Her ex had offered up loads of passive-aggressive hints about changing up her look—code for go on a diet and get ye to a hair salon.

"Your breasts are meant to be suckled," he whispered.

That was it. This Class-C Sex Offender was going down.

"Let's be clear about one thing here, dick-breath. When I finish with you, those less-than-royal jewels of yours will never tingle again."

Her leg came up.

Before her knee made contact, damned if she didn't lose her balance, totter on one foot, and fall into the arms of Henry VIII.

Not really. Sheesh. The chubby monarch had been dead for like 500-odd years. The header she took crashed her into his suit of armor.

Upon impact, the glossy tourist brochure fell from her fingers, and things started getting strange fast. Her calm before the storm ended, and the squalling began. A force, who knew of what sort, swept her skyward. And she thought, This is how the vortex of a tornado must feel. Inside the funnel, she spun around like a record, like a Beatles album from her parents' vintage vinyl collection. Honest to God, she was flying.

Yep, she was a goner.

So long cruel world.

*I love you moms and pops. Bye-byes.*

## Chapter Three

Bertran de Rely traveled regularly without ever leaving the Tower. As his duties permitted—and to break up the wretched tedium of his confinement—he preferred random excursions.

In other words, he liked to wing it.

Lest his quarry overhear the rumble exploding in his chest, he bit back his chuckle.

If her taut expression had been any indication, he would have to say she was a tad too vexed with him at present to find his droll wit amusing. Though her unblinking gaze had contained the possibility of a mischievous twinkle within their blue depths if properly provoked. Definitely, her eyes would twinkle if *improperly* provoked. Her angular jaw gave hint of a perseverant spirit, despite the odds.

He sighed. A fulsome beauty was his intended. A woman such as she would warm a man's loins on dark and chilly winter nights. Her carnal appearance was one of the many reasons he had chosen to abduct her.

What could he say? He did get lonely for female companionship. And not just any female would do him.

Her. Only she would do him. She was the companion of his heart.

For years, he had hoped she would return to him. And so she had—just in time for mating season. With her look of healthy fertility, she would be bred quickly too. Her accouchements would be frequent and easy.

He could not be more pleased.

Or more anxious to begin coupling.

Naturally, she would not be similarly inclined. Naturally, she would not recall him. And, just as naturally, he had never forgotten her.

Not that he could fault her there. He might just as well blame water for its fluidity and flowers for their blossoms as blame her for her obvious receptiveness.

To cock.

An abundance of cock, taken into her body from every angle, positioning, means, and orifice.

This female was born to be mated. Strenuously mated. Mated often and thoroughly, mated beyond what was strictly necessary for breeding purposes.

She needed it. Needed a male moving between her thighs. Her pinched features and rigid posture told him she had yet to find her womanly fulfillment in bed. Her shrewish behavior in the armory—she had pushed countless people out of her way with no regard to courtesy whatsoever—told him she needed a firm hand, particularly as applied to her astonishingly round buttocks.

Her entire demeanor cried out for mastery. A situation easily rectified with the proper taming and training.

She had not changed a whit since her headstrong maidenhood.

During one of his earliest time travel excursions, he saw her here at the Tower. Chaperoned by an older man and woman—her doting parents, he presumed—the spoiled demoiselle had broken free of their loving custodianship and gone off on her own to explore. As he had just now done, he had tracked her movements to make sure no dire circumstance befell her.

A very good thing he had.

A gang of young lads, attracted to her ample beguilements of face and form, had tried to waylay her. Had he not stepped in to right their conduct, anything might have happened.

She had never realized the danger or that his interception had spared her their harassment.

When she finally did return to the safety of her fretting parents, they had welcomed her back without any punitive repercussions, without any disciplinary chastisement whatsoever.

Little wonder she had grown into a wanton shrew. Little wonder she had not found happiness.

He would not be so permissive with her. But she would be happy with him. He would see to it, swear to it on his knight's honor.

Wearing the wysard's curse like a wound from a sharp dagger, he had been far too raw for her back then. And despite her wanton airs, she had been far too innocent for a hardened warlord such as himself. In the intervening years, he had learned to accept his fate. The curse offered compensations that he could share with the right mate, a female of quick intelligence and inquisitive spirit.

And that was the flame-haired beauty at his side, protected under the spread of his black feathers, soaring back through the centuries with him.

The time was right; the hour was now to make her his. Naught would put him off her, not even her own willful refusal to come away with him.

This lush and ripe female would not easily surrender to his authority. Nevertheless, she would.

Eventually.

With the proper leashing, he would temper her wayward liveliness without limiting her ability to fly. Any warrior worthy of his ejaculate would do the same. Until she accepted that she belonged to him and only to him, he would keep her attached to him by whatever means available. A hand on her elbow to guide her to the nearest bed, a cock inside her once he had her where he wanted her, a rope or tether or chain to make sure she remained there. Satisfied in bed, assured of his devotion, she would have no further want of roaming alone.

But, alas, she was not his yet, and as they flew through the years to return to the keep, he took her in, drank her down, and hungered for more than only a glance, for more than a touch of her fiery red hair.

## Chapter Four

Surprise, surprise, she didn't die.

She was, however, having a total meltdown.

Whatever spun her around decided to spit her back out. She landed on her feet, but swaying back and forth, her temper spiking to the roof.

If this place had even a roof or even a ceiling. What was this mad world?

Wherever she had landed, it was as cold as winter. Her lungs actually ached. Breathing hurt. Had a new ice age cometh, or had someone turned the AC up to max in the White Tower?

Shivering, reeling...freaking out in a big way...she would have fallen but for the very large hand clamped on her upper arm.

Great. Just great. Really, *really* stellar. As if she didn't have enough on her plate already, the creep had followed her into this alternative universe.

She cracked her jaw, opened her lips. Before she could tell him to back off and leave her the hell alone, his mouth planted itself on her mouth.

WTF?

She gasped. At her sharp inhale, her mouth must've gaped because a tongue that tasted mildly of honey squeezed between her lips and lunged for the back of her throat.

Holy hell, he was Frenching her. Jumping in with both lips and then adding his tongue. No cautious nibbling first to see if she would slap his face, no lead-up or lead into the kiss at all, he merely cupped her chin in his big hands and, with either

a phenomenal amount of self-confidence or gall, proceeded to send her into an erotic tailspin.

What was he doing to her?

He practically touched that scrap of flesh, the conical one almost hidden up inside the passage, the one a certain someone—who would remain nameless because, really, she was *so* totally over him—had neglected in the latter stages of their togetherness.

No, not her clit. Though, yeah, her former boyfriend had neglected that too.

The dingly-dangly scrap of flesh suspended from the middle of her soft palate. What was it called again?

Good grief, Charlie Brown, she should know this. Before changing her mind about becoming a nurse and switching to a major in computer science, she'd taken intro courses in human anatomy and physiology. She could perform CPR blindfolded; why couldn't she remember the Latin term for that mass of tissue? Had the tornado wiped her brain cells clean?

Wait, wait, she had it. Uvula. That was it.

Relief poured over her. Her memory was still intact. Being wicked pissed accounted for her disoriented thoughts.

Being wicked pissed and something else. Something that made no sense. Something insidious and shameful and shocking, and that felt an awful lot like Stockholm Syndrome to her, wherein captives fell for their captors. Something that had her obsessing about stupid anatomical parts like uvulas. That something warmed her despite the frosty air.

Arousal did that to a girl.

Horrors, she was creaming her panties. Where had this nymphomania come from?

Misplaced adrenaline, she guessed. She was horny from her fight-or-flight response. That was it. Acute stress and all that. Her reaction had nothing to do with



his kiss, which was tantalizingly adept, disgustingly possessive. His technique was absolutely ridiculous. Even sick. And its flawless delivery got her juices flowing. He put his whole body into the kiss. Dropping his hands from her face, he wrapped his fingers around her lower back and yanked her closer. She felt his tension, his heat...

His dick.

My, my, my. What could she say? His response was extremely complimentary.

But too much of a good thing was too much of a good thing, and her lungs were shutting down.

*Dude. Come up for air, would ya?*

When, breathless as anything, instead of twisting away, she started hauling on his tongue too, she knew she had to have sustained a mild concussion from her run-in with Henry VIII. All that spinning around must've bruised her brain, made the lining swell up or something. This behavior wasn't like her. She didn't *do* anonymous encounters.

Until now.

Without even meaning to, she brought up her arms, her elbows straight—owing to the tremendous differences in their heights—and wound her hands around his neck, strangulation style, and went off.

She. Went. O-f-f.

Incredible.

The creep never stood a chance. She was all *over* him. What she was doing to him was assault. Attack. Outright girl lust.

Talk about being out of touch with her inner self. Not until right now had she realized how starved she was for it.

“It” being s-e-x. What else?

Too long since she'd been wanted. Too long since a man just had to have her. Too long since she'd triggered this kind of interest.

What a pleasant change. This guy seemed totally into her, totally inclined to go the distance on her behalf. Who was she to complain?

His large hands molded her, cupped her, chafed the chill from her bones and the bitterness from her attitude.

When it came to men—or at least to one man—she'd had a rough time of it lately.

Forget him. This man was not that man. This man's hands were powerful. Masterful and dexterous, his palms roamed her goose-bumpy skin with abandon. In a good way. In a way that told her, he was as over the moon for her as she had gone Lady Gaga for him.

His cock made itself known to her again, his hard-on blown way out of proportion relative to the amount of clothing they wore.

Um. About that. Not that she was rushing things or anything, but why were they still dressed?

No reason she could see. Then again, she couldn't see anything, including his face. Who turned out the lights? It was dark as night in here. And friggin' frigid.

But he was warming her nicely. Feeling her way along, she moved her center of attention to his crotch, specifically to the outstanding bulge, searching the area for something metallic to pull.

What! No zipper?

What to do, what to do?

The belt at his waist prevented a graceful unveiling of the merchandise. And the idea of tugging his tight pants free of the wide leather strap and then rolling them down over his butt to get at his package seemed a tad unromantic. Plus, in her limited experience, a delay like that would cause a man to lose his stiffy. That left the alternative, the more time-effective, but equally anticlimactic process of somehow plunging a hand beneath his leggings—or whatever they were called—to fondle him in situ.

Then again, she could always continue to grope him and see if he got the message.

Didn't take him long. With a startled jerk, he broke the kiss.

"Nay!" he growled. "I must taste you."

Say what? Her? On the receiving end of oral?

*Get down with your bad self...*

He did. The floor beneath her feet trembled as he fell to his knees and tossed the hem of her sundress over her head.

Okay. Slight exaggeration there. Even in this alternative universe, gravity still called the shots. For real, when the hem of her sundress flew up, she caught it scrunched at her middle.

She was not about to let a little thing like her puritanical reservations over letting a strange guy put his mouth on her pussy get in his way.

Kind of her. Also, completely unfathomable.

She had to be dreaming. All of this was some sort of wish fulfillment. The alarm would sound and she would wake up in her narrow youth-hostel cot. Or worse, in her Back Bay studio apartment alone and crying over her fucked-up life.

She had not a clue what went on here...other than she was losing herself in sex for the first time in...

Forever.

This had never happened to her before.

Right. People said that all the time. But really, this had never happened to her before.

Maybe it was the inherent danger of a nameless encounter with a guy who might very well be a psycho-killer. Or, maybe the trip to England had released her own inner crazy. Or maybe her closeted slut had outed itself. But whatever the reason, when he angled his head, his warm, moist breaths anointing her rounded bare tummy, she—*gulp*—shouted in the cavernous space, so that her shrill, sex-

deprived squeal ricocheted against the walls and echoed on and on: “Do me. Do me good and hard.”

Subtle she was not.

## Chapter Five

Bertran tilted his jaw in consternation.

His intended was hardly the timid sort. Her high-spiritedness could most definitely use taming. With that said, she certainly made her desires known with remarkable forthrightness. Honesty was an excellent trait in a woman, especially as that honesty pertained to carnal demands.

Alas, her meaning escaped him.

Her wild hair loosened—Satan's fury, but her tresses maddened him, and he lusted to sink into the splendor of her naked thighs—she had called something out to him, an instruction, something about doing her good and hard.

What was this unnamed activity she would have him do good and hard?

The customs of the time eluded him. Why had he not obtained a translation book of common twenty-first-century idiomatic expressions before traveling this day?

Because he had not done so, his ignorance of bedding matters hobbled him. He strove to please her, but accomplishing that end left him stymied.

Surely coupling methods defied the passage of time. Babies were still being born, so the act of conception had gone forth. The transference of seed during intercourse must remain similar as well. However, the whims of the age could govern the steps leading up to ejaculation.

What did she want of him?

He had already kissed her. Not lightly on the side of her face. Not respectfully on her knuckles. He had sealed his lips to hers, actually crushing their mouths together...good and hard.

Is that what she meant? Did she wish him to kiss her good and hard again?

And so he would. But not on her mouth.

He had a different sort of kiss in mind. Mayhap, bestowing such a kiss was no longer the custom?

So be it. He would teach her the old ways then. But gradually, so as not to produce fear in her commendable bosom.

Brushing his lips against the hillock of her belly, he proceeded lower, plying her sweet flesh with his tongue, nipping her silky suppleness with his strong teeth to show her the way of it.

“Hurry,” she called and grabbed his skull, still covered in the hood, pressing him downward.

Perchance his apprehensions were misguided. She seemed to understand what he was about and heartily approve. He knew then, in an instant and irrefutably, that he had chosen well.

This female was indeed the right one for him. She would make him a fine companion in his travels, a hot mate in bed, and an affectionately demonstrative mother for his babe, a son, of course, the first of many children, this one to be conceived sometime this coming spring, his Tower time, not hers.

He could not be more pleased with the way the abduction had turned out.

## Chapter Six

Regina thrashed her head back and forth against the wall behind her. Why did this always happen to her? Was this bad karma, déjà vu, what?

He had been doing so well too up to this point, and then—*zap*—disappointingly, everything screeched to a stop.

Some BDSM scenario this was turning out to be. If this was his idea of a capture fantasy, she was telling him to change tropes.

Wait. Maybe she'd spoken too soon. This looked hopeful.

He'd started plucking at the lace-encased elastic of the daring, high-legged Betsey Johnson cotton/spandex panties she adored, a pair of hardly there polka-dot bikinis that would fit into a thimble with plenty of room to spare and yet still stretch comfortably over her amply proportioned hips.

So what? Big deal. She carried a few extra pounds on her large-boned frame. An active lifestyle—and a third-floor, no-elevator apartment—kept her naturally toned. Plus, Boston was an eminently walkable city with very few on-street parking spaces, which had encouraged her to give up the car and hoof it everywhere.

And so what? Big deal. She wasn't dressing for two anymore. Wearing cute sexy undies still pleased *her*, even if the tag was marked Large.

He laid a sharp cheekbone against her rounded tummy and said with tangible longing, “Tis your woman's time, then?”

After interpreting his medieval speak, she relaxed.

Okay. Now his hooded costume made sense in a twisted sort of way. He had to be one of those fantasy-game-playing geeks.

She knew the type. Heavy into role-playing and costumes and all that, the gamers kept their raging hormones in check with strict rules and regs because they couldn't score pussy.

Normally, she didn't find rigid guys like that even remotely attractive—they were so freakishly uptight—but at least he wasn't quitting on her. At least, he wasn't walking away after getting his jollies, forgetting that women had jollies to get too.

Not that he'd gotten any jollies thus far. Thus far, this all seemed to be about her.

So why her defensiveness? So why the unfurled claws?

Because her ex had given her ample reason for such wariness.

*Deep breath. Let the disappointment go, Regina.*

In a bar, at a club...on the street...the number one sexual question she got from men went something on the order of “Hey, Red, you that color all over?” followed up with wink-wink and a dirty laugh, as if no other moron had ever thought of that clever *bon mot* before.

This guy's sexual question, though equally irritating and gauche, wasn't coarse. His question was something else. Something actually sort of sweet. Confusing, but sweet. Why would the goof think she had her period?

In the same spirit of medieval fun, she softly replied, “Nay. 'Tis not my woman's time.”

Did that sound authentic?

God, this was so weird. She felt like she was back in high school again, but instead of competing for a seat at the popular-kids' cafeteria table, which she never had done, she was content to play a few rounds of Dungeons & Dragons with the losers outside in the quadrangle, which she had done from time to time. Why hadn't she joined their D&D after-school club?

She tried again. “But why, my lord, do you ask this of me?”



“The cloth swaddling. 'Tis a sign the flux is upon you.”

Man, he was *good*. Too good for an amateur.

Cross off the game-playing-geek theory.

An actor, then, and a method one at that. When this dude slipped into character, he really got into it. His attention to historical accuracy was pretty impressive. But the question remained—was she actually about to let him go down on her?

Only if she got lucky.

Not that she intended to do the nasty with him, not without the proper exchange of names and medical records, but a little hanky-panky was hard to resist.

“You remind me of young Bess,” he said, the remark colored with nostalgia.

She gave an empathetic nod. “An old flame. I know how that goes. Breaking up is hard to do. The split still bums you out even if the jerk from the past doesn't quite measure up or deserve your angst.”

“Bess was of my future, not of my past, but the young princess was a beauty, much like you, with the same red-hued tresses.”

*The future... Young princess...*

“Are you by any chance namedropping Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen?”

“I will have you know, she would have willingly abdicated the title of 'Virgin Queen' for a toss with me.”

Tee-hee. His droll wit cracked her up. The guy knew how to work it, all right.

An idea took hold, and she just couldn't shake it. The Tower of London had to employ him as a docent. The mode of dress. Of speech. His whole shtick was from centuries ago. Could be he was a Shakespearean actor over at the Globe Theatre who worked this gig part-time.

It was possible. Anything was possible. And the explanation fit. These artsy types were all a little flaky, the same way that computer types like her were all a little nerdy. A hoot, if, after this, she signed up for one of his guided tours...

Snark aside, he hadn't researched his role in any *Medieval for Dummies* book. No shortcutting the details with him. His information was solid. He had to be a history buff.

Then again, what did an American IT wonk...er...*professional* like her know about English history? Hell, the American Civil War still caused her problems. Which side wore which color uniforms again?

In the dark, a hand reached up and caressed her throat, a finger moving along her jaw. "When first you arrived at the Tower this day, I could not stop gazing upon you. Your resemblance to Princess Bess is that startling."

"Yeah, I get that a lot. In fact, all the time." She rolled her eyes.

What a hypocrite she was! Here she was playing it cool, poking fun at him, while at the same time willing him to pay her breasts some immediate attention. The tips had hardened, and not from the cold...

"The future queen was held prisoner in the Bell Tower, but she would oft time take her exercise walking along the wall. 'Twas there, under the guards' watchful eyes, that the young Elizabeth and I first met. I was a warrior—"

"Hey, hate to interrupt your narration, but hold on here a sec. Even a history flunky like me knows Queen E. came later than the medieval period you're supposed to be representing. Like the sixteenth century or something. You need to restudy that period, bud. Facts like that will trip you up every time. Some know-it-all jerk in the audience will interrupt your spiel and—"

The guy kept right on talking—talked right over her, as a matter of fact, as if she had never called him on his glitch. Some men were like that, refusing to admit when they were wrong.

"—just sent here to the old motte and bailey after my return from Hastings with William and the rest of his closest vassals. Verily, I was full of myself. Thought I could do no ill. Make no mistakes. After all, owing to my kills on the battlefield, had not the Conqueror included *me* in his inner circle of his most trusted men-at-arms?"

He sighed. "But then, once I arrived here, troubles beset me. An inner turmoil. All the bloodletting of my past unsettled me. I was not quite myself for a time. Noises, in particular, caused me much distress."

"You're describing PTSD, huh?" she offered.

"Pardon?"

"Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. A common occurrence in the military, after combat."

"I would have no idea, but if you say so. Thankfully, the malady has since subsided, but not without a confrontation with a wysard and his pet ravens. Which brings me to the princess. 'Twas during one of my early travels that I saw her. She had stopped her promenade, and there she stood in all her regal beauty, eagerness shining in her brown eyes. And, after many months without a woman, I was eager too. But, I shall say no more. 'Tis indecent to tell such tales."

His historical monologue probably entertained his audience, but she couldn't really follow. Turned on like this, she just wanted him to get down to business and sex her up.

Maybe.

Then again, maybe not. Not all the way. But first and second base? That was a go.

*For pity's sakes, touch my breasts!*

Her new piercings had healed swiftly, and she was ready to test drive her nipples, so to speak. Large before, the areolae now appeared positively huge. She'd taken the drastic step in a show of defiance after breaking up with her longtime lover. The small gold hoops symbolized her openness to kink. Was that willingness all talk and no action, or would she boldly go where she had never gone before?

With him. A completely loony-tunes stranger.

Undecided, she didn't fully commit to the transaction. While she pondered how far she would go or if she would go anywhere at all, she delayed the decision with more conversation.

"I take it," she said, "you're channeling, or whatever it is you're doing, a different historical era than Norman times now, right? Queen E. I was centuries later..."

"I hail from French nobility and fought with William against the Saxons at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, and after their conquering, eventually followed my liege here to defend this stronghold on the Thames."

She blinked. Okay. Way TMI here. Did he never get out of character? And, by the way, despite the TMI, he had not answered her question. Why the sudden evasion?

"I saw you enter my fortress," he continued. "And I wanted you, and I shall have you. You will not deny me."

Yeah, right. Nice to be wanted and all that, but he was getting ahead of himself. Though his self-confidence made for a nice change of pace.

He wasn't weird. Not really. If he seemed overbearing, with a strong dominant undertone, he was only matching the erotically charged mood to the dark ambience of their location, which was...

She swiveled her head and saw nothing.

Where the heck were they, anyway?

## Chapter Seven

Regina sniffed.

First hint of their location: a fragrant scent hung heavily in the cold air.

“What's that smoky smell?” she asked.

“The burning of thyme,” he replied slowly, mesmerizingly, thumbing her lips. “To ward off evil spirits and as a guard against disease.”

She'd been known to burn a little incense every now and again, but she didn't go around saying it would get her a free pass to good health. Usually, she burned incense to mask the aroma of her occasional bong usage.

A safe bet this guy had some familiarity with recreational weed. When would he get serious?

Second hint as to their location: in the background, the muted notes of some ecclesiastical chant began.

Hey, she recognized that song! As a kid, she belonged to a church choir, and one of the medieval songs they performed was the “Hymn of Hildebert.” She had a firm fix on their location now.

The Chapel of St. John the Evangelist was located on the level beneath the White Tower's armor-exhibition display. Henry VIII's suit of armor must have hidden a stairway. That distinctive twirling sensation she felt must have been her falling down the flight of steps. A stretch, as far as logic went, a real Ripley's Believe It or Not sort of moment, but that was all she could come up with at the moment.

He found her newly pierced breast and squeezed the peak over her sundress.

Finally! Good golly, but it had taken him long enough to shut up and move the foreplay along. And by the way, was it still called foreplay if there was no way he was getting any afterward?

No matter how hard he worked to convince her.

Mmm. His seduction routine was well worth the wait. His touch was amazingly dexterous.

*Ah...so good.*

Her arousal mode, already high, sharpened. After having her nipples done, she hadn't been sure how she'd react to fondling. Everyone—meaning her inner circle of girlfriends—claimed the double piercings would increase the intensity of sensation, but she'd voiced her doubts about that over a few happy-hour margaritas.

Give her back the words, and she'd happily eat them.

This—what he was doing to her—was something to squeal about. She felt his plucking and squeezing all the way down *there*. No longer dead down *there*, her cunt surged to life.

Finding her lost mojo, she arched her throat.

Yikes, but he gave good hand. The back of her head pillowed against a wall's hard stone surface, she sighed, unwilling to break the magical spell of a truly wet pussy. When had *that* happened before?

Never, she mused as he gave a tug and her moistened panties slipped down her legs to encircle her ankles.

Screw it. She was weakening. Her resolve to keep him at finger-fucking length was crumbling.

She had come to Europe to find herself, not to hook up with a stranger, but if in the course of her self-actualization, she found the means—and the man—to fulfill her hitherto unrealized sexual potential, why not go for it? Just go with the flow and see where her estrogen took her.

His skull leveled out at her belly. She yanked on his hood, and his head poked out like a turtle from its shell. Her fingertips played over his face, a sensual exploration in the dark, encountering rugged features, eyes slightly sunken in their wide-spaced sockets, a fleshy mouth. After her recent experience with that fleshy mouth, she highly approved of the mobility of his full, sensual lips. And he had already shown that he approved of her, so what were they waiting for?

*Please, please don't let this end at foreplay.*

*And please don't expect me to take the lead, the same as I always have done.*

A man hadn't expended this kind of time on her in years, and while enjoying this particular man's petting, what she had suddenly developed a craving for was the whole enchilada, with extra-spicy chili peppers on top. Where would she get such an exotic meal here? This was England, the home of bland food.

Both in menus and in bed, she was tired of bland.

What she wanted—a secret she'd kept hidden for years, a fantasy she masturbated to—was for a man, a strong and virile and dominant man, to *push* her to the floor. Or to the bed. Or against a wall. And take her. Positively fuck her brains out. And then make her do things. Dirty things. To herself. To him. And possibly others. Not the entire soccer team, but enough other men to fill her holes.

Dirty, dirty, dirty.

Goodness, but submission as a fantasy turned her on.

Coarse strands of longish hair tickled her fingertips, while an openly investigative tongue tickled her somewhere else.

First, his French kiss, and now this, a lush perusal of her vaggie folds, plumped with expectancy.

*Please, please don't let me down...*

“Oh,” she murmured as he inhaled her, a gusty intake of breath, his nose bumping her notch. His grunt of male appreciation told her he liked her scent. She liked his scent too. Pheromones were so important to erotic stimulation.

There she went again, intellectualizing to avoid the hideous emotional truth, which was...

Her ex's cum had tasted gross to her, a cross between pureed slimy slugs and squished clam bellies. Ew. Not a good combination.

*Let it go, Regina. All of that is in the past.*

Despite her self-chiding, the memory refused to back off.

Until the stranger went down on her. Funny what a little pussy attention will do.

He bit her! There, right *there*, on her clit, his strong hands holding her thighs apart, both his thumbs moving across the flesh of her upper legs. Then, he pierced her passage, his tongue driving deep.

Taken unaware, unprepared, unknowing, she ripped at his hair, her chin jerking high as her vaggie clutched.

She could *not* believe this. It happened. When she least expected it to, she went orgasmic. The release that had hitherto eluded her slammed into her and took her over. Took...her...over. In a dark and foreign place, with a complete and utter stranger, she shattered. Just came apart, tore apart. Her own small corner of the world smashed to smithereens, she screamed like a madwoman.

One small sane part of her nevertheless remained, and that corner of rational thought said, Way to go, Regina. You did it!

Well, not all by herself, she didn't. Not this time.

She'd had some help. A nameless man had given her the climax and, in so doing, had catapulted her forward on the road to discovery.

After her recent breakup, she'd reclaimed her single status on Facebook. And she was totally fine with it. Honestly. She was so over her ex it wasn't even funny, but still needing to bust out of the comfort zone of couple mentality.

Hence, this spur-of-the-moment vacation.



This was England, Shakespeare country, and the bard himself had written, "To thine own self be true."

The thing was, after her breakup, she'd realized she wouldn't recognize herself in a mirror. One of those magnifying ones used to apply makeup, with a thousand watt bulbs and everything.

Nothing wrong with her eyesight. Her vision was 20/20, but even before the split, her self-confidence had hovered around zero.

Her old boyfriend had really done a number on her, she guessed. Messed with her head, big-time. Made her just too depressed for words.

Who was she?

Certainly, after the breakup—no, even years before the breakup—she had no longer felt desirable. That rush that came from knowing her lover couldn't get enough, as if her man just *had* to have her, any hour of the day or night, had never been her experience. When her girl pals would gloat about a long and savage night spent in bed under the covers with either a new lover or one who had hung on for a while, she gave them the floor, like a long-married wife who relied on recollection for those sorts of experiences. Only, she didn't even have those torrid memories to fall back upon.

Her ex had a condition commonly known as penile apatheticus when it came to her. Not that she ever had come with him.

Not once in five years.

Many self-centered males were similarly inflicted. While relatively benign to the patient, any involved woman suffered untold misery. And usually in silence.

Her ex never got it up without some major work on her part. Think heavy pumping, like with a hydraulic jack. And even then, when his dick had lifted, his erection always managed to detour to her mouth. Or into her hands. Not where it would do *her* any good.

Her ex claimed her assertive nature sank his battleship.

But, the thing was, she'd never played those kinds of games. Sure, she was competitive, but she'd never competed with him, except for his affection. She'd tried so hard to win his love.

And she'd failed miserably.

After five years, the truth sank into her heart. No matter how much she'd loved him, he wouldn't or couldn't love her back.

She wiped at her face. Where had these tears come from?

In the afterglow of her first orgasm, wet rivers streamed down her face.

Until righteous anger beat out sadness and took charge.

That lazy, limp-dick, selfish, asexual fungus. She'd never tried to bust her ex's balls, because he'd had nothing there to break.

Ooooh, that was so bad of her to think.

But the scoop was, he'd rather spread out on the couch, colonize there on the beat-up cushions over a plate of nachos, just like a fungus, and watch *Monday Night Football* than tackle her in bed. And every night was Monday to him.

Bitter much?

Once. *Once*, she had been very bitter. She sniffed hard. Once, but not any more.

She was done with all that. Finished accepting the blame for their tepid sex life. Over trying to figure out where *she* had gone wrong.

The important thing was where she was going now. She had plenty of time to figure it all out. Her next computer gig didn't start for another month. And she'd already done the hard part. She'd ditched the girlfriend flock and decided to fly solo, to use this vacation to move her to the next level in the relationship.

With herself.

After reading tons of expert travel advice on the Net, she'd packed light. No suitcase meant no luggage for the airlines to lose. No purse, no laptop, no cell

phone—every tie to her past, she'd left in Boston. Her carry-on backpack contained only the essentials. Not even a raincoat.

Just in case.

She'd had it with living her life just in case. No longer would she include the expression “playing it safe” among her catch phrases. Caution had swelled her 401(k) retirement account but had shrunk her world to only a well-trodden path.

No more.

Letting a stranger perform cunnilingus on her in a medieval church had set her feet firmly on the road less traveled.

Starting right now, she was striking out for parts unknown. She was giving herself permission to have fun, to go from good girl to bad girl in just a few steps. And not baby steps either—giant strides. To that end, if he suggested going somewhere to continue what they had started here, she was agreeing.

This man might just fulfill her fantasy, the shameful one involving a big brute making her get down and nasty.

Her rebound vacation was about to heat up.

## Chapter Eight

“Your privy member tastes of an aphrodisiac,” Bertran whispered as he licked his captive's sweet folds. “’Tis more intoxicating than mead to me.”

Her excited pants changed to hysterical sputters. “What the hell? Privy member? Don't you think that's carrying authenticity a little too far? How do you keep a straight face?”

Such female sarcasm would never do.

He let go of her legs, and the air around them stirred as he came forcefully to his feet. As was his right as her prospective suitor, he applied a sword-callused palm to her bottom. While she yelped in astonishment and rubbed her buttock, he gave her a rough shake.

“Think not to mock me with your sharp barbs,” he growled. “Use me not as a brunt of your jests. I am not like the males of your time, who bow and scrape and earn naught from their womenfolk but derision.” He took both her wrists into his grip.

“Listen, I don't mind a little role playing in the bedroom. Whatever your kink is okies by me. We're both adults here. And make no mistake, I would never mock or make jest of a guy who can use his tongue the tricky way you just used yours on me. A man who gives good cunnilingus is too hard to find.”

She laughed, but her merriment sounded forced to her ears. “But, dude, here's where things get sketchy—I don't know you—so we need to set some ground rules here, some parameters. Like a safe word, especially if you're into BDSM, as the stinging imprint of your hand on my bare ass would seem to imply. And not that I'm

complaining about a little subjugation, you understand, because I'm not, but rules are rules, and I need a parachute to bail if I decide to end it."

"Bdsm." He ts-k-tsked. "Your language is certainly difficult to pronounce."

"My language is your language, only without the lofty accent. I'm American. And even proper Brits must be familiar with that acronym for whips and leather and velvet ribbons and other assorted fun. There has to be 'Ye Olde Sex Toy Shoppes' here in staid London, so stop trippin' on me and let's keep it real. You know, real with a BDSM subtext."

"I know naught of what you speak. And this word, this bdsm, contains no vowels, and I can make no sense of its definition within the context of your phrase."

With his excellent night vision, even in the dark, he could see the whites of her eyes as they rolled. "If you use restraints on women, that's BDSM."

"I always use restraints. On captives. Like you." Removing one such restraint from his belt, he strapped her wrists together.

At first, she giggled at this, but when he cinched her hands tighter, she began to struggle in earnest.

"Hey, dude, hold on there a sec. What about the safe word? Everyone uses a safe word. So that if things get too hot and heavy, I can refuse."

"Settle yourself," he told her tersely. Their ways were not her ways, but she must learn proper behavior to stay with him. Otherwise, she would never fit into her new world. Village ostracism would hurt her more than any rebuke he would offer. He would not have her suffer that sort of isolation, especially from her own gender. She would need her fellow women, the elders in particular, during birthing. He would not be of much assistance to her then.

For that reason alone, she must learn her place as a female, which was not one of inferiority, necessarily—females could and did wield power in his time—but in approach. To be content with her lot, she must learn when to push and when to give way. Giving way was not always a sign of weakness.

Despite what she might think in the coming days ahead, he very much wished for her contentment, wished for her to fit. At his first sighting of her when she was only a young maiden, he knew his search for a female had ended. No more in his travels would he seek out another to mate. He had found the right one in her.

Now to convince her of the same.

"No safe word," he decreed.

"Hey, you just can't make up indiscriminate rules and expect me to follow, willy-nilly, without any say so."

"And yet, you are the one on the tether following me." He began pulling her along.

"Whoa, dude. Scary time."

"Not at all," he said and gave the strap a brisk yank. "As long as you obey me, you will have no cause for concern."

She went rigid. "You...you...can't do this. There are laws against the abduction of US citizens."

That, he ignored. In the absence of the constable, he was the law here at the Tower. "I have been celibate for years, but before my life changed, I had much stamina in the bedchamber, much practice in bed sport. More screams await you whence came the last. I shall make your sheath awash with pleasure. 'Tis obvious to me that your prior lover did not leave you satisfied. You will never get with child without achieving your womanly release."

"I have zero interest in getting with child. I just broke up with the Fungus...I mean...my boyfriend and I'm back to being single again. And...and...you can just stop this autocratic dick swinging right now. Who the fuck do you think you're dealing with here? I've taken courses in self-defense and..."

He could not understand much of her oration and so he turned a deaf ear to her protestations and continued to do what he would do. While he dragged her along after him, she fussed and fumed, and he merely smiled, taking joy in her

companionship. For years, he had hoped she would return to the Tower. Ever the optimist, during that interval, he had readied himself for her, for the responsibility of taking a mate. How could he expect her accommodation to their union in such a brief passage of time?

He could not. And so, he would simply be patient with her. She would come around to acceptance.

Eventually.

And her capitulation would be all that much sweeter for the wait.

“Where the fuck are you taking me?” she screeched.

Her voice was a melody he savored, regardless of its immediate shrillness, and he responded, not in kind, but in appreciation for her presence in her life. This was a lifetime commitment, not a transitory rut.

“I could lead you down through the crypt,” he soothed, “and into the subcrypt, and then to the keep's base. Built in Roman times, the basement contains an ancient well and many private places to conduct a tryst. We would be undisturbed there. But why not indulge ourselves? I shall bring you across the green to my accommodations.”

“Fine. Do that. Dragging me along on this leash will attract attention, as in crowds of gaping-mouthed tourists, and those Beefeaters will come running to my rescue. So back off and let me go before you get into trouble.”

“Nonsense. No one will bat an eye at us. In your scant garb, you have the appearance of a captive slave or a whore.”

“Hold on there. Just because I let you go down on me once does not a ho make me...”

He interrupted. “What it makes you is a female prime for coupling. And make no mistake, your lack of garb gladdens me. My only point was this: no one will question my bringing a female in her undertunic to my bedchamber upstairs at the

keep. We shall have complete privacy there. And a spacious bed. As I said—indulgence.”

“Bringing me upstairs in the keep? That's what we call B and E in my country. “Breaking and entering” to you. You just can't go anywhere you want in this tourist trap. Some areas are open to the public; some are not.”

“I told you, 'tis my private bedchamber. No need to break down the portal to enter. And once inside, a sturdy bar drops in place to keep out intruders.”

“Listen, let's get serious here. Say you do manage somehow to get me across to wherever you plan on taking me. I read the tourist brochure, and I quote, 'The Tower of London closes most days at 6 p.m. and on all holidays, including Boxing Day.' Whatever the hell that is. You just can't wander around anywhere you like, dude, as if you own the place. This is an historical landmark, and there are rules and regs against trespassing. Not to mention alarm systems and video surveillance equipment. Need I continue? So, just let me go, and I promise not to report any of this to the proper authorities.”

“I cannot release you. In truth, I cannot hold myself back from you even now. You will be mine before the vernal equinox.”

“Whoa. And that would be when—spring? As in March?”

“Exactly. When ravens begin their mating ritual and breeding soon follows.”

“No shit, and who cares?”

He sent her a look of censure. “A profanity falling from a female tongue is cause for punishment here.”

“Well, pardon my fucking French,” she said in a huff.

“'Tis not French you spoke, but common Anglo-Saxon, and such coarse expressions are not tolerated from ladies.”

“Then my ass is covered cuz I never professed to be one.”

“You are *my* lady. I knew it the instant I first saw you. I can smell your musk. And, in that scant attire, see the outline of your form in all its magnificence.”



*“All. All,”* she shouted. “Are you calling me overweight, because if you are, you sexist misogynist, then—”

“Overweight?” He stopped his advance and furrowed his brow as he thought. He could see he had offended her in some unfathomable manner, and that is why she had struck out so vehemently. Mayhap, he had even hurt her, which hurt him in kind. He had meant her no malice, had certainly not set out to malign her. He was enraptured with her!

He bowed low before her, and then straightened and looked her in the eye as he would a man and an equal. “I do apologize for my inadvertent insult. I believe you accuse me of calling you too stout of girth, which is a preposterous notion. A female could never be so, for there is no such description, not in my time. Forgive my lack of discretion, but your arse is a wonderment that draws my cock from its hood. Between your thighs, I shall find heaven on earth.”

“Listen, that flowery speech just goes to prove how way out there you are. I’m no shrink, but you sound delusional, with just enough eccentric tossed into the mix to give you an offbeat charm. And believe me, up until you lassoed my wrists in leather, I was charmed. But whatever the diagnosis, you’re a real space cadet. How do you think you can keep me here? Spring is like, what—nine months away? That’s some slow burn you got there. You must have taken one massive dose of Viagra this morning if you can keep it up that long.”

“Dose of Viagra—what alchemy is this?”

“All right. I’ll play along. Viagra is an erection inducer.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“To make your cock get hard and stay hard.”

“I have no need for such magic. Did I not tell you? I shall make your sheath swim in pleasure. And we are now in mid-March. The morrow begins spring. We have little time to waste.”

“You’re certifiable. You know that, dude?”

“Certifiable as to what, pray?”

“As to crazy. As to bats-in-the-belfry insane.”

“Methinks you have overstated your case, my captive. I assure you, I am far from mad. Indeed, I am sound of wit. And, point of fact, ravens, not bats, reside in these turrets.”

“How silly of me. I stand corrected. Huge difference between bats and ravens. Your steering me right makes everything A-okay. Except, you need to look at a calendar.”

“How so?”

“Let me spell it out for you. There's a heat wave going on in London, and you're dressed for winter.”

“Because 'tis winter. As I already explained, spring starts on the morrow, which is why we must make haste.”

“Then why are tourists wearing summer clothes, huh, huh?” she asked belligerently. “Then why is it scorching outside. Wanna explain that to me?”

He looked down, then up. “Then why are your teats pointed like arrows, if not from the cold?”

“Teats? Yuck! Tits, I can handle...if you handle them the way I like, which you did. Even hooters, while offensive, is at least funny. But teats. *Ugh*. Big no-no. What do you take me for—a cow? FYI, my nipples always poke out when I'm chilled.”

“Which you have every reason to be, as 'tis winter.”

“Your argument doesn't hold *Perrier*. I'm from changeable New England, where double-digit drops in temperature can happen in the space of the same hour. Why, in Boston, I've seen it rain on one side of a street, but not the other. So, the temps took a temporary nosedive. Doesn't mean it's winter. And I'm not impressed with your posturing.”

Not so he. In the midst of a confusing situation that would have left many a battle-experienced warlord trembling in his boots, her posturing was that of a warrior. She stood up to him, and that indeed impressed him.

The haphazardness of his approach to travel oftentimes had him stumbling into times where he stuck out like a sore thumb, and sent him scurrying about for something appropriate to wear. He had taken particular care over his grooming this morn. In the armory, he had puffed up his chest and preened in hopes she would notice him.

But nay. She had looked straight ahead, refusing to accept his courtship, for all that he had worn his best braies and hooded tunic.

Garb was everything when blending into one's surroundings. Each era, after all, had its own distinct flavor and challenge. A willingness to understand and adapt to the customs and culture of the period made all the difference between a successful trip and a grim failure.

And possibly coming to a bad end.

When traveling through time, the loss of his head was always a possibility. Which explained why he would go anywhere once, but he would only return to those years where his survival seemed reasonably certain. He was bored, not foolhardy.

Her century provided one such destination, a sentimental favorite too, as that was where he had found her.

A fascinating place was her era in England's long history, fraught with high emotion and drama and few restrictions as to their display. Right here at the Tower, he had witnessed men kissing other men, women kissing other women. Ha! Upon occasion, he'd even seen members of the opposite genders kissing one another.

While he applauded the open carnality of the century, its magic escaped him. Why did everyone hold different-hued boxes up to either their eyes or ears immediately upon entering the fortress? Why did they oft converse aloud to themselves while using these objects, totally ignoring their companions? Rather rude behavior in his estimation.

But what did he know?

He traveled to break the tedium of his confinement, not to judge. 'Twas the people of the time who interested him, not their magic.

Still and all, there was much he would like to learn. Some many questions buzzed inside him. If he asked, would *she* answer?

Mayhap not straight away.

Her nose was out of joint at present. And in the immediate and foreseeable future, she was likely to remain angered with him. But when she became used to him and had adjusted to the change in her circumstances, he would pose her all sorts of questions.

At any rate, it gladdened him to visit her twenty-first century in his quest to find her again. He liked how in the heat of the summer months, people went about in scant garb, males and females alike clad in short braies and overtunics. He greatly approved of any custom that allowed him to see so much of her sumptuous flesh.

And, as he always fought his battles with an eye to a win, surrendering small skirmishes for the sake of ultimate victory, he would relent here, for 'twas much too soon to explain the variation between his time and hers any more fully. "I concede the debate to you, my captive."

## Chapter Nine

Not that winning an argument was everything, but it was nearly everything, and she'd just scored big on that one.

Even if the win had been predicated on a lie.

Her nipples hadn't peaked because of the odd change in temperatures. Humiliatingly, her nipples had sharpened to “arrow points,” as he so quaintly put it, due to his damn sexy charisma. What was it about a dark and brooding and dangerous man that got a girl's pussy purring?

Meow.

There! She acknowledged having the hawts for him.

To herself.

No way would she confess her vulnerability aloud to him and thereby contribute to his already obnoxiously huge ego. What would that get her?

Possibly involved in wax play.

As much as she had thought about having her bikini area attended to this summer, she was too much of a sissy to go through with depilation *down there*. As to candles dripping on her bare skin—um—no thanks.

His praise of her full figure earned him points, but not *that* many points. And, yes, she was that shallow. A nice turn of phrase went a long way. She'd been in the dumps lately about her appearance—her recent lack of self-confidence had settled on the scale. Despite her contentions to the contrary, she was a little sensitive about her weight. Not a lot sensitive. It wasn't a real issue, but the occasional reinforcement was much appreciated.

He'd stroked her but good.

Still, she wasn't a cheap date. When his long stride started up again, she dug in her feet, her flimsy sandals skidding on the stone floor as she put the brakes on his BDSM abduction scenario.

He kept right on dragging her.

"Fuck the safe word," she shouted. "I've changed my mind. No more BDSM games. Undo the bondage already. I'm leaving."

He drew harder on her restraint. "What are you called, my captive?"

Obviously, the guy was impervious to threats, cajoling, and screaming. Going mano a mano would get her exactly nowhere with him.

She changed strategies, going from active resistance to passive cooperation, all in the name of escape.

"My name is Regina," she said softly, compliantly, as a well-trained but slightly schizoid BDSM love slave would do. "Regina Perry."

"Regina?" he solemnly repeated. "You see? We are indeed fated to be together. Not only did you arrive here today on the cusp of a new season and while I was traveling to your twenty-first century, but as I say, you greatly resemble Elizabeth Regina."

They were still inside the White Tower, but at an exit. A flickering torch afforded her a glimpse of his face.

Wouldn't you just know it? He would have to be dauntingly masculine...in a rough-hewn, swarthy, earthy sort of way that just so happened to be the way that did it for her. His face was all interesting angles and hollows, his eyes were large and the orbit slightly sunken, as she'd already predicted from tracing him with her fingertips in the dark. His eyes were black and solemn, without any clear traces of homicidal tendencies. His jaw was clean shaven and square. His nose was largish, matching the rest of him. His hair, so black it shone blue by torchlight, looked as though a barber had stuck his head under a bowl and chopped-chopped away.

And he didn't look like he'd been hitting the weed too much. For a while there, she'd begun to suspect he was a pothead, which would've accounted for some of his weirdness.

She took a deep breath. "How very impolite of me. You asked my name, and I have yet to inquire over yours in return." There! Was that submissive to his dominant, or what?

"My birth name is Bertran de Rely. Of late, I answer to Lord Raven."

Upon hearing the absurdity of that name, she almost giggled. She stopped herself and reconsidered his answer.

Fair was fair, and damn it, the stage name fit.

He was sorta like a bird of prey. She'd thought so right from the start. Hard to forget how he'd swooped down on her like a predator. Also, he had a raven's darkness—the hair, the eyes, the swarthy complexion. But there was more to his choice of monikers than a vague resemblance, she suspected, and she very much wanted to hear the explanation in his own words. Besides, getting him to open up and talk about his personal life would decrease the likelihood of him doing her physical harm. Didn't various law-enforcement authorities advise chatting up a potential assailant?

He regarded her, a smile playing at the corner of his lips. "A pet name, I believe you Saxons call it."

Once more in their brief acquaintance, he bowed at the waist in courtier fashion, an affectation that at first seemed incongruous with his less than elegant appearance, but then made perfect sense. He was, after all, impersonating an early Norman. Those warlord guys didn't go prissing around wearing silks and satins. But being of French descent and all, they probably did practice the manners of court...when they weren't bloodletting and such.

She smiled warmly at him. At least, she hoped she did. Her face muscles had gone tight with tension. "Why do they call you Lord Raven?"

"Do you know anything about the bird?"

“Not a blessed thing, as you should be able to tell from my prior bats-versus-raven remark. Fill me in, why dontcha?”

“Raven are not only songbirds; they are also great mimics, in both their actions and in their ability to speak. They can hold a conversation.”

“They can actually talk? I didn't know that. Smart, huh?”

His black eyes twinkled. “Presumptuous of me to allude to a comparison, but aye, the largest member of the crow family is of high intellect. They are also diligent hunters. They are much like the wolf in that respect. Ofttimes, a pack of wolves will follow a solitary raven as the bird tracks its quarry. The wolf will do the kill, and bird and animal dine together off the carcass. Unlike the wolf, though, ravens eschew pack mentality outside of the hunt. They prefer not to live in large flocks. Also, they mate for life and nest in the same place, year after year.”

“So, I guess, they also *eschew* migration,” she said all snotty-like.

“Precisely.”

She watched *CSI* and all the rest of those TV crime shows. If she'd heard it once, she'd heard it a ton of times that once an abducted person is removed from the scene of the crime, the victim is less likely to survive...or be found.

Victim. That would be her. Potentially.

In case she'd seriously misjudged the state of “Lord Raven's” mental health and he was nuttier than she assumed, her game plan was to stall his exit from the White Tower with her by engaging him in dialogue. And so far, it had worked. They remained within shouting range of safety, sort of dawdling at the door, while she did her question and answer thing. The possibility of getting help was still there...if someone came along. Though, no one had. Where was everyone?

“My lord, what about this legend of the ravens? Could you explain? I read about it in the tourist brochure but I'm still confused. Something about if the ravens leave the Tower of London, the fortress and England itself will go belly-up.”



“So 'tis said. Now, out the portal with you. Let us be on our way. Your ruse to waylay me with an exchange of pleasantries, while clever, will not work. Resign yourself to my courtship.” He tugged her leash.

And out she went with him into the courtyard.

“Wait a minute. Is this the *Twilight Zone* or something?” She craned her neck at the surroundings. “It's dark outside. I arrived at the Tower of London in the early afternoon. How long was I out of commission after bumping into Henry VIII's armor?”

“Not long.” He narrowed his gaze at her, as if trying to gauge *her* mental competence, before saying, “Traveling through time takes but the blink of an eye.”

“Yeah, right. Time travel.” She snorted. “Woo-woo. Beam me up, Scotty.”

“There are rebels who have resisted King William by fleeing England and taking refuge on the borderlands, but they have not succeeded in regrouping and attacking us here. Rest assured, this London fortress is inviolate from any marauding tribe, including Scots.”

“No, not Scots,” she said. “Scotty is a fictional movie and TV character. Brit or no, there's no excuse for not knowing that, especially since you're in showbiz. What? You live under a rock or something?”

“In a manner of speaking, aye. The Tower is a stone edifice.”

She had enjoyed his wit earlier. This time, she found his sense of humor gratingly sophomoric rather than amusing. “This doesn't look like the same tourist trap. Everything looks so primitive. And filthy. And pee-yew.” She would have clamped her fingers on her nose if her hands weren't otherwise occupied. “What's that foul smell?”

“The keep's latrine,” he said offhandedly. “Even in winter, the trenches do grow ripe. Summers are far worse. Though, the old wooden motte-and-bailey fortresses were aromatic year-round.”

“But in my tourist information, I read about a watery moat surrounding the tower, into which spilled the...uh”—how to delicately phrase this?—“into which spilled the contents of the garderobe.”

“The water-filled moat was not in my time. That came later, in the twelfth century, I believe, during the time of King Richard the Lion-Hearted. In my era, there is naught but a ditch. Though, in both periods, furs and garbs are hung within the garderobe enclosure, the pungent aroma killing lice infestations.” He cocked a brow at her.

“Hey, don't look at me like that. I don't have vermin. And no one's hanging my new Urban Outfitters sundress where it will get all stinky.” Her nostrils quivered. “Whew. This place could use some car air fresheners.”

He sent her a blank look.

“You know, those little evergreen trees that dangle from rearview mirrors beside grassy-skirted hula-hula girls and rosary beads.”

“Methinks I glean your meaning. And as I say, these are more primitive times.”

“So—this area is some sort of historical reenactment. Is that it?” Man, she wished she could scratch her chin. Why did stuff always itch when you couldn't scratch? “What year is this supposed to be, anyway?”

## Chapter Ten

“The year is 1085,” he replied. “I travel extensively, and 'tis difficult to always remain cognizant of the exact day.”

“You're on the road a lot doing summer stock or what have you? The stage circuit must get tiring after a while. All those different hotels, living out of suitcases. Ever come to Boston? We have an excellent theater district. Broadway shows and everything.”

She blew out a frosty breath. It really was cold. “Damn, this is one good archeological exhibit. After seeing this, I have a better appreciation for modern conveniences. I heart my creature comforts—hair dryer and microwave, etcetera. I don't even know how people brushed their teeth way back when without an electric toothbrush.”

“The frayed end of a tree twig. I, myself, prefer elm.”

“In your mouth?” she said, aghast. “That's not very hygienic. And the splinters!”

“'Tis my fervent wish that you soon grow acclimated to the customs. I would make your transition as easy as possible.”

“I'm down with that. How's about I transition the hell out of here? If I hurry, I can still make happy hour at the youth hostel.”

“You will enjoy more than one happy hour with me. I offer you a lifetime of happy hours. I offer you lifelong devotion.”

She pinned him with a scowl. “You call dragging me someplace against my will devotion?”

“I must first get your attention before devoting myself to you.”

“I bet cavemen spouted the same crapola after clubbing the girl of their wet dreams.”

“No club. No cave. Wet dreams—what pray are those?”

“Nocturnal emissions,” she said with a smirk. “And don't go all smarmy on me and say you know *naught* about them.”

“I would not lie to you—in truth, the wet dreams of which you speak are the only orgasms I have had of late. Which is why, for the next nights and days, I intend to plead my case to you.”

He looked broodingly into her eyes and said, “With my hands, my lady, like so.”

He cupped her breasts, and golly, didn't her weak and starved flesh go and betray her. Her nipples elongated and throbbed, the hardened tips pleading for more, more, *more*.

“With my mouth, my lady, like so.”

Leaning toward her from his tremendous height, he kissed her, and despite the best of intentions, her lips clung.

Until he broke their mouths apart and said:

“With my cock, my lady, like so.”

Just as her pussy purred, creaming in anticipation of some major action, he paused and said, “Alas, my lady, that demonstration must wait for later.”

*What?* Oh, he was a charmer, no doubt about it. And she couldn't believe how much his stopping at the crucial moment pissed her off. But somewhere along the way, her irritation dissolved like gelatin in boiling water.

Must've been his soothing tone. He could project his words without raising his voice, all while walking several steps in front of her.

He was very attentive, explaining the layout of the White Tower much more thoroughly than her lost tourist brochure had done. His running commentary lulled

her into what would hopefully not turn out to be an erroneous sense of security. She was no pushover, so if he played her false, she could lay the blame on his acting training.

And then there was his enthusiasm. Acting was acting, but something like excitement couldn't be faked. Real passion for a subject had always been a major turn-on for her, and his passion for the White Tower shone through so brightly, it blinded her to her tenuous situation. Genuinely interested in what he had to say, she forgot all about escaping and listened to his historical storytelling.

Midsentence, right when he was getting to the good part about some long-ago lord claiming a virgin's maidenhead on her wedding night before her bridegroom got the chance, a practice called *droit de seigneur*, her abductor stopped talking. Then, he stopped walking too. The next second, she saw why.

Someone was coming.

Yippee! Rescue had arrived.

That hope died when the hooded newcomer clapped her abductor on the arm. "If I may be so bold, my lord, 'tis good to see you again with a wench. The time between ruts has been too long for you, my liege. I feared you had taken monk's vows on the sly."

Raven chuckled. "Nay, Girout, the monastic calling is not for me."

"I am only your lowly vassal, my lord, but I do look forward to continuing where we last left off," Girout replied and pushed the hood back from his face.

She gasped. Honest to *GQ* magazine! As the song went, "dude looked like a lady"

Raven's associate was gorgeous, if effeminately so. His long burnished hair brushed his shoulders, his large hazel eyes stared heavy-lidded at her, as if he were posing for a high fashion photo layout, his finely chiseled face with prominent cheekbones gave him an exotically sexy air. His lean and graceful build would lend elegance to anything he wore. He was the classical ballerina to Bertran's street hip-hop style, polar opposites in appearance.

Another time, maybe, she might've fantasized about doing a few pirouettes with Girout on a black satin-covered bed, but that was another time. Now, getting out of the Tower topped her things-to-do list.

*Call the authorities*, she mouthed behind Raven's back to his "lowly vassal."  
*This man is abducting me.*

Girout raised a tawny brow at Bertran. "You have taken this wench captive, my lord?"

"Aye." Rather than hide his malfeasance, her abductor boastfully juggled the strap in his hand, the one encircling her wrists.

Girout grinned in approval. "Well done, my lord. I hope the strumpet serves you well. Would you like a collar to go with that leash? I own a pretty one. 'Tis yours for the asking."

Her mouth flopped open. Just her dumb luck. Those two had to be members of the same London BDSM club. For real, she'd get no rescue from that quarter. For all she knew, Raven and Girout were long-standing fuck buddies in threesomes. No way was she buying Raven's line about wet dreams being his only recent source of sexual release.

"Hey, fellas, no slave collars. My skin bruises easily."

"She has spirit, my lord. I grant you that. And of course, she is a treat to the eyes. Should you need help with the taming, know this, I am available."

"I shall bear that in mind, Girout."

After that obnoxious statement, her abductor began yanking on her leather leash again, dragging her away.

At the outside corner of the building, where a wooden ladder slanted upward, Raven said, "This climbing structure is portable, lest the rungs give easy access to those who would invade the keep, not only from across the waters but from those who dwell within the city of London, itself. There are Saxons who took William's

ascendancy to the throne as a personal affront to the authority of their various clans, and they do attack us from time to time.”

Still holding onto the restraint, he gave her a small push, enough of a prompt to send her stumbling onto the first rung. Taking up the rear, he helped her negotiate the rest of the steep treads.

Actually, what he did was alternately paddle and then pat-pat her ass, so that she flew ahead in avoidance of his touch. Not out of aversion—she should be so lucky—but out of liking his hands on her posterior just a little too much.

To get her mind off her yearnings, she asked while still climbing the ladder, her gaze fixed straight ahead, “So, is this ladder the only way in and out of the keep?”

“Nay. An interior spiral staircase is located in the circular northeastern turret. My bedchamber is on the first floor, next to that of my immediate commander, Geoffrey de Mandeville, constable of the Tower.”

“Aren't you afraid having a military commander as your next-door neighbor will cramp your style? When I start screaming holy murder, he's bound to hear and come running to see what the brouhaha is all about.”

“These thick walls swallow uproars.”

“Thick walls or not, the constable will know something is up—guaranteed. I can get pretty vocal.”

A lie. She'd never been a screamer. And during the past two years, her ex had given her no reason to whoop and holler. Jerking him off was the only sexual act they'd done during the last twenty-four disappointing months leading up to the demise of their relationship.

“Feel free,” he said. “The constable of the Tower is not in residence at this time. A problem among his serfs called him and his second wife, Lescelina, away to their holdings in Essex. His absence leaves me in charge of the fortress for the next fortnight.”

“You're the constable?”

“Acting constable. Any deviancy is reported to me and is in my jurisdiction to punish as I see fit.”

She was sunk. “Where does the king sleep?”

“One floor above my own chamber. Nice try.”

“Whatever do you mean?” she asked in a small voice, playing at demureness, not exactly her strong suit.

“The Conqueror is rarely here. These are perilous times, and not a day goes by without his needing to put down uprisings somewhere, in one fiefdom or another. My liege only returns to the donjon if he is under immediate attack.”

She had to get away from him, and the only thing she could come up with was jumping off the ladder, taking him with her as she leaped.

Suicide. At least for her. She'd break her neck in the ditch used as a latrine surrounding the keep. And what a perfectly *shitty* way to meet her end. Apart from smelling like poop, he'd probably only fracture a leg or two.

She had to think up something better than that.

Before he understood she was cooking up something and clamped down harder on her restraint, she changed the subject.

“This place is not how I pictured a castle,” she offered. “Where's the glam?”

“Tis quite nice inside. The king's chamber has two stages, with an upper and lower mural gallery, the first of its kind in these parts. I assure you the architecture is all the talk in the country. Gundulf, Bishop of Rochester, built this monument to impress the common folk with its might, and it does. When the Great Hall is completed, 'twill steal your breath away.”

“Not unless the Great Hall comes with a Jacuzzi, dude. I could use a long soak.”

“Bathe later, if you have a mind to.” He took her elbow. “And here we are now at my quarters. Watch your step on the low portal as you enter.”



## Chapter Eleven

Regina's first impression of the vast space before her was of elaborate tapestries and wall hangings, and narrow slits in the stone walls where windows should be.

No wonder she had to squint to see. Good thing about the blazing fire and those lit sconces. Otherwise, she would've tripped over her own feet in the dimness.

The curtained bed drew her squinty gaze next. The four-posters with their brocaded enclosures monopolized the otherwise sparsely furnished room and had her fantasizing about all sorts of naughty things, both incredibly lustful and blissfully romantic.

*Don't go there. It's just your frustration talking...*

Trying desperately to ignore the room's centerpiece, because that fur-piled bed looked positively decadent, she raced for the hearth. This time, she was the one dragging him along with her. Crouching on the stone floor, she extended her palms outward toward the open flame and shivered from head to foot. Whatever happened to global warming?

She looked over at Raven, oddly perched at the door. "This is one humongous fire pit you've got here. And brrr, but I'm grateful. The thick walls you spoke of must insulate against the summer's heat as well as block sound. But jeez, I still feel a draft."

"Tis winter," he insisted. "And the chinks between the stone allow in the winds off the River Thames. Might I offer you a fur?"

"Thanks, but no thanks." She wrinkled her nose. "I don't do furs."

"So long as you do *do* me, my captive Regina."

“Why so formal? Just Regina, okies-dokies? You just tongued my pussy inside a church, remember?”

“No sacrilege, my lady. I do worship you, my Regina.”

Suddenly, she had to know. “Why did you follow *me* specifically? Was it because of my hair, because I reminded you of her, of the young and future queen, Princess Elizabeth?”

“Aye.”

The crushing disappointment threatened to bring on a rush of tears. After the disastrous last five years, essentially wasted on a man who, she now realized, didn't love her, could never love her, she needed this man to see *her*, the real her, the true her. And here she was, second best all over again.

Her shoulders slumped. “Oh—”

“Methinks, mayhap, I have not been clear about my intent. Your hair, your resemblance to Bess, caught my eye as you entered the Tower. With that said—'twas Bess who reminded me of you, not the other way 'round. You came first.”

“But you said you met the future queen soon after your return from the Battle of Hastings and that was in like...1066. You've got the timeline all confused.”

He waved her reasoning aside, and in her infatuation, she gave him a pass. Hell, who needed logic when sexual attraction was involved?

“When I saw you again today, 'twas your determination, your solitary independence, that compelled me to”—he grinned hugely, as huge as the man himself—“to continue my annoyance of you. You took charge of the situation handily and thus gained my admiration all over again.”

Again. What was he talking about? He kept talking as if he had seen her before.

Shit. Was he staying at the youth hostel too? Had he been following her all day? Was that just too cute, or too creepy for words?

His black eyes gleamed wickedly as he pulled her to her feet. “Strip off.”

“Not even dinner first?” she said, her sarcasm a sign of her nerves.

“We eat afterward,” he rasped, giving her tether a flick.

And once again, she was lost to sensation. Without knowing his real name or his background or anything, she absolutely surrendered to his charisma and to the capture scene he had constructed. Who knew bondage would so totally do it for her?

She hadn't dated in years, not since her former boyfriend, junior year in college. Now this. BDSM sex with a madman in a room where they might be arrested for B&E any minute. This was after-hours, in a fortress that held the crown jewels. She was surprised they hadn't already tripped the security system. She didn't want to be thrown in jail.

A bubble of gaiety escaped her chattering lips. Too late for that worry. This was the Tower of London, a jail to end all jails, a dungeon to put sham BDSM dungeons to shame.

Jeez, did they still behead criminals in England?

The ax was one sure way of getting a haircut, she supposed, slipping out of her sandals. Actually, kicking free of them.

And what about him, her partner in crime, the dominant male holding the free end of the leather strap. Could she really have a one-night stand with a...

Already squinting and shivering, she added cringing to her list of tics.

Was she really going to do it with an actor, of all people?

It could be worse. He could be out of work and waiting tables. At least he had a paying job here at the Tower. Actually, with his towering build, he could play the Tower. God, he was huge.

She sighed, icicles hanging from her exhalation in the frosty air, and shuffled to her own two feet. Standing bold and redheaded and, hell yeah, 36D busty, she began to strip.

Never, not in a million years, had she thought to be doing this on her trip.

Class, this is your homework assignment: write a one-hundred-word essay on how you spent your summer vacation.

*This year, I went to England and fucked a medieval thespian who had spread-eagled me to the bed...*

The thought made her clit swell.

Wait till she told her girls. Her gal pals hadn't gotten over her split with her ex yet, and now this. Couples really should stay together for the sake of their bewildered friends. The shock that a card-carrying feminist like herself had allowed a man to boss her around would give her equally militant cohorts multiple coronaries.

So long as she got multiple orgasms out of the deal—that was her, the overachiever—she would brave their lectures about letting the good cause down.

She licked her lips. Her, a BDSM love slave! Who would have thought it?

*Please, please, Sir, spread-eagle me to the bed.*

*Drip-drip-drip.* A betraying slick of moisture dribbled down her leg.

That reminded her. “Hey, Raven, did you leave my panties back in the chapel?”

He fiddled with a pouch on his belt, and when the flap came up, a corner of her underwear peeked out.

Uh-oh. Didn't serial killers keep mementos?

“You have my panties,” she accused. “Why do you have my panties?”

“You will have no further use for them. 'Tis indecent for females to gird their loins. Only males wear such cloths. Hereafter, you will dispense with the custom.”

A bare pussy?

“Oh, kinky,” she cried in delight.

“As you say. Now, silence. No more questions. No more unseemly outbursts. Do as I bade you.”

Right. Drumroll, please. She was doing a striptease number for an actor heavy into the BDSM scene, with an emphasis on medieval fetishism. Sure, she could handle this.

A leather belt encircled her wrist. The looseness of the restraint gave her full range of motion. But how to remove a sundress over her head while attached to a leash tether?

Smirking, she waved her bound hand at him. “Forget something?”

He came and released her. “Proceed,” he said, and backed up.

To watch?

Exactly. To watch.

Whoa. She'd never before commanded a man's full attention.

Horrifying!

Gratifying.

Exhilarating.

Did every woman harbor a secret exhibitionist inside, or was she the only deviant?

Shush, superego. Who cared? If this was deviancy, she liked it. The slight threat of danger only added to her enjoyment. Knowing the Beefeaters could interrupt at any moment and find her naked thrilled her. In her heightened arousal, the serious consequence of her actions no longer seemed quite as dire. Temporary insanity, based on years of sexual frustration, drove her now.

She drew the sundress over her head, which left her in a skinny tank-top jersey that skimmed her midriff with a bra underneath now that she was minus her “loincloth.” No slip—she'd packed light and, besides, the sundress was lined.

She looked up at him.

He stared down at her pussy. “Your thatch is red.”

She knew *that* was coming, and she felt like coming too, just from the awe in his voice.

*Sweeeeeeet.*

He cleared his throat, then mumbled, “Is there anything about you that does not make me tremble?”

Emancipation, empowerment, equality—those catch phrases had been a political platform to her, a banner to wave at college rallies.

Until now.

In the chapel, she had brought this man to his knees in a prayer of a different kind. Here, she held his pleasure in the palm of her hand. She'd never felt so emancipated, empowered, and equal to the challenge of her female sexuality than she did then.

She made him tremble.

In that moment in time, she owned who she was—a woman whose sexual hunger was laced with kink, who liked it edgy, liked it dangerous, who was willing take a risk, a woman who preferred a life lived well to one lived cautiously.

Off went the tank top, whipped over her head.

“Why do you wear a slingshot across your chest?” he asked.

A fit of giggles overtook her. Nothing like the injection of a little humor to bring her back down to planet earth.

He approached her. “A double slingshot. 'Tis a new weapon for sure. I must see how this works.” He unhooked her in back, his adept fingers not once faltering.

With a roll of her shoulders, the bra fell into his hands.

Only to slip to the floor.

“But not now,” he said. “Much later I will try out this new weapon.” He examined her nipples, touching one gold ring and then the other. “The Church frowns upon piercing of the body as a mark of the devil, a sinful practice altogether.”

“Do you agree with that viewpoint?”

“I agree with the Bedouins of the Old Testament, who saw body adornment as a sign of beauty. You are very beautiful, my Regina.”

A breast cradled in each of his large hands, his thumbs moving like windshield washer blades across the elongated pierced peaks, he kissed her. Softly. Gently. Adoringly. The way all women should be kissed at least once in their lives.

This was her first time. She was not a virgin, and she was happy about that, but for real, with him, it was like she had never done this activity called sex before.

Naked, she went up on her toes, wrapped her hands around his neck, and kissed him back, their tongues meeting and joining.

Their mouths now ravenous, both of them taking and demanding, needing more than the kiss, he lifted her upward, and her feet left the ground.

Figuratively, she was walking on air.

Literally, he was carrying her across the floor to the bed.

## Chapter Twelve

Raven laid her down within the enclosure of the bed's embroidered curtains. This was their own little kingdom, the pulled draperies letting in the light and heat from the fire, the remaining three sides closed, keeping the outside world at bay, preventing sanity from interrupting this madness.

She was completely naked. He was fully clothed. Against her bare flesh, the fabric of his hooded garment felt as coarse and nubby as it had looked. The roughness was not a bad thing. The prickly discomfort kept it real, prevented total fantasy from taking her over. Without the sensation, she could easily have succumbed to the fairy tale atmosphere he had woven around her with his never-ending kiss. Oxygen deprivation could do that.

His erection sprang free, butting the cleft between her legs, beginning to delve the lips of her vaggie. They had swapped names and now were about to swap body fluids.

Uh-oh.

Her oxygen-deprived stupor had slowed her reaction time, but she managed to break free of the kiss, suck in a breath, and gasp, "Not without a fucking condom you fucking don't."

Living life to the nth degree was one thing. Living life stupid was something else again.

He had already mounted her in a classic missionary position, his much larger body covering hers, but at her exclamation, he reared back and frowned. "Condom? What is this condom?"

"A safe, a blunt, a rubber. I'm waiting here. Suit up, for fuck sakes!"



He now knelt between her spread legs. Folding his arms over his chest, his thick cock jutting into the air, he said, "Your meaning escapes me."

"Oh, yeah?" Ignoring her pointed nipples, her throbbing vaggie...how much she wanted him to fuck her hard...she came up on elbows and said testily, "Well, your cum won't escape me unless you take action."

When he still made no move to pull on some protection, she tried to close her legs against him. Impossible with him there between them. "You're carrying this acting thing a little too far for my tastes. Enough is enough. No glove, no love."

"What does a gauntlet have to do with coupling?"

That did it. She was killing him.

"Cut it out, Raven! Even for someone with your offbeat sense of humor, this is not funny."

"You are lovely, my lady, a fair beauty beyond compare, and I would come into your body and have you take me unto your heart."

She went from gnashing her teeth to sighing at the romance of it all. And here she had thought him soulless.

Then, she recalled his acting background. "Did you pirate that little speech from a Shakespearean sonnet?"

"I am a warrior, not a pirate. Leave that epithet to the Vikings." He slanted his jaw. "In my travels, I have heard of this Shakespeare. To my knowledge, the writer did make mention of the Tower in his play *Richard III*." He shook his head sadly, the black strands tinged with blue in the firelight. "He gave little credit to William the Conqueror, I fear. Now, be still while I enter your sheath."

"Not without a sheath on your Willie Shakespeare, you don't." She twisted and turned, her head wildly thrashing on the bed as she tried to escape, not so much him, but his damn charisma. Even now, she wanted him, the big phony.

*Take me, take me. Have me over my objections. Plunder me, you big brawny warlord.*

Unbelievably corny, but true.

He captured her wrists, raised her arms over her head, and kneed her already split legs farther apart. “Though I am not of your time, Regina, you have naught to fear from me, save losing your heart, as I have already lost mine to you. I have not lain with a woman in eight years and so carry no pox, be that your concern. As to a babe—your womb will not quicken, as I shall spill my seed outside your passage. You need time to grow familiar with me. After you do, then we shall see. Once, I longed for a babe to come to us soon. Now, I view these circumstances differently. If you must make adjustments, 'tis only fair I make them as well.”

He spoke forcefully, yet levelly, yet quietly. If he had only blustered, she would have dismissed him as a blowhard. Or called him a stinking liar and had done with it. Because he spoke with such conviction, she went still, the fight gone out of her.

But not the fear. Of pregnancy, of disease, of getting jailed for trespassing in a historical monument after hours...of him holding her wrists so she couldn't move. He held all the power here, and that was a new experience for her.

And, God help her, all those risk factors once again contributed to her excitement.

“Hurry,” she said in a small little voice, and angled her hips so he could get it in her, get it in her fast...before she changed her mind. Or came to her senses. Or thought this thing through. Or...

Before she discovered he was a complete phony.

“Go deep,” she called.

“Aye,” he muttered. “As deep as you can take me.”

He started to penetrate, the head of his cock sinking easily into her wet, wet, thoroughly wet vaggie, and she moaned, “Yes, oh yes,” and brought up her legs, her ankles encircling his lower spine as he made that first delicious thrust, his ass pumping as more thrusts followed, hard and fast.

And deep. So deep. Incredibly deep. She'd never been penetrated this deeply before.

He was delving her body's clasp, pressing her into the weird mattress under her back, his positioning so tight against her, he left no room for her body to squirm, no room for her mind to deny what was happening, what he was doing to her.

He was fucking her, taking her, having his way with her, and she was grinding her teeth as a hitherto-unknown urgency shot through her.

She hated what he was doing to her.

She loved what he was doing to her.

She'd never felt so out of control.

Fuck control. Who needed control, anyway?

"Can you take more?" he grunted in her ear.

More?

What was he—insane?

Well, duh, yeah.

So was she, for that matter. Why else would she have let herself fall like this, and for a perfect stranger, unless she was every bit as nuts as he?

Or unless maybe this perfect stranger really was perfect.

For her.

Too pained to speak, too weak to tell him to stop, she jerked out a nod, at which point he ripped away from her, flipped her over onto her belly, raised her hips slightly, and drove into her from behind.

Well. *That* was unexpected.

"I can get at it better this way," he calmly advised her and pulled her up onto an all-fours position before shoving inside her again.

He was holding her in place, both his hands anchored to her hip bones, and she couldn't move. Couldn't do anything but take what he gave her.

New experience. She'd never been taken from the back before, never doggy-style, never so that her full breasts heaved and swayed heavily with each of his strokes.

Hell, not strokes. The man was hammering her.

"So good. Your cunt feels so good."

Whoa. First teats, now cunt?

Where did he get off using the C-word to any woman, never mind a feminist?

Some fems she knew embraced that guttural-sounding no-no with enthusiasm. And she could see their point of view. But a man using it while she was in the doggy-position?

The coarseness of it took her breath away.

And made her almost come.

Naked, penetrated by a fully dressed stranger, up on her hands and knees, her ass waving in the air like a white flag of surrender to him, she was about to climax.

He must have felt her internal walls contract, because he said, "Take your release."

Fool. Like she needed his permission, like he could stop her.

Teeth gritted, she convulsed.

And he kept right on keeping on. No letup, he went at her until she was bucking like mad and pushing back against him, slamming her pelvis into his groin. She had turned into some mindless female animal she hardly recognized, and came so hard a second time, she wilted. Just collapsed with him still thick and hard inside her.

"Again," he pronounced like some god on high.

"I can't." The barbarian! Couldn't he feel her tremble?

Exhausted, strung out, her naked body slick with the perspiration of overexertion, she just couldn't take any more.

"Get the hell off me," she ordered.

His hand came down on her ass. *Swat!*

The sharp sting woke her up to certain realities. Such as, she had no fucking choice but to do as he told her to do. Yeah, she was strong; yeah, she knew self-defense, but he outmanned her. Apart from that, any guy who'd use the word "cunt" as freely as he just had was of a completely different mindset than she, the sort of throwback who would never take nay for an answer.

"All right," she murmured. "Yes. I agree. I give you my full consent. Do what you want to me. Sexually. I won't press stalking or rape charges or anything like that against you. Is that what you want to hear?"

He grunted. "'Tis not. Only acknowledgment that you belong to me will suffice."

Holding her up now, much akin to a rag doll, he began kneading her naked body, his big hands all over her. Fondling her breasts, moving between her legs, diddling her clit. His cock still lodged inside her, not moving, just there.

Oh God. She shivered. Then bucked. What was he doing to her clit?

Whatever it was, she went off like the blast of a rocket.

And still he continued what could only be called his mastery of her. He rubbed her body so long with his big hands, she grew calm, then compliant, then aroused all over again. When a purr escaped her drawn-back lips, he wrapped a muscled arm under her rib cage and began the fuck all over again.

And she had given him permission to do anything.

Everything was on the table. She had released him from all responsibility. He could use her like a whore, discard her afterward, and then walk away, his conscience free and clear.

He pulled her up onto her knees, her back vertical, one muscled arm supporting her under her full breasts, just about crushing her rib cage, his cock pinning her in place like a bug.

“Ah,” he said, triumphantly. “I can feel your womb. Mmm. So good.” He pulled on one of her piercings, forcing a distended nipple outward.

Her cunt—yes, now she used the word herself, because it seemed to apply—clutched.

The tempo increased. His thrusts were still directed, but they were faster, a little less orchestrated, a lot less expert.

He was losing control.

So was she. Her moans changed to groans, every nerve ending on fire, until she was crying in beat to his plunges.

Her neck went down, her hair falling over her face, staying with him, but only barely, as he made her his property, his submissive slave, his mindless chattel. At the point that she truly realized that she would never be the same again, that he owned her completely, he pulled out, opened the cheeks of her ass, and ejaculated within.

As promised, he had withdrawn in time.

That was her last thought, and then there was nothing more.

## Chapter Thirteen

Unwilling to lose sight of his beloved now that he had found her, Raven watched Regina for the entirety of her slumber. A lengthy sleep 'twas too, verily the sleep of the exhausted. Why was she so tired of mind and of body?

Something must have weighed heavily on her mind, perchance the same something that had brought her here across the waters to England again. While regretting the pain she had suffered, he could not help but celebrate her return to him.

Whatever had upset her, he would make it up to her...even if it took the rest of his life. He would dedicate himself to her happiness, a worthy cause.

And not entirely selfless.

Her pleasure would gladden him as well. His commitment to her was resolute but not without turmoil on his part. In order to keep her, he would need to let her go. He of all people understood that clipping her wings would only lead to resentment. Enforced captivity would only drive her away.

A symbolic captivity was something else again.

If she knew she could leave, mayhap she would stay of her own volition.

After a time.

That time had not yet arrived.

Grant her freedom now, and she would bolt. But later, if her confinement was more a thing of the mind than of substance, she might willingly forfeit her modern independence for a chance at happiness.

With him.

And he could make her happy.

Already, she seemed more at ease. Her sleep, while deep with her fatigue, was not troubled. The coupling had done that for her—relaxed her tension. Since he had contributed to her fretful state, helping her let go of her distress was the least he could do. Not that the alleviation of her tension was a penance, not that he suffered overly from helping her discharge it. He had enjoyed the mating.

He longed for more. A bonding of the hearts and minds, as well as of the genitals.

Every breath she took was a revelation. Every inhale and exhale a reason for him to give thanks. She was here with him now, and he vowed to enjoy every moment of their togetherness. No regrets later over what transpired now.

A bout of carnality was part of that. And once again, Regina was not the only one in need of the soothing balm of physical congress. His years of celibacy had taken their toll on his enjoyment of life.

No more. His claiming of her had increased his *joie de vivre* a thousandfold.

Ah! She stirred at long last. And as she roused, so did an elemental part of him. When she came to a sit amid the furs and stretched, her arms raised in exultation to the bedchamber's ceiling, which sent the jutting peaks of her pierced nipples high, his cock followed suit.

She glanced at him, a long and lingering look, her heavy lids and lax expression telling him she wanted him again. Whether she admitted it or not, either to him or to herself, her body was reacting to his presence. The tips of her breasts had reddened with her female receptivity, the points hardened and elongated.

Alas, he could not see to both their aching needs and do it right, do it the way it was meant to be done. Only an expenditure of time would lift base rutting to the higher level of lovemaking, and his time was limited.

'Twas not yet morn, but his day had already begun. As acting constable in charge of the keep, he could not linger much longer here, much to his chagrin.



Before he could explain his situation, she began to explain hers to him.

“That was swell, Raven. I really enjoyed the fuck and all that, but it's time for me to leave. My bed at the youth hostel is paid through the weekend, and I plan to get in some serious z's before my next tourist attraction.” She made to leave his bed.

He crossed the floor and clamped two hands on her shoulders, though he kept his tone cordial. “Why not avail yourself of my tick?”

“You heard what I said. We both got our jollies, and now it's time for a kiss good-bye and our 'see you around' speeches.” She puckered her lips.

“Nay. No kiss. You stay.”

“Quit the me-Tarzan, you-Jane rhetoric and hand over my clothes.” She crossed her arms over her gold-ringed breasts.

Full and womanly teats that made his mouth water.

He had yet to suckle those nipples, yet to bite them until she squealed. Nay, she was not leaving.

He reached for a nipple ring and tugged.

Her mouth opened; her lashes fluttered. “Even my pussy felt that.”

He immediately dropped his gaze to the floor.

“Please, please, if there is a goddess in heaven, do not tell me you're looking for a cat.”

When would he learn?

He had made another mistake involving an idiomatic expression. She must think him the court jester.

Naught to do, but dissemble. “I was surveying the floor for a chain. And I do know the meaning of the word 'pussy.’” And he did. *Now*. The context of her sentence gave him the belated clue.

“Chain as in jewelry,” she asked, crouching on the bed, poised to bolt. “Or chain as in BDSM?”

“Chain as in a collar for a pet pussy,” he replied and reached for her before she could race for the portal. He had encircled her upper arm with a hand, a tight hold, and yet she still continued to struggle, thereby wasting precious time. He had been due down below in the courtyard a goodly while ago, and she detained him, which kept him from his duties.

He fondled one of the gold rings piercing her bosom, and she went very still. “You will come before I leave.”

“Come where?” Her lids hooded. “Oh. That kind of come. Listen, I wouldn’t dream of keeping you. You run along and do what you have to do, and I’ll take care of business all by my lonesome. Believe me, I’m used to it.”

“Are you indeed?” His free hand moved in a southerly course, between her very aroused breasts, over the fetching contours of her rounded belly, on a trip to her loins.

Wet with yearning.

“What a shame your man did not see to your pleasure. Such neglect is unconscionable. Open your thighs.”

The furs were piled unused to one side, and she was squatting low on the bed, her bent legs squeezing together, either to keep him out or to stem her obvious excitement. His arrows were not nearly as sharp as her nipples.

She tossed her head, a move that sent her bright red hair lashing about the hillocks and valleys of her pale body like whips. “About your masturbation offer, dude—thanks but no, thanks.”

“Why do you fear what I offer?”

“I don’t fear what you offer; I fear *you*.”

“Then take the offering, for you have naught to fear from me, sweeting.”

“One hard and raunchy fuck does not a sweeting make me,” she snapped.

“I must disagree, but only on one point. You are indeed my sweeting, *sweeting*.”

“Only one point, eh? So you admit you fucked me?”

“Aye, and will do so again. Then later, much later, we will make love.”

She slapped a palm against the edge of the tick where she knelt, her thighs still lamentably closed up tight. “Stop going off about love,” she cried. “After being stuck with the same man for five years, I’m all about playing the field. Even if you weren’t totally nuts, I wouldn’t think of settling down into coupledness right now. I’m on the rebound, and that makes for a piss-poor relationship risk. And with my brain messed up the way it so obviously is, I shouldn’t even have jumped into a one-night stand. But what can I say? A woman’s biology is complex and so—”

“Hush. No more talking.” He pulled upward on a gold ring, bringing the pierced nipple with it.

Biting her bottom lip, she snarled, “No. I don’t want this. I want to leave. Right now.”

He kissed her with fervor, with fever, hating to leave her but knowing he must...after providing her with a quick climax.

When she began to moan, he insinuated his free hand between her legs and pried them apart, until she was open and available to him, witless in her longing for penetration. He might have entered her then, taken out his cock and rammed it inside her passage, and that would have been that, the end of her denying him, the end of her argument. But ending this contest of wills by default was unappealing and counterproductive to his long-range goal.

Rather than force himself on her, as he ended the kiss, he offered her a finger. A single digit.

“Take it as you will,” he said, and held it before her wet cleft.

## Chapter Fourteen

“Not there,” his lady demanded of him. “Not in my pussy. And not with a finger. “

“Then where, and with what?” he replied. “You must tell me plain.”

She looked away, said, “I want it in the ass. And I want you to use your dick.”

“Sodomy?” he questioned, lest he misunderstood.

“I call it anal intercourse,” she replied tartly. “And I'm hot to try it.”

He sighed. Not without a lengthy preparation. And a generous anointing of oils. And a full explanation.

He started with the most difficult. “Why?”

“Why what?”

“Why your insistence to delve the forbidden?”

She shrugged. “Why a duck?”

“No ducks in bed with us,” he said firmly. “No other fowl of the waters or beasts of the woods either. And please no more jests. I need to hear why you wish to do this of a sudden.”

“Because I'm tired of hiding who I am inside, and who I am inside is someone willing to try on new experiences in sex and in life. I get off on edginess. Call it an adrenaline rush, call it trying to beat boredom, but I happen to like mixing things up. That's why I work short-term computer assignments. A nine-to-five desk job just ain't for me. Knowing what I'll be doing every blessed day for the next fifty years or so would kill me. And for some reason, I don't mind admitting that to you. For some reason, I don't think you find a woman of strong opinions intimidating. I can be

blunt with you, and you won't think less of me for it. And, by the way, this is not 'of a sudden.' This frustration with my present life has been building inside me for whole heck of a long time.”

Though some of her phrases made no sense to him, the underlying meaning of her statement came through clearly. He nodded, complimented by her placement of trust in him. Not that she said the word, but her faith in him underscored what she did say.

He would not push for more. Not yet.

“I shall be gone but a moment. Stay as you are.”

“Ever consider a gig as a stand-up comic?” she said drily as he went to get the tincture.

This statement of hers he had no problem deciphering. He had restrained her to the bedpost. She had no choice but to remain in place.

Another jest. Like a shield she used humor to ward him off. When would she drop her armor and let him inside, not only her body, but also her heart?

He sighed, willing himself to patience.

She had made a first step with her unstated acknowledgment of trust in him, but he was greedy for her to drop all her defenses.

But, once again, he would not push for more. Not yet.

Upon his return to her side, he dribbled a large portion of oil onto his finger while she watched.

“I said I don't want your finger. I want your dick stuffed between my buttocks.”

“And so you shall have it, but not now. Now you get a finger.” He sighed. “Some things cannot be rushed, and sodomy is one of them.” He maneuvered her into an all-fours position, her bottom protruding over the edge of the tick with the rest of her faced away.

She stayed without struggle, without a reaction of any kind.

She was fighting him, combating her attraction to him by demeaning it, by allowing their shared feelings only a carnal significance.

“Are you ready?” he politely asked.

“Do your worst.”

“Sweeting, I am at my best here.” He captured a plump breast, fondled the pierced nipple, and introduced her to a rear-portal entry.

She took the finger well, and so he gave her two more. Gyrating, her hips moving with the finger trusts, she pushed back against him.

His cock noted, but aware of the lateness of the hour, he held back in favor of her needs.

He left off his breast play and reached around to her front, finding the plump site of her passion at the top of her slit and courting it as he stretched her in back.

“Oh, yes yes yes,” she said, sounding raw, sounding strained, sounding on the cusp of her womanly release as she moved wantonly on top of the bed, her legs spread wide, as wide as they would go, his fingers penetrating her in back and pushing to the limit.

The portal opened, and familiar steps entered the chamber.

“You are wanted outside in the courtyard,” Girout announced, standing to one side, watching the proceedings. “A new prisoner's arrival.”

Bertran nodded.

“My lord—I can take over with your captive for you while you attend to your duties,” Girout suggested as Regina, too far gone in her sexual extremity to notice the violation of her privacy, began to come.

“My thanks, but nay.”

“A pity.” Girout sighed.

His vassal's rapid exhale caught his Regina's attention.

“Hey, you,” she flung breathlessly at his man-at-arms.

Girout, looking inordinately puzzled, surveyed the environs of the chamber, left to right.

“Yeah, you,” his beloved said. “Don't look around. I'm talking to you, pretty boy. Draw hither. Or however the hell it's said in this time warp.”

When his vassal accepted the invitation, Bertran shot him a look of rebuke, then said, “Await my attendance outside.”

This directive did not gain favor with his beloved.

She pouted prettily. “But, Raven, what about kink?”

Kink, he took it, meant unorthodoxy, not a knot in a rope or sail.

Normally, he would not oppose such a suggestion. His vassal and he had oftentimes used the same wench as a receptacle for their ejaculate.

But this was Regina, his future wife, the mother of his hoped-for children. He had a multitude of objections here.

“You talk of traveling,” she chided him upon seeing the outrage reflected on his expression. “And I respect your need. Well, this is my journey—to sexual discovery. Please respect my rights to adventure the same as I respect yours.”

Girout shuffled his feet. “My lord, 'twould appear your strumpet—”

“Hey, pretty dude, watch that kind of trash talk. Them there are fightin' words. This girl just wants to have fun...”

“Since the strum...*girl*...has voiced no objections, my lord, may I step forward?”

Bitting his tongue, Bertran nodded.

In the past, when they partook of carnal interludes, his vassal never kissed the sluts they shared, and neither had he, and so Girout's lack of demonstrativeness came as no surprise to Raven. Much to his relief, his subordinate bypassed the delights of Regina's mouth and launched a swift frontal attack of that lush region between her spread thighs, done while pinching an equally lush nipple.

His captive rocked, her spine straightening even more, until she knelt in an upright pose on the bed, her pelvis tilting to receive Girout's fingering in front, pushing back to receive his fingering, a rear flank approach, all the while making shrill ecstatic sobs of joy.

A fit of jealousy surged inside Bertran. He hated this, loathed watching another man touch his woman. But what could he do but bear up under his own resentment and pain? After all, this dual penetration was at Regina's urging. Furthermore, 'twas very apparent by her moans and groans that she was enjoying their simultaneous attentions. Her wanton body, all luscious curves and rounded flesh, glowed with excitement.

"Oh, yeah," she crooned and lifted her manacled wrists to the ceiling. Her hips first swaying, then bumping and grinding, she next tossed her head. At the abrupt movement, her tousled red hair bounced, as did her gold-ringed teats. Everything she did, every move she made, maddened him.

Bertran thought he might spend his seed there and then. Then he thought he might have to kill his vassal. What would it take to keep this lusty female's exuberance all to himself?

Her love.

Naught short of her loving him would tie her to anyone. Sadly, she did not love him.

Yet.

But she would. They belonged together. Never had he been so sure of anything than he was of that.

His lady's lusty nature took her over, and soon her moans and groans erupted into screams of completion.

"I'm coming," she cried out to both of them.

As if that were not abundantly clear.



In short order, after a long wail, she went limp in Bertran's arms, and Girout backed off, a broad smile on his face.

"You have a female with a hearty corporal appetite there, my lord."

How well Bertan knew it. His cock twitched to get at her.

Alone.

"You may take your leave," he told his vassal. "Stand at my call outside the portal."

As his man-at-arms jerked a bow—his vassal's cock was obviously a-twitch too—and then departed, Raven loosed Regina from his embrace.

His ladylove slumped facedown on the bed in sated bliss.

He eyed her rounded rump. "I must take my leave," he grumbled, his gaze on the beguiling crevice between her buttocks. "But I shall return posthaste. Await my pleasure."

His steps halting, Bertran went to meet Girout outside in the hall.

"Here on out, you must knock before gaining entry to my chamber," he told his vassal and boyhood companion straightaway.

"Aha. You have found the one."

"Aye." Unfortunately, she had not found hers, he mused glumly to himself.

"Lucky sod. But why share her with me?"

"Because she craves adventuring."

"Are you asking me to be with your woman, my lord?"

"Aye. But only in my presence. We have shared before, and so I know females dream of you on their pillow at night."

"Of course they do," Girout said cockily. "But you will please note I live a single life, wrapped up in my occupation, not a wife's arms. I am not as generous as you, my lord. My work comes first. With you, your mate may take a submission pose in your bed, but she will always claim an uppermost position in your thoughts."

“Tis because you are gifted artisan whose workmanship is coveted by monasteries and kings alike, that I would have you create two gold chains for my lady, of the finest filament. Fashion them with an eye toward delicacy and to attach to a leather leash collar.”

“I have just the right choke in mind. But gold is a soft precious metal. A threadlike delicacy will break easily.”

“That is my single most important requirement.”

“Will the morrow be quick enough?”

“Aye,” Raven replied and backed away, rushing off to see to his duties.

When he returned, he found Regina still asleep. He lay down beside her and slept too, the first time ever he had ever rested beside a lover. A good sleep 'twas too, with no tossing and turning, and no night terrors. Upon awakening, he found himself with an erection that would not take nay for an answer.

He could disturb her or proceed without her.

The latter seemed more expedient given the deepness of her slumber.

He uncovered her and spread her legs, then undid his braies. His grateful cock sprang forth, eager to begin.

He considered her hips.

From his previous excursion within, he already knew the crevice between her buttocks was tight and deep and wholly receptive to a man's darkest lust.

While she slept on, he raised her a bit, enough to see the slit between her legs, and drank it in at his leisure.

Her cunt. How he would abandon himself to that pink passage.

That was later, when she awakened. He had seen to duty; now he would see to pleasure.

He was not selfless, after all.

After rolling up a spare fur, he carefully stuffed the makeshift pillow under her belly to bolster her higher, enough to visually partake of both passages at once.

He licked her cunt first, then between the admirable cheeks of her derriere.

She never once stirred.

To keep from disturbing her, he went to work on his aching cock. Strong strokes on his flesh, his gaze on her flesh.

The openings, the passages, his means into her body. He longed be one with her again.

As he neared the end of his quest, his cock straining for release, as rigid as a pike, he fingered her female slit. That was all the instigation he needed to spew, which he did, against her rear access, after splaying her buttocks wide.

## Chapter Fifteen

Some time later, Regina awakened to a bright room. Evidently, it was morning, which meant she had slept the night through and she was still on her belly, and with a palm riding her ass, a thumb in the crack. Rather liking waking up that way, she shifted so that his possession deepened.

Feeling randy as could be, she said flirtatiously, “I am ready for you to take what I gave you a rain check for earlier.”

“First, concede I am not of your time,” he demanded of her, a husky melancholy coloring his voice.

She raised herself up on her elbows. “Admitting the first is contingent upon believing the second. How can I believe the impossible?”

“Then, I have no choice but to show you.”

Maybe he was in a rush, but snug in the comfy bed furs—no wonder furs were politically incorrect; lying naked on them was positively scrumptious—she had no great sense of urgency to do anything more taxing than yawn. Absolutely boneless, satiated on good sex, she could hardly find the strength to...

*Yank.*

He pulled her unceremoniously from the bed onto her feet.

“Come with me, my lady.” After undoing the leash from the poster, he started dragging her along again by the tether.

“I’m naked,” she wailed.

“Garb is of no import” was his offhanded reply.

Humph. Easy for him to say. He was fully clothed.

At her pursed lips, he relented. “Be you bashful, cover up with a wolf pelt.”

She grabbed a fur and, despite her initial objections, luxuriated in the silky warmth against her chilled flesh.

But a suspicious trickle rolled down the back of her leg, and she dropped her covering and looked behind her. “Is that stickiness what I think it is?”

She'd slept the sleep of the dead, zonked out like a zombie for hours, maybe even around the clock for all she knew. His ejaculate from before would surely have dried by now.

Embarrassed as anything by the evidence of his possession while she slept and her reaction to it—her nipples suddenly peaked—she asked in a low subdued voice, “You fucked me in the ass while I was out like a light?”

“Nay. I merely spewed my seed against the forbidden egress. I would have liked to go deep, to fully penetrate, but I prefer to bugger whilst my partner is awake.”

“Was your underling here watching?”

“My underling? Perchance, you mean my vassal. Nay—why do you inquire?”

She placed a hank of her hair over a shoulder. “I guess because I liked the exhibitionism of it. Does that shock you?”

“Nay. I accept your hot nature, and I shall strive to satisfy it.” He palmed between her legs.

“Now?” she asked greedily.

He chuckled.

She didn't like that. Didn't like it one bit that she was so vulnerable to him. For five years, she'd been at her ex's mercy because she loved him, and that was not a mistake she'd ever replay.

“Don't you dare laugh at me,” she raged. “I can't help my sex drive.”

He rubbed his hand across her pubic hair, his thick fingers combing the red curls. "I commend your sex drive. Your cunt sets me ablaze. Makes me weak. I laughed out of gladness. Now open your legs for me."

Not at all mollified, she stood with her knees touching. "I'm not in the mood. Go find someone else to make fun of."

"I said open to me. If you do not, I will do it for you, and the result will be the same. You will come, Regina."

Dammit. She was already wet. Why deprive herself of what she so obviously needed? Five years was a long time to go without good sex.

Tossing her head, she splayed her thighs.

"Wider," he insisted and pulled on her pierced nipple. "Show me the slit to your cunt."

Oh God. All of this was just so coarse, so demeaning, so humiliating. And yet, holding this man's attention acted on her like a drug. She just couldn't get enough.

She widened her thighs.

"Ah," he rasped, still pulling on the nipple hoop. "What you do to me, sweetening."

He put the end of the leash in his strong white teeth and felt her up, his fingers, three of them, moving freely and wetly in and out of her pussy until she was sobbing, crying, willing to do anything if he would just not stop.

"Please," she wept. "I need more. Put it in me. Please?" She bit her lip. "Please put it in me?"

He removed his fingers; they made a betraying wet sucking sound as they left her clasp.

"Go down to my feet," he said.

She did. Bending her wobbly legs, she wilted to the floor, the reedy grass scratchy on her kneecaps, looking up at him from her lowly perspective at his boots.

"Go to your back," he ordered.

She reclined, the rushes and mosses and sprigs of fresh aromatic thyme cushioning the bare flesh of her back and bottom.

“Open your legs, Regina.”

She did.

“Nay, wider. Withhold naught of your body from me.”

So humiliating. But unshed tears burning her eyes, she did as he said and widened her thighs.

But still he wasn't satisfied, damn him.

“Knees out and up,” he barked. “I must see the slit agape.”

When she finally appeased him, he came and stood over her, his gaze on her spread pubic lips. “I would give you my fist.”

And she would give him a taste of reality, as in no the hell way was he doing *that* to her. Only...

She'd promised herself to try kink on for size.

There was no better hands-on experience than this, she guessed. But yikes, the span between his knuckles was massive. Major owies there.

“Do you trust me enough to put yourself in my hands, my Regina?”

At his soft tone of voice, at the knowledge that she had captured his full desire, her nipples pointed and thrust. Utterly aroused, completely turned on by all of this, she begged, “Hurry. Please hurry.”

Mercifully, he did. After coating his knuckles with the same oils he'd used before on her, he knelt on the floor before her and pressed his big hand against her pussy, his thick fingers pulled in on themselves.

Even in her excitement, she knew the point of this exercise was to prove how completely she had fallen for him, how willing she was to accept his tyranny over her, how far she would go to ensure their sexual escapade continued.

His hand entered her slowly, and he held her tearful gaze the whole time he claimed her. And though his fist hurt, her ability to take whatever he dished out filled her with pride too. She was no sissy.

“You are beautiful like this, sweeting, on your back with your knees parted wide for me, naught hidden, naught held back,” he crooned and moved his bent hand inside her. “So very beautiful like this. So womanly like this. Look how beautiful you are with my fist lodged deep inside you.”

Raising herself up on her elbows, she peered over her belly and saw his wide wrist at the juncture of the red-framed vee, the rest of his hand housed inside.

That was when she started to cry. Full-out. In acknowledgment that she would never be the same again.

“You please me greatly.” He fondled a breast, his fingers pulling at the hoop through the nipple, and the hot tears rolled freely down her cheeks. “Indeed, you hold me enraptured. Go gently with me, my queen.”



## Chapter Sixteen

It was much later, evening again, and her tears had dried—actually, after helping her back onto her feet, he'd kissed each droplet away—and they faced one another before the blazing hearth.

“Are you ready?” he asked, peering deeply into her eyes and stroking the inside of a bare arm, his knuckles brushing against a full breast.

She shivered. “Where are you taking me?”

“To where you started.”

“The youth hostel?” Her heart started to pound.

*No! I'm not ready to leave. Not yet.*

“Nay. I cannot escort you beyond the gate. I am as much a prisoner of the Tower of London as the souls who lost their heads within these bloodstained walls. I mean to return you to the armor exhibit, where you fell.” He pulled on the tether.

“But I'm naked,” she cried, appalled.

“Your concept of what is shameful and ours differs, Sweeting. The people here will rejoice that I have found joy in your woman's body. There is no need for any loss of pride. I simply mean to show you off.” He fingered her jutting nipple. “These really are quite extravagant.”

She dropped her chin. “Raven, I'm sorry. It's too much. I'd like to try a little exhibitionism on for size, but this is way too hard-core for me. I know it's after hours, but there must be night watchmen here, as well as those Beefeaters. Trespassing, and now this. We'll be arrested for sure. I need to wear something.”

He lifted her face. "Your body is meant to be seen. Anyone who sees you will delight in your fertile curves and my good fortune in possessing you. I would be pleased in showing you off."

Her gaze fell to the floor. "Where's my sundress?"

He handed over her outfit, neatly folded.

"Bra too," she said.

His forehead crinkled. "Pardon?"

"The double slingshot."

"I would see the outline of your sumptuous teats. No double slingshot for you, my lush wench."

She gave up. Absolutely, positively, gave up. She'd just have to bounce.

After pulling the sundress over her nudity, without a bra, the way the outfit was meant to be worn, she faced him. "I'm ready."

"You have no idea how very lovely you are," he said, gazing at her unsupported chest.

"Cut the crap. Let's haul ass. Okay?"

With a nod and carrying a lit torch, he ushered her back down the exterior staircase and across the courtyard.

It was bitterly cold outside. A layer of frost turned the ground white. But with her arousal and his closeness, she felt little discomfort. But she asked herself—how could this possibly still be summer? How could this possibly be the same place?

The courtyard was barren, empty of people, empty of buildings...and empty of any passing history. From all appearances, they were walking across the courtyard in William the Conqueror's time.

But to believe that and more was impossible.

To believe anything less would call Raven a sham.

Something was not adding up here!

“Where are all the suits of armor, the weaponry, the display cases?” she asked in a panic upon entering the room where he had first spoken to her. “Where's Henry VIII's suit of armor. Where did everything go?”

“Nowhere. All are still in place—in *your* time. This is *my* time. Norman time. This is the year 1085, centuries before the Tudor monarchy. We Normans protect ourselves in battle by donning a hauberk, a knee-length armor made of chainmail, not those metal suits. A domed helm with a guard for the nose goes on the head, oftentimes over a tunic with an attached coif.” He pulled up his hood. “Like so.”

“A hoodie.”

“As you will.”

But she had no will, not when it came to him. “You expect me to believe I traveled back in time with you.”

He playfully cupped her bottom cheek and squeezed. “Only because you did indeed go back in time with me.”

“But—how? There's no time machine I can see—”

“A sorcerer's curse.”

“Oh, please. I'll play along, but give me a little credit here. I don't mean to be harshing on you, but there must be a scientific reason. People have talked about the possibility of TT for years, and you say you can do it. Pardon my incredulousness, but how? What's the mechanism involved?”

“I cannot explain, for I have little understanding of the phenomenon myself, so I shall only state the facts as I know them. Once a year, as the season of winter changes to spring, I have the ability to travel forward and back through time, as I see fit. If I miss midnight on the cusp of summer, I must stay in place one full year before making my return during the next spring season.”

By torchlight, she gazed up into his black eyes and saw the windows to his soul.

“You're not lying,” she gasped.

“Would that I were.”

His hand dropped from her ass, and he shook his head. “Nay. 'Tis untrue. Though once I did wish away this ability, even considered it a curse, now I accept the ability to travel through time as a gift, for how else would I have met you?”

She dropped her gaze, afraid of what else she saw within the black depths of his eyes. One preconception-busting revelation at a time was all she could handle.

Regina pulled herself together. Okay, so he wasn't lying. Nor was he acting. Could be he was deluded into *thinking* he could time travel...

“I need to see for myself. Prove it,” she muttered grimly. “Prove you can time travel.”

“Where would you like to go?”

“You can control it?”

“To a degree. I have had years to tinker with the method. As you will please recall, you collapsed into the metal suit of armor belonging Henry VIII while I held a lock of your beauteous red hair. When the portal opened, both of us fell through time together, and all I could think of was flying you home with me to the Tower. And so we went.”

“Oh, my God. *Flying*. You are actually telling me you can fly, aren't you?”

“As a raven flies, so too do I.”

“Let me get this straight. Once a year, you can shape-shift into a raven and then fly through time.”

“Exactly!”

“This just gets worse and worse.”

“Not for me. For me, this just gets better and better. I have no wife, no betrothed, no sweetening until you. Always before, I traveled alone through time.”

When she opened her mouth to speak, he hushed her with a finger pressed against her lips. “I can take you anywhere, any time period, so long as we remain

inside the perimeters of the Tower of London.” He removed his shushing finger from her mouth. “Now tell me. Where would you like to go?”

She answered immediately. “To see your young Bess, the girl who would be queen.”

With a nod of truly smarmy understanding, he took her hand.

The tornado effect didn't hit her as hard as the first time. The portal, located near the armor against which she'd clunked her head originally, sucked them in and just as quickly spat them out. She did have the sensation of flight, but, just like before, she had no awareness of Raven turning into a bird or anything. Maybe she was blocking it out. She felt dizzy, a little weird, and then there they were, back on terra firma again.

First thing she did was check out Raven for any signs of feathers. But there was not a one to be seen.

She eyed him skeptically. “Where's the beak?”

“Shed as soon as we made the transition into the new time.”

“Yeah, right. And another thing, why aren't we naked? We should be naked.”

He shrugged. “Some things, like a wysard's curse, must be accepted on faith.”

The question was: Could she accept him, all of this strangeness, this bizarro world she had fallen into, on faith?

She looked around. They were outside, obviously in a later period of time than the era they had just left, hidden behind a clump of bushes.

“Where are we?” she asked in awe, peeking through the foliage.

“The Tower, the year 1554. Princess Elizabeth entered through the Traitor's Gate in March,” he whispered, filling her in on the details. “I first met her two months later. 'Twas one of my earliest travels.”

“You said she asked you to pop her cherry, right?” She sent him a sneer.

"If that expression means she asked me to take her maidenhead—'twas only a jest, my lady, to see if mayhap you cared for me. Your redhead's rage tells me you do."

"That's a heaping helping of BS." She pointed a finger at his massive chest and thumped him one. "And another thing..."

"No need for vexation. Verily, Princess Elizabeth and I exchanged but a few words. Her courage had a great impact on me then, as your courage has a great impact on me now. What I ask of you requires a bold heart. You have that heart, Regina."

She shook her head vehemently. Forgetting the circumstances, she cried out a heated, "No!"

"Halt," shouted some unseen male from up on high. "Who goes there in the bushes?"

"Holy shit," she gasped, "I didn't know they had guns in the sixteenth century."

"Pistols, muskets, cannons." He yanked her tether. "Can you run?"

"To keep in shape I jog."

"May I suggest you do so starting now?"

With an arm draped across her breasts to support their fullness, she raced across the green with him, as the loud reports of weaponry sounded overhead.

Cripes! They were shooting targets.

She didn't think they would, but they made it back safe and sound to the door through which they had arrived. Turning and facing their firing squad, she gave the armored knights on the wall the finger. After that, she felt much better. So much so, she clutched the stitch in her side, and started to laugh. "I never considered myself an adrenaline junkie or anything like that, but ye gods, dude, that was fun. I can't believe we outdistanced them."

He kissed her then, and the excitement of it all made the kiss totally hot. Both hands palming her face, his mouth sucking on her mouth hard, his big body strained toward her as if he alternately wanted to protect her and eat her up whole.

They were about to do it right there in sixteenth-century England, while Princess E. walked along the turret, her long red hair blowing in the breeze.

But enough about the future queen. This was all about her, Regina, a woman of her times, a chick who lived very much in the present, and who was one uninhibited babe, as it turned out. Who knew?

Not her.

Not until right this very minute did she even begin to understand what kinks got her off.

A warlord would pin her to the wall and put it to her, out there in the open practically, with pistols blazing and a cannon possibly pointed in their direction, and the acrid smell of gunpowder all around them. What could be more adventurous than that?

“Get on your knees and put your mouth on me,” he ordered.

Okay. Not that. Anything but that. She'd been down that path too many times in the past to find it exciting in the least now.

When, she hesitated, he pushed her to the ground. “Do it.”

“Sorry, macho guy. No can do.” She started to rise.

She got nowhere at all before he clamped his hands on her shoulders and forced her back down. Then, to make things even more outrageous, he yanked her sundress, up to her neck, baring her all to his sights.

“I can see your hard nipples, your wet cunt. You want me any way you can have me. Between the legs, in the arse, between your lips.”

“Go fuck yourself.”

“No need. Your mouth will fuck me. Now do it. Refuse, and the militia will find us.”

On an excited shiver, she did as he commanded. She reached for the opening in his tight trousers and freed his gratifyingly huge cock.

His flesh made a mad arc in the air.

He caught a strand of her hair and wrapped it around his wide wrist. "Do it, my lady. Make me glad-hearted. Pleasure me."

She realized then that putting her mouth on him would also pleasure her, would also make her heart glad. After years of begrudging, demeaning, distasteful, unloving service to a man who spouted about equality between the sexes and then delivered nothing to her but his passivity, she wanted to do this. To him. For him.

"You're right. I'm dying to taste your cum in my mouth," she blatantly told him, owning the need.

He dropped his hands loosely to his sides and her sundress descended. "Have to."

She smiled at the moisture dotting the crown of his erection, and then leaning into him, her nose flaring, breathed him in.

No eau de slimy snails or clam bellies. He smelled of sex and dominance and his man's want of her, and his scent stirred her to an untapped wildness that had always been there inside her. The completely out-of-date man who had abducted her, held her naked in leather restraints, and forced her to accept sex, was the one responsible for her liberation.

She licked him, taking the drizzle of precum onto her tongue and pronouncing it yummy as he squirmed.

Squirmed. She made this huge warrior squirm. She'd done that.

In that instant, the memory of all the bad stuff from her prior relationship with what's-his-name disappeared, taking his power to wound her with it. He couldn't hurt her anymore, because she couldn't remember him. Razzle-dazzle, he was gone.

Bertran made her feel beautiful.



No! Fuck *feeling* beautiful. She *was* beautiful. He'd just opened her eyes and allowed her to see herself.

*Dammnnn*. She was hot. And enough of a woman to satisfy this fierce male.

Cradling his balls, she looked up at him.

He had closed his eyes, his firm mouth parted, his strong jaw raised, his throat swallowing repeatedly, his big hands now lightly resting upon her shoulders. He was a warrior, used to calling the shots, yet he had made himself vulnerable to her, the same way she was vulnerable to him.

She put her mouth on him. Only a kiss at first, his heated moans music to her ears, and then a full-out blowjob. Working him hard, his hips pumping in rhythm to the suction of her lips, she felt triumphant.

He was hers.

His hands gripped her shoulders hard, and his cock lunged for her throat even harder, and he exploded.

Afterward, he gave her a hoarse thank you, and pulled her up into his arms. As she swallowed his cum, his mouth captured her mouth, a fast kiss by necessity, what with soldiers shouting commands all around them and bullets spraying the ground.

He whispered against her tangled hair. "We need to leave."

The peril of their positions sank in. What was happening was no video game. This traveling thing was a threat to both their lives, and they could get dead for real, as in for keeps. How dare he play fast and loose with her life?

Incensed and scared and whole lot of something else too she couldn't so easily define, she hauled back and slapped his face.

Holding his jaw, he rushed her back in time.

## Chapter Seventeen

Back inside the White Tower, Raven silently led Regina to one of the bed's thick four-posters.

"What do think you're doing?" she snapped.

Obviously, his lady was still frightened. Fear masked by anger was as common as love masked by lust. Their traveling had filled her with dread and excitement. Their brush with discovery had done the same.

He gently touched her shoulder. "You must learn that, to the best of my abilities, I shall always keep you safe, that I bequeath unto you my very life. With that said, there are no guarantees of a happy outcome. Traveling is fraught with dangers, and therein lies the excitement. You must also understand this: I am your master. I cannot brook your misbehavior."

"You mean the slap?"

"Just so," he said through tightly clenched lips. "You are subject to me and to my authority. If you cannot conduct yourself properly all on your own, then I must train you to do so. Your survival depends upon your submission to me. Your opinions, your female rights, are worthless here. Object to me or my rulings, and you shall force my hand."

"How so?"

"Only this—what I am about to do now will be done publicly next time, in the courtyard, where everyone might see your punishment."

"I was upset. That's why I lashed out at you."

“That is no excuse. Were you a man, not a female, you would be dead now. Safety here depends on the people's blind obedience to their rulers.”

“I'm sorry. Okay? I'll make it up to you. I promise.”

“You most certainly will. After you learn what constitutes a lady's proper conduct to her lord.”

“Are you gonna spank me again?” Her blue eyes shone bright.

She stood facing him before the bed's footboard. Without replying, he turned her away and bound both her wrists, each in a tether, and then, pulley-style, raised them separately above her head. When both arms were as high as they would go in that vee formation, he tied the ends of the two leather strips each to the top of a tall post. He repeated the process on her ankles, the tying done at the bottoms of the bedposts.

After so doing, he walked around to the side of the bed to inspect her front. Then, removing his dagger from its sheath, he took another step forward and raised the blade to her throat.

She struggled like a wild thing. But with her limbs restrained, she could do naught to prevent him.

“I trusted you,” she cried.

“So I thought. But I was evidently mistaken, for if you did trust in me, you would not be fighting me now. Know this—when you do finally gift me with your faith, I shan't ever betray you.”

He dug the tip of the sharp metal into the gauzy cloth and ripped the gown from her body. Then he put his weapon away. “Here on out, you will remain nude. No double slingshot, no unseemly loincloth, no gown. You will stay in your natural state.”

Trying not to let the sight of her large teats, adorned with gold-ringed nipples hiked upward to the ceiling, and her split thighs, the halo of red curls demarcating

the entrance to paradise, influence his decision, he told her what was about to happen.

“Ten lashes,” he said sternly. “For insubordination.”

“What?” she spat.

“You heard me. Across your buttocks, not your back.”

She licked her lips. Her nipples reddened. A drizzle of moisture rolled down a long shapely leg from her cunt.

Regina was excited, a carnal excitement he shared.

She pursed her lips. “You intend to leave welts, my lord?”

“Aye. Raised pink stripes. But no skin breakage.”

She started to pant. “Oh oh oh. Do it, do it, do it. I’ve been a bad, *bad* girl. Punish me.”

He would not allow her unseemly enthusiasm to sway him from the righteous course of action. What he did here today might one day save her life. As to his burgeoning cock—that, he would ignore.

Taking up the whip, he stepped around behind her once more. And once again, he fought against leniency, guarded himself against her nude state.

Her enforced captivity greatly aroused him. Her naked and splayed body, immobilized in leather cords. Her involuntary submissiveness. The way she moved, every muscle straining. But he must not allow that arousal to affect his present judgment. To do so would be to endanger her life in the future.

He let the strap go, once, twice, eight additional times, while her tautly roped body snapped against the tethers like a well-strung bow against the arrow.

When he was done, he walked toward her.

“Are you all right?” he asked her from behind.

“I need to come,” she said in a tiny, shamed voice.

“I see. It does happen at times. The need, that is.”

He went closer, situating himself to her side again so he could see her front, her face up close. He ran his knuckles down her lovely strong jaw. Rounding to compensate for his greater height, he took her pierced nipple between his teeth and pulled.

“Bite it,” she whispered. “Please bite the end.”

And so he did bite the end, soothing the hurt he had inflicted with his tongue afterward.

“It's not enough,” she whispered. “I need more. I need you to penetrate me. Roughly penetrate me.” He heard her swallow. “All my holes.”

Three egresses to fill.

He still clenched the whip in his hand. The handle *should* fit.

“This goes in your cunt.” He held the blunt end up for her to see its width and length.

At her nod of acquiescence, he thumbed the tear from her cheek and began the insertion.

She was tight, both front and back—he knew this from his prior handling of her—but as usual, effusively wet. The whip handle went in with relative ease, the tasseled end sweeping the floor like the mane of a horse. He might have placed the whip between the cheeks of her buttocks to enhance the image, but he had another usage in mind for her rear portal.

“All right thus far?” he asked quietly, moving the instrument of her punishment in and out of her passage, a slippery slide between her split legs, as she wantonly, greedily raised her pelvis to accept the strokes.

She nodded dumbly, more tears falling.

“Easy,” he advised when her motions became too strenuous. In a frenzy for completion, the plump lips of her cunt slightly swollen from her exertion, she teetered at the edge of climax.

This was not to his liking.

He told her his expectations. "You may not find your release until I breech you. Understood?"

Another nod, a sufficient authorization of privilege.

There was naught to stop him from doing whatever he wanted to do. In the aftermath of her first traveling experience, she had granted him permission for it all.

"I should like to sodomize you," he told her evenly and went to collect the oils. "As you are now, strung up at my bed. Any objections?" he asked politely.

When she moaned but voiced no inhibitions, he returned with the lubricant, kissed her bruised bottom, and then began to anoint her anal passage, the route he planned on traveling then with her.

She was weeping now, her pent-up emotions finding a way to let go. But her body remained tense. The intercourse would rectify that quick enough.

He undid his braies grimly. With a higher order of purpose than a simple rut, he took himself in hand and stepped behind her.

He knew how she felt, knew about her feelings of worthlessness. This was all to do with that swine of a lover she'd had before him. How he would enjoy drawing and quartering the sod.

Alas, that was not to be. All he could do to rectify the boar's damage on Regina was allow her to see—and use—the power she had over *him*. Verily, she held him in sway. Her dominion over him was absolute. The woman ruled him.

He opened her up and cocked her full-on, no insertion, only enough pressure to award her a taste, holding himself there against the opening. When she called no halt to the proceedings, he began to feed his cock into her. The wide head, coated with precum, went in with a *pop*.

"Wait," she rasped, pulling on the overhead tethers, his cock stuffed in her rear portal the smallest degree. "This may be a mistake."

“Shush. No mistake.” Keeping himself back from the fatal push, he wrapped an arm around her to calm her.

Still, she tried to dislodge him. An impotent maneuver as he had no intention of abandoning the pursuit.

He squeezed her nipple, smoothed a palm down her belly to the red triangle, fingering the pinnacle of her passion until she purred, and then rewarded her with additional thrusts with the whip handle.

“See, my lady? No mistake. The whip in your cunt, my cock in your arse, my heart in your hand. I love you, Regina. Do what you will with that knowledge.”

“Don't talk to me about love. Please! I just can't hack it.”

“You can and will, and more,” he encouraged, and pumping his hips made the push.

She went up on her toes in avoidance of his length, but went quickly back down at the urging of his hand flattened on the crown of her head.

“Take my love,” he grunted. “Take it all.”

When she had done so, when his entire length and girth had filled her, he penetrated her third and remaining hole—her mouth—with two fingers, and then began the sodomy, a slavish devotion that made her irreparably his.

## Chapter Eighteen

After her punishment, Raven undid her restraints. Too limp with pleasure to withstand his primitive appeal—at least that was how she excused her humiliating willingness to continue when she should tell him to stuff it—she returned with him to the bed.

“Rest now,” he said, placing her facedown on the lumpy mattress. “I have duties to see to, but shall return to you as soon as humanly possible.”

So saying, he tied her up and left.

Her last thoughts before closing her eyes had her dissecting what had just happened.

Raven had screwed her ass. Anal. Her!

And she'd liked it. Liked his dominance too. Enjoyed the bondage aspect. Evidently, she had found her calling.

She was a natural submissive.

Who knew?

Not her.

Maybe Bertran. For an outdated man, he seemed to know an awful lot about the workings of the twenty-first-century female psyche, more than current pop culture did.

On that drowsy musing, she yawned hugely and drifted off to sleep.

Later, she awakened to a dark room. How much later, she had not a clue.

What day was it anyway?



She was so friggin' confused! No watch and too much sex had left her disoriented. She was idly speculating on what these medieval types used for a calendar when a tickle reminded her that there was no time like the present, even if that present was the far-distant past.

The teasingly pleasant touch moved down her spine and into the deep canyon between her plump ass cheeks.

Raven had returned.

He didn't ask if he could; he simply took it for granted she would be in the mood for more sex.

She was, and her wiggle told him so.

Without speaking, he two-handed her around the waist and dragged her on her belly over to the edge of the bed, where he wordlessly positioned her into a tight, rolled-up ball, her ass hanging out into space.

Lovely. Just lovely. Good thing they didn't have video equipment back then. She would *not* want her posterior saved on digital for all posterity.

"Hold," he said.

Like, tied to the bed, she had someplace she could go.

She nodded dumbly.

The oils he used were warm from his hands, his fingering gentle yet firm.

No need to fret over birth control, she consoled herself as he reentered her, much easier than before.

He didn't move. With his dick buried inside her ass, he resisted what had to have been the urge to thrust.

Beside her, from out of the corner of her eye, she saw his muscled arm reach to the taper on the wall. He moved the scone so that light cast down on her.

"I would see my cock inside you," he rasped, both his hands moving all over her back, then kneading her buttocks, opening her cheeks, presumably to get a better look.

She came with a hoarse scream.

He hadn't done anything yet. No moving, no stroking her clit, and she came.

Oh God. She could easily cry. She was just so easy.

He started thrusting. Slow, then fast. He kept it up *sooo* long, without ejaculating, that she came twice more. Clawing at the furs, she swore at him like a Boston driver at rush hour.

"Do it, you prick," she cussed. "End it. Now."

But he didn't. He played with her some more, his dick stopping and starting, until she unrolled from her pose and tried to crawl away.

His hand came down hard on her bottom, the spank over the hurting stripes already there, and she sobbed out another climax.

Eventually, he grunted out his orgasm and quit.

"I do apologize, my lady. I was unable to stop. I shall try to show more restraint next time."

*Next time?*

"Did I hurt you?" he politely inquired and released her from the bed.

"You fucked my ass for hours," she said and stumbled to her feet.

"Aye. I did. As I say, I could not help myself." He faced her. "I love you. Only you. No other woman but you."

Regina didn't want to hear that. His avowal didn't fit in with her commitment to play the field, to try on different experiences.

Yet the plight of Princess Elizabeth had touched her. She had looked so alone taking her morning exercise on the turret wall. So heartbreakingly unloved. If Bertran really *had* bedded her, had taken the virgin's maidenhead, she wouldn't have begrudged them their fleeting moment of happiness. Hell yeah, had guns not been blazing, had she actually been able to get her claws on the bitch, she might've spitefully pulled the young Bess's red hair, but no begrudging. Happiness, regardless of the century, regardless of how fleeting, was too rare a find to dismiss.

As was love.

And what she couldn't accept, what she shied away from in Bertran's black eyes, was love. Not the possibility of love, the actuality of love.

He loved her. The hows and whys went right over her head. But after years of searching for love with the wrong person, she knew the real deal when she saw it, regardless of the place, despite the time.

And it scared her.

Not of being unable to return his love, but scared shitless of how easily she could return it.

"I would know you even in the dark," he said. "Even amongst a crowd, I would know you. And you would know me the same."

"Would not," she said in a huff. Pulling a fur around her, she marched herself off to the fire, cum gushing from her ass. "And if that's a dare, you better know I never back down."

"Are you suggesting I put my assertion to the test?"

"I am." Here was her out, her way of escaping the scary feelings he inspired in her. "Bring in another man. Fuck, bring in a legion of medieval warriors, and we'll just see if I can tell the difference. Cross my heart, I promise to be truthful. And feel free to do the same. Heap your bed with as many companions as can fit. Doesn't matter to me who and how many partners you sex it up with."

"No need. I sated my wildness as a lad."

"If you think I'm just sowing wild oats, let me tell you I was no virgin before meeting you. I had a boyfriend of long standing."

"He was but a prelude to us. He meant naught to you, as all the others before you meant naught to me."

God, he frightened her. "Bring on the challenge. I'm game for anything, especially proving you wrong."

“You will not. You will know then, and in your heart of hearts, that I am the man for you, the *only* man for you.”

That said, he left, the door slamming behind him.

Hugging herself, she stared into the flames. Why had she just run her mouth like that?

Sometimes, she was such a bitch. No excuse for what she had done. The man told her he loved her, and she believed that he did, and what did she do?

She threw his declaration back in his face.

Nice. Really nice.

She was still beating herself up over her unfeeling rejection of him when troops entered the room carrying pails, the contents of which steamed.

Hot water?

Yep. After dragging a primitive-looking wooden tub before the fire, the line of strapping males poured in bucket after bucket of steaming hot water. All for her.

Bertran had to be angry at her, upset with her, just plain not liking her very much at the moment, and still he'd thought of her comfort, how in need she must be of a good long soak in a tub.

Bastard. Taking the high road. Showing her up. What a completely petty thing for him to do. Now she felt worse than before.

Their chore done, the line of men stomped back out. Dropping the fur, she climbed resentfully into the tub.

She had just finished bathing and was drying off with a rough woven cloth when the door opened without a knock and in walked Girout, Bertran's good-looking vassal.

She held the damp drying cloth before her. “Who gave you permission to barge in here?”

“Lord Raven.”

“Bertran knows you're here?”

“He asked me to visit.”

She wasn't liking this.

She wasn't hating it either—Girout was one attractive man, and she had something to prove. To herself. To the man who had so unabashedly declared his love for her.

Her unexpected visitor held up a thin gold chain. “A gift from the overlord.”

“For me?” she squealed.

“He had me make it especially for you.”

How perfectly sweet...and diabolical to choose this particular time to make the presentation. “Did Lord Raven send you to me?” she asked suspiciously.

“Nay. By happenstance we passed in the courtyard as I was on my way here, and he gave me leave to make the delivery. He also made it clear that you would not oppose my putting the gift on you.”

“Yeah, okay,” she snapped, and not at all graciously. She just felt so terrible about all of this, and here Bertran was giving her a present. “Go on. Snap it around my neck.” She lowered the cloth a bit. It was still covering her cleavage, but plenty of space above to drape the chain. She was dying to see how it looked on her.

Until Girout replied, “It does not go around your neck.”

That's when she knew what Bertran was up to.

Damn him.

“Where does the chain go?” she asked.

“Attached to your nipple rings, between your teats.”

Figured.

## Chapter Nineteen

With his duties seen to, Bertran made haste to return to his chamber to attend to his beloved, which is how he thought of Regina. Not how she thought of him, of course. Her thoughts of him came with a few of her favorite colloquialisms attached to the musing.

No matter. He loved her and would wed her this day if she would only accept him. Alas, this was not to be. His little bird had come to him with a broken wing, and a day or two in his care was not sufficient to mend the injury. It did gladden him to see her regain some flapping, however. The rest would come in time. She would fly again—of that he had no doubt—but first he would need to let her go.

He had already taken the first step. He had given her a push to acknowledge the truth in the form of his man-at-arms, Girout.

All the ladies adored his vassal. Rightly so, as he was quite the lover. Generous to a fault and loyal to the bone. Regina would be in capable hands with him.

He arrived at his chamber to see his vassal begin to work his magic. Regina stood before the tub, a towel modestly concealing her statuesque form. Upon seeing him there at the portal, she promptly dropped the damp linen. The drapery fell to her waist, a dramatically sharp indentation directly above the womanly flare of her hips.

Glorious in her seminudity and defying him with the arch of her brow, she said gaily to his armsman, “Go on, Girout. Place the chain where it belongs.”

She dared him with her flashing gaze to stop the proceedings. Since he had strategized this very encounter with all the precision of a military campaign, he was hardly of a mind to do so.

He braced himself against the thick frame surrounding the portal. "Aye, do continue, Girout. I am anxious to see if the piece works in conjunction with the collar."

Regina appraised him with regal haughtiness, her hip-length hair, vibrant red ribbons wet from her bath, sticking to her pale body.

"Collar?" she quizzed them.

Girout held the device in question up to her perusal, which she did, her examination thorough.

She smirked, her lush lips tight with contempt. "Let's get this farce over with, shall we?"

Girout looked to Raven for guidance.

Bertran nodded, and his vassal began to attach the chain, a process that called for his man-at-arms to take each of his lady's breasts in hand.

An unstinting fondling commenced that had her undulating.

Girout was painstakingly exhaustive in his handling, making sure the chains fit just so to the two rings piercing her nipples. There was much adjusting involved during which Regina's movements grew more and more agitated until her grip on her drying cloth faltered and then ended entirely. Her hands dropped, as did her sole covering.

His lady was nude and, in her heightening carnal agitation, seemingly unaware of her dishabille.

Not so the two males in her presence.

His own cock was always erect in Regina's presence. As for Girout, he had been with his man-at-arms in enough coupling situations to know when he was aroused.

With trembling fingers, his usually rock-steady squire centered the collar at Regina's throat and buckled it in back, and then asked, "Will you attach the chains to the front of her collar, or shall I, my lord?"

Raven took naught for granted. "Ask my lady."

Girout did. "Who would you like to do the honors, demoiselle?"

"I have two nipples," she panted in her extremity, a woman besieged by urges beyond her control. "One for each of you."

"As my lady dictates," Bertran replied with a courtier's formal bow. Leaving the portal, he walked across the floor and took up a chain.

At his right, Girout picked up the remaining gold links.

"How much tautness?" his man-at-arms asked, looking to Bertran for an answer.

"I should like the linkage sufficiently tight to excite the nipples like so." He lifted a chain, and as the hardened tips of her breasts projected a lavish degree into the air, her lids went heavy and she began to moan, a pre-climactic reverie that told him she very much approved of that tautness.

Supplicants to her pleasure, they attached their ends of the chain to the front of the collar.

"Oh oh oh," she whimpered when they had finished.

She gnawed on her bottom lip and then turned stormy blue eyes to him. "Please?"

"Please what?"

"Take the ache away. My breasts feel heavy and full, and with all the tugging from the chains, my pussy is soooooo wet right now I could scream."

He looked down and knew she spoke the truth. Her thighs now rubbed together, their increasing frenzy a slippery slide due to her distinct slickness.

"Commendable," Bertran said, and pulled a blindfold from inside the pouch on his belt. With a tight smile—he was raw with arousal himself—he held up the black



length of silk for her inspection. “To cover your eyes. Are you ready to prove you will not be able to tell us apart, my lady?”

“You bastard. Is that what this is all about, proving me wrong?”

“Aye,” he said. “You love me. I need you to admit you do.”

“This sucks,” she hissed. “You know that? I'm standing here naked with two totally scrumptious males, and you turn this...this decadence into a game of who blinks first.” She tossed her head, and red tendrils hair whipped her bare shoulders. “Go ahead, then. Cover my eyes. And I promise to keep this real.”

“Real?” he questioned, not quite comprehending the vernacular of her speech.

“Real as in—if I can't tell you, Raven, apart from your fuck buddy, Girout, I'll let you know, just like I said I would.”

“I trust you will. Verily, I trust you in all things, large and small.”

“What do I win if I'm right, that men are all interchangeable to me?”

“You win both of us for the night, our only goal to satisfy you.”

“Fair enough. And if I am able to tell you two apart, what do I lose?”

“Your heart. And before you ask, what you win is me, for as long as you will have me.”

## Chapter Twenty

Keeping up an abrasive front, Regina snorted in derision at Bertran's soulful declaration. A ballsy attitude was all she had left to defend herself from Raven. If she dropped the sarcastic routine, she might just as well resign herself to...to...

Pain. Heartache. More years spent in a go-nowhere relationship.

She just couldn't handle it. For crying out loud, she was on the rebound. Why couldn't Bertran respect her need for closure before a new involvement?

But no. He was laying something heavy like love on her when she was ill equipped to deal with that emotion. Fun, yes. Sex, hell, yeah. She could handle those. But none of this serious bullshit. Couldn't he see, she was already all torn up inside?

"Bring on the blindfold," she quipped, squaring off for the showdown. "I guess I'll be on the receiving end of some major anonymous sexing tonight."

"Not without an exit strategy for you. You did say you required one for 'hard-core' carnal activities."

"I did. So spill—what's the safe word?"

"What I have in mind is not a safe word, not something you would say at all as we appear to have communication problems at times, but 'tis a certain way to stop the bdsm proceedings, nevertheless."

"That's BDSM," she said with a chuckle. "And go on; lay the method on me."

"Break the chains attached to your collar."

"But they're lovely. Why would I want to do something destructive like that?"

"The chains are yours and are easily repaired. I suggested breaking them as a symbolic severing of our bond."

"I like how you think, Raven. And once the chains are broken, you'll let me go, correct?"

"Exactly."

Funny, how she believed without a single qualm that he would keep his word. "Then a one, and a two, and a three. Let the love action begin. Start putting out, men."

A cool cloth was slipped over her eyes, and she couldn't see a thing.

In her darkened world, she took a deep breath and held out her wrists for tying.

"No physical restraints on your wrists," Raven said.

"Why the hell not?" she asked in disappointment.

"If you are in bondage, you will not be able to freely end our game. Instead, please consider yourself honor bound to make no attempt to reach out to us."

Honor. He assumed she had honor, that she was no cheat. That she was a straight-up sort of gal.

How was it that this overbearing throwback to an earlier time got to her so?

Beneath the blindfold, her eyes filled with stupid tears, and she sniffed them back hard. She was a tough cookie, and tough cookies don't crumble, don't go all mushy and sentimental inside just because a guy knows how to use a little sweet talk.

Only Raven didn't. Not up to twenty-first-century standards sweet talk, anyway. The guy was hopelessly dated, incapable of snowing her, of conning her in any way. What he said came straight from his gut.

Now, how could she bamboozle him? Use his antiquated notion of integrity for her own ends?

Er...

If only she could think! But no, any brilliant plotting she might have come up with just slipped away in the heat of their caresses.

She was blinded, bound by her word and only her word, and maybe that was why every sensation seemed magnified, almost surreal. Each minute touch—and they were touching her now, all over her now—pinged her nerve endings. Each brush of their fingers made her go all shivery.

In the name of adventure, of breaking free—ironic that, as she wore a BDSM collar and nipple chains—she was about to do a threesome. Her. Conventional, straight-as-an-arrow her, who'd never once strayed from monogamy with her ex, even though he'd given her just cause. How had this happened?

And who cared?

A mouth sampled the peak of her pierced nipple. Another mouth nibbled on the opposite tip. She threw back her head and wailed as the two men wreaked havoc on her libido.

Her sex drive went right through the roof, and she opened her legs, no artifice, no subtlety, no grace, willing the man on her left to take possession of her.

Bertran.

Damn him. His scent stirred her. She had recognized him right off the bat. God, how she hated being wrong.

Not that she intended to tell him so. Her very life was on the line here, and she'd just have to put up with two handsome men fucking her silly to keep the status quo—her life intact.

After two non-identical kisses on her mouth—the best of the not-too-shabby pair given by Bertran—she sensed a shifting in their positioning. The air circulated as someone moved behind her.

As one man reached between her spread legs in front, the other man stroked into her buttocks in back, a dual penetration of fingers that had her forgetting all about being cool in favor of having her needs met.

Foreplay wouldn't do that. Only the real deal would ease her hunger.

She panted, "Take me to bed, fellas."

"No *taking* here. Follow the sound of the bell," Raven said.

With her hands held palms outward in front of her and her ears perked up to the ridiculous tinkling of a melodic bell, she started walking. A few steps later, her knees plowed into the side of something hard.

"Stop," Bertran said. "You have arrived."

"*Now* you tell me," she snapped. Feeling around the top, she climbed clumsily onto the mattress, no help from either of the men.

This was all up to her. She was directing this game. Damn them. Her companions in lust had made their point.

Not to be outdone, she made her point too. Once she had negotiated the transition from floor to bed, she stalled on top of the heap of soft furs in an all-fours position.

Yep, the doggy pose.

Collective male moans came from behind her.

It did her ego good to hear their suffering. Was that so bad of her?

Not bad enough. When it came to petty, she could do so much better.

To give herself another ego boost, she wiggled her bottom seductively, which set her full breasts in motion.

This time her men groaned like they were dying.

Torturing them was eminently satisfying.

Finally, she took pity on them and arranged herself on her side. The mattress dipped as they rushed to follow her lead.

A strange thing happened then. Above the scent of male lust surrounding her, was the betraying stench of her own poor judgment.

What the hell was she doing here?

She couldn't let this happen. Not to Bertran. He loved her. How could she kick his love in the teeth like this? For five years, she'd been on the receiving end of hurt, but that didn't give her a license to willfully do unto others what had been done to her. She had no right to spread hurt around.

Using no hands, which kept her in that pesky honor zone, she sightlessly aimed for the mouth of the man facing her on the bed, and succeeded in smashing his nose with her nose.

"Bertran," she whispered into his nostril.

"Aye," he said, and smashed her nose right back.

"You win. I knew it was you. Right from the start, I knew who you were."

"Of course you did, my love." He nosed her nose again. "A strange custom these sorts of kisses, but I could grow used to them."

"It's not a custom," she said crankily. "I was aiming for your lips but caught your nose by mistake. Forget anything?"

"You mean this?" he asked and tugged on the strip covering the upper part of her face. The big dope, teasing her like this!

Before she let him have it in a big way, the blindfold came away, just in time for her to see Girout slip out the door, leaving her alone with Raven.

"Much better," her lover said. "Now I can see your beautiful blue eyes. Do you realize they glitter like sapphires when you are in an argumentative mood?" He smiled. "Fortunate for me, they twinkle like jewels nearly all the time."

Not bothering to interpret his meaning, she rushed ahead with her confession. "It was your scent I recognized, so don't go getting any ideas in your egotistical head. There's nothing profound here."

"Your sense of smell must be as good as a bloodhound," he offered.

"I would say beagles have a more acute sense of smell. After all, that breed sniffs out bombs at airports. Not to debate the issue or anything—"

He laughed uproariously. "How your eyes do sparkle."

She waved aside his half-assed compliment. “At any rate, fair play is fair play, so I told you.”

Raven kissed her hard, enticingly, until she lay beneath him. “I love you, my Regina.”

“I *could* love you too, but not now, Bertie. Not now. Can you understand? The time is all wrong. And I don't know if it will ever be right for us. But let's fuck, okay? No bondage, none of that BDSM crap. Just you and me in a bed. How does that sound?”

“Like making love,” he answered.

That was TMI. She promptly reached up and broke the chains attached to her collar. “Just so you know—I'm returning to the twenty-first century immediately afterward.”

He sighed. “And so you will, my Regina.”

Lord Raven was a man of his word and a man of his world, a chivalrous knight who lived by the sword and loved with his whole heart and soul. As he moved into her body, she clutched him to her.

For the very last time.

## Epilogue

*Three months later...*

Regina had reconciled herself. She and Bertran would always be out of sync. They would never see eye-to-eye on political issues or social problems or the battle of the sexes.

And that was all right.

Temperamentally unsuited to backing down in an argument, she would go head-to-head with him in any disagreement until they both compromised and found a meeting place in the middle, a place where they both belonged, where love was all that mattered.

Too bad she hadn't arrived at that realization a little earlier.

As it was, she'd returned to London almost too late.

According to her calendar, it was September 21, the cusp of autumn. By the same calculations, summer in Raven's time started at midnight.

Tonight.

Bertran's ability to time travel ended this evening. If she missed the cutoff, there was no chance of telling him what she needed to tell him, no chance of even seeing him until the following year.

Unless he opted to remain in this century for the coming year.

And why on earth would he decide to do such an idiotic thing?



She had given him no reason to assume she would return, no reason to believe there was anything further to discuss. The last time they were together, she had called them over, and that was that.

Besides, he had military duties at the Tower. A man who prized honor like he did would never shirk his responsibilities on the outside chance of her having a change of mind.

Yet she had.

Only the lightbulb hadn't gone off in her head until it was most likely too late to do anything about it.

Why hadn't she allowed him the floor in their last debate? Why hadn't she given him a chance to present his side of the argument? Why had she essentially shut him out?

As fast as her feet would take her, she left the bus and ran all the way back to the White Tower, going to the exhibition hall where Henry VIII's suit of armor was on display.

Regardless of what did or didn't happen, she would feel closer to him there, on that spot where they'd first met, and where they'd time traveled together.

Together. They were meant to be together.

The exhibition hall was crowded with tourists, the same as when she'd visited back in June. This time, she was more polite. Neither pushing or shoving, she patiently waited her turn as the line of visitors snaked slowly past each suit of armor on display.

Her tummy clutched in memory as she approached the magical spot. How could she have let him go so easily?

Sometimes she was just so pigheaded! Unwilling to listen to reason, to see the other person's point of view, she had just walked out on the adventure of a lifetime.

And why?

Because she couldn't quite wrap her head around the possibility of time travel.

She sighed. No, that was the reason she gave him at the end, when he wouldn't accept her rebound excuse. The truth was, she hadn't been real with him. It wasn't that she couldn't accept the possibility of time travel; it was that she couldn't accept the reality of his love.

She could and did accept that reality now.

And that's when she saw Raven. One minute he wasn't there; the next minute he was beside her, holding her hand.

"I knew you would return to me, my Regina, my queen."

Why argue?

She simply nodded and stared at him, afraid that if she even blinked, he might disappear.

Naturally, not blinking made her tear up.

"This is a day to celebrate, to rejoice," he said softly. "Not a day to cry."

Who was crying?

But, why argue his faulty reasoning?

She simply nodded and, going up on her toes, kissed him, then whispered in his ear, "To think we might have missed each other. To think I might never have seen you again. But wait—how were you so sure today was the day I would return?"

"I was not sure when you would arrive, only that you *would* arrive."

She frowned. "So why come here today?"

"I have traveled to this century every day since your departure. I thought for sure, someone from the tourist center would buckle me into chainmail and add me to the exhibits."

He laughed.

She didn't.

He had waited for her every day...

"You had more belief in me than I had in myself," she said glumly.

"I do believe in you. And what is more, I also believe you believe in me. Thank you, sweeting." Raven touched her face. "I promise you love and adventures of a lifetime. Down through history, much went on here at the Tower. But you must decide to take what I offer, or decline."

The way she figured it, this thing shook down to trust. Intangibles, like belief, usually did. So how did she want to roll?

Naturally, she started throwing obstacles in their path to happily ever after. "But what about my parents, my girls..."

"I beg your pardon—girls?"

"My BFFs."

When he still looked confused, she spelled it out. "My female friends."

"I see. Akin to ladies in waiting, I take it."

"Except for the lady part. These women would bust your chops for that put down. And the waiting part. I tell ya, my girls are movers and shakers. They only thing they wait for is a cab to take them clubbing on Saturday night. And you don't understand a word I just said, do you?"

He shook his head. "Methinks I have much to learn about twenty-first-century colloquialisms."

"The point is, I wasn't sure I'd find you again, so I never said good-bye to anyone. I'll be reported as a missing person by a whole slew of people if I don't return."

"Time is a continuum, beloved. No one will even realize you are gone. I cannot leave here, but you may visit your homeland whenever you like...on the first day of our Norman spring."

Her brain started working. *Click. Click. Click.* All the obstacles toppled, and everything fell into place. "And during that first visit back to the States, I can tell everyone I found a new long-term assignment in England and so decided to stay. My friends and family can always visit me here. They can even meet you."

“So long as 'tis here at the Tower and providing you garb me accordingly.”

“No need, milord. I shall merely tell them you're an actor.”

“Tell them what you will, for I grow impatient here. Time is a continuum, my lady, but every moment spent without your answer lasts a bloody eternity. Will you stay with me, wed me, allow me to adore you all of our lives?”

“I thought I already had. The answer is aye.”

Despite the tourists milling around, he captured her in his embrace. “I love you, my hot-blooded, stubborn, opinionated wench.”

Why argue?

She was all that and more. But somehow, rather than a negative connotation, the character traits he ascribed her sounded like the highest of praise.

How could she not love a man who not only accepted her as she was, but loved her because of who she was?

In comparison, accepting a little thing like time travel seemed hardly worth mentioning.

❧ THE END ❧

## Loose Id Titles by Louisa Trent

*Bittersweet*  
*Bring It*  
*Captive*  
*Courtesan*  
*Icon*  
*Islet Abandoned*  
*On Moorstead*  
*Sex Stings*  
*Some Rough-Edge Smoothin'*  
*Tempest*  
*The Acquisition*  
*The Pick Up Line*  
*Touch Me*

### **The BLOOMING Stories**

*Lilac*  
*Rose*  
*Thyme*

### **The TAINTED LOVE Stories**

*Bad Love*  
*Bleeding Love*  
*Tainted Love*

### **EROTIC INTERLUDES**

(featuring characters from the *Tainted Love* stories)

*A Christmas Coming*  
*Three on the Fourth*

## Louisa Trent

I am a writer raised in a family of storytellers. My earliest and fondest memory is of my Irish Nana relating a mystical story of a man looking in a window upon a beautiful lady whose long silvery hair swept the floor as she walked. With a simple telling, my grandmother drew me into her tale. A man. A woman. A forbidden love that wouldn't die. From opening word to shivery conclusion, I lived that story with her. Many years later, I'm still awed by the spell of the fantasy world she created with only the dip and swell of her voice.

There's power in words. Hope in love stories. Joy in a happy ending. I'm proud to carry on my family's storytelling tradition