

Power swelled inside Livia Cavalli, tightening her skin. Electricity tingled at her fingertips.

“You will not escape me.” Her eyes narrowed, her gaze focused on the rough waves of the Mediterranean Sea, whipped into a frenzy by the wild winds. Her prisoners were testing their powers.

As if aware of her thoughts, the winds wheeled and raced toward the beach where she stood. They tore at her clothes, ripped the band from her ponytail and tossed her blond hair out behind her. Violence was in the air, restless and searching.

As the Keeper of the Winds, it was her responsibility to keep them in control.

She raised her hands to the stormy seas, and called her own wind.

It blew up around her, cool and playful, powerful and primal. Stronger than anything the wicked *Venti Tempesta* could produce from their jail.

The power ran through her bloodstream, leaving her calm and in control.

Once she'd been weak, powerless to stop those who'd destroyed her world and ruled her life with careless cruelty. She lifted her face to the sky, a cool smile on her lips. Now she held power beyond comprehension and used it to keep mankind safe.

“*Arresto.*” Her wind swept past her and swallowed the biting Tempest breeze. She heard their frenzied whispers on the wind, their curses and screams.

She motioned at the dark clouds building in the sky above. Moments later, the wind dispersed them and left only sunny blue skies hanging over the island.

It wouldn't be long before the powers of the Tempest Winds were strong enough for them to attempt an escape. Livia glanced to the west, to the distinctive silhouette of the Stromboli volcano on the neighboring island. Its eruptions were getting stronger, its primal power feeding her prisoners.

Breathing deep, she let the smell of the sea fill her senses. She hated that the winds restlessness fueled her own. Her emotions were rising to the surface and each time she used her powers, it was a little harder to suppress them.

She turned, glimpsed the terracotta tile roof of her villa and her horse stables. The prison of

the winds.

She would not fail. She'd keep them trapped. It was the duty of the Keeper.

As she caught her hair back into a ponytail, a vibration in her top pocket had her reaching for her cell phone. "Cavalli."

When a smooth masculine voice came through the line, she smiled. "*Ciao*, Luca." But as her boss continued, her smile melted away. "I don't want that man on my island."

She listened to the barrage of Italian on the other end of the phone. The words made her stomach knot, a sensation she wasn't familiar with.

"Luca, you aren't listening to me. I don't like Donovan." Her stomach gave another annoying lurch. Rafe Donovan always upset her equilibrium. Having him on Isola del Vento, with her control already stretched by the winds, would only make it worse. "Now isn't a good time. The Tempest Winds have been testing their prison. I need to focus on stopping them."

More Italian spewed through. Luca Venti was never shy about voicing his opinions or giving orders.

"Of *course* I can handle them, and I realize he's bringing your prized stallion to breed with Eos but—"

When Luca cut her off, she ran a hand through her hair. How dare he question her ability to do her duty? Both to the winds and to her horses.

She looked over the white-fenced fields before her, and the horseflesh dotting them. Luca and his brothers might own the operation, but Island of the Wind Estates was hers. Her horses were the only thing in her world that gave her some degree of true pleasure.

"Fine." She sighed. She knew when to fight and when to conserve her strength. "When is he arriving?"

The answer had her heart rapping against her ribs. "What do you mean now?"

She swiveled, her gaze zeroing in on the whitewashed cottages clustered together at the shore a few miles away. Sure enough, the daily ferry from Sicily was pulling into the tiny harbor.

“*Dio*, Luca. A little more warning would have been appreciated.” She slammed her phone closed. She knew not many people had the courage to hang up on Luca Venti, Keeper of the North Wind.

Straightening her shoulders, she rose to her full five feet nine inches. There was very little she feared. As a member of the WindKeepers, she had no need to fear. Not anymore.

Except one reckless horse trainer who made her feel things she’d given up her humanity to avoid.

She banished the thought. Time to prove she could handle all six feet of Rafe Donovan.

She summoned the wind. It blew through her, unknotting the tangle in her belly, smoothing her feelings away. It left her cool, bare and clean.

As she let her body blend with the wind, her soul became as light as air. It was no longer possible to tell where her body ended and the wind began. Then she traveled with it down to the village.

Livia didn’t worry about the villagers seeing her, they knew of her powers. Generations of them had served the Keeper and kept the secrets of Isola del Vento hidden from the rest of the world. She materialized on the edge of the village piazza.

The sight that greeted her had her limbs turning liquid and warmth rising to burn away the coolness inside her.

The horse was stunning. And the man riding him even more eye-catching.

Man and beast moved like one through the cobbled street. The big chocolate-colored stallion tossed his head, willful and wanting his own way. Full of fire.

But the man controlled the horse with ease, and despite her best effort to fight it, Livia’s eyes were drawn to him. To the powerful, jean-clad thighs gripping the horse, the muscular shoulders filling out a white T-shirt. The thin tattoo of flames banding one strong bicep, the fascinating face—all angles with a jagged scar on his jaw. The dark hair—not long, not short—teased by the morning breeze.

The smoke gray eyes locked on her.

Heat tore through her, washing away her composure. Her fingers curled into her palms. *No*,

she wanted the numbness. She forced herself to stay still, her face blank.

How? she despaired. How did he make her feel like this?

Life had taught her to be wary of men, and she'd seen more handsome, polished men than Donovan. The Venti brothers were perfect specimens of Italian virility, but none of them generated heat in her.

What strummed through her bloodstream for Rafe Donovan was so hot it burned.

He brought the stallion to a stop a few feet from her and rested the reins in one hand. "Hello, Duchess."

The amused voice, with just a hint of drawl, irritated. "I have told you a hundred times not to call me by that ridiculous name."

His slow smile was as arrogant as it was infuriating. "Until you stop talking to me like royalty to a peasant, I'll keep calling you Duchess."

Livia sucked in a breath, released it inch by slow inch. "I talk to you as I would any other colleague, Signor Donovan. And since I run the European arm of Island of the Wind Estates and you run the American one, that's what we are...colleagues."

He raised an eyebrow. "How many times do I have to tell you to call me Rafe?"

"I prefer to keep things professional."

"Really?" He slid off the horse in an agile move she envied.

He sauntered toward her, moved with a swagger of lean hips that made her mouth go dry. His scent wrapped around her, a tantalizing mixture of male sweat and spicy cologne. He smelled of things she didn't want, things she feared.

"I don't think it's very professional the way your pulse flutters at the base of your throat when I get close to you."

Her mouth dropped open. He couldn't know what he did to her. Couldn't know her confused body yearned for him.

Power prickled along her skin. His power, not hers. She sensed he was something beyond human. Sensed the power and wild anger simmering inside him. He kept it hidden under a coat

of charm and devil-may-care humor, but it was there.

She had no idea what kind of supernatural being he was, nor did she want to know.

He stepped closer and she felt the heat of his body. It warmed her cool skin, made her remember what it felt like to be human.

Her stomach quivered. She didn't want to remember. Humanity equaled emotion, and emotion equaled pain.

When he reached out and tucked a strand of her hair behind her ear, she controlled the urge to flinch and stared over his right shoulder.

"The way your pupils dilate when I touch you," his finger brushed over her cheek, a light caress, "that's not very professional either."

She slammed her mental shutters down. Donovan was a threat to her control and she needed it to ensure the Tempest Winds remained locked away, where they couldn't spread their evil.

"I have no idea what you're talking about." She slapped his arm away and stepped around him.

"Coward," he murmured.

She felt her spine stiffen. *Ignore him.* She reached out and stroked the stallion's neck. "So, this is *Astraeus*."

Rafe was silent for a moment. "Yep. My boy here is raring to meet the lucky lady."

Livia felt a quick tug at the thought of mating her favorite mare with the stallion. It would be a winning combination, she had no doubt. "I want this done quickly. Then I want you off my island." Away from her and the coming confrontation with her prisoners.

When Rafe came up behind her and caged her between his hard body and the stallion, every muscle in her tensed.

"He's excited, knowing there's a pretty filly eager for his attention." Rafe's warm breath brushed over her ear. "I understand how he feels."

She closed her eyes. Arousal was like a jagged knife cutting at her insides. Painful, but edged with seductive pleasure. She pressed her hands against her thighs, hard enough to leave

marks.

How did this man generate such intense feeling in her? How, when three hundred years ago, she'd embraced the power of the Keeper to lock her emotions away?

And in three centuries, no one had ever made her feel like this.