



**THE
VALENTINE
WAR**

Maxwell Avoi



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By Maxwell Avoi

Smashwords Edition

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Keene and Tilman stalked the mall, searching for Cupid. Hartsgrove Mall was the largest one for miles and Keene knew that if their quarry was anywhere he would be there just before Valentine's Day. The boys hunted him through the clouds of perfume, through the tacky decorations, through the gifts and cards and posters that all celebrated the day dedicated to love.

Tilman wasn't sure about it. He remembered when Keene had first come to him with the idea. "All myths are born out of truths!" his friend had said. Keene was tall and slim to the point of cadaverousness, and he tended to get a feverish look when he was obsessed with something. Having recently changed his major to anthropology he had become obsessed with the idea of hunting down a god. "Think about it! If we could find the being that the Eros myth, the Cupid myth is based off of, we could harness his power! We could get girls to fall in love with us!"

Tilman was skeptical but he'd learned over the years that it was best to just play along when Keene got that look. At times like that he wondered why he remained Keene's friend but he figured that he was acting as a safety valve. Tilman himself was shorter and wider but he consoled himself with the thought that he'd at least had a few dates in the last months. Still, he'd agreed to go along as long as there wasn't anything illegal or dangerous involved.

"What could be dangerous?" Keene had said. "We're hunting a god of love!"

Tilman had reluctantly agreed with that assessment, though probably for different reasons than Keene.

Now here they were, split up at the biggest mall for miles the Friday before Valentine's Day. They had walkie-talkies and both of them were decked out as if they were on a hot first date. In Keene's case that meant a clean t-shirt and approximately three gallons of the latest body spray alleged that it was irresistible to women. Tilman was a lot less odious, well put together in a nice shirt and khakis. Keene insisted that dressing correctly was part of the hunt, that it would allow them to show Cupid that they were serious petitioners so that they could lull the god into a false sense of security before they nabbed him. He was vague on the nabbing but Tilman didn't press. The whole idea was insane anyway so there was no need to delve too deeply. He just planned to follow

Keene around and make sure that his friend didn't hurt himself.

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Cupid sighed. The problem with Valentine's Day, he thought to himself, was that it wasn't as much about love anymore. It had been wonderful at the beginning, way back there in the early years. Back then it had been an occasion for face-to-face meetings and clandestine love affairs, with handmade cards and other lovely nothings exchanged, the blush of a cheek or the shy smile from a maiden being a reward fit for king or peasant. Now it was all factory cards and anonymous, pre-stamped sentiment that meant less than the chalky candy stapled to it.

And Cupid himself had become commercialized! He blew out a disgusted breath and slapped at a picture of a wing-ed baby with a bow that was totally unsuitable for shooting people. That he himself mirrored the depiction only disgusted him more; gods changed with beliefs and these days when people thought of Cupid they never considered that he was the son of Aphrodite herself! Once his bow had been feared as well as desired, and he had stories of his wrath as well as his joy. These days he was a joke.

He looked around the store, irritated and out of sorts. There weren't even any decent targets around, just a few customers who were buying cards and some candy without thinking about it too much. No one was more shocked than he was when a hand wrapped around his mouth and an arm pulled him right out of the air. He thrashed, trying to free himself or at least get a look at his attacker, but the assault had come from behind and he couldn't tell who had kidnapped him.

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Tilman heard his walkie crackle and he lifted it up to listen. "Got him!" said Keene. "In the bathroom by the Style Aisle store!"

Tilman broke into an unaccustomed run, hoping to head things off before Keene got arrested for assaulting a little person. The door to the bathroom was locked but Keene opened it from the inside when Tilman knocked and nervously

announced himself. He didn't want to be seen knocking to get into a bathroom for any kind of rendezvous but it was early enough in the day that no one was around to see.

Tilman slipped inside and re-locked the door before turning to see what Keene had done. He stood in wide-eyed shock when he saw the small naked man with the cherub wings duct-taped to a toilet. "Oh, fuck, Keene, you're going to jail, dude."

"No, seriously, this is him! It's Cupid! Look, I got his bow and everything, and we got his arrows and now we have him too!"

Cupid glared at Tilman as if planning to declare some sort of undying curse on him, and Tilman found himself shrinking back from the fury in those eyes. Certain as he was that Keene had kidnapped a mall worker, there was something about the guy that made him nervous. "Keene, you've got to let him go, man."

"No, there's no way, not until I have his power!" Keene laughed in a way that made Tilman's worries about his friend's sanity solidify. Keene raised a small but dangerous-looking bow to point at the man taped to the toilet. The arrow nocked to the string didn't look particularly dangerous, what with its pink color and heart-shaped head, but Tilman wasn't prepared to take any chances. He sprang forward and hip-checked Keene, knocking his friend into the other toilet stall. He grabbed the bow when Keene dropped it and entered the stall where Cupid (?) was, tearing at the tape to give the (god?) the leverage he needed to get out of the rest of his bindings.

Cupid exploded away from the toilet as soon as he could, so angry that he was shaking. Tilman fell backward, landing on top of Cupid's quiver and crying out as every single arrow sank into his left butt cheek. Keene left his stall at that point and spent a minute or two chasing the angry god around the bathroom. Cupid fluttered and flapped, slipping this way and that in the air while Keene stumbled. Tilman just tried to get away from them, crawling to the door while doing his best to pull heart-headed arrows out of his ass.

He managed to unlock the door and crawl out before standing up and gripping the shafts of the arrows. Just as he started to pull a woman's voice thundered next to him. "What is all this business?"

Tilman turned and gaped at the spectacular woman standing there with her arms

crossed beneath her armored breasts. She wore chain and plate but somehow it had been smithed in such a way as to emphasize the prodigious curves that rolled beneath the armor. No waif-thin model this; she was the epitome of curves being magnificent. Her dark hair tumbled around her shoulders and the upper half of her face was hidden beneath a helmet. Still, there was no mistaking her body language: she was irritated and wanted answers.

“Kuh gah,” said Tilman as he once again became aware of the pain radiating from the arrows. There was something else, too, some new feeling that made him look at the woman in an entirely new light. She really was perfect and wonderful, now that he got a good look at her. In fact it occurred to him that he’d never seen a more perfect woman.

She rolled her beautiful eyes and said, “You look like a mortal besotted with one of Cupid’s arrows. I wouldn’t be at all surprised if-“

She was cut off when the door slammed open and Cupid himself spiraled out of the bathroom. One of his wings was missing a few feathers which meant that he couldn’t stop himself from slamming into the wall opposite. Keene was out the door a second later, still carrying the bow. He ran directly into the armored woman and bounced off, landing hard.

Cupid turned, his face terrible in its wrath and his hands fisted to do some damage in spite of their small stature. He stopped when he saw the woman standing there. “Ish?” he said. “What are you doing here?”

She tilted her chin upward, proud and beautiful. In Tilman’s eyes she was even more magnificent than mere seconds ago, somehow. He also found himself starting to admire Cupid and even Keene in a way that he’d never considered before. He closed his eyes and tugged at the shafts of the arrows; he had to be rid of them before he did something stupid.

The armored woman tilted her head further, raising her chin another inch to stare down her nose at Cupid. “I could ask you the same thing.” She turned her gaze on Keene, who stared at her with his mouth open. “What is this?”

The arrows were really stuck in there. Tilman didn’t relish the idea of wandering around with arrows sticking out of his ass for the rest of his life but he wasn’t sure he had the strength to just yank them out. He seemed to be working some of them deeper. Cupid said, “This is some idiot mortal who tried to kidnap me to

use my power.”

The woman snorted. “How did he even get hold of you and your weapon?”

Cupid glowered at her. “You know how it is. Less and less power every year.” Surprise and comprehension dawned on his face. “That’s why you’re here, isn’t it. You’re here to make a move on my holiday!” He reached out and grabbed at his bow, but Keene moved it out of his reach.

“Your holiday? It’s a celebration of love, you twit! Ishtar has just as much right to it as you do!” She pulled a short-bladed sword from nowhere, causing both of the mortals to scream and Cupid to curse again in a language that sounded short of vowels. Tilman gave up on pulling the arrows out and just ran, limping thanks to his wounds. Keene leapt to his feet and ran the other way, still carrying the bow.

“Dammit Ish!” yelled Cupid. “Like it or not, that bow and those arrows are symbols of the season! Stop them!”

Ishtar stood glaring at him for a moment longer before sheathing her sword and running after Keene. Cupid himself took off in the opposite direction, flying after Tilman as quickly as he could manage.

Bad luck strikes even the gods when it comes to a commonly-held belief, and the fact that the four of them were chasing each other through a crowded mall on Friday the thirteenth led to a certain amount of bad luck on all sides. For Ishtar and Cupid it meant that the mortals simply melted into a growing crowd. For Keene and Tilman it meant that things were about to get strange.

Keene hid the bow under his coat, hoping that he wouldn’t draw too many stares. The sight of a gangly college student trying to hide something under his coat in a mall probably drew more stares than simply running, and the combination meant that people simply drew aside as he approached. All but one.

For the second time that day he ran into a woman and went sprawling. He blinked up at his obstacle and for a moment he had the insane thought that he’d run into a milkmaid. She was very tall and wore her hair in twin braids that ran down the front of her dress, over a body that was both very sturdy and outrageously female. She held out a hand and said, “Sorry, wasn’t looking where I was going.” Her words were tinted with an accent that wasn’t quite Swedish,

giving more support to his theory about her being a milkmaid. He took her hand and stood, barely coming up to her shoulder. She dusted off his chest and said, “Are you all right?”

He nodded, wordless in the face of her beauty. She smiled at him, her blue eyes crinkling over round, apple-colored cheeks. “Then give me the bow.”

His eyes widened and he turned just in time to see Ishtar burst through the crowd. She skidded to a halt and said, “Freya? What are you doing here?”

A sudden creak of leather and steel made Keene turn back to see that the milkmaid’s dress had changed into armor that looked as though it had been made by welding steel plates to bear furs. She now carried an axe, and while her curves remained the same her eyes looked more like bleak glacier killing pools than sunlit fjords.

“Give me the bow and I’ll reward you, mortal,” said Ishtar. She held her hand out, a queen who would not be denied.

“I’ll reward you with more than she ever could,” said Freya. “I still have my Valkyries.”

The idea of a Valkyrie sounded good to Keene; in his rattled state he couldn’t think of a reason he wouldn’t want a tall blonde. He held the bow out to Freya in spite of Ishtar’s scream of anger. As soon as Freya’s hand touched the bow he felt power wash over him.

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Tilman staggered through the crowd, certain that he was leaving some kind of blood trail but unable to muster much concern about it. The real problem was that he was falling in love with everyone he saw. Male, female, it didn’t matter; there was something sexy and wonderful about all of them and he wished that he could tell them so. He was also acutely aware that he wasn’t supposed to be feeling that way. He didn’t know how many arrows were stuck in his ass but it felt like more with each step. At this point he would have estimated around a

thousand.

Finally he collapsed on an out-of-the-way bench tucked into one side of the promenade. He covered his eyes, trying to banish the thoughts of love that roared through him. He wasn't aware of anyone sitting down next to him until he felt a comforting hand on his shoulder.

He looked up to see the most beautiful Indian woman he'd ever laid eyes on. She sat there next to him, her expression one of concern. Tilman blinked and commanded himself not to look down at her body; his peripheral vision told him that she was just as spectacular as her eyes were in a slender sort of way, but he didn't want to ruin the moment by looking away.

He wasn't at all surprised to find emotion welling up inside him at the sight of her. The damn arrows made sure of that. She said, "Are you okay?"

He shook his head, wanting to dissolve into a puddle of tears but aware that might not be the manliest or most attractive thing he could do. She smiled and moved closer, which was exactly what he wanted her to do. Then she stood and pulled him to his feet, coming closer still. She leaned into him, staring up into his eyes and tilting her face toward his. The sweet moment was derailed when she reached around and yanked a handful of arrows out of his ass.

The pain was more like heartbreak, more emotional than anything, but when he opened his eyes again Tilman still felt everything for her that he'd felt before. She smiled at him and said, "Are you better now?"

"You're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen." Normally he wasn't that forward, but he felt that today was a strange day that might allow him to do things like that.

Her smile widened and she went up on tiptoes to kiss him. "I know," she said when she was done. It could have been a day later for all he knew; he'd lost track of time completely during the kiss.

"Hubah," he said.

She nodded and guided him to the bench. He sat down, marveling at the way that there was no residual pain from the arrows. His pants weren't even damaged. She said, "Now I know you're having all these wonderful feelings, and that's

fantastic! But there's one person who is even better than me, at least in your heart. Isn't there."

She said it as a statement instead of a question, shocking him slightly. "No, there's no one!"

She half-turned and gestured down the promenade as if revealing a new car. He followed her hand with his eyes and gaped at who he saw. She was short and curvy and had bright red hair and green eyes. He knew every detail, every freckle from the time they'd spent together in chemistry lab. "Alana," he breathed. He'd spent an entire semester pining over her, unable to say what he wanted to.

He turned back to the woman beside him, his heart in all kinds of pain. She was right; Alana was his ideal, the most beautiful girl he knew and the one who haunted his dreams at night. The woman smiled at him again, this smile full of knowledge of his pain and confusion. She patted his cheek. "It's okay. You never had a chance with her before."

He blinked. "Wait, what?"

She laughed and he felt himself harden at the sound of it. She really was amazing. She said, "Alana prefers women, silly boy."

The bottom dropped out and he groaned. He put his face in his hands and propped his elbows on his knees. "Of course she does," he said, somewhat muffled. He felt her hand on his shoulder and looked up at her, filled with misery and desire at the same time.

"I have a deal for you," she said. "Give me all but one of the arrows and I'll make sure that she learns to like you the way that you want her to. You can keep the last one to use on her."

His face brightened. "Hey, yeah, that would work, wouldn't it?" In his addled state it felt like the perfect solution to his problems.

She nodded. "Of course it would!"

"Then you've got a deal!"

“Great!” she said, and put her hand on his forehead. A huge surge of energy rolled through him and everything went dark.

“Rati?” said an incredulous voice.

The woman on the bench looked around for the source of the shout. The mortals nearby hadn’t heard anything; even a battle of the gods was often very circumspect these days. Cupid fluttered in midair a few feet away, gaping at her and Tilman. “What...what...”

She waved at Cupid with the tips of her fingers. “Hi there, cutie. Come to watch?”

“What the fuck are you doing here? And give me my arrows back!” He made a grab for them but she held them out of his reach. He was shaking with rage.

“I’m just here to see what you silly gods do on this side of the world. Sad, really, how you squabble over one day. And these are my arrows now, little one. I made a deal for them and they’re mine.”

“I...what...a deal? What possible deal could you have made for the...oh, shit.” He trailed off as he looked over at the comatose Tilman. Tilman was no longer recognizable as himself. His body had gone through massive changes in the last minute, becoming shorter and much slimmer. It had also switched genders, Tilman having turned into quite the beautiful Indian woman. As the two gods watched, one horrified and one smirking, Tilman’s body lost all vestige of its normal appearance and instead became almost a duplicate of the woman on the bench: Rati, goddess of pleasure, love, and sex.

Tilman opened her eyes and sat up, blinking in confusion. She looked down at herself and said, “Oh my god.”

The woman on the bench nodded. “Exactly. I am the goddess Rati, Tilman, and as part of the deal we made, you are now invested with enough of my beauty to attract any man and many women. Including Alana.”

Tilman looked at her and then down at herself. There was no doubt that she was a woman now; her clothing had changed along with her, leaving her wrapped in a tight white dress that hugged and displayed every curve of her new form. It looked as though it had been modeled on a sari, and she absently made note of

the fact that she needed to know why she suddenly knew that. She looked up at Alana, still dozens of yards away, and was overcome by a surge of desire. She said, “You think this will work?”

Cupid made strangled noises as Rati handed one of the arrows to Tilman. “I do. As promised, my dear.”

Tilman took the arrow and said, “I’m not going to be able to use my real name.”

Rati gave her an amused look. “What do you think your real name is, dear?”

“Narmata, of course.” She blinked and said, “Narmata. I mean, not that, it’s Narmata.”

Rati laughed and Narmata felt herself become aroused again. This time it was a matter of stiffened nipples and soft heat between her legs instead of hardness. “It means, ‘gives us pleasure,’” said Rati. “Go and do that.”

Narmata stood, expecting to be unsteady on her long legs but finding that her new body felt not just normal but unexpectedly graceful. “How does the arrow work?”

“You’ve felt them often enough,” said Rati. “Just use it.”

Narmata headed for Alana, swaying deliciously as she approached her target. Cupid pulled at a double fistful of his hair as he watched her go. “Wait, what? No!” he cried. “The curvy one’s supposed to have a series of unsatisfying relationships with men before she finally figures it out at age thirty!”

He swooped after Narmata but found himself unable to stop her. For all his squawking fury his hands simply couldn’t grasp her; they either slid off or passed through. Narmata barely saw him; all her attention was focused on Alana, who was looking at one of the mannequins in the window of a nearby clothing store. She looked unhappy; the mannequin was obviously built to resemble someone much slimmer than she was. Narmata came up behind her and slid the arrow into her shoulder.

Alana stiffened and drew in a deep breath when the arrow went in, drawing attention to her prodigious bosom. She half-reached for her shoulder and then frowned as the arrow melted into her. She refocused, seeing Narmata in the

reflection of the window in front of her. She stared for a moment and then turned. She looked Narmata up and down and said, “Did they base that mannequin on you?”

Narmata giggled as Cupid ground his teeth. He turned back to Rati’s bench and found it deserted; the Indian goddess had moved on, taking her handful of arrows with her.

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Ishtar growled slightly as she approached Freya. She was surprised to find a spear interposed between them. She turned her glare on Freya’s newest Valkyrie.

Keene knew that something was wrong, that some sort of fundamental change had happened when he’d made the deal with Freya. He’d become taller and there had been other changes before his clothes had writhed and altered on his new body as well. He hadn’t had time to see what all the changes meant before Ishtar had approached; Keene’s focus had narrowed to the point where the only thing that registered was that the Lady was in danger. He’d thrust the spear out, signaling his protection of Freya, and Ishtar had turned her glare on him. A tiny part of him questioned where the spear had come from but he dismissed it as unimportant compared to defending Freya.

Freya put one strong hand on Keene’s arm, lowering the spear. “Peace, Dagmar,” she said. Keene somehow knew that was his new name; it was as much a part of him as his old one, as the instinct to protect Freya. He was glad; the name sounded tough and manly.

Ishtar rolled her eyes at Dagmar before turning to speak to Freya. “Give me that bow, slut.”

Freya frowned. “It’s mine by right. Keene took it by force of arms and then traded it to me for his new existence.”

Dagmar frowned slightly. New existence? He’d traded it for a tall, hot blonde. He frowned more as he turned his attention away from Freya and to himself.

That spell had done more than he'd thought. He felt distinctly odd. He looked down.

Ishtar and Freya watched in astonishment as the Valkyrie dropped her spear and screamed in a high-pitched voice. She started to scrabble at her armor, virtually a duplicate of Freya's own, and under her strong fingers and the force of her panic it didn't take long for her to tear her breastplate off. She staggered around in a circle, backward, stumbling into a stand that sold cheap jewelry as she tried to get away from the heavy, bouncy truth. She went down, flailing, in a storm of plastic beads and ugly rings.

The breastplate, in her case, was well-named. Much like Freya's, Dagmar's plate had hidden a chest fit for a herd of cows. Her breasts wobbled and shook beneath a thin white cotton cover as she thrashed, trying to get to her feet and away from her new anatomy. Freya and Ishtar stood frozen, staring in growing amusement at the new Valkyrie.

"Are you all right, miss?"

Dagmar looked up from the pile of beads and wire to see a tall man looking at her with concern. He had a flat, short haircut and wasn't particularly good-looking but there was something about him that made her stop and look again. She finally shook her head, now aware of the weight of her new hair, and said, "I'm ah...I'm fine. Thank you."

He nodded and offered a hand to help her up. "Looks like you got your jacket caught on something and it threw you off balance."

She took his hand and was immediately flooded with images. She saw the tall man in boot camp, working hard to help not only himself but also his fellow trainees. She saw him fighting alongside others, always with one eye on his squad as he rose in rank. She saw the injury that ended his days of battle and almost his life, and the painful road to recovery that left him with only a slight limp thanks to an artificial leg. She saw a hero and something in her heart responded in spite of her shock.

While Freya looked on with an expression of approval, Dagmar said, "Thank you, ah. Would you mind sitting with me for a minute? It was kind of a shock, and..."

She trailed off and he nodded, never losing his concerned expression. He led her to a nearby bench, apparently unconcerned with the fact that she was wearing armor. He had seen the ruined breastplate as a jacket, so Dagmar assumed that the goddess's magic was still at work.

“Disgusting,” said Ishtar. She frowned at the two of them; Dagmar had struck up a conversation with the man immediately and neither of them showed any signs of leaving.

Freya laughed, a sound that made the lights glow brighter for a moment. “Nonsense. Dagmar is one of my Valkyries now, and they're drawn to heroes. He's been lonely for a while.”

“Give me the bow.”

“Hah. Come and take it.”

Ishtar glared at Freya. “You know I can't. But you can't refuse a contest.”

Freya raised one perfect golden eyebrow. “What kind of contest?”

Ishtar smirked and spread her arms, her armor falling away and becoming a long white dress as she did so. “One appropriate to the season, of course. A game of love.”

Freya smiled. “Even so. How do you want to proceed?”

“We simply have to prove which of us is better equipped to be the goddess of love. Whoever wins gets the bow.”

“I accept.”

“Terms?”

“There are two other love deities here. We will play with them,” said Freya.

“Cupid, and...what on earth is Rati doing here?” said Ishtar after a moment's concentration.

“Enjoying herself, as usual.”

“Very well. Whoever can wrap the gods of love in their own bonds first shall get the bow, yes?”

Freya nodded, approving. Then her own armor melted away until she stood wearing a deep-cut blouse and a skirt that revealed a dramatic length of perfect thigh. She smiled at Ishtar and said, “Yes. Shall we begin?”

Ishtar looked around. “Where is your Valkyrie?”

“I left her on the bench with...” Freya looked around and frowned. There was no sign of the newly-minted Dagmar.

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One thing had led to another. Keene, now thinking of herself as Dagmar, had found the tall man, Nelson, to be fascinating. They had gotten into talking about his war record, about the men and women he’d fought beside during his time in a hot, sandy place, and every word of every war story riveted her in a way that she’d never experienced before. She felt something swelling inside, some tight desire that she didn’t recognize at first.

Soon they were walking together, close enough that his slight limp meant that they bumped into one another regularly. She’d found that with a little work she could see what he did when it came to what she wore, the cotton shirt and the jeans instead of the armor and furs. She filled the regular clothes just as well as she did the armor but now wasn’t embarrassed about it. Instead she was proud, the emotion welling upward from a place she hadn’t known before, and she found herself glad that this hero enjoyed what he was seeing.

Nelson was gentlemanly, not leering or making suggestive comments, but she could tell that he was interested. How could he not be, a warrior such as himself? As virile as he had to be, a Valkyrie would be perfect for him!

Awash with desire, her panties becoming damp as they walked, Dagmar took his hand and led him into a department store. They wandered together, he bemused and she delighted with him, until they found themselves in the camping good

area. Dagmar looked around and found that they were largely unnoticed before she stopped him in the middle of a sentence with a strong, soft kiss that left him breathless at the end of it. She breathed faster, excited by his expression of wonder, and she said, “You’re my hero, Nelson. It’s not your time yet, but I can reward you in other ways.”

Nelson’s look of wonder from the kiss faded a bit at her words. “Not my...what do you mean?”

She shook her head, enjoying the feeling of her hair brushing over her neck. “Don’t worry about that part. Come on.” She tugged at his hand, gently so that he wouldn’t lose his hard-won balance, and led him to the largest display tent in the department. He was awkward going in, grinning and scarcely believing that they were doing this. She zipped the door shut behind her and turned to him, also smiling. She pulled at the bottom of her shirt, rolling it off until she wore nothing but a sort of sports bra. His eyes widened.

“Dagmar, it’s been...I mean, are you sure that...”

She quieted him by taking his hand and laying it on her breast. She moaned quietly when he squeezed, closing her eyes at the shock of sensation from his touch. Had her chest been this sensitive when she’d been male, when she’d been Keene? She didn’t think so. The thought of being Keene whipped through her mind like a streaking comet, leaving a glowing trail of doubt and shock behind, but it was quickly swallowed by the sea of desire that filled her at his touch.

“I just wish we could do more here,” she whispered, aware that the tent’s walls were thin and that there were shoppers passing by on the aisle just outside. She found that her previous life, so vibrant just a half hour before, had no more sway over her than a faint shadow on a cloudy day. She only wished that they were in a more private place so that she could do everything to him that she wanted to do, so that she could reward the warrior properly.

She reached down to unzip his pants with a gentle hand. This would have to do for now. Maybe later they could get together at his place. He kept hold of her breast until she leaned down and touched the tip of his cock with her soft lips. He pulled in a fast, deep breath and tilted his head back when she sucked him in, deeper and deeper until she had all of him and the head of his shaft nestled at the back of her throat. It was as if she had been made specifically for him and when

she started to suck and swirl in earnest he shuddered with delight. Staying quiet was murder, but necessary; he urged her on with his quiet gasps and the pressure of his fingers in her hair.

Dagmar closed her eyes and did everything that she could think of. Instead of disgust or disquiet, images of techniques burst into her mind, ways to make the sensations even better for him. She used them all, gladly servicing the warrior who'd earned so much more, until she felt him start to shake beneath her. He whispered something indistinct that she understood anyway, and she pulled him as deep as she could get before he erupted into her. She swallowed quickly, relishing the taste not for itself but for what it represented. She'd served the warrior and she felt nothing but tenderness and pride.

Dagmar licked him clean, only now starting to hear the frantic screams from the part of herself that remained Keene. She wiped her full lips and came up to kiss him again, smiling at the disbelief in his eyes. "Good enough?" she whispered.

"Tha...that was..."

"All for you, warrior," she said, and for an instant he saw her as she truly was. His eyes widened.

"You said it wasn't my time," he whispered.

"It's not. But this time of year, I serve my mistress in other ways." She knew that it was true, that it was part of the deal she'd made in spite of not knowing it at the time. Now that she was done honoring the soldier she felt herself start to slip back into being Keene. Her body remained the same, as she knew that it would, but her thoughts began to fade back to what the mortal part of her thought of as "normal."

"Do you think I'll see you again soon?" said Nelson.

Dagmar was still in control, at least enough for her to pull his hand closer to her and write her number on it with a pen from her pocket. "Call me in a couple days, and we can have a real date."

She felt his yearning, his desire to not be alone, and she wanted to respond to it but she knew that she had responsibilities to her lady. "Right now I've got duties to attend to. You know how that is."

He raised his eyebrows and took in her strong, curvy body with a sweep of his eyes. “You’re in the service?” He sounded confused; his moment of clarity was obviously gone.

“Not exactly. I’m more of a guide than anything, but part of that is being a bodyguard.” She leaned in to kiss him, the last vestiges of her Valkyrie nature taking control to comfort the warrior, and then she helped him out of the tent.

“Call me soon,” she said, smiling at him. She turned and walked away, fully aware of the way that her altered body moved and the likelihood that he was staring at her. The further she got from him the more Keene felt himself take control until he couldn’t sense the Valkyrie nature anywhere.

The problem was that he still wore the Valkyrie body. Heavy breasts bobbed cheerfully with each step, and he had a much harder time maneuvering his wider hips than he had when Dagmar had been in charge. He assumed that he would have been more upset about the interlude in the tent, but whenever he thought about it he felt nothing but a deep surge of satisfaction and joy instead of the disgust he would have felt only hours before. Less than an hour after being turned into a woman and he was already giving blowjobs to strangers? He had to find Freya and back out of this deal right now.

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Cupid watched, fluttering gloomily, as Narmata and Alana sat and chattered together on an out-of-the-way bench. They were close enough that they could feel each other’s heat but Alana was nervous about touching Narmata in such a public venue. Still, their hands were at their sides, flat on the bench between them with just the tips of their pinkies overlapping. Narmata was amazed at how much a pinky could feel and transmit.

Alana was all she’d hoped. She was beautiful and smart and funny, and if it took being turned into a woman for a while to be near her then Narmata was perfectly fine with letting the world forget all about a boy named Tilman. She had some worries in the back of her mind, mostly to do with Tilman’s parents and legal records, but for right now she was in the flush of first love and she didn’t care

about anything else.

“Wonderful, isn’t it?” said a woman next to Cupid. He turned in surprise, reaching for a bow that wasn’t there anymore. In fact, his bow was slung over the tall blonde woman’s shoulder.

“Freya,” said Cupid, a little nervous. The two of them had an on-again, off-again sort of relationship and he was never sure if she was glad to see him. She was smiling at the budding romance on the bench, which was a good sign.

“Don’t you ever miss it? Being in love like they are?” she said. She sounded wistful, as though she missed it herself. Gods lived a long time, and the bud of new love soon either blossomed or withered. Most of the gods didn’t mind but the gods of love were constantly reminded of the wonderful emotion.

“Somewhat. It usually doesn’t turn out well for me,” said Cupid absently. Some of the only stories that the mortals remembered about him dealt with how love betrayed him. Now that his bow and arrows were gone, he wondered if he would ever have any stories told about him again.

To his surprise, Freya removed the bow from her shoulders and said, “You can have this back, on one condition.”

He narrowed his eyes slightly. He wanted his bow, needed it, but she was a tricky lady. “What’s that?”

“I need you to use it on someone.”

He sighed and slumped his shoulders. “You know I can’t mess with the established order. I get my assignments and that’s that, I can’t fiddle around with which mortal gets which-“

“I never said it was a mortal.”

His eyes widened. “Do you know how much trouble I got into the last time I-“

“Shut up.” Her voice cracked through the air, a reminder that she was also a goddess of war and fully prepared to kick his ass if he needed it. Cupid’s words were cut off as if by guillotine. “You’re going to do this or you won’t get your bow back. How long do you think you’ll last without the symbols of your office,

anyway?”

Cupid’s slump became more pronounced, an impressive achievement for someone in mid-flutter. She was right. The arrows weren’t that big a deal but the bow was irreplaceable. “Fine. Who do you want me to inphilate?”

She raised an eyebrow at the word but let it pass. “Rati. She was here earlier. I recognize her handiwork in that girl over there.” She gestured to Narmata.

Cupid mustered a grin. “Actually, that’s a guy. Or he was until he fell in love with that girl there and Rati came by.”

Freya squinted slightly and then nodded. “I see it now. Interesting.”

“But you’ll let me have the bow if I promise to inphilate Rati? Who with?”

“That’s the deal. And I don’t care who she’s smitten with, or for how long. Just do what you do the best and you’ll have your symbol of office back for good.” She handed him the bow and said, “What about your arrows?”

“Those are easy.” He held his hand out into midair as if plucking an apple and suddenly his hand was full of the heart-headed arrows. “The problem is that some of them were stolen from me, and I can’t just wave my hand and make them vanish. Love has to decay.”

“Mm. Well, that would be your problem. You have until the end of the day, dear Cupid. Best of luck.” With that she turned and made her way down the promenade. Cupid watched her go, admiring the way her hindquarters moved under the fabric of her long dress. He turned to look at the two girls on the bench but they were already gone. He frowned; he would have to do something about them before things got too far.

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Keene wasn’t sure what to do next. It seemed that her new clothing had shifted enough that it didn’t draw comment, so she didn’t have to worry about

wandering around in armor. The problem was that she was wandering around in the body of a beautiful female Viking, which drew enough stares on its own. She didn't want to be a woman and she didn't want to be a Valkyrie. She wanted to find Freya, a goddess that she now thought of as her Lady, and ask to be changed back to her normal self.

She had a sense of where Freya was; it was like being able to tell where the sun was when standing in its light. She tried to follow on foot but the location kept changing all around the mall, like Freya was teleporting from point to point. Finally she sat down on a bench and stared at the floor. Her new breasts took up a large portion of the bottom of her gaze, and she shifted her eyes upward to try to stay away from the sight.

When she looked up, Ishtar was standing there with a half-smile on her beautiful face. The goddess sat down next to Keene and said, "You look like you've had a hard day, my boy."

Just having someone refer to her as a boy was nearly enough to unhinge Keene; she was shocked to find that tears and panic were so close to the surface. She swallowed a few times and said, "It's...it's not been the best day, no."

Ishtar patted her shoulder. It felt like warm rain, relaxing and penetrating at the same time. "There there, you're looking at this all wrong. You need to see what a blessing you've been given."

"A blessing? To be...this? I'm not a woman!"

"You're still not exactly a woman, Dagmar. You're a Valkyrie. And that means more than what you see here, you know."

"Like what?" Keene found herself to be interested in spite of everything.

"You mean you don't know about Valkyries? Bold women who take warriors to Valhalla? They scour battles and wars to find those who died heroic deaths so that they can be rewarded in the afterlife."

"Wait, are those the women with the wings on their helmets?"

"Sure. Anyway, there's more to being a Valkyrie than just your looks. You're a powerful creature in your own right. You're called upon to defend your Lady

when she's in danger, the way that she is now.”

A thrill shot through Keene and she felt her Dagmar personality start to awaken. “She is? From what?”

“Sad but true, some gods don't get along. There's one, an Indian deity, who has chosen this time and place to attempt to cause your lady's downfall. She carries a handful of daggers shaped like arrows; you have to take them from her and use them on her to stop her from harming Freya.”

Keene stood, her back straightening and her clothing already shifting on her magnificent body. Within seconds, Dagmar the Valkyrie stood there in full battle array, gripping a spear in one hand and glaring out at the world from underneath half a helmet. “Where is she?”

Ishtar held out her hand and Dagmar took it. Ishtar pressed her thumb into the back of Dagmar's hand. There was a sizzling noise and when the goddess withdrew her thumb Dagmar saw that there was a small impression burned into the back of her hand. She looked at it with interest, barely registering the pain. Finally she held her hand out and moved it in an arc as if searching for something. When she turned in a particular direction, the pain faded and was replaced by a warm, pleasant feeling.

Ishtar spread her hands and said, “Like anything else, my dear Valkyrie. Just follow the pleasure.”

Dagmar took off at a dead run, her armor clattering softly as she moved. People got out of her way without thinking about it or even noticing that they'd done so, and all the while the spot on the back of her hand warmed like she was under a lover's caress.

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Narmata was in no way upset at the loss of her manhood or name; she was too busy kissing Alana to be upset. She relished the feeling of their lips together, the incredible softness pressing into each other until it seemed as though they would

devour one another. They breathed together, Narmata acutely aware of the way that her new bosom pressed into Alana's. Alana was bustier than she was, more voluptuous in all ways, but she seemed to find Narmata perfect. Their hands wandered over each other, lost in one another's bodies and wanting only to know more. Narmata hadn't been around a woman this aroused before; Alana seemed unfocused, her eyes glassy with desire as her body warmed and melted against Narmata's own. Narmata felt the same heat, felt the same softness and dampness between her legs, and she wondered how long it would be before the two of them were in a bed somewhere, far away from everything but each other.

A Valkyrie in full armor charging past them at top speed was possibly the only thing in the mall that could have gotten their attention. They looked up and stared after the running woman and then back at each other.

"Her rack was amazing," said Alana, still sounding half-stoned.

"Yours is better," said Narmata, finally daring to rest one hand on Alana's chest. Alana smiled and shifted a little so that Narmata's hand was hidden and at the same time in a better position for squeezing. Narmata ran a thumb over Alana's stiffened nipple and drew a deep gasp from the other girl.

Cupid could have watched them for a long time but he had other things to get to. He fluttered up to Narmata and cleared his throat. The two girls looked at him through wide eyes, Narmata's hand still cradling Alana's full breast. Until then, he'd been invisible to their eyes.

"You two are just darling, but I have business with Tilman here," said Cupid.

"Who's Tilman?" said Alana, her voice thick.

"Ah, silly nickname from my childhood, sweetest. Just a moment and I'll be right back." Narmata stood but Cupid held out one hand to stop her.

"No no, it's fine that she's with you here."

"Oh," said Narmata as she sat down. Alana immediately cuddled up against her, distracting her with kisses to Narmata's neck.

"Right. Well, I suppose you might be aware that there are some gods and goddesses hanging out at the mall this week. The thing is that you and your

buddy stole something from me, and you need to get it back.”

“What are you talking about?”

“My bow. And my arrows. Are you really that distracted here?”

Narmata gave Alana a long look, taking in everything from the other girl’s copper hair to her statuesque form to her tiny shoes. Cupid nodded and said, “Okay, fair enough, but seriously. You need to help me get them back, and I think I know how.”

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Linda Kravitz moaned with pleasure as her third partner of the day pounded into her from behind. Back in the back of the store where she worked, a clothing store called Zars, she’d been entertaining men ever since the spectacularly beautiful Indian woman had walked into the store. Linda didn’t know quite how it happened. She’d gone up to talk to the Indian woman and then...the woman had done something. For a moment Linda felt as though she’d been stabbed but then she’d been overwhelmed with a surge of horniness that was unlike anything that she’d felt in years. It was only then that she’d noticed that a small train of men had come in with the beautiful woman, and by that time she was well beyond conscious thought. She’d led the first two back to the dressing rooms and ever since then she’d been lost in a sea of hard flesh and thunderous climaxes.

Rati couldn’t believe that things were going so well. She herself was strong enough to create lust in mortals with a little bit of effort, but the arrows that Cupid used were so much more versatile! She laughed happily as Linda came again, her muffled cries mixing with her partner’s. Rati had chosen Linda because the woman had been wasting her beauty; even middle-aged, Linda was a striking woman, but she hadn’t been on a date in years. Rati had focused her power through the arrow that she’d slid into Linda’s arm and suddenly Linda had unleashed the slumbering libido deep within. Rati couldn’t be happier.

She smiled when she looked up and found Dagmar standing in the doorway of the shop. There was a field around the doorway, one that made most mortals

think that the shop was closed, but the Valkyrie had pierced it. She looked magnificent, standing there with her spear and in her armor, her heavy bosom heaving from her run as she glared at Rati.

“Keene!” she said. “You’re Narmata’s friend, aren’t you.”

Dagmar lowered her spear and approached Rati. There were some distracting sounds coming from the dressing area but she didn’t let them split her focus. “I demand in Freya’s name that you hand over the arrows, goddess.”

“Oh, I’m afraid there’s only one left,” said Rati, holding up an arrow and giving Dagmar a pouting look. She shifted her beautiful hips a little to hide the arrows that still sat in her back pocket.

The Valkyrie frowned and held out her free hand. “Still, I need to take it to ensure my lady’s safety.”

“Is that what this is about? Then by all means, please take it,” said Rati. When Dagmar reached for the arrow, Rati held it out at exactly the right angle to let it slide smoothly into the Valkyrie’s palm. She unleashed a pulse of power at the same time, and Dagmar blinked as it flowed into her.

Dagmar felt a sudden pulse of pain followed by a swelling of desire stronger than anything she’d ever felt before. Her vision went reddish as her body suddenly turned hot. It felt as though she’d swelled two sizes and her armor was constricting instead of protecting. She felt it do its changing routine, shifting in accordance with her sudden desires. Keene, in Dagmar’s body, didn’t know how to process what she felt. Her groin felt like it was on fire, a deep and wet heat that burned up into fundamental places inside of her before spreading to the rest of her body. Her chest tingled, her nipples hardened, her throat flushed, and her eyes dilated.

Rati reached out and patted Dagmar’s cheek as the Valkyrie’s armor turned into highly suggestive lingerie. “Poor boy. To be suddenly put in control of a body like that...you need help and an education, don’t you.”

The instant that her fingers touched Dagmar’s cheek, Keene was back in control. The problem was that Keene wasn’t controlling a male body as before; she was in command of Dagmar’s body and it was still revved up and excited in a way that Keene had only read about. She turned away from Rati and noticed the men

standing there waiting for their turn with Linda. Rati patted Keene's shoulder and said, "The dressing rooms have more room, my boy. Why don't you pick out a couple of partners?"

Keene strode toward two of the men, fully aware of the way that her strong body looked in the clinging lingerie. They followed her without question even though she wasn't sure what she wanted to do with them once she got them back to the dressing rooms. Her world seemed to contract until all she could really see was that they were both quite ready for a woman like her.

Rati smiled after them, so delighted with herself and the situation that she didn't notice a change in the quality of the lust in the room until it was too late to react. By the time she turned around, Narmata had already plucked the remaining arrows from Rati's back pocket.

Rati frowned and put her hands on her hips. "Now why would you do something like that, Tilman?" She gestured toward Alana, who looked confused by the sights and sounds around her but who was still determined to hold Narmata's hand. "Don't you have enough to handle with just one lover?"

Alana frowned as well, looking at Narmata. "You don't want someone else, do you?"

Narmata shook her head, backing slowly away from the irritated goddess. "Cupid wanted his arrows back, remember?"

"Did he now!" said another voice. Ishtar strode in, immediately drawing all eyes to her as only a goddess of love and war could do.

Narmata gave the goddess a nod and a smile. "That's the plan, yes." Alana hugged her arm, pressing her delightful flesh into her new girlfriend.

"I don't see the little cherub here. In fact, I-

"You should open your eyes, then, Ish," said Cupid. He fluttered down from the ceiling, passing through tile and displays alike as if little more than a ghost. He twanged the string on his bow and gave Ishtar a self-satisfied look.

"It doesn't matter," said Ishtar. She held out her hand and a sword appeared in it, looking very dangerous. "I'm going to be the last one standing here when this is

all over.”

“Perhaps, but perhaps not,” said Freya. She entered the store as if she owned it. Behind her, the doors slammed shut and locked. “If I recall correctly, you didn’t bring any backup, my dear goddess. Some of us have already acquired a Valkyrie for help in this battle.”

That was the moment when Keene shrieked in pleasure from the dressing rooms. She had two men on her, one between her legs and one enjoying the valley between her heavy breasts. She hadn’t lasted long against the insistent desires that burned in her body, and now she felt nothing but incredible ecstasy as she climaxed. The man inside her was so hot and hard, stretching her and sending waves of lightning through her, and she had quickly lost all inhibitions. She couldn’t even hear Freya’s voice over her pleasure as she came and came, writhing helplessly on her back.

Freya’s face darkened momentarily and then she waved her hand in dismissal. “No matter. You still cannot overcome me.”

“What if I don’t need to?” said Rati suddenly. She glanced at Narmata and said, “Use the arrows, my boy. Just throw them. A mortal’s hand can guide them without the bow.”

“What? No she-” said Cupid, stopping when an arrow struck him. He was intimately familiar with the sensations of new love. He looked to Ishtar and his eyes widened as he saw her in an entirely new light.

Other arrows struck others in the store; Narmata had thrown her entire handful. A few of the men were struck and their eyes widened in the same way that Cupid’s had as they looked around. One arrow even streaked through the wall, catching Keene during her second climax of the day. Another arched out of the shop on business of its own.

The goddesses of love tried to dodge but the arrows of Eros always strike their targets. Ishtar became fascinated with one of the men, an utterly average accountant in a threadbare suit who’d been scooped up in Rati’s wake earlier. In her eyes he became a god among men as the arrow did its work, and she swayed toward him as she dropped her sword. Freya locked on to Cupid, suddenly seeing the cherub as more than an annoyance and rival; he was powerful and attractive and she wondered why she’d never seen him that way before.

Narmata stared around, still holding Alana's hand, as the small clothing shop gradually became the scene of an orgy. Petty annoyances like who was in love with whom were dealt with by simply welcoming multiple partners. Soon the only ones left standing were Narmata, Alana, and Rati.

Narmata and Alana looked at each other and smiled. Alana led the way, pulling her beloved back behind the counter where they could sink into relative privacy while they started to explore in earnest. It wasn't long before breathless coos and moans echoed behind the register.

Rati looked around and saw a man standing at the door, looking in. His eyes bore the telltale signs of having been struck by an arrow, and his body was obviously ravaged by war. Rati went to the door and let him in, smiling at him as he looked around for his new love. "She's in the back," she told Nelson, and he nodded his thanks.

By the time he got there, Keene's partners had deserted her to join the larger pile on the floor. Nelson came in and found her gloriously naked, soaked in sweat, and smiling at him with more than just lust in her eyes. He knelt with difficulty, pulling her to himself as they kissed again. For both of them it felt like water after a long day in the desert.

Rati looked around and shrugged. She re-locked the door and caused her own clothing to vanish with just a gesture. She headed for the pile. She hadn't been struck by an arrow, but a goddess didn't get to be the patron of lust and sex for nothing. It was time to celebrate.