

LES MALHEURES D'ALANA

BOOK ONE

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PREFACE

The area of fiction dealing with alternative history allows the author a vast degree of leeway in presenting both fictional and factual characters. I have used many of these devices to put my heroine, Alana, a Princess of a mythical kingdom, in perils that tax her skills, abilities, and puts her life at risk many times. It allows me to combine technologies, and histories at will.

I am guilty of more than a little copyright infringement in Books 2 and 3 (Patrick O'Brian and Bernard Cornwell forgive me)...it's almost impossible to keep one's hands off some of the great fictional and mythical characters created by writers with so much more skill and ability that its truly pitiful...but for our purposes and without the reality of publishing, this becomes a labor of love for aficionados' enjoyment. At some time in the future alternative story lines, including other heroes of film and literature may be forthcoming.

I have many to thank in this endeavor, not the least of which are Arch Stanton and Helene des Arbres who have contributed art to help tell the story. At some point in time, when I have more skill and ability, I will integrate the illustrations into the actual text. In the meantime, I will have to settle for them as appendages. In Chapter One none have as yet been done. In Chapter Two there are only two completed to date. One is by Arch Stanton and the other by myself. I know that Arch does not feel that his work is a finished product and I hope he will forgive me for including it. I am working on a portrait of Alana in her Princess persona for Chapter One and another as a "servant" prior to her travails. These will have to follow. Also please take note that this is a work in progress. These Chapters will likely alter as the work (it's over 170 pages for Volume 1 and 2 and Volume 3 is nearing completion and almost as long) evolves.

One final note. In Volume II the characters of Aubrey and Maturin have been skewed in my representation. While Stephen Maturin is based entirely on O'Brian's descriptions, Jack Aubrey here is heavily influenced by his depiction in the movie "Master & Commander" by Russell Crowe. Richard Sharpe Bernard Cornwell's epic protagonist is an integration of the character in the novels and Sean Bean's depiction.

Author's Note:

A special note must be added for the contributions recently discovered by Dr. Penelope Larson, Director of Mayan Archeology, Miskatonic University of Arkham Massachusetts. Her excavations of Ixtabian temples and her translation of ancient Mayan texts bring new understanding to the worship of that ancient Goddess and the rites of her acolytes.

Contents

PREFACE	2
CHAPTER 1	4
CHAPTER 2.....	9
CHAPTER 3	22
CHAPTER 4	31
CHAPTER 5	35
CHAPTER 6	41
CHAPTER 7	48
CHAPTER 8	54
CHAPTER 9	62
CHAPTER 10	66
CHAPTER 11	73
CHAPTER 12	78
CHAPTER 13	84
CHAPTER 14	94
CHAPTER 15	98
CHAPTER 16	102
CHAPTER 17	107
CHAPTER 18	111
CHAPTER 19	124
CHAPTER 20	135
CHAPTER 21	138

CHAPTER 1

Alana had been anticipating this day for months. The castle had been so boring over the last few weeks. No matter the number of balls and receptions. No matter the greetings of various dignitaries and ambassadors. The visits of her cousins and other relatives. All these were simply diversions.

Today she was going on a voyage. A real voyage. Not just a trip to the mountains or the southern shores. A real trip across the sea to an unknown land. For a Princess of the Royal Line this was truly amazing. She could barely use the privy without someone hovering over her. Ever since her father had lost her mother at the birth of her sister Alisande, eight years ago, he had treated her like a precious gem, to be kept safe in a heavily armed and guarded vault. It was more than a little chaffing. After all she had just had her 15th birthday and most girls were given in marriage by the time they turned 13.

Not that she didn't have her choice of suitors. As heir to the crown she was, by definition, the most eligible girl in the kingdom. If she married before she ascended to the role of Queen at her Father's demise she had her choice of any man of Royal birth. Once being elevated to the position of queen, the law required that her suitors be relegated to only the Princes of the realm and that pretty much left only the Duke's and their son's...not a very encouraging lot. Of course there was always the chance of a royal suitor from another country, but being that Branart was an island nation this involved additional effort that so far had been unproductive.

Right at the moment, she was the center of a whirlwind. Along with being the most eligible young woman in the land it was rightfully argued she was the greatest beauty and the pride of her country. She stood about 5'6" tall in her bare feet, though with the high heeled shoes of the time, and with her hair up, she literally towered above most of the men who sought her hand. Her hair was a honey red blond and she had piercing green eyes. All this was set off by a pert, almost tilted nose that gave her a smiling disposition and a small but generous mouth, made for laughter.

Her figure was beyond reproach. Ample, pert breasts without the need of "reinforcement" and a tiny wasp waist led to a flat stomach and long thighs and calves. Any man who met her was immediately taken with her beauty and wit, but also by her virtually unassuming attitude and a cheerful and vivacious spirit.

It was said that the only competition she could possibly have, as the reigning beauty of the land, was her younger sister. Even at eight it was obvious that Alisande would be stunning. She had her older sister's hair and eyes. But she was still more interested in climbing trees and playing in the gardens than any of the more courtly activities. And it would be years until her figure filled out to rival her sister's. But in the meantime she was growing fast and in a short time would be as tall as Alana, if not filled out in other areas. Since their mother had died Alana had taken that function over and looked after her little sister with a ferocious protectiveness.

Today, however, Alisande was intensely jealous of her big sister's opportunity to travel. Once their father had given his grudging permission that Alana was to accompany her uncle Joseph on the trip she had been in a blue funk.

The voyage, which Alana had wheedled out of her father, was truthfully not her's at all. Her uncle was the one who actually needed to travel. He was going to set up a new trading route and treaty with a nation across the sea after years of negotiation. And after all her pleading and begging her father, the king, gave her permission to go along. Yes she would have to travel with an entire retinue...and yes she would be under the guardianship of almost a full company of royal guards...but it was a sea voyage to a land full of romance and wonder. How could it be anything but wonderful?

Usually Alana did not find the sea voyage much of a chore at all, though most of her ladies-in-waiting and the Royal Guard seemed to spend the entire time hanging over the side losing what little food they could get down. She seemed to be inured to the tossing waves. On a bad day the joke among the guard was that the only one fit to stand watch was the Princess herself.

But when they reached their port it was all justified. Verdante was as beautiful as she had been described. They had been met by a royal guard and taken to meet the Satrap himself. He was a large and good natured man with what appeared to be dozens, if not hundreds of concubines. His palace was as exotic and wonderful as anyone, especially a sheltered Princess, could possibly imagine. And the city... The city was as intoxicating as the finest heady liquor. Not that she could see that much of it. She was constantly clucked over by her retinue and the guards had been warned never let her out of their sight. She did grudgingly understand. If anything happened to her it would be they who had explained it to the King...and he could be more than a bit testy when the safety of his eldest daughter and heir to the throne was at stake.

But as negotiations dragged on she longed to see more of this lovely country and its people. The Satrap was proud of his land and eager to show it off. But negotiations came first and it seemed that her opportunity to see anything of its foreign charms might be put off forever.

Then came the celebration at the docks. A yearly time with, food and merriment. It was so close. Just a short way down the road from the Palace. But when she asked her Uncle he flat out refused. Her retinue could go but he wasn't going to allow his niece and the heir to the throne to any local celebration. When her ladies-in-waiting left for the celebration that day, she was so envious she almost cried. Even the serving girls went. And when they returned...they had had a marvelous time. Food, players, and enough of a celebration to last a lifetime. And all of the sort they had never seen before.

Alana spent the afternoon pouting. Then she hit on a scheme. They had permission to go. Why not go as one of them? If she wore their clothes and found a way past the guards. Oh yes...that small point...past the guards. Her red blonde hair, almost unique back in her country and now an oddity for sure, would be a giveaway for certain. No, that wouldn't work...or would it? If she used a shawl... Actually it seemed all too simple, until she remembered her lessons that the simple solution is usually the best.

That next day about sunset she decided to give it a try. One of her maids was almost exactly her size. She carefully chose a full blouse with handkerchief ties at the shoulder, arms and wrists as well as a full skirt. She also "borrowed" the girl's nice red and black girdle and a pair of matching slippers.

Locking her maids out of her inner chambers due to her "headache" she tried the ensemble on. No one could see her fine undergarments or rare silk stockings so they could remain on. Her tiny waist and full breasts filled out the clothes nicely. Her long legs looked perfect under the skirt. The shawl hid her red blonde hair. She could do nothing for her large green eyes or pert little nose, but if she hid under the shawl she had a chance.

Money. She would need money. Well there was a pile of foreign coins of no little value she had been collecting. But she would have to leave her jewelry.

No serving girl would wear anything like the jewelry she had on. She took a handkerchief and made it into a purse which she tied inside her girdle and skirt. Then hid her pile of jewelry under her pillow. She had second thoughts about her signet ring. Her father told her that it should never leave her person, so she took a plain fine gold chain and threaded it through. That went around her neck and down her cleavage and under her girdle. No one would know it was there. She looked at herself again in the mirror. Something to highlight her shapely neck was what she needed. A velvet choker did the job. Now she was ready.

But now to get past the maids and the guards...this would take some doing. She put on her long robe and made doubly sure her ladies knew she was in for the night. Then came the hard part. Her balcony was connected to a larger balustrade down one story. By tying her sheets together she made a rope. It was very easy to climb down. Once on the balustrade all she had to do was wind her way down the ramparts and past the guards at the front gate. They were much more concerned with individuals trying to enter the Palace than leaving it.

Once down on the ramparts no one seemed to notice the girl in the shawl that made her way down to the gate and out into the square. She was free. She flushed with success and took off the shawl and robe and hid them behind a bush. Now for some fun.

There was all she could have ever wanted. Entertainment everywhere. And not just the staid stuff performed at court. Bawdy and funny at the same time. Food that made her salivate and drink in excess of anything she could ask.

She was watching a group of performers in a small crowd when she felt a hand brush up against her breast...no, it was not a brush. More like a grope. She recalled her training and grabbed the miscreant's thumb and twisted and turned. The man screamed in pain and went to his knees.

"I'm sure you apologize, don't you?"

"Yes...OH YES...I DO!" the man gritted between his teeth.

"And you'll never do that again to any lady, will you?"

"No never!" he cried.

"Good!"

She released him and watched him run off, then turned around to enjoy the play. She realized, to her chagrin, that the actors had stopped. Everyone, including the players on stage were staring at her. She blushed and moved on to another activity. No sense calling that much attention to herself. Then she realized she should have kept her shawl. It wasn't just her admonition to the ruffian that was drawing attention to her. She was used to being the center of attention at the Court and any functions. Here she was just trying to blend in, but her beauty was arresting and she was drawing far too much attention. She tried to move off and blend into the crowd to avoid the stares. But a young man in the crowd took note of the situation and nodded to himself.

Her stash of coins hardly felt the cost of her dinner...and the honey wine. She sat with the populace and enjoyed the players and musicians. As the evening ran on, she noticed a growing number of folks with what looked like cones of ices which they ate with obvious delight. She decided to track them back to the vendor. It would be a wonderful way to end the evening. She knew she was going to have to steel herself against everyone who would be furious at her for leaving if they had discovered her absence. She was almost sure that they hadn't missed her yet but it would be far more difficult getting back into her apartments then leaving.

But that was a time away. And now she wanted to find those ices. The line of happy ice eaters led her to the vendor. His wares were very reasonable but she had to access her purse for a coin. She did not notice the eagle eyes of the young man watching her, who nodded to his friends. They had discussed the situation and that this girl was no common mark. She needed to be handled with delicacy. As she ordered the ice he came up next to her and spoke to the vendor.

"Come, come, my lady...a lovely like you should not pay for something that doesn't approach your sweetness."

She couldn't decide whether to blush and smile or to tell him to move on. But staying in her "servant girl" guise she nodded and gave a shy smile of thanks. He started to take the ice and hand it to her...then stopped and waived another coin at the vendor. "Here here" He cried, "A double helping of berry honey syrup for this lovely lady." She cast her eyes downward at that obvious flattery and didn't notice him pour a small vial of liquid over the ice.

He handed it to her courteously, bowed and then just melted into the crowd. "Now that was sweet. Just a polite young man" she thought. "How kind."

And oh how good was the ice. She had to resist wolfing it down to spare herself a massive headache. It was gone all too soon and she decided it was time to return to the castle. As she began to wend her way along the docks a drowsiness came over her. Umm. It would be so good just to rest her eyes a little bit.

The local ships were being loaded with huge bags of grain. To Alana the bags looked nothing other than big fluffy pillows. Just a few minutes to rest her eyes. No sooner did her head touch the soft surface than the drug took full effect and she was out.

"All right. That worked fast. Let's see what she's got." said one of the gang that had been following in the shadows.

"I know what she's got and I want a piece." grinned another.

"Here now. We may be thieves but we're not rapists. Bad enough we're going to strip this girl of her savings...let's leave her chastity." It was the young man who had bought Alana the ice and administered the drug.

"Oh lord." moaned a third, "A captain of thieves with morals. We're in for it now boys."

"Let's see", said the leader. "I bet she has her stash under here."

He felt his way past Alana's girdle and under her skirt to the purse.

"AH HA! Here it is and a nice stash it is. Some of these are gold ducats. Now what would a serving girl be doing with gold, I wonder? Hmm. A small fortune in gold. I bet she stole it from her mistress."

"Hey let's turn her in." another called..."Maybe we can get a reward..."

"Idiot!" retorted the leader. "And give back this fortune? No...let her sleep it off and make her excuses in the morning. Poor little thing. Likely get her lovely little neck stretched for stealing this much."

He was about to leave when a glint of gold deep in Alana's breast caught his eye. He traced a finger down her pert breasts and looped the fine gold chain. A gold ring. A fine gold ring, inset with jewels and a crest... Careful not to break the chain he took it off Alana's neck. This was a very good night.

"Alright boys, we can't leave her here. The guards may find her too soon."

"Want us to dunk her? With the drug in her she'll likely go under. Might not be found for days."

"No...we're not murderers, remember? Let's put her in the hold and cover her with a tarp. She'll be safe enough until morning."

It only took two of the youths to lift Alana, but all six managed to "help" enjoying the curves of her lithe young body until they had her settled and covered.

"Yes" said the leader to himself as he flipped the gold ring in the air..."a very good night!"

CHAPTER 2

The gang had no idea that what would have knocked out a servant girl for the night put Alana into a deep sleep for almost a day and a half. She was awakened by the sound of sea bird and the cursing of sailors.

Truly muddled she tried to sit up but bounced against the tarp over her. Chastened by the bounce she looked around herself and tried without success to determine where she was.

Oh she was groggy and her mouth felt like cotton. A corner of the tarp was open so she rolled to it and sat up. She was on a boat. A boat at a dock...but this was not Venderale. Venderale was a bustling beautiful city. This was a mean little burg with a tiny wharf and this was the only ship on its quay. The crew was all up front. So they didn't notice the disheveled girl climbing out of the hold and up the galley way to the wharf.

She needed a privy...and water...and her growling stomach told her she needed food badly. She also needed to know where she was and how she got here. The last thing she remembered was eating some delicious berry honeyed ice.

Across from the wharf was an inn. She walked to it purposefully, entered and ordered a breakfast and some honey water. As it was being prepared she found the comfort of the privy in the rear. She noticed everyone spoke in a peculiar accent that took a moment to pick up.

As she sat down to the hot food and cool drink she noticed a young man watching her. He caught her eye and smiled. She was still mildly muddled by the drug and very hungry, but she had never been as imperious as some of her cousins, so she smiled back. He came over.

"Gracious lady. I am a poet and minstrel. Might a poor performer play for you for a piece of bread?"

She smiled in agreement and he struck up a merry tune.

As she ate she took notice of the inn and its patrons. Very few patrons. Except for a black clothed hook nosed man in wig and lace by the door, few seemed to be partaking of its hospitality. The poet finished his tune and she smiling. She gave him a slice of bread and offered him some of her meal.

"Thank you m'lady...I will take it with me if it's alright with you?"

She nodded in agreement.

"Here here, girl." called the tavern owner. "Its bad enough him hanging around but if you feed him we will never be rid of him!"

"It's alright", she laughed. "Here let me pay you for my meal and let me get something for him for the road." The poet smiled as she reached for her purse.

She searched and searched...it had to be there somewhere.

The tavern owner cleared his throat. "Girl, you've had a quarter crown's meal. You can pay can't you?"

She stood up and started to look around her. Then she caught the flash of a blade out of the corner of her eye.

The poet had used the commotion to relieve the black clothed gentleman of his purse.

"No really!", she cried. "I have plenty of money!"

As she swung around the black attired man grabbed her arm forcefully. He was taller than she thought at first and had that pronounced hook nose.

"What do we have here? A liar and a thief?"

She pulled away as hard as she could. Unused to being touched against her will, much less manhandled she grabbed the closest thing to her and viciously swung at his head with what turned out to be the mug of honey water. It caught him squarely across the top of the head and he went down in a heap.

"Quick m'lady...I think it's time we left." and the poet pulled her protesting out the door.

"This is ridiculous", she called out. "Where do you think you're taking me?"

"As far from here as we can get", he called and literally threw her on the back of a horse then pulled himself up and started to set off.

Started is the word. The long lead on the horse caught on part of the tavern's structure and pulled them both up sharply. Both Alana and the poet flew off and for the second time in two days she was senseless.

When she came to she found her wrists shackled behind her and lying next to the poet on the floor of the tavern.

"I don't need her name! They're obviously partners...she's a liar and a thief and she almost killed me! Two crowns for him and six for her!" she heard someone pronounce.

Before she could get her wits about her strong hands lifted her up to her feet and pulled her outside. She stood shakily as the man who had grabbed her tore roughly at the poet's tunic." You've done this before", she heard him say, "But you won't be so lucky this time."

The man stood before her and roughly pulled her blouse down exposing her breasts! She promptly spit in his face and tried to kick him but with the results of the drug and being knocked senseless off the horse she wasn't effective. He caught her leg, lifted her up and pulled up her skirt and pulled down her drawers. This sudden move made her dizzy, but she still had enough sense to spit in the man's face again.

"No markings...no additional reward", he sighed. He threw her onto a waiting hay cart. She had barely caught her breath when the poet landed on top of her.

She gasped and he pulled himself off her as the man climbed into the driver's seat and set off.

"What in the name of all that's holy is going on?" she cried.

"Sorry m'lady, but it appears that we're in for it now."

"In for what? What's going on?"

"Well we've just been found guilty of fraud, thievery, horse theft and attempted murder and we're to be hanged at the nearest gallows."

"Hanged?" she asked incredulously.

"Yes m'lady. Hanged by the neck until dead. Actually its not so bad if it's done right. I've been hanged twice and cut down in time by friends. Had a wonderful climax each time. Only problem is this time I've no friends about so it will likely be the end for both of us."

"Don't believe him!" called the driver. "Hanging is a nasty slow death that takes forever. He's right about you cumming at the end though."

"Oh this is ridiculous", she cried. "Wait! Wait!" she called. "Who's in charge?"

"Me", mumbled the man in front.

"And who are you?"

"I'm the local Bailiff. The man you just spit on and tried to kick. But more importantly I'm the man who's going to hang you."

"Look, this is all a terrible mistake!"

"So they all say."

"I'm a Princess of Royal blood and I demand to see the local lord or magistrate!"

The Bailiff laughed out loud. "You've seen him, your highness. He's the one you tried to brain with your pitcher and he's the one who sentenced you to hang."

"Oh no no no! This can't be happening!" she moaned. "Poet! Poet!! Here! Look down my blouse!"

"Since its one of the last things I'm likely to see I will do so happily m'lady."

"NO! NO! You fool! I'm wearing a fine chain. On it is my royal seal!"

The poet peered intently. She shook her long hair and let the blouse fall forward forgetting her modesty for the moment.

"Sorry m'lady...nothing."

Then came the full realization...she had been robbed!

"Wait! Wait! Bailiff! I can make this all right. This is just a series of mistakes! I am Princess Alana of the kingdom of Branart and I will make it well worth your while if you will let me prove it."

"Never heard of Branat."

"No, it's Branart! Look have you heard of the Satrap of Venderale?"

"Verderale? That's a day's sailing down the coast! What? You related to the Satrap too?"

"Oh this was impossible!" she thought. "I'm bandying with an idiot" and her heart froze because over the head of the "idiot" she could see the gallows approaching.

"Oh NO NO NO...this can't be happening", she cried to herself a second time. She desperately tried to clear her head. Her wrists. She needed to free her wrists. The manacles were solid though, not a bit of play!

"My apologies my lady", the Poet murmured. "My fee is set at two gold crowns. There maybe a rich widow in the crowd who would fancy a young poet as her stud, but yours is set at 6. That's 12 times what an ordinary slave is worth."

"Wait! Wait!!" she called to the Bailiff..."If you will spare me for the day and send to Venderale I will guarantee you 600...No 6000 gold crowns!"

"Oh yes...and a palace by the sea too, I'll wager", the Bailiff laughed as he pulled up to the gallows. "Come on you two...the sooner you dance the sooner I get my dinner."

But the true problem was the gallows were taken, under use as could be said. Alana looked up and to her horror saw two naked youths kicking at the end of a pair of nooses.

"Hmm" mulled the Bailiff, "They should have been finished a quarter hour ago."

"My god!" Alana cried in horror, "These are hardly children! Why are they being hanged?"

"Humph!" the Bailiff snorted, "Orphans. Brother and sister stole from a local merchant and with no one to pay their fee, No more than a few coppers but..." With this exchange a misshapen creature appeared. Scarcely manlike, with a grotesque visage and bent over, he capered up to the Bailiff gibbering. At both ends of the gallows stood men-at-arms with pikes and swords. They seemed extremely bored with their duty. One seemed to be dozing while the other yawned loudly, completely unaffected by the desperate struggles of the two dangling on the crossbar.

"You were supposed to take care of these two long before this idiot!" remonstrated the Bailiff taking his stick he used on the horse and swinging it at the staring creature. The man-thing howled and scrambled back up the gallows to the top of the gibbet.

By this time each of the victim's faces was a dull congested red yet they struggled on, desperately trying to free their bound wrists and kicking as best they could.

"Can't wait no longer" mumbled the Bailiff as he nodded to the gibbering fool.

"Oh please, yer honor. may I?" inquired a bawd.

"Surely. Save us some effort."

The bawd climbed on the stage and went over to the boy. His face was contorted in agony, teeth clenched, eyes squinted shut still struggling. She dropped to her knees and took his erect penis in her mouth. Pumping her head back and forth in a few seconds she was rewarded with his full ejaculation which she spit into her handkerchief. Having climaxed the boy seemed to slow down a bit.

She came up wiping her lips as if she had just had a drink of ambrosia.

The fool on the top of the gibbet looked expectantly at the Bailiff who nodded. He jumped off and using the rope for leverage dropped squarely on the boy's shoulders.

The entire crowd heard the boy's neck snap and he hung still.

The girl, slightly younger was still struggling. She had no pubic hair and just buds for breasts. The Bailiff nodded to his misshapen servant who grinned obscenely. He pulled himself up to the gibbet and expertly swung himself down heavily on the girl's shoulders. His effort was rewarded with the clear snapping sound of her neck breaking and her body going limp.

The Bailiff reached up and caught the girl's body by the waist and pulled up. With his free hand he unloosed the noose from around her neck, then through her limp body into the back of the cart. In another minute he did the same to the boy. Now both nooses dangled empty.

"Now let's get you two dancing!"

He roughly pulled the poet to his feet and stood him under the first noose. It was not so much a noose as a crude knot. Then he manhandled him onto a low stool and tied the rope tight so there was no slack.

"No!" cried Alana..."This can't be happening! I'm a Princess of Royal blood!! You can't treat me like this!!"

"That's right girl, I can't." grunted the Bailiff as he pulled her up struggling and kicking with all her might and stood her on the next stool. The rope dropped around her neck and he pulled her hair up so he could clinch it down and then took up the slack.

"All right!" he called. "All right...the man is supposed to be a Poet and a minstrel. What am I bid for his shirt and leggings?"

Alana stared incredulously. They were to have their clothes sold to the highest bidder? The poet saw her slacked jaw.

"Yes m'lady...he sells our clothes. The money is part of his fee for hanging us. We're both to hang naked. You in your garters. Further punishment for the Count's injuries."

Alana could only gape.

A used clothing dealer bought the Poet's clothes for a couple of coppers.

"Well his fee's high" called the Bailiff. "Two gold crowns. OK Poet, make your plea."

"Ladies I am called the Poet. I am a rhymester and a musician. I am pleasant around the house, do all the chores, and I am excellent in the bedroom. Pay my fee and I am yours for the rest of my days!"

Some of the women smiled looking at the poet's substantial naked member, but there were no bids.

"I'm truly sorry m'lady" the poet said quietly.

Then the Bailiff kicked the stool out from under him.

The rope was already tightly cinched so the poet hung just a few inches off the platform. Alana tried to turn away but the poor man was hanging just next to her and his struggles brushed up against her skirts so she had to look.

The poet's face was set in an intense grimace...his teeth were clenched and his eyes tightly shut. His face quickly turned a deep red, then a darker congested red. He tugged desperately at his wrists affixed tightly behind him and began to kick wildly.

As he spun toward her on the rope Alana could see that his penis was obscenely erect turning a deep reddish purple. She watched in horror as long minutes went by while the poet did his horrific dance of death.

She finally turned to the Bailiff and pleaded, "If he must die let him die quickly. Not like this! Not so slowly! Please!! For pity's sake! I beg you!! Let that man-thing finish him quickly!"

"No girl. This is prescribed way the Count wants both of you to end. He'll be done in a few minutes. Now you", the Bailiff leered. "We want your end to be as slow as possible. Beautiful thing like you can make me a nice bit of money. If you dance well you might get a reprieve."

"A reprieve?" Alana asked incredulously.

"Well for a little while. We cut you down and let the highest bidders do what they will. But I'll string you up again as soon as they're done."

"How can you do something this evil?"

"Plenty of practice. Got myself four daughters. String them up regular like. Better than whipping them. Ain't killed a one...yet."

Alana turned away in disgust and wished the horror to be all over. Sure enough, within a few moments the Poet's frenzied struggles lessened greatly. His hips jerked and huge gouts of thick cream colored semen spurting off the platform. Then he hung still, his member still massively erect. The gibbering idiot hooted derisively above his dangling body.

Alana had never seen a hanging or a hanged person before. She had always imagined them to die with their eyes protruding, swollen tongue gaping from an open and drooling mouth. Despite his massive erection the Poet looked almost asleep now, his face no longer grimaced, eyes closed, mouth relaxed.

She did not fool herself. His death had been slow and excruciatingly painful and she was about to experience the same fate! The women in the gallery of onlookers surged forward to mop up the ejaculate with their handkerchiefs like it was a golden elixir.

Tears streamed down Alana's face. She had hardly known the Poet and he was largely responsible for her current predicament but she mourned his passing as if he were a brother or lover. As her tears dripped down her cheeks the Bailiff regarded her appraisingly. "She's a real looker" he thought. "I might make a nice piece of change off her, one way or t'other. Prettiest we've ever had on the gallows!"

Then he turned to the crowd.

"Now this one says she's royalty...and she wears some fine things...including undies. And I've seen them" winked the Bailiff. "What am I bid for her girdle?"

The girdle brought a goodly sum. Alana could only moan as the woman who had been high bidder unlaced it.

"Let's see her bubbies!" a lout in the crowd cried.

"Soon enough. Soon enough.", the Bailiff muttered. "Now how much for the skirt and blouse both of the same material? "

These sold quickly.

No men but her father and her physician had ever seen Alana nude so she fought the Bailiff as he untied the kerchief ties on her blouse. It was quite a tussle but finally the blouse fell away leaving her lovely pink tipped breasts exposed. Alana blushed and tears of frustration dripped down her cheeks. The humiliation of being stripped naked in front of this jeering crowd was almost unbearable.

"These drawers she's wearing are of fine material...silk I'll wager...what am I bid for them?"

This time Alana kicked and twisted and almost hanged herself sliding off the stool just being pulled back by the Bailiff before any damage could be done. But finally her drawers came down and her strangely hairless pubic area was exposed. To her shame the physical exertion had caused her labia to become engorged making it seem doubly obscene. The crowd cheered wildly.

"Lookit!" a bad called. "She's naked as a babe! Not a hair on her cunt!" The crowd hooted and cheered at Alana's abject nakedness.

Alana blushed down to her toes. All that she had left were her black silk hose and garters and the velvet choker.

"The Count's exact words are 'She's to hang in her garters' so I'll sell them hose after she's dead", called the Bailiff to the hoots of the bawds who'd been admiring the fine hosiery.

"Now her fee's 6 gold crowns."

"2 silver crowns!" called a pimply ill favored looking youth in the crowd.

"No bargaining!", growled the Bailiff. "This ain't no auction!!"

"I'm not bargaining." called the youth. "I work for the resurrectionist up on the hill. He'll pay two silver crowns for her body after she's hanged and dead." But the look in his eyes told Alana that he had other plans for her body than just being cut up in pieces by some deranged anatomist.

"Make your plea girl!"

Alana looked at him as steadily as she could, even though tears for the poet still streamed down her face. Part of her, a strong part, wanted to beg for her life. To offer to do anything, perform

any obscene or gross act, become the meanest of slaves to be spared the terrible death facing her. But an even stronger part took control and she shook her head no.

"Your choice girl!"

She watched the Bailiff move behind her and felt his foot on the stool causing her toes to shift slightly. She took what she was sure was her last breath and waited for the noose to begin its fatal embrace.

"Master Oldive!" called the Bailiff. "The whorehouse business doing well I wager? Got a nice piece of cunny here for you. Calls herself royalty."

A very tall man dressed in dark blue stopped on his way past the gallows and looked up at Alana as a collector examines a rare piece of art.

Alana allowed herself another ragged breath as the man climbed onto the platform. He was very tall. Even on her toes on the stool he almost looked her in the eye.

"Red blond hair...green eyes...nice breasts...long legs and comely figure... no hair whatsoever on her body! You're right Bailiff she's a rare one. How much? "

"Six gold crowns."

"Six!" sputtered the whoremaster. "That's a good dozen slaves. What did she do? Kill the count himself?"

"Almost", laughed the Bailiff, "almost."

He walked around Alana looking at her from all angles.

"Well let's see if she's as tight as she looks."

The man pulled off his glove and pushed his fingers deep into Alana's vagina.

Her response was automatic. She pulled up her knee, almost falling off the stool but catching the man squarely in his groin. She did her very best to dislodge his testicles from the rest of his body. Then as he gaped up at her doubled over in pain, she spit in his face and called him the worst names she could think of. The Bailiff just looked on in horror watching his percentage of the six crowns disappear. The idiot above gaped in disbelief.

The whoremaster took a minute to get over the rush of pain and wipe the spit off his face. He reached in his purse and took out a silver crown and handed it to the Bailiff.

"Make sure she dies slowly. Very slowly!" he said quietly to the Bailiff. "If she's still kicking when the sun sets it will be too soon for me!"

He turned and strode off the platform.

The Bailiff sighed. "Well girl, you do know how to make an enemy or two, I'll say that!"

He loosed the knot around Alana's neck allowing her to rest on the stool as he retied the rope in an arcane way.

"Professional Hangman came through here a month ago and showed me this knot. Said it really prolongs the dance. First time I've ever tried it. You're the test case girl." Then he pulled her up to the tips of her toes again so that her heels came out of her slippers. Despite her resolve fear coursed through her and she began to tremble.

"Sorry girl...I don't like the idea of this...the Poet went slowly enough, but I've been paid to make you dance for the afternoon and dance you will." He motioned for the man thing to back off and the fool came down off the gallows to watch the show Alana was to put on.

Alana drew her breath and steeled herself.

Then the stool was gone and she was hanging.

With her first kicking swing her red and black slippers flew off into the crowd, starting a minor fight between the two women who each caught one and tried to get the others.

Her unsupported weight did not cause the knot to cinch down as she expected. It bounced against the back of her head behind her left ear and the weight of her body tilted her head down and to the right.

She tried to cry out from the shock and the pain but found that she had no breath...nor any way to breath. Her throat was closed off by the noose's crushing pressure.

An intense burning sensation in her lungs grew second by second.

The crowd oohed as her lithe body twisted and her stockinged toes swung inches off the platform.

The men marveled...they had never seen a beauty like this die on the gallows...and she was perfectly and erotically offered up to them in nothing but her black choker and matching black silk hose.

She just hung there a moment, an erotic pendulum with her toes pointed straight down. Then she knew what she had to do. Of all things now she wanted to die with some dignity, like a princess of royal blood should.

She tried to relax and not fight the noose. Tried to just hang there and let her soul go. But this resolve was crushed as the one overriding need communicated to her brain was to free her wrists and tear this horrific noose from around her neck!

She had no control. She desperately fought to get her wrists free from the manacles but they were locked behind her. Her stockinged legs and feet fluttered back and forth trying to reach the stool or other surface but none was found.

She had no idea that her silk clad toes danced just inches off the floor of the platform.

"Hmmm", thought the Bailiff, "I might have to pull her up a bit after she's dead. In an hour or so it'll look like she died standing on her toes, her neck will stretch such."

Alana fought to open her eyes...but when she did the sight they saw were her stockinged feet kicking just off the gallows floor, and then they slammed shut again. Her head felt like a bursting balloon, exploding one minute, being crushed the next. Her ears roared. Her lungs ached. She had no idea if she had been hanging for seconds, minutes or an eternity! Time was her immutable enemy stretching the agony of her hanging forever. All she knew was she had to get free of the crushing torture of the noose around her neck. She tried to get her hands free again, but the shackles held. In desperation she swung both hands to the right and tried to crawl her right hand up to grab the rope. She came up about 8" too short. There had to be a way of freeing her wrists! She couldn't go on strangling like this...no air...nothing!

The crowd literally roared their approval. The bawds were doing a furious business. The men were dropping coins into waiting purses and skirts were being raised. Some of the whores were down on their knees. Others were being skewered from behind. Alana continued to try to free her wrists, uselessly. Her legs kicked and she spun helplessly like a lovely erotic pendulum with its fulcrum the crushing noose around her neck. The crowd cheered with every new effort she made.

The whores in the crowd continued to do a roaring business. They all wished someone as lovely as this would hang every day, rather than the common slaves and drudges who usually dangled at the end of the rope. Almost all had their skirts raised and were being entered by a client who slipped them their fee and plunged his erection deep into their cunt or ass. The rest were performing oral sex on their marks. The crowd was in a fine lust watching the beautiful girl slowly die.

Alana so desperately wanted it to be over. For it to end. For this crushing agony to cease! Her head felt like it would burst and her lungs roared with an agony of their own, but still she struggled in what seemed like endless torment. Tears of pain dripped down her cheeks to be met by a steady stream of saliva eking its way past her gritted teeth and still she kicked in her agony.

The Bailiff marveled at her resiliency. He hadn't been sure he had tied the new slow knot the hangman had shown him correctly, but the results were twisting in front of him. He hadn't believed it would make the agony last so long and he was sure the girl would succumb fairly quickly, but here she was still fighting and it was almost dinner. He seriously thought about giving her a good tug to hasten things along, or having the cooing idiot climb up and drop on her shoulders. He was capering around the twisting girl, his erection causing his trousers to push out like a tent, cum soaking through the thin material.

The silver crown though weighed heavily in the Bailiff's pocket. It wouldn't do for the whoremaster not to get his full value and he did say he wouldn't mind if she danced until sundown. He blew out a frustrated breath and watched the show Alana's naked struggling body continued to put on. She was covered in a fine sheen of sweat from her exertions and this added a shimmering quality to the light dancing off her breasts and firm buttocks.

He was used to letting the hanged bodies of the condemned swing for least for an hour, usually longer. There were tales of prisoners who had been revived after being cut down in less than that but he had never seen anyone last as long as this girl. Of course there were always rumors. He had even seen Half Hanged Mary for himself. She had supposedly survived a half hour on the noose (more like a half of that, he suspected), but she was a drooling idiot that had no sense so who could tell. But this lovely was putting on a truly remarkable show!

Alana continued to kick and fight to get her manacled wrists free. Her nipples, which were a soft pink when first exposed, were now swollen achingly erect and a dark brown. Sweat danced off their tips. Her sex had puffed out and her clitoris was an engorged red. She had no idea that the torture of the noose had resulted in her vaginal secretions and cum copiously dripping down her legs as she danced at the rope's end. Her eyes were tightly shut, teeth clenched, mouth frozen in a grimace of pained consternation. The veins on her throat bulged blue.

The effect on the crowd had not diminished. The sensuality in the tableau was almost electric. The Poet's slowly twisting body with his empurpled penis still achingly erect dripping semen with Alana's straining twisting body dangling next to him was a sight which had never been duplicated. Old men in their 50's and 60's who had long given up any hope because of their impotence, found themselves with massive erections and desperate for relief from one of the whores and trollops in the crowd.

Then the Bailiff heard the beginning of the cry, "Cut her down and pass her around!" Coppers began to be thrown on the gallows floor. "Hmmm", he thought. "Now what to do?" The crowd was urging that he cut the girl down still alive. That he allow the men in the crowd to have at her. Release their lust in every way possible on her ravaged gasping body. After paying for the privilege of course! And after she had been raped repeatedly, string her up again and let the noose finish its work.

He seriously considered this option. Good money was offered, and she would be just as dead. But it was late, supper was waiting, and he was tired. Let the bastards use the whores. This one was taking far too long as it was.

Alana's face had by now turned a desperate congested red, and the beauty of it had drained from the immense pain of fighting the noose. The veins in her forehead bulged and her teeth were locked in a grimace that could only be described as crushing with the desperate misery of slow strangulation. What was a dull ache in her chest had now turned into a raging torment as she fought for a tiny sip of air into her tortured lungs, but none could eke its way past the crushing noose. Though her eyes were still shut a remarkable light show flashed through her mind. Globules of light floated and exploded and danced as her exertions continued.

Finally Alana could fight no longer. Her arms were lead weights pulled behind her and anchored by the manacles. She had no idea if her legs were kicking or not. They felt more like heavy logs dragging her down and adding their dead weight to the fulcrum of agony that was the noose. All she perceived was the swish of air as she twisted on the rope. All that was left was the crushing, suffocating, excruciating agony of the noose. Her legs and straining toes twitched in involuntary convulsions as her consciousness slipped away. The crowd marveled as each new spasm of pain and torment racked her lovely body and seemed to produce an even more copious supply of erotic fluids down her legs.

A ripping, tearing , electric shock started in her groin and shot through her...her last conscious thought was that she had just experienced a massive, all encompassing orgasm. But there was no pleasure or release in it...no succor from the crushing pain and agony of the noose...then darkness...

CHAPTER 3

Pain! Her head was exploding! It felt like an axe was splitting it in two! She took a ragged breath. She could breathe! How?

"Is this death?" she thought. "With excruciating pain, and breathing?"

"Maybe this is Hell?"

She vaguely realized that there were voices shouting.

"She was up for over an hour...she's dead I tell you!" came the strident cry.

"She's not dead...she's breathing!"

"Doesn't matter...a few breaths but she's likely hopelessly addled from being on the rope. She was up longer than half-hanged Mary and all she did was piss and shit herself for a couple of days and died anyway!"

Who was yelling? Why were they yelling? Could she open her eyes? Despite her entire will they barely opened a slit. A face peered down at her. A hand cupped her chin. "Come on girl. Give me a sign that you're still with us."

She wanted to say she was, but how? She was dead wasn't she? How could she have gone through all that excruciating agony and still be alive? Was this death talking to her? Suddenly she had to swallow. A new shaft of agony ripped through her!

Her throat felt like daggers on end or shards of broken glass. She had to cough which made it even worse.

"Look she's as good as dead and I have two silver crowns for her body so lets get her back up on the rope and finish this" the strident voice called.

"Sorry girl", the other voice said and then someone slapped her hard across the cheek! Her eyes flew open.

"Now, if you're in there just nod yes." She barely had the strength to comply.

"That's it", the voice said. "I've paid her fee of six gold crowns. Now she's mine!"

A voice she recognized from another life as the Bailiff replied in a wheedling tone. "Well not quite sir. The whoremaster did pay an additional silver crown for me to be sure she died slow."

The voice she knew was the man who had slapped her replied in a mocking tone, "Well we certainly wouldn't want to cheat the whoremaster, now would we? Here's his silver crown and another for you."

As this repartee was going on she felt a cloth dig deep in her vagina and slide up and down her stockinged thighs. A blade flashed in her vision.

"Get away from her whore! Touch her again and you'll bring back an arm with no hand!!"

"Its her cum I'm after master. She's fairly dripping with it!"

"Get away from her you filthy fornicating bitch!" the voice replied, and then a whistle. She sensed the crowd around her was murmuring and angry. What she couldn't see was the two guards leading a crowd of soldiers with spears and swords advancing from the village to quell the disturbance. Then a huge black shape appeared next to the platform.

"Come on girl, its time for us to leave!" and a strong arm gripped her around the waist. She was airborne and then came down on a horse's saddled back. The man leapt up and behind her. His arms straddled her and he heard him call, "Let's be off Beaufort. Time to be gone!"

The trip onto the horse's back was as painful as she could imagine. The huge black horse started off at a gallop literally throwing the members of the crowd out of his way, but his gallop was more than the pain in her head could sustain and she quickly lapsed into unconsciousness again.

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The next she knew she was on a soft bed with a graying bearded face peering down at her.

"How long did you say she'd been hanging?"

"The Bailiff said over an hour."

"Could be right from the lacerations, rope burns and bruising on her throat. I've never seen anything as bad as this. I've treated a failed suicide by hanging but it wasn't nearly this serious. I don't see how she could survive that long! Is she addled?"

"She was responding to me before she passed out."

"Well let's see." The grey bearded man looked at her again.

"Dear me! The whites of her eyes are badly bloodshot. This could be a sign of bad bleeding in the brain...I'm not sure you did her a favor by cutting her down. All right, girl Do you understand me?"

Alana tried to say yes...the pain in her throat would not let her. She nodded yes and instantly regretted the action. Pain hammered through her like a blacksmith's hammer on an anvil.

"Good! Very good! Can you speak?"

She shook her head no. Oh that was a mistake...the pain in her head hammered again!

"She may never regain her speech. Voice box could be badly damaged", the graybeard mumbled.

"It would be better if we could undo the manacles so her wrists aren't pinioned behind her."

"I've tried", the other voice she recognized as the man said. "We had to leave in a bit of a hurry and the Bailiff did not see fit to give me the key. It will take a smith's tools to remove those, and the only one in the area is on a three day job south. Removing them will have to wait."

"I know your throat hurts girl. Does your head hurt badly?" The gray bearded man asked. She tried to nod yes again, but barely started before her head almost exploded again.

"Gently! No vigorous movements girl. You'll be hurting for a while to come. Now I will make you an elixir which will help with the pain." He turned to speak to the man. "It would be better if she wasn't moved for a few days."

"I can't do it. This is still well within the Count deLong's lands...he may well take offense to my saving her. I will need to put more distance between us."

"I will mix up a larger batch of the elixir. Dose her every couple of hours and I'll give you a poultice for the rope burns and abrasions on the neck. They will heal but they'll leave some nasty scars. I don't have any clothes for her. Sorry but I am just a poor apothecary. But take the blanket. It will help to cover her."

She turned her head. She thought she could make out that other man speaking was the man from the gallows.

"I appreciate all your help. Here's two gold crowns. That should make up for the blanket."

Strong arms picked her and the blanket up. The pain hammered her from head to toe. As gently as possible the man carried her out to where the black horse waited patiently.

"There there, Beaufort", the man said. "She'll be alright."

The man swung her into the saddle again and jumped behind her. "Now let's be off!"

Once more the horse flew into a gallop and once more the pain in her head turned her vision red and consciousness fled.

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Instead the man brought over the cup. Seemingly not noticing her nudity he put the cup between her lips and she drank in small sips, trying to spare her razor sore throat. It was pure agony to drink the soup and the following elixir but it was helping with the pain. She looked at the face of the man who saved her. She made a terrific effort but just managed to whisper, "Why?"

"Oh good! You can speak! 'Why?' Why did I save you and pay your fee?"

Despite the pain she nodded yes.

"Ah you should thank Beaufort for that." The horse whinnied in response to his name. "He sensed something was going on and as he led me to the gallows at a gallop he told me that he would pay your fee, if I wouldn't. How he knew it was 6 gold crowns is beyond me. Must be his exceptional hearing. But if Beaufort says something is worth the money so it is. And I doubt that Bailiff would have taken a bid from a horse. So I just did it at his behest. You should thank him for your life. He's responsible."

The horse snickered in response.

Alana just bowed her head. "I must be dead, or this is a terrible nightmare", she thought. "I seem to have been saved from a horrific death by a lunatic who thinks his horse speaks to him! What next?"

"Beaufort!", the man called to the horse, "I don't think our guest here fully believes me."

The horse snorted. He pawed on the ground and then tapped out a quick sequence with his front hooves.

"We have to use a kind of code on the road, when we can't take the spelling board, but he says he's a bit disappointed. He believes in you. Now what in the world do you suppose he means by that?"

The man got up and cleared the camp site. He saddled the horse and carefully put Alana in front of him on the saddle and they took off. The pain was bad but not so bad that it left her senseless. Alana managed to nap during their morning ride. But as her strength returned she began to wake up for longer periods. That's when she noticed the truly dark nature of the country they were traveling through. In every hamlet and at every crossroads stood a gallows. And on each of these hung men, women, girls, boys, and even young children. Virtually all were hanged naked and the sight of all those dangling bodies like strange fruit quickly made her sick.

"Why?" she tried to frame the question as they passed a gallows where father, son, mother, and daughter all hanged completely naked. Both father and son had died with massive erections.

"It's the black hand of the Count deLong. He has indentured his people making them slaves to the land. If they want a better life, or any life at all, for that matter, they run for the river and the Duke deMarcy's lands. If they're caught he hangs the entire family as a lesson to the rest of the populace."

All the hangings were terrible, but the children were the worst. Sweet lovely tow haired boys and girls, hanged next to their parents or alone, some with just their wrists bound behind them. Others with both their wrists and ankles bound. None wore clothes. The boys, even the smallest, all died with erections. Some of the girls were too young to even have pubic hair. All had died slowly...very slowly.

After a morning ride and much more of the elixir they stopped for a cold noonday meal. Once again the man fed her gently and persistently. She nodded and croaked her thanks. The horse was always around, almost watching her, it seemed.

When they got on the saddle again, she noticed for the first time that she had been riding on some kind of padding. In her hoarse whisper she thanked the rider, calling him "kind sir", but she was an experienced horsewoman and could ride without the padding.

He smiled. "It's not for your benefit girl. When you first came aboard I'm afraid you were a wee bit too 'exhilarated' by your time on the rope. Truth is you soaked Beaufort's saddle. He's a bit particular about its appearance and it will take a lot to get it clean again."

Alana blushed down to her toes and said no more until she was prodded. Finally she apologized for her lack of countenance.

"Ha!" the man laughed. "No girl. You did not pee. These were erotic fluids!"

Alana blushed even more hanging her head. For the first time she noticed that her nipples seemed to still be painfully erect. This, combined with what she realized was her engorged pudendum, made her embarrassment even more acute. As they rode the man gave her more of the elixir and finally asked her if she felt well enough to tell her story.

She tried. Stopping frequently when her croaking voice gave out. She started with the sea voyage to Vendante finally ending it with waking up on the floor of the gallows platform.

"So if I have this right you are the Princess Alana. Heir to the throne of Branart, and everything that's happened to you in the last few days is one big misunderstanding?"

She nodded yes, the action making her head hammer again.

"You have to understand that this sounds more than a little farfetched Every ballad and story is about some Princess or other in danger. But Beaufort believes you and he's a good judge of character. He either thinks you're telling the truth, or what you believe is the truth. Right Beaufort?" The horse whinnied in response. "Well let me give this some thought. If you're telling the truth there should be a way to get this all straightened out."

Around noon they came to an Inn.

"Come", the man said , "we need provisions and food, and I'll be able to get some information. "

Alana's voice had recovered somewhat and as he set her on the ground she stammered. "Must I go in there completely naked and with my wrists shackled behind me?" It was more of a plea than a question.

"Hmmm", mused the man. "You're really not used to being naked are you? Well there's no prohibition on nudity in this land and slaves often accompany their masters with their charms on display. You'll soon be used to it." Alana looked at him in horror.

"Oh yes. Remember I paid six gold crowns and two silver for you so you're my slave. For the time being, here, take my riding cloak. It will cover you a bit. Let's just hope for your sake there's few people inside." The cloak came over her shoulders but left her exposed in the front.

He was right. They were virtually alone except for the Inn's owner, a serving girl and a few men drinking beer. Everything stopped when they entered. Everyone stared when Alana appeared. It was obvious that a lovely nude girl clad only in black stockings with her wrists bound behind her didn't walk into the inn every day.

The man sat down at a table and motioned the owner over. Alana sat next to him.

"What do you have that's fresh?"

The owner did not seem to hear him, instead staring at Alana's naked breasts. She stared at the table before her, her face feeling hot and reddening terribly.

"I said, what do you have that's fresh?"

"Roast game bird. Pheasant, with tubers", the man stuttered.

"Bring us a large serving, enough for two, and your coldest ale."

The owner went off and the man got up and moved to the table with the other men and sat down to talk. Alana just sat at the table and contemplated her new fate. How had this happened? How did she end up naked, scarred and bound? It was enough to drive one mad!

After a while the food and drink was placed before her but the man did not notice, engaged in hurried conversation with the other two men. Alana stared at the food, and realized she was desperately hungry. But how to eat any of it with her wrists bound behind her?

Then someone sat down next to her. It was a young girl about 8 years old.

"Hello", said the girl. "Why don't you have any clothes on? Are you a slave, or a Pleasure Girl?"

"Its a long story", Alana replied blushing badly, in a very hoarse voice.

"How will you eat with your hands behind you. Oh! Are you a prisoner?"

"Not any more", Alana replied.

"Are you hungry?"

"Yes. Very hungry", she smiled.

With that the girl began to cut up the food and bite by bite fed it to her. As Alana ate, tears of gratitude dripped down her cheeks for a child's kindness. A few minutes later the man came back and sat opposite her and the child.

"You are very kind", he smiled to the child. "What is your name?"

"Katarina", replied the child.

"Well you are doing a good job", smiled man. "Here's a silver crown for you", and he put the coin before the girl. Her eyes widened. Likely more money than she had ever had.

"Now finish feeding Alana, if you would, and assist her in brushing her hair and looking after her needs."

"Your name is Alana?", the girl asked.

"Yes" Alana smiled.

Then the girl noticed the tears running down Alana's face. She took a corner of her blouse and dried them. "No need to cry!"

And then they ate in silence. After the meal the girl took Alana into her small alcove and assisted her in caring for herself. She then spent a good 20 minutes brushing her hair.

"You have the prettiest hair I have ever seen. How did you get those terrible marks on your neck?", she asked.

"A very evil man hurt me", Alana replied, "but that man out there saved me."

"He's a very nice man", the girl replied. "I don't have any clothes that would fit you", the girl decided, "but we have an old apron that could work."

She ran and got the item. It had a halter tie that barely covered Alana's breasts, and a short skirt that tied in the back with a bow. It barely covered her pubic area and it had no back, but did provide a some modesty. The girl had even found an old pair of slippers for her.

When she returned to the front room the man looked up and smiled. "It suits you", he grinned. "Here young lady!" and gave Katarina another silver crown.

Alana was smiling for the first time since her hanging. She leant down and gave the child a kiss on the forehead. Katarina beamed.

"Thank you!" she smiled.

As they exited the Inn a group of three workmen entered. They all admired Alana but one decided to reach down and feel her buttocks as she went by and gave her a painful pinch. Alana cried out in indignation and whirled to meet the oaf, bringing her leg around as she had been taught and catching him with the heel of her foot on the side of his knee. The crack was audible for all to hear. He went down screaming and the man was on him blade in hand.

"Mercy master!" he cried. "She's broke my leg!"

"Be thankful that was all she did", he snarled.

As he helped Alana onto Beaufort, he murmured, "There's more to you than meets the eye girl...far more!"

And then they were off.

CHAPTER 4

It was another hard riding day, but with the meal and the attentions of the girl, Alana's spirits were up. The pain was slowly abating and adding to her physical recovery was the fact that less and less of the crossroads bore the gallows and hanging bodies they had encountered up till then. They reached a town with a coaching inn in the late afternoon. As they rode up a young boy came up to take Beaufort's reins. The man helped Alana down.

"Here lad", he gave him a coin, "Look after my horse and give him a peck of oats and brush him down."

He turned to enter the inn, then stopped and turned to Alana. "This is a rough place. Take my cloak and stay close to me while I get some information and arrange for our dinner."

Alana just nodded.

Entering the Inn, she was shocked. It was more of a brothel than an Inn. Scantly clad women were engaged in all sorts of fornication with men waiting in line for their turn at them. The man quietly ushered her up to the bar and ordered beer. Before it was delivered a woman's voice called, "Now you've got a nice piece of cunny here, Sire! Is she for sale?"

Alana turned to see a tall woman with flaming red hair, dressed in red with black stockings, and a riding crop in her hand appraising her.

"No" he replied and turned back to the bar.

"Give you 2 crowns for her just in her cloak, more if her body's as good as her face and hair!"

The woman stepped forward and with the riding crop and slipped it under Alana's chin tilting her head up before she could slip away. The man caught the crop in his hand and calmly replied, "I told you she's not for sale!"

"Oh, but she's a gallows bird. Look at the rope marks on her neck. Dance well does she? I've got well-to-do clients who'll pay well to cuss a bird who's danced on the rope. I'll offer you four crowns for her!"

"No", the man replied. "I paid six."

By this time the bartender and a goodly number of patrons were watching and listening to the goings on.

"Six!" the woman replied. "A hefty sum! But if she has a taste for the noose she should be able to put on a little dancing show...it might be worth it. I'll up it to seven!"

"Seven gold crowns?" the man asked.

"Gold!!" the woman asked incredulously. "You paid six gold crowns??"

Now the entire room was listening.

"This young girl must be able to dance and dance well. Does she come hard when she's hanging on the rope?"

Alana could only stare at the woman in horror. The woman laughed and pulled back her hair to reveal the distinctive marks of the hangman's rope. "I made a good living dangling for gentlemen who wanted to fuck someone who could dance for the toffs in private. I could make a nice bit of money on you, m'love! Alright! Eight gold crowns. My final offer!"

Alana turned to look at the man. A profit of two gold crowns was a goodly amount. It was more than a working man could earn in six month's time. Despite her efforts to control her emotions a plea came to her eyes.

"Not even close! Our discussion Madam is at an end. May I buy you a libation?"

With that the woman laughed and bellowed, "Well at least you know how to end a negotiation!" and moved next to him at the bar. After the drinks came the man took Alana and slid her out the rear door.

"This could still turn ugly. Best you stay out here until I finish our business."

Alana could not suppress a shiver even though she was in the bright afternoon sunlight. That interaction was too close for comfort. Yet she was intrigued. What fueled this continuing theme of sex and hanging? How did the two come to be so closely linked...besides the obvious physiological response.

On her own for the first time since the night of the celebration she found a small area to the rear and side of the inn where she could sit in the sun. The discomfort of her bound wrists and the pain from her hanging was a constant, but the heat from the day warmed her. It seemed that colors had brightened for her in the last two days. The fragrance of the forest and flowers was much more intense, and the light summer breeze that blew was a joy. Yes, it was very good to be alive! The cloak slipped off her shoulders and she started getting a bit sleepy. She had just started to nod off when she realized she was not alone. A group of about six young men surrounded her.

"Well, well. What do we have here?" commented a tall blond boy. She guessed him to be about her age.

"From the looks of it she's a tart trying to drum up some business" replied an ill natured boy a head shorter.

“Well if she is, she’s a prisoner of some sort. She’s all chained up” cried a third.

"What do you charge darling?" asked another.

Alana was still hoarse, but she tried to make her reply as strong as possible. "My Master" (God it hurt to say those words), "My Master is inside and will be out in a minute. He will not take favorably to my being bothered."

"Oh really!" said a fourth boy and stepped closer to peer into a loop of the apron so as to get a peek at Alana's breasts.

Without her hands most of Alana training in self defense, taught by her masters in Branart, was practically useless. Still she had her legs and feet and as the boy reached out to try to pull at her top she caught him with a side kick in the inside of his ankle. He went down howling.

The others laughed, but as her attention was on the first boy she did not see another with a loop of belting leather. He lunged forward and dropped it over her head and cinched it around her neck. The pain was intense since it cinched down on the area still sore from her hanging and brought Alana flying back with a tug.

"Hey look!" the first one cried. "She's a gallows bird!"

"Sure enough", said the second, "Those are rope burns from a hanging."

"Well than she'll be used to this" said the boy holding the leather dragging Alana back to a high tree stump. The pain was so intense that she stumbled after him without protest.

She knew that she couldn't cry out loud enough, even prior to this abuse, to get help. Now with the leather choking her she could barely breathe. The boy with the tether brought her to the stump and pulled her down so that her legs and backside were in the air.

"Well if you're a gallows tart than you won't mind sucking this clean", he laughed as he released his front flap and his erection popped out. He was a good two feet from her but the stench from his unwashed penis caused Alana to want to gag. She could feel another set of hands beginning to probe her from behind.

"Look a' here!" the boy in back yelled. "She's cumming all over herself. Coo, she's fairly dripping she wants it so bad."

“Yeah!” another called. “Look at her cunny. It’s all swollen up and her clit’s as hard as a rock.”

Alana reddened and tears of anger and frustration flowed down her cheeks as she was unable to control her body's reactions.

"Hey!" one of the others called, "What if they hanged her cause she's a witch. You know one of those kinds that has teeth in her cunce? You stick it in there and she could bite it off!"

"Well", said another, "I'll just use my billy to probe her cunny and arse and then we can be sure."

"Why should it be you?" called another. "My club's just as good!"

The other boys argued heatedly about who should get the first turn penetrating her from behind while the first boy continued to pull tighter on the leather around her neck and began to push his engorged member at Alana's mouth, trying to force her mouth open. Despite the pain she firmly clamped her mouth shut and turned away.

"Oh, playing hard to get, eh? Hey Roddy, grab her head!" As the boy tried Alana quickly sunk her teeth into his hand. He screamed and hopped around dripping blood.

"You're a dangerous one aren't you?", asked the first.

"Alright, Lindon, just clamp her nose shut. She'll open her mouth soon enough."

Another boy came up and clamped his hand down on Alana's nostrils. Now she knew it was only a matter of time. Along with her breath being cut off the choking leather noose was choking her at a rapid rate. She knew it was just a matter of time before she had to give up. Suddenly the blond boy released his grip on the leather and flew through the air landing against a tree. Alana gasped for breath and realized she was free.

There was a general commotion and screams and yells. She rolled off the stump and sat on the ground trying to clear her head. When her sight cleared she could see the blond boy crumpled against a tree, his neck at a strange pitch, with his erection still pointing skyward at a comical angle. To her left another boy, a dark haired one, was literally stomped flat with his chest stove in. As she looked up she saw the other four running as fast as they could with Beaufort snorting after them. As she watched he ran a third down and literally tromped him to death. This commotion brought the crowd out of the inn.

The man ran up to her. "What happened here?"

Alana could barely whisper. "Those two and four others tried to rape me but Beaufort intervened."

"Ah, I understand." The man surveyed the tableau before him and whistled for Beaufort.

"I think we best be going before too many questions are asked."

He removed the leather noose from Alana's throat. "That looks especially painful."

She nodded fighting back the tears.

Beaufort stomped up. The man swung Alana into the saddle and mounted while the crowd milled around in confusion, and they were off.

CHAPTER 5

They rode for an hour in silence. Then Alana turned and looked at her savior.

"I know I have been rude for not inquiring earlier" she asked hoarsely, "but may I ask the name of my benefactor?"

"I wondered when you'd get around to that", he smiled. "My name is Gilbert."

"How long before we arrive at our destination Sir, or is it Lord Gilbert?"

"Just Gilbert for now. I would like to reach the river by sundown tomorrow but it is unlikely."

He reined in the horse. "We'll make camp off the road here."

He picked Alana up off the saddle and set her on the ground.

"I know you can't do much without your hands but if you and Beaufort would get a nice pile of soft leaves for your bed, I'll make us some supper."

Actually with Beaufort's help Alana was able to kick together a reasonable bed for herself in a short while. She wandered over to the small fire Gilbert had made. The partial covering offered by the apron lifted her spirits. She noticed that he had a pot started. He had added herbs, some meat and some vegetables and it already smelled wonderful.

Gilbert came out of the woods with some additional firewood. "Now that's a pretty sight. You look lovely with your bare backside and those black stockings. And it shouldn't be long for supper now!"

He was right. He poured a little of the elixir for Alana and then sat down with the pot to feed them both dinner. She sat next to him sharing bite for bite. A good loaf of bread helped make the meal more filling.

Gilbert got a flask out of his saddle and poured a small amount of brandy for her. She was quite taken with how carefully he fed her and gently held the cup for her. It was amazing how she could sit next to a man she hardly knew, virtually naked, totally helpless, and have him feed her dinner. Despite her force of will her nipples, which had never returned to their original soft pink state, became even harder his physical presence enhanced by the elixir and brandy became intoxicating.

The combination of the both the drinks and a good diner made her quite sleepy. Gilbert laid down the blanket on top of her bed of leaves, and letting her lie on her side, put Beaufort's blanket over her.

"Sleep well. Tomorrow should be interesting."

Alana smiled. She was very tired. Her throat ached both from the hanging and her recent strangling. She was very sleepy but wondered if this would be the evening he would try to take her. A hand on her hip or breast in the middle of the night and bound as she was what could she do but put up a fruitless struggle. Even with these thoughts it was just moments and she was fast asleep.

Morning found the wonderful aroma of a hot breakfast in the air and even though she was still virtually nude and bound Alana honestly looked forward to the new day. After breakfast Gilbert saddled Beaufort, put Alana on the saddle in front of him and they started on their way.

They were on the trail for about an hour when Beaufort snorted.

Gilbert looked up and saw smoke in the trees.

"Something is very wrong!" he murmured.

There was a small path leading off toward the smoke and Beaufort took it almost without Gilbert's direction.

In a few minutes they came into a clearing. It was obvious what had caused the smoke. What was left of a dwelling smoldered before them. A young man's body, almost cleaved in two lay in the yard next to a shovel.

The true horror was on the opposite side of a clearing.

A large half dead oak tree bore horrible fruit. The bodies of a nude young woman and two younger girls dangled from its various limbs. Even from that distance it was obvious that each had been raped brutally before dying slowly. Simple knots had been used to hang them so they truly died of slow strangulation.

The worst, if there could be said to be a worst, was the oldest girl. She had a woman's body and Alana guessed her to be her to be about her age. She had been hanged on a low limb which had bent under her weight. The tips of her toes had plowed furrows in the soft dirt beneath her as she struggled in her death throes. The men's semen mixed with her own cum and urine had dripped down her legs creating a muddy surface that her toes just dug further into. Now with the rope biting deep into her throat, and the limb bending more so under her weight, she appeared to be standing on the tips of her toes, but obviously had died hours earlier.

Alana's eyes teared. The two other girls looked younger but both had been raped and condemned to a slow death on the rope. Despite the bruising on their bodies and the copious amount of leakage from their vaginas and anuses, each girl had an almost angelic look on her face, overcoming the horror of their deaths with their almost beatific beauty.

Gilbert just shook his head. "I have seen evil these last few days, but this is beyond anything I've ever witnessed!" he muttered.

He helped Alana down then dismounted and gently cut each of the three bodies down. This done, he went over to the cleaved boy's body and picked up the shovel. He began to dig a single common grave. Beaufort surprisingly used his front hooves and helped as much as he could.

Suddenly the horse lifted his head and whinnied.

"Behind the ruin?" Gilbert questioned. A responding whinny and both of them were off for the greenery beyond the ruined dwelling. Alana followed as quickly as she could. She realized that the last two days had made her rather adept at moving rapidly with her hands bound behind her.

When she came upon Gilbert and the horse she found herself looking down at a terrified sobbing girl. She was young with a slim figure and long brown hair. Despite the tears and abuse she was a comely little thing. To Alana's horror, she reminded her of Alisande.

She was naked and her hands were tied behind her. She had the same type of crude knot tied around her neck which led to a good sized broken branch. From the raw red rope burns on the girl's throat it was obvious that she had been hanged with the rest and from the bruising and bleeding it was obvious she had been brutally raped in every way imaginable.

Gilbert cut her wrists free and parted the rope around the neck of the sobbing girl.

"I need to look after those bodies Alana. Then we'll have to move on, and rather quickly. See if you can find out from her what happened."

Gilbert returned to his digging, but Alana stopped Beaufort. He knelt down and allowed her, despite her manacled hands, to get the bottle of elixir the old man had given Gilbert for her pain.

With great difficulty, given her bondage, she got it open and managed to get the girl to drink some. In a few minutes the elixir did its work and the girl calmed down enough that Alana's soothing inquiries found a response.

"My name is Krystyana m'lady", she replied in a hoarse and croaking voice.

Her story came out slowly. The four bodies were her brother and three sisters. Their parents had died of fever six months before, but her older brother and sister had continued to keep the farm and animals and the family had sustained themselves.

That morning, as they were going about their chores a band of Norsemen on foot had come out of the forest. Her brother had tried to put himself between them and his sisters, but one swing of an axe had ended his resistance. They looted the farm of all the food and what little valuables they could find and then torched the house. This done they stripped all the girls and took turns raping them and using them in horrible ways including her younger sisters. One of the Norseman had complained that they had killed the only boy which was his favorite. He took great delight in anally raping the three youngest girls, which included Krystyana. By the time they were finished all the girls were bleeding badly.

Finally sated, the leader spoke of leaving the girls as a sacrifice to Odin. The men heartily agreed and arranged a series of rough nooses on the old oak tree. Each of the crying naked girls was roughly bound and the crude nooses knotted around their necks.

One by one they were hanged from the old oak tree in the yard. She had watched her oldest sister die incredibly slowly. Since the branch had bent the Norsemen took great delight in her furious struggles. Eventually her straining toes dug a shallow trench in the soft ground beneath her. It seemed the longer she fought the more pleasure it gave the watchers. Two had become so aroused that they actually took her as she hanged, the largest taking her anally. When the oldest girl finally succumbed to the rope it was Krystyana's turn. She recounted in vivid detail the choking horror, the long minutes of strangling on the rope with her wrists helplessly bound behind her, naked and dripping the men's' semen out of all her orifices. The men lining up and plunging into her ravaged anus as she dangled on the rope. Then all of them laughing as her final struggles left her limp and spent and the darkness took her.

Miraculously, she came to on the ground, her head splitting with pain and her throat sore beyond belief.

The Norsemen were gone and all her sisters were dead. She found herself bound and attached to the limb she had been hanged from by the rope around her neck with her vagina and anus feeling as if they had been torn to pieces. Almost as if she had been ripped in half. She just lay there crying for the longest time. Unable to free herself she had crawled to back of the dwelling. As she could not untie her wrists or the knot on the broken branch she had resigned herself to the raiders returning and finishing what they had started. It was then she heard a horse moving up the trail and hid to the best of her ability. That is when Gilbert and Alana had arrived.

Alana listened to the poor girl and saw her shaking and shivering even in the warm sunlight. She needed clothing or something warm, but it was obvious that everything she and her family may have had was burnt with their dwelling.

"Now now", she soothed, "I need your help."

The girl looked up at her with frightened eyes.

Alana reached behind her with her shackled wrists and undid the bow behind her back holding her apron in place .

"Here now, help me take this off over my head."

Krystyana obeyed, leaving Alana completely nude again.

"Now put this over your head. Good! Good!"

By having the girl tighten the halter top and wrap the apron around her, they made a reasonable dress that covered her slim figure.

"There now", she smiled..."that's better, isn't it?" She thought she saw a hint of a smile in the girl's care worn face.

Just then a commotion started on the other side of the burnt rubble. Gilbert had mounted Beaufort and she saw him draw his sword and grab his shield. In an instant he was surrounded by almost a dozen Norsemen and a melee had ensued. In the first few seconds Gilbert struck down two and another fell under Beaufort's hooves.

Then the melee seemed to recede into the woods with Beaufort gaining and the Norsemen following.

Alana ran forward to the nearest dead Norseman eager to find a weapon, any weapon! He had fallen on his sword but she turned around and was able to grasp his misericord with her manacled hands. Gripping it behind her back she ran back to Krystyana. The girl had crumpled to the ground and was crying hysterically.

Alana was about to try to comfort her when the Norsemen came charging out of the woods chased by Gilbert and Beaufort. They were missing another three men and two were injured. Then three more came out of the woods to her left. Two charged straight for the fight, but one caught sight of the two girls, and stopped to view the lovely nude girl with the golden red hair, black stockings, her wrists manacled behind her. He smiled lecherously and began to walk over to them, while his compatriots entered the battle. Alana tried giving him her most becoming smile while Krystyana wept piteously behind her. She did her best to keep herself between the hulking man and the girl.

"Wonderful!" she thought. "Six years of warrior training and never a word of what to do with your wrists bound behind you.

The Norseman's smile turned into a grin as he approached her. Alana waited until he was less than six feet away, continuing to give him her most alluring smile... and then kicked dirt into his eyes!

He sputtered and raised his sword hand to wipe it off. She leapt forward and put all she had into a swift kick to his groin. He was too big to be felled by the blow but he did bend down and grasp his loins with both hands. She moved as fast as she could, spinning around and driving the knife blade deep into the base of his neck. His eyes rolled back and he toppled over, unfortunately landing on his weapons and driving the misericord beneath him.

Alana could see she couldn't get any of the weapons with her hands useless behind her. She looked longingly at the man's war hammer. She could make it out by its elaborate handle, but it would take more than she had to roll the body over so she went back to Krystyana and just stood in front of her waiting for a chance to grab another weapon.

By this time another four of the Norsemen were on the ground dead or dying, not counting the one Alana had killed. The rest were looking at each other as if to see which would have the nerve

to next attack the madman on the crazed horse. Then they all bolted for the woods, and the fight was over.

Gilbert galloped over and jumped off Beaufort.

"Are you two alright?" And then he saw the dead Norseman. He turned him over to see the puzzled look on the dead man's face with the knife hilt protruding from the side of his neck.

"You did this?" he asked incredulously, looking with amazement at Alana.

"I had to, you were otherwise occupied."

"Amazing! Truly amazing! But now we must go!! "

"We are not leaving the girl!" Alana said defiantly stamping her foot.

"Of course not, but all of us cannot ride Beaufort. He was loaded down with my armor, provisions and just you."

"Take the girl", said Alana, "I will manage as best I can on foot."

Gilbert stared at the sight in front of him. A naked girl wearing just black stockings and a matching choker with her wrists bound behind her by manacles, trying to convince him that she could survive by herself in that vulnerable state if he would just save this unknown child crying so desperately next to her. She had courage and determination, he'd give her that. Maybe there was something to this story of royal birth after all.

"I'm sure you would, naked with your wrists bound behind you. I have a better idea." replied Gilbert wryly.

He picked up Krystyana gently and set her on the massive horse.

"There girl, make room for Alana."

He hoisted Alana up front and set the girls hands around her on the reins.

"Just hold Alana in place so she doesn't fall off. Beaufort will do the rest" and started off at a jogging pace, with the horse following.

CHAPTER 6

He kept that pace up for a good hour and then slowed.

"We should have been easy to track so they must have been a small band and had more than enough of us. We'll slow down to a fast walk." And they continued on.

They had been walking for another 30 minutes when Beaufort snorted.

"Hmmm", Gilbert commented, "This doesn't look good at all!"

Ahead there was the marking for a small village and much more smoke.

"Could be there are raiding bands hitting all over this region. Let's go slowly."

As they entered the outskirts of the village the carnage was obvious. Almost all the buildings were burning. Dead bodies were everywhere. Gilbert found a small outbuilding that had not been touched and pried open the door. Inside were a crying woman and three small children.

"What has happened here?"

"Oh master! It's the Norsemen! They've sacked the town and have been killing everyone!"

"Where are your men folk?"

"They made a stand further down the lane but they could all be dead now."

"All right!" Gilbert took Alana and Krystyana down. "I'll find out. All of you! Stay here and stay hidden!"

He pulled out his boot knife and put it in Alana's bound hands. "I wish I could give you better, girl. You deserve much better!" He closed the door and was off.

Once he left the woman and children took to crying again, and Krystyana was close to hysteria herself reliving her horror. Unable to calm them Alana peered out through cracks in the slats of the building to try to make out what was happening.

To her horror she saw three large Norsemen walking toward the building.

"Listen to me woman. Listen! We are in grave danger! Here, take this knife", handing her the blade backwards, "and use it to pry a few slats clear in the back. Get the children out of here!"

Though obviously terrified the woman obeyed. She was successful as the door started to rattle.

"Get out! Take my girl and get to safety!" Alana commanded.

As she scurried away, Krystyana desperately wanted to stay with Alana.

"No...you must go...let me handle these brutes!"

She just had time to see Krystyana to safety when the door began to splinter.

She backed up in front of the broken slats, arranged herself as decorously as possible and put on her most alluring smile once again. Then to her horror, she realized the woman had taken the knife with her and she was truly helpless.

The door gave way and the three men burst in to be met by the sight of a beautiful naked girl in black stockings with her wrists bound behind her smiling provocatively. They stopped puzzled.

"You alone?" one grunted.

"Not now that you're here!" Alana purred.

"OK", the biggest one said, "She's fair game. Do we kill her or take her back?"

"She's damned pretty enough to keep but let's decide that later...there's still a fight going on" said the second.

The third took Alana by the hair and dragged her out.

She fought but the best she could do was stumble after them a few hundred yards, her head bent down unable to see where she was going. When they stopped she could lift her eyes to see they were in what was left of the main square with a crumbled mortar and brick facade all that was left of some kind of building.

"They're still fighting down near the crossroads we better get on!" urged the first.

"Can't just leave her." the second grunted as he pulled out his knife. "It seems like a terrible waste but I'd better slit her throat."

"Naw! She's the best looken female we've seen since we left home. Come to think of it, she makes our women at home look poor. Shame to waste her!" said the third.

"Here!" He picked up Alana and put her on the first high step of the old building's facade. Taking a thong from his belt. He tied it around her neck and to a protruding wood post a foot above her. He tugged her up on her toes and the three took off down the road.

"Wonderful", thought Alana. "Here I am, almost hanging by my neck again for the second time this week!"

She waited a minute or so until they were out of sight then called out for Krystyana, hoping desperately that the girl and the woman had been watching and following the group. She called out again, but still no answer. A large yellow dog came out from behind some rubble and looked at her inquisitively. She called out a third time.

Now the yellow shaggy dog was interested and came up to her sniffing and panting. Alana ignored the dog and called out again. This time the dog stuck his nose directly in her crotch and gave her a huge lick, its sandpaper tongue catching her directly on her raw engorged clit.

"Stop that!" she cried, and kicked at it.

This dissuaded the dog which left in a huff, but it also shifted her weight drastically on the stone footing beneath her.

She felt the stone beneath her shift and begin to teeter. She was already on her toes from the tight thong around her neck but she tried to spread her feet to balance her weight.

This just caused the stone to shift more violently.

"Oh no no no!" she begged.

Then with a crunch the stone slid out beneath her and she was virtually hanging, her straining toes barely touching the stone beneath. The thong was much narrower than the rope the Bailiff had used and it caused a compression she had not experienced hanging on the gallows. It felt like a thin wire was slicing into her throat trying to sever her head from her neck.

She experienced the same pain from the leather, her breath cut off, and the pressure of her head exploding, but this time as she struggled in her agony, her feet arched and her toes pressing down desperately to relieve the forces crushing her throat it felt as if the pressure was 100 times worse. She strained as far as she could with her stockinged toes in the velvet slippers. The tips scraped the stone below, but she could not get any purchase. No succor there. The thong was thin. If only she had the boot knife she would be free.

Suddenly she realized that the pain and discomfort was beginning to be secondary to something else. Hanging like this seemed to be releasing all her inhibitions. Yes, she was struggling. And yes, she was still trying to free her wrists so she could grasp the strangling thong.

Her wrists! That was it! Of course she had to free her wrists! It didn't matter that she had been unable to budge them in the day and a half she had been imprisoned. She didn't give a second's thought to the impossibility of getting a smidgen of movement, even when she had previously hanged or was threatened by the Norsemen. She had to free them now! She pushed her thumbs into her palms and tried to wiggle her way even for a little purchase. But giddy from the lack of air she knew it was impossible. Suddenly she realized that a part of her she never knew existed was almost reveling in the knowledge that she was nothing more than a naked slut working her salvation out at the end of the rope...condemned to the slowest death possible by hanging.

She felt reality fly by then a revelation. Sluts revel, exult in sex so it was only right that the sensuality of orgasm assert itself.

The thong was doing its job efficiently and Alana's face was already a deep congested red, veins bulging, teeth gritted...but now it seemed that this part of her agony and struggle was not for survival. No! It was to answer her body's most desperate need! Not to find a way to get one last breath past the noose, but instead to revel in one last all encompassing orgasm that was hers, and only hers for the taking! She realized that her clit was actually throbbing as she struggled.

She felt her orgasm build like an enormous bubble rising up to the surface of the ocean to finally burst over her and engulf her, her whole body quivering as wave after wave of pleasure shot outward from her sex and vibrated her entire being. As her head exploded in a tremendous burst of light, the most magnificent orgasm she had ever experienced, literally dwarfing the electric shock she had on the gallows, shattered her being!

She came down from the mountain slowly, slowly, not remembering for a moment where she was or even who she was, only knowing that she had never in her life felt anything, anything at all, that came close to the explosion she had just experienced. It left her totally spent at the end of her noose (gray echoing thought...when did it become "her" noose?) and unable to struggle any longer.

Her thought, "Why struggle?" Life, existence itself paled in comparison to that earth shattering climax she had just experienced.

The agony of her lungs was there but it was a fleeting annoyance to be washed away in the river of passion that was the ebb tide of her orgasm. Surprisingly, given the incredible gift she had received, this death by hanging was tolerable if not welcome! She actually reveled in her helplessness.

Who needed hands? They would just get in the way! Better to leave them bound back where they couldn't spoil the delicious sensations rippling through her.

Nipples? Hard and points of pure pleasure!

Clit? Rock hard and ready to deliver another delicious orgasm, if she could only concentrate a little longer.

Why hadn't she noticed this before? Was she so terrified of death that she couldn't appreciate the incredible gift she had been given? She was getting so sleepy and so comfortable. The noose was better than any lover's embrace she could possibly imagine. It caressed her, loved her, and turned her entire body into a deliciously erect sex organ!

Ummmm! Maybe just one last orgasm and then the utterly delicious sleep of eternity waiting to take her as her last remaining sensations washed her consciousness into a stream of light!

And then she was free!

"M'lady...m'lady are you alright?" Krystyana bent over her as she worked the thong off her throat.

Alana blinked and realized that she was alive. She shook her aching head.

"I'm sorry...we took the long way around the town in the woods and just got here to see what they did to you!"

"Please" Alana begged, "just give me a minute or two!" she barely croaked.

Krystyana looked at her benefactor and cursed herself. She had been hanging too long. She looked dead when they found her. No movement. On the tips of her stockinged toes, a puddle of creamy fluid just beneath her and more dripping down her legs.

At first Krystyana thought she had lost control of her bladder, but no. This liquid was very thick.

Alana's eyes had been closed, but she had an almost peaceful, serene look on her face. No sign of pain or agony. The others had been sure she was dead. But she couldn't be! Krystyana had sliced the leather thong and just cradled Alana, until she had responded!

The older woman brought over a cup of water and held it for her as Alana drank eagerly. She tried to take stock of what occurred. Her nipples were darker than she had ever seen them, almost black, and they were so hard they actually hurt! Her pubic area, now seemed to be nothing but engorged labia and a visibly erect clitoris, while she dribbled thick yellow cream cum down her thighs!

They helped her shakily to her feet.

Alana was not only completely spent but totally confused by what she had just experienced. She had just had the most quintessential magnificent orgasm of her young life hanging by her neck and had almost died a second time. And the horrific realization was that this been the defining sexual experience of her life, despite its danger and the sure death it held as its ultimate reward. And she had reveled in it! Worse than that was the sure knowledge that she would gladly hang again, and again and again...if orgasms as she had just experienced were the reward!

She was as hoarse as the first day after her initial hanging but she managed a return to a semblance of reality and ordered the woman and children to take cover.

The woman led them back to the woods where they waited anxiously as Krystyana fretted over Alana.

"My God", Alana contemplated. "This could be worse than an opium addiction!" No sexual release she had ever experienced held a candle to the shattering climax she had just enjoyed (yes...enjoyed!) hanging by her neck."

Not only was this revelation profoundly disturbing, but it almost precluded her from keeping track of their truly desperate situation!

About an hour later she heard a familiar sound. Beaufort came tromping through the brush. He whinnied in pleasure at seeing her.

"Ah good!", called Gilbert. "You've found them!"

When he saw Alana's condition his face blanched. "What happened?"

Krystyana told him the story up to their escape. In a horse voice Alana summarized the rest.

"Hanged twice in four days and you're still here...girl, you are truly amazing. We might have to rent you out to a traveling carnival troupe where you could do this for pay."

Alana looked at him with daggers in her eyes.

Gilbert spoke to the woman. "Your men made a brave stand. Beaufort and I were able to attack from the Norsemen's blind side and they have fled...but its likely they'll be back." He looked back over his shoulder as townsmen began to come into view. "I hope your husband's well. The group of you need to head south to the next village. Bigger, with walls for defense. I need to take my charges and be off."

With that he again placed Krystyana on Beaufort and Alana in front and took off at a dead run. It was only a matter of a few miles when they came upon a pair of rider less horses. "Here" Gilbert assisted the two girls each on her own mount.

"Alana I am truly concerned. Will you be able to stay in the saddle with your wrists fixed behind you like that?"

Alana knew she was an accomplished horsewoman and with a familiar mount she might have felt competent but this strange horse left her doubting.

"I hate to do this but let me tie you to the saddle."

Her eyes widened. "I'd rather walk than have to ride on my stomach!"

"No, I didn't mean that way. I'll loop a rope around your waist and then tie your ankles underneath so you can stay seated without the use of your hands"

"Oh!" She felt rather sheepish.

Gilbert cinched her in and remounted Beaufort and they were off. "We'll make much better time now."

And for a while they did. But soon they saw the telltale signs of raiders again. Burnt out structures. The remainders of bloody battles. Worse they found the bodies of some of the victims swinging naked from tree limbs.

"They certainly seem to be trying to placate their gods with all these hangings" Gilbert commented. With too many raiders in the area it bothered his conscience not to stop and cut the victims down and bury them.

As Alana rode, now she saw these victims in a new light. Yes she still felt heart wrenching pity for the children, but now her eyes fastened on the men's erections, engorged and purplish black, some with semen still dripping from their final ejaculations on the noose.

The women and girls she also saw in a new light. Their dark and erect nipples. The engorgement of their labia and clitorises. The fact that many had died with thick creamy cum dripping down their legs.

What had been truly repulsive before now left her with almost a sense of excitement. Of mounting sexual tension. Had she become so jaded in so short a period of time?

Add to that the fact she was now on her own saddle, so she could allow the horse's motion and her response to add to the sexual excitement. She was soon flush with anticipation.

CHAPTER 7

As they rode on Gilbert voiced his concern about other matters. "It's only a few miles to the river. You'll be safe there. If we run into any more raiders head southwest as fast as you can!"

Krystyana nodded, but Alana looked deep into Gilbert's eyes. This would be no easy matter. He expected fierce opposition in the short distance remaining.

"Please sire," she pleaded, "Do not split us up. Let us go with you!"

"I believe you can look fairly well after yourself. Let me worry about the raiders, without you two ladies as a distraction."

They proceeded carefully, Gilbert watching the trees intently. He sided up to Alana. "This last batch of victims hanging in the trees. Its not Norsemen who did this. It's Celts! I had heard that the Duke had hired both as mercenaries. I had no idea they were working in such close proximity to each other. The Celts like to hide in trees and attack from behind."

But that all became moot as they came around a bend and found another pitched battle between outnumbered townsfolk and Celts.

Gilbert pointed to a narrow path in the woods. "Head down there. It will take you to the river. Go as fast a you can!" Both Alana and Krystyana urged their mounts on the narrow trail.

The path was overgrown and Alana was concerned about Celts in the trees, but they pressed on listening to the sounds of battle behind them. Alana, despite the use of her hands was by far the better horsewoman and took the path at a fast canter. Krystyana hung onto the horse for dear life. The overhangs were heavy now and it was almost like going through a leafy cave. Both girls had to duck to make it through the lowest parts. With their heads down neither noticed the Celts in the trees until it was too late.

With a triumphant yell, which startled both horses, two Celts attempted to noose the girls as they rode past.

Alana urged her mount at just the right moment and the noose barely missed snatching her. In seconds she was fleeing down the path as fast as her horse would take her. But Krystyana had been noosed and as her horse scampered off found herself dragged off from behind and spinning and hanging from the Celt's rope.

"Looks like we bagged us a young cunny...doesn't even have her pubby hair yet" observed one of the Celts on the ground. "Yeah but I'm sorry we didn't get the other one...she had really nice tits and golden red hair too. Looked like she could've shown a man a good time."

"Come on men", yelled a third from up ahead, "this was only for fun. We've got another village to hit!"

"What about this little darling?" the first asked.

"We've got plenty of line. The longer she kicks and suffers the better chance the god's will forgive her!"

With that the first man tied off the rope hanging Krystyana, jumped out of the tree and set off.

Krystyana found herself kicking and struggling alone at the end of the rope. With her hands free she could tear at the ligature digging into her throat. This proved useless so she tried to grab the rope above her head again and pull herself up and get some slack in the noose! She managed to grab some braches overhead. Small stuff but with enough force to pull up slightly and ease the rope's bite on her throat.

Without the use of her hands it took Alana quite a distance to slow her horse down. Finally he responded and she turned back up the trail so she could see what had become of Krystyana. She finally came upon the horrible tableau!

The bite of the rope had virtually cut off Krystyana's breathing and Alana knew by the congested red color of her face it was just a matter of time, minutes possibly seconds, before the girl lost consciousness and death would soon follow.

Alana had lost Gilbert's boot knife back at the first village so she had no way to cut the girl down. She cursed the manacles pinning her wrists behind her and the safety ropes that kept her tied to her saddle with no way to dismount. She wept at her total helplessness watching the poor girl slowly die.

Krystyana was in agony. She was kicking wildly and tearing at the rope both around her neck and the branches above her. Her struggles had shifted her apron and it now hung to the side leaving her completely exposed. The branches she had grabbed had stripped and she was clawing at the remainder occasionally getting enough force to ease the bite of the noose. Alana could tell from her eyes that she was fading quickly.

Then, as strange a sight as could be imagined, came into view. Three young ones came strolling down the trail. The oldest boy couldn't have been much older than she was.

"Look! Hey Look!" called the girl in the group. "She's hanging! There's a near naked girl hanging by her neck. Do you suppose she's a criminal?"

"Nah replied" another boy, "Probably strung up by the Celts for sport."

"She's a sweet little thing" commented the girl, "She looks very uncomfortable kicking like that! Shouldn't we cut her down?"

"Of course she's uncomfortable...she's fucking hanging by her neck...slowly strangling to death is what she is!"

Up to then they had not seen Alana on the other side of the tree. She guided her mount in front of them "Of course you have to cut her down! The poor girl is dying? Don't any of you have a knife?"

"I do" replied the second boy, "but I think we should just let her die!"

"Yeah, Celts come back to check, might get mad at us for cutting her down and then hunt us down and string us up" replied the third. "Besides she's kinda fun to watch!"

"Give me your knife." Alana pleaded, "I will find a way to cut her down myself!"

"No", declared the first. "If we leave her dangling the Celts won't be any wiser. Besides how is a naked cunt like you with her hands bound behind her going to help her?"

"But look" the girl interjected, "The poor thing is slowly strangling to death! We could save her!"

"Hey!" said the first boy, "She might be a cute lookin little thing. Think she'd be grateful enough if we cut her down to let us have sex with her?"

Alana was almost apoplectic. "You can't be serious!" she cried. "This poor girl is slowly dying and you're not going to help her?"

"Well", the girl said, "That's boys. Only thinking with their dicks! I think I agree with the lady. This poor little thing is slowly dying and all you can think about are your hard peckers."

"Absolutely", said the oldest "We've avoided the Celts so far. If we cut her down now and they come back they'll track us for sure and then we'll be the one's hanging. Best leave her kicking."

The young girl came up to where Krystyana's tortured gaze might see her. "I'm so sorry. We won't be able to help you. but its for the best you know. They say that girls have a climax when they're hanged. Are you cumming?"

Alana was simply beside herself with the callousness of these children.

"Look you little bastards. You want sex? I'll give you sex. If you cut my girl down and release me from this saddle I will satisfy all of you."

"What about me?" pouted the girl.

Alana looked at her in disgust. She couldn't have been more than 12. "You too!"

The third youth cut her restraining ropes holding her to the saddle and Alana slipped off the horse and looked the tallest boy in the eye.

"Well get started", he grinned as he opened his flap. Krystyana's struggles had diminished to the point where she was dangling limp with her toes pointed down, the only movement were slight jerks in her legs and feet.

"You cut my girl down now and just pray she's still alive, or no Sex, and if she doesn't recover I swear I'll kill you all!"

"Sure you will", simpered the boy. But something in Alana's words made him slice the rope and Krystyana's body dropped like a sack of tubers.

Alana dropped to her knees and with her bound hands tore the rope from the girl's neck. "Krystyana, little one!, Come back to us. Please!"

Krystyana's face was the dull congested red of the hanged and she made no attempt to breathe.

Alana was desperate she turned around and began to pound on Krystyana's back even with her wrists bound. Finally she was rewarded with a ragged gasp.

She looked around and saw the flicker of life in the girl's eyes.

"There" the first boy smiled. "We have done our part. Now suck us off like you promised."

"Yes I did promise." Alana struggled to her feet. "Rewarding you with sex for being so morally corrupt that you would have let an innocent child die in agony to possibly protect your own lives?"

"So what?" said the second. "Now get on your knees and suck me off before I cut your throat for the fun of it!"

Alana dropped to her knees before the first boy and he undid his cod piece and started to push his erection at her mouth. At the last second she ducked her head and drove up and forward into his testicles. He wuffed in pain and dropped backward grasping his groin. The second boy started to laugh but stopped when he saw Alana regain her footing and charge straight at him

"This is crazy" he thought. "She's naked and bound. What can she do?"

He was fat and far too slow to dodge. Alana caught him in the midsection knocking him down. She came down hard on his stomach causing him to lose his breath. Then despite her bound wrists, she grabbed the largest stone available, and smashed him repeatedly in his forehead.

The first boy was recovering slowly and staring at her in horror. He looked over at the girl who was wide eyed in fear. By that time Alana had once again regained her footing.

"Wait! This wasn't what you promised!" the first boy whined. He pulled out his boot knife.

"No, I'm keeping a promise I made to myself!" Alana called.

The boy came toward her with the knife raised. Alana ducked under as she had been taught and caught him with her knee in the diaphragm. He dropped to his knees and she put all she had into a kick to his head. He fell face down. She stomped her foot down hard on his neck and spun as she had been taught. His neck snapped easily.

The girl had been transfixed watching the two boys die now screamed and started running for the woods. Alana thought for a moment of giving chase. Then she decided the little fool was making enough noise that she would surely attract the Celts and seal her own fate. Besides staying with Krystyana was more important.

At that moment Beaufort and Gilbert arrived. "Don't tell me. You killed both, didn't you?" he stated incredulously.

"It's a long story. Krystyana was caught by the Celts and was hanged. They missed me. When I got back these two and a third evil little bastard were arguing if they should cut her down and let her live. They decided against it...might set the Celts on them. I offered them sex if they'd release Krystyana and they agreed. I'm afraid I reneged on my part of the agreement." She spat on the older boy's corpse. Gilbert jumped off and checked the girl.

"How is Krystyana?" she asked anxiously.

"This poor little one has had far too much happen to her. Let's get her back on horseback and make for the river as quickly as possible. There's help for her there. Beaufort sensed you two were in trouble. Can't I turn my back on you without someone trying to hang you?" Gilbert looked down at her with genuine concern.

"It's just my talent", Alana replied grimly. "And if you only knew the half of it" she thought privately.

As they rode Alana went over the incident in her mind. She decided Krystyana too young and too much like Alisande. The eroticism of her hanging never came into play. All she was concerned with was her safety. "Well I guess I haven't become a totally perverted lust crazed maniac after all" she concluded.

They traveled all that afternoon and saw signs in the distance of the Celt's activities. Smoke and ruins for the most part. Beaufort sensed water and Gilbert thought it a good idea to rest and take a meal before their final push so they headed for what turned out to be a small pool fed by a local brook. The sight greeting them was a new low in the sadistic killing spree that gripped the area.

Hanging from a tree limb over the pond were three nude females. Each had her wrists bound behind her and cinched tight with a rope through her sex and bound to her waist. All had been hung by their ankles so that they were immersed up to their shoulders in the water. Each had struggled for a long time to bring her head above the surface. This was born out by the fact that their agonies had almost literally sliced the soft tissue of their pubic area and anuses by the ropes

between their legs. Each had finally succumbed to the inevitable fatigue and drowned. Now all hung face down their nude bodies testimony to the sadistic pleasures of their killers.

“Why?” Alana turned to Gilbert.

“The Celts have water goddesses. These women were sacrifices. The longer it took them to die the greater the boon.”

Alana was thankful that Krystyana was virtually unconscious as they turned away from the awful tableau and continued their journey.

CHAPTER 8

Alana's mood was dark but in the late afternoon the coolness of the day revived her somewhat. In another hour she was sure she could hear running water.

They soon came to a good sized river.

"Ah the river and the ferry...once across we're in the Duke deMalfant's lands. He's a fair lord and none of the obscenities we've witnessed are tolerated in his lands. People are free to come and go as they wish, but with the Count to the west and The Duke deMarcy to the north, they usually are quite pleased with what they find there."

As they approached the river Alana saw there was an armed encampment defending the ferry crossing. "Halt who goes there?" came the challenge

"Come Rupert! Have I been gone so long you don't recognize me?"

"Your Grace? What are you doing on foot?"

"I have two lovely ladies needing assistance!"

And then they were surrounded by cheering men.

Alana realized at that moment that Gilbert was far more than he seemed.

The troops immediately took care of them. Both she and Krystyana were examined by the Duke's physicians. Alana was terribly concerned about the girl. She seemed to have revived somewhat from her second hanging but she had been largely non-responsive. A seasoned physician started to examine her while his younger associate checked Alana. He was frankly amazed when she related her last week's misfortunes. He examined her throat carefully.

"M'lady you are exceptional. The amount of bruises and abrasions on your throat will leave some nasty scars, but you seemed to have survived your hangings with little impairment. I'm sure you will have an extremely sore throat for some time and the hoarseness will be likewise but I see no reason why we can't get you some hot food and a trip to the Master Smith to get those manacles off."

"I won't leave Krystyana!" Alana insisted.

"I will have one of our nurses with her constantly", the young doctor assured her. "I'm sure she's suffering from the shock of her misfortunes."

As she left the physicians tent, she had only gone a few steps when she realized that every man was staring at her, some open mouthed. Right! She was walking among them completely nude

with her wrists shackled behind her. She stopped and blushed down to her toes. Had she become so inured to her nudity the last few days that she took it for granted?

The one called Rupert came up and threw his cloak about her. "Come m'lady. Let's get you on the ferry and see about those shackles." She smiled up at him gratefully.

"You know" he confided conspiratorially, "there is no prohibition against nudity in the Duke's lands so you could refuse my cloak with no fear of anything other than a bit of gawking. It's not often we are treated to the sight of a beauty as stunning as yours."

Alana blushed again.

A minute later Gilbert came over to her.

For a second she seethed in his not telling her his status. But even in Branart it was correct manners for a Princess to address a Duke correctly. "Please tell me", and she added, "your Grace, is it my good fortune to find that I am the chattel of the Duke deMalfant?"

"Yes and the first place for you is the smithy. He's a master. He should be able to get those manacles off you."

Still remembering courtly manners, "Your Grace, When may I get some clothes?"

When you're done with the smithy come over to the main house and ask for the Mistress Claudia, she knows the drill."

Once off the ferry it was a short ride though beautiful untainted forests to a large castle amply guarded by yeomen and knights. A cheer went up when they were sighted.

"This gets stranger" Alana thought. "He appears to be everything he says."

As they came to the gate the Duke pointed out the smithy shop to the right. "I will need to conference with my advisors as soon as possible but once you've been to the smith's and have seen Claudia you come to me directly, wherever I am. Understood?"

Alana acquiesced. "Yes your Grace."

The surroundings of the castle were huge. Things were going on right and left. Suddenly she became very much more aware of her nudity and manacled wrists despite Rupert's cloak. The riding cloak she had been given did little to cover her nakedness as she walked.

The doors to the smithy were huge and open. She asked a young man for the Master Smith. He just gaped at her so she repeated herself saying she was on the Duke's business. The smith, a well muscled man with a mustache and a good natured grin came forward.

"Names Turg. You must be the new one the Duke drug in personally. Well come in, come in!"

He skillfully whipped her around flinging off her cape seeming to take in all aspects of her naked body. But while his assistants and apprentices were smitten with Alana's lovely shape and charms all he wanted to do was study the manacles pinioning her wrists.

"Yes...see the problem...old lock. Bailiff broke off a tine when he locked them. Key would have done you no good at all. Come over to my small anvil."

He had her sit with her back to the anvil and brought her wrists up to the tang. It took four blows with his mallet and cold chisel but the manacles released.

Alana sobbed with joy and gratitude. She just stared at her hands as if they were strange and beautiful presents that had been given to her. As she marveled at their return she realized the Smith was going through some items near him.

"Ah here they are. Should work perfectly." He took her right hand and snapped a gold manacle on. Before she could protest one was snapped on her left.

"The Duke did not say I was to be chained!" she gasped in an incredulous tone of voice.

"Note I got said he bought you for 6 gold crowns That's at least 10 times more than any slave he's ever bought to my knowledge. You will be wearing manacles until I get direct orders to the contrary."

Alana looked down at the golden manacles. They were much lighter than the steel, and her hands were free. The pieces themselves were beautifully made. She had seen gold bracelets far poorer than these.

"Well thank you Master Smith. I will take this up with the Duke himself. I have an appointment at the main house." She reached for the riding cloak and started to leave.

"Just one more thing Miss" she heard him say. When she turned he snapped a chain between her manacles and pulled her up so quickly she hardly had a time to gasp. He expertly whipped a rope around her ankles and then her knees and she found herself suspended a few inches off the ground.

"Got to put these on you before you can leave."

Alana, totally taken aback, stammered, "What are you talking about?"

"Why nipple and clit rings with the Duke's seal...all the slave girls wear them." And with that he pulled out a tong set and an evil sharp looking piercing weapon.

"No...NO!" she screamed. "He said nothing about being pierced. I will not be pierced!"

"Sorry girl, it's the rules."

The Smith came forward and with a practiced flip brought her left nipple to extreme hardness and grabbed it with the "o" shaped tong.

Alana screamed in pain and anger.

The Smith just put the piercing tool in the fire and heated it for a moment.

Alana's cried out again in anger and frustration.

Just as the Master Smith was about to plunge the piercing tool through her flesh the side of the barn erupted and a huge black thunderstorm burst in.

Beaufort grabbed the Smith by his collar whipped him around and threw him over his shoulder and against the far wall. He reared his head and snapped the chains suspending Alana with his teeth and then placed himself protectively between her and the Smith's men and apprentices that came at a dead run. Miraculously the Smith was not dead. Actually Beaufort had aimed him for a pile of hay so he should have had a soft landing.

He got up shaking his head slowly. "Girl you have my sincere apologies. Only a suicidal fool would not listen to Beaufort and he is obviously your protector. I didn't know you status here so please accept my apologies for my ignorance."

Graciousness, her tutors had taught. When someone had made an honest error be gracious.

"Certainly Master Smith. You were only doing what you thought your job was. If you will release me I will take my leave and find the main house now."

Beaufort showed her the way to the main house and many along the way took in the odd sight of the newest of the Duke's slaves being personally guarded by his warhorse on her way to his residence.

When she found Claudia, the woman had her remove the cloak and frankly appraised her.

"You're by far the loveliest woman we've ever had here. Make all the Pleasure Girls, slaves and Ladies-in-Waiting look like wilted flowers too. But those bruises and scars on your neck. They look horrible. How did you get them and how did you end up here?"

As she lead Alana to the baths she told her the story, this time a little stronger, though her voice had been strained by her screams in the smithy and she saw the look of amazement that crept to the woman's face. Stripping off her garters, stockings and tape for the first time in days and soaping in the hot water was as delicious a treat as she could remember. A young girl came in and shampooed her hair, and then assisted in drying her off.

"Well" Claudia surmised, "there's no prohibition of nudity in the Duke's kingdom and most of the slaves go totally nude or in skimpy costumes of his design. Let's see what we can do with you."

She led the way along a great corridor to a set of large wooden doors and carefully knocked. "Enter!" called a female voice.

As they walked in, Alana caught the sight of a dark haired beauty clad in girdle, gauze garments upper and lower, silk stockings and peculiar high heeled slippers. She had manacles on her wrists and a gold collar around her throat. A last quick glimpse showed she had gold piercings of her nipples and clitoris.

"Out, out with you Beth! You know better than to answer for me! I have business to conduct!!" roared a voice and the girl fled.

"Mistress Claudia and Alana. Beaufort informed me of my oversight, and to you Alana, I sincerely apologize. I should have given the Master Smith more explicit instructions."

Claudia spoke up. "What is this girl's status to be, My Lord?"

He thought for a moment. "Beaufort believes she's telling the truth, or what she believes is the truth, about being of Royal birth. Certainly not from any country I have ever heard tell about. The medical personnel tell me she may still be suffering some delusions due to her being hanged so often and so long from deprivation of air."

"I am not!" started Alana, but the Duke raised his hand. "I don't believe you are addled. We just have to find proof of you claim. The Satrap at Venderale should be able to verify your story, correct?"

"Absolutely!" she replied emphatically.

As soon as I can I will send someone to see if we can get verification. In the meantime, what to do with you? Call for the Master Smith!"

He arrived very flustered minutes later. "My sincere apologies My Lord, I had no idea she was anything but a purchased slave...."

"Don't worry Targ. That was totally my fault."

"Now Alana", Gilbert turned to her, "The piercings at the breast and pubes are more than a fit of fancy or a desire to inflict pain on my part. There are hanging parties from the Count and Duke all around looking for runaway slaves to string up for bounty, new freeman to enslave, unpledged peasants to do the same. By carrying my gold marks the girls and men in my service are guaranteed that they will never be bothered by such ruffians. All recognize my seal, honor it and steer away. But if you are truly royalty it would be impolitic to pierce you."

Alana let go a breath that it seemed she had been holding forever.

"The Master Smith here can you make a set of gold rings that would tightly fit around her nipples...tight enough that they would not fall or rub off in the bath that the seal could be affixed to?"

"They may not be too comfortable to wear at first and will have to carefully fitted and very fine rings, but yes my lord. Shall they be attached by a chain to the collar?"

"By all means and make a fine chain that could fit around her hips and have a lavalier that would fall down to her V where it could be affixed by a clip to her pubic area."

"Certainly my lord."

"Then let it be done."

"And the neck collar, my lord? "

"Make her a choker of the finest gold with my seal on it."

"How about ankle fetters your Grace?"

"If she'll be wearing the standard attire she'll be wearing stockings", Claudia injected, "and ankle chains run those terribly."

"Right...no ankle chains. But do we think such a dangerous lady as this should be allowed to wander about with her wrists free?" "She's killed at least three men and crippled a number of others and this with her hands chained behind her. She seems to have done well with them pinioned." He smiled at Alana's gasp of horror. "We've had dangerous young ladies wear manacles with their wrists bound behind them for up to a year before they earned the trust to have them free."

"Behind her would mean that she would have to have someone look after all her needs", Claudia observed, "but of course if you mean for her to be in your bed and not work in any way..."

Alana could only gasp in horror at the implication.

"HMMMM, right. Let's leave her unchained for now. There you go girl...protected but not damaged...All right?"

Alana seethed . She felt like telling these fools what would happen when her father found out she had been treated this way. Yet this man had saved her from the very agonies and gates of hell itself, and he had respected her and not forced himself on her. "Thank you your Grace", she finally replied. Beaufort who was looking in a window whinnied his approval.

Claudia next took her down to the stock room where she picked out a half dozen diaphanous long blouses and three girdles in different colors. When combined they did little more than highlight Alana's bare breasts and the bottom hem didn't come close to covering her sex or her bare buttocks. These were combined with a dozen pairs of long silk stockings and matching colored garters. Finally three pairs of the peculiar high heeled shoes in matching colors to the girdles were chosen.

Alana studied herself in the mirror. The combination of garments gave her the look of the most wanton of Pleasure Girls, but they did nothing but enhance her beauty and sexuality.

She gingerly touched her throat. The abrasions were healing but they would scar and the bruising was terrible to look at. Worse to the touch. For a moment she tried to think what she would do to cover these up. High necked gowns? Scarves ? But then she looked at what she was wearing and her state of nudity and she realized that right now there would be nothing that could be done. In the middle of these decisions there was a knock. It was the Master Smith, cap in hand, eyes looking down.

"If the young lady would allow I have the jewelry for her to try on."

First he held out a beautiful gold choker at least an inch thick made of the reddest gold Alana had ever see. The clasp was the ducal seal in the front. She snapped it in place. It was snug, but not tight. It rode up on her throat and with the bruising from her hangings was uncomfortable, but not too tight. Two fine chains hung down from the attachment on the front of the collar from which swung two small gold circlets from which also had the ducal seals. Claudia took them and showed Alana how they were made to fit over her nipples. She had never thought of herself as having prominent nipples but since her first hanging they seem to have become permanently engorged. The rings appeared much too small but, as she had been told, they would have to fit very snugly not to come off, even in the bath. Using a little fragrant oil Alana fitted them over first the left then the right then snapped them into place.

Yes they were far too tight and hurt. She mentioned this as she gritted her teeth. "It would be much simpler Miss if I could have just pierced you, but this is the only alternative." Alana held back a sob.

Next came a gold chain that fit around her hips with a lavalier that came down to the cleft of her sex, also with the Ducal seal. With Claudia's assistance Alana found that the clip actually fit over her seemingly permanently enlarged clitoris and pinched into place. Again this was much too tight, but it also was better than the alternative.

Finally came a new pair of gold "bracelets". Little more than locking manacles. One on each wrist . They had a cunning fixture on them that would allow her wrists to be snapped together in front or behind her back, at the Duke's will.

She, the Smith and Claudia admired her new jewelry in the mirror, and despite the unfamiliar discomfort on her nipples and clitoris she was pleased.

The Smith bowed and turned away and Claudia noticed his attitude.

"Everyone here respects Beaufort's opinions. He and you have made quite an impression on the Smith."

"Claudia" Alana asked hesitatingly, "A question. The Duke keeps mentioning that he speaks to Beaufort and vice versa. I'm puzzled."

"Don't be love. The Duke's personal animals, his horse and dog, have been carefully bred to have exceptional intelligence. Beaufort is at least as intelligent as I am, though" she smiled, "that's not saying a great deal. With him as your friend you have a powerful protector."

"And how goes things here?", came the Duke's voice. Alana realized he had been watching her in the doorway, and somehow his viewing of her partially exposed in her new garments made her blush more than when she was completely nude.

"You look wonderful. A Princess you may be, but you put any Pleasure Girl or whore I have ever seen, to shame" Alana was suddenly very aware of her nudity. The gold sparkled on her nipples and clit, as well as her neck and wrists.

"Come now we have a planning session now and I need your voice in addition to mine to verify what we saw returning here."

CHAPTER 9

Gilbert lead her into the main throne room were literally dozens of knights, their ladies, gentlemen and ladies-in-waiting lined the corridor to the Duke's throne. He sat and motioned Alana to sit on the divan at his right. To his left was Beaufort. And the largest lump of grey white fur she had ever seen in her life. Alana was sure it was some kind of rug. Until it uttered a soft "whurf".

"That's Wyvern. I'll introduce you later.", the Duke whispered.

The first thing she noticed was the modesty, or lack of it displayed by the girls in general and the ladies in the court.

On either side of the Duke's chair were a dozen or more girls each wearing a version of her outfit. Tight corsets, gauzy undershirts, stockings and shoes. All had piercing of their nipples and clitoris, and they were wearing neck bands and wrist manacles. Each was beautiful and exotic in her own way. All were well proportioned and comely. She saw the girl named Beth was closest to the Duke's right hand and was staring at her with a look of pure malice. Easy to see who she had replaced.

Her attention then shifted to the ladies-in-waiting and nobles' wives. She was used to the younger ladies-in-waiting and nobles' wives in her father's court wearing form fitting, low cut gowns. These ladies' (at least those with the figures for it) gowns had a unique key shaped cut out design on the front going as far down as the pubic area, leaving them totally exposed. Those that wore this style either had their pubic hairs trimmed neatly or shaved off completely. And the bosoms of these gowns were cut to enhance the breasts and leave the nipples exposed. All the ladies wore the peculiar high heeled shoes. She noticed that as the ladies walked their long gowns were literally split to the hip showing off their legs and hosiery to their best advantage. The Duke and his lords obviously liked having their ladies' assets shown off.

There were other slaves in attendance. Many were nude or nearly so and all had the piercings through their nipples and clitoral area. "Very different" she mused. "Well at least I'm not alone in being naked."

Then the caller announced the session would begin. Alana had sat in on all major strategy sessions her father had held for the last five years so felt at home listening to the reports and conclusions. The Duke was surrounded and outnumbered a good 3 to 1. The land's being surrounded by rivers to the North East and West and the great southern sea on the South was their main protection.

"The people are streaming across the river my lord", a knight reported. "Mostly runaway slaves, but some indentured servants of high skills. Both the Count and Duke have their patrols out, and woe be to any they catch."

"Woe is right", replied Gilbert. "Alana relate to these worthies what you went through and beheld with your own eyes."

Alana could hardly speak above a whisper but she did relate her circumstance as closely as possible. Then she told of the hangings at every crossroads and in the forests, of whole families, father, mother, and little ones dangling like so much strange fruit from the trees. Her voice did not crack or give out but when she was finished she bowed her head and wept.

"Well", summarized the Duke, "we are not yet strong enough to break these varlets but we will continue to offer sanctuary to any who can make it to our borders. Order the border guards that if the bastards have caught a group and try to execute them within their sight they are to rescue them, and damn the consequences!"

With that a roar went up in the chamber.

"Now its time for rest after a long journey."

As the court began to dissolve Alana looked around for Claudia as she had no idea where she was to sleep.

"This way" motioned the Duke, and he took her elbow and led her down the corridor to two huge paneled doors.

"Whose quarters are these your Grace?" she asked.

As the doors opened she knew immediately. One huge Bed, a large desk, full library. These were the Duke's private Apartments. One very large bed.

The Duke took off his jacket and started to undo his shirt.

She stood there staring at the floor but as he turned she raised her head and looked him in the eye.

"Your Grace you have saved me from the very fires of hell itself. I should be dead three times over if not for you..." then a whinny... "and Beaufort of course", she added with a smile. "But as Princess and heir to the throne of Branart I am to strive to the utmost to maintain my chastity to the end. I am under your rule now and if you wish to bed me that is your right and privilege. But I will not go willingly!" and she stuck her chin out defiantly.

"So I should have had your wrists bound behind you and chains on your ankles so you could be spread for me on the bed, eh? You do think a lot of yourself." He laughed.

"You're right about one thing. One bed...mine. See the piles of furs on the floor? Yours. And Wyvern will be your protector." The big pile of white and gray fur had emerged silently and began licking her hand. "He will look after you when Beaufort and I are not around."

"You have caused me all sorts of difficulty with my ladies-in-waiting and my other lovelies. They do not understand why a mere slave would be given your privileges if she were not truly nobility. Well until I can confirm your story you're in a quasi twilight zone, so the best explanation is that you're my consort...mistress if you'd like, and everyone will leave you alone. Only my closest advisors will know the truth. In the meantime, I will not threaten your chastity, dear girl. Tonight all I want is a bath and some sleep. Oh there's a second bathing chamber for you in there." He pointed over his right shoulder.

He was true to his word. By the time Alana had removed her clothes and found a short diaphanous gown waiting for her and washed up, he was snoring. Wyvern was waiting for her at the foot of the bed. Surprisingly the huge pile of furs was extremely comfortable and with his presence Alana felt she was truly safe for the first time in days.

She wondered at the size of him. He was almost as big as Beaufort and what he lacked in height he made up for in mass. What kind of dog could this be?

In her sleeping furs with only the diaphanous nightshirt that was provided she became acutely aware of her situation. The choker around her throat was snug, but not uncomfortable. The golden wrist manacles were lighter than the heavy iron ones she had been wearing for the last few days, and they allowed her use of her hands. A true treat after being so cruelly pinioned for all that time.

Both the nipple rings and the clit clip were far more difficult to contend with. When her mind was on other things or she was engaged in conversation she hardly noticed them but here, now, in the quiet of the night she felt their presence acutely. The nipple rings were very tight and since they were attached to the collar, as she moved, she felt them biting into her soft flesh. In addition to the pain there was the unmistakable eroticism of their constant irritation. These were nothing compared to the clitoral clip. She seemed to have undergone an unalterable metamorphosis since her hanging. Her clitoris was visibly enlarged and Claudia had maneuvered clip easily past the hood to snap it in place. It was like having a pair of steel pincers attached at all times. Yes, both painful and incredibly erotic at the same time.

Despite these constant erotic sensations, she found that she could not climax. Something seemed to be missing. Her finger between her legs, so faithful a companion in the past, did no good. She realized as she tried and failed to slip off to sleep that what she truly needed, desired, had to have, in order to reach orgasm, was the compression of a noose around her neck.

She sat up and came to the conclusions that this constant state of sexual tension needed to be released. For a second she looked at the Duke sleeping soundly.

No, that simply wasn't an option. She got up and silently went into the dressing area, and enclosed alcove. There, in the wardrobe with her new clothes were a number of scarves and belts. "Long silk scarves", she mused. The bar for the clothing was above eye level. Making up her mind she moved over a small box and took one of the silk scarves. Standing on the box she found if she stood on tip toe the bar was just about chin level. She tied the scarf onto the bar on her left side just next to her ear and brought it around her neck and over on the right side.

It was long enough for her to pull it down and hold it with her right hand. Her left hand slid down between her legs and despite the biting from the clitoral clip she stroked herself. She could feel the result of her arousal slowly sliding down her thighs. The total effect made her moan in anticipation. Her entire pubic area seemed to pulse and throb with anticipation demanding immediate release. Her mind and sense reeled as she realized she was visualizing the scarf as a noose and she was begging it to make love to her.

This was sick! Twisted! She felt her feet lessen their arch and the noose tighten deliciously. She felt light headed, her body responding with a sexual tension like a spring desperately needing release or it would snap. She felt her climax rise and her whole body screamed for release. She knew that this was only play. That the only way she could actually find release was if she stepped off the box. Finally her erotic desire hit the point where she could take the sensations no further and she slid off the box and hung by the scarf.

The sensation was familiar and not unpleasant. The compression, feeling of full headiness, the forced holding of breath as the scarf cut off any air. The noose became her cruel lover, even as it allowed for a final burst of pleasure while it squeezed her neck. Initially her face became a flower blooming, filling with the color. She struggled with her invisible lover in what could be their final rendezvous.

All those living nightmares, the terror of being strung up on the gallows, straining with the leather thong around her throat, and now she was actually hanging herself, seeking the ultimate release! She shivered and squirmed, pressing her thighs together as her orgasm thundered to all parts of her body...as her body deposited its cache of erotic pearly liquid. She had no idea how long she hanged but she kept up her stroking with her left hand and was rewarded by a series of incredible explosive orgasms like lightning bolts that threatened to tear her consciousness to shreds.

She realized, as it ebbed, that she was still hanging. Her grip on the scarf had never loosened. Gratefully she let go and dropped to her feet, taking in the most wonderful cleansing breath she had ever experienced. She was more than light headed. Virtually on the verge of passing out. She stood there until she could move, just breathing deeply. When reason returned she worked hard to unknot the scarf and return it to its peg.

In the candle light she moved to the mirror and checked her throat as if there could be any difference to the damage already done. She noted nothing new. Returning to her sleeping furs she lay there a long while basking in the glow of her sexual release. It had been wonderful, but she knew she had paid a terrible price. She had proven to herself that she needed the added sensations of hanging to achieve orgasm. She had toyed with the idea that this was something like and opium addiction. Now she knew it was true. Finally sleep took her.

CHAPTER 10

She was awakened by a knock on the door.

The Duke was dressed in tunic and pants and working at this desk.

"Come girl. If we're to convince everyone you're my newest concubine and bed slave we must make a semblance of what would be expected. Hop into bed and pull up the covers."

Alana did as instructed and the Duke called to open the door. A serving girl brought in a huge silver tray with a sumptuous breakfast. Alana was thrilled. It had to be the best food she had ever tasted. The Duke had a pasty and some tea as he worked.

When he finished he came over and took her chin in his hand and tilted her head back and forth. "The bruising is better but let's have my physician take another look at the burns on your neck from the rope. They do look like they will leave scars."

Alana hopped up and ran to the wash area where there was a good mirror. Yes. the scars of the hangings had not abated. If anything, after her escape of the previous night, they were worse. Her throat was black and blue, but the welt from the rope itself was very visible as if the very wrapping of each cord was imbedded permanently into her throat.

"Well", she decided, "I will just have to wear the noose's mark as a badge of courage!"

"I will be quite busy catching up on things today", called the Duke. "I will give you an assignment. Along with learning your way around the castle, Wyvern here is as smart as Beaufort, but I have not the time or patience to teach him the spelling board or how to communicate. I think that will be your job."

She looked truly puzzled.

"Ah", he said. "Here in the castle Beaufort uses a spelling board rather than shorthand, when we converse. "

For the very first time she noticed that one of the doors in the Duke's chambers opened into Beaufort's stall. And there on the wall was a full spelling chart. The horse moved over to it and using his hoof spelled out, "Good morning Alana."

She was totally amazed. "Good morning Beaufort". she stammered. "I must thank you again with all my heart for saving my life."

"It was the Duke who made that happen", the horse spelled.

"There, you see!" the Duke replied. "Now if you can get Wyvern to concentrate and do likewise it would be a great boon."

Just then she noticed Beaufort open his stall and head for what looked like a huge privy. She looked at the Duke puzzled.

"He uses a privy here in the castle. He's really quite a stickler for cleanliness."

Alana just shook her head.

"Now as for you", the Duke smiled. "It will be some time before I can get a trusted man down to Venderale to check your bonafides, but rest assured we will. In the meantime you are my 'guest' but as we discussed all the rest must be convinced that you are my mistress. It's the right of any noble to take an unmarried wench at his discretion so you wouldn't last a day without losing your virginity. On the other hand, no man will touch my mistress. Oh, and in the course of the day if you go down to the stables please check on Beaufort's saddle and make sure the grooms have cleaned it."

With that he pulled on his boots, nodded and stepped out of the room. Alana was sure he saw her blush to her toes.

Alana sat with her breakfast a while longer feeding an occasional goodie to Wyvern. It was in the midst of a bite of delicious bacon she realized that her sleeping gown was completely transparent and she had been sitting there quite nude. It was amazing how quickly she had lost her carefully bred modesty in this new setting.

She chose a green diaphanous blouse and a contrasting girdle, conscious how neither hid any of her charms. She pulled on a new pair of very sheer silk stockings and matching garters and then the new slippers with the high heels.

Actually, everything suited her very well. "I look better than any of the high priced trollops we came across", she thought. She picked up the tray and started to open the door, when a young servant girl looked up in horror. She had been waiting outside the door.

She was an attractive little thing with a nice figure, black hair and piercing blue eyes.

"Oh my lady, you must ring the bell when you're done! It's my job to clean up the tray."

"Thank you. What are you called?"

"Illicia mam."

"That's a nice name. I had a favored maid named Illicia. Have you been here long Illicia?"

"No mam. I was just given asylum here a few days ago. I fetch and carry for the most part."

"How did you come here?"

"I was orphaned very young, mam. The locals brought me to a convent and the sisters there raised me for the most part. A few years ago, I was sent to a manor to serve as a maid for the ladies there. There were almost no male servants so we did everything. I lived there for a number of years and learned my duties. When the lady of the house died in a horse accident, her sister closed the house and we were given leave to go. I wandered for a while and found myself in one of the towns in Count deLong's lands. I tried to find work there but it was a very poor town. I was very hungry and was caught stealing bread. The local sheriff was taking me and three others to the gallows when the cart overturned in a rut and I ran as fast as I could. I must have run for what seemed like days. I found the river and a man at the ferry said the Duke would give me sanctuary if I pledged my allegiance to him. So here I am."

"Quite a lot has happened to you hasn't it? "

"Oh yes mam!"

"Are you quite sure this is all true and not partially made up?", Alana smiled.

"No mam, Look!" The girl lifted her skirt and here on her upper right buttock cheek was a brand of a noose. "It's the sign of one marked for death. When they took me in they asked if I wanted to swear to the Duke. If I did they would give me marks to protect me from the Hangman." She pulled down her blouse and exposed her freshly pierced nipples. "The one down there still hurts a bit but its worth it to be protected from the dogs that leave girls swinging from every tree after they've been raped and sodomized!"

Alana came back to the burn mark. "Now why don't I have one of those?" she thought. "I will have to find out."

The girl thanked her again for bringing out the tray and took it. Alana walked along with her to familiarize herself with the Castle and Wyvern happily trotted along. It seemed that all the male servants and royalty smiled and nodded when they saw her.

The ladies, whether they be slaves or royalty virtually snubbed her, except for one small group of girls who actually gave her a curtsy.

"Who were they?" she whispered to Illicia. "I am not certain but I believe that is the Lady Marissa and her two cousins, all kin to the Duke. Is it true that the Duke has given you Wyvern as a bodyguard?" the girl asked quietly.

"Why yes", Alana replied.

"He must value you highly. Beaufort and Wyvern are said to be his two most trusted servants apart from his cousins and other kin." Wyvern wuffed happily, as Illicia snuck him another crust of bread from the tray.

"Well it's my job for now, to try to teach him to use the same spelling board that Beaufort uses." sighed Alana. By then they had made the kitchen and Claudia smiled at her.

"Illicia, is the Duke finished?"

"Yes Mam" the girl replied politely. "Miss Alana accompanied me as she's trying to find her way around the castle."

"Well I won't have anything specific for you in the next hour or so. Just continue to show Alana around the castle and familiarize her with the grounds."

The next hour was wonderful. She and Illicia explored with Wyvern as company. They saw all the high places and defensive positions. The gardens and the working areas.

It would take Alana some time before she completely felt at ease, but Illicia was a good guide. Everyone scrutinized the new girl as they wandered. She was certainly on display. But there was something innocent about the way she carried herself. Without the rolling hips of the experienced bawd or pleasure slave. And her golden red hair made her stand out.

Halfway through their tour a gaggle of girls came over giggling. "You must be the new girl", one commented with her nose literally stuck in the air.

"Yes, my name is Alana."

"Humph...the Duke's new Pleasure Slave. Watch out for Beth. She's angrier than a hornet for getting kicked out his bed by the likes of you!"

A shy young brown haired girl got up her courage and asked, "We heard that you were hanged for being a witch. They say that the Duke found you dead and all, but he was so taken with your beauty he had you cut down and brought back to life by a sorcerer."

"No. I was not quite dead."

"But to hear it said you hanged all day and were cold and dead when they cut you down."

"Just exaggerations" Alana replied.

"May we see your marks, from the hanging that is?"

Alana pulled her long golden red locks back so the scars from the noose were plain for all to see.

The girls oohed in wonder.

"So it's not true you were hanged all day?"

"No", she replied patiently, "More like an hour I am told."

This still brought sighs of wonder.

Another blonde girl asked, "We see the results of hanging on men and boys, the erections and ejaculations. And the women all seem to die with hard nipples and their clits hanging out. And almost all of them seem to die with a look of bliss on their faces. Like they came as they hanged. Did you climax when you hanged?"

Alana turned away in embarrassment, blushing from head to toe.

"It's true!" the girl cried. "You did! I told you. It's supposed to be the most massive climax possible."

"You don't know what you're talking about!" Alana spat back. "Only a madman would consider the excruciations of death by hanging suitable tradeoff for the inadvertent passion that results. It is the most bitter and agonizing death anyone could possibly endure!" Even as she replied she cursed herself for being a liar and a hypocrite.

The girls shrank from that.

Alana and Illicia turned away and continued their walk. Alana fought back tears of frustration. They found themselves in the stable annexed to the Duke's apartments. Alana remembered her errand and asked a groom about the Duke's saddle.

"Ah, yes mam. A right mess that was. I don't know what he spilled on it but it took the devil itself to get out. Some kind of creamy stuff. Yeah, like clotted cream, it was. Thick and yellow. Soaked right into the leather! Tell him it's clean and ready though!"

Again Alana felt herself redden. She wondered if anyone other than Gilbert and Beaufort knew that the "cream" was her vaginal secretions and cum. Beaufort was there in his outside stall and, as improbable as it seemed, appeared to be looking over a sheaf of papers.

"Good morning Master Beaufort", Illicia called. "Is there anything I can get for you?" Beaufort tapped his foot a couple of times and pointed to three letters on a large spelling board across the back of this stable.

"Yes sir, a peck of fresh oats! I'll be right back!"

Illicia motioned Alana to stay as she ran off on her errand. Wyvern just plopped himself down to enjoy the sun.

Beaufort looked at Alana with a quizzical look for a horse.

"I guess I must again thank you for my life, Beaufort. It appears that you are my true savior." The horse whinnied and moved over to peer at her.

She realized what he was looking for and moved her hair out of the way.

"The bruising is terrible, and there are some scars from the rope that I will likely carry for life."

Beaufort nodded.

"May I see your board?" Again Beaufort nodded.

It was a simple alphabetical board, large enough for a horse to use, but it had some combinations of numbers and letters that would allow for quicker communication.

"May I copy this board?", Alana asked. "The Duke wants me to try to teach Wyvern to speak and communicate like you."

Beaufort snorted, as if this was a lost cause, but he nodded yes.

When Illicia returned she enlisted the girl in helping her find the materials to make a board for Wyvern and the two were in deep creation when Claudia came looking.

"Illicia I said one hour, not the entire day!"

"My apologies mam", the girl cried, and ran off promising to come back to help Alana in her off time.

That evening after dinner Alana placed the spelling board in front of Wyvern and with a bowl of scraps from the kitchen, started to get his interest. It was tough going. The huge dog obviously had real intelligence but the concentration of a gnat. If it wasn't for the scraps it would have been hopeless. Just as she was tiring Illicia came in. "May I help m'lady?"

It was only later that Alana realized that Illicia was the only one who called her by a proper title since her adventures had begun.

As they worked with Wyvern the Duke came in. "And how are you doing with my faithful hound?" he inquired.

"Well your grace, with Illicia's help we have made a bit of progress", Alana smiled. Wyvern wuffed his agreement.

"Illicia you say? Well girl, it means a lot to me to get Wyvern able to communicate easily, and Alana here seems to have her hands full. How would you like the job as her servant?"

"Oh yes your grace! That would be wonderful!!!"

"Done. I shall speak to Claudia forthwith." Turning to Alana he smiled, "You'll have to make room for her in here you know."

Illicia's eyes widened. Alana could read her thoughts. Did this mean she became one the Duke's bedmates also?

"Don't be concerned", she smiled to the girl, "I'll explain everything." And she did. The story took some time to relate, but it left Illicia open mouthed in amazement.

"Then you ARE royalty!" she stammered. "Oh m'lady, I will do anything to serve you well...anything. I really wasn't concerned about being bedded by the Duke. It's actually quite a privilege."

Alana took her and gave her a hug. She, who had everything at her beck and call just days before, was grateful for the care of this young servant girl and the friendship of a dog and horse...and the protection of a very strange man who had many different aspects to him.

CHAPTER 11

It was late that evening and the Duke was at some planning session with his nobles and captains. Alana had shown Illicia the sleeping furs and how Wyvern stood in good stead as a anything from a pillow to a comforter.

She was fast asleep and not having her nightmare...where the noose crushed her throat and she wasn't able to breathe when she felt that sensation that began in her groin. She could feel the stimulation beginning in her clitoris, almost as if a soft wet tongue was licking her down there and then she realized she was no longer dreaming! She jumped up and pulled the furs around her. Illicia looked up at her with a puzzled look on her face.

"Illicia, what are you doing!?"

"I'm pleasuring you m'lady. As I have been taught. It is my reason for being, so the ladies said." She looked totally confused.

"NO...never...what you are doing is totally wrong! An abomination! It is the love of Lesbos. What you are doing is only for a man with a woman, and husband and wife at that!!"

Illicia looked crushed. She huddled in the furs and began to cry pitifully. "I'm so sorry m'lady. I was never taught this was bad. I was instructed that this is why I had been spared to live. To use my lips tongue and fingers to pleasure the lady I served. Please! Please don't kill me!"

"Kill you? Of course not. But no!" Alana replied firmly. "That was a perverse and degraded practice you were taught. We will have to have you instructed in the art of love between a man and a woman."

Illicia continued to cry. In sobbing phrases she begged to be forgiven for the lie of how she had come to be in the Duke's service. She tried to explain the perverse series of "trainings" she was put through. Being valued for her lips and tongue and the use of large wooden and marble dildoes. There were virtually no male servants and the few that were had been all eunuchs and had no capabilities. It was up to the girls to satisfy their mistresses in every means possible. Her mistress used her in a myriad of ways. And she was excessively cruel.

She had been strapped, caned, and whipped on her mistress' whim and she had watched the other girls tortured unmercifully. She finally became second girl in the household and was called in frequently to participate with the mistress and the number one girl Sara.

Her most horrific moment, she related in tears, was the fateful day when she knew she would have to escape and run away. Sara and she were called into the Mistress' room and the lady tied Sara's wrist behind her with a silken cord. She then tied her ankles to the bottom posts of the bed. She had Sara lie in her lap on the bed and the Mistress began stroking her breasts. Illicia was

instructed to orally stimulate Sara and she turned herself to her task. In a short while Sara was gasping and her body was bucking harder than Illicia had ever felt.

She looked up quickly and what she saw horrified her. The Mistress had wrapped a red scarf around Sara's throat was strangling her slowly and deliberately with a ghastly smile on her face. She looked up and saw Illicia's horrified face.

"Continue to stimulate her or take her place!" Illicia began to cry but dropped back to using her lips and tongue on Sara's clit. The tortured girl's face had turned a congested red. Her teeth were gritted and tears flowed down her cheeks. Her bucking continued for another minute or so then she totally relaxed. Illicia thought she had climaxed but when she looked up it was obvious Sara was dead.

"Have that fool of a Gardener take care of this", the mistress said. "She got very sloppy. You're number one girl now Illicia. Remember this lesson!"

Alana listened to this with open horror.

With Sara's death Illicia knew it was only a matter of time before it would be her turn on the bed and she had to escape. She was caught in her first attempt and marked with the noose as a runaway slave, but the prospect of death if caught was nothing compared to the continued abuse she endured day by day as an unfaithful servant.

The second time she ran away she made her way to the river and across and here she stayed.

Alana gathered the girl in her arms. "You are to me as my little sister, Alisande. You must forget any sexual aspect between us and let me care for you." Stroking her head to stop her sobbing, with Wyvern licking wherever he could manage, Alana got the girl back to sleep. She lay there with Illicia cuddled in her arms and thought about Alisande. She would be having her thirteenth birthday in a month or so. She wondered if she had spurted up another inch or two. If she ever made it back home she might find that she was shorter than her little sister. Slowly she drifted off to sleep.

Waking the next morning with the sleeping girl cuddled next to her she realized that she had not been bothered with any erotic impulses the night before. Could she truly control her desires and fascination with the eroticism of hanging and strangulation? She would have to see. In the meantime for the next few weeks it was re-education time for Illicia.

What Alana didn't realize was that explaining the correct participation of men and women would hit the girl so hard and so fast. She became an incurable flirt, using her not insubstantial charms on almost any man she could. Her long black hair and beautiful blue eyes made any man stop and appreciate her lithe figure and pert breasts.

And of course, this resulted in trysts of every type and conquests almost beyond number. Alana had heard of girls who became addicted to sex, and now she had one as a maid servant. It seemed like every moment Illicia was not working with Wyvern or assisting Alana, she was coupled with a serving boy, steward, stable boy, or other good looking young ruffian, in every way imaginable. Alana had the "baby" talk with her at the very beginning so she was careful to insist

her lovers used precautions when needed, but otherwise...she enjoyed herself in any way possible.

Then one day as she was undressing Alana noticed that her buttocks were a bright red. When Illicia noticed her face turned a brighter red than her backside.

"That's a holdover from my training, m'lady. I really do enjoy a good spanking, if it's part of the love act."

Now it was Alana's turn to blush.

Alana herself found she was slowly accommodating to the sensations in her nipples and clitoris, and while still in a high state of sexual arousal every night, found that she didn't need to satiate herself nightly by masturbation and hanging, but simply through a force of will. Nightmares of her hangings though were constant companions.

As the weeks went by Wyvern began to respond to his training. He would never be a Beaufort but he was able to tell the girls what he needed, what he wanted to do, and other vital pieces of information. Unfortunately most of this surrounded wanting a treat or getting his stomach or ears scratched. Alana didn't care. She was grateful for the companionship and protection. At least a dozen times a day the memory of her former life, her friends, ladies-in-waiting, father, uncle and Alisande would come to mind and leave her almost unbearably sad. One day, returning from the stables after a useful session having Beaufort explain some of his shorthand techniques she was surprised when a bright eyed girl of about 12 screamed and literally tackled her almost knocking her to the ground.

"Alana! Alana! Oh I'm so happy to see you!!"

Bemused Alana tried to place the really lovely girl with the green eyes and long brown hair...but when she saw a tell tale mark on her neck it finally came to her. "Krystyana! Oh my dear!! How are you?"

"I'm good. The Duke has me staying with one of the ferriers. He's a nice man and his wife is wonderful. They have three other girls so I fit in."

"And you're well?"

"Yes..." but a shadow came over the girl's face.

Alana hugged her, suddenly very conscious of her exposed breasts and loins. She looked at her closely. "Are you going to school?"

"Yes m'lady. I'm learning to read, write, and do figures."

"Alright! I am at the Duke's residence. When they start assigning you chores you ask to speak to Claudia. She will have you report to my girl Illicia and we'll find a good job for you." She held the girl's face in her hands and realized that if it was not for her intervention this little one would not be alive. Maybe there was some reason for her strange captivity after all.

Krystyana begged off as her lessons were about to start so Alana watched her go with a lifted heart.

Complications arose from her near naked condition that she had never experienced before. The act of walking around with her breasts, sex and buttocks exposed was erotic enough. Add to that the heightened sensitivity to her nipples and clitoris from their golden shackles and Alana found herself in a constant state of arousal. Her nipples, already large and dark, were constantly aroused by the rings biting into them. And as the day wore on she had to deal with the embarrassing reality of her own unique physical makeup. The clip on her clitoris brought a constant secretion of her vaginal lubricants. She had to carry a small purse with her and literally find a privy to wipe herself every so often or she would leak fluids down her legs. It became so bothersome in such a short period of time that she sought out the physicians' assistance.

They were bemused to say the least. And, on top of that, they had no ready answer for the problem! They had honestly never run into a woman with such a fierce libido!

They counseled her to continue carrying her purse and when she was in counsel meetings or at dinner with the Duke, to always have Illicia bring a pad. She felt like she was an old woman losing control of her bladder having to constantly use the privy and almost clean up after herself. Her frustration grew.

On top of that, all the serving girls, female slaves, and ladies-in-waiting seemed to have taken a deliberate negative set against her. Here she was, an obvious slave, immediately taken to the Duke's bedchamber, and given her own handmaiden. Some of the girls were fairly seething. With Illicia for company she really didn't mind it. But at the evening session, or dinners her position at the Duke's side made for quite uncomfortable times.

Then one morning Claudia came with some bitter news. "We've had a tragedy last night, my dear. I think you should see this." Alana followed her. They traveled to the area of the Castle where the ladies-in-waiting had their apartments. Each was small but private. In one of the corridors a number of the girls were gathered weeping piteously.

Claudia pushed through the group and opened the door.

A young girl, slim with dark hair had hanged herself. Then a shock of recognition hit her. This was one of the girls that had stopped her the first day and asked about the erotic effects of her time on the gallows! She was hanging from a beam completely nude. Her toes brushed the floor. She had used a silk scarf with a simple knot. The stool she had stood on was next to her, so close it would have been simple for her to step back and save herself. Her face was composed, almost peaceful, as if asleep. No sign of agony or pain. And below her was an ivory dildo. From the scene it certainly appeared like she was trying to achieve some type of increased sexual thrill by combining hanging and masturbation, and took it too far.

Alana shook her head and turned away, tears streaming down her face. Claudia took her gently by the arm. "Her friends said all she could talk about the last week was what it would feel like to hang, to orgasm while hanging. I'm afraid you have become quite a celebrity of sorts my dear. If these stupid silly girls try to emulate your experience on the gallows we could have an epidemic of hangings!"

Alana had no answer for the problem. but promised she would give it deep thought. That night, just before Gilbert bid her and Illicia goodnight she told him about the situation.

"Yes", he mused, "I heard that had happened. I really don't know what to do about it or what counsel to give. Some of these girls are so sexually frustrated that they make love to each other and engage in all sorts of exercises to exorcise their demons. I'm sure there is no blame that can fall on you."

He was very kind, but Alana still fretted and it bothered her greatly. That night the nightmares were particularly bad! She replayed every excruciating and agonizing second dangling on the rope. The next day Illicia drew a soothing bath and washed and brushed her hair.

"Let's try the blue corselet and hose today", she suggested. As usual the combination of short transparent under gown, corset hose and shoes, made her look like the highest paid pleasure girl in the land.

CHAPTER 12

That morning was spent with Wyvern. Even if his progress was slow, he was at least an appreciative student. The days set into a familiar schedule spent with Illicia exploring the castle for an hour or two and then spending the afternoon with Wyvern slowly teaching him the spelling board. Late afternoon was spent in the council chambers with Gilbert and his advisers, then pleasant evenings with music or other entertainment at the evening table.

Occasionally Gilbert was called away to other parts of his realm for judicial or administrative matters. With potential hostilities heating up on his borders he took a number of his knights with him and, of course, Beaufort. For trips close to his border he also took Wyvern. During one of these trips Claudia asked Alana for Illicia's help with a baking project and she was all too happy to help.

So it was that Alana found herself touring a wing of the castle by herself just after noon meal. This seemed to consist of rooms set aside for visiting guests and dignitaries. Each had a comfortable bed, table and chair and basic amenities. As she explored she couldn't get over the feeling she was being watched. A number of times she thought she heard a shuffling noise or a muffled word, but no one was there when she turned.

She was just finishing up the last rooms in the wing when she definitely heard a step. She turned to find two men advancing on her. Both wore coarse woven hoods with eye holes cut out and their menace was obvious. They were so close she barely had time to set herself. As the first grabbed for her she ducked under his grasp and came up behind him kicking him hard in the back of the knee. The second man grabbed her around the waist and she stomped down hard on his foot. He grunted in pain but did not let go. She silently cursed her high heels and kicked them off as she struggled with her attacker. She was able to get an elbow into his midsection and started to pull free when other hands grabbed her from the rear. Before she could deal with this new threat a fabric gag was pulled over her head and into her mouth. Other hands pinned her arms. Another piece of fabric came down over her eyes and she was now blindfolded and gagged. She struggled to get her arms free but there were too many of them and she found herself on the floor with her wrists bound behind her and her ankles crossed and bound.

"In here." she heard one of the men say through his hood, and she felt herself lifted up and taken into a room. The gag muffled any cries for help but she tugged helplessly at her bindings.

"In the middle." said the same voice and she found herself being held in place while a rope was looped around her neck and she was pulled upright onto the tips of her stockinged toes. She was surprised when the rope did not tighten but just held her in place. Her wrists had another rope tied to them and this came up and around her head and back down again, effectively pulling her bound hands up to her mid back.

"Our employers here have had enough of your airs, and usurping their rightful places. They have paid us to teach you some manners and your place!" the male voice said. Alana tried to respond but the gag muffled any response.

She heard a swishing noise and then pain exploded across her buttocks.

Whack!

She gasped in pain behind the gag. Then she heard a number of giggles. That first slashing blow was followed by another then another. They landed continuously on her buttocks and thighs.

Whack!

Whack!

Whack!

She tried to cry out with each new blow. She twisted and turned to try to avoid the rod, but the cord around her throat kept her anchored to one spot.

Whack! Another blow landed on her thighs.

“Concentrate on her bum. She’s quite proud of it. Let’s make it good and red!” she heard a half whisper.

Whack!

Whack!

Whack!

Whack!

Four fast blows landed on her left cheek, leaving her gasping in pain.

Whack!

Whack!

Whack!

Whack!

Four more, now on the right.

For a second a respite. Then a whistling and a feeling as if a firebrand had landed across both her cheeks.

Swack!

The pain was so intense that she couldn’t breathe. As she started to regain her breath five more landed.

Swack!

Swack!

Swack!

Swack!

Swack!

“Oh that’s much better!” came the whispered voice. “Stay with the cane!”

She lost count as the rain of blows criss crossed her scarlet buttocks. After more than two dozen on her buttocks and thighs the target became her breasts. By now she was wailing beneath her gag and her blindfold was soaked with her tears.

"That enough?" the male voice asked. "Another dozen!" a whispered voice replied.

These landed across her buttocks, bringing more cries and evoking more tears. "Well we're done", the male voice stated. She felt the rope around her neck release. A male arm grabbed her or else she would have collapsed on the floor. The two men lifted her up and threw her face down on what felt like a bed.

"It will take you some time to get loose, or for someone to find you. Just remember your place!" the first male voice commanded. Alana hear a door open and the participants exited. She lay there face down sobbing with the pain. A minute or two later she head the door open again.

"A whipping isn't enough for you" a female voice whispered close to her ear. Alana could feel the breath on her ear she was so close. "You need to truly suffer as you have made others suffer!"

She felt a hand tug on her bound ankles pulling them back toward her head. The rope around her neck was grabbed and she felt herself being pulled back into a cruel bow. "Now all we have to do is tie the neck rope to your ankles and we're done!" declared the whispered voice. Alana realized this could be very bad. The tension of her arched back and the rope from her ankles to her neck was putting increased pressure on her throat. If it wasn't released she would slowly strangle to death.

"Oh look at this!" exclaimed the female voice. "You're just dripping with cum!" Alana just cried in her frustration. Again her body betrayed her. She felt a small hand slide itself between her legs. "Here now, lets see if we can do something special now!" Alana tried to struggle but all it did was tighten the noose around her throat and add to her misery. She felt the girl's thumb between her buttocks. "There we go...I'll wager you've never felt this before!"

With that remark she felt the girl's thumb plunge deep into her rectum and the rest of her fingers cupped into her vagina finding her clipped clitoris! Now the girl thrust her thumb in and out of Alana's rectum all the while stroking her clitoris and vagina. Alana shrieked beneath the gag, writhing and moaning in her degradation. Nothing she could do could to stop the gross intrusion. Worse the stroking and the slow strangulation caused by the rope was eliciting an erotic response she knew too well. As the globes of light started to dance around the periphery of her vision the girl kept up her stroking of Alana's clit. It took less than a minute before she felt her body explode in a massive orgasm.

"Oh you poor dear. You've pulled that noose terribly tight around your throat! I just hope that orgasm was worth it! The executioner who told me about this technique said women can last an hour or more if they can control their spasms and arch their back, but that orgasm might cost you about half that time I'll wager. No, the others just wanted you lashed and humiliated. I want you to die! But slowly...very slowly!"

With that her female tormentor removed her hand, laughed and left the room. Blindfolded and gagged, Alana had no way of knowing where she was or what surrounded her, but her first priority was to loosen the noose around her neck. She strained backwards trying her best to touch her toes to her head.

Though her wrists were tied to the small of her back she brought her cross-bound ankles as close to them as she could and managed to catch a loose rope tie with her fingers! By pulling down and back she brought her bound ankles closer to her head and loosened the noose slightly. The explosions of light and pounding in her head lessened a bit. She realized that this was just a stop gap. She had to get free or she would strangle to death, even like this!

With the respite of holding the ropes on her ankles, Alana knew she had to get the blindfold off. She was on some sort of a bed or divan. If it was a bed like she saw in the guest rooms it had four posts, one on each end. She tried to move and found she could scoot to her left the easiest. She increased her grip on the ankle ropes and began to move. After a few moments she had found an edge. She now had to move up. This action caused the rope around her neck to tighten. And then it began. Was it the pain of the lashing and fear that had held it in abeyance? No telling. The first waves of eroticism washed over her and she realized she was soon going to climax again. If she let herself fall prey to these cascades she would lose consciousness and die! She struggled to concentrate on freeing herself.

No matter how hard she pulled on the ankle rope the noose cinched down each time she moved. She could stop and alleviate the pressure slightly by pulling as hard as she could but the overall effect was that she was strangling herself at a greater rate. And every time she tried to relax and get herself ready for a new effort the wave of orgasms would swell up and threaten to hammer her into insensibility.

After a minute or two of this, just when she felt the hammering of her pulse in her head and throat increased like the pounding of a trip hammer she touched the top of the post with her head. She butted up against it and found that it only came up a few inches over the mattress. She found the edge of the post and slipped her face against it catching the edge of the blindfold on its edge and sliding down. The blindfold moved! Throwing caution to the wind she slipped to the other side and did the same. With three pushes the blindfold slid above her eyebrows. Gasping due to the strangling of the rope she could now look around.

It was a plain room as she had see before but next to the bed was a simple table with a pitcher and basin made of fired ceramic. Steeling herself she rolled toward the bed stand and positioned her stockinged feet, she pushed as hard as she could. Though this pushing tightened the rope and sent her into a dizzying spiral of strangulation, she pulled hard on her ankle ropes and got some respite. She was rewarded with the crash of shattering pottery.

The bed was only a foot or so off the floor but she knew it was absolutely necessary she get to the shards. Fighting the choking rope she edged off the bed and slid down. Her knees hit the ground and she fell heavily on her right side. The impact knocked the rope out of her hands and for a few seconds she lay there dazed and strangling. She pushed back and grabbed the rope again. This got her a bit of respite once more.

She realized that the movement on the bed had rubbed her nipples raw from the friction. In the meantime she was literally dripping cum and the combination humiliated and frustrated her even more. She imagined if she succumbed and they found her strangled to death with her nipples bright red in a pool of her own cum. NO! Not if she had any way to avoid it! She looked around her and spotted a shard that had a sharp edge.

Now came the hard part. She edged her way over to the shard and letting go the ankle rope flipped on her side and tried to grab the shard with her bound hands. This, of course, had the immediate result of tightening the rope around her neck and increasing its choking grasp. She gritted her teeth around the gag and reached for the shard again. Once it was in her grasp she knew she had to cut the rope between her ankles and her neck or die. She couldn't both cut with the shard and hold her ankles at the same time. She turned the shard so the sharp end was up and began, by feel, to rub it against the connecting rope.

Her legs and ankles were fatigued and pulled back tightening the noose around her neck choking her relentlessly. Still she kept up the sawing motion. Hours seemed to go by. Her head ached. Her pulse sounded like a sledge on an anvil in her mind. Her breath was ragged as the noose choked her windpipe. But still she sawed away. Her vision began to narrow and turn gray. The explosions of light blocked out any remaining sight. She felt the ultimate orgasm began to build and knew she was just moments away from death. She frantically scraped and cut with the shard. Then another orgasm exploded tearing her consciousness from her and everything went black.

Slowly hearing returned. She could make out the sounds of the birds outside the window. She opened her eyes but everything was blurred. Then her eyesight came back into focus. Dully she realized she was still bound on the floor, but her ankles were no longer tied to her neck. The rope was still around her throat but it no longer was choking her. That didn't stop her throat from aching and feeling razor raw again. And her head ached like a knife had pierced it. She groaned and realized she was still gagged. She tried to piece together what had happened. From the movement of the shadows in the room she had been unconscious quite a while.

She rolled onto her back and then slowly pushed herself into a sitting position. She could now see the cut and frayed end of the rope on her ankles. She must have cut it almost through before she passed out. Totally unconscious her legs relaxed and pulled backwards as her body leaned forward, effectively strangling her but also putting a lot of pressure on the fraying rope. Over time; was it seconds? Minutes? Hours? The last strands that were frayed finally parted and snapped.

It must have been close. The rope should have strangled her leaving her dead on the floor. Much too close for comfort. Now she had a choice. Should she try to free her wrists and ankles or just ankles? The sooner the better! She grabbed another shard and, now being able to see what she was doing, cut through the ankle ropes in less than a minute. Shakily she got to her feet. She went to the door and it was unlocked. Once outside she ran down one of the main corridors and into the main hall.

People laughed to see the lovely honey red haired girl running gagged with her wrists behind her, thoroughly scourged with whip marks on her breasts and buttocks but she made it to Claudia's who looked at her aghast.

"Come here! Come here!" and she undid the soaked gag . Alana just gasped a minute or two as Claudia untied her wrists. "What's all this?" Shakily Alana related the kidnapping, whipping and bondage with slow strangulation, leaving the detail of her forced masturbation and orgasm out.

"I'll bet it was Beth! She was Duke Gilbert's favorite and you took her place in his bedroom. I can understand the whipping. But trying to kill you ... that's going too far." Claudia immediately called for a physician and the Captain of the guard.

The doctor checked Alana carefully and clucked when he looked at her neck. More bruising to add to the already scarred area. He had salve for the whip marks on her breast and buttocks. The areas were raised and bruised badly.

The Captain of the guard arrived and took down Alana's story word for word. Whether they would find culprits was anyone's guess since they could be anyone, but after telling her story for a full third time Illicia found her. She had finished her work hours ago and was searching all over for her.

She drew Alana a hot bath. She had a large jar of the slave and out of the bath she carefully covered every rod and lash mark, as well as the abrasions on her wrists, ankles and neck. Alana could do nothing more than sob silently. A sleeping draught from the doctor finally gave her some rest.

Alana was grateful that Gilbert was off handling diplomatic matters. She was covered in horrific bruises front and back. It took almost two weeks for the worst to subside. During this time she spent the majority of time in the Duke's residence out of sight. By the third week she felt she could walk around the castle without everyone staring at her. Even then, there were still enough of the bruises on her buttocks to make the younger children giggle and point.

Finally almost a month after the assault she was able to look in the mirror and not see any bruising.

The investigation never found out who the men were, but it did determine that Beth was the ringleader. She and two of her friends just disappeared the day after the assault and it was generally known that Alana had survived, so it became obvious. Alana tried to resume a reasonable active schedule but she missed Wyvern and Beaufort terribly. She was sure with either of them present she would not have been attacked.

CHAPTER 13

A few days later the Duke with Beaufort and Wyvern returned. Things slowly returned to normal. The next week, on a beautiful weekday morning, Illicia hurried in to tell Alana that the berry bushes in one of the far outer orchards were just bursting with fruit. Alana rushed down to Claudia to collect some baskets and she Illicia and Wyvern started the longish trek to the outer garden. Once out of sight of the castle proper she sat plopped down under a tree and took off her shoes and stockings. Not wearing her heeled shoes and being bare legged was a treat so the two strolled merrily to the berry bushes.

Once there, they knew they had made the right choice. Just tons of berries were hanging from their branches ready to be picked. As they started they spotted a small stream which looked perfectly cool and enticing. After an hour or so Alana decided what they needed was a cool swim. Both stripped off their garments and splashed in the warm water. When they got out Wyvern was waiting for them. He was quite excited dodging back and forth. Alana heard a puzzled wurff.

She looked around for Wyvern but didn't see him initially...then she saw his rump as he was head down under a bush. "Must be a rabbit", she thought.

But when she looked there was a basket of freshly picked berries. a jug of honey water and a bowl of fresh water for Wyvern. "How kind" she thought. "Claudia must have had these prepared for us."

So before returning to the berries they selected a shady spot and had their refreshments. Wyvern had finished lapping his water up and was already asleep. Alana and Illicia used him as a pillow and took advantage of the glorious afternoon to settle down for a short nap.

Illicia played with Alana's long hair. "It's so lovely...she yawned. "And you always look so beautiful in those sexy outfits the Duke designed. I wonder how I'd look in one of those?" Another yawn and both snoozed peacefully.

"Something was very wrong!" The message came clear as Alana struggled to wake up. "Very very wrong!"

Her head thumped badly. Worse than that when she tried to open her eyes everything was still black! And she couldn't move. For a second panic struck, but then she fought her fear and took stock. The reason she couldn't move was she was bound hand and foot. Her mouth was dry because she was gagged. And the reason she couldn't see anything was she had a hood over her head.

For a few seconds she was sure this was just another nightmare...if she concentrated she would wake up before the Bailiff dragged her up onto the gallows...but no...this was no dream! She tried to say something but all that was muffled by the gag.

"Hey!" a voice cried. "One of them's awake." "Good", another answered "We're here."

Rough hands grabbed her by the waist and slung her off what she supposed was a cart and onto the ground. As she struggled to get to her knees she felt something heavy land next to her.

"It's the two you wanted." said the second voice. "And that bloody monster of a dog?" asked a third. "He's still sound asleep, and good for us too. It'd taken more men than you have on two shifts to have handled him!"

Suddenly the hood was off. She expected to be blinded but they were in some kind of cavern lit only by torchlight.

"Yeah, look 'it the gold on her neck and her tits and cunt!" He spun Alana around. " And gold on the wrists too. She's the one alright, and that must be her maid. Well its good work either way. Take them down to the bottom level and cage them!"

Illicia moaned as the hood was pulled off her head and shook it trying to clear her vision. With both of them gagged they were unable to do more than give an angry muffled response as each was thrown over a brawny shoulder and carried for what seemed like forever. They finally entered a large cavern that had tables on one end and gages on the other. In those gages were girls, three or four to each. A minimum of 40. The girls were for the most part nude and looked poorly cared for. Alana and Illicia were thrown into an empty cell. The door was slammed and locked behind them.

Alana was so mad she could spit, but with that large dirty gag in her mouth there was nothing she could do but seethe. She moved over to Illicia and maneuvered herself to be able to loosen the girl's gag. She then went to work on her wrists. It took some time but with persistence she was able to free her. Illicia quickly undid her ankles and then freed Alana.

Alana tried to talk to the girls in the other cells, but they did not respond. "Either mute or speak a foreign language" she thought.

"Here m'lady, let me try." Illicia attempted greeting the girls in a number of dialects and languages she was familiar with. After a few minutes she got a response from one of the girls and they began to chatter.

Alana forced herself to be patient, until Illicia turned to her with a grim look. "These are the mines of Liticar under the control and territory of Count deLong. These girls have been bought and kidnapped from many villages and are used to satisfy the miners lust. When they are used up, they are literally butchered and become part of the miner's food."

"They're cannibals here?" Alana asked in shocked disbelief.

“So it would appear m'lady. They are used by the miners in every sexual way imaginable and after a period of time, when they have been, the term they used was ‘use up’ they are slaughtered and roasted as a special meal. “

"That's the most horrifying thing I've ever heard", Alana gasped. Within moments a bell rang and the sound of tramping feet began to be heard.

"It's the 3rd shift miners coming off work", Illicia related. "They eat and take their pleasure here." A pair of drudges went to the first cage where two blond girls huddled crying. They grabbed them and chained them naked to the tables so that they were spread and waiting as the men lined up. Each had either girl in the manner of his choice. After their initial screams all the girls could do was moan while they were raped repeatedly in every manner possible.

The sheer ugliness of it turned Alana's stomach and she retched.

"Those girls were here the longest", whispered Illicia. "They were told that this was to be their last day."

"You don't mean what I think you do?"

"Oh my God! Don't look"

But of course Alana had to watch.

The spent girls were unchained and sobbing wretchedly they were taken over to a dark corner where there was a hole in the ceiling. Alana could just make out a block and axe. The two drudges tied the girls hands behind them and the first of the pair was dragged wailing piteously to the block. She babbled uncontrollably as she was thrown to her knees. The second drudge grabbed her long blond hair pulling her down so her neck was pulled across the block. The second drudge grabbed the axe and swung it. There was the thunk of the blade and the girl's screams were cut short.

The second girl, who had been quietly crying screamed and wailed as the drudges tied the first girl's head to her feet by her long hair and waited for a chain lowered through the hole in the ceiling. They attached the body's bound wrists to this and it was hauled up.

Now it was the second girl's turn and despite her ravages she fought. It took both of the drudges to bring her to her knees. Again the first drudge grabbed her hair and the axe fell . Her piteous screams were cut off and the grim scenario of raising her body through the hole in the ceiling was replayed.

"Fresh roast tomorrow boys!", they heard a voice call from above.

Alana fought hard but lost what little she had in her stomach, ending up with the dry heaves.

The miners sat down to their meal and Illicia huddled with Alana.

"We're fortunate..those girls had been designated before we came in. We should have been used for their lust tonight. They run in 8 hour shifts. We'll probably be given to the next shift."

Alana thought for a moment. "There has to be a way out of here . We just need to keep our eyes open for an opportunity."

"Yes", said Illicia , "but in the meantime m'lady, take off your gold manacles and collar and change clothes with me."

"No!"

Illicia stamped her foot. "I gave my oath to be your servant and I will serve you to the best of my ability. Now if you don't change clothes with me I shall have to tear them off you!"

"Illicia I know what you planning "

"Well what do you think? If you were a man and had the choice of someone dressed like a Pleasure Slave or a servant?"

"But you could be sacrificing yourself..."

"A small sacrifice if you can spot a weakness and plan to get us out of here."

It took Illicia the better part of the evening to wear Alana down and convince her to change.

In the end Alana had on Illicia's modest peasant blouse and long skirt, with her plain velvet slippers. Illicia's shawl hid most of her red hair.

Illicia slipped on the diaphanous under skirt and dark blue girdle Alana had worn. She pulled up the long sheer dark blue stockings and affixed the garters. She also fitted on Alana's wrist cuffs and neck collar. Finally she put the high heeled shoes on. Posing in the high heels she smiled. "I always wanted to see how I looked in this outfit!"

"I have to admit", Alana marveled, 'you do look wonderful!"

"Sexy enough?"

"Without question. When we're out of here I will have the Duke get you a wardrobe of your own!"

Now they worked on Illicia's hair long black hair. With it untied and combed out It framed her face and gave her an exotic look. With the small amount of makeup she carried Illicia rouged her lips and painted her eyes, darkening the lids and making herself as alluring as possible.

Then Illicia worked on Alana...a little smudging here, a little dirt there, a dirty rag and the shawl covering her hair and there was little of the alluring and attractive Alana left to be seen. At least if she hid her face. When the next shift came off duty, Illicia was ready for them. She stood at the front of the cell as Alana huddled in the back.

"Too tired for a real woman, are you?" she mocked as the men crowded around. "I've had twice as many as you in a night and left them all trying to catch their breath!"

That challenge got the men's attention. They called for the guard, who opened the cage and brought Illicia over to a low padded structure.

"Now which one of these hungry men will be the first?" Illicia called in a mocking tone. A shambling bare chested miner came over to her, looked her over head to toe and threw her on the table. Alana could not watch much of what went on. Illicia was forced to service each miner to his taste, orally, vaginally, and anally, often two at a time. And by the time the last miner had finished there were a number ready for a second go. It was nearly two hours later when the guard reached down to help her off the cot. Illicia pushed his hand away, stood up straight, and walked back to their cage without so much as a look at the hooting men tramping out of the room. Once the guard had relocked the cage and gone back to his post she let herself collapse.

Alana was crying and she held her servant's head tenderly. Her body, especially her breasts and thighs were masses of bruises. Her face looked puffy. Her vagina and anus leaked a sickening combination of cum and blood. Alicia stripped off her undershirt and knickers and used them to help stem the flow using the small bucket of water they were provided. Illicia tried her best to make her a bit more comfortable. Finally, when she knew there was nothing else she could do, she laid her out on the straw mat and stroked her hair, whispering encouragement and urging her to sleep. Illicia looked up at her and whispered. "I guess I've done my part m'lady. It's up to you to get us out of here now."

As Illicia dropped into a fitful sleep Alana pondered her options. There was one chance and one chance only and it would have to be done almost immediately. Hating herself for doing it, she woke Illicia and told her plan. The girl was totally against it.

"No m'lady...you could die."

"I've been hanged before and survived. I can hang myself again if it means our freedom."

Despite her ravaging Illicia still refused. Alana argued and argued.

Finally Illicia looked her straight in the eye. "M'lady, if anyone's to fake suicide it should be me. The guard sees me dangling from the bars and he's more likely to open up to help someone dressed like this than a plain maid."

This took Alana aback. "Wait", she resigned herself, "There is a factor you don't know or understand." In the next few minutes she explained the erotic hold that hanging had on her and her experience with the phenomena. "And I...I could hang naked" she ended.

Illicia looked deep into her Mistress' eyes. "No. It doesn't matter what you've accustomed yourself to and it's not my place to judge anyone's behavior, especially Royalty. You're the one who has the warrior training. If you missed, hanging like that, there's no telling if I could handle the guard. No it's far better for me to be the distraction and you to take him down."

Alana had to admit to the logic. She helped Illicia on to the upturned bucket.

“We'll use this broad shawl.” Alana explained. “It should disperse the pressure.” Then a thought occurred. “If I untie the cords of your corset here in the back and tie them to the cross bar it would take most of the pressure off your neck and no one would notice. It will have to help!” Alana cinched up Illicia's corset cords and then looped the shawl around Illicia's neck then over a cross bar, snugged it so she stood on her toes and tied it off.

“I'll start now!” and she began screaming at the top of her lungs. Illicia took that as her cue and kicked away the bucket. For a few seconds the corset supported her weight. Then the cords let go and her neck took the full weight of her body. She immediately regretted her insistence. The scarf pulled tight and twisted around her neck. She was truly hanging. Her straining toes swung a few inches off the floor. She immediately wanted to tear the strangling scarf from around her neck, but she willed herself to hang silently and not move. She had to convince the guard.

“Please!” Alana cried, “My lord! Please! The Princess has hanged herself. Hurry please!!”

“What?” a startled voice called. “Naw she's just getting used to being used.”

“No sire, please just look at her. I know your master the Count would be displeased if she died.”

The guard came up to the gage scratching himself and peered through the bars. Illicia did her best to remain motionless, letting her body dangle arching her feet so her toes swung just inches off the floor. “She's a nice one alright. Pretty figure. But looks to me like she's well on her way. I'll send a drudge to collect her. She'll be part of tomorrow's menu.”

“Oh no! Please sire. I don't want to spend a night with a dead body. Please, if you cut her down and drag her out I will pleasure you more than you can imagine.”

The guard smiled. This one, though only a servant, was fresh meat. In the meantime, Illicia fought the excruciating agony of the hanged and desperately fought the urge to kick and tear at the ligature around her neck. Worse, she began to lose consciousness. If the guard did not hurry all would be lost.

“Well for your favors girl, let's see what we can do”. He unlocked the cell and pulled his boot knife to cut her down. Alana timed her kick catching him under the chin! He flipped backward and she grabbed for his knife.

Now Illicia gave into her basic instinct and began to pull desperately at the hanging scarf and kick in her agony. Why was Alana taking so long? Her head was bursting! Then the pressure was gone and she dropped to her knees.

“Sorry love but it took me a minute to get him to release the knife.” When her eyes could focus Illicia could make out that the guard's head had been bashed in by the bucket.

Alana made a split second decision. Illicia's voluminous skirt and blouse were fine for modesty but she needed to be able to move and fight. She stripped the skirt off leaving only the long blouse which came down to the tops of her thighs. Illicia looked startled.

"I used the undergarments to bind you up and I'd rather fight half naked than be bogged down." She grabbed the guard's short sword and handed Illicia the man's boot knife. "I'll get the other girl's out with his keys. See if he had a purse or something else we can use."

By now the other girls were truly mute with terror. Having been subjugated so long, and seeing the violence done to the guard they were paralyzed with fright at the retribution that could follow.

"Illicia make them understand. Either come with us and live or stay down here and die."

One by one the girls crept out of their cages and followed Alana in a line up the stairs and out of the mine's dungeon. Illicia followed with her knife in the rear, whispering instructions to the girls as they went along. They made it up two levels without being seen but at the main entrance a guard sat on a chair snoring loudly. It was a good twenty yard from the corner where Alana had paused. She wasn't sure she could reach him and silence him before he gave the alarm. She went back to Illicia and asked if she had found the first guard's purse. Illicia handed it to her, modest to be sure, but it would be enough.

Alana started by jiggling the purse. This did nothing to wake the guard. She then started dropping the contents one coin at a time on the stone floor. With this noise the guard started awake. To get his attention she rolled a silver crown down the corridor. The guard's puzzled glance followed it as it rolled by him. Then he reached down almost tentatively to see if was real or a dream. Finding it real he looked around and spied the small pile at the elbow of the tunnel. Yawning he moved out of the chair and came over bending down to pick up the coins.

Alana sprang and drove the short sword through the side of guard's neck silencing him and killing him with one stroke. She relieved him of his knife. Slowly the group moved out of the cave and into the clearing beyond. Everything was quiet. No alarm had been sounded.

Alana took them quickly into the woods and silenced all the girls so she could try to get her bearings. If she could hear the river they would have a chance, but there was no sound of running water. Once again she went back to her tutor's boring lessons in the Palace. She found the north star. The mines were supposed to be west of Valmont, Duke Gilbert's castle. They would have to travel east as fast as they could. She moved the girls while hoping Illicia could keep up. The girls were town folk and hopelessly noisy as they went. Still with a good head start...

And then her hopes sank. There were whistles and calls and the next thing she knew they were surrounded by torches. The girls started crying and screaming, but she felt Illicia move to her side her sword up. They would not take either of them without a fight. Through the circle of torches walked a man with the patch. He exuded authority. "So this must be the Master of the mines" she thought.

“You two must have done for my men in the cave, though looking at you girl”, he said pointing to Alana, “I’d wager you did them both.”

Alana said nothing, just judged her distance from him for a lunge.

“Yes”, he said as he looked her over, “Your girl there fooled my men. You’re the Princess and she’s your servant. Sacrificed herself did she?”

He moved forward and Alana’s guard went up.

“Oh yes...you’re the deadly one. Well mistakes have been made, but they can be set right. It’s you the Count wants. Seems you did him a harm a while back and somehow escaped justice. I can see the scars from your hanging even in this light. But he wants to finish the job so you two will be going to him, now.”

He motioned two of his men with swords to come forward. One came high the other low. Alana whirled catching the first one under his guard and deep in the chest The second received a fatal blow to the back on the neck, nearly severing the spine.

“So you have been trained as a warrior!” the Master exclaimed. “Well that changes things even further. Oh Philip! Bring up your toy!”

A shambling shape more like a frog than a man shuffled up. His countenance was so twisted it was hard to tell he was human. But he carried something that was eminently identifiable. A cross bow.

“Philip practices with this every day, don’t you boy?” The slobbering mess nodded.

“Now why don’t you put one right in her thigh and we’ll take her down, shall we?”

As the simpleton nodded Alana shifted slightly in the torches’ light. Her activities had caused her blouse to ride up and she was now fully exposed from the hips down. Her hairless pubic area glinted in the light and her engorged sex seemed to protrude and become even more pronounced. The idiot’s eyes shifted from sighting down the weapon to Alana’s naked sex.

She recalled her training. Her best chance at this distance was to feint left and throw the boot knife. If the bolt missed she might kill the idiot and be among the swordsmen before they had a chance to prepare themselves. She readied herself to spring as the idiot continued to stare, a long goblet of drool dripping from his mouth.

Then everything erupted in a snarling howling cyclone of white and gray fur. The idiot literally lost his head and half his body was thrown into the crowd on her right. Alana had already begun her move so she altered her throw and caught the Master of the mines directly through his remaining eye socket and dropped him.

She spun around to catch the next threat but by then the area was full of mounted men and she realized Duke Gilbert had arrived.

“Well Alana. I see you were getting things in hand here.”

“As you say, your Grace. But this is an evil place. They torture and butcher these girl's for meat!”

“So the rumors are true”, murmured the Duke. “Captain, take a squad of men and see what evidence you can find.”

In a short while the man was back looking very ill. “It’s a carnal house down there your Grace. The girl is right. They butcher them for meat!”

“Then let's see what we can do about closing these mines for good! Can we block the entrance?”

“Yes your Grace. Not a problem. “

“Ornat”, he spoke now to his first cousin and second in command. “Get these bastards down to the belly of the mine and confirm there are no other captives down there.”

A little while later he returned. “Just three shifts of miners and some drudges who claim innocence.”

“No innocents among them”, Alana responded. “I saw a pair actually decapitate two of the girls!”

“Well put them with the rest. Let's block the entrance well enough that none of the miners can escape, at least in the short term. In the long term it won't make any difference. Get those bastards down into the mines and lock them in the girls' cells. Then block that entrance.”

Beaufort nodded and soon the great war horse had a team of his compatriots maneuvering boulders across the opening.

“Excellent” the Duke exclaimed once the job was finished. “Now let's get everyone clear. Ornat, take a team of men and break the dam upstream a mile or so. The waters are high and it should flood the mine and take care of those murdering bastards!”

Ornat smiled and took a dozen men with him. In a short while there was a roar and water came flowing and down into the mine.

Illicia was helped into a cart and as it came by Alana made to go with it. “No”, said Gilbert. “She is under the care of my personal physician and his assistants. You'll only be in the way.”

“But she sacrificed herself for me!” Alana cried.

“Here” he replied. “Beaufort has offered you one of his daughters. Her name is Starfire.”

A lovely female roan, saddled and ready came up. "Mount and let's be off, you can tell me all the details as we go."

Alana grabbed the harnesses and pulled herself up with no problem and the entire party set off at a fast pace. By the time they reached the river the Duke's face was grim with thought.

"That bastard Count had to have someone in the castle to drug you and Wyvern. I knew he was vindictive, but this is just too much. Ronart!", he called to his third in command." Triple all the guards and set someone in the kitchen as a taster for all foods."

He smiled at Alana. "Poor Wyvern was almost mad with worry. When he woke up all we could get out of him was his head hurt and he had to find you. It took us a devil of a time to get him to tell us where you were, or rather to lead us at a pace we could follow. He was all for charging off on his own."

When they returned to the castle Alana immediately retired to the Duke's chambers for a long bath. The servants had it prepared and she gratefully sunk into the steaming water, made fragrant with rose pedals.

She signed closing her eyes and letting the hot water bath the aches from her body. It had been close. So close! And if Illicia had not made her sacrifice...

She heard a noise and her head whirled to find the Duke standing watching her. Despite the fact he had seen her naked hundreds of times she blushed.

"I'm sending out feelers to that blasted Count. See if we can smooth over the mess at the mine. It will be bad enough fighting either the Count or the Duke but both at once would be nigh on impossible. I am suggesting that we give a ball in the Count's honor. Claudia will have a gown made for you with my royal colors, blue and black. In the meantime get some rest."

"Illicia?" she inquired.

"Resting comfortably so I'm told. You should be able to see her tomorrow." He turned and left as Alana slipped back to her warm bath.

CHAPTER 14

After a deep sleep she dressed in a dark red and black corset with black diaphanous under blouse and stockings. A servant had returned her bracelets and collar. She felt oddly comforted as she put them on. She made her way to the sick quarters and a doctor led her into Illicia. “We’ve got her as medicated for the pain as we dare. Once the inflammation and fever goes down we have high expectations.”

Alana sat next to the bed. Illicia opened her eyes and they lit up. “Princess! Are you alright?”

“I’m fine. The doctors tell me you will soon be well. Rest and get strong. Beaufort and Wyvern miss you already!”

The girl smiled and then nodded off.

“Just the Hellebore. She needs all the sleep she can get.” Alana sat by her side for another hour or so. Then a messenger came from Claudia calling her back to the residence.

“Alana. Good to have you back my dear! The Duke has left orders for the ladies to wear their best gowns for the coming gala, but we need to have one made for you. Come and let the seamstresses get to work.”

The ‘gown’ was to be the height of eroticism, fitting the Duke’s taste. High collared behind the head, the neckline plunged below the breasts supporting them but leaving them completely exposed. A narrow corset emphasized Alana’s tiny waist. Then a flared and petticoated skirt completely open in the front left her pubic area and legs completely exposed. Matching black stockings and high heels completed the look. Worn with her gold manacles, collar and jewelry she would look the height of sexual desire.

The Gala had been planned for a month’s time and during the coming weeks Alana spent her time between caring for Illicia, training Wyvern, and the almost continuous fittings. As the gown took shape she could see that the effect would be dazzling.

Illicia slowly recovered. Her old humor came back and by the second week she was up and around for short periods. By the time of the Gala she was almost ready to resume her old duties. The day before the Gala the Count arrived with his retinue.

Things did not go smoothly from the very start. The Count refused the hospitality of staying in the Castle proper, preferring to set up his own set of Pavilions outside the main gate and moat. At the formal greeting ceremony. She recognized him by his height and his crooked nose. She wondered if he had a permanent scar from the blow she had landed with the pitcher. The Count presented his retinue. The Countess Edita was a dark tall beauty with magnificent black hair and a striking figure. Her two senior ladies-in-waiting were similar in appearance. The rest of her retinue were six waif-like sylphs of girls. Very pretty and very young.

The Count was greeted with all the pomp and circumstance the Castle could muster. Duke Gilbert had ordered Alana dressed in her black corset at his side. She thought she saw a look of recognition from the Count as he stepped from the coach. Had he marked her as the girl he had condemned to the gallows that day months before? As the introductions were being made the Count seemed to take little notice but the Countess stared at Alana and focused on the rope burns on her neck.

“Thank you for your hospitality Your Grace”, she purred. The Duke bowed.

“I note a number of strikingly dressed young women in your court but who is this incredible beauty by your side?”

“This is my personal Courtesan, Alana. Her dress is of my own design and you can see it highlights her considerable charms.”

Alana had become used to being constantly exposed in the castle but these new guests caused her a sudden shyness. The Countess came forward and observed her closely. She snapped her fan shut and pointed at Alana’s nipple rings. “What in heaven’s name, are these?”

“They proclaim I am the Duke’s property my lady” Alana replied with all the dignity she could muster.

“And this?” she asked pointing at the gold that dangled between Alana’s legs. “Do you proclaim his ownership by shaving your pudendum and further flouting your nudity?”

“No my lady”, the Duke interjected. “Alana has no body hair so her nudity down there is as natural as a child’s.”

“Humph!” came the reply. “So you prefer children?”

“No Countess. Alana is...how old are you my dear? Yes! Fifteen!”

“Do you often hang your mistresses, Duke Gilbert?” she followed, again pointing with her closed fan. “Those rope marks marring her throat are rather disconcerting!”

“No, my lady. I believe Alana received that gift by your husband’s order the last time they met.” The Count, who had been trying to take minimal notice of the proceedings looked up in astonishment. He peered intently at Alana and then a flash of recognition. “It’s you! The thief who tried to murder me! But you’re dead. They told me you died on the gallows!” He gaped in amazement.

“Actually, my good Count, one of my servants was traveling through the countryside and bought this young lady for me as she twisted at the rope’s end. I’m sure everyone thought she was dead since she had been hanging for over an hour. But enough of ancient history. Let us take some wine and refreshments, You must be tired after your long journey.”

As the group moved into the main hall, Alana noticed the frankly envious glances of the Countess's two older women and the giggling and open stares of the six younger. That evening Illicia helped Alana into her gown.

“Oh Princess, you look incredibly beautiful” she enthused.

“Yes, I suppose if you consider being constantly exposed and dressed in the most whorish way possible as beautiful” Alana grumped.

“Well your hair is perfect. Are you sure you don't want me to use a little of this makeup? Even on your eyes? Not that you need it...”

Alana had never used any enhancers on her appearance and demurred. “I guess I better go before I'm late” she sighed.

She made her way down to the crowded ballroom. The Duke's tastes, as usual, held sway. Young women, wives of nobles and relatives, all dressed in lovely but revealing dresses filled the hall. But all eyes turned to Alana as she made her entrance.

Yes her blue and black gown was amazing. It highlighted her naked breasts and its paring of fabrics and colors, in combination with her long silk stockings emphasized her totally naked sex. The high heels enhanced her perfectly formed long legs and gave a grace to her walk that was impossible for any other woman to copy. Her golden red hair formed a halo around her face and all the elements just stopped conversation.

The Duke smiled and as she entered, offered her his arm leading her to the floor and commanding the orchestra to play. Alana joined him in the first dance of the night. Alana always had enjoyed dancing, but this evening, under the close watch of the Count, Countess and their retinue, it was like being under an inspection glass. Still she kept time with the Duke and mimicked his steps perfectly. At its end she curtsied and felt the flush of excitement.

The rest of the evening went smoothly, though she constantly feared being asked by the Count to dance. Thankfully the various nobles and relatives of the Duke filled her card. Refreshments were served, the dances continued, and at evening's end she retired to the Duke's bedroom.

Illicia waited expectantly. “Oh I watched a little Princess. You were wonderful!” she enthused.

Alana had long given up begging Illicia to call her by her first name and just smiled. As she helped Alana undress and into her night flimsy the Duke entered followed by Wyvern.

“Bloody bastard! I'd rather see him dead for what he's tried to do to you!” Gilbert spat as he threw his coat on the bed.

“It will be war as sure as I stand here. He'll covey up to that damn Ducos and then we'll be in for it! Not your fault, of course Alana. You're the victim twice over in this!”

Alana just stood in her diaphanous night gown and stared frankly amazed. Gilbert was supposed to be the premier diplomat, willing to turn the card on any chance for an upper hand. And here he was turning his back to his next most powerful rival for her?

The Duke sighed. “The bastard will want to go hunting tomorrow with that bitch his wife. Wild game is about all he eats. No wonder he has gout. I’ll take Wyvern just to be on the safe side. Can you look after those young girls of his?”

“Certainly!”

Wyvern had curled himself up and made himself into the pillow bed for the two girls.

“Goodnight ladies” mumbled Gilbert and tossed himself into bed.

It was always amazing to Illicia that the Duke slept alone with the most beautiful girl she had ever seen lying in the sleeping furs at the foot of his bed. But she sighed and cuddled up to Alana and Wyvern quickly falling asleep.

CHAPTER 15

After breakfast the next morning Alana saw the hunting party off. She gave Illicia her tasks for the day and set off for the guests' pavilions to find the Countess' young ladies.

It was the height of summer and she would have liked to have begged a cool breeze so that she could wear a cloak over her corset and stockings. With the warm sun she steeled herself to walk across the drawbridge and into what, for all intents and purposes, was an enemy camp. The Count's men all hooted and called as she went by, her charms totally on display.

Still she had been given a task by the Duke and fulfill it she would. With a little wandering and finally, swallowing her pride, an inquiry of a pair of staring guards she found the girls' pavilion. To her surprise the tent entrance flew open and all six girls were there, apparently waiting for her. Each was young, very tiny and very pretty. Long hair to their waists. No chests as yet but tiny waists. Huge eyes and small mouths and all stifled their giggles as Alana entered. She blushed. Each of the girls wore long sleeved dresses with laced bodices, contrasting girdles and bloused skirts.

Alana blushed. For all their modesty she was virtually completely naked. Today she wore a robin's blue corset with matching transparent blousing that simply floated around her naked breasts and hovered above her hairless sex. Combined with her golden manacles and neck collar and her dark blue silk stockings and high heels she was the embodiment of a Pleasure Girl and felt so totally exposed she could have cried.

The first girl to come forward had long black hair that fell almost straight down to her waist, very large brown eyes and a small beauty mark on her cheek. "Hello!" she trilled. "I am Simone. This is Maria, Anna, Francine, Maricia and Rebecca. Oh! And we've all fallen totally and deeply in love with you!"

Alana just stared in disbelief with what must have been a frown of confusion on her face.

"You are the most beautiful girl we have ever seen. A lot of the Countess's girls are very pretty but you are by far the loveliest. The Count has none in his estates to compare. Not like he would be the least interested." All the girls tittered.

Alana was still taken aback.

"Can we show you a secret. A deep dark secret?" the one called Rebecca asked. "We can only tell you and you must keep it to yourself!"

Alana dumbly nodded.

All of the girls raised their skirts up above their stockinged thighs and the sight caused Alana to gasp in astonishment.

All had penises! Not just small flaccid things but fully erect, deep red and empurpled penises! Each wore a band or collar of blackened metal biting in deeply around the organ's base which almost looked as if it cut the member in two.

“He keeps us like this. That's why we have these bands installed and tightened almost every day. Make's it devilish hard to pee and almost impossible to, to...well you know.”

Again Alana just gaped.

“Then of course there's these.” The girls spun around and bent over. Each had some sort of round object in their anus.

“We're plugged for his pleasure. We can only take them out when we use the necessary...on pain of death. He wants us ready and able 24 hours a day.”

“So you're boys?” Alana managed incredulously.

“Oh yes, very much so. But the Count keeps us for him and him alone. Doesn't like ladies. Only took the Countess as wife to still the peasants and lesser Lords.”

“Yes”, Francine joined in. “Our only release is each other. So we restrict our physical love to ourselves. Except for you that is. We all have fallen madly in love with you!”

Alana still just gaped.

“Oh please don't worry” Anna chimed in. “We've never even considered physical lovemaking with a girl. It can remain courtly love. It's just that you're so beautiful!”

Alana just looked down and shook her head. “This is a little much to take in all at once.”

Simone looked at her shyly. “We know about your legend, and you're every bit as beautiful as they say.”

“My legend?” Alana asked incredulously

“Yes. The Bailiff in Akrat swears you hanged for hours and hours and you came and came on the rope. He said that erotic fluids gushed out of you like a fountain. He swore he hanged you till you were stone cold dead but that you were brought back to life by a sorcerer with a magic horse!”

“My legend” Alana repeated numbly.

“Some say you are a sorceress yourself and that you used your magic powers to survive the gallows. Everyone who saw your hanging was seized by your sex magic and many of the women present are with child from that day.”

Alana had only the vaguest recollection of the crowd at her hanging but she did recall the bawds and whores doing a brisk business.

Simone looked at her earnestly. “We use hangings as part of our sex play. Part of why we were chosen is because he likes us so much shorter than he is. He puts a halter around our necks and pulls us up on a stool so we’re on tip toes. Then he sodomizes us and kicks the stool away so we hang as we sink down on his member. We hang for as long as it takes for him to cum. I think Anna has been hanged the longest.”

Anna nodded vigorously. “But she’s only been up for about five minutes. Anyone who can survive the noose for hours...” her voice trailed off in amazement.

Alana slowly found her voice.

“How long have...have you been like this?” she said indicating the long hair and dresses.

“We are foundlings. Each month the Count and Countess look over the crop of young boys and girls that have come in. The Count chooses the boys and she chooses the girls. We have another dozen or so in training, but we are the Count’s favorites.”

“We take turns servicing him” Anna explained. “He has a difficult time getting hard so we use our oral skills to try to get him erect. When that doesn’t work he’ll rod or whip us for his pleasure, then one of us will hang. He’ll either have one of us suck him off or like Simone said, if he’s hard enough, take the hanged one in the bum until he comes. If it’s a punishment hanging he ties our hands in front and our elbows behind so he can have his way without bother. We’ve lose a couple of girls to the noose because he takes so long, or can’t come at all. If that happens, he just leaves her hanging to die.”

“That’s incredibly cruel and sadistic!”

“Yes, but it’s our life”, Simone replied. “Orphans often don’t survive the winter in our part of the country.”

“Why don’t you run away?”

“The Count has bands of catchers out there. Anyone trying to escape his land that is caught is tortured for days and then executed.”

“So we take turns. Its Simone’s turn to be on call this week, but so far there hasn’t been a request. But enough about us! Please tell us your story!”

So Alana spun her tale. By its end the girls (and she had to label them as such to retain any sense) were just agape.

“So you are Royalty. A true Princess?”

“Yes” Alana responded.

“Shanghaied, hanged, kidnapped!” The girls could only shake their head in wonder.

Now it was their turn to amaze Alana. Each of the young ones had a skill with an instrument which they insisted on playing for her. All were very sweet and very earnest. This was the only world they knew. They reminded her of Illicia who had a similar abusive background, being brought up in a sadistic lesbian household.

“Those bands on your penises look exceptionally painful!”

“Oh they are” Simone cried, “Especially when we try to cum. We just lost a sister last month whose member turned black and she died. It’s like having a permanent erection. It’s the way the Count has of reminding us we are his. See, each has his crest.”

Upon closer examination the Count’s seal was engraved on the bands and the bottom of the anal plug. “But he has an even worse torture if we don’t comply completely with his whims.”

Alana shook her head. “What can be worse than dying like you just described?”

“He has the girl tied down on her stomach with her legs spread. Then he uses fat to cover his arm. Slowly he pushes his hand and arm up her bum until he gets all the way up to the elbow. The pain is worse than I can describe. If he wants her dead he will take a small knife and cut her inside so she bleeds inside. If not, just the pain can last for days. It is truly horrible!”

“Now what do we do?” Alana asked more to herself.

“We were planning to escape” Anna whispered. “We were going to ask for sanctuary and not go back with the Count. We heard that slaves can be freed in the Duke’s kingdom. Now that we’re sure you’re a Princess we would like to become part of your retinue!”

Alana had to laugh. “My ‘retinue’ is one servant. At present I am a slave myself.”

All of them looked dejected. “Let me talk to the Duke and see what he thinks.”

“Oh yes! Please do!!” and they scampered around her like playful puppies.

CHAPTER 16

That evening Alana found a brief moment to speak to Gilbert. He was amazed and bemused. “The Count’s sexual preferences don’t especially surprise me. But it will just move us further down the road to war if we let his body servants stay.”

Alana pleaded their case. “These are just children and they are being used for gross immoral purposes. They are being continually sexually abused and they have no one to turn to!”

“Alana” Gilbert replied, “they are slaves. They are the Count’s property. If I just take them from him it would be theft!”

“Can you buy them?”

“I can try, but with how you’ve put their relationship and the value he set’s on them...and given our current state of disharmony I don’t think there would be any use.”

Alana left truly frustrated. Illicia was waiting for her.

“I’m sorry Princess. I couldn’t help but overhear. So those lovely little girls are actually boys?”

“Yes. And if we don’t help them they’ll surely die at the Count’s hands.”

“I am sure you will come up with a way to help them” Illicia comforted her.

As they talked Alana slowly moved to the wardrobe containing her clothing. “Well on to more pleasant things” she forced a smile. “I have a present for you!”

Illicia looked puzzled as the wardrobe was opened.

“As I promised” Alana grinned and brought out a dark green corset with matching transparent blouse, hose and heels. “You looked so lovely in mine that the Duke gave his permission for you to have a set of your own!”

Illicia squealed in delight. Then she looked concerned. “But if I wear this won’t everyone assume.?”

“Not if you wear it in private” Alana laughed. “But even if you choose to wear it outside of these chambers, what the rest of the court thinks is not important. After all everyone ‘knows’ I am the Duke’s courtesan and bedmate, don’t they?”

Illicia looked thoughtful. “Will the Count and Countess be hunting tomorrow?”

“I expect so.”

“I think I have an idea.”

The next morning the Count’s girls had an early visitor just after the hunting party left. They were expecting Alana but instead a truly lovely girl with long black hair was at the entrance. She wore the same type of outfit as Alana, dark green corset, transparent blouse, long dark hose and heels. She did not have gold manacles or a collar but she did have piercings of her nipples and clitoris. In addition to her collar she wore a dark green velvet tape around her throat.

“Oh!” Maricia exclaimed, “You are Illicia! You are Alana’s servant aren’t you?”

“Yes” Illicia replied.

Rebecca pushed forward. “What a lovely outfit! I’d love to have one just like it, but I’d never look as good as you do!”

“Is Alana coming?” Simone asked.

“A little later. Right now we need to take care of some important business. The Princess has told me that none of you have ever made love to a woman.”

“True” Rebecca replied. She was tall with light brown hair. “It’s not from wanting.”

“Well today I’m here to give you your first course in making love to a woman!”

The girls stared in amazement.

Illicia took charge. First she had them remove their frilly dresses. Then as they all blushed deeply she carefully examined the rings around their erect organs.

“Can you cum with these on?”

“Yes” but it takes some time.”

She touched Simone’s anal plug. “Do these hurt?”

“Sometimes. Especially if the Count has been cruel.”

“Do you ever make love to each other up there?”

“No. We content ourselves with oral or manual love...unless the Count orders otherwise.”

“Well come around me on the bed and let me show you what I have in mind.”

Alana entered the girl’s pavilion about an hour or so later.

Rebecca, completely naked except for her garters and stockings, came up to her giggling. “Alana! We’ve been expecting you! Illicia has just given us the most marvelous gift!”

Alana looked at the tableau before her. All the ‘girls’ were nude, but their penises were no longer erect. They surrounded Illicia on the bed stoking and cuddling her. She looked up frowzled and mischievous in her sexy green outfit.

“I should have known!” Alana fumed stamping her foot. “And in your new outfit too!”

“After all, Highness, it is one sure way of making boys into men...why not girls into men?”

“Oh Alana!” Simone gushed. “It was wonderful. And Illicia is so pretty!”

“Not as pretty as you!” Rebecca added hurriedly.

“Oh no!” Simone sounded truly sorry. “I never meant that!”

“Illicia! Did you do all of them?”

“Well they all looked so needy. And they had such bad erections!”

“Yes” Anna added. “Look!” She and the other girls had removed their rings from their flaccid organs, though each still bore a deep and angry indentation from the band.

“We’ve each come twice!” Anna added. “it’s the greatest gift anyone’s ever given us!”

Alana plopped down on a chair and held her head in her hands. “Oh Illicia I’m absolutely sure you’ve complicated this incredibly!”

All the girls were quickly chastened. They each got dressed again. With Alana, and a chastened Illicia’s help, they redid their hair and makeup so they could be presentable.

“Now for the most important part” Simone murmured as each of the girls started fitting the bands on their flaccid members. But with both Alana and Illicia present, and with not much coxing each had an erection long before the Count returned.

Later that night, at dinner in the grand hall, the Count announced that he would have to bring his visit to an abrupt halt. Business demanded a hurried return, one that would cut off his stay by over a week. None of the girls said anything, but all gave desperate looks of unhappiness.

“Our young ladies don’t appear to be pleased with having to leave” the Count continued, “but we have a regimen back in my household which soon bring them around.”

All six of the girls left the table abruptly crying piteously. Alana remained for the entire evening. After all the necessary pomp and farewells she started to make for the girls’ pavilion when Gilbert stopped her.

“The Count thinks you have been trying to subvert his slaves.”

“Subvert...no. But I feel a great deal of empathy for them.”

“I understand. I really do. But you must stay away from them. He is just looking for a reason to find wrong with you. Still he’s enough of a diplomat to offer to sign a treaty. It will take a day or so for the counselors to wrangle over the provisions and then we can be rid of him.”

Alana nodded miserably and retired with Illicia to the Duke’s quarters. Early the next morning they were awoken by a hammering on the Duke’s door.

“What is it?” the Duke mumbled querulously.

“Your grace! There has been a tragedy in the forest just south of the Count’s pavilions!”

The Duke jumped up and grabbed a cloak. Alana followed suit. Beaufort and Starfire were saddled and waiting so it took just a short while to reach the grove of trees where a crowd was gathered. The mass blocked the view but seeing the Duke they parted and Alana tucked in behind him.

Five of the Count’s young girl/boys dangled from the limbs of the trees. Each was nude and had had their wrists bound behind them, their feet swinging just inches from the forest floor. As their bodies turned slowly it was obvious they had been beaten severely. All bore rod and whip marks. But that was not the worst of it. Each had had their penis severed. They had bled copiously. As the bodies slowly twisted it became obvious as to the location of the severed organs. Each had a tied off end protruding from their anus. They had died a slow and agonizing death.

Alana collapsed in tears. When she was finally able to control herself Gilbert was giving orders for the bodies to be cut down.

“He’s a murderer! A sadistic and brutal murderer!” she finally screamed.

“Yes, if this is his work, he is” the Duke replied coming to her and putting his arm around her.

“What can we do?” she cried.

“Nothing” was the calm response. “A slave’s life is his master’s. If he wanted them dead and if he killed them, he has the right under the law.”

Alana looked up at him in pure horror. And then the realization hit her. This was her current station in life. Her existence depended on Gilbert’s whim. The realization pummeled her.

“Have the Count attend me, now!” Gilbert ordered.

Some time later the Count appeared in the royal residence. He was accompanied by the Countess and her ladies. To Alana’s relief Simone appeared also.

The Count and Gilbert went into a private room and this gave Alana the opportunity to take Simone aside as the nobles met in private.

Once alone the girl sobbed hysterically. “It was horrible Princess. He accused all of us of Treason. He said we would all be slowly tortured to death. Each of us was questioned separately. Questioned! Beaten and tortured! I confessed! Oh I did. I confessed. I couldn’t take the pain. Then he had the other five taken out and executed. Slowly. Rodded and beaten then pulled up on their toes until they were bursting. He had the men cut their penises off and had the erect members shoved in their bums. Then he hanged them until they were dead!”

Just as they finished an angry Count exited the conference room and stomped out of the hall gesturing for his people to follow. A servant motioned Alana to come to the Duke.

Gilbert looked grim. “Yes. He had them killed. Treason he called it. For wanting to run away. Said they all admitted it. He and his brood will be leaving after the new treaty is signed and good riddance to him. I’ve asked Claudia to look after the necessities.”

Alana tried to protest and plead for Simone but knew it was in vain. The whole point of the visit was to get a treaty signed and Gilbert had been just as accommodating as he needed.

“Alana. I know that you were taken by these young people and you would like to save this last one, if you could. But now I must think about my entire realm and the hundreds...no thousands that would die in a conflict with the Count and his mercenaries. More than that, if we should start a conflict then my arch enemy Duke D’Arcy would certainly join that bastard Count and we would be even more badly outnumbered. I am loath to do this, but you must stay out of this. I am confining you to my quarters here. You will not stir from here until the Count and his retinues are long gone. There is nothing more to be done.

She had to acquiesce. As soon as Gilbert left for an audience Illicia burst into her room in near hysterics.

“Oh Princess, I couldn’t help overhearing. He murdered five of the young ones?”

“Yes, and it appears there is nothing we can do to save Simone.”

“There has to be something we can do.”

Over the next hour they formulated a plan.

CHAPTER 17

The treaty was signed the next day and the Count announced his plans to leave the next morning. The farewell dinner was sparsely attended and the attitude was strained. Little Simone did not attend and no reason was given for her absence.

Alana and Illicia had finally settled the night before on their strategy. Alana had given her word to Gilbert, so it would have to be up to Illicia to carry out the plot. She had the resolve but Alana was not sure she could carry it out. It was comparatively simple. Illicia was not confined to the castle. She could leave the grounds and find Simone to take her to safety. Then she would take her place and kill the Count when he came to take his evening's pleasure.

Late into the feast she dressed in drudge's clothing with a scarf over her head and took some garbage out past the castle's moat. Clear of scrutiny she sought out Simone.

Unknown to either Illicia or Alana, Simone had reached a decision earlier in the evening. Her betrayal of her 'sisters' had doomed them to a hideous death. Now she was faced with an almost equally hideous life. Her guilt overcame her. She entered the dressing area and took a loop of rope to the center post. Slowly she undressed down to just her shift. She wrote out a brief note. Leaving it under a candle she moved a low stool under a knot in the post. She tied her rope to it and looped it around her throat. She knew that rare individuals such as Alana survived their hangings so she had thought it out it all in advance.

Alone for the evening it would be hours before she was found. To be on the safe side she had brought a small knife and as she stood on the stool noosed she looked down at her dark blood engorged erection. The knife was sharp. She placed it under her penis just behind the constricting collar. With a strangled sob she stepped off the stool and with a single stroke sliced her penis completely off. It was a slow and painful suicide but she didn't regret her choice. It was a way to expiate her guilt. The blood from her severed penal arteries pumped out like a gusher. Slowly the noose and unremitting blood lose did their work and finally Simone felt the darkness of eternity engulf her.

Illicia arrived too late. Searching the pavilion she stifled a cry when she found Simone's body, blood still dripping from her straining toes just off the floor. For a time she just stared at Simone's seemingly serene face lost in abject sorrow. Then she knew what she had to do. She closed the drape on the dressing area leaving the pavilion in very dim light. Quickly she undressed and started to arrange herself on the bedding. Then she stopped. In the case at the end of the bedding she found a pair of identical stockings and garters to what Simone had worn an smoothed these on.

Suddenly she realized the flaw in her plan. She re-entered the dressing area and, taking great pains to avoid stepping in the pool of blood under the girl. Still firmly implanted in her anus was the Count's plug. Working carefully, despite her distaste, she slowly worked it out of Simone's

body. Swallowing her disgust she carefully washed it and lubricated it with soap. Steeling herself she placed the tip in between her cheeks and pressed.

It took much more pressure than she thought. And it burned! More than that it was painful. It was so uncomfortable that she was almost sure she could not get it inserted, but with a final push it slid in. Gritting her teeth with the pain she went back to the sleeping area and rearranged the bedding. Later that evening her opportunity came.

The Count, liberally drunk, pushed into the pavilion.

“Ah my sweet Simone. Perfectly prepared! Your lovely ass is just what I need after dealing with that idiot Duke. As if a piece of paper could keep me from destroying him. I need some relief. I’m still excited from watching your lovely sisters dance for me. They were so beautiful slowly dying on their ropes. But many more where they come from. We’ll have a new bevy for you to teach your skills to. Now use your lovely lips and see if you can get me hard...or I might have to watch you dance too!”

Illicia felt him move up her legs and press against the anal plug. Then she spun around. She watched his eyes bug out in surprise as he made out her features in the dim light. Before he could shout an alarm she drove the knife under his jaw and tore out his throat. Gushing blood the Count reached up for his gashed neck, gurgled once, and fell dead on the bedding. She looked down on the dead body of the man she hated and forced the plug from her anus. With relish she stuffed it down the dead man’s throat.

Illicia regained her clothes and placed the gory knife with both victim’s blood mingled on it, under Simone’s still twisting body. She dressed and left the pavilion unseen, hiding in the brush through the night until she could mingle with the rest of the workers coming in from their early morning activities. She counted the soreness in her anus as a small price to pay for her revenge. Alana was waiting for her and mourned with her as she related Simone’s fate, As Illicia changed back into her own clothes the alarm sounded and the news spread about the Count’s death, at the hand of one of his courtesans and of the girl’s subsequent suicide.

Illicia looked grim. “I must confess my guilt.”

“It is not your guilt, love. It is mine. I put you in that impossible situation and I will swear anything you did was at my direct order as my servant.”

“No Princess! It was my choice and I will face the gallows for it.”

“You are my servant and you will do as I command!” and that was where the matter stayed for a time.

Gilbert became incredibly busy for the next couple of days, seeing to all the dispositions. Once the Count’s retinue with his coffin had been sent on its way the days stayed long. Dozens of messengers came and went as the affairs of state flew at a furious rate.

This lull gave Alana a chance to meditate deeply on her decision. While Illicia had carried out the Count's murder it was truly her responsibility. Both of them knew it was the right thing to do but the thought of murder in cold blood haunted her. Finally, one afternoon, she dismissed Illicia. She stepped in front of her mirror and undressed. She took down her hair and let it fall down her back. Now completely nude except for her gold shackles and adornments she waited for Gilbert who came in with a number of letters in his hand. As he came through the door she dropped to her knees bowing her head.

His amused look changed into one of concern. "Alana! What's wrong?"

"Your Grace" she replied keeping her head bowed. "In the last year I have found myself in many roles. An heir to a great kingdom, a convicted and executed thief, a slave, your Courtesan...and now I am guilty of cold blooded murder!"

Gilbert sat down heavily on the nearest chair. Alana went on and explained what happened but made herself the perpetrator, leaving Illicia completely out of the story. "And I would do it again. The Count was an evil, sadistic murdering pederast. He did not deserve to live! But as there was no justice for those poor sweet things I extracted my own!"

She looked up into his eyes. "As a murderer I am deserving of death. The right of high justice is yours. I do not ask you to condone my actions, but if I am to die, it would be fitting for the noose to end what it began."

Gilbert stood. "Quite a confession, since it has already been decided that the girl Simone killed the bastard and took her own life. In anyone else I would attribute this confession to some form of mental breakdown or hysteria. But I know you too well for that. I am just sorry that you could not save the 'girl'."

"The right of high justice in this land, however, is restricted to nobles of the highest rank. The Count had usurped the privilege as it is normally reserved to the Dukes, and therefore Princes of the realm."

He began to walk behind her. "All the gold you wear" and he reached down to push aside her hair to finger the clasp of her collar, "identifies you as my slave and courtesan. In that role you do not have any rights, and as a murderer it would be completely in my power to put you to death."

Alana just bowed her head again as she heard him unsheathe his hunting dagger. A swift thrust to the base of the neck or slash across her throat would end it all. Then the point was against the back of her neck.

"However, your revelation is not the most interesting I have received today."

She felt the collar around her throat twist and then the clasp snapped and it was off. She looked up in amazement as he walked in front of her as the collar fell to the floor.

“I have here three sworn affidavits that a Princess, heir to the throne of the far off kingdom of Branart, disappeared from the city of Venderal some nine months ago. Tall, golden red hair and, they claim, the most beautiful woman ever to grace the city.”

Alana’s mouth opened and closed unable to respond cogently.

“Yes in this realm the right of high justice is that of the Prince...or in this case, a Princess. The bastard deserved it! May I assist you to your feet, Your Highness?”

Alana took his hand, still speechless.

“Illicia” the Duke called. “Her Highness, the Princess Alana, will need a scented hot bath. Have the Lady Marissa and her cousins attend her. Remove her manacles. We shall leave the other ‘items’ to your ministrations, Princess. And have Claudia attend me. We shall choose some appropriate garb for her until my seamstress can custom fit her gowns!”

Illicia ran in tears streaming down her cheeks.

Alana looked down and then up into Gilbert’s eyes. “How many times now do I owe you my life, Your Grace? How can I repay this great a debt?”

“The Count’s death will leave a power vacuum and the Duke DeGracey will try to fill it with his troops and mercenaries. The Countess will undoubtedly join him and together they are far stronger than my small forces can oppose. I could use the ally of a strong nation across the water. Might I persuade you to ask your father for some assistance?”

Alana just nodded, tears of joy now streaming down her face as well.

CHAPTER 18

That evening, when Alana entered the main hall the herald called out, “All rise for her Royal Majesty, Princess Alana of Branart!”

The babble in the hall turned to gasps of sheer amazement as Alana entered in a long flowing white gown, without a hint of leg or breasts showing, perfect for royalty. Everyone including Duke Gilbert rose and he personally showed her over to the seat on his right.

“My Lord and Ladies. A grave injustice has been done. It has been confirmed that Her Royal Highness, Princess Alana of Branart was kidnapped and illegally sold into slavery wherein she became part of my personal household. Under suspicion that this may have been the case I took her as my courtesan, but in name only. As her status has been confirmed I am pleased to have her as our royal guest.”

He pointed to a map spread out showing the positions of the forces opposed and those he could call on. “As you can see, Princess, we don't have nearly enough men at arms to guard all the possible crossing points on the river. Even if we did, the remainder of the Count's army and Duke's forces outnumber us at least three to one.”

Alana took in the tactical situation quickly. “The distances are daunting and communication is vital. It's a shame that Beaufort's offspring are not all trained in his language skills. They could accurately relate what the opposition's troop movements are.”

The Duke snapped his fingers. “They may not be able to talk to us and but they can talk to Starfire and she has been trained. They could be used as very efficient messengers. It's one thing to have mounted scouts. Quite another to have a stray horse spying for us. Starfire can use the spelling board. If you stay here with her and act as a central source dispatching couriers as needed, we can take in the whole tactical situation.”

Of course it wasn't that simple. A system had to be devised to get messengers out to all commanders to be able to understand the total situation. In the meantime the roads were filled with peasants and slaves trying to escape what they saw was a murdering band of mercenaries and a horrific war. They were almost 100% correct. The new arrivals had to be divided into three groups. Able bodied men who could be trained as guards and soldiers. The sick and injured that needed to be taken to the hospitals and infirmaries. Finally the women and children who needed to be kept in safe locations.

Alana took on the job of looking after the women and children. She divided them into various camps and assigned a number of the Duke's ladies-in-waiting to organize and supervise them. Her favorite Marissa came with her own helpers, her cousins Victoria and Gabriella. She was Alana's age and a distant cousin of the Duke. It was obvious she enjoyed being part of Alana's retinue, but was willing to take on any job she gave her. She was plainly enthralled by Alana and

was in awe of her ability to survive the incredible things that had befallen her. Gabriella and Victoria were willing to follow their older cousin anywhere.

What had originally impressed Alana about these three was that while the other ladies in the court wore the prescribed dress and showed off their sexuality freely these three had more modesty. They covered their nipple and pubic areas with gauzy but opaque fabric matching their gown's colors and Alana noticed that their skirts were only slit to the knee. She admired the girls for their fortitude in the face of all that peer pressure.

Alana had set up a new camp to the east of the castle with about 150 young women and children and asked Marissa to look after them. So with her two cousins and a dozen servants they set off. Over the next few weeks the situation became grim for the Duke and his men. Incursions came daily and it was only the communications of Beaufort's offspring that kept the situation from becoming impossible. Finally a fully fledged invasion came from the west and Gilbert took his main force to meet it. It was natural that both Beaufort and Wyvern accompany him. This battle went on for two days, but the mercenaries were beaten back.

It was on that day when a ragged and very badly injured servant came in from the eastern camp for women and children. He had a crossbow bolt in his back and was almost dead when he slipped off the horse. "It's the eastern camp", he gasped. "Norsemen. They're killing everyone." And then he expired.

Alana got word immediately. She conferred with the officers in the Duke's remaining guard on what could be done immediately to deal with this emergency. They were unanimous in advising that the Duke be informed but that any action be held in abeyance until they determined what type of force they would face as they barely had enough men to defend the castle. While Alana saw the logic to this course she could not agree.

"It could be days before the Duke has a force capable of dealing with another incursion."

"Yes Princess" the commanding officer of the guard replied, "but all we can spare now is a scout or two to see what kind of force we face. More than that would leave the Castle and all the infirmaries in danger of attack."

"Those women and children, and Lady Marissa and her people are there under my protection. I cannot allow this to continue!"

She stormed up to her chambers and stripped off her gown. She pulled on a leather tunic and leggings, strapped on her short sword and knives and went to the stables. Illicia, in a panic, started to dress similarly.

"No, you must stay here. I know your courage, but you are not trained as a warrior and this is going to be a very dangerous situation."

The girl started to argue.

“I am giving you a direct order! You will stay here and if the Duke can send a force soon you may accompany them. I want you safe.”

Illicia broke down and just sobbed as Alana left.

Rukbat, the head of her personal body guard followed right behind her. “Princess, surely you aren't planning on trying to do this by yourself?”

“I'm not by myself. I have Starfire. I just wish Wyvern was here also, but I did make him go with Gilbert. So it's up to me.”

“M'lady I cannot let you go alone.”

“You may come with me if you insist but there are helpless women and children at risk and I will not just sit here and let them be slaughtered.”

She jumped on Starfire and took off at a gallop with her three bodyguards desperately trying to keep up. The camp was a half day's ride from the castle, but at full gallop they made it there just after sundown. The whole area was eerily silent. No noises, voices, animal sounds, nothing could be heard. Alana dismounted Starfire a quarter mile from the camp and walked slowly in with the three guards following. She had gone no more than a few yards when she bumped into something.

Something was what was left of what once had been a lovely young girl who had been cruelly used and hanged naked from a tree limb. As she walked on she shuddered and tears came to her eyes. Naked women and children hanged from every tree. Young ones dangled next to what must have been their mothers. Young boys swung silently, their erections moot testimony to their slow demise on the rope. There seemed to be no survivors.

“But where were the bastards that did this?” That was the question that she asked herself over and over again. It burned in Alana's soul. She personally had counted over 50 dangling bodies so far and there must have been far more. She had steeled herself for finding Marissa, Victoria or Gabriella among them.

As the group approached what would have been the center of the encampment they made out a small fire. A very small fire with a man sitting in front of it whittling a piece of wood. He seemed to take no notice of their arrival, except to look up when they were a few yards away and nod. Then he spoke. “Good! I was hoping it would be you. I recognize you from the Duke's description of your hair color. Said no one in the land could match it.”

“Are you the leader of the murdering bastards that committed this atrocity?” she spit out.

“You might say that”, replied the man with a smile.

“Where is Lady Marissa? What have you done with her?”

"Ah that would be the fine lady and her compatriots. They put up a bit of a stand. I had to threaten her with rapen an' hangen a dozen of the young'ens before she surrendered. Heh, heh", he laughed almost silently. "Then we hanged them anyway. Made the little cunny's suck the boys off while they hanged, then raped and hanged them too. Odin would be proud."

"My understanding is that Odin is the head of the Norse God's", Alana cried in disbelief. "How could enjoy the rape and slaughter of innocents?"

"Odin himself hung on a tree for ten days, and its him that gives the males erections and women cums...their suffering is a sacrifice to him."

"Where is Lady Marissa?" Alana's became louder and more instant.

"She and her ladies are in the woods waiting for you...we're to take you all to see the Duke."

"All you will see is your death!" Alana spat back.

"I don't think so", he grinned and called loudly "NOW!"

With that men poured out of the surrounding ruins of structures and Alana and her men were fighting for their lives. It was immediately obvious that they were hopelessly outnumbered, but they made a stand of it. Alana's blade took life blood from three of the attackers as Starfire literally stomped another two to death. She found herself with her back to the horse and the circle around them closed.

"Starfire! Find Beaufort! Tell him what has happened here! "

Starfire shook her head in the motion of an emphatic NO.

"That's my order! Don't argue!! Go now!!"

With a shake of her head, Starfire reared above her attackers and charged through their midst. Alana saw at least two crossbow bolts hit the horse but she raced on. She could only pray that she was not fatally injured.

But there was no time for worry now. The circle had closed. Two score of the Dukes men lay at their feet as the leader still at his fire called, "If you surrender I'll guarantee your men's lives. They'll go free."

Alana hesitated. These men were her responsibility...could she trust him to keep his word? At that moment Rukbat made the decision for her. He flung his war axe over the crowd and neatly split the campfire man's head in two. Everything remained frozen for a second and then it was madness. Alana gutted the next man who came at her and drove her knife below the ribs of another. Then she was hemmed in with no option other than to defend herself. A blow from behind brought her to her knees and another brought her low. Her last vision was the surprised look on the campfire man's face split by the axe.

As she came to she realized she was sick of finding herself bound hand and foot in these situations. She looked around and found she was on a bed of straw. Her wrists, knees and ankles were tied tightly. As she looked around a worried face peered into her's.

“Marissa, is that you?”

“Yes your Highness”, the worried face responded.

“Are you alright?”

“We Princess? It’s you we're worried about. You took a terrible blow to the head!”

Alana pushed herself erect to see that Marissa and her two cousins also had their wrist bound behind them, but not their legs.

Then she heard a girlish voice call, “She's awake!”

An imperious lady came into view. Tall with long lustrous hair swept up. She had piercing blue eyes with sensuous lips and high cheek bones. She was obviously proud of her figure wearing a low cut gown that prominently displayed her ample breasts. Her gown was slit at the hip revealing long shapely legs.

“So you are finally with us. We have been waiting for you to awaken. Let me have a look at you.” The woman tried to take Alana's head in her hands but she pulled away fiercely. Smiling the woman grabbed her hair and pulled it away from her neck.

“Yes, you're the one alright. You've know the embrace of the noose. Its written plain for anyone to see. I've heard about your hanging. You supposedly lasted longer than anyone has record of ...hanging by their neck. And the bawds in the crowd said that you fairly gushed fluids like you came dozens of times while you hanged.”

Alana tried to turn her head away.

“Well we have not been formally introduced. I am the Duchess Roxanne”, the imperious lady smiled. “Now mark my words. You're supposedly a Princess but you strike me as just a common trollop. One who gets her thrills from the noose's embrace. My ladies and I also know the pleasure and bliss of the noose. And we have a use for the sexual fluids a willing victim excretes. My husband will not need you for some time yet, if at all. In the meantime we will make use of you and these other young ladies for our purposes. Strip her!”

Alana was helpless as her tunic and leggings were cut off leaving her completely nude.

"An old friend of yours wishes to extend a challenge."

The figure walking was completely nude and her body had been oiled. She had her jet black hair done up and was carrying a three foot long whipping rod.

"Beth" Alana muttered.

"Yes, my dear. She's been waiting for you to arrive. She wants to prove her worth to our group so we've arranged a little contest."

The Duchess snapped her fingers and Alana was dragged to her feet. Her bonds were cut and she rubbed her wrists from the marks.

"I won't give you the satisfaction of playing your games!" she spat at the Duchess. The tall woman nodded.

One of the guards brought in Victoria and tied her to a post. He ripped her gown down the back exposing her back and buttocks and began to methodically beat her with a rod. After a dozen slashes leaving huge red welts the Duchess turned to Alana.

"These are your options. You will play our little game or your sweet little Victoria will continue to receive her caning until she passes out. Then it will be your Gabriella's turn followed by Marissa and then Victoria again and so on."

"Leave her be" Alana cried angrily. One of the guards handed her a similar three foot rod.

As the two faced each other, Alana looking at the other girl grimly. Her head still ached and swam from the blows that knocked her out. Beth just smiled.

"This chain", the Duchess handed them, "is a foot and a half long". The rules are as follows. Never let go of the chain. You must try to force your opponent to release her grip through the use of the whipping rod. Fair targets are the buttocks or thighs. Fouls are breast or pubes. Three fouls and you forfeit. The first to drop her end is the other's to deal with. Beth, I believe you have a very long a slow hanging planned for Alana, with all sorts of accoutrements, right?"

Beth just continued to smile.

"No time limit. You may start!"

Alana tried to dodge but Beth flicked the rod and caught her slashing blow across her right buttock cheek. She bit her lip and swung around looking for an opening. Again Beth beat her, this time a high shot across both cheeks, and she bit back a cry. No matter how hard Alana tried Beth moved away at the right time and slid in to slash her again and again. Her own attempts at response were not nearly as effective. In the first few minutes she had taken at least a dozen nasty stripes on her buttocks and thighs, and despite her resolve tears of pain were etching their ways down her cheeks. She tried to shake her head to clear the cobwebs but it hurt badly from the blows. She gritted her teeth and tried to concentrate.

Finally she realized she had to stop playing Beth's game. The girl was far too tall and had an advantage in reach. She turned and presented a tempting side shot and Beth stepped in. Alana pulled her forward and slid her leg between her feet. Beth lunged forward and fell flat.

She doggedly held onto the chain but was flat on her face almost pulling Alana to the floor with her. She got in a good half dozen slicing cuts before Beth made her way up again.

Now Beth was wary. She circled carefully. She began to get frustrated and in a swirling turn slashed Alana cross the nipples. She screamed but did not let go of the chain. Instead, she stepped in, flipped Beth's left leg up and drove her shoulder into the other girl sending her to the floor and knocking the air out of her. Dazed the girl in black let go of the chain.

"Wonderful! Wonderful!!" called the Duchess. "One of the best matches we have ever seen! You are a worthy opponent Alana. One day you may have to actually try your hand against me. But in the meantime it's up to you to decide to do with poor Beth. Slow hanging? Impalement? Beheading? Torn apart by horses? Drowning? Your choice!"

Alana threw down the rod. "Not now! I'll decide later!"

The guards dragged the sobbing Beth away.

"Bring the Princess here", the Duchess called and two large guards lifted Alana and carried her into the next chamber. A counterweighted gallows stood in the middle of the room. It was equipped with a thick ivory laced rope. Alana thought she recognized the knot it as the one the Bailiff used to hang her.

"Place her on the platform and noose her. Just because you were the winner in that little tête-à-tête doesn't mean that you're free."

Within seconds Alana was on a metal platform attached to some kind of a mechanism, with her wrists bound behind her and the rope was tightened around her neck.

"Once the platform is removed", the Duchess smiled, "the area beneath the gallows is like a large saucer. Its designed to capture all the fluids that a hanged woman might emit and to drain it below into one of our waiting containers. We use them for all our potions and sexual magic's. If I have been told correctly you become so excited by hanging that you positively gush fluids. Let's see how much we can milk from you! Prepare her to dance!"

She then gave a nod to one of the guards who stood by a wheel. As the wheel turned Alana felt the platform drop from beneath her. She was pulled onto the balls of her feet. The noose had been adjusted behind her left ear and it canted her head to the right as it tightened.

Though she knew what would happen next Alana could do nothing other than take a last breath and grit her teeth.

But strangely nothing happened. She could barely breath but she stayed perched on the tips of her toes.

"Brigitte" she heard the Duchess call. "Perform you ministrations."

A lovely blonde girl wearing a diaphanous gown approached Alana. She began to stroke her breasts gently, Despite her discomfort Alana felt her already stiff nipples respond to the caresses. Then Brigitte put her mouth over first one then the other, licking each, coating them with saliva. The next thing Alana knew she was inside her vagina stroking her clit.

"Oh my! I don't believe it!" Bridgette called and then giggled. "She's still a virgin!!"

Alana groaned, then brought her knee up with all her might. The blow struck the girl at the apex of her lowered chin and sent her flying back. Her jaw cracked with a snap and blood started to flow.

"My God!" screamed one of the other girls, bending over her fallen comrade. "She's broken her jaw! And she's lost a tooth!"

"Scum!" Alana spat.

"Guards, tie her ankles to the outside of the platform" commanded the Duchess.

The platform was a good 2' wide, with a looped bar of steel for that purpose. In a trice Alana now stood on her tiptoes with her ankles firmly bound 2' apart.

"Now Claudette, continue." A dark hair beauty dropped her gown completely and brought with her a small container of liquid. It was perfumed oil. This time she liberally coated Alana's vagina with it, and there was nothing the Princess could do to stop her. Claudette started her stroking slowly and Alana could not stop her body from responding. The oiled fingers of the girl probed and circled her clitoris which responded with a mind of its own. Alana bit her lip and tried her best not to show the response to the girl's ministrations, but failed miserably. She finally gasped audibly. The girl smiled and then bent down and began to use her lips and tongue on the hard and straining object of her ministrations. As her tongue circled, stroked and finally as her lips tantalizingly sucked her clit Alana, her face, bright red with her exertions, wet with sweat and tears of frustration and humiliation cried out as she came closer and closer to climax. Copious amounts of vaginal fluids were now dripping down her legs and onto the platform.

"Claudette you have done well. Guards cut her ankles loose!" called the Duchess.

Claudette withdrew.

Alana gasped . She was so close to cumming! But she had to ready herself for the worst. She held her breath and steadied herself. Then the platform was gone and she was hanging.

The knot cinched down pushing her head down and to the left. This time she was ready for the pressure, but not to the extent that it still didn't cause her to grit her teeth, her mouth pulled back into a grimace and her eyes tightly shut. The familiar fullness in her head began and then the burning pain started in her lungs.

She did not want to kick or put on a show for these degenerates, but it was too much to ask for her legs not to twitch and flutter as they twisted inches off the platform.

Again she tried to relax and not fight the noose. Tried to just hang there and let the halter work its magic. The tightening of the rope brought with it all the erotic feelings and she found herself relishing the noose like it was an old friend that would provide her pleasures beyond imagining. The stroke Beth had given her breasts burned now like a firebrand since it crossed both nipples. The girls' ministrations had just exacerbated the sensations.

This time she did not fight the binding that held her wrists pinioned behind her. They just added to the peaceful helpless feeling. She couldn't alter what would happen so she rode the wave of discomfort to revel in the orgasm which was coming. Despite the knowledge and the building of her passion within her, her legs fluttered back and forth trying to reach some purchase but none was found.

"Very nice", murmured the Duchess. "She fights the noose, but does not extend herself. She tries to hold back some reserve."

She fought to open her eyes. She willed them open but her narrowed vision just saw a bunch of eager faces enjoying her agony. Her head felt like a bursting balloon. Her ears roared. Her lungs ached. But all of that was surprisingly secondary, almost an annoyance to the true process...the undeniable cascade of pleasure that was leading her to her ultimate orgasm!

Alana continued unconsciously to try to free her wrists, uselessly but instead of the frenzied exertions in the past, this was almost a gentle twisting. Her legs fluttered and the twist of the rope spun her almost lazily around like a lovely erotic pendulum with its fulcrum the crushing noose around her neck. The girls surrounding her began to clap in unison, mimicking her struggles.

Alana was so close to her orgasm it was frightening. A part of her knew that this audience wanted to leave her hanging for as long as possible, wanted her to continue to struggle and fight to the very end...and she had no way of avoiding that. But if she could only have that magnificent climax it would all be worth it!

Her legs continued to flutter and now she twisted her bound wrists. Her face was a bursting congested red. Her eyes, almost red with bloodshot, clamped shut in her final agonies. Her sex had puffed out and her clitoris was an engorged red.

She had a vague idea that her time on the noose had resulted in her vaginal secretions and cum dripping down her legs as she twisted at the rope's end. Her eyes were tightly shut, and despite her efforts to relax her teeth were clenched tight, mouth frozen in a grimace of pained consternation, and the veins on her throat bulged blue.

Her face had now turned a mottled deep crimson, and some of the beauty of it had drained from the tension and strain of fighting the noose. But she was so close...it was as if a lover had her helpless and was playing with her, exciting her until she came to the edge of orgasm and then taking her back just to toy with her seeing how long the sensation could be maintained before allowing her to climax.

Finally Alana could no longer fight...her arms felt like steel weights tied tightly behind her...she had no idea if her legs were fluttering or not...all she felt was the swish of air on her breasts as she twisted on the rope...her lungs screamed for air, the pain in her neck from the crushing of the noose was excruciating...all that was left was the crushing, suffocating, agony of the noose...her legs and straining toes twitched in involuntary convulsions as her consciousness slipped away.

The Duchess' girls marveled as each new spasm of pain and torment racked her lovely body and seemed to produce an even more copious supply of erotic fluids down her stockinged legs.

Finally the ripping, tearing, electric shock started in her groin and shot through her...the massive orgasm lifted her up...it bore her like the crest of a wave far beyond the incidental considerations of the deadly strangling agony of the noose and well into a land of extreme pure exquisite bliss. The velvet darkness that followed it was ecstasy beyond compare!

“Excellent! Just excellent!”, she heard a voice say. “We must have half a container and just from her alone. I don't think we'll get more than a spoonful from those other three. If his Grace doesn't need her for the next few days we could have a years' supply from hanging her, what, twice a day?”

Alana's head was splitting. Again her throat ached and seared from the burning. She found herself untied and lying in the lap of Marissa who stroked her hair and had a cold cloth she alternated between her head and her throat.

The Duchess' voice came again, “Leave them in their cell. We'll try the other girls later. Let the jewel rest for now. We'll want her strong for the morning.”

Alana's hands were no longer tied behind her so she reached for her throat. It was sore beyond belief. But each breath she took convinced her that she had survived once more.

Marissa had a cup of something hot and she tried to sip it gradually. Last time, she remembered she could not really do anything for the first few hours. “It is amazing how one can acclimate to the most horrific sensations”, she thought.

“Oh Alana...it was horrible! They just left you up there forever. It wasn't for your struggles we were sure you were gone!”

Alana tried to smile.

“Now try to get some rest”, Marissa said in a soothing voice.

Alana lapsed into a fitful sleep, then in what seemed like moments, a voice roused her. The Duchess was back. Was it morning already?

“Bring out the blond haired girl.”

Victoria looked up.

“Courage love!”, called Marissa.

“I’ll try”, Victoria responded in tears. The guards dragged her toward the waiting gallows.

Alana's vision cleared so she could watch the perverse spectacle. Victoria was stripped of her clothes and left only in her garters and stockings. Her wrists were tied behind her and her long blond hair was pulled to one side as the noose was fitted around her neck. She stood on the platform eyes closed, tears flowing, trying not to shake, as the platform lowered and tightened the noose around her neck. The lowering brought her to her toes. One of the Duchess' girls came forward and began to stimulate her. She nibbled her nipples and stoked her clit, finally dropping to her knees to orally bring her to orgasm.

Victoria gasped as she began to climax and then the platform dropped away and she was hanging. At first she didn't move. Her toes pointed down and she spun ever so slowly. Then she erupted into a frenzy of kicks and desperation trying to free her bound wrists. Alana could see her gritted teeth and her eyes pinched shut with the agony of the noose.

As the platform had dropped away a maid servant had upended a timing glass so the Duchess could measure her time hanging by her neck. Long moments went by as Victoria's struggles continued at a frantic rate, kicking and jerking on the rope. Her face turned a congested red, then a darker more mottled red as the minutes went by.

There was no sound as Alana knew she had no ability to get any kind of breath or air past her vocal cords, but still the girl struggled on, her face a hideous rictus of agony brought on by the unrelenting pressure of the noose. Then her struggles slowed, until finally all that was left were the twitching of her stockinged toes above the saucer shaped depression in the ground.

“I think she's done, your highness.”

“It’s only been a few minutes. Quite disappointing. Did we get much out of her?”

“Just a few tablespoons”, came the reply. “We can leave her for a few more minutes and see if anything else occurs, but she's more like to piss or shit herself.”

Alana gave a strangled cry. She could barely speak but she called out, even hoarse as she was. " If you cut her down now she may survive. Leave her dangling and you condemn her to death for sure!"

The Duchess looked over at Alana smiling. “If that's the case finish the slut!”

“No!!” all three girls cried out.

Victoria was floating in her agony. No amount of explanation could have prepared her for the pain the sheer excruciation of hanging. Her head was a lead ball of pain. Her lungs were shear molten lava and beyond both was the crushing pain of the noose.

She was vaguely aware of hands as they gripped her shoulders.

The guard was tall and had come up to the girl facing her. Her face was a dark congested red which stood in sharp contrast to her long blond hair. He marveled at the way every pore, every vein and artery stood out in sharp contrast to the lovely pink that was her visage a few moments ago. She had a look of extreme concentration though her eyes were closed, tears of pain and agony dripped down her cheeks, her teeth gritted, with saliva dripping through her rictus that once were lovely red lips.

He grabbed her shoulders and with all his might he pulled down as hard as he could. Victoria felt the additional pressure as pure pain in her throat, then a sharp crack and a light as bright as the sun blew across her vision, then nothing...

The snap of the girl's neck was audible to everyone. Alana just sobbed and was joined in her tears by Marissa and Gabriella.

A half hour later Victoria's body was cut down and brought into the cell with the Alana and the others. The rope had embedded itself so deep in the tissues of her throat that it took all of Alana's and Marissa's efforts to loosen it. Even then it had compressed the poor girl's throat to one half its size at that point.

Alana united her wrists. Victoria's face was composed and almost serene. It did not portray the horrific agonies she endured during the last few minutes of her hanging. She looked strangely at peace. Alana took one of their blankets and placed it over her.

A few minutes later the Duchess came back. “I think we'll try the long brown haired beauty next”, pointing at Marissa.

“No!” croaked Alana. “You know it's me you want. I'll hang in her place!”

“Very noble” the Duchess chuckled, “but we need you fresh and revived for tomorrow. Take her!”

The guards grabbed Marissa by the arms but she shook them off. “I'll walk on my own if its permissible.”

The Duchess nodded.

Gracefully she stripped off her gown and undergarments. Clad only in her hosiery and garters she presented her wrists behind her to be tied. They then led her to the waiting platform where the hangman placed the noose around her neck and cinched it down behind her right ear, and took up the slack.

“Look!”, one of the girls cried, “she's blushing.” And she was. Marissa had never been undressed before a crowd much less with men in presence. This made the gowns and outfits she had worn in the Duke's court more than modest in comparison. Another of the Duchess' girls brought over the vial of oil and began to stimulate her. Despite her shame and fear Marissa's body responded and she felt the strange combination of terror and sexual excitement.

She fought back the tears as her orgasm crested and took what she was sure was her last breath. Marissa caught Alana's gaze and gave her bravest smile...and then the platform dropped away and she was hanging. Nothing anyone could have said would have warned her about the sensation. The clamping on the rope around her throat shutting down any attempt at breath. The vise on her neck squeezing the life from her. The bursting feeling as if her head were a large balloon filled with water and the growing coursing agony that were her lungs deprived the oxygen.

A part of her knew that she was struggling desperately to free her wrists, another that she was kicking and straining , trying to find some surface, some purchase for her straining toes. Another small part knew that she had been hanging forever, that there would be no end to this agony. And it still kept on and on.

In another world Alana watched Marissa's agonized struggles and sobbed bitterly. She heard the Duchess and her cohorts commenting on how hard Marissa's nipples were becoming and how she seemed to be maintaining a steady kicking action with her legs.

“Oh she's hanging well! Much better than the last one. Look, her face is just a perfect bursting red. And look at her cunt! It's fairly bursting and dripping with cum! I think she's cumming again now!!”

Marissa had no idea what was going on around her...all she knew was that the black agony in her chest was consuming her and as she spiraled into the darkness a flaming orgasm ripped through the last of her being. As hard as she had fought for life, Marissa's struggles stopped suddenly and she swung with her toes pointed straight down.

“Much better. A good eight minutes I'd say. Not in the Princess' cue but reasonable. How much?” the Duchess inquired.

“At least a quarter cup”, was the reply.

“Excellent. Cut her down and see if she can be revived. She's worthy of another effort.”

They cut Marissa down and pulled the noose from her neck. Alana waited for what seemed like an eternity and then she heard the girl take in a coughing ragged breath.

CHAPTER 19

As the Duchess made plans to continue her entertainments a page appeared and announced the Duke required her and Alana's presence at once. The Duchess nodded and motioned the guards to take Alana out. She was shown into the Duke's private chambers with her wrists bound again with her marks from her recent hanging and caning burning hot red against her ivory skin.

"So you're the one", he mused.

"Damn", he turned to the Duchess, "Are you responsible for those new abrasions on her neck?" She bowed graciously.

"She's far too valuable for you to toy with her life!

"Oh my love", the Duchess replied, "She dances on the rope so exquisitely and her capacity is truly astounding. I could have hanged her twice as long and she would have survived."

"Well", the Duke muttered, "as long as no lasting harm was done. But not again. She's far too valuable!"

The Duchess inclined her head, but her expression told everyone she was not happy.

Alana had a chance to glance around the chamber. On one wall her gaze fixated on an horrific spectacle. On a short beam projecting from an overhang was a ring bolt about 8' off the floor. A lovely young girl hanged from the bolt, or nearly hanged. She stood on a short stool. Her body was a rictus of agony as she strained on her toes to maintain her balance, the noose around her neck causing her to grimace and grit her teeth in agony.

"Ah you notice my diversion", grinned the Duke. "I keep a dozen young slaves, most girls, but some boys. They spend an hour or two at a time on the rope. If I'm pleased with them, the day has gone well, my gout is not bothering me, and so on, they are released and given some time to recover. If it's a bad day, well watching them die slowly strangling on the rope mitigates my pain a smidgen."

Alana looked at him with a gaze of pure hatred.

"You turn out to literally be worth a king's ransom girl, or should I say Princess Alana? We intercepted one of the messages coming back to Gilbert, confirming your story. Royal Princess of the far off kingdom of Branart. Well included in notifying your father of your safety, we have asked him for a hefty ransom. You will be our guest until he responds."

Alana's attention was drawn to a noise under the Duke's desk. She could make out a pair of feminine feet. Her gaze made the Duke laugh.

"Ah yes, another of my young ladies is busy providing me with oral pleasure. It assists my... concentration. Are you still a virgin, my dear?"

Alana did not respond.

The Duchess responded for her. "Yes, she's still intact".

"Ah so no sex games with this one. You'll have to content yourself with your dozen or so playmates, wife."

"May I have a few of your hanging harem?" she inquired.

"Why not? I'll be able to afford a legion soon!" And his evil laugh echoed in Alana's ears as the guard started to drag her away.

"And how about the other two?" She heard the Duchess ask.

"Two? I thought there were three?"

"One succumbed a short while ago. Her longevity on the rope was not early this one's."

"Do with them as you will!"

They were shown a large cell with three cots. Decent food and water were supplied and even blankets. They were not given any additional clothes but the blankets and cuddling together supplied some warmth.

Alana had asked for some salve for Marissa and surprisingly it was provided. She also applied it to the abrasions on her own throat. A polished metal mirror, comb and brush were provided. In the dim candle light the indentations and abrasions of the noose were plain on Marissa's neck. She would be scarred for life also. Alana almost didn't bother looking at her's, but when she did it was as bad as she thought. Only Gabriella was left untouched.

After a sparse meal the three girls pulled the beds together and slept as sisters curled into each others arms. A breakfast of gruel was provided in the morning. But soon afterwards two of the guards came for Gabriella. Marissa fretted and Alana paced for two hours before she returned.

She had been bound cruelly, her wrists and ankles badly bruised. But her neck. Her poor neck. This was not a rope burn but a smooth abraded patch in a circular rather than tilted fashion, unlike Alana's and Marissa's scars. And she was bleeding both vaginally and anally.

Slowly she was able to recount the horrific story.

The Duchess had had her brought into her day room where a 5" post had been set in stone. It had a wood dildo angled out about two feet off the floor. Gabriella had watched in horror as this was lubricated and then her two guards had forced her to her knees guiding the large wooden dildo up

her anus. When it was fully inserted they had tied her wrists behind the post and crossed her ankles and tied them behind the post. Then a third guard had taken a loop of two inch leather belting and dropped it over the pole and around her neck. It fit loosely at first, but then he slid a large wooden handle in the loop behind the post tightening and forming an effective garrote.

Gabriella had steeled herself for the agony to come. How it could be worse than the torture up her rectum she didn't know but she was sure it would be horrible. One of the Duchess' girls approached with what looked like a plug . Rudely she manually slid her fingers opening Gabriella's sex and finding her urethra. She pushed the capped tube roughly up inside causing Gabriella to cry out in pain. Only later did Gabriella realize that this would restrict her ability to urinate or lose control of her bladder during the coming ordeal.

The next two hours were a continuous torture of slow strangulation with the guard tightening and loosening the leather at periods of his choosing. Each tightening seemed to be a little longer. About a third of the way through the ordeal one of the Duchess' girls had approached and had begun erotically arousing her. First sucking her nipples and then massaging her clitoris. Trying to eke out as much of her vaginal secretions as possible.

When it seemed that the agony of the garrote was overcoming all her ministrations the girl finally produced an ivory phallus and proceeded to deflower Gabriella in an offhanded manner and use it along with her caresses to continue the stimulation.

Alana noted the burst blood vessels in Gabriella's cheeks and forehead, and the blood red in her eyes...she had come close to strangling to death numerous times.

"The Duchess has a few more tricks up her sleeve", she thought. Finally they were able to get Gabriella asleep.

Marissa began to cry. "This is worse than death. Tortured to satisfy that witch's perverted lust! I can't do this! It would be better to die now!!"

Alana grabbed her by the shoulders. "NO!" she shouted. "We will be rescued! It's just a matter of time. Gilbert will come. We have to hold on!"

Then Marissa collapsed in her arms sobbing.

The next day Alana was brought before the Duke again.

As she entered his chambers she noticed there had been a change. A young boy was perched on his toes, tightly noosed. He must have been chosen for the size of his member because his erection was extremely large.

"Took notice of the young man did you? Yes he is nicely endowed. I've actually hanged him once or twice at my wife's request. She wants the semen for some of her witchery".

Alana looked back to the Duke with hatred. There was another pair of feet under the desk, and the same twisted smile on his face.

"I have also notified Gilbert you are my prisoner, along with those two other ladies. We await your father's response. Take her away!"

The weeks slowly dragged on. Each of the three were given simple shifts to wear and they were given basic amenities, but beyond that there really was nothing to do but wait and for Marissa and Gabriella, to endure whatever new tortures the Duchess had devised.

Alana looked after the two younger girls as best she could, begging any kind of lotion or poultice the guards would give her to treat their abrasions. Gabriella, surprisingly was healing quite well. But Alana could see that Marissa would bear the scars of her hanging for life. Perhaps not to the extent Alana now saw in her mirror. The scars from that first hanging had been added to by the Duchess'. The angry red marks with the indentations would be a permanent reminder of her 15th year on earth.

The next day all three girls were brought into the Duke's presence. This was the first time for Marissa and Gabriella and even though Alana had warned them what to expect the sight of a naked youth almost hanging with a massive erection was more than they could feign disinterest in. Especially this youth had what looked like locking collars around the base and head of his penis.

The Duke saw their curiosity. "He tends to ejaculate too easily. The bands will hold him ready for the next hour or so."

But something else caught Alana's attention. A young brown haired girl lay on the floor next to the Duke's desk on her stomach. Her wrists were tied behind her in the small of her back. She had a thick noose tied around her neck and this was attached to her ankles. It was drawn back so tight that her body was twisted into a cruel bow with the pressure of the tension strangling her constantly. Her face was a rictus of agony, teeth bared, eyes squeezed closed as she fought for every breath.

"She's being tortured exactly the same way Beth tortured me", she thought. So this was what I looked like when she took her revenge."

"This one did not know how to perform oral sex satisfactorily so she will amuse me in this way until she dies...we'll see if the next one learns from her example and is an improvement."

Alana stared with pure malice at the man." And if I were to orally satisfy you, would you release her? Let her live?"

"Yes, I would consider that a fair bargain."

But before Alana could move, Marissa stepped forward, dropped her shift and knelt before the Duke completely nude. Without hesitation she took his member in her mouth and applied herself to the oral arts so that within two minutes at the most he ejaculated.

The Duke mopped his brow as Marissa retrieved her clothing.

"You have very loyal ladies, Princess Alana."

"Free her!" he commanded, and a guard cut the rope tying the girl's neck to her ankles.

By that time the girl's face had gone beyond the deep congested red from slow strangulation. Alana went over to her and turned her over so she faced up. She tugged at the rope around her neck and loosened it, but there was no response. The girl was dead.

Gabriella wept as they were led back to their cell and Alana shed a tear but her worry was for Marissa who looked almost like a zombie.

"Please my love" she implored her, "why did you do that? I did not mean for you to perform that onerous act!"

Marissa seemed to awake from a dream. "Oh Princess, you're still untouched. I was violated over and over again when we were taken by the Norsemen. I'm no more than a common whore in men's eyes. I couldn't let you perform that disgusting act. For me its just another sin added to my already blackened soul."

Over the next few weeks Gabriella and Marissa were introduced to a number of fiendishly horrific machinations.

Marissa was taken down to what looked like a traditional gallows but with no platform per se. Instead a large block of ice with a wooden plank placed under it. The plank had two large holes, one on either end and in each was an iron post with a ring bolt about 4" in diameter. It soon became clear how this worked. A noosed victim stood on the plank. As the ice melted the surface slowly dropped, just as slowly tightening the noose and hanging the girl. The ring bolt on each side was for manacles around the girl's ankles so her legs remained spread during the hanging, allowing for the easy accumulation of her vaginal fluids and cum.

This was Marissa's first introduction to the urethral and anal plugs as the amount of time it took for the block of ice to melt was inordinate. When she was brought back to the cell she could hardly talk given the slow agonizing effect of the noose, but the slow and sure strangulation and the amount of time she had spent on the balls of her feet and toes were indicative of the true horror she had sustained.

The next day Gabriella was introduced to an even more fiendish device. It had the same base. The platform placed on the block of ice with the two pillars, but it had no noose. Instead there was a long tapered upward spike like object. To her horror she was placed on the platform with this protrusion brutally shoved into her anus, bound and gagged. On the tips of her toes it

protruded a good 4 inches up her rectum. As the ice melted not only did the protrusion push deeper into her but its diameter increased. After an hour it was a good 8" up her rectum and into her colon and her anus was dilated by three inches. At this point pins were placed in the poles so the platform could not drop any further and she spent the rest of the morning on her tip toes with the horror imbedded in her bowels.

Day after day Marissa and Gabriela repeated their tortures. Marissa's brought forth a copious amount of erotic fluids but it seemed as if Gabriella's was for pure torture and the delight of her audience. Each day the platform with the anal spike dropped another half inch or so until finally she hung suspended by her rectum with the protrusion a good ten inches up her colon her bare toes swinging inches off the floor, her anus dilated 6 to 8". After a week her rectum was so dilated and abraded she was in agony all the time. That evening a physician visited her and inserted a poultice in her dilated anus. Over the next hour she had to be held down physically as her agony and screams were horrendous, but after the treatment her anus had contracted and had taken on the appearance of normal, and finally the pain abated.

The next day Alana was dragged forcibly into the Duchess' playroom.

"My dear, its time you decided on the fate of our dear Beth."

Alana turned to find Beth bound and crying, kneeling to one side of the room.

"What fate have you decided for her?"

Alana just shook her head. "No. I won't have this girl's blood on my hands!"

Beth looked up with a frank look of amazement on her face. Was she to be spared?

Alana took a close look at her now. She was still as beautiful as the first day she saw her in Gilbert's room, but stripped and bound she didn't have the raw sexuality of the pleasure costume that enhanced every feature of her figure. Still the look of hope on her face was evident.

"What to do? What to do?" murmured the Duchess.

"We could have her garroted slowly and have the Royal bitch eat her out as she strangled!" suggested one of the girls.

"Its been a long time since we had a long drop. We could noose her and rope her from the ramparts. I like long drops every so often. I really like to hear the crack when their necks' snap" suggested another.

"Careful Francine" laughed the Duchess,. "You might presage your own demise."

Francine looked chagrined and all the other girls laughed.

"Let's use the pole!" suggested a third.

"it's been months since we've had a good slow strangulation with a noose on the pole"

"Oh yes! Oh yes! Please?" chimed in the group.

"Oh very well, sighed the Duchess.

Beth looked up on horror as two eunuchs dragged her over to an 8" thick pole about 8' tall with a notch in its top. Behind it was a counterweight attached to a rope that ran over the notch and was fashioned into a noose. Beth was quickly noosed and the rope on the counterweight was tightened so she had to stand on her toes.

"Please my lady I will do anything to please you. Let me live!" she begged.

The Duchess just smiled and gave a nod. One of the eunuchs tipped over the stool the counterweight was placed on and it dropped to the floor.

With the little slack stake up and the tightening of the noose, the result was that Beth was pulled to her utmost with the tips of her toes barely touching the floor. The noose bit into her neck and she began to slowly strangle. She tried her best to extend herself but the rope was tight and the noose would not budge. It gripped her with a vise's force and slowly choked the life out of her.

Alana was used to the circumstances of hanging which cut off all breath and vocalization, but Beth's torture must have not shut down her breathing completely as she made horrible choking and gasping noises as she tried to fill her lungs. The girls came up and played with her as she strangled, flicking her nipples, fingering her clit, trying to make her cum as she slowly succumbed to the noose's embrace.

Alana averted her gaze but she could hear their giggling and laughter combined with the girl's strangled gasps and choking sounds as she slowly choked. The knot had been placed directly behind Beth's head so that the pressure of the noose was primarily on the front of her throat. This had the effect of slowly pushing up on her palate and causing her tongue to protrude as the strangling went on. Suddenly the gasping and gagging sounds stopped.

"Oh I think she's gone" called one. Alana was pulled around to face the scene by the guards as one of the girls savagely bit Beth's nipple, but there was no response. Her eyes were closed and her face was in the repose of the hanged but the tip of her tongue protruded from her mouth and her head was forward almost lying on her chest.

"Oh she died much too fast" complained another.

"Lucette, if that was too slow would you like to take her place?" asked the Duchess.

"Oh no mistress" pleaded the girl and hurried over to kneel at the woman's feet.

The Duchess spread her legs, "Then let see if you can be of use!" And the girl applied herself eagerly to licking and sucking her Mistress' cunt.

Alana looked away again at the decadence, and the Duchess laughed and ordered her taken back to her cell.

The next morning, Alana awoke to shouts and the sound of men running around the ramparts. Then came a note Alana had not heard in a year. There were no windows nearby but it was unmistakable... The great war horns of Branart!

Guards rushed into their cell and quickly bound the girl's wrists behind them. They were then dragged to the ramparts. Below her was a visage that made Alana's heart leap. There was the Royal Guard of Branart encamped in front of the castle with Duke Gilbert's colors next to it. She could easily make out her father, uncle and Gilbert.

"Well!" the Duke muttered. "Cut right through our men like a hot knife through butter they did. But I have a surprise for them."

Then he turned to look at the ladies behind him. He spoke to his guards. "Strip them! Bind their knees and ankles." Again Alana, Marissa and Gabriella were nude and bound.

"Bring up the hawsers!" he commended.

Thick hawsers tied with crude nooses were cinched around the girls' necks.

"Now place them up there on top of the ramparts where they can be easily seen ."

Each was lifted to a rampart height. For each of the girls it was the first time in weeks they had actually been outside of their confines. Alana felt the wind whip her golden hair and the gold breeze caused her nipples to become even harder than usual. She drank in the clean air and felt the hard stone beneath her bare feet.

Then the Duke called to the assemblage below: "It's very simple your highness", he called down to the King. "Withdraw immediately and we can discuss the ransom. If you launch an attack your daughter and her consorts hang as the first causality!"

Alana thought back to the first time she had faced a noose naked and bound. She was helpless then and she was helpless now. Her eyes filled with tears of anger as she watched Gilbert consult with her father and uncle.

Then the Duchess came up and walked from girl to girl, her hands sliding down a thigh, slipping under a buttock or, in Gabriella's case, probing deep into her anus, as she giggled with delight.

Alana looked around her, noting the men and their positions and the hawsers, and made a snap decision.

"Father!" she called in a strong voice. "This is a den of evil. I will not be its savior. Destroy it for me!!"

And she jumped.

Every man on the field watched as the lovely golden red haired girl dropped from the heights with the noose around her neck to a certain death. The Duke reached for her but was too slow. He and the Duchess leaned over and watched Alana's plummet. It would be just a matter of a fraction of a second before the rope played out and snapped her neck, leaving her dangling naked and bound.

There was a general cry from all the men as Alana dropped lower and lower, and then what she had counted on came to pass. The guards had not tied off the hawser. It trailed after her and over the rampart as she plunged into the dank moat below.

Marissa and Gabriella looked at each other. Gabriella looked truly terrified but Marissa nodded yes and jumped. Gabriella followed a fraction later.

Gabriella's slight hesitation cost her her life. Again all the men were transfixed watching the nude and bound girls dropping to what should be certain death. In one case it was. The Duchess was close enough and fast enough to grab the end of Gabriella's hawser and slide it between two stones on the rampart. It jammed after about 20 feet. The jerking stop snapped the poor girl's neck. The crack was audible and heard by all those on the ramparts and the field below. Her body convulsed once as her head snapped to the side and then she hung limp. She dangled part way down the rampart naked and dead.

Marissa landed close to Alana. When they surfaced both looked up and saw Gabriella's bound nude body swinging above them and realized that she was gone.

"That was tragic and so wasteful", Alana thought as the weight of the hawser around her neck began to drag her under. "Now I'm bound and noosed and probably going to drown instead of hang. Out of the frying pan into the fire." Despite the ropes binding her knees and ankles she kicked as hard as she could and broke the surface again gaining half a breath.

Shafts plucked into the water around her. The bastards on the heights disappointed she hadn't hanged were loosing their crossbow bolts at her. Which death first? Drowning or a cross bow bolt?

Then a large whitish gray object grasped her gently and brought her to the surface. She felt herself being lifted out of the water into waiting arms. Her eyes cleared and she saw the arms belonged to Gilbert. The king's archers battered back the crossbowmen as a party of guardsmen assisted her up the bank and freed her wrists, knees and ankles and undid the noose. They hurriedly cut her bindings and put a robe around her carrying her out of range.

Once past crossbow range, Wyvern shook himself furiously. He bathed the nearest guardsmen in a shower of water and a half dozen bolts which had not penetrated his thick fur. Alana ran up to

him and hugged him crying. He had saved her life yet again. Other guards dove in and saved Marissa.

Under a cover of guards and marksmen the two girls were taken to the rear where they were immediately seen by the chief physician. He looked absolutely horrified at Alana's neck. The recent hanging had further abraded her neck and it was a mass of bruises. He could clearly see the imprint of the loops of rope that formed the scar from her first hanging. He covered her neck in salve and wrapped it gently in bandages. Servants came in with garments for the two girls.

Marissa's neck was also abraded and bruised, though not nearly as bad as Alana's. She likewise had her wounds salved and bandaged.

When the two were dressed the King burst in. Alana ran to her father and the two embraced in tears. "Oh my girl! My little girl!! What have they done to you?" The King looked at his daughter as if seeing her for the first time. She tried to reply in a strong voice, but she could do was cry and make apologies. "No apologies! I will raze that fetid pile of stones to the ground and burn everyone in it" the King roared.

"Gilbert!" He called. The Duke entered. "Is there time yet or do we make a night assault?" Gilbert bowed to Alana. "It will need to be a night assault your Highness. The sun is setting now. I would suggest waiting until dawn. By then the rest of our troops will have arrived and with them our siege engines."

With his hostages gone the Duke deMornay turned out to be a superb military strategist. He and the Duchess snuck out of the castle after sundown and made good their escape. When the desertion was discovered the next morning the officers in charge promptly surrendered.

This came as quite a surprise to the Duchess' retinue who were caught in their beds. With the two nobles in full flight for their northern redoubt it was time to take stock and see to securing the castle and the captives. In the meantime the king was anxious to have Alana out of danger.

"She should go to my castle under a full troupe of your guards", suggested Gilbert. "That way we can pursue the bastards without worry."

Alana was present for this discussion and vigorously opposed this option. "Father, there is no one in this entire company that has been more aggrieved than I by these miscreants!" And with that she tore the dressing off her neck exposing the scars of her previous hangings. "I want to see the final justice brought to the criminals and perverts in the castle and to the Duke and Duchess when they are brought to your court for their crimes!"

The King looked at his beautiful daughter who would now forever carry the scars of the murderers. "I understand my dear. I really do. But until we bring them to justice this will be a violent and deadly campaign. If I am to lead my men then I must know that my heir, and the next queen of Branart is safe!"

"You will return to Gilbert's castle with an entire Company of Royal guards and your full retinue of ladies-in-waiting."

When her father used that tone of voice Alana knew there would be no arguing at that point. But he could be bargained with.

"One request. The Duchess' twelve maids...never has a group been so perverse, evil and murderous in nature. I would like to be present at their trial and execution."

Her father rubbed his chin. "Have they been identified.?"

"Easily, your Highness", Gilbert responded. "They were all found in the Duchess' quarters unaware of their betrayal. They have been caterwauling ever since."

"Is one nursing a broken jaw and missing teeth?", Alana inquired.

"Yes"

"Then you have them!"

"Set up a court to hear the Princess' and others testimony this afternoon!", roared the King.

The court proceedings went quickly. Dozens of witnesses arrived to testify against the twelve with first hand observations of torture and death. The guards, in an attempt to save their pitiful lives, testified to a laundry list of torture and murder on their part.

Finally Marissa and Alana testified.

The Court of three belted knights came quickly to a decision. Guilty on all charges. Sentenced to death by hanging in the morning.

The results were unusual to say the least. The 12 seemed to be to hide smiles and whispers. They actually giggled after hearing the sentence. While most of the court puzzled Alana asked to be heard.

"My lords, after being held prisoner by these ladies and seeing their own unique perversions I would make a personal request. Do not hang them! This will just fulfill their ultimate sexual fantasy. Instead let them die by impalement!"

The 12 were thrown into instant consternation. The judges consulted. The girls all cried and begged to be hanged. Finally the court held impaling would be their sentence.

CHAPTER 20

Back in their prison cell, one of the twelve, Janina reclused herself and began to plan desperately. There was no question that if everything proceeded they were all going to die a slow and horrible death. There had to be some way out of this.

She knew that if she tried, redid her hair, removed her makeup and wore the right gown she could appear much younger...maybe as young as 12 or 13. That was her prime forte' and why the Duchess loved her. If she could just get the guards or a knight to let her into the lower compartments she might find a way out of this horrible plight.

She arranged herself as the other girls sobbed and tried to find comfort in each other's arms.

Finally ready she called the guard over.

"Master, I was a poor servant girl forced to do my mistress' bidding. I understand that I am to die by association with these others, but there are things that still need to be brought to the court's attention. If I could have a moment with an officer?"

The guard was taken by her young appearance and a short time later Sir Malart, the head of the tribunal appeared. She bowed almost touching the ground. "Master I am Janina and have been sentenced to death even though I am guilty of just following my mistress' bidding, as a lowly serving girl."

"You've been fairly judged and condemned girl...now what do you want?"

"Master, there are machines in the dungeon that have arcane purposes. I have seen them work. It would unburden my conscience and allow me to die with a cleaner spirit if I could show and explain these to someone."

Malart looked at the girl with narrowed eyes. She was very young, and appeared almost unspoiled. Maybe she had been judged too hastily.

"Come with me girl" he said having the guard unlock the cell. "Let's see what you have in mind."

Janina had put on her highest heeled shoes and finest stockings, but no undergarments. She swayed provocatively as she led the way down the dungeon levels. "Here is a machine that breaks the bones of the tortured" she explained showing him a wheeled device.

"Over here is a special rack that allows the tortured to be strangled slowly over days."

Over the next hour she showed him a dozen instruments of torture, each more horrible than the next.

As they dropped a level she knew the location of an escape tunnel was nearby.

"Now this is a special machine" she explained. "It was specially built to the Duke's specifications."

"What does this one do?"

"It binds the girl and keeps her helpless in its grasp. It then impales her both anally and vaginally. Once that is accomplished it slices off her breasts and then decapitates her, all in one spring loaded motion"

Malart looked dubious.

"Here, let me show you!" and Janina dropped her gown displaying her lovely nude body glad only in her stockings. If she could just get him off guard.

"Now the girl kneels here", she said placing her knees on the rests. "You see how this forces the girl's breasts outward."

Malart was watching very closely.

"Now if I place my neck in the collar", she tilted her head back arching her back readily exposing her sex. Without warning the collar snapped shut and the bands around her arms grasped her tightly.

"Wait!" she cried. "Something's very wrong!". She was totally in the machine's grip.

"How do I release you?"

"It's the lever on the side there. Just pull up and it should release!"

Malart tugged it to the upright position.

Janina was horrified to hear the wheels whir and springs begin to tension.

"OH NO NO NO!!!" she screamed.

Before she could utter another word the collar around her neck clamped shut almost crushing her throat.

As Malart tried to reverse the process he could see the terror in Janina's eyes as the machine began to work. The lower of the two steel impaling posts began to move upward. Three inches in diameter it entered Janina's vagina and started its inexorable journey deep into her body.

The second impaling post, of the same girth entered her rectum and tore upwards through her bowels.

She wanted to scream but only a gurgle emerged. The choking collar did not allow it. Malart fought with one lever after another but nothing seemed to make any difference. When it felt as if both the posts had met deep in her body, Janina heard the next whirring noise of a new mechanism start in motion. With silky smoothness the two razor sharp debreasting blades sliced her breasts neatly from her body. They fell forward on the floor. All she could do was stare in horror.

She gave Malart one last pleading look and then, with another whirring sound, a circular blade cleanly cut her head from her body. Her head lay on the floor staring up in horror at the machine that had killed her.

Malart just stared at the horrible tableau before him, then turned and trudged up the dungeon stairs shaking his head. It took the Smiths over an hour to liberate Janina's impaled torso from the machine.

That afternoon the remaining girls were led out to the waiting impaling posts. They were nude with their wrists bound behind them. They were all crying and begging piteously.

Their posts were basically triangular in shape. The stakes lay on the ground. They were about 12 feet long. A post hole had been dug for each.

One by one the girls were placed on their stomachs and the sharp triangular stake was inserted into their rectums. After they were driven in at least 12 to 18 inches into each girl's body the executioners lifted the girl's body and stake upright and dropped the stake into its post hole. This had the effect of impaling the girl straight up and driving the sharp stake even deeper into her body.

The screams up to that point were horrific. At this moment, for a few, the cries suddenly stopped. For some of the girls the sharp point of the stake came piercing through their chests above the breasts, but for a number it found its way up their throats and out their gaping mouths. Death was quick for these but for the rest they screamed and kicked, some for hours, before succumbing.

Alana watched the executions without pleasure. She wondered about the last open spike, but Malart brought out Janina's severed head and it adorned the remaining post.

CHAPTER 21

The next day Alana kissed her father goodbye as he and Gilbert headed North and she South.

The trip to Gilbert's castle was tiresome. Marissa rode with her and served as her primary Lady-in-Waiting. At night, they would sit and mourn Gabriella and Victoria, trying to make some sense out of the insanity they had been through.

"No", Alana mused, "the evil that inhabited that castle is the evil of men, not demons", and she took a long pull from her wine glass.

Marissa was downcast as usual.

"I feel that my life is over...that I should have died with Gabriella", she sobbed staring into the fire.

"I understand love. Believe me I do."

"No, Alana. My errors in judgment caused the lives of dozens of brave soldiers trying to protect us. I watched as helpless children were slowly murdered and raped for the Norsemen's pleasure!"

"You did what seemed right at the time."

"Now I have no future. What man would want a woman who has been raped and ravaged, who carry's the mark of the hangman's noose on her neck, who has a soul so blackened as mine? It would have been kinder if my neck had snapped and I went like Gabriella!"

Alana lifted her chin. "We both wear the mark of Cain, and I for one will wear it proudly and you will wear it with me." Then she smiled and kissed her gently on the forehead. "Now let's try to get some sleep."

Two days later they reached the castle. Claudia was waiting for them with good news.

"Your highness", she bowed to Alana as she dismounted.

"Claudia, it's wonderful to see you again!" She hugged and kissed her as an old friend.

"Someone, actually two, are chaffing to see you. "

"She led Alana and Marissa into the castle to a new room built adjoining Alana's apartment.

"Starfire! Oh my lovely Starfire!"

The horse whinnied her pleased response.

"And Krystyana! It's wonderful...this is just wonderful." The girl was crying tears of pleasure.

"Starfire knew you were coming an hour ago and it was all I would do to keep her resting", smiled Krystyana. "The physicians say she will recover completely if she just continues to rest for a few weeks."

Alana dropped to her knees and cradled the horse's head. "It was you, they told me. You found Beaufort, as badly injured as you were. And it was you that brought us aid. My wonderful wonderful Starfire."

Krystyana beamed next to her charge.

"Ah Marissa", said Alana, "Did you know that Krystyana also wears our badge of courage?"

Marissa looked at the girl, puzzled.

Alana pushed aside the girls flowing locks to display the scars from her hangings.

"We are a small but mighty group."

"Do I count?" a voice asked.

Illicia stood at the door.

She raised up her hair. "I'm afraid I did not hang long enough to bear permanent scars but can I qualify for your exclusive club?"

"You most certainly can!"

And all four of the girls hugged in joy.

A day later Alana brought Illicia into her dressing area. "I have a surprise for you!" Illicia squealed with delight. "Oh I love presents!"

Waiting in the closet were all of Alana's "pleasure girl outfits." Alana smiled. "Remember when I told you that you looked wonderful in my outfit in the miners' cave? I promised myself then that when we got out of there I would be sure you had an entire wardrobe just for your own. Not just that one set. I don't expect you to wear them until your honeymoon, but you can put it in your hope chest just from me."

Illicia looked dumbstruck. They were beautiful items and only the most prized of the Duke's ladies wore sets anywhere near as lovely. As a matter of fact, she didn't remember Alana having a set this fine.

"But how?" she asked.

"I had the seamstress make this set especially for you. There's not another like it in the entire kingdom. Oh...you'll find a purse with a small dowry under there also...just to be sure there's no impediment when the right man comes along."

Illicia just hugged her and cried.

A few days later Illicia entered Alana's apartment, "Your Highness."

"Illicia you don't have to call me that when we're alone."

"Sorry, Highness . I'm still accustomizing myself to your new title and I don't want to make a mistake."

"What do you need?"

"There is a girl out here I thought you'd like to see. She's applied for work as a drudge and seems to do a good job, but there's something about her appearance you probably will want to evaluate yourself."

Alana nodded and smiled. "Bring her in."

A small girl entered and bowed. She had long blond hair which reminded Alana immediately of her lost Victoria. She kept her eyes down cast. With the shapeless clothes she had on all Alana could tell was she was a slip of a girl.

Illicia commanded, "Move up close and let the Princess take a look at you!"

The girl complied still keeping her head down.

"Come here girl and let me see your face."

The face was strikingly beautiful, with huge blue eyes, small nose and a generous mouth. For some reason the girl had a muffler around her neck in the middle of summer.

"Come girl, remove your muffler", Illicia cajoled.

Shyly the girl did so and the reason for her audience was revealed.

Over the months, at even the most formal occasions Alana did not try to hide the scarring from her hangings. She displayed the permanent mark of the rope around the top of her neck just under the chin almost as a badge of honor. This girl had the same mark.

"What is your name, girl?"

"Mira", the girl replied hesitantly.

"And how did you come by those marks on your neck, Mira?"

"I'm not a criminal, Your Highness."

"I did not say you were, now tell us your story."

Mira recounted that she was the youngest of her family. Her mother had died and her father drank heavily after that. He was constantly in debt. As each of the children came of age they were apprenticed out or given (sold off) in marriage.

She had just turned 15 when a miser in the next village took an interest in her. The rumor was he was impotent but enjoyed beating and torturing his servants and slaves. Fifteen was actually old for a marriage contract. The other girls had been married off at 13. Her father had kept her around since she was the last girl and did the cooking and cleaning. But the miser's money overcame his reluctance and Mira found herself bundled off with her few possessions to the miser's house.

At first it didn't seem so bad. She had her own small room and the other servants treated her like the mistress of the house. There were even some clothes to wear and she wasn't responsible for all the cleaning and cooking. She was actually beginning to look forward to her position when everything changed one evening.

The miser had been drinking his usual port and when he called for another bottle, specifically ordered her to bring it, not the usual servant. When she did he had her stand in front of him and looked her over. Without any warning he grabbed her and ripped her bodice exposing her breasts. As she sobbed he had her remove her clothes. He used a cord to bind her wrists behind her and then threw her over a low hassock. Using a cane he began to whip her buttocks and thighs. She screamed and begged and pleaded with him to tell her what she had done wrong to deserve this punishment. How could she make up for it?

The caning stopped and he whipped her around. His cock was out and he instructed her to take him in her mouth. She had never performed oral sex before and the unwashed smell of his penis revolted her but she began. Despite her best effort his organ remained limp and he became angry again. He whipped her again and again.

"If you're not good for this than you're not good for anything." He left her tied and sobbing.

A young stable boy eventually heard her cries and untied her.

Her status didn't change but every few days the miser found a new reason to cane or whip her. She tried her best to satisfy him but he was hopelessly impotent.

As the weeks went on there seemed no resolution to her problem and her life was one of pain and misery. She thought of taking her own life. She contemplated slitting her wrists, drowning in the creek or hanging herself in the barn.

Her one saving grace was the young stable boy. He was only about eight or nine and his name was Sevrin. He looked after the horses and other barn animals. Initially she was extremely embarrassed since he had found her bound and naked but in a while they became friends. When she found herself crying and alone, he would often find her and try to comfort her as best he could. His friendship helped her through her darkest periods.

Then things changed. The miser was gone for long periods to another town. When he returned he seemed in a much jollier mood.

One night, soon after his last trip, he sent the servants to bed and called her into his chamber. He offered her some port and she drank it at his request. It was drugged and she quickly passed out. When she awoke she found herself sitting on a chair. As she started to move she found she was restricted. To her horror she had a noose around her neck! The miser smiled.

"I've found a widow in the next town over with an excellent inheritance who is looking for a husband. I can have her if I rid myself of you. All the servants know you have been depressed and unhappy. I'm going down to the pub. While I'm gone you're going to commit suicide by hanging yourself."

She just shook her head no in horror.

He pulled up on the rope forcing her to climb up onto the chair then tied off the free end of the rope.

"When I return you'll be dead. I will grave and bury you and in a few weeks have myself a new wife and lots more money", he giggled.

She begged and pleaded for her life, but he just smiled. Then he walked over and kicked over the chair. Mira dropped and hanged. As she started her dance of death he walked out of the house and cantered off for the local inn.

Mira fought the rope. She tried to grab above her and pull herself up but she was not strong enough. She clawed at the noose around her throat but it did no good. She strained her feet but she hung a good foot off the floor. Finally she began to just kick in her agony. Her face became a congested red and her veins stood out. Her chest was exploding and the crush of the noose cut off all her air. She felt herself slipping into death.

Then she was free. She dropped heavily and collapsed with the noose loose around her neck. She gasped and fought for breath which came much easier. As her vision cleared she saw the stable boy standing with a knife in his hand... He cut the noose from her neck and looked at her. "Run, run as fast and far as you can!"

And she did. Grabbing a shawl she ran as far and as fast as she could, hiding during the day and running at night, until she came to the river and one of Duke Gilbert's outposts. She begged to be

able to cross and they helped her, feeding and looking out for her. Finally giving her a job in the castle itself.

Alana gently took the girls face in her hands and tilted her head up and examined the scar. A perfect rope burn. Healed . Bruising gone. What remained would be with the girl for life.

"You have joined a very secret and exclusive sisterhood", Alana smiled. She tilted her head so her hanging scars were readily visible. She then called Marissa into the room and she also showed her scars.

"Not many have survived a hanging like you describe. Come Illicia, we must find a job around here for Mira. Make her part of the staff. After all she is a kinsman."

The two other girls smiled and Mira permitted herself a small smile...she may have found a home at last.

Alana worked late into the night trying to catch up on the correspondence her Father had brought from Branart. Much had occurred during her absence. Illicia had brought her a pot of tea and left her. Now she was musing about how she could bring her diary up to date. The castle was asleep and dark. A noise caught her attention. A scraping noise just outside her door.

Just the guard, she thought, but it continued.

She took her candle and opened the door. No guard. Strange.

The corridor was long and dark but she could hear the noise at the end. Dressed in her diaphanous nightgown and peignoir she slid on her slippers and followed the noise down the hall past Illicia's room. She looked in but Illicia wasn't there. Very strange!

She could hear the noise just behind the drapes to the right. Probably a mouse she thought and began to head back to her chambers...then she heard a rattle.

No, definitely not a mouse.

She pushed past the drapes and stared in amazement. It seemed if the hall or room beyond was filled with mist. She turned to go back, but the draped archway was no longer there. Instead there was a solid brick wall.

She felt the wall to be sure it was real, then realized the darkness and her candle were fading into light.

"Nice of you to join us", a voice said and as she turned hands grabbed her.

She called out and struggled but there were too many hands too close. Her wrists were pulled behind her and she felt some form of restraints snap on them. Hands but no faces...

Then a frighteningly familiar face did appear.

"Still putting on airs are you? "

Oh dear lord! It was the Bailiff and behind him stood the gallows!!

Swinging from one of the two ropes was the Poet. He was still obscenely naked and his penis was achingly erect after all this time. And the noose next to him was tied for her.

"No", she screamed ..."No!!!"

Rough hands muscled her onto the platform and the stool and the Bailiff tied the noose around her neck and pulled her up on her toes. The rope was as thick and as rough as the first time.

"We all know how this goes so there's no need to go through all the rigmarole again, is there?" He brutally tore the peignoir and gown from her leaving her nude.

"Now lets see you dance!" and the stool was gone.

She barely had a chance for half a breath before the noose cinched down on her throat and cut off her air. Now she was struggling as desperately as ever before, trying to free her wrists, teeth gritted, agonizingly trying to eke a tiny slip of air past the crushing agony of the noose.

Her head pounded her lungs ached to bursting. The pain in her throat was eclipsed only by the total desperate lack of air in her lungs and the need to breathe.

Then came the transition...suddenly the ache in her lungs and pain in her throat were secondary to the growing glow deep in her being. Yes she was hanging. Yes she was dying. Yes the noose was choking the life from her.

But all that was secondary to the growing need, that building anticipation, that all encompassing commitment to the orgasm that was about to explode in her.

Yes, the agony was excruciating and it seemed to go on forever as she kicked and danced naked on the rope. But it had to be sustained, to be endured, to finally achieve that one golden moment, that incredible release! And when the orgasm came she was literally torn asunder by its force. It tore her consciousness from her and left the small core of excruciating agony that was death on the noose as a small price to pay!

And then she woke up.

Fifth night in a row, she shuddered as she grasped the sheets, the same dream...and, she noted, the same climax.

She was soaked in sweat, the sheets wet with perspiration and cum. She had tried to have an orgasm earlier that evening in her bath but could not reach climax. Was this to be her only means

of reaching sexual release...these horrendous dreams and the sensation of hanging until she came???

"Your Highness! Are you alright?" It was the guard calling from the hallway.

"Yes...just a nightmare."

She found a dry spot on the bed and rolled over willing herself back to sleep.

When she opened her eyes it was daylight...no it was mid-day. She tried to roll over and found that she was tied down. Held by the neck by a ligature, her wrists manacled behind her.

Mocking tones as the men around her lined up...

"Now let's see if this little cunt has what it takes?"

She screamed as she felt a huge phallus spear her in the rectum. The man buried his cock to the hilt pumping hard as he enjoyed her virgin asshole. The scream opened her mouth and a foul smelling phallus plunged deep into her throat, effectively choking off any further cries. Each pumped away until she felt an explosion in her rectum and the man pulled out. The cur in front of her kept pumping down her throat.

Then another huge phallus plunged deep into her cunt, ripping her hymen and tearing her almost in two. All she could do was weep bitter tears, as the first man spurted huge amounts of semen down her throat. Her vision cleared enough to see a dozen men or more lined up to take her in every way possible...then she felt the leather strap on her throat cinch down even tighter and blackness closed in.

Again she started and cried as she came out of her nightmare. Twice in one night! But this nightmare was pure terror! No sexual release at all. It was truly horrible!

The physicians had prescribed a sleeping draught but that wasn't the problem It was what she dreamed of when she slept.

To make matters worse, these dream orgasms were the only ones she seemed to be able to generate without actually hanging herself. In her bath or alone in her bed she could not achieve orgasm. Only when the rope had closed down her throat and she was hanging helpless did it seem that her body responded.

Finally she got up the courage to speak to Marissa. Late the next evening, over a glass of brandy she confided in her that she was almost unable to achieve an orgasm without the additional stimulation of hanging by her neck.. Marissa just looked at her hands.

"Your highness"...she started.

"No! Not your Highness! Not now. Of all times, not now! Please Marissa you're the only one I can talk to about this and only because you experienced the same tortures I have."

"Alana" she started again with a small smile. "I just assumed that I would be frigid for the rest of my life. I haven't had a pleasuring since..."

"Yes...Please go on!"

"Since they hanged me" she confessed.

"Do you have nightmares?"

"Yes, frequently."

"Perhaps", started Alana, "Perhaps when we have found loving husbands..."

"Oh Alana, certainly for you! Think of the numbers of men lining up to court the heir to Branart!! But who would want me? I have been debauched and whored!" And then she broke down in tears.

Alana reached over and took her in her arms. "I know you feel that way now, but you are a beautiful and loving girl and there will be dozens of nobles waiting to court you!. You will return with me to Branart and be my chief lady-in-waiting."

Then they both indulged in a good cry. But that night it happened again.

The rope jolted Alana's throat as she dropped. One moment she was standing on her toes, an instant of falling, then a vise slammed shut around her neck. Sliding up and under her jaw, the rope burned as it tightened. The shock is far more than she expected or remembers. Instinctively she tries to raise her hands. She desperately needs to loosen the constriction of the rope. Feeling her wrists locked behind her is bittersweet. This is how its supposed to be isn't it?

But the noose is too tight. It's impossible to breathe and pressure is building in her head. She thinks, "Don't panic! This is just a dream...a phantasm." She opens her eyes. She can see her stockinged feet moving, touching nothing.

Little by little the noose cinches tighter in spite of her efforts to stay calm. Two things occur to her at almost the same time. Her body is very excited, she wants desperately to come. And she feels the need to kick now. Her chest muscles are heaving her breasts and she has spasms along her spine. She begins dancing to a rhythm even she cannot hear. All she knows is that the thrusting makes her neck hurt, but the sensations between her legs makes it worthwhile. Isn't this what it's all for?

Her climax explodes so suddenly she is totally surprised. Despite the pain and the crushing in her throat, she inwardly smiles. Then the need for a cleansing breath overwhelms her. As hard as she tries, she realizes she will never have one. Her chest is too tired to work. It's like the last stage of

deliberately holding your breath. Your chest will explode if you don't let it out. But she can't let it out. She's trapped by the rope.

Alana relives the real terror of her hanging now. She feels her body jerking and convulsing, and wants so much to escape. She can't give up her life just to entertain these awful townspeople fornicating like dogs. She's so young, with so many years ahead of her. She finally understands the eroticism she sought is gone from her fantasy. The terror she's experiencing is real. She opens her eyes trying to plead to the audience. She doesn't want to die. Her vision is getting hazy and she knows she'll soon pass out and then the agony will transform itself into the cold hardness of death.

Her head and chest explode at the same time....and she touts at her night clothes gasping for breath.

This time it is Illicia who bursts into her room followed by two guardsmen. They immediately avert their eyes since Alana is now almost completely nude and drenched in sweat.

"Out! Out!" Illicia commands and the two guards obey.

"Princess, we must get you some help for this. Night terrors every evening. You're getting no rest!"

Alana stared out the window with a cloak about her. "You're right, of course. But have we heard from my father?"

"Nothing other than the battle is engaged in the North."

"Part of this trouble is just sitting here waiting...waiting ...waiting."

"Here", instructed Illicia, "Take this sleeping draught. I will take my old station at the foot of the bed and we'll see if we can ward the demons off for the night."

Alana smiled. "No...little sister, this bed can sleep us both."

She took the draught and cuddled next to Illicia. Perhaps sleep would come without dreams for the rest of the night.

It was not to be.

The setting was familiar. Noosed on her toes waiting for the Bailiff to tip the stool. Terrified and sad as the Poet hanged next to her.

But this time something was different. Her knees and ankles were also bound. There would be no kicking this time. And the whoremaster was there. He reached down for her, but with her legs tied she could not defend herself. Instead he began to stroke and play with her, using her lubrication to circle and further engorge her already throbbing clit.

She tried to distance herself in her mind, to somehow not validate the excitement building within her despite the agony of the noose...but then true horror occurred.

Suddenly, without warning, she felt herself being entered from the rear! A huge member spearing her anus and driving deep into her rectum. This unexpected assault pushed her forward off the stool and the noose clamped shut. Now she was hanging while being plowed in the rear and masturbated in the front!

In her horror she realized that the cock in her was the Poet's!

"But how? He was dead??" Still his huge erect member drove deeper and deeper into her rectum.

Meanwhile the cruel eyes of the whoremaster smiled at her as he manipulated her clit and enjoyed her struggles.

No air! Just pain, the agony of being ripped anally and the cruel manipulation of the whoremaster's fingers as her toes dangled inches off the ground.

Her vision exploded with globules of light as her body fought for a slip of air. She felt herself floating with three sensations fighting within her...the agony of the noose, the deep thrusts of the engorged member driving deeper and deeper into her anal sheath, and the stroking of her clit...all of it combining into a streaming vein of erotic agony. Finally, her vision exploded, the Poet's engorged member ejaculated deep in her bowels and her clit transmitted an electric shock of orgasm that tore her very being into helpless shreds. Then blackness...

She awoke with Illicia holding her and stroking her hair...this time she was so spent that she could barely open her eyes. "Again, and again. I'm cursed beyond understanding" she sobbed.

Illicia just stroked her hair and crooned to her and she finally fell back into a restless sleep.

The next day, Alana looked terrible. She cried most of the day and it seemed to Illicia that she was on the verge of doing something terrible. She did the only thing she could think of to help the situation and sent off an urgent message to Gilbert via Starfire.

Alana dragged herself through the day and as evening fell was dreading the coming of night when a commotion occurred at the main castle gate. Starfire had returned and running with her, as happily and fast as he could, was Wyvern!

He found Alana and capered around her for long minutes like a puppy, leaving her laughing. Her first laugh in weeks. She was relieved when Illicia brought in the spelling board.

Wyvern quickly spelled out "i slp wit u.!"

"Yes, yes, of course Wyvern you will sleep here with me."

For the first time in weeks, with the huge dog cuddled next to and protecting her, Alana slept well with no nightmares.

Two weeks later came the ultimate battle in the north with the Duke's forces and mercenaries in an all out melee against the King and Gilbert's forces. The battle raged for three days and for that entire time Alana did not sleep. On the fifth day a rider on one of Beaufort's son's appeared.

"We've won. We've won! A total victory. The forces of the Duke have been crushed. The only one's not taken captive were some of the Norsemen who jumped into their ships and ran!

"What about Gilbert and my father?" Alana asked anxiously.

"Both unharmed and celebrating!"

"And the Duke and Duchess?"

"Can't say for the Duchess, but the Duke's head is on the pike outside your father's tents!"
It was a total victory!

The rider reported that her father and Gilbert would be arriving in three or four day's time.

Alana could hardly contain herself, but was it to see her father or Gilbert again?

Two days later, however, another messenger appeared, this time somber and asked to see Alana in private. In private meant her advisors and Illicia and Marissa, not to mention Wyvern.

"I bear ill tidings, your Majesty" he began. Alana was chilled to the bone. Only the ruler of Branart, her father bore the title of Majesty. Unless?

"Yesterday your father, the King and his chief Generals, including your uncle and Duke Gilbert led the men out of camp and on the road home. Duke Gilbert was called to the rear for some problems with the hospital and wounded wagons. While he was away, navigating a mountain road the path gave way. Your father, uncle, and a dozen senior generals were caught in the landslide. They all perished."

Alana could not speak.

Marissa came forward. "Are you sure of this information?"

"Here", the messenger stated holding out a sealed message, carrying Duke Gilbert's seal. "In the Duke's own hand."

"Your Royal Majesty", it read, "I have the sad news to inform you of the death of your father and uncle in a trail accident this morning."

The message went on to detail the tragedy. Alana read it twice and then broke down in tears. Her physician was called and mixed her a sleeping draught.

"She'll sleep now."

Illicia looked doubtful. "Hopefully without new nightmares!"

When Alana awoke she started up in her bed. "What a horrific nightmare!" Then she saw the crumpled message on the bed stand and realized that everything she feared was true.

A few days later Gilbert led the sad procession carrying the bodies of those killed in avalanche back to the castle.

He found Alana and her advisors packed and ready to begin the trip to Branart. Finding the right moment he took her aside. "I know you must return as quickly as possible. You need to have a royal funeral for your father and uncle...and Branart as a Kingdom cannot withstand a vacuum. You must be crowned as Queen as soon as possible!"

Alana nodded still almost dumb with shock.

"I will consolidate my position here. There's a chance, once the other Duke's can be convened in council, that we can agree on a kingship. If I can attain that lofty position, would you be open to my plight as a suitor?"

Now Alana was certainly struck dumb.

"I have been besotted with you from the moment I saw you on the gallows that I loved you!"

Alana could not bear his eyes and the look of pleading on his face. She shook her head.

"Oh Gilbert. After being your "mistress" and nude slave all those months, you could have had me any time. You had me fooled for certain. It's all just too much. But the sea voyage will let me contemplate all that's happened in the last year. Please be patient with me."

"Of course!" And then he tilted her head and kissed her for the very first time.