

THE BLIND STRIPPER

Charmaine.M Stories

CHAPTER 1

The night was still, the air heavy with the scent of earth and pine. Amina crouched behind the thick trunk of an old oak tree, her small hands trembling against the rough bark. She could hear her father's voice, low and urgent, just beyond the shadows.

"Hide, Amina," he whispered, his grip firm on her shoulder. "Do not come out, no matter what you hear. Understand?"

Her heart pounded in her chest, and she nodded, though she didn't fully understand. She was only 12, too young to grasp the weight of her father's words, but not too young to know fear. She had felt the tension in her father's hands as he spoke, the slight quiver of urgency in his grip that sent a chill down her spine.

From the distant glow of the village, the sound of footsteps crunched on the frozen ground—deliberate, heavy. Soldiers. Amina's throat tightened, and she pressed herself further into the tree's shadow, the cold biting at her exposed hands.

"Do not come out," her father repeated, his voice steady but strained.

He turned away from her, and the sound of his boots faded as he moved to the front of their small cottage. Amina held her breath, her ears straining to pick up every sound. She wanted to run to him, to beg him not to go, but she remembered his words: Hide.

Minutes passed, stretching into what felt like hours. The crackling of firewood and the low hum of the night seemed to blend together in a muffled roar in her ears, but then—voices. Low, guttural voices, broken by the occasional metallic clang of sword against armor.

"I heard they're hiding in there." One of the voices was harsh and clipped, the voice of a man used to issuing commands. "King's orders. We need to root them out."

Amina's breath hitched. She didn't know much about the king—only that he ruled the land with iron fists, his soldiers striking down anyone who dared defy him. She had felt her father's anger whenever the king's name was spoken. Her mother, too, always grew silent at the mention of his title.

Another voice responded, but it was harder to hear, a quieter whisper. "The man's a fool. But he's still a traitor, and traitors die."

The words sent a jolt of terror through Amina's chest. She wanted to call out to her father, to warn him, but her throat was locked tight, her body frozen with the weight of her fear. Her mind raced for a way out, a way to escape, but the sounds of the soldiers growing nearer made her stomach twist.

The door creaked open, and Amina's father stepped into the threshold. His voice broke the silence, sharp and protective. "Stay inside, Amina. Don't come out."

She could feel the tension in the air, the sense of finality in his words, even if she couldn't see the expression on his face. Her father had always been the rock in her life—strong and unwavering. But tonight, his words carried a weight she had never heard before.

The soldiers' boots crunched louder as they approached, the clinking of their armor ringing in Amina's ears so she could listen. Something she was very good at. Her heart slammed against her ribs, her breath shallow as she huddled against the tree, the cold seeping through her clothing.

Then—another sound. The soft rustle of fabric and the faint, familiar scent of her mother's perfume.

"Mama," Amina said in a whisper as she felt the scent of her mother. She rubbed her eyes and took off her spectacles and observed for she could see from afar and was color blind. Her eyes had no rods and cones.

"Get back inside!" her father shouted, but it was too late.

The soldiers had already seen her mother, stepping into the open, her voice filled with the same courage that had always marked her.

"No!" Amina whispered, her voice trembling with fear. She wanted to shout, to stop what was happening, but she couldn't move, couldn't act. She was trapped in the shadow of the oak, her body stiff with terror.

The soldiers descended without hesitation, their boots loud against the ground as they raised their weapons. Amina could hear her mother's gasp as she tried to protect her husband. The unmistakable sound of steel cutting through flesh pierced the night air, and then—screams. The sickening, wet sound of blades sinking deep.

Amina's hands clenched into fists, nails biting into her palms. She pressed her face to her knees, trying to block out the sounds, but it was impossible. The voices of the soldiers—cold, indifferent—murmured among themselves, their words too casual in their cruelty.

"She's gone. Clean the mess up and be quick about it," one of them said. "The king doesn't tolerate failure."

The mention of the king struck Amina like a blow. She had heard the rumors, the whispers of the king's tyranny—how he crushed anyone who stood against him. Her parents had refused to bow to him, and now they had paid the ultimate price.

Amina was alone. Alone in the darkness, her world shattered, the echoes of her parents' final moments ringing in her ears.

And in that moment, a cold resolve began to take root deep within her heart. She would not forget this night. She would not forget the name of the king who had stolen everything from her.

Her parents had been betrayed.

She waited, staying hidden, until everyone had left. Her ears strained for any sound of voices, but there were none. This could only mean one thing: the King's soldiers had already gone.

Slowly, she emerged from her hiding place and crawled toward her mother's lifeless body. Her trembling hand reached out to gently touch her mother's face, hoping, perhaps, that it was all a terrible mistake. But as her fingers made contact, the cold, unyielding reality hit her.

A sob escaped her mouth, and the sound of her grief broke the stillness around her. She could no longer hold back.

"Mama," she whispered, her voice cracking.

And then, she could no longer contain the torrent of sorrow inside her. Her cries grew louder and louder, each one a raw expression of the pain that surged through her. She wailed, her heart breaking with every breath, feeling as though the weight of the world was pressing down on her fragile shoulders.