

Eternally Damned: Chapter 2

Maven

“How’s my favorite redhead?” Dottie asks as we sit down at the local coffee shop, Witch’s Brew.

It’s been a week since I was at the estate, and it is still weighing on my mind.

“Oh, I know that look. What’s wrong?” She sips her pumpkin spice spell latte, leaving a red imprint on the rim from her lipstick.

She’s a classic beauty with long brown hair, big blue eyes with long lashes, and has a plump pinup model body type. She’s perfect.

A few people glance my way and begin to whisper, souring my mood further. I stir my black coffee for no reason other than I need something to do. Dottie on the other hand isn’t coy.

“Hey!” She gently places her mug down against the polished cedar tabletop. “You got something to say? Don’t whisper it like a little bitch, say it to my face.” She stands up and flicks her hair over her shoulder, towering over the gossipers. At five foot ten inches tall, with two-inch heels on to boot, she towers over most people.

They quiet.

“Oh, yeah. Not so tough now when the object of your obsession has backup. Shut the hell up and get out of here.” She shoos them with her hand, and they scurry out the door, curling their lip at her as they leave.

Well, she’s nearly perfect.

The girl has a temper hotter than Hades.

She sits down and smiles as if nothing happened. “So, tell me what’s on your mind?”

Dottie is always saving me.

When the hell am I going to be able to save myself?

“Pa took me to the Monreaux Estate again. It’s been a while since I’ve been there.”

“Yeah, because you work yourself to the bone to save for that property.” She doesn’t cringe at the name of the estate but the people at the next table over give us a little more room.

Hearing the Monreaux name in this town is like being cursed, but Dottie doesn’t feel the same. Or maybe she does and doesn’t care.

“It isn’t realistic of me to buy it. I’m trying, but it’s so hard, Dottie. Eventually, the house will sell.”

She snorts. “Girl, that property has been on the market for over a hundred years. I doubt it. Why don’t you make an offer on it? Maybe the bank will take it.”

“The mansion itself might not be worth a lot but the land is worth more than I have. No way they will take what I have.”

“I can pitch in. I don’t mind investing in your dreams.”

My heart melts at her offer, and I reach over the table and take her perfectly manicured hand in mine. “While that’s so sweet, I can’t have you do that. You’re on a teacher’s salary. I know how much you make.”

“Strike a bitch where it hurts why don’t you?” Dottie puffs out her bottom lip. A waiter passes by us with a newspaper tucked under his arm and Dottie stops him in his tracks with a look.

The power she must hold. If anyone is a witch in this town, it’s her.

“Can I have that?” She points to the newspaper.

He smiles, holding out the paper as if it is the answer to the all the earth’s problems, never saying a word.

“Thanks, sweetie. I appreciate it.” Dottie is the only one I know that loves the paper. She likes the crosswords in them and the arrest report. She likes to know if she knows any of ‘the caught.’ That’s what she calls people who get arrested.

He spins on his heel and hurries away, keeping his red face down.

“Aw, sweet little baby.” Her bottom lip pokes out for a second, holding a hand to her heart as she watches him leave.

“You’re cruel,” I chuckle.

She lifts a shoulder and shrugs. “I only asked for the paper. It’s not my fault he doesn’t know how to talk to a woman.” Her eyes wander across each page as she flips through, her expression transitioning from happy to intense. Wrinkles form above her mouth as Dottie pinches her lips together.

“What?” I mumble around the rim of my mug.

She turns the newspaper around and flattens it out on the table, pointing at the headline. “Maven. Today at three o’clock an auction starts.” Her brows crinkle together, and I set my coffee down to see what has got her rulers in a twist.

I gasp, my fingers curling into the paper so hard the edges tear. “No! No, no, no. This can’t be happening.” Tears quickly burn my eyes and spill over onto my cheeks.

Monreaux Estate is finally being auctioned off. Come with your wallets and checkbooks!

“This can’t be real. I... no. No! That property is mine, Dottie. It has been since I was ten. How could I have not known? How last minute is this? Who put this together? Why now?” I can’t contain my confused, rage-filled questions. I ball up the newspaper and throw it across the room, covering my face with my hands to hide my emotion. “You don’t understand, Dottie. That’s ...” I take a deep breath “That’s my home.” I place my hand over my heart as it begins to thump in agony.

“I know, Maven. I say we go. For all you know, we could be the only ones that bid on it.”

I sniffle and slowly bring my hands to the table to grab a napkin, wiping the wetness from my cheeks. "You think?"

"Hell yeah. No one wants that place. Everyone thinks it's haunted. No one wants anything to do with it. It's as good as yours. If you offered a dollar, they would sell it."

She's right. Out of all my time here in Salem, I've heard nothing but negative things about the estate. It's about as voodoo as I am in this town. Maybe I'll get lucky.

I look at my watch to see the time. It's two o'clock now. By the time we get across town and get checked in, we will have barely made it. I have my checkbook and a pen. I'm ready to drain every cent I have ever earned.

I don't even need to think about what to do next.

"Let's do it."

"Yeah?" She claps in excitement.

"Yeah. I'm not going down without a fight. I have to call my Pa, though."

"I'll drive." Dottie slides out of the burgundy leather booth and loops her arm through mine. She flips her hair dramatically gaining a few longing looks and the bell above the door rings as we push through.

I think a part of me knows she chooses me as a friend because she doesn't get as much attention when she's paired up with the outcast. I should take offense, but it doesn't bother me to be a shield.

We all have armor to protect ourselves with, some are more dented than others, and I think Dottie's quick temper is one of those dents.

I hold my phone to my ear and on the third ring Pa answers, "Yellow?"

I grin when I hear his voice. "Hey, Pa," I greet, trying to hide my fear.

"What's wrong, Fireball?"

Damn, he's good.

"Pa, I won't be home for a while. There is an auction today at city hall. They are auctioning off the Monreaux property." My breath hiccups as I try to explain, but the fear of losing my dream has emotion welling up all over again. What if Dottie didn't ask for the paper? What if I never found out?

I can't even think about it.

I knew I'd have to face the truth one day, either I'd have the house or not, but I didn't expect it to hit me from out of nowhere.

"I'll be right there. Okay? Save me a seat. Me and Whiskey are on the way."

I nod, forgetting he can't see me. "Okay, I love you."

"I love you too, Fireball. It will all be alright. We're going to make those dreams come true. You just wait and see." He hangs up sounding so confident, but I feel the dread settling in my bones.

The wind dries my tears while tangling my hair. I tug my black beanie over my head and open Dottie's car door.

"Hold on tight," Dottie warns before I have a chance to buckle up.

Her tires burn rubber as she speeds out of the parking spot, nearly hitting the car behind us. A loud, drawn-out honk pierces the air.

Dottie rolls down the window and flips the guy the bird. "Fuck off. We have a house to buy, asshole."

So much rage in such an elegant looking woman. Looks really can be deceiving.

The car does a 180 before she presses on the gas, and we zoom down the road in her Honda Civic.

The smell of rubber still invades my nose as we travel through town, passing the antique shops that have been here since before I was born. As much as this town

hates me, I love it. I love how it looks. So quaint and beautiful. The buildings are historic, each one unique down to the brick.

It doesn't take long to get to the big gray concrete building of city hall built in 1838. The steps seem to get higher the longer I look at them. The American flag waves, the red and white nearly blending together the longer I look at the stripes.

My palms begin to sweat, and that doubt begins to kick in, but I remember what my Pa said.

I think back when I stood in front of the gates to the estate, the feeling of hope and belonging that coursed through my system. The urge to break the iron with my hands, to run inside the mansion, to call it my own.

To save it from destruction while saving me from self-destructing.

A few people are heading up the steps and for all I know, one of them will outbid me.

"Are you ready?"

"No," I say honestly. This is all very quick and happening last minute. I have no idea what I'm doing. I never thought of what the process of buying the property would actually be like. I imagined it a million different ways just not like this. "But it's now or never, right?"

Dottie grins as if she has no doubts. "Atta girl. Come on, let's go."

We open the doors at the same time, and I stare up at the large building, swallowing the nerves climbing up my throat.

The feeling of home tugs at me again, and I run up the steps, not wanting fear to rule my life anymore.

"Wait for me." Dottie's heels click and clack against the steps.

I open the heavy solid oak door and a security guard is standing at the metal detector, eyeing me once before I plop my purse on the conveyor belt. I wait for the

guy ahead of me to step through the detector, and when he is in the clear, I walk through next.

“Wildes, right?” The guard questions as he runs the wand down my body.

Great. Is he not going to let me in because of my name?

The wand doesn't go off and I grab my purse. I sling it over my shoulder and hold my chin high. “What of it?”

“I just wanted to say, I don't think it's bad if you're related to a so-called witch. Whatever you're here for, good luck.”

He's handsome, but the thought quickly turns into guilt for some reason.

Weird.

“Thanks.”

He smiles. “No problem.”

“Listen, it's pepper spray. You know, to protect myself.”

I sigh when I see Dottie being asked questions and responding like she is being interrogated.

“Well, can I get it back when I leave?” She yanks her purse out of the other guard's hold. “Be lucky I don't spray you,” she mumbles under her breath. “Come on, Maven. Let's go get you that house.”

I yelp when she snags me by the arm and yanks me with her quick strides. I give the kind security guard a wave before entering a large conference room through heavy oak doors.

The ceilings are high, and the windows are large and square allowing enough light in the room, so it doesn't feel like a cave. There are cheap, foldable chairs ready and lined up one next to the other.

“We sign in there.” Dottie points to the table across the room where two old ladies sit and greet people.

Great. One is Ms. Houser, and she hates me.

My chance of getting this property dwindles by the second.

“We need a seat for Pa too.”

“Duh. Like I’d leave Grandpa sitting alone.” Dottie loves Pa, as if he were her own Grandfather.

Dottie’s heels echo in the hall and when we get to the table, Ms. Houser gives me a once over, her jaw flexing.

“We’d like to sign up for the auction,” Dottie says, chin held high. “And we need a seat for Walter. He’s on his way too.”

“Sorry. We don’t allow—” Ms. Houser begins to say when Dottie interrupts.

“Listen, you old bitch. I didn’t ask for your opinion. We’re doing business here. If you don’t like it, you can go cram that stick up your ass higher when you get home.”

Dottie places thirty bucks on the table and she snags three paddles with numbers on them for us.

Ms. Houser turns red with anger. “You wait till your father hears about this.”

“He hates you too, lady. You judgmental, arrogant, wrinkly hag!”

This time, it’s me dragging Dottie away before she gets arrested for assaulting a senior citizen.

I sit us down in the front row and place my purse on the chair next to me for Pa. “You have to stop picking fights because of me. She will always hate me.”

“I wish you were a witch so you could turn her into a frog.” Dottie crosses her arms and taps her foot against the ground. “Okay.” She takes a deep breath. “How much money can you spend?” she asks.

“About eighty-thousand. It taps me out,” I say sadly, a nervous sweat wetting my palms.

“Okay. I have about ten thousand, so that puts us at ninety. I think we have a good chance.”

“No way am I letting you do that.”

“I’m my own woman. You can’t tell me what I can and cannot do.”

“You’re so sweet and infuriating all at the same time.” I throw my arms around her in a tight hug. “Thank you. I’ll pay you back.”

She squeezes me tight. “Your dreams are just as important as mine.”

“Okay, how are we doing today?” Mike Wilson stands at the podium, gripping the sides with his hands. His dark hair is parted neatly to the side, his red tie perfectly in place. “Let’s get the party started with the biggest item on the agenda. I know we will be happy when this monstrosity is taken care of. The Monreaux Estate.”

The lights turn off and the projector turns on to show a faded black and white picture. The aged photo is hard to see.

“Built in the 1600s, the Monreaux Estate has always been a part of Salem history. Over the years, it’s become a sore thumb sticking out in the gorgeous town of Salem. We were hoping our friends at Hills Construction would tear it down, but apparently, according to an old will we found by Severide Monreaux and witnessed by Alexander Monreaux, it must go to auction. And we are honest people, so here we are...” He clears his throat as if he is annoyed.

My heart leaps when I hear the name Alexander and a fuzzy picture begins to form in my mind.

“Shit, you’re betting against a construction company. I bet they already have plans for that land,” Dottie says, an edge of despair in her voice.

“We will start the bidding at fifty-thousand,” Mike announces.

I raise my paddle and look around the room, no one else is bidding besides some man in an expensive suit. He must own the construction company.

Ass.

“Do I have sixty?”

We both raise our paddles.

“Seventy?”

“Eighty?”

“Ninety?”

I can't go higher than that, but the man in the suit doesn't seem nervous. I bet he could sit here all day.

“A hundred thousand?”

My soul shatters when I can't lift my paddle and the man in the suit does. I bet he could drop a million bucks on the ground and walk away without batting an eyelash.

It's like someone has ripped open my chest and squeezed my heart. I think about Alexander and how I failed him. I don't know him, but something inside me recognizes his name, and I let him down.

“Going once, twice—”

I sob, my home being torn out from under me.

“Two hundred thousand dollars!”

I gasp when I hear Pa's voice. Dottie and I turn around at the same time.

“Cash.” He ends his dramatic entrance with everyone's favorite word.

The crowd murmurs in shock but my eyes are glued to Pa. He sends me a wink as he casually walks around the seats.

The man in the suit doesn't raise his paddle. I guess tearing it down and building something has to be more profitable to him.

Slowly, my heart gets stitched back together. This can't be happening.

"Okay, okay, quiet down," Mike says, slamming the gavel on the podium. "Two-hundred thousand, going once—" he looks around the room. "Twice—" he waits for someone to speak up. He stares at the man in the suit, hoping he will save the day, but the man stands and walks out. "Sold for two-hundred thousand to the crazy old man who has no idea what he is getting into."

Pa finally sits next to me, and I have no idea what to say. I'm at a loss for words. I had no idea he had that kind of money.

"I told you; your dreams were going to come true."

I hug him as tight as I can and cry, shoulders shaking as years of questions and doubt lift off me. "I love you. Thank you. Thank you so much."

Home is just a key turn away now.

Alexander

The shadows become lighter but the dark still overhangs. Life is still out of reach, but it's closer than it has been in a long time.

I think.

Everything is hazy.

I'm pushing against a restraint of some sorts. I'm bound by heavy weights underwater and I'm trying to get free.

I'm drowning.

Something has changed.

I see red.

Flames.

Hope.

Yet I'm frozen.

Beauty stirs me.

But beauty fades and time always stands still.

Darkness awaits.