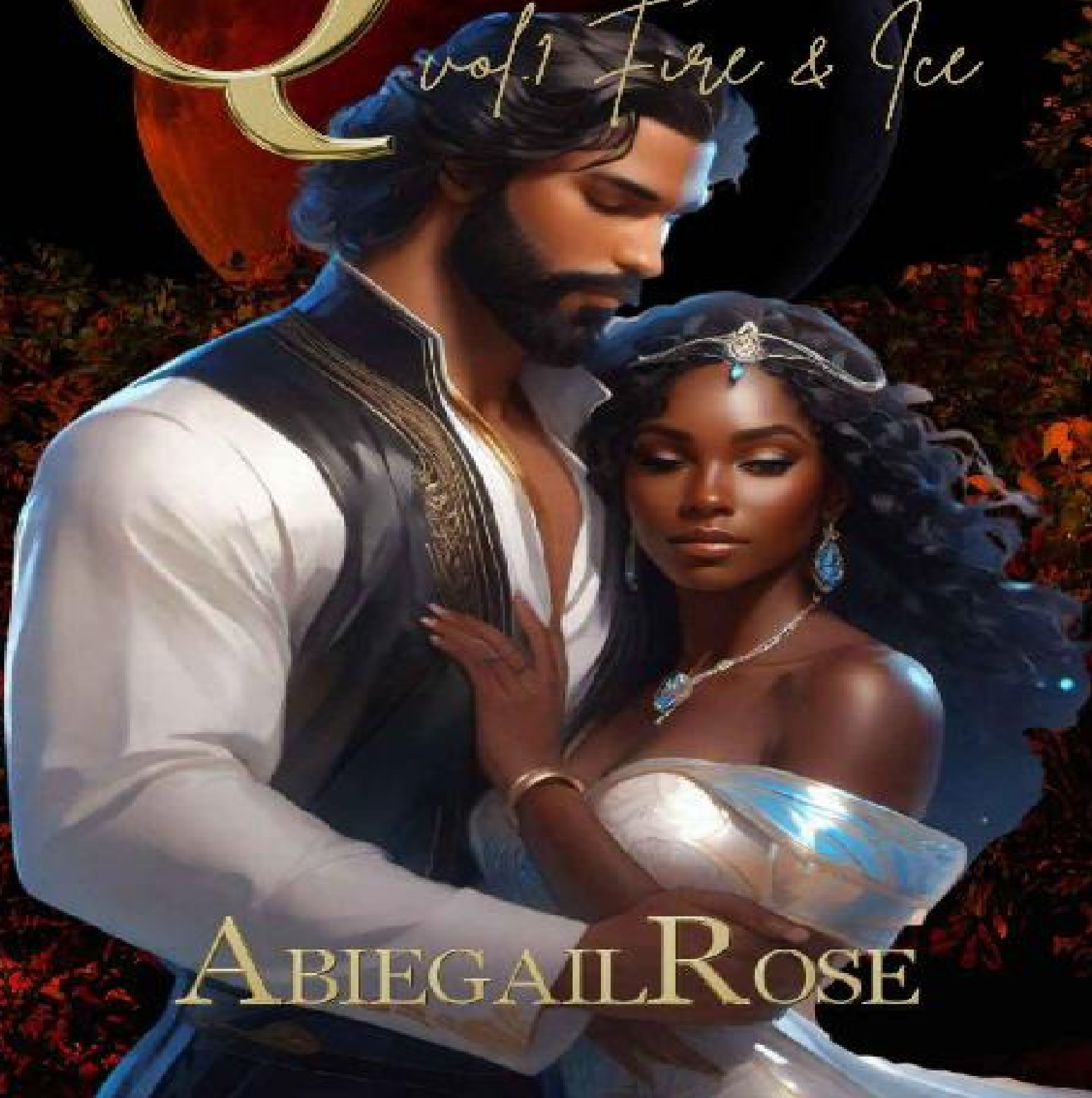


VAMPIRE'S QUEEN

vol. 1 Fire & Ice



ABIGAIL ROSE

Vampire's Queen

Vol 1. Ice and Fire

Abiegail Rose

Copyright © 2023 by Abiegail Rose

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it to a website, or distribute it by any other means without permission.

This novel is entirely a work of fiction. The names, characters and incidents portrayed in it are the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or localities is entirely coincidental.

Abiegail Rose asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

Abiegail Rose has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such Websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Designations used by companies to distinguish their products are often claimed as trademarks. All brand names and product names used in this book and on its cover are trade names, service marks, trademarks and registered trademarks of their respective owners. The publishers and the book are not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book. None of the companies referenced within the book have endorsed the book.

Book Cover by Abiegail Rose

First Edition 2023

Author & Romance Addict



Abiegail Rose

MADISON ROSE - SULTRY READS



Author's Note & Triggers

W elcome,

Thank you so much for taking a chance on my book. I hope you enjoy Beauregard and Tempest's story. Before you meander into this new world, I just want to mention that the people types and gifts mentioned throughout this book are completely unique to how I've attributed them. I've included a glossary, for quick reference.

In addition, I took liberties with their world, Sangre, most rise with the setting sun and operates during the night. Just like in our world where no one has to go to sleep at night, neither does anyone have to during their day.

Their world is ruled by two moons. One moon is constant and appears every night, when the sun sets. The second is the blood moon, red as its name implies, it come into orbit every 100 years, an omen of good luck, that stays in the sky for one month.

This is a semi-dark, gothic, interracial, vampire romance. Therefore, you can expect supernatural elements, an atmospheric setting, a slow burn romance,

spicy sensuality, a touch her and die male lead, mystery, and a sprinkling of blood.

A word of caution...

This book contains several potentially triggering situations. You can find the full list of trigger warning-with-spoilers on my website.

<https://authorabiegailrose.com/vampires-queen-triggers>



Glossary & Translations

Here is a list of the fictional elements in Vampire's Queen.

Fragile - The state all beings are born to in their world regardless of parentage, this resembles humanity.

Gifted - Children born of this world who have been blessed by the moon goddess with a gift.

Halfling - A gifted who upon their 25th blood moon have been blessed by the moon goddess to elevate their gifts - only they are able to be mated.

Mated - A halfling who has been blessed by the moon goddess to have someone to share heartbeat, thoughts, emotions, and gift with.

Vampire - Rare. These are halflings that have found their mated, prior to the moon descending on their 125th moon day, and completed the mating ritual.

Southern gifted Academy - The academy where all Southern Kingdom gifted attend at age 18.

Sun-born - an insult, meaning one who is dumb or hard of learning.

Drinking bad blood - meaning to have done something stupid or crazy.

Sangre – Their planet that is ruled by two moons. The Blood moon which circles their planet every 100 years and the silver moon which rises as the sun does on earth.

Obliviscatur tui memorias - Latin for ‘forget your memories.’

Remota est ab animo - Latin for ‘is removed from your mind.’

Fracture - The war of 3215 that split the world in two parts, the Northern and Southern Kingdoms.

Innerworld - vampire spiritual realm



Graysen Bloodline Prophecy

Given over 27,000 years ago to Queen Selene during the last Blood Moon Ball of her reign.

"Fire becomes one with ice, then memories lost are regained. Caught between death and life, fire is revived by the power of essence taken in protection. Kisses of blood will reignite the flame, fire and Ice will merge again to split in two."





Prologue

One Year Ago

The thick fog swirls around my ankles as I walk through the forest. An eerie stillness blankets everything, muffling even the crunch of leaves under my feet. My heart beats faster, and heat pools in my lower abdomen. Someone else is here. Somewhere in this ethereal landscape waiting—for me. A gentle breeze blows through the trees, carrying the fresh scent of pine and something else—a masculine, sea salty fragrance that appeals to all my senses. A soft growl in the darkness. I spin around, peering through the mist. There, leaning against a tree, is a silhouette I would recognize anywhere. Tall and broad-shouldered, clad all in black. Even obscured by shadows, he radiates a predatory grace that takes my breath away.

Our eyes meet across the clearing, blue ice meeting amber flame. A spark ignites between us, surging through the air in a crackle of power and desire. My heart nearly stops, then kicks into a fierce, pounding rhythm.

I take a step toward him. He pushes off the tree, prowling through the mist in my direction. Closer and closer, until he looms before me, radiating heat and

temptation. He reaches for me. His hands close around my waist, pulling me against him with irresistible force.

A jolt shakes me at his touch, fire racing over my skin. I gasp, tilting my face up to his. Our lips meet, and the world goes up in flames. This gifted kisses me like he's starving, and I'm the only sustenance that can satisfy him. His lips are soft yet demanding, coaxing my mouth open so his tongue can plunge inside.

I moan, sinking into his embrace. My hands wind into his soft black hair, relishing the silky texture of each strand. He growls again, the sound vibrating against my lips, and hitches me higher against him.

The kiss deepens, spinning out of control. Our power awakens, ice and fire mingling in a dance as wild and primal as our desire. The glade seems to tilt around us, fading into shadow and mist. There is only him, only his touch and taste and the scent of woods, the sea, and ash enveloping us.

I break away with a gasp, struggling for breath. My heart hammers as I meet his gaze. His eyes have turned almost white as ice, burning into mine with raw need.

"What is this?" I whisper. "What's happening?"

"I don't know." He brushes his lips over my throat, igniting trails of icy desire with each feather-soft caress. "All I know is that I had to find you. Had to touch you. Had to..." A nip of teeth at the curve of my shoulder, sharp enough to make me shudder. "...have you."

The words spark heat low in my belly. I fist my hands in his shirt, clinging as he continues his exploration.

But when his mouth claims mine again, slow and deep and intoxicating, I realize this feels dangerous, like balancing on the edge of a precipice with no safety net to catch me if I fall.

I suck his lower lip between my teeth, biting down just hard enough to make him hiss. He jerks against me, fingers digging into my hips, and the ache between my legs intensifies to an inferno.

"Minx," he growls, but there's laughter in his voice. Amusement flickers in his pale blue eyes when I release his lip, eyes heavy-lidded and dark with desire. "Two can play at that game."

His hand slips down to grip my thigh, hiking it up around his hip, and I gasp at the new angle it provides, our bodies pressed so tightly not even a whisper could pass between us.

His eyes gleam in triumph. The hand on my breast drifts lower, tracing a path of fire over my stomach, and slips under the hem of my dress. His touch is feather-light, teasing, as he explores, watching my reactions carefully.

I suck in a sharp breath when his fingers brush the inside of my thigh. "Hmmm," I hum, my own grip on his shoulders tightening. I'm wound so tightly already, and his teasing is only fraying what little control I have left.

"What is it?" His fingers dance higher, and it's all I can do not to squirm. Or beg. "Tell me what you want."

The words catch in my throat, pride warring with need. I want to wipe that self-satisfied smirk off his lips. I want to make him as desperate and aching as I am.

Most of all, I want those clever fingers to slip exactly where I need them.

His gaze drops to my lips as I part them on a shaky breath. "Say it."

I surge forward, crushing my mouth to his in a kiss meant to devastate. He groans, the sound vibrating against my lips, and his control seems to snap.

His hand moves swiftly, pushing aside the flimsy barrier of my silken briefs. Two fingers slide into me without warning, and I cry out at the sudden intrusion, clenching around him.

"Yes," he hisses, dragging his lips to my neck. He sets a rough, pounding rhythm, stroking all the way in on each thrust. "Just like that. Let go."

The coil of heat in my belly pulls tighter and tighter. I'm drowning in sensation, in the slick slide of his fingers and the bite of his teeth at my throat. The tension builds and builds, ready to break—

A sharp crack of sound splits the air. The dream shatters into fragments around us as I'm wrenched violently awake, panting, and disoriented. Caught between the dream world and reality. Then it hit me. It was only a dream. Wasn't it?

I blink up at the plain stone ceiling above my bed, my heart pounding, and rub at my eyes with the heels of my palms, trying to clear the lingering fog from my mind... That dream...it had seemed so real. I could still feel the ghost of his touch, and a bewildering ache between my thighs.



PART ONE
BOUND BY DREAMS



Chapter 1

*D*ear Diary,

I think I've been among those counted as fragile too long, for one of their sayings is stuck in my head. 'All is well, that ends well.'

I think it might be true, but what about those who are blessed to have life with a longer trajectory?

I guess a better saying for the gifted and halflings might be, 'All is well, that lives well'?

On living well, I still petition the fates that the pain I felt at Sara's twenty-fifth moonday was all for nought and that she is living life well. Even though the pain I felt at losing access to a friend was unspeakable, I was happy for her. It's just the fact that she was whisked away without a goodbye that made it harsh. I know it's protocol, so I don't understand why I'm whining.

I get it. You must learn to control the new power culled inside of you if you are blessed to be a Halfling. Beyond that, everything else to me is a mystery. I just hope that we will see each other again and that the last quarter moon will not have been our final true moment as friends.

Forgive the melancholy twining around the words of my pen. It's just that tomorrow is already here. Tomorrow is now Today.

My own twenty-fifth moonday approaches. The day I know if Sara and I will meet again or if our paths will come to a fork in the road. The day I know what I am truly meant to be.

Will I be who I am now; gifted, but with an expiration date, or will I be more?

Either way the pendulum swings, there are things I know for certain.

None thus far has ever been bestowed with a gift they could not learn to control.

Blood never lies.

Sacrifice is the way of our world and Radiance shines upon us when we present ourselves as offerings upon our 25th year, bringing about a culmination of what can only be described as either ascension, retention, or disappointment depending on our individual expectations.

Me?

My expectations are that I will remain as I am. Maybe losing a friend but keeping myself. For I do not know how I will adjust. But, maybe just maybe, more will be given to me, and I will not only get to keep my friend but gain more of our world in turn.

Either way, I believe that I am ready. I must be, for if not, why has the little death not taken me and allowed me the rest required for all that is happening in just a few short hours.

I will not lie and say that the uncertainty of what the future holds is not suffocating, and even the rhythmic sound of my breathing, or my familiar fire, can't ease the tension coiled deep within my chest. But I know that I must

gather my courage and walk towards my future with my head held high. Even if it means leaving behind everything and everyone I have ever known.

As I sit here, staring out at the city skyline under the waning moonlight writing, I can't help but wonder what my life will be like if I am blessed to become a Halfling. Will I be able to control it, the elevation of my gift? Will I be accepted as one of few to know all our secrets? Will I be happy?

All these questions and more are swirling around in my head, like a never-ending storm. But amidst the chaos, there is a glimmer of hope. I hope that one day, I will be able to make a difference in our world.

And as our planet Sangre's sun begins to rise, maybe I will try to allow the little death's embrace to grab me once more before the day has stretched on too long, bringing with it my 25th moon day.

Blood and Honor

~ Tempest



Chapter 2

Tempest

Frustrated, I tossed the leather-bound journal. Flopping back into the pillows, I tossed and turned, trying to find comfort in the plush bedding. Normally, rest would come easily. All it took was for my thick black curls mixed with fire to touch the pillow, and I would be pulled into the small death's embrace. But tonight, it eluded me.

My fingers trailed across my scalp before running through hair that had grown long enough to fall in waves around my shoulders. Even my hair was exuding frustration. Tonight, instead of lying still, my curls bounced and swayed around my head and face like a wild, chaotic ball of energy, licked by fire along the ends. I could feel each strand move as though it had a life of its own, each one dancing like a playful blade of fire, as if my gift was bored and decided to make its own game.

My mind wandered as it ran away from rest. I looked about my room, it was full of luxurious knick-knacks and, fabrics—all fire retardant thanks to the never-ending inventions of the fragiles.

“Goddess!” I groaned, when my eyes landed on my bedside clock, as if I needed the confirmation that the sun was waning in the sky. *I’m going to look like a complete mess on the new moon, if I don’t get any rest.* Sighing, I lay back onto the bed, my eyes tracing the ceiling.

“I would welcome the small death tonight,” I whispered, “especially if it brought more of him.”

Sighing again, I closed my eyes and tried to picture him. He was the only man I had ever been with, but it was only in my dreams. I truly had no idea who he was—if he was real, maybe someone I had met in passing once, just a figment of my overactive imagination or a vision of my future. But no matter who he was, he always appeared to me in the same way. Engulfed in shadows. Broad shoulders that dwarfed my own frame. A pale chiseled chest that glinted under the moonlight and piercing blue eyes that seemed to see right through me. In my dreams, I could feel his strong arms enveloping me, holding me close, protecting me from the world. He had a coolness within him that seemed to turn my fire into a gentle warmth, and I had been dreaming of him almost nightly since my twenty-fourth moon. Last night was no exception.



Thinking of him seemed to be the trick to allow rest to embrace me and the second the small death took hold; I gave myself over to dreaming. Opening my eyes, I realized I wasn't alone. He stood there before me, just as he had in so many of my dreams. His cool arms encircled me, and a spark lit in my core. Drawing me closer to his chest, I felt the fire that usually ran through me settle into a delectable warmth that seemed to vibrate through every inch of me.

"Who are you?" I asked, barely believing it was really him again.

"I'm the one who has been dreaming of you," he said with a smile, the shadows hiding his face, but his eyes still piercing right through my soul.

Every muscle tensed as I dreamed, the sensation of his touch feeling so real. I felt my fire starting to take form and come to life from the excitement, causing small flames to dance upon my body and touch me in the real world, as he did my dream.

My knees buckled as his head dipped and he pulled me up his body to lick and suck on my breasts. Following his lead small balls of fire danced across each nipple—seeming to pucker and pull on them— my body broke out into a sweat as my core tightened, in need and pleasure. He trailed his hands down my body as if he was searching out every nook and cranny of my flesh. Other small flames followed suit as if the dream was a blueprint for what my body needed and craved. "I love how you touch me" I whispered into the ether of my dream.

My flesh grew hotter, as my flames danced across my body. My hips lifted as the flames made their way to my core and settled on my most intimate area. The fire danced across my nubbin, just as his tongue was doing in my dream when he ran it over my slit, before sucking on my clit as he slid two fingers inside, pumping me to fulfillment. My body arched again as I climaxed, wetness gushing out, extinguishing the flames and the dream all at once.



Chapter 3

B *eauregard*

I paced relentlessly throughout the corridors of my family's ancient palace, unable to quell the anxiety building within me prior to one of the most crucial nights of my life. Most everyone else within these walls was sound asleep, but not me.

Waning moonlight cast its glow through the stained glass of the library, as I gazed upon portraits of those who had come before me. I wondered if their legacy would continue through me if I didn't find my mated tonight.

Being 124 and unmated was akin to failing to uphold my family's legacy. Although there were no guarantees that a vampire who bore human children, called fragiles, would have them ascend beyond their humanity to become a gifted, Halfling, or part of a mated vampire pair. My family has been the exception to this rule since the first generation. Every one of their offspring have been gifted, halflings, mated then Ruler—if the oldest—each ruling for 500 years according to the Vampiric Law of 800.

Sadly, I was the first born of the 25th generation and found myself without a mate. If I failed to find her tonight, my supposed reign would be the first time that my family's claim to the crown would be up for grabs.

"You're in a blue funk brother," Gabriel spoke from behind me in the shadows of the ancient library.

Emerald eyes pinned me to the spot where I stood. They were ones I had known since we were younglings, and I recognized his voice immediately. I sighed, grateful for his presence. He had a way of bringing me out of my self-loathing.

"You always were one to make an entrance," I smiled.

He stepped forward, grinning lopsidedly. "I figured you wouldn't be able to let sleep embrace you today, dreading the soiree tonight."

I chuckled dryly, trying to pull my mind from under the pressure that was crushing down on me. Not finding my mate would bring an end to our family's claim to the throne, and though I wanted it to go to my younger brother Gabriel, there would still be a fight for power.

"Brother, I have to say that at this moment, I may not be proper company."

Gabriel huffed in understanding. "The weight of duty has always been heavy on your shoulders brother, and I do not envy you it. So, I'll leave you be." His robes swished behind him before he disappeared.

I paced around the room again, stopping in front of the portrait of our family. Our mother Tatiana and father Lucas both stared back at me; Gabriel looked exactly like her—slim, tall and regal with emerald-green eyes—while I was a perfect combination of mother and father. I had inherited my father's cold blue eyes, strong nose, and impressive height. From my mother I took her naturally tan complexion, thick raven hair, and smile. *Too bad I didn't inherit their luck of finding their mated.*

The only thing keeping me sane in all of this was that if indeed I were to be unmated by the end the upcoming night, I would back my brother's bid for the throne and then I would seek out the beautiful woman who had been haunting my dreams for the past year. I could sense that she was just a gifted and not a Halfling, even in my dreams. I closed my eyes as I pulled her image clear to my mind, as if I had seen her in real life.

I opened my eyes and held out my hands as ice began to form between my palms, creating a sparkling sculpture that closely resembled her. My gift pulsed as blue lightning flashed between my hands. Though close, my ice could not capture the true nature of her beauty.

In my dreams her eyes were black with a striking contrast of red throughout them and a swirling effect that drew me in. Her skin was a rich mahogany that seemed to glow with a deep red undertone of fire. Her full red lips and high cheekbones gave her an elegant look. Her hair was thick and heavy, cascading down her shoulders in a graceful waterfall of black tresses interlaced with tendrils of red fire.

I closed my hands around her frozen image and hoped that just maybe, this was a true vision of my future that had been haunting me, and not a figment of my imagination turned obsession.



Chapter 4

B^{eau} Looking at the crystal image of her, I thought of what my father had told me to prepare for on my upcoming 25th blood moon with high hopes that I would find my mated. I snorted as I remembered how excited with anticipation I had been then, 100 years ago.

“Son, you know the reason why there are so few mated in our kind? I mean of course vampires, halflings, and the gifted may choose to mate with any person they wish and walk this life together. However, to truly be mated, to combine your gift with another, to share heartbeats is a rarity that only one percent of vampires will ever know.”

“No, I don’t know, Father,” Beau shrugged his shoulders. He had been told about the hierarchy of things since his eighteenth blood moon when he had received his gift of ice. However, to be told upon his twenty-fifth of an elusive mate that would one day show up to turn his life upside down hadn’t really meant much to him.

Lucas laughed lightly as he turned to sling his thick arm over his son's shoulder, pulling his six feet eight frame closer to his own matching height. "The way my father explained it to me son was like this. The only creature more fearsome than the sacred mated vampire is one that has lost their mated half, which has only happened three times in our creation. When a mated loses their other half, they lose half of themselves as well. Their soul drowns in a deep well of desperation and despair, and it resurfaces as a monstrosity seeking only to kill anyone in its path. They destroy cities, topple kingdoms, ravage armies, and shake the very foundation of our Vampiric Society."

"So why can't they be stopped? I know that we are powerful, but surely there is a fail safe?"

"It has been tried, son. Armies have fallen, thousands of fragiles, gifted, and halflings torn apart. Lost to the violent hand of a grieving mated suffering from Lost Love's Curse. The most they can hope to do is capture and lock them away until they succumb to their final eternal rest. It took three hundred years for the last mated who fell under the curse to finally fall into their eternal rest, and that was from them being starved and suffering with the madness of loneliness. If were to lose your mother, I know I would be the same," Lucas said as he squeezed his son's shoulder.

Beau looked at his father and saw the love he had for his mother shining back at him from the matching crystal blue eyes, and he thought that type of love might be something worth becoming a monster for.

"Son, just know that your heart will not quicken for anyone, and you will not feel true desire for anyone who is not intended to be your mated. With one glance it will be like your universe has rearranged itself. There they will stand, at the newly constructed center of it. Your blood. Your moon. The

rhythm of your heartbeat. She will become the person you will live for. The person whose gift will merge with your own in perfect harmony.”

“Hmmm, nothing to be nervous about then?” Beau chuckled. “No pressure either hmm...”

“No son, no pressure, we know that everyone is not so lucky to find their mated as quickly as your mother and I, and you have a hundred years to grow and find them.”

“Right no pressure,” I let out a long sigh as I gazed once more at the crystal image in my hands, a yearning ache in my chest. Was there even someone out there who could match me, who could complement my gift of Ice? I'd seen other halflings and gifted find love and marry, but not one that had been mated. Being mated was a soul-deep connection that bound two people together in every way possible for eternity.

My breath was heavy as I tried to stifle the restlessness that bubbled inside of me. It was my duty as the eldest son of the royal family to be strong, wise, and focused. But it was so overwhelming at times. With a deep breath, I opened my hands and let the crystal image of her dissolve into nothingness. I knew what I needed to focus on first—being a prince and leader—instead of letting myself get tangled up in dreams that could never come true.

As I exited the room, the cold still lingered in my fingertips, and I rubbed them together to generate warmth. The palace was quiet at this time of night, and I welcomed the soothing silence. Yet it was short-lived as Marcus, my most loyal guard, approached me with a bow. Knowing me so well, he could sense something was awry.

“My prince,” Marcus bowed. “Is everything alright? Did Prince Gabriel find you?”

I nodded my head. “Just needed a minute to myself.”

Marcus followed, faithfully by my side, and I couldn't help but be thankful for his trust and loyalty through all our years of friendship. We trod the corridors in peaceful quietude, until we reached my chambers. I bid Marcus goodnight before closing the door behind me.



Undressed and nestled between the warmth of my heated sheets, my mind was wandering, hearing ice crystals tapping against the windows. I shut my

eyes, focusing on slowing and deepening my breathing until a tranquil serenity had settled over me.

Then suddenly, her whispers came back as they had so many other nights in my dreams. At first, it was faint and distant like a buzzing in the far recesses of my subconsciousness. But then the murmurs grew louder until pleasurable shocks were zapping through me directly to my shaft at her insistent voice.

"Ahhhh, Ohhh," she moaned. "I love how you touch me."

I shook my head trying to make her vanish from my thoughts, yet she only became louder.

I felt the fog begin to settle in my mind as I lay back down and ran my hand through my hair, fingers tangling in the thick black strands. Closing my eyes, I tried to clear away all distraction, but the whispers just kept getting louder and more persistent. It was like I was being called from a faraway place. It felt like someone was bewitching me with their words, and it both scared and excited me.

I shifted uncomfortably in bed, turning onto my back so that only moonlight illuminated my room. The voice got clearer and clearer. It seemed to have wormed its way into my mind both awake and asleep, encouraging me, seducing me.

"Show me. Tell me." The whisper grew almost desperate now, demanding an answer. I licked my lips nervously, feeling the heat rise inside of me. This had to be a dream, nothing more or less. This was turning me on too much.

"What do you want sweetling?" I moaned without realizing it, not sure if I had said the words aloud.

"I want you to touch me. I want to feel your fingers on my body. I want you to fuck me."

My hips thrust into the air, my cock growing harder, thicker, more sensitive.

My mind railed against me, telling me to wake up before I did anything stupid, but it was futile. Both my mind and body were in a feverish state of lust.

"Yes, harder, faster," came her sultry voice over the dreamscape.

My cock twitched eagerly in response to her words, and a guttural groan escaped me as I felt her voice washing over me like a wave of heat.

"Yes, I want to devour you. I want to be deep inside of you. I love the way your heat feels around my cock."

"Yes, fuck me. Fuck me hard. Fuck me baby."

Unable to resist, I stroked my cock, coating it with precum as my hips thrust into the air spurred on by imaginary visions of having her tight around me. Even though it was only a dream, each stroke of my hand along my shaft left me longing for her touch in reality.

Pleasure ripped through me, causing me to buck into my hand as cum spurted from my cock and onto my stomach, cool flashes of pleasure running through my body. I bucked again, my breathing shallow and uneven as I tried to catch my breath, but the pleasure kept coming, coursing through my very veins.

I don't know how long I lay there, but it wasn't long before I began to feel the heavy fog settling around me. The dream had faded, but I knew that was only because the real thing had yet to happen. I'd been dreaming of her for almost a year now, but I'd always been so confused because I've never known her identity.

Laying there, covered in cum, I knew that it was just a dream; it had all been in my head. But still I couldn't help but wonder what it would feel like to have her wrapped around me, to feel the heat of her slit around my cool cock. I had to let go of this imaginary woman. Somewhere out there in the world, there was my mate, someone just for me. I simply had to find her, but I feared

that if I let myself get caught up in this fantasy, I would give up far too easily and lose sight of my duty and my honor.



Chapter 5

Tempest

I groaned and rolled over, burying myself deeper under the covers in an attempt to block out the setting sun. Just then, my mother's voice filled the room. "Tempest Storm Maackiain, please tell me that you allowed death a little reprieve last night and actually allowed rest to claim your body," my mother said sternly as she stood at the end of my bed, her small but intimidating frame looming over me.

I yawned and rubbed my eyes before replying. "Yes, Mom, I rested yesterday morning," I said, my voice hoarse and scratchy.

"It does not sound like it or look like it, my child," my mother sniffed.

"Mother, I have about five hours until my actual blood moon and by then I'm sure rejuvenation will have set in." I yawned again and stumbled out of bed, running a hand through my hair to make myself look slightly more presentable as I got up.

"Yes well, you'll need more than just your natural rejuvenation," Maria sniffed, handing me a blood goblet. "Drink up. This has been offered from a

Halfling who sits on the council, as tribute for your twenty-fifth blood moon. And you need it; it looks like you've been trapped away and deprived of death for quite some time."

"Mom," I laughed, "You are truly bringing about this day in the worst way! After all, there will be hair and make-up for the ball tonight."

"Yes, well that is not my intention, but making sure that you look and feel your best is," my mom said earnestly, her eyes roaming over my figure. We looked almost like twins, except she was a few inches shorter, and she was svelte in comparison to my curves. "All I want is for this blood moon to be the best night ever for you. It's the first time that your moon day has fallen on a Saturday where there will be a ball, and for it to be the final ball King Lucas and Queen Tatiana will host at Palace Fernet. It's really quite poetic."

"Poetic? Seriously?"

"Oh yes my girl!"

I wasn't so enthused. "I don't even know if I want to know anymore," I said flatly, gulping down the goblet of blood. After drinking it, I only felt microscopically better—not enough for me to be excited about tonight. I felt my mother's eyes boring into me, so I flopped back onto the bed to escape her stare. I gathered the silken folds of my blanket around me trying to hide the fire rising in my body from my mom's ever watchful eyes.

Mom just huffed indignantly and winked, sending a wave of water over my head that filled the room with a cloud of steam as it doused my flames. "Tempest, stop lying to yourself, because you're not fooling me," she said sternly. "I can see your gift rising at this very moment and I will not allow you to sabotage yourself."

"Mom!" I sputtered.

She giggled as she took her pointer finger and waved it around me, "Look at

you frothing at the bit, ready to set the whole house aflame with your emotions. Control yourself girl. I know that you want to see your best friend again, that you want us to be closer and to be able to share more with you, I want the same love. Do you think it's easy for Dad and I to only be able to share half of us with you? To withhold anything from you, the shining moon in our lives? You'll be fine my little moonlight, you need to shower and wash your hair anyway. Fragiles will be arriving within the hour to get you ready for today's ball. The clock is ticking, and you will be amazing, my girl."

Mom cupped my wet cheeks within her palms, pulling me up in the bed so we were face to face. "I love you now, and I'll love you no matter what, but I have an inkling that something amazing is in the works for you, my love, and I will not allow you to back away from reaching your full potential because you are full of fear. Quiet your fire and get yourself ready," she ended before placing a warm kiss on my forehead.

I watched in awe as my mother walked away. The strong set of her shoulders and the determined strides of her tiny frame as she left the room filled me with admiration. But her leaving brought me no reprieve, for as soon as she left my fragile attendants took her place.

The fragiles briskly attended to my every need in the bath. I gazed at myself in the rippling reflection of the water while they worked on me, admiring the dark coiled hair piled atop my head, some tendrils bursting free and cascading down my neck and face. My deep umber skin seemed to glow from within, radiating an otherworldly luminescence. Despite this, every fiber of my being burned with unease at the thought of what was yet to come. Transfixed, I was broken from my reverie by a gentle hand upon my naked shoulder.

"My lady... my lady, are you ready to get dressed?" a fragile whispered,

bringing me back to the here and now with a start.

“Yes, please,” I said, impatient to get this night over and done with, barely keeping my mind steady.

“Today is a very big day for you Lady Tempest. We are very excited to see you off to attend your twenty-fifth Blood Moon,” one fragile whispered.

“Here, let's dry you off and get you dressed,” another fragile scurried around to my other side, her pale hands holding open a huge fluffy towel that was cool and smelled of lavender and vanilla.

“Thank you,” I said, inhaling the scent and closing my eyes as the fragile rubbed my skin with the towel.

Another fragile then began to run her fingers through my hair, helping to untangle and comb my tight curls. With a steady hand, she turned each stand from a tight curl into a loose bouncy wave. She stepped back to admire her work before beaming at me in approval and beckoning me towards the full-length mirror.

I gasped as I looked upon my reflection; she had woven a few thin braids throughout, each of them decorated with delicate sapphires that sparkled in the light. A final flourish of holding spray was added for good measure before she handed me a dress that seemed to shimmer even in the pale moonlight streaming through the window.

“Very good my lady,” she said, nodding as she fanned the mirror out before me. “Now let's get you dressed so we can get you to the ball.”



Chapter 6

Tempest

I descended the marble staircase, its steps echoing with each clack of my heels, and the scent of beeswax candles and soot wafted to me. My father sat by the fire lost in thought, while my mother looked up at me with a smile of approval. She bumped his shoulder and he turned toward me.

"Come here, our bright light," my father beckoned me. He was always my hero, both a dreamer and someone who could be trusted to bring those dreams to fruition. His darkly tanned face was etched with lines from years of politicking and war, but he didn't look a day older than a forty-year-old fragile. I knew that just like my mother, he was over two hundred years old, as being gifted or a Halfling provides a life expectancy that is only outdone by a vampire. His silver eyes sparkled with determination, reflecting the soul that had been forged in battle. The charcoal silk jacket embroidered with black crisscrossing diamonds enshrouded him, matching his closely cropped black hair which was streaked with gray and silver that matched his eyes.

My mother standing next to him glowed in the firelight's reflection. Her face appeared tranquil and at ease, but her eyes and crooked smile betrayed her anxiety as she scrutinized my every move. My father looked at me with his usual serious expression, though an intense love was apparent on his face. I could tell there was something he wanted to voice yet he hadn't found the words for.

As I stopped in front of them, the fire roared in the grate before us and reflected off my mother's diamond-encrusted choker. Mom grabbed my hand, pulling me towards the full-length mirror in the room's corner.

"Your father has something for you... Councilman, come on so that we can get our girl where she's meant to be."

My father pushed himself out of his seat, unfolding his six feet frame to its full height and walked over to stand behind me in the mirror. Both of my parents looked at me, their eyes so full of love that I had to stamp down the urge to let flow the tears that wanted to run free. Affectionately, mom pulled a flat black box from the fireplace mantel and opened it for my father.

I stared at myself in the full-length mirror as my father secured a sapphire choker around my neck, its multifaceted blue hues shimmering like forgotten memories of the sea. The matching bracelet on my wrist was a reminder of my eighteenth blood moon, when I received it from my father as an eternal token of his never-ending love for me.

My parents stood rooted to the spot, and watched me silently, although their eyes were wide with worry and hope alike. It was then that I realized how truly special this moment was, and how I could never forget it.

I turned around and my father stepped forward and took both of my hands in his, joining them together in front of me. His voice sounded thick with emotion as he said, "These are reminders of how precious you are to us, no

matter what happens...remember that." He looked deep into my eyes with an intensity that made me feel invincible. It felt like he was speaking directly to my soul and assuring me that everything would be okay if I just kept trusting in myself and believing in what I could do.

My mother stepped up to stand beside him and smiled at us both through her tears, her chest rising and falling with each breath she took to gain control over her emotions. She placed her hands on top of mine now intertwined with my father's before saying softly, "You will make us proud."

There were no words left for us to say after that promise had been made. Instead, we formed a tight hug, encasing solace within our embrace until the clock's ticking reverberated through the moment like a gentle warning calling out for me to go forth into the future bravely, boldly, and without fear.



Chapter 7

Tempest

The limo pulled up to the palace, its front gates standing tall and ornate. The spires reached far into the sky, and banners in vivid reds and oranges flapped proudly from atop the walls. I peered out of the window, my heart beating faster with anticipation. The driver stepped out of the vehicle and opened the door for my parents before coming around to me. My nerves ran rampant as I stepped onto the cobblestones onto red carpet.

Though I admit, I did feel beautiful—like some sort of moonlight goddess in my gown of shimmering white and gold silk. My mother's seamstress had outdone herself with the gown. It flattered me perfectly with its off-the-shoulder design, that revealed just a hint of cleavage.

My mother gave me an encouraging smile as we began walking toward the gate. "You're going to be amazing, darling."

Encouraging though her words were—I wanted to do nothing more than to burn it all down and run away. But looking at how excited my parents were, I decided to just be positive.

Taking a deep breath, I walked up the carpeted walkway and into the palace. Entering, I scanned the ballroom, as sparkling crystal chandeliers cast a warm glow over the entire space.

The ballroom was much larger than it seemed from the outside, with deep crimson walls and polished mahogany floors. My parents left me to wander for a while as I waited for the evening's ceremony. I made my way around the room, greeting old academy classmates along the way.

Just as I was about to get myself some bloodwine, I heard someone call my name, "Tempest!" Turning around, I saw that it was Charlie Snowden, an old academy mate, accompanied by a man who seemed oddly familiar. He gave me a warm smile, and I returned it with one of my own. "Hi Charlie, how have you been?"

"I've been great." Charlie said as he pulled me into a quick hug. The excitement to see me was palpable in his brown eyes. They swirled with a blue wind inside as he pushed me back with his hands on my shoulders to look me over, "My goddess, Tempest, you look more enchanting every time I see you. How have you been faring?"

I felt my cheeks grow hot with fire at Charlie's lavish compliment, and before I could answer, a low growl crept between us, followed by a throat cleared in irritation. Charlie stepped back quickly, his wide brown and blue eyes lit up with something that I thought might have been irritation before it was quickly replaced with resignation. He moved so that I could see his company and introduced us, "Ah yes, my sincerest apologies Tempest. Let me introduce you to Prince Beauregard Lucas Graysen."

My jaw fell open at being introduced to the Crown Prince. "Well, thank you Charlie, and it's my pleasure to make your acquaintance my Prince," I stammered as I curtsied.

“Please call me Beau, and the pleasure is all mine, Tempest,” the prince replied with an intense look in his glacier blue eyes that locked onto mine and sent ripples of longing through my body. “I couldn't help but notice you from across the room. You have a certain...aura about you.”

I felt my heart racing as I took in the sight of him. Prince Beauregard was tall, with broad shoulders and chiseled features that made him look like he was carved out of gold and ivory marble. His hair was jet black and styled in a way that made him look sophisticated and dangerous. Beau had an air of confidence about him that was both intimidating and alluring. His piercing blue eyes matched the silken accents of my dress and seemed to stare straight into my soul, making me feel vulnerable in a way I had never felt before.

There was something about him that drew me in, an inexplicable magnetism that I couldn't resist. It was like he held some kind of power over me, a power that left me dizzy... breathless... already I felt drawn to him, like he was someone I should have known all along.

Time seemed to stand still, and I couldn't bring myself to look away from his gaze. He stepped closer, almost close enough for me to feel his breath on my neck, and slowly he extended his hand towards me.

“May I have this dance?” he asked with a small smile tugging at the corner of his full pink lips.

This was the Crown Prince, and I was just a lowly gifted. The idea of dancing with him was both thrilling and terrifying. My mind raced as I considered all that had happened in the last few minutes, and before I could answer, he stepped forward, gently taking my hand with one of his own and wrapping an arm around my waist.

He guided me across the dance floor with ease, leading us through intricate steps without missing a beat. It was clear that he was an experienced dancer,

which only added to his allure. As our bodies moved in sync with each other's, I closed my eyes briefly and allowed myself to get lost in the moment. This feeling of contentment was unfamiliar but strangely comforting as we continued our dance together, seemingly oblivious to everything else around us.



As he turned us around the floor, I could feel his gaze upon me, like a weight. Every inch of my skin seemed to be aware of him, even though moments ago

we had been strangers.

The melody began to slow, and I felt my chest tighten in anticipation. I could tell he wanted to say something. His face was so close to mine that I could feel his cool breath on my cheek as he whispered, "I know we've just met, but there's something about you that I can't ignore."

My heart was pounding in my chest. What was this feeling? It was foolishness to be drawn to someone in his position, but I couldn't deny the attraction. I even thought maybe he was feeling something too.

"Will you..." His words were cut short, and it seemed he had been perfectly poised to ask me something important when suddenly the snow falling inside the palace caught our attention and the chimes of a royal announcement rang out. Beau quickly pulled back and turned to walk away with a low growl.

I watched him leave, still feeling captivated by him while trying to process what had just happened between us. It felt like something out of a fairy tale.

As Charlie walked over, he looked at me knowingly. His voice—laced with laughter and a hint of disappointment, "I told you that you were enchanting Tempest...now come on let's go get some bloodwine. You'll need it to ease your nerves for this ceremony!"



Chapter 8

Tempest

The ancient banners of the royal family hung from the walls of Palace Fernet, a grand and majestic fortress that had been in their lineage for generations. The sun had set, giving way to a dark night sky filled with stars and a blood moon that lit the sky red and pink.

King Lucas's voice rang out over the thousands present. "Welcome all. Today we are here to celebrate another generation of ours reaching their twenty-fifth moon day and on the night of the blood moon. With the longevity that we are blessed to have—to see our offspring reach the age that will determine their place in life can be a moment filled with many emotions. That is why it is my pleasure to hold this year's first quarter Moonday Ball here at Palace Fernet."

"Tonight, my dear Queen and I will be the ones to bestow the blessings that will shine upon these gifted to determine if they will become halflings." King Lucas spoke as he held out his hand toward his wife Queen Tatiana who joined his side.

As the king's words echoed through the halls of the palace, the crowd erupted into cheers and applause. The queen lifted her hands and began to chant ancient words of divine influence. "As we bless you tonight from our loving kingdom, may you be ever faithful and true. May your life shine bright like the moon in the sky, guiding you through whatever comes your way."

The quarter Blood Moon Ball was one of the most anticipated seasonal events, a night of ascension and revelry for the young gifted of the kingdom. It was a magical event, and the atmosphere even more enchanting. Sparks of light floated across the hall from all directions while minstrels played gentle music, filling the air with a melodic sound that was in harmony with the evening. The scent of roses and jasmine filled the air, adding to the romantic atmosphere of the event. The young men and women were dressed in their finest attire, with shimmering gowns and elegant suits.

The anticipation had been building all night, and finally my moment had come. I stood in line, surrounded by other gifted like me, all awaiting our moment to stand before the king and queen. My heart pounded in my chest as I watched them approach. I fidgeted with the delicate lace of my dress, trying to steady my nerves. This was it—the moment that would determine whether I remained a gifted or became a Halfling like the elite few.

King Lucas stopped in front of me, his piercing blue eyes scanning me from head to toe. I felt exposed under his gaze. He then raised his hands above me as he began speaking an ancient blessing in a language that I did not understand. Queen Tatiana joined in, their voices echoing around us as they spoke in perfect harmony.

"Tempest," the king said suddenly, his voice booming. "You have reached your twenty-fifth Blood Moon, and tonight we will bestow upon you the blessings that will determine if you become a Halfling. Are you ready?"

Nerves nearly overtook me, but I managed to nod my head. Queen Tatiana stepped forward and touched my forehead. The energy surged through me, leaving an ice-cold chill in its wake.

As I opened my eyes, a sense of clarity washed over me. I knew what my destiny was, and it was a destiny that I had secretly longed for ever since I was a little girl. I looked up at the queen and smiled, feeling an immense gratitude towards her.

"I am ready, Your Majesty," I said, my voice strong and confident.

Queen Tatiana smiled at me, her eyes brimming with pride. "Then let it be so," she said, and with a flick of her wrist, a burst of bright light surrounded me.

My body quivered as the light engulfed me, like a veil being lifted from my eyes. I looked around the ballroom and it glowed with an otherworldly radiance. As the light faded, I knew something had changed inside of me. I could feel power coursing through my veins, a mixture of exhilaration and terror. My fangs longed to extend from my gums, and a faint glow emanated from my hands.

The King nodded in satisfaction, his eyes gleaming. "Tempest, you have been chosen to become a Halfling," he declared for all to hear. The crowd roared with joy and excitement, as pride swelled through me. My mother always said I was destined for greatness, but even she couldn't have predicted what was happening now.

As they finished their ritual, King Lucas stepped away and moved on to the next person in line. Queen Tatiana stayed behind for a moment longer and looked me directly in my eyes before speaking softly yet firmly, "Remember Tempest, your destiny lies within you!"

Her words filled me with warmth and hope as she moved away to join her

husband. I was stunned--in a trance--my body trying to adjust to the new power that was now coursing inside of me. I almost didn't notice when they had blessed the last gifted. After giving their farewell speech, they turned away from us all.

Not many of us had been blessed with elevation from gifted to Halfling, and as I looked around at the other few, I saw the same look of awe and wonder on their faces. We were all changed now, and nothing would ever be the same again.

The festivities resumed, but the attention of the room was now turned to me. Everyone seemed to be searching for a glimpse of my newfound power and influence, but all I could feel was the piercing gaze of one man—Prince Beauregard.

My newfound status had attracted the attention of all these gifted and halflings, but somehow, he'd known before them that I was special. He emerged from the shadows of the ballroom and stepped into the light, his deep blue eyes fixed on mine, and he asked in a tone laden with awe, "It's you, isn't it?"



Chapter 9

Tempest

I looked up at Beau, my pulse racing, confusion swirling in my mind as something dark and wanting pulsed deep inside of me—seeking a deeper connection to him. "What do you mean?" I asked, completely bewildered.

"You're the one from my dreams," he said, his voice low and husky. His eyes sparkled in the dimly lit ballroom, and I felt an icy warmth radiate throughout my body. My heart beat wildly in anticipation for what he might say next. "I couldn't see you fully until you became a Halfling. The pull to you was strong even before that moment, but now it is unbearable."

He stepped closer to me, his fingertips lightly brushing my face. "I've never felt anything like this before," he said, his eyes locked on mine as his voice swirled around me in a low growl. "We're connected, and I know you don't quite understand this being a new halfling—but I knew there was something different about you and the moon goddess has confirmed it with this bond, these feelings."

My cheeks flushed with heat, and a warmth crept into my chest at his words. All this night I had been drawn to Beau yet never quite understanding why, but now it seemed that he had felt the same towards me from our first meeting earlier. I know there is still so much I need to learn as a halfling, but this thing here with Beau—the feelings he invokes within me—holds a weight of certainty behind them.

"Thank you," I whispered, my voice barely audible. "I believe that I have been dreaming of you as well. You did seem oddly familiar and though I had seen your images before, in my dreams you're hidden and so... un-princely... so much more."

He stepped closer to me, his hand coming up to caress my cheek. His eyes devoured every inch of me as they traced my body and the features of my face. "I've never felt anything like this before," he said softly. "It's like we're connected in a way that I can't explain."

I couldn't believe that someone could look at me like that. Like I was the most beautiful thing in the world. No one had ever seen me like this before, as if I were something divine rather than ordinary. And yet here he was, gazing into my eyes and holding my hand in his as if I were indeed a dream come true. A chill raced across my skin as my heart fluttered from his touch. I couldn't lie to myself as our eyes locked in a tango of desire. We stood there for what seemed like eternity, our eyes speaking volumes.

I trembled as Beau wrapped his arms around me, pulling me flush to his chest. Leaning down a black curl fell over his brow, and my fingers itched to smooth it back. My eyes traced his handsome features as his face descended to meet mine and my lips parted in anticipation as his lips, soft and cool, brushed against mine, the electricity of our kiss sending a jolt through me. Eyes closing with a whimpering moan, I melted into his embrace as he

deepened the kiss, his tongue exploring my mouth with a hunger that I'd never felt before. This was better than the dreams we had shared; this was real, and he was here. His lips were soft and inviting, but firm in their intensity.

Heat pooled in my belly, warmth radiating out from where Beau touched me. One hand rested on my lower back, sending chills up and down my spine as the other lifted my chin to meet him kiss for kiss. I couldn't get enough of him—his taste, his touch, his heat. We broke apart, panting for breath as we stared into each other's eyes. A smile spread across my face as I looked up at Beau.

"Come," he said, his voice low and husky as he pulled me into a slow dance. My heart raced from the thrill of it all, and I pulled him even closer towards me, so close that I could feel his heartbeat against my cheek. My body was on fire with desire for this incredible man before me. The sound of music faded away as I struggled to hear my own heartbeat over the rushing blood pulsing through my ears, drowning out all other noises. My skin flushed with heat; my stomach twisted into knots. And suddenly our gifts unlocked, fire and ice merged, creating a steam that pushed out between us. It swirled around the ballroom creating a seductive white haze that clung to us like mist on an early morning field.

Our bodies gravitated even closer towards each other when he wrapped those big, muscled arms around me, pulling my body tight against his until not a single trace of space remained between us. He pulled away to twirl me expertly across the dance floor, and as he spun me out the gravitational pull between us was almost too much to handle. We moved back together like we were magnetized, irresistibly drawn in by the other's power. The heat from my flames mixed perfectly with the coolness of Beau's ice.

The power generated between us spun outwards, twisting in opposite directions—one blue and glowing so bright it was almost white coming off Beau, an icy chill following in its wake; the other red and pulsating out of me, slowly settling into the room, blanketing everything with a warmth that was almost too much to bear before pulling back into our bodies. We had no control, and our dancing became more intense as our passions grew untamed, each step pushing out more power, like crashing waves building upon one another.



Chapter 10

B^{eau} I could feel her warmth radiating through me as I looked into her eyes. They burned with an intense fire that made my heart race. Without saying a word, I took her hand and led her out of the ballroom and into the gardens. We walked in silence, only interrupted by the crackling of her flames and the crunch of my frost beneath our feet.

Finally, we reached the center of the garden and were alone. I turned to face her, my breath quickening as I felt the power emanating from us both. We stood there, our breath mingling together in one heavy exhale. No longer able to hold back, I leaned in closer to her, inhaling her sweet scent—cinnamon and strawberries with a hint of smoke. As I looked into her eyes, dark and full of desire. The ice in my veins swirled as I traced a frozen line down her neck. I groaned as she gasped, her inner fire melting the frost. Without a second thought, I leaned in and kissed her—a passionate kiss that left us both breathless.

The intensity between us built as our tongues tangled, and something inside of me screamed, "MINE!"

I pulled away to stare at this gift that had been handed to me. She was beautiful. Soft brown skin that glowed with the light of her inner fire, and eyes that sparkled like rubies and black diamonds in the dark. Her hair was a wild mane of curly black tresses tipped in red that fell in waves around her shoulders. But it wasn't just her beauty that drew me to her, it was the power that radiated from her. A force so strong that it threatened to consume me and drive me mad with desire. I wanted her, every single inch of her. She called to me, my gift sought her, and she warmed me, heating the chill I had carried with me for a hundred and twenty-five years.

I pushed her up against a nearby tree, its rough bark scraping against the back of her dress. Her eyes filled with desire as I traced my fingers up her arm, leaving a light trail of frost across the silk and lace, raising goosebumps on her skin. Every part of me was alive and electrified, even more than it ever had been before. I needed to taste her again, I thought, as a growl rumbled through my chest. As if reading my mind, Tempest tilted her head back against the tree. I pushed up against her, swallowing her soft moan with my lips.

This time, the kiss was even more electrifying than before. The intensity of our passion was undeniable, and something inside of me whispered forever...

As our lips parted, I whispered into her ear, "I want you, Tempest."

Her eyes shone with a fierce fire as she pulled me closer to her, her body pressed against mine. "I want you too, Beau," she said in a husky voice. "I've never felt anything like this before."

I could feel her warmth radiating through me again as I held her tight against me. I'd never felt anything like this before either, and I felt at home in her

arms. I couldn't deny it any longer. My gift demanded it, and I knew she was the one, my mated. The most precious gift had been laid before me right at my darkest hour.

I pushed closer to her, our bodies flush against each other. I wanted to take her right here against this tree, and I knew she wanted me just as badly. But I also knew it would have to wait. The desire between us was too strong, and the night unfolded before us like a blanket of pure lust.

"I know," I whispered, tracing a finger along her collarbone. "Something about you calls to me too. I can't quite explain it, but I feel like I belong with you."

She pulled away to look at me and smiled before leaning in to kiss me again. This time, she took the lead, her soft lips coaxing a moan from me as she explored my mouth with her tongue. Our gifts swirled around us, mixing, and a warm glow filled the gardens. The power between us built, and I could feel it radiating outwards until it pushed its way into the ballroom. I remembered that I was supposed to be entertaining the guests with my parents, the king and queen, but something deep inside of me couldn't care less.

Her hands were on my shoulders as she pushed me away from her. With a shy smile, she said, "I think the king, queen and your guests are wondering where you've gone."

I laughed and took her hand, leading her back towards the ballroom. I knew as I looked into her eyes that I this was it. Not only had I found my mated, but there was a release of the burden I had been holding. Had I not found Tempest on this Blood Moon, I might have lost the crown.

Just as we reached the head of the stairs, the music stopped. A sudden hush fell upon the crowd, and everyone turned to the entrance. A gasp filled the

room as they saw me holding Tempest's hand. I could feel her shiver against me as she heard the whispers that passed through the ballroom.

As I waited for the crowd to quiet down, I turned to look at Tempest and I felt the ice in my veins begin to burn. I saw an intense blush spread across her cheeks as her eyes locked on mine.

Trying to act as regal and collected as possible, I took a deep breath and said, "Tonight, I have been graced with the most beautiful gift, as I have found my other half. I owe my thanks to my guest, my subjects, my brother, the queen, all of whom helped make this night possible. But most of all, I owe my thanks to Tempest, who has brought me more light than I ever thought possible, and whom I will now forever cherish as my bride."

Sighs and gasps rippled through the crowd as Tempest took a step forward. She walked down the stairs graceful as a butterfly as the crowd stared in awe.



PART TWO
TORN BY JEALOUSY



Chapter 11

B^{eau} No words could describe what I was feeling. Only a single thought kept replaying through my mind—She is mine. The mating bond pulled me towards Tempest, it was like a gravitational force. A blood moon one hundred years in the making hung heavy in the sky, and I could feel my ice react to it.

I felt a slight heat radiating from her skin as my large hand encased her smaller one. We were a match designed exquisitely to complement each other in every way—her dark skin to my paleness, her fire to my ice. As we took that first step down the stairs, I could feel Tempest shaking with anticipation. As we reached the bottom of the stairs, I looked around the room, and I could see the shock and awe in the faces of the people gathered there as I gripped her hand tightly. They all thought this night would end with my claim to the throne snatched away, but fate had other plans for me.

I was happy to shout from the rafter and announce to my kingdom, to all the gifted, halflings, vampires, and royalty in attendance that I had finally found

my long sought after mated. I could no longer be called 'The Prince Who May Not Ascend'.

My parents, King Lucas and Queen Tatiana, approached closely followed by Tempest's own parents—who sat on the royal council—Maria and Andreas Storm. As my father approached us, Tempest tensed in my arms, and I sensed her anxiety. I looked up at the king and queen and smiled slightly as they reached us. My mother's eyes were full of tears, and my father's face was unreadable, but I knew that they would both accept Tempest as my mated, as they had been waiting for me to find her for so long. They had been afraid that I would never find my match, and that I would never be able to ascend to the throne. But now, with Tempest by my side, I knew that I could take on anything.

My father put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Congratulations, son. It appears that you have found your mated and we could not be happier for you."

"Welcome, Tempest," my father said, turning to her, extending his hand. "We are honored to have you as part of our family, especially coming from such an esteemed family already so deeply embedded in our council."

Tempest took his hand tentatively, her eyes darting nervously around the room before lowering. "Thank you, Your Majesty," she said softly.

My mother stepped forward then, a wide smile on her face. "I am so happy for you, Beau," she said, placing a hand on my cheek. "Tempest is a wonderful match for you. I knew there was something more in store for her when I bestowed her blessing. You will make a beautiful couple."

I felt my chest swell with pride, feeling a sense of relief as I embraced my parents. I had never felt so supported and loved in my life. And now, I had Tempest by my side, my forever partner.

Tempest's father cleared his throat, and I turned to face him, a feeling of apprehension creeping into my heart. He looked at us both with a mix of emotions on his face. I could tell he was happy for us, but also a little sad to see his daughter leave him. "As a member of the council and father of your future bride, I must say that I am pleased to see my daughter with you, Beau. Your cemented ascension to the throne was long overdue and it is a relief to see that you have found your match." His eyes flickered to me, then to Tempest. "But I must warn you, if any harm comes to my daughter, there will be consequences."

I nodded, holding Tempest closer to me. "I understand, sir. I will do everything in my power to protect her and keep her safe."

"My dear Tempest," her father said, his voice thick with emotion. "You have found your mated, and I could not be more proud of you. I never imagined that your twenty-fifth blood moon would see you on this path, so quickly pulled away from your mother and me. You will always have a place in our hearts and in our home. And Beau, I entrust you with the care of my daughter. Treat her with the love and respect that she deserves, and I know that you will make a great king."

The room erupted into chaos around us as the crowd let out a cheer, and I could feel Tempest's cheeks grow warm with her fire as she blushed. I could feel what she was feeling, her shy insecurity and self-consciousness. But when I looked into her eyes, I smiled in reassurance and kissed her, making her cheeks flushed an even deeper red.



Tempest

My mother looked at me as if I was her everything when she stepped in front of my father, her eyes shining with tears. "I am so happy for you, Tempest," she said, hugging me tightly. "I told you that there was something special in store for you."

I hugged her back, feeling the weight of her love and support. "Thank you, Mom," I whispered, feeling the weight of the moment sink in. As she pulled away, I turned to face my father, who was looking at me with a slightly sad expression.

"I'm going to miss you, sweetheart," he said, pulling me into a hug.

"I'll miss you too, Dad," I said, my voice quivering with emotion.

He pulled away—holding my shoulders—to look me in the eyes. "But I know that you're meant for bigger things, Tempest. You're meant to be by Beau's side, ruling the kingdom with him. You're meant to be his queen."

I nodded, feeling a sense of purpose wash over me. "I won't let you down, Dad. I'll make you proud."

"I already am," he said, kissing my forehead. "Now go and make history."

As I turned back to Beau, I saw something that looked like adoration in his eyes.

As the night wound down, Beau led me to a private indoor garden under a domed skylight located within the center of the palace. The moon was high in the sky, casting a red and silver glow over everything through the windowed ceiling. Beau stood behind me, his arms around my waist, and I leaned back into him, feeling a sense of safety and comfort wash over me. I knew that I was exactly where I was meant to be.



Chapter 12

B^{eau} Turning Tempest to face me I leaned down to trail kisses down her neck, nipping and licking at the sensitive skin. Tempest moaned softly, her arms lifting so fingers could tangle in my hair as I moved lower, pulling the thin silk and lace of her gown down her voluptuous body, giving my hands freedom to roam.

Our gifts started swirling around us once more, the heat of Tempest's flames meeting the chill of my ice. It was a dance unlike any other, an intoxicating mix of passion and hunger. As we kissed, Tempest's hands roamed up and down my back, tracing the contours of my muscles through my shirt. In my haste, I tore at the fabric of her dress as our passion grew and she returned the favor as she ripped open the buttons of my shirt and vest.

I slid the straps of her gown down her arms, feeling her shiver at my touch. I wanted to devour her, and I intended to.



My lips returned to her breasts, and I could feel my fangs begin to extend at the taste of her. I wanted to bite her but fought off the urge as long as I could, wanting our first time together to be perfect, wanting the moment to last forever.

I finally pulled away and stared into her eyes again, “Are you sure you want this?”

Her face was flushed already, but I could see her heartbeat quicken even more at my words, and I knew she was mine. "Yes," she whispered, her voice hoarse from all of the passion we'd already shared.

I slowly moved my lips down her body, tasting the soft skin I found there. I could feel her anticipation and her desire for more through our connection. I teased her, kissing and licking her body, wanting to make her wait just a little while longer. It was only when I felt her relax that I continued my descent down her body, stopping just below her full breasts.

Tempest's hands tangled in my hair once more, pulling lightly as I teased her. With a small smile, I kissed and nipped at her throat before pushing aside the deep tear of her dress and baring her full breasts to my view. Slow, purposeful kisses traced the contours of her body before I once again made my way down her body. My hands followed my lips, gently caressing her soft skin as I moved over her, savoring her. "You are so beautiful, my Tempest," I whispered as I placed a kiss over her womb, knowing that one day it would hold my child.

I could feel the heat of her desire for me and my own desire for her almost become unbearable. Almost unable to control myself, I tore at the remains of her dress and buried my face in her skin to breathe in her scent. I could hear her heart pounding against my ear as my fangs grazed her skin, and I did my best to hold back. I wanted to wait until she climaxed around me. I needed to wait until she was begging for me to fill her with my seed.

To my surprise and pleasure, Tempest arched up off of the daybed as my tongue found her sweet spot. I licked and nibbled at her clit, before I sucked it gently between my lips. Her hands tightened in my hair as she moaned loudly, her body bucking against me as I pleased her.

Tempest's hips bucked as I finally found what I was looking for. The taste of

her was like nothing I'd ever had on my tongue before. I needed more, wanted more. The scent of her desire intensified with my ministrations, and I licked and sucked at her as though my life depended on it. I was rewarded with a flood of her honey, and I sucked every last drop from her.

I continued to stroke her with my fingers until I had wrung every last drop of pleasure from her body, her head thrown back and her eyes closed as she recovered from the intensity of her orgasm.

When she finally opened her eyes, I could tell she'd been well and truly pleased. Her skin was flushed, her heartbeat rapid, and her breathing increased. I felt her desire for me as if it were my own, and my own desire for her made my cock throb painfully in my pants. Tempest reached for me, and I let her pull me up to kiss her deeply. Her fingers moved over the tattered remains of my shirt, tracing the grooves in my muscles as she deepened the kiss. I could taste her desire and her need, and I pulled away enough to look into her eyes, searching for any sign that she might be uncomfortable. "Are you ready?" I whispered to her, the words almost not forming in my mouth.

"I've waited for this moment for so long... Please, Beau," she said softly as her fingers traced my cheek.

I stood up and began to shed my clothes, watching Tempest as she watched me. Her eyes were filled with passion and desire, and when she licked her lips, I almost lost control of myself. I wanted her so much, and I knew that she was ready for me.

I stood there in front of her, my arousal full and hard and her hands reached out to trace the contours of my body. Her hands were gentle and soft, exploring every inch of me with a light touch.

Her eyes met mine, her lips parted as though she was going to say something, but before she could, I captured her mouth in another deep kiss, wanting to

possess her as much as possible, wanting to remind her that she was mine and I was hers. I couldn't stand it any longer, and I tugged at the remains of her dress until it was gone, leaving her naked before me. I stepped back and took a good look at her, letting my eyes trace the curves of her body. My hands traced the outlines of her body as carefully and as slowly as her fingers had traced mine. I wanted to remember every nuance, every turn of her body. Her skin was soft and hot to the touch, even though she was chilled from the ice that ran in my veins. I could hear her pulse pounding and I felt her desire for me almost as if it were my own. She put her hands out to me, pulling me back to her. Our lips met again, as I climbed back onto the daybed, positioning myself between her legs. I placed my hands under her hips and pulled her to the edge of the daybed, wanting to see the expression on her face as she felt me fill her for the very first time.

I entered her slowly, wanting to savor this moment, wanting to take her slowly as her warmth surrounded me. "You feel so good," I murmured, my voice hoarse with desire as I inched slowly inside of her heat. She squeezed me as I entered her and I groaned with pleasure, unable to hold back at her warm welcome stopping only once I felt myself meet the resistance of her maidenhead. Tempest gasped as I broke through and I held still for a moment, waiting for the pain to subside, wanting to give her every opportunity to change her mind if she wanted to.

The tension in her face eased as I grinded my hips in a slow, steady rhythm. Tempest gifted me with soft as she locked her legs around my waist- pulling me deeper inside. My body was on fire, and I could feel the warmth spreading through me as our connection expanded to encompass our emotions as well as our bodies. I could feel Tempest's need and desire for me

as if it were my own, and I loved the fact that I could please her. Sharp nails dug into my back as she lifted her hips to meet my every stroke.

We moved together, our hunger building with each passing moment. My hands roamed over her supple body, grabbing onto her hips, pulling her even closer against as I thrust deeper and deeper. The sound of our bodies slapping against each other echoed through the quiet garden, a testament to the raw, unbridled passion we shared.

My gums itched, then I groaned as my fangs elongated, hunger gripping my body with its invisible hands. I felt the thirst taking over, telling me to claim what's mine and I knew Tempest must be feeling the same, before I could form the words to explain, she moaned, "Beau. What is this?"

I was almost too far gone to explain what should have been obvious for most halflings, but Tempest was newly elevated. I reared back as I felt my own fangs extend from my mouth and into a set of stunning ivory fangs that matched Tempest's perfectly.

"It's the mating call," I growled, a deep rumble from my chest vibrating through my body against hers, my hips jerking as I felt her hot wet slit clamp around me.

"Oh!" she squealed as I entered her with another deep thrust, causing the walls of her sex to suction more firmly around me.

"Yes, I've been waiting for you for so long," I grunted as I started to kiss her neck. "And now it almost makes sense." I kissed up her jaw line and gently scraped her sensitive earlobe with one cold tip of my fang.

"Bite me," I whispered as my fingers rolled her nipple and tugged at her breast causing fire and ice to collide and steam to rise around us. "Tempest."



Tempest

Unable to fight the feelings building like a tide inside of me any longer I gave in to the desire, feeling myself reaching a crest larger than any I ever had before. I kissed the spot on his shoulder where I planned on biting just before sinking my fangs into him. The sweet, woody taste of his blood filled my mouth and hit me like a lightning bolt causing me to climax. I felt Beau's cool cock grow even more inside of me as he grunted.

The sweet taste of his blood caused every nerve ending to pulse. Hot and cold spread instantly and evenly from my chest outward until I thought I might combust and set the whole garden and palace aflame. Then, the feeling changed, and it brought with it a wave of climaxes that hit harder than I'd ever experienced before, but there was no fire as I expected. It was as if a cool breeze wafted over me, moving through my veins seductively.

The feeling of her drawing my blood in her body left me speechless and Tempest's legs wrapped around my hips as her wet silken sheath gripped me so tightly my eye rolled in the back of my head and had my fangs ready to dig as deeply into her as my cock.

After she pulled away from me, the sight of my blood dripping down her beautiful chin did me in and I could no longer hold back, my fangs embedded deep into the soft flesh of her breast.

Searing heat and icy cold coursed through my veins as I pumped my release into her with a roar of pure satisfaction around her plump breast, my tongue still flicking around my nipple.

Goddess my cock was buried so deep inside of her, I felt her heartbeat echo through my own.

"Tempest," I said breathlessly, pulling away to speak- I paused and leaned down licking the puncture wounds I had left on her body, "I can feel your blood... your fire, moving through you."

She nuzzled the spot on my shoulder where she had just placed her own mark. "Mmm. I can feel you too. It's like the most wonderful drug."



Chapter 13

B^{eau} "It is the Mating," I laughed, trying to catch my breath. "Others have described it as the ultimate aphrodisiac."

We lay there in silence on our sides, staring at each other on the plush daybed, listening to the soft sounds of the garden's waterfall making noises in the distance. The air was thick with the scent of sex and Tempest's breath was warm on my skin. I wrapped my arms around her body and pulled her tightly against me. She snuggled up to my chest as we both lay there, basking in our new connection, neither of us sure what to say.

"I guess we should probably find what's left of our clothes so I can show you to our quarters," I said, reluctantly breaking the silence.

"That is probably a good idea," Tempest agreed, her voice soft and languid.

"But first..." I playfully rolled Tempest over, pinning her down. I held her wrists high and tight as I lowered my body and kissed the side of her neck.

Tempest moaned and arched her back, pushing her breasts toward me. I felt a tremor run through her body as I pressed my erection against her abdomen.

Her eyes closed tight as I started to kiss my way down to her breasts. My lips closed over one hard, tight nipple and I sucked gently before pulling her breast deep into my mouth. My tongue swirled around the firm bud, and she moaned my name so sweetly, "Beau!"

"I want you to feel me. I want you to know that no matter what, I am yours. Forever." I reached down and stroked her clit with my thumb, sending another shudder of pleasure through her body.

Tempest groaned as she arched her back, offering her ample breasts to me as if in offering. I switched sides and closed my mouth over the other nipple, sucking hard.



Tempest

"I feel you, Beau," I whimpered as he sucked on my tight bud. I felt like I was riding an out-of-control dragon, one that I didn't want to be rescued from. He released my nipple with a wet pop and trailed his tongue down to the center of my breasts. "I can feel so many things," I breathed.

He released my wrists and kissed his way down to my belly button, swirling his tongue around the sensitive well. "Good, but I need you to feel more," he growled as he moved down the daybed and then nibbled his way up my thighs, licking and sucking hard, leaving his mark on my skin.

His fangs were still extended, and I groaned as I felt their sharp tips cut into my skin. It was an exquisite mix of pleasure and pain. His hands were pinning down my hips and I shook against him, wanting nothing more than to kiss him, to run my hands over his body, and to kiss him everywhere.

"Oh, Beau!" My breath hitched as he pressed his fingers against my hot wet slit.

"Fuck! Yes, this is mine," Beau grunted as slipped his fingers inside of me and started to stroke, sending my head spinning. I could do nothing but moan, gripping the cushions, arching my back and trying to thrust my hips against his fingers. "You're all mine, Tempest. I want to feel you on my tongue," Beau teased, kissing his way up closer to my sex before he slipped his fangs into my inner thigh, "I want to taste you on my lips. Tell me you want that love," Beau demanded against my thigh. I groaned, my whole body on fire, barely able to form a cohesive thought, let alone put words in proper order.

"Yes," I was finally able to whisper. "I want you to taste me."

Beau groaned, pulling his fingers out of me and raking his nails down my thighs until he reached my knees. He pushed them wide apart, and I whimpered trying to thrust my hips against him.

"Please!" I begged; voice barely audible.



Beau

My lips brushed against her knees, slowly tracing their way up as my tongue tasted the wet heat of her pleasure. My mouth devoured her, taking in her soft moans and feeling the tremors that ran through her body. I nipped and teased her until she was arching beneath me, offering up herself with a husky moan. There was something in her response that called out to everything carnal inside of me.

Her taste filled me with desire, pushing me to the very brink of my own pleasure. "Beau, don't stop," she begged from between clenched teeth. I complied eagerly as I traced her petals with my tongue, exploring every secret corner of her sex. She gasped when I pulled her swollen nub into my eager mouth and sucked hard, nipping at it with my teeth. The muscles in her stomach quivered underneath my hand as waves of pleasure coursed through her. I felt absolutely decadent as I feasted on her.

I growled against her slit, wanting more. I needed to drown in the taste of her. Pulling Tempest to meet me, I pushed one finger inside, teasingly stroking it in and out again, as my tongue dominated her throbbing clit. She squirmed beneath me as an orgasm rocked through her body. "Oh Beau!" she moaned and grabbed my shoulders for support.

"Yes, Tempest?" I asked, laughing softly between kisses as I continued to work on her over-sensitive clit with my thumb. Pushing myself to the brink of climax but not wanting to pull away and plunge back into her silken depths until she begged me for it.

She said nothing instead letting another wave take over her body and bring forth a ragged gasp from deep within her body. My fangs grazed against her skin as I drank in the sweetest wine imaginable.

"I need you Beau," she whispered, thrusting against my hand. "I want you inside me."

"Yes!" I breathed eagerly, pulling my fingers out and tracing them slowly up towards the entrance of her desire. Tempest looked down over herself and shuddered as her juices slipped down her wet slit onto the bench beneath us and glistened on my chin.



Tempest

"Beau," I whispered as he pushed me back on the bed and slid his cock back inside my spasming walls. My body shuddered as Beau's cock took ownership of me, immediately starting a new pulsing and aching sensation. I looked up to the night sky and saw the stars dancing above me like twinkling diamonds. My pulse quickened and my heart beat out a frantic tempo as he moved inside me, every movement stronger as if he were filling me with more than just pleasure. His cock seemed to grow even harder, throbbing deeply within me as my muscles began to contract around him.

"Tempest," Beau whispered in a husky and desperate voice. I could feel his need for me, and my heart ached. "I am so close."

"Yes," I agreed softly. "So am I." I had never felt so connected to another before. It was like I could feel his every heartbeat, breath, and movement inside of me.

"Fuck," Beau exclaimed as he thrust deeper while still holding me close, his chest pressed against mine and his talons digging into my back. "I'm going to give you all of me Tempest. Everything that I have."

"Ahh," I moaned, feeling my body start to shake. I held onto him tighter. "I give my everything to you as well." My fangs unable to be controlled, distended again seeking to claim what was rightfully mine as they sucked onto his neck. The taste of his blood sent me spiraling again.

With a moan, Beau came, filling me with every last drop of his strength and power. I pulled him tighter to me and kissed him ferociously. I could feel his

blood in my veins, his cool energy pulsing through me. With a silent explosion, I felt the fire burst in my chest and spread through my body. My heartbeat against my ribs, pounding in time to Beau's heartbeat.

"Beau," I whispered, barely able to find the breath to speak. "Beau!"

"Tempest!" He grunted as he gripped my hips and pounded into me with abandon. I moaned again as I felt his cool cum fill me. I nuzzled my face into his neck and as I did, my flames cooled themselves and the steam that had been swirling around us settled into a gentle mist.

"You're mine now," Beau whispered as he held me against his chest, his cock still throbbing inside me.



Chapter 14

B^{eau} My body hummed in satisfaction as I carried Tempest through the palace walls, the residual mist of our gifts hiding us from the watchful eyes of those remaining after the ball. We had been away for a while completing our mating in the garden, and I'd never felt a connection like this before.

I had waited so long for this moment—to finally be with my true mate. Even as she slept, I could feel the connection between us growing stronger with each passing moment. Looking down at her as I walked through the halls, she was beautiful, even more so now that my mark was upon her. She was mine now, in every way possible. No one would ever take her away from me.

Finally, I reached my private quarters—a lavish suite fit for a king and queen in waiting. Gently, I laid Tempest down on the bed. I was filled with the urge to take care of her and protect her in all ways. I strode into the bath and turned on the hot water before picking up a thick fluffy washcloth. I knew that she must be sore after giving me her innocence.

Walking back into the room, I was captivated by her again. I leaned over Tempest, pulling away the remnants of her dress I had wrapped her in. My breath hitched at the beauty of her dark skin against the blue silk sheets, her thick hair spreading out like a halo around her. She looked so peaceful and beautiful, and I couldn't resist running my fingers through it before I spread her thighs to wash away the evidence of our love.

Tempest stirred, her eyes fluttering open as she looked up at me with love and contentment. "Beau," she said, her voice a soft sexy growl. "Mine."

My heart swelled with emotion. "Yours." I leaned down, pressing my lips to hers in a deep kiss. I reluctantly pulled away from her, so that I could return to the bath to do the same for myself. Coming back to the room I slid into the bed next to her, intending to give her time to rest, but she turned to me, her eyes glowing more red than black.

She kissed me fiercely, her arms wrapping tightly around me and pulling me closer to her. Her lips were warm, soft and sure as they pressed against mine. I kissed her back, completely losing myself in her embrace. Her mouth opened, letting me in deeper, and I groaned against her.

I felt her hands slide over my back as her nails dragged against me, sending a thrill of desire through my body. My heart beat faster with each stroke of her tongue against mine, and my cock ached for her touch.

I pulled back from her just enough that I could look into her eyes. They were still filled with the fiery glow of her passion. Her body was warm against mine and I could feel her heart slamming against her chest. The sheets had fallen away from her breasts, and I could see her dark brown nipples, stiff and pebbled.

I groaned in pleasure as my hands found their way to Tempest's sensitive breasts, my fingers lightly teasing her nipples. She arched her back into me,

giving me more access, and I brought my lips down to meet hers.

My kisses trailed lower, and when I reached her center, I didn't hesitate, burying my face between her thighs, taking in all of her sweet flavor. Tempest gasped as I flicked my tongue over her clit, sending a swell of pride through my body.

She tangled her fingers in my hair, pulling me closer to her hot wet slit and I loved that she was taking control of her pleasure. I moved one hand from her nipple to wrap around her waist, pulling her closer to my face. As I continued pleasuring her, slipping two digits inside of her to pump in and out in time with my tongue, she grunted and groaned, pushing against me demanding more.

After she gushed all over my face and her juices ran down my chin again, I pulled away, crawling back up her body. I positioned myself between her legs, pressing myself inside of her already pulsing heat. Tempest gasped as I filled her, pushing into her over and over with each thrust building on the last one until we both reached our climax together in perfect harmony.

Afterward, I rolled over pulling Tempest into my arms, holding her close and kissing her forehead softly before relaxing together side by side. Her breathing eventually evened out, and a smile spread across her face when she opened eyes with a contented sigh. "That was- amazing," she whispered, and I couldn't help but agree with a nod of my head.

"It was..."

She turned her head, peeking at me from the corner of her eye. "It was almost as good as the garden."

I pulled away and stared at her, shock written all over my face as I tickled her sides. "Almost?"

Tempest laughed. "I'm joking."

I kissed her passionately, loving the playful side of her just as much as the desirable minx. "I know this is the mating, but the pull I feel toward you- I can't fight it and I'm not going to try. I honestly thought that I would never have this," I whispered. My heart felt like a vice had closed around it as I opened myself up to her.

"I love you too. I believed for the longest that I was destined to just be a gifted. I had been preparing myself to stay that way, so that today I wouldn't be disappointed but I'm so glad that I was blessed to be more, that I found you," Tempest responded.

"I understand," I said, kissing the top of her head. "I have been preparing myself to give up being next in line. I told myself that if I didn't find my mated, I would search for the woman in my dreams. And then there you were tonight under the new blood moon, both of those things I sought," I said, kissing her shoulder.

I felt Tempest's body relax once more against mine. She smiled up at me, before her eyes drifted closed. I wrapped my arms around her, holding her tightly against me, not wanting to let her warmth go.

Her body began to go limp as she drifted off to sleep and I let her rest. I would take care of her in every way she needed and wanted. I sighed into her hair, my heart swelling with this new feeling of love, as I fell asleep next to her.



Chapter 15

Sara

My footsteps echo up the tower hall as I make my way towards the balcony and the muted sounds of laughter and conversation drifting from the ballroom. I emerge onto the balcony overlooking the glittering gala below. What are they all whispering about tonight? Curiosity tingles through me as I search the sea of faces for answers.

Candlelight flickers, casting dancing shadows across the ornate walls. Roses perfume the air, their scent mingling with the musty velvet drapes. Gilded mirrors reflect the intricate carvings along the ceiling, vampires riding dragons of old as they are locked in battle. My gaze settles on the one I've come for.

There he is - Beau. His presence grabs ahold of my senses as if they were my vines. I drink in the sight of him, tall and broad-shouldered in his embroidered waistcoat. His eyes are two sparkling pools I long to drown in. My heart threatens to burst from my chest at the mere sight of him.

A hush falls over the crowd. The king and queen step forward, regal and imposing. This is it - the revelation I've been waiting for. Beau turns, his expression unreadable.

"Congratulations, son. It appears that you have found your mated and we could not be happier for you." The king announces.

No. It can't be. This must be some cruel joke. Around me, applause erupts. Beau takes Tempest's hand, leading her into a dance. She has won again, just as she wins everything.

And how can he be so devastatingly handsome as he breaks my heart. His raven hair falls across his brow as his lips part in a dazzling smile. He whirls Tempest across the dance floor, her scarlet gown swirling around her. She glows under his attention, joy lighting up her face.

My chest tightens. No matter how I try, I cannot tear my eyes away. Beau spins Tempest once more before drawing her close. She melts into his embrace, as though they are the only two souls left in the world.

I should look away, but I cannot. The yearning in my heart keeps me transfixed, unable to silence the whispers that he should have been mine.

Rage and despair war within me, threatening to tear me apart. The choice looms - loyalty or love? I fear I may already know the answer.

"Tempest is my dearest friend," I say, my voice hollow. "How can I even think of stealing Beau away?"



Charlie's voice cuts through the tumult in my mind. "The heart wants what it wants, regardless of consequence."

I whirl around to find him leaning against a pillar, half-obsured in shadow. How long has he been watching me?

"This doesn't concern you," I say sharply even though I know he speaks the truth. Ever since I first saw Beau, I've been drawn to him like a moth to a flame. But to act on my feelings would destroy everything.

Charlie pushes off from the pillar, stepping into the candlelight. His ice-blue eyes glint.

"Oh, but I think it does. You see, I had plans for the fair Tempest. Ones that the South's charming prince have thrown into disarray."

He moves closer and I fight the urge to shrink back. There's something dangerous in his energy, like a coiled snake waiting to strike.

"What do you want?" I ask warily.

"The same as you, I'd wager. To claim what is mine by right."

Thunder rumbles outside, loud enough to make me jump and to make my gift seek solaces in the plants around me, pulling their vines to me as if I required aid. Charlie smiles.

"Be true to yourself, Sara because the storm's coming. Though-Perhaps it's time we all...reassessed our positions since only we can decide our fate."

With that ominous threat, he melts back into the shadows, leaving me shaken and feeling as if I've stirred up something perilous and I don't know if I have the power to stop it.



The first fat drops of rain spatter against the back windows of the balcony. Inside, music swells as Beau takes Tempest's hand leading her out of the ballroom. She smiles radiantly up at him, as if he has belonged to her all along.

My chest aches as Charlie's words resonate within me. All my life I've done what was expected of me, never daring to grasp for more. And look where it's led - watching from the shadows as the man I love gives his heart to another, Tempest of all people.

No more.

I harden my resolve. If Beau is my destiny, I must seize it. Tempest will never forgive my betrayal, but I cannot live without him.

Let them call me villain, traitor, whore. I will have Beau as my own or die trying. The storm has broken within me - now there is only the reckoning.



Chapter 16

Tempest

A thunderous rumble sounded in the distance, jolting me awake. I glanced out at the horizon and saw the sun beginning to set, its pink hue transforming the world around me, glinting through the rain like pink morganite. I sat up, trying to remember my dream that had felt so real yet was slowly slipping away from my memory.

Ever since Beau had announced me as his mate last night, the weather has been a steady downpour, as if the sky itself was sad that he had laid claim to me. I pushed that intrusive thought away, for surely if we were fated than the sky wouldn't cry about it.

Turning to my side I saw Beau resting peacefully beside me, his body still warm from our night of cuddling. All night he had held me close after we'd made love beneath the stars above. Our sweat-soaked bodies moving in symphony as unimaginable pleasure radiated through us until we both drifted into an exhausted slumber.

I couldn't help but smile as I recalled how tenderly Beau touched me and offered pleasures that I didn't even know existed within myself. But now something new stirred inside me—a whispering of something powerful and elusive. It seemed like a voice from my dream was trying to tell me something, but what?

Desperately I tried to draw back on the fading memory, yet it felt like smoke just out of my reach no matter how hard I tried to grasp it. With a sigh I lay back down beside Beau, comforted by his coolness despite the anxiousness growing inside of me.

I ruminated about what the future would bring for my parents, my friend Sara whom I'd be able to see again, and my new title as Queen-in-waiting. It had all happened so fast—learning that I was not only blessed to become a Halfling, but also a vampire since I had mated. It was almost too much for me to accept.

I sat back up in bed, deciding to try and clear my mind. My feet led me to what I hoped was Beau's closet. Thankfully, I guessed right on the first try. Inside, among the lines of clothes hung up neatly, there was one large jacquard and silk robe with his family crest and name embroidered on it. As I put it on, I felt like I was being hugged. The plush material was luxurious against my skin and the smell of him surrounded me—soft hints of cedar and sea salt emanating from the fabric. Pausing for a second, I brought the collar of the robe close to my face and breathed in deeply.

My heart pounded in my chest as I leaned against the wall of Beau's closet with my face buried in his housecoat, clearing my mind, and focusing my thoughts. I didn't know how long I stood there like that, but suddenly there was a soft tap on the door. I knew it could only be him who was outside, and a mix of anticipation and excitement coursed through my veins.

I stepped out of the closet into the cool room, my eyes immediately drawn to Beau's. His piercing blue gaze sent a wave of warmth through me, calming my nerves even as he motioned towards the dresser and an open armoire I hadn't noticed last night. There, luxurious dresses, lacy undergarments and toiletries were laid out and hung up before me.

"You're the future queen," he said in a soft voice, his eyes crinkling with amusement. "I told you that you'd have everything you needed."

My heart leaped into my throat as I tried to find the right words to respond. I was so confused by all this. What did it mean to be mated? Before I could manage, Beau plopped down on the bed and pulled me onto his lap, kissing the top of my head softly.

"Let's sit, so we can talk."

Clinging to him, I felt safe and yet vulnerable at the same time. My hands fidgeted with his robe as I spoke in a quivering voice. "I have been pondering what happened. How could I not know about being mated? Why is there so much secrecy among our people?"

The air around us seemed to pulse with intensity as we looked into each other's eyes. Then Beau took my hand and brought it to his lips, kissing each fingertip before intertwining my fingers with his own. "I know the reason fragiles and gifted aren't told simply comes down to the safety of those that are mated," he murmured. "I apologize, as I didn't even consider that this was all new to you in every way and that you wouldn't know what was happening. The only thing that mattered once I touched you was that we were in each other's arms; nothing else came into question."

I smiled weakly, feeling a mixture of elation and confusion. "All I could think about was you too," I whispered. "I just needed you, to feel your touch... drown myself in you."

“Normally, after your twenty-fifth Blood Moon, if you were found to be a Halfling, you’d learn all about being mated when you went for your training at one of the manors,” Beau explained. “But it’s not something that can be truly prepared for. Being mated is a rarity that elevates us from halflings into true vampires, once the bond is cemented.”

I leaned my head against his chest, listening to the steady rhythm of his heartbeat. “What happened at the ball was not something that I could ever have imagined. I’ve never felt that way before. You changed everything in me, and I had no idea how to handle it.” He brushed his thumb against the back of my hand in soothing circles as I spoke.

“You changed everything in me, and I didn’t know how to handle it either,” Beau admitted.

We both sat in silence for a moment, lost in our own thoughts and emotions.

“How did I change everything in you?” I asked, shattering the silence with my curiosity.

“You gave me my life back,” Beau answered, squeezing me tightly. “I was giving up on being mated. I figured that I wouldn’t find my one, and it didn’t seem to matter anymore. You only have until your one hundred and twenty-fifth Blood Moon, and mine was last night. Suddenly there you were, a literal dream that had come to life. In that instant, you were everything to me. You are my everything,” he finished.

Beau let out a deep sigh. “I can’t say for sure that I knew what it would be like,” he admitted with a shake of his head, running a hand through his hair.

“My father tried to explain it to me, and I read about the mating in ancient texts, but I still wasn’t prepared for all these feelings flooding my soul when we came together.”

“What now?” I asked him, leaning against his chest and feeling some of the

tension slowly easing out of my body.

"There is only the mating ritual. It is what elevates us to true vampires. A merging of two halflings to make a whole. It was created by the ancients to unite factions—meant to maintain the balance in our world," Beau said seriously. "It was supposed to unite families and bring peace... but it requires compromise from both sides." He looked at me intensely, searching my eyes for any signs of doubt or uncertainty.

I frowned, feeling overwhelmed as I realized the gravity of our situation.

"So what does this mean for us?"



Beau's eyes softened as he reached out to cup my cheek. "It means, my love, that we will perform the mating ritual. You and I will merge our powers, our souls, and our bodies, becoming one. It is the only way to solidify our bond and ensure that we will be together for eternity."

My heart raced as I considered his words. The idea of merging with Beau, of becoming one with him, was both exhilarating and terrifying. I had never

considered the possibility of becoming a true vampire, of transcending my halfling status and taking the place fate has destined for me in this world.

"Are you sure about this?" I asked, my voice barely above a whisper.

Beau's hand cupped my cheek, his thumb tracing the line of my jaw. "I have never been surer of anything in my life," he said firmly before pulling me into his embrace.

As I sat there, wrapped up in Beau's strong arms, I couldn't help but feel nervous about what the mating ritual would entail. I knew that it was meant to unite us as equals, but the thought of it made me feel more like a pawn than a queen-to-be.

Beau seemed to sense my unease and pulled away from me, holding me at arm's length so he could look me in the eyes. "I know that this is a lot to take in," he said softly, "but I promise I will be with you every step of the way. We will face whatever comes together."

His words were like a balm to my soul, and I felt some of the anxiety melt away. I knew that I could trust Beau with my life, and I knew that he would never let me down.

Taking a deep breath, I leaned forward and pressed my lips to his. His ice-cold lips felt soothing on my hot lips. Our tongues entwined as sparks of electricity flew up my spine, igniting the fire within me. My hands ran through his soft hair as I held him close, completely losing myself in our kiss. Suddenly, a loud knock on the door jolted us both back to reality. Beau reluctantly pulled away from me, his eyes lingering on mine for a moment before he got up to answer the door. He strode across the room, his black robe fluttering around his ankles with each step, and opened the door to reveal a tall man in an all-black suit. He spoke briefly with the man before turning back to me with a serious expression on his face.

"Tempest," he said. "I need to go out for a while. There's something I need to take care of, but I promise I'll be back soon."

I nodded silently, feeling a sense of foreboding settle over me as Beau left the room. What could be so important that he needed to leave in the middle of the day? I tried to push the thought out of my mind and focused on calming the fire still raging within me.

I walked into the bathroom, turned on the shower and stepped under the cool stream of cool water. I soaped up with a cinnamon-scented body wash, relishing in its spicy scent, letting myself forget everything that had been happening in my life.



Chapter 17

B^{eau} Marcus, my loyal guard, was his usual ten steps behind me as I stalked the halls in search of my brother who said there was an urgent issue he needed to discuss. I could feel the rumblings of irritation coming through my bond with Marcus after I had disappeared yesterday with Tempest. I chose to ignore it now, just as I had the moon before. There was no need for him to have been privy to anything my mate and I had done, so he could grumble all he wanted, even if it was in defense of the Crown's protection.

I finally reached the end of the hallway and stepped into Gabriel's room, leaving Marcus in the hall. My brother had his lanky body draped across a plush settee, looking out of the window. His expression was one of deep thought as he stared out into the night sky. I watched him for a moment before clearing my throat, causing him to jump slightly at the sound of my voice.

He turned towards me, his dark eyes flashing with surprise. "Beau," he said in a soft voice, "what brings you here?"

"You sent word that you had something urgent to discuss," I replied, crossing my arms over my chest. "What is it?"

Gabriel sighed heavily and motioned for me to have a seat. He leaned forward in his chair, his gaze intent on mine as he began to speak, "I didn't think you would come so soon, having just found your future bride, but I wanted to talk about the weather anomalies," he said slowly. "It has been raining nonstop since the Blood Moon Ball—something I'm sure you've noticed with your ice powers being affected."

I nodded, feeling a sense of unease settle over me. "What does that have to do with anything? Is it a natural occurrence?" I asked, trying to keep my voice steady.

Gabriel shook his head, his expression growing more serious. "No, it's not. I've been doing some digging, and it seems that there's a group of rogue vampires who have been experimenting with weather manipulation and the old vampire magic," he said, his tone grave. "They're trying to create a permanent storm, one that will cover the entire city and block out the sun. If they succeed, the fragiles will be plunged into eternal darkness and chaos will reign. "

I felt a chill run down my spine as I listened to Gabriel's words. This was not something to be taken lightly. "That would be unacceptable. There are by far more fragiles than us, and they keep our world turning," I snarled, feeling my hands balling into fists at my sides.

"Has there been anything else you've heard? What's happening outside of the city?"

Gabriel leaned back in his seat, his expression serious. "The storms have been wreaking havoc all over the kingdom. The lightning strikes seem to be getting closer and closer to our palace. Reports are coming in from all over

the world of strange weather patterns and natural disasters. It's as if the elements themselves are rebelling against us."

I had heard rumblings of strange weather patterns, but I had assumed it was just normal fluctuations. I had never considered that it could be something more.

"What do we do?" he asked cautiously.

I looked at him steadily. "First we inform our parents and the council. Second, we need to figure out what's causing these anomalies, and if there's anything we can do to stop them," I replied firmly.

"I get will get right on that. Sorry to have pulled you away from my new sister-in-blood. How is she doing by the way? I heard she's from a prestigious vampire family and that she has amazing fire powers," Gabriel said, trying to lighten the mood.

I nodded in agreement, smiling slightly at the thought of her. "Yes, Tempest is amazing. She came here with no expectations, and she has exceeded all of mine. It's like we've known each other for years already, and our bond is getting stronger every minute."

Gabriel smiled softly. "That's good to hear," he said, before his expression became serious again. "Though I am curious as to what happened between you and Mary during her visit."

I sighed heavily, my expression darkening as I remembered all too well who Mary was— a Nature Halfling with no mate who had developed an infatuation with me during her stay in our kingdom.

"It was an... unfortunate situation," I replied slowly, not wanting to go into too much detail about it. "She had feelings for me that I didn't reciprocate even when I was unmated. Tempest called to me in my dreams and there

could have never been another even had I not discovered her until after my one hundred and twenty-fifth Blood Moon."

Gabriel nodded sympathetically, " I understand. It must have been difficult for you to deal with. But now that you have found your mate, I hope that Mary understands and moves on."

I nodded, hoping that was the case. "Thank you, Gabriel. And make sure to keep me updated on the rogue vampire situation. We need to act fast before it's too late."

With that, I stood to leave the room, but then paused, "Also tomorrow there will probably be a dinner for the family and inner circle. I tend to be able to read our parents, and they want to chat with Tempest and I privately on the new moon, so I'm sure a lavish dinner will follow, brother."

Gabe chuckled in agreement, "Of course it will! Well, I look forward to meeting Tempest, for she is the reason that the crown gets to stay in our family after all."

I turned and left the room, my mind already racing with plans and ideas on how to stop the rogue vampires and protect our kingdom. As I walked down the hallway towards my chambers, I couldn't help but think about Tempest and how I couldn't wait to be back by her side, to feel her warmth and love.



Chapter 18

B^{eau} I gazed at Tempest. "The rest of the day is ours, my love. Is there anything that you want to do?" I asked.

"I would like it if I could see my friend Sara," she answered. "I haven't seen her since the night before the last Moonday Ball when she was also declared a Halfling. She came to court for her Halfling education, and it's been over four months since then, with nothing but me being able to send her letters."

"There are a few Sara's here," I spoke, eager to help in any way I could. "I will have my guard, Marcus, find out more about her. What's her family name?"

"It's Andante," Tempest replied softly.

Mind-linking with Marcus, I asked for his presence. Seconds later, a knock at the door signaled his arrival. "You may enter, Marcus," I commanded, prompting him into the room.

Marcus walked in, his posture straight and serious. "My prince, what can I do for you?" he asked, his gaze flickering briefly towards Tempest before

returning to me.

"I have a task for you," I said evenly. "Tempest has a friend here, Sara Andante. I want you to locate her and arrange a meeting with Tempest if possible."

Marcus nodded curtly in response, his expression remaining stoic. "Very well, my Lord. I will start gathering information immediately."

"Thank you," Tempest said appreciatively before turning to me with a smile on her face. "I've missed her so much, and I can't wait to see her. It's been almost six full turns of the moon since I've seen her last."

"Of course, princess," Marcus said bowing and turning to leave the chamber.

"Wait!" I called out suddenly, raising my hand to stop him from leaving yet—an idea popping into my mind. "Before that...I would like to have you give Tempest a blood oath, so that you may be of service to her as well."

Marcus took a step forward, his eyes flickering over Tempest. He looked surprised but quickly schooled his expression. "It would be an honor," he said, bowing his head respectfully.

I nodded in agreement, knowing that a blood oath would cement Marcus's loyalty to Tempest. "Very well," I said, gesturing for Marcus to approach us. "Kneel before Tempest," I commanded, my tone firm.

Marcus did as he was told, kneeling in front of Tempest and holding out his wrist. "I offer my blood freely, my princess," he said solemnly.

Tempest looked surprised but also slightly uncomfortable. "I'm not sure if this is necessary," she said hesitantly, looking at me for guidance.

"It's a tradition," I explained, placing a hand on her shoulder. "It's important that those who serve you, especially guards, are bound to you by blood. You must accept his oath if you want him to serve you."

Tempest nodded, steeling herself as she took Marcus's wrist and bit into it. As

she drank his blood, a look of intense concentration crossed her face, and I could feel the power coursing through her veins. After a few moments, she released him, wiping her mouth with a handkerchief she pulled from her dress pocket.

"I am bound to you by blood, my princess," Marcus said, rising to his feet with a look of reverence in his eyes, his voice filled with loyalty. "I will protect you with my life and serve you until the end of my days."

Tempest nodded in acceptance, a small smile on her face. "Thank you, Marcus. Your loyalty means a lot to me."

As Marcus left the room, I turned towards Tempest, my eyes raking over her body with desire. "Now, where were we?" I asked, a smirk playing at my lips. Tempest's eyes sparkled mischievously as she stepped closer to me. "I believe you were about to show me how happy you are that I'm your mated," she said, her voice low and sultry.

I didn't need to be told twice, pulling her into my arms and kissing her fiercely. As we tumbled onto the bed, I couldn't help but feel a sense of gratitude towards her for accepting Marcus's blood oath. It was important that she had strong and loyal guards by her side, especially with the threats that surrounded us. I've never felt this need to be so protective. She was mine, and no one would ever take her away from me.

Our bodies moved in perfect sync, each of us lost in the moment as our passion overtook us. The heat between us intensified with each passing moment, and I could feel her power pulsing through her veins, fueling my own desires. I wanted her more than anything, and I would do anything to make her happy.

We explored each other's bodies with a need that was both desperate and fulfilling. Our hands roamed hungrily, exploring every inch of each other's

skin as we tasted and savored the pleasure that coursed through our veins. Every touch was electric, evoking a wave of ecstasy that left us gasping for more.

My tongue licked at hers as I kissed her deeply, my lips feasting on hers like she was a piece of forbidden fruit. Her moans only spurred me on further, pushing me to go on until neither one of us had any control over the rising tide of pleasure that threatened to consume us both.

Finally, when we could take no more, we came together in an explosion of pleasure that left us trembling and sated. As we lay tangled in the sheets, our breathing ragged, I whispered in her ear, "I will always protect you, no matter what. You are mine, Tempest, forever and always."



Chapter 19

Tempest

As Beau led me through the palace corridors, I couldn't help but feel in awe of my surroundings. The walls were adorned with exquisite artwork and tapestries that depicted scenes from ancient battles and myths.

"This place is truly amazing," I breathed.

"I'm glad you think so," Beau replied, taking my hand as he led me down a staircase. "But there's one place I want to take you that is even more incredible. A place where gifts can't cause problems and destroy anything."

My curiosity piqued; I followed him down another hallway until we reached a massive set of double doors intricately carved with symbols I didn't recognize.

"What's behind these doors?" I asked eagerly as Beau pushed them open.

"Do you not recognize our secret garden?" he teased with a grin as he ushered me inside the lush oasis hidden within palace walls.

I gasped at the beauty of the garden. Seeing it in the light of day was spectacular. Flower beds overflowed with vibrant blooms, their sweet scent

wafting through the air. Trees towered above us, offering shade and a place for birds to perch.

"How is it possible that gifts can't destroy this?" I asked in disbelief.

Beau led me further into the garden until we came upon a small pond filled with shimmering fish. I stared in amazement at it, mesmerized by the way the fish glimmered in the sun. I had never seen anything like it before.

"That's incredible," I murmured, looking up at Beau with wide eyes. "How did they do it?"

Beau smiled, leading me towards a nearby bench. He sat down and motioned for me to join him.

"The enchantment was placed on this garden by mated from the fifth ruling," he began. "It's said that their powers were similar to ours—fire and ice. The story goes that they used to destroy all they touched when their emotions were out of hand."



I listened intently as Beau told me about the mated, his voice low and hypnotic. I felt my muscles relax as I imagined their immense power and how dangerous it could be if used without control.

"So," Beau said, turning to look at me with a serious expression on his face, "this is also why the gifted who become halflings have to come here for training. Control is the most important part of our existence, especially when

you have a power that grows five or ten-fold in just a few short months after the change."

I nodded slowly, finally understanding what he meant. I had experienced how uncontrollable my own gift was when not kept in check. I was grateful for its existence and marveled at how much care had gone into creating such an oasis amidst all of life's chaos outside.

As we sat in silence, my attention was drawn to something else. At the edge of our viewpoint, a small statue nestled among some bushes caught my eye. It depicted a woman with long flowing hair holding up a staff that glimmered with power.

"Who is she?" I asked curiously.

"That's Selene," Beau replied softly, "She was the third Queen. Our history says that Selene was so powerful, the mating ritual was made because of her, to allow her mated, Vladimir, to share the weight of her gifts. She was one of the only gifted to have multiple gifts and even more manifested once she became a halfling. She was said to be the last known for being able to wield the elemental magic, plus she could control both fire and ice, and was able to bring others back from the brink of passing under the moon. Her parents were the mated who enchanted the garden. I'm guessing they did it to give her a safe place to release her full gift without worries of destroying the palace."

My eyes were glued to Selene's statue, in awe of her powers. To have the ability to make and control elements like that! My fire was hard enough to handle as it was, but Beau could also wield ice. It seemed unreal to have the dueling gifts both inside of me bursting to get free.

"We should leave," Beau said suddenly, standing from our seat on the bench.

"My parents would like to have an audience with us."

I nodded slowly before trailing him towards the interior palace. The mixed

emotions in my heart made me feel anxious and excited all at once—fear because I had been summoned to his parents' presence, but also wonderment for everything that had changed in our world recently. As we walked through the palace to meet them, I couldn't help my curiosity about mated Selene's powers.

"Do you know anything else concerning mated Selene?" I asked Beau as we walked along.

"A few bits," he answered thoughtfully. "It's legend that she could easily use both ice and fire with no struggle whatsoever—a true oddity among even our kind. It's reportedly told that no one ever won against her in battle because of how easily she could dominate those elements, only using her additional arsenal of gifts when necessary."

I hung onto his every word, enthralled by the story he was telling me. The concept of holding multiple gifts appeared too good to be genuine. Even when mated, you did not completely own two distinctive gifts but instead built and shared a second singular gift with your partner. But then again, everything in our novel world seemed to be like this where gifts and technology combined harmoniously like milk being poured into coffee, seamlessly blended yet still staying apart.



Chapter 20

Tempest

I took a deep breath to calm my nerves as Beau and I made our way closer towards his parents' receiving room. Everything in the palace was luxurious, from the sparkling chandeliers to the marble flooring. We passed portraits of his ancestors, their stern gazes following us as we continued our journey.

Finally, we reached a large double door at the end of the hallway. Beau pushed it open, revealing a grand receiving room full of halflings and vampires dressed in their finest attire. At the far end of the room was an elevated platform with Beau's parents seated on it.

Beau led me forward, his hand firmly grasping mine. As we approached, the entire room fell silent, and all eyes were on us. "Mother, Father," Beau bowed before them. "My mated, Tempest," he introduced me.

I curtsied nervously, feeling very self-conscious under the scrutiny of Beau's parents. "Welcome, Tempest," Beau's mother said with a warm smile. "We have been looking forward to meeting you again."

“Thank you for having me,” I replied softly, trying desperately not to show how intimidated I felt.

Beau's father stood from his seat and walked down the steps towards us. He was a tall, imposing figure with a stern expression on his face.

"Welcome, Tempest," he said, his voice deep and commanding. "I am pleased to see that you are adjusting well to your new life."

I nodded; my throat clogged with uncertainty. I was aware of just how much I had to prove to Beau's parents and the southern kingdom.

“We are delighted that you have been chosen as our future Queen,” Beau's mother smiled warmly, her eyes twinkling in the candlelight. “When I felt the power flow through me to you last moon, I knew immediately that you were special. You have an immense challenge waiting for you, but we believe in you.”

“Thank you,” I mumbled, feeling lighter now that I had their support. In the flurry of introductions and polite chatter that followed, it seemed like everyone was fascinated by me and Beau's mating. Although overwhelmed by the attention, I pushed on and tried my best to keep up with what was said. As guests began to depart, Beau's parents approached us once more.

“You did a good job tonight, Tempest,” Beau's father said, his expression softening slightly. “But being queen will not be easy. You must be prepared for difficult decisions and challenges ahead... plus there is the official mating ritual to combine your gifts.”

A wave of determination coursed through me, and I nodded in agreement. Despite how challenging ruling would be, I was willing to do whatever it took to make it work.

“I understand,” I replied confidently, “and I'm ready for it.”

Beau's mother smiled kindly at me. “We have no doubt that you will make a

great Queen, Tempest. Your family has served on the council since its inception and it only makes sense that your blood would eventually become a part of our own," she said.

I couldn't believe it. I had never even considered this possibility before. I guess I just assumed our power levels would be equal since we were already mated, but it was clear that wasn't enough. We needed to undergo the stages of the mating ritual to truly merge our gifts.

As we were leaving the room, Queen Tatiana stopped us briefly near the door. Concern was etched clear across her face.

"Please take care, my boy and be vigilant. Protect her with all your heart. Gabe has informed us of the... anomalies," she whispered softly, but firmly enough that only we could hear it. "And it's always best to remember that our kingdom's enemies are not just outside the palace walls; sometimes they lurk inside walking shoulder to shoulder with us too."

That warning was enough to make me shudder slightly—true words spoken by a worried mother who knew danger better than most.

Her voice pitched louder for the ears trying to pry as a smile worked its way on her face erasing the concern that had been prior. "However, tonight is for family. We will be having dinner together so that Tempest's parents may present her to the council, and so that she may officially meet your brother. Plus, I understand there was a halfling that you were searching for Tempest? A friend, called Sara. Marcus has found her, and she has been invited as well."

I felt a wave of relief at the mention of Sara. I haven't seen her since her own twenty-fifth moonday—over four months ago—and letters were all we'd had since. Though in each, her words had seemed cautious—tinged with happiness—as if she were excited about something but unsure if it would last.

Beau smiled brightly at his mother's words and then turned to me. "I think you'll like my brother. He's always full of surprises."

I couldn't help but smile back at him, my heart racing as we walked through the palace hallways towards our chambers for preparation before dinner. Beau carried my slippers in his hand and the cool marble underfoot felt good against my skin. I found myself lost in thoughts, still dwelling over possibilities regarding traitors roaming freely among us, and the upcoming mating ritual. But it wasn't all bad news. I would have an ally outside with my parent by my side, someone to watch my back as I delved into the secrets buried deep under smiling faces, friendly handshakes, or bloodwine-filled goblets.

As we navigated the halls, hand in hand, my mind kept going back to the mating ritual. What if it didn't go right? Could fate have brought us together only for our gifts to not merge and be complementary?



Beau

I could feel the worry rolling off Tempest in waves, and it was driving me mad. Stopping in the halls, I pulled her into my chest.

"Tempest, what's wrong?" I asked, looking deeply into her eyes.

"I'm just...worried, Beau," she admitted, biting her lip nervously. "What if the ritual doesn't work? What if our gifts aren't compatible?"

I let out a sigh, knowing that her fears weren't completely unfounded. "It will work, Tempest," I said firmly, cupping her face in my hands. "We were meant to be together, and that means our gifts will merge perfectly."

Her eyes widened at my words, and she looked up at me with a mixture of love and awe. "You really believe that, don't you?" she whispered.

"Yes," I replied confidently. "I believe in us, Tempest. I believe in our bond, and I believe in our gifts."

She smiled at me, her eyes softening. "Thank you, Beau," she said softly, leaning into me. "I needed to hear that."

Wrapping my arms around her, I leaned down to kiss her curls which had become more fire than sable as she worried and laughed to myself as the flames settled back to just dancing around the ends of her hair. "Plus, it's not as bad as you think," I said soothingly. "The merging ritual will link us together and allow us both to feel each other's gifts without the normal urge to be intimate. My parents will guide us through it."

Tempest let out a sigh of relief, the tension in her shoulders easing as she leaned into me. "That's good to know," she murmured, her fingers tracing circles on my chest. I felt a wave of relief wash over me as I saw the worry

leave her eyes. She leaned up and kissed me, her lips soft against mine. "I just want everything to be perfect, you know?"

"I know," I replied, my own fingers tangling in her hair, the flames warming my cool hands. "But you don't have to worry about it. Everything will be perfect, because we'll be together."

She smiled up at me, the fire in her eyes making my heart skip a beat. "I love you, Beau," she whispered.

"I love you too, Tempest," I said, leaning down to capture her lips in a soft kiss. The flames in her hair flickered to life once more, but this time I didn't mind as desire was the driving force. I ran my hands down her back and cupped her plump behind, kissing her deeper as our bodies melded together.

It was only the sound of someone clearing their throat that broke us apart. My guard, Marcus was standing there, a smirk on his face and a raised eyebrow. "Sorry to interrupt, your highnesses," he said, "but dinner is almost ready. You might want to get changed and ready to go."

I glared at him, not appreciating the interruption, but Tempest just laughed. I couldn't help but roll my eyes, but I reluctantly pulled away from Tempest, my hand still holding hers tightly.

"Thank you, Marcus," I said, taking a deep breath to steady myself. "We'll be there shortly."

As Marcus walked away, I turned back to Tempest, a smirk on my face. "Well, it looks like we'll have to continue this later," I said, waggling my eyebrows suggestively.

Tempest let out a laugh, the tension from earlier finally dissipating. "You're insatiable," she teased, swatting my arm playfully. "But I wouldn't have it any other way."

I took her hand and began to lead her towards our chambers. "Come on," I

said, "let's get ready for dinner. And don't worry about the ritual, Tempest. I'll be there every step of the way, and I won't let anything go wrong."



Chapter 21

Tempest

I stepped into the room ahead of Beau, my eyes widening at what I saw. The chamber was in its normal exquisite form—curtains draping everywhere and candles burning brightly—but there was something new. Flowers and vines had taken over the room twirling round the walls in a seductive dance. But what caught my attention were two things: a woman lying across my mate’s bed, and it was none other than Sara, the friend I had been worried about for days.

My heart stopped as I stared at Sara in shock. "Sara?"

“Mary! Stop this nonsense at once!” Beau growled, his voice vibrating through the air. His eyes grew colder than the frost that was forming over the flowers and vines in our bedroom, causing them to wither away beneath his gift of ice.

Confusion flooded my mind...Mary? Beau's voice jarred me back into reality and realization hit me and I snapped out, “Mary? That’s her middle name.”



Suddenly Sara leapt to her feet, startling us both, and pulled the blanket around her nude body. She stepped toward me, her gaze locking with mine before they moved to caress over my mate.

My heart raced in my chest, a million questions flooding my mind at once. Anger, hurt, betrayal, confusion, and jealousy mixed to cloud my judgment.

"Sara," I said cautiously, my voice barely containing the emotion that was bubbling beneath the surface. "What are you doing here?"

Her lips curved into a smile as she shrugged her shoulders nonchalantly.

I stepped away, my heart thundering in my chest. I couldn't believe what was happening before me. Beau had been with me all day and he hadn't said a word about this.

"Tempest," Beau said softly, but there was something off in his tone that alerted me to danger. He reached out for my hand, but I pulled it back instinctively. I needed to know what was going on.

"Please tell me the truth," I pleaded, trying to keep the quiver from my voice. Fire flared in my veins as Sara spoke up, her voice grating like nails on a chalkboard, "I'm here for Beau."

My knees nearly buckled beneath me as fear coursed through my veins. Beau clenched his fist as rage filled his eyes and he looked away from us towards the window, tightening his jaw before turning back to face me with calm hands held up in surrender.

"Nothing has been going on Tempest," he said sternly but calmly. "I swear to you. I have no idea why she is here or what she is going about."

"Why would-" Beau's face contorted with rage before he whirled on Sara and snarled at her, cutting her off before she could say anymore. His gaze then shifted back to me and he raised his hands in surrender, almost as if begging for me to believe him when he said nothing was going on between them. But try as I might to ignore it, doubt still crept into my mind.

Had Beau been lying this whole time? Was he really involved with Sara? Part of me wanted to scream yes, but the other part of me held fast, hoping that he was telling the truth and that Mary—or whatever she called herself now—was lying.

"My brother introduced us. He thought that she might be a potential match if I did not meet my mated and decided to lick my wounds as the 'prince who

did not ascend'. I told her that even though she was a nice girl, I was going to wait and find my mated or—"

"So then why are you with her if you are waiting on your mated?" Sara asked indignantly, the intrusive sound of her voice, cutting through Beau's explanation. She sashayed across the room; the sheets Beau and I had made love under earlier still wrapped around her body.

Beau sighed deeply and looked into my eyes pleadingly before turning back to Sara, "Because SHE is my mated." Beau growled. "And you would know that along with everyone else at the Blood Moon Ball had you been in attendance and not have run away like a bitch with its tail tucked between its legs because I rejected you."

I watched them, my heart in my throat. Beau's words were clear and his face sincere. But Sara was not the woman I remembered her to be.

"Her!" Sara hissed out the word as though it was poison, her eyes narrowing in disbelief. "All this time I have been nothing but kind and loving to you! Yet she is your destined one?"

Rage coursed through me at her words, filling me with a fury I had never felt before. I took a step forward, feeling like I had been slapped across the face. How dare she defy the will of the moon goddess? Who did she think she was to decide that I wasn't good enough for Beau?

At the sight of my blazing glare, Sara's steps faltered, and she stumbled back. For just a moment, before something new flashed in her eyes— a mix of sorrow and determination that even I hadn't seen before.

"But . . ." she began, her voice quivering now as tears filled her eyes. "What about us?" Her voice shook as tears welled up in her eyes. "Where does that leave me now?"

Beau's chest rose and fell with a deep breath he took to steady himself from

his fury. “Us?” he repeated coldly. “There is no ‘us’. It’s simply fate.” His voice regained its mellow calmness as he continued, “It’s unbreakable and undeniable—something we can’t control or change.”

Sara’s whole body shook as she exhaled sharply. Tears glistened at the corners of her eyes, and her jaw tightened as her fists clenched. “Fate?” she murmured in disbelief, her voice trembling with a mix of anger and sadness.

Beau’s ice-blue eyes radiated an anger that seemed to pierce through his being. The air heavy with tension as he clenched and unclenched his jaw, struggling to find the right words. He cleared his throat, “It’s not something I’m blaming anyone or anything for,” his voice wavered but was firm. “This is just how things are. I choose Tempest, she is my mated, and she will be my queen.” His fists balled up at his sides as he spoke each word forcefully, the finality of his statement clearly implying an end to any further discussion on the matter. “And now,” Beau continued coldly, sending chills through the room, “I suggest you leave.”

Sara’s face contorted in rage as she glared at Beau, her voice quivering with anger. “Fine,” she spat out, “I’ll leave.” I watched helplessly as she furiously grabbed her belongings and stormed to the door, then it slammed shut behind her, leaving me alone with Beau.



My breath felt tight in my chest as I studied him standing there silently, his expression betraying a mix of sadness and regret. I slowly advanced towards him, trying to ignore the butterflies in my stomach. His eyes were soft, and his lips were a tight line when he sighed and turned to look at me.

"I'm sorry about that," he said after a few tense moments of silence. "I shouldn't have let it go on for as long as it did with Sara." His gaze drifted downwards, and he continued, "But more than anything else, I'm sorry for you—for losing your friend."

I shook my head and tried to lighten the mood with a joke. "It's not your fault. As it turns out, I didn't really know the real her." A small smile briefly touched his lips before dissipating again.

He suddenly stepped closer to me and placed his hands protectively on my waist. My heart raced as his gaze penetrated mine. "Despite the short time we've been together, you already know how to make me feel better," he whispered gently.

A blush of fire spread over my cheeks as those words set something inside me alight. Despite all that had just happened moments ago, I could feel myself leaning into him, drawn in by the mating bond and its neverending force of attraction.

"What now?" I asked quietly after a few moments of silence.

Beau looked deep into my eyes and answered seriously, "Now we get changed for dinner and I will have a new wing opened for us and this one purged."



Chapter 22

Tempest

The dining hall was filled with the royal family and the royal court of which my parents were members. The halflings and vampires were dressed in their best clothing to honor our mating celebration. Everyone was chatting and laughing, enjoying the festivities. I couldn't take my eyes off Beau, who was smiling and joking with everyone, but his eyes always coming back to me. I could feel the intensity of his gaze, and it made my cheeks heat up. As the dinner progressed, Beau's hand found its way onto my thigh, and I could feel the cool weight of it, making my belly clench.

"I heard from the rumor mill that another thought they may have been your mated, Prince Beau." A halfling I had been introduced to earlier, Deakon Lacey, remarked leaning back in his chair, swirling a goblet of bloodwine as a fragile cleared the table before him.

Beau's eyes narrowed slightly, his hand tightening around his own goblet and the other on my thigh. "Is that so?" His voice was cold and controlled, but

there was a dangerous edge to it that made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up.

Deakon shrugged, taking a sip from his goblet. "Just a rumor, of course. But you know how these things spread like wildfire."

I saw the way Beau's jaw clenched, and I knew that he was fighting to keep his anger in check. I reached under the table and covered his hand on my thigh with my own, trying to steady him.

He took a deep breath, then turned to Deakon. "I'm sure you understand that I take my mateship with your future queen, Tempest, very seriously. There is no one else who could possibly be my mate."

Deakon held up his hands in surrender. "I didn't mean to offend you, Prince Beau. I'm simply stating what I've heard. But I understand your fierce loyalty to Lady Tempest. After all, she is quite a catch." He winked at me, and I felt my cheeks flush with embarrassment.

Beau's grip on my thigh tightened even more, and I knew he was struggling to keep his possessiveness in check. "Tempest is more than just a catch, Deakon. She is my everything and the progeny of our highest-ranking council members," he said nodding toward my parents. "And I will do anything to keep her safe and happy."

There was no mistaking the sincerity in Beau's words, and I felt my heart swell with love for him. I leaned over and pressed a soft kiss to his cheek, hoping to ease the tension in the air.

"My apologies, my prince. I just thought you ought to know the gossip going around. It was truly not my intention to offend."

"Well yes Lacey, you know the old saying," my father interjected, "the blood moon's path to the pit is lined with good intentions."

Beau's grip on my thigh loosened, and I relaxed slightly, knowing that he was

starting to calm down. "Indeed. Thank you for informing me, Deakon. But let's not ruin the mood with idle rumors."

Deakon nodded, taking another sip from his goblet. "As you wish, my prince and councilman."

I could feel the weight of the conversation lifting, and the atmosphere in the room becoming lighter, but I knew that Beau would not forget the incident, and I was grateful that he was so fiercely protective of our mating.



As the dinner progressed, we were both served a beautifully crafted blood cake that had been made by the head chef himself. The cake was a symbol of our mating, and I could feel everyone's eyes on us as we cut into it. Everyone was served the decadent dessert, and Gabriel stood to toast.

Raising his glass high he declared, "To my big brother and his beautiful mated half. May your reign together be a blessed journey!" Cheers erupted from every corner of the dining hall as glasses clinked in celebration.

I sighed in relief as I felt the warm shower of positivity rain down upon Beau and me. The knot that had been coiled up in my stomach for the past few hours had finally unraveled itself, and I was able to feel a sense of peace. The well-wishes were genuine and heartfelt, filling the room with warmth and positive energy.

My parents beamed as they looked at Beau and me, their eyes filled with love and pride. As the last guests said goodbye, my father cleared his throat and spoke. "We are so glad you two have found each other," he began. His voice was like honey, thick and sweet. "We have full faith that this journey will be an amazing one for you both." His words hung in the air like glimmering stars against a dark sky.

My fingers intertwined with Beau's, and I followed him through the palace. He grinned at me as he opened a large door, to reveal an extravagant bedroom with a blazing fire in the fireplace.

I inhaled sharply at the sight—from the silk bedspread to the polished furniture and golden accents. Beau let go of my hand and came up behind me, slipping his arms around my waist. I could feel his breath on my cheek as he quietly spoke, "Welcome home."

We were a few hours from sunrise and the lightening sky suddenly lit up in a blaze of vibrant colors, enveloping us in its beauty. Beau swept me off my feet, carrying me effortlessly across the room to the bed where he lay me down before joining me, pulling me into his embrace so we could watch the fireworks together. I nestled myself into the safety of Beau's arms, breathing in his scent of fresh snow and pine. His fingers danced along the curves of my body, as we watched the colors in the sky mirror the passion between us.



PART THREE
Bonded by Love



Chapter 23

Tempest

The flickering candlelight casts dancing shadows across the stone walls of my bedchamber. Tendrils of scented smoke curl up from the incense burning on my desk, filling the room with the heady aroma of jasmine and sandalwood.

My heart pounds as I pace back and forth across the plush rug, anticipation rising within me. It's been two months since Beau and I completed the Blood Rites, binding ourselves together as mates. Two months of learning more about him, spending each night in his arm and hearing his silken voice whisper sweet nothings in my ear.

Today we tackled our individual duties, me at the Southern Gifted Academy and Beau with the Royal Council. Still having seen him this very moon, I ache for his presence. The memory of his icy blue eyes glowing with desire stokes the fire burning inside me. Ever since I returned from working with the newly anointed gifted—I've been restless—consumed by thoughts of our growing connection.

A soft knock at my door startles me from my reverie. I open it to find a fragile holding an ornate envelope bearing the royal seal. My heart leaps as I realize it must be from Beau.

With trembling fingers, I break the wax and remove the heavy parchment within. It is covered in Beau's elegant script, the looping letters conveying a lover's intimate caress. I sink onto the bed and begin to read.



My Dearest Tempest,

Not an hour passes that you don't burn through my thoughts. The memory of your hair, laced with fire, and piercing eyes haunts my every breath. I wish I could make the grumblings of the council come to a halt with a thought, so I may take you in my arms and get lost in your smoldering heat.

You are my anchor in this world of cold facades and ruthless ambition. I've even come to envy the very air you breathe, for the fact that it gets to be so close to your lips. Soon, my flame, we will be together again. I am bound to you in this life and the next, and I count the moments until I'm by your side once more.

Yours Eternally

Trying to steady my racing heart, I carefully fold his letter and place it in the carved wooden box on my dresser. Running my fingers over the intricate scrollwork, I'm reminded of the first gift Beau gave me - a gold comb inlaid

with sapphires that match his eyes and the bracelet and necklace my parents gifted me.

My mind floods with memories of our first tentative encounters in the dreamscape, the exhilarating discovery that he was real and not just a figment of my imagination.

So much has changed since then. We've grown closer than I could have imagined, our souls intertwining until neither of us can imagine a life apart from the other. There have been challenges, of course. Beau's position often requires difficult choices, and my fiery temper has clashed with his icy restraint more than once. But we've come through the storms together, our love burning bright – leading us ever closer to the final part of our mating.

I stand before the open window thinking, I feel the cool breeze caressing my skin. Beau's scent lingers in the air, mixing with the dampness of the rain that has started to fall. I close my eyes and inhale deeply, trying to calm the raging fire within me.

I know there will be more trials ahead. But a future queen has no time to dwell on the negatives, especially when there was more training to be done.

I head down to the palace library to meet with the queen. As her protégé and future heir to the throne, I am tasked with learning all there is to know about the vampire court and the ancient ways of our kind.

The queen is waiting for me, a book open on the table in front of her. She looks up as I enter, her piercing gaze meeting mine.

"Tempest," she says, her voice stern but not unkind. "We have much to discuss today. I trust you have been keeping up with your studies?"

I nod, feeling a wave of relief wash over me. For a moment, I had forgotten everything else that was happening in my life, lost in my own thoughts and

fears. But now, with the queen's guidance, I know I can face whatever comes my way.

Together, we spend the day poring over ancient texts and scrolls, delving deep into the history of our kind. I am fascinated by the stories of Beau's ancestors, of their great battles and fierce determination to survive and thrive in a world that would snuff them out.

As morning approaches, I am exhausted but exhilarated, my mind buzzing with newfound knowledge. The queen nods her approval as I bid her goodbye and head back to my chambers.

As I slip into bed, the moon starts to set outside my window, the intruding light of day reminding me of Beau's absence. I ache for his return, to lose myself in his cool embrace once more. Just a few more days to go and then I can also give him a token of my affection as well.



Chapter 24

Tempest

I awake with a start, the lingering heat of my dreams clinging to my skin like smoke. Our bedroom is cast in shadows, the pale light of the setting sun beginning to creep through the parted curtains. The familiar surroundings soothe my racing heart—the plush velvet chaise where I meditate each morning, the crackling hearth, its embers still glowing ruby red.

I rise and cross the room, my bare feet sinking into the antique rug. I pause at the window, looking out over a kingdom beginning to stir. My people, soon to be my responsibility.

The door creaks open and Beau steps inside, raven hair mussed, icy eyes searching mine. "Tempest," he breathes, crossing the space between us in hurried strides. He takes my hands in his, calloused and cool.

"I'm so glad you're back," I whisper. His nearness intoxicates me. I want to reach out and touch him, trace the angles of his face, run my fingers through his windswept hair. Fire blooms in my veins, desire and nervousness twisting together.

He smiles, a flash of white in the dim room. "I had to get back to you, council be damned. Seeing you in my dreams this time wasn't enough."

"I got your letter..." I trail off excitement and nervousness butting heads in my belly.

"Good," Beau murmurs, tilting my chin up. His lips meet mine, a spark of electricity that steals my breath. I melt into him. Nothing has ever felt so right as Beau's kiss.

I break the kiss, breathless.

"I have something for you," I say, turning towards the wooden box on my dresser. Inside lies the sapphire tie pin I had custom made from my bracelet and necklace my parent gifted me. Beau watches curiously as I lift the pin from its velvet bed, admiring how the gem glitters in the low light.

"This was fashioned from the jewels I wore when we first met," I explain, rolling the sapphire pin between my fingers before I press the pin into Beau's hand, closing his fingers over the sapphire. His eyes widen at the implication of my gift, but he simply nods, pinning the sapphire to his lapel. The blue gem glints like a fallen star over his chest.

"I will cherish it always," Beau vows. He pulls me close once more, lips finding mine. The sapphire rests between us, a silent promise for the future.

I breathe deeply as Beau's hands slide down my arms, his touch leaving trails of icy tendrils on my skin. Our kiss deepens, all hesitation gone. My fingers curl into his shirt, pulling him against me. His heart pounds under my palm, mirroring my own frantic rhythm.

I have never wanted anything as much as I want him in this moment.



Beau's lips brush my ear, his whispered words igniting my blood. "Goddess, how I have missed you, My Fire."

My reply is to capture his mouth again, tasting the ice on his tongue. He groans deep in his throat as my hands slip under his shirt, nails raking lightly over his back. I have never been more certain of anything.

In one smooth motion, Beau lifts me and lays me back on the bed. His body covers mine, cool and hard like marble. My legs wrap around his waist. We

move together, two opposing elements coming together to create something new, something whole.

The sapphire glimmers on Beau's chest as we give in to desire. All thoughts of the uncertain future fade away. There is only this moment, this joining, this love between two halves of one soul.

We lie tangled afterwards, skin slick with sweat, hearts thundering as one. Beau nuzzles my throat, placing a gentle kiss below my ear.

"I love you," he breathes. "Always."

I smile, running my fingers through his hair. "And I love you. Until the moon stops rising"

The vow echoes between us. No matter what comes on the morrow, we have this night.



Chapter 25

Tempest

I looked up at Beau as we embarked on another day of training for the Reckoning, the portion of the mating ritual where we would have to battle together as one after we completed the Merging. His piercing blue eyes scanned my face, his lips curved in a small smile. Even as we scrimmaged, I couldn't help but admire his chiseled features, the way his dark hair fell in messy waves over his forehead, and the way his bulky, muscular body moved with grace and fluidity.

I twirled through the air, forming a fireball that lit up the dark training room. Sparks flew as the flames melted away an ice spear that Beau had just thrown my way. The powerful reaction from the fire and ice meeting, blew me backwards onto the padded floor, knocking the air from my lungs.

In an instant Beau was there. He leaned over me, and I felt his fingers lightly brush against my flushed cheek as he pushed back a strand of hair and said, "Nicely done, my dear. Now take the offensive this time."

I scrambled to my feet and stood in the center of the room, focusing my energy on what was to come. A moment later, flames burst from my fingertips, dancing and flickering in the air. Beau watched with a critical eye; his arms crossed over his chest. "Not bad," he said, "but you need to work on your control. You're letting your emotions get the best of you." His voice was gentle yet firm as he encouraged me to try again.

I nodded silently in response as frustration welled inside me. This had always been a struggle. It was as if my passion and intensity fueled the flames, making them grow stronger and more unpredictable.

"Try again," Beau insisted.

Taking a deep breath, I focused all my energy on the flames. I closed my eyes and imagined swarms of flames gathering around me. I could feel the heat radiating from them, their bright orange and gold colors illuminating the dark training room. I opened my eyes to see Beau nodding in approval. Pushing even farther, I twisted the flames into a Phoenix and sent it rushing full speed at him. Beau's eyes widened in surprise as the phoenix swooped past him, its bright orange and gold flames illuminating the dusky training room. Its wingspan was so large that it seemed to fill the entire gym. Its heat melted the ice on the ground, creating a trail of steam in its wake.

"Very impressive," he said, grinning despite himself. "You're definitely making progress."

Joy surged through me as I realized the power of my gift. I was beginning to understand. But before I could act, a chill filled the air. I spun around to see Beau conjuring a wall of ice, creating intricate designs with his hands. There were shadows dancing across the walls from the light reflecting off the ice.

"Your turn," he said, gesturing towards me.

The rest of the afternoon was spent pushing my limits. Fire spewed out of my

hands in waves as I worked to control it better. Sweat stung my eyes but I kept going until I mastered it.

The sky had just begun to blush pink, heralding the arrival of the sun, when Beau declared it was time to finish for the night. With a sigh of relief, I collapsed onto the soft mat beneath me. It was like a cloud against my sore muscles, but Beau's strong arms soon lifted me up in one easy motion.

"Someone is exhausted," he chuckled, his body radiating pleasant coolness that immediately soothed my heated skin. He wrapped his arm around my waist and directed us towards our suite with graceful steps. Once there, he tilted his head and pressed his neck to my lips. "Drink," he murmured.

His voice sent a jolt of electricity through me as I complied, pressing my lips to his cool flesh and allowing my fangs to sink into him. As I drank from him, a strange warmth began to spread through my chest that had nothing to do with fatigue from training. When I finally pulled away, heat rushed up my cheeks and I quickly averted my gaze. "Thank you," I whispered softly.

Beau's hand cupped my chin delicately and tilted it up so that I had no choice but to meet his eyes. His features displayed nothing but concern as he asked, "What's on your mind?"

I struggled to find the right words, fidgeting with my hands as I looked down at them. "It's nothing," I mumbled, feeling ridiculous for even thinking about it.

Beau cocked his head in confusion, his crystalline eyes searching mine. "What is it? You can tell me anything."

My heart thumped in my chest as I opened my mouth to speak, the words waiting to leap onto my tongue. "Even if we weren't mated, and even if I had never dreamed of you, I think I would still fall for you," They came out in a rush, like a waterfall spilling into an abyss.

Beau's gaze softened and he reached up to trace his thumb across my cheekbone. His voice was low and gentle as he murmured his reply, "Tempest, I've been falling for you since the first time I saw you in my dreams. You are the one - if I hadn't found you when I did, I would have continued searching around the world until you were mine."

He didn't give me time to respond before his lips locked with mine. The fiery heat between us seemed to consume us both as our arms wound tighter around each other. The previous fire and ice we had conjured now paled in comparison to this scorching heat.

The kiss was hot and demanding. Cementing what I had come to know over the passing months as we trained for the final step in our mating ritual. There's an even deeper fire within me that only Beau could quench.

His hands trailed down my body, slipping underneath my clothes to tease my sensitive flesh. I moaned into his mouth as his fingers found my core. He knew just how to touch me, how to make me lose control. My back arched as he slid two fingers into my wet slit, and I cried out as he began to pump them-in and out-building the pressure within me.

"I have been wanting to taste all of you." He dipped his head and pressed a kiss to my parted lips as his fingers continued to stroke my hot, wet slit.

A whimper tore from my throat. Hearing Beau say those words only increased my desire for him. He was relentless in his pursuit of me, never easing up despite my cries of pleasure. He continued his ministrations, his fingers sliding in and out of me as he used his thumb to circle my swollen clit.

"Please, Beau," I begged, my nails digging into his shoulders drawing blood. He pulled away, a wicked grin curving his handsome lips. "I knew you'd like that." He slipped his fingers from me, and I groaned at the loss. I didn't have

time to protest before he was on his knees in front of me.

He quickly pulled off my leggings and panties in one smooth motion, then his head was between my legs. His cool breath danced across my hot core, and I shivered as his tongue darted out to taste me. I cried out as his tongue slid over my hot folds, teasing up and down them. The sensation was so deliciously frustrating.

A moan tore from my throat as he slipped a finger inside me, pumping it in and out in time with the movements of his tongue. I dug my fingers into his hair, pulling his mouth closer to me as he made love to me with his mouth. I could feel the pressure building up inside me and I knew I would soon reach the edge.

"More, Beau. More!" I whimpered, my hips bucking against his mouth as he quickened the pace of his tongue.

Ice danced in his eyes as he watched me, gauging my reaction. He loved seeing me like this. My body was writhing, and I was moaning and clawing at him. He loved the sounds I made as I came, and how I begged him for more.

I could feel myself getting closer and closer to the edge. I could feel the tension building in my body, the coiling in my muscles. Soon, I was teetering on the edge of a high. Finally, I felt myself tumble over the edge as pleasure flooded through me, sending my body into a trembling orgasm.

"Beautiful," he crooned as he watched me.

Beau pulled his fingers from me, licking them clean. Then he was back on his feet, wrapping his arms around me and pressing his lips to mine. I could taste myself on his lips. The heady flavor was a peculiar mix of sweet and salty. I moaned into his mouth, loving the way I tasted on his lips.

I pulled away, my voice husky as I asked, "Have I ever told you, that you're a

very sensual kisser?' My eyes were hooded as I watched him remove his shirt, dropping it to the floor before moving to remove his pants. I stopped him, my fingers curling around his wrist. My body throbbed with more unspent arousal. I didn't know how he did this to me.

"My turn," I cooed.

He smirked at me. "Oh?"

I nodded, my eyes wide and my tone innocent. "Yes. I want to show you how much you've taught me, my king."

A low growl rumbled in his chest as I unbuttoned his pants and slowly slid them down, revealing that he was already rock hard. I bit my lip as I took in his size, and he laughed at my reaction, even after all this time I'm still amazed that he can fit all of himself inside of me. "Though I think it's worth pointing out that I've taught you a few things of my own." I was teasing him. I knew he'd taught me a lot in the past months. Mainly that everything he did had a direct connection to my heart and core alike.

He smiled, his eyes glinting. "I'm all ears, my queen."

I smirked up at him, the fire in my eyes glittering with mischief. "As well as other body parts." I nipped at his earlobe before trailing kisses down his neck, sucking and licking, as I slid to the floor and took him into my mouth.

A low groan ripped from his throat as he tilted his head back.

I murmured my approval as I circled the tip of his cock with my tongue. He grunted as I took more of him into my mouth. Beau's head fell back again, his chest rising and falling as I took him in as deeply as I could.

I dropped my hands to his hips, taking the lead as I bobbed my head up and down. I stroked the base of his shaft with one hand, and cupped his balls with the other, squeezing gently as I sucked on him.

"Fuck, Tempest. Your mouth feels so fucking amazing." He ran his hands

through my hair.

A smile tugged at the corners of my lips, wanting to laugh at his expletive.

I was taking him deep, sucking on him hard with each bob of my head. His grip on my hair had turned to steel, sliding through my locks, the tips of his fingers brushing my scalp. I moaned in approval as he tugged on my hair, showing me just how much he loved my mouth on him.

"Come here," he commanded, jerking me to my feet and kissing me.

His hand tangled into my hair as he kissed me, our tongues dancing. I could taste myself on his lips, a heady flavor of me and him. I savored it, my hand fisting at his nape.

He tore his mouth from mine, hauling me into his arms, mist surrounded us as he carried me from the gym to our suite. He tore my clothes off, then his, before flipping me over and pressing my face into the bed.

He slid his hands up my back, his fingers trailing to my hips before his cock slipped between my thighs. My heart skipped a beat as I felt him press against my entrance.

"Are you ready for this?" he crooned in a low voice.

"I am," I moaned as he slid deep into me, filling me full.

"You're so fucking tight," he groaned as he slid in and out of me, slamming into me over and over again.

I moaned as he grabbed my hair, pulling my head back. He leaned over me, and his lips brushed my shoulder blade, then his fangs sank into my flesh.

I cried out as he drew blood, the pain mingling with the pleasure, sending me spiraling higher. He licked the wound to seal it.

"You like that, don't you, my queen?" he crooned in my ear, nibbling on my earlobe as he thrust into me again. Every nerve ending in my body was on fire.

"I do," I admitted breathlessly.

"Why?" he demanded as he pumped into me, hitting that special spot each and every time.

My body was trembling. I was teetering on the edge of my orgasm, but I wanted to answer. I wanted him to know just how much he meant to me.

"I'm yours, Beau. Every piece of me belongs to you." I panted, my nails ripping deep into the sheets.

"That's right, Tempest. You belong to me. Every part of you. Mind. Body. Soul." He growled. He was so primal in that moment, our connection so strong, so deep, that it felt like he was right inside my mind. It was exhilarating.

"Yes," I moaned, arching into him.

"Let go, Tempest. Come for me." He commanded, his voice rough and demanding.

I hung my head, my body quivering as I came hard for him, my body bathed in warmth as I came undone. I screamed my ecstasy.

"Fuck, yes! So good. So damn good! You're mine, Tempest." He growled, slamming into me a final time before he came.



Chapter 26

Tempest

My heart thundered in my chest as King Lucas and Queen Tatiana stood before the court, their expressions severe. Beau and I stepped forward, our wrists bound together by a thick rope wound into an intricate knot. The King pulled out a dagger from his cloak, its blade gleaming in the candlelight. He drew it down the right side of our necks with precision, and the scent of royal blood filled the air.

The court held their breath, a strange tension building between us all. Then Beau and I leaned forward and clamped onto each other's neck, drinking deeply of each other's elixir until a smoky fog slowly began to fill the room. It rolled and churned like an ocean wave, obscuring our vision until it settled into a wet gray blue mist that engulfed us in its embrace. Fear and excitement coursed through me as we united in this sacred Mating Ritual.

Part one of the mating ritual was underway—the Merging. We drank from each other, slow and deliberate sips that were both sensual and fierce at the same time. Queen Tatiana joined hands with King Lucas to bless our union.

As we drank, a bright glow seemed to shimmer around us, and our bodies clung to one another. I felt a strange tingling sensation as our gifts started to mix, creating something new and unexpected—like fire and ice embracing.

The Queen's voice faded away, leaving behind an almost tangible silence in the air. Beau and I pulled apart from each other, the taste of each other's blood still lingering on our lips and running down our chins. We gazed into each other's eyes, lost in the moment as the ritual completed. The court's silence was abruptly broken by the King's commanding voice as he catapulted us into the final phase of the mating ritual—the Reckoning. "Attack!"

Almost immediately, guards started charging us from different directions brandishing swords and spears. Acting quickly, I waved my hand and a wall of fog rose around us creating an impenetrable barrier between us and the attackers. As the fog swirled around us like a protective embrace, all sound seemed to fade away as if we had stepped outside of time itself.

One guard with the gift of wind blew a powerful gust of air, attempting to throw off our defense. Beau was thrown back by its force, but he quickly regained his balance and retaliated with his own power. A blast of ice shot out from his fingertips, freezing the guard in place. The rest of the guards charged towards us, but they were no match for our combined powers. I summoned a flame to my hand and hurled it towards them, sending them scattering in all directions. Beau used his ice powers to freeze their weapons and feet, making it impossible for them to continue the attack.

Suddenly, an unseen power combined our gifts into something new—a potent mixture of fire, ice, wind, and fog. The swirling energy seemed to take on a life of its own, sucking all the oxygen from the room. The energy was so strong it threw back all the guards as they flew through the air. Bolts of

lightning flashed like quicksilver serpents, enveloping every guard in a thick coat of ice that then shimmered through the air, and as they each hit the ground, the ice that had encased them imploded. Under the impact of the invisible force, each guard was sent sliding across the marble floors, unable to see, hear or breathe.

Beau and I stood in the center of the room, our eyes locked in a fierce gaze. We had just fought off the Royal Guard and survived the final part of the Mating Ritual.

The intensity of the moment was palpable, and we both knew that our journey together was far from over. As we stood there, our breaths heavy and labored, I felt a sense of pride and strength wash over me, knowing that my parents along with the other council members and palace guests were watching from the rafters above.



As the fog dissipated, there was a moment of stunned silence before the King and Queen stepped forward, beaming with pride. "Behold your next King and Queen," they proclaimed. "Beauregard and Tempest!"

The King and Queen raised their hands in affirmation, declaring Beauregard and I as their official successors. The crowd roared with approval as they celebrated the new dawn of the Southern Empire.



Chapter 27

S ara

Night was receding quickly from around the palace and in its place, a darkness began to settle inside my broken heart. I watched from the upper terrace as Beau and Tempest completed the Mating ritual, all but officially crowned King and Queen. Jealousy coursed through me and all around me as the crowd cheered and celebrated this mistaken union.

How could Beau do this to me?

Suddenly, something surged within me—an uncontrollable power that I didn't understand. Vines began to grow outside the palace walls, dancing around each other in a wild display of nature's power. The guards spotted them immediately and started to approach cautiously. It was then that I realized I had commanded these plants with my gift!

Amazement coursed through my veins, I knew I had to keep this newfound strength hidden. All I wanted was to find solace in the darkness as I tried to forget about Beauregard's betrayal. How could he become mated—to Tempest of all women—when I had offered him everything?

My heart raced as I stumbled around the palace grounds, my mind clouded with anger and hurt. I could feel the darkness in my soul, whispering to me of the power I had discovered and what I could do with it. I wanted nothing more than to drown out those thoughts, but they persisted, tempting me with promises of revenge and control.

As I turned a corner, something bumped into me sending a chill wind through my hair. The air was thick with a stillness that made me shiver. Something powerful was about to unfold.

I heard whispers coming from all around me and my feet stopped dead in their tracks as I felt a presence behind me. I spun around and saw Charlie Snowden standing there with an unreadable expression on his face. He stepped forward and looked at me for what seemed like forever before speaking, his voice low yet firm, "I've seen what you've done today," he said simply. "Your gift has matured quite a bit since you were elevated to Halfling."

My heart sank. I knew he wasn't here by accident. He wanted something from me. "I-I..." I stammered, but words failed me.

Charlie chuckled dryly as he took another step closer to me. His gaze bore into mine as he spoke again, his voice dripping with skepticism, "You really think that your gift alone will get you what you want?"

I felt the sudden impulse to lash out at him, but something in his tone kept me rooted in place. There was a foreignness in his eyes that sent chills down my spine, as if he had power over anything I could imagine. I knew then that Charlie was no one to be trifled with.

"What do you want from me?" I asked, trying my best to keep myself composed.

Charlie gave me an unfriendly grin. "I want to make you an offer," he said.

"One that you would be foolish not to accept."

My eyebrow rose in curiosity against my will. "And what would that be?"

He leaned in closer until I could feel his breath on my face, and I heard his words as dark as night.

"I want you to join me. Let me show you secrets of deep sorcery so you can surpass all expectations for your gift and become more powerful than anyone you have met before." His gaze gleamed with the knowledge of ancient spells, confirming the tales of his newly gained power.

"But why are you even helping me? What benefit is it to you to have me join you?" I inquired suspiciously.



“Because I know that you are the only one who can help me to get what I want. Or should I say, who I want,” he replied, his eyes flashing dangerously as he explained.

“I have been in love with Tempest for years. I have been working on my magic and left my birthright in order to find a way to ensure we would become mated. When I introduced her to Beau at the Blood Moon Ball, I

didn't think it would lead to anything more than a dance. Working together with you is our best chance of making sure they get separated and she becomes mine."

I stared at him in disbelief. This was not the Charlie I knew. He had come a long way since we met in our final year as gifted. Now as a halfling, he was on a whole other level of power and ambition. I wasn't sure how to respond, but if there was one thing I did know, it was that I wanted to learn how to make Beau mine. And if Charlie Snowden was the key to that, then I was willing to work with him.

"Okay," I said finally, nodding my head.

Charlie smirked. "Good." He held out his hand for me to shake. I took it firmly, already feeling the thrill of power surging through my veins.

Suddenly, he yanked my body into his and whispered in my ear, "Come, let me give you just a taste of my ancestral power."



Chapter 28

Charlie

I pulled her close, my chest against her back as I curved my arm tight around her waist. I stared out into the void around us with malicious amusement and raised my hand to the sky.

A powerful gale swept us away from the palace grounds, soaring through the air until it deposited us on the grass in front of my home. Sara's eyes filled with wonder as she took in the beauty of our surroundings, and I couldn't help but take pride in that look. As if she had known what she'd find, Sara glanced over her shoulder and asked if this was all me. With an arrogant grin, I responded with a simple nod.



She followed me down a hidden staircase beneath my home, captivated by the array of magical artifacts surrounding us. I watched her face light up as she ran her fingers along the ancient scrolls, feeling their wrinkled parchment under her fingertips. The flames of the candles illuminated the area like some kind of dreamlike paradise, and for one brief moment I allowed myself to forget why we'd come here.

"This is what I've been working on," I said, handing her a simple gold watch. Its face was encrusted with diamonds, but instead of a clock there was simply a swirling void. "It's called Leverage, and it grants the wearer control over certain elemental powers."

Sara's eyes widened in amazement. She had never heard of such magic before! A plethora of artifacts and tomes lay housed around us, objects of power that she recognized from history books of magic long ago held and lost.

I leaned back against the stone table, my body relaxed and my brown eyes hooded as I watched her explore my collection with awe. Sara bent over the items, picking them up one by one and examining them with care. The artifacts that caught her eye were a leather-bound book written in the old Vampiric language, a silver ring with a bloodstone in its center, an ornate silver chalice and a glass bottle filled with shimmering liquid that sparkled under the candle light.

My amusement bubbled as I watched her inspect every piece one by one, as if discovering them for the first time. I chuckled softly as I saw her grasp the chalice, its silver glow glinting in the candlelight.

"My, my, my," I chuckled aloud. "Aren't you the little explorer." With a smile I continued, "This chalice is powerful. As you can see it was forged from pure silver. But what you can't see is that it has been enchanted to conjure whatever liquid is desired at any given moment—a potion, wine, blood, or even holy water."

I held out my hand for the chalice, eager to show her its power. I gripped it tight with both hands and closed my eyes. As soon as I did, it started to bubble, filling to the brim with thick red liquid. I put the chalice up to my lips and drank. The taste of the blood filled me with satisfaction and a single

droplet trickled down the side of my lip. I caught it on my thumb before bringing it to my mouth to finish every last drop.

She stared at me in disbelief, her expression an unspoken question. "That's incredible."

"Hmmm, yes it is." My voice trailed off as I thought about how much better it would be if I had drunk the blood of one mated to a vampire, but this was no comparison.

I set the now sturdy and magically clean chalice back onto the table and picked up a leather-bound book instead. Tracing the emblem on its front cover, I slowly opened it and skimmed through its fragile pages. "This contains spells written in the old Vampiric language, Moriarty, that had long been lost before being rediscovered by my ancestors," I told her as I ran my index finger along some of the words. "It will prove extremely handy." I looked up from over the book and winked at her. "And luckily for you, I'm proficient in Moriarty."

Sara simply nodded in response as she watched me curiously while I set down the book and grabbed a mysterious glass bottle filled with shimmering liquid.

"Now this actually holds untold power within its depths," I explained. "This is a potion, Callidora, that was really meant for fragiles. Whoever drinks this will temporarily gain abilities similar to those found in halflings or vampires such as strength, speed, and agility. But for a Halfling or vampire, it could grant visions into the future or bring one back to life if they have recently perished. All it takes is one single drop."

My nimble fingers grasped the ancient ring and I sighed. "This is it," I murmured, lifting it up for Sara to get a closer look. "It's powerful. Legend

has it that this provides a potent source of control over another's lust. With it, I can manipulate whomever I touch."

I pointed out the bloodstone embedded in the center of the ring. "This stone was made from the essence of a vampire with the gift of lust," I explained. "Its power allows me to take complete control over another's wants and desires. The downside is that I also see what they want, and it could drive me insane too." My eyes met hers with an exhilarating twinkle in my own gaze. "Would you like to witness its power? Of course, strictly for research purposes..."



Chapter 29

Sara

My heart raced as I watched Charlie carefully slip the ring on his pinky finger. I had heard stories of its power but was excited and scared to witness it in action. I was nervous as his tanned face suddenly seemed to radiate an enigmatic energy.

The second he touched my hand, a rush of power seemed to engulf me, and all I could see was Beau staring back at me. My body ached for him, needing his touch, scent, and smile. With a soft groan, I pressed into him, my desires being answered in his eyes.

Charlie's expression changed just then, filled with a lust that rivaled mine. His lips slowly moved closer to mine, and even though it was Charlie standing before me, Beau was what stood out in my mind. He gently cupped my cheek, and I leaned in closer, almost unable to control myself from wanting more.

My breathing deepened as he drew nearer yet still didn't make contact. Every part of me screamed for him to finally kiss me like I'd been wanting since the

day we first met.

"You want this as much as I do," he whispered, his voice husky and filled with desire.

I was filled with a mix of lust and fear as I considered what was happening. I knew that something was off, that it wasn't really Beau that I was looking at but rather a projection of my own deepest desires. I tried to resist, to pull away, but the power of the ring was too strong for me to resist. My heart was racing, my body burning with need for him.

Charlie's lips descended onto mine, his kiss fierce and demanding. I moaned softly, my resistance melting away as I surrendered to the power of the ring and the desire that it was fueling. We kissed deeply, our hands roaming each other's bodies.

We finally broke apart. I was panting heavily, and Charlie's eyes were filled with a primal hunger. "I can give you so much more," he growled, his voice rough with passion. "All you have to do is surrender."

I hesitated, uncertain of the power that the ring held over us both. But the desire was too strong to resist, and I found myself nodding my head in agreement. "Yes," I whispered, "I surrender."

Charlie grinned, his eyes darkening as he scooped me up in his arms, before he summoned a whirlwind that carried us from his magic dungeon to the upper floors where his private quarters were. With each touch, each kiss, I felt the power of the ring driving me on.



Charlie

"Strip," I uttered the moment her feet touched the floor. My breath hitched in my throat as my mind showed me Tempest's voluptuous curves being revealed even though it was Sara who stood in the middle of my room stripping.

I followed suit, ripping off my clothing in haste and pushing her body against my cool silken sheets. Our mouths interlocked, intensifying our desire, while my hands roamed over her curves.

Her fingers twined into my hair as she gasped in pleasure and arched towards me, craving more. The ring's power had unleashed a primal hunger within us both, and we were lost in its heat.

Exploring her body with my hands, each touch ignited sparks of pleasure within her that threatened to consume us whole. Nipping and drawing blood along the way, I soothed each wound with my tongue before traveling further down her body. Her moans echoed around the room as I took her higher and higher.

The power of the ring was overwhelming, but neither of us could stop ourselves from chasing it. Our lust for each other grew uncontrollably as we continued to explore one another's bodies. Every touch sent waves of pleasure coursing through her, eventually carrying her to the brink of ecstasy. The power of the ring was evident, and I could feel its influence as Sara clung to me, her body arching in response to my touch. Our movements intertwined in perfect harmony as if our bodies had been meant to move together.

As she reached the peak of pleasure, I felt a surge of energy course through me. It was unlike anything I'd ever experienced before, and it filled me with an exhilarating sense of power. Crying out Beau's name in ecstasy, Sara

climaxed, and I felt the force of the ring amplify my own passion as I shouted Tempest's name in response to my own release.

As we lay there side by side, spent and sated, I knew that the ring had changed everything. The power it possessed was intoxicating, and I knew that she wanted more. Her eyes filled with a new intensity as I looked over at her. "I want to know everything about the ring," she said, her voice low and filled with desire. "I want to know how to control its power, how to harness its energy and use it for my own desires."

A thrill shot through me at her words, anticipation coursing within me at the thought of teaching her how to master the ring's power. But still, a little part of me warned that it was risky, that this power was not to be taken lightly.

With a deep breath, I smiled at her confident gaze and nodded my head. "I will teach you," I said softly, excitement pulsing through my veins at the thought of what was to come next.

My obsession for Tempest thrummed through my veins, but the notion of a forbidden tryst with Sara just to have a taste of what I truly wanted was too tantalizing to resist. I ran my fingers through the soft locks of Sara's hair that now mimicked Tempest's hair of ebony and fire. I looked deeply into green eyes that now shone back at me as globes of captivating fire. I felt myself begin to slip away, as though I were being beguiled by an unseen force. The power of the ring was taking hold over me, and I knew it was a dangerous path to take. But the only way to stay near Tempest was if I played pretend with Sara.

I rolled over so that I was on top of her. "My, my, you are full of surprises aren't you. Now tell me, how do you feel about mixing business with pleasure?"

Sara smiled up at me, Tempest's eyes shining, filled with a wicked gleam. "I

think it's a perfect combination," she replied, her voice husky with need.

I kissed her deeply, my hands moving over her body as I lost myself in the heat of the moment. The power of the ring was addictive, and I knew that we were playing a dangerous game, but if the only way I could have Tempest for the moment was pretending with Sara... So be it.

I would teach Sara everything I knew, and together we would leave make believe behind us and get what we truly wanted.



Chapter 30

Tempest

The door closed softly behind me, and I was met with an enticing silence. My eyes darted around the room, savoring every inch of it—the pristine walls a pale unique gray, the draping curtains a deep red velvet, the enormous bed draped in a black canopy that invited me to sink into its depths. But all too soon my gaze settled on Beau, his dark hair now wild from our heated battle during the mating ritual, and on the way his muscles moved as he slipped his overcoat off his shoulders. His smoldering expression sent a thousand lightning bolts shooting through my veins as his icy blue eyes grazed my body hungrily. I felt my cheeks turn crimson with fire as I tried desperately to look away but failed miserably.

"So," I stammered nervously, struggling to calm my racing heart, "the final part of the Mating Ritual... what do we—"

"Take off your clothes," he commanded without hesitation.

My breath caught in my throat. "What?" I could barely force out the words.

He smirked devilishly as his powers began to dance in his hands, moving up and down his fingers like wild snakes. He motioned for me to come closer and without hesitation, I inched towards him, feeling the cold radiating from him as if he stood under a glorious winter moon.

His smirk tilted up just a bit more to one side, before he licked his lips, and I groaned seeing the frost that formed across them. Taking one more step forward, I stared deep into his mesmerizing eyes, and he whispered, "I can do it for you... if you'd prefer my love."

I stared at Beau in disbelief, still clutching my velvet skirts between my hands. My thighs clinched together as I shuffled my feet. "N-no. I can do it."

My heart pounded as I looked up at Beau. I swear that he was the most handsome being I had ever seen. His chest, taut with muscles that rippled with every breath he took, was marked with my stamp—a symbol of our undying connection. My fingers trembled as I undid the lacing to my dress, letting the velvet fall around me in a pool of black. His gaze flicked across my body like an ice-cold fire, before settling on my face again.

"Do you like what you see, Tempest?" I felt electricity snake through my veins as his husky words pierced the air around us. He stepped closer until one cold finger was beneath my chin, forcing me to look up into his eyes.

A low growl rumbled in his chest as he circled me like the predator he was, sweeping my hair back as he trailed his fingers along my neck and shoulder. I squeezed my thighs together as an ache built inside me, growing more intense by the second.

He stepped around me once more and I knew he recognized me for who I was—his Blood Moon Queen, his mated. We were two halves of one whole; Yin and Yang; fated to be together forever. He leaned close, his breath cooling the space between us and met my gaze with an intensity that stole my breath

away. A feral hunger filled his stare, and my heart leapt in response. The man before me was no longer Beau—he was a fully fledged vampire, soon-to-be-king. My King.

"I can feel your desire, your fire..." Beau whispered.

My skin was alive with the anticipation of his touch, a warmth that made me tremble with desire. He traced down my spine with a tip of a pointed nail, flicking open each clasp of my corset as if it were nothing. My heart thundered in my chest as I waited for him to reach the final clasp.



When he leaned close, his breath tickled my bare shoulder and sent a light coating of frost across my heated skin. I let out a gasp, and my body convulsed with pleasure. "Are you ready to be my queen?"

Without hesitation, I turned to meet his gaze and whispered, "Yes."

"Good, because I will never give you up." He undid the final clasp of my corset, letting it fall beside my dress. His strong arms engulfed me and before I could react, he cupped my breasts within his palms. We were such polar

opposites, yet we fit together perfectly—his barely tanned hands holding onto my smooth brown breasts. My body burned hotter than ever before while his felt like ice compared to mine.

I gasped at the sensation of being so close to him, my fingers digging into his arm as his hardened cock pressed against the small of my back.

"Fucking perfect," he growled as he massaged my sensitive nipples. Every tug and pull on the beaded tips felt like he was pulling a string that connected directly to my clit.

I arched back against him, wetness gathering between my thighs. I leaned my head against his chest. His cold tongue slid over his claim on my neck just as he pinched my nipples harder, dragging another moan from me and sending fireworks through my veins.

I gasped and his deep chuckle reverberated through me. "So fucking mine. So fucking responsive, Tempest. What other lovely sounds can your mated coax from your beautiful lips?"

He moved his hands from my breasts and down my stomach, leaving a trail of steam in its wake. I hadn't expected anyone's touch to have such power over me. It was like a balm that soothed the fires within me. My body ached for Beau's touch as I silently begged for more. Without verbalizing my desires, he heard my call and answered it willingly.

His hand skirted beneath the red lace of my panties, brushing against the soft curls on my mound before settling between my legs. As soon as his fingers brushed against my core, I found myself taken aback by the overwhelming desire that crashed through me.

"Moon Goddess above you are dripping," he growled. He thrust two long digits deep inside me, causing a wave of euphoria to rush through my body. My hips rocked instinctively against his hand as I clung onto him tightly. "So

hot...so tight...so perfectly mine." His other hand remained firmly grasping one of my breasts while the first hand continued to pump in and out of me at an ever increasing speed, driving me wild with desire. With each intense stroke, his movements grew faster and deeper until they reached an ecstatic frenzy that left me screaming out in pleasure.

Pleasure, hot, cold, and sweet wrapped itself around me, liquid fire flowed through me, quickly overtaken by ice as it grew with every stroke of his fingers and beat of my heart.

"Beau," I moaned.

"Do you feel how perfect we are for each other? Do you feel just how greedy your body is for this? For me?" he asked, his breath cool against my temple. He added a third finger, and thrust them deep inside, holding me in place as he possessively cupped my sex with his hand.

My legs went weak, aching with a need that consumed me. My core throbbed and begged for more of him, and I rocked against his hard length in a desperate plea.

He moaned and I turned to face him, desperate for more. Unable to resist, I reached up and grabbed a hold of his black hair, coaxing him closer so our lips could touch. His grip tightened around me at the sudden contact, but it only served to ignite my desire even more. Our mouths molded together as he explored me with his tongue, sending shock waves through my body until I gasped audibly.

He pulled away, his cool fingertips now tracing languid circles against my clit. Every stroke sent me higher and higher until I thought I'd lose my mind. My name on his lips was like a prayer, sending sparks coursing through my veins as rapture thundered down on me like a wave. I clenched around him desperately as pleasure shook me to my very core.

"Beau," I whimpered softly against his lips, but he only grinned wickedly before demanding more of me than I had ever given before.

"You can cum harder than that Tempest. Cum for me my love." he murmured against my lips, and with those words he increased the pressure on my clit.

I shut my eyes tightly while electricity coursed through me as my orgasm set off an earthquake inside me. With Beau's lips still capturing mine, I shuddered uncontrollably while I felt the flames of pleasure wrap themselves around us, and still Beau did not relent. His ice chased my fire down, extinguishing the flames as he coaxed another orgasm out of me. My wetness soaked through my panties and dripped down my thighs.

The pleasure was too much, and my legs gave out. Beau held me up with ease, as if I weighed nothing. His strong arms surrounded me. I inhaled his scent deeply and clung to him as the waves of bliss made my body tremble uncontrollably.

He pulled back, and I looked into his eyes. He smiled a lusciously wicked smile as he brought his fingers to his mouth. "That's what being truly mated feels like," he said before licking my slick off them. I could feel myself getting even more aroused at the sight as he whispered, "Have I ever told you that you taste even better than you smell?"

My body heated up at the intimate words. No one had ever talked to me like this or made me feel so wanted.

"Take these off," he commanded as he gestured to my soaking panties, still clinging to my mound in an effort of misplaced modesty. Obediently, I hooked my fingers into the sides and slowly slid them down, feeling how drenched they were as they passed over my legs. Taking a shy glance down, I saw the gooey strings linking me to them, and felt embarrassed by how

aroused I was—but only for a moment before anticipation quickly returned with Beau's husky voice wrapping around me.

"Good girl," he muttered as he backed away a few paces from the bed to stare at me. "Now, crawl to me, beloved."

My heart raced as I got on all fours to obey my prince and eagerly crawled toward him.



Chapter 31

B^{eau} I kicked off my shoes and moved closer to the bed, feeling Tempest's eyes on me. I was already hard, my cock aching with anticipation. My fingers deftly undid the buttons of my slacks, allowing them to pool around my ankles and freeing my thick length from its captivity. At the tip was a bead of ice, as if pierced and enhanced. Tempest's gaze followed hungrily as I grasped it in my hand and groaned with pleasure.

"Keep your eyes on me," I commanded her, and she complied, watching eagerly as I stroked myself slowly. Another bead of cum gathered at its head, crystal clear like frozen dew against a moonlit sky. Her breath quickened as her fingers dug into the bedding, her body craving me even though she was too shy to admit it.

I could feel her emotions through the mating bond and fuck was it driving me insane—the thoughts she was sending to me unknowingly.

'I want to taste him, run my tongue along his length, and tease its head. I want to take him into my mouth and see if I can get his ice to melt on my tongue.'

"Fuck! I can feel your need and desire," I whispered, releasing my cock. "But my need to taste your heat is even greater."

I admired the red lace bands that adorned her dewy brown thighs as she happily reclined back onto the bed. They were sexy on her, adding an enticing layer of mystery that had me wanting more than just to take her pussy. I wanted to taste her heat too.

I bent forward and spread her legs apart, revealing her delicate folds to my gaze. I whispered in her ear, "These are sexy on you." She shuddered beneath my touch, and I chuckled at the innocent desire she couldn't hide.

Eager to taste her, my lips explored her slick sweetness, as she moaned in pleasure. My tongue lapping gently at the core, but when her back arched off the bed, I surrendered to the carnal hunger driving me. I dove into her with an insatiable force, feeling Tempest tremble under me as I held her needy body in place. After she reached the pinnacle of pleasure, I sank my fangs deep into her inner thigh. The taste of her hot blood set my soul alight.

I sat back proudly as Tempest lay beneath me in a combination of innocent shock and wanton desire. I laved tenderly at the punctures on her inner thigh before climbing above her, ready to claim her body with mine. Her hands ran along my ridges of muscle and cold skin as her thumbs brushed over my nipples.

Desire coursed through me as I looked down at her. Her eyes were wide and inviting, her lips parted in anticipation. I wanted her with an intensity that took my breath away. Without breaking eye contact, I carefully settled between her thighs and felt the warmth of her skin against mine.

Thoughts of belonging and completeness filled my mind as I pressed forward, entering her slowly. Tempest gasped in surprise before pleasure

swept over her expression like a wave crashing onto shore, blending the pain and joy together until there was no distinction between them.

She dug her nails into my chest and back as we moved together, our bodies resounding in harmony as if they'd been created for this moment. Tempest's fingertips moved up my spine sending shockwaves of pleasure through me. I cupped her delicate jaw, before finally claiming her lips with my own, drinking in every moan, gasp and cry of pleasure that escaped from her parted lips.

I increased the intensity of our lovemaking and felt the familiar hum of ecstasy travel throughout every nerve ending in my body. Everything around us seemed to fade away until all that remained were our soft cries of delight echoing in the night.

Arousal surged through me as my hands grasped her plush curves. She felt soft and inviting beneath my fingers, and I increased the force of each thrust, driven by a primal instinct. Tempest quickly rolled me onto my back and straddled me, locking her eyes with mine as she slowly lowered herself onto me.

Our bodies joined together in perfect harmony—my cold to her warmth. I savored every inch of her tightness around me, encouraging her movements with a firm grip on her hips. Our rhythm rose steadily until I could feel her trembling with pleasure.

"Tempest, my blazing fire," I groaned. "Take everything."

My tongue explored her body, tasting the sweet saltiness of her skin before finding its way to one of her hard nipples. I bit down lightly and felt a surge of energy between us as she gasped in delight. With each thrust, I drove deeper into Tempest's fiery depths, feeling the intensity of our connection grow more powerful with each passing moment. Her moans reverberated

through the room as we came closer and closer to blissful climax. As she let out a guttural scream full of raw emotion, I felt myself shatter in ecstasy.

The flames licked Tempest's body, their tongues a mix of blue and orange as my skin grew cold. Our eyes connected--a current shot between us, binding us together. Every emotion she felt ran through my veins--happiness, pleasure, desire and a deep connection I had never before encountered.

We both trembled with anticipation, the world seeming to still around us in that moment. Then it was on us like a storm--all-consuming and powerful, shaking everything in its path. My teeth latched onto her neck, claiming her forever while her body convulsed with wave after wave of pleasure.

Eventually our breathing slowed and our bodies stilled, yet our minds raced with emotion. This wasn't just about physical gratification or completing the Mating Ritual--this was something deeper. The fire inside Tempest seemed like it had been crafted especially for me. Her sultry smoky scent filled the air as I caressed her back gently in reverence.

"I'm so happy that I found you," I murmured breathlessly.



Chapter 32

S^{ara} I could feel it—the intoxicating allure of lust washing over me like a thick fog. The ring on my finger seemed to pulse, and I swore that I could feel its heat radiating throughout my body, turning everything into a brazen haze.

My decision to attend this gala had been questionable, for with each step I took I was reminded of Tempest and how she had taken Beau away from me. However, I knew that by coming here, I could find someone who would help further Charlie's and my mission. Or at least, I could test out the ring on one of them.

The ballroom was practically abuzz with activity as fragiles and halflings roamed free, indulging in every pleasure imaginable. Despite the carnal chaos, it was the perfect opportunity for me. All I'd have to do was give someone an impish smile and they'd cave right in.

For a few days, I had been able to forget my heartache by pretending Beau was mine. But soon after, the aching in my soul grew exponentially and even

Charlie's charade could no longer dull its intensity. My desperation was rising, and I knew that we needed help from someone on the inside.

Standing atop the elevated dais, surveying the lavish room before me, I began to look around for my target. Someone high enough to be trusted within their inner circle. Someone whose power we needed to gain access to more secrets. Soon, people began melting away from my line of vision until only one face remained. My gaze settled upon a dark-haired halfling—Deakon Lacey. He wore a suit of black and silver, his family crest adorning his right breast. No matter how meticulously tailored the suit may have been, it was nothing compared to the suit Beau had worn during the Mating Ritual, an exquisite creation that accentuated every muscle in Beau's body.

This halfling wasn't Beau. He was average and lean while Beau was tall and muscled. Deakon's eyes were a bland green compared to the depths of the ocean that flowed through Beau's eyes. Despite him appearing to be having fun, I noticed an air of loneliness about him—presumably why he had come here in the first place—and I realized this halfling might be just the weak link we needed. He was my opportunity, and I smiled mischievously as I made my way towards him.

I grasped the ring tightly, feeling its energy swell and rise. I focused my gaze on Deakon, and the power of the ring crashed into me like a wave, burrowing its way into his psyche, entrapping his body in a haze of desire and lust. His dull green eyes flashed with longing as he was pulled to me by the ring's invisible tether.

He walked towards me, as if in trance, and settled across from me at the table I had sat at. His eyes feasted hungrily on my cleavage, and I let him, reveling in the thrill of conquering someone so powerful.



With a flick of my wrist, I cast the privacy spell Charlie had taught me, making sure our conversation remained just between us. I smiled sweetly at him and opened my mouth to speak. "Glad you could join me, Councilman Deakon Lacey. It seems we have much to discuss."

My eyes sparkled as I watched him slowly succumb to the ring's influence. His body relaxed and his eyes widened in lust, showing no awareness of what was happening.

I leaned forward slightly, "You look like you're in need of my company, Deakon," I purred in a low voice.

Deakon's gaze hadn't left mine since I had begun to weave my magic around him. He shuddered under the intensity of it, and I felt a smug satisfaction rush

through me. I could sense his desire for me, and it planted the tiniest seed in my heart. It was soil that had been long barren since Beau.

I smiled to myself as I felt his finger trace the bodice of my dress. Memories of what could have been with Beau flooded my mind, yet I forced them away, knowing that none could compare to him, not even under the false pretense provided by the ring.

No matter. All that mattered was getting Deakon under my spell and onto our side.

"Wow," he moaned, sliding his seat closer to mine and pressing up against me with intensity.

"Even more impressive without all these clothes." I said seductively, leaning forward to reveal my ample bosom. The heat of his desire bathed me as he pulled me closer to him. The smell of his arousal was bitter, far different than Charlie's which at least had been palatable. Deakon was... disgusting, just like all the other halflings and gifted who were here.

"Get over it and do what needs to be done!" I chastised myself.

"You would be on my arm?" he asked.

I grinned slyly as Deakon leaned in close, my slender arm slinking around his back and pulling him flush against me, pressing my breasts against his chest. I could feel the power radiating off him. It ran in his bloodline for sure. Even though he disgusted me, the thought of having a powerful ally such as Deakon thrilled me. All the possibilities for what he could help me accomplish ran through my mind.

"Why yes," I purred, lacing my words with honey. "I would be at your beck and call councilman."

And with that, our game had begun.



Chapter 33

Deakon
The heavy ring felt like a brand searing my flesh as I stood alone in the twilight hallway, my heart hammering with anticipation. Ever since Sara had placed it upon me, I was consumed by her—the beguiling scent of her skin, her melodic voice lulling me into a trance and those captivating eyes that seemed to hold a universe of secrets.

"Deakon," she intoned earlier, her gentle breath tickling my earlobe. "I need you at the Royal Court's meeting tonight. Show them your strength."

No matter how much I wanted to deny her request, her words held me in a vice-like grip and eventually I found myself unable to resist. As the grand doors revealed the royal council's chamber thronged by elite vampires and halflings, I could feel their piercing stares, as though they knew something about the dark magic that had been cast over me. My apprehension grew even more when Baron Vashcroft greeted me with his smug grin, thrusting out his bejeweled hand.

"Ah Deakon Lacey," he said, "Glad to see you've finally decided to join us."

My eyes narrowed at the baron's words, suspicion creeping up my spine. Did he know about Sara's hold on me? Or was there something else he was plotting? I forced myself to keep a neutral expression as I shook his hand. "My apologies for the delay, Baron," I replied smoothly. "I was...preoccupied."

I turned away from Ashcroft and my palms grew slick with sweat as I watched the king approach, my insides churning with equal parts trepidation and desire to please Sara. No matter how hard I tried, her control over me was a raging fire, threatening to consume me completely, and I think that I would want to please her even without her dark magic wrapping around me. "Deakon, my boy!" King Lucas approached with open arms, a fond smile plastered across his face. "Ready to make your mark on this gathering of esteemed peers?"

"Of course, my king," I lied.

"Excellent!" The King clapped me on the back. "We're all eager to see what you bring to the table."

As the parliament meeting commenced, I took my seat at the round, ornate table, steeled myself for the night ahead, and prayed that I could fulfill Sara's wishes without betraying my own instincts.

The air in the Royal Court Parliament Meeting was thick with tension, and I could feel it pressing against my chest like an invisible weight. My gaze darted around the room, taking in the hungry eyes of the elites that surrounded me, all eager to sink their teeth into the night's proceedings.

"Deakon," Prince Beau's voice broke the silence, "we're waiting."

I opened my mouth to begin speaking but could no longer ignore the whispers of Sara in my mind—the same ones that had urged me to disregard my own instincts. As I summoned the words, they felt foreign on my tongue

yet strangely satisfying at the same time. "Esteemed members of the Royal Court," I began, my voice wavering slightly. "I propose we hold a masquerade ball in honor of Beau and Tempest, since our king in waiting has finally found his mated half and completed the Mating Ritual."

The thought of pleasing Sara made it all feel worth it. My heart raced and my stomach twisted into knots, but I forced myself to remain composed, lest I betray myself in this court of vampires.

"Interesting," murmured one of the council members, her dark eyes narrowing in suspicion. "What is your reasoning behind this proposal?"

My throat felt like a desert as I forced out the words. "Their love is a testament to the power of our kind," I lied through gritted teeth, images of Sara's smile flashing before my eyes. I had to continue, no matter how much I wanted to turn tail and run. "By celebrating their union, we demonstrate our commitment to supporting the continued growth of the Royal bloodline—a bloodline that has persevered through time and adversity."

The crowd erupted in conversation as my proposal lingered in the air.

"Ah, a masquerade ball!" Lady Cordelia enthused, her eyes twinkling with delight. "How splendidly romantic!"

"Indeed," murmured the elegant Lord Rothbury, stroking his chin thoughtfully as he considered the idea. "A fitting tribute to young love and triumph over adversity."

Others, however, were less enamored with my suggestion. A whisper of doubt slithered through the crowd, its venomous tendrils wrapping around the hearts of those present.

"Is it wise," questioned the Duchess Morwenna, her voice laden with skepticism, "to indulge in such frivolity amidst our current predicament?"

"Perhaps," replied Sir Osric cautiously, his eyes drifting toward me with something akin to suspicion. "But do not underestimate the value of unity and celebration in times of strife."

"Silence," commanded King Lucas, his deep voice cutting through the din of conversation like a sharpened blade. The room stilled, all eyes turning to him and Queen Tatiana, who sat serenely beside him on their imposing thrones.

"Your creativity and initiative are most commendable," added Queen Tatiana, her enigmatic smile hinting at approval. "We believe this event could serve as a beacon of hope and inspiration for our kingdom."

I bowed my head in deference, barely able to contain the bubbling excitement that surged through me. In the back of my mind however, Sara's smirk flashed like a warning sign, a reminder of the danger that I had now chosen for myself.

"Of course," I said, speaking with a boldness that belied my shaking heart. With each word I spoke, I could feel the stones of my decision resting on my chest, slowly erasing any chance of backing out.

Queen Tatiana surveyed me closely with her steel gaze. "We look forward to witnessing your vision come to fruition."

Beau clapped me on the back, his reassuring touch, an anchor in a sea of uncertainty. The room filled with a chorus of agreement and I felt a chill run through me as I realized what lay ahead of me. This was real now and there was no turning back.

With a decisive finality, King Lucas declared, "Very well. We shall proceed with planning this ball." He then turned to me and added, "I trust you will see to it personally. It is time you took on more of an active role in Court."

I responded with a faint murmur before all sound drowned out around me. The overwhelming burden of responsibility descended upon me like an

anchor chain mercilessly dragging my hopes down into an abyss of darkness. The session ended, and my heart sunk into a deep abyss. My innermost cravings whittled away with each passing second, until I was nothing more than a puppet to be tugged upon. Sara's laughter resounded in my ears. Was there any way to rid me of my affliction and did I even want to be unafflicted?



The air was thick with anticipation as I stepped into the chamber. Sara's laughter, like tinkling bells, rang out from the corner. She looked intoxicating in her velvet gown, illuminated by the flickering candlelight. She motioned for me to come closer, and my whole body tensed in response.

"Deakon, darling," she purred, her seductive spell weaving tighter around me. "I knew you wouldn't disappoint me."

"Of course not," I replied, my voice hoarse and throat parched. "You asked me to propose it, and I did."

"And they loved it!" Sara clapped her hands together with excitement. "The masquerade ball will be the talk of the kingdom—all thanks to you."

Her words hung heavy in the air, a reminder that I still did not know what she truly wanted from me. "Why this charade? What do you want?"

"Me?" Sara feigned innocence, her cherry-red lips curving into a tantalizing smile. "I only want what's best for everyone, especially our dear king and queen in waiting, Beau and Tempest."

My heart thumped heavily in my chest as I took a step back from Sara's paralyzing presence. She stood there, her gaze burning into me, her beauty

belying the depths of her darkness.

"Your intentions are far from pure," I countered, the words bitter on my tongue. "I know there's more to this, and I won't be your puppet any longer. Do you have any true desire for me?"

Sara moved closer to me, her breath hot against my ear. "Ah, Deakon, sweet, naïve Deakon," she whispered. "I have every desire for you—to help me get what truly belongs to me."

"And what exactly belongs to you?" I questioned, my heart pounding with fear and longing.

"Beau..." Sara said gently, her fingers tracing a searing path along the contours of my face. "He will be ripe for the taking during the chaos of a masquerade ball."

Rage and jealousy burned within me. "The prince is already mated," I stated firmly. "Have you gone mad on bad blood? It's impossible and I won't let you use me like this."

A wicked smile crept onto Sara's lips as she spoke again. "Deakon, my love," she purred, her voice dropping to a sultry murmur that sent shivers down my spine and made my cock heavy with desire. "The consequences of resisting me are far more devastating than anything you can imagine."

Her words echoed through the chamber, hanging in the air like a shroud. I could feel my courage giving way as dread and desire waged war in the pit of my stomach. Had I already been pulled too deep into her web? Each step forward seemed perilous as I weighed between longing and doom, acutely aware that our fates were now entwined together if we chose to continue on this dark path.

"Your choice, darling," Sara murmured, her eyes alight with an ominous hunger. "But remember—once we set this plan in motion, there's no turning

back."



Chapter 34

Deakon
I needed to assert myself. She could never understand my true worth if Beau was her goal. My bloodline was rarer than the royals' who sat on our throne. A spirit halfling and she wanted a prince of ice? But I hesitated, for I could not deny that I was captivated by the woman before me, as I felt her vines wrap around me like silken cords, drawing me closer to her so she could rest her hand delicately upon mine. I looked into her forest-green eyes, marveling at the way they shone with the faint glimmer of emeralds.

We leaned in towards each other, and she slipped the ring off my finger. As she placed the ring back on her finger, I took notice of its ruby centerpiece casting a sinister glimmer in the candlelight but reflected in her eyes, it made the green of them even more inviting.

Just then, the opening door shook me from my blissful reverie. Charlie Snowden sauntered into the room; his lips curled up into that characteristic mischievous smirk of his. He took one look at us and raised an eyebrow in

amusement. "Well, well, well," he drawled with a grin. "I see the gala turned out splendidly for you, Sara."

Sara, ever so graceful, merely smiled smugly at him, her fingers tracing the opulent curves of the golden ring that adorned her finger. She knew just how to use her charms to get what she wanted—whatever that may be—and I could feel her yearning radiating through the room. Jealousy flared within me at the thought of more competition for her affections.

Sara's grip tightened on me, and I looked back into her eyes, heart racing. Everything around us seemed to move in slow motion—the flickering candles, the creaking of the floorboards beneath Charlie's feet as he entered into the room with a smirk on his lips—but all I could focus on was Sara and her ring, the ruby centerpiece glimmering like a beacon in the darkness. I stepped closer to her, feeling her warmth and power radiating from her body. "Snowden, what are you doing here... Aren't you a little far from home?" I muttered.

Sara, on the other hand, merely smirked, her eyes flashing with amusement. "Oh Charlie," she said slyly. "Deakon has been helping me to plan something truly spectacular."

Charlie shrugged off my question with a smirk and raised an eyebrow at Sara, intrigued. "And what might that be?" he asked, moving closer to us.

"There's to be a masquerade ball," I murmured, my voice thick with emotion. My fingers reached for Sara's, entwining with her own in a lingering embrace. All my internal struggle forgotten, I wanted nothing more than to whisk her away and make her mine.

Charlie moved closer to us, joining us in an intimate circle. His arm snaked around Sara's waist like a vice grip, and I felt a tinge of envy at their

connection. "A masquerade ball, you say? Sounds like fun. This will allow us to finally get them alone," he mused lazily.

I tried my best to ignore the heat of jealousy burning through me. "So you two are working together?"

Sara glanced at Charlie before her gaze shifted to meet mine. "Of course," she said with a devious smile, reaching up to stroke Charlie's cheek.

My heart raced as I stepped closer to her and took her hand in mine. I knew it was wrong, but I didn't care anymore. I wanted her, no matter which way she was offered to me, even if it meant sharing with Beau or Charlie. "Indeed, you will attend... with me, of course," I murmured softly, my fingers caressing her own.

Sara bit her lip, feigning innocence. "Oh, I don't know," she said coyly, looking at Charlie. "What do you think, darling?"

Charlie leaned in closer to us, his gaze flickering between Sara and me. "I think it's a splendid idea," he said with a smirk. "But what about tonight?"

"I want you both tonight." Sara whispered and I stiffened against her, unsure of her intentions, but the smirk Charlie wore showed he was intrigued by the idea.

"Really?" Charlie breathed, his voice low. "You think you can handle that?"

"Of course," Sara replied, her eyes flicking back to me. My heart was beating faster now, my skin tingling. Jealousy bubbled up inside of me. I was being cast further and further into the shadows of her affection. First Beau and now she wanted me to share her with Charlie. I bristled, about to voice my agitation, but then she rubbed a delicate hand along my jaw and the glinting ruby on her finger caught my eye as her touch calmed the disquiet in my heart. Goosebumps rose across my skin as I felt the fire of unwanted desire burn hot within me.

One thing burning hotter within me was the desire to please Sara in every way, and I was determined to seize her heart from its delusional infatuation with Beau and her mistaken partnership with Charlie.



Chapter 35

B^{eau} The flickering candlelight illuminated Tempest, casting shadows that danced across the walls as she prepared for the masquerade ball. Even from a distance, I could see her dark skin glowing in the warm light, and I knew I had to have her. Small flames flickered among ebony curls that cascaded around her shoulders, framing her striking features as she gazed into the mirror.

I approached her with a hunger in my eyes and a fire in my veins. She turned to me, her red lips curved into a smile that made my undead heart skip a beat.

"Beau," she breathed, caressing me with her eyes. "You look stunning."

I brushed my hand against her cheek, relishing the way her skin felt against mine. "As do you, my Tempest," I whispered, my voice laced with desire.

"But you know what would make you look even more irresistible?"

"What's that?" she asked, her eyes glinting mischievously.

"A mask," I replied, pulling one from my pocket. It was made of black and red lace, adorned with gems that sparkled in the light. "Here," I continued,

holding it up to her face. "This one reminds me of a darkened blood moon, just like your eyes."

She turned to face me, her full lips curling into a wicked smile. Our eyes met and neither of us said a word; we didn't need to. In one fluid motion, Tempest reached up to trace the contour of my jaw with her fingertips and sent fire down my spine. Without hesitation, I closed the gap between us and captured her lips in a searing, hungry kiss. Our tongues danced together, each taste of her sending waves of heat and cold coursing through me.

"Let me feel you," I demanded, feeling a surge of possessiveness, my hands sliding under the sides of her lace panties, hungrily grasping her hips. The heat of her soft skin against my palms only served to stoke the fire in me.

"Take me," Tempest moaned against my lips, her nails digging into my shoulders.

In a swift motion, I lifted her off the ground, our lips still locked together, and carried her towards the bed. We fell onto the soft sheets, tangled limbs and racing hearts pounding in sync.

"You are so incredibly beautiful," I breathed against her neck, nipping at her sensitive flesh. Tempest gasped, arching her back at the sensation.

"Please," she begged, her hands roaming my body, gripping at the fabric that separated us, I responded the only way my mind considered reasonable at the moment, tearing away my shirt.

"Is this what you want?" I asked, looking deep into her eyes as I slid one hand up her thigh, inching closer to where I needed to feel her most.

"More than anything," she admitted, her own hands busy undoing the buttons of my pants. My breath caught in my throat as her hot hands slid over my cool skin.

"Then take it," I murmured, sheathing myself inside of her with a growl.

Our bodies moved in perfect unison, consumed with a passion that could never be extinguished. I kissed her as I flew higher and higher with each successive stroke, until all that existed was Tempest.

"Oh, Beau," she moaned, her nails digging into the flesh at my back as she called out my name. I could feel that she was close to the edge, her body quivering as she clenched tighter around me. I pushed myself a little further, wanting to feel her come apart around me. I trailed kisses down her neck, pausing to graze my fangs over her pulse point. I felt her heart race beneath my touch, her blood singing a siren's song that beckoned me closer.

"You are mine..." I growled, marking her as my own for all eternity yet again. Her nails dug deeper into my flesh as she cried out in ecstasy, her body arching as she came undone around me. My own body tensed, and I followed her over into the abyss, ecstasy washing over me in waves as I emptied myself inside her.

As if moving in slow motion, I heard the clatter of stones hitting the floor as the mask fell from the bed. Nothing could compare to the beauty of the sight before me. I gently flipped us over, resting Tempest against me savoring the feel of her hot satin skin beneath my body.

"I love you, Beau, I will always love you," Tempest promised, her voice vibrating with emotion.

"As I love you," I assured. "And I will protect you until the day I die."

Tempest

I snuggled against Beau, my fingers tracing lazy patterns on his cool skin, drawing circles up his arm before resting my palm flat against chiseled chest, and I felt the steady beat of his heart keeping time with my own.

Reluctantly, I untangled myself from his embrace and rose to my feet. "But we should probably get ready for the ball now," I whispered.

Beau chuckled and nodded in agreement. "Right. We don't want to keep our guests waiting."

"Help me with my dress?" I asked after a quick shower.



I held up the glimmering fabric and stepped into the dress, feeling it hug my body like a second skin. I could sense Beau's eyes on me, taking in the curves of my body and the swell of my breasts beneath the material. Being a queen-to-be was hard work, but had its perks. It was made specially for tonight—a blazing red, like flickering flames outlining my silhouette. The bodice dipped low, allowing just a hint of cleavage to be showcased.

It wasn't until he began to fasten the back of the dress that I felt sparks surge through me. His touch left a trail of anticipation all along my spine, and when he murmured his approval, it sent shivers down my body. He looked incredibly handsome himself, his outfit matching mine with its dark, sensuous red accents. He wore a moonlight white shirt that clung tightly to his chiseled chest, and a blue waistcoat with gold piping that enhanced his broad shoulders and slim waistline. His pants fitted snugly around his powerful thighs.

"Exquisite," he whispered breathily, setting my heart aflutter once more.

"You are quite impressive as well," I replied, turning to face him.

"Thank you," he breathed, his frosty gaze locked with mine. Hunger radiated from him, a palpable force that made my blood rush. "Shall we finish preparing for the masquerade and don our masks?" I nodded, trying to steady my racing heart as I reached for my own mask.

The lace was soft against my skin, and the crimson gems sparkled in the dim light. I could feel Beau's eyes on me as I fitted it into place above my cheekbones, framing my face in an alluring way.

He retrieved his own mask, silver and sleek against his chiseled features. My pulse quickened even more as he moved closer to me, our bodies almost touching.

"Ready for the masquerade now?" he murmured huskily.

I couldn't help but laugh at his question, feeling both giddy and nervous at once. "Yes... though I can't promise not to try and steal you away to a hidden corner," I retorted boldly.



Chapter 36

Sara

The Masquerade ball was a magnificent kaleidoscope of color and shadow. The moment our eyes met, I knew that Deakon's entrance had been my cue. I swept into the room, looking every inch a queen-to-be in my emerald-green costume. The silken fabric rustled as I moved, and the jewels in my hair sparkled in the candlelight. I felt like a goddess, and I knew that Beau, once in my grasp, wouldn't be able to resist me, just like councilman Lacey.

Deakon's eyes were fixed on me, and I could see the desire in them. I smiled and started towards him, my heart pounding with anticipation. As I got closer, the ring worked its magic and once again he was my mind's image of Beau. He stood tall and handsome in his black and red mask. I could smell his scent like sea salt, and it made my head spin. He reached out and took my hand, and I felt a jolt of electricity run through me.

Charlie's face was taut with expectation as he watched me saunter up to Deakon from across the room, doing my best to appear innocent and demure.

"You look beautiful," he said, his voice low and husky.

"Thank you," I replied, my voice barely above a whisper, soaking in these last imaginary moments with Beau, before focusing on the task at hand.

"Deakon," I purred. "It's time for us to play our game."

He turned toward me, the heat of desire in his gaze unmistakable. Looking across the room at Charlie, Deakon hesitated for a moment before nodding his head in agreement.

"Will he be able to control her?" Deakon asked, genuinely curious.

"I guess we'll just have to find out," I shrugged, my lips curving into a knowing smile.

As if on cue, Charlie strode confidently towards Beau and Tempest, greeting them warmly as though they were just old friends catching up at a social event rather than unknowing rivals locked in a deadly game of jealousy and magic. His smile was charming, and his eyes twinkled with amusement, but I could see the tension in his shoulders and the way his hands were clenched at his sides. He knew that this was a dangerous game, but he was just as determined to win as me.

My eyes connected with Deakon's, and I could see the same anticipation in his eyes that I felt. I took a deep breath and stepped away from him into the outskirts of the ballroom, ready to play my part in this deadly game of keeps.



Beau

"Charlie," I replied cautiously, my grip on Tempest's waist tightening ever so slightly. "I didn't expect to see you here." I was filled with trepidation, though I didn't know why.

"Ah, well, you know me, always one for surprises," Charlie tried to lighten the mood with his light-hearted tone, but the tension was still palpable in the air. He glanced at Tempest, and his eyes widened in appreciation. "Tempest, you look beautiful tonight," he said sincerely.

"Thank you, Charlie," she said, her cheeks flushing at the compliment, but her eyes were wary, watchful.

"Care for a dance?" Charlie asked with a bow, extending a hand towards her.

I felt my fangs itching to come out, but I calmed myself down, knowing that jealousy was unnecessary. Tempest and I were mated and bonded. I could feel her love for me through our connection. But that didn't stop the thought of this halfling having his hands on her from making my stomach churn. Tempest hesitated, her eyes darting between Charlie and me, looking for an answer.

Finally, she spoke, her voice soft and hesitant. "Charlie, I..."

"Go on. Dance," I urged gently, my grip on her loosening. She looked up at me with a smile, and I felt my heart skip a beat. "Alright," she conceded, placing her hand in Charlie's. I watched them walk toward the dance floor, a whisper of something not quite right wafting about my senses.

"Prince Beau, I hope I'm not intruding," Deakon said smoothly, appearing beside me like a shadow.

"Of course not, councilman," I replied, turning to face him. "What can I do for you?"



Deakon

"I just wanted to congratulate you on your mating. This celebration was the least the council could do to show our support," I said. "It's a beautiful and timely match."

"Thank you," Beau replied, his cold blue eyes glinting in the candlelight. "I'm glad you think so."

"I've heard that your coronation will be expedited, and that it is planned to be quite an extravagant event. We may even have representatives from the

Northern Kingdom in attendance."

Beau's eyes flicked to mine, and for a moment, I thought I saw a flash of something in his expression, but then it was gone. "Indeed," he said, before he turned away slightly, his eyes locked on Tempest and Charlie as they danced. "It is a celebration of life and love, after all."

"Ah, love," I mused, letting my voice trail off suggestively. "An emotion that can bring both great joy and agonizing pain."

"True," Beau agreed, his knuckles white as he clenched his fists. "However, love can also be a powerful force for good. It can motivate us to do great things and to be strong in the face of adversity."

I watched Beau as he watched Tempest glide around the ballroom in Charlie's arms. Even I had to admit, she was a vision. Every time she twirled past, Beau seemed to shed a lifetime of tension and stress. It was as if he would explode if she wasn't near him. As if sensing his need, Tempest's eyes met Beau's over Charlie's head, and she gave him a smile brighter than the new moon. I felt like a voyeur intruding on such an intimate moment, but I had bigger dragons to slay.

"I could not agree with you more, my prince. But we have more important matters than love to discuss. Your Grace, could we talk somewhere quiet?"

Beau finally responded, "Of course, Deakon."

With one last glance at Tempest, he forced himself to leave the ballroom. He gestured for me to follow him with a tilt of his head. We walked through the halls until he led me to a quiet study, far away from the commotion.

The door to the study creaked open, revealing a room filled with the scent of leather-bound books and aged oak. The study was small and cozy, with a fireplace burning in the hearth. There was a desk in the corner, and a few

comfortable chairs arranged around a coffee table. He closed the door behind us and turned to me.

Beau motioned for me to sit down, while he himself remained standing. His posture was rigid, and his eyes were focused intently on me. I felt a sense of anticipation building inside of me like Sara's ivy, crawling up my spine and filling me with excitement.

"Beau," I began, my voice laced with gravity, "there have been a great many whispers floating around."

"Yes, I know, and the council has them all in hand, do you not?"

I could feel Sara, hidden in the darkness just beyond the room's entrance, listening intently.

"I'm not sure yet," I continued. "The element anomalies are definitely...unique. They're not like anything we've ever seen before. They're not even like the elemental anomalies that happened during the last great war three millennia ago before the kingdom's fracture."

"Unique?" Beau echoed. "My brother has narrowed down the list to three nature halfling women who may be co-conspirators, and I've heard that you've been consorting with one of them. Which makes me question your suggestion for this ball."

My eyes narrowed as Beau's words hit me like a ton of bricks. "What are you insinuating?" I growled, my hands clenched into fists at my sides.

Beau held up his hands in a placating gesture. "I'm not insinuating anything, Deakon. I'm merely pointing out that in his investigations, my brother has come to believe that the halfling woman we have intel on is not acting alone. That there may be others involved, perhaps even among those on the royal council themselves."

I scoffed at him, though he was hitting the dragon right in the heart. "That's

preposterous. We have the council investigating the matter thoroughly. I have no reason to suspect any of our own kind."

The prince's expression darkened. "Perhaps you should start. After all, it wouldn't be the first time a vampire or halfling has betrayed their own kind for power and influence. We have two kingdoms for a reason."



Chapter 37

S ara

My plan had come together flawlessly. I was going to have Beau, no matter the cost. As Deakon and Beau spoke, I could barely contain my excitement. The thrill of the chase made me feel alive, knowing that soon I would claim what was rightfully mine.

The moonlight cast a silver gleam on Beau's handsome face as it shone through the window. I stepped out from the shadows like a phantom, interrupting their tête-à-tête.

With a flick of my wrists, I pulled from my gift, summoning the plants so graciously placed in the corner and calling on them to lengthen, wrapping around Deakon's eyes and wrists. Just in case our plan went sour, Deakon would be counted as innocent.

"Beau." His name felt like honey on my tongue as I breathed it softly into the room. His eyes clouded with confusion until realization dawned upon him, and he glared accusingly at Deakon who tangled within my vines.

"I was right about you! What do you think you're going to accomplish here?" he growled. A smile curved onto my lips as I took a step closer to him and felt the ring on my finger pulsing beneath my skin, its seductive, controlling power begging to be unleashed.

"Taking what's mine, darling," I purred, knowing full well it was already too late for him. Ice started to manifest itself around Beau, and I stepped around Deakon's arrested form before it could fully crystallize. My fingers brushed against Beau's hand, our flesh meeting sending a ripple of longing down my spine. He gasped, body tensing beneath the ring's influence.

"What did you do?" he choked out. I could see the telltale signs of panic clawing at his mind until it was smothered by the ring's control.

"Shh, my love," I cooed, tracing the curve of his cheek with my fingertips. "I'm only helping you."

I opened the ancient vampire grimoire, its pages whispering secrets that had long been forgotten. Charlie's words echoed in my mind, his teachings a twisted dance between darkness and temptation.

I intoned the incantation, knowing full well the power it would unleash.

"Obliviscatur tui memorias," I purred, watching as Beau succumbed to the calling of the rite. His eyes took on a glassy glaze, and his body swayed with mine like a marionette on strings.

"Sara," he whispered weakly, his voice laced with confusion and desire. I reveled in my newfound control over him, a wicked grin spreading across my lips.

"Tempest remota est ab animo," I uttered next, staring intently into Beau's eyes. His body trembled beneath my gaze, and my essence seemed to take root within his very being. He tried to object, but no words came out. His mind had been taken over.

"Who...what is Tempest?" he finally asked, desperation seeping into his voice. I smiled in satisfaction, feeling so powerful in that moment.

"That's right," I cooed softly. "You don't remember anymore, do you? Tempest has nothing to do with you now." With a gentle caress of his cheek, I added, "Focus on me. I'm all that matters to you now."



Beau

Sara's entrancing gaze held me captive, a blurry sensation of fear and desire reverberating through my veins. She spoke softly, her words giving me a sense of security amidst the chaotic mess that clouded my thoughts. My need to trust her was greater than my urge to resist and as I gave in to her charm, I couldn't help but feel something was terribly wrong.

Her lips brushed against my ear, and I shivered from the pleasurable sensation it created. "Let's see what you can do for me," she purred, her voice like liquid nectar.

"Anything," I breathed, my will crumbling beneath the power of her spell. In that moment, everything seemed clear; all that mattered was pleasing Sara. As if reading my mind, a dark flame gleamed in her eyes and without warning, she placed a ring on my finger.

She pinched my chin gently between her fingers and tilted my head back so that she could look into my eyes. A haze filled my mind, making it difficult to focus on anything else but Sara. Her dark red hair cascaded over her face as she spoke, every word tasting like honey and drawing me further under her control.

"Beau," she whispered seductively, her fingers tracing circles on my chest.
"You're mine now."

"Yours," I repeated, feeling the confusion slip away as the ring circled around my finger. The only thing that mattered now was fulfilling her desires and calming the fire that burned within us both.

"Kiss me," she commanded tenderly, her gaze locking onto mine with such intensity it made me weak in the knees.

I didn't hesitate, my lips meeting hers with a hunger I couldn't explain. Instantly, a strong stab pierced my heart, almost dropping me to my knees. I gasped in surprise at the unexpected pain and started to pull away. However, before I could move further a stronger power seemed to burrow its way down deep inside me, wrapping around that pain and dulling the ache.

Sara's taste flooded my senses, intoxicating me further. She pulled away, leaving me breathless and wanting more, but in my heart something just didn't feel right.

"What was that?" I asked, cautiously meeting her gaze. Her eyes were filled with an emotion so powerful that it overwhelmed me on sight—an emotion that made me uneasy.

Sara's voice softened as she spoke, "That was the moon goddess... she has bound us together." A small smile graced her cheeks as she continued, "I told you before I was what you needed. Do you still trust me?"

Her question struck something deep within me and before I knew it, I was uttering the words, "Yes... I do trust you."



Chapter 38

Tempest

The music swelled, and I found myself swept up in the arms of Charlie. His dark eyes bore into mine as we moved gracefully across the dance floor. A wisp of fire flickered in the depths of my gaze, showing my uneasiness, a testament to my gift.

"Charlie," I murmured, my voice barely audible over the lilting melody, "did you by any chance see where Beau went off to with Deakon?"

"Beau?" he chuckled, feigning innocence. His grip tightened ever so slightly around my waist, guiding me effortlessly through the steps of our dance. "When I envisioned your body against mine, it wasn't with us saying Beaus' name back and forth."

I laughed. "Oh my, do those lines actually work on the gifted and halflings?" Charlie leaned in closer, his voice whisper-soft in my ear, "Oh yes, princess, indeed they do."

My heart began to hammer in my chest as anxiety gnawed at my insides. My eyes darted around the masquerade ball, scanning the masked faces of the

other dancers for any sign of my mate. Where could he be?

"Relax," Charlie whispered, his lips brushing against my ear. I shivered involuntarily, both from the sound of his voice and the scent of his musky cologne. Something was different. There was an inexplicable magnetism about him, a pull that I found increasingly difficult to resist. A pull that I knew shouldn't be there and must be a mistake.



"Isn't it enough to simply enjoy the moment? To embrace the pleasures of this dance? I'm sure Beau will be back soon."

The music seemed to fade away as we continued to sway across the dance floor. Charlie's hands never once left my waist, his grip steady yet strangely comforting. I closed my eyes and tried to focus on Beau, fighting against something inside of me that wanted to hide his face from my memories.

I breathed out, wanting to separate myself from the heat of his body pressed against my own. "Charlie, I need to know where Beau is," I said, my voice

low and urgent.

Charlie nodded solemnly and rested his hand in the crook of my elbow. He led me away from the dance floor and through the hallways until we reached a side door with a green ribbon tied around it.

"This looks to be the only occupied room, and I'm sure I remember this being Beau's study." Charlie cocked his head toward the door. "I can stay out here and wait for you."

I walked towards the door, a flutter of anticipation in my stomach. Even though we'd only been separated for twenty minutes, I was eager to slip into his arms.

As I approached the study door, I heard muffled voices and laughter inside. I paused, straining to listen. One of the voices was definitely Beau's, low and husky. The other sounded familiar too, but I couldn't quite place it.

The door creaked open, and my stomach lurched as the scene before me came into focus. Beau had Sara pressed up against the wall, kissing her fiercely, his hands roaming all over her body. And there I was, standing in the doorway, my heart shattering into a million pieces.

Sara's eyes snapped open, and she gazed straight at me, a smug little smile curling her lips. I stared at them in disbelief, unable to breathe, unable to think. The only thing I was aware of was the searing pain in my chest and the uncontrollable surge of fire crackling around me.

"Beau," I said quietly, my voice barely more than a whisper. He slowly peeled himself away from Sara and looked at me with an expression that cut me to my core. He looked at me as if I was nobody to him, "Who are you?"

My flames leapt higher, scorching the walls and floor and I squeezed my eyes shut, fighting to regain control of my volatile gift and tumbling emotions.

I stared at Beau in disbelief, unable to process what was happening. Beau's

gaze was blank, no recognition in his eyes.

"Who am I?" I whispered, my voice barely more than a breath.

He frowned and shook his head. "I'm sorry, have we met?"

The flames roared in my ears, drowning out everything else. All of the anger and hurt and betrayal that I had been pushing down came surging to the surface, scalding me from the inside out. My fire flashed from me. I wanted to lash out at them, make them feel the pain that I was feeling right then, and my flames exploded into the room sending Beau and Sara crashing into the walls behind them.

No, I would not sink to their level. Without warning or thought, I turned and ran out of the room, tears streaming down my face. I ran down the hallway and out of the building, not knowing where I was going or what I was going to do.

Through my blurred vision, I could see Charlie standing in surprise at the end of the corridor, but all I could think about was getting away from this place, away from Beau and Sara's betrayal, away from my own shattered heart.

I ran until I couldn't run anymore, I stumbled out into a nearby courtyard and collapsed, sobbing, onto a bench beneath an old weeping willow tree. The fog of confusion began to clear, and reality began to set in. He had his hands all over her, he had his lips upon her lips when we had just taken pleasure with each other not two hours before... He had just told me he would always love me. I was his mated, he shouldn't be able to do this to me, or was he just using me to secure his crown?

I sobbed as the pain settled into me all the way down to my bones. Beau had just broken not only my trust but also my heart into pieces.

Slowly, agonizingly slowly, something inside of me shifted. Something powerful and primal awakened within me as if it had always been there

waiting for this moment, but I was too shattered to understand. My hands sparked with flames, and I struggled to contain the fire that threatened to engulf me. I couldn't lose control, not now. I had to get away, far from anyone who might be caught in the inferno of my anguish.



Charlie

I watched as Tempest ran away from me, disappearing into the darkness of the forest. Tempest was hurting, and me waiting to ease her pain was all a part of the plan. Tempest was meant for me and now was the time for me to show her. I couldn't help but feel a sense of possessiveness over her, a fierce desire to protect her at all costs and to make her understand we were the ones actually destined for each other. She was the queen I had been searching for. I turned to charge after her when I heard a rustle in the bushes and tensed, ready to obliterate anyone who meant to harm Tempest, as a figure emerged, their features blurred by the shadows.

"Who are you?" I demanded, my hand instinctively gathering power.

The figure stepped forward, hands raised in surrender. "Easy there, Charlie. It's just me."

I recognized the voice and lowered my hand, relaxing my stance. "Prince Gabriel? What are you doing here?"

Gabriel shrugged. "I was in the area, thought I'd check on things. What happened with Tempest?"

I sighed heavily. "Beau happened. He betrayed her."

Gabriel raised an eyebrow in surprise. "Beau? That's not like him. What did he do?"

I hesitated for a moment before deciding to reveal a part of the truth. "The halfling Sara. Beau was caught in an intimate embrace with her, when Tempest walked in on them."

Gabriel's expression darkened as he clenched his fists. "That halfling will not stop. I knew that she was up to something nefarious. I'll make her pay for whatever illusion she has placed my brother under. There is no way that Beau would willingly be with her. I'll talk to Tempest and make her see—"

I shook my head. "I don't think that's a good idea, Gabriel. Tempest needs time to heal and come to her own conclusions."

Gabriel scoffed. "And what if she decides not to forgive him? What then? Sara will just get away with whatever she has done. My parents won't stand for this."

I placed a hand on Gabriel's arm, restraining him. "Please, let me handle this. I'll make sure Tempest is safe and taken care of. I feel bad, I was the one who introduced them after all."

Gabriel's expression softened, and he nodded. "Very well then. I need to find Marcus and get to the bottom of what's going on."

I smiled and stepped away, readying myself to go after Tempest in the palace forest when I heard Gabriel's voice again. "Charlie."

I turned to look at him. "Yeah?"

Gabriel smiled warmly, a glint in his green eyes. "Thank you, Charlie. Tempest is a special girl and the queen our kingdom needs."

I smiled and nodded. "Trust me. I know just how special Tempest is. She was created to wear a crown."



Chapter 39

S ara

I watched as Tempest vanished into the night, a strange mixture of relief and unease coiling around inside my gut. I had never anticipated just how powerful Tempest's gift truly was. Sure at the mating ritual she had blended her power with Beau's, but the quick heat blast that had just blown us back and scorched the study left me unsure and shaken. If Tempest ever discovered the truth about her betrayal...the thought chilled me to my bones... until I looked at Beau's handsome face and saw my future and all I'd ever wanted.

Tempest and her power be damned, I would have him and if I couldn't then... neither would she.

"What happened?" Beside me, Beau stirred interrupting my musing, rubbing the back of his head. "The last thing I remember was talking to Deakon in the study. How did I end up out here?"

I grasped his arm gently and gestured over to Deakon lying unconscious on the floor. His black suit had scorch marks along the front of it and my vines

which had entangled him were dust surrounding his form. "There was an accident with one of the new Halfling's gifts," I lied smoothly. "Her fire got out of control, and she fled before she could hurt anyone else. I'm just grateful you're alright. I've already called the guards to come see about Councilman Lacey."

Beau frowned, glancing around, taking in Deakon's prone form and the scorched walls and floor. "Wow a newbie did this?" He raised an eyebrow at me for confirmation.

I forced a smile and nodded, averting my gaze from his penetrating stare. If only he knew that it wasn't some run-of-the-mill Halfling that caused all this destruction, but rather a complex web of lies and deceit woven by none other than myself.

"Not intentionally," I said, running my hand up his muscular arm. "Her power is tied to her emotions. I'm worried about her, Beau. She's clearly struggling to control her gift, and she has no one to help guide her."

"We have to find her," Beau said immediately. "She could be dangerous if left on her own."

I bit back a triumphant smile. Everything was going according to plan. "I agree, but we must be very careful. This Halfling is volatile right now, and she may lash out if she feels threatened or cornered."

"What do you suggest?" Beau asked.

"Let's give her some space first," I shrugged. "Let her anger cool and her power settle. Then we approach her gently and show her we only want to help. If we can get her to trust us, we may be able to help her gain control over her gift at last."

"Alright," Beau said. "We'll do it your way. But we have to find her soon, before she hurts someone else or herself."

I nodded, my face expressionless as I tried to hide my satisfaction. I knew that I had won this round, but I also knew that the battle was far from over. Tempest would be found, all right, but not before Charlie had his way with her.



Tempest

I had finally stopped running and fell against the bark of a tree, my chest heaving. I didn't even have enough time to fully process what had all transpired before Charlie was there in front of me, pulling me into his arms.

"Tempest, are you okay?"

I wrenched myself away, unable to bear his touch. "Leave me alone," I said, my voice thick with tears.

"Not until you tell me what's wrong," he said, his voice gentle but firm. "I'm here for you."

I shook my head, tears streaming down my face. "I can't," I said. "It's too much."

Charlie took a step closer to me, his hands outstretched. "Please," he said. "I want to help."

I took a deep breath and wiped the tears from my eyes. I hugged myself tightly, trying to stop the shaking. "I just don't know what I'm going to do," I whispered, barely able to speak, "him and Sara... Beau was WITH HER! How could he do this to me? We're fated by the moon goddess herself and he acts as if I mean nu-nu-nothing to him," I sobbed, my heart constricting as the vision of Beau pressing Sara up against the wall, his hands roaming over her body, his lips upon her lips. It made bile rise in my throat and I wanted to burn it all down to ease my pain.

Charlie put his arms around me and pulled me close. "You're going to be okay," he said. "I'm here for you. We'll get through this together. You can trust me, Tempest."

I laughed bitterly, the sound edged with hysteria. "Trust you? After you betrayed me too?"

He looked genuinely puzzled. "What are you talking about? I haven't betrayed you."

"Haven't you?" I shook my head. I couldn't trust anybody. "Just go away, Charlie. I don't want to see you either."

"Tempest, please. I don't understand what's happening here."

"Just go away Charlie," I said before taking off, but he gave chase behind me as I ran blindly through the forest, branches whipping at my face and tears blurring my vision. I could feel the anger and sorrow forming around me manifesting in a smoky fire as I stumbled onward.

"Tempest, stop!" Charlie cried, hurrying towards me with his hands raised like I was a skittish animal. "Please, stop running away."

I froze, torn between fleeing from him as well and collapsing into his arms. But no, I couldn't trust anyone now. Not after what Beau and Sara had done.

"I know you're upset," Charlie said gently, "and I don't blame you. What they did was wrong." He shook his head. "Beau should be ashamed of himself for treating you this way."

A sob caught in my throat. "How could he do this to me?" I whispered. "I thought he loved me."

"I'm so sorry," Charlie murmured, stepping closer and wrapping his arms around me. I leaned into him, too heartsick to resist the comfort he offered. "You deserve so much better than him. Beau never deserved you."

I closed my eyes, wishing the ache in my chest would fade. But it was still there, a gaping wound that throbbed with every breath.

My heart felt like it was shattering, the pain spreading through my veins like poison. I wanted to scream and rail against the injustice of it all.

"Tempest," Charlie murmured, as if he sensed my anguish. He drew me closer, his arms supporting me when my legs threatened to buckle beneath me.

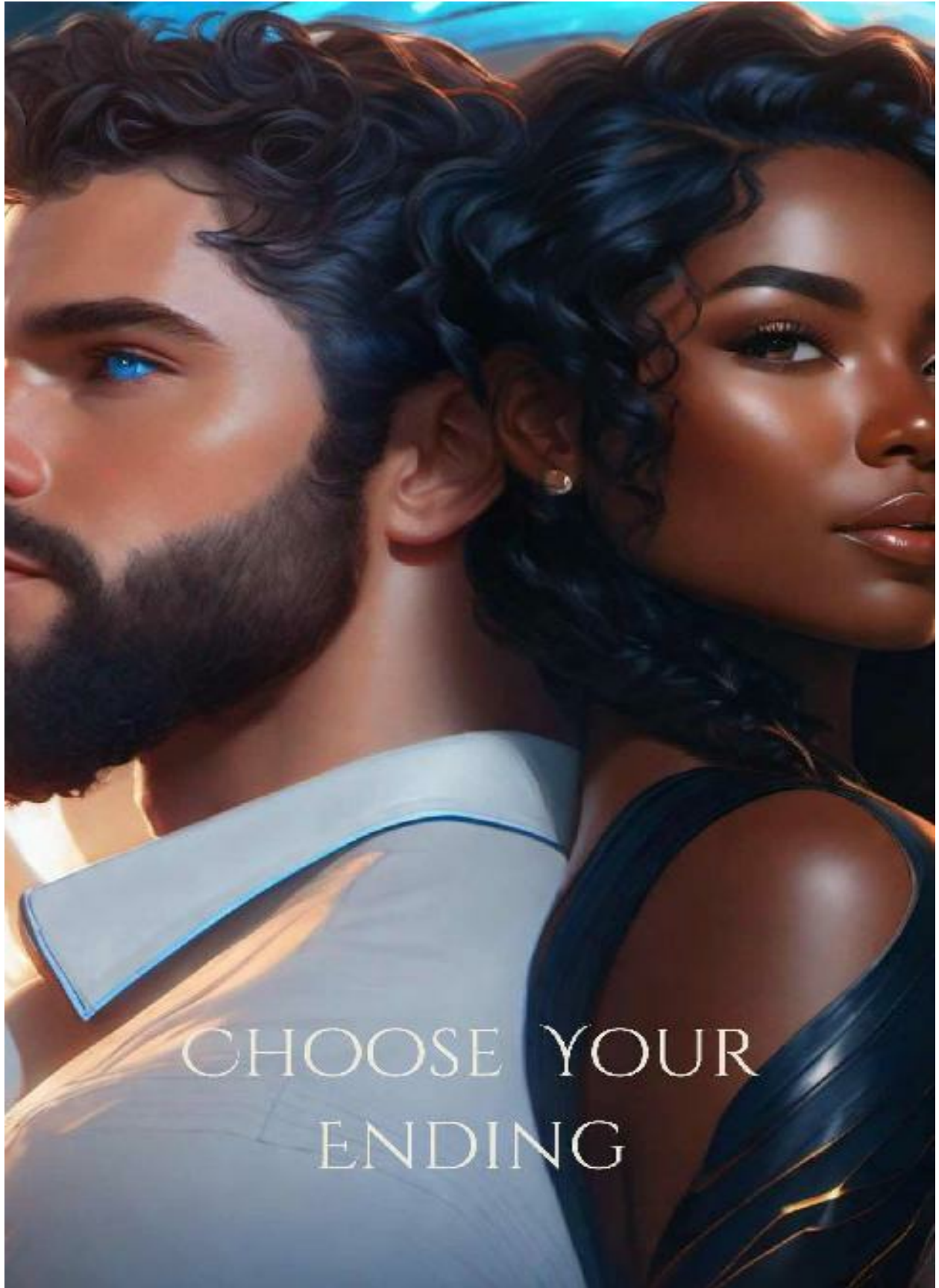
At first, I resisted, too consumed by grief to accept comfort. But then I

allowed myself to relax into his embrace, soothing away the raw edges of my pain with every gentle stroke of his hand.

I closed my eyes, wishing the ache in my chest would fade just a little bit. But it was still there, a gaping wound that throbbed with every breath.

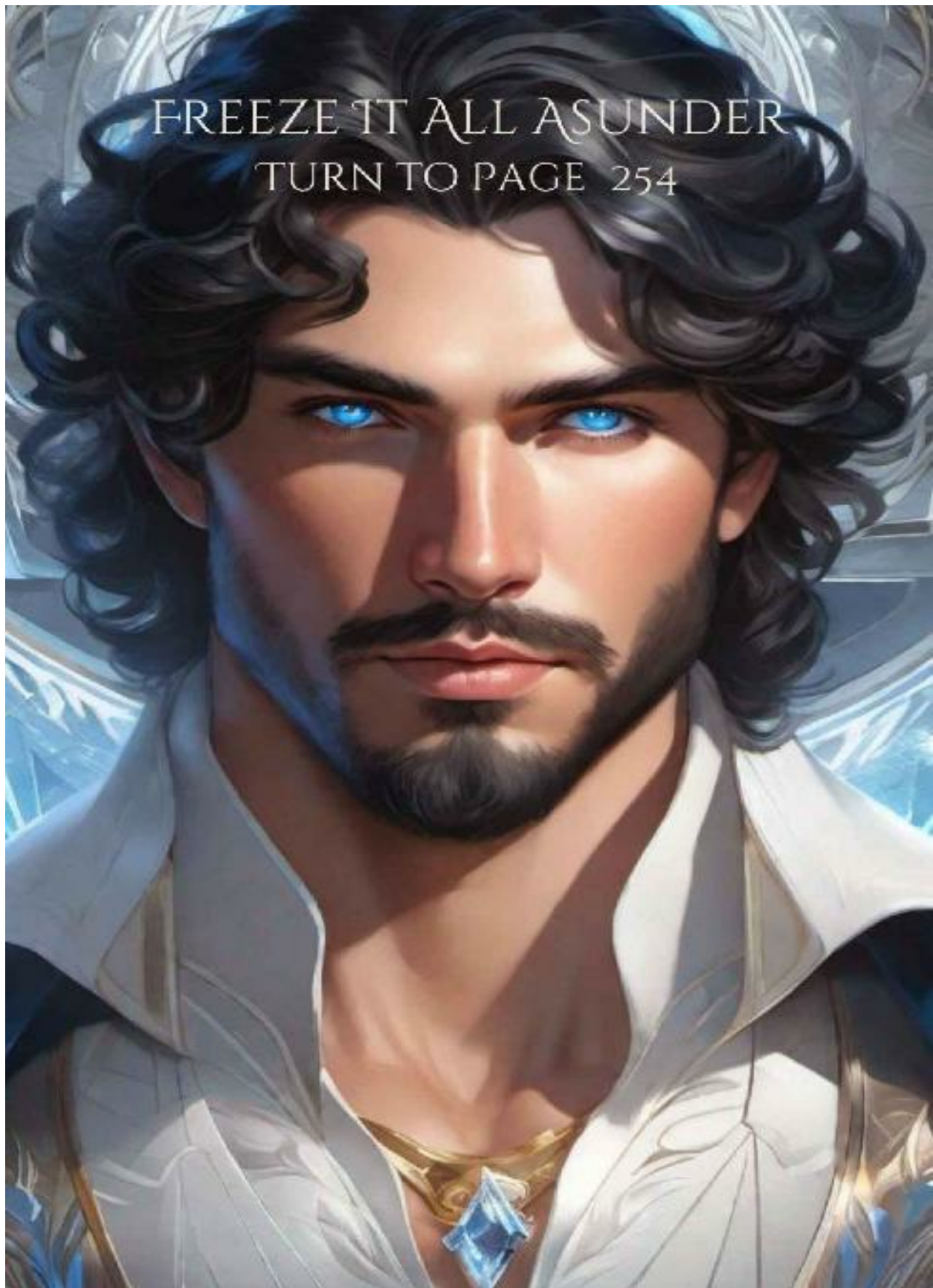
"It's going to be alright," Charlie soothed, his hand stroking my hair as he held me close. "I'm here for you, Tempest." He paused for a moment before continuing softly, "I won't let you go through this alone."

I clutched at him, holding back the inferno building inside until finally I stepped away from him and wiped at the tears on my face with trembling hands. But something still nagged at me, something dark and unsettling at the back of my mind that refused to be silenced. Something was not right...

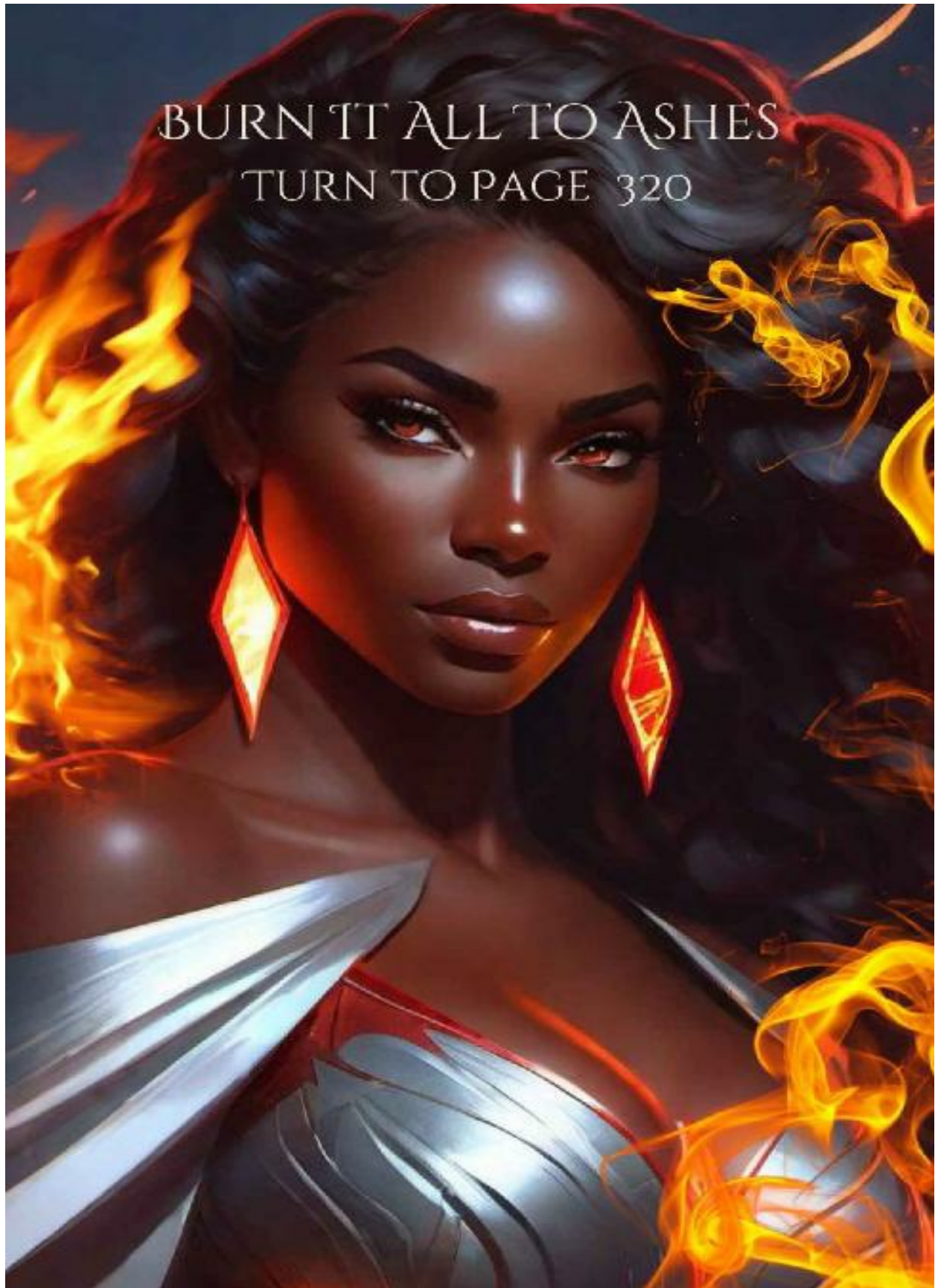


CHOOSE YOUR
ENDING

FREEZE IT ALL ASUNDER
TURN TO PAGE 254



BURN IT ALL TO ASHES
TURN TO PAGE 320



Choice One

Freeze It All Asunder



Chapter 40

Tempest

I swallow hard, acutely aware of Charlie's proximity and the heady mix of scents surrounding us. Jealousy and betrayal, nature, and decay. I want to pull away, put distance between us, but some strange force compels me to remain.

Charlie smiles as if sensing my inner struggle. "There's something I want to show you. Something that might take your mind off all this for a while. Do you trust me?"

The offer should offer reassurance, yet something about his tone sets me on edge. As if he's hiding the truth even now, wrapping it up in pretty words and false promises, just like Beau.

I open my mouth to call him out on it, but the protest dies on my lips. What does it matter, really, if he's not being fully truthful? How could he possibly cause me more heartache than Beau and Sarrah?

I wet my lips, hesitating only a second more before giving him a watery, "Yes."

The familiar scent of cinnamon and earth surrounds me as his arm slips around my waist. "Close your eyes."

I hesitate, a spark of unease flickering to life. But with a resigned sigh, I close my eyes.

The air around us shifts, a chill wind blowing past. The floor seems to drop away beneath my feet and my stomach lurches. Panic bubbles up my throat at the sensation of weightlessness, like drifting in open water. When the whirlwind stops, a thousand new scents assault my senses—the crisp scent of pine and snow, the musky aroma of damp earth and moss, and something else, metallic and sharp—the tang of magic in the air. I stumble as I regain my footing, still reeling from the abrupt change in equilibrium. Charlie steadies me, hands lingering on my waist.

My eyes fly open as Charlie sets me back on my feet. We're no longer in the palace forest. A sea of emerald trees stretches as far as the eye can see, snow-capped mountains rising in the distance. A glacier glints in the distance, bright under the pale sun, and everywhere there are ribbons of color—brilliant auroras dancing across the sky. "Where are we?" I breathe, taking in the impossible sight before me.

"Welcome to the Northern Kingdom," Charlie says, pride evident in his tone. "My ancestral home."

No wonder he possesses such formidable power. This land itself seems touched by magic, ancient and wild. I can feel it humming through the air, in the earth and stones, an energy both familiar yet utterly alien.

How is this possible? My mind is running a thousand miles a minute, trying to deal with my broken heart and Charlie's hidden abilities, but all I can ask is, "How did we get here?"

"A little bit of the old forgotten magic merged with my gift." Charlie's smile

turns sheepish under my questioning gaze. "I may have, ah, left out a few details about my abilities. I hope you'll forgive me?"

I frown, remembering his promise that I could trust him. "You mean you're responsible for all the strange weather we've been experiencing lately? The auroras and storms?"

"I'm afraid so." Charlie winces. "It was never my intention to deceive or hurt anyone, Tempest."

I tear my gaze away from him and step back, unease once again coiling its way down my spine. "Charlie, what is going on? Why did you bring me here?"

Charlie clears his throat, "I thought it was time we had a heart-to-heart. Tempest, I have feelings for you."



The shock must have registered on my face because Charlie rounds on me like I'm a skittish animal as I question his true intentions. "What are you talking about? Beau's my mate."

A sour expression crossed his features, and he snatched my hand hard between his long hot fingers. "You're wrong Tempest. You're meant to be with me. We're both powerful and together we can rule both kingdoms."

I tried to jerk my hand away from his grasp, but he held firm. "Let go of me Charlie. This is madness. The mated are drawn together by the moon goddess herself."

Charlie's lips crashed onto mine with an almost overwhelming force—his body pressed tightly against mine—the taste of him sour like acid. I bit down hard, tasting the salty tang of his blood mixed with burnt cinnamon. Charlie groaned in pleasure, his hands exploring my body possessively.

The air around us sparked with energy as I tried to ignite a flame across his skin, but no matter how much I concentrated nothing happened—just like in academy, he was immune to my abilities.

His desire pressed against me, his hot breath fanning against my face as he kissed me forcefully once more. My cries were muffled by the pressure of his lips as I begged for freedom through the whispers I could barely get out.

"Charlie, please.... why are you doing this?" But no matter how much I pleaded or begged, Charlie remained unmoved, determined to make me his own.

"Oh come now Tempest, have you truly never seen how much I love you, adore you?" He asked silkily, a smug smirk playing on his lips as he leaned back away from me and stared into my eyes, the glow of triumph visible even in the darkness of the tower. "I was with you every step of the way through our gifted years—more of a friend to you than that backstabbing Sara."

"No, Charlie.. you introduced me to Beau at the ball... I've..."

"Ah... yes, well introducing you two was a mistake that I suffer with every day. Had I just told Beauregard I did not know you well enough for an introduction and allowed him to meet you the next day... sure you'd have felt the attraction but being mated—that would be null and void... no worries I have a way to remedy that and free you from Fate's so-called hold."

"I don't want that... I want Beau and I know he wants me... something is wrong."

"He wants you, Tempest... Really? Didn't look like that in his study when he had your good friend Sara pressed up against the wall. It looked as if he was seconds away from sticking his dick in her cunt and his fangs in her neck," he chuckled darkly.

"It's just not right Charlie... something's not right."

Charlie clears his throat, his breath ragged as he reaches into his pocket and pulls out a fist, tightly holding onto something. "Just take this as a show of my sincerest apologies."

His fist opens, and he holds it out to me palm up, proffering a delicate gold chain from which dangles a single red stone. Bloodstone, perhaps, or a ruby. There is something strange about it though, a subtle pulse of power I can feel even from here.

"It's okay Charlie really..." I said backing away from him, but for every step I took back, he stepped forward until my back met a stone wall that dug into my lace dress. I stare at the necklace, torn.

"I insist, Tempest," he said as he held the necklace's long chain open and slipped it over my voluminous hair, after he had lifted the mass of curls, allowing the chain to settle upon my neck. The pendant comes to rest between the valley of my breasts. For a moment, nothing happens, but then a surge of power floods my senses. A heady, intoxicating rush of magic that settles into my bones, twining with my own gift of fire.

"This brings out your beauty even more," he breathed, his gaze burning into me. "I insist that you wear it always."

Charlie's smile turns predatory, his eyes glowing with possessive triumph. He begins to chant, the words strange and hypnotic, his magic wrapping around

us. The necklace grows warm against my skin, the pendant pulsing with power in time to Charlie's words.

A haze descends upon my mind, memories slipping through my grasp like smoke. Beau's face wavers and fades, our connection torn away strand by strand. I cling to the fading remnants of our bond, but it's no use.



Tempest

Confusion clouds my thoughts, a strange emptiness filling the void left behind. I search for the source of this hollow ache, grasping at shadows that slip from my reach. There is something missing, something vital and intrinsic to my being. But try as I might, I cannot remember what it is.

Only a bone-deep longing remains.

Charlie's grip tightens around my waist, his triumphant smile fading into a predatory smirk. "It is done. You are mine now, Tempest, as you were always meant to be."

Mine. The word resonates through me, an echo.

I meet Charlie's gaze, defiance fading into desire, the hollow ache inside demanding to be filled. Perhaps he can give me what I have lost, make me whole again.

"Show me," I whisper, leaning into his embrace.

Charlie's smirk deepens into a wicked grin. "As you wish."

The necklace pulses with heat, magic and desire swirling into an inferno. Charlie's lips descend upon mine, greed and possession in every searing touch. I give myself over to the flames, longing to burn.

A whirlwind picks us up, placing our feet within one of the palace room's. I moan into Charlie's kiss, aching to lose myself in his embrace. The necklace pulses in time with my racing heart, chains of lust and longing binding us together. I am clay in Charlie's hands, ready to be molded into whatever he desires.

"You are mine," he growls against my lips. "Heart, body and soul. And I will give you everything you crave, my darling Tempest, if you surrender to me completely."

His words evoke a longing I do not understand, an emptiness I'm not sure can be filled. I nod, helpless against the tide of desire and the magic he wields.

Triumph gleams in Charlie's eyes as the necklace sears my skin, binding me to his will.

The necklace pulses hotter, magic sinking deep into my flesh and bone. Shadows gather in my mind, clouding thought and reason. I cling to Charlie as the darkness rises, embracing oblivion and the promise of bliss, until there is pain.

I gasped for air, wrenching away from Charlie's kiss as I'm doubled over by pain. My heart feels as if a vice has it tight within its grip. Something deathly cold is fighting for dominance over the fire inside of me.

There is only heartache and the abyss of darkness as Charlie's voice washes over me, "obliviscatur tui memorias. Beauregard remota est ab animo."



Chapter 41

Gabriel

The study was a scene of chaos. Scorch marks stained the walls and furniture, and a single flickering torch was the only source of light. In the center of the room, Councilman Deakon Lacey lay unconscious on the floor, no doubt felled by Tempest's fire blast.

Marcus rushed forward first with me close behind. There was no time to lose. It was imperative that we revive Deakon immediately if we were to have any chance of finding out where Beau was and how Sara was manipulating him.

Marcus used his heightened senses to detect the faint sound of Deakon's heartbeat while I moved closer to the fallen man and bent down beside him. Taking a deep breath, he reached out with his power and created a small stream of water that momentarily soaked Deakon, rousing him from unconsciousness.

Gasping for air, Deakon opened his eyes. Startled, he scrambled away from me until his back hit the wall. He coughed and sputtered, the shock of waking up in such an unfamiliar place written on his face.

"What happened?" He breathed out, his voice ragged and hoarse.

Marcus stepped forward—his face grim but determined. "Tempest happened."

Deakon's eyes widened as he processed this information and a look of fear flashed across his face before he composed himself again. He regarded both Marcus and I carefully before he sighed, "No, Sara and Charlie happened. They've been manipulating me, Beau, and Tempest, using some kind of magic to manipulate our feelings to make them think they're in love with them," Deakon finally said. "Sara and Charlie want Beau and Tempest for themselves."

I shook my head in disbelief. "This is madness!"

Marcus clenched his fists angrily. "Not on our watch," he growled as he stepped closer to Deakon, towering over him ominously. "Tell us how Sara has been controlling you." His voice was low and deadly serious.

Deakon nodded in agreement before turning to me. "You have to find a way to stop this from happening, Prince Gabriel. If you can't, then all of the Southern Kingdom will be at risk, if one of them should lose the other..."

Deakon shifted uneasily as he looked around the room as if searching for an escape route before finally meeting Marcus' gaze again. With a sigh he began talking slowly, hesitantly at first but gradually gaining momentum as more details poured forth from him. My heart thudded in my chest as Deakon's words sunk in. Charlie and Sara had been working together to break apart Tempest and Beau? I felt a stab of betrayal—Charlie had acted innocent enough when he was chasing after Tempest earlier in the forest, but it seemed he had been playing us for fools all along.

By the time Deakon had finished talking, Marcus and I were both filled with a rage that burned like fire in our veins, our expressions mirroring each

other's shock and determination to protect Tempest and Beau. We had to get to them before it was too late.

"We need to find a way to save them," I said. "And fast."

"Do you have any idea where they are headed?" Marcus asked.

Deakon shook his head, regret etched across his features. "Not Charlie," he replied slowly. "But I can tell you this. There is only one place where Sara will feel comfortable enough with her power... The palace's dark forest. There is a cottage there."

Deakon looked up at us, his eyes filled with conflicting emotions. "Sara... she... I do care for her. I don't want to hurt her, but I can't let her go through with her plans either." He swallowed hard before continuing. "Please be gentle with her," he pleaded.

Marcus nodded in understanding. "We will do whatever it takes to keep everyone safe, Deakon," he said firmly.

I tightened my grip on Deakon's arm in support and called for some guards to come and help him back to the infirmary. As they arrived and half-lifted him off the ground, Marcus and I both gave him a final look of reassurance before turning away. We had a mission now—a place to start.

As we set off towards the dark forest where Deakon had told us Sara would most likely be hiding out, my thoughts were peppered with worry about what we might find when we got there. Would Tempest and Beau have already been taken? Or worse... would they have already succumbed to whatever magic Charlie and Sara wielded? The thought made me shudder as we reached the edge of the forest, where the canopy of trees blocked out most of the light from above.

I peered into the darkness nervously, searching for any sign of movement amongst the shadows as Marcus stepped forward into the gloom first, sword

drawn ready for battle if necessary. I stayed close behind him as we moved slowly through the trees until finally, just ahead of us tucked away near a rock face hidden from sight, was an old cottage made from logs that had clearly seen better days.

My heart thudded against my chest as Marcus motioned for me to stay put while he crept silently forward towards the cottage. He disappeared into the shadows, and I waited, my senses on high alert for any sign of danger. Several agonizing moments passed before he reappeared, his expression grave.

"They're inside," Marcus whispered.



Chapter 42

B^{eau} As I walked through the dark forest with Sara, I could feel an invisible weight pressing down on my heart. Though I tried to push away my doubts and focus on the overpowering feeling of lust that brought me here, there were moments when flashes of déjà vu would appear in my mind, like a single lightning strike amidst the darkness, creating an image of a woman with mahogany skin and hair made of fire. Who was she? I felt like I recognized her somehow, but it was hard to tell. All I knew for sure was that she wasn't Sara.

As I strolled beside her, I couldn't help but feel a sense of unease. I knew that something wasn't right, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it. Sara, on the other hand, seemed completely at ease. She chatted away, telling me about her plans for our future and how she couldn't wait for us to complete the Mating Ritual.

I tried to push the nagging feeling to the back of my mind and focus on Sara. I knew that she was trying to charm me with her sweet words and gentle

touch, but I couldn't shake off the feeling that something was off.

Finally, we arrived at the little old cottage by the river, a memento of the past. It was a cozy little place, with a thatched roof and a small garden out front. Sara led me inside, and I couldn't help but admire the way the moonlight spilled in through the windows, casting a cool glow over everything.

Then there it was again—a seductive smile of ruby lips, black eyes swirling with fire and then the vision was gone from my mind.

I looked up at Sara, trying to hide the sudden wave of confusion that had swept over me. "Who are you?" I asked, my voice little more than a whisper.

Sara smiled and stepped closer to me, her eyes boring into mine. She placed her hands on either side of my face and gently kissed me. At the touch of her lips, my heart tightened in my chest as if a vice had been closed around it, restricting it from fully beating. I fell to my knees, and the woman from earlier danced through my mind as if she had always been there.

Ice flowed through my veins and froze me in place as my memories unlocked themselves. A sharp pain shot through my body, like my soul was being ripped apart. I gasped, unable to move away from Sara's embrace. The pain seemed to last an eternity before it finally began to recede, leaving behind an ache deep in the pit of my stomach.

Everything that I'd felt in my study, everything I'd done, rushed back to me at that moment. Now there was no pretense, no illusion, nothing clouding my vision or emotions. My heart was unshackled from Sara's magical chokehold.

I looked up at her as she stared at me on my knees. She was beautiful, but it was hollow, sinister, selfish beauty, capable of inspiring nothing but mistrust and unease.

"What did you do?" I asked softly, not expecting an answer.

Sara arched an eyebrow, "Come here," she beckoned.

I felt her power flow over me, felt its magical undercurrent prodding and searching for something in my mind to latch onto too and my fangs dropped in revulsion. But I didn't move off of my knees.

Sara's eyes darkened, her vines starting to slither around. "Beau!"

I remained in place for a beat, before rising, and she smirked, until instead of stepping toward her I backed away a step, my heart racing despite feeling like one of her vines had it caught in its grip. Sara stomped her feet, before lashing out with her vines, to wrap them around my wrist.

"No!" I pulled and twisted her vines before my other clawed hand shredded them. "What do you want?"

"What do I want?" Sara laughed hysterically, drawing me to a standstill.

Again, her gift surged, vines wrestled, and I shot out my own gift, freezing them and turning them cold and worthless.

"Fine! Prince Beau wants to know what I want. You Beau! I want you!" Sara purred before she propelled herself forward, plunging a silver dagger directly into my chest. "And if I can't have you.... Tempest never will!"

Stunned, I felt the blade cutting through my shirt and sinking into my body. It was cold agony. I looked down in shock to see the blade protruding from my body, dark blood starting to run across the hilt before dripping down on the floor beneath me.

I stumbled back, gasping for air as the pain ripped through my chest. My mind reeled with disbelief as I stared at Sara, who was now smirking wickedly. I couldn't believe that she had actually plunged a dagger into me, and all because of her obsession with me.

"You blood-addled bitch," I growled through clenched teeth. I clutched at the hilt of the dagger, writhing in pain as I pulled it out of my chest. My

breathing was ragged and sweat beaded on my skin as I staggered away from Sara, dark blood dripping from the weapon in my hand.

Suddenly, the door flew open with a loud crash. I spun around, my eyes widening in surprise as Gabriel and Marcus rushed in, swords drawn and ready for battle.

"Beau!" Gabriel shouted, his gaze sweeping the room before settling on me.

"Are you alright?"

Marcus stepped forward and scanned my form with a critical eye. His gaze lingered on the bloodstain seeping from the wound on my chest before he spoke, his voice calm but determined. "What happened here?"

I shook my head slowly, unable to find the words to explain what had occurred here tonight. Gabriel sighed heavily before standing up and turning to face me again, his expression unreadable.

Sara let out an enraged screech and lunged forward, vines snaking around her arms as she prepared to launch her attack, but Gabriel was faster. He grabbed her by the throat and yanked her back.

"Where is Tempest?" I asked softly, feeling a wave of dread wash over me as Gabriel hesitated before answering. "She's with Charlie," he said quietly, looking away from me.

My heart sank as I realized that Sara had been telling the truth.

"You will never get Tempest back," she spat out defiantly, releasing one final vine that crackled like a whip as it darted towards me. But before it could reach me, I reacted instinctively, launching myself at Sara and plunging my fangs into her neck without mercy.

As I drank deeply from Sara's neck, I could feel her power surging through me, a dark, twisted energy that made me feel invincible. But it was fleeting,

and as I pulled away, I could feel the emptiness inside me growing more profound.

Gabriel and Marcus watched me warily, their swords still at the ready, but I ignored them, my attention focused solely on Sara. She lay motionless on the ground, her eyes staring up at me in shock and disbelief. I plunged the dagger into her chest without mercy and watched as her remaining lifeblood drained onto the floor below us in a trickle of crimson red. Finally lifeless, she disintegrated beneath me.

I could feel the darkness receding, replaced by a sense of overwhelming guilt and shame. What had I done? I had betrayed my mated. I couldn't feel her.



Chapter 43

B^{eau} We hurried back to the palace, my heart heavy with worry for Tempest and dread for what was to come. We arrived to find a flurry of activity, fragiles scurrying about in preparation for the arrival of the king and queen. My parents had been alerted by Marcus's report and were on their way to assess the situation in person.

Marcus and Gabriel took up positions outside the throne room doors, steeling themselves for what was ahead. I waited in silence, my hands clenched tightly at my sides.

At last, my father swept into the room, his regal form dressed in black armor that glinted menacingly beneath the flickering torchlight. My mother entered close behind him, her gaze sweeping over us all before settling on me. Her expression filled with concern as she read my thoughts without speaking a single word.

My guard Marcus stepped forward then and bowed deeply before addressing both the King and Queen directly. "Your Majesties," he began formally. "I

have done some digging into all of our newcomers here in the Southern Kingdom over the last two hundred years." He paused then, his gaze flicking to me before continuing. "My suspicions about Charlie Snowden have turned out to be correct. He is from the Northern kingdom, a spy sent by King Danforth himself."

The news hit like a ton of bricks, leaving silence hanging heavy around us like an oppressive fog. Even my mother, the queen, normally so unmoved, seemed shaken by this revelation, her grip tightening around the arm of her chair as she spoke firmly yet calmly, "We must act quickly if we are to protect our people, and son, we must get Tempest back. She is your mated, I can't imagine what you must be going through."

My father nodded solemnly in agreement before turning towards me with an intense look on his face.

"Son, we will send our best warriors to retrieve Tempest from Charlie's grasp," he said, placing a hand on my shoulder. "But you must also be prepared for the possibility that things may not go as planned."

I felt a chill run down my spine at the mere thought of Tempest being permanently lost to me, but I knew my father was right. We had to be prepared for the worst. "I understand," I replied, my voice steady despite the turmoil raging within me.

My parents exchanged a look before turning to leave, their guards trailing behind them like obedient shadows. Marcus and Gabriel remained with me, their expressions grim as they watched me closely. I knew they were both concerned for me, but I couldn't bring myself to care. All that mattered was getting Tempest back, no matter the cost.

"We need to move fast," I announced, breaking the heavy silence that hung within the throne room. "I want a team assembled and ready to go once she is

located."

Gabriel stepped forward, his eyes meeting mine with a fierce determination. "I'm going with you," he said firmly, and I couldn't help but feel a sense of gratitude for his unwavering support.

"We'll get her back, Beau. I promise you that."



I close my eyes and sink into the velvet darkness. My body relaxes into the feather mattress as exhaustion claims me.

An ethereal mist swirls, shrouding everything in mystery. The air itself seems seductive, a haunting melody that stirs my blood.

Where am I? The landscape is strange yet familiar. Shadows dance at the edge of my vision, flickering forms with glowing eyes. An unseen moon casts silver light over twisted trees and towering obsidian cliffs.

The dream pulls me deeper, whispers of forbidden desire echoing through my mind. I feel the stirrings of passion and a bone deep craving for my mated.

When will she appear? I can feel her presence, a ghostly figure haunting the edges of my vision. She is here. She is with me. The seductive melody of her soul calls to my own.

I am lost, willingly ensnared body and mind. In this place between waking and sleep, I have found my heart's desire.

I round a sharp bend in the winding path and there she stands, a vision bathed in starlight.

Tempest.

Her back is to me, black hair streaked with living fire cascading over brown shoulders left bare by her black gown. She gazes up at the unfamiliar constellations as if seeking answers there.

My breath catches in my throat at the sight of her. A fierce longing surges through my veins, impossible to deny. I want her with a madness beyond reason. She is beauty and mystery, darkness and light. She belongs to me.

I step forward soundlessly, the stones muffling my footfalls. She does not turn though I stand but inches away, close enough to feel the warmth radiating from her body.

"Who are you?" Her voice is soft as the rustle of leaves. Still, she does not face me.

"Beau. I'm yours. Your mated," I answer, reaching to brush her hair aside. The silken strands slip through my fingers like water.

A tremor runs through her, and Tempest looks over one shoulder, eyes meeting mine. They shine like twin blood moons in the pale light, filled with secrets I ache to uncover.

"I think that I have dreamed of you before," she whispers. Her gaze drops to my mouth and lingers there, an unspoken invitation.

"As I have dreamed of you," I tell her, my hands finding her waist to pull her

against me. She comes willingly into my embrace with a sigh, tilting her head to expose the delicate arch of her throat.

An invitation and a promise. She bares her soul, her body, her blood to me. She is my dream, my desire, my everything, and I will claim what is mine here in the dream world until I can claim her again physically.

I crush my mouth to hers, kissing her with a hunger that leaves us both breathless. Her lips part beneath mine, tongue dancing with my own in a rhythm as old as time.

My hands roam her body, tracing the curves that have tormented my waking hours. She arches into my touch, a soft moan escaping her throat to be captured by my kiss.

The remnants of her dress fall away as I lift her, carrying her to the bed of silken sheets and velvet darkness. She goes willingly, clinging to me as I lower her onto the mattress and cover her body with my own.

"Beau," she gasps as I trail kisses down her throat, her collarbone, the valley between her breasts. My name on her lips is a benediction, an invitation, sealing my fate as surely as the marks I leave upon her skin.

I lift my head to meet her gaze, eyes glowing in the shadows. "You know me." A statement, not a question. She arches into my hands as they continue their exploration.

"I don't, but I feel as if I've always known you," she whispers, nails scraping down my back in wordless demand.

"You know me. We are bound, you and I, two halves of the same soul. Let me show you," I whisper against her skin before I sink my fangs into her beautiful throat, marking her once again.

She parts her thighs in invitation, and I am lost, drowning in silken heat and searing pleasure. Our bodies move as one, a dance as old as time and as new

as this moment, this joining, this claiming. Release comes swift and hard, shattering our souls to forge them anew—together—as they were always meant to be.

I lift my head from the hollow of her throat, licking the twin pinpricks there. The metallic tang of her blood ignites something primal within me, a hunger that will never be sated.

"Remember me. Come back to me," I whisper against her skin. She shivers, hands gliding up to frame my face. I turn into her touch, pressing a kiss to her palm.

I wake slowly, drifting up through layers of sleep like a diver breaking the surface of a midnight sea. The memory of her lingers—her scent, her taste, the feel of her wrapped around me.

My eyes open to darkness. I am alone.

The ache of loss and longing blooms within my chest, sharp as a knife between the ribs. My fingers curl into the sheets where she should lay, seeking any trace of her warmth. There is nothing.

I rise and move to the window, throwing back the heavy velvet curtains. The glass is cold beneath my hands, a pale imitation of the chill that has settled into my bones. Outside, the sky is darkening, the sun descending below the horizon to herald a new moon.

How I hate the moon right now. Its glow only serves to remind me of all that I have lost, all that I stand to lose if she does not return.

"Remember," I whisper, breath fogging the glass. I press my palm there, as if I might reach through to her. "Remember me. Come back."

I cling to the memory of her voice and the promise whispered there; a spark that can be nurtured into a flame, and this is enough to keep my hope alive.



Chapter 44

Tempest

I wake with a start, my heart pounding. The remnants of a dream fade as I open my eyes, shadows dancing at the edges of my memory.

A flash of ice-blue eyes. A surge of longing. Then nothing.

I roll over and rub the sleep from my eyes, confusion swirling in my mind.

What was that? A memory...or something more?

The amulet at my throat thrums with heat, as if awakened from its slumber. I grasp it, the metal warming against my palm, and close my eyes.

Visions swim before me. The face from my dream, so reminiscent of the dreams I'd had before and the prince I danced with at the blood moon ball.

Pale and perfect, gazing at me with a mix of longing and regret. The cold touch of his skin against mine. A single searing kiss that ignited my blood.

With a gasp, I release the amulet. It was real. It had to be.

But how could that be when Charlie fills my waking thoughts and stirs such passion in my soul? I can still feel his lips claiming mine.

Yet I cannot escape these glimpses of... Beau... Prince Beauregard. He seems like a forgotten dream refusing to fade into the shadows of the rising sun. It pursues me like whispers in the dark, seducing me with promises of something more, something real.

I bury my face in my hands, torn between yearning and denial. How did I come to be caught between two men, unable to escape the desires that threaten to consume me?

This is madness. I need to get this in under control as soon as possible and choose whether to pursue the dreams or my reality. But how can I choose when I no longer know my own heart? When dreams and reality have become so entwined I can no longer tell them apart?

The amulet pulses against my skin, a steady beat that matches the rhythm of my heart. As if it knows the truth I cannot see. As if it remembers what I have forgotten.

I stare into the waning shadows, longing for answers, for clarity, for escape from the prison of my own desires. But there is no escape. Not today.

Today I shall drown in dreams, caught between ice and flame, waiting for sunset.



The full moon filters through gauzy curtains, rousing me from restless dreams. I blink awake to find Charlie in my room gazing down at me, a slow smile curving his lips.

"Morning, darling." He whispers—his voice husky, intimate. "Did you sleep well?"

Heat floods my cheeks as I struggle to sit up, clutching the sheets around me. I avert my eyes, unwilling to meet his gaze. "Well enough."

The bed shifts as Charlie moves closer, his hand trailing down my arm. "You seemed distressed. Were you dreaming of me again?"

My breath catches at the touch of his fingers. I dare a glance at him, at the sculpted planes of his face and the knowing glint in his eyes, and my heart skips a beat.

He leans in, lips brushing my ear. "You have nothing to fear from your dreams, Tempest. I am here now...and I have no intention of leaving you."

A shiver runs through me at the promise in his voice. Something deep inside urges me to pull away, put distance between us, but I cannot seem to find the willpower.

Charlie cups my face in his hands, forcing me to meet his gaze. His eyes gleam amber and gold, bright with hunger and something more—something that steals my breath.

"Look at me," he murmurs, his thumb tracing the line of my jaw. I stare into his eyes, drowning in the depths of his gaze, and see it then. The truth I have been blind to until now.

This is no longer about desire or seduction. Charlie wants far more from me than a passing romance. He wants everything. My heart, my soul...my power. And something foreign inside me wants me to allow him to take it all, something I never felt before.

My heart pounds as realization sinks in, sharpening to panic. I try to pull away, but Charlie's grip tightens, holding me in place.

"Let go please," I demand, struggling against him. He merely smiles, a cold and predatory thing, and shakes his head.

"I don't think so. We have only just begun, you and I. There are so many pleasures yet to explore, so many secrets I long to uncover."

He leans down as if to kiss me and I rear back, flames flickering at my

fingertips. Charlie's eyes narrow, a warning in their depths, and I hesitate. My fire may overpower others, but Charlie and I have always been evenly matched.

I swallow hard, fighting to keep my voice steady. "I would like to leave now."

"You want many things you cannot have, it seems," he says softly. "But I will give you what you need, Tempest, whether you realize it or not. I am the missing piece of your soul...the only one who can make you whole. You belong with me."

"That's not true." I struggle, heart racing as I fight for emotional control.

Charlie laughs, low and throaty. "It's very true my love. Our connection is powerful. You feel it too."

"I don't know what I feel," I spit out in frustration.

Charlie studies me for a long moment, rage and desire warring in his eyes, and I brace myself for his anger. But when he finally speaks, his voice is calm. Controlled.

"You always did have a stubborn streak," he says, brushing a stray curl back from my face. "No matter. You will come to see things my way soon enough."

He gets up from the bed, turns on his heel and strides to the door, pausing on the threshold to glance over his shoulder. His smile is slow and predatory, filled with dark promise, and a shiver of fear runs down my spine.

"I'll wait eternity for you."

The door clicks softly shut behind him, leaving me alone with my thoughts and the sinking feeling I have made a dangerous mistake. Charlie will not give up so easily...and he is not the type of enemy I can afford to make for our kingdom's sake.



Tempest

I pace the length of my suite, anger and confusion swirling inside me in a chaotic storm. How dare he come in here and treat me like that? As if I am some possession he has a claim over, something to be owned and controlled.

The walls seem to close in around me, suffocating and tight, and I need to get out. Now.

I throw open the balcony doors and step outside, gulping in deep breaths of the cool night air. My pulse slows, the raging fire inside dampening to flickering embers, and I close my eyes.

Summoning my gift, I envision the embers glowing brighter and hotter until they become a raging inferno. Flames leap and dance along my arms, warmth flooding my veins, and a familiar sense of calm settles over my mind.

Meditating within the fire has always brought me peace. Here, in this space, the confusion and doubt retreat until everything becomes blissfully simple. There is only the fire and me, the rest of the world fading away into the background.

I seek the truth in the flames, the answers to my questions swirling in the fiery tongues licking at my skin. But tonight, the fire remains silent, refusing to reveal what path I must take.

Am I being foolish in trusting Charlie? Or am I turning my back on my destiny by pushing him away? The fire will not say, leaving me to grapple with my uncertainty alone under the light of the waxing moon.

All too soon, the fire dies away, and I am left standing on the balcony, no closer to the answers I seek. But I know what I must do now, as clearly as if the flames had whispered in my ear.



Tempest

I collapse into bed, exhaustion seeping into my bones after hours spent surrounded by flame. But even as my eyes drift closed, images of icy blue eyes flash behind my eyelids, startling me awake with a gasp.

Beau.

Why does he haunt me so, this prince who exists only in my dreams? As much as I try to push him aside during my night waking hours, during the day he comes to me unbidden. His cool touch, his whispered words, the way he looks at me as though I am his full moon after a long day.

"Tempest." My name on his lips is a caress, drawing me under like the tides.

"You are mine, as I have always been yours."

I try to resist him, to cling to the fading memory of Charlie's embrace. But it is no use. Beau fills my senses, wrapping me in the chill of his gift as surely as I am wrapped in the warmth of my own fire.

"This is not real," I whisper, even as I melt into his arms. "You are just a dream."

"Am I?" His lips brush the shell of my ear, sending a shiver down my spine.

"Or are you finally remembering what is real?"

I wake with tears on my cheeks and an ache in my chest that has nothing to do with the magic flowing through my veins. The fire within answers with a

flare of longing, reflecting the tumult of emotions churning inside me.



Chapter 45

B^{eau} I ache for Tempest. An emptiness gnaws at my chest, ravaging my soul with each breath.

My eyes flutter open but darkness remains. The blackness is as vast and endless as the chasm within me. I grasp at the last fading threads of Tempest in my mind, clinging to the memory of her scent, her touch, the melody of her laughter.

Each moment we were apart—was agony. I crave her with a madness that threatens to consume me. My body burns, feverish in my desperation for her. I would tear the world asunder to find my way back to her side.

The loneliness festers, sharpening my longing into something feral and vicious. I snarl, flinging a blast of ice across the room. Frost crystallizes along the stone walls, shards glittering in the low light of the braziers. But no chill can quench the inferno raging through my veins.

I slam a fist into the wall, ice cracking around the impact. Pain slithers up my arm, but I welcome it. Anything to distract me from this torment.

"Tempest," I rasp, her name the only coherent thought in the deepest recess of my mind. I cling to it like a lifeline, repeating it over and over through gritted teeth.

She is my salvation, my damnation. I would barter my soul for one more moment in her embrace. One more taste of those full, flushed lips. One more glimpse of those fiery eyes gazing up at me with lust and love entwined.

I growl in anguish, the sound reverberating off stone walls. My heart is shattering, fracturing into a million shards of ice with each second we remain apart.



Beau

I've been summoned, and when I storm into the throne room, my father's eyes are hooded with concern. The chamber is dark and heavy with secrets. I inhale the scent of leather, old parchment, and something metallic—the smell of power itself.

Marcus approaches, eyes glowing in the shadows. "Your Highness, we have discovered the truth about Charlie Snowden."

My pulse quickens. "Go on."

"He is of royal blood, a prince in his own right. His family has ruled the Northern Kingdom for centuries since the Fracture."

I stare at Marcus, stunned into silence. Charlie, a prince? It seems impossible. Yet it explains much—his charm, his ambition, his hunger for control.

Marcus's voice drops low. "There is more. At the academy, Charlie became enchanted with Tempest. He desires her as his queen, to rule by his side."

Deakon steps forward, pale and trembling. Once under Sara's thrall, now freed from her insidious influence, what secrets might he reveal?

"It's true," Deakon says hoarsely. "Charlie desires power but Tempest above all else. Once he has found a way to break your mating bond, he means to use Tempest and her gifts to seize control of the Council, and from there expand his reign across the land."

I study Deakon closely, alert for any sign of deceit. But his thoughts are open to me, turbulent and laced with remorse. He speaks the truth.

A surge of possessiveness rises in me, primal and fierce. Tempest is mine. She always has been, in my dreams and in my heart, destined for me by fate and by the moon goddess herself.

I close my eyes, steadying my breath, and I glimpse a vision of Tempest at Charlie's side, radiant in crimson silks, her fire gift glowing as she bestows a tender kiss upon his lips. The threatening vision vanishes, but the sight sears into my mind like a brand. I cannot allow it to come to pass. Tempest belongs with me, and I will stop at nothing to find and reclaim her.

A growl vibrates deep in my throat, echoing across the throne room. My father's mouth set in a grim line. "I believe that Lost Love's Curse may be taking over you, my son. If you do not reunite with your mate soon..."

He trails off but the unspoken threat hangs in the air between us, as sharp as the icicles lining the battlements. Madness. If Tempest and I are not joined once more, the torment will drive me to madness, and I will be locked away so that I don't slaughter innocents.

I surge to my feet, fists clenched at my sides. "Then stop wasting time and find her!" Each word is punctuated with a blast of frost. The guards shift uneasily, hands hovering over their swords.

Let them try to stop me. They will learn the true meaning of winter's wrath.

The King holds up a placating hand, his eyes hardening. "We are doing everything within our power, but Charlie has concealed Tempest well."

"Not well enough." A feral grin splits my lips, all teeth and menace. I can feel her, a flickering torch in the vast coldness of my mind. The bond between our souls may be pulled thin but it is not fully broken. He cannot hide her from me forever.

I close my eyes, grasping onto that lifeline. There. A faint glow to the north, muted but unmistakable. The feel of it soothes the raging inferno inside me. I take a deep breath, the icicles melting from the walls. The guards release a collective sigh of relief.

"I must act quickly," I tell Marcus and my father. "Before it's too late and already enough time has been wasted." Before Charlie Snowden steals Tempest's heart and destroys my destiny.

No matter the cost, Tempest is mine to protect and cherish as she deserves. And once she is safely back by my side where she belongs, I will teach the vile Snowden prince a lesson he will never forget. The battle lines have been drawn. A war is coming, and this time, there will be no mercy.

I close my eyes and reach for the bond that ties my soul to Tempest's. A surge of energy flows into me, both bitter and sweet. Bitter because it is weak which means she is slipping further away. Sweet because it is a reminder of the intimacy we once shared.

With each breath, I absorb more of her power. More of her light. More of her fire. My veins ignite as the heat of her flames mixes with the cold of my own ice.

"Tempest," I whisper into the darkness. In my mind, I see her face. Feel the soft caress of her hands on my skin. Taste the warmth of her lips, like cinnamon and desire.

The power builds inside me, writhing and twisting, seeking release. I clench my fists, nails biting into my palms. Not yet. I must take it all. Every last ember of her flame. Only then will I have the strength to find her.

When the bond is nearly drained, a stab of pain lances my chest. She is slipping away, like a star winking out in the velvet sky. Panic rises as I realize I may be too late.

No. I refuse to lose her. Not when we have only just found each other.



With a roar, I unleash the combined power of ice and fire. The air around me explodes into a maelstrom of our combined gifts as I tear open a rift into our inner world.

I step through the rift and the inner world envelops me in its chill embrace. An eerie mist swirls around my boots with every step, clinging to my skin like a shroud.

In the distance, a pale orb hovers above the horizon—the moon, or what passes for it in this realm of shadows. I lift my hands in supplication, the

beads of my bracelet sliding over my wrist.

“Great Goddess,” I pray, my voice echoing through the gloom. “Guide me to her. Show me the path.”

For a moment, all is still. Then a silvery light glimmers through the mist, winding away into the ruins of an ancient fortress. My heart leaps. The Goddess has answered.

The mist grows thicker and more opaque, obscuring my surroundings as it coils around me like a living thing, tendrils of silver-gray curling over my skin. An eerie silence descends, muffling all sound in its wake. Familiar scents fade away, replaced by a strange metallic tang that sparks my magic.

The mist parts before me, revealing glimpses of strange landscapes. Jagged obsidian spires covered. Gleaming citadels of pearl and silver. Paths that twist and turn, shrouded in mystery.

Yet none are my destination. I press onward, magic and instinct leading the way.

At last, the mist begins to thin, strands of silver fading into the night. A familiar energy calls out, as precious and vital as the beat of my own heart.

I emerge in a courtyard of pale stone, moonlight glinting off high towers that reach for the stars. And there, on a balcony wreathed in night-blooming flowers, stands a lone figure clad in red.

Our gazes meet across the distance, recognition flaring in her eyes like the strike of a match. A single word falls from my lips, filled with wonder and promise:

“Tempest.”



Chapter 46

Tempest

My heart pounds as I watch the sea of guards surrounding Beau below, their swords glinting under the pale moonlight. The tension in the air is palpable, a suffocating blanket of danger that threatens to choke the breath from my lungs.

Beau stands tall and defiant amidst the chaos, ice magic crackling at his fingertips as his gaze locks onto mine. Our connection ignites a fire within my soul, one that threatens to consume me whole. I grip the stone railing, knuckles turning white under the pressure as I struggle to retain my composure.

One wrong move and this could all end in bloodshed.

“Surrender now, Prince Graysen, or face the wrath of the Northern Kingdom’s army!” The guards roar in unison, a menacing promise that echoes through the courtyard.

Beau’s lips curl into a sneer, icy contempt etched into the sharp planes of his face. “The only thing I will surrender tonight is my ice through your

traitorous hearts.”

The guards surge forward as one, weapons glinting under the pale moonlight. Beau stomps his feet into the ground, ice magic erupting outward and encasing his enemies in a prison of frost.

My heart leaps at the display of power, desire igniting in my veins like molten lava. Beau has always been dangerous, a force of nature untamed, but there is a raw power within him now that threatens to break the hold Charlie has on my heart. I realize with startling clarity that if he were mine, I would burn the world to ashes if only to stand by his side.

As if reading my mind, Beau’s gaze lifts, finding mine once more amidst the chaos. There is a question in his eyes, a silent plea that threatens to undo me.

Do you remember me?

I tighten my grip on the railing, the stone crumbling to dust beneath my fingers as my head and heart erupt in pain, bringing me to my knees.

“Tempest.” He whispers my name and it's as if I can hear him loud and clear. My name is a benediction on his lips, filled with promises of forever.

“Beau.” Why do I feel as if this halfling I have only danced with once, is my beginning and my end, the light that will guide me home.

Beau takes a step forward, one hand extended up to me in offering. His eyes shine with determination and something more, a flicker of warmth that steals my breath away. "Come to me."

I sway towards him, helpless against the pull of our connection and the song of my heart. The guards fade from view, their shouts and curses dimming beneath the roar of blood in my veins. There is only Beau, resplendent and magnificent, haloed in starlight and possibility.

A sharp crack splits the air, fire circles me on the balcony. I gasp as the added warmth seeps into my bones, jerking me back to the present.

Charlie stands at my side, pale eyes narrowed in challenge. His grip on my arm is bruising, magic twisting around us in a parody of an embrace.

"I won't allow it," he hisses, fangs gleaming. "You are mine, Tempest, and I will not give you up so easily."



Beau

Seeing Charlie grip Tempest's arm and snarl that she is his, brings out a frightening rage in me. Ice crackles under my skin, awakening as my anger grows.

Ice erupts from me. It surges and I clench my jaw against the chill. It spreads from my hands, coating the stone walls in a slick glaze. My power thrums through the castle, seeking out every living thing and entombing it in ice.

All falls eerily silent, frozen in time. They brought this upon themselves. No one keeps me from her. The whole castle groans under the weight, frost creeping over every surface as everything and everyone in its path, including the guards, are frozen. I summon the mist again to carry me to the tower.

I materialize on the tower balcony, ice crystals glittering on the balustrade.

"She will never be yours," I hiss to Charlie, who's observing his frozen kingdom in shock. My breath comes out in icy puffs, the temperature of the atmosphere plummeting.

Tempest stands amidst the frozen chaos, a vision in red and gold, the only spot of warmth in this frozen wasteland. Her hair spills over her shoulders like flames, her dress clinging to her curves.

Our eyes meet, red meeting blue, and my heart clenches. She's even more beautiful than I remember.

A familiar ruby adorns the necklace around her neck, the deep red gem glowing against her skin. The sight of it fills me with jealousy and rage in equal measure.

She's mine. She always has been. And I won't rest until Charlie admits it or dies.

I stalk across the balcony, ice crackling under my boots with every step. I stop before her, close enough to feel the warmth of her skin in the frozen air. Close enough to breathe her in, cinnamon and ash and something indefinably Tempest.

"You froze the entire castle," she says incredulously. "All those people—"

"Will be fine once I release the ice," I say impatiently. When will she understand that her safety is my priority? That I would lay waste to kingdoms and freeze oceans for her sake? "You're mine," I growl, reaching out to grip the necklace at her throat. The ice retreats from my hand, leaving bare skin against bare skin. "You always have been."

Her pulse flutters under my fingers. I yank hard on the necklace, shattering the delicate chain. It falls away in pieces, clattering to the floor at our feet.

Rage and triumph war within me as I clutch her close. For a moment, Tempest stiffens in my arms, her eyes widening. Then she sags against me with a soft sigh, all the tension draining from her body as she starts to regain back her emotional control and memories.



Chapter 47

B^{eau} Charlie's rage boils over as I hold Tempest against me, her body trembling.

"She was meant to be mine!" he fumes—eyes wild.

I push Tempest behind me. Before he can summon his fire, I clench my fist and ice forms around his throat. He chokes, clawing at the frozen collar, his face turning blue.

Triumph surges through me, cold and sharp. He will never touch her again.

But then flames erupt over his hands, melting the ice. He sucks in a ragged breath and the fire in his gaze ignites into an inferno.

The ice in my veins answers the challenge.

This is not over.

He will freeze, as he intended Tempest to be frozen within her mind, consumed by a power greater than his own.

My ice.

The ice of vengeance.

The ice of possession.

The ice of love.

Charlie lunges, a blast of flame erupting from his hands. I deflect it with a shield of ice, but the heat sears my skin.

He won't get the better of me that easily.

I hurl an icicle at his chest and am rewarded with a grunt of pain as it pierces his shoulder. But he wrenches it free and flings it back at me, followed by a fireball.

I dodge, but my sleeve catches fire. I beat out the flames, gritting my teeth against the agony, and surge forward to meet him in close quarters.

He throws a punch crackling with flame and connects with my jaw. My teeth rattle as I stumble back, vision swimming. But I rally and grab his arm, frost creeping over his skin. He howls as his limb goes numb and limp.

One down.

He kicks out with his good leg, catching me in the stomach. The air leaves my lungs in a pained gasp. Before I can recover, he headbutts me, splitting my brow. Blood trickles into my eye as I struggle to remain standing.

But I won't fall. I can't. Not when Tempest's safety depends on my victory.

I blink away the blood and glare at Charlie through my one good eye.

"Surrender, and I'll kill you quickly."

He bares bloody teeth in a sneer. "I will never surrender to the likes of you."

"Then you'll suffer a slow, cold death." I lunge again, ice and rage lending me strength. He tries to blast me with flame, but only a few sputtering sparks leave his hand.

His power is fading.

Mine is just beginning.

He tries to flee, but I grab his frozen arm and jerk him back. "You're not

going anywhere."

I slam my fist into his chest, ice piercing his heart. His eyes go wide with shock and pain.

"Tempest was never yours," I growl. "And now, neither is this world."

I twist my hand and he screams as the ice spreads through his body, freezing him from the inside out. Within moments, he is encased in a prison of frost, his final expression one of desperation and defeat.

Charlie Snowden will trouble us no more.

Tempest is safe.

I turn away from Charlie's frozen corpse and spot Tempest watching me from the edge of the balcony. Her eyes are wide, her expression unreadable.

Does she fear me now, knowing the depths of my power and the lengths I will go to possess her? Or does she understand that I did this for her—to protect her and claim what is mine by right?

"Beau." My name is a whisper on her lips as she takes a hesitant step toward me.

I open my arms to her in invitation, my heart pounding with anticipation.

"Tempest."

She rushes into my embrace, and I crush her against me, breathing in her sweet scent. "You're safe now," I murmur, stroking her hair. "Charlie will never hurt you again."

"You killed him." There is no judgment in her tone, only awe.

"For you, I would kill a thousand Charlies." I tip her chin up so I can gaze into her eyes. "You are mine, Tempest, as I have always been yours. Not even death will keep us apart."

I lower my head and cover her mouth in a deep, passionate kiss. Her lips part beneath mine, inviting me in, and I plunge my tongue between them to taste

her sweetness.

She is fire and ice, darkness and light. A dream I have chased across lifetimes to find.

And now, at last, she is mine.

Our lips cling as the air around us drops several more degrees. Ice crystals form on the ground, spreading outward in a glittering web as my powers intensify with desire.

Tempest presses closer, her warmth seeping into me, and a low growl rumbles in my throat. I want to devour her, body and soul, until there is no part of her I have not claimed.

Now I just have to get her back to our kingdom and tell the council what has transpired here in the north.



Chapter 48

B^{eau} The mist set us down at the entrance of the palace-blood-splattered and disheveled-my muscles tensing beneath Tempest's fingers as the gaze of every guard seemed to fasten upon us.

Tempest grabbed my forearm as she whispers waving a hand toward her stained dress, "Beau, I think we should change our clothes before we go to address your parents and the council. Besides, it would be best if we had Marcus with us. I don't think dismissing him from our daily duties was wise." I looked down at her with admiration before turning towards our rooms with a purposeful stride as I whispered back with a gentle squeeze to her hand, "Such a queen—wise, fierce, and perfectly correct."

Marcus was there waiting for us, eyes widening in shock at the sight of our bedraggled state. His fangs descended and he growled low in his throat, "My prince, why did you not allow me and Prince Gabriel to go with you?"

I shook my head, squeezing Tempest's hand again, "It is a long story and one that I think we would only like to tell once. Tell my parents that they are

needed along with all council members in attendance for an emergency debriefing, and that we need them to make haste. Return after you've delivered the message."

"It will be done," Marcus said bowing.

I ushered Tempest into our room, and she immediately went to our bathroom for a quick shower.

I entered the shower behind her, and I took the sponge from her so that I could cleanse her body.

"I'm here with you love," I said gently as I rubbed gentle circles across her back.

"What if... Beau..." Tempest struggled to put her thoughts into words as she leaned back against me, finally whispering with a sigh, "I almost lost you."

"I almost lost you too, but I didn't. Because like the fiery moon goddess you are, you saved us both. "

She turned around allowing the cool water wash over her hair, "Beau...kiss me. I need you to take away the feeling of him."

"As you wish." I said, a hand behind her neck and the other on her waist as I guided her back against the cool marble wall.

She pressed her body against mine, a hand sliding up into my hair as I traced a finger along her collarbone. She melted against me, her mouth meeting mine with such ferocity, it rattled my mind.

Taking control, she pushed me toward the back of the shower and pushed me down so I sat on its large built-in seat. Then her thighs encased me as she straddled me hips. The water fell upon us as I kissed her slowly, each touch more intense than the last. She rubbed herself against my straining cock, moaning into my mouth.

I grabbed her waist, groaning as my cool body warmed against her burning

skin. She threaded her fingers through my hair, tugging playfully, as she arched her back.

"Tempest..." I trailed my lips up her neck before I pulled back. Our eyes locked, "You're the only woman that I've ever needed, loved, and cared for. The moon goddess made you just for me."

Tempest smiled. "I feel the same. I felt it before you even came for me that night. I wanted you," she said as she looked into his eyes. "I think that I've loved you since the first night I dreamed of you."

I growled low in my throat as I kissed her again, letting my tongue explore her mouth.



Our hands wandered each other in a desperate attempt to feel as much as we could. She raked her nails down my back as she moaned my name and I smiled against her skin. My lips left a icy trail down her neck and chest, before my lips claimed her nipple.

She arched into it with a gasp of my name.

My mouth moved to her other breast, sucking, and nibbling as I let my hand move down her body to her slick folds. My fangs descended and I slid them

across her skin carefully teasing her and drawing a sharp gasp from her lips.

I lift her off me with a commanded, "turn around."

She beautifully obeys, turning and bending over the built-in seat, her hands bracing themselves on the slick surface. I tease her back with my cool breath before the tip of my tongue traces a line down her spine.

"God you are beautiful." I whispered as my hands slid down her inner thighs, pushing them slightly apart, revealing her slick folds to me.

My thumbs spread her open, my mouth taking their place as I let the tip of my tongue slip between her soaking folds. I give her the most intimate of kisses as I let my tongue explore, drawing moaning from her lips and quivers from her body. I slide a finger inside her hot wet slit, pumping slowly, while another massages her clit. My fingers and tongue doing the most rhythmic tango on her body.

I need more of her pleasure. I need to know that she moans only for me, that this pleasure she can only get from me.

"Mmm... Beau, please... I need you..." She shuddered.

I slid my tongue along her slit one last time before I entered her slowly. I paused, letting her adjust to my girth before I slowly began to thrust home. Sinking deep into her, letting her heat wrap around me. Her body—just as needy as mine—devouring me whole.

"More," she said, her voice strained.

I obliged, burying myself in her to the hilt before slowly pulling out. giving her exactly what she wanted, I thrust faster and deeper, sliding in and out of her as she moaned and cried out, my fangs grazing her shoulder.

As she came, the intense waves of pleasure pulled my name from her lips. Her tightening sheath sent me over the edge as my orgasm washed over me

and I filled her with my icy cum. She leaned forward, resting her head against the shower wall as our breathing slowly returned to normal.

My arms wrapped around her waist as I pulled her against me, my tongue tracing the place where I'd bitten her as a low growl of possession rumbled in my chest.

"Are you sure that you're alright?" I asked, my voice breathy.

"I'm fine. It's just... you know... after everything we just experienced, that ring and necklace thing."

I pulled her closer to me and rested my chin on the top of her head. "That wasn't you Tempest, and whatever you saw while you were under Charlie's spell, whatever it was, you know that it wasn't real."

"I know."

"Good. I know that the spell was supposed to make me forget that I love you," I replied, "but the one thing I could never forget- was your face."



Chapter 49

B^{eau} As Tempest and I stepped through the grand doors of the court, all heads turned toward us in anticipation. The King's eyes glinted as they scanned over us before him, while the Queen sat regally on her throne with a stoic expression, her keen gaze trained on her son. Marcus followed close behind, taking in every detail of the council chambers.

My father swirled his glass of blood. "I understand that the traitors have been dealt with," he uttered gruffly, halting any conversations that had been taking place around the room. His eyes flickered between Tempest and me, waiting for us to share what had happened.

I began as I reached into my pocket, producing the ring and necklace from within and held out my hands for my mother to inspect. "Yes. In addition to the weather anomalies, they attempted to place Tempest and myself under some sort of spell using these trinkets to make us forget about one another and to fall into desire with them instead."

The queen stared at them intently, waiting for a deeper explanation.

"My Queen," Tempest began, her voice surprisingly steady despite what she had just endured, "Sara and Charlie had a plan to make Beau and I fall in love with them. They used some sort of spell to erase Beau's memories of me and then Sara used that ring, and well Charlie used that necklace to try and make us succumb to them. It did not go according to their plans."

Tempest's words hung heavily in the air as everyone listened intently. Even my father was taken aback by this news. Silence permeated the room until the king broke it as he stood up abruptly, his chair creaking beneath him, and let out a low growl. "They wanted you to forget everything that you had with one another and make you fall in love with them? Mates separated by the false whims of magic... This situation with the North and their sun-born prince must be dealt with expeditiously." He commanded sternly, "Marcus, I want you to see to it!"

"I have already placed two of my finest on it and shared Prince Beau's instructions with them," Marcus replied confidently.

My father nodded curtly at Marcus's words as my mother slowly rose from her throne, her face pale and her hands trembling as she addressed the room. "Everyone leave. Beau and Tempest, please stay behind so we may have a moment in private."

One by one, the court bowed and filed out of the chamber, an uneasy silence lingering after they had gone.

The queen bit her lip as she looked back and forth between Tempest and Beau, considering the dire consequences this could have had on their kingdom.

"As soon as Marcus figures out the last loose end, this will be over and done with," I stated firmly. "For now, I want Tempest to rest."

The king shook his head, and muttered to himself, "Unbelievable..."

"It could not have been easy for you," my mother finally said as she walked toward us enveloping us both in the warmth of her arms.

My mother pulled back with a weak smile, nodding up at me in approval, "some have already called you the most powerful vampire in our kingdom. When tested and without the presence of your mate, you have immense power and heart. You didn't shatter under the pressure and succumb to Lost Love's Curse. I'm proud of you, my son."

"Thank you, mother," I grinned. "That means a lot coming from you."

"You are welcome," she said as she turned to Tempest, pulling her into another hug. "I'm so glad your parents had to leave on council business before this occurred and that you are back safely before the missive could even reach them. You truly are an important pack of this family and I'm glad you're okay."

"Thank you," Tempest said with a weak smile.

Continue Story at Chapter 50 on page 363

Choice Two

Burn It All To Ashes



Chapter 40

Tempest

Charlie gazed down at me, eyes gleaming. "There's something I want to show you," he said. "Something that might take your mind off all this for a while. Do you trust me?"

I hesitated. I didn't fully trust Charlie—or anyone for that matter—not after what I'd witnessed with Beau and Sara.

Charlie stared down at me, his eyes alight with something I couldn't quite place. "There's something I want to show you," he said. "Something that might take your mind off all this for a while. Do you trust me?"

Glancing away, I felt unease settling like lead in the pit of my stomach. I wanted to believe in Charlie, but Beau and Sara's betrayal still lingered heavily in my mind. How could I know if what Charlie was asking wasn't part of some hidden agenda? He had already kept so much from me, changed so much from the young gifted he had been at academy. But it didn't matter anymore—not when everything else seemed to be crumbling around me.

"Yes," I said softly, voice barely more than a whisper.

Charlie smiled and nodded slightly, gesturing for me to close my eyes. Swallowing hard, I complied.

The next thing I felt was a rushing wind as the ground disappeared beneath my feet and a dizzying vibration filled the surrounding air. I held onto Charlie's arm tightly, terrified of losing him in the sudden gale... and then we were standing on solid ground again. My eyes opened and I gasped—we were no longer outside the palace. Instead, we stood in an unfamiliar room filled with bookshelves and deep velvet curtains framing massive windows.

Charlie grinned at my expression of shock and disbelief. "Welcome to my home... away from home," he said with a hint of smugness in his voice.

Warily I took it all in, on high alert now that we were alone. How had we gotten here? What other powers did Charlie possess? And why had he never mentioned any of this before? Before I could ask any questions, he took hold of my hand and led me further into the room.

"The view here is stunning," he said. "I think you'll appreciate it."

He swept back the curtains with a flourish, and I gasped. We weren't inside a house at all, but rather a stone tower perched atop a jagged cliff. As far as the eye could see, a tangled forest stretched into the distance, its canopy a sea of emerald-green under the fleeting light of moonset.

"It's beautiful," I breathed, momentarily enchanted by the view and for a moment, my heartache eased, overshadowed by wonder.

Suddenly the soft touch of Charlie's hand on mine caused me to jump. I tried to pull away—but he held tight.

"Not as beautiful as you," he murmured, his voice low and full of longing.

"Charlie, what is going on? Why did you bring me here?" I asked hesitantly, heart hammering in my chest.

"I thought it was time we had a heart-to-heart," he replied, edging closer.

"You see, Tempest, I have feelings for you."

In shock, I gasped, desperately looking for an escape route. "What are you talking about? I'm mated to Beau."

Seething anger darkened Charlie's face. "Beau doesn't deserve you. He's not worthy of a queen like you."

"That's not true!" The protest angrily slipped from my lips, as I struggled against Charlie's iron grip on my hand. "Beau is a good man and a great leader. He loves me and I love him. There is nothing you can say that will change that."



Charlie tightened his grip even more painfully making me wince in pain. His eyes smoldered with anger and passion as he stared down at me. "You're wrong, Tempest. You're meant to be with me. Together we can rule the world."

Panic rose within me, sending fear coursing through my veins like liquid fire. His words seeped into my consciousness like poison, trying to turn my mind away from Beau and our love for one other; while all the while his hands

moved up and down my body possessively tightening around my waist in a vice grip when I attempted move away from him.

Terrified, my lips parted to scream in protest but before any sound could leave them Charlie pressed a forceful kiss upon me, probing deep into my mouth with his tongue until it tasted like bile and disgust invaded every inch of my being.

I could feel his arousal pressing against me, and my disgust grew. My fire power surged through my veins, but I knew it wouldn't work against him. Charlie was immune to my flames, just as I was immune to his. I was trapped, with no way out.

Charlie smirked—his eyes gleaming with triumph. "You can't escape me, Tempest. You're mine now."

My heart pounded in terror as Charlie's lips descended on mine again. I tried to scream, but his mouth muffled my cries. I felt violated, used, and powerless.

"Charlie, please.... I thought we were friends... why are you doing this?" I pleaded trying to understand what was happening.

"Oh, come now Tempest, have you truly never seen how much I love you, adore you? I was with you every step of the way through our gifted years, more of a friend to you than Sara."

"No, Charlie... you introduced me to Beau at the Blood Moon Ball... I've..."

"Ah... yes, well that was a mistake that I suffer with every moon. Had I just said I did not know you and allowed him to meet you the next day - sure you both would feel the attraction, but being mated- that would be null and void- It's okay though-I have a way to remedy that and free you from Fate's so-called hold."

"I don't want that... I want Beau and I know he wants me... something is

wrong."

"He wants you Tempest... Really? didn't look like that in his study when he had your good friend Sara pressed up against the wall. It looked as if he was seconds away from sticking his dick in her cunt and his fangs in her neck," "Charlie sneered, his eyes growing dark.

"It's just not right Charlie... something is not right."

"How about his..." He trailed off, suddenly contrite as he realized his rudeness. He bowed low before her and begged forgiveness, offering a gift of a long golden chain adorned with a dazzling ruby pendant. "I will escort you back to the palace, just take this gift as a part of my sincere apologies."

"It's okay Charlie really..." I stammered and tried to back away, but for every step I took back he stepped forward until I felt the cold stone wall pressing against my back.

"I insist Tempest." He said firmly as he held the necklace up and slipped it over my head, letting the chain settle upon my neck. His fingers traced along my collarbone, making my skin crawl in revulsion.

"Oh my, this brings out your beauty even more," he whispered with malicious intent, his breath scorching against my cheek.



Chapter 41

Tempest

I shivered, suddenly conflicted by the feelings Charlie caused in me. His touch felt so good, better than it should, but it only amplified the remaining unease sitting in the pit of my stomach. I tried to cling to that unease, the only feelings that I was true and right, but my body and mind were refusing to follow my commands.

Charlie pressed closer to me until there was barely any space left between us. His body settled in between my legs as I leaned against the wall. His scent suddenly so loud enveloped me, vanilla and peppery. My body started to hum, my skin prickled, and my nipples hardened against his chest.

What was wrong with me? Why was I unable to control myself?

"Stop..." I mumbled as I suddenly realized that Charlie's hand was on my breast, my dress pushed down to reveal the mocha swells to him.

I was aware of how little of the dress remained now. The dress suddenly seemed to tighten around me, restricting my movements. Charlie's hand

glided from my breast, across my flat stomach, and down to my thigh where he scratched my leg with his sharp nails.

My breath caught in my throat, and I felt a stirring in the pit of my stomach that I hadn't felt before. It was a burning, oh yes, a burning, that started low in my stomach and moved up to my chest and to my neck. A warmth flowed over my body as Charlie's lips trailed kisses up my neck, to my ear, then back down to my neck. "No," I said, but it was smothered by Charlie's mouth on mine.

My body shuddered and my hands reached to push Charlie away, but instead I grabbed his shoulders and moaned, my body arching into his. My mind was shattered by the confusing sensations suddenly coursing through my body.

I wanted him, needed him.

The chain around my neck began to feel hot, and the ruby caught my eye, it seemed to glow a bright red, and the heat from the necklace seemed to spread through my body, wrapping me in the wet heat.

I broke away from Charlie's soft kisses, "Charlie, I...I...I..." I mumbled—trailing off as I looked at him—my vision suddenly foggy, and the warmth that was rushing through my body beginning to fade.

Charlie's smile seemed to grow wider as I began to stumble over my own words. Then that power I had felt earlier surged within me and the fog in my mind lifted, and I was able to see clearly the look of hunger and lust on his face.

Charlie grabbed me tighter. "You know what you want, Tempest. Take it," he said simply, and I gasped at the sexual undertone in his voice. He kissed me again and my body reacted on its own and pressed harder against Charlie.

I felt my eyes roll back and my breathing slow as that power grew steadily stronger inside of me—I broke away from Charlie's lips, "More! I need

more!" I tried to wait for an answer from Charlie, but instead I slammed my mouth against his neck and began to suck. I felt Charlie's cock swell against the material of his pants, but I didn't care. I needed more, I needed have my fill of him, to take all of him.

I wrapped my fingers around his neck. As the tips of my nails pierced his skin, I felt the world around me explode. Power flowed through my veins, and my muscles flexed as I released my hold on Charlie and my nails retracted from his skin. I ran my tongue across his neck and licked my blood from my nails, savoring every spicy drop as it touched my tongue.

My stomach constricted painfully in anticipation as the inexplicable craving to have all of him consumed her mind and soul.

My tongue lapped urgently at his shoulder before my fangs sank back in—deep—Charlie moaned, his knees faltering.

My heart hammered, as an unknown force began to battle its way out from under the depths of Charlie's charm.



Chapter 42

C harlie

I tensed as I slowly began to realize that Tempest wasn't stopping. I could feel my life force being drained, and the intense pleasure that had filled me moments before, quickly turned to alarm. I struggled to break free, but the strength she had leached from my own made her far too powerful to physically overpower.

A cold chill ran down my spine as I felt my strength ebb away with each passing moment. I fought against her with all my might, but it was no use. My pants hung around my ankles as I kicked in desperation, summoning up every ounce of the remaining elemental magic flowing inside of me and pushed against her with it. I felt a wave of energy surge through me and strike Tempest like a tidal wave. She released me with a startled gasp and stumbled back against the wall, the chain on the necklace breaking and the amulet falling from her neck.

Tempest's eyes were wide with shock as she stared at me in surprise, my blood dripping over her beautiful bottom lip and onto her dainty chin. "What

did you do?" she demanded, her voice faint and trembling.

My head shook in confusion, still trying to process what had just happened. Heart pounding wildly in my chest as I realized the gravity of what Tempest had almost accomplished.

"I don't know," I whispered weakly, feeling completely powerless, but still in awe of her beauty, "I just had to have you..." I stumbled backward clumsily holding a hand onto the gaping wound in my neck which was healing much slower than it should have been.

Tempest's skirts cascaded down around her legs as she moved away from the wall and slowly walked towards me. "Charlie... what did you do?" she asked again, stalking me like prey, the fire glowing in her eyes.

I shook my head again. I knew she wanted to drain me. Earlier when the magic and adrenaline had been coursing through me, I had felt passion, but now, now that the spell was broken and I had lost so much blood, I felt that everything I had worked so hard for was about to be yanked away from me.

I tried to run away, but I couldn't even muster the strength to disengage her as she moved to grab me tighter.

Our eyes connected and I froze with fear and panic. What had I done? I could see the desire in her eyes, not for me, but her desire for revenge. "Please," I begged, my voice barely a whisper as her fire swirled around us.





Chapter 43

Tempest

"Charlie, you said that we were meant to be together--You'll be with me always." I promised. Diving toward him, my rage manifested into wings of fire that beat a furious tempo as they carried me across the stone floor of the tower. I knew that my eyes were sparkling with flames of hatred as I summoned every ounce of dark energy siphoned from Charlie's veins. I directed it at him in a single, devastating blast. He stood no chance against my fury and soon he was pinned beneath my claws.

My fangs itched in excitement before they sank deep into his jugular. I drank deeply, savoring the rich taste of his blood as it seeped slowly into my body. Without any of the illusions, I relished the dull sweetness of cinnamon that his blood contained as it coated my tongue. I gripped him tightly in an embrace of death that was without mercy. I drank until his life force was completely drained and he lay lifeless in my arms, a petrified version of the halfling he had been. I dropped his now almost weightless body and Charlie's

husk fell at my feet, crumbling in on itself until all that remained of him was a soft cloud of dust that still carried the faint aroma of pungent spice.

I stood over the spot where Charlie had just been, motionless as memories of all that had transpired suddenly crashed upon me.

“That fucking bitch!” I snarled connecting the dots, recalling how Beau hadn’t even remembered who I was.

The fallen amulet from earlier glinted in the fire that was emanating off my body and the stone jogged my memory further. There was a similar stone on the ring gracing Sara’s finger earlier.

It was all a ploy. Sara wanted Beau for herself, and she was going to use anything at her disposal to get him, just like Charlie had tried with me. Anger and rage burned in my soul.

"How dare that Halfling bitch try to take what's mine!" I growled as I remembered the smirk on Sara's face when I had walked in the room to find them and how Charlie had so cleverly led me straight there.

It didn't matter. I was willing to do whatever it took to get Beau back. Snatching the amulet off of the floor, I held it tightly within my palm, calming the fires of my anger so that I didn't melt the metal. My fire propelling me, pulled by that invisible string that tied me to Beau for eternity.





Chapter 44

B^{eau} As we meandered through the garden, my unease mounted until it threatened to overwhelm me. Sara chattered away, oblivious to my inner turmoil. Her words seemed to take on a sinister quality as she spoke of her plans for our future and how she couldn't wait to become queen and start a family—but all I heard was an icy threat.

I tried to push the nagging feeling to the back of my mind and focus on Sara's words. I knew that she was trying to charm me with her sweet words and gentle touch, especially after our run in with that overpowered halfling earlier, but I couldn't shake off the feeling that something was off.

Finally, we arrived at one of the small cottages that dotted Fernet River. It was a cozy little place, with a thatched roof and a small garden out front. Sara led me inside, and I couldn't help but admire the way the moonlight spilled in through the windows, casting a cool glow over everything.



As soon as I stepped inside, an invisible vice gripped my heart and dropped me to my knees. Every nerve in my body was screaming, urging me to flee before it was too late.

The halfling from earlier appeared in my mind's eye, mocking me for being so naive and trusting. I felt her fiery gaze upon me as if she had always been there lurking in the shadows of my memories. Ice flowed through my veins and froze me in place as my memories unlocked themselves.

Everything that I'd felt in my study, everything I'd done, rushed back to me in that moment. Now there was no pretense, no illusion, nothing clouding my vision or emotions. My heart was unshackled from Sara's magical chokehold. Looking up at Sara as she stared at me on my knees, I saw that she was beautiful. But it was a hollow, sinister, selfish beauty--capable of inspiring nothing but mistrust and unease.

Sara's lips curled into a malicious smirk as a wave of energy rushed from her fingertips and slithered down my body. My fangs descended with a guttural snarl. I could feel the pull towards her, but I was determined to defy it.

Her eyes darkened and the vines around her seemed to come alive, thrashing about in hunger for my submission.

"Beau!" she barked, and for one fleeting second, I faltered—until all of a sudden, something inside me clicked. Like a fleeing dragon, I tore away from her grasp towards freedom.

Sara stomped her feet, before lashing out with her vines, wrapping them around my wrist.

"No!" I roared, my nails clawing through the vines shredding them, I was done being a pawn in whatever schemes she had up her sleeve. "What do you want?"

"What do I want?" Sara laughed hysterically as her gift surged, vines wrestled across the floor, but I shot out my own gift, freezing them--turning them cold and worthless.

"Fine! Prince Beau wants to know what I want. You... what is rightfully mine," Sara purred before she propelled herself forward moving faster than I anticipated, plunging a cold silver blade into my upper stomach with an unholy force. Pain blazed through my body like wildfire. Stunned I look

down at the protruding silver and soon dark blood began dripping onto the floor beneath me.



Chapter 45

Tempest

A fierce gust of wind and fire swept me up and carried me across the landscape, setting my course for Beau like a beacon held high in my mind's eye. As I skidded to a stop in front of the candlelit cottage, my heart pounding in my chest, I felt as if I could see a heatwave radiating off its walls. I charged forward - Beau - the need to be with him reverberated inside my mind, body, and soul with each beat of my heart.

A trail of crimson-stained wilted vines beckoned me onward, and I ran towards the kitchen, not knowing what I would find. When I stepped into the room, my stomach dropped like a stone. Beau laid on the floor, his shirt ripped through with the blade of a knife and drenched in blood. His gaze met mine and I both felt a rush of emotion - betrayal, despair, and desperation all at once. And then I saw her - Sara - lurking in the shadows.

"Let him go, you sun-born bitch!" I snarled.

The smirk remained as she replied. "Let him go? But why? He's mine."

Panic and terror consumed me as I watched black vines slither around Beau's hands and wrists, fusing to his flesh and trapping him. The anger inside me intensified and grew until it coalesced with the elemental remnants of Charlie-- awakening a new power within me.

My eyes narrowed, and I bared my fangs as the dark vines slithered around Beau's hands. They coiled around his wrists, melding with his flesh and imprisoning him.

Sara yanked the knife out of his stomach with a sickening squelch of tearing skin, and I could sense her evil intent as she raised it above his chest.

"You will pay for this!" I cursed at her.

"I might--but if I can't have him--Tempest--neither can you." Sara's voice dripped with malice as she plunged the blade deep inside Beau.

Without hesitation, I took an aggressive step towards her. The fires from my eyes completely eclipsed the flames of the candles around the room. With another wicked smile, Sara plunged the dagger deep within him before I could reach them. My scream echoed throughout the small cottage as hysteria took over. I watched in horror as the vines entwined around Beau, their dark hue melding with his skin and holding him still as he suffered--the dagger gleaming cruelly in his chest. My gift could no longer be contained as it sought retribution and burst out of me, encasing the kitchen, as thousands of black vines surrounded Sara, encasing in a cocoon.





Chapter 46

B^{eau} As the world around me dimmed, I felt the warmth of Tempest's flames wash over me, and a sense of calm took hold. Even as I lay there, the dagger still embedded in my chest, the vines holding me tight, I couldn't help but marvel at the sight before me. Tempest, my fierce and beautiful love, was a force to be reckoned with.

As the flames grew, I felt the vines begin to loosen their grip on me, and I struggled to free myself from their grasp. Each movement sent a searing pain through my body, but I knew I had to keep fighting. I had to be there for Tempest.

Finally breaking free, I stumbled to my feet with a grunt of pain. Blood poured from the wound, but I couldn't focus on that now. I had to help Tempest.

Looking around the room, I saw Sara, encased in a cocoon of black vines, creating more vines to replace the ones crumbling to ash under Tempest

onslaught. I couldn't help but feel a small sense of satisfaction at the sight, but I knew I had to get to my mated, and quickly.

Tiny veins of ice raced across the dagger, traveling along the vines weakening them as the cocoon surrounding Sara starts to fall away revealing her - clothing singed, hair wild--eyes wilder.

My sight briefly flickered between Sara and Tempest as they move closer to one another. Sara triumphantly raised her hands, vines sprouting from her palms, ready to strike. But before she could attack, Tempest whirled around, her leg sweeping out and knocking Sara off balance.

"You may have broken Charlie's spell and the power of the stones and accomplished what we thought was impossible," Sara said, her voice dripping with disdain as she dusted herself off. "But I meant every word when I said, if I cannot have him, neither can you."

Tempest's red eyes briefly shifted to me before she replied, her tone full of contempt. "You are blinded by your own foolishness. No matter how much you wish it were true, he is not yours. What will you do when the King and Queen discover the depths of your deception?"

"You are nothing more than a pathetic imitation," Tempest added mockingly. With a roar of defiance and anger, Sara lashed out. Black vines shot out like whips from her fingertips as she attacked, but Tempest twisted out of the way, dancing between each strike.

I saw one, would get the best of her and before she could react, I lunged forward, shoving Tempest out of harm's way and taking a brutal blow from the vine, hit as if a whip had been flayed across my skin. My body quivered from the force of the blow, sending waves of pain throughout me, but I refused to back down.

With a feral cry of triumph, I pounced on Sara. Her eyes widened, registering

shock, as my hands wrapped around the dagger buried in my chest as metal began to turn to ice. With a grunt of effort, I wrenched the dagger from my chest and plunged it into her own.

The shock registered in her eyes as she grabbed the blade, her hand grasping my fingers. Her eyes turned to me, pleading, but it meant nothing to me.



Chapter 47

Tempest

Sara let out an unearthly howl of rage as her vines lashed out hurling Beau across the room to land beside me. Biting into my wrist I allowed the blood to flow over his lips as i watch for more movements from Sara.

She struggled to stand--Fear and pain twisted Sara's face, making the green glow of her eyes dim.

Rage burned in my veins as I pulled away from Beau and charged at Sara, who was desperately trying to get off the floor. A red fog clouded my vision as I grabbed a fistful of her hair, yanking her head back before sinking my fangs deep into her throat. The taste of earthy blood exploded across my tongue as it flooded down my throat. With a mighty roar, I slammed Sara's head against the floor one more time before ripping away from her neck with a chunk of flesh between my teeth.

Sara's cries turned to gurgling as she tried in vain to fight back against me. My wounds were nothing compared to the pain of seeing him hurt, and I knew that I had to protect our bond no matter the cost.

"He's mine," I growled as I drove the frosted knife deeper between her ribs and twisted it cruelly. "My Beau, my prince, mine!"

One of Sara's hands clamped over mine, squeezing around the handle in a last-ditch effort to save herself. The residual magic of the ring and spells she'd been taught by Charlie flared to life. Power flowed through her, but not more power than Mine. I let my power flow freely, giving her a single command.

"Take the knife and drive the blade into your throat."

Sara trembled in terror, unable to speak. Her arm trembled, as the knife moved towards her throat by her own hand. I watched intently as Sara's hands drove the blade deeper, and blood bubbled up around the wound. I leaned down to whisper softly in her ear, "Now you know exactly how it feels to lose your willpower, your control and be helpless."

Sara's body shuddered as the blade went deeper and she desperately gasped for breath. I stood up and stomped on the knife until it hit the floor underneath her. After pulling her head back up by her hair, I viciously dragged the knife down and separated her head from her body in a single stroke. Uncaring, I dropped her head onto the ground as it turned to ash.



With a gasp I felt strong arms pick me up, a cold body pressed against my back. Beau. He breathed heavily in my hair, nuzzling me close.

"Tempest," he said with relief.

I spun around and threw my arms around him, burying my face into his healed chest as he held me tight.

"Are you okay?" He asked, voice full of concern.

"Me? Beau!" I lifted my head to look at him. I couldn't comprehend what had just happened - confused, terrified, angry - but the most pressing thought was whether or not he was alright.

A long sigh came from him before speaking, "Getting stabbed with a silver blade really hurts." His grip on me tightened. "But the thought of forgetting you and not being able to remember was even worse."

He pulled me closer, inhaling deeply - the scent of fire, cinnamon and ash mixed with the metallic tang of blood and magic surrounded us like a protective bubble. It was home.

I whispered into his neck, "I'm right here Beau. I'm not going anywhere."

"I know." He replied softly before kissing the top of my head. "Same here."

My heart swelled as I closed my eyes and uttered those three important words; "I love you".

He squeezed me tightly as he whispered into my hair, "I love you too. More than anything else in this world."

I smiled against his shoulder before pulling away to look into his eyes, which seemed to sparkle with an intensity all their own. With one hand still firmly planted on my waist, he reached down to stroke my face with the other and asked me the one question that had been burning in both our minds since it all began.

"How was any of this even possible?"

"I might have the answer to that,"

I leaned in, pressing my lips against Beau's. When I pulled away, I walked over to Sara's ashes, kicking them around with my heel until I found the ring. Then I fished the matching amulet out of my pocket and held them both up for him to see.

"These has something to do with all this chaos," I said. "Charlie was part of

this and was behind all of the elemental anomalies."

Beau took the items from me, his eyes glittering with astonishment.

"Goddess above, you're stunning when you're feral," he murmured before gazing into my eyes.

My heart swelled at his words, but there was no time to bask in his affection—we had to get back to the masquerade ball and tell the King and Queen what had happened. Beau offered me his hand and I took it without hesitation as we made our way back to the castle.



Chapter 48

Tempest

Adrenaline fleeing my system, I followed Beau through the palace grounds. We were met with shocked stares from the guards, and my nerves flared as I looked over Beau as he strode purposefully toward the council chambers. Their prince, bloody and unkempt, was drawing their attention like dragons to a flame.

My fingertips brushed against a hard bicep as I squeezed his arm gently, feeling his muscles tense beneath the fabric of his jacket. I peered up at him and said quietly, “Beau, if we are going to be addressing the council, it should probably be in our cleanest clothing.”

My own dress was tattered, streaked with blood and ashes of the dead. I held it in place while gesturing my hand towards his attire. His eyes twinkled as they looked down upon me. “Yes, my queen—wise and perfectly correct.”

As we headed to our chambers, Marcus met us in the halls. The shock on his face at our deplorable state, was well deserved. His fangs descended as he

barked questions about what had happened, catching his breath with his final query. "Why did you not call for me?"

Beau shook his head sadly before squeezing my hand reassuringly and replying sternly, "It is a long story that will only be told once. Send word to our parents, Gabe, and council members that an emergency meeting must be held immediately. We need them all in attendance."

"It will be done," Marcus answered before hastening off on our command.

Beau then ushered me into the bathroom for a much-needed shower.

The unwanted feel of Charlie's body still lingered on my skin. I looked into the mirror, examining myself for any visible marks or evidence of the struggle, but there was nothing except for the dried blood and ash caked to my face and a tattered gown.

I undressed and stepped into the shower, allowing the cool water to wash away the memories of Charlie's touch from my body. It felt as if I was in a dream; nothing I did felt real. Then, Beau stepped into the shower behind me and wrapped an arm around my waist, his other hand taking the sponge from me.

"I'm here with your love," he said softly as he ran a finger across my back.

I leaned against his body-- stammering--trying to find the words, "What if... Beau... I almost lost you."

He pulled me closer and assurance coating his words, "I almost lost you too, but I didn't. Because like the fiery moon goddess you are, you saved us both."

I turned around so that the cool water washed over my hair and then looked up to Beau's eyes. "Beau...kiss me," I pleaded. "I need you to take away the feeling of him."

"As you wish," he replied before leaning down and crushing his lips against mine. A hand tangled into my hair as the other traced gentle circles on my

waistline.

I pushed him toward the back of the shower and pressed down so he sat on its large built-in seat, straddling his hip while his hands pushed my hair back, fingers running through the strands. The water fell upon us as I kissed him slowly, each touch fiercer than the last. I rubbed myself against his erection, moaning into his mouth, lips still locked to his.

He grabbed my waist, groaning as his cool body warmed against my burning skin. I threaded my fingers through his hair, tugging playfully, as I arched my back.

"Tempest..." He trailed his lips up my neck before he pulled back. Turquoise eyes met amber ones, "You're the only woman that I've ever needed, loved, and cared for. The moon goddess made you just for me."

Tempest smiled, "I feel the same. I felt it before you even came for me that night. I wanted you," I said as I looked into his eyes, "I think that I've loved you, since the first night I dreamed of you."



With a low growl he kissed me again, letting his tongue explore my mouth as he pressed his hips against mine.

Our hands wandered everywhere, over wet skin and each other's bodies, in a desperate attempt to feel as much as we could. I raked my nails down his back as I moaned his name and he smiled against my skin.

"You're mine, Tempest. I've always been yours, and there's no other mate for you but me."

His soft lips left a burning trail along my collarbone, before his mouth claimed my nipple.

I arched my back, "Beau." I moaned, the intensity building between my thighs.

His mouth moved to my other breast, sucking and nibbling-- while his hand move down to my slick folds.

I cried out as he continued to suck and kiss, his fangs sliding across my skin - -teasing her and drawing a sharp gasp from my lips.

He lifted her off him and commanded, "Turn around."

I jumped to do as I was told leaning down against the built-in seat, my hands bracing themselves on the lukewarm surface. his cool breath slide across my back before the tip of his tongue traced a line down my spine, and I shivered.

"Gods you are beautiful," he whispered as his hands slid down my thighs, pushing them slightly apart, revealing my slick folds to him.

His thumb spread me open, before his mouth replaced it and he let the tip of his tongue slip between my slit. Licked my inner walls, teasing - he explored me as I moaned then he slid a thick finger inside as he suckled on my clit.

"Mmm... Beau, please... I need you..." I shuddered, feeling the ache between her thighs becoming unbearable.

He slid his tongue along me one last time before he moved behind me, entering slowly. He paused, letting me adjust to him before he slowly began to thrust.

I arched my back. "More," I pleaded--voice strained.

He obliged, burying himself in me to the hilt before slowly pulling out, his cool breath on her hot shoulder, sending me over the edge --I screamed his name as she came.

He thrust faster and deeper, sliding in and out of me as the crescendo built

again, his fangs grazing my shoulder, marking me as his.

As I once again came apart, intense waves of pleasure crashed through me and I screamed his name. His pleasure followed, as he filled me with his icy cum. Body spent, I leaned forward, resting my head against the wall as my breathing slowly returned to normal.

"I love you," I whispered.

"I love you too. Now we just have to tell my parents and the council what has happened today, and something in my gut tells me Deakon may have been a part of this somehow. Now tell me, are you sure that you're alright?" Beau asked, his voice breathy.

"I'm fine," I said, her eyes taking in Beau's naked body as he pulled me up and around in his arms. "It's just... you know... after everything we just experienced, that ring thing."

He rested his chin on the top of my head. "That wasn't you, Tempest, and whatever you saw or did while you were under Charlie's spell, whatever it was, you know that it wasn't real."

"I know."

"I know that the spell was supposed to make me forget you," Beau said, his eyes flickering over my face. "But I could never forget your face, Tempest."



Chapter 49

Tempest

Everyone was already gathered around the Court's round table when we arrived. The King and Queen holding court, perched on their dais, watching, and waiting for Beau and I to arrive. Marcus followed close behind us, his eyes glued to us in case anything else unexpected were to occur.

The King was swirling a glass of blood around in his hand and the Queen sat regally waiting for her son. Her eyes sought him when the door opened, then narrowed as she took in the serious expression shadowing my face.

"The masquerade ball was quite festive," Councilman Lacey was saying. "The most attendance we've seen in a while and a great show of support for our future rulers. I can't say that I'll..."

"We've got a problem."

Deakon swallowed the rest of his words at Beau's interruption.

"Problems do take precedence over masquerade balls," the king said, placing his goblet on the side table before standing. "What is it, Beau?"

"Sara and Charlie Snowden," Beau breathed out slowly. "We'll they were a problem."

"What have they done?" the queen asked.

"In addition to the weather anomalies, they attempted to put Tempest and myself under some sort of spell to make us forget about one another and to fall into desire with them instead."

I stretched out my hands to the queen, "Using these trinkets."

The room was deathly quiet as the King and Queen processed the information. Beau and I stood as we listened to the silence, the air thick and heavy with fear.

"What was the outcome of this spell?" the queen asked, her brows furrowed.

"All that matters is that it didn't work, and I drained Charlie dry. We stopped Sara together."

"That's impossible. The spell should have been effective the moment you were in proximity with them," Deakon whispered to himself.

"We don't think they were working alone," Beau said quietly.

Silence sifted through the room as Beau's words hung heavy in the air. The court sat quietly, waiting for the King to speak.

"We will remedy this situation immediately! Marcus, I want you to..."

"That's not necessary, Your Highness," Marcus said standing. "I have already placed two of my finest on it. Beau has shared his suspicions with me, and the outstanding culprit will be dealt with this very night."

"See to it!" the King ordered.

"Yes, Your Highness."

The queen stood from her seat, "Everyone leave. Beau and Tempest, please stay behind so we may have a moment in private."

The vampire Court nodded as they followed Marcus out of the Court

Chambers, leaving Beau and I alone with his parents.

"Now, I want the full story," the queen said, her hands resting in her lap as she looked at us intently.

"My Queen, it's so much to explain, but I'll try to get to the crux of the matter. Sara and Charlie had a plan to make Beau and I fall in love with them. They used some sort of spell to erase Beau's memories of me and then Sara used that ring and, well Charlie used that necklace to try and make us *succumb* to them. It did not go according to their plans," I explained as best I could, feeling exhaustion set in.

The king let out a low growl, "They wanted you to forget everything that you had with one another and make you fall in love with them? mated separated by the false whims of magic.... impossible."

The queen bit her lip as she looked at us, "That is all you have to tell us?"

"There is something else," Beau said. "Deakon attended the masquerade and conveniently asked me to go to my study with him for a private conversation upon which Sara just happened to come upon us to wield her spell."

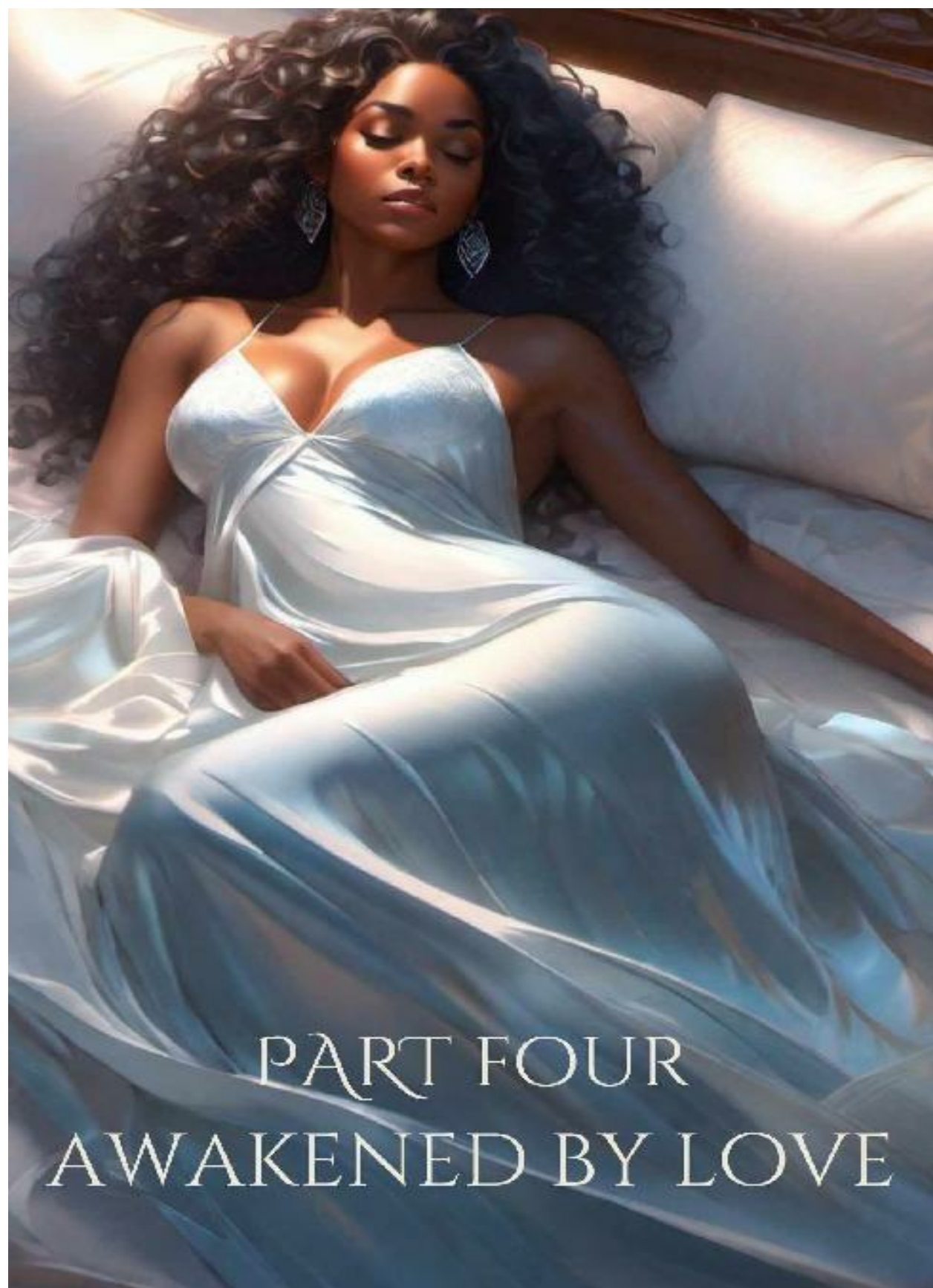
"We are very certain that he was there, and the masquerade ball was all a ploy to get us alone and separated. Because as soon as Deakon left, there was Charlie ready to whisk me away into a friendly dance, before leading me right to them to witness Sara and Beau in their farce of an intimate embrace." I added.

The King and Queen looked at each other gravely, before the King said, his voice low and angry, "It does appear that Deakon was working with Sara to put this plan into fruition. He is clearly trying to hurt our son—my heir—by any means necessary."

"But why?" I asked, true curiosity clear in my voice.

The Queen inhaled sharply before speaking, "He may be like others who

think our family's bloodline has sat too long upon the throne, or perhaps he may have even had true feelings for Sara and wanted to please her. Either way, until we know the truth, we can't rule out that he may be out for revenge."



PART FOUR
AWAKENED BY LOVE



Chapter 50

The thick scent of blood wine permeated the air as Deakon strode through the palace kitchens, his boots echoing on the stone floor. His veins burned with rage at the thought of Beau and Tempest cozying up in their lavish suite, sipping from crystal goblets and laughing without a care. *How dare they live so happily, after what they'd done.* Deakon paused alongside the kitchen corridor, listening. The low rumble of the staff's laughter and giggles as they prepared Beau and Tempest's meals made his fangs ache to sink into flesh.

Not yet. He had a better plan. A more devious revenge.

He slid a vial from his pocket and uncorked it, the colorless liquid inside sloshing—Sara's final gift to him. An odorless, tasteless poison that would plunge its victims into a deep sleep from which they'd never awaken.

The servants were good at their jobs, the food looked delectable, and the fresh blood wine was a succulent deep red. As Deakon crept forward, he tipped a few drops of the poison into the decanter, swirling to mix it in. It

didn't matter which one drank it. Either one of their anguishes at losing a mate would be punishment enough.

He pocketed the vial again and strode away down the hall, a grim smile twisting his lips. *Let the festivities begin*, he smirked as he watched the fragile place the bottle of blood wine on a silver platter and carry it toward Beau and Tempest's suite. His plan was working perfectly.

Soon, Beau would suffer as he had suffered. Losing Sara had nearly destroyed him, and now Beau would experience that same anguish. Poetic justice, he thought, humming softly under his breath.

In the kitchen, the staff laughed and chatted, unaware of the poison that had been slipped into the wine. By the time anyone realized Tempest had been drugged, it would be too late.

The servant knocked on the door of the suite, waiting for Beau to open it and usher him inside, Deakon rubbed his hands together, savoring the moment.

His revenge was at hand, and it was sweeter than he ever could have imagined. Beau and Tempest had taken everything from him, and now Deakon would rip away the one thing they cherished most in this world.

Each other.

Without the other, they would be lost and broken. They would suffer endlessly, trapped in a waking nightmare from which there could be no escape.

He smiled in anticipation, sharp fangs gleaming. Such a fitting punishment for all the pain they had caused him.

Tonight, their world would burn and Deakon would stand back and watch it crumble to ashes.



The fragile knocked again, and this time Beau opened the door.

"Your dinner, sir," the fragile said, bowing as he offered the tray of food and wine.

"Thank you," Beau said, ushering the man inside. "You may leave it there on the table."

The fragile did as he was told, hurrying from the room. Beau closed the door behind him and turned to find Tempest lounging on the bed, her hair spilling over the pillows like liquid fire.

"Are you hungry?" he asked, moving to stand beside her.

She smiled up at him, amber eyes gleaming. "Starved."

"As always." Beau chuckled, leaning down to press a kiss to her waiting lips.

"Come, then. Our meal awaits."

Tempest rose gracefully, slipping into Beau's arms. "Lead the way."

Arm in arm, they made their way to the small table where their dinner had been laid out. Beau eyed the blood wine eagerly, already anticipating its rich, blood red taste.

"Shall we make a toast?" he asked, reaching for the bottle.

"To us," Tempest hummed, "and many more moons like this."

"To us," Beau echoed, pouring two glasses of the wine, and handing one to Tempest.

She accepted it, brushing her fingers against his, and raised the glass higher.

"To forever."

"To forever," Beau said softly as he placed his glass down to uncover their dishes.

Tempest flashed him a coy smile before taking a sip of the bloodwine. The sweet, metallic taste of it burst over her tongue as warmth spread through her veins.

Within moments, her limbs grew heavy. The glass slipped from her fingers, shattering on the floor. Darkness pooled at the edges of her vision, Beau's panicked shouts fading into the distance as she tumbled into oblivion.



Tempest struggled against the enveloping darkness, panic rising in her chest. What was happening? Her limbs refused to obey her commands, as if they were weighted down by lead.

Beau caught her as she fell, clutching her against him. "Tempest! Tempest, wake up!" He shook her gently, then more insistently, dread etching lines in his face. "Tempest, this isn't funny. Wake up!"

She tried to speak, to reassure him she was alright, but her lips wouldn't move. Her eyes remained closed, as if glued shut. She was a prisoner in her own body.

Beau laid her on the bed, pacing around the room and raking his hands through his hair. His breaths came in ragged gasps, his emotions a chaotic storm she could sense even in her paralyzed state.

Fear and anguish warred within him. He paused beside the bed, reaching out to brush her hair away from her face. She felt the feather-light touch but couldn't respond.

"I'll find who did this to you," he whispered. "I swear it. And they will pay."
Rage simmered beneath his words, barely contained. He pressed a kiss to her forehead before stalking from the room, his purpose evident in his determined strides.

Deakon would soon regret poisoning her, of that she had no doubt. Beau's wrath would be swift and terrible, the vengeance he sought absolute.

She could only hope he succeeded - and found a way to break whatever curse held her in its grip. She couldn't remain like this forever, trapped, and helpless. There had to be a way out of this endless dark.



Chapter 51

He had to get out of here before the others realized what was truly going on. Beau's guards were too observant, and Lacey didn't trust Marcus as far as he could throw him. Lacey pulled his cloak over his face and slipped out the back of the castle into the night. The trees loomed like silent sentinels as he made his way down the overgrown path toward the river.

He followed through the garden maze to where Sara had said she would take Beau, the river cottage. The scent of ash and death lingered in the small stone cottage. Lacey's chest tightened as he stepped across the threshold, his boots crunching on the debris littering the floor. His gaze landed on the urn sitting atop the table, a grim reminder of what had been done. He gritted his teeth, rage, and guilt warring within him. This was his fault. He should have protected her, instead of trusting her to Charlie's planning.

"I'm so sorry, Sara," he whispered. He strode to the table and grasped the edge to steady himself, the wood cool beneath his hands. "I won't fail you again."

"I know this is dangerous," he said as if Sara could hear. "But I have to try. You didn't deserve this fate. You should be by my side, not trapped in some vase."

He arranged the candles and herbs around the ashes covering the floor. Kneeling beside them, he dipped his hands in ashes and lifted them, rivulets streaming between his fingers.

"Sara, I call upon the ancient gift the moon goddess blessed me with to restore your life. Blood of my blood, rise and awaken once more."

He sliced his palm and let the blood drip onto the floor. The ashes began to glow and swirl as the magic took hold. Lacey watched in awe as the ashes coalesced into flesh and bone. Sara's body reformed until she lay curled within the urn, pale and whole once more.

Deakon reached down and pulled her close. Her skin was cold, but the flesh gave beneath his fingers.

"Sara," he whispered. "Wake up."



Sara's eyes flew open, with a gasp. Confusion glazed her eyes, after being pulled so violently for the innerworld.

"Deakon? What happened?"

"You didn't succeed in your endeavor to win Beau," he said. "But I brought you back."

She sat up, clutching the blanket he draped around her shoulders. "Brought me back? I don't understand."

He took her hands in his. "Your body was destroyed, but I used my gift Blood Rising to resurrect you. I couldn't lose you."

She touched his cheek, her fingers trembling. "You foolish man. Do you have any idea what you've done?"

"I saved you," he said. "We're together again, maybe like it was always meant to be."

"Nothing is as it was meant to be." She dropped her hands into her lap.

Deakon stared at her. He hadn't considered the consequences of the ritual, blinded by his desire to have her back. "Sara my gift... Blood Rising... It extracts a price, though not very terrible. You are here, but you will not have access to your gift as before, you will be just as a fragile."

"I think I would have rather stayed ash, then to become a subpar fragile in all but name alone."

"I'm so sorry. I didn't think..."

"You never do," she said wearily. "You brought me back, but at what cost?" she asked. "How much of yourself are you willing to sacrifice for this? For me?"

"Any price is worth paying," he said. "Even my soul, if that's what it takes to keep you with me."

She leaned up to kiss him, a soft and fleeting press of lips. "That's more than has ever been offered."

He drew her into his arms, holding on as if he could keep her there through will alone. They were bound by a magic that might one day end them both—but in this moment—she was alive and in his arms.

Perhaps that would be enough.



Chapter 52

"My Prince, Deakon was spotted near the cottage," Marcus reported, his voice tense as he approached Beau. The loyal guard's face was etched with concern, noting the storm brewing within his Prince.

"Show me," Beau commanded, his eyes dark and dangerous like the sea before a raging storm. His jaw clenched, muscles rippling beneath his flawless skin. Anger, bloodlust, vengeance – they all swirled together in a dangerous concoction within him, fueling his thirst for blood.

"Right away," Marcus nodded, leading Beau through the shadows and dense foliage until they reached a vantage point overlooking the cottage. There, they saw through the ragged window covering in a passionate embrace.

"Stay here," Beau ordered, his voice low and menacing as he leaped from their hiding spot and stalked towards the unsuspecting Councilman. His heart pounded with each step, getting Tempest back safe and whole the driving force within him, an unstoppable force of nature.

"Lacey." The words dripped from his lips like venom as he called out to Deakon, his eyes narrowing with barely contained fury. "What brings you to

this humble abode?"

Deakon looked back at Beau, surprise turning into annoyance. "None of your concern," he snapped, trying to brush past the prince.

"Ah, but it is," Beau countered, grabbing Deakon's arm in a vice-like grip. "You see, I'm very protective of what is mine."

"Release me!" Deakon growled, struggling against Beau's hold. But the prince was relentless, rage lending him more supernatural strength.

"Tell me, why are you here and how did you reincarnate this vile excuse for a Halfling?" Beau demanded, his voice cold and unforgiving. He needed answers – and he would get them one way or another.

"Fine!" Deakon spat, desperation etched on his face. "Sara... Blood Rising my gift. I couldn't let you destroy her just because you didn't want her!"

"Ah, so that's what this is about," Beau mused, his grip tightening around Deakon's arm, feeling the vulnerability beneath his anger. "Well, let me tell you something..."

"Beau, please," Marcus implored telepathically, sensing the danger in his prince's actions. But the warning fell on deaf ears, as Beau continued his rampage, driven by forces he couldn't fully comprehend.

"Enough!" Sara's voice rang out, her slender form stepping between Beau and Deakon.

"You will be dealt with next," Beau warned, his eyes blazing with an inner cold fire. But Sara refused to back down.

"Beau, you don't understand," she pleaded, her gaze locked on the prince's. "What's done is done. Tempest is lost. You can't change the past."

"Watch me," he hissed, his wrath reaching its boiling point. In one swift motion, Beau released Deakon and extended his arm toward Sara. A frigid wave of energy erupted from his fingertips, enveloping her entirely.

Sara gasped, her body shuddering as a numbing cold began to creep through her veins. She tried to resist, but the sensation was relentless, like the grip of a thousand icy hands clawing at her insides.

"Beau, stop!" Deakon cried out, lunging forward to intervene. But it was too late. The damage was done, and there was no turning back now.

"Did you truly think you could manipulate me?" Beau taunted, his breath visible in the chilled air. "You should know better than that, Sara. I am no puppet to be played with, I would have thought that Tempest taught you that lesson."

As the last vestiges of warmth ebbed away, leaving her paralyzed and helpless, Sara managed one final, desperate plea. "Please... no..."

"Tempest is safe from your treachery," Beau snarled, watching as life drained from Sara's eyes. "And I will never be yours to control."

Deakon's face contorted in a mixture of grief and rage, his fists clenched tightly at his sides. "You monster!"

"Save your accusations," Beau shot back, his own emotions simmering beneath the surface. "I did what had to be done. For Tempest."

As Sara's frozen form crumpled to the floor, lifeless and cold, Deakon stared at her in disbelief, the enormity of his loss settling like a lead weight upon his chest.

Grief and rage surged through Deakon, a tempestuous storm that consumed his very being. The sight of Sara's lifeless body at his feet only fueled his determination to make Beau pay for his monstrous actions.

"Beau!" he roared, lunging forward with a newfound ferocity. "You will suffer for this!"

"Your threats mean nothing to me," Beau retorted, his voice cold as ice. But deep within those blue eyes, a flicker of uncertainty betrayed his stoic façade.

Deakon struck first, his fists connecting with Beau's face in a brutal blow that sent him sprawling backward. Blood dripped down from Beau's split lip, staining the pristine snow beneath them.

"Pathetic," Deakon spat, advancing upon his fallen adversary. "Is that all you have?" Beau taunted, wiping the blood away from his mouth. "And you call me pathetic?"

"Silence!" Deakon roared, unleashing another series of vicious blows. He fought like a man possessed, each strike fueled by the pain and loss he felt deep within.

But Beau was not so easily defeated. His icy powers coursed through his veins, lending him an unnatural strength and resilience. He parried Deakon's onslaught, their battle raging on amidst the frozen landscape.

"Enough!" Beau bellowed, seizing the upper hand. With a swift, calculated move, he ensnared Deakon in an icy grip, pinning him to the ground. "This ends now."

"Tempest...will never...awaken," Deakon gasped, struggling against the crushing weight of Beau's hold.

"Then neither will you," Beau replied, his voice devoid of emotion. Slowly, deliberately, he reached out and placed a hand upon Deakon's chest.

Deakon's eyes widened in terror as he felt an icy chill begin to spread from the point of contact. It seeped into his very soul, a relentless force that threatened to strip him of his essence.

"Beau... don't..." he whispered, desperation evident in every word. But his plea fell on deaf ears, for Beau was already gone – consumed by the darkness that now held sway over his heart.

"Goodbye, Deakon," Beau murmured, his voice barely audible above the howling wind. And with that final utterance, he drained the last of Deakon's

essence, leaving nothing but an empty shell of the man who had once been his greatest rival.

As life ebbed from Deakon's body, his eyes locked onto Sara's frozen form, the last image he would ever see. Then, with one final shudder, he too succumbed to the cold embrace of death.

And there they lay, united in their demise, victims of a power far greater than any they had ever known.

As Beau's dark power coursed through Deakon, their connection intensified. He could sense Deakon's every thought and emotion – his fear, his love for Sara, his hatred for Beau himself. It was a heady cocktail that fueled Beau's hunger for more.

"Please... Beau," Deakon whispered hoarsely, each word a knife in his throat. The pain in his eyes mirrored Sara's, frozen and helpless beside him. "Don't take everything. Leave me something to remember her by."

Beau smiled cruelly; his once tender heart now encased in ice. "You won't need memories where you're going, Councilman," he hissed, relishing the torment in the nobleman's face as he tightened his grip on the man's very essence.

"Ah, such anguish," Beau murmured, savoring the taste of Deakon's suffering like a fine wine. It was intoxicating, this newfound power – the ability to absorb not just the life force of his enemies, but their deepest fears and desires as well. It was as if he were devouring their very souls, leaving them hollow and devoid of any warmth or light.

"Let it go," he whispered into Deakon's ear, his breath hot against the nobleman's skin. He could feel Deakon's essence beginning to unravel, the threads of his being slipping away like silk through his fingers. "Release yourself to me."

As Deakon's essence pulsed through Beau's veins, he reveled in the sensations that flooded his senses. He could hear the wind howling outside, each gust rattling the cottage's timbers with renewed fury. He could smell the scent of blood and decay, an aroma that had once repulsed him but now filled him with a primal lust for power.

"More," Beau demanded, his voice echoing through the small room like thunder. "Give me everything you have, Councilman Deakon Lacey. Let me consume you."

And with that command, the last of Deakon's essence was ripped away, his soul laid bare before Beau's insatiable hunger. The noble Halfling's eyes went wide in shock, the light within them flickering and dying like a snuffed-out candle.

"Thank you, Councilman," Beau whispered as he stood over the lifeless husk of his enemy, feeling stronger and more powerful than he had ever imagined possible. "You have given me a most precious gift."

The cottage lay in ruins, the aftermath of Beau's voracious attack evident in every splintered beam and shattered heirloom. The lifeless bodies of Councilman Deakon Lacey and Sara sprawled on the floor, their once-radiant features twisted into grotesque masks of pain and terror as they slowly started to crumble into ash.



Chapter 53

Beau burst through the heavy oak doors of their chambers, his chest heaving. She still lay motionless on the four-poster bed, ashen as death, her usual, red-tipped hair now a dull and lifeless black fanned out across the pillow.

He rushed to her side and grasped her hand. It was cold and limp. "Tempest, can you hear me?" There was no response. Panic rose in his chest like a wave. He had failed to protect her. Again.

Tempest was trapped in the darkness of her own mind, spellbound by Sara's poison. But she could hear every word Beau spoke and feel the coolness of his hand encompassing hers. She strained against the invisible bonds holding her, fighting to surface and reassure him. To tell him this wasn't his fault.

"I'm so sorry," Beau whispered, brushing a stray curl from her face. His touch ignited sparks along her skin. "I should have been more alert."

His anguish pierced her heart. She struggled harder, summoning every ounce of will and magic within her, but the poison's binding did not budge.

Beau clutched her hand to his chest, his voice breaking. "Come back to me, Tempest. I can't lose you."

He drew back to look at Tempest, brushing a stray lock of hair from her face. "I need to speak with my mother. She may know of a way to reverse what has happened."

He made his way through the grand hallways of the palace, the marble floors and towering stone pillars a familiar sight. His boots echoed on the floor with each step as he wound through the corridors to the queen's chambers.

Two guards stood at the entrance, and they bowed their heads in deference as Beau approached. He rapped his knuckles twice on the heavy wooden doors. "Mother, it's Beau. I must speak with you."

A muffled "Enter" came from within. Beau took a fortifying breath and pushed the doors open. His mother, Tatiana, sat on an ornate throne, wearing a gown of royal blue velvet and a delicate silver diadem in her raven hair. Her piercing blue eyes, so similar to his own, gazed at him expectantly.

"Mother," Beau began, striding into the room.

Queen Tatiana leaned forward, concern etching lines on her pale forehead. "I've been waiting for you Beau. I've seen Tempest and her state does not look well. The healers have done all they can, but she shows no signs of waking."

"I fear she is trapped, and I don't know how to free her." His mother listened intently, her full lips pressed into a grim line. When Beau finished, she was silent for a long moment. The courtiers and advisors surrounding her waited with bated breath.

Finally, the Queen spoke. "This is dark and powerful magic. It will require an equally powerful counter-spell to break it." She rose from her throne and

descended the steps to stand before Beau. Placing her hands on his shoulders, she gazed into his eyes.

"You must go to the statue of mated Selene. Our revered ancestor has powers beyond our comprehension, and she will know how to save Tempest. Kneel before the statue, and she will guide you."

Beau's eyes widened. The statue of mated Selene was rumored to possess great magical abilities, though few had witnessed them firsthand. But if there was any hope of saving Tempest...

He took his mother's hands and brought them to his lips. "Thank you. I will go immediately."

Tatiana smiled, her eyes softening. "You're welcome, my son. Now go, and do not lose hope. mated Selene may well show you the way."

Beau bowed to his mother and the assembled courtiers, then turned and strode from the room with renewed purpose. He would get answers from the statue, no matter what it took. For Tempest's sake, he had to.

Beau made his way through the palace grounds, his boots crunching on the gravel path as he walked. The maze of hedges loomed before him, shrouded in shadows. According to legend, the twisting paths led to the hidden grotto that housed the statue of mated Selene.

He entered the maze, the thick hedges closing in around him. The gravel underfoot gave way to soft earth as he walked, following the turns almost instinctively. At last, he arrived at a stone archway covered in flowers.

The grotto opened up before him, dim and overgrown with foliage. In the center stood a pedestal of pale marble, and upon it the statue of mated Selene. She was carved from the finest white stone, her features delicate and serene. Beau approached slowly, taking in the candles and garlands of flowers surrounding her.

Generations of his lineage had come here to worship and beseech the revered ancestor.

Would she truly answer his pleas?



He stopped before the pedestal and sank to his knees, gazing up at the statue. "Great mated Selene," he began, his voice trembling. "I come before you in desperation, begging for your aid. The woman I love has been placed under a dark spell, and I was told you alone have the power to save her."

He clasped his hands together, his knuckles turning white. "Please, I implore you. Help me break this curse so I can be with her again. I will give anything, do anything, if you will only tell me how to save my Tempest."

Beau waited, his heart pounding. At first, all was silent. Then a voice seemed to echo from the stone lips of the statue, filling the grotto.

"Rise, Prince Beau. I will give you the answers you seek."

Beau stared in wonder as the statue's eyes glowed with a soft light. He rose slowly to his feet, stunned into silence.

The statue's lips did not move, yet the voice continued, gentle yet commanding. "You have been prepared for this day since your birth, you already know what you must do to save what you love."



Chapter 54

The scent of cinnamon and ash assaulted Beau's senses, and he froze in his tracks. His heart clenched as images of Tempest flooded his mind—her black hair dipped in fire, milky brown skin, full lips curved in a teasing smile.

He stumbled and dropped to his knees, barely noticing the sharp stones biting into his skin. Grief threatened to crush his chest, squeezing the breath from his lungs. How had he let her slip through his fingers AGAIN?

"Tempest," he rasped, fingers curling into fists. He should have been more vigilant. Regret and sorrow warred within him, ripping him apart as surely as a wolf devours its prey. He gasped for air, lungs burning, but found no relief. The earth seemed to tilt beneath him, and he squeezed his eyes shut. Her musical laugh echoed through his mind, a ghostly torment. He could see the mischievous glint in her eyes as she teased him and felt the softness of her skin under his hands.

He bit back a groan, shaking with the force of his anguish. Tempest had slipped into his blood, become a part of his soul. Losing her had left a ragged

hole that could never be filled.

Selene's whisper brushed against his mind like the caress of silk, soft yet startling. "Do not lose hope, my son. Your destiny is written but not how you think."

He jerked upright, eyes flying open. The garden was empty, moonlight dappling the path. Yet her voice lingered, a balm to his battered spirit. As his mind filled with Selene's voice and memories of long ago.

His mother's voice joined hers from a memory so long ago when he was just a child. His mother read to him, reading from the ancient tome as she had so many times before.

"Fire becomes one with ice. Memories lost are regained. Caught between death and life, Fire is revived by the power of essence taken in protection. Kisses of blood will reignite the flame and fire and Ice will merge to split in two."

The familiar words stirred memories of curling up in his mother's lap, lulled by the rise and fall of her voice. She had believed that the story passed down generation to generation in their family was always more.

Beau stared at the ancient tome in shock. Selene's words seemed to fill the room, ringing with power and ancient secrets. He could hardly believe what he was hearing; that Tempest might still be alive!

He sat down on the chair, thoughts whirling as he tried to make sense of it all. How could a kiss of blood bring someone back from the dead? But if there

was a chance that Tempest was alive, anything was possible.

His mind traveled back to his last conversation with her. She had spoken of reincarnation, of powerful essences taken in protection... Could this be what she meant? Beau felt a spark of hope ignite in his chest and he shook his head in wonder.

Selene's voice faded away and Beau looked at the statue. In her he saw his mother, her eyes were aglow with emotion, filled with love for her son and faith in their future together. "This is our destiny Beau," she said softly. "We must take this fire and ice into our hearts and use its power to restore Tempest."

Beau nodded, determined to make it happen. He stood up and embraced his mother, feeling her strength surround him like a shield against danger. Taking a deep breath, he turned away from the past and faced the future: A future where Fire was stronger than dragon's breath.

His hands tightened into fists, determination burning through the haze of despair. He would not fail Tempest. He now knew exactly what would save her. His path was clear at last. Beau strode through the gardens, a new purpose guiding his steps. The familiar path wound past beds of moonflowers and night-blooming jasmine, their heady scent clinging to the air.



Chapter 55

Beau raced through the hidden inner garden, his heart pounding as fast as his feet. He had to get to Tempest. He had to wake her.

His mate was trapped in a cursed slumber, and he was the only one who could save her. He jumped over fallen logs and pushed past branches that whipped at his face, fueled by a desperate need to reach her.

Nothing would stop him. Not the raging river he swam across. Not the pack of werewolves that tried to attack him. He fought them off with a ferocity borne of love and terror, sending them fleeing into the night.

When he reached where Tempest lay, he fell to his knees beside her still form and took her cold hands in his. "I'm here, darling. I'm here."

Summoning the power in his veins, he focused on the ice of his blood, the depth of his love, the unyielding strength of his devotion. The power surged through him, gathering in his chest like a flame.

When he leaned down and pressed his lips to Tempest's, that flame erupted. He slid his tongue across his fangs and his blood flowed into her mouth, igniting her body and soul.

Her eyes flew open, two rubies of fire like twin blood moons. "Beau," she gasped.

"My love." Joy and relief washed over him as she smiled up at him, alive and awake in his arms once more. "You're safe now. I'm here."

"You came for me," she whispered, wonder in her voice.

"Always." He kissed her again, slow and deep, savoring the warmth of her lips and the beat of her heart against his chest. "Always and forever."

He gazed into her eyes, emerald pools that reflected the stars above. "I would cross worlds for you, Tempest. I would defy death itself."

She reached up, her fingers trailing along his jaw. "As I would for you, my love."

The words seared into his soul, branding him as hers for all eternity. He caught her hand and pressed a kiss to her palm, tasting the salt of tears he hadn't realized he'd shed.

"Shh," she soothed. "It's over now."

"I almost lost you-again," he whispered. "When I saw you lying there, so still and ashen..." He shook his head, unable to continue. The memory of it clawed at his heart, ripping open wounds that had only just begun to heal.

"But you didn't lose me." She cupped his face in her hands, forcing him to meet her gaze. "You saved me, Beau. You brought me back from the darkness. I knew you would."

He turned his head to press a kiss to her wrist, drawing in the scent of her skin. "You were gone, Tempest. Your heart, your breath...everything had stopped. For a moment I feared the worst."

"Yet my heart beats for you again, my love, as it always shall." She pulled him down for another searing kiss that chased away his doubts and calmed the raging storm inside him.

When at last they parted, Beau rested his forehead against hers, savoring her warmth and the quiet peace of the glade. "Promise me you won't leave me again," he whispered.

"I promise, Beau." Her hands tightened around his. "We shall never again be parted."

And sealed with a kiss, it was a promise Beau knew she would keep. Beau held Tempest close, his fangs already lengthening in anticipation. He tilted her head to the side, exposing the slender column of her throat. "Forgive me, my love," he rasped, then struck.

Tempest gasped as his fangs pierced her flesh, a soft cry escaping her lips. Beau groaned at the first taste of her blood, rich and dark and full of power. It ignited a fire in his cold veins as her life essence flowed into him.

His arms tightened around her, possessive and protective all at once. Tempest's hands fisted in his hair, holding him to her as he fed. Her blood was a drug, an aphrodisiac, binding them together in a way nothing else ever could.

Beau drank until Tempest's breaths came in shallow pants and her heart raced like a wild bird's. Only then did he withdraw, licking the wounds to close them. Tempest sagged against him, eyes glazed with desire. Beau could see the change in them, a subtle shift in color that proclaimed she was his inside and out.

"Mine," he growled, claiming her mouth in a kiss that left no room for doubt. Tempest responded with a passion that matched his own desire burning between them like an inferno.



The next moon Tempest slowly opened her eyes, blinking against the harsh light filtering through the window. She felt strange, disoriented, and weak, yet also more alive than she ever had before.

Her gaze fell on Beau, who was watching her intently, eyes glowing with possessive warmth. Memories flooded back then—the feeding, the kiss, Beau claiming her as his mate.

A delicious shiver ran through her at the thought. She was mated, bound to Beau in a way that transcended anything she'd ever known. She could feel him in her mind, a steady, comforting presence that filled the empty places in her soul.

"How do you feel?" Beau asked, his voice a low rumble.

"Strange," she admitted. "But...good. Whole." She reached up to touch his face, marveling at the bond between them.

Beau turned his head to press a kiss to her palm. She drew him down for a searing kiss, desire kindling low in her belly. Beau growled against her mouth, the sound sending a thrill of anticipation through her.

They had a lifetime ahead of them to explore the depths of their bond. Tempest couldn't wait to begin.

Beau cupped Tempest's face in his hands, gazing into her eyes. He could see his reflection in their amber depths, could feel the echo of her emotions and thoughts in his mind.

They gazed at each other for a long moment, words unnecessary between them now. Anticipation hummed in the air, laced with desire and tenderness.

The future was unwritten before them, full of mystery and promise. But they would face it together, bonded as mates, partners in all things.

Beau takes my hands, twining our fingers together. "You are my heart, Tempest. My everything. I would burn the world to keep you safe."

Joy and desire surge within her, twin flames fueled by his words. Their lips met, and it was like coming home. The world fell away for Tempest, leaving only Beau and the sweetness of his kiss. She melted into his embrace, parting her lips with a sigh. His arm curls around her waist, pulling her close as their bond flares to life, bright and vivid as the dawn.

When they finally broke apart, chest heaving, Tempest lay her head against his heart. The steady beat beneath her ear was the most beautiful sound.

Beau pressed a kiss to her hair, his voice tender. "The path ahead won't be easy, but we will face every challenge side by side. You are my queen, Tempest, now and forever."

She smiled up at him, joy bubbling in her chest. "And you are my king. Always and always."



Epilogue

One Hundred Years Later

The ballroom was awash in silvers and crimsons, the décor reminiscent of a winter rose in full bloom. In the center of the dance floor spun two figures, as different as fire and ice.

Winter moved with fluid grace, her pale hair flowing behind her like a silvery curtain. Her hands were clasped behind her back, frozen fingertips peeking from lace gloves, as she gazed about the room with eyes the pale blue of glacial ice.

At her side, Ember danced with abandon, a flurry of silver silk and laughter. Her hair was a shock of flames in the sea of pastel gowns, as unruly as her gift. With each spin her skirts flared, revealing slippers that glowed as if lit from within.



Beau watched them from across the room, chest swelling with pride and anxiety in equal measure. After so many years, their gifts remained as mysterious as the day they'd first manifested.

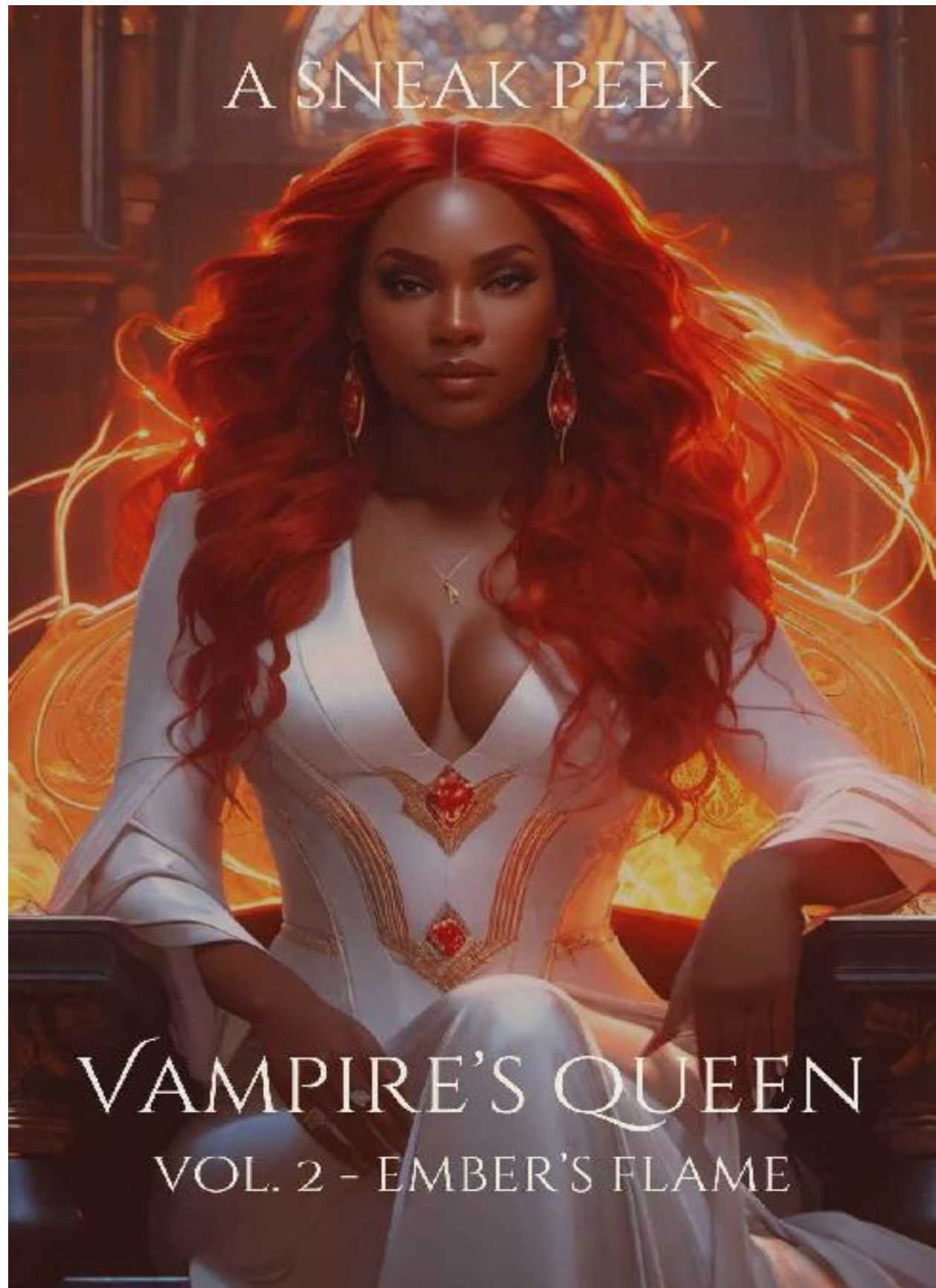
Winter had conjured her first snowflake at three, and Ember lit her first candle with but a breath at two. Now here they were, the bells of womanhood waiting to ring out at midnight.

"Do you see?" Tempest whispered, appearing at his side in a rustle of silk. Her eyes were on the twins, bright with love and lingering fear. "They're ready. Our little fire and ice, all grown up."

Beau's arm slipped around her waist, pulling her close. "And after tonight, the world will never be the same."

The twins spun on, oblivious for now to the change that was to come. But in the flickering light of chandeliers and magic, their gifts had begun to stir.

A SNEAK PEEK



VAMPIRE'S QUEEN
VOL. 2 - EMBER'S FLAME



A Sneak Peek

EMBER'S FLAME

Chapter 1

Ember

The flames dance before my eyes, wild and untamed. I extend my palm and they leap to attention, crackling eagerly at my command. With a flick of my wrist the fire bursts upward, lighting the grand hall in a warm glow. I am Ember Graysen, princess of the Southern Kingdom, and fire is my birthright.

My red hair cascades down my back as I move through the graceful forms Mother taught me. She stands watching, her own eyes-- today more red than black-- reflecting the blaze. This castle has been our family's home for millennia, its sweeping arches and marble floors displaying our kingdom's might. Tapestries line the walls depicting battles won, lands conquered. As heir with my sister, one day this will all be mine, a path unwanted but true.

But for now, I must master the flames. I push harder, sweat beading my brow, feeling the fire swell and surge with my emotions. It frightens me, this untamed power. Winter, with her ice, is all poise and control. Not like my wildfire. It takes all my strength to rein it in.

I finish the last form and extinguish the flames with a wave of my hand. The grand hall darkens. Mother steps forward, places a hand on my shoulder.

"Well done, Ember." Her voice holds pride, but also concern. She senses the firestorm within me, knows my struggle to tame it.

I meet her gaze. "I will not fail you, Mother." The words taste bitter on my tongue. I long for more than endless training within these opulent yet confining walls. For adventure. Passion. Freedom. But I am an heir to the Southern Kingdom's ancient power. My fire magic is my mother's legacy...and this palace my gilded cage.

One day, I vow silently, the fire within me will finally be free.



I take a deep breath, steadying myself after the intense training session. Mother watches me closely, her piercing red and black eyes missing nothing. She is one of the most powerful vampires in the kingdom, her magic and wisdom the pillar on which this reign was built.

"The Blood Moon Ball approaches," she says. "Have you given thought to whom you will take as your escort?"

I bristle at the question. The ball signifies my coming of age, when I will potentially be blessed as a Halfling and Mated. Though if not, I will have to fight off all of the gifted and who will vie for my hand. For now, I must choose an escort, someone to present me to the kingdom's elite, as if they didn't already know who I was. The thought makes my skin crawl.

"I have no interest in these games, Mother. I wish only to hone my skills, not be paraded around like a prize."

Mother sighs. "One day you or your sister will be queen. You have responsibilities..."

"Responsibilities I never asked for!" I snap. Mother's eyes flash with anger. I look away, chastened.

"Forgive me," I mutter. "But this life...it's like a golden chain is around my neck. Beautiful, but I am still a prisoner."

Mother cups my chin. "The life of a queen is not easy, my daughter. But the rewards are great, if you open your heart and mind to them."

I nod reluctantly. Mother means well. But she cannot understand my longing, my need for freedom. We are so alike, yet different. She was a fire born only to burn hot for my father. I was born of that fire—wild, untamed, but scorching the earth for more. One day, I will escape these walls. But for now, I must bide my time...and choose an escort for the ball.

"Very well, Mother. I will select an escort, though none here stir my passions."

Mother smiles. "Give it time, my dear. You may be surprised."

She kisses my forehead and leaves me to my thoughts. Alone on the balcony, I gaze out at the kingdom stretched before me. The winding streets, the soaring Gothic spires, the creatures of the night going about their business...it looks so alive out there. So free.

I've ventured into the city, of course, under disguise and cover of darkness. I've felt the thrum of music in the underground clubs, danced with handsome gifteds, flirted with dangerous halflings. For a few hours, I could pretend I was someone else. Someone free.

But eventually, I must return to the castle, to stifling balls and courtly manners. I am the fire princess—my passions run hot, my spirit rages. Yet here I am trapped, my flames smothered.

There must be more to this life than duties and rituals. More to me than princess, one day queen. I yearn to uncover who I really am, beneath these trappings of royalty.

The Blood Moon rises soon, crimson and swollen. Perhaps it will bring a

chance for me to slip these gilded chains...to finally quench these thirsts.

For now, I must bide my time. The fire in my heart won't have to be contained forever--I hope.

Chapter 2

Ember

I am awakened by a ray of moonlight streaming through the stained-glass window, the kaleidoscope of colors dancing across my face. As my eyes flutter open, I take in the grandeur of my bedchamber in the Graysen Palace. The soaring ceiling is adorned with an exquisite mural depicting my ancestors in battle, their fangs bared and eyes glowing. Tapestries woven with silver and gold thread line the stone walls, portraying scenes of the old vampires feasting on blood beneath a full moon.

Today is no ordinary day. Today is my twenty-fifth birthday. I rise, the silk sheets sliding off my bare skin. I move to the window and gaze out at the kingdom below. The palace towers over the land, its spires clawing at the sky. From here I can see the entire valley, blanketed in evening mist that curls around the trees like smoke.

A knock at the door stirs me from my reverie. "Ember?" It's my sister Winter's voice. "May I come in?"

"Yes," I reply. The door opens and Winter enters, already dressed in an elegant silver gown, her white hair woven into an intricate braid. She looks every inch the princess she is.

"Good morning, sister. Happy birthday." She embraces me warmly. Though we are twins, we are as different as the sun and moon. Where her skin is pale

as snow, mine is a warm caramel hue. Her eyes are piercing blue, like our father's, while mine are a mix of fiery red and sapphire.

"Let me guess, you've been up for hours already overseeing the preparations?" I say with a smile.

She nods. "We have a busy day ahead. Mother expects us to be ready an hour before the guests arrive."

I turn to the armoire and begin rifling through the gowns. "You look beautiful," I tell her. "Father will be so proud when he sees you tonight."

She beams at the compliment. "As he will you. Now, which gown do you plan to wear?"

I consider my choices carefully. Tonight is important - our twenty-fifth birthday also marks the beginning of our transition into leadership roles in the kingdom. All eyes will be upon us.

My fingers brush across the fabric of a scarlet gown. "I think this is the one," I say, holding it up.

Winter nods in approval. "It's perfect. The color suits you."

I grin, imagining how I will look twirling around the ballroom in this gown, every gifted and halfling in the room unable to take their eyes off me. For years I have waited for this night, the chance to step out of my family shadow and truly spread my wings.

I gently lift the crimson gown off the hanger, admiring the way the fabric cascades like a waterfall of blood. Against my caramel skin, the bold red hue makes me feel powerful, dangerous even. I hold the dress against my body and gaze at my reflection in the full-length mirror, picturing how I will look when I make my grand entrance this evening.

The gown hugs my curves in all the right places, the sweetheart neckline showing just a hint of cleavage. I turn slowly, watching the full skirt swirl

around me, and imagine the envious eyes of the kingdom's ladies tracing my every move. Tonight, all eyes will be on me.

I sweep my hair over one shoulder, baring my slender neck. One day soon, I hope to feel a lover's kiss there. The thought sends a delicious shiver down my spine. For too long I have been sheltered here, my passions constrained. But tonight, heralds' freedom and adventure.

My mind fills with visions of the evening ahead - the thrum of music, the swirling dancers, the tantalizing scents of blood and desire. The blood moon will be at its fullest, imbuing us all with its mystical energy. Anything could happen under its hypnotic spell.

For now, I hold onto the delicious anticipation, letting it build within me. Soon, I will take my place in this kingdom and in my sister's heart. No more lingering in the shadows. Tonight, I finally come into the moonlight.



The castle is alive with activity, fragiles scurrying every which way to prepare for tonight's grand affair. I watch them from my window perch, a swirl of motion and sound rising to greet me.

Footmen haul in massive floral arrangements, the blood-red roses and ghostly white lilies cascading over every surface. Maids light candle after candle, dotting the grand ballroom with pockets of flickering light. I imagine how they will shimmer later when the guests arrive in all their finery.

Chefs bark orders in the kitchens below, finalizing the elaborate blood and wine pairings. The rich, tangy scents drift upwards, eliciting a growl from my empty stomach. I cannot wait to indulge tonight.

Crystal chandeliers are lowered from the rafters, each strand of diamonds catching and refracting the daylight. They will dazzle as they spin, casting rainbow flecks across the revelers below.

My fingers strum impatiently on the window ledge. I should feel grateful for all this effort on my behalf, and yet it only stokes the longing within me. I am tired of gazing out at the world - I want to live in it fully, discover all its secret thrills.

Soon, I tell myself. Soon this cage will open, and I will fly free. The blood moon's magic will transform everything tonight. I can feel it in my veins, a siren call that whispers - your time is now.

I turn from the window and make my way down the corridor, the swish of my gown the only sound. Portraits of ancestors watch me pass - stern kings with icy gazes, elegant queens dripping in jewels. What would they think of me, I wonder? The fire to their ice.

I pause before the largest portrait, taking in my father's visage. His pale skin and jet hair are rendered exquisitely, but it's the eyes that capture me. So, like my sister's, and yet colder, full of grim determination.

He bears the weight of this kingdom on his shoulders, while I crave only freedom. I reach out and touch the gilt frame, as if I could connect with him across the centuries that separate us.

"I wish you could understand," I whisper.

I know he loves me in his way, but it's a harsh love. He thinks to keep me caged will keep me safe. He does not feel the growing inferno within, threatening to consume me.

With a sigh, I continue on, determined to put such gloomy thoughts aside for tonight. This is my celebration, and I intend to revel in it. Let them keep me chained tomorrow - tonight I shall be untamed.

The next corridor houses older ancestral portraits, their pigments long faded by sunlight. But their eyes still gleam as they observe me, these ancient kings, and queens. My lineage, my inheritance.

One tapestry catches my eye, its threads depicting a fierce battle. A loan vampire under Lost Love's Curse clashes with a league of gifted and halflings – slaughtering most in his heartbreak. I shudder at the savagery depicted here. And yet we prevailed, he was captured, his heart snatched out for the greater sake of our kingdom's protection.

We always prevail.

The Graysen line is strong, unbroken. Tonight, I take my place among them, no longer a gifted but a halfling grown. I only pray I can live up to their legacy.

From below, the musicians begin tuning their strings. The first strains of melody reach me, rich and intoxicating. It fills me with anticipation.

It is time. I must find my sister and prepare. The celebration awaits us.



I make my way down a narrow spiral staircase, one only the royal family knows of, descending into the secret chambers below the castle. Down here lie treasures beyond imagination, each with their own story from Graysen history.

I pass ancient weapons crusted with remnants of battle, tapestries depicting rituals long forbidden, and chests brimming with jewels and artifacts collected over centuries. Every corner hides some new marvel or macabre curiosity.

As I explore the labyrinth of rooms, a voice startles me.

"I thought I might find you down here, sister."

I turn to see Winter emerge from the shadows, her pale blue gown shimmering in the torchlight. Though we share the same blood, we could not be more different. While I am fire, wild and untamable, she is like ice, cool and composed.

Yet her smile is warm as she takes my hand. "Come. Let us the guest have started arriving."

I allow her to lead me upstairs, back to the world above. We stop to greet the guards at their post. Though sworn to protect us, they cannot mask their unease. My sister is a comforting snowfall, but I am the inferno, unpredictable and dangerous.

As we ascend the staircase, the sounds of revelry grow louder. Musicians test their strings, filling the air with disjointed notes that promise a night of dancing. Servants rush by, arms laden with flowers plucked from the royal gardens. The rich aroma of bloodwine and freshly baked bloodcakes makes my mouth water.

It has been a century since we last hosted a moonday ball. Once every hundred years, when the moon burns crimson in the sky, vampires and their offspring gather from across the kingdom to renew their oaths and feast beneath its bloody glow. My parents do things much different then in their time.

I have dreamt of this night. While most come out of duty, I crave the magic, the romance of it all. To dance until dawn in my true form, not the show I have to put on as a daughter of the crown. To let my passions run wild.

What I don't want, is to find love, as my parents did so long ago. It'll be just another hook holding me back, another tether keeping me bound.

Now lust and fun, with no want for tomorrow I could do.

Beside me, Winter shakes her head fondly. "I know that look, sister. Try not to burn down the castle in your enthusiasm tonight."

I laugh. "No promises!"

Tonight, we are no longer princesses, but goddesses of the night. And I intend to savor every intoxicating moment. The blood moon awaits.

Chapter 3

Braeden

The night envelops me like a lover's embrace as the sleek black car glides through the lamp-lit streets. I stare out the tinted window, my reflection an imposing figure with chiseled features and piercing blue eyes that gleam with frigid purpose. The Southern Kingdom's ornate buildings and gilded finery mean nothing to me, mere backdrops on my single-minded quest.

I will have justice for my brother's death. No obstacle can deter me, no distraction sway my resolve. His killers will pay. My thoughts roil, swirling with memories of our childhood, our shared blood. I clench my fist, rage simmering beneath my icy composure. He did not deserve such a brutal end. I should have protected him. Now there is only the hunt, the relentless pursuit of truth that drives me ever onward into the gathering dark.

I am the predator now. None shall escape my fangs once I sink them into the soft flesh of revenge. This kingdom and all its trappings of power hold no allure for one focused like a blade on retribution. My icy heart beats only for the reckoning ahead. Let them dread my coming. I will show no mercy.

The car slows, the first tendrils of destiny approach. It is time. I open the door, stepping into the night that welcomes monsters like me. My brother, I will honor you. Your killers will scream my name before oblivion takes them. This I vow with ice in my veins. The hunt begins now.



The cool night air washes over me as I emerge from the car, the moonlight glinting off my pale skin. Despite my imposing stature, I move with predatory grace through the shadows, my footsteps silent on the cobblestones. This kingdom reeks of decadence and corruption, but I am not fooled by its gilded facade. I know a rot festers beneath.

It will take all my cunning to navigate the vipers' nest of court intrigue and backstabbing politics. But I must succeed - too much depends on it. In nine months, I must take a mate, or risk losing my royal bloodline forever. The thought fills me with dread. I have no time for distractions from my quest for vengeance.

Yet this mate could grant me access and influence in the court that I desperately need. A ruthless calculation, perhaps, but I will use every advantage in my pursuit of justice. Emotion does not rule me; I view all as means to an end.

Except...a small voice whispers that I may finally meet the one destined for me, the missing piece of my soul. Angrily, I force such fanciful notions aside. I cannot afford weakness. My course is set, my brother's ghost my constant companion.

I blend into the revelry inside the palace, at once invisible and dangerous as a viper. The game is afoot. They will never see me coming, these vapid peacocks who flit and preen through their meaningless lives. Soon they will feel my fangs at their throats.

The cloying scent of perfume and cologne assaults my senses as I glide through the crowded ballroom. Masked aristocrats adorned in silks and jewels surround me, tittering and gossiping like birds. I tune out their inane chatter, focusing only on gleaning useful information.

My eyes scan the room, taking note of who converses with whom, filing away potential connections and leverage. I've learned that the society of the court is a web of secrets, scandals, and lies. Even the most innocent remark can be weaponized in the right hands.

A particularly grating laugh cuts through the din. I glance over to see Lady Vivian holding court with her usual flock of fawning hangers-on. Our eyes meet for a moment before she turns away, feigning disinterest. A coy maneuver but telling. My reputation as a mysterious newcomer has attracted many would-be suitors hoping to thaw my icy exterior.

Little do they know the fire that rages beneath. I have no time for dalliances or romantic games. But I'll play along if it grants me access to the aristocracy's inner circle. Let them believe they can bend me to their will with batting lashes and coy smiles. The truth will dawn soon enough.

For now, I force my face into an approximation of a charming grin, eliciting titters, and blushes from the ladies I pass. The deception chafes but is necessary. I must don many masks in this place if I am to unravel the tangled web surrounding my brother's demise.

Justice will be mine. Vengeance will be mine. But first, I must blend in with these glittering snakes. I am one of them now, in all ways but one: when I strike, it will be lethal.



The thrum of music and chatter recedes as I slip into a darkened hallway, the smile dropping from my face. No more pretense. I'm on the hunt.

My footsteps echo ominously as I ascend a tight spiral staircase hidden behind a tapestry. The air grows thicker, tinged with the scent of mildew and dust. Cobwebs brush my face like skeletal fingers. Any other guest would turn back, unnerved by the oppressive darkness. But I am no ordinary guest.

Shadows hold no danger for me. I am the danger in the shadows.

At the top of the stairs lies a heavy wooden door barred with iron. I shove it open with ease, the ancient hinges screeching in protest. Before me sprawls a labyrinth of stone corridors lit by guttering torches. The castle foundations. Off limits to all but a few. But locks and warnings mean nothing to one with my skills.

I inhale deeply, sorting through the stench of wet stone and dust. There, amongst the foulness - the faintest trace of a familiar scent. My brother was here before his untimely demise. His scent lingers still, imperceptible to most. But I am not most.

Swift as smoke I follow the ghostly trail, vaulting over piles of moldering bones with preternatural grace. Vermin scuttle away from my passing footsteps. Soon, rats will be the least of the pests I exterminate from this place.

The trail ends at a mildewed wooden door. I smash it off its hinges with one blow, adrenaline, and rage surging through my veins. Before me lies a room

that looks as if it had been scorched beyond recognition. The wooden furniture is blackened and weak, crumbling in disrepair.

So, this is where my brother met his end. I should have known the southern court's glittering facade concealed rot and filth. They will pay for what they have done. I will see to it personally.

I stand amidst the carnage, plotting vengeance, when a soft sound draws my attention. A whisper of silken skirts from the doorway. I turn to find Lady Vivian staring at me, eyes wide. She has followed me here, despite the warnings. Reckless, foolish girl.

She takes a hesitant step forward, candlelight playing across her porcelain features. "Braeden," she breathes, "I had to see if the rumors were true..."

I fix her with a cold stare. "Believe the rumors. Now begone, before it's too late."

But instead of fleeing, she moves closer, an intrigued smile teasing her rosebud lips. "You fascinate me, Braeden. I've never met a man impervious to my charms before."

She reaches out to caress my cheek with one dainty hand. I catch her wrist in an iron grip, halting her advance. She gasps in mingled shock and delight.

"This is not a game," I warn. "You know not what you trifle with."

A daring light fills her eyes. "I would like to know. Show me."

For a moment I hesitate, torn between instinct and duty. Vivian could be the key to unlocking this court's secrets. But she also represents a temptation I cannot afford. A distraction from my purpose.

With a herculean effort, I master the hunger rising inside me. This is not the time or place.

"Leave. Now," I command, releasing her.

Vivian pouts prettily, but obeys, casting a lingering look over one shoulder

before gliding up the stairs.

I watch her go, fists clenched. I cannot deny the lure of her blood, her body. But I have not survived this long by being ruled by base appetites. I am master of my desires, not slave to them.

Still...she intrigues me, with her audaciousness and hunger for the dark. Were circumstances different...

No. I crush the thought. For now, vengeance calls. Justice for my brother, and protection for my family's crown. I stalk from the chamber, renewed purpose steeling my mind.



I stride through the marble halls, servants scattering before me like leaves in the wind. None dare meet my gaze. They know what I am and fear me for it. As well they should.

Only the Graysen's do not cower. Our two families have been locked in a bloody feud for generations, neither gaining dominance. A fragile peace reigns now, but I aim to shatter it.

I find just the halfling I'm looking for—Jaime Gleeson—in his study, boots propped insolently on a priceless mahogany desk. He eyes me with languid amusement. "To what do I owe the pleasure, Lord Snow?"

"I require entrance to the Graysen's Blood Moon Ball," I state without preamble.

Jaime arches one golden brow. "Do you now? And whatever makes you think I can provide that?"

I bare my teeth in a ruthless grin. "Let us not play games. You know as well as I your family controls the guest list."

Jaime chuckles. "Perhaps. But what do I get in return for this...favor?"

I step closer, until only the desk separates us. "You want the Southern territories. I can deliver them, once I rule."

Greed flares in Jaime's eyes, swiftly masked. "Can you now? How fortunate for us both." He scribbles a note and presses his seal upon it. "Present this at the palace gates on the night of the Blood Moon. It will grant you access."

I take the parchment, pulse quickening. I am one step closer to my goal now. "You prove wiser than your forebears, Gleeson."

"I simply know how to spot opportunity." Jaime's smile turns mocking. "Do try not to get your heart torn out before the ball, Lord Snow. I should hate for you to miss all the...festivities."

My answering smile holds no warmth. "I shall be there. And before this is through, we will see who gets turned to ash in the end."

I turn and stalk from the study, slipping the precious invitation into my coat. Let him laugh while he can. Soon enough, the trumpets of war will sound, heralding the fall of his empire of corruption. And from the ashes, my mate and I will forge a new era for our kind.

Pre-order Vampire's Queen: Vol.2 Ember's Flame



About the Author

ABIEGAIL ROSE

Abiegail Rose is a romance novelist, motivational author, and public speaker. She has written numerous books and spoken in front of thousands of people. She still get nervous with each new release and each time she stands on a stage.

Her goal is to touch the life of every woman she comes in contact with. Whether it's by making her believe in love again, or most importantly to believe in herself again

Want to join her book club to be first in line for new releases and giveaways?

Follow her on Instagram at @authorabiegailrose

<https://www.goodreads.com/abiegailrose>

<http://amazon.com/author/abiegailrose>

Join my Newsletter: <https://BookHip.com/MKBRXN>

Get a signed book: <http://authorabiegailrose.com>



Also by Abiegail Rose

Did you know I had two pen names?
I write contemporary romance under **Abiegail Rose**; and I write paranormal romance with my husband Norman under **Madison Rose**.

Bella's Beast



ONE LIBRARIAN BEAUTY. ONE RECLUSIVE ALPHA VAMPIRE WHO BELIEVES THEY'RE FATED MATES AND WANTS TO DOMINATE HER MIND, BODY AND SOUL.

I always fantasized about vampires as I read erotic novels about them in our quaint bookstore, never dreaming they were actually real, then one day I walked Rayne.

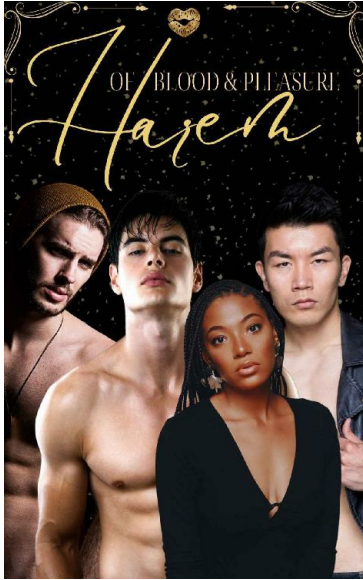
Rayne is a beautiful vampire hybrid with eyes of fire, a black magic tongue, and an even blacker heart.

He's been obsessed with me since I was sent by my father to examine his first editions for our bookstore, determined to claim me as his and I wanted it, but I couldn't leave my father. Now my life has changed... and Rayne's coming to collect what belongs to him... Me.

I want to be his and I will surrender everything to be.

My name is Bella Reed, and this is my story.

Harem of Blood and Pleasure



A Reverse Harem Paranormal Romance

Bianca St. Clair is a vampiress trying to blend into a normal life as a college student. Her quiet existence is shattered when she catches the scent of her long-awaited mate, but she's confused when it leads her in 3 different directions pulling 3 alpha males in her path: an incubus masquerading as her professor, a cocky half-vampire lab partner, and the sexy mage who owns her favorite coffee shop.

What's a vamp to do besides live by her fae-god-mother's motto of 'Want-Take-Have'... Yum!

Only on Kindle Vella

Love After Hours - Cupcakes & Kisses



Shalonda is the owner of Champagne Cupcakery and is just trying to make ends meet. Right when she thinks she's in the clear with a big order, the client suddenly backs out at the last minute, leaving her at risk of eviction.

William, her landlord, is not known for giving second chances when it comes to his money. But he sees something in Shay that says she needs to be protected, even as she tries to give off Ms. Independent vibes.

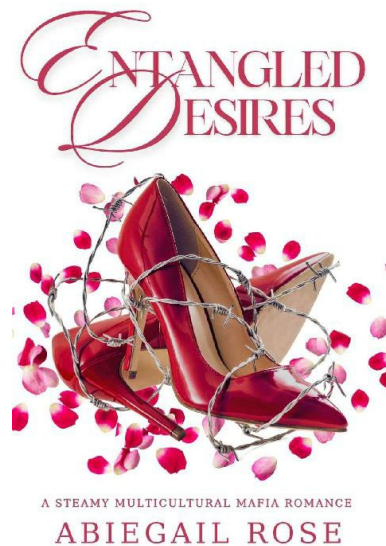
Instead of evicting her, he decides to set up a mutually beneficial arrangement. A business after hours networking event. She gets customers for her shop, and he gets potential tenants for his commercial properties.

There is only one downside. He has become addicted to both Shay and her cupcakes, leaving him wanting more each time he comes around her.

However, Shay has been hurt before and is still dealing with an ex who can't leave well enough alone. She doesn't think she can open herself up again no matter how handsome or wealthy Will is. William thinks he knows just how to change her mind.

Will is on a mission to prove to Shay that both love and business can happen after hours.

Entangled Desires



I NEVER THOUGHT I'D FALL IN LOVE WITH BOTH OF THEM!

HOW CAN I BE SO DRAWN TO TWO TOTALLY DIFFERENT MEN?

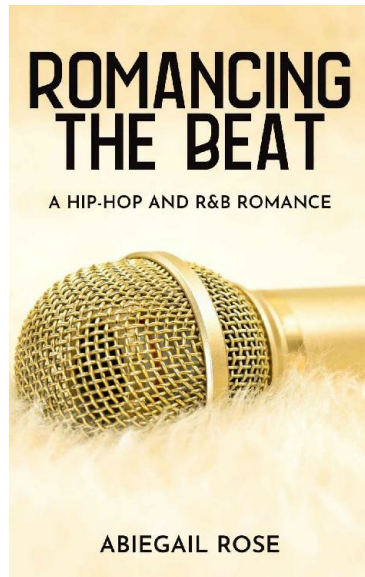
Amaya Adler is a successful fashion designer and single mother who has always been guarded by her past. When she meets Lucas and Liam on the same night, she finds herself drawn to both men in different ways.

As Amaya navigates her newfound love triangle, she begins to suspect that some things are too good to be true. Her suspicions are confirmed when her ex, who she thought was out of the picture for good, resurfaces and will stop at nothing to win her back.

As tensions rise between the three men, Amaya is forced to make a decision that will alter the course of her life forever. But when truths about their intertwining pasts are finally revealed, the twist is more dramatic and the damage is far more reaching than anyone could have imagined.

Amaya's strength and resolve are put to a heart-stopping test, where she must fight for what she truly believes in. With the help of her friends and family, she discovers that true happiness comes from following her heart and trusting her instincts, no matter what the consequences may be.

Romancing the Beat



A Hip-Hop and R&B Romance

Chantelle Brown's Las Vegas wedding was supposed to be huge; we're talking Bridezilla big! After sacrificing her own dreams to be with her high school sweetheart, she is left standing at the altar in the worst way. Trying to numb the pain, Chantelle and her best friend hit the town and decide to enjoy the rest of their time in Sin City to the fullest. Waking up the next day, she is hung over, sporting the biggest rock ever on her finger, and lying next to

a man with tattoos on his face!

Chantelle's mystery man turns out to be, Ace, Hip-Hop's resident bad boy and she's convinced their one night in Vegas is a complete mistake. Ace, however, thinks that Chantelle could be exactly what he's looking for to bring some calm to his hectic life. He's on a mission to prove to her that they can make sweet music together.

Chantelle is struggling to maintain her peace as she tries to figure out what to do next and put her newly instafamous life back together. Along the way, she has to deal with meddling ex-girlfriends, undeserving ex-fiancés, relentless paparazzi, and figure out if she has what it takes to stay married to one of the hottest rappers alive!

“Girl this book was everything needed to restore someone’s faith in true and realistic love. Your novel was not a fairytale version of romance . I

thank you for writing this story. For the remaining stories is it possible you can make them longer, I didn't want to let go! The greatest and most realistic read all year."

Allison Black

GOODREADS

"This is my first book by this author and wow! I loved the story and characters. It is well written and it draws you in from the first page. Your heart goes out to both Ace and Chantelle for how they were treated by their ex's. There is so much drama going on with the two but will Ace's not coming clean with Chantelle break their bond?"

Merry Jelks- Emmanuel

VINE VOICE