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Violence: There is violence in this story.

Subtext: Any subtext becomes main text here.

Summary: The sequel to [To Take What is Mine](#). The Conqueror continues her campaign to the Macedon Kingdom, and she already knows the odds are in her favor. Yet without warning, the Romans invade the Thrace Providence and take aim for the Conqueror's hometown. The Conqueror though bitterly holds back from saving Amphipolis. However Queen Gabrielle and Queen Cyane join together at the Siege of Amphipolis and try to stop the Romans before they overtake Thrace.

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Series 9: **Destiny of Mine** – Story #3

To Fight for What is Mine

by Red Hope

Chapter 1

The Conqueror slammed her fist onto the table and snarled, "He doesn't have much longer."

Borias folded his arms across his chest in a defensive manner. "His supplies are low," he granted. "But he can hold out for at least another moon, my liege."

"We can't say the same for the people in the city."

The Conqueror's eyes flickered to her chiliarchès. She was hunched over the table that held the current map of the local terrain and the city. She straightened up and seemed to take a moment to mentally calm down. She walked away from her subordinates, who were comprised of Borias, Bastien, Deon, Hirsto, and Andelko. Like Bastien, Deon, Hirsto, and Andelko were a chiliarchès to the Conqueror, and they highly regarded the Conqueror.

"Perhaps there is an alternative solution, my liege," Deon offered.

"We have overcome much worse conditions," Hirsto reminded.

Bastien had his head bowed, and he stared dimly at the walls that surrounded the capitol of the Macedon Kingdom. He knew they were so close yet far from overthrowing King Cortese. He understood, like the Conqueror and Borias, that this king was very cunning. Time was precious because every heartbeat gave King Cortese more opportunity.

"Perhaps a withdraw is in order, my liege," Bastien spoke up suddenly.

The Conqueror quickly turned around and narrowed her eyes at Bastien.

"Like Andelko says, the Macedon people are in danger... the Conqueror would never endanger them." Bastien tilted his head and added, "The Conqueror is for the people."

"And King Cortese knows that I will not stop," the Greek ruler sharply reminded.

"Indeed," Bastien muttered. He gave it a bit more thought then smiled at his leader. "But I do believe a distraction is in order after this stalemate."

"King Cortese will suspect something," Borias insisted.

"He will," Bastien agreed, "But I can't imagine him not being curious as to the withdraw. It'll keep him busy enough from noticing."

"Noticing what, Bastien?" Deon fought.

Bastien grinned at Deon then turned back to the Conqueror. "From noticing our liege sneaking into the capitol at night."

The Conqueror grunted and placed her hands on her hips. "Then what shall I do, Bastien? Fight the entire Macedon Army within the confines of the city?"

"I know you are good, my liege but..." Bastien lost his words at the nasty glare coming from his leader. He just softly smirked then became serious. "I was thinking more about working from the inside out. We're never going to get anywhere, and King Cortese is a wolf among his sheep. He'll have no problem sacrificing his people to best you."

The Conqueror sighed and dropped her hands from her hips.

"Aescalus," Borias spoke up.

The Conqueror developed a briefly confused look then it came to her. "Commander Aescalus... he's the weakest link in King Cortese's defenses." She slyly smiled now and rushed over to Bastien. She patted him on the cheek and warmly encouraged, "Brilliant, Bastien." She then rushed out of the tent with a bounce to her fast walk.

Borias and the chiliarchèses raced after the Greek ruler. Borias took the ruler's side, and he waited for his newest instructions.

The Conqueror scanned her hoplites that were busy in the camp all around her. "Borias, at first light we withdraw. I want us to be twenty Roman miles south of here by tomorrow at sunset."

"We need more time to ready and withdraw," the stratègos fought.

"Make it happen, Borias." The Conqueror then devilishly smiled at Borias. "I know you won't fail me."

Borias silently sighed, but he dipped his head in agreement.

"Bastien, find me Tracker and Prostig." The Conqueror then continued to rattle off her ideas about what would lie ahead of them and the Greek Army. She quickly came up with a plan after Bastien sparked her fire. She made a mental note to give Bastien a promotion after all this was said and done. That was if it turned out as she hoped.

After a few candlemarks passed, the Conqueror ended up in her tent but two visitors joined her. She ordered for Prostig and Tracker to take a seat, and she sat on an old, wood trunk so that she could face them.

"I heard rumor there's a withdraw," Tracker first mentioned.

"There will be." Xena studied her two comrades, who she'd known since her teen years.

"What's the catch, kid?" Prostig crossed his arms once Xena's bright blue eyes switched to him. He then started to shake his head. "Are we going to like this?"

The Conqueror chuckled and promised, "Always, Pro." She then relayed her plans to them, and she was content that Tracker and Prostig would assist her when it came time. She sent them on their way after they ironed out the plans. For the rest of the night, Xena prepared herself for what had to be done.

By sunrise, the immense Greek Army snuffed their campfires that were peppered throughout the camp. Next the last remaining tents fell, and drawn wagons were loaded with supplies. Somehow Borias did manage to mobilize an army of over fifty thousand hoplites by noon high. The strategos ordered the army to march, and he took them south but three remained behind.

The Conqueror, Prostig, and Tracker also left camp, and they instead went to a small, neighboring village that had defected to the Greek nation. Luckily, the Conqueror's plans were already working because not a single villager recognized her when she entered the town. She rode sidesaddle on Argo, but she had Prostig actually in the saddle and guiding Argo. Xena pretended to be a lowly peasant girl, and she wore a cloak over her peasant clothing and hood over her face.

Tracker rode his own horse, and he carefully watched the villagers to check for any problems. He too was dressed like a villager, but he did have his sword neatly hidden under his robes.

Prostig brought the group to a stable, and he hopped out of the saddle. He heard his sword clank, but nobody noticed because it was so well hidden in his peasant clothes. He faced the Conqueror and pretended to help his leader down.

Xena smugly smiled at the warrior then she slipped past him. She adjusted her cloak over her tall frame then lowered her head.

Prostig took Argo's reins and headed into the stable.

The Conqueror remained at the entrance of the stable. She reached up and pushed back her hood so that it pooled back over her shoulders. She had messy hair that was tied up in a bun. Some streaks of dirt trailed down her cheeks and to her neck. She'd darkened her eyes with makeup. Xena knew it didn't take much to make people think different about who she was.

Prostig and Tracker came back out with the saddlebags. Together, they trekked through the quiet village and made their way into an inn. Prostig initially drew everybody's attention. He was followed by Xena then Tracker behind her. Prostig went immediately to the counter and asked the innkeeper for two rooms. Once he paid and received his key, he barked at Xena to follow him.

Once the Conqueror made it into the room, she removed her cloak. She wore a red and charcoal cloth outfit that modeled her leathers' design. Her shoulders were bare except for the single, maroon strap, and she donned a gold belt that also had two rings on either side of her front torso. The maroon and charcoal strands of the dress ran down to the length of her knees. The last piece was her golden armband, which she adjusted again.

"We'll wait until the moon is half way in the west sky," the ruler decided.

Tracker had gone to his room and was preparing for tonight.

However Prostig stayed in the same room with Xena. He lightly leaned against the bed post and watched Xena set the saddlebags on the nearby table. He folded his arms. "Are you sure about doing this?" He tilted his head at the ruler's hunched back. "Bastien has good ideas, but they don't always pan out right."

"No, they don't," Xena relented. She pulled out her ivy dagger from a side pocket and held it between her teeth. "That's why I've improved the plan," she muttered between the blade.

"And if Aescalus doesn't agree then what?"

The Conqueror removed the blade and set it on the table. She straightened up and faced the burly warrior. "You know I always have Plan B, Prostig."

Prostig tilted his head, which caused some light to shine on his bald head.

Xena came over to the large warrior, and she studied the concern hidden in his eyes. "Then we'll have to repeat Sparta."

"In Sparta we had an army waiting," Prostig hotly fought, "In Sparta, we had more than just three at the gates."

The Conqueror grinned and patted the man's muscular arm. "In Sparta, we didn't have Plan B." She brushed past the warrior and went into the washroom with the door closed.

Prostig glowered at the shut door then shook his head. He decided to get somewhat ready but first would be a nice meal.

Soon the three warriors took to a corner table back in the tavern portion of the inn. They ate well and ate plenty too. Xena remained hidden in her cloak, but she kept her hood down. She was content at how nobody recognized her. She figured it was her leathers, weapons, and powerful demeanor that captured people's attention. Now she acted submissive and plain, especially towards Prostig and Tracker.

After the hot meal, they retired to Prostig and Xena's room. They finalized tonight's plans and selected the best time to leave the inn. Xena was satisfied that it would work out well. After the long discussion, she checked over her weapons and supplies that would help her tonight. She, like Prostig and Tracker, noticed that the capitol city had come alive now that the Greek Army had retreated. However the gates still remained firmly closed.

Once the moon started to lower into the west, the three warriors slipped out of the quiet inn. It wouldn't be another five to six candlemarks before dawn approached, which gave them plenty of time. They removed their horses from the stable then hastily rode out of town and back towards the city. This time though Prostig and Tracker were outfitted in their normal warrior attire, but Prostig wore a black breastshield so that he blended in the shadows better. Xena still remained in her charcoal and maroon dress, but she'd put her sword across her back and the strap showed across her chest. Her chakram though was tucked away in the saddlebags.

The Conqueror halted Argo just on the edge of the woods. They were a short walk to the main road that led through the woods and directly to the gates. In the air, Xena picked out that distinct scent of the dying. She knew her task ahead would be tough.

Tracker dismounted his horse then went to the saddlebags. He freed a pack from the sides of the saddlebags.

Prostig and Xena dismounted, but Prostig took the mare's reins.

Xena shifted to Argo's saddlebags, and she unhooked a coiled rope. She quickly tied it to her side then strapped a bag to her back in a secure manner. Her pack, like Tracker's, was specially coated with an oil that would resist water. Lastily, she grabbed a closed pouch. She looked over at Tracker.

Tracker nodded at his leader.

The Conqueror faced Prostig and softly reminded, "By dawn."

The large warrior sighed yet nodded. "Don't be late."

The Conqueror grabbed Prostig's upper arm and squeezed his muscle there. She released him then brushed past him.

Tracker gave a nod to Prostig. He followed after Xena.

The Conqueror came to the treeline of the woods before they'd enter into the open fields that surrounded the capitol. She stared at the sporadically lit wall and the well lit gates. She focused on the one spot of interest on the wall. "There." She pointed to it.

Tracker studied the darkness of that section of wall. He had to agree that it was a good spot. He then lifted his gaze to the moon. "It's low enough. We should be able to easily hide."

"Mmmm." Xena studied the sliver of moon that barely lit anything. She leveled her gaze to the field that was littered with bodies from the previous battles.

Tracker turned his head to the ruler. "And don't ever tell me that I have not done any favors for you." He wasn't looking forward to crawling through the bodies, filth, and stench.

Xena merely flashed a grin at him. She then bent down to her knees. She opened the pouch, and it looked as if nothing was inside of it.

Tracker knelt beside his leader and waited his turn.

Xena dipped her hands into the dark content and pulled out her hand, which was now coated by a slick, black paste. She proceeded to rub it over her skin.

Tracker mimicked the ruler's actions. He completely coated his skin and even the hilt of his sword and dagger.

Xena had removed her armband earlier along with her golden belt and rings. She had no metal on her beyond her sword and dagger. She too coated her sword's hilt just to be cautious. She closed the pouch and set it aside. She didn't need it anymore plus it was only an added weight.

One last time, the Conqueror studied the broad landscape. She then reminded, "We follow the stream in, past the wall, and into the city. There's no rush so there shouldn't be any sounds either."

Tracker just nodded.

"Let's go."

Tracker held his breath as Xena stepped out into the field. He waited to see if arrows would fly despite he knew it was impossible from this distance. He released the air in his chest once Xena went onto her stomach. He decided to hurry before Xena was too far ahead of him.

Surprisingly, the Conqueror quickly crawled through the field, and she tried to stay somewhat close to the bodies for safety reasons. She occasionally had to creep over some of them, and she cursed herself

for not getting an herb to put into her nostrils for the scent. If only she hadn't been in such a rush.

Xena then took a break after awhile and waited for Tracker to come near. She decided it was best to break in case the guards may spot them slithering across. She was relieved to find a semi-clear spot among the carcasses.

Tracker sighed in relief then shot a glare at Xena. "Vote me out next time," he hotly threatened in a low voice.

The Conqueror smirked at the warrior. "Prostig is too large for this."

Tracker huffed, but he gazed up at the wall. He realized they were getting close.

"Come on," Xena ordered, and she was off again.

"Hades," Tracker muttered, but he followed her. He'd already decided that when this was over that he'd need a very long bath to get rid of the stench.

The Conqueror kept an eye on the wall and made sure not to get too close or else they'd be seen. She occasionally stopped and remained motionless – luckily Tracker knew to do the same. Then Xena would continue her crawl towards the stream that flowed out from the city. Finally after a solid candlemark, she made it to the stream, which wasn't exactly pure.

Tracker muffled a groan after he picked out the stream's smell.

Xena ignored it and silently slid into the murky water. She sensed her boots hitting the bottom. She signaled for Tracker to begin the slow swim upstream to the city.

The swim was almost as long as the crawl through the field. They had to move slowly so that nobody would hear or see them. Occasionally Xena and Tracker would lift their heads from the water for air and to check on their location. Then they would submerge again and continue the underwater trek to the city.

Tracker personally did not want to know some of the things that floated past him. He was grateful that he couldn't see them because of the darkness. He somewhat could elude the stench until he came above the surface.

The Conqueror quietly surfaced, and she tilted her head back. She resisted a grin once she laid eyes on the walls just above her head. But a wall guard was marching past so she hastily lowered her head down until just her eyes loomed over the surface. She watched him past and was content that he didn't spot them at all.

Tracker raised his head higher once the guard past. He sucked in some needed air despite the flavor behind it.

Xena gently nodded at the stone entrance way that drained into the stream. She prayed that she'd make it in there so she began the silent crawl up the tube. She sensed the silk, green algae under her hands and knees so she moved her hands to the sides where there was less.

Tracker kept low in the water, and he bobbed there until he was sure that there was enough room for him next. He heard Xena's gentle tap, which meant it was his turn so he started up the tube.

The Conqueror felt the heightened potency of stench by being in the confined space of the drainage tube. She shook it off and continued her partial crawl, partial slide through the filth. She kept the pace slow because she didn't need any surprises. She put her hand out in front of her, but she felt nothing in

front of her so she stopped.

Tracker also stopped and understood the problem instantly. He grabbed for the pack lashed to his back and opened it. He fished out a damp wood rod that had a treated cloth lashed to the top. He handed it to the Conqueror.

The Conqueror retrieved it and already had two flint stones from a tiny pouch at her side. She managed to light the torch, tucked her stones away, and stretched out her arm forward. She gazed ahead and was relieved that her and Tracker were in good luck tonight.

Just ahead was the end of the tunnel, and it opened up to a large room. There was black water in front of them that crept over the edge of the tunnel and streamed down. It was unpredictable how deep it was but it would seem that King Cortese firmly believed in a good drainage system.

The Conqueror lifted her head up as best as possible. She smiled at the ladder mounted to the side of the wall and went up and up. She twisted her head back to Tracker. "There's a ladder going up," she whispered.

"Leave the torch here?"

Xena considered it then nodded. "I want you to stay here at the bottom of the ladder with the torch. It'll be enough light for me."

"Alright." Tracker watched the careful leader manage herself out of the tunnel and onto the ladder. He waited until she moved up several rungs then did the same.

Xena handed down the torch. "I have no more than two candlemarks, remember." She left it at that then started the climb upwards.

Tracker prayed that this would work right. He couldn't imagine how Xena would find King Cortese's stratègos, but he had some faith.

The Conqueror reached the closed off top within a matter of heartbeats. She was happy to find holes and slots on the cover of the drainage so that it would make it easier. She fitted her long fingers through the slots and very carefully gave the cover a push.

The stone lid scraped once, but it gave way. It was lifted then pushed across the cobble stones that surrounded it.

Xena had listened earlier and heard nobody. She paused and waited a heartbeat, but it was still quiet. She quickly came out of the hole and easily replaced the lid without actually pressing it down hard. Earlier she'd spotted the wall to her left so she ducked into its shadows to hide herself from view. Xena then pulled out the cloak from her bag strapped to her back. She swung on her cloak and tied it at her throat. She became a mere peasant again even with her hood down.

The Conqueror knew her own, foul scent would only enhance her seeming peasant stature. She still had her hair tied up, and she'd rubbed off some of the gunk from her face with her cloak. She now walked the streets of the war-ravaged city that was just staying together. This gave Xena a chance to truly assess the state of the city as well as the people and dwindling army. Several times, she passed peasants in the streets, who paid her little mind because they were suffering.

Xena came upon the gates of the castle, and she briefly stared at it. She thought of King Cortese and how easy it could be to go in and murder him. But she refused to give into that darker desire in her. She fought and won with honor, and she wouldn't return to the Destroyer of Nations.

The Conqueror slipped past the guarded entrance of the castle, and she recalled her mental map of the city. She wasn't far from the main barrack where she hoped that Commander Aescalus could be found. She came upon it and realized it was indeed mostly busy. She decided on a direct manner to find out whether or not Commander Aescalus was there.

Xena pulled her hood over her head and bowed her head. She slowed her walk greatly and approached the main, guarded entrance of the barrack.

"Halt there," a guard ordered.

Xena was only a few steps from the guards so she did stop. "Food?" she rasped to the guards.

"There's none here, woman," a guard replied. "Keep moving."

"I have two children to feed," Xena pleaded.

"Food is scarce in the city," the guard reminded. "Just keep moving."

"Then I must speak to Commander Aescalus." The Conqueror took a few steps, yet she hesitated when the silent guard drew his sword.

"Sorry, woman but Commander Aescalus can't be disturbed." The guard waved his sword and ordered, "Now go on before we lock you up."

Xena looked between the guards then lowered her head again. She said nothing and wandered off.

"Damn," a guard muttered and sheathed his sword. "Things are getting worse."

"No kidding."

Xena disappeared into a slim alleyway, and she removed her hood. The guards gave her enough information.

Inside the barrack, the king's stratègos had gone to sleep a candlemark ago. His dreams were plagued by the past battles with the Conqueror, and how he could have not been defeated. His nightmares worsened progressively, and he soon witnessed the capitol being engulfed by flames and the people being slaughtered. He had a duty to uphold, yet he'd constantly failed as each moon passed and now it all rested on this last siege.

Aescalus was seen as an honorable stratègos despite the king's questionable character. He'd faithfully served the king for twenty-five seasons now as the stratègos. Prior to that, he was a loyal soldier who worked up in the ranks. Aescalus only knew the life of a soldier. And lately he truly questioned his leader's motives because of the cold facts that he'd learned about King Cortese.

Indeed the king had a lust for exotic slaves, yet that rarely bothered Aescalus. What truly ate away at him was how the Conqueror proved moons ago that King Cortese had hired mercenaries to attack local villages within the kingdom. As a result, the Macedon Kingdom's army had to fight off the mercenaries and King Cortese was vowed a hero. King Cortese's justification was that he would lose favor over his people if he did not because the Conqueror was becoming popular. But did the king's reasoning truly justify? The stratègos had repeated this question over and over without any true answer.

Slowly Commander Aescalus shifted from his ugly dreamscape. He felt a chill come over him and something just stirred him. He sat up in his hard bed, but he was groggy and just barely scanned his room. He couldn't understand why he'd been cold, yet it was gone so he started to lay back down. Then something in the dark recess of his room grabbed his attention. He sat up sharply and tried to pick out

what it may be. Then he realized the form was moving out of the shadows.

The stratègos took in the outline of a person. He quickly went for his sword that rested close to him. His palm touched the cold hilt, but another hand locked his in place. He was stunned to see the face of his enemy hovering above him.

"You're safe," the Conqueror softly promised, "as long as you remain quiet." She carefully watched his features and eyes. "I'm not here to harm you... unless I have to."

"Why are you here?" the stratègos tested.

"To talk."

Commander Aescalus glanced at his sword that was in his hand. He peered up at the Greek ruler then after a beat, he let go. His hand was freed now so he sat up better.

"We both want the same thing, stratègos."

Commander Aescalus looked over the tall ruler. He then questioned, "Which is?"

"That no more lives are lost... not to the battles or to the war." Xena hide her arms back into her cloak and stood motionless. "My army can hold out through the rest of the summer, into the fall, and all winter. My army is readily supplied by the former Macedon Kingdom." She tilted her head. "How long do you think the city and the people can survive?" She now raised an eyebrow. "Plague and disease do not take long to set in once hunger is apparent."

Aescalus bowed his head some and his shoulders drooped at the facts. He gazed up at the blue eyes that glowed in the dim room. "King Cortese does not surrender... he only wins or loses."

"That fact has made itself apparent." The Conqueror folded her arms under the cloak. "And are you going to sacrifice these people?"

"I have fought to save their lives," the stratègos hotly debated. "You have brought this slaughter to these lands." He rose up from his bed and merely stood in his plain, white shift that he would wear under his uniform. "You are the plague that sweeps this once great Nation."

"What Nation was that?" the ruler argued. "The poleis quarreled amongst themselves in this Nation and restricted the people's freedoms." She slotted her eyes at the stratègos. "King Cortese and his polis are nothing different."

Commander Aescalus could not argue that point at all. He sighed then lifted his hand to rub his temple.

"King Cortese is petty and cruel, but I do not see the same about you." The Conqueror hoped her words would begin to sway the stratègos. "You are a hoplite... your family from Sparta. You know the ways of honor."

"Yes, I do," Aescalus hissed, "and that is why I cannot betray my king."

Xena's teeth flashed in a brief smile. "I'm afraid, stratègos that your king has long betrayed you." She read the visible defeat in the stratègos's mannerism.

"The king murdered many people... and soldiers with his antics." Commander Aescalus thought back on the battles he had with the unknown mercenaries that were hired by the king to attack the local villages. He withdrew from his thoughts and focused on the tall, dark ruler.

"A hoplite's duty is to the people... not the polis," the Conqueror reaffirmed.

The stratègos could not argue that truth. He bowed his head then lifted it again. "What do you have in mind... my liege?"

The corner of the Conqueror's lip tugged with a smile. "Thank you, stratègos."

Aescalus dipped his head in formality. He honestly stated, "Many of the soldiers are loyal to me over the king, but there's always plenty of bad apples that have fallen from the tree."

"Yes, there always are." Xena considered her strategy and now upper hand over King Cortese. "A partial of my army will be returning at nightfall in two days. If the gates were to open then it would be extremely helpful."

"The people have to be protected." The stratègos mentally pictured how villagers could easily be harmed in the middle of the rebellion that he and his men would start.

"The best place for them is in their homes." The Conqueror debated an idea then concluded, "Organize a curfew."

Commander Aescalus slowly nodded. "The king may be hard to capture... he's like a fox. I do not even know all his tricks."

The Conqueror wanted her hands on the ruthless king, but she was more concerned about ending the war. She wanted the Macedon Kingdom completely in her hands. "We will capture him, regardless." She set aside her worries about King Cortese's possible escape. She instead continued to quietly plot with the turned stratègos.

Not long after, the Conqueror ended the conversation and backed away into the shadows. She merely reminded the stratègos, "Be ready for the signal." She then faded away.

Commander Aescalus moved in that direction, but he could not find the ruler. He briefly wondered if the Greek ruler hadn't been real, and he'd imagined the entire talk. Yet he was fully awake and it was no dream. He stepped back a few times then sunk down into his bed. Had he made the right decision tonight? Well, he admitted to himself that some weight had risen from his shoulders so it couldn't have been a bad choice.

Xena silently somersaulted off the roof of the barrack. She landed neatly then started her stroll back to her escape route. She kept her head low and used the shadows to hide her face more so. She easily passed a few soldiers that steered away from her anyway.

Down on the tunnel's ladder, Tracker heard the distinct scrape of the cover. He slotted his eyes and prepared for an enemy. He waited for the safety call. He lost his tension once the low whistle drifted down to him. He extended his left arm so that the torch's light went higher. He fully relaxed once he picked out Xena's familiar form.

"How'd it go?"

The Conqueror stopped a few rungs from Tracker. "The seed we planted moons back ago paid off."

Tracker grinned at the news. "King Cortese will be... stunned. It's about time he's been tricked."

Xena couldn't agree more. She came down the ladder then signaled for Tracker to hand up the torch and get into the tunnel. She took a beat to scan her surroundings then she dropped the torch into the water. She waited until her eyes adjusted to the darkness then she managed her way into the tube.

Tracker led the way back down the tube that would bring them to the stream again. He would be relieved to get his bath tonight. "Xena?"

"Yes, Tracker?" the ruler whispered.

"I will only do this again if I get paid double for the moon."

The Conqueror smirked and promised, "You're on." She already had a mental note to see that he had some sort of reward for having a good spirit about tonight. While she and Tracker quietly made their way back out and to safety, she finalized her plans in her head. She could almost taste victory and what was sweeter was that King Cortese would be caught completely off guard. She would thoroughly enjoy the look on his face when it came time. The wretched journey tonight through the carcass field, stream, and sewage would be well worth it.

To be continued.