The Wicked Tower

By Rawly Rawls

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Also, all characters in sexual situations are 18 years or older.

Chapter 1

Like most things, the echo of hooves died quickly out on the Hawk's Road. Engineers had somehow suspended the cobbled path along the ridge. On one side, a declivity fell hundreds of feet down to the sea. On the other rested a barren chasm, dark with volcanic glass. Duke Fortinbras Tullius scowled down at the sea from the window of his carriage. He had been a duke for only three days, his father having officially disappeared on Monday. And here he was, already summoned by the two queens regent. He looked up to see Accipiter Cubitum's twisting spires towering above him. The palace seemed to perch on the cliff like a hawk's nest. From their spot on the winding road, Fortinbras could see the newest tower rise above all others. Still under construction, its iridescence corkscrewed into a passing cloud. The Blessed Tower they called it. Fortinbras shivered. It didn't seem so blessed to him. "Does it frighten you, Potitus? The palace, I mean."

The valet looked over at his hulking master. Young Fortinbras, just past his twenty-fifth year, was larger than any man Potitus had met, standing nearly six and a half feet. The duke also had fair skin. His father's family had blood from north of the Inland Sea. But there was also gossip that his ancestors had consorted with giants. But Potitus preferred to think best of his master. "I accompanied your father many times to see the queens regent. They are most … accommodating, Your Grace."

"Yes, of course they are." Fortinbras nodded and continued to look out at the lapping waves far below. He thought of the gift he carried from his ancestors between his legs. He had nothing to fear. The queens regent were women, and Fortinbras has always had a way with women. He smiled at the thought of showing those twin rulers his mighty cock. He imagined the look on their faces as roles reversed and they swore oaths to his service while gagging on his cum. He closed his eyes, forgetting his cramped surroundings, the suspended road, and his missing father. He ran through his plan again. Find the Maiden Lucia and begin with her. He could do that. He would do that.

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“Well, that went well.” Fortinbras walked swiftly down the marble corridor away from the throne room. He paid little heed to the great animals posed in various states of aggression on either side of the red, running carpet. He shivered despite his heavy, formal cloak with its fur lining. The throne room had been beset by a singular chill. Not pleasant at all. Duke Fortinbras was used to the more pleasant things in life. “A simple meet and greet. They only asked of me my sworn loyalty and the sublimation of my lands. A trifle.”

“Yes, Your Grace.” Potitus scurried after his duke. The young man had such long strides it was difficult to keep up. “Are we going home now?”

“I think not.” Fortinbras looked around. He was pleased the queens hadn’t thought to give him an escort. “You know of my charge, Potitus?”

“I do not, Your Grace.” Potitus frowned. The sooner they left that dark place the better for him. But of course, he kept such feelings to himself. “What is your charge?”

“I must find the Maiden Lucia.”

“I would think the atrium would be a place to start the search.” Potitus was starting to huff and puff as his short legs worked to keep up with the duke.

“Excellent.” Fortinbras turned left at a junction, passing an angry looking scimitar-toothed cat. Fortinbras started when he looked down to see the lifeless, snarling thing, and then strode on. “Is it this way, then?”

“Actually, Lord Fortinbras, it is this way.” Potitus stood by the spotted cat, watching its cold, dead eyes closely. He gestured in the opposite direction. “It’s this way.”

“Oh, excellent.” Fortinbras turned, his long cloak twirling around him, and walked toward the atrium. He almost ventured a cheerful whistle, but looked around and thought better of it.

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What would the new duke want with her? Lucia followed the towering man, his valet at her heels. Those from the lands that surround the Inland Sea were not tall, with olive skin, and dark hair. But as she looked up at the back of his silver blond hair, Lucia thought how foreign this man’s complexation was. His eerie blue eyes had given her something of a fright when he’d fetched her from her tasks amongst the fruit trees.

“You know the princess well?” Fortinbras had the most offhanded tone, simply making small talk with one of the lesser classes. He didn’t bother to look back at her.

“I am her maiden, Your Grace.” Lucia looked down at her muddy gardening stola and wondered again, what such a man could want with her.

“Here we are, Your Grace.” Potitus stopped and pointed to a wooden door. “This is the room you asked for.”

“Very good, Potitus.” Fortinbras stopped, reached a great hand out, and opened the door with a long creak. “Please enter, maiden. We have much to discuss.” He ushered her in, admiring her wide hips and ripe ass. “Potitus, wait here for me. Make sure our conversation is uninterrupted.”

“Very well, Your Grace.” Potitus bowed low and watched his master stoop under the door lintel and disappear from sight.

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“Does the princess treat you fairly?” Fortinbras gazed about the room. It had been set for display, with an impressive suit of dragon-mail worn by a mannequin in a martial pose. The warrior, no doubt, was set to fight off the mighty rays out at sea. But such creatures were now nothing more than sentences in dusty old history books. Or perhaps fables. “Do the queens give you their approbation?”

“Well … I … I …” Lucia stammered as she studied his face so high above hers. He was handsome, but in a cold way. As if he’d been cut from glass. “I rarely see the queens. And Princess Minicia and I are quite close. We both have eighteen years and I’ve been her maiden for …” Lucia blushed. She could tell from his expression that she’d talked too intimately about the princess.

“You will do nicely.” Fortinbras removed his cloak and slung it over the dragon-mail. “Has anyone ever told you that your beauty rivals the moon, and that your eyes sparkle as do the stars?”

“No, Your Grace.” Her blush deepened. She thought of the stablehand that often flirted with her. He might think such things, but he’d never said them to her. Of course, he had stolen from her a few kisses here and there, which had much amused the other maidens and the princess. “May I ask, what is it you require of me?”

“I require nothing. But I ask all that you have to give.” Fortinbras removed his white robes to reveal his tunic underneath. He was already quite hard, and was well aware of the effect his cock had on a woman as it pushed on his tunic.

“Oh, my gods.” Lucia’s hand went to her mouth. Could his viper be that large? Her cheeks were now so hot she thought they’d explode. “Your Grace? I don’t … um … understand.” She rubbed her legs together and her stomach turned over and over like a winged bird. No man had ever made her feel this way. “Wait, you mustn't.” She turned her head as he removed his tunic, but her wide, brown eyes kept sight of him in the periphery. He was muscled and chiseled, everything over-large and out of proportion. Most of all his mammoth of a cock that sprung forth from his loins like an angry devil, with a dark blue head and great, terrible veins.

“Will a maiden tell a duke what he must do?” Fortinbras laughed and stepped toward her. His penis swayed before him. With each step, droplets of precum fell to the floor.

“I am in the queens’ service. It is my duty to –” She cut short when the great bluish head nudged her shoulder. He was so tall that had she been of mind, she could have taken him into her mouth while standing up. A great hand took hold of her brown hair, and her face was lowered to that wide blue-helmeted cock. Apparently, the duke was of mind. She really should put up a fight for her princess and the monarchy. Even a duke should not lay hands on those in service to the queens. But that aroma stole the fight from her soul. It was pungent, like fruit from lands south of the Surround, and it beguiled her senses. For the first time in her life, Lucia pleasured a man with her mouth.

“That’s a good girl.” Fortinbras voice lowered, and smoothed itself over each vowel. He practically purred, watching this young, forbidden woman fall to him. He never grew tired of these conquests. For the first few minutes, she remained taut like a bowstring, as he helped her rhythm with the weight of his hand on her silky brown hair. But it didn’t take long for her motion to turn fluid. What a sight she was, this sweet thing, bent slightly at the waist, fully clothed, and slobbering on his cock. She could get no more than the head in her mouth, but that was fine with Fortinbras. “I taste better than other men.”

“Mmmmpppphhhhhhhh.” Lucia reached both hands up to hold his manhood. She should not have been surprised, since she was rolling her tongue around that meaty helmet, but the weight of it startled her and caused her vagina to gush. She couldn’t reach her hands around the thing. She’d always thought herself to be a normal-sized woman, but at that moment she felt incredibly petite. She pulled off him and gasped for air. “Your Grace … is that enough? May I … go now?”

“Not quite yet, my little arbor flower.” Fortinbras, with skills gained from all the women who had fallen before little Lucia, quickly removed her stola. He drank in her naked beauty. Young, full tits heaved on her chest with each breath. Her dark nipples stood proudly on her copper skin. He admired the sweep out of her hips, and the black triangle between her legs. “First, you must open to me.”

“Wait … I haven’t … before … I … just wait …” Lucia felt herself rise above the floor, those great hands cupping her butt and lifting her into the air. She was now his plaything, and the realization sent an electric shock to her core. The smell of him surrounded her as he pressed her close and her cheek smooshed against that broad chest. “If you put it … in me … I’ll break.” Her heart thudded in her chest. She felt his helmet explore her outer folds. She convulsed in his arms.

“A common misconception, my maiden.” He slipped the head of his dick inside her and listened to her piggy grunts. She was his now. “You’d be surprised how often that’s been said to me. And untrue every time.” He tightened his grip on her round, little ass and pulled her down onto him several inches. She now wailed into his chest and clutched his back with her grubby hands.

“Too … much … uuuuggggghhhhhh … it’s … all the way … inside my belly … ooooohhhhhhhh.” Lucia was faintly embarrassed to lose control in front of a high lord, but her reasoning brain faded fast.

“It’s not halfway.” Fortinbras laughed again. “By summer’s end you’ll be riding me like the queens’ most nimble knight. Now here … ugh … take the rest of it.” With that he forced her down until their hips met. Her scream was surely heard by Potitus. Fortinbras hoped no other passersby wandered the halls in this part of the palace.

“Your Grace … ugh … Your Grace … Your Grace.” Soon, Lucia was guided by those massive hands to take great lunging strokes on that cock in midair. Her poor sandaled feet flopped on either side of the great mountain of a man, and her eyes lost focus. She had heard whispers about sex from the other women in

the palace. Either it was uncomfortable and confusing, or mildly pleasant. But this was something else entirely. Her whole body surged with the power of the gods. Her vagina stretched to just before the point she feared it might snap on her, but never further. It greedily hugged the mammoth invader inside her so tight that she thought she might squeeze him out. And her mind was set aflame. A roaring bonfire of lust reshaped her very expectations from life. If this sort of pleasure was possible, why had nobody told her before now? Why had they kept it hidden? As she bounded on the duke, she knew she would forever give him all that he asked in exchange for access to that magical tool between his legs. A long wail escaped her lips and her mind was carried off entirely, leaving behind only the writhing animal in her lover's arms.

"I am your first, I see." Fortinbras pulled her off his long cock and placed her on her feet. Her legs nearly gave out, but kept her upright with a hand on her shoulder. "Will you tell me more about the princess?" He turned her around and lifted her standing onto the cushion of an embroidered chair. This way, he only had to lower himself a little to slide back into her. He grabbed her hips and let her know the full force of his power, watching his dick furrow into her most protected places.

"Eeeiiiiiiiii … princess? Ugh … ugh …" Lucia wanted desperately to give him whatever he asked, but she couldn't get her mind to process his request. "Ugh … what … princess?"

"It seems …" Fortinbras chuckled. "… that I have so … uh … uh … uh … overpowered your mind that you cannot answer me."

To this, Lucia responded with a series of mewls.

"So be it." Fortinbras accelerated his pace. "It is time … for you … to receive … aaaaaauuuuuuggggghhhhhh." He let the eruption explode out of him and filled the young woman he had speared.

"Wwwwaaaa … wwwwwaa …" She wanted to tell him to wait again. To do it outside. But another orgasm had gripped her mind and robbed her of her speech. Instead of a protest, she quivered on him, held the chairback with rigid fingers, and let the fire spread within her womb.

A while later, Fortinbras retrieved his tunic and pulled it over his head. "Would you like to see me again, maiden?"

Lucia's eyes rolled languidly over to him. She sat slumped in the embroidered chair, still naked. Her breasts hung to the side, and her vagina burped out a copious amount of sperm. She tried to restart her mind. The first thought was that she'd need to see a witch to make sure she wasn't with child. "I must see you again, Your Grace." The ferocity of her own words startled her out of her stupor. She rose from the chair and moved toward her stola. She was well aware that his eyes followed her form and that she pleased him. "I mean, if you would care for such a meeting, I would be at your mercy." And she would be at his mercy. His plaything.

"Very good, my arbor blossom." Fortinbras smiled, set his robes just right, and pulled on his cloak.

As she pulled on her own clothes, Lucia marveled at the warmth in his smile. How a duke had come to see her this way was a deep mystery.

"I will send word." Fortinbras turned and headed for the door.

“Your Grace.” Lucia stopped struggling with her stola, the dress only covering her top-half, and curtsied. She would wait for his word with bated breath. But first she needed to see about cleaning the mess they’d made.

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“And how was my son’s visit to the palace?” Cassia smiled over at her oldest. He was now the Duke of Ostia Novus, she could hardly believe it. Her dimples lessened some as she reminded herself that his position came too early, at the expense of her poor husband. She brushed a curl of brown hair away from her round, pretty face. “Did you find the queens in good health?”

“They made me … take an … oath,” Fortinbras said between great bites of honeyed ham. “All went … well.” He looked from his sweet mother across the long table over to the Sorceress Brynhild. The woman winked a blue eye at the duke and Fortinbras nodded back. Then his gaze moved down the table to his siblings. His older sister, Bantia sat backlit by the roaring fire, she prodded her meat with a silver fork, curtains of brown hair fell on either side of her face. Fortinbras looked next to his little brother, Vel, now nineteen years and nearly as tall as his brother. The boy had inherited the same fair features, too, but his aspect was unmanly in Fortinbras’s opinion. He was a wraith of a man, made of only skin and bone. Which was fine, since he was destined for a life without responsibility of title or lands. Finally, Fortinbras looked to the youngest of the bunch. Naevia was a woman grown at eighteen years, but she maintained a youthful quality. Unlike the rest of her family, she had neither blond nor dark hair, but instead a flaming cascade of copper waves flowed over her shoulders. At the moment, she stared doe-eyed at Vel. Fortinbras wondered about those two sometimes. Now that he was the head of the family, he would have to have a talk with them sometime soon. He turned back to his mother. “I think I shall visit the palace again, soon.” He gave her a mischievous look.

“Now, little sparrow. I know that expression well.” Cassia frowned at her handsome son. “Trouble followed on the heels of that smile throughout your childhood. The queens are not some dockside friends to be taken lightly. Do not *mess* with them. Your father would only visit the palace upon invitation and even then –”

Fortinbras cut her off with a wave. “Did I say that I would travel without an invite?”

“They’ve invited you back?” Cassia raised an eyebrow. She did not want royal eyes upon her house. Better to be left to their work running Ostia Novus. They were, after all, the port of destination for all the Surround.

“Did I say that?” Fortinbras smirked again and then turned his attention back to his ham.

“His Grace’s power is now in full bloom.” The Sorceress Brynhild smiled pleasantly, showing off her chilling northern smile. She was a tall woman, dwarfing the other ladies at the table. Her blond hair was braided up on her head, in a way not in fashion in the Surround. “Don’t you think it’s best to let him see to his own business?”

“Yes.” Cassia’s round face fell. “Yes, of course.” Her husband had always lent an ear to her advice. She would have to adjust to their new life. She turned her attention back to her meal.

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“Are you sure Your Grace wouldn’t prefer some young thing between his bedsheets?” Brynhild carefully removed her stola. She measured her pace to tease the young man as much as possible. She lowered the dress rather than lifting it over her head, exposing one pale breast after the other.

“I had a young thing earlier today on your suggestion.” Fortinbras laughed and reached for his hardening member. He lay on his back in the middle of his enormous four-post bed, watching the beauty sway as she disrobed. “Besides, you look every bit as young as the Maiden Lucia. But much more beautiful.” He carefully regarded her breasts, with their pale pink nipples jutting out. The breasts were probably bigger than Lucia’s, but on this tall woman they were proportionally smaller. They suited her well, Fortinbras thought. He watched as her flat midriff came into view.

“I look that young, you think? His Grace is too kind.” Brynhild could see his eyes fix on the blond hair between her legs. His cock rose higher still. He was like a dog trained to obey for its reward. “Looks are often deceiving.”

“Whatever you say.” Fortinbras reached out for her and pulled her into bed with him. She was the only woman he’d been with who somewhat matched him in size. He mused on her body as he pulled her on top of him and she guided him into her ready pussy. This was how most people of the Surround experienced their mating. Two giants were no different than small people relative to one another. “How are you always so tight?”

Brynhild ground her hips on him and ignored the question. “I know … ooohhhhhh … you like them young,” she cooed. “But how about older women? Do you fancy them … as well? Your mother is very pretty.” She dug her nails into his chest and felt that wonderful cock stretch at her. Every time was like the first time. Because, of course, her vagina was unlike that of any other women.

“My mother?” Fortinbras frowned. “The gods forbid it. And, anyway, she is … my mother.” Despite the woman working him he felt his dick deflate some.

“You long for her, Your Grace.” Brynhild’s eyes locked with his and moved her rhythm faster, now bouncing on his dick. She could feel him harden again. “She cared for you your whole life, bringing you countless joys. It is time you brought her happiness, too. Especially now that your father is gone and her bed is a barren place.”

“By the gods, you’re right.” Fortinbras couldn’t believe it. He had had these feelings all along, and only now just realized them. “I will bring her happiness on the end of my spear.”

“That’s my duke.” Brynhild bounced and rocked her hips in a motion she had honed over the centuries, guaranteed to bring a man to his completion. Her breasts hopped wildly before his eyes. “Now … ugh … give me your seed … oooohhhhhhhhh.” She rolled her eyes and cried out as the young man bellowed and emptied himself inside her.

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“I’m already in here, young man. You can take a bath later.” Cassia covered her large breasts with her arms and squinted through the swirling steam. She couldn’t see the intruder clearly, but his hulking, manly form gave him away. It was clearly her first born son.

“I wanted to join you, Mother.” His keen eyes were blunted by the murk of the room. Fortinbras strode in, confident as could be despite his nakedness in front of his own mother. His heavy dick, soft for the moment, swung between his legs as he carefully stepped through the tiled room. “We need to have a talk in privacy.” He slipped into the bath opposite her. Now that he was closer, he could see the swell of her hanging breasts behind her arm. She was so full of curves and supple promises. So unlike the young women he normally consorted with. How had he not seen her true beauty before now?

“We can have a private chat when I am fully dressed.” Cassia didn’t like the way he looked at her. Her sons were so different. If only gentle Vel had been the first born. He would make for a more caring master. “Please leave and we can discuss this later.”

“You may go.” Fortinbras waved his hand at the shadows of servants that lined about the room. The women quickly exited leaving mother and son alone in the bath. “Now, that’s better. I’ve been thinking, you must be very lonely with Father gone.” He slid along the bench around the bath until they were next to one another. Steam rose around them and he could see beads of sweat form on her forehead and exposed shoulders. Such delicate shoulders, wonderfully juxtaposed with the swell of her breasts just below. He put a hand on her arm and slowly lowered it into the water. His eyes feasted on her exposed flesh. Her nipples were large and dark, with wide areola.

“What … are you doing, darling?” Cassia was well aware that he was aiming to cross a terrible Rubicon. As a woman of the Surround, she always felt small in her son’s presence. But never more so than at that moment.

“Call me Duke Fortinbras, or Your Grace.” Fortinbras bent down and kissed her cheek demurely. “I am your duke. And you are still my duchess, no?”

“I am … the duchess … yes.” The steam seemed to constrict her breathing. Cassia needed to leave that place, and quickly. She lifted herself from the water, knowing full well that she would expose her lower half to him. Sure enough, as she climbed out of the bath, she could see his eyes upon her butt. She stood straight above him dripping on the tile, looking down at him over her shoulder.

“You look less a duchess and more a Venus. You are, in my eyes, the very goddess of fertility and harvest.” He reached out a hand and clasped her ankle so that she wouldn’t slip away. “Come back to the bath.”

“Let go of me, Your Grace,” she said the last two words with a hiss. She pulled her leg, but his grip was firm.

“Oh, I’m sorry.” Vel stepped into the bath, and saw his mother’s form through the haze. “I saw the servants leave. I thought you had left, Mother.”

“Turn and go, little sparrow.” Cassia’s voice had a hint of desperation. She could see Vel’s tall lanky form hesitate. “You can have the bath in a little while.”

“Is there someone with you?” Vel had poor eyesight, but he thought he saw the shadow of a man in the bath next to his mother. By the man’s size he could be no other but the duke. “Are you in trouble?” He did not like the tone of Cassia’s voice. He took a couple steps across the room, paused, and pulled his robes tight around him.

“You are dismissed, little brother,” Fortinbras sneered. His grip tightened on the ankle he held. “Go off and find Naevia so that you might play your games together. Leave me to play mine.”

Vel blinked. He could just make out a strong, muscled arm snaking out of the bath, clutching Cassia. He knew that his brother suspected he and Naevia of being closer than they were, which meant that Vel understood the kind of games Fortinbras had planned for their mother. “Leave her alone.” Vel hurried to the bath, bent down, and tried to pry his brother’s fingers from their mother’s ankle.

Having none of the intrusion, Fortinbras slammed his other fist into Vel’s right check.

“Nooooo!” Cassia screamed.

Vel’s robes opened as he fell to the tile with a crack of ceramic. Fortinbras hesitated when he saw the young man’s manhood exposed. Soft though Vel was, he was quite large. He was, indeed, more manly than Fortinbras had thought.

“Get your hand off my mother.” Using his brother’s brief pause, Vel got to his feet and pulled Cassia from his clutches. “Come, let’s go.” Vel stumbled away, he protectively pulled her under his robes, aware of her hot skin against his. He felt her boob bounce against his hip as they walked, but he did his best to put it out of his mind.

Outside the bath, mother and son nearly ran into Potitus who was loitering about.

“Where is the duke?” Potitus looked unsure of himself as he blocked their path.

“His Grace is enjoying his bath.” Cassia mustered her best smile. “Out of our way, Potitus.”

The man didn’t move.

“Did you not hear your duchess? Move.” Vel was concerned that each moment wasted in the hall offered his brother a chance to retrieve their mother.

Reluctantly, Potitus stepped aside.

“Let’s get you back to your rooms.” Vel took a deep breath in the clear air of the hall. They turned right and hurried away. He looked over his shoulder frequently, but it seemed Fortinbras had not pursued them.

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That night, as the family supped on lamprey bisque, a quiet beset the table. The duke had little to say to the others, but glared especially at his younger brother.

Vel kept his head down, and barely enjoyed the salty meal. He was appreciative of Naevia's hand on his thigh. He hadn't told her how he'd bruised his face, but her green eyes wouldn't leave his cheek, and her freckled face wore a particularly severe frown for one usually prone to joviality.

"I will leave for the palace first thing tomorrow." Fortinbras abruptly stood and cast his bowl into the roaring fire where it shattered. "It should be a day of good fortune for this family. Wish me luck."

They all murmured their good luck to him, though none of them knew of his errand's purpose.

"Goodnight." He turned and strode out, his heavy cloak whirling about him. Potitus followed him out.

Silence lingered in the dining hall after he left. Servants removed the bisque and brought in honey cake. Cassia stood and bid her remaining children goodnight.

Bantia was next to leave. She mumbled her evening pleasantries, and her tall, slender frame vanished out the door.

Then it was just the youngest two.

"Tell me now, sweet Vel." Naevia gently touched the ghastly purple blotch on his cheek. "Was this our brother?" She whispered the words so that the remaining servants wouldn't hear. Like her mother, she had the stature of a woman from the surround, so her hand appeared quite small next to her brother's face.

"It's a confusing business." Vel smiled at her concern and ruffled her copper hair. He took a bite of cake and thought things over. "I hardly know what I saw. You know how my eyes are. I cannot tell you anything for it would surely cast a pall upon our family. And right after Father's disappearance."

"What can't you tell me?" Naevia broke a piece of her own honey cake and took her eyes off her brother to observe it. It was perfectly light and spongy. She squeezed. Yet firm. "You were never very good with secrets."

"I really can't." Vel stood, and gave her a sad smile. He bent low and kissed her perfect forehead. "I'm going to read in the library. We'll talk tomorrow." As he left, his sandal crunched on a piece of his brother's bowl that had ejected itself from the fire. His brow furrowed. He needed to do some research. He couldn't tell up from down at the moment.

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The muffled screaming seeped out into the hall. Apparently, the maiden enjoyed her second meeting with the duke. Potitus smirked as he listened to her fall out of her mind. He leaned against the stone wall near the posed carcass of a giant beaver. The taxidermist had done his best to make the beast look menacing, but it was a beaver after all. Potitus gave the creature a nod. They were becoming fast friends, having spent hours in the hallway together.

A deep ringing vibrated the stone gently. The great bell on the tower somewhere far above them told the palace that noon had arrived. It informed Potitus that he had spent his whole morning listening to rutting with his aquatic friend. “Will they ever finish?” He rolled his eyes at the lifeless animal. A few minutes later, he heard a mighty roar and the loudest cry yet from the woman. “Finally. Right?” The beaver did not reply. It had the patience of Pluto.

It was none of Potitus’s business where the duke sought out pussy. But the valet wondered why they braved the Hawk’s Road, waking up at an ungodly hour, just so the duke could dip his wand in some woman bound to another. Maybe the duke enjoyed taking what was not his? Potitus couldn’t say. But if that was the case, there were plenty of wives in Ostia Novus. And none of them bound to the princess as was the Maiden Lucia. But the duke was the duke, and who was Potitus to question?

The door opened and Lucia emerged. She closed the door behind her and didn’t look at Potitus. Her stola was ripped at the shoulder, and she waddled away down the hall as if she had just spent all morning riding some giant beast. Which, Potitus mused, she had. Motion down the hall caught his eye. Men in the blue cloaks of the palace guard moved two-by-two down toward him. Potitus cast his eyes to the ground and tried to look like he belonged out in the palace corridor for no reason. Thank the gods the duke had already stopped his rutting. Lucia passed them and disappeared. Potitus waited for the guards’ rustling cloaks to pass him, but instead, six pairs of sandaled feet stopped right in front of him. “Good, afternoon,” Potitus said.

“Just so,” said a cold feminine voice from down the hall.

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A knock on the door turned Fortinbras around just as he adjusted his robes. “Hold, Potitus. I am almost dressed. I’m starving. As a duke, do you think I’m entitled to a meal from the palace kitchen?”

The door swung open and Potitus stood in the doorway with the most odd expression screwed to his face.

“Well, man? The kitchens. What do you think?” Fortinbras pinned his cloak and eyed his valet. Was something wrong with the man? And then Potitus fell forward like a board, his face crashing into the stone slab floor. A dagger stuck from his back at about the point where Fortinbras figured the valet’s heart would be. The duke’s breath caught in the back of his throat. A singular chill entered the room.

“I do not think our kitchen will serve a duke without invitation. Even one from our great port of Ostia Novus.” A woman’s voice carried over the valet’s dead body. It was clean, crisp, and precise. Six men filed into the room, their blue cloaks clasped neatly over their purple tunics. And then, a pale woman with black hair wearing a green patinaed copper crown glided in behind them.

“Queen Regent Valeria.” Fortinbras dropped to a knee.

“Rise up.” Valeria carried with her a scepter of patinaed copper, with an image of Salacia fashioned on the head.

“You’ve … killed my valet … Your Majesty.” Fortinbras rose back to his full height, towering above the others in the room. His brow furrowed. Potitus was a good man. Normally he’d be in a rage. But it seemed one of the queens was responsible.

“A price needed to paid.” She stepped around her men and walked up to the duke. “You only just gave us your oath, and yet then you took from our princess.”

“Yes, I see.” Fortinbras nodded. So, this was his way out. Potitus was not an unfair price to pay for his transgressions with the Maiden Lucia. He’d been caught and now he’d need a new plan. “I hope you’ll forgive my passion for your beautiful maiden.”

“Your passion I can forgive.” Valeria looked up into the man’s ugly blue eyes. However could they stand to look at each other in the north, she wondered? Such a hideous people. “You were asking the maiden questions about the princess?” She turned and walked around the man. He reeked of sex. She loitered behind him.

“Only to know her royal highness better.” Fortinbras relaxed his shoulders. He was comfortable with words. “My family has long kept safe the Surround’s biggest port, but my seat of power is new. I felt in bed with the maiden I might learn more about how to please the crown.”

“Fifty-two years.”

“Your Majesty?” Fortinbras furrowed his brow again.

“Your family has guarded Ostia Novus for the crown for only fifty-two years. That is when your grandfather came from the north and aided in our revolution. We are the true people of the Surround. We who are dark, correctly proportioned, and do not scheme for others’ lands.” The queen pressed a button on her scepter and a four-inch spike silently rose from Salacia’s copper arm. “We our bound to honor your family’s seat and title. But we are growing short on male Tullius heirs.”

“I don’t understand.” Fortinbras tried to look over his shoulder at the queen, but she was standing right behind him.

“On that we agree.” Valeria thrust her scepter up and caught Fortinbras with the spike at the base of his skull. With a faint crack, the bone gave way and all four inches embedded in his brain. She then quickly removed the scepter and stepped away from the giant of a man. She did not want to be crushed like some unskilled lumberjack. With a mighty thump, the erstwhile duke’s body hit the stone floor. “Let us hope your brother understands more than you did. We will tolerate you Tullius savages in Ostia Novus,” she said to the bleeding corpse. “But not here. Never in Accipiter Cubitum. And we cannot forgive treachery.”

Chapter 2

There was a smile on his mother's sweet, round face. But her tears worked to undermine and confuse her expression. Vel stood awkwardly as she buttoned his robes just right. "Are you okay, Mother?"

"I'm fine." Cassia sighed and did her best to keep her smile going. "I'm fine. It's just that the queens regent wasted no time in naming you the new duke. Your brother may still be traveling, or spending his time on one of his … hobbies, or …" Weeping threatened to overtake her so she forced her mind to change course. "I'm just so proud of you. My Duke." She finished with the buttons, patted his chest, and looked up at him. "A man of nineteen years and so handsome. I remember when you were just a little thing at my breast, and you've sprouted like a weed." She reached up and lifted his chin so that his face struck a more regal pose. "Now remember, as duke, you are responsible for your people's happiness. Not the other way around. Many would treat such a position as a luxury, but you –"

"I know, I know, Mother." Vel didn't mean to cut her off, but he'd heard the lecture aimed at his older brother many times. How odd that those words should now find him. Vel was the brother who was supposed to inherit his name and nothing more. "I will be good to Ostia Novus, just as she has been good to me. And you will help me rule."

"I hope you will listen to my advice, darling. But I am nothing more than a dowager duchess. To be replaced when we find you a bride." Cassia wiped at her cheeks with the back of her hand and waved the servant girl over to affix Vel's cloak. Sage charred in the nearby brazier, and Cassia breathed in its sorrowful scent. Had she really lost her husband and her first-born in such a short span of time? "Brynhild would like to speak with you before your journey. Your father trusted her, so listen well. But …" Cassia's stomach turned over as she thought of the tall sorceress and her unnatural eyes. "But you may take your own counsel in all things. You do not have to do what she says."

"Yes, Mother." Vel watched his mother closely as she stood with her back toward him by the brazier. The maternal hourglass of her figure was not well hidden by her stola. Vel longed to curl in her lap and listen to her songs like in the days of his youth, burrowing into her bosom. But he was a man now, and he could no longer hide behind her skirts. "I love you, and I will make you proud."

"I love you too, little sparrow." She turned back to him. The tears had stopped and the smile widened. "You have the perfect temperament for what lies ahead. But you must steel yourself against those that would steer you wrong."

"I will." He bowed, a gesture no longer befitting his position, and turned to go. He would find the sorceress, Brynhild.

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"You may leave us." Brynhild waved her servants out of the room and watched the young man stand uncomfortably in her doorway. This would be all too easy. "Come in, Your Grace." She smiled warmly and offered him a cushioned chair. The Duke took a few steps into the room and stood, waiting.

“Congratulations on your ascendancy.” She languidly walked over to him, keeping her eyes locked on his. She was one of the few who could do this at his level, they were almost exactly the same height. She ruffled her northern dress, well aware of how much cleavage and leg it left to his viewing. So unlike the prim women of the Surround. “I have a request for you when you visit the Palace.”

“Yes, of course.” Vel nodded. The woman’s smile was warm, and she was very pretty. Her face looked like it was only a year or two older than his. But something about Brynhild had always put him on guard.

“After you meet with the queens regent, you will seek out a young woman in the company of the princess.” She pushed her power through her gaze. The people of the Surround had little belief in magic, which made them quite susceptible to its workings.

“I will?” Vel raised a blond eyebrow.

“The princess is taking suitors now, but spurns Ostia Novus.” She slowly walked around the duke. He was scrawny, but handsome. He bore himself well enough, with just the faintest hint of a slouch. And she had heard from the servants that he carried a similar package to his brother. He would do well enough. “You are to take one of her courtiers into your bed and gain her confidence. And then you will have access to the princess’s ear.”

“As you say.” Vel nodded. He thought about what his mother had said.

“Very good.” Brynhild walked back in front of him and kissed him on the cheek. She reached down and pulled her dress so that the milky skin of her breast was further exposed. “And you may claim a reward in advance, if you so desire.” She gave him a daring smile.

Vel cocked his head and a crooked smile tugged at the corner of his mouth. Was she offering what he thought she was? His cock gave a lurch. He had never been with a woman, and this powerful, beautiful creature was offering herself. Things would be different as duke, he realized. “Um … thank you, but my carriage waits.” He turned and made for the door.

“Oh. Very well.” Brynhild’s face fell. “I’ve selected a valet for you. He’ll be waiting by your carriage.” She needed someone to keep an eye on the duke, just as she had had men with his brother and father in their time.

“Thank you and good day.” Vel opened the door and hurried from the room. His mind a cloud of confusion.

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“I find it odd that the queens are building such a monstrosity.” Vel looked out at the palace from their carriage window as the wheels under them bumped along the narrow ribbon of the Hawk’s Road. Even with his poor vision, he could see the nascent tower rising above all others. “Should they not wait for the queen and her new king to ascend? It is her palace after all.”

“The princess has been of age for a long time. It may be that the queens regent seek to rule in their own right.” Naevia pressed her small hand into her brother’s large one and squeezed as they gazed out the

window. A breeze swept in and blew a strand of copper hair into her face. She pushed it away and pressed her side into Vel's oversized frame. The two youngest Tullius siblings had always been close. Often ignored as their older brother and sister took the center stage, Naevia and Vel relied on each other for companionship. She adjusted her shoulder to move her right boob away from Vel's lean body. How ever close they were, she was a grown woman, and her brother a young man. The last thing this family needed was the false accusation of impropriety, as Fortinbras had leveled at them not long ago. "Why bring me, Vel, instead of your valet? Brynhild selected him." She looked up into his narrow, squinting face as he dared his eyes to see into the distance. He looked almost comically adorable when concentrating.

"Do you trust the sorceress, Naevia?" Vel looked down into his sister's open and honest face, dappled as it was with freckles, and he smiled at the frown he saw there. She didn't need to answer. "Me either," Vel nodded and then looked off to the sea. It was mostly a fuzzy haze to him. "I've been thinking about sending her back north. But she's been with our family for a long time. I'm not sure how I might relieve us of her service."

"Tread carefully there." Naevia closed her eyes and leaned her head on his arm. The carriage rocked and helped settle her mind. "Have you told Mother?"

"She seems to trust Brynhild." Vel shrugged. The tower grew as they drew nearer the palace. His first summons to court since becoming a duke. All things equal, he'd rather let others carry out the tasks that were now laid out before him.

~~

"How was it?" Naevia jumped up from the marble bench when she saw her brother's long form stride down the hall. His shoulders seemed to droop. She frowned at him and took his hands in hers when he stopped in front of her.

"It was cold." Vel shivered, dropped her hands, and turned his sister away from the throne room. "I said my oath and that was it."

"Can we go home now?"

Vel took a step and paused. "I feel compelled to do another task while here. You should wait at the carriage."

"What is it?" Naevia looked up into her brother's blue eyes. So unlike her own. So unlike most anyone in that palace.

"I cannot say." Vel walked down the hall, and took a right down another corridor.

Naevia lifted her formal stola and hurried her legs to keep up. "You cannot tell *me*? That seems improbable." She tried to smile.

"Go back to the carriage, sister." Vel didn't look at her. His feet seemed to move on their own.

“Vel. Tell me.” her voice carried a sharp note. She grabbed at his wrist and stopped him in his tracks.

Something about her sweet voice shook his brain out its fog. “Brynhild wants me to …” He was embarrassed to say it, especially with the realization that he would have complied with the sorceress’s wishes but for that fierce, little hand on his wrist. “She wants me to bed one of the princess’s maidens. She wants me to be a suitor for the throne.”

“Oh, my.” Naevia put her free hand to her mouth. “But what if you’re caught?” She looked around them down the hall. It was empty but for the taxidermized corpse of a moose standing high, its antlers almost brushing the vaulted ceiling. “And why? You’re already a duke. Who needs to be king?” Naevia thought it over some more. “Do you even know how to … um … do it? With a woman, I mean.”

Vel’s pale cheeks turned scarlet at this last question. “Let’s go home, Naevia. We’ve done all we need to here.” He took her hand and backtracked toward the palace exit. They squeezed each other’s fingers tight.

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“You didn’t find the maiden, Your Grace?” A flash of confusion, followed by anger swept across Brynhild’s unlined face. Then her familiar, calm smile reappeared. A rainbow after a quick summer storm. The young man had refused her body and then ignored her plans. His brother and father had been quite suggestible. What was different about this one? “Did you look for her in the arboretum?”

“I did not.” Vel puffed out his chest, ready to send this woman on her way. “Naevia and I left after the oath.”

“You didn’t take my … I mean, your valet, Your Grace?” She eyed him closely. He looked almost to fit his station with his fine cloak and robes. But Brynhild could see the teenager underneath his accoutrements. “And now, I feel, you mean to send me away.” A most vulnerable sorrow spread across her face. She didn’t wait for an answer. “I beg you to keep me here with the Tullius family. I am sworn to help you achieve. The Peaceful North should not lose its most powerful foothold in the Surround.”

“What do I know of the North?”

“I will teach you. I will guide you. I am your friend, Your Grace.” Brynhild curtsied to him. She felt the change in the room and watched his young shoulders slump. She’d bought some time.

“You may stay. But no more missions. I will not bed women for you.” Vel turned and quickly stormed from the room. He thought of his mother and sister. He would find one or the other. He needed their gentle compassion. It had been a rough couple weeks.

Brynhild watched him go and then glided across the room to close her door. With a flick of her wrist, she locked it. “I fear he would never be king. What do I do?”

“He is more of a king than his brother or father.” The wind, in a soft whisper of a voice, answered her. It spoke in the most beguiling feminine tongue in the language of the polar circle. “You think too small.”

“I work with what I’m given. Fortinbras and Vel have the gifts of their ancestors. They cannot spy and cajole like their Lilliputian father.” Brynhild slowly lit her circle of candles by the window. As the wind spoke, the candles flickered. She knew she needed strong magic and quickly.

“I said you think small, not wrong.” The wind laughed, a fluttering cascade of ringing sounds. “You promised you would not make him bed more women. Keep your promise. Instead, send the women to him.”

“Am I to meet with each woman and push them one by one?” Brynhild sat cross-legged in the middle of her flaming circle with a sour expression on her face. “There is no magic in this world that would do as you say.”

“You think too small, child,” said the wind. “There are many worlds a hair’s breadth away from our own. I will now tear the slightest hole in this world so that you may reach through to a place that has what you seek.”

Brynhild felt the wind move into her and she gave her body over. Through the haze of magic that coursed through her like a wild blaze, she felt herself rip at the fabric of their very existence. And then, she reached her slender hand into … somewhere else. The place was so unlike the Surround, yet she recognized the land and the air. She pulled from that alien world a small stone. The rend in existence sealed back up as if it had never been there. She gasped as the wind left her. And then held up her hand. She held in her palm fine black dust that seemed to faintly pulse with some secret scarlet purpose. “All that for dust?”

“A pity,” the wind hissed. “I have not tried to bring such a rock through before. This one seems to have collapsed from the journey. But …” The wind picked up and swept around the room, careful not to disturb the dust. “… there is still power left. Infuse the dust in your duke. Bind it to him. This will achieve your aims.” The wind whistled out the window.

“But what does it do?” Brynhild felt the power in that dust. A part of some great being had been trapped inside. She was sure. Was this too blunt a tool? Was it too raw a power? A warmth spread down left her arm from the dust and moved to her heart. No, this would work well. She made a fist around the dust and felt quite lovely. She stood to prepare a way to get this powder into the duke, but then she felt a bit lightheaded. She steadied herself on a nearby table. Before she knew it, her free right hand was under her skirt. Fingers slid into her waiting gash. Had she ever been so wet? All she could think about was her stupid young duke and how terrible a thing it was that he’d refused her body. They would make such sweet music together. As she stood there frigging herself furiously, she started to make very fine solo music. Indeed, it sounded like she was singing her heart out as one sweeping orgasm followed the next.

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The duke’s guards would not let Brynhild pass. Especially not while the young lord was sleeping. She laughed and flattered the men. She pushed them with words toward sleep themselves, until both men slumped back against the stone wall. Somnolence reigned and their snores followed her into Vel’s chambers.

The powder now resided in an enchanted leather pouch. Brynhild thought it wise not to touch the stuff again. She crept to the great four-post bed and looked down on Vel. He slept well, his chest slowly rising and falling under the blankets. She hoped the foreign dust wouldn't kill the young man. Opening the pouch, she held it above his slack face. "Andlinnr ok khange," she whispered and turned the pouch over. The black dust hung in the air still pulsing red with beats as even as a heart. Then, as Vel breathed in, the dust turned to two little cyclones and disappeared up his narrow nostrils. Vel coughed, snorted, and rolled over onto his side.

The wind blew in from the open window, carrying with it the sea's salty depth. The breeze happily tugged at Brynhild's dress, spun about the room, and exited the way it had come. Brynhild turned and left the young duke to sleep. He would need his rest.

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Something wasn't quite right. Vel blinked his eyes open. He ached. Not all of him, no. His balls ached like they hadn't been drained in weeks. And he was incredibly hungry. He reached down under the blankets. The familiar steel of his morning tower met his grip. He knew he was bigger than men from the Surround, but that wasn't saying much. And now … now he was sure he'd never been this large before. And his balls felt overripe.

Torn between two kinds of hunger, Vel stroked himself madly. He needed to eat. But first, he needed to cum more desperately than at any point before. The blankets flapped wildly as he brought himself as quickly as he could to a climax. Even so, it was more than a half-hour before the bedding was soaked in a deluge of cum. He'd never suspected a man could produce so much. What was happening to him? He felt bad for the servants that would make his bed that day as he dressed and raced off to an early breakfast. And then he felt for the cook, because he knew that he would be eating near their entire larder.

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After his morning episode, Vel felt the day fall into line. He had some awkward moments adjusting to his swollen package, especially at fencing. He thought about requesting a healer, but everything in his body seemed to be working. Maybe working too well, if anything. He was just so hungry.

There were long silences at the supper table as the family ate. This was by far the most uncomfortable moment of the day. Usually, Vel enjoyed family time. But now he shoveled food into his mouth as they sat in quiet. "What did this day bring?" Vel said between bites. He looked around the table and suddenly realized that with his brother and father gone, and his new valet dismissed, he was the only man in the room. How odd a position for a duke.

"Archery lessons," Naevia mumbled. Followed by more silence.

“We would much like to hear about your day, Your Grace.” Brynhild seemed cheery as ever as she fixed her gaze on him. She brought the smallest bite of scallop pie to her pink lips and nibbled on it.

“I woke early.” Vel shrugged. “I met with the tutor, the marshal, and the seneschal.” As he thought it over, he realized that he’d spent most of the day around men. And now it was women as far as the eye could see. “And your day, Mother?”

“It was fine.” She looked up from her pie to her son and she could see that he did not miss the tears in her eyes. Immediately, a look of concern spread on his face. “I attended to the gardens, mostly,” she said.

“What’s wrong, mother?” Bantia, now the oldest of the Tullius siblings, reached out and patted her mother’s bare left arm. “Maybe Fortinbras will return. It hasn’t been that long.” She glanced quickly at her younger brother, but he had taken no offense. He never did.

“Something in the stars has turned against this family, I fear.” Cassia wiped at her tears. “I don’t think your brother or father are coming back.” She reached with her right hand and held Bantia’s hand. Taking a deep breath, Cassia looked around the table. “I am sorry. I’ve felt odd all day.” She fixed on her brightest smile and looked at her children. Bantia as soft, and solemn as ever. So tall and lithe like her brother. Naevia looking back at her mother with those big, innocent round eyes. Short and round like her mother. And then Vel. Vel … something ancient stirred inside Cassia as she gazed at him. It was the mother’s love that had always been there since his first days. But something more wild moved inside her, too. A vertical line formed on Cassia’s forehead as she tried to place that feeling. She couldn’t do it. “I do not mean to bring you all down.” She stood, not looking over at the other person sitting with the family. The sorceress.

“Wait.” Bantia stood too, as her mother moved toward the exit. She quickly followed and bent down to take Cassia’s hand. “I’ll go with you.” The pair left the warmth of the dining room.

“Goodnight, you two.” Vel called after them. Such a strange day. He shifted in his seat. An aching made itself known between his legs. He knew he would have to relieve himself again. And soon. He stood, adjusting his robes. “I’m tired myself. Goodnight, Naevia.” He smiled at his sister. “Goodnight, Sorceress.” He nodded to Brynhild, wondering if maybe he should confide in her his new condition. Her power might be limited as magic drained out of the world, but she did seem to have some tricks left. She might be of help.

“Not so fast, Vel.” Naevia stood and looked up at her brother. His posture was the same, his face the same, his eyes the same stormy blue they’d always been. He looked every bit the teenager he was. But also, he didn’t. There was something more compelling about him. “We haven’t seen each other all day. Would you have a few moments for me? I very much would like …” She touched his arm as she spoke and lost her train of thought. A tingling warmth spread from her fingertips down her arm. For some unknown reason, butterflies flapped in her belly. “… to talk.”

Uncomfortable as he was, Vel couldn’t say no to Naevia. His cock would just have to wait a few hours more. They held hands, as they often did, as they walked out of the room.

Behind Brynhild the fire roared. She nodded to herself as the servants moved in to remove their dishes. The wind was wise. Things were already in motion. She made a fist with her left hand where the powder had touched her skin. Her palm throbbed and tingled with warmth. How odd.

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The library stood at the top of the east tower. The stairs spiraled up and up to reach it. The rooms up there had once been part of a fortification, but the previous lineage of dukes had not seen a need for defense. Of course, that was one of their failings.

“Let me read to you.” Naevia let go of Vel’s hand as they entered the library and walked off to fetch a book. The warmth in her arm lingered. The library shelves went up several levels, with platforms and ladders to help browsers find their selection. But Naevia knew what she wanted. A tome on a lower shelf. She retrieved it and on her way back she closed the library door. It didn’t matter. Vel and Naevia were usually the only ones interested in reading. “*The Beating Heart of Elltreus*.”

“Ugh. A romance?” Vel sat on the sofa, removed his sandals, and kicked his feet up sideways. He watched his sister jump up with him and sit with her legs perpendicular to his, her knees bridging over his thighs. She opened the book, bit her lip as she searched for the right chapter, and then flipped the brittle old pages. Much to his horror, Vel felt his cock rise as the bottoms of her curving thighs rubbed against the tops of his. He should have excused himself before this for some relief. But it would be okay. His robes would conceal him.

Naevia read, but her mind was elsewhere. She was intensely aware of the heat rising up from her brother. Something was definitely happening. It was like the night before the Liberalia Festival the year she’d come of age. Her tummy churned with pure excitement. But she didn’t know why. It was the same old brother below her. After a while, she became aware that the book had turned racy. As a man escorted a woman toward a protected glade in the story, her vagina gushed. Why had the story affected her so? One hand left the book and settled on her brother’s thigh. She gasped and put down the book.

“What’s wrong?” Vel had been trying to think of his favorite ball game, Harpastum, to ignore the aching in his balls and what felt like a massive erection. When she dropped the book, he looked down. His mouth dropped when he saw that his robes looked like a tent. Apparently, there was no hiding his cock anymore. He looked up to Naevia’s wide eyes and saw that, never the fool, she’d noticed his cock, too.

“I’ve … been thinking.” Naevia gripped his thigh tighter. Nothing had ever made her feel how she felt at the sight of the outline of that thing under Vel’s robes. “If you … um … need to bed a woman as part of some … noble duties, would you know what to do?” The book slid off her lap and hit the tile floor with a thud. The torches guttered in their sconces as a breeze moved through the library. “I mean … I have no formal training. I’ve kissed boys … and fooled around some …” She leaned closer to him and reached for the fasteners on his robes.

“Naevia … don’t …” Vel’s lungs burned as he held his breath. He watched her fingers work on his clothes, and her pretty face go limp.

“If I can help you, Vel. If I can … oh, my.” She spread his robes wide and found the thing pressed against his tunic. There was a wet spot on the fabric above where the head pulsed. She could see the thing bounce slightly to Vel’s heartbeat. He offered no further protest, so she lifted the tunic. “Oh gods, Vel. It’s beautiful.” The head curved out quickly to its flange and was an intense, pinkish red. Clear fluid slowly leaked from the top. The shaft was long and thick, crisscrossed with purplish veins. She could see the whole thing move with Vel’s heart. “What should I do with it?” Her hands moved toward it, but stopped and rested on his hips instead of doing what her impulses commanded.

“The gods wouldn’t … I mean, can you imagine if our poor mother saw us?” He couldn’t think straight. The aching intensified. He needed release, and Naevia, with her freckles, innocent green eyes, and adoring expression, was the most beautiful thing in the world. “What do you want to do?” He watched her pale hands inch toward his cock.

“I’ll just touch it. I know how to do that.” Her hands felt so small as she ran her fingernails gently over his veins. Little shocks of electricity nearly made her cry out. She then wrapped her fingers as far round the thing as they’d go and pumped him. She could fit both hands easily on the shaft with room for a third, and maybe even a fourth. “This is a leviathan, Vel,” she whispered. Her hands became slick with his fluid and she now noticed the wet sounds they made in that vast circular room.

“Is my cock … so … odd?” Looking down at her work, he barely recognized his sweet sister or his cock. His penis had always been a long, pale slender thing. Now it was both colorful and fat.

“Yes,” Naevia breathed. She glanced up at his face and saw concern mixed with pleasure there. Her body vibrated with the knowledge that she was giving him this pleasure. Even if he was her brother, she wanted to be the one to do this for him. She had always been tightly tied to his happiness. “I mean … I’ve seen a few and they were like yours. But much … less so … if that makes sense.” She smiled when he nodded and his face eased into something that looked like pure elation. “Are you close?” Her hands pumped harder. “I want to make you do it, Vel. With my hands. In my hands.” She looked down at his swollen balls. They seemed an order of magnitude bigger than those of anyone else she’d fooled around with.

“I want that, too. Oh … Naevia … your hands are … perfect … but I’m not yet close.” He leaned back on the sofa, his head propped on a pillow so that he could watch her work. Her stola was modest, but he found himself watching the slight jiggle of her boobs under the fabric as her thin arms worked him hard.

“Well, then …” A smile crept onto her pink lips. “I shall redouble my efforts, *Your Grace*.” She said it with a playful, sarcastic lilt. Mighty cock or not, this was still her gentle Vel. And she did enjoy ribbing him from time to time. Even with her hands on him, it seemed.

Naevia worked him for a long time. Her arms grew tired, but she persisted out of sheer joy and dedication. She needed to see him explode.

“Perhaps … your mouth … Naevia?” Vel was beside himself with pleasure. He wanted the moment to go on into eternity, but he also wanted to reach the ecstatic promise of the end.

She glanced up into his eyes, cocked her head at him like he was crazy, and then looked back down at the pinkish head. An awful lot of that clear precum leaked out of him. Did she really want to touch that stuff with her tongue? Her pussy turned from a spring to a geyser at the thought. “Maybe … just … a

little.” She stopped pumping, held him fast, and licked along the curve of his head. It was salty, pungent, and delightful. Her hands resumed pumping, and she licked again and again. If the Naevia of yesterday could have seen herself twenty-four hours later she would have fainted, she thought. Then she realized Fortinbras had been right about them after all. But she pushed that thought far away. “Finish for me … Vel. I want to feel it … please,” she said between licks.

“I’m … close.” Vel’s whole body tensed. He gripped the cushions tightly. He watched his beautiful sister lean back from his cock, but continue her pumping. He knew she wouldn’t want to get covered in his stuff, but still he was disappointed she wasn’t closer to receive at least some of his cum. “Aaaaaaaahhhhhhhh.”

“Oh, my.” Naevia had thought she was safe at arm’s length, but the eruption, like the rest of Vel, far surpassed her experience with men. Long white ropes shot into the air again and again. The hot, salty stuff landed on her arms, on her stola, and her face. She closed her eyes and let it fall. She had never felt closer to anyone than she did as she let Vel cover her with his stuff. It was a while before he finished, but eventually he quieted, although he was still hard in her hands. She marveled at that, but released him and wiped at her eyes. When she’d cleaned them enough, she opened her eyelids and was greeted by the happiest smile she’d ever seen. She beamed back at Vel. “You’ve made a mess of me.”

“Oh … sorry.” Vel’s smile faded.

“No, silly.” She wiped the stuff from her nose and upper lip. She could taste the salt on her lips. “It’s okay. I mean … it’s not okay. But …” She searched for some way to fit this into the general contours of the world she knew. “But was this helpful for you? In case you should need to please a woman?” Her face fell a little. “Or, I mean, let her please you?”

“Very helpful, yes.” Vel nodded his head earnestly.

“Okay … okay …” She looked around, getting her bearings. “Okay, I’m going to race to the bath.”

Vel realized the problem. What a shocking scandal should anyone see her. And she had such a long way to go. “How can I help?”

“Clean up here.” Naevia stood on shaky legs and tried not to touch anything. She trotted to the door and stopped. “And never tell anyone about this.”

“Of course. Goodnight, Naevia.” He watched her round, shapely backside swish away in her stola. Vel leaned back and exhaled. Crazy on top of crazy. Something had clearly been done to him, and Vel was no fool. He would confront the sorceress as soon as he had a chance. In the meantime, he needed to clean the evidence of his misdeeds with his sister.

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The Port Syndicate stood in a line in the duke’s reception room. Seven bulky men in stained tunics making their case for control of the fifth pier. Vel sat on the olivewood seat that had been his brother’s and father’s not long ago. The chair was intricately carved with kraken, ships, and giant stingrays. To his

left sat the duchess, his mother. She poked him when it looked like he might doze off. The lead man for the syndicate drawled on and on about ancient dockside rights and precedence.

Vel's head lifted when a servant raced in carrying a roll of papyrus. The syndicate man stopped his petition and turned to look. The servant delivered the roll to Cassia, bowed, and stood by.

"Who delivered this?" Cassia examined the seal. It looked very much like a crude rendering of the Tullius sign of cephalopod and spear. She showed the wax mark to her son.

"It came by pigeon moments ago, Your Grace." The servant looked at the ground, her dark hair shielding her face.

"We have heard your words and will consider the matter of the fifth pier closely," Cassia's brow knitted as she stared at the seal.

"But, Your Grace …" One of the syndicate men started in again but no one listened.

Vel let the man drone on. He looked over at the concerned look on his mother's face as she broke the seal. He looked back to the men. It was clear Vel needed to say something. "I'm sorry to interrupt, but we have heard enough today. You will have our … I mean, my answer soon. Now, excuse us."

The men bowed grumpily and left the room. With a nod the servant followed them.

When they were alone, Vel turned back to his mother. He stood immediately when he saw the tears had returned to her eyes as she read. He put his hand on her trembling shoulder. "What is it?"

"Your father, Vel." Cassia looked up at her gentle son with her soft, brown eyes. "He's alive. He's alive and hiding in Kart Hadasht."

Vel slumped back into his carved chair. Was the seat still his? He could see the joy on his mother's face. This was good. Maybe he wouldn't have to be a duke after all. A smile spread on his face, too.

Chapter 3

The protective spells were supposed to guard Brynhild's sleep. A triangle of futhark runes were set into her headboard, taming all of the remaining magic of the world that would seek her out in her most vulnerable state. Nonetheless, the sorceress tossed and turned in her feather bed, muttering in her sleep. The cold, stone chamber was still and quiet despite the open windows.

In her dreams, a mighty giant thrust her left hand into a fire. The flames consumed her, but the heat concentrated on her small breasts and slim hips. A demon then burned her alive. With a start, Brynhild woke and sat up in bed. She clutched the blankets to her chest. Her chest … something was wrong. Slowly, she turned her bright, blue eyes down. Her bosom expanded out from her ribs in a way it never had before. A warmth beat a steady rhythm in her left palm as she slowly lowered the blankets. "What is this sorcery?" Her breasts now stood out proudly, with just a hint of obedience to gravity. Her white flesh was expansive, with protruding pink nipples jutting out.

Lowering the blankets further, she saw that her hips were now wide and round. Her jaw fell in horror. She held out her left hand and looked at the skin that had touched that dust. "You did this to me," she said to the absent wind. "I spent centuries beguiling with my Northern looks, and you've turned me into a common breeding sow." The thought disgusted her. She would have to conjure some old magic to bring herself back to the body she knew. But in the meantime … she couldn't help … touching herself. The throbbing hand slid down between her legs and her cries filled the formerly peaceful room.

~~

"I know you've done something." Vel entered Brynhild's chamber without knocking. "After I asked … I mean, commanded you to cease with your sorcery, you've turned me into a monster." He addressed the room without discrimination, spotted her leaning over a table, and turned to face her. "And you've donned a traveling cloak. Meaning to depart? You've turned me against my sister and now you will run?"

"If I understand your meaning, we are both victims of the same plot." She turned away from the book which she'd been fruitlessly searching, stood upright, and faced her duke.

"Speak plainly. What …?" But some of the bile left Vel when he saw the pain on her face.

"I wear this cloak not for travel, but for disguise." Brynhild unclasped the cloak and let it fall. "Behold, I now have the body of a whore." Her normal dress wouldn't fit her now, so she wore an ill-fitting stola that would have been much too small for her even before the changes of the night before. She watched his eyes as they roved her body in confusion.

"You're … much bigger … in certain places." Vel tried with measured success to keep his cock still. The woman before him looked less like the severe sorceress he knew, and more like the goddess of fertility.

“Your Grace looks much the same as before. Why did you think I’d turned you into a monster?” In shame, she covered herself with the cloak again. Her left hand throbbed with more intensity at his proximity. “And is your sister well?”

“Yes … yes … my sister is well.” It had taken Vel two days to gather the courage to confront Brynhild. In that time, he and Naevia had avoided each other. An unprecedented parting for the two inseparable siblings. “I … my … I see you have your hands full.” He winced at the unintended double meaning. “My problem is nothing. I have to go.”

“Very well, Your Grace.” Brynhild watched him go. She didn’t even try to entice him to stay. Would she even know how to use her sow’s body? She turned back to the book. There must be something she could do. The wind, of course, would not answer her questions. It was probably off laughing at her plight.

~~

“I must sail across the Inland Sea.” Cassia frowned at her children. Naevia and Vel sat on opposite sides of the council chamber. Obviously, Cassia noticed that they’d had some kind of falling out. Bantia sat between them with a look of shock on her face. Her daughters had just learned that their father was alive. “I will go to Kart Hadasht, find him, and bring Gallio home.”

“So, I am not the duke?” Vel’s whole body relaxed. His father would be home soon, and everything would return to normal.

“You must stay duke until your father returns.” Cassia thought things over. “This is a very unusual situation.”

“What did the letter say?” Bantia leaned forward across the circular table. “Exactly, I mean.”

Cassia reached into the pocket of her stola and withdrew the papyrus scroll. She handed it to her daughter. Bantia unrolled it, eyed the locked door, and then read aloud to her family. “My dearest Cassia. I have been blown far afield. You may find me in Kart Hadasht if you look, but it is a dangerous voyage and I urge you to remain at home. I trust our lands are well looked after by Fortinbras. When it is safe, I will fly home to you. Until then, I remain your flame in the wind. With undying love, your husband, Gallio.” Tears fell down Bantia’s cheeks. When she looked up, she saw that her sister and mother were crying, too. But her brother was all smiles. “What are you grinning at, Vel?” She frowned at him.

“What are you crying at?” Vel couldn’t wipe the grin off his face. “Our father is alive and will soon be home.”

“I only gathered the first part from the letter.” Naevia didn’t look at her brother as she spoke. She still couldn’t believe she had handled him in that unspeakable way and the shame of it bore its way through her. “It sounds like he has no intention of coming home. Did he flee with a woman?”

“Naevia!” Cassia put a hand to her breast in shock. “How can you say such a thing? The bonds between your father and I were forged by the gods. They are unbreakable. He has had some misadventure, and I will go to him.”

“Did the letter not say that it would be a dangerous trip to Kart Hadasht?” Bantia looked back down at the fragile papyrus in her hand.

“Nonsense, it’s but three days sail.” Cassia shook her head.

“I don’t think that’s what the letter meant.” Naevia scowled and regarded her pale, freckled hands.

A knock sounded on the door. Bantia handed the letter back to her mother who tucked it back into her stola. Vel stood, unlocked the door, and regarded the seneschal. “Yes?”

“Forgive me, Your Grace.” The seneschal, Aulus, bowed his head. “But you have a visitor.”

“Who is it, Aulus?” Cassia wiped the tears from her eyes.

“Dellia Bellius,” Aulus said.

“Our cousin is here?” Vel looked around the table. Smiles sprouted in the room like conidia flowers after a rain. “We haven’t seen her in ages. Does she bring her whole family?”

“Just her.” Aulus looked around the room. “What would you have me do?”

“Make her comfortable. We’ll be there shortly.” Cassia stood. “We’ll discuss the other thing later,” she said to her children. But she realized she had said it to Aulus only, standing by himself. Vel, Naevia, and Bantia had already pushed past him and raced out the door.

~~

“Ho, hey, it’s a crash of Tulliuses.” Dellia had not yet dismounted her horse when she spotted her family racing across the upper courtyard. Her lorica squamata moved like dragon scale and glinted gold in the sun as she kicked her leg and jumped from the steed. Dellia was tall for a woman of the Surround, but still much shorter than two of her cousins. She held her arms out and Naevia and Bantia embraced her.

“What a surprise.” Naevia squeezed her cousin’s metal scales. “Are you well?” She and Bantia let go and stepped back to look at her. She did indeed look well. Her olive skin glowed in the morning light, her dark hair tied back in braids, and her brown eyes glowed.

“Well, indeed.” Dellia’s smile was infectious. “What, no hug for your cousin? Now that you’re a big duke, you can’t be seen succumbing to frivolity?” She held her arms out to him.

Thinking of what he’d done to his sister, Vel hung back, but could think of no excuse. “It is very good to see you, Dellia.” He hugged her but made sure to keep from skin to skin contact. Since her head rested on his chest, that was done easily enough. “What brings you to our home?”

“Did your mother not tell you?” Dellia pushed Vel away roughly and punched him gently on his scrawny chest. “Your mother sent a pigeon to mine bearing excellent news. But she needed an opinion from one who knows the queens regent. And thus, my mother and father sent me with information. I am much more reliable than a pigeon, see. Much harder to intercept.” She patted the sword at her hip.

“And much prettier.” Naevia’s face brightened for the first time in days.

“Thank you, cousin.” Dellia turned and regarded Naevia’s flowing copper hair. “Though not as pretty as you, I’d say. Not by a long shot.” She gave Naevia a friendly shove with her hip. “Now then, get me inside and let’s get this message out of me.” She had always been the oldest of the cousins, now at twenty-seven years, and was used to ordering them around. This was a hard habit to break, even if one of them was now the Duke of Ostia Novus.

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“My father, or I should say, Lord Bellius, has his contacts in the royal palace.” Dellia looked about the round room. She was not familiar with this council chamber, but she supposed it was meant to be out of a mold. A room made to indicate a kindred power shared with Accipiter Cubitum Palace. Although, since there was no longer a council at the palace, did they still have need of such a chamber? Dellia supposed the queens might use the room for storage now. She rolled her shoulders, enjoying the pregnant pause as everyone waited for her words. It felt quite good to remove her chest band and armor. She often cursed the heavy, cumbersome breasts she’d inherited from her mother. This was one such moment. “Lord Bellius can confirm that Uncle Gallio, or … um … the duke …” She glanced at her cousin, Vel. “… or former duke, Gallio Tullius, is wanted by the Vulpes.”

Cassia’s face blanched at this. The room erupted in overlapping questions.

“Why?”

“How have we not heard of this?”

“Is he in trouble?”

“If it’s the Vulpes, are we all in danger?”

Cassia held her hand up for calm, but her arm trembled. The people around the table quieted. “Please, tell us all that Lord Bellius knows.”

After a while, Dellia finished her story. “That is why you cannot go to him, Cassia. While they suspect you, they believe Vel is loyal to the crown.”

“You say crown, but I feel like the monarchy is actually more carefully described as crowns,” Naevia said. “They could simply remove regent from their titles and all would be the same.”

“Don’t be a fool. Do you want to get us all killed?” Bantia looked at her sister with wide eyes.

“Yes, even in a room secure as this, we should not say such things.” Dellia nodded, her face somber.

Vel stared down at the table, rubbing his fingers against the inlay. This was his chance to remove himself from the mess he'd created with Naevia. Maybe with some time away, things would return to normal on his return. Especially if he brought his father home. "I'll go and get father."

"If father could return to us, he would have." Bantia frowned. "You cannot go and *get* him. Did you not hear that the secret police are looking for him?"

"Well, then, I'll go and find him and seek his council. We need to talk to him. Our cousin is right. Pigeons can be intercepted, men not so easily."

"I'm not so sure. They may not suspect you, Vel, but a sudden trip across the Inland Sea might fetch their eye." Dellia watched Vel closely. There was something different about him. Something had changed beyond what she'd expect by just the passage of time and title.

"No. We have to go to him. We have to." Cassia put her hand on her son's hand, but then quickly withdrew it. Her nerves were surely frayed, because when she touched him, she had felt an odd heat. "Vel will go, but he cannot go alone." She bit her lip and thought. "I'll need Bantia here to plan for her wedding. So Naevia, you must travel with your brother to Kart Hadasht."

Naevia and Vel both protested this immediately, but Cassia held up her hand again. "Please, Your Grace, I cannot force you to do a thing, but as your mother I need you to bring someone who can watch your back. If the Vulpes are truly into this, we don't know who we can trust. And Naevia's bow may come in handy." She looked beseechingly into his eyes. It was not a secret among the family that despite Vel's height, he was the weakest Tullius at his martial learning. Naevia had taken well to archery.

"Very well." Vel looked down at his hands again.

Naevia said nothing.

"I would like to also volunteer myself for this voyage." Dellia sat very straight in her chair. "You can, of course, depend on cousin Naevia and her bow, but my sword might also be trusted in a tight situation."

"Vel?" Cassia resisted the impulse to place her hand on her son's hand again.

"Yes." Vel nodded. This was going to be a web of pitfalls. He hoped it was a large enough boat that he might avoid both women.

"Perhaps also your sorceress would make a useful travel companion. That is, if she has any tricks left," Dellia said.

"No, family only," Cassia said quickly. She then paused to think things through. "We'll give the Port Syndicate the fifth pier as they requested. In return, I'll ask them to drum up a reason for a duke to cross the Inland Sea. Perhaps the syndicate needs an impartial trade negotiation on the edge of the Torched Lands. Yes?"

Everyone at the table nodded and rose. It was a somber procession out of the room. So unlike their excitement from just a short time before.

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For millennia, ships had been built and bound by magic. This allowed for massive vessels and shipbuilders to focus their knowledge on how best to harness the winds, or turn on a coin. But over the past century that magic waned, the boats shrunk, and tended to take on water. Vel stood on the deck, watching a storm overtake them, wishing magic hadn't been leaking out of the world. The boat was just big enough for his own cabin, but not big enough that he didn't have to share it with his sister and cousin. As such, he had spent much of the first twenty-four hours above deck.

"Time to head below, Your Grace." The captain approached the tall duke with appropriate reverence. "Things are about to get a mite choppy."

"May I stay and watch your crew work?" Vel turned to him and saw the fear in his eyes. He guessed the man wouldn't want to be responsible for the death of his duke.

"Of course, you may. But for your own safety, and that of my crew …" The captain shrugged.

"I would be in the way. I understand." Vel slumped his shoulders, turned, and took a step. He stopped when he saw his cousin checking the tackle. He turned back to the captain. "Is she to remain above deck?"

"She knows her way around a ship. We can use all able-bodied hands with that coming." The captain pointed to the billowing black clouds that closed in on them. "No offense, Your Grace."

"None taken." Vel headed below. He wouldn't want to be responsible for hurting any of the crew. He would face his sister in their cabin. It had to happen sooner or later.

~~

"So, you and the sorceress have been cursed?" Naevia clutched to her cot as the room heaved around her. She stared at her brother across the small cabin as he clutched to his undersized cot. He looked like he was enjoying this even less than she was. That was something, at least.

"Yes." Vel's stomach lurched with the room as the ship took another wave. "I didn't know my touch would make us … you know. Can we forget about it?"

"I know what your stuff smells like. I know what it tastes like." Naevia crinkled her nose, but it was not actually as unpleasant a memory as she let on. She looked about the room as a book slid across the floor to Vel's cot. She watched him reach over with his foot and step on it to stop it from sliding back across the room. She was glad for his robes to keep her eyes from trying to search out the lump under his tunic. The ship jerked and a great thump reverberated through the hull. Water dripped steadily through the outer wall of their cabin. "But since we may be about to die. I'll forget it. Is it safe to touch you now?" The boat shuddered again. All anger left her. She wanted nothing more than to curl in Vel's gentle arms and hold his hand as they'd always done.

“I’m sorry, Naevia. I don’t think so. I thought this trip would give me some time alone to figure this out. I didn’t intend for you to come.” His face went paler than usual as he watched the increasing trickle of water into their cabin. Small puddles pooled on the floor.

A more powerful jolt ran through the boat. With a scream, Naevia was tossed across the floor. Her cot, now loose from the wall, followed her as the tilt of the room sent her toward the wall several feet from Vel.

“Hang on.” Vel stretched himself out, reached out his hand, and grabbed her by the collar of her stola. He pulled his sister to the safety of his cot just as her cot slammed into the wall where she would have been. The broken cot then slid back toward the other side of the cabin and with the force of the storm, wedged its metal frame into the corner of the wall.

“Thank you.” Naevia found herself in her brother’s arms after all. Even as the storm continued to rage, it seemed the room had settled itself. A quiet fell over her. Warmth spread from the back of her neck where Vel still held her collar and his knuckles pressed into her spine. “I thought I was along on this voyage to watch your back. But you’ve got mine, it seems.”

“I love you, Naevia. I would never let anything happen to you.” Lying on his back on the cot, he looked down at his sister perched on his chest. He held the cot and braced his leg against the far wall, hoping the restraints on his side of the cabin would hold better than hers. “I’m sorry for all the strangeness. We’ll find a way to lift the curse.”

“Curses.” Naevia giggled. “As if such things still existed.”

“You’ve seen what Brynhild could do.” Vel shifted his weight to stay steady as the room moved about him.

“I’ve seen her quiet a horse. Nothing more.”

“You’ve seen my … you know.” Vel willed his hand to move away from the back of her neck, but found he couldn’t release her stola.

“Yes, I have seen it. It really was beautiful, Vel. So much more …” Naevia tensed as another shudder rumbled through the ship. She gripped his bony shoulders tight. “Do you think Dellia is okay up above?”

“She can fight. She can sail. She could challenge the gods to a pissing contest and win. I’m quite sure.” Vel tried desperately to calm his cock, but the churning room moved his sister just enough so that he could feel pressure from her various curves. “She’ll be fine.”

“She’ll be fine.” Naevia nodded and bit her lip. Her body relaxed some. The heat now radiated into the core of her, bringing her closer to her brother. “Can I confess something?”

“Yes,” Vel squeaked. Her face rose just above his. He felt her legs tighten around his sides as she straddled him. Were her hips rocking, or was that just the room? As he hardened, he wondered if he would poke at her. Her hips were centered right over his naval.

“Part of why I’ve been so distant, was that it was so … um … wonderful with you in the library. All my tussles with boys have been awkward. Those men were either needy, or somewhat bellicose.” She felt him finally release her collar and an emptiness filled her. But joy surged when he brushed her cheek

lightly with his fingertips and the warmth again returned with his touch. She leaned her head closer to his. “You are not like those other men, Vel. Your penis is a thing of beastly beauty. Forged right out of my dreams. Built for a singular, furrowing purpose.” She whispered these last words in his ear.

“It’s going to happen again.” Vel couldn’t help himself. He braced harder against the heaving room, lifted her stola, and held her bare hips just above her linen underwear.

“I can’t seem to care that it does. Kiss me, Vel.” She planted her lips on his. She could feel his abdomen tense under her thighs as he strove to keep them on his cot. Her hips moved back and forth ever so slightly. Between her legs, she felt nearly as wet as their cabin. She felt him tentatively push back with his lips, and then her tongue was in his mouth. She didn’t know if she felt closer like this, or when she had accepted his spray in the library. Her whole body thrummed like a taut bowstring. They kissed as would newlywed lovebirds despite the ship going to hell around them.

After a while, Naevia became aware that something poked at her backside over and over. Her eyes opened and she broke their kiss. “Are you really hard enough to push at my ass like that?” She smiled at him.

“I can’t help it.” Vel knew his own smile must look nearly idiotic. “You’re everything I’ve ever wanted, Naevia.”

“Well, in *that* case. I suppose you can just take what you want, *Your Grace*.” Her freckled cheeks dimpled as she laughed and looked down at him with adoration. “Do you want me to help you again?”

“I do. But only if you promise not to get mad at me afterwards. It’s been constant torment these past days with the way you’ve looked at me.”

“Oh, my poor little sparrow.” She kissed his cheek and slowly turned around on his chest, careful to hold on tight to his robes lest she go sliding across the cabin again. “I promise I won’t be mad. I was a fool to try and deny us this. We can make it work.” She finished her maneuvers so that her ankles were on either side of his ears, and her face hovered above his tent. She parted his robes and lifted his tunic. “My, my, my. It’s more beautiful than I remembered.” She took a firm grip of the shaft with both hands, confident that Vel would not let her go as she felt his hands return to her hips and slide over to her butt. When his fingers pressed into her flesh, she could feel how much he truly wanted her. Her heart melted at that, and without thinking she lowered her mouth to the crimson head and licked away the salty fluid that dribbled out. Soon, her head bobbed. He really was unlike anyone else she’d been with, or even seen. Try as she might, she couldn’t get much more than the head into her mouth.

Other than the constant strain to keep them from being thrown about the cabin, Vel was smitten by the moment. His beautiful sister, who had always shared his heart, was giving him the gift of flesh to go with her soul. He could smell the salty water as it seeped through the ship’s outer plating. But also, he could smell something earthy, pungent, and compelling. He had never before smelled its like. “How are you … so good at this?”

Naevia popped him out of her mouth and stroked the fat thing with her hands. Without a grip on the cot, she relied on Vel to keep her in place. “I’ve done this before … but not with anything like yours, Vel. You’re such a gentle brother, but this thing looks almost angry. Just the sight of it quells my insides.” She tried to look for his face over her shoulder, but he was hidden by the curve of her butt and her bunched

underwear. “If you like it so much, return the favor.” The boat gave a great shudder again, but she paid it no mind.

“You want me to …?” Vel wondered at that thought. Did men really put their mouths down there? Without thinking he pulled at her underwear and she lifted a leg to help him get them off. He could now see the bottom of her pussy lips, glistening and open like a flower. A compelling, bright pink invited him from inside. He felt he’d been summoned to a magnificent secret garden. And he never wanted to leave.

“Yes, I want you to. We’ve always done everything together. We should do this together. Mmmmpppphhhh.” She lowered her mouth back onto him. She didn’t bother with further argument because she knew he’d have the courage to taste her.

“Like this?” Vel lifted his head a little and pressed his fingers harder into the flesh of her ass. He licked. It tasted tangy and wonderful. A flavor not unlike the coveted fruits that sometimes arrived over the Roads of Trade. He licked again and soon he was lapping away at her like an eager puppy. Her moans around his cock gave him all the more incentive. “You taste … of ambrosia … Naevia.” She pressed her pussy down onto his face in response. He could feel her thighs tremble.

Naevia spit out the cock and rested her chin at its base. The thing rose up next to her, longer than her head. She let go of the shaft and gripped his hips. “Oh, gods. No one … ooooohhhhhhh … has ever done … that to meeeeeeeeee.” She screamed out the best climax of her eighteen years. Lost in a haze, her mind didn’t register the thin bulwark of the boat. It didn’t matter, the storm drowned out her cries of pleasure. When she’d returned to herself, her pussy still spasming, she went right back to work on her big brother. Pumping him and sucking him as best she could. She let his moans guide her work. She quickly learned to use less teeth, more tongue, and a solid squeeze with her hands.

Nearly delirious, Vel ceased his efforts on the vagina before him and leaned his head back on the cot. She was a master and he was her canvas. The ship had quieted some, but continued to heave. Vel released his grip. The siblings fell off the cot and into the water, now a couple inches deep, on the floor. With Vel on his back and Naevia working furiously on his midsection, they slid across the room. The room moved not quite as violently as before, so, they merely splashed up against the wall, and then slid back. They were both oblivious to their travels.

“Mmmpppphhhhh.” Naevia wanted nothing more than to cause his release. She was even ready to drink the life that would come out of him. Something she’d never done for any man before. The sea might be intent on drowning her that day. But she would rather drown on his seed. Her mind was now singularly focused on it.

As they slid back and forth, Vel felt his balls churn. “Careful … ugh … Naevia. Careful … it’s close.” He remembered how she had tried to avoid his cum the last time and wanted to give her the opportunity again. But truth be told, he hoped she would continue. He had drunk from her as he’d tasted her juices. He wanted to complete the circle and have her drink him. She was right, they had always done everything together. Why not this? “It’s … ah … happening.” He pressed his fingers tighter into her flesh. Water splashed all around him as they slid. He unloaded down her throat. “Aaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhh.” He could hear her gulping, and then gagging, and then his brain could process no more. Ecstasy enveloped him.

“Gggghhhh … ggggghhhhh …” Naevia tried her best to drink his stuff. But there was too much and it came out of him too forcefully. She swallowed a little and then was forced to spit him out. She leaned back and watched him spurt into the air, his cum falling down into the water as they slid back toward his cot. He was so potent. All the other men she’d been with had been kindling and he was a roaring fire. “My sweet Vel. Let it out. Yeesssssssss.” She licked her lips. His saltiness combined with the sea on her tongue. She reached out and grabbed his cot when they bumped into it and held them there so they slid no more. When he finished groaning and spraying, she leaned forward and licked the crimson head clean. She then turned herself around to face him. Her hair hung wet and limp around her face, and his hair nearly covered his. “I am not enamored of this look.” A small crooked smile tugged at her pink lips. Still holding the cot with one hand, she pushed his blond hair out of his face with the other. She was greeted by Vel’s biggest, and stupidest smile. Her own grin turned from a torch to a bonfire. “You’re smiling like an idiot, Vel.” She kissed his cheek.

“How can I help it?” Vel looked up into her deep green eyes, and studied her freckled face. She had water and cum all over her. “What a vision you are.”

“Yes, I’m sure I’ve never looked better.” But her smile persisted. “We should clean ourselves before cousin Dellia returns from her above deck duties. We wouldn’t want to give her a heart attack.” She reached next to them and splashed her hand in the water. “It seems I won’t have to run to the bath this time.” She laughed hard at the sheer joy and absurdity of what they’d done.

“Yes, the storm has lessened.” Vel felt the pull of each wave as the cabin rocked, but it was just a shadow of what it had been just a little while before. He reached into the water, scooped a handful, and splashed it on her face.

“Hey, watch it, big guy.” Naevia laughed harder, scooped some water herself, and splashed Vel in the face. Both, cackling like idiots, now splashed each other and pushed and shoved. A water war like they’d had often enough in the gardens back home. But this time, it ended with Naevia’s mouth distorted around his bloated cockhead again.

While Vel sat on the cot, Naevia brought him to another climax, her knees under water on the floor. She did no better drinking him than she’d done before. But it was easy enough to clean up afterward.

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Dellia opened the door and stumbled into her cabin. Her feet splashed through several inches of water and kicked a bit of floating debris. “I am … beyond exhausted.” She looked over to Naevia’s cot, crumpled and jammed in a corner, and then back to Vel’s cot where her cousins lay curled together. Their clothes were soaked through and they lay spooned, with Vel’s arm around his sister. “You two look more haggard than I feel. What happened here?” Dellia waved an arm at the crumpled cot and splashed her way to her own hammock in the far corner.

“We rode out the storm.” Naevia opened her eyes and looked up at Dellia. The woman looked like she’d just spent a day wresting lions. “Things were turbulent down here.” Naevia giggled. And then Vel stifled a laugh behind her.

“I am so happy you two find amusement out of almost joining Neptune at his palace.” Dellia wanted to grumble, but she smiled despite herself. “We’ve been blown off course.” She stretched out her body in the hammock and rested her head on a rolled tunic. “Add at least another day to our journey.” She yawned.

Vel squeezed his sister at this. Was it a blessing or curse to be trapped at sea together for more time? “Is everyone okay on deck? Did we lose anyone?”

But Dellia only snored in response.

“Vel, don’t,” Naevia scolded. She moved his hands from where they crept above her stola toward her breasts. “We’ll get caught.”

“I almost don’t care.” Vel sighed. He pushed his hardness into her backside and felt her wiggle back at him.

“I care. The gods would sever our limbs and feed us bit by bit to the gulls if they knew.” She squeezed his hand, holding it firmly above her stomach. The warmth spread through her. “And people of the Surround would be even less kind. Ostia Novus would be in need of another duke. Let’s focus on finding Father, and we can play when we return home. Would another trip to the library suit you?”

“Yes, Naevia. Your counsel is wise. As always, I’m glad to have you by my side.” Vel squeezed her and vowed never to let go. The ship gently rocked, and the drenched siblings drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 4

“Do you two always sleep so soundly?” Dellia shook Naevia’s arm. Her cousin’s stola was no longer soaked through, but still moist to the touch. The water on the floor of their cabin had drained away, hopefully finding the pumps down below. The ship listed to starboard, but not badly. “Wake up.” She punched Vel in the shoulder. Her cousins were still cuddled together. The comfort they seemed to find in each other’s arms needled at Dellia a little. She had never had siblings, and wondered if she was missing out. Then she thought of Fortinbras, shuddered, and decided it wasn’t a die she wanted cast.

“Is it breakfast?” Naevia opened her eyes. Pale sunshine angled to the battered floor from the round, dingy window. Feeling her brother’s arm around her, she snuggled back in. Warmth radiated from him all along her back.

“I don’t know about breakfast. But I was going to check on our luggage. I hope our pigeons have not drowned.” Dellia stretched out her arms with a yawn. “Do you want to come with me?”

“What?” Vel opened his eyes, realized that his sister was still in his arms and that his cousin hovered over them. He sat up quickly. “Yes, yes. I’ll help check our things.”

“Whoa.” Dellia turned her head in a show of giving him his modesty, but her eyes crept back to look at the tent in his robes. She had heard that those of giant blood were bigger than men of the Surround. “Your Grace may want to give himself a minute to settle before leaving the cabin. You could take a person’s eye out with that thing. I strongly doubt any sailors want to be accidently foisted on the end of your spear, Cousin. What say you, Naevia?”

“Oh. Oh, my.” Naevia’s pale cheeks turned red. She jumped up from the cot. “I would not be stabbed. No, never. I … we only slept like that because … well … my cot.” She pointed to the corner where the crumpled cot was wedged.

Dellia laughed with good nature. “Of course, Cousin. I would never dream that you two would … well … never mind.” She glanced back at Vel, and laughed harder when she saw how mortified the lad was. “I hope the presence of my feminine form does not cause your condition to linger.”

“No … it’s only … it’s morning … I’m sorry.” Vel turned his hips sideways, trying to hide his hardness.

“You look like you’ve been bitten by an adder.” Dellia held up her left hand and pointed at the iron ring on her finger. “Do you think I do not know the strange and involuntary habits of a man’s body? My husband has a similar morning affliction. Though, perhaps, not quite on the same magnitude.”

“Your husband. How is he?” Vel wanted Dellia to leave, but couldn’t tell her directly.

“Changing the subject, are we?” Dellia smiled. “He has new work from the crown, actually. But you would find it all quite boring.” She put her hand on Naevia’s shoulder. “Come, let us make our way to the holds. We’ll give your brother time on his own without the torment of the feminine species. Perhaps then he can calm himself.” She led Naevia to the door.

Naevia looked back at Vel and gave him a look to apologize for leaving him. She didn’t want him to think she was angry again. She caught his eye and then they were out the door and into the corridor.

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How odd a thing it was to make preparations for a wedding in the midst of all that chaos. Cassia's family had been in Ostia Novus for centuries. She wondered if there had ever been a wife and mother among all those merchant families that had a similar tempest spring so suddenly in their lives. She shook her head and leaned back in the velvet chair. Maybe. She watched Bantia stand with her chest strap and elegant linen underwear as the seamstress measured her on the other side of the room. The woman with the measure had to stand on a stool to do her work properly, and kept clucking her tongue at Bantia's height.

"I little less complaint, madame. Those are noble measurements you're taking," Cassia called across the room.

The seamstress turned toward the duchess and curtsied. "Apologies, I wasn't aware of my own complaints. Of course, she will cut the perfect figure in her gown when I have finished. She is a beautiful, and very tall, woman." She curtsied again.

"I don't mind, Mother." Bantia smiled over at Cassia. The mood around their home had lifted considerably with Gallio turning up alive and half the family on their way to find him. "She's about her task."

"Yes, of course. Carry on." Cassia nodded. If her daughter was happy, Cassia was happy. And that was just the thing. She had lost her eldest, and that was a hole that would never fill. But she still had her other children, and they had each other. And her husband was a clever man, and he would elude the Vulpes. They would pave things over with the crown, whatever the trouble was. The more she thought about it, the more certain she was that, among her ancestors, she was the lucky one. They all must have faced times harder than what she currently faced. Just like the seamstress, Cassia should not complain. Even to herself.

Cassia settled further into her chair. She smoothed her stola out on her legs and watched her eldest daughter's fitting. She would be married soon to a fine man of noble birth. She hoped they would find Naevia a man just as fine. She imagined having grandchildren around the castle and smiled.

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"There you are." Vel heaved a sigh of relief when he saw Naevia hurrying toward him. He had to stoop to walk in the ship's corridor, which made his progress slow. But his sister had room to spare above her head.

"I'm sorry," Naevia said in a hushed voice as she lifted herself on her tiptoes to embrace him. Then she held him at arm's length to get a good look at him. He seemed more handsome every time her gaze was

lucky enough to fall on him. “Dellia wanted to check everything. The birds were okay. But some of our cases were not watertight. I came back to you as soon as I thought proper.”

“Of course.” He resisted the urge to kiss her lips and kissed her forehead instead. She was a fresh spring in a barren forest. The lamplight emphasized the angles on her face and her body’s curves. “And where is our good cousin now?”

“Helping the crew? Fighting a kraken?” Naevia shrugged. “The woman cannot live without adventure.” She grasped his hands and felt that now familiar heat move into her. “Is your … um … stiffness … taken care of?” She looked around, but no one was there. The crew were either above deck, at the pumps, or sleeping off the stress of the passed storm. “Do you … need …?” She bit her bottom lip.

“I had to take care of it myself. It wouldn’t go away.” Vel felt some shame in admitting this, but he couldn’t lie to his sweet sister.

“Oh.” Her expression dropped a little. But it was for the best, if they kept at it in the boat, they would get caught. She reminded herself of her promise that they could indulge in more games once they got back to the privacy of their own library.

Vel suddenly turned and pulled on her. “But seeing you now, I feel that I maybe hadn’t done a satisfactory job.” They rushed back to their cabin. “Cousin Dellia should be busy for quite a while, don’t you think?”

“Yes, Vel.” Naevia’s heart threatened to beat out of her chest. The anticipation was almost too much. “I think we have some time.”

An hour later, they stood naked together. Naevia handled that thick pole with both hands. She felt so feminine standing next to him as they were, his penis on level with her breasts. Her small hands, moving quickly over those large, protruding veins. Her brother’s life flowed through those veins, and he had trusted it to her hands. “You are mighty, Vel. So very mighty.”

“Thank you … ah … Naevia.” Vel felt a bit awkward undressing in front of Naevia again. Vel did not have the square shoulders or the muscles of Fortinbras. He had seen the way women fawned over his older brother, and thought that wasn’t to be his destiny. But the way Naevia had looked at him, with the black of her pupils going wide and her mouth hanging open had given him courage. It was obvious that she liked what she saw. He looked down on her. Her freckled boobs shook as her arms worked him hard. His white stuff slowly slid down the slope of her heaving chest. He had cum for her once already, and she was getting him close again. His stuff also dripped from her chin and left cheek. He wanted to delay what he supposed would be his final orgasm with her on that voyage. “I should return the favor, no?”

“What?” She looked up at him in confusion, but gave a little shriek when he lifted her to a standing position on his cot. She lost her grip on his cock, but didn’t reach down for it. It was too far away and his fingers were clumsily exploring her gash. “Oh, I see.” She laughed and reached up to brush his blond hair off his forehead. He was still taller than her even as she stood on the cot. “You are always so thoughtful. Here, not like that.” She reached down to guide his hand. A finger slid in her. “Oh, yes. That’s better. Wait … no … like this.” She showed him what to do. The thought occurred to her that maybe this was too far, especially when their cabin door did not lock. But in for a pinch, in for a pile. “Aaaahhhhhhhhh.” She released his hand. He was doing fine on his own now. “Oh … oh … that feels …” She leaned forward

and buried her face in his chest to stifle her screams. It wouldn't do to bring the whole ship in there. If she let it all out, they would surely think her murdered.

"You're shaking … Naevia." Vel now had one finger pumping inside her and the other hand rubbed at her button. She was so warm and wet, he let his finger slide along the ridges hidden within her. He hadn't expected there to be ridges, but that new knowledge increased the intimacy he felt between them. "You are the most lovely creature." He removed his hands, reached around to her ass, and lifted her into the air, placing her legs over his shoulders.

"By the gods, Vel. You are … oh … my … ooooohhhhhhhhh." She felt his mouth go to work on her. He had learned quite a lot the previous day. Her back pressed up against the wall and she had to turn her head sideways as her shoulders bumped the rough ceiling. She stuck her fist in her mouth, shut her eyes tight, and shook out a tremendous orgasm riding her brother's narrow shoulders. When he lowered her back down to her feet, she leaned forward and eagerly took his angry, scarlet cockhead into her mouth. For the first time, she reached under it and placed her palms on his heavy balls. She couldn't tell if it was the moment, or his strange anatomy, but they seemed to pulse under her touch. She squeezed them in rhythm with the pulse and bobbed her head on Vel's penis.

"Naevia … what are you … doing?" He watched her wavy, copper hair sway and looked down at the delicate curve of her back as she stood with her ass sticking out. The swell of her narrow waist out to her wide hips was more than a siren song to Vel.

"Mmmpppphhhhh." Naevia sucked at Vel, still only able to get the giant head inside her mouth. With other boys back home, she had taken almost half their length. But Vel wasn't other boys.

"The gods … have given me … the best sister … in the Surround." In his passion, he forgot how the gods would really have felt should they have discovered brother and sister in such a position.
"Aaaahhhhhhhh." He let it out.

"Gggghhhhhhhhggghhhhhh." Naevia swallowed what she could, and when it was too much, she gagged and plopped the gushing head out of her mouth. She kept her face near the thing and let him spray her. She could tell it pleased him to see his stuff on her. And she was discovering that she might actually enjoy it as well. Pride surged as those heavy balls contracted in her hands over and over and a warm salty mess covered her. "My Vel. My sweet Vel," she cooed. When he was done shaking and erupting, she stood up and smiled at him. "I think you produced more the second time."

"Maybe so … but you looked … so beautiful." He embraced her and pulled her in tight, the mound of her soft right boob pressing just above his hip. Vel sighed, and his heart slowed. But when the catch on the door sounded, his pulse stopped all together. He released his cum drenched sister, leaned back, and pressed his hand on the door. The creaky door moved into the cabin, but only about an inch.

"Excuse me?" Dellia nearly hit her head on the door when it stopped abruptly in front of her. "Have you fallen asleep against the door, Vel?" She shoved it, but it only moved a little.

"I'm naked … changing … I'm changing in here." Vel called back. He pushed on the door, but his cousin was strong and it stayed open just a fraction of an inch. "Come back in a little while."

“I don’t care about your body, Your Grace. When you travel with a person across the Inland Sea, you’re bound to see what the gods gave them. You have nothing that I haven’t seen before.” She pushed at the door again, but it didn’t give.

“Um … I’m still … taking care of … you can’t …” Vel said.

“Oh, I see.” Dellia stopped pushing. “You are still working at the morning steel?”

“Well … um …” Vel squeaked. He looked over at his sister, who stood wide-eyed like a deer in a trap. He couldn’t help but gaze at her lovely breasts. Her puffy pink nipples stood out in the cold room, her small areola looked dark against her pale flesh. Those breasts hung so perfectly on her chest. Vel was still so hard despite the situation. He looked back into her eyes. She nodded as if to tell him to agree with their cousin. Vel shook his head, but said, “Yes … I’m having one of those days. I need a little more time.”

Dellia chuckled and removed her hand from the door. “The joys and torments of youth. Take your time.” She turned and headed back up the corridor. “I’ll go find your sister.”

“Goodness, Vel.” Naevia breathed a sigh of relief and raced into his arms. “I know we said it before, but we have to be more careful.” The familiar heat moved from her brother into her core.

“Yes.” Vel squeezed her. He had never been a risk-taker, but now he was putting his life on the very edge of a precipice. Not to mention his sister’s, and the reputation of his family. “More careful.”

“But you’re still so hard,” she said in a hush. Naevia found her hands returning to that massive organ. “Dellia said she would give you some time.”

“She did.” Vel’s muscles tightened as he watched his sister’s sweet, cum-covered face move closer to his cock.

“I can’t leave you in this state.” She opened wide and sucked hard on that wide head. Her hands pumped him as she worked him with her mouth.

“Oh … gods … Naevia.” Vel leaned back against the wall and let his sister go to work.

When they were done, they cleaned as best they could without water, but knew they were still a mess. The room smelled heavily of their actions. The siblings hoped Dellia would assign the smell to the joys and torments of youth, and think nothing beyond. Luckily for them, that’s exactly what she said when she returned to the cabin a good while later.

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With half the family gone and her new deformities to hide, Brynhild took all her meals in her chambers. She had told Cassia that she needed to perform a deep and ancient rite to bring luck to Vel’s voyage. When Cassia had given her approbation, Brynhild detected a hint of an eye roll by the duchess. This disbelief did not disturb the sorceress because, well, there was good reason for skepticism. Over Brynhild’s lifetime magic buildings had crumbled, bridges collapsed, and lost things remained lost.

In her room, she leaned over the small table, reading one of her older volumes. She searched the pages for hints at a transformation that would work. To her left, the dishes from her afternoon meal lay neatly stacked, ready for the scullery servant to fetch them. Outside the window, oranges and purples gave way to the yellowish-gray of twilight. The words became harder to read as the light faded, but Brynhild didn't want to leave her search even for a moment. She could not abide her new sow's body.

With a flick of her fingers, a ball of warm light sprung from her left hand and hovered in the air above the book. So intent was she on the page on werewolves, that it took her several minutes to notice what she'd done. She looked up from the book in awe. That lighting spell hadn't worked since before the fall of the Northern Empire. The light hung before her, giving no heat, but plenty of illumination. She flicked her fingers and it went out. Then, she raised her right hand and made the same gesture. Nothing. The room rested in darkness.

The warmth in her left hand pulsed at her as it had done since she'd held the dust. With a flick of her left pinky and index fingers, she brought the light back. There was magic on the left but not the right. She leaned back and studied the pretty sphere.

A knock on the door brought her out of her reverie. "Come." Brynhild pulled her cloak more tightly around her and turned toward the door. She let her miraculous light continue to shine above the book.

Merope turned the handle, opened the heavy, oak door, and took a halting step into the room. She hated when her work brought her in the orbit of the sorceress. The strange, platinum-haired woman made the hair on the back of her neck rise. "Your dishes, mistress." She curtsied without looking up into the sorceress's cold eyes.

"Very well." Brynhild watched the small dark woman scurry in. "You're a new scullery girl, aren't you?"

Merope stopped dead still at the surprise of an interrogation. She had meant to move into the room and out again as swiftly as the wind. "New, yes. And …" Not wanting to contradict the frightful woman, she pointed to the iron ring on her left hand.

"You mean to say you're not a girl? A woman married, are you?"

"Yes." Merope dared to look up at the sorceress. She was taller than any woman had a right to be. Some said she was as tall as the new duke. Merope shuddered to think of what savagery ran rampant in the North where every woman stood as a giant.

"And I suppose your charming husband works here as well?" Brynhild had so isolated herself, that even an inconsequential chat with this small, timid creature was welcome.

"Yes, he … um … my husband … Nicias works with me in the scullery." Merope had just caught sight of the flaming ball hanging in the air over the table. Her eyes widened. Perhaps this woman still clung to some magic after all.

"Well, married or not, at my age you're all girls to me." Brynhild laughed, her smile full of warmth. This small human interaction had diverted her from her troubles and from her new discovery.

"But … you … look younger than me." It was true, Merope couldn't judge the woman's body under her voluminous cloak, but her face looked to be no more than twenty-five. She could tell from the woman's

smile that the inquisition was over and she should carry on with her business. Merope hustled toward the table to take the dishes.

“I get that a lot. It was a gift from my master many years –” Brynhild was cut off as the clumsy scullery servant let a spoon slip from its dish. Both women reached for it as it tumbled toward the floor. The sorceress caught it in her left hand.

Merope, a split second late, closed her hand around the other woman’s hand and the spoon. Warmth spread up her arm and the dishes clanked back to the table. She felt … something unfamiliar. It was … delicious. And hungry. But not the hunger she’d known all her life. This need was nascent to that very second and … murky.

“You can release my hand now, girl.” Brynhild frowned at Merope. The young wife looked like she’d been punctured by Cupid’s arrow. The scullery servant’s eyes half-closed and she leaned her face closer to Brynhild’s. They were both bent over after catching the spoon, so Brynhild did not tower above her. “Release me, girl.”

“What?” Merope’s olive skin blanched. She recoiled and stood up straight. “I … oh … you got the spoon. Good.” And without thinking she turned and ran from the room, leaving the door open behind her.

“You forgot the dishes.” Brynhild called after her, but the girl didn’t reappear. “Very strange.” She straightened and dropped the spoon onto a dish with a clatter. She then turned and strode to the window to think things over. Raising her left hand, she extinguished the light again. In the growing darkness she looked out over the port, taking in the purple water of the Inland Sea at night. A spell had returned to her and Cupid had struck in the span of minutes. She would need to give up on the search for a reversal. At least for a time. First, she had to figure out what in the fire of Hades was happening.

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They would wait until returning to Ostia Novus to continue their games. That’s what Vel and Naevia told each other time and again for a day. Then, the plan changed. It was Naevia that first suggested that they might find some privacy in Kart Hadasht. That was a crazy thought, to defy the gods while searching for their good and decent father. Nonetheless, they made a pact to wait for privacy in the new city. But they probably should not have shook on it. For after the warmth spread from Vel’s hand, Naevia changed the plan again. She dragged her brother from their cabin and pulled him, stooping behind her, in search of a place they wouldn’t be disturbed.

That is how, a day out from their destination, Vel found himself seated on a crate with his sister on her knees before him. Vel could hear the cooing of pigeons from somewhere else in the hold. His tunic was up around his chest, his linen undergarment around one ankle, and his robes spread. Naevia sill wore her stola as her head bobbed in his lap.

“Every time … is better … than the last.” Vel touched her magnificent copper curls, but tentatively moved his hand away.

Naevia felt the touch and pulled off him for a moment, her hands still sliding up and down his great length. “I would like that, you know.” She looked up at him with a dreamy smile, a dribble of spit running down her chin.

“What?” Vel was eager to hear the next suggestion. Going down on her had been a miraculous pleasure for both of them, what could be next?

“You could hold on to my hair while I do this for you. Not too hard.” She took one of his big hands and guided it to the back of her head. “Yes, grasp it like that. Wait … too much. Yeah, that’s good. It lets me know that you like it. Show me that – ggggggpppppphhhhh.” It seemed her brother was a quick study. He had gently pushed her mouth back onto his cock and set her rhythm with his hand. The cockhead pushed at the back of her throat and she gagged a little, but Vel backed off. After a few seconds, he had measured her depth, and guided her bobbing mouth. Her tongue rolled around the monstrous thing and she delighted in how mismatched in size her mouth was to Vel’s anatomy. It only barely fit, but that tight window was perfection. As he deftly pulled her hair, she remembered their dancing lessons from years ago. Her gentle brother had taken surprisingly well to offering a lead, and with an arm on her back he had twirled her around the hall, both of them laughing. That was back when they were more similar in size.

“I’m close … Naevia.” Vel knew by now how much Naevia enjoyed swallowing those first hot splashes before it overwhelmed her. Nevertheless, he thought it polite to ask, “Where should I … ugh … finish?”

“Uuuuuuppppphhhh.” She pumped harder on the shaft below her mouth, squeezing the spongy flesh tightly.

Vel understood. “Here … it is … Naevia.” He groaned and let loose.

When he was done, Naevia crawled into her brother’s lap, curled up, and sighed. His still-hard penis was tucked against her belly. “I believe in magic less now than before our voyage.” She watched cum drip from her chin onto his pale belly. The boat rocked gently below them and the pigeons cooed.

“Have I not proven my curse?” Vel reached down and absently patted her stola above the curve of her hip.

“Don’t be silly.” She felt the heat come up from him and sink into her being. It was the most natural thing in the world, an extension of what they always were. “We were meant for this, you and I. Our brother Fortinbras surely knew. He said as much. Bantia has hinted at it. Even Mother has stated some displeasure at our … closeness. Are you the only one not to see?”

“I thought it was innocent and natural.”

She looked up at him with disapproval on her cum splattered face. “This is natural. The most natural thing in the world, do you not feel how right this is?” She uncoiled in his lap, lifted her stola past her waist, and sat astride him, his cock sticking up between her legs and bouncing against her belly button with his pulse. She rubbed herself for the first time against the underside of his penis. Her button caught each vein on the way up and down beautifully.

“Yes. It is natural, but … oh … gods,” Vel said.

While rubbing herself, she reached down and placed her hands on his cockhead. She twisted and rubbed with her fingers, using his leftover cum for lubrication.

“You can’t … put it in.” Vel could feel her hot, wet lips slapping at his balls every time she hit bottom.

That brought a shimmer of a smile to her otherwise vacant face. “I am not crazy, *Your Grace*. I know better than *that*. My future husband might not believe me … uh … uh … to be a virgin if I was stretched beyond ruin by your … leviathan. Can you … ah … ah … imagine that scandal? Besides … it would … ugh … never fit.” She rubbed herself on him, worked his head, and watched the happiness spread on his face. “I’m going to … ugh …” Her hips moved faster. “Kiss me … or I’ll scream.” She leaned forward and tilted her chin up. They locked lips. His penis now pressed between their bellies. It was a good thing she had her tongue in his mouth, because otherwise the ship would certainly wonder who was screaming bloody murder when her climax took her.

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For the first time in days, Brynhild ventured out of her chambers. She was still dressed to hide her body from the world, which was, of course, an oddity for her. It was the women of the Surround that were so modest with their tame stolas. The women of the North were not afraid to be seen. But now she was. No other old spells had returned to her left hand in the hours since she’d conjured her ball of light. But she remained optimistic. For the first time since the wind had tricked her, things looked up.

Brynhild walked through the kitchens, sweeping past the cooks who looked up at her stature and complexion with some modicum of fear. The smells of baking bread and roast venison were pleasant, but not much of a distraction. She found the scullery and poked her head in. A man washed dishes in a sink. Beside him, a large pot of water was coming to a boil.

“Hello there, boy.” Brynhild said this, despite the fact that the man clearly looked older than her. “I’m looking for a woman about this high.” She held her hand to about her navel. “She has dark hair, brown skin, dark eyes, and she’s rather round.”

“Yes, mistress.” Nicias stood still, but his eyes darted back and forth. He tried his best not to stare up into her face. “But … you see … you have described most women from the Surround.”

“She forgot to fetch my dishes last night and they sit there still this morning.” She looked to his left hand and saw the iron ring there. “And she is married.”

“Um … I’m very sorry about your dishes, mistress.” Nicias’s eyes darted more fervently. “I’ll have someone fetch them right away.”

“I don’t care about dishes, little man.” Brynhild moved closer to the man, looking down at him with something akin to anger. But it was of course only a show. She so loved to make people squirm. “Where is that woman?”

“That is my wife, Merope, that you seek.” He stuck out his chest and did the bravest thing in his life. “I am Nicias. If you seek to punish someone, punish me.”

“I seek to punish no one, friend Nicias.” Brynhild finally let her laughter out. “I only wish to speak with her.”

Nicias heaved a huge sigh of relief. “She’s in the bath, cleaning.”

“Thank you.” Brynhild turned and left the scullery, her cloak twirling behind her.

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In the prow of the ship, Vel and Naevia stood arm in arm. They watched the tan city rise out of the water as they tacked against the wind. Spires rose up here and there, but most seemed in the middle of construction. Vel knew that the structures were actually in the opposite process. Without magic, the great towering spires of Kart Hadasht could no longer withstand the pressure of standing. But as they crumpled, they were too dangerous to tear down. So, the towers still stood as shadows of what they once were, slowly raining stones back to the earth.

“It is so different from Ostia Novus.” Naevia squeezed his billowing cloak around the small of his back. She did this in what she hoped was a sisterly fashion since they no doubt had many sailors’ eyes on them where they stood. “There is no blue or gray stone. Even the sea is more green than blue here.” She glanced along the lower skyline, watching the buildings that were still in use. “And everything here has curves.”

“It does.” Vel rested his arm loosely around Naevia’s delicate shoulders. He looked down at her and admired the way she looked with her hair flying back in the wind. “It will be good to have a rest in some private room. Don’t you think?”

Naevia grinned, but did not look up at him. Instead, she kept her eyes on the growing city. How odd that the place they would find their father would be the place her and her brother could play their new games without fear of discovery.

“Ho, hey, Tulliuses.” Dellia strode up to them and placed her foot on the taffrail. She wore only a tunic and sandals, but did not seem to care that she looked like a man. “We should ready ourselves. You have no guard but two meek women, cousin.” She looked at Vel with a wry smile that belied the word meek. “And such a dark and foul city will dish out danger with alacrity.”

“The city looks pretty enough to me,” Vel said.

Naevia gave him another squeeze for his naivety. “I look pretty enough, but my arrows do bite.”

“And my husband thinks me pleasant to look at, but there are men who wish they hadn’t met my sword.” Dellia leaned forward, pressing her arms to her knee. “It’s time for armor and weapons. Let’s hope the viscount sends the men he promised. I do not want to carry my own luggage.” With that, she turned, gave Vel a slap on the back, and strode back across the deck.

Vel and Naevia stayed where they were, watching the city in silence, still arm in arm. They had a moment more before readying for the next leg of their journey.

Chapter 5

“I am Tes-amen.” The dark-skinned man looked over the voyagers. They were easy to spot on the docks with the young duke’s height and blond hair. He stuck out like a flaming serpent in the sand. “Our porters will load your things on those elephants over there.” He gestured vaguely behind him. He turned his attention to the women. They were short. One of them was too pale to be of Surround blood. The other was armored like a war rhino. “Good day, ladies.”

“Those are elephants?” Vel looked over at the monstrous creatures as men fitted them with harnesses for the luggage. Despite the strange animals, the odd smells, and the swirling dust everywhere, the bustling port reminded Vel of home. Maybe all ports in the kingdom carried the same energy. “Are we to ride them?”

“No, Your Grace.” Tes-amen bowed humbly. “Elephants are not for riding. We have dragons for that.” A thin smile touched his lips.

“Dragons.” Vel’s eyes widened in alarm.

“He’s joking, Brother.” Naevia hoisted her quiver and looped it over her shoulder, followed by her bow. She lifted her stola and pinned it up at the knees to keep it out of the dust. “There are no more dragons.”

“Careful with those birds.” Dellia scolded a porter holding one of their pigeon cages. “The viscount sends a clown to fetch us?” She strode up to Tes-amen, her lorica squamata clinking and glittering in the morning light. “Do not vex the Duke of Ostia Novus.” She squinted into the man’s face, her hand on her sword hilt.

Tes-amen smiled serenely back at her.

“No, it’s okay.” Vel walked over and put his hand on his cousin’s shoulder, careful to keep his fingers from the bare skin on her neck. He felt very much like he was restraining a guard dog. His mother was wise to send Dellia along. “I like this man’s humor. Come, Tes-amen, lead us to our accommodations.”

“Very well.” Tes-amen turned and a guard of about a dozen men dressed in crimson tunics flanked them as they walked uphill away from the port.

Kart Hadasht brimmed with energy. The lively, organic architecture, joined the snatches of stringed music and omnipresent hum of people. Vel tried his best to not let his mouth hang open as he looked around. They wended their way up cobbled streets that became wider the higher they went. Shops gave way to houses. And then the houses grew larger, with glimpses of fragrant gardens through their arched gates. “Is the guard really necessary? I spy no lone Vulpes ready to swoop down upon us.”

“The Vulpes are in the employ of the queens regent, so they are, of course, welcome in Kart Hadasht. As they would be in Ostia Novus, I’m sure.” Tes-amen looked up at his guest with that thin smile. “And I would not expect to see a lone Vulpes. Has Your Grace not heard? They travel always in pairs.”

Naevia's interest picked up at this. Sweat dripped off her forehead and stained her stola, but she worked hard to keep up. Huffing and puffing, she said, "Speak more of this. We have little contact with that branch of the crown."

"It is said that each pair deployed must be married to each other. A man and a woman." Tes-amen leaned his head toward Naevia and Vel like he relished a bit of gossip. "It is said –"

"Let us not talk of the Vulpes." Dellia cut in. "No good would come of that. Have you heard from the lost cities to the south?"

"No, the south is nothing but ash and fire." Tes-amen shook his head sadly.

"I could stand to hear more of the Vulpes." Vel watched a veiled woman as she looked down at them from a stone veranda. Above them loomed one of the crumbling towers, a ruined building at its feet. Vel swerved ever so slightly away from the tower, knowing that a stone could fall from its heights at any time.

"It is said that the queens regent thought to reorganize the Vulpes, personally." Tes-amen was clearly happy to provide his font of knowledge. "Loyalty was a problem early on, when the order moved from procurement of supplies to procurement of information. In their inexhaustible wisdom, they found that a married man and woman would better maintain loyalty to each other and the crown."

They turned a corner and the seven turrets of the city's fortress came into view.

"Here we are at last." Dellia turned and looked back toward the water. The city was laid out below them, a puzzle of curves and boxes jumbling down to the sea. "Where are our elephants?"

"They are too big to come the short way. They must go around." Tes-amen led them forward, his stern crimson-clad guard still close at hand. "Come, the gate is just over here."

"That … was … the short way?" Naevia huffed and puffed, the strap of her quiver chaffing between her breasts.

"Would you like me to carry you the rest of the way?" Vel smiled down at her. It was nice when he was better than her at something. Apparently, he climbed hills like a champion.

Naevia shot him a mock sour expression.

"Very well. On your own two feet. We will relax in luxury very soon." Vel looked over to his cousin, who was now engaging Tes-amen on the care of elephants. Too bad, Vel was hoping to learn more about the Vulpes. Maybe later.

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"Lovely to see you again, Lord Hostus." Cassia smiled at the young man as he bowed.

"And you as well, duchess." Hostus smiled pleasantly at his soon-to-be mother-in-law. "I trust all is well with the Tullius family."

“Very well.” Cassia didn’t care for the lie, but it was better than the truth.

“Ah, my spring flower.” Hostus turned his gaze on Bantia. She stood by a window overlooking the harbor, every bit the beauty he had been promised. He took her soft hand and kissed it.

“Are you two ready for your garden walk? I will chaperone today.” Cassia, not for the first time, noted their difference in height. Hostus was tall for a man of the Surround, but Bantia was taller by about five inches. Cassia wondered at her family’s strange northern blood. How was it that all but one of her children had inherited the stature of those in the Savage North?

“You are going to chaperone? Can’t one of the servants do it?” Bantia had hoped for a little more privacy with her lover.

“After the wedding you won’t need a chaperone. Or even a mother, I shouldn’t imagine.” Cassia gave a wistful smile and opened the glass double doors out to the courtyard. “Let me have the pleasure of trailing you two. From a respectful distance, of course.”

“Of course.” Hostus bowed to Cassia gallantly and led Bantia out into the fresh air. He looked up at this graceful woman the fates had put in his path. She was perfect for him. He didn’t think Bantia’s height would be a problem at all. He very much looked forward to exploring every inch of her in the near future.

Cassia followed them around for the afternoon, musing on the innocence of youth.

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The viscount was not as entertaining as Tes-amen, but he received the travelers and offered them all the resources of Kart Hadasht while the duke carried on his negotiations. After refreshments, the guests were shown to their rooms.

Vel lounged in the bright, airy room looking out at the city from an open window. A knock sounded on the intricately wrought silver door. “Come.”

The door opened and in stepped Naevia wearing a fresh linen stola that looked like it played on the edge of transparent. “What do you think, Vel?” She closed the door behind her and scurried over to close the window. “Is this not a pleasant place?”

“It is very pleasant.” Vel watched her walk, her shape more readily apparent in her new clothes. “Seems a bit much, actually. Elephants, candied dates, gold plumbing. Did you know I have a bath in my chambers?” He waved his hand at the adjoining room where steam billowed out of the doorway.

“I did not know that, *Your Grace.* You must be a very *important* person.” She laughed and stopped in the middle of a floral carpet at the foot of the bed. “What are you doing in your dusty clothes?” She pulled gently at the bottom of his cloak and tsked at him.

“I see you’ve found something new to wear.”

“Most of my clothes were damaged by the storm. They smell even more of mold than usual.” She stuck out her hips to the left and the right in a pose for him. “I’m borrowing this stola. Do you like it?”

“It is pretty.” Vel was uncertain how to proceed. He was so used to their games on the ship, but this was a new place, and he found himself shy. “So … where is Dellia?”

“Our cousin is out touring the stable. They have camels here, apparently.” Naevia unclasped the bindings on her brother’s sandals and dropped them to the floor. “I’m not sure I see the attraction for Dellia. Camels are ugly, brooding creatures that would like nothing more than to spit in your face.” She laughed. “Come to think of it, you would get along splendidly with the camels. You have so much in common. But, alas, we need to get you into a bath first.”

A little while later, they sat on opposite benches in the hot, steaming water. Vel could just see his sister’s large boobs bobbing below the surface. He wondered if she could see his hardness, submerged as it was. The way she kept glancing down, he guessed that she could. “So, how do we go about finding Father?”

“Let’s worry about that after our bath.” Naevia slid lower, tilted her head back, and soaked her hair, turning it a darker shade of rust. She looked up at him, her eyes gazing through the steam. “You have me here. We have our privacy. Do our games no longer interest you, Vel?”

“No, no.” He shook his head quickly. “You are the most beautiful thing in this beguiling city. But I feel a bit … unsettled … pursuing our games under the viscount’s roof. Perhaps we should –”

“Stop babbling and kiss me, Vel.” She rose on her bench so that her delicate clavicle just breached the surface. Her pinks lips parted as she waited.

“Yes … yes, of course.” Vel reached his long arm under the water, caught her wrist, and pulled her onto his lap. His rigid penis pressed against the outside of her thigh. He leaned in, drinking in her beauty up until their lips met and his eyelids fluttered closed. Vel was swallowed by a host of sensations. The perfume of the bath surrounded him, the warm comfort of the steamy water soothed him, and the heat of his sister’s small body pressed into his lap and chest. Her fierce tongue played its games and soon he found their hands roving each other’s bodies.

A while later, Naevia bounced on Vel’s lap, rubbing herself on the underside of his cock like she had on their voyage. Little waves splashed out of the bath in time to the movement of her body. Sparks danced before her eyes as she brought herself closer to another orgasm. “I wonder … though,” she said as if carrying on some earlier conversation. “Would it … ugh … fit … ugh … do you think?” The steady power of his touch permeated her consciousness.

“What?” Vel blinked and looked down at Naevia. Her face was slack and she had a distant expression. He had been focusing solely on the way his cockhead hit the bottom of her heavy breasts at the nadir of each of her lurching thrusts. It was true perfection.

“In me … oh … I mean. Would it fit in me? Hypothetically.” She knew such thoughts were anathema to her future as a happily married daughter of the crown, but the idea burned in her brain. Could she tame her brother’s beast? The more she thought about it, the more it consumed her mind.

“I think it would hurt you, Naevia.” Vel wanted to stop her sliding for a moment. To shake some sense into her, but found he had no will to prevent her movements.

“I’m … ugh … not so sure.” Just talking about it was sending her to a new level of excitement. Her vagina spasmed, as if to agree with her.

Vel mustered the will to stop her. He put his hands on her hips and held her down so that her pussy rested on his balls. She rhythmically twitched as he held her tight. He reached a hand over and put it flat on his cockhead and then pressed his fingers into her tummy above the navel. “Do you see? Do you see how deep it would go in you? I do not think it would fit.”

“Ooohhhhhhhhh.” At the feeling of how deep his cock would penetrate her, his fingers marking its furthest entrance, her orgasm overtook her. “Veeeeeellllllllllll.” She leaned her head back and gasped at the thought of it inside her. She reached down and took his cock from him, even as her climax crested. She pumped his improbable thing, sending more waves splashing out of the bath. Her mind returned from its pleasure, but the fever of that idea had not left. If anything, her orgasm had increased the thought’s intensity. “I don’t care about my future husband, Vel. I haven’t even met him yet. I love you. I care for you.” She emphasized this last point by expertly working his head with her left hand, pulling the foreskin just the way she knew he liked.

“If I stretched you … or hurt you … your husband would find out. He would know on your wedding night. It would be terrible.” Vel couldn’t believe he was arguing so strongly against this. Every fiber of his being told him to let his sister have her way.

“Stop worrying about my nonexistent husband.” Naevia pushed herself up, letting her nipples brush their way up his chest. She leaned in and whispered in his ear, “Anyway, if we were to only experiment with the tip, no harm would come to me.”

“Oh, gods, Naevia.” He knew her pussy was hovering above his penis in the water. “Are you sure?”

She still held his cock with her left hand. Reaching down between them, she maneuvered it. “Never … oh … more sure … um … of anything … oh, my. It’s … huge.” With a taut plop, the head of his penis slipped inside her. She dared not move or breathe. She had let her muddled thinking steer her wrong. He would surely break her. But she was afraid to even pull off him. She just sat there, with her pussy stretched beyond what she’d considered possible.

“Oh, no.” Helpless, Vel didn’t know what to do. “Is it hurting you?”

“Yes … yes … wait …” She slowly removed her hands from the penis and placed them on his shoulders. She breathed slowly in and out. Vel’s signature warmth swirled through her body. “It’s … oh, my … it’s not hurting … ugh … anymore. It feels … it feels …” She wiggled her hips ever so slightly, careful not to shove more penis inside her. Bolts of pleasure hit her and she gasped.

“Are you okay?” Vel put his hands on the side of her ribs, ready to lift her off. “Naevia?” He could feel her trembling.

“Wait … wait … don’t pull me … dummy.” Naevia opened her eyes and looked up into his handsome face. “You’re … ugh … inside me, Vel. Can you believe it?” Her hips wiggled a little more aggressively.

“No.” Vel’s arms stayed tense, ready to lift her to safety. “And yes. I can … um … feel you squeezing me down there.”

“I am?” She noticed it. Her vaginal muscles flexed around him. The pain was completely gone now. She wiggled again and slid down an inch on his cock. “Oh, gods. You are already in my … belly.”

“It’s not that far in. But you should probably pull off now. I don’t want to …” Vel shuddered as his sister slid down another inch. Her vagina clenched rhythmically. He realized that it had matched the elevated percussion of his own pulse. He didn’t have time to muse on how that was possible, because she slid down another inch. He could hear her mewling now, and knew that he was grunting uncontrollably, like some sort of starving beast. His hands slid down her ribs, past her narrow waist, and out to the curve of her ass. He pressed her flesh with his fingers and found himself working her further onto his cock.

“Oh … Vel … oh … Vel … not so … fast … it’s … too much.” But as soon as she said it, Naevia realized it wasn’t too much. Her body gave a spasmodic hiccup and she found that he had completely embedded in her. “I’m going to … I’m going to …” With a scream Naevia climaxed on her brother’s cock for the first time. Soon, she bounced herself on it like one stricken by many of Cupid’s arrows. Water violently splashed about the bath, crashing into the tiled walls.

“Naevia … Naevia … I never …” Vel tried hard to hold back the coming tide.

“I never … too,” she sang as pleasure danced with her body.

“Am I your first?”

“You might as well … be … the way you stretch me.” Naevia’s hips kept their furious pace. “To … ugh … be honest, I laid with a man last summer … but it was nothing … like this.” With dilated pupils, she tried to watch him as she rose and fell, but it was difficult to focus. “Am I your first?”

“Yes.” Vel was almost happy she had that fling last summer. He liked her having some measure of comparison, now that he could see how much she enjoyed him.

“I … would have waited … if I’d known … it would be you …” She saw by the look in his eyes and sound of his groans that he was close. “Not in me.” With every ounce of fortitude that she could muster, Naevia pulled off her brother. She reached down and pumped his turgid thing with her hands. It felt even larger than normal. Soon he cried out and cum launched harmlessly into the bathwater. “There … there … yes … let it out.” She pressed her cheek against his chest and slowly caressed him with her hand until she could tell her touch was too much. She removed her hand and leaned her naked, heaving body against her brother. She drew in shuddering, steamy breaths. “That is a game … I would play … again.”

“Me … too.” Vel encircled her with his arms and held her tight.

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“Have you not yet found your land-legs, cousin?” Dellia cocked her head at Naevia as the short woman waddled toward her out on one of the side lawns. “You’re walking like a crab.”

“Um … yeah.” Naevia forced a smile and nodded. “That trip across the Inland Sea threw me off kilter.”

“For shame, cousin.” Dellia lifted her bow, notched an arrow, and aimed at the target some seventy yards off. She closed an eye and squinted, very aware that despite her chest band, her right boob was still a little in the way. Sometimes she felt some jealousy of men. “You are a woman of Ostia Novus born and bred. A short jaunt in a ship should not make you walk so. Just wait until you take out to the Endless Sea. You’ll find waves the size of mountains there.” She released the arrow and it arched ever so slightly over the grass and hit the target, just left of center.

“We are not all made for adventure, Dellia.” Naevia stepped up to her cousin, took the bow from her, and notched an arrow. She wiggled her shoulder to bunch the sleeve of her borrowed stola. She didn’t want to loosen the thing the way she herself had been loosened that day. The thought of it sent a thrill through her. She felt herself the queen of the world for taking Vel’s cock, but only she and Vel could know of the feat. She aimed at the target.

“Have you heard from your father yet?” Dellia watched her handle the bow with interest. Something was different about Naevia, and it wasn’t just the voyage. But Dellia couldn’t place it.

“Shh.” Naevia gave a quick look around, but they were all alone. “Someone could hear.” She released the arrow and it sped to the target, hitting just to the right of her cousin’s arrow, dead center.

“There are no spies here, Naevia.” Dellia frowned at the target. “Only you, an improbably good marksman, and me.”

“Don’t sell yourself short, cousin.” Naevia smiled modestly. “I think the wind helped me on that last shot.”

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“There you are, Merope. How pleasant to see you on this fine day. And the bath looks resplendent. I can see my own reflection in the tile.” Brynhild could indeed see herself. Her body looked even more distorted and bloated in the reflection. She pulled her cloak around herself tighter. “But, sadly, my dishes have not been removed from last night. And more have piled up after this morning’s meal.”

“How did you find me?” Merope was frozen on her hands and knees, a rag in her hand. All her muscles tensed and the hairs stood on the back of her neck.

“Your husband sent me. Such a sweet man, Nicias. He offered that I punish him instead of you. But I have no punishment planned.” Brynhild stood over the woman, admiring the swell of her backside under her dark and ragged stola. It had been years and years since Brynhild had taken a woman. Her work had not required it. But, the sorceress reminded herself, life didn’t have to be all work. “Come with me.” She gestured to the door.

Merope stayed frozen on her hands and knees looking at the tall woman’s shadow as it fell in front of her. “I thought there was to be no punishment, mistress.”

“I have in mind the opposite of torture. Come now, off your knees. There will be plenty of that later.” Brynhild reached down with her left hand and brushed the woman’s dark hair to the side. Her pale fingers closed gently on the exposed, olive skin of Merope’s neck. She could see the scullery servant relax at her touch. Gently, she brought the woman to a standing position. “There now, doesn’t that feel better? If anyone asks us in the halls, you are coming to fetch my dishes.”

“Yes.” Merope nodded, but looked up at the platinum haired woman with wide eyes. That heat she’d tried to forget from the night before had returned at Brynhild’s touch. And with it came that hunger again. She was inexplicably wet between the legs. It was not unlike how she got when Nicias had the urge to take her. But more so. Confusion clouded her thoughts.

“Well, come then.” Brynhild chanced dropping her hand. She couldn’t very well lead the woman back to her chambers while holding her. That would certainly arouse the interest of any passing servant. But the small woman complied meekly enough and together they walked through the castle in silence. They ran into no one on their way.

When they were in Brynhild’s chamber, Brynhild conjured her ball of light and sat at the edge of her bed. She redirected Merope from the dishes on the table and beckoned her to stand by the bed. “There now. Clothes off, dear. I would like to see what I bought with our accidental touch.”

“I … I … cannot disrobe for you.” Merope stood with her hands by her sides, her mouth hanging open in surprise. She had been promised no punishment. Was she not there to fetch the dishes? “My body is the forbidden vine for my husband to drink as wine. I will forgo the passing bee that tries to pollinate me.”

“Oh, how quaint. Was that from your wedding?”

Merope nodded.

“Well, I cannot pollinate you, Merope. I have not the equipment. So, you are quite safe.” Brynhild loosened her cloak and let it fall back onto the sheets. She now wore only her ill-fitting, borrowed stola. “Now be a good young woman, and remove your dress.” She pushed these last words harder into Merope’s mind. The sorceress had wanted to avoid muddling the waters with other magic, so that she might see what the dust was capable of on its own. But, alas, she didn’t have all day.

“Okay.” Merope lifted the stola with both arms over her head. She wiggled her hips back and forth as she did this to get the thing off. She was not wearing a chest band and she could see the sorceress’s steel-blue eyes fall to her breasts. Merope covered her boobs with her arms on instinct. She stood in the middle of the chilly room with only her underwear on. She hoped that she hadn’t stained the linen with her strange excitement.

“Oh, you have lovely breasts. Certainly, paler than the rest of you. And your nipples are so dark. Don’t be bashful, let me see them again.” Brynhild saw that the woman had no intention of complying, so she leaned forward and caressed Merope’s thin arm. The scullery servant sucked in her breath with the touch, and her chest heaved. After a minute’s touch, Merope’s arms fell, exposing herself. “There now, they are lovely. Those hanging globes look quite big on you, but they would be small on me. Maybe about the size of my old breasts.” Brynhild saw Merope’s eyebrows raise in puzzlement. “Oh, yes. I am not the woman I used to be. That doesn’t concern you, though.” Brynhild pulled Merope’s arms downward until the woman fell to her knees before her. “Tell me what you make of my touch.” She let

go of the woman and spread her legs, lifting the stola to her hips. She had not worn underwear for the occasion and could see the woman's dark eyes fixed on her triangle of blond hair.

"It is warm, and sweet, and I … I …" Merope still did not grasp what was expected of her. The sorceress was right, she had not the equipment for pollination. What did she want with Merope? "I would like you to touch me again, please." The words came out of Merope unbidden.

"Come closer so that I might touch you." Brynhild leaned back on her right hand. Her left hand hung tantalizingly in the air. The ball of light glinted off Merope's pretty eyes.

"Okay." Merope scooted on her knees a little closer. That long, pale arm reached out to her, the hand wrapped around the back of her neck again, and she felt herself pulled between the woman's legs. Her nostrils flared. The scent of another woman hit her for the first time. It was pungent and pleasant, she decided. A little more pulling and her face met the sorceress's vagina. Merope pressed her lips together tightly, still confused.

"Open your mouth, Merope," Brynhild cooed. She did not push any of her words. She did not think she needed to. "Taste me."

Merope shook her head, but couldn't move away with the hand holding her and the warmth spreading into her from her neck.

"Are you worried about sweet Nicias? I am not a bee, remember?" Brynhild watched what she could see of Merope's face as her pupils dilated and the creases in her forehead smoothed. "You may do this and keep your marriage intact. Fear not."

Tentatively, Merope parted her lips. Her tongue darted out and she touched the sorceress's nether lips with the tip. She wasn't sure that Brynhild was right. This seemed like something Nicias would find upsetting. But the hunger welled in her and she couldn't make sense of her thoughts. She lapped at the vagina before her. It tasted better than she would have guessed. Tangy and salty and just a little sweet. Soon, her tongue delved between the vertical lips with each lick, seeking to drink as much of the sorceress as she could.

"Oh. Careful. I am not a feeding trough. Be a little more gentle." With her grip on the woman's neck, she guided her movements. "That's better. Ahhhhhhh. Yes … that's good. Now … try sucking on the lips. No, no, no. Gentle … no teeth … yes … there … and now … my button. Yes … ooooohhhhhhhh … you're learning. Yeeeeeesssssssssss." Brynhild pressed the woman's mouth onto her clitoris and relinquished to her orgasm.

Stunned, Merope kept at her work. She could feel the woman's strong thighs shake on either side of her head. She looked up to see the great swell of Brynhild's bust tremble under her stola. Merope had never felt more in control of another person. And, at the same time, she had never been more under another's power. She rubbed her own thighs together and a funny, fuzzy feeling built in her belly.

"Good … good …" Brynhild's apogee passed and she pulled the woman into her lap. "Your enthusiasm is quite something." She moved the soaked underwear off Merope. The naked woman was now trembling with excitement in her lap. Brynhild kissed her, enjoying her own taste on the servant's lips. She could feel Merope melt into her, their breasts pressed together with the stola between them. Their tongues danced for some time, hands roaming all over their bodies.

Nicias had never shown Merope what the joys of physical pleasure could be. As she kissed another woman for the first time, Merope felt a kind of anger toward her husband. Why had he not treated her the way this woman did? Soon, she found herself turning around on top of Brynhild, and her face was now confronted with that waiting vagina again. She knew what to do, and nibbled at those lips. But then she screamed out as the sorceress's tongue found her own secret places. She felt hands squeeze her butt, the warmth flowing through her left cheek. "Eeeeeiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii." Seized by her first orgasm, Merope knew that a door to a whole new world had opened to her. She spent hours on top of the sorceress, as they feasted on each other. The climaxes were like waves in a tempest, one crashing down on the next and on the next.

Eventually, Brynhild pushed Merope off her and ordered the woman to dress. She lay on her side, watching that ripe, womanly body disappear under her stola. "Would you like to visit again, Merope?"

Merope shook her head quickly, put on her sandals, and headed for the door.

"Well, think on it, dear." Brynhild smiled at the servant even though the dark woman wouldn't meet her eye. "Oh, and don't forget the dishes." She watched as the flustered Merope hurried to the table, gathered the dishes, and sped away as fast as she could. With a flick of her left index finger, Brynhild extinguished the light. Dusk had settled outside. The sorceress moved her head to her pillow and shut her eyes.

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The screech of a monkey caused Naevia to spin in the seamstress's shop. The small furry creature jumped into Naevia's arms just as her measurements were completed. It tugged at her chest band, and then seemed to calm and nuzzled its face into her bare upper chest.

"Is this your monkey?" Naevia said to the seamstress. The animal seemed to purr into her skin.

"What? No!" The seamstress, alarmed, moved toward Naevia. "Shoo, shoo." She waved a cloth at the monkey.

"Wait. It isn't harming anyone." Naevia folded her arms around it. "Leave it be."

"Well, then it shall be welcome in my shop."

A few minutes later, Vel spotted his sister reentering the busy street. He popped a date into his mouth and ambled over to her. "You know you have a monkey on your shoulder?"

"Yes. Isn't he sweet?" Naevia reached up and patted its head. "I think I'll call him Mercury."

"You're naming him?" Vel handed her a date, but the monkey took it before she could and shoved it in its toothy mouth. "It's your baby now?"

"Our baby, *Your Grace*." Naevia laughed. "He has your looks."

"And your brains." Vel handed her another date and it made it to his sister's hand this time.

“I noticed. He’s a smart little thing.” Naevia’s laugh was drowned out by the grunting of camels, the shouting of vendors, and the squeak of old, wooden wheels. She put the date in her mouth and savored its sweetness. “I’m to come back tomorrow for new clothes.” The monkey jumped from her arms and scurried away, quickly lost in traffic. “Mercury? Come back.”

“He’ll be alright.” Vel took her hand. He was about to lead her up a side street when a cloaked figure in a hood stepped out in front of them. Vel dropped his sister’s hand and reached for his sword. They should have brought Dellia.

“Easy now.” The man’s face was hidden by a silver mask, cast half in shadow by his hood. There was a tear etched into the left cheek of the mask. When he spoke, his voice was a hoarse croak. “Come with me. I have what you seek.” The man turned and disappeared down a narrow alley.

Vel and Naevia looked at one another.

“What we seek. Did he mean Father? Was that Father himself?” Naevia’s eyebrow raised.

“He did seem familiar.” Vel drew his sword, careful not to accidently slice any passerby. “A sword seems reasonable. Just in case we’re wrong and it’s not him.”

“Good idea.” Naevia wished for her bow. Without it, she reached under her stola and drew a long dagger. “Shall we follow him, Vel?”

“On Mercury’s wings.” Vel led the way and they disappeared into the shadowed alley.

Chapter 6

The masked man moved nimbly. Vel and Naevia followed him down the alley, and then lost sight of him as he turned left through a door.

“A trap?” Naevia stopped next to her brother, her shoulder pushing against his side. The dagger in her hand glittered with the faint afternoon light that angled in above the tan buildings around them. “Perhaps we should have the man send us a pigeon instead?”

“I don’t think he trusts such communication.” Vel took an uncertain step toward the door. “As our cousin said, pigeons are brought down with an arrow. Men, not so easily.” He took another step and peered into the doorway. There seemed to be a narrow passage on the other side. “Let’s follow him.”

“Oh, you are brave, *Your Grace*. Guide me by your northern light.” Naevia tried to make a joke of it, but her knees trembled as she followed Vel through the door. Once on the other side, they could see daylight from the other side of a narrow passage. They moved quickly through, staying close together, ignoring the doors on either side. When Naevia looked back, she saw that the door they had entered through was now shut behind them.

“It’s not a trap. If it was, we would be dead.” Vel exited the passage with his sister and looked around. They were in a wide, grassy field, squared off by the buildings around them. All around were scattered large pieces of masonry, sparse at first, them more of them the closer they got to the tower at the center of the square. The blocks, mostly rectangles, had implanted themselves in the grass with the force of their falls. Vel looked up and marveled at the broken tower above them. Even decaying as it was, it was truly a marvel. He tried to imagine what it had been like in its prime, when it had pierced the clouds.

“There he is.” Naevia pointed to the grand double doors of the tower, standing partly ajar. The man in the silver mask looked back at them, his face glinting in the sun. He then disappeared into the tower. “Do we follow still?” She didn’t like the thought of entering that decrepit building. Few dared to explore the old towers. And fewer still returned.

“We would be fools to enter a magic tower.” Vel slid his sword back into its scabbard. There was no trap, and a sword wouldn’t help him should a stone block decide to cave his head in.

“Perhaps others would be fools to follow us?” Naevia shrugged and put her knife back under her stola. “Or at least that sounds like Father’s thinking. If the masked man is father.”

“So, we go?” He took his sister’s hand and approached the tower, listening for loosening stones from above. But all he heard were the sounds of the city from outside their abandoned square.

“Up, it seems.” Naevia squeezed her brother’s large hand as they entered the tower. The inside had clearly been looted, but showed none of the signs of vagrancy that one would expect from an abandoned building. There had been a grand entrance hall, and she tried to imagine it with elaborate sconces, beautiful tapestries, and fine furniture. The tile floor was cracked here and there where stones had fallen from the ceiling above. “The stairs are over there.”

“Does it feel … different in here?” Vel’s senses throbbed with some indefinite portent. A raw buzzing faintly pressed at his skin. He followed Naevia to the stairs and climbed.

“I do feel … something. Perhaps it’s the shadow of the place’s magic?” She moved ahead of Vel in the narrow stairway, her feet creaking each wooden step.

“Maybe.” Vel watched her round butt ascend above him. He tried not to stare, but her form was captivating. Especially as her hips swayed under that nearly transparent stola.

They climbed and climbed. Each time they came to a floor, they looked out, but saw nothing of the masked man. After five floors, it was clear they had more courage than the looters had. Each floor boasted intricately engraved fixtures, grand furniture, and finely embroidered tapestries on the walls. All of it covered in dust, but otherwise unharmed. Up they went.

Naevia was a sweaty mess by the time they finally found the man waiting for them on the seventeenth floor. He was waiting in a hallway, but disappeared behind an oak door when they saw him.

“He’s … here.” Naevia huffed and puffed as she walked down the hall and peered into the room. It was a suite with a bath and toilet through a door on the left, a great room in the middle, and a bedroom to the right. “Did they have plumbing on every floor?” Naevia was amazed.

“With magic, even the common man could live as a duke.” The man’s voice was no longer a croak. Both his children recognized Gallio’s cool speech immediately. He stood in the doorway to the bedroom and removed his mask. “Well, maybe not the common man, but at least those that could afford to live in the towers.”

“Father,” Naevia and Vel said. She rushed into Gallio’s arms, but Vel hung back.

“It is good to see you, child.” Gallio patted her red hair and pushed her away. He looked at his tall, skinny nineteen-year-old son. The lad looked awkward and gawky. Nothing like Fortinbras. “Is it true? Your brother’s gone?”

“Yes. The queens regent made me the Duke of Ostia Novus.” Vel crossed his arms over his chest uncomfortably. They knew from his letter that he was alive, but looking at his father’s face was akin to seeing a ghost. “Fortinbras has disappeared. But now that you’re back –”

“He is dead.” Gallio’s thin line of a mouth turned down in a frown. “I should not have left him as I did. He was the best of us, but too young to lead.”

“But father …” Naevia didn’t want to contradict him, but clearly Vel was the best of the Tullius clan. Fortinbras was a bully.

“And, to correct you, Vel, I am not back.” Gallio shook his head. “You two should not have come. You bring trouble with you.”

“We brought no one.” Naevia retreated to her brother and put her arm around his waist protectively.

“Do you take me for a fool?” Gallio retrieved a spyglass from under his cloak. As he looked out the window, he pulled it to its full length. “Look down there, in the alley between the market and apothecary.” He held out the spyglass to his children.

“What is it?” Naevia pulled her brother to the window, took the spyglass, and found the alley. “It’s cousin Dellia. Of course, we brought her. She served admirably in the storm at sea and she’s got a better sword hand than either of us.” She handed the glass to her brother and he looked.

“Um … Naevia? Who is she kissing?” Vel handed the glass back to her.

“What? She wouldn’t break her vows to her husband.” Naevia hadn’t even paid attention to the man Dellia was with in the alley. She looked again.

“She would not break her vows. No.” Gallio’s voice was cold.

“That is … I believe … is that … Spurrius?” Naevia could see them break their kiss and recognized Dellia’s husband. “What is he doing here? She didn’t mention it to us.”

“I can’t imagine that she did.” Gallio lifted his mask, but did not put it on. “I have always had my suspicions about her father. Find out her true purpose here and report back to me.”

“Do you have a pigeon?” Vel knew it was stupid as soon as he said it.

“Pigeons can be intercepted, and everyone knows to look for them. A monkey is inconspicuous in this city, and more cunning than a stupid bird,” Gallio said. “You’ve met my carrier already.”

“Mercury was your agent?” Naevia should not have been surprised.

“You call him Mercury? How fitting. Give him a note when you want to meet and he will get it to me.” Gallio put the silver mask back onto his face. “Careful on the way out of this building, my children. It is not what it used to be.”

“Wait. We have so many questions.” Vel stepped toward him as his father moved to the exit.

“And I have no answers for those that cannot be trusted.” Gallio swept out of the room, his cloak trailing him.

“But … I’m the duke.” Vel called after him. He heard his father’s laugh slowly die away as Gallio descended the stairs. He turned to his sister. “Well, that went about as well as it could have.”

“Was it that bad?” Naevia looked through the spyglass and could see Dellia and Spurrius holding hands as they waited in the mouth of the alley. They were situated about two blocks from where Naevia and Vel had accessed the abandoned tower. “I think we’re going to have to find another way out. Father could have told us how he planned on leaving.”

“Yeah. But he did not.” Vel walked over to the bed and turned back the dusty velvet blanket. The linen sheets seemed as clean as the day someone made the bed. He sat down with a sigh, the bed squeaking beneath him. “We could just wait them out.” He turned sideways and lay his head on the pillow. His ankles and feet extended over the footboard. He sighed again.

“What sorrows lay heavy on your breast, Brother?” Naevia put down the spyglass on the window ledge and walked out into the grand room. She closed and locked the heavy oak entry door and then returned to the bedroom.

“Our father has a toxic aspect about him. It clouds his view of the world. Dellia would never betray us. Yet he now has us spying on her.” Vel studied the Olympian mural painted on the cracking plaster of the ceiling. He spotted Venus and thought that even her beauty was surpassed by the Tullius women.

“Is she really watching our exit? Perhaps she followed us to make sure of our safety? What did she say she was doing today?” Naevia climbed onto the bed and rested her head on Vel’s chest, listening to the steady thump inside. She reached up and slowly unclasped the fasteners on his robes. A smile parted her lips as she watched up close as a mound of tunic rose between his legs.

“I … um … don’t remember.” Vel couldn’t think straight as the soft weight of his sister’s body pushed into his side. How was it possible to want anything on Earth as much as he wanted her? He watched her little hands spread his robes and move down to lift his tunic. He breathed in deeply and smelled the dust of the room and his sister’s dried sweat from their climb. Ambrosia could not carry a better scent to his nose.

“If we do it again, do you think we’ll bring the tower down around us?” She seized the fat bar of his cock through his tunic and rhythmically squeezed it. Uncovering it, she marveled at the crimson head and the crisscross of veins. How she had fit the thing inside her, she didn’t know. Her senses tingled, almost like the erstwhile magic of the tower called to her from the past. “How long do you think it’s been since a pair mated in this building?”

“I … um … really love hearing you say … mated.” Vel looked down and watched her hands work him. Her freckled arms flexed, looking so thin and pale next to his enlarged penis.

Naevia laughed. “Mated, mated, mated. If it makes you happy to hear it, it makes me happy to say it. You’ve mated me once, Vel, and I dare say you’re about to do it again.” She let go of him, wiping his precum on the sheets. She lifted her stola over her head, removed her chest band, and rolled to her back to remove her underwear. She tossed her clothes onto a far corner of the bed and then climbed on top of her brother. “Your thing is so long that climbing you is about as much a feat as ascending up this building.” She straddled him, reached in between her legs, and held his cock so that the head nudged her pussy. “You have your own magic tower, Vel. And it is in a much better state than our current accommodations. It’s hard, and vital, and huuuuuuuge.” She lowered herself and with a plop the head moved inside her.

“I love you, Naevia.” Vel had never meant it more in his life. He watched her body twitch as she readjusted to his size, her heavy breasts rising and falling on her chest. He gazed at the web of delicate blue veins under her pale skin. She was too perfect. He felt her slide a little farther down on him, and her eyes rolled with the effort.

“Of course, silly. I love you more than ipomea loves the eastern sun. And now … ugh … with the way you make me feel … aaaaahhhhhhhh … with your thing inside me.” She slid all the way down him. Looking down between her breasts, she could see the outline of his monster pushing at her belly from the inside. “And now … I want only this. To feel this …” Her hips rocked and she ground herself into him. “… forever.” She leaned forward, her breasts dangling and swaying, her nails digging into his chest.

“Does it feel good?” Vel knew it was the wrong question to ask a woman who’d just impaled herself on him, but he suspected his sister would forgive him.

“It doesn’t hurt … this time.” She threw her copper curls back and screamed. “I’m going to … cum … Vel … already … aaaaahhhhhhhhhh.”

Watching her hips writhe and her face twist with pleasure was almost too much for Vel. He reached up and grabbed her tits. A loud crack sounded somewhere in the tower, but he couldn’t bring himself to care.

An hour later, Naevia lay perpendicular to him on the bed, her mouth bobbing on his cock. Vel could smell the tropical scent of his cum as it leaked from around her mouth and slid down his cock. “You … drank more of it this time.” He sighed and let his weight settle into the mattress.

Naevia pulled her mouth off him and swallowed another gulp she had saved in her mouth. She wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. “If we’re to go again, I’ll need my sustenance, *Your Grace*.” She tapped his still hard cock with her hand and watched it wobble in the air. When she looked up at her brother’s face, a small frown touched her lips. “None of that, *lord sleepyhead*. I want more.” She got on all fours and turned her butt to him.

“We could take a nap here. Dellia will have to leave eventually.” Vel looked at the way she presented herself to him, eyeing the white curves of her ass, and knew he would not be able to sleep.

“Bother your plans for sleeping.” She wiggled her butt at him and looked over her shoulder. She could see by his expression it was having the desired effect. “I’ve ridden you twice now. It’s time you rode me.”

“Like that?” Vel had seen animals mate as his sister intended, but he’d never guessed that humans could do the same. He got up on his knees and got behind her. His hips were too high, so he opened his legs a bit to lower himself. He grabbed her hips and pulled her so that her legs were together, enjoying her little shriek of surprise as he moved her. “So, I just put it in?” He grabbed his penis and guided it toward her opening.

“Not there!” Naevia squirmed away from him. “You’ll kill me in that hole.” She scooted back to him, reached awkwardly back, planting a shoulder on the bed to bend far enough, and took hold of him. “It goes here. Yes … ah … yes. Is that not paradise, Vel?” She let go of him and uncoiled so that her face was again facing forward. “Hold my hips … while you thrust. Gentle … gentle. I’m still sore. Yeeesssssss. Now harder.” She pushed back at him. The percussion of slapping skin filled the room. “Oh … gods … Vel … you’re a natural … I’m …” Another climax hit her and she bit the ancient sheets. Bolts of lightning danced over her nerves.

They went at it like a pair of rutting dogs for a long while. From time to time the tower would groan or crack around them, but they barely registered the noise over their own grunts, cries, and the creaking bed. Eventually, Vel was ready to release again.

“I’m going to … I’m going …” He looked down at her tight butt, at the ripples bounding off each thrust.

“Not … yet … please …” Naevia was so close to another orgasm. She needed to pull off him, but not yet. Her climaxes were becoming as precious to her as water was to a lost traveler in the desert. The heat that was always flowing from Vel’s contact intensified. An eruption of fire filled her belly, even with her climax almost upon her, the reality of the situation hit. “Noooooooooo …” Naevia pulled forward and

dislodged him, falling on her side. The heat of his cum splattered on her hip, her ribs, the side of her breast, and even her face. She writhed in the sheets, lost in pleasure, as he coated her with his stuff.

“Oh, Naevia. I like … that position.” He fell next to her, and the bed groaned in protest.

“Did you … do it inside me?” Naevia rolled onto her back, spread her legs, and looked down past her copper bush. A trickle of white stuff slid out of her. “We … have to be … more careful.” With her fingers, she spread her lips to the side and watched it dribble out, mesmerized and terrified by the knowledge that she had taken some of his seed.

“Did I?” Vel could feel his body try and tighten with worry, but he was too relaxed after his orgasm to bring on a full panic. He leaned on his elbow and looked over at her leaking vagina. “Oh, gods, Naevia. I did. I’m sorry.”

“Well, it was a stupid thing to do.” She looked over at him and saw the look of post-climax satisfaction on his face mixed with concern. She found the expression endearing. “But I am safe today. It doesn’t matter.”

“Good.” Vel watched as she stayed on her back with her legs spread and her fingers holding her lips open. He noticed her green eyes move from him back down to the damage he had wrought between her legs. “Hey, Naevia?”

“Yes, *Your Grace*?” Her mouth tilted into a smile.

“It does look beautiful, does it not? I mean, what we did.” Vel stood and walked over to the window. Hazy dusk spread over the city.

“Don’t get used to it. Can you imagine what mother would say if you got me with child?” Naevia rolled off the bed and landed on her feet. She reached for her linen undergarments. She shimmied her underwear on and reached for her stola. “She would decapitate me for sure. And remove worse from you.”

Vel instinctively put a hand over his softening penis. “We’ll be more careful.” He looked through the spyglass, but couldn’t spot Dellia in the alley. The tower groaned and let out a sharp crack. He quickly found his tunic and pulled it over his head. “Our cousin is gone. Let’s leave this place before it comes down on our heads.”

“Excellent idea.” With a faint sense of loss, she watched the giant, soft cock disappear under his tunic. She reminded herself she would reunite with it soon. But they had other things to do on that foreign shore. First and foremost was proving to their father that Dellia’s behaviors had innocent explanations.

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What a wonderful morning. Brynhild moved about her room naked, as she prepared for her day. She didn’t even mind the way her new body jiggled at her. She found her balance caught the distribution of mass better, almost as if she’d lived years with a sow’s udders and wide hips. Gravity’s new pull bothered her very little. As she slid on a long skirt and wiggled into a tight bodice, she wondered what

Merope was doing at this hour. Then she caught herself thinking of the small woman with desire, like some smitten schoolgirl. She smiled to herself. “You, the most powerful sorceress left of the North, do not long for a common scullery servant,” she said to the empty room. But as she brushed her hair, she couldn’t get the little woman’s cries of pleasure out of her mind.

Before even breaking her fast, with the wan light of early morning falling through her windows, Brynhild left her room and moved down through the castle. Sure enough, she found Merope working with her husband and another woman in the scullery.

“Servant girl.” Brynhild glided into the scullery, past the pot of boiling water, over to the sink where Merope scrubbed dishes. The young wife looked quite radiant. Maybe she was as eager to meet the day as Brynhild. “I have a box that needs cleaning.”

“A box, mistress?” Merope dared not look up at those steely blue eyes, but she also could not meet her husband’s gaze either. She hoped very much that her rosy cheeks were not betraying her shame to all those in the room. She wanted desperately to run from this woman, but she did not move. And, even worse, a wetness gathered between her legs. She desperately hoped that her poor Nicias suspected nothing. “I must finish these dishes.”

“My box takes precedence, I’m afraid.” Brynhild’s face was tight with anticipation.

“Maybe I can help you with your box.” Nicias moved between the women. He did not like the interest the sorceress had taken in his wife ever since Merope had forgotten the dishes. Was the giantess punishing Merope in secret? His wife had been taciturn the last few days.

A sardonic grin crossed Brynhild’s tight lips. “Thank you, gentle Nicias. But I require your wife’s skills.” She turned and walked out of the scullery, without looking back. “Now come, Merope.”

“Yes, mistress.” Merope finally met her husband’s gaze. She could see he meant to put himself between them again. “Shh, it’s fine, Nicias.” She patted his shoulder. “She has shown me kindness. I will be back with you at work in no time.” She tried very hard to smile for him, and followed the tall woman out.

“See you soon, my love,” Nicias called after her. His wife gave him one quick, reassuring look over her shoulder and was gone.

Out in the hall, Merope hurried after the sorceress. She found it hard to keep up with the woman’s long strides. She watched Brynhild’s rump sway under a long skirt that swept down to the stone floor. Had she really experienced such pleasures while grasping that butt with her own two hands? That memory seemed to be from someone else’s life.

“We are far enough away, and the climb back to my chamber is too long a wait.” Brynhild turned, took the woman’s wrist with her left hand. She nearly pulled the woman off her feet in her urgency. They were in the long curving corridor that connected the temples. They turned and entered Venus’s sanctum. The circular room was small, with the bountiful goddess standing in statue form in the middle, offering her large breasts to her followers. There was no door, but that did not matter. People rarely visited the temples. “This will do.”

“The box … is in here?” Merope found it hard to think. Brynhild’s heat spread through her grip on her wrist, and moved into Merope’s core. She found herself pushed to her knees, then somehow, she was

under Brynhild's skirts. The smell of excitement from the sorceress was a powerful indication of what the woman expected of her. Tentatively, Merope reached up and felt the downy tuft of hair above Brynhild's vagina. There was no underwear between Merope's hand and the woman's secrets. Hating herself for the lack of doubt in her mind, Merope crouched on her feet for her tongue could not reach its destination while on her knees.

"There now, my little marsh flower. Drink what I offer you. Yeeeeesssssssss." Brynhild nearly lost her balance when that hungry mouth fastened itself to her pussy. She reached out and put her hand on Venus's cold, stone breast to steady herself. She looked down, but only the faintest outline of Merope's bobbing head could be seen under her skirts. "You have found the box that so needed your skills. Wash it … yesssssss … delve it … I'm going to …" Brynhild shuddered out her first orgasm standing in the sanctum. As she tried to control her cries, the sorceress knew that it would be just the first of many climaxes that day.

Merope reached up to those wide, round butt cheeks and squeezed them hard as she worked the tall woman's button. She felt that she might climax herself just from giving the sorceress such pleasure. Her whole world had turned upside down.

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The morning wore on and still Merope did not return to the scullery. Nicias tried to make explanations that did not involve some secret torment for his sweet wife. But after more than an hour, he could not continue with his duties. He had to rescue her. "I'll be back in a little while."

The other servants eyed each other, nervously. One was not supposed to break this early in the day, but they knew he worried over Merope. They said nothing as he left.

Nicias went straight to Brynhild's chamber, but found no sound from within and no answer to his knocks. He then doubled back and went down to the main floor. After a while, he stopped in the corridor outside the temples. A mewling sound greeted his ears. After a minute's investigation, he found that it was coming from Venus's sanctum. He entered and stopped, wide eyed. There was the sorceress, holding the bust of Venus. Her face was clearly contorted in some sort of religious ecstasy. Nicias stared at her. "Oh … um … forgive my intrusion."

Merope froze. She now had two fingers in the other woman's clenching vagina, and her tongue stopped as it was mid-lick on her button. She was hidden under the skirts, but recognized her husband's gentle voice. Her heart threatened to beat out of her chest.

"Ah, Nicias. You have caught me giving my devotion to Venus." Brynhild composed herself a bit. It helped that the wife had stopped her ministrations. She made a show of squeezing the stone breast she held.

"I … uh … I … thought you worshiped the Northern gods." Nicias felt like he had intruded on a very intimate moment, and wanted nothing more than to quickly exit. But he had to ask about his wife.

“I find my pantheon to be open and accommodating.” At these words she rocked her hips a little, trying to spur Merope back into action.

Merope could feel the pussy clenching around the fingers of her right hand and Brynhild’s hips wiggling. She still held the right butt cheek with her left hand, and felt it clench under her grip. She knew the woman wanted her to continue even as she spoke to poor Nicias. How depraved did she think Merope was?

“Oh … I see.” Nicias could see the woman’s curvaceous body writhe a bit, in what he assumed was her continued religious fervor. He needed to leave. “Have you … um … seen my wife?

“Maybe your wife is nearby. Would you like to see her?” Brynhild glanced around the room as if searching for someone.

“I … um … don’t see her.” Nicias did not understand the woman. There was nowhere in that small space for a grown woman to hide.

Merope understanding the threat, pumped her fingers again. She tried to do this gently, for she did not want her husband to hear the squelching sounds she made. She pursed her lips and sucked on the button before her.

Brynhild laughed. “Of course, I jest. I sent her on some errands about the castle. She’s probably already returned to the scullery.”

“Oh … okay.” Nicias backed toward the exit. The woman’s hips were now rocking quite rhythmically, like a dance. “I am sorry to have disturbed you, mistress.” He turned and left.

“I am not disturbed, Nicias.” She called after him. When he was gone, she whispered down to her skirts. “Very good, little one. Now … ah … finish me off. Yeeeesssssssss.” And she climaxed again.

Before sending Merope back to her tasks in the scullery, Brynhild pulled the young wife from her hiding place. She lifted her up, swung Merope’s legs over her shoulders, and tucked her head under Merope’s stola. As she ate out the servant, and listened to the woman’s frenzied whining, she thought that perhaps she was not so well hidden as Merope had been. But she knew Nicias would not return. It was almost midday by the time she patted Merope’s butt, advised her to wash her face, and sent her on her way.

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The morning after she had spent such a wonderful time in the tower with her brother, Naevia woke up before sunrise and settled herself just out of sight from her cousin’s room. She did not wake Vel for fear that she might get waylaid in his room. Naevia wore a stola, with a bow and quiver slung over her shoulder. She could not imagine that Dellia would do her harm, but if her father was worried, she figured she might as well be cautious.

Just as the first rays of daylight fell into the hall, Naevia heard Dellia's door open. She peered around and watched the young woman march with purpose away from her down the hall. Naevia followed, sticking to the shadows.

They traversed the viscount's castle, and Dellia slipped into the aviary. Naevia sneaked to a nearby balcony so that she could watch her cousin through the glassless windows of the aviary. Dellia wore her battle tunic, and even from a distance Naevia could hear her sword jangling at her side. Naevia watched her spend time at a pigeon cage and then approach the window. Naevia removed her bow and notched an arrow.

It all happened quite fast. Dellia strode to the window, tossed the bird outside, and turned back to the door. Naevia let the arrow fly just as her cousin's back turned itself to the outgoing message. The poor pigeon exploded in a puff of feathers and fell with the arrow to the rocky outcrop below. Naevia glanced at her cousin but Dellia was already leaving the aviary. She hadn't seen what befell her messenger.

Heart thumping in her chest, Naevia waited a good long while before leaving the balcony. She crept through the castle, telling herself over and over that the message's contents would be banal and benign. She prayed it was so. She exited the castle, crossed the north lawn, and found the dead pigeon and her arrow on the rocks where they'd fallen. She retrieved her arrow, tossed the pigeon into a nearby wood, and tucked the still sealed scroll into her stola pocket. Now it was time to wake her brother. She hurried back into the castle.

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Birds sang in the trees of the courtyard. The portcullis rose as Cassia stood waiting with her retinue. She wore a gold circlet in her hair, and her stola was interwoven with glittering silver thread in floral designs. "Smiles everyone." She reached up and patted Bantia's shoulder. They could hear the horse hooves approach. This was the day Lord Hostus Gala's family would formally propose marriage to the Tullius clan.

A horn sounded. Cassia's smile left her like smoke on the wind. That was not the sound of the Gala family. That was the royal horn. It was supposed to be reserved for the princess in waiting. But, as a column of horsemen entered the courtyard pulling the royal carriage, Cassia could see that it was now used by the queens regent. This was the royal guard. Beside her she felt the sorceress's stance shift uneasily. Bantia reached for her mother's hand and squeezed it tight.

The carriage pulled around the courtyard and stopped in front of Cassia. The duchess stood a bit straighter. She could see another carriage rumble through the gate. The banner waving from it was the gull on a blue field. The Gala sigil. Why had the Gala's not told her the queens were with them?

Guards descended from their positions about the carriage and opened the door. First, the consort regent, Tiberius, exited. He smiled at Cassia and held his hand out for his wife. Queen Valeria took his hand and stepped out of the carriage. She held her free hand behind her, and Queen Cesphea followed her out. Cesphea had never married, so the carriage had no more passengers.

“Welcome, Your Majesties.” Cassia curtsied low and Bantia followed suit. To her right, Brynhild paused for a fraction of a second, and then curtsied, too. “It is an honor and a blessing to have you with us.” She stayed in her curtsey, eyes on the neatly trimmed grass below her.

“Rise, Duchess.” Valeria held up her hand in a magnanimous boon to all present. “The gods bestow their love and charity on you. Now rise.”

“To what do we owe this glorious pleasure?” Cassia looked on the perfect, pale faces of the queens.

A guard handed Valeria her scepter with the goddess Salacia sculpted out of patinaed copper. “We are here for the blessed joining of two of the kingdom’s most storied houses.” She looked around with a faint smirk and raised eyebrow. “But where is the duke? Could he not greet us?”

“I apologize, Your Majesty. My son is across the sea negotiating a trade compact.” Cassia bowed her head.

“Well, it is good that he is working hard for Ostia Novus. We would not want him running hither and tither on personal errands so soon into his ducal duties,” Cesphea said. “Come then, let us help you celebrate this momentous day.” The queens and consort walked past Cassia into the front hall.

Cassia glanced at her daughter whose olive complexion suddenly looked quite wan. “Welcome the Gala family and your husband-to-be. I will attend to the queens.” She watched her daughter nod and rush off to the second carriage. Then, Cassia turned, cursed herself under her breath, and headed into the main hall to welcome this new intrusion into her home.

Chapter 7

“A good morning to you.” Tes-amen smiled at the young Tullius woman. “Have you recovered yet from your trip across the Inland Sea? They say the first trip can be —”

“This is how I always walk, Tes-amen.” Naevia turned on the viscount’s man with fiery eyes. Was she so bowlegged from her time with Vel that everyone noticed? She unconsciously put her hand on the pocket that hid Dellia’s sealed message. “I am affronted that you would comment on the appearance of a lady, a duke’s sister no less.”

“My humble apologies.” Tes-amen bowed low. The way the little, pale thing looked at him he would not have been surprised had she removed the bow from around her shoulder and stuck him with an arrow. He looked around to avoid her eyes. “I made no allusion to your appearance, Lady Tullius.” This was true, he hadn’t any idea what she was talking about.

They stood where the hall curved out by a veranda. This stretch of corridor was open to the elements and boasted a view over most of the city. He saw his opportunity to change the subject. He pointed out over Kart Hadasht. “Ever since last night it has grown. They say it pulled into it all the fallen stones, and now it is greedily taking masonry from nearby buildings. Swallowing the blocks up and spitting them back out on top to form higher and higher levels. It is as if the warlocks of old had returned.”

Naevia looked back down at her feet and was about to push past Tes-amen, when the strangeness of his words caught her. “What are you talking about?” She looked over at him. The rising sun in the east backlit the dark-skinned man, and it was hard for her to read his expression.

“Oh, forgive me, Lady. Have you not heard?” He pointed again out over the city with renewed emphasis. “You need only look over there. One of the relic towers has suddenly awoken, and it is rebuilding itself as we speak. We are truly living through a time of miracles.”

“We are?” Naevia followed his gaze out over the city. Her heart nearly stopped when she saw the enormous column of stone climbing into the sky. She knew the old towers had been tall, but this stretched her mind’s ability to accept her eyes. “Is this some trick? Because I do not abide by foolery.” Truth was, Naevia enjoyed a bit of foolery, but she did not want this man laughing at her expense.

“It is all the palace is talking about.” Tes-amen watched as the young woman put her head back down and hurried past him. Such a strange lady. “I don’t know why I didn’t lead with it, rather than make those unfortunate comments.” He scratched his head as she vanished down the hall. “Very sorry about that.”

“Forget it happened.” She called over her shoulder. Naevia had been in quite a state on her errand to bring the sealed message to Vel. But to see what she had just seen nearly broke her brain. She was quite sure that the reanimated tower was the very same one she and her brother had spent the afternoon in the day before. It wasn’t coincidence. She had no idea what it was, but happenstance it was not.

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“Could Princess Minicia not make the journey?” Cassia was not surprised the princess failed to join her regents. Few saw her at all these days. She remembered Fortinbras had said something about wanting to make her acquaintance. But Cassia didn’t know if her son had done so before he disappeared. He’d certainly not reported it to her.

“Sadly, she caught cold and couldn’t make the journey. But she hopes she may yet travel for the wedding itself. Such a glorious union.” Queen Cesphea smiled over at Bantia and Hostus, the engaged couple sitting at the center of the table in the long hall. Cesphea’s black eyes lingered on Bantia’s slender neck, and the delicate clavicle exposed by her formal stola.

“Thank you, your majesty.” Bantia blushed when she caught the queen’s eye. “I find my future husband and the Gala family to be the perfect match.” She shivered. But she was unsure whether it was the uncommon chill in that great hall, or from the appraising eyes that fell on her.

“You are certainly matched in the quality of your stock, loyalty to the crown, and tranquil temperaments.” Tiberius leaned away from his wife, Queen Valeria, and moved conspiratorially closer to Bantia. He had a devilish twinkle in his eye. “But I wonder as to your match in the service of Venus. My queen hates when I state plain fact, but, Lady, you are a good deal taller than your lord.”

All the women around the table averted their eyes and blushed at the euphemism for sex. All, that is, but the queens regent and the sorceress Brynhild. Valeria looked like she might be cross with her husband. Brynhild and Cesphea both regarded the young couple with amused expressions.

Cassia cleared her throat. Normally, she would not tolerate crass talk. But when it came from the consort regent, she was forced to swallow it. “I’m sure Venus will bless them in their union and give them many children that we might further our houses through the generations.” She held up her wine goblet.

“Hear, hear. Hear, hear.” Murmured people around the table.

“Very fine words, Duchess.” Valeria smiled at her hostess. “I wonder, after lunch, would you mind if my sister and I wandered the castle a bit? We haven’t been here since our uncle was king and your husband was Duke.” She said it in a friendly manner, but a solemnity settled around the table. The mention of the former king and the former duke brought to mind reigns that ended before their time. A touchy subject when celebrating a new union.

“It would be wonderful to see the places we played as girls.” Cesphea put her left hand on her sister’s right hand.

Tiberius shifted in his seat uncomfortably.

“I would be happy to give you a tour.” Cassia forced a smile onto her face.

“Thank you for the offer, but we would prefer to keep our company to queens only,” Valeria said.

“Queens regent, you mean.” Bantia did not mean to let that out of her mouth, but the royal intrusion into her celebration had pushed her mood more than she’d realized.

“Bantia!” Cassia looked with disquieted eyes between her daughter and the queens regent.

“No, it’s quite all right.” Cesphea smiled. “Titles can be so confusing sometimes. We are the queens regent, of course.”

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When Naevia had first awoken Vel, his member was as hard as Uzze steel.

Vel found that his cock got harder still when his sister’s lovely face came into focus. But she had news and their games would have to wait. He softened as she showed him the message.

“I waited to open it. It’s still sealed.” Naevia held the scroll up.

“Whose pigeon did she send? Was it going to her home or ours?” Vel did not want to read the message, but knew they would have to. He admired his sister both for her aim with a bow and her bravery taking the bird right from under Dellia’s nose. He wouldn’t want to risk getting on his cousin’s bad side. He’d seen her angry before.

“I couldn’t tell. My arrow mangled the poor thing.”

“Well, let’s read it.” Vel sighed and looked at the scroll as his sister broke the seal. Spying on Dellia was not why they had braved the Inland Sea. The whole journey was turning sideways.

“Let’s see.” Naevia sat on the bed next to her brother and opened the scroll. “It’s coded.” There were a series of marks and tallies. “I know this. Don’t we know this, Vel?”

“Um …” Vel stared at the page completely befuddled.

“This is the code used for procurement in the old empire. Let me see. It’s been a while and I wasn’t really paying attention to those lessons.” Her finger scanned the lines trying to sort it out. “Can you bring me a something to write with?”

“That gets me thinking, Naevia.” Vel, still naked, threw back the sheets, stood, and walked over to his desk. He didn’t even consider how his state of undress might affect his sister. So much had changed between them in so little time. He scanned the desk. The viscount was kind enough to have supplied him with parchment, fine copper pens, and ink wells of the deepest black. He grabbed one of each and returned to bed. “What did the Vulpes do again? Before they were converted by the queens regent into spies.”

“They … um …” Naevia took the writing material from Vel and began scribbling her translation of the code. Her tongue stuck out of the corner of her mouth as she worked. “They … supplied materiel for the army.”

“Yes, exactly.” Vel nodded. He sat quietly for the next half hour while Naevia worked on the code.

Eventually, she finished as best as she could. “Here, what do you make of this?”

Vel read his sister’s writing out loud, “Suspect truth. Rabbit burrows. Masked but seen. Await delivery carrots.” Vel put down the parchment and looked at his sister. “What the …?”

“I don’t know, maybe I decoded it wrong.” Naevia shrugged.

“The code has a code.” Vel looked over at his sister. “But whatever the meaning, something is wrong with our cousin. She secretly brings her husband. She follows us through the streets. She writes strange messages. We have to talk to her.”

“I am not going to confront Dellia. Leave that to Father.” Naevia’s palms went sweaty.

“Father already had his suspicions. He needs no further hints or gossip. He needs something concrete.” Vel stood, walked across the room, and picked up his tunic. He pulled it on. “We must talk to her first. Not to confront her, but to see if we might pry some information out of her. Let’s invite her to my chambers for lunch and see what she says. Maybe we will gather something stronger. Or maybe she will allay our fears.”

“I do not like it.” Naevia pulled her knees to her chest and hugged her legs.

“I do not like any of this. I wish Father would just tell us what he’s doing.”

“You don’t like any of it? Some of this voyage has met with your approbation I trust.” She looked up at him with mock servitude.

“I don’t like that which has to do with Dellia and Father.” Vel finished fastening his robes. “That which has to do with you, has given me more than I ever dreamed to wish for.” To counter the rise between his legs, Vel put Harpastum into his mind. The ball game countered thoughts of his sister’s supple flesh. “Let’s figure out what’s happening with Cousin Dellia, report to Father, and then sail home. I fear we are wearing out our welcome in this city.”

“Oh, gods. I forgot to tell you.” Naevia’s green eyes sparkled with excitement. “One of the towers is rebuilding itself. I saw it with my own eyes.” She stood, grabbed his hand, and pulled him to the window. She threw open the shutters and had him lean out so he could see the tower. “It reaches into the clouds.”

“Rebuilding itself?” Vel looked where she pointed. He’d never seen the like, it dwarfed even the new tower rising at the royal palace. “Naevia.” His voice was a whisper as he took in the sight. “Is that our tower? The one where we …?”

“I think so. Yes.” Naevia squeezed his hand.

“What does it mean?”

“I haven’t the faintest. But I do not love a coincidence.”

“Nor do I.” As Vel looked at the tower and thought back to the corkscrewed Blessed Tower rising at Accipiter Cubitum Palace, a thought occurred to him. Unlike that tower, this one wasn’t blurry. He could see it clearly. He scanned the city. He could see the whole city with its arching architecture quite clearly. In fact, he realized as he turned it over in his mind, his vision had been improved for some time now. Since about the time Brynhild had cursed him. What else had the sorceress done to him?

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A slate sign hung on the door to the bath that said it was temporarily closed for cleaning. Brynhild tried the handle but it was locked. She knew very well who was cleaning in there. Merope thought herself clever, hiding behind the only door she had authority to lock. The story of the locked door was probably that they were giving the place a deep clean for royal guests, and didn't want any of the royal party to wander in and be scandalized by the scullery servants at work.

Brynhild could find the Seneschal, Aulus, and get him to open the door. But then this would be a bigger production than she'd like. And she didn't want to draw attention to herself with the queens wandering the castle. And also, she had to admit to herself, she didn't want to wait. She had tried several summoning charms with her left hand since the dust had its influence on her. All had failed. But maybe the urgency of the moment would aid her magic.

Thinking back to days before sorcery began leaking from the world, she remembered how her mind would find the right pitch. Her thoughts worked up the scale and then focused on a select, clear note. The key to the lock. She could feel it in the lock just on the other side of the door. So close. She unwound that object in her mind, infusing it with her conjuring spell. Her left hand flicked and closed into a fist. She held it before her and unfurled her fingers. There was an iron key in her palm. It worked. "Well, now, pretty thing, you will not hide from me." She whispered as she set the key in the lock and turned it. The door swung open.

There were two women working on the bath. Steam filled the air. The place looked clean enough without their work, but they must have their orders. They were so diligently scrubbing tiles that they did not see Brynhild enter. Merope was there. The other woman was a pretty thing, too. Brynhild watched her form as her butt swayed with her work. Best not to be greedy. Cassia wouldn't notice when one servant goes missing from her work here and there. But if Brynhild took all the pretty ones into her bed, the duchess would eventually take umbrage. "Merope, I require your services."

Both women froze at the sound of the unexpected voice.

"How did you get in, mistress?" Merope looked to the door. The key should have been on the inside of the lock, but it was on the outside. The sorceress had somehow pulled it through the door. This was a good deal more frightening than a floating ball of light. When the tall, pale woman didn't respond, Merope looked back down at the gleaming tile below her. An average, frightened-looking woman of the Surround stared back at her in the reflection. What was so special about her that Brynhild had taken this interest? Her vagina gushed as she thought of how that interest had manifested itself over the past few days. "I … I … have to clean." Merope stayed on her hands and knees.

"I can manage here on my own until your return, Merope." The other servant said. She wanted the sorceress out of the bath as quickly as possible. Her presence made the woman uneasy.

"No, no, I have to clean here. The duchess said – ow, owwwww." Merope felt strong fingers twist her ear and pull her upright. The familiar warmth spread from her ear, through her head, and into her core as she stood.

"None of that, little marsh flower." Brynhild moved her left hand under Merope's dark hair, and gently held the bare skin on her delicate neck. "There's a box that needs cleaning." Brynhild turned to the

other servant, who was staring at them, her mouth hanging open. “Carry on here by yourself, I’ll have her back to you in a few hours. Oh, and lock the door after we leave. We wouldn’t want one of the queens wandering in here before it was spotless.” Brynhild left the bath, shepherding Merope with one hand still on the back of her neck.

“Please. Nicias suspects something.” Merope’s mind drifted. She was on a knife’s edge between concern for her marriage and the growing hunger inside her. The heat pulsing through her was making it incredibly hard to think. “I can’t keep doing … the things we do together.” Such things that she never would have suspected existed before their affair had started.

“Shall we retire to my chamber today?” Brynhild squeezed Merope in a forceful but tender way. She could feel the small woman’s muscles relaxing. “Or, did you have a request for some other setting?”

“Please … please … I can’t wait to climb up there.” Merope gave in. “Let me taste you in the sanctum again. Let me …” Her voice trailed off as a pair of women, arm in arm, turned a corner in the hall ahead. A chill breeze blew past Merope and she trembled.

“Ah, sorceress.” Cesphea eyed the tall woman, ignoring the servant that walked before her. “Do you still care for the Tullius clan?”

“Yes, Your Majesty.” Brynhild stopped and curtsied. But she did not remove her left hand from Merope. Something told her that it was safer hidden under the servant’s lovely hair.

“You have changed. Haven’t you?” Valeria let out a little laugh and it was picked up by her sister. “You are not the woman we knew as girls.”

“Time has passed.” Brynhild could feel Merope’s steady pulse under her palm. She massaged the woman’s spine as she were a favorite dog. “It’s been many years.” She eyed the queens. They were beautiful, but also somewhat wild. Their patinaed copper crowns were tucked into their black hair like treasure peeking from the bottom of the sea.

“That is just the thing,” Cesphea said. “Years were not supposed to matter to you. You have lost all tricks except for that one gift. The talent that let you fight to overthrow the old empire, and yet stand before us a young woman, decades later.”

“As you say, Your Majesty.” Brynhild hated to do it, but she curtsied again. She needed to be done with this and what might the queens say if their focus turned to the smitten servant before them?

“And yet, though you try and disguise it, it is plain that your body is not the slender thing I remember.” Cesphea looked Brynhild up and down.

“That is so.” Valeria nodded her head in agreement.

“I … um … I …” Brynhild turned her gaze away from them, her cheeks hot.

“Given the chance, we’re all bound to let ourselves grow fat.” Valeria pulled her sister past Brynhild and Merope. “Your magic has left and it seems that you’ve put yourself out to pasture, sorceress.”

“Moo,” Cesphea called over her shoulder. “We’re happy that we have provided you land to graze in your remaining years. Remember our kindness.” The queens laughed and passed out of sight.

“Thank you, Your Majesties.” Brynhild turned away from the direction they’d gone. Warmth returned to the hall. “Come, Merope. I now need your skills more than ever.”

“What were they talking about, mistress?” Merope let herself be led down the hall. She was so wet now she could feel it on her legs.

“Their kind, and mine, were at one time competitors.” No longer willing to wait, Brynhild moved them into a run. “And maybe we will be that again someday.” She knew they looked ridiculous running through the castle, but she couldn’t bring herself to care. “With those two lurking about, the temples will not work today. We must climb to my room.”

A little while later, sweaty from their run, their bodies were intertwined on Brynhild’s bed. Their hips moved rhythmically together. The young wife whimpered and moaned.

It was just as good as the sorceress hoped. She nearly forgot all about the queens and their casual affronts.

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“These spices would be very good with lamb.” Dellia took the last bite of grilled crane and dropped her fork to her plate. She chewed thoughtfully as she regarded her cousins sitting on the other side of the small table in Vel’s chambers. She swallowed and cocked her head at them. “You two have barely touched your meal. Do the victuals on this side of the sea not agree with you?”

“We’re not hungry, I guess.” Naevia glanced at her brother.

“Well, that’s fine then. Maybe if you two got out more, you’d work up an appetite.” She took a swig of wine and smiled at them. “Well, to gather back around the question you left unanswered when we started this luncheon, have you heard from your father, then? We’ve traveled here, his kin, and we’re met with a ghost. Any news?”

“Nothing.” Vel shook his head. He looked back at Naevia sidelong. They had spent all afternoon with Dellia and gotten nowhere. Perhaps, Vel and Naevia were no good at spy work. Frustration mounted for both brother and sister.

“Strange tidings.” Dellia stood, retrieved her sword belt, and fastened it over her tunic. “Well, keep me in the know. I’m sure we’ll find him soon and figure out how to protect him.”

“Or we could just wait for the delivery of carrots.” It just came out of Vel’s mouth. Frustration had got the better of him. He felt his sister’s left hand slip into his right and grasp tight. Dellia stiffened when he said it, and slowly turned around.

“What is this about carrots?” Dellia took a slow step toward them.

“It’s nothing. Just a joke Vel and I have going about rabbits.” Naevia watched Dellia’s right hand creep toward the sword on her hip. “We’re cousins, Dellia. You’ve known us all our lives.” Pleading entered her voice.

“How did you read my letter?” Dellia eyed one cousin, and then the other.

“We –”

“Never mind that.” Dellia held up her hand to cut off Naevia. “That was a private letter to my father. Did you intercept it? Did it not get to him?” She took a deep breath and waited, but they did not answer. Dellia regarded the Tullius’s, huddled together like frightened kittens. “Shit. How in the underworld did you manage that?” She didn’t know what to do about this.

“Dellia, what’s going on? I am your duke and your family, take your hand off your sword.” Vel tried to lend some command to his voice.

“Let me think for a second.” Dellia turned from them, hand still on the pommel of her sword. What was the extent of their knowledge about this? Did they know her mission? She would have to interrogate them. And then? Well, she did love them and wished no harm upon them. The queens thought highly of Vel, after all. She would have them give up their father, and they would end up heroes before the crown. Everyone would win. Everyone but Gallio, that is. It was a good plan. “Now, young ones, you will tell me all that you know. First, where is Gallio Tullius?” She took another step toward them.

“Don’t let her draw.” Naevia leapt onto her cousin, sure that if the sword came out of its sheath, it would be the end for her and Vel. Their father had been right. Dellia was a traitor. She wrestled with Dellia’s right arm.

“Off me, you … little harpy.” Dellia spun and flung Naevia through the air. Her cousin hit a wall and fell in a heap on a richly woven carpet below. “Now, Vel … Vel … put down the sword.” She found that her other cousin had pulled his sword, and held it out in front of him like his tutor had no doubt instructed. “I love you well, Vel. Drop the sword.” She drew her own sword.

“You want Father dead. What has he ever done to you?” Vel stepped sideways, his weight on the balls of his feet.

“Your father has betrayed the crown, Your Grace. But you, so far, have not. Drop your sword.” Dellia lunged, feinted, parried his thrust, and then spun and lashed out. Loosened from his grip, his sword clattered to the floor.

“No!” Naevia wished very much for her dagger or bow, but having neither she jumped onto Dellia’s back again. The room twirled around her and she gripped tight. She kicked at Dellia’s right arm, and heard the sword fall. In an instant, Vel tackled Dellia, too. The three of them stumbled into a wall. Naevia found herself airborne again, and landed on the bed. When she looked up, Dellia was sitting on top of Vel on the floor, her hands around his neck. “Let go of him,” Naevia screamed. She looked around the room for a weapon. Both swords were on the other side of the struggling cousins. She could hear her brother struggling to breathe. Then a thought hit her. “Your curse, Vel. Use it.” She scrambled off the bed trying to get around them to grab a sword, but Dellia kicked out at her, knocking her backward. Naevia crashed into their lunch table.

“Hush … now … I only want … to ask you some questions.” Dellia could feel his long frame weaken under her. The trick was to cut off enough air that he would surrender, but not so much that she might kill her naive cousin. “That’s it … calm down.” He still struggled, reaching his hands up under the sleeves of her tunic, tightly pressing his fingers onto her bare forearms. “What’s … happening?” Her grip on his neck

loosened. A warmth spread up her arms. The most delicious feeling moved into her core and she was suddenly very aware of the rapid thump of her heart.

“Are you okay, Vel?” Naevia propped herself up on her elbows. Spilled saffron rice covered the front of her stola. She couldn’t hear him choking anymore, so that was good. “What should I do?”

“I’m … okay.” The air Vel sucked had never before been so sweet. He could feel his cousin’s hips rocking a little against his abdomen. Despite nearly dying at her hands, his penis swelled. Dellia dressed in a manly fashion, but she couldn’t disguise her beauty. He looked up into her deep, brown eyes and could see doubt there. Doubt was a thing seldom seen in his cousin. “I think … it’s working.”

“What’s working?” Dellia could sense that the tide had turned against her in her struggle with the pair of Tullius siblings, but she didn’t understand why. “What … what … have you done to me?” Dellia had always thought Fortinbras the more attractive cousin, but as she looked down at this tall, gangly teenager, she couldn’t help but admire his strange charisma.

“Just relax, Dellia.” Naevia could see the hunger growing in her eyes. From her own experiences with Vel, she knew that feeling well. “You can stop now, Vel. I think it’s over.” But her brother did not move his hands from Dellia’s bare skin.

“I cannot. She’ll kill me if I let go.” He could feel his cock pressing into her round butt as her hips moved a little faster on him.

“You can’t … do stuff … with her. She’s our cousin and she’s working against Father.” Naevia could see where this runaway carriage of a moment was headed. She had thought, lately, how someday she would have to share Vel with his future wife. She hadn’t liked that thought, but it was inevitable. Sharing him now, with their confident older cousin didn’t sit well with her at all.

“You … suddenly remind me … of Spurrius.” Dellia blinked her eyes and looked down at Vel. That wasn’t quite right, Vel was nothing like her husband. But her stomach and pussy disagreed with her, for she had the same butterflies in her tummy that an intimate moment with Spurrius caused, and she had the same wetness between her legs. “I … don’t understand.” She felt his hardness poking her bottom through her tunic. She had known he was big, but to stab at her with his thing while she sat on his belly, it had to be a very long cock indeed. Her hands, which had been squeezing him tight, now gently touched his throat. Soon, she was unfastening his robes. Heat radiated from Vel’s touch. She wanted to bathe in the feeling forever.

“Vel?” Naevia sat up and brushed the rice off her chest. She watched as her cousin muttered something she could not hear in a confused tone of voice and bent down to kiss Vel softly on the lips. Soon, they were kissing like long lost lovers. Dellia gyrated her hips on his stomach in a way that Naevia would never have suspected her cousin could move. Dellia had always seemed so manly, it was odd to see her feminine side now. Especially after such violence moments before. Naevia’s eyes widened as her cousin opened Vel’s robes, and then unclasped her own sword belt. They broke their kiss. She then reached down and pulled her tunic over her head, tossing it away from her.

“I only want to do this … oh … for a moment longer, then you will tell me … ah … ah … about your father.” Dellia trembled as bolts of lightning shot through her body. She felt the heat emanating from her hips now, she looked down to see Vel’s hands assisting her pelvis in its movements on him, gripping

her right above her underwear. “Oh, gods, Vel. Just let me … finish this one time … and then we can … aaaaahhhhhhhhh.” A minor climax took her, and she heard herself cry out. “Spurrius, Spurrrrrrius, oh, my sweet …” By habit, she called her husband’s name, but part of her mind knew it was not Spurrius underneath her.

“What should I do, Naevia?” Vel turned his head to look at the pale, shocked face of his sister. “If I release her from the curse, she will go back to her treachery.” The hips grinding into him paused, as Dellia submitted to another orgasm, but soon they were grinding him again faster than before.

“Give me a moment to think.” Naevia stood up. She could retrieve one of the swords and threaten Dellia, but she remembered how her cousin had handled them before submitting to the curse. She watched as Dellia removed her chest band. The garment had been very tight, for Naevia had not suspected she had breasts that size until Dellia had tossed the band away. Those boobs were paler than the rest of Dellia, but her nipples were quite dark. Now that Dellia’s breasts shook in Vel’s face, Naevia wondered what Vel’s resistance to her would be. Naevia had to admit, the beauty of the mostly naked woman, undulating as she was, would have made Venus proud.

“I want to … crest this hill … one more time … and then we will get back to … our business.” Dellia’s eyes rolled. She scooted her butt back, so that Vel’s cudgel rested on her left cheek and pushed at the small of her back. “Gods, you are large.” She pulled her underwear to the side, and reached down with her hand to rub at her button. Even Spurrius had never wound her up so. She looked down at her cousin’s handsome face, and could see those blue eyes staring at her shaking boobs. The desire evident on his face filled her with pride.

“Have you thought of a way to … um … handle this?” Vel found it embarrassing to grab another woman’s tits with his sister looking on, but when would he have such a chance again? Vel’s hands slid up her sides, moved around front, and cupped Dellia’s boobs, one to each hand. They were heavier than Naevia’s and hung a little lower on her chest. Vel wondered if that was what would happen to Naevia when she entered her twenties, or if maybe it was because Dellia was a taller woman than his sister. He hefted and squeezed his cousin’s breasts and listened to her moans in response.

“I haven’t thought of anything, yet.” Naevia paced the room to avoid staring at the pair of them. She knew how strong-willed Dellia was. Vel was right, if he stopped, she’d be back at their throats. The thought occurred to Naevia that she could slit her cousin’s throat while she was otherwise occupied with Vel. But she tossed that idea out. Traitor or not, Dellia was still a woman they had known all their lives. And Naevia wasn’t a murderer. They needed to turn her to their side. A strong ally she could be for their father. A double agent. But to turn her, Naevia suspected they would have to break her. And there was only one way she could see to do that. “I think …” She hated to say it. She did not want to see her brother coupled to anyone else. But there was no other way. “I think you will have to go the distance with her.”

“How … Vel … how?” Dellia came again, shaking all over. She was now hunching her hips forward and holding her underwear firmly to side, so that the great cock slid against the bottom of her pussy. Another climax sprung her torqued nervous system.

“I’ll do it, Naevia.” He tried to sound heroic, like it was some great sacrifice to resize his cousin’s vagina, but he doubted he fooled anyone. Least of all his sister. “Go ahead and put it in, Dellia. Put it inside you.” He tried to sound convincing.

“Spurrius … Spurrius … only for Spurrius.” Dellia shook her head and fought against the delicious heat that moved through her. “You would … split me in two … he would know.” She wanted nothing more than to reach under her and guide him in, but she couldn’t do that to her husband.

Naevia could see her cousin’s resolve growing. She knew intimately what Vel could do with his cock. In her memory, she went back to the first time he’d entered her. It had been just the tip, but Naevia had known then that she would do anything to have more of him. Dellia needed the same experience, and quickly, before her mind cleared. “You’ll need to put it in. Do it like we did yesterday. Take her like a dog.”

“What?” Dellia’s mind latched onto those words. *Like they had done yesterday*? Had they? Suddenly, she was no longer sitting astride Vel. Disappointment and relief flooded her mind, pulling her in opposite directions. Without his hands on her, the fog lifted from her brain. She found that she’d been maneuvered onto her hands and knees. She looked over her shoulder and could see the mammoth cock waving back and forth as Vel got himself into position. “Not in a million years, Cousin.” She kicked at him, but her body was slow. He twisted his hips to avoid her foot, and moved in. She turned and reached for his neck again, to continue what she’d started before. What had the queens done by sending her on this mission? Did anyone know what they were up against in Vel? She had to get control of the situation. But as she held him, twisting herself sideways, his hands squeezed her waist, and she shuddered at the warmth.

“What do I do, Vel?” Naevia watched through her fingers, a hand over her eyes. When Dellia had sprung back at him, she’d almost jumped in herself to help her brother. But she could see the fight leave Dellia almost instantly.

“Help me, Naevia. Help me put it in.” Vel kneeled on the floor, holding Dellia as she twisted around in his arms. His cousin’s butt was in his lap, but she was half-turned, so that her face looked up at him, and her hands gently caressed his neck. “I dare not let go of her again.”

“Oh, gods.” Naevia moved toward them. She reached down, pushed Dellia’s hips to make clearance for Vel’s long cock, and then grabbed the fevered organ. “This really is the only way, Vel.” She said it more to convince herself than him. She found Dellia’s slick opening with the wide head, and pushed it in.

Dellia gave a scream of pure joy. That mighty thing was in. It had opened her up and she felt her body stretching and accommodating. She wondered, breathlessly, if it would fit. And then her butt rested on Vel’s thighs and she realized it was all inside her. Her hips moved on their own. She had never experienced anything of the like. Her mind hooked on Spurrius for the briefest second, and then all thoughts of her husband were gone. The pleasure pushed him out of her mind. With him, went her mission, the queens, her father. All responsibilities and loyalties faded with each thrust of her hips. An animal whined in the room with them, and it dawned on Dellia that she herself made those noises.

Naevia stepped back and watched Dellia’s tight butt pound back into her brother. She could see Dellia’s pink lips strained around Vel’s thick, veiny shaft. “Gods, Vel. You’ll surely break her.” Part of her wanted

this to stop, to keep her brother to herself forever and always. And part of her wanted this woman broken and tamed like a wild horse. “Break her in, Vel,” she whispered. “Break the traitor.”

Chapter 8

The grunting, moaning, and slapping echoed off the walls of Vel's chambers in the viscount's castle. Naevia was grateful for the thick walls built to keep out the desert's heat. Did Naevia sound like such a wild animal when she and Vel rutted? She didn't think so, but she so lost herself in her pleasures with him that she couldn't be sure. She guessed that Dellia might sound very much like this in the throes of pitched battle. Grunts, squeals, and curses came out of their cousin's mouth as Vel took her from behind.

"You've … aaahhhhhh … fucking … broken me … Cousin. Stop … and I promise … I will forget it." Dellia tried to look back at him over her bare, tensing shoulder. Her eyelids fluttered as he hit some deep place inside her that Spurrius had neglected with his smaller tool. "Just pull … gods damn … out." The heat that spread from Vel's cock deep in her belly and from his hands on her hips fogged her brain and sapped her of her agency.

"Naevia?" Vel was trying not to enjoy himself too much in front of his sister. But punishing Dellia for her treachery by possessing her from the inside out was a high he had not yet known. "What should I … uh, uh, uh … do?"

"She's asking you to pull out of her. She's not making you." Naevia bit her lip. This really was the only way. Right? Maybe the curse was a gift. Dellia would have hurt them otherwise. And she would have hurt their father. "That means it's working. Keep going. Don't stop, no matter what she says. We can't let her go until she swears her allegiance to the Tullius clan."

"How … ugh … about it?" Vel's hips slammed into his cousin's tight butt. He moved as if he was an automaton. "Will you … swear to … help me … and … uh … uh … uh … my sister … and … my father?"

"N … n … never," Dellia said as she dropped her head to look back at the floor. She tried to focus her gaze on the iron ring on her left hand. She knew a nerve ran from her fourth finger directly to her heart. That was the power of a wedding ring. But her cousin's cock had somehow attenuated that nerve. Vel's power and the pleasure he coaxed out of her were attempting to usurp everything that mattered to Dellia. "I am … oooohhhhhh … loyal to the crown … and to my father. Agh … agh … aggghhhhhhhhhh." She bucked her hips back at him and let out a series of low grunts. She was at the mercy of another climax. There was no mention of her loyalty to her husband.

Naevia sat herself on the edge of the bed and watched. Her pretty, unlined face twisted in awe. Did she actually enjoy seeing this traitor treated thusly? Would she enjoy it even if Dellia had not tried to betray them? She worked hard to keep her hand from going under her stola. After a while, she could see some clarity return to Dellia's eyes, and the woman's back flexed in such a way that it looked like she was working herself up for action. Vel needed to do more. "You must take her harder, Vel."

"I'm … getting … tired." He was indeed sucking in air as if he'd just run a race. But also, he couldn't hold back the flood much longer. Thinking about sports was not working in the least. Not when he could look at the impact ripples on Dellia's tight butt. To make matters worse, his mind kept returning to the idea that he had to vanquish the treachery inside her. And the battle for that conquest, waged inside her pussy, excited his mind into a frenzy he could not easily quell. "And I think … I'm going to …"

“Oh … oh, my.” Naevia rubbed her legs together. “Well, you cannot stop. Or pull out.” She watched her cousin.

Apparently Vel’s words had further sobered Dellia. She looked over at Naevia with a dark look, but said nothing.

Naevia nodded to herself. “First, you need to regain some control, Vel. Grab her hair. No, at the top. Yes, like that. Now, pull her head up and back so that she’s forced to arch her back.” The man Naevia had once lain with had done this to her. At the time, she’d thought it was pure magic. But now she knew that such tricks in the hands of that man were just parlor games. But in Vel’s hands, she could only imagine what this would do to Dellia. “Good, now really drive it into her.” Naevia’s eyes went wide at the sight of it. He was so long, and pulled back so far with each thrust. Power seemed to flow from Vel in waves.

“Aaaaaaaggggggghhhhhhhh.” Dellia orgasmed again. She could feel Vel striking to her very center. With her back curved, she could feel him poking at the front of her belly. Did his penis want to find another way out? He was driving her crazy. His words about his impending orgasm floated out of her mind.

“Going to … do it …” Vel looked over at his sister with longing and guilt. He did not want to plant a baby in his cousin, and he certainly didn’t want to do it while the love of his life looked on. He raised his eyebrows in an unsaid question.

Naevia understood him well. “You’ll just have to put it all inside her. I didn’t tell you, but when you did it in me, I never felt closer to you. It bonded us. It made us as one. She will feel the same thing. I know it.”

“Naevia … here … goes …” Vel felt like his balls might be glowing. He’d never tried so hard to hold back and he knew a monster eruption was moments away. He tightened his grip on Dellia’s brown hair, and her narrow hip.

“Wait … wait … Spurrius … ugh … ugh … fuck! … ugh … ugh … the Bellius … line.” She was stronger than her tall, gangly cousin. But she lacked the fortitude to break away. For the first time in her life, she found something she could not fight: her own pleasure. She heard a growl that she would not have suspected from her nineteen-year-old cousin, and then fire filled her from the inside. Dellia howled and fireworks danced before her eyes. The young, upstart duke planted his seed. In that moment, she wanted nothing more than to provide a fertile furrow for him. As he pushed her over a cascade of ecstasy, she almost prayed to Venus for a successful joining.

Amazed, Naevia watched them. Dellia writhed, grunted, and hissed as she pushed back. Her head still upright with the force of Vel’s grip. Her brother’s whole body jerked spasmodically, his face contorted, and his eyes shut tight. She knew they had just pushed Dellia over her Rubicon. It seemed that the cousins climaxed together for minutes. Eventually, Vel released his grip on her and sat back on the floor. His long cock slid out of her with a wet plop and flopped up to his belly, leaving a smear of their combined cum above his navel. Naevia rushed over to him, dropped to her knees, and flung her arms around him. “How do you feel?” She was happily surprised when he turned his head and kissed her.

His arms went weakly around her shoulders and he broke the kiss, panting. “I … feel ...” He held her at arm’s length, looking into her deep, green eyes. “Are you angry?”

“How could I be? I told you to do it. I put you inside her.” Naevia had been blindsided by everything on that trip. There was a relic tower that they had somehow nudged out of its slumber in that very city, and it was not even close to her strangest experience. “Did she feel good to you?” Naevia persisted.

“I thought I … knew you. I thought you were … innocent … teenagers,” Dellia panted. Now lying face down on the floor, Dellia’s chest pressed at the cold tile with each rasping breath. Her nipples were hard and rebellious at the almost painful sensation. “But you are … some sort of abomination … before the gods. How can a brother and sister …?” With some difficulty, she propped herself up on an elbow and looked back at them. She knew if they cared to look, she was giving them a show, but she didn’t have the energy to close her legs at the moment. “And you’ve soiled me … with your filth. You better pray –”

Without thinking, Naevia smacked her cousin’s butt like she would a braying hound to shut her up. “Quiet.” And to her surprise, Dellia did stop talking. But the look in her eyes was dark. Naevia’s gaze fell down to the backstabber’s vagina. She could see the delicate brown hair around her gash, the froth on Dellia’s lips, and Vel’s semen leaking out of her. She smacked Dellia’s ass cheek again and watched it shake with some satisfaction. With Vel’s gift, they had tamed the most wild of horses. The fight had gone out of their cousin. “Do you feel bonded to him?” She asked Dellia. “Do you feel the warm gravity inside you, pulling you back to him? I know that feeling, too. For me, there was never a purer joy, for I love him above even myself. But for you? I see how it casts a shadow on your countenance. Don’t look so surly, Cousin. Do you swear loyalty to us now?”

“When I get my sword –” She stopped talking as Naevia slapped her butt again. Her cheeks reddened and her brow knitted. How could she be so cowed by teenagers? She needed to get up and flush out her vagina with saltwater immediately. But she just lay on the floor like she was their broken pleasure servant.

“I will have to mount her again.” Vel looked down at the hourglass of Dellia’s body as she lay before him. He could see that her vagina now yawned open where he’d stretched her. “I will have to mount you, Dellia. I cannot match your sword.”

“You speak truth, Vel. You must take her again.” Naevia gave his cock a light tap to emphasize the point. She watched it wobble a moment, and then she reached out and helped Dellia close her legs. “Don’t look at me so,” Naevia said to Vel. “I’m helping you. You mount her like this.” Naevia straddled their cousin’s butt, and thrust her hips a few times to show Vel how it might be done. She was maybe a little jealous of him, as she looked down on Dellia’s strangely quiescent form. Naevia dismounted and moved herself to her seated position on the bed. Goodness, she had just dry-humped Dellia’s tight, round rump. What were things coming to? Under her stola, Naevia’s underwear was nothing better than a saturated bog.

“Will I fit like this?” Vel could barely see her vagina with her legs together as they were, Dellia lying flat on her belly. But the sight was beyond inviting.

“No,” Dellia said into the tiles.

“Yes,” Naevia said at the same time. “The marvel is that you fit at all. But this position should be no hindrance. You have both already readied the way. See how she waits for you. Hurry, before she turns restless again.”

“Very well.” Vel lined up the head with Dellia’s opening. He heard her whimper, but she said nothing more. He had to angle his cock down a bit, but that was no problem. He sunk right in, braced his hands on the fine curve of her lower back, and found a rhythm with his hips. He could tell from her cries that she was already meeting another climax.

Naevia watched them all afternoon. Eventually, sometime after her brother’s third orgasm, her hand found its way under her stola. She pleasured herself as the cousins pleasured each other. She had no idea how many times Dellia’s ecstasy crested, but her grunts, cries, and curses were nearly nonstop. Eventually, Vel grew tired of his position behind Dellia, and turned her onto her back. Naevia was concerned the woman might try to bite Vel, or otherwise make an assault. But it seemed she didn’t have it in her. Dellia let him have his way with her. She even locked her legs around his butt, accepting his torrent every time Vel needed a release.

The pungent, salty smell of sweat mixed with cum filled the room. All three were bound by the moment, continuing their various states of participation until long after the sun set, and the room fell into darkness. Vel could finally go no longer, and he pushed Dellia off him. She had just ridden him to his last orgasm of the day. He then stumbled to bed. Naevia sprung up to help and laid him down onto the sheets. She then gathered her dagger, and sat next to him, one hand on his snoring chest, the other on the blade’s handle. “If you try for our lives, I will finish you, Dellia,” she said into the darkness.

“You have already finished me,” came the mumbled response from the blackness on the floor. Dellia rolled herself over twice and found a wool rug that was softer than tile. She knew her leaking body would make a mess of that fine bit of woven artistry, but she couldn’t move herself anywhere beyond. She closed her eyes, her body an aching mix of longing, languid satisfaction, and tense obstinance.

“I will not sleep this night.” Naevia wondered if that was true. She was very tired, but determined to watch over Vel. “You will not harm His Grace.” That was the first time she’d addressed his new title without sarcasm in her voice. “I will not sleep.”

“As you will,” Dellia mumbled. And she drifted into strange dreams filled with new senses and a compelling sense of tumescence.

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“You are the scullery servant that was with the witch, were you not?” The cool voice startled everyone in the scullery.

“I was with my mistress, the Sorceress Brynhild.” Merope shivered. Despite the pot of boiling water, the room had suddenly taken on some sort of arctic draft. “I was with her in the hall when we saw you,” she quickly added, wanting to avoid any insinuations. Especially with her good husband looking on only feet away.

“I am Nicias. Can I help Your Majesties?” Nicias stepped toward the identical queens. How odd it was that they should roam the castle without their retainer. He had noticed that they hadn’t employed food

tasters at their meals, either. They must have a deep trust of the Tullius House. “Is there something that needs scrubbing? Because we –”

“Quiet,” Cesphea said. “We require nothing from you. We simply wish to borrow your scullery wench for a little while.”

Nicias turned red in the face. “Really, I can be of –”

“You do not argue with a queen.” Valeria gripped her scepter a bit tighter. She watched as Merope reached for and squeezed the hand of the impudent Nicias. Valeria’s jaw softened at the sight of them. She understood that they were married. That’s why he acted so. “Never fear, Nicias. We will have her back presently.” This was not true.

“I’ll be back soon.” Merope gave her husband’s hand one last squeeze. She tried not to let him see how frightened she was. Had the queens somehow found out about her repeated and escalating infidelity with the sorceress? Would she be punished? She could tell the twin sisters were impatient, and it would not do to keep the queen regents waiting. She followed them out of the scullery, through the kitchens, and into the corridor. The queens walked ahead of her, their pale chins high, and their backs straight.

There was silence for a while, and then Merope saw one of the queens whisper to the other one. She couldn’t hear what was said, but they both laughed. Nor could she tell which queen was which. They looked too much alike. She studied their backs as they climbed the stairs. They each had an identical birthmark on the back of their slender necks. No, that wasn’t right. The small crescent mark faced left on the neck to Merope’s left. But on the queen to her right, the mark faced right. So, they were not identical. Same mark, opposite directions. She could tell them apart, if they ever identified to her which one was which. But, of course, dukes and barons would not dare to ask such a thing, so what was a servant to do?

After many stairs, they came to a floor Merope knew well. And then to a familiar door. Her pulse thumped like a brass drum in her ears. One of the queens turned back to regard her.

“You are a small, frightened thing. Aren’t you?” Cesphea cocked her head at the woman. “Despite it though, she’s quite pretty. Isn’t she, Valeria?”

Merope twisted her hands together as they all stood outside Brynhild’s door. So, the one with the right facing mark was Cesphea. And the other was Valeria. She could remember that. She looked from one to the other of them.

“She probably wants to know what we’re doing here.” Valeria put her hand to the door. A brief glow of red light settled around her fingers and the door swung open. She reached up, adjusted her copper crown, and looked at the servant. “She is pretty,” she said with a dismissive wave of her hand. “But clearly, we’ve scared her witless. Don’t worry, the witch isn’t here now,” she said to Merope. “We’ve tasked her with some engagement. She’ll be busy for quite a while. Come in.” She glided into the room, her gown flowing behind her. Merope followed, and then Cesphea walked into the chamber last, closing the door behind them.

Merope’s jaw had dropped when the queen had clearly used magic to open a charmed door. She hadn’t known the queens regent were sorcerers. Was that common knowledge?

“Look at the diminutive wheels spin in her head.” Valeria laughed. “You haven’t the foggiest, do you …? What was your name?”

“Merope, Your Majesty.”

“Well, look at that. The little beauty can talk. You’ll be singing before long, sweet thing.” Cesphea patted Merope on the butt and walked around to stand next to her sister. It pleased her the way Merope stiffened at the intimate gesture.

“You’re wondering what this is all about.” Valeria walked over to the table where Brynhild’s books sat in piles. She put down her scepter, and leafed through the volume on top. She seemed uninterested in Merope’s presence.

“Don’t share too much.” Cesphea, put down her scepter, too. But she stood in front of Merope, eyeing her with a warm smile. “You always share too much.”

“Right you are.” Valeria sighed as she looked at what Brynhild had been reading. “It is enough for you to know that Cesphea and I are not, strictly speaking, sisters.”

“But … but …” Merope’s smooth brow furrowed in confusion. “You look exactly alike.”

“Not quite.” Cesphea turned her back to Merope. “Unfasten my gown.”

With trembling fingers, Merope undid the clasps down the queen’s back. Valeria did not watch, she seemed to have found something interesting in Brynhild’s book.

Merope looked at the delicate spine that arched into view as the gown opened. Something stirred in her. Had the sorceress made her develop a taste in the same sex? But this was a queen, she dared not let her fingers glance upon that alabaster flesh. As the gown fell to the floor, Merope saw that in addition to the common chest band, the queen wore some sort of restrictive band around her hips instead of underwear.

“After the accident, our uncle made me learn to hide myself. And he had to invent, in the popular imagination, that there had always been two of us. Always sisters.” Cesphea turned around. It was clear now that the band around her hips was there to restrain what was in front.

“I … I … don’t understand.” Merope looked down at what clearly was a large, soft penis bound under the band. She watched Cesphea wiggle her wide, feminine hips as she lowered the restraints down her legs. The image of that very male thing, hanging between her feminine legs gave Merope the kind of shock that nearly turned her brain off. “I … I … I …”

Valeria glanced over, barely interested. “Are you broken already, Merope?” She smiled when the woman did not answer. The servant did not even turn her gaze away from Cesphea’s smooth, slumbering serpent. Valeria sighed. “Well, at any rate you can see what she has waiting for you. I possess nothing of the sort between my legs. She also has a hunger that I myself do not possess. I will look through the witch’s things and find out whether our suspicions are founded. You will amuse my sister.”

“Why … me?” Merope squeaked. She had lived such a plain, simple life until only a short while ago. And now this. Everything spun faster and chaos reached out its tentacles all around her. An ever-widening gyre had enveloped Merope’s world.

“Only because it seemed to us that the witch wanted you. This is an easy enough message to send to her. Oh, and you are pretty.” Valeria went back to searching through a parchment on Brynhild’s desk.

“Is it time?” Cesphea looked over at the back of Valeria’s head. She undid the chest band and stood before Merope wearing only her sandals and crown. Merope was fully clothed in her stained stola, but Cesphea could tell she had a pleasing shape underneath.

“Enjoy yourself, Sister,” Valeria said over her shoulder.

“Please me well, Merope, and you shall earn the queens’ favor.” Cesphea took in several breaths, releasing the control she placed on her phallus. She let it swell at the sight of this small, olive skinned woman trembling before her.

“I … cannot …” Merope blushed so deep she was sure she now looked purple. Her eyes did not, could not, leave that strange royal penis. It was so pale, and smooth. Too smooth, really. The only blemish on the thing was the hole up top. It rose, engorging itself. The base was nestled in a thinly populated patch of dark hair, and two overripe testicles dangled beneath it. The thing curved a little to left, but stuck well out from the queen’s person. Was it fully hard now? It was maybe twice, or even thrice the size of her husband’s thing. Oh, her poor husband.

“In this matter, I’m afraid, I will not accept a refusal.” Cesphea’s smile turned imperious and victorious. “Drop to your knees, sweet thing, and have a taste.” As she said it, a trickle of clear liquid leaked from the head of her cock. “You wouldn’t want to disappoint me.” She looked down at Merope’s iron ring with her dark, wild eyes. “Your husband wouldn’t want you to disappoint me.’

“Yes.” Merope dropped to her knees. With tentative, shaking hands she reached out for the long, sleek tool. In fact, she was quite sure that Nicias would happily give his life to stop what she was about to do. But that wasn’t his choice to make. The threat was clear, and she had the opportunity to save him. She shook when her hands came in contact with the phallus. It was cold. Too cold to be a part of this living, breathing woman. She caressed it softly, as she would for her husband. “Is this good, Your Majesty?”

“Well, no. But you’ll learn.” Cesphea laughed, and her sister snickered over by the table.

“Right.” Merope remembered what the queen had said about tasting it. She stuck out her tongue and slowly, very slowly, leaned forward. This was so unlike her infidelity with Brynhild. There, Merope had been burning in a fire of hunger for the tall, northern woman. But here, in this moment, she only hoped the queen would be pleased completely and quickly, and then she could put the whole thing behind her. Her tongue came in contact with the salty fluid leaking from the winking hole in the cock’s head. It wasn’t as bad as she feared. She licked again. The stuff was frigid, just like the rest of Cesphea, but it had a favorable taste. She licked at it like the iced treats she’d seen the Tullius children enjoy.

Cesphea sighed with exasperation. “You look like a cat at the milk dish. Here, let me help.” She reached into the back of Merope’s dark curls, took a handful of hair, and pulled her face forward.

“Gggggggppppppphhhhhhhh.” Merope put her hands on the front of the woman’s hips to brace herself. She had to breathe through her nose and stretch her jaw as wide as it would go. She wondered at how sure of herself Cesphea was that she wasn’t worried about Merope’s bite. Soon, her head was bobbing back and forth under the queen’s forceful guidance. Her eyes watered. After nearly choking on the thing several times, Cesphea had found Merope’s gagging point and stopped each thrust about a quarter of the way down the shaft. Merope wondered at how ludicrous she must look, kneeling before a queen still in her crown, gobbling that giant thing, with drool dribbling down her chin.

“No need to brace yourself.” Cesphea relaxed a little. The pleasure was starting to mount. The young servant and wife was learning. She could feel the woman’s tongue involve itself more in their dance, rolling around the head. “Remove your hands from my hips.” She looked down with a smile as the fellating woman held her hands awkwardly in the air. “The gods gave you hands, use them.”

“Mmmpppphhhh.” Merope tried to give her assent. She took hold of the penis and pumped the strange thing. It was so different from Nicias, that she scarcely recognized them as the same species. But then again, they scarcely were.

“Stop toying with her and break her in.” Valeria did not look up from the notes she rifled on the table. “The witch will be back presently.”

“Yes, you’re right.” Cesphea pulled Merope’s mouth off her, stood the panting woman up, and pulled the stola off her. She then roughly removed the chest band and underwear. Merope’s body did indeed please her. “Have you found anything? Has she betrayed us?” Cesphea then threw Merope onto the witch’s bed and climbed on after her. The small woman was on her side, her legs scissored back and front. She admired how Merope’s heavy breasts hung to the left with gravity. She straddled the back leg and let her cock bounce on the woman’s ass cheek. This would do nicely.

“I see no evidence of betrayal.” Valeria listened to the woman whimper. Her sister did so love to make her women whimper. “But she is dabbling in magics that should no longer concern her. She is reading on spells lost to all but …” Her voice trailed off and she put her finger on the page. In the background, she could hear Merope’s grunt as Cesphea entered her, and then the slow, ponderous slap of flesh on flesh. “I knew that protection spell on the door was odd. She’s added something that the North hasn’t used since the towers fell. A clever charm.”

“Does she … ugh … have some sort … of enhancement device?” Cesphea grabbed Merope’s right ass cheek tightly with both hands. She left Merope’s legs scissored. The servant was on her side still, so that while Cesphea took her from behind, she could also see Merope’s pretty fast twist in ecstasy. This pussy was a tight one. Whatever Brynhild was doing with her, she was not stretching her much. And her husband had left her nearly virginal. That was good. Cesphea had always planned on keeping this one, just to spite the witch. But now, she was looking forward to the time she’d spend with Merope over the coming months.

“I’m not sure what she has, or maybe she’s making one last gasp before our tower lays her to waste,” Valeria said.

“You’ll see the Blessed Tower soon … ugh … ugh … enough, sweet thing.” Cesphea caught Merope’s frantic eyes with her own and winked. “But tell me. What do you … ah … ah … ah … think of my personal, blessed tower?”

It was clear to Merope that the queen was boasting about her cock. And she had reason to be proud. “It’s … ooooooohhhhhhhh … good. It’s … like … nothing … aaaaahhhhhh.” She lost her focus and could no longer answer. She was taking every inch of that tower, and it had turned her body to jelly. She had gone from the tame, timid sex ordained by the gods with her husband. To wicked, mind-alerting sex with Brynhild. To something with a queen regent that was melting the very fabric of reality for poor Merope. She knew her body would never be the same. She doubted her husband would even recognize her nethers once the queens let her go. She also knew that her mind was lost. She only hoped she would recover it once the queen had her fill. “Ooooooohhhhhhhh.” A flood of ecstasy spread over the planes of her mind and she had no more cohesive thoughts for some time. Somewhere, far back in her mind, she heard the sisters, who were not sisters, talking about something. But she could not bring her mind to focus on the words.

A while later, Merope found herself riding Cesphea with wild, thrusting hips. She looked down between her own dangling breasts at the fat shaft that she took over and over. It was a continual surprise to her that it did not hurt her. Indeed, it drove her nearly mad with gratitude. What a boon to be able to take that royal cock inside her. She was dimly aware of the door opening and a tall, platinum blond woman stepping inside. But she could not focus on this event. It was too far outside her vortex of pleasure. Instead, she gripped Cesphea’s breasts below her for leverage, and continued slamming down her hips.

“What?” Brynhild was not normally one to be scandalized. But to find her very own Merope bouncing like a common whore on the … the … abomination that was one of the queens regent. She narrowed her eyes. It was Cesphea. And there was Valeria to her left, going through Brynhild’s things. “What is the meaning of this?”

“You may finish your claim now, Sister.” Valeria spoke first to her sister and then turned toward the door. “I would watch your tone, Sorceress. Remember to whom you speak.”

“Apologies, Your Majesty.” Brynhild forced herself to curtsy. On the bed, Cesphea grunted louder under Merope, and then the little woman howled on top of her. Cesphea’s hands clamped down on Merope’s hips and forced her all the way down, so that the cock was as deep as it could be. But even so, Merope’s hips continued to gyrate, and she screamed as if there were no witnesses. Brynhild closed the door behind her. What had they done to her sweet scullery servant?

“My sister will be finished in a moment.” Valeria glanced at Cesphea. The pair on the bed had now collapsed together, but Cesphea was still grunting as she pumped more blessed seed into Merope. “So, I will tell you what you need to know.” Valeria casually lifted her scepter. “The last two dukes of Ostia Novus behaved in ways which we found adverse to the crown. We always must look out for the welfare of Princess Minicia. And we worried that her life might be in danger. So, we dug into things and found that the rest of the family was loyal and true. But you, we couldn’t be sure of. You certainly dabble in odd magic. But … now that I have you before me … it’s clear. You really are only a shadow of your former self. Are you not?”

“I am.” Brynhild bowed her head.

The couple on the bed had stopped groaning and grunting.

“So, we will go now. But know that we are watching.” Valeria glanced at the sweaty, gasping bodies on the bed. “And we will take your little scullery servant with us so that you may be reminded of our reach. We are, quite literally, everywhere.”

“But the duchess will not hear of losing a servant like this. She’ll –”

“She’ll lend us the servant with her blessings. We are her queens.” Cesphea said from the bed.

“Now leave us. Her Majesty needs to freshen up.” Valeria nodded to the bed.

“Of course.” Brynhild gritted her teeth and forced another curtsy. She turned, opened the door, and strode out of her own chamber.

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“I thought you were going to stay awake the whole night?” Vel blearily rubbed his eyes. He shook his snoring sister next to him in bed until she was awake. He was sore. His whole body, even his penis, ached from the previous day’s exertions. That had been a lot, even for him on that strange trip. He and his sister had yet to try such a marathon.

“What?” Naevia opened her eyes and sat bolt upright, her hand clutching the handle of the dagger. She crawled to the foot of the bed and looked down. Dellia was not on the floor where they’d left her. And her clothes were gone. More ominously her sword had disappeared, too.

“Well, we’re not dead. Or bound. Or hanging over a fire pit.” Vel looked around the room. The sun was up and pale light settled over everything. “So maybe that’s good news?”

“What should we do?” Naevia got out of bed. She still wore her stola from yesterday, but Vel was naked on top of the sheets. She longed to rejoin him in bed, but perhaps that might not be how they’d like to be found by Dellia and her Vulpes accomplices.

“We could flee?” Vel wondered if they had handled Dellia the right way. Could a woman really be pleasured into submission? The thought seemed silly to him now.

“We could find Mercury and alert Father.” Naevia gathered some fresh clothes for Vel. Whatever they were to do, he needed to be dressed while they did it.

“Let’s not force a decision now. We flee the viscount’s castle, regroup in the city. Then we can decide.” Vel leapt out of bed. He could still smell a thick cloud of sex hanging off him. He looked longingly at the adjoining bath, but dressed. He was pleased to find that Dellia hadn’t absconded with his sword. He sheathed it and fastened the belt. “And let’s travel with weapons. All the weapons we can find.”

Naevia rushed about the room. She retrieved her bow. “It’s the start of a plan. And that’s something.”

“It is something,” Vel agreed.

They met at the door, ready for whatever greeted them outside.

“I love you, Vel.” Naevia stood on her tiptoes for a quick kiss on the lips as he bent down to her.

“And my love for you only grows.” He clasped her hand. “I am somewhat surprised you’re not furious at me for carrying on with the traitor as I did.”

“I find it impossible to be furious with you, *Your Grace*.” The familiar teasing lilt entered her voice. They each put a hand on the door. “One, two … three.” They opened it and raced out into the corridor.

Chapter 9

“She’s missing?” Cassia frowned at her seneschal. She didn’t need this right before the evening fete. This was Bantia’s big night. Second only to the wedding itself. “Maybe she ran off? Servants do that from time to time. Can we just find someone to fill in? We do need washers in the scullery for tonight.”

“It’s more than that.” Aulus watched the duchess closely. She seemed poised, but he was fearful of breaking the bad news. “The missing woman’s husband also serves in the scullery, and he is threatening that the whole scullery forgo work until she is found.”

“A strike?” Cassia stood and rushed to the doorway. “I will see to this.” She paused at the door and looked back at Aulus. “What is his name, and is he in the scullery now?”

“Nicias. And yes, you may find him there.” Aulus watched her rush out, her stola trailing behind her. He had no doubt that she would set things straight.

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Dancers twirled in the lamplight. The percussion of feet and drums echoed around the courtyard. Cassia smiled as she watched Bantia, towering above the other women. Her daughter moved with such joy. Bantia’s future husband looked lively too, leading the men in their concomitant dance.

“Any trouble, Duchess?” Valeria leaned over and offered a faint smile to Cassia. The queen regent also watched the wild fete. “You almost missed the opening.”

“Just a small staffing issue. We’re missing one of our servants, but I made promises, and found a replacement.” She glanced at Valeria and Cesphea. And then looked beyond to their mysterious guest. A young woman with a regal face, but poor posture as she slumped in her chair. To be honest, the woman looked under the influence of some narcotic. “Everything is fine, Your Majesty.”

Cesphea giggled, and Valeria gave her a stern look. Valeria looked back at the dancers, casually talking to Cassia. “My sister notices your covert looks at our new companion.”

Cassia said nothing. She could tell when a person was playing a game with her, and she had no interest in moving across another’s board.

“Unfortunately, we were the cause of your little misadventure. Do you not recognize your own servant?” Valeria gestured vaguely at Merope who sat next to Cesphea. “We had to provide her with a gown, and a formal coronet. And clean her up some, too. So, I do not blame you for your confusion.”

Cassia’s blood boiled. What where they doing? This was beyond anything she would expect from the royal house. She steadied her breathing, keeping her eyes on her joyful daughter. “Oh, really? I don’t spend much time in the scullery, so her face was not that familiar to me. Will she be going back to work tonight?” Her voice came out casual. Cassia silently thanked her departed mother for all those years of training.

Cesphea laughed again, a resonant sound mixing in with the percussion. “She will not be … um … available tonight. We have become enamored of her cleaning skills. She will come back to our palace with us on the morrow. You will have to find a permanent replacement for Merope.”

“And what of her husband, Your Majesty?” Cassia looked to her left at where her own retainers sat. She caught the sorceress’s steely, blue eyes. Brynhild looked to be seething. How odd. What exactly had happened to set off that cool, Northern woman? Cassia bit her lip as her gaze drifted back out to the dance floor. She had the impression that some minor skirmish had been fought, and the queens regent were the gloating victors. But why a scullery servant?

“You ask, what of her husband, Duchess?” Valeria’s voice was cold. “He is of no matter. I would think you might be happy that we found such a diligent servant.”

“Congratulations, Your Majesty.” Cassia stood, and curtsied to the queens. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I must dance with my daughter.” She glanced once more at her former servant, Merope. The woman’s eyes were glazed, and her face slack.

“Of course.” Valeria nodded and put her hand on her sister’s thigh to keep Cesphea from audibly snickering. “Enjoy your special night. Two great houses coming together is quite the cause for celebration.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.” Cassia nodded and glided out onto the dance floor. She would put the whole thing out of her mind. That is, until she had had time to investigate on another day.

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“Mercury!” Naevia dropped to a knee and opened her arms for the little monkey. It scurried across the corridor and jumped up to her, pawing at her bosom. “Easy, now, that hurts.” She placed him on her shoulder and turned to her brother as he closed the heavy cypress door to his chambers. “We have our messenger.” She pulled a tiny roll of parchment off Mercury’s ankle, unrolled it, and read. “*Meet me at the Temple Discordia,* it reads. Where is that?”

“Toward the back of the castle.” Vel looked back and forth down the long corridor, expecting the monkey to be a distraction for Dellia’s sword. But only a couple merchants from beyond the Roads of Trade ambled by. Vel nodded and smiled. The men nodded back and walked on, speaking their strange language. When they had passed, he whispered, “Do you have a parchment, Naevia?”

“A little. And some charcoal.” Naevia patted the bag slung under her arm. “Shall I write back?”

“Not now. But if anything goes wrong, we may need to send a message later.” Vel had been offered a tour of the viscount’s castle by Tes-amen several times, but he’d deferred. He’d been busy. Now he wished he’d taken the man up on his offer. “I’m pretty sure we go this way.” They turned left and wound their way to the stairs, dropped two floors, and then tried to head north.

Mercury excitedly chittered on Naevia’s shoulder, screeching here and there like he was offering directions. After a while, they came to a row of cavernous archways. The entrances to several temples.

These were the sanctums of the lesser gods, lodged closer to storage rooms and servants' quarters than the main living areas. They passed the temple of Muta. Then, Pomona, Rumina, and Volumna. Vel, Naevia, and Mercury stopped when the entrance to Discordia's temple came into view. Sitting on a bench just outside, leaning forward as if she were in deep contemplation, was Dellia. Her sword was still in its sheath.

"Oh. There you are." Dellia looked over at them like she'd just wakened from a slumber. "I see our friend delivered the message. He's a good monkey." She slowly stood, her scale armor softly chiming with her movements. She held out a little scroll of parchment. "When I left this morning, the little guy was waiting right outside your door."

"Naevia found herself a pet." Vel's hand found the hilt of his sword.

"You two always had a way of acquiring pets. Remember the goat you found wandering outside Ostia's walls? What was he called?" Dellia's face was dark but inscrutable.

"Um … his name was Ramses." Naevia could sense something was quite unstable in their cousin. Some sort of warped gear skipping and failing to catch against the rest. "Will you let us pass?"

"Mmm?" Dellia's face brightened as if she had come to a decision. "On that matter I have had thoughts, secondary musings, and tertiary judgements. First, you should know that I was to report back last evening to Spurrius. When I did not, it seems he became worried. I signaled him outside the castle this morning. He signaled back that all exits are being watched and you are wanted by the Vulpes for questioning." She absentmindedly put her hand to her belly. "I feel absolutely sick when I think of what they might do to you."

"Can you … call them off?" Vel looked at his sister. He had gone from fearing the presence of his cousin to realizing that she was their best hope.

"I could, yes." Dellia nodded slowly and looked into Discordia's temple. "If I do nothing, they'll take you. They are only waiting for the viscount's permission to enter the castle. A strange formality still in place from the time of dragons. I wonder if …" her voice trailed off and she stared blankly into the empty sanctum.

"Will you … please … Dellia? Will you call them off?" Naevia reached for her brother's hand and pulled it into her grip. It was warm and dry and comforting.

"I want to." Dellia nodded. "I do. But I can't signal them such a message. Spurrius would want to see me in person. To know that I am not … coerced. And … I cannot do that now. I feel … very strange about my husband."

Vel and Naevia exchanged a look with raised eyebrows. They didn't know what to expect from their cousin.

"We'll find a way out of this. You don't want to harm us, and we don't want to be harmed. So, we have common ground." Vel took his free hand away from his sword. "What's the next step?"

"The tunnel?" Dellia looked back and forth between her cousins and the temple door as if she was seeing an obvious solution and they were both idiots. "The tunnel entrance is hidden by Discordia. Very few people know of it."

“Tunnel?” Naevia did not much enjoy enclosed spaces, but an escape was an escape.

“And then there’s your father’s message.” Dellia held up the small, rolled parchment in her hand. “I took it from the monkey when I left you the note to meet me here.” A vague smile spread across her lips. “It is not only pigeons that can be intercepted.” She closed her fist around the scroll. “Your father wishes to meet you. He gives a time and place. I plan on using the tunnel with you to pass unseen past the Vulpes. We’ll fetch Gallio Tullius ourselves, and then turn him over. All of us heroes. Our loyalty proven. Then, perhaps, I can face my husband again.”

“We’re not –” Vel was cut off by Naevia’s sharp squeeze on his hand.

“We’re not going to say no to that. It’s the only way.” Naevia stepped forward. “Lead the way.”

“Very good.” Dellia sighed with relief. “I’m glad you two finally have some sense between you. And we can forget the … misunderstanding we had yesterday and never speak of it again.”

“I’m sorry, Dellia. You were attacking me and I –” Vel started.

“Never speak of it again, Your Grace.” Dellia turned and marched into the temple. “Now come.” They entered the temple. It was a small room, and although the torches were lit, the place looked like it hadn’t been cleaned in ages. Cobwebs hung from a circle of statues carved into the outer wall. Every statue had a different scale and subject, and they were spaced at uneven intervals. It was distracting to look at.

“Ouch.” Naevia stubbed one sandaled toe on a stone that stuck out of the uneven floor. “This room is a wreck.”

“What do you expect from discord?” Dellia found the switch behind the broken statue of a boar-headed man, and part of the stone wall slid back to reveal a black, yawning mouth of a passage. A draft of cool air pushed past them. “Torches.”

Each of them took a torch from the wall and entered the tunnel. Dellia touched a switch inside and they were suddenly sealed in. Mercury let out a long wail, and clutched tighter to Naevia’s shoulder.

“It’s okay, Mercury.” Naevia patted his tiny back.

“Quiet now,” Dellia hissed. “This tunnel is old and built by magic. I don’t want it falling on our heads.” She stalked off down the tunnel with firm, deliberate strides. She muttered to herself something about the Tullius brats and their pets.

Vel held Naevia back a moment and leaned down to whisper in her ear. “What are we doing?”

“Waiting for our moment to ditch her or change her mind,” Naevia whispered back. “There was no upside to arguing in the castle all day.”

“Right, okay.” Vel held his torch aloft and followed their cousin, Naevia right behind him.

They walked in silence for a long time, the tunnel angling down and down. Presently, they came to a fork. Dellia stopped, her head swiveling as she regarded their two choices. One dark, and one glowing an azure iridescence. “There should be only one tunnel here,” she whispered.

Vel reached up and touched the archway. The stonework seemed ancient. “Perhaps your information was a bit off. This split is old.” He held the torch low and bent down. “You can even see where the stone is worn from feet traveled down both paths. Which way?”

“Perhaps we should follow that blue glow.” Naevia pointed to the right. “It seems the safer way.” There was something compelling about the azure light.

“Yes, I agree.” Dellia sounded almost mesmerized.

“What glow? I see no light but our torches.” Vel watched as both women calmly walked to the right. “Um … this isn’t decided on.” They continued on. Something in the air, stale and foul, wafted from the tunnel on the left. He followed the women to the right. “Yes, follow the glow only women can see. Excellent choice.”

They came to several other forks and each time they took the path that Dellia and Naevia insisted glowed a faint, metallic azure, like the wings of the milkweed beetle. After about an hour, their tunnel ended with a patinaed, copper cage about the size of a storage closet. The thing was intricately wrought with the same discordant characters as those depicted by the statues in the temple long behind them. There was a slim opening, and both women stepped into the cage immediately.

“What is this place?” Vel didn’t like the way the pale, green metal seemed to dance under their flickering torchlight. The flames behaved as if there was a draft, but this was the end of the tunnel. He looked up and saw that cables ran from the cage into a hole in the rock above it. And there were rails, too. Vel stepped into the cage with them.

“Isn’t it beautiful, Vel?” Naevia rubbed his arm.

“The light is like the ocean in a storm as lightning hits. It’s very pretty,” Dellia said in a soft, quavering voice quite uncharacteristic of her. They were close together in the cage, and she involuntarily stood close enough to Vel for her shoulder to push up against his chest. The contact made her tremble. She tried to focus on the mission. They had a few hours to meet and apprehend Gallio Tullius. She would get that done, and the rest would sort itself out. But try as she might, she couldn’t disentangle her mind from the jolts of lightning contact with Vel brought her.

“So, you’re still seeing the blue light?” Vel had been expecting movement, but his heart still leaped when the cage lurched upward. It moved fast enough that wind extinguished the torches. He was in total black. His stomach fell as the cage surged up and up.

“It grows faint.” There was deep disappointment in Naevia’s voice. “The light’s almost disappeared.”

“I see it, too.” Dellia moved closer to Vel, and now felt Naevia press into them. The three huddled in darkness as they hurdled upward. The metal cage and rails whined at them at an increasing pitch.

After a minute, Vel spoke. “How deep under the city were we? It seems –” The cage lurched to a stop and the three of them stumbled together and fell to the floor. They were flooded with daylight. Vel shielded his eyes with his hand and looked at an opening in the shaft they had traveled. All he could see was blue sky. He pushed Dellia off him and stood. He then helped Naevia to her feet and they walked out of the copper cage. As his eyes adjusted, he took in his surroundings. They were on a large, circular space made of stone, with copper guard rails all around. He blinked again. There was a bath to his left,

and furniture to his right. It was … the same furniture from the bedroom in the broken tower. “What the …?”

“Vel, do you know where we are?” Naevia took a few unsteady steps and rushed to the guard rail. Far, far below them, the city spread like something from a child’s game. They were so high above it, that she could only barely hear the steady hum of activity always present in Kart Hadasht. The people below looked like ants. She smiled broadly. A surge of energy rushed through her. “Look, Vel, look.” Mercury clung tightly to her shoulder, looking down at the city with wide eyes.

“I’m coming.” He passed a table laid out with grapes, dates, venison, and wine. Vel stopped next to Naevia and her stomach nearly rolled over. Clutching the guard rail, he felt the wind tug at his hair. They were so high up that his mind rebelled. A cold, prickly sensation spread over his skin. He felt himself pitching forward.

“Careful, cousin.” Dellia stood to Vel’s other side. She took a fistful of his robes and prevented him from tumbling over the side. “We didn’t get you all the way out of that castle so you could go flying now.” She tried to wipe the smile off her face, but she could not. Had she ever felt more happy than at that moment? Well, maybe on her wedding day. And maybe, although she would have denied it to anyone that made the assertion, the day before when she’d felt Vel move deep inside her. She looked up at the sun and tried to gauge the time. “We have some time yet before we have to meet your father.” She pulled Vel away from the edge and sat him down on a sofa. She unfastened her weapons and laid them at her feet. Slowly, she undid the clasps to her armor, and dropped it with a jangle. She then pulled off her tunic, kicked off her sandals, and removed her chest band and underwear. “Time for a bath.”

“Are you insane? We’re on the resurrected tower. It could fall.” Vel watched her boobs bounce in unison as she ran over the stones and hopped into the bath with a splash. Maybe this was the distraction they needed to get away from Dellia.

“This is it, Naevia,” he whispered, stood, and turned to his sister.

“Agreed, Vel.” Naevia put down the piece of charcoal she was holding and tucked the rolled note she’d just written onto Mercury’s ankle. “Go find Father,” she said to the monkey. She put Mercury down and watched him run across the floor and scamper down an open hatchway where the stairs began. Mercury disappeared from sight.

“What did you write?” Vel’s eyes widened when he saw her removing her stola. Her weapons were already on the stones about her. Her pale skin was almost blinding in the full sunlight.

“I told him to run,” she whispered. And then much louder, she said, “A bath sounds delightful.” Naevia laughed and moved over to her brother, pushing him toward the water. “How about we wash and then enjoy a midafternoon snack. Those grapes look delicious.”

“Are you … are you drunk?” Vel stumbled as she pushed him. She kicked off her sandals as they went, and tossed her chest band and underwear behind her. He went up right to the edge of the bath and paused, as though she expected him to undress. But instead, she gave him one last shove, his arms windmilled, and he fell into the water.

“I do feel … a little drunk.” Naevia frowned, but her smile returned when she noticed that despite his sputtering, his eyes were on her boobs. She stuck her chest out a little and made a little pose for him. She knew he hadn’t watched Dellia’s nakedness with the same look.

“Your weapons will rust, Your Grace.” Dellia moved languidly in the water over to him and reached under the surface to remove his belt. “You cannot fight with a rusty sword. That’s rule one. Or, maybe rule three.” Her knuckles brushed against his soft leviathan, and she shivered. She tried very hard to keep her mission in the front of her mind. Once Gallio was captured, everything would sort itself out. She lifted his sword out of the water, unsheathed it, and left it in the hot sun to dry. Her breasts brushed against his soaked robes and she shuddered. She leaned up to him and planted an awkward kiss on his lips. She felt him resist, and that did not please her, so she pushed his back against the side of the tub and kissed him more aggressively. A warm radiance spread from him to her mouth and tongue.

Discord and turmoil reigned in Vel’s mind. She had fought him like a spitting cat the day before, and now she kissed him like he quenched a thirst. It was not unpleasant to have his cousin assaulting him so, but it was more than jarring. Even more discordant, his naked sister watched them while standing above. And this was all happening on the top of a resurrected relic tower in the middle of an escape from the Vulpes. Despite it all, he felt his cock rising under the clothes.

“I am not jealous, Vel.” Naevia slipped into the water next to them. She was giddy, wildly giddy, at the sight of Dellia throwing herself at Vel. This was the break they were looking for. If they could get Vel inside their cousin again, maybe this time she would sing a different tune afterward. And at the very least, they might cause her to forget their upcoming rendezvous with her quarry. She put a hand on Vel’s shoulder and felt his tension under his robes. “This is good. Let it happen.”

“Mmmpppphhhhh,” Vel said around Dellia’s tongue. He suddenly thought of his mother and sister across the Inland Sea. How could he spend his time aimlessly fornicating when they were by themselves at home, preparing for the wedding. And who knows what dangers closed around them? When Dellia’s hand snaked under his tunic, robe, and underthings, his worries spread to the winds. He felt her mount him, the intensity of their kiss increasing. And then she was lowering herself down on his cock.

Dellia broke the kiss, bit his clothes, and ground his saturated robes between her teeth. Good gods, he hit a spot that was too perfect for words. But she tried at words nevertheless. “You … fucking … have me … like a stuck … aahhhhhhhhh … pig. Damn … Vel … Cousin … it is like … drinking from Jupiter’s own … chalice … ooooohhhhhhhh.” Her hips wiggled on their own and she had her first orgasm of the day.

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Her castle slept as Cassia ascended the stairs to their library. She had in mind to read some recent history on the royal line. Of course, she knew of the passing of the generation that preceded Princess Minicia and the queens regent. Each of them taken by a wasting disease, one after the other over several years. But she wanted to know more about the queens themselves. She had a strange impression that the king’s little sister had birthed only a daughter. But she had other memories of the arrival of twins. Dueling memories. Maybe it had been only a child’s fancy at the time, but Cassia wanted

to investigate. Her husband and her son had tangled with the queens. And Valeria and Cesphea behaved so oddly. Hopefully, Vel would bring back information from Gallio, and she would understand more of the scope of what had happened to her family.

A daughter. Her mind kept coming back to that memory. The king's little sister bringing a daughter into the world. A rhythmic sound brought her out of her thoughts as she ascended the gently curving stair. She paused. The noise was … slapping flesh and grunting. It had been a while since she and Gallio had made such noises, but she recognized sex when she heard it. Some servants, or maybe a couple from the queens' retainer, had probably sought out the infrequently traveled stair for their rutting. Well, Cassia would give them a stern talking to. Her chosen gods would frown on infidelity if she found it, and Cassia herself wouldn't much stand for lewdness and vulgarity.

Step after step, the noises grew louder. Then, movement came into view. Cassia stopped in her tracks, her hand going to her mouth. She tasted the bitter flavor of her iron wedding ring. A woman, her back to Cassia, thrusted her hips, her gown up over her waist. Her bare ass was quite white in the lamplight. The woman was one of the queens. The pale skin, dark hair, and copper crown were unmistakable. The queen had a naked woman bent over in front of her, the woman's hands on the stairs.

"There now … ugh … ugh … how is it?" Cesphea clutched the servant's hips tightly, almost lifting her up off her feet.

"Good … good …" Merope gave a deep grunt every time the cock rammed its way all the way in.

Cassia took a step back down the stairs, almost losing her balance. Goodness, that was the servant the queens were taking. And … and … the queen was absolutely destroying the woman's nethers with a giant phallus. Cassia could see it clearly with each back thrust. The phallic object was so long that the queen created lots of space between herself and Merope's hindquarters, before crashing back into her with a ferocity Cassia had not witnessed in a mating pair before. But her experience was quite limited. Was that a real penis? It couldn't be, could it? It was too smooth … and the queen was a woman. Cassia's brows knitted in confusion.

"Are you a good little bitch? Will you serve me well and carry my seed?" Cesphea pounded on, unaware of her audience.

"Yes … ugh … yes … Your Majesty." Merope was barely aware of her own grunting and panting. She probably did sound like a breeding bitch from the kennels. It was a role it seemed she was made for. She gave herself over completely to pleasure.

"And what of your husband, wench? Do you wish to go back to him?" Cesphea was gloating.

"I … still … love … him," Merope whined.

Cesphea laughed, a cold hard sound reverberating in the stairway. "I'll pound that out of you … eventually. You belong to the … uh … uh … crown."

"I'm … ugh … sorry … ugh … Nicias … ooooooohhhhhhhhhh." Her insides quivered as another orgasm rocked poor Merope.

Cassia had seen enough. She quietly turned and hurried down the stairs, terrified that some queens' guard would spot her and question her. She wondered that the queen would commit such sins out in

the open. And in the ducal house, no less. She would have to send the full scullery staff to clean that stairwell tomorrow. Well, not the full staff. She would not make Nicias clean the remains of his wife's defilement. Once far enough away, she broke into a sprint down the stairs, clutching at her chest with both hands to stabilize her bouncing breasts under her stola. Not for the first time, she cursed their size.

At the bottom of the stairs, Cassia huffed and puffed from the effort of her quick decent. She raced to the nearest temple, that of one of the lesser gods, Discordia. She dropped to her knees inside and prayed. She prayed to Jupiter that the queens would fly from her home. She begged Discordia to leave her and let order return to Ostia Novus. And she pleaded with Mercury to send Vel and Naevia back to her bosom with news of their father.

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The bright sky faded to a washed out cerulean above them, with pink and purple to the west. Still on the roof of the tower, Vel, Naevia, and Dellia had moved from the bath to the four-poster bed. It was ridiculous to have such furniture out in the open. And none of them could see how it had gotten up there, the entryway to the stairs was much too small for such a passage. But brother and sister and their cousin hadn't spent much time pondering these things.

"He's … fucking … got me … on that … so deep … gods damn … I can't …" Dellia bounced on Vel as if he were a horse at gallop. Both of them lifted off the bed and almost went weightless at the apogee of each springing leap.

"Do you now swear your loyalty to your duke?" Naevia jumped out of bed, afraid that the bucking mattress might toss her to a hard landing on the stone, or the frame might collapse all together. As she stood, she felt the wetness run down her legs. The women had been so giddy and drunk on the magic of the place that both had urged Vel to sow their furrows. Some part of Naevia knew that she was playing with fire, but she couldn't bring herself to worry about her viability as a future wife should she carry her brother's child.

Vel had protested seeding her, saying that Dellia was necessary, but he didn't want to ruin Naevia's future. But he eventually relented when her tight pussy squeezed him like it was trying to coax milk from a tit.

"Do you swear, Dellia?" Naevia looked around her in wonder. The metallic azure light swirled around the tower creating a funnel into the sky. It seemed to increase in intensity every minute they spent on the tower. The light danced around them, adding to Naevia's intoxication.

"I swear it. I will … ah … ah … protect the Tullius ducal legacy with … ugh … my last breath." Dellia's tongue lolled out of her mouth. She had cum on her face and hair, but it didn't bother her in the slightest. If truth be told, she wanted to drown in this teenager's sperm.

"Very good." Naevia clapped her hands. She watched her cousin crash down on Vel, cursing, and screaming her way through another orgasm. She gave them a minute, and then reached down between her own legs. Naevia was a sloppy mess, but her pussy was not sore in the least. A minor miracle. "My

turn.” Naevia climbed back onto the bed and pushed her still convulsing cousin off her brother so that she fell on her side on the mattress. Naevia got onto all fours, and turned her butt toward Vel. “Mount me.”

“I’m tired, Naevia. All yesterday, and all today.” Vel looked at the shapely, pale ass. What a blessing that she could be his. He was indeed tired, but his pulse beat steadily in his cock. He knew he had more cum stored if she wished it.

“You will get up behind me and put it inside, *Your Grace*.” She looked back and a thin smile spread on her lips, tempered by the excited energy of her expectation. “Or so help me.”

“Do it … Vel,” Dellia panted, her mind returning to her some. Her skin prickled with goosebumps at the thought that she would get to see brother and sister mate again. She put her hand to her belly and imagined she could feel his heat deep inside her. She never wanted to leave that rooftop. She would always stay there, mating, and resting, and then mating again.

“I can’t say no to that butt.” Vel rose to his knees and got behind his sister. He watched as Naevia dropped her head forward and put her legs together, raising her ass up to him as high as she could.

“My gods, you’re huge, Vel. For fuck’s sake, I could never get enough watching you put that thing where it shouldn’t go.” Dellia still felt quite giddy, and dreamy. The metallic azure light swirled around them. “Do you still not see the blue light?” She propped herself up on her elbow so she could watch them better.

“No … aaaahhhhhhh.” Vel slid into his sister, and held his cock there, feeling her tremble through his hands on her hips. “I see only the friscalating dusk light. And … ugh … two … tight … alabaster … orbs.” He found a rhythm with his hips and gently smacked her left butt cheek with a hand. He enjoyed her little yelp in response.

“That’s good, Vel. But you can slap my ass a bit harder. Ow … yes … ow … like that.” Naevia felt her pussy clench and she knew she was saturating the sheets below her again with that incredible gush. “Now … ugh … take my hair.” Her head lifted as he gently bunched her red hair and pulled back. “Oh, Vel. You have conquered … me. You could … conquer … the world … like this. Yeeeesssssss.” She screamed out as his hips went wild behind her. Dellia hadn’t finished him off the last time, and he was ready to cum again. She had learned the signs well. “Seed meeeeeeeeeeeee.”

A while later, with night all around them, the three lay in languid repose. They had the grapes and wine in bed with them, but the women said the wine had no effect. They were already drunk on the azure light.

“Can we stay here forever?” Dellia was uncharacteristically vulnerable at the moment. She felt such a deep warmth for and from her cousins. It went beyond loyalty and duty. Was it love? She didn’t know. For all she had shared and cherished with Spurrius in the past, this feeling was new to her.

“Yes,” Naevia purred.

“No.” Vel looked over at the open hatch door to the stairs and then back to the copper cage. “And I’m not sure how we’re going to get down. We’re at the top of the most watched building in Kart Hadasht. We cannot simply slip out the alley as we did before. We will probably have to brave the tunnels again. I

wish there was another way off this roof." An image of his mother praying on her knees suddenly flashed before his eyes. She needed him. And then it was gone. He wished he could return to her that very instant. "Hey, I see it. I see the blue." The metallic azure light was all around them, making his head buzz. And then it was blinding. "Naevia?" He reached out to his sister, and his cousin. He caught their hands in his. He could see nothing but blue.

"Vel?" Naevia closed her eyes, the light was bright. Azure peeked under her eyelids. To her surprise, she wasn't afraid. It felt like going home. And then gravity let go its hold on her. She floated, her brother's hand her only tether to the world. And then the light faded. She opened her eyes and could almost make out shapes. Gravity came back and they fell. Naevia screamed. She heard Vel screaming. With a gentle thump she hit something firm.

All three naked bodies groaned and rolled together on a cold stone floor. Moonlight fell through an open window. "That's going to leave a bruise." Vel let go of Dellia's hand to rub at his back. His eyes adjusted to the dim light. He recognized his surroundings. "What the …? We're home."

Naevia sat up and looked around. It was true, they were in Vel's chamber back in their own castle. None of the lamps were lit, so they could only see by the moonlight. They were all still naked. Their clothes and armaments were stacked in a pile near Vel's bed. She stood and offered a hand to Dellia, who took it. Naevia felt all the drunken giddiness drain from her. From Dellia's peaked face and frown, she could tell the tower's effects were leaving her as well. Whatever had happened to them on that rooftop, it was over. Seeing the cool look in Dellia's eye, Naevia leaped for the weapons, suddenly aware of the vulnerability of her naked flesh.

"You needn't do that." Dellia helped the naked Vel to his feet. She no longer felt giddy, but Vel's warmth had not left her core. And his touch sent new tendrils of the same feeling down her arm. "I offer my sincere and humble regret for what I've done to you and your family." Once Vel stood before her, Dellia dropped to a knee. "My oath to you stands, Your Grace. Tell me what you require of me." She eyed his heavy, flaccid cock dangling between his legs. She hoped he would require hardness, but sensed that would have to wait.

"My mother," Vel said. "I had a vision of my mother before we … um …" He looked around the room. "Before we came home. Something is wrong here." He lifted Dellia to her feet. "Will you help me find and protect her?"

Dellia nodded. "Against all enemies."

"Right." Naevia closed her gaping mouth. It had worked. It seemed Dellia would support them now. Her mind turned over the possibilities. They would soon have a look into what Dellia had been tasked with and what they were up against. "Well, good. Let's get dressed and find Mother."

Chapter 10

They dressed in the gloom of Vel's chamber. The soft chime of Dellia's scale armor mixed with the rustling of clothes. Vel pondered what a pleasant, reassuring sound it was in that moment. Only hours ago, it had been the sound he most feared.

"Where do you think Mother is?" Naevia rested her bow and quiver in the corner. She didn't think they would be much use back home inside their castle. She lifted her stola and strapped her dagger to her thigh, where it could be easily reached through her stola's false pocket. "Her chambers?" She lowered her stola and smoothed it out. The dagger was well hidden.

"That is possible, but I … felt she was somewhere else when I saw the blue light back at our tower in Kart Hadasht." Vel slid his sword into his scabbard and tightened his belt. He eyed his cousin as she did the same.

Dellia caught his appraising look, gave him an enigmatic half-smile, and then slid her dagger into its home on her other hip. "Where then, Your Grace?"

Vel shook his head. He couldn't live his life fretting over her loyalty. He would choose to trust her. He could see that she had changed. Her body language was different, more deferential maybe. And her smile had carried a hint of longing. Of course, he would also keep a close eye on his cousin. He wasn't a fool. "The library, I think. Let's try there first."

"Are we ready then?" Naevia looked around at them. Cast out from the euphoria at the top of the tower, they all looked tired and diminished. She wanted nothing but to curl up in bed with Vel and sleep a good long while. But this was not that moment.

"To the library tower." Dellia led the way out of Vel's room, her hips swaggering almost like a man's. The other two followed her out.

They ran down the corridor, their sandaled feet slapping at the stones. The oil lamps flickered in the breezy wake that passed just after them. Vel slowed to a stop as they passed though the long gallery. The bank of doors were open to his left and he could see the remnants of a party out in the courtyard. "Was the fete today?" He looked over at his companions. Naevia's face fell, but Dellia simply cocked her head, and narrowed her eyes as if she were calculating.

"We missed it." Naevia frowned, looking at the lanterns dangling from the olive trees. "I mean, I thought we would miss it when we left. But still. We were very close."

"Well, it must have been a happy day here." Vel wondered at the gods if they had let something happen to his mother on such a special day. Perhaps she was fine and the tower's magic had confused him. "Let's go." They trotted through the gallery.

Dellia took the lead again to protect the other two. Her cousins were nearly helpless in a fight, unless Vel planned to bed every assailant that meant to do him harm. She smiled at the thought, his magnificent cock standing proudly in her mind's eye. But a less pleasant thought pushed that image aside. If that day was the fete, then the queens were at the castle. Her father had told her of their plans to visit Ostia Novus before she left. What would she do if they questioned her?

“To the right, Dellia.” Naevia waved her daydreaming cousin into a stairwell. “It’s this way.”

“Oh, of course.” Dellia stepped ahead again. They climbed one flight and sprinted out into another hall near the temples. “Someone is coming,” Dellia said in a hush. She put out her hand and her cousins ran into the back of her. She stumbled forward, caught her balance, but a soft feminine shape was already coming into view around the corner. There was no time to hide.

“By Jupiter, what have we here?” Cesphea walked slowly with her back very straight. Her green crown, somewhat askew, was nestled in her raven hair. She still wore her gown from the fete. Beside her, with her head down, Merope waddled. She was quite bow-legged after the way the queen had treated her the past twenty-four hours. “And lo, the young duke as returned,” Cesphea said in mock awe.

“Your Majesty.” Vel bowed, and he watched his sister and cousin curtsy out of the corner of his eye. “We concluded our mission across the sea and returned on the fastest ship to make the fete. But, sadly, it seems we missed it by a few hours.” Naevia gave him a glance that conveyed warning.

“Sad indeed.” Cesphea stopped a few feet from the trio, and Merope stopped next to her like the obedient bitch she was learning to be. Gods, how Cesphea loved training them. “Strange that I did not hear of your impending return upon your departure from Kart Hadasht.” The queen regent turned her piercing, dark eyes on Dellia for a fraction of a second before looking back at Vel with an amused expression.

“I would have sent a pigeon had I known you would be here. But –” Vel stopped as Cesphea waved her hand dismissively.

“What was the name of this fast ship?” Cesphea smiled broadly at Vel, like they were fast friends. “It must have been quite a swift vessel indeed. I must add it to my fleet.”

Vel and Naevia exchanged a glance. Any lie here could be easily discovered. They should have come up with a cohesive cover story before leaving Vel’s chambers. But who could have known they would have run into one of the queens?

“Pardon me, Your Majesty.” Cassia moved down the hall quickly from behind Cesphea. “I haven’t yet seen my children upon their return.” Her face was quite solemn despite the fact that she was beyond thrilled to see Naevia and Vel. She shivered as she stepped by the strange woman that had so savagely rutted in the library stairs. What was Cesphea, really? “I do not mean to interrupt, but I must greet them.” Cassia stepped up and hugged her daughter first. Then her tall son, her face buried in his chest. And then, because she was relieved to see them all, she hugged Dellia, too. The smell of sex was heavy in the corridor. Cassia turned and looked Cesphea in the eye for the first time. She tried not to quake at the strangeness of this royal. The queen should be ashamed giving off such a scent in another’s house. It never occurred to Cassia that everyone but her was spreading that particular miasma.

“You did not know they were returning?” Cesphea’s brows dropped. She absentmindedly patted Merope on her messy hair as a reward for her ongoing obedience.

“Oh, I knew. They returned on the Northern Wind. They were supposed to dock this afternoon, but they must have been delayed. Their return was to be a happy surprise for Your Majesties and Bantia.” Cassia had no idea that they were coming home, but if that was their story, she was ready for it. She had instructed her seneschal several days ago to keep her posted on any ships from Kart Hadasht that might

carry passengers in case Vel and Naevia might return on one. The Northern Wind happened to be the only one that day.

“And how was your voyage on the Northern Wind?” Cesphea looked out the window like she was trying to gauge time by the darkness. It seemed she had other places she’d rather be.

“It was cramped, Your Majesty.” Dellia spoke quickly. “We were known only to a few crew to keep the surprise for Your Majesties. We didn’t leave our cabin.” She nodded to the queen as if to augment the veracity of the statement. “We left port in such a hurry we didn’t even have time to collect some of our luggage and our birds. Those will be sent to us subsequently.”

“I see.” Cesphea rolled her eyes, clearly now bored with the conversation. “As fascinating as your travel plans are, I must put my pet to bed.” She nodded at the four of them. “On the morrow, all.” And walked past them with Merope down the hall.

Once Cesphea and her companion had rounded a corner and disappeared, all four in the hall exhaled. “I am so happy to see you three.” Cassia reached for Vel more enthusiastically than before, pulled his faced toward hers and kissed him on the cheeks several times. A pleasant warmth spread through her lips. She then pulled Naevia into a bear hug, and smelled her hair expecting that wonderful fresh scent she’d always had, but it seemed Cassia couldn’t get the queen’s lascivious scent out of her nose. She let go of her daughter and looked at the three. Dellia stood very close to Vel, looking wary and protective. Cassia had been wise to send her to watch over her grown children. “So, what news?” Cassia smiled a mother’s doting smile. Even though the three looked quite tired, they were beautiful, solid, and in the flesh. What a wholesome counterbalance to the debauchery she had witnessed just a little while ago. A debauchery she would tell no one until she learned more about the queens.

“We have no news on … *that* subject.” Vel looked behind him, but the corridor was still empty. He did not want to discuss his father or any of it out in the open. “We do, however, have … non-urgent tales to tell.” He would have to confer with Naevia and decide what to tell their mother. “But more importantly, are you okay? I had a premonition that danger hounded you tonight. Are you hurt?” He put his hands on her shoulders gently, careful to keep their bare skin from touching.

“I am fine now that you are here.” Cassia smiled up at him. “Come, now. You are tired. If there is indeed nothing urgent for you to tell, let me see you to your rooms.”

“We will see you to your room, Mother.” Naevia could see the uneasiness in her eyes. She was unhurt, but something had happened. “We insist.”

“Very well.” Cassia put one arm around Naevia’s shoulders and the other around Vel’s waist. She let them walk her back to her chambers. She felt a part of her heart had returned to her. She wondered at how they had returned if not by the Northern Wind, but she could wait until morning for answers so long as they had nothing pressing to report. When they reached her door, she leaned into Naevia’s ear. “Did you see your father? Is he well?” Cassia whispered.

“We did indeed see him,” Naevia whispered back. “He was, as always, an enigma. But I held him in my arms for a moment, and he was strong and healthy. We left him in safety.” She hoped this last part was true.

“That is good.” Cassia nodded. “Goodnight to you all.” She gave one last round of kisses, even kissing Dellia’s reluctant cheek once. “Your Duchess is delighted to have you all home.”

“We would rather be nowhere else.” Vel looked over at his sister as he said it, and her eyes misted over. Perhaps she would rather still be on top of that beguiling tower? He hoped that wasn’t so. They said their goodbyes, watched Cassia disappear into her room, and waited for the click of the door’s lock. Then, wearily, they turned and headed back to Vel’s chambers.

“I will return you both safely to your chambers, and then find some guest accommodations.” Dellia watched her Duke put his arm around his sister. Was that a pang of jealously that tickled her gut?

“It’s the night of the fete, Dellia.” Vel exhaled slowly. His mother was safe and sleep was on the way. Things were looking up. “There will be no guest accommodations readily available. Especially in the middle of the night.”

“Well, then I’ll sleep in the corridor.” Dellia shrugged.

“People might find that … strange, Cousin.” Naevia could see Vel’s door up ahead. Her eyelids drooped. “You can have my room.” She yawned. “I’ll sleep with Vel.” She didn’t consider how odd it would look to the castle should they discover that grown siblings had slept together.

Another pang sent Dellia’s stomach on end. She was becoming more certain that jealously was what had hold of her. But her fear of being left out was misplaced. When they were safely in Vel’s chamber, no one protested when she unfastened her armor and undressed. Her cousins simply made room for her in the big, soft bed. A few minutes later, all three of them slumbered, dreaming of a warm, pleasing azure light.

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All night, Dellia dreamed in various shades of blue. At first, she was hounded by an unseen troop. They chased her through city streets, and she hid herself in a relic tower. She thought it very strange that she should run and hide rather than face the attackers. But she was unarmed and pugilist though she was, she couldn’t fight of any number of men with spears. Although she fled to the very top of the tower, a single man found her. His face was a blank, but she sensed victory in his bouncing gait as he approached. Dellia surprised herself when she surrendered to his spear, but instead of death, she found only pleasure. It was not a weapon that he carried after all. As she settled her weight on it, driving it deep into her pussy, she realized that the spear had become the tower itself. She was fucking the relic tower like it was a bucking stallion. What purpose and ecstasy she found there. She woke with a start and felt something hard poking at her lower back. She reached around and remembered where she was.

It didn’t take much to turn dream into reality. They were both naked, and she didn’t think much about disturbing his sleep. “Come now, Cousin.” She rolled him onto his back and mounted him, grasping his cock and enjoying how small her hand felt as her fingers tried to circle it. She looked down at Naevia’s pale form curled next to them. How odd that she should be related to these strange northern people with their alabaster skin. The only others she’d seen with such coloring were the sorceress and … the

queens. She was so wet, the cock slipped in without much fuss. Gods, he must have stretched her the last few times for him to slip in like that. Spurrius was sure to notice the next time they met that her tight box had become a cavern. As she rocked her hips, she couldn't bring herself to worry over her husband. That would sort itself out in time. For now, she was consumed only with the need to hump her duke, get herself off, and to coax him to an explosion inside her. She grunted and moved her hips at a steady rhythm, grinding her button on him and pressing his penis as deep as it would go. Gods, he was deep.

"Dellia? What are you …?" Vel looked up at her shaking tits and then up to her face, scrunched as it was in a look of deep concentration.

"I am … serving my Duke … by easing … his gods damned … morning steel … with my … ooooohhhhhhhh … destroyed pussy. I've … fucking speared myself … on you. Aaaaaahhhhhhhh." Her own words drove her mad. She came on him, making unnatural, guttural sounds.

Naevia slowly awakened as the bed squeaked and rocked around her. She looked up to see her cousin riding her brother for all she was worth, the most helpless look of lust plastered itself to Dellia's face. Naevia put her hand on the olive skin of Dellia's muscled thigh and brushed her fingernails up to the woman's hip. She smiled seeing that her cousin was hopelessly hooked on Vel. "That's a good girl, Dellia. Ride him." She watched for a little while, blinking the sleep from her eyes. "But not so loud, they'll hear you out in the corridor." She looked around, reached down, and picked Dellia's chest band off the floor where it had been discarded the night before. Naevia handed it to her cousin.

Dellia took the chest band and grasped it in her hand. Her arms flailed a bit, and she held the thing up in the air without purpose. "Oh … fuck … oh … fuck … he's making me … ah … ah … ah … his … fuck … puppet."

Naevia couldn't help but laugh at her cousin's words. "He is indeed. I know the feeling. Now put that band in your mouth like a good puppet. There you go. That should quiet you some." Naevia angled herself away from the mating pair a little so she could see them better. The way Dellia undulated her body was so feminine that she had to remind herself that it was really Dellia doing it. She caught Vel's eye. "And how does the day greet you, *Your Grace*?"

"Um … she just … climbed on … ugh … while I was sleeping." Vel held his hands to his sides, afraid if he grabbed at his cousin's bouncing parts that might awaken some jealousy in his sister.

"Will you have more for me when you've marked her?" Naevia's hand fell down between her legs and she slowly worked her fingertips on her lower lips. She was neither giddy, nor drunk, as she had felt on that tower. But the pleasure moved through her. She found she didn't mind how vulgar she must look to them. They were, after all, rutting like animals.

"Yes, of course." Vel smiled at her.

"Well, then enjoy yourself. I see you straining to hold back your hands. Feel her body, Vel. You have earned it. And I can tell she craves your touch." Naevia's body gave a little tremble as she worked a finger into her well-used pussy. "As long as you make time for me, I could not be jealous of our cousin. It's all for the greater good."

“The greater … ugh … good,” Vel agreed. He reached up and took a handful of boob in each hand, massaging them into Dellia’s chest. Had he not seen her naked, he would never have believed she had such wonders hidden under her lorica squamata. “Do you want it inside again, Cousin? It no longer seems … necessary.”

Dellia spit the chest band from her mouth. “Yeeesssssss.” She stopped for a moment to adjust her position. She planted her feet on the mattress, and speared herself on him with long strokes. She wanted to make him seed her sooner rather than later. There was power in sending a man from this life, as she had done more than once. But perhaps, she was learning, it was a greater power in bringing a man to completion. Well, especially this man. “I must find the queens today, and … ugh … tell them a story … to cover for you. They will expect a report … since … aaahhhhhh.” Her muscles strained as she humped down on him, her hips making a two-part thrust, once to push all of him inside her, and then a shorter powerful thrust, to drive their hips into the mattress. Dellia did not know where her hips had learned the movement, but it was satisfying. The haze of pleasure built inside her again.

Naevia waited patiently for Dellia to continue her thought, working up her own pleasure at the same time. Eventually, she realized Dellia had lost the thread. “Your report to the queens regent, Cousin?”

“Oh … yes …” Dellia blinked and looked down at Naevia playing with her pussy. How much they had all devolved together. Not long ago she would never have believed any of them capable of what was happening in Vel’s chambers. “I will … tell them … that you did seek and find … your father. When you asked him … to turn himself in … he fled back here … and we followed. Thus … the suddenness of our departure. I will lie to the queens … for my cousins. I serve … my … Duke.” Her face contorted and she shrieked out another orgasm. Her hips did not miss a beat with their two-cycle thrusts.

“Very … ugh … good.” Vel moved his hands to her hips. Hearing her talk strategy while stuffed with his cock was somehow quite appealing to him. He was getting close.

“Dellia?” Naevia waited for her to come back to them from her ecstasy. “Dellia? Can you hear me?”

Eventually, Dellia opened her eyes and nodded haphazardly as her whole body shook and bounced.

“What was your mission?” Naevia stopped toying with her own pussy, she needed to concentrate on the answer.

“Spurrius and I were to … ugh … report back if you worked … for your father … in his attempt to harm … Princess Minicia.” Sweat dripped off Dellia’s nose and splattered Vel’s pale abdomen. “We do not … know who … he was working with. But the Vulpes … feel that the sorceress … may have been involved.”

“Our father would never harm Princess –” Naevia was interrupted as Dellia didn’t seem to notice that she was talking.

“Your father … was then to be captured … and tortured … back at Accipiter Cubitum Palace.” Dellia’s voice went up an octave. Her body trembled with longing. The telltale warmth from Vel surged through her from his touch. “My father … volunteered me … for the mission. Oh … gods … after the queens … I must go and tell the same story … to my father.”

“So, what you’re saying is that today you must present yourself to the queens.” Naevia’s hand returned to her pussy. The thought of what Dellia was doing for them was just too delicious. “And your father. You will lie to them. All while your womb is filled with my brother’s seed.”

“Oh … gods … Naevia.” Vel loved the imagery as much as his sister. Especially the idea that she would spend her day of counterespionage with his seed avidly trying to sow her fields. “I’m … ready … to …” His body jerked and he shot his load deep inside her.

“My … father’s house … your … cum. My father’s house … your … cum.” Dellia mumbled the words over and over in a growing crescendo until she felt his heat in her womb and screamed out her euphoria.

A while later, as Dellia dressed, she listened to the siblings slap their bodies together in Vel’s bed. More of that strange feeling turned her stomach. She did not much like jealousy, so she reprimanded herself silently for the emotion. Who was she to get in the way of what Vel and Naevia had? She watched them as she tightened her armor. Vel sat upright, cross-legged, his petite sister bouncing on his lap. Her red hair cascaded down her freckled back beautifully. Without a word, Dellia opened the door just enough to slip through, and closed it behind her. She hoped they’d have the sense to lock it. The day was still nascent, and she had much to do.

The empty corridor showed no signs of eavesdropping. Maybe she hadn’t been all that loud. She set off to find the queens, wondering at herself that she didn’t seek to rinse out her vagina with salt water immediately. Did she wish to carry her cousin’s child? Certainly not. The lies she was about to tell would pale in comparison to the lies such a conception would require. Yet, as she strode down the hall with a slightly awkward stride, she put her hand to her belly and smiled. The thought of carrying on Vel’s line through her loins was a happy one. There were many dark clouds on the horizon, so she clung to that thought. And also, the thought that when she returned from her father’s house, Vel would be waiting for her.

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It was quite a scene come late morning as Cassia’s guests made ready to depart. Vel and Naevia stood by her side, standing very straight. They were clean and freshly clothed, thank the gods. First, the Gala family departed with their retinue. Bantia clutched at her mother and wept as Hostus gave one final wave before disappearing into his carriage. A lady was not supposed to weep at the departure of her future husband, but it seemed Bantia was fond of the young man. Cassia would have to remind Bantia to hold her tears later.

Next, the queens regent descended the courtyard’s stairs, flanked by their guard and Tiberius. Among their retinue was Cassia’s former servant. Merope looked quite dazed, and carried herself with a dreamy quality. Her left hand no longer had her husband’s ring of iron. Cassia didn’t know what to make of that.

The queens were in the middle of the traditional words of departure when a great wail went up along the gallery. Cassia turned her head to look. The entire scullery staff stood there in tears and clutching at their breasts and tunics in desperation.

“Merope … do not leave … you cannot leave.” Nicias’s voice carried over everything.

“I’m sorry, Your Majesties.” Cassia caught the look in one queen’s eyes, she could not tell which was which, and knew that if she did not quell this outburst quickly, the queens’ guard would do so. She turned to give instructions to her own guard, but found that her son was already giving instructions.

“… do it kindly,” Vel told the sorceress. He watched her turn and quickly move toward the gallery. He was surprised how fast she could move for a woman of her dramatic proportions. Quickly the wailing stopped and the servants disappeared from view. Vel glanced at the woman for whom all the fuss had been made. She was pretty, but quite ordinary in the way of the women of the Surround. Dark complexion and short. With her vacant eyes and slack jaw, she looked a bit of a simpleton. Vel wondered why the queens had taken her from his castle.

“Thank you, Duke of Ostia Novus.” Valeria smiled at him. “But next time we expect better behavior from your staff.”

“Of course.” Vel bowed. He saw his mother and sisters curtsey out of the corner of his eyes. “We will make sure that never happens again.” He did not add: so long as the queens no longer abscond with servants.

“Such loyalty, Sister.” Cesphea laughed. “We do love to see it.”

Then the queens went back to the formality of their parting. Cassia and Vel gave the formal answer, and the royal procession left the ducal castle. Everyone there noticed with some bewilderment that Merope traveled in the carriage with the queens regent and Tiberius, the consort regent. A privilege rarely given to servants.

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With Dellia back home filling in her father on a version of her travels, Vel and Naevia met with Cassia in their counsel chamber to tell her a different version of the same. They relayed most everything but the more sordid details. One didn’t have to know Cassia long to understand that she would not be understanding of her son and daughter bonding under Venus. And the siblings had known their mother all their lives, so telling her of their sex, even with the excuse of Vel’s curse, was unthinkable. When they had finished their story, the three sat in silence for a good long while.

“So, my sister’s husband conspires with the queens against my husband?” Cassia chewed her bottom lip.

“Dellia says her father seeks to prove his loyalty to the crown.” Vel nodded his agreement. “But they all think that father was out to harm Minicia. Maybe we can clear that up and father can come home?”

“And your father had nothing to say on this?”

“He was angry that we brought a spy with us, Mother.” Naevia studied Cassia closely. “You do not think that Father actually engaged in such a plot?”

“Your father was up to something at Accipiter Cubitum Palace. And so was your brother.” Cassia sighed. What a mess. Her husband was many things, but stupid was not among them. If he had sought to end Princess Minicia, he must have had a good reason. She only wished he had confided in her. “I guess we should count ourselves lucky that whatever spies we carry with us report our innocence.”

Vel and Naevia exchanged a glance. Of course, their castle must have spies. They would have to be extra careful with their illicit behavior. All that rutting in the morning had been careless, especially with Dellia screaming as she did. At least Naevia had the wherewithal to muffle her cries with a mouthful of blanket.

“So … um … what now?” Vel raised his eyebrows.

“Your father is running again, and we won’t go chasing him. When he is ready, I trust he’ll come home to us. I will not have you two traipsing about the Inland Sea.” Cassia’s expression grew dark. “This tower that you say brought you back home, we cannot understand the design behind such a thing. But I think the dangers are plainly clear. As magic decoupled itself from this world, it became more chaotic. I worry now that if it means to worm its way back in, its power may return without cohesion. I cannot have you come under such an influence.”

The siblings exchanged another wary look. The secret they bore just became all the more heavy.

“We have a sorceress in residence, although I trust her little,” Cassia continued. “We should seek her opinion on this resurrected tower. I would like to know the magic’s provenance and whether it might be some dark warlock that has come out of hiding, or a dragon from the desert, or whatever. Whoever wields that sort of power must be formidable, and since you were conveyed here by its device, you must be known to the source. I pray that Discordia leaves our family in peace before long. We have been through too much.”

This time, at the mention of Discordia, Vel worked very hard not to exchange a knowing glance with Naevia. They had not told their mother that Discordia’s temple was at the entrance to the tunnel, nor that the goddess’s figures were on the cage that carried them to the top of the tower.

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“I do not wish to talk now. Come back tomorrow.” Brynhild sat in a chair, curled into herself, in the corner of her chamber. She eyed the nineteen-year-old duke and his eighteen-year-old sister. The young always thought themselves revolutionaries. It was a belief held by all freshly grown men and women that the burdens they carried were new and that their solutions were equally novel. Of course, this was never true. Brynhild could tell that the dark material she’d put in Vel had already changed the relationship between brother and sister, making a tight thing all that much tighter. They were not the first brother and sister to fall into each other’s arms in Brynhild’s experience. And not the first to try and hide it from her. But that could all wait until another time. At the moment, the sorceress simply wanted to be left alone in the dark.

“Perhaps you could light a lamp? We can barely see you in the shadows.” Naevia’s skin crawled. She did not like being so close to this ageless woman, especially in the dark.

“Does your duke command it?” Brynhild glanced at the tall youth.

“I do.” Vel tried to sound sure of himself.

Brynhild held up her left hand and a bright ball of light rose from it to hover in the room. “There you have it, better than any lamp.”

“Um … thanks.” Vel reached for his sister’s hand and clasped it. He found her grip damp but firm. “You already know what’s happened to Naevia and me because you were the cause of it. What I want to know is whether we woke up that tower.”

“Maybe.” Brynhild sighed and stayed curled in her chair.

“And what does that mean?” Naevia gained some courage from the heat of Vel’s touch.

“Perhaps you should reawaken other relics and see?” Brynhild shrugged. “I was tricked by an old spirit down this path. The ends here are not my ends. The means are beyond me, too.”

“If you are so useless, should I rid myself of you? What sort of duke keeps close the one that cursed him?” Vel was not prone to anger, but there was something in Brynhild’s defeated countenance that irked him greatly.

“A wise duke would be the sort. Did you not see the ball of lightning I flung into the air?” Brynhild nodded up at her light. “Look, it hangs before your eyes even now.”

“You’ve always known petty tricks and nothing else.” Naevia squeezed Vel’s hand. Maybe they should just leave this woman alone.

“That is not quite right.” Brynhild sighed again. “I could once move mountains. But then magic ebbed, and the king built a great tower to capture what magic remained. To steal it from the rest of us. And now I have only petty tricks, as you say.”

“What are you talking about?” Vel suddenly perked up. This he had not heard. “Was this the Eagles Roost at the palace? It fell down over time with the rest of them.”

“It did not. The Eagles Roost fell all at once, about twenty-two years ago.” Brynhild didn’t feel like playing schoolmarm. “All that matters is that when it died, so did the magic it had stolen. Probably.”

“Probably?” Naevia said.

“I was once sure of this, but now I’m not as sure.” Brynhild shrugged again.

“Did you send my father and brother to kill Princess Minicia?” Vel was ready to cut to the chase.

“What?” Brynhild laughed. It was a bitter sound. “Why would I hold a grudge against that helpless figurehead? I mean her no harm. You have my word.”

“Let’s go, Vel.” Naevia squeezed his hand again.

“Very well.” He nodded to his sister, turned for the door, but looked back at the slumping sorceress. “You will keep our secret.”

“Of course, Your Grace.” Brynhild seemed to shrink further into herself.

“And you will aid us in understanding this curse and the resurrected tower?” Naevia added.

“I ask only to serve, Your Grace.” The sorceress’s tone was more ambiguous than her words.

“Very well.” Vel led his sister out of the room. As they left the light went out behind them and only darkness followed them into the corridor until they shut the door.

Chapter 11

The library was a safe, quiet place. At least, now that the queens were gone. Cassia sat at the crescent table and poured over recent history. There was very little written about the queens, until about twenty-two years ago. Only that the king's sister gave birth. Much to Cassia's disappointment, nowhere did it say how many children she birthed, or the sex. But, twenty-two years ago, there was suddenly much fanfare about Princess Minicia's cousins. It was noted that they were twins over and over, and that they had barely survived a stone-fall from one of the relic towers. After that, there were reports on their studies, and how they loved and looked after their infant cousin, Princess Minicia.

The twins then lost their parents to a wasting disease. And a little while later, their aunt and uncle, the king and queen, succumbed to the same disease. The twins became queens regent, committed to rule until Minicia came of age.

It was frustrating. There were no clues as to the deformity Cassia had witnessed on the library stairs. She tried to find out more about the accident, and found that the twins had been too close to the only relic tower at the palace, the Eagle's Roost. A stone had fallen and injured them both, but they recovered. The type of thing that happened to children all over the Surround in the past decades. Apparently, history could not account for that extra appendage.

Muffled laughter came from beyond the heavy library door. Cassia looked up from her reading just as the door burst open. In spilled her son and daughter, laughing and clutching at each other. They were quite the unlikely pair. Vel always reserved, Naevia ever adventurous. Her nineteen-year-old son insanely tall and pale for a man of the Surround. Her eighteen-year-old daughter a normal height, and maybe paler still. Whatever their differences, they'd always been inseparable. And even more so in the weeks since their return across the Inland Sea.

"Mother." Vel sounded genuinely surprised. "It's late. What are you doing here?"

"Trying and failing to help your father." Cassia sighed. She closed the tome and stood, stretching out her back. She yawned, ceased her stretch, and crossed her arms. "What are you two doing up so late? Shouldn't you be in your beds? Vel, you've got saber lessons first thing in the morning."

"Vel and I come here to … read sometimes." Naevia looked down and pointed her sandaled toe at the stone floor, twisting her foot back and forth. "He has a lovely reading voice."

"I know. I've heard him." Cassia couldn't help but beam with pride. "I am tired and will retire now. Would you two be so kind and return my reading to the shelves?"

"Yes, of course." Vel stepped over to his mother and hugged her goodnight. He was careful not to touch her bare skin with his. He watched her backside as she walked over to his sister and hugged her as well. "Will you be coming up to the library often, Mother? More research?"

"No." She made her way to the door and turned back toward them, her arms folded over her chest. "I'm afraid I've exhausted our material on my subject of interest."

"What is the subject?" Vel thought his mother looked tired, but still quite pretty. Her brown curls bobbed around her shoulders as she looked from one of her children to the other.

“I cannot say at present. But once I turn it over in my head some, I may seek my Duke’s advice.” She nodded at Vel, and then smiled at Naevia. “And that of his distinguished Lady sister. Don’t stay up until the cockerel calls. You will ruin your tomorrow. Goodnight.” She turned and left the library.

“Goodnight, Mother.” The siblings called after her.

They waited a few minutes in case she returned, and then Naevia closed and locked the library door. “Could you be any more obvious, *Your Grace*.” Her smile mocked Vel good-naturedly. “*Will you be coming to the library often, Mother*?” She said in a singsong. “You might as well have told her we’re up to no good in the library.”

“We are up to no good, Naevia.” Vel closed the distance between them, picked her up in his arms, and gazed into her lovely green eyes. He felt her legs lock around his waist. “No reason to hide it.”

Naevia laughed, enjoying the fresh heat of his breath in her face. “If Mother found out, she would make me a nun to the chaste Diana. And she might geld you. Not to mention all the other catastrophes should our love become known. Seeing as that is how it is, I think we might have to play it close to the chest, Vel.”

“Seeing as that is how it is …” Vel parted his robes, lifted his tunic, and pushed his underwear out of the way. He could see Naevia hurriedly lifting her stola to her waist and reaching down to pull her own undergarment to the side. He loved the frenzy in her movements, making plain that another second without his cock in her was a second wasted. He moved her hips away from his about a foot to give him room to line up with her pussy. Then he slowly pulled her back toward him, sinking deep into her wet warmth. “You are the … best, Naevia.”

“You’ve only … known … two women. Are you … uggghhhhh … comparing me to our cousin, *Your Grace*?” He hit a spot deep inside that nearly melted her. She knew she must have been making ridiculous faces at him. “Because that would … uh … uh … be an honor. She is married … and she has … had lots of … practice. Before you … I only did it a few … times.” The last word she said an octave higher than the rest. He was already pulling her to peak pleasure. She hit bottom, resting in his arms several feet above the floor, her feet now pointing to each side. Suddenly, her first orgasm took her. “Oooohhhhhhhhhh.” Her mouth formed a little happy rictus, and her eyes rolled back.

“Our cousin is good, but … uh … uh … uh … you are better.” He grabbed two handfuls of her ass and bounced her with a slow rhythm. She weighed little, but he didn’t think his muscles could support anything too vigorous. It strained him as it was, especially as her body cantilevered away from him at the top of each stroke.

“It feels like I’m … sitting on that relic tower.” Another surge built up in Naevia’s nerves. She was going to blow over again. “But could you … pull my hair?”

“Sure.” It was easy enough to do, with her neck arched back, her hair dangled close to her butt. He reached up, grabbed a handful, and used his forearm to support her butt on that side.

“Yes … yes … I’m yours, Vel. I … am … yours. Aaaahhhhhhh.” She came again. They humped standing up in the library for a while longer. She surged through crest after crest of pleasure. Eventually, she begged for his seed, and he gave it to her. She had given up all pretense of safety with the access she now gave him to her womb.

Not quite yet at the cockerel's hour, but far into the night, Vel lay on the smooth silk of a sofa. His sister lay between his legs. She lovingly worked one testicle with her mouth, and then the other. All while pumping his long penis with her hands. She had been smart to put her stola underneath her so as not to stain the antique furniture with the stuff that consistently leaked from her pussy. With a pop, she spit out the ball that was in her mouth. She tilted her head to look around his pole up into his eyes. "Do you desire more women, Vel?"

"Me?" Vel could only see one green eye, the other hid behind his cock. He was going to play this as dumb as dumb could be.

"It's just … I would want you to know that I … um … wouldn't be jealous." She leaned forward and kissed one heavy, wrinkly ball. "And you have the most ridiculous, happy expression on your face right now watching me tend to your sacks. I am a smart girl, Vel. I wonder if you'd like to see another girl doing this. Besides Dellia, I mean." Naevia's laugh was a nervous one. Even with their closeness, this seemed a topic fraught with danger.

"Um … yeah …" Vel's nervous laugh matched his sister's.

"Anyway. Think on it." Naevia's laughter died away and her face became serious. She held the mighty cock right before her eyes and examined the veiny shaft closely. She pulled his cock toward her and engulfed the head in her mouth. She pumped him and bobbed, determined to satisfy him once more before they returned to their respective beds.

"I … will … think ..." Vel leaned his head back onto the arm of the sofa. She had gotten so very good at that.

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"Did you miss me, Spurrius?" Dellia tried to be playful with her husband. Since his return to her father's home earlier that day, he had been taciturn and reserved with her. It had been weeks since she'd disappeared with her cousins from Kart Hadasht. Although she had insisted to the queens, her father, and her husband that they had returned by boat, Spurrius seemed least interested in believing her. "Would you join me in bed?" She lay naked on the sheet on her side, hoping that the gentle slope of her hip would entice him out of his melancholy.

"I just don't understand why you wouldn't tell me you were leaving." Spurrius slowly removed his robes and unbelted his tunic. "And you arrived back at Ostia Novus without more than two days at sea."

"It was a fast ship." She twisted her torso up, so that her tits rolled more into his view. Despite everything, it was good to see him. She had found passion with Vel, but she loved Spurrius, even if she had chosen to undermine their mission. Things were quite complicated in her head. Maybe if her husband would just take her as he was supposed to, she would find passion with him and that would clarify things. "Anyway, we lost Gallio for the moment. But at least my cousins will help us now. We can maybe set a trap in this city for him? That way, we wouldn't have to leave our bed so far away. And speaking of our bed, come here, husband." Dellia beckoned him with her fingers.

“Maybe.” He pulled off his tunic and saw his wife’s eyes on his naked torso.

“You are built like Apollo, Spurrius. Now come melt me like the sun.” It was true, as she studied him, he was well muscled and quite lovely to look at. Not pale and thin like Vel. She tried to put her cousin out of her mind.

“Maybe tomorrow we can tussle. I am ill at ease.” He watched her rise from the bed, moving in that manly way of hers. He felt her arms fall around his shoulders, and then suddenly he was off his feet and flying through the air. He landed squarely in the middle of their bed, a bit stunned but not surprised. She had, of course, bedded him like this before.

“That’s better.” Dellia jumped onto the bed, tore his underwear down his legs, and grabbed his cock. She pumped it fiercely, trying not to let her disappointment show. She had become so used to Vel that she had inflated her husband’s tool in her mind. Confronted with the thing in person, she couldn’t help but feel let down. She could fit only one hand on its hard length, and it did not fill her grip. Not to be deterred, she mounted him, put her hand on his mouth when he tried to say something, and slipped his cock inside her. She got her hips into rhythm. He was her husband and, by the gods, she would enjoy this.

“Wow … Dellia … you’re on fire tonight. My absence was perhaps … ugh … a good thing.” She had never ridden him so vigorously. Her face was painted with determination. The coupling made his doubts melt away. Maybe this is what he’d needed all along. Although … despite her vigor, her pussy didn’t seem to grip him the way it should. Maybe it was a side effect of the force with which her hips worked. Even with the loss of sensation, he was going to cum soon. The overall effect of her desire was just too much. “I’m going to …” He tensed up.

“No … no … no.” Dellia rode harder. She needed to feel something with him. He couldn’t finish before she even got started. She ground her hips into him, hoping that if she didn’t thrust, he wouldn’t climax. She prayed that he would hit some pleasure spot, but the only joy she felt came where her clit rubbed against him. She might as well have been fucking a woman. Vel had indeed ruined her. “No. Fucking look at me, Spurrius. Do not cum yet. I said … noooooooo.” She watched his stupid face go limp and felt him tremble out his ending. Her hips slowed to a stop. Well, at the very least, Vel’s sperm had some competition.

“I feel better … my wife.” Spurrius closed his eyes.

“I do, too,” she lied. She dismounted him and lay next to him on the sheet. “My strong Apollo.” She waited for him to sleep. It didn’t take long. When the snoring started, she stood, blew out the lamp, and returned to bed. Her hand immediately returned to her clit and she finished what Spurrius could not.

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The poor little man was inconsolable. Brynhild almost felt sorry for him. “There, there.” She reached down and awkwardly patted him on the back. “Perhaps she will return.”

“Perhaps?” Nicias’ weeping reenergized itself. “You … were … friends with her … were you not?”

“Well … um …” Why did she suddenly care for this sad servant? There was no way for Brynhild to gently say she had been fucking his wife. “She worked … um … closely with me. And … I appreciated her companionship.” This was true. The queens really had hurt her when they’d stolen Merope. The scullery servant had been so sweet, and pretty, and … willing. “Your wife is a good woman.”

“Can you not … summon some magic … to bring her back?” Nicias said between sobs.

“I dare not go against the queens regent.” Brynhild didn’t mind lying to Nicias, even if she felt sorry for him. She had no problem planning against the queens, the issue was an imbalance in power. And now she knew that they had magic beyond what she had thought. Beyond what anyone else had in this shell of a world. Brynhild had tried to even the odds. Biding her time. Recruiting the Dukes of Ostia Novus. But about the best that had come of that was she hadn’t been caught. “But I will do all that I can to retrieve your wife. You have my word on that, Nicias.” This was not a lie.

“Thank you.” He wiped at his eyes. “Thank you.”

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“Might I have a word with you?” Brynhild found Vel stepping into the castle from his saber lesson. She thought she’d find him alone for once, but his younger sister seemed to appear out of nowhere and take hold of his hand.

“You may.” Naevia said.

“I meant to have a private conversation with the duke.” Brynhild’s platinum hair shimmered in the morning sun, held back from her face by a Northern circlet that looked like it was carved from ice. “If you’ll excuse us, Lady Naevia.”

“I will not.” Naevia arched her eyebrows up at the giant of a woman. The sorceress was still quite unsettling, but not nearly so creepy in the morning light.

“Your Grace?” Brynhild looked to Vel for support.

“Come join us on the veranda, Brynhild.” He walked with his sister to the left, stopping at a stone railing that looked down on the eastern meadow. The cool tingle of evaporating sweat tickled his face. “We should have plenty of privacy here.” He squeezed his sister’s hand, and they turned to face the ageless woman. “What did you want to talk about?”

Brynhild followed them out and looked around. There was no one about. She sighed. It was harder to push two, and Vel had already shown resistance to her earlier suggestions. “You two will go to the Royal Palace, and seek contact with the Princess Minicia. You will also locate your servant Merope and –”

“You’re trying to influence me again with magic.” Vel cut her off, his pink face turning red. “I told you not to do that.”

“That wasn’t my intent, Your Grace. I was only asking you to collect information.” Brynhild pulled the loose dress tighter around her. Maybe it was her sow’s body that made this spell so ineffective. Her old

stature was so commanding. She now looked like something waiting to be bred. She shuddered at the morning chill. “I cast no spell on you today.”

“I am your duke, sorceress. It is I that asks you to collect information. Not this other twisted thing you have in your mind.” He had never before felt more like a duke. “My mother seems to be interested in the childhood of the queens regent.” Vel and his sister had read over their mother’s research before returning it to the shelves. “You will collect information of the queens and report back to me.”

“Yes, Your Grace.” Brynhild curtsied and stepped closer to Vel. If she could touch him, maybe she could properly gain the upper hand.

“Vel?” Naevia watched the sorceress approach. She didn’t like the way the woman moved. It was too … innocent. When had Brynhild ever done anything innocently? “Vel, watch out.” But the woman moved at them fast, and they had backed into the railing. A surge of panic hit Naevia. In a split second, it gave way to a wave of calm. A flash of azure light flooded the veranda and knocked Brynhild back.

“You …” Brynhild stumbled and fell, her round butt cushioning her landing on the stones. Her blue eyes looked up at the teenagers with wild surprise. Her focus narrowed on Naevia. “You did that? How? You have no magic. I’ve known you since you were born. You’re as magical as a rock. What trickery is this?”

Vel laughed at the way the sorceress looked sitting on the flagged stones. He couldn’t help it. The woman, with her large bosom heaving and her legs splayed, was so undignified.

“I didn’t do anything.” Naevia joined in her brother’s laughter. She put a hand over her mouth. The woman had turned from threat to buffoon in the breadth of a hair.

“Gather all you can on the history of the queens regent.” Vel stepped around Brynhild, not offering her a hand up despite the fact that she looked like she could use one. “Then we will see what further use we might have for you.”

Brother and sister ran off into the castle, still laughing. They looked at each other and both knew that whatever had just happened with that azure light had primed them for more mating. They couldn’t put it off.

“The library?” Vel tried very hard not to kiss her as they ran down the corridor.

“No.” Naevia didn’t know if her mother might continue her research by day. “My room. My room should be safe.” And off they ran toward Naevia’s chamber.

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Bouncing on top of her brother like she was driving a horse at Circus Maximus, Naevia hunched forward. She faced away from Vel, a new trick they’d learned and called the reverse saddle. Her knees dug into the mattress every time gravity asserted itself, and then left the sheet all together when she launched herself back up again. If she could have seen herself, she would have wondered that such a small woman could take something so large with such violence. But at the moment, she wondered nothing. She only bathed in the joys of mating Vel.

“Quiet … ugh … quiet.” Vel would have covered her mouth with his hand, but she was facing the wrong way. Instead, he lightly slapped her ass to get her attention. But that seemed to have the opposite to the desired effect as she only rode him harder.

“Vel … Vel … slap me again.” The bedframe groaned like a ship at sea.

“Quiet.” He said it louder and did not slap her again.

“What?” She heard the urgency in his voice, and looked over her shoulder. Then she saw the concern on his face. And then, she heard the knocking on her heavy, oak door. Her hips slowed. She was no longer going airborne, just gently undulating. This was also spectacular, because his head consistently nudged the very entrance to her womb, and her button pressed against him. “Should I tell them to go away?”

“No,” Vel whispered. “Say nothing. It’s best if no one knows we’re in here together in the middle of the day.”

The knocking stopped. And then, to the siblings’ horror, they heard the sound of a key scratching at the iron lock.

“I’m in here. Don’t come in.” Naevia shouted at the door. She dismounted her still tumescent brother, and they both hid below the sheets.

The door swung open. In walked Cassia. “There you are, Naevia. You’re an hour late for your dance lesson. I’ve been looking everywhere for you.” She looked around the darkened room with the lamps lit and curtains drawn. “What on Earth are you doing …” Then she saw two lumps under the covers and the smell of sex hit her nose. “By the curse of Venus, do you have a man with you? Have you spoiled yourself? Oh gods.” Her shoulders bunched and her face went hot with rage.

“Go away, Mother.” Naevia said from under the covers.

“Naevia Tullius, get your butt out here and face me.” Cassia placed her hands on her hips. “And the same goes for your partner. Do you know what the punishment is for bedding a lady? There will be lashes.”

Vel was rigid with fear, but the game was up. He lowered the covers past his face and looked at his mother. He’d never seen her look more fierce. But when her eyes registered whom she was looking at, her face went quite blank. Her skin went from rouge to a ghostly shade of white in seconds. Naevia also, tentatively, moved her head out from underneath the covers.

“I … I …” Cassia turned her eyes back to her daughter. “What did you do?”

“Mother, I’m sorry. There’s a curse and on the voyage –" Naevia sat up and then stepped out of bed, holding the sheet to cover her breasts. In doing so, she pulled it off her brother.

“Good gods, put that away.” Cassia couldn’t help look at the monster between her son’s legs. She had always assumed he was bigger than men of the Surround based on his height. But he was bigger than expected. And he was still hard! The audacity of them. And she could see it glistening with his sister’s coating. “Jupiter so help me, put that away!”

“Yes.” Vel scrambled out of bed and threw on his robes without bothering with underwear or tunic. “Look, Mother, she’s right. It’s not her fault. There’s a curse –”

Cassia picked up his discarded sandal and tried to hit him over the head with it, but her short reach only let her smack him up against the shoulder. “How could you do this to our family? You’re insane. You’re both insane. Vel, you go to your room. I will talk to your sister now.”

“Mother, I –” Vel stood still when she interrupted him.

“Shut … the fuck … up.” Cassia couldn’t remember the last time she swore. Maybe when she was Vel’s age. Goodness, they were too young to mess up their lives so completely. “Go to your room and wait for me there.”

Vel gave one look to Naevia. His sister had the expression of one who had just seen into the depths of Pluto’s realm. He left the two women, running down the hall toward his chamber. He felt very unlike a duke, or any kind of ruler of men. He felt like he’d just ruined his life.

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An hour later, Vel was freshly bathed and dressed in clean things. He tried to stand tall as his mother entered his chamber and closed the door behind her. Her stiff manner, and piercing brown eyes, told him she hadn’t gotten over the sight of Naevia and him in the short time since he’d left her. He waited for her to speak.

“It seems that evil Discordia will not leave my family be.” Cassia walked across the room, pulled at the hem of her stola a little, and sat on the edge of his bed. “They say that magic was made possible by the balance of chaos and order, peace and war. Over time, Discordia’s avarice festered, and she did not want to share such a powerful thing with the weak god Pax. She poisoned him with her own entropy. A wasting disease withered Pax and he became but a wraith that she cast to the dragons in the south. But, of course, the balance was now ruined and magic could not survive on chaos alone. Magic became an unpredictable, broken thing.”

“Mother, I –” Vel tried to cut in.

“Quiet, Duke of Ostia Novus.” Cassia’s normally lush lips had set themselves into a thin line. Her upper lip twitched as she spoke. “Now Discordia moves unchecked, and our family is proof.”

“I can explain.” Vel needed to do the impossible, help his mother see past her own prejudices.

“Maybe you could, but I will have none of that.” Cassia folded her arms over her chest. “Your sister is packing under the guidance of the seneschal. When she is done, she will leave for the nunnery on Lorelei’s Rock.”

“No!” Vel’s heart seized in his chest. This was the worst possible outcome. “But Jupiter’s parents were brother and sister. And we didn’t have a choice.”

“I cannot send the Duke away. I would, given the choice, send you somewhere for your penance. But your father and brother’s departure, has left the need of you here.” She stared up at him with deep betrayal. “I will hire a morality tutor for you. But he must not know why. No one must know what you and your sister have been doing.”

“You can’t send Naevia away.” Vel’s heart ran cold. He could feel it rending. He and his sister should have been more careful. There was nothing left but to beg. “Please.” He stepped over to her and dropped to his knees on the woolen rug before her. He put his hands on hers. “Please don’t do this. I promise it will never happen again.”

A strange heat settled into Cassia’s fingers, and then ran its way up her arms. Her face softened as she looked at her kneeling son. Had she been too harsh? “Maybe I’ll only send Naevia away for a short while.”

“You know how close we are. It would kill me if you sent her away at all.” Vel tried to keep his voice from wavering. He prayed to Diana that she would see reason before he had to use the full force of his curse.

“Too close. You two are too close.” Cassia’s heart beat fast and her chest rose and fell as she sucked in air. A sudden memory of the queen taking that poor woman from behind flashed in her brain. But rather than horror, she found the thought erotic. What would it be like to surrender like that woman had? To give in to her base nature? She blinked her eyes and tried to regain some composure. The heat from her son’s touch continued to flood through her. She bit her bottom lip in nervous anticipation of something. But she wasn’t sure what.

“I’m sorry to do this, Mother. But you cannot send Naevia away.” He leaned forward.

“You may be a duke, young man, but I have the ducal authority, too. And I am your mother. I know what’s best. You two cannot go at it like heated dogs.” She watched his face approach hers. What on Earth was he doing? “I saw your thing. You may not know, but it is unnaturally large. You have already ruined her for marriage. And if you somehow brought your coupling to fruition, then I don’t know … mmmmmmpppppppp.” His mouth was on hers, and she melted. That delicious heat flowed from his lips to hers, and soon from his tongue to hers. She closed her eyes and saw stars. Had Gallio ever kissed her right into the heavens? Of course not. The kiss transcended anything she’d experienced. Despite the obvious blasphemy of the moment, she couldn’t even conceive of the will to stop Vel. The moment was too perfect.

Vel, still sitting between her legs on the floor, pressed into her. He reached his hands up under her hair and held her delicate, trembling neck. After kissing her for some time, her pulled her into his arms and stood, carrying her with one arm behind her back and the other under her knees.

“Mmmpppphhhhhhhh.” She felt light as a feather as he carried her across the room. He didn’t break their kiss, but somehow navigated the chamber and sat down on the armchair. She was now on his lap, with her legs dangling off one arm of the chair. That beguiling touch moved to the inside of her thigh, and she parted her legs for his gentle fingers. She shuddered as they traced their way up and up. Never before had she understood Discordia’s draw to the world of men. But she did now. Every fiber of her wanted to spin and spin and lose control. She felt her linen underwear slide to the side, and she did not stop him. She felt the heat of his fingertips on her netherlips, and she did not push him away. Instead, she parted her legs farther.

Vel finally broke the kiss. “You look so beautiful, Mother.” It was true. She was an older, darker, version of Naevia. A breathtaking beauty. He prayed to the gods now that this would be enough to change her mind. He slid two fingers inside her. She was wet and ready to receive him.

“Oh.” Cassia made a small exclamation of surprise, her eyelids fluttered, and her body went completely slack. The steel of his member pressed insistently into the back of her shoulder. Good gods, he was big. She was aware of that, and the pleasure growing between her legs, and not much else. Something was happening with his clothes. He was wriggling under her. “Ooooohhhhhhhh, Vel, what are you doing … to meeeeeeeeeeee.” She was angry with him and his sister. Right? He needed to be taught a lesson. But how could she be mad at the man making her feel such ecstasy? His finger found a spot on the top wall inside her. How did he know about that spot? “Ooooooohhhhhhh.” Shaking all over, she opened her eyes to look up at him. “I’m beyond … the veil …” Between her eyes and his stood that mammoth penis. He had freed it. It was the most distilled symbol of vigorous manhood she had ever seen.

“You can kiss it.” Vel could hear the wet squelching coming from her pussy as he upped the tempo of his fingers. He couldn’t see her face well with his cock in the way, but he did watch her forehead crease and then go smooth. And then her lips met the side of his shaft. Just a peck. And then again. And then she licked up the length slowly and down again.

“Oh … ooohhh … oooohhhhhhhhh.” Cassia stopped tonguing the penis before her. She let out a series of low moans, her voice dropping several octaves. And then lightning flashed in her core, and her whole body spasmed several times. When she’d recovered, the penis was still right before her, so she went back to work on it. Was this why other women made such a big deal out of sex? Had the rest of the world been feeling this all along, and she was only just now catching up? She felt a hand behind her head, wending into her hair. It was clear what her son wanted. This was something she only performed for Gallio on special occasions. But in her foggy mind, this qualified as a special occasion. She lifted her head high enough to get her mouth on the point of his spear, and then opened wide. It wasn’t easy to get the bulbous head past her lips, but she did. With her husband, she would slide his thing halfway into her mouth. But with Vel, that was clearly impossible. So, she made do with bobbing her mouth on just the head, while his magical fingers spread their heat in her vagina.

“Mother,” Vel whispered. “That feels perfect.” He had now forgotten why he was doing this and only cared about staying in that moment forever. The woman that had cared for him all his nineteen years was now sucking him with loving concentration, taking a mother’s passion for her son and applying it to Venus’s realm. “Keep … doing … that.”

“Mmmppphhhhhh.” Cassia sucked on him harder. The happiness in his voice was music to her ears. And the joy he spread between her legs was music to the rest of her body. Her hips gyrated a little in response to him. He was going to send her to the top of the mountain again. She moved her left hand to the base of his penis to hold it steady, not thinking about how she’d just put Gallio’s iron on her son’s manhood. With her mouth still on him, she orgasmed again.

They pleasured each other like that for a long time. Eventually, light dimmed outside Vel’s windows. His fingers shook as they held her hair. The room reverberated with the wet, urgent sounds of their pleasure. “Mother … I’m going to …”

“Mmmmpppphhhh.” Cassia’s brain was in such a fog from all her climaxes, that she couldn’t process his words. It wasn’t until the first hot splash hit the back of her throat that she realized he was releasing. The salty warmth was every bit as delicious as the heat that emanated from Vel, and she surprised herself by trying to gulp his stuff down. This was a favor she had performed for no man. She swallowed once, twice, and then on the third try it was too much for her, and she spit his penis out of her mouth.

“Aaaaahhhhhhhh.” Vel tried not to scream out his pleasure, but his bellow did reverberate around the room. He watched his spray lift into the air and fall back on his mother’s face, hair, and stola. Her mouth hung open in shock, and she closed her eyes tight against the deluge.

When Vel had finished, Cassia felt some clarity return to her. It was very hard to wrap her mind around what had just happened. She wiped his sperm from her eyes, and then reached down and pulled his hand from her box. “Stop, Vel.” Her voice was a hoarse whisper. “I … I have to go.” She pulled away from him and stood on shaky legs.

“But Mother, you’re, um …” He looked up at her. She was always so carefully coifed, but at the moment she looked a wreck. Cum streaked down her face and sat in her wild, brown hair. The upper front of her stola was stained. “You’re a mess.”

“Good gods, I am.” She reached up and felt her hair and her face. “I can’t believe you can produce so much. I can’t believe …” her voice trailed away. She took a throw from the bed, wiped her face with it, and wrapped it around her head like a stole. She then moved toward the door.

“You see, I’m cursed,” Vel called after her. “You can’t send Naevia away. It’s not our fault.”

Cassia paused by the door, not looking back. Goodness, she smelled like his stuff. It had a pungent, earthy scent. “Yes … I do see what you mean. I will not send her away.” She still didn’t turn to look at him. “But you are confined to your room until we figure out what’s going on. And you may not see anyone. I will tell the castle you are sick and post a guard at your door. No one in, and no one out.”

“But Mother –”

“No.” She held up her hand. “Not another word.” And with that, she opened the door, and swiftly departed, heading straight for the baths.

Vel listened to the door close and his heart sank. Well, at least Naevia would still be in the castle. And maybe his mother could indeed get to the bottom of things. He suspected she would have someone deliver supper. In the meantime, Vel was exhausted. He finished undressing and climbed into bed.

Chapter 12

The night passed for Vel with little sleep. He stared out the window and the pink dawn rose outside. He rose, opened his door, and checked again. The two guards were still there. On high alert. They saluted him, but would not let him pass. He closed the door again and slumped in a chair. He stared at the door. Breakfast would arrive eventually. And he supposed his mother would visit again to fill him in on the terms of his imprisonment. He knew the guards would never let his sister pass, but it was a visit from Naevia that he desired above all else.

A flash of blue light crept from under the door. There were two muffled thumps as if bodies fell to the corridor's stone floor. Vel shot up, his mind racing. Was he under attack? He picked up a heavy candelabra and opened the door.

In the corridor stood Naevia. Her hands were clasped behind her back and she had a look of concern on her face. She glanced up at her brother with guilt in her green eyes. "I don't know how I did that, Vel. They wouldn't let me pass. I became frustrated. And … you see." She needlessly pointed at the unconscious men. Other than the frown on her face, she looked ready to meet the day, with her stola unblemished, and her copper hair shining in the lamplight.

"Did you kill them?" Vel's mouth hung open as he surveyed the scene.

"I don't think so." Naevia stared at the guards with wide eyes. Her skin went paler than normal, making her freckles stand out all the more. Her shoulders clenched tight. What had she done? She could feel her nerves building to some terrible crescendo. "I just wish they'd get up and walk away." A calm settled over her and another flash of azure light smothered everything in the corridor for a second.

Both men scrambled to their feet, looking quite shaky. Without so much as a salute, they turned and strode away from their place by their duke's door.

"Um … will they be okay?" Vel watched them amble off. Soon the guards had disappeared around a corner. He put down the candelabra inside his door.

"I think so." A smile spread across her face as their situation struck her. She suddenly felt quite giddy and ready … to be close to Vel. "Sorry about that fellas," she called after them. And then to Vel, she whispered, "let me come inside." She slipped past him into the room. They had their hands all over each other before the door was even closed.

When they were naked on Vel's bed, Naevia straddled him. "I feel like we should go with the reverse saddle, since we were interrupted last time." Instead, she faced him as she maneuvered his cock inside her. "But we need to … uuuuhhhhhhh … talk. Good gods, Vel, you're deep." She settled her slight weight on him, pushing him all the way inside.

"We're going to get caught again, aren't we?" Vel had a moment of panic, but couldn't bring himself to lift her off him. Maybe their mother was right. They had gone insane.

"Don't … ugh … worry. I told the kitchen … to delay your breakfast." Naevia rocked her hips slowly. "And I did something … naughty … to Bantia's wedding dress. Mother will be busy with that all morning." She

leaned forward and winked at him. “Now tell me how you … uh … uh … convinced mother to spare me the nunnery.”

Vel told his beautiful sister as she slowly rode him. He tried to keep his eyes fixed to hers and not on her tits, but it was a difficult task. When he had finished his story, he watched her for a reaction. “I only did it so she wouldn’t send you away.” Vel caressed the curve on each side where her waist rose out to her hips. “And you said you wouldn’t be jealous of other girls.”

Naevia giggled a bit before her face twisted in pleasure. “I did not think at the time that *girls* meant our mother, *Your Grace*.” She put a finger to his lips when she saw the worry in his eyes. “But I am true to my word. I am not jealous.” Her hips moved faster. “To tell you the truth, I’m sorry I missed it. To see our sanctimonious mother, just an hour after giving me a tongue lashing, please you with that very same tongue. And she drank your stuff? That would have been … quite something to see.” She rode him in silence for a time, thinking things over.

Vel lost himself in his own feelings. He watched her bouncing, freckled tits for a while. They looked magical in the flickering lamplight, with a fine line of daylight slipping through the curtains and running up the curve of her right breast. His gaze then dropped, and he watched her trim tummy bulge every time she pushed him to his deepest point. He would never grow tired of his sister.

“I have something to talk to you about.” Naevia leaned forward and dug her nails into his chest. Her expression carried some form of mischief, twisted by her passion. “But first you should cum. Breakfast isn’t too far away.” She leaned back, put her hands on his thighs, and humped him with long, powerful strokes. “We can’t have them find us … like this.”

“Uuhhhhhh … Naevia … I’m going to cum … inside you … again.” He reached up and grabbed handfuls of her heavy breasts. “So … perfect … aaaahhhhhhhhhh.” If the guards had still been outside his door, they would have certainly heard the siblings screaming out their dueling orgasms.

A few minutes later, they lay on their backs side by side, tall and short, skinny and round, touching sweaty shoulders.

“And here … I thought … I wasn’t going to see you … for a long time.” Vel lazily reached over and outlined one of her pink, puffy nipples with is finger. “It gets better and better doesn’t it.” Had he ever been so relaxed?

“Do you trust me, Vel?” Naevia sat up in bed and crossed her legs, facing him. The bottoms of her breasts brushed against her thighs as she leaned toward him with a serious look.

“Of course.” He felt too good to sit up, so he pulled the pillow under his head and stared at her loveliness.

“We can’t have Mother locking you up and doing who knows what with us. We have to be in charge of our own destiny, Vel.”

“Are you talking about the blue light? Because I don’t have that, and anyway, I’m not about to knock out Mother with some sort of magic.” It was odd that they hadn’t yet explored the full meaning of what Naevia had done out on the veranda, and then in the corridor. Things were happening so quickly, and

just about every moment seemed to contain something wondrously full and pressing. His train of thought brought him back to the feel of his mother on his lap, pleasuring him for all she was worth.

“I’m talking about your gift, Vel.” She wasn’t calling it a curse anymore. Her eyes trailed down his long body to where his cock stirred, coming back to life. “We don’t have time for sex right now. I have a plan to put us in charge of our own destiny. We only have a short time before your breakfast arrives. Listen closely.”

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“Welcome, again, Dellia.” Cassia eyed her niece with some suspicion. After all, she had been with Vel and Naevia on their voyage and returned by the relic tower the same as them. Had she witnessed Vel’s curse in action? “And welcome, Spurrius.” She forced a smile at Dellia’s husband. He was a handsome man. But looks could hide duplicity. As they did in the case before her. “I did not expect you two. What is the occasion?”

Spurrius gave a slight bow, his return smile thin and fading.

“I should very much like to greet my cousins. Where can I find them?” Dellia looked about her. The great eastern entry hall seemed dim and cavernous with only Cassia there. Cassia herself seemed somehow diminished from her usual brilliance. In the shadows high above, hung lifeless banners of various cephalopod incarnations. Iterations on the Tullius sigil. She glanced at her husband. Dellia was already wet between the legs. She would have to find a way to occupy Spurrius while she gave Vel a proper greeting.

“Oh, I’m sorry.” Cassia’s forced smile disappeared altogether. “Bantia is in the conservatory of flowers, choosing wedding arrangements. Vel and Naevia have both taken ill and are confined to their rooms.” Cassia turned from her unwanted guests, she had so many things pressing on her that day. Not the least of which was to figure out what to do with her eighteen and nineteen-year-old miscreants. “The seneschal will set a room for you in the south tower. Splendid views of the harbor. Bantia will be thrilled to see her cousin.” The south tower wasn’t usually for family stays, but she wanted Dellia far away from Vel and Naevia. And she made a note to tell the seneschal to have someone keep an eye on Spurrius. “I’ll see you at supper.”

“Goodbye, Your Grace.” Dellia curtsied awkwardly.

“Your Grace.” Spurrius bowed and waited for the duchess’s round, scurrying bottom to disappear through a doorway. He leaned toward his wife. “You were wise to bring us here. She’s hiding something. I can feel it.”

“Yes, indeed.” Dellia thought things through. She didn’t for a minute believe her cousins had both caught a chill. Something was afoot. And she saw the opportunity to relieve herself of her husband for a little while. “Why don’t you follow her about discreetly for a while. It’s probably nothing, but Gallio might be trying to contact her.”

“I hope for her sake that is not so.” Spurrius thought on it and nodded. “And where will you go?”

“I will see about my poor, ill cousins.” Dellia kissed him on the cheek. “I’ll see you at supper.”

“At supper then.” Spurrius smiled at her. Things were returning to normal with his wife. They were never more at home than when they were working together. He walked off in the direction Cassia had gone in an aimless manner that belied his true task.

Dellia sighed, and strode off toward Vel’s chamber. Her undergarment was soaked through.

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A quick knock on the door was answered with a muffled, “Mother?”

“I am not your mother, Vel.” Dellia tried the handle, but it was locked. A second later, the door opened from the inside. Vel and Naevia stood on the other side, smiling big idiot smiles. Dellia tried to control it, but she couldn’t help but break out into her own grin.

“Come in, quick. A new guard should be here soon. They were supposed to change at midday.” Naevia hurriedly beckoned her in.

“New guard? If they’re changing, where is the old guard?” She stepped inside and they closed and locked the door behind her.

“Naevia zapped them with magic,” Vel tried to look serious, but it was too good to see Dellia after these many weeks. He moved to hug her, but she held him away with her well-muscled arms.

“Naevia did what now?” Dellia could not have heard him correctly.

“Remember that blue light from the tower?” Naevia said. “I seem to have borrowed some of it.”

Her cousins brought Dellia up to speed on all that had happened in her absence. Although, they failed to mention Cassia lovingly coaxing a load from her son.

“And now, we have something planned for the afternoon. You must go.” Naevia pushed her cousin toward the door. “Are you staying the night? We’ll catch up with you tomorrow.”

“But wait.” Dellia’s olive cheeks grew darker as she was forced to say what she was hoping would happen naturally. “I thought Vel and I could spend a little time together. I don’t mind if you’re here too, Naevia. It’s just … I mean … I wouldn’t need more than an hour or two.” Her stomach flipped as the real possibility of leaving unsatisfied manifested in front of her.

“Hold on. Let me check for the guard.” Vel stepped to the door and opened it. Two new soldiers stood outside his door. They saluted, and clearly had no intention of letting him pass. If they wondered what had happened to the shift they were replacing, they didn’t ask their duke. Vel returned the salute and closed the door. “You cannot leave now. The guard is right outside.”

“Wonderful.” Dellia moved to embrace Vel, but he held her off with his long arms.

“We can’t do that now.” Vel cursed the complexity of the feelings that bound him. “We expect my mother to visit soon. And if she finds you naked in my chamber her head may explode. We have to –” He was interrupted by a key scraping at the iron lock. “It’s Mother,” he whispered. “Hide.”

“You have to go through with it, Vel.” Naevia guided Dellia toward the wardrobe, whispering back at her brother over her shoulder.

“But Dellia?” Vel knotted his brows in consternation. Did she really expect Dellia to witness?

“Trust me, Vel. We must step out from under Mother’s wing.” Naevia pulled Dellia into the wardrobe with her, leaving the door open a crack.

“What are you two going to do?” Dellia settled her butt against the back wall, the warmth of her cousin pressed on one side and the pleasant softness of Vel’s fur coats on the other side.

“Shh. Just watch.” Naevia tried to keep the giddiness out of her voice.

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“Good afternoon, Vel.” Cassia stood very straight, and closed the door behind her stiffly. Her stola was as formal as her manner. It was loose around her chest and trailed down to the floor. But that was just insurance, because no one could see past the blue, velvet mantle wrapped around her shoulders. Her body was covered doubly over. “I’ve had time to reflect on what happened before. I haven’t enquired of Brynhild or the sorcerer’s guild. There are too many questions that might ignite.” She stood in the middle of the room, hands clasped tight in front of her. Now that she was in the same space as Vel, she felt some of her resolve fading.

“Good afternoon, Mother.” Vel sat on the side of his bed, trying to keep his trembling fingers still. Unless his mother gave him no choice, he wouldn’t go through with it. How could he? His father was a hard, calculating man who had little patience for Vel’s gentle ways. But Gallio didn’t deserve to have his son take what was his. Heck, he had already taken his father’s seat of power. He couldn’t also take his wife.

“I am so sorry to tell you this, Vel. But you are to remain locked in here indefinitely.” A tear ran down Cassia’s cheek. “I have seen the curse at work, and we cannot have its influence spread.”

Vel’s shoulders slumped. She would give him no choice then. “And my sister?”

“Naevia will be allowed out, but she will have a chaperone at all times.”

“Are you watching her now?” Vel stood up.

“I’ve sent a guard to her chamber just now.” Cassia wanted to reach out and hug Vel. Her motherly instinct told her to caress him and tell him all would be fine in the end. But she held fast. She wasn’t sure how his curse worked. “This will be a lonely time for you until we sort this out. I have sent word to your father that you have taken ill and he is needed here. I pray he sends word back. Perhaps he can find a solution.” She paused. Her brown hair caught the glow of the lamps about the room. “You can never tell him about what happened yesterday. He would not … understand. Or about your sister.”

“I would never tell him.” It was true. He might steal his father’s woman, but he would be a gentleman about it. Vel was nothing if he was not gentle, thoughtful, and civilized. “But I cannot stay locked in my room. Naevia and I mean to understand the mystery of the blue light and the relic tower. And the queens regent are not all they seem. I’m looking into that.”

“I’m sorry, Vel. You cannot leave your chamber.” Cassia was caught off guard by his apparent confidence. She had expected him to take his sentence with resignation and tears. But as he stood, he looked almost brash.

“I’m sorry too, Mother.” Vel quickly moved across the room and leaned down to take her into his arms. She was stiff as a board, with her lips shut tight. But he kissed her anyway. He slid his hands over the mantle, under her brown hair, and onto the bare skin at the back of her neck.

“Don’t Vel … the curse,” Cassia said through pressed lips. But she already felt the hollowness of her words. Heat spread from his touch on her lips and neck. It was delicious. The moment felt quite like returning home after a long time away.

Vel leaned his head back so he could look into her eyes, still gently massaging the back of her neck. “I love you, Mother. But you cannot lock me up. I am the duke and you are my duchess. What gives you that power?”

“I am your mother.” She fully intended to seize that moment and push him away. It clearly was the opening she needed. But instead, she leaned up into him, pressing herself against his warmth, and kissed him with passion. What treason her body committed against her!

“Mmmmmppphhhhh.” Surprised, Vel returned her insistent kiss. Her tongue darted into his mouth, and although this was going according to his sister’s plan, he couldn’t help wonder what Naevia thought as she watched from the wardrobe.

Time was lost to mother and son as they kissed. Eventually the mantle fell to the floor, spread out around Cassia’s ankles. His hands moved from her neck, down her back, and groped at her round butt. She carefully moved his hands to her hips, but then they traveled up and up and soon he had hold of her boobs. She kissed him and did not move his hands this time. Her whole body radiated with his heat. Something very large and hard pushed at the bottom of her boobs. She knew what it was.

She pulled her lips from his, but kept her body pressed against him. “I know it’s the curse that has broken the dam, but also …” She bit her bottom lip as she thought of the right words. “I feel that this river of feeling was inevitable. You and I were meant for this.” She tugged his robes off him and lifted his tunic over his head. She was pleased that his hands returned to her breasts after he lifted his arms to disrobe. She looked down. He hadn’t worn underwear. “Oh, my, Vel. It’s so beautiful.” The head of his thing curved out quickly to its flange and was an intense, pinkish red. Clear fluid slowly leaked from the top. The shaft was long and thick, crisscrossed with purplish veins. She could see the whole penis move with Vel’s heart. “I’m going to take care of you.” Her voice sounded girlish in her own ears. She didn’t even know what she was saying.

“Okay,” he said dumbly. He watched as she pulled her stola over her head and threw it behind her. She then discarded her chest band, letting her bare boobs rub up against him. She didn’t seem to mind that

his clear fluid smeared the undersides of her tits. From the wild look in her eye, the loose set of her jaw, and the flush in her cheeks, it seemed she wasn't minding much at the moment.

"I can't believe I'm going to do this." She pushed his hands away from her breasts and held them herself. She then moved each tit apart on either side of his long organ, and pressed them together around it. She had tried this with her husband on occasion when they were younger, but Vel's size made the act almost a completely different thing. Holding her breasts firmly, she moved them up and down.

"That's nice." Vel was captivated by how her tits looked warped and bulging around his cock. "But it's too dry."

"Eh?" She looked up at him. His father had never made this complaint. She hadn't the foggiest notion what to do about it.

"Spit, Mother. You have to spit on it." Vel had seen his sister do this more than once.

"Really?" Cassia's eyebrows raised. Somehow spitting in his presence was more undignified than pleasuring him with her breasts. But she couldn't have him chaffing his most sensitive parts. She spit down on that crimson cockhead. It slid better. She spit again and continued moving her breasts.

"That's better. Maybe one more?" Vel wondered at what Dellia must be thinking, watching the prim duchess stand in front of her son, working him with her large tits and spitting like a dockworker.

"Maybe I should just take you in my mouth like last time." But she spit again and worked him. A short while later she looked up from her work into his face and saw pure joy written there. It was clearly worth the indignity to see Vel so thoroughly pleased. Her heart welled with pride. It was as if her breasts were made for his penis. A perfect fit. No, she had made this penis to fit her breasts. Her vagina gushed at the thought. She pumped her breasts up and down faster, staring up into Vel's handsome face.

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"Shit, shit, shit." Dellia whispered. "She's really into it." She leaned forward to stare out the crack in the door, her cousin leaning just below her. The way they were situated, Dellia's breasts rested on Naevia's back. And Naevia's bent rump was pressed into Dellia's pelvis. The tangy scent of both women's excitement filled the wardrobe.

"Quiet." Naevia was over the moon watching the standing boobjob. She thought of all her mother's admonishments not to be a trollop in recent years. And her tirade the day before when she'd become convinced that Naevia was some kind of harlot. And now here her mother was, acting like she was turning some cheap trick. No, not a cheap trick. Naevia corrected herself. A very expensive one. Men would ransom kingdoms for what Vel had right then. Without thinking, she wiggled her butt back into her cousin.

Dellia was so caught up in witnessing the duke and duchess's lascivious behavior, that it took her a while to notice that her cousin was wriggling her butt back into her. And to her surprise, Dellia found that she rocked her own hips, grinding her pussy onto the firm roundness beneath. She reached down and took

hold of Naevia's hips from behind and pulled her tightly back against her. She heard Naevia's sharp intake of breath as her cousin manhandled her. They both continued staring at the scene out in the room and ground against each other. She took the sleeve of a fur coat and bit down on it hard, letting out a muffled grunt.

"Quiet," Naevia hissed over her shoulder. To be discovered now would be catastrophic.

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"What was that?" Cassia paused her work on her son's penis to look around the room.

"I'm not sure." Vel was sure. It was his sister and cousin in the wardrobe. Didn't they know they had to be absolutely quiet? "Maybe it was the guard?"

"I thought it came from over there." Cassia dropped her breasts and wandered over toward her son's wardrobe. She was vaguely aware that her son's eyes were probably fixed to her butt, with only her thin underwear to hinder his view. But she was more worried there might be a spy with them. If a Vulpes asset had just seen what she was doing with her son, that would be very bad. Very bad indeed.

"It was the guard. Definitely the guard outside the door." Vel was frozen on the spot. They were dead when his mother found the hidden eavesdroppers. Just dead.

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Inside the wardrobe, the cousins had stopped their rubbing. They were both rigid as boards. This was disaster. Cassia stepped nearer and nearer to them.

Dellia wished they were anywhere but the wardrobe. An azure light sprung from Dellia's skin and reached out to encompass both cousins. A thought popped into her mind. *Where would you go?* She answered herself silently. *Anywhere. Naevia's bedroom.* With a flash of light, the furs pressed against her were gone. She floated in the air. The azure faded to black, and then she fell into nothing.

Thump. Thump. Dellia and her cousin landed on a soft mattress. She looked around the room. It was Naevia's chamber.

"Did we …?" Naevia blinked as she took in the bright, familiar space. "Did we escape?"

"Yes. But how?" Dellia needed to mate. The impulse overwhelmed her desire for an answer. A euphoria spread through her. She quickly pulled off her tunic, and dropped her underwear. She didn't bother to remove her chest band. "And I am now in a … frenzy." She picked up Naevia from her sitting position and tossed her onto her back. She then pulled her cousins stola up past her waist and mounted her.

"Whoa, Cousin. We can share Vel, but I'm not sure I desire a woman's touch." Naevia tried to sit up, but was pushed back down by Dellia's rough hands. "What happened in the wardrobe was just a little fun

because we were watching Mother and Vel. I … ugh … I … you really are persistent." She felt her underwear get torn away and now Dellia's pussy was pressed against hers. Her cousin's hips rocked steadily. "Oh … that does feel good. Oh … oh … oooohhhhhhhhhh. Where did you learn that?" Their buttons rubbed perfectly together.

"From … fucking … my husband." It was true. Dellia's attempts to find pleasure with her husband's small penis over the past week had prepared her well for lesbian sex. "You are such … a pretty … little … thing … Cousin." She tore at Naevia's stola, and at the chest band underneath, spilling her tits out into the open.

"Thank you … ugh … Dellia." Naevia quickly built toward a climax. Was this cheating on Vel? She thought it over as she watched the intensity twist her cousin's face. If she wasn't going to be jealous of Vel with their beauty of a mother, and his time with the very cousin mounting her at that moment, then he had no right to jealousy either. She would enjoy this. "Faster … Dellia … faster … yes … right there … aaaahhhhhh."

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"That's strange … I could have sworn I heard someone. And then … a light from this wardrobe." She bent forward into the wardrobe, again giving Vel quite a view of her butt. But why should that matter when her breasts had just been pressed against his penis. Oh, gods, that magnificent penis. She straightened and turned around. "There's nothing and no one there." Her passions had cooled on her little expedition across the room. Maybe now would be a good time to leave? But she had promised to take care of him. But that wasn't the sort of promise a mother should keep. She was so confused.

"No one?" Vel could not understand what had happened. "There's no one there?"

"Perhaps it was the guard." Cassia tried to keep her eyes away from her son's great spear. She crossed the room quickly, picked up the mantle, and pulled it around her shoulders, not bothering with her other clothes. "The guard," she mumbled. She moved to the door.

"Wait, Mother. Don't leave." Not only had he failed in his sister's plan, but he desperately wanted his mother to stay regardless. His desire for her had blossomed over the past two days. To have his own mother give herself over to him was a feeling little considered before, but now powerful and intoxicating. Despite all that, he stood rooted to the spot, fixed with indecision.

"Quiet, Vel." Cassia pulled the mantle tight around her. She did not care to give the guards a show. She unlocked and opened the door, stuck her head out, and nodded at the salute she received. "We no longer need a guard at this door. Return to your other duties."

"Yes, Your Grace," said the nearer guard. They snapped to attention, saluted again, and then marched down the corridor.

Cassia closed the door and locked it again. She pushed her back up against it and then the mantle fell open, revealing to Vel an exposed gap between her breasts on down her body. "If we can hear them, they might have heard us. Especially when you … um … get to the end. Now, let me finish you."

“Really?” Vel still couldn’t move. But he didn’t have to. He watched her drop the mantle to the floor, quickly moved over to him, and then bent at the waist.

“It will probably go faster if I use my mouth.” With shaking fingers, she grasped the spongy flesh of his penis with both hands. Her eyes quickly darted to Gallio’s iron on her finger. Should she take it off? No, she didn’t want to make a big deal of it in front of Vel. She lowered her face closer and closer. That strange heat moved up her arms and relaxed her to the core. The salty taste of his pre-seed hit her tongue. Soon, she had the head in her mouth just like the day before. Only this time, he wasn’t playing with her vagina. She was loath to admit it to herself, but she really wished his fingers were exploring her again. But instead, they wound themselves into her hair, encouraging her to bob on his penis. Which is exactly what she did. She must have been quite the sight, bent over, with her breasts swinging under her. What had Venus done?

“Wow, Mother. You’re gorgeous.” Vel could just see the sides of her tits past her back as they swung from one side to the other. His eyes traveled down her spine, following the flare from her waist to her ass. She was not simply an older, darker copy of Naevia. She was maybe more womanly. Her curves more accentuated. With the hand that wasn’t holding her hair, he took hold of her last, remaining undergarment, and pulled it down her legs. He then reached behind her and accessed her pussy with his fingers from the back. She was quite wet and ready.

“Uuuummpppphhhhhh.” Cassia hadn’t expected her son to come at her from the rear, but he had the reach. She nearly forgot to bounce her head as the pleasure of his warmth radiated out from her insides. She would have to finish him soon or there was no telling what her body would make her do. The need inside her grew.

Twenty minutes later, they had not changed positions. The familiar sound of Cassia’s wet slurping mouth and pussy filled the otherwise quiet room.

It was too much. Cassia spat his fat cockhead from her mouth and released him from her grip. “This must be … what … insanity feels like,” she panted. “Stop … stop.” She reached behind her and removed his fingers from her. She felt him spread a trail of her wetness up her left butt cheek. She shuddered. “On the bed, now.” She pushed his chest. “Quickly, quickly, before I change my mind.”

“Your Grace?” It sounded so stupid coming from his mouth, but his confusion about the wardrobe was matched now as he tried to process her orders. Were they going to have sex?

“You’re a smart lad, Vel.” She pushed him again. “On your back. On your bed.” She watched him comply. Her whole body now shook with anticipation. It probably wouldn’t fit. It certainly wouldn’t fit. But she had to try.

“I’m not … um … far from finishing. Maybe we shouldn’t do this.” Vel considered the plan. His sister had said to make her want him. Keep her coming back for more. But she hadn’t said anything about Vel making his own sibling. “It isn’t safe.”

“I agree with you, Vel.” Cassia climbed onto the bed and straddled him, aware that even now his eyes were on her breasts. She reached under her and took hold of his penis. It was still quite slick with her saliva. “Your father and I do this when it’s a dangerous time of month. We need no more children. You see?” She settled back a little and then his beguiling heat spread from her butthole. And then the head

of his penis spread her butthole. “Ooooooohhhhhhh. This was a bad idea. You’re going to break me for sure.” Her face contorted with pain, but she settled her weight down and … plop, the head went in.

Vel wanted to say something, but he was speechless. His mother wanted him up her butt, and he was slowly sinking in. He looked up from her wobbling tits to stare at the normally pretty face misshapen by grimace and wince. Finally, he found some words. “We don’t have to, Mother.”

“Shh.” She reached down and put a finger to his lips. Her nipples brushed against his chest. “Just let me …” By the gods, he was going to fit. She was going to take all of him. She had never wanted anything with such animal immediacy before. “Oh … it’s good. It’s really … very … good. I …” She hit bottom and squealed. “Eeeeiiiiiieeeeee.” Cassia spasmed and lights danced before her eyes. Her pleasure carried her away.

“Mother … Mother … Mother?” Vel watched her as she leaned back and bounced on his cock. She wasn’t responding to him. Her face looked beautiful again, with an expression that was half smile and half surprise.

After a while, reality came back to Cassia. She was bouncing on Vel’s lap, with her hands back on his thighs. The pleasures of the day before which had been such a moment of wonder for her, were now surpassed. This was a feeling she never wanted to end. But when she looked down into Vel’s sweet face, she saw that they wouldn’t go for much longer. He was about to release. “Yes, Vel. Yes. Let it go … inside me … where it can … do no harm.” When she’d entered his chamber a short while before, she would never have believed that soon she would take all of his tower up her tight ass. No, that wasn’t right. It wouldn’t be tight for long. “Go on … go on … Vel.”

“Mother … I’m … uuuuggggggghhhhhhhhhh.” Vel bellowed and his mother screamed. It was very fortunate that the guards were no longer outside, because surely, they would have broken down the door in response to those primal sounds. Vel moved his hands to her hips and jammed her ass down on him again … and again … and again. He must have stuffed a small lake of cum deep into his mother’s gut. When he was finished, he let go of her, and his weight pressed back into the bed. She fell forward and nuzzled her face and hair into his neck. “Never … was there a mother … better than you.” He circled his arms around her.

“Shh. Don’t speak.” Cassia’s butt clenched and released at the fat intruder over and over. She had now experienced ecstasy that could only have been meant for the gods. She cursed Discordia under her breath. There was no going back from that feeling. If she had to be tied to anyone, she was at least grateful to Pax that her gentle son had been the one to show her this. He was still hard and his hips moved under her. Goodness, they were going to do it again.

Chapter 13

Good gods. Cassia had already allowed two deposits deep in her butt, and Vel worked his way to a third. Her son's curse was strong. She now gave herself to him like a dog, on her hands and knees. Cassia's ass should have been destroyed by now, but instead, joyful heat spread all through her body. The four-poster bed bucked and squeaked under them. How many climaxes had she had that day? Too many to count.

"Oh, Vel, I've never … never …" Cassia squealed as another orgasm rocked her sense of being. When she recovered, she found that his hands had tightened their grip on her cheeks, taking big handfuls of flesh and pulling her back onto him again and again. Why had she come in person to his room? Had she wanted this? She could have written a letter to her son and slipped it under the door. She had given Vel the opening, practically inviting him to make his move. And now … and now … she gripped the rumpled bedsheet with her fingers. She prayed to Juno that he would stay happy with her breasts, mouth, and butt. But she knew men rarely looked at the horizon without wanting to take it. Lost to Cassia, was the implied admission to herself that her newly discovered pleasures would not end on that day.

"I … did not … dare … dream this … Mother." Vel's hips went out of rhythm. "But … your … ass … is … perfection."

"Yesssssssss," Cassia hissed. Her back arched and her boobs swung wildly under her. "I … will … take … uuuggggghhhhhhhh." The now familiar warm jetty pushed into her guts. She heard him bellow behind her and she let out her own scream. There were few paths forward from this that didn't end in catastrophe. But the chaotic ecstasy that clouded her mind didn't let her care. Bring on disorder and ruin. If it felt like this, she would welcome it with open arms. Or at least, that's what she vowed in the moment.

Later, as she lay on her belly on Vel's bed, she had second thoughts about so willingly accepting Discordia into her home. Vel kissed and playfully bit her butt and caressed the backs of her thighs. His enthusiasm for her body seemed to know no bounds. It had been such a long time since a man had taken to her so. Cassia thought about how to proceed. If Pax and Discordia could come to agreement to make magic, surly she could let some chaos in without inviting utter disaster. But Gallio would outsmart the queens regent eventually and return home. He was a shrewd man and would not miss what was sure to continue between mother and son. What would she do?

"So … perfect." Vel kissed her curving supple cheek, moving his head to give his eyes different angles to admire those half-globes. He could see the cum running consistently out of her ass. He hoped it wasn't bad for a woman's health to take such a deluge up there. "I can see my stuff running out of you." He bent a little and gently bit her soft flesh, just to feel its give and resilience. "Are you okay back there? I mean …"

"I don't know if I'll ever be the same. And I'm certainly not looking forward to sitting down." Her voice was muffled as she talked into the mattress. His playful bites stopped and she heard him draw in his breath in alarm. "But I think your curse must have spared me the full devastation that your big thing would otherwise have caused. In fact, I feel no pain at all." She didn't want to admit that a lingering haze

of pleasure still moved through her. And while it was ghastly to be so on display for him, it was at the same time thrilling to know he could see her stretched hole cough up his seed. Thrilling and wicked.

Mollified, Vel went back to his bites and kisses. “So … perfect … Mother.”

“So you keep saying.” She moved her arms from her sides and folded them under her head, resting her cheek on the back of her feverish forearm. “A nobleman does not repeat himself, Vel. He must command his audience and convey his meaning – ouch.” She was cut off by a light, but surprising, smack on her butt. No one had ever hit her, a lady and a duchess, like that before. Her eyes widened in shock and she looked over her shoulder at her son sitting by her hip.

“Don’t look at me like that.” Vel’s smile was mischievous. He was testing her boundaries, and so far, he liked what he’d discovered. “You deserved a little spank. I can’t believe you, Mother, lecturing me at a time like this.” He smacked her again.

“Stop it, Vel.” Cassia sat up and crossed her arms over her bare breasts. “You cannot lose respect for me as your mother and your duchess because of what we’ve done. It was the curse.”

“I have a mountain of respect for you and your station.” Vel reached in and tickled her soft stomach, and moved his fingers to her sides.

“Stop.” Cassia pushed at his persistent hands and giggled despite herself. She tried to recover and keep her face solemn, but he tickled her again and a peal of laughter escaped her.

“My respect does not exclude my affection, however.” She tried to move away from him, but in a playful way, allowing him to catch her on the end of the bed and tickle her some more. The room echoed with her laughter. How rarely in life had he been the cause of his mother’s outward mirth? “And my affection will at times win out.”

They both tumbled off the bed laughing, Cassia landing on top of her son. A knock on the door quieted them both instantly.

“Who is it?” A wild look passed over Cassia’s face. She jumped to her feet and raced across the floor to retrieve her mantle.

“I don’t know.” Vel stood, too. He wrapped himself in a sheet and moved cautiously to the door. At least he wasn’t hard anymore. The sheet was not tented. “Yes?” He called at the door.

“It’s me, Vel. Let me in.” Naevia’s muffled voice came through the door.

Vel paused a few paces from the door. He looked over at his mother as she frantically flung the mantle over her nakedness. She shook her head at him and gestured for him to shoo his sister away. He sighed. He wanted nothing more than to let her in, but he knew better. “Meet me in the library in an hour,” he shouted.

“Can you leave your room?” Came back Naevia’s voice.

“Can I?” Vel looked over at his mother.

Cassia sighed. Her plan to contain Vel had failed. She needed him as a duke and partner now in a myriad of interlocking ways. They would find a way through this, but not while he was locked up. She nodded at him.

“Yes. I can leave now,” Vel said to the door.

“See you soon.” Naevia’s voice faded on the last word.

Vel could hear the ear-to-ear grin in his sister’s voice, even through the door. It was clear she knew that her plan had worked.

“You cannot sleep with your sister anymore.” Cassia frowned at the smile on his face.

“Normally, I would lie to you, and promise that I wouldn’t, and then run to her arms.” Vel spoke slowly, carefully weighing each word. “But I no longer care to deceive you, Mother.” He watched her face soften and then harden at the implication of his words.

“It is for both your sakes that I ask, Vel. Don’t you see? Our family will not survive if you get your sister with child, or if you’re discovered.” This was, of course, rank hypocrisy. But sometimes life’s challenges called for hypocrisy.

“And what of us then? Are we to stop after today?” Vel could sense he had his mother on a hook. If he did not reel her in, she might slip away. But if he pulled too hard, he would lose her just as surely.

“No, we can continue past today if you wish it,” She said in a whisper, looking down at the floor. Cassia was abashed. Her cheeks darkened. “But your sister is different.”

“How so?” Vel let the sheet fall and stepped toward her. His cock rose with each step, her admission raising the pressure of his blood.

“She is eighteen, I … am not.” Cassia’s eyes moved from the floor to the growing, oncoming penis. “I have experience with the world. As a duchess, I have a lifetime of learned restraint. I can help you with this curse until we can unbind you. Until then I will keep us in check. I can keep us safe. If left to your own devises, you and Naevia will make a mistake.” Her gaze ran up his long body until it locked on his blue eyes. He stood right before her now.

“I will go to Naevia in an hour. Do you understand?” Vel swung his dick sideways and it knocked her boob hidden underneath the mantle. He watched an uncontrollable shiver run through his mother.

Cassia swallowed and nodded up at her son.

“But we have time. Perhaps if I was emptied in the next hour, I would be able to think more clearly with my sister?” Vel smiled as the mantle fell from his mother’s shoulders. What restraint did she really think she had? He was now beyond Naevia’s plan and he should show some restraint himself. But he was hopelessly smitten by his mother’s beauty, and her reticent but willing sexuality.

“Another one? Three wasn’t enough for you?” A lopsided smile pulled at the corner of her mouth. He was like any teenage man, but only a thousand times more so. There weren’t many other nineteen-year-olds with his gifts. “Okay, fine. But with my mouth this time.” She took hold of him and bent to lick the head. Goodness, the pre-seed already flowed from him. “And we must be careful not to get your stuff on me. I can’t go wandering the halls covered in semen.” She dropped her mouth onto him.

Forty minutes later, a somewhat defeated looking Cassia left her son's room wrapped tight in her mantle. She had wiped most of her son's sperm from her hair and face, but the smell of it floated around her like a rich, pungent cloud. She headed straight for the baths.

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"Cesphea, Sister?" Valeria knew her twin was somewhere in her quarters in the blessed tower, but where? Normally, it would not be wise to occupy a building under construction. But the queens regent had never done things according to others' rules. Besides, the tower was nearly complete. "Cesphea?"

Moving from one lavish room to the next, Valeria found no one. She came to the study and opened the heavy door. She heard the familiar slap of skin and grunting. Valeria clucked to herself. Her sister had such appetites that she was never fully satisfied. Valeria, not for the first time, thanked the gods that she had been split into the human one. She enjoyed a toss with her husband now and again, but she wasn't ruled by her concupiscence, which allowed her a more rounded life than her sister. She found them in the back of the study. That poor servant girl rode Cesphea's long cock facing away from her conqueror. Merope's hands were on her growing belly, and her ass definitely looked larger as it rippled and shook. Another royal bastard. Valeria sighed, moved over to a nearby table, and started reading an open book. Her sister had been researching the reanimated relic tower before taking a break. The book didn't seem to shed much light on this new threat, however. She read on.

"And now … ugh … do you wish to return to Ostia Novus?" She slapped Merope's wide ass when her only response was a series of squeals. "Answer me … pet. I could open the door for you. Would you … ugh … fly away?"

"No." Merope's mind reeled, as it always did when her pussy was stuffed with the queen's cock.

"No, what?" Cesphea slapped Merope's olive-skinned ass hard enough to leave a handprint. Her pet didn't mind. "Bark it out. Don't say it."

"I … ruff, ruff … never … want to … ruff, ruff … go back to my … husband." It wasn't totally true, of course. But Merope had learned what pleased her new master. At any rate, Nicias would never have her back. Not when she was carrying the child of a cruel queen. All Merope could do was try and please this woman and hope that she never grew tired of her servant. Merope did not want to fall on the wrong side of Cesphea's wrath. And … she also couldn't bear to think about being separated from that evil and beguiling cock.

"That's my … uh … uh … good bitch. Are you … ready?" Cesphea didn't want or wait for a reply, she pulled the woman's hips to impale her completely and added more cargo to the woman's insides. When she was done, she carelessly pushed the woman off her cock and let her fall in a heap on the woolly rhino skin rug. "Don't stain it." She chuckled to herself as the woman weakly crawled onto the bare stone floor and lay on her side, convulsing every ten seconds or so.

"Are you done?" Valeria glanced up from her book. Her sister was still hard. Valeria scrunched her face so that the other queen regent would know that Valeria did not like the view.

“Yes, yes. I’m done for now.” Cesphea stared down at her cock and willed it to subside. After a few seconds, it started its long deflation. She stood, picked up her informal stola from the couch’s arm, and stepped over the still mewling pet. She stopped next to Valeria and wiggled into her clothes. “Gallio Tullius is behind that relic tower, I’m sure of it. He’s conjured back some magic into the world. And I think he’s had help.” Cesphea looked over at her pet. “Leave us now, this is not for your ears.”

The pregnant woman wobbled as she stood, her legs not quite under her. Clutching her vagina with one hand, so as not to spill and anger the queens, she hurried as fast as she could out of the room.

“You do not have to torment her so.” Valeria looked up at the duplicate of her own pretty face twisted in a leering smile.

“You are seldom wrong, Sister. But you are far off the mark there.” Once the door was shut, Cesphea turned to a nearby shelf and pulled a thinly bound sheaf of parchment. She placed it on the table in front of Valeria and opened it. “There. This is the help that the Tullius traitor received.”

“I don’t …” Valeria placed her finger on the page and traced with it as she read. “I don’t understand. Hekate? This goddess is barely a shadow. Bound to the underworld when the moon is dark.”

“That is the goddess Trivia. You are not the first to be confused. Hekate was the keeper of magic when it was a stunted, pathetic thing. Back in the early days of Hellus.” Cesphea placed a hand on her sister’s shoulder and enjoyed the way she recoiled at the touch. “Look here. Her magic was …” She pointed and read a passage out loud, “always accompanied by the ghostly glow of Pluto’s realm.”

“The blue light described by those in Kart Hadasht.” Valeria forgot her discomfort at her sister’s touch. This was something. Cesphea had found something quite solid. “But her magic could not have raised that tower.”

“Yes, but Discordia and Pax could quite easily.”

“And they are both defeated.” Valeria’s skin prickled at the thought of their return. “They are gone.”

“Uncle may have turned them against each other, and captured what he could of their power.” Cesphea had a tremor in her voice. “But can the eternals be so easily bested? Any dragon or mage capable of raising that tower would need a source of power. They would need to combine chaos and order. And they would be dangerous. But a small, ambitious man like Gallio would be a more suitable puppet for the gods. I’m afraid that it falls on our family again to tangle with Olympos.”

“When the tower is built, none shall stand –”

“That is just the thing. Why has this magic resurfaced when we are so close to realizing our power?” Cesphea turned and paced the room, careful to step around a small pool of cum her pet had left on the stone. “Discordia and Pax, risk much in their weakened state. They strike using Hekate now. To end us before the era of the blessed tower.”

“This is thin, Sister.” Valeria looked down and read to herself a passage about how Hekate would appear to men as a breath of fleeting wind. She pushed the paper away and looked over at her sister. “Do you know that Discordia and Pax marshal this attack?”

“No, but –”

“Then we assume this Hekate goddess, who is buried in the pantheon, is up to mischief on her own.” She saw the sour expression on Cesphea’s face. “We cannot go chasing every ghost in the graveyard. If Discordia has come back from the dead, then we will deal with her. But first, we must find the truth of it. To find who is pulling Hekate’s strings, we must find who is using Gallio. If you’re right about our enemies, he will confirm it. If you’re wrong, he will put us on the right scent.”

“We’ve been trying to catch him, Valeria.” Cesphea rolled her eyes.

“Yes, but I give my permission now to use the Tullius clan as bait.”

Cesphea clapped her hands in giddy surprise. “I thought, *they are innocent and an attack on such a powerful family might give other fiefdoms cause for rebellion*.” There was heavy sarcasm in her voice.

“Both are as true as when I said them first. But we must adapt to new threats.” Valeria stood, her back straight and regal. She adjusted her crown. “We must make bigger sacrifices in the face of such enemies. And we are close enough now that we can afford some disobedience among the fiefdoms.”

“I will devise a plan.” Cesphea turned toward the door.

“Where are you going?” Valeria had assumed they would plan together.

“To find my pet.”

“I thought you were making plans,” Valeria said.

“You know I think better when I fuck.” Cesphea left the room, her stola trailing behind her.

“Gods, why was I stuck with such a creature?” Valeria sat back down and returned to reading the parchment. She wanted to know everything she could about Hekate.

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Both Vel’s cousin and his sister sat on the edge of the sofa, their mouths hanging open as he regaled them with what had happened after they had vanished from the wardrobe. Looking at the awe in their faces roused something in him. He had never thought he would elicit such looks. But he had earned them. Well, he and his gift anyway. He finished his story.

“I always wondered what rod Duchess Cassia Tullius had up her butt.” Dellia grinned. “Now I know.”

“Hey.” Naevia punched her cousin on the arm without much force. “That’s my mother you’re talking about.”

“And your mother had that great, long cock up her ass.” Dellia was not happy they’d had to share stories before she got her turn with Vel. But maybe the buildup was worth it. After that story, she was wetter than the Inland Sea. “Were you not listening to Vel’s words?”

“Gods.” Naevia’s eyes glossed over. “Three times, Vel?”

“And a fourth all over her face.” Vel nodded. He could tell from the way Dellia rubbed her legs together that she was anxious to move on to the next phase of their meeting in the library. But he had to know how they escaped. “And what on Earth happened to you two?”

“The blue light again.” Naevia glanced quickly at her cousin and back to her brother.

“You used it again?” Vel wondered in what strange world his sister was suddenly a mighty sorceress.

“Not me, her.” Naevia nodded at Dellia.

“You used the blue light?” Vel was incredulous. He watched his cousin closely and thought back to her undulating body on top of that tower. She now wore what had to be a very tight chest band, a loose tunic, and a fat belt for her dagger. No sword was needed for the library, apparently. It was hard to reconcile that this was the same person as that insatiable, feminine animal from Kart Hadasht.

“I didn’t mean to.” The seriousness of the question quelled Dellia’s otherwise salacious thoughts. “One second your mother was near to discovering us, the next, we were falling through blackness. And we arrived in your sister’s room.”

“What next?” He watched the women exchange another glance. “What? What is it? What did you two do?” There was something going on there.

“Perhaps, dear Brother, it would be best if we told you while your mind was otherwise occupied?” Naevia stood and pulled Dellia to her feet. Her cousin got the idea and they both undressed quickly.

“You did something bad then? You think your duke will be angry?” Vel stood, too. Their eyes told him to undress with them, and he wasn’t about to disobey such lovely eyes. He dropped his robes and pulled his tunic over his head. Despite his mother’s best efforts to completely drain him earlier, his cock stood about three-quarters full and gaining. He tried to politely watch them both as more and more skin bared itself, but his eyes drank them in voraciously. Especially his sister’s curves. “So, tell me. What did you do?”

Naked now, Naevia reached for the growing cock. That delicious warmth spread through her fingers. She stroked him gently. “Remember how I said I wouldn’t be jealous of you? And I wasn’t. Right?”

“Yes.” He stared into Naevia’s green eyes. “And?”

“And …” Naevia paused, looking for the right words.

Dellia watched the connection the two had. She hadn’t made Vel any promise not to be jealous. She found that she was. “And we fucked, Vel. Your sister and I fucked.” Dellia grabbed his cock, too. It was almost long enough to accommodate all four hands.

“You … what?” Vel looked from one to the other. First at their eyes, and then to the four wobbling breasts as their arms worked him.

“I’ve been waiting weeks for you to fill me up, Vel. Do you think my husband can do anything for me after what you’ve done to my pussy?” Dellia felt the heat. She wanted him inside her. She turned around and presented him her backside. “And also, the magic did something to me. It pressed some button. And your sister was there, looking quite lovely, and well, we fucked.” She put her hands on the sofa and looked back over her shoulder at him.

“Oh …” Vel spread his feet to lower himself to the right level as Naevia guided him into their cousin’s waiting pussy. “I see.”

“Are you angry?” Naevia looked up into his face anxiously. She slid him into Dellia, and that did seem to take the edge off his expression.

“No … I mean … how did you do it?” He was more confused than anything. There were no penises involved. He had heard about goddesses making love in stories, but hadn’t considered the mechanics until just now.

“Would … ugh … you like us … uh … uh … to draw you a diagram?” Dellia pushed back at him. He spread her out beautifully. Better than she remembered. If he’d only shut up, the moment would be perfection. Soon his hands were on her hips and they were banging away.

“I’ll explain it to you, Vel.” Naevia grasped his right butt check, enjoying the way it tensed with each thrust. She told him all about how Dellia had taken her, going into as much detail as possible. Based on his expressions and grunts, she thought he enjoyed her description.

“I … am not … angry.” Vel slammed into his cousin hard, listening to what happened between the two women. “I … uh … uh … actually … like it.”

“Thank the gods.” Naevia gave his tight butt a grateful spank. She continued her narrative, speaking loudly over her cousin’s babbling.

“You’ve … fucking … got … me … eeeeiiiiiiiiii … gods damn … it’s in … my … ugh … ugh … fucking … belly.” Dellia writhed on that great invader. In all her battles, she had never surrendered to a man until now. Over the final few minutes of Naevia’s story, it seemed that Dellia went from one climax right into the next.

“Where … should … I?” Vel was close, but mindful that after some time away, his cousin might want him to leave his cum outside her pussy.

“Fill me … I want … to … fucking … feel it.” Under Dellia’s grip, the sofa cushions gave a faint tearing sound.

Naevia stood silent next to them. She was the only one to hear the ripping fabric, but she wasn’t that concerned. She was more interested in whether her brother would be willing to meet Dellia’s request. His body went violently out of sync, like broken clockwork, and his yell of triumph filled the library. Naevia was quite happy to see Vel seed their cousin. Soon it would be her turn.

Much to everyone’s surprise, however, once Vel separated from Dellia he found that his body was done with sex for the day. So, there was an upper limit on what his cock could accomplish.

But Naevia didn’t mind. She would give him a night’s rest and she would catch him before any other woman in the morning.

The three slowly dressed and sat around the half crescent table reading up on all they could about magic connected to blue light. Eventually, finding nothing helpful, they left and headed for the kitchens. The day’s labor had produced quite an appetite in all three.

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“That’s right. I know how you can take her back from the queens regent.” Brynhild eyed the men in the scullery. Not the elite squad of hardened fighters she would have preferred. But they had passion. And they would be easy to steer. “Do any of you have contacts with the servants of Accipiter Cubitum Palace?”

Nicias raised his small hand.

“Other than Merope, I mean. She will not be in a position to aid in your entry.” Brynhild frowned at the poor man. If he was that dense, had she any right sending him? Well, the stakes were high enough. The means accuse, the ends excuse.

Several of the other nine men raised their hands.

“You are a stable hand?” The sorceress pointed to a taller man. “Is your contact in the palace proper?”

The man dropped his hand.

“You. What is your contact?” She eyed another man, cleaner and shorter than the first.

“I know a footman in the palace,” the man replied. “He’s my cousin.”

“Excellent. You will ask him to open the door leading to the scorpion trail on the eastern cliffs.” Brynhild caught the man looking at how the wind had swollen her breasts. She thought about chastising him, but instead folded her arms over her chest.

“I will ask him that, yes. I’ll send a pigeon now.” The man spoke in a bit of a monotone.

“No! Heavens. We must not be discovered.” Brynhild wiped sweat from her brow. She stood very close to a giant pot of boiling water and it was not in the least bit comfortable. Her new body detested heat. The worst was when sweat collected under her breasts. She’d lived centuries without knowing that this was a problem buxom women faced. She would be happy when she got the wind to reverse this spell. “You will send him a pigeon asking him to meet you somewhere outside the palace for a drink. There you will ask for the door. You must bribe him if necessary.”

“I have no money.” The man’s face sank, as if it was a great displeasure to fail the sorceress.

“Here.” With her left hand she conjured out of nothing a small leather sack. She smiled at the gasps in the room. It was nice to be able to perform real magic again. She tossed the sack to the man. It jingled as he caught it. “Us that, but do not think of stealing.” She looked around the room. “And secrecy is of the upmost importance.” She pushed at each one of their minds. “You may not tell anyone outside the plan of our efforts to rescue the good Merope. Not your wives. Not your employer. Not even the duke himself.”

The men in the room all nodded.

“I am very grateful for your help, Mistress.” Nicias spoke up, his voice quavering. “But is this not treason? I mean, is there another way to bring home my wife? You know … without … without … going against the queens?”

“There is no other way.” Brynhild turned her whole attention to the little husband. “And you are eager to show your gratitude to me.”

“I am eager. We all are.” Nicias looked around and the men all nodded and grunted their assent. “How can we show our gratitude?”

“The hour draws late, I fear, for the princess.” Brynhild spoke with deliberation. This was the important part. “She is kept in the same tower as Merope. I will get you the exact room. You must free Minicia and bring her back to Ostia Novus with you. Do you understand?”

“We understand,” the whole room said together.

“Very good.” Brynhild smiled warmly. “Off you all go now. Let us prepare.” She shooed them out of the scullery and followed them out into the kitchen just as Vel, Naevia, and Dellia entered. “Good afternoon, Your Grace.” She did not curtsy, but instead stood tall.

“What are you doing in here?” Vel eyed the ten men as they all filed past. None of them made eye contact, but that wasn’t especially strange.

“You asked me to take care of the staff when the queens regent were here. I am following up.” Brynhild eyed the women with Vel. His sister had somehow acquired crude, but powerful magic. Brynhild had not yet figured out how. That was an urgent task before her.

“Speaking of following up …” Naevia looked around the room. Both the scullery and kitchen were empty of staff. That was very odd, but helpful at the moment. No need for inquisitive ears. “What have you learned about the queens?”

“Well, quite a bit. The queens regent have an older brother.”

“Everyone knows that.” Naevia rolled her eyes.

Brynhild continued, undaunted. “He lives in Antibynium. He is next in line for the throne after Minicia. So, between the princess and the queens. That seems of note.”

“Of note, and well known.” Vel wondered again why he put up with the sorceress. Whenever she seemed about to be useful, her help dissipated like a vapor. “What have you found about them from before the accident with the falling tower?”

“The queens are not close to their brother. In fact, there seems to be some animosity between them.” Brynhild persisted.

“Enough about the brother. He’s not important.” Vel’s cheeks flushed with frustration.

“Of course, Your Grace.” Brynhild nodded her head and smiled. Vel was quite wrong about that, but she didn’t feel like correcting his misapprehensions. “I will continue my research. Rest assured, I will find the information you seek.”

“Fine, just go.” He waved her by and watched her leave the kitchen. When she was well gone, he turned to his sister. “Why did father and grandfather keep her all these years?”

Naevia shrugged. “I’m hungry. Shall we get some food?”

“I’m on it.” Dellia rang the tarnished bell by the kitchen door. “That should bring them back. Venison and potatoes? What do you all think?” Her womb was quite full at the moment, it was time her stomach caught up. Thinking on it, with a little food Dellia decided she might find herself more satisfied than she’d ever been.

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Late that evening, freshly bathed, Dellia crawled into bed with her husband. She put her hand on her belly. How odd that she should be here with Spurrius, while a bit of Vel still lingered inside her. “So, what did you find in your reconnoiter?”

“Nothing useful to the queens.” Spurrius watched his wife’s fine, feminine form slide under the covers. “Cassia spent time on her daughter’s wedding dress, dealing with some small crisis. Then she went to her son’s chambers. There was a guard there at first, I suppose for the sickness. But she went in without a mask covering as one would expect if the duke had a chill.”

“Oh?” Dellia almost winced. Shit! She had sent him on a diversion which had led back to the main event. She prayed he had not heard anything. “And was there anything to discover there?”

“The duchess sent away the guard after a time.” Spurrius smiled. He liked to boast of his skills as a spy. “That let me get quite close unobserved. I did listen. No clear words made it through the duke’s door, but I did her Cassia Tullius screaming and yelling at her son.”

“They must have some disagreement.” Dellia said the words very slowly, forcing herself to make eye contact with her husband. She could see from his docile expression that he did not suspect. “I will enquire.”

“Yes, let’s find out what that’s about,” Spurrius agreed. “It seems quite out of character for Cassia Tullius to go screaming about.” He reached out and lifted the covers so that he could see his wife’s boobs. He loved the way they splayed when she lay on her back. “The rest of the day was quite boring. She went to the baths. Performed several dull errands about the castle and … well … this last bit is interesting.”

“Yes?” She could tell the bastard was being coy. Whatever it was it was good, and he relished the telling.

“She received a message from Lady Bantia’s husband-to-be.” Spurrius nearly chuckled at the bit of gossip. “By order of the queens, the wedding has been moved up by more than a month to next week. Preparations are to start immediately. The duchess seemed quite upset by the imposition.”

“That is interesting.” Dellia had no idea what it meant.

“And what is my reward for such interesting news?” Spurrius slid closer and kissed her. He could tell she was tired that night, because she didn’t put her all into their lovemaking. But that was okay. It was still a lovely few minutes to end the day.

Chapter 14

“Wake up, sleepy head.” Naevia thought about gently waking her brother with something sensual, but she hit him on the head with one of his pillows instead.

“The dreamstone’s broken!” Vel sat up, blinking the dream of a strange, wooden room out of his eyes.

“Oh, is it now? Let’s add that to the ever-growing list of Tullius problems.” Naevia leaned forward on the bed, exposing some cleavage to his blurry eyes, and kissed his sweaty forehead. “You have nightmares about stones now?” She took a bit of his sheet and wiped the sweat from his face.

“Yes.” Vel nodded and relaxed. The dream quickly faded. “Ever since Brynhild cursed me.”

“Gifted you, you mean.” Naevia pulled the covers off him and was happy to find him naked. Although, his cock was not its usually morning steel. “Tired from yesterday?” She leaned down and kissed the slumbering beast between his legs.

“I think I’m recovered.”

“Recovered? You’re like an old man. When was the last time you woke soft?” Naevia climbed on and reversed herself so that her pussy was just below his chin. She stared down at his testicles. His cock was still massive in its somnolence, but smaller than she was used to. It made his balls look comically large. They had a faint fuzz of blond hair, and she could see purple veins running just under the wrinkled skin. Gods damn, men were strange and wonderful creatures. Vel had captured her heart long ago. Now that the seed from these sacks had worked her insides countless times, he ruled over her body, too. She leaned down and sucked on a testicle. It barely fit in her mouth.

“Jove above, this is quite a way to greet the day.” He pulled her stola up over her butt and gazed at her pink slit. It was easy to smell and see her eagerness for him. His eyes traveled up to her tiny butthole. Would she be able to take him as their mother had? They were both Tullius women, after all. Then his mind wandered to Bantia. The thought hit him that he could have her too if he wanted. He pushed that thought aside. Power should not corrupt a man. Especially a duke. His older sister was excited about her husband. She was not a threat to their safety, as their mother had been with that locking business. He would be careful not to touch Bantia’s skin.

Naevia plopped the ball out of her mouth with satisfaction. “He rises!” Her laugh was sweet and pure. “Mother and Cousin didn’t drain you completely.” She took the head of the growing cock into her mouth. Her mother had put that same cock in her ass repeatedly yesterday. Naevia wasn’t sure how she felt about that. But seeing as how she seemed to be trying to suck the life out of him, maybe she could admit to herself that liked it.

“How funny that we were so thoroughly separated a day ago, and now you arrive at my bed like a wife.” Vel licked his finger and placed it at her butthole.

“Mmmmpppppphhhhhhhhh.” Naevia tensed at the new sensation, but let him push his finger into her. The heat from his touch spread from her backside through her body. Had he just said she was like his wife? The thought of it made her tingle. She now pumped his hard cock with both hands as she sucked, letting him do as he will with her butt. She wiggled her hips as the finger penetrated her further.

“Do you … um …?” Vel was hesitant to ask, but he loved the look of her tight hole gripping his finger. “Do you think you could take me back here?”

“Uhhhhhh uuuuummmmmmmm.” She shook her head a little while still bobbing on his penis.

“Could we try?” Vel pulled his finger out of her and buried his tongue in her pussy. They pleasured each other for a while without a reply from Naevia.

After a time, she made up her mind and spit him out. “Only for you, Vel, would I try something like that.” He had gotten so good at licking her lips that she wondered at the flood that must be going on back there. “But if it hurts too much, we have to stop.”

Ten minutes later, she let her brother thoroughly destroy her ass. It didn’t feel quite as good as having him in her pussy, but it was a close second. She accepted him on her hands and knees, pushing back at each powerful thrust. “Is … this … what you did … to Mother?” She hung her head, her copper hair curtained in front of her, her eyes on her dancing boobs underneath.

“Almost … exactly. But she … arched her back … and looked up.” Vel moved his hand from her hip and took a fistful of red hair. He pulled her head up so that she now looked forward, and her back curved beautifully. “Yes … like that exactly.”

“Oh … gods … Vel … it’s really … good.” Naevia gave herself over to a new kind of orgasm. “Ooooohhhhhhhhh.” Maybe this anal mating wasn’t second best. Maybe it was simply different. Amazing, and overwhelming and different. They humped like that for a while, both lost in the immediacy of it.

“I … uh … want you to do something … for me … Naevia.” Vel’s hands were both holding onto her butt now. It was a harder task to grip her cheeks compared to their mother’s. Naevia was a bit smaller, and her flesh was tighter. But Vel dug in his fingers.

“Anything … ugh … ugh … Vel.” Her ass rhythmically clenched that massive cock. She was fixing for another huge orgasm. If, a few months prior, a fortune teller had predicted she would learn to accept pleasure from her butt on the receiving end of her gentle brother’s massive cock, Naevia would have asked for her coin back. Such is life that at that moment, every act seemed inevitable, but it had all come at her from out of the blue.

“Do some magic for me.” Vel watched the little muscles in her back tense. He was glad she was still arching her back for him even without his hand in her hair. Such a thoughtful sister. “You’re a sorceress … now … do something … powerful.”

“I can’t … I can’t … control it.” She wanted to give him his every request. But she didn’t know how she had summoned that blue light.

“Give … me … some … magic … Sister.” Vel grabbed a handful of copper hair again and pulled her head back a little more roughly than usual.

“Aaaaaahhhhhhh.” She was his, completely his. Her body had surrendered itself to the power of that organ behind her. She would do anything he asked. Azure light ran up her arms, down her back, and then covered her legs.

“Yes.” The sight of his sister’s magical power spurred Vel on. He smashed into her tight ass harder than before, still holding her hair and listening to her whine. “My sister … the … gods damn … sorceress.”

Vel’s bedroom disappeared. He was in a circular, empty room. A man and woman with dark skin sat on the wood floor, a matte, black stone between them. The woman wore a strange headdress, and they both wore clothes the likes of which Vel had never seen before. Vel looked down at himself, but he was as invisible as the wind. The dark-skinned woman prayed to a god Vel had never heard of. It was Ella, or Allha, or some such name. She then fell over in what appeared to be a trance. Vel watched in fascination. How odd that he was fornicating like a madman one minute, and the next, he was incorporeal in this strange place.

After a time, the woman recovered. The man helped her. Behind them the matte stone shook and cracked. Pulsing red fissures spread along the black mineral in meandering paths. The glowing red embedded in the rock looked almost like living veins. The light seemed familiar somehow. And then, snap, the odd room with the odd people disappeared. Blackness enveloped Vel again. He fell. And then he was back in his body, still smashing into his sister’s ass. He let go of her hair, and her head fell onto the sheet, with her arms folded under her cheek.

“Did … you … see that?” His hips never fell out of rhythm. Had he actually gone and come back, or had he never left? “That strange stone?”

“I saw … a strange scene with … ugh … ugh … a dark stone.” Every nerve in Naevia’s body went into overdrive at once. Use of the magic worked her into an ecstatic frenzy. “I’m yours … Vel … my ass is yours …” She reached under herself and rubbed at her button. She could feel ecstasy in both places at once. What a revelation. “My … pussy is … yours. Oooohhhhhhhh. My … soul is … yours.” She hunched into the bed as a stratospheric high inundated her. She bit on the sheet and screamed.

“Naevia … ugh … I’m cumming … in your … ass.” It was a stupid thing to say. She was sure to know what was happening. But that level a pleasure made one stupid, it seemed. And he felt he had to say something to mark that momentous occasion. “Aaaaaaahhhhhhh.” The staccato of his hips lengthened their measure, his pelvis timed itself to each blast he released. “Ahhh … ahhh … ahhh … ahhh … aaaahhhhhhhhhh.”

Naevia screamed and screamed into the sheet. Despite the natural heat of her gut, she somehow felt the warmth of each eruption inside her. The world spun, and she lost herself in the moment. When her mind calmed enough to take in her surroundings, she found herself flat on her stomach with her brother’s heavy weight pressing down onto her back and butt. Without thinking, she clenched her sphincter. Thank goodness! It still worked after what he’d done to her. She could tell from the feeling that he was still hard. His hand was back in her hair, holding her tight. As if he did not wish her to escape. She felt both pilloried and fixed on his spear. Naevia nearly held her breath, and dared not move. “You were … um … more forceful … this morning, *Your Grace*.” It was hard to get the sarcastic inflection with her voice muffled by the mattress and her breathlessness.

“It is … the force of your magic … that compels me … I think.” He rolled off her small body, and his dick left her butt with a plop. He landed on his back next to her and stared at the mural on the ceiling. His hand gently trailed the curves of her butt and lower back.

“Well, then … this magic is … even more useful … than I thought.” She sighed and took a deep breath with his weight off her and his great thing out of her. “I don’t think … I can do my ass … again so soon. But would you like some other part of me?” Her breath returned to her.

“I would … but we have to keep our wits about us.” Vel smiled lazily at the ceiling. “We have too much to do today. We must find Brynhild and gather her research. We must understand the queens regent and your new magic.”

“Those are some lofty words, when what you really mean is that you wish to save your cum for a visit with Mother.” Naevia propped her head up and laughed when she saw the chagrinned look on his face. “Do not tell me you were not going to try again with her today.”

“I was.” Vel nodded, still staring upward to avoid her inquisitive green eyes. “Are you mad?”

“No.” Naevia laughed again. “No jealousy between us, remember? But I would like to watch the whole thing this time. Can we arrange that?”

“You want to see our mother rutting?”

“With you? Yes. Very much.” She reached out and stroked his flat belly. “So?”

“If that’s what you want.” Vel looked over and smiled. Her giddy enthusiasm was catching. “Hop on, I think I can spare another go for you, Naevia.”

“Oh, good.” Naevia mounted him. “I was hoping you’d change your mind.”

“Naevia?” He looked up at her beauty as she sank down on him. “What was that vision you showed us?”

“I … aaaahhhhhhh … haven’t the … foggiest.” Her hips found a rhythm as she thought back to that cracking stone. “It was … ugh … strange though. All of it very strange.”

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“Good morning, Mother.” Vel found Cassia with Bantia and a slew of servants out in the upper courtyard. “Morning, Sister.”

Bantia gave him a cursory smile and went back to instructing the seamstress on the alterations to her dress.

“Good morning, Vel.” A shiver from some mixture of anticipation and fear ran down Cassia’s spine. What was she to do with her son? Surely, he wanted to continue from yesterday, but how could they do it again as chaos rained down on their castle? “I know what you would say, Your Grace. And I don’t have any time for private tutoring today. The wedding has been moved to next week, and we are not ready. Not anywhere close to ready. The flowers, guest accommodations, the gown, the food, it is all out of sorts.” She caught him looking at her boobs, even though they were tucked firmly under a chest band and a modest stola. Had he ever stared at her like that before the curse? Probably. Whatever he was, he was still a nineteen-year-old man. “Ahem,” she cleared her throat to get him to look into her eyes. It

worked, and his blue eyes met her brown ones. His cheeks turned a little rosy. “Perhaps your private tutoring can wait a few days?” She said.

“Of course.” Vel was so taken by her beauty. She looked wonderfully regal, with her straight back, braided hair, and circlet around her head. To think not long ago she had wrapped her tits around his cock and taken his spray on her sweet, round face. There was no way Vel was going to be able to wait another day. He had to have her. “I am the duke of this fiefdom. Perhaps we could talk, and I could take one of these chores off your hands?”

“You were not trained for wedding planning, Vel.” She kept her voice even. There were so many people around them, she didn’t want to let on that anything was off in her family.

“And you were?”

“Yes.” She smiled, showing off the dimples on her round cheeks.

“I insist, Mother.” Vel tried to casually smile back. “Let me help.”

Cassia chewed on her bottom lip, unaware of the unladylike mannerism. He was so tall and handsome. He had sprouted like a weed, and while not chiseled from stone like his brother, he cut a compelling figure. She took a deep breath. “I’m going to go give your brother a task, Bantia. I’ll be back in a little while. Can you manage here without me?”

“What?” Bantia gave her mother a confused look. This was odd, but Vel was the duke. She supposed it made sense to give him busy work. “Oh, sure. I can manage things for a while. Twenty minutes?” She eyed her brother. His sandaled foot scuffed at the ground like a horse ready for a race.

“Yes.” Cassia nodded.

“Ahem,” Vel coughed politely.

“Actually, make that forty minutes.” Cassia stood straighter. “I may need to walk him through it.”

“Very well, Mother.” Bantia watched mother and son walk into the castle together. Things had been so odd since her father had left, and her older brother had disappeared. She hoped her father would return for the wedding, but it seemed quite unlikely given how quickly it approached. She turned from the gown to the florists and talked colors, forgetting all the other Tullius troubles.

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“We have to be quick, Vel.” Cassia worked his long penis between her breasts. “Are you close?” They both stood naked in the library, with their clothes hanging from nearby chair backs. She had wanted to make sure they wouldn’t be rumpled when they left in a few minutes.

“Getting … there.” Vel, emboldened by the manhandling of his sister earlier, cupped his hand around the back of her head. The silver circlet was cold against his palm. He pushed her face down onto his cock. “Use your mouth, too.”

They were both aware that this wasn't a request.

"Okay," Cassia nearly whispered. Gallio was a stern, commanding man. But he had never ordered her as her gentle son was doing now. She thought maybe this was a bright line they should not cross, and she should correct Vel. As a duke, one should not ask for the favor of subjects and servants, instead commanding them. But to peers, one should phrase what one desired as a question. And while she was still his mother, they were peers in their rule, and in the carnal tasks the curse commanded. But rather than expound didactic on these lessons, Cassia said, "Mmmmpppppphhhhhhhhh." She took that large, crimson head into her mouth and stroked up and down his great length with her breasts. His hand pulled and pressed her skull, and she understood his meaning. She bobbed on that head. She couldn't take much into her mouth, but she did her very best.

"So … Mother … what can I do to help with the … uh … new wedding date?" Vel looked up at the catwalk to the third level of shelves. He could just see Naevia's hair, and half her pale face peeking out from a column. He couldn't help but smile up at her. He realized he was showing off for his sister. Fun as that was, he would have to be careful not to push their mother too far. "Would you like me to attend to guest accommodations, Mother?" When Cassia tried to pull her mouth off him to talk, he held her head so that she couldn't dislodge his cock.

"Mmmpppppphhhhhhh." Cassia was beside herself. He was toying with her. She was the Duchess of Ostia Nova, and he was toying with her! Her own son. A man she had raised to know better. While her mind rebelled in outrage, her body betrayed her. Her poor vagina gushed. She could feel the wetness running down the insides of her thighs. And her hands continued to press her boobs around him, her spit dribbling around her lips, lubricating her work. Without his guidance, she tested her limits and nudged his cockhead into her throat. "Gggggggrrrrrgggggggg."

"Gods … yes … almost …"

"Gggggpppphhhhhh." Panic hit Cassia. She couldn't let him plaster her again. There was no time for the baths, she was probably late getting back to Bantia as it was. She put her palms on his pelvis and pushed back, but he was so strong.

Sensing that his mother had changed from frenzied lust to fear, Vel released her head. He watched her pop off of him and take a few unbalanced steps back. She wiped her mouth with the back of her hand and looked up at him.

"You cannot soil me today, Vel." She could still feel the heat of his touch moving through her. She looked around wildly for a solution as he stroked his cock with his own two hands. Why did that sight have to be so alluring? His tunic. They could use his tunic. If his robes were clean enough, he could leave without a tunic under them. No one would notice. Probably. She picked up the tunic, squatted down in front of him, and pushed his hands away. "I'll finish for you."

"Sure." Vel was disappointed by the turn of events, but he understood that he was intruding on a hectic day. He could settle for her hands. But, before he could explode, she surprised him again.

"Okay, okay." Cassia dropped the tunic to the stone floor, and turned around. She gripped the sofa. Staring at her trembling hands, she noticed that the sofa's fabric was ripped. She tried to ignore the sight of Gallio's iron ring. "I need it. I need it in me." She gyrated her hips in what she hoped was an

alluring motion with her butt. Gallio had liked when she did such things, anyway. She felt that large invader push up against her. It was so slick with prefluid and spit, she hoped it would have no trouble sliding in. “Wait … no … Vel. We can’t … not there.” She gave a sigh of relief as the cockhead moved away from her vagina and found her butthole. And then she exhaled rapidly and didn’t breathe at all. He was stretching her again. And she was going to take him. “Do it … Vel. You can let it out … inside me. But only … back … there. Ooooohhhhhhhhhhh.” Her voice hit a long, high note as he lunged his cock forward. Within seconds, they were colliding against one another at a rapid pace.

“Mother … Mother … Mother …” Lightning crackled on all of Vel’s nerve endings. He’d forgotten about his sister watching from up on the catwalk. He’d forgotten about getting his mother back to the tasks of Bantia’s wedding. He reached for his mother’s brown hair and pulled one of her braids from under her circlet. He willed himself back from the orgasmic edge to prolong the moment.

“Gods … Vel … you’re a tempest … trapped in the body … of my son.” She was now only pressing into the sofa with her fingertips. All of existence bent in toward their copulation. His intruder plundered her and remade her tunnel in the inverse of its own image. At the same time, it bathed her nerves in a type of warm bliss. All troubles, of which many plagued her, sloughed away in the beauty of that time. “I can feel it … you’re going to … spray it … inside me.”

“Yes … yes.” Vel had a fleeting thought that it was a stupid thing for her to say. Of course, he knew that he was about to cum in her ass. But he knew how such moments dulled the mind. As his cum blasted into her, he realized he liked making his mother a little stupid.

“Eeeeiiiiiiiiiiii.” Cassia shuddered and convulsed as his seed splashed where it could do no harm.

She stood bent over with her butt in the air for several minutes, until he pulled out of her. Slowly, she straightened. She tried to clench her butt, but already she could feel his sperm leaking from her. There was just so much of it. Outside the great bell chimed two.

“Gods … Vel … have we really … taken so long?” It was well over an hour since she left her daughter in the courtyard. “Your sister will wonder where I am. She might have already sent out search parties.” She quickly put on her chest band and then held her linen underwear in her hand. It would never contain Vel’s flood. Her eyes caught the tunic on the floor. She moved to her stola and bent down to retrieve her knife from its pocket. “Do you love that tunic, Vel?”

“What? No.” Vel looked up at his sister on the third level, who was now halfway unhidden by the column. She put her hands on the column and silently mimed having sex from behind, tossing her head back and forth like a wild woman. Vel slid his finger across his throat, telling her to stop. He couldn’t burst out laughing now. If their mother noticed her up there, both siblings would be dead. “It’s just a tunic.”

“Great.” Cassia unfolded her knife, cut a long strip from the tunic, and folded it. She then put it inside her underwear as she pulled it on. She hoped it would hold. “Don’t look at me like that.” Cassia caught her son staring at her handywork as she slipped back into her stola.

“Sorry.” Vel looked away. Now that he was no longer penetrating her, his assertiveness was somewhat diminished. “It just was sort of … an alluring spectacle.”

“Gods, Vel.” She looked at his thing rise again between his legs. “I’m already late. Not again.” She rushed to the door before he could catch her with his curse. “Maybe tomorrow.” She unlocked the door and looked back at him. “If we can make it faster than today.” She opened the door. “And don’t worry about the guest accommodations. I’ll figure it out.” She turned and hurried away, holding her boobs as they bounced with her down the stairs. She was going to organize her daughter’s wedding with her son’s stuff up her butt. The thought of it sent a quick shiver though her. Was it the curse that made that so compelling a thought? Or was it, on its own, as splendid as it seemed? She wasn’t sure.

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“Oh, Vel … you’re going to do it in my … butt. And I … the mighty duchess … will take it allllllllll.” Naevia tossed her head around in a pantomime of ecstasy up on the catwalk. She then looked down at him and laughed.

“Quiet. Someone could hear you.” Still naked, Vel rushed across the library to close and lock the door. He looked up at her with his eyebrows drawn in anger. “I wouldn’t have let you watch if I knew you were going to make fun.”

“I’m sorry, Vel.” Naevia’s smile faded, and she turned to climb the ladder down to the floor. She looked over her shoulder at him as she descended. “It’s just a crazy to see Mother like that, going mad on the end of your spear. And I guess, I wanted to laugh about it to … you know … unwind some of the tension.”

Vel’s shoulders relaxed. A smile crept onto his face. “That was funny for her to say, telling me when I was going to cum in her. Mother can be controlling.” He laughed a little.

“It seemed you were the one controlling her.” Naevia got to the bottom of the ladder and stepped off. She turned and faced him, slowly pulling up her stola so he could see her pale legs.

“I thought you might like watching that, Naevia. I mean … was it overkill?” He watched her slowly approach him.

“I thought it was just-enough-kill. After all, who taught you to treat women so?” Naevia pulled her stola off and dropped it behind her. She was naked and thrilled at the way Vel drank in her body with his eyes.

“My sweet sister did.” Vel bent down and kissed her on the lips.

She playfully pushed him away and turned around. “After this morning, I don’t think I can take you back there.” She bent over for him.

“Still sore?” He moved closer to her.

“It feels strange.” Naevia wiggled her butt in an approximation of what she’d seen their mother do for him not long ago. “But my pussy is ready. What do you say?” She looked over her shoulder at him, a big, stupid smile on her face. “From Mother’s ass to my pussy?”

“How could I say no?”

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The cephalopod banners hung lifeless above her. Cassia shivered. It was not the cold of the great hall that tugged at her nerves. It was the aftereffects of what she’d done with her son. She felt … good. It was such an unnatural feeling in the troubled times that had haunted her, but it was undeniable. Despite the difficult tasks ahead of her, a relaxed calm had followed her from the library.

“Welcome Lord and Lady Uticensis.” Cassia held her stola out from her body and curtsied. The movement may have forced more sperm from her. She wasn’t sure. “We weren’t expecting you for several days.” Her shoulders sagged at the joyous thought of the time she’d just spent with Vel. She forced her shoulders back up and straightened her spine.

Lord Lars Uticensis bowed deeply. “Your Grace.”

“We were aghast at the date change. Really, we were, my dear Cassia. Um … Your Grace.” Lady Norbana Uticensis curtsied low, much lower than her duchess had. She had known Cassia since before either had married, but she tried to remember to keep things formal. “We thought we would help.”

“Yes … help.” Cassia eyed them both. They were people of the Surround through and through. Both with olive complexations, brown hair, and a compact stature. “Did you send a pigeon? I confess, I did not know of your arrival.” She expected Norbana’s cheeks to flush at this confrontation. One did not simply stop by the duke’s castle without forewarning. Cassia thought back at how the queens had done just that not long ago. Well, the Uticensises were not the queens regent.

“Did you not receive our pigeon?” Norbana smiled up at her friend, finally rising from her curtsy. “Those devilish things are always losing their way.”

“Yes.” Cassia was quite sure the reason all of the Surround used pigeons was that they almost never lost their way. “I will have a room made up for you in the south tower.” She looked beyond the lord and lady to their five servants standing in a line, patiently waiting by the door. “And we can find accommodations for your staff in the servants’ quarters. I haven’t had time to erect tents yet.” At the word erect, she almost giggled thinking of her son’s tower of a penis. Gods she was mating like a teenager, and now thinking like one, too. She pushed those thoughts from her mind.

“You are most gracious, Your Grace.” Lars bowed again in a rather pompous manner.

“And how shall we help? I planned my own daughter’s wedding not long ago and –” She dropped into another curtsy as the duke entered the hall with his eighteen-year-old sister. “Duke Tullius and Lady Tullius. It is an honor to see you.” Norbana watched them saunter over to their mother. They looked a bit disheveled. They seemed young and careless, but most youth gave that impression to Norbana in recent years. But worse of all, they were so pale and had such odd hair. His blond and hers red. She shuddered at their northern strangeness.

“Greetings, Lord and Lady Uticensis.” Vel gave them a slight nod, befitting his position. He saw Naevia next to him bend her knees in a small curtsy. “I did not know you were to arrive today. What brings you to my castle?” They hadn’t yet located Brynhild, but Vel was glad they had entered the hall when they did. This was clearly an intrusion in his mother’s day.

“Yes, sorry, Your Grace.” Lars looked a bit flustered. “My wife thought we might be able to help with the compressed preparation for Lady Bantia’s wedding. In our haste over here, we may have forgotten to send our pigeon.” He eyed his wife reproachfully.

“I see.” Vel caught his mother’s eye and saw the exasperation there. She did not want or need the help of these two. “Naevia and I will show these lovely guests to their room. The south tower is it?”

Cassia gave her son a thankful smile and nodded.

“Help, you said?” Vel strode over to Lady Norbana and took her arm in his. He had to bend down a little, as he towered over the woman. “There are many tasks that need doing. Isn’t that right, Naevia?”

“Very true, *Your Grace*.” Naevia smiled and hooked arms with Lord Lars. Together, the siblings led their guests toward the south tower. “The tents are going up on the east meadow today. How are you at erecting tents, Lady?” Naevia snickered at the double meaning. Lady Norbana was a beautiful woman, and if she was not familiar with creating a pavilion, she had surely caused many a tunic to swell in her day.

“Um … we were thinking more of offering our services as decision makers.” Norbana frowned over at the woman holding her husband’s arm.

“We’ll get your room made, and the two of you can rest and think on a whole list of planning issues.” Vel had no list, but he could easily invent one. The goal was to give his mother space. “And how was Lady Issy’s wedding?”

Cassia heaved a sigh of relief. She felt quite grateful to Vel. As she turned and hurried off to her next task, she wondered what sort of reward he had earned himself.

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The sun was low when they finally found the sorceress. Dellia had caught up with her cousins, so the three of them entered the cellar room where Brynhild appeared to be holding a meeting with half the servants.

Brynhild caught sight of her duke and clapped her hands. “Very good. I am proud you’re all working so hard on this wedding. It will be a day to be remembered. Now go about your tasks.” The men around her scurried out of the room. When they were gone, she turned to Vel and his two companions and smiled. “Your Grace.”

“Should not one curtsy upon greeting the duke?” Dellia’s face turned sour as she eyed the tall, blond woman.

“Of course.” Brynhild gave the barest hint of a curtsy.

“What are you doing with the servants, Sorceress? This is the second time we’ve found you with them.” Vel eyed Brynhild with suspicion.

“Only following up on your orders from the other day. Making sure they stay in line.” The sorceress eyed Dellia. That one was the weak link of this trio. She had no magic. She had no help from that infernal gust of wind.

“Well, you needn’t follow up on that any longer. I asked you to devote yourself to finding out more on the queens, and on that relic tower,” Vel said.

“Yes, Your Grace.” Brynhild nodded.

“Well?” Naevia bristled at the obfuscation. “What have you found?”

“I haven’t found anything new, yet.” Brynhild turned to Dellia. “You can volunteer to assist my research. I could use a smart, strong woman by my side.”

“She’s trying to beguile me, Vel.” Dellia sounded almost bored. Her hand caressed the handle of her dagger fastened to her belt.

“Yes, she does that.” Vel shook his head. “I want you, Sorceress, to travel to Minerva’s monastic library and find all you can on those topics. You are not to return until you find something useful.”

“But, Your Grace, I must help with the wedding.” Brynhild stepped toward Dellia, trying to lay her left hand on her.

“She means to touch me, Vel.” Dellia’s voice was still filled with ennui. But now also a threat of something lurked behind it.

“Yes, I see. Stop it, Brynhild.” Vel stepped toward them. But the sorceress continued on her course. Before Vel could reach her, Dellia’s skin radiated an azure light. There was a flash and Brynhild was on her butt on the stone floor. Just like what had happened with Naevia and Brynhild out on that terrace. Vel stopped in his tracks. “Well, that solves that then.”

“Shit, I didn’t mean to do that.” Dellia drew her dagger and held it up. “Magic takes the fun out of things. I thought I was going to get to threaten her with this.”

“You … you both possess this blue magic?” Brynhild’s eyes were wide. She looked up at the tall, lean figure of her duke. Clearly, he was doing this.

“It seems so. And you would do well to remember it.” Dellia leaned toward the woman, hooked the straps of her stola with the dagger, and cut them, one at a time. The stola fell down. Dellia thoroughly enjoyed the look of shock on the woman’s face as she then pulled down Brynhild’s chest strap. “Now those are some massive tits.” Dellia sheathed her dagger, reached down, and smacked the right boob. She watched it shake. “You were not always like this. Why the change, Sorceress? I thought you were plenty beautiful as a svelte minx.” She smacked the other breast. “But these tits. I mean, fuck. They might be too much.”

“Leave her be, Dellia.” Vel didn’t like to see a person humiliated. Even a woman as frustrating as Brynhild.

“As you command, Your Grace.” Dellia straightened herself and stepped back next to her cousins.

“Get yourself to Minerva’s Library, Sorceress. And I expect you to come back with answers.” Vel turned and led Naevia and Dellia out of the cellar.

“Yes, Your Grace,” Brynhild hissed. She reached for her torn stola and covered her breasts with it. She so hated this sow’s body. She would travel to the library. But she was most interested in researching how to channel what Vel gave so freely to the women around him.

Chapter 15

The cockerel greeted the day somewhere in the distance while blackness still hung outside Cassia's window. She stretched under the covers. Her body was quite sore from the last two days' activities with Vel. Sore, but good. She yawned and blinked into the darkness of her room. So much to do! She somehow had to host a magnificent wedding for her eldest daughter, navigate the sycophants that had already begun to arrive, and find some time to give her son a vent for his curse. She shivered. He had vented so much inside her the last two days.

"You're awake." A deep voice rose from the far, dark corner of her room.

Cassia sat up in a fright and clutched her covers to her naked breast. "Who's there?"

With a bright spark, an oil lamp sprung to life in the darkness. It bathed the room in a warm glow. "Do you not recognize your husband?"

"Gallio?" Cassia blinked her eyes. Her stomach twisted in knots. She'd just been thinking about the great joys Vel had given her with his cock, and now her stern, faithful husband sat feet away. She cast her eyes down. "By what magic are you here?"

"By no magic but the knowledge a man has of his own house." Gallio sat stiffly in the chair, a black cloak wrapped around him. He carefully scrutinized his wife. "Or have you forgotten that I am the duke of Ostia Novus?"

"Vel is the duke of –" Cassia was cut off by her husband's sharp, barking laugh.

"Have you replaced me with my fool of a son?"

Cassia's heart froze. Did he know? Would he murder her on the spot? She risked a look up into the man's face. His visage was harder than she remembered, but he had no malice there. He did not know. "Of course, not. And Vel is no fool. He's –"

"Soft. Our son is soft. When I return to my fiefdom, I will not let things slide so." Gallio could see his wife hid something from him. Perhaps she was just trying to be brave in the face of all that had beset them. If only she knew how their lives all hung on the edge of a blade.

"So, you are not returning for the wedding?" Cassia's brow wrinkled in confusion. Why was he here if not to reclaim his seat? "The queens?"

"The queens still seek to do me harm. I am here now because you wrote that Vel was sick and you needed me. I came at great risk." Gallio leaned forward in the chair. "Was it the sorceress? I have come to believe my father was duped by her."

The conversation ahead was a path overgrown with thorns. How was Cassia to answer such a thing? As her mind spun, she became aware of Gallio's familiar stare. She couldn't take too long, or he would know she spoke lies. "He was quite sick and confined to his room. But he took a turn for the better and has resumed his duties. Your children are well."

“Not Fortinbras,” he said with a sour frown. “You could not send word of Vel’s recovery before I raced home? Foolish woman. If they catch me …” He shook his head.

“I am sorry. But it is wonderful to see you.” Cassia forced a smile. She was still holding the covers over her breasts. How odd that she should be so demure around her husband. “I love you, Gallio, and I am eager to have your help now that you are here.”

“Prepare yourself for disappointment.” Gallio stood. “If all is well with Vel, I will be away. I will watch the castle from a safe distance. If you find yourself in trouble, send a signal from the east tower.” He reached for the lamp and extinguished the flame. The room fell into darkness again. “Watch the sorceress, and do not let your guard down at the wedding. I know not why the queens changed the date, but it arrives on a foul breeze. They seek to lure me here. I should not have come.”

“Wait! What do you know, Gallio? What did they do to Fortinbras? Is he still alive? Gallio?” Cassia fumbled in the dark for her own lamp. She sparked it and looked around the room. There was no trace of her husband. The windows and the door remained closed. He must have some hidden passage connected to their room. She shivered. How could she meet with Vel again when her husband could be spying from the walls? Her mind spun. There were too many moving pieces to the puzzle of her life.

After several minutes, a soft knock sounded at the door.

“Cassia? I mean, Your Grace? It is Norbana. Come break your fast with me.” The girlish voice had some urgency to it.

Curse that interfering woman. Cassia climbed out of bed and slowly dressed. “Good morning to you, Lady Norbana.” Faint tendrils of violet hit the horizon outside. It was time to rise. She moved to the door to greet her friend.

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“We can’t today, Vel.” Cassia pushed her son away. He’d found her alone in one of the guest rooms as she reviewed the readiness of their accommodations. The heat of his touch tugged at the foundations of her will, but she managed to push him away.

“And why is that, Mother? I’ll be quick.” He kissed her rosy, round cheek.

“Shh. No more of that talk.” She looked around the room wildly, her eyes darting back and forth.

“What’s wrong?” He scrunched up his mouth in confusion. “Is Bantia your duchess now? She can wait for you a few more minutes.”

“Enough, Vel.” Cassia’s voice rose in exasperation. She backed into a corner. “Do not touch me or speak of such things. It is not your sister. It is your father.”

“What of my father?” Vel took a step back and lifted his eyebrows. His cock was still hard as steel, but his mind tried to grasp back the reigns of thought from his baser inclinations.

“He was here this morning,” she hissed. “And while he does not suspect … that … particular thing, he suspects something. And he moves in the castle in a way I did not know. He’s almost certainly gone now, but still.”

“My father was here?” Vel tried to sort through her words. “Am I still the duke? Wait, how does he move?”

“He came to check on you. I wrote him when you were … sick.” Cassia looked around the room again. “He moved through secret passages. Which I would try to discover today if not for the world falling down around me. He is still in hiding. I am to signal him from the east tower if …” Cassia went very still. She heard a faint tap on the door. Not a knock. Something far less than that.

“What?” Vel watched her, perplexed. “Secret passages? I –” he stopped talking when she narrowed her eyes at him and held her finger over her lips.

“I’m missing a servant today, Vel. And the poulter says the goose shipment is delayed. We’ll have to change the pie courses if those geese do not arrive.” She said this all loudly and nodded to him that someone was at the door. She hoped he understood.

“Lamprey and goose, those are Bantia’s favorites. How dreadful.” Vel took her cue and moved toward the door. “After all what’s good for the goose …” He was now just saying nonsense as he moved lightly across the room. He wished very much Dellia was by his side. “… is good for the poulter.” He opened the door quickly.

Clearly caught off balance at the sudden loss of door, Norbana Uticensis stumbled into the room. She wore a sensible stola, as if she were applying herself to practical matters. And she held something in her hand. It was a glass cup attached to a long tube. A listening device.

“Shit. Come in.” Vel pulled her into the room, and checked the corridor. She was alone. He closed the door and turned to face her. “You were eavesdropping.”

“I … I …” Norbana was normally a pretty woman, but her blanched, frightened expression made her appear a specter before them.

“Spying is the better word for it.” Cassia looked the woman up and down. “You better search her for weapons, Vel, before we question her.”

“Before we what?” Vel couldn’t quite keep pace with the day.

“She must be Vulpes. Sent by the queens to spy on us. And as her luck would have it, she got an earful I’ll wager.” Cassia’s face darkened. “And to think I thought you an old friend.”

Vel patted the woman down. She was quite curvy, so he had to check the hidden areas under her breasts. Giving the circumstances, it was less alluring than one would expect.

“How dare you touch a lady like that.” She slapped at his shoulders, but he shrugged her off.

“I am your duke, lady.” He found a dagger strapped to her thigh. He lifted her stola and removed the weapon, letting his fingers linger on her olive skin.

Norbana shivered at the duke's hideously pale touch. These northerners were so ugly. She couldn't believe Cassia had married one. "Oh." She let out a little exclamation of surprise. A warmth moved up her leg into her core as the duke's fingers lingered on her thigh. The feeling hit her out of the blue, and temporally made her forget her predicament.

"That's all there is." Vel stood straight and placed the knife on a side table. He exchanged a glance with his mother. "What should we do?"

"I will step out and find Lord Lars." Her eyes trailed down to where his robes concealed that great leviathan. "You may begin questioning her as you see fit."

"I have little training in interrogation. Perhaps the guard should –" Vel took a step back from the trembling woman.

"I'm not sure who to trust, Vel. And you've developed new skills. Use them." She arched her eyebrow meaningfully. It was not ideal, but she had experienced his curse firsthand. It should work. Desperate times, desperate measures.

"You mean …" His eyes went round.

Cassia nodded. "But go slow and perhaps Lord Lars should be here for this. It might spur his cooperation to bear witness." She paused at the door, thinking. "Do you trust cousin Dellia?"

"I do." Vel nodded.

"Will your new skills shock her? I mean, we need someone to keep Lord Lars in place while you question Lady Norbana. We can't have him running away when …" Cassia shrugged.

"Wait … I heard nothing. I was only curious. I am not Vulpes." Norbana looked back and forth between them, her eyes very wide. She should never have taken the queens' commission. But it was too much coin to turn down. It was clear the duchy of Ostia Novus meant to torture her and have her husband watch. "Please don't."

"Dellia will not be shocked." Vel ignored Norbana and answered his mother.

Cassia cocked her head at her son. Had he taken Dellia, too? Of course, he had. "I will not be here for this." Cassia gave her ex-friend a cool stare. "I'll send Dellia and Naevia with Lord Lars. You can handle this, Vel. You must." She had little faith her gentle Vel could actually torture the spies. But after the past few days, she had supreme confidence in his curse.

"What do we need to know?" Vel's face was a little more pale than usual. He swallowed hard.

"Find out what they know of your father and of us. And what they have reported. That is most important." Cassia put her hand on the door handle. "If we're lucky, they haven't yet signaled that Gallio was here."

"Gallio was here? Will he be at the wedding?" Norbana steepled her hands in front of her chest. "Please, I was only being a bit nosey. I don't know anything, I swear."

"While you do this, I will have the sorceress ferret out any other spies. These can't be the only ones," Cassia said to Vel. "I won't let them catch your father."

“Not the sorceress. We sent her to Minerva’s Library.” Vel sat down on the edge of the guest bed, eyeing their prisoner. As he thought about what his mother asked, his confidence rose, and so did his cock. He could do this.

“Well, then, I’ll alert the seneschal. And do some digging myself. Bantia will have to plan on her own this day.” Cassia turned the handle and strode out. “Expect the others soon.” She closed the door and disappeared.

Silence filled the room. Dust motes hung in the air, almost like fireflies where they floated by the window’s morning light. They were high in the south tower, and Vel could see far out to the horizon on a sea doted by sails. “So, Lady Norbana, what are we going to talk about?” His blue-eyed gaze drifted over to the trembling woman.

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The library ceiling arched several stories over Brynhild’s head. The walls around her were covered with a mottled façade of books. Their spines were mostly in browns and reds. A few glittered here and there. But Brynhild cared little for the aesthetics of the place. She sat hunched in a chair built for smaller people, at a table too low for her legs. A ball of light floated in the air above the book on Hekate she had open. “Pluto’s light indeed,” she muttered as she turned a page.

“Excuse me, Mistress.” A servile voice came from across the table.

“Yes?” Brynhild looked up. It was the footman with a friend in the palace. “Good news, I hope?”

The servant bowed. “I had drinks as you asked and it is ready.” She had asked them not to speak plainly of their plans to rescue Merope. The man hoped he’d followed her orders well.

“That is good news.” Brynhild cocked her head. “Return to the others and tell them that all is set. Tomorrow as the sun hits its zenith?”

“It will be open.”

“Very good.” She held out her hand. “The coin you didn’t use, please.”

The footman retrieved a pouch about half as light as it once was and placed it in her palm. “Thank you so much for your help, Mistress. We cannot wait to rescue Prin –”

Brynhild snapped with her left hand, and the man instantly went mute. “Let’s be more careful, shall we? Run along now. You’ll be able to speak again by the time you reach the castle.” She watched him turn and scurry away. Things were shaping up. She turned her head back to the book and continued reading about the goddess of old magic.

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“I’m new to this. Are you?” Vel still sat on the edge of the bed.

Norbana still stood on the other side of the room watching him like he was a snake about to strike. “I have never been t … t … tortured,” she stuttered.

“You’re a spy. A Vulpes. You’ve never been questioned? Interrogated?” Vel was actually quite curious. He wasn’t sure exactly how the whole thing worked. “How did you and your lord come to work for the queens?” He stood and slowly ambled toward her.

“I don’t work for them. But … but … I am loyal to the crown.” She backed as far into the corner as she could go. He was so tall and pale. So ungainly. He walked in an odd way, like his billowing robes were too tight for him. Her husband could take this man in a fight. It was good Cassia was sending Lars to them. And in the company of two women? Surely, Lars could handle the lot. Norbana was a refined woman, without any martial training. But her husband was a man of the hunt, and he had fought in several skirmishes. She had to stall until Lars arrived.

“You’re loyal to Princess Minicia then?” Vel closed to within a few feet of her and stopped. What an odd day he was having.

“Yes, yes, Princess Minicia and the queens that serve her.”

“I’m starting to suspect that they don’t serve the princess at all. I mean, has anyone seen her lately? It’s just a theory, but they may have her under lock and key.” Vel reached out to touch her cheek with his fingertips and she flinched away from him.

“Blasphemy. Those are traitorous words,” she spat at him.

“Will you report me then?” Vel closed the gap between them, reached down, and took hold of the back of her neck. He used just enough force to keep his grip as she wriggled.

“I will not. Just let me … go.” Norbana’s skin crawled under the touch of this nineteen-year-old man. She struggled. But then her body slowed. Heat crept up her neck and moved over her skull. Her urge for flight faded. The warmth seeped into her and felt … almost … alluring. “I’m not … a … spy.” Her chest rose and fell as she gasped for breath. Her body responded like she’d just run a race. It was her fear, she reasoned. She put a hand up on his arm, but didn’t push or pull as she’d intended. She simply held him firmly, as he held her like a bitch might hold a puppy, by the scruff. She was as helpless as a puppy, too.

“You do know that the queens would torture and murder my father, if they found him, right?” Vel leaned back and picked the knife up off the end table. He held it up.

“Don’t hurt me. I mean your father no harm.” She wriggled again at the sight of her own dagger. “I am not a Vulpes. But I know of them. I can tell you –” She sucked in her breath as he moved the dagger toward her chest. He carefully cut one shoulder strap, and then the other. Just as he’d seen Dellia do to the sorceress. Her stola fell down, exposing her chest band. Despite the pleasant heat that moved through her body, her fear surged again. But she dared not struggle with the dagger so close.

“Tell me what you reported to the queens. What do the Vulpes know of my father, my mother, and me?” He pulled the blade away from her skin. He did not want to accidentally hurt her. He was trying to appear as tough as Dellia, but his own fear moved through him with the blade out in the open. He

realized he would be hard pressed to kill a person, even one that had tried to sell out his family. “Tell me now.”

“I don’t know anything. I – aaahhhhh.” She screamed as he pulled on and then sliced her chest band. It took a second for her to realize she had shed no blood, but that her breasts now hung free. She had every urge to cover them up, but his grip kept her motionless. “Okay, okay, I have heard rumors. Rumors about you and your sister. That the northern sorceress has her hooks into you. That you are marionettes.”

“What?” Of all the things for her to say, Vel hadn’t expected this. “Okay, that’s a start.”

“Will you put the knife away?”

“Hmmmm …” Vel was still playacting at the hardened torturer when he wanted the dagger away from them as much as she. He eyed her boobs. They were quite large, and sloped down her chest in a way similar to his mother’s. Her areola were wide, dark, and low. Her chest rose and fell with her ragged, heavy breaths. Should he feel bad to be so hard on this woman? No, she would have murdered his father for money. Or, he thought, if she learned and reported what he’d been doing with his mother, sister, and cousin, she might have them all executed. His cock was his real weapon. He tossed the dagger onto the bed. “No more knife.” His hand now free, he trailed his fingers along the blue veins just under the skin of her breast.

“What … what are you doing … to me?” Norbana leaned back into the wall, her body going rigid with pleasure. The heat spread from her right boob to her left. “You’re a filthy … pasty … northerner. Get your hands … off me.” But even without a weapon in his hands, she didn’t push him away.

“I am a man of the Surround. And your duke.” Vel slowly ran his fingertip around her nipple, and then rolled it between his fingers. He hadn’t really taken the time to tease a woman like this before. He wasn’t sure he was doing it right.

“Once the queens … hear of this … you will no longer … rule,” she said though clenched teeth. Despite herself, she stuck her chest out at him. Offering the breast that had fed her children to this vile, ugly teenager.

“So, you have the queens’ ears, do you?” Vel was careful to keep his right hand on the base of her neck as his left toyed with her. He sensed that was what kept her still. He tugged gently at the nipple. “I’m new to this. Am I doing it right?”

“This … is … torture.” She looked up at him with pleading eyes. He no longer looked so hideous to her. Even with his snow-white skin, she could see he was a handsome young man. And so very tall. He had … a strong male presence.

“Well, I guess I’m on the right track.” Vel heard the door open on the far side of the room. He turned his head to see his sister and Dellia march in with Lord Lars Uticensis between them. Dellia drew her sword as she saw what was happening. She placed it to the lord’s throat before he could reach for a weapon himself.

“Unhand her, northern filth.” Without turning his head, Lars eyed the naked blade resting on his shoulder. “What is the meaning of this?” When Vel stepped away from his wife, he saw that she was

topless. His face reddened, his hands clenched into fists, and he trembled with rage. “You will die for what you’ve done to her.”

“You address your duke as, Your Grace.” Dellia’s words were slow and drawn out. Menace spread from every syllable. She calmly searched him for weapons, pulled a short knife from under his belt, and tucked it into hers.

“Northern filth?” Naevia felt like hitting the man upside the head, but she was afraid that might cause him to stumble into Dellia’s blade. They didn’t want him headless. Instead, she closed the door behind them. It didn’t have a lock. She wished for a lock and azure light coalesced around her hands. It then crept into the door and disappeared. When she tried the handle, it wouldn’t budge. She looked at her pale hands. How useful.

“Lady Norbana said very much the same.” Vel stepped over to the bed, picked up the dagger, and tossed it to Dellia. She caught it with her free hand out of the air. “I think they may be racist.”

“Have you forgotten who won you the war?” Naevia stepped over to Dellia’s side and eyed the red-faced man as he clenched his teeth.

Norbana watched the group with dark, darting eyes. Apparently, she’d been a fool to think her husband would be her savior. She covered her breasts with her arm and tried to think. She had gone so pale once the sword came out, one might mistake her for a mongrel with northern blood.

The room was silent for a moment.

“So … um … what we really want to know is what you told your vulpine friends about my father, me, my mother, etcetera.” Vel unfastened his robes and pulled them off. “Tell us now and spare yourselves what happens next.”

“So, it’s to be torture then. You people are pigs.” Lars stood still with Dellia’s blade tickling his neck.

“You people?” Naevia reached over and kicked his shin. Fortunately, Dellia was deft with her sword and moved with Lars as he started at the pain in his leg.

“Don’t do that, Naevia.” Dellia cast her a stern glance.

“Sorry.” Naevia looked over to Vel. “So, what are we doing here? Is this what it looks like?”

“Just as Mother instructed.” Vel sighed. “Are you jealous?”

“Never.” Naevia smiled sweetly at Vel. “Do whatever it takes.”

“Whatever it takes and no more, Vel.” Dellia put in. “I am a little jealous, it seems.” Her smile, directed at Vel, was tight and thin.

“We know nothing. You’re torturing innocent people. Guests of your house. This is an unspeakable …” Lars noticed the great bulge in the front of Vel’s tunic. “What’s that? What’s going on?”

“Blindfold him. I think it’ll be better if he hears all, but cannot see.” Vel turned to Norbana.

“Do something Lars!” Norbana whimpered and shrunk from Vel. She expected him to retrieve the dagger, but he did not. She watched as the duke’s sister tied a blindfold around her husband’s head.

“Be strong, Norbana. They can’t hurt us for fear of the queens’ wrath. Whatever they do to torture us, we shall walk out of here on the other end of it. They –” Lars was cut off by his wife’s shriek.

“Oh, gods. He’s huge.” Norbana shrieked again as Vel continued to undress. All of her tormentor was bigger than it had any right to be, but his penis was an abomination above and beyond. The crimson head looked quite angry, and the veins protruded in a way that reminded her of some feral beast. This was the torture they had in mind. Her body broke out in shivers. “Oh, it’s leaking, it’s leaking horribly.”

“What … what are they doing?” Lars could hear the beastly women next to him snickering.

“What do the queens know? And what do you know?” Vel finished undressing by pulling off his sandals. He placed his hands gently on Norbana’s shoulders. He felt her muscles relax under his touch. “Remove your arm. I’d like to see them again.”

“No.” She shook her head and clutched her breasts tightly.

“You either tell us what we need to know, or you remove your arm.” Dellia called over. She pushed Lars into a chair and leaned on the chair back, her sword fell to her side.

“Do you know what’s coming, Lord Lars?” Naevia could feel her pussy tingling. Vel was about to claim this vile woman. The first woman outside his family to fall. It was splendid. “Actually, tell us nothing now. I want to see what happens.”

“May Pluto take you all.” Lars stared into the blackness of his blindfold. He heard his wife give a startled cry, and then she sucked her breath in. The next noise she made sounded very much like a whimper of pain. He clenched his fists tighter.

Norbana looked down at her left breast in wonder. Her duke suckled at her nipple. She had been so surprised when he had pushed her arm away and crouched down. Now, she experienced a wide spectrum of emotions. Fear and loathing, yes. But also, a strong desire to take care of this strange, pale man. To give him … something … anything. Without thinking, she reached for his face.

“Vel, watch out!” Dellia stiffened as Norbana’s hands moved for her cousin. But he seemed unconcerned. Dellia relaxed as Norbana gently brushed his blond hair off his forehead. Shit, he already had her. He was only sucking on her tit and he had her. Lord and Lady Uticensis had made a fateful decision when they ventured to the duke’s castle. They would surely pay for it with at least their marriage.

“Ooohhhhhh.” Norbana cradled his head with both hands. Her mind pulled in million directions. The urge to protect this man at all costs welled in her. But in the same breath, she swore to herself she would see him destroyed.

“How do they torture you, Norbana?” Lars had never been so helpless.

“I … I … cannot tell you.” The sound of her husband’s voice shocked her mind out of its stupor. She pushed Vel, but found that he held onto her waist and used the force of her shove to spin her onto the bed. She felt his weight fall on her, and he moved from her left breast to her right. “Aaaahhhhhhh.” She gripped the sheets. He kissed all over her breast, playfully biting and licking her tender flesh. That tantalizing heat moved through her, lighting up her nerve endings throughout her body.

“These … are … quite … lovely.” Vel straddled Norbana and sat above her stomach, his balls resting on her sliced stola. He playfully slapped at her tits with his cock, watching the clear fluid smear over her skin and nipples.

“Not in her mouth, Cousin. She’s likely to bite.” Dellia put a hand on Lars’s shoulder and shoved him back into his chair when he tried to stand up.

“Mouth?!?” Lars screamed. “Stop!”

“She won’t bite.” Naevia could plainly see the lust in Norbana’s face. “Do you as you please, Vel.”

“Norbana, what is he doing?” Lars tried to rise again but was roughly pushed down.

“He’s … he’s …” Her husband seemed a world away. She glanced at him, and then back at the approaching cockhead. Her mind was a mush. She knew it was a rationalization, but she still told herself that if she satisfied her duke with her mouth, they could then leave safely. She ignored the thought that there was no satisfying them until they got what they wanted. She understood that they wanted more than the queens’ secrets. “Close your ears, Lars. He’s … mmmmmpppppphhhhhhhh.” She leaned forward a little to take him into her mouth. He hadn’t even forced it upon her. She should not have made her mouth such an easy conquest.

“That’s good … ugh … Lady Norbana.” Vel lied. She clearly wasn’t used to oral sex. Or maybe it was just his size. But it was awkward. She reached up and grabbed his cock with both hands, rhythmically squeezing his girth. Her hands were warm, but he could feel the chill of the iron ring press into his flesh. “Roll your tongue around it.” He listened to her gag and wondered how that sounded to her Vulpes husband. “No, you don’t need to put it all in your mouth. Yes, just the head. Now roll your tongue. There you go. Yes.” He looked down at her face. Normally she was quite pretty, but her face looked silly and distorted with such a large thing between her lips. Her brown eyes rose to meet his blue ones for a moment, and then she shut them tight.

“In case you are as dense as you look, I will tell you what’s happening.” Dellia leaned in close and talked directly into Lars’s ear. “She is learning to suck cock. Annnnddddddd … it looks like she enjoys her first lesson. She’s pumping him with both hands. It’s quite the sight.”

“I’ll murder you all! You will all die a thousand … ow.” Lars winced as something heavy struck his skull.

“Gag him, Cousin.” Naevia looked over at Dellia. “I can’t listen to him anymore.”

“But how will they talk if he’s gagged, and she’s …?” Dellia pointed at the woman on the bed. She was on her back, her head lifted off the covers, and the cock firmly in her mouth.

“I agree with my sister. Let him talk later.” Vel glanced at Dellia and then looked back down at Norbana.

“Sure, I guess.” Dellia had brought several lengths of cloth for binding and such. She tied one to his mouth, and bound him to the chair with the others. It would be better if she didn’t have to keep pushing him back into his chair.

For a while the room fell into a trance. Dellia watched with keen interest the coupling on the bed, but also kept an eye on her prisoner. Naevia’s eyes got rounder and rounder as she took in the sights of her brother’s conquest, and her hand crept under her stola. Lars made the occasional sound of dis-

acquiescence into his gag. Norbana hummed and slurped on the great cock. Only Vel spoke, offering the woman little bits of feedback and encouragement.

“I’m … ugh … going to cum … keep working it …” Vel took hold of Norbana’s dark hair at the top of her head, but didn’t push himself in any further.

Norbana had swallowed her husband’s stuff many times, so she thought she was prepared for what was about to happen. Perhaps she was even eager for it. She did not recognize herself. The tempered lady she thought herself was gone. And this new, craving, mewling thing, had somehow replaced her old self. “Mmmmppphhhhhh.” It wasn’t a sound of objection. It was the sound of acceptance. She heard him grunt above her and she opened her eyes. When her husband arrived at his climax, she thought he looked silly, although she’d never told him so. But this young man looked fierce, almost angry. The ugliness she’d seen in him had vanished. He was now damnably alluring. And then the first hot gush hit her tongue and splashed up against her throat. By reflex, she drank. It was a lively brackish libation. It reminded her of a forest cliff very near the sea. Nothing had ever tasted so delicious. She gulped and gulped, but it was too much. She choked and then felt him pull her by the hair so that he was out of her mouth. She closed her eyes again and let the fiery stuff splash over her.

Vel pumped himself over her. When he was done, he looked down at the ruin of a lady. “Will you tell me what you know, now?”

“No.” A sperm bubble formed on her lips with the word. She said it not because she still wanted to refuse this man, but for the inverse. She wanted to see what he would do to her next. Despite her husband’s braying into his gag not feet away, she only thought about her duke at that moment.

“I was hoping she’d say that.” Dellia glanced at Naevia for a reaction, but her cousin was too busy fiddling with her pussy. A new surge of envy moved through Dellia. Why was she on guard duty? It wasn’t her fault she was the bravest and the strongest. She dipped her lips close to Lars’s ear. “Let me paint you a picture. Your racist wife is now a fucking plaything for the duke. She’s covered in cum, and she’s helping him remove the rest of her clothes. Now she’s on her back again. Oh, I don’t think she’s forgotten you. She looked quickly your way before spreading her legs. She’s wiping the cum out of her eyes to get a better look at my cousin.” Dellia smiled as the man screamed into his gag. “If you’re saying you wish to tell us everything now, I’m sorry to say I can’t understand you. But you will tell us everything. Eventually. I say let’s not rush things. Well, well. She’s reaching down and pulling his cock toward her pussy.”

“I … um … heard your father this morning.” Norbana knew she should hold her tongue, but the words spilled out. “And I heard you and your mother talk of him today.” The head of his cock pressed against her nether lips. Her hips bucked of their own accord. “I have yet … aaaaahhhhhhhhh … to … send word … to the queens.” With her husband, she used spit to help him slide in, but she wouldn’t need to do that with her duke. Her wetness practically gushed out of her. “I will tell you the rest … just … ugggghhhhhhh … send my husband away.”

“Dellia?” Vel looked over at his cousin.

“Nah. He stays,” Dellia said. “I don’t want to miss anything. And she’ll tell us everything anyway. They both will.”

“I guess he stays.” Vel looked down at the small woman and pushed into her. She shuddered violently. Her eyes rolled. He pulled back and thrust again. Soon, he had a good, steady pace going. The steady slap of their skin filled the room.

“Oh gods … I’m sorry Lars … I’m sorry … I’m … eeeeeiiiiiiiiiiiii.” She had no idea what hit her nerves, but it felt a thousand tons of ecstasy dropped upon her. Her body flopped and her brain reeled. When it was over, that massive thing was still plunging into her over and over. “What … what … ugh … was that?”

Dellia laughed. She looked to Naevia to share her mirth, but her petite cousin was too lost in her own lust to notice anything but what was taking place on the bed. So, Dellia turned to her captive. “I do believe that your wife doesn’t know about orgasms.” She smiled as he squirmed and made muffled sounds.

“I made you cum … uh … uh … uh … Norbana.” Vel was starting to work up a sweat. “Do you want more?”

Norbana nodded up at him. Her eyes fell and she saw in awe how much he had stretched her. Her boobs rocked on her chest, and her belly shook each time he hit bottom. She would tell him everything. But not now. Words were lost to her. The second orgasm of her life was already starting.

A while later, Vel’s hips lost their rhythm. He thought for a moment if he should make the effort to cum outside her pussy. And then he wondered why he should extend her such a courtesy. He drove into her harder, causing her to shriek and cry. He felt her hands weakly grab his hips and try and pull him in. “Take it, Vulpes. Talk … it … aaaahhhhhhhhhh.” He lodged himself as deep as possible and seeded her womb.

Interrogator and interrogatee hugged each other tightly on the bed. Norbana mewled and mewled, while all that could be heard from Vel was his heavy breathing. After a time, his hips started moving again.

“I’m done with narration, Lars.” Dellia pulled the blindfold off her captive. “Look and see what your wife has become.” She didn’t bother to gauge his reaction. She would take the gag off soon enough, and she was quite confident he would tell them everything.

Chapter 16

“That’s all we told them, I swear.” Lars was a beaten man. He looked away as the youth dismounted his quivering wife.

“So, they know that we are having ‘servant issues,’ and that the sorceress is researching at Minerva Library.” Vel turned his back to the comatose woman on the bed and dressed. “But they know not of my relationship with my sister, mother, and cousin. Nor do they know that my father has been back to see us and is very likely hiding in Ostia Novus.”

“Yes, yes.” Lars nodded. “Now be done with Norbana. I must take her to an apothecary to protect her from being with child.”

“Well, that won’t work.” Dellia smacked Lars upside the head with her open palm. “The queens regent might not know those things yet, but …”

Vel nodded. “But when we release you, they will know them as quick as the pigeon flies.” He looked around the room. “Dellia. You and my sister will take this man down to a room in the cellar. I will watch after his wife, maybe lock her in one of the east tower rooms.”

“I will not.” Dellia stood tall. Or at least as tall as her Surround ancestry would allow.

“What did you say?” Vel hadn’t thought she’d say no. They had come so far in the last few weeks.

“I’ve patiently waited on guard duty while you fucked the Lady Norbana senseless.” She smacked Lars on the head before he could say anything in reply. “Quiet you.” She then looked back to Vel. “Your sister enjoyed herself well enough with a hand between her legs. But not me.”

Naevia blushed. It was true, she had cum several times as Vel had debauched the woman.

“You take Lord Lars to the cellar, Your Grace.” Dellia blinked up at Vel. “You leave him there until we decide what to do with him. I will find some accommodation for the Lady Norbana in the east tower … after I’ve had some fun myself.”

“I … um … didn’t know you fancied Norbana.” It was Vel’s turn to blush. This was an odd thing since they’d all watched him rut for the last several hours.

“If it’s to be the cellars, my wife will join me. And you’ll send an apothecary. We have rights under – ow!” Lars took another shot to his head from that martial woman. These northern animals were nothing but savages.

“Okay, fine. Do as you will, Cousin. But don’t harm her.” Vel stepped over to Lars and untied him from the chair. He reapplied the man’s gag and blindfold and bound his hands behind him. He then took Norbana’s dagger back from Dellia as his cousin undressed.

“I do not possess your mighty spear, Cousin. I shall be a good deal more gentle with her than you. Such are the rules of physics and biology, sexual dimorphism and such.” She dropped the last of her clothes and weapons and leapt onto the bed. Quickly, she turned the lady onto her side, straddled her ass, and undulated her pussy upon that round cheek. “She’s well proportioned. Aaahhhhhh … I needed this.”

Vel watched the spy lie on the bed as Dellia took her turn with her. He was pretty sure she'd never lain with a woman before. But she'd probably never had a man Vel's size or a 'northern mongrel' before. So, it was a day of firsts for Norbana. On top of her, Dellia seemed to glow azure for a split second. Seeing the magic in his cousin, he wondered if he'd created another sorceress in Norbana. That would not be good. Maybe he should have considered the possibility before cumming in the Vulpes? Well, they'd cross that magical bridge if they got to it. He looked back at his other prisoner, and could see Lars grow red-faced as he shouted into his gag. Vel tried to look frightful and grim as he towered over the man. It was a stretch. "Your wife is fine. She has enjoyed herself plenty. And my cousin will take good care of her. Worry about yourself."

"I'll join, Vel." Naevia smoothed out her stola where it was wrinkled from riding around her waist the last few hours. "Let's drop him off and find Mother."

"Yes, let's." Vel pushed Lars toward the door. "Lock her securely when you're done, Dellia."

"Yes … but I may not … be done … for some time." Dellia's hips moved faster.

"Very well." Vel could hear the woman moaning under his cousin's movement. The wife was clearly enjoying herself. He shrugged as he exited the room with his sister and prisoner. It was better than the spy deserved, that much he was sure of.

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Vel and Naevia locked Lord Lars securely away in the cellar. They found that their mother had already imprisoned Spurrius in another cell. It seemed things had progressed to a point where they could no longer tolerate spies. They would have to hope that the wedding was busy enough that a few missing guests wouldn't be noticed. And that Dellia wouldn't mind her husband absent from her bed.

Cassia trawled no other spies in her search of the castle. That night, Cassia, Vel, Naevia, and Dellia met in the council chamber. They sat around the table. It offered them all a moment to catch their breath. The wedding was almost upon them. Guests were to arrive the next day. Tents spread in the meadows around the castle. They had only to survive the wedding, allay the queens' suspicions one more time, and then they could reassess. And maybe talk to Gallio in a way that would offer more than riddles laid upon conundrums.

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Long before the cockerel could call, Cassia rose from her bed. She was not one to sleep well in chaotic times, and Discordia was busier than usual. It was the time of day when even the corridor lamps idled, quenched and dark. She carried before her an oil lamp as she made her way to the kitchen. A quick bite and then off to check on the tents. She wondered if Vel and Naevia were in each other's arms at that

very moment. She fought against the impulse to check. And maybe to supplant her daughter in Vel's bed. Such ecstasy would only serve her poorly with all their lives so delicately suspended over the abyss.

"Good morning, Your Grace. Or is it still evening? It's hard to be sure." Brynhild's blithe voice floated through the air.

Cassia gave a start and turned on her heel. The sorceress stood just a few feet behind her. She had no lamp, and seemed to have appeared out of thin air. "It … it is morning."

"I've been doing research." Brynhild smiled and looked down at the dark woman. Of course, she was supposed to curtsy in such a situation. But she paid formality no heed.

"Yes, Vel told me. What did you find on the queens regent?"

"Not on them. I already know them well enough. On your son. Will you confirm a suspicion for me?" She took a step closer to Cassia.

"What suspicion?"

"Has he taken you, too?" Brynhild paused, and cocked her head at Cassia's quizzical look. "Oh, I'm sorry. I should not be so coy. Has your son fucked you yet?"

"What?" Cassia licked her lips and looked up at the platinum haired woman. It had been a mistake keeping her at the castle. A terrible mistake.

"Has his cock tasted your pussy? Did he cum in you?" Brynhild reached for her duchess's arm with her left hand. She was taking an awful risk. If she was wrong, azure light was about to place her on her butt again, and Cassia would be furious. But she was able to catch hold of the arm. It was warm, and solid, and devoid of magic. "Excellent. Now answer the question."

A calm fell over Cassia. "His penis has not … tasted my vagina."

"So, you haven't fucked?" Brynhild arched her eyebrow in confusion. She'd been so sure.

"No, we have." Cassia's voice barely carried along the dark corridor.

"So … then …" Brynhild smiled. "You took him up your ass? I'm impressed! You're tougher than you look. Did he cum in you?"

"Yes."

"How many days ago was the first time?" Brynhild thrilled at this inquisition. Things were so much easier when Hekate wasn't involved.

"Four."

"Right, right." Brynhild shoved the duchess onto her butt. The lamp crashed to the floor and went out. Still, none of Pluto's light. Brynhild ignited her own glowing orb above them. "How rude of me. Here." She offered Cassia her left hand and helped her up. The sorceress did not release the hand. "Who else has Vel fucked? Specifically, who has he cum inside? Not some prude playing hard to get with her ass like you. I'm looking for a pussy. I'm trying to rule some things out."

“Naevia. Dellia, I think. Also, Norbana.” Cassia blinked slowly at the pretty orb floating above them.

“Ah, Lady Norbana. Perfect. I’ll check in on her first.” Brynhild took her right index finger, placed it on Cassia’s chin, and turned her round face so that they looked into each other’s eyes. This was the tricky part, but not as tricky as it used to be. “You didn’t see me this morning. You tripped and fell, dropping your lamp. You’ll remember nothing of our conversation.” She let go of the duchess, her orb quenched itself, and blackness consumed them. Brynhild was gone.

“Damn, I dropped my lamp.” Cassia reached her hands out for the wall. She had nothing to spark the sconces all around her. She’d have to walk a while in the dark before she could find some light. She sighed. A rough day was off to a poor start. It was going to be a terrible day … or worse.

When she finally made it to the kitchen, she found it was worse. The women servants were there. They had gathered early as expected, getting ready for the coming wave of guests. But the men were not there. Cassia enquired, but the women knew nothing. She summoned the seneschal, who also knew nothing. She prayed she’d have a solution before Bantia learned of the new catastrophe. She ordered the women to spread out into the city and request the loan of servants from any family that could spare them.

She needed some relief, whatever the source. But Cassia could see the storm was only gathering its strength. She prayed to Minerva to give her the wisdom to survive the coming days. Get through the wedding, and then she could reassess … everything.

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A rushed and perilous journey by boat through the night led to towering cliffs. With dawn’s first breaking light, they made a harrowing climb up the scorpion’s trail, zigzagging to the palace walls. Nicias pushed himself harder than he thought possible. He and his comrades, a group of a dozen men, arrived right before midday. Just as they had planned. Nicias wasn’t sure whether his knees were shaking from fear or the climb.

The plan would work. He would soon take his wife home, and perhaps free a princess, too. On their own, they were nothing but a clutch of exhausted servants. But they weren’t alone. They had the power of a mighty northern sorceress behind them.

The heavy, studded oak door swung open and they were through, inside Accipiter Cubitum Palace.

“Go quickly, or it will be my head.” Their contact looked them over as he shut the door behind them. “Where do you go?”

“The Blessed Tower,” the duke’s footman, Proclus, replied. He clapped his cousin’s shoulder.

Their inside man looked like he enjoyed the mention of that place even less than the sight of them. “That is an evil building.” He spat on the pavement. “Good luck to you. If you leave by this door, I won’t lock it behind you. I was never here.” The man ran off down a narrow alley.

“Follow me, friends.” Nicias put his hand on the hilt of his sword, safely stored in its sheath, and jogged south. Brynhild had instructed him on the way over and over in the preceding days. They found the narrow tunnels and streets of the outer palace deserted. Nicias had been worried the place would be crawling with people. He had rehearsed his excuses for their presence over and over. The sorceress had planned their trip so well, they didn’t run into anyone all the way to the tower.

The Blessed Tower rose to the east of the main palace, nearly disappearing into the sky. Nicias slowed to a trot as they approached and stared up at it. The round building was encased in scaffolding, and there were pallets of stone blocks haphazardly placed in the courtyard. Very high up, he thought he could see workers scurrying about the outside of the thing. “Off to the side. Over here.” Nicias called his troop over. Standing by the front door, he could see the first royal guard with his crimson cape fluttering in the breeze.

Lucky for them, the sorceress had told them of another secret door in back. Nicias led his men into a space covered with broken timber, rendered steel, and cracked stone. They navigated the detritus, and he found the block he was to press. He pushed with his foot, and a door opened in the side of the tower. The masonry looked for a second like liquid, and then it was gone, leaving an arched entrance.

Once inside, they gave themselves the barest minimum of time to adjust from the searing brightness outside to the newfound gloom. The place was stark and barren, obviously not yet furnished. They found the stairs and climbed. The sorceress had bidden them rescue Princess Minicia first, and then circle back for Merope. But Nicias could wait no longer for his reuniting moment. They stopped on Merope’s floor, and fanned out in the hallway. At this point, the sound of drawing steel filled the dark, cloistered air.

The door was locked. With trembling fingers, Nicias pulled forth the charm Brynhild had given him for this moment. It was a simple bit of parchment with strange symbols burned onto the page. He placed it on the glossy, maple wood. The door swung in on hinges too new to creak. They all filed into the room quickly. They were in a large, barren entry space. There was a library to the left and another room to their right. That room had its doorway angled so that they could only see a patch of stone wall inside. A bank of windows ahead of them looked out far over the sparkling sea.

A sound like waves smacking against the shore greeted their ears. The room itself swam about them, as if it was there, but also not there. Nicias lowered his sword. Its point trailed behind him, gouging out a tiny path in the wood floor. The cadence of the slapping waves was familiar to him. There was another sound. A woman’s whimpering cry filled his ears. His wife’s voice roused him from the lethargy that had beset them all as they’d stepped into the room. With his comrades, he moved toward the room to their right.

The chamber came into view little by little, but it wasn’t until they had arrived almost at the door that he saw the thing that caused him to drop his sword with a clatter. A woman … a pretty woman … faced away from them, riding in a horrible sex act. His cheeks went pale as he stared. The cock was far too large and smooth. The woman’s vagina was obscenely spread on it with every thrust. The woman’s asshole gaped, like it had seen too much regular use. And she was clearly pregnant. That was not all. Nicias found his brain much too slow to take in everything the room offered. The woman rode another woman. As the sneering face looked out from behind the mounting woman’s heavy breasts, Nicias could see it was one of the queens underneath. “Who … what …?” he croaked.

“Oh, you made it.” Cesphea’s smile broadened when she saw the gaggle of scrawny men looking in. “We were beginning to worry. Weren’t we, Merope?”

“No …” Nicias rubbed at his eyes. It couldn’t be his Merope. This woman was impossibly pregnant. Not enough time had passed. Had it? And his wife would never … submit to such a horrid defiling.

“Say hello to the traitors of Ostia Novus, darling.” When the woman on top simply continued her riding, Cesphea slapped Merope’s ass. “Don’t be rude.”

“I … uh … uh … I had no choice … Nicias.” Merope turned her head and looked over her shoulder.

Nicias wobbled, teetered, and fell to the floor in a faint. His companions looked at each other. They had expected things might not go according to plan. Not one of them could have anticipated this horror. They wavered like their fallen comrade for a second, but then the courage of their northern sorceress entered their veins.

When she saw her husband fall, Merope’s hips stopped. “Nicias,” she whispered. Then she saw the servants she knew so well from her time at the duke’s castle look at her with pure venom. The men then raised their swords and charged.

“Keep fucking, little bitch.” Cesphea slapped Merope’s tit, but could not get the woman to start her hips again. “Now would be a good time, Valeria.”

Valeria stepped out from behind the men. She had been standing next to the far wall of the chamber, and none had noticed her. She held up her hand coiled by a pale, pink glow. The attackers all stumbled and fell back from their charge on Cesphea. “It would have been easier to take them at the wall. And less death.” She stepped forward, her carmine mantle twirling around her. “You love drama too much, Sister.” Valeria’s scepter came down on a man’s head. He collapsed to the ground. She swung again and took the next man in the midsection. The greenish copper of the scepter blurred, and the bust of Salacia at the scepter’s head exacted cruel punishment on the man.

Seizing the moment of chaos, Merope pushed off the queen, and dislodged Cesphea from her worn pussy. She ignored Cesphea’s commands, and moved as quickly as her bulging belly would allow to the side of her unconscious husband. All around them were curses, cracks, and blows. She pulled Nicias back to the entry room, away from the fracas. Merope looked up and saw the door barred by three of the royal guard. There was no way out. One of the servants, a footman named Proclus, ran out of the carnage and stepped over Merope and Nicias. The guards pushed him away from the door, but did not otherwise engage him. The sounds died down behind them.

“Don’t tell me this was the best Duke Gallio could muster.” Valeria walked slowly into the entry chamber, her copper scepter thumping next to her with each step. “And why come for this trained bitch? What’s so special about her?”

“The former duke, Your Highness?” Proclus blinked at her and his face fell, like he’d only just realized where he was. Droplets of blood dotted his dark face and beard. He turned to face the queen. Behind her, he could see her sister. Or maybe not a sister. The cock stood out frightfully between her legs. He didn’t know what she was. But he did know she was wrong. All of it was wrong. “We came for Merope.” He looked down at Nicias and wished for his friend that he would never wake.

“What were you really sent here to do?” Valeria’s mantle was stained a deeper red in several places. She did not seem to mind. “You did not risk your lives for my sister’s plaything.” She pushed the man with her scepter to the wall, and then shoved the bust of Salacia up under Proclus’s chin. She looked into his eyes. “Oh, I see. You’re under enchantment.” She put her free hand on the man’s forehead and a pale red light passed from her touch to his head. “This is not your fault, is it?”

“No. We did come for Merope. And also, we were to rescue Princess Minicia.” Proclus found it hard to speak with the rough angles of metal pressing his throat.

Cesphea barked out laughter from the doorway. “Oh? So, you added another little errand while you’re out? Fetch the washing and … maybe … fetch the princess while you’re at it?” She yearned to go back to rutting again. She wanted to fuck before her blood cooled. This had played out almost perfectly. Her smooth cock swayed as she stepped toward Merope. “Who thinks our sweet princess needs rescuing?”

“The Sorceress Brynhild.” The words spilled from Proclus’s mouth.

“Well, that much is obvious, little man.” Valeria pressed the scepter tighter, forcing Proclus up onto his toes. “Does the duchess know of your errands? Or your puppy of a duke?”

“No,” Proclus croaked.

“He speaks the truth.” Valeria released the hidden spike at the top of her scepter. A crunching sound filled the room, and Proclus’s blood splattered out on the wall behind him. She withdrew the spike and the dead man fell to the floor. “Secure the last man for further questioning.”

The guard moved quickly across the room, lifted the unconscious Nicias, and carried him away.

“Nooooo!” Merope clutched at her husband but was pushed away. Then, she felt a familiar hand on her shoulder. She was lifted into the air and that terrible and glorious cock was inside her again. Her mind let go of the horrors of the day as her hips met royal hips over and over.

“We should have finished Brynhild when we were there. But you wanted to gloat.” Valeria’s pale face twisted into a frown. Her skin was uncannily clean and unblemished by the day’s chores. “Can you not wait to satisfy yourself?” She shook her head as Cesphea bounced the woman, her hands gripping Merope’s butt. It was such an odd spectacle, this massively pregnant servant humping her queen, carnage all around. Valeria wondered if she would ever get used to it.

“You know I think better when I … ugh … fuck.” Cesphea’s cock practically melted in that once tight pussy. “The sorceress will hide now. We … uh … uh … need change no plans. Draw out Gallio.”

“But Brynhild is stronger than we thought.” Valeria strode over to the windows and looked out at the sails dotting the horizon.

“If relic towers rise on this … ugh … side of the sea. We worry.” Cesphea had to raise her voice to talk over Merope’s cries of pleasure. “Until then …”

“Our tower is almost complete.” Valeria nodded at her sister. It was now a matter of winding down the clock.

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“There is a ruined tower just inside the western city wall. I must show you something there.” Brynhild eyed her duke. It had been a stroke of luck finding him alone, erecting a tent outside the castle.

“I … I …” Vel shook his head, trying to clear it. The afternoon sun beat down on him. He needed water.

“I know you’ve experienced great pleasures with the gift I gave you. I have more gifts.” She tore her stola at the chest for him, exposing milky cleavage. Maybe the young man liked the look of a sow’s body. “Come with me.” She put her left hand on his arm. “I’ll show you brand new worlds. But we need to go to the ruined tower now.”

“Bantia … I have to help …” Vel’s muscles relaxed. He let the sorceress lead him away from the half-erected tent.

“Vel? Vel?” Naevia’s sweet voice drifted to them from amongst the tents and pavilions.

“Shit.” Brynhild’s great height worked against her here. And so did Vel’s. She crouched down and hurried, pulling her duke faster.

“What’s going on?” Naevia stood before them. She was no bigger than a forest sprite, but possessed the fierceness of a mother bear. Her hands balled on her hips.

“Naevia.” Vel’s mind cleared. He wrenched his hand away from the sorceress. “She … she tried to compel me again.” He jumped back from Brynhild and circled over to his little sister.

“Banish her, Vel.” Naevia’s face took on an uncharacteristic darkness. “You’ve warned her enough.”

“I don’t know …” Vel paused.

“The queens regent mean you harm. Both of you. Your whole family.” Brynhild straightened her back, lifting herself up to her full height. She was now eye level with her duke. “I need the resources to protect you. You must take me in a place of lost magic. We must go to the fallen tower of Ostia Novus. That will give me strength beyond what the queens foresee.” She glanced at Naevia and then back to Vel. Coals burned in Naevia’s eyes. He was her only chance. “Your father will die at their hands if I do not protect him.”

“She means to fuck you in the ruined tower, Vel.” Disgust now competed with anger on Naevia’s face.

“She wants … your magic, Naevia. The azure light.” Vel thought things over as Brynhild watched him with pleading eyes.

“Banish her.” Naevia stood resolute next to him.

“If you truly want what you say, you had only to ask.” Vel sighed. “I would have considered it.”

“Ewwww.” Naevia spat on the ground.

“Yes, yes. I was tricked into this, too.” Brynhild nodded her platinum head. “But we can both make this work for us. And against our enemies.”

“I would have considered it,” Vel said. “But you lie and deceive. So, no.” He shook his head slowly. “Leave the castle. I give you one hour to collect your things. Any more mischief and you will face worse than banishment.” Vel hoped the tremble in his voice wasn’t noticeable.

“What?” Brynhild’s face snapped from entreaty to fury in an instant. The shadows cast by the tents around her lengthened and swirled. Even though it was early afternoon, she stood in a penumbra. “I have served your family for …” She stopped when she caught sight of the azure light building around Naevia. “I will go.” She turned, and disappeared quickly from view. The shadows lingered around Vel and Naevia, creeping slowly their way.

“Go with your mistress.” Naevia’s voice was steely. Her azure light flashed around them, and the afternoon sun returned. “That was wise, Vel.” She rubbed her legs together. “Let’s cleanse our pallet.” She grabbed his big hand and pulled him into the nearest tent. It was empty. She pushed him down onto the ground and tore at his robes and tunic.

“Maybe now is not the time. The wedding is almost here, I just banished our family’s oldest servant, and I … aaaaahhhhhh.” Vel let his head drop back to the earth as his sister pulled his cock from his clothes and placed her mouth around it. Why did the magic have to always rile her up so? “Maybe just a few minutes.”

Naevia sucked him for more than a few minutes. She then released him, pulled her stola to her waist, and mounted him. Reaching under her, she took hold of him and pushed her underwear to the side. She lowered herself. “That is … good.” She rocked her hips and felt the pressure of him push deep inside her. “I love you, Vel.”

“I love you, Naevia.” Vel meant it with all his heart. He stared at her loveliness as she bounced on him, working herself hard. He could see she was trying to speed things up so they could go back to helping out.

“She was right about … one thing.” Naevia’s copper hair fell over half her face. She watched her smiling brother with one eye. “We can … uh … uh … uh … make this work for us. We have something our ancestors never had. We don’t need a resident sorceress, Vel.”

“We … are … the magic.” Vel squeezed her hips tight.

“Yes … yes … yeeesssssssss.” Naevia humped down fiercely, listening to him grunt. She could feel his heat move through her. “Yeesss … cummmmmmm.” And her own orgasm launched to match his.

Chapter 17

“There you are, Vel.” Cassia found her son striding in from the meadows, holding Naevia’s hand. They looked sweaty and bedraggled, as well they should. She assumed they had spent a busy day helping to erect tents in the absence of the servant staff. She hoped that was all they had done. They knew better than to get into mischief where they could be found, didn’t they?

Naevia leaned in close to her brother. “There is a shadow that hangs about Mother. I can remove it. Let’s get her somewhere private.”

“There is a what?” Vel looked down at her and then back up to the duchess. He saw no shadow.

“Like the ones Brynhild cast about her.” As she watched her mother beckon to them, Naevia could feel her nerves tingle and itch. “Let’s be quick about it.”

“I’m glad I found you, Vel,” Cassia said. “I wanted to talk about tomorrow. The arrivals should start –”

“Come with us, quickly.” Vel took his mother’s arm and hurried her into the castle. Neptune’s temple was the closest unoccupied room, so he pulled her in there.

“What’s going on?” Cassia looked around her at the statue of the great towering man with his trident and the sea creatures that surrounded him. The blue walls of the chamber became bluer still when her daughter’s skin glowed. There was a flash of azure, and Cassia stumbled into her son. A dark veil that had shadowed her mind lifted. Her thoughts immediately fixed on her conversation with Brynhild that morning. “You’re in danger, Vel. The sorceress plans to …” Her face twisted in disgust. “She plans to rape you, I think. She’s looking for magic.” She grabbed at Vel’s arm. “Where is she?”

“It’s okay. She’s gone. I sent her from the castle for good.” Vel hugged his mother close and squeezed her tight. “Naevia prevented whatever Brynhild had planned. And I banished her.”

“Naevia did?” Cassia looked over at her daughter. “How?”

Vel and Naevia filled in their mother on the azure light and how it had protected them. They left out the part where it had saved Naevia and Dellia when they’d been spying on Cassia. It didn’t seem pertinent.

Cassia relayed to them the conversation she’d had with Brynhild that morning. She left out the part where she’d told the sorceress about Vel taking the duchess’s rear. Her daughter didn’t need to hear that.

Silence filled the temple after they’d, mostly, caught each other up to speed.

“The curse has turned my daughter into a sorceress.” Cassia thought through all the implications.

“Yes. But not you, Mother. You’ve had no blue light? Nothing unexplained?” Vel followed along. He saw what must have been Brynhild’s conclusion.

“Vel! Not in front of your sister.” Cassia’s eyes went wide at his cavalier mention of their secret.

“I know you’ve done it, Mother.” Naevia folded her arms.

“Of course she knows, Mother.” Vel held up his hands in surrender when Cassia shot him a look of betrayal. “Only Naevia and Dellia know. It’s okay.”

“Dellia?” Cassia felt faint. She looked about the temple, her gaze traveling everywhere but her daughter’s eyes. How much had Vel told them?

“Don’t faint, Mother.” Naevia reached out and held her mother by the shoulders. “We need to think things through.” She turned to her brother. “You have to take her to the relic tower tonight.”

“What?” Vel and Cassia both looked at Naevia like a madness had taken her.

“Brynhild went to you, Mother. She said she was going to interrogate Norbana next. Don’t you see?” Naevia looked back and forth between her mother’s uncomprehending face, and Vel’s knowing one. “She would have made Vel take her in the castle if she thought that’s how the magic worked. It would have been easier. But she surmised from you and Norbana that she needed the relic tower.”

Cassia’s hand went to her mouth. “Oh, my.”

Moments later, Vel nodded. “Brynhild’s logic must have been that the magic transfers to a woman only if I join with her in a place of old magic.”

“Yes.” Naevia nodded. “Which is good news about Lady Norbana. We should have been more careful there.”

“But … I don’t want magic.” Cassia looked from her eighteen-year-old daughter with her determined expression, to her nineteen-year-old son with his suppressed smile. “You better not be enjoying this.” She bit her bottom lip. Of course he was enjoying it. Men always wanted to claim the horizon. They hadn’t yet spoken of it, but of course she would have to give him her vagina in that broken tower. That was as clear as day after what Brynhild had said to her. Cassia had given Vel almost every part of her. It was no surprise that Vel wanted the rest. Perhaps it spoke well of his restraint that it was circumstance, and not his pressing for it, that would break this final wall.

“You have to, Mother.” Naevia took a deep breath, trying to control her excitement. “If it wasn’t for the magic, Brynhild would have had her way with Vel.”

“You have no magic?” Cassia looked to her son.

“Only the gift.” Vel nodded.

“The … gift.” Cassia had meant to correct him and call it a curse. But it wasn’t a curse, was it? “I will go ready myself. Take a bath, Vel, and meet me at the lonely rock with two horses in an hour.” She turned and rushed out of the temple.

“Four horses.” Naevia corrected after Cassia had gone. “You’ll need Dellia and me to keep guard at the tower.”

“‘Keep guard’ is a clever euphemism for surreptitiously watching Mother and me.”

“Well, I’m a clever girl, Vel.” She reached up, grabbed a lock of his hair, and pulled his face down to hers. “You know her butt isn’t going to be good enough this time,” she whispered.

“I think that much was clear.” Vel kissed her rosy cheek.

“I just wanted to make sure we were on the same page.” She kissed him on the lips. “Now, let’s go take that bath. We can’t have mother smelling my scent on your cock, can we?”

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The old wooden steps spiraled ever so slightly as Vel and Cassia moved up the relic tower. Vel had to stoop under a beam that had fallen diagonally, punching a hole through the wall. This tower was in even worse shape than the tower in Kart Hadasht had been, before Vel and Naevia had accidentally given it new life.

“Will this hold us?” Vel moved cautiously, weighing each step so as not to plunge through the rotten boards. The bag slung over his shoulder didn’t help matters.

“I’m as light as a feather, Vel. But you should continue to tread carefully.” Cassia looked back over her shoulder and tried to smile. It was a feeble attempt. Her heart was in her throat, thinking about what they were about to do. The failed smile didn’t matter. It was dark enough to muddy their faces. Vel was just a blotchy, pale twig plodding his way up behind her. They dared not risk any light for fear of bringing attention to the tower. “Anyway, I think we’re near the top.” Once, the tower of Ostia Novus had spiraled into the heavens. Now it was only five stories tall, and forever getting shorter.

“Thank the gods.” The panic in Vel’s mind at the thought of breaking his leg in that stairway nearly pushed out the steady excitement of what the night held in store for them.

“There we are … starlight.” In the opening ahead, Cassia could see the sky. She chewed on the plant in her mouth with increased vigor as the moment was nearly upon them. Her vagina gushed and her stomach hung on the edge of an imagined precipice.

They clambered out onto what was now the roof, but had once been a floor. Parts of the stone walls made a circle around them, jagged against the lights of the city on one side, and the inky blankness of the wilds on the other. The furniture was all in ruin and unusable. A soggy, decaying bed sat off-kilter some twenty feet away. Closer, a great sambuca, its strings mostly snapped, leaned against a fallen wood wall. The remains of chairs and sofas lay here and there.

“It is a beautiful night.” Vel took in a deep breath and stepped out onto the floor. The magical builders had used thick, ancient timbers. “Seems solid.” He took several more steps. “The floor will hold.” He blushed when he said it. Hold against what? The statement seemed to beg the question. He walked out farther to a clearing. “Here is good.” He dropped the bag and pulled out the thick, wool blanket they’d brought. As he spread it out, he could hear his mother nervously chewing. He looked over to where she watched him. “What do you eat?”

“I’m chewing silphium.” Cassia could see her son better now under the stars. He looked strong and handsome making ready their makeshift bedding.

“Yuck. That stuff tastes like black licorice, but stronger. Why are you chewing silphium?”

“Think on it, Vel. You’re a smart lad.” Cassia sighed and stepped onto the blanket. She reached down and loosened her sandals. If she was going to back out, now was the time. Once he touched her, there would be no going back.

After he finished getting their blanket ready, Vel took off his own sandals and unclasped his robes. He wasn’t as familiar with herbs as he should have been. He always tuned out those classes. Silphium wasn’t for debriding. His mother’s breath was fresh as a spring breeze anyway. It was … “Oh.”

“Oh?” She slowly pulled off her stola, careful not to disturb her brown braids, or the circlet in her hair.

“It’s a contraceptive.” Vel took off his robes. The sight of his mother in her chest band and underwear sent the memory of their perilous climb out of his mind. Her curves looked even more accentuated in the starlight. “You don’t wish to have my child.”

“You can bet your duchy that I don’t wish to have my own grandchildren.” She paused with her hands on her chest band. “I assume Naevia has been doing the same.” More correctly, she had assumed that her daughter had the sense to use a contraceptive. But if Vel wasn’t familiar with silphium …

“Yes, but she’s been using …” He tried to think of the correct plant. “… pennyroyal.” Vel watched his mother closely. Her face eased. His lie had done the trick. Why hadn’t his sister taken something? “Um … are you ready? We’ve got a busy day tomorrow. We should get started.”

“Right.” Cassia pulled the chest band off her chest and watched her son’s eyes fix on her boobs as they dropped, one after the other. “This will be the only time you take me … in that special place. It’s otherwise reserved for your father.”

“Yes, of course.” Vel removed his tunic and underwear. He leaned back, letting his cock reach up to the sky. An evening zephyr blew in from the sea and tickled his naked skin.

“I would say ‘don’t do it inside me’ … but you have to, don’t you?” She wiggled her underwear down her legs and stood before him, as naked as he was.

“Yes.” He stared at her dark triangle between her legs.

Cassia stared back at her reclining duke, heart now pounding in her ears. She felt flushed, woozy, and swallowed whole by anticipation. He was such a raw, virile specimen. She could just make out the crimson at the head of his cock. For the first time she wondered if she would have fallen for her son without the interference of his gift. She stepped over to him, her feet on either side of his legs. “Shall we get on with it, then?”

“Yes,” he whispered. Looking up from this angle, her breasts looked larger than before. His heart ached at the beauty of his mother. He watched her slowly bend down and kneel between his legs. He listened to her sharp intake of breath when she reached out and touched him.

“With your father, I would normally do my wifely work to get him ready. But …” She bit her lip. Why was she talking of Gallio at a time like this? The familiar, tantalizing heat traveled from his penis, down her fingers, and into her arm. She swallowed the silphium and relaxed.

“Do you need me to get you ready?” Vel regarded her as she slowly shook her head. Of course, she must be quite wet. He had come to expect that from his women. “So, then. Do you want to simply … put it

in?" Vel stopped breathing as she climbed up onto his stomach and reached under her. Her tits hung so low that her nipples brushed against his skin.

"Wait a moment." Vel folded his arms around her back.

"What?" Cassia froze, the head of her son's cock pressed against her slick lips. What had gone wrong now?

"Don't look so serious, Mother. It's just that you are so beautiful in the starlight, and I wanted to see you …" In one swift move, he lifted her, flipped their positions, and laid her back on the blanket. "… from a different angle." He gazed down at her breasts hanging to either side. He rested his cock with his balls on her pussy and the head well past her belly button. "This is how far it will go."

"Gods, Vel." She lifted her head and looked between her boobs to where that giant thing grazed the slight curve of her belly. The heat of him, his sudden assertiveness, and the sight of that monster combined to wipe away all her apprehensions. "If it hadn't already gone in the other way, I would never say you would fit. Put it in, Vel. Put it in, but go slowly. I …" Her mind wandered away when the head pushed between her lips and her body began the process of accepting him. She never did finish her thought. Instead, she spread her legs as wide as they went, and lifted them up to the night sky. Her animal grunting started when the head was fully in her vagina.

"How does it feel, Mother?" Vel knew his sister and Dellia were spying on them. He wasn't sure where they were, but at the very least they were listening. Cassia had insisted on hiking up to the fifth floor to be out of earshot of his sister and cousin on guard duty. But Vel knew there was no way Naevia would miss this. Not only was she not jealous, as she often reminded him, but his sister seemed to take pleasure in his pleasure. Or maybe she enjoyed viewing the pleasure he caused in others. If that was the case, he couldn't blame her. His mother was grunting, her brows knitted in concentration, her eyes fixed on the monstrosity stretching her out. It was a matchless sight. She was so consumed by the moment that she didn't answer him. He asked again. "How does it feel?"

"Every … ugh … time … you enter me … it is magic. You open my eyes … again … and again. This is a continuation … of that … but … ugh … better." Cassia's chest rose and fell as if she had undertaken some Herculean effort. Well, she had, hadn't she? Her son's cock was her Nemean Lion. Or, perhaps, more fittingly, her vagina was the lion, the impervious and pure creature that Hercules was about to destroy. Her hips spasmed and her toes curled in the air. "Push it all the way … in."

"I'm trying … it's tight." Vel wondered that this pussy had birthed four children. His father must have let it go fallow in the years since. "It's … almost … in."

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"Shh." Naevia held her finger to her cousin's mouth. They both stood perched in the shadows of the stairway, watching the sex unfold some twenty feet away. It had been a difficult task climbing the rickety stairs without making too much noise. But they were there now. Dellia had rebelled at guard

duty. Neither had wanted to miss this, and both cousins had agreed that it was unlikely that anyone had followed them. And even less likely that anyone would happen by the tower that night.

“Gods, she loves it. Listen to her.” Dellia pushed her side up next to her cousin, eager for some body contact. She was pleased when Naevia didn’t pull away. Maybe they could fool around a little even without the blue magic as a spur. “She sounds like she just discovered sex.”

“Do you remember the first time you took Vel in your pussy?” Naevia looked over at Dellia. It was dark in the shadows, but they were only inches apart. She could clearly see the smile on her cousin’s pretty face. “Was it not like discovering sex?”

“Yes, but your mother is a champ. She’s been taking him in her fucking ass, Naevia.” Dellia reached over and massaged her cousin’s full breast through her stola and chest band. She met no resistance.

“It’s different.” Naevia leaned back against the canted doorframe. So, it seemed based on the hand squeezing her tit that she and her cousin were a bit of a thing. The first couple times, it could be dismissed. But after a while, one had to acknowledge it. “I like the feel of your hands on me.”

“And I you.” Dellia pulled up her cousin’s stola and pulled down her underwear. She found her wet gash and went to work. Not long after, she felt Naevia’s trembling hand under her tunic. As Vel picked up the pace and pounded into his mother with long, heavy strokes, Dellia and Naevia worked each other’s pussies standing side by side, with legs slightly spread.

“Look how long he is.” Naevia couldn’t move her gaze away from the grunting couple out on the blanket. On each backstroke he moved an impossible distance from the duchess, and then closed the gap with a resounding smack of skin on skin. Her mother’s voice picked up in volume, keening like a lost demon. It was clear that the great Duchess Cassia Tullius was about to explode on her son’s cock. The thought was too much. With her free hand, Naevia put the skirt of her stola between her teeth and climaxed.

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As she accepted her vaginal punishment from the scion between her legs, Cassia tried to sort through what had happened so far. Her gentle Vel had dug into her, found a forbidden spot in her womb that she had no foreknowledge of, and then his hips had taken off at a gallop. A mighty lightning-string of orgasms followed for her. “Vel … Gods … ugh … just do it, Vel.” She looked up into his sweaty face with awe and reverence.

“Mother … I’m going to …” His grunting matched the rhythm of his hips, both slowed their cadence, but amplified in intensity. Vel watched his mother’s tits bounce violently as her round body absorbed each crash. He lifted his head, arched his back, and thrust a final time. He held his cock all the way inside as his balls emptied.

A while later, her womb laden with sperm, Cassia rode her son. She found that to get the full length of him in and out, it was best to plant her feet on either side of his hips and squat down on him over and over. Her thighs and calves burned with the effort, but the pain was overwhelmed by the joy of that

penis and the look of pure happiness on her son's face. His knees were bent behind her, so she reached back and placed her hands on his wiry thighs. Her breasts flopped on her chest with each lunge. She followed Vel's eyes from her boobs to her face and back again.

"Do you want me to … uh … uh … uh … cum again?" Vel held her hips gently, so as not to upset her rhythm. He had unloaded in her three times already, and was nearing a fourth.

"Yes," Cassia squeaked.

"I want to hear you say … ugh … ugh … say it, Mother." Vel wondered how strong a barrier silphium provided. He thought of all that seed smothering her once-fallow fields.

"I want you … to spray it … in my womb … again. I want … ugh … ugh … you to … make me yours." Clearly, she was babbling nonsense she'd later regret. But that was for a future Cassia to worry over. In the moment, she just wanted to soak up every bit of Vel. She screamed when she felt him release again. The thought that she'd ever felt hesitation about taking him in her vagina was incomprehensible.

Over an hour later, they lay on their sides spooning, Vel's tall form behind his mother. His hips moved languidly. He had pounded her enough that night. Now, their intimacy was a gentle, quiet thing. Vel looked to the east and could see a faint line of violet forming above the jagged walls of the tower. They had spent most of the night there.

"We need to finish, Vel. The cockerel will call soon. We'll be missed." Despite her words, she pushed her butt back against him in a steady motion. Their night had burst forth with a storm of energy and passion. The tempest had finally passed, and they were gently rocked by a calm sea. "Maybe just a few more minutes." She cupped her breasts and luxuriated in her body's instincts.

"If we go a little harder, I can fill you all the way up." Vel rested his face on her hair, relishing the faint scent of flowers.

"I am already full." She almost chuckled at the thought she could hold any more of his stuff. "But you have my leave for one more … ugh … final … ugh … time." She saw stars as his hand clamped on her hip and his hips went back to work in earnest.

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The sky was quite pale when Vel and Cassia stumbled out of the tower. They found Dellia and Naevia already mounted on their horses.

"Did it go well?" Naevia tried to keep a smirk off her face. She had seen most of what had happened and already knew things had gone very well indeed.

"I think Mother will have the magic soon." Vel reached out his hand and helped his mother onto her horse. He noticed that she made eye contact with no one. "How long do you think it will take to work?" He swung up on his own destrier and adjusted himself in the saddle. He was exhausted and longed for bed, but that day would not afford him rest. The wedding was so close now.

“Do you feel anything yet, Mother?” Naevia could hear Dellia snicker at the question as their horses turned and trotted toward the road.

“Not yet.” Cassia said it stiffly and sat rigidly in her saddle. It had been so much better than she had expected. Her mind was already scheming against her, trying to come up with scenarios to get Vel back inside her. She kicked at her horse. Her vagina flashed a protest to her, as they galloped onto the road. She would be very sore that day. Of that she was sure.

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“Oh, husband, what have they done to you?” Dellia entered the cell and closed the door behind her. The room was not meant as a prison, but she could see why they’d chosen it. Solid stone floor, walls, and ceiling. Only one way in and one way out. It might have been used for storage at one time, but now it was empty. The place smelled sour and damp. “I came as soon as I found you. When you didn’t return to our bed …”

“Dellia? You are still free?” Spurrius blinked up at her. The lamp she’d brought in was so very bright after all that time in the dark.

“They must not suspect me.”

“I fear they must have done something to the Lord Lars and Lady Norbana. I think they were paid informants of ours, but …” He took a breath. “What have you found?”

“They keep me in the dark.” Dellia didn’t move too close to Spurrius. She had washed her hands and face, but hadn’t yet had time for a bath. She wondered if the scent of her sex lingered about her. “I know only that the wedding proceeds as planned. Where you able to report anything before they captured you? What would you have me report now?”

“There is something … off, my dear Dellia.” Spurrius slowly pushed himself to his feet. He was chained to an iron ring in the wall, but the bond was loose enough for him to move about. “How many hours has it been since you missed me in our bed? Why did it take you so long to find me?”

“Well … I needed to locate the key to your door.”

“And how did you procure the key? You asked the seneschal nicely?” A rage built up inside Spurrius. He could see it on her face. His wife had betrayed him and the queens. “Of the two of us, you are brawn, and I am stealth. I do not expect you picked his pocket or cajoled him.”

Dellia sighed deeply. “I had wanted to keep you and my Tullius family in equal esteem. But it seems I must choose.”

“You choose them,” Spurrius spat.

“It is not so simple.” Dellia eyed him across the cell. Was she not a brave woman? Should she not make a clean cut? “I have taken both Vel and Naevia into my bed. And I had a roll with the Lady Norbana as well.” The muscles in her shoulders bunched. This was worse than pitched battle.

“I … I …” He saw red. He had heard the saying, but never thought it to be a literal phenomenon. But here he was, his vision as crimson as the cape of any royal guardsman. “You are the most cruel and wretched worm. May Pluto’s embrace find you this very minute, and may you drown in the sea of sorrow.”

“I take no pleasure in hurting you, Spurrius. You were a loyal husband. Or, at least loyal to me.”

“I will kill your duke, and his sister, and their bitch-whore of a mother. If the queens don’t get to them first, I will watch them scream and burn and char –” The slap across his face caught him quite by surprise. Dellia moved so fast, he’d hardly had time to understand the meaning of her approach.

“I will not let you or the queens harm any of the Tullius family.” Dellia withdrew to the door and opened it. “I will see that you are safely freed when the time comes. But if you seek to harm them, I will strike you down.” When he made no reply, she stepped out of the cell and closed the door behind her. Her whole body trembled as she climbed the stairs out of the cellar.

Chapter 18

“Good afternoon, Lady Norbana.” Vel closed and locked the door behind him.

Norbana sat up in bed so quickly that her boobs bounced into the open. She realized this and covered them with the blanket. Her cheeks darkened as she took in the northern barbarian with all his height. “Have you come to have your way with me again?” Her vagina gushed at the thought, but she kept her composure. She hoped she would not give in to this savage again.

“Maybe.” Vel removed his robes so that she could see the outline of his hardness under his tunic. “Let’s bargain. You will attend the wedding and tell anyone that asks that the Lord Lars has taken ill. You will inform your handlers that you were very thorough, but you have nothing to report on the duke and duchess.”

“And in exchange you’ll grant my freedom? And you’ll free my husband, too?” Norbana couldn’t take her eyes off the rise in the nineteen-year-old’s tunic. How had she taken such a thing?

“The opposite.” Vel smiled and pulled his tunic over his head. He lowered his underwear and gave his monstrosity its own freedom. He heard her gasp as his cock bounced in the open air. “In exchange, I will allow you to stay as long as you like and enjoy everything my castle has to offer.”

“I can’t … I can’t possibly …” Norbana pulled the covers up to her chin as Vel approached. “What about my husband? I can’t go to the wedding without him.”

“Let us see if I can coax you to change your tune.” Vel climbed into bed with the traitorous lady.

An hour later, Lady Norbana sang a new song. “Eeeeeeiiiiiiiiiiii, aaaaauuuuuuggggghhhhhhh.” Although there were no words to accompany the undignified melody, by her fifth orgasm Vel thought he had her convinced. He seeded her at his climax. As he dressed, the nearly catatonic woman promised that she would attend the wedding and tell people whatever he wanted her to say. In exchange, she wanted several more sessions with the young duke. Vel agreed.

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The queens regent arrived the morning of the wedding. They brought with them their consort, but not the Princess Minicia. There was some wonder among the guests that the princess would miss such a significant wedding. But it wasn’t unprecedented. Minicia hadn’t been out of the palace in some time.

The male servants did not return for the wedding, which caused a terrible scramble to fill their roles. Some of the citizens of Ostia Novus donated their staff for the day. Among the people, there were rumors about what the duke or duchess had done to drive their servants away. The gossip ranged from reduced salaries and unjust punishments, to more sordid stories. Some whispered about the duke disappearing with the women of his family for wicked congress, and the servants that caught them in the act.

These miseries were minor to Cassia and Vel. There was so much more to worry about. They prayed that the day would go as smoothly as possible. Their maxim was “just get through it without catastrophe.”

Just after the ceremony, which went off without a hitch, the crowd retired to the north lawn for refreshments. A murmur swept through the people. Heads turned toward the east. Hands pointed.

“Oh no, Vel.” Naevia reached out and clutched her brother’s hand. “We should have waited,” she whispered.

“What?” Vel looked to the east. Right where the broken tower had been, a massive spire of rock and azure light spiraled into the clouds. Occasionally, he could see tiny dark specs floating up to the top of the growing tower. Vel figured they had to be stones torn from the city’s wall and buildings around the site. Just like in Kart Hadasht. He blinked. “You’re right, Naevia.” He looked for his mother, but didn’t see her in the crowd.

“Friends, gather round the stage. We have an announcement.” Valeria and her sister stepped up onto a platform that had been erected for reception speeches. “Would the bride and groom care to join us?” She held her scepter away from her body in a regal fashion. The wind billowed her dress to the side. Her patinaed crown contrasted against the gray of the castle behind her. Cesphea was a mirror image, but for the scepter. The consort regent, Tiberius, climbed onto the stage and stood between the two queens. He whispered something in Valeria’s ear.

“Where is Mother?” Vel looked around at hundreds of people, but couldn’t find his duchess.

“You must leave now, Your Grace.” Norbana tugged at Vel’s formal robes from behind.

“Lady Norbana?” Vel turned to the woman. There was fear in her eyes. He looked back toward the front of the gathering, where his sister Bantia and her new husband, Lord Hostus Gala, moved between people toward the stage. Bantia looked radiant in her white, flowing dress. Lord Hostus’s smile spread from ear to ear. His ceremonial sword bounced with each step.

“They plan something dreadful for you.” Norbana pulled at Vel like she could get him to run away with her.

“Me?” Vel leaned down toward Norbana. “And what about my mother, and sisters, and cousin?” Norbana said nothing, but Vel could see her response plainly on her face. “Dreadful for them too, but you only mean to save me?”

“I see Mother.” Naevia pointed toward her sister’s tall form. “She’s there, with Bantia.” Cassia was talking to her eldest daughter, stretching up on her toes to get close to her ear. She was saying something urgent, but Bantia shook her head at her mother.

“We must go, now.” Norbana pulled on Vel again, but he shook her off. “I’m not going anywhere without my family.”

“I tried to save you.” Norbana leaned up, kissed Vel on the cheek, and raced away through the crowd.

Bantia and Hostus climbed the stairs onto the platform. Cassia stopped at the foot of the stage, holding her hands together.

“Do you get an unpleasant feeling, cousin?” Dellia stepped up next to Vel. She had her hand on the pommel of her sword.

“Norbana just warned me of something.” Vel nodded.

“If you look, a myriad of crimson capes abound.” Dellia’s voice had a hard edge to it.

“What an auspicious day.” Valeria’s voice carried out over the crowd. “The joining of two formidable, erstwhile houses of our great Surround.”

“Did she say, ‘erstwhile?’” Naevia frowned and pushed her shoulder against her brother’s arm.

“A wedding under the shadow of a miraculously resurrected tower is propitious in ways many of you would not even know.” Valeria beckoned Bantia over. The young woman stood head and shoulders above the queen, her smile as radiant as her dress. Hostus held her hand and stood by her side. Valeria continued, speaking over the rising wind, “I would have you all listen closely now. And when you leave here presently, hold tightly to my benediction. Lady Bantia?”

“Yes, Your Majesty.” Bantia curtsied and bowed her head before the queen. She felt the weight of the royal scepter on her forehead and her pulse quickened. This was to be a special blessing. She stayed bowed low with the bust of Salacia resting just under her circlet.

“We must all reap and sow under the watchful eyes of almighty Jupiter himself. You are deemed innocent in the eyes of the Crown.” Valeria’s face displayed no emotion. “Innocence, however, brings you no pardon for the misdeeds of your blood.”

Bantia turned her head slightly and exchanged a quizzical look with her husband. He had as little idea what was going on as his wife.

“The former duke Gallio Tullius tries to cow us with his blue magic. It is an unfortunate choice.” Valeria reached out and held the bride by her hair as she tried to pull away from the scepter. The queen forced Bantia to continue in her curtsey. “Unless your father slithers out of the shadows in twelve hours’ time, more will die. Come to us, Gallio, or be last in your line.”

Vel, Naevia, and Dellia moved quickly through the crowd toward the stage.

“What does she mean ‘more will die’?” Naevia had no sooner asked the question, than the meaning became plain.

Something exploded from the bust of Salacia on the scepter. A red mist sprayed behind Bantia’s head. The bride’s body quivered, and then went slack. Bantia was suspended in the air by a spike protruding from the back of her skull.

Hostus reached for his ceremonial sword, but Tiberius wrestled the young man’s arms to his sides.

“We’ll return you whole to your family, lad. No need for you to die.” Tiberius picked up the screaming, kicking man and carried away from the queens. “You’ll find a new wife soon enough, and you’ll appreciate the grace we show you today.” He passed Hostus to a group of waiting red capes and they whisked him away.

Back at the front of the stage, the spike recoiled back into the scepter, and Bantia tumbled to the wooden floor below.

A great cry rose up, led by Cassia's scream which echoed off the turrets and spires of her castle. A moment later, confusion reigned.

Dellia's sword was out like a flash. She spun her back to Vel to protect him from an assumed assassination. But there was only the churning sea of wedding guests around them. "Get your sword out, Your Grace."

Vel looked down at his ceremonial sword. It wasn't meant for fighting. The gears of his mind slowed to a standstill, a numbness spreading through him. He felt his sister's hand in his, gripping him like a vise.

"Do you have a weapon, Naevia?" Dellia could see the castle guard in their formal green uniforms, skirmishing with the red-caped royal guard on the outskirts of the lawn all around them. The outnumbered castle guard was valiantly trying to push through to their duke and duchess, but their success was limited. The ring of royal guards let the wedding guests exit, but Dellia doubted they would extend them the same courtesy. She, Vel, and Naevia had to move while there was still a mass of confusion. "Let's retrieve your mother and get out of here." She made no mention of Bantia. It was clear there was no saving her. "And draw your sword." She led them toward the stage, hoping to spot Cassia quickly.

"Do you see Mother?" Vel unsheathed his sword, trying hard not to accidentally skewer some panicked guest.

"You're the one with the high vantage point. All I see are people." Naevia stuck close to her brother.

As people cleared, Vel saw that there was a line of red capes ahead of them, too. "Dellia, wait."

Dellia spotted them as well. "We must cut through them, Cousin." She leapt forward and swung her blade up, catching the first man in the wrong defense, slicing his midsection right below his hidden lorica squamata armor. But two more royal guard were on her in a moment. She parried, gave ground, and counterattacked. But she couldn't make it through.

Not one to leave his cousin on her own, Vel charged. On his first stroke, his sword shattered when met with a guardsman's blade. Left with two-thirds of a sword, he retreated a little. But the man followed him, taking ruthless cuts at the duke. Vel dodged and spun. He was now more than a dozen feet from Dellia and his sister.

"Watch out, Dellia!" Naevia could see two more guardsman rushing toward her cousin. And now, another guardsman turned and headed for her. The crowd thinned around them. She couldn't see her mother or the queens. Oh, how she longed for her bow. She darted to the right, rolled on the lawn, sprang up, and darted back to her left. She was quicker than her pursuer. She zig-zagged again, her dress catching at her feet as she ran. She made her way toward Dellia, who was now hopelessly outnumbered.

"Stay … away … Cousin." Dellia said between sword strokes. Naevia would surely be murdered if she came any closer. But her foolish cousin continued her winding path toward her. Dellia glanced about and saw that Vel was some twenty feet away. She swung into a parry and rolled between one of her

assailant's spread legs. She rose on the other side of him and knocked him over with the pommel of her sword.

Pushed farther and farther back, Vel tried to think how he could turn the tide on his opponent. His studies hadn't included counterattacks with a broken blade.

A fifth royal guardsman moved toward Dellia's rear. Naevia could see him plain as day, but she didn't think her cousin had. The guardsman's sword glittered in the afternoon light. Naevia sidestepped her pursuer again and screamed, "Behind you." But Dellia wasn't going to be able to defend herself engaged as she was. Naevia was so close now. She sprinted across the grass in a race with the fifth man to see who could get to Dellia first. An azure glow spread around her fingers and then blazed up her arms. She reached out and took hold of Dellia's arm a split second before the sword could slash Dellia's back. And just like that, she and her cousin were falling through the familiar darkness. She didn't know where the magic would take them. She had simply wished them away from that horrid lawn.

"Naevia!" Vel watched his sister and cousin vanish. Distracted, he did not feel the man approach from behind. He took the broadside of a sword across his shoulders, staggered, and then tried to parry a strike from the front. His broken sword flew from his hands. The man in front of him swiped Vel's leg with the broad of his sword, knocking him to the ground. The green of the lawn was so vibrant up close, and the fresh smell of it overpowered his nose. He took a deep breath. Something crashed into the side of his head. Blackness descended upon him.

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Had he ever been so miserable in all his life? Vel's eyes slowly opened. His head throbbed and protested at his decision to look around him. He was in his own bedchamber. It was dark. Moonlight filtered through his windows. There was also a pinkish glow bouncing around him that he couldn't place. His windows now had bars on them. He blinked. How had they brought in a metalworker so quickly? How long had he been languishing in blackness?

"It is unfortunate what happened to your sister. She was a beautiful bride." The pink glow receded from Valeria's hands. "Your father is a selfish man."

"I'll kill you!" Vel tried to sit up, but a wave of nausea hit him, and his head fell back to the pillow. Pain shot down his spine. One of the queens sat in the room with him. They had killed his sister. He vowed to himself to make it an equal exchange.

"I thought you were the gentle one." A smile creased Valeria's pale face. "I've healed your wounds some, but don't move too much. You took a vicious blow."

"I … will … kill … you," Vel hissed.

"What a charming refrain." Valeria sighed. "Your father is the one responsible for Lady Bantia's end. We had planned to take prisoners. But when that tower rose, Cesphea and I knew we needed to take a firmer hand with the Tullius traitor. We expect he'll come for you."

“My mother? My sister?” His head throbbed.

“You misapprehend our relationship, Vel. I am here to ask you questions. Not the other way around.” She rose to her feet and gently padded over next to his bed. “What do you know of your father’s plans? Is he in league with a goddess? If so, which one? When were you last in contact with him? You may answer in any order you like.”

“Which one are you? Valeria or Cesphea?” If she was going to kill him, he wished she’d get it over with and end the misery that moved from his soul to his body and back again.

“Will you answer my questions, Vel?”

“Will you fucking take a nosedive off the top of the east tower?” Vel looked away from the pretty woman. He had never seen a more grotesque sight.

“Then we are at an impasse.” Valeria sighed again. She so hated this kind of work, but it was necessary. “Your father has two hours left to show himself before we take the next member of your family. If you tell me something useful, I might grant another twelve-hour reprieve. I should tell you that your sister, Naevia, is next for the gallows.”

“You killed Fortinbras and Bantia. You mean to kill us all. You can rot with Pluto.”

“Pluto does not rot, young man.” Valeria smiled. “And as far as I know, your brother walks the Earth still. All I ask is an exchange. Your father for the rest of your family. It’s a fair trade.”

Vel shut his mouth tight and refused to look the queen regent in the eye.

“Very well, you have two hours to save your remaining sister. Someone will come by before your Lady Naevia hangs, in case you change your mind.” Valeria swept toward the door. It opened for her of its own accord and shut when she was gone.

Vel stared miserably at the wall.

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The pillow beneath Vel’s cheek was soaked with tears and sweat when he heard the sound of stone grinding on stone. A warm, yellow light filled the room, and then faded again. He sat up. Pain lanced down his spine. He quickly reclined again. “Hello?” How long had it been since the queen had visited? Was it two hours? Was Naevia’s time up? What would he say when they offered him one chance to save her? He saw no one at the door.

“It’s me, my sparrow.” Cassia’s soft voice was muted by her grief.

“Mother? I can’t move from the bed. Where are you?” Vel tried to look to the far side of the room, but bright searing pain dissuaded him.

“Why can’t you move?” Cassia quickly approached the bed and inspected her son. He looked whole, but cold sweat ran down his forehead. She used his sheet to wipe his brow. “What have they done to you?”

“The queen said she healed my injuries.”

“Do you have a fever?” Cassia put her hand on his forehead, with her thumb gently resting on his eyelid. She expected that familiar, beguiling heat to run up her fingers, but it wasn’t there. “You’re freezing.” Things were worse than she’d thought. “Try and sit up.” Her son gritted his teeth and grunted when she lifted his head. She put him back on the pillow, her eyes darting to the door. How long did they have?

“Did you use your magic to get in here?” Vel stared up at her beauty. Half her face glowed in silver moonlight. The other half hid in shadows.

“No. Our attempt to fill me with magic didn’t work. Or, it’s yet too early. Or, I don’t know how to use it.” Cassia sat on the edge of the bed wondering what to do. She wasn’t about to leave Vel there. “They locked me in my room, sealing my windows with some sort of enchantment. I wished and wished to escape, and tried to call up what mysterious energies I might have, but I was just a woman locked in her room. Then I set about finding your father’s hidden passages. It took me several hours to solve the puzzle, but I know how he thinks, and I’ve always been good at riddles. I traveled here by secret stairs, and I mean us to leave by the same.” She watched his chest slowly rise and fall, and tried very hard not to think of Bantia. She was grateful that Vel hadn’t brought up that soul-wrenching moment. Her heart burned in her chest, rent by a mother’s sorrow. “Let’s focus on getting you out of here. I am not going to lose you and Naevia. Even if I have to spit in every god’s eye, I will not lose you, too.”

“Naevia!” Vel tried to sit up, groaned, and went prone again. “They plan to execute her any minute now.”

“What they plan and what happens may be two very different things.” The faintest flicker of a sad smile passed over her face. “Both your sister and cousin disappeared from the north lawn and have not been seen since. I was slipped information by one still loyal to us. And the queens do not yet have your father.”

Vel sighed with relief. “They expect Father to attempt a rescue so they can catch him in the act. But he will not risk it.”

“No, he will not,” Cassia agreed. “Now, we must get you out of here while we still can. Come.” She tried to lift him, but he was so large and heavy. She could hear the pain in his shallow breaths. Desperation crept into her heart, a neighbor to her sorrow. She would not lose him, too. He needed to heal. “Come on, Vel.” To her amazement, an azure glow filled the chamber. It emanated from her hands and fingers. She touched his chest and the light spread through him. “Heal, please, heal,” she whispered. A bright flash and the light disappeared. Cassia’s stomach did somersaults.

Vel’s breaths became deeper. He clenched and unclenched his fists. “I … I feel better.” Vel lifted himself up onto his elbows and then swung his legs off the edge of the bed. He sat next to his mother and put an arm around her slender shoulders. “You fixed me. You have the magic, thank the gods. Now wish us out of here.”

“Okay.” Cassia closed her eyes and tried to summon the same forces. She wished for them to be far away, outside the city walls. When she opened her eyes, she still sat in her son’s chamber with his arm around her. “Can you walk? We must go by the secret stairs.”

“I think so.” Vel stood. His body felt quite well. It was now only his soul that suffered from the torment of what the queens had done. He followed her to a wall and watched her bend down. The sound of grinding stone filled the room again. A line of warm, yellow light grew wider and wider until a door stood before them with a flickering oil lamp on the floor just beyond the doorway.

“This is it. I think there may be a tunnel at the bottom that will take us away from the castle. But we’ll have to find it.” Cassia picked up the lamp and ushered her son into a narrow stairway. Her brain was a thorny tangle of emotions now. The more she tried to stuff down her sorrow and fear, the more tightly they seized her. To make matters worse, the magic seemed to have awakened her baser instincts. Her body was responding to Vel’s presence. She hit the switch for the door and led Vel by the hand down the stairs. The enchanting heat of her son’s touch trailed into her body and burrowed to her core. Her mind grew all the more confused. How many more steps before the snarl of emotions overwhelmed her? “Vel?” They continued to descend.

“Yes, Mother?” He watched the back of her shoulders tremble, outlined as they were by the lamp she held. He knew she was crying and understood her pain well.

“Let’s stop for a moment. I … I …” She turned to him. He was taller than usual standing on the stair above her. She stepped around him so that she stood on the stair above him, only slightly looking up into his face. “I need you to hold me a moment. Just hold me.” She put the lamp down behind her and held out her arms.

“Of course, Mother.” Vel bent a little at the waist and hugged her around the shoulders. He was glad she had healed him, for the force of her embrace was strong enough to have crippled a weaker man. They stood in each other’s arms without saying anything. Vel felt her body rack with quiet sobs. He could sense she needed more comfort from him, so he lifted her into his arms until they were face to face. He kissed away the tears on her round cheeks.

“Vel … Vel …” Cassia’s breath evened out. “I need to feel you.” She could feel his hardness press up against her. “Let me forget … if only for a moment … the pain of this day.” She reached under him and worked at his robes, tunic, and underwear until his leviathan was free. “I want your strength.” She pulled her stola out of the way and moved her underwear to the side. “I want your life inside me … I … aaaahhhhhhhhh.” Cassia slowly impaled her vagina on him. She wrapped her legs around his hips. “Plow under my fields and sow … ugh … something beautiful. New life … so that … I … ugh … do not have to think … of … our plight.” She held him tightly by the shoulders and moved her hips in a steady rhythm. The heat of him was now a vortex at the center of her.

Vel grunted in response, but didn’t know what else to say. She wanted him inside her pussy. And she wanted his cum. If this helped her with her grief, so be it. And … her tight pussy and the pressing curves of her body chased some of the torment from his soul. His hands moved down to her ass cheeks. He supported her in the air as she humped him. He could tell from her squeals that she was already cumming. He hoped that the walls of their secret passage were thick.

After her third orgasm, Cassia’s mind lost track of all but a single focus. To coax new life out of their joining. Her feet flopped in the air, sandals brushing against either wall. “Please … Vel … fill me … sow me … fill me …” She could tell by his grunting that he was close. “Uuuuggggghhhhhh.” She threw her head back as he emptied himself inside her. Just as the last of their quivering thrusts subsided, the lamp

blew out. They were cast into darkness. She didn't care. Blissfully, she didn't care about anything but his cock twitching inside her. She hugged him tight, still suspended in air, but no longer moving.

When Vel had recovered some, he took hold of her hips and slowly slid her off his cock. He gently placed her on her feet and put his clothes back in order. The darkness was complete, so he reached out and found her hand. "We should go now, Mother."

"Yes. Of course." Her grief crept back in little waves, but she found it to be a burden she could bear. "I have nothing with which to relight the lamp."

"Well, then we will find our way in the dark." Vel grasped her hand tightly and traced the wall with his other hand. They descended.

The stairs ended and Vel almost walked right into a stone wall. "Are we at the bottom already?"

"It doesn't seem far enough. But it's hard to tell." Cassia felt the familiar heat of him move up her arm from their clasping hands.

"There is a wall here. Hold on." With his free hand, Vel felt around for some way through. His finger depressed a small button. The wall spun. He blinked at the bright light beyond. Through the gap he had created there was a long room. A small man in a strange suit of clothes sat reading in an armchair. He looked up and smiled at Vel and Cassia. Behind him, on the wall, was a tall, ticking device. Its mechanisms were open to the world and truly horrific. The gears were made of broken bone and gristly sinew. A pendulum hung from ropes of intestine. And the pendulum's bob was a human heart that beat with each swing. Blood spurted from the thing every time it pulsed, pooling at the base of the machine.

The man's smile faded as he took in their faces. He turned to look where their gaze fell, then turned back to the new arrivals. "Oh, that." He shook his head. "Not our doing, I assure you. But when life gives you lemons …" He shrugged.

"Where are we?" Cassia stepped through the doorway with her son and looked around the room. Was it a library? The walls were covered in shelves, and the shelves were covered in books and other miscellany.

"Good question. You are a sharp woman," the man said. "I've always liked that about you. You are … you are in my home."

"But this is our castle." Vel finally pulled his gaze away from the dreadful mechanism, tick-tocking away. There were worse horrors in the room. In a far corner near the fireplace, stood a woman who didn't seem fixed. She was dark as a starless night but also white as northern snow. She was a small, decrepit thing. At the same time, she stooped as her head pushed up against the high ceiling. Her face was ugly, and beautiful, and animal, and woman. It hurt Vel's mind to regard her.

"You're in my home." The man looked around the expansive room. The coved ceiling was painted like the nighttime sky. "And you can see that you're not the first guests to arrive tonight. I wouldn't look at her too long, lad. Pure chaos is tough to take in."

"That is Discordia." Cassia looked away from the abomination in the corner. She reached up and turned her son's face away as well. There was another woman that she had somehow first missed, sitting in a

chair opposite the man. She had one face, but also three. The woman was difficult to look at, but not like the woman in the corner. Azure light faintly glowed on her skin. “Who are you?”

“I am from a pantheon unfamiliar to you.” The man nodded at the woman next to him. “This is my friend Hekate, and you are correct about Discordia. I’m afraid she can’t talk. The poor goddess is a bit damaged by recent events.”

“We are dead. This man is Pluto.” Vel felt strangely calm.

“Wrong pantheon, Vel. I am your friend. I’ve helped you already and wish to continue.” The man winked. “Come sit.” He motioned to two vacant armchairs by a roaring fire. “We have much to discuss.”

Chapter 19

“Who are you, exactly?” Vel walked over to one of the armchairs and sat by the roaring fire. He did his best to avoid gazing at the mercurial abomination that was Discordia. Hekate was beautiful, but the way she triplicated over and over wasn’t much easier to look at. He turned his attention to the small, strangely dressed man. “What pantheon are you from?”

“I’m from a pantheon in a world that diverged from yours. There, a single god tries to rule all. But he is beset by anger, hypocrisies, and vanity. I am the brightest of angels. The Day Star, kindler of freedom.” Day Star smiled.

“What is an *angel*, then?” Cassia carefully walked over and stood next to Vel, placing her hand on his shoulder. She dared not sit for fear that she’d leave a puddle of sperm on this deity’s chair. It was bad enough that she could feel it slowly sliding down the inside of her legs.

“An angel is a servant. A kind of … valet. To carry out orders, but not to question. Never to question.” Day Star looked off into the fire deep in thought.

“You sound bitter.” Vel got a sense of Day Star. He’d known others with grandiose opinions but without the station to actualize them.

Day Star laughed. “Well, I have an axe to grind. That is true.” He looked back over at Cassia with a glance of innocent appraisal. “But you should be grateful for that. I know why your mother stands now. I know it is springtime where she cradles the future.”

“What is he talking about?” Vel looked up at his mother.

Cassia’s grip tightened on her son’s shoulder. This creature was telling her that she would have her own son’s child. And that this Day Star was responsible. Her heart went from anger, to gratitude, and then back to grief. She said nothing.

“Enough small talk.” Hekate’s voice sounded like three women singing in harmony.

“I hardly think the duchess’s pregnancy is of small interest to any of us here.” Day Star frowned and leaned back in his chair. “It is a sign of hope and harvest. And, of course, a disregard for the arbitrary rules of love set on high by –”

“That is enough of your pithy chatter, little valet.” Hekate rose from her chair. She was short for a goddess, but beyond even northern standards of height. She stood at nearly nine feet, and her stola flowed down to the ground like water rushing over river rocks. “You don’t need to know everything, but some things you must see.” The goddess waived her hand and azure light filled the room. An image of a man on a throne formed out of the flames in the fire. “There was a man not long ago, the last ruler of the old empire. He accidentally discovered a channel of communication with the gods.” Her trio of voices filled their ears with heartbreak.

“He was a clever man and asked for no boon. Instead, he sought to deceive.” Hekate waved her hand again, and the mercurial goddess Discordia rose up in the flames, ever changing to a new form. “He sought to wrest magic away from the people, and cement his power for eons. He tricked Discordia,

playing on her desire to overcome Pax. He helped her defeat the god of order and peace, and sent his ruined form far to the south. But unchecked, entropy and chaos are their own worst enemies. Discordia became ever more unstable, and this emperor tricked her into entrusting him with her power. Magic waned and a great war crashed upon the shores of the Surround. The northerners joined the rebels and the old empire fell." The fire blazed with the clash of steel and the screams of men falling on the battlefield. "Do you follow me, mortals?"

"The old emperor was responsible for the great drain of magic." Vel looked up at Hekate. She was one goddess, but his eyes could see flashes of three beauties overlapping each other. She was mesmerizing, but also discomfiting.

"When the new king entered Accipiter Cubitum Palace, he inherited Discordia and Pax's shrunken and divorced power," Hekate walked over to Discordia in the corner, but did not touch her. She looked with great pity at the goddess, who was many things and none at the same time. "I am the keeper of magic from times before Discordia and Pax made their truce. I found it was my time to step back into the role. I appeared to the new king and offered to return magic to the people. He declined and had his sorcerer build a tower to contain what he thought of as *his* magic. The tower was a ruin before it begun, but still he persisted. By accident, his failure crushed his niece to death. Her body happened to rest near the source and she was born as two, containing some of Discordia's power and some from Pax."

"So, the queens regent is actually the queen regent?" Cassia could see the pieces falling now. The queens had obviously killed their uncle and others to position themselves for power. It was a wonder they hadn't killed their brother or the princess.

"They are two, and they are one. But different than I am three and I am one." Hekate walked back to the fire and flames coalesced into a rising tower. "They seek to channel their power and complete their uncle's tower. The old sorcerer left plans that were almost correct. They figured out the rest."

"So, they finish the tower and become all powerful?" Vel rose from his seat. It was strange to stand and still look up at a woman. A goddess, he corrected himself. "And you've used this little guy." He nodded at Day Star. "To aid in reestablishing your magic through me. Why use Brynhild? She lies and prizes her own power above others."

"Do you question a goddess?" Hekate's one face turned to three, and they all smiled broadly. "Only those that possess some magic can see me. And I needed one as reckless as she. You are mostly right about the rest. Would you like to question my methods further?"

"No." Vel shook his head and looked to the floor. "So, we must destroy the tower before they become all powerful," he repeated.

"They are out of balance. I fear it may be worse than that. From that new, wicked tower a chaos may spread beyond my ability to check." Hekate waved her hand and the fire sputtered out, hissing. Smoke filled the room.

"And what of the other gods? Cannot Jupiter step on the queens regent?" Cassia had a strange feeling about the way the goddess glanced at her son. Hekate was sizing Vel up for something, and Cassia wondered if it would be a suicide mission. How could she wedge herself between one so powerful and her only remaining son?

“We don’t often notice mortals. Our worlds are attenuated. I am here only because magic has been so affronted.” Hekate’s sweet melody of voices danced around the long room. Smoke lingered around her head, giving her an ominous aura.

“Well, that is the how we came to be here. What is the why?” Cassia neck hurt from looking up at the goddess. She was ready to have the deity’s demand out in the open so she could refuse it. She would lose no more family to the queens regent and their mad tower.

“But you must know. The young duke has already said as much. You must destroy the tower.” Hekate almost looked cross with Cassia, her trio of voices harmonized at a higher pitch.

Cassia snorted a laugh. “You would have the Tullius family dashed to the rocks like a helpless wreck. We are not your pawns.”

“It’s okay, Mother. We must.” Vel put a calming hand on her bare arm.

The heat of Vel’s touch diverted Cassia’s alarm. “So, are we to sneak into the palace and frolic in the viper’s lair?” Cassia would not normally have spoken thus to an ancient immortal, but her patience with life’s tragedies had run out.

“You will have help.” Hekate, moved over to Vel, reached down, and extended a glowing arm around his shoulders. “Come with me, mortal. We are needed under the dryads’ forbearing gaze.” She guided the duke toward a bookcase to their right. A door in the shelves opened. The warm radiance of a sunny afternoon fell into the room.

“Wait, what are you doing to him? Stop.” Cassia moved toward Vel, but the faster she moved, the more she seemed to fix to the same spot.

“It’s okay, Mother.” Vel looked back at her and smiled. “Anyway, it’s not like we have much of a choice.” He stepped through the door and the shelves closed behind him.

Cassia put her hand to her belly. Would the life growing there be the last of Vel?

“Oh, don’t worry. He’ll have the time of his life. It’s not many that get to tumble with a god.” Day Star stood from his chair. He was quite short, only about Cassia’s height, if that. “Now, let’s get this fire restarted. We have guests arriving soon.” He bent down on the hearth and fiddled with some kindling.

“Guests?” Cassia tried very hard not to look at Discordia’s abhorrence. She prayed that there would be no more gods in attendance.

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“Do you think they’re all dead?” Naevia walked out of the cave. The crashing ocean waves were so much louder out on the beach away from their temporary shelter. Once Naevia had saved them at the wedding, they had dropped right into the sandy grotto, a place Vel and Naevia had spent many days in their youth, up the coast from Ostia Novus. It was the safest place Naevia could think of.

“They would have used arrows if they meant to slaughter us all. If they didn’t escape like we did, your brother and mother are hostages. Torture at the worst. For now.” Dellia pulled her tunic down tightly under her belt. They had spent the last few hours naked in their cave, a side effect of using their magic. The diversion had helped both women, and there wasn’t anywhere to go urgently, anyway. They didn’t know which houses they could trust, and mounting a rescue seemed quite foolish.

“You are a cold comfort.” Naevia shivered as the wind howled past her. “We should find my father. He can help us.”

“Great news, Cousin. Where do we find him?” Dellia hunched her shoulders into the wind. She scanned the beach ahead and the rolling dunes to their left. Would the red capes send search parties this far out? She didn’t think so, but what did she know?

“I’m not sure.” Naevia struggled to keep up with her cousin. “We were to signal my father from the east tower if trouble found us. But, obviously, that is impossible. He’s probably not in the city anymore. Knowing him, he’s hiding in the wilds. He knows of places to disappear, but he never confided in me or Vel.”

“What’s this?” Dellia stopped and looked into a small declivity. “There appears to be an open door down there. Did we find one of your father’s sanctuaries so easily?”

“Don’t be foolish.” Naevia caught up to her cousin and stood next to her, looking down. There was a rectangle of a door with unmistakable firelight flickering inside. “But you have found something interesting.”

“Shall we see who is camping out under the beach? Maybe we learn something useful.” Dellia, her question redundant, drew her sword. She scampered down into the small gully.

“Wait, what?” Thoughts of robbers or pirates filled Naevia’s head. But of course, Dellia must have had the same thoughts as she moved toward the door. “Wait, I don’t have a weapon.” She stumbled after Dellia on the loose, sandy decline.

“With any luck, we’ll find you a weapon inside.” Dellia arrived at the door, peered in, and slipped inside. Naevia was right behind her.

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“You may sit now, Duchess.” Day Star set the poker on the hearth and moved away. The fire roared once again. He looked over at Cassia, saw she didn’t move, and gave her an enigmatic smile. “Don’t worry about it, I’ll fix the problem.” He snapped his fingers. “There now, dry as a bone. You may sit.”

Cassia rubbed her legs together. He was right, the insides of her thighs were no longer sticky and wet. She said nothing, but sat stiffly in an armchair. Her mind wanted to turn her gaze toward Discordia in the corner, but she kept her sight away from the goddess who was all things and nothing at the same time.

“Can I offer you something to drink?” Day Star moved over to the wall and opened the bookcase next to the fireplace. Mist drifted out of the exposed closet. “My world has much that you do not have. Magic is limited, but creativity overflows. You must be parched. I have Coke, Sprite, Pepsi …”

“No, thank you.” Cassia eyed the shiny, colorful cylinders inside the foggy closet with mistrust. “I am not thirsty.” She was parched.

“Very well.” Day Star closed the door and the bookcase was a bookcase again. He found his armchair, sat, and crossed his legs. “So, how are you going to tell your husband about you and Vel?”

“I beg your pardon?” She was being toyed with by this *angel*. She detested his sort already.

“I thought we should have a game plan. And we need to pass the time while … oh, never mind. The first guest is arriving now.” He pointed to the far wall where Cassia and Vel had entered the room.

Cassia turned and looked, not knowing what she expected to see. Her husband came into view, eyeing the room suspiciously. “Oh, Gallio. You’re safe.” She clapped her hands and stood, a smile threatening to crease her face.

“And you are here. But I’m not so sure about safe?” His eyes focused on the small man in strange clothes sitting by his wife. “Who are you?”

“The wedding, I –” Cassia was cut off by Day Star.

“Let’s cut to it. I am a god of sorts, and all are protected while in my home.” Day Star waved his hand inclusively at the room. “Your wife has something to tell you.”

“Oh, Gallio. Bantia is dead.” Tears burst from Cassia as she let her mind wander back over the last day.

“Oh, brother.” Day Star slapped his palm to his forehead. Over the next twenty minutes, he let the two share about their various adventures, although it seemed Gallio did not share as much as his wife. Which was, of course, quite funny given what *she* was keeping from *him*. Day Star also noted that Gallio neither looked at the Goddess of Chaos, nor mentioned her. The small man was quite self-controlled. Husband and wife stood by the fire, several steps apart, and talked. Eventually, Day Star cut in. “This is all well and good, but let’s get all our cards on the table before your precious world implodes.”

“Cards?” Gallio’s eyes narrowed.

“Yes, the things you’re both not saying.” Day Star nodded. “You, past and future duke of Ostia Novus, had an affair with your resident sorceress.”

“He what?” Cassia’s hand went to her mouth.

“I … I …” Gallio stuttered.

“They fornicated all over your castle. It must have been quite the sight. She, a giant from the North. He, a lilliputian man from the Surround.” Day Star steepled his hands with satisfactions at their reactions. How soon they would trade places. “He was so enamored of Brynhild, that he committed himself to freeing the good Princess Minicia at her behest. He was, unsurprisingly, caught. He escaped the palace and fled. That’s where your husband’s been. A man who lost himself in northern pussy.”

“The sorceress bewitched me.” Gallio rarely pleaded, but this was the prime moment. He turned to Cassia. “I was bewitched.”

Cassia stared at her husband, her hand still on her mouth.

“Mmmmmmm …” Day Star held his hand out and rocked it back and forth like the proposition was iffy. “You wouldn’t be the first man to fall under the spell of a woman’s sexual power. You’re a bit too strong-willed for her magic to influence your mind.”

“How could you?” Cassia took a step back. “Why are you telling me this, *angel*?”

“There was once in my world a man responsible for raiding a new country. He worried that his party might rather return home than perform the arduous task of murdering and conquering a continent. So, he burned his own ships. People are more apt to focus on the task ahead, when there is no going back.”

“What task do you ask of me?” Gallio frowned, his attention now on the crackling logs in the fire. “You will find I have no inclination for whatever you plan.”

“Oh, I think you will be quite inclined.” Day Star followed Gallio’s gaze into the fire and nodded thoughtfully. “You’re to return to your seat as duke of Ostia Novus. Although, I must confess, this is not my plan. I’m just here for my amusement.”

“Her plan?” Gallio nodded his head in the direction of Discordia.

“A different goddess pulls the strings now.” Day Star glanced at Discordia and then over to Cassia. “But we haven’t burned all our ships yet, have we?”

“No. Don’t.” Cassia shook her head and took another step back from her husband.

“But the former and future duke isn’t the only one to break the vows you two made under Neptune.” A playful smile spread on Day Star’s face. This moment alone was worth the trip. “Can you guess who’s seed grows inside your wife?”

Gallio drew his sword and raised it above his head. He wasn’t sure who to strike first, the faithless bitch or this infernal, gossiping creature. He felt the steel wriggle in his hands. He looked up to see he held a viper instead of his blade. He dropped it to the floor. It hissed and slithered away. He then made a move to throttle Day Star, but the faster he lunged at the man, the farther away he seemed to be. He jumped, ran, and screamed. But only ended up a few feet farther than where he’d started. He eventually stopped, hunched over, huffing and puffing.

Cassia stood stock-still through it all, horror filling her eyes. “Stop, please.”

“You’ll thank me for this one day.” Day Star cleared his throat. “Your wife has fallen for your least favorite child, Gallio. She has given herself to Vel.”

If he was surprised by the revelation, Gallio didn’t show it. He straightened and addressed his wife. “I can see now what this *angel* means by returning to my seat. I am to vanquish my own son and claim what he has stolen.”

“No,” Cassia squeaked.

“No, indeed,” Day Star agreed. “You’ll be filling a vacancy, of sorts. Vel cannot sit on two seats at once, you see. Oh, and we have more guests arriving. How delightful.” Day Star turned his attention to the far side of the room.

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The goddess led Vel by the hand down a forest path. The sun shone gold and green through the canopy above. Bird song echoed from the trees. More than that, a gentle melody wove itself into the fabric of the birch, ash, and oak around them. “What is that song?”

“Birds.” Hekate laughed. Her azure light sparkled with the chime of her giggle.

“The other one, I mean.” Vel’s mind swam through slow waters. The forest was more dream than reality.

“That is the song of the dryads. They eagerly anticipate this moment. It is not often a mortal walks this wood.” Hekate stopped by a small stream. “Now remove your things and let’s see what that strange *angel* made of you.” Right on the edge of the water rested a frame woven of living saplings and a mattress of velvet moss.

“You want me to take off my clothes?” Vel looked up at Hekate in disbelief. He watched as six arms that were really only two lifted off her stola and bared to him a full, womanly form. Her curves waxed and waned in the most inviting way. He hurriedly removed his clothes and hung them on a nearby branch.

“Oh, my. The *angel* fulfilled his promise. You are quite lovely.” Hekate’s trio of voices rose in delight. She moved over to the bed and sat on the moss. “I have never lain with a mortal before.”

“Me either.” Vel’s cock stiffened until he thought it might burst. Her beauty hurt his eyes. He could see her pale, bluish breasts brushing her thighs as she leaned toward him. “I mean … um … I never … with a goddess. Well … really only with a handful of women … but … um …”

“First, drink your fill. We must sustain you through the troubles that lie ahead.” She reached down and lifted her right breast, which briefly tripled, and then returned back to one. “Lay here and be satisfied.”

“Yes … okay.” Vel hurried over to the bed, sat next to her, and leaned his head into her lap. The breast she offered him was truly massive. But that, he realized, was because all of her was much larger than any woman on Earth. He opened his mouth, and his lips found her nipple. A gush of hot, sweet milk hit his tongue. He gulped it down. His mind left him for a while.

“There now, little one. I can feel your strength gaining. My milk will bind you to this wood, should you ever need to return.” Satisfied that he was drinking, Hekate released her breast and reached down for his cock. She played with it gently, careful not to overtax his delicate mortal body. The dryads and the birds sang all around them. The stream gurgled merrily. They spent a long time like that until she observed his bucking hips with a smile. His orgasm exploded all over her arm and his stomach. She laughed again in delight, her three voices harmonizing with the sounds of the forest. “So much, little

one. We should keep you a secret from Jupiter. He would grow green with envy." She had no fear that the nineteen-year-old mortal was done. She continued to play with his hardness as he drank and drank.

Eventually, Vel felt the breast pull away. He blinked up at the smiling deity. "Thank you," he whispered. When she laughed at this, there was no malice in it.

"I have given to you. Now to complete the circle, you must give to me." She pushed him until he was off her lap. She fell back onto the moss and spread her legs. When he didn't move, she nudged him with her foot. "It may feel like it we have forever, but we have less than an eternity here. Our enemies move and the tower rises. Now, come to me." Her enormous breasts, six one moment and two the next, wobbled on her chest as she held her arms out to him.

"Right." Vel thought to himself, when a goddess opens her legs for you, however many they appear to be, you don't let her ask twice. Vel caught a glimpse of her vagina below a dark triangle of hair. She looked human enough as far as he could tell. He moved between her legs. He felt her reach down, take hold of him, and guide his penis inside her. Vel stopped breathing at her tightness. As he slowly pushed in, it felt that she gripped him with three pussies at the same time. "That … ugh … feels good."

"Of course, it does. How did you expect a goddess to feel on the inside?" she purred. Three hands pushed at his back, and three pulled his ass toward her. "There now. Time to join."

Vel's hips accelerated quickly. Their bodies smacked together with violent delight. Little blue sparks shot from their contact and zig-zagged through the forest. Vel looked down at the beautiful creature gritting her teeth, her dark eyes staring up at him. He was fucking an immortal, and from her expression, she loved it. He couldn't wait to tell his sister about it. Naevia was going to cum just listening to the story. His cousin, on the other hand, would no doubt pout with jealousy. That would be fun, too. He had no idea what he would tell his mother, however. He didn't know if she would be jealous, or simply grateful that this goddess hadn't eaten him for lunch.

"Come back to me now, little one. Think less about distant things and more about us." Hekate moved her hands to his hips and urged him on with the grip of her fingers. "Let the dryads see you … yes … yes …" She could feel his muscles tense. "For you … ugh … the time to reap and sow … is one." She lifted her feet into the air. "Good … now … fill me … aaaaahhhhhhhhhh." Hekate threw her head back on the moss, her hair flying about, as her pleasure peaked with his release.

"Oh … gods … ughhhhhhhh …" Vel came inside her, watching the ecstasy on her face. He prayed that whatever happened he wouldn't forget that moment. And then, in the blink of an eye, he had forgotten everything but his own pleasure. When he returned to himself, he was lying on her long body, his cheek resting on her damp breast. He was still hard inside her, but didn't move. Now that he had completed the act, he didn't know what more she would want of him.

"You are quite restrained, Vel. I can feel the longing in your body, but you wait for me." She caressed his sweaty, blond hair. "Would you be happy to know that we have more time?"

"Yes." Vel nodded against her breast.

"Perhaps I will ride my mortal stallion this time." Hekate rolled him onto his back and mounted him. The azure on her skin flickered playfully as she slid him back in. "You fit well." She gyrated her hips on him. For a moment, three goddesses rode Vel, but then there was only the one again. "Very well … indeed."

She placed her hands on his chest. All the while her eyes sought out his, maintaining their connection. The song of the forest grew louder around them, and her three voices sang in sweet harmony with the natural world. Several orgasms swept through her as she bucked on him.

“Oh … gods …” Vel gripped the mossy bed and let her do as she liked. It occurred to him how odd it was that he called to the gods when one sat on top of him. “So … tight …” Eventually, he released inside her again. When they had recovered, Hekate rose from the bed and walked over to the stream. Vel thought she meant to clean, and that they were finally done. But then she leaned over a fallen log and looked back over her shoulder at him. The invitation in her smile was unmistakable. He wasted no time in moving behind her and taking the goddess from behind as they overlooked the babbling water. When he had climaxed a fourth and final time, he was exhausted.

“Come little one, let us bathe. I would see you refreshed for your journey.” She pulled him out of her, and led him by the hand into the stream. The water was brisk but delightful as they washed each other under the watchful gaze of the dryads around them.

Chapter 20

The low humming song of the dryads had changed. It seemed to Vel, as he followed Hekate's tall form through the forest, that the rhythms and murmurs had slowed. Were the dryads as satisfied as he? Maybe he could hear their sated desires in their song. Vel was now fully dressed, but the goddess had bid him carry her stola. He had it slung over his shoulder as he watched her ass ripple and flex with each step she took.

They hiked on. The birds picked up their song as the sun set. Shadows lengthened around them. As Hekate silently lifted her leg high to vault over a downed trunk, Vel caught a glimpse of her belly. It was quite round. He blinked. It hadn't been like that before, he was sure. They walked on. When Hekate turned sideways around a tree, he saw that her boobs had grown, too. Already massive, they hung out and down beyond what they had on their mossy bed. And her nipples were dark, purplish buds now. Vel scratched his head in confusion and followed her.

Hekate's belly continued to expand, until it was quite dark in the forest, and she was quite huge. Finally, she turned to Vel, six possessive hands on her three bellies and then two on one. "We are nearly returned, but first it is time for our child to enter the world."

"Our child?"

"Don't be slow, little one." Hekate's sliver of a smile mirrored the moon. "Now run along and find a secluded place for the birth. There should be a cave readied for us to the east."

"The east?" Vel looked at the stars through the canopy above. He couldn't see much of the sky, but what he could see offered no familiar constellations.

"That way." Hekate pointed a finger, which became three, to their left. Her eyes rolled in exasperation. She was dealing with a mortal after all. And a nineteen-year-old at that. She winced at the first contraction and leaned against a tree. "And hurry."

"Oh, okay." Still carrying her stola, Vel rushed off blindly into the wood. Everything was a blur of gray and black. Branches reached out and clung to him, scratching at his skin. But he moved on. He needed to find a safe place for his child. He wondered whether he was still heading in the right direction when he suddenly stopped. Dark cliffs rose up before him. At the base, not twenty feet away, there was a cave with flickering light. He staggered toward it, his brain trying to wrap itself around the situation and failing. The cave was about fifteen feet wide and ten high. It tapered gradually to a dead end at the back. Inside, a fire burned merrily in a circle of rocks.

The dryads' song rose in volume and urgency in the distance. An owl called from a nearby tree. Vel stepped into the cave. There was no sign of whoever started the fire. The sandy floor compacted under his sandals. This was the place. He turned to the forest. He had no idea how to find Hekate again. "Hekate?" he yelled into the night. "Um … Goddess? Where are you?"

"You found it. Nice work, little one." Hekate stood naked by the entrance to the cave, breathing hard, very clearly in labor now. Her pale bluish skin had the glossy sheen of sweat in the firelight. Her azure glow pulsed like a heartbeat. "It has been so long since I was a mother."

“The child is ready?” Vel rushed to her side. He helped her into the cave. It was awkward assisting one so tall. He thought that this must be what it was like for his mother when she stood next to him.

“Almost. Help me down.” Her belly was enormous. Bluish milk dribbled from her breasts.

Vel spread her stola on the ground and held her shoulders as she positioned herself on her back by the fire, with her knees up. The next few minutes passed in a haze. He remembered her screaming in three harmonic voices loud enough to shake the very foundation of their cliff. He held her hand in his, which felt like the viselike grip of three starving serpents. He heard something pop near his fingers, but ignored his pain, for hers was a roaring blaze of agony next to his. He offered her encouragement, not even knowing the words that fell out of his mouth. With one final scream, it was over. Hekate sat up. Her belly was no longer large, and her breasts were back to their original size. She regarded him with keen, bright eyes.

“Congratulations, Vel. I am happy to have given you your first child.” She released his hand.

Vel sat back in the sand, rubbing what had to be broken knuckles. In bewilderment, he looked around the cave. “Where is the child?”

“Did you not see?” Hekate smiled. “She was as swift as the wind and as beautiful as an approaching tempest. Now, she is off in the world.” She noticed his hand. “I am sorry about your injury. Here.” She touched him and an azure light settled around him.

“I … don’t understand.” The pain in his hand disappeared. But confusion reigned.

“I cannot follow where you go.” Hekate stood, picked up her stola, and wriggled into it. It hung off her like falling water. “But one who is made of you and me may follow. She has much growing to do, but I think she will be a woman grown in no more than a day. You saw how precocious she was in my belly.”

“Oh,” was all Vel could say. He had no idea what was happening or what Hekate was talking about.

“I am pleased to be the first of many to bear you a child, little mortal.” She walked to the mouth of the cave. Her body gave no hint of the birth she’d just experienced. “Now, we return to the others and see about saving your world from the greed of a few.”

“Wait … wait … where is our daughter now?” Vel followed her out into a clearing and into the wood. She set a fast pace, and he struggled to keep up with her long strides.

“Growing, Vel. She is becoming one that might help you.” Hekate waved a dismissive hand. Clearly, she thought she’d explained the matter well enough already.

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“Oh, I am sorry you didn’t arrive a few minutes sooner. Your father just left.” Day Star leaned back in his royally upholstered chair. A red can of Coke rested precariously on the chair’s right wing. He steepled his hands and smiled at the goddess and Vel.

“Oh, Vel.” Cassia ran to her son and hugged him tightly around the middle. “Are you hurt?”

Hekate cast a sardonic glance at Cassia and returned to her seat opposite Day Star.

“He was dreadful, Vel.” Naevia moved over to Vel and hugged him after her mother was done. Normally she’d be the one to rush into her brother’s arms, but she didn’t want to cut in. It was strange the things mother and daughter knew about each other. “Father could not accept … how things are. I’ve never seen him so angry.”

“We’ve seen him plenty angry.” Vel looked down into her lovely face and pushed some of her copper hair aside.

“That’s my point.” Naevia calmed a little at the heat of his touch.

“Did he … did he find out what we’d done?” Vel looked to his mother.

“He did.” She looked into the fire.

“I thought I might have to restrain the once and former duke, but I was not needed. There is no violence here.” Dellia rolled her eyes.

“There is violence here only if I wish it,” Day Star corrected. He sipped his soda.

“So why couldn’t I throttle him?” Dellia turned toward the angel.

“He is needed as the man to secure Ostia Novus.” Hekate’s trio of voices filled the room. “Not everyone will go to the palace.”

“Are we it then? Is this the invading force?” Naevia looked at her brother, mother, and cousin. They had little chance of even breaking into the palace, let alone destroying the wicked tower. “Tell me you’ve sent for reinforcements.”

“We have help on the way. Another will arrive here soon. And one is learning of the world so that she might help you.” Hekate smiled at Vel. “As we wait for your *reinforcements*, I suggest you retire for some rest.” She looked over at Day Star. “Will you open the door to their chamber, little godling?”

“I was thinking it might be good practice if they did it.” Day Star narrowed his eyes and pointed to a bookcase near the everchanging Discordia. “We have a day to rest, you will find all the luxury you require through that door.” He waved a hand at them. “Go on. Open it.”

“Maybe one of these books unlocks it?” Vel walked over to the bookcase and started tipping books and putting them back, one by one. He couldn’t see the outline of a door anywhere.

“No more games, *angel*. I’m hungry and tired. Open the door.” Cassia furrowed her brow.

“There is banquet, bathing, and relaxation through the door. You open it.” Day Star sipped his drink again.

“Maybe a good kick …” Dellia pushed Vel aside and made to smash the books with her sandal, but she found she couldn’t lift her leg. “Let go of me, *angel*.”

“You may not destroy my home.” Day Star leaned out of his chair, picked up a poker, and prodded the low fire. It came to life again. “Now hurry on, this nice goddess and I have much to discuss.”

“He’s testing us,” Naevia said. “We need to use our magic.” She stepped up next to Vel and thought hard about opening a secret door. Azure light formed around her hands and traveled up her arms. “It’s … not working. I need … help.”

Cassia and Dellia lined up next to Naevia. The blue light formed around them, building in intensity.

Hoping that Hekate’s milk had given him the same gift, Vel clenched his fists and concentrated. But when he opened his eyes, only the women shimmered with azure. The light grew stronger and stronger. He could hear his sister grunting with great effort. He had to cover his eyes as the women now shone like fevered stars. There was a flash, and the room returned to normal. Vel blinked away the dancing lights before his eyes and gazed around the room in amazement. The bookshelves had parted all over, revealing more than a dozen doors. He could see the forest where he and Hekate had done … what they’d done. Through other doors he could see wonderous worlds with metal horseless carriages and people with odd sartorial tastes. Yet, other doors were completely dark.

“Wow, okay. That was good. No peeking, you four.” Day Star snapped his fingers and all but the doorway in from of his guests disappeared. He straightened his jacket, eyes a little wider than usual. “Now, off you go.”

“Yes, okay.” Cassia rubbed her legs together and looked longingly at Vel. She then glanced at the two other women. “I need somewhere private to rest.”

Naevia eyed her mother, her pussy flooding. “Me too. Some privacy.”

The three Tullius family members and Dellia entered what looked like spacious quarters. The door shut behind them. They were in a circular room, with tables of fresh fruit and wine. There was a bath on the far end, and one enormous four-poster bed to their right. There were no doors. Naevia and Cassia rushed about the room, looking for somewhere private where they could take care of their urges. After a minute, they realized that they were all stuck there together.

“I’m … I’m feeling really strange after … the magic.” Cassia pulled her stola over her head and removed her chest band and underwear. “I think …” She glanced at Vel and then cast her eyes down. “I think I need to wash.” She rushed over to the stone basin and climbed in.

Dellia watched her aunt closely. She slowly stripped and followed her into the tub.

“Gods, Vel.” Naevia approached her brother. “That magic has sent me into a frenzy. I think I need you inside me.”

“But Mother is right there.” Vel looked over at his mother. The water went up above her boobs. A distant look filled her eyes, and her mouth hung open. Her right arm worked franticly in the water. It was clear that she was masturbating. Their cousin, on the opposite side of the tub, was similarly engaged with herself, although she was staring at Cassia.

“I don’t care.” Naevia’s whole body vibrated with energy. She was a dam ready to burst. “Let me get this out.” She bent at the waist and pulled his robes aside, raised his tunic, and lowered his underwear. “You

smell good, Vel. Where did that goddess take you?" She didn't wait for a reply. With his cock out and hardening, she pumped it and sucked the head into her mouth.

"About that … ahhhhhh …" But Vel didn't tell his sister that she was now an aunt to some unknown creature growing to maturity out in the world. That story could wait. He glanced at his mother who was clearly watching them as she fingered herself in the bath. Vel was surprised to see that Dellia was now sitting next to her and whispering in her ear.

"Mother is watching us, Naevia." Vel absentmindedly put his hands in his sister's red curls and guided the rhythm of her bobbing head. When she pulled back, he released her.

"I need it inside me." Naevia didn't even look toward the bath as she undressed. Once naked, she tore the clothes from her brother and led him to the large bed. "Lie back." She pushed him onto the bed and straddled him.

"She's so small." Cassia watched her son's cock enter her daughter.

"You are the same size, yet you can take him. Yes?" Dellia had one hand between Cassia's legs, and one between her own. She worked both pussies frantically.

"Yes," Cassia squeaked. She tried not to dwell on how it felt to be touched by her niece. Another woman was playing with her vagina, and she loved it. Was it the magic, or had she always been like this?

Seemingly reading her aunt's mind, Dellia leaned toward Cassia's ear. "Regardless of the immortals, I think Naevia and Vel would have ended up intertwined like so. The gods need not have intervened for their love to express itself. Some things are inevitable."

"Oh, gods." Cassia thought it was true. They were meant for each other. She watched Naevia settle herself on that giant penis, and then rhythmically grind her hips on him. At eighteen, her body was so tight and contained even as it shared Cassia's dramatic curves.

"I want to make you cum, Duchess." Dellia let the spirals of her own orgasm slowly unwind. She was almost there. "And later, you will replace your daughter and ride Vel until he sows your fields."

"I'm … ugh … already pregnant." Cassia took her eyes off the mating couple for a second to regard Dellia. The young woman was quite beautiful. That was sometimes hard to tell with the way she dressed and behaved. Without waiting to be asked, she added, "It's Vel's baby. I meant to only take him where it was safe, but we had to … ugh … for the magic … and then I needed him … after the wedding … and he … he …"

"He can have your … pussy anytime, now. Is that it?" Dellia watched the pretty, aloof duchess nod her head. "Shit … that's … going to make me … oooohhhhhhhhhh." And Dellia's climax crested. The women howled their pleasure together in the bath.

"Look … ah … ah … ah …" Naevia lifted her hand off her brother's chest to point toward the rising steam. Fresh off her own orgasm, she could see her cousin and mother kissing. It was clear that Cassia had a hand working between Dellia's legs and Dellia was doing the same for her aunt under the water.

“They’re … really … into it.” Vel tilted his head up from the sheet for a better view. If he were to die at the palace, this might be the last good thing to happen to him. He cupped Naevia’s bouncing boobs and let her ride him for all she was worth.

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An hour later, Vel straddled his mother’s ass on the bed. She lay face down, with her hair fanned out on the satin sheet around her. “Back or front, Mother?”

“My vagina, Vel.” Cassia’s voice was muffled by the mattress.

Naevia lay on her side next to them, watching intently. Cum slowly dripped down her lower thigh.

Dellia sat in a chair with her legs spread, her pussy out in the open. She plopped a grape into her mouth and eyed mother and son with great interest.

“What happened with the goddess, Vel?” Naevia watched as her brother lined up with their mother’s pussy and slowly pressed in. It was always impressive seeing that long, fat cock disappear in a woman. All the more so when it was their haughty mother.

“You’re not going to … ugh … believe me.” Vel let his hips sink until they rested on his mother’s round cheeks. She squirmed and whimpered under him, clutching at the sheets. He noticed that she no longer wore his father’s ring. He would have to ask about that later.

“Try me.” Naevia’s hand slipped between her legs. The sights of Cassia’s writhing and Vel’s vanishing leviathan, made Naevia tingle all over.

Vel regaled all three women with all that had happened in the forest with the goddess of magic. When he got to the part describing how her one pussy gripped him like three, Dellia’s hand dropped to her vagina, too. She and Naevia furiously masturbated, while Vel slowly pumped in and out of his mother from behind. The room filled with high-pitched cries playing over Vel’s deep voice as the story moved through the forest and into the cave.

He was interrupted here and there by his cousin or sister for more detailed explanations. They were particularly interested in what the goddess looked like as her belly swelled on their walk. Cassia, however, said little until his story reached the cave.

“Oh … Vel … I am a grandmother then … already?” Cassia thought of what her granddaughter might be, or what she might look like. “And you … are a … father … oooohhhhhhhh.” She pushed her butt back at his slow strokes, rotating her hips. Why did the idea of his fatherhood fever her mind? She had been so proud of the life growing inside her, but there was now a demigoddess out in the world with Vel’s blood in her veins. She climaxed mightily on his long penis, tearing at the sheet with her teeth. “I … ugh … ugh … ugh … can’t wait … to have your … child.” A brief flicker of azure played upon her fingers.

Once he was finished with the story, Vel’s hips accelerated. The circular room around them was large, but even so, the echo of skin slapping skin reverberated. Vel had cum so much in the last 24 hours, but hearing his mother’s cries, and seeing the looks in Naevia and Dellia’s taut faces, drove him over the

edge once more. “I’m going … to … explode …” And it really did feel like an explosion as he came. Stars danced before his eyes. His body collapsed, and rolled to the side, dislodging him from her pussy. Vel closed his eyes and relaxed completely into the mattress. He could hear the women speak excitedly about what had happened to Vel. After a few minutes, he felt his mother crawl off the bed and someone bounced her body next to him.

“I will note that I don’t complain that I am always the last one to saddle you, Cousin.” Dellia traced her finger up the exposed bottom of his cock. He was a frothy mess, of course. But that bothered her very little. “As long as you maintain your steel for me. Which you have, thank you very much.” When she climbed on top of him, his eyes remained closed and he offered no reaction. Was he comatose? “And I share you willingly with your family, an immortal, a traitor, and gods know who else. I hope you appreciate my personal growth.” Dellia angled his cock toward her waiting pussy and sighed as he entered her. No other pleasure on that Earth matched the way he filled her.

“That sounds suspiciously like … a complaint, Cousin?” Vel opened one eye, and then the other. He smiled up at her. She was strikingly beautiful with her eyes rolling back and her tongue hanging from the side of her mouth. Vel wondered at an azure glimmer that seemed to shine from under the skin of her belly. “What are you doing, Dellia?”

“Eeeeeppphhhhhhhhhhhiiiii.” Dellia mumbled incoherencies and her hips bucked faster.

“Is she … ugh … using her magic?” Vel looked over at his sister and mother. They both stood next to the bed, staring at nothing and cradling bellies similarly lit by blue light. Neither woman responded to him. As he watched, their flat stomachs curved outward. It was like what he’d seen with Hekate on their walk back. Vel looked back at Dellia in bewilderment. He let her ride and grow. Her pussy spasmed around his hardness, squeezing and relaxing over and over. It was a terrifying and beautiful several minutes as all three pregnancies sped through time.

The women seemed to come back to their senses when the light faded from them. The magic hadn’t brought the babies to term like with Hekate, but had left them with the shape of a woman five or six months pregnant. Vel could see a faint stretch mark running up to Dellia’s belly button.

“What … happened?” Dellia felt a stupid smile spread across her face. Her hands caressed her belly and her hips kept to their torrid pace.

“All our pregnancies …” Cassie stumbled and sat in a chair. She felt so off balance with the sudden shift in her center of gravity.

“Did you do this, Vel?” Naevia put out a hand and clutched at her mother’s shoulder. She felt like she might be sick.

“I don’t have … any magic.” Vel reached out and put his hands on top of Dellia’s hands, holding her belly. The novelty of her roundness churned his balls. She was deliciously ripe.

“If they … fucking … expect us … to fight the … gods-damned … queens … like this … oooohhhhhhh.” Dellia’s muscles seized and she came again. A minute later, and she could feel her cousin flooding her occupied womb.

Sated for the moment, all four guests crawled into bed together. They were too tired to speak further of their new bodies or guess at the meaning. They slept in a great tangle, limbs intertwined with limbs and hands clasping hands. When they woke, daylight shone brightly through the windows. Cassia was the first of the women to regain her equilibrium, having gone through the prenatal transformation four times before. Dellia and Naevia struggled some, bumping their burgeoning bellies into tables, chairs, and people. By the time they had all eaten and bathed, all three women moved with more confidence. None of them felt the need to dress, so they lounged naked in chairs, drank wine, and guessed at what the future held.

“Do you think my child will be a thing like what Hekate birthed?” Dellia looked down at her belly. It had not grown since earlier. She frowned as she took in the size of her boobs. Could not this have happened after they saved the world?

“That is my daughter, not a thing.” Vel glared at his cousin.

“Sorry, no offense. But we don’t know exactly what she is, do we?” Dellia shrugged at him.

“No … I … um … the goddess didn’t explain it fully. I think she thought it was obvious.” Vel crossed his arms, his penis somnolent on his thigh.

“Well, it’s not obvious.” Naevia smiled bravely at her brother. Whatever their child, she would welcome it into the world. And she would welcome her niece too, when their paths finally crossed.

“Mother, you’ve been overly quiet.” Vel looked at Cassia. She was naked, the same as the rest, but positioned more modestly to cover herself. “What of it?”

“What of it, indeed.” Now that she had a moment to reflect, Cassia found grief clawing its way back into her mind. She didn’t fight it, but it wasn’t welcome, either. “There was a time not long ago when I prayed to Discordia to leave my family alone. This was after your brother went missing. I thought it was all too much to bear. And now I find that Discordia has fallen to her own entropy and the cataclysms pile up one on top of another for our family. My mind is fully saturated and unable to take in each new event. I am quiet because I can no longer contemplate our position, let alone a strategy for plotting a better course. For lack of a better phrase, the fates have us by the balls, I’m afraid.”

The others nodded at this.

“And what are we to do now? We have rested, refueled, and washed. It appears we must linger here a while longer while our reinforcements muster themselves.” Vel looked around at the women.

“Well …” Dellia smiled at them. “We fuck, of course. But this time I nominate myself for first go at Vel.” She stood, and sauntered over to him. With her pregnancy now somewhere beyond half-term, her hips wiggled side to side more than they otherwise would. “How about it?”

Cassia looked away, but said nothing to the contrary.

Naevia nodded her approval.

Soon, Vel had his cousin on all fours. The four-poster bed creaked and groaned as his hips slapped against her ass. For her part, Dellia cursed and screamed out her ecstasy.

“Magnificent,” Naevia whispered as she touched herself again.

“Yes, he is.” Cassia’s eyes turned back to the mating pair. She could see why an immortal would want her son. He looked truly splendid with his lean muscles flexing over and over and the look of raw determination on his face. Not to mention the size and rigidity of his disappearing and reappearing penis. She hoped they had enough time before the deities called them back. She wanted one more turn with that leviathan inside her.

Chapter 21

Seats around the crammed table overflowed with the upper echelon of Ostia Novus society. Those that were loyal to the queens regent had been tasked with bringing the city to heel. Lord Lars and Lady Norbana Uticensis sat at the middle of the table. The new duke spoke to all. It seemed they would be required to pay an additional tax to properly outfit the Royal Guard outpost in the city.

“That’s fine,” Lars whispered to his wife. “We’ll be happy to pay so long as every vile Tullius is turned to ash.”

“They are not all bad, dear.” Norbana’s upper lip stiffened. Her husband knew she didn’t like his talk about their detainment by the duke.

“Good, gods. They … are … vile,” Lars said through clenched teeth. He felt his blood boil, but the man next to him was showing interest in his words, so he quieted himself. The man was some sort of newly-titled baron, and Lars didn’t know what to make of him.

The new duke went on about taxes at the head of the long table.

“I just wish … that …” Norbana whispered these words to her husband but did not finish. She pushed away from the table. Slowly she stood, her belly glowing a bright azure. Her eyes had gone quite blank.

“Norbana, sit down,” Lars hissed. “Everyone is watching you.”

“Lady Norbana? Did you have something to add?” The new duke called down the table.

Norbana said nothing as she pushed her chair back. It fell over with a loud clatter that echoed around the otherwise silent hall. Gasps and shrieks went up among the dinner guests as her belly grew larger.

“Norbana!” Lars reached for her, but she somehow slipped his grasp. She turned and walked away in a trance.

“What is this? What’s happening, Lord Lars?” The new duke’s complexion turned pallid.

“I don’t know, Your Grace.” Lars stood and made to follow. He tripped on her overturned chair and fell to the ground. When he looked up from the floor, he could see her stola pulling and pulling as her breasts and stomach grew. “Stop, Norbana. I demand you stop this sorcery this instant!” But she ignored him. In disbelief, he watched an azure circle open in the air in front of her. Inside, there was nothing but black.

Screams filled the hall now. There were several calls for the guards.

Before anyone could stop her, Lady Norbana stepped into the glowing circle and disappeared. She had vanished into thin air.

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“What did you do?” Day Star stood when his champions walked out of their rest chamber. He didn’t much like surprises, and here was a big one.

“You should know, *angel*. You did it to us.” Cassia stopped with her hands on her hips and gave the room a steely gaze. Her stola draped over her stomach awkwardly. It was not made for maternity. “You tricked us into that place. And now you expect us to charge into the belly of the beast … like this?” She waved her hand at her changed body.

“I’m as baffled as you.” Day Star looked at Hekate.

Laughter erupted from near the hearth. Vel turned his gaze there. He had been so keen on their confrontation with the strange godling, he hadn’t noticed the tall woman with shining platinum hair leaning against the mantle. Brynhild’s laugh was not kind. The chiming sound carried on and on. After some time, the sorceress’s chortle stopped abruptly at a wave of Hekate’s hand.

“Enough.” Hekate blurred into three women sitting in one chair, her voice a harmonic trio. “The new magic that this one brought into our world is powerful.” She nodded at Day Star. “You did this to yourselves. And it is most unfortunate.”

“What, how?” Naevia’s skin crawled with the thought that they could so easily, and accidentally, alter themselves.

“I would guess that all three of you heard the story of Vel and me in the wood?” Hekate looked them over.

Cassia, Naevia, and Dellia nodded.

“Then I would also guess that each of you wished for such a thing yourself. You wanted motherhood. You wanted to feel what I felt.” Hekate shrugged. “But powerful as you may be, you are limited. Your wishes overlapped. The magic sought to fulfil your desires and brought you halfway. I wish we had time to educate you. Maybe afterward, should we prevail, I will find you a tutor for your magic.”

“I volunteer.” Brynhild lifted her hand, but the room ignored her.

“How do we reverse it?” Dellia stepped forward. “I would rather not fight like this.” She pushed her swollen belly out for emphasis.

“You cannot turn back the clock on life. It flows in only one direction.” Hekate frowned. “You will have to work with this.” She turned toward Day Star. “The armory now, I think.”

“Oh, yes.” Day Star walked over to the corner where Discordia continued her mercurial, diminished existence. “Excuse me.” Day Star pushed the goddess a little to the left, opened a door, and wheeled out a cart with weapons and armor. “I had to make some last-minute adjustments after seeing how you all carry yourselves now.” He rolled the cart out before the fire. “Pick out what you need. I should have everyone’s sizes.”

“I am an unusual size.” Brynhild stepped forward and surveyed the cart. She spoke the truth. She had a tall and curvaceous body.

“I am an unusual armorer.” Day Star went back to his chair and sat. “There is nothing magic here, these are all things I’ve pilfered and altered myself.”

Vel watched Brynhild pick up an oak staff and check its balance. “Can someone explain what she’s doing here? She’s not coming with us.”

“She is.” Hekate glanced at Vel with annoyance.

“She can’t be trusted.” Vel folded his arms over her chest.

“Of course, little one.” Hekate rolled six eyes that converged into two. “That is plain.”

“Listen, everything I did was to hinder the queens and restore magic to its rightful place.” Brynhild ran her fingers over a light, chainmail tunic. She looked over at Cassia. “I was so committed to the cause, that I may have stuck my nose into a marriage or two. I am sorry, duchess.”

“Gallio chose your bed.” Cassia clenched her fists.

“That’s what I’m telling you. He did not. I used what little magic I had left to cloud his vision. He had no choice.” Brynhild did her best to fill her face with contrition. It was always good to admit to something already discovered or easily discoverable. It put others off the scent of other crimes.

“So, he … was telling the truth. You bewitched him?” Cassia’s face fell. It had been easier for her when she had thought he had cheated on her. Maybe she would get a chance to talk to Gallio after this was all over. Maybe she could set things right. She saw the sorceress nod. “And my son? What of Fortinbras?”

“He was a brash young man. I know not what became of him.” Brynhild eyed the goddess. She wasn’t sure how hidden this lie was, but no one contradicted her.

“We cannot have this duplicitous hag on our flank.” Dellia stepped to the side of the cart opposite Brynhild and eyed the swords. “She will stab us in the back first chance she has.”

“She will be a useful ally.” Hekate’s trio of voices had the tone of one long past the point of arguing. “You may watch your backs as you see fit.”

“Now that that’s settled, may I have some of the magic you have given to these other women?” Brynhild picked up a mail tunic and held it up to her chest.

“No,” was all Hekate said to that.

Brynhild didn’t press her.

In silence, the group armored themselves. Naevia found a bow with just the right tension. Dellia found a sword weighted perfectly. Cassia chose a bow and a long dagger. The three of them slipped into lorica squamata that looked like dragon scale and glinted in the firelight. It all fit perfectly. Vel selected a shield, a mail tunic, and a short sword. Brynhild took the staff and some light armor.

“So, it looks like we’re ready.” Vel looked over his women and the sorceress. “How do we get there? I don’t suppose they’ll leave the front gate open for us?”

“There is one more.” Hekate stood and held out her arms in invitation.

A door on the far end of the room opened. A woman strode in with purpose. She was tall, naked, and her pale skin had a bluish tint to it. She looked to be about thirty years old. Her breasts were modest and high, and her hips somewhat narrow. The woman’s hair was the same copper color as her aunt’s.

“Welcome, Daughter.” Hekate smiled and moved swiftly across the floor, her arms still open. She pulled the woman into an embrace. “This is Circe, daughter of mortal and god.” Hekate held Circe away from her with six firm hands and smiled. “My, you’ve grown. Come meet your daughter, Vel.”

Vel’s armor rang musically as he awkwardly walked over to Circe. He bowed in a formal greeting, but the naked woman pulled him into a tight hug. He was surprised by her height; she was just about even with him. But why should anything surprise him about her?

“I’ve so looked forward to meeting you, Father.” Circe had a bright, dimpled smile that lit the room. “I am quite happy with my gift. Thank you.”

“Your gift?” Vel tried not to look down at her tits. Her nipples were a captivating purplish color.

“Life. You and Mother gave me the gift of life.” Circe kissed Vel on the cheek. She looked past him at the others. “It is lovely to meet all of you.” She stepped away from Vel and curtsied. “My grandmother, the former Duchess of Ostia Novus. Well met.” She curtsied again. “Aunt Naevia. You are as beautiful as I imagined.” She rushed up to Naevia, towering over her. She lowered her head so their matching hair overlapped. “You can tell we’re related.”

“Indeed.” Naevia stared, wide-eyed, at this miracle of a creature.

“Cousin Dellia.” Circe pulled a sword from the cart and, like lightning, moved over to her cousin. She had the tip of the sword kissing Dellia’s armor before Dellia could move. The room froze.

Dellia laughed. “You are a quick one. Next time I’ll be ready.” She drew her sword and pushed Circe’s blade away from her breast. She glanced at Naevia with a meaning that clearly said, *What the fuck was that?*

“Shall I provision myself like the others, Mother?” Circe made no greeting to Brynhild. Indeed, she gave no indication she had even seen the sorceress.

“Yes, you are to go with them.” Hekate sat back down in her chair, her jaw set in pride and satisfaction.

“Very well.” Circe set about dressing and arming herself. The crowd in the room watched her in silence. There was some measure of awe, like they had all been joined by a tiger.

As his daughter attached a third sword to her belt, Vel roused himself. “So, I ask again. How do we get there? And while you’re at it, you might tell us what it is we’re supposed to do. How does one destroy a wicked tower?”

Hekate smiled at her daughter with obvious delight and said nothing.

“I can answer this.” Day Star crossed one leg over the other and pulled at his trousers so they wouldn’t wrinkle. “You will use your magic. We have here a stone chipped from what is now the top of the tower. Cassia, Naevia, and Dellia will touch this and focus on moving to that spot. The other three will hold on and travel with them. No one should see you coming.”

“And what are we to do there?” Naevia frowned. She felt a tingling in her fingers. The magic was itching to release.

“We’ve told you this before. You must find Princess Minicia and rescue her. Then you must find the heart of the tower.” Here Day Star frowned. “This was the piece of the puzzle that the queens regent unwound on their own. Their uncle tried all manner of objects, but nothing worked. They have hidden the heart from us, so we’re not sure what or where it is. But you will know it when you see it. And with luck, it will draw you to it. Destroy it, and then magic yourselves far away, for the tower will fall without its heart.”

“This is insane.” Dellia looked down at her burgeoning belly, not all that well hidden by the metal dragon scales.

“Insane or not, it is time. Ready yourselves. We send you on your way with –” Hekate was cut off by a hiss, a flash of azure light, and the Lady Norbana falling from the ceiling and landing with a bounce in an unoccupied armchair. “Well, this is a surprise.”

Everyone in the room turned toward Norbana. They could all plainly see that she was also about halfway through a pregnancy.

“What have you done to me?” Norbana’s face was quite pale and her teeth chattered. She tried, unsuccessfully, to burrow her way into the armchair.

“It seems your desires came into alignment with the others.” Hekate cocked her head at the lady, surveying her. “You did this to yourself. There’s nothing to do now but ready yourself. Find some gear and prepare to fight.”

“Fight?” Norbana looked close to fainting. “I’m a lady. I can’t possibly.”

“This looks about the right size.” Brynhild tossed a dragon-scale tunic at the woman. “Put it on.”

“Oh, my.” Norbana looked around the room. She caught sight of Hekate’s imposing figure, and then the body of the hideous Discordia in the corner. “Oh, my … my … my … my.”

“Easy, Brynhild.” Vel walked over and offered Norbana his hand. “Come with me. It’ll be alright.” As she took his hand, Vel thought he’d never told a more bald-faced lie. There was no way things were going to be all right.

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The workmen were quite surprised when Vel and his party dropped out of nothing onto the top of the tower. One man lost his balance on the scaffolding and pitched over the side. His scream faded for a long time until it became a high-pitched squeak and vanished.

“They’re fleeing down the stairs. Shall I stop them?” Circe drew her longest sword and held it angled over her copper hair.

Seeing this, Dellia drew her blade.

“Let them go. They are not soldiers.” Vel watched the flood of men scramble down the narrow opening to the stairs. When they were gone, he walked to the edge of the circle they stood on. The top of the tower had jagged stone walls that were partially finished, about three feet high. There was also timber framework for several internal walls. It was clear that the tower would go higher if construction carried on uninterrupted. He looked over the side and felt his equilibrium wobble. He couldn’t see the palace below. There was a long stretch of empty air, and then churning clouds, coiling around the lower stretch of the tower. “How high are we?”

“Best not to contemplate that, Father.” Circe took hold of Vel’s belt and lifted him away from the edge. “Sorry for moving you, but I didn’t want you to follow that lost man.”

“Thank you.” Vel shivered. It was cold up there, but sweat covered his brow. They were alone at the top. He could see Norbana shivering, her eyes wide. He wasn’t sure if she’d be a help or a hindrance. Although his mother looked calm and cool, he wondered the same about her. His daughter, on the other hand, had just lifted him off his feet by his belt. A demigod would be quite helpful.

“It’s best if we follow those men quickly.” Dellia strode to the descending stairs and looked down. “We don’t know how long the red capes will take to climb the tower, but it would be best if we were gone before they reached us. The stairway fits two abreast at best. We could get bottlenecked easily.”

“Yes, weapons out everyone.” Vel put his hand on Norbana’s arm and gently kept her dagger in its sheath. “Except you. Best to stay in the back. We wouldn’t want you accidentally poking anyone.” Accidentally or otherwise, for that matter. He trusted her no more than he trusted Brynhild.

With her bow at the ready, Cassia moved over to her son and reached up onto her tiptoes. He lowered his head and she whispered in his ear, “Maybe it’s best if I keep an eye on her.”

“Yes.” Vel smiled and nodded. They were on the same page.

“Shall I go first then?” Brynhild leaned on her staff casually. “I have protections about me that may surprise anyone we encounter.”

“Yes,” Dellia, Vel, and Naevia said at once. They all liked the idea of Brynhild with her back to them and not the other way around.

They descended. Brynhild led the way, followed by Dellia and Circe. Vel and Naevia walked side by side after them. Cassia and Norbana took up the rear. The windows were not yet installed at the uppermost levels, so the wind whistled through unfinished walls, open doorways, and half-finished floors. Everything was deserted for nine floors.

On the tenth, Brynhild paused and held up her hand. “Someone comes.” She held up her left hand, and a shimmering green circle ignited before her.

Vel looked around them. They stood on the stairs. There were two walls on this floor framed out by heavy timbers. The large round area offered nowhere to hide. There was a patchwork hole in the wood floor some 15 yards to his left. “Are you sure?”

“I see her in the flesh.” Brynhild stared through her emerald shield, her right hand clutching her staff tight. “It is one of the queens. Cesphea, I think.” An arrow whistled through the air and shattered against Brynhild’s magic. And then another one struck, split, and fell to the stairs. “I can hold them.”

“What good would that do?” Vel knew they needed to descend. A stalemate gave the other side victory. But he need not have worried. The next moment there was a pink spark and an explosion that sent Brynhild flying back into the party. They all tumbled off the stairs, recovered their feet, and formed a semi-circle on the open floor. The stiff breeze quickly dispersed the lingering smoke. Vel could hear bow strings bending in tension. He gripped his sword tightly. It seemed a long, sickening eternity passed as he waited, and then crimson-caped men burst from the stairwell.

Cassia and Naevia loosed their arrows. Two men fell, but more raced toward them.

“Shit,” Vel muttered. He raised his sword, deflecting a blow meant for his head. Chaos reigned. Discordia, had she not been a ruin of her former self, would have been proud. An azure flash nearly blinded Vel, and the man in front of him spun through the air and right out one of the unfinished windows. Vel stood slack-jawed. He watched Circe charge two men. With one stroke she decapitated the first, and sank her sword in the chest of the second. Had she learned that in the day she wandered the Earth?

“Mom, look out!” Naevia’s arrow found one of the royal guards as he charged Cassia and Norbana. He sprawled on his belly. She watched Norbana jump down through the hole in the floor and disappear. Probably for the best. Naevia nocked another arrow. Blue flame glowed around the head. She had no idea what her magic was up to, but she figured it wouldn’t be good for the royal guard. She loosed again.

“Fly, you fucking ugly bastard.” Dellia sliced a man on the thigh and defenestrated him with a solid kick. His scream faded quickly among the din in the tower. She wondered what they thought down on the ground with all the falling bodies. A grim smile spread across her face as she pivoted and clobbered a helm with the pommel of her sword.

Several more azure flashes hit Vel’s eyes with a sharp percussion. In front of Brynhild, a man struggled as a magical serpent constricted around him. Vel swung his sword at a charging man and deflected him toward Circe, who made short work of him. They were winning. With any luck this was the bulk of the resistance. Once broken, they could move through the tower freely.

Cesphea stood in the shadowed stairway. She had only a few men left. She took a deep breath, pink flame running the length of her gown and dancing on her copper crown. She readied the bolt in her crossbow and launched herself into the fray. She knew how to crush her adversary and so had already picked the target. Her finger stayed a moment when she saw the blue-tinged abomination cutting through her men. She had no idea who that woman was. It didn’t matter. She aimed at her original target. Cesphea squeezed the trigger and with a twang, her bolt shot across the room to where Cassia nocked an arrow. The bolt was true, aimed right for the heart, but something deflected it at the last second. It caught the duchess in her right shoulder and spun her around.

“Mother!” Vel lurched toward her, but there was still so much chaos between them. An evil red glow crept over the round room. Nothing burned, but he felt everything would turn to ash. He saw the surprised expression on his mother’s face as she tried to catch her balance at the window opening. Crimson bloomed from the wound across the silver of her armor. She reached down and protectively cradled her belly. Vel knew she would fall. She glanced quickly in his direction with a look of

desperation, and then she pitched over the side. “Mother!” Vel was still ten feet away when she toppled into open air.

Hearing his call, Circe turned toward her father. She caught sight of her grandmother’s fall and raced across the room. She leapt out of the tower after Cassia and plummeted earthward.

“No!” Vel stumbled. Both his mother and daughter were gone. A great surge of power hit him, and he turned to see Brynhild shielding them from Cesphea’s pink fury. Their magic crackled and clashed in the center of the room.

“Down here.” Naevia grabbed Vel’s hand. She screamed at Dellia, who followed. While the sorceress fought the queen, Vel, Naevia, and Dellia dropped through the hole in the floor and landed hard on the wood decking below. Without thinking, they scrambled to their feet. The stairs were empty here, but they could see light flashing against the walls from above. Quickly, they descended, tears streaking the cheeks of brother and sister.

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It had not been Brynhild’s intention to sacrifice herself for the others’ escape. It would have been the other way around, but for her burning hatred of Cesphea. The despicable queen had robbed the northern sorceress of everything she held dear. Even now, strengthened as she was by the dust on her left hand, she was a pale shadow of what she would have been. The queens could have freed magic after what had happened with the original tower, but they chose avarice. And for that, Brynhild could not forgive them.

The fight took less time than it takes a pot of water to boil. At no point did Brynhild think she would win. She prayed, however, that her hatred would be enough. That was not to be. With a great push of fiery, pooling energy Cesphea extinguished the sorceress’s defense and tossed her to the floor. There, the large woman panted on her hands and knees.

“It was my pride that led us here.” Cesphea lifted her hands, pink light blazing from her fingers. “My sister said we should have removed you long ago. But I wanted you to know. I wanted your impotence and humiliation.” She brought her hands down and lightning bolts shot from her, knocking Brynhild to her side with a howl and sweeping her across the floor. The sorceress came to rest near one of the window openings. “More the fool am I.” She looked at her remaining men. “Go, follow those that escaped and kill or capture them. You are not needed here.”

The ranking officer nodded, and the red capes stormed back down the stairs in hot pursuit.

“You are nothing. You are simply … a shadow of the other half.” Brynhild’s lungs burned and her muscles cramped. She tried to stand but fell back to the floor. She sensed only a small reserve of energy inside her, but decided now was not the time to spend it.

“I exist enough. I have eyes. I will see you and your kind fall into nothingness.” Cesphea tore her gown up the middle and released her cock from its confinement. It sprung out hard and eerily smooth. “Get back up on your hands and knees. Get back up like the bitch you are.” A line of pink fire traced down the

back of the armor and clothes Brynhild wore, sundering them in half. Then Cesphea reached down and lifted the woman back onto her hands and knees.

“You are an abomination.” Brynhild’s attire fell to either side. She now had her naked ass in the air. The wind caressed her skin as it whistled through the room. “Your time will come. You are not meant for this … aaaaahhhhhhhhh.” Brynhild felt the long cock enter her, robbing her of her breath and salient thought. Her pussy opened itself to the intruder like a traitor.

“Not … ugh … a bitch but … a sow.” Cesphea squatted behind the sorceress, holding tightly to her ass. She pumped without mercy. Usually, she would give a woman some time to adjust, but she cared not for Brynhild’s pleasure. She wanted only to dominate. To show this woman how futile her little insurrection was.

“You will … uh … uh … uh … not rule.” Brynhild wished very much that the well of pleasure inside her would seep away. Instead, it built. “I have seen … ah … ah … the goddess Hekate. She will not … ugh …” The rest of her words traded themselves for whimpering grunts.

Cesphea laughed long and hard. “I have reduced you to a … ugh … breeding sow. Maybe I shouldn’t dispose … of you … quite yet. Would you like to … carry my child? They say all my … children are … cursed.” Cesphea howled with laughter and pleasure. The sound of the sorceress’s mewling submission was almost too much. The queen regent was going to cum in the northern woman. She would breed her. Who could stop her?

It was time. Brynhild harnessed her last reserves and locked them together with a coiling serpent. It seemed Cesphea hardly noticed, for she kept fucking Brynhild from behind, although her movements were somewhat hampered. The pleasure built for the sorceress, but she knew she would never cum on that monstrous cock. “You have … uh … robbed me of all. Let me … uh … uh … return the favor.” Brynhild pitched herself sideways out into the open air. The pair fell from the tower, quickly picking up speed.

Even in free fall, with the fading serpent around them, Cesphea’s hips bucked into the sorceress. It wasn’t until they pierced the clouds that the truth of the situation hit the queen. She tried desperately to port herself safely back into the tower, but Brynhild’s serpent held her firm. It was then that the shadow screamed. An earthquake shook the palace when she and Brynhild met the ground.

Chapter 22

The stairs circled down and down. Lady Norbana ran as fast as her overripe body would permit. It had been a long time since she'd been pregnant. She tried to remember how best to move. Her hand traced the stone wall to her right, catching herself as she stumbled more than once.

Even after the sounds of fighting and death were long behind her, she moved as quickly as she could, huffing and puffing from the effort. Sweat soaked through her undergarments. Eventually, she stopped and pulled off her armor. She dropped it to the stairs, and then continued down at a slightly faster pace.

The height of the tower was frightening. She'd been fleeing for what felt like an eternity, but when she stopped to catch her breath and look out a window, she was still just above the clouds. As she panted, cursing the magic that had brought her there, she heard a knock on the door behind her. She turned and carefully crept up to it. The thumping grew louder. Norbana put her ear to the door and heard a woman's voice calling for help.

"Shit." She looked around the deserted entryway to the floor. Was it a trap? But why have a trap there? If the person was in need of help, would it matter if she simply moved on? It wasn't like she was even supposed to be there in the first place. She took a deep breath and stepped away from the door. No one would ever know that she hadn't helped this person. It would be like it had never happened. A faint azure glow surprised Norbana, and she looked down at her shimmering hands and belly. "Shit, okay." She knew she needed to help the woman.

The glow faded as Norbana put her hands on the heavy iron bar that sealed the door from the outside. She was worried for her baby as she strained with both hands at it, but the bar gave way and her body did not. She turned the handle and opened the door. Inside, was a woman even more pregnant than she.

"Oh, thank, thank you, milady. I am Merope." Merope curtsied as best she could, given her immensely swollen belly. "Have you come to rescue me?"

"Um … no." Norbana was happy that this woman recognized a lady when she saw one. But she wasn't thrilled at having rescued a commoner. She had hoped, truth be told, that it would have been Princess Minicia. "Is there anyone else here with you?"

"No, just me." Merope stepped around Norbana and onto the stairway. "And we shouldn't linger, Cesphea could be back any moment."

"You should use the queen regent's title, Merope," Norbana said stiffly.

"Not after the things she's done to me." Merope looked Norbana up and down and decided that the lady would be no more help. "Is the only way out to descend?" Merope held her belly through her tattered and stained stola, frowning at the curving stair.

"I think so." Norbana hadn't considered another way out. They were in a tower, after all.

"And do you know where they're holding the other prisoners?"

“You mean the Princess?” Norbana shrugged. “I’m not sure.”

“No, I mean my husband.” Merope took one last look at the lady. “Thank you for your help. I’ve got it from here.” She turned and descended as fast as she could.

“Hey, wait for me.” Norbana followed close on her heels.

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The wind whipped at Circe’s copper hair as she plummeted beside the tower. She squinted her eyes. Her dragon scale armor clattered. The world was a new, wonderous place to her. But that did not mean she was naïve. Of course, she understood that if she hit the ground below, she would meet Pluto much sooner than expected. “Almost … there.” Her whole body pointed down, like a stiff arrow. One of her hands went to her belt where the coiled rope and grappling hook tugged.

Fortunately, her grandmother fell horizontal to the Earth with her arms and legs splayed. That would slow her down enough. Cassia’s form disappeared into a cloud and Circe lost her. She plunged after her grandmother, pierced the clouds, and came out damp on the other side. The ground, now visible, approached at an alarming rate. Circe closed the gap to Cassia until only a few feet separated them. She made sure not to draft behind her but drop to her side. She would have warned her grandmother to ready herself, but the wind was too loud.

With one fluid motion, Circe released the end of the grappling hook and let the rope unwind toward the tower. With her other arm, she grasped Cassia around the waist. Circe glanced at the windows, judging the distance between each. She engaged the belay device and the two women arced quickly toward the tower. Satisfied with their approach, Circe turned her back to the window to protect Cassia.

Circe’s neck surged with pain. Glass broke around them, and they hurled into the tower. She folded herself as best as she could around Cassia, and rolled up against an oak table. Satisfied that they had no more momentum, Circe released Cassia and rolled to her side, groaning.

“Am I dead?” Cassia blinked wind-induced tears from her eyes. She looked around the strange room. A fortune in books lined the walls. It was some sort of library. Did they have libraries in the underworld?

“We … are … both alive.” Circe sat up. She reached to the base of her neck, lifted her hair, and carefully pulled a small shard of glass from her bluish flesh. It was only a half inch, but it was the first thing to pierce her. Circe contemplated her mortality for only a moment and tossed the shard away. She pressed her hand down on the wound and stood on shaky legs. “And somewhere far below the others.”

“We’re … inside the tower?” Cassia tried to join her granddaughter on her feet, but a flash of pain in her shoulder stopped her. She looked over to see the bolt sticking out of her. “Oh, Gods.” She reached for the wooden shaft.

“No, leave it be.” Circe took her hand off her own wound and felt blood trickle under her armor, slithering down her back. She reached for Cassia’s shoulder. A faint blue iridescence moved about her

fingers. She touched Cassia and her grandmother shuddered with relief. “That should help with the pain, but I cannot heal you here. Would you like to leave now? You have the power.”

Cassia took an offered hand and rose to her feet. The pain had subsided to a dull thudding. She thought of her son and daughter, somewhere above her. “No, I’ll stay.” She looked up into Circe’s deep eyes. “How did you save me? Can you fly?”

“I cannot fly, no.” Circe put her hand back to the wound on her neck. “My mother had the foresight to provision me with a rope.”

“A rope?”

“If you are to stay, we should find the stairs and climb. We have a long way to go.” Circe tried to get her bearings, decided on a direction, and strode across the floor.

“It would be easier if you could fly.” Cassia, with her much shorter legs, hurried to catch up.

“This is true.” Circe nodded. “You should bring it up with my mother.”

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The room shook around Valeria. She stumbled and put her weight on her scepter. The earthquake lasted no more than a few moments, jarring dust from the rafters above. “Something evil has happened.” She reached to her breast, her royal consort holding her arm to steady her. “Did you feel that? It is as if something has been torn away.”

“I felt the trembling.” Tiberius glanced at the massive, undead brute out of the corner of his eye. His skin crawled whenever the queens brought out their pet.

“Cesphea was right. They have come to the tower.” Valeria straightened and steadied her nerves. She felt naked despite her resplendent gown. She turned toward her consort. “Bring me my armor.”

“Of course, my dear.” Tiberius’s face was grim as he hurried off.

“I believe your wife shares this tower with us now.” Valeria straightened her crown and gave Lord Spurrius an imperious look. “Stop her. And all that accompany her.”

“May I take him?” Spurrius nodded up at the silent soldier. “I am but one man.”

“No.” Valeria shook her head and untied the straps to her gown. “I will use him to reenforce the guards on Minicia. Use treachery against them. You have no shortage of skill in that regard.”

“Where are they?” Spurrius checked his sword. His heart was in his throat. Would Dellia cut him down? He didn’t think so.

“They are above us, I think.”

“But, Her Majesty is up there. Surely, they are already stopped.” Spurrius cringed at the withering look Valeria offered.

“Go, now.” Valeria stepped out of her gown and readied herself for her armor.

“I have an alternative. We might lay a trap instead.” Spurrius bowed low.

“I’m listening,” Valeria said.

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“Shh.” Merope put up her hand to quiet the jabbering Norbana behind her. “There’s someone up there, milady.”

“Who?” Norbana held her belly and tried to catch her breath.

“Someone just went through that door. That’s where they keep Minicia.” Merope crouched in the shadows on the stairway and waited.

“Minicia?” Norbana thought she was supposed to know when they found Minicia’s level. The others would need to know this, if they weren’t already dead at the hands of those red capes. She looked back up the stairs behind her. “I couldn’t possibly.”

“What?” Merope hissed.

“I think you were sent to us to show us where she is. It’s stupid, but I think you telling us is how we would know how to find her. That’s how gods talk. In dumb riddles.”

“What are you talking about?” Merope stood. She was breathing more evenly now. “Never mind, the way is clear. Let’s pass quickly.”

“No.” Norbana stared at the upward stair with hatred. “I have to turn around. Good luck.” She ordered her trembling legs to climb. She wouldn’t have to go far. There was one way down. She would find a hiding spot and wait for Vel. He would come to her. If he was still able to walk. And if he didn’t show, she would continue down again.

“Good luck, milady.” Merope spared barely a backward glance as she stole by the massive ironwood door. Soon, she was past and racing toward her husband again.

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“I am no use, Circe. I cannot climb any further.” Cassia collapsed on a stair. The penumbra of her shadow stretched above her. She looked out the gray window and could see the palace far below. They were almost in the clouds again.

“I could carry you.” Circe scrunched her nose as she thought things over. They were lucky to have met no one on their way up, but that wouldn’t continue forever. And she could not fight while carrying a woman, even one as short as her grandmother.

“What happens when we run into some red capes?” Cassia’s eyes moved from the window to the bolt sticking out of her shoulder. Her impulse was to try and pull it out of her, but she resisted.

“That was my thought, too. We may find out now, someone is coming.” Circe turned and freed her shield and sword. She waited in a crouch. As the sound of the person’s approach drew nearer, Circe thought it unlikely a soldier. The footfalls were clearly those of someone with bare feet. A pregnant woman with a pretty face and dark hair emerged from around the bend in the stairway and stopped. She stood still as a statue when she saw Circe.

“Don’t take … me … back.” Merope’s brows knitted. She looked behind the tall redhead and lying on the stairs seemed to be the duchess. She blinked in surprise. “Wait … you don’t work for the queens?”

“We do not. And you?” But Circe was already sheathing her sword and slinging her shield on her back. This woman was no threat.

“I am a servant of Ostia Nova. Is that you, Your Grace?” Merope tentatively approached them.

“It is.” Cassia looked up and her eyes got very round when she saw the state of her former servant. She looked like she could give birth any moment. She shuddered to think about the story behind that pregnancy. “And you are Merope. Are you hurt?” Cassia, with Circe’s help, got to her feet.

“Better than Your Grace, it seems.” Merope eyed the bolt sticking out the duchess with some disquiet. “I am headed to find my husband. They have him locked away somewhere.”

Cassia exchanged a knowing glance with Circe. “I cannot climb, but I can descend. I will help this woman. She and her husband are my responsibility.”

Merope, grateful and seeing this woman’s need, moved over to her and put Cassia’s arm over her shoulder.

“I will help my father. Do not worry about Vel and Naevia. No harm will come to them.” Circe nodded at Merope, curtsied at Cassia, and ran up the stairs, taking two at a time.

“Nicias is your husband, yes? He disappeared with half the servants of my castle.” Cassia was much relieved to have gravity working with her as they set off together.

“It was terrible, Your Grace.” Tears welled in Merope’s eyes. She told the duchess everything that had happened.

Cassia listened in horrified silence.

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“She said Minicia is in there.” Norbana pointed at the ironwood door from around the curving wall.

“Well, that is well and good. We rescue her and then all we need to do is find the heart of the tower.” Vel sighed. Exhaustion gripped him. “What do you think, Dellia? Smash and grab?”

“That sounds about right.” Dellia nodded.

“Yes, strength over stealth.” Circe said just over Vel’s shoulder.

Everyone jumped.

“Good gods, Circe. Where did you come from?” Naevia looked around to see if there were any more surprises in their hiding spot but saw none.

“I climbed the tower.” Circe smiled at the shock on their faces.

“We thought you were dead,” Vel said. And then he and Naevia both said, “Mother?”

“She is safe for the moment, helping a wayward servant find her husband.” Circe smiled brightly, and then turned her attention back to the ironwood door, as if the matter was closed.

“Thank the gods.” Vel leaned forward and kissed his daughter on the cheek. “My heart broke when I thought I’d lost you two.”

“It’ll take more than a small tumble off a tower to extinguish my flame.” Circe smiled with pride at her father.

“We’re going to need more than that.” Naevia nearly laughed with relief.

Circe filled them in on all that had happened to her. And they returned the favor. When they were all caught up, they stood and moved toward the door.

“Should we maybe try the handle? It could be unlocked.” Vel eyed the solid planks reinforced with iron bands.

“I can help.” Spurrius appeared from out of the shadows. They all stood on a landing just inside the spiraling stairs. He on one side, Vel’s party on the other.

“Stop right there.” Dellia, whose sword was already drawn, raised it before her.

Spurrius did not stop, but he raised his empty hands palms out. His hips had a confident swagger as he closed the distance between them slowly. “I am sorry how we left things, my sweet. You want to save the Princess, consider her my reunification gift to you. Our marriage can surely withstand some bumps and bruises. Let this rectify things.” His smile flickered when he noticed his wife’s belly under her armor. He knew not what had happened to her, but he hoped her capture would answer some questions.

“If you come within striking distance, my sword flies, husband.” Dellia’s words frosted with chill.

“Come now. The princess is unguarded. I can open the door, and you will have her in an instant.” Spurrius’s pace slowed considerably at his wife’s threat, but still he walked on. “The queens have had their time. I want only to be with you.”

“Gods, you are still more handsome than Apollo.” Dellia’s sword wavered in the air. Her husband was now only a few feet away.

“You will accept my help?” Spurrius filled his whole being with sincerity.

“You are also less trustworthy than a Kart Hadasht merchant. Not another step, Spurrius. So help me …” Dellia bit her lip, and watched his sandaled feet slap on the wood floor.

“It’s me, Dellia. Put down the sword.” Spurrius was close enough to reach out. He extended his finger, and lightly pressed the flat of the blade so that the sword pointed away from him. “This is our chance to –” All the air escaped his lungs. It happened so quickly he could barely track her movement. His heart filled with ice. He looked down, gasping. Not ice, iron. She had run him through. “You … you … bitch …” He staggered back when she withdrew the sword. “You … killed me.” His hands went to his chest as if he could somehow hold his life in.

“I would not betray my cousins or my progeny for you, Spurrius. You should have known that.” A tear rolled down Dellia’s cheek. “He would have led us into a trap.” She looked away from her husband as he fell to his back and sputtered. In a moment, he was silent. “To answer your question, Your Grace. I do not think we should try the handle. They are waiting for us. We should blow the door out with all the force we can muster.”

And that is what they did. Leaving Spurrius’s prone body on the landing, Naevia, Dellia, and Circe summoned what destructive magic they could. Vel stood behind them, wondering what horrors awaited them on the other side. Was Minicia so important that they should risk so much?

A ball of blue energy crackled and hissed at the iron reinforcements. The explosion that followed sent the door twisting and hurtling through the air across an open chamber on the other side. The rent iron and ironwood swept over several crimson capes on its way to the far wall, and the lot punched a hole through the stone and exited the tower. Quickly, Vel’s party stormed in after the door.

Circe was the first one through, followed by Dellia. There were a dozen people waiting for them, all knocked over, or turned away from the blast. The queen’s consort got to his feet, next to Valeria, who leaned on her scepter. They were both clad in glittering gold and crimson armor. Several guards quickly stood upright, swords drawn. After the trick Spurrius had tried to play on them, Vel had expected a greeting such as what he found. What he did not expect was the towering abomination standing unaffected by the explosion near the queen.

“Vel, is that …?” Naevia kneeled next to her brother and loosed an arrow. Horror was written all over her face.

“It is.” Vel stood still, his mind fighting panic. Even in life, his brother Fortinbras was a nightmare of sorts to Vel. But this monster before him was in no way alive. Vel could see that clearly. His skin was gray and mottled, and his eyes clouded over. His once handsome face was twisted and gruesome. The thing that had been his brother, lumbered toward Vel, brandishing a sword nearly the size of Naevia.

“Vel, run.” Naevia let fly another arrow. It hit Fortinbras in the thigh. He stumbled, fell, and rose again. This time walking with a limp. So, at least, he could be wounded Naevia thought. She pulled her brother across the wide room toward Dellia, who battled the guards. Then a second shock threatened to stop her feet. Chained near the center of the room, gruesome and undead in the same ways as Fortinbras, stood a woman silently howling and wreathed in a pink flame. Her face was barely recognizable, but Naevia had seen her likeness before. It was Princess Minicia. And Naevia knew the second she saw her. “That’s the heart. Minicia is … the heart of the tower.” She dodged a blade and pulled her short sword.

“We’ll fucking know it when we see it.” Dellia screamed over at them.

Red bolts shot from Valeria, and hit an azure barrier Naevia had placed around them. Vel swiped his sword at a closing guard and turned him away. Circe engaged Fortinbras, but was sent flying into a wall. Discord and chaos had their way with the room. Another red bolt hit Naevia and she screamed, fell, and slowly got to her feet.

Vel could quite plainly see they were losing. Circe picked herself up and engaged Fortinbras again. But now the queen sent evil magic her way. They needed help. “Please, Hekate. Please.” But no help came. Vel fought off Tiberius and was pushed closer to Valeria. If she turned her red fire on him, he would be finished. He wished desperately for some way to save his family. And then, he saw it.

On the wall behind the queen, a doorway opened to the dryad forest. He could even hear the song of the wood faintly under the din of battle. Vel had his sword wrenched from him by Tiberius, but he didn’t care. He rolled back, rose into a full sprint and had Valeria in his arms before she saw him coming. Together, they tumbled through the door. In the blink of an eye the battle disappeared and it was only Vel, Valeria, and the wood.

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Breathing hard, Vel jumped up from the spongy earth and moved away from the queen. “Hekate! Hekate! Are you here?” The stars twinkled through the canopy above. Most of the forest hid in shadow. The dryad song was as slow and beautiful as he remembered it. Overhead, an owl hooted down at him with annoyance.

“What have you done?” Valeria picked herself up. She looked for her scepter, but it wasn’t there. She lifted her hands and waited for the pink glow that would finish off the young idiot. But her magic was no more available than the scepter. She looked around and took note of the eerie sounds of the place. They were not in the Surround anymore. Quickly, she pulled her dagger from her belt.

“I’ve given my people a chance.” Vel watched her warily. He had no more weapons, so he made sure to give her distance.

“Bring me back, and I’ll spare your family. You will be exiled to the North.” She stepped toward him slowly, trying to herd him into a clearing where the starlight might let her see better.

“For some reason, I don’t trust you.” Vel continued to back away as she slowly pursued him. He felt quite a bit like a rabbit conversing with a lion. Although, of course, he was more than a foot taller than her.

“Eeeeiiiiiiii.” Valeria called out a battle cry as she charged him. A branch caught at her hand and pulled the dagger from her grasp. Undeterred, she closed in on Vel, swept at his legs with her foot, and pounced when he hit the ground. She had her hands around his neck in an instant.

“Waaaaiiiittt.” Vel tried to pull her hands away, but she was incredibly strong. He couldn’t breathe. His hands loosened. He looked up into that pretty, regal face, twisted in anger. The copper crown hung

askew on her head, and he idly wondered if it might fall off and end up on his head as he died. The dryad song began to fade in his ears. But then, her grip on his neck relaxed.

“What? What is this?” Valeria’s arms soaked up a delicious warmth from the nineteen-year-old erstwhile duke. “What sorcery do you possess?” Her hips rhythmically rocked of their own volition. She was rubbing herself on his chest. Without thinking she reached up with her left hand and untied the laces to her armor.

“Your magic … doesn’t work here.” The world came back into focus for Vel. The hand on his throat was now caressing him gently. “But my gift … does.”

“Your gift?” Valeria stopped unlacing. She looked down at the young man, suddenly understanding that she had fallen into a trap. With all her effort, she pulled her hand away from his neck and jumped off him. “What are … you?”

“Like any of us …” Vel sat up and slowly stood. It was his turn to unlace his armor. He could see he wouldn’t need it in that wood. “I am what the gods made me.” He removed his lorica squamata and dropped it to the grassy forest floor. The dryad song around him grew more urgent, its beat seemingly connected to his accelerating pulse.

“Eeeeeiiiiiii.” Valeria swept at his legs again, but Vel jumped over her. She swung with her fist and struck him on the arm. He was much too tall to fight standing up. She struck out at him over and over in their clearing, but either she came up empty, or her attacks were deflected away. Then, he caught hold of her wrist. That beguiling heat ran up her arm again. She practically melted, her vagina gushing. Unlike her sister, Valeria had never given much energy to sex. Certainly, her body had never responded with such a deluge to anything she’d done with Tiberius. Her body called out to surrender to Vel, but she wrenched her wrist away.

“Do you not see where this ends?” Vel reached down and adjusted his cock so that his belt supported it. He was hard now, but he didn’t want it to slow him down too much.

“Yes.” With that, Valeria turned and ran through the forest. There was no plan now, just a need to get far away. The horribly, sickly singing of the forest filled her ears. Branches lashed out at her, cutting her laces.

“Well, shit.” Vel took off after the queen. His strides were much longer than hers, so he didn’t think she’d get too far. But when he didn’t quickly close the distance between them, he realized his cock was indeed slowing him down. He willed it to soften, but it didn’t listen. “Slow … down … Your … Majesty.”

“Wither … and die … Vel of the North.” Before she had traveled two hundred yards, twigs and brambles had torn her armor from her, and tattered her battle tunic. Valeria looked over her shoulder and could see him dodging through the trees after her. His pale skin made him easy to spot, even in the darkness. Her tunic tore from her, and then a branch somehow caught under her chest band and ripped it clean off. She ran only in sandals, copper crown, and underwear, her breasts now bouncing uncomfortably. She held them with her arm and ran on.

Vel was out of breath, sweaty, and trembling all over when he saw the queen stumble on a root and fall to the ground. He didn’t let up, finally closing the gap between them. She’d fallen in a small, mossy gully. He reached down and placed his hands on her bare shoulders and did his best to hold her down. She

was quite strong, and turned around, her hands punching at his chest. He took the punishment, and held onto her hair and her breast. Despite her fury, he was enamored of her beauty. He reminded himself that only minutes ago she'd tried to kill him. And that she'd killed poor, innocent Bantia. And done something horrific to Fortinbras. The list went on in his head, and his hands turned to iron. After a minute, her thrashing died down and she looked up into his eyes dumbly.

"You … you are going to take me, aren't you?" She lifted his tunic, pulled down his underwear, and worked his monstrous cock from under his belt. The heat licked at her fingers as she fondled it like a love-struck virgin.

"Is that what you want, *Your Majesty*?" Vel released her hair and pulled his tunic over his head with one hand, careful to keep his left hand on her breast. The tunic hung from his left arm. He then unclasped his belt and threw it away.

"Even looking at your queen naked is a capital offense." This wasn't true, but Valeria swore it soon would be. She watched her hands as if they were someone else's as they moved lovingly up and down the long shaft. "I do not want your filth in me." But she gave no resistance when he pulled down her underwear. She was down to just her crown and sandals.

"Does your consort have a similar size, or should I go slowly?" Vel knew the answer, but wanted to torture her, at least a little.

"Go … slow." She watched him climb between her wide-open legs. She guided him in. "Eeeeeeeeeeiiiiiiiiii." The wood echoed with a comical parody of her battle cry. Only the head was in, and he stretched her beyond comprehension. She pushed her head back into the moss, her nostrils flaring and teeth gnashing. "Do it …" The heat of him coiled around her heart. "Push it … ugh … all the way … aaaahhhhhh … in."

Vel complied.

Chapter 23

“It’s me, Fort.” Naevia dived to the floor and rolled away from a sword that nearly matched her in length. Lying on her back, she quickly loosed another arrow. Her dead brother stumbled when it sank into his hip but turned after her. Naevia scrambled backward and rose to her feet. She had to dodge around the princess. The heir to the throne stared past her, her body wreathed in pink flame. Minicia’s mouth still hung open in that dreadful silent scream. “You’re hurting us, Fortinbras,” Naevia screamed.

“Draw him this way.” Circe limped toward her fleeing aunt. “He cannot answer you. It is no longer your brother.” Circe’s shield arm hung useless at her side. But with the other, she lifted up her sword. She surveyed the room. Dellia flashed like lightning as she engaged the last three red capes left standing. Tiberius lay at her feet in a pool of blood.

Lady Norbana cowered by the door, seemingly forgotten by everyone. The dead giant hobbled after his living sister. Circe willed the gods to strike him. Azure light coalesced around her sword and shot past Naevia. It hit a barrier of red before it could take the thing that had been Fortinbras. Even with the queen gone, her magic gave its protection.

“Do something, Circe!” Naevia ducked and sprinted past her niece. She had come to rely on the tall, copper-haired woman in the short time of Circe’s existence. What would they have done had Vel not bedded a goddess? Naevia ran up to the curving stone wall and turned around. She nocked another arrow and watched Circe bend backward to avoid Fortinbras’s swiping blade. Circe went with the movement and somersaulted backward. Her left arm spun limply in a circle, following gravity. Her right arm struck out with the sword like a viper at the monster’s legs.

Dellia cried out at the same moment. One of her opponent’s swords had found a weak spot in her armor. Naevia turned her bow toward Dellia and let fly. Her arrow struck true. After that shot, there were only two standing red capes remaining. Dellia screamed and pressed her attack on both of them.

Naevia pulled her last arrow from her quiver and readied it. Her dead brother bellowed when Circe’s sword bit into the back of Fortinbras’s leg. The giant toppled to the ground. Circe was on him in an instant, but even his back he parried her attack and knocked her up against a wall. Naevia prayed the evil magic would not repel arrows. She let fly and followed the arrow’s path across the room. Just as the creature tried to rise from the floor, he was skewered through the back of the head by Naevia’s shaft. He toppled over and did not rise again. Naevia drew her dagger and raced to help her cousin, but Dellia had dispatched the last two guards before she got there.

“I think … we won.” Dellia looked over at Fortinbras’s rotting corpse. “I’m sorry about … him.” She turned away and stared at the other body in the room that seemed neither living nor dead. Princess Minicia continued her long, silent scream.

“Me too.” Naevia hadn’t had time to grieve. And it seemed that time had not yet arrived. She went and helped Circe to her feet. Blood dripped from under the woman’s armor and slowly trickled down to her sandals. Naevia was too short to support her with her shoulders, so she simply held Circe’s good hand. “How badly hurt are you?”

“I am … badly hurt. But I shall not … meet Pluto … yet.” Circe followed her aunt over to Dellia and all three stared at Princess Minicia. They ignored the cowering Norbana by the broken doorway.

“So, what now?” Dellia put her hand on Naevia’s shoulder and let her sword point fall to the floor.

“Can we save her?” Naevia’s forehead wrinkled in doubt.

“She’s like Fortinbras. She’s already crossed the River Styx.” Circe shook her head wearily. “Lady Norbana, come here.” She looked back and eyed the pregnant woman.

“Yes.” With trembling legs, Norbana raced over.

“We will focus all our destructive power on the heart of the tower.” Circe’s hands glowed faintly.

“Oh, I don’t know how to do magic.” Norbana looked up at the half-deity in awe.

“You came to Vel when he needed you. That was magic, was it not?” Circe’s face tightened when she glanced down at the woman.

Seeing it was no time for argument, Norbana kept her mouth closed and concentrated on destroying the heart. She was a little surprised when she found her own hands glowing along with the others.

The azure light around them grew until it was almost blinding, and then blazed across the room toward Minicia’s tomb. The pink flame that surrounded the princess rose to meet the incoming force with a violent crash that knocked all four women off their feet. When they looked up, nothing had changed.

“A sword worked on Fortinbras, did it not?” Dellia, holding her swollen belly, slowly stood and charged the princess. She was tossed back by the pink flame and slid across the floor back to the other women. From her back she looked over at Naevia. “What now?”

Naevia shrugged and looked at Circe.

“The heart supports the queen. And the queen supports the heart.” Circe unlaced her armor. “We must hope that Vel can overcome Valeria. Then we may destroy the heart. In the meantime, we should bandage our wounds. I do not wish to bleed out while we wait.”

The other women agreed and rose slowly to their feet.

~~

The hatred, surrender, and ecstasy written on Valeria’s face urged Vel on. His hips moved faster. He punished her pussy with long, powerful strokes. The dryad song had a fast beat and higher pitch. He almost felt he could hear words in the melody. He gazed up from Valeria’s twisted face to the trees all around, half expecting to see faces. What he saw instead, was a circlet of wood dangling from a nearby branch. The thing seemed woven from maple, with a black stone set in the front. Still humping her, he reached his long arm for it and grasped it. For a split second, he did understand what the dryads sang.

It was a story of the forest's skill at devouring the poisons of men. If given a chance, the trees would leach from the soil the pollution of humanity's greed. If Vel could replace the copper crown with the maple circlet, the dryads might lighten the shadow on Valeria's soul.

"Put … this on." Vel tried to remove the copper crown, but found that it wouldn't budge from her black hair. He could see that it wasn't affixed in any way. It simply wouldn't budge. "Take off … uh … uh … uh … your crown … and put this … on."

"Fuck … ugh … you." Valeria looked at the wooden circlet with loathing. She could tell it meant to harm her. "I would … never … wear … oh … oh …" The nineteen-year-old's unnaturally long cock found a secret deep inside her that released a wave of pleasure. "Eeeeiiiiiiiiiiiii." The orgasms were building in intensity, a ladder of rapture. She feared for her mind thinking of the ecstasy that might wait at the top. She felt him pull out of her, eliciting both relief and a desperate desire to have him back inside. She stared up at him, gasping, the mercurial tendrils of his heat flowing through her core. When he flipped her onto her stomach, she did not run. When he mounted her thighs, she did not try and squirm away. She waited for his entry. And when he slid back into her sopping pussy, she shuddered with joy.

"Take … off … your … crown." The slap of Vel's hips on her ass was a steady percussion to match the dryad song. When she shook her head, he grabbed the crown and pulled her head back so that he had complete control of her. If it wouldn't come off, he might as well use it. He was usually so gentle, but this was a time for something less than kind.

"May … Pluto … have you … ooooooohhhhhhhhh." Valeria came again. Her whole life people had treated her with exaggerated deference. Even her consort. She had never dreamed anyone would overpower her body and mind the way that abomination did now. But she was still the queen, and she would not relinquish her crown to him.

The way her back tensed and arched culminating at her rippling ass was too much for Vel. "Well … then … I will … sow your field." Vel didn't know why the queen hadn't had children. There were rumors that it was lack of desire. But he had wondered at her ability. Or maybe her consort was barren. He suspected he might know the answer soon. He was ready to try out her womb for himself.

"Eeeeiiiiiiii." Through the haze of her orgasm her mind rang alarm bells. But she allowed him to complete his task and felt his warmth spread inside her. This was bad. Very bad. She felt his weight collapse on her, pinning her to the forest floor. Her mind cleared. Good gods, he was still stretching her as he rested. She needed to take advantage of his post-coital exhaustion. Tiberius always needed a nap after sex. Maybe her chance for escape would arrive soon. She would roll the slumbering man off her, dislodging him. Then, she would see about finding the exit to the accursed wood. "Oh … no." Impossibly, his hips moved again. "But … you … already … aaaahhhh." She groaned. She would have never thought a key so big could fit her lock. But he hit another perfect spot inside her. Her mind unwound again. "How … can … you …?" Another orgasm overtook her.

All around, the trees sang their approval.

~~

The tower had not yet collapsed. Cassia trailed Merope and the woman's rescued husband as they descended the stairs. The fact that the tower still stood did not mean failure. It was anything but dispositive, Cassia told herself. Her remaining children had to rescue the princess *and* then find the heart of the tower. That could take time. She prayed for them. Voices echoed up from a lower level in the tower. She stopped. The voices belonged to more red capes. The queens' reinforcements had arrived. "Merope, come back," Cassia hissed at the woman. She turned and hustled back up the stairs holding her swollen belly. Her shoulder, with the bolt still embedded, ached. She glanced back and saw her servants following her. They made it to the landing above them and tried the door. But it was locked.

"What do we do?" Even though Merope was on the threshold of giving birth, she supported her husband with her shoulders. He had apparently been the subject of torture. "We have to hide."

"Yes, or …" Cassia thought about using her magic to blow the door down, but she was so weak. What reserves did she have left? She turned it over in her mind. They were escaping the wrong way. She could do no more for Vel. She judged that she had enough power in her for one final spell. "Come to me. Hold my hands." Cassia grabbed their hands and concentrated very hard on returning to Day Star's home.

"What are we going –" Merope began.

"Quiet …" Cassia wished very hard. The tower around them faded away and all three fell through darkness.

With a series of thumps, the bedraggled trio landed on a stone floor. Merope screamed when she saw the horrific display of the broken Discordia looming over them. The goddess changed from beautiful to dreadful and every shade in between.

Cassia looked up, blinked, and fainted.

~~

The guttural moans and screams gave Vel confidence. Valeria could be faking, of course, but he didn't think so. He understood more snippets from the dryad tune. The trees encouraged him. He thought he knew what to do. He stopped his hips and left his cock partway inside her. After a few moments, she rocked her butt back at him, trying to get him all the way inside again. But he moved his hips to keep no more than half his penis buried.

"What … are you doing? If you're going … to do it … do it." Valeria's frustration mounted. She needed to recapture that feeling. She thrust her ass back, but he wouldn't fuck her. And then, there was a sudden emptiness as he pulled out. "Oooohhhh … noooooooo." Her vagina without his presence was a new feeling to loathe.

Vel moved off Valeria and lay down on his back. The moss tickled his skin. They were now no longer in contact. The mixture of their cum gleamed in the starlight on his tower of a cock. He didn't want her to try for murder again. Nor did he wish to chase her down should she flee. But, as she watched him from her prone position, he thought he'd taken an acceptable risk. There was deep longing in her eyes. "You

have only ever served yourself, Valeria. Now you serve something outside yourself. Tell me what happened to you when the old tower fell."

When Valeria glanced at his face, hatred returned to the lines around her mouth. But when she looked back at his penis, her visage softened. A war raged inside her. When the war met its armistice in her mind, she crawled toward him and gently handled his cock. "My uncle hoarded Discordia and Pax's power, but he had not harnessed it. One of his many failures happened when the old tower collapsed and crushed me." She had a compelling urge to take Vel into her mouth, but she resisted. "On the far side of the mortal world, I refused to take the downward path. So, I sat under a black, starless sky. A satyr, traveling some unknown road in the between lands found me and took pity on me. He offered to send me back, should I need vengeance upon my uncle for my death. I accepted." Valeria pumped Vel hard with both hands now, barely aware of the story flowing from her lips. "He told me he would need to give some of his life in the effort of resurrection. And when I came back to the world of the living, Cesphea was the product of my joining with the satyr. She was made from some of him and some of me. I love her as more than a sister, because she is partly me."

Vel thought that vain and horrific, but he didn't say so. "Climb on. Feel me again."

"Yes." Valeria's pussy ached for Vel. She straddled his hips and placed the cockhead at her entrance. "Aaaaaahhhhhhhhh." She sank down on him. This was a defeat. She could see it as clear as day. She had impaled herself. Something welled inside her. It wasn't tenderness, but maybe something very much akin. "What about you? How came the gods to … ugh … touch you."

"A story for … another time." Vel grabbed her tits and manipulated her so that her hips bounced up and down. Her strokes were so long she nearly dislodged him at each apex. "Instead of swapping stories. I want you … to admit … that your search for power … turned hollow. You wish for … something more … fulfilling."

"I will not … ugh … be your … breeding mare." It was obvious to Valeria where he wanted this to go.

"I think … you will." Vel tugged at her breasts and pulled her face close to his. He was not gentle with her. Her sweat dripped onto his chest. He looked into eyes that rolled slightly and failed to focus on him. "I can hear it … in the trees. You will wear the maple circlet … and … ugh … give yourself to me … and my new kingdom."

"I … am … queen," Valeria squeaked. Her voice trembled.

"We shall … see." Vel released her breasts and let her lean back on him. She sounded like a wounded coyote when she came.

~~

Bandaged and armor-less, Naevia, Dellia, Circe, and Norbana worked at barricading the door with detritus from about the room. As the task neared completion, Naevia eyed the bodies laying where they fell. Would Fortinbras stay dead this time? She eyed the hole in the wall they had made with the rocketing door.

“I see your gaze, Naevia.” Circe slumped to the floor and rested her back against the barricade. “You are wise. We should toss the bodies out. Particularly those two.” She nodded at where Fortinbras and Tiberius lay near each other on the floor.

“You think … they’ll rise again?” Dellia sat next to Circe and gave a long, exhausted sigh. She rested her head on the woman’s bare arm.

“I think it is possible,” Circe said.

“Come, Norbana. These other two cannot help.” Naevia walked slowly to her brother’s hulking form. “I cannot move him alone.”

“Oh, gods.” But Norbana was beyond complaint. She moved tentatively to the body and mirrored Naevia by grabbing him under the armpit. She shuddered when she caught a glimpse of his cloudy eyes staring at the ceiling.

“One … two … three … pull.” Naevia tugged on the mass and Fortinbras lurched a little. Together, the bedraggled, pregnant women dragged Fortinbras to the hole in the wall. “You … were … not the most … supportive brother,” Naevia grunted. “A bastard … really.” As they passed the heart, the pinkish light from Minicia’s flame gave Fortinbras an even more ghastly complexion.

They arrived at the edge and Naevia looked down at the clouds parting around the tower below. “But you … deserved better … than this.” She got down on the floor with Norbana and they both pushed with their shoulders against Fortinbras’s side. The giant inched out over the edge and gravity took him. Naevia scooted her head out into nothingness. The wind whipped her hair as she watched her brother tumble through the air and then disappear into the mist. She moved away from the broken wall and nodded at Norbana. “Thank you. I think … the Royal consort … should be an easier task.”

~~

When the tall, young man came inside her for the second time, Valeria thought she might lose her mind entirely. She had urged him on, riding him like a common harlot. No, that wasn’t right. No common harlot could bury all that cock in her cunt. She rode him like an exceptional harlot and screamed bloody murder when his seed filled her.

Even after his second climax, he wasn’t done. She let him lift her as he stood. All the while, she was still impaled. He held her ass firmly with both hands. The maple circlet was in his right hand and it pressed into the flesh of her left cheek. Her feet flopped at his sides as he hammered her. She was a normal-sized woman of the Surround, but he handled her like a plaything. She *was* his plaything and no longer loathed him the way she had. Pleasure was corrupting her mind. They stared into each other’s eyes. The damnable music all around them built to a crescendo.

“Place … the copper crown … on my head.” Vel could see her expression had shifted. There was only ecstasy and confusion. He had driven the hate from her.

“Will you … uh … uh … uh … give it back to me … after?” Valeria was not used to bargaining. This sounded ridiculous to her own ears. She knew that without her scepter and crown, her connection to the heart would be severed. But did that matter? She was already cut off by the beguiling forest.

“No … uh … uh … uh … I will not.” Vel brought her down onto his cock with added determination. He watched her eyes roll.

“Yes … yes …” What did it matter? She would still have her magic without the connection. She still had her power. She would take the crown back later. By force if necessary. She released the charm that bound the metal to her head. “Take … it … oooohhhhhhh.” She sang along with the forest’s music as another orgasm battered her mind. She had no idea how many it had been.

“Thank you.” Vel released her ass with his right hand, but still held her in the air with his left. He reached up and plucked the crown from the climaxing woman. He placed it on his own head. Nothing seemed to change. They continued humping. Then, he placed the maple circlet on her head, with the black gem right at the top of her forehead. She screamed louder and flung her head back. Her whole body shook wildly. Vel gripped her butt with both hands so that she wouldn’t buck right off his penis. He stared, amazed, as pink flame rose from her open mouth and formed a cyclone into the forest canopy overhead. It faded, and azure light flooded into her mouth from the trees around them.

“What’s … ugh … happening to – gggggppphhhhhh.” Valeria gurgled and choked on the blue light. She expected fear and death, but elation filled her heart. The warmth spreading from Vel’s touch turned fiery and lit her nerves. She was so overcome with the rapture of it, that she barely noticed him erupting inside her for the third time.

Vel shook and shuddered. He nearly dropped her as he came, but instead pulled her violently to his hips and left himself buried to the hilt. When he was done, he slowly pulled her off and dropped her to the forest floor. The circlet stayed on her head, seemingly fixed there as the crown had been. He had a sudden fright and reached up, but the copper crown lifted easily off his head. He rested it back gently on his blond hair. His cock slowly deflated as he staggered to a nearby fallen log and sat. He was not surprised when Valeria began groaning and reached for her belly. It swelled and swelled. The magic of the place had a firm grip on her. “So, do I leave you here? Or take you back with me?” He caught bits of the dryad song. The words urged him to take her, to use her as proof of his rule. Vel didn’t much like it, but if she was truly tamed …

“Ohhhhhh …” Valeria writhed in the moss. Her belly had stopped growing. She thought she felt a kick from inside. Her child was greeting her. She had traveled maybe two thirds of the way to full term in ten minutes. She stared down at the stretch marks on the globe of her belly. “You are the father … the father of my child …”

“Very well.” Vel stood. “Let’s see if we can find the exit.”

~~

The sound of red capes cutting and battering the barricade was frightful. The four women had decided they couldn't leave until the heart was destroyed, but they didn't know whether they had another fight in them. They stood on either side of the barricade, swords drawn but hanging by their sides. A large timber fell to the floor.

Something changed in the room's light. Naevia was so focused on the impending breach by the guard, that it took a moment to place it. "The flame is out!"

At that instant, Minicia's scream found its voice. All four women turned toward the tower's heart. The wretched sound pierced into their very souls.

"Do we … save her?" Norbana had to yell to be heard.

"She is already dead." Circe's hands glowed with the azure light. She didn't know how much power she had in reserve. She prayed it was enough to take out the heart. Another timber fell from the barricade. "All of us, now," Circe yelled. All four women had a diminished glow about their hands. "One … two … three."

Blue energy shot across the room. In a flash, Minicia folded in on herself, bending and bending. The very air in the room warped, until with a final pop, Minicia and her scream were gone. The tower rumbled and dust fell from the ceiling above.

"We did it." Naevia slumped to the floor, her back against the wall. She wished herself out of the tower and back to Hekate. But nothing happened. "I'm spent. I can't … leave." She looked at the other women.

"Me too." Circe nodded.

Dellia sighed and slumped to the floor. "I can't go either. Norbana?"

Lady Norbana shrugged her shoulders. An azure circle filled with darkness opened before her. "Sorry," she said, and stepped through it.

"Wait!" Naevia stood as quickly as she could. "You can take us with …" But the circle closed and disappeared in an instant.

"Well, that was fucking selfish." Dellia shook her head. "At least we destroyed the heart."

Naevia sat next to her cousin and niece. They held each other as the tower shook and the barricade fell. There was now a hole in the doorway big enough for a man to climb through.

"You did it." From out of nowhere, Vel stood above the women, his hand possessively on the back of Valeria's neck.

"Oh, Vel." Even in that awful moment, a smile spread on Naevia's face. But that quickly gave way to a quizzical look as she took in the sight of her naked brother wearing a patinaed copper crown. The equally naked and very pregnant queen, and the circlet on her head with its glowing black stone further mystified Naevia. "You … freed the heart of the tower from its flame?"

"I had help." An arrow whistled past Vel. He moved himself and Valeria up against the wall, out of the line of sight of anyone shooting through the barricade. "Why are you all still here? It's done. We should leave."

Naevia held up her hands which glowed very weakly. “Our power is spent.”

The tower lurched. There was the sound of something crashing overhead.

The floor canted, and Vel fell against the wall. “So, we die here?” Vel pulled his sister into his arms. “I have always loved you, Naevia.”

“And I you, *Your Grace*.” Naevia leaned up and kissed him on the lips. Another loud crash and the room lurched further at an odd angle.

“I can help.” Valeria looked up at her new master with wide eyes.

“What?” Vel broke the kiss and looked at the former queen.

“I have some of the dryad magic in me now. Take my hands. With our combined power, we can leave.” Valeria held out her hands. Vel took one and held his sister tight. Circe took the other.

“I don’t trust her.” Dellia stared, incredulous.

“But you trust me.” Circe clasped Dellia’s hand and closed her eyes. She concentrated everything she had on returning to her mother.

A crack sounded above them. But when the ceiling caved, it crushed no one. The five of them had all disappeared.

Chapter 24

Like most things, the echo of hooves died quickly out on the Hawk's Road. Engineers had somehow suspended the cobbled path along the ridge. On one side, a declivity fell hundreds of feet down to the sea. On the other, rested a barren chasm, dark with volcanic glass. King Vel Tullius smiled down at the sea from the window of his carriage. He had been crowned king a month ago in Ostia Novus. This was his first return to the palace since he and his party had toppled the wicked tower. He looked up to see Accipiter Cubitum's remaining spires twisting and towering above him. The damaged palace seemed to perch on the cliff like a hawk's nest. He could see workmen repairing the building where the fallen stones had plummeted. Vel shivered. It was not the sight of the palace that made his body shudder, but his mother's work on his cock with her tongue. He held her head firmly as the queen slurped and gurgled. "Does it frighten you, Naevia? Returning to the palace, I mean."

"No, it does not, *Your Majesty*." Princess Naevia laced the last two words with sarcasm. She wasn't used to her brother's ascending titles. But then, it was quite surreal being a princess. "This was the place where we saved the Surround. Where you tamed evil." She regarded the company on the cushioned bench across from her. Her mother sat next to Vel, leaning over to suck his cock. Valeria sat on the floor between his legs, lovingly sucking on his balls. It looked a bit awkward for both women to manage their positions with their burgeoning bellies. But they seemed to manage. "What do you think, Mother? Do you fear returning to the place that almost killed you?"

"Mmmmpppppphhhhhhh," Cassia said.

"I don't know why we couldn't just magic ourselves to the palace." Dellia leaned against the carriage's window next to Naevia, her chin resting on her hand. She looked quite bored. "This is taking forever."

"My Imperator … ugh … craves adventure." Vel smiled and leaned his head back on the cushion behind him. He could feel the rattle of the wheels, but he didn't care. "But sometimes … we … ugh … have to take things slowly. Give the people … what they expect." He was getting close to his release, which was good. He didn't want to arrive at the palace with his queen and his servant servicing him. People guessed at his relationship with his mother and sister. But it was best not to make it explicit. Similarly, Valeria's metamorphosis into servility had shown the people his strength, but Vel did not think it polite to have her slurp his balls in public.

"You better cum, Vel. We're getting close." Naevia winked at him from across the carriage, her smile wide. She loved watching him with his women.

"My … uuuggghhhhhh … thoughts … exactly … aaaaaahhhhhhhh." He held his mother's head tight and unloaded into her mouth. She drank everything he offered.

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The months passed quickly at the beginning of the Tullius reign. Not all the generals bowed immediately to the copper crowns now worn by Vel, Naevia, and Cassia. But when Vel traveled with Valeria to the

Sparrow Islands, Antibynum, or the Gates of Xellas, he was mostly able to bring them in line without bloodshed. They had only to see their old queen groveling before him, serving him, and singing his praises. Once seen in the flesh, it was clear that the older order had passed.

Circe came in and out of her father's life like a flickering shadow. She refused land and title, but she was happy to run difficult errands for Vel when she was not helping her mother or learning more of the world.

Back in Ostia Novus, Gallio accepted his old ducal role. He offered Cassia her familiar seat by his side, but she declined. Even though she understood that he had been bewitched by Brynhild, she did not return to her marriage.

With Lady Norbana's husband now detained by the state, Vel did offer her hand to his father in Cassia's stead. And Gallio took it. Norbana may have been a coward, but she possessed Hekate's azure light, and was thus quite valuable to Gallio. Nicias and Merope were made Lord and Lady and given a small estate in Ostia Novus. Not long after, a baby was born to them. Nicias swore to bring it up as his own, and would let no ill be spoken of the child. There were rumblings in the city, however, that the baby had an unusual deformity and barely cried.

Over time, other pregnancies moved to term. Naevia was the first of Vel's women to birth him a child, not counting the goddess Hekate. They brought into the world a healthy girl. Not a week later, Dellia also birthed a daughter. It was the first time an Imperator had given birth. Mostly because the title had been held by men until the wicked tower fell. Cassia was next with another healthy girl. Vel received word from his father that Norbana had also delivered a girl.

This put some pressure on Vel to find himself a wife to take his mother's place as queen. Rumors that he had fathered the children were omnipresent throughout the Surround. Vel, however, resisted.

Valeria was the last to bear Vel a child that year. Vel could see the love in her face when she carried the crying babe about the palace. It seemed whatever the satyr had done to Valeria had been undone. She was a woman both diminished and enhanced. She almost always wore her maple circlet, her cherished gift from the dryads. She believed it to be a humble symbol of her renascence. But, of course, it was much more.

A special nursery was furnished near the royal chambers. Cassia and Naevia officially had their own private rooms across a long hall from Vel. But they spent most of their nights and evenings either in the nursery, or with Vel. Cassia, not having the stamina of her daughter, often slept next to Vel and Naevia as the mattress bounced under her. Brother and sister could never get enough of each other. It wasn't very long after Naevia had born him their child that they got started on another.

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Rather than use the Vulpes, Vel disbanded the service. They would have need of spies, but not those that had sought to murder and undermine what he loved. He thought on how to form a new service, when Princess Naevia came to him with a solution.

“Have you heard, *Your Majesty*, that magic has returned across the Surround? New witches, mages, sorcerers, and sorceresses have sprung up as weeds in a fertile garden.” Naevia spoke softly so as not to wake her sleeping mother. She climbed into bed, her heavy breasts hanging below her.

“I have.” Vel gazed at her copper curls and sweet face in the light of a single lamp. It was quite late and she was just returning from the nursery. “Did the babe drink her fill, my princess?”

“She did.” Naevia laughed. She knew where this was going, and she enjoyed these affections from her brother immensely.

“Did she drain you, or is there still more for me?” Vel let her climb his naked body and they kissed for a while.

Eventually, Naevia withdrew her lips from his. “There is always more for you, Vel.” She climbed a little further and eased her nipple into his mouth. “Aaaahhhhh, that feels sublime.”

“Mmmmpppphhhh.” Vel drank.

“With so many learning and training their new powers, we have a whole sea of nascent allies.” She cradled his head as she spoke. “They know we freed the world’s magic and let the seeds fly and take root. They see what we did to the tower and the old queens. They look to us now. Not only as their rulers but as the vanguard of the azure light.”

Vel pulled off her nipple. He swished the warm sweetness around his mouth and swallowed. “What do you propose?”

“Well, first I propose that you slide yourself into your loving sister.” She wiggled her hips back down his long frame, reached under her, and guided him in. “Ohhhhhh … that’s better.” She sighed. “Now that we’ve … ugh … settled that … I propose we form … an administration of and for … the magically gifted.”

“A force … of spies … who can see … from anywhere?”

“And soldiers … and governors … and engineers … and whatever they wish to … help with.” Naevia’s hips found their rhythm. She was never more at home than when she was skewered by Vel.

“That sounds … wonderful. What do we offer them … beside our past deeds?” Vel licked a dribble of milk from her shaking boob.

“We offer … to train them. Perhaps your … divine mistress would guide us. I’m sure … Mother and Dellia, and even Valeria would help.” Naevia’s shook her hips, stopped her thrusting, and went quiet as a minor orgasm swept through her. In a minute, her hips started up again. “And for those women … with magical dexterity … and loyalty … you might seed them. You could give them the gift … you have given … me. It seems hardly … fair to hoard your cum … in the palace.”

“I wasn’t aware … that I was hoarding.” He smiled up at his sister. She was of course right that they had an opportunity to usher in a new golden age of magic. He wondered how many gifted women would bear him children. “I suppose … you would want to … supervise my efforts … with these women.”

“Who else would tell you where to put your cock, Vel? You’d be … uh … uh … uh … clueless without your sister.” Naevia swooned thinking of watching so many women shudder and moan in her brother’s arms.

“But perhaps I will … watch from afar. I do not wish … to scare the poor things.” A massive orgasm built within her. A few minutes later, they came together.

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Days later, Vel told his mother of Naevia’s plan.

“How many … ugh … women are we … talking about?” She sat on her son’s lap in his writing chair facing away from him. They both gazed out the window as she rocked her hips in little circular motions.

“I don’t know. It could be hundreds … I suppose.” He gripped her waist, feeling her muscles dance with her movements on him.

“And what of … the men. Will you bestow … your gift on sorcerers?” It was an honest question. She didn’t know how far he would take his new administration of the blue light.

“Um … no.” Vel frowned. He tried to justify his choice in his mind, and settled on an answer. “Women make for better … leaders … than men. They … can better be trusted … ugh … with power.”

“That … is … true.” Cassia dug her fingers into his thighs, supporting her weight so she could bounce on him. “And do you need … to sow their … fields? Is there … another way? Have you asked the … goddess?”

“Circe asked her … for us. And yes … I do.” It seemed his mother went into a bit of a frenzy on top him when he said those words.

“So … many … grandchildren.” Cassia had never in her wildest dreams thought that her blood would flow in the veins of so many. “Will you … care for them … all?”

“The crown … will provide.” He watched her hair whip as she spasmed on him, her ass clenching spasmodically on his dick. When her orgasm passed, Cassia’s body undulated in a more gentle motion.

“Will you … still love our child … with so many others competing for your … affection?”

“Don’t worry, Mother.” He reached around her and held her heavy breast. “There is nothing to … fear.” He wiped sweat from his brow and looked over at the dark-haired, fair-skinned woman crouched in the corner. “Will you fetch me a refreshment, Valeria?”

“Yes, Your Majesty.” Valeria shot up and grabbed the jug from the king’s bedside table. She carefully poured and brought him a cup. She watched him drink with satisfaction. “Is there anything else I can do for you, Your Majesty?” She took the empty cup from him.

“My mother’s pussy is unattended.” Vel smiled at his servant, admiring the black stone in her circlet.

“Yes, of course.” Valeria crawled on the floor between their legs.

“Don’t make her do that, Vel. You are enough for me.” But her son only grunted in reply. “Ooooooohhhhhhhh, Valeria, …” Cassia purred as the woman’s tongue found her button. “You have become … very … good … at that.”

~~

It took many months of vetting, training, and testing to decide on the first woman to be an archmage in the new administration. Portia Verra was a woman in her twenty-seventh year. Her husband was a tanner, and she had helped with his work until the wicked tower fell. Her powers had gradually built after that. Her natural aptitude was in construction. She was located and recruited by the blue light administration, trained by Princess Naevia herself. When she was offered a night in the king’s bed to boost her power, she at first demurred. Naevia did not press Portia. But a week later, after thinking it over, Portia agreed.

“I am here, Your Majesty.” Portia’s legs trembled as she curtsied in the doorway. She had taken it as an immutable truth that she would lie with no other man but her husband. But here she was, having agreed to allow King Vel between her legs. She blinked as she looked around the room. His chambers were far larger than her entire house. She nearly gasped when she noticed Valeria massaging the king’s feet. Whatever doubts she’d had about this offer evaporated upon seeing the former queen, once at the zenith of power, performing such a task for Vel.

“Ah, come in, Portia.” Vel smiled and patted Valeria on the head. “Run along now, we wish to have some privacy.”

Portia tried not to stare at the former queen, who was clearly pregnant again, as the older woman rushed past her and closed the doors. “So, that’s Valeria. And what became of her sister? Stories are unclear if she still lives.”

“Well, you have a direct way about you.” Vel stood and stretched his toes. He felt quite good. “Cesphea rode a wayward sorceress to their mutual deaths.” He stood, noticing the awe in Portia’s eyes. Most people of the Surround had not seen a person a good foot taller than them, and it made quite the first impression. “I will add that Cesphea wasn’t Valeria’s sister. I shall tell you the story later, if you’re interested?”

“I am interested, Your Majesty.” Portia blushed and curtsied again. She was only starting to get used to being in the presence of Princess Naevia. She was traveling in unfamiliar waters. “So, how does this work? I have only ever been with two men. A gardener when I was nineteen and my husband. He is not keen on this, by the way.”

Vel laughed. “The gardener wishes you not to gain great magic?”

“My husband wishes me to keep my legs closed,” she said flatly.

“You remind me of my daughter.” He saw the awed look cross her face again. It was known that Circe was a demi-goddess. “I promise I will keep myself from between you and your husband.” Vel removed

his robes and stood before her. He watched her gaze fall to his hanging cock several times before fixing on his eyes.

“It seems men come in all shapes and sizes.” Portia’s heart beat like hummingbird wings. She was crazy for doing this. “Does it get even bigger?”

“I’m afraid it does.” Vel nodded. “I promise to go slow.”

“It’s not a question of speed, Your Majesty.” Portia’s expression turned dubious. “It’s a question of my aperture, and your royal … thing being mismatched.” She pointed at his penis for emphasis, as if he might not have noticed his own size.

“It’s okay if you’ve changed your mind.” Vel walked up to her, she now maintained steady eye contact. Naevia had been right to pick Portia as their first. He caressed her rosy cheek with the back of his hand.

“No, I’m here for the magic. Whatever it takes to become an archmage. I just don’t want you to be disappointed when I don’t enjoy it.” She remembered who she was talking to. “Um … Your Majesty.” A tingling warmth spread across her face from his touch. It felt delightful.

“Well, I hope it won’t be that bad.” Vel bent down and kissed Portia on the lips. At first, she went rigid but then relaxed.

Portia luxuriated in the sensations of the kiss and the pulsing heat that emanated from him. His presence was like a smooth bath of starlight. When she broke their locked lips, her chest heaved. “I have never … been kissed like that.” She didn’t know what she was expecting from the king, but it certainly wasn’t that. “What is … this heat … from your touch?”

“That’s part of the gift.” Vel’s cock rose, now at about three quarters full. He watched her eyes fall to it and widen.

“Shall I get you ready, Your Majesty?” Portia’s mind was equal parts fire and fear. She prayed he would not destroy her vagina.

“I think it a better use of our time if I attend to you.” He helped her remove her stola, chest band, and linen underwear.

His words were so far away from what she expected from a king that she could not comprehend them until he placed her on the bed and put his head between her legs. Neither the gardener nor her husband had done that for her. It drove the fear from her mind, and fanned the flames of her arousal. He grabbed her forcefully by her thighs. The heat of him swirled to her core. “Oh … Your Majesty … what are you doing … not there … oooohhhhhhh … gods.” Her head thrashed on the king’s perfect sheets. She shuddered through two enormous orgasms. When he positioned his cock at her opening, she tensed all over again. At least he had pleasured her before devastating her vagina. Portia was beyond shocked when he fit inside her, and then doubly so when joy spread from his movements. Instead of pain, she found she loved it. She realized that those first orgasms had only been an appetizer. She was now to enjoy the main course.

They didn’t talk much while Vel humped the future archmage. There were grunts, screams, and cries of joy. But words were mostly limited to Vel directing her into new positions. She was quite confused when Vel took her from behind. That was another thing the gardener and her husband had apparently not

considered. She wasn't sure how long it had been, but she was riding the king to her fifth or sixth climax when it dawned on her that this was a one-time engagement. Once he sowed her field, her enhanced magic would grow. He would not bed her again. This added a new urgency to her bucking hips.

When Portia heard the king growling below her, she was concerned at first. She thought she might have displeased him. But then it became clear that she was used to men who were quiet as mice, but her king was something more of a lion. He was letting her know his pleasure. "Yes … yes … Your Majesty … I am … uh … uh … uh … ready to receive … your gift."

"Aaaaahhhhhhhhhh." Vel held her wide hips and slammed up into her pussy. He held himself there as he filled her. He was so lost in his own climax, that he barely noticed that Portia looked like a woman possessed by a forest spirit as she took his cum. When he finished, he released her hips, and she rolled off him, pulling his cock from her with a squelching plop. She lay next to him on the bed, trying to catch her breath. After a long while, she reached out to his skinny chest and ran her fingers over his fair skin. "I did not think that it would be like that. Do I have Hekate's gift now?"

"It usually takes a while." Vel turned his head to the side and smiled at her. She looked completely relaxed and at ease. So different from the woman who had entered his chamber a little while ago.

"Should we try again? You know … in case the magic didn't take the first time." Her hand worked its way down to his cock. It was still hard and wet from their combined efforts.

"What would your husband think of that?" He watched her climb back on top of him.

"He would … ooooohhhhhhh … say that … ooooohhhhh …" Her hips sank on him, spearing herself. Her body moved of its own accord. "He would … say … that he was … married to a … powerful … archmage."

They spent the rest of the afternoon in the king's chambers.

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"My imperator returns." Vel sat on a thrown of maple. It was carved to resemble writhing leviathans. A much simpler seat than those of his predecessors. "How goes the south?" He was attended only by Valeria at the moment, who sat patiently at his feet.

"The rumors are true. Dragons stir in the torched lands." Dellia kneeled before him, but her unwavering gaze was cast directly at her king.

"We must ready the defenses of Kart Hadasht and Xellas." Vel did not like the sound of dragons. With the fall of the tower, their magic was growing, too. "I will send the Archmage Portia Verra to see to the walls."

"That is very well, but I would like to meet the lizards in their lands while we are at full strength and they are not." Dellia's eyes blazed with the thought of conquering dragons.

"We have only three archmages at this time, Imperator. Along with you, the queen, and the princess. That's hardly a full force." Vel frowned at her.

“Don’t forget our armies or your daughter.”

“Yes, but these are dragons, not the reanimated dead.” Vel glanced at Valeria. The former queen regent hung her head in shame.

Dellia stood and swept her gaze around the room at the various advisors and guards, all hanging on the king’s every word. “Perhaps we should discuss this in private.”

“Very well.”

A little while later in Vel’s chambers, a naked Dellia bent over for him and wiggled her ass. “It’s been too long, Vel. Three weeks in the desert. I love sand. It’s coarse, gets everywhere, and agitates the weak. But that was too long to be away from you and the baby. Aaaaahhhhhhh.” She sighed as he entered her. “You have only gifted the three so far? I thought there was a fourth you were to bed while I was away?”

“Naevia decided she … was not … ready.” His hips got into rhythm. His body knew Dellia’s so well by now. He felt like they were teammates at Harpastum, each knowing what the other would do and teasing and playing with those expectations.

“The world … is changing … Cousin. We need the strength to … meet it.” She made eye contact with him over her shoulder.

“Power … without … restraint … will not help … the Surround.” Vel thought things over as he slammed into her. The intensity of her stare did not diminish, even though he could tell that her pleasure was building.

“I’ll send Circe to parley … with the dragons.”

Dellia gave him a playful growl.

“I’ll send you and Circe … to parley with … the dragons.” He slapped her ass when she scowled at him. “And if that fails … we can talk … about sending an army into the … torched lands.”

“Very well … Your Majesty.” Dellia gripped the edge of the table, and turned her head forward. “Now fuck me … like you … missed me.”

~~

“Do you remember the storm on our way to Kart Hadasht?” Naevia leaned her shoulder into her brother, her hand resting on his thigh. They stared out at a crimson sunset over the Inland Sea. They were at the top of the spiraling western tower. Maybe a tenth the height that the wicked tower had been, but still well above the palace. A warm zephyr tugged at her copper curls.

“How could I forget it?” Vel leaned over and kissed the top of her head. “It was pure insanity. Neither of us knew what was happening.”

“Sometimes I wish we could go back there. And relive it.” She took a deep breath. “It was so simple and immediate.”

“You were fucking your brother in a ship that was very nearly sinking.” Vel laughed. “It hardly seems simpler. Although … there were no dragons involved … so.”

“We owe it all to a misguided sorceress bent on revenge.” One hand moved from his thigh and entered his robes. The other hand caressed her round belly.

Vel leaned back on the veranda when his sister took hold of his cock. “We owe it to a lot of things. It’s a complicated world, Naevia. But no matter what the Surround throws at us, we have each other. That was true long before my gift, and would have been true without it.”

“Yes … but the gift helps.” Naevia pulled his cock from his robes and regarded it like a long lost friend. “We wouldn’t have this without it.” She squeezed the fat penis in her hand. “And we wouldn’t have the Archmage Portia building walls without it. Nor would our children exist without it.”

“I didn’t need the gift to seed you.” Vel pulled her onto his lap and pulled up her stola.

“Such confidence.” Naevia laughed. “I know you and Portia Verra still see each other under the sheets, Vel. Even as her belly grows.”

“I was not hiding it.”

“That is good, because I see all.” She felt his wide head pushing at her opening and smiled. “I want you to know I don’t mind. So long as you have time for me. And our growing family.” She looked down at her belly.

“You sped through the last pregnancy, why take the full nine months with this one?” He entered her slowly, watching her eyelashes flutter.

“I’m … ugh … not sure how we did that.” She rode her brother gently out on the veranda, the sun’s light dwindling behind her. “I have much to … learn … about my own gifts.”

“I get the … feeling … that we’re only just starting … to see the world for … what it will be.” Vel pulled her stola down her shoulders and exposed her heavy breasts. He leaned forward and drank.

They moved slowly together until the stars twinkled overhead. “I have … a council meeting with … the three archmages … in the morning. And the baby has been … ugh … keeping me up.”

“We better … return to bed.” Vel held her tight, knowing what would come next. There was a flash of azure light, they fell through darkness, and landed in his bed still joined together by his cock. They bounced on impact, and Vel flipped his sister onto her back.

“There you two are.” Cassia rolled over in bed and smiled at her adult children. “Finish up now, we have a busy day tomorrow.”

Vel looked innocently at his mother. “But I thought I might have you … once … before I slept tonight.”

“Well, if you’re quick about it.” Cassia shook her head. “You really are insatiable. The Archmage Orania this morning, your sister this evening, and your mother tonight.”

“I will be … as quick as … I can.” Vel planted his hands on the mattress and lifted himself so as not to slam Naevia’s belly too hard. He went to work.

“Not … too quickly … *Your Grace*.” Naevia gritted her teeth against the onslaught. “We have … ohhhh … we have … ooooooohhhhhhhhh … we have … eeeiiiiiiiiiiiii.” Her brother’s heat and his leviathan of a cock swept her thoughts from her mind. It was a perfect moment, and she wouldn’t change it for the world.

THE END

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