

Morrigan shrank away the moment the Roman slaver reached for her. The chain to her slave collar allowed little protection from him clutching her hair and yanking her close. “I look forward to fucking you like we did last night.” The stench of his foul breath hit like a fist. “Look forward to it, little slave princess.”

She sank her teeth into his cheek.

“You little bitch.” He backhanded her, knocking Morrigan into the woman chained next to her.

The master slaver, the one named Silvio, charged his horse between them before the Roman could strike again. “Leave the bitch alone, Ruisco. I don’t want her ruined like you did the last—”

A lance sang through the air and jerked him off the horse. Another pierced the Roman’s chest, throwing him toward Morrigan. She moved aside and let him fall to the ground. An explosion of wild war cry burst from the distant tree line and Trinovante warriors raced toward the line of slaves. Their swords gleamed in the midday sun while they slaughtered the remaining slavers.

*Diras. Calgacus.*

Joy sprang to her eyes while the Iceni cheered. The man behind her was cut free, allowing him to search Silvio’s body for the key to the slave collars.

Once freed, the man shoved the key into her palm. “Free the rest. I have some killing to do.”

The feel of metal falling from her neck would never be forgotten. Morrigan tossed the key to the woman beside her, fell to her knees, and snatched the knife from the Roman’s belt.

All the pain the Roman soldiers had done to her people returned. Her holding Mergith—the man she loved more than life itself—in her arms and his blood pouring onto the ground. Whipping her mother. Insulting her father’s funeral. Killing. Raping. Selling the Iceni as slaves.

Like her mother, she wanted every Roman dead or driven back to the mainland.

Morrigan plunged the knife into the Roman’s chest. “Die, you bastard. Die!” Then again, for her father. And again, for her mother. And again, for Mergith.

Shoving her hair from her blood-splotted face, Morrigan scanned the grove for another worthy of her wrath. There was none because the other Iceni women were purging the same horrors to those who thought they could enslave them.

“Never.” Morrigan lifted the knife to drive it into the body yet again.

A hand gripped her wrist.

Her heart froze. The image of a Roman shifted into Mergith’s friend, Tancorix.

“I think he’s dead enough,” Tancorix said and offered a hand to help her up. “We need to leave before the Roman patrol arrives. Besides, your mother calls for you.”

*Her mother!*

Morrigan deposited the blade deep into the slaver's guts and turned, searching for her mother. The wagon carrying Boudica lay overturned. The funeral gifts, claimed for taxes, scattered the ground. Her mother wasn't there.

"Where is she?"

"On a wagon." Tancorix pointed his bloody sword toward the sharp ridge. "Over there."

Groans greeted Morrigan as she scrambled up beside what was left of her mother. The Roman's whip had competently lashed her regal body until she was barely recognizable and barely alive.

"Mother, Diras came. We're no longer slaves. They freed us." The glorious news failed to stir the Iceni queen. Fear sliced through Morrigan, as it had when she'd lost Mergith. "Mother, answer me?"

"M...Mor...Morrigan," whispered from Boudica's torn mouth. Her hand rose, searching for something.

Morrigan clutched it, feeling the fragile strength in her mother's grip. "I'm here, Mother. I'm here."

"The...Romans?"

"Dead. All of them. Dead."

Boudica nodded. "G-Good. They die."

"I want them all dead."

A faint smile appeared and then faded. "Rhiann...Rhianna?"

Morrigan quelled the snarl on her lips. "I don't know where she is." But she did. She could never tell her mother that her sister had remained with her Roman tribune, believing the lies of this Julius Agricola.

Marleth, the Trinovante queen, swiped a wet rag over Boudica's forehead. "Calgacus will find her, dear friend."

"I pity any Roman who faces Calgacus right now," Tancorix said, as he strolled beside the wagon.

Morrigan glared at the warrior. "I say kill all the Roman bastards."

Tancorix shrugged. "We will. In time."

Diras, the chief of the Trinovante, and his son Calgacus pushed through the lumbering crowd. Both were big, blond, and blood-covered as Tancorix. Concern radiated in their gazes.

"How is she?" Calgacus's deep concern surrounded Morrigan like thick fur. Mergith had once said that Calgacus was one of the best warriors in either the Iceni or Trinovante tribes. He also worshipped Rhianna, something no Roman would ever do.

"Boudica lives," Marleth said to the concerned gazes. "But we need to get her to the hill fort as quickly as possible."

Calgacus turned to his father. "I'll let everyone know. Tancorix! With me."

As both warriors turned to leave, Morrigan started from the wagon. Diras

stopped her. “Stay, Morrigan. Your mother needs you. We’ll see to your people.”

Gratitude blurred Morrigan’s vision as she touched the chief’s forearm. “May all the gods see your strength and goodwill and bless your people.”

Boudica nodded. “An...Andras...te sees. She is with...us.”



Jubilance over the Romans’ defeat sang in the air as the Iceni people walked toward the Trinovante hill fort, until they passed Boudica’s lifeless body, and their cheers turned into whispers.

“I’m glad Boudica spit in the bastard’s face.”

“They take and leave us nothing.”

“I’d like to shove Rome’s taxes up their bloody asses.”

“Send ‘em back where they belong, I say.”

Morrigan listened to their hatred, as obvious as the clouds in the sky. Over the many years, her father had had little choice to either barter with the Romans or be destroyed by them.

Then Rome had returned his cooperation by rejecting his will and demanding payments for taxes they did not owe. What was to stop these invaders from taking anything, taxing as much as they wanted, and destroying all that was sacred from every tribe?

“Andraste, help me. From now on, I will kill every Roman I see,” Morrigan muttered as she walked beside her mother’s wagon.

Tancorix, who had returned to her side, grabbed her arm the moment she stumbled. “You won’t kill an ant, much less a Roman, if you can’t walk,” he said with a hardy laugh.

She swung to slap him, but the warrior clutched her wrist and then the other and let her thrash—just as the Romans had. Terror whipped through her. She slammed her knee into his groin.

Tancorix’s smirk vanished as he tossed her away. Meager satisfaction stirred as she stumbled into a nest of warriors. A sword hilt brushed her hand. She snatched the weapon from the warrior and swung it at Tancorix, still cursing in pain.

Suddenly alert, Tancorix stepped back and slid his sword from its sheath, welcoming her threat.

“Get him, Morrigan.” Cheers rose as people circled, jeering as metal kissed metal.

Morrigan swung the heavy blade where she could. His head. His legs. His narrow waist. However, he merely blocked her attempts or stepped back enough to feel the passing breeze.

Seconds later, his sword slammed against hers, shooting pain through her entire body. He closed the distance between them. She pulled away from the touch of his flesh against hers, only he came with her; wrenching her grip on the sword’s hilt and every

thought from her brain. The iron became heavy, very heavy. Heavy like her heart. She couldn't carry both. She let go.

Calgacus broke through the cheering crowd. "What going on?"

"Nothing really." Tancorix chuckled. "Our delicate Iceni princess got a little upset because she didn't have a rag to wipe her tears."

Morrigan charged, determined to claw the smirk off the warrior's face.

Calgacus's arm swept around her waist and lifted her from the earth. She kicked and tore at her captor and once again felt as powerless as she had ever been with the Romans. The fact struck sharp as any arrow.

"Wait, Morrigan. Owww!" Calgacus set her on her feet, but held her. "Tancorix, apologize before she tears my arm off."

"Why? She thinks she can kill Romans. We all would be safer with her sitting at her loom."

"I can and I'll start with him. Let me go."

"Morrigan. Stop." Calgacus jerked her around to face him. "Your mother needs you. She—"

"She doesn't need me." Morrigan glared at Tancorix. "And I *will* kill any man who thinks he can destroy me, including you."

"Go ahead. Try."

Calgacus kept his grip on her shoulders. "Morrigan, you can't just grab a sword and think you can kill a man."

"Then teach me."

Calgacus relaxed his grip. "Let us take care of the Romans. It's too much for a woman."

She stepped away, glaring at both men. "If you won't teach me, then I'll find someone who will."

Tancorix propped both hands on his hips. "Fine. If you want to learn to fight, be outside your hut before dawn kisses the skies."