



COURT

of

DEATH

COURTS AND KINGS

USA TODAY BEST SELLING AUTHOR

K.A. KNIGHT

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K.A. KNIGHT

Court of Death (Courts and Kings).

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READER WARNING

Please note, this is a dark romance and as such there may be scenes that you find triggering. This book includes scenes with sexual violence, graphic violence, explicit scenes, consensual blood play, and much more.

Step into the shadows and find the death within ...

PROLOGUE



AVEA

“Avea.”

I stare down at the blood staining my palms as death reaches for him.

“Avea!” She screams my name once more. “He’s dying. He’s dying. Help us! Help me!” The panic, horror, and agony in her tone snaps me out of my clouded delusion, and I drop to my knees at his side.

She sobs, leaning into his chest where he’s propped up in bed. His face is ashen, his skin is clammy, his eyes are an odd grey colour and bloodshot, and his fangs are turning grey. He’s dying, and the blood he coughed up is proof of his demise as it coats my palms.

It smells and feels wrong on my hands.

I lay my hands on him again, moving my powers through his body as I try to save the only person I care about in this world, but it’s useless. I sit back, my own tears falling down my face. My bright hair changes with my pain, turning dull and lifeless.

She sees and sobs harder. “No, Avea, you have to save him. You have to. I can’t lose him. Avea, please, I’ll do anything. Avea, you owe him your life, so save his!” she screams.

She is not wrong. I do owe him my life.

I will not let him die. I refuse to live a life without my best friend, without my brother.

I lick my lips nervously as a truly horrible idea comes to mind.

It will probably get us all killed, but it's the only chance we have. "We must go to the god of death and beg for his life," I whisper. "Gather him, I know a place he is said to visit. We will beg for his life, beg for the god to save him." I take her hand, meeting my brother's mate's grief-stricken face. "All is not lost yet. We will save him. I will make sure of it." Laying my other hand on his heart, I ignore his weak protests as I close my eyes and transport us to the one place no living being should ever visit—a palace of death.

CHAPTER ONE



AVEA

I ignore everyone else in the club, focusing on the swirling drink before me—a drink that should kill me. I sense the new judges, the kings and queen everyone is talking about, but if they want to kill me, then let them. I would crave it, just for a moment.

But no, I can't do that. It's the easy way out, and I've never been good at taking that route. Still, I ignore all the posturing and stares of the others at the bar, my shoulders slumped. Tonight had been bad. Why did I do it? Why did I think they would feed me? I knew better than to go to one of the parties, even in my desperation to feed, but I did it only to be publicly rejected and scolded before the entire court.

It's why I stay away as long as I can. I had managed to stay away for two months before tonight, and I vow to myself it will be longer still. I will never go back if I can help it. After all, it's never been a place of safety or home for me simply because of what I am.

Downing the drink, I signal for another, ignoring the fighting and yelling I hear. Hell, it might even be for the best that we all die here. I'm drowning my misery in alcohol when alarm bells go off in my head—not literally, but a bad feeling forms inside me, like when you look down a darkened alley and know you shouldn't enter it. It's instinct born from my other half, but there is barely anyone I care about left in this world who could be in danger, and I'm not in immediate danger, so that only leaves ...

Mateo.

I'm up before anyone even sees me move. Usually, I hesitate to use my magic in front of people. I was taught it was wrong, a sin, and that I should blend in and be like every other vampyr, but the alarm increases in my head, so I evaporate right there in the middle of the club, fading out of existence. The ease of which I travel is halted by my need to lock onto his location. I follow the alarm bells and eventually come into view outside of the three-story townhouse he shares with his mate.

Hurrying up the steps, I pant as the warning blares louder. My body vibrates, ready for a fight, and my magic and power mix, but it's lesser than normal, merely a tiny spark where it should be a flame—not that I've ever fed enough to test the strengths of both my powers, preferring to keep myself half-starved so they don't expose me or make me a target, but I'm running on empty.

Stupid, so fucking stupid.

At the bright eggshell-white front door, I freeze when I see a red handprint mars its perfection. All three of us painted it one summer day before indulging in a BBQ.

It's a warning of what's to come, and when I lay my hand on the knob, my instincts roar at me to leave.

It screams of ... sickness.

It's wrong.

I surge forward, opening the warded door and stepping in. "Mateo?" I call softly. All the lights are off, and wind hits the shutters as rain begins to pour down, obscuring my vision past the huge windows. "Phoebe?" I call for my other friend, his mate, but there's no response.

Moving through the darkened living room to the left, I hurry up the two flights of stairs, not bothering with the second floor where their playroom, home office, and my spare bedroom are. Instead, I stop on the grey carpet of the third floor. There is no door here, only a short corridor leading to an open archway to their mating room. I don't go in there often,

since the scent of another female, even as close as I am to his mate, could trigger her, but when I see candlelight flickering and hear sobbing, I disregard all my hesitations and hurry inside.

I freeze after one step when I view the sight before me. Mateo is sitting up in the four-poster bed, his eyes closed in agony as he wheezes. He's pale, too pale, and he looks wrong. He almost seems to be devoid of life, but that's not right. His aura is usually a stunning kaleidoscope of colours.

Phoebe, his mate, is perched on the bed, holding his hand. The floor creaks as I move closer, my heart fracturing. No, no, no. Her head snaps up, and she bares her fangs before she realises who it is and slumps. "Avea, he knew you would come," she says through a sob. "Help me."

I don't waste time, my powers surging as I hurry to his side, unable to control them because of my panic, but even that show of magic drains me further, leaving me weak. The bloodstained sheets are pulled up to his bare shoulders, and I tug them down to inspect him, covering my mouth at the horrendous wound I find.

It covers most of his stomach, leaving his internal organs exposed. It's not healing, which means it was made with a baptised weapon—the only thing that can leave life-threatening injuries. His blood drips from the large, gaping hole, and I quickly cover it with my hand, trying to staunch the bleeding.

"What happened?" I demand, my voice soft but scared.

I'm never scared. I've faced the worst of our race and suffered more than even my best friend below me knows, but for him? I'm scared. I can't lose him. He's the only family I have left. "What happened?" I demand again as she continues to sob at his side, trying to push her blood into his mouth, but he turns his head away with a weak, protesting moan.

"He collapsed into the house like this. I don't know," she cries. "Feed," she orders him, but he turns away once more.

Closing my eyes, I keep my hands pressed to his wound and force my magic through his body, trying to heal the wound, to stop the wrongness, but it snaps back to me, making me whimper at the pain. I'm too weak.

I lift my hands and look from him to her as he starts to cough.

The rot is spreading through his body.

“Avea.”

I stare down at the blood staining my palms as death reaches for him. I know death well. I have seen enough of it to know it's coming. My back shivers with the chill of the grave reaching for my best friend, the only person in the world who has ever cared for me and wasn't bothered by who and what I am.

“Avea!” She screams my name once more. “He's dying. He's dying. Help us! Help me!” The panic, horror, and agony in her tone snaps me out of my clouded delusion, and I drop to my knees at his side.

He can't die. He can't.

She sobs, leaning into his chest where he's propped up in bed. His face is ashen, his skin is clammy, his eyes are an odd grey colour and bloodshot, and his fangs are turning grey. He's dying, and the blood he coughed up is proof of his demise as it coats my palms.

It smells and feels wrong on my hands.

I lay my hands on him again, moving my powers through his body as I try to save the only person I care about in this world, but it's useless. I sit back, my own tears falling down my face. My bright hair changes with my pain, turning dull and lifeless.

She sees and sobs harder. “No, Avea, you have to save him, you have to. I can't lose him. Avea, please, I'll do anything. Avea, you owe him your life, so save his!” she screams.

Too late, I realise the number of wrong choices I've made. I should have fed to ensure I could heal him. I should have practiced my skills to guarantee I could control them, not fear them. I'm so weak, but I cannot let him die. I can't. He's my only link to a world I hate. He's the only good in this place.

His aura begins to flicker as her words penetrate my thoughts.

She is not wrong. I do owe him my life.

I will not let him die. I refuse to live a life without my best friend, without my brother.

I lick my lips nervously as a truly horrible idea comes to mind.

It's stupid, and it arises from tales and experiences I had as a child. I was a feral fucking child, so it's a time I hate to even think about.

It will probably get us all killed, but it's the only chance we have. I cannot lose him, and neither can she. She would die without her mate, and I would die without my family. I don't even know if it's real or if it will work, but we have to try. No one from our world can save him now; he's beyond that.

No, he needs someone else, someone more powerful than any other being on Earth.

He needs a god, and not just any god ...

"We must go to the god of death and beg for his life," I whisper. "Gather him, I know a place he is said to visit. We will beg for his life, beg for the god to save him." I take her hand, meeting my brother's mate's grief-stricken face. "All is not lost yet. We will save him. I will make sure of it."

I infuse confidence into my tone, more than I feel. It's a lie. I've been to this place once and it was empty. I was only a child then, and I didn't understand many things, but I understood the death I saw and felt there and the memories it held. It was only after I had come into this world properly and researched our history that I fully understood what that place was: a temple for the god of death to connect with his worshippers from this world in a time long since passed.

Laying my other hand on his heart, I ignore his weak protests as I close my eyes and transport us to the one place no living being should ever visit—a palace of death.

CHAPTER TWO



AVEA

I have scarcely enough power to evaporate all of us. It could kill me, and we could get lost in the in-between and be splintered apart like dust in the wind, but I have to try. When we arrive at the edge of the forest, I fall forward, spilling the contents of my stomach onto the grass like an offering. My chest heaves, and sweat pours down my body as I sway with the lack of blood and the draining of my power. I'm dying too, I realise, but then an arm presses against my mouth. I try to reject it instantly.

“Drink. We need you alive to save him,” she snaps. Unable to deny her and the blood, I drink just enough to bring me back without weakening her in case we need it, and then I lick the wounds clean. She's gone in an instant, and I straighten, my eyes going to the woods I said I would never return to.

Unlike the world behind us, which is ever changing, this one does not.

The trees still reach up into the sky, the branches dark in the moonlight. The leaves rustle in the wind, creating a rainbow of colours as my eyesight returns. This place of old magic and strength is beautiful. Inside these woods, I saw a great many things others would never believe, but that is not important now.

“Avea!” she yells, and I turn to see her holding him in her arms, his own hanging towards the ground. He's close to

death, and it spurs me into action as I climb to my feet and grit my teeth.

“Whatever you see or hear in there, do not follow it, do you understand?”

“Avea—”

I shake my head. Usually, she is the strongest and wisest of us, but I know best here.

“I mean it. Follow me and keep your eyes on my back. Do not look anywhere else or you will both be lost to the wilderness.” I grab her hand, pressing it to his chest. “Trust me, Phoebe, you have to trust me.”

She nods slowly, red tears trailing down her face. “I do.”

A relieved sigh escapes me, and I press a soft kiss to his forehead, infusing it with some healing magic to try to keep him alive long enough for our journey. I’m still not strong enough to heal him entirely, but he breathes a little easier.

“I’ll save you just like you saved me, Matty,” I promise, my voice soft. “You always said you wanted to see my home, and now you will. Stay with me.” I kiss him once more before turning away and facing the trees again.

“Avea, is this the place?” she whispers, looking at the trees. There’s fear in her voice now. Good. She should be scared. There are far worse things than the god of death in these woods. “The place ... where he found you?”

“Yes,” I respond without explaining further. It’s my and Matt’s secret, after all. “Come on, and remember what I said.”

As I plunge into the trees, a sense of familiarity and rightness washes over me. The forest welcomes me home, but Phoebe cries out and staggers. I have to reach back and drag her forward, the magic washing over her and attacking her like an invader. Once I offer her my protection, it quickly recedes.

The magic here is wild, untamed, and stronger than any being, so if it wants you dead, you’re dead. It’s the same magic that kept me safe all those years before I voluntarily walked out and into my life now. I often wondered if it would have

been easier for me to stay here, in the trees and the safety they provided, but I can't change the past.

I must focus on the present and what must be done. My feet carry me forward, even as my emotions wobble at the idea of losing him. They know the way, they know every inch of this massive, wild land, and without even meaning to, I walk faster, taking the most direct route to the palace I found whilst exploring. It's deep in the trees, and the magic here doesn't allow me to evaporate without an offering—one I do not have time to find—so walking it is, or more like running since we are panicked.

I can hear his laboured breathing, so I tether my soul to his to keep a check. I brush along Phoebe, my power magnified here in the home of my ancestors. She's worried and scared but determined. I speed up, and she keeps up as we leap over fallen trees and cross shallow streams, the water splashing around us.

I can sense the wild animals and magical beasts watching in confusion and curiosity, but I keep them at bay with a hint of magic. If they were determined, they would still come and investigate, and with the blood he's losing, it might attract the wrong kind.

Like the one who left me with the wicked scars down my back, which I always keep covered by my magic.

No, I cannot think like that. We have to keep moving. We have to reach the palace before it's too late. I once read that the god used to save people if he felt so inclined. I do not even know if he still monitors this palace, if he still cares, or if he will help us, but we have to try. Thousands used to flock here many years ago in a sort of pilgrimage to give offerings to death. Now, it remains forgotten and empty.

"Avea," Phoebe whispers.

"Shh," I respond. "Do not draw attention to us. We are being allowed in, but that could be rescinded at any time."

She grows quiet then, and I risk a glance back to check on her. She's holding his weight easily, but he's looking a little

worse for wear again, so knowing her super vampyr speed can keep up, I focus on running, using all my knowledge to get us there as fast as possible. We have to go under a natural archway made by the trees in which we go sideways, then past some old, ruined structures of what used to be a village. I can feel her curiosity, but I do not answer her unasked question. Once we are past it and break through the trees, we see it.

The ruins of the palace stand atop a small mountain. The dirt road up was once paved and beautiful, with life surrounding it, but now it's dead, and even the grass is withered. The moon shines high above it, lighting up the old spires of the palace and the grey stone.

"I don't like this," she whispers. "It feels ... wrong."

"You are feeling death," I tell her. Maybe if I were normal, I would fear it too, but death always felt like a welcome friend to me—sparing the animals I had grown to love from their suffering, easing the pain of those before, and wrapping me in a warm embrace. This place never frightened me. No, it called to me even then, and now I feel death reaching for me, welcoming me home.

Speeding up the hill, I ignore the graves along the way, as well as the talismans and offering stones long since abandoned. Once at the top, the palace is before us, spread out like the god himself, imposing and powerful. The bricks glisten with magic even now. It was built by a king a long time ago to contact the gods, and although it stood the test of time, I always feel a little sad at seeing how far people fell and were lost just like these lands.

Above the arched entryway are three simple words.

Grata mortis amplexus

Welcome death's embrace.

"Avea," she murmurs.

"This is the only way we can save him." I turn to her. "You know that. He is beyond mortal healing. Are you with me?" I offer her my hand, and she takes it, holding him and turning as we step through the arched doorway. I shiver as the wards pop

and allow us entrance. The magic has long since been abandoned, but it still washes through me, warning me of what is before me. I don't know if she senses the intent, but she senses the magic and whimpers.

Time has stopped inside. No leaves are blown in from the outside. The windows allow a kaleidoscope of colours to shimmer through the glass and reflect on the stone floor. The images depicted upon them are a black wraith-like man preying on the dead, and on another is a man with a blurred face, who sits upon a throne with people worshipping before him. In the final window, a man walks amongst the dead, freeing them.

The god of death.

The arched ceilings have long since lost the candles hanging from them, and the floor is indented from knees and feet. In a circle before the throne is a worshipping altar, and then there is the throne.

It's made from a mix of melted gold and black and easily ten feet tall, with skulls and scythes across the twisted metal. Whereas last time I came, the throne sat empty, today it is filled.

I instantly drop to my knees before the man there, taking Phoebe and Mateo with me until we are submissive and reverent.

Because sitting upon that throne is no man. It is death himself.

The god I came to seek.

CHAPTER THREE



DEATH

Boredom winds through me. Immortality and being a god go hand in hand, and although I often find ways to amuse myself, I have grown tired of the never-ending cycle of life and death. My job, and the reason I was created thousands of years ago, is to ease the passing of death and provide beings with a safe place. Evil is punished, and the good move on. It's a role I excel at and still love, but it offers a lot of downtime, and right now, I find myself in a place I have not been for years.

I don't know why. I never come back here because it reminds me of the changing world I serve. There are many places like this across the world—some were destroyed, some were entombed, but most were forgotten. Very few still come to us for help and guidance. They barely respect or worship us gods anymore. Yet here I am, lounging on the throne as I look around at the place that used to thrive with life. Now, it stands empty, devoid of life and energy.

Not even any death exists here anymore, just the echoes of it and the ghosts who follow me. I watch them idly. They stay with me even though they could move on due to unfinished business. I often try to help them, but there are some stubborn ones who stick around. I will send many to act as conduits among the different races, such as human mediums, vampyrs able to help them cross, and even some fey, but a few remain with me.

I don't know why. I've been told by them many times that I'm not fun to be around, yet here they are.

I'm about to leave, to head to the place I call home and wallow in loneliness and pity, when I feel a ripple in the air. The magic calls to me. Not human, not even fully vampyr or a warlock. No, this is something else. I sense a presence, and when I close my eyes ... blood, lots of blood drawing closer, and death—death so close, it whispers to me, begging me to ease the sufferer.

My eyes snap open as they emerge through the mist and step into the palace like no other should be able to without my welcome. Three beings.

One dying, one vampyr, and one other.

My eyes remain locked on her as they realise I am here and drop to their knees. The male grows closer to death with each second. How interesting. I lean forward, intrigued for the first time since ... well, ever.

“Why are you here?” I demand, lowering the power in my tone so I don't fry their little brains. My eyes dart to the dying man, analysing his wounds. He will be dead very soon. Even now, his soul calls to me. I feel its tie to this world through the woman holding him, but there is also a different tie to the woman that interests me.

She kneels with her head bowed respectfully, her bright icy-blond hair hiding her face from my view. She's in a ridiculously tiny dress, leaving nothing to the imagination, and my cock swells at the sight of her body. Another foreign idea—need. I haven't felt that in centuries, yet this woman stirs it. I almost implore her to lift her head, and when she does, it is like a dagger has been driven into my dead heart.

Her mismatched eyes meet mine, and her bright red lips twist ever so slightly. Her face is pale from exhaustion and worry, but she is beautiful. There is a small scar intersecting her hairline and some lines around her eyes, but those imperfections only add to her beauty in a world of gods who always look eternally youthful and perfect. I am speechless for the first time ever.

“Oh, you know, thought we would drop by for a nice chat,” she whispers sarcastically before her mouth snaps shut as if she didn’t mean to say that out loud. Laughter wants to explode from me, but I keep it in check. Her musical, sultry voice wraps around my cock and heart, hardening one and speeding up the other.

It’s both unnerving and interesting.

“I mean, I beg you for an audience.” She bows her head again and I hate it. It’s clear she does too. She hates having to defer to another. “You are the god of death, are you not?” she whispers when I still do not speak, entranced by the being on her knees before me.

Hadn’t I just been saying how bored I was? I should have known better. Fate always has a way of twisting one’s needs, but I could not turn her away now anymore than I could disappear. I am too intrigued by this being. The magic I feel within her is like nothing I have ever felt before.

It is *other* and very powerful, though it doesn’t seem like she knows it.

Another point of interest.

“What did you expect?” I ask, making conversation when I never do. I usually demand or take demands. I do not converse.

“If anyone were to appear, it would be an envoy of the gods,” she murmurs, boldly meeting my eyes like no other ever has, “not a god himself. Why are you here in this abandoned place?” There is a spark of knowledge in her eyes I find both interesting and infuriating.

She sees too much.

“Why are you?” I retort. The ghosts who follow me surround her, and she glances at them like she sees them. That startles both them and me. Nobody but those touched by death can see my powers, yet this unknown being can.

How did she even get here? This place is spelled. Who is this woman?

Licking her lips, she looks at the male. There is love in her eyes and in a flash, jealousy roars through me. I want to steal his soul and crush it simply because she looked at him. “My friend, the only family I have left”—that makes me relax—“is dying. I can’t save him, so I came here to ask for your help.”

“I see,” I murmur.

“I’ll do anything. You can have my soul, but please, save him,” she implores, sadness filling her gaze. I hate that.

“I do not see you begging.” I smirk, and her eyes flare like I hoped, chasing away the sadness.

“Please, please save him,” she whispers, her voice cracking in pain.

“He is dying. I will guide him across—”

“No!” She leaps to her feet and races towards me, placing a hand on my arm. I yank my arm back with a hiss and stare at her, waiting for her to collapse and die just like every other being who touches me, but something strange happens. She doesn’t.

She breathes, seemingly unaffected by the touch. “Please,” she continues, oblivious to how close she came to dying.

She is the first person to ever live after my touch.

“What are you?” I demand, shuffling away from her, and she steps back hesitantly, surprise flashing in her eyes along with panic before they turn cold.

“Vampyr,” she responds, pointing to dainty fangs.

“No, you are not. I’ve had vampyrs and you are not that. You are so much more, so again, I ask, what are you?”

She flinches, and I see her panic. I hear the thudding of her heart and for a moment, I’m aware of her thoughts.

Impossible.

How could he know that?

Interesting. I watch her, knowing I’m losing her with demands. She is the first person to interest me and now

survive my touch. I shouldn't save her friend because it's not done and it will upset the other gods, but fuck them.

“I do not save people.”

She slumps at my words, and the other woman begins to cry, but the man calls to the one standing before me.

“Avea.”

I like that name, and I run it possessively over my tongue. “I do not save people, yet I will make you a deal. That is the only way I will.”

She jerks up with hope in her eyes. “A deal? For his life?”

I nod, and she looks back at him.

“Avea, no,” he rasps.

Her shoulders round as she looks back at me. That's my girl.

“What kind of deal?”

This is foolish. I do not bargain, yet I know it's the only way I will get what I want, which is her. I want to pick her apart and find out why she has awakened these needs, these feelings within me.

In truth, my curiosity surpasses even a desire now, becoming a need.

“A life for a life.” She startles, her shoulders slumping once more.

“My life is yours,” she says without hesitation, and my estimation of the woman goes up. She is so willing to die for her friend.

“I do not want your death, love. I want your life,” I murmur. “I will make you a deal. I will save his life, and in turn, you will give me yours. You will come with me.”

“For how long?” she asks, watching me carefully.

She is smart.

I want to say eternity, and it's on the tip of my tongue, but for some reason, I know she will deny that. No worries, I will

get there eventually. Besides, I will grow bored with her after a while. “Twenty years.”

“Ten,” she counters.

“Fine, ten.” I will likely be done in one, even as my mind rebels at that and calls me a liar. “You will have no contact with this world, and you will know only me. Think on this, little one, for you will lose everything and everyone you love.” I will not sugar-coat it. If she is to be mine, then she will be mine completely. I’m possessive, and she will be my prisoner.

Mine.

Licking her lips, she glances back.

“Avea, no!” the man begs, struggling to sit up, but he is too weak. The woman he is with glances from him to Avea and nods her head, willing to let her sacrifice her life for the one she loves.

“Fine, deal,” Avea responds. “Save him and let me ensure he is safe and out of these woods, and then I am yours for ten years.”

Leaning forward, I meet her eyes and offer the next words blandly. “You will be mine in every sense of the word. Know that before you so readily agree.” I run my eyes over her. “Your mind, heart, and body. Understood?”

She eyes me warily but rolls her shoulders back, and when her voice comes, it’s firm and certain. “I agree to the deal. Save him.”

Not wasting any time or giving her a chance to change her mind, I approach the male and female. He tries to protect her, even as he’s dying, and they both recoil from me, fear permeating the air as they gaze upon me. I don’t blame them.

The woman with them, Avea, doesn’t fear me, however, and it’s addictive.

Kneeling, I lay my hand above his wound and draw it into myself, soaking in the rot, death, and pain. It begins to heal, and I stand. Avea steps forward, her mouth open as she watches her friend heal.

Laying my hand on her shoulder, I observe her friend over her head as he comes back to life. “Welcome to the Court of Death, love.”

She is mine now.

CHAPTER FOUR



AVEA

“Mateo?” I whisper, ignoring the touch on my shoulder. I stop my body from shivering like it wants to, knowing he’s watching me closely. Too closely. A god’s attention is never a good thing. I’ve spent my entire life hiding most of what I am, of who I am, and here is one of the most powerful beings in the universe and his entire focus seems to be on me.

Well, duh, you just handed your life, soul, and body over to him.

He can’t mean what he said, can he? Maybe he’s just lonely or bored. That has to be it. He will play with me like one does an insect and then toss me away. That’s fine. I can live with that. I’ll build walls around me to protect myself. I can survive this for my best friend. It’s a debt I owe, after all.

Tugging myself away from the cold brush of death behind me, I step towards my best friend as his eyes open, and I almost sag in relief. “You are truly okay.”

“You doubt me, love?” The voice is thunderous, and the castle shakes around us.

Brilliant, a god with a temper. I ignore him, and I feel him seethe at that, but I honestly can’t even bring my eyes to him right now. Not because it hurts, because it does, but because of the fear running through me. I don’t allow it to take hold.

Not yet.

I drop to my knees, checking the already healed wounds. “You’re okay,” I repeat, hardly believing it.

“Avy, what have you done?” Mateo asks, looking at the god behind me before averting his gaze with a pained wince, unable to meet his eyes. “Reverse it. Break the deal.”

“A deal with a god is final. I will escort you from my land and allow you to say your goodbyes.”

“No!” Mateo leaps to his feet, trying to tug me behind him. Death doesn’t like that, and his power slams through the room, almost knocking us to our knees once more. “You cannot have her,” Mateo snarls despite the power that could drain us of life in a blink.

“She has made her deal. You should respect that and feel honoured that such a being would willingly risk their life for you.” It’s the unsaid words that have me looking back at the god. It’s clear no one has ever willingly risked that for him. It’s almost sad, but that sentiment quickly turns to fear when his eyes focus on Mateo again.

I step before him. He’s right; we have a deal. He will keep me alive, at least for now, so I’m safe from him, but Mateo and Phoebe are not. I don’t want to say goodbye, I don’t want to leave them, but I need to keep them safe.

“Let’s go,” I demand.

Death looks at me with surprise and interest, as if he expected me to fight him. What would be the point? He will find me anywhere I go because there is nowhere I can run or hide. A deal is a deal, and I will not go back on it.

Death gestures for us to walk, and I take both of their hands and drag them from the castle. The god keeps pace, and we soon plunge back into the forest.

“You know your way,” he murmurs. I don’t respond, and I can feel his irritation that I am ignoring him as much as one can ignore an eight-foot deity dogging your steps.

“Avy,” Mateo hisses, but I shake my head, ignoring his pleading looks. It takes a shorter time to reach the edge of the forest, and I hesitate there. He tugs on my hand. “Come with

us,” he whispers, but I know the god hears him when the woods suddenly become silent and the feeling of death breathes on our necks.

“Go.” I reluctantly release Mateo’s hand and look at his mate. “Make sure he doesn’t come back for me. Keep him safe.”

“I will,” she replies softly, looking behind me before dropping her gaze in fear. “Thank you, Avea. Thank you ... god of death.”

“Go,” he says, “before I change my mind.”

“Avea,” Mateo demands, “do not make me leave you here, please.” Tears fill his eyes and his hands reach for me, but I step back, and the boundary comes between us. I can see them, and they can see us, but they cannot reach us now.

“Avea!” he shouts, slamming his hands against it. His mate places a hand on his shoulder, but he shrugs it off. “I will not leave you here with him! Take my life, I don’t fucking care, it’s yours, but let her go!”

“He loves you very much,” the god murmurs as we watch them.

“Yes, he does,” I choke out. “Please, Mateo, go,” I beg, laying my hand on the boundary as he does the same on the other side. “I will be okay, I promise. Just go before he changes his mind. I’ve paid my debt now. You saved me once and paid for it, so let me do the same here. Do not dishonour me.”

“Avea,” Mateo croaks.

“You know I can survive anything.” He closes his eyes, knowing my meaning. “Go, I will find you again.”

“You fucking better,” he snaps as his mate wraps her arm around him, and this time, he accepts her touch. His eyes open and lock on the god behind me. “God or no god, if you hurt her, I’m coming for you. Do you understand me?”

“Foolish male,” the god responds. “I will allow that one threat because I know you are upset. Anymore and I will not

let them slide.”

“Let’s go,” Phoebe hisses, pulling him away, but our eyes stay locked until they are out of sight. We know we cannot change the course we have set in motion. All those years ago, he stood in this very spot to feed me and bring me into the world, and he suffered many years for breaking the law.

Now, it’s my turn, and I will do it with honour.

“She made her choice, her sacrifice, so let’s go!” Phoebe demands, keeping her word to me.

As soon as they leave, and I’m plunged into the cold embrace of death, the reality of the deal I made causing terror to bloom within me. I can scarcely breathe, and when a hand wraps around mine, I actually recoil.

His chuckle moves the hair from my neck, causing goosebumps to erupt along my flesh. Everything inside me is split, with one half of me screaming to run far and fast and the other half almost feeling comforted, knowing death was always coming for me. At least this way, I can face it on my own terms.

I raise my eyes to his black ones. His face is perfect, and up close, I can truly appreciate that. He has a shadow across his strong jaw, thick lips, and glistening, tanned skin. His hair is a deep inky black, which is styled effortlessly away from his face. He’s tall, easily near eight feet, and he’s pure muscle.

“Do not start being afraid now, love. Your interest is all that has saved you. Come.” He tugs me deeper into the forest, away from everything and everyone I know.

“Where are we going?” I ask, having to run to keep up since he refuses to let go of my hand. He notices, frowning down at my shorter legs, and slows with a sigh as if it’s an inconvenience.

Asshole.

“To my home of course.”

I guess I never considered where gods live.

I don't pull my hand away, since it would be futile to fight a god, even though I'm uncomfortable with him touching me. So much power races through him to me that it almost makes it hard to breathe. I refuse to show it, however, and he eyes me like he's waiting for me to do just that, so I tilt my head up defiantly and keep up as we head to wherever the fuck we are going.

I feel the need to fill the silence, since it's growing tight and making my fear that much worse. I know he can smell it, and I hate that. I can't control my emotions, but I can distract them. "What's your name?"

"Death or serpent," he responds instantly, making me roll my eyes, some of my fear ebbing to annoyance.

"I can't keep calling you death." Ten years is a long time to be stuck with someone you fear or, worse, hate—never mind someone you don't even have a name for.

"Yes, you can. That's what I am," he replies casually, and I grunt, tugging him to a stop. He turns and glances down at me.

"What's your name?" I try again, my tone polite even as I grit my teeth.

He watches me carefully as if debating if he should kill me for annoying him, but at some point, I've got to stop being scared that he's going to kill me. If he does, he does, and I can't change it, so I might as well just go with it. I'm already this deep. When I don't relent, he sighs, and with it, the screams of the dead fill my ears. "I've had many—serpent, Hades, cold one, titan."

I narrow my gaze on him. "But what is your real name?"

"You know names have power," he snarls, the sound almost ripping my soul out. My eyes want to bleed and my ears want to pop. My knees begin to shake, but I force myself to remain standing through the power with one simple, feral reaction. He didn't even mean it, I can tell, and if I'm going to survive this, then I need to be able to withstand him and his power.

It's foolish, but I never was one to give up.

“You have mine, unless you’re afraid,” I taunt him, and his barked laughter releases me from the agony.

He eyes me. “Mors, my name is Mors.”

I wasn’t expecting that. “Mors,” I repeat, and he startles, his eyes narrowing on me. “What?” I mumble, suddenly afraid again.

“Say it again,” he demands.

“Mors?” I respond hesitantly.

His eyes close, and I just stare, wondering what the fuck is happening, when they open again and he nods. “Yes, you will call me Mors at all times. I like the way you say it. Come.”

Okay then.

He starts to walk again and pulls me along with him. I stay quiet after that, unsure what to say or do. It’s like walking in a minefield—one wrong word and I’m dead. I have to be smart about this. Ten years is a long time, but right now, I’m more concerned about surviving the next ten minutes.

We walk back to the palace, and once there, the ghosts surround us again. I give them a wide berth, eyeing them warily, but he doesn’t even seem to notice as he lets go of my hand and sits on his throne.

“You live here?” I ask.

Smirking, he pats his lap. “Come, love.”

“Yeah, no.” I cross my arms.

His eyes narrow, and I feel pure power slam through the building, more than I’ve ever felt before. I’m blind for a moment before it wraps around me and I feel myself floating. When the power dissipates as quickly as it came, I’m sitting on his lap and he’s wearing a smug smirk.

The prick. “Mors, you—” I begin, but then everything around us goes dark.

It’s just a flicker, as if I have caught myself blinking, and when my eyes focus once more, we are back on a throne—a

very different throne in a very different place. We are no longer anywhere near the forest I entered to ask for his help.

This is the realm of the gods, and I'm trapped here with the god of death.

It suddenly hits me, but I have no choice but to stand as he heaves up and takes my hand once more.

It's not what I was expecting, to say the least. I was looking for a gothic castle, a graveyard, or even a dark cave, but here, it's almost ... paradise.

There's greenery everywhere.

The throne looks to be made from old stone with moss covering most of it, and it's built into a rockface covered in vines and flowers. Sunlight shines down on us, warming me through. Birds chirp, and I hear other animals playing. Grass stretches before us, only intersected by a small path that winds down a small hill to a building in the distance that is hard to make out. All around us is life, not death.

We begin to walk down the stone path, and I realise each little section has a name carved into it. I want to ask, but I'm distracted when the path bends like a bridge, with nothing below or on either side of it. It's a straight drop. I skid to a stop, but he pulls me after him and to the other side. I manage to free my hand and turn to look out.

I can see the edges of the floating land we are on, with mist on either side of us—clouds, I realise, yet there's sun. I'm so confused. I hear water nearby and turn to see a floating island with a huge waterfall crashing down.

“What is this place?” I whisper, turning to take it all in.

It's golden and almost too bright.

“My home. I have many on your plane, but this is where I mostly exist. Below is the entry to the next life, which I guard, and the souls that wait to be crossed at all times. What, is this not what you were expecting?”

“Not at all,” I admit.

He almost seems normal here. Despite the fact that he's eight feet tall and glows from within with power and is the perfect being, with a face and body you couldn't even begin to describe, he appears more human here.

Foolish, I can't let myself think that. He's a god.

Furthermore, he's the god of death, of endings, yet all I see here are new beginnings.

He follows my gaze and smiles, and it transforms his whole face. "Everything lives and dies. I simply celebrate both. To die, one must have lived, and I live here. The plants die and are reborn; the animals die and their young live on. Even the grass dies, but death doesn't have to be frightening or gloomy. It can be beautiful. It can transcend time and space. It can mean regrowth and new life."

He looks back at me. "Each of the gods has our own place in this realm that is spaced far from each other, so do not worry." He must have noticed my sceptical look. "I never see them, and they never see me, but we make it our own. This is my slice of it."

"Are we in another world?" I ask when what seems to be a winged horse flies past.

"In a sense. We are between time, and it stands still here. Years pass here when it's merely weeks back on Earth. We have no true territory or leaders. We have no responsibilities. Here is existence. It is the place between and where the gods retreated to when our powers started to wane from lack of worship."

"I have so many questions."

He holds out his hand. "I might answer some. Come, let me show you where you will be living."

I could run, but I don't. I step forward and place my very mortal hand in the hand of a god capable of ending everything. He squeezes it softly, as if marvelling over my touch, and turns us back to the path. We walk slower, as if he is letting me look my fill, and when I glance up, I see him nervously awaiting my response and reaction to everything.

Surely, he cannot worry about my thoughts and feelings when I am stuck here with him, can he?

“The names, who are they?” I ask.

“The dead.” When I simply stare, he sighs. “There are too many deaths to name every stone, if that’s your question, but these are important.”

“Why?” I ask, but he doesn’t answer me. I guess Mors is only feeling slightly kind.

We keep walking, and the path winds three different ways—left, straight to the building before us, and right. He doesn’t let me explore, taking me down the middle path, and I finally get a good look at where the god of death lives.

Again, it’s unexpected.

Unlike the architecture on Earth, this makes no sense. It’s smaller at the base but grows taller as it reaches into the sky. Columns brace the building, and the colour, which I thought was pure white, shifts before me, flickering from gold and black, and my eyes struggle to make out what I’m seeing.

“You will adjust, I presume. I’ve never brought a mortal here before, so it might be too much for your senses to handle.”

“How lovely,” I mutter, pissed again. I jerk my hand free of his and, surprisingly, he lets me as he enters a huge archway leading into the building where he waits for me. Clearly, I won’t have free rein here, and it’s then I remember I am a prisoner.

I made a deal with the god of death, and I begin to panic that when I step inside, he’ll start on that deal right now and slam me into the nearest wall and have me. However all he does is nod as I cross the threshold. And with a wave of his hand... When I glance back, the door is gone.

“You may go outside with me, no other time.”

“Brilliant, so I’m locked in,” I grumble.

“You are mortal. There are things out there that could kill you. We are not the only beings that transcend time here.”

“Sure,” I mutter, not believing him in the slightest. It’s just another way to control me.

“There are rules, Avea.” It’s the first time he’s said my name. Before, it was little one or love, as if he truly didn’t care about my name. When he says it, however, it’s like I’m struck by lightning and I physically flinch, struggling to breathe.

He’s right; names have power.

“Rules?” I choke out, not wanting to give away how affected I am so he can use it against me.

Whatever I might feel, whatever stirrings this god creates in my body, I have to understand it’s a reaction to his power, nothing else. It’s not desire, it’s just his power, and I need to keep myself safe from him. I plan to make it out of this alive, and to do that, I have to be smart. Trusting the god of death is not smart, so I refuse to, but if he needs rules, I will abide by them. I will be the most boring and well-behaved house guest so he will eventually grow tired of me and release me back to my world. I don’t know what my facial expressions are revealing, but he narrows his gaze, so I blank my face and wait patiently. He doesn’t seem to like that either but luckily, he answers my question.

“This house will be your prison. You will dress how I tell you to. You will join me for every meal. You will be present for my every whim. You will learn to please me, and in turn, I will shower you with everything you wish, such as riches you could have only ever imagined. You will never go hungry or be alone, and you will have anything you could ever desire and everything you did not even know existed. You leave only with me. You will not disobey me,” he finishes.

“Or what?”

His eyebrow rises, and the room goes dark. I’m pushed to my knees by his power as ghosts slam into me from every direction. Just as suddenly as it begins, it disappears and I can breathe again, shivering from the touch of the grave. “Understand now, love?” He stops before me, forcing me to lift my head to look at him. “You are mine in every sense of the word. Try to leave or break the deal, and your life and your

friend's life is forfeit." He turns and walks away, leaving me on my knees, shaking from the section of my soul that seemed to die simply from his show of power.

Ten years ... How am I going to survive?

CHAPTER FIVE



MORS

I force myself away, fisting my hands when I want to reach for the little one, help her up, and apologise. I never meant to use such strength, but she has my powers and emotions all over the place, and it seems my control is slipping. That is no excuse, however, and I lock them down tight so nothing like that will happen again.

She is mortal and easily breakable, although she can withstand my touch and has survived the journey here, which was surprising. I half expected her to die as soon as she stepped foot on the island—the only mortal to ever do so. She is the most astonishing creature, and to discover why she interests me and how she is able to survive this, I must keep her alive.

Her happiness is another thing, though, because I do not require it, but a small part of me wants her to be happy here. How foolish.

A mortal's happiness is not my concern.

I hear her gasp for breath and speed up, needing to escape the small fraction of guilt that assaults me—a mortal emotion. Gods have no right to feel guilt, yet that is what I feel. I recognise it from other mortals I have watched.

How odd.

Maybe I am defective. Maybe my powers have grown wrong over time. I have seen some gods go mad after a while, whether from the years or the powers, it is unknown. I wonder

if that is what is happening here. All the others would think so if they realised I had not only saved someone from death, which I never do, but also brought a mortal into my safe place.

No gods come here. No one else knows this place exists. I've protected it since the beginning, but I brought her here without a second thought. I could have taken her anywhere, such as one of the many homes I have on her plane, and yet I chose here.

Why? Because she cannot escape without me?

Am I truly so starved for attention and bored that I am binding a mortal to me and trapping her like a prisoner? A frown mars my face. It seems so.

I do not look back because a god has no regrets. A god never second-guesses his decision. She is here, and she is here to stay. She might as well get used to it. If she expects me to be lenient or kind, she is sorely mistaken. I am not like the god of fate or the god of fertility. I am the god of death for a reason.

I am the darkness everyone fears.

I am the chill in the wind people huddle against.

I am the shock before the fall.

I am an entity of the end and the worst moments of a mortal's life.

The sooner Avea realises that, the better it will be for her.

I hear her exploring my house. I wish to follow her, but it would be too obvious, so I lie in my bed and close my eyes, calling upon my powers. Instead of physically watching her, I send my consciousness into one of my wraiths and follow her that way. She can see them, but he's discreet, and she doesn't appear to notice him as she hesitantly wanders around. The longer she explores, however, the more confident she gets, as if she's sure I will not pop out and surprise her.

A smile curls my lips at the daring little mortal.

She explores every nook and cranny, and for the first time, I try to imagine how she sees it through her eyes. I have spent a long time collecting objects that bring me peace or joy, and although they may not be for everyone, she doesn't seem to mind them. In fact, she seems curious about my decorations. I wish to explain each one to her and tell her what they represent, but I can't, so I reduce myself to watching. Eventually, she finds the stairs that lead upwards, and she stops on the next level, looking around. I should have shown her to a room, but when she opens the door and finds a bedroom, she shuts the door and flops down on the bed, clearly choosing one.

I make a note of it. I will need to ward it so my spirits cannot get in. Although I want her next to me at all times, this is for the best. She will need her space, mortals are emotional like that, and I should not focus all my attention on her. I am far too important. No, her staying there is best for me. I will simply call for her when I need her.

I leave her to her peace, since she would not like me watching her—mortals are touchy about things like that. It's called privacy, or some such strange expression. My eyes snap open and I sigh. I can feel the souls calling to me, ready and waiting to be crossed. Usually, I'm meticulous about sorting them and easing their passage, but they have time, so instead, I focus on my memories of tonight, my hand curling inwards to retain some of her heat.

She's so filled with life and happiness and she can touch me. It's odd, and I wish there were another god I could ask, but that would show weakness and have them talking. They are bigger gossips than humans. No, I must figure this out alone.

It means I will need to experiment. Most of all, I will need to figure out what she is. She is not merely a vampyr, and she will not be able to withhold the truth from me for long. Feeling confused, I decide to fade and simply reappear where I wish to be.

I dissolve my clothes with a thought and step into the warm, bubbling water of the spring before the waterfall and tilt my head back. I let the water soothe away any worries or thoughts until I simply drift. Birds fill the sky, and the cries of the pegasuses make me smile.

I drift until an unfamiliar noise has my eyes opening and they land on the mortal. Her eyes are wide and locked on my naked chest, filled with both shock and need. I want to ask how she got out of the house, but when she continues to watch me with fascination and lust, I lean farther back to give her a better view.

“Hello, love.” Her gaze snaps back to mine, her cheeks flushing like a mortal’s often do, and I wonder what it means. I can scent her desire on the air as much as her fear, but it’s less than earlier. Interesting. I like this scent better than her fear. “What did I say about rules?”

“The door opened.” She huffs. “I was bored, and I have been here for hours.”

I blink at that. Time passes strangely for me. It always has. After all, you do not live as long as I have and regard it as important, but for mortals, it is. I will have to remember that. “And you found me?” I raise a quizzical brow.

“I heard the water and followed it.” Her eyes drift to the side, and I want them on me once more, so I lift my hand from the water, and the noise makes her look back at me. Her gaze drops to the expanse of my chest and she swallows, the scent of her want doubling. It seems I’m not the only one affected by this strange feeling between us.

I do not blame her. I am magnificent and by far the most attractive god, and I suppose, for a mortal, she is adequate. I crave the feeling of being touched more than the beauty of her face. “Well, are you going to join me, Avea?”

“What?” She startles, her eyes widening.

I stand, letting the water sluice down my body, and her mouth drops open as her eyes roam over me like I expected. I stand taller under her gaze, my cock hardening before her, and

she continues to stare. Someone should tell the little mortal that it could be taken as an invitation, but I like it a little too much. “Are you going to join me or just watch me?” I purr.

I very much hope she takes my hand with the same bravery she showed before and allows me to explore these feelings burning within me.

CHAPTER SIX



AVEA

I stare into the god of death's face and see the flare of challenge in his black eyes. He expects me to back down, to be fearful and feel embarrassed and turn away. He's almost counting on it.

My eyes drop to his body once more. He is magnificent; there is no denying that. He is utter perfection in every way and even just glimpsing his incredible physique makes me wet and needy despite how much I hate him.

I crave him too.

I am here for a reason, though, and it's time to utilise that. Yes, he's powerful and could kill me without even blinking, but I cannot spend ten years cowering and afraid, trying to avoid him. I refuse to waste any more of my life controlled by fear. This god made a deal with me for a reason. I'm beginning to suspect it's because of loneliness, not that I would ever tell him that, which gives me an advantage. He doesn't want me dead, but if I prove him wrong, if I turn away now, a part of me knows that will change. He's as fickle as the wind, and to survive this, I will need to do everything I can to keep the god of death on my side.

Meeting those godly eyes head-on, I reach up and unclasp my dress, letting it fall to a puddle at my feet. His eyes flare and drop to my body as I step towards the spring. It looks like something out of a fantasy, with steam billowing into the sky, trees creating a shaded canopy above us, and a waterfall

making a magnificent backdrop for the god. I found a path from his house to this, and something had drawn me here.

I now realise it's him.

Holding out my hand, I wait for him to accept it, but he takes his time, running his eyes across my body, and when his gaze meets mine, his irises dance with flames. Oh yes, the god of death wants me alive.

"I'm not afraid of you," I tell him.

He tilts his head like he's confused and takes my hand, helping me down the rocks and into the water. I hiss as the heat laps at my thighs and then over my hips as I lower until it reaches just below my breasts, and I have to tilt my head back to meet his eyes.

He doesn't drop my hand like I was expecting. No, he bends over it and blows cool air, the air of the grave, across me. Goosebumps rise all over my skin, pebbling my nipples despite the heat of the water. The juxtaposition of the cold and warmth makes me shiver, and his lips quirk. "You should be, love. I have ten whole years to ruin every part of you, and I plan to start now." Releasing my hand, he sits back in the water.

He spreads his arms across the back of the spring, his thighs parted. "Well? Come and sit on your new master's lap and prove why I broke my laws of never dealing with the living."

Seeing him sit back like that, so in control and godly, is infuriating, especially as I vibrate with need and fury. I want him to feel even an inch of that, but I know I cannot deny him, so instead, I will use this to my advantage.

Each move I make and word I speak are carefully placed strategic moves.

It has to be with him, as there will only be one winner in our deal, and I plan to make sure it's me.

Undaunted by his watchful, heavy-lidded gaze, I slide through the water. He expects me to protest, to run, or to simply perch on his knee, but I surprise him when I settle on

his lap. I perch right over his hard cock and grind down on it as I meet his gaze, daring him to deny his need for me, a mortal. He might call himself my master, but this master wants his pet, and to get me, he'll need more than a deal.

Wrapping my arms loosely around his shoulders for stability, I watch as his eyes narrow on me. "What are you doing, mortal?" His words are slow and careful, demanding my obedience and acceptance of his power.

Well, fuck that. I was never good at following rules, and that's how I ended up here anyway. Leaning in, I purposely drag my pussy along his huge, hard cock, shivering at the feel, but the groan that slips from his throat is worth it. I don't give myself time to think about what I'm doing or what it would feel like to have that god-sized cock slide inside me—it would hurt just as much as it felt good.

Despite being a god, he is still just a man, one in need, and I know exactly how to play a creature like that. I'll give him a taste and leave him wanting. I glance from his lips to his hooded eyes and, with our gazes locked, I slide my lips across his. He shudders against me, and my lips go numb from the cold air of death, but I keep kissing him before biting his plump lower lip, and his eyes finally slide shut with a groan. He grabs the back of my head to deepen the kiss, so I slide farther back, away from his reach, and his eyes slam open once more.

He's furious, like a child who's been denied his favourite toy.

That is all I will ever be to this god—a toy to play with, to break—but luckily, I'm aware of that, and I know how to keep myself alive. "Not if I ruin you first," I whisper as I lean in once more and brush my lips across his. "Goodnight, god of death." I slide from his lap before he can grab me and climb gracefully from the water. I leave the dress behind as I walk away, and I feel his eyes on me the entire time.

I don't look back once.

I barely breathe until I'm back inside the house, whose doors seem to appear at my presence. When I'm in my room

with the door firmly shut, I finally gasp in some air. I might be playing the game he's set forth, but I am only mortal.

Surely a mortal cannot win against a god.

I guess only time will tell.

Ten years, I remind myself. *I have to survive ten years.*

I've done it before, and I can do it again.

CHAPTER SEVEN



MORS

Pacing around the formal dining room that has never been used, I look at the ceiling in hopes she will appear. I have not seen my little mortal since her dip in the hot spring with me. Is she hiding from me? I do not blame her. After her little stunt, I wanted to track her down and force her to her knees so she could worship me properly.

That pesky little mortal left me hard and wanting with the taste of paradise on my lips and the feel of her warmth on my skin—something I haven't felt in so long. Not only can she withstand my touch, but she voluntarily reached for me.

Now she hides from the repercussions.

Moving upstairs, I slam my fist against her door. “You will join me for a meal,” I demand.

When the door opens, she glares at me through the crack. “That wasn't part of the deal.” The door slams shut in my face, leaving me infuriated and gaping once more. Everything this mortal does surprises and angers me.

Using my power, I force the door open. She huffs and looks at me over her shoulder like I am a nuisance and not a god. Ignoring her complaints, I stride over, throw her over my shoulder, and kick the door shut.

“You bastard!”

I spank her ass hard, leaving my hand there as a warning. “Hush. You made your deal, and now you will fulfil it. You are

to see to my every need, remember? Be grateful I do not punish you after your little stunt.” Once in the dining room, I nudge out a chair and drop her into it.

With a glare, she goes to stand, so I push her down and get into her face. “Either you eat with me or I will take other things I want from you.” I expect her to shrink away, but her chin rises, and she looks down her nose at me as something like amusement courses through me.

“It better be good food,” is all she says.

My lips quirk, and I hide it by pushing her chair in and taking mine at the head of the table. By the time I’m seated and she looks at me again, I have wiped all traces of mirth from my face.

“Well, where’s the food, your greatness?” I know she is mocking me, but I simply raise a brow and it appears on the table. I may be showing off a little, but it’s worth it to see her eyes widen and her mouth drop open. She’s silent for once as she takes in the spread. I shift to ignore my hard cock, knowing shoving it in her mouth is another way I could shut her up.

“Wow.” She instantly starts filling her plate, and I watch as she begins to demolish her food with zero manners, uncaring that I am sitting here. When she catches my eyes on her as she fills her second plate, she raises her brow.

“What?” she demands.

“Nothing, little mortal.” I delicately fill my plate as I watch her. “Do all mortals eat like you?”

She snorts, and I like the uncouth sound. It suits her and fills my house with life. “Some,” she replies. “This is good shit.”

“Of course it is. I made it.”

Rolling her eyes, she ignores my response as I narrow my own.

“You have an issue with that? After I have provided for you? After I have allowed you free rein of my house—”

“With rules and chains,” she snaps, dropping the chicken wing she was holding.

“Chains meant to protect you. You made the deal, mortal —”

“Oh yes, I’m a big, scary god and you are a lowly mortal. You will worship me,” she mocks.

“I do not sound like that.”

“I do not sound like that,” she repeats, her voice lowered, and she brings her arms up to mock my muscles.

“Behave, mortal.”

“Or what?” she retorts, and I see the fire in her eyes.

“I am being kind.”

“You are not kind.”

The words fall into silence, and she starts to apologize when my power slams through the room. Food falls to the floor, plates break, and her chair skids back from the force as she holds on. “This is my realm, and you will respect me!” I roar.

Leaping to her feet, she glares at me through the eye of my storm. “Respect is earned, you overgrown toddler! Look at the tantrum you are having right now!”

“You will learn your place!” I shout, getting to my feet.

“You will learn manners, you overgrown idiot!” she screams in response.

We are two storms meeting, two powers clashing.

Her own power rises, and I taste it in the air. Whatever this mortal is, she is not just a vampyr. There is an otherness to her magic. Her eyes flare before turning fully black, her hair turns bright white, and her skin glows from within as her fangs descend.

She looks magnificent, not that I will ever tell her that.

“Manners,” I hiss as I get in her face. “You are an uncouth, feral, little mortal”

“You are a dumb, muscle-headed, cocky god,” she retorts, not backing down in the face of my godly powers. As the room drops to icy temperatures, my wraiths battering the walls, she stands in the middle of it all with her own powers, facing me down, ready to fight me.

Grabbing her, I slam her onto the table. “I’ll teach you manners, mortal,” I warn, ripping off her dress. She tries to fight me, but I’m too strong.

I keep her pinned with my powers as I lean down and cover her heated pussy with my hand. Her lips twist in anger and need as she growls, “You wouldn’t dare.”

“You should never challenge a god, mortal,” I retort. “Keep fighting though. I like the way you fight. It won’t stop me from fucking you, but it will make me harder.”

“You sick bastard!” she snaps, kicking out at me. Catching her foot, I pin it to the table and grind my hand into her wet pussy.

“You are wet for me. Do you like fighting me, mortal? Do you like arguing with me? I think you do. I think you love it. I think you were hoping I would throw you down on this table and fuck you so you could use the excuse that I started it, that I wanted you and you didn’t want me. But oh no, mortal, this won’t be how it is. You’ll beg for my cock.”

“Never,” she snaps, but there is a tremor in her voice, and she grinds into my hand, seeking the pleasure I can give her.

“Oh, but you will, and it will be so sweet. Until then, I’ll take your edge off. We can’t have you raging around my house, destroying everything.”

“That’s you, you idiot—” Her reply ends in a moan as I remove my hand and cover her cunt with my mouth.

“You were saying?” I mock as I press her thighs wider and lick her pretty little pink pussy, groaning at her taste.

She tastes like wild magic.

Like forests and the ocean.

She tastes like life.

Closing my eyes, I dip my tongue inside her, ignoring her protests since her hands grip my hair and drag me tighter against her. She can say she doesn't want this, but nothing will move me from licking this sweet, mortal pussy until she surrenders.

Circling my tongue around her clit, I soak in the noises she makes, loving her surrender. Her channel quivers, begging to be filled, and my cock strains against my trousers, wanting to do just that, but I fight back my own want as she rides my face.

I see hatred in her eyes, and that's what makes up my mind. If I am going to be left wanting, then so is she. I thrust my tongue inside her, hitting that spot that has her legs jerking, and then I keep my tongue there and make it colder. She screams, and she's so close to coming, I instantly pull back.

Standing, I lick my lips clean of her taste, looking down at her spread across my table like a feast. I have to ignore the urge inside of me to drag her into my arms and slam her onto my dick, but I keep my word. She will beg for my cock before she gets it. Leaning up on her elbows, she frowns as I step back.

"If you want me to fuck you, then beg," I demand.

Her eyes narrow. "Never."

"Then have a good evening, Avea." I turn away like she did earlier and leave her there, raging after me. I chuckle as I head to my rooms, still tasting life on my tongue, staining it forever like her soul has stained mine.

CHAPTER EIGHT



AVEA

Pacing around my room, I snarl at the air, furious at him and myself. How could I let him touch me? How could I fall so far into pleasure that I forgot who and what he is?

Stupid, very stupid, Avea, and you're never stupid.

I play the game, and I keep my head down. I don't make rash decisions, and I certainly never let a pretty face and some pleasure sway me. Not like tonight.

I blame the electricity that formed while we were arguing. It tugged me to him, exploding through me and blinding me. Before I knew it, I was on the table and his head was between my thighs. Even now, my pussy clenches at the memory and my clit throbs with need—a need he seems to have stoked into an inferno.

I hate him, and I hate this place and the deal I made.

And yet I want him.

It's infuriating. I bet he's laughing to himself or telling his immortal god friends about the lowly half breed he left wet and wanting. It's all a game to him, right? He looks down on me, that much is obvious.

He's using me.

So why can't I use him?

No, screw that.

Throwing myself onto the bed with a heavy sigh, I cover my face with my arm, ignoring my traitorous pussy that demands I find him and finish what we started, even if I have to beg for his cock. There are some things I won't do though. I can survive ten years of want, right? I have my fingers, so I can take care of myself. Okay, that's a lie. I know nothing will ever compare to his touch again.

The flash of his smirking, mocking eyes as he lapped my cunt has me moaning and arching in the sheets. What fucking magic is this? Has he spelled me?

I hate him so much for making me want him when I've never wanted another, but ten years is a long time.

He wants me too, though, so maybe I can use that. It seems like playing with fire, or more like launching myself onto an active volcano, but what other choice do I have? I will not let the god of death have control over my mind. He might have control over my body and soul for now, but he will never have that or my heart, and that's the way I intend to keep it.

Groaning, I roll over and bury my head into the ridiculously soft duvet, screaming into it. What is he doing right now? Is he touching himself to the thought of me? Or is he sleeping?

Wait, do gods sleep?

No, stop thinking of him. Just stop it.

He might have saved my friend, but he's an enemy, and I need to remember that. He can just as easily kill me as fuck me, and I should be wary of what he can do and what he is capable of because despite everything, he is a god, while I'm nothing ... I'm worse than nothing.

I'm a secret long since forgotten.

Before I know it, I fall into a turbulent slumber with that thought ringing around my head, chasing me into my dreams and pulling the past best left forgotten forward.

The forest sings with life around me. Animals call to their mates and their families, prey and predators living together in harmony. The moon shines brightly down on me as I crawl

from the rubble I have made into my house, the familiar flow of magic coursing across my bare skin. There is no need for clothes here, no need for modesty.

There is just this.

Existence.

Life.

The circle of life flows through everything here, including me. Treading on silent feet, I stop before the lake and peer down at the glowing water, seeing my own reflection. I look older now. I have no concept of time to compare myself to but logically, I know I am aging. My body is different, my hair is longer, and my face has lost the baby fat. I'm taller too. How long have I been here?

I cannot even remember anything before this forest that is my home and my prison. I simply woke here one day like I snapped into existence. I don't know how I didn't starve or die, but the animals and magic here seemed to accept and welcome me. Food was left as gifts from those that inhabit the forest, the trees sheltered me from the extreme elements, and water found me wherever I travelled. I survived, but I know nothing other than this forest.

Not for the first time, I look to the sky, wondering what else lies out there beyond the never-ending trees and magic that keeps it all alive. One time, I found the edges of the trees and stared out into a rolling field, and in the distance, I saw lights. I spent two days there, just staring, before I worked up the courage to try and step from the trees, only to be thrown back into their sheltering darkness.

I spent a ridiculous amount of time trying to find a way through the invisible barrier, but it was useless, and I grew tired and despondent and found myself back here, at my home.

All alone.

I have nothing to keep me company but the books I found in the forgotten villages. The decorations in my home were scavenged from ruins just like the one I live in. I even found a temple once, though when I stepped inside, something akin to

death greeted me. It felt like the brush of it when I freed a dying animal or took life and energy to sustain me.

After all, that's what this world is—an exchange of energy from one thing to another.

Everything that makes up this world has energy, from the grass underfoot to the stars in the sky. Sometimes, I swear I feel it seep into me when I'm injured or tired and it wipes me clean. A lot of unexplained things happen here in the forest.

Is it normal?

How would I know? From the books I've read, it doesn't seem to be. They speak of a world filled with humans and animals alike. Is that what I am? A human? I'm not sure. I don't seem to fit into their description. Although I look like them, this power that fills me is never depicted in any of the books. The closest I have come to resembling another is when I read about supernatural creatures and superstition, especially about vampyrs. I reach up now and thumb my fangs. I don't need to drink blood to survive like they do, though I tried it once and it did make me feel more alive. I didn't sleep for days and I had more energy, but now, I mainly use them to rip into the meat and vegetables I eat. I am also not restricted to the night like they were in the book. I like the night, it's my favourite time, but I also love the day, watching the sun light up the splendour of the forest.

So what am I?

Why am I all alone?

Is this a cage?

Is this a punishment?

Or am I truly the only one left in this world?

I guess I will never know. Closing my eyes, I dive into the water and let it wash me clean of those useless thoughts. Being here and surviving is a task as it is, so I should focus on that and not what I cannot control.

I sink to the bottom, letting the water surround me in a warm embrace. I am so desperate for touch and to be held that

I have to succumb to this. I once watched a family of boars, and I felt an aching kinship, wishing I had someone to spend my life with.

Closing my eyes once more, I float in the water, my thoughts once again turning to who and what I am. It never used to bother me, but the older I get, the more questions I have, and no matter how I distract myself with patching the house's roof, building a new vegetable garden, or saving a hurt animal, it does not disappear.

I'm desperate for answers ... for change.

That's when the spark of wrongness arrives in the air, and the water wraps tighter around me as if to protect me. Propelling myself up, I break through the surface with a gasp and search the shore. Energy swells around me as if preparing for an attack, and the scents of leather and blood reach me here, deep in the lake.

It's the scent of something I've never encountered before, and it's drawing closer.

That's when another noise cuts through the air.

A voice.

One like mine.

"Shit, how the hell do I get back from here?"

Springing from the water, I race through the trees to find the source, my steps heavy, as if my body knows something I don't. Excitement pours through me, and magic pulses inside me as if it has been waiting for this all my life.

Change comes for us all.

CHAPTER NINE



MORS

Lying in my bed, I allow my consciousness to float away and down, submerging myself into her dreams. It's a rare talent, even amongst gods, but she is in my realm, in my house, with my mark stained upon her soul from our deal, and that allows me access to her whether she knows it or not. It does take a considerable amount of power, but I need answers.

What is my little mortal?

More than that, what does she dream of?

Is it an escape? Or does she dream of someone else?

I find that thought infuriating.

Fading into her dreams, I watch her wander through the forest I find myself in. It's a familiar forest, the one in which I found her and we made a deal, yet when she looks at herself in the water of a lake, she appears younger. Her eyes are less guarded, less haunted. She glows from within with the pure power of nature—something that makes me stumble from the strength of it—but she is alone.

She is younger and hiding within an enchanted forest that the other gods won't even step foot in. Why her? Why here? Moreover, why didn't I ever feel her throughout the years? My question is answered when the power around her begins to conceal her, hiding her from anyone.

Her doing or another's?

Who is this mortal?

What is she?

I am intrigued by her. I watch her race through the woods, floating above the ground. The trees help her, and the animals scurry alongside, not the least bit afraid.

The dream suddenly fades.

My eyes snap open, and more questions than answers linger in my mind, a frown marring my lips. The power felt familiar yet foreign all at the same time. She had those fangs then too, but she is no vampyr. So what is she?

I guess only time will tell.

I watch her move around my house. She does not know I am following her. If she did, I have a feeling I would be attacked either verbally or physically. It's obvious she's avoiding me and wants her alone time, but I cannot seem to give her that. I watch her every move. I watch the paintings she seems to appreciate and vow to get more for her room. I make notes on what she likes and doesn't so I can care for her better.

She is my charge, after all, and that is the only reason why.

She is a mystery, that is for sure, and when she settles into the library with a book, I can't look away. I memorise the way her hair falls, the way her brow furrows as she reads, and how her lips silently move as if sounding out the words. Her delicious legs are crossed, bared by a floaty dress. She is beautiful for a mortal, and desire hammers at my temples, demanding that I claim her and the deal she made me.

Patience, I remind myself, she will beg soon.

Fading into the shadows, I feel the call from below, and with a suffering sigh, I evaporate, leaving my little mortal alone. I have duties to attend to, and they are more important than babysitting her.

I appear in my throne before the gates, frowning at all the souls. There are more than usual. I scan them, noting they are

a mixture of races, so at least those pesky judges haven't been slaughtering their whole race again. I did have to explain to the other gods why I allowed it to happen, as if I needed to clarify my actions to anyone else.

Focusing back on my job, I spot the tiger in the distance, carefully escorting a soul.

Judge.

Ignoring him and his presence, I focus on the first soul—a sobbing little girl. I slide from my throne, even though I'm not supposed to. It's my duty to stay impartial, but her pain tugs at me. Only a monster could watch that and do nothing. I stop before her and take her hand. The cold, ghostly weight settles against me as I feel her soul.

She is so innocent and pure, it makes my wretched soul feel dirty.

Tears still blind her eyes. "Are you death?" she asks.

"Yes, little one." I crouch. "Now you are safe. Your mom won't hurt you anymore. I will take you to a better place, where you will never be hungry, sad, or hurt."

"Does it have blankets? I lost mine."

"I personally assure you that there will be more than you can count. Are you ready?"

She looks around but bravely nods. "What happens to my mummy?"

Her mother left her to die, yet despite her actions, this little girl worries for her. Love is strange. "She will be okay," I lie before standing. I walk her towards the gates. "Now go, little one, and be free of the pain you suffered in life."

Once she's through the gates, she looks back, a bright smile blooming over her face as the transformation comes over her. Her body turns corporeal once more, with bright blonde hair, glowing green eyes, and a chubby red face. "What about you?"

"Me?" I murmur.

“Are you in a better place?” she asks.

Swallowing, I release her hand. “Go, little one.” The gates close, and although I have a line of souls to cross, I evaporate. They can wait, but this cannot. It’s easy to locate her mother. She resides in the south, and I watch as she stumbles into her shack. She left her own child there to starve, with bugs feasting on her flesh, in her own filth with nothing but a ratty blanket for warmth.

I am not a judge, but I am a god, and tonight she will meet her god for what she did to that innocent soul.

Fading into the shack, I wait as she stumbles and turns. A scream leaves her throat as she trips backwards at the sight of me. “Who are you?” The language automatically translates in my mind.

“A god who showed kindness to your daughter when you never did. I protected her soul and had to watch her cross over.”

“Get out.” She throws something at me, and it fades through my body. Her eyes widen, and with a flick of my fingers, I drop her to her knees. Tears instantly form in her eyes. “Please,” she begs.

Leaning down, I wipe one away in disgust. “Did your daughter beg? Did she cry the way you are right now?”

“Please, I never wanted to be a mother!”

“But you were one!” The power explodes from me, the windows and the door ripping from their hinges. “You were a mother, and you hurt and abused that precious soul that was dependent on you. You are not worthy of the life you have.”

“I’ll do anything.” She begins to crawl, and I step back in disgust, peering down at her.

“All I want is your soul. Your death,” I purr.

“No. No, no.” She rocks back and forth, her mind splintering.

She’s so weak.

“You will not go to the same place as your daughter. I will ensure that you suffer the same torture and mistreatment she did for the rest of your immortal dead life.” I press my hand to her head and rip her soul from her body. She collapses, her eyes empty and unseeing. I fade out as quickly as I faded in, her soul tethered to me.

I reappear once more at my throne, and I release her soul, injecting it down to suffer. Feeling disgusted by what was allowed to happen, I am angry as I help the others. I do not let it show though. You can think that death is cruel, but sometimes death is just another beginning.

Death doesn't have to be painful. Some welcome me with a familiar smile and open arms at the end—they are my favourite. Some fight, and others are angry, but it is rare. Once the souls have been sorted, I am exhausted—not physically, as I cannot be as a god, but mentally and emotionally, and I find myself appearing back in my house, searching out my new house guest.

I need her vitality.

She's still in the library, and when she sees me, she scoffs. “Do not even dare to try to touch me, asshole.”

When I just stare, she frowns, putting her book down. “What?” she demands.

“How could a mother hurt her own child?” It perplexes me, but more than that, it enrages me.

“I don't understand.” She sits up slowly, her eyes softening and her lips turning down.

“May I sit with you for a moment? I need to remind myself that there is good in the world.”

She watches me carefully and then wordlessly slides to the side so I can sit next to her. I absorb her scent and warmth next to me, letting it warm my angry soul.

“How do you know I'm good?” she asks.

“You gave up your future, your life, to save your friend's life. Not many would do that, little one.”

She's quiet then, and she slowly picks up the book and starts to read. It's nice and almost comfortable.

I turn my head to watch her. "Read to me?" I request, and I think the fact that it's a question and not a demand makes her hesitate before she starts to read out loud.

My eyes close, focusing on the tale she weaves. I let her voice wash away the last of the pain from today's work.

Something warm covers my hand, and I open my eyes and glance down to see her voluntarily covering my hand with hers. She doesn't stop reading, and I don't bring it up in case she stops touching me. The warmth washes through me, making me shudder.

It's a simple, voluntary touch, and yet I am weak.

She constantly surprises me. I never know what this little mortal will do. I like that.

CHAPTER TEN



AVEA

I don't know what happened to Mors, but he seems vulnerable. I don't even know why I reached out to touch him other than he looked so lonely, so lost, I couldn't resist, knowing that feeling well. With his eyes shut, he's almost human.

I wonder what happened, but I don't ask, and I quickly turn my attention back to the book, not wanting to be caught gawking, but when his thumb starts to rub along the back of my hand, I stumble over the words. He doesn't make fun of me like I expect, and I quickly continue reading to cover up my blunder.

I both hate and love his touch.

Mateo called me touch starved. Maybe he's right because I'm accepting the touch of a man, a god, I hate.

Idiot.

Hours pass like that, with me reading and no other part of us touching other than our hands, yet I'm acutely aware of him next to me, and when I shut the book, the silence feels uncomfortable. I never know who I am going to get—the judgemental asshole god or this—and I'm stumbling through, unsure what to do or say.

“Why did you ask about the mother and daughter?” I murmur softly, stroking the book with my other hand. There is every book you could imagine in this library. I even recognise some from my childhood, and the aching reminder of it filled

me until I found myself hiding from him in here, seeking the words just like I did as a child to escape my prison.

Didn't I do that, after all?

Trade one prison for another.

I feel him look at me, and I turn my head, my eyes on him. As usual, the lightning strikes inside me, but I ignore the questionable pull and desire this god causes in me without even trying. His eyes are lazily heavy-lidded, and his hair is pushed back as if he ran his fingers through it in agitation, yet he's utter perfection, and for a moment, I just stare. "There was a soul today, a small girl. Her mother abused and abandoned her to die in her own filth."

Covering my mouth, I choke back my horror, and he watches my reaction intently. "She died?"

"Horribly," he admits, not lying to me like most would. "I helped her cross. I held her hand so she wouldn't be alone anymore, and she will be happy there."

"You are sure?"

"It's the only thing I am sure of," he murmurs, watching me once more. "Would it make you feel better if I told you that I hunted down her mother and killed her and damned her soul for all eternity? Or would you think I was more of a monster?"

"No. I think you did exactly the right thing," I reply. "She deserved it. As for your question, I don't know. I don't know how someone could do that to someone they are supposed to love. Why does anyone hurt another? What makes one person dive towards danger and others from it? Humans are complex, selfish creatures, and evil exists in any race. I'm sorry you had to see that though."

He startles like he didn't expect that. "It is my duty."

"But it still can't be easy." I frown as he blinks as if he never thought about it that way.

"You like the library," he states, changing the subject, and I let him. It's almost ... nice. We aren't arguing, but there's a

tenseness to us as if we are just waiting for the other to explode and start a fight. We are enemies, after all.

“I like books,” I admit. “They are a good escape when you need a new reality.”

“You want an escape?” he murmurs, but he doesn’t seem angry, more curious than anything.

“Wouldn’t you?” I retort boldly, meeting his eyes. “I made the deal willingly, but that doesn’t mean I’m not scared and trapped here, so yes, I need an escape.” I soften my voice, and his brow furrows as if he’s truly confused by my words, and then he sighs. He stands, continuing to hold my hand like he doesn’t even realise he’s holding it, drawing me up with him, before he walks from the library and out of the house.

“Where are we going?” I ask, worried he’s going to have another outburst or tantrum like last night.

“To find you an escape,” he says with a searching look.

Unsure what I see in his gaze, I avert my eyes and look at our surroundings. It truly is beautiful here. Part of it reminds me of the forest I grew up in, which was nature at its finest, but this feels more ... otherworldly.

When we stop before the edge of the island and he lets out a low, short noise, I realise it definitely is, especially when two pegasuses fly closer to investigate.

No, there were no magical creatures in my forest ... well, at least not like this.

“They are sentient,” he says, answering my unspoken question as he bows, so I repeat the action.

They both incline their head towards us, their huge, feathered wings holding them aloft as their feathers glisten in the light. They are beautiful.

Mors holds out his other hand, palm up, and leaves the decision to them. Slowly, the one on the right moves over and accepts his hand by placing his head towards it. Just as quickly, Mors grabs me and gently tosses me onto the back of the pegasus. I almost tumble over the other side, but my quick

reflexes cause me to grab the mane, stopping me with a low yelp.

Mors chuckles, as does the pegasus, and I glare at him as he leaps onto the back of the other one. Show-off.

“How do I steer?” I ask, gripping tighter.

The pegasus snorts as if insulted, and I wince. “Sorry,” I mutter.

“Pegasuses are very emotional creatures. They are allowing you this honour, so they will show us what they wish. Sometimes, little mortal, you simply have to let go and enjoy the ride.”

“Somehow, I don’t feel like that’s usual for you,” I snap, but the wind snatches it away as the pegasus flaps its wings and soars higher into the air. Gripping the mane tighter, I clench my thighs to hold on, but the gentle flap of wings slows my panicking heart, so I relax my grip.

It grunts at me as if in thanks, and I stroke its neck. “Thank you,” I murmur. “My name is Avea. What’s yours?”

When there’s nothing, my cheeks heat in embarrassment, but Mors looks over. “That is Willow, and he said he is very happy to meet you.” I blink, and Mors grins, and it’s almost blinding in its happiness. “Now hold on, little mortal.”

I don’t even have time to scream as Willow tucks in his wings and spirals down, only to flare them back out and catch us. My scream turns into laughter as I float in the air with him, feeling weightless and free, just like I needed.

There are no bars or prison.

Just pure happiness.

With my arms spread wide, I close my eyes as laughter peals from my lips.

I’m flying.

I’m actually flying.

CHAPTER ELEVEN



MORS

I watch her, and something begins to ache in my chest. Her eyes are closed and her mortal arms are spread wide. Her hair flows in the wind and shines under the sun. The clouds around her only seem to highlight the mortal beauty riding the pegasus and embracing it. Rubbing my chest absentmindedly, I mentally offer my thanks to them, and after a while, they circle back and drop us off.

I grip Avea's hips to lift her, then I let her slide down my body as I bow my thanks to the mythical beasts. She does one better and steps forward. "Thank you, Willow." She lays a gentle kiss on his head and presses her forehead to his for a moment.

"He wants me to tell you that anytime you need him, just call." I glare at the pegasus and he chuckles. Avea steps back to my side, making me smirk at him, and then we watch as they take off into the sky where they belong. They are wild, sentient creatures after all.

"Thank you, Mors."

I peer down to see the sincerity in her eyes. She means it. There are no arguments or hatred, just appreciation.

"You're welcome, little mortal. I'm starving. Shall we find some food?"

"I thought you'd never ask." She takes off towards the house, so I have no choice but to follow, and I do so willingly.

Who is this little mortal who is turning my world upside down?

And why do I suddenly care if she is happy or not?

Odd.

“Where’s the kitchen?” she asks once we reach the dining room.

“Erm, why?” I query, perplexed by her question.

“To cook?” She gives me a bewildered look.

Cook? “I do not cook. I simply use magic.” I shrug, truly confused. Does she do this cooking a lot? No wonder mortals are always tired.

Crossing her arms, she glares at me, her nose scrunching adorably. “Is that your way of telling me you can’t cook?”

I huff. “I am an ancient god of power, death, and worlds.”

“So you can cook?”

“Of course I can.” I’m unwilling to lose to this little spunky mortal. She slowly smiles like she caught me in a trap, and I get a little scared.

Just a little, not that I would ever tell her that.

“Good, then where’s the kitchen so we’ll cook? No magic, just us.”

I see the challenge in her eyes and, unwilling to back down, I lead her to the room she desires, even though I’ve never used it. I modelled this on their homes, after all, but she seems delighted and squeaks, clapping her hands.

It gives me satisfaction.

Maybe I should talk to someone. Can gods get sick?

Rushing to the fridge, she frowns as she opens it. “It’s empty. How can we cook?” She shuts the door, looking truly deflated.

As I send out my magic, I tell myself it's because it's easier to make her comfortable than fight. "Try again," I murmur, leaning into the cupboard and watching her.

She opens the door, and her jaw drops as she turns to me. "Okay, fancy pants, let's see if you are as good at cooking as you are at magic." She starts to pull ingredients out, mumbling to herself. "Yes, this will do. We'll start off easy. We are going to make a Pilogram. It's a recipe I—well, it's one I learned as a child."

I want to question what she was truly going to say, but she's too busy moving around, and then she turns to see me standing there.

"Well, come and wash your hands, oh, and magic us aprons."

No one ever commands me. I want to deny her, but with one arched brow from her, I give in.

It's for the peace, I tell myself, no other reason.

Snorting, I click my fingers and do just that. She giggles when she sees hers that says, "Little mortal," and mine that says, "Her god."

"Wow." Shaking her head, she starts to divide the ingredients and pull out chopping boards and knives as I wash my hands.

I should leave her to it. I have much more important things to do than this, but I find myself moving closer anyway and waiting for her next instruction. How strange. Maybe she has cast something on me.

Maybe she does possess some kind of magic and is using it against me. I will make a note to check later and not ask her. I can't have her controlling me no matter how cute she is when she giggles. Handing me a knife, she tells me to cut the vegetables, watching me carefully.

"No, no, like this." She takes the knife and shows me, then she hands it back.

I copy her movements, watching in awe as she perfectly and quickly does the same to hers in the time it takes me to chop one. “When did you learn to cook?”

“When you have to look after yourself, you either learn to cook and eat or die. I found that I liked it, too, and I guess it just stuck.” She shrugs as she pulls out the saucepan and fills it with water. “I don’t suppose we could cheat here, though, and you could make the water boil?”

Smirking, I do so without even looking, and she grins. “Show-off.”

“Cheater,” I retort and then drop the knife. “Done,” I admit proudly.

“Nice, now for the next step. It shouldn’t be an issue since you can cook,” she mocks.

“Little mortal,” I growl in warning.

“God of death,” she growls back, and I just stare.

Her eyes narrow on me as we glare at each other. The sight makes my heart skip a beat.

She eventually breaks our stare down by giggling and turning away, the sound worming its way inside me and making me shift uncomfortably. “What’s next?” I ask gruffly. Luckily, she doesn’t notice my inner turmoil and simply directs me.

Side by side, god and mortal, we cook.

I burn the meat, but she manages to save most of it with spices and a sauce, plating it up with rice and vegetables and some bread that she made that smells like warmth and home. When I step back, I look at the plates in awe.

I never knew cooking could feel so good. Food was always something I simply had to eat to survive, so I never cooked. Not until her.

The little mortal is changing everything.

Grabbing both plates, she smiles up at me. “Grab the drinks and the cutlery, please.” Without waiting to see if I’ll

follow her orders, she hums to herself and moves into the dining room. She places the plates next to each other rather than my seat at the head of the table.

I grumble but grab what she ordered and sit, ignoring the need to move to the head and assert some control. This is my house, and she is mine, yet I don't feel like I'm in charge. She's running the show right now, while I am simply here.

She starts to eat, so I have no choice but to copy her, and the first taste makes me moan. "How is this food so good?"

"Because it's made with love and a whole lot of fat." She laughs. "I can't believe you've never cooked for yourself before."

"I have magic. Why would I?" I feel ... shame move through me at that confession.

"Erm, for fun? Fine, you don't cook, but what hobbies do you have?" she asks. For once, we aren't fighting, and I like it, even if her question makes me frown.

"Hobbies?"

She pauses with a forkful of food nearly to her mouth.

"Little one, I'm the god of death. I do not have time for ... hobbies."

"Everyone should, otherwise your entire life—sorry, godhood—is surely just spent working and revolving around death. Where's the fun in that? Where's the excitement? The joy? The sadness? The pain? How can you help lost souls if you cannot feel what they are feeling? Tell me, Mors, have you ever felt anything other than disconnected?"

"I am a god. We are not made to feel," I reply, and the smile she gives me is almost patronising.

"Then I feel sorry for you."

"For me?" I scoff. "I will live forever. I am all-powerful and all-seeing. I never want for anything, yet you feel sorry for me?"

“What’s the use in immortality if you never feel anything or ever truly experience anything? You are simply observing life. You have no skin in the game either way. No hopes, no dreams, you just are. You aren’t even truly a being. If you say gods are supposed to be better than all of us, then how can you be if you’ve never felt true heartbreak or joy?”

“I—” I close my mouth, staring at her. “It is our duty to serve our realms. Emotions simply hinder us.”

“Emotions are what guide us,” she replies softly. “Emotions are the very reason we do everything. Emotions are what make us alive. Surely you know that?”

I frown. “Blood and magic make you alive.”

Sighing, she puts down her fork, and I have the distinct feeling I’ve disappointed her. I don’t like that. “Technically, yes, but without it, we would all be boring creatures who never did anything wrong or exciting. We would just exist, but we don’t. We feel every inch of it. We connect with others over pain and hope. We see the beauty in the world and it gives us joy. We see death and we are sad. Emotions give us a reason to live rather than just exist.”

“I see.”

Her face falls at that and I frown. She looks back at her food and eats. The silence stretches on, and I debate picking a fight simply to fill it. I like her voice and her way of seeing the world.

Is she right? Do emotions drive everything they do? If so, that must be exhausting.

Then again, haven’t my emotions driven my every action when it comes to her? The deal I made and the reaction I have around her are not logical, after all.

I am a liar. I have felt before.

Have I felt for her?

Once she’s done eating, she clears the table, and I watch her go. When she comes back, she frowns at me once more, and in her gaze, I see pity and sadness.

“Goodnight, Mors.” She turns away, leaving me alone, feeling cold and desolate again.

I need her warmth just for one moment to get me through until our next interaction.

At least, that’s what I tell myself as I do what I do next.

I grab her hand, and she peers down at it. “I have felt emotions. Once,” I admit.

“When?” she asks, clearly not believing me.

“When you walked into my temple and met my eyes.”

CHAPTER TWELVE



AVEA

I'm bored. I'm in a god realm with endless options and possibilities, but I'm bored. Okay, more like I'm lonely and bored. I guess I have changed a lot since I was that lost girl in the forest. I crave contact now. I crave excitement and stimuli constantly so I don't fade away once more.

It's what gets me up, and after lying in the huge tub for far too long, I slip into another elegant dress, which seems to keep appearing in the wardrobe. This one is black with gold skull embellishments across the bodice. It flares out under my breasts and falls to my feet, with one long sleeve and the other shoulder bare. I leave my hair loose and set off to find Mors. Maybe I'll start a fight or demand he entertain me.

My pussy pulses at that and I ignore it.

I search the house, but I don't find him. I'm just passing the corridor downstairs when another door opens, leading outside. The house seems to want me to find him. The last time I did, he was naked, and I almost gave into the desire between us. I hesitate, but only for a moment before strolling outside. I close my eyes as the sun hits my skin and warms me. Birds chirp in the distance, and a smile curls my lips.

It's not too bad here, I guess. It's beautiful, but I miss people. I miss Mateo and my friends. I never had anything to do with the court if I could help it, and they all hated me anyway. The fact that I was a half breed, even if they didn't know what kind, disgusted them. The only reason they

welcomed me was because Mateo agreed to mate the king's niece since he was powerful. I still remember that day and how willing he was to give up his future and happiness to give me a home I had always wanted.

It turned out well since they fell in love, but that home was just a dream. Under the glittering gold and tempting blood was just more bitterness and anger. There were games played that I didn't understand but quickly had to learn. It was a lair of debauchery homing those who prey on the weak. It was never what I thought it would be. I stayed because I had nowhere else to go. All I knew was that I was part of them, nothing else. I guess I never wanted to find out what I could be. Once I found myself visiting a fey shop for answers, but I couldn't bring myself to go inside. No matter how much I hated my life, finding out the truth would have changed everything.

It was better to be a member of the court than their enemy. Even if they hated me, I was one of them. Now, they will think I have turned feral or abandoned them if I stay away for too long. They are used to me wandering off and spending time away from their call, but I must answer it when they do. It is my duty as one of them. I ignored it often before I made this deal. No doubt I will be punished for that. No, maybe it's better here, even if I am lonely and craving contact with someone, anyone, who understands me, but then again, they never truly did either.

Like Mors, I am different.

I stand alone.

Maybe that's why I drift down the path, searching for him. Isn't he also looking for understanding? For someone just like him? He's hinted that even amongst the gods, he is different. Is Mors lonely?

Is he lost like me?

All I know is, I have ten years here. Dreaming of the past and the people in it won't change anything. I made my decision, and I have to live with it. I have to live here with him, so I may as well make the most of it while I can. When I go back, he promised riches and happiness, so maybe I can

leave the court for good, travel the world, and find the happiness I so badly crave.

Mateo is my best friend, but he's mated now so he will understand. I was never allowed to mate or given the opportunity to. I was hidden like a bad secret most of the time. I was good enough to fuck, but not to love, and they never shared blood with me in case I lessened their pure, perfect fucking vamp blood.

My thoughts begin to spiral, turning bitter, so I focus on my feet and the path I'm taking. Dwelling on what has been done to me and how I have been treated will change nothing. I am here now, where I am not hungry, trod on, or mistreated. I am not cast aside or forgotten. I am death's companion, and death is as lonely as I am.

I find him lying in some long grass, his eyes closed. He is only wearing a pair of loose black trousers, his feet and chest bare, and I stare for way longer than what's considered appropriate.

"Everything okay, little one?" he asks. It seems like he truly wonders rather than feeling as if it's something he has to ask. Maybe he has more emotions than he admitted.

He also isn't bristling for a fight, so I lift the edges of my dress and lie next to him. When I turn my head, one of his eyes cracks open to meet mine. Even one orb sends power and desire curling through me. His nostrils flare, no doubt sensing it, but for once, he doesn't mock me or say anything. His eye simply closes once more as he waits for me to respond. He relaxes further, as if he's happy I'm here, and despite my anger at this god and our differences, I find that I don't mind his company either.

It's better than being alone.

"I'm bored," I tell him.

"Bored, what is that?" I see his lips curling down in a frown.

Huffing out a laugh, I turn over to fully face him. He copies the movement, opening his eyes and awaiting my

answer. Unlike most, he doesn't seem to be engaging in the conversation simply to talk, but to listen. He wants to know what I think.

“Of course you don't know what boredom is. It's when you are ... restless. When you lack something to do. I never used to feel like this,” I admit with a furrowed brow. “Before, there was always so much to do, but once I joined the court, I was often bored.”

“Bored,” he repeats. “How silly, how could you be bored, as you say, with so much beauty and splendour around you? With such power and life?” I cock my head, and he smiles sadly. “Close your eyes, little one.”

“If you try anything, I'll hit you,” I grumble as I close them.

His soft laugh wafts over me, making me shudder. “Focus on my voice, on what I'm saying. Feel the wind, feel the ancient tale it's telling. Feel the sun and the way it warms you, speaking its truth on your skin. Listen to the animals around us and the lives they are living. There is so much power, life, and stories around us. If you simply pay attention, how could you ever be bored?”

His voice is soft and smooth, rolling over my skin and causing goosebumps. My fangs ache, and my body stirs, but I force myself to focus on his words and the story he is weaving.

Is that what he's doing here?

Watching the story of the world around us unfold without him?

“Do you feel it, little one?”

“I do,” I admit. “Is that what you were doing? Listening to the story nature has to tell?” My eyes open and meet his. He's leaning on one elbow, peering down at me, blocking out part of the sun. His shadow falls across me, bringing a chill I am growing to appreciate.

“Partly.” He lies back down. “I find it grounds me before I have to go down there and work through the souls. I need some beauty, some solace, before all the death. I suppose that

sounds silly. I am the god of death, after all, but balance is important to my duty. Otherwise, I would grow weary and wouldn't conduct my role."

"It's important to you," I murmur.

"Of course. I am what stands between damnation and happiness, light and dark. I am neither and I am both. I offer comfort to those in their darkest times. Some see me as cruel, forbidding, and dark, but it is not all that I am. I can give life as easily as I take it, and sometimes, I crave life as much as my soul fills with death."

I simply stare at him. He's not what I was expecting at all. Don't get me wrong, he's terrifying, and the power he wields is insane. He holds control over life and death, but under that is just a man—one trying to make his way through his position and this world he was thrust into.

Just like me.

I don't want to like him, but I can't help understanding him, even a little, and when you understand someone, you start to care for them whether you wish to or not. I once read a book that said to understand and to hate someone is to love them because once you understand their motives, you understand their heart and emotions, and you cannot do anything but love that.

"I like it here," I tell him, staring at the sky once more. "Look, that looks like a horse in the clouds."

"It's a cloud."

"No, in the shape, silly." I grin. "And that one could be a frog."

"Oh, I see. The shapes make up objects. Strange. Let me try. That one could be a square."

I nudge him as I laugh. "You can do better," I tease.

Grumbling, he squints his eyes as if he's really focusing on the clouds. "There." He points, and I follow his finger. "That looks like a wolf."

“Yes, see? Okay, that one, it looks like a man riding a lizard.”

His chuckle makes me grin. “That one could be you fighting a house.”

Our game goes on until we run out of insane objects, and when I turn, he’s grinning at me. “I do not understand boredom, but I’m glad you sought me out to help. If you are still bored, you could come with me.”

“Come with you?” I ask softly.

“I am due downstairs to carry out my duties. I have never brought another living being, but if you wish—”

“I do.” I climb my knees. “I’d love to watch.”

He elegantly rolls to his feet and offers me his hand. I accept it and the cool sting that accompanies it. “Good, I’ll bring you. Just be mindful. These souls are lost and scared, but do not fear them. They cannot hurt you.”

“And you won’t let them?” I finish with a grin.

“You belong to me, Avea. Nothing will ever hurt you again,” he promises with a dark look.

The sensual vow makes my heart skip a beat and my throat go dry. “Then lead the way,” I rasp.

He’s oblivious to my confused thoughts as he turns and begins to walk.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN



AVEA

I'm unsure what to expect, but it was not this. I was expecting darkness and blood, maybe a tomb or a chamber filled with skeletons and graves. That sounds dramatic, true, but I should have known Mors doesn't give into the usual stereotypes people would expect of the god of death.

It's almost peaceful and comforting here—nothing like him ... or is it?

Is this place a reflection of him and his powers? He deals in death and usually pain, but there's a spark in him of caring, softness, and comfort for those who have passed, good or bad.

The souls surround us on every side, real but also not. It's bright here, warm and white, but not enough to blind, and in the middle is a huge throne, with gates standing tall behind it as if he guards them. He holds my hand as he leads us to a throne. I expect him to make me stand behind him or sit at his feet, since I don't know how this works, as it seems we are floating in clouds.

Some of the souls are more corporeal than others, though they don't seem to notice nor mind waiting. "Don't they get angry at waiting here?" I ask as he sits and then tugs me down until I sprawl across his lap.

He grins at me as I huff and right myself, sitting sideways so as not to impede him. I try not to notice the thick, hard muscle below me or the heat as he circles my back with a supportive arm for me to lean into.

“They are dead, little one. They do not notice the passage of time like you. For them, it’s been seconds. They go into a trance while they wait to pass over. I deal with those I personally collect from your world instantly, but these are lost souls delivered here by those on the other side with the skill—humans and monsters alike. They wait here and would for eternity to be guided. That is what I am here, a guide. I judge them, but I am not jaded. I know someone can be both bad and good, and I understand motivation. I see their lives, their hopes, dreams, and fear. I see it all.”

I peer up at him while he’s gazing out at the waiting souls, and as if feeling my eyes, he lowers his own. Those all-powerful eyes lock on mine. He’s a beautiful, perfect god who’s stern, strong, and deadly, yet in his eyes, I see the truth—the truth he probably doesn’t even see himself. He feels for them, he feels what they do, and it hurts him. “They are lucky to have you.”

“It is what I was created to do.”

“Yes, but you do not take your lack of choice out on them. You do your duty with honour, with kindness, even after all this time.” He blinks like I shocked him. “Show me?” I ask softly, leaning into his chest for both comfort and security. “Please.”

His hand squeezes my side. “Very well. If you grow tired or bored, alert me and I will escort you back to the abode up top.”

I close my mouth and just watch. I’m embracing this life, this deal I have made. I have ten years with the god of death. I could choose to spend it alone, angry, and vengeful at the god who simply granted me a second chance for my best friend, or I can embrace it and him. We might never fully see eye to eye, but maybe we could be friends.

My pussy clenches at that as if laughing at me, but I know I can’t cross that line again. It was too much. I cannot lose myself, not here. One could easily go mad in the land of the gods, and I will survive it like I survived everything else. That

means not losing myself in him—my god. It means at least keeping a little distance.

Right?

Yet, despite the deal, he's never forced me or claimed my body like he said he would. It's almost like he truly meant that he would wait until I begged him for it. I won't, since I don't beg, not ever. He might be stubborn, but so am I, and I have nothing else to lose. I might desire him and crave the bliss I found under his touch, but if not for anything else, I'll do it just to prove him wrong.

The god of death will beg for my body before I ever beg for his.

Pushing my thoughts away, I turn to the first soul. "Take my hand," he murmurs, and at first, I think he is speaking to the soul, but then he looks down at me. "You, little one, take my hand so you may see what I see when I touch the soul."

Swallowing, I lay my palm in his. When he curls his fingers around mine, I glance up, watching as he stares at our joined hands before looking back at the soul and seeming to swell with power. It's almost hard to watch because he shines brightly with it, so I glance at the soul instead.

His other hand reaches out and seems to grasp the soul, and my view of this world instantly disappears, fading into black and then to memories—no, the life of this soul he is guiding.

It's of an old man. The first thing I see is him in a hospital bed, and in one next to him is an older woman. They hold hands, and their heads are turned towards each other as he dies. The memories surge forward then, moving almost too fast to see.

I see him as a child on a bike while a man who looks like him pushes him and laughs. Next, he's on a swing under a tree, then he's at school, throwing a paper airplane at a girl. I see him comforting the little girl when she falls, and then the little girl and him grow up. He clutches her hand as they kiss, then I see her pregnant with his head on her stomach before it

changes to them at the hospital, crying as a bundle is taken away. It's his life, snippets of this man's life, and it's all filled with so much love and agony. Life hurts, and his did just like everyone else's, but the good made up for it.

He's a good man and, more than that, he's a loved man, and I know it won't be long until his wife joins him once more. It's true love, I realise, two souls destined to meet. When I blink, I'm back in my body, holding Mors's hand. When his voice comes, it's gentle and soft. "To the gate, my friend. Take it and wait, and she will come for you."

"My wife?" the soul asks. Even in death, he worries for her, loves her.

I wonder what that sort of dedication and love feels like.

"I have no doubt she will join you. Go, and when she arrives, I will escort her to you."

"Please don't let it hurt. Please don't let her suffer," the soul whispers before he floats past and the gates behind us open.

When Mors turns back to me, he blinks, reaching his other hand up. I start to move back and freeze as his fingers rub under my eye, and when they pull away, they are wet with my tears.

"You cry for him?" he asks.

"Yes," I admit without shame as he glances from the gates to me. "I cry for what he had. I cry for what he lost. I cry because his life was so beautiful, so filled with love, and I wonder if I will ever have that."

"You will. I have a feeling that you will always get whatever you want, Avea." With those words, he closes his lips around his finger and sucks my tears away. It shouldn't be as sexual as it is, so I turn away as the next soul comes forward.

I see so many souls, so many different lives, ranging between happy, sad, tragic, and pivotal. They all have one thing in common—Mors. He is never rude or impatient. He looks at their lives and thanks them for it, and whether he

judges them to the gates or elsewhere, he is never angry or confused. He is here, strong and confident.

Most would wither under this kind of duty, under what they see, but not him. He does not once walk away. He stays, unlike most. When the souls are gone, he stands, helping me to my feet, and then he looks down at me.

“Are you okay?” I can tell he’s shocked that I stayed the entire time, but it was important. I needed to know what kind of being Mors is, and I do. He’s a good man. Despite what he is capable of, Mors is a good man.

“I’m okay.” I squeeze his hand. “Are you? How do you do this day after day?”

“It is my duty.” He frowns as if that answers everything.

“Yes, but all that pain ... How do you deal with it?” I ask as he turns to me.

The god of death and a mortal stare at each other in the beyond, surrounded by beauty and death.

“Pain is a part of existing. Pain is beautiful,” he murmurs, reaching down to me and curling a stray lock of hair around his thumb. “Pain lets us know it’s worth doing. Without pain, there is no balance. Without balance, there is chaos. Pain is a teacher, a reminder, and pain is proof of life.”

“Pain was always suffering. Pain meant ... ,” I trail off, and he waits as I think through my words, knowing it is important. “Meant loss.”

“It means that too.” He releases the strand of hair and cups my cheek, rubbing his thumb along my lip as I shiver. “But it also means remembrance, and I think that is beautiful, Avea, don’t you? Don’t you think pain has a certain beauty to it?”

“I’m starting to,” I admit softly, and he smiles brilliantly at me.

“Shall we head back?” He drops his hand and I instantly miss his warmth, but I do not ask for it, instead nodding mutely.

He offers me his hand once more, and I lay mine in his. I hold on tight, letting Mors take me wherever he wishes.

Dangerous, so very dangerous, I remind myself.

There is peace between Mors and me, a friendship, although I do not think he would ever call it that, but there is still that electric attraction that makes it hard to breathe around him. All it takes is one flash of his eyes and I'm weak, wet, and wanting. I still refuse to beg, and it's clear he's intent on wearing me down with each passing day.

It's really fucking hard, and yet I'm still drawn to him. We read together in the library, or I sit with him as he works. We even cook together now. He lets me teach him how, and although he's still cocky, he learns fast and respects my lessons. At night, we eat together, unspoken words filling the air.

Every night, he leans in and kisses my cheek softly and offers a soft, "Good night, Avea," before leaving me there, wondering if it would really be that bad to break and beg him.

Nobody else would ever know, only him, so it wouldn't be shameful. He would tease me, but I would get what I want, which I'm starting to realise is him.

I had a taste of the god and now I want more. I crave him with a desperation that borders on obsession.

My body only responds to him now, lighting up around him and leaving me needy. I don't know what he's done to me and I hate it. He seems calm and happy in my presence, clearly liking this deal even though I'm suffering.

It's my own doing. I know with one word from me, he would take me in his bed, on his throne ... everywhere he could get me. He wants me just as badly; he's just better at hiding it—at least I hope. Pushing my food away, I clear our plates, but tonight, I leave the dishes. I need something else because distracting my mind with menial tasks won't work.

Lifting the floating black gown with golden brooches at both shoulders, I ascend the stairs, then I hesitate. They would take me to him. Swallowing hard, I turn away, forcing myself to walk to my room and not his.

I made this deal, but I don't know if I could live after being possessed and owned by Mors. I don't think I would come out of it unscathed, able to function. It's what keeps me distant and has me shutting the door every night. Only this night, I don't force away my need or try to sleep, knowing it would be useless.

It is too strong, so instead, I try something else.

I open each brooch, and the silk dress slides down my body. Even that brush of material over my sensitive skin is too much, leaving me shuddering. I step out of it and walk to my bed as I tug out the chains and clips in my hair until it tumbles free about my shoulders.

Lifting one leg, I press my knee to the mattress and fall to my hands, crawling across the bed before flopping onto my back, naked and needy. A soft wind blows at the gauzy curtains, and the moon looks so close, I could touch it, yet my eyes close and I picture him.

The god of death.

He would be lounging in his bed with that knowing smirk tilting up his perfect lips. His black hair would be dishevelled and begging to be touched. He would glisten with power and strength as he waited for me, his hand held out.

I mentally lay mine in his as my hands slide down my body, pretending they are his as he pulls me astride his lap. His big hands grip my breasts and I moan, tweaking my nipples like he would. In my vision, his mouth meets them, his cold black eyes meeting mine as he sucks and teases them.

My legs scissor in the bedding, needing friction, until I'm gasping in both pain and pleasure.

I hear him chuckle in my vision. "Need something, little mortal?"

"Yes," I rasp. "Please, I need ..."

“Need what? I want your words, little love, or you’ll get nothing.”

I almost groan in frustration before biting it off as I squeeze and massage my breasts like he would. “You, I need you.”

My eyes roll back in my head and pleasure explodes through me as my fingers slide down, parting my slick pussy and rolling across my engorged clit. One touch and I almost come undone, but my fingers are too small and soft. I speed up, but the pleasure only grows stronger, unable to be satisfied as if he cursed my body.

I squeeze my eyes tighter as I grip one breast with one hand and rub my clit with the other. I imagine him once more, sliding down my body, his big fingers thrusting inside. My hips lift as I do that to myself, but the stretch isn’t right. It’s not enough.

I almost scream in frustration, tears leaking from my closed eyes, but then something cold traces up my leg, startling me. My eyes open, and I’m about to sit up, when something cold presses against my shoulders, pinning me there. My moan changes to a scream as cold air blows across my overheated pussy and something large pushes inside my body, claiming me like I needed to be claimed, and I forget everything.

Coldness stretches my pussy as something akin to tendrils rub my clit, while more slide down my chest and torture my nipples. I can almost hear his voice, but I cannot think or move.

I’m trapped as the pleasure drowns me. My cream slides down my thighs as I ride the coldness inside me as it swells, growing bigger. It sends me tumbling over the edge, silently screaming his name.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN



MORS

My eyes snap open, my seed pouring over my hand and onto my stomach as I silently roar my release. The ghostly touch on my little mortal and the sight of her coming for me as she called out my name was too much.

I lost control.

It only happens with her, yet I have no regrets.

I smelled her need and sensed it all day. I could do nothing but watch her, needing to see what she would do. I hoped today would be the day she broke and begged for my shaft, my body, like I want, but she did not, the stubborn little mortal. She tried to touch what was mine, tried to take what was mine, and I snapped. My powers flowed out of me and into her, touching her body.

I expected anger, I expected her to scream and pull away at the first touch of the grave, but instead, she surprised me once more. She moaned for more, taking everything and using it for her pleasure. I could do nothing but bring her over that peak.

Lifting my hand, I lap at my cum, wishing it were her juices. My powers were a pale imitation of the real thing, and I could scarcely feel what she felt like, like a ghost version.

I remember the warm stretch of her pussy, though, as I prepared her to take my cock. The perfect heat was too much. It flung me back into my own body as she came for me, sending me over the edge of pleasure—something I never do without ordering my body to spill.

I float back to my little mortal as a wraith and watch as she slumbers. Her head is buried in the pillow, her body lax and satisfied, and I lunge to my feet. She did this to me. She left me hard and wanting more, and now she slumbers after finding her own pleasure.

No.

She does not get to rest while I am stricken by a need so strong, I cannot breathe. Closing my eyes once more, I lie back down and send my power to her. My plan is to torture her all night, never letting her come again until she screams for me in the morning.

It's time to break my little mortal until she begs for me.

I am a patient man, but not when it comes to her.

She will beg by dawn.

Using my power like a hand, I sweep a tendril up her leg, across her calf and thigh, and then I force her thighs open. She whimpers and I still, but when she does not wake, I slide my power across her pussy and the mess there. She came so hard for me, so beautifully. I sweep across her clit, rubbing it until her legs move restlessly, and then I move lower, pressing inside her pussy. It's not as large as before, but enough to keep her on edge as I play with the rest of her body. My power glides across every limb, every inch, massaging and caressing, covering her breasts as she moans and grinds into my power. When she's close, her back arching, I stop and force my powers back.

She slumps in her sleep, her body shaking in need, and only when she calms, her breathing evening out, do I begin all over again, a cruel smirk twisting my lips. My little mortal will come to me in the morning. She will come to me of her own free will and beg for me to sate this need I'm curating.

She will beg for my pleasure, the pleasure only I can give her.

She rolls onto her back, giving me better access, and I torture her body for hours. I slip into her ass, her mouth, and her pussy, leaving her wet and wanting. Every time she gets

close, I stop, living for the small sounds of need she makes. I memorize them, strive for them, demand them. It's a weakness she would not allow in my presence if she were awake and I like it.

The moon moves through the sky, and by the time the sun begins to rise, her bedding is drenched with her sweat and desire and her body is shaking so badly, I am surprised she doesn't wake up. Just as I sense the day dawning, I pull back, exhausted but satisfied. My eyes open as I lounge in my bed, my cock hard and waiting.

Waiting for her to awaken and search for me.

Waiting for my little mortal to beg for me.

I start to grow impatient, thinking of having one of the wraiths wake her, when power floods my brain.

It comes with a message—no, a demand for my presence by the other gods.

Anger fills me as I stand, and I begin to pace. I can't ignore their summons, not for the length of time it would take for me to properly claim my mortal, which I plan to do for days. It might draw them here to find me since I have never ignored them before.

If I go, though, and she wakes wanting me, then what?

Perhaps I can go and be back before she wakes. I reach out with my power and push her into a deeper sleep when she would have awakened, and then I transport to the meeting place of the gods, which is on an island above the rest. There is a stone circle, and ancient runes stand around it. Thrones are placed between the stones and they are already filled with the other gods.

“This better be important,” I warn, my voice filled with power.

“So glad you could join us,” Vanessa, the god of nature, responds silky, eyeing me hungrily. We have fucked once or twice, but for the life of me, I cannot remember why. She is beautiful, but she doesn't hold the same spark I am coming to crave from my little mortal.

I ignore her and look at the others, and I sit heavily on my throne. They usually don't call me, not unless it's to fuck with me. Some, like Tiberious, the god of fertility and crops, have the sick thought that by including me, it will make me nicer. Idiots. "What is it?" I demand.

"We would not have called you if it were not important." Silasea frowns. I roll my eyes at the righteous tone the goddess of war uses.

"Everything is always important to you, war whore," I snap. "Tell me before I grow tired."

She snarls at me, her armour moving with it, but we both know she cannot best me. I am one of the most powerful gods here. "We have a problem."

"When don't you?" I deadpan, my thoughts reaching back to Avea and wondering if she is still sleeping.

"Phrixius is missing," she snaps, and that gets my attention.

"Phrixius, the stern-faced god of magic and the moon, has abandoned his duty?" I say in disbelief.

"Not abandoned, missing. We must search for him, which means you are needed. Is that a problem?"

If a god is missing, then I have no choice but to comply. We do not go missing—apart from once, when those who worshipped us turned on us and captured us with black magic and killed us for our powers. If Phrixius is missing, then this is serious, and all thoughts of bedding my mortal disappear.

A god's power is not stolen lightly.

It could end both worlds.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN



AVEA

I struggle to wake, as if something is binding me to the darkness, but I manage to break through eventually. My heavy eyes blink open, and I'm still half asleep, as if I could easily slide back into slumber, so I force myself to sit up. A tidal wave of lust washes over and sends me sprawling back to the bed, my back arching in ecstasy as I almost come from that simple action.

My body awakens fully, my nipples hard and begging to be touched and sucked. Every inch of my skin is burning with need, and even the press of the air is too much and my eyes cross. I don't know what's happening. I had the strangest dreams of cold touches last night, but that was just a dream, right?

So why am I so needy?

All my questions disappear under another tidal wave of lust, and it's so strong, I slide from the bed onto the floor, moaning. Staggering to my feet, I grip the bed, my legs shaking. I can't think beyond the need—a need only one person can satisfy.

It's not a thought, it's an impulse, an instinct to find him. I could not stop this any more than I could stop myself from sparring with him or making the deal. On shaking, unsure feet, I stumble from the room and almost crawl up the stairs. Each step is agony, my body thrumming with a need so strong, I'm surprised I don't combust.

At the top step, I almost collapse, my hand sliding down my body to rub my clit, hoping to alleviate some of it. One touch and I'm gone. I scream as I come, gushing down my legs, yet the need only grows. Pulling my wet fingers away, I stumble to my feet and search for his room blindly, knowing he told me where it was, but I can hardly see.

I slam through doors, and when I don't find him, I tip my head back and shout, "Mors!"

It echoes around the house, but I hear nothing. "Mors, I need you," I cry. "Please!"

Nothing.

Breathing heavily, I push through another door and see a mused bed. It smells of him in here, and I fall towards it, rolling in the sheets and grabbing a fistful. I grind into a pillow, coming once more, but it still doesn't subside.

Screaming wordlessly into the pillow, I thrash in his bed. "Mors!" I beg. "Where are you?"

There is still nothing.

Not a sound.

Not a creak.

I'm lost in the pain without an anchor, all alone once more.

The desire does not subside, but my anger takes over. After coming so many times it hurts, I find my feet and search the house, having to stop and pant through the desire washing over me in waves. My anger slowly pushes it back, though, the more time passes. He's not here, and I fall back into my bed, lost in the pain and bliss as the sun sets, the moon taking to the sky once more.

I must sleep, but not peacefully, for when I wake, it's to sunshine again, and Mors still isn't here. Days pass like this. I manage to eat, bathe, and sleep, but my body hurts. I am

oversensitive and need something, need him, but now my anger blots it out.

It has been days since I saw him.

No note, no goodbye.

He simply left me alone, locked on a god island. My panic at being back in my forest raises its head. He just left after everything. After his promise and the friendship blooming between us, he just left like I mean nothing, like I am nothing.

I am clearly just a toy to play with, just a thing to pick up when bored and tear apart and leave. My anger and fury push back the desire so even though my body still thrums with it, I live in a state of rage. It's better than desire and the fear that I will be alone here, left to die.

Days pass like this. I try to read, but it makes me think of him, and I debate ripping up his library, but instead I tear up his room. It's petty, but it brings me joy for a little bit. I check the heated lake and the grounds but nothing.

He is nowhere to be found, and this place is so big and lonely.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN



MORS

I know my little mortal will not starve or die if I am not there, but I hate that this interrupted our time together. She was so close to giving herself to me, only for the pesky gods to take that away. If they weren't unkillable, I would end them right here and now for daring to take that time with her away.

Even now, I crave her, remembering the way she tasted, the way she looked. It's ripping me apart. I'm not the calm, cold, or cruel god of death on this hunt. I'm one filled with lust for a mortal, desperate to return to her side as more time passes, but I try to remember that she will be there when I get back and then we have all the time—well, ten years—to fuck out this desire between us. That should be enough time to satisfy this need I have for her, and then I can get back to normal. In the grand scheme of things, ten years is nothing to a god.

“Can I go now?” I drawl lazily, leaning back on the throne.

“Absolutely not,” Vanessia snaps.

“Why? I found him for you, have I not? After days of hunting, he was located thanks to me.”

“What could be more important than rescuing him?” she sneers.

I stiffen before relaxing, not giving anything away. If I admit that I'm in a hurry to return to my home, they will

wonder why and come sniffing. They will find her and use her against me as a weakness.

I cannot have that.

Sighing, I click my fingers. “Fine, I will rescue him. Stay here on your thrones like you always do.”

I reappear outside the boundaries of where Phrixius is being held captive. Tilting my head, I lean against a tree and watch. Women in long black coats gather at the perimeter, dripping blood and magic into the ground, yet no one seems worried.

Witches. I hate witches. They always want something from me, and don't get me started on necromancers. I almost shiver in disgust. What's dead should stay dead. Their wards are strong on their little village built in the middle of nowhere, and their ancient ground hums under my feet, welcoming my presence. After all, their ancestors used to pray to me, so this is as much my land as it's theirs.

As I watch, none glance into the trees or look in the area where I can feel Phrixius's power. Do they know not? If so, then how? I will free him so I may return to my little mortal and spend the next ten years buried in her tight, wet cunt with her screams echoing in my ears.

I might not even feed her. Every time she tries to die, I'll just drag her back to the living again.

Who's a necromancer now?

Pushing from the tree, I ignore the coven members working to strengthen the wards around their boundaries, and I saunter past them and into the village. I follow the trail of god magic, which feels as if it has been covered or at least disguised so as not to alert another. They do not even know what is hidden or stolen within their own coven, the fools.

I wind through the mixture of old and modern houses, which range from ranches to old Victorian buildings as if they have been picked up and moved here to keep their power and history. Witches are fickle creatures, and more often evil than not. Their magic turns dark and is sold to the highest bidder.

This is an old coven, one of the oldest to ever exist, if I am not wrong. I remember visiting once out of boredom to kill some people for them, but it has certainly grown since then.

I follow the traces of magic to the very back of the village, where the mountains begin, and find one last settlement there.

The house is built into a cave, away from the other houses and coven buildings, and it's there that the magic of Phrixius leads to. I enter silently, testing the boundaries. They are strong and made of dark magic, but they are no match for me. What I find inside the living room makes me pause.

Phrixius sits cross-legged in a binding circle used to trap gods and demons, happily smiling as he watches a small black-haired witch stir potions in the adjoining kitchen.

“Well, isn't this homey,” I remark.

They both turn to me, the witch throwing her magic at me. I absorb it without a care, raising an eyebrow at her and turning to Phrixius.

“The others sent me. Shall I kill her and free you?”

“No!” He jumps to his feet before hesitating. “I mean, no, I am fine.”

“You have been kidnaped,” I drawl, even as I avoid the screeching witch, who is now picking up items and hurling them at me with accurate precision.

“I have not been kidnapped ... Okay, I was, but it's fine. I have this under control.”

“I'm sure you do.” I grin, ducking a cauldron that flies at my head. “But the other gods are worried.”

“Lie to them. Tell them I am free and will return.” Phrixius, the goody two-shoes of the gods, wants me to lie to the others?

My eyes go back to the little heathen throwing things, and this time I catch a knife meant for my face and snarl, “Don't tempt me, witch. If one more item is tossed my way that could affect my ability to please my ... well, you will be in trouble. Understood?”

“You do not scare me,” she replies, her arms crossed in defiance, but I see the fear in her eyes, even as her magic warms her skin.

“I should. I could kill you without even touching you,” I murmur.

“You will do no such thing!” The booming power comes from Phrixius within the circle. I turn my gaze back to him. I have never heard him raise his voice, never mind yell.

“You are doing this for her? A witch?”

“I would not expect you to understand,” he hisses in my direction, shooting her a worried look. “Now leave, Serpent, I have this under control.”

My eyes go back to her to see her watching him worriedly, not fearfully. She almost appears wounded that he might leave her. Interesting. I am not one to throw rocks, though, since I have a mortal hiding in my house. “Fine.” I shrug. “You can deal with their wrath later. I do like to cause chaos, though, so I will lie for now. Don’t get dumb, not over a pesky little mortal witch, and not even a very powerful one.”

I fade from her house to his angry yelling and her worried questions.

The gods are still lounging on their thrones when I reappear.

“Good, you’re back. Where is he?” Vanessa demands.

“He was not kidnapped, nor is he in trouble. He is simply busy,” I drawl. Lying comes easily to me, especially with this lot. They never want the truth anyway, just to stroke each other’s egos and interbreed. I have never been one of them unless they needed something, like now.

“That is not possible—”

“It is the truth,” I snap. “Unless you question my loyalty?” My power, the power that’s stronger than most, rises within me, and they hesitate. None of them want to fuck with death, and I am he.

“No, no, of course not. Very well.”

“Then I’ll take my leave. Let’s not do this again,” I deadpan before leaving them to their endless, boring existences and Phrixius to whatever trouble he has gotten himself into with the witch.

I appear back in my house, smiling widely, happy to return to my mortal and pick up where we left off, but she is not waiting. Frowning, I scan the house, only for my mouth to drop open. Every single thing I see is broken or ruined. Walls have been coated in wine or paint, chairs are smashed, tables are broken in two, and cushions are ripped as if torn apart by bare hands, their stuffing everywhere.

“Avea!” I roar in worry, barely thinking as I hurry through the house, searching for her. No one could get in here, right?

Everything is destroyed, and I cannot find my little mortal anywhere. I never should have left her. She is weak; she needs me to protect her!

“Avea!” I roar again, but there is no answer.

I search each room, finding more destruction as my worry triples each time I find it empty. I kick open the door to the indoor pool that looks out onto my lands and find her lounging naked within the warm depths.

I freeze, unsure what to say or do as she turns her head, eyeing me over her shoulder. “Oh, so now you’re back.”

“What happened?” I demand. “Are you okay? Are you hurt? Who did this? I will rip them apart.”

“Will you?” Sliding through the water, she ascends the steps gracefully before stopping before me. My eyes drop to her incredible body in appreciation. “Then you’ll have to rip me apart.”

“What?” I frown.

“I did it. I destroyed your house,” she says sweetly as she flutters her lashes. “And I would do it again.”

“You ... You did this?” Frowning, I rub my head, beyond confused. “Why?” Did the house offend her? She can redecorate for all I care. She doesn’t look hurt, but I will need to examine her.

“Why?” she hisses, the change coming over her so fast, I actually stumble back a step at the venom in her tone. “Why?” she roars in my face. “You left me for almost a whole week. I needed you and you weren’t here. No note, no goodbye. You left me like I didn’t even matter.”

“Oh.”

“Oh? Oh? Is that all you have to say? After working me up all night—and don’t lie, I know it was you—you left me in agony, unable to even satisfy myself without so much as a word, and all you have to say is ‘oh?’”

I blink, unsure what to say or do. She’s truly angry that I left to fulfil my duty. I should have told her, but I did not want to disturb her in hopes she would still be sleeping when I returned.

“I was called away on duty,” I begin, but she snorts and steps past me. I follow her dutifully down the corridor, but at her room, she grips the doorframe to stop me from entering.

“Fuck duty and fuck you, Mors. Fuck you for leaving me in pain. Fuck you and every single other person who has ever abandoned me as if I didn’t matter. I matter!” She slams the door in my face, leaving me gaping and as turned on as I am angry.

Of course she matters, or I would not be here. How could she think such things? I also have my duty, my role as a god, and I couldn’t deny that, not even for her, a woman who will be gone as quickly as she came.

I turn away, frustrated and annoyed that this did not go how I wished and hoped, and slam my own door. What did she mean by pain? I begin to pace, thinking through everything for what could have been done differently. Exhausted, I flop back onto my bed, only to freeze as her delicious fucking scent wraps around me.

Turning slowly, I bury my face in my sheets and groan as lust roars through me. Her scent is everywhere, covering my sheets, so my every breath is like swallowing her down.

Her release ... Her release covers my bed.

The moan that escapes my lips is not an earthly sound. I press my hips into my bed, fucking the sheets as my tongue darts out to lick them, dying for a taste. I writhe in her scent, breathless and hard. Rolling to my back, I cover my face in the sheets, licking them as I grip my cock, but my hand is not enough.

The next time I come, it will be inside of Avea.

She has done this to me, and it's time she begged for her god. Sliding from my bed, I march from my room to hers. She might be angry, but I don't fucking care. If she thought I would come back and just accept her cum all over my sheets without doing anything, then she truly is a fool.

No, she knew what I would do.

The door slams inwards from my power, and she sits upright in her bed, naked and wide-eyed. "Mors, get out!" she demands.

Ignoring her, I flick my fingers, shutting and locking the door. There will be no escape for her, not tonight, not ever—not until she smells like me and every inch of my body is covered in her delicious scent.

If my mortal wants to come, then she will.

All fucking night.

I dissolve my clothes with a thought, and her eyes widen, her tongue darting out to wet her lips nervously.

"Get out," she demands once more, weakly this time. Her words tell me one thing, but her body tells me another. It sways towards me, her nipples pebbling and begging to be touched, recognising their master. A blush stains her chest and spreads up her neck, her thighs clenching together. "I mean it."

"Sure you do," I mock. "That's why your pretty pussy is wet and dripping, and that's why you are naked and waiting

for me.”

“I was no—”

“You can’t lie to me, Avea. I am a god,” I whisper, appearing above her on the bed. She falls back, clutching the sheets as if to use them as a shield, so I tug them free. She grips them harder, fighting me, so I simply dissolve them too, leaving her naked and bare for my touch.

She tries to bargain. “Mors, I shouldn’t have yelled.”

“No, I like it when you yell. I like it when you get angry. It makes your eyes light up and all I can think about is fucking it out of you, but right now, that’s not a problem. I left you wanting, little mortal, so let’s deal with that.”

“Just me?” she snaps, her eyebrow arching. “So your cock is hard for no reason?”

“My cock is constantly hard around you,” I admit. “Especially when I find my bed coated in your cum.”

She swallows hard, peering up at me. She should look vulnerable and weak under a god, but if anything, my mortal looks beautiful, radiant, and so powerful, it licks at my skin as if her power is rising to meet my own. “Yes, I smelled that, and I licked my bed, but now I want the real thing, so be a good girl.”

“You want me to come? Then work for it,” she challenges me, lying back.

Fuck, she is so beautiful.

Smirking, I lean down like I’m going to kiss her. Her lips part and her eyes shut, and I move at the last second to her ear. “It’s going to be so sweet when you beg.”

She snarls.

Adorable.

Chuckling, I lean back and move down her body, watching her breathing hiccup. She tracks my every move, her thighs opening in invitation despite the anger curling her lip.

Kneeling, I run my gaze over her possessively. “So pretty. Tell me, Avea, did you imagine me when you came?”

Her thighs snap shut and she flips, trying to crawl away. “Fuck this,” she mutters.

Grabbing her, I toss her onto her back, annoyed she tried to escape me when I have been waiting for this since the moment I laid eyes on her.

“Fuck you, Mors!” she spits, thrashing once more.

I pin her down, my own fury rising. How dare she deny me?

“I would not have left your body, not for one second, had I not been bound to. Nothing short of death could separate me from my prize,” I snarl. “But I left, Avea. I left, and every waking second I was away from you was agony. My body, as much as I hate it, is yours, and I have waited long enough to taste what is mine. So open those pretty thighs and show me what belongs to me.”

She stops fighting, her breath coming out in a whoosh as she stares up at me.

“Now,” I command.

Swallowing hard, she parts her thighs again.

“If you shut them one more time, I’ll fuck this tight cunt and will not let you come. I will edge you all night until your mind fractures and all you know is your desire for me. I will keep you chained and wet for ten whole fucking years. Do you understand me, little mortal?” When she doesn’t respond, I send my ice-cold touch through her and she gasps, nodding jerkily.

Lying down between her legs, I drop my eyes to her pussy and tap her thighs to indicate she should open them wider. She follows my command slowly, and I blow ice-cold air across her cunt—the breath of death. She cries out, arching up as goosebumps break out across her skin.

I drag my hands up her thighs, addicted to her soft skin. I’ve tasted this pretty cunt before, but when I seal my lips

around her, I almost come. I had forgotten how sweet she tastes.

Her legs shake over my shoulders, and I grip her hips, dragging her farther down until she sits that pretty pussy right on my face. I'm a god, after all, so I don't need to breathe. I could spend years buried between her thighs, making her come, and still survive.

Dragging my lips up and down her pussy, I lap at her wetness, desperate for the taste of life that lives in this mortal's body. She lifts her hips, trying to force me where she wants me, and I wait, placing chaste kisses along her lips until she stops with a whine.

I reward her, sealing my lips around her clit and sucking. She jerks below me, crying out. The sound is better than anything I've ever heard. Releasing her throbbing bud, I lash it with my tongue, curling it around until she grinds into my mouth, gasping and crying out.

Grinning against her sensitive flesh, I slide my fingers across her pussy, gathering her wetness, and then I thrust them inside her pulsing hole. "We need to get you stretched enough to take my cock. This weak little body needs prepping since I'm a god."

She huffs in annoyance, kicking at my back, so I blow my cold breath across her again.

"Behave and you'll get what you need."

For once, she listens, remaining quiet but her pants as I stretch my fingers inside her, forcing her tight channel wider as I lash her clit until she shudders, gushing across my fingers as she comes. I fuck her through it, abusing her clit until she whines. I force another finger in, and then another. I'm huge, and I'm getting inside this cunt, so she needs to be ready. She has teased me enough with her body, and she will take every inch of my hard cock. My hips grind into the bed as I lap at her release before I slide down to her pretty asshole.

My tongue traces it, circling her ass as she lifts her hips to give me better access.

“Please,” she begs, and I know how much that killed her to voice.

To show her my happiness, I seal my lips around her clit once more and curl my fingers, rubbing the spot inside her that has her screaming above me as she shatters again.

Her thighs clamp around my head so tightly, I can't hear anything as she shoves her cunt against my mouth, riding out her release.

There is nothing more beautiful in this universe than Avea bathed in her pleasure.

I lick her through it, drinking down every drop like a vampyr, and when she slumps, I suck my fingers clean, needing more.

My cock jerks, reminding me it wants attention. I might be a god, but Avea has woken these feelings within me, and now she has to deal with them.

Kneeling, I drag my lips up and across her body, playing with her nipples as her eyes open lazily, her chest arching. I play with her breasts, squeezing my cock with one hand to stop myself from coming at the sight of this beauty below me.

“So beautiful,” I murmur against her flesh before kneeling back, watching her eyes widen as she looks at my cock. I stroke my length as she watches. I am magnificent, and she should be awed that she gets to be with someone like me.

“You came so hard when I used my powers. Now, imagine how hard you will orgasm with my real cock, Avea.” I smirk as I kneel above her, stroking my length. “This is what you wanted, isn't it? This is why you were so needy and angry. You just needed your god buried inside you.”

“Mors,” she begs, gripping the sheets.

“All you had to do was give in and beg, and we could have been here weeks ago.”

“Mors?”

I raise a brow as she sits up.

“For once in your life, shut up and fuck me.”

Gripping my cock, she strokes it with her hand. The pleasure from her rough touch makes me groan. She grins as she teases me, caressing down my length before cupping my balls and squeezing.

“My cunt will feel better than smugness.”

I know she isn't wrong.

Pulling her hand away, I flip her and drag her pretty plump ass into the air. I smack my cock across it as she groans, pushing back for more. Her pretty, flushed cunt is open and weeping for me.

I slide my length across her ass with a promise to claim her there later. Shifting my shaft lower, I nestle my huge cock against her body, grinding into her and bumping her clit as I get my length nice and wet.

“That's it, drip all over me. Drench me. Get me wet so I can feed your greedy cunt,” I order.

She pushes back, rolling her hips with a moan and riding my cock until I stop her. I smirk at her whine of impatience. She looks so fucking magnificent, waiting for me. I send the picture to her head and she gasps.

She turns to see me, and I take that chance to line up with her greedy hole and thrust into her, feeding her every inch. She cries out and drops her head to the bed, trying to move forward to escape my length. Holding her hips, I drag her back, forcing each inch inside her.

“I know you can take it. That's it, relax for me. I'm big, baby, but you were made for me,” I praise as she relaxes around me, letting me slide in the last few inches until I'm balls deep.

My eyes close as I shudder. Feeling her tight, wet cunt wrapped around me is like nothing else I've ever felt before. It's like being struck by lightning, every cold inch of me warming and waking as if her life is invading me.

“Move, Mors, please,” she begs.

“That’s it, beg for your god,” I snarl, snapping my hips before pulling out and pushing back into her channel, stretching her.

Whining, she pushes back, taking me deeper. I speed up my thrusts, forcing her to keep up. If she wants to play with a god, then she’ll get one.

“You loved me fucking you with my powers, didn’t you? You loved it when I filled every hole and used you until your body couldn’t handle it.”

She whines and pushes back to take my cock. Tangling my hand in her hair, I yank her head back as I pull her on and off my cock. “Shall I fill you once more, little one? Fill that tempting, bratty ass while I claim your pussy?”

She clenches around me, so no matter what her bratty mouth says, we both know what her body wants. “Mors, just—fuck.” She pushes back. “I need to come. I need it all.”

“I know what you need, Avea,” I promise, licking up her spine and biting her neck. I see her fangs flash as her head turns, her back arching to take me deeper.

I press my arm against her mouth. “Bite.”

Whimpering, she slashes my skin with her fangs before sinking them into my arm. I watch my blood drip down my arm, and when her pink tongue darts out, lapping at it, I’m lost.

I hammer into her cunt, fucking her right into a release that has her screaming, but I don’t relent, forcing my cock deeper.

Her body is still shaking, but she pushes back to meet me once more.

Oh yes, Avea was made for me, and I’ll show her exactly how good her god can look after her.

I send my power into her, pressing inside her ass. She screams and writhes on my cock as I stretch her ass and pussy. Her body is caught between being cold and hot as she shatters again.

She clenches around my cock so hard, I snarl, fighting her fluttering channel to continue fucking her.

Yanking her on and off my cock, I watch my huge length disappear into her, her pussy stretched around it. Leaning down, I lap at her neck, tasting her sweat. I love every part of her.

I need to see her though. I want to look into her eyes as I pump her full of my cum. I want to see her face as she realises that there will never be anyone else but me for her.

No one could ever compare to the way I fuck her.

Yanking her off my cock, I turn her onto her back. She bounces from the force, her eyes wide and lips parted, her fangs and chest coated in my blood.

Grabbing her legs, I pull her up into the air and slam back inside her, working my magic deeper into her ass until her mouth parts with a cry of ecstasy.

“I’ve wanted to do this since you opened that bratty mouth.” I pull more power forward and shove it down her throat, deep in her mouth. She chokes on it as I power into her from above. Her pretty pussy, ass, and mouth are stretched, until I fill every inch of her. Tears squeeze from her eyes, her chest red and heaving.

“Fuck, look at you. Look at you taking it all. I’m inside every hole. There will not be a place inside of you untouched by me.”

Her eyes widen farther as I shove my power as deep as I can, until ice-cold magic fills her alongside my hot length. The sight is so goddamn magical, I can’t take it.

“Come for your god,” I roar, my hips stuttering.

At my words, she detonates. Her ass and pussy clench as she screams. I hammer into her and follow her into oblivion with a roar, pumping hundreds of thousands of years of desire into her.

My seed spills around us as I thrust shallowly. She whines and comes again, squeezing every drop from me until I fall

forward and collapse across her.

She shakes below me, wordless and spent. Smirking, I recover quickly, or so I think, but when I sit up, I almost fall. She drained me. Groaning, I pull from her tight heat, watching my cum drip free. I rub my fingers through the mess and shove it back inside her before capturing more and shoving it into her ass as she cries out.

Rubbing my hand in the remaining cum, I press it to her lips. She opens automatically, sucking my hand clean and making me groan.

“Good girl,” I praise her. “You get two minutes to rest, and then I get that perky little ass.”

She gulps and her eyes widen.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



AVEA

His promise follows me into my dreams since I cannot fight my exhaustion. I expected Mors to leave after I fell asleep, but when I wake up, it's to find him watching me, lying sideways on the pillow next to me in the bed. For a moment, I feel vulnerable. I am nothing compared to this man. He's a god who controls life and death, and he's more powerful than any being I have ever met, yet he watches me tenderly.

"I have refrained from touching you for five hours so you may rest. That's too long. Sit on my face, pretty mortal."

Groaning, I roll onto my back, my body sore in the best way. "Mors—"

"You will ride my face until I choke on your cum. Your god demands it," he snaps.

He grabs me and throws me over him so I'm straddling his face. My hands slap against the wall as he yanks me down, nuzzling my pussy.

"So pretty. Make it nice and wet for me." He rubs against me, his nose bumping my oversensitive clit, and my eyes roll back as I groan. I try to lift up, to escape, but he pulls me down firmly.

"You are like a fucking feather. I want more. Sit on me, suffocate me. We both know I cannot die."

“Mors,” I say, but he completely ignores me, sliding his hands around and gripping my ass cheeks as he rolls me, making me rock onto his face. I drip across it, but he just groans, licking me slowly and leisurely.

He twists my clit before dipping inside me, setting a slow, sensual rhythm as he makes me ride his tongue and face until I come with a cry. Shuddering above him, I grind down, much to his joy.

“Again,” he demands.

“No,” I snap, trying to swing myself off, but something cold slams into me, making me jerk. I turn around to find a wraith writhing behind me. “Don’t you dare!” It captures my hands, holding me captive as his tongue thrusts in and out of me.

I try to concentrate, to call my magic and control it, but every time I get close, his magical tongue distracts me until I come twice more, flashing between hot and cold.

I slump sideways onto the bed, panting and exhausted.

“Bastard,” I mutter.

“You love me being a bastard.” He grins next to me, his tongue lapping at his lips and face to try and catch my cream. Just then, my stomach reminds me that he might be a god, but I’m part vampyr and I need to eat.

“I’m hungry,” I whine.

“Then I will cook.”

I roll to my front to watch him slide from the bed and head to the door buck naked, his peachy ass flexing with every move. “Are you sure you are okay to cook alone?”

“Avea, I am a god.” He huffs. “Now stop looking at me like that unless you want me to eat you instead.”

With that, he leaves, but I should have known better than to relax. That ghost touch, the one I thought was a dream, slides up my thigh. I try to close my legs, but it wrenches them open, sliding through my messy pussy, and despite my protest, it wiggles inside me, growing bigger until I cry out. That cold

touch covers my breasts and clit, teasing and touching, leaving me panting and riding the thing wiggling deep inside me. It borders on painful, but I couldn't stop it if I tried.

“Mors,” I beg, lifting my hips even though there's nothing there, but it splits me open, and another one slides up my leg and around, prodding at my ass. I try to resist, but it slides inside me, filling my ass so much, I yell. I writhe on the bed as they fuck me fast and hard with the cold touch of death. I can almost hear his masculine chuckle and demand for me to come, to give him more ... to give him everything.

The touch flips me and tugs me up onto all fours, and I have no choice but to push back, fucking the coldness inside my ass and pussy. I ride it as every nerve ending lights up. Power floods the room until I cannot breathe and the pleasure grows.

Burying my face in the bed, I scream my release as I push back onto the cold touch inside my pussy and ass. It slowly fucks me through it until I slump, and then it pulls free, leaving me dripping and panting when the door opens. Turning my head, I meet an innocent-looking Mors as he holds up a plate. “Hungry?”

I lie on the bed, splayed and shuddering with aftershocks. “I hate you,” I whisper.

“Such a liar,” he purrs as he heads my away. “Shall I prove it?”

“No, wait, no!” I try to scramble from the bed, but he pounces on me and pins me down, the food forgotten.

His body, which is so much heavier than mine, pins me to the bed as his hands hoist my hips up and, without warning, his cock sinks into my ass where his power just was.

The surprise invasion and the heat of his very real cock makes me scream. It's so much bigger, more real, and it borders on painful, just like nearly everything with Mors. His mouth meets my ear as he pulls out and slams back in, claiming my ass.

“What's that?” he mocks. “You want more?”

My eyes close as his power slides between me and the bed, playing with my nipples and clit at the same time. The arcing electricity between them makes me clench around him as he drives into me, fanning the flames of my need.

The cool touch twists my nipples and clit, all while Mors hammers into my unclaimed ass. “So good, you feel so good back here, Avea. You are so tight and soft at the same time. I wish I had three cocks on this body to fuck every hole at once, but I will settle for spending my life switching between them, filling them with my cum and watching it drip from you.”

His dirty words have me crying out, gripping the bedding as I try to fight off another release. It builds so strongly, there’s heat below, and then he suddenly bites my neck and it sends me tumbling over the edge.

I scream as that heat flows out of me and I squirt. He stills for a moment, and embarrassment heats my cheeks. “Shit, next time I want that in my mouth.” He groans, and his thrusts pick up speed. The bed creaks and groans—even god-made, it cannot handle the wrath and passion of death himself.

I have no choice but to hang on until he stills, groaning into my ear as I feel him unload in my ass. He pumps me with his cum, his hips slapping against my ass to drive it deeper. When he’s done, he wraps his arms around me and tugs me so we lie on our sides, still joined.

My body is completely and thoroughly fucked and exhausted.

Grinning against my shoulder, he tightens his arms around me. “Now you can eat.”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN



MORS

I feel peace as I watch my little mortal dance around in the grass to the music she demanded I play. She wears nothing but a partially translucent pink gown, her hair unbound and her eyes alight with the sun. Watching her, I know ... peace, contentment, and even happiness, though I'm unsure if that's a correct emotion. All I know is I *feel* around her.

I feel.

She turns to me like she feels my gaze. The last few days, I kept her in my bed until she demanded to be in the sunlight and away from my cock so she could rest and heal. I don't understand, nor do I know how long she needs, but I want her every moment of the day. I will, however, give her anything she needs if she keeps smiling at me like that, which causes something deep inside of me, almost like a tickle of power.

Dancing over, she lowers to her knees, straddling my waist. Pressing her warm hands to my chest, she pushes me back and I tumble, knowing she could not move me if I didn't. Her hair falls around her face as she leans over me, shielding me from the sun. I brush her silky locks behind her ear, and she turns her head, kissing my hand. I almost groan as her warmth invades me.

No, my little mortal is not merely a vampyr. Had she been, her powers would not react to me like this, nor would she have been able to withstand my power for the last few days. I have an inkling, but until she asks, I will not investigate. For some

reason, I wish for her to come to me with the truth instead of having to pry it out of her.

“Beautiful,” I murmur.

“Hmm?” she asks, meeting my eyes.

“You are more beautiful than the sun shining around you like a lover’s caress. You are everything good in this world, everything people wish they were. Even the moon is jealous of the way the sun caresses your skin. You are the prize and my contest all at once. You are so full of life and laughter that it almost steals every inch of me and makes it yours.”

She grins goofily. “You couldn’t just say beautiful?”

“How could one word ever capture the incandescent beauty within you?” I reply, and her smile turns softer.

“Mors, you romantic,” she teases, sitting heavier on my lap and grinding that sweet pussy against my cock.

“Hmm.” It’s my turn to respond as I grip her hips, making her gasp. “Slide that dress up and sit that pretty pussy on your god’s cock here, under the sun. I want to see you shine above me.”

She reaches up, but I stop her.

“Keep the dress on,” I order. I can see her rosy nipples pressing against the material through it anyway.

Smirking, she lifts it to her hips, flashing me her round hips and bare, pink, glistening cunt, making me groan.

“As my god commands,” she teases.

I narrow my gaze as she grinds her wet pussy against my hard cock, which is only covered by shorts. Reaching between us, she unzips them, and I dissolve the fabric away so I’m as naked as she is. Lounging back, I wait for my girl to ride me.

She lifts herself as I hold my cock for her, and then she slides down on my length, working herself on it as I fill every warm inch of her. My teeth grit at the heaven I find inside her body and the tight, wet heat gripping me possessively. Her eyes close, and her head falls back as she rocks, lowering

herself until she's fully seated, and then she starts to move, riding me just like I wanted.

Her skin glows, and her hair flows down her back and sides. Her tight, wet heat grips me so tightly, I groan. She lifts her head and meets my eyes as she grins, riding my cock faster. Leaning forward, she positions herself so her clit rubs against me as she fucks me.

"That's it, take what you want." I groan, barely holding back my desire. My fingers grip her hips so tightly, I know they will bruise. My powers flow across her overheated skin, making her moan.

She shatters above me with a cry, grinding her cunt down on me as her channel flutters with her release.

"Now it's my turn," I warn her.

Flipping her onto her back, I roll on top of her, ripping off her dress and tossing it away as I seal my mouth around her nipple and suck. I hammer into her tight pussy, and her screams echo around my meadows, her nails raking my skin.

Popping my mouth free, I lift my head. "Feed while I fuck you, little one."

"I don't need to—"

"I don't care." Gripping her chin, I yank her mouth to my neck. "I want to feel your fangs buried in me while I'm buried in you. I want you to feast on my blood while I feast on your body. I want to be in you, blood, body, and soul, Avea."

"Mors," she whispers, brushing her lips over my jaw.

"Feed, little one," I demand.

She strikes, slamming her fangs into my neck. I roar as I pound into her, fucking her pussy as she feeds. She grips me tighter, her hips rising to meet mine as I claim her. The pleasure of knowing my blood sustains her almost makes me puff up with pride, and the sweet feeling of her fangs in my neck makes me feel unhinged in a way I have never been before her. I hold nothing back, even if it could kill her. She can take it; I know she can. She cries out against my neck as I

hammer into her as only a god can, destroying her body for anyone but me.

She is mine!

She bites me again, marking me as I pummel into her pussy. Her hands hold me tightly, and her legs wrap around me as she meets my brutal thrusts. Blood and power pour between us until we explode, tumbling over the edge. Our names are on each other's lips as we cry out for everyone to hear.

Gasping, I lean down and kiss her gently. "I'm obsessed with you," I murmur as I roll us until she sprawls across my chest, my cock still firmly buried in her since I will need her again in mere minutes.

Laughing, she places kisses across my chin and neck. "Then it's a good thing I'm a little obsessed with you as well."

CHAPTER NINETEEN



AVEA

I hesitate at the library entrance. “Avea, come in and stop pacing,” he calls through the door. He always knows where I am.

Rounding my shoulders, I gather my courage. It kept me up last night, which was surprising since he fucked me into oblivion, but my worries have returned once more.

I open the door and step inside, not curling up at his side like normal and instead standing before him. He raises his eyes from his book, arching a brow. He pats the seat next to him, but when I don’t sit, he closes the book with a frown. “What’s wrong?”

“I need your help,” I admit softly. “If you will.”

“With what, little one?” He tilts his head, watching me carefully.

“I’m a vampyr, I do not lie, but I know you have wondered what I truly am. The truth is ... I don’t know. I don’t know what I am. I never have. I call myself a vampyr because I feed on blood and have fangs, but deep down, I have always known there is more to me. I think ... I think I’m a hybrid, but I don’t know what kind and I want to. I need to know what I am. I need to understand.”

“Okay.” He leans forward, gripping my hips. I allow him to, soaking in his comforting warmth. “Your parents—”

“I never knew them.” Swallowing, I look away from his knowing eyes for a moment, suddenly feeling shy despite everything I have done and been through. I am stuck with Mors, but more than that, I am happy with Mors. I don’t want to ruin this peace we have so carefully won. I crave him, but he’s a god. He cannot be held down, not even by me, and he will leave me like everyone always has. I need to prepare, and I need to get the most out of this.

Out of anyone, Mors will know what to do and what to find.

“The first thing I remember is the forest. I don’t know if I was born or dumped there, but it was all I knew. I grew up there. Animals protected me, fed me, and sheltered me until I could take care of myself. I always felt this ... this deep magic inside me, as if I were tied to the land. I learned from books abandoned within the magical forest and I became one with it. I found boundaries I could not cross and I was satisfied.”

“Until?” he prompts when I lapse into silence.

“Until someone came to the barrier. I didn’t know much about the world beyond, but it’s where I met Mateo.” He blinks at my admission. “He saved me and brought me from the forest and into the real world where I didn’t have to be alone anymore. He taught me to be a vampyr, but we both knew I was more than that. All that time with the court, though, I missed the forest something fierce, as if my connection to it still stood.”

“How did he free you?” he asks carefully.

“Blood, of course.” I chuckle humourlessly. “He willingly gave his to allow me passage. I know the magic there, whatever bound me, accepted it and let him out, as if it were sentient or at least understanding. I just don’t know who placed me there, why, or what I am. Mors, I want to know. Can you help me?”

He searches my gaze. “Are you sure, Avea? What if you do not like the answers?”

“It’s better to know. I’ve spent my entire life in the dark, not knowing what I am. I need to know, Mors. I need to understand, even if it’s hard. I have long since given up on the idea that there is anyone out there who birthed and loved me, but this is important to me.”

“Then it is important to me as well. I will help you,” he vows, leaning up to kiss me softly.

“Thank you,” I say without malice. “Where do we begin?”

“You remember nothing before the forest, correct?”

I shake my head. “I read some stories, but nothing matched up with ... with the powers I had. The ones I hide.”

“Hide? Can you tell me?”

Worrying on my lip, I straighten. “Unlike a normal vampyr, I don’t need to feed as often unless I drain my powers. I can heal things by moving my powers through them. I’ve never tested how much, but I’ve healed a couple of wounds and broken bones.”

“Interesting. What else?” he asks, watching me like I’m a curiosity and not a freak.

“I ...” I hesitate before diving into it. After all, he’s the god of death, so nothing is weird to him. “Sometimes, I see things, snippets really, if I touch someone. I see their life, past or future, and when I was in the forest, I could call the animals there. I even faced down a magical beast or two who seemed to sense something in me.”

“Anything else?”

“Isn’t that enough to be a freak? Once I found out it wasn’t normal, I stopped exploring that ... that side of me. I didn’t want to stand out. My court hated me as it was, and I didn’t want to become even more of a pariah.”

“You are not a freak, Avea. You are exactly as you are supposed to be. Fuck what those bloodsuckers say. They are all fools anyway. All that matters is what you believe about yourself. You must own it, little one. Own the powers you were born with, learn to control them, and harness them. Show

them why they should fear you, not why they should mock you. You are more than them, otherwise you would have perished when we touched. It was then I knew you were more, not to mention the magic I feel on your skin at all times.”

I stiffen. “You can feel the glamour?”

“Glamour ... Why would you be using glamour, Avea?” he snarls. “I sensed something, but this is ... old.”

“Yes, I have used it since I was brought into this world. Not to change how I look but to hide.”

“Hide what?” he asks, his hand gripping my face, turning me to him. “I will not have lies between us, Avea.”

“It’s not a big deal, and I didn’t do it for you.” I roll my eyes. “It’s something I have always done to protect myself.”

“Show me.” When I try to tug my face away, he pins me beneath him. “You want my help, little mortal? Then you will show me all of you, every inch. I will worship and know it, and there will be nothing between us, not even glamour.”

I’ve only ever shown Mateo and he sobbed. Part of me fears Mors’s reaction. Will he turn me away in disgust? Will he pity me? I guess there is only one way to find out, and it’s evident he will not let this go.

I search his gaze, but all I see is the need for truth there. Mors will have nothing short of everything from me, and that terrifies me even as it excites me. No one has ever been that obsessed with me, and I like it.

Not that I will tell him that.

“Let me sit up.” He does, and I turn on the sofa, unhooking the dress and letting it pool at my waist. His hands instantly grip my hips, trying to drag me back to him. “I’ve seen your back, little mortal, when I had you bent over and filled with my cock.”

Rolling my eyes, I bite back my smile and take a deep breath. “Not all of it.” I remove the glamour that has become a second skin to me, peeling every layer away like flaying my own skin.

He inhales sharply, and I know what he sees—four long, furrowed scars from my shoulders to the base of my spine. They were made by the claws of a beast that I quite literally fell into when exploring the forests. I tried to run, but it hunted me, and I almost died that day.

I almost died alone and bleeding under a beast.

These scars are proof that I survived that attack, coming out with the monster's head in my grip and agony on my skin.

“Avea, who did this to you?” His voice is deadly quiet. Swallowing, I turn to look at him, needing to see his reaction. There is pure fury written in his eyes, and his powers saturate the room, turning it dark. “Who did this to you?” he bellows, yet I don't bend under his power. Instead, I smile.

“A beast, not a person, and it's dead. I killed it myself,” I admit, and he loses some of his anger. His hand comes up and caresses the raised scars, making me shudder under the careful touch.

“I am not ashamed of my scars. They are proof of my survival. I did what it took to be victorious against a magical beast others would perish at the thought of.” I tilt my chin back in defiance, daring him to pity me. “I am not ashamed.”

“Then why do you hide them?”

I flinch, but it's not an accusation. It's a genuine question.

“It was easier. My pain is not their pain. They do not get it or the story of my life. They get what they want to see and nothing else. I became everything I was told I had to be. I hide them because no one would understand, least of all you.”

His head jerks up, and I hold my dress to my chest as a barrier between us.

“Mors, you are a god. Every inch of you is perfect. You call me mortal continually as a reminder that I am lesser.” His mouth opens, and I smile. “I think you do it without even meaning to, but my scars would be another reminder of how different we are. How unmatched.”

“I have never trusted or let another into my life as I have you, Avea. I have never shared what I have with you with another. I was born a god, and I cannot change that more than you can change being born as you are, but I chose you, Avea. Can you not see that?” He turns me again, his lips dragging across the scars, making me shudder once more. “These are proof of why we are matched. The god of death and the brave mortal, in some ways even braver than I. You are perfect, Avea, because of these. They show your strength—a strength that allowed you to survive being with me. Do not ever think you are lesser than I. Maybe once I thought that, but I was wrong. I was a fool.”

“Mors,” I whisper softly.

His lips trace the path of one scar, kissing every inch before doing the same to the others until I whimper, swaying before him. “Lie down, Avea,” he commands.

“Mors—”

“Lie down.” His order is sharp this time. I go to turn over but he stops me, pressing me face down onto the sofa so my back is exposed. With gentle but determined hands, he strips the dress from my body, leaving me bare to his gaze. His fingers trace up my thigh to cup my pussy, making me moan as I grip the edges of the sofa, grinding into his touch, but I feel exposed and vulnerable. He doesn’t want me like this. I try to cover up the scars with my glamour to boost my confidence for what’s about to happen, but his growl stops me.

“If you cover them, I will strip every inch of magic from you so you can never do it again.”

“But surely you would want me more if they were covered.” My words end in a scream as his hand comes down across my ass so hard, tears spring into my eyes.

“Don’t you ever dare tell me what I want again, Avea. I mean it. I want you like this. I have never wanted you more. You are and always will be beautiful. Your scars are a part of you, a part of this body I want to worship, and you will never hide them from me. Do you understand?”

“No,” I whimper, shifting to ease the burn when his hand comes down again. “Mors.”

“Do I need to continue punishing you, Avea? Are you going to be a brat or a good girl? Brats get punished; good girls get fucked.”

“Please,” I beg, my thighs slick with my own need. The pain blazes across my ass, leaving me unable to focus on my glamour, even if I wanted to.

“Please what, little one?” he demands, rubbing in the sting. I bury my face in the sofa as I push back for more. “Use your words.” His hand pulls away, leaving me naked and wet.

Gritting my teeth, I refuse to answer, and his hand comes down again and again. On the final blow, he hits my pussy, making me cry out. “I can play this game all night,” he purrs, and when I look over my shoulder at him, his eyes are dark with need and the room is covered in shadows from his power. His gaze is locked on my body, even my back, as he laps at his hand where it caught my pussy.

“Mors,” I say.

“Yes, pretty girl?” he teases, dropping his hand so I follow the movement, watching as he grips his cock and strokes it. My tongue catches on my teeth as I bite back a moan, remembering how good he felt inside me. “Say it, Avea. Say it and I’m yours. Say it and you’ll be screaming in under a minute, or you can tap out now.”

“Or you could.” I tilt my head back once more, not wanting him to walk all over me.

“Oh, little one, you should have just been a good girl,” he warns as his palm comes down on my ass again and again and pain blazes through me. His hand slides up, caressing my scars.

“Please,” I beg, the pain becoming too much.

His hand instantly rubs the sting on my burning cheeks as his shadows claw at the room, angry and lustful like him. I watch them crawl towards me, breaking and destroying everything in their path, but he doesn’t seem to care.

When they crawl up the chair and over my body, I cry out. They are warm like him and the longer they touch me, as if wrapping me in a cocoon, the hotter they become until I burn from them. One wraps around my throat like a hand, holding me, and others restrain my arms and legs, pinning me for him.

Lifting my hips into the air, I feel his huge cock press against my ass as the shadows crawl down my body. The one on my neck allows me to look down to see the black shadow heading for my cunt.

I can't stop it.

I don't want to, not even as it strokes my clit and then slithers inside me, fucking me. "Look at you. Try to tell me you aren't mine, that you are not perfect and beautiful. I dare you."

"Not yours," I say, unable to push back on the shadow as it wiggles so deep, it hurts, yet it feels too good.

Something smashes deep within the shadows of the room from Mors' anger as he brings his hand down on my ass again, making me scream.

His cock drags lower, pressing to my entrance. "I'll show you." In one smooth thrust, he buries his length in me alongside the shadow, fucking it deeper into me.

I can't take it. My eyes close and my lips part on a cry.

It hurts so fucking good.

"Say it," he demands as he pulls out and plunges back in, taking me hard.

"No," I manage to squeeze out, even as the shadow on my throat tightens. There's another crash and I jerk, pushing farther onto him with a whine.

He speeds up his thrusts, punishing me with them as his shadows burn into my skin, overheating me. I feel him move behind me until he's settled solidly at my ass, our skin slapping together.

Between his cock and shadows, I reach for my peak, but like he knows, he stops moving, keeping on the verge of

coming until I calm down, and then he does it again.

And again.

I'm a dripping, hot mess, whining to come.

"Yours," I relent, needing to come more than I need pride.

With a gleeful chuckle, he bends over my back.

His tongue trails a path along my scars, licking and sucking as he fucks me into the seat.

"You are mine," he says, his voice lethal.

With each thrust, he smacks into my sore ass, and the blaze of pain is what finally sends me wheeling over the edge. Screaming his name, I claw at the cushions as he roars and follows me into oblivion.

He pumps me full of his cum as he kisses my scars. "Tell me what these are, Avea," he demands as I lie there, panting.

"I—" I swallow, unable to speak.

"Tell me," he demands, and this time, I force the words out, unable to take another punishment right now.

"They are beautiful." I know it's what he wants.

"They are, and I will make you repeat it until you believe it."

"There is someone I know who could help us figure out what you are," Mors says as he strokes my back, the room destroyed around us from our fucking. I try to put my glamour back on but it's hard, and when he glares at me, I stop.

"Can we trust them?" I ask, propping my head on his chest.

"I guess we'll see." The grin he gives me puts a smile on my lips. He's so mischievous. "First, let's get you dressed. I would hate to have to kill the only remaining guardian for seeing what's mine."

It doesn't take me long to dress, but this time, I demand pants and Mors magically creates them. They are skintight and black with golden skulls. It's showy, but beggars can't be choosers. I find some boots and a top, and then we are good to go. He takes my hand, and I close my eyes, remembering the last time, then I feel us move. It's like we are taken up into a tornado and dropped back down, and when I open my eyes again, I stumble.

"I've got you. Just breathe, it will pass," he promises.

Nodding, I slowly breathe in and out, and like he promises, the dizziness soon passes and I can look around. It's like the island Mors's house is situated on, but unlike Mors's island, this one has a rocky, winding path with no barriers on either side leading up and around a mountain to a huge castle sitting atop. There are small grassy landings before the path then nothing but clouds.

Don't look down, I tell myself as Mors holds my hand and leads me up the path. By the time we reach the top, I'm out of breath and he's grinning at me. The castle itself is a mixture of Gothic and angelic and clearly very old. Across the entrance, I see symbols, and when I ask Mors about them, he tells me it is the language of the gods.

There is no door, just an archway that pops as we enter, and unlike the reception area I expected, we are thrown right into a huge library—if one could even call it that. It stretches as far as the eye can see in every direction, including down, with curling stairs down the middle that seem to move. There are books, paintings, and scrolls over every surface.

"Let's wander. He will turn up eventually."

I release his hand as we plunge into the stacks and come upon four bookcases that seem to be central with a table in the middle. Across it are scrolls with more of that writing.

Stepping closer, I focus on the letters that almost seem to move as I do.

Arcane Arts.

Shaking my head, I caress the edges as I glance around to find Mors watching me.

“What is a guardian?” I ask, picking up a random scroll.

“They keep the laws and history,” comes a grumbling voice. “Don’t touch that, it’s two thousand years old.”

I instantly lay it down and spin with wide eyes. There’s a man watching us. He was so silent, I didn’t even hear him approach.

“Havier, my old friend,” Mors calls out cheerfully.

“No, you bastard, the last time you were here, you killed me!”

“Oh really?” I grin, leaning into the table.

Mors snorts. “He’s overreacting. I need a favour.”

“A favour implies we are friends, and we are not friends,” Havier snaps.

“It’s for me.” I step forward, taking pity on Mors. “I need to know what I am.”

“Annoying and too perky. There, now leave,” Havier mutters, leaving me blinking.

In one second, Mors is gone and Havier is hovering in midair. The whole room is doused in darkness as Mors shifts into what I can only describe as shadows as Havier hangs, his face pale and terrified.

“If you ever so much as disrespect my little mortal again, I will rip your soul from your body and let the beasts of hell have it,” he roars, and Havier nods shakily.

“Of course, sorry, friend. So sorry, I can help, absolutely.”

Just as quickly as Mors disappeared, he reappears at my side, taking my hand as candles flicker back to life and he smiles. “Good. Let’s get started, shall we?”

CHAPTER TWENTY



MORS

Havier grumbles, righting his clothes before turning to Avea like I hadn't just threatened to rip him apart with hell dogs. "How do you not know what you are?"

I step forward, and he squeaks.

"I'm simply asking so I can ascertain!"

He changes his appearance like others change their clothes, and today he's short and squat, with a handsome face and a youthful appearance.

"I don't know. All I remember is waking in the forest," Avea explains kindly.

"The old spelled one surrounding the Palace of Skeletons," I tell him.

"Interesting. Well, clearly you are some sort of vampyr mix." He watches her. "Powerful though. I can almost taste your magic. Fey maybe?"

"In all honesty, I assumed I was after reading a book, but some of my, erm, abilities didn't match up. Fey are supposed to have one major ability they are better at than others, but I don't have that. Not that I've really tested it, but I don't seem to have an affinity for anything."

"I see," he murmurs. "Come with me. It will be the easiest way."

Keeping her hand in mine, we follow him through the stacks. He throws me a glare every now and again, which I ignore. He could have made this easier, but I don't regret my threat. I will not allow anyone to hurt my Avea. I tell myself it's because she is under my protection and it would make me look weak.

That is exactly why, nothing else.

When she peers up at me with her big, round eyes, I melt. "It will be okay. No matter what you are, it will change nothing," I promise.

"It'll change everything," she whispers but seems to collect herself. "But I want to know."

"That's my girl." I wink.

The stacks suddenly shift, and we enter a smaller corridor made of stone. Candles flicker within arches set into the wall. Havier mutters the entire way until we reach a round tomb. There is a pedestal in the middle with a golden bowl on it, and the runes light up as we enter, reacting to my godly power since it's made for us.

"Wait there," he tells me, so I lean against the wall, squeezing Avea's hand as he impatiently gestures her forward.

Giving me one last look, she confidently steps before the bowl, meeting Havier's eyes without a trace of nervousness. She's so strong, my girl.

"Hand," he mutters, and she holds it out. From his robes, he produces a sytack, a godly blade made for rituals. The edge is so sharp, it could cut through steel. She doesn't even flinch as he drags it across her palm. The wound bleeds, and he turns her hand, clenching his fingers around it to force more blood from the wound. It drips into the bowl, and he releases her hand like she burnt him. She almost lights up as she grips her hand to her chest and her magic moves through her, healing it. She eyes the bowl nervously, her teeth sinking into that plush bottom lip.

Havier doesn't speak to her as he dips his finger into the bowl, closing his eyes as he flares white. His lips move with

silent words, his power slamming into us. He's ancient and very, very powerful, not that he ever uses his magic.

He flies backwards into the wall, his power cutting off as he screams.

"Havier?" I say, stepping before Avea who peers around me, wide-eyed.

He scrambles to his knees, staring at her in shock. "You must leave," he demands. "Leave now!"

"Not without answers," I growl, striding over and kneeling before him. He doesn't even shrink back, his eyes staying on her. "Havier."

"Tell me you don't know what she is," he snaps at me. "Tell me you did not bring her here knowing what she is."

"Havier, you are not making sense. What is she?" I want to shake some sense into him, but that might make him turn us away.

Swallowing nervously, he peers around me to Avea, looking absolutely terrified. He's even more scared of her than he is of me, which makes me more confused than anything.

"Havier," I bark, losing my patience.

"Please, what am I?" She steps closer, and he shrinks back, so she hesitates, looking at me as her eyes fill with tears.

"Now, Havier!" I roar, wanting to destroy everything here at the offence he has caused to make even one tear fall from her eye.

"She is part vampyr ... ," he trails off, and I snarl, then he squeals as he swallows and when his voice comes, it's hushed, almost reverent. "But she is also part ancient one."

"Ancient one? What does that mean?" Avea asks, confused.

"Impossible. They all died out or were lost," I murmur.

"What is an ancient one?" she shouts.

“Before there were gods, there were the ancient ones, magical beings who controlled pretty much everything. They were too wild, more beast than anything, which is why they chose their form. Your people know them as the beasts who wander the forests in your tales. Many simply perished, choosing to disappear after they created us. Ancient ones birthed the gods. You, Avea, are part ancient one. You are not simply just a god born from them. You have part of an ancient one in your soul, which means your mother tracked down an ancient beast and either killed it and abused its magic or ... or it willingly gave it to her while she was pregnant with you.”

“Why would it do that?” she whispers. “What does this mean?”

“It means you are more powerful than most gods, especially lesser ones. Maybe you are even on par with the serpent here. But I also know it is wrong, very wrong. If they ever found out, they would slay you, thinking your mother stole it and you were an abomination,” he hisses.

“You do not think she stole it?” I murmur.

“I do not think she would have been able to, do you? Not a mere vampyr, no. This was given freely. I just don’t know why. I want no part of this. If they found out I knew, I would be destroyed too. Go now and tell no one, and I will do the same.”

“But what does this mean? How do I control this?”

“You do not. You are better off ignoring it. I don’t know how you have up until now, but do that unless you want the fury of the gods to rain down on you. Now go!”

Frowning, I take her hand. “Come on, let’s go.” I throw Havier one last glare and evaporate us back to my island.

She crumbles into my arms, looking up at me with tears in her eyes. “What do I do now? I will be hunted simply for being who I am? Do I have to hide for the rest of my life?”

“Not here, never here,” I vow, uncaring about what she is.

She is still my Avea.

“You are a god.” She steps back. “They will task you with killing me,” she whispers, and I hate the fear that blooms in her eyes.

Ignoring her flinch, I cup her face. “They cannot order me to do anything, Avea. They never could, and you are mine. Fuck the gods, fuck Havier, this is who you are. You did not ask for it. For now, we will explore your powers carefully, but you are always safe here. I promise you that. I will always protect you.”

“But why?” she asks, searching my gaze under the moonlight. “Why will you protect me, Mors, even from your own?”

“It is my part of our deal.”

“Bullshit,” she hisses, her eyes bright with her powers. “Why, Mors? Why?”

“Avea,” I say, but she rips herself away from me, flaring with her powers, and I see it now—the way this world reacted to her, why she could enter my palace, and why the bowl glowed. It all makes sense. “Calm down.”

“No! I want the truth for once. Why will you protect me, Mors?”

“Because I care for you!” I roar, and she stumbles back. “Happy now? I will protect you because I care for you—something I didn’t even think I was capable of, but the very idea of someone harming even one hair on your head drives me to madness. So yes, I will protect you. I cannot do anything else. Do not ask why because I do not know. All I know is that the idea of you being hurt ...” I shake my head in horror. “It terrifies me.”

“Gods fear nothing,” she whispers.

“I fear this, Avea. This god fears losing you.” I take a deep breath. “I never knew fear until you.”

She steps closer, crossing the distance between us, still glowing as she cups my face. “Me either,” she admits. “I trust you, Mors. I trust you to protect me. Let’s just be this for

tonight, okay? Mors and Avea. No gods, no truth, no magic. Just two beings scared of what we feel for each other.”

“Avea ...”

“Shh, I’ve got you.” She covers my lips, silencing me and any protests, and at the first touch of her softness, I am lost.

What a liar I was to tell her that when we met, I felt nothing. With her, I feel everything.

I once thought that ten years was nothing to a god, but I was so very wrong. A decade is a lifetime. Those simple ten years will stand out for the rest of my long immortal life as the only ones where I was ever truly alive. For a being who controls everything, who is all-powerful, and can’t die, there is only one thing I truly fear—those ten years with her coming to an end. I would give all my lifetimes for another ten with her.

Stepping back, she smiles at me, her eyes bright. Her body is bathed in moonlight as she lets her dress fall, leaving her bare to me. How could I have ever thought she was anything but beautiful?

She is more beautiful than any god or being in this world.

My Avea is perfection, causing my heart to beat from my chest and a strange fluttering in my stomach as she tugs me with her to lie on the grass.

Under the beauty of my world, my love claims me slowly and sweetly.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE



AVEA

I know I should think about what Havier said, but I'm not ready to. Instead, as sunlight shines behind my eyelids, I sink into Mors's embrace before my eyes open. I'm curled upon his chest, still in the grass. Lifting my head, I smile at him as he watches me. "Morning."

"Morning, little one," he murmurs, searching my face as if memorizing it. "You are more beautiful than anything I have ever seen in all my long life."

I blink, tilting my head. "What made you say that?"

"You should know. I should tell you every moment of every day," he replies as I giggle.

Sitting up, I groan at the slide of cum down my thighs. God or no god, there are some things we cannot escape. "I need to clean up." I clamber to my feet. "Race you to the springs!" Laughing, I rush towards the hot springs.

"Avea, you little cheater!" he roars after me.

Giggling, I run harder, slipping across the stones just as big arms wrap around me and lift me into the air.

"I've got you," he murmurs darkly. "Now what to do with you."

Shuddering at his dark tone, I turn and wrap my legs around his waist. "I can think of one or two things."

“Oh really?” He arches one dark brow. “Do tell.” He walks until we are at the water.

“Well, you could get on your knees and make me come.” I smirk, rising to drag my body across his.

“Oh, I could ...” His lips linger above me. “I do love to hear you scream my name.”

Then I’m flung.

I hit the water and sputter as I surface. “Mors!” I scream.

“Just like that.” He chuckles as he steps elegantly into the water and wades towards me.

I glare at him. “Nope, you lost your chance.” I go to swim away when a hand catches my leg, making me yelp as he pulls me back effortlessly, plastering my wet body across his. He chuckles as I fight until I finally stop.

“Finished?” he teases.

I pout. “Fuck you.”

“That’s the plan, little one.” He wades us to the seating area and sits, depositing me on his lap as he leans back and grins at me.

I hate his cocky smirk, though, and just like when I was first here, I want to wipe it from his face. I press my body to his, feeling him shiver as my breasts press to his chest and I drag my pussy along his hard cock. Despite all his bravado, he is just as affected by me as I am by him. Lifting, I brush my lips across his.

“You want me to fuck you, my god?” I purr, sliding my hands up his chest and over his shoulders to grip his hair. He groans, his eyes narrowing slightly even as his lips curve in that cocky smirk.

“Then I’ll do just that,” I purr before kissing him. I dominate his mouth, leaving him chasing me, and when I pull back, I rock against his cock, winding him up.

He watches me with heavy-lidded eyes. “Avea,” he warns.

“Mors,” I coo, and when he reaches for me, I smack his hands away, sliding back and cupping my breasts. “Say please. Say please, Avea, ride me.”

“Gods do not beg.” He snorts. “Especially when I can feel your cream dripping on me.”

“True, but you’re so hard, it must hurt.”

His eyes drop to my chest as I speak.

Flicking my nipples, I tug and twist them, moaning loudly as I grind into his thigh. “I could come just like this and be happy. Could you?”

“Avea,” he growls.

“Say it,” I order, sliding my hand down to my pussy. “Beg and I’m yours. Beg for me, serpent. Beg for this lowly mortal.”

I watch his Adam’s apple bob as I slip my fingers through my folds before sliding them into my mouth, fucking it like he would fuck my pussy.

“Fuck, Avea, please ride me. Put that pretty pussy right on my dick. Only I get to make you come.”

“Good boy. Good boys get rewards.” Sliding closer again, I grip his shoulders for leverage and reach down between us, gripping his hard cock. He grunts. Pressing it to my cunt, I watch his eyes as I slam myself down, taking every inch. His eyes flare wide as I cry out.

He reaches for me once more, no doubt to take over, so I smack his hands away and begin to ride him, fucking him like he begged.

Gripping his golden, muscular shoulders, I lift again, our lips brushing together as I slide down. I roll my hips to take his huge length, swallowing his groan, his vulnerability, as I ride him.

“Avea,” he whines. “Please.”

“You beg so prettily, my god,” I purr, winding my hips.

I ride him hard and fast until my release takes me by surprise, making me cry out his name. He watches me the entire time, never once complaining as I slump into him. His cock remains inside me, hard and wanting, but he simply strokes my back.

Pulling myself off him, I drop to my knees. “Avea,” he protests, but I seal my mouth around his length, tasting the salty mix of precum and my pussy.

I suck him all the way down, holding him there as I meet his eyes before lifting off his cock. “I’ve wanted to taste you on my tongue since I saw you.”

“Of course you did,” he replies proudly, his eyes narrowed. “Go ahead then.”

“So kind,” I tease, licking around the rim of his huge cock while my hand strokes his shaft.

“Avea.”

His golden muscles contract as I swallow him down again, and having enough of my teasing, he wraps his hand around my hair and takes over. I let him use me for his pleasure, becoming wetter than I’ll ever admit at how he uses my hair to control me. He pushes me down until I choke on his cock and tears form in my eyes. He watches them fall, grinning evilly as he lifts me and pushes my head back down, forcing me to suck him hard and deep.

His hips lift slowly at first before he just hammers into my mouth. All I can do is hold on, my nails digging into his thighs for leverage as he fucks my mouth brutally. His dark orbs lock me in place as he groans my name.

“Your mouth feels too fucking good, Avea,” he growls. “Like a silken fucking vice. Look at you, taking every inch like such a good girl. You truly were made for me, made for me to fuck and use, and you love it, don’t you? I bet you’re wet right now, feeling my cock deep in your throat. You crave my brand of pain, don’t you?”

I cry out around his cock because he’s not wrong.

His neck strains as he tries to slow, to restrain himself, but I bob faster, wanting him to be feral.

It tips him over the edge, and the god of death roars to the heavens as he slams so hard down my throat, he shoots into my stomach, giving me no choice but to swallow. When he's spent, he pulls free and leans down, kissing me softly.

"Good little mortal," he praises. "You took your god so well."

"Do you know much about the ancient ones?" I ask after eating and dressing.

"Some," he admits. "But most of what we know was passed down. Come, I think I have some books." Taking my hand, he leads me to the library, sitting me down before selecting some. He hands me a few and takes some himself, sitting with me. "We will read together."

Smiling, I duck my head as I open the book. I start to read, and eventually, he untucks my feet and lays them on his lap, rubbing them with one hand as he reads with the other hand. Something about him holding the book effortlessly makes my mouth dry, and he glances at me like he knows. I lower my head with a grin, focusing on the text.

I want to make sense of what I'm seeing.

At first, I expect to be able to read nothing, since it's all in a different language, but the words shimmer and rearrange until I can read them.

Ancient ones were formed from pure magic residing in the universe. Able to take any form, they often chose the visage of what those who came after them described as beasts who roamed the world until they birthed new life—the gods.

Ancient ones have dwindled over the years, choosing to either slumber or cease to exist. Once their magic is released, it flows back into the earth. The exact extent of ancient ones' powers are unknown due to the rarity and secrecy around

them. However, I have managed to interview some first-born gods and also track down some ancient ones and watch from a distance.

So far, we know they can shapeshift, their magic allows them to travel, they can heal almost any wound, and their magic regenerates after great use.

Although similar to gods, they do not reside over one area. They have control over many and can often tap into magic within the earth.

I read for hours, diving into the journals of this scribe who managed to interview certain gods. Most of them are self-centred and speak more about themselves than their creators, but I do gain some insight.

I'm exhausted. I know a little more about myself, but not much, and my head aches. Dropping the book, I close my eyes.

"You okay?" Mors asks softly, reaching over to rub my head for me as if he senses my pain and is offended by it. Knowing him, he is.

"Just tired." I sigh, and we sit in comfortable silence as my mind wanders to my time in the forest, which, of course, leads me to Mateo, and worry flares through me for him. I blurt out words before I can control them.

"I want to check on my friend, Mateo, the one you saved."

"No," he says without looking at me, stroking my foot.

"Mors—"

"No, Avea, we made a deal. Or have you forgotten?" He raises his dark eyes to me, making me shudder at the power I see there.

"I haven't, but please, Mors, I'm worried about him. I never figured out who attacked him. What if they come back? He's all I care about."

His nostrils flare, and I quickly realise my mistake. "I didn't mean it like that," I say, but he stands, sending me tumbling to the chair.

“A deal is a deal, Avea. No.” He stomps away, leaving me frustrated and angry.

“Asshole,” I hiss.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO



AVEA

Mors is gone—I suspect to do his duty—and I usually join him, but not this time. After our spat, we didn't even share a bed last night. He is stubborn and won't back down, but neither will I, not when it comes to my best friend. I need to know if he's okay.

I could go and come back. Mors would never have to know or he would be furious. It's not like I'm breaking our deal. I just need to know that Matty is okay while I play house here, happy and enjoying my life. I cannot continue now that the thought is there.

But how?

How do I leave? I need to find an exit and fast, before Mors returns and stops me. He will be furious, but I'm confident I can talk him out of his anger or kiss it better, and then we can get on with our lives together.

Mateo saved my life, so this is something I have to do. I stop pacing and round my shoulders. I tell myself that Mors will understand. He's not completely mad, right? Either way, I'm going. I am not a prisoner, but as I hurry outside, I feel eyes on me. I turn around, but he's not there.

I run to the throne where we entered, and, taking a deep breath, I step closer. If I am part ancient one, which means god, then I should be able to do this, right?

In all honesty, I don't have a clue. I just have to trust in myself. Closing my eyes, I plunge my arm into solid rock,

only it disappears, and I wiggle it, feeling something liquid around it. When I open my eyes, I can see my arm there. This has to be like evaporating, right?

I tell myself that as I take a deep breath and throw myself into the portal, all while imagining the outskirts of the forest I first appeared in.

Ironic.

It feels like it first did with Mors, only less smooth, and when I stagger out, I turn and throw up the contents of my stomach. I wipe my mouth and climb to my feet, knowing I need to be quick about this.

Closing my eyes, I allow myself to settle before I evaporate once more, chanting his name in my head and hoping it leads me to him. I pray he's at home or somewhere safe so I don't appear in the middle of court—that would be bad.

As if conjured by my thoughts, I appear in front of their house. I hesitate before knocking. Usually, I'd just walk in, but today, I'm nervous. I'm wearing nothing but a golden gown, my hair interwoven with flowers and gold.

When the door opens and Mateo is there, I smile with a wince. "Hey, Matty."

"Avy!" he roars, pulling me into his arms and swinging me around. "You're okay." He runs his hands over me. "Aren't you? Are you okay?"

"I'm fine." I laugh as he tugs me inside.

"I was so fucking worried. God, I'm so angry at you. Are you okay? Where have you been? How did you get away?"

I chuckle and look him over. "You're okay?" I ask him.

"Me? Me? After you disappeared with the god of fucking death?" he yells, shaking me. His glee and worry turn to anger. "What were you thinking, Avy?"

"That I loved you and couldn't lose you," I whisper, and I watch his face soften before he tugs me into his embrace.

“God, Avy, I thought I’d lost you too.”

Softening into his embrace, I bury my head into his shoulder like I have a million times. He feels like home, like safety, but I realise it’s not the same. It’s not as warm as Mors’s embrace. His head doesn’t press to the top of my head protectively and the thrum of power isn’t there. Pulling back, I smile to soften the blow, knowing he will be angry. “I don’t have long, but I needed to know you were okay.” I lose my smile. “Matty, who hurt you?”

“Come, sit.” He leads me into the sitting room and drops down next to me on the sofa, holding my hand as if he’s scared I’ll disappear.

He’s completely healed, healthy, and glowing once more.

“I don’t know. I know what you’re going to say, but I don’t know, Avea. One moment, I was leaving work, and the next, I was bleeding, a knife plunged into my chest. I didn’t even see who did it. I pulled it out but I realized too late it was poisoned. I stumbled home and, well, you know the rest. There haven’t been any attacks since, and I’ve been keeping a careful eye out just in case, but nothing has changed. My mate thinks it could have been a hunter. I’m just lucky I’m alive thanks to you. Now tell me everything. What do you mean you don’t have long? We can find a fey or witch, spell the house, and stop him from getting in and dragging you back. I’m so glad you managed to get away and ran to us.”

Wincing, I look at his hand. “I didn’t run away, not really. I have to go back. I made a deal.”

“You can’t go back!” he roars before calming. “Avy, he’s bad news, really bad news. I did some research, trying to find a way out for you. He’s evil, pure evil. He tortures and kills for fun. Even stories of him depict him as cruel and living on pain and death. We will find a way out for you. I promise. I’m so close.”

“Mateo—”

“I did learn that if he lets you go, then the deal is broken.”

“Mors will never let me go. He’s stubborn like that.” I chuckle. “Truly, I’m fine. He’s not cruel, not like the stories. I was terrified at first, but he’s actually ... sweet.”

“Sweet, Avea? He is the god of death. Oh god, he’s spelled you.”

“Mateo.” His full name gets his attention. “I’m fine, honestly. My word is my word, and I will not break it. Trying to would be dishonourable, not to mention I do not want to.”

His frown could crush rocks. “Why?” he demands. “Avy, why?”

Taking his hand, I suck in a deep breath. “Do you remember what you told me when you met your mate? Even knowing you and her were never supposed to be together?”

“I told you that what anyone else thought didn’t matter because I knew what I felt and I would follow my heart no matter what,” he murmurs, still confused.

“Do you remember what I told you?” I smile softly.

“That I was a fool?” He chuckles before sobering. “That she was my destiny if I felt like that and to never let another get in my way of what is mine and what I want.”

“I think this might be my destiny, Matty.” I hold up my hand to stop his protests. “Like it or not, I have to see this through. He’s not a bad man, Mateo. I mean that. He’s kind and sweet, and he takes care of me. He’s helping me figure out who and what I am in a safe manner. Yes, he’s a little ... crude and rough around the edges, but he’s more like me than you realise. I won’t ask you to understand or like it, but I’m asking you to trust me. I can take care of myself, and this is bigger than us, I can feel it. I’m exactly where I am meant to be.”

“But, Avy ...” He swallows hard. “How can that be when you’re away from your family? When he keeps you away from your life?”

“Life?” I chuckle. “Mateo, you are the only reason I stayed here. I have no life, no friends, no family other than you. Even my own court hates and rejects me. I struggled to even survive and feed. Can’t you see that? I’m not hungry anymore, I want

for nothing, and unlike our own kind, Mors would never turn me away or reject me. Don't believe all the stories you hear, brother. We both know how often fact and fiction are mixed up."

He watches me carefully. "You mean it; you really mean it. You're going back to him." He shakes his head, a small smile curving his lips. "I know better than to fight you when your mind's made up, but Avy, please be careful. I know you care for ... for the god. Maybe you even love him. Do not be a fool who is used and tossed aside. He is an immortal, all-powerful being, and no matter how kind he is to you, he does not love you like I do."

I dare not contradict him. I know he worries, so I squeeze his hand and melt into his embrace once more. "Life is about taking risks, Mateo. I would be a coward if I hid from this simply because it scares me. I will see this through, no matter the ending. No matter if he discards me and turns me away. I will keep my word, and I will give it my all because not doing so would be a dishonour to myself and my feelings." Pulling back, I cup his face. "You're right. I'm starting to fall in love with him, Mateo, and I think he loves me too. God or no god, he's just Mors to me, just a man who hates early mornings and loves feeling the sun on his face. He's funny, he's smart, he's lonely, and he understands pain. He shows me the world as I never thought to see it. He's a good man, Mateo, and one day, I will prove that to you. For now, I need you to stay safe. If it was a random attack, you will be okay, but if not, and you are in their sights ..." I shudder.

"Don't worry about me." He hugs me again. "I can take care of myself, and the court is on it now—after all, one of their own was attacked."

"We all know that if it suits them, they won't care," I mutter, but I relax. They like Mateo despite his connection to me. He's powerful and in good standing, so they will have no choice but to take it seriously, and just like I've given him no choice but to support and let me go, I have to trust him to do the same.

“I never thought our paths would take us away from one another,” he admits softly.

“Me either, but life has a way of giving us a destiny we didn’t even know we wanted. No matter where I am, Mateo, you are always with me, and I trust that the path will bring us back together one day. For now, I am trusting fate. She’s never led me wrong.” I stand, winking at him. “I better go before he realizes I left. He would be angry.”

Hurrying to the door before he can stop me, I pause in the entryway. “I love you, Mateo. Thank you for saving me all those years ago. Thank you for always being at my side, even if it meant you suffered with me. It’s time to live your life and for me to live mine.”

“Be safe,” he calls, “and make sure to visit.”

I grin. “I’ll try.”

As I hurry through the forest, I barely notice the quietness around me. I feel stronger and safer than ever, knowing what I am now. Even without training, I finally understand how I survived for so long and how I was able to defeat the magical beasts within these woods.

I defeated magical beasts ... They were not ancient ones, were they?

I’ll have to ask Mors.

I practically sprint up the path to the forgotten church, but at the archway, I shiver, knowing something is wrong. Death curls around me, cold and stubborn, nipping at my heels like dogs. Ghosts swirl around the outside, hissing at me, whereas they usually welcome me and watch me curiously.

It feels hateful, cold, and dead.

Fuck.

Mors must know I left. He must have come back. Fuck, fuck, fuck. He won’t like it, especially after he refused my

request. Rolling my shoulders back, I blow out a deep breath, knowing I have a fight coming for me, but I can wear him down. I shudder a little at the thought of our fight because it always leads to epic sex.

It's so good and bad.

I can almost feel him inside, but whatever bond was growing between us has been severed, filled with fury and death. This is going to be so much worse than I thought. He thinks I betrayed him, but what I said to Mateo is true. I will see this through. I will not let Mors push me away out of anger. He has another thing coming if he thinks so. I never back down, and I won't start now.

Stepping inside, I take in the sight before me with a twist of my lips. The church is filled to the brim with ghosts and wraiths. Lining the path to the throne are skeletons that all turn to face me at the same time. Familiar, angry eyes blaze in their empty sockets, and some carry swords, others shields. Sitting on the throne, his expression thunderous and cold, is the god of death.

Mors.

He sits alone, his hands fisted on the throne even as he leans back like he has no care in the world. He looks as beautiful as the day I met him, all darkness and power. Here, in the place we first made the deal, he waits for me.

He's trying to protect himself from me with the angry ghosts, skeletons, darkness, and death. My breath puffs clouds due to the coldness before me. That hurts. It hurts that he feels like he needs to protect himself from me. Yes, I left, but I planned to come back, and I realise I need to show him that and get him to understand because I know what it feels like to be abandoned and do not begrudge him his fury.

I betrayed him and our deal, as well as the bond growing between us.

All traces of the happiness and love we found are gone. There is nothing left but a furious, all-powerful god waiting

for my judgement on his throne, surrounded by death and decay.

It doesn't escape my notice that death previously surrounded himself with life and beauty to light up his dull world and now he's shrouded in darkness and pain as if giving into that side of him, and I hate that. I hate the lack of life and brightness in his eyes. I miss the smile he gave me whenever he saw me.

Now, he sits sullen and brooding upon his throne, surrounded by macabre reminders of death and darkness, but it does not scare me. Death and I are old friends, and I have walked this path with him.

"You'll have to do better than that to scare me away," I call loudly, walking forward with a defiant tilt of my head. I once came in here submissively, on my knees as I begged. I won't do that this time. Once upon a time, the devil terrified me, but now I crave him.

He will not scare me away. I won't beg and scrape, not for him.

He flinches slightly, but I notice, before his lips twist in anger. "Leave," he booms, his voice cold and angry. This is the god of death, not Mors. No, this is the immortal being that can kill millions with a glance.

This is the devil himself.

"Mors, I was coming back," I explain, and there's a huge clank as swords are slammed into shields, making me jump. "Fine, be like this, but you don't scare me. You never have," I snap, and with sure strides, I walk towards him, moving between skeletons and gritting my teeth as ghosts and wraiths attack to protect their master. They slam into me, sending me stumbling back, but I fight my way forward, knowing he's worth it.

I stop before the throne like I did once before and boldly meet his eyes. "You do not scare me, Mors."

"You left," he hisses, and I flinch.

“I did.” I gasp when a skeleton steps before me. “Mors. Stop this. Let us speak—”

The skeleton moves behind me, and a sword comes up and around my neck. The sharp edge presses against my throat, tilting my head back with the force. I angle my chin down against the blade and let it cut into my neck. If he wants me to bleed for him, then I will.

He’s worth fighting for.

My devil has been alone for so very long, but he will never be alone again.

“You do not scare me,” I repeat, knowing he needs to understand that. No matter what he does to me, I will withstand it. Nothing but regret and panic at losing him fills me. I once thought I would do anything to be free of our deal, and now here I am, ready to die for it.

“No?” He arches an eyebrow, and the skeleton digs the blade in deeper. “What about now, traitor?”

“You don’t scare me.” I keep repeating it, hoping he will understand and give me a chance. I’ll make another deal if I must. “I want you, even like this, Mors. I’ll always want you.”

Snarling, he leans forward, and I gasp as the skeleton steps around me and, with a flick of its bony wrist, slices through my clothes, leaving them to float to the cold stone floor in tatters like our bond. I stand bare before the god of death as a bead of blood drips between my breasts. He did it to unnerve and embarrass me, but I’m not. I tilt my head back with a grin.

“What about now?” he hisses.

“I still want you,” I say without shame. “Mors, I was coming back. I’m here.”

“You stink of another man,” he seethes. “You betrayed me and our deal, and then you came back smelling of another man.”

I hadn’t thought of that, and the bitter laugh he releases slices through me like blades, making me flinch.

“You are a traitor. We had a deal.” His voice is full of hatred, and I break at that. I want the caress it usually has and the promise that typically laces his words.

“We did, and we do. I have not broken it.”

“You were forbidden to leave!” he roars.

“I was a prisoner!” I scream. “Yet I came back.” I take a deep breath as he sits back, trying to ease my anger. When we meet like that, we are a volcano and a tornado, and we create nothing but destruction. I don’t want that. “Yes, I hurt you. Yes, you asked me not to leave. But I had to so I could check on Mateo and make sure he was okay. I was coming back. You never would have known—”

“That you are a liar and a betrayer?” He smirks, looking at me in disgust, even as his eyes heat at the sight of my bare body surrounded by death.

Anger flares within me. He’s being unreasonable. He won’t even listen, so how am I supposed to talk? Can’t he see that I came back? Here I was, fighting for our relationship, fighting Mateo to let me come back, and I even admitted that I was falling in love, and Mors said it meant nothing. He called me a traitor when I did nothing but defend him and what’s blooming between us.

“Leaving you never even crossed my mind!” I scream. “Do you understand that? I was able to leave, to go back to my world, and I never once thought about not coming back to you, you selfish asshole!” I roar. “I fought Mateo to come back. I told him I would never leave you, that my place was at your side. I fought the only man I have ever loved, my family, for you. For you, Mors!” I pant, tears filling my eyes. “Can’t you see that? Can’t you see I am here right before you? I left, I shouldn’t have, I made a mistake, but I won’t apologise for checking on someone I love. I would do the same for you, so do not ask me to deny who I am.”

A little bit of heat blooms back to life in his expression, and I take in a shuddering breath. All is not lost.

“You told him you wouldn’t leave me?”

“Yes, you immortal fool! I told him I was falling in love with you. I—” I swallow hard. “I told him everything, and then I rushed back to your side. Is that not enough? Deal or no deal, I’m here for you.”

He watches me, and the skeleton pushes me to my knees with a sword on my throat once more. “Prove it,” he orders. “Prove you want me. Prove you love me. Prove you are mine.”

“How?” I ask. If he wants me to fight for him, then I will. I know he will never believe me otherwise. Mors is so used to being rejected for being what he is. It will take him a long time to understand that I want him, that I care for him, and that’s fine. I have all the time in the world.

Mors’s heart is mine and I want it, so if I must go to war for it, I will, right here in this church of death.

I will fight death itself for my god.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE



AVEA

On my knees before his throne, I await his judgement. “Well?” I ask. “Test me, my god,” I purr. “Let me prove it.”

The skeleton steps before me, lifting the sword and pointing to my mouth. I lean forward and lick the blade, ignoring the slice of pain. My fangs lengthen at the coppery taste, even if it’s my own. I leave my mouth open and let it drip down my chin and onto my chest.

I’m willingly bleeding for him.

Stepping forward, the skeleton thrusts the sword into my mouth. My eyes widen as it stops. I know Mors is controlling it; I see it in its empty orbs and feel his power across its bones.

I roll my eyes up to meet those empty sockets, staring into the skull. It slowly pulls the sword out before sliding it back in, the flat edge of the blade dragging along my tongue. Warmth infuses me, and desire sparks within me despite everything. The chill of death washes over me, peaking my nipples into hard points.

Pulling the sword from my mouth, it drags the blade down my neck and circles my nipples. The sharp edge is a threat that leaves me panting, trying hard to control my reaction so I don’t accidentally cut myself.

“Mors,” I rasp as the sword circles my nipples before the flat edge smacks into each one, making me recoil, but I quickly sit back up.

“I want your surrender. I want your everything. Hand it over. Body. Mind. Soul.” His voice is rough, cold, and demanding.

Bowing my head, I sob as the sword moves lower and smacks my pussy. The cold edge makes me jump before I open my thighs wider, giving the skeleton better access. It smacks my pussy again, this time hitting my clit, and I cry out, my cream sliding down my thighs.

Here, in this place of death, my living cries surround us.

Ghosts move across my body, capturing my hands and holding them so my chest thrusts out. I’m a willing captive of death.

“More,” I demand.

The sword smacks into me again, hitting my clit over and over. The slight edge of pain mixes with pleasure until I’m grinding into the air. My entire body is alight with my need to come in any way my god will allow. Just as I’m about to tumble over the edge from that harsh touch, the skeleton steps back. It circles me, giving me a flash of Mors sitting on his throne like a king overseeing his court.

The sword presses against my neck once more as another skeleton steps before me, and with a flick of Mors’ fingers, it collapses onto the floor, shattering.

“Ride it,” he demands with a cruel smirk, no doubt expecting me to give in and leave.

“What?” I ask, my eyes wide.

“Ride the face,” he demands. “Unless you’re scared, unless this is too much?”

It’s a dare. He’s waiting for me to fail again.

Swallowing hard, I look at the skeleton’s face, closing my eyes so I don’t have to see it. I press my pussy to the bone, pretending it’s just a sex toy as I grind against the bumps and ridges and tears slide down my cheeks. Shame and desire surge through me. If I don’t overthink it, it actually feels good. The hard ridges roll over my sensitive flesh, bringing me

pleasure, but I can't come like this. I'm too weirded out, but I continue to rock against it, opening my eyes to meet Mors's gaze.

Just like his love, it hurts.

My eyes widen when I hear a hiss and two snakes slither across the floor. They are black with golden eyes, their mouths showing fangs as they slide over to me.

“Did you forget that I have dominion over all life and death, Avea?”

I hadn't, but I have never seen him use it against me. I understand now why they call him a serpent.

The snakes slither up my thighs, and I meet his eyes as they move higher until they bite in unison, sealing their mouths around my nipples. The sharp pain makes me scream, but I don't flinch.

“Good girl,” he praises, leaning forward, his eyes gleaming with desire. “Just for that, you get to come.”

His power slams into me, knocking me back, and the pleasure that hits me makes an orgasm explode through me. A scream rips from my throat as I writhe on the cold floor, and he drags another from me. His power hits every pleasure spot until I nearly black out from the ecstasy.

It finally recedes, leaving me panting, my legs quaking as my cum slides from my body and the snakes slither away.

Sliding clumsily to my knees, I lift my eyes to Mors's, who is still sitting on his throne with a satisfied smirk.

“I told you,” I rasp. “I want you. Have I passed your tests now?”

MORS

Sliding from my throne, I drop to my knees before her. She tilts her head back, her face flushed and her body bleeding from small cuts along her magnificent nude form. For the first time in my entire immortal life, I kneel for someone.

No, not someone.

Her.

My Avea.

This woman was willing to face death to claim me, so how could I do anything but kneel before such bravery and dedication? I feel ashamed of how I reacted, but when she cups my face, that all flees, morphing to warmth and hope—hope that she can love me the way I love her.

I once thought that ten years was nothing to a god, but I was so very wrong. Ten years is a lifetime, but it still would not be enough with her. I don't offer her the words though, needing to be completely sure and for her to be as well. If she were to ever take them back, I would perish. Love is fleeting within her world, so I hold them close and hope they last.

“Let's go home,” I say instead, hoping I haven't ruined this.

Everyone else would have turned away and given up, but not my Avea. She fought death for me, so that means she loves me, right?

“I thought you'd never ask.” She grins, pressing her forehead to mine. “I promise you, Mors, I was coming back.”

“I know. I'm sorry I reacted ...” I wave my hand around. “... like this. I thought you betrayed me.”

“Never,” she murmurs, and I close my eyes. “Take me home. Take me home and make me yours again. Take me home and fight for me like I fought for you.”

“Always.” Lifting her into my arms, I wave my hand, and the skeletons collapse into dust and bones. My ghosts swirl around us protectively, offering her comfort where they offered her anger. Striding to my throne, I plunge us back into our home, holding the only prize I have ever cared about winning—my Avea.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR



MORS

I carry her directly to my bed, laying her down and stepping between her thighs. With my eyes on her, I lean down and brush my lips across every little cut, kissing it better. My Avea withstood my wrath. She stayed despite everything I put her through.

She fought for me, and no one else has ever done that before.

Could she truly love a serpent like me?

“I’m sorry,” I whisper, looking into her eyes.

“No, I am,” she tells me, dragging me up her body and kissing me hard. “Now love me, god of death. Show me what it means to be yours.”

I do.

I swallow her gasp as I bury myself deep inside her, claiming her. I take her soft, sweet body hard and fast, just like she loves it. Her thighs are still slick from her release in my chapel, and her nipples are bruised from my snakes. Lowering my head, I suck them better as she cries out. Her channel flutters around my cock as she comes for me, but I still do not relent.

I flip Avea onto her stomach and power into her tight cunt.

Electricity sparks between us, our powers calling to each other as she cries my name. Her back arches as she grinds her deliciously plump ass into me to take more. I watch my length

plunge in and out of her wet cunt, glistening with my love's release.

She is so perfect, and when I slap her clit, making her come again, I tell her so. I praise her as she sobs and collapses. Pulling from her body, I drop to my stomach and lick her pretty pussy clean while rubbing her little asshole. She cries once more, her cream gushing from her cunt.

"I can't, no more," she begs, her legs tangled in my sheets as she tries to kick me away.

"You can and you will," I tell her as I lift her and turn us, conjuring a mirror. Her eyes widen at the sight of her perfect, glowing beauty against my dark, obsessive frame behind her. "You'll watch me while I fuck you."

Spreading her cheeks, I work my cock into her tight little ass, still wet from her cum. She cries out, arching her back and presenting her perfect breasts for me, so I send out my powers and let the cool touch spur her on.

I work myself in and out of her ass until she bounces on my cock, then I slide my other hand around and spread her thighs so she can see the pink, raw used sight of her cunt.

"Look at you. Look at how beautiful you are, how perfect."

Moaning, she closes her eyes, and I pinch her clit until she jerks, her tight ass gripping me like fist, making me groan and bite her neck. "Eyes on me," I demand, and hers snap open and clash with my gaze through the mirror.

Slipping my fingers through her wet cunt, I roll her clit as she moans, riding my cock harder until I feel my balls draw up tight. I did this for her, but watching her take me is fucking perfection.

I slide two slick fingers inside her cunt, stretching her. Her eyes roll into the back of her head as she cries out, her cunt clenching on my fingers and ass gripping my cock so tight, I can't move.

It yanks my release from me, and I bite her neck as I pump it deep inside her. She slumps against me, tears rolling down

her cheeks from her pleasure. When her eyes flutter open again, I wrap my arms around her, leaning into her shoulder.

“Look at us together, Avea. We are perfect. Light and dark. Life and death. We were meant to be.”

Turning her head, she kisses me softly. “I know,” she whispers.

“I will remind you all night,” I tell her, scraping my teeth along her shoulder. “Starting now.” Turning us, I drive into her ass, my cock hard once more as she screams and claws at the bedding.

I’m never letting her get away from me again.

I show her that without words.

I worship Avea all night until her screams turn into moans and her eyes shut as dawn approaches. Only then do I wrap her in my arms and let her rest, her body marked by me.

Holding her tighter, I send up a prayer to the Fates, asking that they allow me to keep her forever.

Ten years will never be enough with her.

I want her for eternity.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE



AVEA

“No, try again,” Mors calls.

Huffing in annoyance, I brush my hair back angrily and close my eyes, focusing on the ball of power. We are back in the chapel because he said it’s as good a place as any to practice and that his world has a way of exchanging powers and corrupting them, so I need to practice in my world until I can control it.

All it does is fizzle out again, as if blocked. I can’t even reach it if I can see it, which took a really long time anyway. My eyes open in annoyance. “It’s no good!” I hiss as I turn and blink. Mors is lying in a coffin with his eyes closed. “Are you taking a nap in a coffin?” I ask, my hands on my hips.

“It’s not like he minds.” He jerks his head at the skeleton he’s lying on and then he wiggles his brows. “Want to join me? We both know you don’t mind.”

Shaking my head, I cross my arms. “Mors.”

“Avea,” he retorts with a pout. He’s so fucking cute, I melt.

“Please?” I sigh. “I want to be able to control this.”

With a soft smile, he leaps from the coffin so effortlessly, my mouth dries, but I force myself to concentrate, even when he cups my cheeks. “Close your eyes,” he instructs softly. “Listen to my voice. Reach deep inside of you. Find that power and reach for it. It’s yours, no one else’s. Force it if you must. It’s hard at first, but it will come easier and easier until a

mere thought controls it. Cajole it, demand it, use it. It's yours. It is you."

His smooth, deep voice guides me into that dark space inside me again, past my vampyr powers to the ball that hides in the dark, glowing gold and red. It moves as I approach, as if resisting me and burrowing deeper, but I listen to Mors and reach for it again.

"You are mine," I tell it, gritting my teeth. "You are me. Come to me. Come," I demand harshly.

It flickers, and I grin in victory as it seems to float to me. "That's it. Come here, you beautiful ball—"

Fuck! My eyes open as it slices at me and then retreats. I meet Mors's gaze and he smiles softly, stroking my cheek as he looks at me with nothing but pride, even though I bubble with frustration. "Try again. You've got this. You are stronger than you know. If you can tame the god of death, then you can do this. Reach for that inner strength."

Moved by his belief, I close my eyes and seek it out once more, hardening myself. Mors believes it's dormant and ready to attack if dragged out, since I buried it so deeply, never acknowledging it. I use that now. I wrap myself around it, surging like an attack, and grit my teeth at the agony it sends through my body, as if I'm being cut apart from the inside.

I yank it into me.

My eyes snap open with a scream as I'm flung backwards, power exploding through me. Mors goes flying, landing on his feet, as I stop midair, floating before slowly lowering until my feet touch the stones.

"Good," he praises. "I see it in your eyes, so bright and beautiful. That's it, now harness it. Bind it to you. Make it yours. Teach it. You are in control, otherwise it will be out of control."

Unable to speak in case it escapes and attacks him again, I nod and wrap my thorns from my vampyr side around the power. It hisses and attacks, and I bow over it, blood splattering from my mouth. Gritting my teeth, I close my eyes.

I imagine the thorny vines in my mind and see them wrap around the ball, digging in and taking root, tightening until it stops. Experimentally, I stand and test it, imagining a pink rose before me, and when I open my eyes, I watch it grow in my palm.

It's just what I wanted. Grinning, I meet Mors's eyes, which shine with pride as he strides over and picks me up, spinning me around. "You did it!"

I giggle. "Did you ever doubt me?"

"Never." He grins, sliding me down his body until he cups my cheek and leans in, kissing me softly. "Never. Now let's practice."

I groan as he laughs.

Evil, wicked man.

Mors walks in a circle around me, touching my aura and sensing my power with a prideful grin. "There are many tales of the ancient ones and what they could do, so we will start with the most common and work our way through. We will practice every day until you can control elements of it, and each day you succeed, I will spend that night between your thighs, making you come so much you pass out."

"Mors," I whine, "what if I fail?"

"Then no orgasms for you." He smirks, stepping back.

"That's just cruel," I mutter, "but it's a very good incentive."

"I am known for my evil ways." He smirks. "One very common myth amongst ancient ones is their ability to transform into a beast. However, I feel like that might be difficult, so we will work up to that and start small today. We already know you can heal, evaporate, and use your powers to attack." He winks, no doubt referencing the fact that I threw him across the room. "Ancient ones have one more thing in

common—their ability to harness another’s powers for themselves. Let’s begin there.”

Stepping forward, he spreads his arms at his sides, his palms facing me. “I will start small and call a wraith to me. I want you to stop me and call it to you.”

“How?” I ask, trying to think it through.

“Powers are not an intellectual problem you can figure out. They are also a feeling. They are intentions. Just focus on what you want. There is no shame in failing because it means we learn and adapt.”

Trusting him, I close my eyes for a moment and focus on the power twisting within me, and then I open my eyes once more. When I meet his gaze again, I incline my head, and the tips of his fingers move slightly. It would barely be noticeable if you weren’t looking. One of the wraiths lazing around the ceiling flutters down to him to do his bidding. “Stop it.”

Reaching out with the power inside me, I try to lasso the wraith, only for it to slip through since it’s not physically here. Sighing, I remember what he said—intentions. Swallowing, I send out my will.

Stop.

The wraith flutters closer to Mors, but I refuse to fail. I want his pride directed at me again.

Stop! I roar in my head.

It stills, fluttering in the air between us. “Excellent, Avea!” Mors yells gleefully. “Now call him to you.”

Come to me, I whisper seductively.

It turns, and I see a male’s face, and my hold on him loosens a little. Snarling, I strengthen my grip. *Come to me,* I demand.

It watches me for a moment before coming closer and then wrapping around me. Giggling, I let go. “Thank you,” I murmur to him, and he bows before he floats upwards.

“It’s hard since they have free will, but you did incredible, Avea,” Mors praises. “So good.”

“One orgasm for me.” I wink. “What’s next?”

Rubbing his hands together, he grins. “How about something more fun?”

Oh gods, I fear the look in his eyes.

I was right to fear the mischievous gleam in Mors’s eyes.

He chuckles. “Don’t let them attack me.”

“I wouldn’t want them ruining that pretty face,” I muse distractedly, keeping my power aimed at the live bears Mors conjured from thin air. They roar at him, but I keep a protective barrier between them and him as he taunts them.

“Especially since I plan to sit on it after,” I say. One of the bears lunges at the bubble, so I reinforce it. It holds as the bear swipes furiously before suddenly turning to me. The others notice, and instead of stalking Mors, they all face me. They are wild animals, after all.

“Shit.” I stumble back as Mors narrows his eyes, snaps his fingers, and makes them disappear, not even letting them get close enough to smell me.

“Do not doubt me. Nothing we do will ever have the chance to hurt you. Nobody gets to touch that luscious skin but me. Now, how about ...”

And so it goes. Mors comes up with crazier and crazier ideas. Honestly, I think it’s so he doesn’t get bored. This doesn’t feel like training that gods or ancient ones would do, but it definitely keeps things interesting and fun, and when I collapse in an exhausted heap, he pulls me into his arms.

“You did so well. Such a good girl deserves a reward, don’t you think?” he murmurs as we return to our world and he carries me to the house.

“Definitely.” I nod eagerly.

Smirking, he winks at me. “First, let me feed you. You are still part mortal, and you are going to need energy for the night I have planned.”

Gods, yes.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX



AVEA

After eating, I wipe my mouth and smirk as Mors watches me, his eyes alight with desire as he sips his wine. I stand and step back, and he tracks my every move like a predator.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

Stepping back again, I grin wider. “Why, my god of death, I’m leaving of course.”

“Not without me, you’re not,” he murmurs. “Get that beautiful ass over here. I’m starved for my dessert.”

“You want me?” I murmur.

“More than anything.” He sits up, his wine glass hitting the table as he watches me. “Show me what belongs to me.”

“Me?” I flutter my lashes and smile, reaching up and unfastening my dress. It pools to the floor, and his eyes narrow, his nostrils flaring as he takes me in. When the crack of the wineglass rings through the room, the top separating from the stem, falling sideways, red wine splashes everywhere and I giggle. His reaction empowers me.

The god of death wants me so badly, he forgets himself.

“Avea,” he warns, shaking the wine off his hand and sitting back, patting his lap. “Come here. Let me taste you.”

“You want me, Mors? Come and get me.” I turn and flee.

I hear his chuckle but nothing else. Giggling, I race up the stairs, but when I reach the next floor, he suddenly appears before me. “You can never escape me, but please try. I love watching those sexy as hell curves jiggle for me. It will only make it that much sweeter when I slam into that tight cunt when I catch you.”

Squeaking, I turn and flee the opposite way, only for him to pop up, leaning against a wall with a dangerous grin.

“Try again. At least make this hard for me. Well, you already have, but ...” He rubs himself as he watches me. Narrowing my gaze at the blatant dare, I turn and dart away once more, my hair whipping behind me with my speed.

This time, I call the wraiths to me and urge them to stop him. I hear his impressed murmurs as I race higher, going up more stairs than I have ever explored before. I know he’s letting me get away, and when I tumble out of an arched doorway, I skid to a stop, gasping.

We must be on the roof because clouds stretch before me, and the stars glitter as if they are just for me. The beauty of the night distracts me for a second and that’s all he needs. He grips me from behind and yanks me back into his hard body.

“Got you. Now what shall I do with you?” he purrs.

I lean back, rubbing my body against his as I wrap my arm around his neck to bring him closer. “Fuck me and make me scream into the night sky,” I tell him without shame, and when I turn to face him, I see he’s made the door disappear so I can’t escape him—like I would want to anyway. Leaning up on my toes, I drag my lips across his teasingly as his grip tightens, his fingers digging into my skin.

“Oh, I plan to, my little Avea. I plan to fuck you here until the sun rises and you beg for a break, but I still won’t relent. You taunted the beast, the one everyone in this world and yours fears, and you will reap the consequences.” I see the darkness in his eyes and shudder at the coldness there.

“I can’t wait.”

He backs me up as his lips cover mine, silencing whatever else I was going to say. We lie on the roof under the stars, our powers mingling along with our tongues. Our hands caress each other, moving slowly as we enjoy each other's bodies and touches.

His head lowers, breaking the kiss. I gasp as he slides those plump lips down my chest, taking his time to worship and play with my nipples until my thighs quake and I whimper his name.

I need him with a desperation that borders on obsession, and the glint in his dark eyes tells me that he feels the same way.

He keeps those dark orbs on me as his lips glide across my belly and over my mound, placing butterfly kisses across my pussy. He touches me like he owns me, and in a way, he does. My body reacts only to him. Even now, I'm wet and needy, and when his tongue laps at my clit, it's not enough.

I don't want to be teased tonight. I want him. I reach down and tug him up despite his growl of protest. "I need you inside me, all of you. You can lick me later."

"So romantic," he teases as he blankets my body, lying between my parted thighs, but I should have known Mors cannot leave me without some form of torture. His cold magic strokes up my legs, covering my cunt as his mouth covers mine. He swallows my groan as that coldness slips inside me, stretching me and bringing me to the point of coming before both it and his mouth pull away.

"Mors," I beg, wrapping my legs around him tighter.

"I've got you, Avea. I'll make you fly," he promises, his smoky voice curling around me as he reaches between us and presses his cock to my entrance.

With one smooth thrust, he buries himself inside me, sealing his lips on mine and swallowing my scream of pleasure. He gives me a moment to adjust, but when I scratch at his back and move my hips for more, he pulls out and thrusts back in, rocking his body into mine.

It's not hard, feral fucking like I'm used to.

It's almost sweet as his powers wrap around us and lift us, making me gasp and cling to him as he makes love to me in the air, our tongues duelling.

"I can't hold it." He gasps as he breaks away. "You feel too good."

He sets us down gently, but my head hangs from the edge of the house. I meet his eyes as he grins.

"Still flying, little love."

Gasping, I meet his lips with the fury of love, our bodies moving together faster. My pleasure grows and spreads across my skin.

With a grunt, Mors speeds up, unable to help himself. Even while making love, he has to have an edge of power—power I crave from him and will never be able to get from anyone else.

I dig my nails into his back, begging wordlessly for more.

Every type of love is different, and this is ours—dark and dirty.

Hanging over the edge of the house, I feel my hair float in the air as I scream. He fucks me right into the edge of space until I'm almost flying in the night sky.

I tumble over the edge with a shout, splintering around him, and only his arms anchor me to this plane as he works in and of my tight channel. Yanking me up until we are wrapped in each other's arms, he fucks me.

"My beautiful Avea." He nips my lips, and I run my own across his cheek to his neck, nibbling and sucking at his pounding pulse as he hammers into me from below.

Pleasure and power pull us higher and higher.

I sit on his cock, with his arms wrapped around me, as we make love under the night sky, and I cannot hold back.

Power explodes out of me, rippling into the sky, and I explode with it once more.

I drag him with me, his groan echoing in my ear as he buries his face in my neck, his arms tightening around me as he fills me with his release.

When our powers finally ebb, we tumble to a sweaty heap on the roof, our bodies still joined, and I know it won't be long before we come together again.

It never is.

Mors keeps his promise, and I collapse at the first touch of dawn, exhausted and falling into slumber with his protective arms wrapped around me and his kiss on my lips.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN



MORS

I hold Avea closer, worried as I look down at her. I hope no one felt her release last night. I should have taken her inside the house where my barriers would have prevented such things from happening, but I needed her so badly, I couldn't think straight. Her powers rippled into our world. Hopefully, no god was around to feel it or they will be curious. For now, I relax and watch her sleep, a small smile curling my lips at her beauty.

How could I ever think of her as plain? Was I truly that blind and reckless in my own arrogance? Avea is showing me not just her beauty, but also the beauty in my life and what the world has to offer.

I never cared before her.

Even my duty was done more out of respect than feelings, but she has changed all of that. I cannot be angry when it has given me her. I would want my beautiful Avea with or without her ancient powers. I'm just glad she has them since it allows her to touch me and be with me without dying. They saved her and gave me a chance at living, and for that, I will always be thankful.

Whatever misdeeds and evil that transpired in her life, they brought her to me, and she will always be safe now because I have no intention of ever letting Avea go. I will make a thousand deals if I must to keep her here with me forever.

If she won't let me, I will resign myself to a life in her world, stalking her like the villain she called me. There is no life for me without her.

I have lived since the birth of this world, and nothing has ever meant anything to me until her. There is only Avea. She is my world. She is my reason for being. She is the air in my lungs. She is the sun on my skin. She is the moon that guides me. She is the power that keeps me alive, the food that nourishes me, and the water that heals me. She is everything.

Settling down to watch her, I work on a plan to keep her with me forever.

I begin with my plan when she awakens. I make her breakfast as she washes, and after eating, I take her hand. To be with me forever, she needs to share every aspect of my life. She has already crossed souls with me, but she has never come with me on my journeys that are equally as important—those that call to me from her world.

I can sense her curiosity, but as I cross us, she stays quiet, holding my hand. Once in her world, I evaporate us, and we reappear at a hospital. Her eyes widen as we walk through the doors, but I make sure no one sees us. We stroll through their bustling masses without even a curious glance.

I let the pull lead me until we appear outside of a door in an ICU. An elderly lady sits in a bed inside the room, and beside her is a photograph of her and a man with many children.

Once we step inside, she opens her eyes. "Is it my time?" she asks.

"It is," I murmur.

"Good." She smiles brightly. "I'm ready. My children are all grown, and although they will miss me, I want to be with my love again. I will, won't I?"

“Of course, Sandra,” I promise, walking to her side. I take her hand, releasing Avea’s, and Sandra glances at her then me.

“It’s good you aren’t alone. Not even death should wander alone forever. You should know the beauty of love and life while being at its end. I’m ready, thank you.” Smiling softly at her, I lean down and place a chaste kiss on her forehead.

When I step back, she is at my side in her spirit form. The machines attached to her start beeping as her body breathes its last breath. A nurse rushes in, calling for someone, but as she hurries to Sandra’s side and checks her pulse, she shakes her head. She’s gone, and the nurse knows it.

Taking Avea’s hand once more, I cross us and Sandra, reuniting her with her love.

My next stop is a small boy propped up in a superhero bed in his big house in the city. It’s night, and he should be sleeping, but he’s staring at nothing. His mother, who’s in a suit, is curled up at his side with an open book she must have been reading before she fell asleep. The table next to him is filled with drinks and medication, and a breathing machine and emergency supplies fill the room. When I meet his gaze, I see the truth there—he is dying.

“I’m scared,” he whispers when he sees me. “Are you here to take me away from my mummies?”

“I am, but there is no reason to be scared,” I promise.

He begins to cry, and Avea hurries to his side, taking his hand. He peers up at her innocently, but there is so much ancient wisdom in his eyes.

“It’s going to be okay. There will be no more pain or nasty meds. It’s okay.”

“But my mummies will be upset.” His lower lip trembles. “They love me so much. I hear them crying at night when they don’t think I can hear them.”

She swallows hard, her own tears falling down her cheeks. “They truly do love you, I can tell, but it’s not your job to make sure they are okay. It’s okay to rest now. I promise I will make sure they are alright. It will hurt for a while, and they

will miss you so much, but one day, they'll be with you again."

"Promise?" He holds out his pinkie.

"I promise," she murmurs, linking her pinkie with his. "I will be right here the whole time. It won't hurt."

"Okay." He sits back, looking at his mum. "I hope they are happy again. I miss seeing them smile. They should smile again."

"Hopefully, one day, they will whenever they think of you." Avea looks at me, heartbroken. I shake my head. There is nothing I can do to save this boy. It is nature, the way of things, even if we hate it.

Swallowing, she turns back to him and smiles. "Close your eyes and think of your favourite things."

He closes his eyes and holds her hand, passing gently into the night. We cross him, but I bring Avea back, and I hold her in my arms as we watch his mum wake up with the dawn.

She stretches, her face haggard and tired. "Morning, pudding. Sorry, I must have fallen asleep while reading. How about we try eating something?" She stills, her eyes seeing what her mind is unable to accept. "Sammy?"

Turning into my chest, Avea sobs as the woman screams and calls for help. Another woman runs into the room in a paramedic's uniform. Sobbing, she checks the little boy before holding her wife. They sink to the floor together and cry, grieving the son they lost.

"We have to help them," Avea whispers, peering up at me.

"I cannot take their pain, Avea. To do so would mean taking away their love," I admit, tears in my own eyes. "But I will keep my eye on them. I will make sure they are as okay as they can be. Things will not be easy for them; death never is."

Leaning into me, she places her head on my chest. "It's not your fault, Mors."

I startle at that, my eyes widening as I stare at her.

“Don’t blame yourself. You cannot stop people from hurting. You cannot stop death. You are just its messenger, and you do it with dignity and kindness.”

We stand there, watching the two women grieve until their pain becomes too much, and I take her home with me, just holding her as we grieve with those women for what they lost.

I feel every single drop of that pain, and I silently lead Avea outside, crouching before a stone on my path where I carve a name.

Sammy.

Standing in the sunlight, I infuse their love into that stone so he will forever be remembered, even when his family is reunited with him. He was a warrior worthy of being remembered. He didn’t change the world, but he changed theirs. Everyone deserves to be remembered.

Every single person.

Death comes for us all, whether we like it or not, but I promise every single person I cross, no matter the lives they led, they are not alone in the end. I am there just as I am at their birth. I will always remember them.

Now, Avea will as well.

It is the burden death shares with his love.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT



AVEA

I'm lying in bed, tracing his magnificent golden chest. His eyes are almost closed, hazy and lax, and his hand strokes my back. We spent all morning practicing and all night fucking, but this is my favourite part of our daily routine—just us, in bed, holding each other. I enjoy the silence, comfort, and peace.

Propping my chin on his chest, I watch him. His black hair falls perfectly around his face, even when mussed, and his black eyes flicker in thought, even as his hand continues to caress me. His long lashes crest on his cheeks as if kissing his skin, and his lips curve, flashing perfect white teeth, when he catches me staring.

Mors is magnificent, there is no denying that, but it's the softness lighting up those once cold eyes that's my favourite thing about him. "See something you like?" he teases.

"I don't know. I might need to test drive it first. How about —" I squeal as he flips us, pinning me beneath him with a wide grin. He once told me he never smiled until I came into his life. I don't know if I believe that, but I believe it when he looks at me like I am the only person in this entire world or any other who matters to this god.

"What were you saying, Avea?" he teases, pressing down so I can feel every hard inch of his powerful body. My words catch in my throat, and the smirk that twists his lips is as infuriating as it is sexy.

“You don’t play fair,” I grumble before wrapping my legs around him and spinning us once more, my new powers allowing me to whether he wanted me to or not. He hits the bed with a proud grin, and I straddle him, teasingly pressing my breasts to his chest.

“Now who isn’t playing fair?” he growls, sliding his hands down my back to grip my ass and haul me closer. I sit pressed against his huge length, which is trapped between us. “How about you sit that pretty pussy on your god’s cock and come for him?”

“How about ...” I lean down, licking my lips like I’m going to kiss him. His eyes close, and at the last second, I blow on his cheek, laughing as I slide off him and hurry away. “How about we get dressed instead?”

“Clothes should be banned in this house! In fact ...” He snaps his fingers, and when I reach my wardrobe, which has mysteriously moved into his room, it’s empty.

“Mors, give me back my clothes.” I prop my hands on my hips as I turn to see him lounging in the bed, watching me as he strokes himself. “Now.”

“If you want clothes, then make them. Otherwise, I like this new rule.” His tongue runs across his plump lower lip, and I turn away before I get distracted again.

Letting out what he always calls an adorable growl, I turn back and close my eyes, reaching for that power inside me, knowing if he can create them, then so can I. I fight with it, sending my wishes, but when I open an eye to check, nothing happens.

Annoyed, I grab hold of that power and thrust it outwards, blasting it with my intentions, and when I open my eyes, the wardrobe is overflowing with clothes. I see a mix of dresses, like Mors creates for me, along with leather trousers and corsets, which I used to wear.

Clapping, I turn to see him, waiting on his reaction. He sits up, smiling widely, pride shining from his eyes. “Amazing! You continue to astound me. You are such a fast learner.”

The pride and praise almost make me giddy as I pull on some brown leather pants and add a red flower corset top, which he helps me lace up. His touch lingers on my skin, bringing me to life as it always does, but I step away before we can get lost in each other again.

Otherwise, we would be in bed all day.

Sighing, he wraps me in his arms. “Well, since we aren’t playing, let me take you somewhere.”

“Oh? Where?”

“You’ll see. Close your eyes.”

I do so eagerly.

This is the last place I expected Mors to take me. I don’t even know how he knows where Mateo lives, other than the fact that he’s a god, but we stand outside of his house with sunlight streaming down over our bodies, our hands joined.

“I thought you might wish to check on your friend,” he says as I stare up at him.

With a squeal, I launch myself at him, and he catches me with a laugh, swinging me around as his lips descend on mine for a quick peck. “I take that to mean you’re happy?”

“Very, thank you,” I whisper just as I hear the door opening.

“Avy, is that you?” Mateo sounds both hopeful and confused.

Mors lets me slide down his body, and I rush to Mateo who grins widely. We meet at the doorway, smacking together in a tight hug. When I hear a jealous growl behind me, I pull back slightly. “Aren’t you going to let me in?” I tease Matty.

“Shit, yeah, sorry, you just took me by surprise.” He hurries inside, and I step after him.

When I don't feel the comforting warmth of Mors, I turn to find him.

Mors lingers outside, unsure of his welcome. Grinning, I grab his hand and drag him in after me, pushing him to the sofa and plopping down on his lap. With a relieved sigh, he holds me tight as Mateo stops and stares before shaking his head, seeming to come out of his stupor.

"Not that I'm not glad to see you, but why are you here?" Mateo asks, sitting opposite us. His eyes go to Mors over and over again, his expression unfriendly, yet Mors is completely relaxed, ignoring him as he runs his lips across my shoulder. He's giving us the privacy I want without leaving me alone.

He probably thinks I would get up to trouble, and he would be right.

"Mors thought I might want to see you." I grin widely.

"Did he? Is that why he's not letting you out of his sight?" Mateo snarls.

Luckily, Mors doesn't rise to the bait.

"I want him here," I tell Mateo. "How are you? How's everything?"

"We're good," he replies tightly, something flashing in his eyes.

"Mateo, when have you ever been able to lie to me? Tell me what it is right now," I retort. My powers fill me. Mors feels it and tightens his hold, soothing me until I relax. That's another reason why I want him here. I don't have complete control yet, and I would hate to hurt anyone.

Mateo glances at Mors, and I move my head to interrupt the staring contest. "Mateo."

"Fine," he grumbles. "I ... Well, shit, there isn't an easy way to say this. After the ... judgements, which we didn't go to, a lot of the court either died or left. Those who remain are ... good, Avea. Actually good. Well, most. It seems to have pushed some over the edge. They are angry, and they are taking that anger out on their own kind. The queen survived,

as did the king. The king has taken it upon himself to change our ways, but the queen? She's gone the opposite route. My mate thinks she's behind the attack on me, using hunters of our kind to attack us with blessed weapons. She thinks the queen is trying to kill anyone that she doesn't trust. There is to be a confrontation this evening in the court, and a challenge will probably occur. If we do not stop this now, more will die, and the judges will come for us."

I have heard of the judges. I might not have been invited to the ball, since I'm never in my court, but I heard what happened. Part of me is happy about what they did. Fuck the vampyrs. They never showed me any loyalty, but if it affects Matty, I have to care, and I have to help.

"Tell me you are not involved, Matty," I demand. Mors lets me go, and I hurry to Matty's side, placing my hand on his arm. "Matty, look at me. Tell me."

"I can't do that, Avy." He meets my gaze. "They tried to kill me. They would kill my mate. She must be stopped, as well as whoever else is involved. I will challenge her myself. It is my duty and my honour."

"No," I snap. "I can't lose you. I did everything to save you, and now you will throw it away?" Yes, I am throwing it in his face. He flinches but does not back down.

"You made your choice, Avea, and I have to make mine. If they kill me, they will come for you. I'm doing this to protect you," he murmurs, taking my hand.

"I do not need your protection. I need you alive!" I yell. "Please, Matty, let someone else—"

"No, we have allowed this to happen for too long. If the king is too blind and the judges are too busy, then we must step forward. It is time for a revolution, Avea. They will never hurt anyone else again. It's now or never. I'm doing it tonight. I'm so glad you came so I could say goodbye, just in case ..."

He trails off, his Adam's apple bobbing.

"No!" I yell, turning to Mors, pleading with my eyes for him to do something.

He just stares back at me, his eyes hard, and then he looks at Mateo and nods. “You have honour and courage to protect innocents like that. I am glad I saved you.”

“So am I. Take care of her for me, won’t you?” he demands of Mors. “Don’t you dare fucking hurt her. God or not.”

“I have no plans to. She means everything to me,” Mors says, staring right at Mateo. “I will keep her safe.”

“No, stop it.” I stand and move to Mors. “Stop talking like he’s already dead. There has to be another way.”

“There isn’t. It’s planned for tonight, Avea. Please, I don’t want to spend the time I have left fighting. Can’t we just talk and be together?”

“No, because you’re talking about dying! About leaving me! I will not allow it!” I roar before dropping into the seat next to Mors, tears in my eyes as I take his hand.

“We have to help them, Mors,” I beg.

Snarling, he glances away. “I cannot.”

I flinch. “You would ignore my request for help? Remember, I’m part vampyr.”

“And I am not. I am a god, Avea, and even if I wanted to help, I cannot. I am duty bound. If I intervene without approval, they can banish or end me. It would not just be breaking the law; it would be breaking my vows and my duty. I cannot do that, not even for you.”

I swallow, my anger deflating when he grabs my face, searching my gaze.

“But you can. Like you said, you are part vampyr and strong enough to take on anything. You can intervene. You can go with Mateo tonight and help get to the bottom of this so your friends are safe. I cannot come with you, Avea, and it will kill me. Part of me hopes you will say no, and a bigger part wants to steal you away, but I care too much to do that to you. I refuse to be like those in your past, dismissing your wants and needs. I can see into your soul, my little mortal. You will

not rest until this is done—not when it comes to your family—and I cannot do this for you. I hate it as much as you but go. I will be waiting for you.”

“No, wait,” I blurt, confused and hurt. “Are you leaving me here? Are you going back on our deal?”

“Never,” he growls. “But to allow you to stay away from me without repercussions, I will need to break the deal we made.”

I flinch again. “Then no, there has to be another way.”

“There is not, and we are running out of time. If you want to do this, to be there for Mateo and your old court, then there is no other way, Avea. I must break the deal. It’s your decision, my love. I can take you home and never speak of this again. I want to, but it would hurt you, and that is the last thing I ever want to do, never mind betray your trust like that. You know your heart, Avea, and your power. You decide.”

“I—” I swallow as he searches my gaze, but he must read the truth in my eyes because before I know it, his turn cold and distant once more. When he releases my hands, I almost wither. The distance kills me.

Once, this would have made me dance for joy, but now I hate it, and yet I have no choice. He’s right. To be there for Mateo, to protect him and those who were kind to me at court, I must break the deal. I have to be able to attend tonight, but it means losing Mors.

It means walking away from the only person who ever made me feel alive and accepted and cherished me for who I am.

It means walking away from the man I love.

I don’t know if I’m strong enough for that, even for Mateo.

“I see your decision is made.” He stands, and I stare up at him, my heart breaking.

“Mors,” I croak.

“It is okay,” he promises, leaning down to kiss my forehead. The agony of that sweet kiss rocks through me, and

tears slide down my cheeks. “The deal is broken. I was a fool to try and keep someone like you. You must be free. It’s your nature.”

“No, wait!” I reach for him, but he steps back, putting distance between us. “You’re coming back after, right?” When he doesn’t speak, I stand, panicking. This is all happening so fast. “Mors.”

“You’re free, Avea,” is all he says, and my heart cracks further. With one last lingering look, he turns and leaves as quickly as he came, unaware that I fall backwards, unable to breathe.

Is it over?

He said it’s not, but then why did that feel like goodbye?

Why did that feel like the god of death, the man I am starting to fall in love with, just walked away from me thinking he is giving me everything I want?

Freedom.

All I truly want, though, is to be chained to him for eternity.

How could we go from so much happiness to this?

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE



MORS

With each step I take away from Avea, my soul screams, demanding I say fuck the rules and my duties and just follow her into oblivion, but I am a god and she is half vampyr. She has her place, and I have mine.

The reminder is stark. She never could have stayed with me forever.

She must be around her own kind. She has ties to this world, ones she cherishes and is willing to die for. Death would be quicker than this pain. How foolish I was to once think I could so easily toss her aside. How foolish I was to think that temptress would be anything other than my everything.

This is why gods are forbidden from mating with any being other than another god. Mortals have the ability to destroy us, even if they do not know it. Their deaths, their heartbreak, could destroy us. Our strengths are also our weaknesses, and now Avea knows it because to break the deal, I paid the price.

Still, I want nothing more than to hold her tight. I even wait, hoping she will come after me.

She doesn't, which tells me my answer, and after tonight, I doubt she will even want to come back to me. She will survive the challenge; I have no doubt about that. With her new powers, she is unstoppable, especially against a pesky little

queen. I just hope she controls them so she doesn't out herself and become hunted.

In fact, I will place protection on her, so even if she uses her powers tonight, no other god will feel it. I will protect her from afar, even though I would give anything to be at her side. I have never wanted to be a mortal, but now I do, except Avea and I walk two very different paths, ones that intersected for a while but now veer away.

The time they were joined, though, was the most alive I have ever been, and it taught me what love truly is.

Without it and her, I am nothing.

AVEA

Mors left so quickly and easily, as if it were simple to walk away from me. He didn't just break a deal; he broke my heart.

I have no time to grieve, even though I want to run back to the temple, get on my knees, and beg for another deal. Mors is right. The deal was broken because I couldn't walk away from Mateo. I cannot let my friend do this alone, and even though my heart is gone, taken by the god of death as easily as he takes souls, I have to go on.

"So what's the plan?" I ask Mateo, but it comes out choked, and when I glance up through my tears, I see his face fall.

"You love him. You truly love him," he murmurs, heading my way.

I scramble backwards, my hands out. "Don't touch me, okay? I just ... I can't. I can't break right now. Let's get through tonight."

He watches me worriedly but nods. "It's a party."

"Of course it is," I mutter.

"We figured they want to show off their powers and reassure the masses that everything is fine after the blood ball. There are a few of us, and we will spread out around the crowd. When I challenge the queen, we are hoping those working with her will give themselves away. If not, once she's dead, they will surely stop."

"Have you thought through what will happen when you kill the queen? What if the king does not believe you and takes it out on you in anger?"

He frowns. "Do you have a better plan?"

That's the question, isn't it? Despite the agony in my chest, I close my eyes and think. When my eyes pop open, he grins.

"You do, don't you? You have a better plan."

“What do evil people all have in common?” I query.

“They are assholes?”

“They love power. No one loves that more than the queen. Let’s give her that.” I grin evilly, putting all my heartache and anger into it.

I left the court as a weak, half-starved reject, but now I will come back this evening with the power of an ancient one running through me.

If they crave power, then they will get it.

CHAPTER THIRTY



AVEA

The Elemental Court is exactly how I remembered it. It's unassuming from the outside, just how they like it, with a simple door with intricate metal framework. The metal forms symbols and chalices, and when we approach, they start to shimmer, sending out power.

Out here, beyond the city in the small woods, no one would stumble upon it unless they meant to, and if they did ... well, they wouldn't be coming back. Unlike the bigger courts, like Specter or Vermillion, Elemental is often ignored. Even when the judges came, I heard the king was not part of it nor the meetings after. It makes me wonder if they knew about this court or if our king was simply hiding again. I glance at Phoebe and Mateo, who both nod. Blowing out a breath, he touches his hand to the spikes in the centre of the door. It tastes his blood, which flows across the metal, bringing it to life. Twisting and glowing, it slides open with a creak, allowing us entry.

Only those who have given blood to the court are allowed to enter, otherwise it poisons you—something I've felt far too often when I've been away too long and my blood is clean of the court's. They never liked me being here, since they thought I was lesser, especially the queen. The king was not so bad, and he was even a good man sometimes. He's lost to his wife's wicked ways, completely blinded by the infatuation of mating.

We would only ever see him at meetings or balls, though, because she doesn't leave the court, and I often wondered why.

I allow Mateo and Phoebe to go first, as they don their masquerade masks. Tonight is the solstice celebration, something I had completely forgotten about. It's basically an excuse to throw a big blood orgy and to indulge in all your desires in the name of life. I was never invited. Mateo snuck me in once with a mask that covered most of my face, but seeing them all dancing and partying only reminded me just how much of an outcast I truly was, so I left and never came again.

Tonight will be different.

I wear a tiny silver filigree mask that shimmers with diamonds, thanks to Phoebe, and my dress is flowy and long, reminding me of the ones Mors made for me. They didn't ask where I got it, and I didn't mention that I made it myself with just a flick of my hand.

The rest of the rebels, those willing to face off with the queen to reveal what she has been doing, are already inside. Mateo informed me on the way here, warning that tonight will be a bloodbath. I know that, but my only concern is saving Mateo and Phoebe. Maybe that's selfish, but I owe this court nothing. Where were they when I was drained, starving, and alone? Where were they when I was shunned? They did not step in to save me, so why would I help them?

They are not my people.

Stepping inside behind them, I jump slightly when the door closes. Torches illuminate the narrow tunnel that leads into the ground and to the court. It's a familiar pathway, but now it fills me with dread, since I know what is waiting.

What I cannot let happen.

Mateo will challenge the queen, and he will lose. The king will want retribution, even if it was just, and he will kill Phoebe. I have to stop that from happening. I will not lose the only family I have, especially not to this court. If it means giving into these powers inside me, then so be it.

Let them see what I am.

The tunnel ends and opens up into the middle of the court. The circular entryway is draped with velvet curtains, and the lighting is dim, with candles and lanterns everywhere, plunging us into partial darkness. Sultry music reaches us even here, and, ignoring the tunnels that lead to the living quarters, we move towards the closed curtain that will bring us into the throne room where they are holding the ball.

I hear laughter and chatter, and the scent of blood and cooked meat reaches me through the curtain. Closing my eyes, I reach out with my senses and taste at least two hundred bodies on the other side, including the queen and king.

There's no backing out now.

Turning to Mateo, I take his hand. "Go home and let me deal with this."

"No. They hurt me, and they are my people, Avea, even if they did you wrong," he murmurs.

"Phoebe—"

"They stabbed my mate. No, we are not going back. We have come too far, and it is time for things to change. I thought you, more than anyone, would appreciate that."

I swallow my protests because she's right.

Whether I like these people or not, I have to help them. I can't walk away, and there is no going back. Straightening my mask and flipping my hair over my shoulder, I tilt my chin back and step behind Mateo and Phoebe. "Then let us begin."

They pull the curtains open, stepping into the festivities. I hear some whispers as the music hits me, muffled by the curtain. Once they are through, I walk in after them. My façade easily falls back into place, only now it's powered by magic and strength, not just anger and pain.

I meet their eyes boldly, and the whispers get louder. They pass along who is here until I see the queen turn on her throne, one of her minions whispering in her ear.

The violins soften, the singer hesitating as I glance around. To the left is the stage where they are performing in full ball

gowns and tuxes, all members of the court the queen keeps in favour due to their ability to entertain her. The rest of the court is similarly dressed, and blood is already being spilled. I see bite marks in necks and thighs, as well as four men fucking and feeding in the corner, oblivious to everything but their pleasure.

It's a true solstice celebration, except they are all wearing black, red, blue, and other dark colours, yet here I stand, shining brightly in a long silver gown, my hair brighter than the sun and filled with power.

I am the one they shunned.

I am the one they hate.

I am the one they probably thought had finally died.

The ones who were dancing freeze and fade back into the crowd as they part, creating a walkway right up to the thrones. The king's is empty, but the queen's isn't. Her hair is styled high, like she is Marie Antoinette—she even has the same beauty marks. Wearing a huge, Regency-inspired ball gown of deep maroons, she drips with jewels, and her ample cleavage is pushed up and on display.

Yet here I stand, in an almost see-through dress, and I know I have never looked more like a queen than in this moment. I stride through the empty gap and towards the throne. Once I'm at a respectful distance, which was beaten into me until I learned, I begin to drop slowly.

I curtsy mockingly, keeping my eyes on her the entire time, showing her I can proudly meet her gaze. I dare her to punish me for it like she often did before when I stood against her and her words of venom were spewed at me. I spent years under her thumb.

Although other members of the court never quite made me an enemy, they either ignored or mocked me. Only the queen truly took her anger out on me. Some said it was because the king was nice to me, but I think it was because she's a cruel shrew who enjoys agony. I still have some of the scars she

bestowed on me, yet I never left, not knowing anything else. I thought I was with my people and stuck here.

When I was younger, and Mateo still lived here as an integral part of the court, I did everything I could to blend in. When it became evident I would never become one of them, I left with Matty, distancing myself. I know he did that for me, and it still hurts.

Does he regret it?

He steps up to my side, standing beside me like always. Maybe he never would have been a target had it not been for me, or maybe he would be like her—cruel and lost. For so many years, I only came back here when it was necessary, unable to completely cut ties with my people but hating the looks of disgust even more.

Now, I stand before them as I straighten, and I know what they see—power, health, and strength. I am nothing like the weak, half-starved, angry half-breed because I don't care if I don't fit in. I know what I am and where I belong—with my god, in our home, in our realm.

Regret and shame fill me for how we left things, but as the queen stands, I realise I don't have time to think about that right now. I need to survive the night first because I just wandered into a den of predators and their fangs are out.

“Halfie,” she sneers. “I do not remember you being invited this evening.” She smiles brightly. “But of course, the more the merrier. You are part of the court, are you not?”

“Thank you for your gracious welcome. It looks like I am just in time.” I turn to Mateo. “Shall we dance?”

“Mateo.” The queen nods. “So very good to see you on your feet. We heard you were quite poorly.” The slight grin tugging her lips infuriates me, but I swallow it back and take his arm, ignoring her look as I lead him away before he can strike without proving it first. Phoebe follows, and I take her hand and press it into Mateo's. “Dance, show your faces, and find your loyalists,” I murmur lowly so no one else hears, and then I step back as Mateo bends, bowing before her.

He kisses her hand and sweeps her onto the dance floor. The music begins once more, and other members hesitantly join them as they twirl around the room. I lean back against the stone wall, ignoring those watching me. Instead, my eyes are on the queen who is watching me right back.

Smirking, I wave with my fingers ever so slightly, and her eyes narrow before she tilts her chin back.

“Avea, it has been too long,” a booming voice calls as a familiar, thick silhouette steps to my side.

The queen’s eye twitches, and for a moment, I realise that she doesn’t just hate me for what I am, but for the kindness her husband, her mate, shows me.

“My king,” I greet him softly, bowing out of true respect. He might be an absent and oblivious king, but he is a good man. He’s often overseas at other courts, making trades and deals, which leaves her in charge. Although I agree he should know what is going on, I cannot bring myself to fault him when I see the bags under his eyes.

Some say he knows the true depths of his mate’s cruelty, but I don’t believe that. I think he lies to himself because he still loves her and cannot bear to see her for what she truly is.

“How are you?” he asks.

“Very well, and you, my king?” I murmur respectfully.

“Good, tired,” he admits, leaning next to me. “Truthfully, I didn’t want this party. I wanted to rest. I just got back from Paris, but what my queen wants, my queen gets.” There is an edge of fatigue to his voice—not just physically, but emotionally. Maybe he sees more than I thought because when he turns his eyes to me, and I boldly meet them, he frowns. “You should not have come. I fear she is in one of her moods this evening, and I would hate for her to upset you.”

“Not to worry, my king,” I reply. “She cannot, not anymore.”

He watches me carefully before a small smile tilts his lips. “I can see that. You are different, Avea. Good. Although I could never change what they thought of you, I hated what it

did. Remember, you belong with us just as much as any of them. Never let them see you falter.” He pats my shoulder like a father would a daughter.

Unlike most, he is older, his hair and beard grey, and he has friendly eyes. I once looked up to him to save me before I realised that even as king, his hands were tied.

I look at Mateo and Phoebe, who are still dancing, oblivious to everyone else in the room. Their eyes are filled with so much love and devotion, I have to look away. Pain erupts in my soul. I’m glad they are so happy, but it makes me think of Mors.

I let him walk away from me.

He wanted me to choose him, to leave with him, and I did not.

I love him more than anything, and I let him leave, and now I might never see my god of death again. I might have lost my only chance at true love. Bitterness fills me, as does fury that the queen has stripped one more thing from me. I vow here and now that she will never take anything else.

When this is done, I will hunt him down. I will beg at the altar for him to take me back. I will give him no choice, and if he lets me, I will love him for eternity.

Pushing from the stone wall, I meet Mateo’s eyes as he and Phoebe head my way hand in hand. “Well?” I murmur.

“They are here. All that’s left to do is challenge her,” he murmurs.

I glance over to see the king sitting heavily on his throne, smiling and speaking to those around him. The queen is eyeing us with a cruel sneer of her lips.

“It’s now or never,” he tells me, taking my other hand. “I love you both. If I don’t win, leave as quickly as you can. Promise me, Avea. Promise me that you will get my mate out of here if I fail.”

I incline my head, unable to speak.

He turns to Phoebe and kisses her softly. "I love you, mate. Thank you for giving me the best life I ever could have imagined."

"Don't you dare say goodbye," she whispers. "Kill the bitch and come home to me."

"I will," he promises and turns to me. "Avea." His voice is softer, since I have passed them, heading towards the throne. I will never let him risk himself for what they have. If I can't have my love, then he can have his.

He is right. It's now or never. The truth must be set free.

The dead must speak, and like my god, I speak for them.

She killed and hurt her own people and she will continue to do so. She might even kill her mate to keep her throne, but I will stop her.

Mateo will not challenge her because I will not lose him again.

Stopping before the throne, I bow. "My king."

"Avea?" He frowns, turning to me.

"My queen." I do not bow, and instead, I meet her gaze. "I challenge you."

The music stops, and everyone freezes in place. It's silent.

"Avea, no!" Mateo roars, but I ignore him.

"What did you say?" she hisses, leaning forward as the king stares at me with wide eyes.

"I, Avea of Elemental Court, challenge you, Queen of Elemental Court. Do you accept?"

"You dare challenge me? I am a queen!" she sneers. "You are nothing but a halfie. You were lucky that we let you lick our leftovers."

I simply smile. "Do you accept? Or are you too scared to face me, my queen?"

"Avea, do not do this," the king begs.

“Oh, silence, Reynolds,” she hisses at him. “You always tried to protect her because you wanted to fuck her.”

“My love ...” He flinches, his eyes swinging from me to her.

“Don’t ‘my love’ me.” She sniffs as she meets my gaze. “And you—”

“My king, I mean no offence. I know she is your mate, but she must pay for her crimes.”

“Crimes?” He frowns, and in his eyes, I see the truth—he doesn’t know.

Relief flows through me.

“Fine, I accept,” she tells me, standing and glaring at us all. “And when I am done with you, I will make them watch while I drain every last halfie drop of blood from your body.” Her fangs lengthen, and her eyes flash.

Waving my arm out in a mocking bow, I turn to the side to allow her to walk past me. After facing down death itself, this is easy. She is nothing compared to Mors. If she wants fear, she should take lessons from my drama queen of a mate. “After you, my queen.”

I step into line with her, refusing to walk behind her. She speeds up and so do I, grinning as she glares at me. I see Mateo fighting to get to me, and two men in black suits grab him, hauling him back into the crowd. Good. Phoebe nods at me as we pass.

The crowd clears the stone area just meters away from the throne. The skylight shines down on the floor, a blood line drawn around its edges, worn from use and practice.

After all, there used to be challenges all the time.

I know their rules like the back of my hand. Any powers you have are allowed to be used, and once inside, you forfeit everything else—your name and your blood. It’s killed or be killed. Pure power against pure power. Kings have been usurped right here in this circle, and tonight, so will a queen.

Her head will hang from my hand.

I step into the octagon first, feeling the power wash over me. If I had any titles, they would be stripped. She hesitates only for a moment before stepping in opposite me, so sure she can beat me. After all, she doesn't see me, not the real me. She sees the halfie who's half broken and beat down. Like always, she thinks she is the strongest in the room, but she will lose.

"When I'm done," she murmurs as she circles me, "I'm going to eat that precious friend of yours and his mate." The dried blood around the edge now turns red, fresh and flowing to lock us in until one surrenders or dies.

"When I am done with you, my queen, there will be nothing left," I tell her boldly, and when she stops before me, I meet her eyes. "You are so blinded by your own hatred and greed, you don't see the truth. I was never just one of you. I was always so much more, and I could have been an ally, but now I am an enemy, and you will suffer for what you have done."

"I—"

"Enough talking," I snap, and with a click of my fingers, she flies backwards, hitting the barrier. I drop my glamour, which was hard to replace after so much time with Mors. I know my scars are on display, and I hear gasps, but it's more than that. I glow with my power. It fills me naturally now, coming to me without a thought thanks to Mors. My fangs lengthen, and my hair floats with its own wind.

I am a god.

As she lifts her head and sees me, I watch the realisation hit her along with fear. She knows she cannot win, but she climbs to her feet and throws herself at me. I easily sidestep her and stop her midair with a lifted hand. When I turn, I cock my head. "You would have seen the truth, the one you see now."

"What are you?" she spits.

"Oh, I am so much more," I tell her as I slowly bring her to the floor and release her. When she drops to a crouch, ripping her dress since it's in her way, I call the drop of blood on her

knee. I rip it from her body, and it lands on the tip of my finger before I flick it back to her like a knife, slicing her throat as she gasps and falls back. I eye the crowd as I walk behind her, gripping her hair as I haul her to her feet.

“You are weak,” I tell her, repeating words she threw at me so long ago. “You are so very weak. You are nothing, and no one can save you.” Laughing, I toss her away once more, not even using my powers, just my strength. “Is that truly all you have? You must have used a very different skill set to get that throne.”

There’s laughter outside the circle, and her eyes flash with fury as she flies at me once more. Before, I wouldn’t have been able to keep up, and I would have been rapidly healing myself just to stop myself from dying.

Now, I duck and weave under her attack, mocking her with every step, letting her exhaust herself. I call on all my lessons with Mors, his voice in my head like a guide.

I imagine I am protecting him, and when she flies at me once more, I stop her midair, calling her body to me like a wraith and then throwing it away with a jerk of my head. Enraged, she rushes me, but I sidestep her attacks, evaporating around her as she tires herself out. I let her give it her all so there will be no doubt in anyone’s mind when this is through.

My hand catches her hair and jerks her back when she swings at me. “You shouldn’t have fucked with my family,” I hiss at her before throwing her to the floor. I’m barely touching my abilities.

“Avea,” the king pleads.

It distracts me for a moment, and it gives his queen a chance to slice her fangs across my arm. Slowly, I turn back to see her panting.

“That was foolish.” My voice is as cold as the grave.

Whatever she sees in my eyes has her stepping back, and the power wrapped in thorns blows through me. I glance down, feeling my hands change, and I blink when paws with huge, wicked claws replace them.

She whispers, “What the ...”

I launch at her and swipe at her until she’s curled on the floor, bleeding from her wounds, and then I step back, feeling my hands go back to normal. I am not a coward like her. I will not hurt her when she’s on the floor.

Surprisingly, she climbs to her feet, unsteady but snarling, her blood dripping down her body. With a last-ditch roar, she lunges at me, using all of her powers. I counterattack, letting her drive me around the circle as she gives it all her might.

When she begins to slow, I catch her wrist, her sharpened nails an inch from my face. “My turn,” I say with an evil grin.

She stumbles back as I turn on her, gathering my power and throwing it at her. She screams, her eyes bursting as she falls to her back. Her body arches into the air as she shrieks and writhes. I pull my power back and watch as she covers her face, still screaming. When she rolls to her knees, I see her empty eye sockets.

Oops, I meant to hold back more than that, but I don’t let them know. I walk behind her. “Tell your king the truth,” I whisper as I lean down. “Tell him what you have done. Admit it and I will let you live. Otherwise, I will slowly destroy you, inch by inch, starting with your limbs. Tell me, can we regrow fingers and toes?”

“You wouldn’t dare!” she screams as her eyes start to heal. Gripping one blood-covered hand, I snap a finger and then effortlessly pluck it off her hand, tossing it away. She howls, bending over it.

“I dare,” I tell her. “Now, do you? Tell me, my queen, how much do you want to live?”

She sobs, but I don’t relent. I know how good of an actress she is, and when she straightens, her eyes regrown but raw, I grin.

“Well?”

“Fine,” she spits. “I surrender.”

There's a gasp, and the blood circle drops. Before she can do anything, I cuff her neck and drag her to the thrones, tossing her at the king's feet. "Now, tell him."

"Tell me what?" he asks, looking between us. "Berry?" He stares at his mate, his worry and love evident in his expression.

Laughing bitterly, she gets to her knees, throwing me a glare once more. "Oh, now you care?" she spits. "You are never here!" she roars. "You were never here to lead. I was, and I made the best decisions for our court while you were off traipsing across the world."

"For you," he whispers. "Traipsing across the world to find a cure ... for you."

My eyes widen and I glance at her, wondering if that's why she never leaves the court. Is the queen sick?

"So what if I cannot stand in sunlight? The darkness is better," she hisses. "I have embraced it, unlike you, dear husband. You are a pathetic king."

"Tell him," I demand. "Tell your court how you betrayed them, how you have been using hunters to kill your own. Tell them how you betrayed them."

He glances from me to her. "Berry, tell me this isn't true."

"Blessed weapons kill our kind, you know that," she tells him. "I did what had to be done."

"Berry!" He recoils. "How could you?"

"Our court was weak!" she yells. "After the judges took our own, we had a chance to come back stronger and better, but you chose weakness and life. I did not. Don't you see? I've been doing this for us so they can never steal what's ours again. Only those we can trust, those with power, remain. How could you deny me that?"

"You killed our own!"

"Not by my hand." She trembles, dropping to her knees before his wrath, but I see her defiance in the set of her shoulders.

“No, even worse, you blessed weapons and gave them to hunters to kill our people. You brought lies and corruption into our midst, and you fractured our people. You are no queen!”

“You are no king!” she shouts as she climbs to her feet. “You are weak!”

“You are evil!” he roars at her as they go toe to toe. “How did I not see it? How did you hide this from me?”

“You only saw what you wanted to,” she snaps. “Never the truth, never me, because I was never enough. I was never her. I never compared to the ghost of the first woman you loved, the one you truly wanted as your queen.”

“You are my mate, Berry,” he whispers, “and you disgust me.”

I step back, allowing the king to deal with this. It’s his mate, his court, not mine. I have revealed the truth and survived the challenge. Mateo wraps an arm around me and shoves a goblet into my hand. “Drink, you’ll need to regenerate.”

Usually, that’s true, but I sip it to humour him, ignoring the looks aimed at me as those in black suits surround us, showing the fractured court. The king notices it, and I see the horror in his gaze.

“How many?” he asks her.

“Enough,” she spits. “It’s in motion. It is too late to undo it. They are loyal to me, not you. You cannot stop them.” She turns to me. “And you and everything you love will die.”

“You couldn’t even best me in a challenge, my queen.”

“I do not need to.” She smiles, and there’s a sharp gleam in her gaze that makes me hesitate.

The wicked grin she gives me makes me swallow, and as I glance down, following her gaze to the goblet, my eyes widen. Poison. She poisoned the wine. “How?” I whisper.

“Those I trust have drunk from me, and I have the antidote in my blood. Those I don’t ... well, they will all die, suffering and in pain.”

I drop the goblet, watching the red wine mixed with blood splash across the floor and my dress as I meet her gaze. “It’s the most poisonous weapon you could ever find, enough to even hurt the gods, just in case.” She grins. “Whatever you are, you’ll die in agony, and you will have changed nothing.”

I blink slowly as everything becomes fuzzy, and I stumble slightly to the side, feeling my blood heat and burn. Mateo grips me. “Avy,” he whispers in horror as I slump. My vision goes out, as do my limbs, and I fall to the floor as Matty holds me.

I was too cocky, too sure.

I should have remembered the queen never played fair.

“Help me,” he roars at those around us. “Someone who has drunk from her, give me a vein!”

There is no reply, even though I was willing to die for them and I showed them the truth. They still won’t save me because I will never be enough for them.

It’s then I realise that I don’t care. I’m enough for me ... for Mors.

That’s all that matters.

Too little, too late.

“It’s okay,” I murmur, curling into myself as agony roars through me. I feel my blood dripping from my ears, mouth, and nose.

I’m dying.

My eyes close in agony as I hear her laugh follow me into the darkness. “Mors,” I whisper. “I’m sorry.”

I’m sorry I will not get back to him.

I’m sorry I will never be able to love death like he deserves.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE



AVEA

“**S**orry for what, love?” The familiar, smoky voice snaps me awake. With the last bit of strength I have, I force my eyes open and crawl to my feet as darkness swirls through the room, followed by a cold breeze.

The touch of death.

Mors.

He appears amongst the darkness, so beautiful I want to weep, like an avenging, angry god—my god. His eyes scan the room with a disgusted sneer until his gaze lands on me and fills with love before widening in worry. “Avea,” he whispers.

“Go, let him save you.” Mateo pushes me.

“It’s the god of death,” someone whispers with horror.

People scream and cower, knowing who he is. Darkness swallows the room, plunging it into ice-cold hell.

As everyone tries to escape him, a relieved, grateful smile curves my lips.

He came for me. Despite everything, he came for me.

I stumble towards him through their scrambling masses.

When I reach him, I collapse into his arms. “Avea, what have they done to you?” he murmurs. “What has been done to her?” he roars.

“Poison.” Mateo rushes to our side as Mors lifts me into his arms, and I whimper. “The queen poisoned her. She’s dying. Help her. I will make a deal—”

“I do not need your deals to save my love,” Mors spits.

“The cure is in their veins,” I mumble. “Don’t heal me, she said it would hurt you.”

“And no one offered you a vein?” The room becomes colder and darker, until just he and I exist. I hear their screams within the darkness. I don’t know what he’s doing to them, but I cannot find it in me to care.

“Don’t hurt those wearing black, they are with us,” I mumble, but the words are hard. They no longer seem to make sense, and his eyes are sad as they peer down at me.

“My little Avea, what have they done to you?” He presses a kiss to my cold forehead. I’m dying, but it does not scare me. Death never did. I am death’s lover, after all. “It’s okay. I’m here now. They will never hurt you again, I promise.”

Before I can protest and explain the queen mentioned the poison harming gods, he presses his lips to mine, sucking it from my system. His lips start off warm and stinging and slowly fade to cold and lifeless, as if he were draining death into himself, and when he lifts his head, his eyes are lacklustre and his usually golden complexion is pale.

“Mors,” I croak, feeling my body start to heal now that the poison is no longer attacking me. We stumble back, some of the darkness evaporating around us.

“Nothing can kill me. I am death,” he tells me, yet he slips to the floor, cradling me from the impact. “I just ... just need time to fight the poison. It is strong. Very strong indeed.” His eyes go far away, and it’s my turn to cup his face.

Horror wars within me alongside fear—fear I could lose him. Snarling, I spin to see everyone cowering on their knees, the shadows still cast around the room. Even the king and queen cower before my god, before death.

“Mors,” I murmur, turning back to him. “Hang on.”

“I’m fine, my mortal.” He coughs, spitting black blood onto the floor between us. “Just healing.” He looks worse with each passing second, and when he falls to his back, I catch him and lower him gently, sweeping his hair from his face and kissing his forehead.

“I’ll save you, my god.”

“Avea,” he protests, reaching for me as inky black veins spread across his skin.

Growling, I leap to my feet, only stumbling slightly. I feel much better, and my body is almost fully healed from the effects.

I scan the crowd. I need the cure.

“Don’t. Let him die!” someone calls. “Take the chance and kill death.”

“If anyone so much as looks at him wrong, I will rip you limb from limb!” I roar into the room. “He’s mine!” They cower back once more, their eyes wide in terror, but not of him ... of me.

Good, let them fear me.

I am a god.

I am their reckoning, and if they hurt Mors, I will be their doom.

My gaze stops on the thrones.

I don’t care if he said he’ll heal. I won’t lose him, and I won’t let him suffer. He came for me.

Mors came for me, and that tells me everything I need to know.

Mors loves me, and I love him.

I need the cure, so I go directly to the source—the queen.

Striding up the two steps to the dais, I lift her into the air and strike, stabbing my fangs into her veins as she screams and writhes. I drink her so deeply, she loses consciousness when I drop her, and then I turn to my god.

My face is spattered in blood, and it drips down my chin and chest as I snap at anyone who gets too close and I head back to my god. Mateo reaches for me, and I snarl. His eyes widen, and Phoebe yanks him back as I drop to my knees before Mors. I lift him with one arm and prop him up. His eyes open and narrow.

“Avea.” His lips hardly move, as if it’s too hard.

“Hush,” I tell him. “For once in your life, shut your pretty mouth.”

Using my fangs, I slice my wrist open and press it to his mouth. “Drink,” I order, but he doesn’t, he just holds my arm, so I narrow my gaze. “Drink or I will force you to.”

“Kinky,” he mumbles against my skin, but a shudder ripples through his body, and he seals his lips around the wound, drinking my blood. It’s always been a sexual act, filling another with your blood, but watching my god, my Mors, wrap his lips around me and feeling my blood drain into him has me gasping. I bow over him, protecting him as he drinks, and my pussy clenches as I nearly come. Each pull seems to go directly to my clit, and I can’t stop it.

I come with a growl, burying my face in his neck as he licks the wound and leans into me, closing his eyes. “Beautiful,” he purrs. “My beautiful Avea.”

Uncaring who is watching, I kiss him, tasting my blood and poison. “You came,” I mumble against his lips.

“I am finding, Avea, that I will always come for you. Nothing is too much for me. You cannot even escape me in death, my love,” he murmurs as I see some colour return to his face. “Now, please wait here while I kill every single one of these bloodsuckers for their treachery against my mate.”

He evaporates into black smoke as I shake my head and stand. Screams echo around the room, and I let him have his fun. After all, they never stopped to help me. I watch as the black smoke parts before someone. My avenging death god, even while he’s still healing and weak, steps out and snaps a man’s neck before plunging back into the shadows that dart

around the room, leaving nothing but death and screams behind.

“Erm, Avea,” Mateo whispers carefully, maintaining a cautious distance as he stops next to me. “Maybe we should stop him? He doesn’t seem to care who is innocent.”

“Do you want to try and tell the god of death what to do?” I ask, arching a brow at him.

“No, but you could. You could tell him to do anything and he would. Avea, I know our people deserted and hurt you, but not everyone here is evil and deserving of death. Please, Avea, be the bigger person. Do what they never did,” Mateo begs.

Snarling, I crack my neck, eyeing those who are hiding and seeking help. Some try to fight, but it is useless. They cannot fight death, but I can seduce him.

“Mors,” I call.

He appears before me in an instant, his dark eyes on me. Someone tries to sneak up on him, and I arch a brow, ready to defend him, when he throws his powers without looking. The man screams as he explodes into ash. “My love?” He cocks his head, appearing more beast than human.

“Stop for me,” I beg, sliding my hands up his chest and over his shoulders. “Forget them. They are not worth it. I love that you want to avenge me, but I don’t need you to. They mean nothing to me. They are cowards, nothing else. Take me home so we can rest.” I can see the power he’s using is taking its toll on his healing body, and I know he would hate that weakness.

“Are you sure? I could kill them all for you and offer you their souls. I would have them kneeling at your feet, begging to be released from the eternal hell I would place them in,” he snarls, the threat making me shiver in need.

“I’m sure. Let’s go home,” I murmur.

Sighing in disappointment, he takes my hand and looks around. “You are lucky Avea was here or you would all be dead, though you still might ...”

I cock my head, not understanding, and his grin widens.

“I could not intervene, but I could go to them and tell them to.” Mors smirks as the shadows part, and the judges appear inside the court wearing their masks and robes. “Don’t worry, Avea, no poison can kill me, since I’m a god, but let us go home.”

I offer my hand to Mateo and he takes it, along with Phoebe, and as the masked judges approach the king and queen, I grin. The female, the one I spotted in the club, turns to me and lifts her mask, showing me her long black hair and a heart-stopping face. With her own wicked grin, she winks at me before tugging her mask down and turning to my court.

Well, my old court because my new one is death.

Let them reap their karma for their sins.

I have my own, and his name is Mors.

I drop Mateo and Phoebe at home without a word. I need to take Mors home and fast. By the time we make it back to our house, he’s leaning heavily against me. I manage to get us upstairs and lay him down, staring worriedly at his paling face once more. The cure is working, but the poison wreaked havoc on his body and seems to have affected him more than me, but then I realise he sucked it all out of me so it’s still in his system.

“Ten minutes is all I need,” he promises, even as I flutter around him. “Avea,” he calls, holding out his hand. “Come, you are all I need.”

Taking his hand, I crawl to his side, letting him hold me as he sighs and relaxes. There are so many words on the tip of my tongue, but I don’t want him to hurt himself, so I hold them back as tears fill my eyes. As usual, though, Mors senses my weakness. He turns his head to grasp my chin and kiss them away.

“It is okay. You are safe,” he says.

“I’m not crying for me.” I huff and smack his chest. “I’m crying for you.”

“For me?” He frowns, his brow furrowed, and then he captures a tear and holds it up. “Nobody has ever cried for me before.”

“Well, I am. I thought I lost you! Don’t ever do that again!” I snap.

“Yes, love,” he vows before he becomes serious. “Our deal is broken. You can leave.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” I snap.

He searches my gaze before a soft smile blooms on his lips. “One last deal?”

I lean into him, wanting to tell him I don’t need one to stay, but it will only take time to prove its truth. Mors is used to being abandoned and alone, but he never will be again—even when he’s infuriating and cocky. “What’s that?”

“Your heart for eternity,” he demands seriously.

My heart stops as I stare into his dark eyes that intrigued and terrified me the moment I saw them. They belong to a man I have fallen so deeply in love with that I don’t know where I start and he stops. We are the other half of each other’s soul. The Greeks believed we were split in two, and after meeting Mors, I agree. I could live without him, but with him?

I am whole.

I am happy.

I am loved.

I cannot let him get it too easily, though, because he needs me to keep him humble.

“And what do I get in exchange?” I muse thoughtfully, grinning wickedly at him.

He chuckles before sobering, laying my hand over his racing heart. “Mine, all of it forever. Wield me, use me, take me, love me, and never leave me. I am yours. Just promise me, Avea, that this is forever. Promise to be mine.”

“I promise,” I say. “We have a deal, Mors. My heart for yours, for eternity.”

“Yours has always belonged to me, Avea. You were just waiting for me to collect it, and I will protect it until the very end, when we are nothing but dust and energy once more. It will always be mine, as I am yours. We are infinite, Avea.”

“We better be because I’m not going anywhere,” I promise, leaning into him.

In our house, on his island in the realms of gods, I hand my heart over to the master of death.

I allow him to protect it as I will protect his.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO



MORS

This poison is bothersome. I hold Avea in my arms as she sleeps. She's curled into my chest, her silken hair spread across my skin like a blanket, and her precious curves press against my hardness, yet I cannot do anything about it. We just vowed to spend eternity together. I have found my other half, and I am weak.

I am cold, shivering, and still healing from its effects.

After I am healed, I will spend several days between Avea's legs, probing confessions of love out of her, but for now, I have no choice but to rest. My mind lingers on this evening, on my mate's beauty and power. She stood before me and saved me without hesitation.

Wouldn't I do the same for her?

I would without a doubt, which is odd, but seeing her thrive—no, seeing her as powerful as she should be, displaying her birthright before the people who doubted and mistreated her, was a sight for sore eyes. I would let it happen again, but I do not plan to ever let her out of my sight.

The poison ... I do wonder where the queen got it from. To affect one such as me, a god, or even Avea, it has to be derived from an ancient one's power and life force, and no mere queen would have access to that, but that is a problem for another day. Today, I will rest with Avea in my arms, knowing all is well in the world and that my future, for the first time ever, looks bright.

“Mors, wake up.” The soft voice is familiar, soothing, and arousing, trying to tug me from the comforting blackness I find myself in. Groaning, I close my eyes tighter and fall back into it. “Mors,” the voice says again, louder this time.

“Go away,” I mumble, but I’m not sure if it comes out. I can feel my body but I cannot move it, and I relax once more.

“Mors, open your eyes.” The voice is quick and hard, and it sends a zing of lust straight to my cock. “It’s time to wake up.”

The sleepiness ebbs as I feel the warmth of Avea above me, making my lips tilt in a lazy smile.

“I’m not sleeping,” I grumble. “My eyes are just closed.”

“Uh-huh, saving their strength?” she teases, and I force them open, grinning at her cheeky smile as she perches above me. Leaning up, I grip her head and tug her down until she sprawls across my chest with a laugh. I hold her in my arms, grinning wider when she dots kisses across my cheeks and forehead. My eyes close in pure bliss, and my heart beats so fast that it feels like it might explode. With each soft brush of her lips, each part of me is washed clean and healed.

Our life will not be easy, since death is all I know. We will make mistakes, but I will never let her leave me. I can’t. I’m spoiled now, and she has made me this way. I am spoiled for her attention and hungry for her every touch, desperate for her words. I was so alone before, and I did not even realise what I was missing until her.

She has given me paradise, and I will never let her take it away again.

Forever is a long time for an immortal, as equally as it is a blink of an eye, but I know each second and each day will feel like a lifetime with Avea.

Sighing in bliss, I leave my eyes at half-mast, not wanting to leave this bubble of happiness and comfort. I can feel my

body healing the last remnants of the poison and disposing of it, but I debate how best to drag out her healing touch and comfort, especially when she rains kisses down my neck.

Oh yes, I'm going to drag this out for all it's worth.

Groaning, I tilt my neck, an automatic response as her fangs drag across my skin. "Feed," I murmur, wanting to feel those sharp points pierce my neck as she claims me, using me to sustain herself. I want every inch of her covered in me, even her blood. I grip the back of her head, holding her prisoner as her tongue lashes my pulse point.

"No, you are injured."

"Then kiss it better," I say, desire racing through my blood. "Feed, love. Use me, let me feel my blood pumping through the person I love." I feel her weaken as her fangs hungrily scrape across my pulse.

She wants this as badly as I do.

I know she doesn't need it to live, especially after her powers were unlocked, but I love both sides of Avea and I want her to know that. Never before have I cared or even wanted to be fed on—I hated bloodsuckers—but now I need it.

I need to feel the ecstasy of her fangs in my neck.

"Mors," she whimpers, trying to protest.

"Feed or I will cut my neck and make you," I growl, unwilling to back down. Avea must know I love every inch of her, every side of her, and I need this as much as she does. I almost lost her. This way, I never will again.

She will be unable to die or go anywhere I cannot track her.

My blood will be a protection and a beacon.

She is mine, and I am hers.

I will proudly wear her mark forever.

"Avea," I warn, and I sense the thread of desperation in my tone, as does she. Her hand slides down my chest before curling around the stiff base of my cock. I don't even

remember shedding my clothes, but I'm fucking thankful for it when I have her soft touch gripping me as she pulls back. "Avea!" I roar in pleasure as she strikes.

Her fangs cleanly pierce my neck so deeply, I feel them sink to the bone. The pleasure and pain mixes into an excruciating feeling until my spine bows and molten lava races through my blood as she squeezes and strokes my cock while drinking me down.

The pull of my blood and the touch of her hand becomes too much. My eyes shut, and moans leave my throat as I hold her to me, desperate for release as I feel my balls drawing closer.

I groan. "God."

"Goddess to you." She chuckles as she pulls back, lapping at the blood dripping down my neck, before her fangs pierce my vein once more in the exact same spot.

Ecstasy slams through me, and I spill with a mighty roar.

Moaning into my neck, she rubs against my thigh before her head tilts back with a moan, her own pleasure filling the air. I slump back, watching as her eyes open and lower to me. She grins, my blood coating her lips, as she lifts her hand from my cock, showing my glistening release on her fingers, and then she laps it clean with a groan.

Sitting upright, I smash my lips to hers, tasting my blood and release as she sighs. My tongue probes at hers, ravenous for her, before she slows me down and finally pulls away. I blink at her as she tilts my head. "It's not healing." She frowns.

"Good." I grin.

She blinks in confusion before a soft smile curves her lips. "You truly are a mad bastard."

"Your mad bastard," I tell her as I lie back down. "For once, let's just relax. We have nothing to do and forever to do it. Let me hold you for a while."

“So clingy,” she teases, lying in my arms. “I remember when you told me you didn’t feel anything.”

“No? Well, I feel this.” I grin, pulling her atop my erection. “So, what do you plan to do about it, little mortal?”

“Back to the little mortal shit, are we?” She grins. “I’ll show you who’s mortal here, Mors.”

I fold my arms behind my head as she slides down my body, the sight burning into my memory forever. Even a thousand years from now, I will remember the way her eyes glisten with mischief and love, the curl of her perfect, pouty lips, the shimmer of her pale skin, and the silken curtain of her icy hair.

Perfection.

A disturbance on my island has me sitting bolt upright. The mere seconds I get as an alarm have me turning to Avea. “Hide, now!” I roar at her, sending a sharp order to my wraiths. They surge into the room, converging on us.

“Mors?” She frowns as she stumbles from the bed, landing on her back next to it. All sleepiness, playfulness, and arousal are gone as my muscles bunch, preparing for an attack.

How dare they come here.

How dare they invade my land.

How dare they threaten Avea!

I will kill them all and give her their skin as offerings to her.

“Protect her, shield her, now!” I command my wraiths. They bubble and surge around her, dragging her back into the darkest recesses of the wall and converging on her like a tidal wave until all I see is her wide, panicked eyes and her hand reaching for me before that, too, is gone. “Do not let her out or be seen, no matter what. She is your master now. Serve and protect her as such,” I command before standing with my back to her as I await the power I feel heading my way.

The door blasts open not a moment later and three figures emerge. They should have brought more.

Vanessia, Lochmond, the god of strategy and mirth, and Illios, the god of animals, approach, their gazes sharp and angry.

“Serpent,” Vanessia hisses.

“What an unexpected displeasure,” I drawl.

“You broke the laws, you disobeyed orders, and you have intervened where you are not allowed to,” Lochmond snaps as if he’s rehearsed it in the mirror, and knowing him, he has. “Now you must pay for your crimes. Nobody, god or not, is above the law. They are there to protect our race and their—”

I groan. “Please stop monologuing.”

“Don’t make this harder than it needs to be, serpent,” Vanessia hisses. “Make it easy so we don’t destroy your pretty little hideout.”

That makes me jolt. They would. The battle would be glorious but destructive.

I could kill every single one, but that would take time—time that will give Avea the chance to reach my wraiths or realise she can order them away. No, I cannot put her in danger, not for anything, and if they found out she was here ... No, it’s unthinkable.

I wait patiently and calmly. I sense their uneasiness and see their confusion as they tread closer.

“Alright, fine, you got me.”

They expect me to burst into action, and when they quickly place the dampening manacles on my wrists, they still do not breathe easier.

“Shall we?” I gesture to the door. “After you.”

Illios stops behind me, and I roll my eyes. I follow his nervous gaze to my wraiths and note they are still swarming her. “Don’t worry, they have something much better to do than attack you.” I grin and throw them one last look before turning away and following them out.

I hope Avea doesn't do anything stupid and just waits for me to come back to her.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE



AVEA

I scream into the writhing mass of wraiths as I hear Mors being led away, my powers tingling as I feel a pop, and then his blood goes cold inside me. He's far away. I know it. I know he's gone, and worry and panic fuel me as I struggle against the never-ending wraiths pinning me to the wall.

I'm going to kill him when I find him for keeping me trapped here.

He doesn't know me very well if he thinks I'm just going to remain here while he's taken away in chains for helping me! Fuming, I stop struggling and close my eyes, collecting my power inside me. With a yell, I throw it through the wraiths like a dagger, slicing a path, and when I emerge, they surge towards me again. I narrow my eyes and hold my hand up in warning.

They instantly still and my eyes widen. Are they listening to me?

Testing it, I tilt my head. "Stop." They do. "Let me leave the room, and do not follow me." Stepping backwards to the now shattered door, I make my way through the carnage as they watch me, lifeless and waiting for the next order.

I turn and race through the house. When I get outside, I look around in dawning horror. He's not here.

I cannot even feel him anymore.

Who were they?

Why did they take him?

More importantly, where did they take him? I'll kill them all for touching my mate.

Mors is mine and they stole him from me. No matter how calm he was, I cannot help but worry before that concern turns to anger, and as I glance back at the house and the waiting wraiths, an idea comes to mind.

Mors called me his mate, his equal, a goddess ...

Maybe it's time to show everyone that.

The flap of wings is loud as I sit proudly atop the pegasus. Another flies next to me, and there is a third to my left, creating an arrow formation. The wraiths float around us, in warning. I close my eyes as I focus on my bond in his body and the bond between us, feeling it grow stronger.

"We are getting closer. Faster please," I beg of the pegasus.

They came when I called, and I almost worried they wouldn't, but they seem to feel some kindness or loyalty towards Mors and me, and I appreciate their help. I would be lost without them, trapped on the island with no way to navigate this world. I never wanted to explore it beyond our little island, but as we speed through the golden sky, I spot other islands dotted far beyond. They are isolated and alone, and it makes me sad to think that's how Mors lived until me.

We speed up, the clouds parting for us as I keep my eyes closed, focusing on our bond. I don't have a clue what I'm walking—er, flying into, but I'm prepared. For the first time in my life, I am not hiding. I have embraced both sides of myself, and I plan to put on a show. Mors is not ashamed of me, and I refuse to be ashamed of what and who I am.

He fought for me, he came for me, and I will do the same for him.

The flight seems to take forever, with bigger and bigger islands popping up as I frown. “Stop.” The bond is almost vibrating now, and a familiar tingle spreads through my body, letting me know he’s close. “He’s here ... but not.”

I look around, seeing nothing but clouds until I tip my head back and spot the floating rock above us. We are clearly below a small island of some sort, and I know he’s on it.

“You better be okay,” I hiss, “or I’ll kick your ass, Mors.”

The pegasus follows my gaze, and we ascend higher until we are far above it and to the side so I can see what’s going on.

I silently thank them for giving me the time I need to analyse the situation so I don’t fall into an ambush, but those who took Mors seem completely unaware of me.

There are stone thrones in a semi-circle in the middle of a pavilion made of dark-grey marble. Runes I do not recognise form a circle in the centre, and each chair is filled with what I’m assuming are other gods, all dressed in bright clothes and gold.

I glance to the side where I see Mors in nothing but some black leather trousers, his hands still manacled as he kneels before the only empty chair—his, maybe? He doesn’t look overly worried, but I can taste the others’ anger from here, and it matches my own.

How dare they.

He is a god! They came to his land without warning and stole him away. They didn’t even ask any questions. They might be gods, but they are fools and so sure of themselves, thinking they are untouchable. Mors helped me by breaking their laws, but they never cared about what he did before, so why do they now?

Do they truly hate him that much? I taste their fear of him, but also their disgust, as if he is below them when, in fact, he is so much more powerful than they are.

Never mind, it won’t matter soon.

“Time for action,” I whisper to my pegasus, stroking his neck as I show them what I want.

With a loud, angry screech, its wings flap loudly, sending strong currents through the air, aimed at the pavilion below me, as he descends towards them.

All heads turn up as our shadow falls across the gathering, the sound of wings making them gasp as the wind blows back their elaborate clothes and hair. Smirking, I meet Mors’s eyes before silently thanking my pegasus, and with a leap, I fall through the air.

It whistles around me as I fall, only to land on my feet with a thud at the edge of the chairs. I see their confusion, anger, fury, and shock, and my lips widen, showing off my fangs in a threatening way.

“Who are you? How did you get here?” one of them booms.

I ignore him, my eyes only for Mors. I see pride but also fear in his gaze—fear for me, not him. Winking, I turn back to the bristling gods.

“Speak, I order you to tell me who you are!”

Tilting my head, I look over them. They are gods alright. They are cocky, self-assured, and so damn annoying, my teeth hurt. No wonder Mors hates them.

“For a god, you are not very perceptive. Clearly, I got here by pegasus.” I wave my hand at the beasts flying around us. “Now release Mors.”

Laughter rumbles through them, bar the one speaking, whose eyes narrow.

“No?” I sigh. “Fine, then why are you holding him? For some stupid law—”

“Who are you to question gods?” he spits.

“Oh, gods.” I snort, not the least bit scared. I probably should be, but the power and fury running through me will not allow me to bow, even when I feel their power battering me to

do so. Curiosity fills a few eyes as they glance between Mors and me. “Me? I’m a fucking nobody—”

“Then you dare—”

“I was not finished fucking talking,” I spit, stepping towards him and meeting his eyes as his mouth snaps shut. An incredulous expression consumes his face, and another god to the far right lets out a chuckle and leans back. “I might be a nobody, but there is one thing you should know about me, almighty gods.”

“And what is that?” he seethes.

“Not to fuck with me or what is mine.” My eyes go to Mors. “He is mine, and you took him from me. You came into our house and took my mate. Maybe it’s time you felt a little fear, oh mighty gods.”

I lash out with my power, smashing Mors’s manacles as well as sending the gods tumbling back into their thrones. “Now, let my mate go or else.”

I just threatened the gods.

Damn fucking right I did. Maybe I really do have a death wish.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR



MORS

“**Y**ou dare strike me?” Lochmond roars. “You will bite your tongue and show respect—”

Laughter tumbles from me. “Yeah, she’s not very good at that,” I remark as I grin at her. “Are you, my girl?”

God, she looks so beautiful right now, glowing with fury and power the likes I’ve never felt before. Everyone else pales in comparison, even the other gods. She is an ancient being of this world, deadly and dangerous, and she is all mine.

She came for me despite everything.

Avea put herself in the path of the gods to save me—death.

Never before have I been so moved or so terrified—for them or her, I am not sure—and there is no way this will end well. They learned that I intervened and broke the laws with the vampyrs, and now they know why. Soon, they will realise what she is and order me to kill her.

Never.

Today, the gods will realise that they cannot control death. It answers to only one master—her.

“I’m really not,” she purrs, watching them. “Now, are you going to release him or are we going to have issues?”

“You will bite your tongue or you will receive punishment alongside the serpent,” Vanessa hisses.

I stiffen. Did she just threaten my mate?

I break the invisible godly chains they placed on me, and the crack draws their attention as my anger fills the sky with darkness and shadows as I snarl at them.

“I have always let your insults slide. For years, you have looked down on me, used me, but I will not ever let you threaten my mate or even look wrongly at her,” I warn as the pavilion turns dark and becomes freezing cold.

Avea smirks. “Come,” she calls, and they watch my wraiths writhe across the floor and wrap around her, seeking their master.

“How?” Phrixius whispers. I’m not sure when or how he came back, but he was here when they dragged me before them. “We do not have mates.”

“Well, I do, and I’ll choose her time and time again. You truly are fools. You just threatened the one being in the entire universe that death cares for. Choose your next words carefully, for they will be your last if not.”

“You cannot kill us! We are gods!”

“Gods can die,” I say helpfully.

“Think of the balance of the universe,” one reasons.

“Fuck the universe, and fuck anything that isn’t her. Do you think I care? I don’t. I’ve done my duty for millennia, never faltering, but if you so much as lay a hand on my mate, you will find out how easily I have mastered death and life and why you always feared me.”

Stepping forward, Avea takes my hand, calming me slightly. “They are not worth it. Let’s go.”

“No! You are not dismissed. You broke the laws and this ... this thing— What even are you? You are not mortal or you would have died.” Lochmond tastes the air, awareness flashing in his eyes and then shock. “Impossible.”

“She’s part ancient one,” Phrixius whispers.

“Abomination,” Vanessa hisses.

“Life stealer.”

“Power polluter.”

Their anger crowds the pavilion, mingling with mine. “Kill her! Kill the abomination and bind the snake!”

Throwing my power at them with a roar, I grab Avea and throw us over the edge, knowing they will do just that. We could kill them, but then the world would be destroyed and we would have no future.

Instead, we tumble through time and space until we smack into the ground of her forest.

I search her for injuries.

“I’m fine,” she whispers, and her eyes widen. “Fuck, Mors, what have I done?” She scrambles to her feet and moves away from me. “They will kill you for simply being with me! You should have let them—”

“Never,” I hiss, covering the distance between us and tugging her into my arms. “I meant what I said. I chose you. Let them come. I will not let them harm my mate.”

Terror worms through me.

How long can we run for?

How do you escape the gods?

Is our love doomed?

Is this short time all I’ll have with her?

It’s not enough.

I swear it on the forest she was born into, this will not be the end of us. I will find a way to remove the gods, even if I die trying.

I know it is only a matter of time before they find us. Right now, they will be regrouping and planning. I can take them, but I will end this and every world if I do. No, there has to be a better way. Avea is quiet as I settle her into a nook of a tree

and start a fire with my magic as night draws in. She shivers and I tug her closer, wrapping her in my arms as I huddle before it.

I try to think of where to go. I will not lead them farther into this world. Their wrath would cut a bloody trail, so that means avoiding the city. The wolves are south, which I would love to avoid, so the forest it is.

“I’m sorry, Mors, I just wanted to save you, and now everything is a mess.”

“I love that you risked everything to come for me,” I tell her. “No one has ever cared that much before, but I mean it, Avea, they will not touch you. I will find a way to fix this—”

“How?” She turns, her eyes dewy with tears. I wipe them away, not allowing another to tumble from her eyes. “You should sacrifice me to them. It might stop—”

“Never,” I hiss, gripping her face. “I will never let you go.” Her eyes search mine, and I let her see the truth.

She slumps. “Then we are screwed,” she admits.

“I will find a way.” I pull her closer, stroking her back and kissing her head. “I will. Trust in me. I have never had something to fight for before. The gods are greedy, selfish beings, but they are not foolish. A war with me would lead to nothing but misery, so we just need to show them that they cannot win and that the cost is higher than the price.”

“It is hopeless.”

“Nothing is hopeless, Avea.” I lift her chin to meet my gaze, the firelight flickering across her face. “I found you in this entire massive universe. I found you, and you found me, and that gives me hope—hope we can find our way out of this, because I cannot and will not give up on forever with you.”

“Softie,” she teases, a slight smile curving her lips.

“For you,” I agree. “You looked so magnificent coming to my rescue.”

“I guess that makes you my damsel,” she teases. “Do you know what the hero does when they rescue their damsel?” she

murmurs, her eyes blazing with want.

“What does she do?” I murmur, my voice breathy as she tilts her head.

“She fucks him and makes him hers.”

Growling, I slam my lips to hers, my tongue probing for entrance. She kisses me back, ripping at my clothes as she clambers into my lap and rubs against me until I cannot take it. My need is so great, provoked by my worry.

“Then fuck me,” I say.

Ripping off her clothes, I reach for her, but she knocks my hands away and pushes me to my back. She grips my cock and slams herself down on my length.

My cry is echoed by wolves in the distance.

She moans my name, sliding her hand up her body to grab her breasts. Her hair flows down her back as she glows from within with her power. My cock jerks inside her as she winds her hips and grinds her pussy into me, claiming me like I wanted.

Leaves and dirt crunch under my back, staining my skin, but I would cover myself in them if it meant getting to touch her. I would take a thousand swords and fight a million gods for a taste of my mate.

I lean up and kiss her, swallowing her moan as my hands slide possessively over her body before she pushes me back down on the ground.

I let her lead and set the pace. She rolls her hips as she takes my body on the ground, her hands on my chest, marking me as hers.

We fuck like it will be our last time, both of us rushing to the end, knowing our time is limited. Our lips come together in the dark, and magic binds us together—death and life.

Beauty and pain.

Mates.

She gasps against my lips and her movements speed up, so I know she's close. "Come for me. Make me yours."

"Mine." She bites my lip and draws blood as I feel her cunt flutter around my cock, making me snarl. Gripping her hips, I bounce her faster until neither of us can take it.

We shatter with starlight and magic exploding through the forest, two gods bathing the world in their love.

That is when I realise what we need to do.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE



AVEA

“**Y**ou want to what?” My mouth drops open as I gape at Mors.

We spent the night under the stars, our eyes never once shutting. We watched the sunrise together, scarcely able to sleep. I was worried that if I did, I would wake up and he would be gone again. I’m trying to make the most of our time together since there seems to be a clock ticking down.

After all, we cannot take on the gods, right?

I never should have stormed in like that, but I was blinded by my anger and filled with arrogance, and I was so worried about what they would do to him that I couldn’t even think. Now, I’m worried about how we will survive my mistake. Mors tried to protect me, and he would have found a way back to me. I should have trusted him, but I cannot change what happened. Mors does not seem to care, and if anything, he’s over the moon that I was willing to risk it all to come after him.

After all, he would do the same for me.

If the gods order my death, then everyone I love will be taken with me. They are not forgiving and I stood against them, so they cannot let that lie no matter who stands at my side. We need a plan and fast, but what Mors is proposing is madness.

“Think about it. Who do the gods fear more than anyone? Who are the only beings in this or any realm they answer to?”

Who could stop them and get them to listen? The ancient ones.” He grips my cheeks harder, his forehead pressed to mine. “We must seek them out and change our future. We will fall if we don’t, and I will not let that happen, which means we need to make them back down or bend their knee and accept you. You are part ancient one, Avea, and you need your kind’s help.”

“But how do you even find an ancient one? Moreover, why would they help us? There is a reason they have withdrawn. Yes, they created the gods and are more powerful, but they are always wild,” I hiss.

“They once said that about me.” He smirks as my heart softens. “Now look at me. Avea, you can do anything. This is our only chance, so we have to try. If you wish to just wait here for the gods to arrive, then I will stand with you until the very end, but trust me, it will not end well, and this world could not handle the destruction. No, we need a better plan; we need to beat them at their own game. We need to wipe the slate clean and remind them that they are not the most powerful beings in this world or any other. We need to remind them what it feels like to fear.”

Blowing out a breath, I look between his dark eyes, seeing how serious he is. I have to trust him, and we have to find a way out because I will not be the reason Mors is killed. I will not give up on this life now that I just found it.

“Okay,” I whisper. “So how do we find an ancient one?”

Opening my eyes, I prop my fists on my hips. “It’s not working,” I whine.

“Keep trying,” he urges, sitting across from me.

We are sitting before a very familiar lake, my legs crossed and eyes shut as I send out my powers to hopefully find an ancient one. “It isn’t working,” I mutter again.

“You have their blood, so you can find them; I know you can. Trust in yourself, Avea. Try again.” He covers my hand and squeezes.

Blowing out a breath, I roll my shoulders back and relax, trying not to force it and instead let it roll across me and out, searching for something like me.

“Dig deep.” Mors’s voice reaches inside me, coaxing that part of me he helped train. He helped bring it forward, and he was never scared of it, even when I was. “Embrace every inch of yourself. Become who you always should have been. Your power is who you are. You are part of them. Find them.”

Using his voice as a guide, I give myself over to the power inside me—the one I kept locked down so tight until him. It is both foreign and familiar, but it kept me alive through everything. I hand myself to it and allow it into my soul with an apology.

I become it without fear, guilt, reservations, or terror. I let it tug me across the forest, deep within the folds of the magic that resides here, and past bones of an ancient magical creature I once defeated. A spark of something reminds me that it was no mere creature.

The bones still mark the area, one I never went back to, like a calling card, and it’s here I feel the truth.

Ancient ones cannot truly die.

My eyes snap open.

“I know where we have to go.”

It takes all day to get to the part of the forest I seek—a place I only visited once and was gifted with the scars lining my back.

I know time is ticking by, and the longer we linger, the longer they have to collect themselves and come after us. Time is not our friend right now, so I’m almost running towards the memory of the place. My foot hits the grass and magic shoots

up it, tingling within me, and I know I'm in the right place as I hurry through the trees.

"Here," I tell Mors, not explaining what's happening or the plan. There is no time. He asked me to trust him, and now I'm expecting the same from him.

In the clearing, the sun shines down on a semicircle of dead grass where I feel the bones buried deep within the earth, waiting to be called. Deep down, I know what must be done without even registering how I know it. It's a primal understanding of the magic calling to me.

I need to breathe life back into them.

I slide to a stop outside of the circle of bones, letting go of Mors's hand before I drop to my knees. Turning my head, I lift my wrist and bite it, letting my blood drip to the ground. It reaches the bones buried within and soaks inside with an audible clank.

"I offer my lifeblood freely. I offer penance, and I come seeking counsel. I seek my own kind. I call to you, ancient one."

For a moment, nothing happens, and I worry they will reject me. I squeeze my arm with a hiss, making the blood flow faster. A crack splits the middle of the circle, the jagged edge running deep to the bones.

The roar of an ancient beast comes from within.

"Avea," Mors warns, trying to pull me back, but I am frozen in place, unable to be released until this is done. This is a ritual, one I know deep in my bones, in my blood, yet I have never performed.

"I call to you. I breathe life back into you. I offer it freely. Come to me," I call loudly as birds take flight.

The bones erupt from the earth as I kneel there, Mors at my back. They lift into the air as if carried by its own wind and begin to glow and spin as they transform into a skeleton of a roaring beast. I watch with awe as the bones are covered by muscle and skin, and life is breathed back into the ancient beast choosing to rest here.

The one I thought I slayed. I was wrong.

They cannot die.

As its paws hit the ground inches from me, its open maw roaring so loudly, my eardrums burst, I know they can hold onto grudges.

Bowing my head in shame, I hold out my hands before me, my blood still flowing freely. I feel Mors tense, but he drops by my side rather than in front of me, trusting me to handle this, but I feel his irritation at not being able to protect me.

“I offer an apology. I did not know the truth. I was blind until now. I was merely surviving, an animal,” I admit. “I am sorry for fighting back. I come to beg for forgiveness and help from one whose blood runs through me.”

The roar stops, and my ears heal, allowing me to hear the padding of feet. I lift my head slightly, peering through my lashes, watching the beast circle around me. It watches me carefully before turning away and walking towards the forest.

I slump. “I’ve failed.”

Another huff splits the air, and I tilt my head, meeting its intelligent eyes as it watches me.

Come, young one. The voice is in my head, ancient and so powerful, my eyes bleed. *You seek answers. You were not ready back then, but you are now. Come and find the truth.*

I glance at Mors before scrambling to my feet and offering him my hand.

Only you, the beast roars.

“No,” I say out loud, tilting my head back and meeting his eyes as Mors hesitantly climbs to his feet next to me, gripping my hand. “Where I go, he goes.”

Then leave, the beast warns.

“No,” I snap, stepping forward. “I need answers, and you at least owe me that. I will not leave my mate, not now, not ever.”

The ancient one and I stare at each other.

You would give up what you seek for him? the beast asks curiously.

“Without hesitation,” I reply.

It watches us before turning away, and I slump, thinking I’ve failed us both.

Come quickly before I change my mind.

My eyes widen, and I tighten my hold on Mors’s hand and drag us after the ancient beast, plunging us into the forest in the trail of wild magic and history, hoping it doesn’t get us killed before the gods find us.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX



AVEA

Holding Mors's hand tightly, I silently follow the ancient beast. Its power flows out, touching everything around us, boosting it with vitality and life. I can almost see the animals flocking to follow and the trees bending to be graced by such magic.

I want to speak, but fear keeps my throat closed. Unlike when I was before the gods, I can feel how small I am compared to this being. I do not want to anger it, not when I am trying to ask for their help.

As if sensing my questions or just tired of the silence, his voice comes, echoing around the forest and allowing Mors to hear him.

"I am a guardian of our people, of our realm. I attacked you back then because I sensed your blood and thought you had stolen it. It was only after you stole this skin from me that I realised the truth," the beast speaks, leading the way.

"You keep speaking of truth. What truth?" I ask.

"You will see."

Cryptic bastard. I want to demand he answer me, but I bite my lip to hold it back.

"I sense your irritation and displeasure at my answer. You sought me out, did you not?"

"Yes," I admit.

“For what purpose, if not the truth your heart clambers for?” It turns its head to meet my gaze, and I swallow my irritation down. “As I thought, you wish to see my people. You wish for our help. Your soul practically screams for it. I cannot guarantee we will help, but we will hear your case, simply for the blood and strength in your veins.”

“Strength?” I murmur.

“Only a pure-blood ancient one could have awoken me. It means this earth and the power within thinks you are worthy. That has to mean something, even if it will not get you the answers you so badly seek.”

I share a look with Mors, unsure what to say to that, so instead, I focus on walking.

He leads us deeper into the forest, deeper than I’ve ever been. Something about going this far always made me nervous, as if something were demanding I turn back, but this time, I push through, and we emerge into something out of ancient myths.

Waterfalls cascade down craggy mountain edges, and trees stretch as far as the eye can see. It’s as if we have appeared in a totally different world, one forgotten and untouched by modern times.

The abundance of beauty has me stopping. When there’s a rumble, I glance back at the guardian. “No one comes here. Our magic keeps them away. It was the only way we could find peace.” He glances back at the forest. “This is what your entire world once looked like until the greed of men took over. Come.”

I swallow my awe as we wind down paths, heading towards the cliff edge. At the base of it is a yawning hole, and without hesitation, the guardian plunges inside, letting us choose. I drag Mors in after me.

We enter a cave in the mountain. “Avea,” he murmurs.

“Shh, sense the sanctity,” I whisper. “It will be okay.”

From his glance, it’s clear he doesn’t believe that, but we’ve come too far to go back now so we follow the guardian.

The rock here is a jagged, glistening black, with lights shimmering under the surface. The deeper we go, the brighter it gets, as if we are plunging into the Earth's crust to the soul of our world.

The cave goes deep, the darkness both welcoming and terrifying, until we finally emerge into an open cavern. Shelves line the wall, black and craggy, glowing from within, and beasts lift their heads, waking from their slumber and leaping down from their resting places. There are so many, I gawk.

In the middle is a circle with ancient runes surrounding it.

This is an ancient place.

“Do you know how you came to be?” They speak as one, the beasts forming a circle around us.

My breath catches at the pure power here. “I came to ask for your help,” I begin before my voice cuts off, my eyes widening as it's stolen, leaving me voiceless.

Mors snarls, but power wraps around us both, dropping us to our knees. Mors fights it, but I don't.

“You dare to question us?” one murmurs. “You dare to fight us? We made you.”

I look at Mors, begging for him to stop. He eventually slows, nodding at me as we turn to face the ancient ones. The only way we will survive this is if we play their game and show them the respect they deserve. They have been hunted, hated, and forgotten.

Just like me.

“Hmm, you don't. You know of the blood that runs through your veins, but you truly do not know why.” The voice is disjointed, as they all seem to blend into one, soaking up the shadows. I have a feeling that had I not possessed god blood, then my mind would have fractured when I entered this place.

“Our blood, our powers, can be stolen, and it has been, but you were not made from stolen power. You were made from

pure power freely given. You were made from love.”

I blink in confusion.

“Your mother fell in love with the beast of the forest when she was a mere girl. As she grew, so did their love, until you were created. She knew you would be hunted, knew you would suffer for her love for one of us, so she hid you. She bound you to the forest where you were born. The forest where your maker gave his life to protect you both.”

I feel tears fill my eyes, and my voice is suddenly returned. “My mother ... She loved me? She wanted me?”

“She loved you deeply, as did your creator, or father, as you call them. You were loved, halfling, and that love cost them their lives, yet here you stand, begging your father’s people for help when you are the reason he was lost.”

“You cannot help who you love,” I whisper. “They died for me?”

Someone loved me. Someone loved me enough to sacrifice themselves to protect me.

Why does the thought make me both sad and happy?

I thought I was nothing more than a mistake, but how could that be true if I was born from love? Forbidden love, but still love.

“They did, their souls lost. Love is a foolish concept. Emotions weaken you. Take the god at your side. Born from us, he should stand tall, rule, and guide, yet he has abandoned his duty, his people, all in the vain hopes of a word that means nothing.”

“Love means everything,” Mors interrupts. “I was like you once. I did not believe in it. I thought it made you weak to care for another. It doesn’t. It makes you so much stronger. Despite everything, you survive and fight because of it. Love doesn’t make you weak; love makes you stronger.”

“Silence,” the voice commands. “We will deal with you after, god.”

This is going sideways and quick. I can sense their anger, but under it all is ... pain.

“You mourn my father. Is that not love?” I ask. Using my father’s blood, the one I will never get to know, I break their hold on me and get to my feet. It’s a small act of disobedience, but enough to draw their attention from Mors to me. “I cannot help him loving my mother and me enough to perish. I cannot change what is done, but you loved him, no matter if you deny it, and yet you would hurt his blood? His daughter? You would dishonour him and whatever friendship you had?”

“You dare try to manipulate us? We are the wind of this realm, we are the sky and the earth and the breath in your lungs, and we can take it away,” they roar.

I had a mother who loved me.

I had a father who cherished me.

They both died for me so I could live, and live I will.

I will not fail them. Their sacrifice took strength, and I channel it now.

“Not manipulate. I am calling the truth as I see it. You let me live, and you led me here. It was not to kill me. You could have done that before now. So why? To tell me the truth? Why?” I step forward, and the runes around the circle light up. I feel the connection wash over me.

I gasp as understanding floods me.

They are not separate beings, but one, and losing my father was like losing a limb.

“You are lost without him. You are angry, and you feel his loss, even now. You love a man I never got to meet, a man who loved me. I am his daughter. Would you truly kill me or turn me away to die? You have been gone from this world for so long. Do you plan to hide until the end?”

“So many of us have been stolen, we ache with each loss,” they admit. “We cannot lose any more.”

The world loses when they lose.

They are stealing this world's life force when they steal an ancient one.

Without them, we will cease to exist.

It's the reason for the unbalance in the world, the wars, and global warming. We have stolen from Earth and it's angry, yet I cannot leave without their help or Mors and I will die.

"We cannot give you what you want," they call. "We see into your mind, but we cannot interfere. You have made your bed, like your father, and you must lie in it and suffer the consequences."

"You speak of death. You let him die when he needed you, and now you'll let his child die. You are not gods. You are not all-powerful beings. You are just scared relics, forgotten and alone," I snap. To hell with politeness. They aren't going to help us.

They let my mother and father die.

They could have helped them.

They could have helped me all those years ago when I was alone.

They didn't.

That was a choice.

"Go now, while we allow you to. We have told you of your heritage, and we have given you the truth. We owe you nothing else."

"No, you owe no one, right?" I snap, stepping forward again, ignoring the pain flaring through me. "Just another meaningless death to you, another drop of your blood lost in the world, but what does it matter while you hide here like scared children." I keep stepping forward, each one filled with agony. I hear Mors calling for me, but an ancient anger fills me, and I am unable to stop as I speak for all those lost before us. "You could have saved them, but you didn't. You birthed the gods! You are a creature of power, yet you are weak and useless. This world no longer needs you, and that's what you fear, isn't it?"

I feel something drip down my face and I glance down, seeing my blood hitting the floor. Lifting my head, I meet the beasts' eyes, seeing the sudden, wide-eyed flash of terror there. "Oh," I whisper, understanding flooding me when I realise what I have done.

This is their birthplace, and this is their end.

I walked into their circle of power.

It floods through my feet to my head, ripping each of my molecules apart, and a scream erupts from my mouth as I fall.

So much knowledge and power fill me, it tears me apart until I explode.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN



MORS

I watch her fall with a silent roar. The bindings holding me snap, and I rush into the circle. Damn the consequences.

Pain tears at me, and power floods my body, but I continue to crawl to her. Reaching her side, I tug her into my arms and hold her.

“Avea, Avea, Avea.” My eyesight goes, but I do not care.

I cannot feel her.

I cannot sense her.

My Avea is gone, and without her, so is my purpose.

I give into the agony and let it fill me. I let it tear me apart like it did her. The power of this world invades every inch of me, all while my mortal body wraps around hers protectively. Death can take me. I will not live without her.

Just as darkness closes in on me, a blinding light lifts Avea and me into the air. My vision clears as we are softly placed down outside of the circle. Agony is a constant, but I feel my body trying to heal itself from death’s embrace. I don’t want it to.

I lift my head only enough to see her closed eyes and parted lips, and I give myself over to the pain. One of the ancient ones treads my way.

“Do not,” I croak out.

He moves closer, and I whine, scooting us backwards with what is left of my strength.

“Do not touch my Avea.”

“Peace, god of death, we come in peace,” the voice responds, but I hold her tighter, unwilling to let him touch her. He hovers above us, his blinding power making me feel nauseous.

“Let us save her.”

“No,” I protest. “You will hurt her.”

“She was so willing to die for what she believed in and you for her. How could we deny that? We would be cowards to allow a being to fight like her and then die. This world needs her. The world needs you and the change you bring. Let us save her, god of death. Let us return your mate, our brethren’s child, one of our blood.”

Tears slide down my cheeks as I crane my neck to meet his eyes. “Can you save her?”

“We are life. She is not yet out of our reach, but we must move quickly. It is your choice, god. Work with us and let us save your mate or you will both perish here together. Trust us.”

Trust is not something I am good at, but looking down at her paling face, I know I would do anything to save her because this world cannot exist without me, without death. Even now, it tries to pull me back, and I cannot live without her.

“Save her,” I command. “Save her or you are all doomed.”

“You are death. You do not give life, yet you seek to shield her from the end you provide,” one murmurs.

Swallowing, I glance down at her. “I didn’t know what life was until her or how precious it was. I am death, you are correct, but never before have I feared that power until her. Save her, please.”

Crouching before Avea, he lays his paws on her chest. They almost cover her body, and I have never been so

reminded of how very small my love is until this moment. Her personality and power make her seem larger than life, but seeing her lying lifeless and unmoving under us makes my heart crack.

One by one, the ancient ones come together, placing a hand on each other and creating a chain. Through that connection, I see their bodies and eyes light up with their power—the true power of the universe. It’s so strong, it makes me bend in agony, but I withstand it for her.

Bowing over her, I keep my eyes locked on her frame. Pure power saturates the air, floating through my lungs and healing me, even though it’s aimed at my girl. I see the light penetrate her skin, sinking in deep and healing her fractured body from the inside out.

“Come on, don’t you dare give up on me right now. Not after everything. You promised me forever.” I lean down and brush my lips across hers, even as it rips me apart inside from the power running through her. “We had a deal, Avea, and if I have to go and collect your soul from the other side, I will. We get forever, so come back right now. That is a command from your god ... from your mate.”

Who am I if I cannot cheat death?

Closing my eyes, I reach inside, feeling her soul. She’s here and she’s fighting. She’s tying herself to her body, trying to come back as it dies. I wrap myself around it, using every last drop of power I was given as I hold her in place instead of guiding it as my instincts scream.

I breathe life into it, and I tie her to me irrevocably, until she can never leave my side.

Her soul, heart, and body are mine.

Avea is mine in every way, and I will not lose her now.

I don’t know how long we stay like that, until I feel her lips part ever so slightly, a wisp of breath escaping her. I pull back slightly and open my eyes. Hers are still closed, but as I watch, her skin starts to brighten once more, and her lips turn back to their rosy hue.

She's healing.

"That's it, baby. Good girl, keep going, come back to me. Come on." With a gasp, her eyes open and lock on me.

"Mors," she croaks.

"Avea." The word is a sob, and everything else fades as I gently lift her into my arms, cradling her to my chest. I bury my head into her shoulder, letting my tears fall. With each passing minute, I feel strength return to her body until she's holding me back, rubbing my head and shoulders as I sob.

I almost lost her.

I almost lost the only being in this universe I have ever and will ever love.

Without Avea, there is no life or death—there is nothing.

She gives everything meaning, and I will never let her go again.

I hold her, unable to let go, as if she will fade in my arms if I do. "I'm okay," she whispers softly. "It's okay. I'm here. I'm sorry."

Burying my head deeper, I suck in the scent that is all her. I detested it at first, but now I fill my lungs with it. She is my air.

Lifting my head, I swallow hard as I search her face, assuring myself she's here, alive, and real.

She cups my cheek, wiping a tear away. "I thought gods didn't cry," she teases.

"This god does, but only for you," I admit. "Don't you ever dare leave me again. We have a deal, Avea, forever."

"Forever," she promises, a smile gracing her beautiful lips before she cranes her neck to see the ancient ones watching us carefully.

"I think you have anger issues, love. You walked right into death's embrace ... again."

“Nah, I just really like the master of it.” She winks at me as she sits up and looks at them again. “But that was foolish of me. You saved me, though, and I am eternally grateful.”

“You were right. We stayed impartial and let them die. We could not let you die as well, not when we could save you,” they speak. “You, Avea, blood of ours, reminded us why we loved this world so much we settled here. You are brave, brash, selfish, uncontrolled, and wild. You are this world. You are its power. You are your father’s daughter, and we will help you.”

As one, they bow to my mate, who sits cradled in my arms but could not be more of a queen in this moment. Smiling brightly, she inclines her head to them. “Then we should prepare. A war with the gods is not something to take lightly, but hopefully, a show of force with you at our side will make them back down before it goes too far. This world has seen enough death, I think—no offence, Mors.”

“None taken.” I grin, hugging her closer. “I will follow you, Avea, wherever you lead.”

“As will we. You were correct. It’s time we help this world rather than just live in it. Let us end this, blood of mine, and correct the balance.” Holding out a paw to her, he waits.

She smiles back at me nervously, so I help her stand, and with a determined notch of her chin, she takes his paw.

Blood kin reunited.

My Avea tamed the ancient ones.

I knew she would because she tamed me.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT



AVEA

My body hurts like a son of a bitch. Having the power of the universe blow through you and kill you will do that to you, but we have no time to rest. I expected us to seek out the gods right away and end this before it begins, but instead, one of the ancient ones, the one who offered me his hand, leads Mors and me deeper into the cave, past little nooks with curtains—their resting places maybe?

Deeper we go, until we stand in a cavern so far into the earth, it must be the centre. In the oval room is a pool of shimmering, iridescent colours that, when I stare too long, seem to form familiar, smiling faces.

“This is the pool of memory, of life, of this world and everything in it. In the right hands, it is protected, but in the wrong hands, it is dangerous,” the ancient one explains before turning to me. Crouching down, he tugs me with him until we hover over the edge. “Brace yourself,” is all he says before he pushes us down, submerging our faces into that magical water.

I expect to choke so panic seizes me and my lungs scream, but when I open my eyes, I realise I can breathe normally. The ancient one nods at me, and as the water begins to swirl, my sight changes, as if I have been thrown into someone else’s life.

Another time.

Another person.

An ancient one.

As I watch, the fur they protect themselves with melts away and a magnificent man steps from it. He's too tall to be human and too bright to merely be a god.

My father, I realise.

His eyes and crooked smile are just like mine, and when he turns, I realise he is smiling at a woman with long fangs and short blonde hair. She only comes up to his side, and she giggles when he reaches down and hoists her up.

They are my parents.

A vampyr and an ancient one.

As I watch, he dances her around the clearing, their smiles shining so brightly with love, it hurts. When he slides her down his body, he drops to his knees, making her gasp. He cups her hips and lays his face on her slightly rounded stomach.

She's pregnant ... with me.

"I will love you until the stars die and the planets explode, my little halfling." His voice is soft and caring. "I will make this world whatever you wish it to be, and we will be a family. We will be so very happy, and you will be so very loved."

His head lifts, and he looks directly at me. There is a shadow in his eyes, and I know he knows the truth. How could he not? He is an ancient one. He saw his death coming. He knew what would become of us, and when he speaks next, he speaks to me.

"Never fear. You are not alone. We await you in the stars, my halfling, and when your time is done, meet us there and we will be together."

"What are you saying now?" My mother laughs, and when he turns back to her, he is grinning.

"Just making a promise, my love."

"Then I'll make one too." She strokes her stomach, a look of love written across every inch of her face. "No matter what, I will always protect you. I will always love you. No matter the path we take, we will always be together, my daughter."

The memories fade, and I lift my head from the water, tears brazenly falling down my face.

They loved me so much, and they loved each other. How could that ever be wrong? They were so happy, so hopeful, and they lost it all.

It hurts so much, I rub at my aching chest. I lived my life thinking no one ever loved me, that I was abandoned and alone, but they loved me so much, they reached through time to tell me. They loved me so much, they gave their lives for me.

“Thank you for showing me this and allowing me to meet him,” I say, feeling emotional.

“Your father loved you. It was the least I could do. Come, you can rest here this evening and tomorrow, we will end this.”

Feeling raw and exposed, I let Mors lift me into his arms. Cuddled against his chest, I wrap my arm around his neck, feeling it bob against my skin. I close my eyes, hoping we do not meet the same end my parents did simply for loving one another.



We are led to one of the nooks I saw, and when the curtain is pulled back, I gasp. Inside is a whole other world. There is a small cave entrance with roughly hewn shelves, but beyond that lies a paradise. A waterfall gushes down over glistening rocks, bright green grass filled with flowers covers the ground, and lush trees reach high up into the sky, which shines radiantly. As I glance up, I realise it's the true sky.

“It's beautiful.”

“It is yours for whenever you need it, not just this evening, when the world is too much. You are always welcome here.” The ancient one bows and shuts the curtain after him, and all of the sounds of the cave disappear with it, sealing us away in another world.

No wonder they rest here. There is so much beauty, power, and magic.

“Come here, love.” Turning, I find Mors waiting for me with a bright smile on his face.

Grinning, I run into his arms, and he lifts me up and kisses me hard.

“I thought I lost you forever,” he says as he holds me.

“I thought I lost you too,” I admit, willing to confess how truly terrified I was in that split second when I realised what happened. “Never leave me.”

“Never,” he vows, walking us backwards before laying us down in the grass, his body hovering over mine as his perfect hand brushes my hair aside. “Not ever, not for one second.”

The smile that curves my lips is slow and relieved. “I love you,” I tell him honestly, needing him to hear it. He was so pained when I woke up, so scared, that I felt his terror. It called to me. It kept me with him.

There is always surprise in his eyes when I say that I love him, like he expects it to be a dream, so I make a silent promise to tell him every day until he stops questioning if it is real or not.

Gripping his face, I force him to meet my eyes. “I love you, Mors. I’m sorry I scared you.”

His expression is raw and vulnerable, so unlike when I first met him. Now, he just looks like a man, one in love who almost lost the one he’s destined to spend forever with. Swallowing hard, he holds my gaze. “Just don’t do that again.”

“I’ll try not to,” I reply truthfully. “But if you’re in danger, I can’t guarantee I won’t do something stupid again.”

“Foolish little mortal.” He grins.

“Arrogant god,” I retort, making him throw his head back and laugh.

The sound reverberates around the paradise we are in and I soak it up. It’s something I never heard him make until

recently, so free and truthful. It warms me from the inside out, knowing I made him that happy.

When he tilts his head down, the flames in his eyes make my breath catch. “Shall we play mortal and god?” He bites my lip, making me groan as my eyes flutter shut. “Shall I taunt you mercilessly until you break and remake you as mine so you never leave me again?”

“Yes.” I wrap my legs and arms around him. “Remind me that I’m alive, Mors.”

“In death’s embrace?” He chuckles. “How fitting.”

Arching my back, I rub against him, watching his eyes narrow as I smirk. “Oh please, my big bad god, spare this poor mortal and ease her suffering.”

“So annoying. Why do I keep you?”

“Because you love me.” I lick at his lips. “Because you need me.”

“Very true. Let me show you how much,” he says darkly.

The grass below me is so soft compared to his dark, possessive touch. It burns across my skin as his hand slides down and cups my pussy.

His lips turn up in that mocking grin that used to drive me mad. “Is this little mortal already wet for me? Is she so desperate to be fucked by a god, she drips for me, the master of death?”

“Oh please.” I fake moan. “I need you so badly.”

He punishes me just like I knew he would, his hand coming down hard on my pussy, catching my clit. The spark of pain reminds me I’m alive. I don’t tell him how scared I was and how lonely the darkness was beyond. Instead, I let him bring me back to life with his every touch and caress.

“Let’s make you moan for real, little mortal,” he teases, sliding his knuckles down my cunt, bumping my clit until I grind into his hand.

He repeats the maddening movement until my heart thunders along with the waterfall. My back arches as I shamelessly beg for his attention, and his mouth brushes down my chest, stopping above my nipple where he blows cold air across the peak.

“So responsive, little mortal. You love being fucked by a god, don’t you?”

“Yes,” I answer without hesitation as he seals his pretty lips around my stiff tip and sucks, all while his knuckles circle and tease my clit, driving my pleasure higher as I rock into him. His expression is cold and distant, like when I first met him, but his eyes blaze like an inferno.

His head turns as he tugs and licks my other nipple until it almost hurts. His perfect brand of pain makes me grind into his hand faster, chasing the building release I feel, but just as it’s about to crest, he pulls away, licking my wetness gathered on his knuckles.

“Little mortal, you’re so sweet, but I doubt this little body could even take my big, fat god cock. Shall we see?”

I cannot do anything but whine as he thrusts three fingers inside me, stretching me. It hurts so fucking good. I fuck myself on them as he watches, widening them further. “Hmm, you might be able to. We’ll have to get you nice and stretched and slick.”

I can’t concentrate enough to play along anymore, my hands ripping at grass as he plays with my body, rubbing that one spot inside me that always has me seeing stars. I come with a scream.

He tuts loudly. “I didn’t say you could come, little mortal. Now all my hard work is lost and we’ll have to try again.” I jerk and whine as he fucks my fluttering cunt, stretching me once more. One release rolls into another until I’m a sweaty, moaning mess, and he growls, finger fucking me harder.

“Are you ready for your god?” he growls, stretching my cunt to the point of pain.

“Please, Mors,” I beg, the game long forgotten.

It's finally what makes him snap. Lifting my legs, he presses my feet to his chest and drives into me to the hilt with a snarl. My eyes roll back as I feel my lips moving in praise.

His hands are everywhere, stroking and pinching, and his power rolls across my overheated skin, rubbing my nipples and ass. He growls my name, fucking me hard and fast, the obscene, wet sound louder than the waterfall as my cream slides down my legs and ass.

"Mine," he snarls.

"Yours." I nod, lifting my hips to take him deeper.

"Come for me, Avea," he commands, and I'm lost.

My body detonates like it's his to command and my release is so strong, I scream until my voice turns hoarse. His roar fills our paradise as his hips stutter, pushing his powerful cum inside me as he follows me into ecstasy.

Our pleasure finally releases us, and we collapse together in the grass.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE



MORS

Staring down at my love, whom I hold tightly in my grasp, I watch her chest rise and fall and count her breaths, ensuring she's alive. She's here. She's in my arms.

It hasn't sunk in how close I came to losing her, but I woke from my sleep to a feeling of trembling terror as my heart pounded, and now I find I cannot sleep—maybe I never will again.

I don't care.

We face the gods, my people, tomorrow. I'll stand with her until the end of time, even against them, but part of me wishes it did not come to this and they would leave us be. I deserve happiness after everything they have put me through and the way they treated me. I have never asked for anything except to keep her.

"Mors," she mumbles, turning in my arms.

"I'm here, my love. I will always be here," I promise, holding her tighter. "Sleep now, I'll keep you safe."

"I'll keep you safe," she murmurs adorably, but I know she will.

This woman was willing to face the gods themselves for me, so how could I not fall in love with her more each and every day?

Tomorrow will come all too soon, and I know I cannot let the gods win.

Not this time.

I take my time dressing her, buckling the black and gold armour that matches my own. Her breastplate is extra thick, I made sure of it, but she drew the line at a helmet despite my protests. She takes a blade from me and hangs it at her hip, and I make my scythe appear before we stand at the edge of the waterfall, looking at our reflection.

We are two glowing gods, decked out in armour of gold and black, ready to go to war.

“Infinity,” I vow.

“Infinity.” She nods and turns away. “Let us end this.”

We meet with the ancient ones at the entrance to the cave, and we lead them into the light, traipsing through the forest until we come to a meadow.

We wait there, knowing they will find us.

I grip Avea’s hand tighter. I have never been so nervous before, but if they won’t back down, it will be a bloodbath. None of us could win.

Just as we expected, they appear in the clearing, standing tall in their armour, coming to collect us. When they see the ancient ones, they blink, startled.

Clearing her throat, Avea steps forward, and I move with her. “Stop this,” she begins. “You’ve come to kill me and punish him, but we won’t let you. I deserve to live, and he deserves to be happy. Can’t you see that you are only making things worse?” she reasons. “What have we done that is so wrong apart from love one another?”

I see a few of them shifting uncomfortably, and I take note of them.

They will not die today.

“Stop this before it goes too far. The ancient ones stand with us. Would you really stand against them?”

“She is our kin,” they call as one. “It is over. Go back to your realm and your futures.”

“You ordered us once, but not anymore,” Vanessa snaps. “We are gods, and they broke the rules. She should not exist. We are doing our duty, unlike you.”

“Please,” Avea implores. “We don’t have to fight.”

“There will be no fighting,” Illios murmurs. “Come with us now and we will make it painless.”

Glancing up at me, she sighs. “Then you leave us with no choice.” Power flows up her arm and she throws it at them, knocking them back. “You want us? Come and get us.”

Lochmond steps forward. “You foolish child.” His power soars across the ground, but I step into its path, deflecting it, and he shakes his head. “You are too old to be this dumb. Fine, if you want a war, then you will get one.”

The ground erupts in spiky peaks, and the air turns hostile as their powers grow, yet we stand taller and await their attack. “Element of surprise, baby,” Avea whispers to me, and as I gawk she lets out a battle cry and runs straight at the gods.

Fucking hell.

I watch in awe as wraiths descend behind my mate and the dead crawl from the forest, skeletons coming to our call and charging with her. We created an army and she wields it like a blade, slicing through their masses.

The gods’ surprise causes them to falter and scatter apart.

It will not be enough, though, and just as I think that, I feel the pop and know they have arrived.

“Glad you could make it.” I smirk, looking over at the judges in their masks. I sent word last night, asking for their help. “Still doesn’t mean I like you.”

“Same here.” Althea grins, waving her mask away and looking at Avea, who is throwing gods around like playthings.

“I like her though. Let’s teach them some manners.”

“They won’t be too happy you are helping us,” I warn.

“They’ll get over it. They need us.” She shrugs, and then her mask reappears as she plunges into the fray.

They risk their duty and their lives by standing with me against the gods, yet they do it.

I will need to ask why.

“Avea!” I call with a grin, only for my eyes to widen.

She’s so busy with her power, she does not see Lochmond sneaking up on her, tightly holding a dagger. I push into a sprint, screaming her name, but part of me, the part that feels death, knows it is too late.

She turns with a grin to see me, and her expression morphs into a frown when she hears the panic in my tone before spinning to see the dagger descending on her.

“No!” I blast my power out, but I’m blocked by the other gods, and I watch in horror as the dagger finds its target, sinking into her chest.

CHAPTER FORTY



AVEA

Pulling the dagger free with a grimace, I grip it tightly as I glare at the god. He managed to miss the whole breastplate, the bastard, and my blood coats the blade. “I’m death’s mate, you fool. You cannot kill me. Here, take it back.” I plunge the dagger into his heart as he screams.

There is a mighty roar that shakes the earth as the ancient beasts join the fray, the ground shaking from their fury as they bowl over gods. It does not stop them, and they keep coming. Mors was right; this will not end well. The earth already shakes with its displeasure as its two powers clash. Beasts slice at gods, and gods lunge at beasts. Judges fight their own makers, and Mors battles his own people.

All because of love.

It seems we are stuck in the same cycle as my parents were, and I know this war cannot continue. This world won’t survive it, and the people of this world deserve more than to die over a squabble between the gods.

Gritting my teeth, I toss the god who stabbed me away, searching the meadow for an out. For anything.

Love started this, so can love finish it?

I hear Mors yell, and when I glance over, he’s on his knees with a glowing blade held to his throat by the female he called Vanessa.

My heart stops, and the sudden fear of losing my mate is too much to handle, making my power explode out of me. It knocks Vanessa and Mors back, as well as everyone else surrounding us.

“Enough!” I roar as they climb back to their feet, the ancient ones knowing the truth of what will come just like my father did. Their trust and knowledge give me strength.

“You cannot win. Do you not see this?” I tell them as I expose the truth.

When I died, when I absorbed the power of the universe, some of it stayed. I let my eyes blaze with it now, and cracks appear on my skin as it glows. “I am one with this world now. If you kill me, you will kill it and its subjects. You will be useless, your duty finished. You will die.” I look at Mors to see him watching me with pride and worry. “I will not let you harm my mate, but I ask for peace. That’s all I want, but if it takes destroying this world and everything you have to save him, then I will. I will end it all.”

“You truly would,” one of them says. There are so many gods, and I’ve yet to learn their names, but this is not one of the three who were so vocal. “We cannot do this. We can’t win.”

I watch them argue amongst themselves before Mors joins me. “Enough. It is over.”

“It cannot be! She cannot exist. She can’t be left with that kind of power!” Lochmond roars, looking at the other gods for support. Ancient ones circle them, crowding them in case this goes the wrong way.

He cannot see a way out, and he is too proud to back down, which means I need to. I need to give them another choice.

“Then bind me to him,” I suggest, “to his duty and side forever. Bind life to death.”

“It’s the best option,” one murmurs, dropping his weapon. “We never should have done this in the first place.”

Vanessia snarls, glaring at me. “Why should he be happy when we cannot be?”

“Then find your happiness,” I retort, “but do not take it out on us for finding ours.”

She falters at that, looking away, and when she glances at Mors, I realise she wanted him all along. Jealousy tears through me, but he stands at my side and chooses me.

With a wave of her hand, Vanessia disappears, as do some of the others. They are fickle, foolish gods. Lochmond realises he has lost, and he decides that the only way he can hold his head high is to give into what we want.

The best of both worlds.

“Fine, but she is yours now, serpent. Make no mistake, if she missteps once, it is the end of you both. It will be your duty to control her.”

“Gladly.” Mors takes my hand. “For the rest of my years.”

“You are both fools,” one of the gods hisses.

“Maybe.” I shrug. “But you have no choice, and don’t threaten my mate again.” I let them feel some of the power growing within me, one that stems from the ground I stand on.

I see the fear in their eyes before they swallow it.

“It is not a duty I will ever fail,” Mors proudly tells them. “Bind us now and leave. Let us have our peace and you your victory. I never needed to win. I only needed her.”

Lochmond waves his hand, and I jerk as his power flows across me. Glancing down, I see gold and black marks appear around my and Mors’s wrists, binding us together forever in a way we couldn’t without the gods.

Where he ends, I begin.

We are one.

Life and death.

Two halves of the same whole, united like we always should have been.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE



AVEA

It doesn't take the gods long to leave with their tails tucked between their legs.

I relax and let my power recede. It flows through me and into the ground, and I send a thankful pulse of love for its help.

"Well shit." Mors grips me. "That went well."

"We're alive and we're together. That's all that matters." I lean into his side, suddenly exhausted.

"Thank you," I call out to the masked vampyrs—the judges.

"You are one of us." They shrug before a woman steps forward, her mask gone. "Plus, if you ever need us to help with him"—she jerks her head at my mate, ignoring Mors's snarl—"we'll be here."

"I've got it, don't worry." I grin as she smiles right back.

"I have a feeling you do." She bows to us both.

"The aftermath . . . ," I start, worrying.

"Not to worry, we can handle ourselves. Don't be strangers." She waves before they disappear.

Odd, but I'm too tired to care. My eyes flit to the ancient ones surrounding us, but before I can open my mouth, they bow. "It is time for us to return home. The war is won, and you are safe, blood of my blood."

Pushing from Mors, I close the gap between us, holding my god's hand in one palm and offering the other to an ancient one. "Thank you for standing with me."

"You have taught us the true meaning of being fearless, halfling," one responds. "We will repay that favour. Now go and rest, we will see each other again."

"We will?" I swallow, suddenly worried about losing the link to my father and the other half of me forever.

"You will always have a place with us, and you are welcome whenever—that is a promise." They turn to go. Mors and I watch, hand in hand, as my past and future depart, leaving us all alone.

"Take me home?" I turn my face up to him with a whisper.

"Always, my love."

We return to our home, and everything seems the same but also different. The gods will remember our defiance, and it will not be easy, but nothing worth having ever is.

That night, we hold each other, both of us relieved. Despite Mors's bravado, I know he was worried we would be separated or worse, so when he holds me tighter, I can't help but soften.

"Make love to me?" I murmur, reaching for his lips and rubbing against him. "My mate, my god, make love to me like we have forever."

"We do," he whispers. "Let me show you."

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO



MORS

I keep Avea captive in our bed for days, making up for all our lost time, but I cannot keep her prisoner here forever, despite what I first thought when we made our deal. We are equals now, and although this is her home, so is her world, and I must learn to share her with both.

We have our duties now, my heavy burden of death strewn between us, and as I sit on the throne with her on my knee, it doesn't quite seem as hard as it once was. It's all due to the light of my life holding my hand.

After that, I find myself taking her to a familiar house, one where the door opens to reveal Mateo and his mate. "You're late," he remarks. I sent word that we would be coming, but I surprised Avea, who claps and runs inside.

Sighing, I hurry in after them, and we are whisked into the dining room where we sit together, while Mateo and his mate, Phoebe, sit opposite us.

Avea reaches for my hand and grins up at me. "Thank you," she mouths, knowing how I hate vampyrs.

"Anything for you," I say.

I never thought I would be friends with vampyrs, but I am starting to be for her. If Avea loves this man, then so will I.

She would never treasure anyone who wasn't worthy. I mean, just look at me.

They tell us about the court and how the judges spared many, but the queen and her people were not. The king is alive and in charge for now, but they think he will step down. Phoebe thinks Mateo should lead and Avea agrees, and I agree with whatever she wishes. For now, Avea's old court is healing and in peace like the others.

"You didn't," I comment, tilting my head at the story Mateo is telling us.

"I did." He grins, pouring me another drink. This mortal wine does nothing to me but it tastes nice, so I allow it. He's warmed up to me as the evening has progressed. I think the matching tattoos on our wrists help a lot, as does the fact that I am utterly obsessed with Avea and even a blind man could see that.

Oh, and his mate took him into the kitchen and screamed at him.

That helped.

He came back sulking, his tail tucked between his legs, and tried to make nice. It was hilarious seeing such a strong man led around by a tiny woman. How absurd.

"Wine," Avea commands, holding out her glass from where she talks to Phoebe.

"Yes, love." I hand it over instantly and watch her drink it with glee before refilling it. She's happy and smiling brightly, loving being with her friends again, so I make a note to make this a regular thing. They aren't half bad, and if it makes my woman that happy, then how could I deny her?

"Have you ever brought anything back from the dead?" Mateo whispers.

"No." I shrug. "It's not my style, too creepy. There are necromancers out there who do it." I shudder. "They have no souls. The dead things they bring back are just ... darkness. Evil. Not even the gods fuck with that."

“I’ve never met a necromancer,” Mateo comments. “Though, if they hang with witches, I know why.”

“Witches are equally as odd.” I nod, and he holds out his fist to me. Unsure what he wants, I shake it as he chuckles. “Necromancy is a type of witchcraft, quite old and rare, but it’s a dark gift and often corrupts,” I tell him. “Their courts do not ... handle it well. They are usually slain.”

“How sad,” Avea says, and we all turn to her. “To be killed for simply being what you are. It’s not something you can control.”

I know she’s talking about herself, so I squeeze her hand and kiss the back of it. “Unlike you, my love, they often do not even try. They kill, sacrifice, and contort nature. I’m not saying all. There might be one or two who lie low, but I have never met them. The ones I have had to ... free from their torment are never the same. Do not worry for them or their souls.”

“That’s my job, too, now though,” she comments. “Our job.”

“Very true.” I kiss her again, unable to resist. “But not tonight. Tonight, it’s our job to enjoy time with your friends.”

“You know, maybe he’s not a total idiot.” Mateo nods.

“And maybe you are not a total mortal fool.” I nod back, us coming to an understanding.

“Men,” Avea and Phoebe say at the same time before bursting into laughter while Mateo and I exchange confused glances.

It is not entirely unpleasant.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE



AVEA

“**W**hat are you doing? I ask, peering down at Mors.

Weeks have passed since our showdown with the gods, and everything seems to have gone back to normal. Either they have forgotten about us, assuming our bond is doing the trick, or they are busy with something much bigger. I don't know which is better. Either way, it's left us time to heal and settle into peace here together.

We visit Mateo every week, and despite their protests, he and Mors have become friends.

I don't visit my old court. I never belonged there, and I certainly don't now. I do, however, want Mors to take me to the judges' court that seems more my style, and they intrigue me. Life is ... good. I'm happy. I'm never alone, just like he promised.

Unlike the cocky, cold master of death I first sold my soul to, Mors is ... everything.

He cooks with me and sleeps at my side, and when my dreams get dark, he stands guard. He walks through this life with me, hand in hand, learning how to be human from me and teaching me how to be a god.

He calls us an equal pair.

All I know is, I'm happy when I'm with him. Maybe destiny isn't so bad after all.

Grinning widely at me, he grabs my hand and tugs me down onto his chest, making me giggle as he turns me. He points at the sky. “It looks like a shark.”

My heart warms as he points out other shapes, naming them for me, playing the game I taught him so long ago when we lay here and first found peace in each other’s presence. We were strangers then, with so much distrust, anger, and desire between us.

When his eyes come to me, they soften. “What do you see, my love?”

Swallowing hard, I search his eyes. “My forever.”

The slow smile he gives me makes my heart race. “You once told me you hate me.”

“I was a fool,” I admit, cupping his face. “How could I not love you?”

He scoffs, rolling me under him and blocking out the sun. “That’s what I tried to tell you.” He wiggles his eyebrows. “I’m magnificent, you mortal fool.”

Laughing, I smack his chest before sliding my hand up and grabbing his neck, tugging him down as I taste him. “You are magnificent, my god, my mate. Show me how much.”

Our clothes disappear as I use my power and he chuckles, but I wrap my legs around him, urging him to claim me here in the spot where we became friends and finally lovers.

“I’ll show you how much I love you,” he vows, dragging his cock along my pussy. I’m wet for him. I always am, and he slowly pushes inside me. My eyes close in bliss at the feeling of us being joined. It’s the only time I feel whole. His darkness wraps around me, cooling me from the sun as he rocks into my cunt.

“I love you,” I whisper as he turns his head, giving me access to his vein.

“I love you too, Avea,” he responds, pure happiness in his voice as he cups the back of my head and lifts me, pressing my mouth to his neck.

Knowing what he wants, I tease him by running my tongue along his pulse before nipping. I should have known Mors always gets me back, though, because his thrusts turn punishing and his power slips between us, rubbing my clit at the same speed I'm rubbing his neck.

I bite, sinking my fangs in deep.

His groan echoes through me as I taste the love and desire in his blood. I clench around him until we both shatter, our bodies locked together and his blood flowing through us.

Our souls are intertwined forever.

We are infinite, my god and me.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR



MORS

“You will be okay, I promise,” Avea says softly, taking the old woman’s hand and guiding her to her destiny through the gate. When she comes back, I wipe away her tears and hold her, ignoring the line of waiting souls for a moment to comfort my mate.

Our duty isn’t always easy, but we never do it alone now, and that’s all that matters.

When she’s recovered, I lift my head to call the next one forward when I spot the tiger prowling the line, leading a soul. I nod my head in thanks, and he returns it.

It’s a truce, an important one, thanks to my mate. I’m learning it’s all about who you surround yourself with, and whoever she wants in her life will be in mine, even if they are vampyrs.

I would do anything for her.

I would die for her. I would kill for her.

Most importantly, I will live for her, and as long as this galaxy exists, we will be together—two broken souls finding a home.

AVEA

“No!” I rush from the room, sliding on the floors with a giggle.

The wraiths whirl above us as I call to them, dancing down as they create a wall between Mors and me, who is chasing me. I hear him curse as he orders them away and fights through their masses, but it takes time, allowing me to race upstairs and hide the picture I managed to capture of him reading the *Cooking for Dummies* book.

It’s just too adorable.

“Avea!” he roars, his power shaking the house. Before, it would have terrified me, but now I giggle. I evaporate and appear in our room, hiding it. When he slides in, barefooted and chested, flour on one nipple, I grin with my hands behind my back.

“Yes, Mors?”

“You!” He points as he strolls towards me. “Maybe I need to remind you who I am, little mortal.”

Backing up, I grin at him evilly. “Maybe you do.”

“I’ve become far too lenient with you.”

“You have.” I gasp as my legs hit the bed, and when he’s before me, I spin us, pinning him below me as I grin at him. “Far too lenient, god of death. Shall I show you?” Running my tongue across his nipple, I lick away the flour and suck as he groans.

“My Avea,” he says.

“Yours,” I agree with a wicked grin as I sit up. “Now, don’t mind me, I’m just going to show everyone that photo.” I evaporate, hearing him roar after me.

Happiness like I never thought I would feel fills my chest until it overflows and spills into our land, covering it with life and love.

I sure have come a long way from the lost, lonely little girl who curled into a forest floor and cried.

When I appear in the forest I grew up in, I know I won't be alone for much longer, since I feel Mors following and my father's people coming to find me as they always do when I appear.

No, I will never be alone or unhappy again.

How could I be with the love of a god coursing through me?

EPILOGUE

“Look at me,” I order, using the blade’s edge to tilt the man’s tear-stained face up. Disgust fills me as I meet his watery eyes. He’s weak, so very fucking weak. “Do you know why we were sent to hunt you?”

“Because you found out we helped the vampyrs,” he blubbers.

“Very good,” I say. “You fool. You betrayed us all. You betrayed the cause and, worst of all, you worked with the monsters. How could you?”

“She offered us immortality, power, and money—”

I slash across his face, the wound opening as he screams. The wooden dock creaks with approaching footsteps, but I don’t need to turn to know who it is—my brethren, my family, my fellow hunters.

The moon hangs high, and somewhere far off in the distance, I swear I hear a howl over the tethered boats and crashing waves. It’s empty at this time, just like we wanted.

“You betrayed everything we stand for. You broke your oath as a hunter.” I tower over the coward. “I hope it was worth it.” I kick the centre of his chest and watch as he screams in terror and falls backwards, hitting the cold, churning water with a splash. With a wicked grin, I watch the ropes tethered to him slip into the water until it tugs the cinder blocks in, dragging him down to the bottom.

If he wants to play with monsters, then he’ll die like one, alone, afraid, and drowning in his own regrets.

Turning away, I meet the eyes of the men who have hunted at my side since we were children. “Pack up, we have a meeting to attend.”

They fall into step beside me, our footsteps quiet.

“Do you know what it’s about?” The voice is soft, dangerous.

“We’ve been assigned a new hunt,” I respond, a sardonic smile curling my lips. “It’s time for us to take our place at the top. We’re hunting wolves, boys. We are hunting the beasts themselves.”

ABOUT K.A. KNIGHT



K.A Knight is an USA Today bestselling indie author trying to get all of the stories and characters out of her head, writing the monsters that you love to hate. She loves reading and devours every book she can get her hands on, and she also has a worrying caffeine addiction.

She leads her double life in a sleepy English town, where she spends her days writing like a crazy person.

Read more at K.A Knight's website or join her Facebook Reader Group.

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