

Fara fought the blackness to the coming light. It was so easy to stay in the dark. It was comforting like a warm blanket. But, the light held such possibilities. She knew she must rouse, as if something significant lay in wakefulness. She stirred and felt a pair of arms holding her. Then she heard a heartbeat beneath a rough fabric, felt a coarse texture of chest hair. It was so secure within that embrace.

When she finally realized it was a man who held her, she gasped and tried to retreat from the cord of muscles. She glanced up to be temporarily blinded by the lamplight to her left.

“Don't move,” said a soft but deep voice.

He spoke with the assurance of authority, likely used to ordering people around. Well, he wouldn't command *her*. She lifted her heavy head and whimpered as a stab of agony sliced through her skull. Fara squeezed her eyes shut tight. It was so much easier to be left in the dark for it was as if her head was being cut with so many knives.

“I will have you more comfortable in a moment. Please don't move.”

How could she possibly move with all this pain and that large man rendering her limbs useless?

Suddenly, she felt a light cushion beneath her. The glare from the lantern came across her vision again when she opened her eyes and was then replaced by the outline of a man towering above her. On a panicked breath, she crawled away from him, but his hold on her waist hauled her back. Her head hurt so as he studied her face.

“*Madame*, the pain will lessen if you stay still. I promise I didn't bring you here to harm you in any way.”

She gradually settled back on the pillows and looked at her keeper. He was an attractive man, if one liked the rough, indignant kind. Dark layers of soft waves covered his head and ended at the nape of his neck. He was large, but slim in the right places...it spoke of years of hard physical labor.

His eyes captivated her as she studied him in such proximity. The shade of his eyes...a charcoal color; they were the most intense and unreadable eyes she'd ever seen. It was an odd, yet strikingly beautiful color for a man.

*Oh, you silly girl*, she thought. Really...how ridiculous for her to be wooed by only a pair of eyes.