

## Eternally Damned: Chapter 17

Maven

I'm not crazy.

I swear I'm not. I hear them. There are so many, I can't decipher what they are saying. White noise blinds me, static popping in the neurons in my mind. My hands holding the blanket around me loosen their grip and slide along the side of my head. An inhuman noise leaves me, something along the lines of a crackled screech and my temples throb.

My fingers tug on my hair and the blanket falls, draping around my feet, my knees bucking like a pissed off bronco.

"Maven!" Lex's arms circle around my waist, catching me before I hit the floor.

"God, Maven. What the hell?" Dottie runs out of the kitchen, a cloth in her hand. She is inches taller than me, but she never towers over my height to gain respect. She's more motherly than that, even if she doesn't want to admit she has a sweet bone in her body.

She dabs the cloth under my nose and when she pulls it away, the material is stained red. "What did you do?"

"Me?" Lex nearly yells his innocence. "I didn't do anything. Maven, what is it?" His eyes are on me, assessing me, his hands pushing my hair out of my face as we sit down on the floor. "Talk to me, sweetheart. Talk to me," he begs, lying me over his lap. He's holding me as if I am a child.

"So many," I choke, my eyes rolling to the back of my head as flashes of the past creep into my mind. "So many voices." My back bends as one voice that's stronger than all the others takes control of my being.

I fall slack, watching through a fog as another entity possesses me.

“Maven?” Lex whispers, holding the back of my head up.

My vision hazes, a cloud of white coloring what I see. I try to take control, but whatever is inside me, is stronger. I can sense it won't be for long. However they are doing this, they aren't strong enough.

*“Tell Alexander to take you to the cove. The cove. Go. We're here.”*

“We're here!” The words are torn from me in violent rampage as the entity who used me to relay his message, vanishes. The words are so loud, they use all the air I have in my lungs. I roll from Alexander's lap, my palm slapping against the new black hardwood floors.

Lovely.

“Christ, Maven.” Lex rubs my back as I try to catch my breath.

I wipe my mouth and lick my lips, copper rolling on my taste buds.

He covers my naked body back up with the blanket and tugs me close. “It's okay, Beloved. It's alright. We will figure it out. I got you. Always.”

I wrap my arms around his neck and hold on tight, trying to make sense of what happened, but I can't.

Who am I kidding? It's magic.

Maybe if I do as the voice says, they will stop.

And I'll give anything to make them stop.

“Your eyes turned white, Maven. Are you sure you're okay? I'm going to go get you some water.” Dottie touches my arm and a warmth, protection and love soak through me. Powerful and strong. I gasp when sparks dance between her fingers across my skin.

She yanks her hand away as if I burned her. “What the hell was that?”

*Your familiar will protect you.*

I remember the words of the letter Sarah left me. I had no idea what they meant, but Sarah recognized my familiar as a woman.

It would make sense it would be Dottie. We've always been friends and she's never cared what people said or whispered about me.

Was she always meant to be by my side?

"This is getting weird. Don't get me wrong, I don't mind the hocus pocus, creepy crawly, fang, blood-sucking, witchy stuff. I don't know why it doesn't bother me, but I'm a bit freaked out, so if someone could please shed some light—"

I cast a light over her head, wanting to ease the tension and her shoulders slump while she deadpans me with a hard look.

"Funny. I'm glad your humor remains intact after..." she waves her hands in the air...  
"That."

I sit up and groan, feeling like I got hit by a bus. Lex zips to the kitchen and when he comes back, he doesn't have water, but something a little stronger.

Whiskey. Actual whiskey, not the dog.

I give him a gentle smile, placing my hand on my stomach as a quick reminder of why alcohol isn't a good choice.

His lips part and his eyes round in horror as if he can't believe what he just did. He tosses the amber liquid back himself, disappointed with himself. He doesn't say a word and dashes to the kitchen again, coming back with a bottle of water.

His crooked smile is the sight I need. "Sorry, I guess we should go grocery shopping. The pizza and leftover Chinese food with tap water isn't cutting it."

“That’s what you’re feeding her? Are you kidding me? You’re both rich and you don’t have your own cook? Unreal,” Dottie bitches, shaking her head. “Good thing I’m upgrading your kitchen or you’d both die of heart disease.”

“We haven’t needed anything,” Lex mumbles under his breath.

I blush thinking about what else has satisfied us. I can feel his blood roaring inside me, my gums tingling for another bite of him.

I’m not a vampire, but it seems I am when it only comes to him.

I stare at Dottie a bit longer, the aura around her brighter than ever. It’s taller than she is, a bit wider, arms of neon scarlet engulfing her own body, moving as she moves. I don’t feel fear. I know she’ll protect me.

But *what* is she?

“And what’s this cove?” Dottie asks, cleaning the blood off the floor that dripped from my nose. “You wouldn’t stop shouting it.”

Lex steps in front of me and takes a defensive stance, broadening his shoulders and tightening his fist. “How do you know about the cove?”

Dottie scoffs and points the dirty rag at me. “She was just yelling about it.”

“No, she wasn’t. She didn’t say a word. She sounded like she was choking, but she never spoke.”

Dottie’s eyes turn to saucers and her sight falls on me. “Maven?” Her voice quiet and meek.

“I didn’t say anything, but the voices in my head yelled it. They wouldn’t stop.”

“Why did I hear it?” The words shake from her throat.

Lex sighs and relaxes his hands, his veins bulging in his arms still. “You’re paranormal, Dottie.”

She shakes her head. “No. I’m a teacher. I teach. I can’t...” she sucks her bottom lip into her mouth, nibbling the flesh.

“You’re a paranormal. I can see it in your aura. Pa knew. He said your aura was faint, but it got stronger over the years. Whatever you are, she isn’t ready to come out yet, but she wants to give her service. You’re Maven’s familiar. Do you know what that means?”

I appreciate his tone, how soft and gentle he’s being while he speaks to her about something she has no idea about.

“Familiar? No. I don’t understand.”

“Witches have familiars. When they first come into their power, the familiar reveals him or herself. They can be anything, whatever form that will help the witch the most.”

“I can’t see what your form is. It’s big though. Tall. Powerful,” I explain to her. “I wasn’t able to see your aura until the other day, but the more you’re around us, the stronger she becomes. I think it’s why we’ve always been friends. We’ve been drawn to one another, always.” I reach for her hand, but she steps away from me, thick droplets spilling down her cheeks.

“And you didn’t tell me?” Her mouth opens as she tries to calm her breathing, the heels of her palms pressing against her eyes for a moment to stop the tears. “You didn’t tell me? After everything, after me believing you and that you’re in love with a vampire, who, might I add was a fucking ghost, and *you* didn’t think to tell me the truth?”

I scurry to my feet, swaying and Lex wraps his large hand around my forearm to keep me steady. “I didn’t know how. I didn’t know what to say. I barely understood it myself.”

“Pa said he didn’t want to scare you. He figured whatever you are, when she was ready to come out, then you’d be ready for the truth.”

“He was wrong,” she says between gritted teeth, her face pinching from rage. “I should have known from the beginning. I should have known!” She screams. “This isn’t just about you. It’s about me. I don’t know what... I am.”

“If I knew I’d tell you. I swear.” I’m desperate for her to believe me.

“You didn’t at first, but you did know. You did and I hung around like an idiot, not understanding why I have this need to always fucking be there for you. Always.”

“I’m sorry. I’m learning too. I should have been honest with you from the beginning.”

“Yes, you should have.” Her shoulder meets mine as she strides by me. Before she gets too far, she pauses, turning her head slightly to speak, “Is this how a witch treats her familiar? With dishonesty? If so, I want nothing to do with it.” She swings the door open, slamming it against the wall.

The image around her grows, almost as if the bigger she becomes the more Dottie is protected. The mysterious creature’s head tilts and her arms spread before folding in, hugging her.

Dottie stops walking when she’s able to feel the connection with her animal and holds a hand to her heart.

I run out the door and stop just above the steps, the wetness still hangs in the air after the storm. “Dottie! Please, don’t go. Please.” My pleas end when a bolt of lightning strikes just in front of me, but I don’t jump, I absorb the energy.

And as Dottie ignores me, the storm brews again, fallen leaves carry over the ground.

“Dottie!” I cry out once more.

She stands by her open driver’s side door and stares at me, letting the rain fall and soak her for the second time tonight. Her animal looms over her, staring at me too. With a pinched mouth and dark soaked hair, she gets in the car and slams the door. Tires spin against the driveway, gravel flinging and clanking along the underside of her car.

The tail lights glow as she leaves and the pain of losing my best friend has the rain pouring harder, a sheet that can't be pierced.

Lex's hand lands on my shoulder and squeezes. "She'll be back. She just needs time. It's a lot to accept when you aren't raised with knowing this."

"How do you know she'll be back? I don't want her to come back because she feels like she has to or because she's my familiar."

"No, beloved. She'll come back because she's your friend. Friendship like yours doesn't end. Love doesn't break easily. Cracks can be mended."

"But mended things are never the same after."

His lips press against my mating mark. "Sometimes. Sometimes they are stronger once they are put back together. The weakness, what makes them fragile is gone."

I lean my head back and rest it against his chest, hoping time can fix what magic cannot. Spinning around, I brush my fingertips along his shoulders, admiring the ridges of his collarbones and the smooth skin of his chest. He has sparse hair along his pecs that trail down his stomach.

So masculine.

Every inch of him.

"Take me to the cove."

And maybe all this madness can be over.