

The Price of Blood

It had to be done.

I held her mass of hair in my clawed hand and wrenched her head back, revealing her neck to my steel. Only a gurgle could be heard as blood filled her throat. Her eyes widened in fear as she frantically searched my eyes for remorse. I forced my face to remain emotionless, but inside, my morality battled with my instinct of self-preservation. They reasoned with me; I knew that if I refused to execute this girl (so young and already a Gladiatrix in the arena), the Emperor would end me and kill her anyways. I figured that my way of execution would be less torturous, so I tensed my muscles to prepare for the mercy killing. My subdued opponent shrivelled up in defeat and her eyes dropped; a single teardrop streaked its way down her sandy face.

Minutes ago, she had been standing, proud, sword in her right hand, shield in her left, and her mud-brown rags that she had comically worn as armour had rustled in the hot wind. Strategically placed slices in her flesh by my expert blade had left her incapacitated on the gritty sand. Her knees had landed on the ground with a crunch. This is when I had grasped her head by her hair and waited for the Emperor's motion.

The ruthless leader of the nation of Rome had his arm outstretched, a fist formed with the thumb pointed to the side. I watched with dismay as he rotated his fist so that the thumb was pointed to Hell. I felt the girl sink deeper into herself after this sentencing. Her eyes fluttered shut as I drew the blade away from her throat. A cool wind, as if sent from Elysium, smelling of sweet relief and freedom, rustled the hair on my head as the steel made its short return. The blade seamlessly separated her head from her body as the bloodthirsty crowds jeered in sick release.

I held her severed head with an outstretched arm to the sky and forcibly placed a look of victory on my face. The blood that dripped onto me from the severed arteries in her neck

morphed my victorious look to one of insanity. My insides writhed in turmoil and bile rose in my throat. The Emperor smirked at my faux triumph, as if he'd won. He raised his arms high above his head, urging the crowd to cheer louder. The screeches of the spectators followed suit.

Under the burning sun, my body began to overheat, causing my vision to blacken and my knees to buckle. I was suddenly jarred out of this moment of weakness by a solid thud to my back. I collapsed to the ground, the tension in my hands releasing as the girl's head rolled from my grip to grimly face the Emperor. Her face was slack, but peaceful, creating a stark contrast from the blood-soaked sand in which her head rested.

My chest seized, and my breath came in short, forced bursts. I glanced down to see, glinting in the sun, what appeared to be the point of an arrow protruding from my chest. I looked sharply in the direction from which the arrow had come and saw an archer, standing, with his bow and arrow pointed at my chest. My gaze shifted to the Emperor and his face, contorted into a ghastly grin. In a moment of mental clarity, I realized that I was doomed from the beginning. The city of Rome had no use for Gladiator slaves. Thanks to that one archer, I realized that I would now be free of my Earthly bindings. I would be free from the guilt and pain of murdering the young girl. I grinned at the thought of freedom as my eyes drifted to Elysium and the cool wind that blew before graced my sun-burned skin in a final moment of bliss.