

Eternally Damned: Chapter 18

Alexander

I push away from her and rub a hand over my face. "It's a puddle now. Nothing more, nothing less, nothing but a place where my parents went to escape us. It's nothing."

"What if it's everything?" she asks, closing the distance between us. The hope on her face nearly has me succumbing to her need. "What if it is the answer to everything? What if it tells me what I need to know? What if it stops the voices? The letter said to go to the cove. If anything, I should listen to Sarah."

"It's nothing special," I tell her, leaning my shoulder against the doorframe.

"Why are you so adamant of that? How are you so sure?"

I close my eyes and think back to the day I lost everyone I ever loved. My heart begins to beat faster, my palms begin to sweat, and there is a drum of fear still living in the back of my mind. "It was the last place they were headed. My family. Mother, Father, Greyson, and Uncle Luca." I swallow when I think of Rarity. "And my baby sister. She was just a day old."

Maven's light footsteps brush across the porch. She places her hand in the middle of my back, dragging it up to my shoulder and down my arm. "Is that why you never talk about them?"

"Do I not?" I repeat, thinking of the times her and I have spent together, the moments we have shared.

And I haven't. Not really. I talk about Atreyu because in a sense he is still with me.

I rub my chest and grunt. "I guess I don't. Thinking about that day is painful."

"Why do you think they went there?"

“I don’t know, Maven. Maybe to die where they loved?”

“Tell me about them. Tell me about your family.”

I smile, my memories jumbled together. I take Maven’s hand in mine and bring it to my lips, then drag her down the steps. Then I remember she’s just in a blanket. I run up to the closet, grab a nightgown and a robe, then come back down, dressing her before she can protest.

I toss the blanket on the porch. “Come on. Let’s take a walk through the woods.” I’ll take her to the cove like she wants. I hope it helps her. I know it won’t help me.

“I like it when you go all vampy speed on me.”

I quirk a brow and roam my eyes down her body, her breasts sitting snug in the tight royal blue silk of her gown. “I’ll have to keep that in mind.”

We don’t say anything for a few minutes. We walk the path, the dirt, leaves, and twigs crunching under our feet. The ground is wet from the rain and there is a chill in the air promising winter. We should be better dressed. Again, we don’t have everything we need.

Another way I’m failing her as a mate.

That will change tomorrow.

“My mother’s name was Esmeralda and my fathers was Severide.”

“Esmeralda is a beautiful name. I never heard of the name Severide. I like it. It’s different like your brother’s.”

“Mother loved unique names. When my sister was born, November 7th, 1900, she had white hair and violet eyes. Vampires don’t have features like that. It just doesn’t happen. My mother named her Rarity.”

“Oh, I love that.” She drops her hand to her flat stomach. “I guess I’ll have to keep the tradition.”

I yank her toward me and kiss her deeply, thrusting my tongue between her lips. It almost hurts how much I love her, and I try to show it through the passion of fusing us together. "I'd like that." I press my forehead against hers for a second before pushing away.

"What were we talking about?" She laughs and loops her arm through mine.

"Forgetful?"

"Only because you kiss-stified me."

I toss my head back, a throaty boisterous laugh reverberating off the trees. "Oh yeah? It's my fault?"

"Yep. I blame you. You should come with a warning label," she says as-a-matter-of-factly.

"I do." I flash my fangs and a typical person would be shocked to see them, even after a few times, but my witch of a beloved rolls her eyes.

She isn't fazed.

"Anyway, my big bad vampire, you were saying?"

She tilts her head on my shoulder and I retract my fangs, loving the simplicity of this moment. There's no drama, no stress, no tension. It's us doing something normal for a change.

"Right. My family. You nosey little witch." I bop her nose and she play bites me, pretending to snatch it. "Did you know there were things called matching ceremonies? They were for unmated vampires. Since finding a beloved rarely happened, it was a way for vampires to meet someone who sang to their blood. Still nothing or no one sings to the blood like a beloved, but it was the next best thing."

"Sounds so... business-like."

“It was. In a way. Well, that’s how my father met my mother. He went to a ceremony, but the ceremony was for my mother’s sister. One look at Esmeralda and he knew he wanted her and no one else.”

“That’s so devious. Your father crashed the party.”

I grin thinking about my father’s mischievous side. “He did. They started their life together that night.”

“So fast?”

“Vampires aren’t like humans. We live a long time, and we want partners for it. An unmated vampire can live up to two hundred years. Mated but without their beloved, a thousand. With a beloved?” I spin her around, dancing to no music except the crickets chirping. I yank her back to me with enthusiasm.

I’m a man that’s been deprived of happiness for far too long.

And I have it right in front of me.

I plan on never letting it go.

“Eternity,” she answers my question, eyes locked on my lips.

“Eternity,” I echo, continuing to dance.

She steps on my foot and stumbles. “Sorry. I’m a horrible dancer. Two left feet.”

“That’s alright. I’ll be all the feet you need.” I swing her into my arms, like a bride waiting to be carried over the threshold. I rock back and forth, lazily making a circle.

We’re quiet like that, just enjoying each other’s peace and solitude. After a while, I break the silence. “So, for female vampires, there are two days a month where they are fertile. Well, they wasted no time. That night mom was pregnant. Vampires can tell right away but with you I didn’t know. I don’t know why. Maybe because in some ways I’m still a young vampire. I’ve been missing out on a lot.”

“I guess we aren’t that different. I bet I was pregnant on our first night too,” she states.

A growl of delight escapes me, and I think about pushing her against the tree, lifting her nightie, and sliding into her from the back. “Damn right you were. Mine.” I play bite her neck.

She giggles and leans away. “Don’t get me distracted. I want to know more.”

I let out a dramatic, theatrical sigh. “Fine.” We’ve been dancing for some time now, so I change course and head to the cove. “My Uncle Luca is great. My father’s brother. He’s spirited, happy, positive, and he’s always been there for us. Actually, him and Greyson, my father’s head of security, saved my mother’s life.”

“No way. Tell me, tell me,” She begs so prettily, curling her fingers into my chest. Her almond-shaped green eyes beam up at me with excitement. Oh, my girl likes a little gossipy drama.

Good to know.

“Well, back then, we didn’t have paranormal doctors. Rumor had it they got stuck in the portal but no one ever truly knew. After the burning of Sarah Wildes, finding a witch to help us was difficult. Healers, doctors, nurses, usually came from mages, witches, or fae. Someone who could use magic and the earth to heal. We had no one, so my parents didn’t know they were having not one, but two children. The birth was hard on my mother. My fault. I wasn’t headfirst. My foot was. Father had to cut her open himself. He bit, tore, and clawed for us. It was a memory I didn’t mean to see, but I did. Greyson and Uncle Luca fed my mother their blood. It’s... frowned upon for unmated vampires to do that with one another. It can be sexual. You can have new desires, sexual fantasies, and even love start to form. He had to risk it or mother would have died. His blood wasn’t enough. To his surprise, they didn’t lust after his mate. They did form a close bond, like brother and sister. That’s it. Greyson was... strong, like what you’d imagine a statue would do if it came to life. That was him.” I take a deep breath, then let it out, immersing myself in the pain for a minute. “I miss them.”

“I know.” She rubs my chest, kissing where my heart pounds. “I’ll take care of you for them. I promise.”

I set her down gently and kiss her forehead. “You take the best care of me.” I push her shoulders to turn her around and point to the cove. “Here we are. See? Puddle of water.”

She runs forward and smiles, her eyes flickering with... something. Gold?

“It’s gorgeous. I bet it’s beautiful in the winter when the snow falls and the pond freezes over.”

I squat down and touch the ground, focusing on the dirt as I rub it between my fingers. I inhale next, trying to find memories, and there is.

There’s one.

It’s faint.

I hear my parents laughing, my mother’s smile bright as she stares at father.

And then I taste blood, feel the rivers of it gliding over my fingers. I yank my hand away and stand, trying to shake the feeling that something horrible happened here. I could find out more if I really focused every ounce of memory channeling I have, but I don’t want to.

Wiping my hands on my sweatpants, I clear my throat, then lift my head to see what my curious witch is doing. She’s on her knees, peering into the growing abyss of the water as the banks that receded over the years begin to refill. It must be because of Maven. This cove, maybe it is a portal and it is drawn to her magic. I bet the key was found when the puddle was dried up or maybe the portal spit it out.

I don’t know. There are too many questions that have no answers for me to fully believe this cove leads to other worlds.

The pond appears to be deep with an inky darkness beneath its surface, but you can walk across it. It’s shallow.

A fucking big puddle.

So how in the hell could someone sink into it and travel?

“Find what you’re looking for?” I sit down next to her, intruding on a frog. He jumps and croaks, hopping across the cove to get away from me.

“I’m not sure,” she says in a trance, staring down at her reflection. “The voices are quiet, like they are holding their breath.” She gives the water the slightest touch, her fingertip causing ripples across the slate.

I never believed in this portal. It was just another fairytale that liked to be told in the middle of the night when everyone was bored.

Then again, my beloved is a fairytale, isn’t she? And she surpassed my wildest hopes, dreams, and expectations.

Maven’s hair tumbles down her shoulders, the tips taking a dip in the water as she examines it for the answers she’s looking for. She shuts her eyes and exhales, her hand on the surface of the water.

For the first time, I notice the water is clear. I can see her hand under the surface.

How in the world does the cove remain so black? Why can’t I see to the bottom?

Magic.

I glance up when the trees begin to rustle, the branches bending to kiss one another. The crickets become louder and the frogs croak one after the other, as if we are surrounded by hundreds.

“Maven? What’s going on?”

When she opens her eyes, they are ridden with lightning bolts and sparks. She presses her hand under the water and a shimmery golden hue glitter across the top. She flicks her wrist, spinning the water until the entire cove changes momentum. The

water circles like a tornado downward. The cove becomes larger, the hole becomes bigger as the water twists with the electricity of her magic.

“Maven?” I call out to her, but she can’t hear me, she’s in a trance. Her veins begin to glow, her hair turning a deeper shade of red.

What’s she sacrificing to allow this to happen?

I tackle her to the ground, breaking the focus she has on the cove.

“What are you doing?” I shout over the growling wind.

“I’m bringing them back.” She stands onto her feet with determination, shoving both hands into the cove.

“Who? You can’t bring back the dead!” I try uprooting her again, but she’s planted her feet, tree roots binding her to the ground.

“Not the dead,” she says, her words laced with a magical, faraway component.

“Then, who? Don’t do this. Please.” There’s a strip of gold, sparkling like fairy dust that replaces a chunk where red used to be. It’s pretty.

Pretty sometimes means vile.

Depends on the magic being used.

“Maven? Damn it, answer me!” I shout over the tropical storm force winds.

Her eyes meet mine, the sparks flying into the air like fireworks on the fourth of July.

“Your family.”