



KINGDOM EVA

Zenina Masters

Raleigh Avel has had moderate success with her jewellery shop, but when she is robbed, she has to face the new lawmen on Elsinor. She wouldn't have bothered, but she had no way to dispose of the body.

Azeel, Raf and Hector weren't too sure about taking a post on a world ruled by formality and concealing clothing, but they were drawn to it despite their misgivings. Investigating a dead body at a break-in is par for their course, finding the weapon that killed the robber is the problem.

It has violet eyes, long black hair, and...they begin to suspect...a wild rose tattoo.

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Kingdom Cum
Copyright © 2010 Zenina Masters
ISBN: 978-1-55487-639-6
Cover art by Martine Jardin

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Published by eXtasy Books
Look for us online at:
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KINGDOM CUM
FOUR EVER MORE SERIES BOOK 2

BY

ZENIA MASTERS

CHAPTER ONE

"Son-of-an-ass-fucking-bitch!" Dr. Argent Devereaux was furious.

Her companion rushed forward. "What is it?"

"One of the so-called princes of Elsinor. He is trying to take Raleigh out from under her men's noses." The snarl was her way of getting a grip on her emotions. "Her parents have passed on and she's on her own."

Elsinor was a locked world. Because of environmental factors, no one who landed was allowed to leave. Once a person's body adjusted to the atmosphere, it did not go back. Raleigh was on her own.

"What can you do?" Sylvain was concerned. It showed on her pale and elegant face, so like Argent's own. The perfectly designed daughter.

"Not a lot. I have few contacts in that area and since we are not allowed to land, I am stuck." She pounded her fists on the console. "Fuck!"

"Is there anyone you can send to help them?" Sylvain was trying to calm her, like she always did.

"I can send two messages, whether the recipients can help or not, I have no idea."

"Do you think her men will find her in time?"

"We can only hope." Argent scrubbed her face with her hand. "Let's hope they move fast. I am running out of time."

* * * *

"Thank you for your business." Raleigh bowed low. Mrs. Tanfel was one of her parents' best customers and it was a relief for Raleigh to get the coins in exchange for a set of charms for her client's grandchildren.

Selling off the contents of the shop was hard, but with her father dead, no one would believe that she was the master craftsman. Her family home on the lake north of the city was enough for her to live out her life and once the stock was gone, she could go there to get away from the lascivious eyes of the prince.

She bowed Mrs. Tanfel out of the shop and locked the door behind her. It was time to close up and get a meal on the way home to her rented rooms.

She took the imperial gems out of the safe and hid them within her sash. Half of the day's coin into the safe and the rest with her. They were safer with her than in the unmanned shop and since her parent's death, the guard that normally watched the shop in the evenings disappeared. She turned

quickly when a knock sounded on the door panel. "We are closed. Come again tomorrow, please."

"Please, miss, it is an urgent matter. I have offended my wife and need a gift to mend the breach."

The masculine voice was low in tone and Raleigh couldn't help but grin. It was a common request late in the day. "If you promise to be quick, come in." She unlatched the door and slid the panels aside.

She looked up to see a man in imperial livery just before his fist crashed on the side of her skull. Raleigh lay dazed as she struggled to stay awake. Her body surged with adrenaline as the man in the uniform went through the displays, smashing and destroying the broaches, pendants and earrings that she had made with her own two hands.

Her flesh crackled with energy and when she tried to sit up, he came for her. The tiny exposed piece of skin between his trousers and shoes was enough for her. She lunged and he screamed as his body was racked with a lightning strike.

Her tattoos throbbed and head ached. Raleigh Avel lay back on the floor next to the dead man in imperial livery. Too bad she didn't have time to get rid of the body, this was going to get attention.

She let the world slide away as the satisfaction of her revenge burned in her veins. No one messed with Raleigh Avel and lived to tell the tale.

* * * *

Azeel, Raf and Hector bowed to prince Halun, "You summoned us, prince?"

"Clone warriors, there is a woman in the Sholu prefecture that I wish brought to me. Her shop was ransacked and as the ruling prince, it is my duty to see to her safety."

There was a lustful gleam in his eyes, but it was none of Azeel's business. "What is this woman? Where will we find her?"

"Her name is Raleigh Avel, she is the daughter of a jeweller--now deceased--and she has a small set of rooms in the inn of Sholu. You should find her there. Go now." The prince waved them off, so they left.

Raf and Hector looked at their bond brother. "What do you think?" They were walking swiftly through the palace toward the stables.

"I think that the prince has a hard-on for this woman. He knows far too many particulars for it to be coincidence." The wing-like sleeves of their robes swelled and flared as they walked. Azeel loved the feel of the wind on his body and the clothing of Elsinor made it a constant companion. The loose trousers belted at the waist and the sashed tunics under their robes caught every breeze.

"That is the same thing that went through my mind." Raf snorted.

Hector looked over at Azeel as he mounted his horse. "So, we find his fuck toy and turn it over to him?"

"Unless she can give us a reason why not to." The smirk was unmistakable. They might find out why this woman was so fascinating and what enthralling skills she possessed. The prince was known for his perversions and it was not a great stretch to think that this woman would be on the receiving end of his attentions as soon as she was delivered.

"So, a woman who would pay us for a change. That would be nice." Raf put his foot in the stirrup and launched himself into the saddle.

Azeel laughed as he set the pace with his own steed down the road to Sholu. They would arrive in less than three hours and hopefully return before noon the next day. It all depended on the woman. Raleigh Avel, the prince's target.

* * * *

Raleigh came awake to voices that didn't belong in her shop. Masculine tones came to her ears and she struggled to get up.

"Where is she, the inn owner said this was her shop and that she hadn't come in for the night."

"Raf, over here."

Wooden sandals appeared in her field of vision. Two sets. She pushed herself off the floor a few inches before she slumped back again. "Who are

you and what are you doing in my shop?" Her demand for information was far more feeble than she had hoped it would be.

Hands helped her up and assisted her onto her work stool. "What happened, miss?"

A blurry face with close cropped hair was in front of her. "I was robbed. He hit me and destroyed everything."

"The dead man on the floor? What happened to him?"

Another man was behind the one who was carefully examining her skull on both sides, checking for the damage left by her attacker. There was something so familiar about them, and it wasn't just her bounced brain that was thinking it. "I don't know. He struck me and I fainted when my head hit the floor." She raised her hand to touch the lump and her hand was intercepted by the man in front of her.

"What is this bandage, have you hurt your wrist?"

She yelped and pulled her right hand quickly against her chest. "No. It gives me support when I work in the shop. All those details can be fatiguing to the hands."

"I think we can take you to the inn while we call the doctor to assess your vandal's sudden case of dead. It looks like electrocution to me, but this is a tech-restricted world. No electricity." The third man was examining the dead body in her shop, looking for outward signs of violence.

"Who are you?"

The man smiled gently. "I am Raf, the man in your workshop is Hector and that gentleman over there is Azeel. Warriors of the imperial household. We have been sent by the prince to bring you to the palace for safekeeping, but since your attacker is in an imperial uniform, it does change things a little."

At the mention of the prince, she pushed him out of the way and vomited. Raf held her head and other hands quickly placed a wastebasket in front of her so she didn't sully the floor. Two more hands gave her a damp cloth and she wiped her mouth.

"You have a concussion and you should not be allowed to sleep tonight, nor should you be alone."

"Raf is our medic, you can trust him." Azeel's voice was calm, warm.

She wanted to drown in it. "I have somewhere I can go and there is possibly a servant or two still on premises. It isn't far." She was trying to pull away from Raf, but he had his arm around her for support.

"We will escort you there and wait until you are recovered, then fulfill our duty to the prince." Hector was watching her face and he saw when she went from pale to grey.

Azeel caught it as well. "You do that with every mention of the prince, you know. You look like you are going to vomit."

"I am sure it is just a coincidence, Az. After all, we didn't name the prince that wanted her." Hector was ready to catch her when she swayed. "Okay, that's enough of that. Call the doctor for the body and have him examine it. I am taking her to the inn and then to the spot she mentioned. You can meet us there." He lifted her into his arms, keeping the layers of her robes around her in a dignified fashion.

She asked, "How will they know where we are?"

"We are a matched set, miss. They will know." He had the same dark eyes as his companions, but features that were much harsher.

He lifted her onto his horse and took up a position behind her. It was highly improper, but her head was pounding too hard to complain. They rode to the inn in silence and outside the doors, he waited for a servant to fetch the innkeeper.

"Miss Avel, what has happened?"

"There was an attack on my shop and I was injured. This warrior and his two companions found me and are taking me to safety. Could you have someone retrieve my things and deliver them to the house?"

"Of course, miss." She reached into the small coin purse in her sash and threw him two silvers.

"Right away, miss." He bowed his way back within the inn.

"We can go now. End of the road and turn left, north until you see the cherry tree, then right up the small gravel path." Raleigh leaned back on Hector's chest and let him put an arm around her waist for stability. The rhythm of the horse made her sleepy, but the smell of male behind her kept her alert. She hadn't been this close to a man in years, but somehow she found just being with him incomplete. She cleared her throat and asked, "How long have you been with your companions?"

"Since we were decanted, fifteen years."

A chill ran down her spine. "You are clones?"

"Yes. Bond brothers."

"Why were you sent to Elsinor?"

"We have no idea. There was a rumour that our fourth was here, but in two years, we haven't seen anything. Mind you, we also are living in a community that considers showing a bit of collarbone the height of flirtation. There is no real way to look for her marking."

"Ah. That must be very frustrating for you."

"You have no idea." He kicked the horse to a faster pace and held her to absorb the shock of the bouncing gait. They passed the cherry tree and he turned up the small gravel path.

Her soul relaxed the instant that she saw her home. Even with her parents dead, the memories of her last thirteen years on Elsinor made her feel warm and secure.

If only the prince would get her out of his head she might be able to live a normal life.

CHAPTER TWO

Hector seemed surprised when he directed the horse to the doorstep and no one came to take the reins. "There is no one here?"

She smiled, though her head was pounding. "No. My servant only works days and the lake itself is too cold to attract people. It is why my parents settled here." He slid to the ground with grace that made her envious. Hector lifted her from the horse and set her on her feet.

"I need to attend to the horse. Can you make it inside on your own?"

She smiled. "Of course. The animal shelter is on the other side of the house." She lifted the edge of her robe to help her up the stairs, ignoring the matter of her shoes being back at the workshop.

With Hector leading the horse around the building, she used the thumb scanner to open her family home. A little bit of forbidden tech that made her life so much more secure.

She slid open the main entrance, glided quickly across the floor and grabbed the first available lamp, lifting the glass and placing her fingers on

either side of the wick. A short spark and she had light.

As quickly as she could she moved around the common areas of the house, lighting lamps. She started the fire for bathing water as she was feeling distinctly unpleasant after her hours on the floor and the warriors looked a little dusty.

With their clothing in mind, she also started the drying grate on the back of the house. She loaded the wood box, started the fire and set the iron grate deep into the deck. The fire was in a pit and when she pulled the guard over top of it, the heat was directed under the house to warm the floor of the bathing room and vent in the laundry room.

"What are you doing?" Hector was watching her as she moved across the floor into the bathing room with armloads of wood.

"Setting a fire in the bathing room. I need a bath and you all look a little dusty. It should be hot by the time the others arrive."

He sighed and gave her head wound a sharp look. "Let me get the wood. Where is it kept?"

"Out back, to the right. I have lit the lamps so it should be easy to spot." She nodded and set the washing water to heat.

Elsinor was a colony planet of the Karu, designed to be a historical representation of their original society. When her parents requested life on Elsinor, they agreed to abide by the rules of the colony. The few portions of tech that they had smuggled into the colony were ignored by the

locals. They were just happy to have a family of craftsmen in their midst.

She had been drawn to create in metal from an early age, it complemented her adopted mother's scribe work and her adopted father's stone carving. It wasn't appropriate for a woman of her class, so her father took on the persona of jeweller and she worked in the shop.

She missed them and it was when she was alone in her family home that she missed them the most. Salorin and Makia had been the best of parents, caring for her after she was ejected in a drop pod by the lab that grew her. The doctor had been kind, but she was very direct when she gave Raleigh the facts of mating, clone style.

The news that the three men she had met this evening were clones should have cheered her, but the odds were so astronomically against them being her match, she didn't allow herself to dwell on it. She grinned as she pumped more water and poured it into the washing supply. Her instinct to bathe her guests was going to be twofold. They would see her and she would see them. If their marks matched, she would know then. Raleigh grimaced, she just didn't know what she would do if she finally met her mating set.

* * * *

Azeel was eager to join Hector and Miss Avel as rapidly as possible. "Doctor, what killed him?"

"He suffered a massive shock." The diminutive man with the same golden skin and black hair that they sported had been slightly afraid as they loomed over him, but once they explained what they needed, he relaxed. "If I wasn't sure that the weather was clear, I would say that he had been struck by lightning."

Raf and Azeel nodded. This was not the first time they had heard of this event in Sholu. Three months ago, an entire band of robbers had been found in the same condition. It was the primary reason that they had been sent to the prince. This was the excuse to find the origin of this phenomenon and spend more time in Sholu.

"Is Miss Avel all right?" The doctor cleaned his spectacles.

Azeel looked to Raf and raised an eyebrow. "Yes. She was struck on the head when the man broke in, but other than a bumped head she isn't in danger."

"Such a terrible thing for a young woman to be alone in the world. Her parents were killed by robbers three months ago, you know."

Three months, when the robbers had been struck down. "Do you know where the shock entered him? Our friend in uniform here." Azeel drew the man's attention back to the dead body.

"Nothing visible except for a bug bite on his ankle. Otherwise he is in good shape." The doctor shrugged, "For a dead man."

"Will you call the undertaker and have his body disposed of?" They would not find anything else out with the tech they were allowed on this world. They would have to hang onto the bug bite and see where it took them.

"I will. It's such a shame that Miss Avel is all alone. First adopted to Salorin and Makia, then unmateable by any man on Elsinor, she has had a rough life."

Raf was getting an idea, it glowed in his eyes. "What about her wrist?"

"Oh, that silly thing? She says it is for wrist strain, but really it just hides that mark she came with. Salorin used to laugh and say that it wouldn't be needed if Koru clothing showed more skin. She's kept it wrapped since the prince fell in love with it. He is obsessed with her and now that she is alone, I fear for her safety."

Azeel wanted to reassure him, but they were here to take her back to the prince. Eventually.

Raf asked the doctor, "Has she had any medical issues?"

"She came to me when her body bloomed, but she did not become a woman in the strictest sense. It was quite hard to explain that she had not been designed for it, but she took it very well."

Azeel finally caught on. "Designed?"

"Your confidence, if I may request it?" He waited until they nodded. "She is one of the clone race."

They both straightened as if someone had struck them. "I see. We will disturb your evening no more then, Doctor."

"Take care of her, she needs all the protection she can get with that prince sending his men to sniff around here the instant her parents were in the next world." The doctor sent the assistant hovering outside the door to wake the undertaker.

Azeel took a sharp look around the shop and used his keenly detailed memory to freeze the minutia in his mind. "Let's go, Raf. Hector has probably let her sleep."

They mounted their horses and walked past the inn at a brisk pace. As soon as they cleared the village, they focused on their third and spurred their mounts onward. Time to see the marks this cloned woman carried.

* * * *

Doctor Emetu hoped that he had done the right thing, from Argent's message the quad needed to bond quickly. The hint that the prince was behind her parent's death was not one he was able to share with Raleigh, but hopefully the investigative team would find the truth before it was too late.

If the prince discovered his part in this, it was worth his life, but Salorin and Makia had been good people, good friends.

Their daughter deserved a good life.

The house was alive with light. They entered and removed their sandals in the foyer, slowly entering the main rooms. Hector was sitting across from Raleigh and she was serving him tea. She looked up with a smile, but there were lines of fatigue under her startling lavender eyes.

"Hello, Azeel, Raf. Please, join us." She took two more cups from a tray beside her and poured each of them a cup.

Azeel sighed. The tea did smell wonderful. He knelt on a small cushion next to Raleigh and Raf sat across from them. She served him first, Raf second. She had the order backward, but there was time enough to instruct her on that if she was their match.

They sat in silence, enjoying being safe for the moment. Hector finally broke the golden bubble. "Raleigh has prepared a bath for us, so if you would like to remove the dust of the road she will wash your clothing."

Azeel's erection at the thought of her in the bath with them dampened his clothing. Raf's eyes gleamed with anticipation. "That sounds wonderful. Now?"

She bowed and stood. "Leave your clothing on the floor and I will quickly take care of it. I have placed robes in the bathing room next to the towels."

So much for the hope that she would join them.

Sighing in resignation, they followed Hector to the bathing room and dropped their clothing on the floor. While they were rinsing off before the soak, Raleigh moved in with surprising speed and whisked away their clothes.

Clean, cool and with the water steaming temptingly in the enormous bath, they entered the water one by one, closing their eyes against the steam.

Azeel's eyes widened as he heard the distinctive sound of splashing water, looking over to the rinsing area, he saw a gauzy curtain that wasn't there when they arrived. The intriguing silhouette of a nude woman engaged in a slow dance, which included the rinsing of her hair.

He held his breath as the shadow moved to the edge of the curtain and when she walked toward them in the mist of the steaming tub, Azeel had the feeling that he was watching an apparition from the past.

Emblazoned directly between her breasts was the wild rose tattoo that he and the others wore. She was theirs.

CHAPTER THREE

Walking out from behind the curtain took all of her courage. The tattoo on her wrist was exposed, as was the one between her breasts. She had watched them undress through the crack in the door, they were her match. With communal bathing being common, it was the exposure of her undeniable markings that made her nervous. *How will they react?*

She slipped into the water with only Azeel focussed on her. His eyes were so intense, she couldn't keep the contact up while she searched for the bench in the water. By the time she finished seating herself, fishing her hair out of the water and draping it over the towel behind her, she was the centre of attention. Looking down, she saw the tattooed wild rose peeking above the water. "You are staring."

Their tattoos were blazing front and centre between their pectorals as they sat up and leaned closer to her.

Raf asked the question on their minds. "You knew?"

"I suspected when Hector told me that you were a clone set that you might be mine." She stood, turned, reached out and grabbed the floating tray behind her, set with watered wine and small cups.

"Yours, are we?" Hector smiled.

"You match me, that is all I referred to." She served four cups and floated the tray first to Raf, then Azeel, finally to Hector.

"You have it right. Raf is the first, I am the second and Hector is the third." Azeel took a sip of his wine and raised his eyebrows.

That confused her. She understood about the layers of mating, but hadn't realized that the men had designations. "I don't understand."

Raf surged toward her in the bath and sat next to her on the bench. "It is simple, Raleigh. As with most sexual relationships, the ultimate goal is to bring on the next generation. In our case, the first is the activator, the one who will trigger your body's ovulation. The second, Azeel, is the one who will plant his seed and he must take you within four hours of me."

"What of Hector?" She knew her eyes were slightly wild.

"Hector is our third. His body will change to replace either Azeel or myself if we fall or are injured. The third was added for safety as we were designed for hostile territories." Raf took her right hand and lifted it out of the water, caressing her tattoo in a slow and sensuous movement.

"Before you start anything, Raf, I want to ask you one question."

He nodded solemnly. "What do you want to know?"

"Once we consummate this joining, will you still bring me to the prince?" Her terror came through in her voice.

Raf sat back and Raleigh's heart sank. "We have to take you to his court, but we will not leave you there. By the laws of Koru that the emperor of Elsinor agreed to, we have a right to our mate if we find her. Now I have a question for you. Why do you fear him so?"

"Because he took my best friend to his palace and her body was returned to her family three months later. He tried to take me, but when my father caught wind of it, he contacted the emperor and the prince left me alone. He would find any excuse to have me pour tea so he could ogle my tattoo, and that is when I started wearing the wrap. It seemed to hypnotize him." She shuddered in remembrance and Hector came to her side and wrapped his arm around her. The warmth and security that enfolded her with his embrace relaxed her.

Raf asked, "How is your head?"

"Throbbing, but the wine is helping with the pain from the bruises." She sighed and leaned against Hector, dazed and warm in his embrace.

He slowly and calmly pulled her onto his lap. She could almost ignore the other two in the bath,

but when a third hand stroked her thigh under the water, she found that she didn't want to.

Raf's voice was in her ear, "We won't let him touch you. We promise."

Two voices echoed him. "We promise."

Her skin felt alive where they touched her, hands soothed her back, caressed her breasts, parted her thighs and rubbed her feet. When hands tugged her hair gently, she leaned back and the first kiss of her life was placed on her lips. Raf, she could tell by the sureness of his hands as he avoided her bruised skull. His lips took hers gently and hands raised her body in the water.

Raleigh writhed as mouths touched her, hands caressed her and her body caused a surf in the rhythm of the stroking fingers and tugging lips.

When a touch stroked between her thighs, her lips parted and she cried out as her talent flared out of control, lightning arced out of her hands, striking the partition that flared for a moment with the impact.

The blinding caresses ceased.

"Raleigh, what was that?" Raf's voice was very calm for a man nearly electrocuted.

"The end of a very interesting night if I am not missing my guess."

The hands supporting her lifted her from the water, the three men moving as one. She was wrapped in a drying cloth while they dried off in turn, their marvellous erections not dwindled by her display of energy. That was encouraging.

They picked up the robes, but did not put them on as Hector led them through the house and to the largest bedroom. Wrapped in white linen, Raleigh went along with the crowd.

The men efficiently rolled out the folded bedding. Hector leaving for a moment and returning with another mattress gave her the first inkling that the introduction was now over.

They knew about the electricity and since they were not idiots, they would put her attacker's death at her door. She knew she should have moved the body. Sigh.

Sheets flared and blankets were lined up for a good night's sleep. Raf took her and he gently removed the sheet.

"We decided to get away from the water if you are going to be flinging energy around. We are impervious to that sort of thing, probably a designed feature." He grinned at her, leaning in for another kiss.

This time she parted her lips more easily, welcoming the stroke of his tongue that caused a ripple effect through her body and started a fluttering between her thighs.

Her lower lips were swelling, parting, and a heated moisture was starting to flow. Hector pressed his body against her from behind, his cock snaking between her buttocks to dance in the slickness she was generating. He moved his hips back and forth in a slow motion that arched her up and into Raf's kiss. Out of the corner of her eye,

she could see Azeel slowly stroking his cock from base to head so she reached out, gripped Raf and mimicked it.

He groaned and pulled her hand away. "Not now, Raleigh, I need to be inside you when I cum."

Bemused by the riot of sensation, she leaned back into Hector as Raf broke the kiss and backed away from her.

"Follow him, Raleigh." Azeel's voice was deep and slow.

Instead of following orders, she reached behind her to draw Hector against her and shimmied her hips against him. He slid against her faster and faster until he groaned and white drops of seed rolled down her thighs. He turned her in his arms and gave her a kiss that heated her blood to a frenzy and she cried out as she was torn away from him by four hands that bore her down to the bedding.

Hands stroked the inside of her thighs, angled her knees and parted her sex. She heard a groan, but Azeel was kissing her while chafing her breasts with his calloused palm. Raf slid two fingers into her slick heat and he worked a third into her as he slid his digits around within her. Raleigh cried out as the fingers brushed a sensitive spot within her and worked against it.

An almost painful coil of sensation drew tighter until it snapped and she screamed into Azeel's mouth before gasping at the sense of Raf forging his way into her. Short thrusts eased into her and

when he settled completely within her, he shoved Azeel away so that he could watch her face while he rocked and slid inside her.

Raleigh tried to respond by moving her hips against him, but before she could get into a rhythm, she rocketed over the edge of sensation again and came, digging her nails into his chest. Raf groaned and arched his back, locking his hips against hers while he spilled inside her.

Raleigh shuddered at the flex and shift of her body in response to his semen. Things were moving inside her and it wasn't just him.

When he dropped onto her, he shifted to his side and took her with him, even as he slid free. Azeel pressed against her back, cupped her thigh and lifted it to drape it over Raf's hip. He filled her from behind, pressing deeply into her with every thrust while cupping her breast with one hand. Raf rubbed slow circles on her clit while leaning down to lick and suck at her tattoo. She never knew that the ink and pigment could cause such a riot of sensation in her. Raleigh experimented with stroking Raf's tattoo, delighting in the resurrection of his cock with only a few hard strokes.

When her orgasm claimed her this time, she merely shivered and gasped for a minute while Azeel thrust hard and determinedly into her until he came as well. The grunt and feeling of a short bite on her shoulder extended the inner pulsing caress of her body around him.

Hector pulled Raf away from her and took his place with her facing him. He rolled onto his back and pulled her onto him, freeing Azeel in the process.

She felt, rather than heard, Raf leave the room, but she was too busy sinking onto the rock hard pillar of Hector's cock to pay much attention to it. Instead of being on the receiving end, she was able to control the depth and speed through her now-swollen channel. Hector's dark eyes were intense, she blushed furiously when Azeel leaned over to suck and nip at her breasts and she was making eye contact with Hector at the same time.

Raleigh noticed Raf's return when thickly oiled fingers began to work at her rear passage. She breathed deeply and relaxed deliberately for him when the fingers entered her, then retreated and were replaced by the solid thrust of his cock.

She mewled in discomfort at the feeling of being over-full. Raf took control of the coupling from her and she moved in time to his slow thrust and drag. She was wedged between two rocks and a hard place and she relaxed into the buffeting, her body rising toward release with a relentless, exhausted determination.

With an impish grin, she took what control she could, gripping Azeel's cock and stroking it with the same rhythm that the men were moving her to. He soon became slick with his own lubrication and her hand moved faster as she approached release. Azeel was now sitting back, his cock

jutting, eyes closed as she stroked him with gentle intensity.

Her pleasure spiked and she quickly stroked Azeel until he shouted in reaction, Raf grunted and Hector groaned, all cumming together in a heap of tangled bodies.

She dropped onto Hector's chest, Raf leaning heavily against her as Azeel took her hand and pressed a kiss in the palm.

Raleigh squirmed to get loose, but they held her still as sweat dried on them all. She sighed. "At least the lightning didn't come."

Raf chuckled. "It did. Twice. I put the fires out and then went to get some water in case it happened again. The oil just called to me."

She could call him a few things as well, but he withdrew from her nether passage at last and she sighed in relief. She worked herself free of Hector, slapping his hand when he would have kept her on him. "I need a bath."

Levering herself upright, she took stock of her body. Tiny bites and bruises were testament to the mating that had just taken place, the low throb of her channel and ass confirmed it. Slightly bowlegged, she walked back to the bathing chamber and sluiced herself off again. When she lowered her sore body into the water, the men were right behind her.

She groaned as the sore flesh between her thighs protested the heat, but nevertheless, leaned

back and enjoyed the loosening of muscles that were unused to this evening's activity.

Raf sat next to her and pulled her onto his lap. His sweet kiss made her smile. "It was your fist time, wasn't it, Raleigh."

"Yes. Fortunately, the doctor said my kind don't bleed like normal races. It would be too inhibiting to the mating process. I am sore enough as it is." She cuddled against him and sighed.

After a few minutes, he handed her to Azeel who kissed her softly and cuddled her as well, then Hector was to give her the same treatment.

"We are very happy to have found you."

She giggled and rocked her hips against his erection. "I can tell. I am glad that you were assigned here as well. I have been alone and I don't enjoy it."

Dawn had risen while they were tangled together and she nagged Raf out of the bath to open the back door for the view of the lake.

Held in Hector's arms, she looked at the light on the lake and thought about how differently this night would have been if her parents were still alive.

Tears started down her face and she quickly splashed her cheeks to hide it, standing quickly and leaving the bath. She wrapped herself and asked Raf, "Do you think my head is well enough for me to sleep now? I find myself rather tired."

They stood and she absently sighed as their heavily muscled, yet lean bodies were exposed to

the morning light. They were all blushing and it took her some time to realize that it was because they had forgotten about her injuries.

Shaking her head, she went to her private room and took out a sleeping robe. Azeel was behind her and he lifted her off her feet before she could tuck herself into bed.

She was forced to lie on clean sheets between Raf and Azeel with Hector watching the door, back to back with Raf. She felt protected and safe, and almost loved. Her mind slipped away into male-scented darkness.

CHAPTER FOUR

Hector wrapped the drying towel around his waist as he approached the intruder. The woman would have screamed when she saw him, but he covered her mouth with his hand and dragged her to the front of the house. "Be quiet. Raleigh is asleep."

The older woman with the work worn hands looked at him suspiciously. "Who are you?"

"I am Hector, inside are Raf and Azeel. We are Raleigh's."

The woman blinked. "Really? Her parents warned me it was possible, but I never considered..."

"Who are you, madam?"

"Kelki, servant to the Avel's."

"Her parents are dead."

"But she is still alive and I have known her since the day she came home. I even alerted her father the day that the prince tried to steal the little miss." She puffed up with pride.

"When was that?"

Kelki walked into the kitchen, completely unperturbed that she was talking to a man wearing a towel. "The first time was when she was barely a woman, then when she was eighteen, four months ago and finally a month ago was his last try to get her to him. She said no and the prefect was there so he had to wait until she was out of mourning."

Hector blinked. He had noticed that she was wearing black undergarments under her black robes only because they had passed them when they carried her out of the bath the first time. His cock tented the towel at the memory and he quickly got his mind back on the conversation.

"Why did you men come here?"

He opted for honesty. "We were sent by the prince to retrieve her." The broom that was aimed at his chest made his lips twist. He could easily disarm the old woman, but she was defending her lady and that was worth a lot.

"You try and take her to that pervert and I will unman the lot of you."

"I don't doubt that you will try, but she is ours and we will not part with her. We have to bring her to the prince's home because we are honour bound to, but we will return here immediately after that."

The woman's dark gaze bored into his, she slowly lowered the broom. "Do you really all lie with her at the same time?"

"More or less. All within a few hours. Why?"

"Because her father mentioned it once and I couldn't believe it. Why share one woman when you can each have your own?"

"Because with her we can have a life, a family, and we can be complete. The doctor who designed us made us to match. She fits us like no other and it is the same for her. Now that we have bonded, we cannot be separated by intergalactic law."

"I will go about my day then. I am assuming you are in the master bedroom?"

"Yes."

"Then I will have a meal ready in six hours. Don't worry, I can and will be quiet."

The woman shooed him out and he left, bemused. He returned to the bedroom and grinned as Raf had rolled over to leave room for him next to Raleigh. He dropped his towel and climbed under the sheets with the woman who was truly meant for him and his bond brothers. When Raf tried to roll back and encountered him, he chuckled. His status as the first only worked when he was able to enforce it. In bed, with their fourth, was not the place.

Hector smiled and gathered Raleigh closer, smiling as she trailed her fingers down his chest. He would take the beating that Raf tried to deliver, just to feel this delightful woman against him at every opportunity.

* * * *

Kelki smiled as she peeked into the room to see Raleigh tangled with her men. Salorin and Makia had hoped for this day and tears stung the old woman's eyes as she thought of her old friends.

Salorin and his wife had arrived two years before their daughter was dropped from the sky and no one in Sholu had been the same since. There was just something about Raleigh that made those around her want to take care of her.

Salorin had been a good choice for a father, his time in the service of the Koru noble family brought honour to him and his wife immediately when they arrived on Elsinor. The emperor assigned them to Sholu and here they had started their life.

Kelki shuffled around the laundry room, folding the men's clothing and reminiscing about Makia and her precise handling of everything she touched, whether it be the documents she crafted for the locals or the embroidery on the edge of a sash.

Makia never let her delicate health get in the way of her duties as wife and mother, but she put those two first before her work. In a weak moment when Salorin and Raleigh were in town, she had confessed to Kelki that the pain from the radiation sickness that she had been diagnosed with racked her every day. It was only the joy on the faces of those around her that kept her spirits up.

Makia had wanted more than anything to hold her grandchild in her arms and Kelki wanted to

weep at the unfairness of it all. Three months after her death, her daughter had found her matches. If life was kind, children would soon follow.

Salorin, on the other hand, would have made the men prove their worth for his daughter before handing her over.

Kelki sighed and went about her chores. If they could keep Raleigh from the prince's grasp, the spirits of her departed parents would be able to rest in peace.

* * * *

Raleigh woke, feeling sore and satisfied at the same time. Three pairs of dark eyes were watching her. "Hello again."

"Good afternoon, Raleigh. Kelki has prepared a light supper for us, but she demands that we be dressed before she will serve it."

They helped her to her feet and she blushed and grabbed for a drying cloth to wrap around herself. She was wearing the small marks of their evening, but their intense gazes sent her heart into overdrive and she didn't want them starting over.

"I will get dressed and meet you in the main room. Please follow suit." She scuttled down the hall, sighing in relief as she wrapped the underlayer of gauzy robe around her, fastened it and moved on to her secondary robe. It also tied to one side before the final robe was in place, that she cinched into position with the sash that she had

worn last night. The pockets that her mother had sewn into it made an excellent hiding place for the jewels of the Elsinor Empire. The prince could ransack her shop from dawn until dusk and never find his father's jewels.

She smiled in triumph as she finished tightly wrapping her torso from breast to hip. Snug and comfortable, she put on some socks and made her way on silent feet to the dining table. They turned to watch her enter and she made an effort to keep her knees together while she glided across the floor.

She knelt with some relief and as Kelki brought a lunch of roasted fish and rice she picked up her eating prongs and served a small portion to each of the men, cueing them to begin to serve themselves.

The bright taste of the fish combined with the smooth texture of the rice and Raleigh sighed happily as she ate. She swallowed heavily and asked, "So, when will you take me to the prince?"

Raf paused with food halfway to his mouth. "You are eager to go?"

"No, but if I am to die, I want it to be while I still have the strength of character to face it. If I spend much more time with you..." Her gesture included all three of them. "I will not be able to meet my end with dignity."

"We will not let him touch you." Azeel was adamant.

"You may not have a choice." She knew the darkness that lay in the prince's eyes and it would not stop because her lovers claimed her. Halun was a determined and insane man.

"He has not dealt with our kind before. He will be educated as to our protective instincts when it comes to our mate."

Their fierce faces comforted rather than frightened her. She looked down at her food and ate with renewed appetite.

"When do you leave?" Kelki was abrupt and direct, one of Raleigh's favourite personality combinations.

Hector leaned back and looked to his companions. "We leave after we finish eating. The sooner that we get this over with, the better."

The old woman nodded, "I will prepare an overnight bag for Raleigh then. The prince will be suspicious if she turns up empty handed."

They looked at her with respect and Raleigh smiled. "Thank you, Kelki. I would not have thought of that. He will be expecting me to move into his palace, fresh clothing will feed that assumption." She met Kelki's gaze, telling her without words to load in the decoys. The woman nodded and walked down the hall, her grey robes flapping.

"She is an excellent woman, that Kelki." Hector was admiring.

"She's feisty. She did a good job of helping my mother when the sickness overtook her."

Raf looked concerned, "Your mother was ill?"

"Since before I was brought here. Radiation sickness, a slow death if the robbers had not cut her life even shorter."

"Tell us about that. What happened the day they died?"

She sighed and recounted it as she had to the imperial inquisitor. The emperor had been curious as to why his favourite jeweller had suddenly been cut down. "My father and mother were leaving Sholu to visit the capital. I was in charge of the shop. Robbers overtook them three miles from town and cut them down. They still had their purses on them, so the motive was not robbery."

Azeel looked carefully at her, "Who found them?"

"I felt my world go dark the moment that they died. I borrowed a horse and ran it to the site, crying and bawling the whole way. They were both dead, my mother had crawled to my father and was lying across him, together in their last moments. His sword was bloodied, but there were no bodies." She breathed deeply, sniffing as she continued. Raf took one hand, Azeel the other and Hector rose to sit behind her, with his hands on her shoulders. They were with her.

Raf's deep tone asked, "What happened next, Raleigh? No secrets from us."

"The cuts on my parents were not knives, they were long blade slices. I trailed the blood until I found the gathering of the robbers. They were

clean, well dressed in peasant clothing, and armed like warriors. They talked of their distaste for the orders they followed and congratulated their fallen foes for the honour that they died with. My fury grew and I brought the heavens down upon them. Light flowed from my hands and cascaded from the sky in bolts until they were all dead. I freed their animals and returned to my family, the grocer was on his way from his farm with a cart and he helped me bring my parents home."

The heat from their hands comforted her as no polite touches had been able to do. Even Kelki had her own grief to deal with at the loss of her friends.

"Finish your meal, Raleigh, and we will be on our way. You will not have to face your foes alone." Raf's tone said what his words did not. He knew that it was most probable that the prince had killed her parents.

Few robbers would have access to swords and fewer still would have been able to bring down a trained warrior like Salorin.

She quickly ate, drank the cup of water that was placed in front of her and stood with a hint of her usual grace.

Kelki brought her the bundle and Ralieggh nodded to her men. "Let's go. I want to be back before the trees finish blooming."

CHAPTER FIVE

The horses looked disgruntled at being roused from a comfortable stable, but they stood calmly while they were saddled and waited for their riders.

"We can get a horse for me in the village."

The men looked at each other and frowned. Raf finally announced. "You will ride with me, then Azeel and finally Hector. To enter the prince's property, we will dismount and lead our horses with you in the saddle."

Raleigh blinked and nodded. "Very well, but I cannot mount up on my own. Not in these robes."

Raf swung into the saddle and nodded for Azeel to hand her up. It was slightly dizzying, but she settled with her legs demurely together and Raf's arm around her waist. He held her lightly but firmly and as soon as the others were ready, Kelki reached up to hand her the bundle and they were off.

When they rode through Sholu, she nodded to a few of the shopkeepers who waved at her. They

cared for her and would make sure that her shop was not ransacked while she was gone.

"You are well liked here."

"I grew up here, it is my home." She shrugged and played with the bundle in her lap.

"I envy you the family you had, even though they were taken from you."

She smiled. "I do not envy them having me as a daughter. The lighting came to me when I matured. There were many fires near our home and several exploding chickens."

He threw his head back and laughed. "The home did seem very new."

"I burned two of them down before that one. As I said, I do not envy their having to deal with my peculiarities. They told me once that they knew what they had gotten into with me, but I don't see how that could be possible."

They didn't say anything else, but at the one hour mark, she was handed off to Azeel as promised.

She had a sudden thought, "Azeel, how did you learn of my existence? I mean, who told you."

He grinned, squeezing her tightly for a moment. "We came into the breathing world with this knowledge. Our designer put the knowledge into us so that we would know that we were not alone in the worlds. It gave us something to live for when there was nothing else. Just knowing that you were out here and for us, it made us

smarter, fiercer and more effective at bomb disposal and investigation."

She shuddered. "I am amazed you have all your fingers."

"We do, as we proved last night."

His chuckle was buried in her hair and she blushed to feel heat rampage through her at the light touch. She couldn't bring any topic up again with the memories of last night rippling through her. She was mute until Hector held her against him.

"How is your head, Raleigh? You seem to heal very quickly. We do, too."

His hands were protective, but loose, letting her ask for support if she needed it. "Yes, I always have healed from cuts and bruises quickly."

"Good thing, too. I am afraid we marked you a little last night, and this morning."

"Nothing that isn't fading. Even the stiffness is gone." She didn't blush with him. It was more of a polite inquiry and less of a sexual innuendo.

"Good, you will need to be on your guard and in full health dealing with the prince. Even the emperor doesn't know what to do with his son."

"I know. Keeping him watched most times is all he can manage." Raleigh sighed, then stiffened as the prince's gates loomed as they turned a corner. As one, the men dismounted and walked their horses. Raleigh shifted to the centre of the saddle and balanced primly. It was time to face her fears and trust her men. This was more of a trial of her

nerves than she would have imagined in the early days of her mating.

They stopped at the gate and were about to be searched. The guard took one look at Raleigh and waved them through the gates. Apparently, they were expected.

The prince's guard came to escort her in, but her clone warriors surrounded her. "We will take her to the prince. She is our charge."

Raf could sound frightening when he chose.

In the courtyard, she was helped off the horse, but she saw Raf give coins to the groom with a whispered word, and the groom nodded briskly. Her curiosity was aroused, but she had other matters to dwell on.

She held her bundle tightly as they walked through the halls, the smell of fear was radiating from every female servant in the place. That kind of fear was infectious. Her men crowded closer to her and she took a deep breath, her body relaxing to the point where she could breathe normally.

Not a word passed between them, but she was now certain that nothing would happen to her. They wouldn't let it. She needed that blind faith to get her into the next room, where the prince was waiting.

She hid her trembling as best as she was able, when the door slid open, she looked out and saw the man who ordered her parents murdered. She kept the cold fury she felt off her face, but bowed

as low as protocol demanded when she stepped into the room.

"Rise, Raliegh."

His familiar use of her name made her flesh crawl. She stood straight and thanked the men next to her for their strength. Halun's gaze was running from her midnight hair to the edge of her robes and everywhere in between.

"I must congratulate you, clone warriors, no one else could have brought her to me."

"We thank you for your compliment, prince." Raf inclined his head.

Prince Halun was up and stalking toward Raleigh. "You are dismissed now. I need to speak to Miss Avel. Alone."

"That would not be appropriate, prince." Azeel stepped between the prince and Raleigh.

"Why not?" He was almost drooling with eagerness. Even his loose robes could not hide his erection.

"She is our wife, prince." Raf's voice was steel.

The prince barked a laugh. "Very entertaining. Now step aside."

"It is not a matter for entertainment, she is ours by the genetic assistance contract issued by the Koru and agreed upon by your emperor. She bears our mark and is our fourth."

The prince cursed and ran to the door, returning in less than a minute with a concubine being dragged by the arm. "This mark? A cheap tattoo?"

He shoved the concubine's sleeve up and exposed a crude copy of Raleigh's wrist marking.

Raleigh had to fight a wave of nausea. The hopeless look in the woman's eyes was unmistakable, and her features were so close to Raleigh's that if not for Raleigh's own non-Koru stature, she could have been a relative. This woman was a surrogate for Halun's sick desires.

Before she had taken to wrapping her wrist, the prince's agents or even Raleigh's friend, Leeka, could have provided him with a drawing of the design. There was no way he could know about the mark on her chest.

"No, prince. That mark was a back-up identifier. The primary tattoo is on her chest as are ours." With two fingers, Raf pulled his tunic open and when he finished, Azeel showed his, and when he returned to battle ready status, Hector his.

The prince started to breath heavily. "This is impossible. She is mine!"

"She is not yours. She was never yours." Raf was direct.

Raleigh could feel Azeel shifting his weight into an alert posture.

"I will have her. You cannot keep her from me."

"We brought her here as ordered. We will now leave, with her."

The prince summoned his guard. "I will see you dead before you take her maidenhead."

The clones looked at each other. "We were delayed by our consummation. Also, as a clone,

Raleigh had no maidenhead. With three husbands, you can understand why she had been designed without one. It would have slowed us down considerably."

The prince grabbed a sword and unsheathed the blade. With a howl of fury, he charged at Raf.

In a move that astonished her, Raf extended both hands and a blast of air collided with the prince and his guards. Hector turned, extended his hands palms out and the hall was cleared the same way.

Azeel grabbed her and lifted her in his arms. "Time to run, little rabbit."

Hector blasted the attacking guards with the same force he had used on the ones in the hall. Raf kept anyone from following them and there were four horses waiting by the stairs. Seeing that she would be riding alone, she stuffed the bundle into the top of her robe and parted the layers beneath her knees.

When Azeel placed her on the horse, she fitted her feet into the stirrups and straightened in the saddle. Raf led them out of the courtyard, pausing only for a moment to allow he and Azeel to blow the gates wide open.

She heard Halun call his archers, but only two started to draw. With one hand on the reins, she extended her fingers and sent out a fork of lightning. The men reeled back and the way out of the prince's home was clear.

With hooves thundering, the horses ran to save the lives of their riders.

They did not return to the road leading to Sholu, instead going down the main road leading to the capitol. It didn't surprise her that they were heading into the open embrace of the emperor.

At regular intervals, they stopped to rest and water the horses. Grain in the saddlebags took care of the horses' needs, but Raleigh's stomach started growling.

When the sun turned red in the sky, Raf stopped their travels. "We need to stop."

Raleigh shifted uncomfortably in the saddle, "There is a small grove to the left in a quarter of a kilometre. A stream runs through it. It isn't popular with locals because of predators, but I do not think that that will be an issue." They grinned at her, teeth white in the glowing light of the fading sun.

Raf chuckled. "To the grove then. How deep is it?"

"About another quarter of a kilometre back from the road. My father didn't like to be disturbed while carrying goods for the emperor."

They rode the tired horses down the invisible path that was written in Raleigh's memory. The stream was more swollen than she remembered, but the grove was hidden from the road by thickets and a tangled path.

"I will take care of the tracks. This does seem a good hiding spot though." Hector left the grove on

foot and Azeel took care of the horses. Raf was holding Raleigh and chuckling softly as he massaged her buttocks. She was leaning against a tree to aid his access.

"Not used to riding?"

"No. For friendly animals, they are really hard to sit on."

He laughed low. "Sit on any unfriendly animals recently?"

"Well, I landed on a boar once when I fell out of a tree. I don't know which one of us was more surprised."

Azeel heard her and laughed, Hector had a more serious look on his face when he returned.

"They are following, but I left no trail. This is an excellent spot to spend the night, Raleigh."

She inclined her head and then bit her lip as Raf hit a sensitive spot.

"Raf, let go," she murmured it in a low tone. When he did, she flicked two fingers and sent a blast through the trees. The crash that followed was satisfying. "If anyone wants it, there is a dead boar just past that berry bush."

With raised eyebrows, Azeel finished with the horses and went in the direction she pointed. He came back with the pig over one shoulder, grinning at her. "Well done."

She smirked and walked to a hillock that seemed to be a solid bit of turf. She removed the chunks of sod to expose a fire pit lined with

ceramic and reaching out, found the dried wood that her family restocked every time they passed.

Azeel had drawn a knife from one of the saddles and was working on the pig, Raf and Hector joined him. She set about starting a fire with dried moss and the wood stacked into a log cabin that caught easily and burned fast.

The hillock caught most of the light that was put out and the dried wood kept the smoke from being too obvious in the dark of the night.

The pork was being cut into thin strips, Hector cropped some branches and was sharpening them into skewers. It was a horribly domestic moment.

With the meat preparation completed, they went to wash their hands and dispose of the offal and most of the carcass. Only what they could eat tonight would be kept, the rest was thrown upwind for the predators.

Raleigh dug the sticks into a pyramid formation and smiled as the smoking scents started immediately. She tended the fire and the meat.

"Is it done yet?" Hector whispered into her ear. His hair was slicked back and his neck was wet. He had dunked his head into the stream.

"Almost."

"How did you light the fire?"

She lifted her hand and sent an arc between forefinger and thumb. Finally she remembered what she had seen. "You all blow."

Raf looked over at her and winked. Azeel grinned and Hector chuckled. "That is one way to

put it. We used our talents to disarm bombs. One would work while the other two waited in case of explosion. If it blew, so did we."

"So, you were designed with wind. Not unlike some men I have met over the years." She shrugged and stifled a yelp at the pinch he delivered to her bottom. High-pitched noises would carry through the woods no matter what she did to stop them. It was second nature to keep quiet off the road.

Blankets were unrolled from the saddles. Two for underneath and two for over them. It seemed they were going to sleep in a large pile again. Raleigh didn't mind that thought at all.

"The meat is ready." She handed the first set of sticks to each of them and blew on her meat to cool it. With her free hand, she set the next set of skewers into position.

The soft glow of the campfire was the only illumination as they sat around and ate. It was a basic meal, but when the second round was ready, everyone ate their fill.

"I had better wash my hands." Raleigh stood and started to move using her instincts to guide her.

"I will take you." Raf was suddenly at her side, one arm around her waist.

He led her as if he could see in the dark. She laughed silently, he probably could. She knelt at the water's edge and washed her hands, then

cupped them to drink her fill. A light splash on her face and she was ready to leave.

The pale glow of Raf's shirt was the only sign that she wasn't alone. She stood and turned to return to the campsite. He stopped her with a light grip on her arm, turning her to face him. He kissed her in the dark, his smoothly chiselled lips shaping hers, parting them to let his tongue slip inside.

She moaned low in her throat, a sound she had never heard before yesterday. Her hands clutched at his neck and she pushed her breasts against him.

"Raf, stop it. We need to get some sleep tonight and I am not going to take our bride on the ground." Azeel was next to them, his hand on Raf's arm.

Raf pulled back reluctantly, tiny kisses marking his acknowledgement of Azeel's words.

As soon as Raf relaxed his grip, Hector eased her back out of their first's embrace. As a group, they returned to the camp and lay flat on the bedding Raf and Azeel had prepared. A layer of branches and moss were under them, the blanket keeping the greenery from prodding them as they slept.

Tonight, Azeel cuddled her close while Raf and Hector took the outer guard positions. Despite their dire circumstances, Raleigh smiled. Even with the sky above them and the wilderness around them, she felt at peace.

CHAPTER SIX

Kelki had slipped a comb into the bundle, so Raleigh was able to tame her wild morning hair into a sleek ponytail. A few hard jerks straightened her clothing and she pinched her cheeks for colour as they returned to the road and moved at a quick trot until the emperor's home was visible.

"Stop for a moment." When they closed around her, she quickly dismounted and straightened her robes. "Can someone give me a boost?"

Bemused, Hector quickly dismounted, lifted her to her horse, sidesaddle and resumed his mount.

"Good. We can go now." Raleigh shifted her weight to encourage her horse forward and the obedient beast took the lead.

"Why did you change your seat?" Raf was curious as they passed guards in outlook posts on the side of the road.

"It isn't appropriate to ride that way in front of the emperor, and since he watches out his window when he is bored...I thought it prudent to stick to protocol."

With the imperial guards nodding to her companions, she relaxed. The only way that prince Halun would get her out of their hands was via the emperor's order.

The palace swelled out of the hillside, golden wood, red lattices and black lacquered floors. The hum of a bee hive full of people in a variety of colourful robes, all bustling with their personal duties and imperial assignments. Four grooms arrived, each taking the reins of an individual horse. Raf came to her horse and lifted her to the packed earth of the courtyard.

The clone warriors were recognized, less than a quarter of the archers on the outer wall were turned in to face them. It was a sign of respect and trust.

Raleigh smiled as she recognized the major domo of the emperor's household. She stood next to her warriors and they bowed as one.

"Miss Avel, I am very pleased to see you alive and well. The prince's report indicated that you had been taken by these men and dishonoured." Casu Ekonin was frowning at her men.

"Nothing of the sort, sir. These men are my destined mates and I can prove it if the emperor will let me." She bowed low again.

"You may have to." Mister Ekonin bowed with a wink and a smile. "The emperor is waiting and he will even forego your bathing before you see him. Come with me."

Raleigh bowed again and turned to her men for a moment. "The prince is here, he has tried to have you arrested and the emperor is being pushed to kill us. The emperor is not happy and is on our side, but bound by custom to hear his son's accusations in public."

Azeel was amazed, "You got all that from those few phrases?"

"I have been here before." She smiled. "We should go. The emperor is timing us."

Blinking in surprise, Raf led the way, following mister Ekonin into the cool recesses of the palace. Hector and Azeel paced along on either side of her.

They removed their shoes before entering the audience chamber. The emperor was sitting at the far end of the room with Halun beside him. The older man looked tired and irritated, not a good combination. Lesser courtiers were seated in rows lining the pathway to the emperor.

"Raleigh, come forward." The emperor raised his hand and beckoned.

Bowing low, she straightened and glided forward with small ladylike steps. "Emperor Mahun, thank you for allowing our entrance to your presence."

"Our? My son has given me reason to believe that my clone warriors took you by force and dishonoured you."

Halun was puffed up, not expecting her to speak.

"His plans were thwarted by the warriors and so he is attributing his motives to them. Emperor, they are my most honoured husbands and I am their devoted wife."

Mahun raised his greying eyebrow at that. "Are you saying that my son plotted to dishonour you?"

"Yes, sir. He sent a man in imperial livery to my shop to injure me and insure that I be sent to him for safekeeping. Your warriors found me and through discussions of our early days, we discovered that we were all clones."

Halun's face contorted in surprise.

Raleigh smiled. "It seems that the prince was unaware that I am unmateable by Koru standards. Only my own kind are suitable mates."

The emperor looked at her with the paternal gaze she was used to from him. "Are you happy with them?"

"I am. The proof I spoke of can be shown to you, but for modesty's sake I would ask that you have the minimal number of guards inside the room. Any number are welcome with their backs to the door."

He was looking curious, but Halun was furious. "She lies! There is no proof of such a nature. Only her arm is marked and that tattoo has become common in my court."

The outburst caused a series of worried looks from the courtiers.

The emperor turned his head and looked at his son, "I am aware of it. You and I will discuss that matter privately."

Raf, Azeel and Hector were lined up by the door, waiting.

The emperor raised his voice. "Everyone out. You as well, Halun. I will see this proof and will ask Ekonin to remain here."

The courtiers filed out and even Halun left via the side door. Ekonin raised his eyes heavenward and walked to the crack that the prince had left in the door. He slid it shut and dropped a bar to prevent peeking.

"Where is your proof, Raleigh?"

The men came up behind her, flanking her on all sides. As one, they opened their robes and exposed their tattoos. For Raleigh it was more difficult, she had to unwrap yards of her sash until it slithered to the floor. The emperor was going to protest until she parted the layers of robes to show him the marking that bound them.

He rose to his feet and came forward to examine them. Even the major domo came over to examine the layers of fine detail that turned tattoos into living sculpture on their bodies.

"They are exactly the same. Perfect, each one." The emperor marvelled at the marks on Azeel's chest. The wild roses were in stark relief on each of their chests.

When he reached out, Raleigh spoke. "Please do not touch, Emperor. It is akin to stroking very delicate skin, if you understand me."

He jerked his hand back before making contact. "I accept your proof, Raleigh. But now, I have a question for you. Did your father finish the commission?"

"No, Emperor, but I did. If I may dress again?" At his nod, she closed her robes and the men closed theirs. She knelt to retrieve her sash and started to produce the gems in wildly beautiful settings. One for each of the emperor's favourite concubines, the mothers of his sons.

With her sash empty, she retied it while the emperor picked up the pieces and marvelled at them. "Sir, I also have fakes if you wish to use them to distract Halun. He has sent searching men into my shop for months."

"I know. Warriors, did you find anything in Sholu?"

Raf smiled. "Aside from our bride? Nine locals who were bribed to misinform you as to the quantities of the harvests. He has taken six women from families against their will. There is also the rumour that the men sent to kill Raleigh's parents were from his personal guard."

The emperor sighed, looking every one of his seventy years. "I am glad he is not my eldest or only son. He has brought shame to me and our family."

Raleigh nodded in sympathy as she rose with her sash once again wrapping her from hip to breast.

"I am glad for you, Raleigh. Are you truly happy with them?"

She looked at her men and sighed. "I am. We have only had one night together though, so that may change if we are not given some privacy soon."

The grin on his imperial face made her heart lighten. "You will have bathes, clothes and a large guest chamber for the next three days. Halun will be sent from the palace under guard. I do not trust him with a town. I will reassign the area to ones that I can trust." Ekonin bowed and left the room to make the arrangements.

"That is a very wise thing. Halun would be best somewhere where he cannot hurt anyone. His concubines should be freed though."

"You are correct, Miss Avel. You always were a wise one. Now, for my next set of gems, I wish to have you mix more metals to form even more elegant patterns. My eldest son's wife now has a child and she needs something most special for her efforts."

It startled her, but she nodded and smiled. They sat together and the men finally began to speak as the emperor asked them about their plans for the future. It was a very family style discussion, leaving her warm and relaxed, which was not something she had expected in the palace.

When Ekonin returned, the emperor dismissed them and in a surprising move, gave Raleigh a quick kiss on her forehead. "Sholu is your home and after you rest, you will all return there."

They followed the major domo out of the audience chamber and through the halls of the palace. Raleigh took in the scents of wood, the subtle perfumes as they passed women in the halls and the bustle of clerks and servants. It was the polar opposite from her house on the lake.

"You are to be quartered in the family wing." Ekonin smiled as he nodded to the guards that kept the courtiers out of the precious silence of the family space that the emperor had set aside for his children and their families.

"We are honoured." Raf expressed their appreciation.

"None of the imperial children are in the house right now, so do not worry about disturbing anyone. I will have clean clothing brought to you in the morning." Ekonin smiled, his lightly wrinkled face and dancing eyes enjoying this duty. "Here are your rooms."

When the doors slid open, Raleigh stifled a gasp. Pale wood glowed against the gleaming black of the floors. Blue and red silks covered the walls where exotic tapestries did not cover the panels.

Ekonin nodded and handed them over to their own housekeeper. Taliyun. She was an elegant yet practical woman who bustled them through the

main room, past the bedroom and into the bathing chamber.

The men were on their own, but she helped Raleigh undress and scrubbed her back for her while she rinsed off before the soak. "You need to wash your hair, mistress."

That was all the warning Raleigh received before she was sluiced from head to toe with water and her hair was scrubbed until her scalp tingled.

After another rinse and some towelling dry, Taliyun pinned her hair up on top of her head and escorted her to the bath where the men were already soaking. The housekeeper removed all of their clothing, disappearing behind the doors that slid closed at her light touch.

Raleigh leaned back in the water, enjoying the heat in her horse-abused muscles. "That was an interesting morning."

One by one, they started to laugh. The water splashed and frothed as they gave in to their mirth.

"Interesting is a good word for it, Raleigh. Why did the emperor kiss you?" Hector was wiping tears from his eyes.

Tears welled in her eyes. "He gave me the greeting of a daughter. It basically gives us the status of family by marriage while we are here."

Raf continued the questioning, "Why? How well does he know you?"

"My father and I began to come here for custom commissions when I first started metal working. Around the age of fourteen. The emperor always had a sweet for me and he enjoyed discussing metal compositions and the mystical properties of gemstones. I always enjoyed the visits."

"He would have been the one who agreed to allow you here. As much your parents wanted you, it was the emperor's decision that brought you here."

Raleigh blinked. "I never thought of it that way."

Hector laughed. "I would be surprised if you had. The Koru were the last entrants to the project that brought us all to life. They used samples from their noblest houses."

"How do you know all this?" She stretched out her legs, grazing Azeel's knees with her foot lightly, smiling as he gave her a narrow-eyed look.

Raf answered. "Before we came to Elsinor, the Koru insisted that we knew the history of the race we most resemble. That included how they came into the project."

"Are we the only Koru set?"

"No. There is one other, but they are on another colony world. We met them once on an assignment. They were of the gemstone decanting."

That was news to Raleigh. "How many decantings were there?"

"The roses, the gems and the animals."

"Animals?"

"The Horcross blends. They are rumoured to be shape shifters."

She looked out at them, "Is it true they call us blenders?"

Three faces tightened in anger before they relaxed. "Yes, Raleigh. Where did you hear that term?"

Raleigh drew her fingers idly through the water. "My mother told me when she explained to me exactly what I was. Makia defined what it was to be on Elsinor cut off from the rest of the races and told me that I would not have to worry about it. If I was allowed to travel, it would have been a different scenario. She also told me tales of the outer worlds and how she met my father." She knew her voice had softened when she talked about her parents.

Hector reached out and pulled her into his arms. "It was not a name we enjoyed, but we are glad she had the forethought to tell you who you are and where you came from."

She snuggled into his embrace, kissing softly at his neck. "And I know where I am destined to be."

CHAPTER SEVEN

She leaned up to feel Hector's kiss for only a moment before Raf pulled her from him. His mouth took hers and absorbed her laughter as she giggled at the abrupt change of laps and lips.

She sighed softly and stroked the back of Raf's neck. The water surged around her and hands started exploring her. Six hands roamed from neck to toes, stroking, waking her senses until she was shifting restlessly in their arms.

Raleigh felt the lightning beneath her skin and ruthlessly held it inside. Raf broke their kiss and lifted her, settling her channel slowly over his silken erection. She moaned and leaned her head back, leaving her mouth free for Azeel to take. Raf moved her on him and she held onto his shoulders for balance as her body tightened around him. With every hard thrust into her, she felt tension crawling beneath her skin, tightening her flesh around him until he could barely move. With one hard thrust and extra fingers appearing to rub her clit, she screamed as she exploded in their arms.

Azeel stood her up on the bench and leaned her on the raised border of the bathing pool. She leaned on the fragrant wood as Azeel plunged into her slick slit from behind. He groaned at the feel of her, thrusting hard and fast, as if watching her and Raf had driven him to the edge. With a whoosh of water, Hector sat next to her, his bobbing cock an invitation she couldn't resist.

He obligingly shifted so she could reach him and he shuddered when she lapped at the flaring head of his cock. She put her mouth around him and moved her head to the demanding pace that Azeel was setting. When he moved to a flurry of faster thrusts, Raleigh groaned as she hovered inches from release.

Raf reached around and stroked her tattoo on her chest with slick fingers, the light caress having more of an effect than Hector's earlier touch on her clit. She squeaked and moved rapidly on Hector's cock, bringing him to spurting release before she raised her head and groaned as her body shook around Azeel's.

She was exhausted, satiated and eager for lunch. When Azeel relaxed his grip on her hips, she slid slowly back into the water until they laughed and lifted her up. She complained, "I thought that it was men who were supposed to get tired after sex."

They laughed. "We weren't designed for that, and you were designed to take three of us, but that doesn't mean you can get up and run away

afterward." Raf lifted her from the water and Hector got the drying cloth while Azeel stood ready with a light robe.

She was dried, wrapped in a robe and then she waited for them to wear some of the other guest robes. It was a pity to cover up their bodies, but if their housekeeper had a meal ready, it would be rude to embarrass her.

Raf opened the door and led their little group down the hall to the main chamber where amazing scents were creeping through the sliding doors. When he opened the doors, a flurry of servants bowed and left silently, only the housekeeper remaining.

"You look exhausted, little chicken. Sit and eat." The woman separated her from the men and sat her down.

"Yes, ma'am." Quietly she sat and watched, amused, as the woman bullied her men into seats at the table.

The housekeeper took a seat and dished the food out onto plates, feeding her *little chicken* first.

Hot, spicy, sour, sweet, all were represented in the wide long bowl full of food that Raleigh was handed.

Tea was poured and the housekeeper left them with a formal bow, disappearing into the apartment.

Raleigh ate with a smile on her lips. Dipping noodles into spiced broth and slurping them up

was her favourite part of being at the emperor's palace. At home it was mainly rice, few noodles.

Raf gravitated toward the sweet dishes, Azeel the sour, Hector the spicy. It was a funny thing that her father told her, you could judge a man's character by what he preferred.

She just loved eating all flavours in balance. She hid a grin behind her hand as she imagined what that said about her. She felt her expression soften as she realized what it did mean, that she was designed for them, just as she had guessed.

The deep blue of the robes suited them, making their skin darker golden-bronze and their eyes sparkle a brilliant black.

"Azeel, you have been in the service to the emperor since you arrived, what have you been doing?" Polite chitchat was her only option. That or jump them all one at a time. She wasn't up for another riotous tangle of limbs quite yet.

They looked at her in surprise, possibly realizing that she knew next to nothing about them.

"We are here as investigators for the emperor. We have been sent to a number of prefectures to look into robberies and the occasional murder."

"And what about women?"

"Those we hired as needed."

Her eyes widened, "Seriously, there were whores willing to take three men on at a time?"

Azeel blushed darkly, "No, Raleigh, one of us to one woman."

"Do you mind sharing me?" There, it was out in the open.

Raf looked almost angry before his features cleared. "I do when you seem to prefer Hector over me or Azeel."

"Hector took care of me when I was injured. It is natural that I would cuddle up against him when I am stressed." She looked at the man in question. "He also tends to draw me close to him and I have no objections to being kissed and cuddled."

Azeel and Raf looked at each other, "That is it?"

She shrugged, "Basically. He pays attention and comforts me when I am nervous or frightened and there has been plenty of that recently."

Azeel closed his eyes.

She saw rapid movement behind the lids. Raleigh asked Raf, "What is he doing?"

"He is running over your expressions every time you turned to our third. Azeel is our memory, he sees things we miss."

"She is accurate. Hector's instincts were right on, as usual. His touches relaxed her for our caresses and his light humour kept her calm." Azeel nodded to Hector and their third inclined his head with a smile.

She figured it out, Raf was action. He fought to control himself so often that he didn't know how to ease into life. Azeel was observation and logic. He thought through everything and stored it for future reference, he needed to be coaxed into action. Hector was instinct, which made him the

one to act in the interest of those closest to him. "Shall we retire to the sitting room? It will allow the army of servants outside the door to come in." She smiled and stood.

"We will join you in a moment." Raf's tone was kind, but the dismissal was understood.

She left them alone with Azeel starting to recount every expression on her face since they met. The study opened on to a wide balcony that showed a view of the mountains and hills. The housekeeper was waiting for her with a tray of tea, several instruments, scrolls of local news and the emperor's edicts.

"They will be joining you?"

"Eventually. They are discussing me behind my back right now." She shook her head and reached out to caress the strings of an instrument her mother had taught her to play.

"Do you play?"

The lute was in her hands before she could say no. "A little. Not for many years though." She knelt and started to pick at the strings with the accessory provided.

It took a little bit of trial and error but she was soon plucking and strumming a song that she pulled out of her memory with only a little effort.

A presence behind her made her want to turn around, but she continued into the next song without shifting her posture. When the last notes died in the air, she turned to face her audience.

"Emperor, you took me by surprise." She bowed formally.

"Your playing was lovely, Raleigh. I came to give you something." He sat near her and extended a scroll to her.

"Thank you, sir." She looked to him and he waved for her to open the roll.

Inside was a portrait, but not any woman that Raleigh had ever met. "She looks..."

"My wife, Lehai, was an arranged marriage. Thirty years ago, she came to Elsinor, but not until she had donated some of her eggs to the clone project that Koru wanted us to participate in. They selected only the most intelligent of noble women for donation and when Lehai came to me, I knew that she had been one of the chosen."

The woman was lovely in a glowing robe with her hair swept upward into a dignified arrangement. It was her features and her glowing lavender eyes that burned out of the portrait though. Looking into the portrait was like looking into a slightly older mirror. She touched the face lightly. "We have the same face."

The emperor looked at her sadly, "Yes, you do. My eldest son has the same face, as do two of my other sons and one daughter. Halun was the product of one of my concubines."

"So you think..."

"She was your mother on a genetic level, yes." The emperor leaned back and grinned. "I know you are, I had you tested when you arrived. It was

startling to see my wife's eyes when your parents first retrieved you. I made the arrangements with your father so that I could keep seeing you as you grew into a lovely young woman, like my own daughter. You have very much of Lehai in you."

The visits, the presents that she had gotten from the doting emperor made sudden sense. "She was my primary donor?"

"Based on your appearance, it seems to be the case. The government could only tell me that my wife's genes were dominant in your makeup. I would like to make you and your men an offer."

She quickly served the emperor some tea and as if the words summoned them, the wild rose set came through the door. Hector read her face and they quickly sat around the small table, the emperor at the head of the table.

"We are honoured to see you again, Emperor."

"I am here to make you an offer as you are the husbands of my honoured daughter."

They looked toward Raleigh and she quickly explained. "The emperor's beloved wife is gone, but her donation to the clone project lives on in me. She was a donor before she came to Elsinor."

Their brows cleared and they met the emperor's smiling gaze. "What do you wish to offer us?"

"Halun ruling Sholu was a mistake. He always wanted more from life than it was willing to give him, including you, Raleigh." He sipped at his tea. "We need a strong presence in Sholu, and yours are just the men to provide it."

They remained silent as he sipped again.

"My eldest son is aware of what I am doing and who and what you are, Raleigh. He will treat you as his honoured sister throughout his life. "

"I wish for the clone warriors to take on the jobs of prefects of Sholu. You can take on the house that Holun was living in." He seemed pleased.

Raleigh froze. "Emperor, I do not know what the men think of this, but I do not wish to live in that place. Too many horrors were enacted toward those poor women. I consider that whole place unlucky."

The emperor tilted his head at her and frowned. "You reject my offer?"

"I do not. But I wish to remain in my home on the lake. There is room for expansion to allow for formal rooms." She ended on a happy note, hoping to distract him from his unhappiness.

Her men looked at her and Raf answered. "We agree with Raleigh, Halun's home has been the house for debauchery and cruelty. It should be razed to the ground and the forest left to come in. Acting as your agents in the Sholu prefecture would be an honour."

The emperor nodded. "I will take what I can get." He raised his hand and Ekonin bustled in from where he had been watching through the crack in the hidden door. "This is the design for your new home."

On the table with the teacups holding down the edges, a vellum scroll unrolled to display a house

that would mix with the local landscape and create a new home for the prefects of Sholu.

The emperor winked at her as he went over some of the features including the family rooms and the attached house for special guests. Raleigh caught the skewed reference to the emperor himself in that and merely smiled happily.

The housekeeper brought in a tray of snacks and more tea as the men discussed each of the rooms as well as the details of materials and workmen.

After everyone had bonded over discussing the proper lacquer colour to do justice to the lake and mountains, Raleigh just had one question. "Sir, why have you told me about this now?"

"I promised your father that I would not use your parentage to affect your marriage prospects here on Elsinor."

She blushed. "And since I arrived all ready mated..."

"It was no longer an issue. Now. We have had our snack, I was going to leave you to rest in privacy, but I am thinking you should join me and two of my sons for dinner. They will be here in a few hours."

Raf answered. "I fear that we have nothing suitable to join you and your honoured children."

The emperor smiled. "It has been taken care of. When you return to Sholu, you will be followed by carts full of clothing and decorations suitable

for your new station." He rose to his feet and exited the room, they bowed low as he left.

The housekeeper pounced the second that he was out the door. "Come along, miss. It will take some doing to get you presentable."

Male servants entered through the main room and requested that the men join them.

Raleigh went one way and her men went another.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"There. You look wonderful, miss." The housekeeper circled her, tugging at the fold of a sleeve and the minute pleat of fabric that displeased her.

"Thank you, Taliyun. You knew her, didn't you?"

The older woman's eyes crinkled as she smiled. "I did. I came with her from Koru proper. I was with her when she gave the eggs to the clone project and experienced her shock when she was chosen as a bride for Emperor Mahun. She didn't know what would befall her on Elsinor, but she lived here fifteen years before she passed on in childbirth."

Raleigh was wearing more embroidered fabric than she had ever seen in her life. Her mourning undergarments were hidden beneath five layers of silk robes that made it hard for her to move.

She rustled forward and turned to see the back of the midnight blue outer robe crossed with the silver of the heavy sash. Her hair was up in a

formal style, held in place with combs and spikes that grazed her skin just short of stabbing her.

"I think your men are ready to see you now." The glee in Taliyun's voice was unmistakable.

She took a shallow breath and glided into the front room to see what had been done to her warriors. "Oh, my."

Their short hair gleamed and was brushed smoothly around their ears. Their eyes bored into her clothing as if looking for a way to get her out of it. She took in the snow white of their shirts, the crisp blackness of their wide legged trousers and the belted vests that matched her robe in colour and texture.

"Raleigh, you look...beautiful," Azeel complimented. Barely any strain showed around his eyes.

She blushed and made her way slowly to them. Going up on her toes was precarious, but she gave Azeel a soft kiss in thanks. He was blinking at her in surprise. She smiled, "See, give me what I need and I cleave to you. It isn't rocket science."

They laughed and Raf said what she was thinking. "I am afraid to sit for fear that I crease the clothing before dinner."

She led them through the doors until they reached the balcony. "I can stand for a very long time looking at a view like this."

They stood together in their finery not touching, but close. When Ekonin came to get them, they turned as one, filing after him in

silence. Raleigh was after Raf, in front of Azeel with Hector bringing up the rear.

The formal dining hall was bustling with activity. Emperor Mahun was seated at the head of the table and on either side of him were his sons. Prince Kalin, the eldest, was looking at her with a sort of wistful greeting, and his brother, Kilor, opened his mouth in shock. At Ekonin's urging, she was seated next to Kalin.

"My sons. May I introduce to you Lehai's daughter, Raleigh Avel. She is a clone partially made from the flesh of your mother."

"She looks just like her." Prince Kilor couldn't stop staring.

Kalin was more accepting, or at least less rude. "Welcome to the family, Raleigh."

"Thank you, Prince Kalin. Your acceptance is welcome." She bowed from the waist. "May I introduce my honoured husbands? Raf, Azeel and Hector." She pointed at each one in turn.

That stumped even the urbane Kalin. "Three?"

The emperor laughed. "They are clones, Kalin. They mate in groups so that they can have children. They are not designed to breed with the base races. It is so that the men do not worry about having the clone warriors near their women."

Dinner conversation turned to the new prefect house and the men discussed the details of security while Raleigh made sure that everyone had what they needed within reach and kept the cups filled. She didn't mind doing the table

maintenance as long as it meant her men were kept entertained.

It was nice to see them talking and even arguing with those who newly proclaimed her family. She had already had a wonderful family, she didn't know what this one would demand in return for their acceptance.

Relaxed and full of food, they were dismissed and returned to their apartments. They would leave at dawn, so tonight was for restoring themselves.

The men's clothing was easier, so as they removed their vests and shirts with ease as she fought to free herself from the prison of yards of fabric. Hector saw her distress, elbowed Raf and their leader came over to release her.

His hands smoothed over her body until he found the edge of the sash and tugged it loose. He unwrapped her slowly, tugging on the sash a little too hard and sending her spinning into Azeel with a gasp and a giggle.

When the sash was free of her body and the first robe carefully removed, Raf murmured in her ear. "To see if you respond to each of us the same, we are going to blindfold you."

A strip of black silk slid over her eyes before she could say a word.

With her eyes bound, she could only feel.

Hands removed the final four layers of her clothing, slid off the light protection of silk from between her thighs. Light touches, firm touches,

they all blurred as her body began to pulse from deep within.

Hands on either side lifted her with one hand under her thigh and one around her back, positioned her with her slick and hot folds parted. She bit at her lip as a hot blunt spear of flesh started to press into her. The slow penetration combined by her lack of senses had her on the edge of orgasm in seconds. The cock inside her plunged in and out with a slow heavy beat, keeping her senses high but not letting her find release. Three hands stroked her tattoo in unison and she screamed as her senses flared to the edge of bearing. Her body arched and shook in their grasp, accepting the groaning pulse of seed inside her that she could feel with the lack of her other sense.

The hands lifted her from the dripping member that had just been inside her and forced her to kneel on the edge of the bed. With her on her knees, she felt her bookends move beside her and her hands were wrapped around two hard rods of flesh. She stroked them, listening to their groans as she ran her thumb around the flaring heads until precum coated them, using the lubricant to slide her hands down and up with a firm and steady stroke. She used her hands to the same beat as the man who had been inside her. When first one and then the other groaned, she grinned and slowed her pace. At their hiss, she sped up her strokes, pulling them into their own release.

She felt a spattering of cum on both of her thighs, and the outer edge of her hip. Naked, tired, and still blindfolded, she placed her hands back in her lap.

She heard water and a warm cloth was cleaning her of the traces of her evening. When her body was clean, the blindfold was removed.

Raf was looking at her with a challenging look in his eyes. "Well, do you know who was who?"

She should let them have their moment. "Hector was the one inside me. Raf on the left, Azeel on the right."

"How could you know that?" He looked disappointed that they had not been able to fool her.

"You each ate different things for dinner. Hector had the chili, Raf, you had the sweet buns, Azeel ate everything else." She smiled and shrugged, scooting back onto the large wide mattress and getting under the covers. She tried lying down, but had to sit up and free her hair from the myriad combs and spikes that held her hair in place.

Hector laughed and took a position on the outside edge. "We will just have to keep trying to fool you."

Raf brightened at that. Azeel got a calculating look.

"Come here, Raf, I want to sleep and the cuddling will help." She turned her back against him while he settled for sleep. She snuggled close

and he wrapped on arm around her. Azeel took up the position between Hector and Raleigh. They all settled into a relaxed sleep.

* * * *

They were asleep. They had taken his priceless goddess and had destroyed her. He could not let that stand. With a few well-placed bribes, he worked his way back into the palace and by the giggling of the serving women, the foursome had just had noisy sex and were now sleeping off their debauchery.

Halun crept closer, silent feet making no sound on the lacquer. There was no part of the palace he didn't know, and the family quarters he knew really well. He loaded an arrow into his bow and crouched outside the main entrance. There was no one in the main room, so he crept onward into the bedroom. There, three sets of masculine shoulders protecting their little woman. He circled around so that he could exit via the balcony and run to another room to get away.

A deep breath, he took aim, and a gloriously nude Raleigh was looking at him with a blind expression in her lavender eyes. She raised a hand toward him a strange blue light around her hand. "Too late to beg for forgiveness, bitch."

Speaking was a mistake, three pairs of dark eyes were on him in an instant. Three hands extended and as he loosed the arrow, two things

happened. One, a ball of lightning hit him in the chest, breaking a scream from him as his body tried to keep the heart beating. Two, three balls of wind barrelled out and struck him in the chest, bearing him out of the room, off the balcony and into the air. His scream rent the air as he fell, realising that death was an instant away.

* * * *

Raleigh woke with her arm extended and the men gathered around her. "What happened?"

"Halun came back and tried to kill you. His arrow is in the ceiling."

"I think we should try and get some sleep. We can explain it to Mahun in the morning." She snuggled down into the bedding and was out in a second.

* * * *

"I think she has the right idea. If Halun survived, he will have an interesting story, we need the rest before we return to Sholu." Hector lay back down and grumbling, the other two did the same.

* * * *

"Miss Avel, your men are with the emperor. It appears that Prince Halun decided to commit suicide last night."

"Really?"

"Yes. It seems that he escaped from his guard, came back to the palace and threw himself from the roof. There is no other way for him to have gotten that far down the hill into the gardens." Taliyan was being very helpful.

A cup of tea was thrust under her nose and so Raleigh sat up, clutching the bedding to her breast. "I will get dressed in a moment. Bear with me, last night was difficult."

"The servants who heard are amazed that you could satisfy three so quickly."

Raleigh groaned. "There were servants because Kalin and Kilor were in residence. Damn." It wasn't as bad as she thought. Taliyan helped her get dressed in her spare robe and she was ready for the trip home to start.

She met her men in the forecourt. "I heard about Halun."

"He jumped, or tried to fly. That is all we know." Raf's eyes were solemn.

The emperor was standing near them, sorrow but resignation in his eyes. "He was dishonourable, it is a good resolution to the problem he posed. The only strange thing was that he was clutching his bow."

"That is indeed strange, Emperor. I do wish to return home to begin my new life, sir."

"Then I will not keep you waiting." He lazily raised his hand and four horses and a pack mule were brought out, loaded with goods.

"Thank you, sir, for your hospitality. You are always welcome in our house." She bowed low and stayed until he touched her shoulder.

"I will take you up on that, Raleigh. It is almost time for this part of the planet to be controlled by younger blood. I also would not be reluctant to see a grandchild of Lehai's."

Raleigh blushed. "I will see what I can do."

He laughed and brought her in for a hug and a kiss to her forehead. "Take my daughter away to her home. She will have me weeping in minutes."

Raf grinned, meeting her gaze with relief in his. He lifted her to the horse that had been fitted with a sidesaddle so she could ride in ease.

Once she was on the horse, the emperor started walking into his palace, leaving them to exit his domain. They didn't waste any time.

They rode in silence, stopping only when they had to and pushing through when they saw the hills of Sholu in the dimming night. They rode straight to her home and while Raleigh opened her secure home, they unloaded the mule and the horses. The stable had never seen so much action, but it had been built to stand up to anything that a horse could throw at it.

The food that had been packed was a series of delicacies that Raleigh remembered from holidays near the palace. She smiled when the men were back and seated around the table.

"What are you smiling about?" Azeel was more relaxed here as well.

"Halun is dead. I am home, and you are here with me. Life isn't going to get better, no matter what honours are heaped on us."

They shrugged, lifted their cups and toasted. "To our fourth, her strength, beauty and the pure electricity of her presence."

Raleigh blushed and toasted them back, "To the clone warriors of Elsinor, who found a woman in distress and didn't let her out of their sight."

"To a chance at a family." They shouted it with a laugh.

"To blindfolds!"

Raleigh squeaked and tried to get away from them as that comment made them surge after her like dogs on meat. They carried her to the bedroom and after hours of taunting and teasing, she turned to Raf with a grin. "To more of that."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Zenina Masters was born in Canada and lives in Canada. She has a regular job and does nothing particularly exciting with her life. She enjoys fishing, silence and the ability to pick and choose friends she can trust. Life is too short to watch your back all the time.

Her writing life is a teeny bit of escapism, she would probably chicken out if confronted by three naked men and looks forward to one day finding out.