



Drums & Decisions

A low beat tugged inside my chest, pulling and pulsating.

Steady and calm, the deep sound of drums throbbed inside of me.

Ba-dum, ba-dum, ba-dum.

The rhythm worked its way through my body like a heavy bass that was making the seat of the car vibrate. I could feel it through my muscles, besides my heartbeats, and in my throat.

The sound was not so harsh or sudden as modern drums, softer and almost bordering dark. Again, I felt the beat tug in my chest like something wanted out. Like the rhythm wanted to pull it out of me. The weird thing was that the sensation was so comfortable. It is soothing and exciting all at the same time.

Ba-dum, ba-dum, ba-ba-dum, dum. Ba-dum, ba-dum.

As the vibrations coursed through me, Images of hands slamming down on huge drums appeared in my head—almost hourglass-shaped drums draped with thick white and red paint. Creatures and unknown symbols danced around as the hands kept slamming down on the stretched skin that made the top of it.

Magical and threatening, beautiful and alluring, the constant drumming called for me, pulled and tugged for me to follow. A strange desire to dance bubbled through my mind. I could even imagine the steps—bare feet against dusty, trampled-down soil. The leather straps around my ankles were thin and made a beautiful

pattern up to my knees. Scales, tiny pearls, and animal teeth swayed one way and the other as I danced.

Deep voices, almost carnal. Ancient calls and throat songs accompanied the deep and steady rhythm as my body swayed with it. My knees bent as my hands softly brushed against the dirt, my fingertips gently touching the soil that produced life. Like a bow unbending, my hands moved up in a slow and seductive motion. Stretched to the dark open sky and reached for the cold full moon and the gods behind it.

I wanted to dance; I needed to dance. I needed to move to the beat I'det my hips sway, and let my stomach roll as I let the rhythm guide me in my praise to the mighty gods. I felt strong and heard before, I in control. I knew what I was doing!

Again, the steady beat pulled at something inside my chest, begged for me to follow, and every inch of me wanted to. I was ready to follow, to show my respect, and to let the excitement flow out of my moving limbs.

The beat stopped like it was cut short. Abruptly and wrong. My eyes flew open, and the images, the need, and the pull were gone. Disappointment and confusion were all that washed over me as my eyes scanned my dark surroundings. The sky was dark, the crescent moon cold, and thousands of stars decorated the scene behind it.

But I still felt strong, like I had control I never before possessed. My hands moved slowly on the hard surface beneath me. Soft fur tickled between my fingers, brushing lovingly against my skin. The sensation gave me a feeling of care and protection, like a parent's

love for their child.

Slowly, I made my way up to a sitting position, and as I remembered what had happened last, my hand jerked up to my neck. A ragged cloth was wrapped around my throat, but I could still feel the sticky parts where blood had soaked through. Now that I was aware of it, the entire side ached, from my shoulder, up my neck, to the back of my head. Even down my arms, I could feel the lingering pain throb.

My eyes connected with a pair of eyes glowing in the dark. He was studying me. They were an almost grey, cold blue like the moon had caught a drop of the sea in its cold light. Hades' aura was calm, his hands folded on top of the drum that rested between his feet. The drum was indeed hourglass-shaped, but it looked nothing like what I had seen in my head. It was tall, with no paintings, only dried grass-colored strings braiding up on the sides and looked more like an everyday drum compared to the one I had pictured.

"How are you feeling?"

For once, his voice carried nothing but calm and questioning: no worry, no fear, no expectations.

"I'm fine."

"You're not crying?"

I arched a brow,

"No.. was I supposed to?"

"Well. No, so what do you feel like?"

My cheeks blushed, but the answer slipped between my lips before I even got the chance to think it through,

"Dance. I want to dance."

I waited for him to laugh, but instead, his eyes spaced out, and he began nodding slowly for himself. Something was going on again, and I was kept in the dark. However, this time it feels different. Like something I've waited for and prepared for. Nobody could hurt me, but just as that thought stroked me, fear rippled through my body.

"Did he mark me?"

Is that why I feel different? That bastard managed to mark me? Am I now bound to him for the rest of my life, body, and soul?

"No. His bite was deep but not quite deep enough, and his beast's poison didn't have time to reach your bloodstream. The part he bit was torn out, so, no mark, but most likely a big scar."

Poison? I never knew they had poison; I shivered. It had been close to close. My fingertips found the soft fur beneath me again, letting them caress and appreciate the feel of it and brushing my hand through it like I was petting an animal I loved while my eyes focused on nothing. My head was blank.

"I can live with a scar."

I answered without really being present for the conversation. My head was miles away, but still right here. I missed the beat of the drums, the way it made me feel. My stomach growled, disturbing the

silent night and my line of thoughts.

"Hungry?"

"I. No, not really."

I lied, I didn't know why. But hunger didn't feel so important right now. All I wanted was the beat, to envision the dance. I liked that feeling of control and power back.

"Yes, you are. You have been out for three days. Come, let us eat. I know just the thing you need!"

Reluctantly, I accepted the hand he reached out, and I didn't realize how cold the night air was before now. Cold and heartless, it stung against my bare skin. Again, out for and got up. I felt light, my stomach growled, ached, and I knew I needed to eat. As I followed him over the deck, the hunger I felt increased. With each step, it grew to the point that I began to feel sick. My mouth was dry, and my throat felt raw.

I scowled in Hades' direction as I scuffed down my second serving of the tender meat. The meat melted on my tongue like butter with seasoning. It was indeed the best I've tasted, maybe like ever, but to my surprise, it had already been cooking when we got down to the little kitchen below deck. The table had been set, and two mugs with cold and fresh water waited for me there as he served my food. Did he know I would wake just when I did? How? 1

Without looking up from his plate, he spoke,

"I woke you up now because you were ready."



"Ready for what?"

"To come back, of course!"

Okay, I felt like it meant something else for him than for me. But I guess you go somewhere else when you pass out cold, as I did, so I didn't push it further. I didn't even bother to ask why he answered the question I never asked out loud.

"You need to go and get some rest. Tomorrow will be a long day. I have to break my original promise to Toke, and for that, I will be punished, but under these conditions. It is the only right thing to do; I hope you understand this."

Leaning back in my chair, I sized him up.

"And what is the right thing, Hades? According to you? Are you also making decisions for me, or is this a broken promise for your own sake?"

My calm and cold voice surprised even me, but Hades grinned. Amusement written all over him,

"What?"

"Oh, nothing! You remind me of someone! Don't worry; the decision is taken for my own sake and future. You will be able to make your own when you meet them."

"Who? Met who?"

"Your family."

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"You mean your family? Why would I meet them?"

"No. I mean your family."

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