

Chapter One

Prince Grayson sat in stunned silence as he looked at his father, King Falen. He couldn't have heard him right. Was he really no longer betrothed to Angeline? Grayson turned his eyes towards his three older brothers. They all had their heads bent looking at the floor. All his brothers had the hereditary light brown hair and dark blue eyes of the Macarin monarchy. The three older brothers stood just over six feet.

All four sons had a warrior built muscular frame and the good looks of the Macarin line. Grayson differed only in that he had dark silver gray eyes, dark brown hair and he stood exactly at six feet. Grayson continued to stare at them. Ashton, his eldest brother and Crown Prince, Mason, his next eldest brother and then Layton were all carbon copies of his father. They never seemed to have an independent thought for themselves. They lived and breathed duty to the kingdom.

Grayson sat facing his father as King Falen ran a hand through his graying, light brown hair. His father's dark blue eyes seemed to be looking through him. Grayson could imagine what his father was thinking. He was his father's problem child. He was twenty years old and his father kept a tight rein on him because he wasn't manageable like his brothers. He out shone his brothers in many ways. He could best them and the finest fighters of the King's Guard in sword, knife, or fistfight. He had worked hard and earned that distinction. He knew that his father was proud of his accomplishments but at the same time it worried his father because he said Grayson's abilities made him even harder to handle.

King Falen looked over at his son. "I have betrothed each of you boys to princesses of neighboring kingdoms. As you know your oldest brother, Ashton, the next king of Macarin, is betrothed to the daughter of King Albert who rules the largest kingdom adjacent to ours. Mason

and Layton, you are betrothed to daughters of the next sized kingdoms which all are equal in size. The next kingdom is smaller. Due to the fact that Mason's betrothed is in disgrace she is no longer acceptable. Grayson, since you are not yet twenty-one and your betrothal is not official until then, it leaves us with one option. Mason is the second born son. You are the fourth born. Mason's betrothed must be the daughter of the bigger kingdom. I can't take Layton's betrothed because he is over twenty-one and his betrothal is official. Therefore, I have to take yours and give her to Mason. Your betrothed will be a princess from a smaller kingdom. You have to understand, Grayson, by marrying a princess from another kingdom it connects us to them. It is a strategic move for the safety and security of our home as well as theirs."

Grayson gasped at his father in astonishment. "Angeline was promised to me when we were children. I have grown up with her. I have been in love with her for as long as I can remember." Grayson turned cold, hard eyes on Mason. "I have bedded her Mason! Are you going to marry a woman your own brother has slept with?" Mason averted his eyes and dropped his head. Grayson swung his gaze back to his father. "How could you do such a thing?"

King Falen sighed. "Grayson, it is set. I have talked to Angeline and her father, King Vance. They have both signed the betrothal."

"I don't believe it! I was just with Angeline last night!"

"What?" Mason's eyes glowed with anger. "You are to stay away from her. I feel for you my brother, I do, but she is promised to me now. Angeline knew of this. She signed the agreement yesterday. She had no right!"

King Falen lifted up his hand. "Guardsmen, please escort in King Vance and his daughter, Princess Angeline."

Grayson stared in bewilderment when Angeline and her father entered King Falen's private audience chamber. Angeline glanced at Grayson as she walked by him with sad, regretful, but resigned eyes.

King Vance and Angeline sat in cushioned chairs and then King Vance turned towards Grayson. "I am sure your father has spoken to you and that is why we have been invited in. I'm sorry but I have a chance to marry my only daughter to the second son of the king of the largest kingdom. It is regrettable but the second son is ranked higher than the fourth son." Grayson glared at King Vance who shook his head in determination and regret. "I am truly sorry. I have grown quite fond of you over the years. I must admit though that I was quite irate when I found out you were sleeping with my daughter. Given the nature of your relationship with my daughter, I fully expected you to be the one she would marry. I hope now the situation has changed that Prince Mason can forgive my daughter's indiscretion. Please understand Prince Grayson I have to look to my kingdom's welfare first and so does Angeline."

Grayson turned pleading eyes to Angeline. She was so much a part of his existence. He gazed at her yellow hair, styled with ringlets that fell down her back and to the side of her face and at her lovely sky blue eyes. "Tell me you didn't agree to this. Tell me you are not going to wed my brother!"

Angeline sat straight and a tear slid down her face. "I have no choice Grayson. My father has commanded me to do this. The Kingdom of Akron demands it as well."

Grayson rose from his chair rage pouring out. "You were with me last night! You told me that you and your father had come for a visit! You told me nothing of this! I can't believe you would agree to such a thing!"

Angeline's tears flowed fully now. "I knew that our time was over. I wanted to be with you and hold you one last time. I knew your father and brothers would be talking to you today."

King Vance looked at his daughter and scowled. "Don't shame yourself girl! I know how you feel about Grayson but you are Mason's now!"

Grayson sent a cold stare towards Mason. "How could you agree to this? You know how I feel about her! How could you marry a woman that your own brother is in love with?"

Anguish entered Mason's eyes. "I don't have a choice either Grayson. Surely, you see that. I don't like the fact that you have bedded my future wife. It is something that I will never forget. But you are a few months from the age of majority. There was no other way for this to work out. I am truly sorry. My heart is breaking for you. I knew you would take this hard. But still, I must ask you stay away from Angeline."

Mason regarded Angeline. "How could you have bedded him after you signed the agreement? You are to stay away from Grayson, and you had better pray you didn't conceive last night. I won't take the disgrace of another bride very well, especially if the bride is carrying my brother's child! I don't blame Grayson for last night Angeline because he didn't know of this, but you knew!"

Mason looked back to Grayson. "I don't know what to say to make this better. We are royals. You know we have no choice. Please, forgive us. This wasn't done to intentionally hurt you."

Grayson stepped forward and slammed a hard fist to Mason's jaw. Mason staggered back, stunned.

King Falen shouted, "Ashton, Layton, subdue your brother and put him back in his chair!"

They took a step towards Grayson, but he swung, hitting Ashton and at the same time, he kicked out catching Layton in his midsection doubling him over. Grayson followed this with a hit to Layton's back sending him to the floor.

King Falen called, "Guards!" Several guardsmen rushed into the room. "Subdue Prince Grayson, put him in a chair, and hold him there!"

Grayson knew his father would call in the guardsmen so he wasn't surprised at the command. He whirled to meet the guards. He swung both fists connecting with faces. He kicked out repeatedly knocking guards away. Ashton and Layton stood and came after Grayson grabbing him from behind. He fought them and just as he was about to break free, the guardsmen took hold of him again. The group dragged Grayson, kicking and screaming, to a chair, and shoved him into it.

King Falen bellowed at Grayson. "If you don't sit still, I will have you tied to that chair!"

Grayson glanced at his father in disbelief and then he swung his gaze to everyone. "How could any of you agree to this?" Grayson looked to King Falen and said, "You are my father! How could you?" Grayson turned to Angeline and his heart broke. "I love you! I thought you loved me. You could have refused Mason. If you truly loved me, you would have. You would have told them you belonged to me as I belong to you."

Angeline stood and with tears streaming, ran from the room. King Vance stood. "I am truly sorry son. Hate me if you wish, but please forgive Angeline. She knows her duty and she must fulfill it. I am sorry Prince Grayson, but you must stay away from her. The agreement is official. There is no going back now. She is to marry Prince Mason. We must all try to make this as painless as possible."

Grayson tried to jerk free of his brothers and the guardsmen's hold. All he wanted to do now was get his hands around King Vance's throat. He glared at King Vance as the King left the room and then he turned to his father. "None of your reasons for doing this can justify what you have done!" Grayson looked to Mason. "You and Angeline sicken me!"

King Falen shouted, "That's enough Grayson! Your brother is doing what is required of him, as all royals should do! That is a lesson you failed to learn growing up as a child! You have always wanted to do things your way! You have never looked to the kingdom first!" King Falen's voice softened when tears welled in Grayson's eyes. "I'm sorry son. I know this is painful but it's the way of life of royals and you should know this. You have to let Angeline go. You will marry another and you will give me grandchildren to bounce on my knee."

King Falen strode around his desk and went up to Grayson putting his hands on his shoulders. Grayson stiffened. "It will be all right Grayson. You will see son that this will all work out." He walked back around to his desk. "Let him go."

The men released Grayson and stepped back. He stood and peered at Ashton, Layton and then he looked to his father. His last glance was a murderous look to Mason.

King Falen cleared his throat. "Grayson go to your chambers and stay there until you calm down. I don't want you causing trouble."

Grayson glared at his father and moved towards the door. "I mean it Grayson! You are a prince and you will live by royal rules!"

"Go to Hades!" Grayson turned and walked out.

Grayson knew he shocked his father with his outburst. He always spoke his mind but he had never outwardly disrespected his father. He couldn't help wondering if his father would

realize what a terrible mistake, he had made. He had driven a huge wedge between him and Mason.

Grayson tramped from his father's chambers and headed towards his own. His heart had broken. Misery and pain tore through him. How could his father, brother and the woman he loved do this to him and then pass it off as a royal duty?

He passed portraits of past royals of Macarin Kingdom hanging on the wall. It wasn't time to light the candles in the chandeliers above him because it was just before noon. These were flittering thoughts. He entered his chambers and glanced around him. A huge hearth was on the center wall. Settees and cushioned chairs flanked the room with small tables beside each. He gazed at the wide table set to the back of the room. He looked to his right to his bedchamber door. These were his private chambers but suddenly the rooms were closing in on him. He knew what he had to do. He would not stay here and be a part of this. Before he could move towards his bedchamber, the door to his left opened and his manservant stepped out of the valet's room.

"Is there anything I can get for you Prince Grayson?"

Grayson regarded his manservant. He thought the ebony skinned man had the kindest face he had ever seen and the friendliest spirit. But he knew there was a lot more to Jewel than he appeared.

Grayson smiled when he remembered the first time they had met. He had gone to the town of Palace City, which was only a morning's ride from the palace. He had been walking the street looking through shop windows when he sensed someone following him. He ordered the guardsmen with him to disperse. He slipped into a side street to wait and when the person came into view, he grasped him by the arm. Jewel just smiled and said, "It's about time you stopped and let me catch up with you."

Grayson was astonished again when Jewel introduced himself and said he was his new manservant. Grayson's first thought, was how did he know he needed a manservant? His manservant had just left that morning. His family unexpectedly called him home. Word hadn't even gotten out he was looking for a replacement. When he asked Jewel about that, he had just smiled and said, "It is no matter how I know, I just know." Jewel was a curious fellow but Grayson instantly liked him. He had been his manservant for over a year now but most importantly, he was his best friend.

Jewel walked up to Grayson. "I am sorry Prince Grayson. I truly am."

Grayson peered at Jewel. He would have been surprised if Jewel hadn't amazed him from the beginning with this insight. Jewel always seemed to know what was going on with him. He had long ago stopped being surprised by it. Every time he had questioned Jewel on how he could know so much, he always got the same answer. "It is no matter how I know, I just know."

"I'm shocked Jewel. I-I can't believe this has happened. How could they have done such a thing? How could Angeline have agreed to this? And, Mason is my brother. How can he live with himself? I'm going out for awhile."

Grayson walked into his bedchamber and picked up his sword belt and knife from a small table. He slid his twin daggers in his boots. He also grabbed his gold handled sword. The four jewels and lion cubs on the handle depicted he was the fourth son. Grayson slipped the fine blade in his sheath and then picked out a cloak and drew it around his shoulders, tying it off. He packed a couple of changes of clothes and then bagged some coins dropping them into a pocket.

"Shall I expect you back later this afternoon Prince Grayson?" Jewel asked the question as if he didn't know the answer already.

“I doubt it. I may be gone awhile. I...I just don’t know.” Grayson walked by Jewel and headed for his chamber door. “If there is anywhere you would like to go or anything you would like to do, now would be a good time. Take care of yourself.”

“Prince Grayson there is something important I wish to speak with you about. Would you please reconsider leaving? If you would wait, I could be ready in just a few minutes to show you what I mean.”

“I’m sorry. I need to be alone. Whatever it is will have to wait.” Grayson closed his chamber’s door behind him.

Grayson descended the spiraling staircase and peered around his home. The wood on the staircase shined. Luxury was everywhere. Ornate statues decorated the hallway. Grayson made his way to the main doors and stepped into the foyer. Settees and cushioned chairs were set around for visitor’s comfort. Guardsmen dressed in the red jackets of the king’s guard stood at the doors and bowed as they opened a door. Grayson stepped outside to a glorious fall morning but his heart couldn’t appreciate it.

Shrubs and trees lined the drive. He traversed among them taking a short cut to the king’s stable. Grayson found his chestnut horse, Rusty, amongst the stabled horses. A boy came up to offer to saddle Rusty for him but he refused and soon he had him ready. He rode out of the stables towards the front gate.

Grayson glanced at the guardsmen at the gate and then he looked up at the tower. “Open the gate and let down the drawbridge.”

“Where’s your guard, Prince Grayson? Your father has given orders that his sons always have an escort when leaving the palace.”

“I’m sure they will be catching up soon, guardsman. I’m telling you now to open the gate and let down the bridge!” When the guardsman hesitated, Grayson yelled, “Now!”

The guardsman appeared a little nervous but Grayson heard the drawbridge lowering. He turned towards the guardsman at the gate. “Open it!” To Grayson’s relief, the gates swung open and he rode away from the palace. He stopped to look back at the impenetrable fortress. Although he admired the red brick of the palace, the huge towers, and the high, thick brick outer walls, the place no longer felt like home.

A month passed as he traveled from town to town, taking his time. This was the longest time he had ever been away from the palace alone. He had been gone longer on different occasions but he was always with his brothers or his father and guardsmen always accompanied them. If he wasn’t with them, he was with his two uncles, his father’s brothers, Prince Thomas, the second born son, therefore, the Commander of the King’s Armies and his uncle, Prince Ramos, the second in command. As soon as Prince Thomas retired that position would go to Mason and as soon as Prince Ramos retired that position would go to Layton. A position would be made for him as third in command. In truth, the monarchy didn’t know what to do with a fourth born son of a king.

They knew better what to do with Prince Thomas and Prince Ramos’ children. Prince Thomas’ daughters’ betrothal was to a high birth prince of a large kingdom and his two sons had already taken high-ranking positions in the King’s Guard. As soon as their father retired, they would be advisors to Mason, Layton and himself. Prince Ramos’ two daughter’s betrothals were to low birth princes of neighboring small kingdoms. His aunt, his father’s sister, was married to a king.

Traveling around with his father, brothers, uncles, and cousins he had ridden over all of the Macarin Kingdom while growing up and he knew every place by heart. King Falen believed in being seen. He wanted the citizens of the kingdom to know their monarchs. Citizens knew Grayson because of that exposure so he didn't try to conceal who he was. He didn't draw attention to himself but he didn't hide from it either. He did draw curious stares when he rode into a town from the citizens that did recognize him because he was alone. He knew they were confused too because he wasn't in his majority yet. He didn't turn twenty-one years for two more months. Legally he was still under King Falen's parental care.

Grayson rode into yet another town in the late afternoon and stopped in front of an inn. He went inside and found a table at the back as citizens gawked at him. He ignored them. A serving wench brought him some ale and he paid her, but she didn't immediately leave.

Grayson had been engaged in some deep thoughts and had not even glanced up at her when she put the ale on the table. He looked up now, annoyed she hadn't left and found a beautiful oval face staring back. Her gaze roamed over Grayson and she smiled. Grayson scrutinized her as well and liked what he saw. She had dark hair that hung a little past her shoulders and blue eyes. She was very shapely with large breasts. The serving wench's smile never wavered and she bit her lip in a subtle invitation. It didn't take Grayson long to make up his mind. Angeline had hurt him. She was going to do the unforgivable. She was going to marry and bed his brother.

Grayson picked up the mug, drank, and then took the wench by the hand. He went to the innkeeper and rented a room for a couple of nights. As soon as the door closed, he brought the wench close and kissed her. His tongue entered her mouth and found hers savoring her response. He moaned against her lips as his hands roamed her body. He backed her up to the bed and then

began to undress her. His hands went to her tunic and pulled it off over her head and then he touched her exposed breasts. He enjoyed the feel of her breasts cupped in his hands.

His hands moved to her skirt. When she was naked, he stepped back and looked at her. Lust grew as his gaze roamed over her. He stared into her eyes to see lust glittering there and then her hands were at his jacket unbuttoning it. Grayson took off his boots and weapons dropping them to the floor. The wench tugged off his jacket and shirt then she helped him out of his breeches. Grayson pulled her close wanting to feel her body next to his and then he lowered her gently to the bed. Their hands caressed each other and Grayson's mouth traveled over her until she squirmed beneath him.

For a moment, a picture of Angeline's naked body flashed in front of his eyes and he wished she were the woman he felt beneath him. No, he wouldn't think of her. It would never be Angeline again. He closed his mind to her and concentrated on the needs of his body.

She grasped his hips and said, "Take me!"

Grayson was more than ready to comply. They moved together until they brought each other to fulfillment. Grayson and the wench groaned out in pleasure when their bodies peaked together in sated gratification. Grayson lay on the wench shuddering from the pleasure of his release. He lifted his head and smiled. "What is your name?"

"Jodie."

"Do you have to go back Jodie or can you stay awhile?"

The wench smiled back. "I can stay Prince Grayson. There is no way the innkeeper will bother us. He wouldn't dare interrupt."

Grayson grinned. "Good. I plan to keep you up here all night then." He did and at dawn, he moved off the wench totally sated. He needed some sleep.

When Jodie heard Grayson's even breathing, she slowly slid from the bed. She reached down and pulled a blanket over him as she smiled sadly. He had been wonderful and very gentle. He looked good and felt so good. Jodie looked towards the door and then she looked back to Prince Grayson. She wanted to warn him but she knew if she did, severe punishment awaited her. A courier had ridden into town two days ago and King Falen's missive was very specific. A tear slid down Jodie's face as she let herself quietly out of the room.

Grayson woke early afternoon and stretched. He rolled over to go back to sleep but his stomach growled from hunger. He never did eat his evening meal. He had also missed breakfast and he was sure it was past noon meal. He tried to go back to sleep but he was too hungry. He finally gave it up, got up, and dressed. He wondered when Jodie had left. He walked down the stairs into the common room and found a table. A different wench took his order.

Grayson glanced around for Jodie. His gaze caught the innkeeper leaving the inn. He looked around again disappointed he didn't see her. He hoped she would be back on duty tonight. He planned to seek her company again.

Stew and fresh baked bread was set before him and Grayson ate hungrily. He had just finished his stew and was eating the last of the bread when three dozen City Guardsmen entered the common room. Grayson lifted his brows at the sight. It was odd that so many City Guardsmen were together, unless they were on a mission. Grayson sat up straight. No it couldn't be. He was almost at the age of majority, surely his father wouldn't be looking for him. He knew

his father would be angry that he left but he wouldn't send after him. Grayson shook his head. No this had to be something else. He picked up his ale and watched as the City Guard made their way towards him. Grayson lowered the mug as the Captain stopped at his table.

The Captain bowed and then said, "Prince Grayson, your father, King Falen, has sent missives throughout the kingdom. He is looking for you. He said that when you were found, we were to take you to the City Guard's Headquarters and hold you in a cell until he arrived. I must ask you, Your Highness, to please allow me to escort you to the City Guard's Headquarters."

"And if I don't?"

"Your father has ordered that the City Guard use whatever force is necessary to get you inside a cell. We are aware of your fighting abilities so I came prepared. I ask you again to please allow me and my comrades to escort you to the City Guards Headquarters."

Grayson peered at the three dozen City Guardsmen. There was no way he could defeat that many men. He had no choice. He drank the last of his ale and then stood. Guardsmen immediately grabbed Grayson pushing him against the common room wall. A dozen guardsmen held him while they took his sword, belt knife, and daggers and then a couple of guardsmen grasped his arms and bound his hands behind him.

"I thought you said you were going to escort me to the City Guard Headquarters. What is this?"

The Captain replied, "We are not going to hurt you Prince Grayson. Your father told us to take precautions with you. As soon as we have you in your cell we will release you." Guardsmen pulled him away from the wall. "Now, please allow me."

The Captain and another guardsman escorted him out of the inn. Jodie stood in the street with a hand held over her mouth as they passed. Her eyes opened wide with apprehension.

Grayson had to walk the length of the town as everyone stared.

They reached the City Guard Headquarters and he was led inside and then down a long hallway to a cell. The Captain opened the cell and they shoved him inside. A guardsman stepped inside just long enough to untie Grayson's hands and then he quickly moved out of the cell, closing the door behind him.

King's Heir - Blurb

Raised from infancy to be ignorant of his birthright and duty, Rayden is caught unawares when eventually forced into his role as king of seventeenth century Ruar. Rayden intends to refuse that unwelcome responsibility, but his most beloved and loyal companions aim to see destiny fulfilled – no matter the cost to comfort, dignity, or liberty.

Book One in a Three Book Series

King's Reign – Blurb (EPIC Awards 2017 Finalist)

Rayden is forced to live a life he never intended. As King of Ruar, he finds it is not easy to side step his responsibilities, there are too many injustices to stamp out. Not only must he strive to help the kingdom, he must face his foes, who are determined to stop him from getting what he desires most, his freedom. When turmoil between the parties escalates, Rayden's fight to forge his own destiny becomes paramount.

(Second Book of Three Book Series)

Fourth Son – Blurb

Twenty-One year old Grayson has been chosen to be the next Jewell and Master of the Green Stone. The Stone imparts power to control the dragons – all the dragons. As Master of the Stone, Grayson will live for 7 centuries. Bonding with the Green Stone is a torturous and necessary process. Grayson fights to escape that bonding torment and he flees from the certain anguish of losing everyone and everything that he loves over the course of 700 years.

Coming Home – Blurb

While Europe faces the ensuing Battle of Waterloo, Gabrielle Anderson travels to her brother's best friend's estate. Lord Marshall Hampton opens his home to her but Gabrielle also wants his love. Gabrielle is determined to show him how she feels, but her time is shortened when Marshall is summoned to the war front. Will Gabrielle win the heart of the only man she has ever loved?

A Christmas Wish – Blurb

Katie Holston, raised in foster homes, wants nothing more than a family to call her own. She meets the man of her dreams in Ian Stokely. Being his five year old son's teacher, she is in a position to

make her dreams come true. Kyle Stokely confides in Katie his greatest wish for Christmas. He wants his widowed father to be happy again. Ian Stokely has a different view than Katie Holston and his son, Kyle. He wishes to be left alone. Can Katie and Kyle convince Ian to live life fully again?