FINE PRINT

(Or how a divine contract may not be the best cure for a broken heart.)

Chapter 15

Misery



THERE IT IS AGAIN...

ANOTHER ONE

EVERY SO OFTEN I SEE THEM PASS ME BY. IGNORING ME... JUST WALKING INTO THE WATER. SWIMMING TOWARDS THE HORIZON...

BUT EVERY NOW AND THEN SOME ARRIVE WITH THESE THREADS ATTACHED TO THEM...

IT'S ALMOST LIKE LIKE AN UMBILICAL CHORD

AND THEY TREAT IT THE SAME...

THEY SEVER IT...

AND INTO THE WATER THEY GO.

I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG I'VE BEEN HERE. BUT I'VE SEEN SO MANY OF THEM BY NOW...

AND EVERY TIME I SEE THE JOY WITH WHICH THEY JUMP INTO THE WATER, I WISH TO DO THE SAME...

I DON'T WANT TO KEEP SITTING HERE THINKING BACK ON MY FAILURES.

MY FEAR HAS FADED AND NOW, I JUST WANT TO FOLLOW THEM...

BUT I CAN'T...

BECAUSE NO MATTER HOW HARD I TRY....

HOW MUCH I STRAIN

IT DOESN'T MATTER...

I CAN'T BREAK THESE FUCKING THREADS

FINE!

WE'LL DO IT THE HARD W-- NNNGH

WHAT THE HELL? WHY IS THIS THING SO HEAVY?

HEY!

UM---

HELLO? UH...GHOST PERSON?

HASHDAH SSHHSSHS

SHHSHDSGH HSHSHSDS

I... I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TRYING TO SAY?

CROSSED ARMS?

AS IN STOP? DON'T GO INTO THE WATER?

SIGH...

LISTEN, BUDDY, I APPRECIATE YOUR CONCERN, BUT I'LL TAKE MY CHANCES IN THE WATER

NOT LIKE IT CAN HURT ME. I'M ALREADY DEAD.

OH I WOULD HEED YOUR FRIENDS WARNING IF I WERE YOU...

THERE ARE WORSE THINGS THAN DEATH I ASSURE YOU...

YOU ARE NOT THE FIRST ONE TO TRY AND CARRY THEIR MEMORIES INTO THE NEXT LIFE, BUT HERE AT THE END OF THE ROAD, THEY ARE A GREAT BURDEN.

THE KIND OF BURDEN THAT WILL PULL YOU TO THE BOTTOM, AND ONCE YOU'RE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE UNENDING RIVER, YOU DROWN FOREVER.

MAY I?

MY MY...THIS IS QUITE THE TANGLE USUALLY BY THE TIME THE DEAD MAKE THEIR WAY TO THESE SHORES THERE ARE ONLY THE MOST STUBBORN OF THREADS LEFT, BUT THIS...

THIS MUST BE PURE TORMENT...

I MEAN... IT'S NOT THAT BAD. JUST A BIT UNCOMFORTABLE.

HEAVY...

AND IT WILL KEEP GETTING HEAVIER, I FEAR. ON THIS THRESHOLD ALL THE SOULS FEEL THE PULL OF THE GRAND CYCLE,

TO DENY IT IS TO...

SUFFER!

SO WHO ARE YOU?

MY OLD NAME IS OIZYS, SISTER TO DEATH

BUT YOU MAY CALL ME AS SO MANY OTHERS DO...

MISERY!

RIGHT... FIGURES.

YOU SEEM... UNFAZED

I'VE HAD A VERY STRANGE YEAR.

OH, I KNOW.

I'VE BEEN LISTENING TO YOUR STORY FOR SO LONG NOW...

QUITE THE TALE YET DIFFERENT EVERY TIME YOU TOLD IT

AND EVERY TIME... LACKING.

HIDING THE BEST PARTS UNDER ALL THIS...

MESS.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN MY STORY IS DIFFERENT EVERY TIME I TELL IT?

I HAVEN'T BEEN TELLING MY STORY TO ANYONE?

OF COURSE YOU HAVE.

THAT'S ALL THE DEAD DO.

SUCH IS THE NATURE OF THIS PLACE... HERE AT THESE SHORES OF FINAL CONTEMPLATIONS THE DEAD REMEMBER FOR THE LAST TIME.

AH...

AND THEN WHAT?

THEN YOU SWIM, UNTIL ALL YOUR BURDENS ARE GONE, AND YOU ARE MADE ANEW

BUT I SUPPOSE THAT'S NOT AN OPTION FOR YOU RIGHT NOW

IN FACT I'M SORRY TO SAY, YOU ARE IN QUITE A BIT OF TROUBLE RIGHT NOW. BURDENED AS YOU ARE YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO CROSS, AND A SOUL CAN'T LINGER INDEFINITELY.

STAY HERE LONG ENOUGH AND YOU WILL START DROWNING IN ANGUISH

IT IS ABSOLUTELY DREADFUL!

RIGHT...

CAN I BORROW ONE OF THOSE KNIVES?

OH NO.

THEY HAVE NO EDGE TO CUT, JUST A POINT TO STAB WITH

HOW BOUT YOU? SMUGGLE IN A PAIR OF SCISSORS?

CAN'T SPEAK?

MAYBE YOU JUST DON'T KNOW HOW TO LISTEN?

ANYHOW, THAT ONE IS JUST ANOTHER POOR SOULD STRUGGLING WITH THEIR LAST ATTACHMENT

NOTHING AS SERIOUS AS YOUR SITUATION THOUGH...

YEAH...

SO HOW DO I BREAK THESE?

THAT'S THE REAL QUESTION ISN'T IT?

USUALLY THE THIN ONES SHED ON THEIR OWN, LAST ONES THAT REMAINA RE USUALLY THOSE REPRESENTING LOVED ONES...

BUT TANGLED UP AS THEY ARE, THEY FEED INTO EACH OTHER STRENTHENING THE WEAVE...

SO I UNTANGLE THEM?

UNTANGLE? PERHAPS...

BUT PULLING ON THESE THREADS IS A MESSY BUSINESS...

YOU SEE, AT THE OTHER END OF THOSE STRINGS IS ANOTHER ONE'S SOUL, WITH ALL ITS SECRETS

THEN AGAIN, YOU HAD A GLIMPSE OF IT ALREADY AND YOU DIDN'T FLINCH

SO CARRY ON!

BE CURIOUS!

BE HUMAN!

PICK A THREAD!

AND PULL IT!

OKAY, CALM DOWN, MOUTH OF SAURON!

YOU GOT THAT, HUH?

OKAY THEN... PICK A THREAD...

AND PULL

OH YES!

WHAT A LOVELY CHOICE!

Chapter 16

The failure



I HAVE A LONG MEMORY

UNLIKE HUMANS I REMEMBER MY BIRTH

WAIT, NO. THAT'S A LIE.

I DON'T REMEMBER MY BIRTH ITSELF, AS I WAS STILLBORN

I REMEMBER THE MOMENT I WAS FORCIBLY AWAKENED AS MY MOTHER EXPOSED ME TO THE DIVINE FLOW

THAT WAS ALSO THE FIRST TIME THAT I SAW THE STRINGS...

WHAT WILL YOU NAME THE CHILD?

MERRYLIA...

KEEP IN MIND, MATRON, EXPOSING THE CHILD TO THE YEARNING FLOW SO YOUNG... IT MIGHT CAUSE PROBLEMS WITH ITS DEVELOPMENT

WE WILL CROSS THAT BRIDGE WHEN WE COME TO IT.

IT WAS A COMPLICATED BIRTH. I WAS THE ONLY CHILD OF THE ALARIS FAMILY BIRTHED BY HER...

I CAUSED HER GREAT PAIN.

EVER SINCE THEN I THOUGHT SHE HAD RESENTED ME FOR THIS.

PLEASE, TAKE HER TO THE NURSERY. I NEED TO RECOVER

BECAUSE THE SMILE SHE GAVE ME WHEN I FIRST SAW HER WAS THE LAST SMILE I WOULD SEE FROM THERE ON

IT'S FUNNY HOW MUCH THAT FIRST AND LAST SMILE OF HERS AFFECTS ME STILL..

HOW IT HURTS ME THAT I NEVER EARNED ANOTHER...

HUMANS OFTEN SPEAK OF UNHEALTHY SUPRESSION OF FEELINGS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH.... AND THERE ARE DAYS WHEN I THINK THEY MAY BE ONTO SOMETHING

WHO KNOWS. MAYBE ALL OF MY KIND ARE JUST EMOTIONALLY STUNTED...

AFTER ALL, WE'RE LIVING IN A CONSTANT STATE OF EMOTIONAL CELIBACY THAT MAKES US CLING ON TO ANY SCRAP OFAPPROVAL WHEN LOVE IS SO THOROUGHLYABSENT...

MAYBE THAT IS WHY I STILL HAVEN'T EATEN THE AMBROSIA SHE GAVE ME....

SIGH... MAYBE I'M JUST NOT CUT OUT FOR THIS GODDESS THING AT ALL.

I MEAN, I KINDA SUCKED AT IT FROM THE BEGINNING.

BACK THEN ALLURIA AND MARCUS WERE ON THEIR WAY TO GRADUATING TO THE POSITION OF CALLERS,

EVEN ALTHEO WHO WENT AGAINST THE GRAIN AND PICKED THE PATH OF A SCHOLAR AT LEAST HAD A PATH CHOSEN...

MEANWHILE I WAS TERRIBLE AT WEAVING DESIRE SO MY ONLY OPTIONS WERE BUREAUCRACY AND WORKING DIRECTLY UNDER MY MOTHER... OR I COULD TRY BECOMING A SEER.

SINCE THE FIST OPTION TERRIFIED ME, I WENT WITH THE SECOND ONE...

UNFORTUNATELY I COULDN'T EVEN DO THAT RIGHT.

NOW, I WANT EACH OF YOU TO OBSERVE THESE STREAMS AND IDENTIFY ONES WITH SUFFICIENTLY PURE DIVINE DESIRE.

IT WAS MY EYES... SOMETHING WAS WRONG WITH THEM

BECAUSE WHERE OTHERS CLEARLY SAW STREAMS, ELEGANT AND FOCUSED... I SAW AN EXPLOSION OF LIGHT AND COLORS.

TURNS OUIT I WAS KINDA POINTLESS... AND THAT WAS A VERY BAD THING.,

IN A SOCIETY DRIVEN BY PURPOSE HAVING NONE WAS DANGEROUS

I REMEMBER MY PARENTS GLANCING LOOKS AS THEY SPOKE IN HUSHED TONES WITH MY TEACHER.

IN THE END MY MOTHER FIXED IT BY CALLING UPON A FAVOR FROM AN OLD FRIEND WHO CRAFTED ME A PAIR OF GLASSES TO SUBDUE THE GLARE THAT AT TIMES THREATHENED TO BLIND ME.

AND SO, ONCE AGAIN I WAS A BURDEN UPON HER....

AND YET... I WAS STRANGELY HAPPY.

THE FACT THAT SHE WENT THROUGH THE EFFORT TO HELP ME... IT MEANT THAT MAYBE SHE SAY SOMETHING WORTHWHILE IN ME.

OR SHE WANTED TO AVOID FURTHER FAMILY EMBARASSMENT BY HAVING A PURPOSELESS DAUGHTER...

IN ANY CASE, I WASN'T ABOUT TO GIVE UP, THAT DAY I DECIDED I I WOULD GET BETTER. I WOULD EARN MY PLACE. IN A WORLD WHERE YOUR PARENTS CAN'T LOVE YOU, I WOULD MAKE THEM PROUD!

WHAT'S THAT OLD SAYING?

MAN PLANS GOD LAUGHS?

SIGH

IT DOESN'T GET MUCH BETTER WITH DIVINE PLANS EITHER... I WOULD KNOW...

WE CAN PUT THE GEAR HERE FOR NOW AND---

OH, HEY, MERRYL! YOU ON A BREAK?

YEAH. I'M DONE THO, YOU CAN HAVE THE ROOM

AWESOME! WE'RE HAULING IN SOME STUFF FOR THE SHOW.

BY THE WAY SOME WOMAN WAS LOOKING FOR YOU. I TOLD HER TO WAIT AT THE BAR.

IF IT WAS LAURA I'D SAY LAURA. I NEVER MET THIS ONE.

IS IT LAURA?

RIGHT. FAIR POINT.

HEY, ALAN!

'SUP!

OH HEY, DID ANNE TELL YOU...

SHE DID. THO I HAVE NO IDEA WHO'D COME ASKING FOR ME HERE...

YEAH. I DON'T KNOW HER BUT YOU CAN'T MISS HER. LOOKS LIKE A TALLER FRIENDLIER ASHE.

A TALLER FRIENDLIER ASHE?

OH NO!

FINALLY!

THERE'S MY DEAR LITTLE SISTER!

OKAY, SWEETIES, I NEED SOME PRIVACY WITH MY SISTER SO I'D BE VERY PLEASED IF YOU COULD SCATTER

THANK YOU MY DARLINGS!

SIT WITH ME, MERYLLIA.

SEEING MY SISTER AT THE CRIMSON LIKE THAT... WELL... IT WAS PANIC INDUCING

WE NEVER HAD... WHAT HUMANS WOULD CAL A NURTURING RELATIONSHIP. DURING MY EDUCATION SHE WAS ENDLESSLY CRITICAL.

DURING MY INTERNSHIP IN MY MOTHER'S DEPARTMENT I WAS HER PERSONAL ERRAND GIRL...

IN FACT, I FEARED HER AS MUCH AS I FEARED MY MOTHER WITH THE ADDED BONUS THAT ALLURIA SMILED EVEN LESS.

WHICH MADE THIS SPECIFIC MOMENT EXTREMELY UNSETTLING.

HAH! MERRYLIA, YOU LOOK STIFFER THAN MY FIRST CUSTOMER!

RELAX, I JUST WANT TO TALK!

UH----HUH.

OH COME NOW, WHAT'S WITH THE FACE?

I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S WITH YOU BEING NICE. THAT SCARES ME MORE THAN YOUR USUAL MOOD...

WELL I SUPPOSE I HAVE BEEN A BIT HARSH ON YOU OVER THE YEARS BUT YOU CAN'T DENY MY REASONING.

YOU ARE A GRANDCHILD OF OF THE GREAT NIGHT!

BUT MORE THAN THAT YOU ARE...

I'M AN ALARIS AND I SHOULD...

ACT LIKE ONE EXACTLY. BUT RECENTLY I CAME TO A REALIZATION.

YOU HAVE BEEN ACTING LIKE ONE

AH. THERE'S THE ALLURIA I KNOW.

I MEAN IT. I MISJUDGED YOU.

EVER SINCE CALE'S CONTRACT I SAW ALL THE SCORN TOWARDS OUR FAMILY AND OUR MOTHERS DEFENDING YOU AND I THOUGHT THERE THEY GO COVERING UP FOR HER INCOMPETENCE

MERRYLIA,
I SWEAR IT ON NYX, I AM NOT HERE TO MOCK YOU.

THEN WHY DID YOU COME?

I HEARD OF THE NEW CONTRACT AND OF THE COMPLICATIONS WITH IT...

HEY! THAT WAS NOT...

IT WASN'T YOUR FAULT, AND I UNDERSTAND THAT NOW.

Y-YOU DO?

THE PROBLEM WAS NEVER THE CONTRACTS, IT WAS THE CALLERS HANDLING THEM.

MERRYL, THESE ARE NOT ORDINARY HUMANS. THEIR DESIRE IS DIFFERENT. NUANCED IT NEEDS A SKILLFUL TOUCH. SOMETHING FAR BEYOND THE REACH OF CLUMSY SLOPPY CALLERS LIKE CALE OR THADEUS OR...

...

OTHERS...

WELL... ANYWAYS. I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT I AM HERE TO HELP.

HELP WITH WHAT?

THE PROBLEM WITH THE GOLDEN CONTRACT!

THIS HAS TO BE RESOLVED FAST! THE NEWS ABOUT IT IS INEVITABLY GOING TO SPREAD. IDLE GODS' GOSSIP GETS AROUND...

APPARENTLY SO SINCE YOU KNOW ABOUT IT.

YES, WELL I AM NOT YOUR PROBLEM, MERRYLIA. LUCIFER IS! SOONER OR LATER ALL OF THIS WILL REACH HIM

WHEN IT DOES HE WILL INEVITABLY PRESSURE OUR MOTHER TO FURTHER EXCOMUNICATE YOU.

OH...

WAIT WHAT DO YOU MEAN FURTHER EXCOMUNICATE?

WELL... LOOK AT THIS PLACE.

WHAT ABOUT IT?

DON'T KNOW WHAT?

YOU REALLY DON'T KNOW?

YOU WERE DEMOTED TO COVER A FETISH CLUB.

HEY, I ALSO WORK IN A SEX SHOP!

A... SEX SHOP...

YEAH, MOTHER DIDN'T KNOW WHAT IT IS, EITHER.

OH I KNOW WHAT IT IS!

I'M JUST CONFUSED WHY YOU'D DO THAT?

YOU TRY PAYING NEW YORK RENT WITH THE CASTE'S ALLOWANCE.

ALSO, WHAT DO YOU MEAN I WAS DEMOTED?

YEAH?

YOU WERE INITIALLY ASSIGNED A BOOKSTORE, RIGHT?

AND WHY DO WE PLACE SEERS IN BOOKSTORES AND LIBRARIES?

SIGH... BECAUSE HUMANS OFTEN USE FICTION AS A LIGHTNING ROD FOR THEIR DESIRES.

EXACTLY. BOOKS ARE LIKE A SPARK TO THEIR KINDLING. IT MAKES THEM SHINE. MAKES THE WORTHY ONES EASY TO FIND!

OKAY, SO WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PLACE OR THE SEX SHOP FOR THAT MATTER?

HOW MANY CONTRACTS DID YOU FIND IN THESE TWO PLACES?

I...

UHHHH...

FOUR? NO WAIT... SHIT... YEAH, IT WAS FOUR.

NO, ACTUALLY TWO WERE REFUSED SO... I GUESS TWO

OH...

YES. PEOPLE WHO VISIT SEX SHOPS ARE OFTEN THERE ON A WHIM, THEIR DESIRE IS UNFOCUSED. A VAGUE IDEA OF SEXUAL GRATIFICATION THROUGH THE USE OF TOYS OR MOVIES OR WHAT NOT. IN THE END, THEY DON'T EVEN WANT TO BE THERE.

OKAY BUT THESE PEOPLE WANT TO BE HERE.

MERRYLIA, THESE PEOPLE ARE FETISHISTS.

SO?

FETISHISTS ARE HUMANS WITH FOCUSED REFINED DESIRE, SHOULDN'T THAT MAKE IT EASIER?

NO. THAT MAKES IT DIFFICULT...

THEIR DESIRE IS... HOW DO I PUT THIS...

UNYIELDING...

CALCIFIED?

MORE OFTEN THAN NOT,A BOOK READER'S DESIRE IS PLIANT, FLEXIBLE. EASY TO WEAVE. WHILE THEY GENERALLY HAVE AN IDEA OF WHAT THEY WANT, THEY ARE ALSO OPEN TO GUIDANCE

A FETISHIST ON THE OTHER HAND KNOWS EXACTLY WHAT THEY WANT AND IN THE SPECIFIC WAY THEY WANT IT DONE. THEIR DESIRE IS LIKE... WEAVING A STEEL CABLE

IT CAN BE DONE BUT IT'S JUST... DIFFICULT.

THEY NEVER TOLD ME THAT.

I SUPPOSE NOT. I THINK THEY ARE HOPING WE MIGHT FIND ANOTHER ONE LIKE OUR MOTHER'S GOLDEN CONTRACT. THAT ONE WAS A FETISHIST AFTER ALL.

POINT IS, THIS, ALL OF THIS IS LUCIFER'S PAYBACK. AN ALARIS REDUCED TO WORK THE LOWLIEST OF JOBS AND YET HERE YOU ARE. RISING ABOVE IT ALL, IN THIS BARREN SOIL YOU ONCE AGAIN FOUND A DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH

I AM PROUD OF YOU, SISTER.

THERE IT WAS... THE ONE THING I WANTED TOHEAR ALL MY LIFE, BECAUSE WHEN LOVE IS NOT AN OPTION THIS WAS THE CLOSEST THING TO IT

AND OF ALL PEOPLE TO HEAR IT FROM ALLURIA...

SO WHAT DO YOU SUGGEST?

INTRODUCE ME TO THE CLIENT. LET ME CLAIM THE CONTRACT.

I CAN FULFILL IT. AND REDEEM YOU IN THE EYES OF THE HIGH CASTE! THE TWO OF US TOGETHER WILL RAISE THE NAME OF ALARIS TO NEW HEIGHTS AND MAKE OUR MOTHERS PROUD

AH...

THERE IT IS...

HONESTLY I WASN'T EVEN SURPRISED.

IN FACT I APPRECIATED THE HONESTY.

AND SHE WAS RIGHT. IF SHE WAS THE ONE TO FULFILL THE CONTRACT IT WOULD DO WONDERS FOR THE ALARIS NAME...

AND PLUS, WHAT DID I CARE? WHO WAS LAUREN THOMAS TO ME?

AFTER ALL SHE WAS THE ONE WHO REFUSED TO MAKE A CHOICE!

SHE WAS THE CAUSE OF ALL OF THIS....

FINE, I'LL DO IT.

IT WAS THE SMART CHOICE...

BUT IF IT WAS SUCH A SMART CHOICE, WHY DID I FEEL THIS GUILT?

DONE FOR THE NIGHT, MERRYL?

YEAH. I'M FEELING A BIT OFF. JIM WILL COVER MY SHIFT!

NO... NOT GUILT

Crimson

SOMETHING ELSE.

SOMETHING INTANGIBLE...

PULLING ON ME

THIS DECISION TO HELP ALLURIA FEELS HEAVY...

IT FEELS...

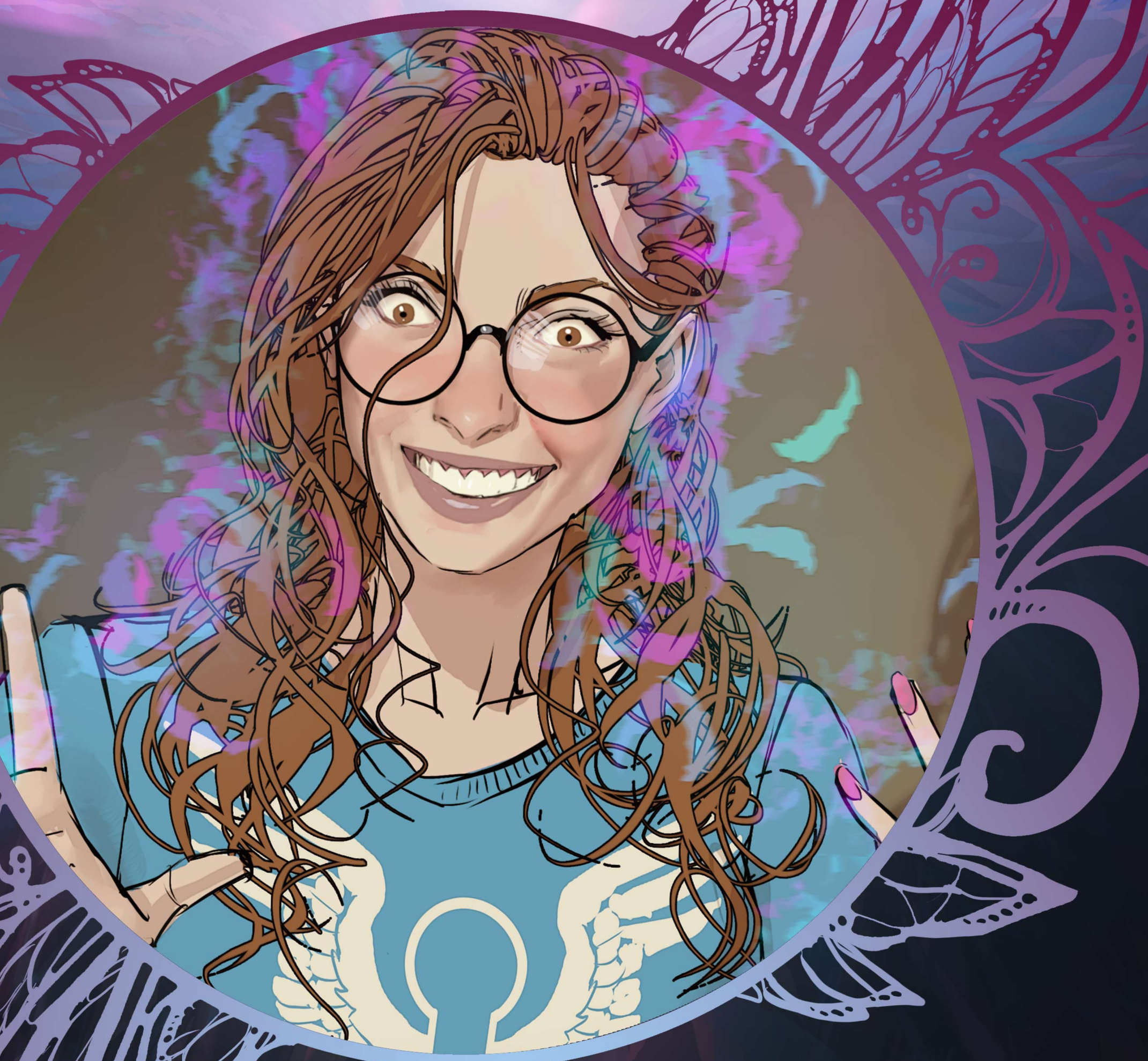
DESTINED...

AND JUST LIKE THAT...

THE STRINGS WERE BACK...

Chapter 17

The shimmer




A WEEK HAD PASSED SINCE THAD'S... DIVINE INTERVENTION. THE BUTTERFLIES WERE GONE...
BUT WHEN I WOKE UP ON THAT SEVENTH DAY, I SAW THE LIGHTS
FLICKERS OF PRISMATIC SHADES TRAILING OUT FROM ME
A GORGEOUS SHIMMER AKIN TO THAT I SAW AROUND THE GODS

ONLY A FEW TIMES IN MY LIFE HAVE I FELT SO MOTIVATED.... SO ENERGIZED! SO ALIVE!!!

IT FELT... MAGICAL.

NO...

NOT THE RIGHT WORD!

IT FELT DIVINE!

HOWEVER AS HOURS HOURS PASSED AND THE NOVELTY OF IT WORE OFF A MORE PRAGMATIC THOUGHT PREOCCUPIED MY MIND

COULD OTHER PEOPLE SEE THIS SHIMMER AS WELL?

SURELY NOT. IT WAS PROBABLY SIMILAR TO OTHER DIVINE STUFF... BUT STILL

I NEEDED TO TEST IT OUT.

TRUE, I COULD HAVE JUST SUMMONNED EITHER OF MY... SUITOR GODS BUT LET'S JUST SAY IT WAS THE WRONG TIME OF THE MONTH AND CALLING THEM JUST TO ANSWER A QUESTION SEEMED EQUAL PARTS WASTEFUL AND RUDE...

SO INSTEAD... I IMPROVISED.

OH YES, AND EXTRA PEPPERS ON IT. THANK YOU!

OKAY, HERE GOES NOTHING.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

OH, HEY, SORRY BOUT THE LIGHT SHOW,

WHAT LIGHT SHOW?

UH, NEVERMIND!

THAT MY PIZZA?

YOU VEGGIE WITH EXTRA PEPPERS?

YUP!

THEN THIS IS YOURS

SLICE-O-TASTY

RIGHT! HERE YOU GO! KEEP THE CHANGE.

THANKS!

PIZZA

UH... WANT ME TO LEAVE IT ON THE FLOOR?

NO... WAIT!

IT WAS A SPUR OF THE MOMENT DECISION. HE DIDN'T SEEM TO NOTICE THE SHIMMER SO I FIGURED MAY AS WELL GO ALL IN ON MY LITTLE TEST

IN FOR A PENNY IN FOR A POUND AS THEY SAY.

AND JUST FOR A MOMENT I THOUGHT I MADE A BIG MISTAKE.

SLICE-O-TASTY

COULD HE ACTUALLY SEE IT?

UH...

I CONSIDERED SLAMMING THE DOORS SHUT...

BUT THEN THE STRANGEST THING HAPPENNED

I NEVER IMAGINED I WAS GONNA BE DELIVERING PIZZAS!

I'M A FUCKING PROGRAMMER!

I WANT NOTHING MORE THAN TO DO THAT BUT I'M FRESH OUT OF COLLEGE SO FINDING A JOB I'S A NIGHTMARE. EVERY ENTRY PAID POSITION IS LIKE NEED THREE TO FIVE YEARS OF WORK EXPERIENCE

RIGHT.

I MEAN IT'S AN ENTRY LEVEL POSITION!

WHY THE FUCK DOES THAT REQUIRE FIVE YEARS OF EXPERIENCE???

MAYBE I SHOULD JSUT GO ONLINE, FIND SOME PEOPLE LIKE ME AND WE COULD START OUR OWN THING?

UH... MAYBE?

YEAH! FUCK IT! I'M GOING FOR IT! THANK YOU!

UH... SURE!

BUT... I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING?

AND IT DIDN'T STOP THERE

I WASN'T NEW TO STRANGERS STARTING UP CONVERSATIONS WITH ME...

SOMETIMES I FOUND IT CHARMING

HEY, UH... ARE YOU OKAY?

YEAH WHY?

IT'S JUST... I SWEAR I WASN'T TRYING TO STARE BUT IT'S LATE AND YOU'RE A GORGEOUS WOMAN STARING AT AN EMPTY GLASS. TRUTH IS I KINDA DO THAT WHEN I'M FEELING DOWN OR I COULD BE WAY OFF BASE SO, UH... I'LL JUST LEAVE YOU BE.

OR YOU CAN BUY ME ANOTHER DRINK AND THE GLASS WILL NO LONGER BE EMPTY.

AT OTHER TIMES... NOT SO CHARMING

I'VE BEEN WATCHING YOU FOR A WHILE AND THINKING THIS IS IF SHE LOST THE GLASSES SHE'D BE A PURE TEN!

SORRY, WHAT?

OH I MEAN IT AS A COMPLIMENT!

WE'RE LEAVING.

THIS HOWEVER WAS VERY DIFFERENT.

WHEREVER I WENT PEOPLE WOULD RANDOMLY START TALKING TO ME TELLING ME ABOUT THEIR HOPES AND DREAMS

GOING ON AND ON ABOUT THEIR DESIRES...

SO EVERYONE KEPT TELLING ME IT WAS A BAD IDEA...

AND AFTER A WHILE, IT ALL GOT A BIT RIDICULOUS

...AND I JUST WANTED TO CLIMB...

OH FOR FUCK SAKE, LADY! I'M ON THE TOILET!

A FEW DAYS LATER WITH NO CHANGE IN SIGHT I DECIDE IT WAS TIME TO TURN TO SOME PROFESSIONAL HELP

OKAY...

WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME???

ALTHOUGH "PROFESSIONAL" MAY BE A BIT OF A STRONG WORD.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?

NOTHING MISS THOMAS, YOU ARE ABSOLUTELY AMAZING!

OH MY GOD CAN YOU STOP BUTTERING ME UP FOR LIKE A MINUTE? I'M SERIOUS!

OKAY? SURE!

WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE PROBLEM?

WHAT SEEMS TO BE... LOOK AT ME!

I'M COVERED IN MAGICAL STRIPPER DANDRUFF! AND HONESTLY THAT'S NOT EVEN THE ANNOYING PART!

OKAY?

I'M ALSO BEING CONSTANTLY APPROACHED BY RANDOM PEOPLE REALLY FUCKING EAGER TO TELL ME ABOUT THEIR DESIRES HOPES AND DREAMS

I MEAN, DON'T GET ME WRONG, AT FIRST IT WAS KINDA CHARMING SEEING ALL THE ENTHUSIASM, BUT BELIEVE ME THE NOVELTY HAS WORN OFF BY NOW.

UH---- HUH

WELL???

WHAT'S WITH ALL THESE PEOPLE SUDDENLY CONFIDING IN ME?

OH, UM, THEY ARE PROBABLY RESPONDING TO YOUR INSPIRING PRESENCE

OH MY GOD CAN YOU JUST TALK LIKE A PERSON!?

I'M SORRY, I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY!

PEOPLE LIKE YOU ARE RARE, SPECIAL!

SIGH... JUST WHEN I THOUGHT YOU WOULD DROP THE POINTLESS FLATTERY

IT'S NOT FLATTERY!

WE'VE ONLY EVER FULFILLED THREE GOLDEN CONTRACTS IN ALL THE YEARS WE'VE BEEN DOING THIS,

TRUTH IS... I DON'T KNOW. IF I HAD TO GUESS, YOUR SEED HAS AWAKENED AND THERE ARE SOME SIDEEFFECTS... A... DESIRE SPILL...

KINDA LIKE... A DESIRE SWEAT!

WOW

WHAT?

THAT'S YOUR BEST METAPHOR?

YOU GOT A BETTER ONE?

I DON'T KNOW, HOW ABOUT THE FIRE OF DESIRE BURNS SO BRIGHT WITHIN YOU THAT YOUR BODY CAN NO LONGER HIDE ITS FLICKERING EMBERS?

OOOH... YEAH THAT'S GOOD. LET'S GO WITH THAT

YOU'RE PRETTY GOOD AT THIS.

I DON'T MEAN IT IN AN ASSKISSING WAY. JUST...

IT WAS A LOVELY DESCRIPTION AND YOU CAME UP WITH IT JUST LIKE THAT

EH I'M PROBABLY PARAPHRASING SOME BOOK...

I WAS AN AVID READER IN MY TEENS... EVEN DREAMED OF BEING A LIBRARIAN ONE DAY.

WHY DIDN'T YOU?

OH RIGHT, YOU REALLY CARE ABOUT THAT....

I MEAN... I DON'T KNOW. IT'S NOT THAT I CARE, IT'S MORE THAT I RARELY EVER GET TO HAVE A CONVERSATION WITH MY CONTRACT HOLDERS THAT GOES FURTHER THAN, WHICH HOLE ARE WE FILLING UP TODAY

HEH... FAIR.

AS FOR YOUR QUESTION... LIFE GOT IN THE WAY.

THE CHASE FOR A CAREER... FOR FAME...

AND I PAID DEARLY FOR THAT CHASE. LOST MY LOVE TRYING TO CLIMB TO THE TOP OF A MOUNTAIN I DIDN'T EVEN LIKE ANYMORE...

MMH...

I... UH... CAN'T RELATE.

RIGHT... YOU GUYS DON'T DO LOVE.

THERE WAS A TIME I WOULD HAVE CONSIDERED THAT SAD...

NOW I JUST ENVY YOU...

BUT HEY!

ON THE BRIGHTER NOTE, I LIKE YOU MUCH BETTER THIS WAY.

THE OUTFIT?

THE PERSONALITY.

THE ASSKISSING REALLY WASN'T DOING IT FOR YOU?

YOU WERE MORE FAKE THAN A SUPERMODEL ON A COCKTAIL PARTY. AND I WOULD KNOW, I WAS A SUPERMODEL ON A COCKTAIL PARTY.

LOOKING AT THIS PLACE...

FASHION INDUSTRY FELL ON SOME HARD TIMES I PRESUME?

NO... JUST ME.

LELIAH...

YOU WANNA GO OUT FOR SOME DRINKS?

UH.... WE ARE FORBIDDEN WHEN ON DUTY

PRETTY SURE I MENTIONED THAT BEFORE.

YEAH... I GET IT. IT'S JUST, I GOT THIS FRIEND... BEST FRIEND, BUT SHE'S AWAY AND... I JUST REALLY FEEL LIKE GOING OUT AND GETTING SOME DRINKS

BUT IT'S FINE IF YOU CAN'T.

I GUESS I COULD DRINK SOME...

UGH... VIRGIN COCKTAILS.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR... FLICKERING FLAMES OF DESIRE

YOU'LL PROBABLY STILL ATTRACT RANDOM PEOPLE LIKE THAT.

OH RIGHT... CAN'T YOU LIKE... I DUNNO... DO THE THING YOU DID WHEN I GOT THAT ENTANGLEMENT?

WOULD THAT DO ANYTHING?

UNFORTUNATELY, NO. AN ENTANGLEMENT IS JUST THAT... ENERGIES ENTANGLED

THIS IS AN ENERGY OVERFLOW....

BUT... OH!

COME TO THINK IF IT, THERE IS SOMETHING WE CAN TRY!

I COULD FOCUS IT WITHIN YOU BUT THERE'S A CATCH...

WHAT?

WELL, ONCE FOCUSED IT WILL BE GIVEN A MORE SPECIFIC PURPOSE

SO WHAT DO YOU PREFER? BEING OVERLY COMMITTED TO WHATEVER YOU FOCUS ON, CRAVING FOOD, CRAVING DRINKS, OR BEING HORNY AS FUCK?



HOWY FUWK!

KETCH

I CAN'T BELIEVE I'M SAYING THIS BUT THE SECOND ONE TASTES EVEN BETTER!

I'M GLAD... BUT I'LL BE HONEST THIS WAS NOT THE CHOICE I THOUGHT YOU WOULD MAKE

HEY, YOU PROMISED ME I COULD INDULGE ONE OF MY CHOICES TO THE FULLEST. THE WAY I SEE IT I DON'T NEED THE SHIMMER TO GET SATISFIED BY YOU, AS YOU GOT THE HORNY BIT WELL COVERED.

ON THE FLIPSIDE, I HAVEN'T EATEN SO GUILT FREE IN YEARS. FUCK, MOST OF MY LIFE!

BIG CHUNK

WHEN I WAS A KID I HAD THESE GARDENING TOOL TEETH THAT MADE ME FEEL EMBARASSED TO EAT IN FRONT OF PEOPLE

EVEN WHEN I GOT OLDER IT TOOK YEARS BEFORE I GOT USED TO THE FACT THAT I GOT MY TEETH FIXED

AND THEN I BECAME A MODEL AND FROM THERE ON PEOPLE AROUND ME MADE IT THEIR BUSINESS TO MAKE ME FEEL GUILTY FOR EATING ALL THE TIME, COUNTING EVERY CALLORY!!! I STILL HAVE ISSUES WITH EATING IN PUBLIC... ALWAYS GOT THIS FEELING PEOPLE ARE JUDGING MY EVERY BITE...

WORST PART IS IT'S JUST AS BAD AT HOME... A FEW DAYS AGO WHEN I WAS TRYING TO FIGURE OUT THIS WHOLE SHIMMER THING, I ORDERED A PIZZA

I THREW THE WHOLE DAMNED THING AWAY....

FUCKING PATETHIC...

BUT HEY, I'M ABOUT TO FINISH MY SECOND BURGER SO I'LL ENJOY THIS MOMENT AT LEAST!

SO WHAT ABOUT YOU?

ME?

YEAH! ANY SECRET CRAVINGS YOU CAN'T INDULGE IN IN FRONT OF THE OTHERS?

UH...

WHAT WAS THAT?

WHAWASWHAT?

YOU FLINCHED

WHAAA---

NO, IT'S NOTHING JUST... YKNOW, IT'S A SILLY QUESTION, I'M A GODDESS OF DESIRE, ALL MY DESIRES ARE IN THE OPEN AND I INDULGE IN THEM ANY WAY I FEEL LIKE

MUST BE NICE... MEANWHILE EVEN NOW, HOPPED UP ON THAT SHIMMER I'M LOOKING AT THIS FOOD AND A PART OF ME IS THINKING, I'M GONNA BE STRESSING OUT OUT ABOUT IT IN THE MORNING.

WELL... YOU COULD... OR YOU COULD SIMPLY BURN ALL OF THIS OFF IN FUN CONSTRUCTIVE WAYS

UH... *GULP*

YEAH, UM... JUST OBLITERATED TWO LARGE BURGERS!

I'M WAAAY TOO STUFFED TO GET STUFFED RIGHT NOW.

I WAS TALKING ABOUT DANCING YOU SLUT!

GET YOUR MIND OUT OF THE GUTTER!

OH MY GOD SO YOUR REAL PERSONALITY IS A SASSY BITCH!

STILL PREFER IT OVER THE ASSKISSING?

DEFINITELY!

ALSO THANK YOU! THE SHIMMER IS ALL GONE NOW.

SEE! I'M JUST BETTER THAN THADEUS. IN EVERY WAY!

WEEEL, I DON'T KNOW. HE DID HELP WITH MY PUKING BUTTERFLIES ISSUE

I'M SORRY PUKING WHAT NOW?

CHEERS!

CHEERS!

SO I'VE BEEN MEANING TO ASK THE WHOLE FETISHWEAR LOOK YOU AND. THAD AND... UH BOFFIT?

BAUPHETTE.

YEAH HER. IS THAT LIKE A UNIFORM FOR YOU GUYS?

IT'S A GLAMOUR. JUST ONE OF MANY WE USED OVER TIME. THIS ONE JUST SEEMS TO BE EFFECTIVE THESE DAYS.

AH... FAIR.

SPEAKING OF GLAMOURS, I NOTICED YOURS IS KINDA SIMILAR TO BAUPHETTE TODAY

WELL, I MEAN MY JOB IS TO FULFILL YOUR FANTASIES, AND I SAW HOW YOU WERE STARING AT HER

HEY NOW! IN MY DEFENSE I WAS HORNY OUT OF MY MIND BECAUSE OF THE SEED AND...

WELL, SHE WAS... INTIMIDATINGLY HOT

AND... UH...

OKAY, WAS I LIKE, HALLUCINATING OR DOES SHE HAVE A MASSIVE...

YKNOW

ONLY WHEN SHE'S PROPERLY PISSED OFF.

REALLY?

THAT'S THE RUMOR AT LEAST.

DAMN! SO I GAVE HER A LITERAL RAGE BONER.

SCARY.

OH SCARY MY ASS! I SAW THE WAY YOU WERE STARING AT IT! IF SHE GAVE YOU A CHANCE YOU WOULD HAVE HUMPED THE ANGER ISSUES OUT OF HER THEN AND THERE.

HAH! YOU BITCH!

YOU BETTER BELIEVE IT! NOW COME ON, ENOUGH DRINKING LET'S HIT THE FLOOR.

I MEANT WHAT I SAID... I LIKED HER THAT WAY...

WILD... RUDE....

A BAD INFLUENCE!

A DEVIL FOR MY SHOULDER PROMISING DELIGHTS AND WHISPERING MISHIEF

AND THEN AND THERE SWEATY AND BREATHLESS, A MISCHIEVOUS THOUGHT ENTERS MY MIND

AN EXCITING DANGEROUS THOUGHT...

SHE COULD TAKE ME! RIGHT HERE ON THIS DANCE FLOOR! AND I WOULD LET HER!

SUCH A CRAZY THOUGHT...

SUCH A SECRET DIRTY THOUGH I COULD NEVER...

VERY WELL, LAUREN.

V-- VERY WELL WHAT?

I WILL FULFILL YOUR DESIRE!

WH-- WHAT? LELIAH, WHAT ARE YOU--- THEY'LL... THEY'LL SEE US!

THEY WILL SEE ONLY WHAT I LET THEM SEE!

I COULD HAVE YOU, RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW ON THIS DANCE FLOOR

AND NONE OF THEM WOULD KNOW!

SEE!? HERE YOU ARE! NAKED IN FRONT OF THEM ALL! AN EMPRESS WITH NO CLOTHES, AND YET NONE OF THEM NOTICES IT

DOESN'T THAT MAKE YOU FEEL POSITIVELY MISCHIEVOUS

MY ... MY HEART IS POUNDING

IT'S THE MUSIC OF LIFE

WHAT DO YOU SAY, LAUREN?

SHALL WE DANCE TO ITS RYTHM?

I... YES!

LET'S!

AND SO WE DID!

IN A SPLIT SECOND A CHARGE RUNS THROUGH HER TAIL AND BY ITS MERE TOUCH I AMCONNECTED TO THAT ENERGY OF PURE BLISS

AND AT THE SAME TIME AS IF THROUGH SOME OUTER BODY EXPERIENCE I SEE THE ILLUSION WHE WEAVES FOR ALL AROUND US.

SHE SHOWS THEM A DANCE, AS WILD AS IT IS ENCHANTING AND SOON ALL EYES ARE ON US

WATCHING US...

ADMIRING US...

CHEERING US ON AS WE DANCE TO THAT WILD BEAT...

AND WHEN I CAN DANCE NO MORE...

SHE LIFTS ME UP

HER SHEER POWER REMINDS ME THAT SHE TRULY IS A GODDESS JUST LIKE THADEUS

AND SHE IS PROUD OF ME

ENCOURAGED BY HER I DRINK DEEP OF THE MOMENT AND GREET OUR CHEERING AUDIENCE

IT IS A SURREAL DREAM.

...AN INCREDIBLE HIGH

BUT THEN... WITH A SINGLE CURSED THOUGHT IT ALL GOES WRONG...

TERRIBLY WRONG...

SUDDENLY, IT'S NO LONGER A DREAM!

IT IS A TERROR!

I TOSS AND I TURN TRYING TO BREAK ITS SPELL

IN MY FUTILE ATTEMPTS TO WAKE UP, I STUMBLE AND FALL

THERE'S NO SUDDEN JERKING MOTION FOLLOWING IT , WRENCHING ME FROM SLEEP AS IT SO OFTEN DOES.

THERE'S NO ESCAPE

AND THE LAST THING I REMEMBER IS.... I START SINKING.

AFTER THAT THERE ARE JUST....FLASHES

LELIAH I'M SINKING!!!

GRAB MY HAND!!

I... I CAN'T...

LAUREN WAIT!!!

JUST... LET ME GO...

AAAAARGH!!!

LELIAH!

Chapter 18

Stupid cupid

I'M COM---

CRRACKLE

WAIT!

NO...

SIZZLE

DON'T! DON'T COME NEAR ME!

THAT'S RIGHT...

IT'S OVER!

IT'S FINE!

I CAN CARRY THE PAIN

THE PAIN IS A TESTIMONY!

THE PAIN IS A TESTIMONY!

THE PAIN IS A TESTIMONY!

SO... HOW DO WE DO THIS?

HONESTLY, NO IDEA. THIS IS MY FIRST TIME AS WELL

THE PAIN IS A TESTIMONY!

STUPID CUPID...

THE PAIN IS A TESTIMONY!

SO WHAT DO YOU SAY?

THE PAIN IS A TESTIMONY!

THE PAIN IS A TESTIMONY!

THE---

FUCK!!!

ARGH! FUCK THIS PAIN!

...AND FUCK LOVE!

MY MY MY THAT'S NO WAYFOR A LOVE GODDESS TO TALK!

FUCK OFF MEDEA!

FWOOP

WHOA, HOLD ON! YOU'RE NOT JUST PISSY, YOU'RE ACTUALLY HURT?

WHAT HAPPENNED?

SIGH

MEDEIA... WHEN YOU UH...

WHEN YOU ENGAGED IN CROWNING...

SSSHH!

SORRY! IT'S JUST... HAVE YOU EVER... UH...GROWN ATTACHED TO ANY OF THEM

THE CUBI I MEAN?

GROWN ATTACHED?

YOU'RE ASKING IF I'VE EVER FALLEN IN LOVE WITH ANY OF THEM?

YEAH, OF COURSE!

REALLY?

SURE!

I MEAN, LOVE IS IN OUR NATURE. OF COURSE I WOULD FALL FOR THEM.

I SUPPOSE SO...

BUT IF LOVE IS SIMPLY OUR NATURE...

YES?

WELL... HOW DO WE DIFFERENTIATE THE TEMPORARY LOVE WE SHARE WITH HUMANS FROM TRUE LOVE?

HOW DO WE KNOW WHEN ONE OF THEM IS REAL?

HEURECA, THEY'RE ALL REAL

ARE THEY?

IF LOVE IS MY NATURE, IT'S NO LONGER MY CHOICE, IT IS SIMPLY WHO I AM.

YOU SAY THAT LIKE IS A BAD THING

MAYBE IT IS... I DON'T KNOW...

I HAVE SEEN SO MANY HUMANS TORN APART BY PURE DEVOTION. I HAVE STITCHED TOGETHER THEIR SHATTERED HEARTS

AND IN THE END EVEN MY BEST EFFORT COULDN'T FIX ALL OF IT... THERE WERE STILL SCARS. A SENSE OF NOSTALGIA... OF... LOSS

AND HONESTLY, I FIND MYSELF ENVYING THAT.

OUR HEARTS ARE NEVER SCARRED.

WE LOVE, WE MOVE ON WE, ENTER THE WATERS OF LETHE AND WE LET GO OF ALL THE PAIN!

WE CAST ASIDE THE GRIEF AND WE JUST... FORGET.

AND AFTERWARDS... THERE'S NOTHING! NO SHADOWS OF OLDLONGINGS, NO YEARNING THOUGHTS NO TUGS AT THE HEARTSTINGS...

IT'S AS IF THE LOVE WAS NEVER THERE... AS IF IT MEANT...

NOTHING.

WAIT!
ARE YOU CARRYING A HEARTBREAK!?
...
W-WHY? WHY WOULD YOU DO THAT?
BECAUSE... BECAUSE I... I WANT TO HOLD ON TO IT FOR JUST A BIT LONGER.
BECAUSE, THE MOMENT I TOUCH THE RIVER THAT'S IT. IT WILL ALL BE GONE.
LIKE IT NEVER HAPPENNED.
...
YOU WANT TO HANDLE THE REST OF IT LIKE A HUMAN TOO? WANT A BUCKET OF ICE CREAM? A BOX OF TISSUES MAYBE?
SIGH... DID YOU JUST COME HERE TO MOCK ME?
OH, RIGHT! NO, I'M HERE BECAUSE THE PRIMARIUS SENT FOR YOU!
WHAT!?
DAMN IT, MEDEA!
SORRY, TOTALLY FORGOT!

THAT ABSOLUTE BIRDBRAIN OF A CUPID I SWE--

OH!

I... UH, I'M EXPECTED?

YOU ARE ALSO LATE.

RIGHT. DO I LOOK PRESENTABLE?

LEAVES!

OH, RIGHT. THANK YOU

YOU MAY ENTER.

PRIMARIUS RAPHAELA, HEURECA HALLOW LUCIUS 4TH IS HERE FOR AN AUDIENCE

AH, MY LOVE. COME IN!

APOLOGIES FOR MY LATENESS, PRIMARIUS

NONSENSE, HEURECA

YOU NEED NOT APOLOGIZE FOR SUCH FRIVOLOUS THINGS

YOU CALLED FOR ME PRIMARIUS?

AND THERE YOU ARE BELOVED.

IS... ANYTHING WRONG?

WRONG? TO THE CONTRARY, MY LOVE! ALL IS PERFECTLY RIGHT!

IN FACT I HAVE ABSOLUTELY WONDERFUL NEWS TO SHARE!

BUT I SHOULD PROBABLY LET MY GUEST EXPLAIN THE SITUATION.

I BELIEVE YOU KNOW OF HECATE?

H--HECATE!?

MISTRESS OF CONTRACTS AND SPELLS

OF FUTURE'S PATHWAYS

OF... OF SPELLS AND CEREMONIES

OF...

WEDDINGS...

JUST MISTRESS OF CONTRACTS TODAY.

AND I BRING YOU SOME UNDUSUAL AND I'M SURE, EXCITING NEWS.

HERE.

WHAT... WHAT IS THAT?

YOUR SPEAKERS TESTED THE HEART OF YOUR NEW PROSPECT AND FOUND IT WORTHY OF A GOLDEN CONTRACT. CONGRATULATIONS!

BUT... WE DON'T USE CONTRACTS?

WELL, TECHNICALLY THIS IS LESS OF A CONTRACT AND MORE OF A STRENTHENED BOND. SINCE YOU CUPIDS OPERATE DIFFERENTLY FROM CUBI, I HAD TO GET...

CREATIVE.

GOOD LUCK...

OH... AND WE MIGHT MEET AGAIN FOR A WEDDING.

IF WE DO... REMEMBER... AN ARROW CAN'T FILL WHAT IS ALREADY FULL.

WEDDING...

FUCK...

A... GOLDEN CONTRACT...

OUR VERY FIRST! AMAZING? YES?

YES...

OF COURSE! IT'S ABSOLUTELY WONDERFUL!

IT'S JUST...

WHY DID YOU GIVE ME ANOTHER'S ARROW? I'M PERFECTLY CAPABLE OF PRODUCING MY OWN.

THE ARROW IS MINE, MY LOVE.

I DO HOPE YOU CAN FORGIVE MY INTERFERENCE. ON ANY OTHER TIME I WOULD EXPECT NO LESS FROM YOU

HOWEVER A MATTER OF THIS IMPORTANCE REQUIRES A PURE HEART DRIVEN BY PURPOSE

AND YOUR HEART... BEARS A BURDEN. AN UNCLANSED HEARTBREAK OF YOUR OWN. I HAD TO STEP IN,

YOU UNDERSTAND, YES?.

SO YOU KNOW...

YOU ARE MY HEART-PROMISED

OF COURSE I KNOW...

ARE YOU... UPSET WITH ME?

HEAVENS NO, MY LOVE.

I UNDERSTAND THAT PULL. I HAVE SAMPLED THEIR FRUIT MYSELF IN MY YOUNGER DAYS...

YOU HAVE?

OF COURSE. LOVE BREEDS EMPATHY AND WITH EMPATHY COMES THE NEED TO UNDERSTAND

BUT NOW I THINK, YOU TOO HAVE UNDERSTOOD THEIR KIND, YES?

YES...

...YET YOU STILL HOLD ON TO THE PAIN...

...THE PAIN THAT HAS NO PLACE IN YOUR HEART!

AND I BELIEVE THAT HEART BELONGS TO ME STILL, YES?

Y-YES!

THEN PLEASE...WASH OFF THE STENCH OF THAT HEARTBREAK FROM WHAT IS MINE.

LET LETHE'S WATERS DO AWAY WITH IT

DO THIS FOR ME, MY LOVE? YES?

YES, RAPHAELA.

Chapter 19

Scarred

WHEN YOU ARE AMONG US, YOU ARE EXACTLY WHAT I SAID. FAMILY

AND IN THIS FAMILY I AM THE MOTHER, I AM THE FATHER, THE MATRIARCH THE PATRIARCH AND THE GODDESS ALMIGHTY

YOU FOLLOW IN MY FOOTSTEPS AND DO WHAT I TELL YOU AND WHEN I TELL YOU AND YOU WILL GO FAR

ARE WE CLEAR?

YES, MISS DELOUISE

CALL ME VERONICA PLEASE.

UM...
I GOTTA ASK THOUGH
IT SAYS HERE THAT THE CONTRACT
IS FOR THREE YEARS

WHEN I WAS
CALLED IN THE FIRT TIME
THE SAID IT WOULD BE
ONE.

YES, WE
USUALLY OFFER
ONE YEAR CONTRACTS
FOR NEWCOMERS
BUT SOMETIMES THE
POTENTIAL IS EVIDENT
ENOUGH FOR US TO
MAKE A LONGER
COMMITMENT

I DO HOPE
YOU WON'T MAKE
US REGRET THIS
GESTURE.

WHAT?
N-NO! I PROMISE!
IT'S JUST WELL, READING
ALL THE KINDS OF CLIENTS
YOU MANAGE, UH...

SOME THINGS
HERE...UH. LINGERIE
SHOOTS...

I DON'T KNOW
HOW COMFORTABLE I
AM WITH THIS...

I WOULD
HATE TO MAKE YOU
UNCOMFORTABLE

IF A CLIENT
REQUESTS THIS
OF YOU, WE WILL
CERTAINLY TAKE YOUR
FEELINGS INTO
CONSIDERATION.

ANYTHING
ELSE?

HEH... I
GUESS NOT.

EXCEPT,
UM...

DO YOU
HAVE A
PEN?

OF
COURSE,
DEAR!

DONE!

WAIT, UH
I JUST NOTICED.
WHAT'S THIS
STUFF HERE?

WHAT
STUFF WOULD
THAT BE?

IT SAYS,
BY SIGNING THIS
THE MODEL AGREES
WITH BECOMING A
PUPPET TO BE CHANGED
AND SHAPED AND USED
UNTIL SHE IS PERFECTED
OR DEEMED USELESS
AND REJECTED

OH DON'T
MIND THAT NONSENSE.
THAT'S JSUT THE FINE PRINT
A SMALL SURPRISE IN ANY
CONTRACT.

WE JUST
WANT TO IMPROVE
YOU.

CHISEL
AWAY THE
SUPERFLUOUS
UNTIL WHAT IS
LEFT IS
SUPERIOR!

WITH SOME
PROPER DIETING
I'M SURE WE CAN
LOSE ALL
OF THIS

IT WILL
ALSO HELP
WITH YOUR
BREASTS!

THESE THINGS
ARE TOO LARGE
THINK OF THE FABRIC
COSTS! THINK OF OUR
POOR CLIENTS

AND OF
COURSE IF DIET
DOESN'T FLATTEN
THOSE...

WELL... THERE'S
ALWAYS SURGERY...

OH YES!
WE ARE
GOING TO MAKE AN
ICON OUT OF YOU!
ISN'T THAT
EXCITING?

BUT FIRST, LET'S SEE WHAT THAT PRETTY FACE OF YOURS CAN DO!

GIVE ME YOUR BEST LOOK!

WELL, COME NOW! THIS IS NO TIME TO BE SHY

I...

UH...

I GUESS...

A SMILE!?

SILLY GIRL DO YOU THINK THIS IS A SCHOOL PHOTOSHOOT?

I ASK FOR GODDESSES, AND THEY SEND ME FUCKING CHILDREN

I... I'M SORRY

NO NO... IT'S PERFECTLY FINE. YOU'RE A WORK IN PROGRESS.

DON'T YOU WORRY, I'LL SHAPE YOU INTO SOMETHING MAGNIFICENT!

BUT FIRST, SMILE FOR ME ONE MORE TIME

LOOK AT IT... THE STRETCHING... THE WRINKLES...

SUCH A HIDEOUS THING...

LET'S FIX THAT, WHY DON'T WE?

...

MMMMMM!!!

THERE WE GO.

SO MUCH BETTER!

AAAAAA!!!

HUFF
HUFF
HUFF
WUH---
WHAT IN THE MATRIX LOVING FUCK WAS THAT!?

W-WAIT!
WHY AM I IN MY BED?

BECAUSE I BROUGHT YOU HERE
WAH!

HOW ARE YOU FEELING?

B--- BAUPHETTE?

BAUPHETTE?

YOU REALLY DO NEED THOSE GLASSES OF YOURS, DON'T YOU?

WH--
LELIAH?

WHAT'S WITH THE CHANGE IN COLOR? ALSO THE VOICE? YOU SOUND LIKE A FORTY YEAR HEAVY SMOKER!

FIRST OF ALL, FUCK YOU FOR THE SMOKER BIT!

AND AS FOR SECOND, HOW MUCH DO YOU REMEMBER OF LAST NIGHT?

WE DID...

I... UH... HONESTLY I'M NOT SURE. I HAD SOME WEIRD DREAMS SO IT'S ALL A BIT FUZZY AROUND THE EDGES. DID WE FUCK IN THE MIDDLE OF A DANCE FLOOR OR DID I DREAM THAT?

AND THEN...

UH...

DID I PASS OUT?

YES...

YES, IT HAPPENS SOMETIMES. WHAT CAN I SAY, WHEN I'M AROUND YOU I JUST WANT TO IMPRESS

I MAY HAVE OVERDONE IT A BIT.

STILL DOESN'T EXPLAIN THE CHANGE OF COLOR AND THE RASPY VOICE

OH THAT... I'M TRYING SOMETHING OUT.

RIGHT... UH...SORRY BOUT MY CONFUSION, I DON'T DEAL WELL WITH BACKLIT STUFF. ASTIGMATISM MAKES EVERYTHING GLARY.

SPEAKING OF WHICH, WHERE THE HELL ARE MY GLASSES?

PRETTY SURE YOU LEFT THEM AT THE CLUB...

GREAT... THOSE WERE PRESCRIPTION, DAMN IT...

I GUESS I CAN USE THESE...

HM... GOTTA SAY I PREFER YOU IN RED.

WELL, I GOTTA SAY I KINDA PREFER YOUR OLD GLASSES. WE DON'T ALWAYS GET WHAT WE WANT

HEY. I DIDN'T MEAN TO OFFEND YOU!

IT'S FINE! JUST... GET SOME REST!

SURE!

RIGHT AFTER I SWEEP UP THE FUCKING LEAVES AGAIN!

I SWEAR...FOR SOMETHING THAT WAS SOLD TO ME AS BLISS, SO FAR EVERY TIME I DID IT WITH ONE OF YOU IT'S BEEN NOTHING BUT WEIRD SHIT...

FUCKING EMOTIONAL NERVE PINCHES

PUKING BUTTERFLIES SHIMMERING

NNNGH! AND FUCKING LEAVES EVERYWHERE...

AND WHY DO I FEEL LIKE A GODDAMNED TRUCK RAN OVER ME!?

THE FUCK EVEN HAPPENNED LAST NIGHT?

BAH! SCREW THIS! I NEED A BATH....

YEAH...

I WOULDN'T FIND OUT ABOUT IT FOR MONTHS

BUT SOMETHING HAPPENNED THAT NIGHT AT THE CLUB

SHIT... IT'S STILL ALL OVER ME!

SOMETHING BAD...

COME OOOON!

SOMETHING THAT LEFT LELIAH SCARED...

AND SCARRED...

GET!!!

...OFF OF ME!

FUCK!

FUCK!

FUCK!

AND IT WAS THOSE VERY SCARS THAT FORCED HER CHANGE IN COLOR...

AND AS FOR THE CHANGE IN HER VOICE...

NNNNGH!!!

WELL... TURNS OUT SCREAMING FOR HOURS WILL DO THAT EVEN TO GODS.

OH THAT DOES SEEM PAINFUL!

AND YOU SEEM DELIGHTED ABOUT IT. THEN AGAIN YOUR NAME IS MISERY... I GUESS YOU *WOULD* APPRECIATE THIS.

OH I DO. AND THE ONLY THING BETTER THAN PAIN IS A PAIN SHARED.

LOOK!

SEE LOVE'S GREAT CURSE. THE EMPATHY OF THE CUPIDS, SO EAGER TO LOVE. SO READY TO OPEN THEIR HEARTS

THE ONLY GODS CAPABLE IN TRULY SHARING NOT JUST THE THE JOYS BUT ALSO THE SUFFERING OF OTHERS

AND OH YES, HER BELOVED LELIAH WAS SUFFERING

BUT SHE DARED NOT GO TO HER AS SHE HAD BEEN SO THOROUGHLY REJECTED...

SUCH A DREADFUL PREDICAMENT

SEE, YOU SAY THAT BUT YOU SAY IT WITH A SMILE...

I APPRECIATE THE PROFOUND NATURE OF PAIN. IT IS THE GREAT ANVIL UPON WHICH LIFE IS FOLDED, STRAINED AND HAMMERED UNTIL IT IS FORGED INTO SOMETHING POWERFUL!

THE SCARS OF THE FORGING BECOME A DAMASCENE PATTERN. A BEAUTIFUL TESTAMENT TO LIFE'S RESILIENCE!

IT IS ONE OF THE GRAND ENGINES THAT DRIVE EVOLUTION!

PRETTY SURE I HEARD A DOMINATRIX SAY SOMETHING SIMILAR ONCE.

YOU JOKE, BUT LIFE LEARNS FROM PAIN. LEARNS HOW TO SURVIVE IT, AND WHENEVER POSSIBLE, HOW TO ESCAPE IT!

THIS HOLDS TRUE FOR MOST GODS AS WELL...

WHAT IS THIS PLACE? ELYSIUM?

NOT FAR FROM IT...

THIS IS LETHE!

THE RIVER OF FORGETFULNESS

IN THE OLD DAYS YOU WOULD HAVE FOUND YOURSELF ON ITS SHORES. THIS IS WHERE YOU WOULD HAVE LET GO OF YOUR MEMORIES...

IT WAS A MECHANISM OF DEATH BELONGING TO DIFFERENT TIMES

NOW, THE ONLY ONES WHO MAKE ANY USE OF IT ARE GODS OF LOVE WASHING AWAY THEIR HEARTBREAK

HEH... I COULD HAVE USED THAT RIVER.

YOU WOULD HAVE PERISHED.

I HAVE PERISHED.

YES... I SUPPOSE YOU HAVE.

BUT THAT TOO IS THE BURDEN OF PAIN.

WHEN IT BECOMES TOO UNBEARABLE RECKLESSNESS TAKES HOLD OF YOU

YOU TAKE ACTIONS TO FIND RELEASE...

WISE ACTIONS...

FOOLISH ACTIONS...

REGRETFUL ACTIONS

IN THE END YOU EITHER ACCEPT DEFEAT TO YOUR PAIN OR YOU FIND A WAY TO ESCAPE IT

AND OFTEN THE EBEST WAY TO DO IT...

IS TO REMOVE ITS CAUSE...

GOODBYE, LELIAH.

YEAH, UH... HERE'S THE THING THOUGH...

SPEAKING FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, THAT DOESN'T ALWAYS WORK...

Chapter 20

Efforts must
be doubled!

SEE, IT TURNS OUT THAT SOMETIMES, NO MATTER HOW HARD YOU TRY ESCAPING YOUR FEELINGS THEY STILL CATCH UP WITH YOU.

I CAN'T PROMISE I WILL BE THERE

NEW OLYMPUS OLD GOD MARKETS

HOW IS DRINKING UNTIL I COLLAPSE A FAVOR TO YOU?

WHY? TOO BUSY WALLOWING IN YOUR SOLITUDE? COME ON, JUST DO IT AS A FAVOR TO AN OLD FRIEND?

BECAUSE THEN I WON'T BE COLLAPSING ALONE!

I SEE... SO YOUR BELOVED IS NOT ATTENDING?

HECATE IS NOT MUCH OF A PARTY PERSON. NOT SINCE THE LAST TIME.

PAPILLON?

ANYWAYS HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!

WAH! MISTRESS BAU---

L-LELIAH!?

SSSH! KEEP IT DOWN!

KEEP IT DOWN? WHY DO YOU LOOK LIKE THIS?

I HAD AN ACCIDENT, OKAY?

I'M HERE TO SEE IF I CAN GET HERMES TO ARRANGE ME A MEETING WITH HECATE.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN AN ACCIDENT?

YOU OKAY?

I'VE BEEN BETTER.

WHAT THE FUCK!?

ARE THESE... HANDPRINTS?

WHAT DID THIS?

IT'S A LONG STORY, BUT I'M HERE TRYING TO FIX IT.

SPEAKING OF WHICH... WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

M-ME? NOTHING?

IT'S A MARKET... I'M... SHOPPING?

SHOPPING? THIS IS THE OLD GODS MARKET. TRUE IMMORTALS. DON'T TRADE IN AMBROSIA

THEIR CURRENCY IS FAVORS.

I KNOW. I'VE BEEN GETTING STUFF FROM HERE BEFORE

AND I'M OFFERING FAVORS.

WAIT!

YOU ARE FUCKING OLD GODS?

ONCE.

BY THE MOON AND STARS THIS IS MY LUCKY DAY! THREE HONORED GUESTS SO---

LELIAH!

OUGH!

THUKK

WHAT THE HELL!

HERMES!? I'M SORRY I....

I FELT YOUR HAND OUT OF NOWHERE AND...

I... I PANICKED

PANICKED?

YEAH...

WELL NO HARM. I GUESS OKAY SOME HARM BUT NOTHING MAJOR

ANYWAYS, HERE! THESE ARE FOR YOU.

WHAT ARE THEY?

AS HIGH RANKED CALLERS, YOU ARE AMONG A LIMITED NUMBER OF CUBI INVITED TO APOLLO AND DIONYSIUS' GRAND BACCANALIA!

SO... CONGRATULATIONS! HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!

NO WAY!?

NOW IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME, I GOT OTHER INVITATIONS TO HAND OVER.

FAREWELL!

WHAT THE---

WHA- HERMES, WAIT! I...

DAMN IT! I DIDN'T ASK HIM ABOUT HECATE.

THE GRAND BACCANALIA...

HOLY SHIT!

HOLY SHIT!

THADEUS YOU'RE NOT GONNA BELIEVE THIS!

WE'VE BEEN---

WAAAH!

VAIN!?

YOU OKAY?

I THINK I TWISTED MY PRIDE.

YOU KNOW, YOU DON'T HAVE TO WEAR THE HEELS ALL THE TIME.

THEY MAKE MY ASS LOOK FANTASTIC.

I MEAN... YEAH. I CAN'T ARGUE WITH THAT...

ALSO, BABE?

MIND TELLING ME WHY THERE ARE STILL ALL THESE HUMAN BOOKS ALL OVER THE PLACE? I THOUGHT YOU SAID THEY DIDN'T WORK?

THEY DON'T... BUT I FIGURE, MAYBE I JUST HAVEN'T READ THE RIGHT ONES

UHUH

RIGHT, A LOT OF SEX ADVICE IN "EVEN THE MEMORIES SING THE SONG OF OUR LOVE"

UH... I MEAN... A LOT OF THESE TITLES ARE VERY DECEPTIVE.

THERE'S A BIT OF A SECRET LANGUAGE TO IT ALL.

YOU WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND.

WELL, FAR BE IT FOR ME TO INTERRUPT YOUR DEEP STUDIES BUT I MUST INFORM YOU THAT WE HAVE BEEN INVITED TO THE GRAND BACCANALIA.

YOU'RE FUCKING WITH ME?

NOT AT THE MOMENT! BUT YEAH ACCORDING TO HERMES WE'RE AMONG THE TEN HIGHEST RANKED CUBI INVITED.

WELL, NOT INCLUDING THE HIGH CASTE THAT IS.

REALLY? CAUSE IT USED TO BE ONLY TOP THREE...

NOT SURE WHAT THE SITUATION WAS FOR CUPIDS?

CUPIDS...

HM WHEN I WAS AROUND I THINK IT WAS JUST THE PRIMARIUS ESCORTED BY A SINGLE WEADED PAIR.

SHE REALLY LOVED FLAUNTING THE VIRTUES OF OUR MARRIAGE.

Y'KNOW... I JUST REALIZED I NEVER ACTUALLY ASKED YOU ABOUT IT WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

HUH?

BETWEEN THE CUPID MARRIAGES AND OURS?

WELL, FIRST OF ALL THE MOTIVATION IS DIFFERENT.

HERE A MARRIAGE IS AN EARNED PRIVILEGE, A LOVELESS STATUS SYMBOL THAT LEGITIMIZES YOUR LAST NAME AND CARRIES IT OVER TO YOUR OFFSPRING

I MEAN... YEAH. NOBODY LIKES BEING CALLED AN ORGYSPAWN FOREVER

RIGHT... I GUESS.

ANYWAYS, CUPIDS VALUE ABSOLUTE DEVOTION. THEY... UH... YOU KNOW HOW HUMANS HAVE THIS IDEA OF A SOULMATE? THE PERFECT OTHER IN YOUR LIFE AND YOU ARE JUST MEANT FOR EACH OTHER?

I'M FAMILIAR WITH THE CONCEPT

YEAH. WHEN CUPIDS MARRY THEY BECOME THAT BUT... WAY WORSE.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY WORSE?

WELL... FOR A CUPID, MARRIAGE IS A TERRIFYING GAMBLE.

TO MARRY AS A CUPID IS TO LET GO OF YOURSELF. TO BECOME ONE WITH ANOTHER PERSON TWO BECOME ONE

AND WHILE THERE'S SOME ROMANTIC NOTION TO THIS IDEA OF PURE SURRENDER.... TRUTH IS....

IF ONE PARTNER'S WILL IS STRONGER THAN THE OTHER...

THERE'S A VERY REAL DANGER THAT THE WEAKER ONE WILL SIMPLY BE....

DEVOURED.

LESSENED...

DOOMED TO MINDLESS WORSHIP BECAUSE YOU WILL KNOW NOTHING BEYOND IT... AND YOU WILL NO LONGER BE YOURSELF.

AND I FIND THE VERY IDEA OF THAT...

TERRIFYING.

YOU NEVER TALKED ABOUT IT MUCH AND I GUESS I NEVER REALLY ASKED BUT... IS THAT WHY YOU SWITCHED?

WELL THAT WAS A PART OF IT. THERE WAS ALSO THIS ASSHOLE INCUBUS WHO DARED ME TO FUCK HIM AND I NEVER STOPPED

...AND WHEN I MARRY YOU I WON'T DISAPPEAR INSIDE YOU WHICH IS JUST A GREAT BONUS

HEH!

OH YOU BETTER BELIEVE YOU'LL DISAPPEAR INSIDE ME!

THAAT'S RIGHT!

OH... BECAUSE SEX AND MY DICK DISAPPEARING INTO...

THAT'S IT!

IF THIS IS THE WIT YOURE PICKING UP FROM THOSE BOOKS I'M BURNING THEM ALL!

HEY!

YYUP! BOUT TO BURN THIS SHIT LIKE I WAS A HUMAN WITH REPRESSED SEXUAL URGES MAKING IT EVERYONE ELSE'S PROBLEM!

WAH!

DON'T MESS WITH MY BOOKS!

IN FACT, ONCE WE ARE MARRIED I MAY JUST FILL UP A PERSONAL LIBRARY

WELL, AT LEAST YOU SOUND CONFIDENT IN WINNING AGAIN, SO I GUESS THE BOOKS DID SOMETHING GOOD!

OH NO THAT'S NOT THE BOOKS

I JUST GOT A REASON TO WIN!

AWW... SUCH A LOVELY ROMANTIC NOTION... AND YOU GOTTA LOVE THE CONFIDENCE.

BUT... THERE WAS A BIT OF A PROBLEM. TURNS OUT, GOLDEN CONTRACT SEEDS ARE... UNPREDICTABLE. THIS WAS SOMETHING ALL OF US WERE GONNA LEARN THE HARD WAY.

UM... WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

JUST CHECKING UP ON THE SEED

SEEING IF IT TOOK HOLD RIGHT!

NOW THERE'S A SENTENCE YOU DON'T WANT TO HEAR FROM A CASUAL FUCK!

YOU CHEEKY LITTLE WISEASS!

YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN!

OH DEAR I'VE DISPLEASED A GOD!

HOWEVER SHALL I REPENT FOR MY SINS??

WITH ACTS OF RELENTLESS FUCKERY, MISS THOMAS, AND LOTS OF IT!

OF COURSE...

WHEN YOU ONLY HAVE A HAMMER, EVERYTHING IS A NAIL I GUESS

NATURALLY, AND IN ORDER TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF SAID NAILING....

WELL, I'D LIKE TO KNOW A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR PERSONAL SEXUAL FANTASIES

CAN'T YOU LIKE... FEEL THEM.

I AM A DOER, NOT A SEER

HEH...

MY FANTASIES...

I DON'T KNOW... I LIKE IT GENTLE...

THEN AGAIN... I ALSO DID A BUNCH OF OTHER STUFF

I'M OKAY WITH SOME PAIN... ROUGH STUFF...

I DON'T KNOW... MAYBE THAT?

YOU DON'T SOUND SURE?

I...

I AM...

LET ME REPHRASE THAT YOU DON'T FEEL SURE.

I THOUGHT YOU WERE A DOER. SO WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

DO!

I AM ALSO A GOD OF DESIRE AND... WELL AS MATRON ALARIS SAID, DESIRE CAN ONLY BE WILLINGLY GIVEN, NEVER TAKEN

AND RIGHT NOW YOU ARE NOT IN A... GIVING MOOD

I GUESS...

I WAS IN THE MIDDLE OF SOMETHING AND... I GOT THIS VAGUE IDEA OF CALLING YOU... BUT... I DUNNO... I THINK I JUST KINDA WANTED SOME COMPANY

I'M SORRY.

IT'S ALL RIGHT. HOW ABOUT TODAY WE JUST STAY HERE AND SEE WHERE YOUR NEEDS TAKE US?

YEAH... NOT GONNA LIE...THOSE BOOKS MADE HIM SMOOTH. WE DID JUST AS HE SUGGESTED.

A KIND GIVING GOD AND A BROKEN UNWORTHY SELFISH WOMAN WHO SOUGHT COMFORT IN HIS COMPANY...

WE SAT TOGETHER WATCHING A MOVIE BASED ON ONE OF THE BOOKS HE READ BELIEVE IT OR NOT...

I GUESS.... I WASN'T EVEN HORNY... I WAS JUST... LONELY.

CAN YOU BELIEVE IT? A LIVING SEX GOD NEXT TO ME AND I INVITED HIM TO CHILL...

THAT'S NOT HOW IT HAPPENNED!

AND HONESTLY, THAT WAS JUST WHAT I NEEDED...

HE MADE ME RELAX, AND ENJOY MYSELF,

AND EVENTUALLY... THE MOOD SHIFTED. THE SUBTLE MOVEMENTS OF HIS TAIL BETWEEN MY LEGS WERE PARTIALLY TO BLAME

BUT THE REST... IT WAS JUST SIMPLE DESIRE... READY, AND EARNEST. A CARNAL OFFERING TO A GOD OF CARNAL JOYS

AND HE ACCEPTED IT!

NOW, YOU GIFT IT WILLINGLY...

WAH!

AND I HAPPILY...

ACCEPT!

OH GOD!!!

YES!

IN THAT MOMENT I WISH FOR NOTHING MORE THAN FOR HIM TO COMPLETELY OVERWHELM ME, AND GUIDED BY MY DESIRE HE DOES JUST THAT!

BOUND BY HIS COILING TAIL I FEEL LIKE MY BODY IS HELD TOGETHER BY IT AND IF HE WAS TO LOOSEN HIS GRIP EVEN A BIT, I WOULD DIE.

THIS WAS NO REGULAR ORGASM, HELL, NOTHING WE DID UP UNTIL THAT POINT MEASURED UP TO THIS....

THE SEED HAD FULLY AWAKENED, AND FROM HERE ON OUT THINGS WERE GONNA GET WEIRD.

SO ANYWAYS AFTER SPENDING TWO HOURS LIT UP LIKE A PRIDE PARADE, I FELT MORE ALIVE THAN EVER

NO WORRIES, NO INSECURITIES. I FELT TAKEN CARE OF, I FELT WANTED...

AND YEAH I'M AWARE THAT THE WHOLE THING WAS BASICALLY A METAPHYSICAL VARIANT OF A SEX WORKER OFFERING ME THE BOYFRIEND EXPERIENCE...

BUT I DIDN'T CARE!

FAKE OR NOT, I WANTED MORE!

AND THAT WAS ALL RIGHT! THE WAY I SAW IT, THEY WANTED THIS AS MUCH AS I DID!

SO I MIGHT AS WELL MAKE THE MOST OF IT!

AND SO I DID!

DAY AFTER DAY, THEY TOOK TURNS!

THADEUS, NURTURING AND SUPPORTIVE!

COME ON, LAUREN! SHOW ME WHAT MAKES YOU SPECIAL!

YOU CAN GO LONGER!

OH FUCK I---

OH GOD!

I---

I CAN!

I CAN!!

AND LELIAH... THE UH... LESS SUPPORTIVE. (BUT NO LESS EXCITING)

AAAH! AAAHHHH!!!

THAT'S IT YOU LITTLE SLUT! AGAIN!

YOU WANNA DANCE WITH A GODDESS YOU BETTER BRING YOUR---

DANCING SHO---

ALTHOUGH OF THE TWO, LELIAH WAS PRONE TO REACTING TO MY UNEXPECTED CHANGES...

DRASTICALLY.

NOT TODAY, SATAN!

IT WOULD BE A HILE BEFORE I LEARNED WHY.

HONESTLY, AFTERA WHILE I GOT USED TO IT ALL. EVEN THE LIGHTSHOW

TRUTH IS, FOR A FEW WEEKS THERE...

LIFE WAS LIKE A DREAM!

NOW, AT THIS POINT YOU MUST BE WONDERING WHAT'S WITH ALL THE LINGERIE AND THE OUTFITS...

I'VE HEARD YOU TELL YOUR STORY MANY TIMES OVER... NEVER ONCE HAVE I WONDERED ABOUT THAT.

FINE... TOUGH CROWD!

YOU THEN?

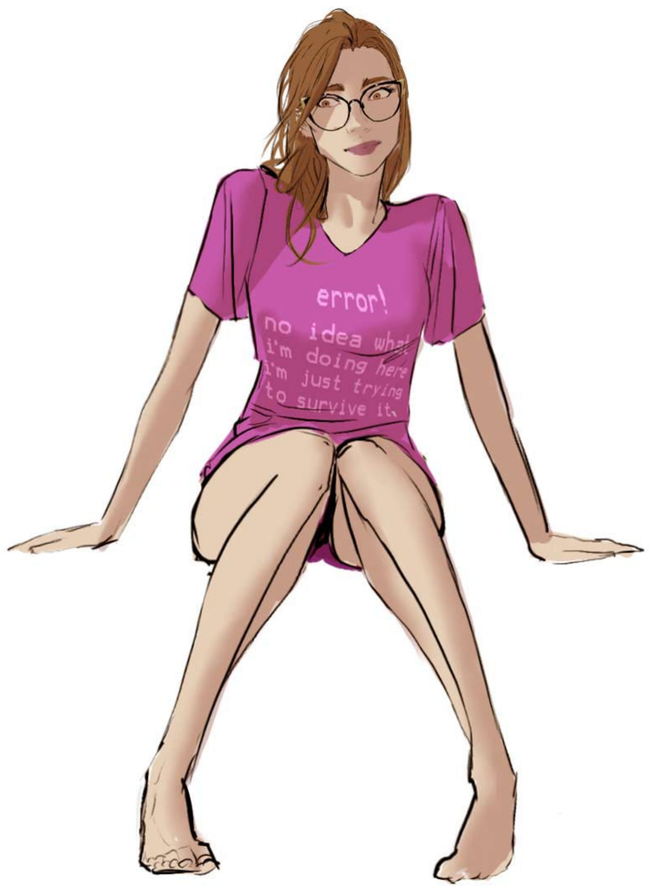
I'M... JUST GONNA ASSUME THAT'S A THUMBS UP!

SEE, EVER SINCE THAT TIME WITH THADEUS IN THE HOTEL, EVER SINCE THE SEED HAD... AWAKENED?

I'VE FELT THIS LOW GRADE BUZZ

AT FIRST IT WAS HARD TO PIN DOWN WHAT WITH ALL THE OTHER SIDEEFFECTS LIKE THE SHIMMERING AND BUTTERFLIES...

BUT ONCE THOSE WENT AWAY I GRE AWARE OF THE SUBTLE CHANGE IN ME.



LIKE... EVERY TOUCH FELT JUST A LITTLE BIT BETTER

I LIKED MYSELF A LITTLE BIT BETTER...

SO ON A WHIM I TOOK SOME PICS AND POSTED THEM TO SAM AND MY SHARED ACCOUNT...

NOTHING SPECTACULAR, MIND YOU! JUST SOME SIMPLE PORTRAITS...

THE RESPONSE, HOWEVER WAS... UNEXPECTED.