

Total Surrender Excerpt

Arabella turned toward Maddux with tears glimmering in her beautiful blue eyes. "Maddux . . . please . . ." she implored, so softly and so kindly even though he'd just announced his intentions to desecrate her dad. "Whatever my father has done to earn your wrath, you can't do this to him. He'll never survive. He's sick . . ." She took a step closer to his desk, brave and resolute despite the flicker of trepidation he saw in her gaze. "Take me instead."

Shock jarred through Maddux, but as a man who'd spent years perfecting a mask of control, neither his expression or body language betrayed that emotion. This woman was willing to give up her own freedom for her father's, and it was definitely an interesting turn of events he never saw coming.

"Arabella, *no*," her father uttered in horror.

Ignoring her father's objections, Arabella held Maddux's gaze steadily. "In exchange for you leaving my father alone, I will do whatever it takes, and whatever you demand, to work off his debt."

Maddux stared at the beautiful woman offering herself up to him, so sweet and naive in contrast to the dark, ruthless man he'd become. While he originally wanted to crush Theodore, Maddux also realized that taking Arabella in exchange—his only daughter he adored—would be equally devastating to the other man. How could Theodore live with himself knowing Arabella belonged to his greatest enemy solely because of his own weakness?

"And how do you propose you work off your father's debt, Bella?" he asked, curious to hear her answer, especially when his own mind was already listing all the different ways he'd enjoy having her at his beck and call.

Bare shoulders held back, she swallowed hard, but her gaze remained bold and determined on his. "I will do *anything* you ask of me. I'm . . . I'm not afraid."

God, the woman was fucking fearless, he thought, and he was drawn to that courage despite himself. Unlike her father, or even Gavin, she was unwavering in her loyalty.

"For Christ's sake, Arabella," Gavin shouted angrily, his face contorted with rage. "He's not going to ask you to cook and clean and wash his laundry for him! He will *ruin* you for any other man."

Arabella turned her gaze to Gavin, her expression cool with resolve. "Then so be it. It's *my* choice to make."

Gavin clenched his jaw and shifted his hot, angry gaze to Maddux. "She clearly doesn't know what she's saying."

"I know *exactly* what I'm saying, and what I'm doing," she snapped at Gavin as she came to stand in front of him, poking her finger at his chest. "Unlike you, I'm willing to stand up and put my father's life and welfare before my own. I'll do whatever it takes to relieve him of this burden."

When Gavin said nothing else, Arabella whirled around to face Maddux again, the skirt of her voluminous ball gown swirling around her legs. "I promise, you'll have no trouble from me. I will work off his debt, in any way you demand, in exchange for his freedom. Just . . . let him go. Please."

Maddux could have denied her request and forged full steam ahead with the original plan, but everything about Arabella intrigued and tempted him. He wanted her, desired her . . . plus there was the added bonus of Theodore thinking the worst was happening while his only daughter was under his care. The things the man would conjure in his mind would rip any decent father apart inside.

Determined to keep the upper hand, Maddux strolled around his desk until he was standing in front of Arabella and she tipped her head back to meet his gaze, hers with bold resolve. She'd clearly meant what she said when she'd told him she wasn't afraid, and her tenacity made his dick twitch with the thought of taming that fiery attitude in the bedroom.

Not giving a shit that both Theodore and Gavin watched, he reached out and brushed the backs of his fingers across Arabella's smooth, silken cheek, immensely pleased to see a heated awareness flicker in her gaze, proof that persuading her into his bed wasn't going to be all that difficult. She might hate him for what he held over her father, but she wasn't immune to the attraction between them.

"I'll accept your offer, Bella," he murmured, taking her chin between his thumb and forefinger, wanting this beautiful creature to look into his eyes and know exactly what he expected of her. Wanted to make sure there was no mistaking what she was about to trade. "Your father's freedom, for your total surrender. That is the deal."