



King's Choice Book II

The Advisor's Apprentice

By

Mandy M. Roth

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Dedication

To my readers. Thanks for your support.

Chapter One

Andrija of Braluse made his way through the village of Sabian shocked by the state of it. Once rumored to be a paradise, tucked partially in the forests of the Kingdom of Braluse, Sabian now seemed more like a post war zone. No longer did it boast beauties as far as the eye could see or wealth. It looked shaken to its very core. The smell of smoke still rode the air from the fires they'd been told were set.

Andrija spent much of his time visiting other regions of Hafoca and even other planets altogether. In his five hundred years of life, he'd seen many advances come about. Although Hafocaians preferred to live the ways of the old, they were keenly aware of technology and the evils it could bring. They kept just enough to assure their planet was protected from others and that was all. They, unlike many planets, had the advantage of natural born weapons—of supernaturals.

During Andrija's travels to other planets, he'd come across one called Earth. The planet's rich history had been of interest to him since it was rumored that many of the Hafocaians had resided there long ago, helping to build what Earth knew as its Greeks and Romans. From his understanding the Hafoca even had a hand in establishing Native American and Aztec races. It made sense. Much of their language overlapped as did some of their customs, not to mention appearances. It was a shame to know that the Native Americans, Aztecs, and almost all Earthlings for that matter had been wiped out. The Earthlings greed and desire to possess technologies greater than they could control had been their downfall. It would not be Hafoca's. Regardless of how much each of the kingdoms on Hafoca fought, they agreed on one thing, they would not become like Earth—a veritable wasteland. They valued nature too much to allow such a thing to happen. Or so he had thought prior to arriving in the village.

Hafoca males possessed something most Earthlings did not. They possessed magik. It was sacred and bestowed upon all males at birth. With this great gift came immortality and the ability to shift forms. Only a few females were born being able to wield magik and up until Andrija met his sister-in-law, he thought them to be a myth. Something the females of the world cooked up to make them feel more special than they were.

It was a fact of life for the Hafoca that their women were kept based on their beauty and health. Assuring the lines continued was the most important thing of all. Other planets tended to look down upon them for such behavior but in truth, they weren't the only ones who practiced selective mating. They were just one of the few who confessed to it at all.

The Sabian village of today looked much the way Earth had in the aftermath of their global war. It hardened his heart, knowing that his queen, Dijana, hailed from the tiny village. Though Andrija had never personally visited the village before, he knew from others that Sabian had been spectacular. It was anything but now.

He sighed.

Poor Dijana.

She had only just given birth to his nephews and was resting at the castle with his brother, King Jakov. As head advisor and brother to the king, Andrija had volunteered to journey to Sabian when the reports of an attack occurred. Never did he expect to see the destruction before him now. Drago, head guard of the seventh legion, continued to mumble under his breath about the state of affairs in Sabian. Drago had been stationed in Sabian for close to nine cycles and was

the primary reason news of the attacks made it to the palace. He'd shifted forms, into that of an eagle, and exhausted himself by flying all that distance in the blistering heat to alert the king to Sabian's need. Andrija, Drago, and armed guards had left at first light and had ridden on horseback for nearly four straight days.

All were amazed at Drago's stamina. Their people, the Avistaurus' of Braluse, were part human, part shifter and were immortal—at least the males were and the females were, as well, once mating was complete. Hafoca was inhabited with various forms of bird-like shifters. Each tribe was able to shift into a bird of prey and some other form of animal. The Avistaurus' shifted forms were that of an eagle and a bull. Since Drago wasn't a full-blooded Avistaurus, he shouldn't have been able to hold his shifted form as long as he had.

Several villagers rushed out to greet Drago, spewing forth tales of the attack and of the losses they had suffered. They were irate with the King's armies for letting them down and Andrija couldn't say he blamed them. Their lives had been threatened and many had lost all they had. It often took days, sometimes weeks for news to travel from the edges of Braluse to the palace. Jakov would never intentionally leave them at the mercy of invading troops.

Andrija glanced back at Drago and found him shaking his head as he soaked in even more destruction. The man wore the normal hair style of the men of Braluse. The sides of his head were shaved and a long, chestnut brown braid hung over one shoulder. Drago's silver eyes unnerved many but Andrija had never been bothered by them. He was aware of the fact that Drago's mother wasn't a full-blooded Hafoca. She had been the result of an Earthling, or human, as so many of their kind liked to be called, and a Hafoca male mating. By rights this and this alone should have prevented Drago from being able to serve as a royal guard. Andrija had grown up with the man, befriending him when they were but children and stood his ground, demanding Jakov allow Drago to serve. Jakov had caved easily enough because he, too, valued Drago's friendship. Andrija did more than simply value Drago's friendship. He trusted Drago fully. Not many men outside of Andrija's family could claim that right.

A group of men in long black robes moved forward from the crowd. They immediately went to Drago. "They came for our women. News spread of the Queen being the Sacerdos of the Sabian Antistitas and they thought to steal the rest of the priestesses from us. They managed to take many of them. The others scattered and have not returned to us as of yet."

It was as Andrija expected. The lure of possessing females whose power was virtually limitless was too great for outsiders to pass on. It was something the men of Braluse had had problems with long ago. At one point in Hafoca history, the lands were littered with priestesses. Many men of the old times believed the women to be too great a threat—being on equal footing with them wasn't an option. Large mass hunts happened, systematically wiping them out. It was part of the reason the priestesses were first thought to be extinct. Dijana's arrival had proven otherwise. Now, every power hungry warlord in the surrounding areas was no doubt eager to get his hands one of the Sabian Antistitas. A greater healer they would never know and the additional magik to their clans would make them virtually unstoppable.

An older man, who must have chosen to age instead of keeping his immortality, bowed his head. "Several of the priestesses did not survive the initial attacks. They are laid to rest in our burial grounds."

Andrija's gut clenched. He fought the urge to be sick. *Such a loss.* "What of the queen's sister? What of Tiegan? Is she laid to rest, as well?"

The elderly man stared up at him with wide unforgiving eyes. "We know not what has become of her. She was taken into the forest some four days past by men from Conias. We were

unable to track her scent. They have managed to mask her from us. The enemy still lurks within the forest and our strongest men joined the royal guards, leaving the rest of us to try to defend our homeland without their aid." There was no accusation in his voice but there should have been.

Andrija heard the same story through Braluse, how virile men had joined the guards rather than choosing to stay and protect their villages. Yes, the guards were many but they were spread thinly throughout the lands. He cast a wary glance at Drago, wondering just how few men he'd been able to station in Sabian. From the look upon his friend's face, the number was low. Very low.

Drago was dismounting and handing the reins to the elderly man before Andrija could comment. "Come. We shall search for Tiegan's trail. If there is one to be found, we shall uncover it."

Without hesitation, Andrija did the same, dismounting and racing into the forest in search of not only Dijana's sister, but any surviving priestesses, as well, though the queen's sister would take precedent. It was a sad truth. The survival of their race meant that only the strongest could prevail. The line of magik that Tiegan came from was powerful. So much so that it had to be protected at all costs.

Chapter Two

Tiegan watched the two men enter the forest but never thought they would be foolish enough to venture further into what the rest of the village believed was territory still inhabited by the enemy. She tiptoed quietly across the forest floor to get a better view of the outsiders. The cold wet earth greeted her bare feet. Her sandals were long since lost in the struggle with the Conias guards. If she had been like most women, her feet would be sore but because she was a priestess, she spent much of her time barefoot in the wild. In theory, she was to be one with nature, to heal the sick and protect her people from evil. As of late, she was having enough trouble protecting herself. Something was off with the land. No longer was its power limitless. Something was draining its energy and in turn, draining her.

One of the men who had entered the forest was just out of her line of sight. The moment her gaze fell upon the other, a tall man with jet black hair and eyes as brown as the *loestinu* nut, she could scarcely look away. His hair was long, and braided in much the same fashion the men of Braluse wore. Had it not been, she would have been concerned he was an invader from the outer lands. The Conias men from the village bordering Sabian wore their hair long and did not shave a good portion of it off.

Just because the man appeared to be from Braluse did not mean he was safe. Too many times she'd watched the guards of old have their way with unsuspecting women.

Every ounce of the man appeared to be covered in muscle. His tawny skin glistened with a thin sheen of sweat and she found herself wishing she could lick it off him. He wore a green wrap that had a golden snake broach fastening it tight. Still, it was slung low enough on his hips to reveal the starts of a black line of hair that disappeared beneath his wrap. Tiegan could just imagine what wonders lay beneath the dark green material. If it was anything like the rest of him, it would be pure perfection.

Never had Tiegan wanted to touch a stranger in such a manner. There had been a commander, stationed in Sabian within the last year, who appealed to her but she'd never acted upon her lust nor had it been this intense. The very idea of running not only her hands but her tongue over this newcomer's body made her inner thighs tighten and her nipples hard. He stepped so close that Tiegan wasn't sure how he didn't sense her there. His masculine scent filled her head, leaving her biting back a moan.

The very fact that the two warriors had made it so far into the forest and so close to the sacred temple worried her. This wasn't something they should have been able to do when the land's power was at its height. Tiegan had to stop them from going further. The idea of harming the man before her sickened her. The idea of betraying her sisterhood sickened her more. The priestesses had suffered greatly and the slain ones needed to be avenged.

Moving up behind the man, Tiegan withdrew her dagger and was careful to watch where she stepped, not wanting to alert the intruder of her presence. She lifted it and went to strike. In an instant, the man had her flipped over his shoulder and pinned beneath his body.

Tiegan gasped as his dark gaze landed on her. A slow smile covered his face. "What have we here?"

"Get off me, you barbarian!"

"Barbarian?" He tossed his head back and laughed. The sound was rich and deep. "If you were blonde and shorter I would think you to be the woman I seek, the Queen's sister."

"The Queen?" Tiegan's heart beat wildly at the mention of her sister, Dijana. She hadn't seen her since guards had come and took Dijana, kicking and screaming from the village. While her sister had later sent word she'd wed the King of Braluse, Tiegan had yet to witness her sister's happiness with her own eyes. Too much was at stake in Sabian for Tiegan to leave.

"What news have you of the Queen?"

"What does it matter to you?" His lips were close enough for her to kiss. She held back. "You are not the one which I seek."

All of their lives Tiegan and Dijana had lived with the reality that they looked nothing alike. Where Dijana was blonde with blue eyes, Tiegan was a brunette with green eyes. She was also a few inches taller than her older sister, putting her at five ten. While Dijana took after their mother's side, Tiegan took after their father's. Their powers were different, as well, yet from the same line of magik.

She narrowed her eyes on the man. "Who seeks the sister of the Queen, the Sacerdos' apprentice?" Sacerdos was the name given to the high priestess. Since Dijana was the Sacerdos of the Sabian Antistitas, Tiegan was considered her apprentice until a time her sister no longer wished to rule and then Tiegan would step into the role of Sacerdos.

"I thought that to be rather obvious," he said, grinding his hips against her, allowing her to feel his rock hard erection. "I seek her. Lead me to her and I shall reward you. Disobey me, or attempt to harm me again and I shall *punish* you."

From the movement of his hips, the man's planned punishment would come in the form of bed chamber play. While she was still a virgin, Tiegan was not naïve to the happenings between men and women. She and Dijana had spent many a day peering into the local brothel windows, seeing the whores pleasure their patrons. They had also witnessed unwanted advances on their fellow sisters of Sabian. Rape was common. Women were property in the eyes of Hafoca men, regarded a step higher than their horses but less than their swords.

Word had spread through Braluse that the new queen had changed the king's views on women, even leading him to disband his harem. Tiegan couldn't help but be proud of her sister for making changes. Now, as Tiegan found herself pinned under a man of Braluse, she feared the ways of old would prevail once more—that she would find herself the victim of a soldier out to sate his needs. She was what was considered a spoil of war, ripe for the picking.

"Andrija," a familiar male voice called out. As Drago emerged from the tree line, his jaw dropped and Tiegan's heart soared at the sight of a familiar face. "Andrija, what are you doing?" *Andrija? The King's brother and head advisor?*

Tiegan remained silent, refusing to voice her questions. Andrija ground against her again and she pictured him above her, driving himself deep within her womb. A tiny shudder ran over her body and her nipples scraped his chest. He smiled. "I am planning on keeping this one." Her eyes widened and he laughed. "At least until she tells me where she is hiding the Queen's sister that is."

Drago laughed and attempted to cover it with a cough. "I see. And has she told you where the Queen's sister is?"

"No."

Tiegan would have commented but her power picked then to surge, warning her of eminent danger. She bucked against Andrija. "Off! Now! Danger approaches!"

"Ah, Drago, she is a hell fire, is she not?"

Drago locked gazes with her. He knew her well enough to know to trust her gifts. He'd witnessed her intervention in an attempted rape of one of her fellow sisters of Sabian. He'd assisted her and then lurked in the shadows, following Tiegan often. "How close?"

"Within seven *marrisons*," she whispered.

"How many?"

"Too many to count."

Andrija arched a black brow. "I am not biting on your little game, priestess. Where is Dijana's sister?"

An arrow shot past Andrija's head and Tiegan couldn't help but cry out, fearful he'd be hurt. He rolled off her and crouched. Drago tossed him a sword and pulled another from the sheath upon his back. He put his hand out to Tiegan. "Come, my lady, get behind me."

"My lady?" Andrija mocked. "She is no lady. She tried to slit my throat and is dressed as a peasant. The smell of her arousal is enough to make me think she charges for her services."

Tiegan chose to ignore Andrija's comment and went to Drago. She'd seen him punishing guards who dared to harm the females and knew he'd forbidden the men from seeking sexual comforts outside of the local brothel. Since his arrival, almost a year ago, rape had declined dramatically and the women of the village no longer lived in constant fear of the men sworn to protect them.

Drago captured her hand and pulled her behind his large, muscular body. "Stay close."

Tiegan glanced to the spot she'd been laying and spotted her dagger. As she went to go for it, another arrow came buzzing past. Reaching out, she snatched hold of the arrow a second before it would have went through Andrija's head. He turned, spotted it in her hand and narrowed his gaze.

"How?"

"Thank her later, Andrija. Seek safety now!" Drago shouted.

Men moved in at them from every angle. Drago thrust her behind him, pinning Tiegan to his body. A tall, toned man Tiegan had only recently had the displeasure of meeting, stepped forth from the surrounding brush. His ice blue gaze raked over Drago. "You think to stop us from taking what we came for?"

She shivered, remembering all too well what it was like to be pinned beneath the man as he tried to have his way with her.

"I will allow no harm to come to her, if that is what you are asking," Drago said, matter-of-factly.

"And you believe that you and one other can prevent my men from collecting the future Queen of Conias?"

Tiegan glared at the man. She'd spent the last three days running for her life after having been captured by Conias guards. They'd taken her to their palace where they had their priests scrape the hair from under her arms, her legs, even her mound. When they'd attempted to pierce her nipples, in much the fashion both men of Braluse and Conias enjoyed in their females, Tiegan had done the unthinkable, she'd lashed out at the priests with her power. At first she'd thought she'd killed them. Much to her relief, she'd only stunned them, affording her a chance to escape. "I will never marry that beast of a king! And I will not go back and be subjected to your ways once more."

The man's jaw went tight. He'd been one of the many guards who had held her down as the priests scraped the hair from her body, before adorning her in jewels and oils. "You will learn

your place woman. For starters, it will be on your knees before me, sucking my cock until I deem you to be done. It is my right as advisor to the king of Conias to sample his future wife.”

Tiegan had heard of such customs and wanted nothing to do with them or the men who practiced them. She stepped out from behind the shelter of Drago's body and smiled. “The King of Conias is not my king. I serve no man.”

“Not even your sister's husband, Tiegan?” the man asked.

Andrija drew in a deep breath. “*You* are Tiegan?”

She ignored him and focused on the man before her. “I know not my sister's husband. My only concern is for Dijana's safety. Because she is married to the King of Braluse does not mean I bow before him or,” she glared at Andrija, “his men. The Avistaurus males differ not in my eyes.”

“Seize Tiegan and kill the others!” the man shouted before he headed off into the forest.

The men surrounding them moved in quickly. Tiegan bent down, in a fighting stance and winked. “Come, let us play.”

“Are you mad, woman?” Andrija asked, coming straight for her.

Someone raised a sword behind Andrija's head and Tiegan charged him, knocking him out of the way and throwing her power up to catch the sword a second before it would have split her in two. She glared at the warrior before her. “You dare to try to kill the King of Braluse's head advisor? His brother?”

She glanced at Andrija who was pushing to his feet and staring at her with wide eyes. If she didn't know better, she would have said he looked proud of her. That was ridiculous. The man had only just finished likening her to a peasant whore. She felt her magik coming back into her, bringing with it a knowledge she did not want to possess.

“I may care not what becomes of him but I sense my sister's magik on him. He has bonded with her.” She swallowed hard. “Bedded her even.” Tiegan didn't bother to hide the hurt in her voice. The idea of Dijana coupling with Andrija made her chest tight. She had no claim to the man but it didn't lessen the pain any.

She glanced towards Andrija and looked away fast, afraid he'd see how much it bothered her that he'd slept with her sister.

“Tiegan,” he said, his voice low.

The man who had held her while the priests scrapped the hair from her body laughed. “Do you bow before him, Tiegan? Do you go to your knees willingly or does he have to force you much the same way I had to force you to spread your legs.”

Tiegan and Drago charged the man only to find additional enemy guards rushing forward to impede them. They fought bravely and with great skill, cutting through many of the enemy's men. Drago dodged a blow to the head from a sword and Tiegan gasped. Andrija's gaze snapped to her, costing him dearly. He took direct hit to the shoulder, the sword piercing his tawny flesh.

Anger at the warrior's attempt on Andrija's life temporarily pushed away the jealousy she felt. She used her magik to thrust the sword back at the man. It struck him quickly and was a clean kill.

Seizing hold of the weapon, Tiegan spun around and struck another attacker. Drago and Andrija followed suit, cutting through the enemy one by one. It wasn't until she felt a warm body pressed to hers, pulling her close in a warm embrace that she realized the enemy was dead. Giving into the security of the person holding her, Tiegan dropped her weapon and sank to the forest floor. Blood stained her hands and upper arms but she was numb to it.

“Come, let us clean you, Tiegan,” Andrija whispered, his voice reassuring. “They shall not take you from us. You are safe.”

She remained in place, still in shock at the carnage before her. It wasn't until Drago knelt before her, pulling a cloth from his satchel and wiping her hands that she looked up. As his silver gaze locked on her, she trembled and went into his arms. “When will they stop coming? We have done nothing to them yet we've been hunted from the moment we were born.”

“Shh.” Drago smoothed the back of her hair as he held her close. “Andrija and I are here to keep you safe. “

The mere mention of Andrija's name brought back the knowledge that he wore her sister's magik. It stung more than she wanted to admit, knowing he'd been intimate with her sister. Tiegan allowed Drago to help her stand and stayed close to him, avoiding Andrija's touch.

Drago led her to the river's edge and cleaned her as if she were a child. As he turned his back to her, to give her privacy to remove her blood stained garments, Tiegan glanced up to find Andrija watching her. He leaned against a tree and crossed an arm over his massive chest so he could apply pressure to his shoulder wound, his gaze narrowing on Drago. If she didn't know better, she would have said he looked to be a jealous lover. That was absurd.

Tiegan ran a hand over Drago's upper arm, using him for support and to shield Andrija from seeing her naked form. Too many men she didn't know had laid witness to her naked body in the last several days and she wanted nothing more to do with being on display. She washed quickly. Drago put his hand in the air and caught a hunter green cloak. Since it matched Andrija's wrap, she had little doubt it was his. Drago turned enough to offer it to her, keeping his gaze averted. Tiegan took the cloak as she emerged from the water. She wrapped it around herself and sighed. “I hate death.”

“Most do,” Drago said, putting his hand out to her. “Your skin is like ice.”

Andrija was next to her in an instant, shoving Drago from her side and taking her hands in his large, warm ones. Against her better judgment, Tiegan was drawn into the warmth he provided and the safety he represented. His manly scent assailed her, making her eyelids flutter and her heart rate quicken. She wanted to be every bit the brave warrior women she believed herself to be but couldn't. Not with all that she'd been through and seen.

Andrija pulled her closer, rubbing her arms and back, returning feeling to them slowly. She sighed and put her cheek against his massive chest. Her hand went to his wounded shoulder. It hurt her to know he was injured. “Are you in great pain?”

“No.” He flexed under the weight of her touch.

“Are you harmed?” he asked, his warm breath skating over her cheek.

Closing her eyes, Tiegan tried to imagine what meeting him under different circumstances might have been like. He touched her chin and tilted her face towards him.

“Tiegan, are you harmed?”

“No. I am well, especially now that you're here.”

Had she really just said that?

She gulped.

“Andrija, this area is not secure,” Drago said, something off in his voice.

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Andrija kept hold of Tiegan and narrowed his gaze on his old friend. Drago's tone told him just how unhappy he was with the current situation and Andrija suspected it had more to do with Tiegan being in his arms than how secure the location was or was not. Still, Drago had a point and Andrija in no way wanted to see Tiegan be forced to take a life again.

She'd done so to save him and the emotional toll it had taken had cost her greatly. For that alone he should want to put her on a pedestal, forever assuring she was cared for and protected. Andrija wanted to do those things for other reasons, as well. Selfish ones. She made his body burn with the need to shift and claim her. From the moment he'd laid eyes on her he'd fought the urge to lay her out on the ground and fuck her sweet body.

The shifter within him allowed him to smell Tiegan's body changing, her fear and shock giving way to desire. Whether the desire was for him or for Drago, Andrija wasn't sure. He did know that no one would like the outcome if Drago dared to take pleasure in her because Andrija would kill him.

Drago cleared his throat. "We should move to a safer location."

Tiegan nodded, still pressing her body to his and Andrija could do nothing more than give her the comfort she sought. Guilt built deep within him for having dared to desire her sister. He sensed Tiegan knew through her own magik that he had bedded her sister, Dijana, and that it hurt her. It had only been one night, nine moon cycles ago but he knew that would not matter to Tiegan. For some unknown reason, pleasing her was what he wanted to do most.

Tiegan drew back from him and hugged the cloak around her damp body. "Follow me."

Chapter Three

Andrija watched silently as Tiegan knelt at the edge of a river, near a waterfall. He and Drago had followed her blindly, wondering where she was leading them. Once they'd reached the waterfall area, she'd informed them they'd arrived. Neither man knew what to say.

Tiegan lifted her arms into the air and swayed back and forth, singing a beautiful mix of chants. Much to his surprise, the waterfall parted, revealing an entrance to a cave. He glanced at Drago who in turn shrugged, following Tiegan as she stood and proceeded to walk across the water.

As Andrija stepped forward, he tapped the river with his toe. It felt solid but still looked like a river. Drago jumped up and down several times, plainly as impressed with Tiegan's power as Andrija.

She directed an amused grin back at them before heading under the parted waterfall and into the cavern. The waterfall closed behind Andrija as he followed her lead and he knew without asking that if he were to try to walk on the water again, he would not be successful.

The cavern was narrow at first before giving way to an enormous room that looked to be more like a palace chamber than a cave. Tapestries hung from various spots on the walls and fine furnishings sat throughout. Several passageways led off from the room.

Drago touched the hilt of his sword and moved towards one of them. "I will search to be sure this is safe."

Tiegan let out a soft laugh as she lit oil lamps throughout the oversized room. "This is one of the hidden temples for the Sabian Antistitas. No one can enter without a priestess opening it for them and no priestess would for someone she did not trust.

The way she stared around the room saddened Andrija, though he wasn't sure why. Tiegan took a deep breath. "This is the first time males have ever been in this particular temple. It feels wrong but right. I can't explain it and I'm too tired to bother." She pointed towards the passageway opposite Drago. "Guest sleeping quarters are that way. Food is back that way and you'll find warm bathing springs just down the way from there. I'll be in soon to dress your wound."

"My wound will heal on its own."

She lifted a brow. "But I can..."

"It will heal on its own."

"As you wish." She walked away.

Andrija wanted to go after her when she headed down another passage but knew she needed a moment to reflect. Drago's hand on his shoulder startled Andrija, nearly causing him to draw his weapon and attack his friend.

Drago laughed. "Rest, Andrija. I'll take first watch."

Reluctantly, Andrija headed in the direction Tiegan told him to, all the while wanting desperately to go to her. As much as he disliked admitting it, his wound was more severe than he'd let on. He hated the knowledge that Tiegan had been forced to protect him. He was the male, the warrior, the one who should have protected her, not the other way around.

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Tiegan sat upon the edge of her bed, made up of oversized pillows scattered over a plush rug. Long white, sheer fabric hung from gold hoops secured into the ceiling. The material hung

all around the outer edges of her sleeping area, affording her some privacy since she normally shared the chamber with Dijana, or at least had prior to her sister marrying the king. Now it seemed cold and lonely.

Deep in thought, Tiegan never heard the sound of footsteps approaching and the moment she sensed someone behind her, she yelped. Turning, she expected to find Andrija there. He seemed the bolder of the two men. When Drago's hungry, silver gaze greeted her, Tiegan inched back further onto the pillows, unsure what he wanted.

"Drago?"

He bent, took hold of a bottle full of scented oil that sat next to her sleeping area and leaned over her. "I won't hurt you, Tiegan."

He poured the rose-scented oil liberally into the palms of his hands and began rubbing her ankle first, then her calf, knee and thigh. He tipped his head, causing his braid to fall over his shoulder and skim high on her inner thigh. Tiegan arched her back to him, unable to stop herself as the starts of pleasure tingled through her.

"Drago."

"Shhh," he whispered, sliding aside the cloak that covered her, leaving her naked and exposed to him. "Let me take care of you, Tiegan. Let me make sure your needs are tended to for once. It's always you who worries about others."

He inched his way higher and cursed softly as he ran his thumb over a scar on her inner thigh. It was faint and had taken a lot out of her to heal. "How did you come by this?"

Tiegan knew better than to answer him. If Drago knew the Conias guards had harmed her greatly, he would run head first into danger, getting himself killed in the process. She touched his chin and eased her fingers over his jaw line. Gold hoop earrings adorned each ear, as they did with all men of Braluse. He bent down further, putting his lips close to hers.

His kiss was chaste at first. It was his hands that wandered into forbidden places, parting her folds and rubbing her swollen bud. She arched beneath his touch, frantic for more. For so many years she'd fought to prevent a man from taking what he wanted and here she was, ready to hand Drago exactly what he desired.

Tiegan stiffened and Drago increased his pace, rubbing her clit faster, driving her to the brink of culmination. She opened her lips slightly and his tongue greeted hers. She moaned and he settled his weight over her.

Running her hands up and over the back's of his arms, Tiegan's mind wandered, picturing Andrija above her instead of Drago. The moment Andrija's image settled into her mind, she began grinding herself against Drago, desperate to have him show her all that could be beautiful between a man and woman.

"Mmm, Tiegan," he whispered, between kisses.

She let out a sultry laugh. He tweaked her clit just right, sending her over the edge. "Uh, there, Andrija. There." The moment Andrija's name left her lips Tiegan knew her mistake.

Drago froze before pulling away, taking his warmth and pleasure with him. Tiegan's eyes snapped open. Shaking her head, she reached for him.

"No." He shook his head. "I need to stand watch."

"Drago, please. I did not mean..."

His gaze hardened as he pushed to his feet, leaving her cold and longing to be touched. He left her chamber quickly.

It's for the best.

For some reason, she didn't feel as sure of herself as she should have. The need to clear her head was great. Tiegan knew if she dared to go to Andrija to dress his wound, he would snap at her and chasing after Drago wasn't an option. Residing herself to the fact it would be a long night, she decided a warm bath was in order. She grabbed hold of a red sheet, wrapped it around herself and headed down the hallway.

Chapter Four

Andrija hissed as the spring water filled his wound. His long unbound hair clung to his shoulders and he was forced to pull it away from his injury. He settled down further into the water, doing his best to ignore the pain. The temple's springs were heavenly. He'd not bothered with lighting any of the oil lamps scattered about. His shifter eyesight was keen.

Varying scented oils were strewn about in different sized glass vials. It was easy to picture the hot spring filled with beautiful, naked women, rubbing themselves down with oils. As exciting as that sounded, Andrija had only one woman on his mind.

Tiegan.

The moment he'd laid eyes on her he'd wanted her for all time. Thumping his head against the edge of the natural spring, Andrija did his best to push thoughts of the temptress from his head. No sooner had he achieved a peaceful state of being than the object of his desire showed herself—walking into the bathing chamber in haste. Her face was flushed and he caught scent of her arousal almost instantly. He also smelled someone else on her.

Drago.

Andrija fought back a growl, choosing instead to grip hold of the edges of the spring. He would kill the man. Friend or not. No one was to touch his Tiegan.

My Tiegan?

He clenched and unclenched his fists, taking long calming breaths as he silently reminded himself that Tiegan was not his. At least she wasn't his yet but she would be. Of that he had no doubt.

She moved to the side of the pool never noticing him, not that he thought she would. There was no light in the cavern. Tiegan seemed to just know where she was going. He guessed it was because she had grown up in and around the temple.

Dipping a toe in, her eyelids fluttered shut and Andrija's cock hardened. He reached down into the water, taking hold of it and stroking it as he watched Tiegan slip out of the sheet she had wrapped around her. It dropped into a silken puddle at her feet as she descended into the spring.

He stroked his shaft, wishing it was his hands sliding up her body in place of the water. He wanted to be what caressed her smooth skin.

Gods, she's perfect.

Gritting his teeth, Andrija barely kept his groan to himself.

Her breasts bobbed on the top of the water doing little to help his current state of readiness. Before he knew it, he was swimming over to her, remaining quiet. He was close enough to touch her yet she didn't seem to notice him. She dunked under and he touched her shoulder.

Tiegan came up with a start, coughing and grabbing holding of his forearms. Andrija patted her back gently and chuckled. She cast him a very unimpressed look.

"I didn't know you were here." She glanced around. "It's pitch black in here. Why don't you have any of the lamps lit?"

Andrija crowded closer to her, his body brushing hers. His cock had a mind of its own and it currently was doing its best to snake its way into her heated core. Tiegan pushed on his shoulders and tipped her head back.

“Andrija, no,” she said, her protest weak.

He growled as he continued moving her backwards until her body was pressed between his and the wall of the spring. “Did you refuse Drago?”

He knew she didn't.

Tiegan stared up at him and reached for his face, her brows drawn in. It was easy to tell she couldn't see him in the dark. Part of him liked that knowledge. She ran her fingers over his cheek, his chin and then his lips. He bit lightly at her thumb and noticed her face flushing instantly.

She wanted him.

He pressed his distained flesh against her. “Did you refuse him?”

Something flashed in her eyes before a resolve came over her. “Did you refuse my sister?”

His chest tightened and guilt assailed him. A part of him wanted to back away, admit defeat and lick his wounds. The dominant half would not hear of leaving what he knew to be true—Tiegan was destined to be his. He felt it deep in his blood. She was to spend the rest of his immortally long life by his side, bearing him fine sons and always being there to share forever with.

Tiegan tried to break free. “I see you no more wish to answer my question than I...”

He jerked her to him. “I took your sister. I shared her with my brother to help them create life, Tiegan.”

She gasped and he could read the concern in her green eyes.

“The babies she has birthed are not mine. I did not spill my seed within her womb. Jakov saw to it he is the father of his sons.” He paused for a moment. “And I have not touched Dijana since that night, many moons ago. Nor have I longed to. She belongs to another and I wish them happiness. I cannot undo my past. Would that I could.”

“Nor I mine,” she whispered, easing the tension in her arms and ceasing her struggle.

Her lips met his and Andrija kissed her with a passion he'd not known before. Their tongues mated as he knew their bodies soon would. He circled her tongue, sucking softly and losing himself in the moment. Andrija sensed another presence and knew Drago was close, watching what transpired between he and Tiegan.

He teetered on the edge of drawing back from the kiss to attack Drago for daring to touch Tiegan but he couldn't. The thought of losing contact with her lush lips was too much for him. His shoulder ached as he yanked her hard to him.

Tiegan broke their kiss and placed her palms on his shoulders. She stared up at him with lust-filled eyes. “I can ease your pain and heal your wounds.”

“At what cost to yourself?” he asked, worried it would drain her.

Licking her lower lip, she smiled. “It will leave me in need of certain things.” She gave him a knowing look.

“Such as?” he prompted.

She slinked against him, rubbing her wet body against his just right. His cock smoothed over her cleft and Andrija groaned in agony, needing to be in her. She nibbled on his jaw line, taking her time with him, teasing him to the point he broke.

Snatching hold of her wrists, he jerked Tiegan's arms around his neck and lifted her out of the water partially. He covered a nipple with his mouth, sucking and enjoying the feel of her bounty pressed to his face.

Tiegan tightened in his arms, crying out and wiggling. She dug her nails into his shoulder and he realized then she'd done something to heal his wound. He also knew she was as in need of joining as he was.

A niggle in the back of his head began and he glanced over to find Drago in the entranceway, watching them. Drago skimmed a hand down his torso and cupped his groin. Andrija nodded, permitting his friend to satisfy himself while watching Andrija take pleasure from Tiegan.

He toyed with her breasts, licking his way around each nipple before biting them gently. She thrashed in his arms and he laughed.

Her chest heaved as she stared down at him. "More."

"My pleasure," he whispered, wrapping one arm around her to keep her secure while moving his other down. He found her mound, slick with cream even though they were partially immersed in water. She wiggled her hips as he began tweaking her swollen bud.

Such passion. Such power in one so young.

He bit at her chest, leaving red marks on her beautiful skin. He hated himself for the action but couldn't seem to stop. The need to mark her, claim her as his own was too great to resist.

Her rosy nipples seemed to swell from his kisses. He pressed his hardness against her upper thigh and glanced up to find her staring hungrily down at him. Tiegan bit at her lower lip again, driving him mad with desire.

"I want more," she said.

A sly smile spread over his face as he lowered her to be able to stand on her own in the water. The second her feet touched the bottom, he took hold of her shoulders, his breathing erratic and his mind wild with thoughts of claiming her. "Take my cock into your mouth."

"You wish me to place your serpent in my...?"

It was hard not to laugh at her innocence. Somehow, Andrija maintained control and nodded. She shook her head and stood defiantly before him. If it was a challenge she wanted to issue, he would accept.

"Take me in your mouth, woman."

Tiegan held firm, refusing to do as he bid. She crossed her arms over her chest and yelped as Andrija reached out, took hold of her and forced her head under the water. His cock brushed her cheek and she gasped at its size, drawing in water in the process. She coughed and he pulled her up, his manly laughter riding the air.

"Are you ready to obey me," he grinned, "my lady?"

"I will not put your..."

He dunked her again, this time when she opened her mouth to yell, he thrust the head of his cock between her lips. The taste of him was pleasant, causing her body to heat. Andrija forced more of his shaft into her mouth and she strained to open wide enough to fit him. Her chest burned for air and she feared she might burst a second before he yanked her up.

Drawing in a deep breath, she glared at him and then slapped him across the chest. He was so chiseled her hand bounced off him. He laughed again. "You are not finished."

She stared at him blankly. He couldn't expect her to do it again.

As he pushed her beneath the water and shoved his cock into her mouth once more, she knew better. He certainly did expect her to please him. The worst part of it all was how excited she was by the prospect of making him happy. She wanted to please him, to hear him shout out in ecstasy because of her.

She took him in her mouth, no longer fighting. He hit the back of her throat and she gagged slightly. It was enough to cause discomfort underwater. Andrija pulled her up for air and then dunked her under. This time she greedily took his cock head in her mouth and bobbed up and down, sucking him. When he next tried to pull her up for air, she resisted for as long as she could, wanting to taste him more.

Tiegan gulped air and dove under water, catching hold of his shaft and slipping her mouth over him. He ground his hips, forcing his cock and water into her mouth. She hurried her pace and the next thing she knew, Andrija stilled and held her head to him as his cock twitched in her mouth. Salty, hot liquid pulsed down her throat. She swallowed and more continued to come. Finally, when his cock stopped jerking, Andrija forced her up and out of the water.

His mouth crashed down upon hers fiercely. He imprinted his very presence on her soul as he kissed her. She melted into him. "P-please, Andrija. More."

Nodding, Andrija pulled Tiegan's waist, forcing her up and over the head of his cock. Her entrance was slick but tight. He locked gazes with her as the water sloshed around them. The knowledge that Drago not only watched their actions but still stroked his cock to the scene, only served to spur Andrija on more. He impaled Tiegan on his cock, slamming through her virgin barrier, making her scream.

Guilt assailed him. "Tiegan, I did not know you were a—"

She bit her lower lip so hard that she drew blood. The shifter side of him went wild, taking control of the man and the next thing Andrija knew, he was thrusting upwards, while pulling down on Tiegan's hips. His lower half burned a second before it began to shift forms. He knew without looking that dark fur now covered his legs and he knew his cock was lengthening at an alarming rate.

Tiegan, already too tight for him as it was, let out a cry and tried to scurry off him. There was no way the shifter side of Andrija would permit the pleasure to end. The best he could hope for was to please her along the way, as well. He let his power up and out, coating her, easing her pain. She exhaled and leaned into him, her breasts jiggling in his face.

A chuckle escaped him as he caught a nipple in his mouth, licking it, sucking it gently as he continued to pound into her pussy. She was sweet, so pure and innocent. He could scarcely control himself. The need to fill her with his seed was great but he wanted the moment to last as long as possible.

Andrija bit at her nipple, careful not to harm her. Tiegan moaned and cupped his head, yanking his face to her breast more. "Harder," she panted. "Bite me harder."

He gave into her wishes, biting her breast harder, this time drawing blood. His balls drew upwards as his body stiffened. Unable to stop himself, Andrija bit down more, drinking her blood down as her channel began to milk his shaft. He exploded into her womb, filling her with his jetting seed.

"Mine," he ground out, still keeping his mouth on her breast, the taste of her powerful blood too perfect to surrender. The claim had been made. She was now his mate, his wife. He continued his sensual assault, his cock remaining hard even though he'd finished.

Gathering control of his lower half, Andrija forced it to return to human form as he planted a healing kiss upon his bite mark. Tiegan's eyes rolled into the back of her head as she rode him with a fiery passion.

He glanced over her shoulder to find Drago, stroking himself to culmination. His friend's seed spit forth and Drago used it as added moisture, continuing to palm himself.

Tiegan followed Andrija's gaze and he held his breath, fearful she would be shy about what they had just shared, knowing Drago had watched. As her eyelids fluttered and she moaned, grinding against his cock, he knew the knowledge Drago had watched excited her.

Still guilty over having taken her sister all those months ago, Andrija did something he never thought he'd do, he put his hand out to Drago. "Come, my friend."

Tiegan stilled and stared at Andrija.

"Do not worry. He will only touch you when and where I say he can." Andrija used his other hand to caress her lower lip. "You want that, do you not, Tiegan? You want Drago to touch you."

She hesitated before shaking her head. He knew she was lying for his benefit. He also knew he would never be able to apologize enough for having bedded her sister. He would give her one night of passion with two men before cutting her off from all others, and keeping her all to himself. He'd already marked her, put his claim on her. She was his and his alone.

Drago approached slowly, hedging along the bathing pool. Andrija patted the edge. "Come. Sit here."

Tiegan's gaze swept over Andrija and he sensed her fear. He offered a soft smile. "I will guide you."

"Andrija, you have claimed her," Drago said, his voice low. "I have no wish to come between a mated pair."

"Claimed me?" Tiegan asked, shock evident.

Andrija soothed the worry from her forehead and looked up at his friend. "You, this with the two of us pleasing her, will be my gift to my new bride."

Drago sat on the edge of the bathing spring and Andrija touched Tiegan's cheek. "Take him in your hand. Stroke him first with your hand and then with your mouth."

She gasped. "Andrija, I..."

He pinched her nipple just enough to make her squirm upon his shaft. "Take him in your hand." He saw the excitement in her eyes and knew Tiegan liked the domination regardless of how independent she thought herself.

She obeyed, taking Drago's cock in her hand and stroking him. Drago tipped his head back and groaned. The sight made Andrija's erection border on painful. He slammed up and into his mate, fucking her to the point she clung to him with one hand and the other wrapped around Drago's cock.

Andrija wanted to release again, come inside her but he held back, choosing instead to withdraw. Tiegan's whimper was music to his ears. He smiled at the knowledge that she wanted him inside her. He lifted her and had her face Drago. Pushing gently on her back, he eased her over, lining her head up with Drago's shaft. "Take him in your mouth, Tiegan. Take him while I take you."

He thrust two fingers into her pussy and began finger fucking her, watching as she bent, putting her mouth over the top of Drago's cock. Andrija moaned in unison with Drago at the sight and sheathed himself in her womb quickly, taking it with a desperation that scared him. He pounded, holding tight to her hips, all the while keeping his eyes on the sight of her sucking Drago's shaft. As erotic as the sight was, deep inside, his gut clenched at the knowledge she was taking pleasure with Drago.

You have much to atone for, he reminded himself.

Drago cupped the sides of Tiegan's head, helping her strike the perfect rhythm. Andrija withdrew, fisted his cock before lining up with her heated core and slamming into once more. He

repeated the steps, pulling out and pushing back in, watching the folds of her channel stretch to accommodate his size and relishing in the sounds of their joining sexes. He kept his magik rushing through her, assuring she remained pain free. Without his help, her virgin body would never be able to take all he was doing.

Drago cried out and pulled Tiegan's head from his lap just in time for seed to jet forth. It coated her breasts and Andrija thrust into her, reaching around with one hand and smearing the cum all over her chest. He drew her back to him and sank under the water, rinsing her body of the other's man's seed as he filled her womb with his own.

They came up, both taking deep breathes as they did.

Tiegan twisted in his arms and stared at him with something akin to fright in her eyes. "Andrija, I..."

"Shh." He pressed a finger to her lips, silencing her. "You have pleased us. Now, allow us to please you."

He lifted her from the pool and set her on the edge, next to Drago.

Drago's hungry silver gaze slid over Tiegan's pussy and he knew what his friend wanted. He also knew he could not allow that to happen. "You shall not spill your seed in her womb. She is ripe and my magik courses through her veins."

Drago's eyes widened. "You seek to make her with child?"

Tiegan tried to sit up, gasping as she went. Andrija splayed his hand over her tiny stomach, keeping her pinned with ease. He smiled. "Do you wish for Drago to taste of you?"

Drago didn't wait for a response, he bent his head and pushed his face into Tiegan's silken depths. She cried out, clutching at nothing as she arched her back. Drago's long tongue slid out and Andrija watched as his mate wiggled under another man's touch. The fierce need to shove Drago away and kill him for daring to touch what was his was great. It took all Andrija had to remain in place.

It seemed like an eternity before Tiegan's cries of passion sounded, alerting him to her pleasure. Andrija climbed from the pool with ease and had Tiegan lifted up and off the ground in seconds. She drew in a sharp breath as he walked her to the cavern wall. "Wrap your legs around my waist, wife."

Her breathing grew ragged. "I'm not your..."

Andrija thrust to the hilt, ramming her full of his cock and rendering her protest silent. He filled her completely, savoring every moment of being in his mate.

My mate.

The thought sent him over the edge. He melted into her body, losing track of where he stopped and she started. His power ran through her, keeping her pain free, allowing him to be as aggressive as he wanted. Tiegan threw her head back and shouted something inaudible as her core constricted around him. Reaching down, Andrija pinched the base of his cock, preventing himself from finishing. He withdrew and let her stand on her own for a moment.

It took Andrija a minute to collect himself enough to speak. "Tiegan, I will leave this decision to you. If you wish to have Drago enter you, as I have, tell me now. For once I send him away, he will not share your body or your bed ever again. Am I clear?"

Her gaze hardened. "And what of you, Andrija?"

He stared at her with wide eyes. "Of course I will still share your bed. I will be the only man who..."

Tiegan flicked her wrist and much to Andrija's surprise, it suddenly felt as if he's been chained in place. "Tiegan?"

A slow smile spread over her lips. "Tell me, *husband*, what of you and other women. Will you seek comforts outside of our marriage chamber?"

She was jealous. The knowledge left his heart soaring.

"No. I will not, wife."

Tiegan glanced to the side, expecting to find Drago there near the pool's edge but he was gone. She looked at Andrija. He shrugged and began stroking himself. Tiegan had only a moment to wonder if his cock was ever truly sated before he was struggling against her power.

"Release me," he said, his voice even.

"No." She went to her knees, running her hands over his torso, shocked he had not only desired her as she did him but had claimed her, as well. Never did Tiegan think she would marry, let alone marry a man such as Andrija.

She bit at his thigh, unable to get much beyond a tiny bit of skin. He yelped and she laughed. "Such a brave warrior."

Groaning, he struggled against her power. "Tiegan," he said, his tone warning.

"I'm sorry, my lord, would you rather I dunk you under water until I am pleased?" A mischievous smile graced her face.

He blushed and Tiegan licked a line to just under his sac. She nibbled playfully. "Mmm, are you always this big? This hard?"

"Around you...yes."

Taking him in her mouth, Tiegan had little doubt he spoke the truth.

Chapter Five

Tiegan rubbed her husband's shoulders while he stared at the edges of the forest. It had been almost two full moon cycles since their time with Drago in the temple bathing pool. In that time Drago had disappeared, leaving behind only a note informing Andrija that he had gone in search of other captured priestesses.

Andrija had been deeply saddened by the news and nothing she did seemed to lift his spirits. Their time, while pleasant and sensual was shrouded with guilt. Andrija was bearer of much guilt and getting him to let some go was next to impossible. Tiegan focused her attentions on rebuilding Sabian and trying to build the foundation needed for a marriage but she often felt as if she was the only one really trying to make things work.

Tiegan kissed his back and sighed. "The village elders wish to meet with you before you depart."

He put his hand over hers. "Before we depart," he corrected.

She hesitated before speaking. "Andrija, I have grown very fond of you over our time together. I will miss you greatly when you go but my place is here."

Jerking around, he stared at her, his brown eyes wide. "You have grown fond of me?" He choked. "Fond? That is all? We join every chance we get. We know every inch of one another, Tiegan." He swallowed hard. "I claimed you as my mate...my wife."

"Yet you distance yourself from me." She pressed her hand to his chest, above his heart. "Here, Andrija. You share your body with me but nothing more. Your heart is locked and your head is off, worried more about your best friend's well-being than that of your wife."

He opened his mouth and then closed it before turning and storming away from her. Tiegan wasn't in the mood to argue with him. The elders had need of her services, as well. They wished to have the village blessed.

She headed down the path, towards the village square and stopped when she heard something shuffling in the brush. Glancing around, she looked for signs of Andrija but found none. She didn't sense him either. Something was off.

On alert, she backed down the path slowly, scanning the area for the threat. These very woods had played host to her kidnapping only a moon and a half ago. Tiegan was desperate to avoid being captured again. A hand clamped over her mouth and she screamed into it, to no avail.

"Shhh," a deep, familiar voice whispered.

She stilled.

Drago?

She tipped her head and when her gaze met a silver one, her heart leapt for joy. He was alive and well. And holding her mouth shut?

Puzzled, she went to ask him but he tugged and motioned with his head in the other direction. There she spotted several guards from the neighboring Kingdom of Conias. Her eyes widened. Had Drago not silenced her, they would have found her and she would have been at their mercy once more.

The guards passed by and Drago released his hold on her mouth. His hand slid down her body and came to a stop on her midriff. He skimmed the backs of his knuckles over the tiniest of

swells on her abdomen and she waited, wondering if he would sense what Andrija had not—she was with child.

Drago pressed his mouth to her ear. “Congratulations.”

Unable to help herself, Tiegan burst into tears.

Drago turned her to face him and held her in his arms. “Why do you weep?”

She couldn't answer. She simply held tight to him and cried, letting it all out, thankful to have a friend in Drago.

“Has Andrija harmed you?”

Tiegan shook her head and looked up at her friend. He wiped the tears from her cheeks.

“Tell me why it is you cry, Tiegan. Life grows within you, are you not thrilled?”

“Oh, I am, Drago. I am, but ...,” she sighed, “he keeps his distance from me... emotionally.”

“Perhaps he is nervous about becoming a father,” Drago offered.

Tiegan wished that were the case. She touched Drago's upper arms. “I've not told him the news and he has yet to guess.”

“He does not suspect?”

“I did,” Andrija said, appearing from behind Drago, “and it would appear I was correct. Her heart is and has always been with you.”

“W-what?” Tiegan asked, confused by her husband's outburst.

Andrija glared at them. “I suspected you cared for him and he you. I wondered if you would be in his arms the minute he returned and I was correct.”

Drago pushed Tiegan behind him and stood tall before Andrija. “Old friend, you are acting the fool. She is your wife and her heart is...”

Andrija struck out, punching Drago in the face before he could finish. Horrified, Tiegan threw herself between the men just as Andrija was about to deliver another blow. It would have connected had Drago not yanked her out of the way. She screamed and Andrija blinked down at her.

“My gods, I almost... Tiegan?” He made a move for her and she stepped back. “I'm sorry. I never meant to...”

“Don't even think about touching me until you apologize to your friend for your behavior!”

Andrija stuck his bottom lip out as if he were a child and let out a long sigh. “Very well. I'm sorry, Drago.”

Drago snickered and the two reminded her more of young boys than seasoned warriors. “Apology accepted if you admit you were too blinded by unfounded jealousy to tell the woman before us that you love her.”

Andrija turned pink from his ears to his toes and rubbed the back of his head. “I do.”

“You do what?” Drago prompted.

“I love her with all my being.”

Tears welled in Tiegan's eyes. She covered her mouth with her hand and nodded her thanks to Drago for making her husband admit his feelings. She opened her mouth to tell him that she loved him, too, when white hot pain shot through her upper chest. Shocked, she looked down to find an arrow sticking out, just above her breast. Red smeared her upper body as darkness danced around the edges of her consciousness. As she took another look at the arrow she recognized it as one of the poison tipped ones the Conias were famous for using.

Her gaze snapped to Andrija who was busy killing the enemy. She put her hand out. "A-Andrija." She went to one knee and he rushed towards her, leaving Drago to kill the remaining enemy.

"Tiegán? You've been hit!"

"Poison," she mumbled as he scooped her into his arms. "The baby."

"Baby?" He held her tighter as a slew of curses fell forth from his lips. "Drago! My wife and child need assistance. Fetch the healer!"

Drago appeared next to them, breathing heavily. "Tiegán is the only healer remaining in the village."

She touched Andrija's cheek. "I love you, too."

"Shh, do not waste your strength," he said, his voice choked. "I will get you to someone who can help."

Chapter Six

Andrija paced the hallway of the palace in much the same fashion his brother had only three moons prior. Though, this time he was not awaiting the birth of babies, he was awaiting the news as to whether or not his wife and child would live. A ride that normally took four days, took him only two. He rode his horse as far as it would take him before taking flight, his wife in his arms and flying straight through to the palace of Braluse. When he arrived he was exhausted and Tiegan had ceased breathing.

The door to his chamber opened and Dijana appeared, covered in sweat and looking disheveled. Jakov came out behind her and wrapped his arms around his tiny wife. "You have done all you could," his brother said.

Andrija closed his eyes. "Is she...?"

"You love her greatly, don't you?" Dijana asked.

"More than life itself, my queen. Life is worth nothing if she is not part of it." He clenched his fists. "I have been afraid to open fully to her and to allow myself to love unconditionally because I thought I would lose her to another man in the end. Never did I think I would lose her to poison."

A hand touched his arm. "Andrija, go in and sit with her."

"I cannot," he said, his throat tight. "If she...I can't...to see her...I..."

"Sister, is he always a bumbling fool or does he save this side of himself just for me?"

Andrija looked up to find Tiegan standing in the doorway. She was pale but alive. Dijana and Jakov made a move to go for her but Andrija beat them to it, sweeping her up into his arms and kissing her passionately. It wasn't until Jakov cleared his throat for the third time that Andrija stopped kissing Tiegan.

He pulled back. "You're alive?"

"I am."

He glanced down the length of her. "And the little one?"

"They are well, too," Dijana offered.

Andrija froze. "They?"

Tiegan giggled. "It would appear twins run in the families."

Andrija held his wife tightly and pretended to be upset with the news. The wide smile on his face foiled his plans. He kissed Tiegan again and put his forehead to hers. "I love you."

"Enough to move to Sabian with me?"

He let out a long breath. "If that is what you wish."

She stroked his cheek. "Eventually, but not until it is safe once more to raise our babies there. In the meantime, be sure to station Drago there to oversee the rest of the rebuilding. I dreamt he found his mate there so he should go."

Dijana nodded and Andrija glanced at his brother. "At what point did the women take over the kingdom?" he asked playfully.

Jakov tossed his head back and laughed. "I would say the minute they walked into our lives, brother."

"And I would agree."

THE END