

Eternally Damned: Chapter 20

Alexander

I can't sleep.

I keep thinking it's because I know Pa won't likely live too long to see his grandchildren grow up or the guilt that chokes me every day because I know his magic is eating him alive. Maven still doesn't have a clue.

But no, that's not it.

I throw the comforter off me and turn to make sure Maven is still tucked in. Her angelic cheek is pressed against the pillow. Her red hair is splayed out and I twist the new golden strip around my finger, worry slithering in my chest. This should have never happened.

And she did it for me.

Kissing her shoulder, her lips curl at the edges, a smile caused by me in her sleep. My knuckles drift down her cheek. "Dream of me, Beloved."

She sighs in content and rolls over, her hair drifting down her back to reveal the mating mark on her neck. I can't help myself. I bend down and place a kiss, my cuspids lengthening on their own accord to pierce the flesh they have claimed.

Maven stretches her neck to the side, presenting herself to me even in her sleep and moans.

As much as I'd like to, I know she needs her rest. I'm not fully convinced something didn't change within her. I can't help but be worried.

"I love you," I whisper before getting out of bed.

I tuck her in more, not wanting to leave just yet, but I need to figure out what's going on that's making me so restless.

The moonlight trickles in through the window, a glow spotlighting my beloved. Knowing she's safe, I head out of the bedroom, noticing it's nearly four in the morning. She only fell asleep an hour ago. Sometimes, she can stay up with me, others she can't. I try to sleep too but knowing I can't enjoy the sun changes everything. At least with the UV protected windows, I can walk freely in the house. So, it isn't horrible.

I'd give anything to walk in the sunflowers with my beloved in the daytime, to see her hair shimmer in the sun's warmth.

The loud snoring coming from the guest room yanks me out of my depressing thoughts. I chuckle to myself as I take my time going down the steps. Pa sounds like a freight train.

When I get to the kitchen, I pour a glass of scotch and sit down by the window overlooking the sunflower field. Those flowers shouldn't be possible in this weather, the chill should stop them from blooming until summer. Maven's magic makes it possible. I could think about her magic for days, about the bad things, but getting lost in the beauty of the good things is always better.

I bend one knee on the bench, keeping the other leg on the ground. I lean my back against the wall and take a sip of scotch, needing to feel something other than uncertainty. Taking in my new home, I should feel more thankful. It's beautiful with rich colors with a mixture of black.

But it doesn't feel like home. Not yet.

Not with my brother in a coma. Not with my family dead.

There will always be an empty space in this house.

Who's a coven master without a coven?

Just a lonely vampire.

I toss back my scotch and swallow, staring up at the full moon and bitterness fills me.

Where are those damn wolves? Where have they been? They were everywhere all those years ago and now I haven't scented one. They only hate us because they were a failed creation by the witches. They were supposed to be vampires, but the witches couldn't get it right at first. It took experimenting.

According to Maven's grimoire.

Placing my glass on my knee, I swirl it around, the small amount of liquid rolling at the bottom.

I perk up when I hear a car coming down the driveway.

Dottie.

I rush outside, waiting for her at the corner of the driveway. When she pulls in, her eyes are red and puffy. Our attentions meet through the window, and she just shrugs.

Opening her door, the breath she lets out is a rush and her eyes start to well again. "Are you okay?" I ask softly. Maybe that's what I've been feeling, her. I don't know how. She isn't technically a part of the coven. She has a tie with Maven though, so maybe that's why.

"I couldn't stay away," she says with a sniffle. "I wanted to come back. I feel like... I feel like that maybe this is where I belong now. I needed to come home, but I'm scared, Alexander. I don't know what to make of this. Of me."

I hold out my hand for her to take and try to give her a reassuring smile. "Because you do belong here and it isn't because you're her familiar, but her friend, her sister at heart. And we will help you. I'll protect you and I know Maven will too. This is the safest place you can be." I stretch out my hand a little more, hoping she'll take it.

She alternates her shoulders to wipe her cheeks. "I know." She slides her hand in mine, and I help her out of the car. Her brown hair is a mess on top of her head and she's wearing pink sweatpants and a matching hoody.

“She’s going to be so happy to see you. She’s been off without you.” Now that I think about it, I wonder if that’s why she was so out of it at the cove. She didn’t have Dottie by her side to keep her anchored.

“Me too. I didn’t mean to get so angry, but I’ve always had a bad temper.”

“Maybe that isn’t you, maybe it’s your other half,” I hint.

She’s stunned, then laughs in relief. “Why didn’t I think of that?”

“Come inside. I’ll pour you a drink and you can tell me about everything on your mind. Pa’s here too. Hope that’s okay.”

“I love Pa. I’m angry he didn’t tell me, but I’ll never not love him. He’s family,” she explains, crossing her arms as we walk at a slow steady pace across the lawn and to the front door. “It’s an adjustment.”

“I understand.” I open the door for her, and she stares inside, not moving. “So, do you have to be invited into homes? Did Maven have to say ‘Yes, please, come in?’”

How did these ridiculous rumors get started? I’m almost humiliated. Almost. “No. The house is in her name now, but there are a lot of things that aren’t true about vampires.”

“I’d like to know them,” she states and takes a step forward before falling back again. “Do you see it too? The thing surrounding me?” her voice is so quiet, if I were human, I wouldn’t have heard. “I do, kind of. I’ve been focusing when I look in the mirror. It’s huge whatever it is.”

“I can’t see it,” I say and her shoulders slump. She wants answers and I’m afraid I can’t give them to her. “You’re right, she is big. Not *it*. She’s a part of you and the more you think that way, about her being *you* instead of this separate entity, a ‘thing’, I have a feeling you’ll learn quickly what she is.” I let my vampire vision come out to play and I get a better glimpse of her aura. I look her up and down, tilting my head back to follow the garnet hue. “She’s got to be close to seven-feet tall, but she won’t make herself known. She’s still blurry. She means no harm. I feel nothing but warmth

coming from you. You know, when you were crying when you left the other day, Maven said she saw her hug you.”

Dottie smiles to herself, holding a hand over her heart. “Is that what I felt? It was so warm and comforting.”

“The creatures that live within us are one and the same.”

I notice the way her creature stands up straighter and Dottie turns her head a second later after her other half does. Kind of like an actress speaking on TV but the sound lags. It seems the oddity Dottie struggles to come to terms with knows more about what’s going on around her than Dottie does.

I follow her line of sight and listen, staring into the ominous shadows of the trees. It’s still dark out. The same owl that always hoots flies from his tree and across the sky, away from us predators. I hear Maven tossing and turning upstairs, as if she’s having a bad dream. I want to go up there, but my feet won’t move. Pa is snoring and Whiskey is just as loud.

“What is it?” I ask Dottie, unable to hear anything that’s a cause for concern.

“Nothing. I... I thought I heard something. That’s all.”

“Come on, let’s go—” Something hot and painful smashes against my back, the flesh burning to the point I can smell it. “Run, Dottie!”

“Not a fucking chance,” she bites out each word, taking a strong stance in front of me. Her creature becomes impossibly taller, wider, the red nearly blinding me. Another silver ball of energy shoots through the night and Dottie braces her arms together in an X, a force field surrounding her, crackling blues and whites. “Holy shit,” she breathes, but her shock leaves her open and vulnerable to the next orb that hits her.

Dottie flies across the porch, smacking against the swing. The chain breaks and one side of the bench falls. She groans, holding her side.

The silver begins to eat away at me, the tissues and muscles disappearing the more it takes over my body.

Another ice-cold sphere is tossed in the air, and I try to move, but I can't get up. I brace myself for impact when Maven's scent fills the area around me. Sweat trickles in my eyes as I look up, watching her catch the malevolent spell before it can hit me.

Floating between her palms, the orb becomes brighter as she soaks her own magic inside it, replacing the ice with her fire. Dottie stands, limping over to her witch and stands next to her side and the power grows.

"Well, well. Look who came into their power like a good little witch."

Brenden.

I seethe. I grasp the handle of the door and force myself to my feet. If I don't get blood soon, this silver will kill me.

Maven doesn't answer. She's in her trance again. Her hair shines as if it has been dipped in glitter and painted fire engine red, the gold streak glistening like the sun. She throws the energy back at Brenden, stronger and faster, it slams into him, and he screams, the sweet sound scaring the birds from the trees.

"I'm going to be your worst nightmare, Brenden. You don't come here and fuck with me and my family."

His sardonic laugh has the hairs on the back of my neck standing up and my instinct to protect Maven pull at my soul.

But the silver has weakened my ability. I can't even feel my fangs. My knees buckle and Dottie is there, shoving a wrist into my mouth. I widen my eyes in surprise, but that's when I notice her eyes.

They aren't hers.

They are Maven's.

Maven has somehow channeled Dottie, giving me permission to feed. If I do this, it isn't a drop that will bind us as a Coven but it will bind me to Dottie like a brother. It's a million times stronger than a coven bond.

I can't. I don't know if Dottie knows, and I can't do that to her. I turn my head away and Pa is there, this time it's his wrist in my mouth except it's already bleeding. I taste the wilted magic in him, the rancid anger of his power unable to be used and I nearly can't stomach it. I know the blood won't hurt me, it will heal me, but nothing would work like Maven's.

She can't though. She's too busy saving the day.

That fucker must have had a cloaking spell. Somehow, I couldn't sense him.

But why could Dottie?

"I know I taste like ass, but it's your only option if you won't take Dottie's. Drink!" Pa demands, and I squeeze my eyes shut, swallowing the bitter blood. It tastes nothing like Maven's. Her's is sweet and spicy while his is sour and thick, like oil.

All a vampire needs is blood, granted, Maven's is grade-A, like Dom Perignon of blood. Her's gives me a high, a magical fluke, and I'm addicted.

So, Pa's blood will do in a pinch. When I get enough, I rip my mouth away. I don't want to be rude, but I hide my face. The blood climbs up my throat and I cover my lips, forcing myself to swallow.

God. I truly have never tasted anything so foul.

I do something I don't expect, and I throw it up. My body rejects it.

"Alexander!" Pa drags me inside away from the danger and I hiss, trying to roll on my side.

"I don't know what happened. I don't understand why I couldn't keep it down."

"You need Maven. You probably can't drink from another again or my blood is just shit."

“I don’t know.” My head begins to throb as the silver pumps through my veins. “Maven needs me.” I crawl to the screen door and collapse, the cool hardwood pressing against my feverish cheek.

“Take care of my girl,” Pa says before stepping outside and yanking Maven inside with me. “I’ll hold him off. Feed him, Maven. He’s dying.”

Maven’s eyes return to the beautiful green shade, and she begins to fumble, scooting herself near me. “Lex?” She begins to cry and places her neck by my mouth. “I’m so sorry. Take what you need.”

I strike, unable to stop the moan that leaves me when her blood hits my tongue. My back begins to heal, and the silver pushes its way out through my skin, forming into small beads that clatter onto the floor.

With a flick of her wrist, they roll into the fireplace, bursting into smoke.

“Are you okay?” She takes my head into her hands, and I nod.

“I’m fine now.”

“Ah, damn!” Pa staggers back, holding a hand against his shoulder. Whiskey is barking to be let out, but Pa doesn’t open the door.

“Old man with weak magic. It’s killing you. I could have so much fun with you.”

I get to my feet and Maven bangs the door open. Whiskey runs out and begins to lick Pa’s hand that’s at his side.

“What do you mean? Killing him?”

“You don’t know? Oh, goody,” Brenden laughs. “Witches need covens, my darling.”

I flash my fangs at the endearment and step in front of her, but Maven tugs me back, protecting me instead.

“Without a coven, the magic slowly eats away at the body. He’s dying. Been dying for a while now.” He sounds bored, puffing hot air against his nails before shining them on his shirt.

Maven spins to her Pa. “Please tell me he is wrong,” her voice riddled with anger and sadness. “Please.”

“I’m sorry, Fireball. I’m so sorry,” he says, wincing as he tries to move. Blood coats his fingers.

“Lex can change you. He can—”

“—I’m too old to want to live forever, Maven.”

“But—”

Brenden cuts her off. “Aw, yes. It’s so sad.” He snaps his fingers and werewolves stand by his side.

They look the same. Tall, grey, large canines, and a light coating of shaggy fur.

I growl when I see them, ready to attack. Memories of the pain they caused me surge in my heart and I remember the promise my father made to his.

To kill all the wolves for killing grandmother.

Finally. After all this time, I can fulfill a promise that should have never been passed down from generation to generation.

“Ah, you remember the last time. How did that work out?”

“How do you know about that?” I whisper, tilting my head.

“I’m the reason your little family is dead. Why you got bitten, why so many things happened.”

“Why?” I shout to the point my throat is raw. “What did we do?”

“Your grandfather signed a contract with me. The first of his family to ever meet their beloved would have to sacrifice her and give her to me. I knew about you Maven, for a long time. I waited. I followed. I watched you grow into the powerful witch that you are. Wildes hold the most power and the Halls are—”

“—The dark ones. You’re the outlaws,” Pa coughs. “The holders of evil.”

“That hurts my feelings,” Brenden pouts, the wolves cackling the best they can in their wolf form. “More like, the most powerful of the damned. Think of me as Lucifer and the Wildes as God. If we joined, imagine the strength of our children. We could rule.”

“I want nothing to do with you. I’m mated. I’m pregnant already.”

“Nothing a spell can’t fix.” He throws a black smoky sphere next, and Dottie stands in front of Maven, blocking the poison from entering her. The smoke dissipates, hitting the shield Dottie created.

“Nothing can break a magical contract. Not even fate.”

I roar so loud, the ground shakes and I charge, speeding to my enemy faster than a bullet.

The wolves attack next, and I jump over one, blurring to the point he can’t see me. I wrap my hands around his neck, his fur tickling my skin, and I apply slow pressure. Each bone gives under me until he falls limp.

The other wolf locks his jaw around my side, the same place the one bit me so long ago, and sinks his teeth in. I laugh, gripping his jaws as my brother did and pull them apart, tearing his head from his body.

“Looks like history repeats itself,” Brenden muses.

I reach out to snag him, but he vanishes before popping up in another area of the yard.

“Jokes on you,” Maven states proudly, coming down the steps. “He is immune now since he survived the bite once.”

“Impossible,” Brenden spits, his gaze darting between us. I love seeing him afraid. If vampires are immune, we can rule anyone and anything.

I stand next to Maven and show my side, watching it heal right in front of me. A part of me was worried it wouldn't work.

“My grandfather would never sign a contract with you,” I say, returning to the matter at hand.

He takes a step forward, an insidious cloak flowing around him. “Anyone will do anything for love. After wolves ripped his mate apart, he asked for her back. He didn't read the fine print of the contract. No magic can bring back the dead, but he could join her.”

“You fucking cheat!” I go to charge him again and he shoots one of his little fucking orbs at me again. I dodge and duck, but this damn warlock knows my every move and eventually zaps me again. This time with enough electricity to send me to the ground, my entire body quaking.

“Not my fault he didn't read the contract fully.” He steps over me and produces the scroll from 1900. “You're mine Maven. Come with me and I'll show you everything. You can't break this. I'll keep coming back. I'll kill everyone you love next time. Alexander can confirm. I've done it once already.” His voice deepens. “I'll do it again.”

I get to my hands and knees and spit on the ground before dragging my eyes from the dew clinging to the blades of grass to Maven. It looks like she's actually thinking about it.

“Maven, no.” I can't believe she takes a step forward, but Pa grabs her hand to stop her.

“He's wrong, Maven. I love you so much. Okay? I love you.” He turns to Brenden and spreads out his arms. “Death will. A willing member of the Wildes family, a guardian

willing to die will break that fucking contract. No way in hell will my granddaughter be with you. Over my dead body.” He peers over his shoulder and time slows as Maven screams.

He looks at her for long seconds, water filling his eyes. “I love you, Fireball.”

Pa grips the scroll in his hands. “Immolare me,” he chants over and over again. “Next time, read the fine print,” he sneers with victory. The scroll is first to turn to ash, a ripple of a magical wave slamming against me. His body begins to drip with his blood before going up in flames. He doesn’t scream. He doesn’t cry.

He turns his head to stare at Maven, a singular tear falling down his cheek before the fire takes all of him, turning his body to dust and ember.

Maven falls to her knees, her heart wrenching scream becoming louder, shaking the world around us. Her hand falls to the ash and her veins turn purple soaking in his magic. I forgot about that. When the power of a witch has nowhere to go when the body is dead, it goes to the next of kin.

She doesn’t seem to care. She fists a handful of ash and holds it to her chest. Lightning cracks across the sky and rolling black clouds take over. Thunder shakes but it isn’t as potent as her wails of heartache.

Rain begins to pour, and Brenden snaps his finger again, wolves at his side once more.

“Kill them,” he orders.

I refuse to fail this time. I somersault into the air, landing just behind the warlock. Reaching for him, he vanishes into the sheet of rain. Maven’s cry vibrates the air, sound waves forming to roll into the distance.

Her pain the echoing song of heartbreak.

In my moment of concern, a wolf protects his master, raking his claws down my shoulder. Flashes of the past immobilize me and another painful gash slices across my chest in my moment of weakness.

It isn't the pain that brings me back to reality.

It's the force field protecting Maven as she claws at the dirt desperately to get the ashes of Pa.

She screeches again and the sound causes the energy field to burst, shooting me, the warlock, and the werewolves a few yards away. I roll across the sloshing wet ground and when I lift my head, a wolf hits a tree, snapping his spine in two.

He falls limp.

Three wolves remain and one circles Dottie. Her brown hair has electric streaks, like lightning hugging the strands. Her creature grows to a giant size, a snout forming for a moment before turning gold.

The wolves claws dig into the dirt, flipping chunks into the air with every step as he snarls and snaps. Drool drips from his teeth, his fangs slick with venom. I'm not sure what will happen if Dottie is bitten. She has to be careful. We can't help her if we don't know *what* she is.

Dottie lifts a hand into the air and a bolt of light streaks down from the sky, forming a dangerous glowing sword in her hand. She grips it tight, grinning and drives the natural born blade straight into the beast's heart. The weapon disappears into the werewolf's body, electrifying him to certify his death sentence.

I'm so caught up in Dottie, I forget about the real issue.

"I'll have her. I have too many plans. I've waited too many years." Brenden says, limping towards me from the sunflower fields.

"I have my plans too." He can't hear my words since I whisper them more to myself. My future has a plan and my life, my world, it all revolves around Maven.

My beloved.

Not fucking his.

My lips are wet from the rain and I lick them, watching Brenden's body come closer, the shadow of him turning into a man.

Two wolves are left and they are at his side, marching like trained soldiers.

Enough.

I'm done.

And death is too good for a man that constantly brings pain.

With as much speed as I can gather, I run. I run at a rate I never have before. Time slows to a crawl. The rain comes to view and each droplet is its own shape. I see the reflections of my growing coven in each drop, reminding me of what I am fighting for.

Dottie's entire being pulsates as if she is being charged, her eyes a bright yellow in this one second of time. Maven is on the ground, succumbing to the pain of losing her family.

Everything is changing in this moment— time is paused for me, yet life still moves on and becomes worse, morphs, adapts, and tries to thrive in a world that would dare be so cruel.

With revenge, with vengeance, I stop behind Brenden and wrap my hand around the base of his neck. "The only plans you'll have of her are the ones you dream about, and you'll be dreaming forever." Before he can react, I bite into his neck and lock him to my body, driving my talons in his back. A mewl of discomfort and fear gurgle from him and he coughs, the blood flowing like a river down his torso.

He tastes of poison and hatred, curses and broken promises. I make sure not to sift through his memories because if I did, I don't think I'm mentally strong enough to survive what I see.

When his heartrate slows to the beat of a dying drum, I spin him around so he can see who is taking his life.

I spit out his blood, regurgitating the vile liquid. His rotten liquid a useless pool in the murky puddles under our feet, mixing with mud and dirt.

The life dims from his eyes.

“You can’t die just yet.” I pull his limp body against mine and whisper into his ear, “I have something better planned for you.” I rip into my wrist and yank his head back, holding my arm over his face and watch as drops of my blood fall into his mouth.

Then I crack his neck, the sound in tandem with the storm above. In order for someone to turn to a vampire, they have to die.

His transition won’t be long now.

I feel stronger than ever, Maven’s magic pouring through me. Triumphant, I snag a beast by the thick of his neck and for some reason, he doesn’t fight me. The beast is staring into space, locked in a trance.

I wait for the warlock to rise.

Anyone can be turned.

Vampire blood has that strength.

But when he returns, will he only return as a vampire?

A few minutes tick by when I see slight movement on the ground.

Brenden groans, rubbing his neck and I use my talons to force him to stand by forcing them into his shoulder. “Your damnation will last forever, warlock.” The wolf’s jaws are pliant since he is in limbo and I shove the venomous fangs into the crook of Brenden’s neck. “You know what’s great? I know for a fact my werewolf immunity won’t work on you. Immunity can’t be transferred to a changeling when it’s forced. The change has to happen willingly.” I remember hearing Maven say that while reading her spell book.

Brenden struggles to say something— anything— trying to form words but they come out as strangled whimpers. Thick rivers of saliva drip down a wide fang into the wounds on Brenden's neck.

I smile.

Victory is so sweet after centuries of waiting. I almost hate it is over.

"You made her hurt. I'll make you suffer like I suffered," I sneer into his ear before tossing the wolf across the yard when I'm done with him.

The other comes to his senses, the trance breaking at last. He backs away, the ominous black eyes confused when his Commander begins to weaken.

"You will never win," Brenden laughs. "I'll always be one step ahead."

"Maybe, but good luck having a beloved find you. You'll finally die instead of living off people's broken hearts and stolen lifespans."

He sardonically grins, his heart slowing, the venom working quicker than it did with me. His confidence falters. With a final hushed and fervent breath, he bites out his last words, "I have something you'll never get but always want." With the remainder of his energy, his eyes lose their spark and his fingers snap, leaving me holding nothing but air and rain.

The wolves stagger. Their bones break and morph as they return to their human form, a sight I have never seen. They are huge men, stout and bulky, and clearly confused.

I want to kill them, but something tells me they were under the influence of a very powerful warlock.

They lift their hands, the black clearing from their eyes. "We don't want to hurt anyone," one says, voice trembling with fear. It's apparent he hasn't spoken in some time. His words are rasped, his throat dry, and he rubs the column on his neck with his hand.

“You’ve always hurt my kind,” I sneer, unable to sheath my talons. “We’ve always had bad blood.” Chest heaving, control dwindling, my skin itching to attack, I barely contain myself from launching at the beast and ripping him into pieces.

“We had nothing to do with that. I don’t even remember how I got here. Please. This isn’t even our home,” the other explains, his voice so deep I can hardly understand what he says. “We beg you.” He holds his hands up in defense. “What year is it? Where are we? Who are you?” Tears and desperation brim his eyes.

“You remember nothing?” I ask, not trusting a damn thing this dog has to say.

They shake their head. “You can look through our heads if you want.”

I’m at his side before the bastard can bark and I grip his chin, staring into his pupils to see into his soul. “I’ll do that,” I say, not missing the cries still coming from Maven. I need to do this for us so nothing like this happens again. After my influence mystifies him, his pupils blow wide, letting me into the depths of his mind.

I shift through his memories.

A young teen, barely learning to shift forced under a spell, taken prisoner from his pack. I follow his journey, his mind a haze as if he has been drugged. I can sense him trying to fight the spell, but his mind is controlled, forcing him to be latent. The warlock made him and the other do things they never wanted to do.

What if there are packs of werewolves missing loved ones because they were taken prisoner and put under a spell? It changes everything I have known.

“Fuck,” I curse, letting him go and turn to the other. “You, come here.”

He steps forward without a fight and I sypher through his memories, hoping to find something that allows me to be vengeful.

Nothing.

He’s the same.

“Goddamn it, you were used as weapons.” I shove him back and lace my fingers over the top of my head. “Your names?”

“Anwyll,” the younger one says before he kneels. “Master.”

My eyes round at his submission.

“Aziel,” the other answers, also falling to his knee.

Oh, fuck no.

I’m not about to be a Master to fucking werewolves.