

## Chapter 1

“Kill them all. Take everything and burn the rest!” Larticass, an armor-clad warlord, ordered from atop his horse. His bellowing laughs of triumph were heard over the cries of the villagers as his soldiers ran through the streets armed with swords, torches, and a mission of complete annihilation. Larticass smiled as he watched the fire begin to lick at the village. His smile widened as the smoke danced in the air and the villagers’ blood stained the ground. “Stupid fools. I told them not to hold out on me.”

“You did sire.” Larticass’ second in command confirmed from beside him. “I don’t think they will make the same mistake again.”

“No.” He chuckled. “It’s kind of hard to hold out from your grave,” he proclaimed, laughing louder, only to stop abruptly as he felt a slight vibration of the earth. He squinted through the smoke and watched as two dark figures emerged on horseback.

A flash of fear passed over the warlord’s face as he recognized the legendary intruders and their powerful steeds that came to a halt before him.

The stories began to pass through the lands many moons ago. They warned of a dark-haired, dark-eyed warrior and her fairer-haired companion who defended villages from pillaging warlords and greedy kings that were trying to build wealth and kingdoms by stealing, threatening, and killing the innocent. The stories of the crusaders were well-known now. Larticass and several of his fellow warlords had promised rewards for information about the two, and even more riches if they brought them their heads. Unfortunately for him today, the Dark Savior, as she was called because of the black-hooded cloak she wore to hide her face, and her companion who fought beside her, still had their heads firmly attached. There were varying myths told and believed as to their origins; tales ranged from avenging angels to Goddesses. Larticass assessed the two who were before him now and wondered which, if any, of the myths were real. It didn’t really matter because he knew he was in for a hell of a fight if even half the stories about their vengeance were true.

Dark Savior and her companion watched Larticass adjust nervously in his saddle. His discomfort meant their reputations preceded them and Larticass was likely pondering; *Goddesses? Angels?* Why else would two women’s presence cause concern to a man and his army of ruthless assassins? Only they knew their true identities and the fact that their blood was that of mere mortals, born to

the same lands as the people they now defended. They did nothing to fuel the rumors, but they did nothing to combat the legends either. Instead, they used the misinformation to help conceal their identities from the countrymen who would have recognized the Dark Savior as their once loved Queen Artemisia, the Queen of Halicarnassus. She had ruled her kingdom well and with a firm, but generous hand after the death of the King. As Queen she had even gone to battle herself to protect her land and her people. However, she did not share the blood and power-lust of her fellow rulers who were engaging battles with no thought to the lost lives of their soldiers, or more so the villagers that got caught in the crosshairs. Their only desire was to expand their land and their kingdoms. So, with the assistance of her companion Freya, a slave-girl who Artemisia had saved from a neighboring abusive King, they staged Artemisia's death. Together they fled the throne to become free to fight only in the wars they believed in; to be defenders of the innocent and to fight for those who couldn't fight for themselves.

"This is no concern of yours!" Larticass finally cried out.

He received no reply. He squinted in an effort to catch a glimpse of the mysterious Dark Savior, not only in an attempt to read the threat before him, but out of pure curiosity. The Dark Savior's legend did not only speak of her unrivaled fighting skills, but of an unrivaled beauty. It was told she had the strong powerful stature of the fabled Amazon women; long black hair, an olive-toned face, piercing, nearly black eyes, and a beauty beyond that of all the goddesses combined. But the woman in front of him revealed nothing, not her face nor her intentions. Uncomfortable in the silence, the warlord yelled with as much menace and threat as he could muster underneath the woman's stare. "Take your little harlot, leave now, and I'll spare you from the suffering I plan to inflict on these worthless peasants."

From beside the warrior, Freya adjusted in her saddle, confused in the lack of response from her Queen. She eyed her companion, then cleared her throat as to prompt the warrior into action. After a few more moments of awkward silence, Freya watched as the warlord's soldiers became uneasy, shifting foot to foot, and then gathering closer. *Okay, this is not good. I guess we'll go with a little improvisation,* Freya thought. She dismounted quickly from her horse and drew her sword in one fluid move, deciding to take charge of the situation. "Lord *Lard-ass* you will not cause any more suffering here today. I suggest you leave now. However, if you choose to stay, then I swear by my own hand, it will be you that will suffer," Freya threatened. She quickly added a steely glare as her usually more vocal and combative companion often did in these situations.

Larticass turned his confused look to the smaller, brown-haired, blue-eyed woman. The stories told of her too being one of great beauty and superior fighting skills. The beauty part was accurate, he surmised, and the way she handled her sword in smooth, almost rhythmic movements made him assume the rumors of her fighting skills were accurate as well. He glanced back at the other warrior, still statue-like on her horse. He thought they must be trying to throw him off; tricking him by changing up their attack because the Dark Savior should have been the one engaging him. He looked back at the other warrior, who gave him a jerk of the head, in a *come get me* fashion. At her prodding, Larticass signaled his army to charge the smaller warrior.

Freya, though not as intimidating as her Queen, was in her own right a fierce and effective fighter. She fought expertly, cutting down all that came at her. Between strikes, she stole glances at her companion, worried by her inaction because she had never known her to be the one to pass up a fight.

*What game is she playing?* Freya wondered as she continued to fend off the continuous line of attackers. Then it hit her, she had been joking about her sidekick status. Maybe this was her companion's way of getting her back, teaching her a warped lesson by letting her fight solo and become the "hero." Freya looked up briefly to see men, hundreds of them, still coming at her. Her poking was not so funny now she thought as she took down two more attackers. *Turns out, I'm totally good with being the sidekick.* She dodged another swing of a sword then began to strategically move her way closer to the warrior.

When Freya got close enough she yelled. "Probably ought to tell someone when you decide to change things up like this." She knocked an attacker down with a spinning sidekick. "This really wasn't the best time to switch things up." Two more attackers went down with a sword strike to the chest and one to the thigh. The warrior did not move. It was like she was frozen, and she had never known the warrior to freeze in any situation. Something was wrong. "Ahh, I could use a little help here!" Freya yelled, trying to provoke her companion into action. She took down another attacker with a thrust of her sword and then shoved the attacker into a second. It was then, out of the corner of her eye, she finally saw the warrior move. It was only slightly at first, but then she began to slide from her saddle.

"Oh crap!" Freya said as she dropped her sword and raced in an effort to catch her Queen, who she noticed, didn't appear to realize she was now horizontal to the earth and in a direct collision course with the ground. Acting fast, Freya slid underneath the falling warrior just in time to catch her head before it struck the ground.

“What the...? CUT! CUT!” a man yelled, jumping from his director’s chair. “What the hell is going on?” he asked as he stormed over to his fallen hero. “Kanyon! Damn it!”

“Oh. Hey, Arthur,” Kanyon said smiling from her prone position on the ground. “What are ya doin’ up there?” She tilted her head slightly and squinted. “Oh man, I can see clear up your nose from here. You really should do something about that. I got some wax back in my trailer if you wanna-” her head rolled slightly to the side. “I mean, it’s for my legs, but I’m sure it would work up there too.”

“That’s it! I’m done! I’m tired of this Lindsay Lohan wannabe bullshit,” Arthur yelled as he threw the papers he fisted into the air. “Wyatt, come here!”

A young intern scrambled from an entanglement of camera cords and lighting rigs to catch up to Arthur as he turned and stomped off the set. “Ah yes, yes sir?” Wyatt asked with a little tremble in his voice.

“Get with the special effects team, I want them to manipulate the last shot so it looks like an arrow went into her back, knocked her off her horse, and killed her.”

“Arthuurrr! Wait. Come back. Don’t be mad, it’s cool. I bet your assistant,” Kanyon used air-quotes emphasizing the word assistant, “probably doesn’t even notice the hairs. Her head is always facing the other direction,” Kanyon yelled after him.

“Make that a hundred arrows in her back,” Arthur growled through gritted teeth as he stormed out, leaving a wake of tossed chairs and equipment.

The Freya facade dropped now, Daylen looked down at Kanyon whose head still rested in her lap. “Kanyon, really? You’re drunk already? It’s not even ten in the morning.”

“I’m not allreeeeeadyyy drunk. I’m STILLLLL drunk!” Kanyon answered with the grin she had learned that nine times out of ten usually charmed people and made them forget her misdeeds.

Daylen answered her grin with a roll of her eyes and then abruptly stood, causing Kanyon’s head to drop and hit the ground, effectively notifying her this was apparently the *one* time her charms weren’t going to work.

“Ouch. Damn, Daylen. Geez... You are no fun.” Kanyon sat up, rubbing the back of her head.

Daylen stood, looking down at Kanyon and sighed heavily, disappointment and frustration clear on her face. “I may be *no fun*, but at least I know I’m worth more than a good time and some bottle of vodka.”

“Just for your information, Miss *Goodie O’Perfect*, it wasn’t just SOOOMME bottle of vodka. It was the best, most expensive vodka.

Top shelf. Like, the very top shelf. Like, get a really tall ladder to reach it, kind of top shelf,” Kanyon yelled at Daylen’s now retreating back.

Daylen spun back to her with a smirk clear on her face. “Well, Miss *Alkie St. Drunkerson*, I’m glad to hear you’re not selling yourself out for the cheap stuff,” Daylen retorted then turned again and walked away.

“Ahh, damn it.” Kanyon slammed her fist into the set’s dirt covered floor, immediately regretting the exchange with Daylen.

Once the area was clear of all but a few people, a tall, slender blonde slipped from the shadows and knelt down by Kanyon, her lips close to her ear. “Well, that was quite the show,” she said softly as she slid her hand down the back of Kanyon’s hair.

“Yeah, some show,” Kanyon replied as she pulled her legs up to her chest. “Lexi, I don’t like this.” She sighed as she dropped her head onto her knees. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me. That wasn’t me and this isn’t good. We shouldn’t have gone out last night. I have responsibilities here. These people depend on me and I keep letting them down.”

Lexi rolled her eyes behind Kanyon’s lowered head. “These people exist because of you. You should be able to take a break and let your hair down every once in a while,” Lexi said, barely covering the annoyance in her voice as she continued to run her fingers through the locks of Kanyon’s hair.

“I’ve been letting my hair down a lot lately. Too much. I think it’s time to put my hair up.” Kanyon lifted her head and felt the alcohol fighting with her brain as the all too familiar pounding began. She turned to look at Lexi briefly and then turned away again. “I should definitely put it up, way up, like Cyndi Lauper 80’s on top of your head kind of up. Or a topknot. I can pull off a topknot. I’ll just stay at home, buy a polyester pantsuit, and wear my hair up in a topknot for a few days and-”

Lexi placed her finger under Kanyon’s chin and turned Kanyon slowly back to face her, cutting off Kanyon’s senseless rambling. “I like your hair down,” she purred in a low, seductive whisper.

Kanyon swallowed hard, looked into Lexi’s eyes, and her body and mind went liquid. “Okay, hair down then, but-” Lexi placed a finger over Kanyon’s mouth stopping her next words.

“Shhh... No more silly ramblings. Okay?” Lexi ordered softly. Kanyon nodded in response. Lexi smiled. “Good.” She ran her finger over the outline of Kanyon’s lips. “Now let’s go get rid of that headache.”

Though everything in Kanyon wanted to stay, to fix what had just happened, to find Daylen and apologize, she stood, a protest falling dead on her lips, and followed Lexi off the set.

Kanyon tried to let her body relax as a stranger's hands worked expertly over the muscles in her back.

"I told you this would get rid of your headache." Lexi sighed, enjoying her own massage.

Kanyon lifted her head to see Lexi stretched out only a few feet away. "Yeah."

"And it's definitely better than worrying about the idiots on the show."

Kanyon smiled, hoping it covered the guilt and the deep desire to go back to the set and put things right, to apologize to Arthur and to find Daylen.

Lexi moaned her satisfaction and then turned her head away to enjoy the rest of her massage.

Kanyon tried to relax as well, but she had never been one for treatments, massages, or strange people touching her. Again, her thoughts were of escape, but something stronger willed her to stay. She took another look at Lexi. Their relationship had started normally enough, approximately three months ago when they began shooting the fifth season of *The Dark Savior*. Lexi got the part of Raya, Artemisia's latest nemesis. Lexi had asked Kanyon to go to dinner so they could get to know each other better and talk about their characters' new rivalry. Dinner led to drinks and Kanyon had tried to resist Lexi's invites, never being one for the going out scene, but Lexi had swayed her. Then eventually it had become their routine. They went out and they partied because Lexi stated she needed "to be seen" to build her career.

Sometimes they would meet up with Kanyon's on-again, off-again boyfriend, Vance, Hollywood's latest hot leading actor. She and Vance were technically "on" at this particular moment, or maybe it was "off", it's hard to remember when you kind of don't care, and he had been out of town for six months filming his latest movie.

At first, Lexi hung on Kanyon's every word, followed her everywhere, and consistently sought her out. Kanyon normally shied away from people and their attention since she had been smothered in it all her life. But for whatever reason, Lexi was different. She found herself oddly drawn to her. Over the last month however, she couldn't help but feel their relationship had changed. She began to notice Lexi wasn't asking but more directing what they did, where they went, and who was allowed to join them. The biggest change of late had been the intimate touches here and there. Lexi would briefly lay her hand on her

thigh; run her hand slowly down her back and through her hair, not to mention the suggestive looks and words. Then there was the other night when she had woken up in Lexi's bed without a clear memory of what had happened. She wondered if that's what was holding her captive, the possibility they had-

Kanyon was startled at the soft fingertips that caressed her shoulder. She flipped over quickly, holding the towel tightly to her chest. She looked up to see Lexi standing over her, smiling as she fingered the yellow stone pendant that she wore around her neck.

"Someone was deep in thought. What, or should I say *who*, are you thinking about?" Lexi asked, her voice dropping to a husky whisper.

Kanyon closed her eyes as a sensation of desire and need washed over her. She swallowed hard, fighting to keep her answer to herself. Lexi cupped Kanyon's chin, lifting it. Kanyon opened her eyes. "You," she heard herself whisper.