

First Meeting

The morning air was crisp against my skin. My breath forming small puffs as I rode towards a town ahead of me. Cresting the hilltop, I stopped and looked down on what should have been a good size village, now nothing more than scattered remains of burnt houses and shops. Urging my mount into a slow trot down the hill and into what was left of the village. Dismounting, I slowly began to walk through the village, I could feel my anger build with each step I took.

I knelt down and drew my dagger to idly toy with a bit of burnt wood from the remains of the house before me. A soft growl escapes my lips and I looked about at the rest of the village, burnt to a cinder like this once large house. Rising to my feet, I followed the hoof prints with my eyes that lead out of town, heading north. Gripping the dagger tightly, I strode slowly to my dark gray steed, throwing myself into the saddle in one fluid movement, and then turned him towards the trail.

Casting one finally glance about, I kicked my horse into a fast gallop. As I left the burnt village behind, I screamed out a name, my voice filled with rage and anger.

Tovias

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Half a day passes as I closed the gap between me and my prey quickly. Knowing he couldn't be that far ahead of me, I stopped my horse, closed my eyes reached out with my mind to try and find him. Turning my head slightly in each direction before stopping, I opened my eyes the found myself looking north east; I spurred my horse again, feeling him just over the ridge. My horse lunged up the hill as my rage began to build, for I wanted nothing more than to teach him a lesson once and for all. Theses were my lands, come hell or demons, I would protect them.

Like a pale haired wraith, I charged down the other side of the ridge as I finally saw him riding slowly along with another. Screaming out his name as I rode towards him, my blonde hair streaming out in waves behind me. Pulling my horse up short of colliding with Tovias, I leaned over and shoved him out of the saddle. I watched as he fell from his jet black war-horse, landing on his side in the dust covered ground, he began to laugh uncontrollably.

“You bastard.... You knew, you knew these were my land, and you just couldn’t stop.” I yelled at Tovias as he laid laughing at me. Dismounting quickly, I stalked over and kicked him. Pulling a length of rope out of my belt, I tied Tovias’s hands to his feet, amidst laughter that had him almost to the point of not breathing. Kicked him again, trying to make him stop laughing.

“When will I ever be rid of you? Damn it all to hell, what in Mother’s name is so funny, Tovias?” I screamed at him. Tovias shuffled his body just enough to look around me and back towards the man still seated on his horse.

I turned and followed his gaze, looking to the other figure sitting atop his dark brown horse. Watching him through my hair that had fallen across my face, our eyes met, and my deep green to his cornflower blue. His raven hair fell almost to his waist but it had been tied back in a long braid, bound at the end with silver ribbon. His fair skin offset the soft grays and blacks he was dressed in. My heart first stopped and then began to pound, as wonder filled my head, my anger melted away as I stood, rooted to the spot by the gaze of the mysterious man.

Looking down at me with a half smile, an air of familiarity wavered about him, as if I should already know who he is. Some faded memory nagging at the back my mind, tangling just out of reach. Turning back to Tovias, I grabbed him up by his collar and yelled at him as I pointed back to the man in black.

“Who in the ever living hell is that?” I said, half kicking as I held the laughter bound Tovias by the collar. “Tell me Tova and I might let you live.” I finished in a low growl, my angry returning to my eyes.

“He’s.... he’s ... Ye gods this is too good.” Tovias spoke trying to hold back the laughter. Taking a few slow breaths as he turns enough to see them both and then grinned up at my, knowing I could have done allot worse. Pondering for a few moments, he then looked up at my and with a straight face.

“Um Tova, Who is this?” the figure in black spoke softly, licking his lips nervously with one hand on his sword. Unsure if the woman before him was a friend or foe.

“Selina, meet Kevaris Blackthorne.” He smiled and spoke, nodding to each of them in turn, he laid there grinning awaiting my reaction. “Kevaris, meet the fair haired wraith Selina”

Standing there rooted in place once again, a smile crept across my face as I turned back at Tovias. “Oh really now...?” I softly said aloud, which sent Tovias lapsing back into his fits of laughter.

Watching Kevaris, as a cat watches a mouse; I slowly paced around Tovias and plotted my next move. Shifting slightly in his saddle, he tried to hide the growing uneasiness that grew with each step I took. Watching me warily, he wondered if he should draw his sword or wait to see my next move. Tovias, meanwhile, could do nothing more than laugh hysterically. Stopping suddenly and I stood with my arms crossed, then grinned openly at Kevaris.

“Are you gonna come quietly or must I tie you up like this piece of meat?” I said to Kevaris, as I kicked Tovias with one foot, hoping to silence his laughter. “Well, which will it be? Speak fast or I may not give you a choice.” At which point I tilted my head, allowing my wealth of hair to spill over my shoulder and partly cover my face, as I watched him with a piercing gaze.

Walking slowly towards Kevaris, I dropped my hands to my side as I stopped next to his horse's head, gently petting its forehead and whispered softly into the animal's ear. I glanced at him every now and again to see if he had finally made up his mind on what to do.

Kevaris watched me carefully, his hand never moving from his sword hilt, he eyed me warily and wondered just what I could be planning. I looked up at him as I stepped away from his mount and I began to wonder if he would ever speak.

"Lady, I have no intention going anywhere with you. Further more, you will untie Tovia....." Kevaris said to me as he looked down at me from his saddle. He only paused with an odd look on his face, when I began to laugh. "What, if I may ask, is so funny?" he replied to my laughter. He then turned to the still laughter stricken Tovia for help, with none to be found. "Tova.....? Oh bother" was the only thing he said.

Starting to turn his horse away from me and the hysterically Tovia, he only got half way turned around before I grabbed his leg and flipped him out of the saddle. Falling in a controlled tumble, he rolled across the open ground and came to stop in a half kneeling position with his dagger drawn. His lips slowly curled into a snarl as I gave him a bemused look and slowly strode towards him, making no move for my weapons.

"Well, well, he has teeth after all." I chuckled softly, as watching him snarl. Walking slowly towards him, I stopped about 12 feet from him and just stood causally watching him. "Now, now, I haven't asked you to bite just yet." spoke to him as my smiles changed to a sarcastic smirk. "You need to learn to play nice. Now come along quietly and I shan't hurt you." Then with a wicked grin, "Well not much anyway."

Pulling a length of rope off my belt, I tilted my head and watched him, awaiting his next move. Holding one end in one hand and feeding the rope through the other, I made a rather large loop, and then tied a slip knot to close the loop. With a wicked grin, I began to pace him out in a wide circle, slowly round and round, pausing every now and again to give each other a measuring looks.

Stopping quickly I threw the rope at him, at the same time drawing energy to create a net, casting the net at him at the same time as the rope, knowing one would capture him. As the rope settled across his chest, I gave it a good tug, pulling the rope tight. Then I drew in the strands of the energy net, which encased his whole body save his head. I watched as his face first snarled then slowly turned to a look of horror as he realized he couldn't move and struggled against the net that held him.

“Let me loose!! Damn you, Let me free! I will have your head for this, my mother.....” he yelled at me as I moved closer and then silenced him with a cloth gag. Then I turned back to the laughter stricken Tovias and hefted him onto horse back, tying him in place before smacking his horse into a gallop towards home.

“Right....” I spoke aloud as I turned back to my still struggling prey. “You and I are gonna have a little talk, now.” I said, trying to hide the amusement in my voice, as I lifted Kevaris into his saddle and lead his horse next to mine. Mounting again I turned our horses away from the direction Tovias had left in; I chuckled and looked at him. “A very long talk indeed...” Then kicked my horse into a fast trot, leading him away from everyone and everything he had ever known.

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Night was falling quickly as we arrived at a small hunting cabin buried deep in the woods. The cabin stood in among the trees silently as the light began to fade. The two stories build had a well kept appearance as the roof was free of debris and the ground was free of vine

and other weeds. A long porch that ran the whole length of the front, around the right corner and beyond

Humming tunelessly, I stopped just outside the doorway; I dismounted and stretched for a moment before I looked back at my prize. His eyes were wide with fear and he had white knuckle grip on the saddle. He withdrew from me as I stepped up to remove him from the saddle. Chuckling softly, I carefully removed him from his saddle only to toss him over my shoulder like a sack of grain.

Still carrying him on my shoulder, I entered the dim interior of the cabin and closed the door behind me. Setting him onto the floor, I freed him of his bonds and then turning to light the candles around the room and fireplace. Waiting until my back was turned, he quickly got to his feet, made straight for the door. He stopped only when he heard me chuckle softly.

“You won’t be able to leave just yet.” I said to him over my shoulder, as I lit a fireplace with one wave of my hand. I slowly turned to look at him. “But you are more than welcome to try.” I spoke softly, and then waved my hands about the air above my head. “The wards won’t let either of us out, unless I want it too.”

Giving me an unbelieving look, he slowly reached the door and tried the handle. Finding it unlocked, he gave me a grin then opened the door and started to walk out. Toppling backwards as he seemingly had run into a wall, he laid there for a moment trying to comprehend what had just happened. Sitting up, he looked at the door only to see nothing that could have blocked his path. Getting back to his feet, he reached out with his arms, he got part way through the doorway before he finally came into contact with the ward. Watching him the whole time, I smiled and shook my head before muttering softly to myself.

“Care to listen to me now? I won’t hurt you, really I won’t?” I said as I crossed the room and picked up a few apples and a small round of cheese. “Here I am sure you are hungry, Gods know I am.” I finished as I walked over to him and placed an apple, part of the cheese round on a table

near him. Then I walked over and settled into an over stuffed chair to eat the remaining apple and cheese.

Eating slowly, we watched each other, very different views of what was to happen. Tossing the core of the apple into the fireplace, my mind raced as I thought back to the night he had been born. I could clearly tell that he had no memory of me or just who I was. Sighing softly, I knew that I had a fight ahead of me. Finishing the last bits of cheese, I stretched and yawned loudly.

“Gods I am tired. I don’t suppose you will be joining me in bed tonight.” I paused as he scoffed a bit. “I will bring you a few blankets and you can sleep where you like.” I said as I stood and walk into the bedroom and returned with 2 heavy blankets and a pillow. Dropping them on the couch near the fireplace, I yawned again and gave him a sleepy smile. “Good night then and try and get some sleep. We will talk more tomorrow.” I finished and returned again towards the bedroom, stopping at the door as he spoke softly.

“Why are you doing this? If its money you want, you needn’t go to all this trouble. I have more than enough to pay you.” He replied, idly turning the last bit of cheese in his hand over and over. Then looking up into my eyes, I could see the hidden fear in his eyes. Chuckling softly I shook my head before answering.

“Money has nothing to do with this, nor does power. I have very different plans for you, but I fear I am a both too tired to tell you all of them tonight. Now get some rest Kevaris, you will need it.” I said as I walked into the bedroom and softly closed the door, leaving him to ponder my last statement.

Stopping to pull my boot off, I flopped onto the bed and giggled softly to myself. Hoping I that things would work out quickly and the way I hope. Yawning again, I curled into a blanket then drifted off to sleep.

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A soft sound woke me; I laid there still with my eyes unopened as I tried to figure out what had awakened me. Another soft footfall told me all I need to know, I opened my eyes and look straight at Kevaris with a dagger in his hand as he knelt on my bed. Chuckling softly, I sat up slightly and looked at him, holding the blanket to my bare chest.

“Now really...? Did you think you would be able to sneak up on me?” I asked him, as he suddenly turned white then red. Following his gaze, I realized that he was staring at my bare shoulders. “What, have you never seen a woman without her clothes?” I said, trying not to laugh as he gave me a sudden indignant look. Dropping the blanket from my chest, I tilted my head and grinned. “Here have a better look.” At which he turned and sat down on the edge of the bed, staring at the wall next to my bed.

Chuckling softly, I reached out and played with his hair that was unbound and laying in thick waves down his back. Lightly pressing one finger against his back, I slowly ran it down to his waist.

“Now really, you must learn that I won’t bite.” I spoke softly, sliding slowly towards the edge of the bed where he was sitting. “I was hoping you would come in here. I wanted to talk to you about why I brought you here.” I said as he turned slightly to look at me, careful to avoiding looking at my bare flesh. He then shook his head and stood.

“Lady, I could care less *why* you brought me here. I only wish to leave and go home. And I will do so at my earliest opportunity.” Kevaris replied as he walked towards the door, at which he paused and glanced carefully back. “Now good night Lady, I shan’t enter this room ever again.” Then he walked through the door and softly closed it behind him.

Sighing softly, I lay back on the bed and stared at the canopy of my bed wondering to myself. I realized then that I was in for a longer haul than I had expected. Chuckling softly to myself, I knew that I was going to enjoy this more than I had first thought. Smiling, I slide back up to my pillows and settled back onto it and drifted back to sleep, knowing I would dream of days to come.

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Daylight was streaming in my window when I finally awoke. Yawning loudly as I stretched, I sat up and looked around my room for him but found an empty room. Shrugging to myself, I flipped back the covers and climbed out of bed, wincing as my feet touched the cold floor. Walking across the room, I opened my closet and picked out some scant clothing to wear. A pair of soft silk loose fitting pants and a small top, both a smoke gray in color, I took a moment to enjoy the feel of the silk sliding across my skin before sighing and turning towards the door and the person on the other side.

Without pausing, I opened the door and strode through, expecting him to still be sleeping. Glancing at the couch, I found it empty with a pile of neatly folded blankets. Turning slowly, I scanned the room for signs of him, of which I found none again. Suddenly a mouth watering scent filled my nose and I walked towards the kitchen area, to find him standing at the stove.

I leaned against the door frame and watched him for a moment, slightly bemused that he even knew what a kitchen was, let alone know what to do in it. I watched as he kept track of not one but three pans. I mentally made a note that I wouldn't have to worry about him starving if I wasn't here. Breaking through my thoughts, he spoke to me without even turning.

“Are you going to just stand there?” Kevaris said as he suddenly glanced in my direction. “Or are you going to help with all of this?” Chuckling, I pushed myself off the door frame and slowly walked towards him.

“I didn’t want to intrude; you seemed to be handling things just fine by yourself.” I said as I took over a pan with some pork strips in it. Carefully I turned the meat over and over, making sure it didn’t burn. “I must say that I am surprised at the fact that you can cook. Most men wouldn’t even know how to boil water, let alone all of this.” Chuckling, Kevaris gave me a bemused grin.

“My mother was very big about making sure I knew how to do things for myself. When you spend as much time on the road as I have, you learn to cook or go hungry. Lords know that Tova can’t cook and what he can cook, I am still not sure is edible.” He said as he pulled a pan of eggs of the stove and set them on the counter. “Besides, I have no intention of letting you cook for me. I figure that you wouldn’t put anything in here that would be of danger and I am quite capable of doing things myself.” He finished as he began to shuffle the food onto two plates. Nodding towards the table on the far side, I smiled and followed him, plate in hand.

Settling myself on the far side of the small circular table that was placed underneath a large bay window, I watched as he, in prim and proper fashion, placed a napkin on his lap and began eating with impeccable manners. Resisting the urge to chuckle as the look of absolute horror crossed his face, when I began to eat with my fingers. Slowly licking the grease off my fingertips, I looked at him with a sweet and innocent look.

“Is there a problem?” I asked as he stopped eating. “Do I have something on my face?” Grabbing my napkin of the table, I lightly ran it across my face even though I knew there was nothing there.

“Um, no there is no problem, per se.” Kevaris replied, trying to recover from his shock. “I was just a bit ... taken back by your... *eating style*.” He finished politely.

I couldn't help it; I had to laugh at his polite way of telling that I was acting like a heathen. Grinning, I took my dagger and stabbed at the piece of pork in front of me, and then I took a large bite off of it, letting some of the juices run down my chin. Chewing for a moment, I spoke around the half chewed chuck in my mouth.

“Sorry... I am a bit of heathen. Always have been, always will be.” I said as I half shrugged, setting the skewered meat down and wiped my chin before any of the grease hit the silk I was wearing. “Doubt I will ever change.”

“I see.” He said as he began to eat again, unsure of what to make of me now.

Chuckling softly, I watched as he mulled it all over. Watching him as I finished the food on my plate, I carefully plotted my next move, knowing I was going to have to take my time with him. I knew that if I rushed him, he would balk and would never trust me.

Standing, I took my empty plate to the marble sink which I had bought not that long ago. Pumping a bit of water, I carefully washed the ceramic plate and then placed it in one of the craved grooves on the edge. Returning to the table, I sat again and looked idly out the window as he finished eating. As I watched the meadow outside, a thought occurred to me and I decided to voice it.

“Tell me about your family. Do you have any brother or sisters, aunts or uncles?” I spoke softly as I continued to watch the meadow awaiting his answer. A few moments passed before he said anything.

“Why do you ask? Do you really want to know or are you just trying to fill idly silence?” He replied, looking at me. I turned and looked at him, smiling.

“Honestly, I would like to know. I will tell you of mine if you don’t care to go first.” I said, keeping my voice a soft soothing tone. At which he nodded slowly and gave me a half smile.

“Well then, where shall I begin?” He started, pausing to take his plate to the sink to wash it as I had. Following him, I leaned against the counter top and watched him carefully. “I guess my mother, Seliath, would be a good place. She is a very kind woman, with a rather large temper when she is upset. My father, Shannon, is a very easy going man; he always has a smile on his face. I have quite a few siblings, most of which are older than I am. Which mean that I am not important enough to worry about most days, so I decided to travel with my uncle” He paused as he placed the plate in the space behind mine. Chuckling he continued.

“You obviously have met my uncle Tovias before and I am not sure I want to know just how you do.” He finished, slowly shaking his head. Smiling as I shook my head at Tovias name, I nodded to prove he was right in not wanting to know about how we knew each other. “I know that I have another aunt, but I haven’t ever met her. Mother never would tell me much, just that she was a very wild person and wasn’t a very nice person to be around. I doubt I will ever get the chance either.”

I stood there for a few moments; I knew that Seliath was not going to be happy with me when I finally returned her son to her. But then I realized that I truly didn’t care what my sister would say. The only I was focused on right now was taming the man standing next to me. I knew that I would have to be careful on just how much information I gave him about myself.

“Well I guess it’s my turn.” I said as I pushed off the counter and began to move to the couch on the far side of main room. Taking a seat on one end, I waited until he had taking up a seat on the other end.

“I am the eldest of 3 children. My mother is someone who tends to get involved in things that she shouldn’t. I have no doubt that you will meet her someday soon; I have been hiding from her a bit too much lately. My younger sister by a few minutes is living happily with her husband and their children. I don’t see them much, which tends to suit her and I quite well.” I sighed before continuing. “I have never been big on conforming to what mother and my sister think I should be like.” half muttering to myself.

I shook my head and sighed again “Anyway, I also have a younger brother who is nothing but trouble. He tends to try and take things that are mine, which means that I have to keep a close eye on things.” Chuckling, I looked at him. “And there you have it. Not that much to tell other than that.”

“Who are they, your brother and sister I mean. What are their names?” He said, with a genuine looks of interest on his face.

“I doubt you would know them, Selene and Rointe. “ I said, hoping he didn’t know Selaith’s real name. As he shrugged, I breathed a sigh of relief. “I thought as much.”

Now I could relax, I thought more on how to get him to come around to the plans I had for him. Stretching in my seat, I yawned and looked about. I knew that I needed to start my morning work out, but I wasn’t sure what he would do. Getting to my feet, I looked at him and spoke bluntly.

“I fear that I must start my work out. You are welcome to join me if you like. “I said as I returned and walked back towards the kitchen, passing through it to the door on the far side. Pausing with my hand on the door, I turned to find that he had followed me. “You are welcome to use this anytime you like.” I said as I opened the door to the practice room and stepped in. “That door wasn’t there earlier.” Kevaris said as he stood dumbfounded.

“It was only hidden; it helps keep people out of here when I don’t want them to be.” I replied as I stepped into the room.

Inside was a rather large room, here and there ropes hung from different position and angles. Along the far wall was a set of wooden swords that had been weighted to feel more real. In the middle of the room was a canvas mat, which was cushioned heavily. Skylights in the roof let the sunlight pour into the room in broad swathes.

Without looking back at him, I walked over to the far wall and picked up a wood sword about the size of a small short sword. Then walking to the center of the canvas mat I stood for a moment and cleared my mind. Opening my eyes, I slowly began moving through fight positions in my sword dance. Slowly pacing the square mat, I lost myself in the movements and forms, slowly arching my body into the complicated moves. Carefully balancing the sword in front of me, I walked in slow circles, almost as if fighting an invisible opponent. In an elegance of sword dancing, I lost all sense of time.

Holding my sword out level as I stopped, my brain sudden let the world around me come rushing back in. Half an hour had past, I was standing there breathing heavily and sweating slightly. Setting the sword down on its point, I leaned slightly on it as I paused to catch my breath. Lifting my head, I turned and looked around the room to find Kevaris transfixed near the door.

Hefting the wooden sword in hand, I walked over and replaced it on the rack before walking to a small sink in the corner. Pumping a small amount of water, I took a rag from the edge and wet it, then slowly wiped it across my face and neck. Glancing back at Kevaris, I found him still standing near the door with an odd expression on his face.

“Are you all right?” I said, turning to look at him fully, wondering just what was on his mind. He stood for a few moments as if searching for the right words to say or to make his mind believe he had just seen that.

“There is nothing wrong. I am just slightly amazed by what you just did. Where did you ever learn such an art?” Kevaris replied, shaking his head slightly as if to remove an image from his head. “I have never seen anything quite like that.” Chuckling softly, I shook my head and walked over to him.

“It’s not really all that hard. I am sure you could learn it easily. It just takes some mental work to be able to shut out the outside world and focus on the movements.” I said as I stopped in front of him. “Would you like to learn it?” I asked, looking him straight in the eyes. Then I realized that this was the key I was looking for. Nodding slowly, an eager look crossed his face.

“If you are willing to teach me” He replied quickly, unable to hide the eagerness in his voice.

Bowing slightly, I stepped back out of his way and directed him towards the wooden swords. Watching as he carefully picked through them, I smiled as he chose a medium length broadsword. Grabbing the short sword I had used earlier, I walked ahead of him to the mat. I paused a moment to stretch, bending over backwards slowly then into a hand stand before flipping back onto my feet.

“Sorry, I had to stretch my back for a moment.” I said, noticing the red tint to his face. “Right, now to start... Hold your sword like this and follow my movements.”

I slowly held my sword straight out from my chest at shoulder height, then slowly dropping the point and arching it backwards until it rested just behind my right shoulder. Taking a small step to the left, I turned slowly sideways as I brought the sword over my head in a swipe in front of me until the tip was near my left foot. Flicking my wrist slowly, I moved the sword back to the spot it was in over my shoulder.

Flicking my wrist again, I moved my sword in a large swipe on my right side and stepped to the right, as I held the sword at waist level. Spinning in spot, I began to move faster as my body began to run through the dance yet again. Breaking through, I paused and blinked as I realized Kevaris was yelling at me.

“I said stop damn it!!” He yelled as I finally got the world back in a rush. “You need to slowly down. I can’t keep up.” Shaking my head again, I sighed and dropped my sword.

“Oh sorry about that...” I replied as I shook my head again. “It’s hard for me not to slip into the dance. But I am sure you get the idea of how it’s done. You will need to find your own rhythm for it. Let’s start with something a bit easier for me to focus on. Do you know any fighting stances?” I said, smiling as he nodded his head. “Good, show me.”

Stepping back of the mat, I watched Kevaris take a moment to stretch and settle into a comfortable pose. Moving slowly at first, he went through all the usual merc training stances and styles. Suddenly he turned and started going through a style that I knew all too well. Tovia had been showing him a few of his better tricks. Grinning to myself, I picked up the sword that was resting against me and stepped back onto the mat.

“I do believe that Tova has been sharing the family secrets with you.” I said then chuckled as he stopped and look at me, mouth agape again.

“How did you know that?” Kevaris stammered “He said that it was something only family knew and kept as a treasured secret.”

“Well it might help if I truly introduce myself.” I replied, bowing slightly to him. “I am Selina Thainen Silverthorne, not too distant cousin to Tova.” I hoped he would buy the story and not press me for too many question. “I think you may have heard Tova refer to me as Sel or Selia.” His eyes bugging out of his head told me all I needed to know. “Yes that was me.” I finished and gave him a wolfish grin

Standing there in total disbelief, Kevaris could only slowly look me up and down, wondering if everything Tovia had told him was true. Suddenly having the woman that Tovia

had warned him to stay away from cause she tended to go through Blackthorne men like water, left him wondering just what was going to happen now.

“Oh come now, He can’t of said that much about me. Or did he?” I said smirking, snapping him back to reality

“Well... He... he did actually warn me to keep away from you, something about going through men like water. Blackthorne men.... in particular.” He replied chuckling as I blushed and looked at the floor.

"You could call it a bad habit I can't get rid of. When it comes to Blackthorne men, I hopeless." I said before he could comment about my coloring. Changing the subject quickly, I moved on to things that were sure to interest him.

“Which is why I know so much about that family secret. Care to have a round with that style?” Nodding his head was his only answer.

Returning to the middle of the mat, I tapped my sword roughly against his then took up a relaxed stance. Taking a slow deep breath, he curtly bowed to me before launching himself at me. Easily stepping aside, I turned and slowly moved backward towards the edge of the mat. As he approached again, I lunged left and immediately hacked right trying to catch him off guard. Parrying easily, he smiled confidently. Stepping back quietly, I attacked him with another volley of hacks and slashes which moved almost to the end of the mat.

As we moved in slow circles around the mat, I could see that he fought move for move as Tova did. Grinning at him, I took the first opening that I knew was coming.

Stepping past his thrust, I danced forward and quickly tapped him on the nose with a finger before dancing away again. Trying not to laugh, I watched a shocked look flash across his face only to be replaced by a grim look of determination.