

~ Amazonia ~

~ Book 2 ~

by Ali Vali

Disclaimers: The characters in the following story are of my own creation. Any similarities to anyone living or dead are purely coincidental. No part of this story may be used or reproduced in any manner without written permission from me, the author.

If the thought of two women being romantically involved is not for you, then this story is one you won't want to read. If you are underage or live somewhere that this type of material is not allowed, please find something more appropriate.

Sit back and enjoy the story, any comments can be sent to me at terrali20@yahoo.com.

I want to thank my betas for correcting this for me. Lenore, Shaun, and Ken, you are all godsends. I bow to your grammatical knowledge and for your continued dedication and support.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank all the wonderful people who take the time to read these stories. Thank you for all the great notes you have sent. I appreciate them all. This story is a continuation of [Amazonia Book One](#), so for better understanding you might want to read that book first.

This is dedicated, as always, to the one woman who holds my heart. I love you and I always will.

April 2006

The End

"Good morning, highness." Kip, the head of Queen Audrey's Royal Guards waited to hear what excuse Princess Bebo had for being at Annie Paddio's door so early. "Is there something I can do for you?"

The night before Bebo and Annie had learned of their family's histories and how it had come to touch their lives in the present. After the emotional toll of finally being told the truth of where her parents were born and raised, Annie had to settle for a very chaste kiss from Bebo at the foot of the stairs. She had wanted more than anything to have Bebo hold her through the night as she processed the information, but with the arrival of Queen Audrey and Consort Boden, a strict protocol of conduct was now being followed.

"I'm here to escort Annie down to breakfast, unless you're waiting for the big glass bubble to arrive," said Bebo.

Annie stood on the other side of the door and laughed at the biting sarcasm in Bebo's voice. It was as if Kip had some special radar that pinged every time Bebo's lips got within a foot of her.

After a few days, the frustration had become so bad she wondered how much longer it would take for the eruption.

"Glass bubble?" asked Kip, confused but amused.

"To put Annie in to protect her from my evil clutches."

"Since you're admitting you're evil, I'll have to look into it," Kip replied drolly.

The door across the hall opened and Kip bowed as a petite blonde woman appeared. The smile on her face indicated that she was also amused by Bebo's frustration. From the day she'd conceived, she had dreamed of then time that Bebo would completely lose her heart and step confidently into her future.

Queen Audrey of Leon knew well what it was like growing up with the expectations of a nation weighing heavily on your head. Strength, no matter what the situation was what Amazonia wanted from their leaders. What saved those leaders from buckling under the pressure was the infinite love of a spouse. Boden was not only Audrey's salvation, but the one person she counted on to love every aspect of who she was.

When they had brought Bebo into the world, her prayer to Artemis had always been for their daughter to find someone who would be the other half of her soul. Someone who would hold her trust, keep her secrets, and embrace her when the rigors of ruling would come close to overwhelming her. Boden had been her pillar and that is what the warrior had raised her daughter to be, so what Bebo needed was someone who would bring down the walls when they were in private so she could be strong for their people.

From the moment she had met Annie Paddio and saw the betrothal bracelet Bebo had given her, Audrey realized her daughter had found her path. Annie was strong enough to be Bebo's equal and soft enough to remind the princess there was something other than responsibility. Not that Kip was giving her that chance.

"Captain Kiger, could I see you for a moment please?" the queen asked Kip.

"But my post, highness."

"I'm sure, if the embassy is attacked, the princess will be more than adequate protection for the Lady Paddio, Captain. If you'd rather though, I could order you to go take a run around the trees out back for disobeying a direct order." Audrey leaned against the door and folded her arms across her chest. "I'm fairly sure I'm still allowed to do that," she said in a teasing voice.

Kip bowed again with a small smile and stepped into the room beyond her queen. Before Audrey closed the door, she winked at Bebo and pointed to her watch before holding up her right hand. Five minutes was more than Bebo could have hoped for.

"I insist you erect a statue in your mother's honor when you take over for her," Annie said when

Bebo pressed her to the door a second later. They hadn't been apart long, but it felt like a millennium since she had felt those wonderful arms around her.

Bebo framed Annie's face with her hands before pressing their lips together. When Annie slightly opened her mouth in invitation for Bebo's tongue to take possession of her mouth, they both moaned at the contact. The thought of how quickly Bebo found all the things that fueled her passion flitted through Annie's mind but she didn't dwell on anything other than how Bebo felt against her.

Before they could get too carried away, Bebo felt someone put their hand in the collar of her shirt and pull them apart. If the thought of arguing crossed her mind, the set of Boden's mouth was a sign of how bad an idea it would be.

"I'm sure Annie can find something to nibble on downstairs now that the staff has served breakfast." The blush on both the young faces almost made Boden laugh, but she held firm. "Do you think you could find the dining room without assistance, or would you like me to escort her?"

"No, ma'am, I'll be happy to show her the way," Bebo said.

"Actually I think your mother is ready as well, so, Annie, why don't you go down with the queen? I'd like a moment alone with my daughter."

"Highness, you should know I wanted to see her just as much as Bebo wanted to be in here alone with me. I'm sorry if we upset you," Annie said.

"We're going to be family, little one, so please don't feel the need to be so formal. I'm not upset with you and don't worry; I'll return her to you in one piece. We just need to review some things."

Annie squeezed the long fingers once more before heading out the door to a very sympathetic appearing Audrey. If Boden was this strict for following the rules, she couldn't imagine how she was going to react when she found out about her relationship with Titus. There was no sense in wasting time thinking about how she should've waited for Bebo to come into her life and saved the gift of herself for the one who really owned her heart.

"I would've thought assigning Kip away from your mother and to Annie would've made you start thinking," Boden said after the door closed. "I didn't raise you to act like an animal who can't control herself."

"Mom, come on, I'm not acting like an animal. I respect Annie, but I love her as well and this is a special time for us."

Boden put her hands on her daughter's shoulders and studied her face for a long while. "I'm thinking of you and your future, sprout. That young woman is special all right and one day she'll share your throne. Do you want to do something now that'll put a taint on what she'll mean to

Amazonia?"

"No, ma'am."

"Then don't give anyone any more fodder for gossip. I know it's hard, trust me on that one, but the coming days will be hard enough without adding any more complications to them." She gently tapped the side of Bebo's face with her palm and smiled. "I've already talked with Bear and the others about what happened before we got here. They gave me their word that anything that happened before your mother and I got here was within the bounds of protocol."

"I'm not ashamed of what happened."

"Of course you're not. This is the woman you love and I fully expect you to stand and defend her. What Annie has done with her life up to now has made her the person she is, but now the two of you have to think of something bigger." Her hands went back to Bebo's shoulders and she squeezed them affectionately. "That's all I'm asking you to think about."

"I promise I'll be more careful and treat Annie the way a future ruler of Amazonia should be treated."

"Good. Like I said, I know it's hard, but we have other things to do before we can start thinking about more festive things like weddings. First thing this morning we have to meet with Philip, in an official capacity, about Arthur then we have to bring him home to your grandmothers." Boden's voice softened as she spoke of her late brother-in-law.

"I know you miss him, but he ask me to wish you well and thank you for all you've done for the family when we met up again. I'm just glad he got to meet Annie before he died and approved of her."

"Arthur was the best of what our people strive for, and he saved the life of our future queen. For that he deserves a warrior's burial and I'm going to see that he gets one. How we carry that out is up to your mother and Bekka."

Bebo hugged her mother before moving back and opening the door before Annie took it upon herself to come looking for them. "I'm sure his sisters will welcome him home, for more than what he did for me."

"Amazonia will mourn his loss but will rejoice that their favorite princess has found a spouse. I don't think I've had the chance to congratulate you properly on your engagement. You did a good job in convincing her to put up with you for a lifetime."

"That remark just bought you a round with the chobos this afternoon."

"You want to beat me with a set of sticks for telling you the truth," Boden teased.

"No. I need to find some other outlet for my feelings since you're not going to let me spend time

alone with Annie. You look like an enticing target to take my frustrations out on."

Boden grinned, mischief alive in her eyes. "Be careful what you wish for, sprout, with the distractions in your life now, it might be you who makes the enticing target."

"It's going to be fine, Annie," Audrey said as she poured them a cup of tea.

"Are you sure, Bo looked a little mad when I came down here."

"There's something about my wife you should know." Audrey pushed the cup closer to Annie to encourage her to take a sip. "She very seldom gets mad, especially not with Bebo. The conversation they're having now is between Consort and princess, not mother and daughter. Bo's just reminding our cub of things love has blinded her to."

"What does that mean?"

"A little twist on the main lesson every young Amazon learns early on. The acts of the one reflect on the many," Audrey said. She smiled when Annie finally looked at her and away from the entrance to the gardens. "How Bebo comports herself during your courtship is how our people will view how she'll treat her position. Both you and the throne Bebo will inherit deserve her utmost respect. That's the talk they're having."

"She's not going to come anywhere near me for months is she?"

The dejected set of Annie's face in a way brightened her heart. "Even the more than capable Kip has to sleep sometime, sweetheart. You'll be fine as long as there's a chaperone with you. I may be queen and have loads of stuff to do, but I might find some time to fill in for your new shadow every so often. Only if you find that acceptable that is," she finished with a wink.

"Along with the statue I told Bebo to erect in your honor for those five minutes this morning, I'm going to demand a parade as well."

When Doris, or Dothan, as she had adopted again came into the room with Reggie, her face brightened when she saw her eldest daughter spending time with Audrey. "Good morning."

"Good morning, sister," Audrey said. "Not that you didn't look fabulous before but you look great this morning."

"The saying 'the truth will set you free' is right. I slept like a rock last night now that my girls know the truth of our family - the whole truth. Patrick will never forgive me for telling the part that was his to tell, but that's something I'm willing to accept as long as I have their respect."

"You have that and so much more, mom. Thanks to you both for finally cluing us in," Reggie said.

"Good. I'm glad you took my advice to listen before you let your anger shut out what Dothan had to tell you. In the coming weeks there are a lot of arrangements to make, but before anything is finalized I have to ask you a few things," Audrey said. The truth she realized was only the beginning of what the Paddio sisters had to face. There was still a family to meet and come to know.

"If you need something from us just ask," Reggie spoke for all of them.

"After what happened in Conger, it's my responsibility to bring Arthur home for burial. Granted this isn't our usual custom, but Bo insisted with my mothers' approval. Annie because of your acceptance of Bebo's proposal you'll have no choice but to attend." She then turned to the other two women. "But for you and Reggie, this is strictly voluntary, but I'd love to have you both there."

"I can't speak for my daughters, highness, but I'd like to go home." Dothan looked from one child to the other before going on. "Amazonia is where I was born and I think it's where I'll find the answers to my future."

"Can I finish school there if I wanted?" asked Reggie.

"The university in Leon is as accredited as the one you attend now. If it's your wish to enroll, I invite you and your mother to stay with us in the palace until you find what your sister has. Amazonia cannot promise you happiness, but it's a good place to sit and think of what your definition of that is." Audrey's eyes shot to the two women heading toward them. "And I can think of three women who'd love nothing but to dote on you for months to come."

"Or give you a hard time, at least one of them will, depending on her mood," Bebo said. She moved around the table giving everyone a kiss on the cheek. "Your grandmother Emelda is one of my favorite people on the planet, but she's a handful."

"A handful I can handle," Annie said as she reached for Bebo's hand. "I have you in my life after all."

"Just wait until you have children," Audrey looked at her daughter with a bit of a smirk on her face. "That's when you'll really know the meaning of handful. They're both tall and better looking than should be legal, but they're both a magnet for trouble," she said referring to her wife and child.

"Funny my description of trouble has blond at the top of the list," Boden shot back.

"That's why Annie picked one so brave and strong, darling." Audrey batted her eyes at her making everyone laugh.

Philip Moines office in the Pentagon was elaborate but the Secretary of Defense jumped to his feet like he didn't run the place and came over to greet his two guests, covering the space between them in no time. After what Bebo had done to save the Cobra unit in Conger, it was time to mend some rifts in their relationship.

"Welcome and please accept condolences on your loss from the President and myself. Arthur was a good man and will be missed."

"Thank you, Philip, I'll make sure and pass that along to Audrey. Bebo and I are here to make arrangements to bring Arthur home," Boden said.

He indicated the chairs behind him and offered refreshments. "The President asked me to make a request before we hand over Arthur's remains." Both tall bodies stiffened at the words making the dress uniforms they had worn appear all that more impressive. "Considering his position and how he died, we'd like Arthur to be buried in Arlington. The president signed off on the placement this morning."

"Tell your boss thank you for the honor, but Queen Mother Bekka is expecting her son to be brought home to be buried with Amazon honors. That isn't negotiable so don't waste our time."

Philip put his hands up to stop Boden before she got going. "I figured as much but he asked me to broach the subject. I do have one more request of you, and again it's on behalf of someone else."

"What else?" Bebo asked.

"Carol, please send the General in," Philip said into the intercom.

General Junis Curtis walked in and came to attention in front of Bebo. When she returned the salute with a fist to her chest they embraced like old friends. Junis had been the one person in the Cobra unit who knew the most about Arthur and cared for him like a brother.

"How are you doing?" Bebo asked.

"I'm great thanks to you."

"General, I'd like to introduce you to my mother, Boden of Argase. Mom, this is General Junis Curtis. He's one of the reasons our mission was successful."

Junis took Boden's hand with a smile. "I see your little apple didn't fall far from the tree, highness." He seemed relieved when Boden laughed at his joke. Junis took a seat after Bebo and her mother did. "Bebo, I was elected the spokesman for most of our unit in coming to talk to you today."

"Is there something else you needed?" Bebo cocked her head to the side and waited.

"The Cobra special ops unit was reshuffled a bit when we got back and I was grateful to be put in charge. We lost two of our members to reassignment and one to combat. It's the brother I lost in that pit that I'm here about today."

Bebo put her hand up to stop him before he also made a request about what was to happen to Arthur's remains. "My family is going to take him home, so if that's what this is about."

"No, I understand why the President asked, but Arthur deserves to be remembered for all he stood for by his people. What I wanted to ask is permission to attend his services. Well myself and my unit." He sat at the edge of his chair as if to rush through the last part before she turned him down. "Arthur Leon was apart of you, but he was also my friend from the time we started training together. Brothers in arms don't rest until the job is done. Until he's laid to rest, my job, and my responsibility to him aren't finished. I can respect there will be limitations to our entering Amazonia, but the entire unit would like to be there."

Boden pressed her fingers together and rested her chin on them. Bebo had given her a full account of what had happened in those jungles Philip had talked her into entering during the first conversation they'd had following Bebo's return. This man had played a major part in helping the Amazons complete their mission, but he had gone beyond that mission and helped her daughter with Arthur's loss.

"What men have been reassigned from your unit, General?" asked Boden.

"Captain Titus Walker and General Patrick Paddio, ma'am. Walker has been reassigned to mess hall duty for now until other arrangements can be made, and Paddio is currently on medical leave. His return to full active duty status is questionable."

"I see." She put her hands down and turned her attention to Bebo. "His request is reasonable but you and your mother will have the final say. Or should I say, the ultimate decision on allowing outside military personal onto the island will be the queen's."

"We appreciate your desire to fulfill your duty to Arthur. As my mother said though, we'll have to take it up with the Queen. It's not that men aren't allowed on Amazonia, rather that there's a strict prohibition of any outside military, especially those of the male persuasion."

Junis relaxed back into his chair and laughed. "Hell, Bebo, we don't want to plan an invasion, just send Art off with full military honors. I'll be on base, so give me a call when you have an answer."

"I promise to get back with you by this afternoon."

"One more thing," he ran his hand over the red stubble on his head. "Brian has been moved to Bethesda and asked if you would come by before you ship out. I know you're most likely busy, but he wanted you to meet someone."

"I'd be honored. If you're not busy, we could go together after I talk with my mother about your

request."

He nodded slightly as if Bebo had proven herself to him once again. "Highness," he addressed Boden. "In case we're turned down and I don't get this chance later, I wanted to commend you on your daughter's training and leadership skills. My sorry ass, along with every other person in the Cobra unit, would be screaming as some bastard with a pair of pliers pulled our short hairs out in the middle of fucking nowhere if it hadn't been for the Amazon unit coming to save us."

"General Curtis, please watch your mouth," Philip said.

"Cut the general some slack, Philip," Boden put her hand up to silence any more reprimands coming from the Secretary. "The general and I speak the same language."

"Thank you, highness. I know this probably isn't the time to ask, but if it were possible once Bebo was done back home, would you consider sending her back and letting her and the others finish our training. There's nothing like getting hit in the balls with the truth to see that we should've been paying better attention the first time around."

His honesty made Boden and Bebo laugh. "Don't worry, it was our promise to Philip to provide the training, and like you said, the mission isn't complete. Depending on what the future holds, we'll either send Bebo or someone equally qualified to finish the job."

They all stood and shook hands and Junis escorted them out to the car. The ride back to the embassy was made mostly in a comfortable silence, but it wasn't unusual for them. Boden and Bebo were at times content with their thoughts. When they were a few blocks from the house Bebo made up her mind about something.

"I know it'll be up to mom, but I think Arthur would've have liked them to be there. Most of the Cobras were new to the unit, but guys like Junis came up with him."

"The old customs are a sacred thing, and that's what both your grandmothers want. He was a soldier but above all Arthur was an Amazon, so he deserves to have his spirit set free. Will your new friends understand that and not come back to spread more rumors of how savage we are?"

"When I first met them I would've been the first person to tell you not to even entertain the notion, but Junis and the others appreciated that they needed help getting out of there. If mom lets them go, I think they'll respect our traditions and come to see what Junis did."

The car stopped but the guard at the door waited until Boden signaled they were ready to come out. "What did he see?"

"That even if Arthur was a soldier, he was also a man he perhaps didn't understand fully, but respected nonetheless. I think he feels the same way about the Amazons."

"Then I'll talk to your mother," Boden said with a slap to Bebo's shoulder. "And if this comes back to bite us, you can help Bear and the others plan my burial steeped in the old customs."

After arriving back at the embassy, Bebo invited Annie to come with her to the hospital to visit Brian. Changing into a stylish suit, Annie got a taste of what the rest of her life was going to be like sharing it with the Princess of Amazonia. No longer would something like going to the hospital to visit a friend be just that simple. Most of the acts she would now carry out would have the word "official" stamped on them.

When the car pulled up to the entrance she was surprised to find more than one photographer sitting outside waiting for the arrival. The night they'd first gone out to the theater she'd expected some media attention because of Bebo, but for something that seemed so mundane, she figured the Post wouldn't be interested enough to send both a reporter and photographer.

"I guess my days of just running out to get something at the supermarket are over, huh?" Annie asked.

"If you'd like, we'll buy you a big pair of sunglasses, highness," Kip said from the front seat. She adjusted the jacket of her uniform when she faced the front again happy to see her two charges contently holding hands.

"The group of burly women following you everywhere might just give it away, baby," added Bebo.

"I remember running into a certain princess out alone when we toured the Library of Congress."

"That, my love, was supposed to be a secret. The burly women in charge get upset with me when I do that." Bebo whispered the confession in her ear apparently not in the mood to receive another lecture.

"Do you promise to take me with you the next time you sneak out?"

"I promise." The vow was sealed by a quick kiss before Kip opened the door to let them out. Behind them another vehicle let out the rest of their party.

The cameras started clicking the moment Bebo reached down to help her from the car. A frame captured Annie brushing her hair behind her ear as she took Bebo's arm. The dark green suit she was wearing contrasted nicely with the blue of the Amazon dress uniform, guaranteeing the papers that did carry the shot would do so in a color spread.

They walked in flanked by Kip, Steph, Beth and Max, ignoring all the questions yelled at them. Some reporters standing at the front of the throng wanted to know if they were there to visit Patrick while others asked about the seriousness of the relationship. All were disappointed when both of them just smiled and walked by.

Brian was covered in bruises but looked much better after three surgeries to repair his various

injuries. They had plastered one of his arms and a leg, but the bones broken in his chest would take an extended hospital stay before they could be wrapped. Once his visitors entered the room the door was closed behind them with the guard staying outside for protection.

"You mean they didn't fix that ugly mug when they had you under the knife," Bebo teased the moment the outside world was shut out.

"Just when I was thinking of thanking you for saving my ass," Brian answered.

"What is it with you military types?" Annie asked shaking her head. This posturing between fellow soldiers wasn't anything new, but something she hadn't expected from Bebo.

"They act macho to cover the fear, miss," said a man sitting next to the bed. His hair was a little longer and he had a bit less muscle, but his face showed them what Brian was going to look like in thirty years.

"Thank you for clearing that up for me." Annie let go of Bebo's arm and moved close enough to give Brian a kiss on the cheek. "Did you miss the class when they taught everyone how to duck?"

"Jesus H. Christ, the two of you together is going to be something else," Brian said, blushing from the greeting Annie had treated him to.

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't tease you when you're injured. I'm just glad the guys found you in time and you're going to be all right." Annie put her hand on the small of Bebo's back when her fiancé moved closer.

"Me too," Brian smiled when Bebo reached down, took his hand and just held it in hers for the longest time without saying anything. Uncharacteristically his eyes filled with tears and he just opened his mouth but nothing came out.

"It's all right, buddy. We made it and that's all that counts."

"No, highness, there's more than that," said the man who had watched the exchange up to then. "I'm Barry Turner, Brian's dad. His mother just left so she's going to be mighty upset she missed you, but please accept our sincerest thanks for not leaving our son behind. He told us how you carried him and fought to get them all out. If there's anything I can ever do to repay you, please just ask."

"I appreciate it, Mr. Turner, but neither you nor your family owes me anything. A good warrior never leaves any fellow fighter behind. It was my pleasure to help him and I hope to serve with him in the future."

"That'd be an honor, Bebo," Brian said, finally finding his voice.

"Enough serious talk, you two." Annie pulled Bebo down to one of the chairs around the bed and

took a seat on the arm. "How long are the men in white keeping you?"

"At lease a month then they might let me go home to finish healing up."

"That won't be all bad if you have your folks looking out for you, and Junis promised to keep an eye on you as well. He was supposed to come with us today but his new promotion has him hopping," Bebo said. When she saw Brian yawn, she glanced up at Annie and winked. "Get some rest so you'll heal faster and I promise to keep in touch."

"I'm sorry about Arthur," he said not knowing any other words to add. "General Curtis told me about what he was going to ask you. I didn't realize you knew each other. I might not be able to go, but I'll be thinking about you, so please don't be a stranger."

"Don't worry, we'll both be back, lieutenant. You have my word on that." Bebo stood and reached down for his hand so as not to cause him any pain. When they let go, she put her fist up to her chest in the Amazon salute, causing him to smile and get glassy eyed again. "Mr. Turner, it was an honor meeting you, sir. If you need anything once you and your wife get this big lug home, please call the Amazonian Embassy and they'll relay any message you have."

"Thank you, highness. It was a pleasure meeting you. Annie, it was also nice seeing you again."

"You too, Mr. Turner."

"You look a hell of a lot happier these days," Brian added talking to Annie.

"I got it right the second time around." She entwined her fingers with Bebo's and patted Brian's shoulder. "I want you to rest up so you can celebrate with us as soon as we come back to Washington. We should be married by then so we'll treat you to a night on the town."

"Just be careful, both of you. Titus never was a good loser even though it's his middle name. You picking Rambo over here instead of him is going to seriously piss him off for a long time."

"Don't worry I'll keep an eye on her. Take care and we'll see you soon," Bebo said.

They walked out of the room and waved the guards down the hall toward the elevator. There were a few hospital workers milling around as if trying to catch a glimpse of the new couple, but for the most part the path was clear. Before they reached their destination a voice from an open door stopped them.

"Traveling with the freak show again are you?"

Bebo stopped and squeezed Annie's fingers. Their eyes met and Bebo's blues softened like they did for no one except for her, and Annie knew if she wanted, she could walk away and the warrior part of Bebo would take care of the situation. Her lover would take care of it and never hold it against her or make her feel like she was weak for leaving.

"I'm all right, honey," she said squeezing the long fingers back. "Daddy, how are you?"

"I find that question almost as insulting as what I'm seeing now." Patrick Paddio hadn't spoken to anyone since his wife had come to visit him the day before making his voice sound raspy.

"What's insulting is keeping who Reggie and I truly are from us because of hate. We had a right to know where our parents come from."

"Where you're born or who you're born to isn't important. That's just a freak of nature just like the one you're holding hands with. I'm a real man who made a real life for myself despite where I started." He winced when he tried to come up off the bed. "That's all I wanted for you and your sister. A real life with a family the rest of the world didn't think of as unnatural."

"My life is anything but unnatural. I'm happy now, doesn't that count for anything?"

Around them the guards closed ranks to ensure the conversation would stay as private as possible. They were doing their jobs in keeping the hall as clear as they could but wouldn't interfere unless Bebo gave the word.

"Your life is a joke. Just wait until news of this gets out and see how many of the people you thought you knew look at you differently. Just wait until you bear this bitch a son and have to get rid of him when the time is right. They throw children away like garbage and pass it off as normal."

"Uncle Greg's life isn't a joke and he doesn't feel like garbage. Neither was Arthur's and he was as much a part of Bebo's life as he wanted to be." Not being able to hold in her anger, her voice started to rise. "That leaves only you of all the men born to Amazons who's ashamed of his family."

He turned his head to the windows and refused to make eye contact with her. "That's because I see what most of the civilized world sees - something to be ashamed of."

Before she could say anything else, Bebo squeezed her fingers again and shook her head. "General, our lives may be different but they are far from shameful. What you seem to have forgotten is that it's the women who raised you who instilled your fighter spirit. Arthur understood better than you perhaps what it means to come from a long line of brave strong warriors. You can choose to ignore that, but it still doesn't change who you are and where you come from."

"Who I am, the man I grew to be, has nothing to do with Emelda or Chris."

The mention of the name made Annie make a mental note to ask her mother if that was her other grandmother. Bebo had mentioned the head priestess of Artemis' temple had never rejoined after her partner's death. The pain of that loss was what had made her become devoted to the goddess and a more faith driven life.

"People can choose to turn away or run from their heritage, but your blood will never betray you. It's their blood that runs through you and with it comes the gift of the extraordinary women who gifted it to you." Bebo knew there was nothing she was going to say that would change his mind but for Annie's sake she had to try.

"Is this something you plan to pursue?" he asked, pointing to their linked hands, Annie's betrothal bracelet just visible under the sleeve of her jacket.

"I plan to join with Bebo at the first given opportunity. I'm sure that there are some hurdles to cross before we're allowed to do that, but I'm happy and I'm in love."

"Then what I said to you holds. You're no daughter of mine."

"You'll live alone and bitter then, daddy, and it'll be all your choice. I didn't come to see you sooner thinking that time would clear your head of the anger, but I was wrong. I'm not going to waste my time changing my life to something that'll make you proud of me." Her voice was strong and held the conviction in her heart. If this was the last time she saw him, it would hurt but having the rest of her family firmly behind her and Bebo would give her the strength to get over it.

"You'll come running back begging for forgiveness just like your mother."

She sighed and leaned a little more into Bebo. "Even if Bebo throws me out tomorrow, I'm never again going to ignore who I am. If that's a person you can't be proud of, then so be it, but I won't beg you for anything ever again."

Bebo didn't hesitate to follow when Annie turned around and headed to the door, her anger peaking a little when Patrick couldn't help himself and took another shot. "If you become a good Amazon wife and bear this woman children, when it comes to the telling, I want no part of it."

"What does that mean?" His words stopped Annie, only because she didn't know what they meant. From the set of Bebo's mouth and the fire in her eyes, whatever it was had brought a sudden storm of anger.

Bebo turned around and let a bit of her temper seep into her words. Her partner might not have known every aspect of Amazonian tradition but she did. What he was doing was keeping a part of who they were from their children. He was denying not only them but future generations as well.

"Do you remember who you're addressing?" Bebo asked.

"I don't answer to you."

"I am the heir to Queen Selene's throne so you might not answer to me, but my reach is far and wide. You can deny our children if you like, but I can deny you the life you so love with one phone call. I can take it away in the cruelest of ways and you know that. And once I do I can still

not respect your wishes. That's my right."

"Bebo?" Annie realized this was something serious but would have to wait until someone explained to her what it was about.

"When a child is inducted into the tribe, just like he was," Bebo pointed to the smirking man on the bed, "there's a telling of their history. By refusing to have his name included when it comes to our child, the rest of the nation will know the only reason his name was not called is because he's ashamed of who that child is. In our culture there's no greater insult."

"And she's going to go against what I want by threatening me with a court martial. Is this the kind of person you want to share a life with?" asked Patrick. He wanted to laugh at the corner he'd painted Bebo into, but he wanted his daughter to see just how manipulative these women could be.

"I don't see it as a threat, daddy."

"What do you see it as then?" He finally looked at her with a frown darkening his features.

"I realize I'll never be able to fight like Bebo, so there are times I'm going to defer to her to keep me safe, and I expect it'll be the same for our children. And there will be children, daddy. Wanting the best for your children is something I find admirable and that's how I interpret her actions."

"Except when it's me who wants what's best for you. Then I'm seen as a tyrant."

Bebo became ramrod straight and took a step toward the bed until she felt Annie holding her back. "Keep your voice down and treat her with respect. She's standing less than ten feet from you so I'm sure she can hear you."

"It's all right, honey." She nodded in assurance when Bebo turned to her. "I trust and believe in her when she does it because she doesn't use the pretense of keeping me safe as an excuse to make my decisions for me because I'm too simple minded to do it myself. Just let it lie and if you don't want to be a part of my life it's something I'm going to have to accept. We can talk for days and not change each other's mind so it would be a waste of time."

"Just like your mother."

"I can only hope. She may have lost her way for awhile, but she's found the courage in her heart to make the past right."

Without another word, they walked out hearing him scream just like he had with Doris the day before. What surprised Bebo the most was that Annie never shed a tear, and when they reached the car she pulled her down for the most passionate kiss they'd shared in days. Kip wisely kept her eyes to the front and gave them their privacy considering the mood Annie was in.

They returned to the embassy and spent the remainder of the day sitting with the others in the immense garden out back. With the patience she was known for, Audrey started to tutor the sisters on their newfound heritage and what was going to be expected of them in the coming days as well as months. No amount of questions posed by either of the Paddios seemed to faze her and she just went about her lessons with a smile.

"There's one thing we need to discuss that might be a little troubling to you, but I'm afraid if we're to go on, especially for you Annie, it's nonnegotiable," Audrey said.

"As long as you tell me I don't have to give up Bebo, then I'm sure it can't be all that troubling. That's the only nonnegotiable thing in our contract."

The princess bent her head and kissed Annie's neck. "Well said, love."

"And have to look at that pouty face day and night, not on your life," Audrey said pointing at her daughter and laughing. "It has to do with your name, sweetheart."

"What about her name?" Reggie asked.

"We leave tomorrow to bury Arthur, and while you and your family are coming with us, there'll be no official announcement of your sister's engagement or your arrival until we have paid him proper respect. Once that's over though, we'll with great pride announce the happy news." Audrey leaned over and put her hand over Annie's and Bebo's. "While I'll miss my brother for the rest of my days, I'm sure this will help heal the pain of his loss."

"I still don't see a problem," Reggie said.

"Regina, please don't speak to Queen Audrey like that." Dothan rolled her eyes and tried to sound as menacing as possible in a whisper.

"It's all right, I'm sure this is a lot to take in all at once. The problem, Reggie, is that while a royal joining with someone from outside the tribe isn't exactly impossible, it does slow the process down somewhat."

"But we're part of the nation, even if we didn't know about it right?" Annie asked.

"Yes you are, but my council won't recognize Bebo's promise to Annie Paddio because she doesn't exist. Not in Amazonia anyway."

"What my mother is trying to explain with the countless interruptions," Bebo said putting her hand up to keep both sisters quiet, "is that Paddio is a name Patrick adopted because he no longer wanted to acknowledge Petkus. But because of Amazonian law, he had no right to impose that on either you or your mother."

"I waved law upon your birth to make your father happy, but if I had been a true Amazonian mother you and Reggie would've carried the name Petkus and Cyr," Dothan said.

"So, Annie and Reggie, I need your consent to change the name you've known all your life so that you can be added to the national library in the book of births."

"What will it be changed to?" Annie asked.

"Love, the name your mother should've given you was Annie Petkus of the house of Cyr. It honors your grandmothers, high priestess Emelda Petkus, mother of Patrick and Gregory and wife of the warrior Christian, and your grandmother Erica Cyr, head archivist of the national library, mother of Dothan and wife of the warrior Teri. Paddio may exist under American law, but in Amazonia it doesn't. At least when it comes to you," Bebo said.

"Will you tell me about them, my grandmothers?" Annie asked, as Reggie nodded.

"We'll do better than that, sisters. We'll tell you of your family from the time of Selene the first queen of the Amazons," Boden said. "But we'll do it once we board the plane for home. In time I promise you won't feel so lost because we'll all do our best to see that you learn all that you must, but for now it's Arthur's time, and as my wife said, that must be respected."

The contingency of cars arrived at the air base just as it started to rain. Bebo and the other warriors, again wearing their blue dress uniforms, were standing rigid in the downpour. Across from them under large black umbrellas were Philip Moines and other dignitaries there to pay their last respects to Arthur's military service to their country because once he boarded the royal plane that part of his life would be over.

The Cobra unit marched alongside the hearse as it made it's way from the hangar, each of them with a hand on the vehicle. When the coffin was pulled out it had the flag draped over the top, and his unit carried him to the stand that had been put out. Junis called them all to attention and rifles shattered the relative silence in a twenty-one-gun salute. Finally they folded the flag and handed it to Junis who then presented it to Queen Audrey.

"On behalf of the President, Secretary Moines, and a grateful nation, highness."

"Thank you, general. Arthur spoke of you often and with great affection."

"He was my friend, ma'am, and my wife, family, and I will miss him."

"Thank you, general, you're dismissed to the transport plane, we'll take it from here," Boden said. "Have a safe flight and we'll see you in Amazonia."

The family stood together as the rest of the royal guard that was with them, joined by Greg Petkus, carried the coffin up to the plane. Once they were airborne Bebo gave Annie a hug and

kissed her before leaving her in the company of their mothers. She was going with Boden to oversee the preparing of Arthur's body since the ceremony would take place shortly after landing.

"I love you so much, and I'm so happy you're here to help me through this." Bebo held her tenderly and for once they were given their privacy for as long as it was needed.

"I'll be here for the rest of your life, honey, you can count on that." The shirt her cheek was resting against was still slightly damp but Annie didn't mind. Bebo was still warm and she'd missed this closeness. "I can stand with you can't I when we get there?"

"There's a few things I have to do for him, but then you'll have a hard time trying to shake me."

She laughed loving that her lover was trying her best to ease her nervousness. "I think you should worry about trying to shake me in the years to come."

Bebo pulled away slightly and put her fingers under her chin lifting her head slightly so she could see her eyes. "Love, we're about to land on an island full of women, most of whom would like nothing better than to take you away from me. Believe me when I tell you that I'm not about to lose sight of you."

She could feel the blush coloring her face at the compliment, but she nodded graciously. "From what I hear, I'm the one with something to worry about. Heck even my grandmother Emelda has a crush on you. The royal family doesn't have some special compensation that allows them more than one wife does it?"

"We don't, but even if it were law, there would be only you, my beautiful Annie."

"I'm so incredibly lucky to have found you. I love you."

They kissed again, slowly and as an affirmation of their declarations. When they parted, Bebo pressed her lips to Annie's hand before leaving to fulfill her duty. Annie then joined her family to continue reviewing what was to happen and their part in it. Her mother, the queen, and the other women around them had changed into their leathers while she was with Bebo. She smiled when she saw how bright Reggie's face was as one of the servants helped her into her first set of the Amazon garb.

"Please bring Annie's out if you would," Audrey said to the woman standing next to her before waving Annie to come and sit on the cushions next to her. "I know we reviewed some of the ceremonies that take place during the year and what the proper color of traditional dress goes with that, but today we mourn as a nation. Because we do, the lines of the different provinces dissolve and we become what we hold true in our hearts, the nation of Amazonia."

"Isn't that what the island is all of the time?" asked Reggie.

"It's no different than loving the state you are from or cheering for your school's sport team."

Amazons are by nature a very competitive group of women, so it's only natural that they pull for the province they are from when it comes to different events that take place during the year."

The seamstress came out with a set of brown leathers that were very different from Reggie's but similar to Audrey's. There was a skirt that would come to her shins she was sure with slits up the sides all the way to the belt, and the top would show a good portion of her midriff. Both pieces were adorned with white, crude appearing beads, some which looked like weathered bone.

For the young historian, the outfit was something she would never have considered wearing in public. Now though, for some reason she didn't understand, she felt a strong sense of anticipation to feel the brown leather against her skin.

"Give yourself time, Annie. Eventually you'll come to understand what the adornments are without me having to explain them to you," Audrey said as she stood. The woman handed her the top with a bow. "These will be yours from this day forward, and as you and I spend time together, I'll share with you the rich history from which you come."

Annie stood as well and started to remove her clothing after Audrey, with a nod, got everyone around them to drop their eyes. Amazonia was mostly an open society with very few modest people, but with this young woman there had to be differences in treatment as there were with her.

"You'll be my teacher?"

"Unless you aren't comfortable with that," Audrey said.

The top slipped on and Audrey took charge of lacing it up. "No, highness, from the first time I read what you sent with the exhibit for the gallery, I've wanted the privilege of spending time with you." The skirt came next and fit just as well.

"My hope is that we'll become good friends, and that you'll come to trust me enough to come to me when you need to. In just a few days I realize how much my daughter loves you," she said softly enough for only Annie to hear her. "When Boden was in the position you're in now, she found an ally in my mother Laine, who in turn saw the sincerity of what she felt for me. In all those years they've remained close and together have been a molding force in Bebo's life."

"I'm sure we'll be just as close because we both have her best interests at heart."

"That we do, Annie."

Audrey looped her arm through Annie's and steered her toward her private quarters. It was time to officially begin Annie's royal training.

"My wish when I had Bebo was to blend Boden's strengths and mine into the future ruler of the Amazons," Audrey started once they were alone.

"She certainly is that," said Annie, accepting a glass of wine. "You would've been proud of her the first day we met." She went on to tell Audrey the story of Larissa, both versions that were offered that day. It was a relief when she was able to share in the queen's laughter.

"In you, I see much of myself, so I'll share with you the rest of my hope. One I've never told anyone not even Boden."

"Anything you tell me, highness, will stay between us. Please know that."

Audrey smiled and patted her hand. "Thank you for saying the words, but I trust you. Annie, when it's just us, please call me Audrey." When she saw the beautiful face relax, she eased back into the cushions of her chair. "My hope is that what Boden and I started will continue for generations to come. It's important to have someone who sits on the throne be a strong leader, but also a compassionate one. Bebo is compassionate, but still has much of that warrior spirit running through her heart."

"If you toured the capital with her you'd see the part that is you shining just as fiercely through her. Don't fear that the urge to fight will overshadow the sensibility that it's not always the first answer." Annie picked up her foot and folded it under her, amazed at how comfortable the outfit was.

"I appreciate you sharing that with me. Now let's begin on what will happen when we land."

For hours, Annie listened as Audrey explained and taught through stories, making the lessons easy to remember. The same thing was happening in the outer room with Dothan and the others who were teaching Reggie. Toward the back of the plane, Emery Felder, Emelda's apprentice, prepared Arthur's body by first replacing the uniform with a set of soft leather pants that had their own bead adornments. His lover, Greg closed his eyes and mouthed the old prayers along with her. He had learned them all at his mother's side in the temple through the years.

The pattern on the pants Arthur had been dressed in were covered in an ancient form of hieroglyphs that told the story of his life and how he had died. His military uniform was folded with care and set at his side with his right hand resting over the breast of the highly decorated jacket. Across his bare chest the priestess painted a series of lines in the same blue used by the royal family in their crest. A pack containing weapons, food, and other essentials for travel were placed under his left hand for the journey to the next life. The last thing to be done would have to come later when Emelda would formally finish preparing him to then turn him over to Laine, Boden and Bebo who would pay tribute to the fighter he had been.

Emery and Greg continued their prayers for the rest of the trip needing the close to twenty hours to get through them so the ceremony could go on without delay when they landed. Bebo sat back and closed her eyes finding comfort in the old chants. She only opened them again when Steph tapped her on the shoulder and pointed out the window.

The first small islands that spotted the Amazonian coastline were starting to become visible as the pilot began her decent. They were less than fifteen minutes from landing and the end of

Arthur's journey home.

Boden rose from her seat and walked to the pallet where Arthur lay and put her hand over one of his, smiling sadly at Greg sitting on the other side of him. She and both men had been friends since they were children, and her relationship with Arthur had only deepened when she'd fallen in love with his sister.

"You're almost home and I hope the elders who've come before you allow you entrance into the sacred lands once we set your soul free." She removed one of the bead necklaces she was wearing and put it in his hand. It was the badge of honor Queen Bekka had given her for winning her first competition, and something she truly cherished. "Maybe this will help you gain admittance, old friend."

She lowered her head and whispered the rest in his ear. "Arthur, before we let you go I wanted to thank you again for all you've given me in my life. Without you I would've never known the joy of Bebo and without you I would've lost that joy in the middle of a jungle. May the goddess look over you and go with the promise that you'll never be forgotten because you'll always be in my thoughts."

She took a seat close to him, buckled in for the landing and took the time to say one more prayer to the goddess that Bebo's aim would be good. Her daughter was herself grieving but the eyes of the nation would be on her to be the one to release Prince Arthur to their ancestors. Even under less stressful times what was being asked of her would be difficult.

"Welcome to Amazonia," Audrey said to the sisters as they came to a stop on the runway. Nearby the military transport carrying the Cobras also came to a stop near a transport unit waiting to take them to the Argase forest. Audrey waited until the unit was loaded and off before allowing the opening of the royal plane.

The trip from the capital was usually a two-hour drive but today it would take most of the day as the citizens lined the road to pay their last respects. All of the women of the right age remembered the charming blond little boy who was usually climbing on something when he was out with his mothers. He had done them proud with the career path he'd chosen and that would never be forgotten.

With their masks in place, the royal honor guards picked up the pallet and readied themselves to start down the stairs so that Queen Bekka, Laine and Princess Sean could have a few moments alone with Arthur. In the crowd along the route and in the forest Regent Leslie had people positioned with modern weapons to protect the visitors and the royal family, but those assigned to the burial detail carried the weapons their people had used for generations.

They stepped back and lowered their heads as the three royals moved closer. Audrey didn't join them wanting her parents and her sister to have as much time as she'd had to say their goodbyes. At her side, Bebo and Boden were dressed in their warrior leathers, swords strapped to their

backs, chobos hanging from their belts, and sais sticking out of their boots.

Their masks were the only two in the nation that were exactly alike. An intentional anomaly since every woman who picked the warrior path wanted her own unique identity. The eagle faces though were part of who each of them were, and that was protectors of their nests. In this case the nation of Amazonia and the women they were responsible for.

Back with the rest of the entourage stood the Petkus family watching as Bekka put her hand on her son's forehead after Princess Sean had kissed him and moved back. Annie watched that for a moment before her eyes went back to Bebo. Never in her life had she seen such an intimidating person who was doing nothing but standing at attention. The story of Larissa came to her mind and she wondered what those barbarians thought when they first sighted the Amazon dropping from the trees ready to lay down her life for her sisters dressed in her leathers and mask.

At that moment, she promised herself she would spend as much time with Audrey as she could manage so that their joining could happen as soon as possible. She had never wanted to stand with someone, because as strong as Bebo appeared, she wanted to offer the comfort of just being close. Just as the thought crossed her mind, Bebo turned and looked in her direction for a fleeting moment. Despite the warrior mask, their eyes met and Annie offered the only solace she could by smiling.

Bekka then leaned over Arthur and kissed his forehead before her partner followed her actions. After kissing him, Laine stayed hunched over him and appeared to be whispering in his ear like Boden had done on the plane. She then turned to Boden and nodded after noticing what was clutched in his left hand.

Another woman joined them with a bowl in her hand. Bekka now leaned against Laine as the newcomer dipped her fingers into the bowl and started to apply new designs to Arthur's face. As she ran her fingers across first his eyes then his jaw, she seemed to be murmuring something the whole time since her lips were moving in a way that Annie guessed to be singing.

"That's the high priestess Emelda, your grandmother," Dothan whispered to her girls.

Emelda finished her part and bowed deeply over the crude pallet before accepting a towel from Emery for her hands. The guards picked him up again and carried him to a horse drawn wagon for the trip to Argase. Everyone else would follow in a motorcade that was waiting, except for Bebo, Boden, Laine and the rest of Bebo's guards. The royals mounted black horses that could have been triplets they were so identical, and the guards mounted gray ones.

The trip through the capital was like nothing Annie and Reggie had ever seen. The crowd had to be at least twenty people deep for miles, all in similar dress and throwing flowers as Arthur passed by. For the number of people in attendance though, they could still hear the birds chirping in the trees it was so silent. It was a level of discipline they didn't think possible for such a large crowd. The crowd of silent women dropped to their knees when the horses of the first honor guards passed and stayed silent with their heads bowed until Audrey and Bekka had gone by.

It was the same scene for the whole trip until they entered the gates of the Argase Forest. There the flowers ceased and Annie thought they had arrived at the gravesite when Bebo put up her hand to halt the caravan. With no warning, she let out a battle cry that made Annie jump in her seat and it was instantly answered by the legions that now lined the road. The Regent Leslie joined the riders at the front of the guards and pulled her chobos out along with her troops' when Bebo did.

Bebo let out the cry again with her chobos held over her head and again the warriors answered it. When she slammed the clubs together it started a cadence that continued for the final distance. Here, only those who were warriors were allowed to enter for what was to happen and unlike the proceedings so far, the crowd followed them as they moved into a grove of trees so large Annie had to crane her head up to see the tops.

From somewhere ahead of them drums joined in with the chobos and they could see spots of fading sunlight and blue sky through the forest. The Cobras were waiting for them on the beach, not sure what was happening but standing at attention and saluting when the wagon carrying Arthur's body came into view. Their drive had been mostly along the coastline, never entering the forest itself. Entry into what was considered sacred ground was strictly forbidden unless born on the island or invited by the queen.

Bebo again put her hand up to halt the procession and dismounted close to a large fire on the beach. Someone ran up and took the reins of her mount as the princess reattached the chobos to her belt. The crowd around her grew silent again as the guards stood next to the pallet preparing to pick it up again.

From the cars Audrey and Sean helped their mother Bekka to the shoreline. In the queen mother's arms was a bundle and the three of them took their time covering the body with it leaving the face for last. Those who were close enough saw that it was a tapestry of sorts with the royal crest at the center. After studying her son's face as if trying to memorize every line of it, Bekka lifted the death shroud and finished the task. She then nodded to Greg and the guards who picked him up and started for the water. They walked until they were chest deep then with one final push set Arthur adrift.

"Won't he drift back eventually?" Captain Michelle Redmond asked as she watched in rapt attention with the rest of the Cobras.

The Amazons assigned to them didn't provide an answer, but only looked on as Laine handed her wife an arrow. Taking a deep breath Bekka walked to the fire and lit the tip before handing it to her granddaughter who was kneeling at her feet. She placed her hand on Bebo's cheek before joining Laine again.

When the guards had entered the water, Bebo had removed her mask and strapped her bow to her back. With the arrow clenched between her teeth she started toward the trees and with a quickness the Cobras didn't think possible, started up the one closest to the shore. She moved through the branches until she had reached the top. Her progression monitored by those on the ground by the flame of the arrowhead. Once at the top she had to clear her eyes of her tears not

wanting to fail in what had to be done.

She drew back the string on the bow and held her breath, watching the sun make its final descent into the water before letting the arrow fly. The crowd below her watched its path praying it hit its mark. It seemed almost instantaneous from the time it left Bebo's bow that the pallet became a floating ball of fire. The flames that reached toward the heavens carried Arthur's spirit back to the goddess, as was their belief.

Bebo let out one last battle cry, smiling when her sisters answered it. She was sure that Arthur would've been happy with the outpouring of respect he'd gotten.

"Safe journey, dad. This is our ending, but you'll forever be in my heart and in my thoughts."

[Continued in Chapter Two](#)

Comments to: terrali20@yahoo.com

[Ali Vali's Scrolls](#)
[Main Page](#)

~ Amazonia ~
~ Book 2 ~
by Ali Vali

Disclaimers: [See Part 1](#)

Beginnings

Chapter 2

The Cobra unit watched as Bebo walked towards them after handing her bow to Steph. If anyone was entitled to have a strut, it was the approaching princess. The rest of the crowd was starting to head back into the trees and to the barracks at one end of the forest. Their regular training would begin again in the morning, leaving only the women assigned to the royal family. They snapped to attention when Bebo stopped.

"General Curtis, thank you and the others for coming. My mother wanted me to extend you an invitation to dinner tonight before you head back, if that's agreeable with you."

"That'd be great, thanks." From the set of her mouth, he guessed she had more to say.

"I don't mean to insult any of you with my next statement, but this is the first time that what you

saw here has been witnessed or participated in by anyone from outside the nation. It would do my sisters and Arthur a dishonor to ever speak of it again."

"Highness, I believe I can speak for all of us," Junis said, as he bowed his head. "We wouldn't do that to you after Queen Audrey allowed us to come. It's something none of us will ever forget but not anything we'll ever talk about again."

Bebo nodded and her face finally relaxed into a smile. "If you'd like, your escort will show you to your quarters in the city where you can change into something more comfortable. I know you're here as representatives of the military but tonight's dinner is casual, no uniforms allowed."

"We look forward to it then."

She turned and headed back to her family, who were now alone aside from guards on the beach. Her grandmothers were still grieving but their tears had stopped, and they looked almost complacent as the last of the pallet sank into the water. If they'd had a choice they would've had Arthur with them, but he had moved on to a place where he'd never know pain, so there was no reason for sadness.

When Bebo hugged her, Audrey kissed her cheek and then discreetly pointed to her mothers. "As broken as they've been about what happened, they're excited beyond words to meet your girl. Let's not keep them waiting any longer."

Annie was happy to take her hand and move closer to the sitting couple. "Grand" she stopped in front of Bekka first, "Pal," she said, using the nickname she'd had for Laine all her life, "I'd like to introduce you to someone." She put her arm around Annie's shoulders and smiled. "This is Annie Petkus. I've spoken with her mother Dothan and offered her a betrothal bracelet. Once her teachings are complete, we plan to join, with your blessing."

"Welcome to our family, child," Laine said, standing and offering Annie her seat. "You have my blessing already after seeing the size of the sprout's smile."

"Thank you, highness." Annie bowed slightly then took the hand that Bekka was holding out to her. "And it's a pleasure to meet you as well, Queen Bekka. Bebo has told me so much about you."

"It's early yet, but I'm sure Bebo and Laine have transportation back to the capital they have to arrange, so sit with me, Annie." Bekka squeezed her fingers and waited for Bebo and Laine to take the hint. She laughed when Bebo looked back one last time before moving out of earshot. "She seems very protective already."

"That's a good thing, isn't it?"

"When it comes to my granddaughter, it's a good thing yes." She laughed and to Annie it sounded very much like Audrey. "So, child, you've found your way home on the arm of the most eligible catch on the island. Impressive."

"More like lucky," Annie said with a smile. "Bebo has had her pick, I'm sure."

"But she picked you. More importantly you chose her, and that's how she sees it. Just look at her." Down the beach Bebo was standing with Laine and Boden, but her eyes were on the two seated women. "I've never seen her like this. It reminds me of another young warrior once she caught the eye of her future wife. Boden was in my opinion extremely smitten, and would've swum around the island if Audrey had but asked."

"Stuff like that makes a girl feel special, and while I'm not going to ask Bebo to go for a swim, I'm enjoying her very kind attentions."

Bekka laughed again, feeling lighter after the sadness of the day. "I'll just bet you are. I'm old but I'm still a woman in love." She put her hand on Annie's shoulder and moved closer to her as if to tell her a secret. "I can't promise you a life free of any pain or sorrow. Days like this one prove me right. I can though promise you the love and the support of the Leon family. Welcome to your new home, and thank you for loving Bebo. Speaking as a proud grandmother, I can assure you of what a good and caring soul she is. After meeting you, I can see Bebo is rather fortunate as well."

"You're saying so means the world to me, highness. I promise I'll keep her heart as safe as she'll keep mine."

"A promise I'll hold you to," she said before standing. "Come, let's join the others before the frown line on Bebo's forehead becomes permanent. There's also someone else who's been anxious to meet you and your sister, and I don't want to keep you all to myself."

Introductions were made between the royals and Reggie before Bekka waved her old friend over. "Emelda, the goddess has made you wait long enough, but your prayers have been heard." Bekka gently wiped away Emelda's tears and then pulled her close. "Dry your tears so you can meet your granddaughters."

Emelda finished drying her face and turned to Annie and Reggie. She blinked furiously as if trying to hold back another onslaught of tears, a response she couldn't help as she looked at the two beautiful young women. They represented the years she'd missed out on because of a son who refused to accept who he was. That refusal had cost them all dearly, but she didn't want to dwell on that, instead she turned an eye to the future. An existence now that included more than just her son Greg in her family.

The sisters moved closer and together put their arms around her. From the human tangle, Emelda mouthed the words "thank you" to Bebo. The princess she'd loved for so long would soon become an official member of her family, which was gift enough, but what she'd brought back with her was beyond measure. After wanting and praying for so long, her family was finally home.

"It's good to finally hold the two of you," Emelda said without letting go of them. "Sporadic

news of your lives was never enough to satisfy my curiosity."

"You can be curious about other stuff now, grandmother, because we're not going anywhere," Reggie said.

"It's good to be here and to be together finally," Annie said, sounding very choked up. Growing up, a piece of her heart longed for a big family like her friends had, complete with grandparents who doted and spoiled you. That part of her that thirsted was now quenched.

"Don't cry, beautiful girl, because I want to know all about you and your sister. And when you're finished with that story, I want to know how my favorite warrior was able to win your heart." Emelda squeezed them both before going to welcome Dothan home as well.

"I'm so sorry," Dothan said softly when she was close enough.

"Chris has been gone a long time, sweetheart, but I still remember what I was willing to do for her because I loved her. You loved my son and wanted to make him happy. How could I ever fault you for that?"

"How can you forgive so easily?"

"That's easy - it's because we love you so much," said the woman standing behind Dothan. Hearing it made Dothan's tears of shame fall that much faster. "Please turn around and let me see you."

Dothan did but couldn't find the strength to lift her head. When the very familiar arms came around her she said the words she'd longed to utter for years. "Oh, mama."

Erica Cyr, keeper of the archives, held her daughter and felt as if she were dreaming. Her partner Teri stood back and just watched, her face showing nothing of what she was feeling. When the touching reunion ended, Dothan received a short embrace from her other mother but still Teri said nothing.

"Give her time," Erica said to her daughter when her partner moved back again.

The hugs continued until the group was ready to move back to the comfort of the capital. During the family reunion, Bebo had stayed back wanting Annie and Reggie to take as much time as they needed to take in what she assumed had to be an overwhelming feeling of joy. Bebo was standing with her bare feet in the surf looking up to the star filled night sky trying to empty her mind of the million thoughts fighting for attention.

She smiled when she felt the small hand slip into hers and heard Kip's feet in the sand not that far away. Bebo lifted her arm and felt her spirit calm when Annie's body pressed close to hers.

"As much as I loved the garden of trees at the embassy, it pales in comparison to the real thing. I can see why you love it here so much."

Bebo kissed the top of her head and sighed before answering. "The first day I have memory of coming here, I thought I'd never know that level of peace. The shamans of the island say that the souls of countless Amazons dwell in this place and they've entrusted their stories to the trees. If you listen close enough, you'll hear them whispering in the wind."

"That's beautiful, honey."

"The peace I felt before has been eclipsed by what I feel when you're this close to me though." She moved behind Annie and pointed to the sky. "I love you more than there are stars and I'll always feel that way."

"And Kip wonders why I miss you." Annie turned around and put her hands on Bebo's shoulders, her face upturned waiting to be kissed. Her princess didn't disappoint her, taking advantage of the others going to the cars to making it exceptionally sweet. "I didn't think I could love someone this much."

"You still do after talking to my grandmother?"

"She did try to tell me what a pain you warrior types are, but she assured me that you are extremely trainable." The laugh she felt rumble through Bebo's body made her feel like she was being a bit of a comfort to her after what they had just finished. "Honey, for as sad as today was, it's been one of the most wonderful days of my life."

"Emelda and Erica are going to be easy when it comes to your mom, love. But I think you and Reggie are going to have to soften Teri up a little."

She could hear the beat of Bebo's heart since her head was resting on her chest. "I noticed she seemed less than thrilled that we're here."

"That couldn't be further from the truth, love. Imagine having a child, pouring all the love you have into her and then one day she leaves and never comes back." She pulled Annie closer and listened to the soft birdcalls flowing naturally through the trees. It was the first watch of the night moving silently through the branches behind them, keeping an eye on the shoreline. "I've never had much contact with her, but my mothers say she carries a sadness that got heavier with each passing year."

"But we're here now."

"And with time, she'll come to realize you're not leaving her behind again." When Kip cleared her throat, they laughed but did start toward the line of cars.

Since they were the last to arrive, Annie and Bebo got to share a car with Teri and Erica. All them stayed silent until they reached the gates of the forest and Bebo tried to begin the dialog of healing.

"Commander, how are our trade agreements going with the middle east?" She asked Teri.

"I thought you served under Boden, grandmother?" asked Annie before the woman could answer.

"I do. What the princess is referring to is trade agreements that are based on military training. We provide the trainers and they in turn provide other commodities the island needs." She still looked stiff, but Annie's apparent interest softened the set of her mouth and eyes. "Perhaps later you can tell me about Conger, highness."

"I'll be happy to, if you promise to do something for me in return."

Teri's back came off the seat and she saluted with a fist over her heart. "Just ask, highness."

"Stop being wasteful."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Then my mother, Boden, gives you more credit than you deserve." She waited for the blowup from the seasoned warrior and smiled at the chiding squeeze to her side from Annie.

Teri's hands clenched into fists but she restrained herself after Erica squeezed her leg, knowing what the consequences would be if she attacked the princess of Amazonia. "I don't believe I've ever done anything to disappoint the Consort."

"A negotiator who is so prejudiced by the past it taints her future is of no help to anyone, especially if she'll never see her way beyond that past."

Her hands stayed clenched so tightly that everyone could see Teri's fingers turning white. "You have no idea the kind of pain we've suffered."

"Your daughter left for a life she wanted, and now she's back with a family who wants nothing more than to be a part of your life. Arthur also left for a life he wanted and he paid the ultimate price for that choice. He'll never be back so that his mothers can hold him or welcome the man he loved into our family, and we'll never know the joy of his company again." Bebo cocked her head to the side and never lost eye contact with her. "Given a choice I'd gladly trade with you for the pain you suffered, because now that suffering is at an end. To squander that opportunity seems rather wasteful to me."

The earnestness in Bebo's eyes was too much for Teri and she lowered her head in shame. Before she could say anything else she was shocked when the tears started flowing and then she started sobbing. She only cried harder when she felt her partner's arms come around her and hold her. It was Annie's voice and her hand on Teri's knee that finally broke through her emotional breakdown.

"I know what my father did, and the fact my mother followed his wishes was unfair to both of you, but I can promise you'll never know a future without your family. I can't speak for my

father, but I can for my mother and sister. Because of what I feel for Bebo, this is my home now. A home I hope to share with you and Grandmother Erica."

"My dear, our home is open to you all," Erica said as she continued to stroke her partner's back. "And I couldn't agree with you more. What's done is done, and it's time to look to the future."

"I have a feeling a lot of our time together will be spent in the archives trying to keep Reggie's excitement down to a dull roar." Teri returned Annie's smile as she straightened out a bit and watched the look of pure delight take over her partner's face. Her wife's second love after her family was the library Audrey had put her in charge of.

The two warriors sat back and stayed silent as the two talked about ancient parchments and history, glad to see the bridge would be easy to gap from their common interest. Teri finally had to laugh when Bebo pulled Annie back, and the young woman looked at her in outrage.

"I just thought you might like to enjoy your first look at the palace, but if old parchments are more important to you," Bebo teased.

Any words of protest died on her lips as Annie looked out the window at one of the most beautiful and unique buildings she ever remembered seeing. It was made of light yellow stones and parts of it looked like hanging tree houses along the sides. In the front, a large fire was burning and there were guards still in their leathers standing at the entrance.

"The original sections were built during Selene's rein and it's been added to by every queen who's had the privilege of occupying it," Teri said. "During Queen Audrey's rein, she's concentrated more on the gardens than on the building itself. Recently saplings from the Argase forest were planted along the back wall that my great grandchildren will someday climb."

"If they're anything like this one," Annie pointed her thumb at the big kid beside her, "then tree climbing and mischief making will be at the top of their learning list."

"Well that's a relief," Erica said.

"What, that she likes to make trouble?" Annie asked.

"No that there'll be great grandchildren in our future."

As fascinated as she was with the palace, Annie turned and looked at Bebo even though it was Erica she was addressing. "Grandmother, as much in love as I am with Bebo, I see many little ones for you to spoil in your future. She's my life and I'm going to be thrilled to start and build a family with her."

"If you make me blush in public, I'm putting you over my knee," Bebo whispered in her ear.

"It might be interesting to see you try, lover," Annie teased back as she ran her finger up Bebo's red cheek. "Because I have a feeling your trying will only lead to Kip putting you in a head

lock."

Bebo bit down on the tip of her fingers, and from her peripheral vision could see their company was intently studying the window as if they'd never seen the building as well. "Just remember one thing," she said around the finger in her mouth.

"What's that?"

"Kip is good. That's why my mother assigned her to you, but I'm better."

"I should certainly hope so, baby." They kissed just long enough not to embarrass their fellow passengers.

They stopped in the great courtyard at the front where Audrey welcomed guests and visiting dignitaries. More than a few staff members were there to meet them, all wanting to give the royals their condolences.

"For now your family will stay here, Annie, but as soon as it's ready Queen Audrey has arranged for a house not far from the palace," Erica said.

"Let me guess," Annie sounded less than amused, "protocol."

"If you were joining with any other Amazon most would be willing to bend a little on the dating part," Teri said. She got out of the car and offered her partner a hand. When Bebo followed, offering Annie her hand she whispered the rest. "You though, picked the one that has the eyes of the nation upon her."

"So no bending."

"Sorry, highness," answered Teri with a sympathetic smile. "No bending."

A middle-aged woman with dark hair walked forward and bowed her head before speaking. "Highness, welcome home," she said to Bebo.

"Thank you, Ruby. I've missed being here." She took Annie's hand and urged her gently to stand in front of her. "Ruby, this is Lady Petkus. She and her family will be my mother's guests for a while. Could you see them to their rooms please?"

Bebo kissed Annie's hand before letting go and gave her a wink as they started to follow the maid to one of the wings, trailed by Kip and a few guards. The princess then joined her mothers as they headed for the family quarters.

Her room was just as she'd left it, even the books were opened to where she'd left off. The last night Bebo had spent here had been consumed with nervousness about her first mission for her mother. That felt like a decade before and now all she felt was lonely without Annie.

"Eventually it fades to a dull roar."

She turned from her desk to find Boden standing in the doorway. "What?"

"The ache in your chest when you're apart. It's been years since I've married her, but when your mother and I are separated because of duty - it's a killer."

"Good to hear, especially since I'm not allowed within ten feet of her without an audience." She slammed one of the books closed and threw it back on the desk.

"About that," Boden sat on the bed and patted the space next to her. "There's a few things I know about you, sprout, so I want you to remember something important."

"I know already. Stay away from Annie - I get it."

"You're no more going to do that than a flea can stay away from a cat. When you give it a try, and I know you will, just remember one thing. Don't get caught." It was all Boden was willing to offer as she slapped Bebo on the back and left.

Their leathers were put away and as Bebo had told Junis, everyone was dressed causally. The dinner turned out to be a memorial to Arthur, one that everyone who knew him believed he would've loved. His parents told stories of when he grew up and the Cobras told humorous ones of their time with him.

It gave a more complete glimpse of the man Arthur had been, and gave the Americans a better idea of Amazon life. There had been more than one of them who'd believed it to be barbaric to give up their sons at such an early age. Listening to Laine talk about their monthly visits and summers together until Arthur was accepted into the elite force, it seemed no different than sending a child to boarding school.

Annie and Bebo sat together reclining on a pile of cushions in the great dining room. Because Audrey had wanted to keep the night casual the furniture had been removed so they could enjoy a more traditional meal in the old ways.

As the laughter died down, Junis lifted his glass to Queen Bekka and Laine. "Your highnesses, I want to again convey our condolences on your loss. I also wanted you to know how proud I am to have known and served with Prince Arthur. As good a soldier as he was, he was a better friend and man. He'll never be forgotten and I'm going to miss him.

"He made you think differently about a lot of things, especially when it came to your feelings." He laughed as if remembering something Arthur had given him a hard time about. "So in his honor I wanted to tell you how much I cared about him. I loved Arthur. He was like the brother I always wanted."

Bekka unclipped one of the adornments from her hair and handed it to the maid behind her to give to Junis. "He taught you well, General, and he's probably laughing now at the blush on your face." He graciously accepted her token but because of his buzz cut, Bekka had to clip it to the collar of his shirt. "You should know my son did the same here whenever he came home. He always tried to broaden peoples' minds beyond their preset beliefs. It's one of the reasons my daughter invited you here. Arthur trusted you and to us that means a great deal."

"We owe your family more than we can ever repay," Junis said. He went on to tell them the story of their rescue by Bebo and her team. The Amazons that had been there with the Princess added the facts he didn't know.

Before long, Bebo and some of the others were up and teaching the Cobras some new hand to hand maneuvers Bebo hadn't gotten to before their training was postponed. She was dressed in a white cotton shirt and drawstring pants, but to Annie she looked just as wild as when she'd been wearing the traditional leathers when she stood to join in.

"This is the part of my daughter you have to balance out, Annie," Audrey said when she moved to sit next to her. "It's a sort of passion that started burning in Queen Selene generations ago and has never faded or been diluted."

"It shouldn't be, and I hope it burns just as bright in our children."

The Queen winced as one of the soldiers went down hard when he tried to sneak up on Bebo from behind. "Why do you hope for that?"

"Because there'll always be places like Conger and people like the Cobras who need rescuing. I don't want to live in a world where there's no one who's willing to help."

"Well spoken, sweetheart. At this rate your lessons will go by quicker than you think."

The palace eventually grew quiet as their guests were escorted back to their quarters and the guards reported to their posts for the first watch of the night. The sentinels walked the corridors, occasionally stopping to listen to the birdcalls that echoed through the silence to tell them all was well.

What the watchers didn't realize was that they in turn were being watched. The figure dressed in varying shades of black and dark green blended in so well with Audrey's gardens that they were easy to miss. Careful not to move when anyone was close by, the intruder's final destination was only a short climb away.

The room was one of the oldest in the palace. Two of its walls were perfectly preserved in honor of the woman who first lived there. To be able to run your hand over something so sacred to the nation was a gift from the queen to her future daughter-in-law even if she hadn't had the chance to tell her the story.

Annie sat at the vanity in the bathroom putting her hair in a ponytail as she thought about Bebo. With so many outsiders on the island, Kip had been extra vigilant, cutting their goodnights short well before they reached the corridors that led to her rooms.

She finished feeling frustrated and hoping it wouldn't prevent her from getting some sleep. The door to her room opened as Annie turned out the light in the bathroom and from the moonlight coming through the window she saw Reggie sitting on the large bed.

"This place is so cool it makes me want to fly home and slap daddy for keeping it from us."

Annie laughed and took a seat in one of the chairs close to the window. The air was heavy with salt from the ocean and she could hear the faint hum of traffic in the distance. "I'd let that go and enjoy the now, sis. You don't want to mar hitting the proverbial jackpot by being bitter."

"All the single gorgeous women aside, getting Emelda, Erica and Teri in the bargain is like hitting the jackpot." Reggie agreed then sighed as she fell back onto the bed. That's when Annie saw it.

Standing in the corner shrouded by shadows, someone was watching them. She didn't want to frighten her sister by shouting out so she acted as normally as she could. "Our grandmothers do give us a sense of completeness don't they?"

"That they do, but you still owe me, Annie."

"I do? Why's that?" Her eyes betrayed her and she looked to the corner again but the person was standing motionless.

Reggie leaned up on her elbows and pointed a foot at her. "You hogged Bebo all to yourself and never gave me a chance. Now you have to get princess wonderful to introduce me to some buff warrior types."

"Then get out of here and get your beauty sleep." Annie walked her sister out and kissed her goodnight then waved to the guards outside their doors. When she closed the door, she locked it before turning around and leaning against it.

Her visitor never moved so Annie thought a little incentive was needed. First she pulled the tie from her hair and shook out the blond locks. She then pulled the tie on her robe and let her garment fall behind her. She took a few steps closer to the bed before pulling her nightgown over her head and tossing it on the floor, leaving her naked and exposed.

"Are you just here to watch? Because if you don't get over here that's all you're going to be doing."

"I need to work on my stealth techniques if you spotted me so easily."

"Uh huh," she pulled back the comforter on the bed, smiling when the camouflage shirt flew past her head. "By the way," the pants came next, "Reggie wants you to introduce her to..."

"Some buff warrior types - I heard her."

Annie hurriedly got in the bed so she could enjoy watching Bebo walk across the room. That she was there at all was making her smile from the heart. Bebo was taking quite a risk, but their being together was more important than what was expected of them and on that she agreed with her.

"I missed you so much," Bebo said. The feel of Annie's skin pressed up against her made her think that if that were all they did all night long - it would be enough.

The sheets felt instantly warmer when Bebo joined her on the bed, but it was the feel of skin on skin that made Annie hot. It still amazed her that to make her father happy, she would've gone through life not knowing what it was to crave a simple embrace of another person. To go through life being content to lie and listen to their heart beating and their lips kissing your forehead.

"Are you okay, honey?" Annie asked after feeling the long sigh that Bebo let out.

"Just a long day."

Annie shifted so that Bebo's head was now resting on her chest. The position made it easy for her to run her fingers through the dark hair. "I know the cure for that."

"What's that?"

"Tell me a story about this room." She kissed the top of Bebo's head and pulled her closer. "Your mom said she was going to when we got to spend time together, but I have you here so tell me."

"Interested in Queen Selene are you?" Bebo laughed but burrowed closer to Annie enjoying the loving attention she was getting. "The archives tell us from the first parchments our ancestors wrote about the different nomadic tribes of the Amazons. In all there were about two hundred each with their own queen. For years they hunted, planted and raised families staying predominately female in makeup."

"There were male Amazons?" Annie asked.

"We sent one to the sacred lands today, love." They moved back to their original positions with Annie's head pillowed on Bebo's shoulder allowing her to run her hand in small circles on Bebo's stomach.

"Sorry."

"No need to apologize. It's hard to imagine when you walk around here that people like Arthur and your father were born here."

Annie lifted up on her elbow for a minute to study Bebo's face. "My father was such a traitor to his heritage in my opinion. Especially now that I've met my grandmother and know the kind of pain he put her through by keeping us away. All those years wasted."

With a slow and gentle hand Bebo caressed the side of her face. "Listen to the advice you gave your sister and don't let bitterness steal the years you have left with your newfound family."

"How do you know it'll be years?" The question posed in a way that made Bebo realize Annie wanted reassurance.

"Because Emelda's too stubborn to let go of life without a fight. Much like the queen you asked me about, Selene."

Annie didn't miss the reverence in Bebo's voice as she told the story of how Selene had united the tribes and brought them to the island despite the pessimists who said the queens would never give in and the sail would kill those who tried. There were those tribes that stayed behind and continued their ways and traditions only to be swallowed up by larger armies and conquering hordes.

"Before her death here, Queen Selene managed to united the tribes and set up the island pretty much like it still functions today. The doubters were put to rest when they saw that true strength came from unity."

Her story was interrupted when Annie pulled her head down and kissed her. "Do her original writings still exist?"

"Yes, my lovely historian, they do. The first queen was much like America's Thomas Jefferson. Her ideas and her passion for starting something new and good have survived the test of time."

"I think she'd be proud of the family line she left behind."

"Under Queen Selene, the nation prospered because each child was given encouragement to follow their heart. For some like my Aunt Sean, it is following a life of commerce and foreign relations, but when it comes to people like my mother, the choices are a little more limited."

"You always have a choice, my love," Annie said.

"I could be selfish I guess and live only to make myself happy by making you happy, but the nation has other ideas and I'd never dishonor them or my parents by turning my back on my responsibilities. My greatest hope is that you can live with that reality."

"Can I live with someone who has honor, is courageous, caring and loves me?" Annie put her head back down and kissed Bebo's neck. "The real question now is can I live without her?"

"Sweet talker."

"Guilty, now finish telling me about this room."

"When the first boats landed on the shores of Leon, Selene's royal guards noticed this one large tree growing close to the beach. They were thrilled that even though they had moved to a large island, they still had the comfort of the trees they'd known before. This particular tree was set aside as Selene's quarters and it had been occupied by every ruler after her."

"But that would make it ancient."

"The tree itself, like all living things, died decades ago, but our scientist have preserved a good portion of it and incorporated it into the existing palace." Bebo turned her head and looked at the smooth walls pointing to different knots that gave you a clue as to what it was. "The room we're in now was actually Selene's quarters. Most queens, once they marry, use this room on their honeymoon night." She ran her finger along Annie's back, loving the way it made her move closer.

"Can we spend our honeymoon here?"

"We can spend our honeymoon wherever you like, love." Bebo kissed her forehead again and sighed in obvious contentment. "But tradition calls for us to spend our very first night as a joined couple in this room."

"Promise me you're not going to completely hate me for what I'm about to say."

"That's an easy promise to make. Nothing you could ever tell me would make me hate you. What's wrong?"

"You have to get dressed and go." She kissed the naked shoulder she was resting her head on before moving away a little. "I can't believe I'm saying this because I'm about to rupture something if I don't touch you soon, but you really need to get going, honey."

"Did I do something wrong?"

Annie immediately moved back and put her hand on the side of Bebo's face. "Of course you didn't. I miss you more than you can imagine, but I won't disrespect what this room means to the past and to us. The night I lie here with you, I want it to be because we're honoring what these walls mean, so no, it has nothing to do with you."

"Just promise me one thing."

"Anything."

"Promise me that you'll really pay attention during all those lessons with my mother. The sooner you get all this stuff down, the quicker we'll get back here without me having to come through the window." Bebo kissed the tip of her nose to show she was kidding.

"Like you said, that's an easy promise to make."

Audrey was waiting in her room when Bebo made it back. She smiled but made sure to hold in her laugh when her daughter stumbled very uncharacteristically as she made it through the window. Sexual frustration could be the only answer.

"Are you here to tell me how evil I am for trying?" asked Bebo.

"Actually, I'm here to tell you how proud I am of you for showing such restraint." Audrey moved closer and put her hand on Bebo's cheek in a familiar gesture she'd done since Bebo had been a baby. "Either that or Bo's going to have that talk with you again."

"What talk?"

"The talk of how to pleasure women, because if you made it over there and back in this amount of time and managed to ignore the meaning of where I put Annie for her stay...you obviously weren't paying attention when your mother went through the finer points of the act." She did laugh this time when the blush that painted Bebo's face heated the palm of her hand. "But since you're my daughter, I know better than that and I'm going with the fact that you know better."

"You'll be happy to know that Annie kicked me out once I told her the story, and I was more than willing to give into her wishes." She bent down and kissed Audrey's forehead. "That was really low by the way. You could've put her up at Erica and Teri's. I'm sure they would've loved to catch up on their granddaughters' lives as well as Dothan's."

"Not low, honey. I just know who I'm dealing with."

"You don't trust me to not humiliate Annie?" A crease formed on Bebo's forehead as she looked down at her mother in confusion.

Audrey grabbed the front of the shirt Bebo was wearing and dragged her over to the bed so they could sit down. "Of course I trust you, but I happen to think you're cut from the same cloth Bo is."

"And?"

"And it's the kind of cloth you want to rip off and feel up close and personal." She wiggled her eyebrows making Bebo laugh. "Face it. You're good looking, smart and the future leader of the Amazons. It's quite the burden, but I'm confident you're more than up to it. And I wouldn't be concerned that it's all a one-way street. I'm sure Annie is hurting just as much as you are. I know I did when it was me Bo was courting."

"Some of these rules really should be updated."

"Uh huh, when you have some more little Bebos running around here, let me know what you want to update when some girl catches their eye."

"That's different, mama. This is me we're talking about and I miss her." Bebo lay down so she could put her head in her mother's lap.

"I know you do, but as hard as this is the time will go by sooner than you think. When you're my age you'll remember this time as some of the most special days of your life." She pulled gently on a lock of the dark hair. "You're a woman very much like your mother, and I have a feeling that Annie is very much like me."

"In a way it was the fact she was like you that attracted me to her."

Audrey nodded and smiled. "Annie will complete you in ways that will bring you everlasting happiness, so use this time to show her just how much she means to you in ways that have nothing to do with making love." She placed her fingers over Bebo's lips when she went to say something. "When your mother and I joined and I stood on that dais with her, and looked into her eyes, I got to see what pure love truly is. That's what I want you to do for Annie."

"I haven't had too much time alone with you so this is nice." Bebo smiled and appeared relaxed and content.

"Part of what I'm talking about is what you did tonight. I'm glad you went over there if only for a little while. Right now you need the comfort only Annie is able to give you. For that kind of happiness and strength a mother doesn't mind being thrown over."

"I'm not throwing you over, mama. I have Annie and I love her, but you're someone I need in my life no matter what."

"Thank you, my darling. Are you sure you're all right after everything that happened?"

"I'm fine really. I'm just sorry I couldn't bring Arthur back to you."

She ran her fingers through the thick dark hair and sighed. "What happened is all Nazia Suire's fault so don't ever blame yourself. It's shameful that some who are born here never really learn the lessons that Amazonia has to teach. The only thing she was interested in was besting your mother whenever she had the opportunity, and in the end that same passion spilled over onto you. What Arthur did, was something everyone here expected of him, and as with everything else in his life, he didn't disappoint." She put her hand on Bebo's cheek again. "He loved you so remember that and carry what he did for you and Annie's future in your heart always. That's the best way to repay his gift."

"Thanks for saying that."

"I said it because I mean it. You and Annie deserve to be happy without anything standing in

your way. Don't squander this time no matter how frustrating it is. Try and make the next few months as special for Annie as your mother made them for me. Courting a girl is something she never forgets and cherishes for the rest of her days. The way your mother courted me are stories I've been clamoring to tell my grandchildren." She leaned down and kissed Bebo's forehead. "Remember that and do me proud starting tomorrow. Are you busy in the morning?"

"Of course I'm not busy, if I get to spend time with you and Annie. Where should I meet you?"

"Smart girl. Meet us at the Archives at ten. I'm giving the Petkus sisters a tour in the morning and I'll be glad to act as your chaperone."

"Think you could leave me in the stacks alone for a little while?" Bebo did some brow wiggling of her own making Audrey laugh.

"I'm sure you'll find yourself alone with Annie more than you might think. Your mother isn't a complete tyrant you know."

The next morning Bebo was up early and at the airport with Boden to bid the Cobra Unit goodbye. That was followed by a workout with the guards so that by the time Annie and her family made it down for breakfast, Bebo and Boden were ready to eat again. Their meal was filled with light conversation and more educational matters of the realm for Annie before they ventured out to the National Archives.

"The bottom floor is actually over a hundred feet below ground and it's where the original parchments are kept. Copies are found in every school book on the island but those first scrolls Queen Selene ordered kept are in my opinion our greatest treasure," Audrey said as they sat together in the back of the car driving them over.

"I've wanted to see the whole collection ever since we received the small part you sent to the museum. As both a student and a fan of history I think it's wonderful when any civilization realizes the importance of keeping a record of their culture."

"If there's one thing the Amazons pride themselves on, sweetheart, it's our history. There's more than enough paper in those archives to set the greatest of all bonfires," Audrey said with a laugh. "But we pray to Artemis that day never comes to pass."

When they pulled up Bebo joined them offering an arm to her mother first then to Annie. There were more than a few reporters from the island's various newspapers on hand taking pictures, and talking with Audrey's representatives about any questions they had.

The tour lasted four hours with Erica showing them the highlights of what was on hand so that Annie would have some idea of what she wanted to concentrate on in future visits. More than once, Erica took time to hug both Annie and Reggie as they listened to her fascinating tales of some of their more colorful history.

"There is one bit of business we have to take care of while we're here," Audrey said. She brought them into the largest room Annie and Reggie had ever seen. It was filled with rows of shelves holding leather bound books. On the cover of each book was a family name.

"This is the whole of the Amazon nation, girls," Erica said proudly. She led them to where there were two books lying open on an ancient looking table at the room's center. "Everyone who was born to a family here is recorded on the pages of these books. For too long your signatures have been missing from the day your names were added."

"Our names are already here?" Reggie asked incredulously, dragging her finger down the page of one book searching.

"At your birth, your name is added to the books of the families you belong to." Audrey pointed first to the book that chronicled the Petkus family. "Your mother married into the Petkus family so your name was added to that line, as well as to the Cyr family book."

"What does our signature signify?" Annie asked, figuring it had to mean something.

"It shows for the rest of time you accept what being an Amazon is, my love," Bebo said. "For all of time, our family will be able to enter this room and look upon what you do today and feel proud they have a history. Your name in these two books, then in a third will leave your mark upon your new home, and the life you will build here."

"A third book?" Annie asked.

"The book of Leon," Audrey said. It was the only one kept in a glass vault with a guard posted in front. The woman bowed to the Queen when Audrey slipped in a key and opened the door. Carefully she opened the book to the first page. There in somewhat faded ink was the name Selene of Leon. "This is our family's book," she then flipped to the very last page and the last two signatures of Consort Boden of Argase and Princess Bebo of Leon. "I am proud that before too long your name will follow my cub's."

Annie went first and with a feather pen signed her name to the two books. Once Reggie was finished Audrey accepted the royal seal from Erica and stamped the Leon crest to the front of the books forever marking them as having a member of the royal family among their relatives.

"Welcome home, both of you," Audrey said.

"It's good to finally be here, highness," Annie said as Reggie nodded her agreement. They both bowed to their Queen before accepting an embrace.

For the next couple of weeks Annie went back to the archives with Audrey daily so that they could have the information they needed at hand. In their time together they found that they were

starting to forge a friendship that would last them a lifetime. In those hours Audrey's pain at losing her brother didn't disappear, but did fade somewhat in Annie's company and her laugh returned. Annie was someone who was so eager about life, and starting a life with Bebo, that the queen found it infectious.

"Do you have any questions on that?" asked Audrey as she closed the book they'd been reviewing.

"I'll go over it again this afternoon and let you know."

"How about a break?" Audrey stood up and held her hand out to Annie. "Someone is coming home today and I thought you might want to be on hand to welcome her back."

"I'd be happy to," she took Audrey's hand and started for the elevator that would bring them back to the main floor of the building.

"So have you and Bebo been having a good time?"

"I couldn't ask for a better tour guide of the island." The guards followed them at a good distance, keeping their conversation private.

"Been behaving then has she?" Audrey pulled her closer and laughed when Annie blushed. "Good, protocol has its place but it's good to remember why you want to join with someone."

"I haven't forgotten anything about why I want to be with her, and while I love the courting stage, I'm more than ready to get to that next part."

When they stepped outside, the statue of Larissa was being put back into place in front of the archives building. After seeing her in the museum in Washington, Annie thought she looked different standing in the sunshine, as if Larissa appeared more at home. There was a group of schoolchildren waiting for the workers to finish so that they could touch the boot. Bebo was waiting with them, and she had two little girls sitting on her lap with the others gazing up at her raptly listening to what she was saying.

"See this is the part of you that's really strong in her," Annie said, pointing to Bebo.

"She didn't just inherit the love of story telling from me, sweetheart. Boden doesn't like an audience but she does love to spin a tale when given the chance." She winked at Annie and laughed. "At least I'm willing to sit and listen to whatever she has to say."

"I definitely know the allure," Annie winked back before turning her attention to her warrior.

"Do you have any other questions before I turn you over to Bebo?"

"Were you this nervous?"

Audrey stopped walking and closed her eyes for a moment as if remembering something important. "I was until I just spoke what was in my heart. Once I did, it was like it was just Boden and me there. It was her listening to what I had to say that was important."

"Thanks for that."

As much as Annie enjoyed her morning it was the next meeting that was making her nervous. With her mother and Bebo's parents blessing it was time for them to put words to their feelings in front of someone who could put forth her own objections putting their joining on hold. Not that she thought it would happen, but the remote possibility was what was fueling the butterflies in her stomach.

When they walked up, Bebo was finishing her story so it took a minute for the schoolgirls to realize who else had joined them. They all bowed their heads along with their teacher and were thrilled when Audrey offered to tell a story as well.

With the attention off them Bebo took Annie's hand and put it over Larissa's worn boot. "Just for luck that my mouth doesn't freeze up," she told Annie with a smile.

"That's one thing I never worry about when it comes to you, honey."

"I can see my life is never going to be boring is it?" asked Bebo as she waved goodbye to her mother.

They chose to walk since it wasn't that far, and Annie had to laugh when, while respectful, she noticed on more than one occasion how women openly appraised Bebo. "I figure if I keep you interested then you'll go through life with blinders on. Can I buy you a leash as your wedding present?"

"Is this some hobby you have that you haven't bothered to share with me?"

"I thought it might come in handy on an island where I can see there's a lot of competition."

Bebo laughed as she brought Annie's hand up to her lips. "I would only throw you over for your grandmother, but we butt heads so often that I figure she'd kill me within the week."

Emelda Petkus waited for them at the door to the great Temple of Artemis. Throughout the island there were smaller places of worship, but this was the spot on which the first temple had been erected and through the years it had become a place of pride. She shook her head at how in love the couple looked, so much so that they hadn't noticed her standing there yet.

She opened her arms first to her granddaughter then to Bebo when they both bowed slightly in front of her. "Welcome to you both."

"Thank you, grandmother," Annie said, as a sense of belonging came over her as she enjoyed Emelda's embrace.

"And you, troublemaker, what are you going to tell me?"

"That you'd better be nice to me because I'm going to be related to you soon," Bebo said, making both of them laugh.

"I'll be nice to you in a little while but right now we have lunch to eat then we'll see if you're going to be related to me."

Emery Felder, Emelda's apprentice was waiting for them at the table that had been set up in the back garden, gladly accepting Emelda's invitation to attend. After a request from the Queen they would begin the process that afternoon so that the joining ceremony could take place as soon as possible.

While Emelda got to enjoy being a doting grandmother, Emery went through what was expected of them in the coming weeks. Once Annie learned the necessary rituals, then Audrey would call a meeting of the Regents and their representatives so the announcement of their engagement could be made official. After that, a call would go out to the island for the joining. It wasn't often that a royal joined. Since the time of Selene, her line had chosen well and only death had separated the royal couples who had followed her.

They finished their afternoon with a prayer and the lighting of the alter incense to Artemis on. Both priestesses were impressed with Annie's knowledge of the prayers, having learned them from Audrey starting on the flight over.

"You have chosen well, both of you," she told the couple as she laid her hands on their heads. "Princess, as I told you before you left for your journey, you have found your fate. You have found the other half of your heart and your spirit. Guard it well, follow your path and your life will be fruitful."

Their vows would be made again before the nation at their joining ceremony, but today the words came from the heart. It would be witnessed by only Emelda, Emery, and the goddess, so in Annie's opinion it was all that more special. The woman kneeling next to her was expected to be strong always, but now those deep blue eyes softened and showed her all the love Bebo had for her.

"Today you truly begin down that path so it's time to state before the goddess your feelings for Annie," she said to Bebo. "And you, Annie," she put her hands on Annie's shoulders. "So many of us have been waiting for your return to Amazonia. That you have come back to join with Bebo has only multiplied our joy. What you both say here today will forever stay here if you like."

"Is that what others before us have done?" Annie asked.

"For everyone this process is different, and I won't betray their trust like that."

"I'm sorry if I wasn't supposed to ask."

Emelda moved her hand to the bottom of Annie's chin to lift her head a little. "Nothing you ask is wrong. I'm sure Bebo has told you that as well as Audrey. I can't speak for all the others who've knelt here before you, but I can speak for myself when it was my turn with Chris. The day we joined my words weren't all that different from the day I met her here to tell her how much I loved her. I did it because I wanted everyone there celebrating the day with us to know what I held in my heart."

"I appreciate you sharing that with me."

"I have so much I want to share with you, love, but I think that it's Bebo who wants to say something now."

"Thank you, grandmother." Bebo bowed her head to the Emelda, and then took Annie's hand. "Annie Petkus of the house of Cyr is my chosen. In my life there will be no other. I will defend her and our children with my life if necessary. She will never know another day of loneliness, just as I anticipate a life full from what we will have together." The betrothal bracelet she had given Annie before she left for Conger was back in her possession and she pulled it from her pocket. "With her I will share my crown, my life, my love and I will protect all with my sword. On this, I give Annie, the goddess and you as her head priestess, my solemn vow." She turned to Annie and held up the bracelet that represented their short history so far and chronicled their beginning. "I ask you to entrust me with your heart, and in turn I will give you mine. Will you have me, Annie?"

"What say you Annie?" Emelda asked.

"I have waited for you all my life. Before the goddess I make my vow to love Princess Bebo of Leon, bring her happiness, raise a family with her and to stand by her side as long as I draw breath. With me she will never know another day of loneliness, and I will belong to no other but her." She put her hands over Bebo's and looked her in the eye. "I'll have you until the end of time, my love."

"Then today accept the blessings of Artemis and the joy of your sisters. May your days always hold such happiness," Emelda said. Both she and Emery then bowed their heads and prayed as Bebo once again fastened the bracelet on Annie's wrist.

Three weeks later Dothan, Reggie and Annie were moved to Erica and Teri's house for the night so that the last tradition before the meeting of the regents could be carried out. Bebo arrived by horseback with her royal guards and presented each member of the family with a gift.

The last gift she presented to Annie with a smile was a small rendition of the statue of Larissa as a remembrance of the first time they'd met. No one said anything as Annie accepted it, handed it to her mother then kissed Bebo like they hadn't seen each other in months.

When the meal was done, Boden and Audrey asked the couple to join them outside. "You have both done well with everything that has been asked of you," Boden started.

"Including the forced separation," Audrey said with a smile. "Tomorrow I'll call together the regents to make this official, so please don't take what I'm going to say next as an insult to what you have and share."

"Please, highness, if we need to do anything else we'll be happy to. What Bebo and I are about to enter into shouldn't be taken lightly, and I wouldn't want to insult tradition by taking any shortcuts," Annie said.

"You've done everything beautifully, honey. I just wanted to give you both the last chance to back out if you have any grain of doubt about what you're getting ready to embark on. Please know that I'm not telling you this because Boden or I have any doubts about you, but because it's the last nasty bit of business we have to get out of the way before we get onto more happy times."

"We'll give you a few minutes to talk about it," Boden said with a wink.

"Have I told you lately how much I love your parents?" asked Annie when they were alone. She took her time walking over to Bebo using the new set of leathers she'd been fitted with to full advantage.

"Stop talking." Bebo quickly closed the gap between them and turned her around so she could put her hands on Annie's bare stomach and provide them some privacy since her back was to the window. Slowly, just using her fingertips she dragged them up until she was just under Annie's breasts. Very gently, she cupped them and squeezed wanting to feel the nipples harden under the soft leather. "Do you have any doubt about how much I love you?"

"Oh, honey, you have to stop or we're going to be adding one more tradition to all this pomp and circumstance. And I think sex on my grandparents' patio is going to be hard to explain." Bebo's hands squeezed a little harder but not anywhere in the realm of being painful. "I know you love me, and I hope you know how much I love you. But do you have any doubt about how much I want you right now?" she asked, her voice dropping a few octaves making her sound sexy as hell to Bebo.

"You know what I'm looking forward to?"

"Moving your hands in the other direction and under this skirt?" Annie sounded hopeful but laughed along with Bebo.

"Besides that yes. I'm looking forward to joining my life with yours because it means I'll wake up beside you for the rest of my life."

"You are a sweet talker," Annie turned around and kissed her long and hard. "How lucky does

that make me?"

From inside Audrey and Boden looked on but since Bebo still had her back to them they didn't see much. "Think her argument is as persuasive as yours?" Audrey asked Boden.

"Yes I remember how reluctant you were to marry me." She slapped her wife softly on the butt. "What is it about you short blondes that makes us so crazy?" The walk Annie had done for Bebo was the only part of the alone time they had caught. "And does someone in that temple show you how to walk in this outfit?" She pulled on the strap of Audrey's top.

"If I told you that I'd have to exile you to the Grazel desert, my love." She turned away from the window and kissed Boden just above her heart. "And I do believe her words will put to rest any worries Annie has, which I'm sure are none. She's about to learn something I did a very long time ago."

"What's that, beautiful?"

"That along with all the lessons on what to do with things that are sharp and pointy, there's someone in the Argase Forest that teaches you tough warrior types to be the biggest romantic fools on the planet." She looked over her shoulder one last time. "Our cub is all grown up, my love, and while I'm sorry that our time as the center of her world has come to an end, I'm proud of the job we've done. She is my greatest wish aside from you because she is so much like you."

"The sprout will be a good mate only because she has a lot of her mama in her. She is the balance of us both, love, and now comes the reward for all our hard work."

"Grandchildren," Audrey said.

"Grandchildren," Boden echoed.

[Concluded in Chapter 3](#)

Comments to: terrali20@yahoo.com

[Ali Vali's Scrolls](#)
[Main Page](#)

~ Amazonia ~
~ Book 2 ~
by Ali Vali

Disclaimers: [See Part 1](#)

Vows and Traditions

Chapter 3

The same area in the capital where the competition winner was crowned every year was again full of people from all the provinces dressed in their traditional leathers. This time most of them had flowers in their hands, but the same festive atmosphere prevailed. At the front, the royal dais had been erected and there were fire pits with food being prepared in a multitude of locations throughout the grounds.

All of the protocol had been met and the day that Annie and Bebo had been anticipating had arrived. Along with the Amazons, there were dignitaries from visiting nations on hand to witness the celebration of the joining. It had been over twenty years since the island had thrown such a large party and everyone was looking forward to what promised to be another day to remember in Amazonian history.

"I hope large crowds don't make you nervous," Reggie said. She was staring out the palace window of the room where Annie was getting ready.

The leathers that had been made especially for her for this day paid homage to both the provinces of Argase and Leon since that was where both sides of her family were from. The beads had bits from all four provinces to honor all of Amazonia as was custom when marrying into the royal family. The light blue leathers had bits of pale green woven through the skirt and fit her in a way that accentuated her figure in the best possible ways. It might not have been what she imagined getting married in, but after the time she'd spent on the island, it felt right.

"If you don't shut up, I'm going to get nervous," Annie said.

"Reggie, could you get away from the window," Dothan said. She was fixing Annie's hair, the final thing to be done before they had to leave. She had added braids with feathers on the end and had combed out the rest. "Do you have any more questions about anything?" she asked Annie.

"I think I'll remember everything, but just poke me if I forget anything."

She stood up when her mother was finished and turned to face them. With the outfit and the armband with the royal crest embossed on the medallion at the center, Annie looked very much like a future ruler of the Amazons. When Reggie and Dothan, as well as all the servants in attendance bowed, she could feel the heat of the blush on her face.

"Highness, you look beautiful," Dothan said.

"Thanks, mom. If I look halfway decent, there's less chance of her turning me down. Right?" Everyone laughed knowing it was Annie's way of settling the nerves she did have.

"Highness, whenever you're ready," Kip said, she bowed along with Rita Mockbee who would

be taking over as the head of Annie's security detail when Kip transferred back to Audrey.

Rita had been Bebo's choice after they'd returned from their mission in the Conger. With Annie, Rita would have more time at home with her partner Jeanne and the new baby Rita had adopted in the middle of the jungle when rebels had killed the child's mother. Both were wearing the dark blue leathers that were the custom for royal guards.

They rode in silence in a horse drawn carriage to the starting point of Annie's walk. Once they arrived, Annie took one last deep breath before taking the hand of the captain of her royal guards stepping out into the waning light of sunset. Torches had been lit along her path and it felt as if they warmed the ground under her bare feet.

When Emelda stepped up to the dais and put up her hand, the din of conversation stopped so suddenly that it seemed surreal to Annie. Emelda's priestess robes were so white that they glowed in the soft lighting and she smiled for her granddaughter before beginning. It was like a wish come true to marry Bebo to someone Emelda was sure would be a perfect wife. "What is your name, child?" she asked of Annie.

"I am Annie Petkus of the house of Cyr. I am daughter of Dothan, granddaughter of Emelda Petkus, and Erica and Teri Cyr, and I am a daughter of Amazonia." Her voice was clear and was heard by everyone there it was so quiet.

"What have you to say to your sisters?"

"I wish to join with Princess Bebo of Leon, daughter of Queen Audrey and Consort Boden, with the blessings of my sisters and the goddess."

From another spot in the crowd, Bebo started for the dais with her parents at her side. Their royal masks were in place and the crowd dropped to their knees as they passed by. It wasn't until they reached Emelda that Annie got a good look at them. Audrey was dressed in leathers similar to Annie's only they were all blue, but Boden and Bebo were identical.

The brown blended well with their tanned skin and the swords strapped to their backs gave them an air of authority. Vests made of braided leather fit their muscular forms in a way that could only be described as sexy, and instead of skirts they wore leather pants of the same material. Like her and her family standing behind her the royal family was barefoot.

When they reached the dais, they removed their masks and put them next to one that stood alone that Annie would soon claim as her own. Annie came close to breaking with tradition when Bebo turned around and smiled in her direction. The way Bebo's eyes softened spoke of the love that grew between them every day.

"Who speaks for her?" asked Emelda, not coming close to breaking the spell.

Reggie and Dothan stepped up to Annie's side. "I, Dothan Petkus of the house of Cyr."

"And I, Regina Petkus of the house of Cyr."

Emelda held her hands up again and turned slowly as if looking at everyone in the crowd. "You have heard our sister Annie and her family. Does anyone find her unworthy of sharing the throne?" The silence prevailed as Audrey, Boden and Bebo stepped up to join Emelda.

"Then come forward, my child, and claim that which is yours," Audrey said holding her hand out to Annie.

From her first step, the flowers the people had brought were thrown into the path she was walking. Half way through, Bebo descended the steps of the dais, which wasn't part of tradition but she didn't care. She wanted to greet her future bride on equal ground and not appear to be lording over her. When Annie was close enough, Bebo held out her hand, which was readily accepted.

"I give you my daughter's hand," Dothan said with a smile, her hand over their two. "Do you give me your word of your protection for her?"

"I give you my word and my vow. Your daughter as well as your family will never know harm as long as my heart beats. I will love her and strive for her happiness."

"A mother can ask for no more in a match for her child." She squeezed their hands before stepping back with Reggie. The crowd bowed their heads again as Bebo walked Annie up the stairs to stand before Emelda.

"In the beginning, our people were lead here by Queen Selene. She joined the nomadic tribes of the Amazons into one strong nation and with the help of the goddess Artemis Amazonia became our home. Together we have raised families, built homes and fought for right and just causes when it was necessary." Emelda's voice rang over the crowd. "Today we continue that walk as we welcome the next in line to lead our people."

She took a minute before calling for quiet when a spontaneous cheer came from the crowd. "Bebo, state your intentions for Annie."

"All my life I've been training and learning all I can, because like my mother Queen Audrey, I want to be a good and fair leader of my sisters. She has given me guidance when I needed it and my desire to emulate her wisdom makes me strive to never stop learning." She bowed her head in her mother's direction. "My mother Boden has taught me the importance of being strong with my sword when the occasion calls for it, and being steadfast with my words when a more peaceful means is necessary. But as important as all those lessons were, there is one I cherish above all else. From them I learned what it is to love unconditionally and what it means to be a good mate."

She took Annie's hands into hers and kissed each one before going on. "No matter what I achieve in battle, or accolades I win when it's my time to lead, the one thing in my life I'll hold most dear is your love." Annie's eyes welled with tears as Bebo dropped to one knee, pulled out her sword

and laid it at her feet. "I promise to protect you, to honor you, take care of you, and love you for the rest of my life." When she stood again, Bebo took Annie's hands and finished her vows. "In you I entrust my heart, my life, my dreams and my hopes. I know that in doing so I will know love."

When Bebo finished, Emelda turned to Annie. "Annie, state your intentions for Bebo."

"Looking back now, I realize I fell in love with you the instant you walked into my life and told the story of Larissa. Only then, my heart knew what my head did not. I grew up listening to what others thought honor and strength were, but until you I had no idea what those words truly meant." She took hold of Bebo's left hand and accepted something from Reggie. This wasn't Amazon tradition but it was something she wanted to do for Bebo. "I wish more than anything that I had grown up here. Then maybe I'd have a lifetime of memories of you, but that wasn't my fate. Where I did grow up though, we have a custom I want to share with you today."

With Bebo's left hand firmly in her right, Annie showed her what she was talking about. The simple gold band would be the sign, just like her betrothal bracelet, that Bebo could look at everyday and know how much she was loved. "Let this ring be a sign of my love and commitment, that I will love you, honor you and take care of you for the rest of my life." She slipped it into place then kissed Bebo's knuckles. "I have waited for you all my life, and I can't wait to share the rest of my days with you."

Emelda placed her hand on theirs and said, "I declare you joined. May the goddess look over you until you are free to walk the scared lands after long and prosperous lives." She said softly for only them to hear then she looked up at the crowd and yelled. "Amazonia, here is your future. Embrace them well and help them carry us in peace and pride. The princesses Bebo and Annie."

It could only be described as a roar, but Annie didn't hear any of it as Bebo lowered her head and kissed her. There would be no more chaperones and not another sunrise would come without Bebo at her side.

"I love you," Annie said when they broke apart. "Thank you for this day. You have fulfilled every fantasy of any fairytales I could've have imagined."

"Oh, highness, I'm going to try my best to make everyday a fantasy for you. Let's get these people interested in this party so I can carry you out of here as soon as possible."

"Just one more thing, Bebo," Emelda said when their heads came apart.

Bebo nodded and helped Annie on with her mask before putting hers back on. When they were in place they turned to the crowd and raised their joined hands. The same intensity of cries rose again as well as the sound of chobos being slammed together.

With the ceremony now over, everyone broke into groups making the area a sea of color as the different provinces scattered to visit old friends and family. There were platforms in varying heights loaded with cushions, drink and candles so everyone could get comfortable and spend the

night if that's what they wished. Amazonia's population had swelled through the years, as had their love of a good time. It didn't matter that almost everyone on the island was in attendance; there would be enough food and spirits to satisfy the over ten acres of people.

"Need any advice for tonight?" Reggie asked Bebo, taking a seat to her left. Bebo was reclined back into a pile of cushions with Annie pressed up against her side.

"Do I look like someone who would need advice for their wedding night?" Bebo raised a brow making Annie laugh.

The only thing better than having Bebo in her life, was the fact that her sister and mother loved her. After all she'd been through with Titus, having Reggie support her relationship was something she didn't realize she really wanted, as well as needed from her sister. Not that she felt a compulsion to talk about Bebo, but if she wanted advice on something it was nice knowing she had someone to confide in whose first words wouldn't be how much she disliked the person.

"Trust me, Reg, I'm more than sure that she'll do great," Annie said. She tilted her head to the side to give Bebo more room to kiss her neck since her answer had rewarded her with Bebo's lips.

"Do you need any advice for tonight?" Bebo asked Reggie in return with a big smile. "I noticed you came without a date."

"I had too much going on, smartass." Reggie reclined against Bebo's legs and stuck her tongue out at her. "I've been working all this time, learning all this stuff, so I haven't had a chance to meet anyone yet."

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to tease you, and thanks for all you did to help Annie out. How about if we agree that I owe you one?"

After the party had gotten started in earnest, a great bonfire was lit at the center of the space. The drums had started and there were numerous women already starting the dances that had been done for hundreds of years. Reggie watched as they moved sensually around the flames.

"Can I get a quick lesson?" she asked Bebo.

"Sure you can." Bebo called her guard Steph up to the dais and whispered something into her ear that made her turn in Reggie's direction before looking back at Bebo. It hadn't escaped her notice how Steph's eyes would linger on Reggie whenever the brunette was around. "Steph will be happy to show you some steps."

Reggie took Steph's hand and was about to make her way down the dais when she turned around and smiled at Bebo. "Remember how you owed me one?"

"Uh huh," Bebo said.

"Let's just say we're even."

She and Annie watched them make their way to the fire, and Annie shivered a bit when Bebo laughed softly in her ear. "Is she buff enough or do I have to keep looking?"

"Planning to leave me already?" Annie joked back.

"I was talking about for Reggie, smart girl. I do pay attention and that's what I believe she ordered the night I came to visit. And from the way she's eying Steph, I can see there's a mutual attraction."

With Steph's hands on her hips, Reggie started to sway to the beat then followed her partner fairly well for a first timer. "I think you did rather well. At this rate, she may have a fire going all the time."

"Highness, would you like something to eat?" asked one of the servers.

"Thank you, yes." Annie accepted the plate and placed it on Bebo's legs. More than a few people looked on as she fed Bebo then took a few bites herself.

Bebo held her left hand up and opened her fingers to get a better look at her new ring. "Thank you for this, I love it."

"I know you probably won't be able to wear it all the time but I wanted you to have it."

"I'll wear it always don't worry about that."

"Good," Annie said as she placed a small sandwich in Bebo's mouth. "After taking some walks around here with you, I want you to look at your finger when you see some pretty girl visually taking your clothes off. Who knew I'd be the jealous type?"

Bebo brought her hand up to the side of Annie's face and kissed her until she felt Annie just fall into her forgetting the food, the crowd and everything else. In the distance the slamming of chobos together along with some encouraging hollers could be heard. Anyone could plainly see this wasn't an arrangement like other royal pairings from around the world; these were two people very much in love.

"I'd much rather be somewhere that affords us the opportunity for you to actually take my clothes off," Bebo said when their lips came apart.

"If you want to do that now, you're going to have to carry me out of here, because I don't think I could walk."

"Your wish is my command, highness." Bebo put the plate of food aside and got to her knees. With no difficulty she scooped Annie into her arms and stood up. The move really brought a response from the crowd prompting her to kiss Annie again. "Unless you'd like to stay longer,

there's a room in the palace that's waiting for us."

"Do you think people would mind if we left early?"

"I think they're shocked we've stayed this long." Bebo carried her to the waiting car close by winking to her mothers before she joined Annie inside.

The room Annie had been using in the palace had candles burning inside as well as a spread of food from the reception. As they made their way to the door, Bebo stopped well short of it and looked at all the guards one at a time. Rita was there as Annie's security and Max was there with her guards.

"If anyone thinks of disturbing us tonight, I promise their spleen will be hanging on the gate by morning so this is as far as you go." Bebo put Annie down to give the order, hearing her laugh from behind her as she finished.

"As you wish," Max said.

"Just in case give it another twenty feet or so," Bebo said before picking Annie up again. She didn't put her down again until they were behind the closed door and finally alone.

"I want to say something before we start our night," Annie said. It was almost as if a collage had started in her mind, the pictures of her life clicked through her head.

Growing up on army bases around the world, she didn't have many close friends, really only Reggie counted in that category, and so she turned to books to fill any void. She could remember vividly sitting in quiet places reading about heroes who fought for right, and the noble lives they led. When she'd met Titus none of the feelings those books conjured up for her ever became a reality. But then she'd met Bebo and she felt like someone had handed her the best novel ever written.

An Amazon princess who was tall, strong and had a good heart was the best lead character for any book anyone had ever thought to write. The fact Bebo wasn't fictional and she loved her as fiercely as she did only made her want to keep turning the pages to find out what happened next. It was a feeling she thought would take several lifetimes to squelch if ever.

"Thank you for accepting the assignment your mother gave you that brought you into my life. Until you, I never thought it possible to love someone so much. I promise you that I'll do whatever it takes to take care of you and to love you in return so that your heart never has reason to feel pain. I know that sounds corny, but I never did think that someone like you really existed. I'm standing here and it just all feels like a dream."

"Thank you for saying that, but you have nothing to prove to me or anyone else. I know exactly how you feel about me every time your eyes meet mine. They can see right into my heart, which

now belongs to you." She kissed Annie's forehead and went through her own memories. "Your grandmother Emelda always told me in our time together that I would find what I was looking for if I only had faith in what I knew. When I met you, I realized two things."

"What's that, my love?"

"That what I thought I knew didn't amount to a whole lot, and I would never be happy without you. Like I told you when we said our vows, I thought I knew what love was by watching my mothers, but I was wrong. What we have together is something that is ours alone."

"Thanks for indulging my sappy side, honey." Annie then reached up and undid the buckle that held Bebo's sword to her back, lowering it carefully to the floor. Then she loosened the ties of the leather vest until it hung open showing a naked chest. She pressed her hands flat on Bebo's stomach before sliding them out just far enough so that when she moved them up she was able to push the garment off to join the weapon on the floor.

"I could come just standing here looking at you in those leather pants with nothing else on," she said when she stepped back and just stood there admiring her handy work.

"But you're not going to." Bebo reached and took out the pin that held the top she was wearing together. When it came apart, she smiled as she was greeted by two very alert pink nipples. "Tonight I'm going to touch you," moving behind her, Bebo took off the top and tossed it behind her. "I'm going to love you," she pulled Annie to her and cupped her breasts. "Until you beg me to stop." With a quick pull the skirt dropped to Annie's feet leaving her in white silk underwear.

"Beg you to stop?" She turned around and pulled Bebo to the bed by the waistband of her pants. They didn't come off until Annie was seated on the bed with Bebo standing in front of her. Her eyes made a slow journey from Bebo's eyes down to her feet; the lazy smile the sign of just how pleasant that trip had been. "I think not."

If Bebo had thought to make a comeback to that, the possibility fled as Annie opened her up and sucked her in sending her brain into preservation mode just to keep her on her feet. Bebo felt like she was on overload. The only explanation she could come up with for the land speed record breaking orgasm was the long days of chaste kisses and handholding.

Her eyes opened and she looked down at her hand, her fingers buried in Annie's hair. "I believe that's what's called a frontal assault."

"I had to, baby, it felt like you were about to rattle apart if I didn't let loose some of that steam." She laughed when her underwear was torn off and thrown across the room.

They went from laughing to sighing when Bebo joined her on the bed and lay completely on top of her, holding her weight off by her elbows. It had been too long for both of them since they were together like this.

Bebo looked at her and ran her finger over her pale brows. "I don't think there has ever been a

more beautiful bride in this room." She kissed her in a way that was slow but meant to start a fire in Annie. Their tongues met but there was no fight for dominance. "I love you, Annie of Leon."

"Then show me."

It was a whisper but Bebo took it as a direct order. She bent her head down and took Annie's right nipple into her mouth and sucked it to a hard point before moving to the other one and giving it the same treatment. Persistent hands held her head in place as Annie spread her legs for her giving her plenty of room.

"Show me, baby," she said again, sounding so breathy it seemed as if she'd run a marathon.

There was so much wetness that Bebo's fingers went in easily until they were buried deep inside her making Annie gasp at how good it felt. She was glad that for a long moment Bebo didn't move as if enjoying it as much as she was.

"Make me yours," Annie said, as she looked deep into Bebo's eyes. It was all the encouragement Bebo needed. She took her all in, the way Annie's hips were moving coming up to meet her fingers, how the heels of her feet felt pressed up against her back, and how much love she found in those brilliant green eyes. They stayed open until Annie couldn't hold back anymore and arched into her taking all that Bebo was giving her.

When it was over, Bebo moved off of her and took Annie in her arms. She ran her hand along Annie's back until she reached the curve of her backside then turned and went back up. "You know this night it's tradition for us to stay in here, but we don't have to spend our entire honeymoon here. Is there someplace else you'd like to go? With all that we had to do to get here I didn't get the opportunity to ask."

Annie looked up from her human pillow and smiled. "It should take about three days before I'm willing to let you out of this room, but there is one place I'd like to go."

"Name it and we're there."

One of the things she and Audrey had talked about was the small house the royal family owned on a very long stretch of deserted beach. It wasn't very fancy and had been left mostly the way it was when it was built by one of the royals way back when. The Queen had shared one special memory with her that even Bebo didn't know. The place on the beach with no electricity and just the bare essentials, one of them being a big bed, was where Bebo had been conceived.

"Ah, you've been talking to my mother haven't you?" asked Bebo when she voiced her request.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because it's the only place on the island, that unless an attack comes from the water, we can station the guards about a mile away."

Annie lifted herself up and straddled Bebo's waist. "Me alone with you someplace where the world has to wait until I'm done with you. That does sound like a hardship your mother shouldn't have told me about."

"Done with me huh? We do have responsibilities so Queen Audrey might come looking for you before that happens." Bebo pulled her down and kissed her. "At least I'm hoping we don't ever get to the point where you're done with me."

"Not on your life, warrior mine. We have nights to share, babies to make and a life to live happily ever after."

For the next week that is exactly what they embarked upon. Their time was spent telling themselves stories of their childhoods wanting to know everything about each other they didn't already, and making love wherever the mood struck them. In the evenings they sat together on the beach watching the sun dip into the water leaving them with only the fire behind them for light.

Annie, who usually needed a hard shove to wake up, found new wonder in the dawn. In Bebo's arms it was the first time she could remember waking up way before the sun every morning just to watch her partner sleep. In the lines of Bebo's face she had found the meaning of happiness, and in her arms she'd found salvation for her heart.

She had what most people searched all their lives for and very few actually found. Bebo was loving as well as playful and tried to bring that out in Annie. For someone who'd spent most of her time trying to keep Reggie and herself out of trouble, this was a welcomed change since Bebo more than encouraged her mischievous side out to play.

"Want to go for a swim?" Bebo asked.

"I left my suit back at the house," Annie had her head in Bebo's lap and gazed teasingly up at her.

"Did you? Want me to run and get it for you?" With practiced fingers, Bebo pulled on the tie of the sarong Annie had on. She peeled it open as if she was unwrapping a gift she'd waited all year for.

"That would mean you'd have to leave me here all alone. I don't think that's a very good idea since you did promise Rita that you'd keep an eye on me the whole time."

"It'd take me a minute tops." Bebo gently put Annie's head on the blanket and stood up. She appeared like any other beach vacationer in the world with her shorts and t-shirt. "Or," she brought her hand to her jaw and rubbed it. "I could just," she reached down and pulled Annie to her feet. When she did the cover fell away leaving her naked. "I could keep my promises."

With ease she hoisted a squealing Annie over her shoulder and ran for the water. The teasing

soon turned more interesting when Annie wrapped her legs around Bebo's waist and trusted her to keep them afloat. They had made love like this more than once since their arrival and it felt just as nice when Bebo initiated another round.

"I want you to promise me something," Annie said. They were so close that Bebo felt her lips moving against hers when Annie spoke.

"What?"

"I want your vow that when you're ready to start our family we come back here to do it."

"Why?"

"Honey, you really need to keep that stream of conversation of yours to a minimum," Annie joked.

"Come on tell me."

"Because I want most of all the things your mothers have found in this world, especially Audrey."

Bebo stopped to kiss her, finding those lips too tempting to pass on. "I'm almost afraid to ask, but what are you talking about?"

"Your mother found a warrior, pure of heart, true to her convictions, fierce in her fidelity and loving of her family. A combination like that makes for a happy life, but it makes for an even better thing to strive for in children. She combined the best of Boden and the best in herself, and because she did, she gave me you."

"I am all yours just incase you were wondering."

"I'm not, because like Boden is with your mother, you're fierce in your fidelity to me. You wouldn't have said those vows to me if you weren't mine." She cupped Bebo's face in her hands and just looked at her. "Being here with you has been the best time in my life so far, and it's taught me so much."

"Tell me," Bebo pulled her impossibly closer.

"You were raised wrapped in tradition. That sometimes isn't a good thing, but it's made you the wonderful person you are. Sharing this time with you has taught me that it's our responsibility that those traditions live on for all the Amazons who will come after us."

They kissed again and Annie smiled against Bebo's lips when she felt the strong legs carrying her out of the water and most probably to bed. "Just so you know you'll never have to do anything alone. I'll be there with you every step of the way."

She bit Bebo's earlobe before continuing, enjoying the shiver it caused. "I know that too, and I'm looking forward to the years that are stretched out before us like a blank canvas waiting to be filled with a multitude of happy memories. I just want to create new life here so that if I'm lucky, I'll be blessed with strong, beautiful girls who'll grow up to be just like the one who stole my heart."

"If I get my wish, those girls will be beautiful all right, just like their mother who will show them the strength that comes from giving in when they are found." Bebo laid her gently down on the bed and dropped to her knees. "I give you my word that when you're ready, we'll come back here and start our family just like my mothers did."

"You knew? But your mom said she never told you." Annie appeared shocked at the disclosure.

"She didn't, the big romantic mush pile she married did. I remember the tears that fell down her face when she told it too." She took Annie's hand into hers and kissed each palm. "Mama often forgets that mom loves to tell stories just as much as she does. Although, I've only known her to do it with me."

"That's because she was teaching you how to be a good spouse."

"Maybe, but I think that it's because she feels just as deeply and is just as sentimental as her Queen. There are days you remember forever she said and that was definitely one of them."

"What else did she teach you about being a good spouse?" Annie asked with a sexy smile on her lips.

"I'm on my knees aren't I, highness. Your wish will be my pleasure to carry out."

"My wish is you," Annie said, her eyes suddenly filling with tears for no reason she could imagine.

"As you are mine," Bebo said softly, her eyes watering just as quickly. She slid in next to Annie and just held her until the overload of emotions passed and they drifted off to sleep.

Outside the waves came in with the rolling tide. They were one of the two constant and never changing things on the island. The other was love. It had been shared by many others before them just as deep and heartfelt as Annie and Bebo, but because they had found their true other half, it assured that it was one Amazonian tradition that would be kept alive for another generation.

The End

Comments to: terrali20@yahoo.com
