

Chapter Eighty-Two



Blood on the Plaza

The plaza shook with the thunder of hooves as Kate drew her arrow, feeling exponential power multiply through the brass wheels. A calmness of spirit flowed through her. She aimed at Pizarro, whose massive warhorse led the charge and released the arrow.

The arrow streaked toward its target but glanced off Pizarro's breastplate armor, spinning to the stone plaza. Pizarro grinned and adjusted his course—straight toward her.

"Retreat," Sunut shouted. "To the boulders!"

The conquistadors had closed half the distance. Kate snapped her reins, and her horse retreated to join the others behind the boulders. Beyond that, the forest loomed. She wondered if help would ever arrive. It was now or never.

She reached them and wheeled about. "These hunting arrows are useless," she said to Qi. "Mine just bounced off their armor."

"Get out your swords," Qi said grimly. "Prepare for melee."

The conquistadors were almost to the boulders. They would soon be upon the warriors, smashing through their ranks with their armored horses and slashing blades, doing what they did best. *I'm going to take at least one of them with me*, thought Kate, as the unfamiliar fog of resignation flowed through her. Her heart broke for Honey, her Appaloosa. *She belongs back in her pasture, running with her friends.*

"Look," Tamino said, putting a hand on her shoulder.

Warriors in gray capes all around them leaped to the boulders' tops. They held long, thin spears that looked like harpoons. Clouds of hummingbirds zipped about.

"The Azhee'kal people are here," said Tamino, eyes wide with wonder. "The legends are true."

Kaat'at, a chieftess of the Azhee'kal, stood on the boulder facing the oncoming conquistadors. To most people, it would feel as if the horses were upon her instantly, but in her mind, she could slow them to the point that they barely moved.

She had practiced this skill from when she was very young, standing on the bow of a light canoe in a storm-tossed sea and tracking a fast-breaching whale, slowing down the world until it all unfolded before her like the opening of a flower.