

# Knight & Lady (Fantasy Body Swap TG Preg)

**By FoxFaceStories**

## **A Commission for AI**

*Within the fantastical world of Vortis, there is no greater hero than Sir Marcus. He has earned the hand of his love, the beautiful Lady Astrid, and all should be well. But when a horrid curse prevents them from conceiving, the pair must leave on one final adventure: to an ancient well that may grant their wish to bear children. But when the wish is made, who shall be the father, and who the mother? Soon the pair must reorient themselves as their bodies switch genders and roles, all while their wish's desire beckons.*

## **Knight & Lady**

### **Chapter 1: The Barren Curse**

Marcus gripped the sword in both hands. His shield was shattered. His armour was falling apart. He had been wounded along his forearms where the fell beast of a dragon had spat its acidic fire. And he was exhausted. But Astrid's life was in jeopardy, and for her he would cross oceans of agony to save.

"I give you one last chance, cruel tyrant!" he shouted across the fallen courtyard of the once-great citadel the dragon Atarax had made its lair. "Release my lady love, and we will leave in peace. Refuse, and your fiery heart shall taste my coldest steel."

Atarax bellowed a dread sound, the monstrous mirror to a man's laughter. Jets of black sulphur erupted from its mouth, and its dark green scales seemed to shimmer with heat. A haze of ash surrounded it, as if to demonstrate through magic that this was a creature of ruin and despair.

*'Petty mortal. Thou hast been injured. I can smell thine blood upon the air, and see thine fear in thine eyes. Your lady is of noble bearing. She will be a fine feast, and her corpse will thus carry magic potential for mine own spellmaking.'*

It swivelled its great head to look upon the Lady Astrid, tied to a pole beside the beast. She was young and beautiful, with bright curls of red hair and mesmerising green eyes. She was twenty five years old, but Marcus knew she had wisdom beyond her years and intelligence too. He had fallen for her when they were teenagers, and it had taken him years to earn her respect, and then later on, her love. Years of honing his body and soul into the greatest protector of the realm of Vortis, so that the scruffy young boy with tangled brown

hair was now a tall, stalwart adventurer with handsome good looks and more than a few scars earned through battle.

“Go, Marcus!” Astrid called, struggling against her restraints. “Please, save yourself!”

“I’m not leaving without you, my love,” he answered. “What say you, tyrant? Will you be honourable, or will you be nothing more than a petty creature, intent on death?”

The creature bellowed more of that foul laughter, tar-like acid dripping from its lizard-like lips.

*“Fool mortal. It is thou who hath chosen to make war upon death itself. Now death will claim thee. It claims thee - NOW!”*

The beast surged forward, its length like that of a snake, its jaws like those of a crocodile, its strength like that of a hurricane. Marcus had little time. He had taunted Atarax, and now the creature was withholding its foul breath, wanting to snap him up personally and crunch his bones slowly. It was just as he hoped, because it closed the distance between them. He ran forward, throwing himself into danger even as Astrid cried out in terror; from her view she could see nothing more than the dragon’s great mass enveloping the beast.

And then Marcus ducked at the last second beneath the dragon’s snapping maw, thrust up his sword, and jumped again to the side before the creature could crush him flat.

Astrid gazed in awe as the dragon staggered, whined, turned about to face Marcus . . . and then collapsed, wheezing. Black ichor of the darkest magic ebbed from its pierced heart. Relief flooded her as Marcus reached her and immediately tore at her bonds with his dagger. She embraced him the moment she was free, holding him close, tender tears slipping down her cheeks.

“Marcus! Marcus! You saved me, I didn’t think you would come. I didn’t think-”

“Hush, my lady. I will always come for you. You know that. I intend to take your hand, if you will still have it, and no dragon will stop me. Only if you, if you no longer desire me.”

Astrid actually managed to burst out laughing, despite everything. “Oh, ever so dramatic, Marcus!”

“Well, I *did* just slay a foul dragon.”

She laughed again, already calming in his presence. “Well, yes, you did. I suppose we must give you points for that. And provided you can get me back to the city in time for a nice, long, hot bath and then wear some clothes that *aren’t* smelling of sulphur, then I’d say the wedding is *very* much still on, my love.”

Marcus grinned, and the two kissed. Her lips did indeed taste of sulphur, but he didn’t mind so much, so long as they were hers.

“Let’s get out of here.”

“No looking for dragon’s gold? No great hoard?”

“The only treasure I need is you, Astrid,” he said, picking her up.

She giggled as he lifted her. She stared up into his hazel eyes. "I don't know, I still think a dragon's hoard would be of some use."

"I am . . . quite tired, Astrid."

"Oh, of course! Sorry! Yes, let's get back to your horse and I'll tend to your wounds."

"I have missed that."

And this, perhaps, might have been where their troubles ended, were it not for the fact that Atarax's life ebbed on for just a little longer, the creature's spite giving it life enough to spit out one final curse upon the pair.

*"Pathetic mortals,"* it rumbled.

Immediately Marcus put Astrid down and placed himself before her, his dagger already out. He hadn't retrieved the sword from the creature's heart yet.

"Atarax," he said. "Are you not dead yet? Would you like me to finish the job?"

*"Dead, and dying. Thine stroke of fortune hath ended me, but I shall have my vengeance beyond my desolate grave, Marcus Denath of Vortis, Astrid of the House of Levian."*

Marcus kept his eye on the creature. "You will be forgotten, Atarax. With your enhanced senses I imagine you heard the plans of my love and I. We will be joyous, while you rot in this fallen place. A fitting end to all the suffering you brought and intended."

The creature rumbled a gasping final chuckle.

*"Joyous, hmm? Joy has always been mine enemy. I have smothered it with ash and smote it with fire. A barren and desolate world is what I hath decreed, and I decree it now for thine union. For though you shall wed, thou shall bear no fruit from thine union, be blessed with nought children. Astrid will find no babes to suckle upon her breasts, nor shall thee, Marcus, have strapping sons to teach thine heroic ways. Your manhood will be sterile as a mule, pathetic knight, and your womb will be as barren as a desert, ignoble lady. This I give with mine last breath, an unbreakable dragon's curse upon your 'loving' union."*

And with that, and silence hanging in the air, the dragon finally died. Unspeaking, Marcus approached the beast and removed his sword from its pierced heart. The creature slumped again, and then started to dissolve entirely into that foul-smelling ichor. Astrid clung to him when he returned to her.

"That curse, Marcus. Is such a thing true?"

Marcus shook his head, though in truth his soul was quite shaken by what he'd heard. "Not at all, my love. And if it is, the wizard Kathorn will be able to aid us in overcoming it." He cupped her cheek. "I know you want children, and I want them with you. The beast is dead, and it will hurt us no longer."

Astrid nodded, and hugged him tightly. "Of course. Nothing can pry us apart now."

“True - but - ahh - you might want to think about prying yourself apart from me now, my love. I am still injured.”

The lady did so immediately, blushing deeply. “Oh, sorry! Well, let’s see to those wounds!”

They left the fallen citadel behind, and the black sludge that had been the cruel dragon Atarax. After helping Marcus patch back up, Astrid clung to her love as he rode them back across the Ashen Plains towards the verdant kingdom of Vortis. Her heart rode high, desperate to finally be able to marry this man, and knowing that this feat of bravery would more than earn him the right in the eyes of the law and the nobility.

But she couldn’t stop thinking of the dragon’s curse also.

She had to put it out of mind, and focus on her future. She was certain it would be blessed with many children.

She was certain.

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Astrid shed tears once more. She had possessed such high hope that *this* would be the time that her womb finally took, but as had been the case many times now, her bleeding had arrived. Not even a sign of pregnancy had come to her this past month.

“Damn it all,” she cried softly. “It isn’t fair!”

There was a knock upon the door to her room.

“Who is it?” the young beauty asked.

“It is just I, my lady. Jenna.”

Astrid sighed. “Come in, Jenna. I need your help . . . cleaning up.”

Her chief handmaid, good friend, and confidante all rolled into one entered. She was a lovely girl with rich olive skin and dark eyes, and hair that would look far lovelier than any noblewoman’s if she was ever daring enough to test against her rank. The two had played together as children, as was the custom in Vortis between nobility and their lineage of servants, and it had formed an unbreakable bond between the two. When Astrid had become wed to Marcus four years ago, Jenna had been, against convention, the bride’s first witness, a greatly honoured role. She had more than earned it through her compassion and loyalty, and those features were demonstrated now, because her expression was immediately crestfallen.

“Oh, Astrid,” she said, dropping ‘my lady,’ “I’m so terribly sorry.”

She came over to Astrid’s side, and the noblewoman leaned against her handmaid, trying not to sob as Jenna held her. She was dressed only in her night shift, but the red stain was obvious, as it was upon the bed.

“I had such high hopes this time, Jenna,” she said. “As did Marcus. We really thought the wizard’s remedy would work this time. Kathorn said it would likely break the dragon curse! Instead, I am still barren.”

Jenna held her. “I am sorry, my lady. Truly sorry. Perhaps next time-”

“Next time I shall get my hopes up again, only to bleed once more. Marcus thought there was a chance, he truly did! He’s returning from that border clash now; the raven came last evening. I’d hoped to give him good news after all his heroics. It’s . . . it’s what I’m meant to do, isn’t it?”

Jenna placed a hand on hers. “Marcus is a good man. He would never see it that way.”

“But he is a mighty hero, and while I am a noblewoman, I am not fulfilling my duty. We’re bred for *breeding*.”

“It’s been four years, my lady. I know that is difficult, but some women take longer.”

“But four years feels like an age. Fah! I know I should not complain, Jenna. Other women bear my struggle, and they do it with far more dignity. But . . . I want a baby. I want several of them. I want to give Marcus a child. I want to feed a babe from my breast. It’s . . . it’s *instinct*. Surely you understand it?”

Jenna nodded, her fingers seeming to fumble somewhat. “I do, my lady. I . . . yes, I do.”

“Jenna, what aren’t you telling me?”

The woman swallowed. “Nothing of importance, my lady. Let us focus on you. I promise I will do all I can to care for you and ensure that-”

But Astrid was already narrowing her eyes, looking over her friend, seeing that her chest looked a bit more full, her skin a little more glowing, a fresh glint in her hair. And she had been tired lately . . . exhausted . . . even sick that one time. Astrid’s eyes widened.

“Wait. Stop. No! You aren’t!?”

Jenna bit her lip. “I’m so sorry, my lady. I did not wish to upset you with the news.”

But Astrid was immediately hugging her friend. “Nonsense! I am joyous for you, my friend! So very joyous. Oh, I am so excited for you and Harren, truly, I am!”

Astrid grinned, perhaps a little cheekily. “But since you insist on getting with child before your own lady, I now also insist that you draw me a hot bath and help me see to all this. And then, my favourite handmaid, we are going to get you a lovely cake to celebrate. At least one woman should not be barren in this household!”

Jenna and she laughed, and things resumed from there. But while she was indeed happy for her friend, there was no denying that the knowledge cut deep. Would the dragon’s curse ever be broken?

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“Damn it, Kathorn, there must be something we can do, anything! My wife’s own handmaid is blowing up like one of your magical bubble shields, and meanwhile my Astrid is still unable to bear children.”

Kathorn sighed. He was a smartly dressed figure, one who looked more like an academic than a classical wizard. He had eschewed the white beard for a smart, black-dyed goatee, and a set of horn-rimmed glasses that helped him peruse the many shelves of his arcanum.

“I’m deeply sorry, my lord, my lady,” he said to Marcus and Astrid. “I had pulled out all the stops on that last remedy. Nothing took, my lady, if I may ask?”

Astrid shook her head, staring at the ground. As regal and beautiful as she looked in her green dress and jewellery, she felt naked and pathetic.

“Nothing, kind wizard,” she said.

“There *must* be something,” Marcus insisted. “I order it. We desire children. We *demand* children.”

“Adoption is always a -”

Marcus held up a hand. “We already tried adoption, though it was not entirely what we desired we were absolutely ready to heap love upon a child we could give our name. But then the poor young babe became sickly. And do you know what happened the moment, in an act of wisdom by my beloved wife, when we returned him to his former caretakers? He recovered.”

Kathorn rubbed the bridge of his nose. “The dragon’s curse runs deeper than I could have imagined. I am afraid it is beyond my talents.”

Marcus tensed. Astrid knew her husband. He was a good man but forthright. He was about to deliver some harsh and unnecessary words, born more from anger at himself than anything. She held her husband’s arm, staying his anger.

“Is there nothing that can be done?” she asked, placing a hand on her slim stomach. “Please, great wizard. We would cross the stars ourselves on the merest chance to hold a child of our own.”

Kathorn paused, sighed, then nodded. “There is one last thing I have found. One final chance. It will be a long journey, and not without danger, but there is a myth about an ancient well known in the Eternal Glade.”

“That’s just a legend,” Marcus muttered, but Astrid shot him a look.

“I know, which is why it is just a chance. But I have a number of new maps that may indicate a site like it, but it is far beyond the hinterlands, across the Jade Sea, towards the edge of the known world and then beyond. You would have to go there, together, and in

union make a wish upon the well, then place a coin of this realm within it. Only then might the dragon's curse be ended. Of course, even the well's power might not be enough. Dragon magic is old magic. The wish may not turn out as you desire."

But Astrid and Marcus were already turning to each other and holding hands. He loomed over her, and she looked up into his hazel eyes.

"You would come with me?" he asked.

"I would go without you, if I must," she said. "But I know you would never let that be the case."

"Of course not, my love. Where you go, I go. To the ends of the earth."

"Literally, now," she said, smirking.

The pair turned back to Kathorn, who was astonished at how quickly the decision had been made.

"We'll leave in a week," Marcus announced. "In that time, wizard, you will tell us everything you know and suspect, and all we will need to prepare for."

## **Chapter 2: The Wish**

The married pair set out a week later, the first stages of their travels carefully planned and well-stocked, the later stages far more up to chance. They travelled by carriage initially - this was what Astrid was used to - but after they left Vortis, and then the neighbouring kingdoms of Talleth and Lormere, the rolling plains and hills and cities gave way to rugged mountain territory. Here they switched to horseback, with as much as they needed packed between them.

It was quite the awakening for Astrid. Apart from that time when she was kidnapped by Atarax, she had never been out in the wilderness like this. Now she was actually *camping*. For all her fortitude and sly humour, Marcus was the one now finding good humour in the situation. She had chipped two nails already, gotten her hair tangled in bushes, and was struggling to sleep thanks to all the bloody crickets. And this was not to mention the situation of a latrine!

"When we make this wish and I fall pregnant at last," she declared, jabbing a playful finger in his chest, "you will treat me like a queen."

"You are always a queen in my eyes," he said, grinning.

"Oh, you make it so hard to be angry with you! I swear, I should have chosen a worse husband!"

When they finally reached the sea, she was more than glad to rest upon the ship that took them across the Jade Sea. The emerald waters were beautiful . . . until the tide turned, and she began to get the seasickness. Marcus did his best to comfort her.

“Think of it as practice for the morning sickness?” he suggested.

She shot him a look that would wither the greatest knight.

“Ah, well, *you* are the well-spoken one of us, so I’ll just be silent now,” he said.

“Please do,” she said.

She was happy to get her feet back on land, as was Marcus. Their horses now took them through foreign lands, and there was more than a few clashes, moments of dread when Marcus was able to use his knightly prowess to keep them safe from predators and monsters. And yet, to their shared surprise, Astrid was able to pull her own weight. She was no fighter, but she was a noblewoman, possessed of regal bearing and diplomatic brilliance. When they were surrounded by bandits in numbers that not even Marcus could face off against, she simply . . . hired them. After all, why risk the death of a few when the kingdom of Vortis could send forth a few reserves of gold from the house of Levian?

And so the pair travelled forth, moving beyond the coastal cities of the Jade Sea and even the Zakarian Desert beyond their verdant lands. They entered regions untravelled by anyone from Vortis for centuries, and then . . . they went beyond even that. This was no mere few weeks of travelling: this was a months-long journey during which danger lurked. It would be impossible to recount all that the loving pair faced. Marcus faced off against the dread scaled beast of Mythar, and had to shield Astrid during a lightning storm, during which strange golems shifted and moved around them. Astrid had to tend to her husband when he contracted the blindsight sickness, and began feverishly muttering about horrors that existed only in his mind. Her hands gained calluses they’d never possessed, and she was able to cook camp meals and grow used to sleeping beneath the stars. The pair lent on each other during hard times, and talked often of their hope for children, and defeating Atarax’s curse.

They travelled to lands beyond known understanding or maps, and then they travelled to lands beyond those lands beyond.

Great mushroom forests whose canopies eclipsed the sky.

Starlit coves where great beasts lurked in wait of prey, their lures like beautiful men and women singing enticing songs.

Endless plains occupied by grass-eating beasts the size of small mountains.

Volcanic fields that burned, impossibly, with a dreadful cold, the lava a bright liquid blue that sucked away all heat.

The pair pushed through these, even as Astrid feared for the worst. She had learned to lean on the strength of her knightly husband, just as he had often leaned on her in court

matters, having grown up without any nobility to his name but for what he earned in his duties.

"I feel so hopeless sometimes," the beautiful redhead admitted. "Like I am just dragging you down and becoming some sort of princess in distress once more."

"Nonsense! For one, you're not a princess."

She punched him lightly on the arm, grinning in response. "Ah, but you once said I am always your queen."

"Exactly, my love. And I will always protect my queen, and never take her for granted. Besides, you have done far better than I imagined on this journey."

"Better than you imagined?" she said. "Oh, you expected me to fail?"

"Well, there was that incident with the big killer minotaur creature."

"Anyone would have screamed!"

"Yes, but it sort of did alert it to our position."

She sighed. "I guess I'm just not cut out for adventuring. I'm a woman of the court, Marcus. I suppose being a stalwart knight is purely your job. My handsome man."

"Well, having a beautiful woman to warm my bed at night, even beneath the stars, has made this journey easier."

They briefly drew their horses closer, just so the pair could share a loving kiss. But that was when Astrid suddenly paused. They had been going across an expanse of salt flats for days now, worrying they were off course, their supplies getting low enough that they'd have to turn back soon. But now something caught her interest.

"My love, is that another mirage, or do I see a forest on the horizon?"

Marcus looked in the direction his wife was pointing, and then he gasped himself. "By all the Gods, I see it as well. If it's an illusion, it must be a magical one. But if ever something looked like an ancient and eternal glade, that would be it. Come!"

They raced their horses across the flats, drawing closer to the site. It really did feel like it was at the end of the world: the flats extended seemingly forever, but now, at the end of all things, was a great garden with trees that were immense and literally sparkling in their beauty. Golden dust seemed to fall from nowhere, the weather perfect, the air temperate despite the heat outside. Enormous fruit of unknown origin and type grew from the plants all around them, and they quickly refreshed themselves and their supplies, finding the food to be wonderfully succulent and sweet.

"This truly is a magical place," Astris said. "The well *must* be here. It *must*."

They took a brief respite to take in the serenity and peace of this arcane setting, but Astrid was eager, even more so than Marcus. He was used to waiting before a big battle, or needing to rest before a major moment, but he couldn't pull back his wife, whose desperation to fall pregnant was now becoming positively manic.

“If the wish works, we could well conceive a child right here!” she exclaimed, tying her horse and striding forth into the unknown.

“Honey, it’s a long journey back, and-”

“I know, I know! But we know the way now, and made friends . . . and hired bandits. But think, my love, we could choose not to waste a single second. How many weeks and months and *years* has Atarax stolen from us? I am nearly thirty years old. We have tried for over four years to make a child, and we wish for more than just one.” She hugged her lover, placing her head against his powerful chest. He wore not armour, but an outfit of leather with very light padding. It was comfortable for her to rest against, and intimate too.

“I want to bear your children, my love. Please, can we not waste a second? Can we at least search right now?”

Marcus sighed. “Of course, Astrid. I would pause the moon for you, if you wished to see its beauty a second longer.”

She laughed. “Oh, you would never know you grew up a peasant boy, I swear! Come!”

They searched, and to their immense joy - especially Astrid’s - it did not, in fact, take long to find what they were looking for. In the centre of this great garden was a clearing where the grass was so fresh and beautiful that it almost looked unreal. An ancient well, its stone work almost marble-like in its whiteness, sat there, a rope somehow unfrayed or aged, like the well was awaiting to be drawn from and given to. The pair exchanged a look. Wordlessly, they stepped forward, Marcus wary of traps, of which there were thankfully none. Astrid jumped when, to her shock, a voice echoed out, serene and female and entrancing.

*‘You have come to entreat me. I will grant but one wish, joined by the union of two hearts holding a single desire.’*

“W-we do,” Astrid said, straightening her clothing. She wore a light travelling dress that was light blue in colour, and she adopted her best diplomatic stance. “We have travelled so very far, ancient one. We have brought a coin from our realm, as the legends say, to beg you to consider our wish.”

The trees rustled in the wind, an ethereal presence seeming to float and hover invisibly all around them.

*‘Yes, I judge your hearts to be pure. You may each step forward to my well. Do not desecrate it, and treat it with respect. Hold one another’s hand, and choose one to place the coin within the well.’*

Marcus passed the coin to Astrid. While the curse had rendered him sterile, it was Astrid’s own barrenness that truly tore at his wife, in a way his own sterility could not hurt him, at least not to such a degree.

“You make the wish, my love,” he whispered to her, kissing her lightly on the cheek.

Astrid had to blink back a single tear.

*'Make the wish,'* the entity of the glade spoke in its calming voice. *'Then cast forth the coin.'*

Astrid had thought long and hard about this, and reached a decision on the words to say. She held her hand out, the coin within her delicate fingers.

"I wish that the dragon Atarax's dying curse upon my husband and myself be broken, that we may have children together, and safely and easily at that."

She dropped the coin. It seemed to fall forever, until the bottom of the well glowed with a brilliant light, illuminating *thousands* of other coins. The entity chuckled softly.

*"A clever wish, with more provisions than perhaps usual . . ."*

Astrid tightened his grip on Marcus' hand, and he did his best to calm her.

*". . . but the wish is accepted."*

They both breathed easy.

"Thank you," Astrid whispered.

*"There is but one complication. A Dragon's Dying Curse is a powerful magic. To overcome this barrier, your forms may need to change, adapting to become virile and fertile once more. This may be unpredictable, but your own heart's desires will define the results. Do you accept this condition?"*

Astrid squeezed Marcus' hand.

"Honey," the knight said. "You should know I have experience with this sort of thing. Curses, wishes, enchantments . . . they don't always go how you imagine."

"I know, beloved, but this is our only chance. We've travelled so far . . ."

She bit her lip demurely, like the beautiful young noblewoman she was. "I leave the decision with you, my knight. I trust you more in this matter."

Marcus thought long and deep. He was still hesitant, but the longing look in his wife's gorgeous green eyes made the decision for him. And in truth, though his wife's desire for a child exceeded his own, he too wanted sons and daughters to raise happily with her, and fill their house with the sound of laughter. He gazed up towards where he imagined the invisible guardian of the well to be.

"We accept this condition," he announced, his baritone voice confident now that he'd reached his decision.

The well glowed even more powerfully, and to their shared astonishment a series of tendrils of golden light emerged from its abyss, coiling around the pair, binding them together. Marcus and Astrid marvelled, their essences lighting up as they were infused with the light. It was impossible to describe, but it was like being touched by the heavens themselves. Astrid felt something inside her shift, as if her very being was being re-oriented and redirected towards some new and glorious purpose. Marcus felt the same, and the two

held hands as the light passed over them and through them, until finally it retreated away and dimmed into silence.

*"It is done,"* the voice said, *"though the changes themselves will take time to manifest. Be on your way, good travellers, and remain pure of heart. Be fruitful and loving, and by the time you return home, the first of your future children will already be on their way."*

Astris and Marcus gaped, unable to believe the words they were hearing.

"It - it worked!" Astrid announced.

"Time will tell," Marcus said, a little cautiously.

But Astrid was already holding her lover, kissing him tenderly.

"Then let us return to camp and *celebrate* our hopes, dear husband. And if your seed does not take this time, then we can just try, try, and try again on the long journey home!"

Marcus smirked at this, drawing his wife closer to him.

"Well, I certainly won't complain about *that*."

They retreated from the well, giving into their passions, which had always been frequent and loving and *lustful*, though the energy Astrid especially brought now was greater than it had been in years, much to Marcus' delight. Little did they know that the magic already beginning to slowly change them would go a lot further than they imagined, all to overcome the dragon's curse. After all, Marcus' sterility was insurmountable, and Astrid's fertility likewise.

But no one had said *who* had to be the mother, and who had to be the father . . .

### **Chapter 3: First Signs**

Marcus frowned as he served strips of cooked meat and eggs for breakfast.

"I think I've stretched my clothes too loose," he remarked. "Either that, or I've getting leaner from all this hunting lately."

Astrid looked over her handsome, stalwart knight of a husband.

"Indeed, my love, it does look a bit loose on you. We shall simply have to fatten you right back up when we return to Vortis. And have a bath. Many baths, in fact. I don't think I can face Jenna without one, so I shall have to send a note ahead for her to draw me one. *Us* one, perhaps."

"That's if you'll fit," Marcus joked, still fiddling with his clothing. "You may be a bit . . ."

He trailed off as he gestured a stomach bump with his hands. Astrid simply smiled, touching her still-flat belly with her finger.

"One can only hope."

“Do you think my seed has taken?”

“I wouldn’t know, husband. I’ve never experienced it before, thanks to that foul Atarax and his curse. But . . . some women just know, so perhaps I shall too.”

Marcus frowned as he tried to tighten his tunic. It really was far too loose around the shoulders. He had definitely become too lean, and his hair was descending too much; he’d need to ask his wife to cut it soon.

“And what is your body saying now?” he asked, shifting closer to place an arm around his wife’s slim waist.

“It’s telling me . . . it’s telling me that it’s full of energy. A bit of extra muscle, perhaps.”

“Hmm, that could be a sign, yes?”

She threw him a small eye roll. “My dashing knight, you reveal yourself as a naive former peasant sometimes, you know.”

He chuckled. “And why is that?”

“Because a woman is meant to become *exhausted* when in her first stages of pregnancy. The energy comes later. There is a . . . tenderness. In the chest, I mean.”

He raised a hand to fondle her.

“You crude tyrant! Out in the open, no less!”

“It’s not like there’s anyone for miles,” he said, continuing to rub her chest. “Any tenderness?”

“Quite the opposite. They feel duller than usual. And, I know you’ll be saddened to hear, but smaller as well. Reduced. All this moving about and travelling is making me lean as well, husband.”

Marcus frowned at this. He wasn’t so sure. In fact, his wife was looking unexpectedly statuesque as of late. It had only been a couple of weeks since they had left the ancient well and its keeper, but her bearing was more regal, her stature seemingly taller, and he’d noticed that lithe, pale body had more athleticism to it; the beginnings of impressive muscle - at least for a woman - on her arms and legs, and even upon her stomach.

But that wasn’t on his thoughts right now. Instead, more primal instincts were stirring as he continued to cup his wife’s slightly reduced breast. She moaned a little - clearly, some good feeling was still there.

“Marcus, you truly are insatiable.”

“Well, if you aren’t with my child, then I think we should just keep trying,” he said, voice smooth and flirtatious. “And the stars are too beautiful not to make love beneath them, wouldn’t you say?”

Astrid had been raised as a proper woman, but Marcus had taught her more than enough about the pleasures of nature, however taboo they could be for a respected noblewoman.

“Beneath the stars then,” she said, starting to undo the stays of her travelling dress.  
“Let’s make it a fertile omen.”

It would be, just not in the way either could possibly guess.

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The pair finally passed the volcanic hellscape in all its treachery and arrived at the vast plains with its colossal beasts. Both were feeling sore from their journeys, their mounts also, but the true anxiety lay not in any danger but fear that the entity of the ancient well had not truly heeded their wish.

“I don’t feel any more virile, I must confess,” Marcus said as he rode alongside his wife.

She smirked. “What, did you expect to sprout muscles upon muscles, my love? To gain ever more considerable girth in your manhood?”

He raised an eyebrow. “No, not exactly. But I didn’t expect to *lose* muscle either. I swear, I am positively slimming. And there must be bugs here: I can’t stop scratching my damned chest.”

Astrid was sympathetic, but a little smug. She was proud of her beauty, but this great journey had hardened her. She had cut her bright flame orange hair shorter, and her emerald eyes shined a little less with naivete now. But this return journey had gifted her with energy and power: her biceps were evident, and her calves were like those of the female Hideti warriors. Unfortunately, the simple rations had slimmed her beautiful chest, much to her disappointment, but on the whole she was more powerfully built. She could have even sworn that she was somehow taller, with a slightly more barrel-shaped chest, though she knew that to be impossible.

“If it’s any consolation, my love,” she said. “If you are worried about feeling less of a man, it seems my own femininity is waning. Observe . . . and despair.”

Taking the reins in one hand, she rolled up one sleeve and flexed her bicep. Marcus indeed observed this, but rather than be disappointed, he slowly smiled in a quite particular way. Astrid’s eyes gleamed with surprise.

“Oh, I know *that* face. Don’t tell me you find my unladylike musculature appreciable?”

Marcus chuckled. “You know, I never imagined I would! I like a dainty, fair, and well-bosomed woman, as you well know. But this . . . hmm, this opens up a new area of unexpected interest for me. Who would have known?”

Astrid giggled, though it was lower in register than her usual sweet voice.

“Then I shall show off my new strength with pride, husband. Though I’m afraid to say my well-bosomed aspect, as you put it, has not kept pace with other growth.”

She stuck out her chest, and Marcus made an over-the-top display of despair.

“Oh, they're not that lost!” she declared, throwing an apple his way.

Marcus caught it easily, held it up, angling it so that from his view the apple was equal in size to her chest as he squinted, the fruit overlaid upon her bosom. Astrid was aghast.

“You better not be measuring me,” she warned.

“I would never, my dear. But how about when we get back, we eat a true feast. Let some extra poundage refill some old familiar places.”

She actually *snorted* this time. “And to think you managed to court a refined noblewoman such as I. If you weren't so deceptively dashing I would never have - Marcus, look!”

Marcus was quick. He slid his sword from its sheath and turned to where his wife was pointing. The weapon was heavier than he remembered it being, but he still held it with practised mastery. It wasn't needed, however. There was no thread, just a sight of captivating majesty.

“By all the Gods,” he whispered to the wind.

In the far distance, a gargantuan colossus was rising up from the other side of a great steppe hill of blue grass. The creature was enormous, easily taller than the mightiest of castles, and with six long legs thudding heavily as it moved implacably across the plain. It's scaly hide was coated in tufts of that same blue grass, and it's head was a shaggy thing, low and flat like a tortoise, lowering on a great stalk to consume patches of reeds below. It had eight yellow eyes, large and round. It was like nothing Marcus had ever seen.

“It's beautiful, isn't it?” Astrid called, pointing out the hundreds of birds nesting on the creature and flying about it.

To Marcus' own shock, his eyes began to fill with tears.

“It truly is,” he replied, voice cracking a little higher. “It truly is.”

Astrid pulled up alongside him, even as the tears continued to flow. He had to keep wiping them away. Astrid beamed, caressing his hand as she leaned from her horse.

“I love seeing a new side to you, my love. I had no idea you could be stirred to emotion so.”

Marcus coughed, getting control of himself. He ran a hand through his longer hair.

“Me either,” he said, voice cracking again.

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The first signs of change continued in their subtlety as the pair reached the starlit coves. Marcus had fought off the creatures lying in wait before, and he kept his eye out again. Surprisingly, it was actually his wife who proved sharper eyed, however.

“Marcus, watch out! It’s camouflaged!” she called, in response to a near-invisible serpent that was literally posing as a stream of water. Not *in* a stream, but as one, unfurling to reveal itself as an elemental being of great size. Marcus slew the beast, though once more his practice with his sword seemed to have waned with his muscles. Once again Astrid proved to help overcome this meagre handicap: in a fit of unexpected passion that briefly terrified Marcus, she launched forward with the small shortsword he had given her and hacked at the creature’s reef-like tail. The creature was felled, but Marcus could scarcely believe it.

“My love, that was so unlike you!”

“I - I know,” she said, still wide-eyed and struggling to resheathe her sword. “Gods, what was I thinking! It was just like this - this aggressive *rush* came over me!”

“Well, try not to get too aggressive, my love. I swore to protect *you*, didn’t I? Though . . .”

She put her hands on her hips. They too had become seemingly less broad in the past few nights.

“Hmm?”

“Well, a mood change like that . . .”

“Could be from being with child,” she murmured, suddenly ecstatic

Sadly, the first true disappointment followed a mere week later, as the pair crossed the Zakarian Desert. Astrid had been feeling bloated and tender, her still-thinning breasts briefly rising in size. After a small bout of sickness, she was beginning to truly hope that her husband’s seed had finally, *finally* taken.

Only to wake in her tent the next morning, her bleeding having arrived.

Astrid wept in Marcus’s arms, and this time he openly wept with her, his emotions further stirred than they had ever been.

“It is all for nothing,” she whimpered. “It was all false hope.”

“Don’t say that yet,” Marcus replied, holding her. He didn’t want to say anything, but his wife felt . . . thicker. Not fatter, but literally larger in stature. Broader. He hoped this was a nascent change: perhaps her body had to become a bit more stoutly in shape and bearing in order to, well, *bear* a child. He didn’t mention this, however, for fear of getting her hopes up too much.

“You were already more sceptical of magic than I,” Astrid said.

“Well, I was wrong, wasn’t I? The ancient well’s spirit did speak to us, and I refuse to believe it was all for nothing. We *will* make a child together, Astrid. I just . . . I know it. I can feel it in my gut.”

His gut took that exact moment to make a loud, guttural sound. It was enough to make Astrid burst out laughing suddenly.

“Your gut sounds hungry more than anything!” she said, finding humour despite her sadness.

He pawed at it. “And here I’ve been eating less. I swear, it’s like my stomach is shifting about lately!”

“I imagine that it would feel quite unfortunate,” Astrid said dryly.

“Yes, it does, and - ah. You’re mocking me.”

“Just a little,” she said, mimicking the motion with her thumb and forefinger.

Marcus left his wife in her tent, feeding the horses and readying them for travel to the edge of the desert. The news that Astrid was not with child saddened him, but he had to hope against hope that this journey would be worth it in the end. He stared across the beautiful, barren horizon, scratching his chest as he did so. It really did feel like his nipples were swollen lately. In fact, his entire chest was beginning to feel a bit sore, and almost . . . flabby. Rounded, perhaps. And as surely as his wife had become a bit more statuesque, so too did he feel smaller as of late. Lither, yes, but also literally shorter, as if the journey was grinding him down. Hell, his legs and forearms were losing their body hair, like his own manhood was being sapped.

He had no idea how true that was.

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It was when they were only a day’s travel from Heersun, one of the Jade Cities of the east, that the pair realised something was wrong. The crossing through the Zakarian Desert had been tough, much tougher than Marcus remembered, but Astrid had acquitted herself with far less complaint, a complete reversal of how it had been the first time they had passed through. Marcus’ skin seemed so much more sensitive, while Astrid found herself more rugged, the sandstorms whipping at her skin but causing little damage. When they tented down for the night, Marcus would grumble and turn in their shared bedding, rubbing his chest and murmuring with irritation at his nipples. His voice, Astrid thought, was light and almost feminine. At first she thought this was comical, but then it continued, and her own voice was likewise lower, becoming the kind of contralto favoured by powerful female singers back upon the Vortis opera stage.

Sleep seemed to bring a kind of peace, at least, but upon waking it was as if their bodies had changed further, far more than during the day. Marcus was awkwardly hiding his more prominent chest, while she in turn was frowning at her increasingly flat equivalent. The various curves, however petite they had been, that Astrid usually took pride in were now smoothing out. Her hips, which she had once imagined would be excellent for producing healthy children, had lost much of their expanse and fat. And while she'd never had the most *rondure* backside, it was somewhat diminished to find it, well, *diminished*. All of these changes, even the tougher nature of her face, she had taken to be a result of their rugged adventure. It wasn't like she could shave all too successfully during such travels, so surely that would explain the greater hairs upon her legs and even her arms, even if they were surprisingly . . . thick. Right?

But then she saw her husband's face after they had reached an oasis at the edge of the Zakarian Desert. This was a place for numerous travellers, traders, and merchant caravans to coalesce before undertaking journeys across the Jade region. They had chosen to tent at the edge of this encampment and resupply before reaching the cities proper. The two had discussed long into the night the various luxuries they looked forward to seeing. But now all of that was forgotten from Astrid's mind as she beheld her still-sleeping husband. The light of the morning sun was shining through their tent, illuminating its interior just enough for her to take in the softness of his features that simply shouldn't have been there.

"Impossible," she whispered, reaching a hand out to gently stroke his face.

He moaned softly as she did so, and even that sound had an androgynous quality to it, where once it would have been low and manly.

Her husband's facial hair was gone. Completely gone. Not just the scruff he had been looking forward to shaving when they reached Heersun, but any evidence that he *had* been able to grow facial hair too. The skin around his chin and mouth and cheeks were as smooth as a baby's bottom. And that wasn't all: his hair had grown another inch, seemingly overnight, and now was long enough to fall to his chin. Marcus' jaw had lost its square-shaped quality, taking on a rounder formation, and his wider nose had thinned somewhat, looking almost dignified in shape. His brows looked as if they'd been plucked, just a little, losing some of their inherent bushiness and gaining a feminine touch to them. Even his cheekbones had changed: they had come out of hiding and rising a little. All in all, he looked to be . . . feminising.

With a trembling hand, a dread thought came over Astrid. She raised a dainty hand - well, it *had* been dainty, but seemed thicker and tougher now - to her own face, pawing at her chin and upper lip. She shuddered with horror at the sensation that met her.

Hair.

Facial hair.

Like that of a man. Light, perhaps barely visible, but there.

“Oh Gods,” she whimpered. She lowered her hand down to body beneath their shared cover. Her breasts were still present, but even flatter than they had been. Her nipples were smaller, their feelings duller. And further down . . .

Something had changed about her womanhood. It was . . . distended, as if her most sensitive part was swollen out from above her feminine hood. She shivered, a terrible chill descending down her spine. Was she bigger? Her husband seemed to be equally large as her by this point. Or had he shrunk? By the Gods, had they been ignoring this all along? How had they not seen the signs?

It was at that moment her husband opened his eyes. For a moment he simply blinked, rousing himself to wakefulness, but then he smiled widely.

“My love,” he said, voice croaky, a little light. “How are you this morning?”

Astrid swallowed. She had no idea what to say. How else to tell him?

“My love,” she said, her own voice that little bit deeper. “I think . . . I think the wish is working.”

He shifted up, the blanket falling down a little. His nipples became visible. He obviously didn’t realise yet, but they were larger. Thicker. More prominent. And his chest was . . . rounder. In two places.

“It is? Are you - are you pregnant?”

Astrid swallowed. “No. I - I don’t think I will ever be pregnant, husband.”

“I don’t understand.”

She placed a hand on his chest, leaving him to shiver a little from the unexpected sensation.

“My love, the magic is working, but not in a way either of imagined. I think . . . I think we’re changing places.”

He furrowed his brow. “What do you mean?”

“I mean that soon I shall be a man, and you a woman. And . . . and *you* will be the one who carries our child.”

Marcus’ jaw fell. Before he could even express his shock, however, he looked down at himself.

“Dear Gods, no!”

## **Chapter 4: The Magic’s Intent**

Marcus refused to believe it. There was no way the magic was turning him into a woman! He had been a man, a valiant, courageous, and proudly masculine one, all of his life. He had

worked himself up from a simple peasant's boy to a respected, feared, and loved knight of the realm, and had earned the hand of a beautiful noblewoman whom he loved dearly, and was *certainly* attracted to. He had proved his manhood in that respect, too. And now his love Astrid was convinced that the magic was making her - a figure of fragile beauty - a man, and he - a rugged, tall, well-muscled man - a woman!?

He refused to entertain the thought. Even as she had explained her understanding of the entity's wish-granting, he had denied it.

"I think that even the spirit of the ancient glade could not overturn Atarax's curse, not completely. You are destined to be sterile, and I sadly barren. But by making us change sexes, that would allow us to produce children. I am not prevented from being virile, love, and you are not prevented from being barren."

"Except for the fact that I am *not* a woman!" he bellowed.

She touched his chest, leaving him to gasp a little from the unexpected sensitivity there. "Husband, look. These developments are unnatural. Your face is softening. I am getting taller, and you are getting shorter. We are changing places to fulfil our wish."

"No, no! I don't believe it. I - I simply can't. This is just the strange results of the weather, of the magic of the glade, of me giving you my extra rations, or something. I'm going to fetch us some water."

He quickly got dressed and removed himself from the tent, ignoring his imploring wife. The oasis encampment was starting to buzz with activity, and he moved through it, his longer brown hair swishing against his cheeks. It was certainly longer, almost unnaturally so, but that didn't mean she was right! He grabbed a strand of it and inspected it. It looked . . . darker than usual. He had always had brown hair, but some of the strands here were almost black now.

"It's just the effects of the sun," he muttered. "Same as this damned croaky voice."

He reached the oasis and placed the buckets into the cool, refreshing water. They were heavy when filled, heavier than expected, even. For a moment he actually struggled with their load, only to pull upon his reserves of energy.

"Don't overdo it, young miss!" came an accented voice. "Here, I shall help you."

To Marcus' surprise, one of the local Zakarian traders, olive-skinned with a dark, heavily oiled goatee, came to his surprise. He practically tried to snatch the bucket from Marcus' hand, but Marcus held firm.

"I can take care of it," he said, voice still a little squeaky. "I am a knight of Vortis, I am more than used to such customs."

"From Vortis I believe, but a knight? I thought only men could become knights there, young miss."

Marcus looked up, his hair parting naturally to each side.

"I am a *man*, good sir. Do not insult me."

The man paused, his eyes widening. "A thousand apologies scattered across the sands of the desert, good sir! I had thought - the desert springs forth many mirages, even here. Please, allow me to offer a discount on my wares!"

Marcus fumed. He rubbed his chin, again finding it utterly hairless. Could he really look so like a woman?

"It better be a big discount," he muttered. His gaze caught his reflection in the stilling oasis waters. For just a moment, even *he* thought he was seeing a woman.

"Of course so! Only the best wares for you and your, er, partner?"

"Wife," he muttered, seeing Astrid approach. She was indeed taller - how had he not fully noticed this until now? Her desert travel clothing was stretched against her form, and her arms were obviously firm and tough as they shifted by her sides.

"That is your wife?" another Zakarian said, astonished. He gave a deep belly laugh. "I guess we know who wears the pants in the relationship, ha! I have some climbing equipment for you sir. I imagine you need it, to mount a woman like that!"

Marcus frowned. He was almost ready to draw his sword.

"Just let me see what wares you have. And don't comment on Astrid. She is a noblewoman of Vortis, and her reputation is beyond reproach!"

"It would be," a passerby said, as the crowd joined to apparently take in Astrid's impressive stature. "I doubt you could find a man big enough to still be the man beside her."

"This one *is* the husband," the first Zakarian corrected a bit sheepishly.

"What? This one? Ha, good sir! You have done well to not be intimidated! I myself believe a man should always be larger than his lass, but I see that-"

"Just let me see the damn wares," Marcus fumed, voice catching into a squeak. This only served to set several of the men laughing some more, which only increased his anger. He was almost ready to draw his sword when Astrid arrived, her hands on her hips.

"Is something the problem, gentlemen? We are looking for wares."

The men muttered and made comments among themselves in their own language, clearly still amused. The shortest Zakarian looked up at her, grinning from ear to ear.

"Anything for a woman of your . . . stature," he purred.

But Marcus knew Zakarian. He had travelled with an adventurer and trained under one from this land as well. He could make out some of their whispered comments to each other.

*"He looks more the woman and she the man."*

*"Do they not shave moustaches on women in Vortis?"*

*"She looks like she could beat him in an arms wrestle."*

*“Bah, she is not attractive as from a distance. No hips on her, and far too mannish in the jaw.”*

*“She bargains well, though! Like a hard-headed man. Don’t try to play this one!”*

He decided not to argue and make things worse. Gods knew, his ego was already bruised enough without drawing this conversation out. In the end, he let his wife negotiate the prices for various things, including a new shaving kit and new clothing.

Hers, she explained, was becoming rather tight.

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Astrid noticed that her husband was near-silent as they approached Heersun. She had tried to initiate conversation several times, but was rebuffed at each turn. She understood why; she was still trying to come to terms with it all herself. They were changing sex, and it was increasingly obvious to both of them. The thought of becoming a man; muscled and hairy, with a - a manhood between her thighs! It was too much to even consider, let alone how her own part in their relationship would change. What would getting hard feel like? How could she possibly act around other men? She had been raised to be a dainty, well-mannered, and well-spoken woman, a figure of silk hiding steel, but not *actual* steel such as a word! And now she would have a *sword* of her own, and one that could become quite erect indeed. Already, it was starting to bulge a little as it extended. It was barely an inch, but she was deeply aware of it.

But of course, any consideration she had was matched if not surpassed by her husband. He had worked his way up from nothing to become a great knight. His pride was in his manliness. To become unmanned in a society such as theirs . . .

Her poor knight.

“My love,” she said. “We can talk about this. We can stop before we reach the city gates and-”

“I’m going to find an omen reader,” he said suddenly. He was obviously trying to keep his voice low, but the softness in it still came through. “Heersun prides itself upon having the greatest omen-readers in the land. They helped us direct ourselves through the desert and beyond to the Ancient Glade in the first place. Now they’ll help us decipher this damned curse.”

“It was a wish freely granted, my love.”

“It is a curse. We didn’t wish to change sex.”

“But the spirit did warn us there would be the unexpected, did it not? And that to grant what we wanted, certain sacrifices would be made. My love, I know your pain, I feel it too. But if this is truly the only way for us to have children, then perhaps . . .”

“Perhaps what?” he muttered. “Perhaps I should lose my member and spread my legs and receive *your* seed, and willingly at that? Perhaps I should grow big with child until it is time to labor and birth?”

Astrid swallowed. She was on a knife edge in this conversation, but she knew she could not back down. They had come so far.

“Perhaps,” she repeated. “If it is the only way. Then yes, my love, perhaps.”

Marcus scowled. “I can scarcely imagine it.”

“I would help you through it.”

“Please, let’s not talk of this anymore. We will find accommodations. We will bathe and get new clothing for our . . . changing forms. And then we shall find an omen reader. We will find a way to undo this. I won’t . . . I won’t be unmanned, Astrid.”

The noblewoman kept her mouth shut. What else was there to say? She wanted to talk sense to her husband, to at least let him see the possibilities, but she was the woman and he was the man. He was forthright and she far more willing to bend. It was the nature of things. Still, as she saw him rub his aching chest, she couldn’t help but think that the nature of things was changing. And she had always been headstrong, just as he had always been sensitive to her, romantic and outward in his affection

Were they truly bound by their sex?

She wondered.

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Proper quarters were indeed lovely. The Jade cities were far more resplendent and open to the sun than the cities of Vortis. Women wore gorgeous, brightly-coloured saris that bared their midriffs and shoulders, while men wore equally bright robes that were loose, going over only one shoulder. The skin of the people ranged from a gorgeous olive-tan to a captivating ebony-black, and affection was freely given - best friends held hands, women welcomed one another with a kiss upon the lips, and food was eaten from shared bowls in the centre of the table. It was a great contrast to Marcus and Astrid, who would usually adore such displays of affection but now found themselves frigid to such.

“At least we have been able to bathe?” Astrid said, half-asking a question of her husband. “And the new clothing suits us better, don’t you think?”

Marcus frowned as he looked over himself. He was wearing a small men’s robe, though he had chosen a simple white colouring rather than anything fancy. To his embarrassment, the shoulder catch configuration meant that his bare shoulder was revealed to be slim and lovely, blemish free. His skin was paler than it had been, and there was the faintest hint of a slight bosom where the fabric drew tight against his chest.

"I don't like it," he muttered. "It makes me look . . . shapely."

"Does your chest still ache?"

He groped it, running a finger over a swollen nipple and sighing. It sent a slight buzz of something approaching unwanted bliss through his system. His member, which had shrunk a little in size, hardened just a little.

"Yes. Very much so. Damn all the Gods for this, why is it still aching?"

Astrid blushed a little, not knowing quite how to break the news. Marcus preferred directness, though.

"I think it means you are still, um, *growing*, dear husband."

"By all the Gods!"

He grabbed a peach - the Heersunnites were not lacking for peaches - and began to devour it.

"Did your bath go well? I missed you. I miss our shared baths."

Marcus sighed. "I feel less dirty, at least." He cracked a small smile. "I won't lie, it did feel good to be in warm water again."

"Same," she expressed. "I would have liked to have shared it with you."

Marcus nodded. He blushed a little. "Even when I am unmanned?"

"You're not unmanned yet, my love. And besides, there are other ways of having fun that I can show you."

She moved over to him as he lay on the couch, placing herself over him. She was astounded at how equal they were now in height, and her own musculature had grown to match his as well. Slowly, she opened the front of his robe and caressed his chest, running her fingers over the slight bulges there that signalled them to be small breasts. He elicited a slight groan as she teased his nipples, letting them stiffen. Indeed, he had more womanly areolas now, and something about this aroused Astrid, making her own womanhood become moist, but also her clitoris to swell, as if it yearned to harden and rise as well.

"B-by the Gods, that f-feels weird," Marcus murmured, swallowing a little. He had cut his hair, but it only revealed the greater elegance of his features, similar to how Astrid's own shaving had shown the prominence of her jawline.

"I can stop, if you like."

"I - ahhh, no. Keep going. Just - ahhh - it's very . . . different."

"Well, perhaps it's one small thing you can learn to enjoy, before we meet this omen-reader."

His hands ran over her, playing with her own chest. It was quite flat by this point, and her nipples less sensitive. Still, it was getting her going. She slipped out of her sari, straddling her husband, enjoying his girth.

“You are not unmanned yet, my love,” she repeated. “And now it’s time for you to show me.”

“Gods, you have a way of pulling me from a black mood, my love.”

Indeed, the lovemaking that followed help soothe Marcus’ fears, at least for the now. He was not as big as before, but he was still capable of thrusting into his wife and bringing the pair of them to ecstasy. But now a strange new dynamic was added to their passion: the way Astrid played and groped and teased his increasingly womanly chest, allowing him to bask in its sheer tenderness. It ached to grow further, and that made him afraid.

But for now, just this once, he revelled in the new sensations.

When the pair finally came, they moaned into each others’ mouths, kissing lovingly as his seed shot within her. It wasn’t nearly as much as it should have been, but the act replenished him, just as it aided Astrid. She imagined in her mind’s eye that she was getting pregnant and that all was well. But when her husband cried out in a higher voice that illusion was shattered. She rested upon him, her head upon his nascent bosom, the pair breathing together in post-coital bliss. She wondered if this might be the last time they made love in such a fashion.

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The omen-reader’s name was Mina. She was middle-aged and beautiful, with dark olive skin and an abundance of hair. Her shop was surprisingly large despite its alleyway entrance, and apparently she was selective with her clientele. Many had warned Marcus of this, but the second she had seen him with her own eyes she had practically *demand*ed she read the omens for him.

“You have been touched by ancient powers at the end of the world,” she said in her accented voice. “Come, sit. Bring your partner too, for I sense the transformation of her aura as well.”

They sat upon purple pillows in the darkened space. The windows were blocked out but various lamps lit the heavily perfumed and cushioned room.

“How can I help you?” she asked. “Do you wish to know the future you are barreling towards? Or something else? I ask only a small donation from you; the pleasure of witnessing such ancient magic up close is blessing enough.”

Marcus and Astrid exchanged a glance, and a silent understanding passed between them: Astrid would speak first. She was less embarrassed and awkward about the changes that were occurring, and the better negotiator and diplomat besides, being raised as a noblewoman.

“Well, you are correct, wisewoman Mina,” Astrid said. “We did indeed travel to the ends of the world, all to correct a great injustice done to us by the cruelty of a dragon’s dying curse.”

She told their story to Mina, who listened with sage patience, though it was clear the story intrigued her greatly when she habitually repeated words such as ‘dragon,’ ‘glade’, ‘unexpected change’ and so forth, as if she were chewing on each sample of the story before devouring it. Astrid told her of their suspicion of the magic’s course upon their bodies, but their desire for confirmation of where it was headed.

“And if it can be overturned,” her husband pitched in, looking down at the faint outline of his burgeoning bosom. “And if so, how.”

Mina nodded. “Yes, I can see how two such as yourselves would find this . . . unexpected. I will do my best to commune with the spirits, and see if I can forge a connection to this magic and speak of it. The entity itself may speak through me, but I promise nothing but hope. Please, take my hands, both of you. Do not sever the connection until we are done. Close your eyes, and open yourselves to the vision that comes.”

They linked hands. Mina spoke some words in a language neither knew, and the lamps dimmed, leaving them in near-darkness.

“Great ancient magic,” Mina said. “I channel my energy to you. I bring forth my spirit into your realm, and beseech that you place your own energy into my empty vessel. Speak through my mortal flesh, that you may answer the questions of Astrid and Marcus, in whatever way you can. Let them know of the magic that affects them, and how it may be overcome. This I ask as a servant of the realms beyond our plane.”

She hummed a few brief bars of music. Marcus and Astrid both found themselves nervous, tempted to open their eyes.

And then, suddenly, there was no need, for the vision came to them both.

They were in the Ancient Glade again, the well that was older than the world itself before them. It was as if they had never left.

*“What would you know?”* came a familiar voice. *“I have already granted your desire. It shall simply take time to shape itself. Fear not, I said you would be expecting a child by the time you return to your homeland.”*

Marcus clenched his jaw. “You did not say *I* would be the one to carry and bear it! This was not what we asked for!”

*“You asked for the power to have children. I will repeat your wish to you, so that you understand.”*

A faint, translucent image of Astrid as she had been appeared between them. Astrid gasped; she had not realised how much she had changed since. The apparition spoke.

*"I wish that the dragon Atarax's dying curse upon my husband and myself be broken, that we may have children together, and safely and easily at that."*

"Do you see?" the entity continued. *"I have found a way to achieve this. But recall, you both agreed there might be a sacrifice."*

Marcus grimaced. "Yes, but—"

"But this is a large sacrifice," Astrid said. "A very large one."

*"It is the only one required,"* the entity said. *"The only one possible to overcome the evils of Atarax's dying curse. And I promise you, it will not be without its rewards."*

"What do you mean?" Marcus asked.

*"You are indeed correct that you shall take on the form of a woman, Sir Marcus Denath, just as Astrid Levian shall take on the form of a man. You shall still be husband and wife, but I anticipated that you would find your new forms difficult to take to, at first. So I have ensured that your transformations would be slow, that you might adjust."*

"That is . . . kind of you," Astrid said diplomatically. "But hardly what one would call a reward."

The well glowed with its golden magic. *"That is not the reward. The reward is that you will be in perfect health, and younger again, to make up the years wasted trying to bear children that could not be. You will be in your prime once more, but further than this, so shall your bodies."*

"Explain what you mean by that," said Marcus, who was starting to feel a bit nervous about what this could entail.

The golden light spread out to envelop them further.

*"The mortal lives of humans are beyond my full ken,"* the light whispered, *"so the ultimate forms you were to take required some aid. I reached into your minds, and found what you would find ultimately attractive to the fullest. I could not make you into each other, of course. Such a change is impossible, and I guessed would be too strange for either to live with."*

"Thank you, you guessed right," said Astrid, who couldn't imagine becoming her husband, let alone making love to a woman who now looked like her old self!

*"I am glad. Instead, I took from Marcus his ideal of the ultimate woman. An ideal partner that would be his personal fantasy. This is what he will be moulded into. For you Astrid, I did the same. The ultimate man, idealised and perfect. You shall become him. And both of you shall find irrepressible attraction to the other."*

Marcus and Astrid were briefly silent. Both could barely look at the other. For one, there was the personal realisation that even beyond their love and attraction to one another, both still had . . . ideas, one could say, of a more arousing individual. A hidden fantasy. This

was obvious to anyone, but no one ever admitted it! For two, the knowledge that they would *become* their own personal fantasy was something else entirely.

Marcus swallowed. A chill was down his spine. He wasn't entirely sure exactly what his deepest fantasy would look like - it had been hidden away since he fell in love with Astrid and known her and her body so long - but it made him anxious nonetheless.

"Look, great spirit, I understand what you are trying to do, but this is not what we wanted. I ask - I *demand* - that you change us back."

The golden light spread further.

*"I am sorry, I cannot. The magic is in effect now."*

"What if we came to you again?" Astrid asked.

*"I can only be visited once, dear ones. No, I'm afraid your changes are irreversible . . . for now."*

Astrid's eyes widened. "For now?"

*"They must be completed. And you must . . . bear a child. This part of your wish must be realised. After this, you will have achieved the wish in its entirety, and there is a chance your forms can be reverted by your court wizard, should you wish them to be. But you must want them to be."*

The light expanded, becoming impossible to see through. It was blinding.

*"This is the only way,"* the well spirit proclaimed. *"I am sorry that this is not how you desired things, but perhaps you shall find peace with it in the end."*

"Wait!" Marcus called. "Isn't there any other-"

The light dissipated, leaving them in a dark room before Mina. The lamps turned back on as her eyes opened.

"-way," Marcus finished.

Mina blinked as she collected herself.

"The connection is broken," she said. "I shall not be able to reclaim it again. But it seems you have your answers, even if they were not what you desired."

Marcus lowered a hand to his stomach, still shocked by what he had heard. He gulped a little, even as Astrid placed a hand upon his smooth shoulder.

"We will still get a child, my love," she said tenderly. "And you will be a man again, after a, well, a break, one might say!"

Marcus nodded slowly. "Do you have a basket you don't require?" he asked Mina.

"Several, I think. Why?"

"Because I believe I am about to throw up."

It was not, at least, morning sickness that followed. But, as Marcus gagged at the thought of becoming a pregnant woman and eventually giving birth, Astrid couldn't help but

feel that upending his lunch into a bowl was a *kind* of training for what he would go through as a woman.

It was, after all, the only way to turn back, it seemed.

## Chapter 5: Faster Changes

The magic was speeding up, much to the pair's embarrassment. Each morning brought new revelations, and it was obvious that the married pair were going to be fully exchanging roles in days to come - the Gods knew that enough people had already mistaken Marcus for a woman from a distance, and even some had viewed Astrid as a man, especially now that her muscles were sprouting, giving her a more manly frame.

When they travelled back across the Jade Sea, the pair largely stayed in their cabins. Astrid no longer got seasick, at least, but the pair were growing increasingly uncomfortable in their clothing as more developments persisted. On the final day, Astrid woke to find her husband huffing with annoyance at the side of the bed. The first thing she noticed was that his hair was now black - it had been going that way for some days now, but now the change was obvious in its completeness.

"I didn't realise you were into dark-haired women, husband," she said, teasing him a little.

He didn't turn to face her, clearly preoccupied with something.

"Are you alright, love?" she asked, observing his now-hairless back. She caressed it, sampling the pleasant feel of it. Her arm had more muscle on it now, and was hairy besides. She would have to give up on shaving soon - like her husband's head of hair, it always grew back unnaturally quickly.

"I am . . . beset by another change, my love," Marcus said, his voice anxious.

"Is it your face?"

"That is part of it, no doubt. But this is . . . something else. Please, do not make fun."

"I won't, you know I won't."

"Still, promise me."

"Just turn around already, dear Marcus!"

He sighed, slight shoulders sagging, and shifted. Astrid's eyes widened.

"Oh, I see. Indeed, that is a change."

"I appear to have . . . grown. Overnight."

"Yes. That much is obvious. Twice the size they were before, I'd say."

Marcus covered his chest, his even paler features bringing out the cute red blush in his soft cheeks.

"I told you not to make fun!"

"I wasn't," she said, still looking at his chest even as he tried in vain to prevent them being seen. In cupping them, a line of cleavage had formed, only further emphasising that he now had a *bustline*. "I was just . . . surprised, is all."

"They feel enormous."

She snorted. It was a sound she felt more comfortable making now that she no longer had to keep up a pretence of being ladylike. "Please, you're not that big. My chest is bigger. Well, *was* bigger. I confess to a little jealousy."

"Jealousy?"

"Well, I miss the 'girls,' as it were. How do they feel?"

He cupped them again, lifting one and then the other, measuring their weight.

"Not too heavy. But . . . they do insist on shifting about."

"They'll do that. We'll have to get you a support."

"A support?"

Astrid smiled, trying to comfort her husband even through her own disbelief. "Of course, my love. You're not immensely ample or anything, but you're not 'flat' either."

"They feel like the size of apples."

"They're not that big! We'll get you a wrap. It will give them some support, and we can tighten it to flatten them if you wish to pass as male. Though, I see other parts of you may defy that now . . ."

Her gaze fell to his midriff, which looked toned but no longer displayed clear abdominal muscles. His waist had thinned noticeably, and his hips . . . they made her think of the ultimate outcome of the wish.

". . . given you appear to be developing more *child-bearing* proportions."

Marcus groaned. "Please, don't even bring that up! This is already shameful enough."

Astrid gave a wry grin. "Well, this is partly your fault, you know."

He raised his face from his hands. "How do you figure *that*, my love?"

She gave a low giggle. "Well, just that you might recall that we are turning into our own personal fantasies. If your fantasy had a flat chest and mannish frame, you wouldn't need to worry about it!"

"Oh, har har," he said.

"I was just thinking, actually, that I had no idea that you were into raven-haired women."

"I - how did you? - oh, this damned hair! It's black now!"

He pulled a lock of it in front of his eyes.

“And long again! And getting longer!”

“Perhaps I should have dyed mine. I thought you liked my ‘flame-hair.’”

At this, Marcus shifted closer, took her face, and kissed it.

“I do love your hair,” he whispered in his androgynous voice. “So much so. It’s just . . . I always fancied dark hair. Slightly curly, perhaps. Or wavy, might be a better way to describe it. Don’t think that doesn’t mean that-”

“Oh, I’m not offended,” she said. “I imagine I’ll take on some traits that might embarrass you.”

He raised an eyebrow. “You are getting taller . . . wait, will you be taller than me? I thought I was quite tall enough!”

“You were! You were! But . . . well, I like tall men. And I like blonde hair, evidently. See?”

She gestured to her own lightening hair. Indeed, Marcus could see that it was becoming a strawberry blonde. He frowned.

“I shall miss that hair. I vow to see it again, once this is done, and I have . . .”

He gulped. Both of them glanced down at the same time. The pair preferred to sleep naked together, and always had. Now, the growth between Astrid’s thighs brought an awkwardness as well. It was a couple of inches long now, and thickening at that. She had to push it down when needing to pee, and occasionally it became slightly hard when she thought about her feminising husband. Her lower lips were starting to seal shut, the excess skin becoming a sac that would no doubt house a pair of testes from which her seed would be formed.

“Once I have b-born a child,” he whispered, finishing his sentence.

“We don’t have to worry about that, yet, husband,” Astrid said, comforting him. “Our changes are far from over.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of,” he said, glancing down at his bare chest, where his bosom was looking quite pleasant. “Speaking of, did my . . . size always please you?”

Astrid couldn’t help but laugh. “Every day, or were my cries of joy not enough for you?”

“So I suppose you won’t be ending up any bigger than I was, then?”

This time it was Astrid’s turn to blush. “I, well, um . . .”

“You’re joking!”

Astrid covered her cheeks. “It was just a fantasy in my head, husband. A woman always wanted a well-endowed lover, and the mind goes places, and . . . it was just a fantasy!”

Marcus crossed his arms across his chest, accidentally rubbing his sensitive nipples.

“This is going to be quite the embarrassment, isn’t it?”

But for once, he actually laughed, and she joined in. Sometimes, laughter was all you could do in the face of such strangeness.

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By the time the sea journey was finished, their bodies had changed yet further. Astrid was right; Marcus needed to wear a wrap around his chest. It had grown further, and now he was equal in size to Astrid's former bosom. Not that she had ever had a gigantic pair or anything, but they were well sized. The problem was, his bustline still ached with the promise of future growth, as surely as his hips did so too, desiring to widen, and Astrid's form yearned to grow muscle and a far more impressive and manly member.

"We'll need to start dressing our proper roles," Astrid said after they disembarked and purchased a carriage trip with their coin.

"What makes you say that?"

"Um, hello? Have you seen how we compare lately? Or did the docksellers calling me 'sir' and you 'ma'am' not tip you off? Besides, I'm starting to feel that skirts and dresses might be . . . a bit of a risk. Um, sort of like now."

Marcus cocked his head. He was next to his wife in the carriage. The two had kissed and held one another for some time, the need for closeness coming upon them, but now she had stopped the passion to discuss this.

"What do you mean by 'risk'?" he asked.

"Well, um, you seem to have . . . excited me," Astrid said, her cheeks now in full red bloom. She straightened the skirt of her dress to demonstrate this fact. Well, straightened it but for one particular place that had risen to the occasion.

"Oh," Marcus said, now blushing himself. "It seems you've grown, again."

"Just like you," she noted, indicating his chest. "Your wraps are getting less able to disguise you."

Marcus sighed. "From great stalwart knight to a dame with a bosom. Not exactly the future I had anticipated."

"Well, having a cock between my legs isn't what I imagined either, my love. We'll adapt. How about this - at the next city, we get some garb to suit our new bodies? That way we can have a few days to still be fully ourselves. Besides, if we, um, *develop* any further, it would be best to wait for it."

"Afraid of breaking open your tunic from all that muscle?" Marcus teased.

"Only as afraid as you are of suddenly bursting your bosom out."

Marcus snickered. "Well, here's hoping I don't grow too much then. I don't think I could handle the embarrassment."

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The pair woke in the town of Yornis, nestled comfortably in bed, in a small but quaint room they had hired. Their naked forms were pressed lovingly against one another as they often were, but something new had entered the equation. It was not uncommon for a hardness to develop between them, the pleasurable thoughts of sleep mingling with the warmth of one another's touch. It was uncommon, however, for that hardness to come from Astrid.

"Mhmmm," Marcis moaned softly, his lips now a little fuller. He squirmed slowly against his lover, his barely-conscious self savouring the sensation of that hard pole against his soft flesh. "That's n-nice."

Astrid woke slowly, similarly pleased. "Ahhh, my I-love. You're feeling quite - oh, it's me!"

Marcus and she woke quickly at that moment, and each member practically *scurried* to the other side of the bed, holding up a sheet in Astrid's case and fur covering in Marcus'. Immediately, it was obvious that both had changed further in the night: Marcus' hair now fell to his shoulders in thick waves of darkest midnight black. His eyes had become a pale, gorgeous blue, and his face was delicate yet refined. His lips were enticing from Astrid's perspective, full and ripe for kissing. His cheekbones were becoming pronounced, though the baby fat on his cheeks gave evidence for his rejuvenation into a younger age, perhaps only twenty years old or so.

Astrid, on the other hand, had only become more manly. He had scruff upon his cheeks and chin and upper lip, and his hair had become clearly blonde. His shoulders were wide - almost as wide as Marcus' had been, if not equal in size - and his neck muscles and Adam's apple had also developed. Her once regal jawline had remained regal, just in a more male fashion. Her eyes had turned from emerald green to blue also, but unlike Marcus' pair, these were not pale and icy, but brilliantly blue like the seashore beneath the warmest summer sun.

Both individuals took in their other half for a moment, gobsmacked.

"Astrid, you look -"

"Marcus, you appear -"

"Most handsome."

"Most beautiful."

They both blushed at the same time. The stirring feelings they were experiencing were both familiar and unfamiliar - attraction to one another remained, but somehow attached to a sex they had never found arousing in that sense.

"I think I woke us," Astrid said, looking down behind the sheet that covered her at the rather erect manhood that now stood tall and firm upon her. "As you once often woke us."

"Yes, I thought it was that," Marcus said. "Sorry for, um, *squealing* like that. It was a bit—"

"Ladylike?"

"I was going to say unnecessary. I just never thought I'd feel *that* against me. We've changed again. Oh Gods, I certainly have."

Astrid was curious. Gingerly, Marcus lowered the sheet.

"Please don't make fun, though I know you will. But overnight I appear to have . . . well, I've grown once more." He spoke in a voice that was demure and shy in a way that Astrid found strangely attractive.

"You appear shorter."

"Um, not there. I mean I've *grown*. Even more. Again."

He lowered his fur covering completely, letting it fall to the floor and reveal his nakedness. Astrid actually *gasp*ed.

"Oh, by the Gods!"

"They're not that big!"

"They're . . . they're not *small*, husband. Not in the least. You've quite outdone me, that's for sure."

Marcus frowned, covering them. It only had the effect of emphasising them more, due to their size. They were like ripe cantaloupes upon him, full and pert and *large*. Certainly, there was a heaviness and a jiggliness to them. His nipples had also become larger; pink and perfect and womanly.

"I didn't intend to become this big," he grumbled, still cupping the breasts. "They're heavy."

"I imagine they would be," Astrid remarked, finding it hard *not* to look at them. She was suddenly quite aware of another change that had happened for her as well. She didn't even need to lower the sheet; it made itself known by pressing noticeably against it.

"By the heavens," Marcus said. "You've grown too, just as I've withered to nothing."

"I, ah, didn't intend to be this big either," Astrid said.

Marcus dared to lower a hand to his own crotch. A small passage had formed there. It was not complete, but it was clear the vestigial remnants of his member were shrinking to form a clitoris. His testes were already evaporating, becoming part of his hood.

"It would seem we're both on the verge of becoming the other sex completely," he said. He touched his neck. "Even my voice . . ."

"It's rather lovely, you know," Astrid said. "It has a . . . musical quality to it. A sort of lightness."

“And yours sounded almost deeper than mine was.”

Astrid grinned awkwardly. “Sorry.”

“Don’t be. This will just . . . take a lot of getting used to.” He stepped forward, emotion clearly bubbling in his eyes a little. With his hands free of his increased bust, his breasts bounced freely with each step. He frowned again.

“That will take getting used to as well. It will-”

He couldn’t even finish the sentence. Tears erupted from his eyes as surely as a sob escaped his mouth. Astrid rounded the bed to her lover’s side and held him against her. He was noticeably smaller than her now, and she was still quite hard against his nakedness. The swell of her husband’s hips was pleasing, as was the flat of his stomach and the rondure nature of his rear. But she didn’t relish these just yet; more than anything she simply felt that it was her role now to do what he had once done for her: be his protector and comforter.

“It’s okay,” she said. “Let it out. I know how it feels. Let it out.”

Marcus did, holding his wife, feeling his own prominent bust against the flat of her chest. There was something comforting in that too.

“I’m a woman now,” he said. “There’s some finishing touches to go, but my . . . passage is there. A tunnel. A feminine flower. A womanhood. Whatever you call it. I guess . . . I’m mourning my manhood.”

“And I’m clearly a man now,” Astrid said. “I too will mourn that. But we know it is only for a time, my love.”

“Don’t remind me. I don’t want to think about the next stage just yet. Besides, there’s still some change to go.”

They held each other a little longer in silence.

“I think you were right,” Marcus finally whispered. “I will need a new shirt.”

“Honey, you will need a whole wardrobe for that figure.”

Marcus snorted. “Tell that to the elephant’s trunk sliding up against my stomach right now.”

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“I feel like I say this everyday, but do *not* laugh.”

“The same is true of you to me, Marcus. My Marcia.”

“I don’t like Marcia,” Marcus said as he completed his fitting.

“Matilda? Millicent? Madeline?”

Marcus considered this. “I don’t . . . mind Madeline.”

“Good! I shall take Aidan, then. I rather like Aidan. Or Alston?”

Marcus considered this also. "Alston," he said. "It suits you."

"Then let's see if we suit ourselves," Astrid said. "Are you ready?"

"As I'll ever be."

"One."

"Two."

"Three!"

The pair emerged from the separate rooms of their quarters, meeting in the living space they had rented. Both were now adorned in new clothing matching their new sexes, though this was the first time wearing them.

"Introducing, Alston," the new male said, flourishing his hand dramatically. He was wearing a rather expensive and fine-looking red tunic with gold trim, marking him as a noble. It fit his broad shoulders well, as did his fine leather pants that were just tight enough to show the strength of his legs. The undone buttons at the top hinted at his hairy chest, not to mention his muscular pectorals. With a sword at his side - appearances were important, after all - he looked every part the handsome, dashing, and rather powerful male hero.

"How do I look?" he asked.

"You look . . . Gods, you look incredible," Marcus said, trying not to peer at those muscles. "Like a true knight and noble of Vortis. How . . . how do I look? As . . . as Madeline, I mean?"

Alston's eyes gleamed, taking in every inch of his feminised husband - wife now, he supposed. The woman before him was unequalled in beauty. She had chosen a simple green travelling dress, one that was not too revealing, though the slight dip at the front meant that enough cleavage was hinted at. A thin cloak was worn over the shoulders, a way for her to conceal her curves, but hiding them was a fruitless ambition on her part: however covered her bust was, it still pronounced itself, rising dramatically with each breath.

"My love," Marcus breathed, trying to keep his voice steady. "You look . . . I cannot even say."

"I think you're *saying* all you can, dear," she remarked, flicking her gaze downwards.

Alston realised what Madeline was referring to. "Oh, this damned thing! You can't blame me for getting like this, can you? You're a vision!"

"I can blame you for getting so well-endowed, my love. That truly is a monster between your legs!"

"Says the woman with a bust like that! They've grown again! I had no idea that you were into women who are so fantastically . . . forward."

Another round of blushing followed. "I truly didn't mean for this," she said, trying to adjust her chest. "Every man likes a good bosom, but to have one of this size! It was just a silly fantasy. I swear, it's like having two fleshy boulders attached to me."

Alston was only getting harder again.

“Honey, if you would stop playing with your chest? I only ask because it’s making me quite . . . excited.”

Madeline stopped immediately. “Oh. Yes, I imagine it would. Gods.”

“But you do look beautiful, truly. I - I know this is strange to hear, my love, but I truly am still attracted to you, as much or more than ever. Your hips, your curves, your hair.”

It now fell to below Madeline’s shoulders. They weren’t even aware if the changes were completely finished, though she certainly hoped so. Her breasts were already like that of a tavern wench’s, and a well-endowed tavern wench at that. Even her dress, which was quite loose in places, was oddly tight around her bust. They were each half the size of her own head, it seemed. But when she took her eyes away from the alien sight of her own cleavage, she instead found her gaze falling upon her lover’s broad shoulders, his hairy chest, his square jaw, his delicious forearms. She shivered, causing her bust to jiggle even in the support band.

“I - I find you very attractive too,” she whispered.

Alston stepped forward, one handsome figure approaching one beautiful one, each very amply endowed in their own way. He was over a head taller than his ‘husband’ now, and the way she looked up at him . . .

He kissed her gently, and Madeline found herself giving over to that kiss, for just a moment.

“It’s still too soon,” she whispered. “I - I’m not ready to make a child. Not yet. Gods, I don’t know if I’ll ever be. It’s strange enough being in this weak, tiny, yet very *overdeveloped* body.”

Alston grinned. “Your fault for liking such busty women.”

“Trust me, I am well aware of how I’ve stepped in it.”

But Alston placed his hand beneath Madeline’s chin, lifting it so that she was looking at him, not her own impressive cleavage.

“I have an idea,” she said. “For tomorrow. A little detour so that we can properly feel at home as Madeline and Alston.”

“Oh, yes?”

“Think of it as a date. Our first date as our new selves. And then . . . we can see where that date takes us.”

“Not to the bedroom yet, I assure you.”

Alston chuckled. “A shame. You know, I’m starting to enjoy picturing you all big and pregnant. You could put those melons of yours to good use!”

“Oh no, you did not just say that!”

Madeline chased her laughing husband around the room. When she caught him, the two fell upon the bed, holding one another, kissing each other, but not daring to go any further. But the attraction, at least, was still very much there, and the curiosity too.

Alston hoped that a date would do her husband-turned-wife good.

Certainly, he had his own hopes for how it might end.

## Chapter 6: Joining Together

They had left Yarreth, but at Alston's direction the carriage had stopped by the side of the road only a few miles on and then taken a slight detour. After making sure everything was secured, the pair marched up the adjacent hill, Madeline fussing over the hem of her dress and occasionally her bosom as well, much to Alston's amusement.

"Please, stop making a show of all that cleavage, my love, or else I could hardly even blame some brigands from sweeping you away!"

Madeline chuckled, putting her hands down. "As I recall, I saved *you* from brigands, that one time. Though, I could hardly blame them from taking you."

"Exactly! So imagine the sight *you* present, twice as lovely as I was."

"Oh, you exaggerate!" Madeline said, though her pale features blushed deeply. She had always liked rosy-cheeked women, so that effect was her own doing, embarrassingly enough. Still, her 'husband's' words were strangely pleasing to hear.

"I'll have to teach you how to wield a sword," she remarked. "With your strength so increased and my own waned, I'm afraid our positions will be reversed. Especially if, well . . ."

If she ended up pregnant, of course. But Alston just took her hand and helped her over a step, which she accepted after some hesitation.

"It's this dress," she proclaimed.

"It's a travelling dress!"

"All this hair then!"

"Oh, let me just carry you!"

Alston then shocked her by sweeping her off her feet, something which caused her to back away just before he succeeded in snatching her.

"You did *not* just pick me up!"

"I've always wanted to do this! It feels good, doesn't it? I have many good memories of you sweeping me off my feet."

Madeline folded her arms. "It's . . . you are comforting, at least. Don't drop the picnic basket."

"Wouldn't dream of it. And you, my former husband, are very beautiful! Want me to set you down?"

Madeline smirked. "No. I want you to feel exactly how arduous a walk with a full person in your arms can be, however slight she may be."

"Not exactly slight with a bosom like that!"

"Never mind! Put me down!"

The pair laughed as he did so, she ribbing him gently. She took the lead, following his directions.

"It hardly seems fair!" she proclaimed. "

"What, becoming a woman? Having to become pregnant?"

"No, not that! Though . . . yes. I mean me not knowing where we're going! I've fought battles all across the continent, and somehow managed to never go near Yarreth on my adventures."

Alston chuckled. "Whereas I visited this kingdom many times as a representative for my father, or with him. Yarreth and Vortis have long had strong diplomatic relations, as well as their own fair share of wars. I was nearly betrothed to a prince here."

Madeline frowned. "Well, I'm glad I ended up the victorious man. Er, woman now, I suppose."

"As am I, my love. But . . . I was shown a rather wonderful place during the rather awkward courtship of that time. Poor Prince Nygard was a timid, nasally mess of a man, though sweet in his own way. But the view I was allowed to see was breathtaking. Care to see it?"

"Only if Nygard has no objections."

She giggled. "I imagine not. He married a woman from Nysbythia. A dusky-skinned beauty, I hear."

"Lucky man, though not near as lucky as me."

"Oh, you remain the stalwart knight charmer, even trapped in that cute female form."

They shared a laugh and trudged forward up the hill, winding their way through a forest path and then cutting across a rocky stream.

"Tell me again why we are doing this?" Madeline asked as she began to fall behind. "I'm getting rather tired here! These little female limbs, I swear by the Nine Hells I'm becoming a dwarf!"

"Please, those legs are pleasingly long, for a woman. And besides, we need a break! A date! A reminder that we can make it through this! And, besides, the view is rather staggering, is it not?"

Alston pulled back a heavy branch blocking their way, and Madeline was surprised to hear herself gasp in a very lady-like manner. Alston grinned and helped usher her through. The leaves fell from her hair as she passed into a gorgeous little grove complete with what appeared to be a natural hot spring and gorgeous flower bed. The whole thing sat upon a cliffside overlooking the great river of Orst, which travelled all the way to their home kingdom of Vortis and beyond. It cut a wide swathe through the valley below, powerful and churning and ethereal all at once.

“By the Gods,” Madeline said.

“Indeed,” Alston said. “Few know about this, but I’m sure the prince won’t mind if we enjoy it for a while. Care to pick a spot?”

Madeline did, moving forward before settling down in the warm grass. Alston found his member stiffening a little. His new ‘wife’ didn’t realise it, but she was starting to sway her hips in an unintentionally seductive manner, a result of her pleasing, child birthing shape. She adjusted her dress, cupping her breasts a little as she settled down.

“You really need to just let them lie,” Alston said, chuckling as he got out some cheeses and bread for them to share. They began to eat, Madeline taking on her husband’s advice. They eyed each other’s forms, enjoying the succor of food as much as the sight of one another’s very attractive forms. But then, Alston chuckled again as Madeline adjusted her bosom, shifting her green travelling dress about and making a new fuss.

“I can’t help it!” she declared, laughing in exasperation. “They’re always reminding me they’re there! And they’re quite heavy. To think, I once wanted a woman with such a mighty bosom.”

“I should think this a fitting punishment! Mine were more than beautiful enough.”

Madeline sighed. “Oh, trust me, I knew that. It was just a fantasy. Alas, we’re both fantasies now. And - ahh - I think my dress needs adjusting.”

“Lace it too tight again?”

Madeline frowned, a realisation creeping across her. “No. Oh . . . oh Gods, no. I rather think I’ve had one, final, growth spurt. If I arch my back just like this I -”

She straightened her back, emphasising her new chest, only for-

*RIP!*

“Oh, oh *shit!*”

*RIIIIIP!*

Madeline’s eyes went wide, as did Alston’s, as this final growth spurt left her chest with no more room to go. Her impressive mammaries tore at the seams of her clothing, and the front of the dress ripped in spectacular fashion, causing the sudden appearance of a veritable *window* of cleavage, and quite a lot of it at that. Madeline’s hands went up, frozen as if she were a green-eared recruit at her first battle, not knowing what to do. She’d fought

demons, dragons, evil liches and even human enemies who were far crueler than those, but she'd never dealt with a godsdamned *wardrobe malfunction!* Her breasts expanded, the flesh no longer constrained nearly so painfully, and it brought a sudden relief among the humiliation. Her nipples were thankfully still covered, but she now looked like a tavern wench about to be taken by the hero of one of those garish novels solid by northern Harish merchants.

"This is ridiculous!" she said, after getting her squeaky shock under control.

"Ridiculous," Alston said, "and spectacular. You know, I am *very much* seeing the appeal in a plump pair of breasts now, husband."

"Plump? These are far more than plump? Gods, they're heavy!"

"They would be! Impressive pert on your chest, though."

She folded her arms, but her arms could never cover all of that boob flesh now.

"Oh, and that's supposed to be a good thing?" she said. "By the Black Mountain, I'm a top-heavy cow!"

Alston moved closer to her. "Well, if you're a cow, you're the prettiest one I've ever seen! May I see?"

Madeline sighed, then smirked, slowly removing her hands so that Alston could take in her cleavage. There really was a canyon of it now. Her large breasts rose and fell with each breath, and something about Alston's gaze upon her made her want to breathe that way, to let her chest rise like a soufflé before him.

"Seen enough?" she teased.

"I'd like to see more, actually."

"Any more and I'll fall out of this dress."

Alston's wandering hand went up her thigh, sliding up her thin waist and then cupped her cheek. His strength was more than attractive to her in that moment, despite the fact that it was a strength she once possessed.

"I can help you out of that dress, you know," Alston said. "I'm more than happy to teach you how it's done."

Madeline said nothing. Her eyes simply stared into those of her lover's. They were both on a precipice, and here, surrounded by the most romantic environs one could imagine, there was little resistance.

"I could use that help," she said, her voice barely a whisper.

Alston slowly lowered his hands and began to do just that, freeing his, well, his *wife's* bosom from the too-tight dress. Her nipples were perfectly sized, gorgeous pink in colour, and he marvelled at them, cupping the flesh.

"Mhm," she murmured. "They're sensitive."

"Just how you liked in a woman?"

She nodded, closing her eyes for a moment, savouring the sensation.

“E-exactly. Oohh, go slowly, but don’t stop.”

“I could use some attention too, my love.”

She grinned, biting her lip in a very cute manner. “Then I shall give it. Just . . . let me go slowly as well. I like this, but I feel that in becoming a maid I have also taken on a feminine hesitance as well.”

Alston continued to carefully but lovingly caress the very impressive chest of her lover, her breasts half the size of their owner’s head each. “And I think all this manliness is making me quite the aggressor. Let me lead this dance, my love, just this once.”

Madeline swallowed, then nodded. She still wanted to be the man, the protector, the knight, but right now, she simply wanted *him*. With slightly shaking hands, she reached out and began to unbutton Alston’s shirt, revealing his strong, supple muscles and impressively hairy chest. It was enough to make her swallow yet again.

“I feel a little hairy,” Alston said, blushing.

“Hairy is good,” Madeline said, entranced as she ran her fingers over his chest. “Very good, in fact.”

They began to explore one another, sliding out of their clothes completely. Madeline blushed and so did Alston as they removed the last of their garments, revealing their changed genitalia. They were indeed now opposites, turned into their own personal fantasies, their libidos beginning to rage. But this was not some primal act, nor some animalistic call to mate, no matter what the spell had ensured for their future. Both were nervous as if it were their first time again, and Alston even voiced this concern.

“It is our first time,” Madeline said, holding him and trying to ignore how wonderful his massive hardness was against her slim belly. “From these bodies, from our new positions.”

“I suppose we take it slow?”

“Not all the way,” Madeline said. “Just . . . get used to one another.”

That they did in the following minutes, their hands gliding over each other’s forms, feeling muscles and curves that had not been there before. The pair gasped and groaned at different points, surprised at the sensitivity of their new regions, or the loss of sensitivity elsewhere. Their breathing quickened, especially as Madeline pressed her very full bustline against Alston’s rugged chest. Her nipples slide against his hairy front, making her moan with surprising ecstasy. Alston touched himself, stroking his own cock and bucking slightly against her as she sat upon his lap, facing him.

“Mhmmm,” she moaned. “It feels good, doesn’t it?”

“It wants you,” Alston complained.

“It can’t have me! It’s far too big! How on earth could I even fit that inside me?”

“Oh, you’d be surprised, my love.” He lowered a hand and slid a finger over her entrance, leaving her to gasp. “Especially when one is properly aroused by good foreplay.”

“Ohhhhh, I . . . ahhhh. Perhaps if I lie down, I could feel it against me? Just against me?”

Alston took a deep breath. “That would be . . . most pleasing. Gods, this big thing really wants to be in you.”

Madeline lay on her back, legs spread from a new feminine instinct. It was strange, having a powerful man over her, just as it was strange to have her big tits flopping about from her movements, weighing heavily on her ribcage. Alston played with them, even licked her nipples a little as he positioned his cock against her entrance. It was enough to make her moan even more loudly.

“I think - Gods, I think we might be going too f-far, Alston.”

Alston hesitated. “I think - I think you might be right. I . . . I feel such a need, my love. I’ve never felt this kind of power, before. This desire to plunge inside of you.”

Madeline shivered, whimpered, even. “Ahhhh, that sounds so - no! We should . . . oh, to hell with it. It’s an adventure, right?”

Alston chuckled. “Still my brave night, no matter how sweet and bosomy she may be right now. Ready yourself.”

“I can handle it. I’ve been pierced by many a real sword and - MHPHH!!”

She was not prepared for this particular sword, and her fingernails began to rake across Alston’s back as he entered her. His girth was incredible, his length even more so. Her wet passage was hungry for him, stretching wide to accommodate her husband’s godly manhood. Alston, for his part, could barely believe what he was doing. He was wielding a manly visage and playing a manly part. All this he could do, but now he was actively *penetrating* his former husband, making her moan like a woman true. He gripped one breast, making her actually squeal, and then began to thrust within her, slowly at first and then with greater speed. She bucked her hips as well, until the full length of his impressive cock went all the way in, retreating almost to her entrance, before diving back in. Her breasts wobbled, jiggling almost all the way up to her chin.

“D-don’t s-stop! Oh Gods, it’s d-different, but good!”

“I a-agree!” Alston said. “I’ve never felt s-so in control! Cry out for me, my love! I want you to be a woman this moment, and me the bear of a man who holds you!”

Madeline blushed redder than ever before, but granted her husband’s desire. She cried out, removing any shame from the moment as she gave into her passions. She was being fulfilled, and she pulled Alston’s face down to kiss it passionately. At that very moment he thrust into her, and it became all too much.

“Mhmm - mhmm - MMHHHMM!!!”

She climaxed, crying out into his mouth even as she continued to kiss him. Wave after wave of pleasure rocked her, and this was magnified by Alston continuing to thrust. He lasted only ten or more seconds, time enough for at least three orgasms by Madeline's delirious count, and then he came within her, his body going rigid, his cock pulsing, his warm seed flooding her tunnel. It flowed deep into her, pouring into her waiting womb. She grinned, biting her lip and shuddering in the afterglow of it all.

They held one another, slightly sweaty, the cool grass dimming the heat of their joining slowly but surely. The sensation of Madeline's breasts was wonderful to Alston; like two great pillows against his chest. He shifted positions to rest his head over them, and Madeline began stroking his head, as if she had played the part of the post-coital lover all her life.

"That was . . . not bad at all," Alston said. "What did you think?"

"I think . . . I think I need time to think," Madeline said. "It's not every day you turn into a woman and then get fucked into deliriousness by your former wife."

"So crude, husband! Where is the poet knight I knew?"

"I rather think he got left somewhere behind, perhaps when you were sucking on these damn sensitive nipples. Gods, I can't believe how good that felt."

They chuckled, holding one another.

"So, we did the deed," Alston said. "Do you think?"

"Oh no, I refuse to think about *that*. Besides, once would not be enough, surely?"

Alston didn't say anything, and the realisation that something *might* be happening at that moment made both of them quite nervous, especially Madeline.

"What should we do?" she asked.

"I think," Alston started, before looking over to the hot spring. "I think we should have a nice bath together. It'll be nice to get to know each other's bodies a bit more in such a setting. Especially those lovely breasts of yours. I don't even mind that they're so much bigger than my pair was, now."

"That makes one of us!"

They got up, and walked to the hot spring together. It was a good way to clear one's head, relax, and come down from the passions they had just given themselves over to. Of course, as they found out just half an hour later, it was also a good way to restore said passions, in no small part due to the way Alston kept admiring the curve of Madeline's bosom above the waterline.

Not long after that, the moans were already starting again.

## Chapter 7: Swapping Roles

Things had truly changed in the time since their first joining. The knight and lady - whatever their forms may be now - found themselves utterly amorous once more. It was as if in conducting that first act, a key had opened the doorway to further such pleasures, and the shame and awkwardness of their union diminished with each continual lovemaking session. Madeline did not want to get pregnant, of course, and so was utterly adamant that Alston did not spend himself inside of her.

“I know I have to go through with this, but . . . I’m not ready yet!” she said, her voice almost a whine even as she began to remove her clothing, her loins hungry for her husband’s member to enter them once more.

But accidents happened, of course. Sometimes she was simply too overcome with her own bliss to let Alston slide out of her, and other times he simply expelled his seed earlier, like when she rode him, bouncing upon him as he lay back against a smooth hillside. The sight of her large breasts tremulously wobbling and bouncing right in his face had simply been too much, and even Madeline couldn’t blame him, especially when his climax brought on her own. Other times, they were more successful, and Madeline found that she could stroke her husband’s member and bring him to his full, even if getting his issue upon her full chest was not exactly what she had planned . . . not that Alston minded the outcome. The pair had never been particularly *explorative* when it came to sex, but now they were finding new positions that suited their new needs, and Madeline was as shocked as she was sheepish to find that being on her hands and knees and having her husband’s cock ram into her from behind was a deeply erotic experience. She would cry out in her high, musical voice, and Alston would find himself grunting, making sounds like a powerful animal, and this too seemed right to him.

Sometimes they slowed the sex down; travel had its own demands, of course. But the fact was that their forms were simply too attractive. Even when Madeline was kindly gifted better fitting clothing by Alston, and he himself found new garments to better suit himself, it was impossible to avoid the glances, the stares, the arousal that came with sleeping in one another’s arms when they rested the horses and stopped the carriage for the night. The nights were warming again, and both found it more natural to sleep in a greater state of nakedness, and this too aided them in becoming more familiar with each other.

“I swear, I’m lucky that damned merchant didn’t try to buy *me*,” Madeline complained, her form resting over Alston, her breasts squashed lovingly against his firm muscles.

“I would have fought him for you,” Alston said.

At this, Madeline laughed.

“What? What is so funny, my love?”

“Oh, just that you may be good - very good - with one particular sword, my love, but I'd be more afraid of you accidentally cutting my tits off than getting embroiled in an exciting fight with a dangerous foe.”

Alston frowned. “You don't think I can fight? My strength-”

“Is not nearly enough. You need dexterity, practice, precision. Training. The kind that takes years to master.”

Alston took this in. Indeed, he had been musing on this lately; the fact that Madeline carried a dagger on her right leg. The fact that her former husband was not only much weaker now, but a ripe target. Already, they'd had a close call with one would-be thief trying to threaten them. Alston's size alone had warded him off, but in truth he had known it would be Madeline's reflexes, her skill with the blade that would have saved them if worse came to worse. In much the same manner though, there were things *she* had to learn as well.

“You're right, of course,” he said. “I just . . . fighting is such a man's work, it still feels alien to me. Perhaps you can teach me, and I can teach you?”

“What can you teach me? I know I'm not perfect with the hair yet, but-”

“Diplomacy. Negotiation. Soft powers. De-escalation. The art of a woman's wiles, my love, and that does indeed also mean becoming perfect with your hair, your makeup, and your dress sense. All the better to know how to present yourself and soothe the tempers of others.”

This time Madeline frowned. She rolled over, groaning a little from the way her breasts heaved, and stared up at the carriage's ceiling.

“That . . . is not the worst idea. If I'm going to be stuck as a woman until you get me with child - a strange enough prospect - then that means I'll also be a noblewoman in the court of Vortis for at least nine months from that point! I was never very good at the regal speech of your upbringing, my love.”

“Well, then we shall teach one another! You help me master the sword and shield and bow, and I shall teach you far finer arts.”

Madeline smirked. “Deal. Now let us sleep. We have a long day ahead of us.”

But Alston's hands wandered, pinching Madeline's reach as she shifted to her side.

“Or,” he started, already growing hard. “We could have a little fun, my love?”

Madeline sighed. “You are very lucky that my fantasy woman is *very* libidinous.”

“Oh, please, like we weren't before we changed!”

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The next day, the pair deliberately slowed their journey back in order to begin training on one another's roles. They took the carriage to a tucked away field away from prying eyes.

Madeline helped fit Alston in her old armour, most of which suited his new form even if some parts had to be adjusted for his larger size. Likewise, Alston helped Madeline prepare her appearance as a noblewoman, which meant wearing a rather regal dress she had been pressured to purchase, one that was a vibrant blue. It was a quiet contrast to her very pale eyes, as well as her dark curtain of raven black hair. The hanging sleeves and low hem made her feel utterly unable to move freely.

“That’s the point!” Alston said with a chuckle. “It’s there to make you beautiful, noble, and willing to rely on servants rather than your own labors.”

“Labor, that word is not the one I want to hear right now! Is this makeup truly necessary!”

“Absolutely. And it makes you look even more beautiful, my love. But is all this armour necessary? Surely not the plate?”

This time it was Madeline’s turn to have a laugh at her partner’s expense. “When a wyvern comes chomping, you’ll be glad of it. Now, tell me how to act like the lady watching a knight train, and I can adopt the proper voice to train a knight!”

“Well, for one, keep your chin further up. Use a commanding voice, but it need not be a low one. Fold your arms just so, and stop adjusting your dress, especially at the front!”

Another blush, but Madeline did as she was told.

“Very well, authoritative voice. I can do that. Okay, take the sword by the hilt. No, don’t hold it that way, you’ll carve your own neck! Keep its point outright when holding it. Remove your other hand, my love, it’s a shortsword. Now, a shield will complement this, so make sure to use both. We’ll go over some basic exercises, and I’ll try that walk you mentioned. The ‘dignified’ one . . .”

And so it began; the exchange of roles that would define their lives for the foreseeable future. From that day, Alston trained vigorously in the art of the sword under Madeline’s teacherly gaze, while he in turn would intrust her in courtly manner and what it meant to be a noblewoman, a figure of silk hiding steel. It made for many an amusing error, and more than a few stumbles: Madeline found walking in a full courtly dress difficult, though the grassy plains upon which she practised did not help, whereas Alston found it hard to get the hang of dextrous movements given his natural reliance on new strength.

“You must be daring, but full of finesse!” Madeline declared. “I shall show you. Pass me the spare sword. It’ll have to be, um, the lighter one. My strength is not what it was. But I can still handily beat you.”

Alston snorted, readying a stance that had followed a week’s practice with the blade.

“Honey, you are the greatest knight of the realm, or at least you were. But I highly doubt you can beat me as you are now. You’re more liable to tip over with that generous bosom!”

Just fifteen seconds later, Alston was on his back with a blade pointed directly at his chest. His head hurt from the fall, and a victorious and very beautiful woman was looking very, *very* smugly down upon him.

"I stand corrected," he said. "That was a rout."

He held out his hand for his wife to pull him up, but she just rolled her eyes.

"Oh no, not falling for that trick. You'll pull me down and start making love with me on the grass."

"Is that such a bad thing?"

"You can do that when you know how to hold a sword properly. Come, this is important. And then, I can't believe I'm saying this, I'll need some aid with those damned spoons and forks and knives and 'proper table etiquette', not to mention going through those lineages again. Boring stuff."

"Ah, but it helps to know the connections between nobles," Alston said, getting up. "And that can be its own kind of sword, my love."

Madeline knew that well; her own hide had been saved from a pack of rampaging deserters who had captured her several years ago, and it was only thanks to Astrid's quick, calm, and decisive work rallying several local nobles to send knights to his aid that he was able to escape and counterattack. Later, he'd learned that the nobles Astrid had managed to corral together were old enemies with blood feuds going back over a hundred years. The sheer level of diplomacy required to have forged a temporary alliance between them was beyond his understanding.

But it would have to be within Madeline's, if she were to be playing the role of a woman who would need to defend their interests in the sphere of court politics. Still, she didn't give up the sword completely, practising new stances and with lighter blades, as well as a lengthier spear, the latter of which would reduce the impact of her shorter reach. In this way, in sparring both physical and verbal, the pair came to know one another's talents and souls on an even deeper level.

It was a good thing too, because after just a month of training and still a week's journey from the capital, they were set upon by brigands.

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It was morning. The pair had just set off after breakfast and brief morning training. They were back within the borders of Vortis, and a sense of nervousness and excitement lay in their hearts. Madeline in particular was embarrassed to be re-entering not as the greatest knight of the realm, but as a quite amply blessed noblewoman, but Alston likewise was unsure exactly what he would be saying to his father to explain all of this. Still, the road back to

civilisation had been far less dangerous than the one to beyond it, and there was a sense between them that the first major leg of their destiny was over. The whole 'making a child part' would obviously be quite daunting and need seeing to eventually, but soon they could settle and come to deal with that.

That was, until the horses reared the carriage to a stop and neighed loudly, causing the pair to jolt within the vehicle. Madeline was up before her husband, but both were alarmed.

"What was that!?" Alston exclaimed.

"Shh!" Madeline hissed, her warrior's instincts still with her. She could hear yelling. Men. Men yelling, and getting closer. Get your weapon!"

She grabbed her own and Alton moved. Everything happened very quickly from that point: horses bounded into view from the sides of the carriage, and several figures on foot could be heard racing up from behind. There were at least four of them, and Madeline confirmed this as she frantically looked out every peephole.

"They're surrounding us!" she declared.

"Should we leap out?"

"No, they'll cut us down or have us in easy sight at least. But we can't just stay in here either. A woman looking like I do . . . best not to think about."

The very thought of brigands seizing his wife made Alston's blood boil. He gripped his sword tightly, his male aggression rising.

"We could . . . when they bang on the door, or try to open it?"

Madeline nodded. "We might need to draw one closer. If only we had a squealing wench we could - oh. Ah."

*"Yer noble carriage is surrounded! Come on out if ya don't want us to set it alight! We're claiming it all; gold, valuables, clothing, women. Whatever ya got is ours, and we won't slit yer throats bloody, so's long as ya get out now, y'hear!?"*

"Well, that's just rude," Alston said.

"It's also a fact, if we don't act properly," Madeline warned. Her heart was beating in her chest: she was very aware that her strength was not as it was. She was not very well practised in a crossbow, but she readied one nevertheless, using the loading mechanism to prepare a bolt.

"Ready?" she asked Alston, seeing that he was also very nervous.

"I - I'll have to be. I have to be the protector now, my love. For both of us."

"We'll protect each other. Make good use of the plate."

*"One last chance! Open the carriage door and step out, right fucking now!"*

Madeline took a deep breath, readied herself for a very unwarrior-like role, and then screamed. Loudly. Very loudly, in fact, right at the top of her lungs. Alston almost had to cover her ears, though he was impressed by her performance.

“Please don’t kill us! We’re just maidens! Please, I’m stuck! The cupboard came loose from the horses pulling up! I can’t reach the door!”

*“We’re not joking! I don’t give a fuck if your legs are come clean off, we’ll make ‘em itty bitty stubs if you don’t-”*

But Madeline was already utilising her emotion, drawing upon her more heightened state. She began to wail, and surprisingly even began to generate tears, so swept up in her own performance was she. Her sobs were loud.

“Please, just help meeeeeee! I don’t want to die! You can take everything!”

The voice came closer. “Oh, we’ll take more than everything. We’ll take you too, dearie, and leave you alive if you make it fun enough.”

“I can’t get to the door, I swear!”

There was a huff. “Gerald. Open it already. Kill ‘em if they’re playing tricks, but try to leave the girl if you can. We’ll punish her in our own way.”

His words sent a dark chill down Madeline’s spine. The notion that she could now be a prize, to be assaulted and raped by cruel men, was a new prospect for her, and one that she would rather die than experience. She readied the crossbow. Alston was likewise disgusted, and gripped his sword more tightly.

“Fine, stay back!” came a new voice.

The bandit stood up to the carriage step and poked his head in through the window. Two things happened very, very quickly from that point.

The first was that Madeline shouted “NOW MY LOVE!” and loosed a bolt from her crossbow right into the brigand’s eye.

The second was that Alston *burst* from the side of the carriage, smashing into a second brigand and hurling a spear forward. It arced through the air, missing the chief of these bandits but spooking his horse, which rode up and tried to buck him. It gave Alston enough time to launch forward in his heavy armour, slashing out with his sword to tear apart the saddle. An arrow shot through the air and plinked off his armour, followed by a second shot which found a gap and embedded sideways along his shoulder. Alston roared, aware that he had been hit yet oddly unfeeling. Behind him, Madeline was emerging with her own shortsword. Her movements were not as full of finesse as they had once been, but she shocked the nearest brigand, slashing him down before he could even assess the damage to his eye.

“Remember your training, my love!” she shouted.

Alston found that he did. In this moment of chaos, it came almost instinctively to him. He pushed into the brigand chief, preventing him from getting up after falling from the broken saddle.

“Kill him! Fucking kill-”

The man never got to finish his sentence. With brute force, Alston was able to pummel the man down and press his sword point into the villain’s throat. Blood spilled from the wound, and for a moment Alston felt queasy. He controlled it, though. This was life and death, and he could mourn this death later. For now, he had to be a man, in all the most violent ways. He turned and ran towards the archer, who was upon his horse and trying to line up a shot at Madeline, who was duelling the fourth brigand and getting the better of him. Alston yelled, distracting the archer, who turned the bow on him. He turned his head just in time for the helmet to absorb the blow of the arrowhead, then slashed at the horse. It screamed, rearing up from the slash to his leg. A deep guilt ran through Alston; horses were beautiful creatures, ones he had spent his entire life rearing and riding in his father’s fields. But this was war, and he had to get at the archer.

Unfortunately, he was distracted by Madeline’s cry. He turned his head, and saw that her cheek was cut upon her right side and bleeding heavily. The other man wore mail, and was using his bulk against her. She had the better of him, but he could outlast her. Something new rose up in Alston: an anger and battlerage that only a masculine knight could possess. He made one last hack at his current enemy and then ran back to the carriage, raising his sword. The brigand was making another go to kill Madeline. She slashed at his leg, but his overarching sword still descended.

“NO!” Alston screamed, catching and deflecting the blade with his own. With automatic reflex instructed into him by his wife, he gripped the enemy’s hand, careful not to touch the blade since his plate armour was not all attached, and then shoved his sword into the man’s mouth and through his face. There was a horrific gurgle and spilling of ruby rich blood, and the man fell.

“Damn it all!” the archer yelled. His horse stumbled away at a half-gallop, back over the hill. “Damn it all, I knew we shouldn’t have tried this one! I had a bad omen!”

The horse whinnied in pain, but managed to get over the hill, urged on by its foul rider. Alston grimaced, annoyed at the man’s escape and for the misery of the poor horse, but at least certain that the villain would not return, not with his other three comrades dead.

“Are you okay, my love?” he asked, ripping off some spare cloth from his sleeve to pad her bleeding cheek.

“I’m fine, just fine,” she said, breathing heavily. “You did well, my love. So very well.”

“As did you.”

“There was a time I could have taken all four of them.”

"You certainly took on two. Not bad for a woman, eh?"

She smiled, holding the cloth to her cheek. "Well, I'll have a scar to remind people I'm not *just* a woman at least. Come, we should get out of here, before we -"

She paused, gripping the edge of the carriage for a moment as she panted.

"Is everything alright, my love?"

Madeline winced. "I'm - I'm suddenly feeling very nauseous. I - Gods!"

She suddenly retched, hurling up the contents of her breakfast just behind the rear carriage wheel. Alston was momentarily alarmed.

"It's okay! It's just battle jitters, I'm sure!"

"I've never had - ughhh - battle jitters like this! Oof!"

She threw up again. As soon as she had, the nausea passed instantly. She panted, taking a waterskin to clear her throat. She looked down at the corpses of the brigands.

"It must be because I'm a woman. Some feminine emotion bubbling to the surface or something. Let's get moving, and perhaps I'll have a lie down. I think I need it."

Alston helped her back into the carriage. He was still coming down from the fight himself, but he took the time to clean his sword before getting into the carriage. He had never felt like this before, nor, he imagined, had his wife. The bloodrage had been in him, but now it was dying away, and he was very glad that it had only been rage, not *lust* for blood. Surveying the carnage, he was actually pleased to find himself revulsed for it. For as much as he would need to be the protector, the knight, from now on, he was still Astrid at heart. Violence should only be used when utterly necessary.

"Lie down, my love," he told Madeline, who was cringing as she settled herself down. "I'll see to the horses."

"S-sorry," she stammered. "I've never felt like this before. Gods, I am tired after that. It must just be that I overexerted myself."

"Of course," Alston said, beginning to remove his armour.

But none of their theories were correct. They had survived brigands and their first taste of sharing new roles, but a new challenge was lurking on the horizon.

Or perhaps more accurately, was growing within Madeline's belly already.

## **Chapter 8: New Arrivals**

"Sick again, my love?" Alston asked.

Madeline groaned, her stomach lurching. They were not far from the gates of Vortis, but her stomach was upset once more, and that wasn't even mentioning the tiredness she'd

been feeling as of late. She had become convinced her sensitive new stomach had tired of the game they'd been catching: Alston was still learning, so it was mostly rabbits and trap-caught critters. Or perhaps those potatoes had been getting too old when she'd put them in the stew . . .

She cleaned her mouth with the napkin Alston gentlemanly passed her, irritated to have once again emptied the contents of her stomach.

"Th-thanks," she stammered. She passed it back when done, irritated that her travelling dress lacked pockets. She cupped her full chest, adjusted her large breasts within their support.

"Honey, how many times have I told you that-"

"They're *sore*, my love! Very sore! All this bumpy road has them bouncing up and down. Don't think I haven't noticed you noticing!"

"Well, you *were* wearing a rather unbuttoned blouse in the carriage."

"Much better than a dress! Gods, what an arrival!"

"We can camp out here, spend another day before arriving in the city."

But Madeline held up a hand. "No way. For once, I actually feel like a noblewoman returning home: lustful for a good bath and a solid clean with servants! Ha! I sound just like you once did, as Astrid."

Alston folded his arms. "Well, as much as I've gotten better at living in the rugged wild, I find I cannot disagree. Besides, I'd love to see you all cleaned up and in the latest Vortesian fashion."

"I'll bet you would. I'm guessing the low cut dress is back among the high nobility?"

"Those that can pull it off, certainly. And you, my dear, can certainly pull it off."

He held her, kissing her cheek. "We can do this. I know we can."

Madeline sighed. "I'm allowed to be a little nervous. I'll stick out like a sore thumb as a lady of the court."

"No more than I as a rather unpractised knight. But we'll talk to Kathorn and my father, of course, and then the King."

"Gods, even the King?"

"We'll need him to transfer titles and avoid everyone knowing."

Madeline sighed yet again, this time more deeply. Alston didn't mind the way her chest rose and fell from the effort.

"You're right, of course. Fine, let's get it done! Oh, and we'll see that maidservant of yours! She has good remedies for sickness, I'm sure."

"Jenna? I have no doubt she will. Besides, she'll have a good laugh seeing the pair of us!"

Madeline snorted. "Indeed. What a pair we make now!"

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What followed after entering the mighty city of Vortis was a whirlwind series of meetings, secret gatherings, and signing of writs, all while finding time to relax and become accustomed to the comforts and bustling nature of city life once more. Naturally, Alston's father was desperate to see his 'daughter,' but the first step *had* to be to see Kathron. The talented wizard was buzzing with excitement to meet them, and after sending a sealed letter his way with the seal of the Levian house upon it, word quickly came back to them. A good thing too: the pair were eager to retreat to their city estate; they had coin enough to have themselves cleaned and taken care of, but some time to settle down was what they needed. Still, they answered the call quickly, stopping only briefly to have some lunch at a market thermopolia.

"Be careful," Alston said with a smirk as his wife wolfed down the rich lamb stew. "You keep eating like you have and it won't be just your bosom that keep bursting through those tight dresses."

"Sorry," she said, a bit embarrassed. "My stomach is growling constantly like a dragon unto itself. I swear, it's like I'm only just realising how malnourished I am."

Alston smirked. "Well, you're outdoing even my appetite. It's good to see you in better spirits, my life. It's a radiant sight, though I think a few men are starting to notice the beauty in their midst as well."

Madeline looked around and frowned. There were indeed quite a few men looking her way, and a few others winking and smirking. It was a warm day, so it wasn't like she could obscure her curves nor hide her exquisite beauty from them. Even her cut had healed remarkably, leaving only a small scar. She was proud of it, but it wasn't exactly turning eyes away from her; one man was grinning at her, lust in her eyes. The new woman placed her hand on her partner's thigh beneath the table.

"Please snap that man like old waxwork if he says anything to me."

"You have my word, my love. You know, it's very strange to be at one of these. I know you grew up with these fast serving little public food places, but it's seen as lower class for the nobility, and a woman of rank would never be caught dead here."

Madeline bit her lip, trying to hold back from snapping at a group of teenage boys who were pointing in her direction from behind her. One was gesturing, indicating that perhaps, from their perspective, her rear was rather well outlined.

"I'm starting to see why," she said. "Okay, that's enough stew."

"You ate it all!"

"That's why it's enough." She burped loudly, and grinned at the disgusted Alston.

“What? I’m not a full lady until we get my new status confirmed. That’ll be up to Kathorn!”

She sauntered back to their carriage, Alston following after, falling into a naturally protective mode. Gods, what a sight his wife was, and heads were turning in her direction. She would need to develop a sense of personal safety quickly; he doubted he could always be there with her!

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“Fascinating! Simply fascinating!” Kathorn exclaimed. He was looking over them both, pinching muscles and even cupping Madeline’s left breast.

“Hey!” Madeline screeched, batting his hand away in an accidentally quite ladylike manner. “Give me a warning next time, wizard!”

“Apologies, of course. Ah, but they are indeed most real. The changes are complete: I can sense the well of deep magic within you, far beyond even my capabilities. You are indeed Astrid and Marcus reborn and remade, now as Alston and Madeline.”

The pair stood within the wizard’s tower chamber, both of them wearing less than they would like in front of the mage. He had insisted on inspecting their bodies to see the way in which the magic had sculpted them. As such, Madeline was awkwardly trying to cover her voluptuous form (and failing rather badly) due to being only in her scarce undergarments, while Alston was only in a pair of trunks, his rippling muscles on display. Madeline didn’t mind *that* so much, though Alston certainly wasn’t used to being so bereft of clothing: even now, he kept raising his powerful forearms to cover a pair of breasts he no longer displayed.

“Please, don’t be so concerned with matters of flesh,” the wizard said off-handedly. “It is the magic that concerns me, not however nubile or virile your forms may be, though they are that, this is certain. Were such peak physical forms necessary for procreative purposes, I wonder?”

They told him again the story of the ancient well, illuminating him as to its reality. The wizard was excited to hear it again, and in further detail too, and continued to ask pointed questions regarding its magic, whether it was innate or druidic or ethereal, terms neither truly understood. Still, he was able to form some conclusions.

“Fantasised ideals conjured from your own minds, fascinating. I can imagine it has been a little . . . awkward for you both.” Despite the wizard’s clear lack of interest in men or women, even he had to dart his gaze briefly to Madeline’s quite tremendous pair of breasts, which were straining her upper garment a little. It frustrated her: it had fit so well only a week

ago, surely they weren't growing yet again? It was enough to make her nipples sore again, and she struggled not to touch them.

"More than a little awkward," the former male said, coughing a little to remind the wizard exactly where her eyes were. "But we are making do. Obviously we plan to turn back, but it seems the magic is fixed until we, well, procreate."

The wizard paused, then his eyes widened behind his smart, horn-rimmed glasses.

"Oh. Oh! Indeed, that would make sense! Ancient magic often relies upon the fruition of its initial intent before it can ever be dispelled. And since Astrid could not conceive . . ."

"Madeline can," Alston said, placing a hand on his wife's shoulder. She threw him an awkward glance, and the former female was reminded of how petite and shorter her wife had become. Well, petite in *most* places.

"Precisely," the wizard said. "This is going to be fascinating to study! Madeline could well become the first ever man to not only experience womanhood, but actually fall pregnant and give birth! Such an honour!"

"It doesn't feel like it," Madeline grunted. "Can we put our clothes back on? I'd rather not be reminded of just how female I am right now, especially when we discuss matters of the birthing bed."

"Oh, yes, naturally! Sorry, please get redressed. May I at least publish part of your experiences for the private lib-"

"NO!" the pair shouted, clinging to one another.

"Yes, of course. Privacy, naturally, comes first in such matters. I shall, nonetheless, keep a record if you change your minds. And I shall confirm with the King immediately, as well as his chief advisors, of this situation. This way, you can maintain your status within the kingdom."

Madeline looked down at her full chest, blocking any possible view of her feet.

"It won't be the same status, though," she murmured.

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Jenna could hardly believe the news of what had happened to her former mistress and friend. She had stared, utterly gobsmacked, at the tall and valiant-looking man who claimed to be Lady Astrid returned and changed. The fiery-haired maiden with her cute freckled cheeks and pixie-like figure was now broad and well-muscled, with radiant blonde hair and bright blue eyes instead of the previous emerald, though in the right light Jenna could see those green flecks return, if only for a magical moment. The wizard's letter had come accompanied by seals from Alston's own father and further from the King; all documents that outlined that Lady Astrid would be Lord Alston for the time being. Jenna, as chief

handmaiden to her lady, was expected to handle such documentation, and now doubt intended to read it to smooth over the coming transition. And yet still . . .

“Astrid, I still can’t believe it, mistress. Master? What do I even call you?”

Alston scratched the back of his head awkwardly. “Um, you may call me Alston, my good friend. I believe it’s in that pile of letters.”

“It - it is! But still! I can scarcely believe this!”

Alston laughed, and it was quite the belly rumble. “Trust me, I can scarcely believe it myself either! The meeting with my father was equal parts amusing and confronting.”

“Did he take it alright?”

“More than I liked, in fact! The man had always wanted a strapping son, so he was puffed up with pride. You’d think he’d never bounced me on his lap as a girl but instead taken me hunting on rites of manhood as a child.”

Jenna nodded, still confounded by it all. “It must be so different.”

“It is. I’m all hairy now, and having a - well, a thing between my legs is quite the strange experience.”

Jenna burst out laughing, losing her composure. “I should imagine so! At least you are most handsome!”

“And you are simply glowing! May I please feel?”

Jenna nodded. Alston lowered himself a little, feeling her best friend and faithful servant’s belly. It had swelled considerably, having been just early days when Jenna left. Now, six months had passed, and the woman was full with child. Her gorgeous olive skin was without blemish, and she beamed with pride as a little kick rippled across her belly.

“There he is.”

“A son? How do you know?”

“Mother’s intuition, Astrid - Alston. Trust me.”

Alston’s face became briefly crestfallen, and Jenna realised her mistake. “Oh, I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean - you must be so upset at how this all turned out.”

“No, it’s okay. But . . . given the nature of things, it might be better if you help out Madeline instead. Marcus’ new name. She will need a handmaiden far more than I do while I’m stuck as a man.”

“Of course. How long will that be for?”

Alston gave a sheepish grin. “Well, until she bares us a child.”

Jenna squeaked. “This is all so much! I suppose I better see her. Where is she?”

Alston grinned, cupped his hand to his cheek, and called out behind him. “Okay, my love, time to face the music. Jenna wants to see you.”

There was a deep, characteristic sigh, and a gorgeous woman emerged wearing a blue dress that flowed down to her feet. She was utterly beautiful, her raven-black hair thick,

her pale blue eyes piercing, revealing part of a warrior's spirit, even though the rest of her face was femininity incarnate. Her figure, despite being covered up, could not entirely be hidden; Jenna's eyes widened as she realised how curvaceous this woman's figure was.

"Good sir," she stammered.

"Good lady now," Madeline said. "Hello Jenna. Congratulations on the child to come. It seems you'll be my handmaiden from now on?"

"Yes, my - my lady. I shall do my best to get you up to speed on all matters of maintaining yourself, and aid in all ways that I can, at least until my child comes. And, of course, when you fall pregnant-"

Madeline put up a hand. It made Jenna and Alston both cringe; the manner in which she did so was not exactly ladylike.

"Let's not talk about that part now, thank you very much. Right now, all I want to do is find a good bed and sleep for three days in it."

Jenna and Alston exchanged a glance.

"What? Is something humorous? Alston, you always did snicker with Jenna here."

"Oh, it's nothing, my love. It's just, that's a very *me* thing to do. You were always much more on the go, as my valiant knight."

But Madeline just clutched her head. "Trust me, I'm more than aware. I just feel so tired. It's this weak female body, no offence, Jenna."

"None taken, my lord. Er, my mistress. But you would be surprised what a weak body can do; a woman has a power of her own. Let me take you to your chambers and help you into your sleepwear. I'll ready your bed as well."

"I don't need . . . actually, that does sound nice. Gods, I'm tired. And I need to sleep. Only I can't sleep on my stomach anymore. Don't giggle, either of you!"

But it was too late: they were both snickering just like old times, Alston's new gender no barrier to old friendships.

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When Madeline found out that she was not only pregnant, but was at least eight weeks along, she nearly combusted on the spot.

"No. It can't be. There must be some mistake. I simply can't be with child."

The apothecary was an older woman named Sara. She had a kindly, patient manner, though was also humorously direct, and it was very clear that this was not her first time breaking or confirming this news to a young woman.

"My dear, I have been diagnosing pregnancy in women for over forty years of my life now, and I follow in the footsteps of my mother, her mother, and even her mother before her.

I know the ins and outs of pregnancy, and have borne three children myself. I have delivered babies, helped infants struggling to suckle, aided nursing mothers, and helped save and end pregnancies where the mother's life was in dire straits. I know all about what it is for a woman to become with child, so believe me when I tell you this: you are with child. At least eight weeks, I'd say, possibly nine, to judge from the slight tautness in your belly."

She extended a hand out and quickly rubbed Madeline's stomach before retracting it.

"But . . . we only . . . just a few times!"

"Once is all it takes, dearie," Sara said, holding up a wrinkled finger. "Particularly with a strapping lad such as that!"

She gestured to Alston, who smiled nervously before placing his hand on his wife's shoulder to comfort her. The apothecary's backroom was small and the walls lined with all sorts of odds and ends, trinkets and tomes. Many of them, to judge from the hastily scrawled labels, were to do with aiding women's issues, including matters of fertility and fecundity. The air seemed chill to the pair, though perhaps it was the sheer awkwardness of what was being confirmed.

"Well, there were a few times," Alston admitted. "And we were . . . told, by a, er, respectable source, that we would likely be quite virile and fertile."

The woman cackled. "Don't place your faith in omens, though I suppose if I were, that omen wouldn't be too unbelievable. Madeline here has a body made for making babies. They'll feed well enough, that's for sure."

The anxious former male wasn't sure she could blush any harder.

"But how can you know for sure? It might not be! I haven't had a period - it's quite late, so-

"So that's a sign, dearie, and a strong one. Listen, you're late to your bleeding. Your breasts are so bloated, and your nipples have darkened some, and even grown a little too. You're feeling tired, exhausted even, and you're getting the nausea that leads to sickness, often but not always after breakfast in particular. I must ask, have you been feeling emotional as of late?"

Alston coughed. "She has been crying a little recently. In response to unexpected things. Like when I ate part of her meal I didn't think she would finish."

"I was hungry!"

"And when we finally went into the public again and saw that play."

"It was deeply sad!"

"It was a comedy."

Madeline gave a petulant 'harrumph', folding her arms beneath her chest in a way that seemed almost princess-like.

"Fine! Fine! I have all the symptoms."

She did, and this was actually what had finally made Alston realise that something was up, though it was Jenna who discovered the truth sooner. The woman was growing with child, and knew all the signs in a way that Astrid had often dreamed of but never got to experience as a woman, and so she was more alert to them. And while the loving pair slept together and often took comfort from one another, it was Jenna who now bathed Madeline, prepared her clothing, who noticed the subtle changes and dealt with the morning nausea while Alston was now taking up a lord's business. The handmaiden had asked several subtle questions, then discussed the matter privately with Alston, who felt like such an idiot when it was all laid out before him. Madeline had been gently encouraged to go see an apothecary nearby, specifically one who specialised in such matters.

Now, the inevitable yet frightfully too soon was occurring: a child was growing within a womb she had never meant to possess, her belly already slightly domed - just slightly - and going through the early struggles of pregnancy. It was almost impossible to take in.

"You do indeed, dearie," Sara said. "I'm going to find a number of ointments, lotions, and remedies for you. They'll help dim the nausea and aid the tiredness, as well as keep that noble skin glowing as you advance in pregnancy. Most of all, they'll help your little one flourish and grow too. I'll be right back."

She left the pair, perhaps quite deliberately, to their privacy. In the shocked silence that followed, Madeline lowered a hand to her stomach and swallowed.

You were right, my love. I imagine you'll be quite smug about that."

Alston lowered a hand also to his wife's stomach, placing it lovingly over her own.

"Smug, my love? *Always*. But happy?"

He raised the hand and cupped his wife's chin, raising her face to take in his.

"I know this is hard, and we don't feel quite ready yet. But . . . I feel more happy than I could imagine. And I know you will too."

Tears formed in the corners of Madeline's eyes, and this time she didn't fight them.

"Do you really think so?" she said, still feeling her belly.

"My love, think of it this way: it's finally happening. After so many struggles, we're finally having a baby."

Madeline paused, looked down, and took in her husband's phrasing. Slowly, a bewildered smile crept across her features.

"We're finally having a baby," she repeated.

She laughed, tears still in her eyes, her chest anxious but her heart warmed. She kissed her husband and clung to him.

"We're finally having a baby," she said again.

## Chapter 9: Adjustments

Of course, feeling an internal warmth and hope for a future baby wasn't enough to stem the hardships of Madeline's first trimester. The former stalwart knight had a number of new things to become used to - wearing courtly dresses, being attended to by handmaidens, learning the fine art of politics and diplomacy - all while dealing with excess tiredness, the occasional morning sickness, and an increasingly ravenous hunger that made her husband positively cackle at times.

"Careful, there won't be any bread and butter for me!"

"Or jam," she mumbled between bits, grabbing a jar for herself. "Pass me some of the scones will you please? With cream, too. Gods, I need a lot of cream right now."

She spilled crumbs down her top and even into her cleavage, causing her to roll her eyes. "Damn stupid breasts," she complained. "They're even bigger now, did you know?"

"Oh, I certainly noticed, my dear."

"Well, I guess I can't blame you. If we were in switched places, I wouldn't be able to keep my eyes off these tits even if a ravenous dragon was attacking."

"You *are* a ravenous dragon, Madeline, from the way you're attacking all this food."

"Your fault. As you might recall, *you* got *me* pregnant, and if that isn't a sentence I never expected to say I don't know what is."

She devoured another scone and switched back to the fine bread with its perfect crunch and buttered side.

"Good lords, woman," Alston said. "You would have never married me if I'd ever acted like this around food! You're filling up your cleavage with crumbs."

"I wish. This cleavage is an utter chasm thanks to the size of these things."

"Still, you need to practice your refinement, even in private. We have our roles to play, and for the next seven months at least you'll need to be a proper noblewoman in etiquette, rather than a pig at the dining table."

Madeline threw a scone in his direction for the insult, and he caught it easily.

"Good reflexes," she noted glumly. "Lessons are going well, then?"

Alston stretched his right shoulder and felt the bandage there.

"Not as well as hoped, alas. I have more strength than I could ever believe, and I'm eager for it. It's . . . exhilarating. But you were right when you started training me: muscles only get me so far. I need to learn finesse."

"Harold will train you pretty hard, I imagine."

"Him and the entire gallery, I'm afraid," Alston said, cracking his knuckles. "Word does get around some quarters about our switch. It seems your knight friends are all very keen on seeing just how well I'll do."

Madeline groaned, placing a hand on her stomach. "By the Black Mountain, it's the same for me! I'm seeing noblewomen give me the side eye, and that Lady Abigail is one of the only ones I like!"

"Oh no, she's a viper. She just wants to play nice and then gossip about you. You want to be friends with Clementa."

She put her face in her hands. "See? I feel like I'm being judged just for using the wrong damn fork at the dinner table."

The two embraced, and Alston chuckled softly.

"Looks like we've both got some adjustments to make, and not just for our little one."

They stayed together for some time like that, Alston's arms hugging Madeline from the back, his hands resting on her belly, as they contemplated their future.

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Over the next couple of months, the pair became more accustomed to their new roles in the Kingdom of Vortis. The initial shock of their body switch slowly faded away, though some amusement and astonishment no doubt remained. This was especially true for Madeline, who was slowly learning the ways of a noblewoman, often on Alston's arm at important events, and becoming more aware of the arts of politics and diplomacy as she met important figures at said events. Her gowns and dresses were elegant and rich, and while they were not revealing, very little could hide her figure, especially her prominent bust, much to her embarrassment. When one drunken noble tried to flirt with her and compliment her 'ample assets of the kingdom' she had to be restrained by Alston to stop herself from punching him out.

"A condemnation in words, dear, will be stronger than physical actions."

"The loud deserves worse than that!"

"I know, but that's my job now, remember?"

Thankfully, Alston had been training rather extensively, and delivered quite the knockout blow when the traditional fisticuffs of honour was declared. It made Madeline swell with pride to see her husband step up in this way, and that made her more driven to step up as well.

Of course, she wasn't just swelling with pride, but in body by this point as well. The physical changes of pregnancy happened slowly, so slowly and then so very fast. It was as if, after weeks of enduring nausea, exhaustion, sore breasts and a desperate hunger, Madeline suddenly woke with a tautness in her stomach. Yes, there had already been a slight curve there from the nine week mark, ever so faint, but now she had an actual dome, and one that could only be hidden under a far more robust series of layers. But Vortis was in

summer, and the fashion for its women was much more sleek than other, more cloistered neighbourly nations. And so, with her pregnancy now four months along and her midriff's muscles effectively gone, Madeline felt truly pregnant for the first time, to the point where Jenna had to remind her to stop poking her belly.

"I can't help it!" she said as she finished getting dressed with another handmaid's aid. "It's - it's there!"

Jenna was feeding her own child by this point, having given birth over a month ago. She resumed her duties only as able, and had already offered to be a wetnurse for Madeline's child, a fact she was happy to accept, despite her own breasts being obviously up to the future task.

"I know well the feeling, mistress," she said with a giggle. "But it would not be ladylike to keep poking at it with your finger."

"Yes, I imagine a soft caress would be it. A touch of the hand, like so."

She rubbed her belly, something she actually wanted to do, feeling the tautness of it. It was at that point that Alston came in.

"I'm not fully dress yet, dear," Madeline complained.

"Oh, please, I'm your husband. Nothing I haven't seen."

She scoffed. "More masculine all the time, barging in uninvited."

He gave a sheepish grin, then focused on her stomach, where her hand was laying. Even with her green dress now upon her, the outline of her bump was easily seen.

"Is that? By the Gods, I can see it! You've blown up overnight."

"And with a lot more blowing up to do, it seems."

Jenna smiled, and excused herself with the other handmaiden. Madeline watched her first handmaiden go, clutching her little boy, her own heart skipping a beat at the sight. He was indeed very cute, and something maternal set off inside of her, even as Alston touched her belly, hand sliding over her stomach.

"Amazing," he said. "I'm really rather jealous."

"Don't be. I'm going to look ridiculous."

"Nonsense, you look beautiful. Just look at your stomach!"

"I can only see it in the mirror with these great things in my way, or when feeling it like so. The morning sickness has gone away, at least. And the tiredness. I feel like I finally have energy again and - and . . ."

Alston waited for her to finish, but Madeline said nothing. Her eyes slowly widened, and she focused her mind entirely upon her female body.

"Madeline? My sweet? Is something the-"

"Get your hand off me, quickly."

Alston pulled it away, still very confused. He went to speak again, but Madeline raised a hand to silence him. Her eyes were so wide they were like dish plates, her mouth hanging open in shock.

“Madeline, what’s the-”

“I can feel it.”

“Feel what?”

“It. It! Our child. I can feel it moving.”

“Are you sure?”

“I’m *certain*.” She broke out into a nervous smile. “It’s so slight, I almost didn’t catch it. It’s not my stomach. It’s sort of . . . shuffling.”

“They say four months is around when you can feel the tremors. I’d read up quite a bit while we were trying for so long. How is it?”

Madeline gave a sheepish laugh. “Amazing! Foreign! Completely bizarre! Good Gods, I have something *living* inside me. I shall have to charge it rent! Gods, this is strange. It never felt real until this moment, Alston. I . . . would you like to feel it?”

She placed Alston’s hand on her stomach, but after some time he confessed that he couldn’t feel a thing.

“I think it’s too early from my side,” he said, still marvelling at her stomach. It really had grown. “I guess for now you have a special little connection to your baby.”

“Our baby,” she said, holding onto her husband, pressing her belly against him. “And you’ll feel it soon too. Plenty of time left as I turn into a giant cow.”

“Nonsense,” he replied, kissing her. “Man or woman, you will always be beautiful.”

“Just keep that in mind when I’m in the birthing bed. I’ve never wanted something to be over so quickly and yet staved off for so long at the same time. Now go on, let me finish dressing. We’ll head out on our walk soon.”

She shooed Alston out of the room and began adjusting her jewellery and final touches of makeup herself, just as she’d learned. She really was beautiful, and for once she was actually proud of it, especially her dark tresses of hair and piercing blue eyes. She placed her hand on her stomach again, almost unable to stop herself after those movements.

“You can move about any time, little one,” she said with a smile. “I won’t mind.”

In fact, she was quite looking forward to the next time it did.

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“Ughhh,” Madeline grunted.

Alston stood beside his wife, both of them present for an important medal ceremony as part of diplomatic relations with the Northerners. It was a long, protracted affair, with many speeches and lots of standing. Madeline *hated* the standing.

“Kicking again?” he asked his wife, taking her hand in his.

“Again?” she whispered to him. “It never damn stopped. I swear I am going to kill Kathorn once I am a man again. I can’t believe he sent us to that well. Feel this.”

Subtly, she moved her husband’s hand to her belly. It had swollen now, her being five months along, and he knew it still galled her that she was now nearly two-thirds through her journey. The belly had certainly come out of hiding now, and all of her dresses emphasised her fertile bump. She practically kept one hand on it all times, though she always gave a sharp glare when Alston suggested she was acting in quite the womanly and maternal fashion in doing so. Now, though, he could feel the movements of his child within, and despite himself, he chuckled, more loudly than intended.

Someone shushed him.

“Stop embarrassing us,” Madeline whispered. “This is a very formal ceremony.”

“Me embarrass? You’re the one grunting.”

“I’m the one who’s pregnant. And hungry.”

“It was you who used to embarrass *me* at these events. What a turn around.”

She gave a sly smile, only to be preoccupied by the little one swimming about in her womb. She rubbed her belly, trying to maintain a noblewoman’s dignity, but it was so very hard to when a number of the medal-recievers up on the raised dais before the king were her old knightly compatriots, and a few were smirking in her direction.

“Oh, they are just going to laugh it up,” she predicted.

Indeed, they did. When the ceremony was over, the ‘old roundtable of knights,’ as they called themselves, formed together for conversation, and Sir Harold practically *dragged* Alston and Madeline over.

“Marcus!” Sir Lochley said with enthusiasm. “We barely see you in the training grounds these days!”

“It is a mystery why,” Madeline said, holding her bump. “Unless you bumped your head and forgot, I was in fact changed into a woman.”

“Quite the glowing one in fact, old friend,” Sir Davis said. “If you don’t mind me saying, you look pretty as a peach!”

“Yes, I saw you appreciating both of my peaches last month, Davis. You do know my eyes are up here, don’t you?”

“To be fair, they are quite overripe!”

The group laughed, and Alston briefly bristled, wanting to defend his wife. She placed a hand on his arm.

“It’s okay, husband. This is the kind of shit-talk real knights get up to when they don’t have an image to maintain. And my tits may be overripe, Davis, but at least I’ve got a pair to grab hold of when I want, instead of wandering down to the Salis Brothels and picking up the first whore willing to put up with the smell of me.”

Another laugh rippled through the group, and Davis cackled hardest of all. “Yep, it’s definitely still our Marcus in there!”

“Madeline for now,” she said. “Just like Astrid is Alston.”

“Ah, such a loss, if you don’t mind my saying, sir,” Lochley said to the new knight. “We all had such a great love for the fiery-haired Astrid.”

“I admit, I do miss the red hair.”

At this point, Harold put a hand on the knight’s shoulder. “Ah, but he’ll draw red like paint to judge from how he’s training. Can beat me two out of five bouts already, and always improving.”

“Becoming a real man, then,” Lochley said.

Madeline put an arm around her husband, caressing his back and looking up at him with love. Her attraction to him was still powerful. “Very much so,” she said.

“Certainly virile!” Lochley joked. “Are you having twins, Madeline-Marcus? Never thought I’d see the greatest hero in the kingdom knocked up with child.”

She pouted. “Alston, punch his teeth out for me, then give me an entire wheel of cheese to finish the job and then eat.”

More rounds of laughter followed, during which she did manage to extract an apology from Lochley. It was still very strange for the pair of them: Alston now a man among their ranks, sharing in jokes about pretty women and heroic deeds, while Madeline was now the quite pregnant and beautiful noblewoman, subject to interested gazes but also occasional moments of awkwardness as her friends tried to navigate their new relationships with her. By the end of the ceremony and banquet, the pair were more than ready to get home.

“I think that went well, at least?” Alston suggested as he helped her up into the carriage, her own core muscles displaced by her distended womb’s growth.

“Oh, very well, Davis was practically drooling at my tits.”

“They are very drool-worthy, my love. But the rest seemed to enjoy seeing you again. You really should come by the training grounds, you know. Other wives do, to see their husbands and gossip among one another. I’ll be in fine form, lots of muscles on display. And besides, I think your friends do miss you. A lot, in fact.”

She sat down in her carriage seat with an ‘oof,’ cradling her bump as their baby began to kick again.

“I . . . yes, that would be quite nice, actually. But let’s get home now.”

“Exhausted? I’ll get the staff to ready your bed.”

“Oh, we’ll be needing the bed alright, but not for sleeping.” She gave a sly grin. “I find myself desiring you, and frankly, you get no choice in the matter.”

Alston smiled back. “I have no problem with this, my darling.”

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“Ohhhhh, yesss. Mhmmm, ahhh. We should have t-tried this ages, a-ago! Ohh!”

The pleasure was intense, but even better than the pleasure in some ways was the added comfort. Madeline gasped as her husband thrust into her from behind, clutching her wide hips and occasionally shifting one hand to grip her peachy rear. The sensations were intoxicating, but this time their actual positions were of great help to her. She was on all fours on the great long-haired rug in their living room, the pair of them in front of the magnificent warmth of the fireplace, which alone lit their perfect bodies. Her belly hung low, resting partly on a pillow Alston had cleverly put in place for her. Her breasts received no such support, hanging low and even bigger now that she was in her seventh month, slapping against her belly audibly with each thrust of her husband’s cock into her. And yet still, this felt damn good for the pair of them.

“I - ah - told you!” Alston declared back, pushing into her again. He was on his knees, and he too found this position far more pleasant than the others they’d tried recently. “You said it would b-be demeaning, not m-me! That it would be like being m-mounted like an animal!”

“I was - ahhh - wrong! Or right, but I w-want to feel animalistic, right now! Keep going! I’m s-so fucking close!”

Alston bit his lip, smiling as he continued to slide in and out of his wife’s tight wet passage. He loved when she swore; even as Marcus he hadn’t done it much, having abandoned the speech of his peasant youth quite deliberately. But when it came out in the bedroom, it was a delight to hear, and more than enough to get him going.

Alston reached forward and cupped her breast with one hand, pinching her large nipples and making her moan, using his other hand for balance. He then caressed her belly, touching it while never losing the motion of their intercourse.

“You’re s-so beautiful, Madeline. I love how pregnant you’ve become.”

“S-say it again! Gods, it sounds sweet to hear.”

“So full with our child. I want to put another one in you. I want to get you knocked up with a beautiful set of twins, next.”

“Oh Gods, that’s so - ohhhhh! Yess! Yessss, my love! Yesss!”

They came, and once more she whimpered as ropes of his warm issue flooded into her. She squeezed him with her inner muscles, taking as many bursts of pleasure as she

could, and only then did he remove himself and help her down to her side, whereupon he spooned himself against her, caressing her stomach. It didn't take long for the baby to wake from all the motion and begin stirring.

"I never get tired of feeling this," he murmured.

She moved his hand to a spot with even more activity. "Try being me," she mused. "And try sleeping with it."

"Don't tell me you don't enjoy it. I see you smiling when you think I'm not looking. Always touching your belly. At the training grounds the other day you didn't even see me win the bout against Harold - I won three out of five and you were so preoccupied with our little one!"

She blushed, not that he could see it. He raised a hand to cup her breasts, playing with them idly.

"I was just - ahhh - distracted. Look, I suppose it is nice. I just wish he slept at the same time I do."

"Still convinced it's a boy?"

"He's a bloody athlete in there, so I'd say yes, my darling knight."

"Oh, darling knight? I like that. I like that a lot."

He continued to squeeze and caress her large chest, occasionally roaming to her stomach but always returning to them.

"And I can tell what you like a lot, right now."

"What can I say? I've learned to appreciate a good pair of breasts since becoming a man, and yours are still the best."

"They're bigger. Yet again."

"Milk will be coming in soon."

Madeline paused, a little embarrassed. "That talk about you getting me pregnant again?"

It was Alston's turn to blush. He moved his hand back to her stomach, relishing the little movements of his baby within. "It was just talk, my love. No need to read into it."

"But it did . . . arouse you?"

". . . yes. It did. Sorry if I spoiled the mood."

Madeline said nothing further. She didn't want to admit a strange truth that had spilled over her like a revelation in those final moments of the sexual act. Admitting it would be a humiliation, even for her present circumstances.

Because the idea of being impregnated again had seemed so, so wonderful in that brief window. And a small part of her still felt warm at the prospect.

## Chapter 10: The Birthing Bed

In the final couple of months, more preparations were made for the impending event. Madeline continued to grow larger and larger, relying more and more on her husband and Jenna, as well as her other handmaidens, for help. She found the energy of her middle months of pregnancy starting to wane, and the famous nesting instinct began: she preferred to spend more time around their estate outside the city, wandering through the gardens, overseeing the nursery room, and generally fussing in a way that made Alston laugh at times. The pair never stopped having sex, though their rate did slow down somewhat; it was more often that Alston initiated it now, and they had to work around her belly, or otherwise please each other orally.

“Never, ever, ever speak of this,” Madeline said to him in the aftermath of pleasing him with her mouth. “Not to Harold, not to Lochley, especially not to Davis. To no one. If you ever want that again, or me again, tell no one.”

“I s-swear,” Alston said, momentarily intimidated.

“Good,” she said sweetly, before disrobing and getting on her back in the bed, clutching her stomach for balance as she did so. She spread her legs, revealing her womanhood. “Now hurry up, good knight. It’s the lady’s turn.”

To say she was pleased with the results was an understatement. In fact, even pleasuring her husband with her mouth hadn’t been so bad, and the pair began to do so more often, especially as regular relations became difficult.

Still, other things began to slow down and almost normalise. Despite the anxiousness of her impending birth, Madeline was actually increasingly confident in acting the part of a female noble. When seeing guests or being one, she observed the proper rites and customs, presenting the image of a woman who was sharp with words rather than steel, while still fulfilling her womanly duty to birth a child into the world. There were times she missed her old self, of course - the rumours that a great troll was rampaging along the outskirts of Vortis made her want to pick up a sword and waddle to the battlefield - but the truth was that, after killing a dragon and travelling beyond the edge of the known world, she really had achieved the greatest feats. Anything else would not measure up. Besides, she couldn’t risk her baby boy, who was so ready to come into the world.

So often, the former male could scarcely believe the transformation her body was undertaking. It was slower than her change from male to female, and more expected in knowing what was to come, but in so many ways it seemed almost *more* dramatic. Mentally, she had taken up the role of being a woman even before being pregnant, but as her belly swelled and her child felt like a true living being, *her* child, within her, she came to embrace her own femaleness. The male ego simply couldn’t survive literally carrying a man’s child, a

product of his seed within her, but despite the occasional embarrassments, she found herself actually proud of what her body was achieving. It felt powerful and mighty in its own way: she was doing something no other man had ever achieved creating life, and even the fullness of her breasts became a point of pride with her despite their ample size: she knew they would do well to feed her child . . . if she chose to feed him, that was. She told herself she would use a wetnurse, but increasingly she daydreamed about having her child against her naked chest, achieving that comfort and closeness that most mothers were blessed with. Even in the morning, when getting out of the bed was difficult and she had to place both hands on her back because of her large mound, she still considered the wonder of what she was doing. And to protect her child, she was more than happy to keep on nesting, and keeping away from danger.

Alston, on the other hand, was ready to go out into it. He stayed relatively close to the city most of the time, but ventured out with his fellow knights to skirmish against threats, particularly since relations with the Northerners were breaking down . . . again. Their tribes were a loose coalition as opposed to the centralised states elsewhere around Vortis, and this made for difficult border stability when a new leader ascended and had to wrangle the various confederacies into submission. Such a new ascension had happened recently, and the more barbarian tribes were stretching their chains, testing how much they would be restrained, all to Vortis' own suffering, alas. Alston had yet to take a life, but knew that would be necessary, as surely as Madeline was destined for the birthing bed he was destined for battle.

"I'll be back safely, my love," he told his wife, holding her stomach and kissing both it and her lips. "I promise you. Don't fret now."

She had to wipe away tears from her eyes. "Damn emotions! I could have my baby any day now and you're heading off! It's hardly fair."

"Now you know how I felt all those times you went away. At least you're not getting kidnapped?"

She crossed her arms over her belly and beneath her breasts. "I don't think many dragons are in the market for formerly male pregnant noblewomen. Look, just be safe, my love. Listen to Sir Harold. And for Gods' sakes, I don't care how appropriate or not it is for a man, I want you there at my side at the birthing bed. I want you there, please."

He kissed her on the forehead, something she had come to love despite how female it made her feel.

"I will be back, my lady."

"You better be, my knight. I may not swing a sword now, but I have a cast-iron skillet I can readily handle."

They kissed once more, this time with even greater passion, and then he parted from her, getting on his horse and whisking away. She placed a hand on the swollen belly she never imagined she'd ever had, and found comfort in it.

"That's your father, little one," she murmured. "Your mother misses him already. Damn that well for making me such an emotional woman!"

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It was just seven days later that Madeline's waters broke. She missed her husband terribly, her pregnancy making her even more attached than usual. Jenna was there to help her, of course, as were the other staff, but she spent long hours simply resting back and subject to the squirming of her child. Her stomach was a large dome now, dominating her figure, and to her embarrassment her breasts had started to leak their early milk.

"I feel like a damn cow," she uttered to herself, staring at her naked reflection in the mirror of her bathroom as she pinched her breasts. More milk leaked as a result, and the sensation was strange, alien. "More than enough milk in these udders, too. Gods, Alston, I need you to come home and take care of this again. I need you just to come home."

She sighed, large chest rising and falling, the pair of them sat upon her taut dome. She cupped it, trying to relieve herself of the weight, when suddenly.

"Nghh! Ohhhhh!"

Suddenly, water trickled down her thighs, leaking from her womanhood. The woman was briefly confused, but a sharp stabbing pain in her stomach, followed by a tension between her legs made her realise exactly what was going on.

"Ahhhh - oh, oh, oh. Oh Gods. It's happening. My waters have b-broken."

She swallowed, riding out the pain. It wasn't as completely terrible as she thought it would be, but then it was early labor yet, and she was still bending over, clutching her stomach as she fought to regain her breath. Finally, it passed.

"Sh-shit. It's happening. It's actually happening."

She opened the door, where her handmaiden Nettie was waiting on the other side. She looked briefly just a little shocked to find her mistress completely naked, though it wasn't completely out of the ordinary. Perhaps it was just the look of fear on Madeline's face that gave it away.

"Mistress, are you-"

"Send every raven we've got! I want my husband here, now! There's no way I'm giving birth without him!"

The woman took off, summoning Jenna to help Madeline. By the time she arrived, another contraction was about to begin.

“B-by the Black Mountain, I can’t b-believe the things that h-happen to m-meeee!”

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Alston *raced* home, pushing his mare to its very limits to arrive back at the estate. He had been celebrating with his fellow knights on their victory. It had been a mere skirmish, but one that had pushed this little tribe of Northerners back in line with the mandate of their leaders, the ones Vortis had signed treaties with. Alston had taken his first life as well, and part of it haunted him. He knew that Marcus had never celebrated it - the death of monsters and foul beasts, perhaps, but never truly the death of fellow human beings. But it had to be done; the man had come at him with a mace, having already helped burn down part of a village, and Alston had simply done what needed to be done. His knights had assured him that the first time was the hardest, and their camaraderie had seen him through, along with some helpful drink. He now had a far greater respect for Madeline’s old life, even more than before.

But such thoughts were furthest from his minds when the raven messenger found them. There was magic upon it, and while he had kept his prying interest away from them out of respect for their demands, Alston could detect the faint work of Kathorn in making sure the message reached him.

Madeline was in labor.

Madeline was in *labor*.

They’d been making his way back slowly to the estates, but Harold immediately released him to make the journey without the rest of them. Now, he positively raced, eager to be there for his wife and child. To witness the birth of new life to salve the fact that he’d so recently taken one.

The moment he arrived in the front courtyard, Nettie was racing out to him, providing no formality whatsoever and all the better a handmaiden for it.

“She’s up in the east wing!” she declared as he ran past. “She’s been in labour nearly eighteen hours. She is nearly ready to push! Hurry!”

He didn’t thank her; there would be time for that later. Instead he ran up the halls, peeling away his studded leathers as he did so, leaving scraps of it in every room until he was just in his breeches and shirt. He *burst* into the room, outside of which stood a number of servants. He dispelled them immediately, and the moment he entered was greeted to the sight of Madeline laying back in a white garment on the bed, her legs slightly spread, a mass of pillows behind her. She had one hand on her large pregnant womb, the other punching the side of the bed from the pains of her contractions. Her face was sweaty, her hair matted in parts to her forehead, and she looked positively exhausted. And yet one look from her to

him was more magnificent than anything in the world, because an instant relief seemed to sweep over her.

“Alston!” she exclaimed, tears forming in her eyes immediately.

“Madeline!”

He rushed to her side, clutching her hand. Sara the apothecary had been summoned as midwife, and Jenna was aiding her.

“She’s about ready to push soon,” the midwife said. “She’s nearly fully dilated. A solid labour, this one. Not the longest by far, at least.”

“F-feels long!” Madeline gasped. She kissed Alston as he pressed his face against hers. “What took you so long?”

“Had a battle. Small skirmish. I did well.”

“I’m p-proud. Longsword or shortsword, which do you - nghh! Gods, again! So close!”

“Close is good,” Sara said. “Close means we’re about ready to go.”

Alston squeezed his wife’s hand. “You’re doing well, my love.”

“It’s been a long day. Been in labour since m-mid afternoon yesterday. Gods, I barely slept! How do women do this?”

“It’s your battlefield, just think of it as that. Your battlefield, my love.”

But Madeline just sighed. “N-no. I think I’m done with battlefields, even if I become a man again. I just want my child. I want to hold him. Even if it means g-giving birth. I don’t care. It’s not embarrassing to me anymore. Just painful. I want him in my arms, Alston. I want to give us a child. I can’t explain it.”

“It’s just what any mother feels,” Sara explained.

Madeline nodded, seeing wisdom in this. She felt like a mother. So much pain and pressure, so much discomfort; how could she not feel as if she’d earned the title now? And more than that, she found herself *wanting* the title. She wanted to be a mother, to hold her child, and judging from the pressure in her breasts, to feed it as well. To nourish, rather than take life, for once.

“I’m so proud, my love,” Alston said. “You’re going to be a mother. You can do this.”

“I - I can. I can do this. I can - Ohhhh! NGH! I can’t! Shit, but I can’t! God, it’s p-painful as a dragon’s bite!”

“Push now!” the midwife called. “Big pushes, and remember your breaths.”

“You’re not a man right now, remember,” Alston whispered to her. “You’re a woman. And women have done this in every age. You can do it too.”

Madeline nodded, collected herself. She gripped her husband’s hand, and Jenna’s on the other side of the bed.

And then she pushed. She bore down her body like never before. She’d faced just giant spiders, malevolent demons, a cruel cursing dragon, and so many other threats.

Somehow, this seemed the greatest challenge she would ever surmount. And with her husband at her side, she knew she could do it.

“Push! Keep pushing!”

“I am! I’m pushing! I can f-feel! I can - NNGHH!!!”

Sara confirmed that she could see the head. Alston kept close by Madeline’s face, whispering encouragements to her. Jenna did this also. The pain for Madeline was extraordinary, so different from anything she had ever felt as a man. The child’s head began to crown, and she felt her vaginal opening stretch inhumanly wide to accommodate it. There was a ring of fire in her womanhood, but still she pushed, wanting more than anything not just to be done but to *see her child*.

And then she pushed again, and the head was out. Another terrible push, and a shoulder came free, followed by another. And from there, Sara helped guide the child out completely. An immediate relief hit Madeline, a flood of sensation that soothed her even with the remaining pain and soreness. She didn’t even care that someone was cleaning her up at her entrance with some towels. All that mattered was what Sara was presenting to her like the grandest prize in all of the known and unknown planes of existence.

“Congratulations,” she said, placing a squirming, crying child on Madeline’s chest, which Jenna helped unbutton her shirt to give skin contact. “You have a baby girl.”

Madeline couldn’t help it. Former manhood be damned; she burst into tears of joy and clutched the blotched, slightly bruised form of her daughter. The cries ceased immediately, the child recognising its mother, little eyes searching.

“Oh Gods, oh Gods, I did it. Alston, I did it. I did it. I gave birth. We have a daughter. Gods, we have a daughter, oh by the Gods.”

Alston held her, marvelling at the child he was now a father of.

“We have a daughter,” he repeated, touching the child softly. “My love, we did it. We finally have a child.”

Even in the soreness and tiredness and overwhelming weight of it all, the loving pair shared the widest smiles of all.

The afterbirth was taken care of later, and Alston cut the cord. Then, the baby began mewling again.

“I think she’s hungry,” Alston said.

“I can be the wetnurse, if required, mistress,” Jenna offered to Madeline.

But the new mother surprised even herself. She answered the calling of her new maternal instincts, not to mention the pressure in her chest. She parted her shirt again to expose one of her mammoth breasts, and with Alston’s help got her daughter upon it. The baby took some time but soon latched, and then Madeline cooed softly as the first of her milk was extracted.

“Ohhhh,” she sighed. “That’s not too bad, actually. I can’t believe I’m b-breastfeeding. I can’t believe I just gave birth.”

“To a daughter, no less.”

“S-so much for motherly instinct, huh? I guess I’m not a full mother, technically.”

“You are,” Alston said, taking her hand. “You are, my love.”

They both watched their daughter suckle away.

“What shall we call her?” Alston asked.

Madeline considered this for some time. “We both wanted this child for a long time. We searched for so long for a way to have her. We hoped. Maybe that’s a good name, my love? Hope.”

Alston regarded his daughter. “It’s the perfect name, my life.”

Not ten minutes later, Madeline was asleep with Hope in her arms, who was also sleeping peacefully in the wide new world she had entered. The new father was beside them.

“My love,” he whispered to his wife in a moment of privacy. “I’m so proud of you. You did what I never could. Maybe we were meant to change places all along.”

Perhaps the sleeping new mother heard his words, or perhaps was just dreaming of her child, but Madeline actually smiled.

## **Chapter 11: The Rest of Our Lives**

Alston was surprised when he woke the next morning. He hadn’t realised his own tiredness after seeing the way Madeline strain her body to push their child into the world. Instantly, the memories of seeing his baby daughter for the first time hit him, and he quickly changed to go see her. He had separate quarters for now while she recovered, but as he made his way down the hall he was surprised to see that Jenna was just entering with some water and food.

“She’s awake, master,” Jenna said, smiling at her friend.

“Already?”

“Both of them, in fact, and feeding well. Believe me, master, it is constant work for a mother. She has asked me to tell you to visit whenever you are able.”

“Then I shall move with haste!”

Jenna opened the door for him and he marched in. Lying on the bed with a fresh batch of pillows propping her up was Madeline. She looked tired, but already much recovered

from her labor pains. She was wearing a night shift that was open at the front, and was cradling little hope who was wrapped in a bundle while suckling from her mother.

“Hello, my love,” Madeline said, smiling in a tired but cathartic manner.

Alston moved to her side, staring down at Hope.

“She’s beautiful.”

“She is, isn’t she? And hungry. I swear, it is a good thing I have such a large bosom, because clearly she intends to drink me dry.”

Alston caressed the cheek of his child. She was still a bit splotchy, but much less so than the previous day. She had a little hair, brunette in colour, mid-way between his own blond hair and her mother’s raven-black hair.

“I still can’t believe her,” he murmured. “She’s real. She’s ours. After so long, we have a child. And you birthed it! Who would have thought?”

Madeline scoffed. “I would! What a terror! God, it was worse pain than any on the battlefield, I can tell you that much. Is our kingdom safe?”

Alston nodded. “A minor skirmish. I . . . took a life. I am assured it gets easier.”

His mood turned unexpectedly dark for a moment, but was lifted as his wife placed a hand on his.

“I understand,” she said. “It does get easier.”

“It need not, when we change back, I suppose.”

“Yes.”

A strange, awkward silence fell between them. Madeline shifted Hope around, switching her to the other breast as if by instinct. “Keep on drinking, Momma’s very full right now.”

“I didn’t think you were going to breastfeed?”

The gorgeous new mother gave a light shrug. “I didn’t think I was going to become a woman either, or fall pregnant, and certainly not push a child out from between my thighs. I’ve done so many things I never expected, my love, what’s one more? Besides, the feeling is most relaxing. I never really understood the bond between mother and child until now.”

Alston could see that. Part of him envied it, after wanting it for so long, but it was oddly far less than he thought it would be. Certainly, the birth had been something he’d been happy to not go through, and recovery was still ahead. In some ways, he was the proud father: a strong protective, paternal feeling stirred in him rather than the envied feelings of a missed-out mother. He wanted nothing more than to care for these two and be the sword and shield that defended them and provided for them.

“Is something the matter, Alston?” Madeline asked.

He hadn’t even noticed that she was carefully placing the child into a nearby cot. Hope was sleeping soundly, so very tiny and yet full of so much future promise. Madeline

hadn't even buttoned up her shirt even as she relaxed back; clearly she was much more self-confident about her own body now.

"Just thinking about how proud I am of you," he said. He took her hand and kissed her softly. She returned the kiss.

"Well, I'm bloody proud of myself, I can tell you that. I doubt Sir Harold, titan of combat that he is, could have made it through what I did last night."

"You did it with extraordinary dignity, my love."

"I can tell you that it didn't feel like it! I could literally *feel* Hope squeezing out of my womanhood. I could *feel* my hips widening just to accommodate her. Nothing prepared me for that! She's a big baby, you know. Thanks for your contribution to that, by the way."

Alston chuckled. "Perhaps she will be one of our rare female warriors."

Madeline looked at her with absolute love. "She will be anything she wishes to be. Anything at all. We'll see to that."

"We'll make sure of it, together."

She nodded, before resting her eyes. "Now, if you'll excuse me, my love, I think I might eat a little and then fall asleep for, say, three or four . . . years."

He kissed her on the forehead. "You sleep as long as you need, my love. And don't worry about anything; Hope is our focus. We can see Kathorn whenever we are ready to turn back; there is no rush."

"Mhmm," she responded, noncommittal. She rested her head back and was asleep again already.

Alston watched her sleep for the second time in as many days. He was so deeply proud of his love, despite all the strangeness they had been through. They now had a child, and could return back. Of course, when he'd been Astrid, he'd actually dreamed of having a big family; five or six children to raise and love as their doting mother. But one should be enough, he knew. It was too much to ask his former husband to delay any further, and far, far too much to expect Madeline to go through another pregnancy or even more just to sate his own desires. Madeline would want to change back, and he wanted to change back too, to be his old self again.

Didn't he?

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A new routine began to slowly emerge for the pair. Madeline was continually exhausted, even with the help of Jenna and the other handmaidens, but despite her complaints she was always present to feed her child. Despite the offerings of Jenna, she insisted on being the only one to breastfeed Hope, guarding her almost jealously. It didn't hurt that she was quite

the producer of milk, a fact practically everyone saw coming given the generous size of her bosom. Still, being woken continuously took its toll in the early weeks until things began to stabilise, and during those times Madeline wanted nothing more than to be a man again and hurl the responsibility over to Alston-turned-Astrid, or Jenna too if necessary for the feedings. And yet . . . something always stopped her from doing so. A maternal duty, perhaps. Or it could have simply been that Alston was so deeply supportive, being more attendant to her needs than any husband in history, given that he was once female too. He was by her side whenever needed, and let the child sleep in his arms or upon his chest when he could be present.

Of course, that was not always the case. The situation with the Northernmen was beginning to stabilise, but Alston still had to leave on several more skirmishes upon the border, leaving Madeline anxious during his absence. He had to remind himself that this was necessary to protect them, just as she had to remind herself that the former noblewoman had become a capable warrior, and was becoming evermore capable.

Still, it was a hard time, and the glue that held it all together was their shared love of Hope and desire to raise her. Whenever Madeline found herself dealing with post-pregnancy pains, soreness, the rigours of healing or just the aching nipples of a woman continuously feeding, all it took was one look at her daughter's adoring face and all complaints were banished.

"How have you unmanned me so?" she asked her daughter more than once while holding her. She had to wipe the tears in her eyes away. "You've turned me from a powerful knight to a blubbering lady and mother. And the worst part is when I look at you and feed you, I hardly regret it one bit!"

That lack of regret churned within Alston, too. Having wanted to bear a child for so long, he was now grappling with the possibility that he had rather romanticised the experience, somewhat. He could scarcely believe how Madeline was having to take care of herself and the child, all while healing, and in that manner developed a healthy respect for peasant mothers, that was for sure. If his wife was finding it difficult, even with handmaidens and servants and endless resources, how could humble farmers do it? It made him begin thinking about using some of the great funds they shared to establish a new hospital, if it meant aiding others in this manner, but that would be some ways off. After all, what would life be like when they changed back to their former sexes?

It was the unspoken question that hung in the air between them. Even when Madeline was able to return to their shared bed, even when four months had passed and her body was feeling much more like her own again, her bloated stomach now a pooch that she was doing her best to restore, even when Hope was moved to another room besides theirs

and was starting to show the first hints of smiles and nascent laughter, the question of when they would change back was rarely discussed.

Almost six months had passed when sexual relations between the pair were restored. Madeline's body had recovered remarkably, no doubt aided by the magic of the ancient well. Her form had been blessed with ample assets and remarkable fertility, it only made sense that it would restore itself as well. It was in the middle of the night when she felt a strange ache in her loins. She almost didn't recognise it at first. Her husband was slumped up against her, sleeping, his hand upon her generous breast, caressing it even in sleep. She could feel his prick harden between her cheeks. It was a hot night, and sleeping naked did not bother her now, though occasionally her breasts did leak a little. The new mother had fed Hope just recently, and there would be at least a couple of hours before the cries came again. She wanted to sleep and yet . . . there was that itch.

Slowly, she began to slide her buttocks up and down against her husband's pole, feeling the wonderful girth and hardness of it. He grunted, gripping her breast harder. She gasped, feeling it leak some milk, but the sensations of his fingers upon her nipples were delightful.

"Mhmm," she murmured, biting her lip. "Husband. Husband!"

Slowly, Alston stirred. "My love, is everything okay?"

"N-no, it's not okay. You are very . . . hard, against me. Do you feel it?"

He woke further. "Oh, I'm very sorry."

"Don't be. I . . . Gods, I can't believe I'm saying this, but I find myself missing it. I think I am more than healed enough, and I very much want you right now."

He clutched her breast, caressing it more firmly and making her body tremble.

"Are you sure? Because, in truth, I have wanted to take you so many times these past few months. It has been difficult taking care of myself when I want to be inside you."

"I've been having dreams, too. Wonderful dreams. Ahhhhh, you feel so strong. I want that, right now."

"Should we wait until we turn back?"

She shook her head, shifting her body so that she was face to face with her husband, just able to see him in the darkness.

"I can't wait a *second*. Think of it as a last hurrah."

"We'll see him tomorrow, then?"

She nodded. "Yes, or maybe in a week. One last, big, hurrah."

Neither could fully see the other's expression, but both could sense that they were beaming with excitement. Slowly, Alston's caresses turned more forceful. He gripped her breasts, uncaring of how they were leaking, and placed his lips upon her left nipple. He

sucked down deep, eliciting long moans from Madeline as she was overcome by the sheer pleasure of it.

“Yes. Ohhhh, drink from m-me. Empty me, my love. Drink up - ahhh.”

Alston found that he loved it, and he switched breasts to keep taking in her sweet milk. He lowered his fingers to tease at her womanly folds, rubbing his digits over her most sensitive places. She moaned further, and in response she gripped his member, stroking it softly at first and then with increasing vigour. She even lowered her hand down to fondle his balls, stimulating them. Some part of her wanted his seed inside of her, and she embraced that need.

Soon they had shifted their positions, her upon her back in womanly submission, her legs spread wide as he placed himself atop her. Still she grasped his cock, helping guide it into her womanhood. It felt like it had been forever since she had been penetrated, but unlike so many previous times she no longer cared about the demure nature of it, about how she would be the receiver, not the give in this act. Instead she kissed him passionately, wrapping her legs around him as he began to pump into her.

“S-so tight and wet, my love,” Alston said. “You feel perfect.”

“And you f-feel - oohhh - so big!”

“I can go slow again?”

“N-no. Don’t stop. I missed it! I missed f-feeling like this. Like your woman, as odd as it is to admit. P-please keep going. Make me yours.”

Alston did exactly as asked, thrusting into his wife with increasing vigour and speed, ploughing her fertile fields again and again. Her large breasts wobbled on her chest, occasionally hitting her own chin from the sheer motion, but the sensation of his hand upon them made it all worth it: it sent delightful pulses of pleasure down to her core, further lubricating her tunnel. Soon she was crying out, uncaring if she was waking up the entire servants’ quarters. She was wild like a whore in heat, and wouldn’t stop until he came within her. Alston felt that same desire, and the sensations of being the one in control, the manly husband pleasing his wife, of *taking her*, only further empowered him. He gripped her ass with one hand, pressing his chest against hers and savouring her milky bosom, and then, with one last great thrust, he *exploded* within her. His balls, already full of his seed, expelled it in generous amounts, stream after hot stream shooting into her depths. Madeline had to literally bite her lip to stop herself from literally *screaming* with bliss, and she gripped him with her thighs as several orgasms rolled through her; she wanted nothing of his issue to escape.

When Alston finally rolled off his wife, the two were still panting, and Madeline was leaking now just from her breasts but between her legs too. Without thinking, she crossed

them, shifting her hips a little to prevent any of his warm cum to escape. She wanted it all within her.

“I’m going to . . . miss that,” she said, still breathing heavily.

“Me too, my love. Me too,” Alston replied.

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The meeting with Kathorn was inevitable; they couldn’t ignore his letters forever. The following week after that first reunion was filled with more sex, and once more Madeline cried with joy as she was taken from behind as she clutched her dresser, sending a lot of jewellery scattering to the floor. It was a final week of celebration between them in between taking care of Hope, but eventually they had to see the court wizard.

“Incredible,” the young mage mused, looking over them. “To see this powerful magic all the way through to its end! Just incredible! If you don’t mind me saying, Sir Marcus - er, Lady Madeline, I mean - you truly do appear to be the image of regal motherhood.”

Madeline smiled, feeling a little proud of the compliment. She was dressed in finery once more, and held her child in her arms, sleeping.

“Thank you, I think,” she replied.

“And the child is well?”

“She is very healthy indeed.”

“Excellent! And Alston here is like the very image of a great heroic knight as well. Truly, the Ancient Well is worthy of study; a pity it is such a long and uncertain journey to reach it. Still, already I can sense that its magical hold upon the pair of you has waned, at least enough that I can make a difference. As we have discussed, the wording of your wish required the birth of a child, and as the well itself told you, if the will to change back is present, then change you back we will. I take it the will is present?”

There was a brief half-pause, just long enough for both stalwart nobleman and woman to exchange an uncertain glance.

“Of course,” Alston said.

“Naturally,” Madeline replied. “I don’t want to be a bosomy mother forever.”

“And I would like to be a fiery-haired maiden once more. Well, not a maiden, but you know what I mean.”

Kathorn nodded eagerly, excitement in his eyes. He brought them over to a circle in chalk on the floor he had drawn, right beside his desk. His wizard’s tower was very neat, everything filed away, but the desk itself was stacked with texts.

“I have done a great deal of research upon physical transformation spells in preparation for this. I believe I can recapture your original energies and transpose them upon

your forms. Alston will become Astrid once more, and Madeline will become Marcus as well. Are you ready?"

Madeline took her husband's hand by impulse, squeezing it. Her husband could detect her moods.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

The former male nodded. "I have to be. I . . . we should change back, right?"

"If we must," he replied. "In truth, I have gotten used to this body, quite a bit."

"And I mine, which is what scares me. If we stay too long, we may get too used to them."

Madeline placed her child into the hands of Jenna, who had accompanied them. The handmaiden gave a compassionate expression to her mistress of the last year and so.

"Are you sure about this, mistress?" she asked. "You have been such a mother to her. She will miss you."

Madeline had to swallow and wipe away a tear. "I know. I just have to . . . prove something to myself. Trust me, Jenna."

Alston said the same: "I too need to see something, old friend."

Jenna nodded, wishing them both well, and left the room with Hope in her arms. Kathron directed the couple to the chalk circle, then steadied his hands.

"Remember, you must focus on the life you want, along with that of your partner. Only with that can we overcome the well's magic."

Madeline stared up at her husband, taking his hands.

"The life we want," she said carefully. "Do we know the life we want, Alston?"

His brow furrowed. "I believe I do."

"I as well, my love. It is with you, always."

"And that is all I want, too."

Madeline turned her head. "Begin, wizard. We will see what happens or doesn't."

Kathorn lifted a book and began to recite from it. His words were eldritch and unknowable, but caused wild green and purple and golden sparks of magic to shift and careen around them. Soon they were surrounded, and the transformative magic was digging deep into their souls. Alston found himself drawn to his wife, and Madeline to her husband. Before they were totally eclipsed in light, the pair held one another, sharing a passionate embrace and an even more passionate kiss.

The world bloomed into blinding light and when it faded . . .

. . . nothing had happened.

Madeline still stood there, as did Alston, the pair still locked in their kiss.

"I don't understand what happened," Kathorn said, looking over his notes. "It failed! How did it fail?"

But Madeline simply giggled, and her husband guffawed.

“It didn’t fail at all, mighty wizard,” Alston said, holding his wife’s hand and caressing her chin. He looked upon her as if she were a goddess. “You confirmed what we both knew in our hearts: we wish to stay this way, and not be parted from one another.”

“It is true,” Madeline said, kissing her husband for a brief moment. “I don’t wish to be anything but a wife and mother now. I’ve had my adventuring days, now I wish to have this life.”

“And I wish to protect her and our Hope, and be the man they and this realm needs.”

Kathorn was quite flustered by this point. “But the possibility! I could have written books on this! And - and - and there’s no convincing you otherwise, is there?”

“Not one chance, wizard,” Madeline said, now beaming. “But never forget, you put us on this path in the first place.”

The wizard sighed, somewhat alleviated. “That, I can certainly take credit for. But it is very strange; the spell failed even before the well’s magic overtook it. I was sure to separate all other life from the chalk; nothing else crossed into it. And yet it felt like three souls were present, not two . . .”

Madeline’s eyes widened, as did Alston’s. Both were *very* deeply aware of the week of sexual celebration they’d just had, the passions they had stirred in one another. Madeline lowered a hand to her belly, where she already knew the very, very early beginnings of a new life was already stirring. Alston placed his hand on hers, and the two shared a shocked glance that slowly turned to true excitement.

“Well, I suppose we’re getting that large family after all,” Madeline said. “How do you feel about that, my dashing knight?”

Alston held her, unable to keep his grin off his face as he kissed her. “Happier than words can possibly convey, my lady.”

**The End**