Allow me to tell you a story.

It will sound like a fairy tale, because it's got chivalrous knights, beautiful damsels, medieval castles and treasures, crowns, kings and power, love and intrigue, even witches and murder. But it is not a fairy tale. It's not even a legend. It is even more than a story, because it is all true. This is a story about the Count Herman II of Celje and his children.

Herman II of Celje was a very ambitious nobleman, a Count, who lived in the 14th century. But he wanted more. He knew his lifetime might be too short to achieve his goal of becoming the European most powerful family. So he included his offspring.

He and his wife had seven most adorable children, the most prominent of whom were Friderick and Barbara of Celje. Barbara, the youngest of them all, was an intelligent, charming, charismatic and very beautiful young woman, who caught an eye of the Hungarian king Sigismund of Luxemburg. She became his wife and queen consort of Hungary and Bohemia, now Czech Republic. But this is not the story of Barbara of Celje. It is a story of her brother Friderick and his tragic love.

Now, similar to Barbara, Friderick was a strong and handsome young knight, who loved riding horses and getting into battles, loved hunting game and women and his parties were legendary. He was next in line to the throne of Celje, so Friderick helped his father run their estates all over what is now Slovenia. Their realm was growing in size, power and wealth and the treasury was always full. Noblemen all over Europe were getting aware of the powerful and ambitious Counts, later Kings of Celje and their coat of arms, red and white logs and three golden stars were recognisable. So Friderick became of age when he was supposed to get a wife. His father wanted to expand their lands to the south, so they decided that Friderick should marry Elizabeth of Frankopan, a Croatian princess. Unfortunately, the marriage was unhappy, because in contrast to Friderick’s frivolous demeanour Isabel was pale. Translucent even. She was religious, pale and boring. She didn't laugh or dance, she didn't want to ride horses or be active in nature, so she couldn't possibly make Friderick happy. They did however manage to produce two sons. Now that an heir to the throne was born, they moved in separate directions and lived separately. Friderick continued to enjoy hunting and partying and was a very active soldier in his father’s army.

So it happened one day that Friderick with his friends was hunting a deer and an accident happened, when Friderick was shot with an arrow. They took him to the nearest house, where the lady of the house took care of the wounded prince. Luckily she was skilled in picking herbs and making medicine to treat some ailments. When he came back to his senses, he thought he had died and an angel was leaning over him. The woman was namely so pretty with her long blonde hair and blue eyes, that Friderick fell passionately in love with her. Her name was Veronika of Desenice.

Apart of her youth and beauty Veronika had nothing that Frederick could benefit from. She was not from an important nor wealthy family. But they couldn’t help themselves. The love they felt was stronger than all earthly bonds and they needed to be together. And they wanted to marry no matter what. But there were some problems. Not only that Herman II did not approve of the match, Friderick was married. So they sneaked around for a while and stole some moments to be together and waited for the situation to change. But it didn’t. So Friderick was getting impatient. First there was the situation with his wife. She had some health issues, but was nowhere near dying. So one day, he decided to visit her in the castle where she lived. The wife met him with all the necessary honour and they went to her private chambers. He spent the night, but then he left in a hurry before dawn. In the morning they found Elizabeth dead. Was he the murderer?

Herman II was strongly against the union with Veronika, so they married in secret. Then he broke into his father’s treasury to steal the money which would finance the building of a love nest for his bride. They built a small castle Friderihstein in the woody hills far away from Celje. There is still a black rock where Friderick kissed Veronika and their love was so hot that the rock melted.

But their bliss didn’t last long. Herman II was furious when he found out that Friderick remarried. He sent his soldiers to capture the couple. Friderick was imprisoned in a dungeon in a castle tower without food, water or even sunlight and would surely die if some pious servant didn’t help him. The servant namely dug an underground tunnel to deliver food and drink to the prisoner. And Veronika was taken to trial. Surely, they believed, she bewitched Friderick to love her so passionately, so she had to be a dangerous witch. She was tried for days in front of the judges and clergy, but to Herman’s disappointment they couldn’t find any faults in this beautiful young woman. But he needed to get rid of her, so he paid two of his soldiers to drown her. She died in a pot of water no deeper than her head. Her body was bricked in the wall of the castle and people say, that you can still hear the wailing voice of Veronika on a windy day.

After Veronika’s death Friderick’s demeanour changed. He was no longer the charming and larger than life young man, but a broken shadow of one. He took no interest in anything. No earthly possessions could bring him joy, not even him becoming a king. Fortunately, he did not live long enough to see his son, the last king of Celje, died in Belgrade. Since his son had no heir their bloodline died out.

Now this is not only a story about love, it is also a story of ambition. If Friderick and Veronika were allowed to join and live happily ever after, perhaps the kings of Celje would still exist today and the map of Europe might be completely different. But Herman II wanted too much too soon and wasted everybody’s happiness for his own futile ambition.