

# Between Two Sisters



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## *Between Two Sisters*

"You don't really think you can get out of this," said Baroness Lena Katina. Julia grinned, "Really? You think a trap like this is going to hold someone like me? Really, sister, you are far too traditional for your own good."

"You open a couple of factories, and suddenly you think you can reshape the world?"

"Factories and industry are the way of the future," she said. "Where once, the power came from the land, now it shall come from a new set of assets."

"Play," Lena constructed.

Her little sister flashed her a grin before she grabbed one of the pieces, a beautifully sculpted battleship made of pewter, and she moved it across the board.

Instantly, the conflict changed.

Pressing her lips together, Lena nodded as she evaluated this new scenario.

In particular, Lena considered her options as she studied the Regicide board and the cards sitting in front of her. She could make dozens of different moves, all of which would be countered by her sister in one way or another.

What to do? What to do?

"You can surrender right now if you really want to," Julia said.

Yes, these girls were sisters, but they looked quite different. Lena had shining, midnight black hair and elfin features. Between her sharp cheeks, narrow eyes, and small nose, she was still beautiful, but there was something sleek and predatory about her features.

Julia, on the other hand, had softer, rounded cheeks and big, green eyes. Unlike her sister with her black hair, Julia's tresses were the shade of red flames. Not only that, she made the rather untraditional choice of growing it out. Rounded bangs curved along her forehead, and the wavy contours of her tresses fell around her shoulders and down her back.

"Never," Lena said.

"Even if you don't stand a chance? Even if the inevitable is coming upon you?"

"Nothing is inevitable, dear sister. You should know that better than anyone."

"Unfortunately, I think you are wrong on that point," Julia said with a shake of her head. "Granted, we don't get to enjoy any counterfactuals, but it's pretty clear some situations are unavoidable."

"What's your favorite example?"

"The Battle of Old Orleans," she said immediately.

"Oh?"

"What can I say? I'm fascinated by inevitability," Julia said. "All of those boys, they fought so hard, but they never stood a chance. Surely, we can agree on this point, if nothing else?"

Lena pressed her lips together as she considered the different figurines arrayed before her. Finally, she reached down for the dreadnought and moved it a single square forward.

"That wasn't very dramatic," Julia said. Even as she had her eyes on the board, she hunted through the different permutations as she attempted to figure out exactly what her rival had in mind.

"Sometimes the best moves are the simplest," said the baroness.

"Unless you are delaying the inevitable. Perhaps you're hoping that I will second-guess myself because I can't see why you did that."

"Perhaps," Lena replied with a quarter-smile. "But that's part of the challenge, isn't it? That's part of the fun!"

"Perhaps," Julia answered, mocking her sister with that appropriately vague and diplomatic answer.

"But anyway, you were telling me about your fascination with Old Orleans."

Although Julia kept her eyes on the board, she still spoke, "I was saying that those boys never stood a chance. It didn't matter how many weapons they procured, how many males they could recruit, or how many collars they cut. One way or another, they were going to end up in shackles, exactly where they belong."

"They don't all belong in shackles," Lena said. "Yes, most of them are little more than livestock, but a few of them can be pretty incredible."

"And yet, from what I understand, you rarely take any lovers for yourself," Julia pointed out.

Lena pressed her lips together in a frown. "Maybe I haven't found the right boy."

"Or maybe you are still looking for a replacement for Sebastian," Julia

said.

As aristocrats, both of the Katina sisters quickly learned to suppress their emotions and hide their feelings. When every engagement and activity, even the most celebratory events, could be opportunities for trade, transaction, and negotiation, then genuine relaxation became impossible, at least out in public.

"No. I got over him a long time ago," Lena said.

"How old were you?"

"Fourteen," Lena replied. As she spoke, she was careful to give the information even as she maintained that neutral detachment. Her voice was flat, like this was just one more detail.

"I know I have said it before, but I'm genuinely sorry. Mother had no right to sell him off like that."

"She was right to do it," Lena said. "You should never allow yourself to get too close to a boy."

"Traditional values?" Julia asked, although she didn't bother hiding the disdain from her voice. As far as she was concerned, the world needed rebellion and innovation. Yes, that attitude had served her well in the business world, although it also encouraged their peers to shun her. Considering how many dull balls and galas Lena had endured as the Baroness of New Toledo, she couldn't decide if this was a flaw or feature in her sister's strategy.

"Traditional values can be very useful. Besides, we have done quite well for ourselves. There is wisdom in double checking your movements and maneuvers, but throwing everything out for an entirely new way of life would be foolhardy at best and self-destructive at worst."

"I wonder what the boys at Old Orleans thought."

"They were delusional," Lena said flatly. "They thought they could create a new society? One where women and men would be equal?" She snorted with undisguised disdain and shook her head.

"Why would that be so impossible?"

"Julia, my little sister, you've always enjoyed playing the demon's advocate."

"Someone should," said the cute redhead.

"As you say," Lena replied.

For the next few minutes, the Katina sisters made their moves. They picked up their figurines, rearranging them across the Regicide board as the

two factions vied for control. They took territory, resources, fresh advantages, all while they tried to figure out exactly what the other player had planned.

Julia finally came back to the boys of Old Orleans. "Personally, I think Gregorio had a pretty good chance. His strategies were sound, right up until that last moment."

"Then, for the sake of argument, pretending that he wasn't surrounded by a hostile nation or a world that would have beaten down any nascent republic he tried to found, what do you think he did wrong?"

"Isn't it obvious?" Julia asked.

"Enlighten me," Lena replied.

"He got clever. He got cute. At first, he did very well for himself because the generals who went up against him all underestimated him. Annika Del Reina thought he was a pet who needed to be trained. Zarana Espadas figured he might be a threat, but she only took one battalion with her. None of these women really knew what they were doing because none of them thought he was an actual fighter."

"He wasn't," Lena pointed out. "He and his merry band of rebels were just a bunch of boys who hated the idea of being treated like animals. They didn't have any training."

"He fought. That made him a fighter," Julia replied.

"Semantics." Lena rolled her eyes.

"As a species, we see the world through language, so semantics matter a great deal. If you get to control the definitions in an argument, then you get to control the outcome as well."

"Make your move," Lena told her little sister. "If you don't, I'm going to start thinking you want to hold off the inevitable because you know you're going to lose."

"Here we go," Julia picked up one of the toy sky ships, moved across the board, and set it down just a few spaces from Lena's castle.

"Impressive."

That's when someone gently knocked on one of the two double doors leading into the library. Lena and Julia both glanced back as the baroness's major domo appeared.

Kalia was a young woman with short, wheat colored hair and pale brown eyes. Like so many other servants, she wore understated skirts and tunics.

"My apologies for interrupting, Baroness."

"What is it, Kalia?"

"Strange occurrences, Baroness." The servant paused, glanced around, and seemed to hesitate because she didn't know exactly how to report this.

"To be honest, I think some of the huntresses may have been mistaken."

"Get on with it," Julia said. "I was just about to win!"

"No, you weren't."

"Yes, I was," Julia shot back before sticking out the tip of her tongue.

Baroness Lena Katina may have controlled a vast territory made of thousands of hectares, but she still couldn't control her bratty little sister.

For her part, Kalia kept her expression devoid of any judgment or reaction. If these wealthy women decided to play around, then it wasn't her place to object or even take note of it.

"What are the strange occurrences?" Lena finally asked as she focused on the issue at hand.

"A male," Kalia said.

"Did one of them get loose?"

"You could have your very own Gregorio on your hands," Julia said.

The possibility seemed incredibly unlikely, especially considering how rare uprisings were. All across the world, men accepted their status as inferior. Deep down, they must've recognized that they were meant to be property. Although Lena had never come to a distinct conclusion in terms of religion or the existence of a Goddess, she could see how the universe had been structured. In so many things, hierarchies existed. In the natural world, food chains dominated. In the home, a woman made the decisions, her slave supported her, and maybe she would marry him. Her daughters would go on to perpetuate the cycle, and her sons would learn to happily serve.

"Not likely," Lena said.

"That's the thing, Baroness." Kalia licked her lips now. Normally, she was a capable functionary, only now she seemed especially uncertain. Still, she must have realized that her employer wouldn't be patient for much longer, so she finally said, "According to the Scouts, this male wasn't collared."

"Excuse me?"

"A wild male?" Julia asked. When was the last time that happened in this region? Has it *ever* happened in this region?"

"No," said the baroness as her mind whirred and she worked to come up with an explanation. Unable to come up with anything logical or easy, she

rose to her feet and called out, "Gather the huntresses."

"Which ones?"

"All of them."

*Three hours earlier...*

Calvin Drake kept his eyes locked on the ground. With his backpack pulling down against his shoulders, and the sun beating down against his exposed skin, he really, really wanted to take a break. Yeah, everything had looked amazingly gorgeous when he first parked at sunrise, but a long morning of hiking up these hills had drained away a lot of his enthusiasm.

At least, that was how it felt while he climbed up to his first rest stop. Eyes aimed down, he studied the worn path and scattered rocks as he forced his legs to move mechanically. Right foot. Left foot. Right foot. Left foot.

But then, a fresh breeze washed across his dampened features, and that's when he glanced up.

This was amazing.

It was perfect.

Calvin stood there. He slipped his backpack from his shoulders, letting his gear fall to the ground. Then he stepped forward, right up to the cliffs. The trail continued, but at least here, he could see exactly why he did this. Fresh energy infused his body as he stared out at the carpet of trees, the vibrant blue sky, and those few puffy clouds.

As a kid, he remembered a friend who once complained about adults and their seeming obsession with "reality". As a young, precocious guy, Calvin's friend made the point that, "We have technology. We have the Internet. Why would I care about going to Tokyo, France, or wherever? I can see the pictures. I can watch the videos! What's the point?"

*This*, Calvin thought. This was the point!

Obviously, he couldn't go back in time to talk to his friend, but Calvin still marveled at how incredible something like this could feel. There was something so exquisite. The fresh breeze. The hint of pine. The vivid colors. All of it reminded Calvin of why he spent more than four hours driving to Red Feather.

Feeling relaxed and knowing that he had already made good time, Calvin opened up his backpack and pulled out his camera. He started to take different shots. At first, he focused on the hills off in the distance, the jagged peaks and random boulders. Then his camera lens drifted back toward the

trees themselves.

At that moment, he wanted to find individuality. To the human eye, it all seemed to blend together, like one massive pine tree was the same as any other. And yet, as a photographer, he knew that there was always something unique to be found, some fresh perspective he could coax out for his viewer.

Fresh air washed over him again, stronger this time.

Calvin hardly noticed. He kept taking pictures.

Then he heard it, a blast of thunder, a streak of lightning.

He glanced up, only to realize that the landscape had darkened around him.

Those gentle, puffy clouds from before had morphed into something dark and massive. The earlier blue had been replaced.

"Crap," he whispered.

That morning, Calvin had dutifully checked the weather reports, all of which called for clear skies and maybe light cloud cover.

So what was this?

Maybe it would pass?

As the light shifted and the shadows lengthened, Calvin decided to take a risk. He kept hoping the storm would break. It was a freak occurrence, after all, some wild deviation from the norm.

While he held onto those tenuous hopes, a fresh burst of silver lightning streaked across the sky and thunderous booms echoed across the horizon.

"Crap, crap, crap," he muttered.

Then again, he had hiked extensively; more importantly, he had taken various safety and emergency courses. So yes, he had anticipated a quiet, peaceful afternoon, but he could handle this.

Just as that thought crossed his mind, a bolt of lightning shot across the sky and slammed down into the cliff side. He watched as electricity tore through the stone, ripping away shards of rock.

What were the chances?

Calvin searched through all of his experience, all he had read, and the various rumors that floated between hikers, but he couldn't think of a single storm like this.

"I'm not going to panic," he told himself.

He grabbed his pack, looked around, and quickly spotted an opening up along the side of the mountain. It wasn't too far away.

He started trudging forward, only to turn back toward the landscape spread out before him. Biting down, he desperately wished he could just watch this bizarre storm. He knew there were probably hundreds of amazing shots just waiting for him.

"They don't count if I get myself killed," he muttered.

Another bolt of lightning slammed down into the ground right behind him. Little pieces of dirt and debris rained down on top of him.

How could something like this be happening? Seriously, this wasn't how storms or lightning were supposed to work! Doubling his pace, he broke into a jog. He headed up, climbing higher and higher. He needed shelter; he needed to stay away from the open space or the trees that might attract the lightning.

He shivered just beneath the surface of his skin as cold winds buffeted him. The ground crunched underneath his boots, and he climbed up, higher and higher. He scrambled as quickly as he could.

When he made it to the cave entrance, he grimaced. It wasn't going to be tall enough to walk into, and so he pulled out his flashlight.

This "cave" part deserved the name. At least he wouldn't have to worry about wild animals. The aperture wasn't especially large, and he could already see the back. He had gotten especially lucky because there didn't appear to be any vermin inside. It was just this roof carved into the mountain, and it would give him plenty of protection.

Right as he finished his inspection, another bolt of lightning slammed down from the sky.

It hit him.

It engulfed him.

White light searched around him. His thoughts seemed to slow down, and he started to think that the pain would swallow him up, that he would be burned to a cinder. His heart would stop, the incalculable energy would rip through his body, killing him instantly.

And sure enough, everything went black...

...But then he groaned, and he pushed himself up. He still wore his backpack, and he could move and think.

"What the hell?" Calvin asked. He got up, looked down, and saw the dust smeared along his shirt and down his jeans.

Lifting his head, he expected to see the cave right in front of him.

No. It was gone.

In fact, he wasn't standing on a rocky path near a high promontory. He wasn't near a cliff, and he couldn't see the forest down below either.

Instead, he was midway up gently rolling hills covered in golden yellow grass. Overhead, every single cloud had disappeared. It was also peaceful and serene. The sun was high in the sky.

Spinning around, Calvin searched for some logical explanation. He searched for some familiar landmark. At the very least, he needed to find his path!

But this didn't make any sense!

He rubbed his eyes, like he thought that might help. When it didn't, he reached down to pinch himself, thinking maybe this had to be some sort of dream.

"Or maybe I'm dead?" Calvin asked.

No. He wasn't dead. He couldn't be dead.

Overhead, a hawk or eagle drifted along the currents of warm air while Calvin slid his pack back down onto the tall, brittle grass. He took a step, felt some of the dried foliage crunch beneath his boot, and he furrowed his brows.

He knew it was a long shot, but he reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone.

No bars.

Okay, so that made sense. Last time he checked, he didn't have any signal.

What about the radio app?

He pulled it up, and he figured he would be able to pick up something. Maybe some aggressive lecture from a pastor, maybe some random country music, or the distorted cracks of rock or rap.

Exhaling slowly, he pulled up the app, hit the button on the side of his phone to increase the volume, and he started checking the different frequencies.

Nothing.

He tapped the screen again.

Nothing.

He kept tapping.

Just static.

He continued to tap.

More static.

Where the hell was he? What the hell was going on?

Calvin told himself that he wasn't going to panic. At the same time, he attempted to come up with some logical explanation for what was going on here. As hard as he worked at it, he couldn't come up with anything. Nothing at all.

Actually, that wasn't true. This little voice at the back of his head started whispering about the Elysian Fields. As a little kid, he watched some terrible, Greek fantasy show. In it, the hero always talked about how he would one day fall and join the rest of his family in the Elysian Fields. To twelve-year-old Calvin, he assumed that meant the warrior would get to go to an ancient version of heaven.

But this was still real, Calvin reminded himself.

Then again, he had never been dead, so he couldn't be sure one way or the other. He smirked, shook his head, checked his pack, and found his supplies. He had plenty of food and plenty of water. He didn't need to worry. If he had to just start walking in a random direction, he was confident he would find a road or some other sign of civilization eventually.

As the plan formed, he took a shallow drink of water. He would ration his supplies, especially until he knew exactly what was going on.

But first, he decided to walk up the hill. He left his bag there for just a moment, confident there wouldn't be anyone else around to take it.

He trudged up to the top, and then he looked around.

There weren't any mountains. There weren't any big, luscious trees either. Instead, there were just the rolling, golden hills that reminded him of...San Francisco? As he blinked, he nodded to himself. He had visited the Bay Area a couple of times for work, which meant driving along the freeways. At several points, he had needed to head through the outskirts, which meant seeing these beautiful hillsides.

Except he didn't see a freeway.

Biting down, Calvin started to wonder if maybe he had been struck by lightning and somehow wandered down south.

But hundreds of miles? With no memory of the trip? More importantly, he glanced down at his boots, his jeans, and his shirt. They weren't dirty or worn. There were no signs that he had traveled.

"What is going on here?" Calvin asked again.

He headed back down the hill, found his gear, pulled it up onto his back, and looked around.

West, he decided.

At first, he checked his direction based on the position of the sun. Then he was about to confirm it with his compass. When he pulled it out, the arrow twisted and spun, like it couldn't make up its mind.

Calvin shook it, expecting the small tool to start making sense at any moment. Sometimes it needed a few seconds.

Not this time.

It must have gotten damaged by the lightning strike. Yeah, that had to be it.

Calvin really wanted to hold onto that explanation, if only because logic had to start applying here at some point. No radio signals, a confused compass, and no logical way for him to have traveled half a state.

Even when he glanced down at his hands, he didn't see any sign of the lightning strike. There wasn't a single burn on his body. Nothing was even singed...

Because he didn't have much daylight left, Calvin pushed those thoughts aside. He started walking, first down this hill, then up the next one.

When he made it to the top of the third hill, Calvin paused, took another sip of water to stay hydrated, and pulled out his camera. He started snapping different images. One or two small trees poked up from between the blades of golden grass. He snapped a few shots and wondered when he might be able to show these to his friends and family.

Checking the initial results, he looked down at the small screen built into the back of his camera. That's what he thought he noticed something.

A building?

His brows creased, so he zoomed in. Calvin might not have noticed it before, but his camera lens could be a lot sharper than his human eyes. Still, he looked up, squinted, and searched for that same detail.

It could have been a glitch, maybe some trick of the light. But no. That looked like a building off in the distance.

Calvin tried to figure out which plan would be the best. If he continued to head west, he might find some sign of civilization. This detail, however, seemed to be a lot more concrete. At the same time, he didn't know if it would turn out to be anything at all. Yeah, it could be a building. It could be some abandoned grain silo or something totally random. He could waste a lot of time and energy heading in the wrong direction.

"Screw it," he muttered. To the west, he saw nothing but rolling hills

and more orange grass. "Let's go exploring."

Yes, he had been able to spot the building, but Calvin had a very well-developed sense of how long it could take something off in the distance to actually get close. He remembered an early road trip with some friends. They picked a mountain in the distance, laughed, and said something like, "Okay, we have to explore that thing!" Excited, they had piled into their beaten-up sedan, initially assuming it would just take a few minutes to get there. This few minutes turned into hours. And yes, the mountain started to get bigger, but it took way, way, way longer than any of them had expected.

In fact, they never even made it to the top.

And now, Calvin was chasing some small building off in the distance...on foot.

Over the course of several hours, he traversed one hilltop after another. In the meantime, the small building didn't seem to grow any larger. He tried not to get frustrated. Instead, he concentrated on his surroundings.

He saw a deer. That was pretty cool.

A little while later, he heard the hiss of a rattlesnake, so he circled away in the opposite direction before returning to his original path.

A little brown bunny with long ears popped its head up and seemed to consider him. "Hey there," he said with a wave.

The bunny hid its head back down and darted between the blades of grass, disappearing almost instantly.

Calvin did his best to photograph as much as he could. Again and again, he told himself that he would eventually find a road, find his way back to his car, and he would have to return to his normal life. By Monday, he would be back in his cubicle.

That night, he pulled out his sleeping bag, checked the radio frequencies, and was dismayed to once again hear nothing but static. Seriously, how could that happen? If this really was California, then there should have been tons of signals. He probably wouldn't have wanted to listen to any of them, but there should have been some reminder of civilization.

It was dark now, so he couldn't see the building off in the distance, but he pulled out his camera again and checked those original shots.

He squinted down at those pixels. As hard as he tried to find something definitive, he knew that this might just be some optical illusion. "That would suck," he whispered. "That would suck really, really hard."

The next morning, he opened his eyes, stretched his arms, and first

thought about how much he didn't want to go to work. His job wasn't awful, by any stretch, but Calvin was the kind of guy who wanted to live out in the wild and explore. Yes, he could enjoy the amenities of civilization, but he didn't belong in an office. Sitting in front of a computer, typing out messages, and dealing with logistics didn't suit his temperament.

Only then, fresh air brushed along his face, and he opened his eyes. He looked around, and the same golden yellow grass surrounded him. He got up, stretched his arms, and pulled out a granola bar.

He was still lost. He still had no idea what was going on or what might happen next, yet this didn't bother him. In fact, he sat back down, took a bite of his breakfast, and nodded to himself. For a guy who was lost in an unknown area, he actually felt pretty good. The smile stretched across his lips as he enjoyed another sip of water. After that, he packed up his stuff and headed toward the building.

There was something so pure and easy about hiking, about just walking and making his way forward. Step-by-step, he could enjoy this freedom.

Granted, Calvin had no idea it was about to come to an end. He didn't understand what this world was or how it worked, not yet anyway.

Up ahead, he finally saw something besides golden hills and wild blue sky. A copse of trees drew his attention. These reminded him a lot more of the forest he had been exploring the previous day. Tall oaks and pines stretched up from the ground and reached toward the sky with powerful trunks, thick branches, and millions of leaves or needles.

Feeling curious, Calvin headed in that direction. Backtracking along this terrain would be easy, so he wasn't taking a significant risk.

About three quarters of the way there, he saw something else. Another bunny popped its head up, so Calvin yanked out his camera, aimed, and got a good shot. Then the little rabbit dropped back down, started out into a clearing, and he took several more shots.

At first, Calvin didn't understand why the little mammal would rush off so quickly. Only then he heard the sounds.

Rhythmic beating. A steady pounding.

Horse hooves?

This wasn't what he expected, but he quickly started to look around. He climbed up a little bit higher, and that's when he saw the riders. They crested one of the nearby hills, stopped, and seemed to consider what was

going on.

Calvin marveled at them.

Three riders, all women. They had their hair tied back into these sleek braids. Not only that, they carried both rifles and bows. He spotted the arrows and automatically wondered if this was some kind of cosplay event.

Either way, he lifted both of his hands into the air and called out. "Hey! Hey, do you think you could help me?"

The riders seemed to talk to one another. They were conferring, perhaps trying to figure out what they could do.

"Look, I'm lost!" Calvin called out again. His voice boomed along the ground and out into the atmosphere. "Look, I don't know how I got here, but I really need to get back to my car." At the very least, maybe he could find a Wi-Fi signal and call a rideshare.

Finally, the riders made their way down the hill and toward the trees.

At first, Calvin walked toward them. He kept his hands open to show them that he wasn't any kind of threat. Then again, they were the ones with guns.

If this had been the Wild West, then maybe he would have needed to worry. "Women in freaking California," he told himself even as the nervousness started to mount.

"Chicosh! Parate ahorash!" came the command a few seconds later.

The woman's voice was harsh, a clear demand.

What was that? Spanish? No. Calvin had heard lots of Spanish in random movies and TV shows, but this was different.

Was it possible he had ended up in a different country altogether? He first assumed that this had to be California, but could he be somewhere in the middle east? As far as he knew, there weren't any hills like these in that part of the world.

"Hello? Do you speak English?" Calvin asked. Yeah, he felt foolish even as he lifted his hands a little higher. At least he didn't just start talking louder or slower on the assumption it might help.

Two of the women glanced back and forth. They seemed to be arguing as they tried to figure out what was going on. "Muestranos tu cuellosh, ahorash!"

"I don't understand," he said carefully, shaking his head. "No entiendo," he said, hoping a couple of Spanish words might help.

The women stopped for a moment; they seemed to understand what

he was trying to convey.

One of the women slipped from her mount. She dropped down, grabbed something from her saddlebag, and held up the shackles for him to see.

Calvin instinctively took a step back.

"You don't need those," he said, shaking his head again. He did his best to keep his voice level and diplomatic. He didn't want to provoke these women, especially because they still had their weapons. Fortunately, none of them were wielding their rifles or bows.

The woman approached. Her black hair shone underneath the morning sun as she came closer and closer.

"No," he said again.

The woman paused, apparently confused. Maybe she understood that word. "No," he said again. He specifically pointed to the restraints. "I am not going to wear those." Although he had no explanation for what could be going on, the idea of letting random strangers restrain him clearly counted as a terrible idea.

The woman strode forward with this look of determination on her face. When she came closer, she seemed to study him, only she didn't make eye contact. Instead, her gaze seemed to linger on his neck. She called something out to her compatriots.

"What? What is it?" Calvin asked, more because he felt like he needed to say something.

They spoke back and forth, but their words came too quickly for him to try to parse out any meaning.

The frustration mounted inside of his chest as he attempted to figure out some way to communicate. Hand gestures? Was he really going to try to play charades right here and now?

One of the mounted women said something with confidence and authority. The younger woman on her feet came closer with the shackles. She started to grab his wrist. He pulled back. He stepped away. She seemed confused, like that wasn't what she had expected.

"Look. I'm sure you're trying to help me or something, but I'm not going to let you put those on me." He shook his head. "No." He pointed back to the restraints again.

The other woman on her horse laughed.

The one on the ground grabbed him again, only he jerked his arm

away. Then, without thinking, he lifted his hands, and he shoved her back. She stumbled, not because he put a lot of force into the maneuver but because she hadn't expected it. She didn't fall down, but then her eyes blazed.

"Un chicosh disobediente," she muttered, making it sound like one of the worst insults she could manage.

She strode forward again, and Calvin had to make a decision.

He dropped his backpack, slipping it off of his shoulders before swinging it in her direction. The momentum hit her hard in the chest, and she stumbled back.

Maybe thinking they were under attack, the women grabbed their rifles.

He heard fresh commands, and that's when they started to load their weapons. He heard them pull back their bolts, slide the cartridges into place, and lock as they engaged.

Were they going to shoot him?

It seemed impossible, especially out here, but Calvin couldn't be sure of anything, so he glanced back toward the trees. He kicked his feet down against the soft ground, and he ran, swinging his arms and slashing his fingertips through the air.

In two or three seconds, he felt the shadows of the trees descend over him as he darted into the woods. Right as he jumped to the left, a dart slammed into one of the trees, just a few inches past his shoulder.

They were doing it. They were really shooting at him!

Disbelief coursed through his body, but he glanced over his shoulder.

Two of the riders had started thumping forward, their enormous stallions slamming down as they raced toward him.

Up ahead, he saw the trees get even thicker. If he could make it another couple hundred feet, he could get lost in there.

Before he could stop and ask himself if he really wanted to get lost in a random forest he knew nothing about, another dart slammed down. This one hit the ground a few inches from his feet. He kept running, harder and faster now. His heart slammed, and the adrenaline gave him extra strength. He couldn't outrun horses, but he was way, way more maneuverable.

The trees got bigger, thicker, and heavier all around him.

He darted to the left, then the right. He ran across a stream, jumping down. The cold water couldn't pierce his boots, but some of the liquid splashed against his ankles and shins, soaking into his jeans.

In the distance, he could still hear them shouting back and forth.

The women sounded confused, like they weren't really sure they were supposed to be chasing him.

But they wanted to shackle him. They wanted to restrain him and drag him back?

All this didn't make any sense! What was going on? Where was he?

Eventually, the exhaustion dragged him to a stop. Gasping and panting, he turned back. The sun was still high overhead, but those warm beams had a hard time penetrating the big canopy of branches and leaves overhead.

He stopped and listened. At first, he had to strain to pick up on any sounds beyond the pounding of his heart and the ragged gasps from his lungs.

Then a big, silly grin spread across his face. A trio of women had actually hunted him, chasing him through a forest. Better yet, he managed to escape!

At first, Calvin had no idea how something like that could be possible. But then he started to put the different pieces together and it started to make sense. First, those women hadn't really expected to find him. Clearly, they had been hunting for rabbits or other prey. Second, once they did see him, they were confused.

There was something about his neck?

That idea kept coming back to him as he remembered the dark-haired woman and how she seemed especially interested in his throat.

Knowing they could still be out there, Calvin caught his breath, turned, and started walking. He didn't know where he was going, but he was sure he should double back and find that stream again. He would need to get some water, especially because he didn't have his bottle or his gear.

Could he go back for it?

No. They probably grabbed it. Or worse, they would be expecting him to return to their first meeting place.

Whether he liked it or not, Calvin had to keep moving.

"This is so much better than playing Regicide," Lena called out. Both she and her sister had changed into their riding gear. Instead of wearing elaborate tunics and skirts, they now had on matching pairs of black, denim pants and form-fitting blouses loaded with pockets for the various items they might need on the hunt.

"You only say that because you were losing," Julia protested. She had tied her red hair back into a sleek, simple ponytail. It bobbed as she rode along.

The two sisters and six of Lena's huntresses bounded on their stallions as they made their way over the rolling hills of her territory.

For the most part, they rode in silence. Shouting over the pounding hooves could get tiresome pretty quickly. When they arrived at the edge of the woods, Lena raised her hand, made a fist, and brought her followers to a stop.

"Three of you have already seen this boy," she said. "What can you tell us about him?"

The three dark-haired huntresses seemed to consider one another for a moment. Perhaps they were still nervous about the prospect of wasting Baroness Katina's time in case this turned out to be nothing.

"It's okay," Lena said, encouraging them. "I've never punished you for your ambitions before, and I won't do so now. If you say you found an unclaimed male, then I believe you."

The most experienced of the three nodded, set her lips, and said, "We saw him earlier this morning. Reasonably handsome and fit, but he was strange." Her voice trailed off as she tried to pick out the specific details from her memory.

One of her comrades interjected, "First off, he didn't seem to understand us."

"No?" Obviously, the baroness had already debriefed these three, but the rest of her huntresses didn't have this information.

The woman continued, "No. It was like he really wanted to communicate with us, so he wasn't running away or anything. In fact, we might not have noticed him at all if he hadn't started shouting for us."

"So what makes us think he might be a Wild Boy?"

"No collar," came the answer. "And yes, I double checked. I was thinking maybe it might be one of those thinner, more fashionable chains? But no. He wasn't wearing a collar at all. Plus, there's the fact that he ran away from us."

Several of the women frowned, perhaps thinking there had been some mistakes, like the huntresses had done something dumb if some random boy had been able to escape. For the most part, males were trained to never, ever disobey, let alone actually run away from a woman. From early childhood,

the boys were all taught to obey and respect their superiors. So what had happened here?

"Are you sure he ran? Are you sure he wasn't just scared? Maybe he didn't realize what was going on or he thought you were going to punish him or something?"

"We tried to explain what was going on," came the answer. "It should have been pretty simple. Even if you got lost or his collar somehow fell off, why couldn't he explain himself?"

Julia remained quiet as she listened to the exchange.

"Ultimately, it doesn't matter. I want this boy in my custody. If he belongs to another woman, that's fine. We will return him."

Lena had meant to leave the other half of the equation unspoken, but her little sister had to ask, "What if he hasn't been claimed?"

"How is that even happen?" asked one of the women.

Another answered, "Could he be from a colony of some kind? Maybe the rumors are true."

"Those aren't rumors," someone sneered. "At best, they are conspiracy theories. More likely, they're dumb stories people tell each other when they're bored."

"We aren't going to be jumping to any conclusions," Lena announced firmly. "That said, we are not going to dismiss any possibilities either. If there are escaped males out here, I want to know about it. If there is some kind of colony, no matter how unlikely that seems to be, we come to the same conclusion. One way or another, we will find this boy and bring him back to the estate."

The women nodded, voiced their agreement, and headed out into the woods.

The hunt was on.

Lena pressed her heels down against her mount's flanks, so she started to trot between the trees, carefully picking her way forward as she scanned her surroundings. Of course, her younger sister followed along.

"Can I have him?"

"What?" Lena asked, distracted as she stared between the different trees. Long ago, she had learned not to take any detail for granted, especially because he could be hiding in plain sight. Simultaneously, she made sure to look up towards the branches in case he had tried to hide above them.

She didn't generally expect that kind of cleverness from a boy, but

she didn't know this one, so she wouldn't underestimate him either.

"Can I have him?" Julia asked again. She made it sound so simple. "I could always use another boy for my factory."

"We don't even know if he is actually a Wild Boy," Lena answered.

"But if he is..."

"If he is, we can talk about it."

"But if I catch him first?" Julia asked.

Lena glanced over at her sister. Back straight and poised, she looked elegant and powerful, exactly like an aristocrat. Just as importantly, her eyes sparkled with mischievous delight. Clearly, she was imagining what she might do with a new captive.

"Couldn't you just buy someone if you're feeling bored with your current stock?"

"Hey, I said I would put him to work in one of my factories."

"But I'm sure you would have some fun playing with him first?"

"The perks of management," Julia retorted.

"But there's something else," Lena pointed out.

Her little sister shrugged before deciding to tell the truth. "Okay. So maybe I'm intrigued by the possibility of having a wild, unregistered male without an owner. I mean, what do you think that would be like?"

"A challenge," Lena said dismissively.

Julia considered her sister as their horses carefully picked their way through the woods. Mounted atop this beast, she enjoyed one of the odd ironies life seemed to bring so routinely. Yes, this creature was many times her size and much stronger, yet she rode this animal and held his reins.

More to the point, he seemed to enjoy it.

"You don't like taming boys?"

"I..."

A whistle's shrill cry sliced through the air, cutting off Lena's answer.

"We got him," Julia said.

Somehow, Lena suspected her little sister may have gotten ahead of herself.

Calvin Drake might not have noticed these women, but one of them put a whistle to her lips and blew. Cold dread shot down his spine, swirling through his stomach, and turning the world to a blur as he twisted back.

Despite the hunger lodged in his gut, he stopped thinking about his body in that exact instant because he saw the two women on horseback.

"Not again," he groaned.

Without waiting to see what they might do or say, Calvin sprinted again. He launched himself forward, jumping ahead before he started swinging his arms. The cool, early afternoon air washed over his cheeks and forehead. His boots slammed down, cracking dried sticks underneath his weight.

"No corresh!" called out one of the women.

Calvin had absolutely no idea what she might have wanted to say. If he had to guess, it was probably something like, "Stop!" Then again, he never understood why police or other pursuers told their prey to stop since it wasn't ever going to happen.

Calvin ducked around one tree after another. With his heart slamming in his chest, he pushed himself as hard as he could.

Behind him, he heard the trotting hoofbeats as the women chased after him.

Quickly scanning, he searched ahead for thicker foliage. Again and again, he told himself that he only had one advantage here: maneuverability. If he pushed himself hard and continued to run, he would be able to get beyond their line of sight. He could weave to the left or right, and maybe get himself even more lost in this forest, but they wouldn't be able to find him either!

It worked once. It had to work again!

As this boy ran, his vision tunneled, and he stopped looking around. He couldn't help it. The seconds turned to minutes, and this was a hearty, frantic sprint. Behind him, he thought he heard a woman laughing.

Since he was so focused on making it to the next cluster of trees, he hardly noticed the other two riders.

They cut right in front of him, more than a hundred feet ahead.

There were two of them, one woman with red hair tied back into a ponytail. The black-haired female narrowed her eyes at him. Even from this distance, he recognized that judgmental frustration, like she couldn't understand why he wouldn't just give up right then and there.

With two riders behind him and two ahead, Calvin seriously considered jogging to a halt and just surrendering. He could have raised his hands and said something inane like, "I demand to see a lawyer!"

Instead, he glanced to the left. The trees seemed lighter in that direction. He glanced to the right.

Gasping now, he darted to one side. He ran to the right, pushing himself as hard as he could. Pain gripped his chest, and it felt like he might collapse at any moment, but the worry about what might happen if these women caught him continued to drive him forward.

"I'm not going to let them catch me," he tried to whisper. "I'm not going to let them catch me!" Those little noises came out like unintelligible whimpers, but it didn't matter.

They hadn't caught him yet.

Only then he caught the sound of whizzing darts as they shot past his ear.

One of the women laughed as she mocked her compatriot for her poor aim. Another dart glanced through the air, only this one actually caught Calvin in the shoulder. He expected pain, only he couldn't really understand what just happened.

The momentum of that dart slamming into his shoulder threw him forward. Already exhausted, he lost his balance, tumbled forward, and landed in a roll.

Instinctively, he reached back, found the dart, and yanked it free.

As he held it up, he saw the metallic tip and some kind of green liquid dripping downward. They drugged him!

Worse, the riders galloped up. Three of the women jumped free from their saddles.

And now, they held up a set of whips. They gripped the handles on one side and kept the roped tips wrapped around their other wrists.

What were they going to do? Were they going to whip him? Were they going to choke him?

The one woman who remained atop her steed called out to him, "Jho no she porque eresh en mish territorio, pero demandosh tush obediencia."

As hard as he tried to pick out the individual syllables, he failed completely.

Down on his back, surrounded, and utterly spent, Calvin thought about just giving up right there. Only then, he remembered the shackles. More to the point, he had no idea what these women would do with him. If they genuinely wanted to help him, then why the restraints?

No. This didn't make any sense.

Slowly, he pushed himself back up onto his feet. He straightened his back, rose up, and looked out at them.

He braced himself for a fight.

Two of the women glanced back and forth at one another. Then smiles cracked their lips, like they couldn't believe what they were seeing. He couldn't understand their language, but the meaning was pretty clear.

*Are you seeing this?*

*Oh yeah. Silly boy.*

*What's he thinking?*

*Who cares? We're going to bring him down anyway.*

One of the women stepped forward, so Calvin spun around to face her. He braced himself, leaning forward, raising his elbows, and holding out his fists. Even as he prepared himself, he felt ridiculous, like he was some old-timey barfighter who was about to get in a brawl at the local saloon.

This woman seemed to think the same thing because she grinned at him. Then she rushed forward, only Calvin somehow managed to dart to the side. The woman pushed herself too hard and too fast, so she stumbled, landing hard in the dried dirt and discarded leaves.

Her comrades laughed at her!

"Look. I don't know what's going on here, but I really don't want to fight you."

The redhead cocked an eyebrow. She glanced up at the dark-haired woman and started to say something. Their conversation bounced back and forth.

Calvin didn't get to appreciate what any of this might have meant, however. The woman who just fell jumped back up onto her feet, and now she roared as she rushed at him.

As he tensed up again, Calvin wondered if he could try to grab the whip from her. Of course, if he did get it, he didn't know what he would do with it.

This woman's hair flared out as she rushed at him. Her primal shouts of defiance almost made him laugh, if only because all of this was so ridiculously absurd. Calvin was the kind of guy who spent most of his time in an air-conditioned office. For him, the wilderness was always peaceful, a place where he and his fellow hikers could relax and enjoy the serenity of nature.

But now, this woman wanted to fight him!

He stumbled out of her way, only this time he didn't move his left foot fast enough, so her ankle caught on his leg, and she tumbled down to the

ground again.

If her friends thought that first fall was funny, the second one was absolutely hilarious!

"Look, I don't want to fight you," he said again. "Please, can't you just let me go? Give me back my stuff, and I will be on my way." He ignored the woman who had fallen for the second time. Instead, he stared out at the other riders. His expression was nothing less than imploring as he tried to convey his willingness to work with them.

"I'm not a threat," he promised. "I don't even know what's going on. If this is your land or territory or whatever, I just want to get home."

His opponent scrambled back up onto her feet, only now she darted over to her horse, and she pulled off to the right for with the tranquilizer darts. (Or at least, he had to hope this thing would be loaded with tranquilizer darts.)

She raised her weapon, aimed, and her finger was right there against the trigger.

Freezing in place, thinking there was no way she could miss at this range, Calvin jerked his hands up into the air.

Another voice called out. This came from the woman with the short black hair. "No disparash!"

The woman snarled something, glanced up, and seemed to consider this. They argued back and forth for the next few seconds, then she lowered her weapon.

"Boy, tell me, is this a language you understand?"

"Wow," muttered the woman with the red hair. "You know, when Mother insisted we learn a dead language, I never imagined it would actually be useful."

Dead language? What were they talking about?

Calvin gulped and kept his hands up in the air, if only to demonstrate that he wasn't a threat, and they definitely didn't need to shoot him.

"Yeah..." he finally answered. "I, I understand you."

"Excellent," she said. "Then you can tell me, who is your owner?"

"My owner?"

"Yeah," said the redhead. She smirked at him even as she approached. While the others treated him like he might be some dangerous animal, this young woman seemed to view him as a curiosity. "You know, the woman who keeps you, trains you, and takes care of your general behavior." As she

spoke, he noticed the odd cadence in her voice. There was a certain hesitation, like she wasn't exactly sure which words to pick. More to the point, they seemed overly enunciated, but she only learned these words and phrases as part of some classroom exercise.

"I don't have an owner?" Calvin said. He should have been more definitive, but the idea seemed so absurd. Slavery was something that existed in history books or maybe other countries. It wasn't something he had ever contended with.

"No owner? Julia, do you think that's possible?"

The redhead focused on him. "Are you from a colony? Are there others like you? Are you part of a rebellion?" She uttered that final word like it may have been some sort of insult or maybe profanity.

"I'm not part of any rebellion," he said. As he spoke, he wondered if maybe he had been struck by lightning, lost his memory, and somehow wandered off into another country. But if he started in the American West, where could he have possibly gone?

Maybe some wild part of Mexico? Even as the idea occurred to him, he dismissed it as ridiculous. Sure, the Mexican government may have struggled with cartels behaving more like countries, but they didn't have full-blown rebellions as far as he knew. Then again, what did he really know about Mexico?

More to the point, was it possible for someone to wander hundreds or thousands of miles without realizing it?

"But you don't have an owner?"

"No."

"Is that why you're not wearing a collar? Do you have special dispensation papers?"

"Dispensation for what?"

The redhead laughed, "You're a boy out in the wilderness without a collar, and you aren't being escorted or leashed by a woman. You realize how bizarre this looks, don't you?"

"No?"

These two women started talking back and forth in their own language. As hard as Calvin listened, he couldn't figure out any of the ideas they conveyed back and forth.

"Please, can you just tell me where I am?"

"Did you just interrupt us?" asked the redhead. She seemed more

amused than anything else.

"Sorry," he stuttered out. "I wasn't trying to be rude or anything. It's just that I'm—"

The dark-haired girl cut him off, "Boy, we are talking. I don't know where you grew up or why you failed to learn these basic points of etiquette, but you will be silent now. Because if you aren't, I will have one of my huntresses muzzle you."

For a second, Calvin started to smile, thinking this had to be some kind of joke. But when he looked up into her crystalline blue eyes, he saw nothing but seriousness and determination. If she threatened to muzzle him, she meant it. Then he glanced over at the other women, and he remembered their tranquilizer guns, their whips, and the shackles they probably all carried in their saddlebags.

What was going on? Where was this place? How could something like this ever happen?

Those questions pulsed behind his eyes, but he decided to stay quiet.

In the meantime, the dark-haired woman returned to her conversation with her colleague.

Biting down, Calvin had to channel all of his patience into remaining there, especially while he was encircled. Part of him wondered if he could just make a break for it. If he sprinted hard, would he be able to run past some of them? Would he be able to make it back into the densest parts of the forest?

But even if he escaped, what good would that do? Seriously, where did he think he was going to go?

Finally, the two women came to a consensus. The one with red hair said, "You're lucky. I think you have a real shot here."

A shot? A shot at what?

Calvin turned back to the other woman. He wanted to speak, but she intimidated him. From his vantage point on the ground, he could tell that she was fairly slender. Still, she sat upon this mighty horse, which gave her more gravitas and authority than she would have otherwise wielded.

"Strictly speaking, I don't know whether or not I should believe you. You claim to be an unregistered boy. You say you don't have a collar. You also say you don't speak our language."

"I don't," he said.

"Boy, I'm not done. Remain quiet. My threat from before remains in

effect." When he kept his lips pressed together, she continued, "I will bring you back to my facility where you will be inspected and debriefed."

"She's going to interrogate you," said the other woman with a little smile.

"I don't think that's a good idea," he said.

"What makes you think you have a choice?" The woman nodded. "After all, I am Baroness Lena Katina, and this is my sister, Julia Katina. Do you know who we are? Do you know the kind of familial influence we represent?" She lowered her voice to trail off. Her power and gravitas seemed obvious to everyone else, yet Calvin still stood there, blinking and unsure of himself.

"I don't?" Calvin said.

"It hardly matters," Lena told him. "I suppose the only question is whether or not you are going to make this difficult."

"Fine. I will go with you, but only if you give me some answers."

"That's not how this works," she said.

"I have the right to some answers," he insisted. He wasn't just going to head back to some strange settlement with these women, especially because nothing they said made any freaking sense!

"Because you seem to be confused, let me explain something to you. You are a boy. Boys have no rights and don't get to make demands. At this point, I'm going to give you one option. Step forward, toward my sister, and allow her to restrain your hands behind your back. After that, we will fit you with a temporary caller, the shoe, and take you back with us. Once at my estate, we will send out some messages to determine whether or not you are telling the truth."

"And if I am?" Calvin asked even as he did his best to skip over her description of what she wanted to do with him.

"Then we are going to have some very, very interesting discussions."

"Okay," he said. "I'm going to cooperate. But I am not going to let you leash me."

"Cute," she said.

"I'm serious."

"And so am I," Lena told him.

His nostrils flared as he discovered something. Once, back at a bar with some friends, he remembered one of his buddies going on and on about how people got too emotional when it came to dealing with the police. "What

does it matter if you get handcuffed? It's not like you have been assaulted or anything." At the time, Calvin hadn't entertained any particular position. For the most part, he looked like a pretty normal guy, so law-enforcement left him alone. But now, these women wanted to collar him. They would restrain him and drag him back. And if he didn't cooperate, they would muzzle him?

"No," he whispered. "I'm not--"

Before he could finish his sentence, Lena pulled out her pistol, aimed it, and fired. This time, the dart didn't just catch his shirt. Instead, the needle tip ripped through his jeans and caught him right in his thigh. The drugs flared through his body instantly. He stumbled back. Even as he grabbed the dart and yanked it free, the quick burn of pain seemed to grow dull. He looked at the different women and collapsed down onto his knees. His head bowed forward, and he caught himself on his palms.

Around him, the women started to speak as they decided his fate.

"Was that really necessary?" Julia asked.

"You're just jealous because I did it first," Lena retorted.

"Maybe," said her sister.

Lena looked back at her huntresses. "I gave him a mild muscle relaxant, not a sedative. He isn't going to lose consciousness, so I want him thoroughly restrained."

"Baroness, should we strip him?"

Perpetually confident in her authority, Lena didn't hesitate, "Yes. Do it."

The women went to work.

The boy tried to struggle. At one point, he even raised a fist and tried to throw a punch, but his arm lanced out, and he stumbled forward, dropping right back down onto his knees.

Lena admired him. There was something impressive about his attempts to resist. Obviously, he would lose, but she was entertained by his best efforts. In fact, she started to think of someone else, another boy...

Quickly suppressing those thoughts, Lena focused on this male. Could it be? Could he really be genuinely wild? And why did he speak a dead tongue? She vaguely recalled one of her tutors mentioning a few of the settlements on the East Coast still using "English," but the dialectic shifted over the last couple of centuries, so she wasn't sure it counted.

One woman grabbed this boy, ripped off his shirt, and threw him

down onto the ground. He tried to get up, but another female put her boot right there on his neck. Julia and another one of the huntresses pulled out their blades, and they quickly cut through his denim trousers.

Then they saw his underwear.

"Stop," Lena ordered.

For his part, the mysterious boy continued to struggle, but the women had no problem pinning him down. One put her hand on his throat and braced her knees against his wrist. Another simply locked his other hand beneath the heel of her boot. He squirmed and kicked out, but it was obvious he wouldn't be able to get away, especially with the drugs running through his system.

Lena dismounted. She approached, crouched down, and examined him. First, she grabbed at the waistband of his underwear, pulling and watching as the fabric snapped back into place. "Fascinating," she said.

"These are strange garments. It would make sense if he's lying. Maybe he speaks something besides English."

"But why pretend?" Lena inquired.

"He could be a spy? House DuRoy could have sent him?"

"Voice can make decent spies," Lena acknowledged, although several of her huntresses glanced away. They didn't like the idea of a competent male under any circumstance. Fortunately for them, they only had to focus on tracking down rabbits and deer for their mistress; they rarely had to worry about the intricacies of politics, especially between the various families. "A boy can be recruited or sold into a house while remaining loyal to his previous owner. It's distasteful, but it can happen. Those boys are supposed to be innocuous and unnoticed. This boy is the opposite."

"It doesn't make any sense," Julia acknowledged. She was pouting now with undisguised annoyance.

"No," Lena agreed. "It doesn't. And now, we have this."

"His undergarments?"

"Have you ever seen a material like this before? It's not quite silk, nor is it cotton. Additionally, look at the fine threading."

"Interesting."

"What?"

"If I didn't know any better, I would say that this was done by a machine. And yet, I haven't seen anyone develop any kind of embroidery technique that can work with this kind of precision."

"You're not going to get away with this. If I have to call the police, I

will!" the boy called out, but the two sisters just ignored him.

"Muzzle him," Lena ordered.

The women pulled off his underwear, rolled him onto his stomach, as he tried to kick out, but it still didn't do any good. Then he felt the shackles as they were looped around his wrists, drawn tight, binding his arms behind his back. Next, they forced him onto his knees.

"Would you like to do the honors?" one of the huntresses asked the baroness.

Normally, Lena of House Katina would've eschewed this kind of demonstration, only she found herself holding out her hand. One of her followers handed her the black, leather collar and the small combination lock. Lena slipped it around his neck. She scattered the numbers, and then she nodded to herself, apparently content. Or maybe she simply enjoyed the view. This boy did look quite entertaining, especially with his arms pulled back like that. He heaved, twisting from side to side, not that he posed any real threat to these women. They were all skilled fighters, while he was some drugged stray who still didn't seem to understand what was going on.

He tried to open his mouth one more time, to argue and communicate with them, but another woman shoved the muzzle up against his face. A leather strip was pushed between his teeth and held down his tongue. Then they tightened the straps, rendering him speechless.

"Let's get back to the estate. I want to have a very long conversation with this boy," Lena said.

For the first half hour or so, those drugs made it hard for Calvin to take this seriously. Everything felt distorted and distant, like he was just an observer taking a ride in his own body. In those first minutes, as he followed along, it all seemed so easy.

He kept glancing at the different women, only Calvin didn't draw any specific conclusions. He was just a boy who followed along. In fact, he almost felt like a sweet little puppy dog chasing after some pretty girls.

"I'm not a puppy dog," he attempted to mutter at some point, only the muzzle made that impossible. The gag vibrated with those sounds, but he couldn't communicate, and no one was listening to him anyway.

Calvin studied the two women who had clearly been in charge: Lena Katina. With his view of the world distorted by the drugs in his system, he had to wonder if her parents noticed the rhyme.

Little by little, his senses started to restore themselves. He became

more aware of his surroundings, especially as they emerged from the forest, traversed the hills, and traveled toward the structure he had originally noticed.

The two women who were in charge started talking back and forth. The baroness lifted her hand, made a fist, and the group came to a halt.

That's when the redhead turned around and glanced at him, "You must be hungry."

For a second, Calvin was tempted to shake his head from side to side. Obviously, he couldn't speak, but some limited communication remained possible. This was the opportunity to defy them, to show them that he was strong, and he didn't care about what they did or said.

Only then his stomach grumbled, and this nauseating sense of weakness coursed through his body. He gulped back his pride and nodded obediently.

The redhaired young woman slipped from her saddle and nodded toward the other women. "This does look like it will be a good place."

"Make camp," Lena commanded.

Calvin could have been mistaken, but some of the huntresses seemed confused, only then they whispered back and forth. Then it made sense.

For Calvin Drake, nothing about this was logical.

In that moment, Calvin glanced up and around. Still naked, leashed, and bound, he realized they had been walking all day. A different kind of exhaustion started to course through his frame, and he realized he would be able to run off. Then again, there was no guarantee these women were going to let him off the leash anyway.

Deciding he needed to keep his strength up, he stood off to the side. Strangely enough, it felt easy to wait and watch as these women worked.

They made a fire, opened up their bags, and got ready. Although he remained leashed to one of the horses, Calvin remained quiet and off to the side and out of the way.

The redhaired woman approached him. She let her eyes wander up and down his naked body.

In that moment, Calvin really, really wanted to bring his hands up over his genitals. He wished he could hide some sliver of modesty.

"Fascinating," she said. "You don't like it when I look at you, do you?" Again, she used to that oddly accented form of English, but at least he

could understand her.

After a few seconds, he just turned his head down toward the side. "You know, when a woman asks you a question, you should respond. If you don't, there could be consequences."

He shrugged, and she rolled her shoulders back and started laughing at him.

"Oh, that's okay," she said. "For now."

"Are you playing with him?"

"Not yet," said the redhead.

"You should be careful with this one," Lena said it, only those words weren't aimed at her compatriot. Instead, she looked right back at Calvin.

"This young woman is Julia Katina, my sister."

He narrowed his eyes together. They didn't look similar. Or maybe they did. Perhaps he could see some family resemblance in the curves of their jaws and their slender builds. "But for right now, I think it's time that you and I have a little conversation. My followers are surprised that we are making camp, but I have made a decision. I don't think I want you to see my estate yet."

She glanced back at several of her followers. "Restrain him."

Calvin didn't understand what that meant, not when he was already bound and powerless before them.

He was about to discover what these females can do.

They came up, untied his wrists, and he enjoyed a moment of freedom. He rubbed at his skin as he worked some of the circulation back into play. It didn't last long, however. They used fresh rope, tying his hands together, over his head this time. They looped the rope around a solid tree branch, pulled, so now he was suspended, his feet just barely touching the ground.

They moved so quickly, shoving him around, positioning and manipulating him in the span of just a few seconds.

When he let out a little whimper of surprise, the women smirked and laughed.

Not only that, they tied his ankles, pulling them apart and making him especially vulnerable.

"Ladies," Lena said, "See what you can find."

The huntresses nodded and obeyed, disappearing back over the hills and into the trees as they sought their prey.

For several minutes, Lena continued to study him. She looked into his face and occasionally allowed her eyes to move down the length of his body. She didn't touch him, not yet, but she examined his chest, shoulders, and legs.

In so many ways, this boy still reminded her of a stallion: sleek and powerful, yet he still needed to be trained and domesticated like any other beast.

At several points, he tried to meet her gaze, like he thought he might be able to compete with this woman. Each time, however, she studied him, and he found himself looking away. Yes, she could frighten him. Yes, she could intimidate him.

If nothing else, she knew what was going on here. She understood this place, even if she didn't seem to know how he had arrived or what she would do with him.

"My sister and I are going to talk to you. I expect you to be honest. If you try to lie to me, I will make sure you regret it." She didn't utter those words like a threat. Instead, they had morphed into a simple statement of fact.

He nodded.

Moving on some unseen signal, Julia stepped forward.

"Would you like to speak? Would you like to talk?"

He looked at her, confused for a moment. Yeah, obviously.

"Nod your handsome little head up and down for me," she ordered.

Slowly, he started to understand what this was and what it meant. She expected him to cooperate. She wanted to see if he would follow her commands.

Telling himself that playing along, at least for now, didn't really cost him anything, he bobbed his head down and up.

"Smart boy," Julia said. That's when she grabbed him by his muzzle. She turned his head to the left, then the right. Just as her sister had done, Julia examined this boy, only now she touched him. "I wonder if you are as responsive as you are smart."

His eyes flickered as he heard those words. He looked back at her green irises, gulped, and then she burst out laughing. It didn't last for long, however. Only seconds later, her expression hardened into something serious.

"It's okay. You're a boy. I'm sure you've been examined many times before. Let's see if you respond."

Maybe in this strange land, guys were manhandled all the time. Maybe they grew used to it, and maybe they didn't react to it. Perhaps this

was some kind of defiance or rebellion on their part, something they could whisper back and forth to one another in those rare moments when the women weren't listening.

If so, Calvin Drake didn't enjoy any of those protections or benefits. He didn't have the training for this!

And Julia was a beautiful woman with her wavy red hair, her bright eyes, her perfectly shaped breasts, and her slender frame. She pressed herself forward, rubbing her chest against his even as she reached down. Simultaneously, her breath was hot against his ear as she whispered, "We are going to find the truth. You can't lie to us." Then she chuckled.

She still hadn't removed the muzzle, so he could only whimper as her hand dropped down to his crotch. At first, he had truly believed she was just going to tease him. She might mock him for a few seconds before stepping back. Then both of these young women could laugh at him.

Only now, her fingers actually brushed along his scrotum. Her touch felt electric. Hot desire coursed through him. He knew he was supposed to be terrified of every second. He didn't know where he was or why his phone didn't work. He didn't understand what was going on, yet this woman casually moved her hand along his most sensitive parts. She started touching his cock...

Light, almost tender caresses moved up and down his shaft.

He hardened instantly.

Calvin couldn't help himself!

The baroness shook her head. "It must be so difficult to be a boy. You can't hide what you're thinking, you can't hide your desires. Women can be more subtle. We can manipulate one another. But the male half of humanity will always be the weaker sex."

Julia said nothing. Instead, she simply exhaled, gently breathing against his ear as she stroked him. His erection pushed against the palm of her hand.

Without even realizing it, he started pushing his hips forward. He tugged against the restraints, leaning against the ropes as best he could.

"You like this," she said. It wasn't a question. "You like being trapped. You like being helpless."

He shook his head around. He growled like some restrained animal as she continued to play with him and touch him. She teased and played with him, sending fresh jolts of arousal along his skin and straight to his core.

Right as he thought he might be able to climax, Julia jerked her hand away. She spun off, fast enough to make her ponytail smack him across the face with her fiery red tresses.

Hands on her hips, she sauntered back to her sister where they proceeded to talk about him.

He heard the words, but none of it made any sense. Intellectually, he understood that this was a fully formed the language, yet the harsh sounds cut across the air, morphing into incomprehensible gibberish.

Finally, Lena strode up to him. She started circling him. He shivered.

Although Julia seemed intent on playing with him, Lena craved something else. Her eyes slid along his shoulders, over the curves of his biceps, and up to the lines of his forearms.

Halfheartedly, he pulled on the restraints, if only to convey his desire to speak.

Part of him wondered why they were taking so long. If this was supposed to be some kind of interrogation, why not just get to it? Why not ask the questions?

They wanted him to wait, he realized. They wanted to assert themselves. By dictating the pace of this interrogation, they asserted control without uttering a word.

This realization didn't help. On the contrary, it only amplified his frustration. His breathing came faster, and he tugged on the rope that held up his arms. He tried to pull his legs together, to kick out.

"That's not going to work," she said. "Face it, boy. We have you, and we don't have to let you go. If you really are a spy, then you wandered in here with the intention of getting my attention. If so, congratulations. You have succeeded." She stopped behind him, and Calvin tried to jump forward when she reached down and gently brushed her fingers along his naked buttocks.

"You can't get away. I have you," she promised.

Then she reached up again, and he didn't know what was going to happen.

Her hand flew down hard and fast, striking at his naked backside. The clap of sound exploded through his body and echoed along the open air.

He blinked, shocked: what just happened?

His brain caught up, and he put the pieces together. He realized what she did.

She spanked him!

For a moment, Calvin almost wanted to laugh. As a guy who worked in an office, he had sat through more than a dozen sexual harassment prevention seminars. The idea of having a woman just stride up to him, grab him and touch him however she saw fit seemed completely alien. It was almost ridiculous despite the stinging that flared through his frame.

Then she struck him again.

This time, the pain seemed to drill straight to his core.

"What? Do you think this is a punishment? It's not," she promised him. "This is just a taste. This is a sample. I expect you to be honest with me."

This time he tried to shout out, "Honest? How can I be honest with you when you haven't even unmuzzled me?" The desperate aggravation roared through his frame, but she still couldn't understand him.

"Such a strange beast," she said. "You don't have the humility of a slave. So what are you?"

She asked this without actually giving him the opportunity to speak. Apparently, in her world, men didn't need to talk. Women could draw their own conclusions while the boys stood around, off to the side and out of the way.

Finally, she reached up and pulled on the straps holding the leather bit between his teeth.

With a gasp, he pulled in fresh air.

Now that he could talk, Calvin froze up. He didn't know what to say. Somehow, he thought it would be better to wait for this aristocrat to speak first.

She yanked on his hair, pulling his head back. Then, like her sister, she spoke into his ear, "Boy, tell me your name."

"Calvin," he said quickly. "I'm Calvin Drake!"

"Drake?" Lena asked. She glanced over at her sister, but Julia just shrugged. "You mean, your owner gave you a last name?"

The frustration from before flared up again as he snarled, "I already told you. I don't have an owner!"

"True," she said. She stepped back in front of him and touched her fingertips together as she evaluated this boy. "How did you come to my territory?"

Once again, he found he couldn't match her stare. It was something about the way she evaluated him, looking down on him like he really was

nothing but a possession. Still, he managed to speak, "Look, I really don't understand what is going on here. This morning, I arrived at Red Feather National Park."

Lena turned away and glanced over at her sister who simply shrugged.

They both knew of the Red Feathers' territory, a semi-autonomous region under the queen. But Red Feather National Park? For a moment, Lena had to wonder if her mastery of English had slipped.

"I'm a hiker, okay? I'm a hiker and a photographer, so I just want to take some nice pictures. That's all."

"That can't be all," Lena pointed out.

"You're right," he said. "I was walking along, and a strange storm swept across the sky. I, I don't know how it happened. I have never, ever seen anything like this before, not in real life anyway."

"Then where?"

"I don't know," he said. "On TV. In movies."

"TV?" Lena asked.

Further back, Julia added, "In movies?"

"Yeah," he said. "On TV. You know. Flattish rectangle. You put it on your wall and watch stuff," he said. He probably intended those words as sarcasm, only the blank expressions on his interrogators' faces made it clear they had no idea what he was talking about.

"TV," he said again. "Television. You know what that is, right?"

Even if they were trying to mess with him, he searched for some sign of amusement, like maybe he'd notice the hint of a smile or something. But no. They seem to be genuinely confused, like they had never heard of this word before.

"I've never heard this word before," Lena said. "And frankly, I don't understand how a rectangle would provide any kind of meaningful entertainment."

"You've never seen a TV? You've never seen moving pictures before?" He stared at her.

Lena was intrigued by this. Not only was his tone strange for a male, not to mention his use of this language, but he possessed something else: confidence. Virtually every male she had ever encountered had been thoroughly trained and domesticated. But this boy spoke to her like they were equals.

How could such a thing be possible?

"Okay. So you don't know what a TV is." Although he kept wondering how such a thing could be possible, he quickly summoned and dismissed different theories. Surely, there were a few people on earth who might not be aware of the outside world. He envisioned different communities and tribes hidden away in Africa, South America, or maybe some remote part of Asia. Perhaps there were some islands somewhere that had no contact with the rest of the world. And yet, they spoke English, so that obviously wasn't true. "Anyway. I was hiking like I said before, and the storm rolled in. Lightning started to hit the ground, so I tried to hide. I think a lightning bolt struck me. Then I lost consciousness. When I woke up, I was here." Automatically, Calvin tried to motion toward the rest of his surroundings, only the ropes around his wrists kept his arms stretched up towards the sky.

"Impossible," Julia said. "He has to be lying."

"Is it your belief that a lightning bolt struck you and somehow transported you to my territory?" Lena asked, her expression neutral, like this was a perfectly valid possibility.

He thought of movies and TV shows with even more preposterous premises, but he couldn't talk about any of those, so he nodded. "Look, I know it sounds crazy. I really do."

"It sounds like you're lying," Lena replied. "But what still confuses me is why you would bother. How could this work? If someone trained you for this ruse, what is the purpose, especially because I would obviously see through it. More to the point, I'm now on my guard."

"I'm not part of some plot," he said, only to realize that is exactly what some spy or saboteur would also insist. "Please. I'm a United States citizen."

"A citizen?" Julia asked. "Since when could boys become citizens?"

"They can't," Lena replied. "There isn't a nation on earth that would recognize the equality of males."

"But, but I am..." Calvin insisted.

"Could he be delusional?" Julia asked.

"No. I don't think so." Still standing behind him, Lena reached around his torso. She grazed her nails down his chest. "I have trained other boys," she said. "Of course, those were less interesting because they already knew what was going to happen. They understood the inevitability of their situation. Do you?"

"Please. Just take me to the embassy. That's all you have to do. And I can be gone, and you won't have to worry about me."

"What embassy?"

"I'm from the United States!"

"Never heard of it," Julia said.

His insides tightened as those words smacked into him. But for good or ill, Calvin didn't get to ponder what they might mean for long, not when Lena drew her hand down his torso. Her nails grazed his sternum, his stomach, and then her palm pushed against his pubis before she found his erection again.

"Tell the truth right now, and I might allow you the privilege of release. Tell me what is really going on here. Tell me who sent you and why. Who is your owner?"

The moisture drained away from his mouth as he tried to think. He lifted his head, closed his eyes, and savored the way she touched him. At the surface of every thought, Calvin understood this was a terrible idea.

"I can reward you, Calvin Drake." When she said his last name, there was something else, this amused lilt in her voice. "I can make you feel very, very good. I can make you one of my most cherished slaves if you tell me the name of your owner right now."

"I, I don't have an owner," he vowed.

"Boy, we both know you are lying."

"I'm not!"

She let go, pulling her hand away and stepped in front of him.

"Calvin, are you sure you're not lying? Because if you don't have an owner, and no one has claimed you, that means you are very, very vulnerable. Not only that, you look like a healthy specimen. If I drag you down to the auction house right now, I could make quite a bit by selling you."

Both Julia and Lena enjoyed that look of confusion as it played across his face. Sometimes, boys could be so adorable, especially when they didn't realize the consequences of their actions or words.

"Are you genuinely a Wild Male? Are you telling me that you really don't have an owner?"

Right there, Calvin knew he could try to lie to her. He could make up some random name and hope that these women would just release him. No, he dismissed the idea. Deception wouldn't work here, so he had to be honest with these women. "Please. I just want to get out of here. That's all I want."

"That's too bad for you," Lena said.

He opened his mouth to speak again, but she grabbed his muzzle and shoved it right back between his teeth. Then she turned back to her sister before they started to discuss and decide his future. Obviously, he didn't need to be part of that conversation.

"What do you think?" Lena asked.

For once, Julia seemed to consider this question carefully. "It doesn't make sense," she finally decided. "I think he's telling the truth about not having an owner."

"So he's a rebel?"

"No..." Julia added. "I don't think he's a rebel either."

"Could he be telling the truth about that lightning storm?"

Julia opened her mouth, considered this, and shouted after another couple of seconds. Then she shrugged. "According to the philosophers, there is still so much we don't know about the world, not to mention the universe. Could such a thing be possible?"

"Okay, so for the sake of argument, are we saying that he came from another territory, one that the Queen's forces haven't yet discovered?"

"I thought every continent had been thoroughly mapped. Even then, if there was some hidden island or something, how would a lightning strike take a boy from one part of the world to another?"

"Could it be something else? A different world?"

Julia glanced back at him. "He is so alien."

"He is," Lena agreed. She touched her fingertips together. "Maybe he stumbled through some kind of gateway or door. It seems so improbable."

"Does it matter?" Julia asked after several more seconds. "If we're talking about some natural phenomenon, this is something wild and unpredictable. It's something no one has ever experienced. We can do our duty and send a messenger off to the Royal Academy, but I'm not sure if they will even take it seriously. Then that doesn't tell us what we should do with this boy?"

"Let's assume he doesn't have an owner."

"I like that assumption," Julia said.

Feeling puckish, Lena nodded. "I do too."

"We could claim him," Julia said. "We could have this boy, and he could provide quite a bit of entertainment, I suspect." Even as she talked

about him, Julia wandered back over to the bound boy. He watched her, and she savored that look of nervous energy that ran across his face. "We could keep him for ourselves."

"Or we could play a game," Lena said.

"A game?" Julia asked, surprised. Normally, her sister was always so focused on the Koran and following the rules. Then again, there weren't any protocols for a situation like this.

"Call it a little competition. We could play with him."

"Oh, I like that. I like that a lot," Julia answered.

But of course, her sister had to be the mature one because she smirked. "But first, we need to be sure one way or the other. This interrogation isn't done."

"By hand or by whip?" Julia asked.

"Whip," Lena said. "But first, I want to give him one more chance."

As the women spoke, Calvin ran through his options. He circled through different possibilities as he tried to imagine scenarios where he might be able to get away and back to a world that made sense. Now that he started thinking about it, he actually came to the conclusion that this might be an entirely different dimension or plane of existence.

Some part of him rebelled at that idea, but he couldn't come up with any other possible conclusion. Unless he had somehow wandered into a mental health facility, he knew this couldn't be the United States. Heck, he couldn't even be in his world.

As the women continued to talk, Calvin tugged on his restraints. He did this as furtively as possible. He also tried to rotate his wrists and push his fingertips together, like maybe he could make his hands slender enough that he would be able to slip free.

None of it worked.

Yes, his brain could jump to the second part of his plan, running off and hiding and somehow managing to evade detection. As hard as he tried, he couldn't get to that point.

It was all just a fantasy, naïve and foolish.

And then one of the women stepped up to him again. It was Lena, and she pulled the gag from his mouth.

"Do you see this?" She held up one of the whips from before. "I'm going to use this on you unless you tell me the truth."

"But, but I did already!"

She let out a dramatic, exasperated sigh, only then she smiled. "I want to be honest with you. I'm looking forward to this. You know why?"

"No?"

"Because she's never faced anyone like you before!" Julia called out. Even as she spoke, the excitement rippled through her voice.

"That's right," Lena said. "I have trained many boys before, but none of them have been like you. None of them have been...wild. This is going to be fun."

Was this some kind of interrogation tactic? Was she trying to trick him somehow?

Calvin didn't know what was going on. Perhaps he didn't really believe she would do something like this. After all, she held a whip in her hand. It seemed like an ancient implement, maybe something used in some other culture. Now she stepped behind him, and he listened intently as her boots crunched down against the dried grass.

She unfurled the whip, letting it drop down to the ground. Then she jerked her arm back, and she swung.

It hit down against his right shoulder blade. He could feel the heated line flash down his skin.

"Oh, it's been far too long since I have had this kind of opportunity."

"When is it going to be my turn?" Julia asked.

Lena didn't answer. Instead, she pulled her arm back into the air, braced herself, and got ready to deliver the next biting strike. The whip snapped forward like an angry snake and slashed down against a different spot along his back.

The pain flashed through his body, making him jerk to the left, to the right, but with his legs spread and tied to the trees, he couldn't go anywhere. He might wiggle or squirm, but that was all.

"Care to try again? Care to tell me the truth?"

"I told you the truth!"

She struck again.

"I'm not lying!"

This time, she didn't answer.

Instead, she simply used the whip over and over. She watched as the patterns of welts spread and criss-crossed along his skin. Along the way, she enjoyed that pulse of adrenaline as she hit this boy and he gave him exactly

what he deserved for his defiance.

Then it stopped, and she sauntered back over to him. She grabbed him by his hair and pulled his head back. "That was just the beginning. Are you sure you're not a spy? Are you sure you aren't here to cause trouble?"

He didn't answer, so she held up the whip.

Calvin saw this happen, so he quickly sputtered out, "What, what are you doing?" He hated how that fear rippled through his voice, but he couldn't help himself.

"It's my turn!" announced the redhead. She sounded so chipper-cheerful!

"You know, I don't know who you really are, but I'm glad you came to us. I think we're going to really enjoy your company, Calvin Drake."

"You, you can't be serious," he said despite all evidence to the contrary. "You can't do this, you can't get away with this!"

"Why not?" Lena asked from her spot in front of him. She grinned, revealing the edges of her teeth. "Just stop and think about it. If you don't have an owner to advocate for you, why wouldn't we be able to punish you? Why wouldn't we be able to claim you for ourselves?" As she asked, she made it sound like he would have some logical answer.

He didn't.

Julia embraced the moment, savored her authority, and she marveled at this boy. "I'm wondering whether or not you belong in my factory, Calvin. All of my males are well trained. They also work very, very hard. Or. Maybe I could just put you on display. You could be an example of what happens to disobedient boys who don't enjoy the privilege of having an owner. You could make all of my other slaves so grateful."

Yes, he heard the words, only they didn't make any sense to him. He had grown up in a nation where freedom was touted as the ultimate ideal.

His old experiences no longer mattered.

Julia proved that when she jerked back, and sent the tip flying. It cut across the air, smacked down against his right buttock, and she grinned.

"Perfect," she said.

"You always had excellent aim," said her sister.

"Thank you," Julia said magnanimously. "Now let's see if I can do that three more times."

"Want me to time you?"

"No. I just want to have fun with him."

They were talking about Calvin like he was nothing but a toy. He might be a threat, but they still enjoyed him. In their eyes, he had been demoted. If they couldn't find any reason to suspect him of espionage, then they could play.

"You're not going to get away with this!" Calvin called out.

The women didn't answer, however.

Instead, the whip spoke for them, smacking down against his right shoulder blade, then his left, his right flank, then his left again. After that, Julia focused on his buttocks, letting the whip fly out and bite down along the same points.

Each time, he gasped or hissed as those jolts of agony shot through him. His breathing came fast, and it felt like he had run miles, only he hadn't moved.

Even after it stopped, he didn't know what to do or say, so he hung there with most of his weight pressed down against the balls of his feet.

"Would you like some?"

Lena held something up in front of his mouth. He raised his chin and looked at her before he saw the piece of salted meat in her hand. His stomach rumbled again. The pain temporarily washed away the need to eat, only now he felt his mouth water.

"Tell me you want to be a good boy for us," she said.

"Hey. That's not fair. You are already starting to train him."

"It's just a basic lesson," Lena said dismissively. "Besides, I can tell that this one has a strong will."

"He's a boy. Do any of them have a strong will? If they did, they wouldn't all be chattel!"

"Fair point," Lena acknowledged before turning back to the captive male. "What's it going to be? Are you going to cooperate? Are you going to do as we demand?"

"I need to keep my strength up." He had no idea why he admitted that, yet it made both of the women laugh.

"See what I mean? Even now, when he cooperates, he still wants to defy us."

"Adorable," Julia said with a dismissive shake of her head. Unless he managed to escape, these women wouldn't take him seriously. Then again, they had a lifetime of experience that demonstrated the malleability and apparently inherent obedience so many men experienced.

"Go on," Lena said. "Eat."

"Could you loosen the ropes first?"

"We could," Julia told him. Even with those words hanging on the air, neither of them moved to help.

His nostrils twitched, and he bit down, but he knew he couldn't hold out for long. At any second, Lena might pull away his meal. Worse, she could just leave him like that.

"I'm going to be a good boy for you," he said. As he uttered those words, they sounded ridiculous and childish, all of which made him flinch.

"What is it?"

"I shouldn't have to say that," he told her.

"Because we all know you're going to be an obedient boy? Because you have earned our trust? Is that it?"

"What? No. I..."

Lena reached up and stroked his cheek. The surprisingly soft gesture made it easy for him to close his eyes and pretend he wasn't really there, naked and bound before them. "It's okay. I understand that you might be confused."

"I'm not confused," he grumbled.

"Eat," she said again. He took a bite, chewed, and swallowed. He started to feel a little bit better. In the meantime, he recognized one simple fact: he had done everything these women wanted.

She continued to feed him, and he literally ate out of the palm of her hand. After the first couple of bites, he expected her to get bored, like this game might lose its novelty. But no. Lena stood there in front of him and made sure he had enough. Then, when he finished, she asked, "Would like some water?"

"Yes."

"Say it again."

His nostrils twitched imperceptibly, but he didn't see another alternative. "Please. I'm going to be a good boy for you."

Julia clapped her hands together. "I love the way he says that!"

"What? How do I say it?"

"Like you hate uttering those words. I mean, it's so normal for a boy to promise obedience. Toddlers know how to do it! But look at you. You are trying to fight it so hard. That's cute. It's really, really cute."

Cute? He didn't want to be cute!

Julia grabbed one of the canteens and brought it over to her sister. "We could dress him up and put him in a wet tunic contest," suggested the redhead.

Her sister grinned, "Maybe later. Right now, I think he wants to drink. Isn't that right, boy?"

"Yes," he said.

She removed the top, took a sip, and watched him. "You realize, this is my prerogative, don't you? I get to decide what happens to you, boy. We both do."

"Yes," he said, if only because he wanted to feel the cool, refreshing water against his tongue and down his throat.

"Good," she said and took another sip for herself.

It was only when he licked his lips and looked at her longingly that she finally brought the canteen up to his mouth. She allowed him a few quick sips before she pulled it back. Straining against his bonds, he stretched forward, but he still couldn't get what he wanted.

"Open your mouth," she said.

"What? Why?" Calvin started to ask, but she grabbed the muzzle and pushed it back between his teeth, gagging him again.

That night, he hardly slept. Even as the women made a campfire, sat around it, chatted and laughed, the boy remained off to the side, trapped and on display like a trophy.

Stuck in place and muzzled, he wondered what these women were going to do. Were they talking about him? Were they making plans?

At some point, most of his captors decided to go to sleep. Calvin tried to do the same, especially because he already knew he wouldn't be able to escape. But in this position, sleep became something close to an impossibility. One woman, however, remained awake.

He didn't think anything of her. Instead, he focused most of his attention on Julia and Lena, at least until she got up from her spot. By now, everyone else had drifted off.

Her outline flickered in the firelight as she strolled up to him. "Hello, boy," she said. Then she raised one hand to her shoulder and showed him a pin. "You know what this is?"

Snapped out of his reverie, he shook his head. No, he didn't know what the five-pointed star and square represented.

"It was a reward from Baroness Katina. Normally, I'm one of her most effective huntresses, but then you put up a good fight today." As she uttered those final three words, her tone chilled. "You made me look like a fool in front of my employer. I want you to know that they're going to be consequences, boy. My name is Cassandra, and I'm going to make sure you regret fighting me."

He grimaced, whimpered, and tried to make some sound. Normally, Calvin didn't think of himself as a confrontational kind of guy, so he wanted to convince her that he hadn't meant to insult her or cause any trouble.

As hard as he worked at it, she didn't listen. More to the point, the muzzle made it impossible for this male to articulate himself.

"Sleep well, boy," she said before she reached up and patted him on the cheek.

Helpless, he could only watch her go.

That night, they slept, ate in the morning, and headed out again. Their new prize was leashed and tied to the back of Cassandra's mount. As they got ready to go and climbed back atop their steeds, the women conferred once again. "Are you sure we shouldn't have just taken him back to the estate?" Julia asked. "It seems like it would have been a lot easier."

"I want to get Victoria's perspective before we do," she said.

"I never liked her," Julia muttered.

"That's because you never did your assignments."

"So?" Julia initially stuck out the tip of her tongue even as her sister shook her head with mild exasperation.

"So she was our tutor. It was her job to educate us."

"Yeah, yeah," Julia replied with a dismissive gesture. "Although I still think she didn't like me."

"I thought she was fair," Lena said, although she looked a little smug.

"That's because you always flattered her."

"I did my work."

"Same thing."

At moments like this, Lena really loved her sister. There was something so amazingly fun, easy, intimate, and just a little annoying about spending time with her little sister.

"Anyway, you might not like her, but she is one of the most well-read scholars in the region."

"Yeah," Julia didn't sound impressed. "Whatever."

Before long, they lost themselves to the steady rhythm of travel as they made their way along the rolling hills and east toward the humble home of Victoria Santash.

If they had ridden harder, it would have only been a couple of hours. Considering that they had this boy who had to walk behind them, it took almost the entire day.

For his part, Calvin did his best to think of some logical solution to his problems. Yes, they had him. Yes, they had taken him captive. But surely, there would be some logical way out of this. He had to be able to get back to his old life.

But what could he do?

Again and again, he envisioned these wild scenarios where he might be able to break his bonds, rip the leash free, and dart back into the forest. Even now, surrounded by these rolling hills with nowhere to hide, he still liked to think he might be able to fight his way free.

Somehow these thoughts always dissipated whenever one of the women would glance back at him. It could be Cassandra, Julia, or Lena. He shivered when they saw him. Even now, with the sun beating down against his naked body while he was escorted through the wilds of this territory, he could see the hunger and desires swirling around their eyes. They wanted him.

Cassandra wished to punish him, he could tell. He had embarrassed her; for a woman like that, this might have been the worst thing in the world.

Obviously, Calvin had encountered sensitive guys back in his own world. This little jolt of fear ran down his spine as he remembered different bosses and classmates, even a couple of random friends, who had been these blustering men. They always viewed themselves as so strong and powerful. But if something went wrong, they had to lash out against the rest of the world.

Was Cassandra like that?

Calvin told himself that he didn't really know her, but he had fought hard. More importantly, he had almost escaped. Apparently, these women weren't used to men who could do anything like that.

"Where am I?" Calvin tried to ask at several points. He didn't really expect an answer, especially with the muzzle fitted back in his mouth, yet this simple question continued to reverberate through his head.

What if he couldn't get back to the world as he knew it? What was he going to do?

Escape.

Although his eyes were drawn back to these different women, he knew he couldn't you just stay here. When they looked at him, they didn't see a man, a person, or an individual. So what was he? If they could have their way, what would he be?

Different words fluttered through his head.

Prey.

A toy.

Chattel.

Then the last word hit him, and he continued walking because he had no choice. Leashed and with his arms bound behind his back, he followed these women on their gorgeously groomed and perfectly trained stallions. They wanted him to be a slave.

Calvin had never considered himself to be an especially aggressive guy. He loved exploring, which usually meant heading off into the wilderness on his own. He could relax without the noise, pressure, and garbage of work and office life. But now, he knew that these women would keep him like this: leashed.

He bit down on his muzzle and promised himself he wouldn't allow that to happen.

It took several more hours, but the small estate finally appeared off in the distance.

"You know, every time I think of Victoria, I imagine some witch out in the swamp, hiding away in her little hovel."

"Victoria boasts one of the largest private libraries in the queendom," Lena reminded her sister.

"I know. I know."

The baroness, her sister and huntresses continued to walk their horses toward the home, only now Julia glanced back at Cassandra. They didn't say anything to one another, but something seemed to be conveyed.

Lena glanced back at her sister. When their eyes met, they both smirked. Were they going to do it?

After traveling so slowly, for Calvin's benefit, they were ready to get some speed, if only for a few seconds.

Without waiting for the command, Cassandra kicked her heels down against her horse's flanks. The beast had been waiting for this signal. In fact, he had probably been wondering exactly why his owner had forced him to move so slowly. Didn't these people realize he and the other horses could run hard?

Having lost himself to another reverie, Calvin didn't know what was about to happen, not until Cassandra laughed and whooped.

Her horse leaped into a trot. It wasn't as hard or as fast as the beast would have enjoyed it, but Cassandra knew her place. More importantly, she knew she couldn't break the baroness's new toy, not yet anyway.

Still lost in his thoughts, Calvin didn't notice until he felt the jerk on his leash. Then he was yanked forward, and he threw his right foot out, just barely keeping himself upright. He ran now, jogging and then sprinting as the horse darted forward. His eyes widened, and Cassandra glanced back at him.

She actually blew him a kiss!

The others watched and he could hear their laughter peeling out across the air as he sprinted. Of course, that was a lot harder with his hands tied behind his back!

Watching the show, Julia leaned over and asked, "We're going to stay here tonight, right?"

"Right."

"If he slips and falls, I get him for the night."

"Another game?"

"Think of it as incremental," she suggested.

Lena pondered this.

As an aristocrat, she had to deal with the niceties of court, not to mention the myriad relationships between the different houses and families. But at this moment, as she watched this boy get jerked along, she couldn't help but smile. She glanced down toward her lap, ran the tip of her tongue along her incisors, and finally said, "You're on." The queen generally didn't encourage gambling, but she figured an exception could be made under the circumstances.

As Cassandra's mount trotted along, his rider quickly glanced over her shoulder, and that's when she saw the boy loping along as best he could. His cheeks had started to turn red, and his forehead was damp and shiny with perspiration. Hearing the laughter from her compatriots, Cassandra knew she could push (pull?) him harder.

Giving her stallion just a little more freedom, she let the mount to go harder and faster.

The boy did his absolute best to keep up. If he lost his footing, even for a second, he would be dragged along the grass. Obviously, Cassandra would have to come to a stop, but he didn't know that...

"He's going to fall," Julia said. "He's going to fall!" The excitement reverberated through her voice. "He's going to fall, and I'm going to have a lot of fun with him. Do you think I can train him completely in a night?"

"Absolutely not," Lena said. And even as she spoke, something surprised her. She really, really wanted to see this boy remain up on his feet, running behind the horse.

They were halfway to the estate now. The triangular roof pointed up toward the sky while the wraparound porch waited to welcome them.

"Oh, I think you underestimate me, sister. I'm sure I can train him in a night. I think he's the kind of boy who looks strong on the outside, but you know he's really fragile."

"Or maybe you're just seeing what you want to see."

"What do you think would be the best way to train him? The whip definitely had an effect, but I prefer the intimacy of a spanking."

"You haven't won this little bet yet," Lena reminded her sister.

"It's only a matter of time," Julia said, but she spoke faster than was necessary. Perhaps she was trying to hide something, perhaps a hint of nervousness.

After all, he hadn't fallen yet, and they were more than three quarters of the way.

"You're about to lose," Lena teased her little sister.

Without realizing it, the entire group came to a stop as they watched. Even the horses seemed to be intrigued by what was going on while the huntresses whispered back and forth. Lena and Julia were the only ones making a set of wagers.

"He's going to fall," Julia said. "At any second, he's going to lose his balance. He's just a boy. It's not like he has even been trained as a dancing boy or anything."

"He's going to stay up," Lena announced.

Unaware of the eyes aimed at him, Calvin thought to breathe through his nostrils as he jumped from one stride to the next. The horse yanked him forward again and again. At several points, he almost slipped. Almost.

As he ran and fought so hard to keep up, the world seemed to shrink around him. He stopped thinking about his captors or even escape. He just had to stay up. He just had to keep running!

"What would you even do with him?" Julia taunted her older sister. "Seriously, you always focus so much on your estate. I mean, I'm the entrepreneur. I'm the one who should be busy all the time, but I still make a point of playing with my toys."

Lena pressed her lips together. She glanced back at her sister. Some of the irritation faded, especially because it was obvious that Julia was just mocking her. Besides, they were sisters. They had shared these kinds of arguments before. Many, many times.

"You're just mad because I'm going to have him in my chambers tonight."

"Oh wait!" Right as Julia called out those words, it looked like he might fall, like he might stumble and get pulled along by his leash. Somehow, he recovered at the last instant. He stayed upright, and Cassandra finally started to slow down.

Fresh waves of laughter came from the other women.

Julia grumbled, "You got lucky."

"And you underestimated him," Lena retorted. Before her little sister could answer with some other insolent remark, the baroness turned back to her retainers, "Ladies, I think our mounts have been forced to walk for far too long. Don't you?"

"A gold piece to the woman who gets there first!" Julia called out. And just like that, she started a new game, and the riders snapped the animals' reins. The horses broke into hard runs, galloping forward as these women fought hard to show one another what they could do!

This time, Julia won.

When she got there first, she threw up her arms and laughed as she bounced to the rhythm of her steed beneath her. Only now, she turned back to her competitors and cried out, "I win. I win, I win, I win!" But then someone else called out, "You are the one who is going to pay the winner. So what does that mean?"

For a second, Julia pouted adorably, and the huntresses all laughed. But then, Julia pulled out the polished coin, slipped it onto her thumb, and snapped it up into the air. It spun hard, and she caught it a second later, "You know what the wise woman says: gold saved is gold earned."

"Are you girls still competing with one another?"

Lena's smile disappeared from her face. Atop her mount and now an adult, Lena knew she should feel like Victoria's equal. Or better yet, she should have felt like her superior. By so many metrics, Lena had far more power and influence. Even so, she looked down at her tutor, and she still experienced that little shiver of intimidation.

"Hello, Victoria," Lena said with a polite nod of her head.

"What are two of my favorite students doing here?"

"We haven't been your students for a long time," Julia pointed out.

The scholar, however, simply smiled. Her eyes shined with amusement, "As far as I'm concerned, you will both always be a pair of little, precocious girls who need some extra training and maybe a swat on the bottom."

Strictly speaking, Victoria was only ten or fifteen years older (neither Julia nor Lena had ever been brave enough to ask her how old she might be).

"You wouldn't dare," Julia said.

"Are you sure about that?"

"As much as I would love to see you punish my little sister, we are actually here for a good reason."

"And what would that be?"

"The boy," Lena said. She slipped off of her mount, dropped down to her feet, and stretched her legs. After spending most of the day in a saddle, she savored the sensation of having the ground underneath her feet. Strictly speaking, it would have been inappropriate for a baroness to start massaging her muscles, but then she glanced back at Calvin, and a different thought occurred to her. Suppressing a smile, she walked over to him, and Victoria followed.

"He looks like a fairly standard specimen," said the scholar.

"Maybe," Lena replied.

"But he isn't wearing a collar. More to the point, he seems confused by what we're saying."

It was true.

Under normal circumstances, Calvin would have loved to pant through his mouth, lean forward, and brace his hands against his knees. With his wrists still trapped behind his back and the muzzle in his mouth, he couldn't do either of those things. At the same time, he glanced back up at this newcomer.

She had black hair with a gray streak, but her eyes were sharp. Although he tried to maintain some sense of dignity as he worked to catch his breath, this new woman examined him like he was nothing but an insect. He was some strange creature which she had never seen before, but she intended to understand him to the best of her ability.

"You want to hear the really strange part?" Lena asked.

"Always," Victoria replied.

Lena stepped behind the boy. At first, he tried to maneuver himself so that he could see both of these women, but she grabbed him by his neck, pushed him forward, and held him in place. From there, she used her free hand to loosen the muzzle.

"Speak," she said in the mostly lost language of English.

"What, what you want me to say?"

"He speaks with an odd accent," Victoria said, easily slipping into this foreign tongue.

"I speak like an American," Calvin said. Despite the sweat along his forehead, down his shoulders, and along his chest, he stood straight. He remembered exactly what happened last night, yet he wasn't about to let these women scare him either.

"Don't lie," Lena said, grabbing his right buttock. She squeezed down, drew her hand back, and gave him one quick swat. "You said you were from the United States."

At first, he didn't understand, only then he growled, "I did because I am. Please, can I just have my clothes back? We can talk about this like equals."

Victoria laughed. "Okay. I can see why you brought him to me. Take him to my laboratory, and I will examine him more thoroughly."

"What?" Calvin started to ask. He didn't even get to finish this single word. His captor shoved the muzzle back into this lost boy's mouth.

Only a few minutes later, he found himself tied down and spread out.

Yes, this was a laboratory, but it wasn't anything like he had expected. He didn't see any white lab coats or plastic, single-use implements. Instead, it felt like something from a different century. He saw the beakers, bottles, and other jars. The space must have occupied more than a third of the estate because it seemed to stretch on as one enormous chamber. Not only that, two of the walls were completely covered by books, each one bound by leather.

Calvin had halfheartedly struggled when they dragged him in here. But by this point, he knew he wasn't going to be able to resist.

It was only when they shoved him down against the cold, metal table that he started to fight harder.

It didn't make any difference. He hadn't pulled the muzzle out, and they had strapped his limbs to the corners of the table.

When he detected movement in the corner of his eye, he hoped it would be Julia or Lena who appeared. At least he knew them.

"I seldom use the title," announced to the stranger, "But my name is officially Dr. Victoria Santash. You and I are going to have a conversation. I expect you to be very, very honest with me. If you are, and I appreciate your answers, I will have you escorted back to the stables, where you will be kept in relative comfort. How does that sound, boy?"

Still unable to speak for himself, Calvin nodded. He understood that this was probably the best he could hope for.

Finally, she reached down and pulled the muzzle out. "Please. I just want to get back to my life. My regular, normal life."

"Boy, the baroness has you, so it is her prerogative to decide what happens to you. Tell me you understand."

For several seconds, Calvin seriously considered defying her. Finally, he said, "I, I understand."

"Good boy." She patted him on the cheek. "Now, tell me what happened."

This time, he felt a little bit more articulate as he explained how he had been on a hike, how this lightning storm had swept across the sky, and how he now found himself here...whatever that meant. With each word, he really, really hated to ask his own questions, but it was clear this woman had no interest in giving him any information.

"I'm really glad the baroness brought you to me. You are an intriguing animal."

"I'm a person."

"You're a boy," she corrected him. "Now, we have several possibilities. First, starting with the least likely, you are telling the truth. You wander through some magical portal opened by a bolt of lightning, and now you are here in a different world. More likely, you have been programmed with this idea."

"Programmed?"

"There are mentalists throughout the world who claim they can alter the human mind. Considering that you're a boy, and necessarily weak willed, then you would be the ideal specimen. Perhaps you are an experiment that wandered off. Or more ominously, you might be a spy who isn't even aware of his situation. Maybe this elaborate storyline was created and implanted in your mind so that you would confuse and distract your potential targets."

He blinked and stared up at her. "I'm not a spy!"

"Do you recognize the inferiority of boys?"

"What? No! Men are just as capable as women," he said. Even as the words left his lips, they felt strange. Sure, he had listened to plenty of women who needed to make the inverse point, but he never imagined a scenario where he would have to defend the competence or capability of his sex.

"Interesting."

"What?"

"If you are programmed, I suspect that this may be the foundation of the delusion."

"What? What are you saying?"

"This is just a hypothesis, but I suspect that your owner, whoever she might be, has implanted you with these ideas. If we can break down the most obviously incorrect point, then perhaps we can find your true identity."

"But, but that sounds insane!"

"Does it? If you had been programmed, would you know it?"

"No, but..." Calvin try to understand what was wrong with this.

"It's okay. Sometimes, boys make mistakes, and they don't understand what it takes to fix them. This is normal. This is natural. This is why we have a set of order in the universe."

Biting back his frustration, he tried to approach this logically. This woman, whoever she happened to be, seemed to be somewhat reasonable. At the very least, she had the respect of the women around her.

"Let's say, just for the sake of argument that you are wrong. I am exactly who I say I am. How can I prove it?"

"I think a thorough examination should help," she said. "We can start with the physical and move on to the psychological."

"Physical?" He gulped.

She grabbed a large book, opened it, and then set out a quill and ink pot. "Correct," she said. "I will start with the standard data points."

"But I have rights," he said. The moment those words left his lips, he

regretted them. Obviously, this woman wouldn't believe that simple idea.

"You're a boy without a collar. You have rights," she said. "Maybe your owner has rights over you, but we still don't know who that might be."

Then she set her hand on his forehead, and she seemed to consider his temperature for several seconds. Then she made a note. From there, she reached down along his arms, and she pinched his biceps, followed by his elbows and forearms.

As far as he was concerned, none of this made sense, but he still couldn't stop her.

When she moved it down to his thighs and shins, he exhaled with relief.

"What is your height?"

He told her.

"And your genital length when aroused?"

He sputtered.

"You're right. I should just check for myself," she said.

"Wait. No!"

He thought he was going to lie to her, only this woman had already made up her mind. She knew exactly what she needed to do.

She positioned herself near the side of the table, reached down, and she started to tease him. She started by wrapping her fingers around his manhood. Even as it happened, this strange mixture of excitement and fear played through him.

"You, you aren't supposed to be able to do this. Didn't you take a Hippocratic oath or something?"

"No," she said simply. "I've no idea what that is."

"It, it's a promise for doctors. They aren't supposed to do any harm to their patients."

"Sweet boy, I'm here to help you. If you have been programmed as I suspect, don't you want to know the truth?"

"But this is unfair! You have already assumed that I have been programmed!"

"I have done no such thing," she said. "This is an examination. I want to know the truth. One way or another, I will find it. It's simply unfortunate that, if you have been programmed, that your true owner has put you in this position."

"I don't have an owner!" Calvin snarled back as his muscles tensed.

He jerked against the restraints holding him to that table, but he still couldn't free himself.

"Honestly, I don't know why you are complaining."

"Because, because you're treating me like I'm some kind of lab rat!"

"Shush," she commanded.

He blinked, confused for a moment. Then he realized what was happening. She had simply decided she had wasted enough time talking to him. He was just a boy, so it wasn't like his position warranted any real consideration.

Then he stopped thinking altogether because she continued to touch him, stroking and teasing him. Her fingers tightened around his shaft, bringing him close to release. Then she stopped, only to reapply the pressure.

Feeling petulant and defiant, Calvin exhaled slowly and told himself he wouldn't let this happen.

Then again, it was too late. She pulled out her ruler, and she set it down against the side of his manhood.

"Not bad," she said.

He didn't ask. He had never measured himself, and now he told himself that he didn't want to know. "If the baroness keeps you, she might decide to use you from time to time. Wouldn't that be lovely? Wouldn't you be a lucky boy?"

"Let me go!" Calvin snarled instead.

He shook yanked hard enough to shake the table underneath him.

"I didn't think I was going to really need a sample," she told him. "But I sense that you may need something to help you relax, especially before we move on to the second half of your exam."

"What, what are you saying?"

"When was the last time you enjoyed sexual relief?"

"No," he said as the different pieces came together. "You can't do this."

"Who's going to stop me? You?" She made it sound like some ridiculous joke. "Besides, you're a boy. We both know you need this. Just relax. Relax and enjoy your captivity."

His nostrils twitched, the contours of his nose morphed into a snarl, and he tried to launch himself forward again. Calvin didn't know why he did it. Maybe it was the last couple of days, the frustration mounting until this moment.

She started stroking him again, gently teasing his body.

At first, he focused on the anger and helpless surge of frustration. He thought he might be able to drown out his natural instincts with this visceral determination.

But he couldn't. His body betrayed him. He remained hard, and she pushed him closer and closer to release. As his breathing quickened, he bit down and told himself he wasn't going to yield to this woman. He wouldn't give in! He wouldn't give up!

"You're lasting longer than most boys," she said. "Very impressive. I should make a note of this in my log."

Even now, when he tried to fight her, he just gave her more fodder for her "research".

At any second, he could have surrendered, but Calvin felt this aching drive to show these women that they couldn't beat him. Yes, they hunted him down. They gagged him, tied his hands behind his back, and leashed him before dragging him across the countryside. But this time, he wouldn't succumb!

"You know, I might ask the Katina Sisters if I could borrow you. I'm sure I could write an interesting monograph all about your defiance. Granted, it might not last that long." Victoria shrugged like it didn't really matter one way or the other. She had this boy for the time being, and she could do whatever she liked with him.

Even as she continued to stroke him, he concentrated on building up its defenses. He did everything he could to draw his mind away from the arousal pulsing between his legs. He could feel that desperate need along his length, down into his scrotum, and flaring out along his thighs, into his stomach, up along his chest, all the way to his lips and fingertips.

"I'm curious. Why would a boy want to fight me?" Victoria didn't ask him specifically. Instead, she mused aloud. Apparently, his opinion didn't count, not even when it came to his own body or motivations. "Could it be a general sense of stubbornness? Is it possible that you are fighting because you think you might be able to garner something special? Or maybe you really want to hold onto some sense of dignity?" She chuckled at that last prospect. "But boy, you should understand that males don't need dignity."

When he heard that casual disregard, Calvin glared up at her. He pulled as hard as he could on the shackles, tensing his muscles as he glowered at her.

Calvin Drake snarled, "You don't know what you're talking about!"

"Are you sure about that? Are you sure, that right now, you aren't thinking about some beautiful woman? You're not thinking about waiting in your bridal bed, naked and spread out as she climbs up on top of you?" The words penetrated his psyche, sliding down into the deepest recesses of his mind.

It was so easy to imagine. And he pictured a woman, maybe Lena, maybe Julia, holding him down, leaning forward and kissing him. Maybe there would be the soft brush of her lips along his neck or his clavicle. Or maybe she would just lower herself down onto his exposed shaft.

In that moment, Victoria played with the tip of his manhood. She slid her finger around his opening before squeezing him again.

"Just a few more seconds," she announced.

"No," Calvin contradicted her. "You're not going to be able to do this to me. I'm not going to let you!"

"Adorable boy," she said. "You really think you can stop me? You're a male. You are a prisoner to your own body."

He jerked on his restraints, like he thought he might be able to contradict her. And yet, she squeezed again. He was right there, right at the edge.

"Three," she announced.

What?

"Two," said the scholar.

No! He couldn't let her time it so perfectly or precisely!

"One," she said as her hand danced up and down, gliding and sliding along his most precious body part. The arousal flared, hot and intense, unyielding and irresistible...

"Now," she said as his shaft started to pulsate.

Calvin had needed to believe he had some kind of control, but this woman could just manipulate him. Once again, however, she demonstrated her expertise. She understood male physiology and psychology. She knew how men reacted and what these boys needed to prompt their total loss of control...

Worse, she made him enjoy it!

She drained him thoroughly, moving her hand up and down his length as he growled out. He tried to jerk his hips from side to side, like he might be able to free himself at the last moment. But no. She adjusted, shifting and

maneuvering her palm so the delicious pressure remained, stimulating him until that very last moment.

Spent, exhausted, and drained, Calvin closed his eyes.

In that moment, he wanted to fall asleep. Or maybe he simply needed to hide from the post-orgasm mix of shame and frustration.

“You really thought you could defeat me, didn’t you? You thought you could be a stubborn boy and get me frustrated, didn’t you?”

Pursing his lips, Calvin didn’t answer.

Then he realized he could try something else. He gulped and looked up at her. Although she could muzzle him again at any point, he took a shallow breath and said, “Please. Look, I don’t know what they told you, but I really am from a totally different country.”

“The United Countries,” she said.

“States,” he corrected her. “I’m from the United States of America!” He didn’t consider himself to be an especially patriotic guy, but his insides clenched and twisted as this woman gazed down at him with something between pity and amusement.

“Never heard of it,” she said.

With a growl of frustration, he arched his back and tried to twist away, but then she grabbed him by his cheeks. Her nails pressed down against his skin as she explained, “Boy, you and I need to have a conversation.”

Boy. The word dug down into him.

“You already did what you wanted,” he said, doing his best not to think about how helpless he had been.

“I completed the physical exam. Now, we need to test your psychological resolve.”

His throat clenched.

“If you’re going to learn anything. I’m telling you the truth.”

“You’re telling me the truth as you perceive it,” Victoria said.

That’s when the door opened, and the two sisters strolled in.

Victoria glanced up, “Come to watch?”

Lena dipped her head down respectfully, “If you don’t mind.”

“It looks like you’re having fun with him,” Julia said. She must’ve noticed that the shine along his genitals.

“I just completed the physical exam. Would you like the preliminary results?”

“Please,” said the baroness.

“As a physical specimen, he is in excellent condition. He appears to be completely healthy, but there is a significant problem.”

“His story?”

“Possibly a story,” Victoria acknowledged. “It could also be a delusion or a hypnotically implanted suggestion.”

“You think someone brainwashed him? I thought that was just something you would read in a novel,” Julia said, glancing back and forth at her comrades.

“With women, brainwashing is pretty much impossible. With men? Who knows? Many psychologists, mentalists, and philosophers throughout the ages have posited that the male psyche is significantly weaker and more malleable. They are susceptible to influence, so it would make sense that it might be a possibility, especially considering his story, not to mention his linguistic limitations.”

“Couldn’t he just be faking it?” Julia asked.

“That’s what I wish to determine.”

“How?” Lena asked, always the adept student.

“Electrical stimulation,” Victoria said. “According to my latest readings, there have been some excellent results. Disobedient males have been shocked into proper comportment. Apparently, the energy can redirect certain behavioral impulses.”

“We trust your expertise,” Lena said with a bow of her head.

Calvin had followed along, only now he looked at the three women. His gaze bounced from one to another. “Shock therapy? Is that, is that what you’re suggesting?”

“You’ve heard of it?” Victoria asked, nonplussed. “I didn’t know boys were allowed to read the latest psychological publications.”

“You’re not going to discover anything because I haven’t been brainwashed. I’m telling the truth.”

That’s when Lena surprised him. The black-haired young woman strode forward, leaned down, and looked right into his eyes. With her elbows braced against the table, she seemed to consider him for several long seconds. Then she uttered just two words, “Prove it.”

“I can’t! I don’t know how!”

“Proceed,” Lena said as she stepped back.

Victoria rolled a large machine forward.

Twisting his body around as much as the restraints allowed, Calvin stared at the device.

“Now, I want you to understand that this is perfectly safe. It has been thoroughly calibrated for boys just like you.”

“This isn’t going to work. Nothing is going to happen,” he said.

“Then you have nothing to be scared of,” Victoria replied. She smiled down at him and stroked his cheek with the back of her hand. “I understand. You’re a boy. Maybe you’ve heard about electricity before. Maybe it sounds novel, new, and frightening to someone inexperienced, but it will be perfectly fine. All you need to do is relax and allow the voltage to do its job.”

“No,” he said. He didn’t know where the word came from or why he even bothered, especially because these women were going to do whatever they liked, and he wasn’t going to be able to stop them.

Still, he couldn’t just cooperate. He couldn’t agree with this!

“There must be, there must be another way,” he said. He watched as she unspooled a set of electrodes. Each one was large, about the size of a quarter. Next, she attached them to a metal ring—it reminded him of a crown. That’s when he realized it was going to slip over the top of his head after she connected the corded electrodes.

As his breathing quickened, he looked back up at Julia, then Lena. “I’m telling you, this isn’t going to work. It’s not going to get you what you want. Just listen to me!”

“Should we?” Julia asked.

Lena seemed to consider this for several seconds.

“Here in lies the difficulty with mental manipulation. An individual might be under the sway of someone else, but he would never know it. That’s what you’re suggesting, correct?”

“That’s correct,” Victoria said.

“Proceed,” she said.

Calvin’s body tensed as the scholar slipped the ring around his head. Suddenly, he could feel the electrodes as they pushed down against his skin.

“I want you to relax,” Victoria said. “Relax and let the currents do their work. Embrace who you really are.”

“My name is Calvin Drake. I have a Social Security Number: 075-77-7132.”

“Does that mean anything to you?” Julia asked.

“It sounds like a random string of numbers,” Lena said.

Victoria didn't bother to answer at all.

He kept going, and he managed to hold their interest for a few moments. "My phone number is 717-541-8892."

"Another random string of numbers?" Julia prompted.

"This is probably part of the hypnotic programming," Victoria suggested. "I imagine, that when he is stressed, he is supposed to rely on this information. I think this validates the hypothesis."

"But it doesn't prove anything, does it?"

"No, it doesn't. In fact, we could still be wrong quite easily," Victoria said. "But you understand how this works, don't you? We are engaging in science here."

"This isn't science!" Calvin called out.

"How would you know?" Victoria asked, apparently bemused. "You don't know anything about science. You're just a boy."

He bit down, and that's when she grabbed the lever on her machine. Apparently, Lena nodded or maybe she gave a whispered assent. Either way, Victoria pulled the lever down, and the machine engaged. The batteries came to life, sparks snapped out onto the air before shooting into the copper wire.

Then he felt it, the slam of pain as hot energy surged through his body.

He tried to jerk away, to break free from the restraints, yet they held him down just as easily as before. The agony swirled through his frame, glancing into every nerve he possessed. In that moment, Calvin Drake ceased to exist.

"This isn't going to change anything!" roared the boy restrained on the exam table.

"That was just a low dose," Victoria said before she started to recalibrate her device. "Besides, if you really are who you say you are, then this can be good for you. After this, perhaps you will be able to prove your identity and your strange circumstances."

"So, so you admit it's a possibility?"

"Calvin," she sounded almost insulted, "I haven't asserted any possibility as definitive. We have only established the possibilities. Now we are examining them."

He turned around as much as he could. In his peripheral vision, he watched as her fingers wrapped around the lever again; she was ready.

"Please. Please, you don't need to do that again. I don't need another

dose!”

“Yes, you do,” Victoria said.

Before the captured boy could try to talk to Julia or Lena, Victoria administered the next burst of electricity. She pulled the lever down, and fresh energy coursed into him. He arched his back, jerked against his bonds, and fought to break free. As hard as he tried, he couldn’t summon the force or leverage necessary to rip through those leather restraints, so he stayed there, bound and powerless as they observed the results.

“It’s okay,” Victoria reassured him. “It might sting now, but don’t you want to know the truth? If you have been programmed, don’t you want to know for yourself?”

“I haven’t!”

The older woman chuckled, “That is the kind of shortsighted thinking I expected from the male half of humanity.”

By this point, she had her hand on the lever again.

Closing his eyes, he tried to prepare himself.

Calvin thought of ways he might be able to build up some kind of psychological defense. At first, he thought of some of his favorite fantasy novels. He envisioned massive walls made of malachite or granite. He tried to think of the details, little cracks in the stone, imperfections that could hold his thoughts.

Then he heard the lever snap down right as the electricity coursed back through his body. He thrashed.

His fantasy walls evaporated instantly, overwhelmed by the surge of pain as it flew through his body. Then it stopped. He twitched once or twice.

“Tell us about the United States.” Victoria made it sound like some magical land of fantasy and whimsy. It couldn’t be a real place.

“The United States is a democratic republic with a president, a bicameral congress, and a supreme court.” He uttered those words like some middle school kid giving a presentation to a social studies class.

“A democracy? I thought that idea faded away a couple of millennia ago?”

“Yes,” Victoria said. “It was a great curiosity. I’m surprised this boy has heard about it.”

“Democracy is one of the most powerful ideologies on the planet,” he snarled back at them.

By this point, Victoria had lifted the lever again. She had her hand in

position with her fingers wrapped around the handle. With one tug, she could throw him back down into that swirl of pain.

“Monarchies are the only viable form of government,” Lena said simply.

“Well, there are some other possibilities,” Julia said.

“I don’t need to hear your entrepreneurial beliefs right now,” said her older sister.

“Girls, you don’t need to fight right now. Instead, let’s focus on this boy.” Victoria smiled down at him. “And in this world, are women elected to office? Is that how it works?”

“Women and men,” he said.

“Impossible. You understand that, don’t you? This is nonsense you are telling us. Men can’t rule. Men are incapable of taking any serious work.”

“That’s not true,” he said. “I work in an office. I manage other people.”

“Other boys?”

“Men and women,” he said.

Something close to genuine irritation flared across Victoria’s face as she yanked the lever down again. This new storm of electricity rocketed through his body, lighting up his pain receptors. He cried out as he lost himself to that hurricane of agony.

Luckily, it only lasted for a few seconds. After that, her capacitors would need to recharge.

“Do you think he’s just lying to us? Is it possible he’s messing with us?” Julia asked as all three women seemed to consider him. Of course, each one of them had dealt with men extensively. All three women came from the upper echelons of society, so they were accustomed to telling males what to do, giving them commands and punishing them when necessary.

“Electricity can stimulate certain parts of the brain, including the pain receptors, so I don’t think he’s lying. Rather, I’m concerned that this is just a cornerstone of his programmed delusion.”

After everything he had endured, Calvin could barely keep his eyes open. Even so, he glared at the women. “I, I’m not lying. This isn’t some hypnotic delusion. I’m telling you the truth. I know my life!”

Then he realized something. “I can prove it! Just, just bring in my stuff.”

“And what would that demonstrate?”

“Look around. This technology is completely different from everything I know. I can show you my phone.”

If they had never seen anything like that before, maybe they would start to believe him...

...But he had lost his backpack and the rest of his gear when he first ran from the huntresses.

“Baroness, I think we should focus on him right now. We can worry about the other pieces of evidence later.”

“Why bother asking me anything if you’re just going to punish me anyway?”

Victoria rested her hand on his dampened forehead. In that moment, she seemed like a big sister who really wanted to help this boy understand. “This isn’t a punishment. This is science. Now, tell us more about your so-called leaders.”

“We vote on them.”

Lena snorted, “If you want us to believe you, you need to find something less fanciful.”

“He did say that it was a democracy,” Victoria pointed out.

“It’s nonsense—so what if it’s consistent nonsense? We need a strong aristocracy with the ability to lead us forward. That is how the world works. That is how it has almost always worked.”

“*Almost* always,” Julia said.

“It’s true. We vote. If we don’t like what a leader has done, we take them out of office. Then someone else takes their place.”

Lena pressed her lips together. She clearly didn’t like this.

Calvin started to wonder if maybe he should try to talk about something else, so he jumped to a different topic. “What about technology? Please, let’s just talk about technology. Maybe if you help me get back, I can show you what we have done. We have TVs. We have the internet.”

“I’m not familiar with these words,” Victoria said.

“It’s this giant network of connected devices,” he said.

“Wired technology?”

“Sometimes, but it’s usually wireless,” he said.

“This is madness,” Lena said.

“And yet, he clings to these delusions. If it is madness, the electricity should have cleared his thoughts by now. Same goes for the hypnotic programming.”

“Give him another couple of doses.”

“By your command,” Victoria said. Then she glanced down at the bound boy.

He hoped to see some sign of mercy or sympathy flash across her face. Instead, Victoria flashed him a little smile.

Her machine hummed with pent-up electricity.

Glancing around, he searched for some way off of that table, something he could do or say. Frantically, he scoured his brain for some way to convince these women.

Nothing. He had no options, no alternatives, nothing he could do. There weren't any strategies. There was nothing.

“Are you ready?” Victoria asked. Without waiting for an answer, she yanked the lever down again. It slammed into position as the next rush of electricity darted into his body. It was instant and all-consuming. It destroyed every other thought as it pulled him down into this storm of pain.

But then it was over.

Calvin could hardly process how that worked. In one instant, everything could be the stinging agony. In the next, it stopped, and he was right there again, under the watchful gaze of these three women.

“Tell us,” Victoria instructed.

For a moment, he thought that maybe he should try to lie to them, especially since he didn't know how long they would keep at this. They had talked about maybe finishing soon. Maybe. And yet, he had no control here.

The truth was better, he finally decided. If he tried to lie to them and admit his failings, then they might ask questions about the rest of the world. He wouldn't have the answers, so they would know the truth anyway.

“I'm from the United States,” he said again. “My name is Calvin Drake.”

He opened his mouth again to speak, but the women stuffed a gag between his teeth. Not only that, they slipped a blindfold over his eyes, making sure he couldn't see anything.

For a moment, he was tempted to call out, to ask them what they were doing or what they had decided. Then he fell back down against the table and relaxed as best he could.

Lena, Julia, and Victoria exited the laboratory.

“Your conclusions?”

“He hasn’t been programmed,” Victoria said. “Perhaps it’s impossible to draw a definitive conclusion, but I believe he is genuine in terms of his perceived experiences.”

“So he really is from—what?” Julia asked. “Another planet? Another dimension? Maybe some hidden land beneath the surface of the world?”

“I don’t have a good theory for you,” Victoria said. “Unfortunately, science is often more about asking questions than getting satisfying answers.”

“Of course, this still begs another question,” Lena said. “If we believe he is being honest and that he doesn’t have an owner, that means we can claim him.”

“I want him,” Julia said.

“He was found on my land,” Lena replied.

“Would you even play with him?”

“Irrelevant,” Lena said.

“What’s the point of taking a beautiful specimen like that and locking him up in a cage in some basement somewhere?” Julia asked. “Or what? Maybe you want him because I want him? Maybe you want to keep me from having some fun?”

“Can’t you just find a different slave?”

“I want this one,” Julia said flatly.

“Why?” Lena asked, like the simple question would have been enough to diffuse her sister’s juvenile desires.

Julia was about to answer with something snide, but she stopped herself. Deciding to be honest with her sister, she said, “I want to challenge. I also want a unique boy, someone I can show off to all of my friends. I want to be able to leash him and bring him around after I have trained him.”

“I want him for the same reasons,” Lena said.

“No, you don’t. You’re the older sister, so you think you’re entitled to him. But that isn’t fair.”

“The careful of what you say,” Lena retorted. “I am the head of our family.”

Julia wanted to snap back with something cruel and vindictive, but she stopped herself.

“Girls, maybe there’s something else you can do. Perhaps a competition?” Victoria suggested.

“She would never be brave enough to face me,” Julia said.

“Nonsense,” Lena retorted. “I’m happy to take on my little sister.”

“What kind of game? Regicide?”

“For a prize such as this, I would recommend something else.”

Victoria seemed to consider the possibilities.

Before their former tutor could come up with a specific answer, Lena interjected, “This needs to be special. I can tell that we both want him quite badly. Take your time, Victoria. Think on it.”

Julia squinted slightly, like she couldn’t understand exactly what her older sister was thinking, so Lena told her, “I can tell we both really want this. It needs to be fair.”

“Always so cautious,” Julia said. “You would have made a terrible businesswoman.”

“That’s because I’m a baroness.”

Blindfolded, gagged, and powerless, Calvin squirmed around. Again, he lost himself to those easy fantasies of escape. He pictured himself somehow slipping free from one of the shackles, pulling the blindfold away, and examining the rest of the restraints. He would get them off, one after another. And eventually, he would be able to slip out of this laboratory.

The fantasies didn’t come true, however. As hard as he worked them, the shackles kept him locked down, spread out and powerless.

At some point, he started to relax. He didn’t need to bother closing his eyes. Already submerged in the darkness, he allowed himself to drift. Soon enough, he lost himself to something close to sleep.

Over dinner, Julia and Lena considered one another.

As children, they constantly competed with one another. Generally, Lena defeated her sister, largely because of her age. A little bit of experience, especially at a young age, could make a huge difference.

“Can I ask you something?” Julia said. She had set her silverware down. Instead, she focused all of her attention on the baroness.

“You can ask. I can’t promise I will answer,” Lena replied.

“I have heard the rumors and whispers, but I never received a distinct answer.”

“Tread carefully, little sister.”

“Sebastian.”

“No.”

“That’s it?”

“Exactly,” she said. “That’s it.”

“I understand that things went badly. But please. Don’t you think you should share this? I’m your sister.” Julia could have stopped there, but she reached over and rested her hands on top of Lena’s clenched knuckles. “You can trust me. We’re competing. We aren’t fighting. We aren’t rivals.”

“I’m very glad you never had an interest in court life,” Lena replied.

“Me too,” said the redhead. “But that’s why you can trust me. Go on. Just tell me.”

“Maybe later.”

“Is that a no?”

“What do you believe?”

“You’re saying no,” Julia replied.

“Perhaps you’re better at this than other of us suspected.”

“I think you should tell me,” she repeated.

“I know.”

“I think it would be good for you.”

“Not all things need to be shared.”

“But this is different. Special.”

“He was just a boy. They’re interchangeable.”

“If that were true, you’d let me have Calvin. I would let me slip a collar around his neck, tattoo my name to one of those cute buttocks, and take him back to my factory.”

“And what would you do it in there?”

“I already told you. I’d play with him.”

“And if you got bored of him?”

“I don’t think that would happen,” Julia said. Perhaps the mood had lightened because she reached out, grabbed her goblet, and took a sip of the delicious wine. Obviously, she could have purchased a better stock back in the city. Lena also had a much stronger inventory, but the scholar still understood the finer points of viticulture. “Besides, I can always use more boys in my factories.”

“So you say.”

“The world is changing, dear sister. We may not have an aristocracy for much longer. A generation? Two or three?”

“The world changes slowly. And some traditions persist beyond all expectation.”

“But the pace of change is speeding up. You know, I could help you. I

could help you with the family investments. Yes, the land is still valuable, but what happens when the cities become more important? Agriculture will be a source of wealth for quite some time, but the real money will be made in other investments, new technologies, and so much more.”

“Once again, you try to distract me,” Lena replied. Now it was her turn to take her glass and hold it up. With her semi-sarcastic salute, she smiled and said, “I imagine you do the same with your investors. They must ask difficult questions.”

“Frequently.”

“So I will drag you back to the question at hand. Are you sure you would be responsible for this boy. He is a unique specimen, and he shouldn’t be wasted.”

“Oh? Now you suggesting I’m going to waste him? Is that it?”

Lena shrugged. “It’s a distinct possibility. If I take him, at least we know he will be cared for.”

“I take care of my boys.”

“Perhaps.”

Leaning back, Julia changed the subject. “So what do you think it’s going to be?”

“What?”

“Our game. What do you think Victoria will have us play?”

Lena shrugged like it didn’t matter. “One way or another, I’m going to defeat you, little sister.”

“You’re going to try, but we aren’t children any longer.”

“Perhaps this is one point upon which we can both agree.”

“Hello, boy,” came the whispered voice. “I’ve been thinking about you. I have been thinking about playing with you and what I might be able to do with you.” Listening hard, Calvin did his best to pick out the tone so he could tell who was actually talking to him.

Lena? Cassandra? Julia?

“Now I’m wondering, could I convince you to cheat? Might I convince you to play along with our game, whatever it happens to be?”

He gagged and blindfolded, Calvin tugged on his straps. He growled and grunted. He tried to get this woman to free him. If she wouldn’t free him, then at least he might be able to speak. One-on-one, he might be able to negotiate with one of these females, especially if she started to believe him

and take him seriously.

From what he had seen so far, the people of this world had little technology. They were just barely starting to play around with electricity! Maybe Calvin wasn't a scientist, researcher, or engineer, but there had to be something he picked up in middle school or high school or college that would be useful to these women. Maybe he could leverage that...

But first, he had to be able to talk!

"It's cute when you struggle," she said.

Who? Who was this? Who was talking down to him like he was some pet or immature boy incapable of comprehending what was really going on around him?

Then it hardly mattered since she reached down and slid her fingers and nails along his skin. She started with his right calf before drawing her touch up along his inner thigh.

Calvin went rigid. At the same time, he focused on those same defenses from earlier that afternoon. Again and again, he promised himself that he wouldn't succumb. This time, he wasn't going to allow his shaft to harden.

At first, the stranger's hand only moved along the captive's thighs and up to his pelvis. At first, she only used one hand. Then another set of fingers started to play along his sensitive flesh. With every softly stroking caress, she sent fresh tingles of electric desire dancing along his nerves.

*I hate this. I hate this, and I'm going to fight it. I don't know who she is, but I'm not going to let her do this to me. She isn't going to win. I won't let her win.*

These simplified thoughts buzzed through his head even as he blinked his eyes. With the blindfold over his face, however, he couldn't see anything.

She could do whatever she liked with him. He wouldn't be able to stop her. He wouldn't even know who was touching him!

Somehow, he managed to resist.

But then, this woman leaned down, and he still couldn't recognize her voice. As she whispered, the sounds penetrated his defenses, sliding through his psychological barriers. Yes, he could try to think about getting the oil changed in his car, doing his taxes, or maybe changing the air filter on his air-conditioning unit. None of those unsexy thoughts were enough to block out her voice, playful, lilting and teasing.

"I could touch you right now. I could take you in hand and play with

you, just as Victoria did. You know, I read her report. All of the women around here read it. They think you're quite a specimen. You're going to be very popular. Women are going to fight over you. Doesn't that sound lovely?"

"I'm not a piece of property!" Calvin tried to shout back, but with the leather cylinder pushed down against his tongue, so he couldn't do more than moan out incoherent gibberish.

"What was that?" whispered his tormentor. Before he could respond, she teased him some more, "You want me to touch you? You want me to climb on top of you and ride you? Is that it? Greedy boy. You know, lots of other males are locked in chastity. I bet your new owner, whoever she happens to be, will do the same for you. Or maybe we should talk about it beforehand. Would you like that?"

He bit down, digging his teeth down against the leather. At the same time, he tried to push the strap out with the tip of his tongue. As hard as he fought, none of it helped.

"I like seeing you struggle, Calvin Drake. There's something so adorable about seeing you fight with everything you have. You have to know that you aren't going to win. Or maybe you are *really* a dumb boy? Maybe all of your articulation and bravery is just some kind of veneer or façade? Is that it? Have you been lying to us all this time? Maybe you aren't as independent and strong-willed as you look. Maybe breaking you won't be as much fun as everyone seems to think."

He tried to answer again.

Only then, she started using both of her hands. With one, she rubbed her palm up and down the length of his cock. He stayed soft for a few more seconds. With her other hand, she started to caress and fondle his balls before gliding to fingers along the underside of his sack.

No one had ever touched him like this before.

Yes, Calvin had been with a couple of women, and they had all in attentive in bed. Those girls really liked him and wanted to make him feel good. Even so, they never approached sex like this. He didn't see it as an opportunity to harass or torment the boy in their bed. They never got this creative or determined. They never saw teasing Calvin as a game.

This stranger giggled, although she still kept her voice low.

He tried to figure out who was talking to her. Maybe if he could tell for certain, he might have been able to use that information to his advantage.

But how?

Only a blank silence answered that question.

Now she squeezed him again.

“Oh, there we go. That’s right. Look at that. You’re getting hard. You can’t help yourself, can you? Boys *never* can.”

He grunted a response, but she just chuckled at him.

“It’s okay. You’re a slave to your biology. It’s true of boys all across the world. You can simply accept it and enjoy your life and the power this gives the women around you...or you can try to fight. Either way, the women around you are still going to be in charge.” She finished her argument with a gleeful little giggle right there against his ear.

He was so hard by now! His tumescent shaft pushed up against her hand. She pulled her fingers away from the underside of his balls, but she continued to glide her palm up and down his length. With every maneuver, he shivered through the wild desire.

Then she pulled her hand away, and he grimaced, groaning with disappointment.

She chuckled again. He had to strain to hear her, but she whispered, “It’s okay. It’s okay if you are just a boy. Accept it. You can surrender to your vulnerability and your weakness. Maybe this will help.”

He didn’t understand what she meant, not until she climbed up onto the exam table. Then she straddled him, and that’s when he felt the naked skin of her shins and inner thighs pressed against his torso.

She leaned down and gently started to nuzzle the side of his neck.

“Technically,” she whispered, “This isn’t even against the rules. No one said I couldn’t play with you. We can call this another examination. Are you ready, boy?”

He snarled at her again, only then it didn’t matter because she started licking and grazing her teeth along the contours of his neck.

His breath caught, and she reached back, wrapping her fingers around his cock in time to feel that twitch of desperation.

“You like this,” she said with a hint of amusement. “There’s no shame in that. We both know you can’t fight this. You might as well enjoy it.”

On several levels, he understood that this woman was absolutely correct. Even so, he tried to drain the arousal from his body. He tried to let go, to simply meditate and find the mindful position that would allow him to

escape the desires she imposed upon him.

It didn't work.

"You *want* this," she said. "You want me. You want me to ride you."

"No, I don't!" Calvin tried to shout back at her, only there was just one problem: if he had been able to speak those words, then he would have been lying.

He needed this. He craved it with every fiber of his being. He couldn't help himself.

Maybe it was the humiliation from before. Or maybe these women were right, and they had uncovered something, some hidden instinct to surrender...

No. No way!

Calvin wouldn't allow himself to think that way.

He was an independent man capable of thinking for himself, so he wasn't going to let these women take over or control his mind, not after a few days. He knew who he was and where he came from.

Didn't he?

"I really wonder who you are, but then, it doesn't actually matter because you wandered into our grasp, didn't you? If you really wanted to be your own man, then you should have run harder, don't you think?"

Calvin bit down and still tried to speak. He grunted through the gag you, but the woman stroking him just kissed his neck again. Then she pulled away, and she scratched his chest before leaning forward. Some of her hair brushed along his skin, and he shivered as he enjoyed that simple intimacy.

She licked at his nipples, reached down, and scratched at his flanks.

Consciously, he told himself he hated every second of it. This was demeaning and humiliating. He was supposed to be able to fight back!

Yes, he shook exam table. He pulled and twitched, fighting with everything he had, but it wasn't anywhere near enough, and she knew it. She chuckled at his best efforts before she pulled something away. In the next moment, something landed against his cheek. It was soft, fabric and warm.

Her blouse? Her tunic?

He couldn't be sure one way or the other, but then she leaned down, and he sensed the soft give of her breast push against his rib cage. She rubbed herself on him. Her stiffened nipples slid along his body before she grabbed his cock again.

"I'm going to enjoy this," she promised.

For a moment, he thought he might have been able to pick up on some phrase or intonation, something that would allow him to figure out exactly who was tormenting him.

But then his suspicions dissipated, as she aimed his member upward. In the next moment, she lowered herself down. She didn't take him right away. Instead, she rubbed his manhood along the trench of her opening. She teased him, rubbing herself forward and back as she used him.

“Oh, that's so good. But hey, you're going to keep fighting me, aren't you? You're going to make sure you don't climax because you want me to think you hate this.”

Yes!

That's when she burst out laughing again. Why? Even when he tried to fight, he played into her hands. He allowed himself to be used...

Then he couldn't think it all as she lowered herself down and enveloped his length. She squeezed him from every angle at once. That wet heat suffused his body. The sensations crowded out everything else.

In that moment, his eyes opened, and he didn't care about the black on this side of the blindfold.

He couldn't think, couldn't breathe. In that moment, he just savored the heat and weight of her body. It was so perfect!

She started to move down and up, only this wasn't the soft touch of her fingers or the palm of her hand. It was so much better! It was irresistible!

“This must be so frustrating. You can't see my face. You might not even know who I am.” She laughed again, and that tutoring sound vibrated through his body.

No. He wasn't going to climax. This time, he wouldn't succumb. He wouldn't lose control. It didn't matter what she did or how she touched him! He would fight back and maintain control of his body. He knew what kind of man he needed to be!

But then she slid up along his length again. At the same time, she leaned forward. She almost pulled away.

Almost.

Instead, she kept his most sensitive body part trapped between the walls of her slit. She tightened as she stretched forward licked at his neck again. She just barely touched him with the tip of her tongue, yet those teasing caresses sent fresh waves of need rocketing through his frame. They swirled at his center, growing more and more powerful.

“Even now, you fight me. Poor boy. Poor, desperate boy. But don’t worry. I’m going to make sure you lose control. I will see you surrender to me.” She chuckled again. “Even if you don’t know who I am.”

His captor seemed to enjoy that simple fact, like she could do whatever she liked, and he wouldn’t even know which of the women had enjoyed his body.

As far as he knew, only Victoria, Cassandra, Lena, and Julia actually spoke English. It had to be one of them.

It probably wasn’t Victoria. She had already been given the opportunity to torment him, and she had taken it, but her interests were scientific. So it had to be one of the other three, right?

If so, who? Which one?

With another growl of aggravation, he tried to throw himself forward, like he thought he might be able to break his bonds in that exact moment.

No. He couldn’t. Tied down and helpless, he stayed right on his back, exactly where his captor wished him to be.

She must’ve noticed, however. She saw the spasms run through his body; she noticed how his muscles and tendons and joints locked up or twitched from side to side as he thought.

“Poor boy. You’re not getting away,” she said in that frustratingly low and indecipherable voice. “You might as well give up. Enjoy it. Accept the fact that I’ve got you, and I can keep you like this for as long as I want. Unless of course, you lose control and climax. If that was going to happen? Are you going to lose control? Are you going to lose control to me?”

“No!” Calvin howled.

Although that single syllable vibrated from deep within his chest, he couldn’t do anything more than make her laugh.

“How about now? Should I make you climax for me right now?”

She wouldn’t be able to pick the moment, he told himself.

But then, she started moving faster. She slid her body up and down, writing his pole as she enjoyed the pleasure he provided. Yeah, he could fight and struggle, yet it didn’t make the slightest difference, not to this woman.

From moment to moment, his imagination shifted.

He thought of Lena and her dark hair bouncing against her forehead. He imagined Julia and those red tresses playing along the contours of her neck and shoulders. Then there was Cassandra. He pictured the huntress’s hungry gaze.

He could have been anyone of them.

Then she stopped.

He groaned.

The sound came automatically. It was some instinct buried deep within his mind. She pulled away altogether now, shifting her weight.

“Or maybe I’m going to leave you here like this. Is that what I should do, Calvin? Should I leave you here when you’re hot and ready?”

He froze up, paralyzed. Maybe it wasn’t decision. Perhaps he wished to convey some sense of disinterest, like he didn’t really care one way or the other.

She giggled again, fully aware that his best efforts were little more than a sham.

“Maybe I’ll suggest that one of the servants put you in a chastity cage. I could even take out your gag. I bet she’d be interested in hearing you beg. You could continue with her, and I’m sure you would sound so incredibly desperate, but it wouldn’t matter, would it? You only speak this strange language. You don’t understand the Queen’s Tongue, do you? No. Poor boy.”

“Or I can have some fun with you right now. I could mount you again. Is that what you want?”

This was a test. Her words quickened, but he still couldn’t tell who spoke them.

If he remained stoic and pretended to be unaffected despite the intensity of his erection, then she might just leave him there.

She touched him again, grabbing his shaft. She pressed her fingers down against the base of his member.

He nodded. He dropped his head down, pulled it back up as he swung his chin as quickly as he could.

That’s when he heard her laugh again.

Infuriatingly, Calvin still couldn’t identify the voice!

But it hardly mattered because she wouldn’t be denied. She climbed up on top of him, straddling him and encasing his cock between the walls of her slit. She squeezed him again, only this time the desperation came roaring back. Instinctively, his body knew that she might pull away at any moment, so his desires doubled; they quadrupled!

Grunting and growling, he threw his head back, arched his back, and pumped up into her.

“Desperate boy!”

Yes! Yes, it was true! It was so true!

She rode him hard and fast now, pumping him. Her body tensed around his, stealing away whatever control he may have possessed.

His shaft started pulsating as she cried out. She moaned, groaning and growling like some wild animal. Then she bent forward, and she scratched at his shoulders before pushing her hands down against his restrained wrists.

She took her time now, slowing down for just a moment before she started to ride him faster. Sliding along his manhood, she trained him just as Victoria had.

Soon, he was spent, exhausted, still bound and blindfolded, gagged and powerless, just the way these women like him.

During breakfast, Lena and Julia fell into their traditional habits and routines. In particular, they debated whether or not the Queen would open up titles for purchase. Yes, individual women had been able to join the aristocracy throughout the nation's history, but it had always been a function of service, whether that meant a military, artistic, or scholarly achievement.

"No one is ever going to be able to buy a title," Lena promised.

"Oh? And why not?"

"Titles are special. They're remarkable."

"And if the Queen started selling them, then they would become little more than she bobbles?"

"Exactly," Lena replied.

"What if it starts out small?" Julia suggested. At the same time, her older sister understood exactly what this might entail. Before her sister could object, she persisted, "Knighthoods technically entitle peasants to become members of the aristocracy, yet this title isn't transferred along bloodlines. Perhaps the same should be offered for the entrepreneurs of the queendom."

"But it would just be the beginning," Lena argued. "And that's the point, isn't it? That's why you want to see it happen. This could be one step in a new direction for our nation. Eventually, entrepreneurs and businesswomen could seize so much political power."

"It's true," Julia replied. "And yet, would that really be so bad?"

"You're talking about a transformation of our culture."

"Whether you like it or not, big sister, the world is changing."

"The world might be changing, but we can influence the direction it takes. Turning money into society's prime mover would bring countless

consequences.”

“Money has always been the prime mover,” Julia replied. “The only difference is that we are getting honest about it now.”

Although Lena was ready to rebuff her sister, she didn’t get the opportunity because the door to the small dining chamber opened, and Victoria appeared.

“Ladies,” she said. “I believe we need to have a discussion.”

“What is it?” Lena asked, narrowing her eyes slightly. A lifetime had trained her to recognize when a subordinate brought bad news.

“I went to check on and feed the boy,” she began.

“And?”

“Apparently, someone decided to use him last night.” Although the scholar didn’t make any accusations, the implication was obvious.

“Interesting,” Lena said diplomatically.

“It wasn’t me,” Julia said, raising her hands and displaying her fingers as though she needed to avoid being caught with her hand in the pastry jar.

Inhaling slowly, Lena looked back at Victoria. “You have an idea, don’t you?”

“The identity of the woman who decided to have some fun last night? No. I don’t have any particular thought or supposition on the matter. That said, I thought that perhaps we should establish some rules at this point. Additionally, I’m prepared to make my proposal for your competition.”

“Agreed,” Lena said, her tone shifting toward regal and authoritative.

“What are going to be doing? A race? Wrestling? Maybe an examination of rhetorical acumen?” Julia asked.

“You better hope it’s not that last one,” said her sister with a smirk.

“Hey, I have to inspire my employees every day.”

“I’m pretty sure your workers do most of the work in that case,” Lena retorted.

“Maybe.”

“Girls,” Victoria said. She pursed her lips. “The proposal is simple. There will be a competition: a race to see who can catch the boy fastest.”

“We’re hunting?” Julia grinned as the possibilities roiled through her mind.

“Yes,” Victoria said.

“At the same time?”

“No. Each of you will be required to hunt him down on separate days.

This way, you will both be well rested, as will your prey. Whoever brings him back in a short a span of time will win custody of this boy. Assuming you can get approval from an adjudicator, you will then be his legal owner.”

Victoria paused and looked at the two young women. “What do you think of this?”

“It’s perfect,” said Lena, and her sister agreed with a quick, emphatic nod.

“Additionally,” Victoria said, “I think it’s important for this boy to be properly motivated.”

“And how are you going to do that?”

“Actually, I have a very good idea.”

“You’re in trouble,” Calvin heard later that morning.

Still strapped down, naked, gagged and bound, he turned toward the voice, and he tried to grunt something back in her direction. This time, he had no trouble telling exactly who was speaking.

Cassandra.

When he heard that note of anger ripple through her voice, he had this strange impulse: apologize. In fact, the word started to form at the back of his throat. He could have said something like, “I’m sorry. I’m sorry I tried to run off. I’m sorry I embarrassed you.”

Really? He intended to apologize? These women wanted to kidnap him! As near as he could tell, they meant to enslave him!

Then he felt her fingertips glide along his body.

“I’m going to leash you, boy. Then I’m going to escort you outside. After that, you and I are going to have a nice, long conversation. If you fight me, there will be consequences. And trust me, I won’t make any mistakes.”

She put her hand on his neck, pressed down, making it harder for him to breathe. Just as he started to ask, she let go, having made her point.

True to her word, she removed the restraints.

He started to reach up for the blindfold, but she slapped his hand away. “No. You don’t need to see.”

Then she attached his leash, and she tugged. She pulled him along, and he stumbled forward. The tiled hallway wasn’t even, so he nearly tripped at several points, especially because Cassandra refused to slow down.

Within a minute or so, he started to get better at navigating, especially as he followed the tugs of the leash.

With every second, he wondered if maybe he should try to take this opportunity to escape. Perhaps he could pull off the blindfold and throw himself forward. Maybe he would be able to tackle Cassandra before she realized what was happening.

It was a nice idea, and it sounded good between his ears, but he already knew that this woman was a skilled fighter. Maybe he got lucky last time. It wouldn't happen again.

No, he had to bide his time.

Some doors opened with a clank, and she pulled him out into the afternoon air.

Warm sunlight washed over his naked frame.

He could feel the dirt crunch beneath his feet before she pushed him up onto something smooth and wooden. Then she grabbed him again, placing her hand on the back of his neck before shoving him down.

The strength in her arm surprised him, catching him off guard. He fell forward, hitting his knees.

Just as the pain flashed up his legs, she grabbed his arms and pushed them down.

What was happening? Why did she want him in this position?

That's when his neck and wrists slid into the stocks. In the next moment, she slammed the top half down, secured the latch, and finally reached out to pull away his blindfold.

Turning his neck as much as the wooden contraption allowed, he turned to the left, then the right. He tried to pull his arms back. It didn't work. His hands couldn't fit through those narrow slots. The smooth wood held his wrists in place, and the contours of his hands simply wouldn't fit if he tried to free himself.

Bent forward, he lifted his head and looked up.

There was Cassandra.

She touched the underside of his chin, and she asked, "Would you like me to take the gag out?"

He did his best to listen to her voice. As hard as he tried, he couldn't tell if those taunting syllables matched the whispered notes from last night.

Still, he wanted to speak, so he nodded his head down and up.

"Good," she said. For a second, he wondered if she was just teasing him, like he just admitted something, only it wouldn't make the slightest difference. After all, his desire to speak didn't mean anything. He couldn't

change anything because he was bent forward, naked, and utterly powerless.

*I'm going to figure a way out of this. I'm going to get back to my world,* he promised himself right as she pulled the gag free.

Then a different idea occurred to him, "What if I took you with me?"

She pressed her lips together into this little, contemplative pout.

"Oh?"

"Yeah!" Calvin called out. This idea could work, he decided. "Look, I have seen how you talk to the others. You're obviously well-educated."

Her expression didn't shift, so flattery probably wasn't going to work.

"You might be well-educated, but that doesn't mean anything here. If this whole area is ruled by an aristocracy, then you know it doesn't matter how skilled you are. It's all about your bloodline."

Did her lips just harden? Maybe he saw her eyes flick toward the main house, like she worried someone might walk out here and overhear the conversation.

Calvin couldn't be sure one way or the other, but he had to keep trying. "I come from a land with computers, cars, TVs, instant access to information and incredible entertainment."

"I don't know what most of those words mean," she said, sneering.

"How do I know you aren't lying to me?"

"My phone. Please. If you could just get me my phone, then I can show you!"

"Interesting," she said. "But I have a counter proposal for you, Calvin Drake." She strode closer.

Yes, he was naked and on display, but she wore a dark red blouse, a leather vest, and a matching skirt. Her boots stretched up toward her knees, but she leaned down now. She grabbed him by his hair, pulled his head up, and forced him to gaze up at her.

"You embarrassed me in front of the others, so you need to be disciplined. There's an imbalance between us."

"What, what if I apologize?"

"Go on," she said. The smirk returned. "Try your best, boy."

Boy.

He wished that could have been a linguistic fingerprint, something he could have used to figure out who had taken him last night. And yet, all of the women here seemed to view all of the males as "boys": immature, unreliable, inexperienced, and untrustworthy. As far as they were concerned,

males didn't deserve any respect because they weren't capable of earning it.

So he ignored that little insult and decided to do his best. "Please, you have to understand, I'm not from this area. I'm not from this world or this region or whatever. I don't understand how things work. When you came after me, I was just doing my best to—"

"What?" she interrupted. "Did you think you're going to run away? Did you think you were going to escape captivity? When a woman calls out to a boy, he should stop. When he's being chased, he should turn around, get down on his knees, and accept her judgment."

Forgetting all about diplomacy, he narrowed his eyes and glared at her. "What? Why?"

"She's his superior," Cassandra said.

"What if they don't even know each other?"

"She's his superior," she said again. He bit down for just a moment, glanced toward her boots, saw the shine along the black leather, and reminded himself that he needed to carefully plan and strategize. If he allowed his emotions to slip free, he would probably do or say something he would regret.

At least this huntress bothered to speak with him. They were having a dialogue, which was the most progress he had made so far.

"Men are just as capable as women," he wanted to say. Again, he stopped himself. Instead, he had to focus on display. Arguing gender dynamics and fairness wouldn't help him. So he exhaled slowly and looked at her again. "I need to apologize."

"Go on."

He looked up at Cassandra.

He had never encountered a woman like her before. There was something about her physique, the strength of her stance, and the way she seemed to exude some primal power and authority. This was a woman who knew how to hunt, how to fight.

Some of the moisture drained away from his mouth, but he didn't bow his head down, and he said, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry I resisted. I'm sorry I fought you."

"Are you sorry that you failed to recognize your own inferiority?" Cassandra asked, choosing each word carefully. Every sound and syllable was so precise as she looked down at him.

This was a test, he recognized instantly.

“I’m sorry I defied you,” he said, hoping that might be good enough.

She touched three fingers to the underside of his chin and forced him to slowly look back up along the length of her body. Somehow, he couldn’t meet her gaze, not this time.

“Not good enough,” she said.

Biting down, he swallowed back his frustration. “Yes. Fine. I’m sorry I didn’t...recognize my own inferiority.”

“I don’t believe you,” she said. “Try again.”

Aggravation flashed through his body, prompting him to try to stand. The top of his neck banged against the locking stocks, and his hands still wouldn’t fit through those openings.

“I shouldn’t have to say this!” Calvin snapped back at her.

“And that’s the problem. That’s why you need this.”

“I need this? What?”

“You know, as a girl, I worked with quite a few tutors. My parents couldn’t decide whether or not I should become a scholar or a huntress. In the end, I convinced of them that learning to track wild and rebellious boys would be better for me and society. But still, I had to play along for quite some time. A classroom was never my ideal setting.”

“What’s your point?”

Her eyes narrowed. Even as a huntress, she wasn’t used to hearing that kind of insolence from a boy like Calvin.

“My tutors explained that males are the weaker half of humanity because of physiology and biology. They warned me that I shouldn’t be overly cruel with the boys in my life. They couldn’t help their weakness. They couldn’t help the decisions they made. That’s why, as women, it would be up to us to guide them.”

“You mean, enslave them,” Calvin told her.

He expected some defense, maybe some explanation. Instead, Cassandra simply apologized! As his eyes widened, she smiled down at him. “Call it one way or another, every boy needs the guiding hand of a strong woman. It’s for his own good.”

He was about to say something else, only she covered his mouth with her palm, silencing him. “I can pull out the gag again,” she pointed out.

He didn’t say anything.

She drew her hand back and continued, “Much of your ignorance and disobedience comes from one place: one biological flaw.” She stepped away,

around the stocks, so Calvin could no longer see her. He had no idea what she was about to do.

Then her fingers brushed along his flaccid shaft. “This,” she said, sliding her fingers around his circumference. “You boys always think that you are supposed to be powerful. And why is that? Because of this? But you know, many scholars have studied methods of control. You claim to be from another world. Do those exist there?”

“I, I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said after a second of hesitation.

Her hand withdrew from between his legs, and now she smacked his ass. Her hand flew down, clapping hard against the curve of his posterior. The pain flashed through him. It wasn’t as intense as the electrical shocks, but he pulled against the stocks nonetheless. He tried to free himself, only to make the frame clack and clank.

“Should I spank you again? Or maybe you want to keep trying to apologize?”

“I’m sorry!”

“Are you? Are you *really*?”

That’s when Calvin realized what she truly craved: his desperation. She wanted to hear him sound utterly pathetic and completely defeated.

His breathing quickened, and then she smacked his ass again. She went for that same spot three times in quick succession. She pushed herself up against his buttocks, grabbed his ass, and spanked him.

Then she stopped, she circled around, and she looked down into his eyes.

“I can still see your defiance,” Cassandra pointed out.

“I, I’m not trying to be defiant,” he said.

“But just look at what you did right there. You contradicted me. I told you one thing, and you commented on it, like your opinion would be equal to mine.” She clicked her tongue a couple of times in quick succession, shaking her head as she looked down at him. She seemed almost sympathetic, like she could understand how difficult it might be for a boy such as Calvin to be so confused.

“I have something to show you.”

She walked back behind him, opened a pouch he hadn’t noticed, and then she came back.

“On your so-called world, do boys ever get locked in chastity?”

“Chastity is an antiquated concept,” he said with his head bowed down because he didn’t want to see what she had in her hands. “Maybe women had to wear chastity belts in the Dark Ages, but that was it.”

“Women? Really?” Cassandra sounded intrigued. “And was that a method of control? Did it help you boys assert your will over the women in your lives?”

“Yes. No. I guess? I don’t know!”

“That’s the kind of attitude you should adopt,” she said.

Confused, Calvin blinked and glanced up at her again.

This time, he said nothing, so she smiled down at him. She encouraged him. “That’s right. You don’t want to speak. You don’t want to express an opinion. You’re a boy, and boys should be quiet. Of course, your path is going to be a little bit more circuitous, from what I understand.”

“What, what are you talking about?”

“Your deal,” Cassandra said.

“What deal?”

“Oh,” replied the huntress. “They haven’t told you yet. I suppose that means I should keep it to myself. But don’t worry. All we need to do is get you worked up and ready for your run.”

His run? What did that mean?

“Please. I was serious before. You and I could go back to my world.”

“A world where boys are allowed to speak up for themselves? One where they probably run around, defiant and disobedient? That sounds like a terrible place,” she said.

He opened his mouth, and he wanted to contradict her, only then he thought of global wealth inequality, political corruption, climate change, refugee crises, and the other problems that seemed to wrack the planet. Then he stopped and bowed his head right back down.

“Look,” she commanded.

Calvin slowly raised his gaze, and that’s when she showed him the metallic cage. It sat right there on the flat of her hand, shining and metallic.

As a guy who routinely wandered the internet, he had seen reference to these toys before. They existed back on his world, but he had never seen one in person. At the same time, he marveled at the different box and facets.

He understood how it would work.

“You’re going to wear this, Calvin. You know why?”

Now, his mouth became completely dry. Worse, his tongue refused to

move, like he forgot how to talk. Instead, still trapped in the stocks, he just shook his head.

“Because it’s going to be good for you,” she said. “It’s true that there are some boys out there who can handle the freedom. They understand their place. Whether its nature or nurture, they recognize their inferiority. But not you. You think you should go back to a world where men have rights.” She snorted out that last word, like the notion was completely and totally ridiculous.

Then she stepped back behind him, and she pulled his legs apart, shoving him down.

He didn’t understand why, not at first, not until she bent forward and slipped the straps around his ankles.

Only moments ago, he could have tried to kick out or even crossed his legs. Maybe he could have squirmed from side to side, but now she restricted his range of motion. He could hardly move!

Bent forward, locked in the stocks, now with his legs spread and strapped into place, he couldn’t resist.

“Are you ready? Are you ready for your chastity to begin?”

“No,” he answered honestly. “Please. Please, Cassandra. Please, don’t do this to me.”

“And why wouldn’t I?”

“Because I can behave!” Calvin pleaded. Childish and pathetic he sounded, yet he couldn’t stop himself. As hard as he tried, he couldn’t push any dignity or gravitas back into his tone.

“Oh? What are you offering? I hope it isn’t another attempt to take me back to your terrible world.” She shook her head. Even as she spoke, disdainful disbelief rippled through her voice. Clearly, she didn’t believe his story, even if she couldn’t explain where he really came from.

“I, I’m offering my obedience,” he said. He struggled to calculate through the different possibilities. He needed to figure out exactly what she wished to hear. Then, and only then, he would be able to evade that metallic cage.

He imagined it’s cold touch, the steel wrapping around his shaft, making corrections impossible.

The thought scared him more than he expected.

Then again, a guy like Calvin had never really considered the possibility that some random woman would be able to take away access to his

most sensitive body part.

Ever since he hit puberty, Calvin had been able to rely on that one stress reliever. No matter how bad a day at school or work might have been, he could go home, throw himself down on his bed, pull on his pants, and slide his hand into his underwear. He could move his fingers along his shaft, close his eyes, and hop into some wild fantasy. It could be a cute girl in a bathing suit, a sexy boss getting down on her knees, or maybe some time with a celebrity. No matter what else happened, he had control of those images and his body.

Only now, this woman wanted to take away that access.

“Go on,” she said. “Tell me all about it.”

“I, I swear. I can be obedient without the chastity cage. I will do whatever you want. I will say whatever you want.”

“You will say whatever I want?” Cassandra seemed intrigued. Her eyes glittered mischievously, and he really, really didn’t like the playful lilt invading her voice. “Okay,” she continued. “Beg for this chastity cage. Plead for it.”

A groan resonated at the base of his throat, but he swallowed it back as best he could.

If this was another test, then he had to pass it.

Despite his suspicions, he licked his bottom lip, turned his gaze back up toward this beautiful woman who towered above him like some kind of goddess, and he started to speak, “Please. Please, can I wear the chastity cage? I want to be an obedient boy. I want to please you. Please, would you put it on me?”

“Really?” Gripping the chastity cage, she put her hands on her hips and looked down at him, her eyes shining with disappointment. “That’s the best you can do? Come on, boy. I want to hear the desperation. I know you can beg prettily.”

He seethed, sucking in air between his teeth.

“Please,” he said again, only now the frantic energy started to pulse through his body. “Please. Please, would you put it on me? Please, I need to be locked in chastity?”

“Because you’re an inferior boy who is incapable of taking care of himself? Because you need a woman to tell you what to do? Because you need to be owned?”

“Yes!” He could have stopped right there, yet the words continued to

tumble from his mouth. “I, I’m an inferior boy. I’m incapable of making my own decisions! I need a woman. I need a woman to tell me what to do!”

“And?”

The final part raced through his head. Calvin didn’t stop, “I need to be owned!”

“Very good. The first step to ownership is a chastity cage, so let’s get it on you.”

“What? No!”

“You begged very nicely,” she said, patting him on the head before she stepped around the stocks. “You should be very proud of yourself.”

“But, but I did what you wanted!” Calvin reminded her.

Standing behind him and off to the side now, she chuckled, “That’s right. You did exactly what I wanted because you’re a boy, and boys have an instinctive need to obey women.”

“I don’t—”

“Shush,” she said, sounding almost conciliatory. “A woman is talking now.” He shut his mouth. “That’s right. I’m talking, and I’ve decided what you need. But don’t worry. After this, you might enjoy what happens.”

“What, what’s going to happen?”

“You’ll see,” she said.

He gulped.

Although he knew it was futile, Calvin couldn’t help himself. As she started to slide the chastity cage into position, Calvin tilted his body to the right, then the left. He tried to evade her touch, but it was no use.

She slipped the metallic tube into place.

Just as he expected, the cold soaked into his body. The metal slid along his flesh. It was smooth but rigid and completely unyielding.

Then she slipped another piece underneath his scrotum. She drew them tight, so the metal pressed into his skin.

Although he couldn’t use his hands, Calvin already knew he wouldn’t be able to remove this thing. Maybe if he had a chainsaw or a blow torch, but he never, ever would have employed those kinds of tools so close to his genitals.

Then he heard the click.

“What was that?” Calvin asked despite being able to guess.

“The lock,” she said simply.

“So what? Now you let me go? Now I try to take it off, and I feel like

an idiot because I won't be able to do it? Is that it?"

"Oh no," she purred. "I promised you something nice. And that's exactly what you're going to get."

That's when she walked back around to face him. Now she grabbed him by his hair, and he expected another lecture.

Instead, she tilted his head back, and then she leaned down. She came closer and closer. He still didn't figure it out, not until the last moment when she started kissing him. Her lips played along his mouth, and he didn't react properly at first, but then he started kissing her back.

Cassandra was a beautiful woman, and this felt so good. Or maybe he fantasized about being able to seduce her, like he could make her so aroused that she would just decide to free him.

One woman had used him last night. Maybe it was Cassandra. Maybe she would expect access to his manhood...

Before long, those thoughts scattered as she continued to kiss him. With one hand, she cupped his cheek. With the other, she held onto his hair. And through all of it, she continued to press her lips against his. Their tongues danced against one another, flirting and playing. With every second, fresh waves of heat pulsed through his body.

The chill from the chastity cage was quickly banished.

His shaft struggled. He could feel the excitement pulse down along the length of his manhood, only he didn't get that usual thrill of his hardening cock.

Instead, it remained in the same position, pointed downward just as she expected.

He tried to wiggle his hips, like he might be able to get it off.

No way. These women knew exactly what they were doing. In fact, this chastity cage was probably far more secure than anything he could find in the world he knew and understood.

After a few more seconds or minutes, Calvin let out a little groan or growl.

"Poor boy," she said, caressing her fingers along his cheek. "Are you getting frustrated? Does this bother you?"

"Yes!"

"Oh, that must be too bad. But hey, if you try begging again, maybe I will let you out for a little while."

"You're teasing me," he said.

“And now you have figured it out. But this is just the start.”

He didn't understand what she meant, but Cassandra was about to show him.

She stepped back around. He watched her for as long as he could, but between the wooden planks set against his shoulders, neck, and wrists, he couldn't see her for long. Suddenly, Cassandra was gone, right outside of his line of sight, and now she brushed her nails along his buttocks and up to the small of his back.

“It's strange seeing a boy without any kind of mark. I mean, there are some women out there who don't like to have their males branded or tattooed, but it's pretty rare, especially right here.”

She continued to trace her fingers along his skin. But then she reached down, past his thigh, and back toward his exposed to scrotum. Now her fingers darted along his balls. She just barely touched him, yet fresh sparks of exquisite arousal coursed through his frame.

“What's wrong? Are you enjoying this?”

“No!”

“Are you sure about that?” With one hand, she teased his scrotum. With the other, she brushed her fingers along his buttocks, up his back, along his flanks, and down again.

It was exquisite.

Calvin told himself he wouldn't admit any of that, yet the delicious ecstasy raced through his frame as she continued to touch and tease him. He didn't know how to fight back against that heat or the pleasure that pulsed through him.

Through all of it, however, his shaft continued to twitch against the confines of its metallic prison. He could feel his manhood struggle, pushing and pressing, but he would never be strong enough to break through.

Even if he had the use of his hands, Calvin wouldn't have been able to get the chastity cage off, not without the key.

“I know you're probably lying to me, but I don't care. I can just keep touching you until you admit the truth.”

“Why are you doing this?”

“We need to make sure that you are motivated for your run,” she told him.

She patted his buttocks, grinned, and continued to touch and tease him.

“Please. Please, I can’t take it.”

“Beg.”

“Please, I will do anything. Please, I will be obedient. I will be a slave. Whatever you want!” It wasn’t fair. He had never been in a situation like this. Yes, he had been lucky and spent some time with a couple of girlfriends in high school, college, and after, but this was completely different! He was powerless, spread out, and unable to stop her!

Worse, she seemed to tease and manipulate him with clinical precision. She understood exactly what it took to arouse a boy, so she used to that expertise against him.

“Very good,” she said. “Now, concentrate on your feelings. There’s something you need to know.”

“What? Please, tell me!” He couldn’t help himself. He kept begging as she teased him. Every caress and soft, gentle movement of her fingers along his body made him squirm, wiggle, and writhe with an animalistic need.

“You’re going to get two chances to escape. You should take advantage of them.”

That’s when she stepped back in front of him, only she had something dangling from her grip now.

“What, what you going to do?”

“Don’t worry about it,” she said as she tied the blindfold in place, taking away his vision.

Then she stepped away.

He jerked his head from side to side, like he thought he might be able to pick up on some hint of light. But no. The blindfold did his job perfectly. Everything became impenetrable black.

Then he heard new and different noises: a zipper, rustling fabric, maybe something else. He strained to pick out the details as he tried to figure out what was going to happen.

“Open your mouth,” she commanded next.

By this point, some of the arousal had faded. Or perhaps Calvin had simply started thinking about what this all meant and how she’d torment him, no matter what he did or said. Whether he liked or not, he was powerless before this woman...

Calvin made a mistake. He started to ask a very simple question, “Why?”

Before he could even finish that simple inquiry, she grabbed him by the sides of his head and shoved forward with her hips. In the next moment, something rounded and rubber shoved up against the roof of his mouth, then toward the back of his throat.

“Suck, boy,” she ordered.

He couldn’t comprehend what was happening.

Blindfolded, he had no idea. He couldn’t see the look of triumph on her face, nor could he put the pieces together right away.

Only then she pulled her hips back before thrusting into his mouth again.

“Have you for sucked on a dildo before?”

A dildo?

A mixture of shock and humiliation played through his body as the understanding finally dawned on him.

No, no, no!

She worked her hips forward and back, savoring that look of dismay as a played out across his face. Bright humiliation glowed at his core; there was nothing he could do about this as she continued to work in the toy forward and back. She pumped his face and used him.

He whimpered. He moaned.

Not like that, Calvin even made the adorable mistake of trying to communicate with her. He attempted to force the words out onto the air, but his body just vibrated as she played with him.

“Nice and deep,” she said. “That’s right, boy. Keep sucking. Show me what you can do. You know who you are, don’t you? You know where you belong.”

Calvin absorbed each and every sound. The syllables pummeled down against him, glancing into his psyche.

“It’s okay,” she said. “Just relax. Let it happen. We both know you can’t stop me. Just relax. Surrender, boy. Accept your fate. Accept your position.”

Again and again, he tried to snarl back at her, to tell this woman that she wouldn’t be able to do this to him.

Only there was a problem: she could do it. She could do whatever she wanted!

He kept sucking. With his lips wrapped tight around the circumference of that toy, he continued to obey her commands. Even if he

hated himself for giving in, he didn't see any other choice. He didn't see any alternative.

"Good," she said. "Very good."

He didn't want to hear her approval. In fact, he wished he could defy her and make her angry. But that wasn't how this would work. That wasn't what she had in mind, and in that moment, her desires were the only ones that could possibly matter or mean anything.

Eventually, she jerked her hips back. She pulled the toy away from his lips.

"I know you can't see it, but I love the look of my dildo right here."

In spite of himself, he imagined this woman stroking that rubber shaft. In doing so, she would feel so powerful, so deliciously unstoppable.

"Now, are you ready for the best part?"

"What, what are you talking about?"

"The best part," she said again, make it sound like he should know precisely what she meant.

"I, I don't understand," he confessed.

"Oh? You don't? That must be so frustrating. Are you sure you want me to tell you? I would hate to ruin the surprise if you don't already know."

"What is it? What are you going to do?" Even as the words left his lips, maybe the wisps of a suspicion started to play along the edges of his senses. Maybe he had started to figure it out. If so, this boy couldn't bring himself to say it. He couldn't utter the words. He couldn't accept the truth, no matter how obvious it must have seemed.

She stepped away.

"Tell me!"

"No, no," she chided him. "I definitely don't want to ruin the surprise now. But hey, you should be proud of yourself. You are so adorably naïve!"

No. That wasn't true, he told himself.

Only then, she made him face something terrible, something had never envisioned before.

She sauntered around him. He could hear the sounds of her boots clicking down against of the boards.

And she grabbed him by his hips. That was only the beginning. She shoved forward, and he didn't even get the opportunity to clench down.

She shoved her fake shaft deep between his buttocks.

Hot dread coursed through his frame along with this strange mix of

shame and arousal.

Once again, his manhood strained against of the cage locked over his cock, but he still couldn't free himself.

She pulled back, and he started to hope that maybe she was done with him.

Nope. This young woman was just getting started.

"You embarrassed me in front of my comrades," Cassandra said.

"And now, you are facing the consequences of your actions. How does it feel, Calvin? How does it feel, boy?"

"No!" He tried to clench down, like he thought he might be able to defeat her at any moment. It was a lovely little delusion, but this woman retained her control and power over him. If anything, her influence only grew stronger as she pumped. With each thrust, she reminded him of his status.

"What are you again?" Cassandra teased him. "That's right. You are a slave. And over the next couple of days, they are going to figure out exactly who owns you."

He wished he could insist that he couldn't be owned. He wanted to tell this beautiful woman that he wouldn't be defeated, owned, or controlled. As brave as those words sounded, however, he knew the truth. It was obvious. He could see it, whether or not he wished to acknowledge it.

"I could let you out of your cage," she taunted him. By this point, the tip of the shaft had been wedged between his buttocks for long seconds or short minutes. He couldn't tell one way or another. His skin was hot, and the desires continued to pump through his frame.

"Look at that," she said, reaching out and wrapping her fingers around his imprisoned manhood. "You're dripping."

The pre-come gathered in the droplets at his tip as she reached down and stroked him. She played with his balls, with his exposed skin. She taunted him. Moment by moment, Cassandra reminded this boy of how little power and influence he had. He wanted to think of himself as an independent individual, someone capable of making his own choices and decisions. But no. He found himself restrained in the stocks, on display and utterly powerless.

That's when he heard the other giggles.

At first, he really thought those sounds had to come from Cassandra herself.

When they first stepped out, they had been all alone.

Calvin couldn't understand what they were saying, yet the taunts and cheers were obvious. They were having fun with him. They were enjoying that look of subjugation on his face.

"What do you think, ladies?" Maybe Calvin couldn't understand what was being said, the same wasn't true for Cassandra. Even as she worked the tip of her fake phallus deep into his body, the others called out their encouragement.

"Pump him!"

"Take him!"

"Show that boy where he belongs!"

The other huntresses!

Calvin had no idea when the other women decided to join. He couldn't tell how long they had been watching.

Despite those questions, he knew the truth. They were watching him. They saw his humiliation! They could enjoy the show as he was taken, used, and utterly degraded.

"Please," he panted out. "Please, someone help me! I'm not a slave!"

"You look like a boy to me!" Called out one of the women.

"I bet this boy would do anything to get out of his cage!"

"Pump him. Pump him hard, Cassandra!"

"Anything for you, ladies!"

Cassandra basked in the applause. She loved how good all of this could feel. Better yet, it was so easy. It felt right, simple, and correct. She was a woman, and she had fought this boy. Sure, he had embarrassed her, but now he needed to be taught this important lesson.

In the end, she knew it would be good for him. She was giving him precisely what he needed, whether he could acknowledge it or not.

"Tell them. Tell them you're a slave!"

"I can't!"

Cassandra laughed. Sticking with English, she called out, "The words are simple. Repeat after me, boy: eshtoy un esclavosh."

If he gave this young woman what she craved, he would acknowledge her authority. He would be surrendering to her. There would be no escape, no way for him to assert himself. More to the point, he wouldn't be able to convince any of these women that he deserved rights or self-respect. They would see him as nothing but a plaything or a toy. But then he grimaced and came to the obvious conclusion: they already saw him as nothing but a

plaything and a toy!

Calvin gulped. He hated to succumb like this, yet he saw no choice.

“Estoy un esclavosh!” he gasped.

And that’s when Cassandra finally jerked her hips back.

He couldn’t see what was happening, but Cassandra looked back to her comrades. She bowed forward, accepting their applause with grace and humility.

“And that, ladies, is one way to get an apology out of a disobedient boy.”

In the next moments, several of the women skipped forward. Still laughing and giggling, chortling and enjoying themselves, they raced ahead onto the platform. They started pinching him, spanking and stroking him. Someone brushed her fingers along his neck. Someone else ran her hands through his hair. Another woman pinched his cheek. Someone else grabbed his ass.

Those hands were everywhere!

And through all of this, Calvin continued to struggle. He tried to pull away, to break free, but they only reveled in his best efforts. They loved how he continued to fight, like he really believed he might have some chance of breaking away. But of course, that wasn’t going to happen. These women had him, and they loved owning him. There was no reason for them to let go. Rather, they would enjoy themselves for as long as they liked, and there was nothing he could do about it...

After Cassandra finished with him, she took him back to a cell. She shoved him up against a wall and strapped him in place. Now his arms were braced above his head, and he could hardly move. Even so, Calvin still occasionally struggled.

Conflicting emotions raged through his body every few minutes or hours. Sometimes, he simply wished to succumb. It felt natural, like he could just forget about the man he had once been. He could let go of his old life and accept the fact that these women had taken him, so they could own him and use him however they saw fit.

Surrender would have been so easy.

Except that little voice told him to fight back. Some part of him still ached for the opportunity to be an individual capable of making his own decisions. He didn’t wish to be owned. He didn’t want to simply surrender to

their power and authority.

He didn't know what to do; he didn't know how to feel.

And in the end, it hardly mattered. It wasn't like they were going to ask this boy for his opinion.

Eventually, the door opened, and the redhead skipped in.

At least he wasn't blindfolded or gagged this time.

He expected to be pinched and pawed again.

Instead, Julia Katina strode forward and held her hands behind her back. In that instant, she looked quite regal, like a princess or some head of state.

"I heard about that little demonstration," she said.

"I didn't have anything to do with it," he replied.

"What are you talking about? You were the star."

"I was a prop," he said. Julia shrugged, like she agreed, yet it hardly mattered.

"A very cute prop," she said, reaching out for him finally.

"What are you even doing here?" Calvin demanded as a flicker of his old pride snapped back to life.

"I wanted to see what the price would be," she said. "Also, I was very curious about this." She reached down and grabbed his cock. He could hardly feel it, however. Her fingers tightened around his metal tube, reminding him once again of how these women had taken away control of so much.

"I wonder what you would be willing to do for the key," she said.

"Nothing. This doesn't change anything," he said.

But then she put her hand on his forehead, pushed him up against the wall, and then she leaned in. Tilting her head to the side, she started kissing him.

As her lips played along his, he made a decision. Calvin attempted to turn his head to the side, if only to show Julia that he wouldn't be controlled.

Like his previous efforts, his attempt failed. She simply grabbed him, pulling him back into place so she could enjoy the use of his lips.

"You're not going to win," she said. "One way or another, we are going to get you."

"I'm going to escape," he said as she pulled back. He was panting, each breath coming fast as she studied his gaze.

"You are a remarkable creature," she told him. "I love seeing you get punished over and over again, yet you keep resisting. Like you actually think

you might be able to beat us!”

“I can! I will!”

Julia laughed like that was the funniest thing she had ever heard.

“If I offered you the chance to get out of your chastity cage right now, would you take it? Would you beg for it?”

His lips parted, and he wanted to lie, only then he realized it would be too obvious. So instead, he glowered at this woman.

“Poor boy. This must be so frustrating for you. But don’t worry. When I own you, I’m going to train you so thoroughly that you might not even need the chastity cage. Instead, I’m going to leave it on as a decoration.”

When he heard those words, he tried to launch himself at her. He yanked on the shackles, so the chains jangled, yet he remained trapped in place.

“Right now, you want me, don’t you?”

“No,” he snarled. Yet even as he spoke, Calvin had to keep his eyes aimed down toward the floor.

“So pouty,” she laughed. “There’s nothing wrong with giving into your natural weaknesses. Just surrender. Right now, you can beg, and maybe I will be more generous with you later.”

“Cassandra already made me beg you,” he reminded her.

“I heard. But now I want to hear it for myself,” she said.

“No.”

Her expression hardened, and in that moment, he braced himself. He wondered if she would try to kiss him again. Or maybe she had something else in mind. But then the pout faded, and the corners of her lips stretched upward into a tantalizing smile.

With her red tresses pulled back into a pair of braids, she looked amazing. Only now, she slowly shook her head. “I want you to remember this moment, Calvin. When I own you for myself, I’m going to think about it a lot.”

The silence stretched between them.

Finally, he had to ask, “Why?”

“Because I’m going to strip you of your rebelliousness,” she promised. “I’m going to make sure that you are an obedient boy who understands his place in the world.” She leaned forward and dropped her voice to a whisper, “It’s going to be at my feet.”

Calvin attempted to come up with some logical retort, but this

beautiful woman turned, and she started to walk away, leaving him there as he waited for his fate.

After the redhead left him, Calvin didn't know what to expect. He watched her go, and the door boomed shut behind her. After that, Calvin tugged on his bonds. He tried to pull himself free at several points, although he knew it was a futile gesture.

More time went by. Maybe an hour elapsed before the door opened again.

"Hello," Lena said to him.

"What you want? Are you here to taunt me?"

"Always," she said with a little smirk. She strode forward and examined him. She brushed her fingers down his naked chest, all the way to his pubis. From there, she brushed her fingertips along his scrotum and over the length of his shaft.

Calvin attempted to tell himself that he was used to it, like it didn't really matter what they did or how they touched him. But each time she slid her fingers over his body, he experienced that rush of frustrated embarrassment.

"Tell me something," she instructed. "You really believe women and men are equal?"

"Yes," he said.

"But how could that be possible? Doesn't equality imply sameness?"

"No, it doesn't. We can be the same under the law with the same sets of rights without being the same kinds of people."

"You know, our scholars have studied boys extensively."

"You make it sound like a bunch of wild animals," he said.

"Wild animals? No. The vast majority of you have been tamed," she said unironically.

He blinked, thinking she had to be joking. But no. In that moment, he realized she really meant every word.

"What's wrong? You don't like the idea of being an animal? You know, my sister wants to put you to work in a factory."

"At least it would be a job," he said.

"Are you sure about that?" Lena leaned forward, "If she catches you, she's going to put you in a harness. You're going to pull carts filled with coal. Trust me, that's not the kind of life anyone wants." She made it sound

so obvious.

His jaw tightened.

“I could get away.”

“Do you know how many boys have escaped her factories?”

He didn’t need to answer, but he still responded with a quick shake of his head. Lena pursed her lips into an almost mournful little frown. “None.”

Refusing to be manipulated, he said, “And how many tried? From what I understand, you do a good job of brainwashing the boys here.”

“You would have to ask her,” Lena said. Only then she did something he didn’t expect. She watched him for several more seconds. Although he glared at her with all of the frustrated fury he could muster, she just watched him. And then she smiled. “You are definitely a different kind of boy. I feel like we could actually discuss the world.”

“You could do that with any of the boys you know,” he said it before he flinched. Boys. He called the members of his own gender “boys”. Was this how it worked? Was this how the training and psychological programming soaked into his mind?

“No,” she said with a shake of her head. “That’s not how it works. The boys here know that they aren’t allowed to have their own opinions.”

“You can change that,” he said. “You could lead a revolution.”

“I’m a very wealthy, powerful woman. Why would I want to do that?”

“The world is better with equality,” he said. He tried to pump real passion into his voice.

“You don’t believe that,” she said.

Calvin pressed his lips together as he considered her response. It was so easy for her to talk over him, to tell him what he “really” thought. “Yes, I do,” he said a little too quickly.

“Tell me about your world. How does it actually work?”

Hoping to distract himself for the next couple of seconds, Calvin turned to the restraints. He looked over at the shackle around his right wrist, then his left. He pulled on those bonds, halfheartedly hoping that maybe the restraints would finally break. But of course, they didn’t. They held him right there, spread out and naked before this woman.

“You’re hiding something from me,” she said.

“I’m not,” he replied, although he couldn’t meet her stare this time.

“What are you hiding?” demanded the aristocrat as she reached up

and brushed her fingers down his neck and along his chest. "If you like, I can get Victoria, and we can have a thorough interrogation."

"No!"

She touched to fingers to the underside of his chin. "Then answer me, boy." Before he could speak, she smiled, "It's not difficult. I'm simply curious; whether you are delusional or if you have fallen through some gap in the building blocks of reality, I want to know about it. I want to know about you. Besides, I promise I won't punish you for your answers, so long as you are honest with me."

"Fine," he said. He tried to sound aggrieved, like he still possessed the option of defying her will. But then he puffed out his cheeks and said, "We try for equality in our world."

"Try?"

"It doesn't always work," he confessed.

"Why not?"

"Honestly, I don't know."

"But you have heard some theories, I'm sure."

"Sexism is still a problem."

"Sexism," she said, tasting the word. "I have never heard this term before, but the meaning seems pretty clear. Preference based on sex?"

"Exactly," he said. "It's still a problem." He hoped she wouldn't ask how, like maybe she would get bored. He was cooperating, after all. If she couldn't torment him or play with him, then maybe she would become disinterested and wander off.

Calvin wasn't that lucky.

"How?"

"In my country, women still aren't paid the same amount as men."

"Excuse me?"

"Basically, there was this really long period of time where women weren't expected to work, not outside of the home anyway."

"So what did they do instead?"

"They were housewives," he told her. "But look, I'm not a historian or anything. It's not like I'm an expert."

"I know," she said. "You're a boy. I'm well aware of the different problems associated with getting information from one source of information. Still, I'm not going to let you hide in your ignorance. I want to understand your world as you perceive it."

He didn't back down. This felt like another test, only he couldn't see an obvious answer. More to the point, he recognized her power and authority. Even if she didn't technically "own" him, she obviously had the right and willingness to punish him...

Whether he liked it or not, his answers had to please her.

"Tell me about these housewives," she said.

"Basically, they cooked and cleaned and took care of the home while their husbands—" Calvin stopped himself, especially as he watched her expression. She was clearly calculating through the implications.

"So they were slaves," she said.

"What? No!"

"Are you sure about that?"

"Yes?" Calvin said, although he couldn't insert any real vehemence or certainty into his voice. "They were marriages."

"What other options did women have if they didn't want to get married?"

"Not many," he said.

"So there were only economic pressures encouraging a woman to get married?"

"There were social pressures too," he admitted.

"It's a fascinating idea," she said as she reached up and stroked his cheek. "There are countries in this world that operate along similar lines. Slavery might be legal in this land, but there are other territories where it isn't permitted." But then she smirked.

"You're laughing," he said.

"Because it's funny. I suppose every culture clings to its own set of hypocrisies. There are lands here where men are considered to be citizens. No, they aren't allowed the right to vote or own property, but they are 'equal under the law to the best of their capabilities.'" She quoted the legal text.

"What, what does that mean?" Calvin asked, although he already suspected.

"It means that the boys aren't considered capable of being full citizens. So yes, in theory, they can have the same rights and authority as any woman, but they don't. More to the point, they are treated as second-class citizens, even if those aren't the actual laws. Personally, I prefer our queendom. The precedents are clear; boys are property. We don't play around. We are honest with who males are and how they should be treated."

“It’s not fair,” he grumbled before realizing she might be insulted.

“You’re right about that,” she said with a nod. “But this isn’t a question of fairness or justice. The world is frequently unfair and unjust.”

“You could make it better,” he said.

“What about you?” Lena asked, sounding genuinely curious. “What did you do to make your world a better place?”

He opened his mouth to respond, only nothing came out. “That’s what I suspected,” she said.

He braced himself, like he might get punished for his complacency, only then she stroked his neck again, likely petting him as though he were some beloved animal, a pet. “It’s okay,” she said. “Well, perhaps it isn’t okay. Our world, every world, is a function of what the people do in it. If you really want the world to be a better place, you have to take concrete actions. You need to channel your time, energy, and wealth into improving things.”

“Is that what you do?” Calvin asked. As he spoke, he did his best to sound respectful.

“Actually, yes,” she said. “Personally, I consider it to be an obligation for someone of my station.”

“A baroness,” he said.

“You sound surprised.”

“In my country, we don’t have noble titles. We abolished them with our last revolution.”

“Really?” She sounded more intrigued than offended. “Someday, I would like to hear about that.”

“There isn’t much to say,” Calvin told her honestly. Even as he spoke, he had to marvel at the bizarreness of the situation. He had this beautiful, dark-haired girl standing in front of him, and she had total control. She could have blindfolded him, gagged him, spanked him, or shocked him, simply because she felt like it. And yet, they were talking.

If he closed his eyes, maybe he could envision this conversation taking place at a bar, like they could be on a first date...

No. He couldn’t allow himself to think like that, especially because he would make it back to his world. He would get to the United States, he would have his phone in hand, and he could stream a movie, or drive around in his car. He would get back to his cubicle, and he wouldn’t resent that mouse or keyboard as he spent his hours answering questions and inputting data.

Because she still seemed interested, he continued, “I don’t know

much about early American psychology, but I'm guessing it was just a reaction to the British Empire. They had titles, so we decided we wouldn't."

"How do you determine rulership?"

"Democracy," he said again. She nodded. Perhaps that had been a test, like she wished to see whether or not he would stick with the same answers from before. "Everyone gets a vote."

"Fascinating. Even the children?"

"You have to be eighteen and a citizen," he clarified.

"Is every vote is counted equally?"

"Yes," he said. But then he stopped. "Well, actually, it's a little bit more complicated than that."

"Why?"

Calvin was really struggling here as he worked through his middle school and high school social studies classes. "For a lot of situations, the votes are handled differently. People in smaller states get votes that count more."

She grinned at him, like she couldn't decide whether or not this was a joke.

He clarified, "People in smaller states want to feel like their votes still count."

"So one person in one part of your nation gets a say, but someone else in a different part gets a larger say?"

"Technically, yes," he said.

"You know, when I win you, I might have you give a little speech to my friends."

"What? Why?"

"Because this is hilarious," she said.

"But, but didn't you tell me that every culture is filled with hypocrisies?"

"Hypocrisies, true. But this sounds more like an absurdity, don't you think?"

At a glance, he could tell that she didn't really care about his thoughts or opinions. Rather, he was an entertaining animal, like a bird that could sing or maybe a monkey that could juggle. In her eyes, he would always be an animal, some exotic creature and little more.

"I guess..." Calvin finally said because he needed to tell her something.

“Let’s go back to the relevant point,” she told him. “Let’s talk about those housewives. You claim they weren’t slaves?”

“They weren’t,” he said.

“But they had few options and faced significant social pressures?”

“Yes. But that’s changed now. Women have plenty of options.”

“But they don’t make as much for performing the same jobs?”

“No...”

“What about positions of leadership?”

Biting down, Calvin silently cursed. When he glanced up at this woman again, he realized something. Yes, she might smile or laugh at him, but he still couldn’t read her expression, not really. As an aristocrat, she must have learned from an early age to hide her truest thoughts and reactions.

Everyone did that to some degree, he knew. He had a teacher who once said that honesty, to some degree, had to be an illusion because everyone performed. It was instinctive, something as natural as breathing or blinking, because people needed to make choices. Even those who argued for “radical honesty” or “total transparency,” still had to choose specific words and details. They couldn’t say everything all at once, so they made choices. In making choices, they attempted to influence and manipulate their audiences.

“You’re scared,” Lena said.

“Nervous,” he admitted.

“And why would you be nervous? Is there something you don’t want to tell me? Are you worried I’m going to get upset?” Again, she flashed a smile, only now she revealed more of her teeth.

“We are making progress,” he said. “All across the world, women are making progress.”

“How?”

“They’re getting more assertive and aggressive.”

“You make that sound unusual.”

He opened his mouth, inhaled, and realized the mistake he just made.

“Tell me,” she commanded.

She touched the underside of his chin again, emphasizing the simple fact that he had to answer. If he chose to remain silent, then maybe she would need to grab one of the paddles...

“Okay, so part of women being housewives meant that they were supposed to behave in a specific way.”

“What way?” Lena wouldn’t allow him to hide behind vague responses. “Kind. Sweet. Soft. Demure,” he said, rattling off the words without even really thinking about it. Even now, he understood that many men expected women to behave this way. Maybe they didn’t know it or articulate it explicitly, but they didn’t want women who fought back or argued.

“Obedient?”

“Maybe,” he said.

“And these expectations linger?”

“In some places,” he said. “There are still people who would like to see women act like housewives.”

“What about the rules?”

“Explicitly, women and men are equal under the law. They get the same opportunities,” he said and felt a little bit better about making those points.

“Explicitly?”

Damn!

“Sometimes, the rules aren’t really enforced.”

“Explain,” she said.

“Please, do I have to do this?”

“You’re a boy,” she said. Then, without any hint of irony, she asked, “What do you think?”

The answer was obvious: he had to respond. And if he didn’t, this really could turn into an interrogation. For the moment, she enjoyed herself, but she might get more aggressive. Perhaps a different set of instincts would emerge.

“Okay,” he said, dipping his head back down. “Let’s say a woman wants to apply for a job at a company. Let’s say it’s an important position, like she might be the CEO or something.”

“The CEO?”

“The top executive,” he said.

“Go on.”

“So she is applying for this position, and she knows exactly what she’s doing. She has all of the right education and experience. But...”

“But what?”

“But she won’t I get hired.”

“Why not?”

“I guess that’s the question,” he said. “We see it in politics and business all the time. Women have made a ton of progress, especially in terms of getting hired. That whole housewife thing isn’t really a problem any longer, but women don’t get elected as often as men. They don’t take leadership positions either.”

“What are your guesses?”

“What?”

“You live in this world,” she said. “Surely, you must have some notion for what causes this disparity.”

“I...”

“Tell me,” she said. The hint of a threat alert just beneath the surface of those two words.

He shivered as she watched him and waited for his answer. Knowing he had to say something, he just guessed, “I don’t know. I mean, people talk about systemic sexism. It’s the idea that guys are in charge, and they want to hire other guys. Like, they aren’t necessarily being sexist. They aren’t trying to be unfair or anything, but they make the best decisions they can, and they are biased without even realizing it.”

“Are you biased without even realizing it?”

“Probably?”

“You are a very, very fascinating boy.” She seemed to consider him again. “My sister and I never set any rules, but I have made a decision. I want to see what you can do.”

That’s when she reached up, and she loosened the shackle on his right wrist, then his left. The restraints popped open, and he stumbled forward.

“You may remove the ankle chains,” she said.

Tentatively, he leaned down, and he opened the latches.

Then he glanced back at the door.

“You can try it if you like,” she said. “Of course, the consequences might be severe.”

“Like what?”

“Would you like to spend some extra time with Cassandra?”

“No!” Calvin squeaked out.

She laughed. “That’s what I thought.”

“I’ll be good,” he said quickly.

“That’s right,” she replied. Then she walked over to a chair set in the corner of the room. He had hardly noticed it before.

It was leather, and looked exquisite, more like a throne than anything else.

She lifted her skirt, pulled down her panties, and kicked them off easily without removing her boots.

“Come here, boy,” she said, beckoning him with the crawled movement of her finger.

For the last few seconds, he had felt frozen in place, like he couldn’t move on his own. But now, Calvin walked toward her. His legs felt unsteady. Maybe it was the fact that he had been restrained for so long. Just as easily, it might have been his own uncertainty. It seemed to spread through his body, especially as this dark-haired woman studied him with her hungry eyes.

“You are an intriguing creature,” she said. “And now, I want you on your knees with your mouth between my legs.”

“Isn’t that against the rules or something?”

“I’m an aristocrat,” she said haughtily. “I make the rules.”

“But what about your sister?”

“You’re a boy,” she said easily. “You don’t need to worry about her.”

He opened his mouth, like he needed to say something, but then she pointed to that spot right there between her black boots.

He lowered himself down onto his knees.

Before, he suspected that he might have been hypnotized. At this point, there was something about being so close to this woman. It could have been her confidence or something else, but he experienced this instinctive tug, like he couldn’t resist her orders.

He was a stranger in this new land, and he didn’t understand how things worked, but now he had his weight pressed against his hands and knees. She looked down at him. “You want to be a good boy for me, don’t you?”

“I, I don’t know,” he said truthfully.

“It’s okay if you are uncertain. You’re a boy. You just need to relax and do as you’re told. When you stop thinking, you’ll be so much happier.”

“I don’t think—”

“Exactly,” she said, cutting him off. Then she reached for him and slipped her fingers around the back of his skull before nudging him forward.

The soft contours of her skin brushed along his cheeks. The hem of her skirt was warm against his forehead, and he could hardly see anything, but it didn’t matter. The tip of his nose slipped along her sex.

“Serve,” she commanded. Maybe in her language that was a simple order, but Calvin couldn’t believe he was about to do this.

She tightened her grip on the back of his head. Her fingertips pressed down, and he knew her patience wouldn’t last for much longer. Then she would force him...

Tentatively, he slid out his tongue, and he tasted her.

As he licked, he knew this wasn’t about his pleasure. She could be selfish, demanding, and take whatever she liked. In the meantime, he would simply have to obey.

*Serve.*

And yet, she never saw him as a person did she?

*I have to get out of here. I can’t let these women take me. I can’t let them keep me as a slave!* But even as he concentrated on those thoughts, Calvin continued to lick. He slid his tongue up and down her crevice as he lapped like a thirsty dog.

“Good boy,” she said. “Good. Very good. I love having you down on your knees like this. Boys always look so cute in this position.”

He couldn’t even grimace. In fact, the words seemed to wash off of him as he served her.

“Deeper,” she said. “I want you to go deeper now.”

She let out a quick little gasp, that sent this flutter of pride reverberating through his body. Although she was in control, he could surprise her. More importantly, he could show her that she wasn’t always in control.

Exhaling slowly through his nostrils, he obeyed, plunging his tongue down along the deepest recess of her crevice.

A little squeal of ecstasy shot from her mouth.

He wanted to laugh.

He did that! He made her feel this good! Under most circumstances, Lena Katina was this refined young aristocrat, a woman who understood exactly what it took to communicate with others. She could probably be manipulative and adroit when it came to courtly maneuvers. But right there, he actually made her squeal!

Surprisingly proud of himself, he tried twice as hard now. His tongue sped up, and that’s when she embraced her hands against his shoulders. “Oh, yes. Please. Yes, just like that. Keep going, boy. Show me what you can do. Show me what you can do with that clever tongue of yours!”

He obliged, licking furiously. He moved his tongue up and down, left and right, in tight little patterns and expansive sweeps.

He alternated as best he could. Not only that, he realized something else: he was paying attention to the sounds she made. He focused on her breathing, and the way her fingers tightened or loosened around his shoulders.

Yes, he could do this! He could make this woman feel good.

But was that what he really wanted?

He thought back to his rebelliousness from before, over the last few days. Yes, it had only been a couple of days, yet their influence seemed to seep into the fabric of his identity.

In that moment, he could almost pretend that he didn't have a chastity cage locked around his manhood. He could almost pretend that he still had the option of walking away.

But they had caught him like an animal. They dosed him and brought him down. Just as importantly, they now wished to determine who would get to own him.

Even so, he kept licking. He moved his head down and up. His tongue got tired, and his neck started to ache, but he didn't care.

Why not? Why didn't he stop? Why didn't he just stand up and look into her eyes and tell her he wouldn't surrender.

The cage. The shocks. Cassandra. The restraints.

All of it had beaten down so many of his defenses, leaving him there on his hands and knees as he kept his head beneath her skirt. He kept licking, moving his tongue up and down, all for her pleasure and satisfaction, like nothing else could matter.

"Good boy. This is what I like to see. Yes. You know how to please me, don't you? Yes, keep going. That's right. Show me what you can do. Show me what you can do with that dexterous tongue of yours!"

He couldn't know it, but she looked down at him for just a moment. She admired the contours of his buttocks, the strength of his arms, and at the other details of his body.

He had been so articulate just a few minutes ago, describing his world.

But there he was, down on his hands and knees now, licking and serving her by her command. It was an exquisite dichotomy, she reflected.

"Yes. Just like that. Keep going. Keep going." She panted out now,

closing her eyes as she surrendered to the pleasure.

Then his tongue swept up and down her clit just as she expected, and the anticipation soon exploded into wild satisfaction. Hot ecstasy coursed through her, and she threw her head back, moaning and crying out.

The sounds echoed off of the walls until he tentatively pulled back.

With his lips wet with her juices, he glanced up at her.

She smiled down at this boy. "Oh yes. I'm definitely going to keep you," she promised. "One way or another, you're going to be mine."

Braced on his hands and knees, Calvin hadn't said anything for a little while. He remained quiet as he didn't wish to distract her. For the next few minutes, Lena seemed to bask in the afterglow of her orgasm.

"I feel like I should give you something in return," she said. But then she giggled, "Silly, isn't it? You're just a boy, and boys serve."

"I'm not just a boy," he said, his voice low.

But then she touched the underside of his chin again. Her fingers slid from his Adam's apple and up along his jaw. As she touched him, little sparks of sensation pulsed through his body. His shoulders tightened, and she said, "Yes, you are. You're an intriguing boy. You're a fascinating boy, but you are just a boy nonetheless. Now, let's save some time. You see that cage right there?"

She pointed toward a black, metal cage off on the other side of the room.

"Yes?"

"Get in into."

"Please, can we talk about this?"

"What is there to talk about?" Lena inquired.

He didn't know. Obviously, he wanted to request his release once again, but this woman wouldn't free him. Still, he had to try, didn't he?

"You, you don't have to keep me as a slave. You could let me go..." Even as the words left his lips, he knew how lame they sounded.

The smile left her lips, "Be an obedient boy right now and get in that cage."

His throat clenched, but he found himself yielding to her command. He started to walk across the room, back toward the cage just as she ordered.

"Boy," she said.

He stopped, tensing up.

“Crawl,” she said.

He glanced back at the cage. Climbing into captivity would mean something, he knew. It would be the worst kind of surrender to this aristocrat. She would know that she really could do whatever she wished with him. He wouldn't be able to fight, argue, or resist. If their conversation had made any difference in how she saw him, he would squander her new perspective.

And yet, what choice did he have?

None. That much was obvious. That's why he lowered himself down onto his hands and knees for the second time. In doing so, he acquiesced. He started crawling, moving along on all fours until he made it to the cage. He climbed inside.

As she walked away, Lena expected to bask in the easy glow of victory. Perhaps it shouldn't have counted. He was just a boy, after all. And yet, there was always something so alluring about training a male. It felt like an accomplishment.

Better yet, she thought of him back in the cell, caged, both between his legs and all around his body. As she started to grin, she knew she needed to appear more professional.

As she strode down one of the short corridors and back toward her guest chambers, Victoria found her. “There you are,” she said.

“Yes,” Lena replied.

Her former tutor paused for a moment, squinted slightly, and seemed to consider the young woman before her for several long seconds. Then she decided not to say anything and continued, “It's time for the final agreement between you and your sister.”

“Let's get to it then,” Lena said.

“You seem very cheerful today.”

“It's a beautiful day,” Lena said.

Victoria and Lena headed back into the dining chamber. Once there, they found Julia sitting there, only she had something on the table in front of her.

“What's that?”

Small and black, matte on one side and shining on the other, it was a rectangle with rounded edges. About the size of Julia's hand, it doesn't seem to do anything.

“I sent out one of the huntress's to see if she could find any evidence

of our ‘guest’s’ path before coming across us. She found his backpack. This was inside of it.”

“Anything else?”

“Plenty,” Julia replied. “But this is the most intriguing piece. Have you ever seen anything like it?”

She slid it across the table, Selena grabbed it, picked it up, and was surprised by the strange weight. She examined the different sides and saw a strange circle. There also appeared to be some sigil on the back set in light gray: G.

“Does this prove anything?” Julia asked.

“No, not really,” Lena said with a shake of her head.

“It is something to be considered,” Victoria pointed out.

“Agreed.” Lena set the device back down on the table, almost like she worried about what it might do. “I talked to be boy. Apparently, the political situation in his land is quite different.”

“How?”

“It isn’t simply a matter that women and men are equal in his land. Rather, men rule, and women seem to be subordinate.”

“Are we sure we don’t want to reconsider the possibility that he is simply insane?”

“And how would you explain that?” Lena asked as she glanced back down toward the small rectangle.

“Fair point,” Julia conceded.

“It doesn’t really matter, not right now anyway. Instead, dear sister, I think we need to determine ownership rights.”

“Yes, please,” she said.

As Lena sat down, both of the women peeked back toward the scholar. She touched the tips of her fingers together and said, “I trust you above taken time to consider my offer.”

“Two races on two different days,” Julia told her. “We’re both going to be timed. Whoever catches him quickest gets to keep him.”

“Exactly,” Victoria said. “Now, should we be allowed to use mounts?”

“Sounds like more fun to me,” Julia said.

“Are you sure about that? I’ve always been the better rider.”

“You’ve always *thought* of yourself as the better rider,” answered Julia with the smug smile of a little sister.

“What about tranquilizer darts?” Victoria asked.

“This might make it a little bit too easy,” Lena said.

“Then what do you suggest?”

“How have your experiments been going with the shock batons?”

“Quite well,” Victoria said. “They only have a few charges each, but I’m sure it would be plenty to make sure this boy comes back on a leash.”

“And what if he escapes?” Lena asked.

“Don’t worry. You may not be a skilled a huntress as I am,” Julia interjected, “But I’m sure you’ll do just fine.”

Lena was very, very tempted to stick her tongue out at her little sister.

“I’m serious,” she said. “If he gets away, there could be consequences.”

“Like what? Another group of women will find him, enslave him, and give him exactly what he deserves.” Julia actually sounded irritated at the possibility, like they could lose their toy to a bunch of strangers.

“I admire your confidence,” Lena decided to say. After that, she glanced back at Victoria. “That said, you’re probably right. We will be able to track him down and catch him in each time.”

“Who would like to go first?”

“What do you say, little sister? Do you have a preference?”

Julia pursed her lips and stared off into the distance. “I’ll go first,” she said.

“Agreed,” Lena replied. “Now, it’s just a question of hunting him down.”

“Would you like him to know what’s going on? If you prefer, we give him the opportunity to think he has snuck away.”

“No,” Lena decided with a shake of her head. “That might for the first time, but if it happened twice in two days, he would become suspicious. It’s better for him to know the truth.”

“Is it?” Julia asked skeptically. “Is it really?”

“He’s smarter than he looks,” Lena answered. “As such, I think he deserves to know the truth. Besides, if we’re actually giving him the opportunity to escape, this could work to his advantage.”

“He would certainly have the right incentive,” Julia said with a nod.

“That’s agreed,” Victoria said. “In the morning, your boy will run.”

Both Julia and Lena smiled at one another, their eyes sparkling as they contemplated the different possibilities. It was time for them to compete

again.

Locked in his cage, Calvin felt exactly like a dog. He couldn't run, yet he actually yearned for the opportunity to follow along as the women rode on their horses. He itched to stretch his legs, to feel the sun, to walk upright and *move* once again.

Somehow, the prospect of being leashed and stripped naked, put on display, and humiliated in front of these females didn't really bother him now. Maybe his current position was so demeaning that he couldn't imagine anything worse.

Only then he tensed up when the doors to the large chamber opened. Victoria entered first, followed by Julia and Lena.

They stood over him. They gazed down at him.

"Hello, Calvin," Lena said. "How are you doing?" She sounded friendly.

Feeling defiant after several hours of solitude, he glowered up at the women. "I feel like I want to get out of here," he snapped back, grabbing onto the bars of his cage and shaking them. The metal clanked and jostled around him.

"I'm sure," Victoria replied.

Julia crouched down and looked past the bars and into his eyes. "You are so adorable, especially when you get all fierce like this. You really think you can intimidate us, don't you? You really think we're going to respect you." She clicked her tongue and shook her head like she thought this was absolutely hilarious. From her perspective, a boy who might try to overwhelm a woman was an oddity.

"I'm going to get away," he vowed.

"About that," Lena interrupted. "We're going to give you the opportunity to escape. Twice."

"What?"

"That's right, boy," Julia said. She actually reached between the bars of the cage and slid her fingers along his cheek. Then she tapped tip of his nose like he really was just a canine therefore her amusement. "You see, my sister and I have made a decision. We're not going to share you, so we should compete for you."

"Right," he said. "How?"

"We're both going to hunt you. In the morning, Julia will chase you

down. After she brings you back, it'll be my turn," Lena told him.

"If I'm just going to be part of your game, why would I bother?"

"Isn't it obvious?" Julia asked him. When he didn't say anything, she smirked, "You shortsighted boys. You never really can think things through, can you?"

He continued to glare at her.

With a shrug, she decided to tell him, "Think about it. We're giving you a *genuine* chance to run away. If you escape, then you are free."

"But you should be aware that there are other women who have territorial claims in this region," Victoria told him. "If you're caught, your fate could be worse than what you would find here."

"Really? How?" Calvin asked. His tone tightened with sarcastic disdain. "The two of you just want to turn into a slave. What would someone else do?"

"I admire your bravado," Lena said. "I'm not interested in frightening you. The point stands. If you run and if you evade us, you may very well be able to escape."

As he heard those words, he didn't know if he could believe her. But then something else occurred to him. If they didn't know what phones or cellular networks were, then they didn't have any method for tracking him. If they genuinely let him go and he could run off, he might be able to get back. Maybe he find that lightning storm if it persisted. Maybe there was some way to get back to his own world...

Even if he just escaped, he might be able to find someone who could help him.

And yet, in this world, men were enslaved all across the globe, it seemed.

He wasn't going to be able to find someone to help him.

But would it be better than slavery?

Yes.

He glanced over at Lena, and he imagined what it might be like if *she* owned him.

Only then he swallowed and pictured a collar around his neck. Maybe she would be reading some book, and he would be on his knees, massaging her feet. Or maybe he would slide his head back between her legs to satisfy her carnal desires.

Yes, those thoughts pumped through his head, but he wasn't sure

what to do with them.

“Be sure to eat,” Victoria said. “Be sure to drink. You don’t know how long you’ll have to run.”

“You don’t have to bother,” Julia said as she waved away the idea. “I’m planning on catching you within a few minutes.”

The next morning, he contemplated the food left outside of his cage. There was a tray right there with a few sliced pieces of fruit that he couldn’t identify, plus some dried meat. They also left him a cup.

He ate and he drank. Along the way, he thought of what his future might be.

All too soon, Victoria came back. She dropped a collar down into the cage and ordered him to put it on.

“If you don’t cooperate, I will tell the others, and they may decide to cancel your opportunity. You wouldn’t like that, would you? No. I can see it in your eyes. Even now, you still believe you might be able to escape their hold on you.”

“I’m going to get away,” he said. He didn’t know why he told her this, especially because he has no way of proving it, not yet anyway.

“Confidence can help,” Victoria agreed. “But first, you must put on the collar. After that, I will be she went take you back outside. Then Julia will start her hunt.”

“Do I get a head start?”

“Ten minutes,” said the scholar.

He nibbled on the inside of his mouth and considered this. Ten minutes wasn’t a lot of time, but it would have to do.

Reluctantly, he grabbed the black, leather collar and slipped it around his neck. He pulled the clasp tight, and then he looked back up at her.

“Good boy,” she said as she opened the cage door. He crawled out and stood up, just in time for her to slip the leash into place. She latched it on, tugged, and guided the naked boy out.

“How does it feel?”

“What? Captivity?”

“Your chastity,” Victoria said as she glanced back at him. She casually let her eyes roam along his cock and balls.

“I hate it,” he said honestly.

“I have thought about writing a monograph on the effects of chastity

on the male psyche. Tell me. After being in chastity for a while, do you feel more obedient? Do you feel more susceptible to female commands?"

"No," he said.

"It hasn't been very long," she said, her tone conciliatory. She almost made it sound like she felt bad for him.

"It's not going to change anything for me," he promised her.

"Are you sure about that? Have you thought about what it might be like after a few days, a few weeks, or a few months?"

He didn't want to play her game or engage in this line of inquiry, but they continued to walk through her property, down one corridor and past different doors. With each step, he tried to remain silent, but he hated the idea that this woman thought he could be so easily manipulated.

"It wouldn't make any difference," he said.

"And what if I offered you access to the key?" Victoria paused and turned back. A set of double doors led outside, but she blocked the way outside. "What would you be willing to do?"

"Do you have it?"

"You didn't answer my question," she retorted.

He knew this was foolish, but maybe this woman really did have it. Biting down, he glanced toward her boots. "I don't know."

"Would you be willing to get down on your knees and kiss my boots?"

His brows tightened with confusion.

Normally, when he saw Victoria, she seemed somehow more professional and detached. And yet, she was a woman like the others. She had her own appetites, desires, and drives.

"I guess," he said. He wanted those words to seem embittered and angry.

She laughed anyway.

"Prove it," she said.

"What? Now?"

"The young mistresses are waiting for you, but I think we can spare a few moments."

"I'm not going to do it," he promised.

"Did you know that they have no intention of letting you out? Both of them love the idea of keeping you locked in chastity in perpetuity."

"No..." His eyes widened as he registered those words and

considered the possibility.

Even now, after such a short time in a chastity cage, his body thrummed with need. It was a familiar sensation, something he experienced right when he hit puberty. He remembered going to school, being embarrassed of his erections, all while recognizing the simple fact that he would have to wait until he got home to relieve the pressure.

But now, while locked up, he didn't just have to wait a few hours. It could be days, weeks, or longer!

As those different thoughts ran through his head, he found himself crouching down and kneeling before this woman.

"We don't want to keep them waiting," Victoria reminded him.

His insides tensed as he considered all of this.

Getting down on his knees was bad enough, but was he really going to kiss her boots?

"Go on," she said. She gave his leash a little tug, if only to remind him of his status.

He bent his head forward. Bowing down before this woman, he locked his teeth together, nuzzled her right boot with the tip of his nose, and the aroma of the leather filled his senses. With his eyes closed, he knew this was his last chance.

Technically, this woman served as a scholar and tutor. She wasn't supposed to have this kind of power.

That yet, she was a woman, while he was a boy, which gave her every advantage.

"Hold your hands behind your back, and start kissing," she said.

"Does the position really matter?"

"Because I'm telling you how to do it right, it clearly does," she said. She made it sound so obvious that he couldn't possibly disagree with her.

He bit down again, only now he obeyed her. He crossed his wrists behind his back. His fingers pushed down into his palms while the frustration mounted, but he obeyed her. Telling himself he just needed to get this over with, he kissed her boot.

She heard the puckered smack and chuckled, "Very good. Now tell me how you feel."

"Humiliated," he said.

"That's a good reaction for a boy such as yourself." Jerking his head back up, he glowered at her. "How can it be good? You like being a

humiliated?”

“It’s not about what I like or dislike. It’s about you. We are different people, and you need this. It’s good for you.”

His lips parted, and he bared his teeth like some kind of wild animal.

“Be careful,” she said. “If you try to bite me, you will be muzzled like a wild animal.”

“I’m not going to bite you,” he said.

“Good,” she said, yanking on his leash and forcing him back to his feet as she strode through the double doors.

When she pushed them open, a cascading blade of light cut across his face. He blinked rapidly as his eyes and struggled to adjust.

“Our prize,” Julia said. She strode up to him, leaned forward, and whispered, “If you decide not to run, maybe I’ll be nicer to you.”

Despite her attempt to keep her voice low and quiet, Lena still figured out what she was doing. “You can’t trust my little sister, especially because she has a bad habit of breaking her toys.”

“You should have seen him a few minutes ago,” Victoria said. “I don’t think you have to worry about his best efforts. You’re going to try to run, aren’t you?”

He exhaled slowly, then looked at each of the women in turn. “I’m going to get away,” he said.

“No, you’re not,” Lena said. She didn’t raise her voice, nor did she sound especially aggressive or hostile; then again, she didn’t need to. There was something about her perfectly crafted certitude.

“I will maintain the stopwatch,” Victoria said as she pulled out a timepiece that would have belonged to another century on Calvin’s world.

“Are you ready?” Victoria asked.

Julia stepped back and nodded. Then it was Lena’s turn to stride up to him. “Do your best. I don’t want her to accuse me of cheating.”

“I’m going to get away,” he reiterated.

Calvin could make this point as many times as he liked, yet these women had already made up their minds. They couldn’t envision a scenario where he escaped.

Well, he was just going to surprise them then!

“Ready,” said the scholar. “Set...”

Calvin shifted his weight even as he glanced around. Part of him was surprised to that this could happen so quickly. Anticipation boiled through his

body, then she called out that final word.

“Go!”

Victoria, Julia, and Lena watched as he darted along the grass and out toward the wilderness, past the boundaries of the estate.

“Which direction do you think he’s going to go in?”

“He will probably run back for the woods,” Julia said. “Those will give him the most cover, plus he might be a little bit more familiar with them.”

“Unless he intends to surprise you,” Lena said.

“How long has it been?” Julia asked, glancing back at her former tutor. “I’m getting bored.”

“Two minutes,” Victoria replied.

“Impatience,” Lena said with a bemused shake of her head. “Are you sure you have what it takes to train a boy like this?”

Julia shrugged. “Having him will be a lot of fun, but I have been thinking about that. I’m wondering if I should trade him off to some of my subordinates.”

“Really?” Something inside of Lena tensed. As far as she was concerned, when a woman owned a slave, she should keep him all to herself. There was a certain intimacy that needed to be exchanged between the woman and her head boy.

Then again, another set of words echoed inside of her head, *“I sent him off for your own good. You’re getting too attached.”*

Refusing to let her eyes moisten, Lena drew upon her practiced expressions and kept her features neutral. No one would be able to tell what she was thinking. More importantly, no one would be able to discern what she felt.

At this point, she wouldn’t even let herself remember his name.

“Yeah,” Julia said. “Why not? I have some really smart women who work for me, and I think they could have a lot of fun with a boy like Calvin.”

“What if they break him?”

“I could always get a new one,” Julia said with a shrug.

“But he’s unique.”

“He’s a boy,” Julia said. “I mean, yeah, he’s a little bit rarer, but I’m sure I could find some other disobedient, rebellious male in another auction house. If anything, I might be able to get them for a better price!”

Run. Run hard.

Run fast!

Those were the only thoughts pumping through his head as he kicked to the ground and darted from one stride to the next. Before long, the sunlight pumped into his skin, leaving him hot as he panted for breath.

Even so, he didn't stop.

With every step, he waited to hear the of hoofbeats as Julia hunted him.

He made it down to the tree line. Once there, he glanced over his shoulder. He squinted for a moment, and a couple of droplets of sweat got into his eyes. Ignoring the burning as best he could, he wiped away those droplets with the back of his hand, turned, and continued to run.

The weight from his chastity cage felt strange, but he ignored it.

At the same time, Calvin tried to tell himself that not having a backpack or extra supplies to weigh him down was an advantage.

The shade from the canopy blocked out most of the sunlight. Still, the warm shadows stretched out ahead of him.

Where was he going to go? What was he going to do?

Calvin told himself that it didn't matter. He could worry about the future later. For now, he had to get away from that redhaired huntress.

In this first two minutes, he wondered precisely what he could do. Were there any strategies he had neglected?

Then he looked up, and he thought about climbing one of the trees. If he couldn't outrun Julia Katina, then maybe he could hide from her...

Dismissing the idea, he knew she could wait him out. She could patrol these woods, track him down, and find him. Or worse, he glanced over his shoulder and looked down at the ground behind him.

Was he leaving tracks?

As a city boy, Calvin had no idea how to track someone, but he wasn't walking on stone either. He probably broke a bunch of leaves or sticks without even realizing it. For all he knew, he left an obvious trail, one she would be able to follow.

That's why he broke into another jog and raced ahead, doing his best to put as much distance between him and the pursuer as he could.

As he moved, strange thoughts fluttered through his mind. In particular, he kept coming back to the question of her abilities and talents.

Online, he frequently saw people lament the loss skills that modern kids and teenagers no longer possessed. So many commentators complained that kids couldn't drive a stick, write in cursive, or perform some other skill that had once been considered basic. Calvin only shook his head at those comments, especially because the skill sets had simply changed. No, kids couldn't write checks, but they knew how to use apps and photomanipulation software on their phones. There would always be an opportunity cost.

So what about Julia? What would she be able to do? How was he underestimating her?

At the same time, he wondered if maybe he had underestimated himself. Maybe he could use some skill set or ability to escape.

Granted, that would have been far more likely if he still had his phone. But he didn't, and he couldn't worry about that.

Pushing a little bit more speed into his legs, he ran between trees and rocks as he made his way along the curves of the hilly landscape.

After a little while, he came to a stream.

He glanced over his shoulder.

After the run through the heat, he was thirsty. More to the point, he didn't know when he might be able to find another water source.

He could have continued in his current direction, or he could start following the stream. But where would it go?

Biting down, he hated this indecision as it paralyzed him. As hard as he tried, he couldn't come up with an obvious answer. If he followed the stream, would that be predictable? Would she decide that he needed water, so he would have to stick with his only known source?

Before making a decision, Calvin approached the water, crouched down beside it, cupped his hands, and pulled some of the cold liquid up to his lips. It was almost icy!

The cold water ran down his throat, and he could feel it pool of the base of his stomach.

That was incredible, he reflected.

He drank some more, glanced up, and wondered how long he should stay here. If he wasted a lot of time, Julia might be able to track him down.

What kind of supplies did she decide to bring? Was she loaded down by some heavy backpack? If so, maybe he had another advantage...

Unlikely.

Both of the Katina sisters seemed strong, like they knew exactly how

to wander out in the wilderness. For these girls, this had to be recreational. It was a game, an easy way for them to blow through some stress.

“They’re playing with me,” he whispered.

That’s why they let him go in the first place.

Still, it was his chance.

He couldn’t blow it, nor could he allow his own insecurities to strip away his determination. He pulled some more water up to his lips, gulped it down, and looked around again.

Could he fight her? What if he found some rock or discarded branch?

Strangely enough, even after all this time and everything he experienced, he still felt this odd sense of shame at the prospect of fighting a young woman. It seemed silly, especially considering everything he had seen her do, yet he still needed to resist, right?

What if he hurt her?

“This is ridiculous. She’s hunting me,” he growled.

Even so, he worried about hurting her. He tried to imagine what it would be like if he swung a branch or a rock, connected, and she dropped to the ground.

He decided to go upstream.

Calvin didn’t have any logical reason for this. He just followed his instincts and hoped for the best. The water bubbled beside him, and he kept glancing over his shoulder. It felt strange to move at an angle now, especially because part of him wanted to run in a straight line away from the Katina sisters.

He didn’t know where he was going; he had no idea where he might end up. Even so, he kept pushing himself. He climbed up between the hills.

The trees loomed over him, and he couldn’t see very much. He started to wonder if this was a mistake, only then he thought he felt something. It was this little whisper of uncertainty along the back of his neck.

Turning around quickly, he froze.

He saw her!

She wore her boots, tight leggings, and a tunic. She glanced around, and he couldn’t tell whether or not she saw him.

She approached the stream, and he knew his only chance was to remain utterly motionless.

Only then, the redhead looked up, and that’s when her eyes seemed to lock onto him. In an instant, he knew he had been seen!

Run!

This one imperative shot through his body.

Calvin swung his fingers through the air as he slashed ahead and pulled himself forward. He ran uphill, which might have been a mistake, but he couldn't think through any of the other choices. With one long stride after another, he pulled himself up.

Twenty feet on, he glanced back.

She ran at him, coming hard.

He easily pictured Julia and Lena playing in these hills as little girls, learning their way around and developing the kind of endurance he couldn't match.

His stomach twisted, but he knew he'd have to fight.

"I'm not going to let her get me," he said. But even as those words tumbled from his lips, he didn't really know what to do.

She moved with the expert grace of a huntress who enjoyed the chase. With every stride, she kept her eyes aimed in his direction as she drank in the details around her.

Calvin crouched down, grabbed a loose branch, and picked it up. Ridiculously, he realized it was way too thin. It wasn't going to work, not as any kind of weapon. He tossed it down, grabbed another one, one that was bigger this time. He lifted it, and that's when he stepped out in front of her.

"I don't want to fight you. Please. Just let me go, and we can pretend this never happened."

"You know how much my sister would tease me if I let a boy go?" Julia asked. She smirked just a little bit, like this was hilarious.

"I don't want to hurt you," he said.

"You won't," she replied with that same, aggravating with perfect confidence.

Calvin didn't know what to do. But then, he remembered a friend who talked about embracing the troglodyte part of his brain. "Sometimes, you just have to let the primitive side take over because you have to fight. You have to more like an animal, run hard, and throw away civilization."

At the time, Calvin thought those points were just random pieces of dialogue from one of their many conversations. But now, he knew that if he tried to behave like a modern guy, he would fail.

After all, a woman like Julia would have no problem tranquilizing him, collaring him, or leashing him. She would drag him back, put him on

display, and shove him forward like a trophy.

“I’m never going to be what you want,” he said.

Stupid. Again, he just tried to reason with her. But as she strode closer, she reached down into one of her pockets. He couldn’t see what she held, but his insides tensed and twitched. It wasn’t fair; she knew what she was doing. She was comfortable out here. Even the idea of hunting another person seemed normal to her.

It was just a game.

But it was just a game that he had to win.

What could he do?

How could he cheat?

Calvin almost wished that he had tried to ambush her. Maybe that would have worked, but now he tightened his grip on his primitive club, raised it a little higher, tensed his muscles, and got ready to swing.

“Is that you really think? Are you worried about disappointing me?” Julia asked.

He blinked, and some of the frantic tension dissipated from his body. He needed to concentrate on his adrenaline, on his aggression, on his rage...

“That’s cute,” she said. She strode forward again, coming closer and closer.

Rather than hold his ground, Calvin found himself drawing back. He couldn’t help it, not when he was faced by this young woman. At any moment, she could leap forward, pounce and grab him. She could shove him into the ground...

He had to stop her, only then her voice cut across the air again, “You really think you’ve a chance, don’t you? That’s so sweet. I mean, I’m sure you’re going to do your best. I want to see you try. But it’s not going to work. You have to know that.” She flashed him another grin, revealing her teeth even as she tilted her head to the side and let some of her hair fall along one shoulder.

“I’m bigger than you,” he said.

“Yeah, and I ride horses all the time,” she said. “What’s your point?”

“I’m not a horse,” he said.

“You’re a wild animal that needs to be domesticated,” she replied. Quite carefully, she stood just beyond the reach of his club. She looked utterly relaxed, and that’s when he raised the weapon higher.

“I’m going to domesticate you, Calvin. I’m going to make sure that

you are properly trained. You will recognize and acknowledge my authority. You probably won't be able to do it out loud, not when I put it in your mouth, but that's fine."

"I'm not going to be your pet!"

"What? Do you think Lena is going to get you? Is that what you're hoping?"

"I am a man. I can make my own decisions," he said.

"You're a boy," she said. "You need to be owned."

"That's not true!"

This time, she didn't answer. Instead, while he watched, she leaped forward. She moved like a blur, cutting across his vision, rushing to one side, and knocking her shoulder into his chest.

Calvin had never fought, not really. Back in high school, there had been that one time when he bumped his chest up against another guy. Before anyone could throw a punch, one of the teachers showed up.

But at least Calvin had been able to hold his ground then. This time, he stumbled back.

She swept her foot out, catching the back of his leg with her ankle. Suddenly, the ground slipped out from beneath him, he flew, falling down hard. The air was knocked from his lungs, and she started to jump down.

Some instinct took a hold of him, and he rolled to one side.

She grinned over at him.

Without thinking, he scrambled up onto his hands and knees, and he started to dash away.

He was running from this girl!

She was shorter and lighter. He should have enjoyed every advantage, but she knew what she was doing. She had probably done this before.

"You can't get away," she called out to him. Amusement played along every syllable as she watched him. He grabbed his club again, only this time he didn't stop. He turned around, faced her, lifted it, and roared.

Dread should have stretched across her beautiful face. He charged her like some medieval conscript with his weapon held high.

In the next instant, she dropped away like fluid, sweeping to the left. His club swung down clumsily through the air, and she avoided it.

His tip hit the ground, so she stabbed the heel of her boot against of the brittle wood. Pressing her weight down, she cracked through it.

Suddenly, his club broke. Ridiculously, he lifted it up and examined

it, like he couldn't comprehend what just happened.

"Poor boy," she teased him. "Did I just break your toy?"

Calvin let go, stumbled back, and got back up onto his feet. "We could try this a different way," she said. "If you get down on your knees right now and promise to come back with me without a fight, I will be a kinder owner for you."

"I'm not going to have an owner!"

She giggled, like this was funny. "Young man, you are already owned. You are already property. That's not up for debate. The only question is whether or not you belong to me or my sister. And trust me, you don't want to belong to her."

"Why, why not?"

"She's an aristocrat," Julia said. "She would probably just lock you up in a display case somewhere and let her friends poke at you from time to time. You don't want that, do you?" Julia shook her head from side to side. "No, you want to be played with. You want an owner who is going to have some fun with you. You want someone exciting!"

"You would probably just keep me locked up so you could hear me beg," he growled back at her. At the same time, he started to step back.

Julia shrugged, like he wasn't wrong. "Maybe from time to time," she said. But her eyes glowed with impish delight as she strode toward him. "But then, what's wrong with that? You are so good at begging!"

His fingers pushed down into his hands, and he didn't know how well he could throw a punch, but it felt like he didn't have a choice.

Then he stopped, braced himself, and leaned forward slightly as he got ready to fight. He wasn't going to lose, not to this redheaded girl.

Again and again, he focused on all of his advantages.

"I hunted you down," she said. "And I did it pretty quickly. See you might as well just get on your knees and acknowledge my superiority. You couldn't get away. You're never, ever going to escape. You couldn't escape me, and you won't be able to get away from my sister either. She may not be as fast as I am, but she still knows what she's doing. Go on. Save us both a little bit of time."

Finally, she came close enough. He threw a punch, only she hopped back, pulling beyond his range. His knuckles sailed through the air, and he the momentum caught him off guard; he lost his balance, tumbled forward, and landed on his knees.

The next thing he knew, she was right there in front of him.

She grabbed him by his hair, pulled his head back, and he didn't know what to do. He raised his arms for a moment, like he intended to shove Julia away from him, only something held him in place.

"That's right," she said. "You don't want to defy me. Deep down, you know you need to be owned. You want to come with be back to my factory, don't you? You want to be treated like any other boy—any other animal."

He jerked his head back and away. She lost her grip on his hair, and he jumped to his feet.

"Don't do it," she said. Apparently, she could read his body language quite easily.

"I'm not going to let you catch me," he said.

"I already have," she said.

"No," he told her. "No one is going to catch me!"

That's when he turned, and frantic, pulsing dread still clung to his insides. He imagined himself back at her factory, pulling heavy carts or hammering away at random widgets.

As he spun, he started to run again. He told himself he wasn't going to stop, not until he lost her.

And then he felt the prick right there against his left buttock. The little jolt of stinging caught him off guard, almost as though he had been bitten by some bug.

But then he reached back, and he felt the tiny needle. He pulled it out, slowed to a stop, and that's when the drugs started to kick in.

"You're not going to lose consciousness," she said. "But you are going to relax. You're going to feel very, very obedient," she said.

He turned around and shook his head.

Sure enough, the edges of his vision started to warp and wobble. With every moment, he tried to shrug off the effects of whatever drug was now running through his system. It probably didn't help that his heart was pounding wildly and his breathing came in one frantic gasp after another.

She strode up to him again.

"Are you ready for this?"

That's when he saw the collar.

He started to stumble back again.

Remaining upright and on his feet felt like an achievement.

"And where do you think you're going, boy?"

“Away,” he said. “I have to get away!” Calvin didn’t know why he answered her. Seriously, it didn’t make any sense. He could have kept his mouth shut and retreated. Still, he managed to turn away again.

He could do this. He had flee!

“Stop,” she called out. His momentum drained away, and he slowed to a halt. He didn’t even turn around. Instead, he kept his eyes aimed forward.

“What do you think?” Julia asked. “Be honest, I always marvel at this kind of chemistry. I mean, you boys could always look so strong and powerful, but just a little dose of this is enough to render you completely obedient.”

“No...” Calvin managed to whisper.

If he had been completely truthful with himself, that he would have admitted that his brief protest had been for himself, to prove that she couldn’t *actually* control him.

Only then, she put her hands on her hips, smirked, and said, “Tell me you are completely obedient.”

Calvin should have been able to laugh at her. It should have been so easy to just chuckle or shake his head and tell her that she was wrong. Those actions had come so easily before, only now his mouth started to move, “I’m completely obedient to you.”

Even as he spoke, a little thought occurred to him. Maybe this was why the women ruled so completely and easily in this dimension or world or whatever it happened to be. Maybe, at pivotal moments in history, women had simply taken over with the help of this pharmaceutical miracle.

“Come here,” she said.

The boy started moving as she pointed to the spot in front of her. With every step, he fought to stop himself, only he had become a passenger within his own body. She had demanded his presence right in front of her, but she didn’t say anything about what he might say. He tested the bounds of her power as he looked around. He could turn his head, flex his fingers, and control every part of his body...except for his legs.

“You’re not going to get away with this,” he said. Back on his world, maybe those words would have been true. Maybe they would have been plausible or believable.

But here, in a land where women ruled and men expected to live as servants and slaves?

Calvin stopped in front of her.

“On your knees,” she said. She pointed down again. He fell forward, kneeling down like a servant. “Don’t move,” she said.

And just like that, his body froze.

She touched to the underside of his chin, tilting his head back as she looked to down into his eyes.

“Very good,” she said. “Now, are you starting to understand? It’s not just the restraints. It’s not just our training or skills.”

“I’m going to get away,” he said.

“You keep telling me that. And yet, you can’t do it. Even now, we gave you the opportunity to run off, and what happened?”

Locking his teeth together, Calvin didn’t respond.

“Tell me,” she ordered.

“You gave me the opportunity to run off, and I got captured again.”

“Well, you haven’t been captured *quite* yet.” She seemed to revel in those words as she held up the collar for him to see again.

“What do you think of this one? Apparently, the slaves think of it as incredibly embarrassing.” That’s when she shook it, and the little bells attached to the black leather jingled and jangled.

“I don’t want to wear a collar.”

“This isn’t about what you want. This is about who you are now. When I drag you back to Victoria’s estate, you’re going to be a proper, deferential boy.”

“No...”

She continued as though he hadn’t protested, “To be honest, I don’t really spend much time thinking about boys or how their hierarchy works. As far as I’m concerned, as long as you obey the women around you, it doesn’t matter what you think of one another.”

“I’m going to beat this,” he said.

“Oh, sweet, silly boy, that’s not how this works. It’s not a question of determination or desire. It’s chemistry. Biology. Science!” She brushed her fingers along his cheek, down his neck, and along his shoulder. His skin tingled where she came into contact with him. “It’s okay if you don’t understand. Science and intellectual curiosity are for women. Obedience is for boys.”

“No,” he said again.

“Say yes.”

“Yes.”

“Tell me that obedience is for boys.”

Behind his eyes, he attempted to erect some psychological barrier or defense. Once again, he attempted to hold back, only this time he wasn't just fighting the temptation for an orgasm or the desperation to avoid some punishment. Rather, he needed to defeat the chemicals running through his blood stream.

It wasn't going to work. He wasn't going to be able to do it.

“Obedience is for boys,” he said. Calvin only whispered the words, yet his mouth shaped those sounds just as she had commanded.

“Don't worry. I'm sure you won't need to be dosed very often. Eventually, obedience will start to feel easy for you. It's easy for all of the other boys, after all!”

He shook his head. He didn't trust himself to speak, so he looked up at her, and he turned his face from side to side as he tried to convey that one simple point: he would never give up!

“You're so cute, but let's see you to that again once I get this around your neck.”

She pushed the collar up against the base of his throat, drew it tight around the contours of his neck, and secured the clasp. Then she reached down into the pocket on her tunic again, and she pulled something out for him to see.

It was a small lock. The key had already been removed. “Are you ready? Are you ready to be locked in your collar?” But then she chuckled, “What am I saying? You're already locked up, aren't you?”

Julia glanced down at his crotch.

“Aren't you wasting time?” Calvin finally growled back at her.

“No,” she said. “My sister is many things, but she isn't fast. She prefers to be methodical and careful. Frankly, I don't understand why she agreed to a race in the first place. It's not like she ever had a chance against me!”

“Unless she has lulled you into a false and security, and now she's going to beat you,” he said.

Julia's lips parted slightly, as though she had never considered this possibility. That's why she reached up, grabbed him by his collar, and pulled Drake to his feet.

Calvin found himself rushing forward as she shoved him up against

one of the trees. He throughout his hands, touched of the solid bark, and then she grabbed his ass.

“You aren’t clever. You aren’t smarter than any of us. What are you? Oh, that’s right. You’re a boy. Boys don’t need to think, and they definitely don’t criticize their superiors.” She grabbed his ass, pinched, and pulled her hand back.

Before he could even think about trying to retreat, maneuver away, or dart to the left or right, she called out, “Stay. Don’t move. Don’t you dare move!”

Her hand swung down, and she struck hard at his backside.

The stinging snapped through his frame. Red heat glowed along his flesh, but this little sister was just getting started. She struck again and again, swing her hand down quick and hard.

“You know, I didn’t think I was going to need this equipment, but now I *really* want to punish you. I want to show you exactly where you belong.”

She stepped back, lowered her satchel, and took something out. He could hear her as she started to strip off her clothing, pulling away the layers one after another.

What was she doing? What did she have in mind?

The sounds of rustling fabric seemed familiar, clicking into place as a different kind of dread pulsed through him.

“Do you know it’s going to happen? Do you know what I’m going to do with you?”

“I don’t,” he whispered.

She laughed. “And that’s because you’re a boy. Boys aren’t very good at predicting how things are going to play out. But that’s okay. There’s a reason why you need a woman to hold your leash and keep you collared.”

“Turn,” she ordered when she finally finished.

With the drugs still running through his system, he obeyed. He turned around, and his eyes widened when he saw her.

She had stripped down, removing her tunic and leggings. Naked from the waist up, she looked amazing, especially with her red hair stretching down along her shoulders.

But now, his eyes fell down to the rubber phallus between her legs.

“To be honest, I think Cassandra had the right idea. Boys don’t get a strong understanding of who they are because they aren’t penetrated often

enough. You boys might be locked up, but I think there might still be some hint of ego left over. Now, open your mouth. I want you to make this nice and wet for me.” Even as she spoke, she brushed her fingers along the underside of mounted dildo.

“This one is a little bit more elaborate,” she said. That’s when her eyes sparkled even more. “It’s double-headed.”

Calvin didn’t really understand at first, not until he started to imagine what that she might look like, how it stretched out onto the air, but the other side pressed against her sex or even penetrated her.

“Are you ready?”

“Don’t do this,” he said. His voice became more frantic. He remembered what it had been like to be with Cassandra.

“Maybe I’m jealous,” she said. “Did you ever think of that? Maybe I really, really want to see you on your knees, gently sucking away at my toy here...”

She snapped her fingers again and pointed to the spot right in front of her. “Come here and kneel.”

He crawled forward. With every inch of motion, Calvin struggled with everything he had. He fought, channeling all of his desperation into his arms and legs.

And yet, they continued to move.

“That’s one thing I love about these harnesses,” she said as she reached down and brushed her fingers along the snug leather. “They make it so I don’t need to free you. Yes, you have a very nice body, Calvin. Yes, I could ride you all night, but this way, I don’t have to release you. You don’t have to enjoy it. Still, I can have all the fun I want. Isn’t that lovely?”

He stopped right in front of her.

“Beg for the opportunity to suck my toy.”

“Please. Please, may I suck your toy?”

“Tell me how much you like being hunted.”

His eyes widened.

If he had been able to control himself, then Calvin would have shaken his head. He would have snarled back at her like some angry animal. All of his self-control could have drained away, and he could have jabbed her right against of the base of her neck. He could have promised her that he wasn’t going to give in. He wasn’t going to be treated like some slave or animal! He was his own man, and he could make his own decisions!

None of that happened, not here.

“I love being hunted,” he said.

“And why is that? Do you love being hunted because you know you are a piece of property? Do you know that you deserve to be owned?”

As she looked down at him, it became obvious. She didn’t need to hear these words. She didn’t think they were for his own good, nor did she seriously intend to train him. Rather, she liked watching him struggle and lose...

“I love being hunted because I know I’m a piece of property. I know I deserve to be owned,” he said, surrendering. As he spoke, he gave this woman exactly what she wanted.

A sickening sensation coursed through the base of his stomach because he thought he should have tried harder. He should have channeled some unseen reservoir of strength.

But as hard as he worked at it, Calvin still couldn’t resist the power of the chemicals and compounds running through his blood stream. These women knew what they were doing; they understood precisely what was required to control a male like Calvin Drake.

“Very good,” she cooed. “That’s right. You know where you belong, don’t you?”

“I know where I belong.”

“You belong on your knees,” she said.

“I belong on my knees.”

“You love being owned. And guess what? This is just the start. After my sister loses tomorrow, you’re going to enjoy this kind of treatment every single day.”

Despite the chemicals running through his body, he gulped. The nervous energy raced along his arms and legs. He could feel it of course through his joints as he tried to stand.

“Kiss this,” she said, “right here and right here.” She touched both sides of the rounded toy poised in front of him.

He leaned forward, and he kissed the right side of her artificial cock. Then he kissed the left.

“Good boy,” she said, placing her palm on his forehead. Then she nudged his head back, and she ordered, “Suck.”

Just like that, she shoved the toy forward, and he had no choice.

Because this beautifully precocious young woman expected him to,

he wrapped his lips around the artificial member.

Before, with Cassandra, he had been trapped, bound in place. But now, there weren't any shackles around his wrists or ankles. He could technically move.

Technically.

And yet, the compounds still trapped him just as thoroughly as a set of wooden stocks or iron manacles. "You look amazing," she said.

Over the next few seconds, Julia marveled at his lips as they slid along the contours.

When he pressed forward, the toy pushed against her slit. She loved the rubber penetration, how good that solidity felt against the walls of her opening.

Still, there was something more important, more alluring and intoxicating.

This boy. His surrender.

Even now, he occasionally glanced up at her. In those moments, she could feel the shame and humiliation radiating off of him.

It was so exquisite! Yes, she could have taken some other male, but he would have been tamed. More than that, he would have seemed to accept it, like he understood that he really belonged right there. Even if he tried to fight it, he knew losing would be the only possible outcome.

But not this boy. Not Calvin.

He kept struggling against of the inevitable. He kept persisting like he thought he could actually defeat her!

Yes!

Exquisite satisfaction rolled through her, but she held that orgasm back. She wasn't going to succumb; she wasn't going to let it seep through her body, not yet.

Soon.

But then she braced her hands against the sides of his head, and she thrust forward, pumping her shaft up against the back of his throat.

His eyes widened, and he nearly gasped right there.

"Good boy," she said, making it sound like he had some choice.

"That's right. Take it. Take every inch. You want this nice and wet."

He grimaced and growled, groaning even as he continued to lick and suck by her command. He gave this woman everything she demanded. Then again, he didn't get a choice!

“What do you have to say for yourself?” Julia demanded as she nudged him back.

He licked his lips, swallowed back his frustration, and he whimpered out, “Please, just let me go.”

“Really? You think you have any chance of pleading your way out of this?” She leaned to down and shook her head from side to side. There was something so condescending and mocking in her expression.

“You’re not going to get away. You’re not going to be able to beg for your freedom. Well, I mean you can *beg*. It just won’t do any good!”

He opened his mouth, inhaled, and got ready to say something else, only she cut him off. The power of her voice compelled him. “Down on your hands and knees, boy. It’s time for me to take you.”

“No,” he said. “Please. You can’t!”

“Maybe if you beg for me to let you out of the chastity cage, I will.”

“Do you, do you have the key?”

“There’s only one way to find out,” she said.

Perhaps Calvin could have told himself that he only did this because he wanted to delay the inevitable for as long as possible. But down on his knees, he held his hands together. He pushed his elbows up against one another, and his eyes widened as he whimpered, “Please. Please, let me out of my cage. Please, let me out of this chastity cage!”

“You deserve an orgasm?”

“If you think I do,” he said.

She seemed to contemplate him for several long seconds. Then she burst out laughing. “Yes! That’s the kind of attitude you need.”

Somehow, seeing him succumb and surrender only amplified the pleasure. Yes, he might give in, but he would always remember what his life had been. He had soaked and marinated in freedom for so long. He would never truly be able to give up.

Better yet, Lena wanted this boy.

As a little revelation sparked into existence, Julia tilted her head to the side and looked off into the distance for a moment.

That was the real reason she wanted him, Julia decided. She could be honest with herself. She could be sufficiently introspective to understand that sisters could always compete, and now there was this boy between them.

“You’re going to be mine,” she said.

“Would you consider it? Would you consider letting me out of the

chastity cage?”

“Yes,” she said.

“You will?”

“Absolutely,” Julia told him.

This warming beam of hope seemed to rush through his chest as he looked up at her. But then she touched one finger to the corner of her cheek, and she said, “Okay. I’m considering it. Considering it...Considering it... Um, no.”

*No.*

He blinked, confused. “But you said you would...”

“I said I would consider it. And I have. So guess what? You stay in that cage, and now you’re going to get down on your hands and knees for me, boy.” Her tone hardened, and he had to obey.

It wasn’t the intimidation or ferocity of her personality. Instead, she was simply a woman, so the chemicals compelled him to drop back down.

Suddenly, he was on his hands and knees, his weight pressed against his elbows as she approached.

His breathing quickened, and he told himself he was going to hate this. That was the most important part, he reflected. He couldn’t allow himself to enjoy it, only then she teased him with the tip of her dildo. She pushed against his opening. She didn’t penetrate him right at first. Instead, she slid forward, going just a little bit before drawing back.

After enduring so much stimulation while wearing a chastity cage, his body reacted. His manhood struggled against the boundaries of the cage these women locked him in. At the same time, sparks of need flared through his chest and down into his gut.

“You like that, don’t you? You want more.”

“No!”

“Tell me the truth, boy.”

“It feels good,” he answered automatically. As he spoke, he felt like a puppet. This woman could pull his strings and insert whatever dialogue she liked right into his mouth.

“Good boy,” she said. She reached down, grabbed him by the back of his collar, and pulled. In the next moment, he could hardly breathe. When he struggled, he filled his lungs, but that choking effort reminded this boy of his status right there on his hands and knees before her.

Then she shoved forward, and he tried to clench down, only she

purred one word at her boy. With his head pulled back, he absorbed the sound and instantly obeyed her command, “Relax.”

She pushed forward, going deep. At the same time, he listened as she giggled. Wild ecstasy burned through her body as she laughed at him, “How do you like that? Is this what you need? Does this help you understand?”

He tried to gasp out an answer, but she pulled on his collar again, cutting off his air supply for just a second or two. Then he gasped, filling his lungs, and she laughed again.

“This is where you belong, down on all fours just like an animal!” She pumped into him, pushing forward, drawing back, only to thrust just as hard as before.

Worse, the promise of ecstasy spread through his torso. His heart kicked faster and faster with primal desire.

“You can try to fight me, but you won’t. You know who you are,” she said, laughing. “Let go of your delusions. Let go of the lies you heard.”

Julia didn’t know where those words originated from, yet it hardly mattered. As she laughed at him, she closed her eyes and envisioned a world where boys could actually have a say. It was so ridiculous! They needed to be owned! He needed to be trained!

She threw herself forward, sliding into him, pulling back, setting the rhythm and using him. With every thrust, the opposite end of her toy moved along her crevice, adding to the wildfire of brazen need rocketing through her body.

She pumped him harder and faster, taking exactly what she wanted.

Panting, she came closer and closer until she cried out. The sounds of her screaming ecstasy echoed through the forest, bouncing along the branches and leaves. Birds fluttered off, and then she stood up. She wobbled on her feet for a few seconds, grinning like some drunk girl at a party.

“You can drop,” she said.

Sure enough, he collapsed down onto his side.

Then he lifted his head, and he looked down along the length of his body, all the way to his shaft. There, he saw the dampness right at the tip of his manhood, yet the metallic prison kept him from enjoying an erection, let alone an orgasm.

“Come along,” she said, inserting the lock, then adding the leash.

“You’re nervous,” Victoria said to her former student.

“I’m fine,” Lena replied.

“If you want, you can pace back and forth.”

“I’m not nervous,” Lena answered. Normally, she could sound sincere under pretty much any set of circumstances, only here and now, she couldn’t tear her gaze away from the tree line. With every second, she waited to see the flickering movement of Julia returning with the boy.

Of course, this didn’t make any sense. With every moment they didn’t appear, her chances of victory improved. And yet, Victoria stood there, just outside the doorway as she continued to watch.

“You know, you have an advantage.”

“My experience and maturity?” Lena asked.

“No,” Victoria said. “Tomorrow, the boy may not run as hard.”

“What makes you say that?”

Rather than answer directly, Victoria said, “What you think your sister is going to do with him?”

“Have some fun,” Lena said with just a hint of disdain.

“Exactly. She won’t be able to resist the temptation. She will toy with the boy and enjoy herself, which will add more time to her hunt. More importantly, she might break him.”

“You think you won’t run as hard tomorrow?”

“Learned helplessness is a concern,” Victoria said. “Or least, it should be considered a factor. Most boys surrender right away. Most of them never experienced the obedience compounds, yet they still do as they’re told. They still recognize their inferiority. Why do you think that is?”

“I’m not in the mood for a lesson,” Lena answered curtly.

“And I’m not interested in teaching,” Victoria said just as smoothly. “But we don’t have anything better to do right now, do we?”

Technically, Lena had various letters and messages she could write. Matters of court could always draw her attention, but something locked her in place. It was the temptation, the knowledge that if she returned to reports and sat down at a writing desk, her sister might return.

Lena needed to see; she had to be there.

“Fine,” Lena said as she crossed her arms and pulled her gaze away from the distant line of trees. As she faced the scholar, she asked, “Why? Why do they recognize their inferiority?”

“They grow up with role models. Whether we like it or not, we are social animals; we follow the patterns and paths established by those around

us. In our culture, young boys make the normal mistakes and defy their parents from time to time. All children do. And yet, the boys still learn to embrace their status. They understand that they will be husbands, servants, pets and slaves. Why? Because that's what happens to all of the men they see."

"But this boy is different."

"He is."

Lena followed the line of reasoning, "He is always going to be defiant because he will always have grown up in a different land."

"So it would seem."

The baroness opened her mouth, looked back toward the woods, and that's when she saw the flickering movement.

Julia escorted the convoy back. Collared and leashed, he followed her. Every few strides, she tugged, reminding him that he needed to keep up.

Lena's younger sister strode up and announced, "That, my comrades, is how you do it!"

"Not bad," Lena said.

After Julia's return, the three women decided to celebrate. They went back into the dining hall, sat down, and enjoyed some wine. With every moment, however, Lena continued to glance over at Calvin Drake.

Their potential prize stayed quiet as he stood off to the side. Even so, she could sense his resistance, like he thought he might be able to fight back.

After they finished their dinner, Lena looked back at Julia. "I can take him back," she announced. "I will make sure he is properly restrained."

"And you're probably going to interrogate him as well, right?" Julia asked.

"Perhaps," said the baroness.

"Whatever you want, you're my sister," Julia said. "I can share my toy with you for the evening, especially because we both know he will be mine tomorrow night."

Lena had a little twinge of discomfort as it twisted along her chest. But then she quickly pushed those thoughts aside, took Calvin by his leash, and she got him back through the estate.

Soon enough, they were back in the dungeon.

"In the cage," Lena commanded.

Although he obeyed, she still sensed that reluctance. It was so

completely different and alien. Boys like Calvin weren't supposed to hesitate, especially when a high-ranking female gave him a command. But now, he made his way behind of those bars, she slammed cage shut, and then she locked it.

Lena turned away, and she headed for the exit.

"I'm not going to mess up again," he whispered.

The rest of the chamber was utterly silent, so those quiet words still reverberated out along the air.

She stopped at the doorway.

"I'm not interested in the mistakes you made. One way or another, I will catch you. I will bring you back, and I'm going to win."

"I get a second chance," he said. "I won't mess up again."

She turned around, strode right back to his cage, and she crouched down. She stared between the bars that this boy.

"Why are you so infuriating?"

"Because I know that I can think for myself. I'm not some servant, and I won't be a slave."

One corner of her mouth rose. She started to smirk, only the amusement couldn't reach her eyes, not when he sounded so much like—

Lena pushed those thoughts aside, especially because her parents had made the correct decision.

"I have a question for you," she said.

"What?" Calvin demanded. Even now, after all he had endured, he seemed resistant and defiant. It was fascinating and exquisite.

"Get out," she ordered. Lena didn't make a logical decision here; she didn't ponder the options or potential outcomes. Instead, she threw the gate open, and then she reached in, grabbing him by his collar. The bells along the edges jingled once again as she guided him out.

Then she shoved him up against the wall.

Despite his tone, he didn't fight back. Perhaps he recognized the simple reality that she still had followers throughout the facility. If he tried to attack her, she could make sure he regretted it.

She pushed him up against the wall, grabbed his arms, and slid them into the restraints. She tightened the straps around his right wrist, then his left. From there, she kicked his legs apart, she bent forward to strap him into place. Now he was spread out, naked, collared, and powerless.

Even so, there was something in his gaze.

“I have a question for you,” she said again.

This time, he didn’t bother answering.

Then she reached up, she closed her eyes for a moment, and she massaged the bridge of her nose. “How badly do you want out of your cage?”

Some of the defiance flickered across his features, like he didn’t know what he should do or say. Then she strode forward, and that’s when she pressed her lips to his.

Lena couldn’t help herself. No, he wasn’t a perfect specimen. He hadn’t been properly trained or prepared by any of her servants. He wasn’t exactly what a woman of her status should expect or demand, and yet she enjoyed the defiance in his stare and the taste of his lips.

Better yet, he started kissing her back. He leaned forward as much the restraints allowed, and that’s when she stepped away. She lifted the key, and she looked into his eyes. “Where you are from, tell me about it.”

“I already have,” he complained.

“I want to hear it again. In particular, I want to know whether or not we can take more boys like you.”

He stared at her for several long seconds.

“I, I don’t think so,” he told her.

“Why not?” Lena actually believed him, if only because she had been so thoroughly trained at court. She had a strong sense for when individuals attempted to lie to her.

“From what I can understand, your technology is about a hundred years behind ours.”

Her eyes narrowed.

“You believe your society is superior?”

His lips parted, and maybe he wanted to say something rude or disdainful, but Calvin stopped himself. Then he sighed slowly, puffing out his cheeks before he told her, “I don’t know enough about your culture.”

“Very diplomatic of you.”

“It’s not about diplomacy,” he replied. “Clearly, I don’t agree with how you treat men, but I’m wondering if your society isn’t simpler and more stable.”

“Why?”

“Do you have to deal with the misinformation caused by mass communications or social media?”

“Enough with those phrases,” she said.

“Exactly.” He shook his head. “Yes, we have a lot of technology, but it might be killing us. I wouldn’t be surprised if my nation fell into a civil war.”

“Over what?”

“No one can agree about the facts of any situation,” he said simply, maybe bitterly.

“One of your governing forces?”

“There isn’t much they can do about it,” he said. “In my culture, people are free to disagree with one another as much as they want. For a long time, that worked really well. But now, we can’t seem to agree on anything...”

“Give me an example,” she ordered.

She held up the key in front of him. He licked his bottom lip.

This boy didn’t argue or fight back at all, which both intrigued and amused her. Perhaps there was even a little spark of arousal deep within her as she came closer.

When she lifted the key up and held it there front of his eyes, he tried to reach out for it, only to feel the limits of his restraints.

No, this boy couldn’t grab it from her.

“Our world,” he said. Then he smirked, raised his head up, and stared toward the rafters as he started to chuckle, “What shape is this planet?”

“It’s a globe,” she said. “A round.”

“Our scientists have come to the same conclusion,” he said. “In fact, is pretty obvious if you stop and think about it.”

“So what?”

“There are a lot of people in my world who don’t believe the world is round.”

Her brows tightened with confusion. “How so?”

“To be honest, I haven’t bothered listening to them. As far as I can tell, they are just wrong, so they don’t really deserve my attention. I don’t know. Maybe that makes me a hypocrite. But that’s just one example. Again and again, different factions in my society argue over the most basic details.”

“Are you vulnerable?”

“For what?”

The baroness kept her expression detached and devoid of any real emotion as she uttered one word, “Invasion.”

His throat tensed up.

“That wouldn’t work,” he told her.

“Why not?”

“Like I said before, our technology is better.”

“Invasions can work in very different ways,” Lena said. “More to the point, we can be patient. I assume your world still uses gold?”

“It does,” he admitted.

“Then you have enterprises that can be bribed. Technology is an advantage, but I’m sure we could secure whatever we needed before hand. More to the point, your leaders don’t know we exist. We could start taking you, a few at a time, learn all that we need, and build up our arsenal.”

“But, but you don’t know how to travel from one world to the other,” he said.

“Not yet,” she replied. “Victoria is only one scholar. And if I believe you, then I now know there is this entire world out there. Perhaps it’s time for the Queen to spread her Imperial rule.”

“You can’t be serious.”

“The element of surprise is an incredible advantage,” she said.

He tried to answer, only then she slipped the key into his lock, popped it open, and removed his chastity cage. In an instant, his manhood hardened, becoming completely rigid.

She stepped right in front of him, cupped the base of his shaft in one hand, and reached down for his balls with the other. As she slid her fingers along his sensitive flesh, Calvin didn’t know how to react. The instincts swam through him, swarming every thought.

“We could take your world,” she said. “We could spread the gynarchy.”

“No. It wouldn’t work.”

“Are the other boys like you? Would they be defiant? Would they resist?”

“Yes!”

Baroness Katina lowered her voice even as she reached up and nibbled on his ear, “Just think about what you would be willing to do right here and now for the chance to come.” The words burned across his psyche with so many different possibilities, all while she continued to touch him.

Within seconds, he started to groan and growl. Not only that, he tried bucking his hips forward and thrashing, to get his release.

The freedom of an erection was incredible, but he needed so much

more. He had a taste of freedom, and now his body ached for more. There was just that one step, that next point, and he would do anything to get it.

“Tell me about how you want to see your people enslaved. You want to see the women of your world elevated while the boys are collared and chained.”

“No,” he said with a frantic shake of his head. “No. Don’t. No. You can’t make me!”

“What’s wrong? You could just try to lie to me,” she said. “Isn’t that what you are going to do? You could attempt to deceive me. Perhaps that would be good enough,” she teased him.

She dragged her teeth down along his ear before she started to lick and suck at his neck. Through all of this, she continued to play with his boy parts. She squeezed his cock, fondled his balls, and sent this raging conflagration of passionate heat roaring through his frame. His muscles clenched, and he needed this so badly.

But the baroness knew exactly how to tease him. She kept him there on the edge, close, so tantalizingly, dangerously close to release. Even so, she knew exactly how to deny him.

Every time he came close, she pulled away. She relaxed her hold, so it didn’t matter what he did or said. The movements of his body became utterly irrelevant as she tormented him with an animalistic temptation.

“Please...”

“Tell me. Tell me all about how you boys could be enslaved.”

“No. We, we can’t. We would fight you!”

“I’m sure you would,” she said. “And guess what? Your resistance would be half the fun.”

He kept his eyes closed now, like he didn’t want to see her perfectly sculpted features, the shine along her black hair, or the way her eyes sparkled with delight as he struggled. But then her lips pushed up against his mouth again, and he seized up, locking himself in place.

She brought him close to an orgasm.

“You really think any of the boys would be better than you? Once they were locked in chastity, what would happen to them?”

“They, they would be trained,” he panted out.

“And why is that?”

“Because we are men, and men can’t control themselves,” he said.

“Try again,” she commanded.

Calvin wanted to believe that he only uttered these words because some remnant of the obedience drugs continued to run through his body. But no. That wasn't true. Rather, this woman knew exactly how to touch him.

"You intrigue me," she said. "You fascinate me. I don't like that."

She pulled her hands away, and he tried to thrust his hips forward. As hard as he worked, he couldn't connect with anything but empty air.

Lena placed her hands on her hips as she studied him. "You remind me of another boy."

Hoping to hold off the inevitable, he gasped out, "Who? Who do I remind you of?"

Lena didn't talk about this with her tutor, her sister, or even any of her closest confidants. None of her handmaidens or huntresses knew the full truth. Many suspected, but the reality remained her secret.

She reached up and stroked his cheek. As she touched him, she realized something. She could be honest with this male because it didn't matter what he knew or believed. His opinion didn't count. Besides, he wasn't a spy.

There was the possibility he might be able to share whatever she said with Julia, but that possibility didn't really bother her, not right then or there. "Right after I turned eighteen, I met a boy. He wasn't supposed to be unusual or special. Basically, he was just a gift."

Lena smirked, shook her head, and looked away. Yet even as her eyes roamed along walls and back to the cage, she still saw his face. "He was supposed to be frisky. That was how my parents described him. He was supposed to be an interesting challenge, something special and different for a young woman to face as I got ready for my time at the University."

"But what? He was defiant? He wouldn't break?"

"No," she said. "He wouldn't. At first, it didn't matter if I spanked him or paddled him. It didn't matter if I left him in a cage. He could be whipped or I could use a crop. He even endured electrical stimulation."

"So what, you just got rid of him?"

"Because I liked it. Because I liked him. Because we started talking, and I started to see him as more than just a plaything."

"You liked him," Calvin said.

"I did," she said. "I liked him, and that was the problem. I let myself become vulnerable. My parents saw this, so they sent him off. They made sure that I wouldn't see him again."

Calvin started to say something, but she shook her head, and then she leaned forward again, pushing her mouth up against his. Not only that, she grabbed him by his shaft. In those first seconds, she thought of another boy.

But then she pulled away and looked into his eyes. She saw Calvin even as she continued to stroke and tease him.

Then she reached up, and she freed him. She pulled the shackles away, and that's when he didn't know what was going to happen.

"I didn't get to keep Sebastian," she said. "But I'm not going to lose you. I found a boy I want to keep, so you are going to be mine. You are never, ever going to belong to another woman," Lena said.

Then she stepped back, and she looked right at him. With the eyes of a predator focused on this boy, she drained away any chance he had of resisting, arguing, or fighting. "Remove the restraints around your ankles."

She had freed his wrists, so now he could do it.

Tentatively, Calvin leaned forward. He freed himself, and that's when she shoved him up against of the wall again, only this time he wasn't trapped.

He started rubbing himself on her, and that's when she chuckled, whispering, "You can come right now like a horny dog, or you can let me use you."

All at once, he understood precisely what she was offering.

Lena didn't have to worry about this boy trying to escape. Clearly, he understood the limitations of this taste of freedom. She wished to play with her boy, so he followed along, guided by her will.

She kissed him hard, serious and passionate. She stroked him again and again. Then she finally pulled him away and pushed him down onto the ground. The cold stones couldn't leach away the heat from his body, not as she pounced.

She lifted her skirt, pulled away her panties, and held them.

"This isn't a seduction," she promised.

Calvin didn't know how to answer. But then it hardly mattered because he opened his mouth, and she stuffed the black silk of her underwear right between his teeth, gagging him.

"Right now, I don't need to let you speak because this isn't a seduction. I want you. That's all I know and all you need to know."

With her underwear balled up and pressed between his teeth, he panted as the aggravation pulsed through his body. Somehow, it didn't morph into rage.

“You look cute,” she said, gliding her fingertips along his cheek and down toward his neck. “You look like—” Before she finished, she stopped herself. Her lips hardened, and she plucked the panties back from his mouth.

“No,” she said with a shake of her head.

Calvin always considered himself to be a kind man, the kind of guy who tried to consider other people around him. So now, he wondered what she tried to hide, what detail made her stop.

“You do look cute with my panties in your mouth, gagged by something so soft and intimate,” she told him. “But right now, I’m not interested in soft or intimate.”

The baroness grabbed his wrists, pushed them down, and then she looked right into his eyes.

“Beg for it.”

“Please, take me,” he started to say.

Only then, this cunning smile stretched across her lips. “No,” she interrupted him. “That’s not what I’m talking about.”

“Please. Please, enslave me,” he said. The words came out tentatively, like he wasn’t sure this might be the right answer either. Only then, she flashed him this big, victorious smile, so he had to continue. “Please, please enslave me and all of the other boys. Turn us into your pets. Please—turn us into your property!”

She took his cock in hand again. Then she lowered herself down, little by little.

Baroness Katina straightened her back and raised her chin as she embraced this moment. Second by second, she enjoyed the power she held over him. In those first few seconds, she simply used the tip of his shaft, gliding along her crevice. Already damp with the excitement thrumming through her body, she embraced his solidity.

“You’re using me,” he between gasps like this was some sort of revelation.

“Yes,” she said simply. “I am.” She lowered herself down again, taking him. The walls of her opening tightened around his circumference, and he growled, moaning through the frustration because he craved more, but he couldn’t get it.

Then she leaned down and looked right into his eyes. “Don’t mess this up, Calvin.” With those words on the air, she sounded almost polite, like maybe she respected him. But then she threw her head back again, and she

started to ride him as she slid up and down.

After so much teasing and so much time in chastity, Calvin didn't know whether or not he could really do this. The different urges surged through his body, gripping him.

And yet, he looked up at this beautiful woman, and he realized something.

She had shared something with him, something special.

Yes, she saw him as a pet. Yes, she saw him as property.

Somehow, that didn't bother him in that moment. Maybe it was the arousal or something else. Maybe it was the proximity to this beautiful woman, like the gravity of her personality could bend the rules around her like some celestial phenomenon.

For Calvin, it didn't matter.

She moved up and down, savoring the feel of his body. Desperate for more, Calvin drank in the visage of this beautiful woman. Her hair, her cheeks, the curves of her neck, the contours of her breasts, and the shine of her tunic. She had only removed her panties, nothing else.

While he was naked, vulnerable and obedient beneath her, she took whatever she liked.

"Yes. Show me what you can do," she growled down at him.

Calvin should have blinked, surprised because that command didn't seem to make any sense. He was on his back, spread out beneath her, an object to be used. He couldn't *do* anything.

No, that wasn't true. She had reduced him to the status of an object, so he could please her. He could maintain his control and pull back the tsunami of release. The orgasm was right there, just waiting to burst through his defenses.

Somehow, he held back his urges. Somehow, he kept his shaft from pulsating with that primal need.

"Good boy," she said, only now she was becoming breathless. She had to fight to get the air out, and her words became stretched with effort. "Good boy. Such a good boy. That's right. Show me what you can do. Good. That is so good. Yes."

Then she slowed down, and he worried he had disappointed her.

Only then, when he looked up, Calvin saw that same eagerness mirrored on her beautiful features. She had closed her eyes, she was biting down on her lower lip, it was obvious she needed this.

“You are going to be mine. You’re going to be my property. I won’t let her have you. I won’t let anyone else have you.”

Then she sped up again, riding his member as she slid along his length. The contact of her sex against his shaft made him buck. Without realizing it, he started pumping his hips. He worked his manhood deep into her, connecting them.

“Yes. Just like that. That’s right. Show me what you can do, boy. Show me what you can do, Calvin!”

When she called out his name, she made him sound like a pet. She didn’t take his name seriously, yet that hardly mattered.

Her pleasure. Her bliss.

That was all Calvin could think of in that moment. He didn’t know why. The drugs from before? Training? Some other psychological trigger? Those whispered little theories buzzed at the edges of his thoughts, but he didn’t really care.

Instead, he knew where he belonged. He had to be right there, on his back, beneath this woman.

Finally, she kissed him again.

She bent forward, rested her lips on his, and their tongues played against one another, only she pushed him down. Finally, she broke off the kiss, raised her head, and called out, “Now. Do it now. Obey my command. Come—come for me!”

As that final word left her mouth, she lowered herself down, and he surrendered to the excitement. Hot, blazing desperation coursed through him as his shaft pulsed. He experienced it right up there between his legs before the ecstasy splashed out into the rest of his body. He arched his back again, pushing his shoulder blades down against the cold stones beneath them. He cried out as the heat worked through both of their bodies, and maybe she moaned; maybe she gasped.

He couldn’t tell one way or another. Lost in that haze, he surrendered completely.

Then she pulled away, and she looked down at him.

Calvin didn’t know what he expected.

“Back in the cage,” she ordered. “But first…” She held up his chastity cage.

His lip started to move, but he couldn’t force the words out onto the air because he already knew what the answer would be. So instead of making

a request, he decided to be quiet, and that's when she smiled.

"Very good." Lena sounded genuinely impressed. "Since I haven't trained many boys like you, I'm not sure how long it might take, but I want you to know that I'm impressed by your progress. I think you have a lot of potential."

She seemed contemplative and serene, like she had learned something important from their time together. For his part, Calvin felt like he could barely move, especially since he didn't think he had ever climaxed so hard.

Languidly, Lena slipped her fingers down along his shoulder and over his chest. These were soft movements, gentle and kind, more like a petting than anything else.

In that instant, despite the fatigue clinging to his body, he turned and faced her and wished he could make her feel good.

In fact, he started to ask what he could do, but she touched a finger to his lips. "No, no," she said. "Just relax, boy. You don't need to talk. I've already had my fun with you."

If she expected something else, she would tell him. More likely, she would make her demand, and she wouldn't force her will upon him. In that moment, she genuinely wished to touch him, to pet him and to enjoy the quiet.

It couldn't last for long, he knew.

Lena locked him back in chastity, applying one piece after another. When he felt the cool metal against his skin, he shivered. That shuddering fear coursed through his body again, especially because he knew what he was about to lose.

But it didn't matter because he didn't argue or fight back. He wasn't strapped down or chained to a wall. Instead, he stayed right there, spread out beneath her, powerless.

It wasn't just the sex, he knew.

"Are you ready? Are you ready for my favorite part?"

Click.

It was such a simple sound, yet it pulsed through his body because they both knew exactly what it meant.

"All locked up," she said.

Was she goading him? Was she waiting to see if this would prompt some burst of disobedience? Either way, Calvin didn't try to fight back. Instead, he accepted his place right there on his back, beneath her as she

continued to slide her fingertips and palms along his body.

At several points, he thought maybe he should try to say something to her. Instead, he stayed quiet.

For her part, Lena didn't know exactly what she was thinking. Instead, she allowed herself to bask in the quiet here. At some point, she would need to return to responsibilities. There would be obligations, duties, and questions, all of which would require her attention.

But for now, in this darkened chamber, with this boy down on his back, she enjoyed the soft glow of satisfaction.

More than that, she reveled in something else, knowing that this boy would fight ferociously for his freedom, yet she had him there, quiet and obedient on his back.

"You're a good boy," she said to him. "But it's time for you to get in your cage."

Drained, spent, and utterly exhausted after everything he had endured over the course of the day, plus his time with Lena, Calvin neither argued nor considered whether or not he should resist. He crawled along on his hands and knees until he came to the cage. He slipped back inside, and she closed the latch.

Lena crouched down and peered at him—her potential prize. She studied this boy, only she said nothing for several long seconds.

Calvin didn't know what he expected.

Then she rose up onto her feet and glanced back at him. Her gaze lingered on him for several more seconds, and he watched her. But as always, he had to turn away first, intimidated by her power and ferocity.

The door closed behind her as she left, and Calvin had to wonder, *What just happened?*

"The rules are the same," Victoria announced. "This is a race. Your sister required four hours and twenty-two minutes to catch this boy and bring him back. If you can do so in less time, you will keep him as your property. If you fail to do so, ownership rights will go to your sister, Julia Katina."

Because her precocious little sister couldn't keep quiet, Julia called out, "Yeah. He's going to be mine. There's no way you're going to beat my time!"

Lena said nothing. Instead, she looked back at the boy. His neck was naked once again, and he wore nothing except for his chastity cage.

“Good luck,” she said to him. Then she turned back to her sister and grinned.

Julia turned away after just a moment or two. She had seen that look of focused aggression before.

Victoria called out the count, so the boy rushed off into the woods once again.

Julia, Victoria, Lena, and the huntresses watched as the boy ran off into the distance before disappearing among the trees.

“If you want, you can just give up now,” Julia said. “You could save us some time. Besides, I’m sure the huntresses would love to get out and have some fun.”

Lena’s followers carefully kept their gazes aimed forward. They knew better than to get involved with the sisters’ rivalry.

“Don’t worry, Little sister. I will let you punish him when I catch him.”

Narrowing her eyes slightly, Julia frowned, but she decided not to say anything else.

“Are you ready?” Victoria asked.

“I am,” Lena said.

“Then let the hunt begin.”

Lena strode forward, took several steps, and then she broke into a jog before letting the instinct grip her. As she hunted, she ran hard, sprinting into the forest. She would need to slow soon enough as she wove her way around the different trees.

But in that moment, she enjoyed the simplicity of running after a boy as the wind cut through her hair, splashed across her face, and the excitement roiled through her body.

She thought of last night, she thought of another boy, and she thought about what she would do to make sure she didn’t lose this one, no matter how hard he tried to escape.

Something different. Something different. Something different.

That thought kept vibrating inside of his head because he knew he had to try some other tactic or strategy. Julia had caught him easily, and he didn’t think Lena would be any different.

Only now, he jogged along the different hills, up and down as the trees blocked out most of the sun. Random beams of light slid across his body

before he glanced over his shoulder.

He thought he saw something, a flicker of movement. But that motion came from some random bird flitting between the branches. It had nothing to do with the woman who now pursued him.

His heart pounded faster.

He kept jogging.

At one point, he stopped. He turned and tried to hide behind one of the trees. Pushing his shoulders up against the rough bark, he tried to come up with something good, something clever.

The same ideas from yesterday popped into his head: run or hide.

Fighting obviously wouldn't work, not when these women were so well-trained.

In fact, he flashed back to his struggle with Julia. The petite redhead had easily knocked him to the ground, stripping away any notion that he might be able to fight back.

These girls could toy with him. They could allow him to kick him out or throw a few punches, but it wouldn't make any difference. They were faster and stronger, lean like predatory cats. They could pounce whenever they liked, knocking him to the ground and pinning him.

When he thought of being pinned by Lena, his shaft twitched again. At the same time, he recalled her soft caresses along his body.

It was ridiculous.

He wasn't supposed to enjoy any part of his captivity. These women wanted to enslave him!

Running wouldn't work.

He had to hide.

Yeah, that could work, he told himself. He looked up at the trees and wondered if he could just scurry up into the branches, cling on, and wait until nightfall. After that, he could start moving again.

Wandering around in a set of darkened woods sounded like a terrible idea, but he hadn't seen any sign of real predators: no lions or tigers or wolves.

Besides, that might be the best option he had.

Of course, if it worked, Lena would lose. And if these women found him, he would end up with Julia...

His insides twisted and turned at the prospect. He hated this weird, wrenching sensation in his gut, but he didn't know how to push it back either.

“This is stupid,” he muttered. “I want to escape. I want to get back to my own world.”

But how?

Maybe a woman with Lena’s resources would be able to find the right scholars, teachers, and scientists. Maybe, because they now knew other dimensions existed and it was possible to traverse from one to another, they might be able to figure it out.

Or maybe not.

But what about Calvin? Seriously, what could he do on his own? What did he think he could possibly accomplish?

At best, he could wander around and hope to find another random lightning storm. Maybe he could hope another bolt of electricity would shoot down and transport him to his world without hurting him.

He started.

What was the alternative?

Lena. Julia.

Slavery.

“I’m not a pet,” he growled. Yes, he sounded ferocious, but he couldn’t ignore the fact that he kept his voice low on the off chance that Lena might have already caught up with him.

He started running again. As he dashed past one tree after another, he kept hoping he might find some good spot.

But no, there weren’t any gashes or openings in the ground that he might be able to exploit. Eventually, he had to slow down again.

As the aggravation morphed in his body, he thought about turning around. He thought about trying to fight Lena.

No. It wasn’t going to work. At the same time, he realized something. He would never be able to throw a punch at that woman.

Did she know that? Maybe he could manipulate her?

“Yeah, right,” he snorted. He wasn’t going to be able to intimidate her.

So what?

Hide.

Again and again, he came to this one option.

There were dried leaves all across the ground. He could hear them crunch beneath his heels and toes.

The idea of laying down, covering himself in vegetation and debris

twisted at his stomach, especially because he didn't know if she would be able to see him or not.

No. He could climb. That was his best choice. If he climbed up, stayed still, and just remained quiet, she would probably walk right by him. She wouldn't notice.

And maybe he could jump down. Maybe he could just land on top of her, knocking her to the ground. She was faster, but he could essentially tackle her, then maybe he would be able to win. Yes, it was easy to imagine this woman knowing some secret wrestling maneuver where she would just pull out from beneath him, grab him, shove him right back down to the ground, but he couldn't allow himself to think that way.

"I'm a man, and I can fight. I can do this. I know I can," he told himself. Yet even as he whispered those words, Calvin didn't know if they were really true.

So instead of looking for some hole in the ground, Calvin Drake started to search for a tree to climb.

Then he saw one. He thought this would work.

A different idea occurred to him.

Calvin turned back, and he could see some of his tracks he had left behind. Unsure of how much time he might have, he doubled back, walked over to one tree, did his best to step in the same spots, and then he went to a different tree.

As she tracked him, she would see his direction had changed. Maybe this would make her nervous, but it didn't matter. Hopefully, but the time she figured out what had happened, it would be too late. He would be on top of her, he would be able to hold her down.

Better yet, he might be able to grab that drug and inject her. What if he could make *her* obedient?

He could get the key to his chastity lock...

His breathing quickened as adrenaline pulsed through his body.

Satisfied with the fake tracks he had set out, Calvin now scurried up in the tree. He found a strong branch, held on, and exhaled slowly. He needed to remain perfectly still. If he didn't move, then there was a good chance she wouldn't notice him, especially if she kept her focus aimed at the ground while she navigated his tracks.

Wait. He just had to wait.

If Lena hadn't been born an aristocrat, she was sure she would have become a huntress.

As she stalked forward, excitement pulsed through her veins. But more than that, she savored one key question. Wonderfully simple and deliciously complicated, she had to contend with the problem of speed versus caution.

Yes, she could dash ahead, sprinting as fast as her legs could carry her, but then she would be likely to make a mistake. If she slowed down, she wouldn't miss anything, but then her prey might outpace her and escape.

This tension seemed so much easier than dealing with the court, the other aristocrats and then there those competing agendas.

With practiced expertise, she tracked her boy.

She saw the steps, the crunch to leaves and snapped sticks. Every few yards, there would be the little tickle of fear at the back of her neck because she wouldn't see another obvious sign or clue of his passage. Perhaps she had missed something. Maybe he had pivoted.

These possibilities made her reach down and clutch her satchel as she resisted the temptation to check her timepiece.

How many hours did she have left? How many minutes?

Simultaneously, she knew she would have to double back and return him to the estate. Finding him wouldn't be enough.

Then the tracks veered to the left *and* right.

*What?*

He saw her.

In that moment, he desperately wanted to readjust his position, to shift around, to maybe get a better angle. But if he did that, he knew she would spot him. She would look up, detect that hint of motion, and understand his plan right away.

No. He couldn't mess up. He couldn't give his position away by making any sudden movements. In fact, he wouldn't even shift around. Instead, he held his breath for several long seconds as she came closer and closer...

If she stood underneath this branch, he could launch himself down, grab her, slam her to the ground, maybe knock the air from her lungs, and take her. He might be able to make Baroness Katina his prisoner!

Fear and excitement mixed in his bloodstream as she walked over to

one tree, seemed to consider it, and turned back. She was following his fake trails, tracking his movements as she started to put the pieces together.

And yet, she didn't look up.

Was it possible?

Actually, yeah, he told himself. Maybe Calvin had finally found a way to defeat these women. After all, most people didn't look up. They didn't think in three dimensions. Instead, they looked to the left and right, forward and back without realizing what kinds of threats might be raising above or below.

As he swallowed, he worried she might be able to pick up on the sound. But no, she continued to search around, her brows knitted with confusion as she thought about the different possibilities.

Lena tentatively strode forward. She was braced slightly, her eyes aimed forward as she turned around and searched for different clues.

There. She was almost ready. She was almost in the perfect spot.

...Almost.

Almost...

...Almost...

Lena considered her options. Simultaneously, she formed a theory. She resisted the urge to look upward. Instead, she relied on her memory and concentrated as she tried to map out the branches overhead.

She took another step forward, turned to the left, then the right, and she checked behind her in case she might be wrong.

"Calvin," she called out. "Calvin, I know you are here. I know you are trying to hide from me, but I'm sure you're around here somewhere."

She started to step forward, shifting her weight before she stopped.

Some instinct prickled along the back of her neck and down her spine. She froze in position and braced herself.

At any moment, she expected him to leap up, maybe from underneath some mound of leaves. Maybe he would try to wrap his arms around her and throw her down onto the ground.

Lena understood her own abilities. Simultaneously, she recognized what might happen if he managed to pin her. In a fair fight, she would win every single time. If he sucker-punched her, however, things could go badly.

These boys were like wild animals, after all. The women around them admired and respected their physical strength for a reason. Yes, boys could

be tamed and domesticated, but they still posed a danger. They could be threatening...

With this in mind, she held her position for several seconds. Then she inhaled, turned her head slightly, and called out his name, "Calvin. Calvin, I'm coming for you."

Poised above her, Calvin Drake needed her to step forward, just a few more inches. That was all it would take. Unfortunately, close wouldn't be good enough. The angles would be wrong, he could already tell. If he wanted to grab her and push her down onto the ground, then he needed her to step forward. Just one more step!

Only now, she used his name.

Her voice was sweet, sexy, controlling and powerful all at the same time. The syllables of his name pushed out among the leaves, and he tightened his grip on his branch.

"Calvin," she said. "We both know the truth. We both know you aren't really capable of fighting me. You aren't really capable of running either. Deep down, you know who you're supposed to be. You know that you're a boy, and boys need to be owned. They need to be tamed. This is what you want. Face it. Accept the truth about yourself."

Calvin bit down, and he waited for that rush of anger.

It didn't arrive.

He told himself that he needed to be cold and calculating right then and there. He couldn't allow his emotions to get the best of him. After all, she was probably trying to manipulate him. She thought she might be able to trick him...

"Calvin..." Lena let her voice hang on the air between the leaves and branches of the forest around them. "Calvin, think about who you are. Think about what you need."

He wanted to think about freedom and independence. Instead, he remembered what it was like to be down on his back, beneath this woman. She had looked at him and smiled. In that moment, something had felt so right.

That's when he shook his head. Then he froze, realizing he had messed up.

The little flicker of motion was enough. She glanced up, saw him, her eyes narrowed, and she grinned at him.

Acting on instinct or emotion, Calvin let go of the branch, and he jumped down. The positioning wasn't right. He landed hard, but maybe he hoped he might be able to leap forward and catch her. If she hadn't expected him, then maybe he would still have the advantage! Maybe he would still be able to grab her and throw her down onto the ground!

After that, he didn't have time to think.

Her hand flew to the satchel, and she pulled out the needle. In one swift motion, she swiped it down, and she caught him in his arm.

Calvin tumbled back, uncertain. He looked down. She had pulled the needle back, but that small prick remained.

"The drugs need a few seconds to take effect," she said. "But first, I want you to hear me. I want you to hear me and be honest with me. What do you want?" When she stared into his eyes, he could feel it, that uncertainty, the nervousness and vulnerability.

In those moments, before the compounds could seize control of his biology, she wanted the truth from this male

"You," he said.

If he intended to say more, he didn't get the chance because she grabbed him, leaned forward, and kissed him. She pressed her body to his, and he moaned, surrendering to one simple truth. He would never get back to his dimension. That fantasy faded away, replaced by a future where he would belong to this beautiful, dark-haired woman as her pet, as her plaything, as her favorite prize.

She didn't just collar and leash him. She pulled his hands behind his back and secured them with leather shackles. They locked around his wrists, keeping him uncertain and unsteady. Then, she commanded him to follow as she pulled on his leash, and he obeyed.

Along the way back to the estate, she remained silent for most of the journey. But then she glanced over her shoulder at him and smiled as the estate came back into view.

"Calvin, I just realized something."

Like an obedient slave, he remained quiet. If his owner wished to share something with him, then that would be her prerogative. In the meantime, he would be quiet. Maybe he kept replaying what had happened and how easily she had caught him.

"You didn't have to hide there. You could have run a lot longer. You

could have delayed the chase. You could have fought me.”

What was she saying?

“You had a choice,” Lena told him.

With a nervous swallow, he nodded, but he couldn’t tell if he was agreeing with her or simply acknowledging the fact that his owner had made her point. Either way, they continued to march back to the estate.

Julia stood off to the side, her lips tensed with a frown as she kept her arms tight over her chest. Victoria nodded and quickly announced, “Ladies, we have our winner! The baroness is victorious!”

The huntresses gathered around Lena who quickly asked, “Who’s ready to celebrate?”

They dragged him inside, straight to the dining hall this time.

Some of the women pushed him forward. Others just glanced back at him, like they couldn’t wait to start playing.

Once they arrived, Lena climbed up onto the table, faced her sister, the scholar, and these other women. She grinned, bowed her head down for a moment as though lost in thought, and then she said, “I have been thinking a lot about our society, our culture, and our way of life. I’ve pondered what this boy is and everything he might represent. For now, I see an opportunity. I see the chance to expand, to grow the reach of imperial rule, and to correct some great injustices.”

The women nodded along, eager to hear more.

“But before any of that can happen, we need to start right here and now. You see this boy? He is starting to learn. He is beginning to accept the truth, but he isn’t there, not quite yet. That’s why we’re going to play with him. That’s why we are going to show him once again where he belongs.”

Calvin could feel some of the color drain away from his cheeks. By this point, he knew he couldn’t escape. It was a simple fact, verified and utterly true. It became the central pillar of his universe as he understood it.

“Grab him, hold him down, touch him, play with him, and spank him,” Lena uttered the words, one after another. They came out quick and defiant, a sharp rhythm beating against the air.

The baroness may have sounded utterly commanding as she uttered her orders, but the huntresses started to giggle and chortle, laugh and whisper back and forth.

Then they grabbed him.

Calvin hadn't even been able to stumble back.

But now he felt their hands on his arms, against his sides, and down along his chest. Some of them stroked him. Others held on. A few pinched his buttocks or reached out to slide their fingers through his hair.

They worked hard for their leader, and so now they were rewarded. Then he was shoved down, first onto his knees.

That didn't last for long. Soon, they pulled him against the table, bending him forward. And with that, the girls started to spank him. They struck hard and fast, embracing something childish, primal, and utterly alluring.

Their hands rained down again and again. They turned his backside into a bright shade of pink.

He squirmed even as they laughed at him. Then someone grabbed him by his hair and pulled his head back. She leaned forward and whispered, "Are you finally starting to figure it out?"

Cassandra.

"Yes," he mouthed the word, and the huntresses laughed along with all of the others.

Watching, Lena hopped back down onto the floor. Her sister stepped over to her and held out her hand. "A race well run," she said.

"Thank you, little sister."

"You know, I'm going to win eventually."

Lena flashed her a warm smile, "I'm sure of it."

But then Julia blinked, apparently surprised by that easy acquiescence.

The baroness smiled again, tilted her head to the side, and asked, "What? A surprise?" Before Julia could stammer out a response, her wise crack continued, "Julia, you are an amazing young woman, and you come from a powerful family. There's a reason why you are so successful. You may not have my title, but you have my respect, and I know that you will succeed."

Julia turned away even as her cheeks started to match the fiery red of her hair.

"Are you blushing, little sister?" Lena teased.

"What? No. Of course not!"

Lena reached out and grabbed her sister's hand. She gave her a warm, reassuring squeeze, and then both women went back to enjoying the show as

the women worked on breaking through this slave's bad habits.

Eventually, the women stopped spanking him. Instead, they had the servants bring them bottles of wine, gourmet cheeses, salted meat, and more. As they ate, Calvin realized the women wanted him off to the side. He stood there with his hands behind his back, still restrained. Someone had removed the leash, but it hardly mattered. There was no chance for this boy to escape. Then his owner surprised him.

About a third of the way through the celebration, she walked over to him and whispered, "When we finish here, I will take you back to my quarters."

Calvin tried to ask what that meant, but he couldn't find his voice.

"I'm going to have a lot of fun with you, Calvin. Yes, I am." She reached up and pinched his cheek. From there, she ran the tip of her tongue along her teeth and sauntered off.

He didn't understand what the cause might be, but he allowed his gaze to follow her. He studied the contours of her boots, the curves of her buttocks, the lines of her waist, and the tantalizing shine of her dark hair.

Apparently, she knew exactly what he was doing because she stopped, turned, and looked right at him. She blew him a little kiss, and his spine went rigid. He stood there, like some toy waiting for his owner to return as she went to go talk to her associates.

Victoria left first, excusing herself as she said she was tired and still had some reading she wished to complete. Next, a few of the huntresses wandered off. Last, Julia and Lena came up to the boy.

"You and I could have had a lot of fun," Julia said as she reached out, scratching lightly at his chest.

But it was Lena who attached his leash, tugged, and said, "Good night, little sister. Don't worry. If you ask nicely, I will let you play with him whenever you like."

Julia's eyes sparkled mischievously as she looked right at him even though she spoke to her sister, "I'm counting on it."

A little shiver ran down his spine as he heard those words.

Soon, they were back in her guest chambers, and he marveled at the size and opulence. Although she didn't give him the opportunity to inspect any of his surroundings, not really, he still admired the huge paintings, each

one a landscape sculpted and brushed onto enormous canvas rectangles. From there, he couldn't help but wonder what the azure sheets might feel like.

"You want to know what I'm about to do with you?"

"Yes, please," he said.

She slid her fingers down along his cheek. Then she grabbed onto his collar, pulling him close so he couldn't look away.

"I haven't decided," she whispered with an ambitious little smile. "So I'm leaning on doing something novel."

He remained quiet and deferential, allowing his eyes to drift back down toward the floor.

"Calvin, I'm going to let you decide. I could have sex with you right now with my boy down on his back, spread out and powerless while I ride him," she said.

"Or?"

"Or I can just enjoy that pretty mouth for a little while. And I will go to sleep without letting you out of your cage. I think I'm going to use you like a stuffed animal tonight." Her eyes twinkled as she considered the possibilities.

"And, and you want me to decide?"

"Don't worry," she said. "I don't expect you to respond yet. After all, you don't know the best part yet."

The best part? What was that supposed to mean?

"Please, I, I want to be with you," he said.

"That's going to happen one way or another," she promised. "Don't worry. I'm not going to let you escape."

She grabbed him by his leash, pulled, and shoved him down onto the bed just a moment later.

He needed to ask; he needed to understand, but then she pounced, climbing on top of him, pinning him down, holding him in place, and gently kissing him. She brushed her lips along his neck, then up toward his mouth. She kissed him and played with him. At the same time, she scratched at his flanks, all before reaching down and teasing the underside of his balls.

"Boys are so sensitive right here," she said with a grin.

"Yes. Yes, I can't help it," he admitted.

"Good," she said. Lena seemed to enjoy his every acknowledgment of his helplessness and vulnerability.

Then she sat up, and she pulled out his key.

His lips parted as he stared at that little piece of metal, perfectly sculpted to give access to his most important body parts. As his breathing came faster, she leaned down and touched it to the tip of his nose before dragging it all the way to his forehead. The metal just barely touched him, but he wanted to reach out and grab it so badly!

“If I let you out, I’m thinking I’m going to lock you up for another six months. If I leave you locked up tonight, I’m thinking it’s only going to be three.”

Three months? Six months?

The numbers pulsed through his head, but he clenched his eyes shut like he couldn’t really comprehend how those numbers actually worked.

“Please.”

“What was that?” She grinned down at him. “Were you begging? Was that it? You want me to make you helpless? To strap you down?”

“What? You have restraints here?”

“Absolutely,” she said. “Lots of women want to make sure the boys in their bed are nice and powerless.”

Before he could stammer out some protest, Lena removed the shackles holding his hands behind his back. She only allowed him to enjoy a moment or two of freedom, however. Then she pulled his arms up toward the corners of the bed, and another set of restraints encircled his wrists. She strapped him down, making sure he was powerless beneath her.

Then she picked up the key again and held it there in front of him.

“I like knowing you can’t get away,” she said. “I love knowing that you are mine.” She kissed him again before returning one hand to that spot between his legs. Only now, she slipped her fingers along his inner thighs, then beneath his balls, then up and over his chest. She let her touch roam all over his body.

With every second, she stimulated him, turning him on more and more. The arousal cascaded through his frame, pulsating hotter and faster.

“What’s it going to be, dear boy? What does my pet want? What is he willing to give up?”

Three months or six months.

The questions burned hot behind his eyes, yet he didn’t see any other choice.

“Three months,” he said without really understanding what the words meant. In that moment, with this beautiful woman placed on top of him, he

couldn't think clearly. But once the words left his lips, he exhaled with relief, grateful.

Six months would have been way too long!

"Okay," she said. And then she started to strip, peeling away her tunic, her boots, her skirt and panties. Soon, he saw her naked, and his eyes stayed open wide. He couldn't blink, not if it would mean missing an instant of her gorgeous frame.

He studied her nipples, the curves of her breasts, the lines of her body, and then his eyes roved down toward her pelvis, her pubis, and her slit.

"Is someone reconsidering?" Lena asked.

Swallowing back his reluctance, he shook his head from side to side. "No. No, I'm not reconsidering anything," he protested. At that moment, he seemed to mean it.

"So cute," she said. "Let's see how long you can hold out."

How long he could hold out?

The different possibilities flared through his head, and he realized that she was messing with him. Maybe she was genuinely curious to see how he might react. Either way, those thoughts were swallowed up as she kissed him and touched her body against his.

The heat of naked flesh pressing together made him arch his back as he pushed up, but he still wore the chastity cage. He could rub himself on her, but he wouldn't be able to feel it or enjoy it. The pressure only aggravated those flames of desire burning through his body.

Then she pulled away and looked down into his eyes. "Does someone want to reconsider?"

He answered with a quick shake of his head.

She reached down and kissed him again. Her lips brushed along his before she stroked his neck. From there, she pulled away and kissed his chest. Her lips trailed down along his sternum.

For a moment, he imagined she might use her mouth between his legs, only then he dismissed the idea as ridiculous. A woman like Baroness Katina would never do something like that!

He was there to serve her. He existed for her pleasure. That dynamic would never, ever be reversed.

And now, she pulled forward, grinned down at him, straddled his face.

Suddenly, her sex was pressed right there against his lips. "Lick," she

said simply.

He obeyed, gliding his tongue up and down her opening. Then she lowered herself down another quarter inch. She impaled herself on his tongue, and he continued to lick, worship, and serve her.

He had done it. Yes, he had held out long enough, so now he knew he wouldn't be manipulated at every step.

She rode his lips and tongue, moving her hips just a tiny bit. Not only that, she grabbed onto the headboard, holding it and bracing herself as she enjoyed the sensations pulsing through her body.

Then she cried out, climaxing hard. The ecstasy swept through her, sharp and intense.

But Lena wasn't done.

She pulled away and looked down at him.

Without saying a word, she unlocked his chastity cage and pulled the toy off.

"But, but I thought we weren't going to have sex," he stammered.

"Oh, we aren't," she said confidently. "Not unless you want to change your mind."

What was she doing to him?

She was training him. He understood this on some level, yet it didn't matter.

Her fingers slid along his erection. He had hardened instantaneously, so now she manipulated him, gently fondling his balls with one hand while caressing his manhood with the other. She wrapped her hand around his shaft. She brushed the pad of her thumb along the tip of his manhood, making sure every second brought fresh flames of need burning through his torso.

"No. Please, I can't..."

"You can do whatever you want," she said. "Under my guidance and with my permission, you can do whatever you like."

His lips pulled back, and he panted as the spasm of pleasurable need rocketed through his body. He could feel it along the tips of his fingers, along his arms, down his legs, all the way to his toes.

"Please. Please, ride me. Please, use me!"

"Six months," she whispered into his ear.

"No, wait!"

"Too late," she taunted her boy as she taught him one of the most important lessons a male could learn.

She positioned herself, straightening her back and lowering herself down again.

“You have been getting so much sex lately,” she said. “I think six months will be good for you.”

His eyes widened and he shook his head. “I, I want to take it back!”

“I’m sorry, sweet slave. That’s not how it works.” Her eyes glimmered and shined as she enjoyed that look of panic on his face, but then it morphed into something else as she lowered herself down and surrounded his member. The walls of her opening enveloped his most sensitive part, trapping him beneath her, exactly where he belonged.

“It’s so sweet to think that you actually get to make a choice,” she said before another burst of giggling jumped from her shining lips. She threw her head back and laughed, all while she rode his shaft, taking everything she expected, demanded, and deserved.

“You don’t get to fight. You don’t get to resist, and you never get to win, Calvin Drake. You belong to me. I’m going to keep you collared. I will have you marked with my sigil, and everyone will know that you are mine. Mine now. Mine forever. I’m never letting you go, Boy!”

She threw her head back and uttered those words, calling them out, one after another like an incantation.

All at once, the friction of her body against his triggered that explosion of bursting pleasure as it flared through her veins, along her nerves, into her core and back out again.

“Now,” she said, and that’s when he lost control.

With just a word, she could tell him exactly what to do, and this male couldn’t resist.

Maybe he didn’t have an owner before. Maybe he hadn’t been trained. Perhaps he could have even been called wild. But all of that came to an end as his shaft throbbed and she drained him, leaving him weak and tamed.

She pulled away, lowered herself down, and rested her head on his shoulder.

“Don’t worry. I’m going to let you out of the shackles. Eventually.”

Then she closed her eyes and relaxed. The lamps continued to flicker, but the yellow haze made it easy for her to start drifting off to sleep.

Just before she lost herself, she said, “You will be my most cherished prize, my favorite piece of property. Always.” And with that, she snuggled up against him before allowing sleep to claim her.

Calvin Drake had gone exploring, thinking he would wander some beautiful trails and see a few natural wonders. Instead, he had found his owner, so now he closed his eyes and drifted after her, falling asleep with his owner.

**The End**

## **Connect with me:**

My name is Anna Ritter; thank you for reading my story. I love books about erotic power play, and I'm eager to connect with my readers and talk about our favorite fantasies. You can email me here at [ARitter664@gmail.com](mailto:ARitter664@gmail.com). Feel free to ask questions or send me ideas for future stories. I'm also available for commissions.

## **My favorite games:**

Female supremacy is my favorite fantasy. I love stories and novels about entire societies where women have seized control. Men are reduced to the status of chattel, slaves, and toys for their female superiors. In these storylines, men can fight, but they're destined to lose. Sometimes women have taken control based on magic or technology. In other stories, women are just smarter and work to outmaneuver the boys who foolishly thought they were in charge.

Dominant women make up many of the characters in my stories. These tales focus on wives, girlfriends, and other female rivals who take power in specific microcosms. Here, the women are still very much in charge, but their control is limited to a single man. He'll still be enslaved, but the rest of the world remains largely the same.

Chastity training is intense. Boys are obsessed with their libidos, so there's something magically enticing about locking a man up and reducing him to a pathetic, kneeling slave ready to obey every command. Sometimes these males need to be tricked. Maybe they need to be blackmailed or even kidnapped and forced into a chastity cage. One way or another, they'll give in. Holding his key is one of the most delectable pleasures I can imagine.

Cuckolding is another incredible fetish. Since I am interested in how men can lose control, I'm fascinated by the idea of a wife or girlfriend who's decided that her man just isn't good enough. Yes, she still cares about him and wants to keep him around, but he will be a slave, forced to watch his girl with another man—if he's lucky. This kind of the trail is one of those ultimate expressions of power and control.

Bondage can be psychological, but I tend to prefer the literal restraints. The notion of having a man strapped down, his arms and legs spread, his naked body on display is powerfully erotic. I love knowing his girlfriend or wife can touch him and tease him, forcing him to beg and plead. His dignity drains away as he succumbs to that overwhelming desperation.

Spanking is an amazingly simple punishment. Take a man, put him across your lap, and spank him. Make him cry out. Pain might be one of the oldest incentives, but it works beautifully. When a man whimpers, he understands what he's lost.

Humiliation is one of those tools men seldom acknowledge. They want to believe they're capable of dealing with any slight or insult, only this isn't true. So many men are incredibly fragile. They tell themselves that they're powerful, but they still worry about what the women nearby might think. Getting collared, leashed, and crawling before a woman is an incredibly humiliating experience. It strips him of his identity now that the world can see who he really is.

These are just a few of my favorite fetishes. If a game involves taking or losing control, I'll probably love it. So please, if you have any fantasies or ideas you would like to share, feel free to email me: [ARitter664@gmail.com](mailto:ARitter664@gmail.com).

### **Commissions:**

Do you have a fantasy you just have to explore? If you're interested in hiring me for a commission, you can get started by sending me an email.