

BELLONA'S WAR RIBBON

By

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Chapter 1

Curran studied the impeccable glistening marble statue before him. Fine feminine features stared unseeing into the vast room, some of the best sculptor rendering he'd seen to date of the famous war goddess, Bellona. A heavy plate of chest armor guarded her naked breast, visible through the arm slit on either side. Her sword rested near her thigh gripped in her hand, as though she surveyed her battle from a point above it. Her hip was twisted, her leg propped on a haphazard stack of books. For such a beauty, the strength of will in that face was formidable.

He felt a tingle of a shiver cross his shoulders, envisioning the scene. The screams of the fighting, the smoke of the fires, the crush of the soil beneath his feet. Curran could place every molecule of such a battle, every nanosecond of action. It was enthralling.

His entire life he'd studied *ad nauseam* the Roman and Etruscan empires, delving into every crevice of history to find this goddess. Known as the wife, daughter and sister to Mars, Curran found it least distasteful to make her place standing next to Mars, as the god's sister. Considering how the gods and goddesses liked to play within their own gene pools, he certainly didn't want the wife, nor the daughter, of such an antagonistic male god.

Want?

He sighed in disgust, shifting his weight to his other foot. There it was again. His therapist had warned him the obsession would linger since his very livelihood revolved around the ancient deity and her evolution and demise, among others. At least now, he'd learned to separate the obsession from his real life. He'd never once believed he'd be susceptible to such a weakness, but he was.

He'd dreamed of her. He'd compared every woman he met to her. To the strength and fortitude of the goddess. She was brash, yet knew compassion when it came to the innocent of war. She invoked passion, demanded ferocity in every aspect of life. There was nothing soft about her.

Except in his dreams.

Lifting his hand, he rubbed his eyes, scattering his thoughts and his condemnations. "Damn it," Curran muttered. He knew he shouldn't have come to the exhibit, but it was a once in a lifetime opportunity. He'd *needed* to see her, needed to see some rendition of the face that had haunted him since he was twelve. No statue, painting or casting ever came close to the beauty his mind had given her. For twenty-one years, he'd had an exact image of the goddess.

None of the best or oldest ever came close to the woman he'd secretly loved and adored. A woman who was nothing but a figment of his imagination.

His hand dropped and he shook his head. "You're losing it," he barked with sheer mockery at himself.

Then, when he was about to turn, to leave the torture behind, his gaze noticed something near the base of her display. *That hadn't been there two minutes ago.* He leaned forward and studied the gold medal draped over the carved, propped torch flame at her feet. A wide, satiny red ribbon knotted the medal.

"I'm sorry. Did you drop that?"

Curran snapped up, facing a young lady in a dress suit and name badge. "No, I-

“Don’t worry. I’ll get it for you.” She promptly stepped up to the nine-hundred pound statue and lifted the medallion. “This is gorgeous. Be careful with the exhibits. Don’t step into one yourself.” She said that as if he might have and had dropped the ribbon and medal while being too curious for his own good.

“Uh... Okay.” He hesitated reaching for the medallion. “But this isn’t mine.”

“It isn’t?” Melanie, as her badge stated, held it up. The gold dangling on the ribbon sparkled. “This isn’t part of the statue. I wonder how it got there.”

Curran shook his head. “I’m not sure myself. I’ve been here for the last twenty minutes.”

“And you didn’t go within the boundary?” She didn’t sound convinced, eyeing him doubtfully.

“No,” he stated, confused. He knew that had *not* been there. Melanie wasn’t looking at him with any better of an expression. Okay, Curran knew his mental faculties could be tested, but not by something like this. There was reality, and there was...his imagination.

That medallion was real, very real.

“I’ll take it to the security office then,” Melanie said, then left him muttering under her breath about children and bad parenting.

* * * *

That night he called Clark. His voicemail message was returned before he’d even changed out of his teaching attire.

“Hi, Curran. How was it?”

Curran sat in his recliner, his socked feet wiggling as he stretched tired calves. “Magnificent.”

“How are you feeling about seeing it?”

Curran silently contemplated the question. Clark always referred to anything to do with the goddess and her renditions as an ‘it’, removing the humanizing Curran had lived with for two-thirds of his life.

“The statue was what I expected, actually one of the best I’ve ever seen. Beautifully carved.” Closing his eyes, he rested into his chair, letting his therapist pick his brain.

“Carved. I imagine it was very lifelike?” he queried.

Curran swallowed, determined to not impose his own image of Bellona on the well known marble statue. No matter how beautiful, it still didn’t compare. After hours of questions and delving, there had never been any inspiration unearthed behind Curran’s own personal infatuated image of the goddess. She simply was. Perfection.

“It was. The statue was dated around two hundred B.C., in the overlap of the Etruscan and Roman Empire.”

Clark chuckled. “Right up your alley, then?”

“Without a doubt.” Curran relaxed, feeling at ease about the whole episode. Nothing had come of it, other than a few mocking curses at his own willingness to desire something that didn’t exist.

“I want to see you next week, but I believe you have hit a stable road, Curran. This was a good test and it sounds like it went well.”

“I think it did. I was more interested in the art and the exhibition as a whole, than on a single woman’s existence or non-existence.” *As the case may be.*

Pleasure rippled through the phone. "I'm glad for you Curran. See you next week?"

"Same time as usual."

With a pleasant goodbye, Curran ended the call. His eyes remained closed and he let his mind wander. A cloud of semi-awareness unknotted his muscles. A few deep breaths sent him into a meditative state.

That was when it all went to Hell in a handbasket.

Drifting, his mind returned to the exhibition hall, paintings hanging like giant windows into the past at every turn. Rich fabrics adorned mannequins, dressing them in the clothing of eras gone-by. Cases presented breathtaking jeweled treasures from around the world.

There, before him, stood Bellona in every tangible way. Thick walnut hair flowed down to her waist from beneath the glistening bronze of her horse-mane helmet. The deadly point of her spear sought the ceiling, her grip snug, but not tense; aware, not threatened.

Beneath the crown of her helmet, he met the most unusual eyes. Jade green, but lighter, pale jade, a smoky jade. He knew her face, he knew every curve of her sensuous mouth, the proud tilt of her chin. It was the woman he'd envisioned since puberty.

Walking into the room as dreams will, he made no sound yet she whirled her focus and pinned him, freezing him where he stood. His heart thundered.

"You will come to me," she said, her voice husky, compelling.

Curran quivered, inside his dream and without. Never in his life had she spoken to him directly. "You are not real." He thought he spoke the denial. He heard the words, but his lips didn't move. Curran fought to eradicate the image before him. He'd spent the last two years breaking this obsession. He would not succumb again!

Those eyes narrowed. "You defy me?" she asked, so quietly, his mouth went dry.

"You are not real," he shouted. "You have never been real."

She lifted a little and laughed, and not with humor. "Not real? If I am real, then you are real. If I bleed, so will you!"

In a fluid motion, she hefted her spear, catching it in a strong palm then hurtled it right at Curran.

With a shout, he jerked awake in his chair. Panting for breath, it took several minutes for the dream to fade into the ether of his mind.

Shaken, he rubbed a cold hand down his face. It was dark and a peek at the clock told him he'd dozed for more than two hours. He'd called Clark intending to rest then eat. Now his stomach was tossing too much to even want to think about dinner.

Sitting up, he propped his elbows on his knees, furrowing fingers through his blond hair. *What is happening to me?* All he did was visit a fucking museum! Even before he went to get help for his obsession, she'd never spoken to him, and she'd definitely never tried to hurt him! Dream or not, seeing that spear flying at him wasn't something he wanted to relive.

Throwing himself forward, he launched from his chair. Shower. He'd take a shower and force the dream out of his memory to sleep. He could do that.

Stripping, clothes landed where they may, unconcerned tonight about keeping things even remotely neat. Entering the bathroom, he cranked the heat up on the shower, steam billowing to fill the room within a very few short moments.

Stepping within the cubical, he groaned in pleasure when the scalding water battered his chest, feeling the heat soak into him as much as the water slicked him with moisture. A moment later, he adjusted the spray and reached for the soap. Building a lather, the slippery feel on his skin seemed to send shocks and tingles of awareness from his neck to his toes. He shook himself. It was the affects of the dream, that was all.

Yet when his palms roamed over his chest, his nipples tightened into hard, demanding little discs of pleasure.

A grunt of frustration echoed off the shower walls. He hadn't reacted like this in months. It had been a sign his mind had been improving. He wanted to cry with the frustration, failure beating at him with haggard fists as he ran his hands down his flat stomach. His fingers flared, a hard shudder rifling his spine. Sensation slammed into him, his eyes dropping to half-mast, a slow groan wound from his chest. He couldn't help it, or himself.

Then he watched his cock twitch and fill, almost with a mind of its own rising into the falling spray of the shower.

Her image had been so clear, before he'd defied her. Utter beauty.

"No!" Wrenching himself from the images and growing hunger, he planted his hands on the shower tile, shoving his head beneath the spray, gulping air and mist at the same time. "I am stronger than this! You do not exist!"

A trail of water formed and wound down his hunched back and he shivered. The well of water maneuvered with the same speed as a tantalizing finger, zigzagging oh-so-precipitously down the ridges of his spine. Tension sent tremors to every limb. His fingertips turned white where he tried to dig right into powder blue ceramic tile with his building anger and desire.

Inch by inch, second by second, the volcanic heat roaring through his blood lessened.

Breathing easier several minutes later, with his driving lust under control once more, he straightened and grabbed the soap again, thinking about anything to block her image from his mind. He reiterated the lecture of the week. He recanted the monthly meeting with the Department Dean, item by item.

Jade green. Who has eyes that color?

He pinched his lips and redirected himself again. Curran needed to remember to give the curriculum to his aide on Monday so he could...*run his hands down her back, gripping at the feminine softness of her waist to hold her. He pounded into her heat, slick and hot, her hungry whimpers filling his ears.*

"What?" His eyes snapped open.

Looking down, he wanted to cry but moaned instead. Tightening his fist, he gave in, exhausted and unable to fight the sensations curling around his penis.

Flattening a hand on the shower wall, he closed his eyes and brought her back, bigger than IMAX, to fill every inch of his memory and body with her presence in a way he hadn't in months.

"Goddess," he murmured. Water sluiced over his body, but he no longer cared. His only goal was release, craving the one woman he could never have, because she didn't even exist. But it ceased to matter as he swirled his palm over his cockhead. Fully aroused now, he ached.

Clenching his jaw, he stroked his length, riding the skin back and forth, imagining everything he'd locked away, inviting it even. His fist moved over his flesh,

imagining her pussy walls fluttering around him, claspng at him, sucking him in deeper as her orgasm neared.

“No, sweet goddess. You threw a spear at me,” he admonished in a lust-dazed voice. “I’m going to fuck you until *I* say you can come.”

A feminine groan filled his ears and he thrust harder into his hand, heat settling between his legs to tease and torment his balls. Air rasped through his lungs. *Her hair lay plastered to her back from the running water and he shoved it aside, bending over her to thrust deeper. Her breasts jiggled with the intense thrusts of his hips driving into her. Water cascaded in streams from rose red nipples. He licked his lips, lost in sensation.*

Adjusting his position, he straightened, sliding his other hand beneath his body to tug and play with his balls. His groan filled the shower cubicle. Glancing down, the red head of his cock seeped seed. Away from the shower spray, he rubbed it beneath his palm as he fucked his fist.

“Shit,” he ground out. *He wanted to drive himself balls deep into her welcoming body. Wanted to feel every inch of her clinging to him. Begging him to let her come.*

His balls began to tighten, the burn gnawing at his spine growing. “Come with me,” he whispered, lost in the euphoria. His shaft thickened within his fist, his hips pumping into the tight cage of his hand as his orgasm raced through his veins. God, he wanted this so much! Wanted her.

He shook his head roughly. He was sick. Curran knew it, but fuck, it felt good. *She pushed into him, begging and he thrust harder, jolting her every time he filled her, feeling her stretch around his girth, then tighten as though she never wanted to let him free. Her cries rose, drowning everything with her lusty wail. Her orgasm was sweeter than any honey, stronger than any liquor.*

“Yes! Shit!” He shouted and jerked, spraying the shower wall with spurts of white. Pumping into his fist, he emptied himself until there was nothing left.

Trembling, he sank down to the shower floor, and for the first time in over a year, he cried, fearing for his sanity.