

Eternally Damned: Chapter 8

Alexander

Her distress beacons me like a light from the dark.

I don't know how long it's been since she has been here, but she's wearing a new outfit, what I now know are called leggings and a shirt that hangs off the shoulder. Even from upstairs and as I look out the window, the ridge of her collarbone meeting the elegant curve of her neck entices me.

I want her, but she wasn't wrong about what she said.

What kind of life would there be for her with me? It's best if I remain in the night, quiet, so she can live her life the way she wants. It will hurt to watch her live without me, but maybe if I stay in the void, I'll become the void, and she won't have to worry about me again.

She stares up at the house, her flaming hair drifting in the slight breeze, standing stark against the gloomy sky.

I want to be closer to her, I need to be, and just the thought has me outside on the porch instead of upstairs.

The sudden transportation with a mere thought must be a ghost thing.

Her hands grip her hips as she continues to look at the house, but I continue to watch her, every part of my soul calling out to her.

To *save* me.

To *fix* me.

To bring *me* out of the cold.

My fangs lengthen when she lifts her hair up into that messy bun, showing the delicate sides of her neck.

She's mine.

She knows it.

I know it.

I just have to respect her space until she realizes that fighting me is useless. I always win.

Dead or alive.

I remain quiet as she walks around the truck and grabs a toolbox, carrying it to the bottom of the porch. I can't help myself, I stand next to her, needing to be close and she freezes.

Leaning down, I close my eyes and relish in her warmth. I feel how uncertain she is, the confusion, the restless in her heart. I want to know what happened to the curious woman who walked through the door to make her into the scared woman standing in front of me now.

"Alexander, I know you're here."

I keep my lips shut and take a step away, respecting her boundaries.

"Don't even think about staying quiet. I know you're here. I feel you. You're all around me. There's a buzz hovering over my skin and that only happens because of you. Answer me."

I don't.

A flash of disappointment crosses her face, the sides of her mouth curve into a frown. I don't like the sadness pinching her eyes, but she wanted space, so I'm doing what she wants. Isn't that what matters?

Sighing she changes the subject, “I have a friend coming over today to help me rip the porch out. I found a picture of the estate and I think I can replicate it.” She pulls out an odd device from her pocket and places it on the hood of the truck. I peer over her shoulder and on the surface is a picture of what my home used to be. The photo is vivid. I can’t believe it fits on that little device. How do they get images in there?

Grinning, I reach out and try to touch the picture. The house looks like it was built recently. The colors are so bright and clean. The pictures I’m used to are blurry and the color was dull, if the photo had color at all. The mansion is painted white, the shutters black, but the door is a deep blooming red.

The porch in the picture had just been built and now half of it lies on the ground. I loved this porch. Atreyu and I sat on these steps many a night, laughing as we drank blood martinis. We’ve told many stories to one another on this porch. I’ve stopped him from attacking father, from running away, and there are plenty of times where we have physically fought right on those steps.

I experienced my first kiss on that porch.

Tears.

Heartache.

Everything happened on those steps.

The house is a memory and when I look at the trash that has become of it, it pains me. I don’t know what Maven saw in this estate, but maybe it’s best if she cut her losses.

I’ll sink into oblivion anyway. What’s the difference?

Why is it I can remember that, but I can’t remember the events leading up to me being a ghost?

“You’re sad,” she says, cutting through the silence. “Your energy changed.”

Rolling my lips together to keep myself quiet, I disperse into the house, finding myself in the library. The comfort of books was where I always went when something was bothering me when I was alive. Why would that change because I'm dead?

Well, dead-ish. A part of me still doesn't believe I died.

"Alexander!"

I grind my teeth together from her constant pushing. "What?" I bark, rushing out to the living room where I see her with her chin held high. "What do you want, Maven? You left, remember? *You*. I'm only staying quiet because it seems like that's what you need. Actually, you should go. This might be your property, but it was my home first. You need to leave."

"We need to talk. I'll explain why I haven't been by in a few days."

"You were able to be gone for days?" The question leaves my lips before I can stop it, but what I really wanted to ask is how she could be without *me* for days. If I was able to notice how many days had gone by, I'd be aching for her.

"It wasn't easy." She rubs her hands down the front of her thighs. "I learned a lot about myself when I left here. You're very overwhelming, Alexander. I've always been a simple person with simple wants. I don't have many friends besides Dottie, and I've never dated. I worked from home and lived with my Pa. I only ever wanted one thing with every fiber of my being and it was this estate. But come to find out, my life wasn't simple, and I didn't want this property because I actually wanted it." She begins to walk around the mansion, her arms folded under her breasts. She turns suddenly and I nearly run into her, not that she knows that, but I grab her shoulders from habit. It isn't the first time I've nearly run into someone.

"Do you really not remember anything?" Her eyes dart around the space I encompass.

"I remember plenty of things just not the things that matter. I remember my brother, Atreyu. My parents. My coven. I remember what blood tastes like. I remember this home being pristine. I don't remember what happened when I died. Everything is

black and numb. I don't know what happened to my coven and I don't know where my twin brother is. I'm here alone, like you."

She searches the bookcase, looking the shelves up and down. "Do you remember anything about witches?"

My brows raise, not that she can see. I stand beside her as she searches for something. I'm sure she'll know when she finds it. Our coven witch slams into the forefront of my mind. I remember her name now. I nod. "We had a coven witch. Her name was Sarah. She was very protected but eventually the werewolves caught her and burned her in the trials. My grandparents knew her, but I was raised with stories. We didn't have a coven witch since. We were constantly vulnerable. It's probably why this house is such a waste now."

"My Pa told me—"

"Maven?" A woman's voice interrupts us.

"Your Pa told you what?" I urge her to finish her thought, cursing the intrusion.

"I'm meant to be here," she whispers. "I'm the descendent of Sarah Wildes. Pa told me I am coming into my power and that's why I wanted this estate so much. I'm your coven's witch apparently."

"Maven!" The impatient voice grows louder, and I hiss at the intruder, wishing I could scare her away.

"Which means you are the reason why the coven will exist again," I say with hope.

"I don't know how. I have dreams but that's it."

"Dreams? What kind? Talk to me. Maybe it will help me remember."

"I have to go talk to Dottie and rip out the porch. I promise, we will talk later." As she leaves, a book falls from the shelf and the title tells me everything I need to know.

Monreaux History.

“Idiot. Of course, the answers are here.” I try to pick it up or turn the page but fail. I attempt to will the book to open since my efforts worked with the Ouija board.

Nothing.

Frustrated, I leave the book behind, following the pull tugging me to Maven. When I see her friend, my vampire instincts roar. Something isn't right with her. I can't smell her to tell, but she isn't all human.

I growl and Maven glares in my direction.

“Jeez, did it just get really cold?” Dottie rubs her hands up and down her arms.

“No, I'm warm,” Maven replies.

I lean into Maven and whisper into her ear, “Because you're so fucking hot. You have no idea how much I want to sink my fangs into you, taste you, and have you beg for me.” I'm not sure why I'm wanting to make her uncomfortable around her friend, but I do. All I have is time on my hands and ruffling Maven's feathers is fun.

I'm a ghost. What else am I supposed to do?

I smirk when Maven coughs, holding a hand around her throat. An image of me manhandling her with my grip around her neck, throwing her onto the bed while drinking from her femoral artery has me weak in the knees.

“Maven, are you okay?” Dottie asks, her painted pink lips pinch.

I need to get this woman out of here. She can't hear me or see me which is a benefit I can use to my advantage.

“I'm fine. It's just been a long few days. Come on, let's go rip out this porch. I have a delivery of lumber coming in a few hours.”

Dottie claps in excitement. “I'm so proud of you for going through with this. It's such a huge project.”

Okay, the high praise doesn't make me want to rip her throat out. A supportive friend is a good friend.

I stay near Maven, walking side by side, staying close to protect her in the only way I can. She feels it too because she reaches for me subtly, the veil between her world and mine colliding again, the bright orange color reminding me of a million fireflies.

That's new.

I wonder what that means.

"Thanks, Dottie. It finally feels like mine."

"As it should. You worked your ass off for this. Hey, where is Pa? I thought he'd be here with you." Dottie surprises me by ripping into the porch with her bare hands and tossing the ruined wood to the side.

Super strength, questionable for a human woman.

But she isn't human, is she?

Maven doesn't notice, but perhaps she's used to her friend's unique ways. Maven, my sweet, struggles with one piece of wood but with a grunt she finally rips it free.

"Good girl," I praise her and a blush forms on her cheeks.

Oh, she likes that.

Noted.

"We got into a fight," Mavin admits, and I reach for her hand, wanting to bring her solace. Her world must be turned upside down right now. We talked nearly all night the first night we met, and I know how much her Pa means to her.

"What?" Dottie stops tearing apart the porch as if she's an animal feasting on her kill.
"That's unlike you guys."

"Yeah, well, he hid a big thing from me my entire life. I'm allowed to be upset."

“Can I ask what?” Dottie becomes noseey. She doesn’t lift her eyes from the porch, instead, she waits to see if Maven will answer.

I sneer and it turns into a hiss, my fangs at the ready... ghost ready.

Maven rubs my arms, well, tries to, and picks up a hammer to get an unruly nail out. She remains quiet and I can tell she’s debating on telling this woman the truth. I could always try to kill Dottie if she doesn’t accept Maven.

Maven is mine to protect. She will only ever need me at the end of the day, everyone else, they are just temporary.

I’m for eternity.

The word eternity stirs a memory or tries to wake it up. It’s on the tip of my tongue but eventually the feeling fades.

Maven laughs. “Apparently, I’m from a line of witches. Sarah Wildes to be exact. So, everyone has always been right to point fingers. I’m here because my magic is tied in with the Monceaux’s. I didn’t truly want this property. I was made to. Forced to.” I don’t like the bitterness in her explanation.

I take a step away, feeling like I’ve been punched in the chest. It’s in the molecules of my cells to believe in fate and when someone doesn’t, it always surprises me. Especially, since it is coming from Maven.

Dottie doesn’t seem surprised. She keeps working. And almost has her half of the porch ripped open. “I think it’s awesome. I mean, you’re a witch. You’re truly meant to be here, which means this place is yours by blood right. What’s so wrong with that?”

Yeah, I actually agree with her. “What’s so wrong with that?” I repeat, crossing my arms at Maven.

She glowers in my direction before turning her attention to her friend. “He lied to me. I knew nothing about myself. Only to find out I’m supposed to be a coven witch? A coven that isn’t even here? With powers I don’t even have?” She snorts in disbelief. “Sounds like a bunch of hocus pocus.”

I'm here. Did she forget about that?

"Hmm," is all Dottie says as she continues to work, throwing bits and pieces of wood into the air. Something about the anger in her eyes reminds me of... of... something.

God, I hate this. I need to remember.

"What, do you think I shouldn't be mad?"

"I get it, but how was he supposed to break something like that to you? He must have seen some type of sign, right? Give the guy a break. Don't throw such hard stones, Maven. You have your dream house and on top of that, fate intertwined you with it. How cool is that? Stop being such a glass half empty." Dottie pauses and pulls out a tube of lip gloss and slathers the glittery substance on her mouth while she's working.

What a weird creature.

"Yeah, I suppose you're right."

"But that can't be the only thing bothering you," Dottie pushes. "You aren't the type to get so worked up." Dottie has made her way to Maven's side of the porch and Maven finally notices how quick her friend worked.

"Not fully human," I whisper in her ear to let her know.

Maven's mouth falls open and I go to shut her jaw by lifting her chin, but it doesn't work. I keep forgetting I'm on another plane.

"I'm not ready to talk about it. I'm still figuring it out."

Meaning, she's still figuring out me.

"Okay, girly. I get it. When you're ready, I'll be here." Dottie gives a bright, sincere smile and tosses the last piece of the porch to the side. "Whew, what a workout, right?" There's barely a sheen a sweat on her skin.

Maven barely got three planks out of the porch. "Yeah, crazy." She gives me a confused look as if she doesn't understand how Dottie can't be human.

How can she hear me, but her friend can't?

Sometimes, things just can't be explained.

"Well, I have to go. I have a tutoring session starting in an hour and I need to get cleaned up." Dottie kisses Maven on the cheek. "If you need me, call me. I know you said you were staying here tonight, but if you need company, let me know."

Knowing she told her friend she was staying here has me tingling all over. I'm excited to know we will have another night together. I can show her how much I need her and prove to her that *we* are home. Not the house or the stories, but her and I.

"I will. Thanks for your help. You were... so fast."

"It felt good to get some of that anger out. That must have been why. See you later and be safe. Oh, and don't think I forgot about Mr. Hot Security Guard dropping off the lumber. A protector and a businessman? Don't do anything I wouldn't do," Dottie winks.

My talons unsheathe and my eyes flip to a crimson hue. My fangs descend and anger rips through me, a roar causing the house to shake again.

Who the fuck is this security guard? The thought of another man touching her has me wanting to raise from the grave.

I'm going to kill him.

"What the hell was that?" Dottie stares up at the house and takes a few tentative steps backwards.

Maven tries to shove me with her elbow to get me to be quiet. "The... wind?"

"That's a piss poor excuse, but I'll take it because I'm not mentally prepared for the truth. Love you." Dottie waves and gets into her car that doesn't have a top.

Interesting. So much has changed since the 1800s.

Maven waves in return as Dottie speeds off and when Dottie can no longer see us, Maven spins around, kicking up dirt that floats in clouds around her feet. “What the hell was that? Seriously?”

“Another man wanting you like I want you makes me want to be violent.”

“It shouldn’t. I don’t care about him. And what do you mean you *want* me?” She cocks her head and tilts her hip to the side, but I ignore that question and decide to answer the others.

“No? You mean a man, one you can see and feel the way I want you to see and feel me, is coming here? How can I not be mad and jealous? It’s like every time I think we take a step forward, we take a step back. I can’t fucking touch you!” I yell, my eyes burning at the raging thought. “Do you know how bad I want to hold you?” I take a step closer, my heart thrumming inside my chest, my voice bouncing off the empty space of the fields. “Do you know how bad I want to feel your lips on mine? Taste you?” I run my nose down her neck and inhale, not smelling a thing and my bones ache for it. “To scent you? For vampires, scent is everything.”

“Lex—”

“—And we shared a perfect night. I held you the only way I knew how, then you left. I know I’m not enough like this.” I place my hand against the apple of her cheek. “But even knowing that, I’m selfish enough to admit I don’t want you to be with someone who is enough. I want you to settle for this, for me, for this house, and what you’re meant to do here. Settle for me.”

A stray hair floats in front of her face and she blows the wayward strand out of her line of sight. “We barely know each other.”

“That statement means nothing when we feel everything.” The wind kicks up and the leaves rustle together, a few falling onto the ground from the force. “Tell me you don’t feel it and I’ll go back into the caves of this house.”

“Feel it?” She says in such a low whisper I can barely hear it. She lets out a half chuckle mixed with frustration. Her green eyes brighten, bolts flickering in the emerald irises, and I can’t tell if it’s my imagination or if her eyes are electrified. “I’ve felt it since I was ten years old,” she yells at me, the sky darkening as she lets her emotions rule. She spreads her arms, and the wind gathers around us, sending the leaves rolling along the ground. “I’m furious that I’m here and you’re nowhere to be found. Settle? It wouldn’t be settling when I feel more than I ever have when I’m here, with you, in this house.” A tear breaks her lash line and rain begins to pour at the same time, lightning striking in the distance.

A dangerous glow fills the clouds, the electricity veining through the ground as if it is chasing Maven. Her hair becomes impossibly redder, and her eyes have crackles of gold.

As the droplets of turmoil roll down her face, the rain bullets against the ground, the road quickly becoming mud. Watching the magnificent sight before me, I witness the tree branches dancing in Maven’s power, the day disappearing behind the storms building above us.

Even though she can’t see me, I wrap an arm around her waist and the crashes of the veils jolt like the lightning in the sky, warming me, almost as if I can feel the sun again.

Impossible. A man in my state shouldn’t be able to feel a thing, but one look at Maven, it’s as if I feel everything at once.

Having enough of the fucking what ifs, maybes, and fear, I grip her by the back of the neck hoping she can feel me. I tug her close, the rain becoming perilous, and the wind becomes stronger and untamed.

I stare into her eyes, wide and glowing as a solar eclipse in the night, directed straight at me.

“I see you,” she shouts over the static of the storm she’s causing.

A storm that's also raging within me, it only makes sense the environment matches the chaos inside.

"What?" I lick the water off my lips, darting between the gold flecks blazing in the green grasses of her eyes.

It's when I notice the fireflies of the veil are gone and I notice a faint white glow. Instead of warm colors, I'm reminded of snow with how the sparks slowly drift around us.

She lifts her hand to my face, the warmth of her palm restarting the nerves that have lied dead in my skin. "I see you," Maven repeats, bringing her other hand to my cheek to cup the edge of my jaw.

The clouds above us wring together, drenching us in heavy sheets of water. I can barely see her through the haze it causes, but I still see her emerald shards combined with flickers of flame, and chunks of gold.

"You see me?" I ask desperately, wishing she could feel the way my heart pounds in my chest.

She grins, her red lips painted wet, and I suddenly feel a thirst in the back of my throat. Maven nods, finally answering my question. "You're beautiful," she admires me, her tongue peeking out from her mouth for a split second as she looks me up and down.

I want...

To taste.

To devour.

To savor.

I rub my knuckles down her face, tracing the freckles sprinkled across the high cheek bones. "You can hear me, you can see me, but can you feel me?" The words are a strangled choke in my throat as I force them out.

Her lashes flutter shut as she leans into me, the snow heavier between us the harder she presses against me. Her hair is drenched and clinging to her head and shoulders, her clothes sticking tight against her body, leaving nothing to the imagination.

Her brows furrow as she thinks, and I want nothing more than to rub the wrinkle she's created away. "Almost. I can and I can't. You're so close," she whimpers, taking my wrist in hand and dragging my hand down her neck as if she's aching to feel me.

A roll of thunder shakes the ground beneath our feet.

Once. Twice.

Then a lightning strike.

It does this again.

And again. A catastrophic cycle on repeat.

When Maven flattens my palm over her heart. "I wish you could feel what you do to me," she says, raising her voice over the power she's created around us.

Thunder quakes in the rhythm of her heartbeat.

"You're showing me. I don't need to feel you when I can hear it all around me." The next wave of thunder is louder followed by a strike of lightning that would be dangerous to anyone else. "This is all you, Maven."

"I want to feel you," she screams on a broken sob. The scream has another bolt piercing the sky, hitting a nearby tree. A branch cracks and falls to the ground in a smoky heap.

My hands drift up her breasts, settling on either side of her neck. "You do, Maven. Just as I feel you." I smash my lips against hers, groaning as the veils bends to the point I think it will break, but it remains, keeping us just out of reach.

But that doesn't mean the closeness, the heat, the want, isn't there.

It is.

And I'm torn apart with it all.

I move my lips, turning my head as I control the kiss and she does the same. A whimper escapes her lips that I try to drink down.

She's right.

I can almost feel her, it's similar to being cold to the point of freezing, the chill settled in the bone. Then, the sun beams its warmth onto the flesh, and you melt, yet you can't reach out and touch flames, you just have to trust it's there.

And I trust Maven is here.

Because she is the sun on my frozen bones.

I break the kiss and press my forehead against hers. She holds onto me, clutching me, willing this veil between us to fade, but not even a Wildes witch is strong enough to break the planes of life and death.

The rain eases and the wind dies which stops the leaves from swirling in the air. The thunder grows distant, but the overcast remains.

She takes a step away from me and the snow fades between the veils as she takes her touch out of reach. Maven grins, opening the driver's side door and snagging blankets and a pillow.

Without one word, she marches to the house, her boots squelching over the wet ground. I follow, not making a sound, staring at the way her shirt sticks to her curves. I can see the milky flesh beneath the wet material and want nothing more than to peel the clothes away.

I want to drink her down, her moans, her whispers, her secrets, her skin, her orgasms.

Her blood.

I fucking need all of her to survive.

She heads to the library, stepping over the piles of ash, that have gotten smaller since the last time I've seen them, and that I've deemed so important. It's like the house stayed suspended in time, only to unfreeze when she walked through the door for the first time, allowing the ashes to finally dwindle away. It means everything that she's stayed mindful. I rub my chin, hiding a smile, glancing at the muddy shoe prints she's left behind.

The floors need to get replaced anyway.

She passes through the archway that leads to the library, the doors broken and off to the side. Maven piles the blankets on top of one another before tossing the pillow on top last. With a nervous smile, she strikes a match and lights the lantern she left the other day.

The glass burns with fire, and she sets it on the nightstand next to the Victorian chair I loved to read in.

"I want more," she breaks the silence between us, my lips still tingling from the kiss we shared moments before.

"I want everything," I reply, stepping into the room.

She crosses her arms over her torso and grips the hem of the wet shirt. Inch by inch, I'm graced with the view of the flawless skin of her stomach.

Images assault my mind imagining her pregnant with my child, her stomach round, my hands caressing the beautiful bump, and the baby kicking against my palm.

I don't know how to make that happen, but I will.

She tosses the shirt over her head, her cascading locks flowing with the material before it's far enough away for her hair to fall to her sides. The tips reach her hips, perfect for wrapping around my wrists and using them as reins to fuck into her tight heat.

God, I bet she's fucking perfect and made just for me. I bet every inch of her body was created and sculpted for me. My hands, my chest against hers, my cock gripped by her cunt, we will fit like missing puzzle pieces.

I swallow to coat my dry throat as I stare at her. Her undergarments are very different than what I was used to seeing. Her brassiere is a delicate plum-colored lace, dipping into a low V and her breasts are pushed up. My fangs ache to sink into the soft and giving mounds. I trail my tongue over my teeth, licking the tips of the sharp points.

Delectable is the word I'd use to describe her.

The lace is sheer so I can see the faint outline of her rosy nipples. My mouth waters.

And I wish I could feel her.

There's that feeling again, the chill in my bones.

I blur closer to her, hearing her breath catch from my sudden nearness.

"Are you afraid of me?" A question I should have asked when I met her.

She nods, her throat dipping as she gulps, casting her eyes downward.

"You should be. If I were alive, you have no idea the things I'd do to you."

The faint brilliance of the lantern emphasizes the auburn in her lashes as she lifts them. "Show me," her breathless voice sounds timid, but attempting to be brave.

In a motion quicker than she can blink, I take my shirt off.

She gasps, her hands landing on my stomach, the damn veil glimmering from our touch.

Mark my words, I'll break this damn thing by the end of the night.

"What happened?" she rubs her fingers over a horrid scar. It's pink and ugly, eerily familiar to a bite mark.

“I don’t know,” I say honestly, the weighted regret of not remembering heavy on the words.

Because I don’t know anything about myself other than I’m supposed to be here with her.

“I want to find out for you.” She bends down and I move her hair out of the way as she kisses the wound. Maven is careful, her lips just a whisper against my skin so she doesn’t hurt me.

I close my eyes and enjoy the bending of the veil once more, her warmth, the buzz it brings, it floods my veins with hope.

“You’re gorgeous, Lex,” she states, standing straight and undoing the clasp of her brassiere.

My vision flips to crimson, and she inhales a sharp breath, her movements slow as she slips the straps off her delicate shoulders. She pinches her lips together and lowers her arms, letting the seductive lace hit the ground at my feet.

The growl leaving my chest permeates, shaking the dust into the air as it loosens from the floor.

“I love that sound.” Maven slides off her leggings next, along with her panties, revealing soft legs I can’t wait to drag my tongue down.

“Good. You seem to bring it out of me often.” In her next breath, my pants are off as well and her eyes land on my long, thick cock.

Enough playing nice, I remember how I moved the planchette and focus on moving her.

She yelps when I send her to the ground, hands pinned above her head, the damp tendrils of her hair splayed around the pillow.

“You’re a goddess,” I whisper.

We're in a library, after all. We can't be too loud.

I roam my eyes down her body, focusing on her nipples that have pulled tight into mouthwatering points.

Our bodies align.

Our chests press together.

My cock is settled between her legs, the crown nestled in the copper hair above her sweet cunt. Another rumble of pleasure sings my insides. I run my right hand down her side, keeping her left arm pinned above her.

The veil explodes with light, the familiar luminacin multiplied by thousands as every inch of our skin touches.

Her eyes flutter shut and her back arches. The lights of the house flicker and black roses begin to grow from between the wooden slates, the green vines circling all around us.

Maven is bringing life to a dead place.

That's her power.

I should know, since death is what I am.

I roll her nipple between my fingers, the sparks wrapping around the pink morsel, touching her in ways I can't.

Bending down, I rob her of her next breath and use it as my own, slanting my lips over hers. Tingles spread throughout my body as her hands wrap around me, her fingers tracing the muscles along my back.

When did I unpin her wrist?

I can't remember.

I break the kiss, wrapping a hand along the side of her throat while trailing my tongue down the vein I want to use as my own life source.

If only I could break through this veil, then maybe.

She turns her head more, submitting to my urges, telling me it's okay to take if it were possible. I press a kiss to the side of her throat and keep skating my tongue down her body, wishing I could taste her flesh.

How unfair to be so close, to want so bad, to need to the point of tears, and not be able to enjoy the body and soul meant to be mine.

I suck her nipple into my mouth, and she cries out, scratching her nails down my back. The pain is a sharp tingle, closer than I've ever felt before.

"I feel the veil vibrating," she says in a breathless moan, her cheeks a gorgeous shade of pink.

"Funny. I thought it was you," I smirk, pressing open mouth kisses along her ribs.

She runs her fingers through my hair, the inky tresses falling into my face. It's like a barely-there caress. It's the only way I know to describe it.

When I get between her legs, they fall to the sides, and I kiss each supple thigh.

Each petal of her pink lips.

"Alexander?"

"Maven, my sweet?" I don't take my eyes off the glistening sheath before me.

"I've never..." she takes a breath. "I've never been with a man."

Everything around me fades to roseate as my vampire sight takes hold. My talons grow and try to dig into her hips, but the veil protects her from being marked.

I press my forehead against her stomach, clutching onto her tight as I try to breathe.

As much as I want to dive into her and claim her, I know I can't. The circumstances aren't right. She deserves more than that.

And I'll beg a dark witch with magic illegal to use to be brought back to life so I can experience Maven to the fullest degree.

"I'm the only man you'll ever be with, Maven." I wrap her legs around my neck and delve into her depths, the curtain that keeps us apart shocking her from the inside out.

Pleasure is to always be found even when everything is out of reach.

"Lex. Oh god, that... that feels..." she grips the covers in her fists, those black roses continuing to snake around us. Her mouth drops open on a silent scream and one blooming flower turns red.

"Let me hear you, Maven. I've spent too many years in darkness and silence to be denied the pleasure of hearing you scream." I kiss her core before latching onto her pearl, her legs shaking on my shoulders, the veil trembling at the same rate.

"It's like static and needles and boiling heat all at once." She tosses her arm over her eyes, her breasts jostling from the move.

While flicking my tongue across her bundle of nerves, she becomes louder with every stroke. I reach down between my legs and wrap a hand around my girth. Precome leaks from my slit, and I use it as lubricant to fuck my fist.

God, I want to come. I don't even know if it's possible.

I feel nothing while feeling everything.

Just like she is.

"Lex," she pants. "Oh, god, Lex." Her legs tighten around me one last time just before the veil blinds us as she orgasms, embers smolder snowing down around us like pieces of paper on fire.

My claws dig into her hips and she gasps, but not from trying to catch her breath from the orgasm.

“I feel you,” her voice shakes, the white of her eyes as big and bright as the moon.

“You feel this?” I rock my hips and my cock glides across her sensitive bud.

She cries in response, and I hold out a hand as ash from the veil floats onto my palm.

We broke it.

But I know it won't last forever, I hold onto her like a dying man in need of sanctuary. Lifting her arms and legs, I wrap her around me. Her feet cross and lock behind my back. Her arms laced around my neck. Her breasts against my chest.

And I cherish every second of this embrace.

I thought I'd want to tear her apart when I finally got her in my arms, but I don't. I've wanted to feel her body and taste her lips. I could sit here all night just like this if it meant feeling the tickle of her hair, her wild breaths, and the heat of her skin.

“I feel you too,” I say quietly, my eyes landing on her lips just as a tear outlines the side of her mouth. My hands grip her jaw, my palm and fingers too big for such delicate features. “I fucking feel you, my sweet, sweet Maven.” I press my lips against hers again, but it's the first kiss.

Our mouths move as if they have been destined to. Our tongues duel, hers timid and submissive while I tangle mine with hers, needing to dominate, needing everything in the short amount of time we have.

She clutches onto me, her nails digging into my skin just as my talons claw down her back.

I draw blood.

The scent hits my nose.

She smells of rivers in winter and honey when it's warm. I rip my mouth away from hers and her green eyes are glassy as they stare at the monster before her.

I don't let her give me her neck willingly like she did last time.

I take because that's what monsters do. I bend her neck to the side and strike, sinking my fangs into the pumping vein filled with magic.

A memory slams through me.

Beloved.

I squeeze my eyes shut and wrap my arms tighter around her as another orgasm rips through her, her wetness dripping onto my cock.

Tasting her, feeling her, knowing she's the other half of my soul, sends me spiraling. I latch onto her neck harder, holding onto dear life as I come, hot seed shoots from me and lands between her thighs, marking her.

God, she tastes like nectar straight from the flower, the finest champagne, the perfect combination to sate my hunger. I can taste her magic, the spice, the strength, like the finest top shelf bourbon that doesn't get made anymore.

Exquisite.

I'll never be able to feed from another again. She'll feed me.

My life will be in her hands for the remainder of eternity.

Before I take too much, I retract my fangs and lick the wound shut. Two small dots remain.

She's mine.

"My beloved," I whisper, kissing the middle of her chest, smiling when I hear the strong pump of her heart.

"What's that mean?" she asks as we struggle to breathe.

“We are meant to be together. You’re my blood mate, the better part of my soul.”
There’s a piece of the story missing, I just can’t remember it right now.

“Make love to me, Beloved.” She runs her fingers through my hair, and I tilt my head up to look at her.

“I want to, but as a man, not... this,” I say painfully. “Not on borrowed time.”

“That might be all the time we ever have,” she says honestly, with sadness turning the corner of her eyes.

“I want you like this if the other option is not at all. And if you can drink my blood, then you’re here on this plane now, which means, this...” she reaches between us and wraps a hand around my cock. She squeezes it tight, and I can’t remember how to breathe. “This can be used too.” Maven’s fingers can’t wrap fully around me, but she slides her small palm up and down the engorged shaft, using my come to help her hand glide. “Now, Lex, before there’s no time.”

She climbs off my lap and lies down on her stomach, her round ass swaying in the air as she opens her mouth. Maven’s tongue wraps around the flared crown before stretching her mouth wide as she sucks me into her soft cavern.

A vicious snarl rips from me and my fangs lengthen. I yank her by her hair, pull her off my cock with a soft pop and flip her onto her back before covering her with my body.

I kiss her, tasting myself on her tongue before I line myself up to her wet heat.

“Take me. Make me yours, Beloved, just as you are mine.” Her hand gently presses over my chest and a stinging has me flinching.

When I look down, I see her mark on my skin like a tattoo. A W with a black rose intertwined around it.

“How did you know to do that?”

“I didn’t,” she says, confused. “I just followed my instincts.”

Instincts.

The ones telling me to fuck her into oblivion.

And also, the ones telling me not to claim my beloved in this body.

Would fate be so cruel to give me my beloved on borrowed time?

I kiss her instead, tasting her spice and not a minute later, the veil stitches itself back together. The glowing light blocks our skin from touching and now I crave her more than I ever had, reminding us that borrowed time is all that we will ever have.