

Chapter One

“The Humans have invaded Breaton, Goddess.”

Clay’s voice grated on her ears. He had an annoying habit of pointing out the obvious, a trait which annoyed Camilla to no end. She knew what the Humans were up to. It was being played out right before her eyes; the Humans were not discreet. She did not need a moment-by-moment replay.

Camilla leaned on the large oak table in front of her. Her long brown hair hung freely over her right shoulder in loose waves. The surface of the table was carved to mirror Kalondial’s landscape. The twin mountains stood tall in the middle of the Nodin Mountains; their height unrivaled by anything else. To the east, the Adamina tree’s canopy rose above the Lakeisha Forest. White frosted the tips of the green leaves as winter was setting in. The Glendower Falls were frozen as well, the giant waves stuck in time. The only land untouched by the snow was the Vukan Desert. The yellow sand shimmered with an undying heat. The map mirrored the weather as seasons passed. The pegs on the surface were the only items untouched by the weather.

Each city was marked with a peg; the five capitals coloured and carved to each element they represented. Spiridon’s peg—shaped in the form of an angel—was silver and larger than the others. The city being in the centre of the country was the convergence for the Elemental Wills and created the balance of power in the land.

Camilla moved a small black peg over beside the brown one that marked Breaton. It was a newer city, built for both races to share, but the Humans had now run the Elements

out, demanding the city for their own. It was one of many the Goddess had handed over to them. And after all these years, they were still pushing.

“What more can we offer to prevent them from taking our land?” asked Camilla, more so to herself than to her advisor.

He snorted at the question. “They are arrogant and want it all to themselves. We should send them back across the White Sea, from where they came.”

“We will do nothing of the sort, Clay,” she snapped. “I will not have unnecessary bloodshed.”

“Unnecessary?” he laughed. “Goddess, you already have it! They are killing our people while we stand here debating on what more we can *give*—what more they can take from us.”

Camilla sighed. She hated to admit it, but he had a point. The Humans were greedy and would not stop until they had what they believed to be rightfully theirs. They had already taken other cities in the west, and Camilla had thought giving in would be enough to satiate them. Yet, here they were, forcing their claim on another city.

The wind swirled around her, warm and comforting. The will enjoyed having the Humans in Kalondial. It was something more for it to play with. At night, she could feel its pleasure as it knocked down an entire encampment from the Human army. The Elemental Wills were having fun with their new occupants. They caused chaos wherever the largest settlement was and followed them in their every move. She knew that was the reason behind the Human’s anger towards them. They thought it was the Elements doing.

“We should march on the city and take it back,” Clay said. “If they refuse to accept our terms, then they should

get nothing from us.”

She pushed herself away from the table, letting a sigh escape her lips. The great hall echoed under her footsteps as she paced the length of the map. An orange hue cast down upon the grey walls from the half dozen windows of the room. Crystals glimmered on the white silver banners that hung between them. Her throne sat at the end, looking cold and intimidating. It was a large stone chair, with no cushions to soften it. Intricate carvings lined the back, each elemental symbol etched along them.

Sitting on the seat was not her favorite thing. Camilla hated the long hours she had to be in it for the seventh day of the new moon. That was when her citizens would come and state any grievances they had. Before the Humans came, she had only spent an hour or so listening to them. Now, she was there for most of the day, hearing stories of villages being raided, merchants robbed, and every so often, the deaths of loved ones.

The Human’s arrival brought a wave of repercussions to her door for not turning them away. They had come off their wooden boats, swords drawn and prepared for battle. War was the first thing they had created.

Many died that day. Including her late husband. She so dearly missed the warmth and comfort he had brought her. Their marriage had been arranged, both of them being the strongest Elements in their time. She had fought against it at first, but soon came to love him as a wife should. She remembered the kiss on her forehead he had given her before leaving the castle.

The Elements won that battle, at great costs, and had wanted the Humans banished. Camilla had different thoughts about them. Even through her grief, she had the wills surrounding her as she made the decision to let them

stay in Kalondial. They wanted the Humans there. It was beyond her control. None of the Elements understood it, especially after the loss of her love and their King.

They were angry and had good reason to be. The Humans had no notion of forming peace. They wanted the land all to themselves. At the time, Elves, Dwarves, and Orcs were the only other races that had been allowed to share the country. Since the arrival of the Humans, they all had left to go back to their homelands. That was nearly four hundred years ago, and still, the Humans created trouble wherever they went. She needed to find common ground with them or else more death would follow.

With a sigh, she crossed her arms. "I will speak with Eragon about this." She nodded over to her guard who was standing at the door. He disappeared through them to gather her horse. "Clay, please send for Saline. I need her to arrange a meeting, immediately."

"A meeting?" Camilla noticed the little jump out of Clay's heartbeat through the earth at her feet. "Goddess, you cannot reason with these people. They will stop at nothing to gain control over all of Kalondial. Do you think it wise to meet with him at a time like this?"

"Yes, Clay, I do. I take care of this land, and I will not have it covered in blood; by either race."

"My Goddess, what if they try to kill you? Do you think they will not attempt it?"

"I am very capable of taking care of myself," she fought him. Irritation rippled over her skin at his voice.

"Camilla—"

"That is enough!" She swept her hand in front of her. The wind slammed into Clay, staggering his weak stance. At times like this, the will was very useful at getting her point across.

Her hair flowed around her darkened face as the wind mirrored her anger. Speaking her name was a sign of disrespect, and she would not have this low-level advisor talking to her in that way. She was the *Goddess*, and every now and then she had to remind certain people of that.

"I am your Goddess," she stated. "Do not disrespect me again."

He shook his head, bowing. "I did not mean to disrespect you, Goddess. I only want to ensure your safety."

"Do not concern yourself with matters that are not yours. If I was not capable myself, my guards are there to protect me." She let the cold chill of the wind bite at his skin, taking satisfaction from his flinch. "Do as I say."

He gave her a curt nod and exited the great hall, mumbling something under his breath. She ignored the annoyance that filled her, taking the three steps up to her throne. A sudden wave of exhaustion overcame her as she fell into the hard chair. She would not yield Breaton. If she did, it would show her as weak—both to the Humans and to the Elements. The city was meant as a test to see if they could coexist with one another. It seemed the Humans would not even try.

The Wills would not be so adamant to keep them here if there wasn't a way to live together. Her skin itched as the warm hand of the wind touched her. She looked down, knowing she would not see anything at the touch, and smiled at it.

"Are you going to explain now or keep me guessing?" she asked it. The gust ran up her arm, catching her long strands of hair and blowing it around her face. Her laugh rang in the empty hall. "Alright." She swatted at it. "Keep your secrets."

With another sigh, she hoisted herself out of the throne

and left to find Uli. It was time to find a new Fighter for her guard.