

MY WARRIOR

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It was a cold drizzly day when Sir Bram Croft step foot back in his beloved France. The last four months were long and bloody, and now Bram was just relieved to have gotten most of his men back alive. The Moors in Spain were a formidable enemy. Road weary Bram and his men look for a tavern to quench their thirst and toast their safe return.

Dismounting his horse Bram looks to his long time friend Edwin McGregor. Edwin is smaller than average, his body toned but not overly muscular. His shoulder length brown hair tied back from his boyish looking face. Bram on the other hand was tall, standing almost six foot two. His body was strong and well muscled. His face handsome and his electric blue eyes blazed with life. His shoulder length black hair flowed freely and his smile would dazzle anyone. "We lived again, my friend." Bram placed his arm around Edwin's shoulders.

"Ay, thanks to your leadership."

"And too your bow." Bram slapped him on the back and turned to look for his squire. "Joseph you better hurry up." Bram called out to him.

"Just finishing tying the horses up Sir Bram." Joseph Bache was rather young man, but very strong. Women often equated him to a cute puppy. He was glad to serve Sir Croft. Though others thought he was crazy to do so. *Who wants to serve the son of a traitor*, they would say. But Joseph knew Sir Bram was a great and fair knight. He would learn much from him. Seeing how Sir Croft fought on the battlefield was awe

inspiring to the young squire. Joseph hurried over to Bram and Edwin as they entered the tavern.

They were greeted with cheers from the room full of soldiers, all raising their tankers to Bram. A cute barmaid intent on getting Bram's attention hurried over with a round of ale for the three men.

"You are a most handsome knight." She smiled coyly at Bram. "And your friends are too adorable for words." She winked at Joseph.

"Your flattery is pleasing fair lady." Bram flashed the young woman his most devilish smile. The men grabbed the tankers and head over to an empty table. Edwin observed the pretty barmaid watching Bram's every step.

"Well, I would say your bed won't be cold tonight, Bram." Edwin shook his head and sat down.

"It has been to long since I felt the pleasures of a woman." Bram flashed another smile at the woman. "You two would be wise to obtain a woman for yourselves as well. Nothing makes you feel more alive than the softness of a woman underneath your body."

"Easy for you to say, Bram, women throw themselves at you." Edwin said taking a swig of his ale. "I will have to hope there is a brothel around."

"Would you like me to buy you a woman, Joseph?" Edwin teased.

"I..ah.." Joseph's cheeks burned. Bram and Edwin laughed loudly.

“Leave him alone Edwin.” Bram smiled at the barmaid as she brought some food over. The fresh bread and roast lamb smelt good. The woman swayed her hips as she walked back to the bar a clear invitation for Bram.

“Well, I believe I will secure my pleasures for tonight.” Bram walked over to the bar right toward the barmaid.

“Eat up, Joseph.” Edwin cut off a hunk of meat and bread.

“Soldiers fresh from the battlefields.” An old half-drunk sailor stood by their table. “May I join you?”

“Why not.” Edwin said tearing off another hunk of bread.

“My name is Wilbert.” The old man tipped his imaginary hat. Joseph chuckled.

“I’m Edwin and this is Joseph.”

“I couldn’t help but hear your talk of women.” Wilbert swigged down more of his ale. “Would you like to hear a tale?”

Just then, Bram headed back to the table. He sat down next to Edwin and gave him that what the hell look. “This is Wilbert and he is about to tell us a tale.”

“Really.” Bram grabbed some meat and bread.

“Have you ever heard of the warrior women?” Wilbert leaned in a little.

“Can’t say that I have.” Bram didn’t understand why Edwin let this drunker bother them.

“Well, they live across the sea, in the wild lands of the Moors.” Wilbert looked around. “My friend sailed down there to trade. But found himself in a heap of trouble.

Those Moor bastards tried to dirty deal him. Just as he thought he was done for, he heard the thunderous sound of horses charging. At first, he thought they were angels coming to take him to heaven. That is until they rode closer. He said they were blond, beautiful, and scantily clad. The precision in which they shot their bows was amazing. They hit the Moors at full charge. Do you realize how hard that is to do? They killed all the rotten Moors but left my friend and his crew alive. One of the women looked down at my friend from her horse and told him to leave this land. Then they simply rode off.” Wilbert drank a big gulp of his ale.

“A horny sailor’s tale, old man.” Bram sighed.

“They are real. My friend was so enthralled with their vision he set out to find them.”

“Did he find them?” Joseph asked. He seemed most interested in the old man’s tale.

“He found out about them but never seen them again. He sailed to a small fishing port further down the coast of the Moor’s land. When he inquired about the women, one of the fishermen told him that they were the warriors of Arcarndia.” Wilbert burped really loud. “This is the good part. The fisherman told my friend that these women not only war, but they hunt down their future mates or husbands. They knock the poor fellow out and drag him back to their village. But apparently men don’t mind for these women are most beautiful and very skilled in the art of lovemaking. The

fisherman was only disappointed that these women didn't venture out toward his village and take mates from their men."

Bram laughed hard. "Oh that is good. A bunch of beautiful women who clobber men on the head and drag them back to their village and pleasure them. And they are warriors to boot." Soon Edwin and Joseph joined in Bram's laughter.

"Laugh if you want but it is true. Unfortunately my friend died before ever seeing them again."

Bram stood up and left money for the meal. "Here old man buy yourself another ale for your entertaining story." Bram had laughed so hard his eyes tear up. "Come on Edwin and Joseph. I have arranged with the stew-holder for company for you two."

"But Sir Bram." Joseph seemed nervous.

Bram placed one hand on Joseph's shoulder. "Enjoy yourself. Feel alive young Joseph. You fought valiantly. You seen with your own eyes, so called great knights turn tale and run from battle. But you didn't flinch, you stood by my side." Bram saw Joseph beam from his praise. "Listen, if this is the first paid winch you have had. Just be gentle and treat her like a lady you had to really charm to have." Bram patted him on the back and down the rest of his ale. The barmaid hurried to his side. The look of sheer lust covered her face as she left the tavern with Bram.

The morning's first light woke Bram from his deep sleep. The little barmaid laid content in his arms. She was a most eager lover but not skilled. In fact, she had been quite innocent. Though she had no maiden's head when he penetrated her, she still was too timid for a whore. Bram laid there and thought of the countless women eager to take him as a lover. Even noble women, though they would never want him as a husband. After all he was a knight without land at the moment. He had worked five long years to restore his family name and lands and still the Baron Richard Kinghorn was not satisfied.

Bram slipped out of bed and got dressed. He wore a simple gray tunic with black trousers. Bram gave her a light kiss on the cheek then left.

"Bram about time. The men are eager to get back to Adkins." Edwin said. He mounted his horse.

"Sir Bram your horse." Joseph held the reins to Samos, Bram's large black warhorse. Bram patted Samos on the snout and then mounted. Joseph quickly followed he had another horse behind his carrying all Bram's armor and supplies.

"Men, by nightfall we will be in Adkins." Bram called out. The two dozen or so men shouted out. "We must go to the castle first once we are back in Adkins. The Baron wants a full report." Bram told Edwin then gently kicked Samos sides and started on the dirt road that headed toward Adkins. Bram worried little of bandits on the road. Who would be foolish enough to attack an armed party? His worries were focus on the Baron. He was gone much longer than anticipated. It matter not that it was by order of

King Philip, the Baron would find ulterior motives. Especially since Bram voiced his displeasure about the Baron's plans to attack the neighboring Baron James Trudeau. This was a foolish move to Bram. But Baron Richard's greed and arrogance would not listen.

"What are you so deep in thought about Bram?" Edwin asked.

"The Baron." Bram sighed. God he wished he could free himself of his duties to Baron Richard, but for his families especially his brother sake he must endure this.

"Bram surely the Baron has heard of King Philips holding men past their forty days required service."

"You know this won't matter to the Baron. I am sure he thinks I am plotting against him." Bram just stared down the road.

"Once you report I am sure he will understand." Edwin didn't like the way Bram seemed lately. Almost defeated, after all it has been five years since Sir Gaven was beheaded.

"Edwin, how am I going to talk David from going on the Crusades? It is not right that I hold him to our land. After all, if I ever get them back they will be mine. David being the second son must make his name." So much was weighing on Bram's mind. His brother David was newly knighted when their father was executed. David stayed at the Manor tending to the everyday task of it, not to mention protecting their mother and sister.

"Bram, David will do what he feels he must. He is not a little boy anymore."

“I know Edwin.”

“He wants to find a suitable wife, Bram. And to do this he must make a name for himself.”

“I know this too, Edwin.” A wife, children, Bram’s heart sank. He wanted these things too. Edwin had these things once, but his wife died in childbirth. But Bram had never known what it was like to have someone waiting for him. Somewhere warm to return to.

“Bram we are alive. This is all that should matter now. It is not the time to get melancholy.” Edwin had to do something. He couldn’t stand it when Bram got like this. Bram’s zest for living pulled Edwin out of his depression after his wife died six years ago.

“As usual Edwin you are right. Let me focus on the warm sun on my face. The sweet smell of the flowered air.” Bram smiled at Edwin.

“There you go.”



It was dusk when they arrived at the town of Adkins. Bram dismissed the men that lived in the village so they could go to their families. As the rest of them headed down the cobblestone main road of Adkins, the villagers greeted them with warm smiles and a hearty welcome home.

“Sir Bram.” An old man yelled out. Gustave Barnhart the town’s blacksmith hurried out of his shop to greet Bram. Gustave was getting on in years, his gray hair testament to that. However, his body was strong for his age due to the demands of his trade. He and Edwin’s father was the only two brave enough to speak out for Bram’s father at the trail.

“Gustave.” Bram dismounted Samos. He shook the old man’s hand giving him a warm smile.

“I am glad you come back unscathed.” Gustave looked over Bram; oh, he was the spitting image of Sir Gaven. “Listen Bram.” Gustave moved a little closer. After all the Baron had eyes and ears everywhere. “The Baron is not too happy that you stayed out so long.”

“Thank you Gustave. Is all well with my family?”

“Yes, the crops are growing well, the orchards are full and livestock fat. Sir David has managed just fine.”

“As I knew he would. I must report to the Baron, old friend.” Bram mounted up on Samos.

“Edwin, your father wants you to stop by when you are able. He has got two new mares he wants to breed with your steed.”

“If he comes back in town before I see him, tell him.”

“Bram be careful.” Gustave warned once more as they rode off toward the castle.



The castle was perched up on a large hill; nestled in the crook of two rivers. The shadow it cast over the village was ominous. The stone walls were high. The large drawbridge was down still, but as soon as the sun completely set, it was raised to secure the occupants who dwelled behind the walls. The two tall towers that flank the portcullis served as a warning to all the villagers and any who entered Baron Richard Kinghorn's castle. For one of the towers held the dungeon and the fable torture chamber. While the other stored life giving grain. Many said they stood for the Baron's hold of life and death over his subjects. This symbolism was not wasted on Bram as he glanced up at the tower of misery.

Anton Kasfer the Baliff of the castle met them. Anton was otherwise known as the Baron's lap dog, and this dog had one mean bite. He was a thick man with steely eyes. There was no love lost between Bram and Anton.

"Decided to return to your lord, I see." Anton's voice dripped with disdain.

"Where is the Baron? I was order to report to him the instant I returned." Bram dismounted Samos and handed the reins to the groom.

"The Baron is in the great hall. The rest of you go to the barracks." Anton walked on ahead.

"Bram hold your tongue. Don't fall into the Baron's word games." Edwin was worried. Bram had a terrible habit of speaking what was exactly on his mind.

“I will be careful. I will join you later.” Bram handed Joseph his sword and riding gloves. “Be careful with my sword and stow the rest of my armor in the knight’s chamber.”

“Yes Sir Bram.” Joseph hurried to the horse that held all of Bram’s armor and remaining weapons.

Bram took a deep breath before joining the now irritated Anton. “Your squire shouldn’t need instructions.” Anton turned and walked forward making sure Bram walked behind him.

“My squire is young and is my concern.” Bram had to take the Baron’s insults and games. But he will be damned if he took it from any of the Baron’s lackeys. Anton said not another word but took Bram into the Keep. The second they entered the Keep two Royal bodyguards flank Bram. ClBarony, Gustave was correct about the Baron being angry.

The one thing that stands out the most is the unusual quiet in the air. Only the sounds of their boots hitting stone filled the air. They turn down another hall, two female servants scurry past them. Fear painted on their faces. Bram looked up ahead and saw one young, pretty, chambermaid waiting outside the entrance to the great hall. As he gets closer, he sees her shaking almost uncontrollably.

“What is the matter, my lady?” Bram’s said in a soothing tone.

“I am waiting for the Baron to summon me.” Her eyes are locked on the floor.

“Please move forward, Sir Bram.” One of the guards said flatly.

Bram wanted to help the girl. God knows what will happen to the poor thing. However, the gentle push of the guards warned him otherwise.

Bram entered the great hall. This overly lavished hall was as tacky as the Baron was. Tapestries hung all over the walls. Weapons from foreign lands, probably secured by great expense hung around the room. The mahogany table where the Baron sat at meal times was to grand for a mere Baron.

The Baron was seated at his table. He was middle-aged with dark short hair. He was short in stature compared to the other men around him. He was trim and groomed impeccably. His face was ordinary looking except for the scar on his chin, said to be given to him by his late wife as she fought for her life. A group of rough looking men all stared at Bram, as though they were trying to memorize every detail of him. Seated next to the Baron was a man simply called Michael. Though still young, his hair was silver in color it hung down the length of his back, tied back with a golden band. His lifeless eyes were as silver as his hair. Michael was tall, lean, and ghostly handsome and well known as the best of the mercenaries. Tales of his cruelty and plain gruesomeness was known throughout the land. Why would the Baron be consulting this man? Was the question that plagued Bram's mind as he headed up to the table.

"My lord." Bram bowed respectfully. Each time he did that, it made him ill to his stomach.

"Sir Bram. I was beginning to wonder if you had deserted Adkins." Richard looked down at Bram. He knew Sir Gaven's son was planning his revenge against him.

He thought showing mercy to Sir Gaven's noble sons would gain him favor with not only the Duke and fellow Barons, but would keep Bram close. He strung Bram along for five years now, promising giving the titles back to Bram for his father's lands. However, he had no real intention on doing this. After all, there was always another hoop for Sir Bram to jump through. But how much longer could Richard string Bram along. All men have their limits. Sir Bram was a valuable asset to him right now.

"I would never desert Adkins, my lord." Bram handed Richard the parchment with the seal of King Philip II on it.

"Well it seems as though our King detained you. Anton tells me most of your men have return with you, well done Sir Bram. I am sure this feat will be the talk of many tables." Richard rose from his seat. "Sir Bram I have one more quest for you. I am going to plan the attack against Baron James Trudeau. However, I will have to wait for my remaining men to come back from Philips latest conquest. When they have come back you will lead them."

"But, my lord this would be..."

"Would be what, Sir Bram. Don't tell me you intend to go against me on this."

"Of course not, my lord." Bram couldn't believe this. Was the Baron crazy? Baron James Trudeau was a powerful Baron every bit as much as Richard. The Duke will not look the other way with this battle. The other two Barons, Richard overtook were thorns in the Duke's side. But Baron James was in a strategic position, the Duke would surely not want Richard controlling that much land.

“Then rest for the night. Go visit your family in the morning but be back here when summoned.” The Baron dismissed Bram. He could see the anger seething in Bram’s eyes. Once Bram left he turned to Michael. “Sir Bram is the one you will follow. Let me know if he does indeed mean to seek his revenge now.”

“You murdered his father.” Michael chuckled. “He wants you dead Richard, I see it in his face.”

“I didn’t murder his father. The bastard bedded my wife!”

“It is your tale; tell it the way you like. I don’t really care. Now about my payment.” Michael’s voice was cold and monotone. It never betrayed his feelings to anyone. This made him that more chilling to those around him.

“You will get all I promised.” Richard didn’t really care for Michael but he was the best and only cared about money. This made him reliable.

“More if I have to have my men follow Sir knight longer than agreed upon.”

“Of course. Woman get in here!” Richard yelled out. The young chambermaid hurried in.

“Your Baroness looks the other way I see.” Michael said.

“That sow’s only purpose is to raise my two sons. Once they are old enough then the Baroness will no longer be needed. Come here!” The woman hurried to him. She wore a simple blue dress. Richard grabbed her breast and pulled her to him. “Why don’t you and your men visit the stew-holder. The women are clean and well trained.”

“Psss.” Michael rolled his eyes and headed out the door. His men followed behind.

“Remove your clothes and lay on the table.” Richard sat back on his chair and waited. The woman obeyed her hands shook as she undid her dress. She heard how the Baron took women, cruelly. A maiden was lucky if she didn’t end up dead. She knew about the bodies of the many young servant girls that were found in the forest just beyond the castle walls. Two, three, and this year four bodies had been found. Officially, wild animals were blamed for the killings but all knew it was the Baron. She stood there naked. “Lay on the damn table!” Richard pounded his fist against the hard wood of the table.

“Yes my lord.” She climbed up on the table and laid down. She could feel her heart pound in her chest. Richard got up and let his eyes run down her whole body.

“You are very pretty.” He jumped on the table and removed his trousers. “Spread your legs.” she obeyed quickly. He got down on his knees and rammed the entire length of his cock into her. She wanted to scream from the pain. She had never been with a man. He thrust violently until he released his seed. Richard rose up and looked down into her face. His eyes were wild looking.

“Please my lord!” She raised her hands to her face. He removed them holding her arms above her head. He pulled himself out of her and got off the table still holding her arms. He pulled her off causing her to hit the stone floor hard. Richard pulled her

up to her feet. She didn't see the punch coming, she felt her cheek burn and ache from the impact.

"Get dressed and go." He threw her to the floor and put himself back in his trousers. He had much to plan. This little one will have to be satisfied with what she got. He kicked her hard as he left the room.

She grabbed her leg where his boot just assaulted. "Thank you lord." She said over and over. She would only have a couple of bruises; she was one of the lucky ones. She quickly got dressed and ran out of the great hall. She watched out for the Baron as she raced down the hall. As she looked behind her to make sure the Baron wasn't coming, she ran squarely into Bram, almost knocking him over.

"My lady." Bram helped her back to her feet. Tears fell from her eyes mostly from relief.

"Sir Bram I am sorry."

Bram looked at her swollen cheek. "Allow me to escort you back to your chambers." Bram knew this was the same chambermaid that was outside the great hall. Damn Richard. "Are you alright, my lady?"

"I am now, Sir Bram. Thank you for your kindness."

"Don't thank me. I should have taken you with me when I left." Bram noticed that she was limping.

“Sir Bram there was nothing you could have done. But I...” She winced in pain. Bram lifted her up into his arms and carried her down the hall. She directed him to the servant’s quarters.

“Thank you Sir Bram.” she said as he gently put her down.

“My lady, I will leave in the morning to go to my manor. I wish for you to join me.” Bram couldn’t leave the poor women here. The Baron was surely to summon her again.

“But Sir Bram.”

“I leave at first light. Meet me at the stables with your things. My mother is in need of a new house servant. You will be perfect for it. That is if you wish to work for me.” Bram forgot that not all people in Adkins wanted to associate with him.

“Thank you Sir Bram. I would be honored to serve you.” How could anyone doubt this man’s honor? She thought. Bram smiled at her and headed toward the barracks.

Bram was almost at the Barracks when the young scribe Lucas stopped him. Lucas was small and pale. His fingers were usually stained with the black ink he used. The young man looked tired and drawn. “I have to write down your tale.” The young man was ready with pen in hand.

“Why?” Bram only wanted to go to sleep.

“The Baron orders it.” Lucas again positions his pen over the parchment.

“It is simple. I went to Spain, fought with the Moors and came home alive.” Bram went around the young man. The Baron’s unrelenting self-importance was getting stranger every year.

When he got to his room Edwin was waiting for him. “Oh thank God you are still in one piece.” Edwin said jumping from his chair.

“You should be asleep, friend.” Bram pulled off his tunic and fell into bed.

“What happened?” Edwin sat back down.

“The Baron is planning on attacking Baron James and yours truly gets to lead the charge.” Bram was exhausted mentally and physically. He could feel this damn castle sucking the life out of him.

“Is he mad!!”

“I believe he is.” Bram closed his eyes and tried to picture the gently rolling hills that surrounded his Manor. His mother’s warm smile and his sister sweet laugh, even David’s stern look. Bram chuckled softly.

“Bram.” Edwin looked down at him and saw that he had fallen asleep. “Damn Bram. I think you are right the Baron will never let you get your lands back.” Edwin was growing war weary himself. Bram and he in the last five years had fought two Barons, the Moors in Spain and now he heard King Philip is invading England. Bram was a grand leader and always managed to get most of his men back alive. But there is always that one time when... Edwin stopped his train of thinking. He left Bram to sleep

and headed back to the soldier's quarters. Though Edwin was as old as Bram, he would never be a noble knight, not so much because of his smaller stature but for his lack of French noble blood. True his father was a noble warrior in his native Scotland but he married a common French woman. Now he lives on Bram's family lands overseeing the crops. His father never regretted leaving Scotland or lowering his social position. He loved Edwin's mother more than life itself and that was all he needed. Bram's father treated him with respect and too has Bram and David. Edwin took the bunk next to Joseph and went to sleep.

In the morning Bram, Edwin and the young servant girl headed to the Croft Manor. Joseph decided to stay in the barracks and wait for Bram to summon him. They rode most of the day and finally saw the Manor. It was nestled in a bunch of trees sitting high on the hills. Bram smiled his face beamed, he felt alive. He hurried Samos along as the small woman clutched Bram for dear life as Samos bolted forward.

"Bram!!" His mother and sister hurried to greet him.

"Take care Edwin." Bram shouted out as Edwin turned toward the west heading to his father's house.

Bram dismounted and helped the little woman down. "Bram." His mother embraced her son tightly. Thanking the lord that he was okay. His mother and sister looked alike, long brown hair, golden brown eyes, elegant beautiful faces, and small lean bodies. His sister Flora had such a sweet innocents about her and his mother

Camila had a regal warmth to her. Bram scooped both of them up in his arms and kissed them both on the cheek.

“Who is this?” Camila asked hopefully.

“This is Emily and she is your new house servant.” Bram gently placed his hand against the small of Emily’s back leading her to the house.

“Bram another one.” A man who looked similar to Bram stood in the doorway. He was a bit younger and his eyes were a warm brown.

“David.” Bram smiled and gave him a big hug. “Find her a place.” Bram looked down at her. “Go on inside, Luce will tell you what will be your duties.”

“Yes, Sir Bram.” Emily smiled shyly at David and went into the house.

“Bram that is the third woman you have brought here.” David followed Bram into the main room.

“I couldn’t just leave her there.” Bram greeted the other house servants. It felt so good to be home.

“Your big heart.” David shook his head. “You can’t rescue everyone.”

“But I can help this little woman.” Bram sat down at the dining table and just inhaled the fragrance of the house.

“Were the battles fierce in Spain, my brother?” David’s eyes lit up. He was a well-trained knight and has yet to see a battlefield.

“They were bloody. I wish not to discuss this.”

“Is the Baron appeased? You came back with most of your men.” David chuckled. “The tale reached Adkins before you did.”

“I have to lead the Baron’s men against Baron James Trudeau.”

“What!” David jumped to his feet. “Bloody hell, Bram.” David hated this. Why wouldn’t Bram let him bear some of this!

“Let’s not talk about this now. I am home.” Bram pushed everything about the Baron from his mind.

Chapter 2

“This land is strange.” Devi said. Devi was six feet tall, blond-hair blue eyes. Her body was strong but still feminine. She pulled her fur cloak closer to her. It was much colder here than in her land. “Rhia why do they wear so many clothes?” She observed the women walking up the cobblestone roads of Adkins.

Rhia was a lot smaller than her friend Devi. Her body was well toned but still very feminine. Her hair was blonde and her eyes blue. She was most beautiful even among her own people. Her full lips made her a favorite with the Rama warriors. She looked down at her own clothes. She wore the barest of clothing. Her blouse just barely covered her ample breasts and the leather skirt if you could call it that, though it look more like a loin cloth just covered her bottom. She was glad she brought her fur cloak

seeing how it was cool and damp in this land. She had her bow secured to her back and her sword to her side.

Rhia and Devi crossed the great sea to find a mate from their native land. The stories that were passed down were their only clue. However, none of these people looked anything like them, except for the color of their skin.

“Let’s travel on, Devi. We still have a few days before Inor comes back with the boats.” Rhia was growing disappointed. Ever since she was a child, she heard the stories that the elders told. Brave strong warriors from across the great sea came to this wild land and conquered. The Rama warriors were strong and brave but she wanted something different. So far, none of these men in this land could compare to the Rama warriors.

They went back to their horses and rode to the west. They had to be careful not to be seen by the natives here. Therefore, they kept to the wooded areas.

“Rhia. I have something to tell you.”

“What is wrong Devi?”

Devi seemed hesitant. “Our women always seek out the biggest, strongest warriors to mate with. But...”

Rhia stopped her horse. “You can tell me Devi.”

“Well, what all of our women seek, I don’t want that.” Devi dismounted her horse to stretch her legs.

“What do you want?” Rhia dismounted her horse.

“You will laugh or think less of me.”

“I will not. Come on Devi.”

“I want... I want a small man, strong but not overpowering. I want him to be cute. Someone I can cuddle up to, someone for me to defend. As you see, I am rather large. The kind of man I would have to find by our traditions would be a monster.”

“Then find your smaller man, Devi.” Rhia went to her friend. “We only mate once it should be with someone you want. Don’t worry about others. You choose your mate for you Devi.”

“Do you really think it will be acceptable?”

“Yes, and if not make it acceptable.”

“Thank you Rhia. I will find my small beautiful man.” Devi grabbed the reins of her horse and walked down the path. Rhia walked next to her. Their time was running out. The Domos gave them four weeks to find a mate. If they couldn’t they would have to return and choose their mate from the Rama warriors.



“Bram, I can’t believe the Baron has summoned you already.” Edwin loaded up his bow and sword to his horse.

“I will understand Edwin if you wish not to join me this time.” Bram saddled up Samos and strapped his sword to the saddle. The rest of his armor had gone back to the castle with Joseph. Poor Joseph was the one the Baron sent to fetch Bram. Bram had only been home a week before Joseph told him the news.

“Of course I will join you. I do believe I am your good luck charm.” Edwin grinned.

“ I believe you just might be.” Bram chuckled. He mounted up on Samos.

“Already said your goodbyes.” Edwin looked to Bram’s manor.

“Yes. Ready.” Bram gripped the reins.

“Ay, let’s head back to purgatory.” Edwin jumped up on his horse and then the two headed out across the field.



Rhia and Devi were letting their horse rest next to a small stream. They ate some of the dry meat they had brought with them. Rhia ran her fingers through the lush grass. “This area is not so bad.” Rhia said looking out across the open meadow.

“It looks like some kind of grazing grounds.” Devi said. She filled her water jug from the stream.

Both women jumped to attention when they heard the sound of horses coming closer. “Hide the horses.” Rhia said. She positioned herself behind a small group of bushes. She readied her bow. Devi crouched down next to her. The sound of male laughter rang out, as the horses got closer.

“Your horse is too big, Bram.” Edwin yelled out. He laughed heartily as he came over the small hill. “See old boy, I told you.” He patted his horse’s mane. “You are much faster than Samos.”

Devi dropped her bow. She reached down and pulled out the blowgun from her belt. She quickly loaded up two darts. Rhia looked over at her and smiled.

“Come on slow poke.” Edwin called out. “Ouch.” Edwin felt a pinch in his thigh. He looked down and saw a dart sticking out of his right thigh. “What the hell?” Edwin dismounted and pulled his sword from its scabbard. His eyes scanned the area. Another pinch, he saw a dart in his left thigh. Everything was getting blurry. “Who is out there? Show yourself!” Edwin tried to steady himself. He shook his head as a large beautiful woman emerged from the bushes. She wore next to nothing only the fur cloak she wore kept her somewhat decent.

“Be calm.” Her voice was sweet and gentle. Edwin was convinced he was having a poison induced delusion.

“Bram!! Be on guard!!” Edwin cried out. Then he fell to the ground, out cold.

Bram crested the hill and saw a large woman standing over Edwin. He pulled his sword out and leapt from Samos. “Back away from him!!” Bram shouted.

Devi pulled out her sword and readied herself against the large male coming straight for her.

“Who are you?” Bram’s eyes traveled down her. He had never seen anyone dressed like this or a woman so strong looking before. “I don’t wish to harm you lady. But if you don’t step away from him I will.” Bram didn’t relish the thought of harming a female. What did she do to Edwin?

Two stabs hit his upper thigh. He looked down and saw two darts lodged in his leg. He looked up to the large woman she was smiling strangely at him. Damn an ambush of some sort. The woman was a distraction. Bram still moved toward Devi.

“Rhia he is strong.” Devi readied herself for Bram’s attack.

Bram followed the direction the large woman called out to. “What the hell?” Bram saw the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. She was loading up a reed with two more of those darts. She shot one at him, but he blocked it with his sword. The little woman beamed. Bram felt two more jabs hit his other leg. Damn he forgot about the large woman. She shot him in the leg with two more darts.

“He still stands!” Rhia walked to Bram. Oh, he was so handsome and strong. She bet he would be grand in battle. He was everything she always dreamt of. Now watching him fight the effects of the sleep dart, mmm, he was magnificent what a wonderful mate he would make. Rhia’s body ignited with desire.

Bram tried to stand up but the potion in the darts were too much. He saw the big one pick Edwin up and throw him over his horse. Bram couldn’t move his body but he could still hear what was going on around him. “Rhia I will help you put this big one on his horse.”

Bram felt himself being lifted off the ground he opened his eyes and saw both women looking down at him. “Oh, he is a heavy one.”

Bram looked down and saw Samos' saddle strap. Why couldn't he move? Who the hell were these women? His mind was getting fuzzy. He felt a pair of smaller hands run through his hair. "Devi, he is so beautiful." The woman's voice he heard was soft.

"Come on Rhia we must head back to the boat."

"It is at least a day and half back to the shore. We will have to keep them under until then. But how are they to eat or drink?"

"I brought chains, Rhia we will worry about it later. They will be out for awhile yet anyways."

"Yes, your right. Let's go." That was the last thing Bram heard.

Chapter 3

Bram's head ached as his eyes slowly started to focus. He saw trees everywhere. He tried to move but couldn't someone had him bound and sat him up against a tree. His throat was dry and his stomach gnawed from hunger.

"Bram are you alright?" Edwin asked. Bram quickly turned his head and saw Edwin was also bound to a tree.

"Yes, what about you?" Bram's voice cracked as he talked.

"I am fine. What happened?"

"I don't know." Bram surveyed his surroundings, a forest of some sort. They were still in France he could feel it. The sound of twigs snapping drew his attention. The large woman he saw Baronier went toward Edwin.

"Here." She raised a wooden mug to Edwin's lips.

"What is it? Who are you?" Edwin turned his head from the mug.

"I am Devi and this is only water. Now drink little one." Edwin was so terribly thirsty he let her give him the water.

"Here my big warrior." Bram turned his head and saw the same petite, beautiful woman from Baronier. "The darts make you thirsty you must drink."

"Who are you?" Bram looked into her eyes.

"I am Rhia. Now drink." Like Edwin, Bram was also very thirsty so he allowed Rhia to give him the water. He drank four mugs full before his thirst was sate.

"Who has hired you?" Bram struggled against his chains.

"Ah, you are a spirited one. Mmm I like that." Rhia brought her hand to Bram's chest. His chest was rock hard under her hand. She wanted so much to take off his strange garment and see what he looked like. Did he look as good as he felt?

"Answer me!" Bram's body was beginning to respond to Rhia's exploring hands. Her touch was soft and that look on her face. Bram growled and tried to focus on anything but her.

“I told you my name is Rhia. I am from the village of Arcarndia and I have chosen you for my mate.” Rhia removed her hands from his hard body; otherwise, she would take him right there. She should really wait until he was back in Arcarndia. “What is your name, warrior?”

Bram looked at her with stunned silence. This was a joke it had to be. He watched as Rhia stood up and looked down at him with a look of concern about her face. The woman was hardly dressed and yet she stood there, as if this was an everyday thing. Bram’s eyes followed every curve of her body until his gaze went to her full sensuous lips. Bram felt his cock grow hard taking in this woman’s beauty. He watched as Rhia’s eyes traveled down his body.

“Oh, I know what’s wrong.” Rhia straddled him and pressed her body against his. “I am sorry, my warrior but I can’t mate with you until we are back in Arcarndia.” Rhia grabbed a hold of his hard shaft through his pants and held it firmly in her hands. “Here let me at least give you a little relief.”

“What! Listen, my lady, you can’t just grab a man’s member. Untie me this instant!” But oh did her hand feel good. What in the hell was he thinking. This woman drugged him, tied him to a tree and now she fondles him.

“You don’t want relief?” Rhia looked at him strangely.

“What I want is for you to untie me.” *And get your wonderful, mmm talented hand off my cock before I explode right here.* Rhia got off his lap and went back to the fire. Bram could smell the rabbit cooking over the open flame.

“Your what? From where!!” Edwin cried out. Bram turned his head to Edwin and saw the large woman pawing at Edwin. “This is a joke, isn’t it?”

“I don’t know what you mean, my Edwin. I will bring you some food when your stomach is full I think you will not be so grumpy.” Devi went over to Rhia.

“Rhia they don’t act like the Rama warriors. I heard the other women tell that it took everything they had to fight off the Rama warrior’s lust until they got back to Arcarndia. But my Edwin, doesn’t even want my touch, let alone mate with me.” Devi prepared a dish for Edwin. They put together a hearty stew from the vegetation and wildlife of this forest.

“At least you know your mate’s name. Mine only struggles against his chains. His body desires mine but he doesn’t want me to bring him relief. This is strange, very strange. Rama warriors are more than willing to let you explore their bodies, even if you can’t mate with them.” Rhia also prepared a plate for Bram.

“This land is different. They act as though they never heard of Arcarndia. Wait Rhia let’s see if they know Rama.”

“Good idea. Maybe they have heard of Sadosa. This will put them at ease.” Rhia went back over to Bram. “Here eat something.” Rhia raised the wooden spoon to Bram’s lips. The food smelt wonderful and Bram reasoned if these women wanted to kill them, they would have done it by now. Bram opened his mouth and allowed Rhia to feed him. The food tasted as great as it smelled. “Will you not tell me your name?” Rhia smiled sweetly at him. She was treating him as though he was a treasured pet.

"I am Bram Croft." Her eyes lit up.

"That is a strong name." She fed him some more until he had finished the whole bowl. "Tell me Bram surely you know of Sadosa the leader of the Rama village."

"I don't know of any Sadosa or Rama. Where are you taking us?"

Bram was getting uncomfortable in his restraints.

"I am taking you back to Arcarndia."

"Oh my God, Bram!" Edwin turned to him. "Remember that drunken sailor's tale. What if..." Edwin looked up at Devi.

"Why would they come here?" Bram asked.

"We wanted mates from our homeland. This land is across the sea. You looked like a strong warrior, my Bram. This has to be Valhalla."

Both men looked at her with the strangest expression on their faces. The sound of twigs snapping in the distance had both women reaching for their bows. "Be calm." Rhia positioned herself in front of Bram. Providing him a shield with her body. Devi did the same for Edwin.

Both women track the sound. "They are man steps." Devi whispered to Rhia.

"Untie me, so I can defend you." Bram said.

"Be quiet, my mate." Rhia's head turned suddenly to the west. She pulled her bow back taking aim.

“Would you look at that?” Three men walked toward them. “Just what did we stumble on?” The larger man leered at Rhia. “A little sex game, huh. Well wench it’s gonna cost you. Seeing how your men are tied up. We will have fun with you first before taking your money. Drop the weapon, wench.” The men laughed loudly. They seemed to pay no mind to the fact both women were armed.

Three more men came around Devi’s side. “This one is a big wench, Marcus. She should prove to be most sporting.”

Rhia let loose her first arrow the same time Devi did. Hitting there targets square in the heart. Rhia immediately reloaded with such speed the likes Bram had never seen before, and like the first arrow the second one hit its target square in the heart. The third man was on her before she could reload. Rhia dropped her bow and pulled her sword from the sheath on her back. The man lunged at her with his sword. However, he was no match for Rhia’s speed and fell quickly to her blade. Devi had already taken care of the three on her side.

Rhia stood between the two men with her bow ready while Devi searched the area for anymore of the men. Edwin looked over at Bram. “Am I dreaming? Are you seeing this too?”

“You must be quiet, little Edwin.” Rhia said as she scanned the area.

Bram watched Rhia’s every move. She was well trained he gave her that. She had shed her cloak during the battle, and now Bram’s eyes traveled up the backs of her legs. They were strong and well shaped, her leather skirt flapped in the wind, giving both men a

nice view of her rounded bottom. A thin slip of fabric was the only thing that covered her bottom. Bram's cock hardened as his eyes focused on that nice firm, rounded butt.

Rhia turned around scanning the area behind them. Again, her small skirt played in the wind. The same small slip of fabric covered her womanly secrets barely. Bram's eyes traveled to her small waist and well toned stomach. His eyes wandered over every muscle line of her stomach. He had never seen a woman like this. His eyes went farther up to her full rounded breasts. The fabric that covered them barely did the job. Half of her bosom escaped from it. She pulled her bow back and Bram watched the small muscles in her arms contract. Her shoulders were narrow and delicate. His eyes traveled back down to her breast and lingered there. His cock was so hard now it was beginning to ache.

"There are no more of them." Devi returned and flipped one of the dead men over. "Thieves, I believe." Devi rushed over to Edwin. "Are you harmed?" she ran her hands over him.

"I am fine." Edwin's eyes drawn to Devi's large breast as she bent over to inspect him.

"Bram I will untie you so you may stretch out a bit. But stay here." Rhia unlocked the chains. Devi had the blowgun to her mouth ready to shoot him if he tried to escape. This didn't go unnoticed by Bram. They still had Edwin tied up, so he couldn't chance... what was he thinking he was a man they were two women he could easily overpower them.

The chains fell from Bram and he stood up. A little wobbly at first but it didn't take him long to adjust. He went to relieve himself and come up with a plan. He would take down the big woman first.

"Walk around Bram." Rhia kept a sharp eye on him. She could tell by his stance that he was ready to pounce.

Bram walked over to Edwin. "Untie him." He looked at Devi.

"When you are secure I will."

Bram leapt at Devi grabbing her firmly in his arms. Damn this woman was almost as tall as he was, and damn strong too. Rhia just watched for the moment. Devi flipped Bram over her and sent him to the ground. Bram quickly got back on his feet. Damn it he didn't want to hurt her.

"Rhia." Devi said. Bram felt the smaller woman climb on his back. She wrapped her strong legs around him.

"Be calm Bram." While Rhia distracted him, Devi shot him with four darts.

"Not again." Bram said as he fell to the ground.

"Edwin, don't try that." Devi smiled at him and unchained him. "If you promise to behave I won't knock you out."

Edwin stretched out. Now that Bram was out cold, what the heck was he suppose to do. He decided to play along; at least one of them should be alert and awake. Valhalla, where did he hear that name? Edwin felt Devi's arm wrap around him as she pressed his back up against her.

“You are perfect, my warrior.” Devi said breathing in his scent. Everything about her small mate was igniting her. She pulled the leather tie from his hair letting his hair flow freely in the wind. Edwin didn’t fight her attentions he strangely welcomed it.

“I am sorry my Edwin but I must tie you to your horse.” Edwin climbed up on the saddle and Devi tied his hands to it. He watched as Devi and Rhia lifted Bram up and threw him over the saddle of Samos. Damn those women were strong. Devi grabbed the reins of Edwin’s horse after she mounted hers.

“It is not much further to the docks, Edwin.” Devi smiled back at him. Edwin looked at Bram laying helpless across Samos’ back. *He is a grand knight of France and yet these women captured him.* Edwin chuckled remembering the sailor’s tale of the warrior women of Arcarndia. Boy wouldn’t that old sailor’s friend had loved to be in Edwin’s place. *Just where in the heck was Arcarndia? In addition, who was Sadosa or the Rama warriors? Why wasn’t he fighting this abduction as hard as Bram was?* Edwin pondered these questions and a whole lot more as they rode on through the forest.

Chapter 4

Bram slowly began to focus. He saw wooden crates secured to the wall by ropes. Bram raised his hand to his face and rubbed his eyes. He was seated on a straw-

filled mattress one of his legs was chained to a large wooden beam. His head ached and he was dying of thirst.

“We are in a cargo hold of a ship, Bram.” Edwin said. He was seated across from Bram in the same predicament Bram was in. “It looks like we are going to Arcarndia.”

“Those two women are manning this vessel?” Bram looked around. Judging by the size of this cargo hold the boat had to be decent size.

“No, I saw at least a dozen really big men.”

“A dozen?”

“Ay, and they were dressed a lot like the women, except of course more masculine. There were also two smaller vessels flanking this one, escorts no doubt.”

“What did these men look like?”

“Big, Blonde and well they look like the Norsemen.”

Bram knew what the Norsemen were capable of. Damn Edwin and he were probably taken as slaves. But why only take two.

“Bram, I remember where I heard Valhalla before. My father often talked about the Norsemen. After all, he fought a few in his time. They had a belief that if they died in battle they would go to Valhalla. Like our heaven.”

“But the little woman seemed to believe she was in Valhalla.” This was getting stranger by the minute.

“I know this makes no sense. Plus they spoke French pretty fluently.”

“Yes they did, didn’t they.” Bram rubbed his temples. His blasted head was aching. Why couldn’t he wake up from this bazaar dream? Warrior women who spoke French. Yes, this is what this is a strange dream, it had to be, or Bram’s sanity had left him.

The door opened and in walked Rhia. She brought some water for Bram, sitting it down by him. “I will bring you food if you wish.” Her eyes lingered over Bram’s body. How was she going to control herself until they got back to Arcarndia? She wanted to taste him, feel him.

“You can’t keep me chained up like an animal!” Bram’s eyes danced with fire, this cause Rhia to surge with desire. Oh her spirited one, she had to feel him. Not being able to control herself, Rhia jumped on Bram pinning him to the mattress. Her hands began exploring his hard muscular body.

“I am sorry spirited one. Your flames have ignited my body.” Her hand reached for the ties on his trousers. “I must feel you in my hands.” Her hand plunged into his trousers grabbing a hold of his now hard cock. Bram let out a sigh; damn her body felt good against his and her hand stroked his shaft with such skill. “Feel me, my warrior. Feel how I desire you.” She took Bram’s hand and brought it between her legs, pushing his hand to her pussy. “Feel my desire for you.”

Bram’s hand was pressed against her heat, his control quickly fading. This beautiful creature was ravishing him, he should stop her, but his male mind was in control now.

Edwin tried to look away from the scene in front of him. He would have certainly left the room but he was chained to the bed. He heard the door opened and saw Devi looking at Bram and Rhia. She went to Edwin and freed him from the chain. She grabbed his arm tightly and pulled him from the room.

Rhia was possessing Bram's lips, mouth, and tongue with her own. She needed him now. "Stop, we have to stop." Bram pushed her from him. Bram was almost breathless, his control shaky at best. But damn it this woman abducted him and he wanted to know why. More importantly, he wanted her to bring him back.

"Why stop, my beautiful warrior." Rhia reached up to the string that was holding her blouse to her. She pulled it over her head, baring her breasts for Bram. "Do you not want to feel me?" She brought both of her hands to her own breasts, squeezing and kneading them. Rhia stood up and pulled off her small skirt. "You felt how much I want you, Bram." She slipped two fingers into her wetness. The last of Bram's control was gone he pulled her to him. He took one of her nipples into his mouth and suckled on it. Rhia sighed with pleasure.

"Oh my Bram I want to taste you." She pushed him back into the bed and pulled down his trousers. "Such a nice cock my warrior has." She licked her lips as her eyes took in every inch of his hardness. "I must taste." She lowered her mouth to his cock. Her tongue feverishly lapping at his shaft, she let her tongue swirl around the head and back down the shaft. Bram moaned loudly. The pleasure her mouth was bringing him was incredible. He had other women suck on his cock before, but sure the

hell not like this. Rhia was thoroughly enjoying the taste of him. When her tongue found his balls, he arched his back up. He didn't want to spill his seed yet, oh no not yet. He felt her hand grip the base of his balls tightly. "I want to enjoy tasting you for awhile this will stop your seed from spilling." Rhia smiled up at him. She licked and sucked at his cock, completely tasting him and breathing in his male scent. The sheer pleasure of what she was doing was incredible.

"Mmm, you tasted good. I want to ride you now." She straddled him and slowly let his cock fill her. She moaned loudly, he felt so good in her. So big, so hard, she rode him wildly up and down. Bram couldn't take any more he needed to fill her with his juice. He gripped her hips and drove himself deep into her. Faster, harder he drove himself with each stroke. He felt her walls grip his cock, squeezing and massaging his whole length. He felt his climax build; he couldn't stop it any longer. His orgasm build and build the deeper, faster he rammed into her. He cried out with sheer pleasure as he filled her up with his juice.

Both of them were breathing hard. "I am sorry, my warrior." Rhia ran her hands across his chest. "I should have waited to take you when we got back to the village." Bram looked into her face; he could see the guilt in her eyes. "I will not say anything about this to the Domos. Your pride will be intact, my Bram."

"My pride? I don't understand."

Rhia got off him and quickly got dress. "You show strength by resisting my desire. However, I made this impossible for you. And for this I am sorry." Rhia tied up the lace to her shirt. "Please forgive me Bram."

He could see the tears forming in her eyes. "I forgive you, but I am still not sure for what."

"You are most understanding. I will control my lust until we are back in Arcarndia. Your pride will be safe." Rhia turned and walked out the door.

Bram was confused. "That was incredible and she is sorry." Bram shook his head and reached for the mug of water. "If anything I should have been the one to apologize."

Edwin looked out across the sea with Devi standing next to him. Devi brought him up to the bow to let him get some air and to give Rhia privacy. They were not supposed to mate with their chosen male until they were back at the village. It was tradition. Devi was going to make her Edwin look like a proud warrior. She wouldn't take him until they were at Arcarndia. Devi couldn't help but notice the Rama warriors on the ship looking at her Edwin. She heard them talk this morning. All believe Devi should have taken a warrior larger than herself to ensure strong offspring.

"I would bring you much pleasure once we are in Arcarndia, my Edwin." Devi ran her hand across Edwin's cheek.

“You really mean to bring me to your Arcarndia don’t you.” Edwin looked up into her eyes.

“Of course.”

“What if I don’t want to go?” He saw pain slipped across her face.

“Edwin, you don’t desire me.” Her voice wavered she was trying desperately not to cry. She was a strong warrior.

“Desire you, what man wouldn’t. You are very beautiful. What I meant was what if I didn’t want to leave my land?”

“Arcarndia is beautiful. You will love it there.”

“What if I don’t?” Edwin looked back out across the sea. The warm breeze felt good, the salt air was refreshing.

“I don’t understand. The Rama warriors don’t fight this. They see it as an honor not some kind of punishment.”

“Then maybe you should have chosen a Rama warrior.” Edwin heard her hurried footsteps running across the deck. Edwin turned quickly and saw Devi slipped down to one of the cargo-holds. Then he saw the biggest man he had ever seen headed right at him. He had the blond-hair like the rest had but he also sport a full blond beard and the meanest looking eyes, and more importantly this solid wall of muscle didn’t look to happy with Edwin.

“How dare you dishonor Devi!” His voice boomed. “I am Korr and would have made a suitable mate for Devi. Instead, she picks some one like you. You are the

size of our women. I could break you in two so easily." Korr came on this voyage for he was sure Devi wouldn't find a mate and he would honor her by asking to be her mate. He long admired the large warrior woman. Her beauty set his body on fire. And this puny man dare spurn her!!

Edwin couldn't speak; hell Korr was right he probably could snap him like a twig. "Well, give me a sword if you wish to challenge me." Edwin said holding his head high. He maybe scared as hell in the inside, but he was not going to show that to this gorilla.

"Korr!!" Devi yelled out. Korr watched her approach. Damn this man towered over Devi that was saying something.

"I want to be your mate. Take this puny one back." Lust danced in Korr's eyes.

"The choice is mine Korr. Now you will not threaten Edwin again. It is forbidden and you know it."

"I can fight my own battles, my lady." Edwin chimed in. He saw the other Rama warriors starting to gather.

"But Edwin."

"Now give me a sword." Everything became quiet. All the other men looked to Korr. To challenge such a small man would be beneath Korr, but this man was going to be Devi's mate.

“Give him a sword.” Korr pulled his large sword from the sheath on his back.

Holy crap that thing is as big as me. Edwin thought. But there was no backing out now.

“Korr! NO!!” Devi threw herself between him and Edwin.

“Move woman. You heard him challenge me. Now give him a sword.” Korr pushed Devi aside.

“Korr, he doesn’t know our ways.” Rhia and Bram hurried to them.

“Little warrior stay out of this.” Korr’s eyes went to Rhia then to Bram. Now this man would make a worthy opponent for him. The other men were starting to get excited. Bram saw the bloodlust in their eyes. There was no way Edwin could take on that monster, hell he didn’t know if he could. At least Bram stood a chance. He was well trained with the sword, where Edwin was more proficient with a bow.

“How dare you speak to her that way!” Bram pushed Rhia behind him. Korr didn’t really say anything bad but Bram had to make this look good.

“Spirited one what are you doing?” Rhia whispered behind his back.

Saving my best friend. “You will face me first. Get my sword woman!” Bram yelled out. He could see these men were barbaric so he will act like one too. Rhia rushed away and came back moments later with his sword.

“This is my sword.” Bram looked at the familiar hilt of his old friend.

“Of course I would never leave your sword. It is a warrior’s soul.” Rhia backed away to give him plenty of room. Korr was one of the largest of the Rama warriors, but her Bram was large as well, even if Korr was a full head taller than him.

Korr just smiled and ready himself. “This will stop!” Yet another large blond-haired warrior emerged. All the men fell silent. Korr looked at the man and sheathed his sword. “I am Inor, son of Sadosa, if this happens again you will face Sadosa when we get back.” All the men practically slinked away. No one wanted to taste Sadosa’s wrath.

“Give me your sword, Bram.” Rhia whispered to him. Her eyes never meeting Inor’s. Bram sheathed his sword and handed it back to Rhia.

“To challenge Korr is foolish, unknown. I would advise not to do it again.” Inor glanced over to Edwin. “Devi come with me.” Devi quietly walked over to Inor, like Rhia, her eyes never met his. They headed to the aft side of the deck.

“Bram, Edwin, we better head below.” Rhia looked around at the group of Rama warriors giving them steely looks. Korr stood across the deck with his arms folded piercing Edwin with his daggered looks.

“I think you are right.” Bram said as they walked cautiously back to the cargo hold.

“Devi, why would you choose such a puny man for your mate?” Inor’s voice was stern. Inor was the mate of Freya the most skilled of all Arcarndian warriors. Inor

was not happy when Freya chose him as her mate. When he woke up from the dart's potion, he tried to escape her several times. But Freya was a clever woman. Freya chose Inor for the simple reason that he was Sadosa's son. She really wanted Sadosa always had since she was a girl. But Inor proved to be a grand warrior like his father. Freya is proud and very much in love with Inor. As now, he is with her.

"He is what I wanted."

"You wanted a puny man?"

"Edwin is not puny; he is just smaller than others. I have no doubt he will be a grand warrior!" Devi shot her glance up into Inor's eyes. She no longer cared if he was the son of Sadosa. No one insults her Edwin.

"He better be, Devi." Inor gave her a disapproving look. "Or I will kill him myself." Devi quickly turned to him.

"Than you will have to come through me first."

"I would expect no less." Inor was disgusted with her. Devi could of had Korr and make strong offspring. But she shames Arcarndia and Rama with her weak choice. Now Rhia looks as though she has brought them a strong warrior. Maybe this will appease Sadosa and the Domos. If not Inor didn't really care.

Devi watched him walk away. "Edwin what have I done to you." If Inor was so mad, Sadosa was liable to kill Edwin before the joining ceremony. And the Domos agreed to this journey to bring new blood into the village. She may have Edwin killed and force Devi to make Korr her mate.

“Devi, I believe Edwin will prove himself.” Rhia stepped closer to Devi.

“You witness that?”

“Yes.” Rhia grabbed Devi’s hand. “He will prove himself.”

“Rhia, Sadosa will kill him.”

“Then you will fight beside him. I have faith Edwin will prove himself. He stood up to Korr. That shows his bravery, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, you are right. My Edwin will prove himself.” Devi squeezed Rhia’s hand tighter. “Or I will kill the one that harms him.”

Bram and Edwin were chained back down in the cargo hold again. Rhia thought this was safer for them. “What the hell were you thinking to challenge that monster?” Bram said. He was trying to break the chain that held his leg captive.

“I didn’t want to, but those other men were coming over. I felt it was important to look strong.” Edwin didn’t fight his restraints what was the point. “You didn’t have to do that, you know?”

“Oh, yes and let you get slaughtered.” Bram had always stood up for Edwin, even when they were but children. Bram smiled remembering. His father insisted that Bram spend time with the McGreggor family. His father had quite a bit of respect for Edwin’s father. Therefore, this was the beginning of Bram and Edwin’s friendship. Bram fought Edwin’s bullies and Edwin helped him practiced.

“You are always fighting my bullies.” Edwin smiled at Bram. “But seeing how these men are barbaric I better fight my own battles.”

“How many times have you saved me in battle with your bow?”

“Bram.”

“How many Edwin? I would say we are more than even.” Bram finally gave up on breaking the chain. “Now I think maybe we should get some sleep.” Bram laid down on the straw-filled mattress.

“Bram, did she take you. She seemed damn determined to before Devi pulled me out of here.”

“Now Edwin a gentlemen never kisses and tells.” A smile broadened over Bram’s face as his mind lingered on that delicious memory. He almost half-wished Rhia would ravish him again.

Chapter 5

“Come here whore.” Baron Richard Kinghorn was growing impatient with the young woman sobbing. The raven-haired girl tried to cover her self with the scraps from her torn dress. Scratch marks were all over her body. She was huddled in the corner of the Baron’s bedchamber.

Richard was completely naked, his cock was jutting out like a deadly weapon as he approached his prey. He had taken this particular morsel several times and wanted more. He held a length of rope in his right hand and a bottle of wine in the other. He took a long gulp from the wine and then threw the bottle toward the woman. It smashed the wall just to the right of her sending pieces flying at her. "Come here!" He commanded standing only a few feet from her. "Oh, I see what you want." A nasty grin swept across his face. He grabbed her violently by her slim arm and pulled her to him. Making sure she was kneeling in front of him. "Go on taste me. Don't try my patience anymore." The frightened girl obeyed taking his hardness into her mouth. "Yes, more take more in to that lovely mouth of yours." Richard closed his eyes and focus on what her mouth was doing. "Very good, I will make this less painful for you now." He removed his still hard cock from her mouth and threw her to the floor, then he mounted her roughly, surging forward fast and hard, he drove himself into her over and over until he filled her with his seed.

"Now for your punishment, you little whore." He took the length of rope and wrapped it around her delicate neck.

"Please, my lord, I have done all you have asked." Her eyes wide opened with terror. She knew the Baron was capable of such violence.

"Shut up." He tightened the rope slowly around her neck. He watched as the terror built in her eyes. He drove his now hard again cock deep inside her as he tightened the rope.

“Please my lord.” Her voice struggling to come out as the rope was beginning to restrict her breathing.

“Shut up!!” His eyes were cold and lifeless as he tightened the rope and listened to her gasping for air. All the while driving himself in and out of her. He cried out his orgasm filling her full again with his seed. Her gasps were becoming louder and more labored, as he tightened the rope again. It cut into her flesh as it blocked her breathing. He removed his cock from inside her and sat on her stomach pulling the rope so tight that her gasp couldn’t be heard anymore. She beat him frantically with her fist but he was like a wall, unmoving.

“Will you just die already.” He hissed watching her life slip away. A knock on the door caused him to release his grip on the rope, the young woman coughed and gasped desperately for air.

“Who the hell is it?” The Baron jumped off the bed and grabbed his robe.

“Sorry, my lord, but there is urgent news from Michael.” The guard spoke through the door.

“Oh, good tell him I will be there in a few minutes.” The Baron had been waiting for Michael to return. He was eager to hear about Sir Bram and just why in the hell he didn’t return to the castle like he was order to do. Damn it, he wanted Baron James’ lands a big pile of ash by now. The Baron turned back to his bed, but it was now empty.

“Now just where do you plan on hiding from me, you stupid whore. We must finish our game quickly.” The Baron grabbed the rope from the bed and quickly went around to the other side fully expecting to see the woman. “Damn it, I don’t have time for this!” Anger was building in him as he scanned the room. Then he saw the opened window. He hurried over to it and looked down. The woman’s body sprawled out on the rocks below. “The Damn whore jumped to her death and denied me the pleasure of her screams.” The Baron threw the rope across the room. He would have to make sure to have his guard rustle up another fresh young thing for him to finish the game with. Now however Michael had brought him news, and it had better be that Sir Bram was killed, hopefully violently. A smile broadened on his face as he quickly dressed.

The Baron dressed himself in a gray tunic and black trousers. He hurried to his meeting chamber with his usual two guards scampering behind him. When he entered the room, he saw Michael sitting there. Michael though he was still quite young, had long silver hair tied neatly back from his face with a leather strap. His face was handsome, but his gray eyes were cold and chilling to behold. He was tall and lean and was one of the best swordsmen in the land. The people of this land called him the deliverer of death and all feared even the mention of his name. He was dressed casually in a black tunic and gray trousers. Michael rose up in one fluid movement to greet the Baron.

“Please sit back down. Tell me about Sir Bram.” The Baron was like an eager child waiting to hear the dreadful way his disloyal knight had died.

“Well, my lord, he boarded a ship full of barbarians and headed out to sea. I had some of my men follow and they will return when they find something out.” Michael’s voice was monotone as he spoke.

“He is still alive!!” The Baron was in a total rage now. “You were supposed to kill him, Damn it!!” The Baron smashed his fist into his oak desk.

“Your orders were to follow him and see if he was up to Treason, sire.” Michael’s voice had a way a making one uneasy, even the Baron.

“I suppose you are right.” The Baron flopped down in his chair. This day was not going as he wanted it and nothing made him angrier than that.

“Seeing how he went to the barbarians, I would say that was an act of treason, sire.” Michael remained calm and unmoved by the Baron’s anger.

“Well of course it is treason. Well bloody hell, kill the bastard, or bring him back here to me and I will kill him.” The Baron liked the latter idea better.

“As soon as I find out where he went sire, I will hunt him down for you.” Michael never moved or changed expressions on his face.

“Very good then, let me know when he is found and you are ready to leave. I will give you my fastest ship.” That damn Bram will learn a very painful lesson indeed. Michael was even more sadistic than the Baron was. “You are dismissed.” The Baron waved his hand shooing Michael away. A moment later, he looked up and

Michael was already out of sight. "I must really find out how he moves without making a sound." The Baron called out to one of his guards.

"Yes sire." The guard stood as stiff as a board before the Baron.

"Go find me another fresh young thing to play with. I had broken my last toy. Now hurry." The Baron went back to his chamber to await his new plaything.

Knowing it meant his own life if he didn't follow orders. The guard with a heavy heart set out to find the next victim for his crazy lord.

Chapter 6

Bram and Edwin were on the port deck as the ships traveled down the wide river. They had been at sea for a week. The lush jungle-like vegetation lined the river. "Look at that animal." Edwin pointed to the large animal that entered the river.

"That is a Hippo, my Edwin. They don't make good food too much fat on thier body. However, the fat on this animal makes good lamp oil. They take many arrows to kill." Devi had left Edwin alone this week to let him adjust. Rhia had done the same with Bram but simply because she couldn't refrain from touching him.

Bram couldn't believe the speed in which the large boat glided down the river. The smaller war ships followed behind. The air was warm, moist and smelt sweet. Where on earth did Rhia take him? Bram's mind drifted to Baron Richard surely his absents wasn't taken well. Would David be able to defend the manor and their family? Damn it he had to find away back. However, being forced to stay below decks for most of the journey, Bram had no idea where in the blasted hell he was. This sure wasn't France or even Spain. Bram spotted large scaly animals scurrying into the river. Yes, this wasn't anywhere he had ever been before.

"Arcarndia, my Bram." Rhia dragged him to the Starboard side of the ship. Bram's eyes widened the village was immense. Wooden huts with a kind of thatch roof stretched on forever. A group of young women waited at the small wooden docks. Apparently, these three ships were the extent of these people sailing vessels. The women were dressed like Rhia and waited for the men on the ships to throw them the tie down ropes. Bram looked to the north and saw a large and long wooden building. Beyond that, there were fields of growing crops. Older men and women were busy tending to the crops. To the south, another large building had horses grazing outside of it. Bram looked down at Rhia she was beaming as she gazed at her village.

The Rama warriors disembarked first carrying some of the crates with them. The group of women boarded the boat. The lead one threw herself into the man called Inor's arms, obviously delighted with his return. After she greeted the male, she headed towards Rhia.

“Rhia, greetings.” The woman looked over every inch of Bram, making him feel like some prize stallion. This started Bram’s slow burn.

“Freya.” Rhia bowed respectfully at the woman.

“He looks strong.” Freya slapped Bram firmly on his bottom.

“Excuse me, my lady.”

“Good strong voice.” Freya stood directly in front of him. Her eyes wandered down his body. Freya reached down and cupped Bram’s cock.

“Umm, he should give you strong offspring.”

“What the hell are you doing?” Bram stepped away.

“Oh, Bram she is honoring you.” Rhia smiled at him. “She looks upon you favorably.”

“Too favorably.” Bram stepped back more.

“Rhia he is a spirited one. You shall have to tame him.”

“In case you haven’t noticed, I am not an animal!!” Bram’s eyes burned with fire. Rhia sparked with desire instantly.

“Of course you are not.” Freya shook her head. “Maybe to spirited.” This man reminded her of Inor. Rhia was in for a rough time. Freya hoped Rhia had the strength to get through it.

Freya walked over to Devi. She looked over Edwin. Then back at Devi. “He is too small, especially for a warrior of your strength.” Freya walked behind Edwin. “His shoulders are not broad enough. How is he supposed to wield a sword?”

Freya went to Devi. "Sadosa will not be pleased. Neither will the Domos. She sent you to find warriors equal to the Rama men."

"He is equal to the Rama men." Devi looked down into Freya's eyes. She will be damned if Freya belittled her Edwin.

"I am angry with you Devi." Freya turned back to Edwin.

"Are you a warrior in your land?"

"Yes, I am."

"We will see." Freya headed away.

"When Edwin proves it to you Freya. Will you offer an apology for your insult?" Devi's voiced was full of venom.

"If he proves himself I will. But he doesn't Sadosa will kill him, then I will kill you." Freya didn't even look at Devi she simply left the boat.

"Prove himself, just what the hell is that suppose to mean!" Bram went to Devi. "Tell me."

"If Sadosa believes Edwin is weak he will challenge him and kill him. Weakness is not tolerated."

"You knew this and you took him anyways. These men are enormous. Edwin is a bowman not a swordsman!" Rhia grabbed Bram's arm.

"Hey, I am standing right here." Edwin was growing tired of this. But how Devi defended him didn't go unnoticed.

“Bram please be calm. You can’t act like this in front of the Domos and especially not in front of Sadosa.” Rhia gently pulled him away from Devi.

“Follow me.” Another warrior woman stood in front of them. They all followed her off the boat.

They followed the woman up a dirt path. Bram couldn’t help but noticed the stares they were getting from the villagers. The one thing that stuck out to Bram is that all the villagers had blonde hair. He could hear the whispers as they passed. A couple of women dressed like Rhia approached them. Bram saw that look of confrontation on their faces as they stop the lead woman.

“Freya has order us to take them to the Domos.” Their escorts said.

“Rhia what matter of warrior have you brought back.” The larger woman pushed pass the escort and went to Rhia. She was a head taller than Rhia and clearly hostile.

“Make way, Maya.” Rhia glared up at her.

“I bet he couldn’t last one round with Rolf.” She gave Bram a disgusted look.

Rhia pulled her sword from its sheath and held it by her side. “Step aside.” Rhia tightened her grip on the hilt of her sword. “Or fight me. These are your options.”

“Hmmp.” Maya pulled her sword. “Little warrior you don’t stand a chance.” Before Bram could stop them, the two women began their deadly dance. Both women were fast. Their swords clashed as they lunged for each other.

“Bram what should we do?” Edwin said.

“You will do nothing.” Devi said. “Rhia has challenged Maya this is between them.”

Edwin looked up at Bram. He could see Bram looking for the right moment but the women were moving fast. “Stop this!!” A woman’s voice rung out, both women stopped immediately bowing their heads and sheathing their swords.

“Domos.” Devi bowed her head as well as all of the other women around them.

“Maya, leave.” Maya quickly retreated. “Rhia come here.” Rhia hurried to the older woman. Though much older than Rhia, Isadora was still very attractive. Her body was just as strong as the other women were. And like Devi she was a big woman. Her long blonde hair had speckles of grey; it was braided and hung down the length of her back. She was dressed in a white gown with a golden rope tied around the waist. Her sword was strapped to her back, throwing off her feminine look. However, it was her eyes that stood out to Bram; they were the palest shade of blue and full of compassion. Bram had heard the eyes were the window to the soul and looking at this woman, he now believed it.

“What is your name warrior?” Isadora moved to Bram. She looked over his body the same way Freya had done.

“I am Bram Croft.” Bram’s eyes didn’t leave hers. Isadora liked that.

“I am the Domos, Isadora, the leader of Arcarndia.” Isadora was pleased with Rhia’s choice. He looked to be a strong warrior. “What land are you from?”

“France.” Bram noticed the shocked look that came over her face. This was the land Sadosa’s mate was said to be from. Isadora was now intrigued.

“Rhia then you didn’t make it to our native land.” Isadora turned to Rhia.

“But Domos we sailed across the sea.” Rhia was upset. She heard the stories from the elders. They crossed the sea toward the sunset. They followed the land for two nights.

“There are many lands I suspected that lie across the sea. But however I am pleased with your choice.” Rhia beamed with pride for her Bram. Isadora walked closer to Bram. Oh God he hoped she wasn’t going to grab his cock the way the other one did. Instead, she reached up and ruffled his hair. “Bram the dark-haired warrior.” Isadora smiled warmly at him. Then she went to Edwin.

“What is your name warrior?” Isadora looked down into Edwin’s face.

“I am Edwin McGregor.” Edwin also noticed her eyes.

“Are you also from this France?” Isadora studied his small frame. Why did Devi choose such a small man?

“Aye, I am.”

“But your speech is different from Bram’s.”

“My family is from Scotland but I was born in France.”

“Scotland? Where is this?” Isadora liked how this little one talked. It was lively and a bit quirky.

“It is to the north of France across another sea if you will.” Edwin saw Rhia spark.

“Yes Rhia I am thinking the same thing. Maybe just maybe are home land is across this other sea.” Isadora went to Devi then turned back to Edwin.

“I am afraid Edwin, Sadosa will not be pleased about you. Though I believe, Odin will smile upon you. You have that look.” Isadora sighed. “That look of witnessing many battles. You have seen your share of bloodshed haven’t you?”

“Aye, I have. Bram and I have fought many battles together.” Isadora moved around to Bram.

“Then you have seen Edwin fight.” Isadora liked this little Edwin. She believed that she might learn from him and was looking for a way to save him from Sadosa.

“Yes. There is none better with a bow.”

“A bow?” The women are skilled with the bow not the men, most intriguing.

“Aye, Domos. I am skilled with my bow.” Edwin injected.

“We will see.” Isadora smiled. “Devi I approve of your choice, but Sadosa will have to see his skill.” Devi stood behind Edwin beaming with pride. “Now let’s go to my hut. I want my mate Eriq to greet you both.” They followed behind her toward a large hut in the middle of the village.

Bram wanted to run as fast as he could away from this primitive village. The heavy stares of the villagers were almost too much. He could feel that Edwin was in trouble. There were many bullies on the schoolyard here. There was no way he could protect his friend from them all. Bram gazed down at Rhia. She was a beauty he admitted that and the lustiest woman he had ever met. He rather enjoyed her endearing looks or better yet that look of pure hunger. This was another reason Bram wanted to run. Something about this little woman was so, so...oh damn it, he couldn't find the words to portray his emotions even to himself. Bram walked inside the large hut. Though it was constructed similar to the others, it had several more rooms to it. The first room was like a greeting area. Bram suspected this is where all matters concerning the village were dealt with. Isadora moved like a queen as she led them to a smaller room off to the right hand side. It was much cooler in here than it was outside. A fact Bram was grateful for.

"This is my mate, Eriq." Isadora beamed with pride at the large blonde warrior. He was as old as Isadora but still a formidable man. He stood a full head taller than Isadora putting him at least six foot six. He sported a neatly trimmed beard and mustache that were the same color as his hair. He was dressed in a light linen black trouser and an animal pelt of some sort vest. Bram couldn't recall any animal that had black and white stripes in any of the places he traveled. Isadora introduced Eriq to the two men.

“You look like a strong warrior.” Eriq’s voice was as big as he was. He smiled warmly at Bram as he approached. “Fine choice Rhia.” Eriq slapped Bram hard on the back causing him to lurch forward.

“We will beef you up little one.” Eriq slapped Edwin on the back. “My Isadora has taken a liking to you. This is a good thing wouldn’t you say?”

“Aye, I am honored.” Edwin bowed his head toward Isadora.

“But I will have to admit Devi; Korr would have made a better choice. But what is done is done. Now Devi you will have to soothe Korr’s wounded pride.” Eriq said. He headed back to Isadora and wrapped one of his powerful arms around her waist. “My mate is a big woman, Devi. So she chose a big man. My son is powerful, so much so Sadosa is training him.” Eriq kissed Isadora lovingly on the cheek and then sat down on the wooden chair.

“Sadosa will not arrive till tomorrow. So take your mates and settle them into your huts. I know you are most anxious to mate with them.” Isadora sat down on Eriq’s lap. Bram and Edwin just looked at each other with puzzled looks. Devi and Rhia smiled at each other and grabbed their respective mates and dragged them out of Isadora’s hut.

Chapter 7

Rhia led Bram passed a group of huts to one that faced the forest. All the huts were similar to one another. Rhia hurried into the hut pulling Bram by the arm behind her. When they were completely inside she released Bram's arm, then went behind him and shut the door. Bram looked around the small hut. The main room served as the kitchen and greeting room. There were two rooms off to the side and that was it. This hut reminded him of the small dwellings in Adkins. Bram turned around and looked down at Rhia. The pure look of desire in her eyes sprung his cock to life.

"My warrior," Rhia purred. She undid her blouse and tore it from her body. Bram's eyes immediately went to her firm rounded breasts. Rhia quickly pulled off her skirt and threw it across the room. Her body ached with need so bad she wanted to tear the clothes right off Bram's body and impale herself on his glorious cock. "Does my body please you?" Rhia stepped slowly, seductively toward him.

"You are beautiful, Rhia." Bram just stood there looking at her nude body. She was so at ease with her sexuality that it was an incredible aphrodisiac to him. Bram pulled his tunic over his head and let it fall to the floor. However, before he could reach for his trousers Rhia was on him. She hungrily pulled at his trousers. She wanted to get at that cock.

“Wait.” Bram grabbed her hands.

“Why?” Rhia stuck her hand down his trousers and grabbed his hard shaft.

“Let me take you,” Bram moaned out the words as Rhia expertly stroked his cock. Rhia released him and went over to the table. She sat down on the tabletop and spread her legs open. Bram’s breath caught in his throat.

“Then take me.” Rhia brought her hands to her breasts and kneaded them. “Hurry I need you to fill me.”

Bram lunged at her and scooped her up in his arms. He lowered her wet pussy to his hard cock. With one strong thrust, he filled her with every inch of his hardness. Rhia gasped as she stretched to take him. “Ride me,” Bram groaned.

Rhia wrapped her arms around his neck and tightened her legs around his waist. She moved her body up and down his hardness. “Yes, Bram,” she varied the speed and depth she took him, bringing him to the edge then slow down enough to prevent him from going over. Her pleasure build and build until it crescendo in pure bliss. She screamed out his name as another wave overcame her. Bram tightened his grip on her ass and forced her to ride him faster, to take all of him inside her. He grunted and growled as his own orgasm build and finally exploded, filling her full of his seed. Bram laid her back down on the table with his cock still inside her. He bent over the table to lay his body against hers.

“More, I want more,” Rhia whispered in his ear. This instantly made Bram hard. He began riding her again. This continued for the rest of the night.



“Oh, my Edwin,” Devi snuggled up against his chest. They had spent a wonderful evening making love and now Devi was finally sated.

“That was wonderful,” Edwin said, breathing hard. He never knew he could make love that many times in one night. Devi kept exciting him. She used every opening of her body to bring him pleasure. He only hoped he brought her the same ecstasy she brought him.

Devi looked up into his eyes and gently stroked his face. “Tomorrow, you will meet Sadosa.” She brought her lips to his and sweetly kissed him. “Whatever happens, my Edwin, I will stand by your side.”

“What is going to happen?” Edwin asked, stroking her hair.

“Sadosa will challenge you and Bram. If he thinks that you are weak he will kill you.” Devi climbed on top of him. She slid her wet cunt against his hardening cock. Edwin could feel every fold of it as she moved slowly up and down. His now hard cock stroked her clit causing her to moan. “Edwin, I will not let Sadosa hurt you.” Devi lifted up and directed his cock into her.

“I don’t want you to get hurt, Devi.” Edwin arched his hip up to fill her completely full.

“Yesss...” Devi rode him faster and faster until they both climaxed together.

“Devi, you will have to let me rest.” Edwin was breathing hard. He reached out his arms to her wanting to feel her next to him. “I don’t want you to protect me against this Sadosa.”

“We will fight together Edwin or we will die together.” Devi laid her head on Edwin’s chest.

“Devi.” Edwin stroked her hair. He knew arguing with her was futile. They lay quietly in each other’s arms until they fell asleep.



Bram opened his eyes as light flooded into the bedchamber from the small window. He sat up and stretched looking around the room. The bed was big enough that they could rest comfortably, be it snugly. The mattress was straw filled and rested in the wooden bed frame. Bram admired the artisanship of the bed. The covers were made of some kind of animal hide. But the sheet that caressed his body was the softest fabric he ever felt. He saw Rhia’s bow and sword sitting in one corner and his sword sitting in the other. There were two wooden trunks on either side of the room. Rhia came in and placed some clothing in one of the trunks.

“Greetings, my warrior,” Rhia smiled warmly at him. She would have to contain herself this morning, though this was going to be a hard thing. Bram look so sexy with his hair all tousled like that. “You must ready yourself. Sadosa is here.” She laid some clothes on the bed. “Wear this you will be more comfortable.” Rhia thought

his clothes that he wore here were way too heavy. With the warm weather year-around, he had no real need for them anymore.

Bram reached for the clothes, they were similar to what Eriq was wearing yesterday. Bram felt the fabric of the black trousers. It was lightweight and soft, a far cry from the woolen trousers he had. "Where is the tunic?" Bram lifted up the black and white stripe, animal skin vest.

"What is a tunic?" Rhia was dressed in her full battle gear. Her fur blouse barely covered her breast. The small animal-skinned skirt was fastened with strings that ran up both hips, emphasizing her curved hips. One of her thighs had a metal plate secured to it. She strapped her sword to her back and tightened her weapon belt. She placed her two daggers into the belt. She slid her small shield onto her arm. Bram watched her intently. Rhia wore no armor but some shoulder plates and the leg plate. She reached up and secured her leather headband. Bram focused on the angel engraved on the metal plate that was on the front of Rhia's headband. Rhia then pulled her hair back into a high ponytail and begun to braid it. Finally, she grabbed her bow and a quiver of arrows. "Hurry Bram," Rhia stood impatiently in front of the bed. How could he not be ready yet?

"I am supposed to wear just this?" Bram held up the vest. "What kind of animal did this come off of?"

“Here let me put this on.” Rhia grabbed the vest and slid it on Bram in one quick movement. “This is from the Zebra; they look like a horse but smaller and are striped like this. The meat is pretty good.”

Bram pulled up the trousers. They fitted him well, though he felt odd wearing only the vest. “Our elders make the clothes from the animals we bring back. The soft fabric is from the traders of Mali. You look so handsome Bram.” Rhia’s body burned for him. His body was so strong; she wanted to run her tongue over every muscle line of his glorious body.

“Why are you dressed like that? Is Sadosa your enemy or some kind of threat?” Bram couldn’t take his eyes off her.

“Sadosa is the leader of Rama. He is certainly not my enemy. I am in battle dress to honor him.” Her Bram had so much to learn. Sadosa was the greatest of all warriors. All feared, yet respected him. Sadosa was the standard all women warriors of Arcarndia measured their potential mates too.

“I didn’t mean to insult you Rhia.” Bram felt awkward. He could see the respect and awe in Rhia’s eyes when she spoke Sadosa’s name.

“I am not so easily insulted Bram. But, you must be careful around the Rama warriors. They love to battle. Please Bram walk softly.” Her spirited Bram was surely going to insult one of those blood thirsty Rama warriors. This thirst is why there is only Arcarndia and Rama left. Rhia remember the elders telling stories about the many

villages that dotted the land. All full of their kind of people, but constant war amongst themselves dwindled their kind.

“I will follow your lead.” Bram smiled at her. He had an urgent need to soothe her. He didn’t like the look of distress on her face. That closing in feeling was beginning to creep up on him again.

Bram followed beside Rhia as they walked up the dirt path toward the Domos’ house, there was a buzz going through the village. Bram could feel the excitement mixed with tension in the air. This Sadosa must be something to create such a sensation. Bram looked around for Edwin but couldn’t see him anywhere. Maybe Devi took him from the village. That would have been what Bram done. Bram adjusted his sword strap, wearing only this vest the familiar burden of his sword felt clumsy.

“Please be silent Bram.” Rhia slowed her steps the closer they got to Domos’ hut. Bram followed her gaze; standing in front of the hut was the most intimidating man Bram had ever seen. The man stood with his arms crossed and a stern look over his tanned face. He was wearing black trousers, a leather vest, metal wristbands, a leatherhead band similar to Rhia but with a dragon carved on the metal plate, and the most impressive sword strapped to his back. He easily stood six foot six, broad and extremely muscular. His hair was golden with a few streaks of gray, it hung down to the middle of his shoulders.

“Sadosa,” Rhia said, as she stopped abruptly. Bram come to a halt beside her. He gazed down at her face. Her eyes were filled with reverence, but there was also

fear in those beautiful eyes. Rhia gasped causing Bram to look up. Sadosa was headed for them. He walked with such authority that Bram was starting to become nervous himself.

“Oh, Bram please show him respect.” Rhia’s eyes went to the ground as Sadosa approached.

“Little warrior introduce your mate,” Sadosa’s voice was more intimidating than he was.

“Great Sadosa this is Bram Croft.” Rhia couldn’t lift her eyes to look at Sadosa. She had never spoken with him before. She felt two large fingers touch her under her chin and jerk her head up.

“Look at me when you talk,” Sadosa bellowed. Rhia locked eyes with him. His eyes were a pale blue that danced in the light. His face was most handsome though rigid. Rhia trembled a little, but quickly summon forth her battle stance.

“This is my mate Bram Croft,” Rhia said, with a strong voice. Sadosa smiled and brought his hand to her cheek where he lightly caressed her face.

He turned his gaze at Bram. “You come from the same land as my mate.” Sadosa walked behind Bram. “Though you are much larger than the pitiful bunch that was with her, they died too easy.” Bram heard Sadosa draw his sword and going on pure reflex, he turned quickly and drew his own. He did it in time to block the blow from Sadosa’s sword. His arm vibrated from the strength of Sadosa’s blow.

“Very good,” Sadosa still gripped his sword.

“Great Sadosa,” Devi said, as she and Edwin approached. Edwin was dressed like Bram. Sadosa turned around and looked at Devi then at Edwin.

“This is the man you rejected Korr for.” Sadosa headed toward Edwin. Bram tightened his grip on his sword. “Korr is one of my best warriors.” Sadosa was clearly angry.

“Korr would have treated me like an animal. Edwin will not.” Devi locked gazes with Sadosa.

“You will fight me, Edwin. If you survive I will permit Devi to take you as a mate.” Sadosa felt a point of a sword in his back.

“You are not done fighting me. It was unwise to turn your back in the middle of a battle,” Bram said. He heard Rhia gasped. Sadosa turned quickly and deflected Bram’s sword. Bram positioned himself, this Sadosa was big and rather strong but so were some of the men he fought on the battlefield. Sadosa came at him; Bram blocked a series of blows. Sadosa may be stronger than him but he was slower. Bram would use this. Bram quickly evaded Sadosa’s sword strikes only blocking when there was no other choice. Damn Sadosa had endurance. A crowd gathered including Isadora and Eriq.

Whispers ran through the crowd. Bram had lasted longer than any other warrior had against the great Sadosa. “Stop this!” Isadora called out. She didn’t want Bram to be injured, for she was sure Sadosa would eventually win. Why waste such a strong warrior. Sadosa stopped per Isadora’s request. As he turned back to Edwin an

arrow embedded itself in the ground inches from his foot. Sadosa looked up and saw Edwin loading another arrow.

“I have no wish to challenge you. For it is obvious you would win.” Edwin pulled the string of his bow back. “None can match me with a bow. If you wish to test me, do it with the weapon that I am skilled with.”

Sadosa laughed out loud and put his sword back in its sheath. “I will grant this. Freya!!” Sadosa yelled out. Freya instantly came to his side. “I wish you to challenge Edwin.” Freya readied her bow. “Go to the training grounds.”

Edwin released his string and followed Devi to the training ground. So did the crowd that had gathered. Two young boys fetched Edwin and Freya’s horse when they arrived at the training grounds. Rhia looked over Sadosa this was not like him. He would have sliced Edwin to pieces, why was he giving Edwin a chance. Then she saw Sadosa look at her Bram. Rhia beamed the great Sadosa was much pleased with her Bram. Rhia hurried to Bram’s side and grabbed a hold of his arm. Bram didn’t seem concerned about Edwin passing this test.

“If he fails Bram...” Rhia couldn’t finish she knew Sadosa would kill Bram’s friend. Seeing how Bram put himself in danger like that for Edwin, their bond must be tight.

“He won’t fail any test dealing with a bow.” Bram watched Freya ride her horse at full gallop toward the wooden target. With a fluid motion, she released the arrow it struck dead center on the target. Edwin followed. Bram had seen Edwin pick

off enemies on the battlefield, and with the same accuracy Edwin hit the target right next to Freya's arrow. The tests continued Edwin matched Freya shot per shot.

"Enough!!" Sadosa bellowed. Freya was the best archer if this Edwin could match her than he may prove useful after all. Both of them headed back to Sadosa. "Very good Edwin," That was all Sadosa said. Then he turned and walked away. Korr followed him clearly displeased with the turn of events.

"I knew you would please Sadosa," Isadora smiled at Edwin. Devi was most impressed by Edwin and she stood silently by his side, a great show of respect to a Rama warrior.

Edwin smiled at her. It took all his skill to keep up with Freya. Isadora and Eriq walked back to their hut to find Sadosa. "Bram you damn fool." Edwin hit Bram on the arm. "You could have got killed."

"Well, we all die sometime," Bram smiled at Edwin.

"Thanks, Bram." Edwin playfully hit him again.

"It was your skill that saved your behind, not my sword." Rhia went to Bram and Devi grabbed a hold of Edwin. Bram watched the bigger woman pick Edwin up and squeezed him hard, before sitting him back down. Edwin only came to her shoulder but the size difference didn't seem to bother Edwin at all.

"Edwin did well. Freya is our best warrior." Rhia still had a firm grip on Bram's arm. "Let me show you the village." Rhia guided Bram up the dirt path. A group of dark-skinned men with wagons full of all kinds of silk and spices were

bartering with some of the villagers. "The Barter hall," Rhia noticed Bram watching the men. "Many people come here to trade with us." Bram nodded at her and they continued up the trail.

"Sadosa was pleased with you Bram." Rhia couldn't help but smile.

"I take it that was a good thing." Bram couldn't help but smile back at her. Rhia was literally beaming. Her eyes danced, her face glowed. Bram felt a warm feeling race through him when she looked into his eyes.

"It is an honor, Bram." She liked the way his smile reached his eyes. For a brief moment, it was only them. This moment bounded Rhia even closer to her dream warrior.

"Rhia!" Maya's voice intruded on their moment. Rhia turned her attention to the angry woman warrior. "It seems as though your pathetic mate passed Sadosa's test. Rolf wouldn't have needed a test. Sadosa already favored him."

"Good thing, Rolf probably would have failed." Rhia's voice was calm and steady.

"How dare you insult Rolf!" Maya stood right in front of Rhia.

"You will pay for insulting my Bram." Rhia drew her sword. Maya instantly jumped back and drew hers.

"Rhia you don't have to do this." Bram grabbed her arm.

"Let go Bram. I can't let this insult go. I will not have her bad-mouthing you all through the village." Bram saw something glint in the corner of his eye. With

lighting speed, he drew his sword from its sheath and blocked the blow of Maya's sword, mere inches from Rhia's face.

Rhia dropped her sword to her side and stepped back. Maya had a sheer look of panic on her face. Knowing just what she had done. "You must fight her Bram," Rhia said, glaring at Maya. She wanted the pleasure of defeating Maya. Now that Maya's blade had crossed with Bram's it was his fight now.

"What?" Bram looked at the smaller woman, he had no intention on fighting a woman. Even one who was intent on fighting with Rhia.

"She has challenged you." Rhia put her sword back in its sheath.

"I don't give a damn. I will not fight a woman!" Bram still gripped his sword. Maya readied herself for Bram's attack. Though the Arcarndian women were unsurpassed with a bow, Rama men were deadly with the sword. Moreover, since this dark-haired stranger held his own against Sadosa he was probably just as deadly. Maya knew she was going to die.

"You may win intruder. But I will make your blood mingle with mine." Maya came at him. Bram deflected her blow.

"I will not harm a woman!" Bram yelled at Rhia. Maya came at him again. Bram dodged her next three strikes. Bram didn't want to hurt her but she was hell bent on harming him.

"Stop this!!" Isadora called out. Only then did Maya stop her assault. "Bram you..." Isadora paused. "You are the victor." Isadora put her hand on Maya shoulder.

“You have Odin’s right, Bram.” Isadora turned to Maya. “I will call the Valkyries to speed your way to heaven.” Isadora stopped the battle to let Maya save some pride and die a warrior’s death. The ease in which Bram stopped Maya’s attack would have surely been noticed.

“What is Odin’s right?” Bram had a good idea, but this couldn’t be what he thought. Surely, Isadora didn’t mean for him to kill this woman.

“You can take her life, Bram.” Isadora looked into his face. “Please be merciful.”

Bram couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “I will not take her life!!” Bram put his sword back in its sheath. Gasp rolled through the gathering crowd.

“Isadora gave you Odin’s right, Bram.” Rhia looked at him odd. “You will insult Odin.”

“I don’t give a damn who I insult. I will not take her life.” Bram walked away from all of them. His head pounded his heart was heavy. He thought he was through the worst. There couldn’t possibly be anymore strange things to figure out. But this...was truly barbaric.

Rhia watched Bram walk away. “Rhia, you better bring Bram to Odin’s temple and beg forgiveness. Maybe you had better go to Thor’s as well maybe he will restrain Odin. Hurry Rhia.” Rhia nodded her head to Isadora and ran toward Bram. When she caught up with him, she latched hold of his arm and dragged him forward. But, Bram pulled from her grasp.

“Leave me be.” Bram stopped.

Rhia hurried back to him. “Please Bram we must go to Odin’s temple.”

Rhia clutched tightly onto Bram’s shoulder, with a pleading look she looked deeply into his eyes. “Bram, please, I don’t want Odin to strike you down. Please!” Bram’s heart melted. Rhia was truly afraid for him. He let her lead him up the rode passed the Domos’ house and then passed what appear to be the blacksmith hut of the village, and a large square shaped building on the other side that had beautiful windows. Up the dirt path Rhia, dragged him with an urgency that matched the look on her face. Off to one side were the fields, but on the other were two obelisk looking towers. Both towers were covered in gold with precious jewels embedded in them. The trees hid these treasures from view until you were right on them. Rhia dragged him in front of the smaller of the two towers.

“Kneel Bram.” Rhia fell to her knees in front of the tower. Bram followed her lead. “Odin please forgive Bram. He is new to our village.” Rhia bowed her head. “Great Odin I have honored you in battle.” Then she became silent. Bram looked at her then at the tower. There was enough gold and jewels on the tower to make any man richer than the King. But it was more than that, it was the pure beauty of this work of art that was awe inspiring. The larger one was even more elaborate.

“Keep praying to Odin, Bram. I will ask Thor for help.” Rhia hurried to the large tower and fell to her knees. Bram continued to look at Odin’s tower then he

noticed the pile of swords that surrounded the bottom of the tower. Some so old they were completely rusted. Others look like they were placed there mere days ago.

Rhia came back to Bram. "Let's go Bram. I think our prayer was heard." Rhia bowed before Odin's tower. "Thank you great Odin." She walked slowly backwards still bowing at the tower. Bram came to her when she turned around and walked away.

"We should go to our hut, Bram." Rhia walked quietly back to the hut. What was wrong with her Bram? He had no respect for Odin and seemed to scuff their traditions. Moreover, he still had more to learn. Would he accept her? Would he join with her? She had put off the question but she only had one week before the joining ceremony. Were things in his France so different than here? She wished her mind would rest. Give Bram more time. She would ask him to join with her in a few days. Yes, give him a few more days. Still, something was troubling him. What was it? She looked over at him. He was miles away from her though he stood right next to her. The warmth she felt when she looked at him only intensified. She loved her warrior and she would show him just how much. Yes, that was it. Show him how much she did love him. With new hope, Rhia brightened up as they approached their hut.

Bram was still silent when they entered the hut. "Sit down, Bram." He was so deep in thought Rhia was starting to think maybe her warrior was ill, that never occur to her. She must make sure he didn't have an ailment.

Bram sat down at the table his mind still racing with so many thoughts. "What is wrong? Please tell me, Bram." Rhia sat a mug of water down next to him.

Bram looked down into her pretty face. She looked so distraught. *How can she care so much about me?* Bram drank down the water.

"Maybe I should get the Keeper? Do you need healing, my warrior?" Rhia brushed his hair back from his face. He didn't burn with fever his color looked good.

"I am not ill Rhia. I just don't belong here." Bram had to go back to Adkins. With all the weird things going on around here, his family slipped his mind. Now the full force of it hit him hard. What if they were paying for his absence? David was a skilled knight, but how long could he protect the manor against the goons the Baron was sure to send?

"You need time Bram." Rhia kneeled down in front of him, placing her hands gently on his thighs.

"I need to go back to France. Everything is wrong here."

Rhia all of a sudden jumped to her feet. Bram could see the anger flash across her face, her eyes burned and her fist clenched. "Have you bothered to look at my people? They are happy and peaceful. There is nothing wrong about the way my people choose to do things." Rhia put distance between them. Pride for her people fueled her anger. "Let me tell you something, Bram. When I went to your lands not very many of your people seemed happy. Your lands were cold and dreary. Women were treated like fragile creatures almost the way my people treat our horses."

“Forcing a man to come here against his will, hunting him down like an animal is okay, huh!!” Bram slammed his fist against the table. “Well I am sorry, dear lady, if men in my country prefer to be the hunters. We treat women fragile because that is what they are suppose to be!!” His voice boomed through the hut. “Women are not supposed to go to war. Damn it!! They are supposed to be like a beautiful flower. To be cared for and protected!!”

Rhia just stood there. Tears filled her eyes. “You don’t look upon me as a real woman. Is this the reason you looked so sad?” Rhia ran out of the hut she didn’t want to hear his answer. She ran as fast as she could to the forest. She tried to hold her tears but they came out anyways.

“Rhia!” Devi called out as Rhia flew past her and Edwin. They saw Bram standing outside of Rhia’s hut. His fists were clenched and his face hardened. Devi hurried over to him and with every ounce of strength she had she punched Bram square in the jaw, knocking him down.

“What did you do to her?” Devi drew her sword and readied herself.

“Devi, stop it!” Edwin called out. Bram sat there on the ground. He deserved that, he didn’t mean for Rhia to take his words like that. Of course, he thought she was a real woman. Her beauty and strength made a deadly combination for any man. But he didn’t know what to say to comfort her, so he let her go.

Devi put her sword back in its sheath. She didn’t want to distress Edwin. “Bram what happen?” Edwin helped Bram to his feet.

"I stuck my foot in my mouth as usual." Bram reached up and felt where Devi popped him one. Damn, that woman hits hard.

"Devi, maybe you should find Rhia," Edwin said.

"Yes, I will go find her." Devi gave Edwin a quick kiss then raced toward the forest. Edwin went inside the hut with Bram.

"Damn it, Edwin. I didn't mean to hurt her. She was insulting our country and..." Bram kept seeing that hurt look in Rhia's eyes and it really bothered him.

"Tell her you are sorry when they get back."

"Of course I will, Edwin. But I still want to go back to Adkins. I can't leave our people unprotected."

"Adkins does have other knights, Bram."

"And none of them will dare go against the Baron. Hell, I wouldn't either."

"But you plan on it now, why?" Edwin understood that Bram was worried about his family.

"Yes, someone has to stop him. You know as well as I that the Baron is a madman, who only gets worse with every passing year. I can't stay here and let our people suffer under his rule. The Duke will do nothing for the Baron is important to him strategically and the other Barons fear him."

Edwin admired Bram's resolve. Who else would give up paradise to honor his duty? Edwin knew he couldn't do it. "Tell Rhia maybe she can help you get back."

"I don't want her coming with me and getting hurt."

“How else are you going to get back? If Rhia knew this was that important to you, I am sure she would move heaven and earth to give it to you.”

“She doesn’t want to be dishonored if I left, Edwin. I doubt very much she would help me get back to Adkins.”

“And you are blind and a fool. Do you not see the way she looks upon you? There is so much love in her eyes; it pains me to know that you don’t even see for yourself.” Edwin went to the door. “Open your eyes and look, Bram. Rhia would do anything for you. I bet even let you go back.” Edwin then left.

Bram sat there for what seemed like an eternity when he was startled by the sound of a large horn and a loud knock on the hut’s door. The door flew open and there stood Inor. “Grab your weapon, Kador threatens.” Then Inor hurried out.

Bram went to the bedchamber and grabbed his sword. He quickly went outside and saw everyone readying himself or herself. Who was Kador? Bram thought, as he watched the women mounting their horses and gathering at the edge of the village. The men were dividing into four groups and going out to the edges of the village. They were forming a barrier to the village. Eriq was gathering the children and elderly and putting them into the Domos’s large hut.

“Did Rhia come back?” Bram looked up at Devi as she tried to steady her horse.

“No, didn’t you find her?” Bram gripped his sword tightly.

“No. Don’t worry I am sure she heard the horn and is waiting for the rest of us.” Devi turned and smiled down at Edwin. He stood with his bow gripped tightly in his hand and a quiver of arrows slung over his shoulder. “Guard the village, my warrior.” She then kicked the sides of her horse and raced out of the village with the other women.

“Rhia doesn’t have her weapons.” Bram was growing uneasy. “We have to find her, Edwin.”

“We don’t know where she went. She knows this land Bram; you have to help guard her village.” Bram nodded and they headed to Eriq.

“Stand guard here. You are skilled with that?” Eriq looked down to Bram’s sword and Edwin’s bow.

“Yes, we are very skilled,” Bram replied.

“You are being trusted with our most valuable assets. If Kador’s warriors get past the rest, it is up to you to stop them from getting inside my hut.” Eriq then went toward the other side of the hut and headed toward Odin’s tower.

Bram heard the children crying inside. He looked over to the door and saw an old woman looking out at him. Eriq trusted him and Edwin to guard the children and elderly. They were the last hope for them should the warring party get this far. Bram knew this was an honor that Eriq has bestowed on them. He heard Edwin climb on top of the roof. *Very good Edwin*, Bram thought. He hoped that Rhia heard the warning,

and then he got into his battle stance and waited. That was the one thing he hated about battle, the waiting.

After about an hour, another horn sounded and the children poured out from the hut. "You hold yourself the way Inor does," An old woman said to Bram. "We are safe now. All that is left is to pray for the safe return of the women." Bram watched the old woman shuffle her feet as she left.

Edwin jumped down from the roof. "The women are coming back." Bram sheath his sword and followed Edwin. The air was heavy and a sense of dread was stifling the closer they got to the returning women. Bram knew that some of the women were dead or injured. He had seen that same look upon his own men's faces when they returned from battle.

"Edwin!!" Devi jumped from her horse and hurried to him. She looked almost frantic as she talked with Edwin. Bram couldn't hear what she was saying but when Edwin looked at him. *Rhia!!* Bram ran as fast as he could to the group of women. Freya jumped down from her horse and went to him.

"Where is Rhia?" Bram scanned all the horses.

"Bram." Freya grabbed his shoulders hard. "Listen to me." She looked deep into his eyes. "Rhia has been captured. Kador took her himself." Bram felt the blood leave his face; it was his fault she ran out into the forest... his damn fault.

"I have got to get her back!" There was no way he was going to abandon her.

“Don’t worry, Bram we will. But you must do what I say, understand?”

“Anything, but let’s go.” Bram headed for the stables.

“Wait, I will take four of my best and you may come too. But we must let him believe we have given her up for dead. He must see us do as we normally do. He is watching Bram can’t you feel eyes upon you.”

“But we can’t leave her with him!!” How could that woman be so damn calm? One of her comrades was out there; his Rhia was out there. Rhia wouldn’t be in this mess if it weren’t for him. Bram cursed himself repeatedly.

“Bram, I know where he is. They will not get away.” Bram could see the sincerity in her eyes. “Now follow me and we will leave another way.” Bram did as she said. What choice did he have? Freya knew where Kador was and he didn’t. Damn it, he was going to get her back even if he lost his own life trying.

Chapter 8

Rhia’s arms were getting sore being tied up against the tree. Kador just sat there staring at her. He was a large man, his hair was blood red and his eyes a lifeless

almost black color. His face was harsh and bore many scars. His skin was a bronze color. His red hair was rare among his people. Why did she leave without her weapons? Rhia was angry with herself and worried about Bram. She knew he would blame himself. It was her fault running off like that, running away like a child.

“They used you as bait,” Kador’s voice was deep and booming. “Why else would you wander the woods without your weapon?” He got up and went to her. Kador had sent his men back to the village. He wanted to have fun with the little warrior woman not have to fight his own men for the privilege. He knew his time was limited; the others would surely try to save this one. That is where they differ, he would have never sent any of his men to save just one other. Weak, he spat at the ground in disgust. He wanted the fertile lands of Arcarndia; he wanted the beautiful women and hardy children as well. But mostly he wanted the Domos dead. A woman had outwarred him; this was an insult to Kador.

“You are beautiful and I wish to sample your well trained cunt.” Kador reached his hand between Rhia’s legs. “Mmm, warm and wet.” He ran his tongue across her cheek. Rhia struggled but couldn’t fight his strength with just her legs. Kador freed his hard cock from his trousers. He ripped Rhia’s skirt from her. His hungry eyes lingered on her bush. “A pity I don’t have more time to thoroughly enjoy you.” He lifted Rhia’s hips and plunged himself roughly and deeply into her. Rhia closed her eyes and imagined Bram. The way he felt when they mated, he was so gentle. As Kador rammed

himself over and over into her, Rhia held fast to that image of Bram loving her. Kador may take her body but her mind was on her Bram.

Kador grunted loudly and plunged himself deep one last time before pulling out of her. He put himself back in his trousers but left Rhia as she was. "If you live, tell that bitch Isadora what my huge cock felt like. I want her nice and wet when I take her right in front of her mate." Rhia didn't even acknowledge his words. Kador pulled a dagger from his belt and plunged it into Rhia's shoulder. He twisted the blade causing Rhia to cry out. Kador howled like a wild animal as he watched the blood run down her arm. "Now pray that those warrior bitches find you soon or you shall bleed to death. Then you will be a nice feast for the wolves if they don't." Kador pulled his dagger out of her causing more blood to pour from the wound. He mounted his horse and looked down at her. The mixture of her blood oozing down her arm and his seed running down her leg excited Kador very much. Then he simply rode off leaving Rhia hanging there awaiting her fate.



Bram forced Samos to ride fast behind Freya as they twisted through the woods. He dodged tree limbs as Samos raced forward. Freya leapt from her horse and ran toward a group of trees. Bram followed. He saw rope tied around a tree as they approached. Freya readied her crossbow and Bram drew his sword. Slowly they approached the tree. Bram jumped out with his sword ready but there was no one

there. He turned to the tree. "Rhia!" Bram quickly took off his vest to cover her. *Oh, what did my harsh words put you through, Rhia.*

"Bram," Rhia's voice was weak, but she smiled at him as he cut her down. "You shouldn't have left the village, my warrior." She fell into his arms.

"You were in danger and I had to help you." Bram nuzzled her to his chest. Freya came back with a piece of cloth to tie around her wound.

"I will be alright, spirited one. It is only a shoulder wound." She clung on to Bram tightly.

"Oh, Rhia, did that beast..." Bram couldn't finish the words. Her appearance was the proof he did.

"Be calm. I can't let it be allowed to hurt me. This is what Kador wants." She laid her head on his shoulder.

"I.." Bram took her to Samos. "Sweet Rhia, he forced you. That bastard!! I will kill him for this." Bram kissed her on the head. He hauled both of them up onto Samos and kept her cradled in his lap. "Rhia, I didn't mean to say you were not a real woman. That was not my intention. When you are well I will tell you what troubles me." He pulled her closer.

"Okay Bram. But, it was my fault for not bringing my weapons into the forest." Rhia passed out. Bram's heart was heavy. Damn, why does she keep trying to protect him? Bram already saw it right there in her eyes. Edwin was right she did love him. Any fool should have seen that. But how could she? She didn't really know him.

Wasn't love something that happened after you have known someone. Lust happens right away but love. Did he love Rhia? He cared for her obviously but love, did he even know what love was. Then a rage surge through him, Kador, how could someone do this to a woman, his Rhia? Bram tried to calm himself he had to concentrate on healing Rhia.

They rode more slowly back to the village being careful not to tousele Rhia around too much. She lay quietly cradled in Bram's lap as he urged Samos forward. Bram saw the pale color to her face. Rhia had long since passed out. She can't die, she just can't. Bram swore, cursed, and then prayed for this little woman who lay perfectly in his arms, almost as though she was made just for him. Bram never felt this way about any other woman. He had shared many beds with countless women, but he was always gone as quickly as he came. Is it possible he loved his beautiful captor? Was he really a prisoner or blessed beyond belief?

Bram saw the guard towers of Arcarndia. Did these people have a decent physician? At the gate stood a large Rama warrior with a small golden hair woman standing in front of him. He was dress like the other men. The woman wore a white gown that was wrapped around her body and went down to her knees. A golden bracelet of a serpent snake up both her arms, they match the golden serpent headband. She looked like an angel to the Rama warrior's demon. The large warrior's eyes looked

familiar to Bram. They were Rhia's eyes, and right now, those eyes held a deadly gaze for Bram.

Freya jumped from her horse and went to the small woman. The large warrior hurried to Bram. "Rhia." He reached up his arm and pulled her from Bram's embrace. Bram quickly jumped off his horse and approached the man.

"Who are you?" Bram wanted Rhia back with him and out of this barbarian's arms.

"I am Ranos the brave, son of Crog the merciless." Ranos scowled at Bram. "Rhia is my sister, my only sister," That was the only thing he said as he carried Rhia into the village straight toward the Domos' hut. The little woman went to Bram's side.

"I am Iduna. I will heal your mate, warrior." Her smile was like a beacon of hope to Bram. How could someone bring instant calm like that? "Ranos is my mate. He is concerned for his sister. I beg you warrior, please don't rise to his challenge."

"I will try." Bram understood the love between brother and sister. He would kill anyone that attempted to hurt his little sister. Iduna quicken her steps to catch up with Ranos. He brought Rhia into Domos' hut. Bram and Iduna were right behind him.

"Bring her." Isadora showed Ranos to a small room. Freya, Inor, and Eriq were standing just outside the room. Ranos gently laid Rhia on the bed then quickly turned to Iduna.

"Work your wonder, my love." Ranos stroked her cheek then rushed Bram pushing him out of the room. "You wait out here."

"I will not." Bram wanted to see what Iduna was going to do to Rhia. She needed stitches and bandaging not tribal hocus-pocus. Bram headed back to the door. However, Ranos held his ground.

"You will have to kill me to enter, unknown." Ranos' looked was deadly serious.

"You can't keep me from Rhia." Bram felt a strong hand pull him away from Ranos.

"To challenge Ranos would be foolish, Bram." Eriq said quietly. "Iduna is very skilled. Wait here." Eriq led Bram to a large wooden chair.

"I have to be in there with her." Bram had to make sure Rhia was getting proper care.

"I know your worried. But ruffling Ranos will only get you killed." Eriq saw the look Bram flashed at Ranos, sizing up his opponent. "Ranos is the son of Crog." Eriq saw his words weren't reaching Bram, for the dark-haired unknown was coiling like a snake preparing to attack. "Listen unknown." Eriq gripped Bram's shoulder. "Crog was one of Rama's best warriors. He killed without mercy, thus earning him the name merciless. He trained Rhia and Ranos. But took extra steps to make sure his son out fought any Rama warrior. He had too. Ranos was born in Arcarndia, and to earn a mate worth having he had to prove himself to Sadosa, thus proving himself worthy to Isadora." Eriq turned Bram to him. "Listen unknown, Ranos challenged Druce the deadly and won. But since you know nothing of our culture, this will make little impact

on you. Druce was Sadosa's Chapin warrior and for Ranos to defeat such a warrior earned him Iduna the healer. Is any of this reaching you? Do not challenge Ranos." Eriq then released Bram. He warned the unknown.

Bram took a deep breath. He wouldn't challenge the damn barbarian just for the simple reason he was Rhia's brother. He would have to resign himself to wait.

Bram had fallen asleep and was woken up by a gentle touch. "Rhia," Bram jerked awake. He saw Iduna looking down at him smiling.

"Bram you may see her now." Iduna jumped back when Bram bolted to his feet and headed to the room where Rhia was. When he entered, he saw Ranos sitting on the bed holding Rhia close to him. Rhia was leaning back into him borrowing some of his strength to sit up. Bram just stood there.

"Bram," Rhia smiled up at him. The poison look Ranos shot him didn't deter him. He walked slowly over to her. "Ranos, I will be fine. Please see to your mate."

Ranos gently sat Rhia up and place her up against the headboard. "I will not be far, rest Rhia." Ranos didn't even acknowledge Bram's existence as he left the room.

"He will warm to you." Rhia held out her arms to Bram. She wanted to feel his warmth next to her.

Bram gently took her into his arms. "Are you alright?" He stroked her long, silky hair. It hung down to the middle of her back, freed from the braid. It gave Rhia a warm almost vulnerable look.

“I told you it was only a shoulder wound. I am fine.” Rhia buried her face in his strong chest. “Bram I want to go to our hut.” Rhia soaked in the warmth of his embrace.

“Is this wise?” Bram pulled away from her and looked into her face. She was so petite looking sitting there. Her face was beautiful almost innocent looking and her love for him filled her eyes. Bram loved that look it made him feel safe, warm, at home.

“She may go to your hut. But carefully take her there,” Iduna said in a quiet voice behind Bram. “Make sure she rest. She lost a lot of blood.” Bram looked up at the healer.

“Thank you.” These words seemed inadequate somehow to Bram.

“Your welcome.” Iduna turned and left.

“Can you grab my neck?” Bram lifted her gently into his arms. Rhia put her arms around his neck and leaned her head against his shoulder. Bram slowly carried her back to their hut. He cared nothing about the looks they were getting. Bram laid her down in their bed and made sure she was comfortable.

“Now sleep.” Bram pulled the furs up around her.

“I will heal fast and will not be a burden to you.” Rhia felt his hand cup her cheek.

“You are not a burden. Now rest.” Bram kissed her lightly on her lips then left the room.

“Is she alright?” Edwin asked. Bram was glad his friend came by; he needed a friendly presence now.

“Yes, but she is weak.” Bram heard the door open and in walked Devi. Edwin smiled up at her and she knew Rhia was all right.

“Devi, tell me about Kador.” Bram wanted to know about the man he planned on hunting down.

Devi sat down next to Edwin and studied the look in Bram’s eyes. Rhia’s enemy was now his. “Kador is the leader of a band of nomads.” A look of disgust filled Devi’s face. “Kador is like a leech. He captures a village sucks it dry and then burns it to the ground. After destroying many of the dark-skinned warrior villages, he discovered Arcarndia. And for the past year he has tried to take Arcarndia but Isadora is too clever for him. Sadosa has tried to help the dark-skinned people. He has even opened Rama to anyone who needs a safe-harbor.”

“Is Kador like your people?” Bram asked. “Why doesn’t he attack Rama, why Arcarndia?”

“Kador is not like us!!” Devi was clearly insulted.

“I didn’t mean it like that. Is he like the dark-skinned warriors?” Bram remember seeing some of them at Barter hall. He had rarely seen people like them in France.

“No, Kador is bronze in color. His features are more similar to ours. He doesn’t have the proud lips of the Mali. He speaks in the desert people tongue though he knows some of our language.”

“Desert people,” within a fraction of a second Bram and Edwin both spoke, “Moors!” Bram jumped from his seat and had begun to pace. He had spent many months fighting Moors. Battles still fresh in his mind. He had heard of the Moors being referred to as the desert people by some of the foreign knights he fought along side of. “What of Rama?” Bram continued to pace.

“Kador is afraid of Sadosa. About five years ago Sadosa journey to the fishing village of Latso. Kador had just slaughtered a caravan of travelers from an unknown land. The only two survivors were a woman and her female child. Kador spared the two for they were most beautiful and he planned to use them for a while. Sadosa happened upon the carnage.” Devi paused, a smile swept across her face. Edwin and Bram thought this rather odd. “One look at the woman and Sadosa attack Kador. Sadosa killed several of Kador’s men and spilled some of Kador’s blood. Kador overwhelmed by Sadosa he retreated leaving the woman and her child behind. Sadosa made the woman his mate and called the girl his daughter. So Kador would never attack Rama for fear of Sadosa.”

“Bram!!” Rhia jerked awake. Bram dashed into the bedchamber to her.

“I am here, shhh.” Bram got under the furs and took Rhia into his arms. Making sure her injured shoulder was protected.

“I should have brought my weapons.” Rhia started to cry. “I focused on your handsome face, Bram, so Kador wouldn’t take my soul. But I can still feel his hands, breath and...” Rhia buried her face into his chest.

Bram tightened his arms around her. “That will never happen again. I will kill him for hurting you, I swear Rhia.”

“NO!!” Rhia pulled away from him. “I can bear the vile thing he has done to my body. But if he kills you, this I couldn’t bear. Please don’t hunt him. I beg of you, Bram. You know not this enemy, please.”

“Then you will teach me about your enemy. I will not battle him blind this I can promise you. But I can’t let him live after what he has done.” Bram pulled her back to him.

“I will teach you, Bram.” Rhia listened to his heartbeat. Bram came for her she didn’t expect this. He sat in the same spot while Iduna mended her and now he swears to kill her enemy and holds her so gently. Rhia’s heart leapt. Bram Croft does care about her. However, he has not proclaimed his love for her yet. His actions of today were enough to make Rhia’s heart sing. She smiled to herself and snuggled even closer as she drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 9

Bram watched over Rhia for the next three days. But this morning Rhia couldn't stand not training anymore. In addition, she had to ask Bram to join with her. The ceremony was only a few days away. Rhia was dressed and sat on the bed waiting for Bram to come back, what if he rejected her?

"What are you doing out of bed?" Bram said coming in with a pitcher full of water.

"I need to train." Rhia was twisting the fabric of her skirt in her hands. The words wouldn't come out of her mouth. If her Bram rejected her...

"Don't you think it is too soon to be using that shoulder?" Bram sat down next to her.

"I will check with Iduna before a beginning." Rhia felt like she was going to throw up. "Bram."

Bram looked at her waiting for her to continue. "I have something to ask." Rhia smooth down the fabric of her skirt. "Would you join with me?" There she said it.

"Join with you. What does that mean?" Bram knew it was something big judging by Rhia's nervous fidgeting.

“There is a ceremony in a few days, where all the women who went on the hunt become joined with their mates.” Rhia turned to him. “This is a sacred ceremony, my Bram. Two souls become one in the eyes of Thor and Odin. This union can’t be broken. We will be mates forever.” Rhia quickly dropped her eyes from his. Clearly, he understood what she was asking of him.

“I don’t know what to say.” Bram was shocked; essentially Rhia was asking him to marry her. “In my country this is a most serious matter. Please give me time to think.” Bram saw the tears forming in her eyes. “Rhia.” Bram lifted her eyes to his.

“I am a strong warrior Bram. I will make strong children. Don’t shun me for my one lack of judgment.” Rhia grabbed a hold of him and buried her face in his chest. “I swear, I will kill Kador the next time. Let me prove to you what a grand warrior I am.”

“Rhia.” Bram pulled her from him. “I have no doubt you are a great warrior. However, in my country a man and a woman get to know each other before...joining. All I am asking for is a little time to think.” Bram pulled her back to him. “There are so many things we don’t know about each other. Give me a little time.” Bram stroked her back.

“I will give you time. But please be kind and give me your answer before the ceremony.” He didn’t say no but still Rhia’s heart broke just the same.

Bram could hear her holding back the tears. “Rhia let’s talk.” Bram held her closer. “Rhia, your leader is kind and fair given what I have seen so far. You are right your people look content with their lives here. This is always the sign of a good ruler.”

Bram stroked her hair. He had to tell her everything so she would understand his resolve to help his people. "As you noted, my people don't look so happy. This is because our leader is a bad one. He is greedy and twisted. His venom poisons the land and takes away the joy from my people's faces." Rhia looked up into his face. Anger and pain etched his handsome face.

"Then your ruler needs to be killed and a new one should take his place." Rhia sat up and looked at him. Bram smiled, that was it, the answer for the people of Adkins. However, it wasn't as easy as Rhia made it sound.

“Do you remember your first battle, Rhia? I do. I was very young and was training under a great knight when the call was given from the Baron. A neighboring Baron had become bothersome to my leader. Though in reality, my Baron only wanted this one's land. I remember standing out on the battlefield looking out over the enemy army. Their forces were much smaller than ours were, but they fought hard. I was so afraid but exhilarated at the same time. Sir Gaven the knight who trained me smiled and then charged ahead.” Rhia watched the smile on Bram's face as he remembered his teacher. “I pushed forward. My first encounter was with a dark-haired older man. His face is still etched in my mind. That look, a mixture of terror and bloodlust as our swords clashed. I often wondered if I have that same look on my face when I battle. Then I felt my blade plunge into his stomach. That sound...”

“A sucking wet sound followed by the blood running down your sword,” Rhia interjected.

“Yes exactly. I saw his body fall he was dead. This is the only one that seems to remain in my mind so vividly.”

“My first kill does too, Bram. Mine was with the crossbow. He was a big blonde-haired man and hungry for blood. I aimed my arrow for his heart. I never expected so much blood to fly out of his body. He cried out and hit the ground hard.” Bram gazed into her eyes. She understood the pain and exhilaration of battle. “I had to use my sword later on in the battle; this by far was the most terrifying. My sword rattled with each blow from the male warrior's sword. I

had to rely on my speed not strength and got behind him and lunged, my sword embedded in his back. After he fell pulling my sword out of his flesh it made that sucking sound." Rhia winced. "But I always knew why I was fighting. We only fight to protect our village nothing more. What ever happen to Sir Gaven? Is he still living?"

"Shortly after I was knighted, Sir Gaven was executed for treason." Bram couldn't tell Rhia that Sir Gaven was his father, he just couldn't. How could he explain to this proud warrior why he didn't stop his father's murder? "But Sir Gaven never committed treason. He was just a victim of the Baron's paranoid delusions. You say you know what you fight for, but Rhia; I never knew why I fought for the Baron. I would gladly risk my life to defend Adkins, but..."

"Bram." Rhia pulled him closer to her. "You fought because your ruler ordered it. I am sure some of Kador's men feel as you do. There has to be some good men in their ranks. We must do something about your Baron. This is why you are so troubled, isn't it?" Rhia's eyes burned the same way his most trusted men did when they were readying for battle.

"Rhia, I can't allow you to risk yourself for my battle. You no not my enemy either."

"Your battles are my battles. If this troubles you so then we will make it right. I understand your need to protect your people, my warrior. But I will fight along side of you."

Bram grabbed her shoulders gently and turned her to him, being very careful of her injury. "Listen Rhia, the Baron is a madman."

"This doesn't matter."

"Listen to me. You believe that your mate is the most important thing, right. And you would do anything to protect that mate."

"Of course, ones mate is the most precious treasure to a warrior."

"The Baron had a beautiful wife named Geneva. She was kind and very generous. She would go out and mingle with common people so she would know their troubles. Geneva helped the poor, injured, and anyone who asked. She treasured life and loved the Baron very much. Geneva always had a smile for us knights and even for the lowliest foot soldier. One day her body was found in the forest. It was said that she wandered off on her own and was attacked by some wild animal. But I saw the rope mark on her neck. An animal couldn't make that mark. That is when the rumors started. It was said the Baron murdered his Geneva in a jealous rage. He believed that Geneva was lying with one of his knights. Sir Gaven was the one the Baron believed was sleeping with his wife. So the Baron strangled Geneva and placed her body in the woods, knowing that the animals would more than likely feed on her body. A week after that is when he accused Sir Gaven of treason and sentenced him to be hung. After six months had passed, another young girl's body was found in the woods. I believe the Baron got a taste for murder and liked it for several young women have died mysteriously over the years. So do you see why I can't let you help

me?" Bram gave Rhia the condense version. Geneva did love his father, but this love was not returned to her. She had told the Baron of her love for Sir Gaven this was a fatal mistake. Bram shook his head he didn't want to deal with the memories.

"A madman is unpredictable but not unstoppable. If he favors killing women then I would be a great aide to you."

"Rhia." She put her fingers to his lips.

"I am a great warrior Bram. I have killed many men who were your size or bigger. I know what I am doing, spirited one. You see me like the women from your country. Try to see me as I am in this village."

Bram saw her resolve to aide him. He closed his eyes and focused on the image of the warrior women mounting on their horses and rushing off to battle with Kador. But the image of Rhia tied to that tree flooded his mind.

"Knight, is this what your warriors are called?" Rhia asked. Bram opened his eyes and watched as she undid her braided hair.

"The leaders of troops are called this."

Rhia ran her fingers through her hair as it fell gently down her back. "You are called Knight?" Rhia stood up and reached behind undoing the tie of her shirt.

"Yes I am called Knight." Bram's eyes feasted on her round firm breasts.

"I liked the name, my Knight." Rhia slowly pulled her skirt down her curvy hips. Bram's cock hardened at the sheer beauty of her body. Bram pulled

his vest off and pulled off his trousers. His eyes linger over every inch of her. Her body was strong, yet soft.

“Come here, my warrior.” Bram’s voice was low and very inviting. Rhia smiled and walked slowly over to him. Her eyes traveled up and down his glorious body, memorizing every muscle, every inch of him. Bram scooted to the edge of the bed and took her into his arms. His hand reached behind and grabbed a handful of her silky golden hair the other cupped her bottom. His mouth latched on to her erect nipple. Rhia moaned and arched closer to his mouth, grabbing a handful of his dark hair.

“Bram,” she whispered. He lifted her up and laid her gently down on the bed. Bram’s body was on fire and urgent with great need. However, he wanted to taste all of her. His mouth kissed and licked down her tight belly. Rhia’s breathing quicken as he lavished his kisses on her body. Slowly his mouth went lower until his head was between her legs. He wanted to taste all of her honey; his eager tongue explored every part of her sweet heat. Rhia felt the pleasure build and build with each stroke of his tongue, until she exploded with sheer ecstasy. Her hands were tightly in his hair as she was washed with wave after wave of pleasure. “Bram, I need all your hardness in me. Please Bram.” Rhia was almost breathless. Bram rose up and pressed his hard cock against her hot opening.

“You want all of it.” Bram looked down at her with a wicked smile on his face. “Stroke me first, feel how much I desire you, Rhia.”

Rhia sat up and took his large cock into both of her hands. Slowly and firmly she stroked. After each stroke, she would run her thumbs firmly under the head, sending shudders through Bram's bodies. "See Rhia I am about to burst with desire for you." Bram threw his head back and moaned with pleasure. This was exquisite torture. Her strokes firm enough to stoke his flame but not enough to bring him over the edge.

"I want to taste you," Rhia whispered. She got on her hands and knees and lowered her mouth to his hardness. With the same slow strokes, she sucked on him. Every time Bram was ready to explode, she would stop letting him linger on the edge. Bram reached over her and stroked her back as she continued to suck on him. His hands cupped her ass hard, as he did his cock would go deeper into her mouth. Rhia enjoyed this she wanted his hands stroking her heat. She rolled over and spread her legs open a sweet invitation for him. Bram looked down to watch her take all his cock deep into her mouth. He moaned loudly and felt his orgasm start to build but Rhia stopped and left him hanging on the edge then she started again. The sheer pleasure was unbelievable to him. He bent over and reached for her wet core. His fingers slid in and out of her tight tunnel. Her moans vibrated on his hardness as he climbed on the bed to reach her sweet honey with his tongue. Rhia gripped his hips and guided him in and out of her mouth. After he gave Rhia another mind shattering orgasm, he lifted his head from between her legs.

“Rhia I need to be deep inside you.” Bram’s voice almost begged. He needed release badly. Rhia slid out from under him and turned around going on her hands and knees again. Bram gripped her hips and drove himself deeply into her. Her wet hot pussy gripped his cock tightly as he surged deeper and deeper. “I can’t get deep enough. I want to bury myself in your sweetness.” Bram cried as he rode her harder. Rhia’s sweet moans made Bram surge deeper still until all of his cock was consumed by her sweetness. “YESSS!!!” He cried. His orgasm so intense he thought he might die from it. He thrust over and over filling her with his seed. He collapsed on the bed next to her and gathered Rhia in his arms. They lay quietly enjoying the afterglow of great sex.

“Rhia.” Bram snuggled his chin against her soft hair.

“What is it, my warrior?” Rhia was almost purring with contentment.

“I would be honored to join with you.” Bram had never felt so at peace than he was at this moment. He knew now that he did indeed love Rhia. No other woman could understand him the way she did or could make him feel like this.

“Bram!” Rhia jumped on top of him. “I love you so much.” She lavished kisses all over his face.

Bram laughed. “I love you too, Rhia.”

Rhia looked at him. Her eyes were moist with tears. “Say it again, Bram. Please say it again.”

Bram gently moved the hair from her face. "I love you, Rhia." Tears rolled down her cheeks as she kissed him hard and deeply. He loved her yes. Her Bram loved her. Rhia thought she was going to burst with joy as they made love again.

Chapter 10

"Are you nervous?" Edwin asked. Bram and he were bathing in the bathhouse. This large wooden hut was divided into two large rooms, one side for the women and the other for the men. There were long stone tubs that went almost the length of the room. The bathhouse was a bit of a shock to Bram and Edwin. *These people take baths together!! Edwin was almost outraged when Devi explained this to him a couple of days ago.*

"Yes." Bram was terrified. The last couple of days were heaven to Bram. Rhia and he made love and talked. They rarely came out of their hut. Rhia assured him she would talk to Inor about gathering some warriors to help Bram with the Baron.

Today was the joining celebration. The villagers were busying themselves with preparations. A grand feast had been planned. The women who already

were joined decorated the open celebration area. The celebration area was a large opened grass meadow just beyond Odin's tower. The men brought low wooden tables to place the food on. Wine barrels were being placed by these tables and special metal mugs were lined up for use. Flowers were placed in clay pots and circled a large area in the middle. A large pile of wood was being piled for the fire and those who were musically inclined brought their instruments. Drums, flutes, and strange string instruments were the staple. Iduna blessed the inner circle with a special blend of herbs and flowers. Joy echoed through the village. All six women that went on the hunt had come back with mates.

"Bram, I hadn't got a ring for Devi. Is this a necessity I wonder?" Edwin finished bathing and climbed out of the tub. The women were on the other side bathing as well.

"Don't worry all will be provided for you, since you know not our customs. Ranos had taken upon himself to have the necessary items made for you," one of the golden warriors chosen as a mate said. He also was getting dressed.

"I suppose you four are not as nervous as we are, huh?" Edwin chuckled.

"Why be nervous. My mate treats me well and is a good warrior. She will bare me strong children. Who would want more than that? I am Brogg," he said nodding at Edwin.

Introductions were made the other warriors names were Cros, Brakan, and Druce. The larger one named Druce liked to talk and told Bram and Edwin

about Inor and Eriq. Eriq was the leader of Ramos and chose to give up his leadership to his brother Sadosa when Isadora asked him to be her mate. She did not hunt Eriq out of respect for his leadership. Inor was Sadosa's youngest son. Though younger than the average mate hunted, he was the most respected among the people of Arcarndia. Most men chosen as mates were at least twenty-five summers old and Inor was only twenty. Freya was indeed the greatest of all the female warriors and earned the right to take such a grand warrior as Inor.

Bram enjoyed talking with Druce. It distracted him from his jittering nerves. They also learned about Tiben. Druce thought Tiben a brave man for taking the curse away from the women.

"Curse?" Bram asked.

"Many generations ago Ikor the male leader of Arcarndia placed a curse on his wandering mate Tatum. Every time she lay down with a man that wasn't Ikor she would suffer pain and would bleed. His curse was so strong that every woman born in Arcarndia had this curse. Tiben would lay with the young women and free them of this curse. However, since Tiben wasn't their true mate they must endure the pain and blood. Afterwards they were free of the curse and couldn't give it to their new mate." Druce continued talking with Bram, until he left to ready himself for the ceremony.

"How could these people think virginity is a curse?" Edwin asked Bram when the other men left.

“We shouldn’t say anything.” Bram felt kind of sorry for Rhia, her first time with some old geezer.

Bram and Edwin left the bathhouse and was met by Ranos. “Follow me,” Ranos’ tone to his voice was dry. Ranos walked over and took two fur satchels from Iduna.

“Friendly fellow,” Edwin said. The tension between Bram and Ranos was thick and uncomfortable.

“Here, take this.” He tossed one at each of them. “You must dress as a Rama warrior.” Then he walked away.

“Please forgive him.” Iduna walked to them. “Ranos, is uncomfortable with his feelings. After all his beloved sister is joining,” she chuckled. “He is reluctant to hand her over to your care.”

“Oh, I can understand that. I would be none to easy handing my sister over to some stranger myself.” Bram smiled.

“You have a sister?”

“Yes, Flora. She is a fair bit younger than me.”

“I am sure you miss her very much.”

“Indeed. This is the Rama warrior battledress?” Bram wanted to change the subject quickly.

“Yes.” She gently took the satchel from Bram. She pulled out two metal wristbands. Dragons taking flight had been carved on both. “These bands carry the Rama symbol of the dragon. A couple of Elders made these for you.”

“Please tell us which ones so that we may thank them,” Edwin said looking at the fine craftsmanship of the ones made for him.

“Of course. These are the garments the warriors wear.” She pulled out a hard leather vest. The black cloth stitched with heavy string. “That is made from the black bull,” Iduna said as Bram ran his hand over the vest. Next, she pulled out dark brown trousers. The cloth was soft and flexible and a thick leather belt with holders for daggers. “Your sword sheath can be your own. But you must wear your sword.” Finally, there was a leather headband with a metal medallion in the center of it. The medallion had a dragon with its claws readied for the attack. Again, the craftsmanship was exquisite.

“We are not Rama warriors,” Bram stated.

“Along time ago the first Domos chose her mate from the Ramos village. He wore his battle dress at their joining. This is why you have to wear this. Tradition.”

“What do the women wear?” Edwin asked.

“The first Domos presented herself as a woman.” Iduna looked over to Ranos. She could see the irritation in his eyes. “Please ready yourself for the ceremony. I am happy that both you chose to join with your mates.” She rushed over to Ranos.

“I was not a Rama warrior, either,” Ranos said to them as he pulled Iduna closer to him. “But I honored the tradition. All the available Rama males will be attending the ceremony.”

“Okay,” Bram said.

“A Rama warrior not chosen as a mate for one of our women is nothing to trifle with. “

“Thank you for the warning, Ranos,” Edwin said. Ranos nodded his head to them and then walked away with one of his arms firmly wrapped around Iduna.

“I think he was trying to be nice, Bram.” Edwin followed Bram back to the Domos’ house. “Why are we going here?”

“Druce said we were to get ready there.” They went into the hut where the other men were waiting. They looked quite impressive in their battle dress. Bram and Edwin quickly dressed. Bram felt uncomfortable in the Rama outfit. The vest fit snug but was still easy to move in. Bram moved his shoulders around as he looked into the seeing glass at himself. The wide belt emphasized his trimmed waist and made his shoulders look even broader. The trousers were a bit snugger fitting than his usual ones. The lines of his leg muscles were pronounced, so to was his manhood. “Well this borders on obscene.” He reached up and fastened the headband on. This made his handsome face look harsher. He looked at his image. “Well, I certainly look the part of a barbarian.” He strapped his sword onto his back and sighed. He wished that he had been able to bring his armor then he would have felt more like himself. He took a deep breath and headed out to the main chamber.

"You look fierce." Eriq smacked Bram on the back. No he looked barbaric Bram thought. The other men nodded with their approval. Bram looked over to Edwin. Edwin looked every bit the barbarian dressed in the Rama battle dress.

"Tiben will instruct you on the joining ceremony. We must meet our brethren and I am in quite a hurry to see my niece. She is to be wed to Tiben." Eriq seemed very proud about that fact. "He will be wearing Rama battle dress as well. He should be here soon." The five men joyfully left the hut eager to see old friends, no doubt.

"The old coot is marrying the Rama leader's daughter, huh," Bram said.

"Hell, Bram old coots married young maidens all the time in our country." Edwin started to chuckle. "Remember Mr. Myers he had to be at least eighty when he married the Lady Leanne. His twenty year old wife killed him on their wedding night and she became the most sought after widow."

Bram joined in Edwin's laughter. "But what a way to go," Bram added making the two laugh harder.

"Edwin, what I can't believe is that the Rama men don't wear armor. What exactly is this garb suppose to protect against?"

"Well you have to admit that it is easier to move in, and this vest is made of some sturdy leather. It seems to me that every article is meant to make the warrior look more intimidating. And besides they do have shields."

"But still."

“I have seen how they make weapons and shields. They can make some good steel,” Edwin said.

A tall, well-muscled man walked in. “Greetings, I am Tiben.” Bram looked over the man. Tiben was sure the hell not an old man. In fact, he was extremely handsome and well made.

“Greetings.” Edwin was just as stunned as Bram. They both engaged a knowing look and watched Tiben move closer to them.

“What is troubling you?” Tiben’s voice was smoothly masculine.

“Just nervous.” Bram felt a strange rage start to build. This man who was probably close to his own age deflowered all those women. Deflowered his Rhia was more to the point!

Tiben could sense a tension in the room. “I will explain the joining ritual.”

“First, why don’t you explain the curse.” Bram couldn’t believe the words that flew out of his mouth.

“Bram!” Edwin shot him a look.

“The curse. It is simple. A male ruler caught his mate coupling with other males. So he placed a curse on her. Every time she would lay with any man but him she would feel pain and bleed. His curse was so strong that even now all females are born with that curse. But don’t worry I have already removed the curse from your mates.”

Bram clinched his fist as the sudden urge to beat the hell out of Tiben began to consume him. Tiben felt Bram's anger and was baffled.

Edwin sense Bram's inevitable explosion coming. "I must apologize for our confusion. This is not a custom in our land. So it sounds a bit strange to us."

"Oh I see." Tiben sat down and waited for Bram to cool off. "We must prepare for the joining ceremony."

"Please continue," Edwin said standing close enough to Bram in case Bram leapt at Tiben.

"Shortly we will head over to the ceremony grounds. There will be a circle made of flowers. We wait in this circle for our mates to arrive. Then Iduna will speak the words to join the two mates. That is it. A grand celebration happens afterwards where available Rama warriors mingle with our unattached female warriors so that she may be ready for next year."

"This means all the best warriors will be in this village," Bram said. The knight in him was sounding off alarm bells all over the place.

"Yes, except of course for Sadosa and his two high warriors."

"But this will leave Rama opened for Kador to attack it."

"Ah, you are a wise warrior. But so is Sadosa. He has trackers out seeing where Kador is. It would take him days to reach Rama. And any movement would be known." Tiben rose up. "Now meet me outside and we will head to the ceremony grounds."

“Okay.” Bram didn’t like this. Rama would be almost defenseless. If he was Kador that is when he would attack. “Wait a moment,” Bram hollered at the Tiben.

“Yes.” Tiben turned around to face him

“Has Kador ever attack Rama?”

“No, he only wants Arcarndia. Now let’s go.” They followed Tiben up the dirt path. Young girls with dreamy eyes watched Tiben stride pass them. Then their admiration shifted back to Bram and Edwin. The girls whispered and giggled. Edwin noticed Bram was commanding most of their doe-eyed expression. Edwin had to admit Bram looked damn impressive in that Rama garb. His dark hair made him look all the more threatening.

“You all look well.” Eriq smiled. Tiben whispered something in his ear then strolled up to the ceremony grounds. “So you fear Kador will attack Rama?” Eriq asked Bram.

“He might all your warriors are here.”

“Don’t fear for Rama. This is your joining day, besides Kador wouldn’t dare attack Rama. The repercussion of such a stupid act is more than he is willing to pay. You see Bram unlike Arcarndia warriors; Rama warriors would hunt down Kador and rip him to pieces. Women though proven warriors don’t have the vicious streak in them. So I am impressed by your warrior instinct but your fears are unfounded. Now come let’s go to the ceremony.” Eriq was beginning to think that Rhia didn’t make a mistake by bringing the dark-haired

warrior to this village. Only Sadosa recognized the possible threat to Rama during the joining ceremony. The rest of the Rama warriors included himself were too arrogant to even consider such a threat.

Bram looked at all the villagers gathering for the celebration. He could also feel all there eyes upon him. A huge bunch of Rama male warriors were off to one side, and off to the other the female warriors of Arcarndia. But he didn't see Rhia anywhere. There was indeed a large circle made of flowers in the middle of the open meadow. Tables were set out covered with all kinds of food and drink. Off toward the front a group of musicians were beginning to play. The songs had an enchanting sound to them, so different from his country.

"Come." Bram looked down at Iduna. She was even more beautiful dressed in her flowing white gown; her beaded headdress framed her pretty face. Bram nodded and followed her. That is when the nervousness really started to creep in. They are joined for all eternity kept playing in his head. Bram then noticed there were about four extra men standing with them.

"They are from Rama," Iduna whispered to Bram. "They are joining with females from Rama." Bram nodded to her.

The music stopped and as Isadora walked gracefully to the front. She was also dressed in a white gown with a headdress. She too was most beautiful. In fact, Bram looked around and noticed that all the women in this village were rather attractive not an ugly duckling in the bunch, maybe it was their strength and sense of self that made all of them glow.

“Welcome great warriors of Rama. We are grateful that you could attend to witness the joining of our warriors.” The Rama warriors were a noisy bunch as Isadora walked over to Eriq.

The music started to play again, followed by a round of grunts and growls from the Rama warriors. Bram turned around to see what was whipping them up so. Then his heart almost stopped when he saw Rhia. *My God, she is beautiful.* Bram watched Rhia gracefully make her way up to him. She wore a long dress that looked like it was spun from gold. It was snug to her body. The sides were opened with golden strings keeping the dress to her body. Her hair was loose and hung down to the middle of her back, and silver headband with beads looping so that they laid in her wealth of golden hair. Bram couldn't take his eyes off her as she approached him.

“Bram you looked so handsome.” Rhia was so proud of her warrior. He was by far the most handsome and manly of all them. Her heart pounded hard and her body ached with desire for him.

“Rhia you are so beautiful.” Bram could hardly focus on anything but Rhia. His body throbbed with passion as his eyes hungrily traveled up and down her body.

“You must take it, Bram,” Rhia's sweet voice broke the trance Bram was under. He saw Iduna smiling at him holding a metal bracelet.

“Give this token to your mate as I speak the words,” she whispered to Bram.

Bram nodded and held the delicate bracelet in his large hand. A dragon wrapped around an angelic looking woman was carved on the bracelet. "With the giving of the sacred bracelets you are giving your life for one another. To protect, to love, to put above all else this is the promise you give your mate. To mend, to guide, and to comfort is the promise you give your mate with the exchange. For Thor knows that there is no greater love than the love between a man and a woman. For they are the beginning of new life and once joined in the name of love they can never be torn apart." Iduna stepped back and waited.

Rhia gently took Bram's hand and slid the bracelet onto his wrist. "Forever, my warrior." His bracelet looked like hers' but thicker.

Bram took Rhia's hand and slid the bracelet onto her wrist. "Forever, my warrior." Tears brimmed in Rhia's eyes. She thought she couldn't be any happier in her life than in this moment. Bram pulled her to him and kissed her so deeply it almost touched her soul.

The villagers cheered but Rhia and Bram were lost in their kiss, lost in each other oblivious to anything else. Only Eriq slapping Bram on the back pulled them out of their intimate embrace. "There is plenty of time for that in the privacy of your hut." Eriq chuckled.

"I love you so much." Rhia felt she was going to burst with joy. "That sometimes I think I..."

"Might be overwhelmed." Bram finished her words. He looked deep into her eyes. "I love you that much too, Rhia, though I just now realized how much."

“Oh Bram.” Rhia wrapped her arms tightly around him and laid her head on his chest. Bram held her tightly in his strong arms and snuggled his chin against her head.

“Rhia,” Ranos hollered. Rhia reluctantly let go of Bram and went to her brother.

Bram followed her and for the first time saw Ranos smile as he hugged Rhia. “You look beautiful sister.”

“Ranos, will you welcome Bram now?” Rhia reached for Bram’s hand.

“I have to sister he is your mate now.” Ranos extended his hand to Bram. “Welcome to our family.”

Bram shook Ranos’ hand. “Thank you.”

“Now I must find my lovely mate and protect her from the Rama warriors. You would be wise to do the same with Rhia.” Ranos face returned to its hardness.

“Don’t worry about the Rama warriors. They want to impress our warriors so they will be on their best behaviors,” Rhia quietly told Bram.

The celebration was in full swing now. People were dancing, feasting and drinking. The bonfire was lit. “Be careful Bram after the Rama warriors have had their fill of drink,” Inor said. Bram knew all too well how men act when they were intoxicated. He was guilty of making a royal ass of himself on few occasions.

“You look most fierce,” Inor stated to Bram

“This is a great compliment,” Rhia whispered.

“But not as fierce as you.” Bram could see the pleased look cross Inor and Freya’s face.

“Eriq has told me about your warrior instinct. You think like my father, though I don’t see any real threat from Kador, myself.” Inor spoke with a matter of fact tone to his voice.

“Inor, why don’t you take Bram and Rhia to Rama? I can see in your face that you miss your home.” Freya gently stroked Inor’s cheek.

Inor’s eyes sparked with such life at the thought of seeing Rama again. “Yes, you come to Rama and speak with my father, Sadosa. He is the greatest warrior of them all.” Inor’s voice filled with pride.

“I would be honor to see your Rama,” Bram said. Rhia clasped her arms around his right arm. Her face beaming as she looked at the two warriors.

“I will speak with the Domos at first light. Maybe we can go back with the Rama warriors,” Freya said. She knew Inor needed this and she was going to give it to him. Inor and Freya excused themselves and headed to a bunch of Rama warriors.

“I have never been to Rama.” Rhia seemed excited about the chance to see Rama.

“Here.” Edwin handed Bram a mug full of wine. “I guess we are married men now.”

“It appears that way. Well here is to long and happy marriages.” Bram raised his mug to Edwin’s.

“Amen to that,” Edwin downed the sweet tasting wine.

“Rhia,” Devi called out. She was dress similar to Rhia and looked quite lovely herself. The two women hugged each other. “Did you see Tiben’s mate?”

Rhia was too focused on Bram during the ceremony that she didn’t even notice. “Where is she?”

“You can’t miss her Rhia.” Devi looked over across the meadow. A small dark-haired woman was cradled next to Tiben.

Rhia gasped, “She has dark hair.”

“You didn’t notice this?” Devi questioned.

“But how?”

“Sadosa’s mate has dark hair remember?”

Bram looked at the dark-haired woman. She was delicate looking compared to the other women. most certainly not from any of the villages around here. “What is her name?” Rhia asked.

“Dalma,” Devi replied.

“I heard that Sadosa’s mate had dark hair. Well Bram and Edwin maybe the stares and whispers will stop. Nobody wants to offend Sadosa.” Rhia looked a little weary all of a sudden.

“No one is more beautiful to me than you are Rhia,” Bram said as if knowing what was wrong. Rhia smiled and buried herself in Bram’s arms. Bram looked over at the woman again. She looked so much like Flora. The Tiben towered over her and seemed quite pleased with his new mate

Rhia saw that Bram was still gazing at Dalma with a far away look to his eyes. She rolled up her fist and punched Bram in the arm.

“What was that for?” Bram looked down at her. For a little woman she packed quite a punch.

“Why do you keep looking at Dalma?” He could see the anger dance in Rhia’s eyes. She was jealous, Bram tried not to laugh at this.

“Rhia, she reminds me of my sister that is all.” Bram couldn’t stop the smile that swept across his face.

“What is so funny?” Rhia hit him again. She felt foolish over her jealousy. Dalma looked like his sister whew what a relief.

“Ouch. You keep that up and I might have to spank you,” Bram teased.

“Spank me?” Rhia had no idea what that meant. Bram reached behind and smacked her firmly on her bottom. Rhia yelped and rubbed her behind. “This is a spank?”

“Yes, and if you don’t behave I will do it again.” Bram’s smile was so delicious.

“Well then I must not behave. I enjoyed that.” Rhia licked her lips and ran her hands up Bram’s chest.

“Well, Devi show me how to dance,” Edwin’s cheerful voice chimed in. Devi laughed and headed to where others were dancing. The Arcarndian way a dance was very different from the style Bram was use to seeing. Males and Females pressed their bodies together, swayed, and grinded to the sensuous

beat. Hands were free to wonder as bodies intertwined. He saw some men sitting on the ground as women were seductively dancing in arms reach of them. Bram's blood raced as Rhia enticed him to dance with her. She took him to where the others were and sat him on the ground. She stepped a few feet away and started her sexy dance for him. Her hips moved in such a sensual way Bram thought he could of took her right there. Rhia kept her eyes on him the whole time as she rolled her hips. She turned away from him so he could watch as she shook and swayed her ass. Her body moved in perfect rhythm to the music. Bram's cock was painful as he watched her incredible dance. He had never seen a woman dance so seductively it was so damn hot. She moved closer reaching out her hand to him. He stood up and went to her. Rhia rubbed her hands over his chest as her body snaked up his. She closed her eyes and let the music fill her. She turned her back to him and let her bottom rub up against his hard body. Bram clasped his hands around her tiny waist and encouraged her to grind hard against him. Damn he wanted her, it took every ounce of self-control not to throw her to the ground and bury his throbbing cock deep into her. The drums beat faster and faster whipping the dancers in a heated frenzy. Growls and howlers from the men and encouraging moans from the women filled the air and rose above the music. Bram had to have Rhia now, right the hell now. He pulled her even closer and lowered his mouth to her ears. "I need you," he whispered.

Rhia reached behind her and took a hold of his hand. She led him to their hut. The walk seemed to take forever to Bram. His cock was so hard and aching

with such urgent need. More than once, he wanted just to throw Rhia to the ground and have her. Rhia opened the door to the hut and gasped when Bram turned her around and lifted her up to him. He kissed her hard and hungrily. Kicking the door shut with his foot, he carried Rhia to the table. He laid her down and pulled her dress up. He pulled the belt off and quickly took his trousers off. He wanted to bury himself in her. "Are you ready for me?" Bram asked with the last of his self-control before placing his hard cock against her wet opening.

"Always." Rhia's breathing was hard. The need in Bram's face was sending heat throughout her whole body. Bram plunged himself deep into her. Rhia gasped as he filled her full. Bram gripped her hips and rode her hard. He needed release with such urgency he had never felt before. He thrust harder and faster, deeper and stronger until he cried out. He pulled Rhia to him and kissed her passionately running his hands over her body.

"Take off your dress." Bram stood back to watch her. The music from the celebration could still be heard in their hut. Rhia moved her hips in a circular motion with the beat of the drums. She watched the hunger in Bram's eyes and loved every second of it. She pulled at the strings of the dress slowly all the while continuing her erotic dance. Reaching up she started to lower the dress. Her hips swayed and her breast bounced as she danced. She let the dress fall from her body but still she danced. She ran her hands over her breasts and let her hands follow the line of her stomach. Bram moaned as she let two of her fingers slide

into her wet pussy. Bram could take no more and once again lifted her up into his arms. This time he brought her to the bedchamber. He pinned her against the wall and entered her again. Rhia wrapped her legs around his waist. His utter animal desire enthralled Rhia. The pleasure the sheer pleasure of him was driving her to the edge. Bram's moans and the feeling of him thrusting deep inside her caused Rhia to explode. She clung tightly to Bram as the waves of pleasure raced through her. Bram carried her to the bed still having his hardness inside her. He lay her down and begun pumping again. She cried out his name and sent a jolt of pleasure through him. "Again cry out again," Bram's voice begged as he thrust harder and faster.

"Bram, more Bram!!! YESS!!!" Rhia surrendered to the pleasure that over took her again. Bram saw the look of ecstasy on her face this sent him spiraling into his own orgasm; he continued to pump until every drop of his juice filled her up.

"I don't think I will ever get enough of you Rhia." Bram was breathing hard. He rolled off her and pulled her to him.

"Don't worry we have forever to enjoy each other." Rhia ran her fingers lazily over the hair on his chest.

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Rhia was positively glowing as she made Bram something to eat the next morning. "Rhia I have a rather awkward question to ask you." Bram sat down at the table.

"What is it? You can ask me anything." Rhia filled his plate with the delicious smelling vegetable and egg mixture. She sat down next to him and fixed herself a plate.

"The way the men and women were dancing with each other, how can they not want to make love to each other?" Bram didn't know how to phrase what he was thinking. He only wondered how many men Rhia had seduced over the years.

"It is frowned upon for a man and woman to make love when they are not mates. A woman's mate is the only one she has, except of course for Tiben but I am sure you have heard about the curse."

"Yes, I have heard about the dad blasted curse," Bram's voice was a little angrier sounding than he intended. Rhia looked puzzled for a moment.

"There are other ways to bring pleasure than just to make love."

"What!!" Bram jerked up.

Rhia jumped up too. "What is wrong?"

"Other ways like.." Bram's blood was starting to boil uncontrollably.

"Fingers and mouth can bring much needed release for both." Rhia was growing more puzzled by Bram's reaction. What was she saying wrong?

“Damn it!!” Bram slammed his fist down on the table and pushed it away from them. “How many men have you brought much needed relief to?” The very thought of Rhia’s delectable mouth on some other man’s cock. “AHHH!!” Bram cried out trying to vent some of the anger inside.

“I have only tasted you, Bram.” Rhia hurried into the bedchamber and grabbed her sword.

“Is this the whole damn truth!! God damn it, if you danced like that for one of those fucking Rama warriors. There is no way he would let you just walk away!! Rhia!!! Get the hell back here!!” Fury soaked every cell of his body as images of Rhia taking a Rama warrior’s cock into her mouth filled his mind. Bram stormed into the bedchamber and stopped abruptly as the point of Rhia’s sword was aimed right at his most favorite body part.

“I have only tasted you.” Rhia moved closer to her angry warrior. Well if he wanted to fight, then damn it, she would oblige him. “I never danced for another man like that. None of the Rama warriors did to me what the mere thought of you does to my body.”

Bram looked at the sheer anger in her face. “Put your sword down, Rhia. I have no intention on hurting you.” Bram’s voice was straining to remain calm. “What about Tiben? You laid with him.”

Rhia lowered her sword and sheathed it. “He removed the dad blasted curse. And let me tell you Bram Croft it hurt like hell.”



“AHHH!!” Bram could not squelch his anger. Rhia making love to the Tiben really bother him. Though common sense told him, it shouldn’t.

Rhia grabbed a hold of his arm and flipped him over her. She pinned him to the floor, one hand by his Adam’s apple and one knee between his legs. “I laid with Tiben for you,” Her voice was stern.

With one quick movement, Bram grabbed her hand and flipped her over him. Then he sat down on her stomach pinning her underneath him. Rhia gasped as he held her arms above her head. Her body instantly ignited with desire. His pure strength excited her beyond words. Bram was breathing heavy and Rhia felt his hard cock on her belly. “Take me Bram, right now.” Rhia struggled to free herself so she could rip the clothes off him.

“No.” He held both of her arms with one hand and reached for her breasts with the other. He tore her flimsy nightshirt exposing her breasts to him.

“Bram put your hardness between my breasts,” Rhia said almost breathless.

Bram reached down and fumbled with the ties to his trousers. “Let go of my arms. I wouldn’t fight you.” Bram did using both of his hands to pull his trousers off. He straddled her again and placed his cock between her breasts as she requested. Rhia squeezed her full breasts together totally engulfing his cock. She squeezed and rubbed her breasts against his hardness. “Stroke against me, Bram.” Bram moved his hips to the rhythm of her stroke. Bram moaned and quickened his pace. Rhia bent her head forward and licked at the head of his

cock as it poked out from the tunnel her breasts made. Such delicious pleasure, Bram brought one of his hands behind her head. He lifted her head up so she could take more of him into her mouth. He watched as her tongue swirled over his smooth head. "I am going to release my seed, Rhia!!"

Rhia reached up for his hips and brought him closer to her, taking more of him into her mouth. "Rhia I can't stop it much longer." Bram felt his orgasm building but still Rhia sucked on him.

"Feed me," she purred. With that, Bram went to such heights of pleasure he thought he may never come down from it. When the wave of pleasure receded, he felt his hand firmly tangled in Rhia's hair holding her to him.

Bram quickly got off her. "Your turn to feed me." Bram turned her to him and spread her legs. He hungrily lapped at her sweetness wanting to bring her the unbelievable pleasure she had just brought him. Rhia felt every stroke of his tongue as he explored every fold of her pussy.

"Bram." Rhia looked down and watched him pleasure her. He truly enjoyed what he was doing to her. She felt the ripples of pleasure building and building with each stroke of his tongue. Her orgasm was so strong she cried out his name over and over. However, when he stuck his tongue deep inside her she thought she was in heaven. He didn't stop until he brought her many orgasms.

"There is more than one way to bring pleasure, spirited one. I have been taught all kinds of ways to pleasure a man. But you are the only man that I have brought pleasure too." Rhia stroked his hair as Bram laid content in her arms.

“It was not my place to ask such a question. I am sorry for my anger, Rhia,” Bram said. He ran his hands lazily across her legs.

“I rather enjoy your anger. But make no mistake if you ever lay a hand on me in anger, I will hurt you.” Arcarndian women don’t put up with abuse from any man, like the Rama women sometimes had to endure.

“I would never hit you, Rhia.” Bram was raised never to hit a woman and besides he totally believes Rhia would carry out her threat. Bram smiled, he was really beginning to enjoy the fact that his Rhia was a warrior.



Freya had informed Bram and Rhia that the Domos gave her permission for the four to go to the Rama village. They were to leave with the group of Rama soldiers.

“What about Edwin and Devi? I am sure they might enjoy this as well.” Bram strapped his sword to his back. He kept on the leather vest and belt from last night but wore his own trousers.

“The Domos said only us, Freya and Inor, besides Devi has arranged for the weapons maker to let Edwin learn from him. Devi believes he would be suited for the task.” Rhia was dressed in her battle gear. She looked like the first time Bram saw her. “You will need a shield. You can say goodbye to Edwin there.” Rhia and Bram rode their horses up the path to the weapons maker’s hut.

Smoke billowed from the outside furnace and the smell of hot steel was heavy in the air. An older man was pounding out some metal and Edwin was watching him. The man seemed most pleased to have a student assigned to him.

“Well, off to Rama,” Edwin greeted them. “Bram this is Ross he is a master craftsman.” Bram greeted the man.

“You want to be a weapons maker?” Bram asked dismounting Samos. Rhia was talking with Ross.

“Yes, it had always been something I was interested in. I told Devi and she arranged for me to learn from Ross.” Edwin looked content and yet excited. Bram was happy for his friend. “Be careful Bram; don’t go mouthing off to those warriors. Devi tells me that things are a little different in the Rama village so take your cues from Rhia. Okay?” Edwin couldn’t help but worry about Bram. After all Bram did have a knack for sticking his foot in his mouth.

“Don’t worry, Edwin I will be on my best behavior.” Rhia brought over a shield for Bram to inspect.

“Is this satisfactory?” she asked. Bram looked over the sturdy steel shield. It was surprisingly light.

“This will do nicely.” Bram slipped it on his arms and swung it around. Rhia went over to her horse and pulled a handful of something out of her satchel. Bram watched as she handed Ross a handful of what appeared to be diamonds.

Ross inspected the gems and smiled. “Good trade, Rhia.” She nodded her head in agreement.

“Where did you find those gems?” Bram asked.

“Oh those, I was exploring down by the waterfall and found them embedded in some rocks. Ross likes them so they are good for trading.

Bram looked to Edwin. Edwin threw his arms up. “I have given up trying to make sense of things around here. I suggest you do too, Bram.”

“Well, I will see you when we get back,” Bram said to Edwin. He mounted up on his horse and waited for Rhia. She gave Edwin a big hug and told him to say goodbye to Devi for her. Then she mounted her horse. They went to the northern edge of the village and waited for the Rama warriors.

“Eriq is giving them gifts to bring back to Rama,” Rhia stated. “Bram please calm your spiritedness at Rama. They might think it is a challenge.”

“I will follow your lead, Rhia. Don’t worry.” Rhia sighed with relief. If Bram thought the Arcarndian way of doing things were barbaric then he would most definitely think the Rama way was almost prehistoric. They watched the herd of Rama warriors riding toward them, along with Freya and Inor. Rhia took a deep breath as they followed along side of Freya. *Please let Bram behave himself* she thought repeatedly. The Rama people weren’t as forgiving as her people have been.

## Chapter 11

“It is a ghost!” An old man watched as the group of men disembarked from their ship. The ship was good size, much larger than the smaller trading vessels that usually docked here. His eyes were on their leader. The man was tall, trimmed built. His face was hauntingly handsome and his silver hair flowed down to the middle of his back, he almost seemed to glide as he walked.

The villagers of Lasto had never seen a man the likes of Michael before and all were keeping their distance. The old man seated on the pier had stopped in mid-task of removing the scales from the fish in his hand as Michael and the five dark-haired soldiers approached him. The old man looked into Michael’s steely gray eyes. Fear gripped the man, he couldn’t move. He had seen many foreigners come through this small port town. However, this ghost of a man was pure evil.

“Have you seen two men that look like my companions? They were with a band of Barbarians.” Michael’s monotone voice chilled the old man further.

“I remember seeing two men arrive a few weeks ago that had dark-hair.”  
The old man’s hands were shaking as he put the fish and knife down on the barrel.

“Are they in this village?” Michael never removed his gaze from the man.

“No, I believe they were with the warrior women or possibly the Rama warriors.”

“Where can I find these women?” Michael hardened his look on the old man.

“Uh, they are from Arcarndia.” The words came out fast. He wanted this ghost to leave him.

“How do I get there?” Michael’s voice never changed in pitch or volume as he spoke.

“You travel down the river.” He pointed to the northern part of the village. “It will take you about a day to get to Arcarndia.”

“The river goes straight to Arcarndia? What about this Rama?” Michael never moved or even seemed to blink.

“Rama.” The old man was reluctant to reveal this village. The Rama warriors were not to be trifled with. “About a two maybe three day journey through the jungle. However, I am not certain the way. I have never been there myself.”

“You sure on this?”

“Yes, now please let me get back to my work.” The fear that held the old man turned to terror as Michael smiled at him. With one quick movement Michael’s dagger sliced the old man’s throat. Michael kicked the gargling man off the pier into the water below. He hated that it took so long for somebody to die.

“Mount your horses we have a long ride ahead of us.” Michael and his men walked off the pier to their horses. They paid no attention to the many eyes that were now upon them. If this Arcarndia could be reached by the river, he would follow it on land and survey the area as they rode.

Michael’s silver hair flowed like a veil behind him as his horse rode out of Lasto. The Barron had paid him well to bring Bram back to Adkins. The Barron insisted that five of his soldiers accompany Michael, he wanted Bram alive when he was returned to Adkins. Michael had all intentions on bringing Bram back alive. Now the poor souls that had been chosen to come with him that was another matter. Michael worked alone and he was quite certain tragedy was about to fall on his five companions somewhere along the way. Arcarndia would make for wonderful sport for him. Michael smiled, the very thought of the horror he could spread through this barbaric land enticed him to no end.



## Chapter 12

It was a day's ride to Rama and for the most part the Rama warriors didn't talk much to Bram. The group of men suddenly put their horses into a charge as they approached a hill.

"What is it?" Bram asked Rhia.

"Rama is just over the hill. They are eager to get home." Rhia kicked the sides of her horse and Bram followed. From on top of the hill Rama was visible. The village was smaller than Arcarndia but had the same kind of wooden huts.

The warriors cried out when they got to the entrance. Like Arcarndia, there were guard towers at the entrance. The men in the towers had their sword raised hollering back at the returning warriors.

"Remember Bram be careful here." Rhia said. Bram couldn't help but noticed the guards looking lustfully at Rhia and Freya as they passed by them.

They dismounted and young boys took their horses to the stables. Across from the stables was a large training ground. The warriors who were there also raised their swords and shouted at the returning warriors.

“Come with me,” Inor said to Bram and Rhia. Bram noticed Freya was more tense than usual. She was scanning the area as they walked past a group of huts. Everything was built similar to that of Arcarndia. This made sense to Bram seeing how the men were the carpenters in Arcarndia.

They headed straight for a large hut that look like the Domos’ hut in Arcarndia. Korr and another large warrior stood guard at the entrance. “Korr, Alvaro, greetings.” Inor slapped each man on the back. Both look genuinely happy to see him. Korr looked up and saw Bram his expression instantly turned cold.

“Where is Devi?” Korr directed his question to Rhia.

“She is still in Arcarndia.” Rhia didn’t make eye contact with the large warrior.

“It was foolish to bring your mate to Rama, unknown.” Korr went back to his post not waiting for Bram’s response. Rhia gently grabbed Bram’s arm and led him into the hut.

Inor had a small dark-haired older woman lifted up into his arms. She lavished sweet kisses on his cheek. “That is Sadosa’s mate, Emily, Inor’s second mother.” Freya offered as they all watch the warm welcome.

“I have missed you so, Inor.” Emily straightened her skirt when Inor sat her back down. Emily looked like a porcelain doll. Her ebony hair was braided and hung down pass her bottom. The garment she wore was made of pastel colored silk and wrapped around her delicate body. Her face was beautiful, a

few lines graced it, but this only gave her warmth. Her eyes were large and the darkest blue Bram ever saw.

“Freya, greetings,” Emily’s voice was angelic.

“Mother this is Bram and Rhia. He is from your France.” Inor gently guided her to them.

“Greetings.” Emily reached out her hand to Bram. He grabbed it gently and kissed lightly. Emily smiled it had been ages since a man had done that. Sadosa saw the pleased look cross over his beloved Emily’s face. He would have to remember to do that to her.

“Emily,” Sadosa’s voice boomed through the hut. Emily nodded her head to Rhia and then hurried to Sadosa’s side. She was so small standing next to the enormous Sadosa. Her modest frame almost seemed to be swallowed up by his powerful arm as he pulled her closer to him. Emily only stood up to the middle of his chest.

“Inor I am pleased to see you in my home again. We must hunt together while you are here.” Sadosa smiled at his son. This warmed his handsome face. “You will come too.” Sadosa gestured to the rest of them.

“Sit down.” Sadosa went to a large table in the center of the room. He guided Emily over with his hand pressed lightly on the small of her back. He pulled out a chair for her and then sat down next to her.

Rhia was touched by the gentleness the great Sadosa showed his mate. She had heard many stories about the cruelty some Rama men had toward their

mates, and she was sure Sadosa would be like that. Or at the very least treat his mate like his inferior. However, so far he treated Emily like a precious treasure.

“You are from France,” Emily spoke to Bram.

“Yes.” Bram seated Rhia before sitting next to her.

‘How did you end up in Arcarndia?’ Emily took some food from the tray the serving girl brought in. Two more servants brought in some kind of roast beast and sat it in the middle of the table. Trays of various vegetables, fruits, and breads were being passed around.

“Well uh.” Bram didn’t know how to answer her. Emily held herself like a noble French woman. Explaining to her that he was hunted down and dragged back here seemed, well disconcerting.

“I journeyed to find our ancestral lands.” Rhia injected. “I chose Bram for my mate.” Rhia handed Bram the tray of bread. Her answering for him relieved Bram.

“Oh, I see.” Emily sat back as Sadosa tore off a chunk of the beast for her and himself. “Then you should be out of sorts.” Emily smiled up at Bram. “Sadosa was most patient with me when I first arrived.” Emily lightly touched Sadosa’s lower arm and smiled up at him. Anyone could see the love they had for each other as it blazed in their eyes. “Inor and Tyr were most accommodating with helping me and Dalma adjust.”

“You will have to meet Tyr, Bram,” Inor added.

“Rhia is helping me to adjust. Isadora has been very patient. As it seems I tend to commit grievous social blunders.” Bram chuckled, as did Emily the rest who sat at the table didn’t seemed to understand what Bram had said. Emily immediately noticed.

“It seems Bram has a lot to learn about our customs.” She addressed Sadosa.

“He will learn.” Sadosa could see Emily was pleased to have someone from her homeland to talk with this made him happy. “Bram you will have to tell Emily about what has happened to her France later.”

“It would be my pleasure.” Bram saw the puzzled look on Sadosa’s face.

“He will enjoy talking about our homeland,” Emily told Sadosa. He immediately relaxed. “Bram please remember that certain words invoke massive jealousy.” Emily nodded at him.

“Inor, how is my Dalma?” Emily asked.

“She is most happy with Tiben.” Inor talked with his mouth full of food.

“Dalma was happy to see that Tiben was most pleasing to the senses.” Freya added.

“Tiben is handsome?” Emily asked.

“Very much so, they should have beautiful offspring,” Freya answered. Inor looked at her with jealousy in his eyes. Just the response Freya was after.

“It is an honor to have a man such as him to be our daughter’s mate.” Sadosa closed the topic. “Feel free to look around my Rama, Bram and little warrior. Tomorrow morning we will hunt.”

The rest of the meal Inor and Sadosa talked about various fighting styles and promising young warriors. Bram and Rhia were invited to stay at Sadosa’s hut which Rhia immediately accepted. After the meal, Bram and Rhia decided to look around Rama. They walked down the dirt path toward the weapon maker’s hut.

“This is a fine weapon.” Rhia looked over a small dagger. The handle was made of ivory and fit nicely into Rhia’s hand. She traded the dealer a few diamonds and watched Bram look over the swords.

Edwin was right the weapons were made well. Bram had no desire to replace his old faithful sword. However, he admired the workmanship of the other blades. Bram looked to the right and saw a large hut with several women sitting just outside of it.

“That is the comfort house.” Rhia had a look of disgust on her face.

“Comfort house?” Bram observed a couple of Rama warriors approaching the women.

“This is where Rama warriors go to ease their lust. Sadosa chooses a few girls that are born here in Rama to work in that hut.”

“They are chosen at birth”

“Yes they are called Valka. When these girls reach womanhood, they are sent to Tiben to be tutored. Then they are sent back and placed in the comfort house, where they must please any Rama warrior that chooses them.” Rhia grabbed Bram’s hand and led him away.

“Arcarndia doesn’t have this.” Bram followed Rhia.

“Of course not!” Rhia led Bram to the training grounds. She heard Sadosa would be training and was most eager to watch him. As they approached the training fields, a large group of dark-skinned women and children entered the village. Sorrow and terror dwelled in their eyes and they look like they had journeyed hard. Rhia stopped Bram.

Sadosa strode up the training grounds right to the group of refugees. A large dark-skinned warrior followed him. Sadosa would speak to them and the large warrior would translate for him.

“Kador has destroyed their village,” Inor told Bram as he watched his father rally aid for the displaced souls. Women and elders led the group to a large opened area. Food and water was brought to them.

“Inor have all the men build a shelter for them.” Sadosa watched them. The sorrow, the pain these people will have to endure. Sadosa saw Emily emerge from their hut with Korr and Adham in tow. She headed right for the refugees.

“I will help her,” Rhia said. Rhia hurried over to help with the wounded.

“Come Bram we must build them a shelter,” Sadosa said. Inor had already begun to gather a group of men to aid them. Sadosa and Bram went to

the open field where some of the elderly men were already piling lumber. Elderly women were making the thatch for the roof. Bram worked along side of Sadosa, he lifted and held lumber while old men tied them in place. In the matter of hours, a large hut was built. Bram was surprised how efficient the Rama people were.

“Well done, Bram. They will at least have a safe place to sleep. Tomorrow we will have to hunt well to provide for the extra mouths.” Sadosa watched the women gather furs and firewood for the refugees.

“Sadosa,” Emily’s soft voice wavered. Tears were in her eyes as she wrapped her arms around his waist. Sadosa pulled her close and cradled her head in one of his hands as she nuzzled his chest.

“Kador will die soon.” Sadosa brought his lips to the top of her head and kissed gently. “Kador will die.”



Rhia snuggled up to Bram as they laid in one of Sadosa’s guest rooms. “How many times has that happen?”

“Kador has destroyed five villages in the last five years. They always come to Rama for everyone in this area knows Kador fears Sadosa.” Rhia ran her hands across the patch of ebony hair on Bram’s strong chest. “Many survived this time usually only a handful manages to make it to Rama.” Rhia moved her



hand to his handsome face. "Isadora and Sadosa have tried to stop him but he never stays in one place to long."

"But he tries to take Arcarndia. He has to stage the battle somewhere."

Bram lightly caressed her back.

"Isadora and Sadosa have been working on a battle plan. Sadosa had hoped Kador would have attacked Rama during the joining. That is why most of the Rama warriors stayed. It was spread that only Sadosa and two of his warriors would be there but Kador won't attack Rama." Rhia looked into his eyes. "Let's not think of this now. I want to make love to you, my warrior." Bram gently took her into his arms and took his time loving her.

## *Chapter 13*

Three of Michael's companions had met with unfortunate accidents on the ride to Arcarndia. Since they were in a savage land these mishaps were easy to explain to the others. They rode all day and made camp just outside of Arcarndia.

Michael sat outside looking out into the darkness. He could see the fires from the village. The sound of horses captured Michael's attention. He did not bother to wake up the last two of the Baron's men. Let them be bait for whatever was coming. Michael lean back against the tree he was standing in front of with his hand by his sword. He heard the horses stopped a few hundred feet away and the familiar sound of humans walking shortly followed. Michael stood still, not making a sound. The footsteps were getting closer, though they were not the heavy footsteps of a man. Curious, Michael kept his eyes on the camp.

Out of the shadows, he could make out four women approaching the camp. They were half-naked and beautiful. Two had swords drawn and two had bows. His eyes kept the larger one targeted as she went into one of the tents. Michael smiled when he heard the sweet sound of flesh being torn. Well there goes the last two of the Baron's men. The women continued to look around the camp checking everything.

Devi looked up and saw the silver haired man standing calmly against the tree. His gaze locked on hers. She loaded up her cross bow and took aim but before she could react, an arrow lodged itself into her shoulder. Devi didn't cry out but hid behind a nearby tree. She gave the signal to the other women that danger was near. Devi peeked out from behind the tree but the odd-looking man was gone. She heard the sound of steel cutting flesh and a body hit the floor. Fearing for her comrades, she pulled her sword and headed back into the camp.

“Maya,” Devi whispered. Maya laid on the ground with her throat slit from ear to ear. Devi scanned the area.

“Where are the two dark-hair men that were brought to your village?”

Devi turned quickly around and was face to face with the silver-haired man. “Who are you?” Devi backed up and readied her sword.

“The bringer of death.” Michael smiled and lunged at Devi slicing her arm. “Now let’s try this again where are the two dark-haired men?”

Devi knew this ghost was talking about Bram and Edwin. “They are dead.” Devi shot her crossbow hitting Michael in the forearm.

Michael laughed loudly. This woman actually inflicted a wound on him, most amusing. “You lie.” Michael readied his sword. “Since you are the first to actually cause damage to me, I will let you live this time.” Michael charged at her stabbing her through the leg.

Devi fell to the ground. *Oh Edwin I have failed you.*

When Devi didn’t return by morning, Edwin went to the Domos. “Don’t worry Edwin I have already sent a party out to see why they are late coming back.” Edwin studied Isadora’s face he could see the worry she was trying so hard to hide.

“I have to go help.” Edwin started to head for the stables but Eriq blocked his way.

“You don’t know these lands.” Eriq led Edwin back to his hut. Three other males were waiting as well. “They are worried as much as you are Edwin but they wait.”

After a few hours one of the women warriors on horseback raced toward them. “Domos!” The woman leapt from her horse. Edwin’s heart stopped he couldn’t breathe as he waited for the woman to speak.

“What is it?” Isadora hurried to her.

“Domos, they are dead.” Edwin felt his legs turn to jelly. He couldn’t breathe. No, his Devi couldn’t be dead.

“All of them?” Isadora sat down on the steps.

“Devi is wounded badly, Domos. But Maya, Tha, and Nyssa are dead. Oh, Domos the way they were...” The woman burst into tears.

Eriq went to her. “Tell me.”

“They were beheaded and their bodies strung up in the trees like they were some animals that were being dried.”

“Where is Devi?” Edwin asked. He had to be with her. He had to do something.

“She is being brought to Iduna.” The woman gently touched Edwin’s arm. “Edwin, she is hurt badly. I am not sure Iduna can mend her.” Edwin patted the woman’s hand and raced toward Iduna’s hut. The wails of the other three men hastened his footsteps.

Edwin banged on the door. Ranos opened and looked down at the little man. "She is...let my mate try to heal her, Edwin."

"You won't stop me from seeing my mate." Edwin reached back for his sword. Ranos stepped aside and let him in.

"She is in the room to the right."

Edwin almost flew to the door. However, when he got there his hand slowly turned the knob. His mind tried to prepare him for what might lay on the other side.

Devi was lying on the bed and Iduna was frantically applying some herbs and bandages. "Devi," Edwin's voice was soft.

"Edwin," Devi said in a weak voice. Edwin rushed to her side. He saw the arrow wound to her shoulder and the cut on her leg it was a bad wound.

"Edwin, please come here," Iduna said. Edwin followed her to the other side of the room. "There are more injuries than what you saw. But I suppose I will have to let you see it. Maybe you will know what it means. She has loss a lot of blood, Edwin. We must pray to Odin and hope he grants Devi strength." Edwin nodded his head and followed her back.

Iduna pulled the fur blanket off Devi's stomach. Edwin gasped. Carved on Devi's stomach was Bram X. "Oh my Devi." Edwin felt sick to his stomach. He knew what that mark meant only one man did such a vile thing. *Michael.*

"Edwin." Devi reached her hand out. Edwin grabbed it and kissed gently. "Edwin, listen to me." Devi was very weak, her words strained. "A man with

long silver hair...and...gray eyes." Devi took two deep breaths. "He seeks you and Bram." Devi tried to squeeze Edwin's hand. "Edwin be careful." Devi smiled up at him. "I love you, my strong warrior."

"I love you so much." Edwin kissed her lips softly. "Oh please don't die, Devi. I need you so much." He ran his fingers through her soft blond hair.

"Edwin. If I die..."

"You won't die." Edwin stroked her cheek.

"I will wait for you in paradise." Devi smiled at him. "You have...made me complete." Devi closed her eyes.

"No, you will not die!! Do you hear me?" Edwin laid his cheek on her hand. "Please don't leave me." Tears started to form in his eyes. "Devi."

Iduna put her hand on Edwin's shoulder. "Edwin, I must tend to her. This will be a long night and you may stay just in case Devi..."

"She won't die!!" Edwin sat up and looked into Devi's face. His stare so intense as if he was sending his own will into her soul. "No my Devi will not die."

## *Chapter 14*

Bram rode next to Rhia as the hunting party rode out at dawn's first light. Sadosa, Inor, Freya, and two other warriors were just ahead. Korr and Adham flanked Emily; they rode behind Bram and Rhia.

"What are we hunting?" Bram asked.

"Antelope, Zebra, perhaps a lion or wild boar." Rhia continued to scan the nearby jungle. Bram heard the sound of wheels moving. He turned around and saw a wagon driven by yet two more Rama warriors following behind the party.

"Expecting to do well?" Bram commented.

"Antelope are herding." Rhia kicked the sides of her horse and Bram immediately followed her. He observed her pulling an arrow from the quiver on her back. Rhia gripped the horse tightly with her legs as she pulled the string back. Bram felt a sudden rush of desire. The gracefulness in which Rhia moved was pure fire to him. Rhia let loose her arrow and Bram heard the grunt of an animal injured.

“Finish it, Bram.” Rhia stopped her horse. Bram jumped from his horse a few feet from the strange looking deer. Rhia’s shot was on the mark the animal barely hung on to life. Bram slit its throat.

“Antelope,” Rhia said. She stretched the animal out and field dressed it right there. Bram was impressed by her efficiency and how she knew just what to do. The two large warriors came over and picked up the beast carrying it back to the wagon.

Bram mounted back up on his horse and followed Rhia forward. Emily rode behind them with her escorts. “You hunt?” Bram couldn’t picture Emily killing anything.

“Oh no, Sadosa likes it when I accompany him.” Emily smiled sweetly at Bram. Korr noticed.

They hunted the entire morning and managed to get enough game to feed the village as well as the refugees for a few days. Sadosa rode back with Emily by his side.

“Great Sadosa, may I have a word?” Korr asked.

“Inor ride with your mother for a little while.” Sadosa dropped back and Inor assumed his position next to Emily.

“What is it?” Sadosa constantly scanned the area.

“This pains me to say.” Korr paused. “But Emily seems too fond of the unknown.”



Sadosa stopped his horse. Korr followed suit. "You have served me well Korr." Sadosa pulled his sword from its sheath on his back and pointed it at Korr's chest. "No one speaks ill of my Emily." Sadosa glared at him then put his sword back in its sheath. "Don't do it again or I will remove every limb of your body before I kill you." Sadosa rode back up to Emily.

Korr's rage built. He was certain Bram would feel Sadosa's rage. It didn't take much to ignite Sadosa's jealousy. Instead, Sadosa threatened him. The insult stung. This was the second time Sadosa had angered Korr. Not giving him Devi already pushed Korr to the edge but this plummeted him over.

"Bram come with me," Sadosa said as they entered the village. Bram dismounted his horse and walked over to him. Sadosa gently lifted Emily off her horse and held her tightly in his arms for a moment. Emily reached up, cupped Sadosa's face, and kissed him gently. Bram waited quietly a few feet behind them. He felt Rhia's hand on his arm.

"I wish we could be alone, my warrior," Rhia whispered in his ear.

"You read my mind." Bram smiled down at her. Sparks flew between the two. Sadosa could feel the heat they generated as he approached Bram.

"Bram," Sadosa's voice was low. Bram immediately looked up at him. "I wish to speak with you. Little warrior join my mate." Rhia nodded at him and smiled up at Bram then hurried to Sadosa's hut.

Sadosa began walking and Bram hurried to catch up with him. "Kador will more than likely try to attack Arcarndia again." Sadosa walked with his hands behind his back as he looked around his Rama. "I think he grows tired of getting defeated by Isadora."

"If he is planning a large attack he will have to ready himself. There has to be some kind of battle camp or something," Bram injected.

Sadosa stopped and looked over at Bram. "My thoughts as well, I will be sending scouting parties out to find him." Sadosa paused. "You are a Knight. My Emily said this is a name for great warriors of France."

"I am called Knight. I led men into battle many times."

"Have you fought the desert people before?" Sadosa started walking again.

"Yes I have." Bram was sure this Kador had to be a Moor.

"Then you know this enemy." Sadosa took a deep breath. "Kador has blood red hair. I have seen him many years ago and know this is true. It is said that his hair is stained this color by his victims' blood." Sadosa paused and looked over to the refugees helping prepare the animals from the day's hunt. "Kador is a rarity among his own people." Sadosa look back at Bram. "So you don't know this enemy, Bram. Remember this. Come." Sadosa led him to the training grounds. Sadosa watched his men train. "I want you to help Isadora. I have the utmost respect for her but she is too timid. She needs to hit Kador hard.

She needs my help. If we attack together, we could stomp out Kador. Convince her of this Bram.”

“How do I do that?”

“Convince Eriq.” Sadosa smiled at him. “Now I want you to train with me.” Sadosa drew his sword and Bram followed suit.



It was nightfall when three Rama warriors rode their exhausted horses into the village. Bram and Rhia were sitting outside of Sadosa’s hut when the three approached. They jumped from their horses and headed for the hut. Sadosa meet them at the doorway.

“Great Sadosa.” The man was winded and obviously had ridden hard all day.

“What is wrong Garth?” Sadosa exited his hut and went to the other two men. “Kell, Loki.” Sadosa made sure to acknowledge all of them.

Garth went to Sadosa’s side. “Our mates were killed. Devi was the only warrior left from the scouting party.”

“Devi!!” Korr hurried over to them.

“She is injured badly, but is still alive.” Garth returned his gaze to Sadosa. “My mate was mutilated and hung out like an animal after a hunt. I want blood for this!!” Garth was breathing hard. “Isadora will not permit this. I don’t know the enemy she said. Great Sadosa help us to get our revenge.”

“Was it Kador?” Sadosa saw the battle rage in all three of his former warriors’ eyes.

“Isadora doesn’t believe it is.”

“Please come inside, rest. Tomorrow we ride for Arcarndia. Your vengeance will be sated.” The men followed Sadosa inside.

Korr headed to Bram. He reached down and pulled Bram to his feet. “If Devi dies I will kill you and her weakling mate.” Bram held his anger in check. After all this man obviously cared about Devi, his anger was understandable. Korr released Bram and stomped into Sadosa’s hut.

“Bram, Devi...” Rhia couldn’t believe her strong friend was overtaken. Which three of her comrades had fallen in battle? Who did this? Rhia searched Bram’s handsome face for comfort and found it as he took her into his arms. His eyes full of compassion warmed her.

“Rhia we will ride with Sadosa tomorrow. You will have answers.” Bram pulled her closer. “Devi will be alright. Don’t forget she has Edwin to care for her. He has dressed many battle wounds of mine.” Bram felt Rhia’s arms tighten around him.

They rode hard; night fell when they finally arrived in Arcarndia. The Domos came out to greet them. “Much has happened Freya.” Isadora seemed so distressed.

“I heard about my comrades.” Freya gently touched the Domos on the shoulder. In all her years, Freya never seen the Domos looked so distraught. “There is more isn’t there?”

“Come into my hut.” Isadora motioned to all of them. An ominous feel was in the air as they entered. Rhia had a firm hold on Bram’s arm, so afraid to hear that Devi had died.

“Sit.” Isabella sat at a large table similar to the one Sadosa had. “I will not waste time trying to protect any of you from this grim news. You know about our four warrior women. But, yesterday...” Isabella couldn’t continue the sight of those victims still fresh in her mind. She felt Eriq’s familiar touch on her shoulder.

“Go my dear. I will tell them.” Isadora patted his hand and rose up. She placed her hand softly on his cheek quietly saying thank you. Then she left. Eriq remained standing.

“Yesterday at dawn, I heard a child screaming in the fields. Therefore, Isadora and I rushed out to see what was wrong with the little boy. We got there the child was covered in blood. Isadora examined him and saw no wounds on him. He kept shaking and pointing in the direction of the woods.” Eriq closed his eyes and paused for a moment. “We pulled are swords and headed to where he was pointing. There was blood everywhere and there in front of us laid the first body. The head taken and arms were pointing up. About another hundred feet was another body it too was headless with its arms pointing up. Each led to

another and another. There were ten in all. They were perfectly lined up heading toward the forest." Eriq shook his head. "When we got to the forest all of their heads were hanging from a tree and at the bottom of this tree written in blood was Bram X." Eriq fists clenched. "Damn it, the ten were four old men, four old women and two children." Eriq rubbed his face. "The little boy must have escaped, all he will say is ghost."

"Damn it!!!" Bram screamed. Those people died because of him. The anger and despair welded up. "Damn it!!!" Bram stood up and pounded on the table. "Keep everyone in this village allow no one outside. NO!!!! It is my fault. I brought my enemy to you. GOD DAMN IT!!!!" Bram punched the wall. Bram was breathing hard the rage inside was bursting to get out. "I will hunt him. Just keep everyone in here. I will do this alone. I will not have even one more person die, I..." Bram had to get out of here. The room seemed to close in on him.

"Be calm!" Eriq grabbed a hold him.

"AHHH!!!" Bram broke free of Eriq's gripped sending the large man crashing into the wall. Inor rushed over to help Eriq. Rhia and Freya rushed over. Inor and Eriq both grabbed Bram and knocked him to the ground. Rhia and Freya each grabbed a leg.

"Listen, be calm!!!" Eriq slammed Bram's arm to the ground. "You are one of us now. Your enemy is our enemy."

"NO! I will not have another person's death on my conscious. He wants me. Now let me go!!!" Bram struggled hard against all of them.

“What is going on?” Sadosa’s powerful voice boomed through the room. Sadosa stood over them and saw the utter rage in Bram’s face.

“He is in a killing rage, Eriq.”

“Brother?” Eriq looked up momentarily at Sadosa. “Listen Bram, it is not your fault do you hear me. The same that it is not my mate’s fault that Kador kills.”

“Let me up!!” Bram struggled hard.

“Bram, I will not let you hunt this man alone.” Rhia’s voice rose above his rage.

“I will not place you in danger, Rhia.” Bram had begun to quiet down.

“Your enemy is my enemy.” Freya said.

“Your enemy is my enemy.” Inor followed.

“Your enemy is also my enemy.” Sadosa added. Bram could hear the conviction in their voices. How could they stand by him like this? He hasn’t given them cause to fight beside him. Bram was humbled by this.

“Are you calm now?” Rhia let go of his leg.

“Yes.” Bram replied quietly. Eriq helped Bram to his feet.

“No one blames you Bram.” Isadora’s voice filled the room. “But we need your help to fight this enemy.”

“The ghost is here because of me. And I will shoulder all responsibility for this.” Bram instinctively reached for Rhia. He needed her touch. Rhia grabbed his hand tightly.

"I heard Domos about your elders and children." Sadosa broke the silence in the room. "I have sent for twenty of my best warriors to help find this ghost."

"Thank you, Sadosa."

"My mate is coming with them, I asked that we stay in your hut so she will be protected."

"Of course, I will post two guards for her."

"Thank you, Domos."

"Devi, is she alright?" Rhia couldn't wait any longer she had to know about her friend.

"Devi is with Iduna at her hut. She was wounded badly Rhia. Our prayers are with her." The Domos nodded at Rhia giving her permission to see Devi. "You might want to go with her Bram. Your friend hasn't left Devi's side and probably needs your company." Bram followed Rhia out and they raced toward Iduna's hut.

Rhia quietly entered the room. Devi was lying motionless on the bed and Edwin was asleep sitting next to her bedside. He was holding her hand with his head lying next to her shoulder.

"Bram she looks bad," Rhia whispered. Devi was terribly pale and drained looking. Rhia went to the other side of Devi's bed and sat on down on the edge of the bed. She gently took Devi's cold hand into hers. Devi didn't move she just laid there. Rhia looked to see if she was still breathing. She was but shallowly.



“Edwin.” Bram gently shook Edwin’s shoulder. Edwin stirred.

“Devi.” Edwin suddenly sat straight up.

“Edwin. What can we do to help?” Edwin heard Bram’s familiar voice. Edwin looked so tired. His eyes were dull. He had a couple days beard growth.

“We can only wait to see if the salt and herb water that Iduna has been giving her works.” Edwin turned back to Devi and stroked her hair.

“Edwin, let’s go outside and get you something to eat and some fresh air.” Bram said.

“NO! What if she wakes up? What if...if...she dies? I have to be here.” Edwin gripped her hand.

“Edwin, I will stay with her. You must keep your strength up. Devi needs you. If anything changes I will get you right away.” Rhia’s heart reached out to Edwin. Devi didn’t look well at all; she had seen this look in other warriors. Most didn’t live.

“Come on, Edwin, Rhia is right.”

“Aye, but if any thing changes...”

“I will come get you.”

Edwin slowly raised from the chair his eyes still on Devi. Bram put his arm around Edwin’s shoulder and led him out of the room. Iduna saw them walked pass and she immediately went to get Edwin some food. Edwin sat on the steps of the temple. Bram sat next to him.

“Bram, it was Michael,” Edwin’s voice was low and solemn.

"I know. Devi will live Edwin." Bram looked out across the celebration grounds. On the far northern end was a stone altar and all around it were shrouds.

"Oh my God, Bram, how did they all die?" Edwin looked at the shrouds.

"Michael." There was no point lying to Edwin he was bound to hear from someone.

"Why?" Edwin mind couldn't comprehend what he saw. "How?"

"Edwin, let me worry about this. You tend to Devi. I will kill Michael."

Edwin said nothing and only looked out. Bram sat silently next to Edwin as Iduna brought Edwin some food. "You must eat," She said leaving the tray next to Edwin. Bram was relieved when Edwin ate the meal.

"We must clean you up. You wouldn't want Devi to see you like this when she wakes up." Bram took Edwin to the bathhouse where he cleaned up. They headed back to the temple and Edwin went right back to sitting next to Devi.

"Bram, I want to help you find him," Edwin's voice was quiet.

"Edwin."

"Don't start. I have been on the battlefield with you before. I may not be that good with a sword but I am quite competent with my bow. I will go with you or I will go alone. Either way I will find that bastard."

Devi opened her eyes. "My Edwin." Edwin clutched her hand and looked into her eyes.

"I am here."

"Edwin, don't look for this ghost. Please," Devi's voice was weak.

"Devi, I must. I need to satisfy my vengeance."

"I need you here."

"He hurt you Devi."

"Edwin." Devi lifted her other hand and reached for him. Edwin took it into his other hand. "Listen, my love." She looked deeply into his eyes. "I need you beside me. I want to spend every minute with your warmth next to me." Devi reached up her hand and stroked his cheek. "My brave warrior." Her hand was too weak to hold it there for long. "Please stay, Edwin for I believe I will die soon and your face is the last thing I want to see."

"Don't say that. You are not going to die." Edwin smiled at her. Devi loved his sweet smile. "I will stay here." Edwin kissed her on the cheek. "I love you, Devi."

"And I love you, Edwin." Devi turned her head and saw Bram and Rhia.  
"Rhia."

"What is it?" Rhia went over and sat on the bed.

"Promise me something."

"Anything."

"If I do die, please find Edwin another mate."

Edwin gently touched Devi's chin and turned her head toward him. "I don't want another mate." He moved a loose curl of her hair from her face. "You

have to get well." Edwin smiled. "I want a child next year." Devi smiled warmly at him. Edwin already buried one wife; he really didn't think he could live through that kind of pain again.

Rhia saw the love in both of their faces. Edwin gave Devi the best chance of survival. He showed her their future.

"You rest Devi. Don't worry about Edwin. Bram and I will make sure he takes care of himself." Rhia patted her hand and went to Bram.

Bram nodded at Edwin and took Rhia out of the hut. "Edwin won't let her die, Rhia." Bram kissed her softly and held her close.

"I couldn't bear if I had to wait like Edwin is doing. Everyday, every night might be the last." Rhia snuggled closer. "Bram if you died I would follow."

"Rhia, I want to make love to you." Bram needed to be close, needed her warmth. Rhia took his hand and took him back to their hut.

Without saying a word, Bram picked Rhia up in his arms and carried her to the bed. Gently he laid her down. He stood over her just looking at her. Rhia undressed herself with Bram still standing over her. His eyes memorized every line, every curve, and every little detail of her naked body. Bram loosened his sword and let it hit the ground. He pulled his shirt over his head and let it fall to the floor. Rhia studied every muscle of his strong chest and stomach. She watched as he undid his trousers and pulled them down. Her eyes fell to his hard cock and lingered there. Bram climbed on top of her, he buried his face in

the middle of her breasts. Breathing in her scent, and feeling her softness. His tongue traveled up her breast until it found her erect nipple. Rhia moaned as he suckled. He could feel her wetness on his stomach she was always ready for him. He lifted himself up so he could reach her lips. He kissed her deeply letting his tongue explore her mouth. Rhia felt as though she might melt from the heat of his desire. She loved his kisses and never wanted him to stop. She gasped as his hardness entered her, filling her completely full. While he continued his soul kiss, he thrust slowly. His tongue moved with the same strokes as his cock. First, slow then fast then slow again. Rhia wrapped her legs around his waist. She could feel her pleasure build and build until it crescendo in a glorious wave of pure pleasure. Bram arched up as he felt his orgasm exploded. He thrust hard as he filled her with his seed. Bram looked down at Rhia. She looked deliciously satisfied this brought a big smile to Bram's face.

## *Chapter 15*

"We must go." A solemn feel was in the air. Today all of the victims of Michael's twisted mind were going to Odin. Rhia was in full battle dress and Bram was dressed like a Rama warrior. They walked up the dirt path toward the temple. The whole village was quiet except for the noises of the animals.

Bram felt strange going to the ceremony. Would these people resent him being there? Bram watched the precession of villagers heading for the towers. All the warriors were dress in their battle attire. The rest of the villagers wore white gowns like Iduna. Bram saw Tiben ahead of them with his mate. He was dress all in black and carried a golden torch.

Rhia did not say a word when they reached Odin's tower. Nobody said a word. Bram noticed that two more altars were made to hold all the bodies. The warrior women were on one altar and the villagers on the other two. Bram's eyes couldn't stop looking at the small shrouds of the children that laid on one of the altars.

A precession of elders and children carried pieces of wood to the altars. Rhia grabbed Bram gently by the arm. He followed her to the large pile of wood that was off to the side. Bram followed Rhia's lead and grabbed an armful of wood. Quietly they went to the altar with the warrior women's shrouds on it. Bram laid the wood around the altar. The smell of death was strong as they passed by. Rhia pointed to the group of Rama warriors and Bram went to them. The three men that lost their mates held swords in front of them. Bram knew by the sizes of the swords that they were the fallen women's swords. Still no one said a word. A small fire was lit behind the warrior women. Freya walked over to the altar and placed the small shields on each shroud of the women. Then she walked over to the three men and handed them the bracelets from their mates.

Bram could see the pain in the men's eyes as each took a bracelet from Freya. Bram noticed no one was crying they all stood there silently.

The Domos was also in battle dress. She walked up to the three men and one by one took the swords they were holding out in front of them. She bowed her head to each of them. She went to the altar and laid the swords on the women's shroud. Then she walked over to the group of villagers. Ten men and women and a couple of children held out flower reefs in front of them. She took each of them bowing her head as she did. She placed the reefs on each of the shrouds of the villagers then went back to Eriq. Sadosa walked up to the altar and his warriors followed. Bram did as the men did. They circled the altar only part of the front remained open. They took their swords from their sheaths and raised them to the sky. Bram could see Rhia from where he was standing. She was loading up her bow and aiming it to the sky as were all the other women warriors. Tiben lit his golden torch and walked up to the altars.

"Odin, send your valkeries to take these souls into the hereafter. Guide them to the paradise that was promise and free them of pain and sorrow. Let their deeds pave the way to your light and forgive their wrong doings. Though are hearts are heavy with sorrow, Odin, we shall not cry. We will not hold them to this earth with the weight of our sorrow. Grant them wings to fly to you," Iduna's voice rung out. As she finished the women shot their arrows high into the sky. The men held the swords as high as they could.

"For the fallen!" Sadosa's voice boomed.

“The fallen!” the men shouted as they slammed the point of their swords into the ground.

The women raised their swords into the air. “The fallen!” they shouted and embedded the point of their blades into the earth. The arrows the women shot up into the sky began to rain down onto the ground. The elders grabbed the arrows and stood there.

Tiben lit the wood by the altars and the flames began to roar. The elders walked up and threw the arrows into the dancing flames. Tiben watched the flames get higher. Bram could feel the heat of the flames but he stood there as the other men did. When the flames reached the bodies, Tiben slammed the torch into the ground. He released the torch and walked away. The Rama warriors pulled their swords from the ground, placed them back into the sheaths, and walked away. Bram followed. The women did the same then the villagers. Everyone walked back to his or her huts. Not saying a word or crying a tear.

Rhia and Bram entered their hut. Rhia sat down at the table and said nothing.

“Rhia.” Bram looked down at her.

“Shhh, we must not speak for a little while.” Rhia gestured to the chair so Bram sat. They sat in silence for about twenty minutes.

“You did well.” Rhia broke the silence. “We had to be quiet so their souls would not hear the sorrow in our voices. Do not cry for them Bram or they will be bound to earth and not go on to paradise. The valkeries should have



come by now. They will show are warriors to Odin and guide the villagers to Thor.”

Bram could see the sorrow in her eyes. He wanted so much to kiss the pain away, but he dare not. He did not want to chance breaking any custom he wanted Rhia to believe her friends were going to paradise. It was the very least he could do.

“When the flames die we will go see Devi.” Rhia got up and started slicing some vegetables.

“You want me to help you?” Bram offered.

“No, this will occupy my mind, Bram.” Rhia looked down at the carrot she was dicing. “I didn’t like Maya, but she didn’t deserve this.”

“Rhia.” Bram went to her and placed his arms around her. Rhia stilled sliced at the carrot.

“She wanted me to choose her brother Rolf but I didn’t feel anything for him. Maya believed I insulted her family and sought any chance she could to challenge me. She didn’t deserve to die like an animal.” Bram didn’t know what to say so he just laid his chin against the top of her head, and listened to the knife hitting the wood block. Rhia went about cooking dinner and Bram begun thinking about how to kill Michael.

In the morning, Rhia took Bram to the Barter house. She wanted to get Devi something. Bram looked around at the people entering the village. Several

fur traders, a couple of silk merchants all were dark-skinned. He also noticed carts full of melting ice with fish in them.

“Fisherman from Lasto, the ice keeps the fish fresh. The fish they bring are tasty,” Rhia noted. This made sense to Bram.

“Lasto, is a port town?” Bram asked

“Yes, this is the only major harbor I am aware of.”

“So, all larger boats must dock there?”

“Yes.”

“Rhia, Michael came from my land so he would have to travel here in a good size boat. His boat must be docked in Lasto.” Bram’s mind started to work rapidly.

“Then we know where he will retreat.” Rhia went over to one of the merchants who were selling his cart of fish. She talked with the older man for a little while. Bram watched as the man became really animated when talking with Rhia. Rhia hurried back to Bram.

“Bram, the whole village of Lasto is afraid of the ghost ship. You are right. The boat is quite large with a crew of about ten. The man said a pale looking man with long silver hair and cold eyes scared the hell out of him. He rode toward Arcarndia with a few others.”

Bram saw more people enter the barter house. A tall thin ebony-haired Moorish looking man stuck out. The man was talking with all the other

traders but wasn't really trading anything. "Pick Devi something pretty." Bram smiled at Rhia. Rhia went over to the merchant with all sorts of jewelry.

Bram casually walked over to the thin man. "You are not from Arcarndia?" The man's gravelly voice surprised Bram.

"Not originally." Bram looked at the man's attire. Similar to the other traders but with fur strips running down one side of his trousers. Bram knew this was significant somehow.

"I am sorry but I must hurry." The man smiled and left Bram.

Bram looked to Rhia she was picking out a necklace. He walked over to her as she finished her trade. "I think she will like this." Rhia showed Bram the beaded necklace. Bram smiled and nodded.

"Rhia, have you ever seen someone with animal fur running down the side of the trousers."

"Where!" Rhia pulled her sword startling Bram. Bram saw the man jump on his horse and galloped off.

"There." Bram pointed at the fleeing man.

"Magnus, Kador's spy!" Rhia shouted up at the tower guard. Magnus loaded his bow and shot but the man was too far already.

"Only Kador's men wear the strip of fur. This spy wasn't too bright to wear that in here." Rhia put her sword back. "I must report this to Domos." Rhia reached for Bram's hand. "You have a good eye, my warrior." She smiled and led him to the Domos' hut.

"We can't send anyone after him. Not as long as that ghost is out there," Domos sighed. Kador was up to something, why now.

"Then we must prepare to defend Arcarndia," Sadosa interjected.

"You believe he will attack now." Domos turned her full attention to Sadosa.

"Yes. Especially once he knows what has been going on. I would attack now."

"We must know what Kador is planning." Domos didn't want to send anymore of her warriors out to be slaughtered but she had no choice.

"I will send some of my men to scout," Sadosa offered.

"I thank you for your generosity. But I believe it will be better if we send two of your warriors and two of mine."

"Very well, I concede only because this is your Arcarndia, Domos."

"I understand, Sadosa. Thank you for your council." Isadora bowed her head then went to pick two of her warriors. Bram was impressed by the Domos diplomacy.

"Bram, you were a high warrior in France?" Sadosa sat casually on the large chair.

"I was a knight. Sort of like your highest warriors."

"Ah, like a chapan. You earn respect of many men; therefore they will follow in battle, a chapan."

“Yes.” Bram felt Rhia tugging on his arm.

Sadosa chuckled. “I see your mate has another task for you. We will talk more later.” Bram bowed his head to Sadosa and left with Rhia.

“We have to see Devi.” Rhia didn’t want Sadosa choosing Bram to scout for Kador. So the faster he got away from Sadosa the better.

When they arrived at the temple both of them was shocked to see Devi sitting on the steps. Edwin was propping her up and she looked a bit to pale, otherwise much improved.

“Devi!” Rhia hurried to her friend. “You look much better.”

“I couldn’t let my fallen comrades’ souls be tied to this world worrying about me.” Devi was saddened that she wasn’t strong enough to attend the ceremony. “Were they sent off well?”

“Yes, Devi I am sure they are in paradise by now.” Rhia smiled.

“Devi, I want to talk with Bram. You visit with Rhia for a little while.”

Edwin waited until Rhia was propping up Devi before walking over to Bram.

“Go walk around, Edwin. I will be fine.” Devi smiled at him. Bram could see the relief on Edwin’s face now that Devi was out of bed.

“Let’s walk.” Edwin motioned to the dirt path. “Any news about Michael?”

“Yes, I know his boat is in Lasto. Therefore, I can set up an ambush for him there. The only thing is how do I lead him there?”

“You answered your own question.”

“What?” Bram stopped.

“Though I don’t really like that you will be using yourself as bait. You will have to plan the ambush well.”

Bram grabbed Edwin and kissed him on the cheek. “You are brilliant!” Bram picked Edwin up and spun him around; several children started laughing at them.

“Bram put me the hell down. Do you want these people to think you have gone mad?”

“Sorry. That is one hell of an idea. Use myself as bait.”

“Hey, oh, damn it. Why did I have to open my big mouth?” Edwin walked ahead. “Bram promise me you will plan this out carefully.”

“Of course, I don’t want anymore of these villagers to get hurt.”

Bram put his arm around Edwin’s shoulder. “What would I do without you?”

“Have to actually think for yourself.” Edwin chuckled.

## *Chapter 16*

“Kador, two Rama warriors were spotted. They know we are here,” The big guard reported.

“Damn!” Kador tapped his sword on the wooden table. “Break camp and ready the men. We ride to Arcarndia.” The less time he gave Domos to prepare the better. In addition, if Rama warriors were spotted then Sadosa was in Arcarndia.

“Kador.”

“Report.”

“I was in Arcarndia. There was a lot of talk about a ghost warrior. He killed ten villagers and three Arcarndian warriors. Sadosa is in Arcarndia and there is a dark-haired Rama warrior.” The scout wisely omitted the fact that he was spotted.

“Ghost warrior?”

“Yes, they say he is a ghost, all white even his hair.”

Kador remembered the strange man he saw in the forest a few days ago. Then this ghost must have been the one who killed his two warriors. They were strung out like animals; no Arcarndian warrior would have done such a thing. “Dark-haired warrior?”

“Yes I spoke with him. He talks strangely as well. He said he wasn’t from Arcarndia. That is all I had a chance to find out.”

“He must be from a village far away. I doubt we have little to fear from him. That’s all.” The scout left. Kador started tapping his sword on the table again. Maybe this ghost will help. Domos no doubt fears this man. Hell, to kill two of his guards so close to camp even Kador was impressed. What was this

ghost after? Kador could use a warrior this skilled. "Sadosa." Kador tapped his sword faster. What is Sadosa's weakness? All men had one. Damn why did Sadosa have to interfere. The last time Kador tangled with Sadosa he almost lost his head, and over a stupid woman and her child. Kador stopped tapping his sword. "The woman and the child." Kador smiled. " Sadosa's mate was his weakness." Kador's mind was weaving its wicked web.

"Boy!!!" The small boy hurried to Kador. "Bring me my woman."

"Yes, Kador." The boy rushed to the end of the camp toward the large woman. Her blond hair was braided and hung down her back. She was dressed like the men and had a large sword strapped to her. Her body was strong and her face was beautiful. She nodded to the small boy and headed toward her mate.

"Dara, you will have a chance to see Arcarndia again. I have an important task for you to do." Kador slapped her on the ass. He captured her five years ago. He needed a breeder and she provided him with five sons so far. Dara loved him, but he only saw her as a breeder and entertainment.

"What is your wish?"

"You will go into Arcarndia and bring back Sadosa's mate. You are the only one who stands a chance of getting this done. Now ride out."

"I will not fail you, Kador." She wanted so much for him to return her love. If she pleases him enough maybe he would.



“I know you won’t.” Kador smiled at her. Then she left as instructed. He would miss her if she was killed but he could always replace her. With Sadosa’s mate as leverage the mighty Sadosa will die. Kador was getting excited every thing was falling in place and all in his favor.



Michael looked down at the village of Arcarndia. Bram’s dark hair made him stick out and this made him easy to spot. Michael observed the same woman always by Bram’s side. Michael retracted the small binoculars and climbed down from the tree. He was growing bored of this barbaric land. They were too easy to hunt. No traps were set for him, disappointing indeed. Now all he had to do was wait for the one barbaric tribe to attack the other. Then he would capture Bram and head back home. He decided that Bram’s lowly bowman wasn’t worth the time to dispose of.

The sound of horses heading toward him captured Michael’s attention. He hid his own horse and climbed back up the tree. A small group of Rama warriors stopped a few hundred feet from Michael.

“Sadosa, where to now?” one of the warriors asked.

“Ride to the other hill and search. I will head back to Arcarndia.”

Michael looked at Sadosa. So this was the man that other barbarian seemed to

fear. When he spied on Kador's camp, he heard this Sadosa's name a lot. Yes, he was certainly a big man, but Michael was less than impressed.

"Yes, Sadosa." The group of four men rode off while Sadosa remained where he was. Michael observed Sadosa pulling something from his saddle. Michael jumped from the tree as Sadosa shot an arrow from a small crossbow. Michael smiled this was most unexpected.

He heard Sadosa dismount his horse and draw his sword. "So you are the ghost? Hah!" Sadosa was closing in.

"Though I find this most intriguing, I need you alive barbarian. Well, for now anyways" Michael hurried to his horse and jumped on. He kicked the sides and put it into a gallop. By time, Sadosa got back to his horse and pursued, Michael was gone.



"Bram, Sadosa almost captured the ghost." Rhia ran her fingers through the hair on Bram's chest. They had just spent a wonderful morning loving each other. Now laying on the bed spent Rhia's mind was spinning. "Maybe, he will kill this ghost and..."

"Rhia, don't worry. I know this enemy." Bram stroked her hair. Rhia heard what Bram and Edwin were discussing. Bram couldn't use himself as bait she would not allow this. Nevertheless, the warrior in her knew this was the best

plan. The woman in her didn't want to lose her beloved Bram. Rhia had a bad feeling something awful was going to happen to him.

"Bram, I am afraid for you." Rhia kissed his chest. Bram pulled her on top of him and settled her pussy on his hard cock. Rhia gasped as he filled her. Bram caressed her breasts as Rhia moved up and down on his shaft. Her tight wet tunnel was heaven to Bram. He moved his hands to her hips and helped her ride his hardness. She squeezed and tightened her pussy massaging and gripping his cock. Bram moaned with pleasure. Rhia looked down into his eyes. She loved the look of pleasure she saw. This heightened her own pleasure; she felt her orgasm building as she rode faster. Her pleasure rose and rose flooding her body until she climaxed. Crying out she continued to ride Bram. She felt his arms go around her hips as he sat up. He drove himself deeper into her. "Don't stop Rhia," he said breathlessly. Rhia squeezed and pumped until he released his seed into her. He pulled her to him resting his head on her chest. Both were breathing hard.

"You don't need to be afraid, Rhia." He looked into her pretty face. "I will not fight foolishly." Rhia cupped his handsome face in her hands.

"You are everything to me," Rhia said. She kissed him deeply. Bram rolled her over and entered her again.

"You want me again!" Rhia was surprised. They made love at least five times this morning.

Bram smiled and thrust slowly. "Your beauty is inspirational, my warrior." He brought his lips to hers and kissed passionately. He never felt this way with any other woman. He wanted to make love to Rhia as much as possible before he faced Michael. He wanted to leave Rhia with beautiful memories. He wanted her to feel his love.



The war council had assembled at Domos' hut. Isadora, Sadosa, Eriq, Freya, Inor, Abrianna, and two of Sadosa's Chapin warriors attended. "I have seen this ghost, Domos. He fled when face with my sword," Sadosa said. They all were seated around a large wooden table. A map of the area lay out and several strategic locations marked.

"You have stated that he was a strange looking man, Sadosa. In addition, I remember the words he told you. He needed you alive. I would say this was not fleeing." Isadora sat forward.

"He is nothing."

"Nothing! He murdered people of my village. He overcame four of my best warriors." Isadora stood up. "You are underestimating this enemy."

"Do not raise your voice to me, woman." Sadosa glared at her.

"Remember who you are addressing, Sadosa." Isadora sat back down.

"Don't let that Rama arrogance get your men killed."

“Eriq, your mate is overstepping her bounds.”

‘My mate is the ruler of Arcarndia and you would be wise to remember this.’

“Let’s concentrate on what is important. Kador is going to attack. He is about a day’s march away.” Isadora turned to Sadosa. “I need your experience Sadosa. I place great trust in the men from Rama. However, my warriors have never defended. They excel at attacking.”

Sadosa looked over the map. “Let him come to us. The Arcarndian warriors who have mates let them instruct on how to defend the village. But...” Sadosa paused. “Your warriors are unsurpassed with their bows.”

“Ah, we could place them on high to strike the enemy with their arrows.” Isadora pointed to the guard towers and the hills.

“Yes, my men will wait for Kador to arrive and cut the enemy down with our swords.”

“But the ghost.”

“Bram has a plan,” Inor interjected.

“Continue my son.”

“He will take a couple of warriors with him and lead this ghost away from the village. This ghost had to arrive on a boat so Bram will lead him back to this boat. The ghost will believe he has good fortune and then Bram will attack. But most importantly this ghost will not trouble us while Kador attacks.”

Sadosa laughed loudly. "Bram sounds like a Chapin. Tell him to ride out today."

Isadora agreed. "I will go with Bram, father," Inor said.

Freya gasped.

"Then this ghost is already dead." Sadosa smiled warmly at his son.

"Domos allow me to assist Inor," Freya said. There was no way she was going to let Inor out of her sight.

"Okay Freya, but be careful."

"Now let's discuss the placement of warriors, Domos," Sadosa said. Freya and Inor left to prepare for their journey.

## *Chapter 17*

"Korr where are we going?" Emily followed Korr into the jungle. Korr grabbed her arm and dragged her out of Arcarndia. He wanted Sadosa to worry so much about Emily that his battle skills would be diminished.

“Sadosa wanted you to go back to Rama.” Korr lifted Emily up and placed her on the horse he had waiting. He climbed on behind her and kicked the horse’s side.

“What about Alvaro? Why didn’t Sadosa tell me of this?” Something wasn’t right Emily could feel it. She felt uneasy something she never felt before around Korr.

“Alvaro will be guarding Dalma. She refused to go back to Rama and leave Tiben. Sadosa wanted this to be quiet and done in a hurry.” Korr wrapped his arm around Emily’s waist securing her to him. He didn’t want to injure her. He had nothing against Emily she had always treated him with respect. But Sadosa will learn not to take him lightly again.

Emily grabbed hold of Korr’s arm. Alvaro would never leave her side and Dalma wouldn’t disobey Sadosa. “Korr take me back. Let me speak with Sadosa.”

“I am sorry Emily but this has to be.” Korr urged the horse to ride faster. He would get Emily safely back to Rama and wait for Sadosa.



Dara rode hard to Arcarndia as she entered the gate no one seemed to notice her. She was in her old battle dress and blended right in with the other women. The whole village was readying for Kador’s attack. Dara’s eyes

wandered over the familiar lay of the village. Everything was still as it was when she was captured those five years ago. She often wondered how long her comrades looked for her.

“Sadosa,” Dara whispered as she watched him exit Isadora’s hut. Her eyes followed him. He walked over to a well-built dark-haired Rama warrior. She continued to observe them until they walked out of her line of vision. Dara scanned everywhere for the possible location of Sadosa’s mate.

Dara dismounted her horse and tied it beside the entrance. A quick withdraw was the only option. She only hoped the commotion would veil her retreat. Dara looked toward Odin’s tower and there standing in front of it was a small dark-haired woman. Dara’s heart quickened that woman had to be Emily. She shot a look toward the last place she saw Sadosa and he was nowhere in view. She quickly but casually walked to the woman. As she got closer, the woman looked to young to be Emily.

“Dalma?” Dara called out.

“Yes.”

“You have to come with me.” If she couldn’t have Emily, Sadosa’s daughter would have to suffice. She couldn’t chance lingering to long.

“Why?” Dalma asked.

“Sadosa wants you out of Arcarndia before the attack begins.” Dara reached out and gently took the young woman’s arm. She didn’t have time to coddle her.



“I can’t leave Tiben. I will talk to father.” Dalma pulled her arm from Dara’s hold.

Dara pulled her dagger from her belt and placed it against Dalma’s slim waist. “You will come with me or I will slice you wide open. If you cry out, I will hunt down Tiben and make him suffer for your cowardice.” Dara felt the young woman stiffen as she grabbed her arm again. This time Dara pulled her hard over to the gate.

Dara looked up at the guard tower the warrior in it wasn’t paying attention to the entrance but instead was looking out toward the east. Dara quickly untied her horse then led it and Dalma out of Arcarndia.



“Bram are you sure Inor and Freya is the only two you want with you?” Sadosa asked. Bram was finishing putting the last of his weapons on Samos’ saddle.

“The rest of your warriors will be needed to guard Arcarndia.” Bram didn’t even want those two coming with him. They didn’t know Michael’s abilities. Bram only knew what he heard. For he never saw Michael fight but he had seen what Michael’s blade was capable of.

“Sadosa.” Alvaro was pale and winded.

“What is wrong?” Sadosa’s heart stopped for Alvaro to look like this something must have happened to Emily.

“I can not find Emily or Korr anywhere.”

“Where were you?” Sadosa’s fist clenched.

“Korr told me you wanted me to guard Dalma but I can’t find her either.”

Alvaro grew paler as anger danced in Sadosa’s eyes.

“Tear this village apart. Find them,” Sadosa commanded his warriors to search for Emily and Dalma. Bram mounted Samos and raced toward the entrance, Freya and Inor followed. If someone took the two women, they couldn’t have gone far. Rhia watched Bram gallop through the entrance heading into the jungle.

Rhia grabbed one of the Rama warriors who were walking past. “What has happened?” She couldn’t believe Bram would leave without saying goodbye first.

“Emily and Dalma are missing.” The warrior paused briefly then continued ahead.

“You can not go out there!!” Rhia heard Isadora’s voice. Tiben was arguing with her but his voice couldn’t be heard. Tiben never spoke loud even in anger.

“Wait Sadosa, you know Kador arranged this. You will be walking into a trap,” Isadora said.

“I know that woman. But I must get my Emily back.”

“Sadosa. Bram, Freya, and Inor already went to get her,” Rhia said. She had to help Isadora to calm both men. Kador was getting ready to attack, if Sadosa left so too would the Rama warriors.

“Damn!” Sadosa slammed his fist through the wall of Isadora’s hut. “I can’t just sit here and wait.”

“Please Sadosa wait. Your son will get them back,” Isadora pleaded. She didn’t want the great Sadosa throwing his life away. It was surely a trap. Kador knew if Sadosa were killed, the Rama warriors would be in disarray. Isadora was starting to wonder if perhaps she underestimated her enemy.

“Brother, they will retrieve your mate. If you stay all Kador accomplished was igniting your wrath,” Eriq added.

“GRRRR!!!!” Sadosa embedded his sword in the nearest tree. Then he fell to his knees. If anything happened to Emily, how would he live? She was his very breath, his whole world.

Rhia was afraid watching Sadosa’s angst. Kador knew where to hit him to do the most damage. Then Rhia felt like she was going to be sick. Bram was out there, her Bram. Kador probably sent his best warriors to abduct Emily. “Please Odin give Bram strength to fight our enemy,” Rhia quietly prayed.

☪☪☪

Emily convinced Korr to stop, claiming she had to relieve herself. She went behind a bunch of trees. She looked out and saw Korr standing there with his arm crossed. Without thinking, she bolted into the jungle heading back in the direction of Arcarndia. She had to get back to Sadosa; his worry for her would make him distracted. He would be killed. This thought hastened her forward. It didn't take long for Korr to discover what Emily was up too. He jumped on his horse and gave chase.



"Bram I don't understand your thinking," Inor said. Bram was racing toward Rama.

"Trust me." Bram had a hunch; in all of his experience, his hunches were usually right. He prayed they were right this time. Korr tricked Alvaro this was obvious. Where else would Korr go but Rama? With Kador ready to attack, Rama would be the only safe choice to take Emily. But what if Korr wanted to hurt Emily? Bram shook his head and hoped his first theory was right.

They rode hard for an hour. Bram knew he couldn't ride Samos this hard for too long. However, neither could Korr ride his steed this hard either. Bram heard a woman scream in the distance and saw Inor leap from his horse. It had to be Emily for Inor to jump from a horse going at full stride. Bram brought Samos to a halt and followed Inor into the jungle. Freya did the same. Bram heard the snapping of twigs and heavy breathing closing in on him. Bram's eyes scanned

the area he pulled his sword out and gripped it firmly in his hand. Off to his right the tree branches moved violently. Bram raised his sword.

“Bram!” Emily yelled as she came out from the trees. Her hair was coming out of its braid, her dress was torn, and she was breathing hard. Bram quickly lowered his sword and pulled her behind him.

“Where?” Bram continued scanning.

“Inor...” She pointed to where she had just come. The faint sound of swords clashing drifted on the air.

“Are you alright?” Bram turned back to her.

“I am alright. Korr why?” Emily’s heart stung by his betrayal she trusted him not only with her life but also with Dalma’s life.

“I will have to help Inor.” Bram didn’t really want to leave Emily alone.

‘No need he has killed Korr,’ Freya said, coming to them. “Emily.” Freya went to her. She quickly checked Emily for injuries.

“He didn’t hurt me, physically anyways.” Emily shot her eyes up to Bram. “I have to get back to Sadosa.”

Bram brought Emily to Samos and gently help her up then jumped behind her. Inor was silent; Emily could feel her stepson’s sorrow having to kill his friend Korr. Freya gently reached up and touched Inor’s hand. Inor pulled her up to him and placed her in front of him then reached back and tied her horse to his. He pulled Freya close and headed back to Arcarndia.

Sadosa paced back and forth in front of Odin's tower, clutching his sword tightly in his hand. He had been doing this for the last couple of hours. Rhia sat on the grass watching Sadosa. She could see the rage and worry on his face. Rhia's stomach was in knots worrying about Bram. No other Rama warriors dare come close to Sadosa for fear he would want to train to vent his rage.

"Sadosa, they are returning!" one of the tower guards shouted.

"Is Emily with them?" Sadosa froze in place.

"Yes, she is with Bram. She seems to be alright."

Sadosa could hear the horses coming closer. Bram was in the lead with Emily sitting sidesaddle in front of him. For the first time ever Sadosa dropped his sword to the ground. He rushed over to Bram's horse. Emily extended her arms out and Sadosa swept her up in his. He kissed all over her face and squeezed her tight.

"Well done my son and Freya. I owe you Bram; you brought my world back to me." Sadosa kissed Emily over and over. Bram smiled at the warm display. He jumped from his horse and went to Rhia.

She ran to him and threw herself into his arms. "Bram," Were the only word she said. She wanted to hold him and smell his scent.

"Rhia I will have to leave again soon. I still have to get rid of Michael." Bram stroked her hair.

"I know and I must prepare for battle," Rhia replied. Bram cupped her face in his hand. He hadn't thought of that. Rhia would be fighting.

“You be careful. I want your warm arms to come back to.” Bram caressed her cheek.

“I will be eagerly awaiting your return.” Rhia smiled up at him.

Bram turned to Inor and Freya. “We will be leaving soon.” They both nodded. Bram observed Emily pushing against Sadosa. He let her down gently. She walked over to where he dropped his sword and picked it up. Using her dress, she wiped the dust from the blade. She carried the large sword back to Sadosa and handed it back to him.

“Your sword, leader of Rama.” Sadosa carefully took it from her and put it back into its sheath. Then he scooped Emily into his arms and carried her to Isadora’s hut.

“Oh, Bram will we love like that, when we have been together as long as they have?”

“More so.” Bram brought his lips to hers and kiss her sweetly.

“Rhia I have to go now.” He pulled her closer. “I wish we had time to make love before I go.” He breathed in the scent of her hair. Just the mere smell of her was enough to bring him calm.

“We will have to make up for it when you return.” Rhia smiled sexy at him.

“You keep looking at me like that and I may never leave.” Bram lifted her up hugging her tight. “Fight well, Rhia.”

“Fight well, my warrior.” Rhia kissed him one last time. Bram mounted his horse and kissed her hand.

“Did they find Dalma?” Bram asked.

“No, Tiben went with four Arcarndian warriors to search for her.” Isodara couldn’t convince Tiben to stay.

“Keep an eye on Edwin,” Bram said as he started to leave.

“I will, I promise. I love you, Bram.” Rhia watched his horse leaving the gate.

“I love you, Rhia.” Was the last thing she heard as he rode off.

## *Chapter 18*

Edwin pulled his bow back, making sure the string was tight. “What are you doing?” Edwin hurried to Devi. She was in battledress and had her bow ready.

“I am going to defend Arcarndia.” Devi filled her quiver full of arrows.

“You have not regained your strength. You had better stay in Isadora’s hut.” Edwin reached up for her bow.



“Edwin, I will help you defend the children.” Devi ran her fingers through his hair. Edwin was everything she wanted in a mate. His smaller stature didn’t matter to her. He was every bit the warrior as the largest Rama warrior. “Please do not argue with me. It would be a waste of energy.”

Edwin smiled up at her and accepted her need to be the warrior she was. He would defend her with everything he had. He ran his hand over her cheek and rose up to bring his lips to hers. They kissed sweetly; the sound of a group of horses charging into the village drew both of their attentions.

Tiben and the four Arcarndian warrior women hurried into the village. Dalma cradled gently in his lap and another woman lay tied across another horse’s saddle. Sadosa and Emily rushed out to them. Sadosa yelled up at the tower guard. The horn sounded the alarm. Kador was about to attack. Tiben pulled the woman from the saddle and tied her to a post in front of his hut. If Kador wanted his mate, back let him come.



Michael saw the group of women heading toward the hill. His eyes locked on the smaller one. A smile broadened across his face. With fluid movements, he went to where the women were.

He noted Bram with the two barbarian warriors. Getting Bram was going to be a bit more difficult with those two with him. Moreover, they were

obviously looking for him; it would be hard to sneak up on them. Seeing the little warrior woman gave Michael a plan. He hid in the trees and waited for the right moment, keeping one eye out for Bram.

The women positioned themselves on top of the hill just as a group of scruffy looking men had started ascending the hill. The women loaded their bows and waited. "Kador's men, the attack has begun," Rhia whispered. That familiar accelerating feeling flooded her body. Battle, all thoughts other than this moment had to be clear, even thoughts of her Bram. Pure concentration and a certain bloodlust must be obtained if she ever wanted to see Bram again. Rhia drew upon her training. After sending a quiet prayer to Odin she pulled her bow back. The men crested the hill; the women shot them down with the arrows. Their shots deadly accurate, a small handful charged at the women. The women pulled out their swords and met them head on. Rhia started to run at the remaining men, when she felt the stabbing pain in her leg. She looked down and saw a dart sticking from her leg. "What?" Rhia said. Everything was starting to spin and get fuzzy.

"Now you know what Bram must have felt like, when you tag him like a prize animal," Rhia heard the monotone voice say. She looked around and saw a blurry image of a man. His long silver hair blew in the wind and those eyes as cold as steel sent a shiver of fear through Rhia as her vision dimmed.

“The ghost, where is Bram?” Rhia tried to stay conscious. She felt Michael lifting her over his shoulder and carrying her off. If the ghost is here, then Bram...no it can't be. No, her Bram was alive she felt it

“Don't worry, I need you alive. You shall see Bram very soon.” Michael laughed. “You are going to help me capture him.”

“No.” Rhia couldn't focus anymore and in a matter of seconds was unconscious.

Michael threw Rhia over his horse and got on behind her. He rode off in the direction he last saw Bram. “He is heading toward that fishing village. Ummm, interesting, well I hope he likes the little surprise I brought.” Michael looked down at Rhia's ass. “I think I will have much fun with you.” One of his hands caressed Rhia on the ass. “I will show you things Bram has never thought of showing you.” This excited Michael and for the first time in awhile his cock was growing hard thinking of all the nasty things, he was going to do to this woman. What was more delicious, he was going to make sure Bram knew every little detail of what he was doing to his woman.

Michael rode for about four hours going as fast as his horse would take him. “Come out Bram,” he yelled. All the while, his eyes scan the area. If Bram were going to set up an ambush this would be the ideal spot, plenty of cover from the trees and large rocks. “I know you are here, Sir Bram. I have a surprise for you.” Michael lifted up Rhia so that she was in a sitting position with her

head lying on his chest. Michael placed his dagger to her throat. "If you don't show yourself I will... hmmm, well you know what I am capable of. That goes for the two barbarians you are traveling with."

"Let her go you bastard!" Bram emerged from the forest. How in the hell did Michael get Rhia? How could he know how important she was to Bram? Michael was watching he had to be. Rhia lying helpless against that monster, was she alive? Fear filled him. He was so close and...Bram's anger exploded as he pulled his sword out.

Michael smiled smugly. "Drop the weapon and the other two will do the same." Michael put the dagger closer to Rhia's neck.

"Is she still alive?" Freya asked, coming to Bram's side.

"Why yes, she is. You know the ironic thing is that I used the same kind of dart she used on you Bram."

"Where would you get that?" Freya inquired.

"Off the cold, dead, mutilated body of one of your comrades." Michael deliberately talked slow. Freya pulled her sword. "Down girl." Michael pulled Rhia's head back exposing more of her throat to his dagger blade. Freya dropped her sword to the ground.

"Freya!" Inor went to her laying his sword down next to hers.

“Ah, the last one, listen up. Wait, I don’t really need you two.” Michael lifted the blow dart and shot Inor and Freya with three darts in rapid secession. Inor took two of the darts and Freya took one.

“Inor!” Freya supported his weight. One of the darts hit him in the throat spreading the sleeping agent much faster.

“Oh boo hoo. Lucky for him my hands are full with this...ummm...luscious creature.” Michael ran his tongue across Rhia’s cheek. Bram lurched forward. “Ah ah, wouldn’t want my dagger to slip would you Sir Bram.”

“It’s me that you want let the rest go.” Bram clenched his fist and tried to think of a way to free Rhia.

“Oh how noble but I will tell you what’s going to happen.” Michael loaded the dart gun back up. “You want to play a game Sir Bram?”

“No, I want to slice you open with my sword.” Bram couldn’t see a way to grab Rhia without Michael cutting her throat.

“Temper, Sir Bram. The rules are simple.” Michael shot two darts into Bram’s side. “I am taking your woman with me back to Adkins. I will give her to the Baron and we all know what he does with new playthings, don’t we Sir Bram.”

Bram struggled to stand up. “I will kill you.”

“We will see. Nevertheless, hear the rest of my game. You will have to convince these barbarians to take you back to Adkins. Here’s hoping the

simpletons can remember the way. You will have very little time to exchange your life for hers.”

“I don’t want any part of your game. Let Rhia go, you bastard just take me back with you.” Bram felt his knees weaken and his vision fading out.

“You will have no choice. This should be most intriguing.” Michael watched Bram lay out on the ground still struggling to get back up. “A parting thought, let’s say something to spur you on. I will show your woman all sorts of new delicious tricks on the journey back.” Michael laughed loudly, took one last look at Bram before racing his horse toward Latso.

“Rhia...” Bram lost consciousness.



Bram’s eyes opened; slowly he rose to his feet. His head ached and his thirst immense. “Bram, Freya won’t wake.” Inor grabbed Bram’s shoulders.

“Rhia,” Bram whispered. Michael had Rhia; he had to get to her. Bram stumbled over to Freya. She lay still upon the ground. Bram checked her pulse it was good and strong. “The dart must last longer on women.” Bram looked up at Inor. “Inor we have to get back to my land. Rhia... I must get her back.”

“We will go back to Arcarndia and get a crew together.” Inor bent down and scooped up Freya in his arms. “Let’s ride out.” Inor handed Freya to Bram as

he mounted his horse. Bram gently lifted her up onto Inor's lap. After retrieving his sword, he moved swiftly to Samos and charged back to Arcarndia.

As they got closer to Arcarndia, they heard the clashing sound of metal against metal. Men and women's voices screaming out in agony and rage. They could smell the pungent odor of blood and sweat in the air. "Kador has attack Arcarndia!" Bram drew his sword "Stay here with Freya and protect her." Bram said to Inor, the leader in him sparking to life, and then he charged down the hill. Kador's men had penetrated the first wave and entered the town. Bram continued to charge swinging his sword slicing through the oncoming enemy. Battling without his armor was strange to say the least. Bram put his thoughts in the mindset of battle. Arrows flew through the air striking earth and flesh as Bram fought his way closer. He knew his destination, the Domos' hut. The children and elders would be there. Kador's men were gaining ground. If Kador reached that hut he would surely murder all of them.

Sadosa's large sword hacked away at the hordes of Kador's men. The sheer number of them was unexpected, but this did not matter to Sadosa or his warriors. The pure savage way the Rama warriors fought was enough to instill terror on any enemy. Sadosa stopped the onslaught shortly. He heard Bram's voiced raised in a war cry and saw him slicing his way toward them. Sadosa smiled, Bram showed no fear even being surrounded by the enemy. But why was Bram here, and where was Inor and Freya?

Bram covered in blood reached Sadosa. "I trust this is from the enemy and not from you, Bram." Sadosa pointed at the blood.

"I am uninjured." Bram dismounted his horse and ready himself for the next wave; the two men out fought Kador's men easily. However, the number of them was beginning to wear them down. Bram saw arrows raining down on the next wave of men. He turned around to see where they were coming from. Edwin and Devi were on top of the Domos' hut shooting anyone who got near. A group of woman warriors circled the hut and shot arrows at the oncoming men.

"Kador!" Sadosa growled.

Kador was in a sword battle with Isadora. Eriq lay on the ground bleeding a few feet away from them. Dara, Kador's mate lay dead just beyond him. Without thinking, Sadosa rushed to Isadora. Hack and slicing his way, he dodged the raining arrows finally reaching them. Isadora was no match for Kador's strength. Her fighting skills were exceptional but so to was Kador's.

"Go to your mate, Isadora." Sadosa stopped Kador's blade with his own.

"Sadosa," Kador hissed. The two men engaged in battle. Isadora stood in front of Eriq and fought off any man who came near him. Bram watched Isadora she was magnificent. He never saw a woman fight like her, not even his best man back in France could have matched her. Bram charged at the next wave of enemy warriors.



Sadosa matched Kador slash per slash. "You looked tired, great Sadosa," Kador smirked, his red-hair ablaze from the afternoon sun; a look of pure hatred on his face.

"You will die today, Kador." Sadosa felt his sword rattle from the strength of Kador's blow. Kador jabbed at Sadosa slicing the skin on his side.

"Ah, I see you can bleed." Kador had to win. His men were so close to overtaking Arcarndia. He fought harder backing Sadosa up. Kador jabbed again slicing Sadosa's arm. "When I kill you, Sadosa, I will take Emily as my new mate."

"AHHHH!!" Sadosa hacked and slashed with everything he had. Kador felt the impact through his whole body. The look of sheer rage in Sadosa's face filled Kador with fear. Sadosa continued his assault. What this monster did to his Emily all those years ago, *ting! clash!* , passing her around to all his men. *Slice!! Rip!!* It took him years to mend his beloved. "You will never hurt her again! GRRRR!" Sadosa raised his sword above his head and swung down embedding his sword into Kador's body. Almost cutting Kador's shoulder and head off, Kador fell with a thud to the ground. The sight of seeing their leader fall before the great Sadosa made Kador's men flee.

The Rama warriors yelled out the victory cry as the remaining warriors fled. Isadora joined their yell, as too did her warriors.

Edwin climbed off the roof of the hut and helped Devi down. "Edwin." Bram was winded and weary. Rhia was the only thing on his mind. He didn't

worry about the many men who fell by his sword this day. Rhia, sweet and beautiful Rhia, if she survived Michael's devious intent, she be too drained to endure the Baron's fury.

"Michael?" Edwin tried to read Bram's eyes.

"He's got Rhia." Bram sat down on the steps to the hut. The adrenalin rush of battle was rapidly leaving him. "I have to get back to Adkins."

The horn sounded and all the children and elderly left the hut. So did Emily and Dalma. "Are any of you injured?" Emily saw the blood that covered Bram.

"No, I was lucky." Bram looked out across the blood-coated ground. Bodies laid everywhere. Enemy and ally, men and women, the waste of life was always difficult to deal with after the battle. Bram felt the loss, the sorrow, and the relief of the fortunate ones.

Bram saw Dalma run off and throw herself into Tiben's arms. He looked up at Emily who was desperately scanning for Sadosa. The pure look of agony on her face was heart wrenching. Then in an instant sheer relief filled her eyes, tears rolled down her cheek and soft sobs of joy came from her. However, she didn't move. "Sadosa!" She cried out her arms opened waiting for his embrace. Sadosa closed the distance between them in the matter of seconds. His large arms scooped her up and held her tightly to him. Emily pressed her lips to his as the sobs still escaped. "My love I was so scared for you." She kissed him again and

again. "I wouldn't want to live without you. Oh Sadosa..." She wrapped her arms around his neck and shoulders as tight as she could.

Bram's heart wrenched his Rhia was out there without him. Alone to face his enemy; she done nothing but love him, now she will suffer because of him.

"Father!" Inor's voice rang out.

Sadosa slowly put Emily back down gazing in her eyes, cupping her cheek with his hand gently, before turning to Inor. "You are alive." Sadosa slapped his son's shoulder.

"I had to guard Freya." Inor was glad to see Bram had fared well. "Rhia was taken by the ghost."

Bram jumped to his feet. "I need a boat and a guide to take me back to my home land."

"Inor assemble some warriors to help Bram." Inor quickly went off to find the needed men. "You fought well, Bram."

"For Rhia," was all Bram could say. It was all for her. Arcarndia was her home and she was his life. There was no way he would have died in battle this day. Rhia needed him and just now, he realized how much he needed her. Desperation engulfed him an emptiness filled the pit of his stomach. Michael took his life from him as surely, if he stabbed Bram threw the heart with his sword.

Sadosa nodded at him. "Emily, Eriq is injured we must help Isadora. "Take what you need to get your mate back and rid yourself of your enemy,"

Sadosa said to Bram then he placed his hand on the small of Emily's back leading her to Eriq. Iduna and Tiben were already there helping Isadora. Dalma ran to Sadosa and hugged him as he and Emily approached Eriq.

"Edwin will you come to Adkins with me?" Bram needed his old friend there.

"Of course, I am your good luck charm."

"Then I will come with you, Edwin," Devi said. She had to help Edwin fight his enemy. He defended Arcarndia.

"Devi, I don't know."

"I am going, Edwin. We must stop your enemy." Devi smiled at him. "Together." Edwin knew it was pointless to argue with her.

"We will gather supplies and leave as soon as possible," Bram said. *I'm coming Rhia hold on please hold on.*

## *Chapter 19*

Rhia woke up, her head groggy and throat parched. She felt the mattress under her. Was she home with Bram? A brief moment of relief washed over her. Until she turned over and saw the wooden planks of the ship's cabin. She tried to move but only felt the heavy chains on her ankles. She sat up on the large bed and pulled at her ankle restraints. The chains were too thick and strong to move. An uncomfortable feeling of helplessness flooded her.

"Is this what you felt, Bram?" she whispered. She was the one now being dragged from her homeland by a complete stranger. Tears stung her eyes. She did this to Bram. How could he have forgiven her for that? How could he love her now? A few tears escaped and rolled down her face. She was truly ashamed of herself at this moment. She could handle whatever that ghost had in store for her. She had trained well. But what Bram has went through because of her. She decided if she lived through this, she would let Bram stay in his beloved France. She had no right to take him from his homeland. Her heart broke; she would have to live without her warrior, her Bram.

The door of the cabin swung open pulling Rhia from her thoughts. Michael moved fluidly as he approached the bed. His eyes wandered over Rhia's body. "Well you finally woke up, I see." Michael stood at the foot of the bed. His body came alive just looking at the little woman.

“Unchain me,” Rhia demanded.

“Why would I want to do that?” Michael brought one hand down to one of the iron shackles, caressing it gently.

“Fight me if you dare.” Rhia’s eyes burned with anger.

Michael laughed loudly. “You would pose no real challenge for me. I have other things in mind for you.” Michael’s hand moved up her calve.

Rhia moved her hand to strike him away. With one quick movement, he leapt on top of her pinning her to the mattress. “I like it when I have to break a woman down. Keep feeding my lust.” Michael’s gray eyes remained cold, lifeless. Rhia was afraid, truly afraid.

“Your body is strong.” Michael pinned her arms with one hand and let his other explore her body. “It might take awhile to break you.” He smiled wickedly.

“Get your soiled hands off me.” Rhia wouldn’t let him see the fear he brought to her. She knew what he did to her comrades, the villagers; even Bram seemed to fear this man. But she would not let him take pleasure from her fear.

Michael laid his body against hers. Letting her feel his hard cock on her thigh, he wanted her to know his intentions. Let her fear build. He brought his hand to her face and leisurely studied every curve and line. God she was beautiful and brave. Most other women would have been crying and screaming by now. She twisted and moved underneath him trying to rid herself of his

violation. This only deepened his want, his cock ached and his mind searching for the most erotic image. The first time he took her had to be perfect.

“Yes, that’s it fight woman.” Michael reached down and tore off the flimsy shirt of her battle wear exposing her firm breasts to his hunger eyes. Michael reached down to the floor and produced a length of rope. Roughly, he tied both her hands above her head then to the bedpost. Using both hands, he cupped her breasts feeling the weight of them in his hands.

Rhia closed her eyes and tried to detach from what was going on. Kador had violated her so violently, but it was at least quick. “Look at me,” Michael commanded. Rhia kept her eyes closed, let him take my body but she would not witness it.

Michael smiled then lowered his mouth to her nipple. He sucked hard and frantic all the while still squeezing her other nipple. His body was on fire as he tore off her skirt; his hand roughly explored her pussy. Rhia used her training and transported her mind back to her hut, lying there gently, warmly in Bram’s arms.

Michael removed his clothing and pried her thighs apart. With one swift move, he entered her. Slowly he thrust his hips, feeling her tightness wrap around his thick shaft. The warmth of her was sheer ecstasy. He laid gentle kisses on her neck inhaling her scent. Rhia was surprised by his gentleness, it reminded her of Tiben when he removed the curse from her. Yes, that is what this is. Rhia tried to convince her mind. She felt him shudder and fall on her. She

could hear his breathing start to calm. Then he pulled himself from her. Michael reached up and untied her arms. Rhia heard his footsteps and the sound of the door opening and closing.

She opened her eyes he was gone. Rhia grabbed the silk sheet and wrapped herself in it. Did Michael believe he was raping her or making love to her? Rhia wasn't sure she wanted to know the answer to that. She felt something metal on the side of the bed. A key, she scooped it up and tried it on the leg shackles. A clicking sound followed by the shackles falling from her ankles. Michael had freed her, why? Rhia rubbed her ankles then pulled her legs up to her chest. She laid her head on her knees and just sat there hugging her legs.



Michael strolled across the aft deck. His long, silver hair flowed in the wind as he looked out across the open sea. He heard her footsteps closing in on him, but he just stood there.

Rhia saw Michael standing there. His hair looked like silk blowing in the wind. His tall, trimmed frame stood there perfectly still, giving him the illusion of being a statue. Her first instinct was to rush up to him and push him overboard. This would only leave her alone with the ships crew and at this point, she didn't know what would be worse. Rhia looked out at the sea no land could



be seen. She inched her way closer to him. Not sure what she was going to do when she reached him. She was at his mercy she and he knew it.

“Coming up for air, warrior woman?” Michael’s cold voice chilled her to the bone.

“What are you going to do with me?” Rhia stood only a few feet behind him now.

“Well that depends on you, doesn’t it.” Michael turned to her. She had torn a swatch of his blue, silk sheets off to make a sarong for herself. It complemented her body nicely. He smiled briefly at her resourcefulness.

Rhia looked into his cold, lifeless eyes. “What do you mean?” She remembered Isadora’s words: *Study your enemy carefully. Sometimes your sword and bow will not serve you well. Use everything Odin gave you.*

Michael went to her. There for a moment his eyes sparkled, even if briefly. Rhia noticed but what did it mean. She would have to study this enemy for her battle skills will not serve her this time. His hand reached up and caressed her cheek. His eyes never leaving her gaze. Michael tilted his head slightly and pressed his lips to hers. Slowly he kissed, Rhia allowed it. Michael sensing her willingness deepened his kiss and took her tightly in his arms. This woman showed no fear and her soft body felt good next to his hardness. When he pulled away from their kiss, Rhia saw it again his eyes sparkled with life.

“You will stay in my cabin at all times unless I personally escort you on deck. This ship is full of men who haven’t been home in awhile, understand?” Michael took her braid into his hand.

“Yes, I understand.”

“You may walk around for awhile to stretch your legs. But stay on the aft deck.” Michael released her hair and turned back to the sea.

Rhia stared at him. Something was very unsettling when the enemy didn’t act like what you imagined they would. This Michael was a puzzle, and a complex one at that. She would have to hurry to solve this puzzle if she wanted to get back to Bram. However, one thing she knew. This Michael would lead her to Bram’s Baron. The thought of plunging a knife into this Baron’s heart warmed Rhia. She would kill Bram’s enemy and avenged her people that this ghost had slaughtered.

Rhia walked around the aft deck glancing at the sea. Michael watched her in the corner of his eye. She was everything he had been searching for his entire lonely life. He would still turn her over to the Baron, but he would stay and guard her from the Baron’s little quirk. Moreover, after the Baron killed Bram, he would take her somewhere far away with him. Michael enjoyed this thought. This little warrior woman would be his wife one-way or the other.

“I am going back to your cabin.” Rhia waited for him. After a few minutes he turned around very pleased that she was still standing there.

“Then come.” Michael walked beside her and placed his hand on the small of her back leading her toward the cabin. Rhia’s eyes darted around glimpsing at the big men operating the rigging. She counted five men so far, when they reached the cabin. She knew there had to be more, judging by the size of the ship.

Michael opened the door for her and followed her inside. Rhia felt his presence and it made her uneasy. Could she continue this façade? She would have to until she learned about this enemy.

Rhia felt his breath on her neck. She felt his hand going up to where she had the sarong tied. The silky fabric slid down her body. Rhia just stood there waiting for his invasion.

Michael’s eyes wander down her smooth toned back toward her firm, rounded rear. “Turn around.” The words caught in his throat. Rhia complied; his eyes lingered on her firm breasts then followed the lines of her stomach to the silky blond hair that covered her sweetness. Michael let his hands go where his eyes just went. Rhia closed her eyes. She had to be strong she must endure.

“Lay down on the bed.” Michael watched as she climbed up on the bed and obeyed. Michael leisurely walked over to her. His eyes never left her body. He climbed on the bed next to her and captured her lips with his. His hands journeyed over her body, caressing and stroking. His kiss deepened his tongue darted into her mouth wanting to taste her.

A loud knock on the door drew his attention. “What is it?” Michael asked.

“Sorry to bother you but there is trouble near the starboard deck. What do you want to do?” The young man’s voice trembled.

“Stay just like this,” Michael commanded Rhia. He leapt from the bed in one fluid movement. Michael burst through the door causing the young man to jump back. “Where?” Michael’s voice was cool. The man led Michael to the starboard deck where two gruff looking men were beating the crap out of each other. Michael was irritated this is what this idiot bothered him for.

Michael drew his sword and went to the two brawling men. “Stop this.” Michael slashed at the man on top sending him jumping right off the other. “This will not happen again.” Both men backed away from Michael.

He went back to the young man. “What is your name?” Michael asked.

“Jacque,” he answered quickly.

“Goodbye Jacque.” Michael ran his sword through Jacque’s stomach, and then sliced up before pulling his sword from him. Blood poured from Jacque’s wound and mouth. Michael kicked him hard sending him overboard. All the men that witness this hurried back to their duties not wanting to draw Michael’s attention. Michael wiped the blood off his sword and put it back into its sheath. He walked back calmly to his cabin.

“Is he crazy?” one of the sailors asked the other.

“Yes, he is the bringer of death,” the other replied.

Rhia heard the door opened she laid there naked in his bed, just as he said. She watched as he stripped off all his clothing. Rhia noted that Michael had little body hair on him. His cock was hard and ready for her as he climbed into the bed. Without saying a word he plunged himself deeply into her. He thrust hard gripping her hips tightly as he drove himself into her repeatedly. Before long, he cried out and fell on her. He laid there breathing hard. He rolled off her and propped himself up on his elbow.

“As long as you obey me like this. I will not hurt you. However, if this willingness is a trick I will kill you then hunt down Bram and make him wish for death. Understand?”

“Yes.” Rhia felt a chill race through her body.

## *Chapter 20*

Rhia lay silently in Michael’s tight embrace. The morning light poured in from the porthole. He used her body many times that night. But he wasn’t violent almost tender in his touch. Rhia’s skin still crawled. Rhia heard his quiet breathing as she spotted his sword propped up against the doorsill. If only she could get out of the bed without waking him. Rhia looked into his hauntingly handsome face. Even in sleep, there was hardness about him. An image of Bram

and his tousled raven hair and the softness of his handsome face; she remembered kissing his eyes gently while he slept and that little smile that spread over his lips. Rhia's heart clenched. She wanted her Bram beside her. His loving touch, his spicy scent, his hearty laugh, and his deep masculine voice that never failed to ignite her body. Rhia fought back the tears that filled her eyes.

She moved Michael's arm and started to slide out from under it. His arm clenched around her waist and pulled her close to him. "You wouldn't have made it to my sword." Michael rolled on top of her and with his knee he spread, her thigh giving him entry into her. He plunged his hard cock into her. He was savage with his thrust his hands gripped her hips so tightly that it was painful to her. Rhia reached up and grip the pillow holding it tightly in her hands, his savage attack was causing immense pain. He groaned and fell on top of her.

"Get dressed and come out." Michael leapt from the bed. He quickly got dressed and left the cabin.

Rhia wrapped the sarong around her. She wished that animal didn't tore up her battle clothes. She looked around the cabin for anything that could be used as a weapon. There wasn't much in here other than the bed. Rhia went to the trunk on the side of the bed. It was full of his clothes and a few books. Dishearten Rhia sat back down on the bed. She didn't want him touching her anymore. Rhia sighed and went to the door. She had no choice but to surrender to him. Bram's very life depended on her compliance.

Michael grabbed her arm the instant she open the door. "I want you to dine with me." Michael caressed her cheek. "I wish to talk to you." Michael pulled at her arm almost dragging her to the galley. He knew his presence would clear out any sailors that were in there. When they entered the galley, he thrust her forward to one of the tables.

The cook rushed out with eggs, bacon, water, and thick homemade toast. He nodded at Michael and hurried back to the stove. "Tell me does it make you feel like a man to have everyone fear you so?" The question shot out of Rhia's mouth before she could stop it.

Michael laughed aloud. "When everyone fears you they tend not to get in the way." He continued to laugh. He was glad that Baron Richard sent him on this dumb quest. Never in his life had he encountered such a spirited woman. Michael filled Rhia's plate first and handed it to her. "Eat." Rhia didn't argue her stomach was empty and ached. Michael filled his plate and ate watching her. She ate heartily. Michael smiled at her.

"What are you?" Rhia looked up at him.

"I am a mercenary."

"Mercenary?"

"I get paid to kill people." Michael studied her face there was nothing there to give away what she was thinking.

“What if I paid you to bring me back to Arcarndia and forget about Bram?” He saw the pleading in her eyes and for a brief moment, he almost agreed, almost.

“Afraid I can’t do that.” Michael went back to eating his breakfast.

“Then take me to this Baron and leave Bram be.”

“Bram is unworthy of your sacrifice.” Michael poured her some more water.

“He is worth any sacrifice.”

“Really, did he tell you about his father?” Rhia thought about this, she couldn’t remember Bram speaking of his father.

“Judging by the confused look on your face I would say no. Well then, allow me. Sir Gaven Croft...”

“Sir Gaven, Bram’s trainer,” Rhia injected.

“Bram’s father, Sir Gaven was executed for treason for having an affair with the Baroness.”

“Bram said Sir Gaven was innocent.”

“That may be, but only two men stood up for Sir Gaven at the trial, a Blacksmith and a lowly immigrant farmer. Not even the noble Sir Bram stood up for his own father.”

“No, you lie! Bram wouldn’t abandon his father.” Rhia’s whole body tensed she wanted to throttle that arrogant look off Michael’s face.



“Protest all you want but it is true. Moreover, he served the very same Baron that executed his father. Now this Baron wants him dead. I say let Bram die. I would never bring you dishonor.” Michael reached for her hand but she pulled away.

“What!” Rhia jumped up. “You slaughtered my people. You crept up on them like a lion and murdered them. They were my comrades. The others were mere children or elders. That is the most dishonorable thing I ever heard!”

Michael grabbed her and pulled her to his lap. “I do what I must do. Your people didn’t scare easy so my statement had to be a strong one.”

“Let me go.” Rhia struggled against his steely grasp.

“Bram is not a noble knight like he led you to believe. He is a coward.”

“No! Bram is not a coward.” Rhia didn’t want to think her Bram would desert his own father, the very man who trained him. It can’t be true.

“Let me take you back to the cabin. I know this is a shock for you.” Michael went to his feet and scooped Rhia up in his arms. Rhia lay placated against his chest. “I will leave you alone for awhile.” Michael nuzzled his chin to her head. “I know it hurts.” Michael walked quickly to the cabin. He kicked the door open and then laid Rhia gently down on the bed. He stroked her face softly with the backside of his hand. “I swear I will bring you honor and I can give you anything your heart desires. Think about this.” Michael kissed her cheek delicately. “I want you to be with me. I want you...to...love me.” Michael left the room.

Tears fell from Rhia's eyes. Michael lied about Bram. Sobs racked through her. My Bram is not a coward. I won't believe it. Rhia buried her head in the pillow and cried for a long time.

## *Chapter 21*

"Bram, Inor said it will be only a couple days at most before we reach Bandal." Edwin stood beside Bram on the starboard side of the war vessel. Sadosa sent ten of his best warriors to aide them. Isadora sent the same number of her best as well.

Bram nodded at Edwin then return to his thoughts. Rhia was out there by herself. Even though Sadosa was quick with getting the needed provisions around, Michael still had a good two days on them. Two days Rhia would be with Baron Richard that is if she survived Michael. Bram clenched his fist. Why in the hell didn't he kill the Baron all those years ago?

*"Honor means nothing son if a man has no family to go back too. Bram protect your mother, she will need you now." Gaven extended his arm through the steel bars and touched Bram on the shoulder. "Listen my son, avenging me will not gain you anything."*

*"Like hell. I can't let you just die for nothing." Bram pushed his father's hand away.*

*"Restore our family name Bram. You must." Gaven sat down on the stone bench. "Not for me, but for your mother, brother, and sister. My father and his before him worked hard to bring honor to the Croft name. I will not see that bastard Baron destroy it!" Gaven went back to the bars. "Promise me you will find a way to restore our name, our lands"*

*"You ask...I can't just stand here and let you die." Bram gripped the bars and rested his head on the cold steel.*

*"Bram." Gaven rested his hand on Bram's head. "It has to be you. Your brother David is too young and reckless. You must convince him to squelch his anger. I know I ask a lot, my son."*

*Bram shot his head back away from his father's touch. "Fight damn it!"*

*"I will not put your mother through a scandalous trial!"*

*"She knows you didn't lay with the Baroness."*

*"I know this. If I resist your mother will suffer and I refuse to witness it."*

*"Don't you think she will suffer when you die?" Bram took a couple steps back.*

*"Bram I love your mother more than my own life. I will not fight a battle I can't win. I will be found guilty with or without a trial. No other knight will stand up and defend me. Don't you think I thought of everything? I have no wish to leave Camilla or my children. Listen son, you're strong you will see our family through. Now promise me*

*that you will find away to get our lands back. Let me die knowing my strong son will honor me this way; not throwing his life away with a need for revenge."*

*Bram went to the bars and grabbed both of his father's hands. "I swear father I will do what you have asked."*

Bram's mind swirled with so many thoughts, emotions. Five years he served the very man that killed his father. Fought battle after battle, but nothing was enough. Bram wanted to scream. Rhia the very thought of her brought him calm. An accident of fate brought her into his world. Now she was going to suffer because of him.

"Rhia is one of our best warriors, Bram," Freya's voice broke into his thoughts. Bram looked over at her. "She will survive, she was trained well."

"But..."

"Rhia will know when to fight and when not to. Arcarndian warriors train for everything. If he wanted to kill her Bram we would have found her body at the docks."

"Michael is one of the best swordsmen in my land." Bram wanted to believe Freya, wanted to believe Rhia would survive.

"Bram listen to me. We trained for everything. We can block are minds to the ravishing of our bodies. We can endure pain. We can adapt to almost anything. I only hope you don't abandon her if she has to rely on her womanly wilds to survive."

“What do you mean?”

“You saw how he looked upon her. Rhia might have to mate with him to stay alive.”

“I understand.” Bram didn’t want to think about Rhia making love to that monster.

“Now calm your mind and devise a battle plan.”

“Thank you.” Bram nodded at her. He watched Freya walked over to Inor. Twenty-two warriors to take a castle, the insurmountable task weighed heavy on Bram. How was he going to get Rhia away from the Baron?

## *Chapter 22*

Rhia felt the weight of Michael as he entered her from behind. His hands gripped her hips as he drove himself into her again and again. Rhia focused on what the sailors had said. They were going to dock in a few hours. The last two days felt never ending. Michael used her body often. He talked seldom when he

did it was venomous and ugly things about her Bram. He spoke little about himself only saying again, how much he wanted her.

Michael groaned loudly as he filled her with his seed. He ran soft kisses down her back then rolled off her and laid on the bed. "When we get to Bandal I will get you more appropriate clothing." Michael got off the bed and got dress. "I will wait for you on the deck." With that, he left.

Rhia felt dirty and wanted desperately to bathe. She wrapped the sarong around her. She had use the last strip of the silk sheet for the latest sarong. Rhia wanted to go home, wanted Bram's arms around her, his sweet kiss. She knew Bram was more than likely following them. Even after everything, Michael had said about Bram, Rhia didn't care. She loved him anyways. She knew Michael was wrong he had to be.

Rhia headed to the bow of the ship and there was Michael, his long silver hair blowing off to the side. Rhia looked past him and saw the town of Bandal off in the distance.

"Come Rhia." Michael called back. Rhia walked over to him and stood by his side. Bandal was so much larger than Latso. Large ships were docked and being unloaded of their cargo and passengers. Michael grabbed Rhia by the hand tightly. "Don't worry warrior woman, you're with me no one will dare touch you." Michael smiled at her. When they arrived here the first time, Inor didn't want to dock in this large port town. They traveled down about a few

miles and made a dock. Their boats were capable of going in much more shallow waters than the huge sailing vessels of Bram's people.

After the sailors secured the boat, Michael and Rhia went ashore. People especially men stared at Rhia as Michael led her down the busy streets. Rhia looked over the women. They wore so many clothes. How did one hunt with that many clothes on? Michael led her into one of the shops. Rhia saw all the dresses out for display.

"Pick one." Michael told her.

"I can't wear these. I will not be able to move."

Michael laughed then picked a simple light blue dress for her. "No undergarments just this dress." Michael told the storekeeper. The blatant look of disapproval crossed the older woman's face. She led Rhia to the dressing room and helped her put the dress on. The soft fabric of the dress felt good on her skin. The skirt reached Rhia's feet and flowed; the bodice part was tight and propped up her breast. The light blue color complemented her eyes.

"I am sorry the fit isn't better, but her body is well different than the young ladies around here." The storekeeper never seen so much muscle tone on a young woman before and wondered what kind of labor this poor woman had done.

"Yes, she is unique isn't she?" Michael smiled at Rhia when she emerged from the dressing room. He liked her better in her battle outfit or the made sift sarong she wore on the boat.

Rhia felt awkward in this strange garment. She still wore the leather boots of her warrior outfit but the dress was too long for anyone to notice. Michael paid for the dress and they left. Rhia looked down the busy streets this made her long for Arcarndia that much more.

Two young men scurried up to Michael. "Retrieve my men and find a decent horse for me." Michael missed his men. The Baron refused to allow him to bring them on this mission. Well Michael hope the Baron wasn't too attached to the baboons he sent with him for they were rotting somewhere in the jungle.

"Let me get you something to eat." Michael grabbed her arm and headed across the street to the tavern.

Rhia waited at the table while Michael ordered the food. She felt the eyes on her. Did she look that different from the other women? She was now dressed similar to them. She saw two women whispering and glancing over at her. At another table, a young man flirted with her.

"They mean nothing," Michael said, sitting next to her. He saw the uneasy look on Rhia's face as he approached the table. A rotund serving woman carried two plates full of venison, bread, and corn. "Eat Rhia."

Rhia took a bite of the venison the strong after taste reminded her of lion. She was hungry and needed her strength when they reached the Baron.

"How long until we get to the Baron's land?" Rhia asked, as she tasted the corn.



“About a days ride from here. But you shouldn’t be in such a hurry to meet the Baron.”

“Oh but I am.” Rhia dug into the bread. Michael chuckled and watched her eat.

An hour had past before the two young men came back with a velvet black steed for Michael. Four big and scary looking men rode up. Rhia reached back for her sword before she realized that her sword was gone. “Easy warrior woman these are my men.” The men dismounted their horses and greeted Michael. “This woman is mine, anybody that touches her I will kill,” Michael said, mounting his horse. The men grunted and got back on their horses. Michael extended his hand to Rhia. “Climb up here.” Rhia wished he had given her a horse of her own. She pulled the dress up revealing most of her legs. Michael saw his men admiring her. He would have to keep a sharp eye on her. He knew what his men were like and how immodest Rhia was. He felt her body against his, fueling his desire for her. “We ride until night fall then we will camp.” Another round of grunts from his men then they rode off.

Michael’s men were as non-talkative as he was. It was obvious that the group of men knew each other for a while by the way; they seem to know what

the others were going to do. Rhia kept her mind focused on the Baron. Once she saw his hut she would find away to kill him.

They rode until night. Michael's men set up the camp as he led Rhia to a small stream. "You can bathe if you wish." Michael stripped off the last of his clothes and dove into the water. Rhia thought of running but to where. She let the dress fall off her glad to be rid of it. She dove into the water. It was colder than the river of home. The water felt refreshing all the same. When emerge she felt Michael's hand in her hair. A clean scent leapt to her nose. He was washing her hair then her body. "Dive to rinse yourself off," Michael said, doing the same.

When Rhia came back up, he engulfed her in his arms. His long wet hair slicked back and plastered to his body. His eyes danced in the moonlight and for a brief moment Rhia saw him as a man not a monster. "Rhia." Michael pressed his lips to hers. "You can save me." Michael laid his forehead against hers.

"From what?"

"Myself. Rhia give me a reason to live, to care, to stop."

"What...stop what?"

"Killing." Michael looked deeply into her eyes. "Help me to stop killing, Rhia. Show me how to love." His eyes burst with life.

Rhia felt afraid and yet sad for him. He was crazy truly crazy. How could she possibly help him? Michael took possession of her lips then her body.

They broke camp at first light. Rhia looked over at Michael he just stared ahead he seemed deep in thought. *Help me to stop killing, Rhia. Show me how to love.* His words still echoed in her head. Conflicting emotions tore at her. She should hate this man after what he did to her people and to Bram. However, she couldn't help feeling pity for him. What had Michael gone through to make him lose his mind? Was he born this way?

"Adkins," Michael dryly said as they crest the hill, Rhia gasped. The town spread out between the v of the two rivers at there junction there was the largest stone building Rhia had ever seen.

"What is the large stone building?" Rhia pointed.

"Baron Richard Kinghorn's castle."

"That is where he lives?" Rhia's eyes looked over the structure. She wanted to get closer. If it appeared this big from this vantage point it must be enormous. How was she ever going to escape such a fortress?

"Rhia your naivety is refreshing." Michael smiled and rode forward. Rhia rode close to him as they headed for Adkins.

Rhia couldn't help but notice the villagers leaving the streets as they rode past. *The bringer of death,* Rhia heard some whisper. Michael remained unmoved by their words. His stone like exterior returning.

"Rhia I will remain in the castle to protect you," Michael said to her as they approached. Rhia's eyes scanned the two tall towers of the gatehouse as they crossed the bridge. As they crossed under the portcullis, two archers

watched them pass. A young man took their horses when they entered the courtyard.

“Ah Michael, the Baron will be eager to hear the news you bring.” Bernard Reiss the constable of the castle addressed him. Michael had great disdain for this weasel of a man. The Baron’s lap dog was a most apropos name for this scrawny man.

Michael and Rhia followed the tall wiry man through the courtyard. Rhia noted for such a large place there weren’t many people in here. A few men Rhia surmised were probably warriors due to the swords they carried patrolled the area. A couple of older woman bustled about and few other villagers muddle about.

“Where are all the villagers?” Rhia whispered to Michael. He too noticed the lack of activity in the castle.

“Michael something is wrong,” one of his men stated.

“Rhia stay close to me.” Michael said, his eyes scanning everywhere. “Anton is there some sort of celebration going on in the village?” Michael knew very well, there wasn’t.

“None that I’m aware of,” Anton quickly replied. Michael looked back at his men and they instantly went on alarm. They were ushered into the great hall. Rhia’s eyes shot everywhere taking in as much as she could. Never had she seen such things. Huge cloth pictures hung everywhere. Rhia ran her hands over the one showing a man in a metal suit raising a red flag over a battlefield. Rhia saw

one of these metal suits in the corner of the large room. Rhia rushed over to it and touched the cold metal.

“What is this?” Rhia shouted across the room. Michael walked over to her, totally enjoying her wonderment.

“This is a suit of armor worn by Knights.” Michael watched her hands caressed the metal.

“Do all knights wear this armor?”

“Yes.”

“Then my Bram would wear this.” Michael continued to watch the gentle way Rhia touched the metal suit. Jealousy flared in him. The Baron wouldn’t have time to kill Sir Bram; he wouldn’t make it past Michael.

“Come Rhia.” Michael grabbed her arm roughly and dragged her across the stone floor to the largest table Rhia ever saw.

“How are these pictures made?” Rhia eyes looked at all the tapestries.

Calm return to Michael. “Women make these maybe later I will take you into the sewing room if you wish.”

“Yes I want to know how these beautiful items are made.” Rhia continued to take in all the room.

“Michael you have returned.” The Baron’s voice rang through the room. “Where is Bram?” Richard’s eyes fell on Rhia.

“He will be here soon.” Michael moved closer to Rhia.

“Introductions.” Richard smiled at Rhia.

“Rhia this is Baron Richard Kinghorn. This is Bram’s barbarian woman.”

Michael felt Rhia tense.

This was Bram’s Baron; this man was the leader of this land. Sadosa could break him in two. Isadora could out fight this meager man. Surely, Bram could slay him easily then why is this Baron still alive?

“Bram’s woman, ah, playing your games again Michael I see.” Richard moved closer to Rhia. “How long before Sir Bram joins us?”

“No more than a couple of days.” Michael moved Rhia behind him. “Why is your castle so bare, Baron?”

“Most of my army is squashing that damn Baron James. The villagers are preparing for his retaliation, stupid simpletons. And I have sent a small platoon over to the Croft Manor.” Richard smiled. “I’m preparing a nice welcome home for Sir Bram. I thought having his family and the freeman who lived on his lands; hanging by their necks in the middle of the courtyard would be nice.”

Rhia jumped on Richard knocking him to the ground. She had been so fast Michael had no time to stop her. “You will die!!” Rhia punched and kicked at him. The image of everyone Bram held dear hanging dead waiting for her beloved to see blinded her with rage. Within seconds Richard’s guards pried Rhia off him.

“You little bitch!” Richard’s nose bleeds profusely. “Give me your sword!” Richard yelled at the guard closest to him. “Hold her.” Richard gripped

the sword tightly in his hands. Michael drew his sword and placed himself in front of Rhia daring any of Richard's guards to approach.

"What the hell are you doing?"

"No one touches her. You are no worse for wear. What did you expect her to do? Bram is her lover." Those last words were like bile in his mouth.

Richard had no intention on challenging Michael. He was angry not suicidal. How dare that lowly mercenary draw his sword. He will deal with Michael later. This mercenary has lost his usefulness. Richard handed the sword back to the guard. "Your right, Michael." Richard sat down at the large wood table. Oh God did he hate humbling himself to this common murderer.

Michael placed his sword back in its sheath. "She will stay with me until Sir Bram shows up." Michael stated. He could see the plotting in Richard's eyes. After Michael collected his money from Richard, Michael would rid these poor villagers of their tyrant.

"Of course." For now anyways, Richard had every intention on playing with the barbarian woman. He would take much delight in breaking this one.

Rhia felt the venom and tension in the room. Bram's enemies were waiting in ambush for him. She couldn't sit here and not help Bram. Michael said two days; she would have to work quickly to form a plan. She could kill this Baron but she would need a weapon. Bram's family needed aide. Her mind spun. Sadosa and Isadora would have surely send warriors with Bram. They

could help Bram's family. Rhia needed to escape and find Bram; yes, this was the best plan.

Richard took his leave of them after a few moments. "Rhia, let us go." Michael reached out his hand to her.

"Is it possible to look around more?" Rhia needed to know this castle.

"As you wish." Michael then turned to his men. "Scout the area and meet me back at the guest wing. They nodded and headed out. "What would you like to see first?"

"The training grounds." Rhia wanted to sum up the warriors here.

"Well there are barracks I'm sure they train some where around there."

Michael led her out of the room.

## *Chapter 24*

"They don't trust foreigners Bram," Edwin said as they landed on the shore. The sun had just rose lighting the sea a brilliant red.

"It would have been easier to dock in Bandal." Bram strapped his sword to his back and waited for the second boat to unload the horses.

"How are we ever going to get them past the guards?" Edwin looked over the group of Rama and Arcarndian warriors.



“They do stick out don’t they. Well I don’t plan on walking right through the front gates.” Bram still didn’t know how they were going to get into the castle. He hoped something would come to him before they got there.

Inor brought over Samos for Bram. “You have a plan yet?” Inor handed the reins over to him.

“Let me see the battlefield again.” Bram petted Samos’ snout. “We have a good days ride from here. “ Inor nodded at Bram and went to his horse. “Edwin we will stay off the main road this will gain us a few hours anyways.”

“Aye.” Edwin kicked the sides of his horse and headed into the forest. Devi rode by his side. Bram and the others followed.



Rhia moved Michael’s arm and got out of the big plush bed. Michael showed her around the entire perimeter of the immense castle. Today Rhia would study the inside. This room filled was with strange objects. Rhia felt uneasy she missed home, but mostly missed Bram. What was the point of one man having so many treasures? What she saw of Adkins many of his villagers suffered from the lack of basic comforts. Sadosa and Isadora would never indulge in such waste. No one went without in either Rama or Arcarndia.

The door slowly opened and a young woman quietly came in. “The Baron wishes to see you.” The woman wouldn’t look Rhia in the eye.

Rhia went back to the bed. Michael was still sound asleep. Strange he never noticed her leaving the bed. Rhia was going to shake him but she stopped. What am I doing? Now I can kill the Baron. She quietly went back to the young girl. She followed the girl down the hall past a large room filled with women making those pretty cloth pictures. Rhia wanted to go in and watch them but the young woman gently grabbed her arm urging her forward.

They seemed to walk forever. The young woman was visibly shaking when they got closer to a large pair of doors. Rhia reached for the woman's hand and place her own on top of them. "Be calm." Rhia smiled at the woman.

"You've got to get out of here. The Baron is evil." The woman grabbed Rhia shoulders. "Get out of here." The door opened and the woman went completely white.

"Well looks like you will join our little game." Richard grabbed a hold of the woman and pulled her to him. Then he raised a dagger to her throat. "Come in barbarian woman. Needless to say if you attack me she will die first."

Rhia walked into the large bedchamber. Like everything else, this room was in excess.

Rhia heard the door close and sobs of the poor woman. "Watch barbarian this is for yesterday." Rhia turned to him. A strange grin swept across his face then he ran the dagger across the woman's throat. Blood poured from her throat as he tossed the woman to the ground. Rhia rushed to her but there was little she could do to save her.

“Why?” Rhia crouched over the limp body of the woman, stunned.

“Why not.” Richard pulled a length of rope from the pocket of his robe. Rhia leapt for him but this time he was ready for her. He seemed stronger now. His eyes filled of rage, of murder. He pulled Rhia’s hands behind her back and shoved her into the bed. He jumped on top of her before Rhia had time to react, and he wrapped the rope around her neck. “I am going to kill you slowly.” Rhia struggled underneath him. How could a man become so strong so fast? He was easily taken yesterday. Rhia felt the rope tighten around her neck.

Michael jerked awake. His head felt heavy and foggy. Someone drug him. “Rhia!” Michael jumped out of bed. “Rhia!!” The silence was agonizing to him. He reached for his sword and burst from the room wearing only his pants. With speed he didn’t know he possessed he bolted toward the Baron’s room. For the first time in his life, he felt fear. He charged full steam at the door using all his body weight and momentum he crashed into the door knocking it from its hinges.

Richard jumped from the bed. Rhia coughed and gasped for air. “Now you will die.” Michael charged at Richard.

“Wait!” Richard yelled his guards rushed into the room. “Do you plan on fighting them all?”

“If need be.” Michael jumped over the bed and landed a few feet in front of Richard.

“I will let you leave take the barbarian with you. But if you kill me you will never see your money.” Richard backed up putting as much space between him and the point of Michael’s blade. “After I have Sir Bram you can leave. Hell I will pay you extra for my little peccadillo here.”

Michael survey the number of guards there had to be at least ten of them. He was reasonably sure he could take them but if he couldn’t Rhia would have no protector. “All right, we have a deal. However if you ever come near her again, nothing in this world will save you.”

“Fair enough.” Richard relaxed money always solved everything. Richard followed his men out. He sure the hell wasn’t staying in there with Michael.

“Rhia.” Michael set his sword down at the end of the bed before going to her. A bright red mark circled her neck. “Are you all right?”

“Yes.” Michael saved her. The man, who slaughtered her villagers, haunted Bram. He saved her. Emotion swirled up in her until it all bubbled to the surface, tears streamed from her eyes. Her entire body shook. Michael took her in his arms and held her gently. Rhia allowed his comfort. She would never be able to avenge her people. She couldn’t kill the ghost not now, not after he saved her life.

## *Chapter 25*

It was mid-morning when Bram arrived in Adkins. Bram looked out over the town it seemed to lose something. The houses were too close together, everything seemed dull and impersonal, Bram used to love Adkins.

“Adkins has lost its allure,” Bram said to Edwin.

Edwin chuckled. “It just doesn’t compare to Arcarndia, that’s all Bram. “ Bram knew Edwin was right. Adkins lacks the warmth of Arcarndia.

“Let us find Gustave, he would know what has been going on,” Bram said. There was no real way to hide the warriors from the people of Adkins. Bram could only hope the Baron’s guards weren’t in town today. Sometimes the best way to hide is right out in the open. If the warriors sneak around town this would only bring more attention to them.

They rode down the stone road right to the Blacksmith shop. Gustave Barnhart was a long time friend to the Croft family and was the only villager that spoke up for Bram’s father. Edwin’s father was the only other person who did the same. Bram couldn’t help but think about how Sadosa came right to Isadora’s aide. How the entire village of Arcarndia came together to fight off the enemy and protected all the villagers.

“Sir Bram you are alive!” Gustave was getting on in years, his long gray hair pulled back. Due to his profession, he was still sturdy built even for his advance age.

Bram dismounted and greeted Gustave. He had great respect for the older man. “I need your help again old friend.” Bram smiled.

“I will help anyway I can. Joseph is due any minute.” Gustave looked over Bram, he was so much like his father Gaven. He would do anything to protect the son of his friend. He couldn’t stop what happen to Gaven but he will be damned if history repeated itself.

“Joseph is alright then.” Bram was relieved that his squire was unharmed.

“Yes, he has been keeping a sharp eye on the activity in the castle.” Gustave chuckled. “He wanted to make sure to have all the details for you.”

“Sir Bram.” Joseph ran over to him.

“Joseph, I am glad to see you are all in one piece.” Bram shook the young man’s hand and patted him on the shoulder with the other.

“What is your plan, Sir Bram.” Joseph’s mouth opened wide when his eyes fell on Devi.

“This is Edwin’s wife Devi. These others are here to help. They are warriors from Rama and Arcarndia.” Bram moved out of the way. “Inor this is my squire Joseph.”

“Greetings.” Inor patted him on the back. Joseph lurch forward from the impact.

“Hello.” Joseph had never seen anything like these warriors. His focus was on the women. They were barely clothe and wielding weapons to boot.

“Joseph when you are done gawking you can tell me how many men are in the castle is the Baron there and most important did you see a woman who looks like them in there?”

“She is your wife, Edwin?” Joseph stunned by Devi’s beauty had a hard time focusing.

Edwin smiled and wrapped an arm around Devi’s waist. He looked up into her loving eyes. “Yes she sure is.” There was no denying the love that had grown between the two, or the pride Edwin had in his warrior woman.

“Joseph.” Bram needed to know about Rhia.

“I am sorry Sir Bram. I have never seen women like these before.” Joseph turned his full attention to Bram now. “I saw Michael come in with a smaller blond woman, but she wasn’t dress like them. She had some strange garment wrapped around her. But her body was strong looking like them.”

“It has to be Rhia. Was she harmed?”

“No she seemed to be just fine. But Sir Bram...”

“What, tell me Joseph?”

“What is this woman to you?” Joseph wanted to phrase his words right.

“She is my wife.” Joseph turned from Bram. “What is it?” Bram grabbed his shoulder and spun him around.

“I am sorry Sir Bram but...she shares a room with Michael so I assumed she was his woman. If I knew she was yours...I ...”

“It’s alright Joseph.” Bram could see the pain and embarrassment in Joseph’s eyes. “Tell me how many men are in the castle.”

“Well now that is the good news Bram.” Gustave chuckled and came closer to the two. “Ole Baron Richard decided to go ahead with his attack on Baron James so most of the soldiers are off doing that.”

“But Sir Bram, the Baron sent men to attack your lands,” Joseph injected.

“Don’t worry Bram; Joseph managed to warn David of the oncoming attack. That leaves mostly your men defending the castle, Bram.”

“Yes, I can bring them word that you have returned. Their loyalties lay with you Sir Bram,” Joseph added.

“Thank you Joseph. I owe you much. “Bram needed to let everything soak in. His family was endangered and needed him. He had to get Rhia out of there. *I only hope you don’t abandon her if she has to rely on her womanly wilds to survive.* Freya’s words echoed in his mind. The man in him felt the rage build his Rhia was making love to Michael. The lover in him wanted to understand she was only trying to survive.

“Joseph tell my men to ready themselves, to either fight or flee. As soon as night falls then we go in,” Bram said.



“They will fight, Sir Bram they owe you much.”

Bram smiled. “Make sure to tell them about these warriors. I don’t want allies hurting each other.” Joseph nodded then headed off.

“Bram go through the servants’ entrance. There are only a couple of guards on the wall walk.” Bram knew Gustave would be observant he always was.

“Thank you Gustave.” Bram went to the warriors and explained the plan all they had to do now was wait until nightfall. Gustave offered his shop for them to rest and stay out of sight.

“Edwin do you think David can hold off the Baron’s troops?” Bram sat down on the floor with his back leaning against the wall.

Edwin sat down next to him. “David will not be fighting alone. My father and the other landholders will help. You saw how hard those women fought in Arcarndia. They were protecting their home, so too is David and the others.”

“It feels wrong just sitting here.”

“Bram, you will not fight well until you know Rhia is all right and you know it. We will do this first then we will help David. Your father trained you both Bram, remember this.”

“You are right.” Bram pushed Edwin gently. “As usual.”

“Naturally.” Edwin puffed out his chest and put an arrogant look to his face. Bram grabbed a hold of him and put him in a headlock. Devi immediately came over to them.

“Release him,” Devi demanded, puzzled by their laughter.

“It’s all right Devi.” Edwin was laughing hard. Bram let go of him. “We are just playing.”

“But you are not children.” Edwin stood up and took Devi’s hand. “Come over here and warm me woman.” Devi smiled she loved it when Edwin was forceful it was so cute. The two went over to a corner and snuggled.

Bram missed Rhia more than he believed he could. How could he need someone so much so fast? His arms ached from the emptiness, his heart ached needing to hear her voice, smell her skin, and taste her lips. His body ached with need for hers. Why didn’t this damn sun set already? The waiting, damn Bram hated the waiting. He looked up and saw the same edginess in the other warriors’ face they were ready for battle. God he hoped none of them lost their lives over this.



“Michael there is something in the air, do you feel it?” one of his men whispered into his ear.

“Yes. Take the others and leave this place. This fool Baron has underestimated his enemy. There is no need for you to be here.”

“What of you?”

“I will stay long enough to kill Sir Bram then I will join you. If I don’t arrive at dawn...huh...then it was nice working with you. You and the rest divide my estate amongst yourselves.” This group of men was the only people Michael ever trusted.

The man shook his head. “You will be there. This pathetic Knight should be no match for you. But I will carry out your wishes in the event your luck runs fails you.” Both men regarded each other in silence no words were needed.

Michael watched his men ride out of the castle. Soon it will be dark. Bram and his barbarians would try to take the castle. Michael climbed up on the wall walk that overlooked the courtyard. Rhia was locked safely in their room he made sure of it. Moreover, Richard was oblivious to what was about to take place. Surely the fool believed Bram would just hand himself over for the woman. Michael noticed a group of men gathering in the courtyard. “What’s this?” Michael whispered. A younger looking man was talking to the group. “There is no sign of attack yet.” The men went in different directions. Michael kept his eyes on them. The men started attacking the castle guards. “Mutiny huh.” Michael chuckled quietly. “These have to be Sir Bram’s men, of course. Bleeding idiot Baron.” This was going to complicate things a little. Michael was glad he sent his men away now. Besides, he liked to work alone. Michael pulled his sword from his sheath and started working.

Rhia punched, kicked, and ran into the door. "I have to get out of here." She heard the sound of metal on metal. Bram was here somewhere. Rhia took the awkward dress off and tore pieces of cloth off it fashioning her self a shirt and skirt. "I need a weapon." Rhia remembered the great hall had all sorts of weaponry hanging all over the walls. Rhia went to the window the height was too great to jump down. She rushed at the door but only fell on her butt as she bounced off it. Rhia went back to the bed and tore the sheets from the bed. She went back to the door and stuffed the sheet in the crack at the bottom. She really hoped this work or she would be in big trouble. The walls of this room were stone, Odin please don't let stone catch fire. Rhia grabbed the candle by the bed and placed it down by the sheet it caught on fire and in minutes, the wooden door went up in flames. Rhia rushed to the water basin and soaked another sheet with water. She covered herself in it and charged at the blazing door. Weakened by the fire the door cracked and broke with the impact of Rhia's small frame. Rhia quickly removed the sheet and hurried down to the great hall.

"Where do you think your going?" Richard grabbed Rhia by her hair, knocking her to the ground. "Resourceful aren't you. Let's wait in here for Sir Bram to arrive shall we." Rhia kicked, hit, and bit at him nothing seemed to faze him. Richard dragged Rhia by her hair into his chamber. If Bram were lucky enough to get up here, then Richard would need this woman as a distraction.

Joseph opened the servant entrance signaling Bram that all hell had just broke loose. Bram and the warriors charged into the castle. "Be careful some of them are my men." Bram shouted back at them. The Arcarndian warriors and Edwin climbed up to the wall walk. Bram and the Rama warriors charged through the courtyard. Bram gathered up what was left of his men insuring the Rama warriors didn't accidentally kill them. He took them into the castle with him.

They were met with a handful of the Baron's guards. "Lay down your swords or give up your lives!" Bram yelled out. Hesitatingly the guards laid down their swords. "Secure them." Bram told his men. He signaled for the Rama warriors to follow him. "Give them a chance to surrender first," Bram told Inor.

"Why?"

"These are my country men." Bram charged forward he had to find Rhia. The Rama warriors split up and searched the castle. Bram heard some women screaming, he hoped it was from the surprise of seeing the barbarians.

Bram's legs couldn't carry him fast enough as he headed for Richard's chamber. His hand gripped the hilt of his sword tightly. All the anger, frustration, and hate of the last five years surged to the surface. Bram was out for the Baron's blood no less would suffice.

"Stay still you barbarian bitch!" Bram heard Richard scream out.

"Rhia." Bram raced to the door.

“Bram will come and you will die!” Rhia yelled, pounding at Richard’s arm he held her tightly against him waiting for Bram. His grip stiffened when he heard the pounding on the door.

“Bram!” Rhia struggled hard against Richard’s steely hold.

“Rhia!” Bram slammed the door with all his force knocking it off its hinges. Bram stood in the doorway hate, anger, and rage played across his face. “Let her go,” Bram growled.

“Well, Sir Bram finally made it back. Drop your weapon or I will kill her.” Richard lifted his dagger to her throat.

“No Bram!” Rhia shouted as Bram set his sword on the ground and kicked it out of the way.

“Just like your father.” Richard shook his head. “He didn’t fight to damn hard either.” Bram charged at him. “Stay back.” He pressed the dagger closer to Rhia’s throat.

“My father was a man of honor. The only mistake he ever made was serving a bastard like you.”

“No, the only mistake he made was lying with my wife.” Richard backed away from Bram.

“He never touched her. He loved my mother. You knew this but you also knew your wife loved my father. This is why you murdered him. Because she gave him something she could never give you.” Bram saw the rage flare in Richard’s eyes.

“She loved me! Your father seduced her!” Richard kept moving backwards. “Ahh, enough of this; it’s your life or hers now choose.”

“You will not hurt him.” Rhia jammed her elbow into Richard’s stomach catching him off guard. He released her for one brief moment. This was enough time for Rhia to pry his arm off her. Her fear for Bram gave her extra speed as she escape his grasped and headed for Bram’s sword.

“No matter I will kill you myself.” Richard’s eyes were murderous as he charged at Bram.

“My warrior!!” Rhia threw Bram’s sword toward him. It landed right in front of him. He quickly snatched it up and braced for Richard’s attack. Richard pulled his own sword out as he got near Bram. Their swords clashed with both the same hatred and force.

“I only wished that I killed your father with my own hands.” Richard continued his attack. He would not let Sir Gaven’s son live.

“I should of killed you year’s ago.” Bram dodged Richard’s blow.

“To much a coward to seek revenge against someone such as I.” Richard circled Bram and tried to stab him from behind but Bram was to fast.

“No you arrogant bastard. The only reason you still breathe is because my oath to my father.” Bram knocked Richard’s sword from his hand.

“You want your lands back you got it.” Richard had nowhere left to back up and nothing to defend himself with.

“Who is the coward now?” Bram pinned Richard to the wall with the point of his sword. Rhia stood in the corner; Bram looked up briefly and saw the red mark around her neck. With one quick stab, he ran his sword through Richard’s stomach. “For my father, Sir Gaven Croft.” He twisted the sword watching the blood pour from Richard’s mouth. “For my mate Rhia Croft.” He took his sword and sliced up. He watched Baron Richard Kinghorn breathe his last breath.

Rhia walked slowly over to Bram. He still held the hilt of his sword embedded in Richard’s body. “Bram, he is dead.” Rhia reached for his hand that still held the sword in place. “Bram, be calm.”

“Rhia.” Bram let go of the sword and wrapped her in his arms lifting her off the ground. Rhia kissed him with every ounce of love she had for him as he did to her. Warmth, a comfort swept over both of them.

“Rhia I have to help the others.” Bram lowered her gently down.

“I will help but I need a weapon.” Rhia ran her hands over Bram’s face wanting to make sure he was really here. “I love you so much my heart fills like it will burst from it.” Tears filled her eyes.

“I love you, Rhia.” He wanted to stay in the safety of her embrace but he had to help the others and get to David. “Rhia we must go.”

“I will show you how much I love you later.” Rhia smiled at him and then she bent down and scooped up Richard’s sword.



“Rhia you have already showed me your love. It’s there in your eyes.”

Bram stroked her cheek.

They headed back to the courtyard. There still wasn’t any sign of the Rama warriors. “We should wait here for them,” Bram said. They walked into the courtyard when Bram was knocked off his feet.

“Rhia is mine.” Michael grabbed Rhia and pulled her to the other side of the courtyard. “I am sorry but this will keep you safe.”

“Please Michael don’t hurt him,” Rhia pleaded. Michael looked into her eyes then everything went black for Rhia.

Bram got back up on his feet just in time to see Michael knock Rhia out. “Come on Sir Bram. Only one of us will have her.” Michael was ready, for the first time in his life, he loved someone, and this knight wasn’t going to keep him from her.

Bram readied himself. He had to win for Rhia. “Rhia is mine, you will not win, mercenary.” The speed in which Michael charged at him Bram didn’t expect. He heard about Michael’s exceptional skill with a sword but actually fighting him was different. Bram managed to evade the first attack. However, Michael was on him again. There was no way he could match Michael’s speed so a head on attack was futile.

“Come on knight.” Michael wanted Bram angry that always made a man sloppy. Michael leapt over the barrels of wine and ended behind Bram.

Damn he is agile, Bram thought he barely escaped Michael's sword that time. Bram clashed swords with Michael causing Michael's arm to vibrate.

The knight was strong Michael gave him that. "She deserves better than you, Sir Bram."

"It won't work; your words mean nothing to me." Bram lurched forward for his attack. Michael evaded and managed to knock him to the ground. Bram rolled in time before being impaled on Michael's sword.

"Oh very good; you are more of a challenge than I thought." Michael jumped over the barrels and maneuvered behind Bram. He swept Bram's feet from under him knocking him to the ground. "Now you die Sir Bram Croft." Michael heard a whistling sound and then a sharp pain in his chest. He staggered backwards; he looked down and saw an arrow sticking out of his chest. Michael looked up and saw Edwin still holding his bow in ready. Michael laughed. "The lowly bowmen, damn it." Michael fell to the ground.

"Bram!!" Rhia rushed over to him.

"I'm all right Rhia just stunned." Bram looked up at Edwin. "You are truly my good luck charm, Edwin," Bram whispered.

"Rhia," Michael said in a weak voice. Rhia looked at Bram he nodded for her to go. He didn't know what went on between them but she needed closure.

Rhia walked over to where Michael laid dying. "I am here."

“Rhia will you hold me until I die. Let me feel your warmth.” Rhia lifted him up, placing his upper body in her lap. She wrapped her arms around him and laid her chin against his head.

“I love you warrior woman.” Michael took two deep breaths. “I wished I would have met you years ago. I would have had a chance for a ...life.”

“Thank you for saving my life,” Rhia whispered to him.

“Don’t thank me...I ...would of did anything...for you.” Michael leaned back and looked into her beautiful face. “Rhia.” Michael’s eyes closed.

Rhia should have hated him, felt glad that he had died, but she couldn’t. He saved her and she felt pity and maybe a little sad for him.

Rhia laid him gently on the ground. She felt Bram’s hand on her shoulder. “Bram, I should tell you...”

“Rhia you did what you had to you don’t need to explain anything to me.” Rhia turned around and hugged him burying her face in his chest.

“Bram I know this is going to sound strange but I want to bury him.” Rhia tightened her hold on Bram. “He saved my life.” She couldn’t begin to tell him what she was feeling the conflicting emotions the strange sense of sadness.

“Don’t worry it will be done.” Bram didn’t understand but if that man saved Rhia then he would see to Rhia’s wishes. Bram pulled her even closer and just held her.

“Are you two alright?” Edwin said.

“Rhia.” Devi pulled her from Bram. Devi put her hand on the red mark on Rhia’s neck. “Are you well?”

“Yes, my friend. I am so glad to see you battle ready again, Devi.” The two women hugged each other.

Bram instructed two of his men to bury Michael outside the castle. “When the task is done come get me.” Bram said. The men agreed and carried Michael’s body out.

“I owe you my life again, old friend.” Bram grabbed Edwin by the shoulder.

“No, I think we are even now.” Edwin was still shaking a bit. He couldn’t believe he made that shot in time.

“Inor you fought well,” Bram said as the Rama warriors approached. Bram was relieved that none of the warriors were hurt. “I have one more thing to ask of you all.” The Arcarndian, Rama and Bram’s men gathered around him. “My lands are being attack by some of the Baron’s men. I need your help to protect my family and the people that live there. Will you help me?” Bram didn’t want to force any of them to help him. They had done enough already.

“Your enemy is our enemy,” Inor said. All the male and female warriors nodded their head in agreement.

“We will follow you anywhere Sir Bram,” Joseph added. The rest of Bram’s men agreed whole heartily.

“Thank you all. Now we must ride out for I don’t know how long my brother can hold them off.” Bram saw the two men come back in. “Ready your horses and get whatever supplies you need. Gustave, shall we dispatch some one to Baron James?”

“Yes Bram, but don’t you worry about that. I will send a couple of the villagers to Baron James. I am sure none of the villagers saw what happened here. The remaining guards can be persuaded to keep their mouths shut. “

“What will happen to Adkins?” Edwin asked.

“Don’t worry Edwin; the Duke will appoint a new Baron until Richard’s sons are old enough. We will ride in about an hour,” Bram said. He went over to Rhia. “Rhia come with me.”

Rhia latched onto his arm and followed him to the two men. They showed them where Michael was buried. “Thank you.” Rhia told the two men. “Bram.” Rhia knelt down to the grave. A large tree served as Michael’s grave marker. “I am confused.”

“Rhia he saved your life.” Bram stood behind her. He didn’t know what to do. How could he ease her pain when he didn’t understand it himself?

“He was so lonely, so lost. But he slaughtered my people, he tried to kill you. How can I hate him but feel sad for him at the same time? When your Baron was choking the life out of me, Michael busted the door down and saved me. He placed his own life in danger. Then I think about what he did to my

people and how he defiled their bodies. What he did to Devi, what he almost did to you.” Rhia wanted this feeling to stop.

“Rhia come here.” Bram offered his open arms to her and she threw herself into them. “He is dead, the Baron is dead, and it’s over. No one will ever take you from me again.” He stroked her hair. “I don’t want you fighting the next battle.”

“I will fight beside you, Bram.” Rhia stepped back from him. “I will show you what a great warrior I am.”

“Rhia that is not necessary.”

“It is to me. I let myself be captured by Kador. I couldn’t find an honorable way to escape Michael and your Baron bested me. I will show you what my father and brother had taught me. I will bring honor to them but more importantly I will bring honor to you.” Rhia looked into his eyes. “I will be battle ready when we get there Bram, I swear by Odin I will be.” She had to show him that she was the descendant of the grand warrior Crog the merciless.

“All right Rhia we will fight together.” Bram could read her face so easy now. This meant more than anything did to her. Though it was going to be hard for him, she had to do this.

## *Chapter 26*

It was mid morning when they arrived at the Croft Manor. Bram pulled his sword, there had to be at least fifty or more men still alive and charging right for his manor.

“Your brother must be a grand warrior to hold that many off,” Inor said. His horse was as eager as Inor to charge.

“Charge!!!” Bram yelled. The Arcarndian warriors were faster and led the charge. Bram watched the line they formed. In perfect unison, they ready their bows. The Rama warriors rode right behind them swords drawn and ready. Bram, Edwin, Joseph, and the rest of Bram’s men were right behind until they flank to the right. Bram watched the women fire their bows in unbelievable accuracy, each hitting their mark. The Rama warriors jumped from their horses and charged at the men. Bram led his men and charged at the men from the side. Bram jumped from his horse and engaged the first man he saw. When he dispatched this one, he headed for another. He looked up and saw Rhia pulling her sword and engaging one of the men. He wanted to hurry to Rhia and protect her, but she quickly took down the man. Rhia readied her bow again and shot an arrow hitting a rather large man square in his chest. She didn’t show fear, only the skill she had trained many years for. Bram couldn’t help but feel pride.

“About time you came!” David yelled out. Bram breathed a sigh of relief that David was still alive. David was in half armor and fought just as their father had done.

“My warrior!!” Bram turned toward Rhia’s voice just in time to dodge the wiry man’s sword. Two arrows one right after the other struck the man’s chest. Rhia lowered her bow and rushed to Bram.

“Rhia that was incredible.” Bram looked down at the man’s body. Rhia just smiled with pride. She battled well, *thank you Odin*, she silently prayed.

Bram looked around to make sure all the enemy was dead. “You fought well, Rhia.” Bram smiled at her.

“As did you, my warrior.” Rhia slung her bow over her shoulder and look out across the field. Rhia stared at David as he approached Bram. He looked so much like her Bram, only the eyes were different. Her eyes went to the metal chest plate on David’s chest. His hands were metal as well. Rhia went over to him and ran her hand over the metal on his chest.

“David this is my wife Rhia.”

“Suit of armor all knights wear these. Did you lose some of it?” Rhia looked down to his legs.

David laughed loudly. “Hello my new sister.”

Rhia looked at Bram with a confused look on her face. “I will explain later.” The other warriors slowly came up to David.



“Everyone this is my brother David Croft. These are Arcarndian and Rama warriors, this to I’m afraid will have to be explain later.”

David then noticed the apparel the women were in. “Did you go to Valhalla, Bram?” David laughed.

“Do you know where Valhalla is?” Both Inor and Rhia said at the same time.

“Let’s go to my house and explain everything to everyone all at once.” Bram gently took Rhia by the hand. “You all fought well, and I thank you,” Bram said. David led the way to the manor. He couldn’t wait to hear Bram’s explanation for all of this.

“If women hunted their mates here it sure would uncomplicated things a bit.” David said. He could hardly believe the story Bram just told him.

“They must be descendents from a lost Viking tribe,” Edwin’s father Logan McGreggor said.

“Let me get a good look at her son.” Edwin’s mother Anna went to Devi. She couldn’t help but notice that Devi was a head taller than Edwin. The look on love of Edwin’s face told her he didn’t care one bit. “She is beautiful Edwin. Oh what gorgeous grandchildren I will have.” Anna smiled up at Devi. “Welcome to our family, Devi. Though we are really going to have to get you some new clothes.” Edwin didn’t have the heart to tell his parents that he intended to go back to Arcarndia with Devi.

“Rhia this is my mother Camilla and my sister Flora.” Bram gently guided her to them.

“Welcome my new daughter.” Camilla embraced Rhia, as did Flora. Rhia noted that they smelled of spring and looked liked delicate dolls, nothing like her.

Bram noticed Flora staring at one of the larger Rama warriors and he was staring back. He remembered how the Rama warriors acted at the joining ceremony and quickly ushered his sister out of the room.

“Bram, Tyr wants your sister for his mate,” Rhia said as he came back into the room.

“He just met her.”

“She looks so much like Sadosa’s mate. She seemed to like him.”

“I don’t want to talk about this now.” Bram sat down on a wooden chair.

“But you are the male of this hut. He will ask you before we leave.” Rhia sat down on his lap. Bram didn’t think about what happens after. Of course, Rhia would want to go home.

“Bram let them rest. I have prepared every guest room we have. Some will have to double up and still some will have to find a space on the sitting room floor,” Camilla said.

“Anything will do. I am tired come on Rhia lets retire.” Bram and Rhia waited until everyone was settled then headed for Bram’s old room.

As soon as Bram closed the door, Rhia jumped on him. Her body was on fire. She tore at his clothes wanting them off his body now. Bram carried her to the bed; they both fell in bed with Bram on top. His hands were everywhere his need as great as hers. Love, lust, and just wanting to be one with each other fed the flames of their passion. Bram's lips devoured hers, his tongue explored her mouth. They pawed and tore at each other's clothes. Bram pulled his shirt over his head and kicked his trousers off. Rhia gasped when he tore the skirt and shirt she made off her.

"Rhia I have to have you now." Rhia wrapped her legs around his waist and pulled him to her. His cock entered her wet opening, both let out a sigh when he plunged every inch of it into her. The warmth, the wetness of her felt heavenly to Bram. With every thrust Bram felt his orgasm build, his control was amazing he wanted to hear, see her pleasure. Rhia arched her back up and screamed out his name. "Rhia..." Bram exploded with her. He laid his weight on her as the pleasure pulsed through him. He wanted to lie like this forever but soon realize he was causing her discomfort. He rolled off and laid his head on her breasts. He loved the feeling of her hands running through his hair. He lay contently until he heard her sob.

Bram lifted his head and looked into her face. Tears streamed down her face. "What is wrong?" Bram sat up and pulled her to him.

"I am sorry, so very sorry."

"Why?" Her tears tore at him.

“I should have never taken you from your home. I had no right.” Rhia pulled him closer. “Bram I will not ask you to come back to Arcarndia with me. Your place is here.” Rhia’s heart broke. She knew she had to do this.

“My place is with you.” Bram wiped the tears from her eyes.

“I can not live here Bram. I would try for you but I know I wouldn’t fit in.”

“Rhia, my place is with you. Where you go I go. Do you understand?”

“You would go back to Arcarndia with me?” Rhia nuzzled her cheek in his large hand.

“Yes, Rhia.”

“I could not ask you to give up your land not after you fought so hard for it.” Rhia wanted just to be happy that he wanted to go to Arcarndia. Bram was needed here.

“Rhia listen to me. My brother David can have the land he has yet to find his place this would give him something. I have found my place and it’s with you. I want to be with you where you will be happy, for if you are happy than I am.”

More tears fell from her eyes. She didn’t deserve this warrior. “I love you Rhia.” Bram kissed at her tears.

“I love you my warrior.” Rhia wrapped her arms around him and kissed him deeply.

THE END



*I hoped you enjoyed the first erotic romance novel I ever written. I loved this story too much not to share it with you.*

*Best wishes,*

*Justus Roux*

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