



# X Marks The O's (Season's Readings #2)

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**Category:** Fantasy

**Description:** "Who did this to you?"

As the reincarnation of Cupid, ex-special forces, Valentin is forbidden from getting involved with humans. His job as the defender of love is to protect mortal relationships, and unlike the stories, his bow is not a cute deliverer of romance but a brutal weapon of war, intended to guard the sanctity of love.

But the moment he lays eyes on Amorette, the beautiful café owner, his discipline wavers. She's forbidden fruit, but Valentin can't stay away. He resolves to watch from a distance until she arrives injured at her café, and his protective nature rears its head. He can no longer abide by the rules. No one touches what's his.

Amorette and her ex-boyfriend were having problems, but when men break in on Valentine's Day looking for the money he stole, her life is suddenly in danger. Given twenty-four hours to return the money or both she and her parents pay the price, a desperate Amorette races against the clock to rescue her family. With her deadline fast approaching, she fears her life is forfeit until the hulking, gorgeous blond who frequents her café and captured her heart appears with a golden bow and arrow of vengeance.

Valentin vows to protect her. She's his, even if his kind forbids it. He can't fight destiny anymore, and together, they paint the town in red X's for justice and hot O's of true love.

A vigilante, forbidden romance Valentine's Day novella, X Marks the O's is intended for mature audiences. Please see the Author's Note inside the book for more info.

**Total Pages (Source):** 15

## VALENTINE'S DAY, PRESENT

Valentin had been shot before. It was during his tour in the Special Forces before he'd been tapped to succeed the aging Cupid, and the bullet had ripped through his flesh, shattered his ribs, and punctured his lungs. He almost hadn't survived, but the pain of that bullet tearing through him was nothing compared to the agony in his chest when he saw her. He would rather aim a gold-tipped arrow at his own heart than endure the sight before him. People often assumed Cupid's arrows were sweet metaphors delivered by infantile cherubs, but the bow strapped across his back was anything but innocent. Valentin was six feet and five inches of pure muscle, and the wicked bow curved brutally to hang down half of his body. There was nothing charming about its threatening appearance, nothing worthy of drawn hugs and kisses in its harsh angles. No, Cupid's bow wasn't magic that gifted romance. It was the defender of love, a weapon designed to protect the sanctity of that beautiful emotion, and if shot point-blank with one of his arrows, his Fae heart would explode into bloody tears.

And still, that pain would be a welcomed relief compared to staring at her. Nausea coiled in Valentin's gut, and darkness blurred his vision. He didn't know he could feel this viscerally, yet anguish riddled his chest all the same. It was too much to bear, too great to avoid, and ignoring everything he knew, everything he believed in, Valentin crossed the street and threw open the café door so violently the glass cracked.

The brunette recoiled as he strode toward her, terror bleeding into her eyes. He didn't want to frighten her. Hurting her was the last thing he wanted. She was so fragilely human, so small and soft and sacred compared to his Fae size, but he couldn't control

the anger raging through him, the unbridled fear poisoning his blood. He had seen war, violence, death. None of them affected him like this sight, and he stormed for her, unable to stop. The beautiful brunette loosed a terrified grunt as she scrambled for the back of the café, but Valentin was upon her in two long strides. He caught her elbow in a gentle but firm hold and whirled her around to face him.

Her big brown eyes stared up at him with fear, tears blurring the chocolate color that matched the sweets she sold, and while some of her nerves were aimed at him, the horror he read in her features came from something else. Rage boiled in his chest to the point of pain. She was so delicate and perfect, and standing above her revealed in high definition what had made him so angry. His sight was better than a human's, and he had noticed it across the street. He knew if he'd noticed the marks from that distance, she would look worse up close, but nothing prepared him for the reality. His rage doubled. He didn't know he was capable of anger this severe, but as he stood above her, his wrath coiled around his heart so tight, he longed to draw his bow and use it for death, not love.

The brunette held his gaze, watching his fury multiply, but she didn't pull away. She lingered against his hold, and Valentin realized she was waiting for him to help her, for him to prove he wasn't like whoever she was fleeing, and a possessive tenderness wove through his anger, softening its jagged edges. Rules be damned. He didn't care anymore. Not when she looked at him with such desperate hope.

With reverent fingers, Valentin brushed his thumb over her bloodied bottom lip. Crimson stained his finger, and never had the color of love been so vile. His eyes flashed, and he saw the minute she realized his righteous anger was for her. A terrified yet relieved sob escaped her lips, and he cupped her face gently, careful to avoid the bruises. He could smell her blood mixing with the chocolate and coffee that always scented her skin, and slowly he lowered his forehead to hers. He had to stoop to reach, but the moment their skin pressed together, he spoke low and clear and deadly.

“Who did this to you?”

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 6:42 am*

### THE DAY BEFORE VALENTINE'S, ONE YEAR AGO

All that's left is for you to take this." The retiring Cupid extended the bow and arrow to Valentin. Despite his centuries, Paris looked barely fifty, the lines on his forehead only just creasing his skin. Grey peppered his blond hair with distinguished grace, but his muscular stature was that of a younger man. Humans spread tales of Cupid, a sweet cherub who shot arrows laced with romance, but Paris was living proof of their flawed assumptions. Cupids, like the race of Santas, were Fae warriors. Men of incredible power, they were the guardians of love, protectors of marriage, and while they aided humankind in binding their souls together, it was a ruthless job. Paris had held the position of Cupid for over two hundred years, but after his second century, he announced his watch had ended. It took another five years for the council to find a worthy successor in Valentin. A decorated soldier who had survived the impossible, Valentin's election had been unanimous, and tomorrow would mark his first day as Cupid, a sacred title he would hold for centuries or until his death.

Valentin accepted the bow with reverent care, its golden metal its only delicate feature. Intricately forged, it was all harsh angles and threatening curves. It was a weapon of destruction, one worthy of an immortal guardian.

"May it serve you well," Paris said, clapping Valentin on the shoulder. "I'll miss it, but it's in good hands."

"I will bring honor to the role as you did." Valentin tilted his head with respect.

"Of that, I have no doubt." Paris smiled. "Now, before we get too sentimental, I will gracefully bow out. I have a flight to catch."

Valentin quirked his eyebrows in a question.

“I finally decided to take a vacation.” Paris laughed.

“You a vacation?” Valentin meant the words to sound like a tease, but shock escaped his lips instead.

“I know, I know. I don’t recognize myself, but here I am, getting on a plane.”

“Where are you going?”

“A tropical cruise.” Paris smiled wistfully. “We kept it quiet so as to not disrupt the succession, but Venus and I are getting married.”

“Married? And you didn’t tell me?”

“You have enough on your plate, my boy. This job. It protects human love, but it keeps the reigning Cupid busy. It won’t leave you time for romance, and I didn’t want to smear my marriage in your face, knowing you’ll most likely spend the next decades alone.”

“Paris.” Valentin clapped his mentor on the back. “I could never resent you for what you found with Venus. I only wish I could be at the wedding.”

“If it makes you feel better, no one’s invited to the wedding,” Paris said. “We want it to be just us, the open sea, and our vows.”

“I’m happy for you.” Valentin smiled. If anyone deserved happiness, it was the man who’d dedicated the last two centuries to protecting countless couples. “I wish you and Venus every blessing. You deserve it.”

Paris grabbed his protégé and pulled him in for a hug. “We’ll speak soon. I’m always here for you, my boy... just not on my honeymoon. If you even think of bothering me while I’m on that cruise, I’ll punch you.”

“I’d like to see you try, old man.” Valentin laughed, leaning into his friend’s embrace. They had grown close over the past few years, and this goodbye pained him more than he expected it would.

“You have the potential to be a greater Cupid than I was.” Paris pulled back, his affectionate voice grave. “Just remember, Cupids are tasked with guarding love. We protect human romance, but we never get involved with their relationships. Our emotional interference disrupts their hearts’ ability to find their soulmate. It’ll be difficult. The urge to become personally invested will often be unbearably strong, especially in heartbreaking cases, but that’s not the job. We work in the shadows, never in their presence. Remember this warning when you witness situations that test your resolve. I struggled to remain aloof and unbiased at first, but to involve yourself directly in the love lives of humans is to doom fate. It’s the worst sin a Cupid could commit.”

## EIGHT MONTHS AGO

Valentin smelled the shop from a block away. He was accustomed to the scent of chocolate, the sweet synonymous with romance, but this fragrance? It was magic on the breeze. For a moment, he forgot he wasn’t in the Fae realm. It seemed impossible to smell beauty that delicious here among mankind, yet the chocolate’s perfume wrapped him in warmth and desire. It settled in his chest, tugging him down the street with its siren’s call. He followed its pull, stepping invisibly through the crowded sidewalk. He stood a head taller than most men, his ice-blond hair shockingly enticing, his crystal blue eyes like oceans begging to be drowned in, yet no one noticed the hulking Adonis. His glamour was a necessity of his position, but he missed eyes on him. He saw everyone, but no one saw him. He understood now why

Paris hadn't announced his wedding. Cupid was a blessing to those who received his protection, but a curse of loneliness to the warrior who carried the bow.

Valentin rounded the corner, and the scent of chocolate increased tenfold until he stood before a quaint café. Fragrant coffee joined the aromas, and his eyes traced the sign hanging above the door. Amorette's Café . It was a beautiful name for a shop filled with handmade delicacies, for a brunette so perfect it was as if the gods had fashioned her.

Valentin froze, his skin burning cold as he registered her. A group of customers had hidden her when he first approached, but as they stepped away, she came into full view, and Valentin's world stopped spinning. She was the most exquisite thing he'd ever seen, like a painting pulled from the canvas and given breath. Her long, wavy brown hair was the color of dark chocolate, her eyes matching the enticing shade. Her ponytail swung as she moved behind the counter, and his fingers twitched at his side with the urge to wrap the hanging locks around his hand and pull them back like the string of his bow. She was much shorter than him, and the angle would force her to look up through those thick eyelashes. He could picture her now, ponytail choking his fist, neck exposed, that chocolate smudge on her cheek begging to be licked off...

Valentin jerked as if he'd been slapped. What was wrong with him? She was human, a stranger, a fruit forbidden for his kind. Images like that never slipped unwanted into his imagination, and that he kept fixating on the chocolate staining her soft skin unnerved him. He needed to leave. To get far away from this shop before he broke his sacred vows.

SIX MONTHS AGO.

Two months. He stayed away for two months, but as if a needle had stitched a threat between him and that damned brunette, Valentin found himself back at Amorette's . He lingered outside, a battle waging in his chest as he watched her steam milk for the



cappuccino she was preparing. Her hair was down this time, but the urge to wrap it around his fist was no less overwhelming. He shouldn't go inside. He should leave this gorgeous creature alone, but that small and wicked part of his soul argued that a latte wasn't a sin. There were no rules about caffeine fixes and harmless 'have a nice day' comments. As long as he didn't get emotionally involved with her or her love life, there was no harm in ordering a drink. He worked long hours, too long, and he often wondered how Paris lasted centuries on the job. Valentin was so tired he could sleep for a year, and he'd been Cupid for only six months. He needed a coffee... or fifteen.

Rationalization fully in place, Valentin removed his cloaking magic and walked into the shop. The intoxicating fragrance was even stronger inside, and he wondered if it was truly the chocolate wrapping him in obsession or if it was her presence drawing him ever closer.

"Hi, welcome to Amorette's. What can I get..." the brunette trailed off when she saw him, freezing behind the register. Valentin knew how he looked. At six foot five inches with muscles forged on the battlefield and blond hair the color of ice, he was an otherworldly sight to behold. It was why he rarely allowed humans to witness his true form. Most had this exact reaction, even though they only saw the outfit his glamour presented and not the severe uniform clinging to his body.

"I... um... sorry, what can I get you?" she recovered quickly, and her attempt at professionalism made him smile. It was a mistake coming inside. At least outside, a pane of glass had protected him from her beauty, but standing before her was like being stabbed repeatedly in the chest. How could a human woman be this lovely?

"Black coffee," Valentin answered, noticing how her skin pebbled with goosebumps at his deep, melodic tone.

"Black coffee?" she asked in surprise. "Are you sure?"

“Yes.”

“One black coffee, then,” she said good-naturedly as she grabbed a cup and placed it under the carafe. When it was full, she twisted back and set it on the counter. “Will that be all?”

“Yes.” He couldn’t say more. He shouldn’t be saying anything, not when an aching longing begged him to take her hand as he accepted his drink, to feel her skin press against his.

She tapped the register with a soft laugh, and Valentin handed her a ten-dollar bill, fully aware of how ridiculous it was to order a black coffee in a chocolate shop. The beautiful brunette counted the change and attempted to give it to him, but he snatched up the cup and stepped back from the counter.

“Keep the change.” He didn’t smile as he turned and fled the café. He shouldn’t have come inside. Everything about her, from her eyes to her fingers to her voice to her curves, called to him. If she wasn’t so obviously human, he would have been convinced that magic had drawn him to her.

### THREE MONTHS AGO

“One black coffee.” The brunette smiled, holding out the steaming cup before he even reached the register.

Valentin had fled the café three months ago, telling himself to stay away, but two weeks later, he had returned. The random caffeine stops had turned into weekly visits, but he argued seeing her once in a while held no harm. With each passing week, the need to see her became increasingly unbearable. He never spoke more than necessary, resolved to only order coffee and study her face while she poured the liquid. They didn’t exchange names, although he guessed it was Amorette since she owned the

café. All they traded were coffee and cash, and smiles on her part. He rarely let a grin grace his lips, and he tried to prevent his voice from saying more than please and thank you. Some days tested his resolve more than others, though. Her spirit was infectious, and it amused her that he declined her offerings of handmade chocolates. She tried every visit to tempt him with her newest creations, and when her attempts failed, she sought to wrangle full sentences out of him. She experienced greater success on that front, and despite his best intentions, he found himself answering her more and more. Her triumph made her smile, which only encouraged his voice. He always kept his thoughts innocent, even though her dark hair begged to twist around his wrist as he pulled, but he locked that fantasy away in a cage to grow feral and ravenous.

“You sure I can’t tempt you with anything else?” She waggled her eyebrows as she accepted the ten-dollar bill. She tried to give him change every week, but he refused, letting her keep the large tip. He liked how her face lit up when she tucked the extra bills into her apron. Owning a business was stressful, even one that seemed successful, and if he couldn’t speak with her the way he craved, he would leave her with something that brought a smile to those full lips.

“No thanks.” Valentin gripped the coffee and backed up, holding her gaze as long as he could.

“Maybe next time,” she teased as another customer stepped up to order. “One of these days, I’ll convince you to buy chocolate in my chocolate shop.”

### THREE WEEKS AGO

“Here you go.” She handed him his weekly coffee, but unlike their other encounters, her smile failed to reach her eyes, and Valentin’s heart constricted painfully in his chest. Every time he walked inside this café, she was all smiles and teases. He said little, but she didn’t mind filling the silence with her attempts to seduce him with

chocolate. If only she knew she was trying to convince Cupid to eat sweets. Her teasing would become insufferable. Valentin almost wanted to break the rules and tell her just to hear her rant about the guardian of love only drinking black coffee. But today she was a different woman. The spark was gone, and as a Cupid, he sensed the rancid stench of souring love swirling around her.

“Keep the change,” Valentin said, careful not to touch her skin as he handed her the bill. He had never noticed an aura of love surrounding her before, and he had assumed it meant she was unattached. He could never love her, never have more than these stolen moments, but his selfishness hoped no other man had claimed her. Sensing the turmoil tugging at her spirit made him realize that there was something worse than another holding this glorious creature’s heart, and it was someone damaging it.

“You don’t have to keep tipping me,” she said, her voice tired. “It’s just black coffee.”

Valentin leaned into his power, pushing aside his own longing. This was his calling, and if her love was suffering, it was his job to protect and heal it. He remained silent as his spirit wove through her emotions, searching for her fraying threads, but after a few seconds, it retreated into his body. He frowned in confusion. She was clearly upset, the residual sorrow tied somehow to her love, but nothing spoke to him. There was nothing within her for him to seize hold of and defend.

“I didn’t mean to offend you,” she said quickly, and he realized she assumed his frown was for her refusal of the tip and not the confusing emotions pulsing through her spirit. “I just meant...” she trailed off as if she didn’t have the strength to argue.

“You didn’t.” Valentin rearranged his features into a neutral expression, even though he wanted to wrap her in his arms. For the first time in his brief career as Cupid, he was helpless to heal someone’s love. He had grown too attached to her, her smiles

clouding his judgment. This was what Paris had warned about. Never get involved with a human. It ruined their chances at happiness, and with a sickening in his gut, he realized he had broken the one absolute rule. He cared for her. He adored her laughter and her teasing. He dreamed of her lips, her hair, her curves. His growing affection was ruining her relationships, and she stood before him in desperate need of Cupid's aid. Yet he was powerless to defend her romance.

Valentin stared at her, memorizing her face as she shifted uncomfortably beneath his scrutiny. He wouldn't be back. He wouldn't let his selfishness harm her future.

"Okay, good," she said softly, tucking the change into her apron. "I'll see you next week?" He didn't answer, and her look of concern surprised him. "Right?" she asked, and her tone shattered his heart. It never occurred to him that she enjoyed their interactions as much as he did, but the disappointment on her face proved he needed to leave this beautiful human alone. Her emotions were evolving as well. Her attachment to him had grown like a flowering weed, determined and unexpected, yet undeniably lovely.

"Goodbye." Valentin turned and strode out into the cold before she could speak, refusing to glance back even though it killed him. How could he feel so strongly for a human? For a woman he had fallen for in the brief moments she served him coffee?

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 6:42 am*

### VALENTINE'S DAY – EARLIER THAT DAY

A violent crash exploded through the early morning air, and Amorette woke with a startled yelp.

“What the fu—” her boyfriend Doug leaped from the bed, but the door flew open, cutting off his outburst. The wood splintered as four armed men invaded the bedroom, and before Amorette could register what was happening, two intruders forced Doug to his knees while the other two charged for her.

White-hot panic raced through her chest, and on agile legs, she lunged for the on-suite bathroom. The sheets tangled around her ankles, and she cursed as she stumbled, but she didn't stop moving. She didn't know what she would do in the bathroom. Only that her survival instincts begged her to move. But just as her fingers gripped the doorknob, the men seized her, pulling her back from safety.

Amorette screamed as she fought with all her strength, but her captors overpowered her and unceremoniously forced her to her knees beside Doug. One of them punched her in the mouth, splitting her lip, and an ugly terror slid against her bones, freezing her from the inside out. She had spent the night at her boyfriend's, crashing after an uneventful and slightly uncomfortable date, and now she was kneeling in only a tee shirt before four armed men. Tears involuntarily slipped from her eyes as she stared down the barrel of a gun. She didn't understand what was happening, but the gravity of their situation hit her like that punch when a fifth man entered the room.

“Good morning, Doug,” he said as he settled before them. Unlike his companions, the newcomer wore an expensive suit, the immaculate tailoring mocking her oversized

and worn tee shirt hanging loosely over her braless chest. He carried no weapon, but there was no mistaking the power shift the moment he entered the bedroom. This unarmed man was the one to fear, and the fact that they weren't wearing masks wasn't lost on her. Amorette started to hyperventilate despite her desperate attempts to remain calm. These men had allowed her to see their faces. She wasn't getting out of this room alive.

"Where's my money, Doug?" the man in the suit asked calmly, and Amorette's gaze flickered wildly between him and her boyfriend. Money? What Money?

"I..." Doug sputtered. "I don't have it."

The suit nodded, and his armed companion punched Doug in the mouth without warning. Amorette screamed as he spat crimson onto the carpet, and the guard restraining her yanked her by the hair with an excruciating tug.

"Where is my fucking money, Doug?" the suit repeated.

"I don't know, I don't have it," Doug said as blood dripped from his mouth.

"And why is that?"

"Please, Mr. Cattivo," Doug plead, ignoring the armed men aiming their weapons at him and his girlfriend.

"Did you think I wouldn't notice?" Cattivo asked, leaning forward with disgust as he surveyed Doug's boxer-clad body. "Did you really think you could steal from me and not get caught?"

"I... I." Amorette watched her boyfriend blubber as a resounding alarm blared in her brain. She felt manic, out of control with terror. No one broke into someone's house

and held them at gunpoint for some missing cash. No, she was on her knees in her underwear because Doug had stolen a sizable sum from a man who was comfortable aiming a gun at an innocent woman's face. Bile burned her throat, but she fought it down, desperate not to vomit as tears poured from her eyes.

"I. I. I," Cavitto mocked before nodding his head. The guard punched Doug again, and the savage blow knocked him to the carpet. "Where is my fucking money?"

"I don't have it." Doug started crying. "Please, I don't."

"That's a shame." Cavitto extended his hand to the man holding Amorette and took the gun from him. With a twist of his wrist, Cavitto aimed it between her eyes, and she pitched back with a yelp. Paralyzing fear flooded her bloodstream, but the unyielding hands pinned her in place.

"It would be an even greater shame if I were to shoot your girlfriend, Doug." Cavitto continued as the guards gripped her biceps with bruising force, shoving her closer to the weapon. Amorette's chest heaved wildly as her heart thundered. This was how she would die. On her boyfriend's dirty carpet in her underwear. She didn't want to sob like a child. She wanted to be brave, but the swirling panic was a storm determined to shatter her into tiny shards.

"I'm going to ask you again," Cavitto continued, shoving the gun closer to her forehead, and Amorette gagged on the fear clogging her throat. "Tell me where my money is, or I paint this room with your pretty girl's brains."

She threw Doug a desperate look. They were having problems. Fighting had become an almost daily occurrence, but he wouldn't let this monster murder her. He had to care enough to save her life.

But Doug merely stared at her with fear in his eyes, and with a sinking in her gut, she



realized it wasn't a concern for her life. It was for his and only his.

"No?" Cavitto said in surprise. "Don't care if I shoot her right between the eyes? You're a sick fuck, you know that. Oh well, I gave you the chance to save her." His finger shifted to the trigger, and Amorette screamed.

"Wait!"

Cavitto paused, staring down at her.

"Wait, please. I can get you the money." She'd been saving to expand the café. It killed her to lose years of hard labor and sacrifice to save a man who clearly didn't care whether she lived or died, but Amorette desperately wanted to keep her brains inside her skull. "How much does he owe? I'll pay it."

Cavitto grinned wickedly, and then with slow and deliberate words, told her the number. Amorette's skin went icy as her jaw dropped. She didn't have that kind of cash. No one she knew did, and she looked at Doug with disgust. Hatred coiled in her chest. Hatred of his selfishness and stupidity. Hatred of herself that she was dating him. How had she been so blind? Why had she stayed three weeks ago after that fight? She wasn't desperate for love. She wasn't a woman fooled by good looks. Doug dripped sex appeal, but that wasn't why she hung on. Something inside her had shifted over the past few months, leaving her confused and unsure. Her emotions were clouded, and she couldn't decipher her true feelings. When she was with him, she worried they were wrong for each other, but when they were apart, confusion tugged her back. Not even her dreams offered peace, for her nights were filled with a strange longing for a man with ice-blond hair and an otherworldly presence. The only times she'd felt normal were when he came into her café, but he had disappeared. Between her argument with Doug, and the blond's sudden absence, her heart had morphed into a war zone, all shrapnel and explosions and chaos. She'd never experienced this kind of emotional turmoil, so she stayed with Doug. She stayed, and

it had gotten her killed. She didn't have enough money. She was never making it off this filthy carpet.

"Do you still wish to repay his debt?" Cavitto asked, shifting the gun to remind her of her execution.

"Yes," she lied. "But the money isn't here."

"Not trying to run, are you, darling?"

"No." She shivered as his foul voice slipped over her bare skin.

"That's wise because if you were to run, I would find everyone you love, everyone you care about, and I would kill them one by one until you returned."

"Please," Amorette didn't know what she was begging for, only that this fear would eat her alive.

"What's your name?" She ignored his question. "I asked your name."

"Amorette Ellis."

Cavitto nodded, and one of his men left the room, phone in hand. "My colleague is looking you up as we speak. Within a few minutes, he'll learn where your parents live. Who your coworkers and friends are. What salon styles your hair. Where you grocery shop. You get the drift. You have twenty-four hours, Miss Ellis. If you don't return with the money, I start killing your family."

"Please don't hurt them."

"I won't if you get me my money." He stared at her as if he knew she was lying, but

she nodded, head aching from the fear and the blow to her face. “Derrick will go with you.” Cavitto gestured to the guard who had struck her. “Don’t want you calling the police or fleeing with the money. I’ll kill your family if you do either, but you can never predict how someone will behave under pressure.” He looked pointedly at Doug, and Amorette’s heart sank. She didn’t know where she would find that amount, and with a chaperone? All she had managed to do was extend her life by twenty-four hours.

“I won’t run,” she said as she stood, pulling her clothes from where they sat folded on the dresser.

“Excellent. See you soon, Miss Ellis.” Cavitto smiled, all teeth and no kindness.

Amorette gathered her belongings, but when she reached for her phone, Cavitto shook his head. All hope fled her body with that single gesture, and she looked down at Doug. She couldn’t bear the sight of him, knowing that he’d been willing to let this monster kill her for his transgressions.

“We’re through,” she whispered, her voice unstable with anxiety. “After this, I never want to see you again.”

Amorette’s hands shook the entire drive to her café. Her mind raced through every possibility, through every outcome, but each conclusion was the same. There was no reality where this ended with her alive. Her savings were a quarter of the money needed, and her family wasn’t wealthy. They couldn’t help her. No one could, and the sickening bile of dread coated her throat. She wanted to call her parents, to hear their voices one last time before she died, because she had told the truth. She wouldn’t run. Not when they would pay the price.

The trip was too short. She had twenty-four hours, but it didn’t matter. The moment she opened her safe, Derrick would know she was lying. Amorette had never given

her death much thought, but this wasn't how she pictured leaving this world. She hadn't experienced all of life's offerings. She hadn't traveled or fallen in love, and now she never would. Her eyes drifted to the empty carafes, and her memory conjured the tall blond ordering his black coffee. She didn't know why she thought of him as she mourned never finding her soulmate. Maybe it was his tips that seemed too generous but were too little to help in the end. Or maybe it was because something about him stirred something deep inside her. Something dangerous she would never experience. For months, he'd come to her shop every week like clockwork, only to stop three weeks ago. She didn't understand how she could miss someone so fiercely, despite not knowing his name, but her heart ached in his absence. She would never see him again, and that realization felt like an arrow to the chest.

"Hurry up," Derrick ordered, and Amorette tore her eyes off the register. She moved to the safe, and with shaking fingers, she punched in the code. This was it. The end, and... Why was that carafe sitting there? She didn't remember leaving it by the safe, but there it sat, heavy, metal, and within reach.

Amorette lunged forward, capturing it before Derrick realized she was moving. With one swift swing, she threw it at his face. The crunch of his bones failing against its metal echoed off the walls, and she raced past him as he grabbed his gushing nose.

"You fucking bitch," he growled, scrambling after her. His fist captured her ankle, and she fell, her cheek slapping the wall. Pain radiated from the instant bruise, but it cut through the panic, giving her something to focus on. She had worked too hard for this café to die in it.

Amorette rolled to her feet with grace, grabbing a metal folding chair she had randomly propped against the wall. With all the strength left within her, she swung it at Derrick's head. For a split second, their gazes met in shock, and then the chair collided with his temple. His head flew back at an awkward angle, and she watched

with horror as he crashed to the floor, his skull smacking the sharp corner of the safe. The room fell silent save for her labored breaths, but she was afraid to move. Had she really just killed someone in her café?

Bile ran up her throat so fast she barely made it to the sink. She retched until her stomach hurt and her face throbbed, and when only dry heaves wracked her body, she cleaned out her mouth and leaned weakly against the wall. To her immense relief, she noticed Derrick's chest move, and she burst into tears as she stumbled into the front of the shop. She hadn't killed him. She wasn't a murderer. Not yet at least, and if the police got here in time, she would stay that way.

Amorette made it halfway to the phone by the register when the café door flew open so violently, the glass cracked. She almost jumped out of her skin as the intruder strode toward her, and with vague recognition, her eyes scanned the ice-blond hair and massive form. The hulking man stormed for her, but fear overrode her rational thoughts as someone crashed through a door for the second time that morning. Amorette loosed a terrified grunt as she scrambled for the back room, but he was upon her in two long strides. He caught her elbow in a gentle but firm hold and whirled her around to face him.

Her big brown eyes stared up with fear, tears blurring the chocolate color that matched the sweets she sold, and while some of her nerves were aimed at him, the horror she let him read in her features was for Doug, Cavitto, and the guns pointed in her face. She wondered if her thoughts of this blond Adonis had summoned him to her rescue, or if he was just another monster come to plague her. She held his gaze, watching his fury multiply, but she didn't pull away as she realized his wrath was for her and not with her. She lingered against his hold, unconsciously waiting for him to help, for him to prove he wasn't like the men she was fleeing, and a sudden possessive softness wove through his rage, softening its jagged edges.

With reverent movements, he brushed his thumb softly over her bloodied bottom lip.

Crimson stained his finger, and anger flashed through his eyes. Righteous anger for her, and the dam broke in her soul, unleashing the horror with her relief. He was the largest man she'd ever seen, yet protectiveness wafted off him in palpable waves. She felt safe in his grip, and realizing this was the first time they'd touched in eight months, she didn't understand why he'd never let his skin touch hers before. There was power in his hold, a fierce emotion racing through their connection, and a sob escaped her lips. The blond cupped her face gently, careful to avoid her bruising, before lowering his forehead to hers. He had to stoop to reach, but the moment their skin pressed together, he spoke, low and clear and deadly.

“Who did this to you?”

### VALENTINE'S DAY, PRESENT

“Who did this to you?” His voice was a song Amorette’s spirit recognized. Feral rage coated the rich tenderness in his words, and she collapsed against him. Her forehead leaned on his thickly muscled chest as her fists clutched his shirt, a life vest in the storm, and he wrapped her in his powerful embrace. He held her close, possessively, longingly, and the intoxicating scent of his skin reminded her of home.

“Tell me,” he murmured against her hair like a lover, like a warrior. “Tell me who hurt you.”

“No.” Amorette jerked back, shoving him away. “You can’t be here. I can’t let you get involved.”

“Too late for that.” He stepped forward with a single stride, closing the distance she desperately tried to put between them. “I’m already involved.” A soft groan escaped the back room, and he stiffened, alertness coiling through his massive frame. “Is he here?” he asked, as his rage multiplied. “Is the man who hurt you here?”

“Yes,” Amorette whispered with a nod. “One of them.”

“One of them?” The blond looked like he might explode with the strength of a bomb. “Stay here.” He strode past her with the power and grace of a panther and pulled a bow from his back. Amorette gawked at him as he nocked a golden arrow. Maybe she was unconscious; the blow from her fall worse than she thought because where on earth had he gotten a bow and arrow? The gold clutched in his fists was no ordinary bow, either. Its precious metal was the only thing soft about it as its curves hung

halfway down his body, its edges and designs harsh and tactical. As long as she was tall, that was no hunting bow. Neither was it a competition weapon or a showpiece. That bow and arrow was an angel of death, a harbinger of pain, and the only reason one would carry such a monstrosity was to end another in a brutal display of carnage.

“What...?” Her voice gave out. He hadn’t had that when he walked in. She would have noticed the golden craftsmanship of war. It was too large to ignore, much like the intimidating warrior storming toward the back room. “What are you doing?” she squeaked, finally finding her voice. “Why do you have that?”

“Stay here, Amorette,” he said, not slowing.

“How do you know my name?” she grabbed his biceps in both her hands and yanked him to a stop, vaguely aware of how dangerous it was to physically restrain a man with an arrow aimed for the kill. “What are you doing? And where did you get that?” She could feel her sanity spiraling.

“I’ve always had it,” he said, anger in his eyes, but tenderness in his voice. “Now please stay here. I wish to shield you from this sight.”

“You have not always had that,” she practically shouted. She should stop fighting the warrior bent on vengeance, but something about him promised she was safe. She could argue with him, fight and confront him without harm befalling her. And she was tired of men leaving her oblivious, only for her to pay the price. “I would have noticed a god damned golden arrow and the tactical gear...” she trailed off, convinced she’d gone insane. Since when had he been dressed in black, form-fitting tactical gear? She swallowed, painfully aware of how unreasonably sexy he was in the formidable uniform that hugged his every muscle. Amorette always thought her blond Adonis was gorgeous, but seeing him like this was like walking into a fire and letting it flood your veins and ignite your heart. He was otherworldly in his beauty. An angel with ice atop his crown, and the devil with violence simmering beneath his



surface. He normally wore sweaters and dress coats, tailored ensembles that conveyed wealth yet somehow hid his unnatural size, but dressed like this, there was no mistaking him. That man was a warrior, a demon, a monster, and his wrath was aimed at all who harmed her.

The blond pointed at the sign hanging above the cracked café door where her name hung in curling script, and her cheeks blushed at the obviousness. “I’ll explain,” he said, gently extracting himself from her hold. “But I won’t allow any more harm to come to you. Stay here, and let me avenge you.”

“Avenge me... wait, you’re not going to kill him, are you?” Amorette chased after him.

“Was he trying to kill you?”

“Yes.”

“And when he regains consciousness, will he try again?”

“Probably.”

“Then he sealed his fate.”

“But the cops? You can’t go around killing people.”

“Mortal rules do not apply to me.” He drew the arrow back and rounded the corner.

“Do not watch.”

“No.” Amorette stood her ground despite his odd comment about mortals. “This is my fight. My brains they were going to paint across the bedroom. I’m not hiding.”

“If this is your wish, so be it, my brave Amorette.” He aimed for Derrick’s heart.  
“Witness what happens to anyone who so much as lays a finger on you.”

And the blond warrior shot.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 6:42 am*

Valentin rubbed Amorette's back as she heaved, her hands desperately clutching her knees to keep from toppling forward in shock. He was impressed by how she handled herself in the face of death. In hindsight, he handled this poorly. He should've taken her somewhere safe and then delivered justice, but the moment he saw the blood on her perfectly full lips, his vision filled with red. No one touched his Amorette without paying the price. No one bruised her gorgeous skin without experiencing his punishment.

"Here." He handed her a glass of iced water and helped her to the front of the café, easing her into a chair before striding toward the refrigerated display case. He seized a tray of chocolate-covered strawberries since they were the closest thing to breakfast in the shop and placed them on the table as he crouched before her. "Eat," he ordered as she sipped the water. "It'll help with the shock, and I need you to tell me everything."

"What's your name?" Amorette asked, suddenly staring at his ears, and Valentin cursed. He'd let too much of his glamour fall, and in the heat of the moment, he forgot about his pointed ears.

"Valentin," he answered, capturing her smaller hands and pushing a strawberry into them. He couldn't stop touching her. He needed to feel her pulse beneath her skin, to assure himself he'd arrived in time.

"Am I dreaming?" she asked, obediently taking a bite, and his thumb wiped the strawberry juice dripping down her jaw. Despite his title of Cupid, he didn't love chocolate, but damn, did her lips around that fruit make it appetizing.

“No.”

“Then why are your ears pointed?” Amorette withdrew her hand from his hold and traced the outline of his ear.

“I’ll explain after you tell me why you’re in danger.”

Her expression soured, and she lowered her fingers. He instantly missed the warm electricity they sparked against his skin, but he watched mesmerized and heartbroken as she traced her split lip to wipe off some smudged chocolate. Valentin had the urge to kiss her pain away, but he held still, sensing the storm brewing inside her. Something about her aura told him he shouldn’t touch her. Not for this confession, so he handed her another strawberry before pulling his hands into his lap.

Valentin expected her story to gut him, but as she spoke of Doug, Cavitto, the stolen money, and the death threats against her and her family, it felt like a dull and rusted saw had carved into his chest with sloppy, excruciated cuts. It took all his strength not to react as she sobbed, and the fear in her eyes when she recounted kneeling on her asshole boyfriend’s carpet broke him apart. He longed to pull her into a hug, to promise this would never happen again, but her hands remained at her side, so he followed their lead.

Amorette finally fell silent, the magnitude of the situation hovering between them, and Valentin’s memory drifted to three weeks ago when he abandoned her. He had blamed the wrongness enveloping her on himself. A Cupid couldn’t get personally involved with mortals, and his growing attraction had muddied the waters. At least that’s what he thought had happened, but Amorette’s story told him that while he played a part in corrupting her emotions, the pollution surrounding her was born of Doug’s sins.

“I don’t have the money,” she finished, wiping the tears from her cheeks. “Cavitto

knows who my family is, so even if I flee, my parents will pay the price. I don't know what to do."

"Even if you had the money, Cavitto wouldn't let you live," Valentin said, and Amorette stiffen with an almost tangible panic.

"Don't worry." He cupped her cheek, unable to keep his skin from hers any longer. "No one will ever touch you again. I'll keep you safe."

"My family? Doug?"

"Your family is safe, I swear it, but Doug? I've heard of Cavitto. He isn't a man you cross. He isn't a man you survive. Your boyfriend is either already dead or well on his way."

"Ex," she said forcefully. "He's my ex. He did nothing when they pointed a gun at my face. I don't want him to die, but he can rot in Hell for sacrificing me to them."

"Trust me, he will," Valentin growled. "They all will." He stood up and slung his bow across his back, eyes not missing how Amorette tracked his movements appreciatively. "I could help you get the money, but you've seen him. You know his face and name and could identify him to the police," he continued. "Cavitto can't afford loose ends. The authorities don't know who he is, and that he personally showed this morning up means your ex was in deep. This is more than just some stolen money, and he only let you leave because you were guarded. Perhaps he needed you absent while he dealt with sensitive issues. Either way, he will kill you. The only difference is if you return willingly, he might not go after your family."

"What do I do?" Fear clogged her voice, and Valentin lunged for her, cupping her jaw in his broad hands.

“What do we do?” he corrected.

“Why are you helping me?” she asked, her fingers unconsciously coming up to cup his. “You barely spoke more than ten words at a time to me. Why do you care?”

“Because I don’t need words to pass between us to know I would sacrifice the world for you.”

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 6:42 am*

A morette stared at Valentin, his confession ringing too loud. Who was this warrior that captured her heart with a single look, who promised her the world without asking anything in return? Why did life feel right in his presence, despite it crumbling down around her?

“Cavitto is one of America’s most wanted,” he said, and Amorette wondered if he realized his thumb was rubbing her cheek as he spoke. “My kind doesn’t get involved in the personal, day-to-day affairs of humans, but I’m making an exception for you. The only way to stop him from harming you is to kill him or hand him over to the authorities.”

“Your kind?” That comment was the least shocking thing he’d said, but Amorette’s panicked brain kept fixating on those damn pointed ears.

“I’m a...” He paused, as if searching for the best words to explain himself.

“Just say it,” she blurted. “I feel like I’m losing my mind. I’m terrified for my life, and I just watched you shoot someone through the heart with a barbaric golden weapon. You’re dressed in a tactical outfit I know for a fact you didn’t have on when you first walked through my doors. What’s going on? Why am I not afraid of you?”

“Because deep down you feel this.” His hand drifted down her throat to rest over her thundering heart. “I can’t explain it, but it drew me to you week after week. It won’t let me stay away.” His face lowered until his lips hovered inches from hers. “You know I would never harm you.”

“What are you?” she whispered, her breath hitching as his broad hand pressed against

her racing heart, his long fingers brushing the swell of her breast. She wanted to know what he was, needed to understand why her soul begged her to close the distance and capture his bottom lip between her teeth.

“I’m Fae.” His face moved closer to hers, and she gasped as his pinky brushed her bare skin at his movement. “I am the reincarnation of Cupid.”

“Cupid?” The haze of lust cleared, and she jerked to a stand so fast, the chair tipped backward and crashed to the floor. “Screw you. I told you everything. I was honest, placing my trust in you, and you make up a ridiculous story about being a mythological cherub? God, I’ve had enough of men today.”

She turned and stormed for the door. She was smart, and Cavitto didn’t know Derrick was dead yet. Perhaps she could get her parents out of town before he found them.

“Amorette.” Her name on his tongue was more decadent than chocolate, and in two steps he captured her waist and spun her around. Her chest slapped his as a surprised gasp escaped her lips, and she didn’t miss how his gaze dipped longingly to her mouth. “Please,” he begged, restraining her against his forged body like a lover and not a captive. “Look deep within yourself. You know I speak the truth. I am Cupid, but I’m no childlike cherub. My arrows don’t deliver obsession, but protect true emotions. I am the defender of love and romance. I don’t shoot mortals with magic and force them to feel, but I spend my every waking hour defending the sacred bond between two souls that have intertwined to become one.”

Amorette stared up at him, her heart thundering viciously as if it was trying to break free of her chest and embed itself in his. She couldn’t think this close to him. The world faded away. Her problems vanished. All that existed was this Adonis and the adoration in his eyes, the magnetic lust braiding them together, the unspoken connection stitching them ever closer from the moment their skin touched.



“You know I speak the truth.” He placed his hand over her heart again, and she gasped as his palm burned her alive with desire. Her nipples pebbled, and she arched her back slightly, leaning into his touch. “You can feel it.” He leaned in, hunger dancing in his irises as his hand consumed her flushed chest.

“I do.” She nodded, and somehow it wasn’t a lie. It was impossible. There was no such thing as cupid or the Fae. Yet as his aura intertwined with hers, wrapping them in an unexplainable bond, she recognized every word that fell from his perfect lips as the truth. “I can’t explain it, but I believe you.”

“Then let me help you,” he begged, and while he meant with Cavitto, she couldn’t stop herself from picturing a different kind of help. One that left her naked and screaming as his ice-blond head buried between her thighs.

“Give me your blessing,” Valentin whispered, his lips hovering just out of reach. “And I will hunt down your enemies and make them regret the day they learned the name Amorette Ellis.”

Cupid? The hulking warrior whose beauty rivaled the angels themselves was Cupid? The man who had shot a human in her café with a brutal bow and arrow was Cupid? Amorette’s mind was chaos as they drove to Doug’s apartment. Since Cavitto and his men knew her car, they took his vehicle, and she’d almost laughed when she saw the gorgeous bike. A warrior dressed in black atop a steed of metal and chrome wielding a golden weapon. The sight of his long legs straddling the large bike as he waited for her to climb on was too much for her brain to handle.

Riding behind him through the cool morning air only heightened the intense sensations racing over her skin. She understood why he’d been so careful to avoid touching her these past eight months. Their contact was unnatural in its electricity. Amorette had never experienced such raw and unbridled power in a touch before, and while the cynic told her it was merely his supernatural abilities causing this reaction,

her intuition screamed that was a lie.

Before they left the café, Valentin helped her board up the cracked front door. He had made a call afterward to ensure the back room would be purged of evidence. They hadn't spoken since, yet Amorette felt comfortable in the silence. His quiet presence wrapped her in a safe cocoon, and they were speeding down the street before she realized she'd just willingly mounted a motorcycle with a man who claimed to be Cupid. She should be terrified, concerned about his sanity, but hugging him tight to her chest was like waking for the first time. Something inside her was clicking into place, forcing her overstimulated brain to confront what her intuition already knew. This man was dangerous, the wrath of the gods fueling his forged body, but her trust in him wasn't born of trauma or fear. It was born of her own blood, a part of her since she drew her first breath.

Amorette was thankful when they finally pulled up to Doug's building. She wasn't sure she would survive another second pressed against Valentin's broad back, feeling the way his muscles coiled against her stomach. He'd guided the motorcycle through the streets as if he was conducting an orchestra, his every move executed with precision and grace. He handled the bike like a work of art, his biceps straining as he weaved through traffic with the ease of a stunt driver. His powerful thighs tensed with each bend in the road, and the momentum forced her smaller body flush against him. His abs flexed beneath her fingertips, and she had to fight the urge to picture her nails digging into his bare skin.

Amorette practically threw herself off the bike the second he slowed a block away from Doug's. Her life was falling apart. Her family's lives were in danger, and she berated herself for being so caught up in the definition of his graceful form as he dismounted. He was Cupid. That had to be why she felt intoxicated around him. Valentine's Day was manipulating her emotions. It was the only reasonable explanation. Otherwise, the truth behind why every molecule in her body craved every cell in his would irrevocably alter her life.

“Stay close,” Valentin said, pulling his bow from his back and dragging her behind him as he strode toward the building. Amorette wordlessly fell into his shadow, dreading climbing the stairs to face Cavitto and Doug’s unsympathetic eyes. Any attraction she felt for the Cupid vanished as they climbed closer to the apartment, fear crowding out any other emotion. She didn’t want to see the man who hadn’t cared whether she lived or died. She didn’t want to see the dirty carpet that had almost soaked up her blood and brains.

Amorette wordlessly directed Valentin to Doug’s apartment, and they paused before the broken door, its twisted hinges preventing it from closing completely.

“You don’t have to come in with...” Valentin trailed off as his eyebrows pinched together. He studied her for a second, leaning toward the apartment as he listened, and then he shoved the door open so hard it cracked on impact. Amorette flinched, waiting for a storm of bullets to cut them down, but when the quiet held, she stepped around the mountain of the man shielding her. She wasn’t sure what they would find, but the nothingness that greeted her was the last thing she expected. The apartment was empty. No Doug. No Cavitto, just the damning silence that mocked her for hoping she could escape fate.

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 6:42 am*

Valentin followed Amorette inside her ex's apartment, acutely aware of both the fear coursing through her body and the rage pumping through his. That asshole had let someone point a gun at her, let them threaten her, bruise her, scare her. It was all he could do to keep the wrath contained beneath his skin. She was already terrified. He wouldn't add to her stress.

"No one's here," Amorette said, trying not to stare at the bedroom, and Valentin couldn't stop himself from reaching out and gripping her hip.

"I didn't think they would be," he answered.

"Then why come here?" She leaned into his touch, and he'd never wanted to kiss the emotions off a woman's face so badly.

"I'm Fae." Valentin forced his fingers to release her curves. No matter how his soul longed for her, no matter the heated desire radiating from her aura, the rules had not changed. She was forbidden. Not only for his job's sake but for her future's. As it was, he had already drastically altered her fate. The longer he involved himself, the more clouded her romantic future became. If he stayed too long, held onto her soft body that curved in all the most delicious places, she would lose every hope of finding a soulmate. He couldn't do that to her. His selfishness would not destroy her happiness.

"My senses are heightened, and I can smell your ex's blood on the carpet," he continued, touring the apartment with clinical professionalism. "And the mildew in the bathroom, the dirt caked between his boot's tread, the stale coffee in the cabinets, which is surprising considering your profession." Valentin paused before the

bedroom door. “I can scent your fear. It clings to your skin instead of the chocolate I’ve come to expect.” He avoided her gaze at his confession, clearing his throat uncomfortably as he changed the subject. “I’m now acquainted with Cavitto’s stench and can recognize every man who entered this building to threaten your life. Tracking them will be easy.”

He turned back to her, studying the surprise on her face. What he didn’t say was that while the scent of her skin on Doug’s sheets ignited his jealousy, he didn’t smell sex, and that pleased him immensely. Seemed Amorette had spent a passionless night here, and a dark part of him whispered if she ever slept in his bed, the intoxicating perfume of her orgasms would never leave the room, for he would make her come until she begged for a break.

“You can find them by scent?” Amorette asked.

“I was special forces.” Valentin shoved the image of his head trapped between her thighs out of his mind and extended a hand. “Only not with the United States Military.” She took it, and he led her from the apartment, following the trail Cavitto and his men so sloppily left behind. “There’s a lot I can do. Things you may not want to see. We’ll take care of the men watching your parent’s house, and then you can stay with them.”

“No.” She jerked his hand so hard, his torso twisted to face her. “This is my fight, my family, my life on the line. I’m going with you.”

“It will be dangerous. It will get bloody.”

She stepped closer, their toes touching as she stared defiantly up at him, and he clenched his fist to keep from gripping her hair and yanking her mouth to his.

“Good.” Amorette smiled a wicked grin, and his heart stopped beating in his chest. “I

hate feeling helpless. I don't like begging for my life on my knees. You make me feel safe, and I'm choosing to ignore all the rational thoughts warning me not to trust you. Help me be brave. Help me reclaim what was stolen from me this morning when a man who I thought cared sat silently by to watch me die."

Valentin's grip on her hand tightened reflexively at her words. "You're already brave, but your wish is my command. I am powerless to refuse you."

Heat flared in her eyes, and she shoved up onto her toes to kiss his cheek. It was an innocent display of thanks, but Valentin's life changed in that moment. He knew what her lips felt like, and they would haunt him every day until his death. He had to deal with Cavitto quickly before he not only broke the rules but obliterated them into dust.

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 6:42 am*

They raced unseen for her parent's home, her chest pressed against his back, and Amorette let herself enjoy how he rode the motorcycle. How his legs flexed and bent. How his hands fisted the throttle, how his biceps pushed and pulled their speed around every corner with precision. He handled the bike with power, grace, and dominance, and she wondered if he would handle her with such intensity. Amorette was grateful she sat behind him. The vision of him throwing her onto the mattress and caging her beneath him flooded her cheeks with a scalding flush, and it would've mortified her to have him witness her body's uncontrollable reaction. She'd never been so attracted to a man before, but this longing went deeper than the physical. Perhaps it was why she always missed Valentin when he left with his black coffee. They barely spoke, but he was right. They didn't need words to feel fate threading them together. There was a reason he never strayed from her thoughts.

They slowed as they approached her parent's neighborhood, and without warning, Valentin pulled the motorcycle off the road and hid it behind a small patch of trees.

"They're here," he said, helping her off the bike, and Amorette sobered so fast, her skin stung with the cold. Men were here, waiting to kill her parents if she failed to repay Doug's debt. "Be careful with this," Valentin continued, pulling his bow from his back. He removed two arrows from his quiver and handed her one. "I don't want you unarmed."

He led the way through the neighbor's backyard, his footfalls too silent for a man of his stature. Amorette followed his lead, clutching the arrow as she attempted to mimic his quiet steps. It was so large it looked like a spear in her fists, and one soft swipe of her finger against the sharp tip told her all she needed to know. This weapon would rip a man apart, leaving no chance for survival. Amorette shuddered at the

imagery and stepped closer to Valentin, suddenly concerned she wasn't brave enough to face the violence in their path.

"There." Valentin pointed toward the bushes in the neighbor's backyard, and Amorette squinted. Nothing was there, and she opened her mouth to ask what he was pointing at when the leaves rustled. An armed man shifted into view, and with a stifled gasp, she gripped the back of his shirt.

"He really sent men after my parents." Violence electrified her body. Fear had controlled her entire morning, but seeing Doug's selfish actions threaten her innocent parents burned her from the inside out with vengeance. It was cruel enough that they almost executed her, but it had been her choice to date the asshole. Her family didn't deserve to be hunted like prey. "Is there only one watching the house?"

"That I recognize the scent of," Valentin answered. "My gut tells me there's a second, but too many humans live on this street for me to pinpoint who it is. Are you sure you want to do this? You can wait with my bike."

"Yes, I'm sure." She wasn't, but she needed to do this.

"Stay close." Valentin moved into position and raised his bow. He looked like a god with his ice-blond hair falling perfectly over his forehead, his eyes narrowing in on his target, his back muscles flexing as he pulled the string taut. For a breathless moment, Amorette watched Cupid in all his glory, and then he loosed the arrow.

The golden weapon shot with unnatural speed, piercing its target's heart with perfect aim. The man fell into the bushes, dead upon contact, and Amorette studied the sprawled corpse with mixed emotions. She'd witnessed this blond Adonis kill two people today. Men that were willing to torture her and her innocent parents, but he had killed them all the same. She waited for disgust to poison her chest at the sight, but it never came. Part of her wondered if maybe she and Cupid weren't so different.



Maybe they both got off on delivering justice?

Bang! A shot rang out so loud, Amorette's world went silent with deafness. She ducked, waiting for the pain, but with a scream she barely heard, she watched Valentin collapse, crimson soaking his shoulder.

Amorette lunged for him as he dropped to his hands and knees. Blood dripped onto the cold ground, the red too bright against the dead February grass. "Valentin!" Her ears cleared, registering her screams. He couldn't die. She wouldn't let him, but just as her fingers clutched his shoulders, a blur of motion caught her eye. A man raced across her parent's yard, and with a painful twist in her gut, Amorette understood. They'd warned her. Any attempt to escape Cavitto would end with her family's murder, and if he got inside their house?

"I'm fine. Are you hurt?" Valentin groaned as she seized him, but when she didn't answer, he twisted with an agonized grunt. He followed her line of sight, and with bloody fingers, he lunged for her. "Amorette, no!"

But she was already moving. Her athletic form carried her over the short yard, the massive arrow clutched in her fist. He would not kill her parents. Over her dead body would she let Doug's selfish actions cause her mother pain. Her mom, with her blonde hair, flashed through her thoughts. She pictured her dad's black locks, their colors mixing in her brunette curls. Her memory played every Christmas, every Sunday breakfast, every phone call. Amorette treasured the memories of her mom curled up on the couch with the cat while she made her taste each new chocolate recipe she was testing. She loved how her father came to the café anytime she needed help with something heavy. No, her parents wouldn't die today.

With a scream, Amorette launched herself at the man just as he reached the back steps, her body plowing into his so hard, they both rolled to the cold ground. All anger and limbs, Amorette climbed on top of him and aimed the arrow at his throat,

shoving the tip against his skin so forcibly it drew blood. The man froze when his eyes registered the weapon, and then he paled as his gaze flicked behind her. An intimidating shadow shifted to hover over them, and Amorette's heart slowed in relief. He was alive and moving. She hadn't lost him.

Blood-soaked and feral, Valentin reached down and yanked the man clean off the ground with one hand, catching Amorette with his other as the sudden movement knocked her off his chest. "Where's Cavitto?" he growled.

"Go to hell," the man spat, his expression not nearly as brave as his words.

"Where is Cavitto?" Valentin repeated, his voice so low and dangerous that Amorette's heart stuttered in both fear and arousal.

"Fuck you."

"I'll find him whether or not you tell me." Valentin pulled him closer with a threatening growl. "It will only end better for you if you help."

"I'm not telling you shit!"

"Very well." Valentin turned to Amorette. "It's your choice what happens to him."

"What?" she stammered, unprepared for that request.

"He's transgressions are against you, and he was attempting to kill your parents, so you decide his fate. Do we hand him over to the cops, or do I break his neck?"

"Oh..." Amorette paused, staring at the man's shocked face. For a split second, she contemplated letting Cupid have his vengeance, but then she shook her head. "Police station." Valentin had already killed two men and would undoubtedly kill more

before her life was no longer in danger, but she didn't like the idea of murdering a captive.

"Your wish is my command." Valentin pulled golden twine from his gear and bound the cursing man in unbreakable knots.

"Are you okay?" Amorette asked after they located the man's car and shoved him into the back seat. She would drive it to the station while Valentin followed on his bike. The idea of being alone with this attempted murderer scared her, but Valentin swore that no mortal could escape Fae bonds. He also promised that he could shoot while riding a motorcycle. Even if Cavitto's man broke free, he would be dead before the seatbelt unbuckled.

"I heal quickly." Valentin peeled the tear in his black shirt open to reveal the bullet wound. The flesh was already knitting back together, and Amorette sighed in relief.

"Thank goodness." Her arms wrapped around him, pulling him into a hug before she realized she was moving, but it felt natural to surrender to his gravity. "I was so scared. I didn't want you to die, but he was going for my parents. I had to choose?—"

"Fuck the rules," Valentin growled, cutting her off with a kiss. Amorette yelped in surprise as he caught her waist and hoisted her into the air, pinning her against the hood of the car. Her legs parted instinctively, urging him closer as he deepened the kiss. Her surprise evaporated as his lips claimed hers, and she moaned so obscenely loud, she worried the entire neighborhood heard her. His hold tightened, pulling her flush against his powerful chest, and she gasped when his hard length ground against her core. Electricity sparked between them. It was as if two bolts of lightning had struck at the same time, and Amorette feared she wouldn't survive the intensity. It was too much. He was too much, and she gripped his hair and tugged him harder against her mouth, encouraging him to take control of her body. Valentin responded to her unspoken need as if this kiss was a well-choreographed dance. He anticipated

her every desire and answered with unbearable pleasure. He was all domination and fire, an angel and a demon as he owned her mouth without mercy, and this kiss would destroy her. It was perfection. It would be her undoing.

Valentin's tongue pushed against hers, coaxing another moan from her voice, and without thinking, Amorette ground herself against him. A haze of intoxicating lust clouded her brain, and all she could think about was his hands gripping her hips. They guided her movements, heightening the bliss dancing through her, and she gripped his hair harder. She needed more. She needed to feel every inch of this perfect man, and hooking her leg higher on his hip, she rolled teasingly against him.

Amorette froze against his length, biting his lip in shock, and it was his turn to moan obscenely. There was no way he was that big, yet as Valentin pressed between her thighs, there was no mistaking the size. The reality made her lightheaded. He would never fit inside her, but she wanted nothing more than to take every inch. Heavens, what would it feel like to be filled by this man? She shouldn't be thinking about fucking him after he'd just been shot. The size of him should send her running, but she rolled her hips again, aching to take his thickness to the hilt.

"Fuck." Valentin jerked back as if he suddenly realized where she sat and who was watching. Amorette mourned the absence of his lips, but the man in the car caught her eye, and she laughed with embarrassment. She wasn't normally a fan of PDA, but this Cupid and his sinful mouth would turn her into an exhibitionist if she wasn't careful.

"You shouldn't have risked your life like that. I was just about to stand up and stop him." Valentin tangled his fingers in her dark hair and yanked her head back softly. "But fuck, that was the hottest thing I've ever seen a woman do."

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Fuck the rules.”

Those words played on repeat in his mind as Valentin claimed her mouth in a rough and primal kiss. Amorette gasped as he slammed her onto the hood of the car, but her legs opened, welcoming him closer as he took everything she gave him. His tongue slid against hers, coaxing a moan from her, and his brain almost short-circuited at the sound. Her voice was everything. Her kiss would be the death of him. His ever-increasing desire screamed for the universe to freeze this moment and let him live against her body. To allow him to spend eternity between her thighs as pleasure fell from her lips.

Valentin’s broad palms dwarfed her waist as he pulled her closer, letting her feel how aroused that stunt of hers made him. Seeing Amorette fly across the yard and tackle that man terrified him. For those endless seconds, he waited to watch the woman he couldn’t live without die at the hands of that monster, but with the grace of a trained warrior, she pinned him to the ground, one of Cupid’s arrows at his throat. Her bravery and ferocity made him instantly hard, and he tried to resist. Heavens did he try, but every word that fell from her full lips drew his attention to her mouth. The mouth he wanted to devour, to own, to worship. The lips he wanted to wrap around his cock until his legs gave out with his climax.

Amorette moaned again, fisting his hair, and if Valentin didn’t get control of himself, he would fuck her right here on the hood of this scumbag’s car for the entire neighborhood to observe.

“Fuck.” He yanked himself away at the thought. Her parents were inside that house and had undoubtedly heard the gunshot. He hoped they’d called 911 and hid instead

of looking out the window to witness him almost take their daughter against the car. “You shouldn’t have risked your life like that. I was just about to stand up and stop him.” Valentin tangled his fingers in her dark hair and tugged her head back softly, enjoying the sensation of her locks finally choking his wrist, but her expression destroyed him. This was so much more than lust. He couldn’t say what, though, because the moment he uttered the word, it would kill him to let her go. He couldn’t keep her, even though she was everything he wanted. “But fuck, that was the hottest thing I’ve ever seen a woman do.”

Amorette grinned; her legs still locked around his waist. “I think I might explode. I can’t believe I did that.” She laughed and then lay down on the hood of the car, her chest heaving as she caught her breath, and Valentin could watch that sight for the rest of his life and never tire of it.

“My brain must have snapped from the stress,” she said, leaning up on her elbows to look at him, and he forced himself to focus on her words and not the way she was laying there. Heavens, it would be a dream come true to strip her bare and fuck her against this car... or better yet, his bike.

“Cupid, criminals, assassins, missing money, ex-boyfriends who don’t care if you get shot, me tackling a man with a spear-sized arrow... that’s gold.” Amorette laughed, looking at him as if she needed his assurance. “I’ve definitely gone insane.”

“No, you haven’t.” Valentin leaned forward and cupped her jaw, kissing her softly. “You are brave. You took charge of your fate.”

“But I’m not brave. Not like this, at least. Sure, I opened my café, which terrified me, but I don’t tackle people and threaten their lives.”

“You’re like me.” He caressed her cheek. Pride swelled in his chest that she was opening up to him, and he focused on her eyes so she would know he spoke the truth.

“You protect what is yours. What you lo—care about.” She pinched her eyebrows at his slip-up, but he sped on before she commented. “You can never predict how you’ll react until faced with danger, but you refused to surrender without a fight. It’s sexy as hell.”

“It’s you.” She pushed herself off the hood of the car, breaking their contact. “I’m different with you. Even when you only came in for coffee, I sensed a change in me. Why is that? Why do I feel braver, more myself around you?”

Valentin stared at her, a rock suddenly in his throat. He couldn’t say it. It was impossible.

“We should get going.” He opened the car door. “I have a contact at the station. They’ll handle him and the body, and I’ll ask him to send someone to protect your parents.”

Amorette ducked to sit, but then jerked back to stare at him. “What did you mean, fuck the rules?”

“Get in the car, Amorette,” he smiled, gently nudging her to the driver’s seat. He needed a few minutes alone before his control broke and he told her every secret.

The drive did little to cool the fire in his blood. The crisp February air bathed his skin, but the sight of her driving that car, unafraid of the man behind her, electrified him. He always had the sense that she was confident and self-assured, but seeing her in action was mesmerizing. They would make a great team, working side by side to ensure love and justice triumphed, but like a knife to his heart, her mortality reminded him their beautiful partnership would end before it ever truly began.

They made it to the station in record time, his contact waiting outside as they parked, and Valentin dragged their captive from the backseat. He had called his friend on the

drive over, explaining the situation. The detective was a human, and while he didn't understand Valentin's true nature, he was more aware than most. A multitude of humans worked with the Fae to ensure peace between the races, and his contact knew enough to not ask questions.

"I have a unit heading over to the address you provided." The detective shook Valentin's hand before accepting the bound offering. "We received a call about a potential gunshot, so it was easy to dispatch a car. They'll stay outside the residence until you give me the all-clear."

"Thanks. I owe you one." Valentin turned to leave but froze as he watched Amorette climb out of the car to wait expectantly by his bike. "Cavitto?" he twisted back to the detective. "Do you have any idea where he or his men might be?"

"Why are you looking for Cavitto?" The detective's gaze flicked to Amorette, and Valentin bristled at his observation. His friend was smart, already piecing together the clues before him.

"Do you have anything for me?" Valentin shifted until his massive frame blocked Amorette from sight. "As a cop, you have to operate within the proper channels, but I don't." Valentin stepped closer and glared at the bound man who had the decency to look terrified. "Even if it's just a hunch, tell me you have something."

The detective sighed and shifted his weight before surrendering. "The Rye. It's an upscale whiskey bar. Some of Cavitto's known associates have been spotted there, but we aren't sure if it's a meeting spot or a coincidence."

Valentin nodded as he studied the bound man. The criminal refused to spill Cavitto's secrets, but Valentin's Fae's senses picked up the man's increased heartbeat when the detective mentioned the bar. He smirked. They always said they wouldn't talk. If only they knew how much they communicated without ever saying a word.



“Thanks.” Valentin nodded at his friend and turned to Amorette, holding out his palm in an invitation. She didn’t hesitate to take it and climbed on the bike behind him, her body communicating more than he could bear.

Valentin nudged the kickstand with his boot and pulled himself off the motorcycle, taking Amorette with him. The Rye was the exact place he would take her if this was a Valentine’s Day date and not a hunt for the men threatening her life. All exposed brick, rustic décor, and industrial architecture; he pictured her dining here in a little black dress paired with stiletto heels. Heels she would wear while he stripped her bare and fucked her after spoiling her with a decadent meal and expensive jewelry... preferably a diamond to sit on that lonely left hand.

Valentin shook his head slightly and slipped his fingers through hers. He needed to get a hold of himself. Cupid could never marry a human. It was impossible, forbidden for his rank, and the best Valentine’s Date he could hope for was this one. One where he led his woman into the devil’s mouth.

“How is no one staring at us?” Amorette asked, glaring pointedly at the bow strapped to his back and the blood dripping from his healing shoulder wound as they carved a path through the tables.

“The same way you never saw my weapons.” He squeezed her fingers affectionately as he led her past the concrete-style bar. “They simply see a couple on a date.”

“Our first date. Serving justice like vigilantes... with Cupid.” Amorette laughed, rolling her eyes at the situation.

“This isn’t a date,” Valentin said, but when disappointment flashed across her face, he cupped her chin possessively. “If it was, you’d be wearing a gorgeous dress without panties underneath so I could slip my hand up your thigh to your bare pussy and make you come anytime I wanted while feeding you the best food and wine.”

Amorette squeaked, and Valentin slammed his mouth shut. He hadn't meant to say that out loud. She was going to think he was crass. They'd been acquainted for months, but she didn't know him that well.

"We have time for that later," she said with a devilish grin. "After the vigilante part." Valentin's heart almost ripped out of his chest at her expression. "I consider this a date since you kissed me. Today has been insane, but the more time I spend with you, the more I know this is where I'm supposed to be. That we are meant to fight alongside each other. Is that weird? It is weird. Maybe I'm still in shock."

He shouldn't say it. He couldn't, but that damn word was boiling over, threatening to spill off his tongue. She wasn't the only one who sensed they were destined for one another.

He opened his mouth. The words raced unbidden up his throat, and to keep them inside him, he slammed his mouth to hers, backing her up against the brick wall out of the diners' sight. He held her face in his hands, leaning down to claim her lips, and she offered him every part of her in that kiss.

"Stay close." His voice was rough as they parted, his words thick with need, and she blinked, trying to clear her lust. Damn, he loved her like this, shifting as she tried to ease the ache between her thighs. She would be glorious to edge, to watch hover in a constant state of arousal until she was begging, and a deep longing rushed through his chest.

Valentin seized her waist and pulled her further down the hall before pushing her back up against the brick. He kissed her with a rough possession, and as her fingers tangled in his ice-blond hair, he pushed his knee between her legs. Amorette gasped as his massive hands gripped her hips, grinding her down on his thigh, and the moan that followed made him lightheaded. He captured her sounds with his kiss, using his fists to guide her, and she arched into his body, desperate for more. Heavens, but she

was intoxicating, writhing and moaning and kissing him as she rode his leg. He heard her heart racing, felt her skin burning with arousal, scented her orgasm rushing to the surface, but just before it crested, he withdrew. It was painful to release her, but the shock on her flushed face made him smirk.

“Why...” she tripped on her words as she floated down to earth. “I...”

“We have work to do,” he said with a wicked grin. “We don’t have time to waste.” He seized her hand as she scowled and led her toward the back of the restaurant. “Remember to stay close. We don’t know what we’re walking into.”

“I hate you,” Amorette humphed, but her words lacked conviction.

“No, you don’t.” Valentin winked. “You love it. You like living on the edge. We aren’t so different.” He leaned closer to whisper conspiratorially in her ear. “Plus, I love watching you ache for me. Imagine how sweet it’ll be if you’re a good girl and wait patiently for your Valentine’s Day gift.”

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Valentine's Day gift? If anyone else had said that, Amorette would've rolled her eyes with annoyance. But the promise on Cupid's tongue? Her anticipation lamented the delayed pleasure, but the thrill of his praise kept her quiet. She would wait, the ache electrifying her almost as much as their hunt.

Amorette shifted on edge as they ventured down to The Rye's basement. Valentin walked before her, seemingly unruffled by their encounter in the dim hallway, and she glared at his back. Her heart threatened to explode just being near him. How was he so calm? Didn't he feel the dangerous sparks flying between them, threatening to consume them with destructive flames?

Valentin strode forward, every inch the legendary warrior, brutal weapon clutched in his fists. He'd given her another arrow, and she gripped it like a baseball bat. It was so large compared to her, she didn't need to be an experienced fighter to inflict damage with it. One well-placed swing and her enemies would regret waking up that morning, but a sudden fantasy played out in her head of her and Cupid fighting side by side, equal in their skill.

"I recognize the scent of a man downstairs," Valentin whispered, his body stiffening with awareness. "It's a shame. This seemed like a nice place."

"Do you really think this is a front?" Amorette asked, stepping closer to him.

"From the upstairs appearance, I would've said no, but the basement feels different. Evil hangs thick in the air."

"Is Cavitto here? Doug?"

“No... I don’t scent them.” They rounded a dark corner and came face to face with a heavily locked office door. “Stay behind me and keep your eyes open. Things are going to happen fast.”

Valentin tested the handle, but when it didn’t budge, his hand found her stomach, palm flattening protectively over her. He pushed her back as he settled into place, and nocking an arrow, he lifted a powerful leg and kicked down the door.

The wood cracked into splinters upon impact, an orchestra of panicked male voices joining the groaning hinges, and Valentin lunged through the doorway, his towering frame filling every inch of space. Through the sliver of air between his arm and the wall, Amorette watched a man grab for his gun, but before his fingers could grip the handle, Valentin loosed an arrow. With a flash of gold, the arrowhead pierced the man’s hand, pinning it to the desk, and as he roared in pain, Valentin nocked a second arrow, shooting the man racing for them. It hit his shoulder, slamming him into the wall, and with an efficient, perfunctory scan of the office, Valentin shifted so the restrained men could see who stood behind him. The man bleeding on the desk snarled when he saw her, and Amorette shuddered as her memory flashed to him punching Doug so hard in the mouth, he spat crimson onto the carpet.

“The lady has something she would like to ask you,” Valentin said, his gaze studying her as her limbs shook imperceptibly. She shot him a panicked look, but he simply raised his eyebrows and jerked his head toward the office. Their eyes competed in a silent standoff, but despite the rigid structure of his shoulders and the deadly bow, his eyes were soft and full of grace. They spoke volumes, and Amorette understood. He wanted her to speak, to seize control of the situation and reclaim what they stole from her. An overwhelming realization flooded her as he gifted her that power. She could love this man. The person who not only protected her but gave her a voice in her own fate.

Armed Cupid at her back, Amorette strode into the room, gaze avoiding the pooling

blood as she emulated Valentin's confidence. "Where's Cavitto?" she asked, settling before the desk. The man's cold eyes surveyed her as if she was an insect invading his space, and he lunged for his gun with his free hand.

"Where is Cavitto?" Amorette threw herself across the desk and snatched the gun from the pooling blood before he could. She'd never held one before, and his blood coated her fingers as she leaped back to safety. Panic flooded her chest. She smelled the coppery scent, felt the sticky liquid, and her breath escaped her lungs in desperate gasps. The room was spinning, spinning, spinning. She was going to pass out.

A solid chest pressed against her spine as a hand pulled the gun from her grasp. The sudden pressure of Valentin's weight grounded her, and with a shaky breath, Amorette reached back to grip his shirt with a white-knuckled fist.

"Still the terrified little bitch we found in that asshole's bed this morning," the man at the desk sneered, and his cruelty snapped her out of her downward spiral. "I see you get around. Couldn't even wait for Cavitto to kill Doug before you decided to whor?—"

Amorette smacked him with the arrow, the look of surprise on his face matching her own. It wasn't a hard blow, barely enough to knock his head to the side, but she wasn't trying to hurt him. Only warn him that no one talked to her like that, not anymore, especially when the man at her back went feral at the insult. A tap to the temple from her was nothing compared to what Cupid would do if he didn't watch his tongue.

"An arrow pins your hand to the desk," she said calmly, pulling the golden rod to her stomach. "I have no interest in running you through with another, but if you continue to act uncivilly, I'll step out of his way." She nodded behind her, feeling braver by the second as Cupid's weight urged her onward. "Now, what will it be? Tell me where Cavitto is or let vengeance have his turn with you?"

“It’s cute that you think your little threats will get me to roll over like a lap dog,” the man spat. “I didn’t become who I am by running my mouth.”

A crash jerked her attention sideways, her brain barely registering the golden arrow clattering to the floor before she saw the second man rush for them. He was massive, all muscle and no neck, and he bent forward, aiming to take both her and Valentin out in one blow. Amorette braced for the pain, but Valentin’s fist shot out inhumanly fast, his knuckles greeting the man’s throat. A strangled choking echoed throughout the office as his head flew backward at an awkward angle before he crashed to the tile, writhing in agony.

“As I was saying,” Amorette turned back to the man at the desk, shocked by how calm she sounded. “Will you tell me what I want to know?”

“Go fuck yourself,” the man said. “I’m dead even if I tell you, so your threats are useless.”

“No? Well, don’t say I didn’t give you a chance.” She stepped aside, shaking with nerves and exhilaration as Valentin moved to the desk. With controlled yet threatening movements, he placed his powerful hands on its surface and leaned forward. He said nothing. He didn’t move beyond what was necessary, but something in the room shifted. The atmosphere changed. Darkness weaved through the air, carrying malice and threats on their molecules. Amorette watched in a trance as Cupid didn’t speak, didn’t flinch, didn’t breathe, yet he commanded every atom in the office. Power wafted off him, infinite and damning, and she could barely breathe through the thick fear he wove like a tapestry around the men. All were silent for what seemed like an eternity, and then the man spilled every one of his secrets.

Valentin dropped the restaurant’s phone, letting it hang from its wire after his anonymous call to the police. There had never been enough evidence to raid The Rye, but their stunt in the basement had gifted the authorities probable cause on a silver

platter.

“That was amazing,” Amorette gushed the second they moved out of earshot of the dangling phone, excitement pouring uncontrollably off her tongue. “You said nothing. Not a single word, but he told you everything. I’ve never felt power like that. It was terrifying but awe-inspiring. I never knew magic existed, and to see it in action. You are incredible.”

Valentin grabbed her waist without warning and shoved her into the restroom. With a resounding click, he locked the door behind them and then walked to each stall, kicking them open. When he found no one, he captured a bewildered Amorette by the hips and hoisted her onto the vanity.

“No, you... you are fucking incredible.” He slammed his mouth to hers, and with a moan, she opened her legs for him. He accepted the invitation, pushing his painfully hard cock against her core, thrusting gently to show her just how amazing he truly found her.

“Valentin,” she gasped, biting his lip. She ached everywhere for him, her body wild and out of control in desperate need of the relief only he could give her.

“I can’t do this.” He twisted her dark hair around his fist and yanked her head back until their gazes met. His eyes traced her lips, her throat, the swell of her breasts, and Amorette felt his gaze as clearly as if it was a physical touch.

“Why not?” she asked, arousal clouding her rational brain. All she could think about was how hard he was between her thighs, how desperately she wanted him to rip off her clothes in this upscale bathroom.

Valentin started to retreat.



“No.” She locked her legs around his waist, pulling him closer. “Why can’t you have me? Is it my consent? You have it.”

“I would never take you without that, my gorgeous girl.” He lowered his mouth to hers, stopping just shy of her lips. “But you are forbidden for me. I can’t have you. I’ll ruin you.”

“I don’t care.”

“You should. A Cupid cannot get involved with a mortal. It ruins their chances of finding love, and I’m afraid I’ve already destroyed any future you might have had. I’m not good for you.”

“I don’t care.” She closed the distance, taking his mouth rough as her tongue licked his lips, begging for access.

“You only say that because it’s Valentine’s Day, and I’m Cupid,” Valentin groaned as he struggled to resist her perfection. “My power’s enhanced on this holiday, and it’s clouding your emotions. I can’t have you. I won’t ruin you.”

“I’ve felt different ever since we met in my café.” Her hand slid to his throat and gripped tight, surprising him as she took control and forced him to face her. With slow sensual rolls of her hips, she ground against him, owning his throat in her grip. “Your magic might be supernatural, but this between us is everyday magic. The kind that threads a man and a woman together. Don’t tell me my emotions are clouded, because, for the first time, they aren’t. So, ruin me, Cupid. Ruin me for any other man.”

Amorette watched his control crumble, and Valentin stepped back, grabbing the waistband of her jeans. He yanked them down until her lower half was bare and then stood frozen, studying her thighs with an almost critical expression. For a breathless

moment, she worried he didn't like what he saw, but then he knelt like a man come to worship.

"I don't deserve something this beautiful," he said as he gripped the back of her knees and dragged her to the edge of the counter. She yelped at the sudden movement, but her voice dissolved into a moan as his tongue found her clit. He started slowly, tasting her, licking her, sucking her. He savored her as if she was decadent chocolate, and Amorette threaded her fingers through his ice-blond hair, staring in awe at how divine he looked as he devoured her like he was starving.

"Oh my god, Valentin," she moaned. She'd never felt a man's tongue do that. Or that... and definitely not that. "Oh my god, I'm going to come."

"Stop calling out to God, Amor." Valentin pulled back, her arousal dripping from his chin as he pushed two fingers inside her, and she arched off the counter at the exquisite pleasure. "He can't help you. No one can, for you're mine now, and I own what is mine. I protect and care for what's mine. Say you belong to me. Tell me I own this pretty pussy, that it's mine alone to fuck."

"It's yours," she moaned.

"Say it again, Amor."

"I'm yours. All of me. I don't want anyone else."

"Good girl." He leaned down, timing each lick with the pumps of his fingers, and Amorette's vision blurred at the edges. "Tell me how I'm the only one who will ever worship you like this, Amor," he growled against her.

"Valentin." She was barely coherent as her climax raced to the surface.

“Don’t you dare come.” He pulled his lips away as he added a third finger, stretching her deliciously. “You don’t get to until I say so, and I need to hear your promise first. I want your voice, Amor. I want it filthy while I bury my tongue inside you.”

“Harder, Cupid.” Amorette fisted his hair, shoving his face back to where they both wanted it. “This pussy is yours. Please, fill me to overflowing... fuck, right there... Stretch me until I’m ready to take your cock, because if I’m yours, then you are mine and only mine. Oh... don’t stop.”

She was practically screaming as she rode his face. If his fingers were any indication of how he fucked, she would be ruined. She couldn’t take the bliss. It was all-consuming. Violent in its hunger, and her body raced for the finish line with an urgency she’d never experienced.

Without warning, the bathroom door rattled, and they both froze as someone pounded on it.

“Ignore it—” Valentin started.

“If you don’t unlock this door, I am calling the police,” a male voice boomed, and both Amorette and Valentin stifled a laugh. If only they knew law enforcement was already racing for this restaurant. “We received complaints about this bathroom. Please open this door before we have to involve the authorities.”

Valentin stood and helped Amorette into her pants with a wink as he tucked her panties into his pocket. “Guess I’m going to keep you on edge a little while longer,” he murmured against her mouth, and Amorette desperately tried to ignore both the orgasm hovering just below her surface and the knowledge that he’d called her Amor while he knelt between her thighs. Yes, it was part of her name, but the way he said it felt different. It felt like love. Love she’d never experienced before.

Valentin threaded his fingers through hers and dragged her to the door, unlocking it and shoving out so fast the restaurant employee stumbled back in surprise. “Excuse us,” he said with a wink as he pulled her close, aiming for the street.

“You’re awful,” Amorette laughed, releasing his hand to wrap an arm around his waist. She hugged him tight as they moved for his bike, and Valentin instinctively draped his arm over her shoulder. The movement was natural, so terribly normal, as if they’d walked like this a thousand times, and that odd emotion struck her again. He was wrong. This wasn’t some side effect of his power or the holiday. This was fate. He was her future, and she suddenly worried about what would happen after they found Cavitto. Amorette didn’t want him to leave her. She couldn’t shake the sensation, but her conviction grew with each passing second. They were destined to find each other. They were supposed to fight together as a team. There was no other explanation for why she’d fallen in love with this man before she ever learned his name.

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Is that what you meant by ‘fuck the rules’ when you kissed me earlier?” Amorette asked. Night had fallen as they sped toward Cavitto’s location, and he could tell by her tone and the way she clutched him that she was trying to take her mind off the danger they raced toward.

“Yes, Amor.” He should stop shortening her name, but he needed to let her know how he felt. He couldn’t say it. It would make it real, breaking every rule he lived by, but he needed her to understand she wasn’t some meaningless hookup. That this wasn’t a spell that ended at midnight. No, this was something true and strong and lasting, and he hoped she understood why he kept abbreviating her name.

“I’ve broken so many rules with you,” he continued. “As a human, you are the one thing forbidden for me, yet you are the only thing I can’t stay away from.”

“Why don’t the Fae interact with humans?” She asked, leaning her cheek against his back as he weaved in and out of the holiday traffic.

“They do. There are plenty of hybrid couples,” he answered. “It’s because I’m a Cupid. My position can manipulate love, and if I get involved with a human emotionally, I ruin their chances of finding a soulmate. I disrupt their minds and affections, causing them to doubt themselves, and eventually, my presence stops them from finding love. I worry it’s too late for you. I’ve meddled too much.”

“Oh...” she trailed off, and Valentin berated himself for making her assume this was a one-day affair.

“I merely meant, I’ve changed your future irrevocably, that’s all.” He released the

throttle with one hand to pat her fingers comfortingly. “I’ll never willingly abandon or harm you, but I fear there will be a price to pay for my involvement today.”

“I wasn’t having luck with men anyway,” she said, but he still detected the nerves in her voice. He wanted to assure her he wasn’t leaving, but when the day was over, he would have to face the backlash of his actions. Valentin didn’t know what that would mean for them. He would fight for Amorette, though. That much he knew, but would it be enough?

“Is that why you stopped getting coffee three weeks ago?” she asked, and he could tell her mind was trying to fit the puzzle pieces together. “Doug and I had a huge argument, and instead of breaking up like we should have, I stayed. I felt so odd, like I didn’t recognize my own body or emotions. My decision confused me, and then you stopped coming, which left me in a tailspin I didn’t understand. I couldn’t stay with Doug, but I couldn’t leave. Was that your power?”

“Yes.” Valentin felt ashamed. If he hadn’t been so selfish, Amorette would’ve had the presence of mind to leave, saving her from Cavitto’s wrath. “I thought if I stayed away, the damage would be minimal and you would heal.”

“I didn’t want you to stay away,” she admitted. “I missed you. It was strange to miss someone I didn’t talk to often, but it was as if my spirit recognized you.”

“I missed you painfully. It’s why I kept an eye on your shop, and I’m glad I did. If I hadn’t been there...” Valentin shuddered, shoving those escaped possibilities from his thoughts.

“But you were there.” Amorette hugged him tighter, and it struck him how easily they shifted from sex on the bathroom counter to an emotional conversation.

“You’re Cupid,” she blurted, jerking him from his admiration. “Why did you always

order black coffee? You're the defender of love. There's an entire holiday dedicated to you. How do you not like chocolate?"

"I'm ex-special forces, Amor," he laughed. "I like the simple things. A good cup of coffee, a beautiful road to ride my bike, and a gorgeous woman screaming in pleasure beneath me. You can enjoy chocolate for the both of us. We complement each other."

"Shit." Valentin's boot hit the pavement as he steadied the bike, and Amorette stared wide-eyed at the monstrosity hiding behind an impenetrable gate at the end of the lane.

"Are we at the right address?" she asked, and Valentin nodded. "Cavitto's in there?" Her voice was incredulous. "He's in that mansion? The house taking up half the property in plain and obvious sight, and the authorities can't find him? How could they miss him coming and going from that? It's the most obnoxious mansion I've ever seen."

"It is." Valentin settled back in his seat, leaning into her chest. His arms folded over hers on his stomach in a decidedly comfortable yet intimate hold. "But it makes sense if you know who owns it."

"Who?" She peered around his mountain of a torso to study his chiseled profile.

"Otis Gaynes." Valentin felt her shrug behind him. "You haven't heard of him?"

"You saw my parent's very suburban home," she said, looking back at the mansion. "We definitely don't travel in the same circles, and I'm usually too busy running the café to pay attention to the news... the café I've abandoned on its busiest day of the year."

"If it'll make you happy, I'll eat one chocolate and then buy the rest to make up for

today.” Valentin nudged her, drawing her eyes back to him. “Your safety is more important.”

“I know.” She kissed his cheek softly, and once again, he was struck by how seamlessly they slipped between the different aspects of a normal relationship. An hour ago, she’d been riding his face as his filthy words filled the bathroom, and now she was kissing his cheek and talking about finances. If only they had a lifetime together. How many more moments like this could they have? Conversations where she held him tight and told him everything.

“So?” she squeezed him impatiently. “Who is he?”

“Otis Gaynes is a multi-millionaire philanthropist and flamboyant entertainer. He’s well known for his humanitarian charities and over-the-top fundraisers. They say his excessive parties and ridiculous personality are the reason so many financiers flock to his causes. His events are always a spectacle.”

“Why would the mafia give us his address?” Amorette asked, and Valentin could almost hear the wheels in her brain spinning as she tried to solve the problem. “That man at The Rye was telling the truth. I saw it when your power flooded the room, so there must be a reason we’re here. Can you scent anything?”

He shook his head. “There’s too much going on in that estate. Everything is blurred.”

Amorette peeled herself off the bike and walked down the lane. The trees hid them inside their shadows, but every step she took injected worry into his heart. He didn’t like her out in the open.

“Amor?”

“The Rye.” She ignored his gentle warning. “Upscale, unassuming, a desired



Valentine's Day date spot. Not the location one would expect the mafia to have their claws in." She started pacing, and Valentin pulled the bow off his back, holding it at the ready in case he needed to defend her.

"Millionaire philanthropist," she said, stopping in her tracks to stare at him. "Not someone you would associate with the criminal underworld. Cavitto isn't often seen in the flesh, but I saw him. He never meant to leave me as a witness or expected me to overpower my guard. I'm one of the few who've seen him and survived, and the thing that stuck out was his suit." She moved closer to Valentin until she stood before him with anticipation. "It was designer. I was too worried about keeping my head to memorize his outfit, but it's hard to miss a designer suit. What if Mr. Gaynes isn't the philanthropist the world thinks he is? What if he's a front like The Rye? Just like the suit?" Her voice escalated with excitement. "People wouldn't question a millionaire devoting his time and money to charities, but why the excessive parties? Because the best way to get away with a crime is not to hide it but to turn everyone's attention to something else."

"Like a fundraiser conducted like a circus?" Valentin leaned forward with wide eyes. "You think they're using them to transfer funds without the authorities noticing?"

Amorette nodded. "Doug stole from Cavitto, an ungodly amount." She whispered what her ex had stolen, and Valentin almost choked on his own spit at the number.

"Holy shit, and you were going to try to pay that yourself?"

"I didn't want them to shoot me." Her voice turned brittle, and he was on his feet in seconds. Her tears erupted as he pulled her against his chest, her fingers clutching his shirt as she sobbed.

"Let it out." He brushed her hair comfortingly, her shaking form so small and precious clinging to his mass. "You've endured more than anyone should."

“I didn’t want to die, and Doug just sat there, willing to let Cavitto shoot me.” Amorette looked up at him through damp eyelashes, and Valentin swore he would protect this woman at all costs. “I was terrified, but now? Now, I’m angry.” She wiped the tears from her eyes, and a feral rage replaced her sorrow. “I can feel it, Valentin. Cavitto’s in there, and I need to do this. I need to not be the girl kneeling on the dirty carpet, begging for my life.”

“That will never happen to you again.”

“Promise?”

“I swear it.” He said it as if he was swearing fealty to a monarch, vowing eternity to his bride.

“Then let’s finish this.” She grabbed his hand and pulled him toward the gate.

“People will die if we go in there,” Valentin warned. “Because if it comes down to you or them, it will always be you. I’ll put an arrow through the heart of anyone who tries to harm you.”

“I know,” Amorette said. “But without proof, we can’t call the police, and I won’t let you leave me behind. We finish this together.”

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 6:42 am*

Valentin stood in the shadows, one with the darkness, as he surveyed the wall surrounding the estate. He disappeared in the night, a thief in the blackness, vengeance come to collect. Despite the heavy security, not one camera registered his size nor the beauty his glamour shielded. Standing before the impressive walls guarding the mansion, he smiled at how intuitive Amorette was. No one suspected Otis Gaynes. No one ever came close enough to his defenses to witness the veritable fortress his home was, but she had figured it out. The gate was impenetrable. The wall was too tall for mortals to scale. Surveillance cameras peppered the property, leaving no inch of land unattended, and Valentin's heightened senses detected dogs on the grounds. They were the least of his problems, though. Dogs, even the trained guard animals, adored him. It was his Fae power influencing their trust. A fact he was thankful for as he stared at Amorette. Instinct warned him that while she was every inch the vigilante he was, she drew the line at harming pets.

Valentin wordlessly reached behind him, captured Amorette, and pulled her onto his back. Her legs instinctively wrapped around his waist as her arms circled his shoulders, and when she was securely in place, Valentin raced for the wall. His powerful thighs launched them up the barrier, and he scaled its height in a matter of seconds. He smirked at Amorette's grip as he dropped to the other side, her body barely moving as she cemented herself to him. He'd said nothing. Hadn't warned her of his plans or instructed her to hold on, yet she knew exactly what he wanted. What would it be like if this was always his life? What would it be like to love someone who understood him without words, who answered without speech?

Enjoying the feel of her wrapped around him, Valentin strode across the grass, holding the backs of her knees to keep her steady. He didn't bother hiding within the shadows. They wouldn't see him coming, and even if they did, it didn't matter. An

angel of war descended upon them, for they had laid their hands on his Amorette. Justice had come, and it would be swift and bloody.

Valentin swung her off his back as they closed in on the front door and handed her an arrow. She clutched the gold in her fists as if she was a weapon's expert, and his cock grew hard, straining painfully against his pants at the sight. He would love to train her in combat, hand to hand and skin to skin as they grappled. He pictured her in the tight workout clothes, and his mind lingered on how he would peel them off and carry her into the shower when they were done.

"Look." Amorette nudged him, gesturing to the shadows by the house. Two Dobermans stood eyeing their approach. Valentin waited for her to recoil in fear, but she only moved out of his shadow to smile at them. "They're so cute," she whispered. "I like their ears."

Valentin stifled a laugh; thankful his presence soothed the dogs. Just as his spirit threatened the men in the basement, it delivered peace to the animals, and deciding the intruders weren't a threat, they lay down in the grass. He had been right. His beautiful girl was a brave and ferocious woman, but she would never forgive him if he hurt a pup.

He slid his fingers through her hair and pulled her close, kissing her head before releasing her. Everything about her was precious, from her love of chocolate to her infectious smile and the way her lips fit against his. To her adoration of the Dobermans' ears, to her determination to guard his back. He would protect her at all costs, no matter the price.

"Can you feel that?" She asked, moving closer to him as they lost sight of the dogs. "The oppression in the air? This place feels wrong."

"He's here." Valentin nocked an arrow and raised the bow.

“You won’t let anything happen to me, right?” Her voice was steady, her words more a statement than a question.

“Never, Amor. Never.”

“Good, because I want him to know I’m coming for him. That I’ll be his downfall.” She gripped the arrow tighter, and Valentin looked away before he took her right there in the grass. She was unspeakably gorgeous with revenge tensing her muscles, and he wondered if she knew just how sexy bravery was on her.

“Watch my back,” he said instead.

“Always.”

Always. Always. Always. Heavens, he fucking wanted that.

“Cupid?” she asked, and he glanced down at her, loving that she called him that. “Can you do me a favor and only shoot to kill if it’s necessary? Leave them alive for the cops?”

“Of course, Amor.” And with a deep inhale, he kicked down Gaynes’ heavy front door.

Two guards jerked in surprise as the ornately carved door flew across the foyer and slammed into the opposite wall. The whistle of wind was the only warning Cupid gave them as his bow shot two arrows at once. True to his word, the wounds weren’t fatal, and the guards collapsed in bloody heaps. They wouldn’t be getting up without the aid of an EMT, though, and Valentin strode into the foyer on silent steps as four men thundered into the entranceway. With brutal ease, he loosed four arrows in rapid succession, knocking them to their backs before they could even raise their guns. He then aimed for the top of the grand staircase and shot two more attackers. They

toppled over the railing, but just as their bodies slapped the expensive tile, movement registered in the corner of his eye. Amorette heaved a breath, but before he could throw his mass protectively before her, she lifted the golden arrow like a baseball bat and swung.

The blow knocked the guard out cold, and Amorette glanced up at Valentin in surprise. Her astonishment morphed into a tease when she saw the unbridled lust in his eyes, and she swayed her hips for his benefit as she moved further into the house. He stood rooted to the tiles for a moment, so incredibly turned on by the fight in her. She was too good to be true, and that nagging idea he refused to speak aloud tickled his brain again. It had to be. It was the only explanation.

With an appreciative grunt at the way her ass looked in those jeans without the panties that still sat in his pocket, he strode forward, overtaking her to resume the lead. They crept down a long hallway, coming across five more easily dispatched guards, but as they rounded a corner, Valentin paused.

“I can scent him.” His gaze met hers with a spark of both anticipation and anger. “This way.” His palm pressed against her back and turned her in the opposite direction. “Your ex is with him.”

“Cavitto kept him alive?” she whispered. “That’s good. I never want to see him after today, but I don’t wish anyone dead.”

“Are you going to be okay—” Valentin’s words cut off as a gargantuan man barreled into him. Both men careened through a door, shattering it as they crashed to the ground.

“Valentin!” Amorette lunged for him, but just as she crossed the room’s threshold, an unforgiving arm wrapped around her waist as thick fingers clamped over her mouth. “Valentin,” she screamed, the hand garbling her cries, and Valentin’s vision burned

red as a mountain of a bald man hauled her away from him.

“Amorette!” He roared, headbutting the guard on top of him, but before he could escape, four more massive guards pinned him to the hardwood floor. “Amorette! Get your fucking hands off her, or I’ll kill you!”

But she was gone.

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 6:42 am*

A morette kicked and yelled and bit, but the man would not release her as he dragged her deeper into the mansion. Her heart beat so viciously, she feared it would rip free from her chest. Where was Valentin? Was he hurt? Was he alive? She screamed against the man's meaty fingers, thrashing wildly. She needed to escape, to help Valentin.

"Shut up," the man growled, his spit hitting her ear as he spoke, and Amorette recoiled. A flash of gold caught her vision at her movement, and she froze in her captor's grip. The arrow. She still had it. How had her guard not noticed? Amorette waved the projectile experimentally, but he was blind to it. Her hope surged anew. Cupid could conceal both his true form and his weapon from human eyes. His glamour must extend to the arrows parted from his presence, and if the brute manhandling her couldn't see it, then Valentin was still alive. Amorette took a steadying breath. Her captor was undoubtedly taking her to Cavitto... with a golden arrow of Cupid clutched in her fist.

Amorette stopped fighting, her mind silently begging Valentin to hurry. He would break free and come for her. He promised. She just needed to survive until he did.

After endless turns through the garish mansion, the man dragged her to the lower levels and into a cleanly styled office. Its sleek and tasteful design didn't match the flamboyance of the rest of the house, and she knew. This was where Cavitto ran his empire from. This was where he hid from the world, not one person thinking of searching a philanthropist's basement.

"Back already?" a male voice asked, its malice coating her skin with dread. "Did you bring my money? Or must I take the payment from your flesh?"



Her captor shoved her into the room, locking the door behind them as Amorette came face to face with Cavitto. An involuntary shudder raced up her spine as she stared down at him, his cruel eyes eating her alive as if she was nothing. Her gaze flicked behind him where a barely recognizable Doug sat tied up and unconscious, and she fought down the bile burning her throat at the gruesome sight. He was alive; she reminded herself. She may hate him, but at least he wasn't dead.

"Are you going to answer me, or are you just going to stand there like a stupid girl?" Cavitto asked, his calmness a threat. "Because that's what you are. A stupid little girl. You didn't have the money. I knew that this morning, but it was fun to watch you squirm. Although now that you have not only killed Derrick but many of my men, I'm done with this game. You should have let me shoot you because what I'll do to you now will be so much worse than death."

His calmness pricked her skin with terror, hands sweating as her heart panicked. She twisted her slick palms around the golden arrow and was once again surprised when neither Cavitto nor her guard batted an eye at it. Its shaft was as long as her torso, more spear than arrow in her fist. He should be able to see it, but his blindness meant one thing. She took a steadying breath. Cupid was still alive. He was coming for her, but she wasn't the same woman she'd been this morning. Valentin had shown her that. He believed his power clouded her judgment, but she was more herself than ever. She finally felt comfortable in her own skin, confident in her purpose. He encouraged her bravery, her inner warrior, and while she knew he would rescue her, she would help save herself.

"I would be careful what you threaten me with," Amorette said smugly, slowly shifting her weight into position. "Vengeance is coming for you, and his wrath won't be satisfied until all who harmed me pay their debts." She smiled at Cavitto's confused expression. "Your words sealed your fate. I would refrain from saying anything to anger him further."

Cavitto laughed, unconcerned by her threats. “I’m going to enjoy this.”

“As will I.” And with that, Amorette swung the arrow backward. The sharpened arrowhead slammed into her captor’s temple, knocking him into the wall with a spray of blood. For a split second, Amorette stood confused by the power emanating from her arm, but her focus turned on Cavitto before she lost the element of surprise. With a feral roar, she charged the desk and leaped onto it, crawling across the wood until she knelt face-to-face with the mafia boss.

His eyes stared up at her in shock as she pressed the arrow into his throat. He paused for a fraction of a second before reaching for his gun, but Amorette shoved the sharpened tip further into his neck until a trickle of blood trailed down his skin. Cavitto paled, and she grinned wickedly as he finally registered the ruthless weapon in her hands. Her lips parted to speak, but a sudden commotion outside silenced her. She froze, arrowhead digging into his soft flesh as they listened to the war being waged. When the fighting grew closer, Amorette smiled. Cupid had come for her.

A second later the door flung open, its hinges warping at the force, and Valentin lunged into the office, bow aimed and at the ready until he saw her crouched on the desk, Cavitto at her mercy.

“I see you didn’t need me, Amor.” He strode forward, his aim never leaving Cavitto as he rounded the desk.

“I’ll always need you,” she said, triumph bubbling over in her chest. “I’ll always want you to come for me.”

“And I always will.” He settled before Cavitto, and the softness his features reserved for her vanished. “Mr. Cavitto, you threatened my Amorette. Your men put their hands on her. No one touches what’s mine and escapes unpunished. By the time Valentine’s Day end, you’ll regret ever laying eyes on my beautiful Amor.”

“Happy Valentine’s Day.” Valentin draped a muscled arm over Amorette’s shoulder as they surveyed his handy work. Police sirens sounded in the distance, drawing ever closer, but they lingered, enjoying the sight before them for a few more minutes.

“This is a better gift than roses,” she said, her arm slipping around his waist.

“Better than chocolate?” he teased.

“That’s pushing it.” She rose onto her toes and pressed a kiss to his lips. It was soft and romantic. Anyone watching would see a couple on a date, not two vigilantes desecrating a millionaire’s home, purging the head of the mafia from its well-defended walls.

After Valentin found her in Cavitto’s office, a golden arrow pressed against his throat, he had hunted down every man in the building, including the pompous owner, and hauled them out onto the grass. He left most of them alive, only killing the men who pinned him down while Amorette was dragged into the basement. But she could live with their deaths.

She had helped him as best she could after they transported the criminals outside, and using his golden arrows, Cupid strung up every man, Cavitto and Gaynes hanging in the middle for all to witness. If the police required probable cause to breach the property line, they would give it to them, and what a sight it was. Maybe it was the adrenaline or the fact that he kept edging her without relief, but this Valentine’s Day gift of her enemies stacked like human décor along the walls of the mansion turned her on. Valentin hadn’t needed to protect her. He didn’t owe her anything, yet he had stepped up to bat to save her, and heavens how he swung.

Their kiss turned searing, hunger and excitement electrocuting the surrounding air, but the suddenly loud sirens broke them apart.

“We should go.” Valentin pulled his arm off her shoulders and extended his palm. She threaded their fingers together, and he led her into the shadows just as the first police car raced down the drive.

They walked in silence until they reached his hidden motorcycle. The street was teaming with a sudden army of cops and paramedics, and Amorette studied the flashing lights with a critical eye.

“Your magic? How does it work?” She pulled her hand from his as she strolled backward toward the bike. “It conceals your ears and tactical gear. Does it make only your weapons invisible, or can you disappear too?”

“It’s a glamour,” Valentin answered, crossing his arms across his broad chest as he watched her. “It isn’t invisibility, but rather I make people see what I want them to. My friend Nick is the reigning Santa Claus. The guy is a huge muscled brunette, but on Christmas Eve, his glamour shows him as the jolly man in red.”

“You know Santa?” Amorette gawked. “He’s real?”

“Very.”

“I...” She shook her head with an infectious smile. “I’m tucking that away for later because I want the full story.”

“I’ll tell you as much as I’m allowed to.”

“Deal.” Her grin turned wicked. “The arrow in my hand was glamourised before so no one noticed it. It’s how I cornered Cavitto. If your glamour works on your weapons in my control, can it work on me?” He nodded, eyes stalking her as she seductively leaned against his bike. “So, if the police or a nosy neighbor walk by, they won’t see me do this, right?” She grabbed her shirt and pulled it over her head. Valentin made a

strangled noise at the sight, and she fingered the buttons of her jeans. “And they won’t see me do this either?” She peeled her pants and shoes off until she stood in nothing but her bra, her panties still safely tucked away in his pocket. “And they definitely won’t see me do this?” Her eyes burned electric as she reached behind her and undid her bra.

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 6:42 am*

Valentin experienced a system-wide shut down as she pulled her bra off and leaned seductively against his bike. Her long legs angled out before her, parting slightly in a tease. Between her thighs was unspeakably beautiful, a masterpiece worthy of his worship, but he couldn't stop staring at her breasts. Her pink nipples were hard in the cool air, seductive in their invitation. Heavens, he wanted them in his mouth as he claimed her, owned her, loved her. He wanted to thrust his cock between those gorgeous swells, spill his cum all over them and watch it drip down her skin. Her beauty was unmatched in this world, and he knew if he stepped one inch closer, he would fuck her until she didn't even remember her own name.

Valentin clenched his hands into fists. If he did this, there was no going back. No leaving her, and the council would never allow that. He was Cupid and couldn't get involved. He could not keep her, marry her, love her, and he swallowed as that damn thought flooded his mind again. She was gloriously naked, and while he was so hard he feared his pants might rip, his brain kept fixating on that invading idea. He didn't want a one-night fling. He wanted her forever, wearing his ring, taking his name, fighting at his side. But she was human, and her life was a blink of an eye compared to his.

"Today started horribly, but it turned into the best Valentine's date I ever had," she said, as if sensing he needed encouragement to overcome his own thoughts. "But what is Valentine's Day without Valentine's night?" She leaned further back, her soft thighs highlighted like a painting in the moonlight. His breath caught as she opened for him, but he stopped breathing when she slipped her hand between her legs. Eyes holding his gaze, she stroked herself slowly, every movement of her fingers a show just for him. "Please, Cupid," she begged. "I'm so wet. Are you going to make me do this myself?"

Valentin roared as she brushed her clit, her breasts heaving as she moaned in pleasure, and he was on her in a second. His hand knocked hers out of the way, claiming her bliss as his own. He worked her into a euphoric frenzy as her bare body leaned against his bike, and the sight of her naked skin pressed against the metal and chrome almost had him spilling in his pants.

“Oh my god, Valentin,” she moaned, grabbing his biceps as his fingers thrust inside her. She wasn’t lying. She was so fucking wet, he thought he would pass out from the intense sensations. “I’m going to come.”

“I told you god can’t help you.” Valentin ripped his hands from her and backed up, a devil of a smirk playing across his full and inviting lips.

“Please, no,” Amorette whimpered. “I can’t wait any longer, Cupid. I need to come.”

“Say it again.” He lifted his hand to his mouth and sucked her arousal seductively off his fingers.

“I need to come.”

“No, my name.”

“Cupid.” She leaned back further onto the motorcycle. “I want you, Cupid.”

Valentin pulled off his tactical gear with efficient speed. He could tell by the hunger in Amorette’s expression that she reveled in his body’s power as he flexed and stripped. It took him seconds to free his remarkable physique from his clothes, and then he settled before her, letting her drink in the sight of him. He watched her carefully as her eyes admired his chest and abs, and he smirked wickedly as they widened when they fell on his hard length. His immortal body was powerful and strong, towering over humans, and his cock was equally as impressive. She licked her

lips, his control utterly ruined as he saw her eagerness to take every inch of him. That was one reason he'd been edging her. He loved keeping her flushed and ready, but he also knew she needed to be aching for him in order to adjust to his size. And he intended to sink in to the hilt. She was going to take all of him, and he would make her scream as she enjoyed the largest cock she'd ever ridden.

“Tell me you want this.” He stroked himself while she watched, reveling in how her eyes widened at the sight. “Tell me you want me inside you, bare and raw. Swear to me that if I fuck you, mine will be the only cock you ever let thrust into your pussy, the only cum you ever let fill you.”

“Promise me if we do this, you belong to me.” Amorette challenged back. “I want you, Cupid. I want you to own me as I own you.”

Valentin lunged for her, gripping her throat not in a threat but in ownership, his hold soft yet dominant. “I have belonged to you from the moment I laid eyes on you, Amor. You have me, body, mind, and soul. You are the only one I'll ever get hard for.” With that confession, he slammed his mouth to hers. Hand still controlling her throat, his other palm slid beneath her knee. He lifted it and twisted her until she straddled his bike backward, guiding her back until she lay against the handlebars, her legs spread and ready. He paused for a second, his eyes tracing her beauty as she waited, and then he straddled the bike and her body.

“Open your mouth, Amor.” He gripped his length and stepped closer until he stood over her chest, the tip of his cock rubbing her lips. “Make it good and wet for me so I can slide deep into that pretty pussy.”

Amorette gasped, her mouth opening greedily, and he plunged inside until he hit the back of her throat. She gagged at his size, and he tried to pull out to give her room to breathe, but her hands flew out and clutched his ass. Their gazes met, and it was all the consent he needed. She wanted to choke on him as he took his pleasure. To



swallow him until he saw his outline in her throat. His fists gripped her hair as she held his ass, and he fucked her face like a man possessed. She welcomed each thrust with a moan, not caring that a tear escaped her eye at how deep he was, but her eyes never left his. It was the most erotic thing he'd ever seen; her swallowing him with enthusiasm while she held his gaze. And then her tongue moved, the pressure increasing, and he thought she would suck the soul from his body with her talent.

"You choke on me so well, Amor," he growled. "Heavens, I want to come down your throat and make you swallow every drop, but I need to be inside you." He yanked out of her mouth and leaned over her to capture her lips in a kiss.

"Cupid," she murmured against him. "What is this? Why do I feel this way?" She kissed him harder, and he knew she had the same thought he did. That damn intrusive thought.

"Cupid." Amorette could barely form coherent sentences. An unbearable ache pulsed through her heart, and her desire was a raging forest fire, threatening to ruin all in its path. "Please. I need you."

"You have me." Valentin gripped her thighs and spread her wide, leaning forward to capture her mouth. Her arms and legs wound around him, the bike pressing into her back, and as the tip of his swollen length nudged her entrance, she hoped he rode her with the same control and power as he did his motorcycle.

"Oh god." She jerked as he pushed inside slowly. "You're so big."

"And you're going to take every inch like the good girl I know you are." He bit her lip as he drove further. "You are so wet, so tight, Amor. You feel like you were made for me."

"I..." Her body shook as he sank into her, his hips rolling seductively as she adjusted.

“I was made for you. I belong to you.” She felt out of control with need. “I’m going to come.”

“Good girl.” He thrust hard, filling her to the hilt, and her head flew backward, forcing her nipples against his solid chest. “Now that I’m inside you, come as much as you want.”

His pelvis brushed her clit, and Amorette screamed as the orgasm consumed her. She’d been on edge for hours, and his swollen cock splitting her in half was too much to bear. Every inch of her was sensitive, her skin like electric wires, and the pleasure rolled endlessly through her. Wave after wave shocked her body, and she knew she was already addicted to this man. She would never get enough of him.

“That was the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen.” Valentin pressed his muscular frame against her, pushing her into his bike until it looked like he was speeding down the highway.

“Again,” she gasped, holding him so tight it was impossible to see where she ended and he began. “Please, Cupid.”

“Anything for you, Amor,” he growled, his thrusts harder now that she was fully adjusted to his thickness. Her back arched as he hit where she needed him with a talent no man should possess. Valentin’s attention caught on her peeked nipples, and with a kiss that lingered deliciously against her lips, his head lowered to her breasts. He captured a nipple between his teeth, his pelvis brushing her nerves with torturous pleasure until a second climax ignited her body. But Valentin didn’t stop. He rode her hard, his hands and mouth pleasuring her with such attentiveness, she couldn’t contain the obscene moans spilling from her lips.

“You sound so beautiful,” he praised. “I want to hear you all night.”

Amorette gifted him her voice and moaned with each orgasm that shook her to her core, changing her forever. She screamed with pleasure, with whispered words of encouragement.

“Make it filthy,” Valentin growled in her ear as her praise wrapped around them. “Tell me every thought that’s inside that beautiful mind of yours while I’m inside this perfect pussy.”

“I’m never going to forget the way you feel.” She gripped his hair as her lips traced his pointed ear. He groaned into her neck, his hips moving faster. “You want my words, but I want your moans. Louder, Cupid. Moan like you fuck. Hard and rough and dominant.”

“Amor.” Valentin kissed her throat, his hands finding her breasts. He pinched her nipple as his voice spilled from his mouth. He obeyed her request, his bliss so loud it was like the roar of the bike’s engine.

“Louder,” she gasped, her body shaking for release. “I want your voice and your cock for the rest of my life.”

Valentin took her every sound to heart. His stamina lasted and lasted and lasted, bringing the stars to her eyelids, and when she lost count of how many times he’d made her climax, she cupped his jaw with her hands.

“I can’t.” Her limbs shook as she tasted his mouth.

“One more.” He kissed her deeply, gripping her hair as he pulled her close. “I want to feel you choke me as I fill you.”

“It’s too much,” she protested, but her fight was weak. She wanted it. Even this tired, she craved more.

“Good girl,” Valentin breathed into her mouth, and she swallowed his admiration with greed. “Now, Amor. Come with me.” He gave her nipple a tug, and she exploded in light and color. His thrusts grew erratic, and she felt him pump his cum inside her.

“Fuck, you’re amazing.” He kissed her with worship on his lips, and she gripped his ass tighter so she wouldn’t waste a single drop. “What a good girl,” he smirked as her pussy milked his sensitive cock until his body sparked electric. “Take it all, Amorette.”

“I am.” She ground her hips against him and then placed a hand over his thundering heart. “I am,” she repeated with a serious expression, her eyes full of meaning, and she knew he understood. “I want all of it. I’m taking it, keeping it, cherishing it. Happy Valentine’s Day, Cupid.”

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*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 6:42 am*

Neither of them spoke as they dressed, the magnitude of what just passed between them hanging thick in the air.

They helped each other clean up, the movements reverent and loving, and then Valentin settled on his bike and pulled her behind him.

She wrapped her arms lazily around him, leaning against his back as he angled for the road, but Valentin paused before he took off.

He savored how different the motorcycle felt now that he'd had her on it, and he captured her fingers, pulling them from his abs to his mouth.

He kissed her hand gently.

The hand that made chocolate, even if he cared little for its taste.

The hand that brought him pleasure.

The hand that fought to save her life and protect his.

Valentin pressed it against his cheek as that emotion barreled through his chest again, and suddenly he didn't want to drive away from this spot.

He wanted to freeze time and exist in this beautiful moment forever.

Amorette hummed a content noise at their contact, and the sound burrowed deep into his soul to hide eternally.

Valentin finally released her hand, but she paused, fingers hovering before his abs.

For a second, she didn't move, and then Amorette pointed toward the darkness.

Valentin followed her directions and smiled when he saw what she was gesturing at.

The two Dobermans had emerged from the shadows, observing them with attentive kindness.

It seemed his power had done quite the number on the animals.

Valentin shifted in his seat to glance at Amorette, her blissfully tired expression an enchanting sight he wanted to see for the rest of her life.

His eyebrows quirked, and Amorette understood his wordless question.

Her face lit up, and she nodded before leaning in to kiss his cheek.

Valentin lingered against her lips before looking at the dogs.

He jerked his head before driving onto the street, and the Dobermans raced after them.

Looked like he... they had pets now.

They wordlessly enjoyed the leisurely ride to his apartment, and when he opened the door to his sleek, industrial studio with exposed brick and rustic décor, the dogs barreled into the living room, making themselves at home on the couch.

Valentin rolled his eyes as he set his bow and quiver down, but when he turned back to Amorette, she was sitting between the animals, scratching their heads.

“We don’t know their names,”

she said. “Let’s give them new ones... like Coffee and Chocolate.”

“Anything you want, Amor.”

He didn’t move, content to just watch her. “They’re yours now. This home is yours, too. As am I.”

“I’ve always wanted dogs, but the café eats all my money.”

She looked up at him, his heart swelling at the excitement in her eyes. “I’m yours, too?—”

The front door slammed open, and Valentin threw himself before her, bow in hand as he took aim.

Four massive Fae stormed into the apartment, the Dobermans growling at their tactical gear, but they were smart enough not to attack the warriors.

“Cupid, you need to come with us,”

one of the intruders said. “The council has summoned you.”

Valentin’s heart sank.

He knew this was coming.

The moment when he would pay the price for ruining a mortal’s future.

He knew it was coming, yet the reality still stung.

For eight months he had grown to love her, and while he didn't regret a single second they'd spent together, the time only made it worse.

It would be excruciating to give her up after learning what her lips felt like, what her passion and affection unraveled within him.

He would fight the council until his last breath, but what was one Fae against many? With defeat, he nodded, and two of the Fae seized his arms.

"Protect her for me,"

he called over his shoulder to the dogs. "She's the most precious thing in this apartment."

"Wait!"

Amorette launched herself off the couch. "I'm coming with you."

Her hand slipped around his biceps.

"Ma'am, I'm sorry, but you need to stay here,"

the Fae leader started.

"Not today,"

she snarled so fiercely, all four warriors leaned back in surprise.

"I've had guns aimed at me, my family threatened, my café almost destroyed. Criminals lied to me, hunted me, chased me, and I have had enough of men telling me what I can do. Only one person helped me when I was in danger, and I won't leave him when he needs support. So, shall we?"



No one spoke for a silent minute, and then Valentin chuckled. If he didn't already love her, he did now. "Don't argue with her,"

he said. "I'll go willingly as long as you listen to her."

"Very well."

The Fae leader nodded, and they disappeared in a whirl of magic.

Amorette listened dumbfounded as the council read Valentin's violations to him.

The couple stood in the center of a circular chamber, and an older gentleman named Paris, who had been introduced as the previous Cupid, presided over the trial.

She'd assumed Valentin's resistance to being with her had been his fear taking precautions, but standing there and hearing his crimes recited aloud forced her to confront exactly what he'd risked to help her.

Her stomach cramped with each word spoken.

This man, this glorious, protective, gorgeous man, had jeopardized everything for her, and her heart broke with every listed crime.

He'd saved her, and now he would pay the price.

"You are hereby stripped of the title of Cupid,"

Paris said with a heavy heart. "Your weapons will be removed from your possession, and you are forbidden from crossing into the mortal realm."

"What?"

Amorette gasped. “No!”

“This is your punishment for your crimes against this woman.”

Paris continued, and while his tone was harsh, his expression told her this trial gutted him to his core. There was tenderness in his eyes. An affection for his successor that turned his own words to poison on his tongue. “You altered Amorette Ellis’ future irrevocably with your actions. Her thread of fate burned to ash, leaving her incapable of finding a soulmate. Because of your involvement, you have condemned her to a loveless life.”

“No, stop!”

Amorette screamed, desperate to be heard. “He saved my life. You can’t punish him.”

“He knew the rules,”

Paris said, struggling to meet her gaze. “He was well aware of the harm his actions would inflict on your life and emotions, and for that, I am truly sorry, but he willfully disobeyed. There’s a reason Cupid is forbidden from forming bonds with a human.”

“But he hasn’t condemned me to a loveless future.”

Amorette grabbed Valentin’s arm for emphasis. “I think I fell for him the first time he ordered black coffee at my café, but today sealed my fate. He didn’t ruin me for love because he’s who I love.”

Valentin stiffened, staring down at her in shock.

“I understand why you would say that, but it’s Valentine’s Day, and he is a Cupid,”

Paris argued. “Your emotions are muddled.”

“People really need to stop telling me how I feel.”

Her grip on his arm tightened. “Today, I interacted with two different men who claimed to care for me. One was willing to let me die for his sins, and the other sacrificed everything to ensure I saw tomorrow. Valentin knew this would happen to him, but he helped me anyway. You can’t tell me these are holiday emotions. That kind of dedication and sacrifice takes real love.”

She paused, looking up at Valentin with the same surprise he wore at her discovery. “You love me.”

“Amor,”

he whispered.

“I love you,”

she whispered back. “I love that you sacrificed everything so I wouldn’t have to die, so my family didn’t die. I love that you like black coffee while I prefer chocolate. I love how you made me brave and didn’t treat me like I was helpless or inferior. You let me control my own fate, and I love that you didn’t hurt those dogs. I love you, Cupid.”

“She’s my mate,”

Valentin said, shocking the entire room, and Amorette swore a weight lifted from his chest at the confession. “We fought today as one, my weapon just as dangerous in her hands as it was mine. I didn’t break any rules because she is my destiny.”

“Do you realize what you’re saying?”

Paris asked. “If you’re wrong?”

“I know.”

Valentin sobered.

“What?”

Amorette looked wildly around, her brain experiencing whiplash from the day’s nonstop action and changes. “What are you saying?”

Valentin peered down at her with heartbreak in his eyes, and fear filled her chest. He opened his mouth to speak, but when only silence escaped his lips, Paris answered for him.

“You are human, and while you can engage with a Fae, your lifespan is too short for a meaningful connection. If a Cupid claims a mate, it’s for life.”

Paris lifted the finger sporting his wedding band to illustrate his point. “Fate cannot be denied, and if a Cupid finds his mate in a mortal, there’s a way to ensure they live eternally alongside each other.”

Amorette gasped as her gaze flew to Valentin’s. “How?”

“I must shoot you through the heart with my golden arrow,”

he said solemnly, fingers tracing her face. “If we truly belong together, you’ll survive the blow and live as long as I do, fighting for love alongside me.”

“If you’re wrong?”

her voice shook.

“You die.”

Amorette froze. The entire room held its breath, and then she walked away from him. She felt his despair at her back. He assumed she would never risk her life, and with each step, his sorrow grew to poison the air until she grabbed his bow from the guards.

“Do it.”

She shoved the golden weapon at Valentin.

“I’m yours, remember, and not just because fate decided it, but because we chose each other.

We swore our futures to one another, so destiny may have played a part, but I want this.

You promised me on your bike that I’m the only woman you’ll ever be with, and I’m holding you to it.”

She stepped back, clutching her hands behind her to keep them from shaking as she gazed at him with all her faith and love. “Do it, Cupid.”

Valentin stared at her for a long moment, his eyes tracing the lines of her face, and then he raised his bow, aiming for her heart. “You own me, Amor,”

he said. “Body, mind, and soul. You are my present and my future.”

Then he shot her.

The savage arrow flew for her chest, and Amorette braced for the impact.

She’d witnessed the damage this bow inflicted on flesh.

She observed firsthand how it ripped muscles and skin apart, but the second it struck her, it dissolved into golden light.

The sparkling glow dove deep into her heart and filled her with a bubbly sensation, like champagne flooding her veins.

The world grew brighter, her body bloomed stronger, and as the last of the delicious light receded, a forceful emotion barreled through her.

A love so strong it gave them an eternity.

The crowd gasped as she raced for Valentin, launching herself into his waiting arms.

Her legs wrapped around his waist as his lips claimed hers with radiant passion.

“Amor,”

Valentin moaned into her mouth. “My mate. I love you.”

“Happy Valentine’s Day, Cupid.”

Amorette smiled against his lips. “You can keep your job now, right?”

“Yes.”

He pulled her closer, and she felt him harden as they kissed. “Only now I have a partner in my calling.”

“You have a partner in everything.”

She laughed, pulling back to cup his face. “Now take me home, Cupid. There’s only a little time left to this Valentine’s Day, but I want to spend it with you, celebrating

with champagne and chocolate...”

she leaned conspiratorially down until her lips brushed his pointed ear so only he could hear. “And you screaming you’re mine for the rest of our lives.”

Thank you for reading X Marks The O’s. The Season’s Reading Series continues in Tryst of Treat: A Halloween Romance . If you enjoyed this novella and feel comfortable leaving a review, I would greatly appreciate it.