



Tyr (Speed Dating with the Denizens of the Underworld #38)

Author: *Rebekah R. Ganiere*

Category: Fantasy

Description: A battered heart.

A fierce protector.

A battle that could steal his soul.

Tyr, Norse God of War, has spent the last thousand years trying to keep his emotions under tight control—because if he has a bad day, so does everyone else. But when an old friend comes to him for help, Tyr can't help but promise to keep his friend's daughter safe.

Celeste is half-angel, half-demon, and has been taught to keep her psychic abilities to herself. But when her mom sells her to a drug dealer as payment for a debt, she finds herself on the wrong side of the man's fist.

As Celeste's father goes to deal with his ex and her drug-dealing boss, Celeste is left in Tyr's care. The problem is Celeste makes Tyr feel things he's never felt in the eternity of his existence, and the longer she's with him, the harder he fights to keep her safe from the man hunting her—and from himself.

Will Tyr be able to protect his heart? Or is he doomed to fall for the enchanting Celeste?

Tyr is book thirty-eight in the Speed Dating with the Denizens of the Underworld shared world, featuring a broody god, a hybrid psychic, fiery passion, and more.

Total Pages (Source): 16

Page 1

Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 8:37 am

CHAPTER 1

“I am telling you, it’s just embarrassing at this point. Even Fenrir has found his fated mate, and here the three of us sit, not having found one for any of us,” said Hermódr. “And what’s wrong with us? We’re hot. We’re cool. We’re rich as hell. Plus, we’re gods.”

“There is nothing embarrassing about waiting to find the one you’re meant to be with forever, Herm,” replied Vidar.

Hermódr shook his head and took a massive bite of his burger. “I am done waiting to find her. All we ever do is work, and sleep, and drink, and?—”

“Enough,” said Tyr. “You two sound like two silly little maidens who want to braid each other’s hair and draw your wedding dresses on paper. You’re ridiculous.”

Herm and Vidar looked at each other and burst out laughing.

“Awww... are you feeling left out? Come here, I’ll braid your hair.” Herm reached for Tyr, but Tyr slapped his hand away.

“He’s cranky because he hasn’t been laid in what? A year?” said Vid. “Two? I think you need to go down to Odin’s and find a girl and bed her well.”

Tyr growled and stood from the couch before walking to the fridge and grabbing a bottle of water. He chugged down the icy liquid and then tossed it in the trash before setting his hands on the counter and staring at them.

His brothers-in-arms were right. It'd been far too long since he'd bedded a woman, but that was not his problem. His problem had been the same for the last thousand years—companionship.

Fenrir finding his fated mate had made things much harder for Tyr. Not because Fenrir quit working for him, that he understood. But because it showed him how deficient he must be if he, Tyr, God of War, could not find someone to share his life with, and Fenrir, the cursed god, could. Even Loki found a Valkyrie to settle down with. And have children... Children.

Tyr had no children. No family. No legacy to pass on. Nothing. Sure, he had the two idiots sitting on the couch, but they weren't family in the sense he wanted.

They had been together as a trio from the moment they'd betrayed Fenrir. Brothers-in-arms. Vid and Herm knew everything about him... mostly. But even he didn't have the same bond with them as they had with each other. Even with them, he was the odd man out.

“What do you say, Tyr? Want to go with us? It could be fun.”

Tyr blinked at the mention of his name. “What?”

Herm and Vid laughed.

“He asked if you want to come with us to the DeLux Café to the Speed Dating Event,” said Vid. “It's in a few hours.”

“Yeah, maybe you will find a woman, lock eyes with her, and just know she is meant to be yours forever,” Herm said wistfully.

Vid punched him in the shoulder, and they both burst into laughter again.

Tyr shook his head. “I’ve had horses more mature than the two of you?”

Herm shrugged. “And we’ve had a set of triplets between the two of us who had less PMS.”

Tyr had no idea how to respond. Was he uptight? Yeah. But he had to be. He had to be rigid. Had to be in charge. People’s lives depended on him. Always had. As the God of War, peoples’ fates had always been in his hands. Millions of people. If he had a good day, they would win a battle. If he had a bad day, so did they. If he lost his temper... people got hurt. People died. He hadn’t asked for it, but that was his fate. He couldn’t change that fact any more than he could change the color of the sky.

He had to control his emotions, whims, and passions. When he let those things go... bad things happened.

“So, are you coming or not?”

“You don’t have to participate,” said Vid. “You could sit on the sidelines and observe.”

“You know, that’s not a bad idea. If he watched us, he could get some pointers.”

Tyr rolled his eyes. “If I took pointers from you two, I’d still be single in a thousand more years. Who is going to put up with you two teenage troublemakers for eternity?”

Herm and Vid looked at each other in astonishment. “Wow. Good one.”

“I think he actually wounded me with his words.”

“Yeah, that kind of stung, Tyr. Mean. It was plain mean.” Herm began to fake cry.

Tyr rolled his eyes. Gods help the women who ended up with those two. They'd need more patience than Frigg herself.

Tyr's phone buzzed in his pocket, and he pulled it out. His brow furrowed. It was a number he'd not seen in forever. He pushed the button and answered.

"Sylax?"

"Tyr? I need your help."

Tyr strode to the stairs and jumped down them in one leap. He grabbed a set of keys off the wall and threw open the door to the garage.

"Tell me where you are."

Page 2

Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 8:37 am

CHAPTER 2

24 Hours Earlier

Celeste stared at the floor as the broken glass ground into her palms. The beautiful vase of flowers that had been presented to her less than twelve hours prior as an apology gift lay smashed on the wood all around her.

“Why?” Anton yelled. “Why are you so unhappy? I have power. I have money. I’m excellent in bed. I give you everything, and it isn’t enough.”

Tears dripped from Celeste’s eyes, but she refused to let him see them, so she kept her head bowed and her hair encasing her face.

“Answer me!” The metal bat hit her shin, and she bit the inside of her cheek to keep from crying out.

Her head and face throbbed from the blows he’d rained down upon her earlier. They’d heal quick... too quick... leaving him wondering why, but that wasn’t something she could do anything about. Her mother had sold her off to the man as payment for gambling debts. She’d told him of Celeste’s particular gift but not why Celeste had it. And he hadn’t cared to ask. Anton had taken one glance at Celeste, and she hadn’t needed to read his mind to see what he wanted. The lust that wafted off him like a stinking donkey was there for anyone to witness.

And now she lay on his floor, not only the cause of his latest violent episode but the recipient as well.

Anton grabbed her by her hair and whipped her head back. “Usually, I like my women silent, but if you don’t answer me, you ungrateful little bitch, I’m going to cut your tongue out.”

Celeste couldn’t help the shakes that took over her body at his threat. She’d been with Anton for a week and a half and had seen things she never imagined. Beatings, murders, sex of every kind. The last had been particularly embarrassing as Anton forced her to witness one of the girls from his club kneel in front of him and show Celeste how he liked it.

Not that he would ever get that from Celeste. Not unless he wanted it bitten off. Even so, the display shocked her. She’d seen it in movies, but seeing it in person, and with someone she loathed, made her want to vomit.

Anton dropped the bat with a clang and pulled a gun from his waistband, pressing it to her temple. “Tell me, Celeste. What is so bad about everything I want to give you? Why will you not utter one word of gratitude? Tell me, or I will splatter what little is inside your skull all over this floor.”

Celeste couldn’t hold back the terrified tears any longer. Couldn’t hold back the snot running over her lips. Couldn’t hold back the violent shaking of her body at his threat. She could only control the one thing he wanted more than anything. Her words. Not that she would have been able to speak if she’d wanted to. She was sure her jaw was at least cracked.

“I’m gonna give you until the count of two. One... Two?—”

A huge bang sounded on the door, and Celeste jumped at the sound.

Anton turned his head. “I’m busy!” he yelled before looking at her once more. “Where were we?”

“Boss!” came a muffled voice. “There’s a problem.”

Anton’s eyes didn’t leave hers. “Handle it. It’s what I pay you for!”

There was another bang. “Boss, a guy’s been stabbed! Twice.”

Anton stared at her for a moment and then shoved the gun back into his waistband. He threw her to the floor once more, and Celeste stiffened, waiting for his parting blow, but it didn’t come. Instead, he stomped to the door and yanked it open.

Panicked voices and shouting floated up the stairs. The music stopped, and women screamed below. “Shit.” Anton walked out the door but turned and pointed to her. “Put her in the closet. She doesn’t come out until I get her, understand?”

The bodyguard nodded, and Anton took off down the stairs, yelling obscenities the entire way.

Celeste allowed herself to take a shaky breath but winced as her ribs screamed at her.

The guard closed the door and surveyed the room. She read his thoughts.

Broken chair. Broken table. Broken Vase. Broken Celeste.

His eyes landed on her. She didn’t move. For a moment, pity flickered through his gaze before his eyes hardened again. He walked to her, kicking various pieces of debris out of his way. He offered her his hand, but when she reached for it, her side shot with pain, and she winced.

Instead, the man scooped her into his arms. He stopped for a moment and glanced from her to the door and back again.

The words that flowed from him struck her to the core. “I’m sorry, little sister,” he said in demonic.

Celeste swallowed hard. He was a demon? A chill ran through her, and he sensed it in her, too. Why? Why was he working for a man like Anton Burcheron?

“Help me,” she begged telepathically.

“I can’t. I’m sorry. Like you... I owe a debt.” His demon voice pitched lower and huskier than the normal tone he adopted to fit in with the humans.

He carried her to the other side of the room and stopped outside a set of double doors. He glared down at her again before blowing out a deep breath, opening one of the doors, and walking into Anton’s special closet.

“But I don’t. This isn’t my debt.”

The closet that had been her home for the past twelve days, ever since the first meeting where Anton had wanted her to use her powers, and she’d refused.

The closet held every single sexual instrument Anton possessed. The closet she was more than sure she would die in.

The guard laid her on the makeshift bed she’d made from a couple of red heart-shaped pillows and a blanket. She faced the wall as the man backed away from her. She sucked in a shuddered breath and stared at the wall.

“What’s your name? Your real name.”

He remained silent for a moment. “Amezodile.”

“I appreciate your gentleness, Amezodile. But you will die like the rest. I vow it.”

He stared at her for a moment, pity lacing the hard lines of his face. He closed the closet door, bathing her in darkness. She lay breathing for more than a minute as pain radiated through her body. Pain she'd never experienced before. Pain that went beyond pain.

She tried to roll over, but lightning shot through her hip and up through her chest. Cracked ribs. She sucked in shallow breaths. She moved to touch her ribs, but her arm screamed at her, hot and swollen. She parted her lips, whimpering at the pain in her face, and licked over her lip to the blood caked in the corner. The cut from Anton's ring split her lips open at least half an inch in the corner.

Her gut clenched, and she stopped trying to see how bad her injuries were. Instead, she closed her eyes and focused on the one thought she'd clung to since arriving. Her dad would save her.

For five days, she'd reached out with her mind to try to find the one person she thought could help her; and for five days, she'd not been able to sense him. She had no idea where her father was. She didn't even know what her father did for business outside of being away for long periods. But she knew one thing for sure. Whenever she'd called her father on the phone, he'd always answered on the first ring. When she emailed or texted him, he responded within minutes. But with her powers, it had always been different. Sometimes, she'd been able to reach him, and sometimes not. This was one of those 'not' times.

She'd never asked her father why there were times she couldn't reach him. She'd only assumed he was too far away and hoped it was somewhere beautiful. Somewhere beautiful. Somewhere that one day he would take her. Just her. Far from her mother. Far from the bruises and broken bones. Far from her misery.

Celeste scooted sideways and laid her head on one of the fuzzy pillows. She'd waited. Five days she'd waited for him to find her. And for five days, she'd never once found him through their bond. Pain coursed through her body, and she let out a sob.

She'd never once disobeyed her father. Not when it came to their special powers. He'd told her never to use her full power. Not unless it was the direst of emergencies. Using her full power might alert others like them of her presence. So, up to that point, she'd only used a fraction of her power. The one he'd trained her to use to connect with others. But also to find him if she ever needed him.

But he hadn't answered. Five days and he hadn't answered. And now... she had no choice.

She didn't want to disobey him. She didn't. But she couldn't go on. Two weeks was all she'd been able to take as a slave to a masochist. She'd always thought she'd be stronger. That she could do anything. She was the product of an angel and a demon, after all. And her life with her mother hadn't been easy. She'd abused Celeste on occasion. But nothing compared to the breaks upon breaks upon breaks Anton had rained down on her.

But no. A week and a half; that's how long it had taken for him to break her. Not completely, but she would rather be dead than break completely and give him what he wanted. Even if it meant dying at the hands of another demon or her father.

Celeste took a breath and dropped her mind shield, not a little bit like usual, but dropped it. The barrier in her mind crashed down like a toddler kicking over a tower of blocks.

Voices bombarded her. Emotions and voices invaded her mind like a suffocating blanket, pressing her toward panic and hysteria.

She heard it all. Men, women, children. Happy. Sad. The good, the bad, and the worse. Thoughts of men down in the strip club. Women panicked and running for safety. And even further out. Down the block. Across the city. So many voices.

Her heart raced, and she gasped for breath despite the pain. She couldn't handle it. Just as the voices threatened to overwhelm her into madness, she cried out.

"Papa, I need you," she screamed into the void. She let her pain drip through the mental connection, praying he would feel it, hear it.

A moment passed, and a number of voices halted. Her body trembled. They saw her. And she saw them as well. Demons.

A wave of fear washed over her, and then it paused.

"Celeste?"

"Papa." An audible cry escaped her, and tears leaked from her eyes.

"I am coming."

CHAPTER 3

Tyr stood inside the DeLux Café watching the patrons file in like moths to a security light. Some looked confident, like Herm and Vid. Others appeared terrified. And still, others seemed like they had no clue how they'd ended up there.

He sipped his scotch. Some of the women were quite beautiful, though not one stirred a single muscle in his body. It had always been that way. Like he waited for something. Someone. After his first several centuries of loneliness, his hope turned to despair. That's where the Crusades and Dark Ages had come from. But after despair, it morphed into something else. Apathy. He'd given up all hope of finding her. Until he now viewed every woman out of mere casual curiosity but no longer believing he would find the one he'd been promised. The one meant to be his. His fated mate.

He took another sip of his scotch when Eve spotted him, and before he could turn away, she smiled and headed his way.

Shit.

“Lord Tyr, you're here tonight. Are you going to get a number? We will be starting soon.”

Tyr shook his head. “I'm only here to meet someone.”

She chuckled. “So is everyone.”

“No. I mean an old friend. It's a work thing, not a pleasure thing.”

Eve stared at him for a moment. “What a pity. Pleasure is always more fun than work. And you definitely look like you need a bit of fun.”

Tyr nodded and pointed to Herm and Vid, who flirted with a pair of succubae. “Trust me, those two have enough fun for everyone in the underworld.”

Eve smiled. “Yes. Those two will give some woman a run for her money.”

A bell rang, and Eve turned. She traced a finger down his arm and her eyes widened and then relaxed again. “I wish you the best of luck in your... work endeavors, Tyr.”

Tyr inclined his head. “And you, Lady Eve.”

Wait... had she said, woman? He glanced at Vid and Herm. They’d both gone for the same woman once before... it hadn’t turned out well for either of them. Tyr hoped Eve’s words had been a slip of the tongue, though Eve wasn’t the kind of woman to do that. He made a mental note to talk to Vid and Herm at some point.

Most of the patrons made their way to tables on the other side of the café. Vid and Herm included. He glanced at his watch. Sylax should have been there thirty minutes prior. He pulled out his phone. There were no new calls or messages.

He was about to call Sylax when the café door opened. A tall, thin man walked in, arm around the shorter figure, who wore a long black cloak covering him from head to toe.

Sylax scanned the bar, anxiety planted on his face. A shockwave shot through Tyr, making him pause. What was that?

Tyr gulped the rest of his drink and headed toward them. The moment Sylax spotted him, his shoulders relaxed a fraction. He whispered something to the smaller figure,

and together, they took a few steps into the café. The smaller figure limped, but from the way they held their body, Tyr knew instinctively they were in pain—a lot of pain.

“Sy.” Tyr extended his hand, which Sylax shook.

“Lord Tyr. Thank you so much for agreeing to help me. I cannot tell you what a relief it is.” His words broke off as he peered down at the smaller figure.

“Any time. Whatever you need.”

Sylax nodded to the smaller figure. “I need to hire you to protect my daughter.”

Sy had a daughter? Explained why Tyr hadn’t seen him in so long if he’d started a family.

Wait. She was his daughter—and someone had hurt her.

A flash of anger threaded through Tyr, and someone at the bar slammed down his drink and yelled at the bartender.

Tyr caught Eve’s eye, and she glared at him. He inclined his head as an apology and swallowed hard.

Keep it together.

His gaze moved back to Sylax.

“Tell me what you need, and it’s done. We have safe houses all over California as well as the US. I can set her up?—”

“No,” Sylax said forcefully. He cleared his throat. “I apologize. What I mean is, I

want to hire you until I can come back for her. Please. You are the only person I trust.”

Tyr looked at the hooded figure and just distinguished between the long, black hair and the silky fabric of her cloak. He wasn't used to taking care of someone personally. He was used to taking care of problems. Helping get rid of people that no longer deserved to live. Setting up clients in new places with new identities. Blackmail. Roughing people up. Everything others needed to have done but weren't willing or capable of doing for themselves. But babysitting someone's daughter was a new one.

Sy wasn't just someone, though. He'd helped Tyr on more than one occasion, and outside of Vid, Herm, and one other, Sy was the only real friend Tyr had.

From somewhere deep within the dark hood, a bright blue eye lifted and met his gaze. Red tinged the edge of her eye where a blood vessel had been broken.

A feeling raced through him that he couldn't place. Familiarity maybe? But he'd never met Sy's daughter before.

Puzzled, he stared at her, trying to figure out why he couldn't see both of her eyes.

As if reading his thoughts, she removed her hood.

His fists clenched, and his gut cramped so tight he fought for breath. One side of her face had swollen beyond recognition. Her cheek had been split open, as had her lip. Her second eye swelled shut, and a jagged gash split through her eyebrow. Her other side was a little better, with a black eye and bruised cheek.

Tyr wanted nothing more than to cut apart the man who'd done that to her. A heated wave of emotion blasted away from him, and two men across the room began to

argue.

Tyr unclenched his fists and glanced over his shoulder. Vid spotted the two men and then glanced over at Tyr. He half stood from his chair, but Tyr gestured with his hand, and Vid sat back down. Herm whispered something, and Vid shook his head.

Eve glared at him. Tyr bowed to her, and she cocked an eyebrow.

He needed to control himself. She wouldn't stand for a third flare-up. Damn. He hadn't had two anger flares in a row in decades.

Sy's daughter studied him and then looked up at her father and winced, raising her fingers to her jaw.

Was she mute, or did she have more extensive injuries to her face he couldn't discern?

Sylax nodded. "Please, Lord Tyr. I?—"

"Are you sure you want me? You see how my emotions?—"

Sy grabbed Tyr's hand.

"I trust only you." Sy's thoughts flowed into Tyr, and he experienced the depth of Sylax's fear and need. The emotions permeated Tyr as if Sylax's feelings were his own. It both intrigued Tyr as well as made him uneasy, knowing Sylax could penetrate his mind at any moment if he didn't lock it down.

Tyr nodded. "Okay. But are you sure you only want me to keep her safe? I would happily take care of the person or persons who harmed her as well."

Sylax let go of Tyr's hand. "I appreciate that more than words can say, but they are something I need to deal with in my own way."

"I understand." He did. Tyr understood more than anyone the need to enact vengeance with one's own hands. "It would be my honor to ensure her safety until you return."

Sy bowed. "I can't pay you all the money upfront, but?—"

Tyr waved his hand. "This is beyond money. Pay me when you can pay me. And if it so be that you never pay me, I am fine with that as well. You just take care of the bastards who did this." Tyr said to Sy. "And if you need anything, anything at all, I will be there. As you were for me many years ago."

Sy nodded and hugged his daughter. She sucked in a sharp breath, making Tyr's anger burn hotter.

Chill, man, or Eve and Aphrodite will have your balls to decorate the café.

Tyr swallowed hard, trying to not cause another incident.

How could someone do that to a woman? Whoever it was, they were damn lucky Sy was taking care of them and not him. Because if Tyr got his hands on them, when he finished, there would be nothing left but a pile of tissue and pulverized bones.

A tingle skittered up his spine to his mind, and his gaze locked straight on Sy's daughter. Her eyes widened and then lit from within. She had Sy's gift. And at that moment, he got the distinct impression she approved of what he'd wanted to do.

Celeste peered up and up and up to the largest man she'd ever seen. Tight black t-shirt so crisp it looked freshly ironed. The cotton stretched over muscles so massive

she had no idea how his skin didn't burst. His body tapered down to a trim waistband, where the t-shirt tucked into a thick belt and a pair of dark gray combat pants disappeared into black leather boots. Strangely, he wore a single black leather glove that reached up past his left wrist but no right glove.

Her father had told her about his friend Tyr, the Norse God of War, and she hadn't known what to expect, but it wasn't the man standing in front of her. Dark hair, tan skin, high cheekbones, and a heavy chiseled jaw. Every inch of him screamed power. Power and danger. Celeste swallowed hard and fought to keep herself from shaking again. She'd shaken so much in the last two weeks that every muscle felt as if she'd run a marathon every day for a month. As she sized Tyr up. Was she going from one monster to another?

No. Her father would never do anything to hurt her. He was nothing like her mother. Ironical since her mother was an angel and her father a demon.

As her father and Tyr talked, Celeste lowered her defenses a fraction to reach into Tyr's mind. Her father had told her not to use her powers unless absolutely necessary, especially in the underworld, but in light of what she had been through, she couldn't help herself. She needed to know if he had any intentions other than helping her.

Like rolling down the window of a car, she peeled her shield back a fraction. Immediately, every mind in the café bombarded her. She sucked in a shallow breath and fought to push them away. But in order to do that, she had to catalog them all.

She'd taken her shield down in the closet the day before and had explored the mental world. In doing so, she'd realized every brain had a specific wave attached to it. Each one as unique as a set of fingerprints. All she had to do was touch each wave with her mind, and she could immediately tell the difference between them. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine... she lost count of how many there were.

“Damn, she is so fine.”

“Ugh, when will this be over?”

“I wonder how much he is worth. I guess I could agree to a real date and find out.”

“Oh my gosh, if I can’t convince her to be with me, I’m going to die.”

“Man, the crop is getting lean. I think I might have to give up finding a mate.”

“I bet she’s amazing in bed, but is she wife material? I don’t think she is.”

Celeste blushed at all the carnal thoughts.

What the hell? Where had her father brought her? A brothel?

After several seconds, she pushed the other thoughts from her mind and focused on the man in front of her.

“How could someone do that to a woman? Whoever it was, they were damn lucky Sy is taking care of them and not me. Because if I get my hands on them, when I finished, there would be nothing left but a pile of tissue and pulverized bones.”

Tyr’s gaze turned on her cold and unreadable. He knew. Somehow, he knew she’d been reading his thoughts. Embarrassed, Celeste pushed her shields back up. She’d heard enough. Tyr was a threat, but not to her. The rage in his thoughts at what had been done to her gave her a strange sense of comfort.

His dark, piercing eyes seemed to look right through her, as if they’d seen too many years of pain and horror. If it hadn’t been for the rage she’d seen in him, she’d have thought them blank, soulless almost. But somehow that drew her to him. Drew her to

him because she wanted to do the same thing to Anton.

Her father gave her a side hug, making her broken ribs jolt her. “I’ll come back for you as soon as I can.”

“How long?”

Her father shook his head. “I don’t know, dearest. But I promise you, I will deal with this. I will make it safe for you to go home again.”

“I don’t want to go back there. I don’t want to go with her. I want to be with you. Why can’t you teach me what you do? I can stay with you. Help you.”

Her father shook his head again. “I’ve told you before the men I work for are as bad as Anton. I don’t want to risk you with them.”

“And yet, I ended up in the same position, staying with my mother.”

Her father blew out a breath. They’d had the same conversation half a dozen times in the last twenty-four hours. Her father worked for a higher class of demons as well as other supernaturals as an independent contractor. Surely those beings weren’t worse than the human monsters her mother had sold her to. She’d never once seen her father come back to her with bruises or broken bones.

A moment of silence passed between them as Tyr watched their psychic interaction with interest.

Her father scanned the room and then lifted Celeste’s hood and covered her face. “I’ll be back soon. Stay with Tyr. Do not leave his side. Promise me.”

She looked from Tyr to her father.

“Promise.”

She sucked in a painful breath. “I promise.”

“You know how to get a hold of me if you need me. And both you and Tyr have my phone number in case I am not in the Underworld.”

She recently learned something else. The times she’d not been able to reach her father through their connection had been because he hadn’t been on Earth; he’d been in the Underworld. She’d never known he lived and worked down here most of the time.

Her father kissed her head. “I love you, Celeste. You are everything to me.”

“I know, Papa.”

He stuck out his hand and shook with Tyr. “I cannot ever repay you, my friend. For this, I can never repay you.”

“Take care and be safe.”

Her father nodded and headed for the door. She turned to watch him go.

“Papa.”

He stopped and glanced back at her.

“I love you.”

Her father smiled. “ And I you, my Little Angel.”

And then he was gone. Out the door. To where she didn’t know. She knew he

planned on dealing with Anton, but other than that, she had no idea. He'd refused to tell her his plan in case she tried to follow him. He was smart and knew her too well.

She'd healed superficially over the past twenty-four hours, but a lot of her wounds would take at least several days if not more, to heal. She couldn't be sure since she'd never been hurt so extensively before.

Celeste stared at the door like a puppy awaiting their owner's return and when her dad didn't come back in, she turned back to Tyr.

He continued to watch her until she grew so uncomfortable she pulled her hood lower. As she went to drop her hand, Tyr grabbed her fingers with a thick, gloved hand and stopped her. He inspected her broken and bruised fingers as well as the round cigar burn on her wrist. She jerked away and hid her arm under her cloak, once again using it to cradle her other broken arm.

Tyr took a step back. "I'm sorry. I just wanted to see how extensive your injuries to your arms were."

She stared up at him. Her injuries were none of his business. It didn't matter anyway. The bruises were halfway faded, and the cigar burns were blistered over and drying.

"Let me tell Herm and Vid I'm leaving." He pointed toward the tables. "They're my brothers. They'll get weird if I leave without saying something."

Weird? She looked over to the group of people sitting at tables. A bell sounded, and the men stood and started to switch places. Was it some sort of networking thing?

"I'll be right back."

Instinctively, she followed him. He stopped and looked back at her and then scanned

the dozens of people watching them.

Without pretense, Tyr placed his hand on the small of her back, sending a jolt through her. His rough palm pressed into her cloak and she swore the heat of his hand burned through her layers of clothing. A jolt shot through her, and her cheeks heated for some reason.

Tyr didn't move for a second. She squeezed in closer to his side, his body comforting. Instead of continuing toward the tables of people, Tyr whistled, and a bulky man covered in tattoos looked up from a far table. Tyr made some sort of hand signal to the man, who spotted Celeste and broke into a smile before giving a thumbs-up.

Tyr growled and looked like he might say something, but he just shook his head and turned her toward the exit.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 8:37 am

CHAPTER 4

Tyr pulled up to the high-gated estate and pressed the button on the remote from his keys. The metal gate with foot-long spikes on top swung inward. Her heartbeat quickened at the idea that she might not be able to get out of the estate once she got in. She reached out through her mental connection to her father.

“Celeste?” her father asked.

“I’m fine, Papa. Just checking.” She let the connection drop.

Part of her hardly believed she was actually in the Underworld because her father had always made such a point of keeping her away. He’d always insisted she stay on Earth. But the minute he’d discovered her in Anton’s closet, he’d grabbed her and run straight to his natural home.

It wasn’t that the realm was so different from Earth as much as it was... the smell, the feel... the beings. On Earth, she’d run into the occasional supernatural, but in the Underworld, everyone was supernatural as far as she could tell. She couldn’t decipher all the different species, but for sure, every species had a different wave pattern to them.

She let her shields dip for a moment to discern what Tyr thought, but his mind remained blank. She lingered for a moment, confused. How could his mind be completely blank when before she’d been able to read everything?

Tyr’s grip tightened on the steering wheel, and she threw her shield back up. Her

cheeks heated. He purposely cleared his mind because he knew she read him. But... how? No one had ever been able to tell before unless she'd wanted them to.

They headed down a long driveway in silence thicker than when they'd left the café. Finally, the drive ended at an expansive white mansion. Huge. Like something she would have seen in Beverly Hills that a movie star would own.

Celeste's mouth tried to fall open at the sight, but it shot with lightning pain, and she grabbed the side of her face and whimpered.

The whole front of the house sported a huge bay of enormous two-story windows tinted from inside. An expansive lawn devoid of any bushes, flowers, or trees stretched to the side of the house. She assumed it was so they saw anyone trying to sneak up on the house. As she scanned the roofline, she spotted dozens of cameras swiveling back and forth.

Damn. She doubted even the White House had that many cameras.

Tyr glanced at her and back to the windshield.

Just what did Tyr do for a job? Her father had money, but he was in no way as rich as Tyr appeared to be. But then again, she didn't think her father was as old as Tyr. He was a god, after all. Which meant he'd been gathering wealth for what? A thousand years? Longer?

Holy hamburgers! Was Tyr a thousand years old?

Tyr pulled the vehicle around the side of the house and pushed a button on his key ring to open a huge garage door tall enough for an airplane. They waited in silence for the door to roll up.

Tyr pulled his Jeep into an empty spot between an even larger SUV and a sleek sports car of some kind.

How had he gotten those into the Underworld? It wasn't like they would have fit through the portal she'd come through. There was so much she didn't yet understand about the Underworld and its connection to the Earth realm. She wondered if her dad would let her stay in the Underworld with him now.

The garage door shut behind them with a soft bang, and they sat for a moment. Around the garage, dozens of vehicles sat pristine and ready for their turn on the road. What the hell did they need so many for? Celeste had never understood men and their obsessions with cars. Guess even gods weren't immune to the fascination.

Tyr peeled his hands from the steering wheel. "Let's get you somewhere comfortable where you can rest."

He slid out the driver's side door, and before she got out, he rounded the vehicle and pulled open her door for her. He stood like a mountain blocking her way and then lifted his hand. She flinched involuntarily, and he stopped.

"I will not hurt you. I understand you're frightened and you do not know me. But I promise you that even if your father weren't a friend of mine, there is nothing, nothing that would make me strike you. Even if you struck me first. I would never hurt you, Celeste."

The sincerity in his voice struck Celeste as genuine. In her twenty-four years of life, she'd learned to read people. Not just with her gift but without it as well. She'd learned about body language, micro-expressions, voice inflections, and more. And everything from his body language to his relaxed speech patterns rang true.

Celeste nodded, but didn't take his hand when he offered it to her again. She dropped

the extra-long distance to the ground, and a whirlwind of pain coursed up her side and across her chest. Her knees weakened, and her vision blurred as pain rocked her entire body. Tyr grabbed her gently around the waist, holding her up. She wanted to push him off but didn't have the strength to protest. She hadn't slept in almost thirty-six hours and hadn't eaten in... who knew how long. The pain all over her body seemed to increase with every passing moment.

"Can you walk?"

She nodded, catching her breath. Tyr waited and then slid his hand from her waist when she straightened. She took a step, but once she let go of the car, she crumbled.

Tyr tried to soften the drop by reaching for her, but he gripped her upper arm where Anton had stuck her, and she cried out.

"I'm sorry. I... I'm sorry."

She cradled her arm against herself. A cold sweat broke out over her skin.

"I'm going to have to carry you. I am sorry to do it, especially after everything you've been through, but you'll be much more comfortable in a bed and not on the garage floor. And I want to make this trip as short as possible. Okay?"

He waited for her to respond.

She was unable to do anything more than nod.

She hadn't taken time to log every injury, so she forgot about them individually. They were all just a collective of agony. And though they would begin to heal once she rested and eaten, in that moment, she couldn't take anymore, so she let Tyr lift her.

He swept his arm behind her knees and lifted her. He stood with her in his massive arms as if she weighed no more than a babe. She leaned against his chest, and the heady scent of minty soap mixed with his natural cologne filled her nose and soothed her. She closed her eyes, taking in his fresh scent.

He waited until she relaxed into him, and then he moved. He carried her across the expansive garage in long, quick strides. It surprised her that when he lifted a finger to a security system to scan his fingerprint, she already drifted to sleep. Something about being in his arms gave her a sense of safety for the first time in weeks. She opened her eyes as they walked into an underground safe room of some kind. A retinal scan and a second door later, they stepped into a plush hallway next to an entertainment room of some kind. Enormous flat screen, gaming system, huge recliners, pool table, foosball table, and bar. She barely registered them all as he stalked to a set of glass stairs.

For a moment, she wondered if the glass would break under his weight. She held her breath, anticipating the pain of being jostled, but it didn't happen. Being the God of War, he'd probably perfected the ability to carry injured allies. Taking the stairs two at a time, they emerged onto the main level, which consisted of a spacious open area. White marble floors and minimal modern furnishings met her tired gaze. She registered a dining room, living room, and kitchen, all open up to twenty-plus foot tall, vaulted ceilings.

She peered through the gigantic windows and took in the entire front of the house to the tree line two hundred yards down the driveway. He cut between the living room and dining room to another set of glass stairs on a wall that appeared to be made of a waterfall.

He ascended the stairs, and she fought not to run her fingers through the dripping water. He turned to the left and crossed over a glass walkway overlooking the open area below. It ended in a hallway that spread in opposite directions. He turned right

toward the back of the house.

Reaching a door at the end of the hall, he punched in a code on the door lock, and it slid open. The room had been designed the same as the rest of the house. White, modern, clean. No clutter anywhere. It was dang nice for a guest room.

He walked to the cream bed and went to lay her down, but she pushed against his chest.

“No.”

He cocked an eyebrow at her.

“I’ll get blood on it.”

“You have no idea how many times I’ve gotten blood on my bed. That’s what new comforters and sheets are for. I have an entire closet. It’s fine.”

His bed? Celeste scanned the room frantically.

“No!”

He looked at her again.

“I... This is your room.”

He nodded. “It’s the most secure place in the entire house. It is the only place I will have you sleep.”

A mixture of fear and anticipation whirled in her belly. “But... What about you?” Part of her wanted him to stay so she could continue to revel in the peace he brought

her, but the other part remembered the things she'd been subjected to by Anton.

"I'll sleep somewhere else. As long as you are here, this is your space."

She searched his eyes, no longer so cold. They had softened a bit around the edges but remained alert.

He laid her gently on the soft, downy, feather bed. She sunk into it and relaxed.

Tyr watched her for a moment and then walked to a wall and pushed a button. A set of security shutters clicked open, revealing the wall to be windows overlooking the back of the estate.

Tyr opened one of the windows about a foot and then crossed to the grand open bathroom. He opened a cabinet, pulled out a plastic container and several towels, and returned to the bed.

"Would you like to shower?"

Frick ya, she wanted to, but she didn't think she had the strength.

"Not tonight."

He nodded and stared at her for a moment. "Can you not speak, or do you prefer not to?"

"Does my telepathy bother you?"

Something flashed in his eyes that she couldn't read. "Not... exactly. It's a bit uncomfortable, but I can get used to it if need be."

Uncomfortable? So he did feel it. “I speak, but... I am sure my jaw is broken. So, it’s easier...” Her words trailed off as his eyes flashed with a red light.

He turned from her and spoke in a tongue she didn’t understand for almost a full thirty seconds before blowing out a breath and turning back to her.

He inclined his head. “I apologize for my language. It’s just... You have no idea how much I’d like to get my hands on the person who did this to you.”

“I... appreciate your concern, Lord Tyr.”

Tyr shook his head. “Tyr. Just Tyr. No, Lord. No God of War. None of that foolishness. I’m just Tyr.”

“Tyr.”

He nodded. “To make you more comfortable, I would like to check your wounds. Make sure nothing needs to be reset or disinfected.”

Celeste’s chest squeezed, and she fought to keep her anxiety at bay.

“You can read my thoughts again if you want to make sure my intentions are clear.”

Heat flushed her cheeks.

“I just ask that you not make a habit of it. If you want to know something, ask me. I will not lie to you.”

“I apologize. I... haven’t had a need to read people until recently. Not that I’ve had many opportunities. But...”

“It’s understandable. You don’t know me. You are hurt and scared. But, like I said, it is... uncomfortable. There are things in there even I don’t want to see again. I’d rather you ask if you want to know something. Hopefully, before you leave my care, you will learn to trust me.”

“I’ve never had someone be able to tell before.”

He nodded. “We gods are a bit different, I suppose. Or maybe it’s me. Who knows?”

“I promise I won’t anymore unless I have your permission.”

He nodded. “Now, do you need to read my intentions before I examine you?”

She wanted to insist on reading him, but something inside told her she didn’t need to.

Tyr set the plastic container and the towels on the bed and then lifted her into a sitting position. He undid her cloak, and it dropped down on the bed.

Using his fingers, he took a minute to inspect her face. His jaw clenched, and worked hard as if chewing something.

“It’s obvious your cheek is fractured on the left side. Possibly your eye socket. But there is nothing that can be done about that. You said your jaw is broken, and I believe you. We can get a doctor and have it wired shut.”

“No need. It will be healed within a few days, hopefully.”

Tyr bit his lip. “I am sorry to intrude, but it’s to help you better. Your father is a demon, and your mother is... human?”

“Angel.” What a joke. Her mother was more demon than her father ever had been. He

said it was his fault she turned out that way, but Celeste didn't believe it.

Tyr cocked an eyebrow. "Interesting. Well, that should help speed up your healing quite a bit."

"I want to say yes, but I've never been this injured before, so I can't say for sure."

"What else hurts? I am assuming your arm. You winced when your father hugged you earlier and when I caught you outside the car."

"I was struck with a metal bat. I think there might be a fracture or two in my upper left arm."

Tyr's eyes flashed red again. "Anywhere else?" He gritted his teeth.

"Ribs. Legs. Back. But the ribs are the only other breaks, I think."

Tyr nodded and stood. "I... uh... I'll be right back."

Without another word, he strode to the bedroom door. It opened automatically and slid shut behind him.

Celeste stared at it, wondering why he'd left so fast. She waited for him to return, but when he didn't, she laid back on her pillows and closed her eyes. His chiseled features swam into view. His bulging muscles. His strong jaw, but most of all, his eyes. His eyes had turned bright red in a flash. So different from his cold, dark eyes. Even so, they were both beautiful and terrifying.

CHAPTER 5

Tyr jumped to the first floor from the landing. The ground shook beneath him and he headed straight for the kitchen, where he whipped open a cupboard, ripping it from its hinges, and grabbed a bottle of whiskey. He gripped a glass, but it shattered in his hand onto the floor.

Dammit!

He grabbed a second glass, careful not to break that one as well, and poured whiskey to the top. He gulped it down and filled it a second time, downing that one as well.

A bat. Someone hit Celeste with a bat. Not once, but over and over and over.

He gripped the glass too hard, and the second one shattered.

“Son of a?—”

Hermódr and Vidar’s laughter and joking preceded their footsteps ascending the stairs.

Tyr sucked in a harsh breath and fought the rage coursing through his body. He stared at the bottle of whiskey and fought the urge to down the entire thing. His vision darkened further, and the dark pinkish haze that tinged his vision previously turned completely red. Calm down. He had to calm down. Even though Frigg had placed magic on his house to keep his emotions from bleeding into the Underworld, or worse, Midgard, it didn’t mean he could afford to keep breaking things. And being

angry as well as drunk in front of Celeste was not the way to instill trust.

“Tyr!” Hermódr called. “Who’s the little cloaked thing you left with?”

“Yeah,” said Vidar. “You holding out on us? You have a hottie you’ve been hiding?”

“Bet she’s upstairs right now, isn’t she? In the guestroom. Waiting for you to come back and take advantage of her”

“Is she hot? Tell me she’s hot.”

Tyr hurled the whiskey bottle across the room at them. “Haltu kjafti!”

Herm ducked, but Vid caught the bottle before it hit him in the face.

Vid and Herm looked at each other. Tyr took several deep breaths, and they walked slowly forward. He fought against the wave of emotion, which threatened to burst from him. If he let go now, who knew what damage he’d do to the house. His fists shook as he slammed them on the granite counter, making it shake.

Vid set the bottle on the island and scanned the scene.

Herm rounded the counter and picked up Tyr’s hand. A jagged shard of glass stuck out of his palm. Blood dripped down his arm. Tyr hadn’t even noticed. Herm pulled the glass from Tyr’s hand and then led him to the sink and ran it under the cool water.

Tyr hissed and gritted his teeth against the sting. His vision darkened further, and his blood pounded. He wanted to find something, someone, to hurt, maim, kill...

Vid set his meaty hands on Tyr’s shoulders. He moved in so close his body pressed against Tyr’s. He breathed in deep, and Tyr mimicked him. The three stood together,

none of them speaking for several minutes as Vid breathed with Tyr, and Herm cleaned Tyr's wound and then put a bandage on it.

When Herm finished, he put one of his hands on Tyr's shoulder, and Vid removed one of his hands to rest it on Herm's shoulder instead.

Tyr closed his eyes. Images bombarded him. Blood. War. Death. Bodies torn and bleeding at his hand. He fought against the rage wanting to be unleashed.

For over a thousand years, the three of them had fought side by side. No one knew him better. No one he trusted more. And no one who had learned how to calm him the way they had.

Which was why they didn't pry. They simply stood with him, lending their support and focusing on him.

After what seemed like an hour, Tyr took a deep breath and opened his eyes. His vision cleared, and the wave of rage dissipated. He nodded to Vid and Herm, and without another word, the two began moving around the kitchen.

Vid grabbed spray and a towel and wiped Tyr's blood from the counter and floor. Herm removed the broom from the pantry and swept up the broken glass.

Tyr moved to the edge of the bar and dropped onto a stool. He didn't speak for several minutes and then finally said, "The girl I left with is upstairs. Her name is Celeste."

Both stopped.

"It's not what you think. I didn't bring her here to bed her. I brought her here to protect her."

“You brought her here?” said Hermódr. “You never bring a client here.”

Tyr nodded. He’d never brought anyone to their house. “Do you remember the demon who helped me out a couple decades back? The one who could read minds?”

“Sylax,” said Vid.

Tyr cocked an eyebrow. It surprised him that Vid remembered his name.

“The girl upstairs is his daughter. She’s been injured. Badly.”

“Not by Sy...”

“Absolutely not. Sy asked me specifically to keep her safe. So, I am. I don’t know yet who hurt her, but...” He didn’t need to finish the sentence. His meaning hung in the air. If Sy didn’t deal with the man who’d hurt Celeste, Tyr sure would.

Tyr stared at the bottle of whiskey for a long minute and listened to the sounds of Hermódr and Vidar cleaning. After Vid dropped the glass shards into the trash and put away the broom, he sat next to Tyr.

“How bad is it?”

Tyr shook his head. “Her face is such a mess it’s hard to tell for sure without a closer inspection. He hit her with a metal bat all over her body. Who knows what is broken? Her cheek, for sure. Her eye socket. And one arm and at least two fingers. Probably ribs. And her legs barely hold her weight so maybe something there. I counted at least half a dozen burns on her arm. They resembled cigar burns.”

Her sapphire eye with red tinged edges swam in his mind, and he grabbed the bottle of whiskey and took two gulps.

“Shit.” Herm leaned against the counter opposite them. “What are we going to do about it?”

Tyr shook his head. “Sy’s dealing with it. He only wants her protected.”

“We should take her to a doctor,” offered Vid.

“She won’t go. She said she should heal quickly. I’m still concerned and...”

“And?”

“I need to see the extent of her injuries to know if I should call someone, but I’m not sure she’ll show me. After the way I left her, she’s probably as scared of me as she is of the guy who did it.” He shook his head, not understanding his visceral reaction. He’d seen women injured before. Beaten and battered. And it had inflamed him. Incensed him. Caused him to want retribution. But nothing, nothing had caused such an uncontrollable reaction like the one he experienced.

“I barely controlled the rage at seeing what had been done to her.”

“If you explain, she’ll understand,” said Vid.

Tyr ran his hands through his hair. “I don’t want to push her, but I need to at least monitor her healing over the next twenty-four hours.”

“Tell her that.”

“I will, I just?—”

A blood-curdling shriek sounded from upstairs.

Tyr leapt out of his chair and jumped to the upper floor walkway. He ran for his bedroom and punched in the code. He grabbed the knife from his boot and pressed a button on the side of it as he raced into the room. His knife lengthened in his hand to a full-sized golden flaming sword. Tyr scanned the room.

Celeste sat on the bed, clutching a pillow and using it as a shield. Above her, a giant falcon flapped its wings, talons out, ripping at the pillow.

White feathers sailed in every direction. Tyr dropped his sword and rushed forward.

“Yegret! Yegret! Stop!” He stepped between the bird and Celeste and covered Celeste with his body.

Yegret slashed his back, tearing into his shirt and burning his skin with a deep cut.

“Yegret,” yelled Hermódr. “Bed!”

“Come on, you senile bird,” said Vidar. “Get in your cage.” Vid opened the door to Yegret’s enclosure. “Freak, when are you going back to Valhalla? I tell you, pets should not live this long, even ones belonging to gods.”

Tyr let go of Celeste. “Are you alright? Did she hurt you?”

Celeste shook her head, breathing heavily, her face pale as his comforter. A trickle of sweat rolled down Celeste’s cheek.

“Are you sure?”

“She just scared me.”

Celeste clutched his t-shirt. She looked at her hands and let go immediately.

“Sorry.”

“No reason to be.”

The sound of Yegret’s cage being locked pulled his attention. Vid and Herm looked between him and Celeste. She turned away and lifted her cloak to cover her face.

“Celeste, you don’t need to do that here.”

She peeked out at the two men.

“This is Hermódr, messenger to the gods.”

“And a god myself.” Herm gave a flourishing bow. “At your service.”

Vid elbowed him in the ribs, and Herm straightened and grabbed his side. “Ouch! What the Freya did you do that for?”

Vid growled. “Don’t take my mother’s name in vain, you little twat.”

Herm burst out laughing. “Twat? Seriously? That’s the best you came up with?”

“Knock it off,” Tyr said too loudly. Celeste flinched, and he took a moment to gather himself.

“Sorry about him,” said Vid. “He’s more the god of prepubescent boys than anything else. He has the mentality of a twelve-year-old.”

“Hey,” said Herm. “That’s so rude. I have the mentality of at least an eighteen-year-old. Ask any of the women I’ve been with. They say?—”

“No one cares,” interrupted Vid. “I’m Vidar, God of Vengeance. And now I will be taking this one to have a little timeout in his big boy room.”

Without another word, Vid slung a massive arm over Herm’s shoulder and forcibly moved him toward the door.

“Wait.”

The men stopped.

“See, Tyr doesn’t want me to go,” Herm ducked out from under Vid’s arm.

Celeste wore a perplexed expression. “As juvenile as they seem, they are my best friends and brothers to me. We’ve been together for thousands of years. I trust them with my life. They’re the only two men I will allow near you while you are in my care. But never, ever, will they touch you. On my honor be it.”

Hermódr and Vidar bowed to Celeste. “On our honor be it,” they said together.

Celeste’s perplexed expression turned to something akin to amusement.

“Celeste is a telepath like Sy,” Tyr continued. “I would like you to consent to let her read you both for her peace of mind. You don’t have to, but if you don’t, I won’t be able to let you near her for any reason.”

Vid and Herm shrugged.

“Sure. Just don’t judge me too harshly if you see anything personal in there,” said Herm.

Vid snorted. “What? Like porn?”

“HBO isn’t porn, bro.”

“Naked people. Having sex. Porn.”

“It’s fantasy.”

“Yeah, your fantasy. Orgies with half a dozen women.”

Herm looked wistful and sighed. “I miss the old days. What can I say?”

“Enough,” said Tyr. “You two are so embarrassing.”

“You always say that,” replied Herm.

“And I never lie.” He turned to Celeste. “Sorry about them. They may both act like teenagers in a frat house, but they are excellent at their jobs. And they can be serious when they need to be. You can read them to be sure, though.”

“It’s okay. I don’t need to. I trust you.”

She did? Interesting.

Tyr stared at her for a moment as she tried to open the eye, which had been swollen shut an hour or so before. His gut clenched as she tried to focus on him with both eyes.

Once again, something inside stirred, and he couldn’t get Herm and Vid out of the room fast enough. “Okay, you two get out.”

Vid and Herm started to leave when Vid turned back. “Are you guys hungry? I can cook something.”

Tyr looked at Celeste.

“I can’t chew.”

“Her jaw is broken.”

“I can heat some broth. I have homemade bone broth in the fridge. It’s essential for mending and regaining strength.”

Tyr nodded. “Thanks, Vid.”

“What about you,” asked Herm. “You want something?”

“I’ll eat later.”

The two nodded and exited his room.

Tyr turned back to Celeste. “They can be mature when they want to be.”

She gave a soft, lopsided smile, and the split in her lip opened and wept. Tyr grabbed the towel from the nightstand and pressed it to her mouth. She reached out and touched his hand, turning it over.

“That wasn’t there before.”

“Yeah... I... uh... had an accident in the kitchen with a glass. Glasses are so fragile. I’m more used to metal tankards, so sometimes I forget my strength.”

She ran her fingers over the bandage lightly and then pulled away.

Her touch left a trail of sparks on his palm, and Tyr fought for something to say. “I’m

sorry about all of this. It isn't the impression I wanted to make, I can assure you. With those two, as well as with me almost losing my temper. I promise it wasn't anything you did. I just... sometimes I have a hard time controlling it. Even after all this time. And about Yegret?—”

“I get it. She was protecting you and your space.”

He looked over at Yegret in her twenty-foot-long, built-in glass enclosure. “I’ve never let anyone else in my room before. It was stupid of me not to think of it. I open the window for her every evening to come back in after she’s gone for a flight. I just...” Just what? Almost lost himself to bloodlust and left to compose himself? Yeah, that would instill confidence.

“No harm done.”

“I don’t want you to think I’m thoughtless or careless. That isn’t the case.”

“I don’t. Truly.”

He stared at her for a moment. Even with the bruises and cuts, she was pretty. But there was something else. Something he couldn’t put his finger on. Something about her that made him more protective than of anyone he’d met before.

“I should check your injuries and monitor how they are healing over the next couple of days to make sure we don’t need to take you to a doctor.”

Celeste stared at him as if trying to decide.

Finally, she nodded. “All right.”

He had no idea where to start. He decided her face was the best and most convenient

place.

He scooted closer and brushed several strands of dark hair from her skin. Then he carefully turned her chin to inspect the more damaged side. Her cheekbone had swollen at least two times the normal size. The split had scabbed over, and there didn't seem to be an infection. Her eye was puffed shut, her lip bled every time she moved it, and the towel did no good. He opened the kit, pulled out a styptic pencil, and dabbed it on the cut.

"I am hoping this will help you heal quicker. It should at least keep it from bleeding whenever you move your lips."

He applied some salve over top of the cut and then moved on to the other side of her face. She studied him, and he tried not to focus on it as he cleaned a smaller cut on her cheek that bore the resemblance to a round ring with a crest on it.

A set of deep bruises on her throat resembled a handprint.

Tyr gritted his teeth.

"Are you all right?"

"He choked you."

She glanced away.

"You must tell me who did this. Your father said he would handle it, but you have to tell me."

Her eyes sparkled with flecks of anger, and then she blinked, and the flecks swept away. "I'm too tired tonight."

Tyr wanted to press her. To make her give him the name so he could find the man and exact justice for what had been done.

“I... I should check the rest of your body as well.”

“I’ll let you check my top half, but my bottom half is equally as bruised. Nothing broken. And he didn’t cut me or burn me down there.”

Tyr wanted to ask if he’d done anything else to her... down there.

“He didn’t violate me. If he had... well... let’s say that my father would be the least of his problems.”

Tyr didn’t ask her to explain.

“I won’t be able to get my shirt over my head, so you’ll have to cut it off me . Preferably not with the flaming sword burning a hole in your carpet.”

Shit. Tyr jumped up and grabbed his sword. He pushed a ruby on the side and the blade retracted, becoming a pocketknife once more.

Damn. He needed to replace the carpet. Again.

Tyr held the pocketknife out to her.

She took it and rolled it in her palm.

Why had he done that? In the thousand years he’d owned the sword, he’d never once let someone else touch it. So why had he handed it over to her so willingly?

“Impressive.”

“You are impressive.”

Her brow crinkled.

“I have no clue how you aren’t a shaking, terrified mess. I’ve seen grown men go through less than you did and not mentally come out the other side. But you...”

“Me?”

Tyr didn’t know what to say to her. She what? Too calm? Too put together? Too...

A strange sensation settled in Tyr’s gut. Something he’d never experienced before. He couldn’t put his finger on it, but somehow, her tough persona made him want to protect her all the more.

She blinked her good eye, and Tyr cleared his throat.

“Uh... Can I see your arm?”

“Okay.”

He slid his hand up her forearm to her elbow, where the cuff of her shirt ended. He slipped the edge of his knife under the fabric and, in one swift movement, sliced up to her shoulder. As the fabric parted, he hissed.

She exhaled and relaxed. “Oh my gosh, that feels so much better. I thought the tightness was just my arm.”

He shook his head. “It’s from the swelling and compression of the shirt.” Her arm was most definitely fractured above the elbow. Her entire upper arm looked like someone had painted it black and purple and had blown it up like an over-inflated

balloon.

Odin help him to be strong.

He reached into his container, pulled out an ace bandage, and wrapped her entire arm. Then he cut the rest of her shirt away, leaving her in a sports bra.

Thank Valhalla, her breasts remained covered.

He went to the linen closet and pulled out a sheet. He ripped a strip off it and used it to put her arm in a makeshift sling.

“It’s not the best job, but it will stabilize your arm at least. You should wear it for a few days. A week would be better.”

She nodded.

He treated the burns on her other arm and then turned his attention to her ribs. Her entire right side was the color of the night sky. As he slid his arms around her to wrap her torso in another ace bandage, his skin heated, and goosebumps rose up his arms.

He told himself to stop. He was being ridiculous. How many men and women had he bandaged in his lifetime, thousands? What was wrong with him that the mere brush of her skin on his made his body react like it was the first time he’d ever been touched by a female? Ridiculous. Not to mention unprofessional as well as impractical.

Vidar arrived with the broth as Tyr finished. Tyr set the mug with a straw on the nightstand, then got Celeste a glass of water and handed her two pain pills.

“I don’t need them. I’m going to sleep.”

He held them out to her, anyway. She'd rest better if the pain eased somewhat. She took them and popped them into her mouth. He held the glass for her as she took several considerable swallows.

He put away the supplies and then returned to the bed. Her eyelids drooped as he lifted the broth to her lips and placed the straw in her mouth. She took several sips.

"Why do you wear a glove?"

"I lost my hand a long time ago. I had it replaced. My replacement scares some people, so I find it's easier to wear a glove."

She took another sip. "Where did you lose it?"

He scrunched up his forehead. "You mean, how did I lose it?"

"No. I want to know where you lost it. Did you go back and search for it? Do you think it might still be there if you went and searched now? You are immortal, after all. So is your hand immortal, too?"

He stared at her for a moment, and a small smile crept across her lips.

"You're kidding. After everything you've been through, you are joking?"

She shrugged and then winced. "He tried to break my body, but the fact that he couldn't break my mind frustrated him the most. To me, it was everything, though. My bones will heal. My cuts will fade. But my mind is my real weapon. It's what I hold dearest. It's the one thing I can never let anyone break. Because the day they do, I'm dead."

Tyr had no words.

She sipped the broth. “So, how did you lose the hand?”

Tyr licked his lips. “I betrayed a friend, so he bit it off.”

“That’s terrible. You must hate him.”

“Not at all. What I did was horrible. What he did was purely instinctual. I don’t blame him any more than you can blame a Yegret for trying to protect my space.”

She licked her lips and took another sip, but the mug was empty. “You’ll have to tell me the whole story sometime.”

He nodded. “As soon as you tell me who did this to you and why.”

She gave him a soft smile as her eyes closed. “Deal.”

Tyr stood and set the mug on the nightstand before helping her slide down and covering her with the comforter.

He propped her broken arm up on a pillow. “If you need me, call, and I’ll come right away.”

“Where will you be?”

“Not far. Get some sleep. You are safe here. Do you want me to close the windows and lock down the shutters?”

“No.” Her eyes flashed with fear and Tyr filed the information away to ask her about later. “I... I appreciate being able to see outside.”

“The windows are unbreakable, and there is security around the property, the house,

and the windows. If anything bigger than a fly tries to get in, I'll be alerted."

Tyr picked up the mug and walked to the door.

"Tyr?"

He turned.

"Thank you," she said sleepily.

Tyr inclined his head and then walked out. He watched the door slide closed and caught a glimpse of her curled up in his bed.

Again, the strange sensation stirred in his gut, and a thought flashed through his mind that troubled him.

He liked her being in his bed.

CHAPTER 6

Tyr checked on Celeste throughout the night, but she didn't move. By two a.m. she'd become cocooned in some kind of light he assumed had to do with her angel healing. So, he shut down the security shutters and covered Yegret's enclosure. In the dim glow surrounding Celeste the bruising on her face had started to heal, and the swelling in her eye lessened by about half what it had been. Whatever she did, it worked.

He watched her for several minutes, allowing the strange emotions to overtake him again, trying to pinpoint it, but he couldn't. It wasn't lust. It wasn't sympathy. It was something... foreign. He gave up and left the room, confused and strangely dissatisfied.

Celeste awoke to the pitch-black room, and for a moment, panic seized her. Her heartbeat thundered, thinking she was back in Anton's closet. Her lips parted to scream when she touched the soft bed underneath her and realized she wasn't there. Tyr. She was at Tyr's. A soft cry escaped her as she caught her breath. She was fine. She was safe.

She tried to sit up, but her body grew stiff and sore. Not as sore as it had been, but not healed, either.

She tried to open her mouth, but that was an instant no-go. She touched her face, and her swollen eye had caked with sleepy dirt, making her lashes cling together, but the swelling was considerably less. Little by little, she took stock of her body in the dark. Her ribs ached, but didn't scream. Her arm was still not healed. The burns on her

other arm had become no more than faded circles. Thankfully, her lips healed as if nothing had happened.

Celeste nodded, satisfied with the progress. She let down her barrier and reached out for Tyr. She found him outside her door. She located Vid and Herm as well, but they were further away. Downstairs in the basement room? From their happy natures, she assumed they had to be playing a game or watching a movie or something else fun.

She waited for Tyr to enter, but he didn't. Weird. He wasn't far away. Confused, she walked to the door, and it slid open. In the dim light that shone down the hallway, she made out his muscular form propped up against the wall inches from the door. Head back, arms and legs crossed, eyes closed. Agun lay in his lap, and next to him sat a bottle of whiskey and a glass.

Had he been like that the whole time she'd been asleep? She frowned. She didn't like the idea of him sleeping against a wall. It wasn't right. He shouldn't have to be uncomfortable, so she could be comfortable.

Now that she saw better and not everything was blurry and hazy, her first assessment of him had been correct, yet fatally inadequate. He was unbelievably handsome. Massive. Strong. With a jawline that could cut rubies. He sat unmoving in a tight, white tank top and dark pants. His feet were bare, and she had the urge to run a finger up the sole of his foot to find out if he was ticklish.

"I can turn a light on if you'd like a better view."

Celeste's cheeks flamed. He wasn't asleep. Damn. How had she missed his brain activity?

"I... I can't figure out how to turn on the lights in the room."

He opened his eyes and raked her over from head to toe. She still wore no shirt. Only her arm sling covered her sports bra.

Tyr shoved the gun into the back of his waistband as he hopped to his feet. She backed into the room, and he reached out and placed his palm on a plate on the wall. The lights illuminated the longer he held it there. Then he removed his hand and placed it there a second time. The lights dimmed.

Was everything in his place so fancy?

She stepped up and placed her hand on the plate, again, the room illuminated. A small squawking sound came from the side of the room.

Tyr walked to the windows and opened the shutters, revealing the late afternoon sky. He unlatched the windows, and a rush of fresh air caressed Celeste, making her bare skin pebble.

He strode to the enclosure and pulled open a set of blackout curtains. Inside, Yegret hopped from foot to foot and chirped at him.

Tyr crossed his arms over his chest. "I understand why you did what you did, and I thank you for protecting our space, but you should have stopped when I called your name."

The bird squawked.

"No excuses. You know your commands. You ruined my shirt, by the way. And you are lucky you didn't hurt Celeste, or I'd let her eat you."

Tyr pointed to Celeste, and the bird cocked its head.

“Celeste is going to be here for a few days at least. This is her room until she goes. You are to protect her the way you would me. Got it?”

The bird shifted from foot to foot again.

“I won’t let you out unless you agree. She’s been through enough. She doesn’t need to worry about being attacked by you again.”

Yegret looked at Celeste and then Tyr. A pang of sympathy raced through Celeste for the bird. She only did what she’d been taught. It wasn’t her fault.

Tyr turned to Celeste. “Actually, it is her fault. She knows when I say to back off, she backs off. And the fact that I had to physically protect you, and she still didn’t stop, is a problem.”

Son of a breadbasket! Celeste rolled her barrier back up. She hadn’t realized she’d still had it down the entire time. What else had he accidentally heard from her?

Oh, gadzooks! Had he heard her thoughts when she’d been ogling him in the hallway? Mortification rooted inside her. How could she be so stupid?

Tyr and Yegret stared at each other for a minute before the bird hung its head and chirped at him.

Tyr nodded and then opened the enclosure. Yegret jumped onto his shoulder. Though twice the size of a normal falcon, she appeared small against his bulky frame. She began preening him. Tyr paid her no attention as he walked to the window, but she was more interested in Tyr’s hair than going outside. After a minute, Tyr reached up and scratched under her chin.

“Okay. Okay. I’m not mad anymore. You can go.”

She preened him for a moment and then flapped her wings and dove outside. Tyr stared after her and then turned to Celeste.

“Come on, let’s get you cleaned up.” He walked to the bathroom and touched another pad on the wall. It lit up a sparkling white marble bathroom with a deep clawfoot sunken tub, a shower big enough for ten people, and a stone three-faucet vanity.

Celeste wondered if, at some point, he planned on hosting a couple of women in his room the way she was sure Herm did. But then she remembered him saying he’d never had anyone in his room before.

He turned on one of the faucets, went to a closet, and pulled out a white towel. White. Everything was so white. What was with that?

He motioned for her to join him. He set the towel down and lifted her onto the vanity. His hands spanned her entire waist, and the warmth of his skin on hers made her cheeks heat. Man, she hated that.

He ran the water over the towel and then wrung it out a bit.

“It will be easier on your eye if you hold this to it for a minute or so before trying to wipe.”

She raised the towel to her eye.

He turned her head and checked her cheek and then her lips. Finally, he lifted her arm and inspected the burns.

He nodded, satisfied. “That cocoon thing you did seems to have worked quite well. Your smallest wounds healed in less than thirty-six hours.”

“Thirty-six?”

He nodded. “You’ve been asleep for about a day and a half.”

Had he sat in the hall the whole time? “What cocoon thing?”

He shrugged. “I’ve never seen something like it before. It was like you were surrounded by white light or something. That was you, right?”

“I suppose so.”

“Do you not know what I’m talking about?”

She shook her head. “It probably has to do with my mother’s blood. I’ve never used those powers before, never needed to.”

“The angel?”

She snorted. “Angel... well... technically, she’s an angel. Personally, I think she’s Satan’s sister.”

His intense stare made her almost shudder. Unlike when she’d first seen him, she realized what she’d originally thought to be coldness in his eyes was, in fact, an intensity she’d never experienced before. Like he searched deep inside her for the answers to some gigantic question, only she could answer. And damn if that intensity wasn’t hot.

Celeste’s nipples hardened, and her skin flushed. She coughed and moved her sling to cover her breasts. Gods didn’t have any enhanced sense of smell or anything, did they? Because she was sure her hormones were trying to make her ovulate from looking at him.

What the fiddle-faddle? She was all but broken in half but still got aroused by a hot guy? Not a hot guy, the hot guy. The hottest guy she'd ever seen, undoubtedly. Move over Adonis and Achilles. Tyr was the god of all hotness.

She rolled her eyes. Man, she was so screwed up. Was it her dad's side of the gene pool which made her react that way? She scoffed. More likely, her mother's. She'd been the one to sleep with every being she got her talons into.

Tyr cocked an eyebrow at her snort.

Reaching up, Tyr took the towel from her eye. She tried to open it and the lashes parted slightly. Gently, he wiped at it, and she caught the glint of metal peeking out from under his leather glove. She was tempted to touch it, to see how it fused to his skin, but she didn't. She wasn't that brazen. In that one department, she wished she was more like her mother than her dad. Her mother had no shame when it came to anything.

"Try again."

She blinked several times and opened her eye about halfway. Then she gave up and turned from him to the mirror for the first time.

Holy macaroni! What a flipping mess.

She wasn't sure what Tyr had seen on her face, but he laid a hand on her shoulder.

"It's much better than before you went to sleep. A couple more days, and you'll be as beautiful as before it happened."

Beautiful? He thought she was beautiful?

He averted his gaze and removed his hand. “Uh... I don’t have any girl clothes, but you can borrow one of my t-shirts if you’d like. If you’re more comfortable in what you are wearing, though, you can stay like that instead.”

She peered down at her bare torso. Modesty had flown out the window between them as fast as Yegret had a few minutes prior. What did it matter? He’d already seen almost everything from the waist up. Well... more than any man before, anyway.

“I need some pants. I can’t manage a shirt, though, until my arm heals.” She remembered her sports bra. There was no way to get it off. “Uh... I think you’re gonna need to cut my bra off so I can shower. Too bad. I liked this one.”

Tyr’s eyes widened, and his gaze fell to her chest before moving swiftly away. It was his turn for his cheeks to redden.

The idea made her smile.

“Uh... If... uh...” He cleared his throat. “I... I can get you a pair of Herm’s sweats. He’s smaller than Vid and I, so you can at least pull them tight and have them not fall off.”

Something inside her felt weird about wearing Herm’s pants. But she didn’t mind the idea of wearing Tyr’s. Even if they would dwarf her.

“No, thanks. I’ll stick with my leggings.”

“Well, I can at least wash them for you.”

She thought of Tyr holding her leggings and underwear. Him putting them in the washer and then the dryer...

What the hell is wrong with you? Why are you thinking of those things? Get it together, Celeste!

“Thank you.”

He walked to the shower and turned on the water. “Let me help you unwrap your arm. Then you can get your clothes off and drop them by the door. I’ll grab them and wash them.”

She nodded. He unknotted the sling and pulled it over her head before unwrapping her arm.

Blood flooded her limb. She looked down at it. The swelling lessened, but it was still discolored. She tried to move it a little.

Nope! Nope! Nope! Not doing that again.

Tyr set towels on the counter and stopped briefly. She thought he might say something, but he strode from the bathroom.

Celeste didn’t breathe for a moment, and she took in her reflection as the sensation of his calloused hand brushing the hair over her shoulder played again and again in her mind. She shivered and shook her head as she registered the state of her hair. She might have to shave her head; her tangles were so bad. Pity. She liked her hair.

She hooked the thumb of her healed hand into her leggings and tried to push them down. They didn’t budge. Damned shaper leggings hugged her too well. She blew out a breath and tried using both hands but immediately cried out and stopped.

She took several deep breaths. She had two options. Shower in leggings or ask for help.

Peachy. Just peachy.

She hated wet clothing sticking to her skin... but did she hate it more than having to ask Tyr to undress her? She sighed. Could her mortification for being a damsel in distress get any greater? She truly doubted it.

Tyr waited outside the door for Celeste to tell him her clothes were ready to be washed. He'd berated himself for a solid two minutes about his stupidity in calling her beautiful. Not because she wasn't, Hel knew she was, but because he'd said it out loud.

Her beauty, even with her remaining injuries, went beyond evident. Gorgeous, almond-shaped blue eyes. Skin like the fairy tale Snow White, and long, thick dark hair. Her healed lips were not quite as swollen as he'd first thought. They were just naturally plump and red. And her cheekbones were also not as he first thought. They were high and prominent, giving her face a perfect heart shape.

"Tyr?"

His name pulled him from his thoughts. He punched in the code and poked his head inside, but her clothes were nowhere to be seen. He took several steps inside and peeked into the bathroom to find her standing where he'd left her.

"What's wrong?" He moved closer.

She rolled her eyes and scrunched up her face for a moment.

"I... I can't get my pants off."

A surge of desire rushed through him. Oh, Hels no! Knock that shit off!

“You... you need help?”

She gazed at the ceiling. “I am wearing shaper leggings, and the waistband is too strong for me to get off without two hands.”

What the Hel did she need shapewear for? She was perfectly shaped already. Wait... Tyr blinked several times. She wanted him to undress her. To take her pants off her?

No. Nope. Not doing it. He shouldn't... But he really freaking wanted to. Which was the exact reason he couldn't.

She lowered her gaze, and they stared at each other awkwardly through the mirror.

“If you won't, someone else will need to help me. Perhaps your friend Hermódr?—”

Tyr didn't let her finish the sentence. He moved in front of her so fast she took a step backward and bumped into the vanity. He struggled to keep visions of eviscerating Herm from his mind.

“I will do it,” he said too forcefully.

Something flickered in her eyes. Was it triumph? No, it couldn't be.

He closed his eyes and knelt in front of her.

I can do this. I can do this.

When he opened his eyes again, his gaze lined up with her breasts.

Aphrodite, Oshun, Parvati, Freya, and all the other goddesses of love above, couldn't he catch a break? He did not need those beautiful, pale, round globes staring at him,

barely covered by her sports bra.

He moved his gaze downward to her slender waist and let his gaze settle on her belly button. She'd pierced it, and a small round diamond stuck out the top. It took everything he had to keep from leaning in and kissing the soft-looking flesh.

Get her pants off. Get them off and get out. That was the mission. That was his job. He could do it despite his rock hardness pressing against his sweats.

He swallowed hard and tugged on her leggings. They didn't budge. He tugged again. Again, they didn't budge. He inspected the waistband. It had to be at least four inches wide and hugged her like a glove. But what the heck was she trying to keep in place?

I give up. I just give up. My life is over. I just need to admit it. Herm and Vid were right. It's been too long since I've bedded a woman.

"As I mentioned, they are shaper leggings. You have to scoop your hands inside the waistband and push them down. Their job is to not budge."

Tyr looked up at her. She had to be joking, right? "So... you want me to slide my hands inside your leggings and push them down?"

She bit her lip before nodding.

Tyr swallowed as his pants tightened further. He chastised himself for his body's reaction. Now was not the time. Not the time at all. But he couldn't help it. A beautiful woman had asked him to put his hands on her bare skin. Not any woman. This woman. This gorgeous, strong, strange woman. How else could he react?

No! She's Sy's daughter. He needed to stop thinking of her as a woman and remember he'd promised his friend he'd keep her safe.

Tyr slid his fingers inside the waistband of her leggings and worked his palms inside as well. His erection kicked painfully against his waistband as he pushed the leggings downward. Why a woman as beautiful as Celeste with the most perfect curves both sinner and saint gave her needed shapewear was beyond him.

He skimmed his hands down the outsides of her thighs, and she steadied herself by placing one hand on his shoulder as he tugged them off. He tried not to notice the pink satin panties that blocked his view, but he couldn't help it. He bit the inside of his cheek as his thoughts turned to spreading her thighs and licking every inch of her.

Tyr stood so fast he almost fell over as he backed away. What the hell was wrong with him? She was injured. More than injured. Even her legs were covered in welts. Sure, he'd bedded women after fights before when he was injured, but that was different. He was the God of War. Injury was part of his life.

"I'll... I'll take your pants to be cleaned and be back later to bring you some food." He grabbed up her pants after she stepped out of them and tore through his room for the door.

"Tyr?"

He closed his eyes. By all that was holy, why couldn't she let him leave?

"I... I..." She blew out a breath. "I can't get my bra off."

Oh, sweet Frigg, Freya, and Hel. What was she trying to do to him? A man could only keep his parts in check for so long before they burst. And she skirted that line with every word that fell from her mind.

He willed his erection to deflate. He begged it to subside. But nothing happened. Finally, he took his hand holding her leggings and used it to cover himself as he

turned to face her. Her expression gave nothing away as she turned away from him, exposing her back.

Tyr stared at her shapely, round rear, barely covered by a strip of fabric as wide as three fingers. Even bruised and welted, her legs were strong and muscular.

In that moment, he fought against a rise of lust inside him that had nothing to do with wanting to bathe in someone's blood. He needed to get out, had to get out—if he didn't, he'd surely give Sy a reason to want him dead as much as the guy who'd hurt her.

Tyr stepped up behind her, flicked his knife out of his boot, and sliced through the fabric in less than a second. Then he raced from the room before she asked him to do anything else. If she called him again, he wouldn't be able to hold himself back a third time despite his desire not to either hurt or scare her.

He strode down the hallway and banged on the first door he came to. Vidar pulled it open and spotted the leggings in Tyr's hand.

"I need your shower."

Vid nodded and moved into the hallway as Tyr stepped into his room and tossed her leggings to Vid.

"Washer," was all he got out. The door wasn't even closed before Tyr tore off his clothes and dropped them on the floor. He ran to the shower and turned it as cold as possible before jumping under and allowing the water to do to his body what he was unable to do himself. Freeze his dick into submission.

CHAPTER 7

For the next forty-eight hours, Celeste didn't see Tyr, though she felt him close by. He'd left her leggings freshly laundered outside the door later that night, as well as some food, but she hadn't seen him. It didn't surprise her. His arousal had been more than evident when he'd removed the leggings, and she assumed he thought she'd been playing some sort of game with him. But she was smart enough to know women didn't play with an immortal like the Norse God of War. Not if they wanted to live. So that night, after trying to reach her dad, she'd fallen into a deep sleep remembering the touch of Tyr's strong hands on her skin.

At some point, he'd come in, opened the windows, and let Yegret out. Celeste wasn't sure how he'd known when she slept. She wondered if perhaps he had cameras in the room. It wouldn't surprise her... No. She decided he wouldn't do that. Everywhere else on the estate, yes, but not the bedrooms or the bathrooms. That wasn't Tyr.

By day four, the majority of her injuries had healed, but mentally, she'd begun to go downhill. Memories of Anton locking her first in her bedroom and eventually moving her to his closet made her skin prickle, and she broke into a light sweat.

She reached her breaking point. She needed to get out. Out of the room and out of the house before she lost it. The door opened as she approached, and she stepped into the hallway.

Men's voices floated upstairs, but she couldn't make out what they said until she tiptoed to the edge of the glass landing.

“So, you took care of it?” asked Tyr.

“Would I be back here if I hadn’t?” said Vid.

“I just want to make sure. It’s been a long time since you’ve had to get your hands dirty on a job.”

Vid snorted. “Too long. I’m not sure why you talked me into letting Fenrir do that stuff. That’s the fun stuff. The vengeance part. Making them promise to leave someone alone. Or making them pay for what they’ve done. I like it a hell of a lot better than doing surveillance.”

“I like surveillance,” said Herm.

“Because all you do is play games on your phone,” said Vid. “I’m the one who does the actual watching.”

“That’s not true,” Herm protested. “Who do you think does all the watching while you snore away in the passenger seat?”

“No one,” said Vid. “I don’t snore.”

“Enough,” said Tyr. “I’ll contact the client and inform her the man won’t be harassing her anymore.”

“That, and she’ll be getting reassigned to a new partner in the firm, receiving a sizable settlement and a raise,” said Vid.

“Perfect,” said Tyr.

The scent of fresh coffee filled Celeste’s nostrils, making her stomach groan. She

would love a mochaccino. She wondered if they had a specialized coffee machine that could make one. They had state-of-the-art everything else.

Celeste walked across the landing to the top of the stairs and paused before heading downward. Herm poured Tyr a cup of coffee. He spotted her first, and his eyes widened. She gave him a small wave.

Herm blinked and poured hot coffee all over Tyr's hand.

"Shit, Herm, what are you doing?" Tyr followed Herm's gaze, and his eyes widened at the sight of her.

"Hi," she said.

Vid turned and spit his coffee all over the counter.

"Hi, Celeste," said Herm. "Looking better. Much, much better."

Tyr set down his mug, jumped the massive island, and stripped off his t-shirt as he raced to where she stood.

He wrapped his shirt around her bare torso and pulled her against his chest. "What are you doing?"

She looked up at him. "I'm sick of being in your room, and since you've taken to becoming room service only, I figured I'd come down to talk to an actual human... well... immortal, I guess."

Tyr stared down at her. "But... you don't have clothes on."

"I have my underwear, and my boobs are covered by the sling. You only brought my

leggings and I can't get them on or off by myself. Remember, you helped me?"

Herm choked and coughed. Tyr glared over his shoulder, and she caught a glimpse of Vid whacking Herm on the back harder than necessary.

"Anyway, you never brought me anything else, and I figured you wouldn't be too keen on me looking through your closet, so here I am in the only thing I have."

Tyr shook his head and stared at the ceiling before speaking in a language she didn't understand.

Herm burst out laughing, and Vid grabbed Herm by the arm, dragging him toward the stairs to the basement.

Tyr turned her as they got close so they couldn't see her.

Herm pointed at Celeste. "I like her. I like her a lot."

"Let's go," said Vid.

"I can't. You know how Tyr gets if we leave a mess in the kitchen. He'll kill us if we leave coffee everywhere."

Vid yanked on his arm. "He'll kill you if you don't."

Hermódr and Vidar disappeared down the stairs, and Tyr turned back to her.

"You shouldn't be down here."

"What did you say?" she asked. "In another language. What did you say?"

He blinked several times. “I’d rather not repeat it.”

“Well, if you don’t want me to read your thoughts, then I ask you not to speak in a language I can’t understand.”

He worked his jaw for a minute and then licked his lips. “Fair enough. Now, what are you doing down here?”

“I... I... uh...” Her heart pounded as he wrapped her tighter in his arms. Again, security washed over her. “The guy who hurt me kept me locked up. I needed to get out.”

Tyr nodded. “I didn’t know. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean you couldn’t come down, I just meant?—”

“You don’t want me down here without clothes on?”

“Well, yes. It’s not that I don’t think a woman has the right to walk around in what she wants or doesn’t want. It’s just Herm, he’s...”

It took a minute, but then Celeste smiled. “It flusters you that I’m almost naked, doesn’t it?”

“I’ve seen lots of naked women. I don’t mean lots. I mean...” Tyr groaned and shook his head. He stayed silent for a moment and then looked her directly in the eyes. “Yes. It flusters me and frustrates me. You’re Sy’s daughter, and he asked me to protect you, not...”

He didn’t need to finish. So that was the problem. Tyr was attracted to her, but he was her father’s friend. A thousand-year-old god. Of course, he didn’t want her half-naked. To him, she was his friend’s daughter. No wonder he’d run from the room

after taking off her leggings.

“I’m sorry,” she said softly. “I didn’t mean to... fluster you.”

His thick eyebrows pushed together.

“Have you heard from him, by the way? My father. I haven’t heard from him at all.”

“Not yet. But it could take some time. Be patient.”

She nodded, and he loosened his grip on her. “Let’s get you dressed.”

He let go of her and headed toward the stairs.

She turned to the kitchen, and her eyes widened. “Oh my gosh, you have an espresso machine.”

Without a thought, her feet moved her toward the ultimate caffeine administering machine.

Tyr raced up to her. His heavily muscled arms wrapped around her and his bare torso pressed into her back, warming her. His chest hair tickled her neck.

“Celeste, you need to put something on,” he insisted.

“But... coffee!”

He grabbed the t-shirt he’d wrapped around her and pulled it over her head. He reached inside, grabbed her non-injured arm, and pulled it through the armhole.

“What about my other arm?”

“What about it?”

“What if I lose my balance and tip over?”

“I’ll catch you.”

They stared at each other for a moment, and then he grinned.

“What?”

“You’re talking. Like, with your mouth.”

“Believe it or not, I prefer to speak with my mouth.”

“Your face is almost healed as well.”

“The vision in my right eye is still a bit blurry, but at least I don’t look like I went a couple of rounds with Rocky Balboa. Now, about that espresso?”

He ran his hands through his hair and over his face. “Fine. But then you go back upstairs.”

“Why?”

“Because your father asked me to protect you, and that’s what I’m doing.”

“But you said nothing bigger than a fly could get in here without you knowing. So why do I have to stay up in your room? Why can’t I be down here?”

“Because... Because... I feel more comfortable with you up there.”

She scrunched up her eyebrows. “Do you think if I sit in your kitchen, someone is going to try to break past your gates and come get me?”

“Well... no, but...” He opened and closed his mouth several times. “I’m more comfortable with you up there.”

“Yeah, you said that already, but why?”

He stared at her for a long minute and then blew out his breath and rubbed his face.

“You trust Herm and Vid.”

He lowered his hands. “Yes,” he drew out the word.

“Then it’s not them you need to keep me safe from, right?”

“Safe from? No. But... but...”

“But what?”

“But you are still in your underwear. And when a woman who looks the way you do is standing around in only their underwear...”

“Then men should be as respectful as if she’s wearing a muumuu.”

“Of course. That’s not it.”

“Then what is it?”

“You’re in your underwear!” Exasperation rang clear in his voice.

“Then let’s fix that. You get me clothes, and I get to not be a prisoner in your room.”

She wasn’t sure if Tyr would say no again or throw her over his shoulder and take her back upstairs. To her surprise, he did neither.

“Fine. I’ll get you clothes, and then you can move around the main house. Tell me what you want, and your sizes, and I’ll have someone get it for you.”

“I also need underwear, and though I may not be ashamed of my body, I prefer not to have someone else picking out underwear for me unless it’s someone I’m dating.”

“Do you let the men you date pick out your underwear?”

Her cheeks heated. “Maybe. Not that they’ve ever picked something remotely comfortable. Why do guys think underwear that goes up the butt crack is so sexy? Have they ever tried wearing them? I’m pretty sure if men did, they would realize how very unsexy things can be when they aren’t comfortable.”

“Uh... I wouldn’t know.”

“You wouldn’t know because you’ve never bought a woman that kind of underwear, or you wouldn’t know because you’ve never tried them on yourself?”

“Both,” he stammered.

She admired his chiseled chest and hard-packed abs. “I think you might look good in a g-string.” She thought for a moment. “I bet Herm has tried a g-string.”

Tyr opened his mouth and closed it again. “Thank you for an image I will now never get out of my head. There’s a place here in the Underworld where you can get anything you need. I’ll take you after you eat, and I finish my meeting with Herm and

Vid.”

“Okay.”

He turned from her and headed back into the kitchen. As he went, she glimpsed a full back tattoo of an intricate war scene. She followed him into the kitchen to get a better view. He grabbed a cup from the cupboard as she stepped closer to make out the details. The scene had been amazingly done—so intricate that she waited for it to start moving.

He turned and bumped into her, knocking her off balance. He grabbed her healed arm and steadied her.

“Guess you weren’t kidding.”

“About what.”

“That you’d catch me if I started to tip over.”

Tyr pulled his hand away and put the cup under the espresso machine.

She bit her lip. “So, you haven’t heard from my dad?”

Tyr looked at her sideways as he pushed several buttons. “No.”

Celeste’s gut twisted. She let down her barrier and felt for her father.

Nothing.

“We should call him.”

Tyr shook his head and handed her the cup of coffee. “We’ll give it until the end of the week.”

“He should have called to check up on me.”

“I’m sure he will as soon as he is able. Let him do what he needs to first. He’s dealing with a lot right now.”

Celeste took a sip of her coffee. “But what if he needs me? What if he’s in trouble?”

“He would call me for help. Give it two more days. If we don’t hear from him, we’ll call, okay?”

She nodded. She didn’t want to wait, but Tyr might be right. If her father was indeed in the middle of something, she didn’t want to bother him or get him in deeper.

“So, what are you going to make to eat?”

Tyr said nothing for a moment and then yelled, “Vid! Get up here and make us some food!”

CHAPTER 8

Tyr waited inside the door of Metamorphosis as Celeste talked to the woman helping her and picked out several items to wear.

He thumbed through his phone messages to make sure he hadn't missed anything important. An invitation arrived that a family dinner was scheduled for Friday at Odin's place. For a moment, Tyr thought about taking Celeste but pushed the thought away. He would tell them he wouldn't be attending. If Celeste was still with him, he needed to stay with her.

He scanned the rest of his messages and replied to the urgent ones, forwarded three to Herm to take care of, and decided he should send a quick text to Sy. He hadn't wanted to say anything to Celeste, but he was concerned he hadn't heard from her father. He had no idea what Sy planned, but it should have been taken care of within the last five days.

Tyr:

Sy- Just checking in. Everything ok? Celeste is almost healed. Let me know if you need anything.

He sent the text as Celeste joined him, wearing a pale pink t-shirt, dark jeans, and a pair of girly flats with giant bows on them. Around her broken arm, she sported a new sling made of silky floral material. She looked so natural. The outfit suited her perfectly. Score One Million for Metamorphosis. He shoved his phone away and pulled out his wallet, noticing the giant bag in her hand.

“Let me pay for those.”

Celeste shook her head. “She said it’s taken care of.”

Tyr glanced at the woman behind the counter, who nodded to him and smiled. He nodded back and opened the door.

The warm, muggy air made him breathe deeply. He scanned the street, looking at every shop and registering all the people going about their business.

“My dad mentioned the guy who held me lived on Earth, right? Not down here. No one is looking for me down here.” Celeste tried to squeeze around him.

Tyr stepped in her way, blocking her. “Your safety is my responsibility. Please, let me do my job.”

She looked up at him like she wanted to say something. Instead, she nodded. “Okay.”

Tyr turned and placed his hand on the small of her back and walked her to the car. He took the bag from her, opened the door, and put her inside before placing the bag in the trunk and getting in on the driver’s side.

He turned the vehicle over, and the engine roared to life.

“Can we go somewhere else now?”

Tyr looked at her. “Are you hungry?”

She shook her head. “No, it’s just...”

He waited.

She stared down at her arm still in the sling and blew out a breath. “The guy kept me locked up in a closet, and being out makes me feel better.”

Her words sucker-punched him in the kidneys. The man kept her in a closet? His grip tightened on the steering wheel until his knuckles went white. A myriad of swear words made their way through his mind, and then he swallowed hard and blew out a breath.

“Sure. Do you have anything else you need or want to do?”

She thought for a moment. “I don’t know. What’s down here?”

“Everything you had in Midgard, we have down here.”

“I think... Is there somewhere quiet we can go? Somewhere I can relax outside? Being down here has opened something up in me. There’s a connection I can’t explain, but I’d like to maybe explore it a bit somewhere tranquil.”

Tyr grinned. “I know a place.”

Tyr pulled up to an expensive wooden gate with intricate designs carved into it. He turned off the car, climbed out, and then walked over and opened the door for Celeste before helping her out. She studied the gate but said nothing. As they walked across the sidewalk and approached the gate, the sounds of distant tinkling bells filled the air, along with a soft, gurgling waterfall.

Tyr pushed open the gate to a lush garden. The smell of herbs and flowers tickled Tyr’s nose and made him relax reflexively.

“Wow,” said Celeste. “I didn’t think something like this would exist in the Underworld. What is it? A temple?”

“Nah, this is Vali’s place. It’s kind of a yoga retreat meets meditation center, meets holistic medicine and farmers’ market.”

“That’s a lot.”

Tyr chuckled. “So is he.” He led her up the path through the garden to the simple, round, yurt-style building. “Vali decided when he got here that he wanted a place for people to cleanse and heal or get away from the world for a while to find balance. He focuses on the body and the mind with natural medicine, therapy sessions, meditation, and stuff like that.”

“Sounds expensive.”

They walked up the steps to the front door, and light music filtered out the door.

“He doesn’t do it for the money. He does it for the satisfaction of helping those who need it most.”

She nodded but said nothing as they walked through the front door into a circular open room. Shelves lined one wall with different jars of herbs and plants. Across the back wall, a juice bar with fruits and vegetables from all over Midgard stretched out. At the front of the room, a bright blue pond split to either side of the room and around the inside of the building. And in the middle, Vali stood in a ridiculous-looking yoga pose Tyr was sure would break every bone in his spine if he tried it.

Show off.

Several people stood in front of Vali, silently trying to achieve the same pose. Tyr and Celeste watched for several minutes before Vali opened his eyes and caught sight of them. He nodded to the class and dismissed them with a bow.

The class gathered their things and dispersed. Some went through a back door, several to the juice bar, and a couple through a small side door leading to the private rooms.

Vali approached them with a broad smile. His long, shaggy blond hair had been pulled back into a bun, and his goatee neatly trimmed to perfection. He wore a baggy white shirt opened in the middle, showing off several necklaces, and a pair of light-colored linen pants. Tyr kept from laughing at the sight. Vali, the God of Light, traded in his war armor and white sword to become a hippie-dippy love guru. It always amazed Tyr how much his kin had changed since coming to the Underworld. Only he, Vid, and Herm remained mostly unchanged.

Vali stuck out his hand as he approached them. “Tyr. I wasn’t expecting you today... or any day.”

Tyr shook with Vali, who pulled him into a hug. Tyr hugged Vali awkwardly. Another thing that had changed about Vali, he’d become so touchy-feely in the last century.

“Who is your friend?” Vali looked at Celeste.

“This is Celeste. Her father is a friend of mine. I’m looking after her while he is away.”

Vali bowed and stuck out his hand. Celeste went to shake it, and Vali clasped her hand in both of his. His smile faded for a moment but then returned.

“Celeste, it is a pleasure to meet you.” He kissed the back of her hand before she pulled away.

For some reason, the gesture made anger surge inside Tyr, and he fought the urge to

punch Vali's mouth for touching her skin.

"And you," Celeste replied.

Vali studied her, and then smiled and turned to Tyr.

"So, what can I do for you today, Cousin?"

"Celeste wanted somewhere outdoors and peaceful where she can gather her thoughts for a bit. I thought of no better place. Do you have any of your outdoor suites available?"

Vali nodded. "I'm booked, but you are welcome to use mine if that works for you."

"Thank you."

Vali held up a finger for them to wait. He jogged to the wall of jars and removed several of them. He took out a bit of each and ground them together with a mortar and pestle before putting them into a small linen bag.

He hurried back over and handed them to Celeste. "These herbs are for healing. But they are also for soothing the mind. I'll have some hot water prepared and sent out so you can make tea."

Celeste took the herbs and smiled. "Thank you. That is very kind."

Vali turned to Tyr. "Feel free to browse the fresh fruits and vegetables for anything you two might want. I made goat cheese this morning as well. There are three different varieties. Help yourself."

Tyr nodded. "Thanks."

“There are also extra clothes in my closet if you both would like to get into something less restrictive and lighter.”

Tyr nodded.

A woman with deep purple skin and white, glassy eyes called to Vali from across the room, and he turned toward the juice bar and nodded.

“Stay as long as the two of you would like. I’m happy to sleep in the garden if you would like to use my room.”

“That won’t be necessary. We will be heading back to my place before dark.”

Vali nodded. “Let me know if you need anything else.”

Tyr led Celeste across the room and out the back door.

Celeste walked around the room in awe as Tyr removed his jacket and threw it onto a soft, creamy-colored bed. It was hard to tell the difference between the outside and the inside. Only a wooden doorway separated the spaces.

The entire room was made out of a grove of tall trees. Evergreens, maples, and oaks lined the walls of the circular room. A spongy moss with tiny purple flowers covered the floor. But outside the room, the moss morphed into long, thick blades of grass.

The ceiling was made of tightly woven tree branches. Yet somehow, the sun filtered through, lighting the room with a soft glow.

Every piece of furniture was made from natural wood and stone. It made her feel like she’d gone back thousands of years to a time when people lived naturally off the land.

On impulse, she slipped off her shoes and let her feet sink into the moss. A surge of peace washed through her, and she smiled. She wanted to strip off all her clothes and lie naked on the ground.

“I love it.”

Tyr watched her with interest, and her cheeks flushed at having wished to be naked.

“I thought you would,” he said.

A small rap on the door pulled their attention, and Tyr crossed to it and took a tray with a pot and two cups from the woman on the other side.

“Thank you.”

She gave a slight bow with her palms together. “Namaste.”

Tyr returned her bow and closed the door.

Celeste sniffed the small satchel of herbs Vali had given to her.

“Would you like to take tea here or outside?”

She shrugged. “Is there much difference?”

He motioned with his head for her to follow him as he walked out the door.

She sucked in a breath as she exited the room. Tall trees also surrounded them outside, but they didn’t cover the sky. On the far end, a waterfall trickled down into a pool big enough to swim in. The sounds of birds chirped and sang in the trees. Squirrels scurried across tree branches. And she swore an actual deer ducked behind a

rock.

“I feel like I’m in a fairytale,” she mused.

Tyr snorted. “It does feel a bit like that, doesn’t it?” He walked to a table and set the tray on it. Celeste sat in one of the chairs, and he sat across from her. The chair groaned under his weight, and she was once again reminded of his immense size.

He held out his hand, and she gave him the herbs. He opened the teapot and set the linen bag inside before closing it again.

“Are there many areas like this in the Underworld?”

Tyr shrugged. “I don’t know. But my bet is there aren’t.”

“Did Vali create this place?”

“I’m sure he got some help, but yes.”

“From who?”

“Plenty of people in the Underworld have magic and are willing to use it for profit.”

Celeste wanted to ask him, like who, but she didn’t want to sound like a silly child asking—why? Why? Why?

Celeste closed her eyes and breathed in deeply.

“My dad took me camping once in the redwood forest near San Francisco, I think. Just him and me for a whole week. I’d never been so happy before or since. We camped and talked, hiked and swam, and ate s’mores over a fire. It was amazing and

so peaceful.”

“How old were you?”

She opened her eyes. “Ten.” Her smile fell as she remembered what happened as soon as they’d gone home. “When we got back, my mother was in one of her ‘moods’, as my father called them. She and Papa got into a fight, and she kicked him out. Literally, kicked him out the door and put some kind of blessing on the house so he couldn’t enter again because he was a demon.”

Tyr’s chest squeezed. “I’m sorry.”

“Me too. My dad’s been the only stable thing in my life. After that, my mother got worse and worse until I ended up as payment for one of her debts, and then here.”

“Wait.” Tyr held up his gloved hand. “You got beaten up as payment for one of your mother’s debts?”

“Yes and no. My mother owed a guy a lot of money from gambling. He, in turn, told his boss. They broke in about three weeks ago and dragged her out of bed and into the front room. They threatened to kill her if she didn’t come up with the money that day. She said she had something more precious than money. She told them I could read minds. The boss didn’t believe her at first, but then they hauled me out as well. He told me if I didn’t read his thoughts, they would kill my mother.”

“So, you did it.”

“I’ll be honest, there was a moment of indecision on my part. Not because Papa always told me not to use my abilities unless I had to and never to show them to humans. But also, because I was sick of my mother.” She sighed. “In the end, I couldn’t let them kill her. She’s my mother, after all.”

“So he took you? The boss?”

She nodded. “Said I was the prettiest songbird he’d ever seen, and I was going to be his forever.”

“What did your mother do?”

“Nothing. He promised that as long as I stayed, she’d have as many drugs and gamble all she wanted.”

Tyr’s hand slammed on the table, making it shake, and Celeste flinched.

“I’m sorry.” He reached across the table and squeezed her hand. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to frighten you.”

“You didn’t scare me; it’s an involuntary reflex, I guess. I used to not be afraid of anything. It makes me so angry how my body reacts like that now. I want it to stop, but...”

“So, he took you and made you use your abilities?”

Celeste looked at her hands. “He tried. At first, he was nice, well, nice-ish. He took me to a fancy house and gave me expensive clothes and jewelry, shoes, and bags and said as long as I stayed with him and helped him, he’d give me whatever I wanted. That didn’t last, though. A couple of days later, he needed my help and took me down to the basement of his mansion. The man tied to a chair was a bloody mess. I expected him to die right while I watched...” She trailed off.

Her eyes took on a faraway expression. He wanted to ask more, but when it came to trauma, you had to let the victim speak in their own time.

“He told me it was time to do my job,” she whispered. “I needed to determine whether or not the man had been stealing from him. So, I delved into the man’s mind, and yes, he had stolen from his boss. But he had done it to pay the hospital bill for his little girl.”

She took a shuddered breath.

“What did you do?” Tyr asked quietly.

“I lied. I told him the man wasn’t stealing. I told him it had been someone else. That was the first time he hit me. He said he had proof the man had stolen from him, and I was covering for him. That night, I slept chained in a closet in the boss’s bedroom above his strip club. It was... awful, to say the least, and not because of the physical abuse, either. He made me watch... other things. After that, I wouldn’t do it. I wouldn’t be the reason he hurt people. And every time he took me to read someone, I stayed silent, and he would beat me. Later, he would apologize and bring me more gifts. Flowers, food, jewelry. Even a car. When it didn’t work, he tried to appeal to me... sexually. He...”

Tyr’s grip cracked the corner of the wooden table.

Celeste’s gaze traveled to where his metal hand gripped the wood and stayed there for a long minute.

Finally, her gaze connected with his. “He told me if I didn’t do what he wanted, I was no use to him, and he would kill both my mother and me. That’s when he used the bat. I thought he would kill me that night.”

“What stopped him?”

“Someone got stabbed in his club, and he left. When his guard put me back in the

closet, I knew when he got back, I would die. So, I did the thing I'd only done once before in my life. The one thing my father told me I must never do unless it was the worst of emergencies. I opened up my mind to the entire world and called for him. I didn't think he would hear me because I'd been calling for days with no response, but that time, it worked. Something about my kind of psychic power being amplified by the mix of his blood and my mother's and my ability being able to break through the barrier that separates the realms or something. I don't know."

"And he came for you."

"Yup. He set a fire in the dumpster outside. When everyone raced outside, he broke in, got me out, and brought me down here. Man, it's only been less than a week, but it feels like it's been a lifetime since that happened." Celeste breathed in deeply and smiled. "Is the tea ready?"

Tyr poured them both a bright pink cup of tea. Celeste brought it to her lips, blew on it, and sipped. It tasted of berries and fruit with a hint of cinnamon and something else she couldn't place. As it slid down her throat, it warmed her from the inside out and made her smile despite having just told Tyr about her ordeal.

It surprised her that she'd not shed one tear while telling him. Why was that? She thought for a moment and realized it was because she wasn't sad. Wasn't hurt. She was pissed. Super pissed. Mega pissed at what had been done to her. Now that her injuries had mostly healed, she only wanted one thing— revenge.

Revenge on Anton. Revenge on Amezodile. Revenge on her mother.

Tyr watched her with a heated gaze. She didn't doubt that if she told him where Anton lived, he would leave that instant to let Anton endure his wrath. Problem was, he would never let her help. Just like her dad. And no matter what her father did to Anton, Celeste would get her own revenge in the end.

“I’ve never had tea before. I like it.” She took another sip.

Tyr nodded and sipped his own tea, but his gaze never left her face.

“So, I told you my story. You tell me yours.”

His eyebrows smashed together. “What story?”

“The story of how you misplaced your hand.”

Page 9

Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 8:37 am

CHAPTER 9

Tyr flexed his hand. “I thought everyone knew the story of how I lost my hand. I mean, it’s in all the mythology books and stuff.”

“But that is rarely the real story, isn’t it?”

Tyr’s gut clenched. “It is in this case. I betrayed Fenrir, who had been like a brother and son to me.”

“Why?”

“Because Odin wished it.”

She sipped her tea. “Are you bound to obey Odin no matter what?”

“Not anymore, but back then, yes.” Tyr’s gut clenched. The betrayal of Fenrir hit him more than all the people he’d killed in his lifetime. Of everything he’d done, that was the one that hurt him most.

“So, Fenrir tore your hand off.”

Tyr scratched his head. “It’s a bit more complicated than that, but yes. I betrayed him, and, in the end, I paid for it with my hand. I would gladly give more if it would earn his forgiveness.”

“He hasn’t forgiven you? But that was so long ago.”

Tyr flexed his fingers. “Some betrayals run so deep that no matter how much time passes, it will still be there in some way. I was closer to Fenrir than I was to even Vid and Herm back then. His parents abandoned him. The other gods shunned him. For a long time, it was him and I together. But when the head of the gods tells you to do something, you do it.”

“Would you still do it today?”

“Absolutely not. I would gladly take his place. If I could do it again, I would have protected him. Even if it meant my death.”

“Have you told him that?”

Her eyes were sincere and compassionate, nothing more. He’d never talked to anyone about what had happened with Fenrir before.

“I haven’t.”

She shrugged. “Maybe you should.”

His gut clenched. “What if it doesn’t change anything between us?”

“What if it does? Whether it does or doesn’t is on him. If you tell him how you feel, and that’s probably not easy for the God of War, but if you tell him and he doesn’t accept it, that’s on him. But wouldn’t it at least be better to know? Better to let the burden go after so long?”

Tyr stared at her. He couldn’t answer. Would it be better? What would it be like to finally be unburdened? Who would he be?

“Tell me something about yourself.”

She chuckled and sipped her tea. “Like what?”

“Anything. What did you like growing up?”

“Normal stuff. Music. Books. Art. TV.”

“What kind of books?”

“Anything. I read lots of webtoons online.”

“What are webtoons?”

“Cartoon stories online that people post daily or weekly. I devoured those.”

“What else?”

“Many websites have free stories you can read. Some are terrible, obviously, but some are amazing. I read romance, fantasy, young adult, basically anything I could find. You have no idea how long hours can be when you are stuck in a room with no one to talk to all day for years on end.” She looked at him strangely for a minute. “Or maybe you do. You’ve been alive long enough to witness the fall of Rome, the Renaissance, the Hindenburg, and every other major event in history.”

He turned his teacup around. “A lot of those things I only know about because of reading about them or watching movies. Valhalla is far removed from Midgard. And Midgard isn’t the only realm we were in charge of. I knew about the wars firsthand, but not much else. Honestly, I wish I’d paid more attention to some of those time periods. The Renaissance sounded so fun. And I would have loved to meet da Vinci, the Wright Brothers, Einstein, Tesla, and even Edison, though he stole most of Tesla’s work. They were all so world-changing. And the things they invented were amazing.”

Her mouth fell open.

“What?”

“You just... If you could meet people, those aren’t the ones I would have assumed you’d want to meet.”

“Who did you think I’d want to meet?”

“Napoleon. Julius Caesar. Xerxes. Genghis Khan. Great generals and warlords.”

“I knew all of them, of course. But they weren’t anyone I would want to hang out with. Believe it or not, not everything about me has to do with war. I am fascinated with how Midgardians invented things without divine intervention. Movies, television, and computers you can hold in your hand.”

Her cheek tinged a beautiful shade of rose. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to imply?—”

He held up his hand. “It’s okay. Most people expect that of me. And in a lot of ways, I have many things in common with those men, but that’s not who I want to be, it’s who I was born. I didn’t ask to be the God of War. I didn’t choose to be the God of War. I just am the God of War.”

She reached across the table and squeezed his metal hand. “I’m so sorry, Tyr. I can’t imagine what that must be like.”

Again, only compassion and understanding shone in her eyes. Not pity. It made his heart squeeze. She was so beautiful. So amazing. So... perfect.

“So, what about you? Tell me something about you.”

“Like what?”

She thought for a minute. “Do you like movies?”

He chuckled. “I love movies. Why do you think I put the theater in the basement? I have over five thousand movies.”

“Wow. That’s so cool.”

He shrugged. “I have to admit it is a guilty pleasure I indulge in at least once a week or when I have time off. I have even gone up to some of those movie premier things in Hollywood.”

Her eyes widened. “Like walking the red carpet and seeing movie stars and stuff?”

“I have clients who owe me favors. They get me into the movies first. I don’t do the whole dress-up and take-my-picture thing, though. Photographs can be... tricky for immortals. Especially with the internet. Take one photo, and it lasts forever. Especially at a place like a movie premier.”

She nodded. “Tell me your favorite movie.”

He cocked an eyebrow at her and smiled. “Pass. Different question.”

“What? Why?”

Because it’s embarrassing .

“Now I must know. And don’t lie. Tell me your favorite. I promise not to laugh.”

No. He couldn’t. No way. She would laugh despite what she said. And yet...

“Tangled.”

Her eyebrows drew together, and her lips quirked up. “Tangled. As in, the Disney movie about Rapunzel?”

“Yeah, it may sound stupid, but that movie deserved a lot more credit than it got. A girl fighting for her freedom and following her dreams no matter what stood in her way? She was sweet and cute but fierce and loyal. She helped people and loved despite what she’d been through. She reminds me a lot of you.”

Shit! Had he just said that?

Celeste’s eyes rounded, and she pushed her lips together.

“I like most of Walt Disney’s movies. Especially the older ones Walt did himself,” he said, trying to break the tension. “They make it seem like anything is possible and that love always wins in the end.”

She peeked up at him through her thick, dark lashes. “They do. I think that’s why I had such a hard time with them when I was little. They gave me such a sense of hope. Hope I never thought would be fulfilled in my lifetime.”

He squeezed her hand hard. “But you’re out now. You can follow your dreams. Do what you want to do. You don’t have to go back to that.”

She nodded.

“What would you do? If you could do anything, what would it be?”

She shrugged. “Books were my escape and my lifeline. I think if I was going to do anything, it would be to write books so I could maybe help others do the same. Or

make my own comic books or something. Maybe I'll write one about you. Tyr, God of War by day, Disneyphile by night."

They both laughed, and her gaze traveled to where their hands joined.

"Can I... feel it? Not your glove, but your actual hand?"

Tyr looked at her. No one had ever wanted to see his hand before except to critique it or ask a thousand questions. But something about her made him believe she wouldn't be the same as the others.

Tyr slid the leather glove off and held his hand out for her to inspect.

She hesitated for a moment and then slid her fingers over the top of his.

"Can you feel that?"

A tingle danced through Tyr's body at her soft touch, and his pants tightened around his burgeoning arousal.

He coughed and adjusted in his seat. "Uh... yeah."

"But it's made fully of metal?"

He nodded. A warmth spread through him, comforting him and making him relax.

"That's amazing." She lifted his hand and turned it over, touching his palm with soft light strokes. "Does it have the same sensation as your flesh hand?"

"Not exactly, but it's close."

She took his other hand and placed it palm up on the table. She traced her fingers over both palms, and Tyr's pants tightened further.

“What's the difference in the sensation?”

“I... uh...” Tyr swallowed hard as his body grew warmer, a peaceful sensation flooding him. “I don't know how to explain it.”

She stared at him for a moment. “Can... Can I try something?”

“What?”

“I want you to open your mind up so I can feel what you feel.”

“You can do that?”

She nodded. “I have only done it once. The first time I kissed a guy, I tried it. That was a disaster. But as long as you don't think about another woman while I do it, I can handle it.”

Tyr stared at her for a long moment. The thought of her kissing someone else had him ready to punch something, but the feeling faded as her beautiful, almond-shaped blue eyes stared at him earnestly, sparkling with interest. Her cheeks had flushed a brilliant rosy shade, and the natural hue of her lips had deepened as well.

It was a strange and foreign concept, but the idea intrigued him. “All right.”

He opened his mind, and hers touched his. He couldn't describe the sensation except to say that he no longer felt alone. Like the sensation of someone watching you, but you couldn't see anyone. Not in a creepy way, though. More in a comfortable way.

Her hands pressed down on his, and she swirled circles into his palms. Slowly, a smile spread across her face.

“It is different. Almost like... TV static fuzzing out the sensation in your metal hand. Or like tinnitus where you have a buzzing in your ear and can hear quite as clearly.”

Tyr’s chest squeezed. “Exactly,” he whispered. He’d never been able to describe it before, and yet, she had. How had she done that?

She smiled as she continued to touch him and experience his reaction. Her plump lips curved upward, forcing up the corners of her eyes as well. She was amazing.

When he’d first seen her at the speed dating event, he’d known she was pretty. But he’d never imagined she’d be that gorgeous. Perfection. Perfection made flesh; she put all goddesses to shame.

Tyr blinked and realized her fingers had stopped moving. They stared at each other, and he caught the hitch in her breathing.

She’d heard his thoughts.

Tyr locked down his mind, and she drew her hands away.

“I... I’m sorry,” she stammered. “I didn’t mean to. It’s just...”

Embarrassment flooded Tyr. He was such an idiot. How did he let that happen?

She sipped her tea. “You are super lucky to have Vid and Herm and so much family around, even the ones you don’t like so much.”

“Haven’t you ever met your extended family?” Tyr took her lead and changed the

subject.

“I never met my dad’s family. He never talked about them. My mother’s family... Well, they kind of disowned her, I guess. I met her mother once. I guess met is a strong word. I saw her once. She came to talk to my mother. My mother told me to stay in the house, but I was so excited to meet my grandma that I peeked out the door. That day, my mother locked me in the playroom and put wards all over the walls. I want to think she did it because she loved me... I’m she did it for herself.”

“Why did your mother invite your grandmother to visit if she didn’t want her there?”

Celeste shook her head. “I think it was an accident. Angels can send out a signal when they are in distress. It’s like a beacon for other angels. I think my mother did it because she was high. I don’t think she meant to.”

“Did your grandmother ever come back?”

“I’m pretty sure my mother did something to the house, so she couldn’t be traced. Kind of like she did something to it to keep my dad out.”

Tyr wanted to comfort her, but he didn’t know what to do.

“We Norse gods all get together once a month for a family dinner. You can join me next time if you want. Uh... if you’re still here, I mean.”

“I’d like that.” She gazed at the waterfall. “Do you think Vali would mind if I put my feet in the water?”

“Not at all.”

Celeste smiled and stood from the table. She slipped off her little shoes with the bows

on them and walked barefoot to the edge of the small pond.

She sat down on the mossy bank and rolled up her pants before dipping her toes in. Her audible sigh struck Tyr right in the heart. He congratulated himself on bringing her to Vali's. He'd been sure it was perfect for her, and he was glad he'd been right.

She lay back on the bank and stretched her arms over her head.

Tyr watched the rise and fall of her chest. She deserved a place like Vali's after everything she'd been through in her life. She deserved someone like Vali. Not the God of War who couldn't even control his emotions.

But even as he thought it, his rage bubbled to the surface.

"Are you going to join me or stare at me?" She turned her face toward the sky.

Tyr's cheeks flamed. Damn. Why couldn't he take his eyes off her?

For the first time, a thought stirred inside him, sending a flush over his skin. No. It couldn't be... She couldn't be... Could she?

"Well?" she called.

Tyr told himself to stay put, stay in the chair until she was ready to go, then take her and keep her safe until the danger had passed. When that time came, he should bring her back to Vali and let him take care of her. She deserved someone like Vali. She needed someone like Vali—someone gentle, patient, and soothing.

What could the God of War offer a woman who'd already been through a life of hell?

"Do I need to come and get you?" She flipped on her belly and looked at him, finally.

He should leave. He should really leave.

Instead, he gave in and joined her on the bank of the pond.

“Take off those huge boots and let your feet breathe.”

Tyr pulled his knees into his chest. “I’m fine right here.”

She giggled. “Come on, Tyr. Relax for once.” She rolled to her knees and scooted in front of him. She tried to pry his folded hands from his knees, but he didn’t budge.

Instead of giving in, she threw him a wry smile and yanked on one of his bootlaces.

“Hey.” Tyr unfolded his hands and went to retie his laces but she grabbed a lace on his other boot and pulled it as well.

“Celeste.”

“What?” she asked innocently.

“I don’t want to put my feet in the water.” Tyr tied his boot and moved on to the second, but as soon as he did, she pulled the laces on the first one again.

“Celeste.”

“Tyr.” She tried to keep her face serious, but a smile quirked the corners of her mouth.

She looked so damn kissable that he wanted nothing more than to lay her on the moss and make love to her. He grabbed her wrist and pulled her toward him. She landed with her body pressed against his, and her eyes widened.

Without thinking, he moved his face inches from hers. She stared at him, her eyes full of desire. Her gaze traveled to his lips. His body and mind collided as every inch of him wanted to kiss her sweet lips. To taste her. To bury himself inside her. Her floral scent swirled around him, making him dizzy and his body hard for her again. Close. So damn close.

He brushed a hair from her eye and looped it around her ear. Then he traced his fingers down her throat and gripped the base of her neck. It took everything he had to hold back. He wanted to kiss her. Needed to kiss her. Needed to feel her lips on his.

“If I’m Rapunzel, then you’re my Flynn Rider,” she whispered.

No way did she just say that to him!

She was so close her warm breath tickled his face, and he tasted the tea she’d drunk.

Tea. The tea!

Tyr pressed his lips together and let go of her neck.

“Did you finish your tea?” he asked huskily.

Her eyebrows drew together, and she blinked several times as if waking from a dream. “Yeah. Didn’t you?”

Tyr released her wrist, and she sat back on her heels, confusion playing over her features. Freaking Vali.

“Nah. Tea has never been my thing.” Which was why Vali had most likely made it extra strong.

Damn, self-proclaimed Love Guru. What the hell was he playing at? And what the hell had he put in the damn tea? As soon as he had a minute, he'd tell his cousin exactly how he felt about being tricked with magical herbs. Maybe with a black eye, possibly two, to get his point across

Tyr scooted back a few inches and went back to tying his laces.

Celeste's eyes clouded, and her playful smile vanished.

She picked at the moss and then looked up at the sky again. "None of this is your thing, is it?"

"Not particularly."

She nodded but didn't catch his eye. "Then why did you bring me here?"

"Because you needed it."

She stayed silent for a minute before saying, "Is peacefulness hard for you?"

He stopped tying his boots.

"I only ask because you are the God of War. So, I would assume this kind of place might be... something you weren't used to."

He double-knotted his laces. "That's one way of putting it."

"Is that why you aren't in Valhalla?"

"Give me a battlefield, blood, and fighting any day. Even after thousands of years, I could go into battle tomorrow and not think twice about what I needed to do. But

places like this..." He gestured around. "I don't know what to do with myself. It's foreign to me."

"I'm sorry, Tyr. I should have realized..." Compassion shone through her eyes, but not pity.

He opened his mouth to say something but stopped. Usually, he would have told her she was right. Peace made him as uneasy as arguing, or violence did to most people. But he hadn't once felt an ounce of unease with her. With her, he wanted to go anywhere and do anything as long as she was with him. Hell, he'd lay in bed surrounded by puppies and butterflies, and he'd be utterly content.

Dammit, if he didn't leave ASAP, he'd kiss her. Tea or no tea. Sy or no Sy. There was only so much a guy could take before he cracked. And her saying that he was her Flynn Rider...

Tyr's phone beeped, and he pulled it from his pocket and read the message.

"Crap. I gotta go."

"Oh." Disappointment laced her voice.

"I forgot. I have plans. Dang it. I think I have enough time to get you back to the estate before I need to head out."

"Where are you going?"

He licked his lips. It was dumb. He should cancel. But he'd promised. And in that moment, he really, really freaking needed to do and think of something other than how much he wanted Celeste.

“I’m going to a concert.”

“Like a rock concert?”

“Yeah... uh... My favorite band is playing tonight. I don’t get to see them often, but I try to at least twice a year. I have a standing date to go.”

She frowned. “A date?” Was that a hint of jealousy in her voice?

“It’s a friend. We always go together. That’s all.”

“A female friend?”

She was jealous. Something about that made Tyr happy.

“No. A guy friend. I don’t have any female friends.”

“Oh.” A slight smile replaced the frown.

“What?”

She shrugged. “You don’t seem the concert type.”

“I’m not. But you’d have to see these guys to understand. They aren’t a regular band.”

“What are they like?”

How did he explain? “If Metallica, Europe, and Scorpion had a baby with a Viking shield maiden.”

She scrunched up her face. “So heavy metal Vikings?”

“Exactly.”

She broke into a broad smile. “Disney movies and heavy metal. You are a conundrum, Lord Tyr. A total, absolute conundrum. Which is why I find you fascinating. What are they called?”

He blinked several times. How did she do that? How did she keep mixing him up into knots and making him lose his train of thought? He never lost his train of thought.

“Who?” he asked.

“The band you are going to.”

“Brothers of Metal.”

She nodded. “A fitting name. Too bad you don’t have another ticket. I would have loved to see them.”

“You would?” He couldn’t keep the incredulity out of his tone.

She chuckled. “They sound awesome.”

“They wrote a song about me,” Tyr blurted. Why had he said that? He sounded like an arrogant prick.

Her eyebrows shot up. “Seriously?”

“Well, they wrote an entire album called Prophecy of Ragnarok. There’s a song about Loki and one about Freya, too. Loki’s kids got an entirely different album, so I’m not

special. Even so, I'm partial to the one they wrote about me."

"Have you met them before?"

He nodded. "Many times."

"Do they know your true identity?"

"I don't think they believed me when I told them."

"Did you, like... show them?"

"Show them what?"

"Your powers or something. Your pocketknife sword thing."

Tyr chuckled. "We weren't in a place for me to show them super strength, super speed, or battle rage."

She nodded. "You could have shown them your hand."

Tyr put his glove back on. "If some guy showed up at your concert, told you he loved your song about the war god Tyr, told you his name was Tyr, and flashed you his missing hand, would you believe him or call the cops?"

"Fair point." She picked at the grass again. "I would love to hear them sometime."

"I wish I could take you, but... it's on Midgard. And your father wanted you to stay down here for your own safety."

She slipped her flats back on. "I've never been to a concert before."

“What?”

“Dad was always gone, and Mother hates music for some reason. Not that she would have ever let me out of the house.”

Tyr’s gut clenched. Damn, if her disappointment wasn’t as beautiful as her happiness. The only difference was this time, he wanted to do whatever it took to make her smile again.

“Do you want to go?” The words tumbled from his mouth before he could stop them.

Her entire face lit up. “Yes.”

Idiot. Why had he asked that? First, he told her about his Disney movie fetish, and now he was asking her to a concert for his favorite band. Next, he’d be taking her to a family meal and introducing her to everyone.

“Do you have another ticket?”

Well, he couldn’t back out now. “I’ll call the band and tell them I have a guest coming.”

“Just call the band.” She laughed and then stopped. “Oh my gosh, you are serious!”

“Any band would be cool with getting a new fan. But honestly, these guys are super chill and super cool. It won’t be a problem.”

She looked down. “Should I change into something else?”

He took in her tight t-shirt, jeans, and arm sling. “Nope, you’re perfect the way you are.”

She jumped to her feet. "Let's get moving." She tapped him on the head and ran for the exit. "Goose!" she yelled over her shoulder.

Goose? What in the world did that mean?

Tyr shook his head and made a mental note to find out what exactly Vali had put into the pink tea.

Tyr kept his hand on Celeste's back and shielded her still-healing arm from the crowd as they moved toward their section of the arena. She shook her head and, a moment later, stumbled and grabbed her head with her free hand.

Tyr picked her up and whisked her to the side wall, out of the way of the throng. He caged her against the cement with his body, trying to block out everyone else from view.

"Breathe," Tyr said. "Focus on me and breathe."

Her wide gaze connected with his like a terrified doe. Tyr slowed his breathing and took her hand in his. She focused on him, her eyes round and fearful. She blinked back tears as he breathed in and out slowly. He placed her palm on his chest, and eventually, she matched his tempo. He rubbed a tender circle into the palm of her hand with his thumb, and after several minutes, she gave a small smile.

"I'm sorry. I was so excited to come I didn't prepare myself for all the people. Usually, I'm able to block them out, but in the week I've been with you, I guess I've kind of gotten used to the quiet of the estate, so I've let my shield slip more and more."

Tyr shook his head. "If peace and quiet is what you need, this is not the place. We should go." He pressed her against him and scanned for the nearest exit.

She squeezed his hand. “No. I want to stay. I’m all right now. I have my barriers in place.”

He looked at her, unsure. Part of him wanted her to stay and experience the show, while the other wanted to get her right back where she belonged—in his room.

She pulled on him. “Please, Tyr. I want to stay.”

When she looked at him with those beautiful eyes, he’d give her whatever she wanted.

He leaned in and kissed the top of her head without thinking. “All right, Fylgja. You win.” He stopped breathing. Fylgja? Had he called her Fylgja?

He was in trouble. So. Much. Trouble.

Celeste held his hand the entire way to their section. When they reached their row, an immense man with a scruffy beard and heavy leather jacket sat waiting, almost taking up two whole seats with his mountainous frame.

Tyr gave a small wave, and the man stood, throwing Tyr a lopsided grin due to the long, deep scar which ran down the left side of his face from when his mother had thrown him as a baby.

“Who is this?”

Tyr shook Hephaestus’ hand. “This is a... uh...friend. Her name is Celeste. She wanted to join us. Celeste, this is Hephaestus.”

Recognition hit Celeste, and she smiled. “The Hephaestus who made your hand?”

Tyr nodded.

“Wow. I am so honored.” Celeste shook Hephaestus’ hand. “Your work is unbelievable.”

Tyr fought the urge to rip her hand out of his friend’s grip.

Hephaestus blushed and rubbed his neck. “Uh... thank you. That’s very kind.”

“No, seriously. I don’t know how you did it, but it’s unbelievable. The fact that he has feeling in it and that the sensations are so near to what actual nerves register is nothing short of magic.”

Hephaestus chuckled. “It would be better if the giant baby would come over and let me make a new one for him. I’ve made a lot of advances since that relic.”

Tyr punched Hephaestus in the shoulder.

Phes smirked. “Awwww. Don’t get all butt hurt. You know I love you more than my asshole brother, Ares, any day. And that isn’t just because he stole the girl I married.”

Tyr felt for Hephaestus. Even after all these centuries, old hatreds died hard. Really hard.

For the first half of the show, Celeste sat mesmerized by the music, and then her mood changed when the band sang Gods of War. She jumped up and danced to the beat. Tyr couldn’t help but smile at the sight of her letting go. Hephaestus jumped next to her, and together, they were like two teenagers at a rave. Tyr laughed.

He had always loved music, but very little of it had spoken to his soul throughout his life the way Brothers of Metal did. From the first time he’d stumbled upon it, it had

just resonated with him somewhere deep. And seeing it do the same thing for Celeste was almost better than the music itself. Almost. He liked that he was able to do that for her. That he was able to help her forget what she'd been through and enjoy herself. Even if it was only for one day.

Herm and Vid had tried to placate him by coming once, but their reactions had been nothing like Celeste's. And those guys liked everything having to do with themselves.

He chuckled, remembering Herm trying to headbang to the music, hitting his head on the cement and knocking himself out. Idiot.

As if she'd heard him laugh, Celeste turned to him, hair wet with perspiration and cheeks flushed. He imagined what she looked like after sex and wished more than anything to see her like that in his bed. Happy. Pink and sated. Sweat slicking her body.

She held her hand out for him to join her, but Tyr shook his head. Dancing was one thing he could not do. She stuck out her bottom lip and tugged on Hephaestus. She whispered something in his ear, and Phes glanced at Tyr and shook his head. He said something to her, and she laughed. Tyr kicked Phes in the leg, and Phes grabbed his thigh.

"Charley horse! Not cool, man!" Hephaestus rubbed his leg and punched Tyr in the thigh.

Celeste dropped into the seat next to Tyr, grabbed his beer, and chugged it. She set the cup down in the holder and made a face.

"That's horrible." She rubbed her neck and massaged her arm.

He quirked an eyebrow. "Are you old enough to drink?"

She rolled her eyes. “I’m the daughter of a demon and an angel. Is there an age limit for beings like us?”

Fair enough.

“Would you like me to get you a different kind of beer?”

She shook her head. “Not if all beer tastes like that.”

“Have you never had alcohol before?”

She shook her head and wiped her tongue with her t-shirt.

For a split second, Tyr wished he was the one licking the taste out of her mouth.

He clenched his fists. He had to stop. He was supposed to be keeping her safe. Nothing more.

Hephaestus laughed. “Let her try some honeyed mead from Frigg’s place. That’s probably more her style.”

Tyr stood.

“Where are you going?” Celeste pushed the hair from her face.

“To get you something else to drink.”

“Like what?”

My tongue. Tyr wanted to punch himself in the face. Repeatedly. “I’ll find something. Do not move from this spot. Got it?”

“And miss one of their songs? I’d rather piss myself.”

Hephaestus smiled at Tyr. “I like her. I like her a lot.”

His friends kept saying that.

“Don’t let her go anywhere,” he said to Hephaestus.

“Yes, Dad.”

Tyr shot Phes a glare. Phes raised an eyebrow and then nodded. His eyes flashed with the realization that Tyr felt more for Celeste than just a mere friend.

Celeste jumped up, dancing again before Tyr had made it to the end of the row. His gut twisted as he climbed the steps, fighting every instinct to drag her along with him.

Tyr walked down the row and up the aisle. He looked back at her, and she smiled and waved. He nodded and continued upward. Her smile fell as her heart pounded in her chest. She wasn’t sure how much longer she could pretend she hadn’t heard what he’d said about her at Vali’s place and what he’d wanted to do to her moments before. Thinking about her in his bed. Wanting to lick the beer from her mouth.

She was damn proud of herself for not tackling him right there. She had tried to push down her growing feelings for him, but she was reaching her breaking point. His strong jaw. His piercing eyes. The rough, calloused hands that had traversed her body too many times in as many days. All of him shouted to her of protection, strength, and raw sex appeal. Her body tingled at the thought of his cool metal hand caressing her flesh. Tempting. Touching. Teasing.

Celeste shook her head. No. She needed to stop. He was... a god. Immortal. Ancient. He’d probably been with hundreds of more experienced women than her. Women

who knew how to treat a man like him. How to please a man like him... The idea soured her stomach.

“Don’t worry,” said Hephaestus. “He likes you, too.”

Celeste turned. “What? No... I wasn’t... I mean...”

Hephaestus hugged her with one arm. “Yes, you were. It’s written all over your face. Believe me. I’ve seen it before. Never aimed at me, but at my brother, Ares, all the time.”

Celeste’s cheeks heated.

“It’s not my place to say, but I’m going to anyway. I’ve never seen Tyr look at a woman the way he looks at you. The way he watches you. However, I also know him enough to know that if anyone is going to make a move, it will have to be you.”

“Why?”

“I’m not sure, to be honest. It’s just how he is. But if you make a move and he reciprocates, you need to be prepared for him to want you for himself and no one else. I’ve known him for a long time. And I’ve never seen him notice a woman more than once. But you... You’re his one. I feel it.”

Celeste turned and looked up the aisle for Tyr, but she couldn’t see him.

She tried to remember the word Tyr had called her earlier. Fyg... Flug... “Do you know what Fyga means?”

“ Fyga? Sorry. Why?”

She shook her head.

The song Yggdrasil started with one of the singers talking about the legend of the tree. As the melody thrummed through her, she couldn't help but think of Tyr and wonder what his strong lips would feel like on hers. She sat for a moment and let down her mental shield, reaching for the band, feeling what they did as they played the music. It was beautiful.

Celeste swayed in her seat and closed her eyes, taking the music in and letting it fill her.

Suddenly, a shockwave rushed through her, jolting her in her seat. She scanned the arena, trying to spot where it came from, but there were too many people.

Her heart pounded. She'd never felt anything like it before, but she was sure of one thing: someone needed help. But she had no idea who or where.

"I didn't know what you'd want, so I got a few different things."

She jerked her head up. Tyr held three kinds of soda, a bottle of water, and two different juices.

He sat, dropping several of the bottles onto the floor. "What's wrong? What happened?"

She reached out again to see who had sent the distress call, but nothing happened.

"I... I'm not sure. One minute, I was feeling the music, and the next, there was this... pulse that ripped through me."

"What do you mean, pulse?" Tyr's voice became urgent.

“Pain. Someone in terrible pain. Calling for help.”

“Do you know who?”

She scanned the arena again. “There are too many people. I can’t tell what it is or where it came from. It may not even be someone not here. They could be anywhere.”

“We should go.”

“No.” She grabbed his arm. “I... I want to finish the show.”

Tyr stared at her, conflicted.

Her throat clenched until she almost couldn’t get out her next words. “You still haven’t heard from my dad, have you?”

Tyr shook his head.

Her gut twisted. Where was he? Why hadn’t he contacted her? She wanted to reach for him. Call him. But if he knew Tyr had brought her back to Earth... She didn’t want to get Tyr in trouble for doing something nice for her.

“We can go.”

“No. I’m sure it’s nothing. It happens sometimes,” she lied.

“That happens sometimes?”

In truth, she’d never had anything like that happen before. The only person she’d ever had real psychic contact with besides her dad was Tyr. “Well... no, not specifically, but I don’t understand all my powers because no one has taught me much. For all I

know, it could have been the equivalent of a prank call or a wrong number. Or the person might be halfway across the world. I have no idea and no way of figuring it out.”

“Still. We should get back. It’s been a long day.”

“But they haven’t played the song about you yet,” she pleaded.

“The lady said she was fine,” said Hephaestus. “Just relax, Brother. Finish the show. Even if something bad is out there, nothing is gonna happen to her with both you and me here.” He opened his leather jacket, and tiny magical weapons lined the inside. Any one of which she was sure would be deadly in Hephaestus’ hand. But none more so than a small, bronze hammer.

Tyr nodded. “Okay.” He picked up his dropped items and held out his bounty to her.

Celeste picked a soda and chugged half the bottle before burping and touching Tyr’s arm.

“Thank you,” she said. “For bringing me and for staying.”

Tyr stared at where she touched his skin. She slid her hand away. And chugged the rest of her soda.

Hephaestus was wrong. Tyr obviously did not want her to make a move.

CHAPTER 10

After the concert, Tyr escorted Celeste backstage, where he introduced her to the band. They were as amazing as their music. Friendly, welcoming, and all-around a bundle of fun. Celeste thanked them a dozen times for giving her a ticket.

“Anything for Tyr,” said the drummer. “I mean, he’s the God of War, right?”

The band laughed, and Celeste peeked up at Tyr to gauge his reaction, but he seemed to take it all in stride.

Hephaestus lounged on a deep couch with several band members, chatting and smiling. The gentle giant looked right at home with them, and she wondered how his relationship with his own family was after so many centuries. She knew the legends, but... how could anyone not like him? He was like a huge teddy bear.

One of the band members led Celeste over to their instruments. It made her wish she’d learned to play something instead of just listening.

“You can still learn,” said Johan.

True. Now that she’d gotten out from under her mother’s thumb, she supposed there would be time for her to do everything she always wanted to.

Celeste’s neck prickled, and she peeked over her shoulder. Tyr leaned against the wall, drinking a beer, his gaze trained on her. A shiver raced over her, and she flushed. How could one man be so damn sexy without trying? No swagger. No

posturing. No fake charm. Just being. Living. Breathing.

His expression gave nothing away, but she swore she caught little flecks of gold in his eyes, and she wanted more than anything to discover what they meant.

After almost half an hour of Celeste gushing over the show, Brothers of Metal gave her a t-shirt and CD and signed both before saying their goodbyes.

Celeste hated to leave, but they had to be exhausted from such a performance. She got exhausted from talking to people. She couldn't imagine ever getting up on a stage and doing what they did for over two hours.

As she, Tyr, and Phes walked through the sparse crowd toward Tyr's car, Celeste couldn't help the buzz that still lingered from the music.

"It was the coolest thing I've ever done. Can I play the CD in the car?"

Tyr smiled. "I don't have a CD player, but I can hook up my phone, and we'll listen that way."

She and Hephaestus chatted as they walked across the parking lot. Celeste hugged her new t-shirt to her chest. She didn't want the night to end. She'd never had such an awesome time. Not only did she get to go with the super-hot Tyr, but she got to meet Hephaestus, who she decided had to be the best Greek god ever, hands down. The mythology books didn't do him an iota of justice.

She smiled at the signed CD, but an icky sensation slithered up her spine, stopping her dead. She sucked in a breath, but she couldn't pinpoint where it came from.

"What's wrong?" Tyr questioned.

She shook her head. “I need to let down my shield.”

Tyr glanced around. “Are you sure? There’s a lot of people here.”

She nodded. “Something... doesn’t feel right.” She had to find out what. She wasn’t trapped in her mother’s house anymore. And her dad wasn’t there to protect her. She had to learn to use her powers, one way or another.

Tyr moved her to his sports car, and he and Hephaestus stood on either side of her. She took a deep breath and let her mind shield drop. Hundreds of voices flooded inward.

“Breathe,” said Tyr. “Breathe. We’re right here.”

She nodded and closed her eyes, letting her mind travel out over the cars and down the row.

“That was an epic concert.”

“Damn, I am so wasted I shouldn’t drive.”

“I wish I’d gotten the number of the cute guy in front of me.”

“I can’t wait to get this little cutie back to my place. I’m gonna tie her up and do all those things I’ve wanted to try. It doesn’t matter what—” The slimy feeling oozed down her spine again, and her stomach roiled as she caught the disgusting thoughts. She bit the inside of her cheek as he cataloged in his mind the steps he needed to go through to abduct the woman.

She grabbed Tyr’s arms.

“What is it?”

“There... There’s a man, but I’m pretty sure he isn’t a man.” She shook her head, trying to pinpoint the thoughts. “The things he’s gonna do to a girl he’s following... I?—”

“Where?” Tyr growled.

She shook her head again.

“Focus, Celeste. Where is he?”

She pushed away all the voices in her head except for the one she searched for. The sick sensation rolled over her again, and she focused harder. A moment passed, and then another.

Her eyes flew open, and she whirled around. “There,” she pointed. “They’re up there.”

She dropped the t-shirt and CD and took off so fast that Tyr yelled her name. It didn’t matter. She had to get to the woman. Had to help her before it was too late.

Celeste dodged through the lingering patrons and pushed past a couple, getting to their car. She ignored people’s protests, swearing, and the ache, which had returned to her body as she raced to the end of the row. She scanned both ways and spotted them. A long, red-haired woman walked arm in arm with a blond man.

“Celeste—”

“That’s him!” She pointed.

Tyr grabbed her around the waist and pulled her back against him. “Wait here.” His breath tickled her neck. He squeezed her hip. “I mean it. Stay put. We can handle this.”

He nodded to Hephaestus and strode off for the couple.

Celeste started forward, but Hephaestus caught her.

“You need to listen to him. We have no idea what we’re dealing with.”

“I have to make sure the woman is okay.” She wrenched free and moved toward where Tyr had stopped the couple.

Anger and frustration wafted off the man. The woman seemed confused. Celeste locked her shield back in place to hear the actual conversation.

“Piss off,” said the man. “Go find your own date.”

“I’m not looking for a date. I’m looking to get this woman home safely.”

“Yeah, sure you are. Come on, sweet thing, let’s go.”

“Uh... I... um... what did you say your name was again?” She stepped sideways away from the blond man.

“You don’t know him?” Tyr questioned.

The woman shook her head. “He offered to help me find my Uber.”

“Ubers are back by the building.”

The man stepped up to Tyr and tried to shove him, but Tyr didn't move an inch. Without warning, the man's entire body changed from a cute frat boy to a blue scaly monster with deep red eyes.

He hissed at Tyr.

Demon!

Tyr carefully positioned himself between the demon and the woman. She cocked her head to the side as if listening, but she didn't scream. Had the woman already known he was a demon?

The demon slashed and spit at Tyr, but it was futile. Within a quick strike and a spin Tyr must have done thousands of times, he had the demon pinned to the ground with his knee in the demon's back and his metal hand gripping the demon's throat.

The demon spit and clawed at Tyr's arm. The leather glove melted away, and his metal hand sizzled.

Celeste rushed to the woman's side and took her hand. "It's going to be alright."

"What's going on? Who are you?" The woman turned to Celeste.

Celeste patted the woman's soft hand. "I'm Celeste, and as crazy as this is about to sound, that man wasn't taking you to an Uber. He is a demon who wanted to hurt you."

"A demon?" The woman faced Celeste, but her gaze didn't quite hit Celeste's eye line.

"I know you don't understand. Just know we're here to help. I promise. We want to

keep you safe.” Celeste lowered her shield and allowed the woman’s mind to touch her own. She sent calming, peaceful vibes to the woman, and the woman’s hand relaxed in hers.

“What... What are you doing to me? Are you a psychic?”

“No. I’m not psychic. I’m... showing you I’m telling the truth. That you can trust me.”

“I knew that the moment you took my hand.” Her eyes drifted toward where the demon had stood a moment before. “I just don’t understand why I couldn’t tell he meant me harm.”

“What?”

A bright light flashed, and Celeste covered the woman to shield her from the glow, but the woman didn’t move.

Tyr moved to Celeste. “We need to go.”

His blood-red eyes jerked involuntarily.

Tyr’s brows knit together, and he turned his back to her. She wanted to apologize, but he stepped away.

She looked to where the demon had lain moments before, but only scorched asphalt in the shape of his body remained.

What in Yggdrasil had Tyr done?

“We should go,” Tyr repeated. “Before we attract any more attention.”

“We can’t leave her here,” Celeste replied.

“Fallon,” said the woman. “My name is Fallon.”

“Fallon, do you have a car?” Tyr refused to meet her gaze.

She chuckled. “Why would I have a car?”

Tyr glanced at her, perplexed for a moment, then at Celeste, and quickly away.

The idea that he felt the need to hide himself from her slammed Celeste in the gut.

“So, you can drive home?” said Tyr.

Fallon laughed again. “That would be interesting for me to try.” Fallon widened her eyes. “I’m blind.”

Blind? No wonder she hadn’t reacted when the demon had changed form.

Tyr nodded as if he should have realized it before. “We need to get you out of here. Where there’s one of his kind, there are others.”

His words were a punch to Celeste. “His kind?” she spat.

Tyr looked at her, confused for a moment, and then recognition dawned on his face. His eyes edged back to their murky, unfathomable deep color. “Fear demons. I mean, fear demons. They feed off people’s pain.”

“I wonder if that’s why I couldn’t get a read on him,” said Fallon absently. “Because he was a demon.”

“We’ve told her too much. She needs to get home before shock sets in.”

“I’ll take her,” said Hephaestus. “Back to the Ubers, I mean.”

Fallon turned toward where Hephaestus stood. “I wondered if you were going to join the party.” Her peachy lips parted into a smile, and her freckled nose crinkled.

Hephaestus’s eyebrows smashed together. “Uh... Sorry.”

Celeste wasn’t sure about letting Fallon go yet, but the beautiful redhead stuck her hand out in Phes’s direction.

“I’m Fallon.”

He took her small hand in his massive one. “Hephaestus.”

She smiled. “Like the Greek god of metalworking. That’s so cool. You know, he was given a raw deal in the myths, if you ask me.”

Hephaestus shot her an awkward smile.

“Hephaestus is a friend of ours. Would you be comfortable with him getting you to your Uber, or do you want us all to go together?” Celeste asked.

Fallon laid her hand on Phes’s forearm. “No need. I’ll be safe with your friend.”

Again, a myriad of questions flooded Celeste. “Do you have a cellphone?”

Fallon reached into her pocket and pulled out a larger pink, glittery phone with bigger than normal buttons and raised numbers on it.

Celeste looked at the phone, only to realize she didn't have a phone anymore. She held it out to Tyr. "Can you put your number in so she can text us when she gets home?"

Tyr opened his mouth but closed it and nodded. "Of course."

Fallon had yet to let go of Hephaestus' arm.

"You can call me tomorrow or the next day if you want," said Celeste. "Maybe we can have lunch."

Fallon smiled. "I'd like that. Thank you all so much for your help. I don't know what I would have done if you hadn't been here."

Tyr handed her back the phone, and Fallon and Hephaestus moved a few steps away. Phes stopped and jogged back, pulling something out of his jacket. "You dropped your merch. I didn't want anyone to take it."

Celeste took the items and smiled. "Thank you, Phes. It was great to meet you. I hope to see you again soon."

He gave her a strong, one-armed hug. "Absolutely."

Hephaestus strode back to Fallon and offered her his arm. "Don't screw it up, Tyr. She's a keeper," he called.

Celeste blushed and had to duck her head to keep Tyr from seeing the smile that spread across her face.

Tyr splayed his hand on the small of her back and led her to his car without a word.

Celeste chewed her lip, trying to decide how best to approach the subject of his eye color.

“Fallon’s gonna be alright, right?”

“Hephaestus will die before he lets anything happen to her on his watch.”

“I wasn’t implying he would do anything. I meant the demon. He can’t come back for her, can he?”

“There’s no coming back from where I sent him.”

“Good.” Celeste thought about Tyr’s words. “Hephaestus will die before he lets anything happen to her on his watch.”

She pulled to a stop. “Wait. Hephaestus is an immortal. He can’t die.”

He finally looked straight at her again. “Then I guess she’s safe, isn’t she?”

He opened the car door for Celeste, and she slid into her seat. The noise of all the people dropped away as soon as the door closed, and Celeste relaxed.

They drove in silence for a long time. As they neared the portal, Celeste realized they were going to go back to the Underworld.

She gazed out the window and let her mental barrier down. She shouldn’t have done it, and she knew she shouldn’t have. He would be mad she went up there, but she couldn’t help but try.

“Papa?”

She waited, the portal coming into view.

“Papa, are you there?”

The silence that stretched out from her call made Celeste’s heartbeat quicken. Why wasn’t he answering?

They’d almost made it to the portal.

She threw out a call as wide as she was able. “Dad! Where are you?”

Seventy yards.

“Sylax!”

Sixty.

Forty.

Twenty.

“Celestine. I feel you, girl,” came a familiar voice.

Celeste gasped and threw her barrier up.

“Is something wrong?”

She shook her head as they entered the portal and roared through the darkness.

The sound of the voice reverberated in her mind. I feel you, girl. I feel you, girl. I feel you, girl.

Fear trickled down her spine. It wasn't possible. It wasn't... Please, no. Don't let her find me. Don't let my mother know where I am.

CHAPTER 11

After they'd made it through the portal, Tyr looked at Celeste again. Something had happened right before, but he wasn't sure what it had been. All he knew was he wanted to wipe the fear right off her face.

He took out his phone and hooked it to his car, turning on his Brothers of Metal playlist. A moment passed, and then another. Finally, Celeste's shoulders relaxed, and she nodded her head in time with the music. The tension left her body as she closed her eyes and hummed along.

By the time they reached the mansion, her head leaned against the window, and light snores filled the air. She appeared so peaceful. Not like the fear he'd witnessed when he'd taken her hand after banishing the demon.

He'd forgotten what he must look like to her, and the thought that he'd scared her made him want to stab his own eyes out.

He parked the car, grabbed her shopping bag, and shoved the CD and shirt inside it before rounding the car and opening the door for her.

She gave a drowsy smile and a small curtsy. "Thank you, kind sir."

Tyr couldn't tell if she teased, so he stayed silent.

As they crossed the garage to the house, she rubbed her arm.

“Still hurting?” Tyr opened the door for her. The sounds of the television and the smell of popcorn hit Tyr before he stepped inside.

“A little. I think it was all the jumping around at the concert.”

They walked down the short hallway into the entertainment room.

“Concert?” Vid stood from one of the recliners and paused his movie.

He wore nothing but pajama bottoms, and it took everything in Tyr to not yell at him about being courteous with a female in the house. But wearing pajama pants was modest for Vid. Herm as well. Tyr would say something about that.

Celeste nodded. “Tyr took me to the Brothers of Metal concert.” She pulled her t-shirt out of the bag. “They signed it for me.”

A bemused expression spread across Vid’s face. “He took you to meet the band, huh?”

Tyr shot Vid a warning glare.

“They were amazing!” All traces of her earlier fear and tiredness vanished in an instant.

A wry smile spread across Vid’s face, and he crossed his huge arms over his bare chest, making his tattoos morph. “What was your favorite song?”

Tyr rolled his eyes. Brother was looking to get punched.

“There were so many amazing ones. Yggdrasil, Theft of the Hammer, Gods of War. I love them all. Rise above the mountains... Light a fire in the sky... For the blood is

running still... From the roots of Yggdrasil.”

Vid chuckled and nodded. “Looks like you found someone who might like them more than you do. Too bad her favorite song isn’t the same as yours.”

Tyr growled.

“What is your favorite song?” She peered up at him earnestly.

Vid laughed. “Can’t you guess? It’s the one about him.”

“You’re just jealous you don’t have one about you.”

Vid nodded. “Yeah, that’s it for sure.”

Tyr shook his head. “Come on. Let’s get you upstairs to rest. It’s been a long day.”

Vid sat back in his seat and grabbed his popcorn.

“Is Herm here?”

“He went down to the races,” he called, picking up the remote.

Of course. It was Tuesday.

“What are the races?” Celeste walked to the top floor.

“A group of demons race cars for fun. Herm loves it. He goes about a few times a week.”

“Wow. I can’t imagine how intense that is. Is he any good?”

Tyr pushed the pin pad to open his bedroom door, then set the bag from Metamorphosis on his dresser by the wall. “He says he is. He’s only lost three cars, so he must be right.”

“They bet their cars?”

“Didn’t you notice the huge collection in the garage? Those are his winnings. He’s always liked to move fast. When he discovered the races, he became obsessed.”

Celeste rolled her shoulder and cracked her neck. Tyr rubbed his fingers together, wanting to touch her. To feel her soft flesh, pliable and willing, beneath his palms.

“Do you want some pain meds?”

“Nah, I don’t want to become dependent on them.”

“How about a little CBD lotion? It works well on my hand when it bothers me.”

Her eyebrows drew together. “CBD lotion works on your metal hand?”

“Not on the hand itself, but on the juncture where it connects to the skin. Sometimes, if I overdo things, it separates a bit. Hephaestus said he’d make me a new one that would connect better, but I’ve gotten used to this one.”

She nodded. “Sure. Why not?”

“Sit. I’ll get it.”

She pulled out her t-shirt and sniffed it before wrinkling her nose. “Maybe I should shower first. I kind of stink from all the dancing.”

Tyr laughed as he walked into his bathroom. “Trust me. Until you’ve lived in a war camp with thousands of Viking warriors, horses, dogs, and more through the heat of summer, you have no idea what the word stink can mean.” Besides, he’d smelled her the whole way back to the estate, and he liked her natural scent just fine.

He reached into a drawer and grabbed the bottle before looking at himself in the mirror.

You’re helping her, not yourself. Don’t do anything you’re gonna want to cut your balls off for later.

Unsure whether the pep talk had helped, he returned with the bottle and sat next to her. She’d removed the bandage and rolled up her sleeve, exposing her biceps. He shook the bottle, and she grabbed his hand.

He stopped. Did she want to do it herself? A pit grew in his stomach at the idea he may not get to touch her after all.

She looked at the partially melted leather glove and peeled it from his hand, sliding it off one finger at a time.

Tyr swallowed hard at her gentle touch.

“Did it hurt? The acid he spit at you.”

“I’ve had worse,” he choked out.

She turned his metal hand over and inspected his palm and the back of his hand again. She ran her fingers over the spot where the leather had disintegrated.

His body reacted to her touch despite himself.

Whelp... so much for the pep talk. Could he not control anything around her?

“There are small little pits in the metal that weren’t there this afternoon at Vali’s.”

She could tell that?

Concern crossed her features, and something bloomed inside him. Concern. Concern for his well-being. No one had ever been concerned for him before except Vid and Herm. No one.

“These won’t get worse, will they?”

She looked up at him, and he blinked several times.

“They shouldn’t.”

She nodded. “I hope you sent that bastard somewhere truly awful. Makes me sick to think I am half the same species he is.”

Tyr turned his palm up and gripped her hand. “You know I wasn’t talking about you back in the parking lot, right? When I said his kind, I didn’t mean you.”

She nodded.

“Just because you may share a scintilla of blood with that creature doesn’t make you anything like him. Humans share a great deal of DNA with apes, but apes don’t treat each other the way humans do.”

She smiled. “Thank you.”

They stared at each other for a long minute before Tyr asked, “Where would you like

me to start? Your arm?”

Celeste nodded and turned around. “Then maybe my neck?” She pushed her hair to the side.

Tyr swallowed hard. “Of course.”

He squirted the lotion into his palm and rubbed his hands together. He paused only for a moment before setting his metal hand on her arm and lightly massaging it into her muscle. When the oil had seeped in, he poured more into his hands and then squeezed her shoulders, working his way up to her neck.

Her head fell forward, and she moaned.

Damn, if it wasn't the most erotic sound he'd ever heard. Every particle of him wanted to hear her make that noise over and over as he buried himself inside her.

He hesitated.

He should stop. It wasn't right. But even as he thought it, something deep inside disagreed. It was right. For the first time in his existence, it was right. She was right.

He ran his fingers over her neck and around the sides of her throat and back again. He slid his fingers under the collar of her t-shirt and rubbed her shoulder blades. She bent forward further and paused before lifting the hem of her shirt and sliding it up her back and over her shoulders. The lace of a peach-colored bra stared at him.

He placed his palms on her cool, damp skin and rubbed it upward. Goosebumps rose over her skin, and she shivered.

His gaze remained on the clasp of her bra. So small. So delicate. He could have the

thing off her in less than a second. Then he'd slide his hands around to her breasts. Those undoubtedly beautiful globes that had teased him for days. He wondered what the color of her nipples was. If they matched the color of her full lips. Or if they were the color of?—

Tyr tore his hands away, realizing he'd slid them down around her waist to her belly.

“Uh...” He retreated from the bed and backed toward the door.

Celeste sat up and looked at him over her shoulder.

They stayed that way for a long minute, and he didn't need to read her mind to tell what she thought.

“I should let you rest.”

He beelined for the door, but Yegret squawked in the corner. Tyr stopped and squeezed his eyes shut. He needed to let her out so she didn't pester Celeste all night.

He strode to the enclosure, and the bird hopped up onto his shoulder and preened him. For the first time in longer than he remembered, the sensation grated on his nerves. He threw the window, but she didn't stop.

“Go,” he commanded.

Yegret stopped and blinked at him.

He scratched her chin. “Go,” he said gentler. “Hunt.”

Yegret blinked once and then dove out the window into the darkness. Tyr turned without looking at Celeste. He couldn't look at her. He couldn't. If he did...

Celeste jumped from the bed and grabbed his hand.

Don't. Don't you do it. Don't you dare look at her.

He turned but kept his gaze on the open window.

"I... I just wanted to thank you for today. It was exactly what I needed. I am feeling more myself than I think I ever have."

"I'm glad I was able to help."

Don't look at her. Don't?—

She reached up on her tiptoes and kissed him quickly.

Heat flooded his body. Stunned, he looked down at her.

Her cheeks flushed, and her lips parted, so soft. She bit her bottom lip and stepped away. "I... I'm sorry."

He stared at her for half a second before every shred of control inside him snapped. He yanked her back to him and fisted his hands in her hair before slamming his lips down on hers.

He couldn't hold back. Everything his body had wanted from her for days rushed to the forefront, and he parted her lips with his tongue.

He needed to taste her. To feel her. To claim her. He needed... her.

She wrapped her arms around his neck, and he lifted her off the floor, deepening the kiss. Backing her into the wall, he pressed against her as he kissed her harder. She

moaned like earlier, and his manhood strained to be let free.

Her lips were hot and demanding, and he was more than happy to give her whatever she wanted to take from him.

He broke the kiss and continued to pin her against the wall as he kissed from her throat to the front of her shirt.

His hands traveled to her rear, and he pressed against her, the heat of her body melting into his.

She sucked in a breath as he kissed over her collarbone, and she raked her fingers through his hair.

“Tyr,” she panted.

He growled and nipped at her skin, tasting every salty inch. She rubbed against him, and the friction made every part of him jolt.

“Tyr,” she whispered into his ear before biting it. “Make love to me.”

He carried her to the bed and laid her on it. “As you command, my Fylgja .”

Celeste’s body thrummed with need. Her core throbbed, and her breasts ached for his touch. Slowly, he slid off her shoes and socks. He removed his jacket and t-shirt and then knelt on the floor and kissed the sole of her foot before continuing up to her ankle.

Celeste bucked on the bed and gripped the sheets as he pushed the leg of her jeans up and continued to press firm kisses up her calf.

She bit her lip and moaned as he reached the back of her knee. Every moment was an excruciating ecstasy she'd never experienced. Wanting him so badly, but not wanting to rush him.

He stopped kissing her skin. "Your jeans," he commanded. "Unbutton them."

She hesitated for a split second as a ripple of fear coursed over her.

"Lower your shield."

She bit her lip.

"Lower it so you can see my intention. I'm not going to hurt you, Celeste."

She unbuttoned her jeans. "I don't need to read your mind to know you won't hurt me. I just..."

"If you don't want this?—"

"I do. Gods know I do, it's just..." Embarrassment flooded her, and Tyr lifted her leg over his shoulder and kissed her calf again.

"Tell me, Fylgja."

"You'll need to guide me. I've only done this once before, and it wasn't slow, and it wasn't?—"

His eyes flashed red, and she stopped talking.

He crawled on top of her, caging her with his arms. "I promise you, Celeste, you've never done what we are about to do. And you never will again with anyone else. Do

you understand?”

A thrill raced through Celeste, and she nodded as he loomed over her, his intensity raining down over her.

“Say it. I need to make sure you understand. If we do this, there is no going back. You are stuck with me. Forever. This isn’t going to be a one-time thing, Fylgja. I can’t do it. Not with you.” The caress of his words had her already on edge and ready for him to take her. Her nipples hardened under the lace of her bra.

“I understand,” she whispered.

He stared at her like he was trying to decide. She reached up and touched his cheek, and his eyes went from dark to red. Without another word, he swooped in and kissed her again, but not like before. Not heated. Not rushed. He kissed her tenderly. A promise of worship. As if he was giving into something he’d never given into before. He brushed the hair from her face, and she clung to him, reveling in his weight on hers.

She didn’t know how long they kissed before he broke away and laid his forehead on hers before kissing down over her breasts to her waist. He reached behind himself and pulled off his shirt before lowering her pant leg and slipping her jeans off her. He resumed kissing her leg right where he’d left off and worked his way up the inside of her thigh to her hip. He kissed over it and then lifted her shirt, exposing her belly.

When he kissed the first spot Anton had hit with the bat, she flinched.

“Ticklish?”

She shook her head. “No. That’s...” She couldn’t finish. She didn’t want to ruin their moment.

His eyes intensified. “I will kiss and love away every bad thing that’s ever happened to you , Fylgja .”

Tears sprang to her eyes as her chest tightened. She nodded, and he lowered his mouth to her side again.

His eyes stayed on hers as he licked and sucked the spot where days before she’d been broken and black and blue. The red was different in his eyes, somehow. She didn’t know how. She just knew. The red in his eyes had nothing to do with anger and everything to do with wanting her.

He worked his way up her side, and she stripped off her shirt and went to unclasp her bra. He stopped her and rolled her on her belly. She gasped as his breath hit her lower back. He ran his tongue up her spine to her bra, and a moment later, the clasp popped open, and his lips grazed her skin.

“Tyr.” She gripped the sheets so tight her fingers ached.

He kissed up her shoulder to her mouth once more. Every inch of her ached for him. Needed him.

Impatience got the better of her as she flipped back over and flung her bra to the floor.

He gazed down at her and drank her in. His pants bulged against the gigantic rod that pressed against her. Getting to her knees, she reached out and tugged him closer. She kissed his navel as she undid his belt buckle.

It was her turn to tease.

She ran her tongue over his salty abs and slid his belt from its loops before dropping

it. His hands found their way to her scalp, and he massaged it as she undid the button on his pants. She trailed her tongue down to the waistband of his underwear as she unzipped his zipper.

His grip intensified, and she slid his pants over his hips. She tried not to gasp as the full length of what lay beneath his underwear took shape.

He was a god.

Not knowing what to do, she laid her palm over the front of his boxer briefs and rubbed him through the slick fabric.

He growled low in his throat, and his body tensed.

That was a good growl, right?

His fingers gripped her hair, and a shiver raced over her. She wanted to see him. Feel him. Taste him. All of him.

Gathering her courage, she slid her hand through the fold in the front of his underwear, eliciting a groan from Tyr.

“Celeste...” His voice came out strangled and hoarse.

His hips bucked toward her as she slid his length out, and her eyes widened.

She’d never seen a fully naked man before. Sure, she’d seen movies and read books and stuff, but that was it. To say she’d been raised as an antisocial homeschooler who had basically never left her house more than one or two times a year was the truth.

Celeste leaned in and kissed the tip of his soft skin as she gripped his length with both

fists. Though her hands were substantially smaller than his girth, she did her best to stroke him.

His skin was salty and musky. The scent of him invaded her, making her want to taste him all the more.

She stroked him hard, and Tyr jerked away from her. He tore his underwear from his hips and covered her with his body.

“I need you, Fylgja. I need you. I need to be inside you. Now.”

His eyes glowed brighter, and the command in his voice told her the foreplay was over.

She scooted back on the bed, and he spread her legs with his massive thighs. A moment of anxiety passed over her, but then Tyr pressed her thighs apart further as his lips slammed down on hers.

His quick, forceful nature rolled over her and excited her. His length pressed against her slick folds, and he broke the kiss.

“I... I’m gonna try to go slow.”

She nodded, and he pressed against her core, making her tense.

Tyr kissed her again, thrusting his tongue in her mouth. He moved his hand between their bodies and rubbed at her. She panted into his mouth.

He slid a finger inside her, and she grabbed onto his broad shoulders as he stretched her.

He slid a second finger inside, and she bit his lip. She wanted more. Needed more.

He rubbed her wetness all over himself, ready to enter her.

She broke the kiss and pulled his neck down to her mouth. She licked up to his ear.

“Too slow.”

He chuckled and inched inside her. Her nails gripped his back, and she bit his shoulder until he filled her completely.

He waited and dropped his head to her shoulder. “You’re so perfect, Fylgja .”

He pushed up on his arms, and she dropped backward. He looked deep into her eyes.

He withdrew from her and slid in again, but this time, he pulled her hips into his.

Celeste gasped, and his gaze intensified. Tyr began a steady rhythm. Celeste grabbed the sheets, trying to understand the sensations rushing through her body. She closed her eyes as waves began to build inside her.

Tyr stopped moving. “No. Don’t close your eyes. Don’t shut me out.”

She opened her eyes, and he smiled and kissed her before beginning to rock into her again.

His gaze stayed on her face as if wanting to experience everything she did.

A moment passed, then another, and the waves built inside her until she floated, and waves crashed down on her body. She arched as her muscles pulled tight.

“Yes, come for me, my Fylgja .”

Celeste’s breath caught as her vision filled with Tyr’s gorgeous face, and her body squeezed tight around him.

She sucked in a huge breath when Tyr tensed and called her name over and over. His rhythm sped up, and he thrust into her harder, his mouth open in a mixture of a smile and a grimace.

She bucked her hips against his, trying to give him as much friction as possible.

His eyes grew as bright as stars, and then he dropped on top of her. They clung to each other.

It was the most amazing thing she’d ever experienced. And she wanted nothing more than to grab a glass of water and start all over again.

He cupped her face and tenderly brushed down her cheeks and over her forehead as he continued to kiss her.

Hers. He was hers. Her fierce and lethal God of War. Tender. Loving. Soft. But only with her. Forever. She felt it in her gut. Phes was right. He belonged to her now, and she belonged to him.

Minutes passed, and then more minutes as they continued kissing and touching and exploring each other. And then exploring turned to need, and need turned into him inside her a second time. And then a third.

Tyr rolled on his side, and she curled into his broad chest. He wrapped her in his arms and kissed her head.

Their hearts beat in unison for several minutes.

“I... I never knew it could be like that,” she admitted.

He was silent for a moment and then said, “Neither did I.”

She chuckled. “It’s okay, Tyr. You’re a thousand-year-old god. You’ve had sex before.”

“Sex, yes. But not like that.”

For the first time, she realized she’d dropped her shield. When had she done that? She hadn’t even realized it.

He stared down at her with his fiery eyes.

He wasn’t lying.

“Your shield came down as I entered you.”

It explained why he’d ordered her to keep her eyes open.

“I... I don’t understand. You’ve to have been with women much more experienced than me.”

“I’ve had sex before. Lots of sex. Plenty of sex. But I’ve never made love to a woman.”

She curled into him and closed her eyes.

She left her shields down as he held her in his strong arms, and she swirled her

fingers in the hair on his chest.

“Tyr?”

“Yes?”

“Why do you keep calling me Fylgja ? What does it mean?”

His arms tightened around her, and he bent down and kissed her.

“It’s an Old Norse word. It’s hard to explain, but the closest word to it in the English language is soulmate.”

Soulmate? Tyr thought she was his soulmate?

Something inside her warmed, and she smiled. She pulled his lips to hers and kissed him hard.

She’d never considered she might have a soulmate before, but... something told her he was right. He was her soulmate. Her Fylgja.

CHAPTER 12

A knock on the bedroom door woke Tyr the following morning. He went to roll over but found his arm pinned beneath Celeste's head. He gazed down at her for a moment, conflicted. He hoped Sy didn't kill him, but he'd held out for as long as he'd been able. Celeste was... everything now. And he could no longer deny the fact any more than he could deny that he thought, in all honesty, they were meant for one another.

The knock sounded again, and Tyr slid his arm from under her and pulled on a pair of sweats as he hopped to the door and opened it a crack.

Herm stood dressed for the day. He looked Tyr up and down, tried to glance over Tyr's shoulder, and smiled. Tyr closed the door a few inches, blocking Herm's view of Celeste.

"What?"

"Vid and I are getting ready to head out and tail the loser suing his ex. We might be gone most of the day, so I wanted to ask if you would take this over to Frigg's place and give it to Heimdall." Herm held out an envelope full of cash.

"You're the messenger god, not me. Take it when you get back." Tyr tried to close the door, but Herm stopped him.

"Come on, bro. You know how he gets about this kind of stuff. I like Heimdall, but he's a stick-in-the-muck when it comes to money. He already texted me about it. If he

doesn't get it today, he won't bet on me next time."

Tyr looked at the envelope.

"Never mind," said Herm. "I'll do it on my way to tail the client."

"No," Tyr grabbed the envelope. "Do your job. Don't be late."

Herm nodded. "See ya." He stood on his tiptoes as he backed away, trying to peek over Tyr's shoulder.

"Do you want me to kill you?" Tyr growled.

Herm chuckled. "Can you blame me? Seeing her the other day in only her underwear? Damn, man, I'm jealous."

Tyr leaped out his door, but Herm disappeared down the hall and around the corner before Tyr reached him. Good thing for Herm, too, because just the thought that Herm and Vid had seen Celeste in practically nothing was enough to have him ripping the eyes out of both of their heads.

Tyr went back to his room and closed his door. He wasn't an errand boy, but Herm and Vid had taken to picking up all their workload since Celeste had arrived. The least he could do was drop off Heimdall's winnings. Though after what Herm had said, maybe he should wait until late in the day to do it.

Tyr dropped the cash on his dresser and headed over to make sure Ygrette had gotten in safely. She slept with her head tucked under her wing on a high branch in her enclosure. Tyr closed the glass door and then closed the bedroom window.

"Are we going to Frigg's place?" Celeste asked in a sleepy voice.

Tyr turned. "Sorry. I didn't mean to wake you."

She shrugged and sat up, pulling the covers with her and covering her perfect breasts.

"I'll get to try that honeyed mead Phes mentioned?"

He nodded. "If you'd like."

"I take it Frigg's place is a bar?"

"Frigg owns a tavern and inn of sorts. Upstairs is in the Midgard realm. And downstairs is here in the Underworld. Heimdall works in the upstairs pub as security."

She nodded. "Do a lot of you work together? The Norse gods, I mean."

Tyr nodded and sat on the bed near her feet. He resisted the urge to kiss her.

"Herm and Vid and I work together. Fenrir used to help out, but he doesn't anymore. Loki is a lawyer and has jobs for us quite often. Odin owns a burlesque club. We all help out from time to time if he needs it. Thor has a motorcycle shop. Frigg has her place. Both Loki and Thor's wives work there... or used to. I'm not sure, to be honest."

"Is that all of you?"

"No. There's Hodr, Meili, Baldur, you met Vali, and there's Hel, but she has her own little slice of the kingdom down here that she rules, so we don't see her much."

"Wow. You have a lot of family."

Tyr snorted. “Technically, I’m not blood-related to any of them, but yes, we are all Norse gods, and we have lived, loved, and hated each other for enough time that I suppose you call us a family. A very dysfunctional family, but a family, nonetheless.”

“If you want dysfunctional, you should see my family. To be honest, though, it would be nice to have a lot of people around who support you. Whether or not they were blood-related. I’ve never had that.”

Tyr couldn’t hold back. He brushed her cheek with his knuckles and then leaned in and kissed her. Her warm, soft lips had him hard in an instant, remembering the feel of her the night before. So timid, and yet so willing. The idea of her submission had him harder still.

Tyr broke the kiss and set his forehead against hers. He wanted to say something profound. Something that would help heal her bruised and battered heart.

“You never have to be alone again, Celeste. Not unless you want to.” He swallowed hard. He’d never said something like that to a woman before, but his words were the truth. She didn’t have to be alone. He would take care of her. Be there for her. Beside her. But only if that was what she wanted. Though, even thinking about it, he knew it was a lie. He’d never let her go, now. Never. She was his. Whether she wanted to be or not.

Never, in all his long years, had anyone made him feel what she did. And not once had someone brought him peace.

She stared up at him, her eyes wide and searching.

“We should get you something to eat.”

She nodded. “I wish I could argue, but I’m starving.”

Tyr nodded and stood. “Come on, get dressed.”

“Where are we going?”

“First, we’re gonna stop off at Frigg’s, and then, I’m going to take you to my favorite place for breakfast.”

Tyr opened the door to Frigg’s Pub, ‘The Raven Weaver,’ and kept his hand on Celeste as they walked through the already gathering throng and headed for the stairs in the corner.

Tyr nodded to Frigg before stepping up the wooden staircase and through the portal that would take them topside. His gut twisted with anxiety, and he squeezed Celeste’s hand hard as she stepped through the portal as well. Every nerve in his body told him he shouldn’t have brought her, but at the same time, he couldn’t have left her at the estate by herself. He would have stressed the entire time; who knew what trouble she’d get herself into. And his stressing was not a smart thing. He thought finding his soulmate would help his ability to control his emotions, but he wondered if it would do the complete opposite. Because one thing had been made overly apparent to him since making love to her, he would do whatever it took to protect her. Whatever. And for the God of War, that was not a good thing.

They exited the stairwell and stepped through a curtain to the Midgard side of Frigg’s pub.

He scanned the bar, and though it was early afternoon, there were still plenty of humans drinking, eating, and watching a soccer game on the television above the bar. Tyr never got into soccer. Not enough contact for him. He preferred hockey and rugby. The more blood, the better.

Tyr headed to Heimdall’s table without needing to see if he was there. He was almost

always there when the doors were open.

Heimdall's golden eyes waited for them as they slid into his booth. Tyr made Celeste get in first, and then he followed, blocking her from the rest of the bar.

Sylax had told him to keep her in the Underworld and as soon as he dropped the money off to Heim, they were going right back down. Problem was, Tyr wasn't sure how to just hand money to Heimdall and walk away. He felt obligated to at least have a few words of small talk with him, even if he didn't like it.

Tyr had never been afraid of anyone. Not even Odin scared him. But Heimdall... made him uncomfortable at best. He wasn't sure why. Possibly because the god saw everything about everyone. And there were a lot of things Tyr had done in the dark that he didn't want anyone to witness. Maybe it was because, like himself, Heimdall was the only other Norse God who wasn't descended from or a relative of Odin and Frigg. Which meant his loyalties could lie anywhere.

He was sure it was that Heimdall knew everything about him which made him the most uncomfortable, though.

"Tyr. I can't remember the last time you came looking for me," said Heimdall.

"I think it was back on Asgard," Tyr replied. "I was?—"

Heimdall cocked an eyebrow.

"Of course you remember. You remember everything."

Heimdall chuckled.

And, of course, Heimdall knew why Tyr was there, too.

As if on cue, Heimdall held out his hand, and Tyr pulled out the envelope and placed it in his palm.

“Isn’t it cheating?” Tyr asked. “Considering you already know the outcomes of all the races.”

Heimdall shrugged again. “Are you chastising me for taking money from demons who should know by now that if they race against Herm, they are going to lose?”

He had a point.

Heimdall’s gaze turned to Celeste, and Tyr tensed. He laid his hand on Celeste’s thigh and squeezed. She slipped her fingers into his.

Heimdall stared at her for several seconds. “It is a pleasure to meet you, Celestine, daughter of Sylax.”

Daughter of only Sylax? No mention of Celeste’s mom at all. Interesting.

“So, is it true, then?” Celeste asked. “You can see everything? Everyone’s past and future?”

Heimdall nodded.

“Can you see my dad? Do you know where he is?” Celeste held up a hand. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t ask. You probably get asked things all the time. That must be so hard.”

Heimdall’s brow crinkled, and the side of his mouth quirked upward. “Thank you. Your gift is hard, too, though.”

“Yes, but the difference is I can tune out my gift. And if I wanted to tell someone what I am hearing I can try to help. But you have to sit by without interfering, right?”

“Most of the time.” He nodded.

“How do you do it?”

Heimdall thought for a moment, his eyes darkening. He twirled his empty mug on the table. “I learned at a young age that interfering caused more problems than not.”

For a split-second, Tyr wondered what Heimdall referred to, but when Heimdall’s gaze flashed to him, he knew it would do no good to ask. The pain lingering in Heimdall’s eyes was enough for Tyr to realize for the first time how hard Heimdall’s life must be.

Celeste opened her mouth to ask another question, but Tyr squeezed her leg, and she closed it.

“Would you two like something to drink?” Heimdall asked.

“No, thank you,” said Tyr. “We are about to go grab something to eat.”

Tyr wondered how Heimdall did it. How he carried on conversations when he knew what the answers would be.

“Of course.” Heimdall nodded.

“I thought you were getting me some honeyed mead?”

“Yes. I forgot. It’s on the downstairs side. I promise we’ll get some on our way home.”

Home? Had he said home? Not estate. Not the house. Not compound. Home . Yes. Yes, he had. Because it was now home. With her, it was home. For as long as she wanted. The thought made him warm inside, and suddenly, he wanted nothing more than to christen every room of their home.

“We should be going,” said Tyr. “But Herm insisted I get that to you.”

Heimdall nodded. “As he should be. That is if he wants to keep getting my advice on which car he should drive for the night.”

The wicked smile that glinted on Heimdall’s lips made Tyr snort. So Heimdall wasn’t as perfect as he seemed.

Tyr stood and held his hand out for Celeste’s.

She slid out of the booth and gasped before stumbling. Tyr caught her around the waist, and a pained expression crossed her face.

“Is it your arm?”

She sucked in a deep breath and blew it out slowly before shaking her head. “No. I... Uh, I need to use the bathroom before we go.”

“Of course. It’s right there.” Tyr pointed, and the hairs on his arms prickled as he held onto her.

He began guiding her toward the bathroom, but she let go of him.

“It’s okay. I can go on my own. I’ll be back in a minute.” Her voice remained calm, but her eyes said something wasn’t right.

“Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Just my ribs. Guess they aren’t fully healed.” She reached up on her tiptoes and planted a kiss on his cheek. “I’ll be right back.”

Tyr wanted to protest and go with her. He wanted to examine her ribs and make sure she healed properly. But he was being stupid. And overprotective. It was just the bathroom.

She squeezed his hand and threw him a smile as she crossed the bar.

She disappeared into the restroom, and he continued standing in the middle of the bar until several patrons eyed him.

Tyr slid back into the booth to find Heimdall watching Celeste disappear into the bathroom.

His metal hand creaked as he closed it into a fist. He needed to control his reflex to men looking at Celeste. They couldn’t help it. She was freaking stunning. Why wouldn’t men ogle her?

Heimdall turned back to Tyr. Neither said anything, and an awkward silence fell between them. In that moment, he realized he knew very little about Heimdall. Where he lived. What he did in his time off. If he took time off.

“So, you were right about Fenrir’s triplets,” Tyr blurted.

Heimdall’s eyes darkened. “Did you think I’d be wrong?”

Dammit. Apparently, mentioning the one time Heimdall had slipped up with a premonition was not the right way to foster goodwill.

Heimdall was still chafed at the mistake he'd made, blurting out the little tidbit of information at the family gathering where Fenrir and Grace had announced they were having a baby months prior.

"What about you?" asked Heimdall. "You still kicking yourself about chaining up Fenrir?"

Ah... so that's how it was going to be. Tyr peered around the side of the booth to the bathroom door. He sure hoped Celeste hurried.

Celeste collapsed as she locked the bathroom door. Pain tore through her. She dropped her mental shield, instinctively reaching out for where it came from.

Someone was in pain. Terrible pain. Excruciating pain.

Another strange wave blasted through her, and she cried out. She pitched sideways, letting her cheek rest on the cool tile as she fought against the pain and sweat that broke out all over her body.

"Help," someone said in a weak voice. "Please. Someone, help me."

"Who are you?" she managed.

"Sylax."

Her eyes flew open. She sent out a mental blast to pinpoint her father's mental signature. "Papa?"

She couldn't feel him anywhere.

"Celeste? Is that you?"

Tears flooded her eyes. She sent out another blast. The voice sounded like her father, but she still couldn't locate him. "Papa. Where are you? I can't find you. Why can't I sense you?"

"I'm... at the house... It must be the wards your mother put on it. I was able to break a few of them, but not all."

Her house? He was at the house? But why?

Celeste went cold. Had he gone after her mother for what she'd done, and things had gone wrong?

"Celeste?"

She pushed tears from her eyes. "I'm coming to get you."

"No," he said. "No, Celeste. I don't want you to get hurt. You have to stay away."

Not get hurt? She was the reason her father was being hurt. It was her fault. She was to blame. Guilt twisted in her gut. She never should have called to him. She should have handled things on her own. She should have been stronger.

"Can you walk?" She fought to formulate a plan.

"I..." Her father cried out. "My legs are shattered in too many places. I... can't."

Shattered legs would take at least five days to heal. At least a day before he might be able to bear weight on them enough to get away. Who knew what her mother would do to him before then. She had to get him.

"Papa, I'm so sorry. This is all my fault."

“It’s okay, Celeste. I’m just glad you aren’t here at home. Where are you right now? I haven’t been able to sense you at all.”

How wasn’t he able to find her in the Underworld? Did Tyr’s estate have some kind of wards on it as well?

“Why haven’t you called me? Why didn’t you call Tyr? It. It doesn’t matter. I’m coming.”

“No, Celeste. Whatever happens, don’t come here. Don’t—” Her father screamed, and the connection dropped.

“Papa? Papa? Dad!” No answer. Tears dripped from her eyes. If the connection dropped, it meant either he was unconscious or... She didn’t want to think about that. She couldn’t think about that. She had to get to him.

Celeste stumbled to her feet and cracked open the door to the bathroom. She couldn’t see Tyr where he sat. She should get him. Tell him what happened.

No.

If she told him, he’d never let her go. He’d insist on leaving her at the compound while he went to find her dad.

Anger bubbled inside Celeste. Her mother. Her stupid, angel-born mother had her father captive. And she was hurting him.

Something inside Celeste opened up, and rage flooded her. Her gentle, sweet father. He’d gone there for her. To protect her. To save her. And her mother had shattered his legs. Shattered them. And who knew what else.

Enough was enough. She had to stop her mother, once and for all. And she was the only one who could. Yes, Tyr could hurt her mother, but only Celeste could end it.

Without waiting another second, Celeste darted for the exit and bolted onto the street before flagging down a taxi and diving into the backseat.

“Long Beach.”

The cabbie nodded and pulled away from the curb.

Celeste threw out her mental ability, looking for her father. Nothing.

Please, be alive. Please, let her father be alive. She would never forgive herself if he died because of her. And heavens help her mother if that happened. Tyr may be the God of War, but he would have nothing on Celeste for what she would do.

Celeste peered over her shoulder as The Raven Weaver disappeared from view. She should at least call Tyr and tell him the address.

Fudge nuggets! She didn't have a phone. It was fine. She'd get to the house. Deal with her mom. Get her dad. And get her phone from her room. Tyr could pick her up when she'd dealt with it.

Besides, she needed Tyr, as well as her dad, to see she could handle herself. That she wasn't helpless. It was the only way her dad would accept her and Tyr being together. As much as it would anger her dad, she needed to do it. She had to break the one rule he'd made her swear to when she was three. And, one way or another, she'd figure out how to use all the power locked inside her.

Tyr leaned out of the booth and tried to spot the restroom door. She'd been gone too long.

He stood.

“She’s not in there.”

“What?”

“She snuck out about ten minutes ago.”

“What?” Tyr’s heart hammered. “Why didn’t you say anything?” he demanded.

Heimdall regarded him impassively.

“Where did she go?”

Heimdall continued to stare.

Fear crept up Tyr’s spine. Real and true fear. Something he had never felt before, and that terrified him further. Then, his fear morphed into anger and red stained the edges of his view.

Tyr slammed his fist on the table, making it shake. The mug tipped over. “Dammit, Heimdall, you’re not the guardian of Asgard anymore. You are no longer under oath. Tell me where she went.”

Heimdall didn’t speak.

Tyr’s heart slammed against his ribs. His vision went crimson, and his mind whirled. Where did she go? Why would she sneak out? Was she sneaking away from him? Did she not want him?

Tyr’s gut clenched. No. She couldn’t. She wouldn’t. She felt the same as he did. He

knew it.

“Please,” Tyr begged. “You know what happened to her before. I... I can’t lose her. Please, Heimdall. I’ll do anything. Give you anything. She’s my one. My Fylgja.”

Tyr had never begged for anything in his entire life. But for Celeste, he would get down on his knees and grovel if it meant keeping her. Whatever it took. He’d thought it earlier, and he’d meant it.

“Long Beach.”

“Why?”

“Her father.”

A million questions bombarded Tyr, and he tried to push them away and think straight. What the hell was wrong with him? He’d never once lost it in battle or in life, so why now, when things were at their worst, couldn’t he think straight?

“Address. I need the address.”

Heimdall blinked and stood. “She won’t be there by the time you arrive. She’ll be somewhere else.”

“Where, Heimdall? Tell me.” Tyr couldn’t control the commanding timber of his voice any more than he could control the anger that boiled through him—or the way every person in the bar had stopped moving and now stared at them.

Heimdall grabbed his coat. “I’ll do one better. I’ll go with you.”

CHAPTER 13

Celeste stepped out of the taxi in front of the medium-sized, rundown ranch-style house that had been her whole existence for more than twenty years.

The cabbie rolled down his window. “Thirty-five fifty.”

She looked back at him. “Yeah... just let me go inside and grab it.”

He glared at her. “I’m gonna keep the meter running.”

She nodded and turned back to the house. It felt like years since she’d last seen it. A place once colorful and beautiful had turned to death and suffering after her father left. And now possibly his tomb.

The anger that had begun to burn back in the bar now lit into a signal fire. Looking at the place that had been her prison for so long was like throwing a Molotov cocktail on a haystack.

Celeste slammed open the broken wooden gate so hard it fell off its hinges and dropped onto the crunchy grass. She replayed the plan she’d come up with.

Her mother wouldn’t take the chance of hurting her father in the front room or kitchen, where anyone might peek in. And she wouldn’t have chosen their bedroom, either—too close to the neighbors. So that left only one room—the back room. Her room.

Her father had converted it from a porch early on so Celeste had a play area. After he'd left, her mother had moved Celeste into that room permanently. She put celestial wards on the walls and a lock from the outside. She'd told Celeste it was for her own protection in case they were ever found by fellow angels, but Celeste knew the truth. It was so Celeste couldn't get out when her mother got drunk, high, or... entertained.

Celeste's entire world had become the prison of that room. Not that it had been all bad. Her mother had at least given her a TV, a computer, and her own fridge. Celeste had gotten her education online. Scouring educational sites for free courses and lessons. Her father had taught her to read, write, and do basic math by the age of three, but everything after that she'd learned herself. It wasn't like half-demon, half-angel sups just went to regular school with humans.

So she darted to the back of the house and down to the secret entrance her mother didn't know about.

Celeste snuck up to the front of the house to the group of windows that overlooked the bright, sunny day. Through a crack in the curtain, she saw the TV was on, as were the lights in the front room and kitchen. She waited to see if her mother emerged, but she didn't.

Celeste made her way around the side of the house to a tall bush and weeds that covered what she searched for.

She reached the door, double the size of a pet entrance, and pushed the dead brush off it. The hinges creaked as she pulled it open. The scent of dirt and damp cement met her nose. She peered into the darkness below and stepped down onto the extremely narrow first step, remembering every inch of the place.

Going slow, with one hand on the wall, Celeste made her way into the cramped room not much more than a crawlspace. A wave of nausea coursed through her as

memories of sleeping in Anton's closet, battered and bruised, came floating back. She leaned on the wall and sucked in deep breaths several times until the feeling passed, and she spit bitter saliva out.

She continued forward to where a crack of light filtered down from the ceiling. She walked under it. The hatch leading under her bed waited above her. She waited, listening, but still, nothing stirred.

She grabbed the little stool she'd used when she wanted to escape her room to enjoy the stars or breathe fresh air. It wobbled but held her weight.

Celeste ducked her head and pushed against the hatch, praying she hadn't locked it the last time she'd used it. To her relief, the wood lifted easily.

She lifted it an inch before peering out from under her bed. The scent of her favorite candle still lingered in the air, and a strange sense of home rushed through her. She pushed aside a set of shoe boxes to get a better view of the room. She didn't have to search far to spot a figure on the floor, hands tied behind them and bound to their feet.

Papa!

Celeste fought against her shaking hands as she lifted the hatch higher and located the hook she'd made when she was twelve to hold it open. She hooked the hatch to her bed and pulled herself up through the hole. She slung her leg up and kicked over a stack of books to the left. She held her breath as they hit the ground with a slap.

A minute passed. Then another. Nothing. No one entered the room, and her father didn't stir.

When she pulled herself under her bed, she lay mere inches from where the light

spilled onto the floor. She reached out and prodded her dad with her foot.

“Papa,” she whispered.

Nothing.

She reached out with her mind, trying to connect with him, but there was nothing but blackness.

She prodded him again, kicking his calf a bit harder. “Papa!” she whispered louder.

Again nothing.

She cursed herself and scanned the room for her phone. She should call Tyr. There was no way she’d be able to get her dad out by herself if he wasn’t conscious.

Dammit! She didn’t even have his number. Why hadn’t she thought things through better?

Papa had always told her to be wary of the rage that came with being a demon. Though, honestly, she was more worried about the rage that came with being half-angel. Why had she let her anger get the better of her? Why?—

She shook her head. It was too late for whys or should haves.

Celeste needed to get her father out of the house. As soon as he was outside of the wards, she would use her mind to call Tyr. She’d tell him where they were, and if he didn’t hate her, he’d come.

She shimmied out from under her bed and spotted a chair next to the door. She silently jumped up and tiptoed to it. Picking it up, she wedged it under the doorknob.

“I’m afraid that won’t keep me out,” said a voice behind her.

Celeste spun around. Her mother lounged on the bed. Celeste’s stomach flopped, and she had to look twice to be sure it really was her mother.

As a child, her mother’s eyes had shone like brilliant aquamarines flecked with golden starlight. But years of abuse and sin had diminished the golden flecks that belied her celestial heritage to nothing more than smoldering embers behind a starless night sky. Her cheeks, which once had been the perfect shade of peach, had sunken in and tinged a deep grayish color. Even her mother’s once shiny, thick hair hung limp and as dry as her mother’s cracked lips. As Celeste took in her mother’s frame, she wondered how long it had been since her mother had eaten or bathed.

“I’m taking Papa.”

Her mother laughed and motioned to the figure on the floor. “Him? He’s all yours.”

Celeste knelt next to her dad and pushed the hair from his face.

“Papa? I’m here.” She pressed her hand over his heart. It still beat.

She reached out with her mind to see if he was conscious.

For a second, nothing happened, and then the man’s eyes opened. A sick feeling dripped through Celeste, and she scrambled away.

“You aren’t my father.”

The man chuckled as he broke the ropes with ease and got to his feet.

Celeste touched the man’s mind. A cold wave washed over her. Demon.

She looked from him to her mother. “What is this?”

The man shook off her father’s facade to reveal Amezodile. Anton’s bodyguard.

“Where’s Papa?”

“You ran from Anton, and he wants you back. I knew you would only come if you thought your father was in danger. Amezodile’s a trickster demon.”

Celeste tried to grasp her mother’s words. “So... Papa isn’t in danger? He isn’t here?”

Her mother licked her lips. “I haven’t seen your father.”

Rage bloomed inside her again. “I don’t believe you.”

“I don’t care.” Her mother jumped to her feet. “You left me here to deal with the mess you created. You and your stupid father. Do you have any idea what I’ve been put through by Anton? I made a deal with him. You broke that deal. He almost killed me.”

Celeste couldn’t hold back the vitriol that she’d suppressed for too many years. “This wasn’t my mess. You sold me knowing what he was capable of. He broke almost every bone in my body because of you.”

“You should have just done what he asked, and you would have been showered with gold and jewels and everything you want.”

“No! Gold and jewelry, yes, but never what I wanted. I don’t give a crap about that stuff. I want love. I want a family. I want—” She stopped herself right before saying Tyr’s name.

“Just like your father. Stupid. Na?ve. Weak.”

Celeste clenched her fists to keep from smashing her mother in the face. “Where is my father,” she asked again through clenched teeth.

“I said I don’t know.”

“And I said I don’t believe you.”

“That’s not my concern. I gave birth to you. Took care of you. Fed you. Raised you. Kept you safe. You owe me.”

Celeste swallowed the boulder lodged in her throat. “You don’t love me at all, do you? You think I owe you because you pushed me out of your body? You should have given me to my dad and lived your own life.”

“You ruined my life!” she shouted. “You and your damn father. Filling my head with the idea we’d be a family. That he would make everything okay for us. But he didn’t! He ruined me. Tainted me. Made me into this.”

“No, Mother. You made you into that. Dad tried to do everything he promised. It was you who broke that. You who ruined him. Ruined me. You just couldn’t handle the fact that a demon was a better person than you were supposed to be.”

Her mother’s eyes narrowed, and her fists clenched. “Take her.”

Amezodile stepped forward and clamped his hand on Celeste’s arm. She struggled against him and tried to pull away, but Amezodile’s grip was too strong. He dragged her toward the bedroom door. No. Not again. She refused to be weak and pushed around any longer.

Celeste dropped her shield and blasted him with a wave of mental energy. Amezodile dropped her arm like it was on fire. He grabbed his head and crumpled to the ground.

“Stop!” her mother commanded.

There was no stopping. Not this time. Not for Amezodile. And not for her mother.

Celeste blasted Amezodile again, and he wailed in agony, his form shifting into dozens of different people.

Her mother ran forward and grabbed Celeste, shaking her, but Celeste shoved her mother to the ground.

Over and over, Celeste let her rage pour out of her as she blasted Amezodile. The power and control intoxicated her. It lit inside like a tender flame growing with each cry, each physical shift, each plea for her to stop.

“I warned you, Amezodile,” she said softly. “I warned you last time that you would pay for not helping me.”

“Stop, or you’ll never see your father again!” her mother yelled.

Celeste’s gaze whipped to her mother. “You said you don’t know where he is.”

Terror flooded her mother’s eyes as she glanced at Amezodile, who still cried in agony a foot away.

“I lied, like you said.”

Celeste took a step forward. “Where is he?”

Her mother licked her lips, and Celeste attacked, blasting her mother with a wave of mental energy. Her mother screamed and curled into a ball. Celeste hit her again. She'd never attacked her mother, but as her anger boiled over, Celeste let all of her pain and rage flow into her mother, who screamed and writhed like the snake she was.

Her mother's wings sprouted from her back, ragged and decrepit. She tried to shield herself, but there were no protections against what Celeste bombarded her with.

Power. Control. Pain.

"Where is he?" Celeste yelled.

Her mother screeched. "Anton's!"

Celeste blinked rapidly and pulled back her ability. Her father was at Anton's? Why was he there? What had Anton been doing to him?

Rage built inside her once more at the prospect of someone hurting her Papa.

Her gaze traveled back to Amezodile. "You should have told me that in the first place. It would have saved time. Let's go."

Amezodile tried to get to his feet, but his legs buckled, and he dropped again.

"Now!" Celeste ordered.

He tried again and managed to get to his feet shakily.

"Start the car. And pay the cabbie outside."

Amezodile nodded, shuffled to the bedroom door, and stumbled out.

Celeste's gaze slid to her mother's prone form. "You too, Mother."

Tyr took in the strip bar called Anton's Dolls . "Is this a joke? You said we were going to Celeste."

Heimdall held up his hand. "Give it a minute."

A minute? What the hell did that mean? He'd given it a minute, a lot of minutes, and Celeste was nowhere to be seen.

Tyr growled and paced. He had so many things he was going to say to her. He'd practiced his words over and over. Heimdall had given him the basic rundown of what she was doing and why. As much as it relieved him to know she wasn't running from him, he was equally as angry she'd thought she could rescue her father alone. She was still healing, and she had no fighting skills at all. If anything happened to her?—

A black SUV screeched to a halt at the curb, and the driver jumped out like he was being chased by hellhounds. He raced around the vehicle and yanked open the passenger side door, pulling someone out. The dark-haired woman clawed at the man, swearing and spitting. The man dragged her by the arm toward the bar, an expressionless mask on his face. He stared straight ahead and didn't bother to glance Tyr's way.

The back door to the vehicle opened, and Celeste slid out. Tyr strode forward, the words he'd practiced waiting on his lips. But the moment he opened his mouth, Celeste threw herself into his arms. She squeezed him tight, and the anger inside crumbled. He wrapped her in his arms and crushed her against him. She was okay. She was in his arms again. Safe. Safe but... furious. The anger wafting off her seeped

into him, making his skin tingle and his view glow red. He wanted to feed on her anger, stoke it, see it play out.

No. Not her. Not Celeste . She didn't deserve what would happen if he stoked that fire.

He pushed her away and peered into her tear-stained eyes.

“What the Hel were you thinking?”

She shook her head and wiped her face.

“Do you have any idea what I would have done if you'd been hurt? Or worse?”

“No,” she managed.

Anger bubbled inside him again at the thought. “I'm the God of War, Celeste. Give it a guess.”

She sucked in a deep breath. “I'm sorry. I just wanted to get my dad.”

Tyr nodded to the car. “Is he in there?”

She shook her head and pointed at the bar. “Anton has him.”

Tyr turned to the bar, and his gut twisted. “Is that the guy who hurt you?”

“Yes,” she said, stronger. As if something washed over her, she stood straighter, and her expression hardened. “He has my dad.”

Again, her anger burst through him, fueling him, feeding him. His sword pressed

against his ankle, wanting to be unleashed and used to slay every being in the bar.

Tyr nodded. “You stay here. Heimdall and I will handle this.”

“No. I need to do this.”

Tyr wanted to argue with her, but he, of anyone, understood how cathartic vengeance could be in healing a wounded soul. And from the anger wafting off her, she was beyond wounded. He realized she’d dropped her shields. She let him in. Fully in. It excited but also terrified him of what he might see. He delved into her memories from the last thirty minutes.

Power, anger and pleasure in causing pain flooded him. If they’d been at home, he would have taken her right in that moment. But he had to choose. If he fed that side of her, he didn’t know who she would turn into. Or how much she would hate him for letting her... Even so, she had to choose. He couldn’t choose for her.

He prayed he’d be able to hold himself back from ripping the guy and his men apart. Just thinking of what he’d done to Celeste, the man was lucky he’d not already started slaughtering everyone in the place.

“It’s your choice. But you stay by me.”

She nodded. “And you stay by me.”

He grabbed her hand, and together with Heimdall, they entered the building. A bouncer stopped them.

“Anton is expecting us,” said Celeste.

He took one look at her and nodded, opening a second door.

All around, women in various degrees of nudity writhed and ground their bodies against metal poles. The sensual music blared from speakers above, and the scent of fruit, sweat, and sex permeated the air, bringing back memories of the many after-battle celebrations he and his men had taken part in.

Tyr coughed and wiped his thoughts. He didn't want Celeste to see any of it.

Dozens of men ogled the dancers, but at least a dozen more kept their eyes trained on Celeste and him.

"Where to?"

She pointed to a staircase hidden behind two gigantic men in the back corner. Tyr strode to the stairs, his hand gripping Celeste's tighter with every human who gaped at her. His metal fist squeezed tight as he fought not to smash the lusty stares out of all their eyes, and he wished he'd grabbed his sword before entering.

They approached the stair guards. Their gazes lingered on Celeste, and then one nodded to her, and she started forward. Tyr followed her, but the man blocked the way.

"Only her."

"Move," Tyr commanded.

"Only. Her."

The second man took a step forward and flashed a gun holster. The intimidation and posturing they displayed only further stoked his anger.

Tyr smiled, and his vision went blood red. "I won't ask again."

The men stared at Tyr and crossed their arms over their chests. Tyr stepped forward, and the second man reached for his gun. Tyr knocked it from his hand and grabbed the man's throat in his metal grasp. The man clawed at Tyr's hand, and he squeezed.

Gods above, he'd missed this part. The part where they realized they'd made a fatal miscalculation and weren't leaving the confrontation unscathed.

A ripple coursed over Tyr's skin, and he smiled.

The first man reached for Tyr but crumpled to his knees, grabbing his head.

"He's with me," said Celeste to the man on the floor.

"Why is it when someone who is clearly a human's superior tells them to do something, they don't realize said person is being kind by trying to save that human a lot of pain, and even their life?"

"Because they are arrogant toddlers," said Heimdall.

Tyr dropped the purple-faced bodyguard to the ground, where he gulped down air like a dying fish. He stepped over the man and took Celeste's hand again before ascending the steps.

A shot rang out, and fire burned across Tyr's arm. He growled and whirled around.

The dancers stopped moving, and several of the patrons stood, confused.

The men he'd noticed upon arrival made their way toward the stairs, guns out and trained on Tyr.

Heimdall smiled. "Go. I'm going to hang down here."

Tyr glanced at him. Damn. Heimdall had known what they'd walk into, and he'd chosen to come.

The man truly was full of surprises.

Tyr and Celeste hit the top of the stairs, and he retrieved his knife from inside his boot. Red still stained his gaze as he inspected every door they passed. Finally, they reached a sturdy wooden door at the end of the hall.

"This is it," said Celeste.

"Are you sure you want to do this?"

Her steely gaze stared at him. "Absolutely."

He didn't like it, but if what he'd seen on the stairs was half the power she stored inside her, he had drastically underestimated her. She was half demon, half angel, and it was time to let her find the superior being she was inside. And damn if seeing her so strong didn't turn him on.

Tyr breathed deep and planted his boot in the middle of the door. It burst from its hinges and exploded inward. A scream sounded, and several men swore. A gunshot rang out, and Tyr stepped through the doorway, covering Celeste.

Bullets ripped through his abdomen, shoulder, and leg. He let the pain wash over him and through him, spurring him on.

The man who'd fired his gun paled and dropped it when Tyr didn't go down. He backed up several feet, bumped into a couch, and fell onto it.

Tyr took a step, but Celeste grabbed his hand. "Wait."

Tyr nodded, and she stepped to his side and scanned the scene.

Five men stood inside a lush office. Two held the woman with black hair while a third punched her in the face. The man who had dragged the woman out of the car stood next to a shorter man who Tyr could only assume was the boss. The man from the car assessed Tyr, and his eyes widened in fear and turned pure black.

A demon.

The woman barely held up her bruised face as blood dripped down her chin.

“Who the F—” The man stopped short when he spotted Celeste.

The woman on the floor gasped for air. “Are you happy now,” she croaked. “Are you satisfied seeing what Anton will do to me?”

Celeste didn’t answer.

Tyr looked closer at the kneeling woman again. The high cheekbones. The swolle, pouty lips. The blue eyes. Celeste’s mother.

“Who the hell is this gorilla?” Anton spat.

Celeste stepped toward the man. “Give me my father.”

Tyr had never heard her voice so flat.

Anton chuckled and opened his arms wide. “Baby girl, I’ve missed you. I can’t tell you how heartbroken I’ve been since you ran away. Have you seen the error of your ways? Realized what I can give you? You healed amazingly, by the way. It makes me happy I didn’t do any permanent damage to your stunning face.”

Celeste's fists clenched. "Give him to me."

Anton's eyes narrowed, and he thought for a minute. "And why would I do that?"

Celeste took another step forward, but Tyr held her back.

"Because I'm asking nicely. All I want is my father. Give him to me and I'll let you live."

"I'll do you one better," Anton retorted. "You come back, and I'll forget you left. I'll let your mother and your friend go."

The arrogance. The utter arrogance of the man set Tyr's battle rage close to exploding. This small, insignificant human had hurt his Celeste. Had beaten her. Chained her. And almost killed her.

"I have a third option," Tyr growled. "I kill all your men and torture you until you tell me where Sylax is?"

Anton chuckled, pulled a gun from his waistband, and pointed it at Tyr. "You may be tough, Big Guy, but I'm sure even you can't take a bullet to the brain. So, let's all be civil. Celeste comes back. Her mother goes free. Everyone is happy."

Tyr growled, and Celeste took a step forward, her gaze locked on Anton.

"Boss—" The man next to him tried to warn Anton, but it was too late.

Anton grabbed his head and bellowed.

"Tell me where my father is," Celeste said.

Anton dropped to his knees and puked. He sucked in several breaths, and then his head whipped up.

“Kill them!” Anton shot wildly, missing and then ducking down again.

Tyr grabbed Celeste and wrapped himself around her as the first semi-automatic emerged, and bullets pierced his back.

They tore at his flesh like red-hot lava ripped through him. He gritted his teeth.

“Tyr!” Celeste screamed.

He hugged her tighter.

Seven. Eight. Nine. Ten. Twelve. Fifteen. Twenty.

The bullets stopped. Celeste clutched at him.

“Tyr. Tyr!”

He relaxed his hold, his crimson vision tainting her beautiful pale skin.

“Immortal, remember?” He kissed her forehead. “Don’t move.”

Tyr turned and flicked his wrist. His knife lengthened to its full size, and flames sprung from it, licking the blade.

“What the hell?” Anton said.

“Nope. She’s a different Norse God,” Tyr replied before the battle-rage took over.

He ran at the guy with the gun and decapitated him mid-ammo change. He rolled across the floor as another volley of shots rang out. Tyr swung at the second guy, but he doubled over, grabbing his head. He tripped backward over a chair and dropped to the ground. Tyr jumped the distance between them and plunged his sword through the man's chest and straight into the floor, cracking the wood underneath.

Another shot rang out, and Tyr spun around. The man shot three more times. One ripped through Tyr's wrist just above his metal hand, causing him to drop his sword. A second-round embedding in his rib, shattering it. Tyr roared. Blood. He wanted blood. Emotions burst from him like a shockwave through the building. The man fired again, missed twice, and then ran out of bullets. Tyr tackled him and bit into his throat.

The man screamed, and Tyr reared back, spraying himself and the entire area with the man's blood. Blood. Slick. Wet. Warm. Blood.

Adrenaline and ecstasy flushed his body. He laughed as the rush of lust shot through him.

How long had it been since he'd killed someone with his hands? Felt their blood on his face. Tasted their sweat. Listen to their heartbeats slow. Watch as their mouths gaped open and closed as they pleaded with him to make it stop.

He smiled. Too long. Much, much too long.

Tyr roared again and jumped to his feet. Another pulse blasted from him, and he shuddered.

Anton backed away from Tyr, and the guy from the car made for the door.

Only two? Bummer. He was just getting started.

CHAPTER 14

Celeste's throat dried as Tyr turned, and she caught sight of him. Blood covered his face, throat, jacket, and shirt. His eyes had gone as red as the blood staining his skin, and his eyes told her everything she needed to know.

Bloodlust.

She'd heard stories of it before, but she'd never seen it in person, and in all honesty, seeing it was a lot scarier than she had ever imagined. Tyr charged Amezodile, but Amezodile headed for the door.

"He's mine!"

Tyr looked at Celeste and then refocused on Anton.

Amezodile had reached the doorway when she blasted him. He fell forward and slammed into the floor.

"Please," he begged. "Please, stop. I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

"Where's my father?"

He wretched and gagged as foamy saliva fell onto the floor from his mouth. "I don't know," he gasped.

She blasted him again.

He curled in a ball and screamed a guttural sound, deep and animalistic.

“Where is he?” she demanded.

“I don’t know. I swear,” he cried.

Celeste released her blast and walked forward. Grabbing Amezodile by the head, she forced her way into his mind. He froze as she searched his memories. His hands gripped her wrists, and his jaw clenched.

She watched everything since the day she left, but there was nothing—not one memory of her father.

“Where is he?”

Amezodile’s grip tightened, and she delved deeper, and then, everything went blank. His eyes rolled back in his head, and blood oozed from every hole in his face.

She dropped him to the ground and turned back into the room. Guess I’ll have to get my answers elsewhere.

Anton had scampered behind his desk and reached for something under it.

“No more guns.” Celeste let out a mental blast that had Anton falling onto his desktop, flopping and writhing, scattering papers, pens, and everything else onto the floor.

Tyr jumped over the desk and grabbed Anton, jerking him upward. Celeste immediately pulled back her mental powers.

Tyr twisted Anton’s arm until the shoulder popped, and a crack sounded.

Anton screamed.

“Shhhhh...” Tyr said. “Don’t scream yet. We are just getting started. You should save the screams for when I get going.” He yanked Anton’s head back, and Anton stared straight at Celeste.

Tyr drew close to Anton’s ear. “You see that woman? That beautiful, perfect creature? She’s my mate, and you hurt her. Used her. Tried to break her. But you didn’t. Even so, I am going to break every bone in your body. Then, I am going to ask you a question. If I don’t get the right answer, I will start cutting pieces of you off. Pieces you like. Pieces you need. Maybe even a few you don’t.”

Tyr slammed his metal fist down on Anton’s open palm, and the bone crunched beneath the blow.

Again, Anton screamed. “Please. Please. Ask me anything. I’ll tell you whatever you want.”

Tyr shook his head. “Pain first, question second.”

Tyr reached in and bit into Anton’s ear, ripping it from his head and flinging it across the room. Then, he flipped Anton over, raised his fist over his head, and brought it down heavily on Anton’s chest. Celeste watched as several of Anton’s ribs cracked. She wanted to be the one to hurt him. To see him squirm and writhe. But something told her not to interfere.

“That’s enough,” Celeste’s mother yelled.

Tyr looked at her, and a wicked smile crossed his face before he turned to Celeste. “How many bones of yours did he break, Fylgja ? Ten, twelve, fifteen?” His gaze swung to her mother again. “When I’ve tripled that number, then maybe it will be

enough.”

Tyr grabbed one of Anton’s knees and with a sickening pop, broke it.

Celeste swallowed hard.

Tyr’s thoughts invaded her mind. Images of things he’d done in the past. Things he was prepared to do to Anton as well.

A perverse part of her delighted in his power. More and more images bombarded her, and Celeste had to raise her barrier.

“Please,” Anton begged. “Stop. For the love of God, stop.”

Tyr cocked his head to the side. “What god? Me? Odin? Thor? Or maybe a different god. Zeus, perhaps.” Tyr shook his head. “Nope. Sorry. None of us love you.”

“Please,” Anton pleaded. “Take whatever you want. You want the girl? Take the girl. I give her to you. You can have her.”

Tyr smashed his head into Anton’s, breaking his nose and spraying blood everywhere, before smashing his fist into Anton’s jaw.

“You give her to me? You? A mere Midgardian? A man who is not more than a flea on the ass of this world, think you could give me a goddess like her?”

Tyr pulled Anton’s face so close Celeste was afraid he might bite Anton’s throat out the way he had the bodyguard.

“You cannot give what is not yours. And Celeste was never yours. She is mine. Not because you gave her to me. Not because I took her. Not because I forced her. But

because she was born to be mine. And you put your hands on her. Your dirty, disgusting, human hands.” Tyr dropped Anton back onto the desk and slammed his fist into Anton’s second hand before he swung his fist across Anton’s cheekbone, jaw, and finally his temple.

A red aura swam around Tyr, and she swore with every swing of his fist, his aura grew brighter and his frame larger.

Celeste took a step forward. “Tyr!”

Something inside told her that if she didn’t stop Tyr, the people in that room wouldn’t be the only ones who would pay.

Tyr swung again, and Anton’s head cracked.

“Tyr!” She pushed a mental blast at him, and he shook his head before looking up at her. He squinted, and for a moment, she thought he might attack her as well, but he blinked twice, and then his eyes widened in recognition.

He looked at Anton and then at her again. He took a deep breath and stepped away. Anton lay on the desk, not moving.

“Do you really want me to stop? Or perhaps you want to exact your own revenge. Come, Fylgja . Let me help guide you.”

She wanted to say yes. Wanted to tell Tyr they’d torture Anton for the next twenty-four hours, make love in his blood, and it would still not be enough for what he had done to her. What he had tried to take from her.

But the vibes Tyr gave off told her she needed to calm him or risk the whole western hemisphere breaking into civil war. America struggled enough without that

happening.

She walked toward him in slow, confident strides. He smiled, and she reached up and cupped his cheek. She needed to say something to get through to him.

“If you continue, he won’t be able to answer our questions.”

Anton moaned, and his eyes fluttered open and closed.

Tyr grabbed her hand where it touched his skin. He pulled it to his nose and breathed her in.

She laid her other hand on his chest. “You’ve done enough. You’ve avenged me. He can’t hurt me anymore. Can’t hurt anyone anymore.”

He closed his eyes for a long moment, and when he opened them again, something shifted, and he came to himself.

He slapped Anton’s cheek twice. “See that? See the woman you tried to break, tried to destroy. She just saved your life, you useless tick.” Tyr raised his fist again, but Celeste encased it with her smaller one.

“I need to know where my father is.”

Tyr nodded and pulled Anton off the desk with his free hand. “Where is Sylax?”

Anton groaned, and his eyes rolled, unfocused.

Tyr leaned his hand onto Anton’s broken arm, and Anton cried out, his eyes flying open.

“Where is he?”

Anton sucked in a shallow breath and muttered something so softly Celeste couldn't hear.

“You're lying,” Tyr said.

Anton's head lolled from side to side, and he mumbled again.

Tyr licked his lips.

“Where is he?” Celeste asked.

“He says he never had him. He has no idea who Sylax is.”

A chill swept down Celeste's spine. She lowered her shield and delved into Anton's mind.

A wave of nausea coursed through her, seeing all the things he'd done and the perverse pleasure he'd gotten from doing it. She slapped Anton before looking harder.

Anton cried out as she refused to go slower. Anger raged inside her as she pushed him, looking for her father. Tyr groaned and slid behind her, pressing into her and kissing her neck.

She kept looking and finally growled and let go of his mind. Nothing. He told the truth. Anton never had her father.

Tyr's hands roamed her body, and her skin heated. He spun her around and kissed her hard. His lips were so hot they almost burned her, and his hands scorched her skin as

he rubbed them over her body. She let him kiss and claim her for a minute and then stepped away, breathing heavily.

“I’m sorry. I...”

She squeezed his hand. “I understand. Trust me.” Her gaze traveled to Anton. “He didn’t ever have my dad.”

“Where does that leave us?”

“If he never made it here, there was only one other place he would have gone.” Celeste’s gaze moved to where her mother had scrambled across the floor to the corner.

Her mother had lied. And there was only one reason her mother would have lied. A pit grew in Celeste’s stomach, but she shoved it away. No. She wouldn’t give up hope. Couldn’t give up hope.

“Where is he?” she whispered.

Her mother shook her head. “I... I don’t know, I swear. He said he was coming here to kill Anton for what he’d done.”

“When?”

Her mother’s brow furrowed, and she shook her head. “When what?”

“When did he tell you? You said you hadn’t seen my dad.”

Her mother licked her lips. “I... uh... I...”

Celeste lashed out and blasted her mother with a huge wave of mental energy.

Her mother screamed, and her eyes rolled back in her head, and she began to convulse.

“Where? Tell me! Tell me, or I’ll pull it from you,” Celeste screamed.

She continued to hold her mother in her mental grasp, searching for the answer, but her mother fought back, blocking her mind from Celeste.

Celeste pushed harder, making her mother whimper, but she couldn’t break her mother’s wall.

Celeste yelled in rage and then took everything she had and pushed it at her mother. Her mother’s eyes flew open, locked on Celeste, and her mental block shattered.

The pieces of the memory were fuzzy, broken, and disjointed. Her father at the front door. Her mother yelling at him. He didn’t back down. They’d struggled. Then, everything went black.

“Where is he?” Celeste ran to her mother and slapped her. She turned to Tyr. “Kill her.”

Tyr stormed forward, scooped up his sword, and headed right for them.

Her mother’s eyes widened. “He’s at the house! Sylax is at the house!”

Celeste grabbed Tyr’s arm before he struck.

Tyr’s gaze became conflicted. She touched his cheek, and his expression softened.

Celeste pointed at her mother. “Bring her.”

Tyr nodded, hefted her mom over his shoulder like a sack of flour, and together, they strode from the room.

They reached the bottom of the steps, and Tyr stopped short. Celeste scanned the bar. Shattered chairs and bodies lay dead or unconscious on the floor. She blinked several times, taking in the scene. Everyone. Every single male in the bar littered the floor.

Several bloodied women lay on the sparkly runways. She touched their minds in turn, making sure they were still alive.

The men, though... less than five were so lucky.

“Finished?” Heimdall sat at the bar, drinking from a bottle of whiskey.

“Someone had fun,” said Tyr. “Thought you weren’t supposed to interfere.”

Heimdall shrugged. “I saved as many of the women as I was able. Some I couldn’t stop from attacking, though, so I had to knock them out. They shouldn’t have to suffer for your temper tantrums.”

“Maybe you should work for me. Not spend all your time at Frigg’s.”

Heimdall sipped his drink. “We leaving?”

Tyr snorted. “You already know the answer.”

Heimdall downed his drink. “Let’s finish this.”

They walked over the bodies littering the floor, and as they pushed open the front

door, noise on the streets assaulted them.

The group stared at the chaos outside the strip club. A complete riot ensued all around them. Men beat each other. Women screamed and slapped each other. Dogs barked and snarled at everything that moved. The entire street was littered with crashed cars. It was mayhem. Sirens wailed in the distance, and a helicopter flew into view.

Celeste took Tyr's hand, and his eyes clouded in regret.

"It's not your fault."

Tyr shook his head. "Yes, Fylgja . It is."

Celeste's heart pounded, and her leg bounced in the front seat of Amezodile's SUV as they headed back to her mother's house.

Please, please, please , let him be okay. She let down her shield and reached for her father again, but there was no response.

The best she could think was that her mother had him in the house somewhere warded that Celeste didn't know about, and his abilities didn't work where he was being held.

Tyr squeezed her hand, and she tried to smile, but her mouth wouldn't work. At least his eyes had returned to normal, and the red aura had left.

As they pulled up in front of her house, a pit grew deep in Celeste's gut. She sucked in several breaths.

"I should go first."

Celeste shook her head.

He looked like he might argue, so she jumped from her side of the vehicle before he said anything.

“Celeste!” Tyr leapt from the car and met her at the front, where the high beams fell across the now-dark yard.

The car door opened behind them, and Celeste turned to her mother. “Where is he?”

Heimdall joined them.

Her mother’s gaze bounced between them.

Heimdall grabbed her mother’s arm and jerked her forward. “Tell her,” he ordered.

Her mother chewed her lip.

“Now!” Tyr demanded.

Her mother jumped and pointed to the front of the house.

Celeste didn’t wait. She ran straight for the front door and threw it open. “Dad?” She ran into the front room and scanned it.

Nothing had changed from earlier.

“Dad?” She ran down the hall to her mother’s room, opened the door, and flipped on the light.

No dad.

She ran to her mother's closet and looked under the bed. Then, dropping her shields, she explored every inch of the house.

Still nothing.

She opened her old bedroom door.

A pit in her gut grew bigger.

She rushed to the bathroom and the kitchen. Celeste yelled in frustration and stormed back out the front door.

She slammed her mom with a blast, knocking her off her feet.

"He's not in there."

Her mother dry heaved on the ground. "I... never said... he was."

Celeste's patients shattered. She slapped her mother's face before pushing her mental energy into her mother's mind. She'd get answers one way or another.

Her mother screamed and clutched her head.

"Celeste," Tyr called from somewhere far away.

Celeste dug deeper. She found the scattered and fragmented memories from earlier and focused on them.

A week ago, her dad had stormed up to the front of the house, shouting for her mother to come out. When she wouldn't, he ran to the front door but was met by an invisible hand and flew back across the grass. He lay for several seconds before

hopping to his feet and running at the house again, shouting her mother's name.

The front door opened, and her mother peered out at him. He yelled about how horrible her mother was. He said he never should have left Celeste with her. And then, he said he would kill her for what she'd done to Celeste. He brandished a gun and shot through the door, hitting her mother three times.

Her mother stumbled and rushed out the door. Grabbing her father by the lapels of his coat, she threw him into the invisible barrier.

Her father's body convulsed, and then, out of nowhere, her mother produced a golden javelin. She flung it at her father, pinning him to the barrier. He screamed and writhed for a long minute before his form blackened and stopped moving.

Her mother trudged forward and pulled the javelin from her father's chest. His body dropped, and the javelin disappeared.

Her mother stared at her father's body for a minute, and then she picked him up and dragged him into the bushes.

Celeste fell backward with a thump. Tears streamed from her eyes, and she convulsed as the emotional toll tore at her insides.

Dead. He was dead. Her father was dead.

"Celeste?" Tyr's hand pushed the hair from her face.

Her gaze drifted past him to the bushes by the front door. Celeste crawled toward them, begging, pleading with any deity that would listen that she wouldn't find him. That, by some miracle, he'd been spared and was somewhere in the Underworld recuperating.

She reached the half-dead shrubs, her hand hovering above the foliage.

Please, don't let him be there. Please. Please.

Shakily, she pushed the branches apart, but it was too dark, so she reached out, and her fingers slid across something that felt like leather.

"Celeste, don't." Tyr pulled her into him as Heimdall peered into the bushes.

Celeste hung limp in Tyr's arms as memories flooded her.

Her dad taking her to the park. Going to a hockey game. Camping in the Redwoods. Lunch at the pier. Him letting her win at Monopoly. Teaching her how to use her gift. The tears as he left her. Then, reaching for him on lonely nights, only to find him nowhere. All of it, gone. Done. Over. There would be no more memories.

The anger and pain multiplied inside her so all-encompassing that she could not hold it back. She wailed up at the sky, allowing all of her pain and anger loose into the air.

The sound that emanated from her was one she'd never heard nor made before. So primal. Visceral. From a place deep inside she'd never accessed.

The cry went on and on until she had no breath left. It cut off, and she fell back against Tyr.

She wept into his chest, clinging to him for support. He pulled her to him and held her close.

A minute passed. Dead. Her father was dead. And her mother had killed him.

A light shot across the sky. Then another, and another, and another. And like strikes

of lightning, a dozen or more golden beings stood in the front yard.

Angels.

Heimdall assessed the beings surrounding them and put his hand on his hip but didn't speak.

The angels inspected the area, and their eyes all lit on her mother.

One of them turned to Celeste. The woman's hard eyes pierced straight through her, and Celeste recognized the angel immediately. Grandmother.

A tense silence stretched out over the group, and finally, her grandmother spoke.

"Take them."

Two angels stepped toward her mother, and Heimdall pulled a small knife from his belt that grew to over five feet long and ten inches wide. He stabbed it into the ground and leaned on it, making the angels stop and pull their own weapons.

At the same time, four other angels walked toward where Tyr held Celeste. He sat her on her feet and retrieved his own flaming blade.

"Wait," said Celeste.

"You should move before I have my soldiers cut you down." Her grandmother's gaze remained fixed on Tyr. "These two are our business, not yours."

"I beg to differ," Tyr replied. "Celeste is my mate. That makes her my business. Don't force us to cut you all down in her defense."

“Do you know who you are speaking to?” one of the angels spat. “This is the Archangel Sariael.”

“Do you know who that is?” Heimdall retorted. “That’s Tyr, Norse God of War. And I’m Heimdall, Guardian of Asgard. Amongst other things.”

The angels stopped and looked to Sariael for orders.

“You can try to take Celeste,” said Tyr, “but you’ll not do so until I am dead. And seeing as I cannot die...”

Celeste swiped her eyes and got to her feet. “I think it’s time for my mother to go home. She’s done enough damage.”

Somehow, when she had cried out it had been a beacon to the angels, and they had come to her aid. And she needed aid because she could no longer deal with her mother without killing her. And as much as she wanted to kill her mother... she just couldn’t.

Her grandmother took her in. “And you?”

Celeste slipped her hand into Tyr’s. “I’ll be with my husband. In the Underworld.”

Her grandmother didn’t speak for a minute. “Be sure you keep her there. I can’t guarantee her safety here on Earth outside of the room I created and warded for her.”

She created it? Not her mother?

Sariael nodded, and the angels picked up her limp mother and disappeared in a flash of light.

Her grandmother stood a moment longer. “I’m sorry about your father, Celestine. Even though he was a demon, he was better than most and obviously much better than my own child. If you ever change your mind and want to join us in the fight against evil, call, and I will come for you. No matter where you are.” Her golden glare landed on Tyr. “God or not, if you let harm come to my granddaughter, I will bring all the hosts in heaven to aid me in your eternal destruction.”

Tyr nodded once, and then a golden light fell over her grandmother. She gazed at Celeste for a long minute before wiping a tear from her eye and disappearing. A patch of lilies sprouted up from where her grandmother had stood.

Tyr hugged Celeste before kissing her head.

“Did you mean what you said?”

“What?”

“That I am staying with you?”

He searched her face. “Did you mean what you said? I am to be your husband?”

“Well... I figured...”

Tyr smashed his lips to hers and pulled her hard against his chest, sending a thrill through her.

A moment later, they parted

“Does that mean you want to marry me?”

Tyr smiled and kissed her again.

By the time they parted again, Heimdall had retrieved several blankets from the house and had wrapped Sylax in them.

“Can... we bury him on the estate?”

He put his arm around her. “Of course. We will bury him at our home.”

Despite her sadness and pain, Celeste couldn't help smiling. Hers. Her place. She finally had a home. A real home. A home with Tyr.

CHAPTER 15

Tyr came home, and the first thing he did was shower with Celeste. She pulled the bullets from his wounds, and he cleaned the blood from her body. Nothing sexual, simply two people helping each other wash off the worst day of their lives.

Then, they crawled into bed naked, and he held Celeste as she cried. He wanted more than anything to make it better. To fix it. To stop her hurt. But he had no idea how. His way was to injure people. Kill people. But there was no one to kill. She'd said to leave the human, Anton. And her mother was gone. So, the only thing left for him to do was be there for her.

As the light crept into the sky, she fell asleep in his arms. Only then did he slip out of the bed, pull on pants, and leave their room. He walked the distance down the hallway to the landing and from the landing to the stairs, his heart aching with every step.

He descended to the dining room to the thick glass table where Heimdall had laid out Sylax's body. He stood for several minutes, staring at the navy blue blankets, before opening them. The pain of seeing Sylax had Tyr's knees buckling and him dropping into a chair. If he hadn't known it was Sylax, he never would have guessed. He'd been burnt beyond recognition.

"I'm sorry, Sy. Sorry I couldn't save you. That you wouldn't let me help. But I promise I did what you asked. I kept her safe. She's my Fylgja, Sy. I love her. And I promise I will never, ever let anyone hurt her again. For as long as I live. I swear it."

“That’s Sy?”

Tyr looked over at Herm. “Yeah.”

Herm joined him at the table. “I’m sorry.”

“Me too.”

“Is Celeste okay?”

Tyr shook his head. “No.”

Silence fell between them.

“Why did you ask me to take the money to Heimdall?”

Herm shrugged. “He asked me to.”

Interesting. Heimdall would have seen the future; he wondered what would have happened if he hadn’t gone to deliver the money. If he hadn’t taken Celeste with him. What had Heimdall seen?

“So, you and Celeste?”

Tyr whipped toward him, and Herm held up his hands.

“I’m happy for you. Sad for me. I like her.”

Tyr growled, and Herm took a step back.

“I’m happy for you. You heard that, right?”

Tyr let the anger inside wane.

“Is there anything I can do to help either of you?”

Tyr shook his head, and Herm headed toward the stairs.

“Wait,” said Tyr.

Herm stopped.

“Can you find a spot on the estate for us to bury Sy?”

“Of course.”

“And dig the hole?”

Herm chuckled. “I’ll have Vid do that.”

Tyr was in no mood to argue.

He turned back to Sy and rewrapped him in the blankets. He set his hand on his friend. After all his years alive, burying friends never got easier.

Tyr watched over Celeste as she sat with her hand on the mound of dirt in the early evening light. She’d woken up about four in the afternoon, and he’d told her they’d prepared a spot for Sy. Tyr had carried his body out to where Vid had dug the hole, under an ancient, beautiful tree, and where Hephaestus had created a pristine white marble headstone with the words “Beloved Father. Beloved Friend” . He laid the body in the grave with Vid, Herm, Hephaestus, and Heimdall looking on.

Celeste told story after story of Sy, and as she did, all five gods remained by her side.

Eventually, she'd sunk to her knees and sat with her hand on the dirt. Tyr told the others to go, but he had stayed, eventually joined by Yegret, who sat in the tree watching both of them without moving.

An hour passed, and then Celeste let out a deep sigh. "Where do you think he is?"

"If I had it my way, he would be in Valhalla. Being tended to by virgins and Valkyrie alike. Drinking his fill and never having to worry about anything ever again."

She gave him a sad smile. "I'd like that for him."

She ran her fingers through the freshly churned dirt.

"It's so weird to think he was a demon. Born a demon. Died a demon. And yet... he isn't in the Underworld. But I'm alive, and I am here."

Tyr had no answers for her. He himself didn't fully understand why things were the way they were.

She dug her fingers deep into the soil and crumpled it in her hand before throwing it down again.

"I hope they hurt her. I hope they torture her. I hope they burn her the way she burned my dad. I hope she suffers until she can't take anymore, and then she suffers again for the rest of her existence. I wish I could see it. To help. To make her pay for everything she put him through. Put us both through."

Tyr took her hand. "You don't."

She pulled away. "Yes. I do."

He touched her cheek. “You aren’t that person, Celeste.”

“How do you know? I am my mother’s daughter, after all.”

“Because you are your father’s daughter, too. And he wouldn’t want that.”

She shook her head. “I’m so angry, Tyr. The anger inside me, it’s just...”

“Believe me, of anyone in all the realms, I understand.”

She stared at him, eyes blazing. Her anger ignited him, heating his blood.

“Let me show you something,” said Tyr.

“What?”

“Trust me. I think it can help.” Tyr held out his hand to her, and she took it. He lifted her to her feet, and together, they walked back into the house.

Tyr opened the door behind the entertainment room. Celeste hadn’t noticed the room before, but then, she’d never been in the entertainment room. She’d only seen it a couple of times on her way to and from the garage.

Tyr flipped on the light and walked inside. Celeste followed. It was an apartment of sorts. Several televisions scattered the room. A wooden table and chair sat in a corner. Several windows adorned every wall, but from where they stood in the house, no door or window could lead outside. Other items scattered various surfaces. A blender, toaster, microwave, lamps, a glass coffee table, several vases...

“What is this place?”

“A rage room.”

“What’s a rage room?”

Tyr leaned against the dresser. “It’s what it sounds like. Whenever one of us needs to blow off steam, and we don’t want to go to Odin’s to do it, we come in here.”

“What’s at Odin’s?”

Tyr held up his hand. He walked to a wardrobe in the corner and opened it. Inside, hung over a dozen different instruments, from bats to crowbars to golf clubs.

Tyr stepped to the side. “Pick your poison.”

She scanned the room again. “I can break anything I want?”

“Yes.”

“Anything?”

Tyr pulled out a metal bat and held it out to her. “Anything.”

Celeste slid it from his grip.

“Why did you pick this one?”

“So, you can take back control. That’s one of the things that… human hurt you with. Use it to hurt back.”

She hefted the weight of the bat in her hands. Anything. She could break anything. Everything.

Her anger raged as she chose her first victim. A lamp on the table caught her eye. It reminded her of the one in her mother's bedroom she was never allowed to touch.

She walked to it and sized it up.

"Hold on." Tyr held out a helmet with a plexiglass shield on the front. "Don't want you to get hurt."

"What about you?"

"I'll be fine."

"Tyr, I don't want to hurt you."

"I took a dozen bullets yesterday. A few shards of glass won't faze me. But if you'd like me to leave..."

"No. I... At least step back, please. I don't want to hit you."

Tyr nodded and backed up by the door.

Celeste put on the helmet and walked to the lamp. She was about to swing but paused. "Who's gonna clean this up when I'm done?"

Tyr's muscles flexed beneath his t-shirt as he crossed his arms over his chest. "Don't worry about it. Just let go."

Celeste pictured her mother's face until she couldn't hold back.

For more than thirty minutes, Celeste let every single item in the room suffer her wrath. Every hit from Anton. Every annoyed word from her mother. The burned body

of her father. The room she'd been locked in. The blame. The fear. The guilt. All of it.

When she finished, she dropped the bat and sucked in several deep breaths. Every muscle in her body ached. But if anything in the room hadn't been smashed, she would have kept going.

A warm hand fell on her shoulder, and she turned and grabbed onto Tyr. He pulled her close.

After a minute, she undid her helmet and dropped it to the ground. A piece of glass stuck out of Tyr's cheek.

"Oh my gosh, Tyr." She reached up to the fragment, but he stopped her.

"I told you a little glass wouldn't hurt me."

The red flecks danced in his eyes. Something about them made her body heat with desire.

She tugged the glass from his cheek and dropped it to the floor. "Why did you get excited when we were at Anton's, and you hurt him?"

He didn't speak for a long time, and he searched her face as if trying to decide something. "I'm the God of War. Anger and pain... do that to me."

She pressed her thumb into the gash on his cheek. The red flecks flared brighter.

"Is that why you also had thoughts about... other women?"

"No. Yes. I mean... It wasn't other women specifically. It's just..." He took a deep

breath. “I can’t help that fighting makes me hot. It’s how I was made. When you do what I’ve done for thousands of years, you can’t help but get some wires crossed.”

She pressed her thumb deeper into the cut on his face. “So, me doing this?—”

She didn’t need to finish the question. The way his erection pressed into her stomach answered it for her.

Celeste pressed Tyr back until he hit the wall. “Lower your mental barrier.”

His eyes brightened further. “No.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t want you to see what’s in there.”

“I already saw enough at Anton’s. The women. The sex. The pain mixed with pleasure.”

“You shouldn’t have to see those things. See that side of me.”

“You call me Fylgja . Do you mean it?”

“Of course.”

“And you told Anton I was yours. I was made for you. Your soulmate. Your fated mate.”

“Yes,” he breathed.

“Then, if you believe that, how can you believe I won’t be able to handle what I see

in you? How can I ever be what you need if you shut part of yourself away from me?”

“But you... You’re different. You make me want to do better. Be better.”

“But I like you the way you are. What you are. Who you are. All of you. How can I be what you need if I do not know you? And how can you give me what I need if you don’t trust me?”

Celeste lowered her shield and waited.

A moment passed, and she squeezed him again. “Lower your barrier, Tyr. Let me understand.”

His eyes flickered with conflict. She licked his bottom lip and then bit it, teasing.

He groaned and kissed her hard before letting down his barrier. She sent out a small mental shove, and Tyr hissed.

The pain, though small, made him grab her rear and squeeze. Images flashed through his mind. Not of other women. Not of things from the past—but of her. Things he wanted to do with her, to her.

She blasted him again, harder, and he growled and pulled her hips into his.

“If you do that again?—”

She did it again. His red eyes flared, and he slammed his lips down on hers. Flipping her against the wall, he lifted her off the floor and smashed his chest into hers.

A thrill raced through her and landed in her core. She kissed him harder and delved

back into his mind, seeing everything he wanted. What he needed.

She broke the kiss and slid her tongue down his throat. “Tyr. I want you.”

His vibrant red gaze landed on her. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

She bit his shoulder. “I don’t want it soft. I can’t. Not now. I want... I need what you need. Not always, but this time. I don’t want slow. I don’t want tenderness. I want you to screw me, Tyr. Show me what the God of War is made of.”

His eyes remained conflicted, and then she reached between them and squeezed him hard enough to cause pain.

The flash of emotion and desire that surged through her at his thoughts made her smile and tingle.

“Tyr. Do you love me?”

His eyebrows drew together.

She squeezed him again, and his jaw clenched.

“Answer me.”

“Yes.” His voice came out strangled.

“Then give me what I want. Show me why you are the God of War.”

It took them less than a minute before their clothes were on the floor, and he carried her into the other room and set her on the kitchen counter.

He growled as he entered her hard and fast.

A wave of pleasure rocked through her, and she hit him again with a blast. Tyr groaned and pulled out before slamming into her again. Her head bounced against the wall, and she smiled. The pain traveled down her spine and settled in her core.

More. She wanted more.

Tyr's mouth claimed hers, and he thrust into her again. She looked deep into his eyes, and their minds connected.

He saw what she wanted, and he was going to give it to her. Minutes passed between them, with her blasting him and him responding. His response to the pain heightened her experience.

"Tyr." Pleasure and pain collided inside her as he took her hard. She wrapped her arms around his neck as he lifted her and pinned her to the wall.

Over and over, he thrust into her, and she lost herself until she couldn't tell which thoughts were his and which were her own. All she knew was that everything she'd been through, everything she'd experienced in her life, had prepared her, trained her, for that moment. For him.

Tyr roared as he came, and Celeste's own orgasm crashed into her a second later. Even as her climax tapered off, Tyr didn't stop. He didn't want to stop. She saw in his mind what he wanted and was willing to oblige him.

"Tyr." She called his name, but he didn't stop. "Fylgja ." She lifted his face. "Let's go upstairs and continue this. There are things I want to do to you, but not if it's going to cause me to get glass in my knees."

Tyr withdrew from her and swooped her into his arms.

He strode naked from the room, jumped to the second floor, and then to the balcony before continuing to his room.

They'd barely shut the door before he bent her over the edge of the bed and entered her again.

Celeste smiled. Being Tyr's mate was going to take her places she'd never dreamed of.

Page 16

Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 8:38 am

It'd been six weeks since Celeste had left the estate. Every day she'd gone down to sit at her dad's grave to talk to him. She knew he wasn't in there, but she talked to him anyway. She told him about Tyr and Herm and Vid and Phes. She told him about how Yegret was getting used to her. How she'd planted a bunch of flowers around his grave. How being in the Underworld, she'd found more peace than her entire life on Earth. But mostly, she talked to him about the classes she'd started taking online, and the graphic novel she was writing.

She loved being so close to him, even though he was gone. For years, she had wondered where he went when he wasn't with her, and now, to know he would be with her always, brought her more comfort than she thought it would.

The sky had begun to grow dark when Tyr joined her on the grass. He kissed her and smiled, but his eyes remained uneasy.

“What's wrong?”

Tyr shook his head. “Nothing is wrong, Fylgja. I just think it's time.”

“Time for what?”

He blew out a breath. “Time for you to get out of the estate.”

Her gut clenched. She didn't know what kept her from leaving; she just knew that she hadn't felt like it.

“Tyr, I don't know...”

“Hear me out. It’ll only be for an hour, maybe. Nothing too long, and if you aren’t comfortable, we can come right back.”

“Where?”

He licked his lips. “To Odin’s place. It’s family dinner, and I need you to come with me.”

“You need me to, or you want me to?”

He grabbed her hand. “I need you to.”

She stared at him for a moment and realized how nervous he was. “You’re going to do it?”

He nodded. “It’s time. But I don’t know if I can do it without you.”

She chuckled. “The God of War needs me to hold his hand while he does something hard?”

“Something like that.”

He’d been so attentive the past two months. Never pushing or prying, just being there for her, whatever she needed. And he’d asked for nothing in return.

“Okay,” she said.

His face lit up. “Seriously?”

She nodded. “Seriously.”

Tyr had never been so nervous in his entire life. Everything he’d been through.

Everything he'd done. Every battle. Every fight. Every everything. And going into a room full of people he'd known his entire life and saying two little words terrified him more than he could even vocalize.

"Wow," said Celeste as they walked through Odin's bar, "This place is... not what I'd imagined."

Tyr noticed her staring at the half-naked girls up on the stage and shielded her eyes.

"Can I do that?" She smiled up at him.

Tyr's vision went red.

She burst out laughing. "I'm kidding. Totally kidding. This body is only for you, Lover." She patted his chest.

He pulled her closer and kissed her. "It better be."

Tyr glanced around, and stared down several men who checked out Celeste. A pulse of anger washed through him, and one guy bumped into another, and the two started yelling.

Celeste pulled Tyr's face to hers. "Easy. Always remember, I go home with you. I'll always go home with you."

He nodded, but her words did little to soothe his jealousy.

"Come on, where are we going?"

Tyr nodded but kept his mouth shut as they headed to the next room and then down the hall leading to Odin's house, attached to the back of the club.

They walked to the ancient wooden door carved with the Norse tree of life. Yggdrasil . He stopped and stared at it. He'd seen it a million times, and still, it gave him a sense of longing. He wasn't quite sure what for, but he admired the beauty all the same.

A minute passed.

“We can go home if you want,” Celeste offered.

She appeared as nervous as he felt.

No! He was doing this. Not just for him but for Celeste as well. She needed to get out of the estate, too. Plus, he wanted her to meet the family. Everyone else who had found their one had brought them to family dinner, some before they'd even been together for certain. Herm had started teasing him that he was ashamed of Celeste. Which had gotten Herm a bloodied nose.

Celeste needed this. She needed a family, not just him, Herm, and Vid.

Celeste squeezed his hand. “Seriously, we can go home.”

“No. It's been too long already. I should have done this centuries ago.”

“Are you sure?”

He gave her a tight smile. “I am.”

“Okay.” She lifted her hand and knocked.

Tyr cocked an eyebrow.

She shrugged.

The door opened, and Herm grinned. “You actually showed. I thought you were going to hide her away forever.”

“Actually, I didn’t want to leave,” said Celeste. “I haven’t been ready to go anywhere.”

Herm’s eyes widened. “Oh. Well... uh...”

“Move,” Tyr said.

Herm scratched his head and stepped out of the way before heading across the room to the dining table.

“Do you have magic powers I don’t know about?” Tyr asked.

Celeste looked at him. “Why?”

“Because Herm has never shut up that fast in my life.”

Celeste smiled.

The spacious room was like the front of an apartment. Heimdall sat on an ample leather sectional, surveying the scene, an ale in his hand. He noticed them and nodded. Tyr returned his nod.

Thor and his wife stood in the kitchen preparing food and laughing with Frigg and Meili. Baldur, Vali, Herm, and Vid sat at the table, playing cards and drinking.

Tyr looked past the sectional to a wall of dark French doors that stood open and led to an atrium. Odin took up his normal place, tending to a fire and cooking in the middle of the grassy area.

On the lawn around him, Loki and Val lounged as their daughter, Freyette, toddled between them and then over to where Fenrir held a small pink bundle. Grace sat next to him, holding two bundles of her own. Their triplets.

Tyr glanced around the group, his stomach in knots. Celeste squeezed his hand.

“Tyr’s here,” Heimdall called, loud enough for everyone to turn.

Tyr glared at him, and Heimdall raised his ale and then sipped from it.

Damn, Heimdall.

Frigg hurried over, a radiant smile on her face. “Tyr, I’m so glad you made it. We’ve missed you.”

From anyone else, the sentiment would have sounded like a lie, but Frigg never lied. And of anyone, she loved her family most.

She hugged him and then looked at Celeste. “You must be Celeste. I’ve heard so much about you. I’m so glad you came, too.”

“You’ve heard about me?”

She nodded. “Your father used to come in every few months for a meal and a drink. He always talked about you. And, Herm hasn’t stopped talking about you and Tyr.”

Tyr rolled his eyes. Of course. Herm never could keep his mouth shut. But being the messenger to the gods, Tyr supposed it was written into Herm’s DNA.

“Oh, Tyr, I hope you don’t mind, but I invited a friend to join us from now on. I know he’s your friend, and we don’t know him, but I felt like I needed to.”

Tyr's eyebrows drew together. "A friend?"

She nodded, and a loud knock sounded at the door. Frigg smiled and walked to it, opening it.

A smile spread across Tyr's face as the broad man ducked in the doorway and glanced around nervously.

"Hephaestus, you got my invite. I'm so glad," said Frigg. "Thank you for joining us."

"Uh... thank you for the invitation, Lady Frigg. I am truly honored."

"Frigg," she replied. "Just Frigg."

Poor Phes seemed as nervous as Tyr felt. He'd put on a button-down, black shirt and had slicked his hair back. It even looked like he'd brushed and waxed his beard.

Frigg took his arm and led him to where Tyr stood.

The two shook hands, and then, as Phes went to shake Celeste's hand, she pushed his hand out of the way and hugged his hard middle. Phes hugged her back as his cheeks reddened.

"I'm so glad there's someone else here who is as new at this as I am," said Celeste.

Phes chuckled. "I can't remember the last time I was invited to some kind of family gathering."

Frigg patted his arm. "You are welcome with us any time."

Phes smiled, and Tyr swore he saw tears in Phes' eyes.

“Come on,” said Tyr. “Let’s get a drink.”

Phes sniffled and nodded. Together, the group walked to the bar, and Frigg poured them each an ale.

For a minute, no one spoke as they each tried to calm themselves.

“Why do I feel like the girl at prom without a date?” Celeste asked.

Tyr and Phes laughed.

“Does kind of feel like we are the odd ones out,” said Phes.

Tyr took a deep breath. No. This wasn’t how it was supposed to be. Celeste was his mate. His life. He shouldn’t let her feel that way.

Tyr downed his drink and set the mug on the counter. “Come on.”

He grabbed Celeste’s hand and motioned for Phes to follow them. Together, the three walked out the doors to the atrium and onto the grass. Loki turned and nodded, and then Fenrir looked over his shoulder as well.

“Loki, Val.” Tyr nodded to them and then to Fenrir. “Fen.”

“Tyr.” Fenrir’s eyes remained wary, but at the same time, they’d softened since Tyr had last seen him. His demeanor had, too. His gaze no longer shot around the room, assessing everyone and looking for a way out like a trapped animal. He’d found a sense of peace. A sense of calm. The thought both made Tyr happy and jealous.

“Who’s this?” asked Grace.

“This is my mate, Celeste. Oh, and Hephaestus.”

Phes held up his hands. “I am not his mate.”

Everyone laughed.

Fenrir stood and walked to Tyr. “This is my daughter, Sygni.”

The expression in Fenrir’s eyes went straight to Tyr’s heart. The love and total adoration were more than apparent, and soon, Tyr found his throat so tight he couldn’t swallow. After everything that had happened, everything Fenrir had been through, he had found his Fylgja . And his family.

Fenrir looked up at him. “Would you like to hold her?”

Tyr’s mouth opened and then closed.

Go on. Hold her.

Celeste beamed up at him.

Go on.

Tyr looked at Fenrir again. “Fen, I?—”

“Stop,” Fenrir cut him off. “I know what you’re going to say. And I forgive you. To be honest, in a way, I owe you and Odin my gratitude.”

“What?”

“If it hadn’t been for what happened to me, I may never have gotten Grace. And now, my three pups.”

“But it doesn’t excuse what I did.”

“Maybe not to you, but it’s enough for me.” Fenrir smiled. Truly smiled.

Tyr had no words. Fenrir had changed. Grace had done that for him, and there would never be a way he could repay her for fixing what Tyr had broken in Fenrir.

“Are you two gonna hug now or punch each other or something?” Celeste asked.

They both chuckled.

“I think we’re good,” replied Tyr. “But just so you know, Fen, I am truly sorry for what happened to you. And I’ll spend as long as it takes to re-earn your friendship and your trust.”

Fen nodded and smiled at his baby girl before looking at Tyr again. “So, do you want to hold her? She doesn’t squirm half as much as her brothers.”

Tyr chest squeezed. Fen was willing to let him hold his daughter? He fought to keep his throat from choking up. “I’ve... uh... never held a baby.”

Fenrir chuckled. “The first time I held Freyette, I thought I would break her. But don’t worry. You won’t.”

Tyr held out his arms, and Fenrir placed Sygni in them. She weighed as much as a loaf of bread and was just as squishy.

She yawned and blinked up at Tyr with deep, soulful eyes.

“How old is she?”

“Four weeks. But she seems much older, doesn’t she?” said Fenrir.

Tyr nodded. “Yeah, it’s like she is already thinking a million things about me.”

“She’s always like that.” Fenrir chuckled. “An old soul.”

Tyr gazed down at her tiny pink face and dark black curls. She was so delicate. So soft. Something in his heart squeezed, and suddenly, he wanted nothing more than to hold a child of his own.

Hephaestus walked up behind them and put an arm over both Tyr and Celeste’s shoulders.

“So,” said Phes, “When are you two gonna start a family?”

Celeste smiled.

Thanks for reading!