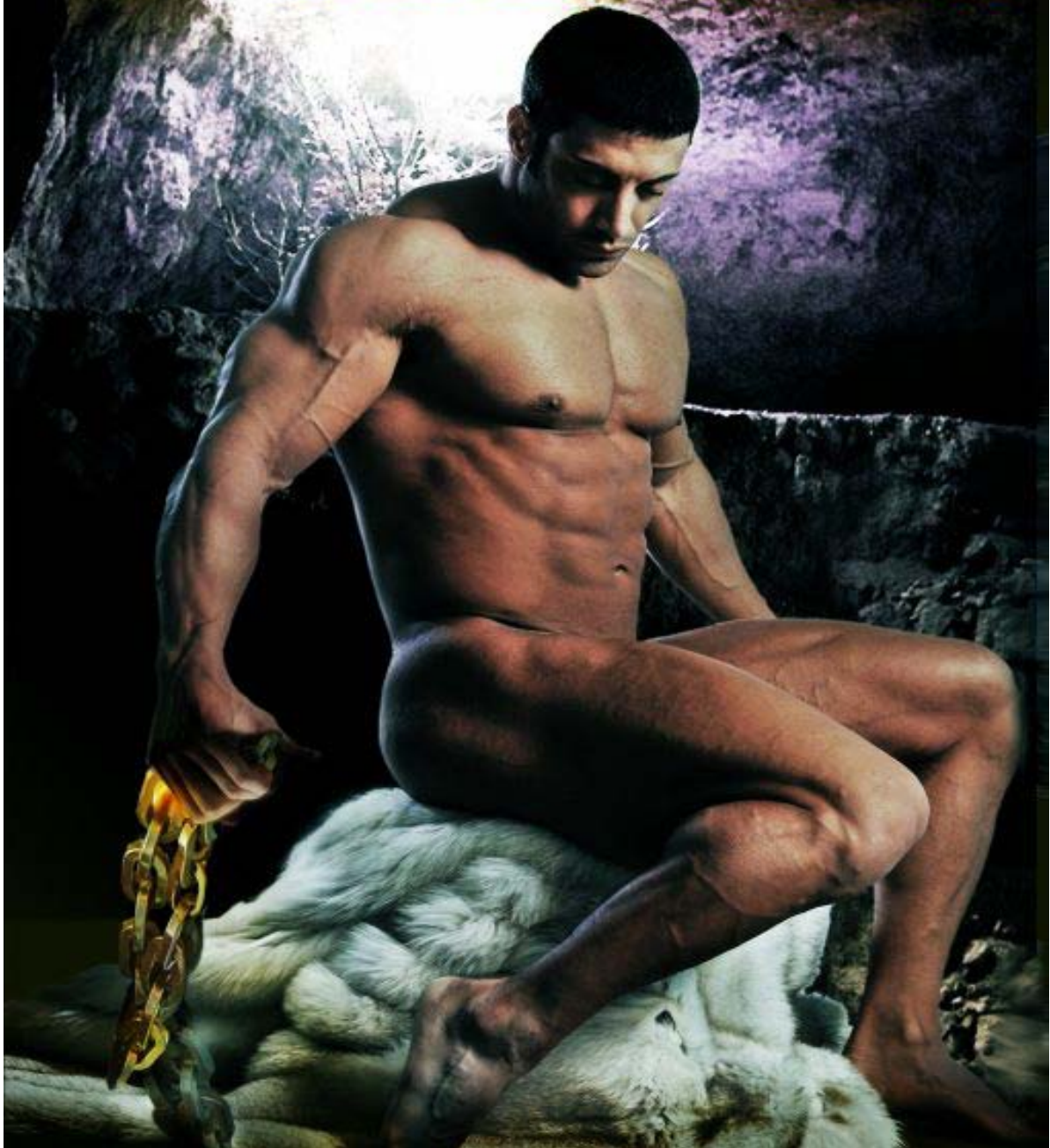


# ENSLAVED

MELINDA BARRON



# *Enslaved*

*The Sons of Gunnmarr*

By Melinda Barron

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Enslaved

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*As always, for CAS, with my love.*

## *Prologue*

How well can you really know someone? You can grow up with them, trust them your whole life, and in the end they turn on you and leave you to rot in Hel.

This wasn't a new thought for Benedikt. He'd had it often, every time he thought of his father. For most of his life, he'd respected the man, tried his best to learn from him. But all that ended when his father had changed, into something that Benedikt didn't recognize.

He went from a man who loved his wife, took pride in his sons and was an honorable sovereign to the people he governed, to a greedy man who took great pleasure in causing others pain. It seemed as if the change had occurred over night. King Gunnmarr had thrown his wife out of his bed and replaced her with a long string of youthful women, who seemed to grow younger as the time passed.

Benedikt and his brothers, Rugoff and Egill, had also been pushed aside. At first, his attitude change toward his sons had seemed gradual, as if they were the only things the king still loved. But, one month after the transformation had started, Egill had mentioned to his father that they'd like him to join a hunting party, the King's response had been to throw a plate against the wall and bellow at his youngest son that he had no time for that sort of frivolity.

Egill had gone to Benedikt, and they'd both approached their brother, Rugoff. A natural peacemaker, Gunnmarr's oldest son always had a way of solving problems without upsetting the delicate balance of pride and honor. But this time, he had no solutions.

Benedikt had barely held back laughter when Egill had suggested they chain their father to the wall until he came to his senses. Benedikt knew that wouldn't work, though. Their father was too tough to be broken by something like that.

They'd been pondering other remedies when the witch had shown up. Benedikt knew nothing good would come with her arrival. His father's greed hit new levels and he'd asked the witch for untold riches and the ability to defeat those who were against him.

She'd agreed, but asked for his father's emerald in return. His father had betrayed her. Benedikt and his brothers paid the cost—and were still paying it these many centuries later.

But something told him things were about to change. There had been a change in the air lately, something that told him his life was about to turn a corner.

He couldn't quite put his finger on what it was, and that bothered him.

But he was ready for anything, as long as it got him away from the living Hel where he found himself every day.

## *Chapter One*

“Work, damn you, work. WORK!” Lilliana Dawson pounded her fist against the dashboard of her rental before screaming in frustration. “What good’s a GPS if all it does is flash without providing useful information?”

She thumped her finger against the screen; in return, it blinked and then went blank.

“This is a big cock up.” She turned the machine off, let it set for a few seconds, then flipped it back on. It replied with another flash before the screen turned dark. “Bugger off!”

She clasped the steering wheel firmly in her hands. Why hadn’t she written the directions down on her pad? *Because you knew you had your mobile. Who knew the battery would die? And that the GPS would go on the fritz?*

Surely she was heading in the right direction, though. The map she’d looked up on the Internet last night had given her the instructions she’d followed this morning. If she’d been smart, though, she would have printed out the map. Instead, she’d relied on what could be her sometimes faulty memory and the technology she would have with her.

Her shortsightedness and faith in gadgets had put her in quite a pickle.

“Right,” she snorted. “It’s not my fault I’m in Norway with no idea where I’m heading. I place this problem squarely on Uncle Trenton’s shoulders.”

He was the one, after all, who said he needed papers delivered to a Mrs. Westergard, and that it had to be done by hand. He could have sent one of his clerks, but he’d patted her on the shoulder at a family dinner and basically said since she was jobless, she could do this for him and earn a little bit of money.

The cash would come in handy, but first she had to get through what was turning into a trip from hell. The airline had lost her luggage, and she’d been forced to purchase new clothing the day she’d arrived. It was what she got for checking a bag, but some of the items in there, shampoo and the like, were not allowed in carry-ons, so she’d really had no choice.



“Should have just left all the liquids at home and bought new,” she whispered as she glanced out the window. “Would have been cheaper than buying clothes.”

She could take the blame for that, but the entire trip was definitely Uncle Trenton’s fault. She’d tried to beg off, saying she didn’t have the proper authority to deliver legal papers, since she wasn’t a notary. He’d countered with the fact that the delivery wasn’t for official papers, but a map that the woman had purchased during an auction.

“She trusts me completely and has no problem with you delivering it. As a matter of fact, she was thrilled when she heard your name.”

That information didn’t seem to bother her uncle, but it had thrown Lilliana for a loop. Why would the woman know her name? She’d finally rationalized the argument down to the fact the older woman was glad it was another female coming to her house, which was in the middle of nowhere.

“Of course, if I sit here much longer, the only thing to come out of this trip will be going home in a box after freezing my arse off.” She fiddled with the GPS one more time, getting the same result she had before.

“Just go in the direction you’d been going in,” she said. “There’s a gate to turn into the property. Just keep on the lookout for the gate. And if it’s not the right place, maybe the people you find on the way can tell you where Mrs. Westergard lives.”

She carefully pulled out onto the road, not at all surprised that she hadn’t seen another car for many kilometers. The roads were fairly slick, as there’d been a heavy storm last night. The driving in town hadn’t been bad, but the further away she’d traveled, the worse the conditions had become.

It was time to pick up the pace so she could deliver her parcel and get back to town before the sun went down. It wouldn’t be good to get stuck in the vehicle in these frigid temperatures.

Another ten kilometers passed before she saw a gate. She hit the brakes so hard the car fishtailed and it took all her strength to keep it going in the right direction. When that debacle was solved, she pulled off to the side. Her hands shook and she tried to take even breaths to steady her heart.

“I should have hired someone to bring me out here,” she said as she pulled a u-turn.

A sigh of relief escaped her mouth as she pulled into the private roadway. It was dirt under the snow, and obviously, it hadn't been kept up very well. The car bounced and rattled as she drove, but she kept going. If this was the right place, she could be in and out in seconds, and then go back to the hotel where it was warm and she could order a large gin and tonic, or two.

The car rounded a corner and a house came into view. "Thank the stars," Lilliana said as she pulled up beside an SUV. Seeing the larger vehicle reminded her of the clerk at the car rental agency who had suggested just such a vehicle for her. She'd nixed the idea, and was now kicking herself for it.

She parked next to the SUV and picked up her package, determined to knock, deliver and run. After she received the woman's signature, that is. She needed some sort of proof the item had made it to its destination.

Clutching the package to her chest, she exited the vehicle and hurried up the steps, then knocked on the door long and hard. There was a shuffling noise inside and then the door opened.

An older woman stared at Lilliana, her hand moving in a quick motion that indicated Lilliana should come inside.

"No, really, I'd just like you to examine the map, then sign for it so I can leave." She thrust the packet at her, but the woman took a step back.

"Come in, come in. You must be Lilliana. We have much to do, so don't dawdle, child. Come in and have a seat in my very special chair."

Great, just what she needed; someone who thought she was here to visit for the entire afternoon. "Thanks for the offer, but I must beg off. If you'll just sign, then I'll—oh!"

Mrs. Westergard grabbed her arm and pulled her inside the house, slamming the door behind her and shooting home a bolt. For a woman her age, she had a lot of strength behind her.

"I can't stay." Her hostess scurried across the room, effectively ignoring Lilliana. "Damnit," Lilliana whispered. Why could nothing be simple?

"Mrs. Westergard?" If she stayed where she was, maybe the woman would get the message that Lilliana didn't want to dawdle. But when the woman didn't reappear, she decided a tougher stance was needed. "I just need a signature and then I'm off."

There was a lingering silence, and then Lilliana heard...humming. A soft, female voice sounding as if she didn't have a care in the world.

“Crap on toast,” she whispered, shaking her head. She could stand here and wait, or she could go after the woman, stick the papers in her face and demand a signature, and then she could leave.

Lilliana strode across the floor, the sound of her boot heels clicking against the wood floor. She approached the doorway through which Mrs. Westergard had vanished, and stopped. The woman was at a table, filling a plate with food.

Meatballs, cabbage, potatoes...the fare looked heavenly and smelled even better.

“You can put your coat over in that corner.” Mrs. Westergard indicated a chair against the wall. “Then come and have something to eat, please.”

The urge to say no, thank you, was strong. But the smell made her stomach grumble, and truthfully, the idea of getting back out on the road wasn’t something she was thrilled about. However, the longer she waited to leave, the worse the conditions would get.

“Can we take care of business first?” She wiggled the packet. “You look at the map, sign and then...I’ll eat.”

“Eat first.” Mrs. Westergard held out a plate piled high with food, and Lilliana felt as if the woman were someone’s grandmother, eager to please with her culinary skills.

“Oh, fine.” She put the packet under her chin and held it in place by tipping her head down as she took off her coat, tossing it, and the envelope, onto the indicated chair. “Promise me, though, that you’ll sign pretty quick. I don’t want to get caught up on the roads too late at night.”

“You won’t.” She held out the plate once more.

The food looked delicious. Lilliana took the proffered plate and fork and speared a meatball, taking a huge bite of it. She mumbled her appreciation around the food.

She swallowed, then said, “Delicious.”

“My son always says so. This is his favorite thing.”

*Here’s hoping she’s not keeping me around to meet her son. Unless he’s a strapping Viking. Then I’ll take a quick shag before I go. —No! No! No! Your wild days are over. Stop thinking like that.*

“Does your son live with you?” Lilliana put another meatball in her mouth.

“Not anymore.” Mrs. Westergard sat down and folded her hands in her lap.

Lilliana frowned. “Aren’t you eating?”

“No, I’m not hungry.”

Lilliana cast a glance at the table where every surface was filled with a dish of food. Strange her hostess would cook so much food for one person. Unless someone else was on their way. Like the woman’s single son.

She took another meatball, then set down her plate. She picked up the packet and waved it gently. “Your map, Mrs. Westergard. Would you like to examine it before you confirm delivery?”

“No need.”

That was a shocker. If she didn’t want to examine it, why couldn’t the map have been placed in the post? “You sure?”

“Positive.” There was her sweet smile again, as if she were someone’s grandmother. Either that or she was a really good actress who was actually a serial killer and used things like delivering maps to lure people into her web. If that were the case, at least her uncle knew where she was and expected her to check in with him tonight to make sure everything went according to plan. If she failed to call, he would ring Mrs. Westergard to see what was what.

The silence in the room was a little oppressive. Lilliana cleared her throat as she toyed with a meatball on her plate.

“Do you collect maps? Or is the artifact going to lead you somewhere?”

For a moment, Lilliana thought the woman wouldn’t answer her. And then she nodded. “It leads somewhere, yes; a place that will hopefully…” Mrs. Westergard turned her head toward the huge window that dominated the far side of the room. “Are you familiar with Scandinavian folklore?”

“No, I’m not.” Lilliana ate the meatball she’d been rolling around. They really were delicious. “Is there a fairy tale about treasure? Is that where the map leads?”

“There are different kinds of treasure.”

“Yeah, but the gold kind’s the best,” Lilliana said, putting down her fork on the plate, which set on the table. “It’s getting late. If you’ll just sign this—”

“King Gunnmarr had three sons.”

Confusion shot through Lilliana at the woman’s words. “Excuse me? Oh, wait, you mean in the fairy tale? Three sons, okay. Listen, I’ll just pull out this sheet and—”

“Rugoff, Benedikt and Egill. All three are very different. Rugoff is kind and gentle, and very eager to please people. Benedikt is a scholar, always looking for ways to fill his mind with knowledge. This will help.”

The first guy sounded okay, but for the second one, Lilliana pictured a tall, thin man with wire-frame glasses and a book in his hand. Of course, this was a fairy tale, so she should nix the glasses, she supposed. “And the last one? Egill?”

“A warrior, always ready to do battle.”

“Does this map have something to do with the story?” She waved the packet, hoping once again to get the woman’s mind back on the business at hand.

“Yes, it does. Benedikt will be able to decipher it; he will be able to lead the way.”

A chill settled in the pit of Lilliana’s stomach. She’d said he “will be” able to decipher it, not that “he could.” If someone were telling a story it would be in the past tense, wouldn’t it? Something told her Mrs. Westergard wasn’t in complete control of her faculties. Did her uncle know that? Was he this woman’s solicitor just for the map transaction, or was there something more to it than that?

If he represented her in all matters, he needed to know that his client wasn’t entirely stable.

“Are you sure you don’t want something to eat?” Lilliana asked as she put the packet down on the nearest chair—a gnarly looking one that looked very uncomfortable. It seemed to be carved from the trunk of a tree. “Maybe I could fix you a spot of tea? Would you like that?”

“They were all banished by the witch, and the time has now come to bring them back to the light. You’ll know what to do.”

Oh yes, she knew what to do. Her uncle had made sure her cell phone would work internationally, and she needed to pull it out and give him a ring. But she didn’t need to do it in front of her hostess. “Tea it is, then.” Lilliana muttered and looked around. She was eager to get back to town, yes, but she couldn’t leave this sweet woman by herself when she was obviously having a break from reality. “Is the kitchen that way?”

“No tea.” Mrs. Westergard shook her head and Lilliana clicked her teeth together. It was a habit her mother had long berated her for, and something she did a lot when she was nervous. If she couldn’t get away from this woman to call then maybe she could text him. Would that function work out here? Only one way to find out.

Lilliana grasped her purse, then picked up the packet she'd brought and sat down in the chair.

"No!" Mrs. Westergard leapt toward her and Lilliana shrieked as the air around her seemed to shimmer. "Not yet! I have more to tell you. It's not time!"

Lilliana felt as if she were on an amusement park ride gone wrong. Her stomach lurched, a nauseous feeling spread through her as the bottom of the chair seemed to cave in and she fell.

"No!" Mrs. Westergard's voice sounded as if she were speaking from inside a well. Either that or Lilliana was the one inside the well. She tried to grasp the wood, to end the sinking feeling that intensified with each passing second. But the chair was no longer there. Nothing was there. Fear gripped her, wrapped around her heart and squeezed, made her feel as if it had stopped beating.

She tried to catch her breath as she continued to flail out, looking for something to grab onto. But nothing was there, except open air that seemed to whiz past her as she fell.

And fell.

And fell.

## *Chapter Two*

Benedikt closed his book, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, then ran his fingers lovingly over the leather cover. This one was a good story, about a man who was two different people, good and bad, in one body. Mr. Stevenson had concocted a superior tale when he put his words down on paper. Or was it Mr. Louis Stevenson? Which one was his last name?

He put the book down and went to the shelf, pulling down an encyclopedia. He looked up Robert Louis Stevenson and found that Stevenson was his last name. His wife, it was said, called him Louis. Strange to have so many names one could go by.

The custom of having more than one name had long fascinated Benedikt. During his time, he'd been known as Benedikt of Gunnmarr. But as the times had progressed, people had changed the way they'd done things. They'd given babies more than one name, and the children had also taken on the surname of their father.

No more was someone simply known as Robert of England, as he supposed the great writer might have been called. He was known as Robert Louis Stevenson. *And his creative mind has provided me with hours of pleasure*, Benedikt thought as he caressed the leather one last time, then placed it on the shelf.

He had more than ten thousand books in his library, gifts from the witch that had battled his father and lost. But they weren't really from her, were they? His father had killed the witch, so it couldn't be her who delivered the food and other presents every day. Despite all his research, all his reading and studying, Benedikt had been unable to discover who his benefactor was.

During the hundreds of years he'd spent in this prison, he'd kept track of events in the outside world by asking for information about what was happening. Every day, when he sat down to break his fast, thoughts appeared in his mind. It was a female voice that relayed to him the changes in society, discussing wars that not only involved Norsemen, but those who lived in other parts of the world.

He'd come to know her as his guide, and she was a very knowledgeable woman. She'd told him of inventions and new countries, and things that had fascinated him. But one thing had done more than just peak his interest. When she'd told him of a man named Guttenberg and a thing called the printing press, things had changed.

The next morning, he'd received a copy of the Bible. The words had been foreign, but he'd been fascinated to turn the pages, to see the words. He'd asked his guide to teach him how to understand the words and she'd done it, going over everything until he knew how to pronounce the Latin words and read them, too.

As time progressed and more books became available, his guide had taught him how to read and write French, Spanish, and English. He'd started to ask for books along with his food and they'd always arrived.

He adored Robert Louis Stevenson, and Jules Verne. He even read the tales of H. Rider Haggard, loving the adventures the characters went on.

After that, he'd fallen in love with the works of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, savoring each issue of *The Strand* as it came out. He'd tried to figure out each clue and see where the mystery was going; sometimes he was right, and sometimes he was wrong. But he was always entertained.

When Agatha Christie started writing, he'd been thrilled to get her latest, reading it from cover to cover the first day it arrived. As much as he savored reading, it awoke a new passion in him: writing.

He'd long ago asked for paper and ink to put his thoughts down, but after reading *Death on the Nile*, he'd been inspired to create his own characters, to think out his own mysteries. He made them complex and thought provoking, thinking that, if he ever found his way out of his prison and someone were to see it, they would find them as entertaining as the authors he loved to read.

Now all he needed was someone to read his work. But that wouldn't happen anytime in the near future. At least he didn't think so. But he still had the feeling that something was happening, that maybe, just maybe, after years of frustration things would end happily for him.

It always happened in fairy tales; a knight in shining armor would rescue the tortured heroine. Only in this case, it would be the other way around. He'd had the premonition for weeks



now, and every day he'd check to see if he had more than food and books delivered; and every day he was disappointed.

Part of him had given up, thinking his sense was more likely just strong desires, that he wanted to leave here so much that he'd made himself think someone was coming for him. The other part of him just kept asserting that *she* just wasn't here yet.

After placing the encyclopedia back on the shelf, he went to the table and ate some cheese and bread, then downed a glass of water. His evening meal, sushi, waited for him. It would stay fresh until he was ready to eat, which would be after he'd been outside, after he'd taken a walk to the cliffs and trekked to the top.

Exercise helped him get through his day. He made the same journey nightly, the climb helping him to stay centered. He strapped on the harness, all the time thinking of the book he'd just read and how it related to his situation.

It was his father's complete one hundred and eighty degree turn that had changed his son's life. The only difference between Gunnmarr and Hyde was that Hyde had come about as a result of a scientific experiment. His father had just...changed.

After packing the rest of his gear in a duffle bag, he grabbed two knives, both about nine inches long, and attached them to his belt.

Over the years he'd found that, no matter how badly he was injured, either in a fall or a fight with a wild animal, his wounds would be healed by the next morning. That didn't mean it wasn't painful, though, and it was better to be prepared for a fight than to be caught with his pants down, to use a modern turn of phrase.

There was only one thing that could harm him, and that was a ritual test of strength and wills, which changed form every time it appeared. But it wasn't time for that battle yet. Still, things changed and he always made sure he was armed when he left his house.

As he stepped outside, he took a deep breath of the mountain air. The smell was fresh, sweet, and he stood there a moment, letting the cool air rush over his skin. There were dark clouds in the offing, which meant at some point there would be a storm, and from the looks of it, a bad one. Every time he stepped from the house he'd built, he wondered where his brothers were, if they were somewhere nearby, if he could somehow join forces with them to find they way out of this nether world, or worlds, as the case may be.

He started for the trail, heading toward the mountains where he did his daily climb. There were four large mountains within a good hour to half an hour walk and he selected which one to scale depending on his mood.

As he walked, he thought, as he always did, about his situation. He'd read several versions of their banishment in collections of folk tales, but all of them had ended with the disappearance of the sons, and of their father. Benedikt knew it was his father he faced annually, but the purpose of what he termed "the trial" was unknown. He'd found nothing in any book to provide a clue, and his repeated requests for more information from his benefactor had gone unanswered.

A chill ran through him and he stopped. The sensation was stronger this time than it had been in the past and he stood, silently, hearing nothing but the chirp of insects and the rustle of leaves on the trees.

But something was out there. The question was whether or not what he sensed was the good force that would be able to aid him, or a bad one sent by the same magic that brought about the yearly trial.

Maybe whatever he felt was sent by Loki. Whatever it was, it was out there right now. He backtracked to the house, opening the door to set his pack on the floor, then he grasped the sword that set nearby.

He hefted it in his hands, then frowned. The sword was good in battle, but he had no idea what he was up against. An opponent would see the sword straight away, and they'd either turn tail and run, or they'd have one of their own. Best to go in with weapons his unseen opponent would not be able to detect right off.

Benedikt put the sword back by the door and hurried to the weapons room. He looked around, trying to decide which would be the best to take on what was essentially a hunt. The bow and arrow would work, but he'd need time to get everything set up before he used it. That might give his opponent time to attack.

A smile crossed his face as he looked at the table set up near the wall. His brothers may have teased him about always wanting to learn, to listen to the storytellers and find out about the outside world, but he knew how to take care of himself, too. This room proved it. He'd made sure he had plenty of things to use for protection.

He walked to the table and selected a slingshot. His benefactor had left it for him and he'd modified it so that it could be attached to his arm and brought out for use in seconds.

He loaded his pockets with large glass marbles and iron balls. When he saw what he was up against, he'd decide which ammo to use. Then he took a bow and arrow and strapped it to his back.

There was the possibility that his senses were off, but after the centuries he'd spent here, he knew the lay of things. Something was afoot, and he planned on finding out what it was.

\* \* \* \*

Lilliana woke with a start, her throat feeling as if it were swollen shut. She clawed at it, trying as hard as she could to catch her breath. She panted, her breaths short and shallow, and she felt as if the world were spinning rapidly around her. She put her hands down, touching the soft, moist grass, and it took her a few moments to realize there should have been snow under her if she were sitting on the ground.

Maybe she was still inside the house, but she knew that was impossible, unless her strange hostess had a room with trees and a carpet of leafy, green vegetation. If that wasn't proof enough she wasn't inside the house anymore, the dark blue sky, full of ominous looking clouds, was an added nail in the coffin, so to speak. It looked as if it were going to rain.

Lilliana held her hand out in front of her face, twisting it from side to side. She examined her fingers, her wonder growing as she touched each digit. Why weren't her bones broken? When she'd landed on the hard-packed earth, she was sure she'd heard them crunch, and she'd felt as if someone had dropped a car on her. Then, luckily, darkness had set in.

Now that she was awake she had not an ounce of pain. And she had no broken bones. How very strange. She seemed to remember seeing sunlight when she'd landed. Had a storm moved in while she'd been unconscious, or had she been here on the ground overnight? There was no telling how long it had been since she'd sat in the chair, and the bottom had dropped out from under her.

She flexed her fingers as she thought about Mrs. Westergard's last words. Something about it not being time, about her not having all the information she needed. What the bloody hell did the woman mean by that? Obviously, there had been some sort of drug in the meatballs. Maybe that's why it was her son's favorite food, because it gave him a buzz.

“Old biddy. If you’re trying to make it so I think your son rescued me from certain death, I have a few choice words I’d like to say to you. This is a hell of a way to run a dating service.”

Her words startled her just a bit. She hadn’t expected to hear her voice spoken so loudly. It seemed to echo amongst the trees. “Are you there?”

No answer.

“Is anybody there?”

No answer.

“Am I losing my mind?”

No answer, except an internal voice that said, “Probably, but your great Aunt Rebecca lost hers, remember?”

Yes, she remembered. The “dear old thing” had been shuffled off to a “place of comfort” in Kent. Maybe that’s where Lilliana was right now, her own little *place of comfort*, some nice, quiet nut house that probably provided a family discount.

“Is it time for my medication?”

No answer.

“Is my doctor around? Or is he already visiting great Aunt Rebecca? Do we have adjoining rooms?”

No answer.

“Have I just gone barmy?”

The silence reigned. Maybe this was some sort of joke her Uncle Trenton had set up. She’d played a trick or two on him, like having his car towed by a friend of hers. He hadn’t been thrilled with that one, so she’d sent him a strip-o-gram to make up for it. Actually, she’d sent two, a man and a woman, just to throw the people in his office for a loop.

He laughed about it now, but he hadn’t been thrilled at the time. Maybe this was his way of getting back at her. But if it were, how had they gotten rid of all the snow? Was it some sort of light show? Was she actually still in the house? Or had the food been drugged?

A sharp crack of thunder interrupted her musings. Whatever was going on, one thing was for certain. She was outdoors and it was about to rain. And from the way the clouds were building it would not be a little afternoon shower. This one was going to be a whopper. She needed to find shelter. Then she could figure out where to go from there.

If getting here was as easy as sitting in a chair, maybe leaving would be as simple as climbing a tree, or one of the mountains off in the distance. She looked at the towering rocks and wondered if they were as far off as she thought they were. Maybe she could find a cave in which to hide.

Maybe after the storm her uncle would jump out and let her know this was all a big joke.

Yes, that's exactly what it had to be. She was going to have a hard time topping this one.

\* \* \* \*

Benedikt watched the blonde gaze around at the trees, then head in the direction of the mountains. He hadn't expected to find a woman here. The annual trial had never come in the form of a female, but this could be the first time. And if she wasn't the demon he battled every year, she could be a scout, sent to throw him off guard.

Sending a woman would make sense. He hadn't enjoyed feminine comfort in centuries, and when he'd seen her, his cock had instantly hardened. The urge to throw her to the ground and bury himself in her soft center was almost overwhelming, and it had taken all his willpower to stay where he was, crouched behind a tree, watching her.

When she'd first woken, she'd looked around, as if bemused by her surroundings. Then she'd called out, in English, asking about a relative and doctors. She was either trying to hide her real reason for being here, or she was as caught off guard as he had been when he'd first arrived.

Either way, it would be in his best interest to follow her, see where she went, try and gauge what was happening. If only he could tell his cock that. It pounded painfully under his breeches, and he imagined her under him, or on top of him, or to the side, or in any other position that came to mind.

He closed his eyes and could envision her taking his length into her mouth, her tongue sliding over him. Then he was in her wet center, the soft walls clenching around him. He could almost feel himself climaxing inside her, hear her cries of passion as she tightened her legs around his waist.

Benedikt dropped his weapons and hastily undid his pants, his hard cock popping out as soon as the laces were loosened. He grasped it as the image in his mind changed. She was on her knees now, holding open the globes of her beautiful behind.

"Please." Her soft plea made his dick pound even harder and he stroked it furiously as he fantasized about placing it at the puckered entrance to her behind.

“So good.” The fantasy blond wiggled her hips as he pushed further inside her.

His cock swelled as his seed rushed from his body, wetting the ground as the fantasy woman under him screamed to take her ass deeper, harder.

Benedikt collapsed against the ground, his cock still hard in his grip. What was wrong with him? Here was a woman who could be plotting his demise, or looking for a way to take him down in the trial, and he was dreaming about fucking her.

Acting like a feline in heat wouldn't help him. He needed to follow her, see if she was alone, see if she set any traps for him. To do that he needed to stop thinking with his dick. He wiped his hand on the grass and tucked himself back into his breeches.

The woman was glancing around, as if trying to decide where she should go. Another flash of lightning rent the sky and she crouched down to the ground, looking around as if she were frightened of the bright flash.

That was a hint to her character. If she were a powerful witch, the show of nature would not frighten her; in fact, she would probably draw power from it. It would be a good point to remember when the two of them were face to face.

She stood up and hurried toward the trees. Benedikt knew that path led to the mountains, which would include several caves. Maybe she was planning on taking shelter there. Or maybe her confederates were there. There was only one way to find out.

Benedikt waited a few minutes, then took off after her at a slow rate. He didn't want her to hear him, or to sense him if she were a witch. He would be able to follow her trail if he lost her, but he was pretty sure where she was headed.

The question was, who was waiting for her, and what did they have planned?

## *Chapter Three*

She should have joined the Girl Guides. Maybe then she would know how to build a fire. Lilliana sat with her arms wrapped around her knees, trying to stay warm. The sun had gone down quite some time ago, and the rain had started on her trek through the forest.

By the time she'd found a cave, she'd been soaked. She'd stripped down to her bra and panties, then searched for something she could use to make a fire. She'd found some sticks, but she had neither matches nor lighter in her purse, which had somehow made the journey with her.

The map her uncle had sent with her had also been transported to this place. She could use that for kindling, if she could find some incendiary device.

She saw the map as the start of all this trouble.

She'd gotten over the idea this was a joke perpetrated by Trenton. This was not funny, whatever it was, and there was no way he could set up something so elaborate. Something had happened to her, something supernatural in nature.

When the sun came back up, she could set her clothing out and let it dry. When she was dressed, she could start out again, see if she could figure out where she was, and how she could get out from this hellhole—back to civilization.

Her eyes drooped, and her head lolled to one side. She jerked it back up, afraid to fall asleep. On her trek to the locate shelter, she'd seen several different wild animals, none of which looked familiar. She'd managed to hide from them, but if they found her here in the cave, she was trapped. Best to stay awake in case something came for her. She might not be able to run away, but she could at least fight it.

When she'd found the cave, she'd taken a branch from a nearby tree and tried to wipe away her tracks from the ground, which was essentially mud from the rain. All she'd managed to do was stir things up and leave streaks in place of footprints, basically laying a trail to where she'd gone anyway.

The animals hadn't followed her yet, though, and she'd seen no signs of human life here. Unless they were hiding from the rain and coming out later. Maybe in the morning, some tribe of people would be waiting outside the cave door, ready to capture her.

She thought about what she would do if she found someone searching for her. "As long as they have food and a blanket, I might be happy." She shivered and tried to tighten her grip on herself. Her fingertips and toes were numb with cold.

Her eyes closed again and exhaustion settled over her. She'd walked for well over an hour to find this place, then searched for a way to start a fire for heavens knew how long. All she knew was that it had been dark for some time and she needed to rest.

If she could sleep for just a little while, things would be fine. But what would happen if something came into her improvised habitat during the middle of the night? She considered the items in her purse. She had a few pens and a notebook, her phone, and a bag that held a few cosmetics and...her eyes widened: a roll of dental floss.

The opening across the cave wasn't that wide. She could figure out some way to string the floss across the door, and if someone or something entered while she was sleeping, they would trip, and she would hear them and wake up.

She opened her bag and shuffled around the items inside. She found her little bag of cosmetics and found not one, but two tubes of dental floss. One of them was almost empty, the other not even opened yet.

Now that she had the floss, she needed to figure out a way to secure the string to the cave walls. It was pitch black in there, the only light coming from the intermittent bolts of lightning streaking across the sky.

She got up on her hands and knees, and when the next bolt flashed, she started to crawl toward the entrance, the floss clutched in her hand. She examined the entrance, running her hands up and down the bottom and finding nothing.

Then she thought about the pens in her purse. She could tie the floss to two pens, then dig enough of a hole to secure the pens in the dirt. The floss wouldn't be that far off the ground, but hopefully it would be enough to trip any animal that came in.

After another bolt of lightning, she crawled to her purse and found two pens, securing the floss with knots, then using the lids to hopefully make it more secure.



Once she was back at the door, she dug two holes at both sides of the doorway and then buried the pens. She found several large rocks and used them around the base to, hopefully, lock the pens into place. Then she flicked her finger against the floss. It moved slightly, but the pens didn't move.

It wouldn't hold up for very long, but all it would take would be one trip from an intruder and she would be awake.

She crawled back over to the wall and lay down in a fetal position, wishing her clothes were drier so she could use them for a pillow. She put her hands together under her head and closed her eyes, confident that she'd hear any animal that happened to come inside her little den.

\* \* \* \*

Benedikt crouched down and touched the string the woman had stretched across the cave opening. It was thin, and very slick to the touch. If he hadn't watched her do it, he never would have known it was there, and he probably would have caught his foot on it when he stepped inside.

"Good job," he whispered as he stepped over the contraption. He'd watched her come to the caves and pick one out, then he'd gone back to his lair to pick out more equipment with which to take her hostage. He'd returned in time to watch her set up her little trap.

Then he'd waited about fifteen minutes, knowing she'd set up the string to alert her in case someone entered the cave. She would be asleep by now, he was sure of it.

He stood just inside the doorway and let his eyesight adjust to the darkness. When he could see again, he scanned the room and found her lying against the wall, huddled in what he was sure was an effort to stay warm. She wore very little clothing, and from his readings of modern novels, he would say the clothing was a bra and panties. He'd always wondered what they looked like on a woman, and now he knew.

Beautiful. His cock hardened and clutched the handcuffs he held in his hand. He'd asked his benefactor for them after reading a detective novel not too long ago. He'd tested them on himself, and the fit had been tight around his wrists. They should fit fine around the woman.

He set down the fur and chains he'd brought with him. He'd thought about bringing ropes, but he thought the chains would frighten her more, and that's what he wanted. If she were frightened, she might be more likely to tell him what the hell she was doing in his home.

Unless she was a demon. Then nothing would scare her, but he hoped the chains would keep her prisoner.

He took a step toward her, fighting to ignore the increasing throb coming from his prick.

When he was at her side, he clasped a wrist and slapped a cuff on it. Her eyes flew open and her loud shriek filled the cave. She was a large woman, but it didn't take much to turn her onto her stomach and secure her wrists together behind her back.

"No! No! No!" She spoke English again. Interesting. He was pretty sure that meant she wasn't an agent of Loki. If she were Norse, she would have spoken her native tongue in her newly awoken state.

She continued to scream as he reached for the chain and wrapped it around her ankles, then pulled it upward, threading it through her arms and back down. Her knees bent as he pulled it tighter, securing the end to her ankles with a lock he'd pulled from his pocket.

He said a silent thank you to his protector for the items she'd provided. Every time he'd read a book and discovered something he didn't know about, he'd asked for it so he could study it, see how it worked.

Now those items were coming in handy.

He stood and took a step back, looking down at his prisoner.

Benedikt knelt down next to her and put his lips to her ear. "Who are you? Who sent you?"

She shook her head violently, turning it away from him. He stroked her blond hair and his cock threatened to erupt as she wiggled. If he removed the chain, he could spread her legs and fuck her right now. His need for her was powerful, but he needed to ignore it. It wouldn't help to give into his dick.

"Answer me and I'll let you go."

"Not bloody likely."

He chuckled and cupped her bottom. Her body shook as he squeezed a firm buttock.

"Tell me who you are."

"Up yours."

He moved his hand to the other side and squeezed. "Answer me and I shall be lenient with you."

“Go to hell.” The fear was gone from her voice, replaced by anger. It made him even harder.

He stood, grasping the fur and throwing it over her body, then he clasped her around the waist and lifted her, throwing her over his shoulder.

“I’ve read of this hell,” he said as he started for the doorway. “Something tells me it’s not a place I’d like to visit.”

He stepped over her trap, then headed toward the edge of the cliff. They weren’t far from the ground and the climb was easy. He could feel her struggling against the chains, but it would do her any good. Another reason he’d selected chains over the ropes; something told him the ropes would be easier to get out of, and he wanted to keep her secure until he had her back at his home.

She was silent as they walked, and her breasts pressed against his back. Her head, lolled as it was toward the lower part of his body, made him think once again of her being on her knees, greedily sucking his manhood.

He wanted to fuck this woman. He shook his head to clear his thoughts, and by the time they’d entered the house, he was only partially hard.

He dumped her on the bed, then went to the one bare wall to measure. He then went into the weapons room to search for restraints. The sounds of her struggles reached his ear and he imagined her tangled in the fur, trying as hard as she could to move. It wouldn’t be happening, though.

He found a few rings of steel, and some of the stouter nails he’d used to build the house. After finding a hammer, he went back to the wall, securing the rings to it so that he could secure her, spread eagle, against the wood. He gathered more chains and ran them through the rings, attaching cuffs to the tops and bottoms, wondering if his protector had imagined this day when she’d left him so many pairs of the manacles.

When he was satisfied with his work, he went back to the bed. She’d managed to throw off the fur, and from the way her shoulders moved, he knew she was breathing heavily. He undid the lock and pulled the chain from her, her lower legs falling back as he did.

She kicked out at him and almost hit a vital part of his anatomy. He laughed as he sidestepped the attempt and pulled her up. She grunted in pain as he hauled her toward the wall,

undoing the cuffs and quickly securing one wrist. He secured the other one, keeping her legs pressed tightly together with his own as he worked.

She struggled furiously, and when he'd secured her second wrist, she managed to free a leg, kicking out at him again. This time she connected with his thigh and he grunted, bending quickly to use the chains he had left to secure her ankle to the ring in the wall.

When all four limbs were bound, Benedikt took a few steps back. Her beautiful face was masked with fury and he smiled at her.

“Tell me who you are.”

“Shod off.” She pulled violently against her bonds, and he stood and watched silently until she stopped, her breasts rising and falling rapidly in their silky prison.

“Tell me who you are.” He kept his tone even, hoping it would throw her off guard.

“Are you deaf? I said shod off, and let me go, you bastard.”

He needed to get her to cooperate. If the chains wouldn't do it, maybe something else would. If she were an agent of evil, she might be the start of his annual trial. Time was of the essence. He went back to the weapons room and picked up a knife.

As he walked toward her, her eyes widened in terror as he approached.

“Please, no, I'm no...”

She was frightened but she didn't cry, which meant she was strong. He put the knife at the small strip of material that ran between her breasts, slid it under and pulled up. The material cut easily, freeing her large, beautiful breasts to his view.

He wanted to throw the knife down and stroke her, suck her, nibble on the hard nubs that seemed to scream from his attention. He was sure, though, that her nipples were hard from the cold, not from the desire to be sucked.

Plus, there wasn't time for that.

Benedikt worked quickly to cut the rest of the bra from her body.

“Now, do I need to take away the rest?” He looked down at the lacy cloth that was wrapped around her hips. “Or are you going to tell me who you are.”

“My name is Lilliana.” She gasped for breath and he wanted to reach out and stroke her cheek, tell her everything was going to be just fine. “Please don't hurt me. Please don't...”

“Shush.” He pressed his body against hers, putting his lips on her ear. Her body was soft against his, increasing the desire he felt. Right now, he didn't care if she was an agent of Loki,

she was the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen, and the thought of taking her was almost unbearable. "Tell me, Lilliana, why are you here?"

Her nipples seemed to harden even more and the feel of them almost pushed him over the edge. He could lift her just enough to bring her down on his length. He wanted to fuck her.

It took all his resolve to tell himself to heel, to not allow his physical needs to take over.

"I don't know. You must believe me, I was in this...I was...oh bugger."

He took a step back, then shook his head. "So be it, Lilliana. We'll play it your way."

And then he knelt down and put the knife against her thigh.

## *Chapter Four*

Lilliana tried to stay still, but it was hard when cold steel pressed against your cold thigh, and a man had just bound you to a wall and cut your bra off.

Who the hell was he, and what was he doing to her? Was he going to cut her because she refused to tell him why she was here? She didn't know why, so she couldn't tell him. And if she said that, she was sure he would laugh and think she was lying.

The knife slid up her panties and she knew what was going to happen next.

“Please, no.”

“Tell me why you are here.”

Oh Lord above, would he rape her? Please, no. “I don't know why, I—”

He cut the material on her left hip, the material slicing apart easily. Then he moved to the other side, and without asking another question, did the same. The material fell to the ground and she was naked before him.

“No, I—”

He stood quickly, his body pressed against hers once again. “Tell me what I want to know, and I will find covering for you.”

She swallowed hard. “My name is Lilliana Dawson and I live in London, England. I came to Norway to deliver a map to a woman called Mrs. Westergard. I was in her house, I sat down in a chair that looked as if it had been fashioned from a tree and I fell. If you look in my purse, you'll find my driving license, passport and credit cards. They will confirm who I am. Now, please, give me something to wear.”

“Tell me why you're here.”

“I just did.” She wiggled the chains. “This isn't getting us anywhere. Let me go!”

He stood a step back, then crossed the room and grabbed a chair. He sat down about six feet in front of her, stretching out his long legs. He could touch her with them if he so wanted, and she tried to keep her fear in check.

Her jailor was a large man, with close-cropped dark hair. His arms were huge and his thighs were muscular. Resting between them, pressing against his light-skin breeches, was what looked to be a very large, and very hard, cock.

“You say you’re bringing a map to a Mrs. Westergard, but there is no Mrs. Westergard here, and I see no map. So you’re lying to me.”

“No!” She looked around the room. “Where is my purse? The map is with my purse.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“It was in the cave with me.” Thinking of the cave reminded her of her stupid trick with the dental floss. Fat lot of good that did. “Please, let me go and get it, and I’ll prove everything I’m telling you.”

“I think not.” He rubbed his booted foot against her bare one. “Tell me the truth.”

“I am!” She tried to move her foot, but it was no use. She was totally at his mercy, naked for him to see. Yet he hadn’t made a move to touch her except to press against her when asking questions. *Please, please Lord let it stay that way.* “I am telling you the truth. The things I had with me in the cave will prove it. You must let me go and get them.”

“If anyone goes, it will be me. You will stay right where you are.” He stroked her foot again. “I rather like having you at my mercy. But I won’t go quite yet. I’ll give you a little time to tell me the truth.”

“I am!” She screamed the words this time and tried to shrink back at the look of anger that crossed his face. When she spoke again, she lowered her voice. “I am not lying to you.”

He stood and took a few steps closer. She could feel the heat from his half-naked body soaking into her totally naked one. One good thing about her capture was at least she wasn’t cold anymore. Just scared.

She needed to keep her head, though. If she allowed her fear to show, he would use it against her. “What is your name?”

“That’s not important.” He pressed against her again. “One more chance. Tell me why you’re here.”

His tone was low and seductive and it sent shivers up her spine.

“I did tell you.” She tried to keep her voice steady. “Please, let me loose. And let me get dressed. Please.”

For a moment, she thought he would say yes. Instead, he took a step back and shook his head. "I'll be back, and I'll expect the truth when I return."

He walked toward the back end of the house, where he'd gone to get the knife. She prayed he wouldn't come back with something else, something that he would use against her in some other way. Tears threatened to fall, but she blinked them back. She wouldn't let him see her crying.

She would find a way out of this situation. She wasn't sure how, but she would.

\* \* \* \*

Benedikt hurried to his bathroom, freed his cock and stroked it once. He came hard, the seed bursting from him in long streams. If he'd stayed in the room with her a second longer, he would have unchained her and bent her over, and that would never do.

He never should have cut off her clothing. He'd hoped it would free her tongue, would make her tell him the truth. Instead, all it had done was increase his need to to fuck her.

His cock throbbed in his hand and he stroked it again, a second climax building. The way he felt, he could do this all night. He could make himself come, but it wouldn't do any good. It wouldn't lessen the desire he felt for the woman he had chained in the other room.

Too many centuries had passed since he'd felt warm female flesh around his manhood. And staring into her beautiful green eyes while he pumped inside her would only increase his pleasure. And if she came while he was inside her?

A deep groan escaped him as he shot off again. His sac tingled as another stream left his cock. He was pretty sure if he died right now, his cock would stay hard as he traveled to Valhalla, and he was sure that was his destination. He'd already been in Hel.

He let go of his still hard cock, then wet a cloth under the running water and cleaned himself off. His dick was still hard as he fastened his breeches. He needed to think of something to do with the woman in the other room.

Her lack of magic told him she was not an agent of Loki. If she were, she already would have found out a way to break out of her chains. And she would have found a way to hurt him when he'd stripped her.

Thinking of her naked made his balls tingle again. What the hell was he going to do with her? He tried to remember if there had been something on the floor of the cave when he'd chained her, but he couldn't remember.



It had been dark and his main objective had been to make sure she wasn't getting loose from her bonds. Tomorrow, they would go back to the cave together and he would see if she were telling the truth.

Until then, he would have to keep her bound; but he would also have to feed her. There was only one bed in the house, too, since he'd never expected to have visitors. That meant they would have to share sleeping arrangements.

The handcuffs would come in very handy, again.

Seeing her still bound would pose a problem with his dick, but then again, having her anywhere in the house was doing that already.

He splashed water on his face as he considered his next move. He would have to release her from the wall, but he needed to keep the upper hand. There was every possibility when he cut her loose she would swing out at him. He didn't want to hurt her, but he had to let her think that he would if need be.

He dried his face and then went into the other room, stopping to look at his beautiful prisoner. She watched him warily and he stayed where he was, thinking once again that her beautiful curves might be the death of him. "Stop thinking with your cock," he said to himself.

"Are you hungry?" he asked aloud.

"Thirsty." Her voice was soft and her eyes were pleading as she spoke. "And yes, I'm hungry, too."

He walked to her, putting his hands on either side of her head. "You will obey me, do you understand?"

"Yes, I do."

"You will not fight me in any manner, or I will leave you in this position until I am satisfied you will cooperate with me."

She nodded and her breasts jiggled. He resisted the urge to capture a nipple and squeeze it ever so gently. "May I have clothing?"

"No."

"You can't leave me naked."

"I can do anything I want with you. You are trespassing in my home."

She shook her head violently and he fought back a smile. She definitely had a great deal of spirit. "You're the one who brought me here, so don't blame it on me."

“You showed up in my land, and you’ve yet to tell me why you’re here.”

“I did!” She pulled against her bonds, then knocked a fist against the wall. “I told you—”

Benedikt held up a finger and she stopped talking. “Yes, I know what you told me. Tomorrow, when the sun is up, you and I will go and investigate your claims of a map. Until then, you are my prisoner. Now, if you don’t follow my lead, I will do as I said and keep you chained. I hope you believe me.”

Her eyes widened and she nodded ever so slightly. Oh yes, she believed him.

The best thing to do would be to unchain her feet first. He did the left, and then the right, waiting to see if she would kick out at him. She didn’t.

“Good girl.” He smiled as she shot him a look full of venom. He undid her left wrist, and then her right, clasping them together in one hand as he unfastened a set of cuffs. He bound her wrists together, then took a step toward the center of the room.

“Please, give me something to wear.”

“I’ve already said no. If it will make you feel better, I will take off my clothes.” He watched as her gaze raked over his body, centering on his crotch.

“No.” She lifted her arms so that her breasts were covered. But the beautiful, bare spot between her legs was still visible. “Tell me, Lilliana, why do you not have women’s hair between your legs?”

“It’s called a Brazilian.” He studied her carefully. Some of the romance novels his protector had left him talked of this procedure. It had baffled him when he’d read of it, and it did the same now as he looked upon it. Not that it wasn’t attractive. Her bare pussy was very inviting, and he wanted to touch it, lick it. But he still didn’t understand the reasoning behind it.

“Why?”

“Excuse me?”

“Why do you have the hair waxed from your body?”

“You’re kidding me, right?” She tried to put her hands on her hips, but her bound wrists stopped the movement. “You tie me to a wall and expect me to discuss intimate details of my life with you just because you won’t let me get dressed? Shod off.”

She stalked toward the table, then stopped, turning around in a full circle as if she were examining her surroundings. He tried to hide a smile as she walked to the fur he’d dropped on the floor, picked it up, and held it in front of her.

“I thought I said no clothes.”

“I’m cold, you arse, and this is not *clothes*, it’s a blanket. And I thought I said—”

“Yes, I know. Shod off. You’ve said it several times.” He wanted to rip the covering from her body, but he wasn’t sure if it was in anger because she was defying him, or because he wanted to see her body as they ate. But he had to admire her determination to fight him on the clothing matter.

That told him she would be a wonderful, spirited bed partner. He wanted to skip dinner, to tear the fur from her and take her, hard and fast.

“Are you going to feed me, or not?” She glared at him. “I think there’s some sort of international law that says when you take a person prisoner, you have to treat them humanely. I had to find my own blanket. Do I need to find my own food, too?”

He took a step closer, and while her eyes widened just a little, she didn’t move away from him. “I may have let you go from the wall, but remember that until I find out the truth, you are my prisoner and will do as I say. Perhaps you should consider the chains that are still on the wall before you go issuing orders.”

“And perhaps you can—”

“Shod off?” He grinned at her and was a little disappointed when she didn’t return the smile.

“Exactly.” She marched to the table and looked around. His eyes followed her behind, which was bare since the fur was being held to her front.

“Sushi?” Her voice was loud and she turned to him. “Now I know this is some sort of joke, because there’s no fricking way you would keep my favorite food on the table just waiting for me. Uncle Trenton tipped you off. He set this up. Son of—get out here!”

Instead of marching, she ran this time, going from room to room, screaming for Trenton to appear, telling him how sick he was.

Benedikt sat down at the table and picked up a fork. He cut a piece of wasabi off the large wedge on the main plate and put it in the bowl. Then he took the soy sauce and poured it over the wasabi, using a chopstick to mix the two together.

He picked up the second chopstick and used them to pick up a piece of California roll, placing it in the mixture he’d just made, coating it liberally. He loved the taste of the spicy wasabi as it slid down his throat.

He ate another piece as her voice rang out. She screamed obscenities at “Uncle Trenton” as Benedikt ate. This reaction also reaffirmed that she wasn’t an agent of Loki. If she were, she wouldn’t lose her temper this way, and she wouldn’t be screaming at someone who wasn’t there. She would be centering her anger on him, trying to push him into getting mad, into attacking her.

This changed things totally, but he wouldn’t let her know that, not until he had a chance to examine the items that were supposedly in the cave. If he found out she was lying to him about it, then that would change things yet again.

He picked up a piece of tuna and had just put it in the sauce when she came back in. Her grip on the fur seemed to be tighter than it was, her knuckles red from being clenched together.

“Get me the hell out of here. Right now.”

“I wish I could.” He ate his tuna. “But I’m afraid it’s not possible right now.”

“What, is there a time lock mechanism on the door? How much is Uncle Trenton paying you? I hope it’s enough to hire a good barrister.”

Benedikt shrugged, then indicated the chair across from him. “I can’t make any promises there will be food left unless you start to eat right now. Sushi is one of my favorite meals.”

He snagged a piece of yellowtail and dunked it in the sauce. As he placed it in his mouth, he glanced at her. Loud rumblings coming from her belly let him know she was definitely hungry.

“It’s not poisoned, if that’s what you’re worried about.” He popped a salmon piece in his mouth. “It is delicious, and if it’s your favorite, I’m not sure why you’re holding back.”

“Oh, let’s see, some muscle-bound moron chains me to a wall, cuts away my clothing, and then expects me to sit down to dinner with him?”

“I know, shod off, right?” The side of her mouth lifted in a smile and he returned it. “I’m not going to hurt you.”

“Get me some clothes and take off these cuffs, and we’ll talk about me eating with you. If you want something, you have to give something.” She cocked her head and her green eyes flashed in anger.

Benedikt twirled his chopsticks in his soy sauce, which needed to be replenished. “I already did. I let you down from the wall, didn’t I?”

“Put me back if you want, because I’m not eating with you until I have something to wear and these cuffs come off.” She straightened her shoulders and glared at him. Her strength

attracted him as much as her beautiful body did. She'd gotten over her initial shock and was trying to take the lead. That wouldn't happen, but he would give her something.

"You have a choice, clothes or cuffs. You decide." She didn't move, but he could tell by the way her eyes narrowed that she was weighing her options. She looked down at her hands, then glanced at the food.

"I'll take something to wear. Now."

"Disappointing," he said, standing suddenly. She took a step back and he fastened his gaze on her wrists. "I rather liked the naked you. Although the cuffed you is just as...titillating."

"Jackass."

A laugh escaped his mouth as he walked toward the bedroom. He gathered a pair of breeches and a linen shirt, and then came back out and offered them to her.

In response, she held out her hands. "I need both hands to dress."

"I'll help you." When she shook her head, he laughed again. "It's not as if I haven't seen what you have to offer, which, I might say again, is very pleasing. I'll help you with the pants, and when it comes time for the shirt, I'll undo one cuff so you can slip it over your head. Then it goes back on."

"It would be easier for me to eat with them off." She batted her eyes at him and nodded.

"Maybe, but you have to look at this from my point of view. You showed up in my home—"

She held up a finger and he stopped talking. "You brought me to your home. I was perfectly fine where I was—back in the cave. If you have a problem with me, take me to the cop shop. In fact, I would prefer it."

"There are no police here." Her frown was deep, and he could tell she was trying to decide whether or not he was lying to her. "I am the only human in this land."

Her snort of derision was not unexpected. He put the clothes on the table, then sat down and picked up another bite of food.

"Leave me some!" Her stomach growled as the words left her mouth.

"All you have to do is let me help you dress, then you can eat." For a minute, he thought she was going to use the phrase that seemed to pop out of her mouth every five seconds. Instead, she sighed heavily and nodded.

“Fine, let’s do it, but I’m warning you, if you try any funny stuff, my knee will come into contact with that part of your body that will bring about the most pain. Understand?”

“Oh yes, I understand completely.”

“Good, then get off your arse and get me dressed so I can eat.”

## *Chapter Five*

When she got her hands on her Uncle Trenton, she was going to wring his neck. Where made him think up such a crazy scheme? Did he think she couldn't find a date, so he'd hired someone to chain her up then strip her naked? And now she was caught with this person for heavens knew how long.

She hadn't seen anyone on their trek here, and from the sounds of things, it was still raining outside, very heavily. If she tried to make a run for it, there was no telling what would happen.

There was a distinct possibility she could end up soaking wet in the cave where she started. There was also the possibility that the gorgeous man sitting in front of her, happily eating sushi, wouldn't get paid unless he kept her here. But was that really her problem?

"Are you going to help me or not?"

He put down his chopsticks and stood, then tugged on the fur. She tugged back. "Oh no, I don't think so. You give me the pants and I'll put them on while you hold the fur in front of me, and if you so much as take another peek at me..." she let her words trail off, hoping he would understand that she meant business.

"I've already had full view. What harm is one more glance going to do?"

"You're a jerk." She grabbed the pants off the table. "Now, hold the fur up—in front of your face."

He did it and she tried as hard as she could to wiggle into the pants without falling down. He was much taller than she was, so the legs were too long. When she'd managed to tie up the waist—who wore laced pants anyway?—she leaned over and folded up the legs.

Every few minutes she glanced up, and not once did she catch him looking over the top of the fur. When she was satisfied with the pants, she straightened.

"Okay, I'm ready for the top. I'm going to stick my hands up and you're going to undo one cuff, just like you said. Then you'll hand me the top and I'll put it on."

*After that, I'll decide whether to knock you on your arse and make a run for it, or sit down and eat some sushi.*

“All right, stick ’em up.” From his tone, it appeared he got great pleasure from saying that, and she wondered why.

She lifted her arms in the air and felt warm pressure from where he grabbed one of her forearms. She watched him put a key in the cuff and wanted to sigh in relief as it slipped from her wrist.

This was her chance. He wasn't watching her. She could ram him, using the fur as a shield, and he'd never know what hit him. He was large, but she was pretty sure she could knock him off his feet. But if she did, it created a whole new set of problems.

There was the fact she'd seen no one on their trip, and she didn't know where the hell she was. At Mrs. Westergard's house, it had been snowing and freezing cold. And here it was green, and raining cats and dogs.

Plus there was delicious sushi waiting on the table for her. What was it her mother had always said? Better the devil you know than the one you don't.

That was the game plan to stick by. She'd stay around, but when she got her hands on Trenton, she'd slap him senseless. Plus, she'd make sure the jerk in front of her paid, too. He may be gorgeous, but that wouldn't stop her from pressing charges against him. Kidnapping came to mind, and then wrongful imprisonment.

Oh yes, they'd both pay.

She put the shirt over her head and it fell to her knees. There was a tie belt with it, and she secured it around her waist. Maybe if she were nice to him, he'd leave the cuffs undone.

“I'm done.”

He lowered the fur and she watched him rake his gaze over her. “I liked you better naked.”

“So nice to know.” She pushed past him before he could bring up the issue of the handcuffs. She sat down at the table and glanced at the offerings. She'd watched him eat more than a few pieces of food, yet there was still a great deal to offer.

“You were expecting me,” she said as she reached for the California roll. She placed several pieces on a plate, then added salmon and yellowtail.

“No, I wasn't.”



“You can’t tell me you would eat all this food. Plus, it’s still cold. Who set it out for you while you were out taking me hostage? Cause I know you haven’t had time to do it.”

He sat down and loaded his own plate, then he began eating slowly, coating each portion of sushi in the sauce, stopping to add wasabi.

“What’s your name?”

“Why should I tell you my name?” His glance was suspicious and she put a piece of tuna in her mouth to give herself time to come up with an answer.

“You know mine,” she said after she’d swallowed. She couldn’t believe he hadn’t brought up the handcuffs again. She wasn’t about to, either.

“Do I?”

“Yes, you do. And when we go to the cave, I’ll be proven right. Won’t you feel like an idiot when you find out I’m telling the truth?”

“Not at all.” He ate several more pieces of food, then sat back in his chair, stretching his legs out in front of him. “Tell me about this map you propose to have.”

What was that accent he had? It wasn’t British or American, nor French or German. It might be Swedish, but truthfully, it sounded like nothing she’d ever heard before.

“I didn’t look at it.”

His eyebrows lifted just a little. “Curious. Why would you carry around something if you’ve never seen it?”

“I told you, I’m to deliver it for my uncle, who is a solicitor. But I—”

“Fell through a chair.”

Heavens above, when he said it, it sounded like the most idiotic thing in the world. She whispered, “Yes, that’s right.” then twirled her chopstick in her soy sauce, concentrating on that rather than suffering his skeptical glare.

“People don’t fall through chairs.” The doubt was deeper now, and she knew she needed to talk fast before she found herself chained to the wall again.

“Alice fell down the rabbit hole.” Was it her imagination, or had his face brightened considerably before a veil came over it?

“That’s fiction.”

She waved her chopstick at him. “So they say, but what if it’s really based on fact, and was written as fiction? Would you believe that?”

“No.” He stood suddenly and she had the distinct feeling he was going to grab her arms and link them back together. Instead, he went to the end of the table and retrieved two glasses and a pitcher.

He returned and poured two glasses of some mysterious yellow liquid, then handed one to her. She sniffed it carefully, then watched him down his own before refilling his glass.

Lilliana took a tentative sip, then murmured her approval. Lemonade. “Thank you.” Who would have thought a big, strapping man would keep lemonade to drink. She would have thought he’d give her ale.

“Well, you did say you were thirsty, although you didn’t mention it when you started to eat.”

“Well, let me just say thank you again.” She took a longer drink, then turned her attention back to her food. Lord, that sounded lame. What else could she say, though? She could think of no small talk to make, especially to a man who just hours ago had stripped her naked and acted as if he were going to interrogate her.

“What do you do in London, Lilliana Dawson?”

“Right now, absolutely nothing.” That sounded just as sad as her thank you. “I’m unemployed at the moment.”

“What do you do when you’re employed?”

“Whatever comes up.” She sat down her chopsticks and glanced around the room. “This is a lot of space for one person.”

Obviously, he thought the statement didn’t deserve a response, because he didn’t give her one. *Okay, moving on.* “What do you do, Mr. Nameless, besides hire yourself out for practical jokes? Are you just a stripper? Or a male escort? Does Uncle Trenton think I need to get shagged? Did he think I’d respond to the chains, or will you get paid extra for them?”

“Tell me, Lilliana Dawson, who is Uncle Trenton?”

“Oh you’re good. You should ask for a nice, hefty tip. It will help pay your legal fees.” She smirked at him. “And why do you keep using both my names? Is that supposed to throw me off guard? Is there a hostage takers handbook? *Keep your prisoner off guard by not getting too personal, like just using their first name.*”

“Who is Mrs. Westergard?”

“She’s a client of my uncle’s.” Lilliana pushed back from the table and imitated his stance, stretching her legs out in front of her. “So, what’s for dessert?”

“Your uncle, the solicitor?”

“Dessert?” She glanced around. “Where the fridge? Do you have cheesecake?”

Lilliana continued to scan the room, and something seemed off to her, something besides the fact that she wasn’t supposed to be here, that she was virtually a prisoner. There were no lamps, or overhead lights, yet it seemed as if it were daytime outside. The only source of light seemed to be the large fireplace against the far wall.

If he had no electricity, which he didn’t seem to, it only shored up her idea that someone else was involved in this mess. They had to be the ones who brought the sushi. Anger surged through her as she thought about being chained to the wall naked for all the world to see.

“Forget the cheesecake, just call out whoever is watching, or heaven forbid filming, this fiasco and tell them the jig is up. I want to go home. The game is over.”

“Or the game is afoot.”

Lilliana threw up her hand in disgust. “What are you some sort of Sherlock Holmes nut?”

“I love to read, yes, and Sherlock and Watson are among my favorites.”

“Great, a literate kidnapper. How lucky for me.”

“Which one is your favorite? I like *A Scandal in Bohemia* where we get to know the wonderful Irene Adler. She is a fascinating character, don’t you agree?”

It was all Lilliana could do to keep her chin from hitting the floor. He wanted to talk literature? How many men would chain you to a wall then ask about your favorite Sherlock Holmes story?

“Of course *The Red-Headed League* is very good, too. Fascinating, really, the way they tunneled under the floor to break into the bank next door. I loved it. I have all the original *Strand* magazines, if you would like to read it.”

“Thanks, but I’ve read all the stories.” Maybe making a run for it wasn’t such a bad idea. This devil seemed to be off his rocker.

“If you prefer, we could discuss something else. I’ve read the entire collection of Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys, and Agatha Christie, or perhaps the Bobbsey Twins. Or we could talk about Robert Louis Stevenson, one of my favorite authors of all time.”

She wasn't sure exactly what to say. He was looking at her with expectation unlike anything she'd ever seen before. It was as if he hadn't spoken to another person in days, maybe months.

"Um, it's been a long day. If you're not going to end this charade, can you just show me to my room, please?"

"Your room?"

"That's right. I'd like to sleep a little while." *And get as far away from you as possible.*

"Ah, well you see, there's only one bed."

"Excuse me?" She hoped her voice sounded as menacing as she wanted it to. If this jerk thought they were sharing a bed, he was nuttier than a fruitcake.

"Don't worry, I won't bite. Not at first." He had the audacity to wink and she lifted her hand to strike him. Unfortunately, it was the hand with the cuff still attached to it, thus producing a very awkward swing that he easily blocked. He clasped her wrist tightly, reaching for the other one as he did.

Lilliana kicked out her foot, connecting with his thigh instead of the place just north that she'd been aiming for. He grunted in pain and she shot to her feet, pushing back. He was too strong, though, and before she could knock him off guard and break free of his hold, he had secured the cuff to her other wrist.

"We were doing so well," he said as he took off across the room, tugging her behind him. And unless she wanted to fall onto her knees and let him drag her, she had no choice but to follow.

Visions of him forcing himself on her flashed through her mind. She couldn't stop him, or fight him; he was much too large for that.

They left the room and traveled down a short hallway before stepping into a bedroom. A huge bed took up much of the space, a large four-poster that looked as if it had been made of tree-trunks.

"No! Please, I...we can talk literature. Just not this, I'm begging you. I like Robert Louis Stevenson, too. I—"

"You needn't worry," he said as he tossed her on the bed. She tried to scramble off, but he caught her and pushed her arms above her head. "I'm not going to force myself on you."

He kept one hand on her bound wrists while the other reached for the tie around her waist. She struggled as hard as she could, but he held her in place. When he had the tie, he climbed on top of her.

Lilliana's heart raced with fear as he looked down on her. This was not Uncle Trenton. He might play a joke, but it would never include rape.

Her unnamed captor wrapped the tie around the chain that linked the cuffs, then attached it to the headboard. When he was done, he stood.

"Please, I... Let me go."

"Rest, Lilliana Dawson. Tomorrow we will go and get your map. And then we will see why you are truly here."

He stalked from the room and Lilliana tried to fight back the tears that leaked from her eyes. It was an impossible task, though, and her chest heaved, the pressure almost unbearable from the position she was in.

One thing was good, though. He hadn't bound her feet. She inched her way up, trying to get in a more comfortable position. She finally ended up on her side, facing the doorway. There was no way she would sleep, and she wanted to make sure she could see him before he came inside.

She tried to clasp the tie so that she could undo the knot, but it was no use. Finally, after what seemed like hours, she laid her head on the pillow and sobbed. Uncle Trenton definitely had things to answer for.

## *Chapter Six*

There was a male body behind her, muscular and oh so delicious. Lilliana wiggled her bottom against the cock that was definitely hard and ready for action. It felt as if it could give her a good, hard pounding.

Oh, how she loved cock, and it had been so long since she'd had one. She imagined it sliding between her breasts as she held them together. If he was long enough, she could stick out her tongue and taste him as he moved back and forth.

Or he could fuck her mouth, her pussy, or her ass. She loved getting it anywhere, but this morning, she'd go for a little titty fucking, and then he could fuck her senseless, claiming her pussy as his. She sighed and wiggled again, melting back into his warmth as a hand snaked up her belly and cupped her breast.

Her nipples hardened under his touch and wetness began to flow down below. This was a wonderful way to start a morning—with a good, hard fuck. She pushed against the hard dick and it pushed back. If it wasn't for the pants she wore, he could just slip inside her. They could save the titty fuck for later.

The large hand snaked down her stomach. When it slipped over her mons, she inhaled sharply and spread her thighs. Large, expert fingers found her clit. They pinched and she gasped as pleasure-pain swept through her.

Bliss intensified as the fingers continued to stroke her nub, rolling it back and forth, pushing it into her soft flesh. She hadn't felt anything so incredible in...well, never.

“Good morning, Lilliana Dawson.” The rough, aroused voice pulled her from her fantasy.

“Oh bugger, it's you.” She tried to pull away and was delighted to see her wrists, while still cuffed, were no longer attached to the headboard. But his arm held her firmly in place. “Let go of me. If you think I fancy a fuck with you, you're even crazier than I thought.”

“Are you sure? Your body seems to think differently.” He tweaked a hard nipple and she threw back a foot, connecting with his shin. His yelp of pain was like sweet ambrosia and she laughed.

“Does that answer your question?”

“Yes, I believe it does.” He stood and offered to help her up, but she ignored his outstretched hand.

“Where is the loo?”

“Loo?” For a minute, she thought he might scratch his head in confusion. “Oh, the toilet. That’s an English term. Loo.”

Lilliana rolled her eyes. “The loo?”

“Down the hall. I’ll take you.” He took a step toward her and she backed off.

“Don’t even think about it. Just point me in the right direction.”

Her unnamed captor pointed to the door. “Turn right and go down the hallway. I think you can find it from there.”

“Yes, I’m sure I can. And I hope you know what you can find.”

She found the loo easily enough, but it was a little hard to use the provided toilet paper with her hands cuffed together. But there was no way she was going to ask him to come in and unlock her.

When she was done, she stepped into the hallway and started out the way she’d come. She passed the bedroom, which was now empty, and then stopped at another room. It was jam-packed full of books, and her eyes widened. He wasn’t kidding when he said he could discuss any author she wanted.

The next room she came to made her eyes widen. It was full of weapons, from swords, spears and knives to nunchakus and guns. There was also a great deal of mountain climbing equipment resting on a table. Oh crap, she’d wandered into some sort of extremist camp. But what sort of extremist? Was he looking to overthrow the government and force everyone to read eight hours a day, then climb a few mountains before going for target practice?

“There’s another weapons room at the front part of the house,” he said from the doorway. She whirled around to face him. “I like to have things close at hand up there, in case I need them.”

“Good plan.” No sense pissing off a man who owned enough weapons to open his own shop.

“What would you like for breakfast?”

“Waffles, and bangers.”

“Bangers?” He had the same confused look as when she’d said loo, then he snapped his fingers. “Sausages. Perfect. And tea?”

“Yes.”

“As you wish. No beans? I’ve heard the English like beans with their breakfast.”

“No, thank you.” He was being very polite this morning.

“When you’re ready, come into the main room.” He turned and left and she stared at the weapons. He was awfully trusting. She could grab one of the knives and use it against him. Why would he just leave her here with them? Did it show that he trusted her, or did he know he could stop an attack before she got one off? Probably the latter, she decided.

She might be thirteen and a half stone, but she was no match for the man who had enslaved her. And as much as she hated to admit it, part of her body was still aching for his touch. When she’d wiggled against him, she’d felt a cock that could provide her with hours of entertainment, she was sure. And he’d definitely been hard and ready to do just that.

Lilliana left the room without a weapon, following the heavenly smell of just cooked waffles and bangers into the main room. Her “host” sat at the table, pouring tea into delicate cups.

“I put in milk and sugar. I hope that’s right.” This time his look was inquisitive. “Some of the characters from the book like both, but some like one, or the other. I took a chance on both.”

“You’re right,” she said, sitting down. She had definitely dropped into some sort of alternate reality. She held out her cuffed wrists. “Please?”

For a minute, she thought he would say no. But then he reached into his pocket and, to her amazement, undid both cuffs, dropping them next to his plate.

“Do you pray to your god before you eat?”

“Not as much as I should, obviously.” She picked up a fork. “I believe in Him, but I’m afraid I don’t pay as much attention to Him as I should. What about you?”

“I thank Odin for everything, for I think it’s because of Him that I’m still alive.”



That caught her off guard. She wasn't much of a student, but she remembered Odin was the official Norse god, the top dog so to speak.

"So, you're a Viking?"

"Yes." He closed his eyes and she imagined him saying a prayer. She did the same, but not to Odin. She asked for help out of her situation. When she opened her eyes, she noticed that he was already eating. She followed suit, trying not to think about the fact there was no kitchen, no refrigerator, and no way for him to have prepared this food.

After a few long moments of silence, she cleared her throat. "So, we're going to get my purse today?"

"If that has the map, then yes, that is what we are going to do." He finished his first plate and refilled it from a huge stack of waffles. It was only then that she noticed there was other food on the table, what looked to be Shepherd's Pie, and a whole plate of meatballs. There was also cooked squash and green beans, strawberries and cream, and a large chocolate cake.

"Where did all this food come from?"

"That is of no concern to you."

"Oh really? The same way your name is of no concern? You know, you napper, you need to give so you can get. I don't like being in the dark."

"My name is Benedikt." He gave her an even glance and she frowned. Where had she heard that name before? It seemed to have just been recently.

"Do you have a last name?"

"Not in the sense of your time."

Okay, that was freaky. "What does that mean?"

"I am Benedikt of Gunnmarr."

Cold seeped into her bones as she remembered Mrs. Westergard's words. King Gunnmarr had three sons...and one of them was named Benedikt. It wasn't Uncle Trenton who had set this up. It was the crazy woman who had tried to force-feed her meatballs.

"You're her son—Mrs. Westergard's, I mean."

"My mother is dead." He stood suddenly. "And she has been for many years. You had better eat because we are leaving very soon."

He stalked to the back end of the house and Lilliana watched him, her food forgotten. Something very off was happening here, and she was afraid that it wasn't a joke, but that she

had, indeed, been pulled into another realm. She tried to remember what the woman had said, but she'd been too busy wondering how she would find the old woman help, since she was obviously off her rocker.

But what had she yelled at her as the world slipped away? She'd told her to wait, that she wasn't ready to go yet. That meant that Lilliana didn't know everything she needed to for this little voyage.

"No shit, Sherlock." The world seemed to slip away as reality set in. She wouldn't be going home anytime soon. She was stuck here with Benedikt, the wonder Viking who had a gorgeous body and a wonderfully hard cock nestled between his thighs.

"You haven't finished your food." He was beside her now, buckling a holster around his waist. He put his foot on a chair and secured a tie around his thigh.

"Planning on trouble?"

"It happens." He nodded at her plate. "You need to eat. It may be several hours before we return."

She wanted to tell him that she wasn't hungry, but he left without giving her the chance. She ate a few bites, the food feeling like lead in her stomach. Several pulls on the tea helped settle her nerves.

Benedikt came back into the room and her eyes widened as she watched him sheath two knives in the belt and stick a large gun in the holster.

"Is that really necessary? I mean, are the things here that scary?"

"If you prefer, I will go and find your things. You can stay tied to the bed."

"Oh no." She wiggled a finger at him. "There's no way you're leaving me behind, especially tied to the bed. What happens if you die while you're gone? Then I'd starve to death. Not something to look forward to."

"As you wish. But life here can be harsh. You need to follow my lead and not stray from the path. Do you understand?"

She saluted him, and the frosty look he gave her told her he didn't appreciate the gesture. He was obviously not happy with her for bringing up the subject of his mother. Should she say she was sorry? Or would that just piss him off more? Probably better just to not approach the subject again.

"Speaking of starving to death, we're not leaving until you finish the food on your plate."

“Heavens above, you sound just like...” She stopped speaking and turned to her plate, forking the food into her mouth in a hurry. It really was delicious and she wanted to ask him who had made it.

Instead, she finished eating and showed him the empty plate. “Do I pass inspection?”

“You do.” He stalked toward the door. “Let’s go.”

His mood had turned. It was probably best if she stayed quiet and walked after him. They stepped out into the warm morning, the smell of rain still lingering in the air. The grass and trees were a bright green and she knew that meant this area saw a lot of rain. She hadn’t seen anything on her trip to the house, being slung over his shoulder and all, and when she’d arrived to this strange realm, she’d been too shaken to notice anything detailed.

Now she took everything in. It really was a very beautiful place. She wouldn’t say anything to Benedikt about it, though. What she wanted was for him to tell her the story of how he came to be here. Had he sat in Mrs. Westergard’s chair, too? Was she setting up her own little fairy tale, kidnapping people and depositing them in the middle of nowhere so she could get her jollies?

Maybe after she showed him the map, they would sit down and discuss things. But only if he were in a better mood than he was right now.

They walked in silence, and from time to time, Lilliana wanted to stop and take a look at the beautiful flowers that dotted the landscape. They were unlike anything she’d ever seen before—purples and blues and reds, and the shapes were different, some of round and some of them triangular.

“Do the flowers have a name?”

“Yes.” He continued to walk. “They’re called flowers.”

She stopped in her tracks. “If you’re pissed off at me, go ahead and tell me what’s wrong. I’m not sure I want to spend time with you when you’re acting like a child.”

He stopped and turned to her, and there was a smile on his face. It wasn’t quite as bright as the one he’d given her this morning when he’d been laying in bed, but it was an improvement over the scowl that had taken up residence there for the past twenty minutes or so.

“You’re right, of course. Forgive me. Sometimes I get...being here just...I’m sorry. Now, it looks as if it might rain again, and I would rather not be caught out in it. So we need to hurry.”

Lilliana glanced up at the sky. Dark clouds were indeed forming. How had she missed that? Maybe it was because it rained so much at home that she expected it. She picked up the pace, hurrying after him.

When they finally got to the caves, she was out of breath, but he was already climbing the slope to the place where she'd taken shelter. Had it really been that steep? She sure didn't remember it.

She put her foot on the bottom step and searched for a handhold, stopping when he called her name. "Stay here, but don't wander off. It will only take me a few moments to retrieve your belongings."

"Sounds like a plan to me." She sat down on the bottom step, listening to his soft footfalls as he made his way to the cave. Hopefully some thief hadn't come along and taken her things, but then again, he told her there were no other people here except the two of them, so that wasn't possible, was it?

She heard a crackling sound and she turned her head, expecting to see Benedikt. Instead, she saw a snake, a huge one, dangling down from the cliff above her. She screamed and jumped down, and the snake fell onto the spot where she'd just sat.

Lilliana turned and stared at it as it slowly slithered down the rock, heading toward her.

"Benedikt!" He didn't answer her and the snake kept coming. It was unlike any serpent she'd ever seen. It was purple, with yellow diamonds on its back, and it was huge—she'd swear it was six feet long if it was an inch. There was nowhere for her to go but into the trees, or back to the cliffs; and the snake was in the way of her doing the latter.

She was just about to turn tail and run when Benedikt's soft voice sounded from above. "Don't. Your fast movements make it want to give chase. Stay perfectly still."

As hard as it was to do, Lilliana followed his instructions. The snake's pace seemed to slow, and then a sound from behind caused it to change directions.

Benedikt had jumped down from the ledge, a knife in each hand. He advanced on the snake, which had stopped and not moved an inch toward him.

"You're not supposed to be here yet," Benedikt said. "You're changing things."

"Not allowed." Lilliana gasped at the last words, which she realized came from the snake.

“What the fuck?” She took a step back and the snake redirected its attention to her. It started to move again, faster this time, and Lilliana ignored Benedikt’s order for her to stand still. She turned and bolted for the trees.

Behind her, there was the sound of a scuffle. She stopped and turned to see Benedikt on top of the snake, knife raised. And then suddenly the snake vanished. Benedikt’s knife swished through the air and hit the dirt where the serpent had just been.

He lunged to his feet and sheathed his knives before running back to the cliffs where he grabbed her clothes and purse. She noticed the envelope sticking out from somewhere in the bundle.

“What the hell was that?” she blurted as he hurried back to her, grabbed her hand, and pulled her toward the path they’d taken to get there. He ran, tugging her behind him.

She tried to dig in her heels, to halt their flight and demand that he answer her question, but he was too strong for her. Finally, she managed to grab a branch, which gave her the leverage she needed to pull back on his hand. He stopped and looked at her, irritation clearly written on his face.

“I’m not going another step until you tell me what the hell that was.”

“That was my father,” he said, coming back to draw her closer to him. “He left this time, but I can’t guarantee that he will the next time. We need to get inside, now.”

“Your father’s a snake?” She tried to pull away from him. “What was your mother, a rat? Did he eat her, is that why she’s dead? What are you? I don’t want to go with you if—”

“Lilliana.” His voice was calm; he let go of her hand and tried to stroke her cheek. She moved away from his touch and he didn’t try to force it. “If he comes back, he will try to kill you. And I can’t guarantee that he won’t succeed. Please, let us go back inside the house. It is the only way I can guarantee you one hundred percent protection from him.”

If she hadn’t seen it herself, she would think he was as loony as Mrs. Westergard. She thought about digging in her feet, telling him she wasn’t going anywhere until he told her exactly what the hell had just happened. Then an image of the snake appeared in her mind. She had a feeling that she wouldn’t be as successful as vanquishing it as Benedikt had been.

He started to walk again, and she fell into step behind him, wondering where if the path would lead back to the house, or if they’d go somewhere totally off the map.

## *Chapter Seven*

He was running around like a banshee, pulling books off shelves and slamming them onto the table. Then he would sit and read, his hands pulling at his hair.

Twice she'd tried to get him to talk to her. The first time, he'd just waved his hand in her direction. The second, he'd gone to the shelf and pulled down a book, thumbing through it until he found what he wanted.

He'd placed it in front of her and pointed, then gone back to his own book. At first, she'd been tempted to throw the book at his head. But then she'd sat down to read. Her body had turned downright frigid.

The folktale talked of King Gunnmarr, who had three sons, Rugoff, Benedikt and Egill. The King had turned greedy and summoned a witch to give him power, wealth and victory in battle. But when the time had come to pay her for the gifts, he'd refused to give her the emerald she'd wanted. In response, before Gunnmarr could kill her, the witch had banished his three sons to the underworld.

And there they were to remain, until the end of time.

Lilliana looked at the sketch of the three sons, then looked back at the gorgeous man reading the books in front of him. The resemblance was incredible. She tried to tell herself that didn't mean anything, but then there was Mrs. Westergard's statement about the King having three sons, and the whole chair thing. And the change from freezing snow to constant rain.

She didn't want to believe it, but there was a great deal of evidence to show that she'd just fallen straight into the middle of a folktale. And she wasn't sure how to get out.

They'd been sitting here for hours now, and Benedikt didn't look as if he were getting up from his books anytime soon. He could probably sit there for hours more. Hell, he'd probably been doing just that for the last...how many years?"

"How is it that you speak English? And that you know about Sherlock Holmes and Agatha Christie?"

“The protector,” he mumbled. “She delivers food, and anything else I desire.”

“Does she give you a daily rub and tug, too?”

He actually looked up from the book he was reading then, a frown on his face. “Rub and tug...oh, you mean sex. No, I have to tug myself.”

Benedikt turned back to his book and Lilliana laughed. “So that’s why you’ve been hard since I’ve been here,” she whispered.

“Exactly,” he replied without looking up. “I would like to fuck you, but I won’t force myself upon you.”

Holy shakers, did her nipples tighten at his words? What sort of man just blurted out that he wanted to fuck you, but was basically waiting for you to make the right move? One that had spent the last several thousand years by himself, obviously.

“Um, so what does the map say? Does it show you a way out? For both of us?”

“Not exactly.”

“What does that mean?”

“It’s more like a family tree.”

Lilliana rolled her eyes. “I’m still expecting someone to jump out and say, ‘Smile for the birdie.’ Tell me, whose family tree is it?”

“Mine.” He motioned her over and, despite her misgivings, she went to him, standing over his shoulder and looking down at what was indeed a tree drawn on white paper. It had numerous branches at the top, but only three roots. Off one of the roots was a smaller offshoot, labeled with the names of Gunnmarr’s three sons.

“What does it mean?”

He was silent for a long time, and then he pointed to each one. “I’ve been reading a study of Norse mythology by a woman named Abella la Sistra. She’s a scholar from Madrid. I read it before, when the book appeared a few years ago, but I never paid much attention to it.”

She waited for him to expound, but he didn’t. Was she going to have to pull the story out of him like a dentist pulls a tooth? “And?”

“How much do you know about Norse mythology?”

“I know the gods Odin, and Thor, and Loki. But other than that...nothing.” She felt like a moron. Why hadn’t she paid more attention in school? She’d been more worried about Stuart and

what kissing him would feel like. Too bad, it had been wonderful at first, then turned sour when she found out he was shagging Sheri and Melissa.

“Yggdrasill is the tree that gives life to all Norse lands, from Odin to Hel.” He looked at her in anticipation.

She nodded. “Okay, I get it so far.”

“It has three roots, but when Abella la Sistra studied it, she said she saw a very small offshoot from one of the roots. She wrote that she studied drawings of Yggdrasill for years, and that the smaller root started to appear in all the reproductions. Her studies led her to a woman named—”

“Mrs. Westergard.”

“Exactly.”

“The chair I saw in her house looked as if it had been carved from a tree. I remember thinking that it was strange looking, and would probably be uncomfortable to sit in.”

“I think your Mrs. Westergard tapped into Yggdrasill and somehow sent you here. Not only that, I think she sent someone to Rugoff, and someone to Egill.

Lilliana felt as if a fist had just slammed into her stomach. Air left her lungs and she clawed at her stomach. Was she stuck here? “Excuse me? She just decided to send us down as some sort of purported sex slaves?”

“Unfortunately, no.” He had the audacity to wink at her. “I think you’re here to help me escape.”

“And how do you get that from a drawing of a tree?”

He smoothed his hands over the paper and she couldn’t help think that, for a scholar, he had wonderfully large hands, which could probably provide a few hours of sexual pleasure.

“The three main branches of Yggdrasill lead to different places, from the home of the gods, to the forest, to the icy plains. Abella la Sistra writes in her book that at some point, she believes the tree sprouted the new root, and that is where the sons of Gunnmarr were banished. She theorizes that, if the sons could meet in a general location, they could fight their way out.”

“That’s all it would take? Just to climb a tree?” She’d never been much for that type of activity, but if it would get her away from here and back home, she’d be willing to give it a shot.

“Again, not exactly. Before my father had the witch put to death, she stole the jewel she wanted and placed it in a bronze box that could only be opened by three keys.



“Let me guess, you have one, and your brothers have the other two.”

“Yes, and every year, we face a trial, a fight with our father, for the keys.”

The air was slowly creeping back into her lungs, but she still felt as if one good punch would make it so she would never breathe again. “Does he always appear as a snake?”

“No, he chooses different forms. I think he came today to let me know that your appearance was, as you might say, not playing by the rules.”

“Charming.” Lilliana moved toward the fire. “I could use a cuppa right now.”

She turned just in time to see a teapot and two cups appear on the table. A gasp escaped her throat and she backed away. “What...how...?”

“My benefactor. She provides food daily, provides books, weapons, and pretty much anything I ask for.” He gave her a bright smile. “Except female companionship. Until now.”

“I’m not your sex slave.”

“No, but I have enjoyed having you’re here, having another person to talk to.”

“Yes, I’ve seen the evidence of how much you’ve appreciated my appearance.” She pointed at his crotch. “You’ve been hard for the past day and a half.”

“Yes, I have. I’ve relieved myself several times, but I’m afraid it’s been more gratifying than satisfying, if you know what I mean.”

“Yeah, I get it. You’re getting your rocks off, but not really getting what you want. Well, don’t expect me to lie down and spread my legs.”

“I’m fine with the wall, or the chair, or the table...”

She couldn’t help but laugh. “I get your point, but I’m not getting your point. Not right now, anyway. I need time to process what you’ve told me. A cuppa will be great, but I also need a nice, hot bath.”

“I’ve got just the place. I’m even willing to scrub your back...when you’re ready.”

“Keep the loofah in reserve; maybe some other time. For now, just point me in the direction of the bath.”

“As you wish, madam.” He got up from the table, bowed slightly, and headed toward the back end of the house. After a few moments, Lilliana followed him, wondering if a bath would help, or if nothing would clear her mind of the questions that rolled around inside it.

\* \* \* \*

He could hear her bathing, the sounds of the water splashing in the large tub sounding like an invitation. He wanted to join her, strip off his clothes and walk into the warm water, scrub her back and then sheath himself inside her.

Benedikt closed his eyes and envisioned the look of rapture on her face as he stroked her, as she shuddered in climax. He pressed the heel of his hand against his hard cock, willing it to go down.

As usually, his manhood had a mind of its own. It seemed to harden, the feeling almost painful. She'd been in there for a while now, and it had been one of the toughest things he'd ever done to sit and look down at the map in front of him.

When he'd first read Abella la Sistra's interpretation of the folktale, he'd laughed, then forgotten about it. But to have Lilliana appear, carrying the map, showed him how wrong he'd been. If he had paid attention to the words when he'd first read them, would he and his brothers be released now? Or did they have to wait for the time to be right.

And if they had to wait, why was it now? "Will you answer my questions?" He'd hoped for his protector to answer him, talk to him like she had when she'd taught him to read and speak the many languages of the modern world.

"Which question?" He turned sharply at the sound of Lilliana's voice.

"I thought you were bathing."

She stood not far from him, wrapped in the same clothes she'd worn earlier. "I was beginning to feel like a prune. It's amazing that you have hot water without a water heater, and that you have a toilet and a sink, but again, no pipes. Is it this person you're trying to get to answer your questions the one who provides you with water?"

"And food."

"And guns and knives." She laughed a little at the last part and he returned her smile.

"Are you hungry now?"

"No." She had a piece of the shirt caught between her thumb and forefinger and was working it back and forth. "I'm just tired, so I think I'm going to bed now. What time is it, anyway?"

"It's dark, but I don't really keep track of time. I count the days by the sun coming up, and then going down. But I don't worry about the time like they do in the books I've read."

She opened her mouth as if to respond, then closed it tightly. The silence became uncomfortable and he wondered if he should bring up a different subject, say something to help her deal with everything that had been laid at her feet today.

“Would you like me to ask for special food tomorrow? Perhaps something that you would enjoy?” He followed her glance to the table where the food that had been delivered for today sat untouched. “Or maybe we should eat something now.”

It seemed at first as if she would say no. But then she went to the table and picked up a plate, piling it high with Shepherd’s Pie and some toasted bread. “If we ask for steak, will we get it?”

“Oh yes. I can remember the first time I asked for a filet mignon. I’d read about it a novel, and it was the only thing I requested the next day. When I tasted it, I thought it was the most heavenly thing I’d ever put in my mouth.”

Her laugh intoxicated him. “You know, I think I had the same reaction when I ate it, but I was about ten at the time.” She ate a few bites of her food, then fixed a sweet gaze on him. “Have you tried lobster? Or lasagna? I love Italian food. And, for dessert, cheesecake. Delicious.”

She toyed with her food and he could see that her hand shook just a little.

“How did you adjust to being in this place by yourself?” she asked.

Benedikt sat back in his chair. He toyed with his food the same way she had just done. “At first I thought I would lose my mind. I climbed mountains, thinking I would be able to see all through the land, to find my way back home. But I found nothing.”

His stomach ached just a little as he recalled those first days in this prison. “The food would appear, and it would keep me sated, and I used to scream at my protector to answer my questions, to tell me what I wanted to know.”

Lilliana watched him intently now, ignoring her food. “When did the books start?”

“I would say around the eighteenth century was when I received them full time. I had a copy of the Gutenberg Bible, and after that, it was sporadic. But once books were published by printing press for public distribution, I received them often. And I learned to read and write many different languages. Everything was perfect, except for the fact that I was alone.”

She turned her head slightly. “I have to say I’m very happy that you’re here. Despite the whole chained-to-the-wall-cutting-off-my-clothes thing.”

“I’m afraid I’m not very good at it, seeing as how I have been alone so long. If you’d like to practice it again, I’d be willing to try.”

Her smile captivated him. “I think not.”

“Shame.” He hoped the look he gave her was seductive.

“As long as we’re on the subject, though, I think we need to talk about the sleeping arrangements. You said there’s only one bed?”

“It didn’t seem to be a problem last night.” A flush brightened her cheeks and it made him want her even more.

“That’s because you chained me to the bed and left me there.”

“I can do it again, if you like.” He wanted to touch her. “As I remember, you rather enjoyed my attentions.”

“I was sleeping!”

“Not at the end. You were awake, and you loved it.” Benedikt licked his lips. “We could enjoy ourselves and, as some of the books I’ve read lately say, there will be no strings attached.”

“Fuck buddies?”

“I love the sound of those words coming from your lips.” A smile spread across her face, but quickly disappeared. The short-lived smile made his heart race. “We could be here for a while.”

“Oh, that’s a charming seduction, ‘By the way, there’s no other humans within miles. Wanna fuck?’ Makes me wet just thinking about it.”

“So you want seduction?” He sat forward. “Lilliana, I’ve been alone for so many years that just talking to you makes me hard, but you know that already.”

Ah yes, the smile was back.

“But if it’s seduction you want,” he continued, “then it’s seduction you will have, starting tomorrow. For now, I’m going to take you to the bedroom and put you to bed alone. But starting in the morning, you’re mine.”

“I didn’t say I wanted seduction.”

He couldn’t quite read the expression on her face. “Then tell me what you want.”

She stood and walked toward the doorway. “I’m going to bed now. Try to figure out what I want, Benedikt, if you can. But something tells me you’ll fail.”

## *Chapter Eight*

Four days later, Lilliana wondered exactly what Benedikt had up his sleeve. He hadn't started the seduction the next morning, which surprised her. Of course, seduction didn't really work with her. She wasn't a roses and candy type of girl, and he'd obviously figured that out from her statement.

Not that it would be hard to figure out, since she'd plainly said she didn't want seduction. But would he actually give her what she wanted? Would he figure it out? And if he did, would he just go for it, basically throwing her to the bed and having his way with her?

That would turn her on. Just the thought of it turned her on. The last few days had been good, with them getting to know each other. They'd given small glimpses into their lives. Actually, she'd been the one giving a peek into hers. She basically knew all about his from reading the folktales; after that, she knew he'd spent time here, learning to read and speak many different languages.

And what had she done? She'd been a party girl, flitting from job to job and trying to hit the trendiest spots in Soho. Compared to him, she felt like a total slacker. She only knew how to speak two languages, English and French, and the trip she was on now was the furthest away she'd ever been from home.

Well, the trip to Norway. She wasn't exactly sure where she was right now, or how far it was from London. If Benedikt was to be believed, she was under a huge tree, far away from the surface of the Earth.

Yet there was sunshine outside. Sometimes. Mostly there was rain, and the accompanying clouds hid the sun. Which made for a lot of time indoors. She could see why he'd turned to reading books for amusement.

Maybe she should do the same thing, because she'd just had breakfast and there was nothing to do. She'd eaten alone, since Benedikt hadn't shown up. Since there was only one bed,

they'd shared it at night. He'd always come in after her, and woken up before she did. During the night, they'd spooned, and she'd always felt his hardness teasing her, the promise of a good fuck.

But he hadn't made a move, and every day she was becoming more and more frustrated. She wasn't sure what he did all day long, but he usually showed up for dinner, and they would talk about things that seemed so trivial, mostly about whether or not they thought someone was going to show up at any day and suggest they climb a tree trunk together.

Benedikt was of the mind that at some point, his brother Egill and an unnamed woman would wander into the house, and then the four of them would go in search of the tree. When they'd climbed for a while, they'd find Rugoff and another woman, and then, at some point, the three brothers would find their father and fight the final battle against him.

Lilliana thought it sounded pretty lame, but she was fairly new to the "I'm in a folktale world."

Not that it was a bad place to be. She hadn't done any cooking, or dishes, or any of the other horrible chores associated with keeping a house. Those things seemed to happen while they were sleeping. She supposed the same unseen force that delivered food also cleaned house.

If she could bottle up this type of thing and sell it back home, she wouldn't have to work. She'd be rich from the profits. Women all over the world would pay a fortune to have someone come in and clean their house while they slept, then make sure their families' favorite foods were delivered without having to dirty a pot.

Of course, that made for a lot of down time, which was what she had right now. It would be nice if she had something to do during the day. Maybe she should go to the library and choose a book, since it didn't look like Benedikt was going to hit on her anytime soon.

She'd read most of the classics while in school, and she wasn't into rereading things. Maybe he had some newer books from which she could choose.

As soon as she got up from the table, the remnants of her breakfast disappeared. "Thanks." She waved her hand at the air. "Appreciate your help. If you could show us the way out, maybe with a big flashing exit sign, that would be perfect."

Nothing appeared and Lilliana huffed. "Thanks for the help." She started for the library, stopping when Benedikt stepped into the room. As always, he wore linen pants and was bare-chested. He was gorgeous.

"You know, they make jeans nowadays. I'm sure you could ask—her—for them."

“I’ve tried them; too constricting.” She started to walk toward the library and he came up behind her, putting his hands on her hips and pulling her backward, her ass resting against his crotch. “They don’t allow my cock to breathe.”

Benedikt wiggled his hips and Lilliana felt her clit tighten. Oh crap, he was right on target. “Where are you going, Lilliana?”

Oh damn, he was hard, pressing against her backside and... “What?” Was there something wrong with him? Did he want to fuck, or talk?

“I said where are you going? Perhaps I can join in your morning activities.”

“I thought maybe you had other activities planned.” She wiggled her hips the same way he’d just done.

“Hum.” He kept her tight against him. “I thought about rock climbing.”

“Excuse me?” She tried to pull away, but he wouldn’t let her go. “There’s a snake out there that resembles your father, remember? We said we were going to stay indoors until we figured out a way out of this place.”

“Who said anything about going outdoors?” Her body cried out in need as he stepped away from her.

“How are you going to climb a mountain in the house?”

Holy mackerel, her body tensed at the smile he gave her. “Come with me.” He walked to the hallway without looking back and Lilliana stared at him in wonder.

Did she have anything better to do besides see what the hell he was up to? No, she didn’t. She hurried after him, wondering if the house had grown since that morning. She didn’t remember rooms being back this way.

“Have you been building the last few days?”

He was whistling now, ignoring her as he walked.

“Hello?”

Benedikt disappeared into a room and Lilliana hurried behind him, stopping in the doorway with her mouth open. They were standing in front of a mountain. Sunshine flooded the room and the smell of trees and grass filled her senses.

“What the hell?”

“Do you like it?” He stepped out of his pants and her eyes widened. He was hard and ready for her, but instead of coming toward her, he started strapping himself into belts and harnesses. But all she could focus on was the hard cock jutting out from his body.

“Um, rock climbing?”

Was it hot in here, or was it just her?

“In the nude.” He picked up a harness and walked toward her. “Have you ever done it?”

“Which *it* are we talking about? When I’m naked, there’s usually only one activity on my mind.” He standing in front of her now, and if she moved her hand, she could touch him, grasp his length in her hand and see if she could fit her fingers around him. She imagined she could, but the fit would be tight.

With his free hand, Benedikt tugged on the end of her shirt. “Why don’t you take this off?”

“Not for this.” She waved her hand toward the mountain. “I think climbing rocks in the nude would be dangerous.”

“I’ll protect you.” He fixed her with a hard stare that made her body flush with heat. “Now take off your clothes.”

They stared at each other, and then she pulled her top over her head. As she stepped out of her pants, she wondered why she hadn’t asked the “protector” for other clothes. She would focus on that later, though. Right now, she wanted to know how far they’d get in this little game before he took her.

“You know, from the looks of your...” she trailed her fingers along his length, “equipment, I would say rock climbing is the last thing on your mind.”

Her breathing increased as he glanced down upon her. This was it. He would drop the harness and clasp her breast. Then he would—

The sound of the harness jingling pulled her from her thoughts. He knelt in front of her and held it out. “Step in, please.”

“Excuse me?” Was her body so unappealing to him? She didn’t think it was, not from the perpetual hard-on he’d had since she’d arrived.

“I said—”

“I heard what you said. Can we stop the game and just...?” She moved her hands in circles, hoping it would encourage him to finish the statement for her.”



“Just what?” He jostled the harness and she stepped into it, one leg at a time. He fastened it around her waist. “Don’t worry, I know this is your first time, so I’ll be the belayer. I’ve already anchored a rope to the top, so we’re all set.”

“All set for what? If you think...” She inhaled sharply as his hands grasped her ass and his tongue pressed into her pussy. Her knees shook as he lapped at her, his tongue eagerly exploring every fold and sucking up her juices.

Benedikt’s murmurs of desire let her know how much he was enjoying what he was doing. She kept one hand on his head, running her fingers through his short-cropped hair. With the other, she massaged her breasts, flicking her hard nipples, wishing it were his tongue playing with them.

But that craving wasn’t enough to take him away from what he was doing. She felt as if she would lose her balance and fall on top of him. But as long as her pussy was still on his mouth, things would be fine.

Unless her pussy fell on his cock. That would be just as fine.

“Benedikt, I...” She was about to come, the peak building inside her. Her body shook and she let go of his hair. “I need to...lie...bed...”

He tightened his hold on her, his tongue sliding up and down until he came to her swollen opening. When he tilted his head and pushed inside, she came. He moved his mouth up to her clit, sucking it into his mouth, nibbling on it with his teeth.

“Bugger me!” Lilliana clasped his head between her hands and ground herself into him, a second climax rolling through her, the feeling more intense than the first one.

Benedikt stood so suddenly that Lilliana felt as if she would collapse. His lips glistened with her wetness and he gave her a predatory grin that shook her to her very core. He grasped her wrists in his hands and pulled her toward him, then turned her suddenly and pushed his palm flat on her back. She bent, then fell to her hands and knees, crying out as he fell behind her, and thrust inside her.

“Ah, yes.”

“Yes, I know.” He clasped the harness and held it tight as he pounded her. “It took me a little while to come up with the proper *seduction*, but then I remembered your words about being sent here as a sex slave, and how you rejected the idea.”

He stopped fucking her, his cock pulsing inside her pussy. “But I thought, what if that’s what she really wants? What if she is a horny little slut who wants to serve me? So now I’ve claimed you with my mouth, and with my dick. Until we leave here, you’re my sex slave. Do you understand?”

A thrill shot through her and she shuddered as she clawed the grass under her.

“Answer me.” He pulled tighter on the harness around her waist.

“Yes, I understand.” *And I love it.*

“Good.” He started to thrust again, pounding into her with a roughness that drove her over the edge once again. She bore down on the hard length inside her and heard his passionate cry of release.

Benedikt’s harsh gasps for breath made her smile. He was still hard inside her and he pushed ever so slowly as he spread her ass cheeks and ran his finger over her opening. She shivered as he did it once more.

“You’re going to be mine in every way.”

“Yes, Benedikt. Yours.” She put her head against the grass and moaned softly as he pounded harder.

“But I’m going to make you beg for it.” He pushed her fully to the ground, laying down on top of her, his cock as far into her as the position would allow. When he licked, then bit on the area where he neck joined her shoulders, she cried out.

“And I promise, Lilliana, you’re going to love it.”

## *Chapter Nine*

Sitting in the chair was painful; not a horrid “I can’t stand it” pain, but a sore “I’ve been shagged until I think I might die” pain. Lilliana adjusted her bottom, then reached for an apple.

Across the room, Benedikt was putting logs on the fire. The rain had been coming down in sheets since their encounter in the mountain room, which meant that for three days straight, it had done nothing but storm.

That hadn’t really been a problem, though, since they’d done nothing but fuck. Benedikt had been insatiable, which didn’t surprise her since he’d been alone for so long. She hadn’t had sex in months, but it didn’t compare to what he’d been through. Of course, the sex she’d had just several months ago couldn’t compete with the mind-blowing orgasms Benedikt produced.

The sex had been wonderfully rough, and he’d captured her hands above her head, or behind her back as he claimed her repeatedly. It had been fantastic, and she wanted to do it all over again, despite her aching pussy.

But for the first time in days, Benedikt was not hard, although she knew it wouldn’t take much to get him that way. All she would have to do was get on her knees and beg to take him in her mouth.

Which was a wonderful idea, because he tasted so very delicious.

“Stop it,” he said, turning a stern gaze on her. “We need to rest and refuel our bodies.”

“I’d rather—”

“I know what you’d rather do, you naughty minx.” Damn, she loved it when he said things like that. “But I have special plans for later this evening, and I want you to be rested for it.”

“What sort of plans?” She bit into her apple.

“I’m not going to tell you.” He was now sitting across from her, looking over the fruit in the basket. The food had been delivered on schedule for the last three days, but they’d paid little attention, until now.

Even though she still wanted to shag him, her stomach told her he was right. If she didn't get some nourishment soon, she would wear out, and that just wouldn't do, especially if he had special plans for the evening.

He picked up a peach and bit into it. Lilliana leapt from her seat and licked the juice from his chin. He stroked her hair as she kissed her way around his lips, savoring the taste of the sweet fruit.

"Very good, little one." He pulled her onto his lap and offered her the peach. She took a bite, then gasped when he ran the cold fruit over her nipple, which instantly hardened. He sucked the nub into his mouth, nibbling it until she sighed. Then he held it between his teeth and flicked his tongue over it until she tried to pull away.

Sweet pain swept through her as he gently bit her, then released the throbbing nubbin.

"Bad girl, getting me all worked up again." She followed his gaze down to his crotch, where his cock stood at attention. "On our knees."

Lilliana complied eagerly, moving her head toward his crotch. He grasped her hair and stopped her before she reached her prize.

"Did I say suck me?"

Oh lord, she loved it when he was rough. "No."

He let go of her hair. "Spread your legs wide, then lean back and play with your cunt."

Her eyes widened. He'd never used that word before. He'd probably learned it from one of the thousands of books stacked in his library. But still, why had he—

"I'm waiting."

She followed his orders, using her left hand to keep herself in a half upright position as her right spread her lips and found her clit. She closed her eyes as sensations rushed through her. Knowing he watched made her juices flow heavily. She pinched and pulled and was just on the edge of orgasm when he roughly pulled her hand away. She shot upright and his cock pressed against her lips.

"Suck." She took a few seconds to try and catch her breath, to recover from being denied that which was so close. He put his hand behind her head and pulled her closer. Her mouth opened and he popped inside. "I said suck."

Benedikt clasped her hair in his fist and moved her head up and down on his dick. Lilliana gasped for air when he slipped from her mouth. He barely gave her time to recover before he demanded entrance again.

She loved the feel of him inside her, letting her know that he was boss, that she would do as he told her to. The heady sensations made her wonder if she would come without further stimulation on her clit, although that had never happened.

Lilliana sucked hard, letting him slip in and out so she could take in air. She could tell he was just on the edge, and she prepared to take all he had to offer. She wrapped one hand around his shaft, then tickled his balls with the other.

“Oh, Freya,” he grunted and she stopped sucking, running the edge of her teeth back and forth so that his skin exposed the head. She gave him three hard strokes, heard his harsh guttural groan again, and then he pulled her away before she could taste what he had to offer.

“Let go of my cock.”

She shivered at his command and the sensation intensified as he pulled her over his lap. She dangled over his thigh, her head almost to the floor. He spread her legs and drove his thumb into her as his other hand worked her clit.

After a few seconds, he pulled out his thumb and inserted two fingers deep inside her. He moved them fast, and when he added a third and fucked her furiously, Lilliana came hard, slamming her fists against the floor, ignoring the pain that shot up her arm as her body jerked and throbbed in bliss.

“So much for resting,” he said as he slapped her ass. He pulled her upright and cradled her against his chest.

“Sorry.” She giggled, something she hadn’t done in quite some time. “I just couldn’t resist your luscious lips. And where did you learn the word cunt?”

“From one of the erotic books I have. There are many of them if you’d like to borrow one or two. I don’t think you need lessons, but they can be quite entertaining.”

She giggled again, then snuggled deeper into his arms. “You amaze me sometimes with all you know. I think I would have lost my mind being down here by myself.

Benedikt stroked his fingers over her thigh and kissed the top of her head. “At first, I thought I might. But then I realized it would do nothing but make my, shall we call it *stay*, here unbearable. The best thing to do was to learn. And that’s what I have done.”

“Do you blame your father?” The words were out of her mouth before she’d really thought about the consequences of saying them.

“Sometimes.” He moved his fingers to her other thigh. “But I quickly discovered that didn’t do any good, either. I have questions for him, like what caused the change in him. Was he unhappy? Did he, like Dr. Jekyll, ingest something that changed him? I hate to think that...that he was not happy with his family.”

His voice shook a bit on the last words and she put her hand on his. Her family was a happy one, as she’d told him, and she couldn’t imagine what he’d gone through with his father. “I’m sorry.”

“So am I,” he whispered. “At first I was sorry for myself, and I hated my father. It took me years to come to terms with the idea that, although I’m a prisoner here, he’s a prisoner, too. The only difference, I think, is that I’m not unhappy. Lonely, yes...well, not anymore.”

He tipped her head up and kissed her, his tongue tracing over her lips. She opened her mouth, delighting in the feel of him as he slipped inside. He stroked his finger over her chin, and warmth spread through her. This was the first time he’d kissed her with such feeling, and it made her heart beat out of sync.

“Your cock’s still hard.”

“Yes, I know it is.” He looked down, then gave her a very dark, sensual look. If a person were able to melt, his eyes would have started the process and she’d be a puddle of goo at his feet in fifteen seconds. “So it is. You distracted me with talk of my father. What a bad girl.”

“I suppose I am.” She wiggled enough to rub her thigh against his hard length.

His look darkened and then he stood, catching her around the waist before she fell to the ground. He set her on her feet, then pointed to the wall. “Walk.”

Lilliana shifted her gaze to the wall, the same one where he’d first chained her. The chains were still there, but they’d been changed. Before he set them up so that he could keep her spread eagle. Today she could see he could link her wrists together and bind them above her head.

“Oh no.”

“Oh yes. As my sex slave, sent specifically to me, you obey. Now go.”

Lilliana shook her head. Not that she had anything against bondage, but she’d rather... “Why don’t we go to the bed? You can tie me up there and I’ll be thrilled.”

“You’ll do as you’re told.”

“Or what? You’ll spank me? I’ll love every second of it. Unless you threaten to hold out on me, there’s not much punishment you can mete out.” Except the wall, she said silently. “Now, shall I go to the bed?”

“I had a feeling you wouldn’t want to go to the wall.” His eyes narrowed just little. “I thought it might bring back some bad memories. But I want to erase them.”

“I’d prefer to be on my back and...bleeding hell.” He’d grabbed one of her wrists and slapped the cuff into place before she knew what was happening. She tried to fight the second one, but there was no chance of getting away.

Once they were both in place, he turned her and put his lips on her ear. “Go to the wall.”

Excitement mixed with just a little fear as she followed his directions. He fell into step behind her, and when they arrived at their destination, she noticed the chain had been hooked into an anchor in the wall. It hung in two lengths, and he shorted one, using a padlock to chain it around the cuffs. Then he used the other length to pull her arms above her head. She watched him walk a little to the left and attach the chain to a ring in the wall.

Her chest rose and fell rapidly and she tried to calm her nerves. Memories of being bound to this exact spot and having her clothes cut from her, of fearing what was to happen next, flashed back.

“You asked me if I forgave my father,” he said as he took a step back. “And I have a question for you. Did you forgive me?”

“Excuse me?”

He walked back to the table and she wondered what the hell he was doing. His back was turned to her, but she could make out movement, as if he were jacking himself off. What the hell was he doing?

“I’d like an answer, please.” He turned back to her, his hand working his dick. It took her a few seconds to realize he was slicking himself up. That could only mean one thing.

“Obviously I did, or else we wouldn’t be...fuck buddies.”

“I think it’s gone beyond that, don’t you?” He was in front of her now, one hand still stroking his length while the other massaged one of her breasts. She arched into his touch, sighing in pleasure as he pinched her nipple.

“Are we?”

“Yes, we are.” He put his mouth on her free nipple, biting and sucking it as his fingers continued to pull and twist the other. The feelings were harsh, and she loved every second of it.

He continued to provide sweet torment as she jerked against her bonds. There was no way she could get loose, but somehow trying to escape added to the excitement she felt.

“Forgiveness is a funny thing,” he said, catching her off guard.

“What?”

“You hated me, yet now you can’t wait to take me inside you.” He turned her and pulled her hips out, slipping his cock between her ass cheeks. “In any way that I want.”

“Oh, yes.”

His cock pressed against her anus. “If you had continued to hate me, there would be no way we’d be enjoying this.” He pierced her ass, the burn spreading through her body, snaking into her clit, making her want to thrust back, take him deep inside her.

But she couldn’t move; the chains made sure of that. He held her hips firmly, pulling back ever so slightly so he could slip inside her more. She imagined him standing on his toes as he worked his cock into her ass.

When he was fully seated, he stayed still. She could feel his cock throbbing within her tight passage, doubling the pleasure she already felt. He stroked his fingers up and down her side, and when he finally started to move, he put one hand on her hip, and the other moved around to her clit.

“Benedikt!” Her orgasm surged through her, like lightning hitting every part of her body. He continued to pound and stroke her, and when the second wave crashed over her, she felt her knees give out. The combination of the chains and his hands kept her upright.

Sweat dotted her skin as he stroked her back, moving the moisture around. When he blew gentle breaths on it, she tried to pull away.

“You’re not going anywhere, for a long, long time.”

“Really? What about the map? What if one of your brothers shows up and finds me here, chained to the wall with your dick up my ass?”

“He’ll be jealous that I have such a beautiful sex slave.” He thrust harder and she shivered when he growled out her name. “So beautiful.”

“But what happens...” She was afraid to say the words.



Benedikt placed his head on her back as he slipped from her body. He wrapped his arms around her and held her close, and then he started to kiss her skin, his lips moving over her skin in soft, light kisses.

He turned her and cupped her face, pressing his lips against hers. Lilliana felt warm, and wanted. And truthfully, she never, ever wanted to leave this place if it meant losing Benedikt.

“You didn’t finish your question,” he said, keeping his lips hovering just over hers.

“What happens when we have to leave?”

“We leave together,” he said, running his thumb over her lips. “And we stay together.”

“It could happen any day now.”

His nod was short. “It could, but I won’t allow anything to happen to you. I swear it. And when we’re back in the real world, I expect you to teach me all the ins and outs the books didn’t provide me.”

“I’d be most happy to,” she whispered before she kissed him. “I just have one request.”

“What’s that, sweet one?”

“Pack a big bag of chains to take with us. I rather like being under your control this way.”

“I’ll just ask our benefactress to supply us with all we need.” He kissed her again, cupping the back of her head and pulling her close. Lilliana opened to him, taking him inside her, the kiss making them seem as if they were one person. “I’ll make sure every room in our house is equipped with restraints, and I’ll make sure we use them all.”

## *Epilogue*

The cold enveloped Abella la Sistra as she hurried from the car to the house. The other two vehicles parked outside were a wonderful sign. Hopefully, everything was going as planned. She didn't bother to knock on the door. Instead she pushed inside and dropped her keys on a table near the door.

"Mrs. Westergard?" Abella didn't pause as she spoke. She found the older woman standing near the chair they'd fashioned together, one that would send people down into the roots of Yggdrasil.

"What is wrong?"

"She went too fast. Without information. I didn't tell her about—"

"It doesn't matter." Abella went to the table and gobbled down a few meatballs. She was starved. She had spent the last few hours reading runes and mediating. It wasn't until she was on the road that she'd realized how long it had been since she'd had food in her belly.

"It does matter." Abella jerked her head toward the older woman, who stood wringing her hands. "What if it doesn't work? All of our plans will be for nothing."

"Benedikt will care for her, and this will work," Abella said. "I read the stones right. Lilliana is Benedikt's match, just as Venise is Rugoff's, and I am Egill's."

She flushed as she thought of the man she'd dreamed of since she was a child. At first, he'd been someone who kept her company when she was sent to her room, alone, for punishment.

But as she'd grown, her feelings had blossomed. She hadn't dated, hadn't let another man touch her. She wanted no one but Egill. She'd been perfectly willing to live with her fantasy man, never letting a flesh and blood human touch her.

But then, while at her grandmother's house late one night, she'd overheard her mother and aunt talking of a family legend, about a witch who banished three men to the depths of the earth during the time of the Norsemen.

They'd been holding a book between them, one that looked as if it would fall apart if it were touched by the wind. Abella had tried to overhear their conversation, but their voices had drifted off and she'd only been able to catch bits and pieces.

One of those pieces had made her tingle.

Egill. They'd said the name Egill.

Later that night, when everyone was asleep, Abella had crept into her grandparents' library. She'd bypassed the books that sat on the shelf, and gone to a small cubbyhole near the window. She'd watched her mother wrap the book in cloth, then place it there.

She'd taken the item down gingerly, placing it on the table, putting her hand over the covering. It seemed warm to the touch, which was odd to her.

Abella peeled back the material, ran her fingers over the image of the tree on the front, then opened the cover and started to read. She'd been fascinated by the story, and had done research, which lead her to where she stood.

"You will go now? My husband will try to find a way to stop you. He will try to kill you." Abella turned to Mrs. Westergard, who studied her with a worried expression.

*Let him try,* Abella thought. *I've waited for this my whole life.*

"Yes, I'll leave now. Within the week, Mrs. Westergard, or should I say Queen Gunnmarr, you will have your sons back. I promise you."

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## *About the Author*

Melinda Barron loves to explore Egyptian tombs and temples, discover Mayan ruins, play in castles towers, and explore new cities and countries. She generally does it all from the comfort of her home by opening a book.

Melinda loves to lose herself between the pages of a book. The only thing she loves more is creating stories from the wonderful heroes and heroines that haunt her dreams and crowd her head. She believes love is for everyone, not just those who are a size 2. Her books are full of magic, suspense and love, in all sorts of shapes and sizes.

Mel currently lives in the Texas Panhandle with two cats and a file stuffed with new ideas to keep her typing fingers busy, and your heart engaged.

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### ***Wish Me Up, Rub Me Down***

With no love life to speak of, BBW Anya Bartholomew lives only for her job. This dedication has paid off. As a successful advertising agent, she has risen in the ranks of her firm to be the top money-maker.

But at the insistence of her two best friends, who claim she needs a break from work, Anya takes a weekend vacation to the small town of Pleasant, Maine. While shopping at an antique shop, she rubs a lamp that looks as if it could belong to Aladdin himself.

Things will never be the same.

Back at work on Monday morning, Anya finds that her boss has given her a new account...for a lamp factory. However, her clients—two very handsome, very sexy men—are more than what they seem.

They're Pleasure Djinn. And they have come to fulfill five of Anya's most secret sexual wishes.

### ***Aliya Baban and the Cave of Pleasure***

Advertising agent Aliya Baban is beautiful with a capital B. Unfortunately, she's also a witch with a capital B. In her twenty-eight years of life, she's managed to offend almost every woman she has ever met.

But she doesn't care, really. That's just the way life is.

When her boss tells her to get the *Cave of Pleasure* account, or else get a new job, Aliya takes her party invitation—and the strange lamp she's received—and attends the nightclub's grand opening, ready to do battle for her livelihood.

Matuse is more than just the owner of the *Cave of Pleasure*...he's a pleasure djinni. And Aliya has rubbed his lamp. For the next thirty days, she belongs to him. Though he intends to bring intense pleasure to her body, it's also his job to make sure his "she-devil" changes her wicked ways.

Will Matusé be able to help Aliya overcome her painful past? Or will Aliya fail to make the five heartfelt apologies she needs to make to the five women she has hurt the most.

### ***To Rub, Honor and Obey***

Moreen McGee is a perfect example of how poor decisions made in youthful rebellion can haunt someone for life. Now on probation for ten years, she serves her court-ordered community service at a center for troubled teens in the hopes of stopping other kids from taking the wrong path.

But when one of her young charges pickpockets a wallet from her high school nemesis, Aliya Baban, Moreen decides to put the illicit skills she learned as a teenager to good use...by breaking into Aliya's apartment to return the stolen wallet, thus keeping the kid who stole it out of trouble and out of jail.

However, once she's in the opulent Manhattan flat, Moreen can't resist the urge to take one small token from the woman she still blames for her own downfall—an old, neglected oil lamp that she's sure Aliya will never miss.

Moreen accidentally summons a gorgeous demon-turned-pleasure djinni named Paran, and he's not too thrilled with the theft of his property. Moreen has rubbed his lamp, the contract is sealed. For the next thirty days, she belongs to him. And Paran intends to use this time to help his little felon learn some very important lessons, including the true meaning of the words *honor* and *obey*.

### ***Smoke, Fire and Desire***

Scientist Rhylic Dawson works hard, but when it comes to play she's pretty reserved. Until her friends take her to the *Cave of Pleasure* in New York City. She's there to celebrate her birthday, and maybe, just maybe, get lucky.

What Rhylic doesn't know is the *Cave of Pleasure* is run by Pleasure Djinn, and they're eager to show her that there's more to life than just work. On stage in front of a bevy of male dancers, Rhylic is told to choose one for her special birthday dance.

She picks the fireman, and quickly learns that where there's smoke, there's fire, and a great deal of desire.



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When Department of Natural Resources officer, Gwendolyn Locke, hits a black bear on the way home from work one night, her entire view of reality changes. She discovers that shape-shifters exist, and she's just become Goldilocks to three gorgeous, very aroused men who also happen to be werebears. Being snowbound has never been so hot.

***Open Sesame* by Mia Watts**

Alister Baban overheard a business discussion that netted him and his Uncle Cassimer a lot of money. When the Simsim Group stock crashes and declares bankruptcy within weeks, the owners immediately suspect the Babans of playing dirty.

Oz Adamo, one of four brothers who owned Simsim Group, agrees to abduct Alister to obtain information and win back the lost pensions of former employees.

Tied to a bed and lusting after his captor, Alister fights the sexual attraction he has for Oz. They want information and he isn't about to give it. But Oz loves a good challenge, and shrewd, serious, sexy Alister is naked and his—at least for now.

***Heart of Ice* by Brynn Paulin**

Kai is perfectly unhappy with his life. Cast into a role as shop boy and forced into marriage to save his family, he sees nothing good in his future. In fact, his betrothed, Gerda, seems to hate everything he enjoys. Especially winter and his attraction to dominating his partners. His prospects look grim...until the Snow Queen arrives.

Wyn has spent her life alone, living vicariously through those who love winter. When she learns of Kai's predicament, she knows she must save him. If only she could save herself. She craves his dominance, but there's one tiny thing standing in their way. No human can touch her without experiencing chilly agony. And that might bring any relationship to an icy death.

## *Handcuffs and Lace*

### **Resplendence Publishing's Erotic Romance Line of Law Enforcement Themed Stories**

#### ***Search Me Baby, One More Time* by Melinda Barron**

Wren Thornberry's life isn't going according to plan. She let her father talk her out of marrying Bryan Stockard, the man she loves, and moved halfway around the world. Now she's back home in Texas, babysitting her grandmother while grandma and her boy-toy work through their list of sexual exploits, making themselves the talk of the town.

But what Wren doesn't know is that things in her hometown are about to heat up even more, and it will have nothing to do with her grandmother. It seems that Bryan Stockard is still around, he wants to get back into Wren's life—by any means necessary, and now he has just the tools to do it: a police uniform, handcuffs, and the authority to make Wren *assume the position*.

#### ***Ticket Me More* by Tia Fanning**

Hailed by the bridal flower world as an artistic genius, Meli works long nights making bouquets for women lucky enough to find love, while she herself lives a life of solitude. She yearns to share her heart and body with someone other than Bob, her *Battery Operated Boyfriend*, but acute shyness keeps her from engaging the "living" world.

However, Meli's quiet and predictable existence takes an unexpected turn when she is pulled over and ticketed by the most gorgeous cop she has ever encountered—Officer Michael Johnson. Though he doesn't seem to notice her as anything more than a traffic violation, Meli makes plans to overcome her timid nature and seize the police officer's attention...using any speed necessary.

#### ***Cuff Me Lacy* by Demi Alex**

Three months is way too long to wait for some simple, low-down, straight forward sex. It's not like Officer Chrissie Hansen is asking for prince charming to offer her the love of a lifetime. All she wants is a good orgasm that she doesn't have to work for alone.

At least with "The Bull" she knows what to expect. But when Patrick MacKlick returns to her life and tempts her with new options, she discovers that lace can imprison a heart better than handcuffs can.

## ***Stripped* by Celia Kyle**

Sometimes life just required tequila...and vodka...and a shot or two of whiskey for good measure. Jasmine Wright, Jazz to her friends, has reached that point. And now all that liquor is making her clothes fall off—in the middle of the street. Good thing a friendly neighborhood police officer stops to help.

Sheriff Ian Blackwell has loved Jazz since high school and then some. When their relationship burned out so many years ago, he wasn't sure he would recover. Now he's getting a second chance, and he won't Jazz slip away from him this time. He has her naked and at his mercy, and he's going to keep her that way. Forever.

## ***Going Commando* by Catherine Chernow**

Bounty hunter Shyra Lawrence listens to her favorite radio station one morning where the DJ's are discussing "going commando" —*a.k.a.* wearing no undies. Captivated by their conversation, she decides to shed her panties in favor of the freedom that wearing no underwear brings.

Enthusiastic, Shyra sends an email to her best friend, Donna, detailing the delights of panty-freedom, but unbeknownst to Shyra, she's hit the send key...to the wrong email addy!

When Derek Grayson opens his emails that morning, he discovers that his #1 employee and top bounty hunter has sent him an erotic, enticing message about going commando. Derek has always been polite, professional, and so damned attracted to Shyra, it's almost painful. Working day in and day out with voluptuous woman has sent Derek's hormones into overdrive on more than one occasion.

Now, Shyra's shed her panties and Derek's got all he can do to contain his lust when she announces that she's... GOING COMMANDO.

## ***Handcuffs and Lies* by Bronwyn Green**

Sometimes promises to friends are the hardest to keep. Undercover police officer, Michael Tanner, promised his dying partner that he'd take care of the man's little sister. Trouble is, after her brother's death, Doctor Tori Spinelli wants nothing to do with Michael—or any other cop for that matter.

Tori has always fought against overprotective men and deception. Forced into protective custody with Michael, she's now faced with both in the same package. Despite their differences, Tori falls in love with him, but how can she trust a man who lies for a living?

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