

He was close.

Rordan Sarkany paused in a small clearing and scanned the trees. He smelled the lush, rich scent of the forest, but under it was the ripe stench of wild dragon.

“You know I’m coming for you, don’t you?” He flexed one hand, eyes alert. “You feel my breath on the back of your neck.”

He studied the thick forest of dark trees surrounding him. He’d tracked the wild relentlessly for the last three days. Three days following the trail through the fir-covered mountains of western Hungary. Three days of persistent pursuit. This wild was very aware of Rordan’s reputation. He’d know his death wasn’t far behind him.

Regret flashed before Rordan clamped down on it. He crouched, scooped up a handful of the rich soil and worked it through his fingers. He’d been killing wild dragons longer than he cared to remember. He’d become so ruthless, so efficient at it, and this would be another kill to add to a long list.

His fingers clenched into a fist. Another friend he’d be forced to destroy. Another kill to push him closer to the edge.

God, he was weary of this. He pushed to his feet, dusted off his hand. But weariness didn’t change the fact he had nothing else in his life but his duty.

He pulled his cell phone off his belt. A brief glance showed he had no reception. Not that he’d expected to have it up here. It didn’t matter anyway, he always worked alone and never required back up.

Straightening his broad shoulders, he slipped the phone back into place and turned in a slow circle. As a knight of the Order of the Dragon, it was his job to track and kill those who turned. Those who let the lure of immortality and their dragon magic twist them into the beast living inside them.

But he wasn’t just a knight, he was a prince of the Dragon Court. His family and the other pure blood dragon lords had a duty to ensure the security of their people. The Order was their greatest weapon in achieving that.

There. He caught a glimpse of movement in the shadows under the trees. His muscles

tensed, his senses sharpened.

He called on his magic and summoned his weapon. A dragon's magic was based on an element—not the modern elements, but the five ancient ones: Earth, Metal, Water, Wood and Fire.

In an instant, his wooden quarterstaff appeared. It was big, heavy and fit into his hands like an old lover. He ran his fingers over the ornate image of a dragon carved into it, then over one of the ends sharpened to a wicked point.

The hum of power filled him. His wood magic was entwined with nature. The trees whispered their secrets to him, he heard the wind flow through the leaves and sensed the small animals sheltering nearby.

He reached out with his senses. He was gifted with acute vision, had eyes as sharp as any hawk. His gaze never left the trees as he waited for the attack. He held the staff like an extension of his body. Time extended, the steady beat of his heart thudded in his ears and the cool forest breeze washed over his skin like a caress.

Then he smelled another scent, one he recognized all too well, an intoxicating blend of leather and pure ocean air. His gut clenched, distracted him for a second.

A weight crashed into his back and sent him stumbling. The staff flew out of his hand as his assailant wrapped arms and legs around him like tight vines.

Together they hit the ground hard. With his attacker's weight on top of him, the air rushed out of Rordan's lungs with a grunt.

"Don't move," a voice hissed in his ear.

He ignored the advice. In a lightning fast move, he rolled. There was a brief, violent struggle before he succeeded in pinning his opponent beneath him.

She was beautiful with a classic oval face, angry color riding her high cheekbones and her full lips twisted into a scowl. Strands of golden-brown hair escaped her braid and fell across her cheek.

Indigo blue eyes glared at him. "Damn you, Sarkany. What the hell are you doing here?"

"Hello, Kira. Nice to see you too." He knew he should get off her, but he liked the feel of

her too much. Where their bodies touched, he felt the burn. He'd wanted her for his entire life it seemed, even though she hated his guts.

She wriggled and he closed his eyes against the sensation. Flames flashed along his skin, his body hardened. Something she couldn't fail to feel.

"Get. Off. Me." Her tone was stiletto sharp.

He pushed himself up, but didn't get off her. Instead he stayed straddling her hips, watching her beautiful face.

Kira Bethlen always roused his beast. He'd watched her grow from a gangly, young girl into a strong, stunning woman. The man in him wanted to explore every inch of her enticing body. The dragon in him yearned for a taste of her.

But he was well aware that after what he'd done to her, she'd never forgive him. And he'd never taste those sweet lips.

Something hot flashed in her eyes. "Off, Sarkany. Now."

He tightened his knees. He let her feel the weight of him, let her know he was stronger, before he got to his feet.

She leaped to hers, shoved her hands under her fur-lined, corduroy jacket and onto her hips. "What are you doing here?"

God, she made a picture. Black leather pants slicked over long legs. The shirt under her coat had enough buttons undone to show a hint of cleavage. A thick, gold chain with a medallion hung in the deep V of the shirt. Her tawny brown hair was currently tucked away in a long braid that fell over one shoulder. He ached to see it hanging loose and wild around her.

"Answer me," she snapped.

He arched a brow. "Isn't it obvious? I'm tracking a wild."

Her blue eyes narrowed. "I'm tracking this wild. He's mine."

Rordan sauntered over to his staff and scooped it up. He planted one end in the ground and leaned on it. "You know the Order rules. The most experienced knight has precedence."

The breath whistled through her teeth. "Damn you."

Yeah, she didn't like being reminded of that. At thirty-six, Rordan had been a knight for almost twenty years. Kira had been a knight for less than half that time.

"Haven't you killed enough of them already?"

Her words were like a spray of acid on his skin. Jaw set, he stared hard at his staff. Using his magic, he made it disappear. "I'm just doing my job."

"The great Rordan Sarkany. You know what they call you, don't you?"

He balled his hands into fists. He didn't care what the dragons called him. Nor did he listen to their hushed whispers and dark tales. He forced his hands to unclench--big hands that had taken the lives of countless dragons gone bad.

"They call you the Savage Dragon. They say you kill with no remorse, no mercy."

He turned away from her. He didn't care what they--what she--thought. It was for their benefit he protected them from the wilds, stopped the beasts bringing his people to the attention of the human world. Just as the Order had done from ancient times to the modern age. Stopped them raping and killing humans and dragons alike.

*Why do you kill for them? An insidious voice whispered in his head. Why not accept your power, become the savage beast they already think you are?*

With sheer force of will, he silenced the voice. "I'm tracking this wild, Kira. You can either team up with me, or find another wild to hunt."

"What makes you think I'd team up with the man who slaughtered my brother?"