

## Lallia: The Slave Girl - Dray Prescot Short Story

By

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This is a story told on the world of Kregen, which orbits the twin suns of Antares, four hundred light years from Earth in the constellation of Scorpio. This is a story sung and mimed in all the great halls of the cities of Loh and Turismond and Havilfar of Vallia and Pandahem and sung and danced around the campfires of the hosts in Segesthes but it is not told or sung in any smallest part of the continent of Gah.

It tells of Lallia a chained slavegirl one of the beauteous chail sheom. Most gorgeous of all the women in the city was Lallia, golden-haired and emerald-eyed, of a form to dizzy the senses and of a sweetness of touch that would not bruise a flower. Every night her master would chain her to the iron slave bar at the foot of his couch with iron chains. He would smile on her with a smile of very cruel fondness before he reposed himself to sleep among the silks and furs, and she stretched upon the marble floor at the foot of the couch.

Not by a full arm's length could Lallia reach her sleeping master. Night by night she worked beneath the couch, with a broken shard of pottery, a lacquered hair pin, a discarded comb.

Lallia laughed in her captivity and lifted her sweet rose-red lips to her master, and in her heart she stored her purpose and in her mind she planned her course.

Night by night she worked until at last from beneath the hidden inner rail of the couch she stripped free a long and sharp splinter. Like the tongue of a risslaca, that splinter, like the horn of the mythical brumby in length a full two arm's width stretched wide, at one end as thick as Lallia's calf, at the other jagged and sharp and cruel.

Night by night with the deadly splinter in her hand she waited for her master to turn on his couch, sleeping so indolently with his purple mouth open, his veined purple cheeks puffing, waited for him to twist and turn until he was within reach and she knew she would make no mistake.

For three waxings and wanings of Kregen's largest moon, which in Gah is not called the Maiden with the Many Smiles, Lallia waited patiently on the cold marble.

For one hundred and sixty two days rising and setting of the twin suns, the crimson and the emerald, which in Gah are not called Zim and Genodras or even Far and Havil Lallia waited.

Her master would boast of how much his chained slave girl, his chail sheom Lallia loved him and of how she liked to feel the touch of the slave chains upon her rose-pink skin. Like his fellows he believed that her nightly sojourn naked upon the marble floor of his bedchamber made her love him more.

On the one hundred and sixty second night after she had torn the splinter free, Lallia saw her master's bedclothes slide back from his turning body. He had suffered an ague during the day and was restless. He lay exposed. More, he

twisted sluggishly down the bed. She could see the thick white skin over his heart moving with a slow and heavy pulsation. Carefully she selected the space between two certain ribs. She pointed her wooden splinter between the two ribs at the dull white skin where it sagged and puffed, and she kneeled up tall, for she could not stand in the chains shackled to the iron slave bar, and she thrust with all her strength.

Who can say what emotions coursed through her breast as she struck? Who can say what primitive beast-senses were aroused and slaked in that delicate girl-body? She struck in silence and the wooden splinter penetrated the thick white skin and pierced through and embedded itself in the beating heart.

Only then her breath broke through her clamped lips in a long and shuddering revulsion. For a moment, after her master's huge gasp and lapsing gurgle, Lallia remained taut, high-strung, trembling. Then, with all her strength once more, she dragged free the splinter. Thick blood gushed in a stream onto the bedclothes and the couch and the ornate rugs of Walfarg weave upon the floor. Carefully, Lallia drew off a sheet from the bed, carefully she wiped the gory splinter, and the sheet's whiteness turned a lurid crimson. Carefully she made sure that not a single spot of blood had splashed her naked body. Who can say what feelings of triumph filled her breast as she wadded the sheet and hurled it towards the window? Blood speckled a trail between couch and window. The stained sheet lay crumpled beneath the curtains. Perhaps Lallia smile as she bent to replace the murderous splinter in its secret cavity beneath the couch. And then - and then her face lost all its smiles, her eyes glared, her breath came quick, her breast rose and fell in spasmodic horror.

For from the end of the splinter its tip, a full three inches long, was broken off, was gone, was nowhere to be seen--instantly her eyes turned back to the sheet and she saw with deadly anguish what she had done. In that sheet, proof positive and damning evidence, neatly wrapped and waiting to be found, lay the broken splinter tip.

She dragged at the chains and shackles, she tugged at the slave bar; but she could not break free. No slender slave girl could break the chains that bound her to the foot of her master's couch.

All that night as the seven moons of Kregen passed overhead against the constellations, and the samphron oil lamps burned low, Lallia lay huddled in her chains and her nakedness at the foot of the couch, shackled to the slave bar, helpless, waiting for the morning and the discovery and the wrenching away of the splinter from its cavity and the matching of the blood-soaked tip. The heady scent of moon blooms dizzied her. Then would follow the instant call for the torturers, and then if she still lived, the executioner.

Who can say what agonies passed through her mind all that long night?

With the first light of the green sun falling through the window past the thick drapes and painting an evil patina upon that blood-bedappled sheet, Lallia roused herself. Her fate lay blood-soaked and wrapped in a gory shroud. She prepared to play her part to the end, as she had planned, even this late. She set up a wailing and a screaming.

The retainers and household servants and slaves rushed in and fell to shrieking and moaning at sight of their master lying dead in a rimed crust of his own blood.

The trail of blood stains was found. The window was tightly shut--an assassin! A master stikitcher, it must be, who had entered here, for the closed window proved that no ordinary criminal could have done the deed. The sheet was snatched up.

The smell of blood overpowered Lallia. She could not close her eyes and look away. The steward lifted the stained bundle, calling that the assassin had wiped his blade before he left, as a master stikitcher would do, another proof, if any was needed. The steward took the upper edge of the sheet, where the golden threads and the scarlet and blue embroidery shone with a more sinister lustre. He lifted it high.

Lallia's heart must have beaten faster. How she must have dug her teeth into her lip, her breath coming fierce and short. Now they would find the wooden splinter tip and guess, at once, what she had accomplished. The steward lifted the sheet high, and shook it out, and--lo!--it was empty.

Lallia was sold to a more kindly master, who by his lights pampered and petted her, allowing her to wear robes during the night and who did not always chain her to the slave bar at the foot of his bed. And when he did so he used silver chains. Her beauty and allure were so great that any man would dare much for her sake. As for her old master, he who had perished because he believed a folk myth, after a magnificent funeral and much officious weeping, he was buried in the family's ornate tomb, laid to rest with three inches of wood buried in his heart.

I have also heard a further ending to this story. In some places of Kregen it is often the custom among the high born, who are superstitious in these matters, to be embalmed after death, in the fashion of the Ancient Egyptians. As you will understand, the allure of Lallia was so great any man would risk much to gain her. It was the embalmer of her late master who bought Lallia the Slave Girl.

-- THE END --

Dray Prescott, like Alan Burt Akers, is the well-known pseudonym of the equally well-known Kenneth Bulmer. The Prescott saga is, according to its author, not really a series as such, but one single story. Each book is written to be read as a complete volume and missing one will not ultimately detract from the pleasure of reading; however, Ken tells us that following the plot-threads is best! In December, DAW Books are to publish the 28th novel in the series, Delia of Vallia a variation in the Prescott saga. Meanwhile Sphere have published seven volumes in his popular The Professionals series under the name of Ken Blake and his Bruno Krauss Sea Wolf books, published by Sphere and Severn House, will have added a further three volumes by the time you read this: They are Shark Raid, Shark America and Shark Trap. Although outside the fantasy field, the author tells us that he is very happy to have been able to make a German U-boat skipper a sympathetic character to English readers. The tale you have just read is Ken's second appearance in Fantasy Tales--he had the cover story way back in our first issue in 1977.