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Maiden

Written by Aishling Morgan

Published by Xcite Books

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Maiden

Book 1 of
the Maiden Series

By

Aishling Morgan

Try the rest of the Maiden Series:

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Author's Note

The world of *Maiden* is not ours, neither in terms of physical characteristics nor of culture. Elethrine, her friends and antagonists know nothing of commuting, office politics or supermarkets. Instead they inhabit a world of beautiful girls, stalwart men and strange half-men. This is fantasy, a genre that has long been developing from the romantic myths and which many readers will instantly recognise. Such tales have always had an underlying erotic power, yet in *Maiden* this is given full, uninhibited rein.

In this story I have for the first time combined my love of the erotic with my love of fantasy. I feel the two have blended well but I have certainly benefited from the advice and patience of friends, in particular David and Hilary Wade. I would also like to thank David for his contributions to the bawdy songs. Finally, I trust you will enjoy reading *Maiden* as much as I have enjoyed its creation.

Aishling Morgan

Chapter One
Demoiselle

Elethrine peered down from her window high in the castle's tallest turret. A noise had attracted her attention. Far below in the blockyard a ring of youths had surrounded a girl and were teasing her by singing a song that was always guaranteed to bring the blushes to maidens' cheeks. Elethrine listened to the words drifting up with a trace of irritation, knowing that had she not been the daughter of a baron, she herself might be subject to such cruel taunting -

Here's the dirty goblin, hop, hop, hop,
Down with his trousers and out with his cock,

Now you'd better run girl, far, far, away,
Cause if you let him catch you, he'll put you in the hay,

See how big his cock is, all green and fat and long,
And there's no good in telling him, he doesn't know it's wrong,

He'll lift your skirts and split your drawers as it begins to swell,
He'll put it in your maidenhead, your bottom ring as well,

He'll squeeze your tits and smack your arse, and if he's in the mood,
He'll make you suck and lick his balls, and other things so rude,

He'll fill you full of thick white cream, in every single hollow,
He'll stain your clothes and soil your face, he'll even make you swallow,

And when he's done he'll steal your clothes and leave you shamed and bare,
With jism up your bottom, and jism in your hair,

But if you run and tell your men and ask them to go searching,
It's like as not they'll strip your rump and tie you for a birching,

'Cause they all know that girls can run as fast as needs may be,
But goblins can't, and never could, and so it seems to me,

That girls who walk where goblins live and whistle, laugh or sing,
Know well what fate waits there for them and hunger for its sting.

The ditty trailed off, leaving the youths laughing and the girl hiding her face for shame. The knowledge that her rank made her immune to such coarse behaviour pleased Elethrine, yet also left her with a faint sense of missing out on something; as if it might actually be enjoyable for the poor girl below to be tormented with the thought of what would happen if the goblins caught her. The song was no joke either. Sometimes it actually happened, and when it did - Elethrine's nurse assured her - the poor victim was sore for a week. Sore where, Nurse Anaka had not made clear, but Elethrine could imagine, and found her hand moving involuntarily to the front of her skirts.

The thought made her shiver, a naughty sensation that immediately filled her with utter mortification. With a disturbingly warm feeling in her belly, she turned away from the window. In her mind she made a note to have the youths whipped, not for teasing the hapless maiden, but for disturbing her, the Demoiselle Elethrine, only daughter to Dakarmoth, twelfth Baron Korismund. In reality, of course, their punishment would be for causing the disturbing thoughts that had made her belly warm and set her throat fluttering, but that was hardly something that could be spoken of.

Anyway, it was a silly rhyme. Especially the ending, as if any girl would actually let herself get caught on purpose, knowing she would be put through such an ordeal. Besides, it wasn't even accurate. Goblins didn't wear trousers, everybody knew that. In fact, a pouch of uncured leather was the only thing they wore, if that. Trousers were hardly practical with their shape, which Elethrine knew, because she had seen one. A woodsman had caught it in a net and brought it into the keep, intending to use it for sport. Forbidden to go near it, Elethrine had sneaked down at night and peeped through the keyhole of the room in which it was bound in an iron cage. One glimpse had been enough. It had been no more than one third the height of a normal man, deep, rich black-green in colour and covered in warts and wattles. The face had been set in an expression that was somehow unutterably lewd and also fierce, which had terrified her, but not nearly as much as what it had between its stubby, bowed legs.

Never having seen a naked man, she was unsure of the anatomical details of their secret places, yet knew enough of male animals to know that they were very different from girls, and ruder. What was between the goblin's legs was far ruder than anything she could have imagined, and hardly secret, being barely constrained within the crude pouch of stained leather. The outline of the penis had been clearly discernible; a great, fat thing that squirmed and writhed obscenely in its sack as if determined to burst free. It had been huge too, out of all proportion to the goblin's body. Beneath it the balls had also shown clearly, bulbous globes larger than hens' eggs.

Elethrine had stared entranced, until, perhaps catching her scent; the grotesque beast had moved its hand purposefully towards its pouch. She had screamed and run, not stopping until she was safely in her room with the door locked behind her. There had also been a curious scent, although she had scarcely been aware of it until it was gone. It had been compelling, making her want to do things the very thought of which brought blushes to her cheeks.

In the morning the goblin had been gone, which caused an uproar that ended with the Baron banning them inside the castle walls. It had never been found either, and for the next three months two veteran pikemen had guarded her door night and day. That had been in addition to her purity-girdle, which she wore anyway to ensure that she remained chaste until the day she was taken in wedlock by a highborn Mundic strong and cunning enough to achieve her.

She sat down on her bed, remembering the gross sight and the disturbing dreams that had followed for weeks afterwards. Always it would be the same. She would be picking flowers in one of the meadows above the castle. It would be quiet and still, and then she would hear a rustling in the long grass. Somehow she would know what it was, and run immediately, down the hillside in a blind panic. In reality, goblins were easy to outrun, their short, bow legs making them incapable of any speed. In her dream they were as fleet as the finest horses, while she was clumsy and slow. Always they caught her, and always in the big cherry orchard, where, under the shelter of the blossom-hung trees, they would pull her to the ground. Her skirts would be thrown up, her bodice torn apart. They would fumble open the strings and catches of her petticoats and chemise, tearing what wouldn't come easily. They would open her drawers and burst her corset, breaking the lock. They would rip open her pantalettes to expose her final barrier, her purity-girdle…

Only she wouldn't have it on. Their monstrous cocks would be out of their pouches, their obscene balls swinging beneath them. Lying on a bed of her ruined clothing, her precious tuppenny would be open, vulnerable, as the biggest, ugliest goblin got down between her legs, its gigantic, hideous penis ready to deflower her. The others would be molesting her, some holding her thighs apart, other using their long spatulate fingers to explored her body, several pawing at

her naked breasts, one trying to get its penis to her mouth, one with a finger sneaking towards the most intimate part of her bottom…

And then she would wake up, always an instant before she was deflowered. She would be sweating and breathing hard, and always, always, her tuppenny would be wet and warm. Her purity-girdle stopped her touching herself there, which was just as well, as without it she knew that she would try to do what her giggling maid had told her was possible.

The maid, Nurse Anaka's daughter Aisla, was a tall, lithe girl with the flame red hair colour known in Mund as "peasant red". Elethrine herself, like most nobles, had hair of a rich, yet pale blonde, which made her stand out from the tawnies and reds of the peasants and artisans. When Aisla had hinted to Elethrine of the pleasures of playing with her tuppenny, Elethrine had ordered the poor girl to do it, not believing it was possible. Aisla had protested, but under the threat of a paddling, had agreed. Blushing furiously, the maid had raised her skirts, opened her single pair of drawers, and pulled apart her pantalettes to reveal a neat, pale pink tuppenny. With her eyes closed in embarrassment, Aisla had started to rub at the little bump towards the top of the soft pink centre. As she played, her embarrassment had faded, until she was lying with her thighs spread wide, breathing deeply as her fingers worked in the wet, fleshy folds between her legs. The maid had popped her breasts out of her bodice after a while, feeling them and sighing and arching her body in a pleasure that was obviously no pretence. At the end Aisla had cried out as if in pain and called her mistress's name, only to revert to coy blushes within the minute.

Elethrine had watched the display with the warmth between her own thighs becoming increasingly urgent. By the end she had felt so discomfited that she had ordered Aisla to strip to her underwear and kneel on the bed with her haunches up. Elethrine had then opened the maid's drawers wide to get at the full breadth of trim bottom. The position had left Aisla's tuppenny and bottom ring showing, to Elethrine's delight, and she had taken further pleasure in describing to Aisla how she looked. Elethrine had then beaten the poor maid across her bare buttocks, using a wooden rule, then a hairbrush and finally the thin cane that was kept for her own discipline. Far from soothing her nerves, the act of beating her maid had only served to heighten Elethrine's discomfiture. The harder she beat, the worse it had become, until Aisla's bottom had become the colour of a ripe cherry and the unfortunate maid was crying into a pillow. Finally Elethrine had had to abandon the process and, feeling very odd indeed, had ordered Aisla to draw her a cool bath.

The memory made Elethrine feel much the same, filling her with an urge near to desperation to get her purity girdle open and see if she could do the same as Aisla had done. Unable to resist, she quickly checked to make sure that nobody was coming up the stairs. Confident of her privacy, she began to massage her breasts, feeling the full globes of flesh under her straining bodice. Naked, they were heavy and each one filled a hand, as she knew from feeling them at night when her lined gown could be pulled up for access. Leaving her breasts she stroked her hands down the trim line of her waist, delighting in the gentle, elegant curve. Lower, her hips flared, supporting a bottom that was perhaps a shade fatter than she might have liked. The heavy cheeks were sensitive though and she cupped one in each hand and stuck them out as if awaiting punishment. The feel of her bottom in her hands made the need to try and get at her tuppenny even stronger and she began to pull up her skirts at the front. Lifting her dress and three petticoats left her drawers showing, at which point she hesitated. Exposing the lock to her purity girdle meant unlacing the front of her drawers and then the front of her pantalettes beneath. To undo them would be the work of a moment, but to do them up again was a very different matter. If she was caught trying to open her purity girdle the result would be a hasty upending over her bed, the exposure of her bottom and the application of twelve agonising strokes of the cane that always hung above her bed to remind her that she was not above discipline.

Even as she paused, listening carefully, she caught the sound of the door at the bottom of her staircase being opened. Frantically rearranging her skirts, she just managed to adopt a demure, ladylike pose by one of the windows when the door opened. Elethrine turned, discovering to her

annoyance that it was not Anaka but Aisla, who not only would not report her but might have been made to help.

From nowhere the thought that Aisla might have been made to help with more than getting the girdle open came into Elethrine's head, sending furious blushes to her cheeks at the very idea of what she had so briefly imagined.

'What do you want?' she said rather curtly, trying to rid herself of the image of the maid's delicate features pressed against the soft golden curls between her thighs.

'Your father commands your presence Mistress,' Aisla answered hastily. 'In the great hall.'

'Why?' Elethrine demanded, irritated at the summons.

'I don't know Mistress,' Aisla replied. 'Father awaits you at the foot of the tower stair.'

'Your father I take it?' Elethrine replied. 'Oh well, I suppose it must be important then. Stay in your room, I may want you later.'

'Yes Mistress,' Aisla answered.

Elethrine made a final adjustment of her dress and started down the stairs, meeting Aisla's father, Uroth, at the bottom. Greeting him with a curt nod, she set off towards the great hall. The gigantic Uroth walked steadily behind her, his great steps easily keeping up with her brisk pace. As master-at-arms and armourer, Uroth was not the normal person to escort her, and as she passed through the tall, dim corridors of the keep and crossed the cloistered courtyard she was wondering at the reason for so much ceremony.

The great hall opened off the cloisters, and Elethrine walked through the high door, Uroth remaining at the entrance. The scents of smoke, dust and old wood struck her as she entered. Walls of rough-hewn granite of the deepest grey rose on either side, set with high, arched windows and half-covered by the banners of the various nobles of Korismund. What had once been rich, deep colours highlighted with cloth of gold and silver lacquer were now faded and thin with age. Above them the soot-blackened roof beams reared to a peak that was lost in shadow, the dull light from the high, stained glass windows providing only hints of grotesquely carved faces bearded with cobweb.

An enormous grate ran the length of the room, deep with the cold ashes of the previous night's dining and ringed with tables. At the far end a vast wooden throne rose to half the height of the room, its back fantastically carved and worked with polished stones - garnet, dark malachite, jet, blood-stone. On the throne sat a tall, grim figure, his black cloak and armour of dull steel worked with the arms of Korismund, a crimson rose held in a clenched steel fist. A great banner hung above his head, showing the same arms, as did the shield fastened to one side of the throne. A massive sword hung on the opposite side, its worn leather grip showing that it was not merely ceremonial. A coronet ringed his head, bright in contrast to the grey of his hair and long beard.

'Why so formal father?' Elethrine said cheerfully, giving the smallest of curtsies as she approached.

'For good reason child,' the Baron replied. 'As you know, Talithea, Princess of Mund, will be coming here to take formal betrothal with Kavisterion, Prince of Ateron in Aegmund.'

'Indeed father.'

'Her outriders are here and she will be here also, within the hour,' they went on. 'It is necessary that we receive her with due protocol.'

'Within the hour!' Elethrine echoed. 'I thought she was coming this evening. I must change, bathe, have my hair set! Where is my maid?'

'Calm yourself little Pommette,' he continued. 'All that in due course, but first there is something important I must tell you.'

'What is that?' she replied, trying not to sound too impatient.

'As you know,' Dakarmoth rumbled, 'being a somewhat remote barony, we have tended to stay with the old traditions.'

'Yes father,' Elethrine replied conscientiously.

‘And thus,’ he continued, ‘being of the fourth rank, and noble, we are entitled to names of nine letters in length.’

‘Yes father,’ Elethrine repeated.

‘Yet,’ he sighed, ‘as you may not know, some two hundred years ago, some modernist clique in the royal court - led by King Galaitharion XI himself I believe -reduced the number of ranks to nine, abolishing the four ranks of peasants and decreeing that all peasants are equal and might have names of four letters. Artisans might all have five, regardless of rank; the thaneclan, squires and reeves six, nobles seven and royals eight, again regardless of rank. Foolish, I know, yet the upshot is that Princess Talithea has a name of only eight letters, as you may have noticed.’

‘Indeed, father,’ Elethrine answered. ‘I had thought it because her family are descended from Thane Etharion…’

‘So is ours, impertinent child,’ Dakarmoth interrupted.

‘Your forgiveness,’ she said meekly.

‘Granted,’ he answered. ‘Now, we must observe protocol…’

‘Of course,’ she put in.

‘Exactly,’ he continued, ‘we must observe protocol, and so, for the duration of her stay, you must shorten your name…’

‘Father!’ Elethrine exclaimed, scandalised by the suggestion. ‘Then, then, should it be eight letters, I would be thought no more than of the rank of a thane!’

‘Seven letters,’ her father corrected her.

‘Seven!’ Elethrine shouted. ‘Me, be thought a member of the squires! Never! I could never! Oh for shame!’

‘Elethrine!’ Dakarmoth boomed in a voice redolent of thin canes and sore, female bottoms.

Elethrine shut up hastily.

‘But father,’ she continued after a pause, her tone now thoughtful, almost wheedling, ‘the Prince of Ateron is named Kavisterion, a name of eleven letters…’

‘He is of Aegmund,’ Dakarmoth interrupted her, ‘and frankly little more than a barbarian, although it is clearly an important move on the part of the king to join his line to ours. No, this evening at the ceremony of betrothal, you shall be announced as Ethrine, which, when all is said, is a pleasant name.’

‘A pleasant name for the daughter of a squire!’ Elethrine retorted.

‘Silence!’ her father roared. ‘Do as you are told or I shall call for Nurse Anaka and a cane!’

Elethrine bowed her head meekly although her blood was boiling inside. From long experience she knew that the Baron was as good as his word and that if she resisted she would end up bent over the table with her skirts up and her purity girdle off for a dozen stinging strokes of Nurse Anaka’s cane. The nurse had little sympathy with tantrums and might even pull her victim’s pantalettes open and inflict the caning on the bare bottom. With her buttocks on show the humiliation would then be worse than the pain, yet she would still be announced as Ethrine. The difference would be that she would have a fresh set of smarting cane stripes on her bottom to remind her of her disobedience.

It was pointless to double an already intense shame, and so she curtsied politely to her father and left the room, breaking into a run as soon as the heavy doors had clanged shut behind her. Her blood was boiling in her veins and she mounted the steps to her tower full of determination to take her temper out on someone.

‘Aisla!’ she yelled as she reached the doorway of her maid’s room. ‘draw my bath and fetch Nurse Anaka for my key.’

‘Yes Mistress,’ she heard as she carried on up the steep, spiral stairs.

In her room she glanced out of the window that looked out across the countryside of Korismund, fiddling with the laces of her dress rather than wait for Aisla to help her. To north and south stood the high grey ramparts of the mountain range known as the Spine, a natural barrier that separated the Kingdom of Mund from barbaric Aegmund. Korismund Keep stood in the pass which it had been built to defend, perched on an outlying crag high above the dense

woods that covered the lower slopes of the mountains. To the east she could see fields and orchards, the village that shared its name with the keep and the road leading out across the broad, mountain ringed bowl that was the Barony. She could see no sign of an approaching party of horsemen, yet knew that her preparations would take longer than the Princess and her guard would need to cover the distance from the furthest visible point of the road.

'Aisla!' she called back over her shoulder as she struggled with the complicated set of laces that held her bodice shut.

There was no response, increasing Elethrine's fury despite the knowledge that her maid would be fetching Nurse Anaka. A moment later she heard the lower door close and footsteps on the stairs.

Elethrine grabbed her hairbrush, intent on taking her anger out on her maid's bottom even if a dozen Princesses were approaching the castle. She began to smack the brush meaningfully on her palm as the door handle turned, knowing the shock Aisla would get on discovering she was to be spanked for nothing.

'Now…,' she began, only to discover not Aisla, but Nurse Anaka coming through the door.

Elethrine hastily returned the hairbrush to the table and greeted her nurse with a smile. Nurse Anaka - Aisla's mother and a big, strapping woman with a no nonsense look about her - gave Elethrine a single curious glance, curtsied briefly and came into the room.

'Aisla is drawing your bath,' the nurse stated. 'I will help you undress.'

'Thank you, and please hurry,' Elethrine replied.

'Hurry does not become a Demoiselle,' Anaka remarked.

'True,' Elethrine admitted as the nurse took over the process of unlacing her bodice, 'but the Princess Talithea will be here for her betrothal within the hour and I should greet her.'

'Nonetheless, Pommette,' Anaka continued, using Elethrine's pet name as she always did when her charge was letting her enthusiasm run away with her, 'you must be properly presented.'

'Indeed,' Elethrine agreed, 'which is why we must hurry. Now, while Aisla bathes me, you must lay out my dress in the deep blue Jhai velvet, chemise, corset and under-dress in the royal blue silk, silk petticoats of lake blue, blue-grey and powder blue, white silk drawers and my new coral pink pantalettes. Stockings of…'

'But Pommette,' Nurse Anaka interrupted, 'nobody will know what colour you petticoats are, much less your drawers and certainly not your pantalettes!'

'I will know,' Elethrine replied, 'and don't call me Pommette in company. I'm not a child and it's an embarrassing pet name.'

'It's a pretty name,' Anaka replied defensively as she undid the key-buckle on Elethrine's chemise.

Elethrine sighed as her breasts burst free of restraint, drawing a mild noise of rebuke from her nurse. The chemise and bodice held them tight against her chest, giving her figure a smooth line of which she was proud. Nevertheless, it was always bliss to have her chemise undone to let them return to their natural shape, and also to have her nipples pop out as the cool air touched them.

'You can be such a wanton girl,' Anaka said mildly.

Elethrine didn't reply, quite aware of the strength of her body's responses, and simultaneously pleased and ashamed. Nurse Anaka took no notice, instead turning to one of her favourite topics, the decline in the old traditions of the kingdom.

'I don't really hold with this betrothal business,' she began with a phrase that Elethrine had heard perhaps a dozen times since the news that there was to be a formal agreement to marry between Prince Kavisterion and the Princess Talithea. 'In my day he'd have had to carry her off and ravish her like everyone else.'

'Theiron and Ateron are nearly a thousand leagues apart,' Elethrine pointed out.

'All the better,' she continued, 'think of the glory of having a Prince ride a thousand leagues for your sake.'

‘Two thousand leagues, by the time he’d got back,’ Elethrine said. ‘The marriage also makes an important alliance

‘That’s true,’ she admitted, ‘but still, I always think ravishment is so much more romantic. Who knows, someday some bold thane may come and take you in your bed, risking everything for your beauty and the chance to become Baron Consort.’

‘Ha!’ Elethrine laughed. ‘There is no thane in Mund so stupid. First he would have to break into the keep, then get the key to my purity girdle from your apartment and risk facing Uroth in single combat. Should he survive - which I doubt - he would have to defeat a guard or two, batter down my door, ravish me, descend the height of twelve men to the blockyard and escape with me across his shoulders. Name me the idiot who would so much as consider the feat?’

‘I don’t know. Still, it’s a nice thought,’ Anaka responded.

‘Indeed,’ Elethrine admitted, ‘but it is also most unlikely. No, I shall consider the suits that are put to me and hold a jousting contest or something modern.’

Nurse Anaka tutted disapprovingly and went back to the task of loosening Elethrine’s clothes.

With the dress and corset off, it took Nurse Anaka’s practised fingers only minutes to strip Elethrine for her bath. As always the sensation of having her purity girdle removed was more blissful even than the unlacing of her bodice. Scampering naked down the stairs to her bath also produced a deliciously naughty feeling of freedom very different indeed to the shame of having her bottom exposed for punishment.

In the room below Aisla had Elethrine’s bath ready, a great oval tub filled with steaming, lily scented water. Aisla stood by it, as naked as Elethrine herself as she would be using the water once her Mistress had finished. The sight of Aisla nude set off the same, dirty, guilty thoughts Elethrine had had before, and she climbed quickly into the bath to hide the flush that rose automatically to her face and chest.

In the bath it was worse, with Aisla’s bare breasts swinging naked inches in front of Elethrine’s face as the maid soaped and scrubbed. They were big for such a slim girl and kept touching Elethrine’s arms and her own breasts, once even her face as Aisla leant across to reach for a fresh vial of scented bath oil. Minutes before Elethrine had intended to spank Aisla, but as the maid bathed her the urge to punish was rapidly being replaced by the urge to caress.

Elethrine shut her eyes, trying to think about something other than the soft, full breasts that were pressing against her upper arm or the dainty, gentle fingers that were working soap into her belly. It was no good, Aisla’s fingers were going lower, one hand soaping the subtly rounded undertuck of her tummy, then working the lather into the curls between her thighs.

‘Could you lift your bottom a little please Mistress?’ Aisla asked.

Elethrine responded, trying desperately to keep control of herself as Aisla’s hands slid down between her thighs and under her bottom. One hand began to rub at Elethrine’s tuppenny, the other at the sensitive skin of her bottom. Elethrine moaned, lost to pleasure as Aisla’s fingers slipped between the lips of her tuppenny and found the little, hard bud in the middle. Aisla giggled, one long finger slipping between the cheeks of Elethrine’s bottom, finding her anus and poking a little way into the tight ring.

‘Don’t stop!’ Elethrine sighed.

‘Now, now Mistress,’ Aisla chided gently. ‘It’s not the first time I’ve bathed you. It doesn’t do to get so excited.’

‘I don’t care,’ Elethrine breathed, ‘just carry on rubbing like that.’

Aisla made a little tutting noise and made as if to take her hands away.

‘Please!’ Elethrine begged hotly.

‘I’d better do it for you then,’ Aisla replied, ‘but be quick, if mother came down…’

Elethrine moaned again, abandoning herself utterly to whatever was going to happen. Aisla increased the urgency of her rubbing and slid the finger that had been cleaning Elethrine’s bottom ring deep inside the hole. An exquisite feeling began to build up as Aisla’s mouth found hers and they began to kiss, lightly at first and then with their tongues twinned together. Aisla’s breasts

pressed against Elethrine's chest, their nipples hard in mutual pleasure. The muscles of her bottom and thighs began to move of their own accord, wriggling against Aisla's hand and squirming on the finger that was up her bottom. The feeling was become unbearable, as if she was about to burst.

'Girls!' a shocked voice rang out from the doorway, shattering Elethrine's blissful state.

Aisla jumped back, leaving Elethrine with a view of Nurse Anaka standing in the doorway with an expression of absolute outrage on her face.

'We… I… we…,' Aisla stammered.

'Strumpets! Dirty, wanton little strumpets!' Nurse Anaka declared. 'Out of the bath Elethrine! Over the bench, both of you!'

'Not naked!' Elethrine retorted, horrified by the sheer indignity of what her nurse was demanding.

'You'll get your formal caning later, in proper style,' Anaka stormed. 'For now, over the bench with both of you, you wanton little sluts, and if you're in your birthday suits, then you should have thought of the consequences before allowing your filthy lust to get the better of you.'

'But…' Elethrine began, determined not to suffer the terrible indignity of a naked beating. 'Nurse Anaka, beat Aisla nude if you must, but my father would never permit me to suffer a punishment suitable only for a peasant girl.'

Nurse Anaka paused, her face red with fury. Aisla was already bent over the low wooden bench with her bottom raised for punishment. Her tuppenny and anus were on full show in a nest of dark ginger curls, a position that Elethrine was determined not to be put in. The bench normally served as a seat for Elethrine while she was dried, but was also ideal for girls to be beaten over. Nurse Anaka looked at her daughter, who gave back a look of utter misery and contrition. For a moment the big woman seemed to waver, then her expression hardened.

'No,' she said brusquely, 'you need a sharp lesson Demoiselle Elethrine Korismund, and being beaten like any common peasant girl may just teach it to you. Should you object, we may happily take the matter before your father, otherwise get over the bench next to Aisla? I shall use a strap on your naughty behind and no more need be said. Well?'

'I shall not!' Elethrine stormed.

'I think you shall,' the nurse replied, 'otherwise I shall recommend that you be taken out to the blockyard this afternoon. Once there I shall strip your haughty little bottom, whip it well and leave you there for the afternoon. What is more, I shall get a clerk to write your crime out and have it pinned to your upturned skirts. Then how much will your precious dignity be worth?'

'Father would never permit it,' Elethrine began determinedly, only to stop at the thought that her father might very well permit such a degrading punishment if he were told that she had allowed her base lust to carry her away enough to make love to her maid.

'And think,' Nurse Anaka continued, 'the Princess Talithea visits at any moment. Think how it would feel if the first she saw of you was your blushing red bottom. Now what's it to be?'

'Very well, Nurse Anaka,' Elethrine said, suddenly feeling very crestfallen, 'you may beat me naked.'

The tears were starting in her eyes as she got out of the bath and padded reluctantly across the floor. Aisla looked back at her, the maid's big green eyes full of sympathy. Elethrine tried to smile but felt her mouth curl down at the edges into what she knew was a singularly pathetic and hang-dog expression. She sank slowly to her knees and bent forward, going down over the bench into the same rude position as her maid, bum up and cheeks open, hairy tuppenny and pink bottom ring showing to the woman who was about to beat her.

Nurse Anaka left the room, leaving the two girls with their bums up and ready, not daring to move. Elethrine heard the door to Aisla's room open and then close, and a moment later Nurse Anaka returned, holding the broad leather strap that was normally reserved for Aisla's bottom. Elethrine shut her eyes tight, trying not to whimper and make a display of herself. There was a whistle and then the smack of leather on girl flesh and a squeal from Aisla. Elethrine winced,

fought the urge to get up and run and then yelled out loud as the strap came down hard across her naked bottom.

'Ow, Nurse!' she protested an instant before the sound of Aisla's second smack and the resulting squeal rang out.

Elethrine squealed again as the strap once more struck her bottom, the tears starting in her eyes as the pain and shame of being strapped with a belt in the nude became too much for her. Aisla was crying too, a snivelling, sobbing sound suddenly broken by a yelp as the strap hit her. As Elethrine braced herself for the next smack she heard a distant trumpet, sounding from well outside the walls of the keep. The beating stopped abruptly, leaving Elethrine profoundly thankful for what presumably heralded the approach of the Princess's retinue.

'We will finish this later,' Nurse Anaka announced, slightly out of breath from the exertion of taking the strap to the two girls. 'For now we must hurry.'

Both girls got up, hurriedly wiping their tears and rubbing briefly at smarting bottoms before running upstairs. Elethrine stood patiently as she was dressed, trying to ignore the fact that the ignominious beating had done nothing to lessen the hot, urgent feeling in her tuppenny. In fact it was worse, as if adopting such a rude pose and then having her buttocks smacked up to a rosy pink glow was no different than being touched more tenderly. From the swelling of her tuppenny after previous beatings she knew that it happened, but it was now stronger by far.

A second trumpet fanfare announced the arrival of the party at the gates as Elethrine was being laced into her corsets. Glancing towards the south window of her room, she saw the men on the walls start to work the mechanism that controlled the portcullis.

'Hurry!' she urged, as she stepped into her dress while Aisla was still working frantically at the corset laces.

Neither woman answered, but both increased the pace of their work, so that they had Elethrine's bodice half-done by the time a third fanfare announced that the Princess was actually within the walls of the keep.

'You must greet her in the Maiden Garden,' Anaka said as she began to pull Elethrine's hair into a jewelled net.

'I know that!' Elethrine snapped, forgetful of what had just been done to her in the panic of the moment. 'Aisla, put some clothes on, quickly!'

Aisla scurried away, Elethrine getting a last glimpse of her bare white back and pink bottom as she left. Slipping her feet into shoes as Anaka finished her hair, she tried to calm her breathing, knowing that she was far from the cool, decorous young Demoiselle that she wished to appear before the Princess.

Finally she was ready, with the wet parts of her hair artfully concealed in curls and tucks and no more than a mildly uncomfortable damp feeling between her legs. Aisla greeted her at the door, her simple dove-grey dress chosen to complement Elethrine's magnificent gown of rich blue velvet.

Together they walked to the rear door of the Maiden Garden, a tiny walled garden exclusively for the use of highborn women. Normally it was a peaceful, private haven for Elethrine, somewhere she could go to be alone as her mother seldom used it and neither Aisla nor Anaka could enter without her or her mother's permission. Protocol, however, demanded that she greet the Princess there, which seemed to Elethrine something of an invasion of her privacy.

To her relief the garden was empty, but no sooner had she arranged herself on an iron bench in a posture that suggested she had been there all along than the main door opened and a page ushered a girl of much her own age into the garden.

Elethrine rose and curtsied formally, taking in the appearance of the Princess as she did so. Talithea was slim waisted, full at chest and hip and perhaps half a hand breadth shorter than Elethrine. Her hair was almost white and was bound into a complicated system of plaits and coils that framed an oval face with features of exceptionally delicacy. A scattering of freckles across the bridge of her tiny, upturned nose softened a look that would otherwise have been too formal, the whole creating a beauty not far short of Elethrine's opinion of her own looks. Her dress was a

deep crimson and even richer than Elethrine's, while slippers of golden leather peeped from under the hem.

'Princess Talithea Mund, third daughter of Utharion V, King,' Elethrine spoke in the correct formal address between their respective ranks. 'I give you welcome to Korismund.'

'Demoiselle Ethrine Korismund, daughter of Karmoth, Baron, I accept your welcome,' the Princess replied.

Elethrine choked down her immediate flush of anger at the contraction of her name and her father's, instead completing their formal introduction and asking if Talithea would care to take refreshment in the Maiden Garden.

When Aisla had left to fetch an infusion of pear blossom, Elethrine attempted less formal conversation, choosing as her topic the dark leaved, purple flowered roses the cultivation of which was something of an obsession among Mundic horticulturists.

'Most fine,' Talithea replied evenly, then paused before continuing, 'for an outland Barony, very fine indeed. Of course in the Royal Botanical Gardens at Theiron we have had pure black flowers for some time now.'

Elethrine found herself brindling but went on trying to be polite.

'You are fortunate in Prince Kavisterion,' she suggested. 'He is a great warrior and exceptionally handsome,'

'He is a monstrous, hirsute oaf,' Talithea responded, 'also a barbarian; broad but rather less tall than your maid and with hair of a colour that suggests more than a touch of peasant blood. He has the manners of a troll and something of one's appearance. Still, one of my ranks has little choice in these matters. You, of course, are more fortunate.'

'My nurse,' Elethrine replied, desperately trying to find a topic that the Princess was unable to turn into an insult, 'hopes that I will be ravished, in the old tradition, but I have little hope that any thane would dare the attempt.'

'Indeed,' Talithea answered, 'it is hard to imagine a man of real quality considering the reward worth the risk. Still, perhaps if you were to wear your hair in a more fashionable style and try a little more make-up you might tempt a man of moderate ambition.'

For a moment Elethrine could find nothing to say but found herself wondering what the consequences would be is she and Aisla were to sit on the haughty Princess and give her a well-deserved dozen cuts of the cane across her thighs. Talithea was relatively small, and Elethrine was sure they could do it and that it would not take many more goads to make her lose her temper completely. At that moment Aisla returned with the infusion and also a companion, immediately reducing the tension.

The newcomer was quite unexpected, being a tiny girl, although quite obviously mature. She stood no higher than Elethrine's chest and was pale skinned with a great amount of jet black hair, a rarity in Mund. Pert breasts constrained within her bodice and neatly rounded hips showed that she was not the child she would otherwise have seemed. Her manner was grave and pensive, her clothing black in every detail.

'May I present, Ea, apprentice to the witch Aurora,' Aisla announced, bobbing slightly to Elethrine and Talithea. 'Ea, I present the Princess Talithea Mund, third daughter of Utharion V, King and my Mistress, Demoiselle Elethrine Korismund, daughter of Karmoth, Baron.'

'Elethrine?' Talithea demanded, turning in sudden outrage.

'We hold by the old traditions in these outland Baronies,' Elethrine replied, rather pleased that Aisla had made the mistake of giving her proper name.

'No matter,' Talithea responded, suddenly gay again. 'I shall call you Trina to remind you of your place.'

Elethrine opened her mouth but shut it quickly, sure that whatever retort she made it would only meet with a still more biting response. Short of physically punishing Talithea there was nothing she could do, and the consequences for her would undoubtedly be worse by far.

'So what is this?' Talithea continued in an amused tone as she turned her attention to the newcomer. 'A witch's apprentice, you say?'

‘The apprentice to Aurora, who can summon a demon with a single motion of her hand,’ Elethrine said, hoping that association with the powerful witch would impress Talithea. ‘She is due to stand witness to your betrothal.

Talithea made no reply but stepped forward.

‘She is extraordinarily small,’ the Princess remarked as she walked around the tiny witch’s apprentice, studying her as if she were a moderately interesting piece of pottery.

‘Possibly she is half-elf,’ Elethrine suggested, glad that Talithea had found a new mark for her bitter tongue.

‘Elf!’ Talithea replied with a sharp laugh. ‘Whoever heard of a lordly elf condescending to speak to a mere human woman, never mind take her to wife! Especially as, with a name so short, her mother would have to be the lowest of pariahs.’

‘It is rumoured,’ Elethrine said, mindful of propriety, ‘that elven girls have sometimes surrendered to woodsmen, or possibly been taken unawares. They are without doubt winsome, after all.’

‘Sheer fancy!’ Talithea snorted. ‘No, she is more likely half-dwarf.’

Aisla laughed, a nervous titter promptly silenced as Elethrine turned to look at her. Ea raised her eyes, and Elethrine found herself staring into them. The apprentice’s gaze was more than a little disturbing, her eyes large and lustrous with irises as black and shiny as the pupils. The suggestion that she was half-dwarven was absurd, halflings of dwarven lineage were invariably squat and broad, almost as much so as dwarves themselves.

‘Or even half-goblin!’ Talithea continued, oblivious to Ea’s expression of mounting fury. ‘Perhaps on her mother’s side!’

‘I am one eighth part nymph if you must know!’ Ea answered in a hiss, the appalling and impossible insult finally stinging her into refute.

‘Oh look, she is angry! How droll!’ Talithea laughed as Ea turned to her. ‘Still, we cannot have a lowborn halfling daring to answer us back, can we?’

‘Indeed not,’ Elethrine answered, unwilling to dispute the Princess despite her caution.

‘Then have your maid spank her,’ Talithea continued in an amused tone. ‘By hand, it will teach the little frippet an important lesson.’

Elethrine hesitated. Having Aisla spank Ea would certainly be amusing, especially as the indignity of a hand spanking was bound to make the tiny apprentice thrash and squeal most beautifully. It was also hard to resist Talithea’s forceful personality, yet there was something about Ea that made her nervous. More importantly, seeing Ea punished in such a humiliating way would do something to reduce her own feelings at the way Nurse Anaka had treated her.

‘May I speak mistress,’ Aisla put in meekly.

‘You may,’ Elethrine answered, grateful for the interruption.

‘Thank you mistress,’ Aisla continued. ‘Please forgive my presumption, but might I not strip her nates, the better to bring her punishment home to her.’

‘Excellent!’ Talithea laughed. ‘Bare-bottomed, over the knee of a mere maid! That will truly teach her to not to be impudent to her betters! Yes, do it!’

Elethrine felt a rush of anger. Talithea had no right to give Aisla a command, Princess or not. She had also manoeuvred Elethrine into a difficult situation. For Elethrine to support the order would be an admission of her inferiority to Talithea, while if she countermanded it she would look weak. There was only one option that allowed her to retain her dignity, which was to make the punishment more degrading still.

‘Yes,’ Elethrine said in her most haughty tone, ‘do it, but do not merely strip her bottom, strip her naked.’

‘Naked?’ Aisla asked in obvious alarm.

‘Naked,’ Elethrine repeated, ‘and do not answer me back, or you shall be served the same way.’

‘Yes mistress,’ Aisla replied hurriedly.

Elethrine raised her chin, aware that the game had gone far further than they had intended but determined to carry it through. To strip a girl naked and spank her by hand was a punishment considered so degrading to the victim that it was normally reserved for the daughters of peasants, and then only in private. Talithea was looking a little shocked, which pleased Elethrine immensely. Even when nurse Anaka had beaten Aisla and herself she had not gone so far as to do it by hand, although she had subjected them to just about every other possible degradation.

Ea looked as horrified as was to be expected. Her face, always pale, had gone white. Her little mouth open was in an O of disbelief and her eyes were wide and staring. As Aisla advanced on her she backed away, but instead of the rush of tears that Elethrine expected, the apprentice began to chant and make patterns with her fingers. Elethrine swallowed hard, having once seen Aurora summon a great black demon with the body of a monstrous toad and recognising similarities in the apprentice's chant and hand movements.

'Silly child,' Talithea remarked, but her subsequent laugh sounded more than a little strained.

Ea's voice rose to a scream as Aisla backed her into the corner of two tall yew hedges.

'Come quietly,' Aisla remarked firmly, reaching out to take Ea by the arm.

Elethrine relaxed. Whatever invocation Ea had been attempting had evidently failed. She felt her pulse calm and a smile came to her face as Aisla dragged the struggling apprentice away from the corner towards a heavy iron bench. As Aisla got a firm grip, Elethrine and Talithea exchanged glances of malicious delight at the prospect of seeing a naked spanking, their initial antipathy forgotten. Ea fought hard, pulling Aisla's hair out of its net into a cloud of red-gold, an action that caused the maid to give a cry of annoyance and redouble her efforts. A moment later the apprentice's dress was being hauled up over her head, revealing her petticoats and corsets, as black as her dress and worked with purple embroidery and ribbon. With a brisk motion the maid knotted Ea's dress over her head, rendering her helpless. Elethrine felt a disturbing, yet familiar, warm sensation between her legs as Aisla set to work at the stripping, tearing the tiny girl's chemise-bodice open to reveal two breasts not much larger than the halves of a big plum, yet surprisingly womanly.

Ea gave a scream of pure outrage at the exposure of her breasts, but with her dress up she could do nothing. Elethrine laughed at the girl's consternation, glancing once more at Talithea to find the Princess watching the stripping with an expression of rapture. Aisla had pushed Ea onto the wet ground and turned her bottom up. The maid's face was set in mischievous delight as she took hold of Ea's petticoats and began to pull them out from under her corset. Ea kicked and thumped at the ground with her fists as her drawers were exposed. Aisla laughed and whipped off the petticoats, all three at once. Ea began to chant again, her muffled voice pure fury as Aisla began to interfere with the strings of her drawers.

Elethrine found a hard lump in her throat as she watched Ea's legs kick. They were pretty, and sheaved in black silk. A froth of lace, also black, hid the more interesting parts of the girl's trim figure, but Aisla had opened the drawer string and was about to expose it all.

'One… two… three… and off they come!' Aisla chuckled wickedly and pulled Ea's drawers down and off, revealing a pert bottom covered only by black silk pantalettes.

'More black, how pretentious,' Talithea remarked, the hauteur of her voice failing to conceal the underlying lust. 'And silk too, quite inappropriate.'

'Pull them off Aisla, and throw them to me,' Elethrine said, 'they'll make a nice trophy.'

'No!' Ea screamed and then yelled out another word which Elethrine didn't understand.

Ea was kicking and bucking frantically, putting every effort her small body could muster into trying to prevent Aisla from inflicting the ultimate indignity on her and pulling down her pantalettes. Elethrine found herself grinning and desperately trying to resist the temptation to push against the front of her dress so that her tuppenny rubbed on her purity girdle.

'Say goodbye to your modesty!' Aisla crowed and tugged Ea's pantalettes down.

Elethrine felt a hot flush rise to her face as the girl's pert white bottom was laid bare. Aisla raised her hand and planted a heavy smack on it, making the soft nates wobble delightfully. Another harder smack made them part a little, giving a glimpse of jet black hair and wet, pink

flesh. Two hand marks showed pink against the white skin of the small girl's bottom. A shiver went right through Elethrine at the sight, making her want more of the same; a tiny, round bottom, red all over and parted to show the girl's most intimate secrets. Not just framed by a tangle of dishevelled clothing either, but on a nude, shamed girl.

'Naked!' she ordered.

'Naked! Stark naked!' Talithea echoed frenziedly.

Once more Ea screamed, using the same word as before as her pantalettes were pulled free of her ankles. A scream of utter fury sounded, not from the struggling girl, but from high above. Elethrine looked up, and screamed herself.

High above the castle, a grotesque shape was tumbling towards them in a tangle of wings and other, indeterminate body parts. Elethrine found herself frozen to the spot, her eyes locked on the horror as it untangled itself and the head became apparent, and then the rest of the thing. Elethrine immediately wished it had stayed hidden.

Vast, leathery wings supported a bony body from which stubby legs and a short, flattened tail stuck out behind. Yet it was the head to which Elethrine's eyes were riveted. The skull was an explosion of bony spikes, from the centre of which two great red eyes starred angrily down, likes the eyes of some nightmare owl. A long beak protruded from between these eyes, with two high set nostrils on top and a quadruple row of spine-like teeth lining the open jaws.

She heard Talithea echo her scream as the ghastly apparition went into a dive, directly at them. Ea was gabbling frantically, a sound of which Elethrine was barely aware as the demon landed with a rush of air and a great crash of its wings. She heard Aisla's scream and then a gigantic claw gripped her body, crushing her to Talithea. Ea screamed out once more and the great demon responded with a furious croak. Its wings beat down and Elethrine was being lifted, whirled high into the air with the walled garden shrinking with distance beneath her and then the castle itself. The shout of a guard and Ea's triumphant yell reached up to her and then everything went mercifully black.