

A S E N A M A R G R A V E



A CATAMITE'S
LOVE



Slave-born Nihilus has but one duty: to pleasure.

While his fellow catamites have long since become jaded by the cruelty of men's lust, hope for finding true love remains in Nihilus' heart. He prays for the day that the gods would grant him the love of one man and, perhaps, his freedom from a life squandered in the brothel. And when the late night arrives, bringing with it a cohort of Roman centurions bound for war, Nihilus realizes his prayers may yet be answered...

NOTE: This is a work of fiction fashioned purely from the author's imagination. Any resemblances to persons and events real or otherwise are strictly coincidental and unintentional.

A CATAMITE'S LOVE

Copyright © 2015 by Asena Margrave

Edited by Jenn Waterman

Cover Photo by Nino Barbieri

Cover & interior design by Asena Margrave

Originally e-published in the United States.

All rights reserved.

This is a FREE edition of *A Catamite's Love*. If you purchased this copy through another channel unknown to the author, you have been wrongfully charged and have purchased an illegal, stolen copy.

www.asenamargrave.wordpress.com

“Love is born into every human being;
it calls back the halves of our original nature together;
it tries to make one out of two and heal the wound of human nature.”

-Plato, *The Symposium*

A CATAMITE'S LOVE

The brothel's harem room, not for the first time, had been reserved for a full party. Exotic flowers plucked from the Britannia wild bloomed in thin attic vases, silks traded from the mysterious Far East hung along the banisters and archways, as if the brothel could afford to use such luxury as menial decoration, and the floor was adorned with soft furs and woven rugs, all of which many hands had bled to make.

Then there were the boys. A carefully selected cohort of the finest catamites in all the world, we had been scouted and brought from across the vast expanse of the Roman Empire, the Balkans, and Persia. Each of us had an exotic story to tell, to remember us by, yet the simple truth was we had all been raised for the sole purpose of serving the men of Rome. Our speech was their bread and butter; our thin garb was their treasure from afar; our livelihood was their home away from home. If it is true that the gods decide our fates the moment we are born, perhaps this is all I shall ever know.

Men rich and poor frequent this particular brothel seeking a catamite before their wedding day, but it is not quite so easy to ask for one's body knowing it must be abandoned the very next day. These men, so mighty and prideful with their gruff speech and hardy manner, discovered the weaknesses of their hearts at our simple touch. They often came to love us. They'd try to steal us away in order to keep us.

If a catamite's heart was more than just an item, surely he would not hesitate to run away with his man. Alas, it is a time when love stolen is for the courts to settle. No different than the brothel, men must pay dearly if they wish to love us.

Our lena is always reminding us, whip in hand, if any man dare try to take us away from her, she will chase him down to the underworld itself and stick a spear in his ass. She also reminds us if we agree to run away with him in the first place, we will languish for an entire month serving the depraved warrior-slaves imprisoned beneath the Colosseum. I couldn't blame her for her trepidation. After all, we provided her income. We gave her reason to live. We were beautiful. What sane person would give away their jewels so readily?

Even as she recited these things to us in the harem room while we awaited our patrons, the Persian blood in me pulsed stronger yet. I turned my chin up at her when she gave me a particular look of distrust. Not only did I inherit my mother's sharp eyes

and delicate voice, but her sensibility. If ever an opportunity walked into this room and said to me “let me take you from here”, I wouldn’t hesitate to defy my lena.

In the middle of her warning us of the dangers of the outside world, there came a sudden sound, like a string instrument being dropped on the floor. We needn’t look to know what it was. From his cloud-like balcony up on high, the hired muse gave the lena a broad grin. She glared at him, and we boys allowed ourselves a soft giggle.

Looking up at him miming innocence, the muse reminded me of a dear poet who had once been inspired by the joy of my rare laughter; he had been a poor man without any value to his name, a rogue without friend or foe. Truly, he had been a poet to the marrow. Having seen me but once, he was smitten and made it his life’s goal to have my love; he would exhaust his entire savings to spend but one night with me. Some weeks following our night, I received a short message from him: he had not died of a starving belly after all, but a full heart. It was the story of the century when word leaked, yet I could not leave the brothel to attend his grave. I burned a candle in my room and sacrificed a day’s worth of meals in his honor, but in the end I could not say I loved him in return.

The muse, noticing my stare, turned his attention from the still-ranting lena and smiled down at me. He gave a sweeping wave of his hand and a small bow of his head. He understood well that my heart, or any other here, could never belong to him, yet he continued to flirt. I turned my head aside and gave a small sigh. All men desired things beyond their grasp. It is in their nature.

Suddenly, another sound, more raucous, disrupted the lena’s speech yet again. We all turned our heads toward the entrance as a sharp silence fell between us. My skin prickled. The familiar sounds grew in volume; the rambunctious hollering of animals in heat, of rugged men after a hard day’s work. Their laughter and pounding on the walls echoed throughout the entire brothel, making their presence known to all.

My breath held. Our lena had made sure to spruce up the harem room especially nice for this night, but not even she was aware of the nature of the company we were to keep tonight. Patrons themselves rarely made the reservations, often sending errand boys in their stead. All we knew was they were important people. Very important.

BAM!

The door slammed open. The sharp silence turned to one of shock. We huddled closer together, trembling lambs in glamorous fluff. As the man who kicked open the

door brought his muscular leg back down with a thud, he stepped forward with haughty swings of his hips and shoulders.

The torchlight glistened against the polished silver of the centurions' segmented cuirasses, and the red and white plumes of their galeas glowed like hot fire upon their heads. Seven centurions in all stepped into the room, and their pearl-white grins slowly faded from their lips as they came to a halt. One by one, they removed their helms to reveal their wide-eyed amazement. Their mouths hung slightly agape as their eyes roamed over every single one of us, drunk from the sight of us alone. I let loose a shallow breath, vaguely remembering I had been holding it in to begin with. Calm only moments before, now I was deathly nervous. It should be an honor to serve the men who served Rome, yet the fear was clear in our eyes. We catamites were all too familiar with their...tenacity.

Just as the centurions began to whisper to each other who was their favorite boy amongst us, so we eyed them warily. Rather than loose robes, we should have worn shields upon our arms. From the shakiness in her voice, the lena agreed.

Still, she was our master. Grinning forcibly, she greeted the men. They didn't care for her. Even as she stepped forward beaming, a centurion brushed her aside with a violent wave of his hand. She needn't another hint. With one final, worrying glance at us, our lena disappeared to leave us to the dogs of Rome.

Many eyes turned my way, but I found myself unable to return the stares. Somehow, I felt guilty. My days were filled with men of every conceivable type, but in the arms of a soldier, my heart seemed to awaken from its sleeping state. I find myself overwhelmed with the feeling of loss, yet in my piercing sadness I felt alive. Rarely, if ever, do I see my soldier patrons again.

The centurions stepped forward. All their arrogance seemed to have dissipated as it dawned on them this would not be another typical night. No. This was a special night. We would all do well to make it count.

Each man had a defining trait to his step. I had long since learned to gauge my men this way, to prepare myself for what may or may not come, but I was struggling to get a hold of my bearings. So were my fellow catamites. We were nervous. The muse, finally catching on to the tension between the two parties, began his song. The dance had already begun.

As the soldiers dispersed to collect us, I realized I had missed one Roman in my count. As his brothers in arms went to retrieve their catamites, he stood alone with his back against the door, his helmet still sitting resolutely on his head. I could not make out the face beneath the shadow of his helm, but anyone could read the hesitation in his limbs. A stray wolf watching his pack feasting from afar, he was too timid to join the fray.

I could not lift my eyes from this man. My heart knew him, regardless if from this lifetime or lifetimes past; this was the one.

One soldier plucked his boy from off the floor with a sweeping scoop while another offered a gentleman's hand to raise his partner to his feet. Someone was so impatient that he simply mounted his boy and fell straight into a passionate embrace of lips and limbs, their eyes having locked from the moment they discovered each other.

Gentle laughter ensued as the boys gradually eased into their poetic charms once again, a stark contrast to the centurions' crude profanity. We weren't unaccustomed to hearing *cock* and *fuck* used so casually, but it humored us nonetheless when they attempted to teach us their harsh language, as if we didn't already know. Our lena had always said we shouldn't use such words so long as we considered ourselves respectable young men.

Three centurions had asked for my hand, but they did not complain when I rejected them, albeit nervously and fearing for my safety. I think, upon seeing my furtive glances at their comrade at the door, they understood and respected my decisions. Each left with a small chuckle. They could easily take me by force, but perhaps they too hoped their comrade would have me. I sat with my fists tightening upon my lap, wondering if he would ever step forward.

So I continued to wait for my man. Then I waited some more. By now, everyone had long since found a partner. Of course my man was still the last to choose and I the last to be chosen. The sound of laughter began to die down as poetic words turned to exclamations of the body, crossing the thresholds of passion. Still he remained rooted to the door. I was growing discouraged. Did he not want me?

I looked up to the muse on his balcony. Couldn't he play a song to help entice the lone centurion? Alas, the muse had turned his back to us. He bitterly refused to even look my way; there would be no help from him this night.

As I looked back over to my soldier, my heart gave a sudden leap. I instinctively rose to my feet. He was leaving! I needed to go after him, fetch him with the tenacity of the girls and boys outside who desperately pulled at passing patrons. Without him, I will starve tonight, tomorrow, and for all the days to come. I needed—

I stopped myself. My hand, raised to catch him, fell limp at my side. I remembered my place, my occupation. *His* occupation. Who was I to push a centurion into unwanted business? Who was I to demand his time? I was not some lowly prostitute in a roadside tavern. I was royally bred for this. I was to have class, dignity, a sense of control!

Yet my insides ran cold with rejection. Truly, had I not been to his liking? Should I have donned my other robes, done my hair a little differently, or worn the scarf my friend had suggested? I hung my head, torn inside. Seeing no boys left but me, surely he left in disappointment. It was certainly not the first time I had been passed over for others, but never had I been so affected by it.

I was about to sit down again in defeat when another centurion walked over to me. He had his arm slung possessively over another catamite's shoulder, a wine goblet in his other hand. He looked me up and down, strong approval in his nod. Still jarred from having been rejected, I blinked several times to clear my mind. I tried to return his gesture with a lascivious smile, but could not. I looked to my fellow catamite for help. He gave a worried frown and raised his hand to hold mine for comfort. I took it. I was expecting them to invite me to a threesome, but I was relieved it would not be so.

"That Vitus," the soldier began with a sigh, shaking his head as he looked to the door. No one stood there now. "Are you disappointed, boy, that he didn't approach you? It's written all over your pretty face. Well, then? Go after him. Seduce him. Make him yours this night. He too was once a slave, hailed from a pathetic world where men ask before they take." He sniffed in contempt, then smirked. "Through combat he proved himself and earned his freedom. Nay, his *glory*. But talking to him, you'd think the sorry son of a bitch was still chained and waiting for his master's approval to do anything! Go on, boy. Let him know that a real man simply *takes* what he so desires."

With that, the soldier playfully snatched up his boy as if to kidnap him. A little wine spilled onto the floor. As our hands unlinked, my friend gave me a small wave goodbye. Heading off to find a corner, they seemed to have already forgotten me.

My courage swayed by his words, I shot towards the exit. *Formerly a slave*, the words echoed in my mind. Perhaps there was more to this rejection after all. Behind me,

the door closed on its own with a resounding thud, cutting off the harem room's light to shroud me in the dim candlelight of the hallway.

Vitus could not have gotten far. Either he would have only just reached the exit, or he would have gotten lost or distracted along the way. I decided to meet him at the exit. He would be there one way or another.

As I reached the hall leading to the exit, I watched as the door at the end opened. Moonlight poured in, and a chilly draft weaved through his helm's crest. Framed in silver light, he looked magnificent.

"Vitus!"

The desperation in my own voice shocked me. I had never chased after a patron like this. Not purely out of my own desire.

Neither turning round to face me nor saying anything, Vitus kept his back to me. I dared close the distance between us, albeit quietly and cautiously. The light began to fade as the door closed, eventually turning to darkness. The intruding winds had snuffed the hall's candles, leaving only a handful still burning.

"How do you know my name?" Vitus asked through the dark. His voice was hard, unforgiving. I swallowed, but my mouth was dry.

"It was given to me," I replied.

"You haven't the right to know it."

"Please, Centurion Vitus. Why do you leave so soon?"

"That's none of your business, boy." Harsh words, yet the tone was almost shy.

"Am I not to your liking?" I asked. "Is that it? Or were you disappointed? Would you have preferred a girl? If so, I can fetch our finest right now—"

"No. I haven't any desire for a girl tonight."

"Please. It is my sole duty to give you happiness so long as you are a patron here. Just say what it is you desire, and you shall have it!"

There was a long pause. I ran out of words to say that might convince him to open up to me.

"Will you at least let me see you?" I asked when he remained silent.

"I will not," he replied curtly.

I swallowed my hurt pride. "Then will you at least let me talk to you? That's all I ask."

"Why?"

I replied softly, "It would make me very happy."

Another length of silence followed. I hated to think I was inconveniencing him, but I wanted to be selfish. Even if only for a minute. I wanted to tell him many things about me and in turn get to know him.

"What's your name, boy?" he demanded, but again, his voice lacked the resolve of his comrades.

"Nihilus," I replied.

"Nihilus of?"

"Honestly, I'm not sure."

"Well, then, Nihilus, consider this a paid rest. I've already paid my fair share of coin to the proprietor and don't intend to ask for it back, so return inside and do what you will. If it is greed that moves you now, then I warn you: palaver won't help you nor your friends squeeze any more out of my purse."

"I'm not asking you to stay out of greed," I insisted as calmly as I could. "Not at all."

"Then what do you want from me?"

"You."

"You would desire all walks of life! It is your duty as a slave."

"Please don't think of me that way! It may be true, but all the same, it is you whom I desire; I cannot think of any other way to express this except to hold you. Tell me how else someone so pitiful as I could possibly convince you, and I shall do it."

Couldn't he be convinced by my desperation? I feared I was going to lose him before even having had the chance to please him in the first place. Then what were the chances of him returning? I would become just another pestilent old memory in his mind buried beneath a pile of other bitter remembrances. I was a slave, yes, a nobody; but even slaves longed for warmth.

Silence dragged on. My hopes were not entirely dashed, for surely he would have left by now. Something was holding him back. Something.

"Nihilus," Vitus muttered to himself, tasting my name properly. A sudden change came over his demeanor. The tension loosened from his shoulders, his voice. "You're a strange one. You are a slave and I am a centurion, yet it was you who had the courage to chase after me this night."

"What do you mean?"

“Forgive me,” he whispered. I caught a flash of movement as his hand moved to the door again.

Courage having taken me again, I raised my own hand towards him. I managed to feel the nervous heat emanating from his body before he snatched up my hand with the distrusting grip of a lion. He held me tight, still cautious. Through the dark, his assessing gaze pierced me, searching. Slowly, his hand released mine, and my fingers found his cheek. This time, he did not react badly.

“Though we do not know each other well,” I said softly, “there is only warmth in my heart for you, Vitus. Will you let me love you this night?”

Leaning up on my toes, I brought my face up to his. Vitus softly pressed closer, the tips of our noses just touching. His hot breath was ragged against my lips. Whatever insecurities we held before seemed to lift with that slightest of touches. We could not see much in the dim light, but there was a beguiling challenge to exploring another’s body without seeing it. I sighed a minute breath of relief and allowed myself a victorious smile as I outlined his features with my hands.

Vitus’ breath against my flesh was reassuring as a lover’s touch. He smelled musky, like a day spent in the wild, but his embrace was delicate. He wrapped his arms around my waist, bringing me closer yet.

“May I?” muttered Vitus. I twitched at the tickle of his trimmed beard against my cheek and rested my head in the crook of his shoulder. The biting cold of his armor pressed against my bare skin.

“You don’t have to ask me,” I replied softly. “Never ask, Vitus, simply take. Boys, girls, riches, fame, power: take it all for yourself, for that is what it means to be Roman.”

Vitus pulled us apart momentarily. His hand traced my spine from hip to neck. Then finding my chin with a thumb, he traversed across the soft contours of my face, teasing my lips with the tips of his fingers. I felt his hot breath move against my mouth again as Vitus pressed his lips upon mine in a shy kiss, venturing only to suckle my upper lip a little before pulling away again. Savage lust inspired by passionate longing roused my cock. I gasped as his hands smoothed down to my buttocks.

“Wait a moment, Vitus.”

“Hmm?”

“How can we enjoy ourselves fully with you still dressed in your armor, and in the dark? I would like to see you.”

Vitus suddenly froze. The veil of passion lifted as quickly as it appeared. His once exploring hands now receded from my body, though my own arms insisted on clinging to him. Had I said something wrong?

“We can enjoy ourselves just fine in the dark,” said Vitus, his tone suddenly stern. “I see no reason for light.”

“At the entrance?” I chuckled at the idea. “We will surely be interrupted.”

“Then we should hasten ourselves.”

“But I would like to see you,” I implored, this time with a sensual stroke along his jaw. “Let my eyes feast upon you naked, and in turn yours upon me. Doesn’t that sound lovely to you?”

Vitus caught my palm with a kiss. “I would die a happy man to see you in your stark beauty, Nihilus.”

“But?”

He hesitated, then replied, “I’m afraid I cannot offer you much in the same way.”

I fell silent, stunned. Something in me clicked as I came to understand. Those strong words yet feeble tone of voice, why he stayed when he could have just as easily left, his reluctance to reveal himself to me. It was as Vitus’ comrade said: subjugation from his past life made him unsure of himself.

Many who came asking for my company tended to strut about as if they were the very sons of Heracles. Far from it, they were overgrown children no more mature than myself. Status defined their character, and status gave what they believed to be owed to them. For men such as Vitus, however, their hearts could not be moved by riches or titles. They were men who defined themselves by their deeds and the contents of their heart, struck down by the flaws of their own design.

Snatching Vitus’ hand, I led him back down the hall. He asked where we were going, but the answer was quite clear. Rather than the harem room we had come from before, I turned in a different direction. He called out to me several times, taken by my sudden determination, but I continued to urge him along.

Eventually we reached the private quarters of the brothel—as private as cheap rooms could get—where the rooms were separated by partitioned walls. There were no doors, simply silk curtains that lifted with the slightest disturbance. As we walked down the long hall of occupied private rooms, lustful cries of men and women lifted the still air, their lascivious acts of skin crashing against skin in a holy song of arousal. If one

was curious enough, he could pull the curtains apart to peek inside, and no one here would think any worse of him for it; indeed, looking behind me, I caught Vitus peering for a brief moment through one of the curtain's openings. The glow from the torchlights inside the room delineated the rising erection beneath his tunic.

I found us an unoccupied room at the very end of the hall where no torchlights had been wasted, as the rooms back here often went unused. Pulling the curtains aside, I led Vitus in. Pale moon- and starlight shafted in through the open window, naturally lighting nearly the entire area. Vitus' armor clinked as he moved about to study the simple room.

Frescos of sex—of men and men, of men and women, of women and women, even of beasts and men—were meticulously painted across the walls. In one corner was a shelf full of shapely red-figure pottery; I went over and removed a lidded vase. Inside was an aromatic oil, the precious recipe of which had been passed down through the lena's family for generations.

Vitus found the place of rest on the floor and seated himself. Fashioned after Persian common rooms, there were plush square pillows and woven rugs set against the wall. He seemed particularly interested in the rug's design, tracing its stitched mandala with a forefinger. His head hung low in a weak attempt to obscure his face in the shadow of his helm, and his shoulders sagged. Coupled with his erection, this sullen posture made for a rather endearing scene.

I stepped forward as cautiously as I would approach a wild lamb. He visibly tensed. Inches away from him, I set myself on my knees and the basin of oil on the ground. After a reassuring caress of his cheek, I lifted the helm from his head.

The moonlight cast the pale sheen of a water nymph upon his skin. A set of scars ran down from his left cheek, as if three paths had been carved in by a chisel, ending beneath his jaw. Burns spanned the right side of his neck and face, creeping down onto his shoulder. Hidden in plain sight by his cropped black hair, I could see where he had been bashed and cut on the head in an unforgiving manner.

Vitus did not move in all this time. He had been keeping his eyes gently closed, as if dreaming would pass the time more quickly. After a light kiss upon his lips, he finally opened an eyelid to reveal a shining gray eye. The other was sealed shut by a deep white scar. I smiled at him.

"We could always return to darkness," he said, his voice wavering.

“I see no reason to,” I replied, caressing his hollow cheek. My smile could barely contain itself.

“You needn’t pretend, Nihilus.”

I tilted my head. An honorable warrior of Rome, afraid he was not handsome? Didn’t the scars make him even more dashing than someone without? Surely these hands of his have done more things in but a few years than a commoner would do in a lifetime. This alone was worth the envy of noblemen.

“Will you let me remove your armor?” I asked. “I would very much like to see the rest of you.”

Vitus said nothing. Rather, he simply studied me, his mouth hanging slightly ajar. After a time, he closed it and gave a single nod. His spine straightened. Slipping a hand round his neck, I found the knot that bound the cape around his shoulders. I did not know the way by which a Roman typically removed his armor, as previous soldiers I’d slept with did not typically wear such ornate armor, but Vitus did not make any comments as I unshelled him from top-down.

After unraveling his red cape, I found the leather buckles by which his cuirass was securely held. Each took a bit of fussing, but even before undoing them completely, I realized the cuirass would not come off so easily without removing the other pieces of armor first. So I set to removing his spaulders, arm braces, pteruges, and, finally, his shin guards and sandals. His cuirass was the last to be removed. I set his armor aside in a neat stack beside our bed.

All that was left now was his red tunic. Its edges were fringed with gold patterns, but it was oddly cut. It had been made in an Eastern fashion so the cloth folded over itself in the front and was held together by a thin yellow sash at the waist. It was rare to see such a garment worn so casually by one outside of high society.

I peeled the tunic apart from his chest curiously, almost shyly. Despite my delight thus far, at the sight of his burly torso I reached my paramount and gave an inward gasp. Vitus, misreading my expression, caught my hand upon the thick black curls of his bare chest. There was a keen blush on his cheeks. I stared at him, unable to fathom what stopped him now. But I did not argue. With a promising kiss upon his collarbone, I left his tunic on. It would come off in due time, even if I had to tear it off with my teeth.

I took his arms and pulled them round me as I settled myself in his lap. Sweat formed on his brow as his muscles stiffened and he swallowed hard, evoking a chuckle

out of me. Had he never exposed himself this way to others before? Surely a warrior of Rome, the state of conquerors, knew all about the powers of sex.

I placed feathery kisses upon the underside of his chin. My lips and fingers traced his many scars. I would not care if he had been hunchbacked, three feet tall, or limbless. I knew his heart now. I knew his fears, his longings. Vitus gave a chilled shiver, and his arms wound tighter round my torso. The confidence from when we had been in the hall gradually returned to him.

I moved up and nibbled the soft lobe of his ear. He shuddered again and turned to face me, catching my gaze with his single eye.

“Touch me, Vitus,” I whispered, resting my head upon his broad shoulder.

Vitus’ hands found their way beneath my robes. They massaged the muscles of my legs and along the soft planes of my body, an electrifying crawl making its way up my spine. He was most particularly taken by my nipples, small pink petals perked upon an alabaster chest in excitement. Surprise took me as he pressed his mouth on one and timidly began sucking it. I raked a hand through his hair, signing approval.

Again, a flattered smile took my lips. I was glad to be under the light, for I would not miss his lovely expression for the world.

With that, the last of his inhibitions dispersed. My own erection was tingling at the very tip of its head, its rosy warmth resonating throughout my lower half. Vitus, seeing me in my flustered state, stroked my shaft through the sheer silk of my robes. Rather than relieve the tension building inside, however, his touch served only to heighten the fires to an excruciating pain. I begged him to take me. So his hand slipped under my robes once again, and he took hold of my cock. I instinctively thrust my hips into his grip. Beyond my cries, words failed me.

Vitus seemed surprised at my reaction at first, then he chuckled. We had only begun, but already I was lost in his arms, taken by his hand alone. Surely that should warrant some boasting.

Suddenly, mid-thrust, Vitus removed his hand. A searing sting of disappointment overwhelmed me as his rough hand left my cock. When he brought his hand up between us, he curiously observed the sticky milk upon his fingers.

“It’s because you’re so handsome,” I muttered with a blush. It was only pre-cum, but he had milked quite a bit out of me already.

“Please,” he muttered, smiling briefly, “tell me I’m ugly and I’ll feel more at ease.”

“Never!” I cried, scandalized. Why would he even suggest such a thing? “Vitus, it saddens me to know how you think of yourself. Don’t ever let me hear you speak of yourself that way!”

Vitus’ hand traced the silver armlet on my bicep, then fell upon my thigh. He stroked it absent-mindedly, gradually pushing the silk upwards. The softness of my robes rubbing against the head of my penis was enough to evoke another bout of fire in me. I was in an excruciatingly sensitive state.

“But ’tis true,” muttered Vitus.

“Who says so?”

“So many that I’ve grown used to hearing it. Really, Nihilus, it doesn’t affect me the way it does you. The truth doesn’t hurt so much after you come to accept it.”

“Oh, what can I do to prove to you how handsome you are? Perhaps I shall kiss you—” I playfully pecked the tip of his nose, “—because of how happy the sight of you makes me. Would something so hideous bring joy to my heart?”

“Perhaps. You *are* a strange one.”

“Stranger still, then, to think you’re amongst the handsomest men I’ve ever kissed.”

Vitus observed my face closely, perhaps searching for that fabled lie. But he looked for naught, for I was quite serious. The corner of his mouth twitched. He broke into a smile, then a hearty chuckle. His gray eye shining, he cupped my cheeks and brought my face down upon his for another kiss. While he was distracted with my lips, my hands surreptitiously ventured to his tunic again. They slid underneath, combing through the trimmed forest of hair. The sash came off with only a little weaseling, the tunic opening to reveal the rest of him.

I pulled my lips from him to have a gander at my unearthed treasures. As one would expect of a soldier, Vitus was heavily built like a god of war, but even the divine powers couldn’t fully heal the trauma his body had endured. I noticed the chafe scars round his neck and wrists. Beside the scar formed from the chin strap of his helm, I immediately recognized these other scars for what they were: the mark of defiant slaves. Of runaways. Bounty hunters often noosed runaways with a tight metal collar or rope that was never again removed, even after the slave was returned to his master. The slightest growth in body caused the restraints to bite down on the flesh. Attempting to remove it after so many years, if at all, was oftentimes brutal.

Remembering the other centurion's words, I felt a pang of guilt. Somewhere, at the ends of these treacherous paths carved so cruelly into his flesh, was his life's story. What had war done to make the man? To change him? I would learn it all tonight.

Vitus guided my stilled hand down his torso to just above his crotch. It hit me then that I had been staring; it was making him nervous. My eyes ventured farther downwards to witness the mammoth beast meant to be my altar of worship tonight. His cock peered up at me, the pre-cum drizzling from its slit in hunger, reminding me of a simpleton's open-mouthed stare. Blue and green veins coursed as rivulets beneath a sheer layer of velvet, the road of the underside of his shaft supremely thick. At a full seven inches in length and perhaps three in diameter, too large for my hands to fully close round, it quickly turned from beastly to preciously lewd.

I stroked him gently, teasing the hole of his pink tip with a swirl of my finger, but he was such a rogue. A simple touch could never fully satisfy him. Vitus took my hand again to conduct my movements, and I, knowing fully well the pleasures of the human form since I was but a lad, humored him by allowing him the satisfaction of control. He couldn't possibly know that the heart of a mammoth such as his could never be brought to heaven with mere fingers. So we stroked his shaft together, slowly up and slowly down, the thick folds of his skin furling and unfurling over his blushing head.

I could only endure so many long minutes of having his cock in my hand without having tasted its deliciousness. Pulling away from Vitus, I bent down on my knees and brought my lips to the dimple of his cock's head. Whatever briny sweetness had been there before was now in my belly or lathered upon my lips, which I wiped with a finger and used to tease my arse.

Vitus looked stunned at my eagerness, but I had only just begun.

"Lie down, Vitus, and have at my cock as well," I told him. "Unless—" I was about to say, *unless you are uncomfortable*, but he obeyed almost instantaneously and lay his head upon a pillow. I brought my body round and mounted my thighs over his head so that our bodies were parallel to each other. With me in a prostrate position, we brought our mouths upon each other's cocks at the very same moment. Vitus ravenously devoured my young prick between his lips, occasionally nibbling with his teeth in a risqué manner. I found myself choking upon his cock and my own moans, only able to relieve myself with a little thrust of my hips upon his face, which he welcomed with thrusts of his own. After much coercing and spittle, his cock eventually managed to

push through to the back of my throat, but even then I could only fit the greater half of him inside.

Of course, the shaft was hardly the only part of a man so delectable. With a free hand I gathered his dark sack in a fist. Each firm ball itself was fat enough to fill my entire palm. I moved my mouth downwards to devour them, stretching his sack as far as it could go before I was met with resistance. Truly was this the underappreciated part of a man in love; more so than the feel of being stabbed in the arse with a cock, I delighted in the feel of a man's ball sack slapping against my skin as he pounded into me, the very particular and unique sounds it made, both the firmness and softness of it as it worked up a torrent of cum.

I raised my hips and peered at Vitus through the space between our bodies. My prick stood directly horizontal to his face, the lump of his throat bouncing as he tried to suck all of me inside. With every teasing thrust of my hips came the sounds of chugging and swallowing. I abandoned his own cock to cry out several times in glee; I was being swallowed alive.

For one so nervous only moments before, Vitus was relentless and had come within inches of making me cum too soon. I had to yank my entire body away and fell on my backside as I felt a violent storm well up inside the pit of my belly.

"Oh, Vitus, you'll be the end of me!" I cried as he hounded my poor cock and sheltered it between his warm lips again.

How the tables have turned! I had every intention of pleasuring him, but here I was being pleased. How strikingly handsome he was, gazing up at me in sheepish helplessness against his own surmounting desires; how simple the path to his little corner of heaven as he took such a thrill from swallowing my peg. How I ached to have more, to have him all, yet I was almost at my wit's end. Arching my body, I cried out. My legs spread apart in an eagle's wingspan, and he finally pulled away to gaze at my lascivious form in its entirety.

"You are beautiful, Nihilus," he whispered, huffing. "Gorgeous."

I looked to the vase beside us. Vitus realized what it was without my saying and moved to open the jar. He cupped an entire fistful and lathered it first upon his cock, then my hole. I felt a small twang of regret, for I was anticipating after the head he had given that maybe he would like for me to fuck him. All the same, there was no reason

to fret. Sitting up, he took my legs and mounted each one upon his shoulders, raising my backside a little and placing a pillow beneath me.

Naturally, we catamites prepare our holes beforehand knowing full well the ceaseless ravaging we have to endure day and night. Pushing my robes up to my chest, he was surprised to see that first one, two, then three of his fingers slipped easily inside my arse. Glancing downwards, I saw first his sleek cock, my beloved totem, standing fully upright in its own anticipation, and then his fingers driving up and down in a basic rhythm. Vitus had taken a little too much oil and was composing all manner of lewd sounds with my loosened orifice.

I couldn't help but release a small laugh. He'd found the budded organ tucked away deep inside my bottom and was absolutely fascinated by my reaction to his teasing of it. It rather tickled and sent giddy sensations pulsing up along my throbbing cock. Such bliss! I was free under a clouded sun. One fine day, when I truly am free of my bonds, for my very first liberty I shall take my lover up to the green hills and have a fuck under the open sky for the gods themselves to bear witness.

Vitus at length removed his hand, then pulling me up, straddled me upon his lap so that his cock sheathed its length directly between the cleft of my butt cheeks. My own penis lay upright against his abdomen. My pale form was a lovely contrast against his sun-darkened skin, an innocent nymph smitten with his war-hardened hero from far away.

Vitus cupped my cheeks. His eye asked of me, *What shall we do?* Anyone in all the empire was capable of answering for himself, but I suppose my man was either teasing or simply being a gentleman by allowing me to lead the charge.

Now, my own prick was not nearly so large as his, but I was still quite a considerable size. Longer than I was thick and curved as a sickle, though not quite so dramatically, I could easily fill a cunt and stretch her still more. My sack, too, was of a perfectly formed oval that bounced cheerily with the slightest movement. Again, it was a mere trifle compared to Vitus'. With the mere tip of his head, he would have cleaved apart that same cunt I could only please in a plain manner. How would my own hole weather against the coming brutality, not naturally designed yet bred for cock all the same?

While I sat contemplating in idle humor of how I should take him, Vitus took the opportunity to remove my robes. It was so light, sometimes I forgot I still wore it to begin

with. With a lift of the sleeve from my shoulder, it fell from my body in a broken halo. Vitus tossed it aside amongst his armor.

Vitus gave a few innocent blinks of his eye as I stood myself upon my knees. Even at this height, his cock still stood slightly higher than my orifice. Not only would he stretch me to new limits, but also penetrate me deeper than any man who came before him. That is, if he could to begin with. His hands found the plumpness of my hips and squeezed tightly as he readied himself for the sweet embrace. I pinched my lips together and closed my eyes. Gently, his cock tucked inside.

The fit was first met with a sharp twinge of pain at being stretched a little too much for comfort, but a pause in movement allowed me to recover and even grow to enjoy this feeling of being pulled apart. As his head was in, he no longer needed my guiding hands, and so I placed them upon his shoulders and sat the rest of myself down upon his cock.

Down I plunged upon him with a turtle speed. Vitus stared up at me, eye following mine with a wolfish hunger. When I heard him mutter something incomprehensible, I pressed my body closer upon his to hear him again. He kissed my brows twice.

“Deeper,” he muttered weakly.

I chuckled and pecked his cheek. I had planned to oblige from the beginning, but even one so seasoned as I must practice a little caution. So I continued to fall upon him at my own pace. Vitus closed his eyes and leaned back on his elbows.

At last his sack cushioned against my bottom. I was now seated upon him and had taken him in all his entirety. With this I released a slow, ragged breath. I wiggled my buttocks a little to be sure that not only was he housed entirely inside, but that his shaft was in perfect conformity to my shape. A man’s totem, as mighty as it was, was still fragile. It could break without the expertise or care to properly nurture it to climax. So it was with these minutest of movements I initiated the first strokes of what would inevitably turn into a raw, remorseless fucking.

In the middle of my grinding, I heard him mutter something again. But being so preoccupied with enjoying myself, and the tinkling of my jewels overtaking any soft sounds, I did not realize he said something rather important. Suddenly, he grabbed hold of my hips. He held me frozen in place above him, digging his fingers into my flesh. The realization of what he was about to do struck me too late.

“Oh, darling!”

I gasped at him, first in surprise, then in sheer delight. The poor thing couldn't hold himself back; he furiously bucked his hips and pounded my ass, the distinct clap of skin against skin resonating across the room. Another jingle added to the lewd chorus emanating from the neighboring private rooms.

Vitus must have realized he had struck directly upon that charming little spot buried inside me, for he now concentrated his efforts there. The timid man in him had finally revealed its true form: a savage wolf controlled by his carnal instincts. I, his prey, urged him on with mewling cries.

And as suddenly as he began, he came to a halt, panting for breath. I was dazed, blown away by the abrupt fucking. With his initial fury now somewhat satiated, Vitus allowed me to take us gently again. I delivered short, quick thrusts, more to please him than myself. Occasionally he halted my steady movements to again exercise his lust. In these moments, I need only close my eyes and enjoy his sex.

"Wonderful," I whispered as he grabbed hold of me for yet another welcome bout of his fucking. I spread my cheeks apart whilst bouncing upon his cock, the fire enveloping my innards almost too hot to contain. "*Agapi mou*, darling. You are absolutely wonderful."

"Aye?" muttered Vitus.

"A-Aye—" I gave an involuntarily hiccup and sharp intake of breath.

"*Se thelo*, Nihilus," he whispered through gritted teeth. "Fuck me!"

My body toppled upon his as we indulged each other. We momentarily fell into passionate kisses, playfully licking our tongues and lips. Kissing a beloved one, to say the least, was an erotic massage upon the mouth: relaxing, liberating, and long overdue. When we pulled apart with soul-rendering regret, he gasped contentedly and closed his eyes, shuddering. His body was still, but his cock continued to throb inside my orifice with a beating heart of its own.

I buried my mouth upon his neck. All my years of training had abandoned me. Rather than pleasure Vitus, I had allowed him to spoil me to such an extent, to cradle me, to kiss me and sweep me off my feet with his love. It was almost unfair, for he was beginning to foster dangerous thoughts in my head. Dangerous thoughts and dangerous emotions.

After I had regained some composure, I slipped from off his prick. A slick, slimy *pop* accompanied his manhood's departure from its home inside me; I had felt the heat

shooting upwards into my belly, but I had somehow failed to recognize it was his ejaculation. My hole's sphincter throbbed and contracted, seeming beckoning for its beloved partner to return once more. Looking to Vitus, he blushed furiously. Neither of us had expected him to come so soon.

Chuckling, I lay my head upon the cushions beside him. Kissing him to reassure him, for he could not meet my eyes in his shame, I wrapped a leg and an arm round his body. My rosy orifice, still gasping, rested directly upon the beloved cock that had graced it so. I pushed the muscles in my arse to expend whatever was left inside, then grinding upon Vitus' cock once more lathered it in its own juice. He groaned for mercy.

Though he had come, Vitus' cock failed to calm in the subsequent hour. We did not wait that long for another bout, of course, but made love while resting on our sides. Lathered with both cum and oil, he stabbed his shaft inside without so much as a guiding hand, muffling my cries with his mouth upon mine.

I quickly turned from moaning to restrained sobbing. As both pace and strength intensified in tempo, our bodies clashed in great thunderclaps, jarring my mind of all sense and reason. I was being rammed into the corner like an animal, burned from the inside as my man ravaged what sanity I had left.

Then, as suddenly as his assault began, so it came to a halt with one last smack of our bodies. Vitus wrapped a sinewy arm about my neck, pressing his forehead against mine, his breath ragged and heavy. He whispered between huffs, "Good?"

"Y-Yeah," I managed at length, nodding. "Good."

"Then why do you weep?"

His question stunned me. Words failed me. Realizing the abruptness of the question had rather torn me from our passion, he pulled me in for a deep kiss. I tried to meet him with equal fervor, but now my mind was preoccupied. Indeed, why did I weep so? The tears had come so suddenly.

No. I knew why. I knew perfectly well all along. The fear had always been in the back of my mind, surfacing when a man came to me with his final wish to hold me. What would be left after all was done? I had allowed myself to be swept away with this single night of passion, allowed my mind to indulge in deep waters. Now I pained to even think of returning to those dreadful days before Vitus. To return to a life where he would become but a memory, for in my deepest heart of hearts, I knew it was inevitable. They all come; they all go. All of them.

Vitus closed his eye for a moment. We were both sweating even with the cold breeze from the window to chill us. Only a minute had passed when Vitus clambered over me to rest all his weight on my form. As he dug an arm beneath my neck, I wrapped my limbs round his torso. Gently, I rubbed my smooth cheek against his. I would miss even this simple touch.

“If it was painful,” he said, “you should’ve said so, Nihilus. I’m sorry.” Another kiss. There could never be enough of his kisses.

“No—” I stopped short. Will I ever hear those three little words uttered to me so sincerely again? In another lifetime, perhaps. Another world altogether.

I blinked several times. Hot streams of tears continued to flow down my cheeks. I brought our lips together for another session. No one, not even those I considered my past lovers, had ever asked me whether it was painful or not. During those rough times, I couldn’t help my sorrow in thinking there was no one who cared.

At length, I managed to reply, “Even if this pain were unbearable, do not feel the need to hold yourself back. It is, after all, *your* night, and I am yours.”

A pause. “So long as the coin is good,” he added sullenly.

His words caught me by surprise yet again. I shouldn’t have said those things just now. “Oh, Vitus, don’t ruin this moment by saying such things! It might be true to some extent, but still I...”

Vitus furrowed his brows as my words tapered. He said nothing more nor pressed me to continue. Instead, he brought his arms about my body in an even tighter embrace, then positioned us so that he stood on his knees and I lay prostrate on all fours. No more words. I broke into another set of tears as he slammed into me from behind. His amorous thrusts from before had morphed into the brutal stabbings of raw lust. He would give no mercy, no reprieve; pounding after pounding, my ass cheeks soon swarmed with stinging pain. It was not unbearable, but it was not loving either. I brought my arms to my face in shame and terror as I continued to weep. Vitus was everything I had wished for in a man. I could not thank Jupiter enough for bringing us together this night. I had whispered it so in my head. *I love you, Vitus*, again and again. Even as he treated my body so cruelly, the words flowed from my lips.

I wanted to touch myself. Release this heat, this tension, yet I also wanted to savor this precise sensation at the apex of carnal pleasure. I wanted to savor Vitus inside me for as long as possible.

Even as his cock stiffened and his body tensed, I begged him, “P-Please, don’t go yet. Stay with me awhile more, Vitus.”

I sobbed as, against my own wishes for him to restrain himself, I felt his cock jolt as hot torrents of cum unloaded in my arse. My soul rendered by the end of our second session, I abruptly pulled apart from him and plopped into the cushions in tears. His cum trickled down my thighs, but I didn’t bother to play with it as I usually did for most patrons.

The lingering sensation of sweetness that often accompanied a session of sex was now a feeling of loss and sorrow. Vitus hovered above me, his looming shadow cast across the floor. I turned to look up at him, stared into his single eye, and told him again how I loved him.

He said nothing in reply. The sounds of our neighbors soon returned to our senses, though they had never left to begin with. Odd how the mind can so easily block outside distractions when preoccupied. The entire world could have moved on without me this night, and being in Vitus’ company I’d have never noticed.

My swollen eyes grew yet heavier. Despite all my longing to stay up so as to enjoy Vitus’ company while I still had him beside me, I was wavering. I might boast of my carnal prowess, but in the end I was still a young man. My body honestly could not take so much exercise without falling weak. Only the thought that this would be our first and perhaps last time together kept me awake.

But why? Why must I think such sad things while he was still beside me? Being the slave I was, surely I had long since learned to make the most out of moments, fleeting as they were. Sometimes I forgot the sadness could always come later.

“Nihilus?” Vitus called, taking my shoulder in a hand.

I looked to him again. Flipped myself so that I lay on my back facing him. I gave him a crooked smile, but it was almost painful to hold. The inevitable was soon to come. They all left. All of them, always. Mother. Father. My old master. I had watched so many of them turn their backs on me. Yes, I was raised to be a slave, and yes, my heart was hard, but how could I settle for this coldness inside knowing fully well I had the gift of loving others? That even I, a nobody, could be loved in turn?

Vitus would turn his back on me for his duty. That much was certain.

More time continued to pass silently between us. Vitus sat beside me and, probably to pass the silence faster, took up a cloth and delicately wiped the cum and oil

from my thighs and my buttocks. The realization must have struck Vitus too, for once he was done he lay beside me and began to caress my shoulder with bittersweet kisses. We reeked of manhood, a homely smell to most others but familiar and comforting to me.

The chill passing into the room grew colder as the night wore on. Even so, our bodies were still hot from our sex. Vitus' kissing had reached my neck now, and with his ear so close to my lips, I whispered to him.

"Take me away from here, Vitus. You were once a slave, but now a centurion. Surely you can afford to take me with you?"

Vitus froze. He slowly craned his head to stare at me, his expression unreadable. I suddenly dreaded to hear what was coming.

"Truth be told, Nihilus," he began hesitantly, "I have never been asked something like that before. Not without ulterior motive. Neither have I ever been told that I am handsome, wonderful, darling, or anything of the sort. You have given me many, many things to think about in a single night."

"Is it so difficult to believe that you are wanted?" The energy returned to me. Jolting up, I looked to him with a fiery gaze. "You have no idea, do you? No idea! Your fellow soldiers say you had gained your freedom from a life of bondage through combat. You aren't even aware of how your name is praised in the streets and your accomplishments endeared by strangers alike, are you? You *are* somebody, Vitus. Don't ever think that you're in no one's heart, least of all mine!"

"I don't doubt my name has been whispered amongst my comrades," he replied. "But you misunderstand. If it were all truly so simple as gaining one's favor, I wouldn't be here to begin with. I would be where I belong: at home, in the wild hills, where I could say with dignity that my body was still my own. I would live day by day in peace and contentment beside my family and friends, but fate has made an enemy of me. I am no Roman nor a freedman, but ever a prisoner. All that I dream of has long since been lost to me." He paused. His eyes glazed with memory. "No matter my achievements or my merits," said he, "in the end, I'm still a slave to my killers. Do you understand? After all the blood of my kin they have spilt, I have come to don their armor and dared to call myself a centurion of Rome. I spit on my own family's grave."

The depth of his words slowly sunk in. It was selfish of me, but it hurt to hear him say he would have preferred such a life of peace if it were possible. Would we have

ever met if he had continued to live in that fabled land of his? If he somehow found a way to achieve even half of such a dream, would there be any space left for me in his heart? Most likely not.

As infatuated as I had become of him, my heart knew all along that Vitus could not be my hero.

“Is that why you had tried so hard to hide your face from me?” I asked, bitter. “Because you are ashamed of yourself?”

Vitus’ silence this time was strained.

“Perhaps it is so,” came his terse reply.

I broke into a bitter, misplaced laugh. “Do you know,” I began, feeling my sorrow boiling to a tipping point, “that I have seen you, and you I, many times before? Tonight is hardly our first meeting.”

Vitus furrowed his brows and gave me an odd look.

“Of course you don’t remember,” I replied for him. “I always wear a veil whenever I leave the brothel, otherwise I would be snatched up from the very streets, dragged into a hidden alleyway, and raped. No one would try to help me even if I emerged broken and begging.” I forced a smile. “We said hello all but once that time, Vitus. You picked me up in your arms and told me that you were sorry that happened to me, but even as you carried me you were so nervous that you dared not look at me properly either. I thought you were simply going to take me to have your way as well, but you were protecting me, weren’t you? Despite your position, you still stepped forward to help me. I realized in you, I saw something that has since haunted my mind.”

Could he remember? Every night after that first fateful meeting, I had peered through my bedroom window just to watch him pass by on the streets outside on his nightly excursions. He was always alone and always wore a commoner’s garb. No ring on his finger signifying rank, no armor, no pomp air. Just a hero posing as an ordinary man. People avoided him keenly, often second glancing his way as if they could not believe such a man existed. Whenever I saw him, I was moved to tears.

“I saw in you,” I continued, “pain. Regret. Sorrow. Do you know that you have this awful habit of avoiding looking at others? That though you raise your chin your eyes are cast downwards? Whatever bad memories you kept have burrowed so deep inside you they have grown to become a part of you. They are the extraneous, broken

limbs that weigh you down. Not even your battle-hardened façade can hide your true deformities.

“I know these things well of you, Vitus, without having ever known your story before, for every time I gaze upon the mirror I see you there too, if only with a different face and body.”

I trailed off. Another silence sat between us. Vitus was struggling to compose his words, perhaps too stunned by mine.

No matter. Words held only so much sway. As Vitus opened his mouth, I planted a kiss upon his lips. No, he needn't say a thing at all. He owed me no explanation, no replies. I, as a slave, hadn't the right to hold any expectations of my superiors. I could show him just precisely how much I had fallen for him every day for the rest of my life, but he would never be obligated to return the favor.

“Never mind, Vitus,” I said. “It doesn't matter. Whatever may happen in the future to come, I will wait for you. I have said it before, and I say again: my heart is yours.”

When he still said nothing, I slowly lay back down. From this angle, I could just barely make out Vitus' features in the moonlight, most of him shrouded in shadow.

“The night is yet young,” I whispered to him with a trembling voice. I reached a hand out for him. “Let us savor it, darling.”

He turned to look at me. “Aye,” he whispered.

We fell into another session. This time it was tinged with desperation, a little clumsiness and a little more pain. All the while, I wept that I loved him and would miss him dearly.



Dawn arrived the next day in silence. No chirping birds. No promiscuous neighbors. I myself was so exhausted I could hardly stand on my own feet. Not only was my spine aching from Vitus' relentless fucking, my heart was drained. I had refused to rest and stayed up the entire night preparing myself for his departure the following day. Vitus himself had fallen asleep late, just before the night sky turned light. We had never let go each other.

I shakily stood and caught myself from stumbling by leaning up against the wall. My limbs seemed to have lost their form, and my spine was shooting up and down with

pain. After a few stretches, I recovered enough to at least drag myself out the door. Certainly, I reminded myself, I have endured worse.

Retrieving fresh water from the well outside, I spent a little time bathing myself. There were other patrons there washing themselves as well, as the frigidarium was still being prepped at this earliest of hours. They leered my way, strutting about like dogs and playfully holding their crotches. I ignored them entirely, too preoccupied with my thoughts to bother with them. They could have their way with me later, but not just now.

I returned to Vitus with a basin of water. Most of the other patrons had left the private quarters, leaving us by our quiet lonesome. Vitus had woken and now sat awake, facing the open window and perhaps watching the sky. I had only stepped over the threshold when he turned to look. He smiled.

“What are you thinking of so early in the dawn?” I asked him.

“Many things,” he replied softly, returning his gaze to the window.

I sat behind him and set the basin of water down. His morning wood had sprung forth fully raised, yet he did not seem particularly interested in it himself. At my staring, however, he again smiled in return and said it was quite all right, that I must be exhausted. He could relieve himself on his own.

“Are you sure?” I muttered, moving to take him. He stopped my hand.

“I am.”

I embraced him from behind. The grief had never left me from the night before. Hot tears formed again. He was not a cruel man by heart, but merely circumstance. I was only so used to the prior; I didn't quite understand how to handle the latter.

“Come, Nihilus,” he beckoned, “I do not wish to leave you this way.”

Nodding, I pulled away from him with a sniff and took up the cloth. Vitus sat with his spine straight, composed as if praying hard. I wiped him down, studying every inch of him. It was a slow, intimate process for me, remembering this body.

After the bath and drying was oiling, which again I took my time on. His cock had hardened further since, but I merely stroked this part of him to oil it. It stood gleaming now, a majestic piece of manhood. If I weren't so exhausted, I'd have sat on it and taken it again.

My work soon done, I stepped back to gander at him in his naked beauty one last time. He stared back at me, the both of us transfixed. The first bird's cry pierced my

thoughts. I tore our gaze apart. Going to his pile of armor, I took up each piece one at a time and replaced it on him precisely the way I had remembered it. After the tunic, it was all done in reverse; the cuirass, then the others. His cape, which I wound round his neck with delicate care, I had fashioned so that it fell across one shoulder as an epaulet. A personal touch.

Finally, his galea. Its tail was excited by the slightest breeze. It was uniquely different this way, as most other helms were simply fanned and lacked the tail at the end.

Taking the helm in my hands, I stared at my distorted reflection upon the metal sheen. Even with my face so oddly shaped, I could see the swelling of my eyes. With this final piece, our time together was sealed. Though I had spent most of the night mourning this, inside I still felt a twinge of hope he would say something after all.

Vitus rested his hands upon mine then. A final, hopeful leap of my heart. *Take me with you.* He bent his head forward, and we together placed his galea upon his head. He gave me a wan smile, perhaps as encouragement. I withered inside at the sight of it.

He gestured towards the door. "You'll at least see me off, won't you?"

"It is your final hour here, is it not?"

"Aye. I should have told you from the beginning, but I could not bring myself to say so."

"No, I knew all along. What other reason could there be for a cohort of centurions to gather in our harem room but to celebrate a fair farewell to the mortal world? War is ever looming, and every soldier is being called to the front. I live in this dark corner, but I am not so ignorant." I tried to smile and shrug it off. My attempt failed miserably. Casting aside whatever composure I had left, I lunged forward and buried myself upon his chest. He held me tightly in turn.

"I'm sorry, Nihilus," he whispered. "I didn't understand at first why you would say such wonderful things to me. But starting and ending this with you on this same meeting has been just as painful for me, if not more so."

"Yet you will leave me behind."

"To bring you with me would be your end."

"A single end with you is worth more than ten lifetimes spent here!"

“No...No, it isn't. You have a passionate heart, Nihilus. Where I go, there is no mercy for men of passion. In the end, we are all the same: but skin and bone. There are no passionate endings in war. I dare not take you with me to meet a fool's end.”

I felt his lips upon my forehead. Reluctantly, I pulled us apart and led the way to the brothel's exit. We said nothing more to each other.

Outside, the sky was clear and the air chill. Reunited with the others, I quickly discovered I had not been the only one pining for love lost. Bidding farewell to their soldiers marching off to war, the catamites openly kissed their men, gave them precious trinkets to remember them by, or outright wept in their arms. The centurions themselves forgot all formalities and openly embraced their loves in return. Jupiter had split the first humans long ago; Venus had reunited us with our other halves; it is our own empire that tears us apart now.

Vitus and I watched them all mourning from afar. We had yet to say a proper goodbye to each other. Telling him I loved him and would miss him all night hardly seemed enough.

The first instance of sun peaked out from beyond the horizon. At last, Vitus and I turned to look to each other. The words caught in my throat before I had opened my mouth; I was about to say *until we meet again*, but knew better than to be optimistic. Barbarians were knocking on Rome's doors with blades drawn day after day. Her Western front was largely unprotected, and her armies were spread thin across a vast empire split evenly between East and West. While the East thrived, West continued to be sorely neglected. Just like her gods.

If miracle granted that we reunited, it would be under wholly different circumstances. Would Rome or Greece or any state even be here at all? Would this brothel continue to stand the test of time? It would've been unfair of me to expect Vitus to make any promises. More unfair still to expect him to keep them. But for me, who hadn't a thing to my name, no home I could return to beyond this, no reasons to look forward to tomorrow, promises were my skylights in the dark, my North Star when I was lost. My word and my heart were the two greatest things I could offer anyone.

The centurions gathered in a group, just as they had first come to us. Vitus was the last to rejoin them. His comrades watched us, waiting patiently.

“Well,” I began, “the time is finally come.”

“So it has.”

“Listen, I... All those things I have said to you, I—”

Vitus lunged forward. My words were broken as he clashed into me with a desperate kiss. I closed my eyes and instinctively returned it, throwing my arms around his neck. We came apart gasping.

“In heaven,” he whispered. “Let us meet again in heaven, my love.”

Vitus turned round, tearing himself from my arms. The warmth of his lips upon mine was fading fast. He jogged forward to join the others as they too turned their backs on the brothel. One of the other soldiers patted Vitus’ shoulder and gave him an encouraging nod.

As the cohort of centurions strode towards the rising sun and away from us, Vitus glanced back over his shoulder. Our eyes met. I remembered our first encounter, my happiness when he had carried me in his arms and brought me back to the brothel. He’d been too shy to look at me, but my own eyes never left him.

My lips stretched from corner to corner as tears fell once again. I gave him my handsomest smile, and I raised my hand to bid my darling goodbye.

Let us meet again in heaven.