

Elliot Silvestri



Rachelle's Readiness: Part Three of The Palace

An Erotic Novel of Court
Intrigue and BDSM

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Smashwords Edition

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Part Three of The Palace

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Chapter Twelve

In a rage Roderick swept all the food and dishes of the small table. For an instant he wished he was in the formal dining hall so there was more to destroy, but he was in the family's private dining room.

Over the destroyed meal and china on the floor he glared at his mother. "Who killed him?"

She was stone-faced as always. That had always been attributed to her upbringing and ethnicity. The Mulvadians were not an emotional people and as far as Roderick knew, his mother never had any affection for his father, let alone love. It was a miracle the couple had two children. "A coquette he had seduced back to his bed," was her stiff answer.

Captain Gillard stepped forward. "It was your mother who found them," he reported.

It was the wrong thing to say to Roderick who was not in control of his emotions at the moment. He let Roderick jump to the wrong conclusion. The prince stared daggers at his mother. "You killed the both of them?"

If Princess Annedulisia had been any stiffer, she would have been made of stone. "I killed his assassin," she said coolly, as if reporting the dinner menu for the next banquet. "The...thing he had dragged into his bed had already poisoned him."

Roderick found it strange that his mother would find herself overwhelmed by emotion and sense of loyalty and duty that she would act to protect her husband, but that was always a possibility. Perhaps. "How?" he demanded of the captain.

The captain cleared his throat and tried to present the facts as a formal report, though the investigation had not yet been completed. "As your mother already stated, it appears your father died of poisoning by the woman in his dead."

"Her cunt was probably so foul that it killed him," Annedulisia commented coldly.

The captain ignored her. "The most likely method of transmitting the poison was via scratches on his back. The coquette wore many rings and other jewelry that we are inspecting, though other methods are also possible. Transmission through

the...sexual organs seems unlikely and a great risk to the woman.” His face went from the near-white pallor to an almost healthy pink as he reported these facts. Talking about the Crown Prince’s sexual activities was bad enough, but to do it in front of Princess Annedulisia and her son was nothing he was prepared for. As it stood now, there were two deaths in the palace that could be blamed—if not directly, then indirectly through incompetence—on him which meant the king or Prince Roderick would be more than within their rights to demand his head on a literal platter.

He continued. “Princess Annedulisia, upon seeing her dead husband—your father—became hysterical and used a knife to attack the girl, stabbing her—repeatedly—killing her.”

“It would have been better to capture her rather than murder her, mother,” Roderick hissed.

The older woman frowned ever so slightly. “I am neither guardian nor soldier,” she said. “I acted like a wife.”

Roderick was unsure if his mother had killed the girl out of anger because her husband had fucked another woman—which seemed unlikely because most of the palace was well-aware of the Crown Prince’s dalliances with staff, visitors, and prostitutes—or because the other woman had killed her husband making Annedulisia’s presence in the royal court an unnecessary one. A widow was a useless asset and could be sent to her family home without repercussions.

“The bloodline is nearly extinguished,” Roderick muttered to himself.

“My prince?” asked the captain.

“Nothing,” Roderick said dismissively. “Wait. Are there any more reports of other murders of my family, other cousins?”

“Two more have trickled in,” Gillard said. “They occurred several days ago. The killers weren’t killed or captured. Minor nobles, distant relatives.”

“Someone is trying to weaken House Groverian,” Roderick said.

“That was my conclusion as well, sire.”

“A weak house means a weak kingdom. We cannot be seen as vulnerable.”

“Yes, my prince,” Gillard agreed.

“The king, Myself. My unborn child. We are the next targets. Choose your best men, Captain Gillard. “Your most trusted and loyal soldiers. There are but three members of House Groverian left that matter.” He stood up straight and fixed her jacket about his shoulders. “I need to see the king. He must know of these events.”

“The king is very old and barely able to deal with day-to-day events,” said Princess Annedulisia.

“Which is probably why he hasn’t been killed yet,” Roderick added. “A nurse could slip the wrong ingredient into his soup and he’d be dead and no one would question it. I still need to meet with him. And his nurses. And all the men who will be guarding his life. I’ll see him this afternoon, Captain.” He marched out of the room, ignoring his mother.

One of the many things that Roderick hated about the palace was how spread out everything was. It took forever to walk from one wing to the next and find the person he needed. The architects who had initially built and then re-built the place did their best, but there was no way to effectively defeat time and distance. The series of bell pulls and calling tubes sometimes did the job, but Roderick was reluctant to use them. They offered no privacy.

The doors to Pauline’s small apartments were guarded by a pair of soldiers. They carried both spears and short swords. The spears were not ceremonial like they were outside the royal court entrance. When they saw him, they acknowledged the prince with a salute and admitted him without a word. That made him wonder about security in the palace, but at the moment he didn’t care. He needed comfort and a distraction in preparation for his meeting with his grandfather, the king.

He found his mistress in a rocking chair near the window, reading a book by the noontime light. The belly of her dress bowed outward, showing off her ever-growing belly and the promise it contained. When she realized who had come into the room she struggled to her feet. “My prince,” she greeted him.

He spoke not a word to her, but instead flung open his jacket and pulled at the closures to his trousers. Pauline, having been the prince's mistress for long enough to know what he needed, struggled out of her chair and went down to her knees. By the time she got into position, his cock was already half erect. That was more than enough for her to work with. Her mouth opened and she eagerly sucked his cock deep into her throat. Roderick placed his hands on either side of her head, cupping the elaborate hairstyle, and slowly began fucking her face, forcing his cock down her throat which she tolerated without complaint. There was no way for her to complain. Roderick was convinced that she actually enjoyed doing this service for him.

They had done this before dozens of times. It took away the concerns of the moment and let him have some peace inside his head. For most of his life, as the second-born son, most of Roderick's concerns and existential worries came from the fact that he was essentially an afterthought. Whatever he did made no difference in the grand scheme of the kingdom, or even the minor matter of his own life. But then it became apparent that perhaps Prince Martin, his older brother, preferred men in his bed, so there was the possibility that maybe someday one of Roderick's offspring would have to take the throne, depending on if Martin was able or willing to stick his cock in a woman long enough to get her pregnant.

But now—now!—he was faced with the very real certainty that with the death of his brother and father, he would one day sit on the throne. He hadn't prepared himself for that.

And so it was easier to fuck Pauline, to quiet his mind by shoving his cock into her mouth and then maybe her cunt, so he wouldn't have to worry about his future. What about her ass? he thought as he continued to receive head from his mistress. He hadn't used that part of her body yet. She was already carrying his child so he didn't need to worry about having to get her pregnant; he could fuck her anyway he wanted. Surely there must be something to the practice his brother so loved; otherwise Martin wouldn't have wanted to bugger every prettyboy that caught his eye.

While he was thinking about abusing Pauline's body in a way she wasn't prepared for, Roderick found himself rapidly approaching the little death that would signal his return to the reality of service that had become his life. Keeping her head between his hands, he pulled his cock back from the depths of her

throat until he could feel her tongue on the underside. She could feel his throbbing hardness and sucked as strongly as she could while massaging his perineum and cuddling his balls. It was more than enough.

Each jolt of ejaculate was a powerful spike of pleasure. It felt good and kept the demons at bay. Pauline did everything possible to heighten his pleasure: swallowing his cum, maintaining eye contact as he used her, making all the right noises to keep him on edge. It was perfectly lovely and if he were not the prince of the realm and heir to the throne Roderick might have sung her praises to his friends and court gentlemen.

When he was done cumming, Roderick pulled his cock free of her mouth and pushed her away. It wasn't a rude gesture, but he didn't want her playing with his cock while it was over-sensitive. He didn't push her to the floor like a common street prostitute. Pauline didn't complain; she was used to this sort of treatment and expected it. Roderick's casual use and abuse of her body was just another facet of her life as the prince's mistress.

He put his cock back inside his trousers and only then seemed to see her sprawled on the floor. Letting out a little gasp of concern he went to one knee and carefully helped her up and to sit on the edge of her huge and comfortable bed. "I'm so sorry," he apologized with sincerity. "I forget myself at these moments. Did I hurt you?"

She shook her head. "You could never hurt me, Roderick."

Lifting up her chin with his fingertips, he met her eyes and judged she wasn't lying. He nodded and sat down next to her taking her hand in his. "It was still wrong of me."

"No hard done."

"I need to speak with my grandfather," he said, staring at the wall. He didn't even make the effort to move his eyes a few feet to the side so he could gaze out the window at the lovely, well-maintained gardens on the palace grounds. "We have the affairs of state to discuss."

"You don't need to spend any time with me on that account," she said. "Go to him and return to me when you can." Although she would have loved for him to push her back on the bed and take her anyway he pleased, she wouldn't make

that demand of him at the moment.

He nodded and half rose up from the bed, but held onto her hand. Before he could get his feet under him, he collapsed back on the bed and dragged her body down next to his. “What do you need, my prince?” she asked as he dragged her close to him.

Roderick didn’t answer her. He couldn’t. He was crying. Pauline said nothing to him. She just allowed him to hold her. It wasn’t her job to give him counsel; it was her job to bear his child.

Chapter Thirteen

King Dorian II looked blankly at Roderick. He sat upright in the lounging chair, a heavy quilt drawn over his lap. A small glass of wine sat on the table next to him. The old man's blue eyes were clouded, but Roderick was certain his grandfather was as sharp as ever. Maybe he wasn't physically the same man he had been forty, or even twenty, years ago, but Roderick was convinced that the king was putting on an act where he pretended to only understand half of what was going on around him.

Roderick put his own glass of wine down on the table next to his chair. Unlike his grandfather's well-padded lounge, his chair was hard wood with a straight back. Just a reminder of the subservient position he occupied. "And so, without meaning to, I'm your last direct heir," he finished.

The king looked glumly at his youngest grandson. The silence filled the room for a very long time and Roderick didn't know what to say. Finally, the old man spoke. "When you were born, I thought the bloodline and dynasty was secure."

Roderick sniffed. "I had nothing to do with that."

"I had a son and two grandsons. And now someone has gone and fucked that up!" The old man's anger was apparent.

"Again, I had nothing to do with that."

The king's glare didn't diminish. "Your ass-fucking brother did nothing to perpetuate the line. You have. You're married, but your wife is barren."

Roderick's back unconsciously stiffened against the too-hard back of the chair. "She's not barren," he said behind clenched teeth.

"You've been married four years now, I can tell time. She needs to bear you a child."

Roderick said nothing. He had nothing to say.

"Your mistress is with child," the king finally said.

It was only a mild surprise to Roderick that his grandfather knew about Pauline. "Yes," he said automatically.

“That’s not good. A mistress is only useful when your wife has already given you a child. You got the order mixed up, you damned fool. Still, a bastard offspring is better than nothing. When is she due?”

Roderick hadn’t been expecting the question. “Three months.”

The old man grunted. “Time enough to get on your wife. Do it. Don’t acknowledge the bastard as your own until your wife is dead or gives you a child.”

“I’ll...I’ll take that advice.”

“Good. See that you do.” The old man quickly down the wine that was in his glass. “Your cousin Oliver, he survives still, yes?”

Roderick was confused by the shift in the conversation. “Yes. Or at least I haven’t heard any reports that he’s dead.”

The king grunted. “He’s your closest living relative now, besides me, and I’m due for the graveyard. Call him to the palace. Either he’ll be your closest ally over the next few years because whoever is behind these assassinations will focus on him and you, or he’s behind it and it’s easier to deal with an enemy that’s close.”

“Thank you, Grandfather.”

“Give your mistress another bellyful as soon as you can,” he added. “Bastard children are better than no children. Your great-great-grandfather had more children than he could count by five different women. Caused a civil war, but he established a dynasty. So he was great in more than one respect.”

Roderick didn’t think that bedding five different women and starting a war that nearly destroyed their country was a good thing, but he wasn’t going to argue with his grandfather. There was no point in it now. “I’ll do what I can,” he said blandly.

“Good. Go.” King Dorian waved his hand at his grandson, dismissing him. “When I die, see that my funeral isn’t full of weeping women. Can’t stand crying women.”

Standing up, Roderick bowed slightly to his king, and exited the room.

Chapter Fourteen

After the shock of the murders and attempted murders of nearly every branch of the royal family, an uneasy peace settled through the palace. Roderick took over the role of Crown Prince, stepping into his father's job. An investigation was launched into the murders. Security was tightened. Captain Gillard kept his head but spent as much time as possible outside the palace hunting for the killers. Some were easy to find, they were nothing more than desperate, hired men looking for easy money.

There had always been an underground criminal organization in the kingdom, but they kept their activities small and any killing was done surreptitiously and always with the tacit and unspoken approval of the king's guard. The sudden blossom of death in the royal family was from an outside agency. It didn't take long to figure that out.

Princess Annedulisia took an extra interest in the hunt for the killers and worked closely with Captain Gillard. It was easy for the aristocracy to say it was in revenge for the death of her husband, but the truth was something far more twisted.

"You shouldn't be here, Princess," Gillard said to the widow of the crown prince. The dungeon wasn't dark and damp and noisome. Gillard ran a proper prison tower and dungeon. It was clean and well-lit with excellent sanitation. That only made it more horrible. In the dark, secrets could be hidden. In the bright light of day, torture always fully revealed the truth. He didn't want his prisoners dying of some dread disease; he wanted them alive and well to give up their secrets.

"Am I forbidden?" she asked the captain.

"No, ma'am, but what we do here is not for delicate souls."

Annedulisia took her eyes from Gillard to stare at the man strapped to the iron chair. Thick leather bands held him in place. His mouth was gagged but that would be removed shortly. The screams of the tortured were an effective tool in loosening the tongues of other prisoners.

"Is this the man who helped in killing my husband?" she asked, slowly approaching him.

"We believe so, but he hasn't confessed. Yet."

Besides the prisoner, the princess and the captain, there was only one other figure in the room, the torturer. He stood off to the side, waiting for his orders. The captain sat at his small wooden desk, making notes.

“He can’t confess if his mouth is gagged,” she pointed out.

“We haven’t begun questioning him yet,” said Gillard. “We haven’t even brought up the idea of torture.” He paused and wet his lips with the flagon of wine on the desk. “Your presence here, ma’am, makes things difficult.”

“Remove his gag,” said Annedulisia.

The torturer looked at Gillard. It was impossible to read the man’s expression with the red mask he wore to conceal his identity, and his dead eyes gave away nothing either, so Gillard just nodded and the royal expert in causing pain did as the princess requested.

“I didn’t do anything,” he quickly babbled. “I’m just a pitchman in the stables. I’m no one. Please, please,” he begged.

Annedulisia didn’t hear the man’s words. She walked slowly and carefully to the racks of instruments available to the torturer. They were out as yet another subtle piece of intimidation. There were tools there that didn’t have names and yet could still do grievous things to the human body.

The princess picked up one of the tools; it was nothing more than a long leather strap with a handle. The strap had sharp bits of metal embedded in it.

“Princess, please,” Gillard begged.

But she ignored him and went up to the prisoner who continued to babble his innocence. She lashed out twice with the tool, striking his chest both times. It left horrible bleeding cuts on his skin and he screamed and started telling them that he’d say anything they wanted. He was clearly frightened. Gillard was positive the man wasn’t a killer, but he knew something, maybe it wasn’t something the man considered important, but torture often sharpened a man’s mind where he’d give details he’d forgotten.

But the princess was disrupting the process.

“Did you kill Crown Prince Bradford?” she asked him coolly.

“Yes, ma’am. I’m sorry I did. They made me do it. I didn’t mean to stab him to death. It was an accident. I had to do it or they’d kill me.”

The prince had been poisoned. She knew that because she saw it happen. The man was a liar. A useless liar. She lashed out with the studded leather strap again, this time it tore across his face, ripping off skin and making him scream. Blood flew through the air between them. Droplets landed on Annedulisia’s yellow dress and bare hands.

“Liar,” she said and dropped the strap. “I’ll speak with you when you’re done,” she said to Gillard. He just nodded as she left.

The woman excited him and scared him at the same time. He was glad he was seated at the desk so neither the prisoner or the torturer could see his erection.

“What do you know?” Gillard asked the bloodied man.

Annedulisia screamed in pleasure. It was torture to have Gillard’s cock up her ass, but it was also pure pleasure. She was on her back, her legs up over his shoulders, hips tilted wildly so her ass was presented to him rather than her cunt.

“I could fuck you like a normal man,” Gillard said to her as he steadily pumped his cock in and out of her ass.

The widowed princess panted and groaned as he slowed his pace; he didn’t want to hurt her. “No. You can’t.” She wasn’t calling him an abnormal man; she was denying him the type of sex he wanted.

They hadn’t been carrying on for long, but it had started before Crown Prince Bradford had been killed. She was used to concealing her affair. She took pleasure in being buggered and while the chance of her falling pregnant was nearly nonexistent, before Bradford’s death it could have been explained away, but not it was impossible. She was supposed to be a grieving widow. Getting fucked in the ass was easier all around—except for the pain it was a perfect solution.

“You’d love my cock in your cunt,” grunted Gillard as he continued to move his cock back and forth—carefully! Always carefully because he couldn’t risk hurting the princess—inside her.

Annedulisia snaked her hand down between her legs, scraping the fingers over her drooling cunt to grip his oiled cock as it went unnaturally into her. She teased him a moment before bringing her hand back to her cunt and finding her clit. In some ways she preferred sex like this because the pleasure it gave her was greater than straight sex even it came with some pain. The pain wasn’t terrible; it heightened the pleasure.

“Just fuck me and be done with it,” she demanded. She was right on the edge and her lover begging for sex she wasn’t willing to give spoiled the moment denying her the climax she desperately desired.

Gillard shut up and focused on fucking the princess. Fucking her now wasn’t nearly as exciting as it had been when they needed to conceal their affair from everyone, especially the crown prince. Still, she was a willing partner, and a handsome woman who enjoyed their time in the bedroom. There was no reason to stop.

Her busy little fingers found exactly what she needed. With his cock up her ass, Annedulisia gasped and her entire body tightened up, especially her sphincter that was stretched out by Gillard’s cock. As she came the little thrill of pain shot up from her ass to her cunt and then through her body. Why did sex feel so good if the only way she could properly cum was with pain?

It took a long minute for the orgasm to pass through her body and dissipate. The feeling of elation afterwards didn’t go away and Gillard’s cock was still firmly embedded in her ass. She was willing to keep going. He spoiled the mood.

“I’m going to cum,” he grunted. He was always making pronouncements like that. She was torn between hating it—because it was distracting and he made it seem like some great accomplishment—and liking it because it gave her fair warning.

“Not in my ass,” she ordered him.

He nodded and pulled out of her ass. When his cock was gone, she felt a sense of loss but she didn’t have time to dwell on that because a second later, with his

cock inside his fist, he started cumming.

It was probably a stupid obsession, Annedulisia knew, but she was fascinated by men ejaculating. The thick ropes of cum burst forth from his cock, briefly arced through the air, and landed heavily on her skin. He pained her with the white droplets from chest down to the upper edge of the hair triangle that covered her cunt.

“When will you let me cum in your cunt?” he asked. She had occasionally granted him the boon of cumming in her ass, but never in her cunt. Never, ever in her cunt.

“When you’ve earned it,” she told him and reached for a towel on the side of her bed. She wiped away his cum, all the while thinking the actual answer to his question was never.

He watched her, kneeling between her legs, his cock still in his hand. When she was done cleaning herself, she frowned at him. “Let me,” she said, indicating his cock.

He relinquished his grasp and she took his manhood in her hand. At first he was eager. Gillard never knew what to expect from the princess. Since he was still semi-hard he thought that she might revive him and they’d have another quick session. His cock was still slick with the oil they used to lubricate her ass before he penetrated her so her fingers glided up and down his length.

The sudden shock of pain as she twisted his balls forced his brain to focus with a sharpness that was sadly lacking in most of the men he interrogated in the tower. If she had been any other woman, he would have cuffed the side of her head and put her in her place. But she was still a princess and there was no way for him to explain both an affair with the recently widowed Annedulisia (“She threw herself at me. She needed the comfort of a man after the death of her husband. She’s obviously distraught.”) and a bruise on her face (“Yes I fucked the whore. She grabbed my Jon-Thomas and I smacked her for it.”) was impossible so he suffered her attention.

“I liked whipping that man today in your dungeon. I want to do it more. I want to help you find the person who ordered my husband’s death.”

It would have sounded more sincere if he hadn’t just fucked her. He believed she

wanted to find the true killer, but he was certain that she was more interested in torturing men in the dungeon than she was in finding truth.

He ground his teeth together as he tried to form a logical response to her statement. "That would not be wise, Anne. Your involvement would corrupt the process." He looked down at his cock being squeezed between her fingers. It was starting to turn purple even as it started to numb.

"A little corruption would be good at this point I think," she pondered aloud.

Gillard violently shook his head. "No. That's the worst possible outcome," he proclaimed. "But perhaps..." he struggled to clear his head from the pain of her pressure on his testicles, "perhaps I could involve you on other interrogations. You seem to have a talent for inflicting just the right amount of pain on a man," and he again glanced at his steadily purpling cock, "to loosen his tongue."

That half-promise seemed to delight Annedulisia; her eyes sparkled with desire, not unlike the first time she had seduced Gillard into her bed. "I want to take you up on that offer. Right now!" In her excitement she leaned forward and kissed him, still not loosening her grasp on his cock, perhaps even squeezing harder in her excitement.

The only problem was at the moment, there wasn't any prisoner for Annedulisia to practice her burgeoning torture talent. Gillard was luckily saved by an opportune knock at the door.

"Captain? There is an urgent matter for you to attend," came the voice of a nameless soldier calling through the door. Gillard groaned and cursed, but not in the same as he used under Annedulisia's firm hand, but one of annoyance rather than endured pain.

Annedulisia opened her mouth to retort to the nameless, faceless soldier, but Gillard violently shook his head and was so bold as to put his finger to her lips.

"Why am I being bothered when I am in consultation with the princess?" he boomed back at the soldier. He spared a glance to the door and saw the key was still in the lock. He was fairly certain he had turned the key assuring them of privacy. Fairly certain.

"I wouldn't interrupt," came the quavering voice of the soldier, "but Lieutenant

Hammond insisted.”

Lieutenant Hammond was, as the title implied, Gillard’s most trusted lieutenant. Only a summons from the general would have carried more weight. He would have to leave his lover.

Only Annedulisia refused to relinquish his cock. In fact, her eyes sparkled even more and she twisted his manhood a little. “They know we are in here fucking,” she told him in a half-whisper. Amusement twisted her lips into a cruel smile, but was she amused because she was abusing him or because she found great mirth in being caught in her affair with the captain.

“They know nothing,” he hissed at her. Gillard had to believe that otherwise he could not think straight because of the risk.

“What good reason would you have to consult with me on anything in private?” she asked. With her free hand she reached up and pinched one of her nipples, twisting it at the same time, causing it to distend and pink up. “And behind a locked door, no less.”

Gillard couldn’t think of an answer. As long as no one saw, he reasoned he was fine. What sane man would risk his life bedding the recent widow of the crown prince? He had to focus and he needed to leave Annedulisia. “I’ll be in my office momentarily,” he called out to the messenger. “Have the lieutenant wait there for me.” It disturbed him greatly to know that a man was outside the princess’s apartments waiting for him while he dressed.

“Yessir!” There was a ceremonial stamping of his feet and Gillard was positive he could hear the man salute the door before marching off.

“Please, your highness,” Gillard said to Annedulisia. Her grip hadn’t loosened at all despite the perilous position they were in.

“What if I want to fuck you one more time before you leave me?” she asked. He could tell right away she was teasing, but even so, he had to persuade her to release his manhood. There was no way he would risk actually touching her unless by specific invitation. Annedulisia was exactly that sort of woman, that part of the aristocracy that took great pleasure in abusing their underlings.

“I’m afraid I’m spent,” he said. Even with her firm grasp on his cock, it was

slowly and steadily shrinking. The anxiety of a meeting and being caught had effectively emasculated him in a manner that the princess was incapable of.

“You still have a mouth and fingers you can please me with,” she pointed out.

“My lady, please,” he begged. The strain, both physical and emotional, was too much for him to bear.

“Oh fine.” She abruptly released her grip on his cock and pushed his aside. “Go do what you have to, but I make you no promise. My body is my own. I’ll take another lover if the need arises before you return.”

He scrambled off the bed and started throwing on his clothes while he ignored the numb throbbing sensation in his cock. Was it really worth all this just to fuck a member of the aristocracy? There was no end goal of the affair.

Annedulisia fell back on the thick mattress and spread her legs wide, her knees pointed at the ceiling. Her fingers went between her thighs, finding her wet cunt. “I’m already missing you...maybe I’ll call in the serving boy...”

The only man that Gillard would consider trusting with his life stood waiting for him in the tiny office that was afforded the captain of the royal guard. “Royce,” he said with great relief, grasping his best friend’s forearm in greeting as Lt. Hammond did the same. “What is the urgency?”

Both men were experienced in the subtleties and polite fictions of guarding the royal family which always involved keeping secrets. Gillard would never have imagined himself involved in one of those delicate secrets, but here he was.

“I have good and troubling news, Johan.” If Royce picked up on the fact that Gillard was hiding something—specifically that he was fucking the widowed princess—he didn’t ask or he knew that Gillard had to be hiding dozens of secrets, so what was one more?

“You’ve tracked down who is behind the murders?” Gillard asked doubtfully. “That would be awfully quick work, even for you.”

Hammond smiled thinly. “Not that, but a good lead.” He paused. “I know a man

who knows a man,” he began in the semi-joke they used to make all the time. It wasn’t far from the truth. The art of being a spy was all about knowing the right people. “And this man indicated that the Shadow Society is doing the killings.”

Gillard fell into his chair and gestured for Hammond to sit in the one other available seat. “First, that’s probably a story. Second, I could have guessed that and I already did. Third, the Shadow Society was wiped out years ago, before you and I were born.”

Hammond shrugged. “Sure. I agree with all of that. But someone hired killers through a group claiming to be the Shadow Society—perhaps they are, but more likely they’re just appropriating the name—and all the targets were of royal blood.”

A sigh escaped Gillard’s lips. “I’ve got a dozen murders of artisos, Royce. If there was an assassin’s guild big enough to do all that, then we’ve got bigger problems than a royal dynasty being threatened.”

Scratching at the scar just above his right eyebrow, Hammond said, “I think only a few of the killers were professionals. Most were either men who lived on the outskirts of society and desperate criminals looking to make a little silver. A few though, a few, were of the sort the Shadow Society, at least the old Society, would have. Look at Prince Bradford. He was poisoned by a whore. That’s not the work of a soldier looking for drinking money. That’s...that’s going back nearly a century to times of utter chaos.”

Pulling a bottle of spirits from the bottom drawer of his desk, Gillard poured them each a shot in clay cups and threw his back. The liquid burned as it went down and helped him focus. “How do you know all this?”

Hammond followed suite with his shot, wincing at the strong taste. “I’ve got a prisoner in the tower. I think he just needs a bit of persuasion to tell all...”

Chapter Fifteen

The last time Roderick had seen Cousin Oliver was at the annual day of majority when Oliver had legally become a man. It wasn't that many years ago, but much had happened since then. Oliver was only a few years younger, but he was incredibly handsome and as a mere cousin to the ruling family, he could take pleasure in his family's small estate without having to worry about the duties to country.

Of course that was when he was eighteenth in line for the throne. Now he was third in line, after Roderick's child was born.

He strode into the royal court with a small retinue of followers. Oliver wasn't yet married, so his appearance at the court was a new opportunity for young aristocrats to make a royal—or near royal—match.

"The Earl of Dunwood, Oliver of the House Bickford," the herald announced upon Oliver's entrance.

After the formal bowing and scraping, Roderick spoke to his cousin. Oliver was much as he remembered the man, though just a touch older and a bit more mature. "Please forgive my grandfather for not formally greeting you," Roderick said as he stood next to the throne. He couldn't compel himself to sit on the seat just yet. "He is not in the best of health and in these trying times..." He let the thought die out.

Oliver smoothly stepped into the conversation. "No apologies needed, cousin. I understand completely."

Roderick smiled without mirth. "Thank you. I do hope to spend some time alone with you after the day's proceedings."

Oliver bowed again, knowing he had been received and dismissed. "Of course."

This was the part of the royal responsibilities that his father had sheltered him from, dealing with the members of the court. There were always problems to solve and disputes to mediate. Roderick hated it. Oliver faded into the background, an amused smile on his lips. Roderick once again wished he was just a prince and not the crown prince.

Because he was exhausted from the petty squabbles of the court, it was no surprise that Roderick didn't hear the door open. Once Oliver spoke, however, Roderick was immediately awake.

"If I was an assassin, you'd be dead," his cousin said from the end of the bed where he stood.

Roderick sat bolt upright in his bed. He had barely bothered to undress and—worse—he hadn't brought either Pauline or his wife into the bed to keep him company. There wasn't even a weapon at hand to defend himself, not that he needed protection from his childhood companion. "Most likely," he conceded, "but only a master assassin would have gained access to the secret passages of the palace and I would have died in my sleep. There are worse ways to go." He glanced over at the open door. A faint breeze came from the passage. The door was normally well-hidden only a few knew the way into his apartments.

"These passages aren't so secret," said Oliver as he rested a thigh on the edge of the bed, casually half-seating himself. "You and I knew about them when we were children. How many other people know? A handful? A dozen? Dozen? Maybe a few hundred?" He sighed. "Anyway, they're better used for conducting clandestine trysts with lovers than assassins stalking their prey." He paused and smiled. "Speaking of which...would you like to have a clandestine tryst with a lover?"

Roderick flopped back on the bed. "I have a pregnant mistress and a barren wife. I don't need a lover, especially not my cousin."

The prince's pronouncement made Oliver chuckle. "While I'm certainly open to almost anything, I'm not offering myself. I have a young lady in my entourage who would like to meet your acquaintance."

The prince said nothing, but just sighed deeply.

"Or a young man if you wish," Oliver added with amusement.

"You came to my bedroom to offer me a whore?" Roderick asked.

"First...no. Second...yes. Not a whore. I only keep the finest of lovers in my traveling circus. And I did come to make an offer to get you laid. You look like you need it."

“I’m exhausted.”

“They’ll do all the work.”

“I’m sure.”

“And I’m surprised you are still in these rooms. You’ve had these since you were a boy. Why not move to better accommodations?”

“Better accommodations would be my dead father’s rooms.”

“Ah. I see. Well, it is late and since you’re not interested, I’ll return to my whores and coquettes and lose myself in their charms.”

Roderick sat back up. “I didn’t say I wasn’t interested. Just exhausted.”

He heaved himself out of the bed, looked at his jacket and rejected the idea of it. Pulling on his boots, he followed Oliver down the hidden passageway.

“I should really tell my guards where I am,” he commented.

Oliver was carrying a single shielded candle, but they hardly needed it. They were both familiar with the way. Oliver was proud of himself having remembered all the turns after many years of being away from the palace.

“No need. You’re safe with me.”

“I’m sure that’s what every dead royal thought before they wound up dead.”

Oliver turned around and looked at his cousin. “Are you accusing me of murder?”

Roderick reflected on what he had said and shook his head. “No. Sorry. Again, I’m exhausted. But I’m sure that all of our relatives that have recently been killed thought they were safe up until the last moment,”

“True. That’s what assassins are supposed to be good at.”

They arrived at the guest room where Oliver was lodged. The door had been concealed at the back of a huge dressing closet. Roderick wasn’t surprised his cousin remembered that secret. When they emerged there was a drinking party in

full swing. It seemed all of the dozen or so members of Oliver's retinue were there. They all smiled and bowed to the prince once they realized he was in their presence. To their credit, none of them were surprised at his sudden appearance.

A few informal introductions were made and then Oliver asked, "Now then, dear cousin, it's been a few years, and I make no judgment, but would you prefer a girl or a boy for tonight."

"Girl," he said firmly.

"Then let me introduce you to the fetching Rachelle." Oliver pulled a pretty girl with bright red hair bound up on the top of her head. Freckles were liberally painted across her face. Her bare shoulders were pale, broken only by the freckles, and the loose dress she wore promised breasts that were smaller than Roderick's. "She looks innocent, but I can assure you she is not," said Oliver as he kissed the girl's cheek and she gasped with false protest at his assessment of her sexual behavior.

"My prince," she said politely and then curtsied formally. Roderick smiled, but without joy, and took her hand to kiss it.

"And what family house are you from, my dear?" Roderick asked, uncertain as to the protocols in this situation.

His question made her, and those around her, laugh. Oliver answered for Rachelle. "She's not an aristo, cousin. She's a pretty little maid I found in the mansion with a talent for fucking."

"Truly?" he asked, looking directly at Rachelle and all but his ignoring Oliver.

"There's only one way for you to find out for sure, my prince," she replied as she ran her finger along the edge of her neckline. "But someone will have to help me out of this dress. I'm not very good at wearing aristo clothing, and I can only undress others, not myself."

The crowd laughed again and began moving away. Roderick noticed that most of the retinue paired off, though there were two sets of trios, and clothing began to be removed. But he didn't care about that. He could see strangers fuck any time he wanted. He was the crown prince, after all and such a show was available to anyone with the right amount of coin at most of the houses in the red light

district.

With a broad smile on her face, Rachelle boldly took the prince's hand and pulled him toward the bed. While the prince wasn't exactly skilled at undressing women, he had done it more than once or twice and with Rachelle's able assistance he was able to get her out of the restrictive dress with relative ease.

The young woman was completely at ease in her near-nudity in front of the prince and everyone else in Oliver's large guest room. She wore the stylish white stockings that came up to her mid-thighs, held in place with a blue ribbon around each perfectly tapered limb. Under her dress she had worn a light chemise to protect the fabric. Roderick could see the bright pink of her tiny nipples through it along with the slightly darker shadow of the scarlet triangle between her legs. He had been so eager to see her naked that he had ripped the chemise from her body, a move that delighted the girl right before he pushed her onto the bed.

Her hand went between his legs to cup his manhood. She was delighted to find him firmly erect. "May I, my prince?" she asked and without getting his approval loosened the fasteners and started fishing out his cock.

"I'd prefer to undress," he said as her hand went up and down his shaft. "I'm not some workman looking for a knee-knocker behind the pub."

"It would be my pleasure to undress you, my prince," she said politely. Again, without asking permission, she set to do exactly that. Her hands worked quickly and efficiently, stripping off first Roderick's shirt and then his boots, which was a moment's struggle, and then his already opened pants, leaving him as naked as the day he was born. He was on his back for most of the time while she worked, which allowed him to admire her slim body. It was more boyish than he preferred in women; slim hips, small breasts, a flat belly and thin limbs, and her fine features, while well-set, had a certain androgynous quality that made her all the more alluring.

When Roderick was finally naked enough for her liking, she hunched down between his legs and licked the length of his still-erect cock from balls to glans and engulfed the rigid member between her pink lips. He allowed her to suck him a moment, and then pushed her away from his cock. "I prefer cunt to mouth," he told her, pulling her bodily to him. She complied with a giggle and straddled his body. Together they found the entrance to her cunt and she lowered

herself down on him, their bodies slowly joining together.

He was pleased with how easily she lubricated. Maybe she was more of a hussy than would be expected of a noble-born woman, but there was adventure and pleasure in that. She wasn't just some hanger-on to Oliver, she was there for a purpose and whatever Oliver had done to keep her in his household was more than worth it, Roderick thought as the young girl started rocking and grinding her hips on him.

She knew exactly what she was doing. It made Roderick wonder about her. "You do that very well," he complimented her as she rode him. "Have you had a lot of practice?"

The smile she gave him was sunny and bright. "Much. Too many partners to count."

He had doubts about her counting abilities, but that didn't bother him at the moment. He was the crown prince and he deserved to take a little pleasure in the cunt of a willing woman...and if she provided him with another bastard...maybe that was even better.

Silence fell between them as she rode him with pleasure on her face. Roderick couldn't tell if she liked it that much or if she was that good of an actress. It didn't matter to him either way. It had been years since he had last had sex in front of an audience. It wasn't much of an audience, but there were more than a few people in the room and while they weren't paying all that much attention to the prince and his consort of the moment, it was thrilling to be able to show off his cock-slinging skills. He wondered if they cared...and then realized he didn't care what they thought of him. It wasn't exactly the small orgies that took place at the summer festivals when he was still in his youth, but it was close enough for him.

Roderick grabbed Rachelle's hips between his hands and held her in place while he thrust up into her cunt. She seemed delighted at the sudden change of pace, but her face soured when he started cumming. His grunts were low and dignified, but he caught the shadow of displeasure on her visage even in his moment of little death.

Her cunt was too warm and inviting to waste his seed and he didn't want to bother with the unpleasantness of having his cum splattered all over his chest

and belly. It was her duty as a good citizen to accept the prince's gift.

"What bothers you, girl?" he asked when his load was firmly ensconced in the depths of her cunt.

"Nothing, my prince," she lied easily. Roderick knew when he was being lied to, even by as skilled a liar as Rachelle.

"Did you not enjoy our little romp?"

"I...I didn't get off, my lord," she admitted. It was partly true, Roderick could tell that. She was a very good liar, another attribute that made her attractive to his eyes. "But that is not fault of yours."

"I like it when my citizens are happy," he said smoothly and quickly flipped their positions, putting her on her back. With his quick movements they decoupled, but his hand quickly went to her hot, wet cunt where his cum started to dribble out of her already.

"That's not necessary, my lor—" her admonition was cut short as her eyes rolled up into her head and she gasped. His nimble fingers found her already swollen clit and quickly pushed her to the edge of climax.

"For a trollop you are awfully easy to manipulate," he whispered in her ear. She wasn't able to respond. Her breathing was shallow and ragged. "Though I suppose it is better for a trollop to enjoy her work rather than have it be a terrible burden." He pinched her little clit between his fingers firmly enough to make her legs scissor together in surprise but not so strongly enough to make her protest in pain.

"You're right there," he admired in her. "So beautiful. Stretch out the moment, savor it."

Rachelle nodded and gasped, trying to do as he asked.

"Do you enjoy it? Being a whore? Fucking for coins? Or is this the best part? When a man has you in his power and you are living for pleasure?"

She couldn't answer. He didn't expect one.

It was the greatest relief of her life when she was finally able to cum and she didn't have to answer.

The prince lay in the bed next to her, savoring the moment and relaxing even as the others in the room continued on in their own couplings of raw sex.

It wasn't too many minutes later when Oliver came wandering by. Roderick's cousin was naked but for his open shirt. His cock hung wetly between his legs. It was impossible to tell if the earl had fucked one willing girl or a dozen, or if he had taken other pleasures with women and men in equal portions. Roderick tried not to be jealous of his cousin's cock, but even when it was soft and precious it was more impressive than he always remembered.

"Did you enjoy yourself, cousin?" Oliver asked. A naked doxy was at his side. The woman had seen better days, but Roderick knew his cousin didn't fuck women on appearance alone. Either her cunt or her mouth was worth her weight in gold, or something close to it.

"Immensely."

"Good. Keep her as long as you like."

Roderick grunted and closed his eyes. Rachelle's body was warm and close to his. He wondered if the guards truly cared where he was. "I'm sure I'll get objections from my wife. And from my mistress."

Chapter Sixteen

Vasten was nervous. Being held in the tower wasn't so bad. The accommodations were nicer than he ever would have guessed and that's what made him nervous. He was under arrest for suspicions of killing an aristo—which he had—which meant he should be under a death warrant, but he was being given accommodations better than most people ever had in their lives. It wasn't that of an aristo manse, but it was more than good enough.

The heavy wooden door banged open and two guards grabbed him and dragged him out. He didn't resist. There was no point to it. They marched him down the hall, and then some stairs, and eventually to a chamber that was much more suited to traditional torture, at least to Vasten's eyes. Lt. Hammond and the captain of the guard were waiting for him. That made Vasten even more nervous, but he remembered his oath and reminded himself not to give away anything. He was useless to them dead and the society would compensate him and his family for any injuries he sustained during torture.

"Well?" he asked them after they had stared at one another for a minute, the pair of men strangely silent.

Hammond spoke. "I'll give you this one opportunity to confess everything."

Vasten snorted. "I think not. I can withstand any torture you can devise." He smiled smugly at them.

"No doubt," Hammond agreed. He had heard more than enough tales of how the members of the Shadow Society were trained and initiated. Nodding to the two guards, the armored men left the room. "How well are you prepared to withstand what I can inflict on you?"

Before Vasten could answer the two guards returned, each dragging a hooded prisoner. The hoods were summarily removed to reveal both his wife and his lover. The two stared at Vasten and the room in confusion a moment before they set eyes on each other. At once they scowled, almost in unison.

"Cheap whore," Vasten's wife spat.

"Dry cunt," his lover spat back.

"Such a lovely way to greet each other," said an amused Hammond. "You both

share his cock so you'll both share his torture."

"What?" the wife asked in confusion. She wasn't an ugly woman, but years and childbirth hadn't been kind to her.

"He's going to torture us, you stupid cunt," the lover told her. He you a younger man, almost pretty, but too crude-featured to pull it off.

"Whenever my subject has a wife or child or lover I know I'm going to get what I want," said Hammond. He then addressed the two guards. "Hands on the chopping block," he ordered. Though the two prisoners struggled, they weren't any match for the burly guards and shortly both had one hand each splayed wide on a wooden board not unlike what a butcher would have in his store. "Last chance," Hammond said to Vasten who was staring at the two people he loved the most. He didn't know what to do. "Well?"

"I—I can't," he gasped.

"Very well," Hammond said amicably. "Choose one."

"What?"

"Choose one," Hammond said precisely. "You can't save both. Choose one or the other or I'll choose both." He picked up a heavy cleaver exactly like what a butcher would have in his store. "Neither is going back to you whole."

"Vasten!" his wife pleaded, tears were in her eyes. "I'm you wife! The mother of your children! Tell him what he wants!" She glanced at the young man next to her at the chopping block. "Choose me. He's nothing but a faggot!"

"You love me, Vasten," his lover begged. "You've told me again and again how dry and useless her cunt is. I know you love me and not her! Choose me!"

The assassin didn't know what to do.

Hammond raised the cleaver. "Ten fingers each. Twenty opportunities. And you have children as well. This will get bloody." His smile was thin. "The only question is how much you're willing to lose before you tell all."

The cleaver descended.

Roderick found that he liked sneaking through the secret passages of the palace. They really weren't all that secret, and there were enough keys to the doors to allow almost anyone access, but it was the mere act of going through the motions of doing something that was illicit that gave it the fun element that was missing from his life. And his life had taken yet another downward turn in recent hours.

Slipping into Oliver's room was easy. Oliver would never lock the secret entrance to his room, that would prevent a possible lover from joining him in bed. Either he didn't worry about assassination or felt he was safe in his bed, either way, it was an advantage to Roderick.

The crown prince wasn't at all surprised to find Oliver in bed with not one but two other people. It was the middle of the day so, as painful as it was for him, Roderick had to rouse Oliver from his slumber, even if his cousin had only gone to sleep in the small hours of the morning, though it was possible he had been awake as late as the dawn.

"Awake awake, dear cousin," he sang while flinging back the curtains that had been drawn to stave off the day's light. There was a certain satisfaction in letting the light of day into the dark recesses of the palace. "I have disturbing news!"

"Why would I want to awake to that?" muttered Oliver as he slowly came to consciousness.

"It's all part of your royal duties," replied Roderick as he flung back the bedcovers to discover who Oliver had spent the night with.

He didn't recognize the pair immediately. After a moment of contemplation he placed them as part of Oliver's over-large retinue. The girl had a pretty enough face with firm, almost boyish, features but she kept her hair short and had tiny tits that actually complimented her slim hips. She wasn't to Roderick's taste, but he didn't begrudge Oliver his choice of lovers. The boy was almost a perfect match to the girl. He had features that were decidedly feminine and his thin body was completely hairless, like the girl. His chest was no larger than hers, his hair just as short. The only real difference was the erection that sprouted up between his legs. The young man's cock was thin and delicate. It made Roderick wonder if the boy was a eunuch or if Oliver allowed him to retain his balls. Either way,

the boy still wasn't to Roderick's taste.

"Really cousin?" Oliver protested. Even though he had just been roused from sleep his cock was hard and ready for use. Roderick didn't know if he should attribute that to Oliver's natural randiness or if his cousin was using the spice that was all the rage among the nouve-riche aristos and their male whores. Supposedly it could give a man enough stamina to fuck all night—and day, if necessary. "I can understand you waking me for important matters, but can you at least wait for me to have my morning fuck?" He turned his head and kissed the boy. There was just the faintest hint of blonde whiskers on the boy's face. Knowing his place the boy reached for Oliver's erect cock and started stroking it. Oliver groaned in appreciation. "Mmm, this is the way to wake up." His eyes fluttered as the girl kissed his cheek and he turned his head to accept her tongue into his mouth. Roderick shook his head in annoyance. The two whores were obviously well-trained and knew to service their master rather than defer to the needs of the prince.

As Roderick watched the boy started kissing his way down Oliver's body and eventually engulfed the earl's cock with his mouth while the girl and Oliver continued to exchange kisses.

"I don't have time for this," Roderick commented. He had no need to see his cousin have sex; he'd seen that plenty already in his life.

"Why don't you join us, dear cousin," said Oliver. "I'm sure Tev's not to your liking, but Tis has a lovely cunt. She'd be proud to have the crown prince fuck her." The girl—Tis, undoubtedly a name given to her by Oliver—turned her head to smile at Roderick and shyly wink at him. Had she started her life as a girl in a traveling acting troupe? A peasant's daughter? Was she born in a whorehouse? Was she some minor criminal that Oliver took advantage of? Roderick knew that it didn't matter.

"Not now," said Roderick. Even as he spoke Tis disengaged herself from Oliver, leaving the earl to Tev's talented mouth and started crawling down the large bed toward Roderick. Even crawling like an animal her tits were still tiny, barely any flesh hanging free from her chest.

"There's always time for a relaxing fuck," Oliver contradicted him. "Or one to start the day."

When Tis reached for Roderick he stepped back and remembered his place in the world. “Oliver, what I’m about to tell you might have you facing the headsman’s axe.”

Oliver snorted. He was annoyed his cousin, whom he loved very much, was ruining a perfectly good blowjob. “I doubt that, cousin. I’ve done nothing wrong.”

“Then tell me why your aunt—my mother—is the one behind all the murders of the aristos over the past month?”

Oliver pushed away his whore and shoved aside Tis who had been pawing at Roderick. “What the fuck are you talking about?”

“My mother is a treasonous whore.”

End Part Three

About the Author

Elliot Silvestri lives in upstate New York where he works and writes, not always at the same time. He has a degree in English Literature and his professors would be appalled at the shoddy construction of his characters and plots for his ebook erotica. His free time is spent with his wife and children, repairing a one-hundred-year-old house, and herding the family's three cats.

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