

RANDOM HOUSE *e*BOOKS

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# Pleasure Toy

Aishling Morgan

'In Araphai we have none such as you, Shujin,' said Meilia. 'Many of the devils in our temples are shown like you, with burning eyes.'

'I do not understand the term "devil", or "temple", but I'm not sure I'm flattered by your tone. Perhaps I should spank you?'

'If it pleases you. I was more hoping you would indulge me.'

'Perhaps both,' Shujin answered, taking hold of her heavy breasts and running his hands over her nipples. 'You mate with these devils, then?'

'They are depictions only,' Meilia sighed. 'You are real.'

'Very,' Shujin assured her. 'Come across the wall. I'll smack you to raise your heat.'

'Here?' Meilia giggled, glancing up at the high wall of the male citadel above them. 'What if we are seen?'

'If Lord Comus is in his roof garden he may well see,' Shujin answered. 'My only concern would be that he might wish to share you and so dilute my pleasure.'

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## About the Book

Set in an alternate world of gothic eroticism, *Pleasure Toy* follows the fortunes of the city states of Suza, led by the flagellant but fair Lord Cornus and his Ladyship, the beautiful Tian-Sha. When a slaver, Savarin appears among the pleasure-loving residents of Suza, they soon find that Savarin's kiss is more punishing than they had thought.

*By the same author:*

THE RAKE  
MAIDEN  
TIGER, TIGER  
DEVON CREAM  
CAPTIVE  
DEEP BLUE

# Pleasure Toy

Aishling Morgan

**NEXUS**

# One

'MILK, LADY?'

'A drop, my pleasure,' Tian-Sha answered.

Aphelia, kneeling, took up a glass and put it close to a breast. Tian-Sha watched patiently as the suanthrope girl squeezed the fat globe of baby-pink flesh, making the nipple twitch upwards. Beads of milk appeared, white against the rose of the nipple skin, grew and burst out in a spray. Aphelia sighed and adjusted the set of her knees, allowing her pregnant belly to swing forward a trifle. Again she squeezed, and a third time, leaving a puddle of milk in the bottom of the beaker.

'Just so,' Tian-Sha stated, holding up a hand. 'Thank you, my pleasure.'

Placing the beaker on the stone, Aphelia completed her task, pouring her milk into the tiny cup of dark, steaming liquid and holding it up to Tian-Sha. Accepting the cup, the tigranthrope wrinkled her nose, allowing the rich scent of arabica to mingle with those of honey, jasmine, lime and myriad human notes. Sipping delicately at the cup, she sat back, allowing her gaze to move slowly across Suza. The city beneath her shimmered in the afternoon heat, the burnt sienna of the buildings highlighted by patches of green and brilliant blossoms. The landscape beyond the walls showed the same contrast of colours, bone-pale hills behind fields of vivid green with the river and carp ponds reflecting the blue of the sky.

'Will that be all, Lady?' Aphelia asked.

'Indeed,' Tian-Sha answered. 'I wish you well with the birth. It is soon?'

‘Not for perhaps two weeks,’ Aphelia answered.

Tian-Sha nodded as the suan girl collected her utensils and fastened her robe across the double line of breasts that decorated her chest. Standing, she made a formal curtsy to Tian-Sha and left the roof garden. Again Tian-Sha sipped, then twitched aside the edge of her robe, revealing the rich red and black stripes of her fur, and rested the cup on her leg.

Turning her attention back to the view, she watched the slow progress of a camel train along the far bank of the river. Her mind was relaxed, entirely at ease, considering the society that she and Lord Comus led with a satisfaction that fell just short of complacency. Since her ascension to the Ladyship, matters had run smoothly, with none seeking to challenge Suza’s power and the three cliques of true-men, suans and felians in a rare balance.

The distant camel train passed behind a bluff, an outcrop of broken rock that also concealed the river. On it, she could see figures, tiny in the distance as they laboured to build the walls of what was to be a bastion overlooking the river and road and so guarding Suza from the east. Other bastions were also under construction, five in all, ringing the city, but none so far advanced. A tower was already complete, seeming from her vantage to hang over the turn of the river road.

A movement on the river attracted her attention; the prow of a vessel, then a sail, triangular and hanging from a yard, also red, very different from the irregular quadrangles of white cloth that characterised the Suzan river craft. It was also larger, fully five times the length of any of the fishing vessels visible to her. Only three figures could be seen on the deck, quelling her initial fears of an opportunistic raid, and she realised that the vessel was a trader, from the look of it up from the sea, over a thousand miles downstream.

Tian-Sha rose and adjusted her robe, striding quickly from the roof garden and down into the female citadel. Her



private chambers were hot and close after the cool breeze on the roof, as was the council chamber beneath. Continuing her descent, level by level, she made her way to the stables, where the great baluchi riding beasts were kept, immediately outside the walls of the citadel. There was already considerable activity. The two massive suans who ran the stable were hurrying to saddle the beasts, their thick snouts wrinkling and their spinal hair ridges stiff. Beside them stood a third suan, less tall but broader of shoulder, his tusks longer and decorated with silver filigree. He waited impatiently, his thick fingers flicking at the cloth of his crimson cloak.

‘Captain Arsag,’ Tian-Sha addressed the waiting suan.

‘Lady,’ Arsag replied. ‘You have seen the dhow?’

‘This moment,’ Tian-Sha answered. ‘A trader, I imagine.’

‘Just so, from the coast, it seems.’

‘Dyes then, perhaps purple of Tannurai. Perhaps coral and pearls.’

‘Pretty things, no doubt. Of little use.’

Tian-Sha shrugged and climbed quickly to the mounting scaffold as one of the stable men bowed to her, indicating the great dun baluchitherium of which he was holding the reins. The beast, a male, gave a snort of unease at Tian-Sha’s scent. It had a monstrous cock swinging beneath its belly, on a level with Tian-Sha’s face as she mounted the scaffold. The powerful scent caught her nose; a thick smell at once bestial and masculine, strong despite the background odours of dung and male suan.

Tian-Sha mounted, pulling herself onto the great beast’s back as others arrived: Lord Comus, Councillor Khian-Shu, who headed the military and was a tigranthrope like herself, and a squad of Uhlan guards, both suan and true-man. Each mounted in turn until the last was in place and then Arsag moved his escort out into the high passage that led from the citadel to the main gates of Suza.

Tian-Sha rode in her place beside Comus, discussing the possible cargo of the ship with the true-man as they moved out into the brilliant sunlight and fields. In the river ahead they could see that the dhow was moored, anchored in midstream as the crew lowered a longboat into the water. Closer still, they could see figures climbing down into the boat; true-men, their skin pale in the sunlight, and suans, of richer, darker shades. Others followed, one showing the brilliant yellow and black fur of an acyonthrope, a second the shaggy bulk of an ursanthrope, another a pale tan marked with black, a combination unfamiliar to Tian-Sha.

‘Many are naked,’ Khian-Shu observed.

‘Common enough, along the coast,’ Comus replied.

‘A large crew also,’ Khian-Shu remarked. ‘Where are their goods?’

‘Doubtless they will show us samples,’ Tian-Sha suggested.

‘Perhaps,’ Khian-Shu stated, ‘they fear we will simply sequester their merchandise and send them on.’

The longboat was pulled quickly to the shore, beaching as Arsag called a gruff order from the head of the column and urged his mount to one side. Tian-Sha and Comus rode past, towards where a tall true-man was climbing from the longboat. He bowed, his face split by a broad and somewhat insolent grin, turning to a look of appraisal as his eyes travelled down Tian-Sha’s body. Clambering to the top of the bank, he threw a quick order behind him, then bowed once more, again conveying as much insolence as respect.

‘The Lord Comus, I presume,’ he began, addressing the true-man, ‘whose fame has spread the length of the river; and the Lady Tian-Sha also? I present myself, Savarin, a mere trader but capable, perhaps, of supplying your needs. Ambric, Kale, bring up our merchandise!’

Tian-Sha watched silently as the two suanthropes began to chivvy the other occupants of the longboat out onto the

bank. Only as the first emerged did she realise that each was chained to the next by the ankle.

‘A fine selection for your delectation,’ Savarin went on. ‘Slaves for every need, every taste. Exotic also. Note the great brown-haired beast, an ursanthrope from the northern forest. Moag he is called, dull witted, pliable, yet with the strength of four ordinary men. Have you ever seen the like?’

‘Indeed,’ Comus answered, ‘we find they make the best stable hands.’

‘Perfect, perfect,’ Savarin went on, unperturbed. ‘What then of this pretty thing, a viverimorph, from far to the south? The human genome cunningly blended by our ancestors with that of the civet and genet. Is she not beautiful? Come, Jikalinaï, display yourself, as you were taught!’

As he spoke, Savarin pulled a light whip from his belt. Flicking it out, he caught the tan-and-black-marked girl on one buttock, making her jump and spit. Her eyes blazed hatred, and for a moment she looked into Tian-Sha’s eyes, then began a series of postures. First she pushed out her chest, bringing her breasts into prominence, cupping each pair and running fingers across the nipples until all six stood proud, buds of firm flesh in nests of cream-coloured fluff.

Moving, she turned side on, displaying the elegant curve of her back and the swell of her bottom, and lifted her tail in a supple gesture. Again she turned, looking back as she flourished her bottom, bending as she lifted her tail, and displayed the neat purse of her vulva; white fur marked by a darker harp shape and fleshy pink in the centre. Again the whip snapped out, catching Jikalinaï’s thigh. At once she dipped her back lower, spreading her buttocks to reveal the white fur of the crease and the tight spot of her anus, pink, wrinkled and targeted in black fur.

‘That, I will vouch, you have not seen,’ Savarin went on, tapping his whip handle between Jikalinaï’s buttocks. ‘Nor had I, until we bought her from a trader of Araphai. True, all

felians have cunt markings. You yourself, my Lady, are doubtless most pleasingly endowed. An anal eye, though, is rare indeed, and so tempting to sodomy. She buggers well, by the way, if a little noisily. But enough of Jikalinaï; possibly you do not care to meet her price.'

Savarin stepped back, allowing the viverimorph to move from her lewd pose. Two sharp snaps of his whip put the acyonthrope in the same pose: back tucked in, tail high and bottom pushed out to display the purse of her sex and the yellow-and-black-spotted globes of her buttocks.

'Less rare,' Savarin said, 'but beautiful none the less. This is Cythiniel, an acyonthrope, as you see. No mere bauble either, but a scribe in her home city. Still, she also buggers well – better perhaps than Jikalinaï, certainly with less fuss – while when on heat she is insatiable. Again, she is not cheap.'

All the slaves were now out of the boat, standing in a dispirited line on the bank. Aside from the two rare forms, there were the female acyonthrope, a true-man, three female suans and four true-girls, all young, full breasted and broad hipped. Finally came two small creatures that Tian-Sha did not recognise. Savarin began to make the girls pose, flicking his whip at breasts and buttocks until the display was to his satisfaction.

Tian-Sha watched, holding her face impassive as breasts were held and bounced, bottoms opened and flesh slapped, making the suan girls' curly tails jiggle and twitch. As the seventh of the girls was put into her rude position, bending with buttocks held wide, Savarin applied a vicious cut to the plump white globes and turned, once more bowing to Comus.

'Magnificent, are they not?' he crowed, gesturing to the line of parted bottoms. 'So full, so juicy; wet sheaves for many a cock, I'll warrant, or perhaps the tighter embrace of anus and rectum? Obedient, too, trained to the whip, of

which you may be sure that I am master. Ah ha, but it nearly escaped me, we have another rarity.'

He took two swift strides back along the line of girls, bringing him to where the smallest of the suans was bending, her face pink as she displayed her charms. Barely half the height of Arsag, she also lacked his tusks and bristling hair, only her upturned, snoutlike nose and twelve breasts marking her as anything other than a slightly plump true-girl. Savarin's whip cracked down across her bottom and she promptly altered her pose, parting her feet and taking her ankles in her hands. The position left her vulva gaping, the plump lips open to show off every detail of the fleshy centre: the large, glossy bud of her clitoris, the knotted pink of her inner lips and the damp mouth of her vagina.

'This is Romea,' he said, 'a suan girl as you see. Small, pretty, an exceptional cock sucker, but remarkable for another reason.' Savarin held up a finger, then bent down and pushed the digit deep into the girl's vagina. It seemed to twist to the left as it went in and, as a second finger was inserted and Romea's vagina pulled open, it became plain why she was individual.

'Corkscrew cunted, like all suan girls,' Savarin went on, still holding the hapless Romea's vagina wide, 'yet little Romea twists to the left! So, of course, does her tail, but that is not nearly so pretty! You, the big fellow in the armour, can you imagine how your cock would feel inserted into such an orifice? And indeed, can you imagine how Romea here would feel when you did so?'

He had addressed Arsag, who grunted in reply. Tian-Sha thought of the Captain's big, spiral cock forcing the small suan's insides to twist around it as he entered her. It conjured up a vision both painful and ecstatic, although alien to her own experience.

'A little more expensive than her sisters,' Savarin continued, pulling his fingers from Romea's vagina and

slapping her bottom, 'but good value, as I'm certain you will agree. So, one man, several girls, two of whom are exceptional, and the mighty ursanthrope. What else then? Little, I fear, save this pair of rattenmensch.'

He indicated the two creatures at the end of the line: small brown-furred beings half the height of even Romea. Sharp black eyes looked back at Tian-Sha, their emotions unreadable in their small, pinched faces.

'Animals, really, as they do not breed successfully with humans,' Savarin remarked, flicking his whip idly at the nearer of the rattenmensch. 'Still, they are intelligent, and it is said that the females have cunts of remarkable elasticity yet also exquisite tightness. They are ideal for dealing with vermin, upon which they also feed.'

He turned, once more gave his half-mocking bow and stepped to where he could easily look up at Comus.

'One more thing,' he stated, 'which I say purely in order to avoid the possibility of any misunderstanding or unnecessary unpleasantness. Four of my men remain in the boat, each with an arbalest trained on one or another of you. But no matter, let us not speak of so horrid a thing as your sudden deaths. Do you care to purchase?'

'Is this all your stock?' Comus asked.

'It is,' Savarin answered. 'Trade has been good and my selection is depleted. I am willing to purchase, if fine merchandise is available at a reasonable price.'

Comus nodded and his gaze lifted to the river, as if indifferent. Turning towards Khian-Shu and Arsag, he gave a supple shrug.

'My prices are not unreasonable,' Savarin continued, 'although I am sure you will understand that we must charge a premium for the finest goods. Is this not always the case? We understand that your city does not use coinage, but we are happy to barter. Gold, silver, essences?'

'None of these,' Comus remarked.

‘Wine, perhaps?’ Savarin said, speaking more quickly. ‘I note extensive vineyards on the hillsides behind the city. Brazen armour? In the coastal cities they have nothing like the fine pieces of your champions. I know, gems and polished marbles . . .’

‘Nothing,’ Comus interrupted. ‘Rather you will leave these unfortunates on the bank and go your way, content that you take your lives.’

‘Come, come, this is not what I wish to hear!’ Savarin declared. ‘If you do not wish to trade we will simply leave, taking our merchandise with us. Do not forget the arrows pointed at your chest!’

‘I do not believe that they are pointed at us,’ Comus answered.

‘But they are!’ Savarin declared. ‘Rest assured!’

‘Not so,’ Comus answered and nodded towards the dhow.

Savarin turned, calling in anger as he saw the dhow swinging around in the current, the rope of its bow anchor trailing limp in the water and the ports facing at right angles to the group. His hand went to the knife at his waist, only to stop as Arsag lifted a bronze-bound club.

Grabbing the slaves’ chain, he tugged, pulling two of the suan girls off balance. They rolled, squealing, down the slope and into the mud at the river’s edge, pulling the others behind them as Tian-Sha swung herself down from her mount. Only the great ursanthrope Moag stood firm. As Savarin and Kale bundled a girl into the boat he jerked on the chain, pulling back. Arsag dropped to the ground, Tian-Sha letting her claws slide from their sheaves in clear view of Savarin as she advanced.

Savarin cursed in frustration, dropping the chain as Kale and Ambric hastily boarded the boat. Arsag stopped, impeded by the tumble of naked girls on the bank, and Savarin jumped aboard, pushing off as Kale struggled to fit the oars.

‘Thieves!’ Savarin shouted, shaking his fist. ‘I am a reputable trader! I sit on the port council in Tannurai!’

‘Save your breath,’ Comus called. ‘It is a long row to Tannurai.’

‘Row?’ Savarin demanded.

‘Just so,’ Tian-Sha answered. ‘Your dhow is on fire.’

With great care, Fiorena allowed the door to shut behind her, closing the latch silently. Ahead she could hear the chatter of the workers in the dairy; female voices and a few male, raised in laughter or in quieter, more serious tones. One in particular caught her attention, a high-pitched giggling.

Walking quickly forward, she pushed aside the cloth drape that closed off the lobby and stepped into the main dairy chamber. Immediately the happy voices fell silent, the workers applying themselves to their tasks with sudden enthusiasm. Only one, a true-girl whose back was to the door as she churned butter, failed to react immediately. Her laughter continued for an instant, loud in the sudden silence, then stopped abruptly.

‘Fiorena, Mentor, I didn’t see you there,’ she stammered.

‘So I see,’ Fiorena answered, ‘and what was amusing you so, little Yasha?’

‘Nothing, Mentor,’ Yasha replied hastily.

‘Nothing?’

‘I mean, not nothing, just a remark Tilia made, of no matter.’

‘Undoubtedly of no matter. I would be amazed to learn that either of you ever uttered a single word of consequence. You both talk too much, and production is not what it might be.’

‘We work hard, Mentor. We work as we talk.’

‘Talk is a distraction. Your chatter is for when you have finished your work, not before. Should I beat you for talking, do you think, or for being slow and clumsy?’



‘No, Mentor, please, neither. We work hard. All the milk will have been used up in no time at all!’

‘So I see,’ Fiorena answered, glancing into the great earthenware urns.

Both were near empty, while the two distinct smells of fresh goat and camel milk had mellowed to the richer aromas of butter and curd. On the long table against the wall stood rows of low dishes, each smoothed full of butter and more than enough for immediate needs.

‘Good, Soumea will be pleased,’ Fiorena went on, smiling pleasantly at Yasha.

‘Indeed, Mentor, just so, Mentor,’ Yasha answered, stumbling over her words. ‘There is cheese ready, too, plenty.’

‘Good, good,’ Fiorena said sweetly. ‘Doubtless Soumea will want me to reward you. Still, she is a fat sow and understands nothing of how to get the most out of you sluts. Across the bench, Yasha; you, too, Tilia. I intend to beat you, not for poor work, nor for chattering, but for insolence. A dozen swats across that bulbous rump will do you both good.’

‘But, Mentor . . .’

‘Two dozen.’

‘No, we . . .’

‘Three dozen.’

‘Shut up, Yasha, you’re making it worse!’ Tilia cut in.

‘Four dozen,’ Fiorena finished as the two girls finally scrambled into position, bent across the bench with their bottoms to the chamber.

Both were looking over their shoulders, their faces showing apprehension and self-pity. Both had figures typical of Suzan true-girls: big, heavy breasts, now squashed out on the bench top; tight waists with just a trace of soft fat; full, proud buttocks, deeply clefted and straining out the seats of their culottes.

Fiorena's body, slim and taut, with high, pert breasts and slender haunches, was a striking contrast. She knew that she was more elegant, more poised, more beautiful, and also more intelligent, having risen to the rank of mentor when no older than those who worked under her. Unfortunately, to her undying annoyance, the men of Suza preferred the plump bodies and witless prattle of girls like Yasha and Tilia to her own more refined qualities.

Yasha in particular annoyed her. Not only did the young true-girl represent all the traits Fiorena most despised, but she was also the younger sister of Zara, Mistress of Castigation, a post to which Fiorena felt herself far better suited. Now, with Yasha's chubby bottom ready for beating and her big eyes moist with fearful anticipation, Fiorena felt both pleasure and further resentment.

'Culottes,' she ordered.

Neither girl hesitated, both putting their hands back, flicking up their kirtles and tugging their culottes smartly down. Fiorena made no move, folding her arms as the two full moons of the girls' bottom were exposed. Yasha's was perhaps a trifle fuller: her cleft deeper, her quim fatter, her buttocks bigger and paler of skin, somehow impudent despite her undignified pose. Tilia was darker skinned, also hairier, with a thick growth of black fuzz covering her quim and growing up between her bottom cheeks, leaving pink skin showing only at vulva and anus, both of which her pose left clearly visible.

The other dairy workers had gathered behind Fiorena, at a respectful distance yet close enough to ensure a fine view of the two girls as they were beaten. More had come in from adjoining rooms, giving the girls a full audience. Deciding that enough time had passed to let a full appreciation of the true-girls' fate sink in, Fiorena put her hand to the short quirt in her belt. Yasha's eyes grew rounder as she watched the thin shaft of the whip emerge. Tilia looked suddenly away.

Fiorena stopped and pushed the quirt back, struck by a more amusing possibility. Taking the churn with which Yasha had been working, she drew out the baton, a three-foot wand of pale wood, sticky with butter. Yasha's mouth came open before she hurriedly looked away, burying her face in her hands.

Fiorena laughed, took a step forward and brought the baton down across Yasha's naked bottom with a smack. The full buttocks jumped and bounced. Yasha squeaked in pain and butter spattered across both girls, the bench and floor. Fiorena waited until Yasha's bottom had stopped quivering, then struck again, full across the plump cheeks. Again Yasha squealed and bucked, her hip jogging Tilia to leave both bottoms briefly wobbling in synchrony.

Tilia got the third stroke, Yasha the fourth, and Fiorena went to work, not troubling to count as she beat the girls, working over both big bottoms, smacking the baton down on one or the other as the girls kicked and squirmed in their pain. The colour quickly began to come, the bottoms flushing pink then red, glossy with the greasy butter that was smeared across them. Fiorena was laughing, warming to the task, the heat going to her quim as her victims bucked and thrashed.

The same was true of the girls, for all their pain. As Fiorena crossed to apply the baton from the other side, she saw the state of both girls. Their quims were swollen and juicy, the mouths of their vaginas were wet. The sight was appealing, yet gave her no illusions about the effectiveness of the punishment, and she resumed the beating with a will, applying the baton to Tilia's burning bottom with all her force. Yasha had begun to blubber, snivelling into her crossed arms as she struggled to hold back her reaction. Fiorena laughed aloud at the sight, laying five furious blows full across the girl's quivering rump, then stopping abruptly.

Neither girl moved, both knowing the consequences of not waiting until they were told they could rise. Her head

swimming with sadistic pleasure, Fiorena said nothing, but pushed the baton into the butter churn, drawing out a thick clot of butter. This she put between Yasha's buttocks, wading it down into the crease. Yasha groaned, then gasped as the end of the thick baton slid up her vagina, going in easily with the mixture of butter and her own juices.

Fiorena began to fuck Yasha, working the baton in her hole, all the while with her eyes fixed on the two beaten bottoms in front of her. Yasha had begun to squirm her cheeks, rotating herself helplessly on the baton and pushing out her rear. Tilia was little better, her cheeks clenching and unclenching, melted butter running down between them to her anus, which was pulsing lewdly with her motions.

'Sluts!' Fiorena snapped. 'Little, dirty, she-dogs! Look at you, beaten and with cunts running like spigots!'

She twisted the baton in Yasha's hole, fighting down her own urges, determined not to disgrace herself or lose her dignity, yet determined to make the girls do exactly that. Sure enough, even as Fiorena wondered if she could hold herself, Yasha gave a broken moan and slid a hand back between her thighs. Fiorena pulled the baton from Yasha's vagina, allowing the audience a clear view as the beaten girl began to masturbate.

Putting the baton to Tilia's vulva, Fiorena slid it in as she watched. Yasha was rubbing hard, her fingers clutching over and over at the puffy, butter-smeared flesh of her quim. She was moaning, sounds of wanton ecstasy mixed with broken snivels and little choking sobs. Fiorena's lust was threatening to overwhelm her as Yasha gave a last, gasping cry and her buttocks and thighs tightened, squeezing a fat worm of yellow butter out of her vagina as she came in a flurry of urgent fingers and quivering, reddened buttocks.

'Lick your friend, you little slut,' Fiorena ordered Yasha, knowing that if Tilia didn't break soon, she herself would.

Yasha said nothing but obeyed, going to her knees behind her friend. Fiorena pulled out the baton, allowing Yasha to

press her face between Tilia's thighs. The sound of lapping started and with a groan of despair Tilia reached back, pulling her bottom apart to give Yasha full access to the buttery centre of her sex.

'You look so right,' Fiorena remarked, holding her voice cool and level. 'Beaten and soiled, your natural place.'

Tilia came, sighing deeply as she orgasmed in her friend's face, then slumped to the bench, her eyes shut, her lips parted in exhaustion. Fiorena let her mouth curve up into a small smile, even though her stomach was fluttering and the wet was running down the insides of her thighs.

'Now thank me,' she ordered and began to pull up the front of her scarlet silk robe.

Yasha shuffled around on her knees, looking up with big, wet eyes. Her dark hair was sodden, the fillet that normally constrained it for dairy work gone. The front of her kirtle had come loose, displaying two full slices of creamy pale cleavage. Moving the baton down, Fiorena pushed Yasha's kirtle open, spilling out one fat breast. Tilia moved, sinking down into a kneeling position. Fiorena dropped the baton and took both girls by the hair, pulling them into herself as she lifted her robe to the level of her belly.

Beneath it she was naked, preferring to go without culottes specifically to avoid what she considered the indignity of having to pull them down. Pushing her belly out a little, she offered her sex to the two girls, holding both firmly by the hair. Tilia kissed her full on the pubic mound, mumbling thanks as she pulled back. Yasha followed suit, lower, on Fiorena's quim.

'Lick it,' Fiorena ordered.

Yasha obeyed, her tongue flicking out to lap at Fiorena's vulva, on her lips, touching her clitoris. Fiorena sighed but tugged at the girls' hair, forcing Yasha away and Tilia into contact with her sex. Tilia in turn began to lick, then both of them, their faces pushed in, side by side, sharing her sex, kissing at her skin, her pubic mound, her quim, until at last

a tongue once more found her clitoris and it all became too much. Fiorena came, eyes closed in pleasure, emitting only a faint, pleased moan as the ecstasy of orgasm swept through her.

She held her grip, keeping the girls' faces pressed between her thighs until her climax had run its course. Only then did she let them go. Both sat back, looking up, Tilia uncertain and Yasha with a little smile as she wiped the thin moustache of Fiorena's cream from her upper lip.

Ciriël pushed the circle of cork into the mouth of the glass vial, sealing in the rich red oil. Briefly she held it to the light, checking the clarity and colour. Both were satisfactory and she turned to the suan beside her. He was heavy set, the crest of ruddy-brown hair running from his scalp to the small of his back tinged with grey, tusks curling from his mouth, each capped with golden filigree. In contrast her own body seemed tiny, impossibly delicate.

'Your tusk oil, Master Urzon,' she said, passing him the vial.

'Perfect,' he answered, sniffing it and then holding it up to the light just as she had done. 'You make it well, perhaps better even than Comus used to.'

'It is the identical blend, Master,' she answered. 'Shall I place it to the account of my new workbench?'

'Indeed,' Urzon answered, moving to inspect a vase of scarlet lilies as Ciriël reached for a roll of parchment.

'Adymus lilies,' Ciriël informed him as she wrote. 'They have a heady scent and will make an excellent perfume. Perhaps they have other properties as well.'

'I have never seen their like,' Urzon replied.

'There are plenty in my roof garden,' Ciriël answered. 'Comus had the seeds from a trader, a northerner. Only now do I have enough to experiment.'

'Indeed. You are remarkably adept for one so young.'

‘Comus still provides me lessons, Xerinus also on occasion.’

She returned the parchment as Urzon bent to press his great snout close to a lily. The door gong sounded and she called out a welcome. A suan girl appeared; small, compact and fresh faced, dressed in the deep-blue garments of a councillor, cut in the elaborate fashion favoured by her genotype.

‘Mistress Pomina,’ Ciriell greeted her. ‘How may I help? Fresh apple oil?’

‘Thank you, no,’ Pomina answered. ‘I have a sufficiency. Master Urzon, the councils are meeting. We must decide what to do with those who were on the dhow.’

‘The slaver?’ Ciriell asked.

‘Yes,’ Pomina replied with a shudder that sent a ripple through all twelve of her breasts. ‘I was at the carp ponds. I saw it all. A true-man led them, very tall and with a cruel face. He had them chained and lined them up on the shore, naked! He made the girls adopt lewd poses, even placing his fingers in the vagina of one, a girl with a left-hand twist, like my own! He could simply have shown them her tail but no, he made her bend and put his fingers up and showed the inside for all to see! Imagine, slaves!’

‘Did they carry no other merchandise?’ Ciriell asked. ‘No rare essences? Unusual dyes?’

Pomina gave her a look of irritation, clearly having expected a response to her own delighted horror.

‘We do not know,’ Urzon replied. ‘While the man was showing his wares a boat came round into the shadow of the dhow. At a signal from Comus the anchor rope was cut, negating the slaver’s arbalests. Our men set light to the dhow, forcing the crew to swim for the longboat. The burnt-out hulk of the dhow rests on a sandbank if you wish to investigate. Still, they took the strongbox as they fled, although we did not trouble to pursue.’

‘How many were rescued?’ Ciriell asked.

‘Thirteen,’ Pomina answered, once more eager, ‘and several of distinctive type. There is an ursanthrope, a viverimorph, which is a felian with fur of pale tan and the most beautiful black markings, and also some creatures called rattenmensch, which are tiny and quite hideous, with eyes like currants and greasy brown fur.’

‘Remarkable,’ Ciriël replied.

‘Just so,’ Pomina went on. ‘Tian-Sha offered them sanctuary and all have accepted. The council meets to decide the best station for each.’

‘Then you had best leave,’ Ciriël answered. ‘If any have skill with essences, send them to me.’

Pomina nodded and gave her arm to Urzon, who dropped his vial of tusk oil into the recesses of his clothing and accepted. Ciriël waited until they had left and ran light footed up to the roof garden. The citadels rose above her, obscuring the view, but not so much that she was unable to see the river and the point at which it disappeared behind the bluff. The dhow was visible almost at the centre of the stream, the hull lying at an angle.

Eager to reach it before anybody else did so, she scampered back through the chamber of essences to her own private chambers. Quickly changing her silk robe for kirtle and culottes of light cotton, she made her way down through the city and out across the fields, half walking, half running until she reached the riverbank.

A handful of agrarians – true-men and suans – were there, leaning on their tools and discussing the events of the day. Ciriël ignored them, moving a little way down river. In the shelter of a stunted olive she slipped off her clothes, hanging them on twigs to go naked except for a leather pouch and the belt that held it around her waist.

As she stepped into the water she came into view of the agrarians and waved happily in response to their calls. One remarked on her hairless quim, asking if she’d been shaved. Another went so far as to lift the front of his short leather



smock, revealing a thick cock lying over a good-sized pair of balls. Ciriël replied with a gesture, making a ring of her fingers and sticking her tongue through it, implying that she was willing, only to dive into the river and strike out for the boat. The man who had shown his cock laughed but made no move to follow, leaving her to concentrate on fighting the current.

The dhow proved in poor state. The mast was gone, the upper works a mess of charred wood and the deck collapsed. Crawling in through an arbalest port, she found herself in a flooded cabin with no more than a narrow gap between charred planks and the surface of the water. Taking a breath, she dived down, finding the water gloomy but clear. All that was apparent were rows of crude shelves, doubtless accommodation for the slaves. Returning to the surface, she once more took a breath and dived again, this time into the sunken stern of the ship.

An air pocket had formed in the largest of the stern cabins, allowing her to search in detail. For some time she tried but found only a bronze box. With some effort she retrieved this and returned to the sandbank to examine her find. Not wanting to be observed, she sat in the shadow of the bow, setting the box down on the sand and quickly opening the catch.

Within the box was water, with many coloured and curiously shaped objects beneath. Reaching in, she drew out what proved to be a carved statuette of green stone, set with pieces of coral. At first glance she giggled, only for her mouth to drop open as she took in the full details of the thing she was holding.

Her first impression had been of a merely lewd statue: a kneeling girl being mounted from behind. An instant later she had realised that the girl was not being mounted by a man, but by a grotesque ape-like creature, part baboon, perhaps part dog. Its hands were locked in the flesh of the girl's hips, its lips drawn back in a snarl. It was carved in

exact detail. Even its coral penis had been perfectly rendered, the brilliant pink shaft joining its crotch to the gaping vagina. Behind, his buttocks had also been rendered in coral, and a large pair of equally colourful balls hung between his open thighs. All of that was enough to send the blood to her face, but more powerful still was the expression of open, gorging lust on the girl's face, showing that this was no depiction of some terrible rape, but of willing, obscene pleasure.

Seated on her throne, Tian-Sha allowed her fingers to move over the smooth shapes of the carved wood as the great audience hall filled. Eleven of the twelve who made up the council were already present, while other citizens filed into the galleries at either side of the chamber, marshalled impatiently by suan guards. Comus sat to her left, talking quietly to Ilarion, the senior councillor and Master of Judiciary. Beyond them was the elderly suan Councillor Lomas, taking a cup of wine offered by the servitor Troke. To her right was Alla-Sha, a pure white tigranthrope and her predecessor as Lady, in conversation with the refectory Mistress, Soumea.

Another white-furred felian arrived, the Councillor Ares, who took his place at the end of the row. The sound of a gong brought her attention back to the chamber. A suan warden appeared with the thirteen people they had freed from the dhow behind him. They were now dressed, after a fashion, but most still seemed nervous, even dazed. Only the massive ursanthrope appeared indifferent, apparently just accepting his change of fate.

Welcomes were exchanged, with Tian-Sha making a formal repetition of the assurance of freedom before Ilarion outlined the laws they would be expected to follow as citizens. None declined and the brief ceremony was completed with each adding a name or mark to Alla-Sha's census.

‘So be it,’ Comus announced as the second of the rattenmensch marked an uneven cross on the parchment. ‘Naturally all must work, according to their abilities. Do any among you have skills of a specialised nature?’

‘I was a courtesan in Jurhain,’ one of the true-girls answered, ‘as was my sister.’

‘Jasiel?’ Comus asked, leaning forward from his throne to look at the yellow-and-black-furred Mistress of Courtesans.

‘New courtesans are always useful, when skilled,’ Jasiel answered. ‘You are?’

‘Zirita,’ one girl answered.

‘Linell,’ the other added.

‘You are twins?’ Tian-Sha asked, eyeing the apparently identical dark hair and opulent curves of the girls.

‘We are,’ Zirita answered.

‘Always popular,’ Jasiel remarked. ‘Subject to a test of your abilities, I will take both on.’

Both girls gave a nodded acknowledgement and stepped back. The suan warden showed them to a bench.

‘Cythiniel,’ Tian-Sha remarked. ‘Savarin said you are a scribe. This is true?’

‘Yes, Mistress,’ Cythiniel answered, her voice so quiet as to be almost inaudible. ‘I illuminated scrolls in the library at Tannurai.’

‘Perfect,’ Alla-Sha put in. ‘I am Alla-Sha, Mistress of Tomes. You may attend me and I will test your skill.’

Cythiniel gave a curtsey and retreated to a bench. Tian-Sha watched her, wondering at her extreme diffidence, as if every eye in the chamber was on her in disapproval. In general acyonthropes were bold, vivacious and quick tempered. Cythiniel was clearly an exception; perhaps her experience as a slave had crushed her spirit.

‘Our essencier Ciriell seeks an assistant,’ Pomina remarked. ‘Do any of you have skill with dyes? Distillation, perhaps?’