

HERALD OF STEEL

Chapter 13 Brief Respite

As soon as they stepped inside, the first thing that they felt was "warmth.

It felt like being embraced in a warm, motherly hug and both had a brief sense of profound bliss.

This tent had a portable fireplace that had a cracking fire going, being managed by a girl.

"Who.....?" The little slave immediately turned around in shock as she felt someone enter the tent.

"Oh, it's you, Alex. Thank goodness you're safe. We were worried sick." Seeing it was Alexander, the girl patted her chest and let out a sigh of relief.

This was Mean- a slave like Alexander. Or more specifically, she was Cambyses's personal slave.

The tanned girl dressed in a white chiton barely reached 140cm. Her raven black hair was tied in a bun and she had large black eyes and a cute, oval face.

Only one word could be used to describe her- cute.

"Mean, isn't this a pleasant surprise! What are you doing here?" Alexander asked in a jovial tone. After all, he knew the girl for ten years.

"All the other camps sent people to get our medicine. Now mistress wants me to try and find some from master's private stash." Mean replied succinctly.

"Anyway Alexander, why are you here? You know even you aren't allowed to enter master's tent without permission. You even bought that good for nothing Camius with you." Mean put her hands on her hips and glared.

Ah, there's the Mean he knew. He understood he would get an earful the moment she changed from calling him Alex to Alexander.

Mean might look like a cute doll but she was anything but.

The phrase "the shorter ones are the feistiest" couldn't be more true for this girl. She had a temper as spicy as hot pepper.

"Little sister, please don't be mad. We are only looking for some food and medicine." Camius wagged his silver tongue to try and placate the angry munchkin.

But this only seemed to rile up the girl as furiously shot back, "Shut up you snake! Get out right now before I call the guards."

Normally a slave talking like this to a free man would not end well for them.

But the phrase "look at the master's face before beating his dog" seemed to apply in this world as well.

Mean was the only personal slave of the daughter of the mercenary group's leader. She was also close friends with Alexander, meaning she was above most ordinary soldiers in the camp.

Also, she particularly hated Camius because of a harmless prank he played on her that got out of control caused her to humiliate herself in front of everybody.

"Mean, you know how short supplies are right now. Please let us stay." Alexander pleaded to the enraged lioness.

"Of course you are more than welcome to Alex. But why this snake?" Mean ground her teeth in rage.

"Treat him like air. Now could you give us some warm sweet water? We are freezing."

What was this sugar water? It was just beetroot juice boiled, filtered and then mixed with water.

Invented and patented by yours truly.

As Mean was working the indoor stove to boil water and serve the drinks, the men skitted around the interior edge of the tent, careful not to wet the carpet and they soon arrived at a corner of the tent separated by a wooden panel.

This was the private shower room, with all the necessary plumbing present. It even had a bathtub filled with water, probably there to be used by Nestoras when he got back.

Ignoring to ask why there was a conveniently filled bathtub waiting for them, the men promptly stripped into their birthday suits, discarding their muddy, wet chiltons and then using a large mug started to pour warm water over their bodies, washing away any grime and mud.

As the warm water cascaded off Alexander's body, he felt a moment of profound comfort as if all his exhaustion was washing away.

"Ahhhhhhh." He let out a happy involuntary moan.

"This tent is fit for a king. Still can't believe you designed it, doc." Just as Alexander was starting to enjoy it, Camius's crass voice shattered the serenity of the place.

But at least this time Camius couldn't be fully faulted for his comment.

Because the tent was really one of its kind, with amazing facilities truly fit for a king and not just a mere mercenary leader.

Along with the usual assortments, the tent had a fireplace to keep the place warm, a stove to cook, an armor station to properly store armor, a private washroom and even a shower room.

It had marvelous innovations of the time like a small chimney placed at the top of the fireplace to allow smoke to escape, a portable wooden latrine and slanted panels and drainage pipes in the shower room that drained all the water to an outside ditch.

It was more like a complete house rather than a makeshift tent.

And it was all single-handedly designed by Alexander, taking inspiration from a few trips he had taken to the Middle East, where he spent a few nights out in the desert at a luxury tour.

"...." Alexander simply ignored his talkative colleague and concentrated on getting all the grime off of him.

As he bent over to scoop up more water, he caught a hold of his own reflection.

A strong face with a well-built nose and a prominent jawline, his pitch black eyes mirroring his black shoulder-length hair. A face in the midst of transforming from a boy to a man.

Alexander kept staring at the reflection for some time. Even now, he could not fully get used to his new face, occasionally being caught by surprise by his own image.

Just as Alexander was mired in his own thoughts, a bellow rang out behind him.

"Ahhhh, I just filled that."

Mean in the hustle and bustle of her work had missed the men sneaking behind the wooden panel to take a bath.

She had assumed they would at most use a wet towel to clean their body. To think they would be bold enough to use the bath water reserved for the camp leader to take a bath. Water that she painstakingly carried over. What gall!

"You wastrels, I am gonna...."

"Don't worry Mean. We will fill it up for you in a moment." Alexander noticed the little girl flaring up and quickly interjected.

"You bozos can barely carry yourselves, how are you gonna carry the water?" Mean sneered in reply. "Step out right now!"

"Okay, okay we are done anyway. Don't get mad." Alexander quickly complied and stepped out of the shower room, making his way to his trunk nearby.

He took out a towel from it and then handed a guest towel nearby to Camius.

"How many sets of clothes do you have?" Camius asked in surprise, while vigorously rubbing himself.

He wasn't surprised by Alexander having clothes both here and in his tent. He was Nosteras's slave and a soldier after all.

What he was surprised by was how many clothes he had.

The mercenary group wasn't rich by any stretch of the word. Here a normal slave would have likely one cloth- which he would wash and wear at the same time. Special slaves like Mean had two, at most three.

But from what he had seen here today, Camius conservatively estimated that Alexander had four sets of dresses along with various towels and undergarments.

A slave was richer than most soldiers in the group!

"He's got another at the medical camp." Quipped Mean, happy to dig a deeper pit for Alexander. She was still angry about the water.

Camius look in awe at Alexander, then said with a wry smile, "As expected of you, doc. Common sense doesn't work with you." His voice distinctly had a touch of sourness to it.

After all, in this era slaves were just breathing tools. No free man would ever want to be outdone by a mere "it."

"They are all gifts," Alexander explained. Then he warned, "Don't spread this."

It would not be good for him if rumors about his wealth spread. Don't look at how the people seemed to like and follow Alexander.

In private many of these hot-blooded men detested the slave that seemed to be better than them.

"Hehe .. spread what?" Camius asked in a mischievous tone, feigning complete ignorance.

This was why Alexander and Camius were friends. Camius might seem to have a loose tongue but in reality, he never spilled any real secret.

Camius could talk for hours on end and not reveal a single piece of useful information, always blathering useless banter. A trait he picked up as a street hustler.

Alexander was the opposite of Camius. Socially introverted, he preferred to keep his conversation as concise as possible.

This little trait had caused problems for him because people assumed him to be stuck up and arrogant.

Thus, with Camius keeping the talks going, and Alexander occasionally pitching in, an unlikely duo that complemented each other was formed.

