

Chapter 1

The gladiators of Ursos were more like mountains of muscle than men. They towered over enemies, blocked out the sun with their wide frames and made arenas shake as they approached their enemies.

I was not one of them.

I was a slave of the gladiatorial company, but I had managed to avoid the pits by doing odd jobs for the master. It was more of a circus than a bloodsport most of the time, and I made sure that the real warriors were well fed, well equipped and well away from me when they fought each other. Sewing costumes and painting backdrops was much more my speed, especially considering the alternative. I was by no means femininely inclined, but no one was as inclined towards masculinity as the men in my company, and I knew what would happen if I faced their sword.

And I had managed to avoid it for eighteen years...until today.

Fritus had been gravely wounded by The Grizzly, our company's most famous and least liked gladiator. He thought that he could do whatever he wanted because he made the people come to our fights, and the sad thing is that he was right. So here I was, wearing a toga and holding a spear and shield as if they might do me any good. I looked to the stone tunnel which would lead me to the pitch and then down at a puddle where I saw my reflection. The fear on my face made it clear I might soon make a puddle of my own.

I could hear the people chanting already as I looked over myself and mused on how poor a choice I was. They were shouting for death, as The Grizzly had promised it

last night but had been pulled away before he could deliver it. I might be the sacrifice to sate their blood. And as I looked at my short blaze of red hair, my wiry frame and my boyish face, I knew I could mount no resistance.

My legs were shaking. My arms felt like lead. And as the horn blew to bade me enter, I finally fell to my knees.

"Please...please..." I muttered to no one in particular, hoping that they didn't come for me. This was my last refuge, and I at least needed to make a last appeal before doom.

"Whichever god can hear me, whichever will reward my humility, whichever has a plan for me beyond death on that sand, heed my call. I need mercy. I need a reprieve. I need an intercession. Save me. I'll do anything. Just...don't let this be my fate..."

The horn blew again, the last warning before someone came in here to drag me down the tunnel. My tears were adding to the puddle beneath me, creating ripples that warped the sight of my reddened face. But I managed to stand, my legs moving on their own as the light at the end of the tunnel grew larger, and as my enemy came into view.

He stood so tall that my head reached only to his pecs, and so broad that he seemed almost as wide. He was a heel known all throughout the region, a barbarian for people to jeer until he gave them the gore they wanted. We were cautious and restrained with our violence as to not lose members, but he often forgot that. Besides, it was the death these people wanted to see. He had filled this provincial arena to the brim, but even then it was merely a small stop on our touring circuit.

He was going to kill me for them. For some backwater town. Just to make them cheer.

I looked to them and then to him, raising my weapons as best I could. He laughed at the sight of it, and began approaching me as if we were about to talk and not battle. There was no caution, no slow stalking towards me. I backed away in fear, watching as his smile grew. He'd always hated me. The artsy one. The one who avoided battle. If only I'd avoided this one...

"Ready for your first and last battle?" he growled, his voice making me tremble as I raised my spear.

He knocked it aside.

I drew a dagger and brandished it, and he let out a wicked howl. After a moment he dropped his weapons entirely. Then, he lunged for me.

One hand grabbed my shield. The other grabbed my wrist. He was too fast for a man as big as him, and even I was taken by surprise. I'd seen him fight before, but his speed seemed impossible up close.

He squeezed until I dropped the dagger and then tossed me back. I hit the dirt with an impact that drove the air from my lungs, and with the roar of the crowd ringing out around me. They liked his cruelty. They liked his bullying. And I was the prime candidate for it.

I tried to stand and lift my shield as he picked up his weapons. It was hopeless, but a glance to the balcony reminded me of the master. If he gave a thumbs up, I would get to live.

Only, he went with the crowd. And the crowd wanted blood.

I held my shield between us until a swing of his sword sent it flying away. I was defenseless now, and The Grizzly looked up to the crowd who had come here for death.

He'd packed this place with a promise that someone would die by his hand, and so there could be no other way. The Grizzly looked to the master, standing on the balcony with a sad air. He was probably thinking that this was a waste of a slave. But he did what he had to do, and gave the thumb's down to kill me.

I sheepishly raised my fists as if that would do anything against steel, and waited for the inevitable. The Grizzly had a satisfied expression, and lifted his sword for the kill. I closed my eyes, wishing a god had listened and waiting for the end. The crowd screamed death. I could hear the sword cutting through the air-

And then there was darkness.

But it wasn't the darkness of a closed eyelid, or even the darkness of a total void. It was the darkness of a vast room with end, and only enough light to reveal an obscuring mist.

"You are far from my seat of power. But your words have reached me, and a new path is prepared. Will you walk it?"

The voice was faint, and I could hardly see anything, but I knew immediately what this was. This feeling that defied all description was the presence of a god. From their voice, it seemed to be a goddess. And they were offering me help.

"Yes. I...anything but death" I whimpered in awe.

"Then drink from me."

I saw something in front of me, some sort of dark protrusion which I assumed was a nipple. If it was then it was large, and long as well. But how else could I drink from a goddess?

So I suckled on it until suddenly something shot itself inside of my stomach, with such force that my mouth and throat were no impediments to its journey. It wasn't milk. It was thicker. Saltier. More viscous and glossy...

As I realized what it was, I felt myself dragged back to the mortal plane.

The crowd's cheers had been replaced by confused muttering, and The Grizzly's sword had stopped mid swing so he could cover his eyes. Apparently my conversation had taken no time at all, and a bright light had overtaken me to stop him. I wasn't sure how that would save me, until I realized that my toga was practically falling off me.

I was kneeling in the dirt, finding it suddenly feeling softer, and not realizing that it was my skin which was now soft. Every part of me was soft, save for the fine features of my face and my collarbone. My shoulders had narrowed. My hair tickled my back. I felt even weaker than before, and a slight breeze on my chest told me that weakness was not the only new feeling.

Looking down, I saw...

Breasts.

Bare, exposed breasts. Breasts the like of which I'd never seen before, which any country girl would pray the gods for. But they were attached to...*me*?

I moved instinctively to cover them as a feeling washed over me that everyone was staring. I was one of the gladiators, but they weren't staring at me for that. They were staring at me because they were out, and they were spectacular. Even The Grizzly seemed stunned, and I looked up to see that his jeer had become a leer.



I was...a woman?

One hand reached down to check as the other tried to pull my toga back over myself. There was a penis within, but not much of one. I had once sported seven inches and showed a good deal of that while soft. Now...I shuddered to think of how little it might grow.

The sudden turn of events had bewildered the rage right out of The Grizzly, who looked up once more to the master. He looked to me as if musing, gears clearly turning in his brain...

Then, he pointed his thumb up.

I was saved...but as what?