

Legatus

Saxa's Journey – Book Two

By

Pasha Baker

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Chapter One

For the first few days without Master Gaius, things did not seem much changed in the centurions' tent. Hemsgale and Saxa were busy taking down and setting up camp whenever Centurion Bors was ordered to move, along with the many other chores required for surviving life in a Roman legion. Saxa tended to remain hidden in the tent for the most part, feeling ill at ease without her master's presence living among thousands of hardened soldiers. Other than that, Saxa felt like things were going well, and would only be better when Gaius finally returned.

"I do not like her." Bors' gruff voice woke her one night. "She thinks she is still a priestess, still higher than me. She refuses to smile, does not stand when I enter the room and she barely talks."

"Give it time, Master. I am still teaching her the ways of being a slave, but I agree; she still believes she is due the respect of a priestess. If you'll just be patient with me, I promise you I will make sure things get better." Saxa smiled through her tears as their voices continued in an even quieter tone she could no longer make out.

Hemsgale does like me; she just has to defend me from her master. He is right, I do not like him, but for Hemsgale's sake, I will try to show him the manners due a master from his slave—even though I am not his slave. Saxa went to sleep feeling a bit more content than she had for a while since Gaius had left.

Saxa tried to use any means she could to show her gratitude and understanding to Hemsgale, but the stoic slave kept her distance, wearing her anger like a shield. Within a week their troops had joined with the Roman army's main camp. Though they found a spot in a bare area, other soldiers soon surrounded them with their own tents. A few days after their arrival, Saxa stood at the edge of the hill they chose to camp upon, amazed to find the Roman army encompassing the hillsides as far as she could look, line after line of tented tanned hides stood and the grounds teemed with men. At the center stood a grouping of camps larger and more solid than the rest where she assumed the highest officials were stationed.

"Come Saxa. We must forage herbs and roots for dinner," Hemsgale said as they finished cleaning up that afternoon. Saxa choked on her drink she was so surprised at the older slave's

addressing her directly. Hemsgale grabbed two baskets, holding one up for Saxa to take.

“I’m glad you invited me along, Hemsgale! Learning about types of herbs, berries and roots were some of my favorite lessons at temple.” As they wandered through the brush and trees Saxa felt truly relaxed and happy for what seemed the first time since she’d been abducted; the hiking and foraging reminding her of when she was a young apprentice. “Sister Ingrid took me on almost all of her excursions into the mountains.” Saxa grew excited when she spied a plant with pale, fuzzy leaves. “This is lamb’s ear! It is very good for ointments, especially for cuts and scrapes. We should definitely gather some.” She sliced near the base of the plant with the tiny knife Hemsgale had given her to use, “There see, if you leave the root and some of the leaves, the plant will quickly revive and we can come back for more at a later time...” Saxa patted the leaves gently. Hemsgale grunted as she brushed by Saxa, grabbing at what was left of the plant and pulling it up root and all. Saxa stared after her as the woman presented Saxa with her back as she continued her walk. *Why does she make this so difficult?* Saxa sighed as she picked up her pace to join the older woman. When their baskets were full and the two were tired and dirty and the sun had almost set, Saxa joined Hemsgale at the edge of a high rocky bluff that overlooked a valley of endless trees.

“Give me your knife.” Hemsgale held out her hand. Saxa frowned but knew it was just the woman’s naturally surly demeanor. She did as told.

“Now the basket...” The blonde woman didn’t even look up as she started reorganizing the herbs and mushrooms in her own basket.

“That’s all right, I can organize it myself.” Saxa settled down on the ground to do so.

“No.” Saxa jolted to the feel of something hard and cold against her cheek. “Hand me your basket.” Hemsgale pressed her knife harder against Saxa’s skin.

“You can have it, Hemsgale.” Saxa carefully pushed her basket away.

“Stand up you silly, fat bitch.” Hemsgale annunciated every word and Saxa, no longer daring to question, moved backwards as Hemsgale advanced.

“Hemsgale... please,” Saxa stumbled forward when she felt soil begin to crumble due to her being close to the cliff’s edge. “I really am sorry for my betrayal. I didn’t mean to insult you or our masters by running off. I only wanted to go home, and now I no longer do. I want to be with Master Gaius. Please, can we not be friends again?”

Hemsgale’s brow furrowed as she shook her head. “We were never friends.” The other

woman's lip lifted in a sneer. "I know you don't care for Master Gaius. You are not worthy to be desired by such a man as Master Gaius. He deserves someone who would fight for him, someone who would love to do things for him, to cook for him, to sew for him, to clean for him. He deserves a woman like me. So, throw yourself over this cliff and preserve Centurion Gaius some dignity. Let him forget you and find himself a slave who is honored to belong to such a good soldier as he is." Hemsgale quirked her head in the direction she wanted Saxa to go as she continued to advance, forcing her backwards towards the sharp, rocky precipice. "If you leap high, it might make your death quicker."

"I do care for him, Hemsgale, please! We are planning to marry when he returns."

"Ha!" Hemsgale let out a sardonic laugh. "You think that makes things better?" She squinted as she shook her head. "The way you abuse that poor man; I do not like you. Master Bors does not like you. We agree that you are no good for Master Gaius." Hemsgale shoved her, causing Saxa to slip causing the rocks to loosen into a small avalanche that tumbled down the sharp decline. Before she fell, Saxa made a hard lurch forward and to the side in order to avoid Hemsgale's knife as she grabbed at the hardy scrub brushes that clung to the edge of the rocks. With an angry shout Hemsgale slashed her blade down, striking Saxa near her shoulder. Saxa pulled away, but Hemsgale continued, her blade cutting into Saxa's skin. Saxa cried out as she grabbed at Hemsgale's ankle, causing her to stumble and fall to her rump. Knowing she had been given only a moment, Saxa pulled herself up, grasping desperately at the brush to pull herself over the ledge, tripping and scrambling up the rocky edge until she was able to fall against the hillside away from the cliff. Panting with effort, her reprieve was short-lived as she realized Hemsgale was rising, lifting herself to standing at her impressive height of almost a foot taller than Saxa and glaring fiercely as she righted her blade to strike again. Saxa still numb to the idea that Hemsgale meant to kill her, stared up at the other woman, fixated on how her messy, pale hair and fierce expression gave her the look of an avenging goddess from some northern isle. Saxa squawked as she fell back, Hemsgale's blade registering on her shin. Finally coming to, Saxa wrenched herself away, scrambling further up the hill as Hemsgale shouted and stabbed again. The blade sliced through her ragged cloak, hitting Saxa in the outer thigh, but she knew she had to keep moving. Finding a new embankment, Saxa rose to standing and began to run. Unable to think, she raced through the trees back towards the Roman encampments, not daring to look back.

“Stupid little whore! You think you are better than me? Better than the Romans? You don’t even deserve to be a Roman slave!” Hemsgale’s voice sounded close behind.

Saxa had no idea where she was going, she only knew that if she dared stop for breath the woman behind her would kill her. A tree’s grasping root caught Saxa’s foot, causing her to take a tumble down into a ravine. Hitting bottom, Saxa found herself in a dried creek bed. She cried out as she attempted to rise, grasping her ankle at what felt like a thousand tiny arrows piercing it, looking up to find her pursuer standing at the top edge watching her. Hemsgale took only a brief pause before she began to make her way down the rocks and dirt. Saxa cried out as she forced herself to move on, grateful to find her limbs relatively unbroken as she fought the high bushes further into the trees, further away from Gaius’s camp.

“Get ready to be chopped into bits, little bitch!”

Saxa finally broke through the thick brush into a clearing, slowing as she saw a file of Roman army tents. A sense of relief filled her and she turned to view her tormentor as she took several long strides into the broad opening. Hemsgale halted at the edge of the trees. Saxa, seeing the camps made her attacker reluctant, hurried to work her way deeper into the vast lines of officers’ tents, walking past a few soldiers and many slaves sitting and working at their sites.

“Hey! Where did you come from?” Saxa’s eyes met one soldier’s as he stared in amazement at seeing a woman stumbling near his tent. He looked about to see if anyone was with her before shoving aside the armor he’d been working on to stand. Knowing that a horny Roman soldier was not much safer than the woman she was fleeing, Saxa ducked back into another stand of trees and hurried further into its depths.

After fighting several more expanses of prickly brush, small valleys and heavy woods, Saxa stopped to lean against a tree to catch her breath. “Dear Freyr! Heed me please! Give me your knowledge and strength. I am sorry I have failed you. Please show me through this predicament!”

Men’s deep voices forced Saxa to throw herself into another thick bramble of brush. She stiffened as they drew in close and she could hear the large group as they made their way nearby, not seeing her tucked deep inside the brambles and leaves. When she was certain they had passed, she began to pull herself from the brush only to find her clothes a tangled mess about her, the rough fabrics caught tight by the many thorns and twigs she had forced herself deep into, her work only seeming to trap her even further.

At least I am safe. I will stay here till nightfall when I will less likely be seen. Then I will take the trail through the trees and begin my trek north. Exhausted, Saxa laid her head against a branch, too bewildered to cry, too tired to care anymore. Funny how all I want is to see my master again now that I am certain I never will. I am sorry I fought with you Master Gaius. This hunger in my chest hurts worse than the one in my belly. If you were here, none of this would have happened. Saxa closed her eyes, almost smelling his musky scent and feeling his protective embrace around her. Goodbye, my dear Master. Please know that I love you.