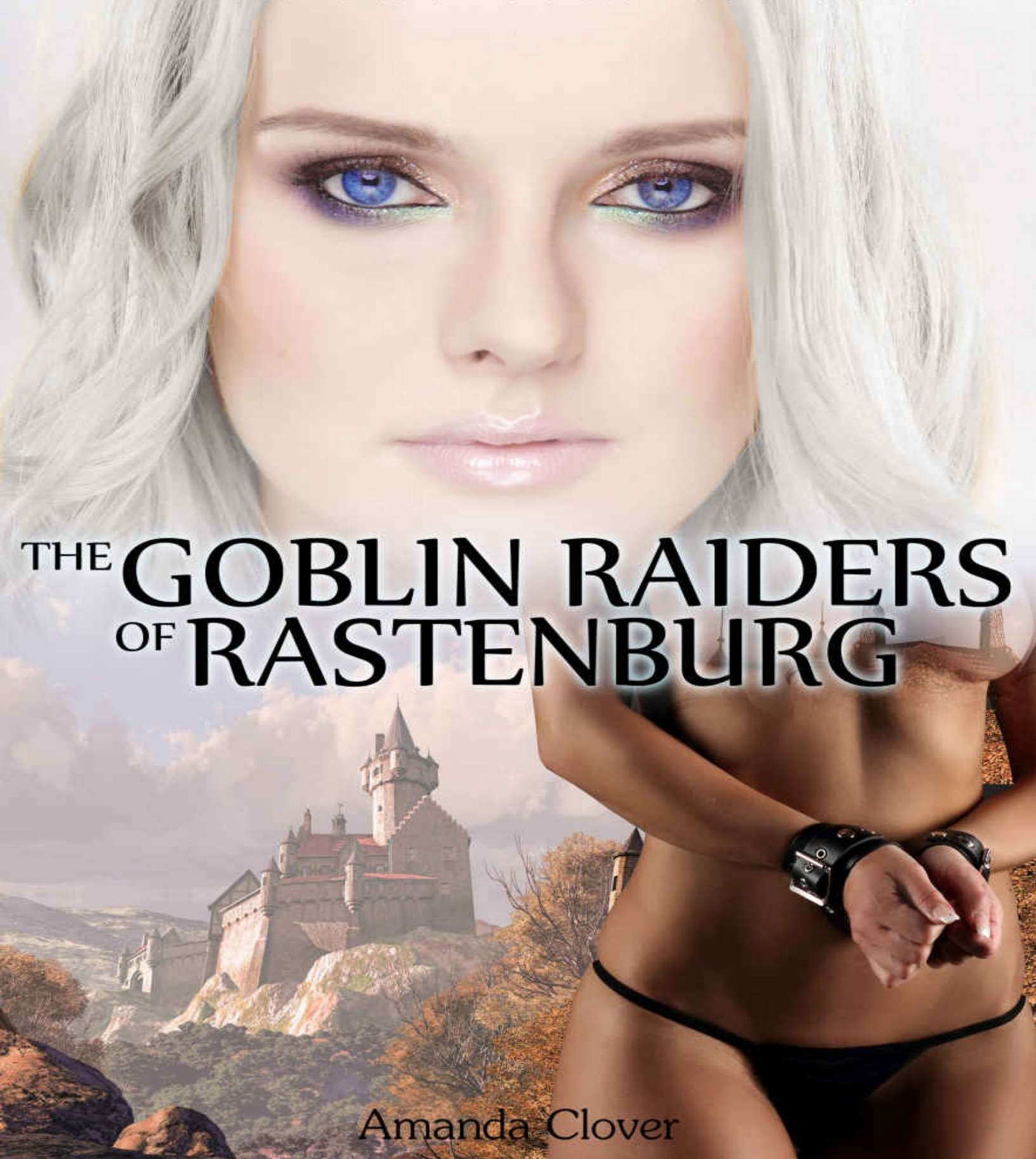




The Adventures of Xara Wolff Volume One



THE GOBLIN RAIDERS OF RASTENBURG

Amanda Clover

Huntress

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The Goblin Raiders of Rastenberg

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"Gather to me all orphan daughters,
Swear the blue oath of the waters,
From your lips my Word speaks power,
Through your body my Scent finds truth,
By your will my Snare binds defilers.

You are a huntress.

No man nor monster will escape your justice.

You are a huntress.

You are the light that destroys the darkness."

The Psalm of Helena Agathus, The First Huntress

Chapter I

Arrival

She tipped her head forward and the water spilled from the hood of her oilskin cloak. The night's rains had continued into a leaden morning. The wheels of the wagon churned the mud roads of Rastenburg, slipping behind the draft horses one moment and nearly stuck the next.

Even in daylight, it was obvious to her that this was a blighted place. The shingled dwellings slumped beneath the weight of glistening moss, the windows were shuttered, and the lanes, once cobbled, were now lost to the mud. In this downpour there was no one about on the streets, though she suspected on a sunny day, were Rastenburg to ever see one, the roads would be just as empty.

Overlooking this pitiful settlement was a stone keep. Though it seemed just as forlorn as the town, light showed through its windows and there was smoke from a chimney concealed within its upper crenellations.

"I will find my way from here," she said to the driver of the wagon.

The old man turned to her. His eyes were clouded with age. He reached a gnarled hand out and caught her sleeve.

"Do not linger," he said. "Even a huntress should not stay long in Rastenburg."

Xara Wolff pulled her sleeve away from him. She dropped the hood of her cloak as she stood. Her pure white hair was pulled back and bound in a tight ring of bronze. The white belied her youthful face with a nose and lips that verged on childlike in their delicacy. Her angular blue eyes gleamed with power, a sign of a huntress, but it was her ears that set her

apart from even that particular breed. They came to long points that extended a finger's length from her head. Her left ear was notched with an old injury. Her right was decorated with several silver rings.

"You're... I thought you was..." The wagon driver stammered and fell silent. She suspected that he had never seen an elf, not in person, and finding he had been riding with one for a night and part of the morning caught him by surprise.

Xara kept her ears hidden when it served her purposes. Now, summoned by the Baroness of Rastenburg, it served her better to reveal her elven heritage. She gave the wagon driver a tight-lipped smile and dropped down from the side of the wagon. He gawped after her as she climbed the hill approaching the keep's gatehouse.

A single guard sheltered beneath the ancient stones. He languidly raised his head, his eyes finally opening wide when he saw who approached.

"Elf!" he said and snapped to his feet. His hand went to his sword, but he had the sense to keep it in its sheath.

"I am here on the invitation of Lady Gisela Salian," said Xara. She reached a hand carefully into her cloak so as not to arouse the suspicion of the guard and brought out the letter marked with the signature of the baroness and baronial seal in wax. The guard took it from her and looked at it for a very long time with his thick brow furrowed. Obviously displeased, but unable to find fault in the document, he handed it back.

"Very well," he said, straightening his cap. "Follow me."

He marched beside her up the winding, rain-slicked stones to the keep's entrance, past a pair of shocked guards and into the echoing halls of the keep. The space was gloomy. The tapestries were dusty and the rugs were threadbare. There were chandeliers and sconces that must have once gleamed with gold. Now they were dark and coated in grime. Rastenburg's time as a gold and silver mining town had passed two generations ago and

its orchards had mostly succumbed to an unknown curse. The people of Rastenburg were left farming and hunting the wilderness. The barony had lost all influence in the capital city of Ixham.

Xara could see that this keep was a remnant - a husk - of what was once proud and noble. Her reluctant escort brought her past the entrance of a quiet kitchen and into a small office that had once perhaps been occupied by a clerk.

A dark-haired woman of middle age sat behind a desk piled with scrolls. Her face was handsome, but drawn with stress, and she wore bone-rimmed spectacles that enlarged her brown eyes. The only indication that this woman was not a clerk was the fur-trimmed cloak that wrapped her shoulders against the chill in the room and the corset that held in her ample bosom. This, Xara was certain, was the baroness.

The woman did not look up as they approached. She heated a signet over a candle on her desk and pressed it to a red seal. The smell of hot wax cut against the dust. They stopped before her desk and the guard cleared his throat.

"What is it, Jensen?" asked the woman, still intent upon her task.

"Lady Salian," said Xara, stepping forward. "I am Xara Wolff. I am here in answer to your call for a huntress."

That finally caught the baroness's attention. She put down her signet and slid the spectacles from her nose. Her eyes widened slightly as she looked at Xara for the first time. It was her only indication of surprise.

"Leave us, Jensen," said the Baroness. The guard saluted her and marched out of the study. The baroness drew the door closed behind him before turning to regard Xara once more. She did not conceal her annoyance this time. "I had expected someone from your guild much sooner."

"The war in the east keeps the huntresses busy maintaining order,"

said Xara. "There are monsters loose in the land from the alleys of Ixham to the Vertiko peaks. Rastenburg does not merit my guild's immediate attention. Not simply for goblins."

Xara knew her words were insulting. It was a test. She watched the baroness tense in anger before the woman's shoulders dropped and an expression came over her face. Something like sadness. She leaned against the desk in an undignified fashion and let out a long breath.

"Of course, you're right. We produce nothing for the war effort. Most of our men are gone already, never to return. I am... Forgive me, huntress, for speaking with annoyance." The baroness forced herself to her feet and approached a cabinet. She took out a gilded bottle of red liqueur and poured two small glasses. "Apple sherry. It will warm you. Put some color in those pale cheeks."

Xara took the glass but did not drink. The baroness drank hers in a single swallow.

"You look very young," said the baroness.

"I am not."

"No, I suppose not. It is difficult to judge with your kind." The baroness unrolled a map upon the desk. She leaned over it and Xara could not help but notice the woman's breasts nearly burst from her stuffed corset. The baroness tapped a finger upon the map to indicate several red marks. "These are farms on the eastern outskirts of my lands where there have been goblin attacks. And here as well, on the western outskirts. I will assign what guards I can to protect one side and the beasts will attack the other. They are killing livestock, wounding boys who try to fend them off and they have taken several young women as captives."

"Goblins are not usually slavers," said Xara. "They are known to trade captives with orcs and the porcens, though I know of no tribes of either bordering your lands. How long ago were these women taken?"

"The first was several months ago. The most recent was last week." The baroness looked at her seriously. "Nine girls in all. My people are near revolt that I have been unable to bring a stop to this."

"If the goblins have been keeping women captives they must have a reason. I will find it out and, if possible, free them." Xara felt an unusual bit of sympathy for the baroness. She reached out and touched the woman's hand. "You seem to have done your best under difficult circumstances."

The baroness accepted the consolation and nodded. "My husband fell during the rout at Pelion."

"They don't call it a rout in the capital," said Xara. "A 'strategic withdrawal for advantage' and those who call it a rout, or a defeat, well, let us just say that the agents of King Pontius have been very aggressive with dissenters."

The baroness's painted lips tightened with anger.

"Whatever they may call it in the king's court, it was a rout. I lost two cousins and an uncle as well as my husband. This war has cost us so many and we seem no closer to winning. But... I do not want to tire you with my problems, huntress. I will have my cook prepare you a meal. I will have a bath readied and clean clothes you may wear while yours are dried."

"I thank you," said Xara. "I will not catch the goblin's spore in this weather. When the rains subside I will begin the hunt."

"Until then," agreed the baroness.

True to her word, the baroness supplied a warm, soapy bath poured in a fine porcelain tub. Once the maid had left with her buckets, Xara bolted the door and slowly undressed. Beneath her heavy cloak, she wore a simple hide jerkin over a gray blouse. It fit her figure well, smoothing her pert breasts to an almost boyish flatness and ending short of her hips.

Below the waist she wore boots and riding trousers, padded in the inner thighs and tightly fit. No protection, but she relied on her agility for protection in a real fight. The sword on her waist was a cheap blade of steel, but on her thigh she strapped her dagger. It was her weapon of choice.

Xara unsheathed the blade to admire its faint blue color. She turned it over before setting it on the antique bed.

She set all of her costume out to dry. Her inner garments were simple and her body, when naked, bore the marking of straps and laces hidden in the fabric. Her skin was otherwise unblemished white. She was slender and long-legged, with a slight widening at her hips and a firm backside that spoke of near constant travel. Her breasts were pert and capped with small pink nipples surrounded by areolas that faded into the lightness of her surrounding flesh. Her blushing sex was scarcely hidden by the thatch of white hair atop her mound.

The huntress had been told by many men that her body seemed as pure as a maiden. The truth made her smile as she slipped into the warm water and felt the dirt from the road begin to melt away. She worked the ring from her hair and slipped beneath the water. Her white hair unfurled above her.

Bathed, dried, oiled and perfumed. Xara felt like the woman she had been when she hunted the imp in the king's court. Those pompous fools had liked her smelling like a courtesan even if she wore a man's boots. The maid entered as Xara stood nude in front of the silver mirror. The dour woman looked with some wonder at the elegant physique of the huntress. She said nothing and placed a pile of folded clothes upon the bed.

Xara wore what the baroness desired. It was a long dress and brocaded bodice exceptionally suited for her frame. The baroness must have studied her body more carefully than Xara had realized. She smiled at the thought. It was not rare for her employers to make overtures. They were usually piggish men she took pleasure in spurning. A beautiful baroness? Xara fancied a bit of noble sport.

Before leaving the room, she strapped her dagger to her thigh beneath the dress. Always best to carry a weapon.

She made her way through the keep, drawn to the glow of firelight and the sound of low conversation. A dissonant trumpeter and a servant announced Xara's arrival to the dining hall.

"The Lady Gisela Salian welcomes the honorable huntress Xara Wolff."

The hall's long table was decorated with a sumptuous feast. It seemed no less than a king's table to Xara's eyes and her growling belly. Given the poverty of Rastenburg, she knew this was intended as a great honor. A collection of men and women filled the table's many chairs. The seat at the head of the table was occupied by the baroness, resplendent in red and white corseted silk. Her dark curls were woven with red ribbons and she, along with her guests, rose from their chairs as Xara approached.

"Please, do not rise on my account, my lady," said Xara with a slight bow.

"We were just about to make a toast, to our huntress." The baroness raised her cup and waited for Xara to do the same. She continued, "Our woes will soon be over, the violence that has plagued the frontiers of Rastenburg will be brought to an end, and for this we owe the huntress our bottomless gratitude. Here is to her and every daughter she saves."

The table toasted and Xara swallowed the sweet apple wine. Conversation with Rastenburg's court and merchant class was accompanied by roasted game birds, buttery purple carrots, potatoes, baked apples spiced with cloves, pork shoulder, several kinds of breads, and plentiful wine.

Xara found that the more she drank, the more tolerable the conversation. She was able to almost ignore the rude comments several of the women of court made about her ears. One of the men, a cleric by his manner of dress, made particularly nasty comments about the work of a

huntress being unnatural.

"What could be more natural?" wondered the baroness. "She uses all of her assets to overcome danger. Pleasure is her greatest weapon and, I might add, what a fine weapon it looks to be."

The guests chuckled. A few of the bolder men cast their gaze upon Xara as impossible fantasies played out behind their leering eyes. The cleric appeared scandalized by the baroness's comment.

"Thank you, my lady," said Xara. She willed herself to blush. It was a facet of her arousal she had learned to control at the guild. The baroness smiled and fanned her cleavage.

A little more wine and the guests began to open up with complaints about the king and the war in the east. Some treated Xara as if she were an emissary of the king and unloaded detailed complaints about goods that were never repaid or the lack of attention given to Rastenburg's plight. When a guest became overly emotional, he or she was politely escorted out by Jensen or one of the other guards.

A particularly fat and obnoxious merchant by the name of Vrigg dared to ask Xara about her keen blade.

"I hear all of your huntresses have one. Magic isn't it? Always sharp? Do you have it with you now?"

Xara reached under the table and found the dagger's hilt. She drew the blade and in a quick flourish drove it through the picked skeleton of Vrigg's dinner hen and into the table beneath. The remaining guests gasped at the sight of the faintly glowing blue blade.

"Y-yes, well, very nice," said Vrigg, looking as if the dagger still might kill him.

"Each blade is crafted from one of the scales of the long-dead beast called Arius," said the baroness. "Each huntress must find her own scale in

the darkness of the tomb where the beast is kept beneath your order's castle. Isn't that right, huntress?"

"It is, my lady," said Xara, though the huntress knew the legend of Arius and her scales to be full of half-truths.

The journey into those dark catacombs was a terrifying quest for every huntress at the beginning of her career. Xara had undertaken it after six years of training. She was stripped naked and sent in alone with only a candle and a tool for prying loose a scale. The tomb of Arius was not a world for living things. The tunnels echoed with strange sounds and the air seemed to freeze in Xara's lungs.

She rounded a bend in the tunnel, just like many others she had taken before, and stepped into a chamber so vast it seemed to have no ceiling. There was Arius, a hill that burned faintly with unearthly light in the darkness. The beast that had nearly destroyed the entire kingdom of Ixx was real. The beast that only the first huntress, Helena, for whom their order was named, could conquer.

Xara had not taken long to see the scale she wanted. It had called out to her with pulses of blue from Arius, high on his back, and she had climbed him with the candle caught in her teeth and dripping hot wax upon her breasts. She had scuttled up the beast's spine and pried the scale loose and she had known that Arius, or perhaps Helena, had given her that scale. That it had always belonged to her.

"Most scales are much larger than mine, making swords and pike blades. I know - knew - a huntress who carried a double-sided keen ax as big across as that serving tray."

A murmur of respect went through the crowd.

"Pity you only found one large enough for a dagger," said Vrigg, trying to sound good-humored. Few laughed at his joke.

"You said 'knew', huntress. What happened to your sister with the

ax?"

"Slain by kobolds," said Xara. "In their den. She could have killed a hundred of them in open battle, but in the confines of their tunnels their tiny swords were more effective than her ax. She was a good friend."

"So your deadly little blade might be a blessing," suggested the baroness.

"I think so," agreed Xara, retrieving her blade without even a glance at the chastened merchant.

The members of the party prattled on, mostly with inane questions. Xara stole long looks at the beautiful baroness, deciding more and more, perhaps with help of the wine, that she intended to have the woman. Guests continued to be removed or to excuse themselves, until the cleric finally bid farewell.

"Just us now," said the baroness. "I expect there is no point continuing with this seating arrangement."

She picked up her goblet and moved from the far end of the table to the seat closest to Xara.

"You put on a show for them," said Xara. "You held this dinner to prove that you are doing something to protect the kingdom. I hope I satisfied your needs."

"Some of them," said the baroness, playing her finger around the rim of her goblet. "With my husband gone, I must constantly remind them that they cannot have this keep for themselves."

"Tell me of your husband," said Xara.

The baroness seemed surprised by the request. She swallowed more of her wine for courage and nodded.

"He was tall. Very tall. And handsome, with a lion's mane of rust-colored hair that... he shook it when he was cross or when he laughed. His eyes were shrewd, but not unkind. When he spoke the whole of the keep seemed to echo with his voice. I thought surely he would... he would return a hero. He was the sort of man."

Xara studied the sadness in Lady Gisela Salian's face. The wine had relaxed some of it, smoothing the lines and coloring her cheeks, but now the tension returned as restrained anguish. The huntress reached out a hand and placed it gently upon the baroness's leg.

"We have all lost in this war. Some more than others. But I can see the burden weighs heavy upon you."

"I cannot mourn him," said the baroness softly. "I must maintain these lands in his absence. They must feel as if he is still here to protect them."

"I am here now," said Xara, squeezing the baroness's leg.

"Yes, of course. You are here. For how long?"

"Until the job is done," said Xara. "But I see now there are more jobs that need tending than hunting goblins."

The huntress reached a hand beneath the baroness's chin and lifted the woman's face. The baroness had held back tears, but now they glistened in her eyes. A single droplet spilled down her cheek. Xara smoothed it away.

"Do you have suitors?" asked Xara softly.

"Yes. Some you met tonight. But I cannot replace my husband."

"No, not replace," said Xara, leaning closer. "But you are alive, Lady Salian. Life is meant to be enjoyed whenever possible."

The baroness had another objection, but Xara leaned the last of the distance to the woman's plump lips and kissed her, firmly. The warmth between them melted together in that moment. Lady Salian's eyes widened and then, just as quickly, began to close. A moan vibrated deep within her and Xara pushed her nimble tongue into the woman's yielding mouth. She tasted the wine and felt the need of the baroness's sweet mouth and awakening tongue.

Xara retreated at the height of their kiss. Lady Salian's soft lips remained parted expectantly.

"Gisela," said Xara, presuming that all propriety had been abandoned. "I believe it is time you show me to your bed."

Lady Gisela Salian, flushed deeply, could only nod her agreement.

They ascended three staircases, past rain-swept windows and sky that hid the storm behind the gathering darkness. Gisela's chambers were large, her bed overstuffed, and her hearth thankfully filled with the golden warmth of a fire. A dark-eyed portrait of the late baron hung opposite the bed and Xara imagined the desperate Gisela pleasuring herself to this reminder of her dead husband. Xara bolted the door shut behind them and guided the baroness to the foot of the bed.

"I have not done this before," said Gisela.

"With a huntress?" asked Xara, caressing her cheek.

"With anyone other than my husband."

Xara smiled before kissing her again, on the lips and then her cheek, moving to her shoulder and neck. The huntress pressed her slender body against the baroness and felt the substantial cushion of Gisela's breasts. Xara's fingers were practiced. She found the binding of Gisela's corset and began to untie it. The bodice fell as the laces were relaxed. Xara pulled it from Gisela's shoulders, exposing the white dress worn beneath. Shoes and skirt and under dress were all removed by the huntress as if unwrapping a

gift on the solstice.

Gisela, at last, wore only her white stockings and a soft, cotton slip dress that clung to her ample curves. Her fat, heaving breasts and prominent nipples were clearly outlined beneath the slip. Xara could even make out the dark thatch of hair between Gisela's thick thighs. Gisela reclined on the bed, her head propped upon a pillow so she could observe as Xara began to undress herself.

Xara shed the layers of her borrowed costume like teasing petals from a flower. She moved and extended her body to tantalize the baroness with her long limbs and the curve of her buttocks. She was unashamed of her nudity and stood, pale even in the firelight, a slender, snowy goddess with doe-eyed innocence belied by the way she moved her body.

"Gods, you are beautiful," murmured Gisela.

"As are you, my lady."

"Will you use your powers on me?" asked Gisela. "Have you used them already?"

Xara shook her head. "The Word is to control my enemies. The Scent is for sensing desires and lingering truths. The Snare, my lady, is for the intimate domination of my quarry. I suspect I will not need these skills to sense your desires and to make you... a willing participant."

Gisela nodded again, though she looked the slightest bit disappointed that Xara would not probe her secret desires, nor dominate her body with lust. Those powers were not a thing for play and if Xara were not already very fond of the idea of curling the baroness's lovely toes, she might refuse her for the insult.

Instead, Xara easily concealed her annoyance and crawled onto the bed, bright blue eyes on Gisela as she prowled between the baroness's parted thighs. The huntress trailed the fingers of one hand up Gisela's leg, raising the slip dress and exposing more and more of Gisela's thigh until

the mound of her sex was exposed. Xara brushed it with her fingers, feeling the warmth radiating from Gisela's hidden folds before continuing up her body.

"Please," said Gisela, trembling slightly and unable to give further name to her desire.

"Yes," said Xara. "Yes to all you want. Yes."

They kissed again and this time it was hungry and entirely unrestrained. Xara's tongue probed deep into the baroness's eager mouth as her hand explored the soft expanse of her bosom. Xara plucked at one fat nipple and let her thigh rest against Gisela's overheated sex. The baroness moaned into the kiss and thrust her hips to grind her aching furrow against Xara's leg. For long moments their sighs and the smacking of their lips competed with the drum of the rain and the crackle of the fire.

Xara tore open the baroness's slip with sudden violence, withdrawing her kiss and burying her face instead in the soft, pale mounds of Gisela's breasts. Xara fondled Gisela's tits with both hands, kissing deep within the valley between them, mashing them against her face, and finally seeking out a nipple, to flick and tease with her tongue. To coax to straining hardness. To suckle as a hungry daughter might suck at the milky breast of her mother.

"Ohhhhhhh," cried Gisela, pulling Xara against her breast. "Your mouth is boiling. Your thigh... rides against my desires."

Gisela continued to thrust her hips, grinding against Xara's thigh. She came loudly, quickly, throwing her dark curls from side to side among the pillows as she tensed and released the slick flow of her ecstasy onto xara's slender leg. The huntress suckled roughly at a nipple, even nibbling to prolong Gisela's pleasure with momentary spike of pain.

"Thank you," gasped Gisela, panting for breath. "Thank you for this pleasure."

Xara lavished her with another long, deep kiss.

"It has only begun, my lovely Gisela," said the huntress, smoothing hair from the baroness's pretty face. Xara's kiss began to travel lower again, passing the mounds of Gisela's breasts, over her soft belly and to her thighs. The musk of the woman's arousal was thick in the air. Xara was no prude. The womanly scent was enticing. As she lowered her face between Gisela's thick thighs, the huntress could not resist sliding one hand between her own thighs, to cup and gently stroke her slick sex.

"What are you doing?" moaned Gisela.

Xara answered her with a light kiss upon the baroness's silky mound. She kissed again and again, teasingly, tasting her inner thigh and letting her tongue slip gently against those pink folds. She sampled the sweetness of Gisela's sex, her tongue lingering against that dewy furrow, sliding just inside and out again, to seek the fleshy pebble of Gisela's pleasure.

"My husband never... ohhh...kissed me in such a way huntress! Huntress!" Gisela's fingers twisted in the duvet and she thrust her sex against Xara's exploring tongue. As that tongue slipped into her overheated channel, the baroness cried out, "Aaaahhhh!"

Xara's guild had trained her well. She had studied administering pleasure to more than one hundred species of monsters. Gender was no barrier to the application of her skill. But the pleasure of a human woman was her first and particular area of expertise. It was, in the words of one of her instructors, Xara's "ultimate calling."

She did not simply lick or suck the quivering quim of the baroness. She did not merely apply her fingers. Xara made love to the slick, womanly cunt of Gisela Salian with her mouth and thrusting fingers. She pressed her face firmly between those scissoring thighs, her nose buried in the fragrant hair and her tongue lashing against Gisela's clitoris. Her fingers sawed wetly past Gisela's fleshy lips and into her clutching channel as the baroness wailed and rocked her hips. Even as those fingers pumped in and out, Xara's knuckle dug between the plump buttocks of the baroness

and rocked against the hot clench of her anus, soon slicked with the nectar flowing from Gisela's cunt.

"Ohhhhhh huntress!" cried Gisela, practically levitating from the bed such was the arching of her back. "I am cumming!"

No more words could pass her trembling lips. She wailed in mind-shocked pleasure, cumming again and again upon the flicking crucible of Xara's tongue. Her inner muscles spasmed and squeezed against Xara's fingers. Her entire body shook, breasts heaving, thighs tensing as waves of pleasure broke upon her desire.

Her orgasm spent, she finally relaxed onto the bed, but Xara was not finished. With surprising strength, the slender huntress turned Gisela onto her hands and knees. She swatted Gisela's plump cheeks, stinging them and reddening the pale mounds until the baroness was crying out in surprise and confusion.

"Why do you torment me?" cried the baroness.

"Pain sweetens pleasure," explained Xara. "You have felt the sting, now feel the soothing warmth."

Gisela was too shocked to object as the huntress spread the baroness's buttocks apart, exposing the pinkish knot of her anus. Xara expected the woman had never been in such a humiliating position and yet all such shame was forgotten the moment Xara's tongue caressed Gisela's clenching hole.

"Goddddds!" cried the baroness, calling out to all and sundry, those above and below as Xara began to vigorously lick the rim of her anus. The huntress's darting tongue pressed past this reflexive tightness and invaded the inner heat of her body. Gisela threw back her head and wailed once more as Xara's tongue fucked her nastiest passage and the huntress's fingers now strummed Gisela's straining clit.

Such pleasure was only a taste of the long night of ecstasy. By dawn,

Xara made sure the baroness knew no boundaries of desire, no limits to her body's capacity for pleasure. She was not only the recipient of such gifts, but Xara patiently instructed her on how to reciprocate.

The elf's long legs intertwined with hers, their sexes grinding together one moment and the huntress's thighs enclosing Gisela's head the next. The baroness knew the sweetness and the scent of the beautiful elf's cum. She knew the faint bitterness of her anus and the way the white-haired huntress's entire body seemed to tighten when she came.

"I will never forget this," gasped the baroness as dawn's first light began to penetrate the curtains.

"I know," agreed Xara, sitting up from the bed. "Let our night together be an open door for you and not an anchor. Continue, unencumbered, my lady."

Gisela reached out a lazy hand to stroke Xara's slender back. Her fingers missed as the huntress rose from the bed and crossed to the window.

"The rain has stopped," said Xara. She turned back to the baroness, her pale body now marked here and there with red. "It is time for the hunt to begin."

"Will you return to me?" asked the baroness, her breasts shifting as she sat up in the bed and watched Xara begin to dress.

"When it is done, I will call upon you once." Xara bent down to kiss the baroness. "Then, my lady, I hope you will never have need to see me again."

If Gisela was hurt, she did not show it on her face. She replied with a nod. Good, thought Xara. She did not need someone falling in love with her, least of all some lonely and beleaguered noblewoman. She pulled on her cloak and pulled the hood up over her head.

"I will need one of your horses," said Xara, not bothering to look back at the baroness.

"Take whatever you need."

Xara left the baroness still flushed with pleasure and slipped out of the keep by one of the scullery doors. The world was soaked and muddy. Though the rains had quit, a steady mist added to the chill already in the air. Xara's breath came in small puffs of steam as she made her way across the swampy commons to the stables.

A flash of her huntress's badge and the stout stableman gestured to the stalls, offering a choice of pampered dressage ponies and swaybacked old draft horses.

"Unacceptable. Prepare one of the guard horses. Give me Jensen's mount."

"He won't like that," said the stableman.

"I am not concerned with what Jensen likes. I am concerned with ridding this land of goblins and I need a horse." She plucked at the stableman's apron. "Now tack the horse or I'll put a saddle on you."

He backed away and put himself to use saddling up a sturdy-looking brown stallion with a white diamond pattern on its nose. The moment he was done, Xara pushed past him and climbed into the saddle. She ducked beneath the doorway to the barn and rode the horse out at a gallop with the banner of her cloak flowing behind her.

Xara had memorized the map of the barony and she knew, from the most recent attacks, where to begin her search for the goblins. Once she had their trail, there would be no escape for the little beasts.

Chapter II

The Hunt

Xara kept her face sheltered and partly concealed beneath the hood of her heavy cloak as she rode among the farmhouses and the burned shells of barns on the eastern outskirts of Rastenburg. Now and then a shutter or a door opened and an anxious face peeked out to watch her ride slowly past. She reached the most recent house to be attacked. The dwelling was made of stone with a clay chimney giving smoke into the chill of the morning. The roof was newly thatched and glistened with the rains.

The barn was destroyed, a windmill toppled, and the fence that enclosed the plot of vegetables and grazing pasture had been ruined seemingly out of pure maliciousness. As if the goblins had attacked it with hatchets to make it useless.

Xara tied the horse off to a fencepost and jumped down. She made her way up the muddy path to the house and rapped her knuckles against the door.

"No visitors!" came a raspy woman's voice through the door.

"My name is Xara Wolff," she replied, raising her voice to be heard by any within the dwelling. "I am huntress and agent of the baroness. I am investigating the disappearance of several girls and I understand one was taken just days ago from..."

Xara let her words trail off as locks began to turn and the door creaked open. A hobbled, prematurely aged woman peered up at the huntress with a suspicious eye. Her expression was hard, but it softened

just a fraction when she saw Xara's bright blue eyes.

"Huntress?" The woman stepped back from the door to allow Xara inside. "Come in then. You'll be wanting to talk to the boy. It was him that saw his sister taken. Him that tried to... well, he paid a price. And Milly was a good one. Sweet as an apple. They grabbed her up he said."

"Are you her mother?" asked Xara.

The woman shook her head. "I'm raising them. Ma was my sister and she and her husband was both was took by the fever some years back. The little ones somehow survived."

The woman brought Xara to the only door in the small farmstead other than the entrance.

"I've let him take my bed since... well... you'll see what those beasts did to him." She turned the knob and pulled the door open.

The room was gray with the light from a single window. It was hardly wide enough for the small straw bed. Though the privy looked clean there was an unmistakable scent of urine.

The young man in the bed was pale and possessed the slightly feminine appearance Xara associated with a scholar or even a young nobleman rather than a farm boy. He was lean rather than muscular, his hair cut short, and he looked fresh of conscription age. It was obvious the king's army would not take him. Not without his hands. The two stumps were wrapped in blood darkened bandages. He was staring out the window and did not even glance at Xara as she entered.

The woman hobbled over to the lad and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Tristan, you have a visitor. She's a huntress. She hopes to find your sister." When he did not reply, her lips pinched tightly and she backed away. "I'll leave you to it, miss. Be gentle with him."

Xara waited for the old woman to leave the room and latch the door

closed behind her. The huntress approached the foot of the bed.

"Tristan," she said, imbuing his name with the slightest flourish of the Word. "Look at me."

His head turned slowly and he regarded her with sad eyes. She pulled her hood back slowly from her face, revealing her white hair and her long, pointed ears. He did not react. Truly, he must be suffering.

"She's gone," he said, his voice barely strong enough to reach her.

"Milly, is it?" Xara knelt before the bed and placed a hand on his covered leg. "I intend to find her, Tristan, and bring her back."

"Couldn't stop them," he whispered.

"You were very brave for trying to protect your sister. You did everything expected of you and more. And your... sacrifice, was not in vain." She climbed onto the bed, crowding against him as she sat. She put an arm around him and opened her cloak to pull his head against her breast. "Tell me of that day. When did you first know the farm was under attack?"

"The dogs," he said, seeming to gain a little strength from her embrace. "The dogs began to bark. They made a furious noise like I had never heard. They were down by the stream, past Shandy's field, and I had to leash them to pull them away."

Xara was not surprised the dogs scented the goblins.

"And that was when the goblins attacked?" she asked.

"Later," said Tristan. "They came just after dark. I heard the dogs again, in their shed, but only for a moment. I knew something was wrong. Milly was digging up potatoes for dinner. I heard her screaming as I ran out there... and..."

"Be strong," said Xara, using the Word once again to make her

words supernaturally convincing. "You can save her by remembering."

"They had swords. They were tearing open her clothes and touching her, oh gods, all over. They were laughing. I had a pitchfork. It wasn't much. I wounded two of them. One of them badly. The biggest of them spoke clearly. Not in our language but in theirs."

"You've learned the tongue of the goblins?" asked Xara.

"Yes. I have a knack for languages."

Xara was impressed. The lad could not have heard much goblin spoken. To be able to translate any must be more than just a knack. He must be blessed by the gods.

"What did he say to you?"

"He said the girl belonged to something. Yarmot, maybe?"

"Yardok," said Xara. "He is the 'God of the Least' often paid tribute by lepers. Goblins and kobolds also worship him."

Tristan nodded dully. Xara left unsaid that the very fact the goblins were saying the boy's sister belonged to their god did not bode well at all. It might mean they were a cult sacrificing these girls as some sort twisted ritual to their god.

"They cut off my hands," said Tristan, raising his bandaged wrists. "They laughed and... I can't work. I can't hold a sword. What if they come back?"

"They won't," said Xara.

"I'm useless!" cried the young man. "I'll never till the soil. I'll never have a wife to hold."

Xara rested her fingers on the young man's chin. She turned it gently

until his eyes were on hers.

"I come from Ixham and in the capital they have many wondrous things. I have seen a man walk with legs made from brass. I have seen a bird made from gold that could fly as fast and true as any hawk." She cradled one of his bandaged wrists. "Hands could be fashioned. I cannot say if you will feel with them, but you might one day hold a woman."

His eyes welled with tears. He nodded again, as if trying to convince himself her words were true.

"I want to go with you," he said. "I know these lands. I can read a map and translate their tongue."

"I speak their ugly tongue as well," said Xara. "But you are very brave to want to go."

"I just want my sister back." His chest puffed slightly. "I promised her I would save her."

Xara could see she would need to distract Tristan. Perhaps a reward for his bravery was in order. She suspected she could provide such relief without tarrying long.

"Tristan," she cooed, "I have hunted dozens of monsters and dispatched them without hesitation. Your valor is not in question, but you would only slow me in my hunt for these beasts."

"I promised her," said Tristan, looking her in the eyes.

"So brave," moaned Xara. "Brave boys like you, sacrificing so much for the love of your sister, deserve to be rewarded."

She cradled his face with both hands.

"What... sort of reward?"

"Ohhhh," she leaned closer. "I can think of something just right for a young man like you."

The huntress could play the cosseting lover as easily as the loyal handmaiden to a baroness or the fearless monster huntress. She giggled as she kissed Tristan, the sweetness of her mouth quickly overwhelmed his sourness and her tongue tended to his lust. She slid one hand down his slender chest and felt beneath the blanket for the growing hardness of his cock.

"Oooh," she said. "You're so big, Tristan."

If the change in her tone disturbed him, he hid it well. He leaned back, watching as she pulled the covers away from his lap. He was unable to hide his smile as she wrapped her hand around his cock straining beneath his bed trousers. It was quite large. Perhaps, reasoned Xara, the lad was blessed with more than just an unnatural ability with languages.

She dragged his trousers lower, revealing by increments the glorious, swollen pillar of his cock. Such massive fuckmeat did not belong on such a slender young man. It was as if an ogre's cock (though far less warty, thankfully) had been fused to his hips.

"It's huge," cried Xara, unable to restrain herself.

"Is it? I have not seen other members."

"For a man," said Xara, lowering her head to his lap, "I've not seen larger."

He began to reply, but lost all ability to speak as the beautiful elf ran her tongue around the bulging tip of his cock. She tasted the salty-sweetness of his precum almost immediately. She pressed a kiss to the throbbing tip and opened her mouth to him. Her skilled lips wrapped around his cock as her equally trained fingers massaged the length of his bulging shaft. His bollocks, big as eggs, shifted in his tightening sack.

"Oh, gods, your mouth... it's so hot!" gasped Tristan.

"Mmmmmhmmmm," agreed Xara. She bobbed her mouth atop the obscene totem of his cock. Her spit drooled down his length and lubricated her fingers as she stroked him. With great effort and patience, she relaxed her muscles and allowed his huge tip to invade her throat.

It might have been an impossible task for a normal woman, but Xara had taken more than even Tristan could offer, cocks big enough to bulge her neck as they filled her throat. Her lips slid lower and lower. She shifted her position to allow his cock even deeper into her throat. Her tongue cradled his shaft and touched his sack.

"Something... something is happening!" cried Tristan. "Oh gods, huntress, you are doing... you are doing something to me!"

Her fingers gently kneaded the hard stones of his bollocks. She squeezed them and curled her tongue beneath his cock. His hips pushed once, driving him deeper into her throat, and he let out a strangled cry of pleasure as he exploded into Xara's sucking mouth. His cock throbbed between her lips, it twitched against her tongue, and deep in her throat she felt the hot, thick pump of his seed. She swallowed around him, drawing out his pleasure and draining every drop from his twitching stones.

She looked into his pleasure-mad eyes as she finished him. His will was hers, completely, but she would not use him like some monster she had dominated. She let his cock soften slightly in her throat before lifting her mouth from him with a gasp of air.

"I did not, I mean, I meant, I am sorry for..."

Xara pressed a fingertip to his lips to quiet him. She ran her tongue over her own lips, cleaning the traces of his cum, and wiped some drool from her chin.

"Do not apologize," she said. "It was your first time and I did not expect you to last long."

Tristan nodded.

"Now rest," she said, rising from the bed. "Sleep. When I return it will be with word of your sister."

He closed his eyes and she pulled the cover up to his neck. She smiled as she left his room. He was already snoring and she had not even used the Word.

The hunched woman greeted Xara with an unhappy scowl. She did not dare speak against the huntress, but she suspected what Xara had done. Xara did not have the time, nor inclination, to comfort the old woman. She pulled up her hood.

"Which direction to the stream by Shandy's field?" asked the huntress.

The woman, still scowling, pointed to the north. Xara departed without another word.

Shandy's field was as miserable as every other plot of land in Rastenburg. The crops - bean plants of some sort - were brown and stunted and the rows between the pitiful beans were swampy with mud. She moved lightly and quickly to keep from being sucked into the morass. At the edge of Shandy's property was a small orchard of crabapples. Nothing worth eating, but perhaps some sour cider could be strangled out of the misshapen apples.

A runoff spilled from the orchard down to a rock-strewn bank. She heard the stream before she saw it, swollen with the rainwater, it had carved deep into the land and hid itself among reeds. She dropped down into its rocky shallows and drew her sword. She could sense them. They had been here not long ago. With her eyes she saw the traces of their passing. The crude boot prints in the mud and the claw marks on the roots of cold cypress plants. There was a bit of cloth torn from a plain peasant dress and there were a few blond hairs that might have come from Tristan's

sister.

Xara followed the path along the edge of the stream until she could smell their musty scent. The entrance to their tunnel was well-hidden and surprisingly well-designed to keep out the water from the high waters. It was not nearly tall enough for a human, so Xara dropped to a crouch. There were markings in the mud at the tunnel's entrance and she imagined poor Milly bound and dragged into the darkness.

But it was not darkness for Xara. Even without the perception of a huntress, her elven eyes saw into the lightless tunnel and perceived in shades of blue what lurked within. The tunnel was precise for goblins and it was deep, suggesting these creatures were far more organized and motivated than the usual rabble they formed.

Xara drew her keen dagger and ventured deeper. There were symbols carved into the rocks of the tunnel and they were not carved in the simple language of goblins.

"Daemonic," she murmured. She could not read the obscene runes, few could decipher such a complex language, but she recognized the insidious design of the symbols. But Yardok was no daemon. Perhaps these were tunnels used by daemons long ago and now occupied by the goblins. If that was the case, evil power might still be at work.

She continued, deeper and deeper, until she reached a chamber that was piled with stolen grains, bits of meat, and the butchered, drying carcasses of several dogs and other animals. It was a larder of sorts and more than one tunnel connected to it. Xara realized now that this was a vast network of tunnels, perhaps crossing the whole of Rastenburg and allowing the goblins to move back and forth unseen and raid at their leisure.

To her honed senses as a huntress, this chamber was befouled with lust. This, she realized, was where the goblins brought their prizes immediately after a raid. Some filthy straw and dog pelts seemed to vibrate with the residue of the defilement.

She closed her eyes and called upon the powers of the Scent to heighten her senses. She breathed deeply and saw, in the discreet molecules that lingered in the air, a vision of the past. She saw a beautiful blonde, scarcely more than a girl, beyond tears, wide-eyed with fear as the goblins mauled her breasts with their tiny green hands and wagged their cocks in her face. They climbed atop her and thrust into her virgin sex and her mouth at the same time. They used her for their pleasure and she was powerless to stop them.

Xara's heart quickened as she experienced a remnant of the pleasure, both that of the goblins and that of the girl, brought to climax against her will. Older scenes mingled with the violation of Milly. A dark haired girl did her best to service the goblins as the leader of the raiding party held a blade to her throat. A very pale, red-haired girl, oldest of the memories teased out by Xara's powers of Scent, cried out for her daddy as a goblin fucked her from behind.

The scenes aroused Xara. She was repelled by what she was seeing, but could not avoid the sympathetic lust creeping into her mind. She forced herself to endure them, lost amid the blending scenes, one girl melding into the next, cocks spurting and thrusting and goblins cackling with laughter, until she saw them dragging their bound captives deeper. She saw the path she needed to take and her eyes flicked open. Her grip tightened on the handle of her keen dagger. She was getting closer.

Creeping through the depths of the earth, following the distant echo of voices, it was not long before Xara Wolff came upon a goblin raiding party moving through the tunnel. They were heading deeper, unaware of her presence, and she listened to their words as she stalked them.

"Yardok requires one more," said the largest. "So we must find him another."

"Pretty I hope," cackled one of the runts.

"Time for a little fun," said the leader. "We fuck girls. Yardok says ritual not begin until moonrise."

Xara smiled. She sheathed her dagger and stepped out into the midst of the tunnel behind the goblins. Her expression skillfully mimicked the fear she had seen on the faces of the girls in her visions of lust.

"Oh, gods!" she cried. "I have to get out of here!"

She turned and began to run. She intended to let the goblins catch her, but not without a bit of a chase first.

Chapter III

Captured

There were six of them and only the largest was even as tall as Xara's shoulders. She could have fought them off, but that was not her plan. Each goblin carried a short sword of crude manufacture but savage sharpness. Their arms and legs were long and corded with muscles, their flesh was green, their eyes red, and their teeth sharp and ugly. Their leader wore a loincloth, the smaller goblins wore only bandoliers and belts, and their wee cocks became erect as they grabbed at Xara's clothing and dragged her down to the tunnel floor.

"No! Release me!" she cried, kicking out and knocking one of the goblins over. She reached for her sword and the leader knocked her hand away, drawing the long blade for himself. The beasts turned her over and tore off her cloak. Their hands began to pull open her blouse. She felt her boots taken and her trousers being dragged down from her hips with the laces still tied. She screamed convincingly, "Please let me go!"

"How did you find your way down here, pretty elf?" wondered the leader of the goblins.

Xara continued to wail and ineffectively fight against the pawing of the goblins. She did not intend to reveal that she could understand their language.

"She have knife!" cried one of the goblins. The little brute drew her keen blade and nearly took off his own finger from its sharpness. He dropped the knife and the others laughed at him. The leader picked it up.

"A very good blade." He held it up and the blade flashed its faint

blue luminance. "Look, it glows. Must be magic. Master will like it."

Xara watched the goblin leader slide the blade into the belt over his loincloth. She would retrieve her weapon when she had the chance. For now, she thrashed and wailed and played the part of a helpless victim.

"Please don't rape me," she cried out. "I am a virgin."

Some of the goblins laughed at her cries. Perhaps they understood her words or only her pitiful tone. She forced herself to weep as they at last tore apart her underclothes and exposed her naked body. The goblins did not wait to drag her back to their little pleasure nest. They were feverish with lust. She did not need to use the Scent to know their desires as their hands squeezed her breasts and their tongues licked at every curve of her pale body.

One of the goblins began to kiss Xara. The little brute held her head in his clawed hands and forcing his sour tongue into her mouth. Her tongue fought back and she moaned with feigned terror as the battle to expel his tongue with hers developed into a passionate kiss.

A moment later she felt a nose sniffing between her thighs and a hot goblin tongue began to lash the dewy folds of her sex. She was rolled onto her side and a moment later another tongue pushed between her firm buttocks as a goblin began to lick her ass. Tongues lashed her nipples and goblin mouths suckled Xara's pert breasts. Her hands brushed against their hard cocks. She felt them thrusting desperately at her thighs and wanking themselves in a frenzy.

"Enough!" growled the leader. "Release her!"

The goblins scattered. All but the one with its lips pressed to Xara's and its tongue tangled with hers in a passionate kiss. Her hand had found its hard little cock and she was gently stroking it off, smearing precum onto her shoulder. That goblin was suddenly and violently lifted from her head as the largest of the goblins kicked it away. It whined in pain and cradled its bruised belly.

Xara gazed up at the biggest of the goblins as it stood over her and began to untie its loincloth. She looked at him in wide-eyed terror.

"No," she whimpered, covering her breasts with an arm and using a hand to cover her wet sex.

Outside, Xara was the scared little farm girl the goblin expected. Inside, the huntress was smiling. Fucking the leader of the raiding party might spare her the need to bed all six of the little beasts.

Not that she minded. Goblins were energetic lovers and she had plentiful experience with them. The Order of Huntresses kept several imprisoned for training purposes in the dungeon at Ixham Chapterhouse. The lives those captive goblins enjoyed was more like a fantasy for them. They had a comfortable bed, all they could eat and drink, and an endless procession of beautiful girls eager for mating. A dream to most of their kind.

No, if she had time she would have enjoyed all six of the green-skinned beasts. Goblin orgies could go on for hours. Xara wanted to be quick. She had to find Tristan's sister and the other girls and save them from a fate she increasingly suspected was very dark indeed.

She fixed her gaze on the goblin standing over, now brandishing its hardness in one clawed hand. Her face was still twisted with fear, but when she spoke, her words reverberated with the full power of the Word.

"Do it," she spoke the words in the goblin tongue. "Claim my cunt."

He made no attempt to resist her. The goblin dropped to his knees and pulled Xara's ankles up to his shoulders. His cock was pink where the bulging tip emerged from the pale green sheath of his foreskin.

He did not need to use his hand to find her sex. She was hot and wet and her groove invited his cock into her slick folds. He thrust into her in a single stroke, burying his modest length in her clutching channel and

pressing his bollocks against the spit-damp wrinkled of Xara's anus.

"Yessssss," she gasped, unable to resist the genuine sensation of pleasure.

Xara's well-trained pussy was as tight as the virgin the goblin was expecting. She squeezed against each ridge of his cockhead, each bulge and throbbing vein, pulling him deeper into her hot channel as if by suction. The brute grunted and his lips curled back from his jagged teeth as he began to savagely fuck her.

"Warm human bitch cunt," snarled the goblin. "Pussy tight to squeeze out seed. Mmmmm... yes. Would breed pussy."

"Yesssss," cried Xara, ignoring the insult that the goblin had mistaken her for a human. "Breed my pussy. I deserve to carry your seed."

He bent over her, his shoulders and arms supporting his weight as he grasped her breasts in both clawed hands. His fingers pressed into her pert mounds and he leaned his fanged mouth down to Xara's parted lips. His long, foul tongue slid into the huntress's his mouth. His lips followed, pressing down in a desperate kiss.

"Mmmmmm!" she cried, feeling her orgasm grow.

The goblin's strokes became ragged. Xara did not need her powers to know that he was also approaching his climax. She used the Scent and she could see into his lust, his desires, and into his deepest thoughts. The blue-tinted realm of his memories unfolded in the mists behind Xara's eyes.

She saw from the goblin's perspective as he barked commands at his underlings. She held the blade that maimed Tristan and it was her cock, the goblin's cock, that filled Tristan's sister with spurting goblin cum. She felt the glory of Yardok. He was a huge, savage, yellow-skinned goblin with red eyes that glowed with supernatural power. She glimpsed him furtively as the goblin knelt and bowed his head.

Yardok needed the girls for a ritual. He was keeping them, alive, in a pit beneath an iron grate in his throne room. She could hear the girls moaning. There was something down in that pit with them.

With a little teasing, Xara peiced together a map of the vast complex of tunnels by recalling the goblin's travels. Reaching deeper into the goblin's hazier long term memories, Xara witnessed many moments of digging and excavating. The tunnels were not old at all, and the daemonic runes were inscribed by the goblins exactly to Yardok's specifications. Whatever this ritual was involving the girls was using the runes and maybe even the layout of the tunnels to channel magical power.

Her pleasure grew too intense and she was forced out of her Scent trance. She bucked beneath the goblin, arching her back and thrusting her pussy onto his cock. His tongue was still in her mouth, exploring and twisting and filling her with his inhuman taste. She held his back, spreading her thighs wide and pulling him against her, pulling him deeper.

Her last trick was ready for him. The Snare. The most powerful skill a huntress could wield. The ability to completely dominate the mind of another through sexual pleasure. The fluttering start of her orgasm amplified her reach and she released the Snare against her lover. The goblin's head jerked up, its red eyes rolling back to white as her squeezing pussy triggered what was surely the most intense orgasm the brute had ever felt.

"Aahhhhhh!" shrieked the goblin atop her, his nails digging into her breasts hard enough to draw drops of blood.

In the moment of the goblin's greatest ecstasy, his mind yielded to Xara's authority and his cock exploded inside her. She felt the spasms of his release and the hot flow of his cum into her clutching channel.

Xara was not concerned with being impregnated. Though she was extremely fertile - a part of her conditioning used to lure monsters that could sense such things - she maintained absolute control over her womb. She would not be impregnated unless she chose. The goblin's cum slicked

her walls and poured in a great quantity against her womb. She held him against her until he had shuddered out every last drop of his seed.

"Ohhhhh, what... what do you... what do you desire?" he asked.

"Get off of me," she said with a grunt.

She pushed the goblin off of her and he stood, his flaccid cock retreating into his foreskin and dripping with their mingled juices. She exhaled the goblin's foul body odor. A silky trickle of the goblin's cum spilled out of her creamed nethers and dripped over her sensitive anus. There was no time to seek out a spring or underground river. She would be forced to wallow in the goblin's filth. Still recovering from her orgasm, she gathered her wits and sat up.

The other goblins looked from the huntress to their leader with confusion. Some were still wanking their little cocks waiting their turn. Others had spent their seed upon the tunnel's floor, leaving little glistening puddles on the stone. None had expected their leader to be asking their captive what she wanted.

"Barbik," said one of the smaller goblins. "Why you talk to the human?"

"I am an elf," said Xara in the goblin's tongue, brushing some of the dirt from her shoulders. She insinuated the Word into her words. "Barbik is my friend now. We are all friends. Do you understand?"

The goblins looked at each other, at Barbik, and then back at the huntress. All but one nodded their agreement. Their minds were weak and they were glad to defer to her new authority. Xara was quick to address the remaining goblin.

The huntress crawled on hands and knees across the tunnel floor, her eyes flashing blue in the tunnel's dim light. She seized the goblin's wee cock between finger and thumb and it let out a plaintive whine of surprise. She began to stroke it, quickly, lubricating her fingers with its dripping

precum. She caught its eyes with her gaze, holding it transfixed, breasts jiggling as she worked her hand on its cock.

"What is your name?" she asked with the Word.

"Nimik," whined the goblin and several of its companions repeated the name. They watched her stroking Nimik's cock.

"I want to be friends with you as well, Nimik." Xara took her hand away and slowly ran her tongue over her palm and fingers. She returned her hand to the goblin's hard cock, holding his entire rigid length in the luscious softness of her palm. She squeezed and resumed stroking him. Her lips hung open as if touching him in this way might bring herself to a climax. She moaned, "Oh, Nimik, spill your seed for me."

The words had hardly left her mouth and the little goblin squealed with pleasure. Hot goblin spunk jetted out in a sticky stream, lashing her outer thigh and dripping from her grasp. She squeezed his throbbing member tight and milked it of every drop. Nimik's mental defenses were meager to begin with and crumbled in his moment of his ecstasy. Xara's power overwhelmed him before she felt the first splash of his cum. His pleasure spent, his cock slipped from Xara's fingers and Nimik dropped to his knees and bowed his head.

"Whatever you command," he groveled.

"Very good," said the huntress. She wiped her sticky hand onto Nimik's bandolier and turned to the other goblins. "Fetch me my clothes you have scattered about the tunnel. Then I will tell you what I require of you."

The goblins scurried about, searching for the torn remnants of Xara's clothing. Her domination of this particular group of goblins was absolute, but goblins were not particularly smart. Fortunately, her plan to get to Yardok was one of the simplest and oldest ruses employed by her order when facing larger numbers of foes. She would have her pets take her directly to their master. Xara was going to play the prisoner.

She was certain that Yardok was not what he seemed and she needed time to expose his lie. Whatever he really was, the huntress was certain she could defeat him.

Chapter IV

God of the Least

Xara's wrists were bound together with a length of twine. A worn leather collar was fitted around her neck and a dog's Barbik pulled her along by a leash. She kept pace with him easily as the other goblins followed along behind her. Her clothes hung in tatters from her naked torso, though her trousers and boots had survived intact.

The deeper she was led into the tunnels, the more the ubiquitous runes carved into the walls and floor of the tunnels began to take on a faint luminous quality. It was only when they encountered another group of goblins, and Barbik halted to parley with them, that Xara was able to get a better look at the source of this malevolent glow.

To her surprise, she realized each rune was attracting pink fungus consisting of a carpet of fleshy fronds. These mats kept almost perfectly to the design of each rune and rippled with growth that sent out occasional flashes of light. When she held her hand close to the fungus, the fronds quivered and reached out towards her fingertips. She pulled her hand away without touching the trembling surface.

The drumming began soon after the brief halt. She felt it in her feet initially, but as they ventured deeper it throbbed in through the air and shook in her organs. It was disorienting and not totally unpleasant. The way it vibrated her breasts and shook inside her womanhood awakened a primal lust. It was the bestial urge to rut and it was as powerful as it was crude.

As the steady beat of the drums surrounded her, Xara became very

aware of her nipples rubbing against the remnants of her shirt and her sex, engorged and eager for a cock. She need only ask one of the goblins to take her and satisfy her lust. They would surely be all too happy to agree. Barbik turned to her and she thought she might demand exactly that. He spoke before she could make such a foolish request.

"We approach Yardok's throne room. There are many guards. They will take you from us."

"Stay as close as you are able without arousing suspicion," said Xara. She wet her lips. Barbik gazed at her as if he expected more. She resisted the urge to demand he untie his loincloth and pin her against the wall of the cave. "Get moving."

"Yes, mistress." Barbik gave Xara's leash a gentle tug and their journey was resumed.

The tunnel widened ahead and a warm light spilled into the tunnel. Beneath the powerful pounding of the drums, Xara heard the distant moans of women. She recalled these cries of pleasure and fear from what she had scented in Barbik's memories. The captives were being held in a pit beneath Yardok's throne room.

A large goblin wearing a masked helmet of iron and armed with a crude pike stepped into the passage, barring their way forward.

"More tribute for Yardok," said Barbik and he yanked Xara roughly forward by her leash. The huntress let out a fearful cry and fell to her knees. It was a bit of drama on her part and it worked perfectly. The guard growled and snapped the leash from Barbik's hand.

"On your feet bitch," snarled the goblin. "I take you to Yardok."

He turned and began to pull Xara roughly along behind him.

"I go too," said Barbik. "Not letting you take my catch, Homok."

The big goblin guard snarled a reply and gave Xara another violent

tug on her leash. The huntress spilled onto the floor again, this time not pretending, and the goblin guard lashed out at her with a kick. She managed to avoid the worst of it and scrambled back onto her feet. His rough hand shoved down the back of her leather trousers and he squeezed her buttock and ran his fingers down her crack.

"No, please," whined Xara. The truth was she wanted the brute to rape her. She wanted him to fuck her ass and mouth, to fill her cunt with cum, and pound into her slippery sex in perfect rhythm to the drums.

"Bitch," said the goblin, rubbing his finger against her tender anus, "you wish I fuck you when you get what Yardok has for you."

His fingertip pressed hard against her tender pucker, nearly forcing its way inside. He stopped and drew his hand out of her trousers. With a growl, he gave her another yank of the leash and she stumbled behind him into the throne room of his god.

Xara was led into the torchlit throne room of the supposed goblin god Yardok. The large chamber echoed with the powerful beat of the drums. Sweaty goblin drummers pounded on the crude instruments and at least a half dozen masked guards stood at attention around the room. The domed ceiling of the chamber throbbed with the baleful light of thousands of fungus-filled daemoniac runes. The fleshy pink symbols seemed almost to breathe in and out to the rhythm of the drumming.

Beneath this grotesque sky of squirming flesh was the throne itself; an obscene pillar surrounded by bearded labial and phallic fungi as if male and female genitals had been fashioned from plump orbs and straining columns of living meat. Yardok sat atop this throne. The illusion of a hulking, yellow goblin king was flimsy to the power of Xara's Scent. She inhaled his spiced foulness and saw him as he was: a man-sized daemon of rough red scales, yellow eyes, and a lolling, forked tongue.

The imposter Yardok leapt up from his perverse throne, jiggling a cushion of myconic mammarys and descending from his platform to approach his new captive. As he strode towards her, his feet thumped

against the grate covering the pit and Xara heard the cries of the other women and the breathless grunting of something else. With her heightened senses she could hear the slap of flesh on flesh from that pit, the wet rake of a tongue on a breast, and the orgasmic groan of a young girl at the height of her ecstasy. It was the wet snorting sounds that disturbed her most, and the rotten sulfur smell of evil.

"What is this?" said Yardok. "An elf? Where have you come by her?"

The guard pushed Xara to her knees on the stone as the daemonic imposter approached. Barbik knelt beside her, lowering his gaze submissively to the floor.

"Master," began Xara's original captor, "we found her wandering the tunnel. She was armed, but my men easily defeated her."

"And took your filthy pleasure, no doubt?" Yardok's voice boomed louder than the drums. "Do not tremble, my son. You only do what comes naturally to the rightful rulers of these lands. Those blue eyes... let me see her weapon."

The guard seized Xara's captured sword from Barbik's belt and held it out to the disguised daemon. Yardok took it and pulled it from its sheath. He raised it so that it caught the torchlight and seemed to burn.

"I thought she might be something more dangerous," said Yardok. "Was this all you found on her?"

"Yes, master," said Barbik, not mentioning Xara's dagger, nor the badge of her order looted when they tore her clothing apart. Both were well-hidden in Barbik's loincloth, so long as Yardok did not insist on searching the goblin.

The daemon leaned down and sniffed at Barbik and then at Xara. His yellow eyes were like a serpent's. His stink was as cloying and lust-stoking as the constant drumming. Xara squirmed involuntarily as the daemon looked at her. His hand shot out and caught her around the throat.

He lifted her head, but did not squeeze to constrict her windpipe. Tears spilled from Xara's blue eyes.

"You are a particular beauty," he said, running a clawed thumb over Xara's cheek. "Not so soft as all the others. What girl carries a sword into a place like this? Answer me!"

"My-my sister," she choked. "You took my sister, Milly."

Delight spread across the angular features of the daemon. Its smile exposed the perfect alignment of its curved fangs.

"Oh, and you thought you would come and rescue her from goblins, did you? But you found a bit more than that, my dear. You found a god." He released his grip on her throat, but invisible hands still held her arms and began to tear at her clothing. In moments, these unseen limbs had stripped her naked and lifted her to her feet. Yardok bellowed, "Open the pit."

Two guards came forth and used long iron bars to lever open the two halves of the hinged grate covering the center of the room. Yardok tore a luminous blob of pink fungus from the wall and let it drop from his fingers and fall, a dozen feet or more, into the smooth-sided pit. Xara watched as there was a momentary flash of light as the fungus broke apart. A flash that revealed in gruesome detail the blasphemous violation occurring in the pit below.

Creatures like a cross between a fleshless, long-limbed man and a war dog inhabited the filthy bottom of the pit. Wild, white eyes bulged from their heads and tongues like whipping tentacles hung from their jaws or probed the mouths of the helpless captives. Lesser daemons, Xara realized. Human souls twisted into beastly life by the evil of the chaos realm.

Most of these horrible creatures were in the act of mating with the human woman, mounting them from behind and holding the unfortunate girls in place with claws that bent like human hands. The worst detail of

this tableaux, worse even than the cries of pleasure and the fact that more than one woman was obviously pregnant, was the way it made Xara tremble with new depths of desire. Even her conditioning could not fortify her resistance.

"Isn't it glorious?" Yardok's voice was disturbingly pleasant. "They are giving their souls willingly. Soon, with your help, my sweet one, you and your sister will open the gateway to my realm. I will rule this land. I will shape it to my desires. It is a noble sacrifice and, I promise, one you will enjoy until the final moment."

Such was the nauseating power of the desire welling in Xara that it required every bit of her training and willpower simply to choke out a few words. She fixed the daemon imposter with her blue-eyed gaze and imbued her words with The Word.

"Set me free."

Yardok cocked his head, perhaps sensing the magic at work in Xara's words. The smile never left his face.

"Of course, my sweet," he said.

The invisible hands holding her above the pit released Xara and she plummeted into the darkness blow. Her fall was broken by something slippery and warm. A woman grunted and a daemon snarled and lashed out with a claw that raked Xara's outer thigh. She rolled away from the attack, landing in a musky slime that covered the floor of the pit.

It was hot and humid in the pit. Xara sensed the rutting bodies all around her. Her elven vision could not penetrate the darkness and the sound of the moans and slaps of flesh were distorted by the stone walls of the pit. Her instinct told her something was coming for her. She rolled and moved again and a daemoniac beast splashed into the mud where she had been a moment before. She could just barely see it at this close distance, a reddish-blue shape turning to leap upon her.

"Why do you fight it?" jeered Yardok, apparently able to see into the pit. "Pleasure will win out, brave girl, and you will give yourself willingly."

The daemon was at least partly right. The huntress knew she had only one way of escaping this encounter and it meant almost certainly succumbing to the oppressive desires burning inside her body. She had no choice. She used the Scent and, with a deep breath, took in the full reality of her predicament.

She saw all nine captive girls as if in a blue-tinted dream. Their filthy bodies and torn rag-dressed were caught in almost frozen motion in the hyper-reality of the moment. Dangling breasts seemed to slow mid-swing, sweat droplets glittered as they were flung from their hair, and ripples of impact radiated up their plump bottoms to recede in frozen waves into the taut flesh of their backs. Above them, behind them, the howling daemons snapped their jaws and rolled their mad eyes. Daemonic cocks invaded the once-virgin folds of human cunts. Foul daemonic seed trickled down thighs and drizzled into the slime collecting at the bottom of the pit.

And Xara saw the daemon that was coming for her. It had already launched itself into the air and was coming for her, jaws open and clawed hands out stretched. She turned and brought up her bound wrists above her head. The daemon's claws caught the twine and separated her bonds. It collided with her, but she rolled out from its slippery grasp and got to her feet once again.

In slowed motion, the air seeming to visibly vibrate with the drumming from above, the daemon landed and turned on her. She saw its hideous, fleshless face. Its jaws opened and revealed its savage rows of teeth and the fleshy tentacle of its tongue. Its cock was fully aroused and bouncing beneath its haunches. It was yowling with rage at being denied its quarry twice.

"Come on," rasped Xara. "I'll turn you to mush."

There was no avoiding the daemon's charge this time. Xara braced her legs wide apart in the greasy foulness beneath her feet and caught the daemon in her arms. She wrapped her arms around its rippling muscles and drove her fingers into its shoulders, holding fast as the momentum carried her and the hound over. They landed side-by-side in the slime. The air was knocked out of the huntress's lungs, but there was no time to recover.

The beastly daemon swung its snarling jaws and tried to snap them shut on her head. She thrust her hand into the daemon's mouth and grabbed its tongue, pulling the muscle between its teeth as the dripping length of it wound up her arm. When the daemon snapped its jaws at Xara it only managed to chew its tongue. It yowled in pain and pulled at her arm.

"Your spirit is strong!" shouted Yardok. "But I can sense your desire. You are in heat and the only relief can be found on the end of a cock. Submit yourself. Give in to pleasure."

"You're right," muttered Xara, looking at the wild eyes of the beast she was wrestling. "I have to give him what he wants."

Still holding the daemon's tongue, she slid a hand down the daemon's thrashing, muscular chest, fighting past its claws until she felt the flattened bell of its cockhead. It was hot and oozing with beastly precum. She slipped her fingers over and around it, grasping it and squeezing gently until the beast stopped fighting her.

"That's right," she purred to the daemon. "I'm giving you what you want."

Her fingers wrapped around the beat's bulging member and she began to stroke it. She released its tongue and the drooling tentacle unwrapped from the huntress's forearm. It ran its tongue over her face, tasted her parted lips and smothered her bare breasts in saliva. It snorted in her face and nudged at her shoulders and neck. Its tongue dipped lower and tasted her thighs and her wet furrow. It sampled the creamy flow of juices there without reluctance.

"Ohhhhh," moaned Xara, on the edge of an orgasm at the first lash of the beast's tongue. The daemon nudged her again, more forcefully, and she fell onto her back. A woman and daemon were rutting just beside her head. She could make out the plump, pale flesh of the naked woman and the straining leathery hide of the daemon as it rhythmically pounded its cock into her.

She did not have time to see much more. The daemon was upon her, quite literally, straddling her naked body and dangling the writhing eel of its tongue over her breasts once more. It thrust its tongue into Xara's mouth, smothering her cry of pleasure as she felt its hot cock pressing between her thighs and bulling against her eager sex.

"Don't feel bad," laughed Yardok. "None can resist for long once they are in the pit. Enjoy yourself. It won't take long, I promise."

The grate above her clanged shut. Yardok himself turned the lock and departed with a last laugh.

The daemon's tongue squirmed into Xara's throat. The foul saliva that filled her mouth was sickly sweet and thick, like the greasy discharge of its cock that it now rubbed against her inner thighs. Moaning around the length of the daemon's tongue, the huntress reached a hand between them and grabbed the pressing cock. She guided it to her aching slit and the beast thrust its hot cock into her slick depths. She arched and cried with ecstasy around the daemon's tongue.

Her orgasm pulsed hot in her body, uncontrollable and rippling through her as the creature pounded its cock into her in a bestial frenzy. Its clawed hands held Xara pinned to the slimy floor and its haunches worked steadily to feed it cock in and out of her clenching channel. A barbed tail flicked from side to side and prickled her spread legs. The leather satchel of its bollocks slapped against her Xara's clenched anus with each thrust.

Through the pleasure, the huntress saw the way to freedom. Using the Scent had exposed her to the limits of her self-control, but she retained enough sense to know if she could make the beast cum there was an

opportunity for her to use the Snare to dominate the daemon's mind. That assumed this daemon could even succumb to her powers. Some were entirely immune.

It felt as if the daemon's wriggling tongue had reached into her belly. She swallowed around it as her body shook with another wave of orgasmic pleasure. She pulled the daemon against her. She wrapped her thighs around him and found the strength to fuck back against the piston of his cock. Tension knitted its shoulders and the stones of its bollocks tightened. Its strokes pulled back less and less until it was rocking its hips with its cock buried deep inside Xara's fluttering cunt.

Sweat and filth slicked Xara's body. She felt as if she was being drawn into the realm of chaos with each spasm of pleasure and each thrust of the daemon's tireless cock.

Cum, she begged in her mind. *Cum for me. Cum inside me. Fill me with your daemonic seed.*

With great effort of will, she milked the daemon's cock inside her, squeezing and massaging it with muscles made disobedient in the throes of her pleasure. The beast snorted and let out a sound like the whine of a kicked hound. Its grip tightened on her shoulders and it slammed its cock so deep she felt as if the flattened tip might force its way into her womb.

The daemon's drool spilled all over Xara's face and made it difficult to breathe. She felt as if its invading tongue was choking her from within and she realized, perhaps far later than she should have, that the tongue was the means by which the daemon was siphoning away her very life force. She knew she could not cling to her sanity much longer.

Aching with pleasure and pain, squeezing with all the force she could muster, she willed the daemon to cum. She reached out to the beast's inhuman mind with the power of her Snare and invaded a mind filled with nothing but the thought and deed of predatory mating. Whether lost souls caught in the trenches of writhing flesh in the realm of chaos or lone witches here in the realm of the living, the beast had mounted so many,

draining life and sowing the seeds of blasphemous birth.

Xara saw her daemoniac lover standing atop an ocean of writhing bodies. She found it there, in the dream of her Snare, and she embraced it. She offered her shapely hindquarters to it and her hand beckoned its cock into her tight, elven tunnel. The beast howled as it penetrated her.

In the flesh, in the prolonged moment of pleasure, the beast's swollen cock erupted inside Xara. Its length beat against her clit and its clenching bollocks unloaded a soaking quantity of thick, hot daemoniac seed into her channel. The pumping cum spilled out of her sex and poured in a milky sheath down the daemon's throbbing length.

Its immortal mind broke in that instant and its defenses were lowered by the pleasure. Xara's will invaded the daemon's consciousness. Its tongue withdrew from her throat and out of her mouth. She choked and gasped for air and pushed the creature away with the force of her will. The daemon's cock left her with an obscene slurp and its cum poured out from her nethers in a milky gush. The daemon heeled and whimpered beside her, completely under her control.

She turned her attention to one of the daemons still rutting with the women. Xara slid her hand over the filthy rump of the captive girl. The daemon mounting her looked at Xara in surprise and slipped its tongue from between the woman's dangling breasts. Before it could lash out, Xara's hand gripped the base of the daemon's cock and she guided it out from the woman. The poor girl collapsed face first into the slime beneath her and was so exhausted she hardly moved. Xara had other concerns before she could see to any of these girls. She had to turn the daemons to her will and there was only one sure way to do it.

Xara opened her mouth and her lips descended on the daemon's cum-smeared cock. It whined in surprise as she began to suck its tip and stroke its length. She closed her eyes and reached out to the daemon. If it could sense her will invading its mind, it was too lost in the pleasure of her sucking mouth to fight. Beastly claws gripped her head and the daemon began to fuck its cock into Xara's throat. She was trained for just this sort

of abuse. She would not let the creature stop until it filled her belly with cum and its mind fell under her control.

When this daemon had been dominated by the Snare, Xara would move on to the next, again and again, until the imposter Yardok's chaosborne servants all bowed to her will.

Chapter VI

Fury of the Huntress

A swarming tide of daemons tore the grate above the pit from its hinges. The masked goblins scarcely had time to react before the daemons were upon them. The sinewy beasts leaped atop the guards, tearing them to pieces with claws and teeth.

Xara scaled the daemons out of the pit. She turned back and cast one last look into pit at the poor girls huddled together in the muck. Some were nearly catatonic. A few, including Tristan's sister, looked up at Xara with pleading expressions.

"I will return for you," shouted the huntress. "This will all be over soon."

She caught a fleeing goblin with a clothesline arm and ended his consciousness with a well-placed heel to his face. The goblin's sword flew from his hands and Xara caught it in midair and finished the wretch with a single stroke of the blade. The guards were doomed.

"Hold this room," she said to her new servants. "Let none approach the pit unless I am with them."

The daemons ducked their heads submissively before returning to feasting on the massacred goblin guards. She suspected Yardok was behind a gilded doorway marked with a profusion of daemoniac runes. She was not quite ready to face him. She had to find Barbik first.

The door opposite the gilded doorway was the one through which Xara had entered being pulled on a leash. She opened the door and stepped

into the tunnel. Her senses were still perfumed with the musk of bestial sex, her sex ached and cum slicked between her thighs, and she missed the cues that would have warned her she was about to be attacked.

The masked goblin Homok struck from the shadows, slashing a deep wound in Xara's arm and nearly knocking the sword from her grasp. She cried out in pain and brought up her weapon just in time to deflect a second blow that would have taken her head from her shoulders. She was larger than the goblin, maybe stronger, but the wound his first attack had inflicted was bleeding terribly and sapping the strength of her sword arm. He pushed her back, driving with his sword and slamming her into the wall.

"Elf bitch!" snarled Homok, spittle flying through the slot for his mouth in the iron mask. "You kill friends! You defy Yardok! I kill you and will feed your corpse to the daemons!"

"They'll be too full up with your friends," said Xara, holding her own blade with her fading strength. "Besides... what makes you think you'll... kill me?"

She punctuated the question with a strike from her off hand. It was not a powerful jab, but she delivered it precisely to the artery in the goblin's muscular neck. The blood flow to his brain was momentarily interrupted. Dizzied, he staggered back, and Xara switched hands with her sword and drove her blade into the neck joint of Homok's armor.

He gurgled once, blood spraying from the wound and covering Xara's face and naked breasts. She twisted the blade and silenced him forever. She separated from him with a kick and let his body drop to the tunnel floor.

The wound in her arm was bad. Homo's attack had sliced her bicep to her elbow, cutting nearly to the bone. She held the flaps of the wound closed with her hand as blood continued to pour out between her fingers. She shook her head to clear the gray that was closing in on the edges of her vision. Xara knew that if she lost consciousness now she was likely never to awaken.

The huntress relied on the Scent to lead her to Barbik. She could smell herself on him, lingering and forming a path to a doorway blocked with a heavy wooden door. She forced it open with her shoulder and stumbled into a hot room stuffed full of goblins. She counted more than a hundred at first glance. Such a stifling press of goblins that she had to immediately deactivate her Scent.

Barbik and his raiding party appeared from the crowd and the large goblin caught her and held her upright.

"You are hurt," he said. "I bandage."

He began to wind a cloth around her wound and tie it off to stanch the flow of blood. Xara could not look away from the goblins filling the room. Most seemed to be laborers, no doubt the ones who had dug the extensive tunnel system. A few were from raiding parties and these were armed and looking at the huntress with open hostility. They seemed to be protecting a smaller group of females and whelps.

"I am not here to hurt you." Xara spoke in the simple tongue of goblins, trying to use inflect her words with the Word to calm them. The pain of her wound was distracting her abilities. "The one you see as Yardok is a daemon. He has used illusions to convince you that he is your god. He is not and I believe he plans to open a gateway to the realm of chaos. He plans to kill you all."

"Lies!" shouted one of the goblin warriors. "Human bitch speaks false! We prosper with Yardok and have human cunts to fuck."

"Those girls were in a pit being bred by daemons!" countered Xara, but her words were weakened by her blood loss. The other goblins began to jeer. Some were shouting that she should be killed or thrown back into the pit.

"Enough!" shouted Barbik, his voice booming loud enough to silence the growing mob. He stepped between Xara and the other goblins.

"The elf speaks truth. We have been tricked by false Yardok."

"You do not speak for tribe," said one of the other raid leaders. Some murmured their agreement. Barbik struck the goblin in the face and kicked him over onto his back. The murmuring was immediately silenced.

Xara stepped past her protector once more, awing the goblins with her fierce expression and her stature. Barbik passed her the silver badge of her order and her sheathed keen blade. She strapped the knife to her naked thigh and hung the badge around her neck so that it rested against the upper curve of her bare breasts. She took in the fearful crowd of goblins.

"I will free you from your false god," she said. "Join me, join Barbik, and let us put an end to this."

She turned and marched back out of the room. She did not look back, but she could hear them chattering and shuffling their feet. Barbik and his raiding party were at her back. Some of the others were following. It was enough. It had to be enough.

The huntress led the tribe of goblins back into Yardok's throne room. The daemon stood atop his platform, the last of the lesser daemons dangling lifelessly from his clawed hand. He tossed its limp body aside and greeted Xara with a profane smile.

"I knew you were trouble," he hissed, "but I never expected you to turn my loyal dogs against me. It was very painful to be forced to kill them all."

"Allow me to put you out of your misery," said Xara, drawing her dagger from its sheath.

"What of the rest of you?" asked Yardok, raising his voice. "Do you defy your god and throw in your lot with this elf usurper?"

"Praise Yardok!" shouted one of the goblins from the mob.

"We are with you, master!" cried another.

Xara cast a glance over her shoulder and saw that even Barbik and the goblins of his raiding party were doubtful. She saw Yardok as he was, a scaly daemon, but they still saw the illusion and it was hard to take the word of an elf over their own eyes.

No more stalling. No letting the imposter turn the mob of goblins against her. Xara charged, her keen dagger raised to keep him distracted. She intended to kick him and possibly buckle his leg, but her charge became a sideways somersault as Yardok drew a blade of pure flame and brought it down in a roaring arc. She landed on her bad arm and nearly lost her blade. The roaring blade passed over her close enough to lick her with its flames.

"When I take the keep," growled Yardok, "I'll stick your pretty little head on a pike right beside that whore, the baroness. I'll feast on your body myself."

She dodged again and again, narrowly evading the daemon's burning blade each time. The burning sword seemed weightless in the daemon's grasp. He was wearing Xara down and she knew that soon enough she would be too slow and would feel the fire slicing into her flesh. Worse, her movements were being restricted as a shouting mob of goblins closed in around the melee. Their brandished swords and picks promised to wound her if she dodged too close to them.

"Kill her, master!" one shouted.

"Carved her up!" screamed another.

Yardok seemed to be enjoying the combat. He raised the blade over his head for a two-handed swing, bringing it down like an executioner and narrowly missing Xara's neck. His cross-swipe hissed over her back, scalding her naked flesh. She landed on her belly, rolling onto her back just quick enough to avoid another potentially mortal blow.

"It's over, huntress," laughed Yardok. "Stop fighting and I will make it quick and clean."

A look of resignation came over Xara's face. Her breasts heaved with exhaustion and she pulled herself up into a sitting position.

"You're right," she said. "Do it then. Finish me."

A cheer went up from the bloodthirsty crowd of goblins. She tipped her head forward, exposing the back of her neck for Yardok to cleave her head from her shoulders.

"A pity we could not spend more time getting to know one another," growled Yardok. "You would have made a fine addition to my harem."

She saw the flash of flame reflected in the stone floor as the daemon raised the sword above his head. It flared brighter as he began the downward stroke.

Xara inhaled the Scent and the world shifted to a blue tinted dream. Everything slowed, but this was no chance to take in the detail. Xara willed her body into motion. It moved as if caught in molasses, her legs firing out beneath her and her hand pushing her up off the stones. Her thoughts, and therefore her reflexes, were moving at a much greater speed. She drew the dagger as she was launching sideways from beneath the swing of Yardok's flaming sword.

The daemon had not even registered her movement on his reptilian face. He was still grinning triumphantly as he brought the blade down towards where her neck had been. Her lower body was still in the path of the swing and she knew he might still catch her with his blade. She twisted and fired her hand at him, releasing her keen blade in a perfect trajectory aimed at Yardok's forehead. In the heightened moments of the Scent, she could perceive the normally invisible vibrations of the blade that were the actual source of its unearthly blue color and unnatural sharpness.

Everything blurred into motion once again as she lost the Scent.

Xara's eyes went wide as she felt the agonizing lick of flame from Yardok's blade. It seemed to slice into her calf and then stop and disappear suddenly. Above her, there was a singular "thunk" of blade connecting with bone. Yardok staggered back a step, his illusion slipping away and his reptilian eyes slowly rotating to stare at the handle of the dagger sticking out from his forehead.

The daemon imposter tried to reach a hand up and pull the weapon out, but his hands fell limp. He staggered a few steps and fell into a sitting position in his throne. He focused with great effort at all the goblins, who now saw the lie of their god unmasked. His lipless mouth tried to form words. A gurgle came out of his mouth and he slumped, dead at last, back into the throne.

A dreadful silence fell over the chamber. Xara pushed herself up onto her hands and knees. A goblin reached down and offered to help her up. She took his aid and found herself leaning against Barbik on one side and one of the goblins that had bayed for her blood on the other.

"You did not lie," said the goblin.

"It is over," said Barbik. "She has freed us from our slavery. What do you want from us now, huntress?"

"Food. Water." She stepped away from the two goblins and over to the pit. "For them. We must get them out of that pit."

The goblins set about hauling the captive girls out of the pit. The greenskins were dazed by the realization that they had spent months, perhaps years, obeying the orders of a false god. Xara made sure the goblins fetched pitchers of water, washcloths and blankets for their captives.

"This is almost over," said Xara, embracing the first girl to emerge from the pit. "Are you Milly?"

The shapely young woman nodded almost uncertainly. Her voice was a dry croak.

"My brother..."

"Tristan sent me to rescue you," said Xara. "He is alive. He can be made whole again. I will take you to him very soon."

"Thank you," said the girl and she hugged tightly against the huntress.

Milly would recover, Xara could see the strength in the young girl's eyes. It would be a much longer road for some of the other girls, particularly those who appeared hugely pregnant and seemed to have forgotten how to speak. A lot of work remained to be done, not the least of which would be arranging for the goblin tribe to take any offspring from these unpleasant couplings and to leave the area of Rastenburg. Convincing the goblins to abandon this comfortable home would be difficult. Xara had a plan for that as well.

Xara washed herself first. Once the girls were cleaned and given something to eat and drink, Xara left them to regain their strength before the journey back to the surface. She sought Barbik among his party of raiders. He was conferring with several other goblins.

"Barbik, I need to speak with you." She took the goblins hand and led him away from the others. They stared jealously after him, perhaps suspecting what Xara had in mind. She brought the strapping goblin into the daemon's demented bedchamber and closed the golden door behind them.

"What is it, mistress?" he asked.

She sauntered around the room, rolling her hips provocatively as she examined the twisted artifacts and discovering more than one box of black wood overflowing with jewelry and other treasure. The bed was extravagant, a four-poster bed with heavy covers stuffed with goose down. She could only imagine the effort to bring such furniture down into these tunnels.

Xara caught one of the upright columns and spun her weight on her good arm, locking her blue eyes with Barbik's.

"You know your people cannot stay here," she said.
"We built this home."

"On a lie," said Xara, beckoning him closer with a curled finger. He embraced her, looking at her with desire. She brushed her lips against his cheek and then around to his ear and whispered her words. "Terrible things have been done to those women out there, Barbik. The people of this land will want revenge. Even if I convinced the baroness not to retaliate, they would rise up and come to slaughter you all."

Xara slid her hand down the taut washboard of Barbik's stomach. He tensed at her touch and let out a deep rumble of lust as her fingers slid beneath his loincloth and touched the root of his stiffening cock

"Where will we go?" he asked.

"You will take most of the treasure here and you will find a new place where you are welcome. Go to the north. Where the Porcens will trade with you for gold." Her hand encircled his cock. She began to stroke him beneath his loincloth, but he caught her wrist firmly and stopped her.

"Most of the treasure?" he asked, raising his eyebrow.

She was impressed at his willfulness. Most goblins she had encountered would be on their knees and begging for her touch at this point. Perhaps her good fortune had made the strongest and wisest of the tribe her slave.

"I have use for some of it," she said. "Let's call it reparations."

His hold on her wrist relaxed and she smiled and resumed gently stroking his cock. He grew to full hardness under her ministrations. She kissed his collarbone and bent her head lower.

"As you wish," he said and added almost unwillingly, "mistress."

Xara took her time with Barbik. She undressed him and kissed the bits of flesh her hands exposed. Her mouth engulfed his straining cock and she sucked him as she gently massaged his bollocks. When her lips had coaxed him to the brink, she climbed atop him in the bed and rode him vigorously.

Her lithe body was devoted to pure pleasure and she used her Scent sparingly to tease out the momentary urges of the goblin warrior. When his hands caressed her buttocks, she turned to face his feet so he could watch her silken peach of a quim devouring his green hardness. Her bottom bounced on his lap and he rubbed the flat of his thumb against her clenching anus. When he grabbed her hips she pulled him with her onto her hands and knees and rocked back onto him, impaling her rippling channel onto his hardness.

Barbik kissed her shoulder and called her name as he exploded inside her. Before their fun was over, she had coaxed two more orgasms from him, leaving him a panting mess, smiling like a fool on Yordak's overstuffed bed. She cleaned herself with a towel and kissed the goblin on his sweaty lips.

"They are your people now," she said softly. "I must take those girls back to where they belong."

"I cannot persuade you to stay?" asked Barbik, reaching for Xara's shapely hip. She dodged out his grasp and scolded him with a wag of her finger.

"Not today, but perhaps our paths will cross again Barbik, and we can remind each other why we worked so well together."

She filled a small sack with treasure from Yordak's hoard and left Barbik without another word. She knew that if she lingered for her own pleasure she would risk enticing more than just obedience from the goblin.

Some huntresses enjoyed killing their prey and taking trophies. Xara preferred to let monsters live, reasoning they were just a different sort of beast than she and no less worthy of life. But love could be dangerous and she had been forced to dispatch more than one obsessed monster in her time as a huntress.

Dressed in a new cloak stolen from the daemon's wardrobe, Xara found the girls where she had left them. They were still huddled together and talking quietly. Those in a better condition perked up as she approached.

"Come on now, girls," she said, helping one poor woman to her feet, "it is time for you to go home."

Xara took the hand of Tristan's sister and had the other girls form a chain to follow her through the darkness. The girls began to laugh as they left the goblins behind. When the first daylight appeared far ahead of them, some of the girls wept with relief. Xara would not let any more harm come to them.

Chapter VII

Departure

Voices and laughter filled the hall of Rastenburg Keep. A banquet was spread across the table, even more stuffed with delicacies than Xara had enjoyed the night of her arrival. Bright garlands of pink and white carnations were hung from the upper timbers of the dining hall, turning the darkness into a welcoming splash of color. Even the guards wore doublets with the hart symbol of Rastenburg and decorative caps in place of their iron helms.

The baroness sat at the head of the table with Xara at her side and young Millicent, Milly, at her other side. Tristan was seated next to her. He seemed in high spirits, though he relied upon his sister to feed him. All along the table were girls and their families enjoying the extravagant meal and the relief of freedom and fine company.

"This is because of you," said the baroness, raising her goblet in a private salute to Xara. "I suppose we will never know what became of the goblins. I think I will assume you frightened them all off."

"Something like that, my lady," said Xara.

Once she had returned the girls to Rastenburg, Xara had gathered Jensen and the other guards and spent a day and a night preparing them to clear out the tunnels. She had insisted on training the guards in close-quarters combat using daggers and short bludgeons. The intensive training was merely an excuse to buy time for Barbik and the other goblins to clear out.

Her stalling tactics had been successful. By the time Xara brought the baroness's guards into the throne room, the only thing left was the throne and the dead body of the daemon. Jensen and the guards had pretended at great disappointment they had not been able to avenge the kidnapped girls. Xara could see through their boasting. These were old men and very young men in the baroness's guard. They were glad to have been spared the bloodshed.

She smiled at the memory and caught Jensen smiling at her. She had given the old fool a bit of pleasure from her hand to ensure his cooperation and he had been drooling after her like a lover ever since.

Though the table around her was crowded, Xara knew that not all the girls were well enough to join the feast at the keep. It had only been a few days since Xara had brought them out and many were still coping with the reality that they were too far along in their pregnancies to be cured with cups of mandrake tea. They would have to birth goblins and maybe even daemons. The baroness had assured Xara that those girls who gave birth to half-goblins would be given a choice of keeping the child or sending it off to Ixham to be raised among the huntresses. But the cleric had insisted if the child was a daemon half-breed it could expect no mercy.

"No good can come of a half-devil," the pompous fool had said.

"It can be wiser to show kindness to evil than to try to crush it," countered Xara, but she knew it was an argument she would lose. The king might send inquisitors to investigate the daemon taint and they would be just as cruel as the cleric.

Xara was glad the cleric had given his blessing to the meal and then departed. Her order and the church were often at odds on how to deal with problems.

"Thank you again for, um, saving my sister, miss." Tristan's voice was almost too quiet to be heard over the conversations going on.

"It was my duty, young man. And my pleasure." She gave her last

word a teasing lick of the Word. Tristan's face reddened and his eyes went wide as he no doubt recalled what sort of pleasure Xara could grant. "Have you given any more thought to my offer?"

"Ixham is very far away," said Tristan. "I would like to see it, of course, and to help the huntresses however, um, I am able, with my, my, my..."

"Your sense of tongues," said Xara, flicking her tongue teasingly at him.

"But with Milly back and, um, needing my help, and..."

Milly put her hand on her brother's forearm. He winced as she touched the bruises beneath his sleeve. Millicent was a very shapely, doe-eyed young woman, with long, straw-blond hair that fell to her shoulders in springy ringlets. She wore the green velvet dress the baroness had given her as if born into it, her ample cleavage straining the beaded bodice.

"I want him to go," said Milly. "But he won't listen to me. He thinks after what happened I'll be taken again."

"You know, Tristan, you don't have to come with me forever. You can visit your sister." She held up a hand to stop him stammering out another reply. "Sleep on it, lad. Think it over. I will depart in the morning and have your answer then."

Tristan looked as if he might say something else, but only pursed his lips and nodded in reply. Milly whispered something to him and then smiled winningly at Xara. Under happier circumstances, Xara might have sought a diversion with the comely young woman. Considering Milly's recent ordeal, not even the young blonde's charming peasant beauty could convince Xara to pursue a night of pleasure with her.

Something brushed Xara's calf beneath the table. The huntress looked over at the baroness and saw the mischievous smile and slightly drunken eyes of the lady of the keep. Lady Gisela Salian knew Xara was

leaving in the morning and she had made very clear that she intended to have one more roll in the bed with the huntress. Xara could not refuse such a request and certainly had no inclination to do so.

"I am feeling overly exercised today," said Gisela, locking her eyes on Xara, but raising her voice to be heard by all. "I must apologize and retire to my quarters. If the huntress would accompany me, so that I do not lose my way, I would be much obliged."

"It would be my pleasure, my lady," said Xara, taking Gisela's hand and standing up with her from the table.

The guests at the dinner applauded them both as they departed the room. They made it up three sets of stairs before Gisela paused, just ahead of Xara. The baroness looked back at the huntress on the lower steps. She gathered up the folds of her skirt and lift the dress up her long and shapely legs. She wore dark stockings, her plump bottom framed by her garter and her backside cradled by black panties. The baroness held her skirt up like that, indecently above her waist. Her smile was bewitching, and Xara did not use such terms lightly, even in her own mind.

"Do you think I am some common whore?" asked Xara. "To be pushed against the wall of the alley beside the butcher's and fucked senseless?"

"A lovely thought," purred the baroness. "I rather thought I was the whore tonight."

Xara laughed at the noblewoman's pluck. The huntress rarely let her guard down, even in the throes of passion, but something about the Lady Gisela Salian and her scrumptiously plump posterior proved to be too much.

With a hungry growl, Xara mounted the stairs behind the baroness. She slid her hands up the backs of Gisela's stockinged legs until she felt the warm meridian of her thighs above the stockings. Her thumbs caught the underside of Gisela's buttocks and lifted those delicious mounds. Gisela's

laugh of satisfaction became a yelp of delighted surprise as Xara bent her head forward and gently bit the baroness on the bottom.

"Oh my!" cried Gisela. "I thought you were a huntress, not a beast!"

Xara seized Gisela by her silky black panties and roughly yanked the dainty garments down the baroness's trembling thighs, down to her ankles and the short-cut boots the baroness was wearing. The baroness tried to step carefully out of them, but Xara pushed her forward, off-balance and onto her hands and knees on the stairs.

"Huntmistress Ceorwynn taught us," Xara gave Gisela jiggling bottom a slap with each hand, "that we had best be careful when hunting monsters, lest we become them."

Xara's blue eyes flashed as she bent her head forward again and gave the baroness a sharp bite upon the inner curve of her buttocks. Gisela cried out with real pain this time, but it was only momentary and a moment later Xara soothed the red bite mark with a slow, prowling taste of her tongue.

"Your ass, my lady, and the lovely fruit of your thighs, is as succulent as anything presented at the feast below us. I cannot resist," Xara's head descended once more, "having a taste."

"Ohhhhhhh!" cried Gisela, her head bouncing up and her silky black hair flowing around the shoulders of her lovely dress. The stone stairwell echoed with the baroness's cries of pleasure as the huntress took her time with tongue and fingers. She devoured the clenching pink asshole of the baroness, skewering it first with tongue and then with two fingers, before her mouth sucked at the swollen folds of the baroness's cunt. "Gods! You were sent here for this! For me!"

The slurping lewdness of Xara's mouth filled the stairwell as the huntress fucked her fingers in and out of Gisela's stretched hole. She drove the baroness to more than one climactic release. Gisela's pleasure became so intense that she tried to crawl away, up the stairs, but Xara pinned her down and climbed atop her from behind. The huntress's fingers took over

at Gisela's clit as she kissed the mature lady's slender neck and sucked at her earlobe.

"Ohhh, please, huntress," cried Gisela. "Xara. You defile me here and anyone could come upon us. Jensen might see this."

"And what of it?" hissed Xara, her tongue teasing Gisela's ear and her fingers working steadily at the baroness's clit. "You flashed your bottom like a peddler selling herself to me. What more could you have wanted?"

"Please," moaned Gisela. "I beg you, huntress. Take me... take me, ohhhh, to me bed."

"I cannot refuse such pleading," said Xara and she scooped Gisela into her arms and carried her up the remaining stairs to the baroness's bedchamber. The huntress threw the woman upon the bed and before the laughing baroness could react, Xara was atop her. "Now, my lady, I must insist you repay me for all of my work in your name."

"Why, huntress, I have already sent the gold to your order," said the baroness, batting her lashes and feigning ignorance. Xara was having none of it. She straddled Gisela's chest and pinned the baroness's arms beneath her knees. She gathered the skirt of the dress the baroness had given her to wear up around her waist, exposing that she had not worn undergarments.

"My lady, I think it is time you put your tongue to good use," said Xara. before the baroness could object, Xara lowered her white-furred cunt onto the baroness's face. Xara rocked her whole body forward and smothered the noblewoman in her thighs and beneath the dewy folds of her sex. She felt the vibrations of Gisela's words of protest deliciously against her groove. "Ohhhh, I can't hear you, my lady. You'll have to use your tongue and, ohh, enunciate."

The baroness wrestled her arms free and, much to Xara's delight, grabbed the huntress's firm bottom with both hands to hold her fast. The lovely Lady Gisela Salian proceeded to spell out her message in passionate

plunges of her tongue and lingering licks on the aching bud of Xara's clit. The huntress tightened the grip of her thighs and rocked her hips. She ground the wet groove of her honeyed sex against the baroness's moaning mouth. She fucked against the noblewoman's tantalizing tongue.

"Yes, that's it," cried Xara, tensing as she felt her pleasure mount. "You're verrrry, oh, very generous, my lady. Such riches... nnnnn... for me!!"

Xara threw back her head, moaning loudly and fucking against the baroness's thrusting tongue as the white heat of her elven orgasm exploded through her body. She clamped her thighs tight around Gisela's face and spilled her sweet nectar into the baroness's hungry mouth. The licking and sucking carried on far beyond Xara's body-shaking orgasm.

The huntress caught her breath and wrestled her bottom free of the baroness's deathgrip. Gisela emerged, sweaty, her lips and chin smeared with Xara's cum and a broad smile on her pretty face. She seized the huntress before Xara could fully escape and the two half-dressed women tangled together on the bed.

"I have half a mind to suck those pretty little pink nipples until you scream," said Gisela, tearing at the bindings of Xara's bodice.

"If you can get to them," teased Xara, leaning over Gisela's shapely hip and paddling her bottom with both hands. The baroness, caught between her lust and the surprise attack on her posterior, proved helpless to Xara's spanking. Her jiggling cheeks reddened with handprints and she finally collapsed onto her back, laughing and whimpering. Xara unlaced the baroness's corset and freed the soft, lined-mounds of her breasts from a rather frilly sling. Her nipples, fat and fleshy, were covered in turn by Xara's mouth and tormented by her tongue.

"You brute," cried the baroness, nevertheless cradling Xara against her suckled bosom. "Ohhhh, you are so rough with me. I should, mmmmmmm, have you trussed in the dungeon!"

For that threat, even in jest, Xara carefully bit the baroness on her nipple, holding it tight between her teeth and punishing it with her tongue. The shapely noblewoman cried out in protest and thrust herself against Xara.

Their lovemaking continued throughout the night. After a particularly sweaty frolic that left even the huntress out of breath, the baroness got up from the bed, returning some time later with a cock of dark wood strapped above her mound.

"That? You think I would let you have me with that?" Xara feigned offense. "It's hardly big enough to reach all the places I want."

"Oh!" The baroness laughed, catching Xara in her arms and falling back onto the bed. "I think I will find your spot."

To Xara's surprise, the baroness flipped her onto her hands and knees. She felt a hot, wet tongue thrust into her bottom, swirling and loosening her and making her moan. She raised her ass, inviting what she knew would be coming next.

The wooden cock - very smooth lacquered- slid into the huntress's ass with little resistance. Xara reached for her clit, to strum herself as the baroness began to fuck into her, but the baroness had already anticipated this desire. Gisela's increasingly practiced fingers sought the huntress's clit and stroked it as the wooden cock thrust in and out of Xara's spit-lubed hole.

"Ohhhhh, my lady," cried Xara, finally entirely at the mercy of the noblewoman. "I think... ohhhh... you've found the spot!"

Xara's slick hole tightened and squeezed against the thrusting cock. Her sex rippled up and contractions of pleasure spread into her tummy in hot waves of ecstasy. The baroness held Xara's hip with one hand and slammed the cock deep into Xara's throbbing hole.

"Ohhh, my sweet huntress, what a view I enjoy!" cried the baroness.

"You must try this on me next!"

So they continued, trading tongues and fingers and thrusts of the wooden cock, until the rays of dawn broke through the curtains and painted their glorious bodies with all the colors of the heavens. The women were exhausted, but found the strength to summon a servant. The poor maid was scandalized by the sight of the two naked women and, Xara was certain, the lingering smell of their sex.

"Therese, a bath, please!" moaned the baroness. "Every muscle in my body aches. I desperately need a soak!"

Xara kissed the baroness and stroked her fat nipples as both women watched the embarrassed servant filling the porcelain tub with water. It took relays of steaming kettles and several minutes to finish the job. When the servant had excused herself, Xara and Gisela walked hand in hand and slipped into the relaxing, soapy broth.

"Come here," said the baroness, "I will wash you."

Xara was more than capable of washing herself, but did not decline the offer. She relaxed against the baroness's breast and enjoyed the warm, gentle probing of the washcloth beneath the bubbly surface.

"Can I persuade you to remain here?" asked the baroness.

"You know the answer," said Xara, sighing softly.

"I do, but I would have cursed myself for not asking. You are a.... precious woman."

"And you are the ruler of these lands." Xara rotated in the water, pressing atop Gisela and bringing her face level with the baroness. "Your people need you more than you need me to distract you with kisses and licks."

The baroness leaned her lips closer, dewy with sweat from the

steamy water, parted and pink tongue flicking enticingly.

"Do not presume..." The baroness leaned ever closer, as if in a dream. "...to tell me what I need."

Xara denied the baroness the kiss she sought. She pulled away and lifted her head. Gisela frowned grabbed Xara around the waist to pull her tightly down. She found the huntress an immovable stone of taut muscle.

"You cannot have me, Gisela," said Xara, all play spent from her voice. "No man or woman can possess me. I belong to the order."

"I understand." Gisela's hands slipped free from Xara's soapy body. "I am... I am sorry for attempting to impose that on you."

"No apologies." Xara relaxed again and brought her lips down to the baroness. "Understanding is all that I ask. Now... we have some time yet before I must go. Let us make good use of it."

Xara thought it fortunate the maid had left the room, for what transpired in the bathtub would have colored her cheeks for years. Satisfied, bathed, satisfied again, bathed again, and finally dressed, Xara and the baroness descended together to the stables. The baroness had made a gift of Jensen's horse as part of her reward.

"A boy came calling, huntress," said the stableman. "I sent him away."

"Tristan? Where did you send him away?"

"Just down the hill, ma'am. He said he would wait with his sister there."

Xara bit back her anger at the stableman. No point upbraiding him, in front of the baroness no less, when she would likely never see the man again. She turned to the baroness.

"I suppose this is where we say our goodbyes," said Xara, taking Gisela's gloved hands.

"Nonsense. I will see you down the hill."

Xara secured her belongings, including the goblin treasure she looted, to the saddle of the horse. She walked it behind her and descended the cobbled lane with the baroness. They passed through the gatehouse and Jensen waved goodbye. Even if he was losing his horse, apparently a fireside wank had been enough from Xara to leave him with a favorable impression of her. She would have to remember to stroke off guardsmen more often.

"Ah, look," said the baroness. "There is that boy and his very lovely sister, Millicent."

Tristan and his sister stood by the road. Tristan was dressed in simple breeches and a coat over his tunic. He held a crumpled farm hat in his hand. His sister, however, was dressed in the height of peasant finery, her body trussed and squeezed into a corset that did wonders for her physique so that the young girl looked to be the most popular tavern wench. She batted her lashes and flashed a smile at them as they approached.

"You remembered her name?" asked Xara.

"Oh, of course, I make it a point to remember the name of my subjects."

Xara, knowing the habits of Ixham's nobility, doubted that very much, but she saw a look in the baroness's eyes that suggested there was more there than recognition. The huntress did not need the Scent to detect the noblewoman's oozing desire.

"My lady," said Tristan, approaching and bowing, "and huntress. Is that correct? To call you huntress?"

"That is fine," said Xara. "And hello to you as well, Millicent."

Millicent curtsied dramatically.

"You are looking beautiful today," said the baroness.

"I am humbled by your words, my lady. You and the huntress are the true beauties."

"I will never refuse a compliment," laughed the baroness.

"Have you made a decision, Tristan? Will you be accompanying me to Ixham?" Xara busied herself with adjusting the packs on her horse and did not even regard the wounded young man as she asked the questions.

"I have, huntress. I am willing to accompany you to Ixham and aid in your work, on two conditions." He waited and when Xara did not reply he continued to list his conditions. "One, my sister must also be employed at the Order of Helena. She is with child of a, um, sort that most would fear and she will need support. Also, I will need to come and visit my mother at least once per year."

"Do you know that this is dangerous work?" asked Xara.

"Yes, huntress, I assumed it might be so."

"Good. But perhaps the baroness could help you with your first request." Xara finished securing her pack to the horse and looked to Gisela. The baroness took in what Xara meant and a smile crept across her pretty face.

"Oh, yes!" cried the baroness. "Yes, my dear, I have urgent need of a handmaiden. Someone who could attend to my every need. And, my dear, I assure you that there will be no judgment for the child you have in your belly. Yes, the more I think of it, the more I see the huntress is right. You belong in the keep with me."

"Really?" Milly looked up at the keep with obvious excitement. "It does seem so lovely there and you are very kind, my lady. I think I would like this."

"As for your other demand," said Xara, "I promise to do my best you are able to visit your mother. Allow me to sweeten my offer to you, lad. I will see that your hands are replaced, not with hooks, but with fine brass contraptions that will restore almost full function to you. I cannot have a useless cripple by my side during the hunt."

Xara was aware her words were cruel, but they were cruel for a purpose. If she could shame him into bettering himself, a bit of cruelty was worth it. She could see the boy mulling it over. She added one last incentive, leaning forward and rest her hand on his, speaking almost directly into his ear.

"There are other rewards to aiding a huntress," she purred.

Tristan stiffened and tried to hold his head up straight.

"Very well, huntress. I will join you. I accept your offer."

He held out his hand to shake on the deal. Xara looked at his hand for a moment before brushing past him. He stepped quickly out of the way of the horse following behind her.

"Farewell, my lady," Xara called over her shoulder. "I hope you never have need to call upon me again."

"I will not forget what you have done for me, huntress!" shouted the baroness.

Xara knew her words were true, but suspected the lusty noblewoman would be enlisting the help of Millicent to do her best to forget. Tristan shouldered his pack and hurried along beside the horse. He remained a respectful distance behind Xara as they made their way through Rastenburg's muddy lanes. The chimney smoke and the hilltop keep receded behind them into the gray mists of morning.

"I hope you understand," said Xara, "that you will not be receiving any more pleasure from me. That was a mercy. I do not make a habit of doing such things for those I employ."

Xara though she heard a sigh escape Tristan. She hid her smile from the poor lad as he trudged along behind her, his horizons darkening as the fantasy of her mouth descending upon him began to dissipate.

If only he knew the sorts of things he will be facing, thought Xara, he would run screaming and marry the first peasant girl that spread her legs.

Xara's adventures have only just begun...

