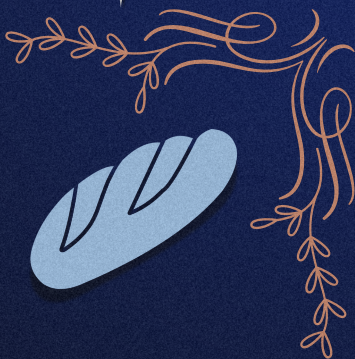


The Reluctant Queen | Bonus Chapters



SAKA & BERIM TIE THE KNOT

FROM THE WORLD OF DUHRA



M.A. Lakewood

Saka & Berim Tie the Knot

The Reluctant Queen | Bonus Chapters

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First Edition

Contents

1. Berim's hand is tied.	1
2. Ehmet & Hevva visit the solarium.	11
Acknowledgements	20
About the Author	21

ONE



Berim's hand is tied.

Nine months later.

HEVVA BUMPED INTO EHMET'S side as they walked down the hill toward Rohilavol. When she did it again and raised a palm dramatically to her forehead, he chuckled.

"Practicing a new walk, Saka?"

"I wish. Is it a good one? I feel a bit faint."

Concern pleated his brow. "Should we head back to the hall?" To help her feel better, he added, "And it is a good walk, you look a bit like a drunkard."

"Oh, fantastic. And no, we should not head back. It's our *handfasting* you ninny, we can't skip out on such a critical ceremony."

"Can you believe we're doing it?"

"Saka and Berim's big day," she said through a happy sigh. "Of course, I can believe it. It was my idea."

"And you're happy to marry me again?" It hadn't been a year since their official handfasting, so she better still be elated at the prospect.

"Without a doubt." She bumped his side again, this time intentionally, as she flashed him a glowing grin. "Ooh, I can hear the festival ahead. How do I look?"

Saka hurried ahead and spun, stopping him on the hard-packed lane. Her hair sat coiled atop her head in a deceptively simple-looking updo he happened to know took her lady's maid quite some time to accomplish. She wore a practical

spring green gown with some sort of flowery print over low-heeled leather shoes and wool stockings tied below the knee—which he couldn’t wait to see again later. In her common attire, with a patterned scarf tied around her neck and a green ribbon wound around her head, she looked very much the part of Saka and not so much like the Queen of Selwas.

“Perfect. And me?” Ehmet, as Berim, pirouetted with his arms spread wide. The warm evening breeze snuck through the thin weave of his muslin shirt, and he was glad he’d talked Hevva out of making him wear a tweed jacket. When she held it out for him back at Hewran Hall, he claimed he’d never seen it before. He—Berim—certainly didn’t own anything that fine.

Laughing then, Hevva had tossed the thing aside before giving him a kiss. Laughing now, she said, “You look *almost* perfect,” before dashing up and unlacing the top of his shirt. While running her fingers through his now-visible chest hair, she pecked him on the cheek then on the chest, and stepped back to reassess her Berim. “Perfect.”

“Good.”

“Good. Let’s go.” Swinging around to his side, Hevva wound her fingers through his, and Saka and Berim ambled toward lower Rohilavol.

A few minutes on, her steps slowed and Ehmet glanced down to find she was eyeing the houses rather than the street. Directing her around a small puddle and a pile of manure, he turned them toward the square where the Annual Raucous Festival That Had No Proper Permits was well underway. As they passed others on the road, Ehmet dipped his chin in silent greeting, earning a few skeptical glances.

They’d opened the symposium the evening before, had even gone to a few presentations that morning and been seen around town . . . as the king and queen. But King Ehmet and Queen Hevva were meant to be tucked safely away at the hall. It was time for Saka and Berim to tie the knot.

“What would it be like?”

“What?” Ehmet asked, steering her around a child who was dashing up the lane.

“Living in one of these homes. How do you think it would be?” With her chin, she gestured toward a tall, cockeyed cottage with empty flower boxes tacked beneath each of its four shuttered windows.

He studied the narrow front door, the muddied boots left outside to dry, the single small window on the top floor, nothing more than a vent really, tucked beneath the eaves. One side of the cottage bled into the home on its left, and on the right, an exceedingly narrow alleyway slipped away into darkness.

“Cramped and rank, probably,” he replied.

“Ehmet!”

“Berim,” Ehmet corrected, swatting his wife on the bottom.

“*Really*,” she scolded, swatting him back. “If you think that, you should fix it.”

“You should fix it, Queen Hevva.”

“Saka,” she hissed, wary of a passing couple.

“Hev, do you truly believe no one knows who we are?” Ehmet caught sight of an old woman sitting on a porch, her tangled hair and weathered eyes matching shades of milky white. She dropped her chin in a clear sign of deference and elbowed the young boy at her side, who swiftly bowed. Ehmet lifted a finger to his lips and urged them to keep quiet. The old woman winked, though he hadn’t a clue how she could see him.

“I like to pretend.”

He did too. And most of the residents of lower Rohilavol were either too foxed to notice or seemed happy to play along. Though he did hear a few unstified “Your Majesties” when they entered the bustling square. It was to be expected now that their faces were on the coins.

Hevva squeezed his hand and tugged, urging him to lower his head. “Last summer, did you imagine we’d be back here like this?”

“Not in a million years, my dear Saka. I wouldn’t have it any other way. About the homes though, there’s not much we can do about their size without expanding the town. Perhaps stipends for beautification projects?”

“Oh, yes. For any locals who spruce up their frontages, fill their flower boxes, make repairs—”

A young man pushed past, eager to get to the pub, where they were heading, too. In his haste, he knocked Hevva’s shoulder, pushing her into Ehmet.

“So sorry!” he called back, glancing over his shoulder before skidding to a stop and spinning back around, ale sloshing from his mug and fear widening his eyes. “Your Maj—”

Ehmet cut him off with a glare and a terse shake of the head. “Miss,” he mouthed silently.

“Miss,” the man corrected, bowing to his queen, “my apologies. Coming this way too?” He swung open the door to the pub and the music and laughter from within melded with the similar sounds erupting from the street.

Ehmet’s chest warmed as a grin rounded Hevva’s cheeks. He gave the man a nod of thanks before looking back at his wife.

“Up you go,” he rumbled, scooping a startled Hevva into his arms and carrying her through the door into the dark interior.

“Put me down, you big oaf!”

“Is that any way to speak to your husband?”

“Not my husband yet, Berim. There’s a ceremony to be had.”

Chuckling, he set her down to cheers and whoops from the gathered crowd. “I’ll go grab us pints. Tell the celebrant we’re here?”

Hevva sashayed away, green gown swaying over her round bottom. With appreciation curling the corners of his mouth, Ehmet turned to the bar and flagged down the server. The young man who’d bumped into them outside was also awaiting a fresh pint, so Ehmet slipped him a coin as further thank you for preserving the mood and bought him a pitcher of ale to boot.

When Ehmet approached Hevva, drinks in hand, he found her waiting behind an affectionate couple in conversation with the celebrant. Two other couples stood nearby: one looked stoic as can be, though they occasionally side-eyed each other and smirked as blushes stole up their cheeks; the second was practically going at it in the pub, tongues in each other’s mouths and hands roaming free, unable to wait for the ceremony’s official kiss.

“That could be us,” he said into her ear, holding her pint out in front of her. Hevva snorted when she caught sight of the intimate couple and slipped her arm around to squeeze Ehmet’s arse before taking the proffered drink.

“I would *never*.”

“Oh? Do you not remember watching the fight last year? As I recall you climbed on my back and rubbed your—”

“Berim!” she scolded, swatting his chest.

The couple ahead hurried off to wait with the others, and it was their turn to approach the celebrant.

“Here for the handfasting?” The dark-haired publican’s eyes crinkled, her ruddy cheeks aglow in the candlelight.

“We are,” Hevva replied, shooting a smile up at Ehmet as his hand slipped around her waist.

“And . . .” The officiant looked back and forth between the two of them, her eyes narrowing. “What names will you be using this evening?”

“Saka and Berim,” Ehmet replied before she could do something like refer to them as her Majesties.

“Wonderful. We’ll get started in just a minute.”

Grinning, Hevva yanked Ehmet off to stand with the other couples.

“Ho there!” a familiar voice rang out, the crowd parting for a man with flour dusting his chubby cheeks and a basket of steaming bread in his hands.

Hevva thrust her pint against Ehmet’s stomach, and he took it from her so she could rush forward to greet the baker who’d been running the games during last year’s festivities.

“For you, Your—Miss.” He held the loaf out for Hevva, a twisted, flaky-looking creation glistening with sugary glaze. “It’s honey, cinnamon, and pecan. A gift for your big day—even though I could’ve sworn you were married when I met you.” He winked.

“Our . . .” She turned toward Ehmet and lifted up on her toes to ask, “Did you plan this?”

“It was your idea.” He smirked.

“*Beyond* our conversation when I said the symposium was the perfect place for this?”

“You’re busy handling the affairs of the realm. I had time to spare.”

Lilting laughter tickled his temple, and she pressed a kiss there before nibbling on his earlobe.

Stifling a groan as his pants tightened, Ehmet thanked the baker for his gift and asked after the man’s roof repairs.

“Finished up just last moon. Cannot thank you enough for the spring festival, Your Maj—”

Ehmet cut him off with a cough, but Hevva was already pursing her lips and glancing back and forth between the two men.

“How long have you known, sir?” she inquired, dropping Saka’s accent in

favor of her natural regal inflection.

The baker smiled sheepishly, running a hand through his gray hair. “I can’t say there was a time when I didn’t know.”

Her pink mouth dropped open and Ehmet boomed with laughter.

“Truly?” she checked. “Even last summer, you knew who we were?”

“Knew who the king was, Your Majesty. Knew you were someone special too, and guessed you might become the queen. It’s in the way you carry yourselves, you see.”

Hevva giggled. “I thought we’d disguised ourselves very well.”

“Talking about how we all knew who they were last summer?” the celebrant inquired, returning to her station at the back of the pub, a bundle of green ribbons in hand.

“*Everyone* knew?” Ehmet asked, aghast, his startled expression matching Hevva’s. He realized they recognized him now. But last summer too?! They’d acted outrageously for nobles—appallingly for reigning monarchs—dancing in the streets. Fates, Hevva had ridden on his back with her skirts pulled up. *Fuck*, he’d run a race with her tossed over his shoulder.

“Aye,” the woman confirmed through a laugh.

“Are you talking about last year when the king and queen came to our festival?” the server inquired, her long red skirts swishing as she pushed over to refill everyone’s pints.

“Please!” Hevva held up a hand, trying not to laugh. “No more until *Saka and Berim* are handfasted. Pretend we’re not here.”

“I don’t think we can do that, Your Majesty,” the baker chuckled.

“I can pretend well enough,” the celebrant chimed in. “All right, let’s get started. If you’re getting wed, gather round!”

The ceremony passed in a blur of laughter and smiles shared between all four happy couples, three of whom were whispering about how fortuitous it was to share a ceremony with the king and queen.

Berim pinched Saka’s bottom to distract her from being identified as the officiant wound the green ribbon around their clasped hands, binding them from wrist to fingertip for the night to come.

Stepping back to command the room, the publican nodded to the baker, who pounded his fist on the nearest gnarled wooden table. A hush overtook the

patrons as they turned their attention back to the matrimonial display.

“Through these cords, I bind each couple here today. Together, as one, you must weather life’s storms and partake in its pleasures. You must walk through all seasons as friends and partners, for fate has intertwined your destinies. Do you pledge to love and support your spouse forevermore?”

“I do,” they all murmured in turn.

“Do you pledge to walk beside them in light and dark, in sunshine and storm, forevermore?”

“I do.” Hevva squeezed his hand, pulling the cord tight against his flesh, a reminder of their everlasting commitment. Made once already nine months before, there was something about the—albeit pretend—anonymity and the lack of pomp that added to the intimacy of the moment.

“And do you promise to stand steadfast beside them through all the days of your life?”

“I do.” Berim squeezed her back, leaning down to press a kiss atop her moonlight silver hair.

“Let this knot serve as a symbol of your union. No longer walking alone, you now share one heart, one path, one destiny. By the power of the ancient gods, I now pronounce you joined in love, now and forevermore. And so, you are bound.”

“Kiss!” someone screamed, voice cracking with their fervor.

Most of the crowd laughed, pounding their fists on the tables as others joined in the chant of “Kiss! Kiss! Kiss!”

Like the summer before, there was nothing Berim could do but oblige the masses. Hevva turned toward him as he pivoted to face her, the fingers of her free hand coming up to lace through his messy hair. She tugged him down and his mouth eagerly met hers, pulling her bottom lip gently between his teeth.

Saka’s hand dropped to his arse and she squeezed him hard, angling her head for better access as she pulled his groin against her stomach.

Chuckling deep in his chest, Ehmet dipped his tongue into her mouth briefly before ending the encounter with a chaste, but lengthy, kiss on the lips. Her pale eyes were glazed with lust.

“Not here.”

“Oops.” She laughed.

The baker pressed warm hunks of bread into their hands and congratulated them heartily on their second handfasting.

“This is delicious!” Hevva exclaimed around a bite.

Grinning, the gray-haired man promised to send a fresh loaf up to Hewran Hall in the morning and the recipe to their cook, then he excused himself to get back to the festival and relieve his wife at the games table.

Hevva retrieved Ehmet’s mug of ale and passed it off to him before grabbing her own from the table.

“Shall we run a race when we’re done here?” he asked, clinking his mug against his wife’s and taking a hearty swig.

“Oh no, not with our hands bound.”

“We could undo them.”

She glowered. “Absolutely not. You know that would be begging for bad luck.” After another sip, she shoved her mug at him. “Take this. My stomach feels sour.”

“Yes, Your Majesty. Your tastes have grown too refined.” He laughed, setting his own empty cup down to accept hers.

“Ready to go?” she asked with a bob of her brows.

“Already? We only just got to the festival.”

“I’d like to eat this bread in peace,” Hevva admitted with a frown on her lips and a twinkle in her eye. “Then, I have my own celebrations to attend to.” She yanked their bound hands toward his groin, but he tensed his arm and held her away, forcing her to smash into his chest.

“Understood,” he rumbled.

While Hevva was distracted grabbing a flaky hunk of bread, he found a familiar black-haired boy standing near the wall and, when their gazes met, Ehmet dipped his chin.

It wasn’t long before they were leaving, winding through revelers and tables to make their way out to the cobbled street. The festival had only increased in fervor in the short time they were inside the pub.

Haidar hopped down from his seat atop the wooden cart Ehmet had arranged to borrow from the boy’s family. Pulled by a pony, rickety, open to the elements, and with no padding to speak of, it was the perfect ride for Saka and Berim—a terrible choice for his queen.

“You arranged all of this?” Hevva asked through a wide smile, pulling him along with her as she stepped up beside the cart to grasp one of the many floral garlands dripping from its sides.

“Sure did. Where’s the pony’s crown?” he asked Haidar.

“She ate it,” the boy replied with a pout.

“Unsurprising.”

Hevva watched the exchange, laughing. “*Berim*, you thought of everything.”

“For you, my lovely Saka.”

A craggy old hand swung around the back of the cart, grasping onto Hevva’s forearm.

Acting swiftly, Ehmet wove a serviceable knife and prepared to attack before a stooped-back, gray-haired old woman appeared and rasped out, “I’ve been looking for you.” Her cloudy eyes were crinkled in a smile and her wide, toothless grin appeared genuine, if a bit unnerving.

“What can we do for you?” Ehmet inquired, gently taking the woman’s hand and removing her from touching Hevva. It was the same person he’d seen earlier who’d winked at them when they walked into town.

“Ah, I have much to share. Speak with me a moment? The fates, you know, they’ve shown me your path.”

Shaking his head, Ehmet began, “We have—”

“The fates?” Hevva interrupted him, clearly intrigued.

“Fated to fate, mated to fate, destined to see what has been, is, and what will be,” the old woman explained like she was talking about peeling potatoes. “From my fae blood, deary.”

Hevva’s lips twitched. “And what do you have to share?”

“There are two moons in your sky.” Gleefully, the woman raised her ragged voice, as if she was hoping for an audience—which she probably was. “One ice and one aglow.” She reached out to clutch Hevva’s free hand. “Ice flies west to settle east, and the light casts shadows of wings over the land.”

Ehmet glanced at Hevva, who was careful not to meet his eye as she held back a smile.

“Is that all?” he asked.

“Of course, that is all!” The woman chortled. “Congratulations!” she cried. “Congratulations on both!”

“*Everyone* knows who we are, don’t they?” Hevva laughed as the strange woman scurried away.

“Seems they do,” he admitted as he helped her up onto the cart and clambered in himself. “Thank you, lad. Pass on our gratitude to your parents as well.”

Haidar waved them off before disappearing into the crowd, likely to enjoy the festivities rather than returning to the Elk & Heron on the finer side of town. It’s what he’d have done as a lad.

It took some time to make it out of upper Rohilavol. Even skirting the square, the streets were clogged with people dancing to lively tunes and racing about drunk on ale and the energy of the warm summer night.

“This cart is making me sick to my stomach,” Hevva grumbled as they bumped along, winding their way up the hill toward the hall.

“Almost there,” he promised, urging the pony along as fast as she could go.

“We should have walked,” she scoffed.

“This is far classier.”

“Saka and Berim are not *classy* people.”

Ehmet boomed joyously, which seemed to spur the pony on more than picking up the reins had helped.

“Almost home, my love.” Ehmet shifted their bound hands up her leg higher and higher, stretching his fingers—and hers by proxy—toward the apex of her thighs.

“Stop that,” she scolded, “someone will see us!”

“We’re surrounded by trees.” He tickled her center, and she wriggled her bottom on the seat, dropping her knees open.

“Hurry,” she demanded.

“Hurrying.”

TWO



Ehmet & Hevva visit the solarium.

A STABLEBOY WAS WAITING in front of the house as Ehmet had instructed him earlier in the day. After climbing down and lifting his two-time wife from the cart, the boy took over, hopping up and directing the pony around the hall to the stables where she'd spend the night, a fine holiday amongst the royal bloodstock.

Alone on the steps of Hewran Hall, Ehmet urged Hevva to bend her arm behind her back as he swooped his free arm beneath her legs and scooped her up. Though she squealed and squirmed, she let him carry her through the doors she opened herself and into the quiet entry hall.

"No, no, no, no, no," she repeated as he neared the stairs.

"No?"

"Take me to the solar."

"Are we going for a turn about the garden?" He lifted a brow and looked down into her sapphire eyes.

She answered by nipping his nipple, and Ehmet had to hold back a yelp.

Giggling, Hevva kicked her legs, her swinging feet nearly taking out a portrait of his grandfather that hung on the foyer wall.

The balmy heat of the dark solarium welcomed them into its fragrant embrace. As he carried her toward his favorite hidden alcove, the sofa and chairs hidden among tall grasses, Hevva dropped her head back and peered up through the glass ceiling as she used her magic to part the stalks from the hidden path and swiftly sweep them closed at their backs.

She cloaked a canopy of protection around them; the palms arced in to greet her, the magnolia seemed to stretch across the room as it reached to cover the sitting area, and the grasses folded in on themselves, a near-solid wall preventing anyone from seeing or getting through.

He set Hevva on the flagstone floor and gently untwisted her arm. Holding her by the elbow, he gave her wrist a flap. “Did I hurt you?”

“Mmm, not at all. Give me a once over while I do the same for you.” She smirked, and before he could utter a retort, she dropped to her knees, pressing their bound hands against his hip as she began working loose the fall of his pants.

“Hevv—”

“Help me out,” she growled before taking him in her mouth through his trousers.

Concentration was fleeting, but he managed to free the right side while she loosened the left. His cock sprang out, and his drawers and pants made it down to mid-thigh before she had him in her hot mouth in earnest, her free hand wrapped around the base of his shaft while her tongue plied the underside of his manhood.

Ehmet moaned, tossing his head back to look up at the stars. Not a candle was lit in the solar that night, as the staff were all abed, and *they* certainly hadn’t paused activities to do so. He urged a moon of his making to hover above them, lighting the scene for his enjoyment.

Wide-eyed with deceptive innocence, Hevva looked up at him and licked a circle around the underside of his head. Drawing back for a moment, her hand took over where her mouth left off, and she said, “Thank you, my love. Tonight was perfect.”

He tried to respond, but she ran her thumb over the tip of his cock, and he only shuddered instead.

“I know they know who we are, we can’t hide it any longer, but it was still a wonderful evening.”

Ehmet growled when she pulled him back into her mouth, humming while she swallowed him up, her lips and nose pressing against his groin, her throat constricting around his length.

“Oh, gods,” he groaned. “Let me see you.” Bending as best as he could while deep inside her, he tugged up the back of her skirts, exposing her bottom to the air. The angle didn’t offer the view he envisioned—though the top of her

heart-shaped arse was pleasing—so Ehmet wove a mirror to lean against the sofa behind her, providing a perfect visual of her backside, her plump pussy offering glimpses of glistening desire each time she leaned forward and bobbed on his cock.

“I’m going to come, Hevva.”

She mumbled something that sounded like, “Do it.” But he wasn’t ready yet.

Leaning down again, he smacked her on the arse and said, “Stand up and turn around.”

Startled, she gave him one last lengthy suck with a slightly aggravated tug on the balls before hopping to her feet and obeying his request. Skirts still lifted, she backed into him and rubbed her cheeks against his erection.

“Get up on the couch.”

“Knees?”

“Mhm,” he grunted, letting the mirror dissipate with a *pop*. Perfect view now accessible to him, Ehmet placed their entwined hands on her lower back and dropped down to his knees behind her. Slotting himself in between her stockinged legs, he ran a finger down her bottom, from the dimples above her arse all the way to dip into her wetness, earning a ball-tightening squeal.

He kissed her left cheek, then her right. Shaping his tongue into a point he skated down her cleft, enjoying the way his chin pushed open her bottom cheeks, clearing the way for his mouth. He plunged his tongue into her at the same moment he brought his fingers around her clitoris, lightly squeezing her as he stroked up and down.

“Oh, Ehmet,” she moaned, arching her back to give him better access.

He palmed her soft arse, molding her beneath his fingers as he lapped her delicious center, bottom to top, top to bottom. He devoured her, pulling the whole of her pussy into his mouth, Ehmet sucked, and Hevva screamed, gasping for air amidst the all-consuming pleasure.

“Oh—Oh—Stop, stop, stop.”

“Stop?” He drew back, cupping her pussy gently before folding down her skirts.

“The smell of roses is far too strong. Let’s go upstairs and finish there.” She looked back over her shoulder, eyes glazed, hair mussed from rubbing against the back of the sofa, and cheeks flushed from nearing her peak.

“You always smell like roses.” He helped her off the sofa.

“Not like this. Please, Ehmet? I want you but not here.”

Laughing, he scooped her up again, because it was far too fun to carry her around, and sauntered off toward their apartment. The moon, left behind in the solarium, vanished with a *pop*.

Ensnared in their bedchamber, Ehmet set Hevva down before him and brought their beribboned hands up to her chin. Urging her to look up at him.

“Did you just walk through the house with your cock out?”

“Yes. Are you feeling better?”

She inhaled slowly as if testing her response to the air. “Yes, I believe so. Now fuck me, please?”

Smiling at his demanding wife, he studied her dress and found it laced up the front, so he set to work unfastening the drawstring ties.

His efforts got her close to nude, but not near enough. Giving up on a proper undressing, impossible with their connected hands in the way, he did the only thing he could think of and produced a pair of scissors from the chaos around him.

“I am going to rip this off.” Ehmet’s words invited no comment.

Hevva commented anyway, “So big and strong, Berim.”

Rumbling with effortless laughter, he cut off her stays, snipped through her chemise, and made a cut at the top of her sleeve. Between his teeth and his free hand, Ehmet tore every last bit of fabric from his wife’s perfect body . . . except for the stockings. He left those on.

Hevva kicked off her shoes as he walked her backward to the bed. “You too,” she demanded. “Scissors?”

He recreated the scissors and handed them over so she could cut him loose from his shirt while he kicked free of his pants.

Naked except for the ribbon around their wrists, and Hevva’s stockings, they tumbled onto the bed. While he lavished attention over her breasts, squishing them beneath his palm and pulling her nipples between his teeth, she yanked their attached arms up above her head.

Something hard and cool came around the back of his wrist, holding him firm to the headboard, even when he tried to pull his hand back down.

“Did you just cuff us?” He cocked his head.

Hevva smirked. “Myself. Not my fault you’re connected to me.”

“You cuffed yourself?” He would’ve done it for her if she’d asked. Candlelight flickered over her slender ivory wrist, held taut to the bed by the bed frame itself. She’d urged a curl in the ornately carved wood to wrap around her wrist, and another around their bound hands, before drawing back and capturing them there, stretched above her head.

“It’s fun.” She tipped her head back to eye her handiwork.

“Can I not just . . .” Ehmet wiggled the fingers on his right hand, making a slashing motion over his stuck left arm.

“You want to cut off your hand?”

“The ribbon, Hevva.”

“I know, Ehmet. And no, you cannot.”

“We’re already handfasted!”

“I’m not risking it!” she matched his indignant tone. “What if we remove the ribbon and it undoes the first ceremony? Not worth it.”

He pouted, dipping to kiss her neck at that tender spot beneath her ear. “With us stuck up here, I can’t taste you.”

“Get creative, big boy.” She wriggled her hips.

“Yes, *Mrs.* Saka.”



EHMET’S GAZE SWEEPED OVER her body, delighting Hevva. Another fizzle of anticipation rocketed through her, propelling from the center of her chest out to tingle in the tips of her toes and tops of her ears.

His free hand tweaked her nipple before he trailed his fingertips down her belly in a serpentine pattern that made her pulse between her thighs. She wanted to run her hands over his strong shoulders, grasp him by his tousled brown hair, but she’d restrained herself for a reason. The desire to touch coupled with being held back was a delectable torture, and Hevva pulsed again from sheer wanton need.

Something fizzled beneath her bum, and she tried to sit up, only to be yanked

back by her restraints. She eyed Ehmet with rounded eyes as he lifted her bottom up on a magical wedge, some sort of pillow that put her hips higher than her head.

“You said to get creative.” He smirked before tipping down to nuzzle her mound with his nose. The move lifted his perfect arse up into the air.

“I want to smack your bum so badly right now.”

“Why?” He nuzzled her again, but her thighs were clenched tight, even though the angle urged her to drop them open.

“Just so delightfully round.” She craned her neck to try to get a better look at his bottom, peachy with just the lightest dusting of hair.

“I understand, but no. Now, *open*.” Ehmet’s big hand came between her knees, and despite her squeezing, he pushed her legs apart, earning delighted laughter in response.

Dipping his head, he devoured her from the side, slicking his tongue back and forth, up and down her slit before turning his attention to her clitoris. His hair brushed against the inside of her left thigh and his chin pressed into her right as he worked her into a frenzy, writhing on the pillow with her heels pressed into the mattress. She couldn’t help but lift her lips, pressing herself firmly against his face. Ehmet’s side angle offered a whole new palate of sensations from his typical front or back approach.

“Please,” she begged as he teased her with a pointed tongue.

With a low moan he sucked her clitoris into his mouth, pulling on her sensitive bud rhythmically. Pressure built, tightening her lower belly where he pressed his palm, urging every one of her muscles to freeze in wait for the great explosion that was just, just, just around the bend.

When Hevva shattered, she cried out his name, begging for more even as she fluttered down from her place among the stars. Ehmet lifted his head from between her thighs, then thought better of it, leaning back to press a smoldering kiss to her throbbing pussy.

“Please! Now,” she demanded with a gasp.

Leaving the wedge beneath her arse, he climbed between her thighs and lowered himself over top of her, boxing her in beneath his broad chest. One huge, chiseled bicep came up past her face where she had them both trapped against the bed frame, so she settled her mouth there and gave him a love bite on the soft

flesh of his inner arm.

Groaning, he shifted his hips until his erection found its destination and he pressed forward, sliding in with one hard thrust.

“Oh, gods,” she cried out. “This *angle*.” It was exceptional, his thick head pressurizing her with every movement as he rubbed against that exquisite spot within her.

“Definitely doing this again in the future,” he grunted as he moved in and out of her in long, swift motions, pulling almost entirely free before slamming home over and over again.

Panting and moaning incoherently, Hevva wrapped her legs around his back, holding her tightly in place until the desire to run her hands over his back, to clutch his arse, grew so strong she had no choice but to release the restraints around her wrists. Her palm slapped his left bum cheek, squeezing him while he pressed their bound hands into the bed and drove into her with fervor.

“I love you,” he grunted, as he slipped his free hand between her legs to work her clit.

“I love—ohhhhhh,” Hevva’s response devolved when she came again, her muscles pulsing around him, locked ankles holding him firm.

It wasn’t long before he lost it as well, coming apart with a roar as he finished, filling her with pulses of hot release.

“I love you, Ehmet,” she murmured into his neck as he panted over top of her.

The pillow *popped* away and her bottom landed on the mattress. “Oof.”

“Mmm, sorry. So tired,” he mumbled, rolling them so he lay on his back and she could curl against his chest. Her right hand and his left, entwined in green ribbon, settled over Ehmet’s beating heart.

Laying there in the glow of the flickering candles, she blinked at their connected hands, symbolic of their intertwined fates, the destiny they chose to share. Her stomach gave a flip, but not the pleasant kind.

“As delicious as it was, I don’t think that bread is sitting well.”

“I have jostled you around a lot. Are you all right? Need me to ring for assistance? Tea?”

“Mm, I’m all right. Just snuggle me.”

His free arm swung up over them to rest upon her back. Gently, he trailed

his fingers up and down her spine, sending forth a battalion of pleasant shivers to combat her upset tummy. Her eyelids fluttered closed as the sensation relaxed her.

“Maybe it’s your courses? Aren’t you due for them soon?”

She was, actually. It had been just about— “Oh—” Hevva froze, eyes popping open as she struggled to sit up. “Oh my gods.”

“What?” he asked on an intake of air.

Despite his question, she could tell from the way he shifted their hands to rest upon her belly he knew what she had realized.

“Ehmet, I haven’t had my courses in . . . in *two* moons.” Her mouth fell open as her heart kicked into a gallop.

They’d been trying for this since their handfasting, both agreeing it was precisely what they wanted next: a family. It could take ages, years, or it might not happen at all. For many, children never came to be—with the gods on holiday, or wherever they were—it was a possibility they’d tried to prepare for.

Gently, Ehmet shifted her onto her back.

In silent protest, Hevva propped herself up on her elbow but stilled her movements when he rested his cheek upon her stomach and stared up into her face, his eyes glossy with emotion.

“Hevva.” His voice was reverent, holding a note of disbelief.

“Ehmet,” she replied, the “t” getting lost in her grin as tears clouded her vision.

“I can’t believe it. Are you certain?”

“Fairly. I haven’t been feeling well, I haven’t bled, we’ve been *trying* . . .”

“I think your breasts look bigger?” he offered before peppering kisses around her belly button.

“All of me is going to look bigger.”

Satisfaction, pride, love, and an inkling of fear flitted across his face as he studied her. Ehmet kissed her on the mouth before returning to her belly. A hundred more kisses landed there, then he smushed his face against her, eyes squeezed tightly closed. “You’ll tell me, right?” His words were muffled against her skin.

“Tell you what?” Hevva threaded her fingers through his hair, scritchingly lightly the way she knew he loved.

“If I’m not loving our babe the right way. If I’m being like my father.”

She tugged his hair, forcing him to meet her gaze as her heart clenched. “Ehmet,” she said with quiet conviction, her eyes beseeching, “you’ll be just fine. I’m sure of it. After you realized you loved *me*, you’ve yet to go about it the wrong way. I am positive you’ll make a fantastic parent.”

He searched her gaze a moment longer before accepting her words and nodding. “Same to you, my love.” His shoulders relaxed and he pressed a celebratory kiss to her stubble-scratched lips. Ehmet’s fingers found their way to her breast, swirling her peaked nipple between his thumb and forefinger. He retreated from their kiss and met her eyes, a new sort of sparkle consuming his.

“Now you’re going to come for me again,” he commanded, voice low and husky. “Then we’re going to sleep until midday and take breakfast right in this damned bed, because Ehmet is planning to pamper Hevva until this little baby arrives, and Saka and Berim have *no* duties whatsoever.”

“They’ve lost their posts,” she offered, laughing at his antics, then gasping as he slipped his thick fingers between her legs, teasing her, plying her to his every whim.

“Precisely.”

Wriggling beneath him, fingers gripping his shoulder as he sucked her nipple, Hevva asked, “Do you think we’ll have *two* children? One for us and one for the other us?”

He snorted. “I’d say, yes, in time. It seems we’re good at making them.”

“In time.” She smiled, eyes closing in bliss as his lazily trailing fingers picked up their pace and she found herself flying to the moon again under his expert command.

Acknowledgements

Thank *you* for reading my bonus chapters for *The Reluctant Queen*. This was supposed to be a single bonus epilogue, then it became one bonus chapter which swiftly grew into two. I hope you enjoyed this extra night in Hevva & Ehmet's life, I sure had fun writing it!

I also want to thank my awesome beta readers and my amazing editor who all got back to me so quickly with feedback so I could get these chapters out to you.



About the Author

Lakewood's adult fantasy romance novels transport readers into an historically-inspired world where everyone has magic. Each book offers a well-wrapped standalone story with a satisfying HEA. Her duologies tell a wider tale, and the full set will paint a vivid picture of the world of Duhra as details unfold. Full of plentiful banter, believable love between well-suited matches, and a dash of absurdity, M.A. Lakewood's delightful romances are set in a diverse universe with Regency era vibes minus the guns, gloves, and misogyny.

Mary Ann (M.A.) Lakewood is the pen name of a woman with too common a name to use as an author. She lives in upstate New York with her husband, two children, and two cats. When she's not writing, and often while she is, M.A. can be found hanging out with her baby and watching another rerun of *Time Team*. Lakewood, under her real name, has two bachelor's and a master's degree, none of which she really uses in her day to day life, and all of which have helped her to become a stronger writer.