

## The Gift

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# The Gift

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## Summary

A barbarian with sun-kissed hair is seized from the plains of Gaul by a legion of Roman soldiers. He survives a harsh journey and even harsher treatment as the caravan of slaves travels to distant and exotic Egypt. He is offered as a tribute from Caesar to Queen Cleopatra to endure life as a pleasure slave. Caught in the precarious space between his beliefs and his emotions, the barbarian finds that his fate lies in the hands of the man marked with the eye of Horus on his wrist.

## Notes

This is a fiction, therefore it is not real. Please don't post this elsewhere or pass it on to those whose names are used in this story.

Tommy's POV  
Adam's POV

# Chapter 1

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The Commander lifted the flap and entered the tent where the slave was being held. He had too much on his mind to be bothered with the day-to-day affairs of the slaves in this caravan. He quickly glanced at the malnourished barbarian in the corner and took notice of the bloody lip below the gag, some bruises and the half-shaved, matted head of hair. Oh, [Jupiter](#), this was the pretty slave with long hair the color of a field of ripening wheat; the prize of the lot. The Centurion and six soldiers stood guard over the helpless creature with such intensity that it was almost amusing. “Well, Centurion? What manner of trouble could such a little man provoke that I must be burdened with it?”

“Commander!” The Centurion saluted as was customary. “By order of Augustus Caesar, this bounty of war is to be delivered to the palace unblemished, as a pleasure slave for the Queen’s amusement. And he remained so for nearly three moons, but last night, a few of the soldiers saw fit to break him in for his new mistress and make sure he had the proper aptitudes, being that he is a Barbarian.”

“And...” demanded the Commander, his fury building.

“He has no sense of self-preservation. The barbarian, barely larger than a boy of fourteen summers, tried to fight off a dozen men rather than accept his fate. And in the middle of the fray, the idiot snatched a knife from one of the soldiers and started hacking off his hair,” the Centurion explained.

The Commander had an inkling of what had happened. The same fools, led by this Centurion, were constantly stirring up trouble in the camp. The damage to the slave could not be undone. Cuts and bruises would heal, but what a mess he’d made of the long hair that had hung down his back. One side of his head was sheared to the scalp, and the other side wasn’t much longer. His golden hair would never grow back in time to present this prize of war to the Queen.

“You take me away from matters of war and strategy to inform me you damaged a slave you’d been ordered not to harm? How dare you rape this man - the Queen’s property - and disobey my direct order? And why do you think he cut his hair? This slave was valued precisely because of his hair!” he thundered.

The Centurion hung his head and at least was smart enough to keep his mouth closed.

“Fools! I shall have your hide if the Queen rejects our tribute,” the Commander bellowed in anger. “But perhaps he is not as dim-witted as you presume, Centurion, after all, he did not leave your century a man short, forfeiting his life as payment.”

“Yes, Commander,” the Centurion kept his head lowered.

The soldiers' punishment would be his pleasure later. "As for the barbarian," the Commander turned to the slave and pulled his chin up to inspect the damage to his face properly, "he is a pretty one."

The slave struggled against the Commander's firm hold on his jaw. "He shrinks from my touch, when has no reason to. I blame you and your men for this." The commander tugged on what was left of the slave's hair to subdue him. "Perhaps the barbarian cut off his hair because he didn't care to be controlled in such a manner while your soldiers had their way with him."

Hair pulled tight, the slave had no choice but to allow the Commander to twist his head from side to side. "Apparently he didn't like things in his mouth either," the Commander noted as he assessed the damage to the slave. The barbarian's defiant glare riled the Commander.

The Commander had no patience for slaves who did not accept their lot readily. Initially, he'd believed the barbarian to be smart. At least, smart enough to know not to raise a knife to a Roman which would have earned him a death sentence. But now, the barbarian looked at the Commander with wild, accusatory eyes as if he was a freeman - one soldier wronged by another. The barbarian might be a battered slave, but his spirit was still that of a freeman. Such a slave had no value, not to Rome, and certainly not to Egypt. This slave needed to be broken, first by a beating and then, perhaps some time with him in the Commander's own tent.

"Twenty strokes with the leather paddle should teach him a lesson without breaking the skin." The Commander leered at Tommy, whose eyes suddenly lost their fire. "Then shave the sides of his head evenly and do something with the rest of it to make it look presentable, but keep as much of it as you can. And I repeat, after this punishment, he is not to be touched by you or any of your men or you'll pay with your own hide. There is no reason to deny myself since he has already been used. I will send for him tomorrow."

He watched as the defiance on the slave's face morphed into fear, and what little color remained in his sunken cheeks washed out. With that, the Commander turned his back, ducked under the flap and left the men to carry out his orders.

I awake from my troubled sleep again. The memories of the previous night flash behind my eyes. I would choose death over living with the shame of the violations and brutality I've suffered. Since the guards dragged me back to the slave tent, the others have tried to help me, but all I want is to be left alone in my misery. They tell me this is what is expected of me, to spread my legs and lay with men. Just the thought of it makes my stomach lurch and I work hard to relax enough to prevent the loss of whatever may still be in it.

A guard sticks his head into our tent and points to me. "The Commander wants to see you."

I begin to shake and back away, willing him to leave me alone. "No!" I howl. "No more, please!" I shake my head back and forth slowly, pleading with the guard. His cruel face makes it clear that no matter how much I plead, it will do me no good; my fear and panic consume me.

The slave called Brad approaches the guard. "Sir, can I have a moment with him to calm him down? I promise to give you some special attention tonight," he says with a wink. *How can he wink at this brute?!* "I'll calm him down and send him out to you."

The guard raises his eyebrow as he searches Brad's face before glancing back at me. "Be quick about it!" he growls as he stomps away from the tent.

"What are you doing? You are going to bring even more punishment down on yourself. Calm down and listen to me."

I shake my head and attempt to put some space between us. *This traitor is sending me back for more? I can't go! I just can't!* I panic like a caged animal before it's struck down, but I would welcome the slaughter.

I'm shocked by a sudden slap, and hold my face in stunned silence.

"Now listen to me! I can see that this is not the life you would choose, but you can make it easier on yourself by not fighting battles you can't win. I understand you are in pain, but you have no choice. You have been summoned by the Commander. You can beg and plead your case, but whatever you do, don't refuse him anything he wants. If he wants you to relieve him, beg to use your mouth."

My mind returns to the abuse inflicted on me by the guards. "NO!"

"Would you prefer the other? Stop thinking about it and just get it over with. It's only skin."

"You may enjoy being with a man, but I don't. I don't know how to ever imagine welcoming it. Where I come from, it's an abomination, yet they call us barbarians!" I say.

"Listen to me. Ask to take him in your mouth. You can endure it and save your ass. Be sure to cover your teeth and use your tongue. Think about what would feel good to you and do it to him. The better it feels for him, the faster it will be finished. And call him master. Let him know you are done fighting them."

"I'll never stop fighting."

"No, I imagine you aren't ready to stop. But if you continue on this path, you will only make it more painful for yourself."

"They'll kill me eventually."

"Oh, you silly, naive boy. They are not going to kill you. But they will break you one way or another. You need to accept that you're a slave now. No one wants to be a slave. But until you quit fighting it, you're going to see a lot of punishment. Go now. Do what I tell you and don't anger them further."

He pulls me up and holds me until I am able to stand by myself. Every step is a new lesson in suffering. Brad walks with me to the flap and holds it aside for me. I look across to the Commander's tent where more pain awaits me and I just want to lie down and die.

The guard points to the tent and I continue in that direction. One of the soldiers garrisoned outside the Commander's tent pulls the flap back and ushers me in.

"Master." My head is almost touching the floor when I prostrate myself before the man that ordered my beating. I ignore the foul taste of that word on my tongue, but will do everything I can to escape worse atrocities.

"You learned your place, slave."

Everything inside screams at me to run. *But where would I go? How far could I get? Two steps outside the door? Maybe not that far.* It takes every bit of my willpower to quell those screams inside and remain subservient. "Yes, master. I know my place." I remind myself of the atrocities he's already subjected me to and keep my face as calm as I can.

"Without your hair, your value as a pleasure slave is diminished. Surely you have some redeeming talents?" the Commander sneers.

"I can play a lute, master." If only I would be given the chance to play and find beauty in this harsh world again.

"We have some instruments stowed away in one of the wagons. You will be given a chance to prove your talents. Since you hacked your hair off, you need another asset to make you a worthy gift." He scribbles something on the paper and returns his attention to me. "How old are you?"

"They told me I was born the year of the big storm."

"Ignorant heathens along the coast! You don't even know your age! You all belong in chains!"

He pushes the parchment aside on his makeshift desk. I hear the swish of fabric and watch him undress. He points to a spot before him and I go dead inside. *Oh, Gods! No! Not again!*

The rest of the journey is a blur in my mind. On the far side of the Mediterranean, we come upon an ocean of endless sand. The sweltering heat leaves me numb from walking in the blinding sun. The guards speak in hushed but excited whispers about the palace and the land's treasures and pleasures, but the slaves do not share their excitement. I know what fate awaits me at the palace, and horrible dreams fill my nights with terror. I try and fail to escape into a safe spot in my mind, praying to Morrigan and any other useless god, to take my life before we reach our destination. My prayers fall on deaf ears and somehow I survive.

Adam let the incense fill his lungs as the slave boy rubbed myrrh over his flawless skin in preparation for the night's festivities at the Queen's per-aa, her magnificent palace. Cleopatra was to receive tribute from Rome, and she wanted to welcome them with all the glamour that

Egyptian riches could buy. Who cared that the wealth was begotten at the expense of others? Certainly not the woman who now ruled Egypt with the iron fist she once abhorred. Adam remembered that girl, the person she was before she was Queen. He was thankful that he was one of the few to see that side of her still today. He was one of her few advisers, and the only one she confided in about personal matters.

“Which robe my lord?” another slave boy asked, holding up two garments the overseer had selected.

“The black damask, threaded with gold will do,” he dismissed the boy with a wave. He was a new boy, one Adam had not encountered before.

His father had many slaves, most were nameless, faceless errand boys. Others, mostly the females, worked in the kitchen or threaded clothes. There were a few pleasure slaves that populated the required harem for any man of stature. Yet only a handful of the slaves would ever be known to his father; the guardsman, overseer, food-taster, personal servant and concubine.

Not that his father was an evil man. On the contrary, the high priest of Amarana treated slaves properly as was the moral imperative – save for those times that included cruel and wanton punishment as sanctioned by the precepts of the gods.

His father’s slaves were taught to fear their master despite whatever kindness or charity was bestowed upon them. Indeed their lives, though tied to a noble household, could be disposed of without question, or worse yet, they could be sold to the mines, put to work at the pyramids or gifted to the temples.

But one slave was not like any of the others as far as Adam was concerned. Sutan. Sutan, his constant companion since childhood. Sutan, whose scars told the story of Adam’s father’s intolerance of an inappropriate and unlikely friendship.

Sutan walked into the chamber and gestured the other slaves away, “My lord,” he bowed, touching his forehead to the floor as was customary.

Adam acknowledged Sutan’s prostration with a simple nod and waited until the other servants were out of the room to address him with his usual intimacy. “Sutan! Whatever can be done about keeping the overseer out of the business of my wardrobe? He stocks the house with the most hideous clothing!” Adam complained.

“I see you have taken a liking to the black damask. If you do not take care to wear other garments, the people will think that is the only clothing you own,” Sutan said with a smirk.

“It is the only garment that suits me. I should send you with the Overseer on the next trip to the marketplace. Perhaps you can ensure my coin purchases something I would actually find acceptable.”

“It would not be wise to have me overstep my boundaries. You know your father would not trust an ordinary house slave to deal with matters of trade,” Sutan cautioned.

Adam reached out and traced the line of Sutan's jaw, "You are right. I should not expect so much out of you."

Holding Adam's hand against his face, Sutan sighed, "Adam, you know I would do anything within my bounds to please you."

Adam knew Sutan was both grateful for his friendship and fearful because of it. In the privacy provided by the stone walls of his chamber, they were friends, but outside these walls they were master and slave. And there was nothing Adam could do about that. Sutan belonged to his father, as did everyone on the estate. "One day, Sutan... you'll belong to me, and things will be different," Adam promised.

"I am well aware of our present circumstances, but right now you have to make sure that we both make it to that 'one day' with your standing and status intact," Sutan lightened the mood with his laughter.

"I could have my mother suggest sending you with the overseer to improve my wardrobe," Adam pointed out.

"You are serious?" Sutan asked.

"You said yourself if I wear that black damask one more time, I'll be mistaken for a pauper's son," Adam grinned.

"Well, if she suggests it, then perhaps it will pass without notice," Sutan agreed.

"I will be very subtle. I promise," Adam said.

"You? Subtle?" Sutan laughed, "Perhaps when the winds wear the pyramids down to dust."

"Now he mocks me," Adam complained with a pout. "As always you are right," Adam sighed. "And I may jest, but I would not risk your hide in such a manner."

"Let me dress you and adorn your face," Sutan coaxed, "You know how your father frowns upon tardiness."

"I was planning on making an entrance," Adam smiled.

"And which poor camel-tender will be punished for it this time?" Sutan scolded.

"No one. I have asked the Queen to send some of the Praetorian guards to accompany me," Adam grinned.

"Romans? How ingenious," Sutan commented.

"Indeed," Adam still had a grin plastered on his face. "My father cannot touch them and the Queen is rather likely to be amused."

"She gets amused?" Sutan asked, disbelief evident in his voice.



“Yes. Actually she used to be very amused by my antics - but that was a long time ago,” Adam ceded.

“You Egyptians rival Roman womenfolk in making a soldier await your company,” Mark Antony commented.

“And, like your women, we believe our presence is less desirable when we are unadorned. Therefore, we should be properly beautified beforehand,” Adam smiled, arm extended in greeting.

“I must concede that you are far more pleasant to the eyes, although I am not convinced that’s a good thing,” Mark said, clasping Adam’s arm.

“And why is that?” Adam asked.

“It’s rather disconcerting not always knowing whether your loins are stirred by a woman or a man,” Mark replied.

“And does it matter? Romans are known to bed either without discrimination,” Adam pointed out.

“Indeed, we do. But we would rather bed a man knowingly than have desire thrust upon us when we least expect it.” Mark replied.

“You Romans!” Adam exclaimed, “You try to think with your head, the things that should be felt in the heart.”

“Or in the loins,” Mark laughed.

“Or the loins,” Adam joined in laughter. “You do realize we shall be late for the festivities,” he pointed out.

“I’ve always liked making an entrance,” Mark replied, “You?”

“Absolutely!” Adam smiled at the grinning Mark, and for a moment it felt as if they were part of a secret plot; Roman and Egyptian being true friends, instead of enemies under an uneasy truce between the Queen and Caesar.

“You are everything I like about Egypt,” Mark said.

“I thought the Queen held that distinction,” Adam teased. Mark’s affection for her was well known to most at the per-aa.

“Besides her...” Mark clarified.

Adam smiled, “...and you are everything I like about Rome,” he said.

When they arrived at the per-aa, the festivities had indeed begun and they made quite an entrance; Mark Antony accompanied by the young Egyptian.

“Surely you would not have your Queen share her lover with you?” Cleopatra leaned forward and whispered in Adam’s ear as he knelt down to pay homage.

“That would be treason against my Queen, as well as the betrayal of a friend.” Adam had been Cleopatra’s companion as a child. Now that they had grown, he had taken the position of confidant and advisor.

“Yet you would make a handsome couple with the Roman, would you not?” Cleopatra sat back on her throne.

“I cannot imagine the general being willing to submit to my passions. And you know my preference,” Adam smiled.

“Aye,” she nodded. “Perhaps it stirs my loins to think about the two of you in such circumstances.”

Adam raised his eyes to meet hers and caught her barely perceptible raised eyebrow. “Perhaps if the Queen wished it so...” he whispered.

Marc Antony stood at the base of the stairs beneath Cleopatra’s throne and bellowed, “Queen of Egypt, ruler of all the protectorates west of the Jordan, I present you a tribute from Rome.” A double file of Roman soldiers marched in a parade of slaves. The captives were only part of the tribute. Some of them carried hand-carved wooden chests filled with gold and silver, while others carried pails of incense and myrrh. The rest of them walked in empty-handed, chained to one another.

“Is this from Rome or from Caesar?” the Queen asked. She held out her hand, a signal to her entourage that she wished to be helped up. Adam, the closest of her courtiers, extended his arm to her and escorted her down the steps to where Mark Antony and the tribute awaited her inspection.

“Is there another Rome but that of Caesar’s?” Mark replied, answering the Queen’s question with one of his own.

“Surely this is a tribute from Rome to a queen, not a gift from Caesar to me, for what use would I have for such scrawny slaves,” she observed pointedly.

“You speak naught a word of the coin and oils,” Adam prodded his Queen. This offering of slaves was pitiful, for that he had no words of solace to offer.

Mark Antony, charged by Rome with the delivery of the tribute to the Queen, was ready with an answer, “The journey from afar has left them weak. A fortnight’s ration and they will be plump with flesh anew.”

Cleopatra looked over the slaves. “And that one?” She pointed to a tiny boy with locks of hair that looked cut with a jagged edge, the grime so thick on him that the strands of his hair

were plastered together - an odd shade of brown. "What use could I have for a male slave more slender than the fairer sex?"

"Aha! I see that your eyes are drawn to the barbarian," Mark Antony said. "Beneath that layer of dirt lies the potential for a very valuable pleasure slave." Cleopatra looked at the Roman as if he was insane. "If not for her highness," he continued, "then perhaps as a gift to one of her council who indulges in the male form."

"What do you think, Adam?" Cleopatra asked.

"I cannot say, my Queen." Adam was not about to admit he found the boy attractive. "That's far too much dirt to see through," he joked.

"Have them bathed and brought back to the small hall," the Queen commanded the guards before she walked out of her throne room with Adam and Mark Antony.

Adam looked over his shoulder. There was something about that one slave that drew his gaze. When their eyes met, Adam recognized the reason he was intrigued. In those eyes was a fire that burned strong - a pride uncommon in a slave.

His presence was not required at the Queen's harem, but Adam felt an urge to check up on the recently offered tributes to his Queen. Adam spotted the slave that caught his eye during the ceremony almost immediately - fighting off the guards as they dragged him out of the bath.

"Cease!" Adam called out as he approached them.

Everyone, including the slave in question, went still at the sound of his voice. Even though the slave did not recognize the eye of Horus on his wrist, Adam's demeanor, along with his clothing, hinted at his authority.

One of the Egyptian guards prostrated himself and addressed Adam. "My lord, the slaves won't enter the baths."

"Yet, some of them are already in the water," Adam pointed out.

"Aye, my lord. It's the womenfolk who won't bathe with the men," the man explained.

"My eyes see evidence of a manhood." Adam's gaze followed the tapering of the slave's torso as it dipped into his hips and the member that hung in front of him. It was not hard and erect, but even in its shriveled state it was of an impressive size for such a small body.

"He's a troublemaker, this one!" One of the men held the slave down and tugged on his hair. It was a battle of wills. The more the man yanked the barbarian's hair, the more determined the slave seemed to endure the pain without begging for relief.

"You could pull out every strand of his hair and he would still not submit to you," Adam noted.

"Aye, my lord. Insolent bastard!" the guard spat out.

"Release him," Adam commanded, much to the guard's surprise and the slave's, judging from their struck-by-a-camel-hoof daze.

He turned to the slave. "Why do you resist your fate? Surely, you must know it's futile?"

The man said nothing, and Adam's temper flared. "Speak, slave!" he bellowed.

"I just..." the slave cast his eyes to the ground, his fear palpable. *No doubt this slave had learned that one wrong word would result in torment*, Adam thought to himself. His initial upset ebbed.

"I will not harm you for speaking the truth," Adam assured him.

"The women would not bathe with the men. When one of them resisted, she was pulled into the baths until she gulped down enough water to drown. I lived by the rivers of Gaul as a freeman. I know the look of a drowning creature. She would have died," the slave finished.

*By the rivers of Gaul as a freeman*, those words sounded like a man not resigned to his fate, but hopeful of a return to his former existence. Adam wondered how long it would take the desert sands of Egypt to fill that river of hope.

"Get into the water," Adam motioned to the slaves. "All of you. It's in your best interests to be chosen by the Queen or a nobleman. The life of a pleasure slave is longer and filled with comforts not afforded the others."

Clearly behind those fiery eyes was an intelligent mind, because the slave obeyed immediately. But Adam wondered if the Barbarian would thank him or curse him for intervening on his behalf. Most likely the latter. He watched the boy lead the rest of the slaves into the water.

Adam stood by the edge of the bath basin longer than was necessary and watched the water envelop the boy, turning cloudy where it lapped against his filthy skin. He turned to walk away, but stopped behind one of the carved-stone pillars and pretended to busy himself with parchments of royal orders, so he could observe the slaves without bother. Adam watched as the slaves got shepherded out of the water, but his eyes lingered on a particularly lean form, with the mane on his head falling all to one side much like a stallion's.

Adam drew in a sharp breath at the sight before him. Freed from the grime, he was even more striking. The filthy, brown hair was now brighter than the noonday sun. If the Sun and the Moon mated, surely their progeny would be less fair.

From his vantage point behind the pillar, Adam observed the guards bellow obscenities at the slave, and watched as he pulled away from their touch. To Adam, the slave looked like a bewildered animal with its back to a wall, nowhere to run and nowhere to hide.

Adam made sure to walk past one of the guards as he departed. "Handle the tributes with care," he instructed. "The Queen will not be pleased if they are tarnished before she has

availed herself of them," he warned, the threat in his voice very clear.

"Aye, my Lord," came the reply.

Confident that the object of his fascination would come to no harm in his absence, Adam left to prepare himself for the Queen's banquet. He couldn't help but think about the slave though, and note that Ra blessed the boy with more than just heavenly locks and a pretty face. The slave-boy had a noble spirit. Helpless himself, he'd attempted to save another. Perhaps, the eye of Horus watched over the sun-kissed slave and had sent Adam along to intervene with the guards. Perhaps, it was the will of the gods that Adam noticed the slave at all.

Upon finishing our bath, we are no longer troubled by the guards. We're directed to the next room and told to sit. Our beards and bodies are shaved and plucked to perfection by the many slaves working here. Afterward, the attendants trim the nails on our hands and feet, and then buff our calluses to smoothness. All of the others have their hair trimmed. Since they prize my hair for its unusual color, mine remains in the odd style fashioned by my shearing off the sides and the guards trying to salvage the rest.

We are then laid out on tables and oiled until our skin glows and even the peeling skin is softened. The comfort of being taken care of is a pleasure I thought never to have. I revel in these few moments, blocking out all the horrible things that have happened to me recently. I bask in the gentle touch of hands rubbing oil into tight muscles and even more gentle hands on the burned and bruised skin. Then, finally, we are all given short wraps to wear around our waists and soft leather sandals for our feet.

"Kneel before the Queen of Egypt, Cleopatra, lord over the Nile, Egypt and lands beyond," the guard orders when the Queen stops to glance into the chamber in which we slaves are being dressed for the festivities.

*Cleopatra? My salvation!* I won't have to live through more pain and shame at the hands of another man. My elation at this knowledge knows no bounds.

Although I face straight ahead, I catch glimpses of her from my periphery. She's beautiful. Straight black hair with a fall of jewels to highlight it, and the golden torque at her neck only enhances her looks. Her eyes are compelling, outlined in kohl and powdered in blue, yet I try to keep mine averted. *Pleasure slave for Queen Cleopatra? Finally, you decide to grant me some solace in this bitter place, Morrigan!*

I notice as she points to me and says something quietly to the men standing beside her. I have her attention. I need to win her favor! She is my salvation that I never thought to have; salvation from abuse by brutish men of the worst sort.

The slaves who accompany her are well taken care of, and joining their ranks does not frighten me. For the first time in a long while, I look forward to tomorrow.

Once we are properly attired, we are taken to a large room in the per-aa which is filled with people. The mood is raucous. Apparently, the wine has been flowing long before we were summoned.

There are so many beautiful people. The women are all adorned with jewels dangling from their ears, necks and wrists, with more gracing their hair. Their garments look soft and flow down over them like colorful rivers. The men are handsome in their fine linen robes with their oiled skin glistening under the soft light of the lamps. Dozens of slaves on their knees, all of them attractive, line the walls behind them.

We are led before Cleopatra's dais, where she sits upon a gilded and bejeweled throne. We kneel and lower our eyes from the beauty of her fair face, as instructed.

Cleopatra stands and addresses those gathered. "Friends and guests! Welcome! I have been presented with a gift of pleasure slaves, and I wish to share my good fortune with you! They are untrained, and I would like to see my head trainer break in one of the most fair for our entertainment." She lifts her hand, and points me out to one of the men beside her.

I stay on my knees, my mouth open in shock and I begin to shake. A guard behind me nudges me hard and I catch myself with my hands as I fall forward. I try to curl into myself on the floor, overcome with fear and humiliation. *She means to put me on display and let him... Oh, Morrigan! No!*

"Is there something wrong with him? Is he sick?" the Queen asks.

A tight hand grips each of my arms as two guards haul me to my feet. I look up at her from under my lashes, glancing quickly at one of the men behind her. I recognize him as the man from the baths earlier. I quickly avert my eyes from him to hold the Queen's gaze and beg. "Please, my Queen! Please don't make me...." A wave of murmurs and gasps punctuates my words.

"SILENCE, wretch! You are a gift for my pleasure! I wish to see a demonstration of your talents." She turns her attention toward the guards, and says, "Bring him to me."

I cower back from the dais as the guards' hands tighten around my arms, and push me toward the Queen. "No." I say. "No! No! NO!" I shake my head and fight to pull away from the guards, looking for a way to escape. With one hard shove, the guards have me at the Queen's feet.

Something inside me snaps. "Kill me! I cannot go to another man for more pain and humiliation!" I look up to the Queen, prepared to die. "I want to please you, my Queen! But I can't. I...Not with a man!"

"I want him caned!" the Queen snapped.

The two guards drag me over to where chains are lowered from the high ceiling of the chamber. There are leather cuffs hanging at the ends of the chains which the guards quickly

attach to my wrists and I am shoved down on my knees. My wrap is ripped from my hips, and I kneel naked and ashamed before all.

A stool is placed in front of me, and I am pushed down and held with my chest flat against it. In this position my ass is exposed to all the guests. I tremble in fear when a muscular brute of a man enters my much-restricted field of vision. Leather straps run from his sandals and around his legs and more straps crisscross over his torso, but my eyes seem to focus only on the long thick whip coiled at his side and the cane that he is slapping from one palm to the other. His size is intimidating enough, but the way he is outfitted has unhinged me.

He positions himself to the side behind me and says, "Not a sound, slave!" Then the whish of the cane flies through the air, followed by pain. My breath catches from the force of it.

I hear a whish again and I tense up in anticipation of the horrible pain that follows. I barely have time to pant out a breath before I hear it again. I hold my breath as the cane slices into my upper thighs and try to clamp my teeth on the grunt that escapes my mouth.

Hands hold me tight as I struggle to escape this new pain-inflamed world that engulfs me. It is hard to take a breath for the pressure they use to hold me down.

Another whish and another strike. I have lost count as pain rains down on me. I bite my tongue against the screams that build inside me. They become harder to hold back with each blast of the cane upon my skin. Never does it hit a spot that it touched before. The fire of the pain grows intolerable.

When the cane strikes again, I can no longer hold in the loud grunt that escapes my mouth. My face is wet with tears of pain, despair and humiliation. I cannot stop the scream that erupts from my throat with the force of the next blow. I catch my breath and begin to beg, "Please...I'm sorry! I'm so sorry! Please, forgive me!"

The Queen stood, anger written all over her face. "This slave still refuses to obey. He was ordered to silence, and now he chatters like a magpie! Guard, whip him!" She watched intently as the chains were raised and the slave was stretched high by the cuffs around his wrists.

Adam had been the Queen's confidante for many years and knew what she was capable of when angered. He needed to do something to distract her before she destroyed this beautiful boy who had captivated his attention. Leaning forward, Adam touched her shoulder and whispered in her ear, "He looks like he was birthed by the sun, my Queen."

The Queen's expression transformed from rage to mild interest as she turned to her friend. "So he does," she observed. "You seem to be quite taken with the insolent creature."

"I find him fascinating," Adam admitted.

"He is trouble, they tell me. Apparently fact." She watched the grimace on Adam's face as the slave screamed in pain when the whip landed on his bare back.

“Yes, that does seem to be true,” Adam agreed. He should have known the Queen had spies everywhere, including the baths. “I would hate to see something so beautiful, destroyed, trouble or not.”

Adam’s interest in this slave went beyond his normal benevolence, and it apparently did not go unnoticed by the Queen. She considered his request, no doubt on account of their lifelong friendship, yet Adam also understood she had been put in a delicate position.

“Well, a skinny, disrespectful slave is of no use to me. It’s a shame that you have no interest in owning a slave yourself, or I could gift the troublesome creature to you,” she replied in carefully measured words. The boy screamed again and Adam could feel the Queen’s eyes on him as his gaze shifted to the slave. Her eyes were still on him when he looked back.

Adam recognized the opportunity with which he’d been presented. He may have never desired a slave of his own in the past, but this slave was unlike any other. “I would be honored to relieve you of this useless package, my Queen. He is obviously too stubborn to serve at the per-aa and too frail to work on the pyramids. I think that it is time for me to have a pleasure slave of my own,” Adam smiled slyly.

The slave screamed again, but this time Adam kept his eyes locked on the Queen. Adam sensed the moment when the Queen made up her mind. She smiled back at him, her eyes sparkling with the conspiratorial glint that Adam recognized from the days of their childhood pranks.

“My dear Adam. Take this slave as a gift then. I hope he brings you more pleasure than he has given to me.” She stood and signaled the guard that the punishment was over after only three strokes of the whip. She then took Adam’s hand and squeezed it tightly as he smiled at her.

“Thank you, my Queen. You honor me.” Adam couldn’t believe his good fortune. This beautiful slave was his.

Adam watched as two slaves hurried out with a sling of cloth secured between two poles. The chains securing the boy’s wrists lowered and the servants carefully placed him on the stretcher. The Queen turned to Adam and asked, “Would you like a slave to tend him for you while you visit with us?”

“My Queen, you are too good to me. But no, thank you. One slave is enough bother. I will tend to him myself. Thank you for a gift I am sure I will treasure.” Adam bowed from the waist and took his Queen’s hand to kiss her fingers. He then looked into her eyes again and asked, “Would you excuse me, my Queen?”

“Of course, Adam. Go attend to your slave before the bad humors attack his flesh. I will see you tomorrow?”

“Yes, my Queen,” Adam responded. “I look forward to our time together.” Adam turned and stepped down the stairs from the dais.



Adam then turned to the slaves. "Come," he bid them and looked down at his new slave who was laying on his stomach. The boy showed no signs of life until they lifted the apparatus and he let out a loud groan. *At least he is still alive*, he consoled himself.

Adam guided them to his own personal quarters and had his new slave laid out on the bed.

The slave was still naked, and the damage done to him was great. It would be many days before he would be moving around, and longer still before he would be able to sit.

Before Adam was able to look through his cabinets to find some healing balm, there was a scratch at his door. He opened it to find a servant who was holding two jars. "My Queen sends these from the healer. One is the best salve he has, and he warns that while it stings going on, it will cool the fire and ease the pain. He also sends laudanum, to help your slave rest and heal faster. The healer has been put at your disposal by the Queen, if you have need of him."

Adam was surprised at the Queen's generosity. *Did she suspect the depth of interest he had for the slave? Surely not!* He took the jars from the servant and set them on a table beside the bed.

He watched the boy take shallow, painful breaths. Adam would have to lift his head to give him the laudanum and he anticipated that this would waken the boy and cause him even more anguish.

Adam poured some of the potion in a cup and squatted down beside the bed. He lay his free hand over the slave's and watched as his eyes flew open. "You are safe here. I have some laudanum to help you rest and some salve to help you heal. I know it will hurt, but you need to sit up enough to drink some of this."

Adam held the cup down and tilted it so any movement the slave made would be as small as possible. Beads of sweat quickly dampened the boy's forehead and the long fringe of his hair stuck to it. The miserable slave groaned loudly, and did his best to drink what was in the cup, but half of it ended up on the bed. Adam watched his slave slump back down on the bed, panting for breath.

Adam picked up the ointment and bent back down over the slave, "I don't even know your name. Can you tell me what to call you?"

The boy opened his eyes and looked at Adam, but said nothing. Adam sighed and warned, "This is going to burn, but it will ease your pain after the sting goes away."

Adam swiped a daub out with his fingers and carefully applied it to the ruined back. The boy quickly tensed up and began to shake. "Stop," he begged. "Please, stop. Oh, GODS, STOP!"

"You need this salve so you can heal." Adam pulled his hand back and waited until the burn eased and the boy calmed down.

"No," the boy whimpered when Adam reached for him again. "Please, no more."

“I have to do for your own sake,” Adam insisted.

Adam put no more than one gentle swatch of salve on at a time and the boy lay immobile and silent. It seemed to take forever to cover the welts on his back. By the time Adam finished administering the salve, the boy was exhausted and fell into a restless sleep.

Adam covered the boy with a sheet and quietly pulled a chair to the side of the bed. He sat there most of the night, just watching the beauty that now belonged to him. And he didn’t even know his name.

I wake with a pounding in my head and take an inventory of my pain. The intense fire down my back from my shoulders to my knees has become almost tolerable, but the throbbing in my head is not. *How many days have I been here?* I slowly open my eyes to see a man slumped in a chair by the bed asleep. I remember that every time I woke up, this man was by my side. I am not sure what that means.

I believe he is the one who stopped the guards from beating me to a pulp in the baths. I can picture him behind the Queen as she sat on her throne. *Why is he tending to me? Why is anyone tending to me at all? I’m just a slave. My life has no value.*

The pain is so much better now and that tells me it has been days since the beating. I remember fire burning on my back from something this man put on me, but not much more than that. Everything has the haze of a painful dream. He surely drugged me, which explains this endless pain in my head.

I move and groan without meaning to and the man’s eyes snap open to look at me. “How are you feeling?” he asks as he bends down over me.

“Better, I think,” is my response. This is all so confusing to me. “Where am I?”

“You are in my room. You’ve been here for almost a fortnight. I have been giving you laudanum to help you rest, and you haven’t had any since last night. Your back is healing, but you will carry the scars for the rest of your life. Can you tolerate the pain, or do you need more of the drug?”

“My back is better, thank you. It’s the evil spirits trying to beat their way out of my head that woke me,” I tell him. Then I have to ask myself, *what am I doing by talking to this man so freely? It is my mouth that put me here in the first place.*

He chuckles quietly at my comment. “I’ll get you some water. The healer said that when the drug wears off, it would cause you pain. He also claims that drinking water will help.”

I watch as the man walks to the door and sticks his head out to talk to someone. When he comes back, I notice the dark circles under his eyes, and wonder again why is he the one that is taking care of me.

“Fresh water will be here soon.” He kneels beside the bed with his face at my level and asks, “Now that you are awake, can you tell me your name?”

“It is Tommy. Why am I in your room?” I ask, unable to control my mouth at all.

“Tommy. A name as beautiful as you. I’m Adam. You are a gift from the Queen. I could not stand to see you beaten any more and I convinced the Queen to stop the torture. I was fortunate that she did so. She can be single-minded when it comes to punishing slaves. And after all that, you were granted as a gift to me from the Queen. You are mine now, Tommy”

Those words send a shiver down my back, and I’m not sure if it’s fear or gratitude. I keep my teeth clamped on my tongue so I don’t say the wrong thing, and I wait to find out what is expected of me. The throbbing in my head increases with my worry, when a knock at the door pulls his eyes away from me at last.

I watch him as he walks away. He is taller than I, but I already knew that. He is unbent from the weight of physical labor and has a beauty to him that is rare in most men. If he were a woman, I would call him beautiful.

Two servants bring in an ewer and a platter of fruit. My master pours me a glass of clear, cold water and helps to lift my head high enough to drink. I think it is the most enjoyable thing I have ever tasted. I look at my new master and hope he will pour me more, but he sets the glass aside.

“I’m sure you want more, but I don’t want you to get sick from drinking too much at once,” he tells me. “I’ve had the servants bring some fruit. You can eat some of that to fill the empty spot that used to be your stomach. You were too thin before this. We need to get some food into you.” He looks at me a moment longer, and asks, “Would you like to try to get out of bed? It might be easier to eat.”

I think of the pain I’m in and know that I’m going to have to get up eventually. I know I must have had to relieve myself in the last week, but I don’t remember doing it. Now that it’s on my mind, I need to go again, but the last thing I want to do is get out of this bed. I sigh quietly and do what I know I must. “Yes. Please.”

I struggle to the edge of the bed; my unused muscles are very little help. When I feel my new master gently helping me, it scares me and I wonder why he is being so kind. I tense up and look at him in confusion, which he seems to ignore as he continues to assist me out of bed.

When I stand everything starts to go black. He grabs me before I fall and lowers me to the floor on my hands and knees. While the position is painful, the blackness ebbs away from my eyes, and I see his face close to mine as he holds me up. “Are you alright?” he asks me, worry written all over his face.

I remind myself that this man owns me. “Yes. I’m sorry, master,” I tell him.

“Do you want to try it again, or return to bed?” he asks me.

This is not at all what I expect from a master. So far, all the free men and women here have made it clear that I am only a slave and worth nothing. I worry that this kindness is a ruse to get me to drop my guard. I am sure to be hurt worse later. But why the rings under his eyes then?

I finally find my voice and answer his question. "Please. I would like to try it again, master. I have need to empty my water."

He chuckles and reaches under the bed for the chamber pot. He sets it under me to catch my water and says, "You can empty your water here. It will probably be easier than trying to stand to do it."

This is awkward. I have a man, my master, with his hands under my chest to hold me up, and he tells me it's alright to release my water.

Of course, now, I can't let it flow to save my life. We stay in this position for many, many heartbeats with him doing nothing more than supporting me. Finally, the water begins to flow, and my release is almost as satisfying as shooting my milk. When I am finished, I quietly say, "Oh, goddess. What a relief."

He chuckles and grabs my dick to shake off the last drops. I tense up when his hand touches me, but he doesn't seem to be expecting anything. I fear I know his plans for me, and I cannot completely relax around him.

"Are you ready to try it again?" he asks me. I nod and he helps me to my feet slowly. "I swear, you are nothing more than skin and bones. We have got to put some meat back on you, Tommy."

Somehow, I feel like he is being too familiar with me when he calls me by my name, but there is nothing I can do about that. I belong to him now. He seems to be kind, and I hope my assessment of him doesn't change. He protected me in the baths and shortened my whipping, so I will probably have to repay him for those things. I worry about the method of payment this man will expect. *Oh, Morrigan, but I miss my freedom.*

I continue to heal a little more each day. The man I must now call master continues to put balm on my back and legs every morning and night. Whatever potion he uses in that balm heals my body, but I feel my mind slipping into depravity. It has to be the medicine. It cannot be me.

My eyes constantly seek out and observe my perplexing owner whenever they can do so without him noticing. He always seems to have an eye on me, so escaping his notice is not easy. Now that the dark lines under his eyes are gone, his face is rather striking. And those eyes, they lie. They must lie, because they are the eyes of a kind man and a master is never a kind man.

I am sitting on the bed, my hair still wet from the baths, when Adam returns from a visit with the Queen. He hasn't asked that I accompany him when he attends to his duties at the per-aa

and I am so grateful. I never want to lay eyes upon the Queen or her guards again. Their invasion of my sleep is more than enough.

Adam picks up the jar of salve and raises his brows. He doesn't have to say a thing because I know by now that there is no arguing with him when it comes to this. My earlier attempts to treat my almost-healed wounds were rebuffed and this is one thing he will not cede to me.

I nod and turn my back to him as I drop my robes and make myself comfortable on the bed. My master settles between my legs to administer the balm. His hands are gentle as they rub the salve into the scars on my back. But there is something about the way his hands feel as they massage me that makes my traitorous mind wander to other things that those hands could do to me.

I hate that I crave his touch. But those hands... his hands... they stir an unclean desire in me. The last week of this tender treatment has tormented me. I can barely stop myself from grinding into the blankets to seek the friction my erection so wants. Everything I believe, everything I know, tells me this is an abomination. I am a slave and my **body** belongs to him, but not my soul does not.

I think back to my village and the men that were found dallying with each other. It was an ugly death for them. I am no longer in my village, but the way his hands make me feel, the things his eyes tell me he wants to do, the things I want him to... no, I want nothing. It must be the drugs. I cannot want this.

When he finishes with my back and his hands slide up my thighs, my body responds by pushing back against his thumbs when they slide between my cheeks. That snaps my wandering thoughts back to the present. I'm filled with shame at my response and I begin to panic at what this means. My heart beats faster and I try to hold myself still under his hands. He continues to rub the ointment up and down over my legs and thighs, each time his thumbs slide between my cheeks and over my hole. My dick, having been ignored for so long, is taking too great an interest in this turn of events.

"You are so beautiful," my master moans out.

My heart is stuck in my throat when I realize where this is going to end. I already know what happens when I fight and I have little faith in the kindness he has shown me. My beliefs are not strong enough for me to choose the whip again, not when the drugs have muddled my mind so much that I desire this man. Biting down my moans, I lay quietly under his hands and I submit to him.

Afterward, I am filled with confusion and shame for the way I enjoyed it.

## Chapter 2

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Adam walked into his chamber at the per-aa, strangely nervous. He knew exactly why his heart skipped a beat as he neared the door. He'd left his slave at first light to attend to his duties as was customary. He left despite wanting to stay. He wanted to wrap his arms around Tommy's tiny frame and promise nothing bad would ever come to him again. He wanted to lay there and cuddle. With a slave. And so, he left.

Now? Now Tommy would not even look him in the eye.

Adam prepared the jar of salve, but Tommy shook his head. "I'm fine. I don't need that any more."

"I'll only..." Adam started, but stopped short because Tommy pulled away from his touch. Adam was confused by this change of heart. Last night, Tommy had been willing. He sat the jar of salve down on the table.

"At least share a meal with me," Adam offered. "I will have you put on some more weight before we depart for my family's villa."

They shared that meal in an awkward silence that cut sharper than a soldier's blade. Adam worried that he'd done something wrong. The per-aa was not the place to sort these things out, he counselled himself. Tommy was his, and he could be patient. After their meal, he left without another word.

It was late and they were tired when Adam led Tommy through the courtyard of his father's house. Tommy walked a few steps behind him as he did at the per-aa. Once inside Adam's bedchamber, Tommy knelt before Adam as he had been taught. Adam pulled him to his feet. "Inside these four walls, we shall not be master and slave."

"What shall we be then?" Tommy stared at him with dead eyes.

"Lovers, friends, equals," Adam listed some options.

"If you wish," Tommy responded in a bland voice.

"I do," Adam assured him.

Tommy was not merely a slave to Adam. While his beauty was rare and unusual, it was the steel inside Tommy that drew Adam to him like a magnet. Tommy had wormed his way into Adam's heart and awakened his soul. But the fire that once burned in Tommy's eyes was extinguished and somehow, that light meant everything to Adam. He hated to see Tommy so broken. He hoped that he would be able to relight that fire, and with time, perhaps even light a flame in Tommy's heart.

"Take off your robes and lie with me," Adam beseeched. "I desire the warmth of your flesh against mine as we sleep." Adam wanted to hold Tommy close and protect him. More than that, he wanted Tommy to desire him in return.

"If we are equals in your chambers, then I must tell you that I will never be a willing lover. I will endure it, because I am your slave, but it will not be by choice," Tommy said with quiet conviction.

"But, at the per-aa---?" Adam asked. Tommy's silent response betrayed a painful reality and that realization hit Adam hard. Tommy had granted Adam the submission of a slave, never the consent of a man.

Maybe Tommy would never love him, but they would have to come to some kind of understanding because he now owned Tommy. Adam sighed and pulled him close and cuddled against his back. He felt Tommy stiffen in his arms when his erection brushed against him. "I won't ask anything of you tonight." Adam reassured him, even though every part of him ached to take Tommy in spite of this promise.

After many long moments, Tommy finally relaxed and asked, "You said 'inside these four walls.' Are we equals only in your quarters or the whole estate?"

"Just my quarters and when we are alone," Adam explained. "I can't have the extent of my leniency become common knowledge outside these walls. That means in my father's presence as well."

"Has he no complaints that his son is a lover of men?" Tommy asked.

Adam sighed again. "He has my brother to bear him an heir, besides, I can hardly choose to be otherwise."

"Yet, you would have me go against my nature?" Tommy asked.

"No, Tommy, I would not. I will have you willing, or not at all." He hummed his words against Tommy's ear. "I know you enjoyed it the last time."

"That's not fair," Tommy argued.

"I promise not to take you against your will, but I won't promise to always be fair," Adam licked around the outside of Tommy's ear as his finger traced a path down Tommy's arm.

"What is this mark on your arm?" Tommy changed the subject.

Adam smiled. "It's called the eye of Horus. It protects me and those close to me," he explained and twisted his arm to give Tommy a good view of it.

"Does it show status?" Tommy asked. "I've noticed that other Egyptians bow to you when they notice the marking."

Adam smiled again, Tommy was very perceptive. "Yes. Only those of high rank are marked." He then leaned down over Tommy and kissed a path to his mouth.

When Adam licked his bottom lip, Tommy murmured in protest. "I thought you weren't going to ask anything of me unless I was willing."

"I am only kissing you, Tommy. I never said I wouldn't try to pique your interest," Adam replied before his tongue delved into Tommy's mouth, chasing after his sweet taste.

They kissed until they were both panting and breathless when Tommy begged, "Please, stop. No more, please."

From the erection that pressed against him, Adam knew Tommy was as excited as he was, so Adam hated hearing those words. But because he gave his promise, he lay back down and pulled Tommy against his chest. It was a long time before either of them went to sleep.

They slept curled up together every night, and in the morning Adam would wake before Tommy. He'd slip out from under the covers and seek out some privacy to release his pent-up seed. Although Tommy would kiss him passionately each day, he always stopped Adam from going any further.

Adam kept true to his word. He never asked Tommy to service him in the manner befitting the title of pleasure slave. Yet, Tommy brought him pleasure in other ways. Tommy loved to play the lute and to his father's chagrin, the house was often filled with music. He played so beautifully, it made Adam want to sing.

Although Tommy still remained a mystery to him, Adam wanted Tommy enough to be patient. He would wait a lifetime to have Tommy wanton and willing. But Adam was not above using all his wiles or his wealth to overcome Tommy's reluctance. He'd show Tommy that life as his consort would be one of luxury, even for a slave.

When the caravan from Damascus was in Kenet, Adam took Tommy to the marketplace. He wanted to impress him with all that Egypt had to offer. Adam attempted to buy Tommy something at every stall, but Tommy rebuffed all of his offers.

When Adam offered him six arm-lengths of linen for a new tunic, Tommy shook his head. "I have no desire for elaborate clothing, master. I have all I need." Tommy said.

They came across a jewelry stand. "These are beautiful," Adam picked up one of the necklaces. It was made of gold and its design was so intricate it looked almost too delicate to



handle. "This will look exquisite against your pale skin. It would capture the color of your fair locks. Would you not wish to own such a precious bauble?" he gushed.

"What use would a slave have for such things?" Tommy asked demurely. "Besides, a slave owns nothing," he added.

"I'm buying it," Adam announced.

Tommy looked away, a red stain flooding his pale cheeks.

"What is it?" Adam asked.

"Now I'll be even more indebted to you," Tommy said in a quiet voice only Adam could hear.

"Tommy, I don't..." Adam started to explain and stopped. He'd never even considered that Tommy was reluctant to accept his gifts for fear of what might be asked of him in return. "I would not..."

Adam could not help feeling like a jilted suitor yet again, especially because Tommy clearly saw his efforts for what they were - an attempt to win his affections. "I'll buy the necklace for myself then," Adam smiled at Tommy, knowing he would have to earn Tommy's trust. "You can wear it when we are alone," he added with a friendly grin to let Tommy know he'd not taken offense.

The corners of Tommy's lips curled into a hesitant smile. "If it pleases you, master," Tommy said, the last word uttered rather loudly for the stand keeper's benefit.

Although Tommy had to call him 'master' in public, Adam didn't really care for it. But, the shy smile - he'd keep the smile. Tommy's smiles were so rare that each one felt like a gift from the gods and Adam wanted more. He bought the necklace and they continued their walk through the market.

"There's a sweet stand," Adam beamed.

"I don't really like sweets," Tommy commented.

"But these are from the sugarcane plantations in Persia," Adam protested, even though he knew it was futile. That description meant nothing to Tommy. "You have to try it," he insisted. "And we'll have to buy some for Sutan. Did you know he was from Persia?"

"No, I didn't," Tommy replied with a smile.

Another smile! Adam was pleased.

"Look! They have musical instruments at the next stand! Let me buy you a new lute! Which one do you like?" Adam asked, pointing to the line of polished wooden lutes.

"What's wrong with the one I play for you every day?" Tommy questioned, seemingly appalled.

“That one is old. I’d not seen ten harvests when my mother bought it for me,” Adam said.

“The old lute has such a mellow tone. I had one like it before...” Tommy stopped, but Adam knew what he’d meant to say. “I don’t want a new one,” Tommy murmured.

“Then I shall buy myself a new one and give you the old one,” Adam explained.

“Really?” Tommy looked up at him, eyes wide with surprise and excitement, and Adam felt beaten at his own scheme. He’d intended to seduce Tommy with the finer things a nobleman could afford, and instead it was Tommy that speared his heart with an unassuming, earnest outburst of joy.

“Yes, Tommy, you can have my old lute,” Adam said, wanting to kiss him and hold him close.

“Even though it was a gift from your mother?” Tommy asked him.

“Yes. I’d only give it to someone who would value it,” Adam assured him.

“I will treasure it,” Tommy said. And there it was, another smile.

Tommy smiled a lot more after that, and Adam found himself treasuring each one. And with that realization, the purpose of the trip to the market changed. By the end of the afternoon, Adam understood that Tommy was not interested in anything he could buy with gold. It was the little things that made him smile.

Weary after their trip to the market, they stretched out on cushions in Adam’s chambers and compared lutes. Of course, the old one sounded better.

“It’s timbre has warmed with age,” Adam excused.

“I’m just a better musician,” Tommy joked and flashed him a huge bright smile.

Adam started the day wanting to give Tommy a gift, instead it was Tommy who gave him a gift. A priceless one at that. His smile.

It was the time of the deluge of the Nile during the third akhet when the slaves started to take ill with the flux. It began with just two water-bearers, but Adam’s plea to have the healer attend to them fell on his father’s deaf ears.

“Just keep the other slaves away from them and let the gods decide their fate,” his father ordered.

The two slaves soon became two dozen. Adam’s father readied the household for departure with a few of his healthy slaves and still did not summon the healer.

“Father, please?” Adam begged.

His father shook his head. “And risk the life of a healer for some slaves?”

“So you would leave two dozen slaves to their death?” Adam asked.

“I leave them all to their fate. No slave that has been in contact with the water-bearers shall accompany us.”

“That’s most of them!” Adam exclaimed.

“Most of the domestic slaves that attend the baths, yes,” his father nodded.

Adam felt a tightening in his chest because that included Sutan and Tommy. “They have not all taken ill,” he argued.

“And they may not take ill at all. Their fate lays with the gods now.”

Once his father made up his mind, argument was futile, yet Adam was not easily deterred.

Adam told his father that he would spend the duration of the flux epidemic at the palace. He had duties there and had no reason to go to the temple with the family. After the family caravan departed, Adam went to visit a local healer. It turned out that his father was not the only man that placed no value on slaves. The healer would not return with him, even at Adam’s behest.

“Is there a concoction you can brew?” Adam asked.

The healer nodded.

“Very well then. Make me a large batch of it and I will take it to them myself.”

“What madness is it that possesses you? Surely you are not so light of purse that a few dozen slaves are irreplaceable.”

“Do not concern yourself with matters of my estate. I will pay you handsomely for what medicine you provide,” Adam offered.

The healer looked askance at Adam for a few moments before relenting to the promise of heavier coffers. “Very well,” he agreed.

Tommy ran out to greet Adam when he returned to the house. “Why have you returned? You know it is not safe here.” Tommy embraced him quickly, before pulling away embarrassed, “I thought that you’d abandoned us.”

“I’m here to see that no one dies. Has the flux claimed anyone yet?” Adam asked when he noticed Tommy’s worry-strained eyes.

Tommy shook his head. “No, but Sutan has taken ill,” he informed Adam.

Without a word, Adam grabbed the pouch with the potions and headed for the slave quarters.

“You can’t go in there!” Tommy called after him, but Adam ignored him.

The stench inside the room burned his nostrils, and the air was still and stale. Adam’s first instinct was to open the shutters, but he knew they were closed to keep the disease in. He found Sutan curled up into a ball, clutching his belly and writhing in pain.

“Sutan!” Adam ran to his friend.

Sutan looked up then, eyes wide with surprise and a smile burrowing through his pain. “You are a fool to be here!”

“I brought some medicine,” Adam explained and reached into the pouch that hung at his side for the potion vials.

“I fear we are more in need of clean water, clean air, clean bedding and an empty shit bowl than some potion,” Sutan’s smile was sad. “It was foolish of you to come, but your presence warms my heart.”

Adam looked around. Most of the other slaves looked to be in worse condition than Sutan. Two of them looked very close to death, leaving little doubt they had been the first to have taken ill. The pail at the end of the room overflowed with excrement and the sick were laying on sheets soiled with more of the same bloody shit.

“Who tends to the sick?” Adam asked.

“The other slaves do well to steer clear of this place until the wrath of the gods is appeased,” Sutan replied.

“And you?” Adam asked.

“I’ve taken ill for my efforts and you should leave before you do, too!”

Adam placed the medicine pouch by the bed and got up. “I’ll be right back. The gods will have to be content without your life, old friend.”

Adam walked out of the slave quarters to a gathered crowd of the remaining household slaves. “Keep your distance. I’ve been inside with the sick,” he bid them.

“Why did you come back, master?” one of the slaves asked.

“To bring medicine for the sick,” Adam replied. His words were greeted by a rush of murmurs and hushed whispers. Adam raised his hand to silence them. “The sick need more than just medicine. They need clean air to breathe, fresh water to drink, and food to eat,” Adam announced.

“Tell us what to do,” Tommy said, his voice filled with worry.

“Gather food from the pantry and retire to my chambers. Close the shutters and stay inside. You should be safe there when we release the bad air from the sick. Those who are willing can gather in the kitchen. I shall not order anyone to tend to the sick with me, but I ask that you boil pails of water and bring it to the door every hour.”

“Tend to the sick with you?” Tommy asked quietly, and Adam noted the surprise was laced with reverence. Not that he deserved it, Adam had not planned on tending to the sick until he was greeted with news that Sutan was stricken. Now, he had no choice in the matter.

“We must cleanse the air quickly. Go and prepare everything as I have asked!” Adam commanded. His voice gave purpose to the slaves and they scrambled to fulfill his requests. It seemed that once their hands were busy, their minds were not so bogged down with impending doom. There was something fresh in the air, and it felt like hope.

They carried barrels of grain into Adam’s chambers. “Take several large stones to my bath, so the women can cook while you are locked up,” Adam called out to Tommy.

“But, the walls will be destroyed by soot and ash,” Tommy argued.

“Marble can be replaced, Sutan’s life cannot.”

Tommy didn’t argue with that and the other men followed his lead.

When everything was readied and most of the slaves were garrisoned in Adam’s chambers, Adam called out to Tommy. “I want you to stay with the others,” he said.

“Why?” Tommy asked, surprised.

“I need you to stay safe,” Adam replied.

“I can help you take care of the sick. Surely, my life is not of greater value than yours,” Tommy protested.

“To me, it is,” Adam murmured under his breath, but he did not stop Tommy from joining him and the other slaves that gathered by the supplies for the sick.

“I can manage with help from just one of you. The rest of you can keep us stocked with supplies,” Adam instructed. He grabbed four empty pails, filled them with the linens off the table and started toward the slave quarters that held the sick. He didn’t look back to see which of the men was brave enough to accompany him. He preferred that the slaves decided of their own accord. If none came, he would tend to the sick by himself.

He turned when the door opened again and saw Tommy as he entered the room carrying two pails filled with fresh water.

His eyes admonished Tommy, but before he could utter a word, Tommy spoke. “Can you save them?”

“I can try.” Adam was not naive.

“Then, I will try with you,” Tommy stated simply. His words caused a tightening in Adam’s chest because they were uttered in a manner Tommy never used before. They were uttered with admiration.

The first thing Adam did was open all the shutters. It released some of the stench, enough of it that they could breathe without choking. Then Adam went straight to Sutan.

“I feel better already,” Sutan groaned out, obviously still in a lot of pain. “And the others?” Even sick, Sutan was the sort to worry. It was one of the traits that endeared him to Adam.

“Safe in my chambers,” Adam replied.

“You are a good man, Adam,” Sutan murmured, clearly exhausted by the effort of speaking.

“Shhh...” Adam quieted Sutan with a hand on his shoulder. “Rest. You need your strength to get better.”

Adam filled a cup with water and put a few drops of the tonic from the healer into it. He held the cup to Sutan’s lips. “Just take a sip,” Adam instructed.

When Sutan pulled away, too tired to drink anymore Adam passed the cup to Tommy. “Give some to the others and feed them some dates,” he bid Tommy.

While Tommy did so, Adam busied himself emptying the shit bowls and changing out linens.

“These men are too sick to drink or eat,” Tommy called out when he reached the sickest of them.

Adam wiped his hands clean and walked over to where Tommy hovered over one of the slaves. He touched the man’s skin and found the man burned with fever.

“Wet some linen for me. Quickly!” Tommy obeyed without question.

Adam started an incantation to dispel the evil spirits much like a shaman would when summoned to attend nobles that take ill. When Tommy returned with the wet linen, Adam folded it into a strip and placed it on the man’s forehead to break the fever. He did the same for the others before turning to Tommy. “These men need to be fed. They will not last the night if they do not recover some strength.”

“They can’t hold down what little I can force into their mouths,” Tommy informed him, his voice heavy with concern.

Adam considered their options and settled on a solution. He bid Tommy to have one of the slaves bring some honey.

“Honey for a slave?” Tommy asked in disbelief. “Your father would never allow it.”

“My father is not here, is he?” Adam muttered.

Tommy left without another word. When he returned a short while later, he carried a jar of honeycomb soaked in the coveted golden sap.

“Break off pieces of the honeycomb and place it on their tongues. They don’t even have to swallow it,” Adam explained.

It was hard work caring for the two dozen ill by themselves and by nightfall Adam was completely exhausted. It was Tommy who demanded that he take a break. “It serves no purpose if you take ill as well,” he said to Adam.

“Very well, I’ll take the pallet by Sutan’s,” Adam acquiesced. He felt Tommy’s hand on his arm before he saw Tommy shake his head. “You have been breathing diseased air all day. You need some reprieve in your sleep. Outside.” Tommy left little room for argument, and Adam followed him out into the night.

Two sacks were laid out in the yard, not very far from the slave quarters. “I knew you’d prefer to remain close to Sutan,” Tommy replied when Adam’s eyes widened in question.

The night breeze was warm enough that a sack sufficed to lay under the open sky. Adam collapsed onto the sack and rolled over so he was on his back.

“The gods mock us by masking misery and illness with such a beautiful night, do they not?” Adam asked.

“I have little use for the gods anymore. I called on them in vain one too many times,” Tommy replied.

They stared at the sky in silence for a bit before Tommy spoke. “So many things are different between my home and Egypt, but the sky stays the same.”

Adam nodded. “The stars bear witness wherever we are.”

“I was born under stars like these,” Tommy murmured.

Adam smiled. That was the first thing Tommy had shared about himself unbidden. It warmed his heart to hear it. “I was born under different stars, those of the water-bearer.”

Tommy seemed content to let the sounds of the night entertain them, until finally sleep wrapped its arms around him. Adam followed suit.

It was another fortnight before the slaves were fully recovered. Adam ordered a ram sacrificed to thank the gods for allowing death to pass over them without claiming any lives.

“Tonight we feast, but tomorrow we have to prepare the household for my father’s return,” Adam said to them. Adam knew they understood his meaning. His chambers needed to be put back to normal, and cleared of all evidence that it had served as a make-shift quarters for the slaves. They also had to go back to their normal roles of master and slave.

Adam felt Sutan wrap an arm around him. “You! Risking your own life to tend to sick slaves,” Sutan pulled Adam into a very public, very affectionate, hug.

“Sutan,” Adam whispered, “some of the slaves could be spies for my father.” It was one thing for him to deal with his father’s wrath for returning to the villa; it was quite another for Sutan to risk a flogging to hug him.

“And every last one of them is indebted to you,” Sutan whispered back.

They all sat at the table together, Adam and Tommy, the heroes of the ordeal, with the other slaves. They broke bread together, not as master and slaves, but as celebrants of a feast. For the first time since he could remember, Adam found himself laughing, really laughing and he wished things could be different. He watched Tommy with a tender gaze and Adam wished so many things could be different. But, they were not.

Many nights after Adam falls asleep, I stay awake to watch him. When he sleeps, the years fall from him and there is a sweetness and innocence about him that isn’t there during his wakeful hours. I find myself holding back my hand from running a finger over the soft lines of his face.

I often think about the epidemic. Somehow, that terrible time nursing others back to health is one I wouldn’t trade for anything. I know now that his kindness is not a façade, and the man Adam has shown himself to be is one that I admire and respect.

I love him as I would a brother, except one does not think lurid thoughts about a brother.

For a moment, I wonder what would happen if I reach for him. It would be so easy to pursue what my body, and now my heart, desires. But men from Gaul do not pursue such forbidden pleasures of the flesh. So every night, I stop myself from doing more than just watching.

I wake and realize I’m alone in the room. Adam must have left to take his morning bath. He seems to enjoy them. I wonder if all Egyptians bathe as often as he does. He always smells good when I see him afterward, although he rarely comes straight back to this room. This may be the only privacy I get to relieve my frustrations for awhile.

Every morning, I wake up hard and it never seems to completely go away anymore. Between Adam’s kisses and my memories of the pleasure he’s given me, my dick is always eager to stand. I would never have believed I could be eager for a man to force himself upon me, but how else can I have him and not be cursed by my goddess.

I push the covers down and squeeze myself as I quietly moan at my own touch. I close my eyes and lick my palm until it is covered with spit. I pull back on the foreskin as I stroke myself. I slide my thumb over the beads of moisture pooling at the head of my cock and hitch my hips at the sensation. As I slide my hand over my erection, I remember just how good it felt when Adam’s mouth was wrapped around it. I think of Adam’s eyes, intense and focused on mine as his sinful mouth swallowed me whole.



My other hand teases my hole and I relive the feel of Adam's tongue as it licked its way past muscles held tight. I remember the thrill of his fingers as they found their way to that magic spot hidden deep inside me.

I lose myself in the memories as I touch all the sensitive parts on my body. I roll my balls in my palm and pinch my nipples, all while I fist my cock up and down. I pant and moan with desire for the man that I've come to love. The man with the eye of his god on his wrist; my master.

The heat at the base of my spine builds, but I hold myself back from the brink. I can almost hear his voice whispering in my ear. "*Come for me. Now, Tommy.*" My groan fills the room as I cum. Warm wet ribbons of seed stripe my belly and chest as I imagine Adam buried deep inside me.

Completely spent, I hold my dick as it shrinks into my fist. I need to clean up the evidence before Adam returns. Slowly, I open my eyes and look around the room just to be sure I'm still alone. Nothing looks out of place, until I notice the door is slightly ajar. I could have sworn it was shut.

Adam was known to be extravagant in one regard - his bath. The first thing that he did after the epidemic ended was to renovate his private bathing chamber with stones from the quarry at Antolia. But this indulgence served another purpose.

His real need for this privacy was to take care of his constant erection. Time hadn't dulled his lust for Tommy, or his love for him. He ached with desire almost constantly, and of course, their kissing sessions only added to his problem. Until he could convince Tommy to come to him willingly, this was his only remedy.

He had barely left the room when he heard a moan from his sleeping chamber. The sound reminded him of those long-ago nights when Tommy, battered and bruised from his beating at the Per-aa, cried out in his sleep every time he moved, in spite of the laudanum.

Remembering those nights, Adam opened the door quietly to see if Tommy was having a nightmare or if he was hurt. The view caused Adam to draw in a sharp breath. Tommy was hard.

He watched as Tommy slicked his palm with spit, and tugged the foreskin off his cock, exposing a cock head glistening with pre-cum.

Adam watched as Tommy's free hand slid down to tease his hole. He bit down on his lips to stifle a groan when he saw Tommy's finger slip past the tight ring. Just when Adam felt like he would come undone from the sight before him, Tommy slipped his finger out and pulled his hand back up to his chest.

He ran the index finger of his free hand around his right nipple in circles, inching closer with every circle to the center. When Tommy finally grasped his nipple between two fingers, he moaned and shuddered, while Adam cupped his throbbing self through his robe. *The gods*

*must be crazy to have created a man so beautiful in the throes of passion*, Adam thought to himself.

Adam found himself grinding against the door-frame looking for friction. He wanted to be the one making Tommy moan like that and he stifled another groan when Tommy arched his back off the bed.

Tommy increased the pace of his strokes until he moaned loudly and trembled as his hands wrapped around his cock. Tommy groaned as shudders wracked his body and he came. Adam watched as pearly drops flew through the air and landed against Tommy's chest. He watched until it slowed to a dribble that ran over Tommy's fingers, still clenched around his cock.

Adam quietly backed out of the room before Tommy's gasped breaths evened out.

Adam was certain the gods had cursed him. Why else would he become besotted with a man whose loins he could not stir, much less ever lay claim to his heart. Despite the many nights they'd kissed and fallen asleep naked in each other's arms, Tommy had never been moved to go any further.

Adam returned to the bath and allowed the warm water to soothe him, but his thoughts were filled with Tommy. Adam was stuck on the memory of how Tommy's mouth hung open when he pleased himself. Adam shut his eyes, reached under the water and wrapped his hand around his cock. *By the gods, I want him. I want to feel him quiver around my shaft again. I want to hear him moan when I plunge into him. I want him to beg. I want him to want me.* Adam groaned his frustration as he neared his own release. "Tommy....," he moaned as he jerked himself faster. "Tommy!" he called out when he came.

Still breathless, Adam opened his eyes. But the image of Tommy did not disappear. It was permanently engraved upon his heart.

"Your father requests your company at the slave auction today," Sutan said when he walked into Adam's chambers.

"He knows I hate such things," Adam groaned.

"Which is precisely why he requests your presence," Sutan smiled sadly.

"I just know he will pressure me into acquiring another pleasure slave," Adam lamented.

"It's unacceptable to give one slave so much of your attention," Sutan mimicked the High Priest, Adam's father.

Adam laughed. "Or he'll try to appeal to my nobility. Son, why do you burden the poor slave so?"

Sutan rapped his fingers against his cheeks for a moment. "He might be right. Your cock is a whole lot of attention to bear."

Adam doubled over in laughter.

“Although,” Sutan continued, “you have yet to burden the sun-child with it.”

Adam sprang back upright, “How...?” Adam started to ask.

“It’s me, Adam,” Sutan interrupted his question. “I know you.”

“How?” Adam asked again.

“Not even a blind man would miss the sexual tension between the two of you,” Sutan sighed.

“My father?” Adam asked in horror.

“He’s the exception,” Sutan calmed him.

“He can’t take Tommy from me,” Adam said chewing nervously on his lip.

“Tommy is your property. Your father cannot sell him,” Sutan agreed.

“But, he can still make Tommy’s life miserable,” Adam pointed out.

“Yes, but only if you give him cause,” Sutan replied.

“He’ll find cause,” Adam remarked, feeling defeated.

“Not if you purchase another pleasure-slave today,” Sutan suggested and Adam groaned.

“Hear me out,” Sutan pleaded. “One of the men brought to Egypt along with Tommy will be auctioned away today. He has a reputation as a pleaser-of-men and perhaps your pet will be grateful to be reunited with a familiar face.”

“This may be the only way to deflect my father’s attention from Tommy.”

“Then for his sake and yours, you know what you have to do,” Sutan pointed out.

“Thank you, Sutan,” Adam smiled. “You are priceless.”

“Remember that when your father puts me up for sale,” Sutan said with a wink.

Adam’s willingness to purchase a slave surprised his father so much that the High Priest offered to provide the coin.

Adam was sure that Tommy would be delighted to see a familiar face. The look of utter confusion and anger that flashed across his face shocked Adam.

“I acquired Brad today at the slave auction. I believe you are acquainted. Does it not please you?” Adam asked.

“Are you pleased?” Tommy asked, his face a pained mask that Adam could not decipher.

“I am,” Adam nodded. “And so is my father.”

“That’s all that matters,” Tommy replied. Tommy’s demeanor changed in an instant, his face was suddenly blank as he approached Brad with his hand out to clasp arms.

“Well met, Brad. I’m glad you’ve found a good home,” he said in a voice void of emotion.

“Tommy! Well met! It’s good to see you again!” Brad told him as he pulled him into a one armed hug.

Adam was surprised when Tommy pulled away from the contact. *Why was Tommy acting like this?* Adam was so sure that Tommy would be grateful to see a familiar face.

He paused to consider Tommy’s motives before he focused on his new slave. “Within these chambers, we are all equal. Not master and slaves, just friends. You’ve met my father, so you know that won’t be tolerated outside the privacy of these four walls,” Adam told him.

“I’ve been blessed to find such a kindhearted master. It will be a pleasure to serve you,” Brad said, his double meaning obvious. Tommy’s face reddened with what looked like rage. *What is going on with Tommy?*

“Tommy, take Brad to the bath and let him get cleaned up,” Adam instructed. “I had Sutan see that it was filled with warm water. I’m sure you two have things to catch up on. ”

“Will you not be joining us master?” Brad asked. “Perhaps we could both pleasure you.”

Adam smiled. He also noticed the sharp look from Tommy. *Disgust? Anger? Jealousy? If only that were possible!* “I’m tired, Brad. Although I shall have you spread word of my prowess in bed to remain in my good graces.”

Brad chuckled. “Whatever the master desires,” he bowed.

Adam licked his lips and regarded Tommy for a moment. *The master can’t have what he desires at all.*

*What fuckery is this!! I can’t believe Adam brought that traitorous harlot here! He’s the one who loved to pleasure any swinging cock he could find!*

*I know I have not been the bed partner that Adam wants, but this? I cannot compete with him. Have I held off too long? Has Adam lost interest in me? Did I exhaust any chance I may have had?*

*And what is wrong with me that I rage so? I should be happy for this turn of events. But I’m not. Were it not for my goddess, I would have thrown myself at Adam long ago. And now it’s too late.*

I guide Brad to the baths, ignoring all of his attempts at conversation. I leave him there before he gets a chance to disrobe and I make my way outside. I just need to be alone and as far

from him as possible to sort out these confusing thoughts.

That night in bed, after he sent Brad back to the slave quarters, Adam pulled Tommy into his embrace.

“You are not pleased to have Brad here,” Adam noted.

“In Gaul, his kind are an abomination to be shunned,” Tommy said.

“Because he finds pleasure in men?” Adam asked.

“Yes.”

“Am I an abomination?” Adam questioned.

“You are not from Gaul.”

They lay in silence for a few minutes before Tommy spoke again. “I understand why you would want another pleasure slave...” his voice trailed off.

“Is that what you think?” Adam asked, “that I bought him for my own pleasure?”

“...you need more than just a warm body next to you at night,” Tommy continued.

The sadness in Tommy’s voice caught Adam off-guard. “You are more than just a warm body,” Adam whispered.

Tommy’s fingers stroked Adam’s chest and his silence wrapped itself around Adam’s heart.

Adam could not believe his eyes. A comely slave girl from his father’s harem walked up to Tommy in the corridor near the dining hall and kissed him full on the lips! To his credit, Tommy pulled away almost instantly and darted his eyes around to make sure they hadn’t been seen. His eyes apologized when they met Adam’s, but it was too late. Adam’s fury was beyond reason.

“How dare you?” Adam bellowed when Tommy reported to his summons a short while later.

“I didn’t expect such a reaction from her!” Tommy explained. “That was the girl who almost drowned in the baths.”

“That is no excuse! You will keep your mouth shut unless I give you permission to talk. You are a slave, and I am your master. I was a fool to give up what has always been my right to take just to let a slave girl take my place!”

Tommy opened his mouth to speak, then seemed to think better of it and closed it without a word.

“Undress yourself,” Adam thundered.

Tommy quickly shed his robes and stood before his master.

“Get on the bed!” Adam commanded and took off his own robes off.

Tommy complied, but when Adam climbed on top of him he couldn’t remain quiet. “Adam, please...” Tommy felt it necessary to put up some fight or lose his good standing with his goddess.

“You forget your place, slave.” Adam’s words were filled with venom.

“Please...” Tommy pleaded.

“I would have done anything you asked of me! Anything! I was besotted with you like a fool. No more.” Adam’s anger masked the anguish of a wounded heart. He grabbed Tommy by the wrists and held them above his head.

“I won’t fight you,” Tommy said, but Adam ignored him.

“Fight me? You’ll scream in pleasure until there is no fight left in you. Until the only pleasure you crave will be me!” Adam spat at him. “Until the only touch you can remember will be the pleasure at my hands.” He would claim what was rightfully his by the Queen’s decree and forfeit all else. “You deny me my due as your master, yet you so willingly offer yourself to a slave girl,” Adam snarled.

“I didn’t do anything!” Tommy threw back at him.

Adam straddled Tommy’s torso and released his wrists, only to grab Tommy by the neck.

“Tell me, did you enjoy that kiss? Did it make you forget how my hardness pressed helplessly against your naked flesh every night, rendered impotent by my affection for you? Did your pride feast on my torment?”

“No!” Tommy said with fervor, his hands went to Adam’s cheeks and stared him dead in the eye. For a brief moment Adam thought that maybe...but no, that was just him chasing after a dream.

“Kiss me,” Adam demanded as he bore down on Tommy’s lips. It wasn’t a sexy kiss. It was passionate enough, but it was angry, too. It was the sort that left lips battered and bruised. Tommy’s arms went around Adam’s neck and pulled him tighter.

The pain of their lips crushed against teeth was not nearly enough to dull Adam’s senses to the taste of Tommy’s mouth. A date dipped in honey would not be as sweet. But, unlike a date it didn’t pacify his hunger, it merely fueled it. Adam cursed the gods for dangling such a man just beyond his reach. “I will have you tonight. I will sate my hunger for your flesh, and I will not be denied,” Adam said pointedly between kisses.

Tommy’s arms slipped from around Adam’s neck as he sat up. “Please, don’t...” Tommy begged, but his words had no feeling behind them.

“Do I repulse you?” Adam asked, for a moment his curiosity pierced through his anger.

“No!” Tommy assured him.

“Then what is it?” Adam screamed in frustration at him. “I could swear that sometimes you arch into my touch, and other times you recoil from me like I’m a poisonous asp.”

“I don’t know why you are so angry with me. She kissed me. I did nothing to encourage her,” Tommy insisted, as if that would make any difference at this point.

“But you find her appearance agreeable...” Adam was surprised at the masochist in him searching for the pain. Of course, Tommy would find her pleasing to his eyes. She was a beautiful slave. Even Adam could appreciate the curves of her silhouette, and he was not at all inclined to favor the fair gender.

“I’m a slave and I belong to you. I don’t have eyes for anyone else,” Tommy mumbled.

Adam wanted to believe him. But, night after night, Tommy had rejected his advances and Adam had been willing to wait. He finally had to admit to himself that he would never find the way to Tommy’s heart. So Adam was determined to have this one night. One night to wash away all of his pain and frustration.

Adam ran his hands along the ridge that ran down the middle of Tommy’s chest. “You tremble at my touch, Tommy.” Adam goaded. “See?” His hand traveled along the trail of hair that led to Tommy’s hardening cock, “Your body does not discriminate touch by gender if it’s pleasurable.”

His hand wrapped around Tommy’s hardness tight enough that when Tommy groaned, Adam knew it was both from both pleasure and pain. He kneaded the hardening length until Tommy bucked into his fist. Tommy didn’t pull away from Adam’s touch. Instead his body sought him out and Adam watched Tommy transform under his touch.

“Kiss me!” Adam demanded as he leaned in close. Adam expected a shy, chaste kiss, or worse a kiss draped in resignation. That was not what he got. Tommy kissed with the untamed ferocity of a barbarian and the wild abandon of an Egyptian, and Adam found the mix intoxicating.

Their tongues dueled, equally matched in force and passion, until breathless and panting, Adam pulled away. He expected to meet Tommy’s defiant gaze, and instead, Tommy’s eyes were glazed over with a hunger that seemed to match his own in intensity.

Adam was perplexed. After all, Tommy was not a lover of men. He’d repeated this often enough that Adam had no choice but to believe him. Feigned desire or not, Adam clung to its existence and drowned out protests by his conscience.

Seizing on Tommy’s obviously lowered guard, Adam dipped a finger in the open jar of grease and tapped it gently against Tommy’s tight ring.

“Please...” Tommy begged, “no...”

Adam grabbed Tommy's long fringe with his other hand, grateful for the span of his reach, and yanked hard. "You will be an obedient slave," Adam growled.

Adam wanted to tear the blindfold off of Tommy's eyes. *Can he not see it is more than lust that fuels my passions?* He could quench his lust in any number of ways; it was the fire that Tommy lit in his heart from which there was no escape. *A man does not take what his beloved does not give freely*, his conscience tried again. *He is my slave! A pleasure slave...* then came the compromise... *I will only take what his body begs me to.*

I feel Adam's tendrils seeping into my soul from the tips of his fingers. It's like I'm collapsing into an abyss and there is nothing on the other side but a mockery of the man I used to be. I tremble beneath him when he lingers at my nipple along the trail of kisses to my navel. The anger in his touch is unmistakable, but my pulse still quickens in response. *Oh Morrigan, why do you cause me to crave this man so? Why do you curse me to love him?*

He slips his finger into me slowly, teasingly, and I gasp at the invasion. His fingers move inside me until my toes curl from the pleasure and I squirm beneath him.

I grasp onto his hair like a lifeline when he bends over me and takes my hardness into his mouth. Pulling away from his lips only thrusts me further onto his fingers...until I am overwhelmed from both sides, unable to decide which source of pleasure to shy from or move toward. When his fingers chase down that spot inside, I squirm and his lips engulf all of me.

"I'm close," I pant, expecting him to stop before I spill. I continue to whimper, but he just sucks me harder. I try to hold back, knowing he hasn't given me permission to cum.

"I can't..." I try to warn him. But I am unable to withstand the force of Adam's passions, even tainted by anger as they are; and so I cum down his throat. He swallows every last drop and continues to suck on me until I whimper, "Aaaaaam..."

He replaces his mouth with his hand and whispers against the tip of my cock. "So sensitive, aren't you? Too much and the pleasure turns to pain," he taunts, as he runs his hand up and down the length of me.

He secures me under him and prevents my escape from his tongue as he licks the last drops off my over-sensitive tip. "Adam...please...stop..." I pant, while shudders ripple through my body in never-ending waves.

"Breathe, Tommy, just breathe through it," Adam whispers against my softening cock. The shudders turn into more violent versions of themselves until my whole body quakes, and still he won't let up. I can barely remember how to breathe at all.

Slowly it passes, and my hardness returns.



Adam watched Tommy squirm beneath him and whimper at his touch. It would be so easy to believe it was real, to fool himself into thinking that they could be lovers. The taste of Tommy in his mouth eased his anger, but he wanted more. "That's it," Adam coaxed, "get hard for me again."

Out of the line of Tommy's sight, Adam prepared himself with his free hand. He released Tommy's cock, straddled his hips and bent forward to take a nipple into his mouth. Tommy's hands tangled in Adam's hair as he teased first one then the other into a taut bud, until Tommy's breathing quickened to match his own.

Adam shifted himself so he could whisper into Tommy's ear. "Don't make a sound and don't move!" Tommy's hands untangled themselves from Adam's hair and fell to his sides. Adam pushed himself up so he was seated upright and Tommy's hipbones bore into his thighs.

Adam rose up just enough to point Tommy's hardness at his readied hole and slid down slowly. He bit down on his lips to counter the burn of the invasion while his eyes stayed fixed on Tommy's face. Adam saw the emotions flicker across Tommy's face: shock, surprise, then understanding. Tommy obediently didn't move, and, other than wanton groans, he didn't make a sound.

When Tommy was fully sheathed inside him, Adam let out the breath he had been holding. *It burns and yet feels so right!* He leaned forward, his heart slamming against his ribcage. This time he didn't have to ask, Tommy met his kiss eagerly as his arms again wrapped around Adam's neck. A silent understanding passed between them. *More than just a slave to me!*

Adam rocked his hips back and forth, to signal it was now okay to move. He shuddered at the sensation of thrusts that hit a spot inside, blinding Adam with pleasure.

Adam fucked himself on Tommy's cock while they kissed. He held on while Tommy hit that spot inside him over and over, until the heat built up in the base of his spine and he could wait no longer. He sat higher and fisted his cock, Tommy's hand wrapped around his and together they pumped, until Adam groaned loudly and his pleasure spilled over both of their hands to Tommy's belly beneath him. Tommy was only a stroke behind him with his own loud groan as he filled Adam with his milk.

Adam's eyes were filled with unshed tears when Tommy pulled out of him and they rolled onto their sides, still holding each other.

"Did I hurt you?" Tommy asked as he gently ran his fingertips over Adam's cheek.

Adam shook his head and blinked back his tears. A heavy silence filled the air around them as their breaths evened out. "Why are you unable to love me?" Adam asked.

Tommy nudged Adam onto his back. "But I do love you," Tommy responded quietly and his eyes spoke to him the truth of the words.

"You never gave a hint of your attraction to me," Adam replied, almost afraid to believe Tommy's words, a truth those brown eyes declared.

Tommy blushed. "All you had to do was touch me and I was hard. But I was afraid of my feelings because of the way I had been raised. No matter how I acted toward you, each day I lost myself to you a little more."

"I can't believe we wasted all this time," Adam pulled him close. "When I saw you with that girl, I thought your heart was lost to me forever."

"I tried to tell you..." Tommy started, but Adam interrupted him.

"I know you claimed it was nothing, but I cannot compete with a woman for a man's heart when he is not a lover of men and I just panicked." Adam sighed. "Not that anything I did in anger was justified."

"Well, it is forgiven," Tommy replied without missing a beat. "Perhaps you understand how I felt when you bought Brad. I thought for sure I would lose my place in your bed to him, with the reputation he has. I realize now that I must stop fighting my feelings for you. My beliefs do not belong in this land."

"If this is a dream, never wake me," Adam begged.

When Tommy smiled and kissed him, Adam could feel the urgency behind the kiss. It wasn't a timid or shy kiss; it was the kiss of a man embracing a love he'd denied himself for too long. "This is not a dream that you can wake from. I'm here to stay, if you still want me," Tommy declared when he pulled away.

"I was drawn to you that first day at the palace, and knowing you has only made me love you more," Adam confessed. "All I can offer you is the life of a slave and a master's love, but I promise it will be a good life, and my love will be a slave to your happiness."

Tommy acknowledged his pledge with another enthusiastic kiss. "Do you think the Queen suspected how it would turn out when she gifted me to you?" Tommy asked when they pulled apart.

Adam thought about it for a moment. He thought of the little girl who'd been his friend years before she became Queen. She was the first person he told of his preference for men. "*You will have a hard time finding love,*" she warned. "*One day you'll be Queen of Egypt, and you can just gift me true love,*" he replied. "*I don't think it works that way,*" the young girl frowned.

Adam chuckled. "As hardened a Queen as she has become, I think she gave me exactly the gift she'd always intended."

"And what's that?" Tommy asked.

"Love."

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