

# The Bandit King

Part 3 in the Battle of  
Lavita



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No war is won or lost until the final battle is over

- Haruki Murakami



# Chapter 1

Rhysand stared at the setting sun with a grim and tired look in his eyes. The sky turned orange-red as he and the others struggled to find shelter for the night. He felt like he could see all the way to Oros. The place where his loved one was trapped in the hands of their enemies.

"We're almost there," Tiki said, walking slightly ahead of the others. "Are you going to make it?"

She turned and looked gravely at Rhys and Adrien who were supporting Rivin. The fire mage had been seriously injured after the battle in the Ice Mountains. On one hand, it was a good thing that Drogon had made all the bandits dissolve into nothingness, otherwise Rivin wouldn't have survived. He had just been stabbed by someone with a sword when the bandits disappeared and kidnapped Amira at the same time.

Rivin had suffered a deep elongated laceration that ran from his chest to his abdomen. It was fortunate that Adrien had so much knowledge of healing with plants. Before their departure from Rivin's valley, Amira had ensured that all of Adrien's medicinal herbs, ointments and other items were in the shoulder bag. Just in case there was nothing she could do. As if she had sensed this was going to happen.

Rhys glanced sideways at his father's pale face. Their progress was slow and they had spent days on the ice patch treating his injury before moving again. Rivin was exhausted. He couldn't do it anymore. He needed a healer. Otherwise, he would never be able to contribute anything to the fight that was to come. Because that there would be a final battle between the Lavitans and bandits, that was certain.

"How much longer?" he asked Tiki.

"Ten minutes," she said softly.

Like Rhys and Adrien, she was worried about the man. He was centuries old, had endured a lot in his life and she got the feeling that his life energy was seeping from the wound. But she knew him long enough to know he would fight to the extreme. Tiki wouldn't be surprised at all if Rivin managed to reach Oros and collapsed there.

"Then let's continue," Adrien urged the others.

He tightened his arm around Rivin, who groaned in pain. Rhys followed his friend's example and they walked slowly. As the sun disappeared completely behind the horizon, they found a rocky area covered with rocks on all sides. The men carefully lowered Rivin to the ground. They didn't want the wound to open again, but Adrien still had to inspect the injury.

Rhys made a ball of light that illuminated their shelter so they could see everything clearly.



Adrien took all the things out of the small shoulder bag. Although it looked small, it held a surprising amount of space. Before their departure from Lava Rock, Amira had enchanted the bag with a deepening spell. That spell ensured that a lot of stuff could be stored in it. If they tried their best, they could be in it themselves.

The young man gathered some herbs and berries from the bag and added a few leaves. He then grabbed a pestle and mortar and placed it next to the rest. He looked through the bag for a moment, but then fished out a wide roll of bandages and wipes. Rhys and Tiki helped Rivin into a semi-sitting position and Adrien removed the bandage with the same precision with which he had applied it that morning. The bandage was wet with wound fluid, but fortunately it had not bled anymore.

Silently he began to clean it with the wipes, moistening them slightly with water from his canteen. He did his work very carefully and nodded at one point. Then he gave Rivin a handful of sour berries, which he had to chew and then spit out into the mortar. Each time his face scrunched up from the sour taste the berries gave off, but he knew it was necessary.

Adrien added some herbs to the mortar and started mixing them with the berries. He used the leaves to very carefully spread the mixture over the injury. He placed a few dry cloths over that and then neatly connected it to the roll of bandages.

When Adrien nodded that it was okay, Tiki and Rhys gently placed Rivin on the ground. Judging from the mage's face, he was in pain, but expressed it as little as possible.

"I'll give him some relief from his pain," said a soft feminine voice.

Before them appeared Evie, Amira's guardian dragon. The beautiful dragon with scales colored like the rainbow had felt immensely guilty that she had been unable to do anything to protect her mage from Drogon. The day after she was taken, the young princess had sent the dragon on a mission to help the others. Only if it were really necessary would she call on her dragon for help.

Rhys knew they weren't the only ones struggling. In the first days after her disappearance, he had been in contact with Amira. But the last message he had received from her had been ten days ago. He knew she was alive, he could sense it through their bond of the companionship, but she was not in good shape. He didn't need to see her to know what was going on there. Sometimes her feelings would reach him through their bond. She didn't do that on purpose and Rhys knew she wanted to protect him from the pain she was experiencing, but it kept getting worse. There seemed to be no end to it.

"If you want to do that, please do," he said to Evie.

The beautifully colored dragon nodded and a soft light shone from her small claws. The guardian dragons each had a bit of

magic. Whether it was pure luck, Amira's guardian dragon had the ability to relieve pain. Haro, Rivins guardian dragon, had telepathy as a gift. Very useful in some cases, except now he couldn't do anything for his mage.

Rivins face seemed to calm slightly when Evie finished. It was an exhausting force and she sometimes used it for hours at a time. She flew to a spot in the corner and lay down.

"Thanks, Evie," Tiki whispered.

But she didn't hear it anymore. The beautiful dragon had already fallen deeply asleep.

Adrien was looking outside. He could see the Rock Plain. It would probably take them all hours of the next day to get there, when it would normally take them three hours. He sighed deeply as darkness fell.

"Are you noticing a change yet?" Rhys asked softly.

He sat down next to his friend and looked north with him. They sat there in silence for a while, watching and Rhys didn't think Adrien wanted to answer. As if he didn't know how Rhys would react to it.

"His wound looks better," Adrien said finally. "It heals slowly and that is probably because we went on another trip before he could properly take steps."

"We had no choice," Rhys said sullenly.

"We always have a choice," Adrien responded. "And we made the right choice, Rhys. If it had been up to your father, we would have left him on the ice plain."

Rhys looked at his friend in surprise. That was something he hadn't known. It was typical of his father to suggest leaving him behind. But no one would leave him behind. Rivin had known that very well. He had probably checked to see if Adrien didn't want to go to Oros first before he started on the injuries.

It was a choice they had all faced immediately after the events on the ice plain. Only Rhys had fallen unconscious as his companion had vanished into thin air, leaving her at the mercy of Drogon. That misfire would have probably already handed her over to Navarog, who wanted to use Amira's powers for his own purposes.

A faint smile crossed Rhys' face. Navarog didn't know Amira yet. She would never just help a bandit. Something had to be very wrong if she did that. The only thing she had to worry about now was keeping herself alive. He would go to her. And he wouldn't stop until he found her. He had promised her in one of the brief conversations they had had together.

And as if they on the other side of the covenant knew he was thinking about her, a horrible pang of pain went through him. It ripped through his entire body and he clung to the wall of their shelter. He clenched his teeth and tried not to wince, but Adrien noticed immediately.

And as if it wasn't enough, a second stab ripped through his leg. Shivering and trembling, Rhys breathed through his teeth. He growled and cursed as a shock went through him. Adrien grabbed his shoulders to keep Rhys in the here and now and Tiki came closer too.

Rhys' tense body relaxed slightly after a few minutes. He blinked and his whole body shook, but not from pain. It was anger that coursed through him.

Whatever those bandits did to his companion, they would pay for it. Piece by piece. If it was causing him such incredible pain, then Amira must be dying of pain.

It let him know two things.

One: she was still alive. And that was the most important thing in Rhys' eyes.

And two, they hadn't broken her will yet.

She still fought them. She didn't want to help them. Drogon should have known that before he kidnapped her. How else could she have escaped him for months? Her will to escape them had been great. But the moment he'd been in danger, it hadn't mattered to her anymore. She had wanted to protect him from Hama, Drogon and Darran. She had freed him from Hama's clutches. The ice witch had not known what had happened to her when Amira had knocked her out with a single blow.

But the enormous energy she had used to get to him had ultimately killed her. That was the only reason Drogon could have taken her hostage. It was his fault that he lost his companion.

"I think they're getting desperate," Tiki said when Rhys finally came back to the present. "This is already the third time today."

"This makes me desperate," Rhys said grimly.

Adrien still had his hands on his friend's shoulders. They looked at each other.

"You know Amira, right? She really doesn't just give up," he said, trying to cheer Rhys up.

"Everyone has a breaking point. And if this becomes too much for me and drives me to despair, I don't know how much longer Amira can hold on."

"With a bit of luck, we will be in Oros in three weeks. Then we'll find her, even if we have to break into the castle to catch a glimpse of her," Tiki said.

She spoke encouragingly to him. Rhys nodded slowly. He knew that his friends were willing to go to any lengths to save Amira from the clutches of Drogon and Navarog. He would be eternally grateful if they succeeded.

And maybe along the way they could catch something from the rebels, who had been causing problems in Oros for a few weeks. That was also something Amira had told him. What she

had not told any of the bandits was that Prince Raphael was the leader of the rebellion.

The prince had already escaped from the dungeons beneath the castle before Rhys and his father had joined the group. Amira had not heard from her brother for weeks, but suddenly she had let Rhys know about the rebellion. At the moment they provided a good distraction. Drogon, Darran and Daja were busy keeping those rebels under control. They had made all kinds of threats, but the rebels were not going to give up until the city was recaptured by them.

Rhys and the others wanted to be there on the day Oros would be free again. And Rhys would make sure Amira was there too. It was a silent mission that he had imposed on himself and that he had not told the others about. Yet he knew they felt the same way he did. Amira had to be found, freed and reunited with her friends.

But before that happened, they first had to bridge the distance to Oros. In a few weeks, Rhys promised himself and quietly through the bond to Amira. We'll be together again in a few weeks.

## Chapter 2

A sharp pain ripped through her head as she regained consciousness. The slightest movement of her head sent a flaming pain down her right temple. The pain was so intense that it made her feel nauseous and she had difficulty suppressing the urge to vomit. She sat very still on the chair she was attached to. She had to try to relax. It took her a lot of effort to concentrate on her own body, but after a while she felt her muscles relax.

Amira carefully opened her eyes. Not that she could see much in the dark, but it had a reassuring effect on her. At least she could still open her eyes.

As long as she was stuck in this chair, it was one of the few things she could do. Drogon had prepared this room for her. She had known that from the first moment the bandit had pushed her in here. She had fought him wildly, despite not having access to her magic. But it hadn't been enough. She was stuck.

Four chains were attached to the chair. A pair of chains for both her wrists and for her ankles. And all four of them had been modified thanks to Navarogs black magic. They caused all magic to drain away and cannot be used. And that was exactly what Drogon wanted.



But what the bandit had not counted on was that Amira's power was so great that her magic was not completely extinguished. She could no longer summon her flames, nor could she summon the devastating magic. And she had said goodbye to lightning magic completely. She needed more energy than she had for that magic. So, at the moment she had to make do with her clairvoyant gift and the healing magic.

And she needed the latter more than anything. Darran had discovered that the wounds Drogon had inflicted on her during a gruesome interrogation had healed. And that had given Drogon an idea. They would keep her in this dark hole until her energy was so low that even her healing would fail. She didn't know how long they had been doing this. She had no idea how many days she had been stuck here. Maybe she had been here for weeks. What she did know was that she was growing weaker every day, although she hid it from her tormentors as best she could.

She pulled her left arm, which hurt terribly. She knew where that pain came from, even though she ignored it as much as possible. Navarog was usually in a nasty mood.

Today too. Ever since he burned a part of her soul when she spied on him with her clairvoyant gift, she had been strangely bound to him. There was a red handprint of his on her left forearm. And through that imprint she experienced shooting

pains when the bandit king was angry with his subjects. Which was the case almost every day.

Amira turned her head slightly. Careful not to feel another pain shooting through her head. Her neck was stiff. She didn't know how long she had been unconscious, but because her head had been bent forward for so long, it hurt when she lifted her head.

"Look who's awake," she heard not far from her.

She heard Drogon rise to his feet and walk toward her with purposeful steps. His magic allowed him to see in the darkest darkness. So, he could see her, but she couldn't see him. The only thing she could faintly make out in this dark hole was the green glow radiating from her chains.

It was rare for her to be alone. Drogon and Darran had taken care of her. The two had also involved Daja, although she did not want to act as babysitter. She didn't want to join her brothers until they got through Amira's mental block.

Amira held the mental shield up with her willpower. She could never allow to give Darran access to her memories. If they found out who she really was... She didn't want to know what would happen to her.

At the moment, she was valuable to Navarog because of her healing magic. But when they discovered that she was the princess they had been looking for since day one... A shiver ran down her spine.

“Don't we say good morning anymore?” Drogon asked her.

In those few words, Amira could hear his pleasure and she wasn't about to act. She kept her mouth shut tight. She never answered his questions. Not if it was about her or her friends. Even if he tortured her half to death, she wouldn't give in. There was only one thing she was desperately clinging to at the moment. And that ensured that she had already managed to endure all the pain here. Rhys.

In the rare moments she was alone, she thought about him. About his smile, his eyes that could shine so beautifully, his touch... Without him she would have succumbed long ago. But now she fought for the day they were together again. Because that was a day, he had promised her would come.

She was startled from her thoughts when Drogon gripped her chin tightly. He squeezed so hard that she feared he was planning to break her jaw.

“Keep your focus, girl,” he snapped.

If she could, she would have given him a good kick. Now she just growled something unintelligible at him. He pushed her head back hard and leaned over her.

“What was that?” he asked.

She didn't answer him. Why would she? He wasn't paying her any proper attention anyway. All he wanted from her were answers. Answers he wouldn't get from her. He hit her in the face with the flat of his hand, then grabbed her chin again.

“Give it up, you stupid girl.”

“Leave me alone,” she hissed at him fiercely.

She felt the rage radiating from him. It pulsed through the room like a warning. He probably wasn't used to an eighteen-year-old not crawling in front of him. And that was something he absolutely couldn't stand. The leader of the bandits would probably skin him alive if he found out he'd been holding her for so long.

She felt the air moving around them and she gritted her teeth. A knife sank deep into her right arm. A scream formed in her throat, but she didn't let it go. She groaned in pain and clenched her hand into a fist. How she would love to do the same to him. Make him suffer.

Drogon pulled the knife from her arm again, which was now gushing blood. Amira wondered what she looked like. Day after day, Drogon wounded her to weaken her magic. And the more energy she used to heal, the weaker she became. She imagined that her tunic must be completely red with her blood by now. It could hardly have been otherwise when she thought about her injuries.

She swore loudly as Drogon pressed his hand against the latest wound in her arm. He put so much force behind it that her arm couldn't hold and broke, causing a second string of curses to flow from her mouth.

“Well, well, that's not very nice,” Drogon chuckled.

“Fuck off, you bastard!” she shouted angrily at him.

Drogon grabbed her hair and pulled her head back. She felt him lean over her. He ran the blade of his knife across her cheek. And no matter how hard Amira tried to hold it back, she felt the fear flaring up inside her.

“Be careful what you say,” Drogon said deceptively calm. He now held the knife to her throat. “I can kill you without you being able to stop me.”

“Then why don't you do that?” Amira dared to ask defiantly.

Drogon chuckled. “You'll find out for yourself.”

He let go of her and stepped back. Amira took a shaky breath. She knew he hadn't missed it, but he didn't respond to it. She heard him grab something from the corner of this room and place it in front of her. Apparently, it was a chair, because he sat down. He pressed the point of his knife against her knee.

“Where is she?” Drogon asked.

She was well aware of who Drogon was talking about. But Amira had no intention of answering him. She couldn't give him an honest answer anyway. She had no idea where exactly she was. Even if it had to be near Oros.

“Answer me!” he growled impatiently.

Amira felt the urge to spit in his face. She gritted her teeth to keep from doing that. She didn't want to suffer any more torment. Although she knew it was a waste of time to think about it. Drogon wouldn't stop until he had answers they could

use. Of course she could lie. But she knew they would check her every word. And then they would know she had lied. She had no interest in the consequences that came with it.

The pressure Drogon put on the blade increased and slowly pierced her skin.

"It's very simple. You answer my question and I'll leave you alone," he said.

"Liar," she muttered.

"Tell me where she is hiding," Drogon continued imperturbably.

No answer. The bandit started to get angry and Amira could tell. However, she didn't care at all. She wouldn't give away any secrets. Not to him, not to Darran or Daja and certainly not to Navarog.

"Then you have to decide for yourself."

His voice sounded cold and menacing. The sound in his voice alone made her shiver. But when she felt his dark power wrap around her leg, panic shot through her. Tears were in her eyes. Drogon did it slowly on purpose. He wanted to see her reaction and hoped she would answer after all. Ten seconds passed, twenty, thirty...

Amira almost started to hope that he wouldn't do it, but just then his dark magic clamped tightly around her lower leg. Using his willpower, he broke her lower leg in several places and she screamed in overwhelming pain.

It literally went through marrow and bone. She didn't care that Drogon was enjoying her pain and the tears that were now streaming down her cheeks. She took in ragged breaths and tried to calm herself down, but couldn't.

She jumped when she heard Drogon's voice near her ear.

"Remember, I can break every bone in your body with a little bit of my strength." He paused and ran his hand over her broken arm. She felt his grin. "It appears that you are starting to have difficulty with your healing. Just a little while and I'll hand you over to my king. And I promise you, you'd wish you were dead." The last thing Amira realized was Drogon's fake laugh before he knocked her unconscious.

## Chapter 3

It snowed! Tiki couldn't get her head around it. The last day they had to travel through the Ice Mountains, it started snowing again. Thick flakes fluttered down and obscured her vision. She knew it wasn't very far to the Rock Plain, but this way it would take forever to get there.

It was hard enough since they had to half carry Rivin. And now with the snow it almost seemed like a hopeless task. The fire mage didn't complain and did his best to walk along with her and Adrien, but it was very difficult.

Normally she would lead the way and help Rhysand carry his father. But that morning his leg had collapsed out of nowhere, as if he could no longer stand on it. They all understood where that had come from, although they didn't say anything about it. The fiery look in Rhys' eyes had told Tiki enough. If he could, he would move heaven and earth to get back to Amira. And he did his best to make that happen.

He was now walking normally again. The pain had persisted for a long time and he had been able to move very slowly. At some point Tiki noticed that it bothered him less and that he could put his weight on his leg again.

And despite the improvement, Tiki was worried again. It had lasted a long time. Longer than normal. That could only mean that Amira's healing was weakening.



A shiver ran down Tiki's spine. She thought back to the time when she had been a bandit herself. She had interrogated prisoners with Drogon and it had never gone smoothly. The army commander had always enjoyed the torture he used to get prisoners to talk. And when she thought that Amira was now the one who had to endure that, she felt terribly sick. And at the same time, she felt admiration for her young friend. All the time she was away from them, she held her ground and didn't give in. Otherwise, it wouldn't have been necessary for Drogon to break her leg.

She sighed and looked up at Rhys, who was suddenly standing in front of her. His violet-blue eyes still flashed with anger, but he had calmed down somewhat. His anger no longer radiated from him so intensely.

"I'll take over from you," he said to Tiki.

Without arguing, they switched places. Tiki created her green orb that would show them the right way to the Rock Plain. She took the lead and continued walking. As soon as she looked back, she saw that Rivin was taking steps again. His face was still twisted in pain, but he clearly had no intention of giving up. Although her mood was particularly somber that day, a smile still appeared on her face. She hadn't seen her friend take such confident steps in days. As if he knew time was running out.

Despite the snowstorm they were in, they were moving faster than they had since Rivin was injured. It made them all hopeful to see him like this.

"Are you okay, father?" Rhys asked him after a while.

"Yes, I am," Rivin said in a weak voice. "We'll just keep going."

Rivin knew how fragile he sounded. Yet he had a point in mind that he had to reach. He had to persevere. There was no other option possible.

He was exhausted. They had been walking like this through the snow for several hours. Their clothes were now soaking wet and yet none of them felt the need to stop. Rivin even felt his strength returning as they progressed. He felt the fire inside him again. The first time in the last three weeks. His skin began to glow as if his magic was working its way out. It was strange that his magic was returning now, even though he was far from recovered. But he clutched the fire with both hands. It was a sign that he was getting better.

Adrien noticed the heat coming from Rivin's skin. It made him feel warm himself. At one point he even had to wipe the sweat from his brow.

"It's going in the right direction," Adrien whispered to himself.

Rivin's squeeze let him know that the mage had heard him and agreed with him.

He was also improving. Even though he was far from well, the fact that his magic was felt again was a good sign.

By mid-afternoon they had only a few kilometers to go before they could finally leave the Ice Mountains. They could all see the barren Plain of Rock as they slowly and carefully began their descent. They wanted to get downstairs before it got dark. But before they had properly started the descent, they saw four women appear on their way. Each and every one of them was beautiful. Their skin was blue as ice. Their long white hair was pinned up and their silver eyes were shining. They wore blue robes that were so long that they dragged on the ground.

As soon as Rivin spotted the women, he wanted to bow, but because of his injury he couldn't. His face contorted in pain and Rhys supported him a little tighter.

Tiki bowed to the women. She bowed for herself and the others.

"My lady," one of them nodded. Her voice was soft and melodious. "And dear warriors," she continued to the three men.

"Nynea," Rivin said, his voice rough. "I'm sorry I can't bow."

The woman who had just spoken came forward and walked toward Rivin. Rhys and Adrien were surprised to see that the woman left a trail of ice where she had walked.

Nynea placed her hand on Rivin's chest and closed her eyes. It was silent around them. It even stopped snowing. After a while she let go of the mage and looked at him.

"You are still badly injured, my old friend," Nymea said with a sad look in her eyes.

"I'm doing better," Rivin countered.

"Don't be so stubborn, Rivin," she said sternly. "You need a healer."

She swept her gaze over Adrien and Rhysand. Her gaze lingered on Rhys for a very long time. She stepped up to him and grabbed his arm. She lifted the sleeve of his thick sweater slightly and looked at the band of stars.

"You are connected to the healer who has the power to save your father," Nymea spoke seriously, looking at him.

"Yes," said Rhys.

He wanted to say more, but his voice broke after that one word. Emotions were rushing through him and he didn't feel like he was breathing anymore. Nymea placed her hand on his forehead, cooling him and that flood of emotions at the same time. Rhys blinked.

"You're looking for her," Nymea said as she removed her hand from his forehead.

Rhys wasn't sure he could find his voice again, so he just nodded.

"Can you read minds?" Adrien asked the woman.

Nymea looked at him and shook her head. "It's not mind reading. However, I can read and understand the covenants between companions. Certain emotions come to my mind, such

as the anger and dejection when Rhysands companion was taken by the bandits.” She looked back at Rhys, who was watching her in bewilderment. “You and Amira together have the power to help your father.”

“How do you know our names?” Rhys asked.

Nymea smiled. “I know much more than that, young light mage. But what is important now is how you can help your father.”

The three other women came closer and took Rivin from Adrien and Rhys. They placed him gently on the ground. One of them put a pillow under his head. No one knew where she got it from. Tiki came to stand with Nymea, Adrien and Rhys. “What should we do?” she asked.

Nymea gestured for them to take a seat on the ground. Despite the cold, they did what the special woman asked of them. Nymea sat down across from Rhys. Adrien and Tiki each sat on one side of him.

“What I noticed is that your companion has no freedom,” Nymea began. “I don't know where she is or what's going on, but she's getting physically weaker every day. And I think you were all already aware of that, weren't you?”

Adrien nodded. He glanced at Rhys, who had lowered his eyes.

“What do you know about her magic strength at the moment?”

“Nothing,” Tiki replied.

Rhys swallowed his dark thoughts. “I saw Drogon put her chains on her just before he took her away. A green glow shone from those chains. Adrien and Amira had seen them before in Torof, where they were deprived of magic. The mages could not use their power with the chains on, nor for a short time after they were freed.”

“Have you had any contact with her?” Nymea asked.

“Yes, but that was already eleven days ago. It has been dark ever since. I try to make contact, but I don't hear anything back.”

Rhys blinked away his rising tears. He didn't want to think about what that silence could mean. And apparently neither did the others, because it remained eerily quiet.

Tiki put an arm around him to let him know he wasn't alone. He looked at her gratefully for a moment and then sighed deeply.

“I know it's hard for you, but would you try to make contact with Amira? She is the key to healing your father,” Nymea said carefully.

“What do you want me to tell her?” Rhys asked, wanting to do everything he could to help his father.

“That you will use her healing magic to heal Rivin,” Nymea said.

Adrien, Tiki and especially Rhys stared at her in amazement. Actually, more with disbelief.

“What do you mean?” Adrien asked.

“The Companion Covenant,” the woman said in a tone as if that made everything clear. “Because of the covenant, you are united as one. Your inner being is connected to each other. That’s also why you can feel her pain, Rhysand. But with very powerful mages it is sometimes possible to send magic through each other. To be able to apply the magic that is needed at that moment from a great distance. And there is no more powerful mage than Amira. So, if you can reconnect, you can also send her magic to your father. Of course she must have the strength for that. And that’s the only thing I’m not sure about right now.”

Rhys looked at his father lying on the ground a little further away. They looked at each other. He saw the hope in his father’s amber eyes. He turned his gaze to Nymea and was suddenly determined and unstoppable.

“I’ll do it.”

## Chapter 4

The voices continued for a long time. Every now and then Amira could catch a word, but it was not enough to understand what was being talked about. She had figured out that Drogon was now in the company of Darran.

She didn't know how long it had been since she'd seen Darran, but it had to have been at least a few days. She wondered why he had been absent for so long. At the beginning of her captivity, he had been here at every turn, as if he had been unable to distance himself. And then suddenly he didn't show up anymore.

Amira had to admit to herself that she would rather have Darran as a babysitter than Drogon. Drogon truly enjoyed tormenting her, but his brother did not. Oh, he'd hit her before, but he'd never broken her bones like Drogon did.

She tried to move her right leg. There was almost no movement because of the tight chain, but she noticed that the pain had gone away. That was already quite a relief. Although she assumed that Drogon wouldn't keep her unscathed for long.

Suddenly, she felt a tug on her ribs. She was shocked, but knew immediately what it meant. She expanded her mental shield further with her willpower, and gave a push back through the covenant with a hidden message in it. She hoped Darran didn't have the strength to hear a conversation made through a



companion alliance. But because she didn't know if he could, she didn't take any chances and set up such a block that she couldn't hear Rhys and he couldn't hear her either.

Yet she had felt from the tug that it was urgent. And that was why she had left a hidden message for him in that push she had sent back. She knew she had to make contact with Rhys quickly, but she wouldn't do that until Darran was gone.

She heard stomping on the stairs that led to the room where she was. She closed her eyes and hung her head forward so that she still seemed to be unconscious.

Not much later the door opened. Amira could hear both brothers entering. She heard a soft click and then saw through her closed eyelids a light turning on.

"By the gods!" Darran exclaimed, upset. "What have you done?"

"None of your business," Drogon snapped.

Amira noticed by the movement of air that Darran was standing in front of her. He crouched down in front of her and brushed a strand of her long blond hair away from her face.

"I haven't been here in six days, Drogon, and she looks half dead. What did you do to her?"

Darran sounded furious. Amira was surprised that he got so angry with his brother.

"I was trying to get answers out of her," Drogon replied lightly, as if there was no problem.

Darran lifted Amira's chin slightly to get a better look at her face. She shivered internally at the touch, but managed to avoid doing so noticeably. She felt his fingers slide softly over her cheek, along her jaw, through her neck to her collarbone. His touch moved further to her shoulder, over her arm to the chain on her wrist.

"When was the last time she ate?" Darran asked.

Drogon shrugged. He didn't give a damn.

Darran shot up, breaking the confusingly tender touch with Amira. She could hear Darran grab his brother by the throat and push him against the wall. Drogon did nothing, even though he would be able to get rid of his younger version in a second.

"Father wants us to hand her over in a usable condition. She can't do anything like that!" Darran shouted. He seemed really mad.

Amira's heart stopped at those words. The piece of information Darran had unknowingly given her chilled her. He had said father. Navarog was the father of the three most dangerous bandits she knew. Suddenly a few things fell into place. For example, why Navarog had kept Drogon as army commander even though he had failed to catch her for months. Drogon was his son.

"She's still healing herself," Drogon said, pushing his brother away. "But it is finally weakening. Just a little while and we can hand her over without her being a danger to us or father. Why

are you so damn concerned about her? After all, you are just as much a part in dimming her energy.”

“That’s my business,” Darran said shortly.

The small room was silent for a moment and Amira knew Drogon was grinning at him. A moment later he started laughing.

“Don’t tell me you’ve fallen for her!” he shouted, suddenly angry. Amira was so shocked that her body shook. Immediately it became deadly quiet around her. Now it was difficult for her to hide the fact that she was awake any longer. She opened her eyes slowly and blinked into the light. She had been in the dark for weeks and now that soft light hurt her eyes terribly. It took a moment for her eyes to focus, but then she saw the two men looking at her.

“Oh, nice,” she said testily in a mock tired voice.

“You won’t think that anymore,” growled Drogon.

Darran tried to stop his brother, but he hit him so hard with his dark power that he fell backwards and collapsed against the wall.

Drogon leaned toward Amira. His eyes were even blacker than usual and she knew it was because he was angry with her.

“I don’t know how you do it,” he said, grabbing her throat.

“What?” she choked.

“As if you don’t get me mad enough by keeping your mouth shut all day,” he snarled, pushing her against the backrest. “Now you

have to get my retarded brother on your side too? Listen to me very carefully, you stupid thing. If you don't start talking soon, I'll crush your bones into such tiny splinters that even you won't be able to heal them. And then I will give you to my king who will..."

That was all that came out of his mouth as he was pulled away from her by black straps. Amira breathed hard and stared in surprise at the two bandits in front of her. Darran pushed his brother to the ground with his dark magic and looked at him with glowing eyes.

"I don't care about her, you bastard!" he shouted angrily. "We have promised to hand her over in good condition. That's what I'm all about now. Is that in good condition?" Darran asked, pointing to Amira.

She didn't dare say anything. She just stared at them. They just stared at her.

"Fine," Drogon finally agreed. "I'll get some stuff. At least then we can present something beautiful."

"To your father?" Amira asked casually.

The shocked looks of Drogon and Darran made her grin.

"What?" she asked innocently. "Was it a secret then?"

Drogon rose so quickly that she could barely register it. She felt his power rippling through the room and around her leg again. She knew he would break it. No, he would probably make good

on his throat and crush it. He pressed a razor-sharp knife against her throat and pierced her eyes with his furious gaze.

"If you talk about that to anyone, I'll cut out your tongue, understand?" he asked menacingly.

She didn't dare move and she couldn't say the words, paralyzed with fear. She had never seen him like this before. She knew him in bad moods, but this was much worse than that.

"Well?"

She still stared at him without saying anything. Drogon soon had enough of that and broke her entire lower right leg as if it were a twig. But Amira was so paralyzed with fear that the pain barely registered. Adrenaline rushed through her body as Drogon continued to look at her, waiting for an answer.

"I don't think she'll say anything, Drogon," Darran said.

The army commander slowly withdrew his knife from her neck and stepped back.

"Stay here with her. I need fresh air."

Darran said nothing, but let his brother pass him. He swept his gaze over Amira, who was now aware of what Drogon had done to her leg. She clenched her molars and held back the intense pain she was suffering.

It wasn't until he heard that Drogon had left that he walked over to her. He ran his hand over the chains and looked at the green glow that had bled onto her skin two weeks earlier. Something that she herself could never have noticed due to the darkness

in which she had been trapped. He noticed that she was watching his movements closely.

As he walked around her and stood behind her, he could clearly see the shiver that ran through her. He rested his arms on the back of the chair and clasped his hands together in front of her throat. He leaned his head forward.

"You know, I just lied to my brother," Darran said softly.

Amira trembled. She wished he was far away from him too. He noticed her disapproval.

"I think you are a very interesting young woman," Darran continued. When Amira didn't respond, he said: "I've been wondering who you are since I saw you that first time. Remember? That day at Rivins mansion?"

"How could I forget that day?" Amira remarked sullenly.

"I admire you and your magic," Darran confided. "But I want to know who you are. Not what you are capable of."

"Why?"

Darran chuckled near her ear. "As an admirer, I should know who I admire, right?"

She didn't answer that. She stiffened as he ran his hand along her cheek.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"You know this is the first time either of you have asked me that in months?"

"So... Tell me. Then you have put me out of my misery."

Amira couldn't contain her strangled laugh. "That's ironic."

"What do you mean?"

"You want to be put out of your misery, but I want that too," Amira said.

"You know I won't let you go free. And neither will my brother and sister."

"I just want to be free from those chains and that chair. Even if you keep me in this damn box, I just want to be able to move like a decent human being. It would be really great if you made Drogon stop his torturous actions."

She didn't know where she suddenly got the courage to say that, but somehow this moment felt right. She now had to talk to Darran.

"If you think of a way to give me a little more freedom, I'll tell you my name," she added in his silence.

She felt his smile. Not a grin, but a genuine smile.

"What if I told you that I already have that solution?" he asked.

Amira blinked. She didn't expect to hear this from Darran.

"I asked my father to come up with something on those chains. It works extremely well, but as you say yourself, you have no freedom whatsoever. My father wants to use your healing power. To achieve this, you cannot be tied to a chair forever, but you must be able to move around freely. And then I had the idea to use this," Darran said.

He held out a pair of metal bands for her to examine closely. "Instead of those chains, I'll give you these metal bracelets. And yes, they were modified by my father so that your magic will still be suppressed. But you get your wish. More freedom."

He stood up and walked back to the front of the chair. He looked at her.

"And now it's your turn. What is your name?" he asked.

"Iana," she said softly, using the name she had needed at the beginning of the journey.

The adrenaline had subsided and she started to feel the pain in her leg even more. Darran saw it in her, but did nothing about it. He kept looking at her.

"Iana," he said with a smile on his face. "You have a beautiful name."

He took a key from his pocket and unlocked the chain on her left wrist. He grabbed her arm and was about to put one of those metal bands around her wrist when he saw the black stripe with stars. He turned pale and looked like he was going to throw up.

He quickly covered the wrist with a metal band and then did the same to the other wrist, where he saw the exact same tattoo. Quickly he covered them with the metal band and then freed her ankles from the chains which, like her wrists, were replaced with a band.



Then he stood up, even paler. It really looked like he had seen a ghost.

"Sorry," Darran muttered before rushing out of the room, locking the door and rushing out of the cottage.

Amira stared at the closed door for a while longer. She wondered what had shocked Darran so much. But she didn't give herself much time to think about it. Once she was sure Darran was gone, she pulled back her mental shield slightly so she could reach her companion. She needed to know why he was contacting her so urgently.

*Tell me what's going on.*

## Chapter 5

Rhys breathed a sigh of relief as soon as he heard her familiar voice in his head.

*First, I want to know how you are doing.*

He had sensed her fear. She hadn't been this scared in the past few weeks. He knew that because he had never received that feeling from her so intensely before.

*I'll survive, Rhys.*

That was something he was convinced of. And not just him. Everyone who knew Amira knew that she would not give up. He had watched her grow from an ignorant girl into a strong and loving young woman. In a few weeks she had changed. From the moment she met her fire. And he could vividly remember that fire shining in her eyes.

*What do you need my help with? I felt that it was urgent from that pull on the strap.*

*Yes, it's urgent too. My father is still seriously injured. Although we are already on our way to Oros, it will take a long time. We are now at the edge of the Ice Mountains, almost on the Rock Plain. A while ago we came across a group of women. One of them said that through our alliance you might be able to heal my father. If you have the energy for it, I'm curious whether it is really possible and I would like to try it out.*

There was silence on the other side for a very long time. Rhys started to worry.

*Is Darran back?*

*No... It's... I think... I don't know if I can do that right now, Rhys. I can barely heal myself. Let alone someone at a great distance.*

Rhys felt himself grow cold inside. So, Tiki's suspicion was correct. Amira's healing power now also began to fade, as her magic was repelled by those chains.

*Where are you injured?*

Another silence. Now it didn't last that long, but eventually Rhys got an image of Drogon and her and how the bandit hadn't just broken her leg, but actually shattered it. For now, she wouldn't be able to heal it. So, she couldn't even walk anymore.

"The bastard," he said with restrained anger.

Tiki, Adrien and Nymea looked up at him in surprise. But his attention was focused on a stone in front of him. He had his hands balled into fists and his jaw clenched.

*How long until you heal it?*

*No idea. I will probably be handed over to Navarog in a few days' time. By the way, he is the father of Drogon, Darran and Daja. It's all very nice... So not. I don't know what awaits me in the palace, but I don't expect anything good. All I know is that Navarog wants to use my healing power. I don't know anything else.*

Rhys looked up at Tiki, who looked back at him curiously.

“Did you know that Drogon, Darran and Daja are the children of Navarog?” he asked.

A flash of surprise crossed her face. “You can't be serious,” she said, taken aback.

“Amira just said it,” Rhys responded with a nod.

“Can she help us?” Nymea asked.

*So, wait for the time being with father's healing?*

*Yes. I will soon be expected to heal prisoners after interrogations. Then they have to recharge my energy. At some point I can heal myself. As soon as I can, I'll let you know. Then we can help your father together.*

*Please be careful, Amira. I'm coming to you. I promise you that.*

*I love you, Rhys.*

*I love you too.*

Rhys didn't want to think about her last words. Those were the last words she'd spoken to him when Drogon kidnapped her. Tears welled up in his eyes. That little bit of contact was harder than not hearing anything for all those days.

In the image she had shown him of what had happened between her and Drogon, he had watched from a distance. He had seen how much weight she had lost and how much blood had flowed. Her green and yellow tunic had been almost entirely red with blood. It hurt him terribly to see that.

“She can't help for a while,” he said, his voice hoarse with emotion.

Adrien gave him a friendly slap on the shoulder. "It will be okay, Rhys."

"I hope so," he muttered. He looked at Nymea. "What do we do now?"

"You guys move on," Nymea said simply. "My sisters have tried to heal your father's injury, but cannot. Not even the three of them. It has been improved a bit so you can move around more easily once you reach the Rock Plain. Promise me you'll be careful. Even though the bandits took Amira from you, that doesn't mean they'll leave you alone." She looked at everyone for a moment. "Navarog will order you to be found, if he hasn't already."

"Don't worry, Nymea," Tiki said. "I will lead us through the Rock Plain via the underground ways. The bandits probably don't know this road. At least I never told them they existed. And we have to wait and see how we get through the desert."

"The Plain of Death," Nymea said with a sigh. "That will be one of the last obstacles before you reach Oros. You are vulnerable there, as you are visible from a great distance."

Adrien looked at the others. "We'll stay low to the ground so that we are as invisible as possible. Either way we will reach Oros."

Tiki and Rhys nodded. They all looked up at the three women helping Rivin to his feet. Evie flew right next to him, a sign that the rainbow dragon completely trusted the women.