

A MASTER'S DISCIPLINE



TARYN WILLIAMS

BLUSHING BOOKS

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CHAPTER 1



The doors to his presence opened abruptly. A small, dirty, snarling bit of baggage hurtled through them and into the chamber to turn immediately and bang loudly on the doors that had already closed behind her, assaulting them with her body, screaming at the top of her lungs—to the point that his ears hurt. Trying to use her own small body as a battering ram in order to escape the room, she screamed about who she was or who she used to be—a princess—and that she would have the head of everyone who was involved in her kidnapping, as well as the heads of all of their families and friends. According to her, entire villages would be slaughtered because of this insult to her person and her station.

She was dirty, disheveled, fierce, and feral as he watched her quietly from his desk, well practiced at appearing dispassionate when he was anything but.

This one was smarter than some of them—which seemed to be an unfortunately rare commodity in females, in his experience—or at least in the females that his lackeys were able to procure for him. She had quickly switched to turning her shoulders, alternating sides, to the seam of the door. Not that it was going to help

her any, although she didn't know that, but he was enjoying watching her efforts, regardless of how futile they would prove.

Eventually, though, as they always did—those who even bothered to put up the fight—she began to realize that she wasn't getting anywhere. Desperation yielded in her to anger rather than despair, which he was much more in favor of. The ones who simply wept all the time were useless, as far as he was concerned.

She kicked uselessly at the door, inevitably stubbing her toe and swearing in—what language *was* that—when she did so, stopping for a very short moment to stand on one leg and hold her foot, then back to kicking, but this time, with the other foot and much more gingerly.

Not wishing to allow her to hurt herself, he rose, and she gasped, as if she hadn't realized that she wasn't alone in the room, backing away from him as he advanced.

But, despite his size, he was too quick for her, easily trapping her in the nearest corner despite what seemed like her practiced efforts to get away from him. He countered each one of them, his admiration for her growing at both her apparent and unusual skills as well as her relentlessness. She didn't stop trying to escape until he'd pressed his body against hers—touching her in no other way at that moment—until she stilled.

She was so small and slim that he'd easily overpowered her but without inflicting one iota of harm, either, which was more consideration than she'd expected.

Instead, he watched her eyes flare in surprise when he took a small step back from her. Not one large enough that would allow her to slip past him, but big enough that he could crouch before her, reaching out to curve his long, thick fingers around the back of her ankle, startling her almost to the point of falling. She managed to steady herself, scrupulously not touching him to do so, but doing her best not to let him handle her, either. As if she was a fractious mare who didn't like to have her hooves cleaned.

Again, without hurting her, he did with her as he pleased, placing her foot on his massive thigh and holding it there with one hand as he examined it carefully with the other. He could see a bruise forming on her big toe, and the nails were broken and chipped on it as well as her other toes, but there were no other obvious injuries. He rubbed her foot almost absently before reluctantly releasing it to her.

As soon as she regained use of it, she tried to bring it up to kick at him. Although he could see that she was clearly terrified to do so, she did it, anyway. But he was too close for her to truly connect with his shin, and even if he had stepped back to allow her to assault him in this way, it would have been as if an ant had decided to kick a draft horse.

He had to admire her guts. This one had spunk. So many of them didn't by the time they got to him, despite the restrictions and requirements he had placed on the men who recruited women for him.

While she was still trying to hurt him, he turned and walked away from her, so quickly that she was still kicking as he did so. He was—with those long strides of his—halfway across the room, having left her kicking wildly at the air before she noticed his absence, she was so incensed. But now was most thoroughly insulted by his complete indifference.

He'd even turned his back on her, apparently feeling that she posed no threat to him whatsoever.

Her anger got the better of her—as her mother had often warned her against—and she flew at him from behind, her swift approach as quiet as she could make it, so as to preserve the element of surprise.

Somehow, though, he had sensed her approach and turned—just as she was poised to attack him—to simply hold his hand out at her chest level, right over her sternum, feeling the incredible warmth of his hand on the delicate skin between her breasts and

apoplectic to realize that her nipples were rising because of its presence there. It stopped her in her tracks with a bone-jarring jolt, and he held her there, his fingers gathering and thus destroying what remained of her ragged garment, but not so much as leaving a scratch on her as he completely neutralized her in the most humiliating way possible.

She could move—and she did—she could swing at him with arms that were free, kick at him with feet that were the same. But his arms were so long—and hers so lacking—that she couldn't reach him, nor could she move as his hand crept up—taking her dress with it—to consolidate its hold, when she rapidly grew tired of not meeting her goal, and encircle her neck, very nearly wrapping itself around all of it.

But again, simply keeping her where he wanted her—never hurting her in the least—maintaining just enough of a hold to subdue her, but never contracting his fingers or choking her in any way. Which was somehow much worse than if he'd gutted her from quim to collarbone.

When she began to cough and choke, it was from her own renewed efforts at getting to him, not his at stopping her.

It didn't take her long to realize how counterproductive her actions were, and, shortly, she stopped fighting and simply stood there before him, panting heavily and glaring fiercely up at him.

He allowed himself a very small smile in recognition of her bravery—especially if she had any inkling of who he was—and knew that she still held herself tense and at the ready. As any good warrior would, the errant thought popped into his mind.

"How have my men treated you?" he asked calmly, in her language.

That set her off again, as he had known it would, and he simply stood there—almost seeming bored—as she again tried to harm him but managed to do nothing but exhaust herself in the pursuit.

When she could do nothing but stand on shaking legs, still captured by him quite humanely, she began to rant at him, instead. "I am Princess Vellia SeDonna, daughter of Donna SeRequia of Iveronne. And I will *not* be treated like this! You will return me to my people immediately—"

To her horror, the hand around her neck tightened just enough that she had no other option but to move the way he encouraged her to, such that she ended up being held around the waist and bent over at his side, where he proceeded to swat her as if she was a three-year-old.

The skirt of her dress—like the rest of it—was tattered and worn, just barely hanging in thin, obscenely short strips of material down from the waistband. It served as absolutely no protection from the enormous palm that descended on her vulnerable bottom five—seven—ten times, each swat distinct and crisp and infinitely painful, especially to someone who had never known anything other than physical affection from men such as her father and her brothers.

But the pain—at least at first—was much less than the humiliation of having been neutralized, rendered immobile then punished as one would punish a child.

When he stopped, he left his hand on her behind, as if in warning. "How have my men treated you?" His tone betrayed no emotion at all. He was simply repeating his original question.

And she stubbornly repeated to him what she had already said, but, this time, he interrupted her much more quickly than before by continuing the application of his hand to her cheeks for another fifteen or so smacks that were breathtakingly hard. And, although she valiantly tried to keep talking, before he was halfway through them, she was only able to get out one or two words between the moans he forced from her lips with each casual swat, and by the end, she had given up speaking entirely—except in the distressed sounds he so easily drew from her.

"How have my men treated you?" came the same question again when his hand stilled.

Instead of answering him, she tried to find a way to bite him, or kick him, or otherwise inflict some portion of pain on him in repayment for the agony he was causing her. But the way that he was holding her, not to mention his overwhelming strength and size, neatly prevented her from doing so.

He didn't wait very long for a response he could deduce wasn't coming, and so the spanking began again, and this time, he laid down another twenty-five on her backside that had her screaming long before he was through.

"How—" he began again.

"Terribly! Abominably! Horribly!" she yelled at the top of her lungs, and even though she'd answered him, he gave her another ten slaps.

She wanted to call him to account for smacking her when she'd done as he'd asked her to, but she didn't have the breath or, she was horrified to realize, the will to do so.

"*Don't* interrupt me, my little warrior," he warned quietly. "So you were mistreated? If so, you must have many bruises. Show them to me."

He turned her abruptly loose to stand in front of him, and it was all she could do to keep her hands in front of her and not reach back to soothe the area he'd scourged so thoroughly.

"I am not going to show you any such thing, and it is improper of you to even think of asking a princess to reveal herself to you in that way. It's improper for you to even *speak* to me, you filthy, lying, murderous barbarian, much less actually lay your hands on me! My mother will castrate you, then force you to consume your own genitals before she drives a knife into your heart for having—"

She found herself in the same position she'd been in, again, before she had a chance to begin to defend herself or find a way not to end up where he wanted her. And what was worse was that

she had caught a look at his face as he slowly bent her to his will, only to see the hint of a smile on it, as if she was no more than an amusement to him.

This time, from the first awful smack to the last he placed on her already beleaguered flesh, she lost every bit of dignity she possessed, weeping and wailing in a manner that made her cringe at her own behavior, but that she had absolutely no ability to stop.

In the matter of a few short minutes, he'd robbed her of her pride and her sense of self, her dignity and her honor. The pain was bad, yes, but combined with the humiliation—which she was completely unfamiliar with—it laid her low, indeed. She was not a noble princess from a long line of queens; she was not a well-trained, disciplined warrior. In his hands, she was a child. A feckless, uneducated female of no worth at all. A slave. And a blubbering, keening, mindless one, at that.

She was seconds away from actually begging—*begging*—him to stop, when he finally did, letting her go unexpectedly, then reaching out to steady her when she stood up and nearly fell over again. She ripped her elbow out of fingers that were gently trying to help her rather violently once she was steadier, although she also found herself feeling somewhat grateful to him that she hadn't been reduced to quite that point. Yet.

But then, she'd only been in his presence for about twenty minutes. There was—she was just beginning to comprehend—probably going to be more than enough time for him to do just that—and with horrifying deftness.

"Show me the bruises."

The big man remained annoyingly calm throughout, while she had been reduced to near hysteria.

Forcibly straightening her back and lifting her chin to look him in the eye, which she fully expected to be punished for, she stated, trying to mimic his placid demeanor, "I have no such bruises."

One eyebrow rose in what she felt was mock surprise. "Did you lie to me, then?"

"No!" The word burst from her mouth with an eagerness that was shameful, as if she'd do anything to keep him from spanking her again. "I mean, I have definitely been abused—starting with my abduction, in the first place, and ending with your atrocious mishandling of me since I was thrown into this room."

"But no bruises? Not a scratch? Were you starved? Stripped? Molested? Raped?"

Her face reddening at his increasingly improper suggestions—as well as the sobering realization that none of those things had happened to her—she nonetheless spat, "I was *kidnapped*. I was *touched*. My person was searched, and I was disarmed. I was kept locked in my cabin for days on end."

It was the last thing she said that he latched onto with a frown. "You were *never* allowed out?" He moved to lean against his desk, and she hoped she had hidden the way she had flinched as he did so, until she realized that he didn't mean to punish her again. "And I think that it would be a kindness to inform you that lying to me—even though I am but a filthy, lying, murderous barbarian—would result in the same punishment as you have been experiencing, but with an even more effective implement."

She couldn't control the way his words made her blanch white after her cheeks were made so red before, but she still forced herself to take the few steps between them to stand much too close to him for her own comfort.

And, not that she'd ever tell him so, and not that she wanted to notice, but he smelled much better than most men of her recent acquaintance—and even those of her rank at home. His person was obviously very clean—his dark hair was short but combed, his face washed, beard trimmed neatly—even his fingernails did not show the usual dark, dirty crescents beneath him, and his breath smelled, surprisingly, of wintergreen. His clothes were impeccable,

stylish, and almost obscenely well-tailored to such a giant of a man, but not particularly flashy, as if he felt no need to flaunt his wealth—at least not in the way of clothing.

With her eyes still locked to his, she warned in a tone that she hoped was calm, "I have not given you leave to call me by my private name. You may address me as princess, or Princess Vellia."

That drew a deep chuckle from him, the blatant discourteousness of which annoyed her in the extreme. "As you wish." He even inclined his head a bit to her, then executed a bow of sorts, saying, as she had instructed him to, "Princess," but doing so in a way that let her know he was thoroughly amused by her demand that he do so.

Remaining where she was, Vellia drew a deep breath, remembering, because of the sizzling sting in her rump, that she needed to answer his question and hating that she remembered any such thing.

"I was kept locked in my cabin against my will for days on end."

Both eyebrows rose, and she did not consider that a good thing. He shifted slightly, and she started, although she knew he had done so on purpose, just to make her react the way she did. "You are not answering my question."

Nothing more.

But she knew he expected more of an answer from her, and she found herself very unwilling to push him far enough that he might punish her again.

With her eyes firmly on the first button of his shirt, she told him what he wanted to know. "I was allowed out only occasionally."

"Perhaps when it was not storming, and thus, you would be less likely to be swept into the sea?"

Bristling, she replied, "I have no idea what might drive my captors to decide to free me for a short time, only to find myself shoved rudely back into my cabin at their crude whims."

"Other than that, they did not touch you?"

"Isn't that enough?" she returned imperiously, only to see him again try—unsuccessfully—to hide a smile at her expense.

As entertaining as her responses were, he probed further. "You were not molested?"

"Constantly! Any excuse to put their filthy—"

"Princess!" he interrupted sharply, still not having raised his voice. "Being deliberately obtuse is just as bad a sin, as far as I'm concerned, as not answering me at all. Were you actually molested? Did anyone on board—or elsewhere—have carnal knowledge of you?" He didn't bother to add the extraneous, "against your will".

He saw the color rise in her cheeks, staining them a becoming shade of pink. As much as she wanted to lie and tell him that she had, she did not on two counts—one that she did not want to give him cause to do something as unthinkable as try to discover proof of her claims on her person, and two, she was not given easily to lying—even to him. Not that it mattered to her in the least, but she also thought that, had she answered in the affirmative and given him proof therein, it would not go well for those who were found to have done so. Not well at all.

"No—but that does not make it any less of an offense for them—or you—to touch me."

He nodded. "Yes, yes, I understand. Filthy, lying, barbarian hands violating the sanctity of your royal self, etcetera, etcetera." He threw her words back at her mockingly, impatiently, although he had no doubt that the hands—as well as the rest of them—of the men who captured her were probably quite rank. "I might comment, however, at the risk of being indelicate, that you are not—in your present state—altogether...how shall I put it...odor free?"

He levered himself away from the desk to move behind it, to a small, beautifully decorative gong that was hanging unobtru-

sively in the corner of the room, using the small, equally gorgeous mallet, both of which seemed to be jewel encrusted, the quality and amount of which made anything she had seen before pale in comparison. And those were not on grand display in any manner, but rather on an instrument used to summon servants.

The doors she had done her best to try to get through, a few minutes ago, were flung open immediately, and a small man wearing a hat that was much too small for him cocked to one side—as if it was an ornament rather than an actual hat—came in and prostrated himself in front of the man who was tormenting her currently.

"Ubu, have someone—not whatever servant she might have come here with, but one of our own—take her to the baths. She smells vile and wants cleaning up. I shall be busy all afternoon, but present her to me again, after the evening meal, tonight. And see that she eats something. She's much too skinny."

The man in question rose as soon as he was given something to do other than lie face down on the floor in front of the man who was obviously his ruler, bowing frequently and obsequiously to everything that was being said to him.

Then he said something that was obviously in their native language that caused the bigger man to come to stand by her again, looking down at her intimidatingly. "Well, we have ways of making recalcitrant slaves eat when they don't want to, don't we? Although I have heard that they are *much* less than pleasant."

With that, he gave them both his back, and she desperately wanted to follow him and stab him till he was beyond this world, but she had no weapon and not a lot of strength left, after having spent so much time and so much of her meager stores of energy just in the short time they were together.

He addressed her directly without looking at her, as if as an afterthought. "Princess Vellia, it would be in your best interests not

to give Ubu—or anyone else you might encounter who is mine—as hard a time as you tried to give me."

The smaller, shorter man was in the process of trying to corral her out of there without actually touching her, which Vellia found surprising. But then, on second thought, she didn't know if he was trying to be respectful of her or whether he found her too odious to touch.

A hearty chuckle diverted her attention from trying to avoid being herded anywhere, and she saw that he had turned and caught the sight of the two of them. A broad smile slashed across his face, making him appear much less barbaric, somehow, and much more pleasing to the eye.

Not hers, though, of course.

"You are too much the diplomat, Ubu—or too afraid she's got something that's catching," he chided, the smile still in his voice. "Take her arm and lead her where you want to go. And if she resists you or anyone else who is mine—in any way—let me know when you bring her back, and I will deal with her disobedience. But beware, my friend. This one fancies herself a *warrior* princess."