

# *Transforming Love*

*By Grace Dvorachek*

*“But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are*

*saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.”*

—*Ephesians 2:4-7*

“**L**ET go o’ me!” I struggled fiercely against the guard’s unyielding grip.

“Hold still, Denton!” Forcefully, the guard flung open the wooden door at the bottom of the stairs. He shoved me forward, and I landed hard on the damp, stone floor beyond. “This will teach you to defy the king!”

Shielding my eyes from the light of the guard’s torch, I leaped to my feet.

“He deserved it!” I clenched my jaw. “He don’t have no right to go ‘round makin’ those laws o’ his! Bloody tyrant,” I added under my breath.

“King Alistair is no tyrant!” The guard—but a few years older than I—took a defensive step towards me. “He is the most compassionate, generous ruler I have ever known, and his laws are just and fair!”

“He don’t know what it’s like, bein’ a peasant!” I waved my hands angrily. “He jes’ sits on his high-an’-mighty throne, expectin’ us to obey them ridiculous laws o’ his!” I paused, regarding the guard sullenly. “Why’d you leave the village to serve *him*, Jothan?”

“I—” Jothan hesitated, and then shook his head. “You wouldn’t understand. Perhaps someday, but not now.”

“I understand good and well! King Alistair’s the reason I’m down here, waiting for his ‘just punishment’!”

“It *was* a just punishment, Denton!” Jothan snapped. “You’re just too stuck-up to realize it! You disobeyed the king, and you have to pay for it, just like anyone else!”

Angrily, he turned on his heel, slamming the door behind him. The torch-light vanished, and Jothan’s footsteps sounded heavily on the stone steps, slowly fading away.

Left alone in the darkness of the cell, I clenched my fist. “I was just livin’ my life! Why’d the king have to make up all them laws, anyway?”

*“Life in the real world’s about survival. You can’t let nothing get in your way—not even King Alistair.”*

Jothan had been the one to teach me that, just as he'd taught me how to survive after my parents' death. He'd been like an older brother to me.

Until the day of his arrest.

I never did find out what had exactly happened to him. All I knew is, after Jothan was released, he was a changed man. No longer did he want to live among the peasants, stealing just to survive. He'd left—gone to serve the king who'd sentenced him in to begin with.

And now King Alistair had sentenced me.

"I hate King Alistair," I muttered rebelliously. "I hate him!"

Furiously, I kicked the wooden door with my boot, the resounding thud lingering for a moment, and then dying away. I lowered myself onto a pile of moldy straw, considering the advantages of protesting my fate.

But I knew King Alistair would never repeal a sentence he'd already pronounced.

Shaking my head, I leaned back against the stone wall. "They'll give me that floggin' tomorrow, no matter what I say." I closed my eyes against the bitter reality of defeat. "There's no way out."

\*\*\*

Bright sunlight met my eyes as I stepped onto the hard-packed dirt. Blinking, I glanced around the castle courtyard. Villagers, soldiers, and nobles alike stood against the stone wall in an expectant crowd.

And they were all there to see me.

Jothan gave me a shove from behind, and I stumbled forward. Struggling to regain my balance, I caught sight of a tall, regal figure on the far end of the courtyard, seated on a throne. Sudden hatred boiled up within me as I recognized King Alistair—the one who had sentenced me to this torture.

Another shove from Jothan nearly sent me sprawling face-first in the dirt, and the crowd jeered. To keep from falling, I grasped the rough, wooden post in the center of the courtyard.

A rough hand jerked me onto my knees, and bound my hands to the post with strong cord. I lowered my head, not daring to look up into Jothan's face.

He pulled my thin jerkin down to my waist, and I felt the warm, afternoon sunlight on my back.

Jothan moved away, I slowly raised my head. The first thing my eyes met was the wise, firm gaze of the king himself.

I glared at him fiercely, refusing to be the first to look away. But King Alistair's face was an emotionless mask.

Footsteps from behind made me turn. Another guard was approaching, a whip dangling from his hand.

The time had come. The guard behind me raised his whip, and paused. King Alistair's eyes locked onto mine, and held them there with a look I couldn't interpret.

In that long moment, I was aware of nothing else but him—his face filled my vision.

Then time seemed to begin again in a jolt. In one, brisk motion, the king stood. Sunlight glinted off the scepter he extended from his hand.

I glanced behind me. The guard had frozen, his eyes fixed on King Alistair. Slowly, I turned back to watch the king.

Removing his long robe, he stepped down from his throne, and steadily crossed the courtyard.

He motioned to Jothan. "Release him."

A frown of bewilderment crossed Jothan's face, but he obediently reached down, and sliced my bonds with his dagger. At a wave from the king's hand, Jothan and I stepped back together.

Kneeling, King Alistair loosened his jeweled doublet, and let it drop to his waist. Then he nodded to the other guard. "Bind me to the post."

"Sir—" The guard began in protest, but the king cut him off with a stern look. Still looking as baffled as the rest of us, he did as he was told.

The king nodded as the guard finished tying his wrists. "Now, give me the lashes."

The guard's jaw nearly hit the dirt. "Your Majesty—"

"Do it." King Alistair's voice was the only sound in the courtyard—a voice of unwavering authority.

The guard paused, uncertainty stamped on his face, and then raised the whip. In another instant, he brought it down in a swift, cutting motion. The crowd gasped.

A long, red stripe appeared on the king's back, but not a sound escaped from his lips.

I watched the unbelievable scene as though in a daze. Again and again, the whip fell, and King Alistair's body sagged to the ground.

Each time the lash struck, I could feel Jothan tensing beside me. I glanced down. His hands were clenched so tightly they were almost white.

At last, the whip clattered to the ground and the guard backed away, his face pale. Immediately, Jothan rushed forward to untie the king's hands. King Alistair shook his head as the young man began to help him up, and mumbled something.

Jothan looked up, and beckoned to me. "He— he wants you."

I stumbled forward to kneel in the dirt next to the post, and Jothan moved away.

"Denton," King Alistair said.

I turned to meet his gaze.

"I sentenced you in justice, and I took your place in love." He clenched my arm tightly, staring deep into my eyes. "Now you must accept it. Turn away from your wicked deeds, and trust me."

I stared at the king's face, rebellion welling up inside me. It was he who had sentenced me to begin with! I could never accept him.

But the punishment *was* just—and the sacrifice all the more precious for it. *I* was the one who deserved that flogging. I deserved to be lying there, bleeding, in the dust.

Not King Alistair.

I opened my mouth, but the words wouldn't come. So I nodded.

In the next instant, an attendant was taking his arm, and helping him to his feet. Haltingly, they headed for the castle.

I rose to my feet, and Jothan and I stood side by side. We both gazed after King Alistair, silence hanging in the air between us.

Finally, Jothan turned, and spoke in a shaky voice. "You're free to go."

I blinked, staring at him.

"You're free to go," He said, more firmly this time. "You can no longer be kept here as a prisoner."

He paused, his eyes traveled to the other end of the courtyard. "King Alistair has taken your place."

Those words stayed with me, as Jothan turned away. And they were true. I was, indeed, *free*. Free to do whatever I pleased—to go wherever I wanted.

Free to return to the village.

But even as the thought struck me, I knew I could never go back. The same love that had drawn Jothan was now drawing me. I was no longer a servant of myself. I was a servant of the king.

I'll never forget King Alistair's love for me. It transformed me into someone I never thought I would be, and renewed me to a life I would have never chosen.

But it wasn't only love that wrought this miraculous change—it was King Alistair himself. I owe everything to him.

He changed my life.