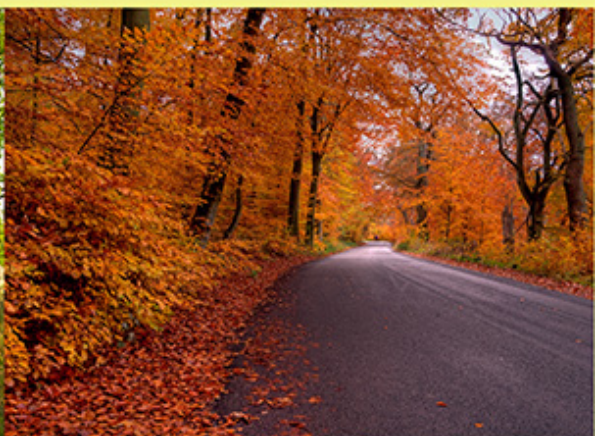
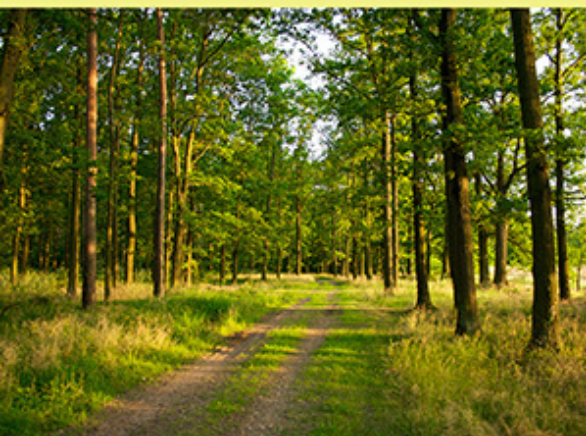


LOVE IS AN OPEN ROAD



Don't Read in the Closet 2015

**AND O! THE
HEAVENS TREMBLE**

M. LeAnne Phoenix

Table of Contents

Love is an Open Road.....3
And O! The Heavens Tremble – Information.....6
And O! The Heavens Tremble.....8
Chapter 1.....9
Chapter 2.....13
Chapter 3.....19
Chapter 4.....25
Chapter 5.....32
Chapter 6.....38
Chapter 7.....45
Author Bio50

Love is an Open Road

An M/M Romance series

AND O! THE HEAVENS TREMBLE

By M. LeAnne Phoenix

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love is an Open Road* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

What Is Love is an Open Road?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love is an Open Road*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

Each year, a dedicated group of Volunteers from the M/M Romance Group work hard behind the scenes to bring these stories to you. Our Editors, Formatters, Proofreaders, and those working on Quality Assurance, spend many long hours over a course of several months so that each Event is a success. As

each and every author also gives freely of their time and talent, it was decided that all edits suggested may be accepted or rejected by the author at any given time. For this reason, some stories will appear to be more tightly edited than others, depending on the choice of the author.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

All rights reserved worldwide.

This eBook may be distributed freely in its entirety courtesy of the Goodreads M/M Romance Group. This eBook may not be sold, manipulated or reproduced in any format without the express written permission of the author.

And O! The Heavens Tremble, Copyright © 2015

M. LeAnne Phoenix

Cover Design by Goodreads M/M Romance Group

Cover Photographs from

Pixabay.com and freeimages.com

This ebook is published by the *M/M Romance Group* and is not directly endorsed by or affiliated with Goodreads Inc.

AND O! THE HEAVENS TREMBLE

By M. LeAnne Phoenix

Photo Description

Four photographs—two black and white and two colour—of Dan Feuerriegel and Pana Hema-Taylor, aka Agron and Nasir on the Starz series *Spartacus*. In one, Dan and Pana are on a boat, bundled up in long-sleeve shirts and hoodies, asleep. Another shows them indoors and Pana and Dan standing close together, both men giving different hand signs—Pana gives a peace sign and Dan gives a rock'n'roll sign. The next photo shows Pana in a striped undershirt, a black tee-shirt over it, and a white scarf. His long hair is in braids, a purple ball cap stuffed on his head on which his sunglasses are perched. Again, Dan stands close, an arm around Pana, wearing a sweater and two necklaces, one a brown leather cord hidden under the sweater, the other a silver chain weighted down by some bauble. Bottom right-hand corner shows the two of them on the bow of a boat, Dan behind Pana, his outstretched arms and hands on top of Pana's.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

People often wonder how we ever became friends let alone lovers. We're different in so many ways; we come from different cultures, different economic status, we have different interests, different heights, etc. However, we somehow managed to make it work and have fun learning about each other in the process.

Recently something happened that really brought our differences to the forefront. We have totally opposing views on the subject and it hurts that he can't see the situation from my point of view. How can I make this stubborn man, whom I've fallen in love with, widen his narrow view?

Thank you!

Please no BDSM.

Sincerely,

mw138

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: abuse, dark, slave, HEA, action/suspense, established couple, captivity, non-explicit

Content Warnings: rape, violence

Word Count: 16,528

AND O! THE HEAVENS TREMBLE

By M. LeAnne Phoenix

Chapter 1

The clock ticking on the wall roused him from thought. Lifting his dark eyes to the timepiece, Mayar Enver wondered if it had always been as loud or if it decided on this day alone that it would keep him from thinking. Rubbing his hands over his face, he remembered at the scratchiness of his chin against his palms that he'd forgotten to shave.

Why did I forget to shave? I never forget to shave. Oh, yeah... I was about to shave when Aiden walked into the bathroom. That's when we... that's when we argued. Why did I have to push so hard?

He closed his eyes and ran his hands through the waves of jet-black hair that fell to his shoulders, as he took a shaky breath. The clock ticked, and then chimed eleven. Three hours and thirty-three minutes since Aiden had left the house. Would he return soon? Mayar clenched his fingers in his damp hair, hissing, "Where *are* you? Today... today is Saturday. It's our day together. Aiden...!"

The phone rang, the ringtone one that sent him running to where the mobile phone sat on the charger. A big smile filled the face of his phone and he picked it up, breathless, "Aiden!"

"*Mo chridhe*—" The Gaelic term of endearment that translated to *my heart*, sent his heart pounding in his chest and relief flooding his body quickly enough to send Mayar to his knees. "—we should be able to talk like rational men, aye? We've been together sae long, I guess I forgot how impassioned and heated we can be when we differ on—"

"I'm so sorry, Aiden! I shouldn't have brought it up! We don't ever speak of it and there's a reason for that, and it is only here lately that we've even looked at maybe attending—"

"I'm coming up the steps. I dinna want to fight, Maya. I just want to be with my partner."

Mayar smiled thinly, nodding, realising then where Aiden had been for the last three hours. *He's been down at Murtagh's on Fulham High.* "Your partner is here... waiting for you."

Ending the call, he listened as the key turned in the lock and Aiden's shoes scuffed against the acid-washed cement floor. Mayar stayed put, his copper

eyes trained on his lover as Aiden stopped at the coat tree to kick off his shoes and hang his hoodie. His blue, blue eyes—the colour of the Texas sky they'd met under—searched the room for him and soon, those strong arms wrapped around him and Mayar was home.

I love him and he loves me. We belong together and that's no mistake. We swore that nothing could ever take us apart, so why is this so frightening? What is trying to take us apart?

Aiden pushed his cold nose against Mayar's neck. "Me wee god... I missed ye."

"You great brute... you had me terrified." Mayar turned and wrapped his arms tight around Aiden's waist. "You wouldn't answer your phone. You weren't—"

"I went drinking. I'm a great numpty, I am," Aiden mumbled. "Ye deserve better'n me, Mayar. Far better."

Just how much did he drink? Why did he drink so much? Mayar lifted his gaze to Aiden's before another thought could cross his mind. "I deserve better? Aiden... I'm the one you rescued off the streets in America! Me! And you brought me all the way to London to live with you, no questions asked. When I was unable to obtain any documentation that proved my identity, you found a way... and then I was blessed by the gods when you fell in love with me and claimed me as your own years ago. I find it difficult to imagine that *you* are the one undeserving of my love, but rather the opposite."

"I hurt you." His large hands framed Mayar's face, bringing their foreheads together. "I hurt you and I shouldn't have." His mouth found Mayar's in an uncharacteristic soft kiss and when Mayar deepened the kiss, briefly tasting the dark beer on his lover's tongue, Aiden hiccupped and whispered, "You could do so much better'n me."

Withdrawing to the bedroom, he left Mayar stunned in the living room.

Aiden Gillespie took a ragged breath as he stepped beneath the steaming shower spray, the familiar and comforting itch of too hot water on cold skin briefly taking his mind from the events of the morning. The photos delivered by the post, the letter written in Jupiter's hand, the *call* from Jupiter on the burner phone he'd received, and the not-so-veiled threat that could have—

“But it dinna happen. It dinna.” He wept, leaning against the tile wall as the water pinked his skin. “And it won’t!”

Shaking the excess water from his short hair, Aiden swallowed the emotion down and stepped under the spray to scrub himself clean. He focused on the ancient cleansing prayer that he’d found just before he’d been taken by Pantheon. Chanting the Latin words as he bathed, Aiden steadied his spirit and worked to relax his body even as he heard the bathroom door open and shut. Under the scent of the soap and shampoo, under the warming oil, Aiden detected the faint perfume of sandalwood and lavender.

Mayar... I will let him do as he wishes. I can only hope he’ll still love me after all this is over.

Aiden turned bright eyes to the silhouette of his man, and he offered a tentative smile as he watched Mayar strip off his clothes one piece at a time. Turning fully to face his olive-skinned lover, Aiden groaned when Mayar hissed as he rushed him. Climbing him like a tree, Mayar shoved something into Aiden’s hand before biting the taller man’s lips as he rocked his hips. Mayar’s hard cock sliding against Aiden’s own had Aiden slamming the slight man’s back to the tile as touch discerned Mayar’s gift. Slickening and preparing the way with an expert hand, Aiden soon filled Mayar, and a long shared moan sent satisfaction over both their faces.

“Ye feel sae good, me wee god—I cannae think of a day when this... connection... wi’ ye—” Aiden’s head fell back as they began to move in a dance only they knew. “Maya... Maya—please... I beg ye!”

Mayar’s hands framed his face, bringing Aiden’s shiny eyes to his. “You needn’t beg. I go wherever you go, Aiden! I belong to you!”

“Mine!” Aiden echoed, kissing Mayar’s palms before taking his lover’s hands from his face and threading their fingers next to Mayar’s head. “Mine!” Aiden cried again before the sound was muffled by Mayar’s kiss.

It seemed only a few moments later that Aiden held a sleeping Mayar on his chest as they lay on the cool tile floor next to the bed in a bundle of damp coverlets. His shaking fingertips gently pushed shiny black hair over the delicate shell of Mayar’s ear and as he watched a small smile upturn his lover’s lips, Aiden remembered meeting him.

“No! Let me go!”

Aiden whirled at the heavily accented voice as he shut the door on the rented Charger... only to find himself nearly thrown to the ground when a

slender reed of a youth attempted to barrel past him. Catching the terrified boy and shielding him behind his own body, Aiden put a hand to the concealed handgun at his hip as he lifted his gaze to find a woman hurrying towards them.

It was unfortunate that Aiden knew her face well. He snorted at the irony he felt, and put a bullet in her brain before opening the Pantheon phone and calling in to report the death. Holstering his weapon, he turned around to inspect the trembling young man behind him, the bruises and abrasions on his face, arms and wrists telling the tale of extended captivity. When Aiden ducked a little to slide a gentle hand over the gruff cheek, the trepidation in those burning copper eyes made him catch his breath.

“What’s yer name, lad?” Aiden murmured, his thumb tracing an exquisite cheekbone.

The boy shook his head, hiding behind a curtain of tangled jet hair. “I’m no-one.”

Aiden ducked to catch those beautiful eyes once more. “Well, yer someone to someone—”

He shook his head again, burrowing against Aiden’s chest, effectively hiding from sight beneath the soft black leather duster Aiden wore. “I have no-one. My family is dead... long before she bought me. I am no-one. Please... please... don’t let them catch me.”

“Bought ye? Lenore dinna steal ye?” Aiden blinked in surprise. “No matter,” he continued as two vehicles careened into the parking lot. Opening his door as he realised they were Lenore’s men, Aiden made a snap decision. “I’m no lettin’ them have ye. Get in an’ buckle up. This is goin’ to be a helluva ride!”

A sidelong glance at the young man seconds later as he sent the back end of the car in a tailspin in his haste to get them out of there—the moonlight giving the contours of his face an almost ethereal glow, sealed the deal. No way was he going to let those haunting copper eyes lose their light. Never. Ever. Again.

Pressing a kiss to that warm jet hair, Aiden whispered, “Know that I love ye.”

Chapter 2

Mayar blinked groggily as he rolled onto his back and stretched under the cool sheets. His body ached sweetly in various places that had been recently used for the first time in months due to Aiden's job taking him out of town for weeks on end. Lips covered his, a fuzzy chin tickling his own as his hands slid over powerful shoulders.

And he's leaving again. His routine is easily recognisable.

Opening his eyes, he nuzzled Aiden's nose, whispering, "You just got home. Can't the art world be without you for more than a day?"

"Mo chridhe—" Aiden sat down on the edge of the pallet. "—this time, me time belongs not to the galleries, but to me past. If I have any care in the world, it's for this man, this life, an' I am willin' to go to the ends o' the earth for ye, me wee god."

"Because of me? You're leaving this time because of me? I don't understand!" Mayar's hands held onto short hair that he knew would be shorn soon; Aiden liked his own russet hair short, but he preferred Mayar's to reach his slim shoulders or past them.

"Ye will. Upon my return, Mayar, I will reveal all... an' I hope ye will still be able—" Aiden's voice shook, his eyes glossing over as his chin trembled. "I hope ye will still be able to love me as I love ye."

Feeling a terror that he'd last felt at his rescue from Lenore McTiernan, Mayar whispered, "Aiden... why do you keep this from me? It is more than obvious that you do not wish to be leaving—"

"I could never wish to be far from your side, Mayar Enver, *mo ghràdh... mo bheatha... mo shaoghal...*" Tears slid down Aiden's cheeks, and though his voice wavered as he spoke the Scottish Gaelic that Mayar loved to hear on his tongue, Mayar knew that something was terribly wrong. "Upon my return, I wish to give ye a new word to learn, one I cherish above all, me sweet Maya."

"Tell me!" Mayar rasped. "I love the burr of the Gaelic, and when you teach me more of your language, I feel woven tighter into your life—"

"*Mo chéile.*" Aiden's smile stretched over his whole face as his great hands smoothed over the pitch waves of Mayar's hair. "Mo ghràdh is *my love*. Mo bheatha—"

“Means *my life!*” Mayar excitedly interjected, his own smile reaching up to shine out through his eyes. “And mo shaoghal is *my world!* Mo chridhe was my favourite because I love being your heart, but I have a feeling that this new one, this mo chéile—”

“It means... *my husband.*” Aiden laughed when Mayar jumped him, sending him backwards onto the many pillows they’d dragged down onto the floor with them during the night. As their mouths crashed into one another, Aiden rolled his man underneath him to kiss the column of Mayar’s throat, whispering the Gaelic over and over and over—

“*Gu brath,*” Mayar murmured, kissing his ear. “Gu brath!”

“Aye, forever.” Aiden brushed a kiss across Mayar’s shiny swollen lips. “Forever.”

Mayar gave in to Aiden’s seduction, watching as his lover kissed and bit down his chest. Making a mental note to discover just what had caused Aiden to feel there existed no other course of action but the one he’d obviously committed to, Mayar curled his fingers in the thin skin of Aiden’s back. Thought processes completely derailed by the sudden wet heat of Aiden’s lips and tongue on his cock, Mayar groaned, his nails digging into his lover’s back.

The phone rang from the nightstand.

Their eyes caught and Mayar gave a slight shake of his head. Aiden took him into his mouth again, moving quickly as he pushed Mayar’s left leg up... before pulling off of Mayar’s hard cock to flick his tongue downwards as he began to open him with tongue and fingers. His free hand wrapped tightly around Mayar, stroking him fast as his fingertips found the spot inside him that sent him over the edge into bliss—

The phone rang again from the nightstand.

Aiden lifted his head and crawled up Mayar’s body as he pressed inside, a wicked smile slithering across his shiny lips at Mayar’s hiss. Aiden shook his head, “I’m nae goin’ to stop. I’m goin’ to see ye into an absolute state, mo chéile—”

“Say it again!” Mayar arched his back as the pleasure keened brightly. “Please, Aiden! Say it again!”

“Anything for me wee god!” His hips sped up. “For mo chéile!”

Whiteout—

As his heart pounded in his ears, Mayar heard the phone still ringing and as he attempted to catch his breath, his arms tightened around Aiden's back. His lover's hot breath across Mayar's neck and the feel of Aiden spasming inside him—Mayar whispered, "Must... be... important if they keep calling back."

"They can wait. Right now, the only sounds I care to hear are yer voice an' yer pleasure, Mayar." Aiden's teeth grazed his neck, bit down on the crook of his shoulder.

A hard knock came at the front door, successfully ending their time together. Lifting his lips to Aiden's, Mayar gave a small smile. "Well... it's Sunday, isn't it?"

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

When Aiden pulled from the warm confines of Mayar's body, it felt very much like the tearing of some ethereal fabric... and Mayar wasn't certain why he felt that way. He watched Aiden get to his feet and grab his robe, tug it on and tie it. Mayar smiled up at him from the floor when Aiden looked back at him before leaving the room, shouting, "Okay, okay, I hear ye! Shut it!"

Mayar laughed under his breath as he picked himself up off the floor and ambled over to the bathroom. Cleaning himself up quickly, he was ill-prepared for the crash that told tales of the coffee table being smashed to bits. Tying a sarong around his hips, he ran to the living room and pulled Aiden off of another man in jeans, a long-sleeved green shirt under a black leather jacket, and black Doc Martens.

"What in hell is going on!" Mayar shouted. "I loved that coffee table!"

Aiden narrowed his eyes as he looked over at the one man in the world who could make his life complicated, the one man who could essentially pull the proverbial rug out from underneath him. "Markins was just leaving. He decided comin' over unannounced wasn't a good idea."

He felt Mayar's heart pounding against his back as the smaller man held tightly to Aiden's arms, disallowing him movement. Mayar leaned his temple to Aiden's bicep, his unique eyes focused intently on the man amidst the wreckage.

The man picked himself up off the floor and wiped his lip. "If you'd answered the phone, *Gillespie*, I'd have stayed out of your home. There's that

little matter of the *if*.” The tip of his tongue licked the blood that welled in the split pad of his lower lip before he turned an icy gaze to Mayar. Aiden pushed his lover behind him completely as the soldier named Markins chuckled. “This your new life, ’ey? Gay lover and an art dealer, is it... Kenyon?”

Mayar’s eyes widened and he lifted his gaze to Aiden’s face. “What’s he talking about? Who’s Kenyon?”

“I’ll wait for you on the patio. Don’t be long. We have need to break words.” Turning on his heel, Markins crossed to the French doors and let himself outside.

Mayar turned Aiden around, asking, “Aiden, who is he? What is he talking about and who is this Kenyon?”

“I cannae tell ye all of it at this verra moment. I wish to heaven I could. Suffice it to say that the on’y person who knows me inside out is me wee god, but there’s a few things that I still have left to show to ye, Mayar, an’ part of that is who I was before we met.” Aiden sighed heavily. “Once upon a time, I had a different name. I was called Kenyon MacKenna.”

Mayar nodded once, searching Aiden’s face with such an open gaze. “Was it too dangerous for you to continue to be him?”

“Everything changed from when I was Kenyon. I cannae tell ye the rest just yet, but I swear it to ye that I will.” Aiden lifted his hands to Mayar’s cheeks, his thumbs tracing the soft line of his cheekbones. “I will no fail ye. I will no lie to ye. Ye are me whole world, me verra heart’s blood.”

Mayar stretched up to bring his mouth to Aiden’s for a brief kiss. “If this that is happening is what has come between us, what we differ on, then get it done so that you can come home to your husband... so that you have a tale to tell him... so that we can have the life we dream about.”

Aiden pushed him back against the wall as he kissed Mayar, holding him close enough to feel their hearts pounding against each other’s. His fingers buried in soft black waves, clenching, fingernails grazing Mayar’s scalp to elicit a moan. Opening his mouth wider to deepen the kiss they shared, Aiden lost himself in the feel of his man, lost himself in Mayar’s scent, his taste—

I will nae lose this... I will nae lose him to Jupiter! I sent Orpheus to the Underworld. He’s been gone these ten long years an’ he ain’t comin’ back!

A tender kiss pressed to the skin above his heart as Aiden realised Mayar snuggled against him, his quiet words reaching Aiden’s ears to rouse him from

thought. “I won’t lose you to this. I won’t let him take you from me, Aiden. You’re coming back from this and—” Mayar lifted his gaze to Aiden’s own. “—and then if we have to, we’ll change our names and move away. You’ve always said you wanted to live on the Isle of Lews. We could go there!”

“No amount of hell or torment could rip me from yer side, me sweet Mayar. Ye have me word!” Aiden pressed a kiss to his love’s smooth brow. “Go get clothes an’ I’ll follow suit after I speak to Markins.”

He watched as Mayar disappeared down the corridor to their bedroom and when the door closed after him, Aiden followed Jupiter’s eyes and ears outside, shutting the doors after him as he growled. “Why are you here? I buried all of it and you know that. You *verify* that every day. I *stay* on my very best behaviour so that Jupiter continues to let me walk—”

“Jupiter perceives you to be taking unnecessary risks and—ye gods, it’s nice to hear the real you back. That Scottish accent is a bitch to understand.” Markins whirled to lean against the railing, a slow smile that Aiden had once thought was sexy snaking across his thin lips. “Someone saw you with the little man in there at the gallery and the partners in your very conservative world are all a-buzz... they don’t like that you’re breaking rules.”

“Breaking rules... what—what are you talking about?” Aiden’s heart pounded. *Someone saw me with Mayar?*

“A disagreement you had in the parking lot with your little man apparently was overheard. Oh, and someone observed you kissing in an alleyway. It does not appear to be well-received that your proclivity is... well, men.” Markins’ whole posture had stiffened as he’d spoken, and even now, his grey eyes glowed hot with anger. “Jupiter is not pleased with you. This gallery is important to him. He wishes you to understand the ramifications of his displeasure.”

“How is who I love pertinent to Jupiter’s eyes and ears—”

“Jupiter explained the rules before allowing you to mingle in society once more, and while you *did* earn your freedom, there were conditions to you walking free. He *reiterates* the terms as an only warning to you.” Markins heaved a sigh. “You cannot make waves. In this technological age, it causes a great amount of investigation for those who do, and Jupiter’s anonymity is of utmost import. You signed on to this gallery knowing that the owners were a conservative lot—”

“Jupiter sent me to them!” Aiden exclaimed, eyes wide.

“That is of no matter. You accepted the work and you excelled. Jupiter, up until now, has been quite pleased with your performance. Tomorrow morning, you will be called into your supervisor’s office. He will tell you that you are one of two up for a promotion. He will invite you and your wife to a party where the winner of the aforementioned promotion will be announced. Jupiter wants it to be you that wins. Having Pantheon so integrated in that gallery will be killer for him.”

So all I have to do is make certain that no-one knows about Mayar.

“All you have to do, *Orpheus*, is make certain that you refute any claims regarding the relationship between you and the little man.” Markins shrugged. “Come up with a story that will erase any doubt in their minds that you’re a fag.” He glanced down at the floor and looked up slyly through his lashes. “Or Jupiter might see fit to return your tight ass to his cock and put a bullet in the little man’s brain.”

Anger exploded at the plain threat. “Jupiter won’t lay a finger on him or he’ll die bloody!”

Markins lifted his eyebrows at Aiden’s bold words. “Then play the game. Utilise what you were taught as *Orpheus* and everyone’s happy and Jupiter swears to leave you be.”

Aiden’s nostrils flared as he lifted his eyes to the sky. “Because I have a choice.”

“Oh, you always have a choice. You just might not like it.” Markins stepped up next to him. “Irony at its best, since it was you, *Orpheus*, that told me that.”

Chapter 3

Mayar turned on the television and put *Spartacus* on for white noise. Letting the silk robe flutter to the floor at his feet, he padded into the bathroom and made quick work of brushing his teeth and hair. As Lucretia and Illythia plotted, Mayar pulled on loose blue jeans and a black long-sleeved tee-shirt. Remembering that he needed to clean up the broken table, he rolled up the legs of his jeans and hurried to the hall closet to get the broom and dustpan.

They're taking an awful long time to converse. I hope he's okay... I hope Markins isn't—I won't even say it. I won't think it!

Mayar took the big pieces of glass out to the trashcan at the curb and dumped them inside before rushing back inside to pick up the broken bits of wood and run the vacuum. He took his time getting up all the broken glass, hoping that his bare feet wouldn't catch any shards. He heard Aiden raise his voice to the man called Markins, but Mayar couldn't make out any actual words. He didn't like Aiden being afraid, and Mayar knew he was, he could feel it. As he put away the vacuum and closed the shutter door, he ran his hands over his face before leaning against the hall wall.

This isn't good. It can't be good... and I don't like Markins!

“Who is he anyway?” he murmured to himself. “Why does he look familiar? Where have I seen him? What does he want with my Aiden?”

The French doors creaked open and Aiden and Markins came back in, Markins laughing quietly. “He keeps a neat house. That is some quick clean up.”

“Ye owe him a new coffee table,” Aiden snapped. “Mayar loved that table.”

“I owe... no, no, no, Gillespie. That is on *you*. You threw me into it. That's on *you*.” Markins retorted. “Good luck tomorrow.”

Tomorrow? What's tomorrow?

Mayar listened closely, hearing what sounded like a kiss—*he doesn't like this man, so why would he kiss him?*—before hearing Aiden, devoid of any accent, growl, “He comes near him—*anyone* comes near him—I will rip them apart.”

Near me? Is it me he defends in such a feral manner?

“See you soon, Gillespie.”

When the front door shut, Mayar hurried down the hall to appear in the living room doorway, finding Aiden standing silently in the middle of the room. He crossed to his lover, sliding his hands up his chest as he lifted his gaze up to those blue orbs. “Tell me what is going on... tell me what is terrifying you?”

Aiden’s hands slipped over Mayar’s as for a moment, he held both Mayar’s hands and gaze. His lips spread in a smile that did not shine out his eyes and he shook his head. “Markins is an arsehole—”

Mayar scoffed, loosing Aiden’s hands to push hard against the taller man’s chest. “Don’t do that, Aiden. Don’t misdirect me—”

Mayar’s back hit the wall and in Aiden’s haste to get the jeans off, his nails dug into the skin of Mayar’s hips. He hissed as Aiden took him with little preparation, his fingers digging into the thin skin of his lover’s shoulders. Mayar bit his lower lip so hard he tasted blood as Aiden rode him, and while the physical pain he experienced was great, what sent tears down his face was witnessing the torment his lover endured.

It was me. He’s terrified because they threatened me.

Mayar pushed his face against Aiden’s neck, his fingers finding and curling in Aiden’s as they neared release. Aiden dragged his lips down Mayar’s throat and he bit the crook of his shoulder hard, eliciting a cry from Mayar that sent them both over the edge—

“Listen to me. Maya, listen to me. Are ye listenin’?” Aiden murmured next to Mayar’s ear, his tongue tracing the sensitive shell. “Stretch against me an’ arch your neck as ye drag out an *aye* if ye are.”

Mayar smiled as he did, his breath catching in his throat. “Yessss!”

Between kisses along Mayar’s throat, Aiden spoke. “I want ye to gather yer things in a bag, somethin’ ye use every day—”

“No. Aiden, no... I’m not leaving you. I’m staying right here, next to you.” Mayar nipped at Aiden’s ear, his jaw. “You promised we’d never be alone, that you’d always protect me. How can you do that if I’m not beside you?”

“He will *kill* you—”

“You won’t let him... and I won’t let him hurt you. Markins comes here again—”

Aiden laughed, but no mirth embodied the sound. “It’s nae Markins I’m worried about, mo chridhe. It’s who Markins represents.” Hugging him against his chest, Aiden took a ragged breath. “It’s them ye dinna wish to upset.”

“Aiden, I don’t understand. What happened? Who is Markins? Who does he work for? What does he or they *or whatever*—what do they want you to do?” Mayar rasped, holding tighter to Aiden. “Why can’t we just leave?”

Aiden kissed Mayar’s shoulder, letting his legs down as he withdrew from Mayar entirely. “We should get some food an’ go hunt for a new coffee table. Know that I love ye.”

Due to the morning’s visitor and his stress level being pushed well beyond normal limits, Aiden put on a face for the furniture shops. Proud of the show that Mayar put on as well, a small smile still turned up the edge of his lips as he kept an eye on his heart. Real or imagined, Markins’ visit had sparked his paranoia and Aiden felt as though they were being watched.

Mayar’s left hand dangled at his side, an invitation beyond tempting, with a voice of its own telling him that it missed its seat on Aiden’s bicep. Even now, unable to remove Mayar’s touch from his mind, he gazed at the strong fingers, the clean fingernails, the curves of his lover’s palm and he groaned from need to touch.

“You all right?” Mayar turned to ask, stepping in to lightly place a hand on his shoulder. “Aiden?”

“Aiden? Is that you, Aiden?”

Mayar blinked at the female voice calling Aiden’s name and he arched an inquisitive eyebrow up at him. Aiden grimaced, lifting his gaze to the approaching intrusion, who threw her arms around his neck to hug him tightly. Her touch startled him straight out of his head and Aiden’s hands gently moved her back from him as he gave a small smile, murmuring, “Kyra, it’s good to see you—”

“I know! Who’d a thunk it, yeah?” Kyra Milton, the gallery receptionist, bounced a little as she stood before them. “I hope I didn’t interrupt your afternoon or anything—” She turned politely to Mayar and held out her hand. “Hi! I’m Kyra and I work with Aiden at the La Croix Art Gallery. You’re his friend, right? The one in the photos on his desk?”

Aiden nodded, interrupting, “Kyra, this is Mayar Enver. He’s my best mate in the whole world. No-one comes close to knowing me like he does.” Smiling encouragingly at Mayar, he explained, “Kyra deals with all the guests who come through the gallery and she helps me keep my head on straight.”

Kyra giggled and stepped in closer to Aiden as she put a hand on his chest. Her enormous hazel eyes met Aiden’s blue as she said quietly, “You did not hear this from me, but rumour has it that a promotion is being handed down and I swear I heard your name in talks to receive it. If that’s true, they always have a dinner. Just so you know... I would love to be your date! Lemme know!” Popping a kiss to his cheek, Kyra spun on her heel to head in the opposite direction. Once she was about five feet away, she whirled back around to wave and call out, “Good luck! Oh, and Mayar... I have a friend who totally would dig your look! We should double date, the four of us!”

And then she was gone and Mayar whirled on Aiden. “What just happened? What the bloody *hell* just happened?”

“It’s—” Aiden gritted his teeth, grabbing Mayar and dragging him into an alleyway, down past the dumpster the Italian bistro used, pushing him up against the wall. “Mo chridhe, I need ye to go. I cannae worry about ye—”

“I’m not going! I’m not! Tell me what—”

Aiden ducked his head to kiss Mayar hard on the mouth, burying his hands in the heavy jet waves of his hair as he pressed his man against the stone wall. “I cannae do this, mo chéile, if’n I have to worry about ye bein’ a target—”

Mayar hissed, his eyes flashing dangerous lightning. “I’m not going to say it even one more time, Aiden. Next time you suggest I leave, I’ll hit you.”

“But—”

A thick black brow arched as Mayar’s strong hands reached under the well-worn leather sides of Aiden’s duster, gripping his hips and yanking them flush to his own. “Do you think I jest?”

“Ye know they dinna know about us at work,” Aiden murmured, leaning his forehead to Mayar’s smooth brow. “Ye know they dinna know that ye’re the only reason I still breathe, that the very heavens would tremble were I to lose ye.”

“You know that I would raze all the planes of existence were I to lose you, Aiden. I would send this world into a bloodbath not seen since the days of Spartacus and his battle against the Romans!” Mayar vowed.

Aiden chuckled, taking the backs of his knuckles down his lover's cheeks. "Ye *do* know that the program on the telly is not all fact, that they took some liberties with the story?"

Mayar rolled his eyes before directing quite a petulant expression Aiden's way. "I'm sure the Thracian needed something to make him fight. There had to be a catalyst for his rebellion. I think Starz probably hit the nail on the head with Sura."

"I'm certain ye're right, mo chridhe." Briefly slanting his lips over Mayar's full ones, Aiden whispered, "Please... stay safe. Dinna make me mourn ye."

"Tell me what's going on, Aiden. Tell me—"

"I cannae. All I can say is this. Dinna believe anything I dinna tell ye directly. Dinna believe anything ye see, anything ye hear, and if'n I dinna tell ye, *Mayar, it's like this*, ye dinna believe it!" Blue to copper, Aiden held Mayar's gaze captive for a long, long moment. "Swear it to me. Swear it to me now!"

"I give you my word, I will not believe what you do not tell me directly." Mayar nuzzled Aiden's nose, taking another kiss, this one soft and long and thorough. "Tell me that you love me."

"I will love ye, me wee god, until there is no me to love ye with... and when the stars all wink out of existence and the universe folds in on itself, when time starts to run backwards and all there is be light, then and *only* then, might there be a chance that me feelings for ye may change." Aiden winked at him. "But ye have to know, Maya... *my* Maya, that I dinna think even then that me soul could be persuaded to love another. Ye have to know... all I've known since I looked into these deep eyes of the sweetest honey and the hottest fire, is completion. Since these two hands touched me sides and me heart, all I've known is the very epitome of love. I cannae believe me soul could ever love another."

Mayar's mouth found his as his hands lifted to fold over Aiden's heart. "I cannot believe my soul would ever fall for another's sweet words, either, Aiden. I belong with you, standing at your side. Send me not away. I could not bear it. I know that if we are parted, we shall not see each other again."

It was something, Aiden thought, that his lover would even utter those words, and it made him blink. He'd always thought Mayar a wee bit tuned in to the spirit world, as often the things he said would happen, *did* happen. For him

to suggest that were they parted, a chasm would open up between them, one they could not ever cross; it gave Aiden pause. Swallowing hard, he let his thumb pass over the pad of Mayar's lower lip. "Ye believe this truly?"

"I do. I feel it deep in my gut. Someone is trying to part us and we cannot let them, Aiden." His fingers curled into Aiden's jacket lapels. "We cannot let them."

Chapter 4

Mayar tried to focus on his television program as Aiden dressed for the dinner that Kyra had mentioned. Leaning back against the pillows on their bed, he held the remote control in his left hand, his right arm over his chest as his eyes followed Aiden as he dressed. His lover glanced over at him as he tied his tie.

“Ye’re sulking, me wee god,” Aiden chastised.

“Sulking implies I have no justification,” Mayar clipped, returning his eyes to Andy Whitfield as Spartacus on the screen. “Sulking is for children and I am not a child. I am a lover... who has to pretend that he does not exist. I would not expect for you to understand how that feels.”

Aiden blanched and he flew to Mayar’s side. “Hey, hey—”

“No!” Mayar shouted, jumping to his feet. “No! Don’t hey me! I didn’t make this decision, Aiden. I didn’t even agree. I wasn’t given a *choice*, remember?”

“Mo chridhe—”

Fury seared his veins and Mayar refused to look Aiden in the eye as he folded his arms over his chest, hugging it as Aiden’s words touched his ears, so small it hurt Mayar’s heart. “I’m nae trying—Maya... please, Maya, listen to me!”

“What could you possibly say that will make any of it better?” Mayar swatted Aiden’s hands away, taking hold of the tie and fixing the knot, smoothing it down Aiden’s chest. “You’re pretending to attend a work function with your secretary because you *don’t have a significant other* to bring.” Mayar laughed dryly. “Except that you do.”

Mayar yanked from Aiden’s touch, determined to keep the salty tears in his eyes from falling. He refused to let his lover see how deep the hurt went and though he knew in his heart that *none* of this was Aiden’s fault, that he was being coerced to attend the dinner, part of him screamed that there should be *something* that he could do. He came to a stop at the window, his eyes closing as his man approached him, hands shaking as they slid over Mayar’s sides. When Mayar leaned back against Aiden’s chest, he gave in to insecurity, murmuring, “It makes me sick to my stomach, Aiden, that she will touch you,

that her hands will be with yours and that she will try to kiss you in front of your colleagues.”

“I won’t let her kiss me—or touch me!” he hissed. “I swear it to ye!”

“How can you swear it? You have no other choice, do you? You must wear two faces now. You must.” Mayar took a deep breath, a familiar terror freezing his blood, chilling his core as he remembered what it felt like that night... the night he met Aiden Gillespie.

He held tight to the knife as the car shook and he listened to Lenore speaking to the Broken that would guard his prison. Her words turned Mayar’s blood to ice.

“You will keep him here. You will not harm him. Should he wake, you are to press this button once and it will send gas into the trunk that will sedate him. You will then call me. Am I understood? This cargo is precious and Ares has paid a pretty penny for him. I will not see Ares disappointed.”

“Yes, Mistress.”

Ares? Ares bought me? I’m to belong to him? I cannot! I cannot! I would rather die!

As he heard Lenore hurry off, he contemplated his limited options: stay and die at Ares’ hands or attempt escape. Rolling the handle of the makeshift knife in his hands, he heard the latch on the trunk unlock and the voice spoke to him. “I am not turning my back, but if you are intelligent, you will slip out of here and run like hell, for Lenore is the least of your worries should you stay in that trunk.”

Without hesitation, Mayar crawled out of captivity and ran. As he neared the end of the row of cars, two large men stepped out of the shadows and into his path. He gave a dry laugh, thinking to himself, Because I thought this would be easy? Mayar turned left and made a mad dash towards the street as he heard Lenore shriek his name. His ankle rolled and he stumbled but kept running, looking behind him to gauge his distance from his pursuer as he shouted back to her, “No! Let me go!”

Mayar slammed straight into a hard chest. Arms encircled him briefly, a voice murmuring in a comforting tone next to his ear, “I will no let them take ye. Get behind me, lad, and stay.”

The man turned, took one look at Lenore, pulled a gun and shot her. Mayar blinked a couple of times as the man holstered his weapon and whirled to check

on him. His bright eyes looked him over before reaching a tender hand to cup Mayar's cheek. As the man's thumb tenderly stroked his cheekbone, the touch shocked Mayar, rocking him to his core.

"What's yer name, lad?"

Mayar heard the question, his eyes fluttering shut as the man's thumb traced his cheekbone a second time. He shook his head, forcing himself to move from his touch and instead, hide behind a curtain of tangled hair. "I'm no-one."

The man ducked his face to catch his gaze, giving a tentative smile. "Well, yer someone to someone—"

Mayar shook his head, his wet eyes widening before burrowing against the man's chest, doing his best to hide under the long jacket the man wore. "I have no-one. My family is dead... long before she bought me. I am no-one. Please... please... don't let them catch me."

"Bought ye? Lenore dinna steal ye?" Surprise resonated in the man's slow blink. "No matter—" The man whirled as two vehicles careened into the parking lot. He opened his door for Mayar, his voice firm as he motioned for Mayar to get into the car. "I'm no lettin' them have ye. Get in an' buckle up. This is goin' to be a helluva ride!"

He didn't know then why he got in that car, but Mayar accepted the man's help without question. He'd killed Lenore and, in so doing, freed him... but he didn't know a thing about taking care of himself. As the driver door slammed shut, a wide toothy grin spread across the man's lips as he touched Mayar's cheek. "Me name's Aiden. I will no let them hurt ye again—no ever!"

"I was once called Mayar and I trust you... though I am not certain as to why." Mayar gave a tiny smile as the man called Aiden leaned across him to tug the seat belt across Mayar's torso. When he pulled back to sit up and fasten his own, Mayar kissed his cheek. "And I thank you."

Mayar remembered the way the moonlight spilled through the window, giving Aiden's blue eyes an almost ethereal glow, and he remembered that he swore to himself that he'd make this man love him—

"I might have to wear two faces, aye, but Mayar, she will no touch me. No-one touches me, wee god—no-one but ye." Aiden's eyes chilled before they slammed shut and his mouth took Mayar's in a hungry, possessive kiss. "No-one but ye!" Aiden's hands slid under Mayar's thin tee-shirt, folding over his heart as his mouth opened wider to deepen the kiss.

Mayar's hands covered Aiden's and he turned in his arms as he gave himself over willingly to Aiden's seduction. "I'll wait for you to come home. Please, if I fall asleep, just wake me. I won't sleep well without you."

"You have me word, Mayar." Another kiss and Aiden nuzzled his nose. "I belong to ye."

"As I belong to you, Aiden. Only to you." Mayar's eyes searched his. "Come home to me."

The doorbell rang, signifying the arrival of Kyra and Aiden took one last kiss. "I love ye. No-one else... and I will definitely come home to ye."

His mouth fumbled on the Gaelic, but Aiden's heart soared at the sound of his native tongue on his lover's tongue. "*Tha gaol agam ort!*" *I love you... those most precious words!* As his smile split his face, Mayar blushed, his voice quiet. "I said it correctly, yes?"

"Certainly I have never heard sweeter words!" Leaning down to nuzzle Mayar's nose with his own, Aiden breathed in the earthy scent of his lover. "Words I shall dream of until me return." He caught Mayar's dark gaze with his wide bright blue. "I will think of nothin' but yer touch and yer kiss 'til I have it again!"

"Come home to me, my husband!" Mayar's sweet smile lit up his face. "I will be waiting!"

The doorbell rang a second time and Aiden took one last long look at Mayar, memorising every nuance of his countenance before he hurried out of their bedroom and towards the front door. Looking at his reflection in the entry hall mirror, he straightened his hair before unlocking and opening the door to see Kyra Milton smiling widely at him.

She turned in a wide circle, showing off a form-fitting dress the colour of seafoam that dipped down into a low v-neck. It came to her knees and he wondered absently how she'd walk in it as she stepped closer to lift a kiss to his cheek. "You look super handsome and I think we'll be the talk of the party! You ready?"

"You look verra nice," Aiden conceded, turning to see Mayar peeking around the hall. "Are you ready?"

I love you, Mayar mouthed and Aiden nodded, giving him a tiny smile before offering his arm to Kyra.

Oh, me wee god, I love ye, too!

The entire ride to the gallery was spent listening to Kyra prattle on about their co-workers, who she thought was dating, who had a bad work ethic, and did he think that the gallery owners were *too* conservative? It was difficult to remember that this was one night, that it would be over by midnight, and that all he had to do to get home was play a part... even if it wasn't the one he wanted to play.

So he forced himself to answer Kyra's questions and make conversation. By the time they arrived at the party, Aiden had sunk into the mindset that he was working for Pantheon again, that he'd been chosen by Jupiter and was sent to gain a client. When they walked into the dinner party, his eyes fell onto Braden Massey, one of the gallery owners, talking to another man, one he didn't recognise immediately.

"Who is that?" he murmured, half to himself, but Kyra heard him and she leaned up to say next to his ear, "Braden and Jerrod are looking to sell the gallery, so I hear. That is the prospective buyer. His name is Aaron Clarke and he's very into Greek mythology."

His heart clenched. *No Pantheon... it cannae be!* Out loud, he said, "And ye know this because—"

"—because I pay attention to detail! Did you forget why you hired me?" Kyra batted her eyes at him and Aiden shook his head in amusement. *Ye gods, she's actually likeable right now?* "Mr. Clarke's company is MOW, Inc., as in *Machines Of War* and his bookshelf must have all of the Percy Jackson series, because he named his stock Ares. That's what he made his money off of, but he's giving in to his artsy side in buying the gallery, which he wants to show darker art in... as in what came in yesterday. Did you see it before you left at lunch?"

Aiden shook his head. "I dinna see the collection, no, but I heard it's pretty dark. It's supposed to be a war series, but the thumbnails in the emails he's sent us look like something straight out of *Hellraiser*."

Braden and Aaron approached the two of them, Braden waving Kyra off as he introduced Aiden. "Aaron Clarke, this is the man behind the magic, Aiden Gillespie. He's in charge of the exhibits and approving the marketing to get them seen."

Aiden dared to look up at Aaron as he held out his hand to shake. "Pleasure to meet ye, Mr. Clarke. Braden gives me too much credit. All I do is look at

paintings and decide which ones I like, and then I've a knack for putting them up straight on the walls. After that, I just try to put together a plan for catching the community's eye and it seems to work."

"Braden, your partner is signalling you. I believe Aiden is competent enough to keep me entertained while you're gone." He smiled at Aiden's boss. "Catch up when you can."

Aiden nodded at Braden as the man whirled away. Lifting his gaze to Aaron Clarke's cordial one, he watched it turn icy as the man looked him square in the face. Though Aaron's voice remained pleasant, Aiden felt his stomach clench.

"Why don't we go out into the courtyard and you can tell me some of your ideas for this place if I do buy it from Braden and Jerrod?"

Aiden felt a hand slide up his back and curve over his shoulder as he was led outside. Aaron leaned in to say, "I know who you are and it's the understatement of the year when I say that you have been a very. Bad. Boy."

Aiden's mouth went dry as he rasped, "Ares."

"One and the same... Orpheus." He chuckled. "The things I've dreamt of doing to you for years. Jupiter welshed on that deal with me for you back in the day, and then when Lenore was murdered by a Freed so many years ago... well, let's just say it's nice to see you again, Orpheus... *very* nice to see you."

Ah, cor, Markins... ye dinna set me up, did ye? Aiden slipped from Ares' grip, putting space between them as he held up open hands. "First, I cannae be held responsible for Jupiter's mistake. As he put it often to me, he liked me too much. As for Lenore's deal with ye—did ye truly believe that I weren't goin' to try to save someone when I kent where they been? Jupiter dinna break me and because he didn't, I weren't goin' to let anyone touch *him*, let alone break him."

"Is that so?" Ares gave a cruel smile. "I think I'll take special pleasure in making you eat those words."

"Ye can try. I'll tell ye, though, that I will nae go quietly." Aiden's heart pounded. "And I will nae fight for ye. I refuse."

Ares stepped in, clearly not expecting the weapon that a former slave of Jupiter Optimus Maximus would carry. Aiden had known that he'd not be able to carry the gun he favoured these days; blades were a last resort in the outside world, and yet, in quiet situations such as this, the unexpected saved a man's life. As the small blade slid between the evil man's ribs, Aiden twisted,

growling out, “Men like ye made me what I am, Ares. I take *special pleasure* in watching the life drain from yer eyes!”

“You... will—” Ares began, his eyes widening in surprise. “—Jupiter will see you *dead* for this—”

“Gillespie!”

Aiden twisted the blade once more before yanking it from the man’s body and whirling on an approaching Markins. He felt a slight pinch at his neck and darkness took him.

Chapter 5

Mayar paced.

Midnight had come and gone, then one, and two... and three. As the clock ticked the minutes by to four, he rubbed his arms, hating the shivers that slid up and down his spine. He'd tried calling Aiden's mobile, but it had gone straight to the voicemail. He'd left four messages now, each on the hour every hour past midnight.

As the thin red line appeared on the horizon, signalling the approach of dawn, Mayar shouted, "*Where are you?*"

No answer from the silent walls of the house... and then, he heard the tumblers engage in the front door lock. Hissing loudly, his worry transformed into palpable anger, Mayar rushed the door, only to be thrown up against the wall by Markins.

"Hey! This will not help him! It won't!" the man shouted, pinning him to the wall.

"Where is he? What did you do to my Aiden?" Mayar struggled against the man's hold, but Markins did not let him move.

"I did *nothing!* If you want him back, you have to shut up and listen to me! All right?" At Mayar's stilted nod, Markins stepped back and leaned against the opposite wall. "I'm going to ask you a hard question and I need the truth... Mayar, isn't it?"

"Yes." He took a shaky breath. "What is your question?"

"Did you, at one time, belong to Lenore McFarlane?" Markins' words almost echoed in the hall as Mayar swallowed hard and looked away.

"Aiden... he saved me from what would've certainly been my death at the hands of a cruel master. Lenore... she sold me to a man named Ares. All of her Brokens knew that if you were sent to Ares, that monster would eat you alive." He shuddered, rubbing his arms. "I caught a break one night, as she was making my delivery. Aiden happened upon me escaping, and he took me away, brought me here to his home and I've been free ever since."

"Aiden was once called Orpheus, and he was a slave to my boss, Jupiter Optimus Maximus, who runs Pantheon—"

Mayar blinked, his blood freezing in his veins as he whispered, “Jupiter Optimus Maximus? Pantheon?”

Markins nodded. “Lenore was part of the organisation, but her headquarters were in Brazil and she—”

“That’s why she used the name Medusa on the phone at times.” Mayar slid down the wall, folding his arms on his knees. “So Jupiter is coming for me, then.”

“No, Mayar. Ares was. He was the buyer that Aiden’s bosses were courting for the gallery. He saw and recognised Aiden, and he threatened him.” Markins sighed. “As you can well imagine, Aiden *did not* take it well, and he took decisive action. He killed Ares with a knife and Jupiter, not wishing for his name to be dragged through the mud, sent me to take Aiden back and had his operatives cleanse the scene.”

Mayar furrowed his brow. “Take Aiden back? You took Aiden back *where?*”

“Home,” Markins answered honestly. “Back to Jupiter, being as Aiden violated the terms of his freedom—”

Mayar exploded, crossing to the Pantheon soldier. “Violated? He *violated*—was he supposed to let himself be murdered? What the—bloody hell—he *violated*—I’ll show him—”

Markins straightened, holding up his hands. “Whoa, there, little man—”

“You took my husband! You delivered him back into bondage!” Mayar hissed at him. “And *don’t* call me little man!”

Markins shook his head. “I’m sorry! My apologies! I will never call you that again!” In an uncharacteristic move, he gently placed his open hands on Mayar’s upper arms. “But you can’t walk around saying things like that. Jupiter still monitors his favourite slave. If he heard you say such things... it could be bad for Aiden.”

“I will not stand by and let him be chained, Markins. I will not! He did not and would not let me be taken—even before he thought to call me *husband*,” Mayar declared. “If I am to be worthy of that title, then I *will* do whatever it takes to free him.”

Markins shook his head. “And what if it costs you your life? What if the cost is being a Broken to Jupiter?”

“Don’t you understand, Markins?” Mayar smiled softly. “A man only becomes a Broken when their spirit has been shattered. Because of Aiden, I could never be a Broken. My spirit lies within his, and his spirit... it shines like the sun, and though mine is not yet as constant as that shining star, mine is more like a lightning storm, still I can never be broken because I am cocooned within him.”

“What if you have to sacrifice that lightning?” Markins pressed. “If you had to give that passion to someone else in place of Aiden?”

Mayar shook his head. “My fire belongs only to Aiden. My body is but a vessel for the fire he sparked in me. If the body must be given to another, so be it, but they will never steal my fire.”

Markins took a deep breath, nodding. “Then much will be required of you.”

“I am ready.” Mayar’s eyes caught on the old black leather duster hanging on the coat tree. Grabbing it, he slid his arms into the sleeves, smiling grimly as the long jacket swished around his ankles. Lifting his gaze to Markins’ appreciative gaze, he murmured, “And I have a plan.”

Aiden groaned as he rolled onto his side. A soft pillow was placed under his cheek, one he could tell wore a silk casing, but it did not smell like home. He frowned, pushing his face into the cloud-like cushion, realising that his head throbbed even as his legs tangled in coverlets.

More silk. Feather mattress. Not home.

Large hands smoothed over his bare back, fingers tracing the slope of his spine from nape to tailbone. His eyelids finally fluttered open on a headboard he remembered with vivid clarity and Aiden swallowed hard, his lips forming the three syllable word he hated the most. “Dominus.”

Kisses dropped all along his back as the strong hands turned Aiden over onto his back, following his arms to leather cuffs on his wrists. Taking the thick braided cord, the head of Pantheon looped it over a hook, and he smiled down at Aiden. “I finally did it. You always said I should just install one since I loved to tie you.” His teeth nipped the crook of Aiden’s neck as Jupiter murmured, “I knew you’d come back to me, *my Orpheus.*”

One hand slid down Aiden’s chest and over his hip, pushing his legs open before using gentle fingertips to check Aiden’s entrance.

He's been working me while I been out! He's goin' to—

Jupiter sat up, smiling down at Aiden as he dribbled warm oil over him, slickening them both. His hooded crystal gaze held Aiden's blue as he joined their bodies with a slow thrust, his large hand smoothing up to cup the back of Aiden's head as he whispered, "Welcome home, beautiful Orpheus... welcome home! I promise to never let you fly again, to always keep you safe, and to always keep you happy."

Aiden closed his eyes as his master covered him in kisses and began to move.

Forgive me, me wee god. I beg ye to forgive me!

For hours, Jupiter made love to him, his worship of Aiden's body and the many promises he made him terrifying him more than any punishment Jupiter could have seen fit to dole out. When he finally took his tied wrists down, Jupiter pressed kisses into Aiden's palms. "I plan to make you my prince-consort, Orpheus, and together we will rule Pantheon."

"Dominus—"

Jupiter's eyes flashed dangerous lightning, but he smiled tenderly, his thumb tracing the inside of Aiden's left wrist. "Orpheus, I go now to get you some food."

As the door shut behind the god he'd once made the mistake of thinking himself in love with, Aiden rolled to his side, rasping, "Please, Mayar... I'd never dream of asking this of ye... but please... please—"

A sob burst from him, sending his body curling into a fetal position as more sobs wracked his body until finally, he turned his face into the pillow and gave in to the horror of the day. He wept until his eyes were sore and his body gave in to exhaustion, and it was only when his mind drifted into slumber that he finished his request to Mayar.

Find me.

When his eyes opened next, Aiden started awake to shouting. The door burst open and Jupiter's Brokens moved to the bed, one saying in a low voice as he avoided Aiden's gaze, "Dominus commands we bathe you and clothe you in order to ready you for transport, Magnus Orpheus."

Sae he calls me mighty as though it's a title now.

Aiden did not fight their care, and when he had been clothed in a long sarong and a short tunic, both black in colour—the same colour of Mayar's

hair... will I ever see him again?—Jupiter arrived. He removed the leather ties, taking Aiden’s hand in his. “Come, lover. I wish to show my adoration to you and then we shall leave this place and return to the Aegean.”

Mutely, knowing that a fight would only render him unconscious and Jupiter’s orders still being followed, Aiden allowed himself to be led by the hand down to the courtyard. He only hesitated when he realised what was soon to happen. The hesitation caused him to pull on Jupiter’s hand, and the man turned a tender gaze and a gentle hand to Aiden’s cheek. Pointing to a man stirring the coals of a fire in which a branding iron could clearly be seen heating, Jupiter murmured, “My Orpheus, I mean only to give you a gift of my adoration, a promise you can never forget.”

“Your words are enough, Dom—”

“Address me as Jupiter, please, husband of mine.”

Am I livin’ in the Twilight Zone? Was me life outside these walls a long hallucination? Was I dreamin’ Mayar up? Aiden lifted his head, asking, “Why did ye grant me freedom?”

Jupiter’s full lips spread in a wide smile. “Because there was no other way to teach you, beautiful Orpheus, that the outside world was not for you.” Pressing a kiss to Aiden’s brow, he finished, “My love for you is great, and greater still is my devotion. I knew that the only way to get you back into my arms would be to grant you what you so desired.”

“Sae me freedom was never real? All of it was a lie?” Aiden shook his head. “Ye allowed for me to have me ain life until it dinna suit yer purposes and then ye allowed Ares to threaten me sae that I’d do what ye kent I’d do and it would kill two birds with one stone. Ares out of the way, me violating the terms of me freedom?”

Jupiter nodded to the guards flanking them. “Secure him. Smithy.”

Aiden’s eyes flew wide. “Jupiter, nae. Please.”

“I was going to make pretty words, to soothe your already frayed nerves, but your contempt for me will need be worked through. Again.” Holding Aiden’s right arm immobile, he nodded to the man with the brand. “However, I will tell you the meaning behind the brand, as you are the only one to possess it.”

“Sae I’m a trophy—”

“No! You are not a trophy. You are the one I’ve wanted to possess forever, the only one I could not break. You are the only one to ever fight for his freedom. You are the only one who refused to bend to every command. Your spirit is one that could not be dominated, no matter how hard I tried. You had but to ask it, Orpheus, and I would find a way for you to achieve it. So to you, I give you my brand, which is a halo encircling a J. The halo is yours, your O, and the J within it means that I belong to you, that you are Dominus.” His grip never changed, though his eyes softened when the brand sizzled on Aiden’s forearm.

I will nae scream. I will nae scream. Mayar! Mayar! Please... please... I beg ye. Gods, I beg ye!

Setting his jaw as he took several deep breaths while the Brokens accompanying them treated the brand and bound it, Aiden glared at Jupiter. “Pretty words, aye... but nothing more.”

Chapter 6

Mayar took a deep breath as he lifted his gaze to Markins. “You are certain this will work?”

“As certain as I can be about Jupiter, but do remember that he is possessive, that Orpheus has likely been returned to his station.” The operative ran his hands through his dark hair, taking a deep breath. “Mayar, you have no training in the art of war or deception, why do you not want to leave this to the professionals?”

“The art of war?” Mayar furrowed his brow. “No, I don’t. The art of deception? I have that in spades, as you say. It is all I did from the time that I was ten until Aiden rescued me when I was nineteen.” He gave a dry laugh. “You don’t want to know what Aiden dealt with bringing me home. You don’t want to know what kind of mess he had on his hands. I’m still not fixed. I’m still not free of triggers. This we’re doing here?” He threw one hand out towards the door. “This is for a man I never knew was me. I thought he was a fighter—he is, but not the kind that I imagined for years. He’s me... and that’s why he fought so hard to protect me. Aiden is me, Markins. Me.”

Shoving his hands into the deep pockets of the duster, he found both pockets filled. Pulling his right hand out, he found a small velvet bag in his clutch, and attached to the drawstring were two little tags. One had his name, and the other read, *Mo chéile?* Opening it, he found two smooth black bands, one bigger than the other. Tears blurred his vision as he slid the smaller one onto his right ring finger, and the bigger one onto his thumb. Reaching into his left pocket once more, he withdrew a silver chain bearing a pendant that was a staff and a pointy hat.

Obviously from Tolkien. This is Gandalf’s hat and staff. Why does he have this?

Markins chuckled. “Oh, I get it now. See, your man is a big Tolkien fan. Like card carrying member of the Society and everything. He tried to tell me all the stages of godhood one time, and one of the things that stuck out in my mind after meeting you was your name. Gandalf was a wizard, sure, but he was also known to the Elves in the West as Olórin, one of the Maiar.”

“And that’s said the same way as my name,” Mayar murmured. “He calls me Maya sometimes.”

“Singular form of Maiar is Maia.”

“Also said the same way.” Mayar closed his eyes and pressed a kiss to the pendant. “So this is representative of me and his love of Middle-Earth.”

“He calls you little god—”

“*Wee* god, yes. Were the Maiar gods?” Mayar lifted a shiny honey-brown gaze to Markins’ grey.

“Lesser gods, yes... and yes, I believe he calls you that because it’s a play on words. His two great loves intertwined.” The operative moved over, taking Mayar’s head in both his hands, and pressed a kiss to his brow. “Let’s get you to your man.”

They drove for almost an hour before Markins pulled off the main road onto a pothole-ridden dirt road. Having been formed solely from the tires of cars and trucks driving the path over and over, Mayar was glad he rode in a military issued vehicle. He glanced over at Markins, asking, “Private airstrip?”

Markins nodded. “It was either a short flight or a longer drive than we have time for, and I don’t ever want to see his face wear that expression ever again.”

“What expression?” Mayar watched the other man’s face intently.

“The *was-it-a-dream?* expression.” Markins swallowed hard. “I made up my mind after delivering him to Jupiter that I would do anything I could to deliver him back to your arms.” He glanced over at Mayar. “I swear that I will do everything in my power to do just that.”

Mayar gave a tight smile, looking up to see the lights of the airstrip illuminating the cleared land and he motioned to it, murmuring, “I will help you free him or die trying, so let’s get this done.”

Markins cleared his throat. “Let’s just try to keep you both in one piece, ’kay? I don’t think your Aiden would appreciate freedom quite as much if he had to begin it by burying you.”

Mayar gazed down at the black bands on his hand, evidence of a love that Aiden had described before he left as one that would make the heavens tremble were the two of them rent apart, and he took a deep breath. “I will see him free, back to my arms, so that he might give me a mighty gift.”

“Mighty indeed,” Markins replied, bringing their ride to an end as he put on the brake and took out the key. “You ready?”

“To go back to bondage?” Mayar teased, offering his hands in a motion that proved to the waiting Pantheon personnel that he was a seasoned Broken. “Not even a little bit, but I would do anything to keep his heart beating.”

Markins took a deep breath as he wound the leather binding around Mayar’s wrists, securing it to a heavy chain welded to the door of the vehicle. Mayar waited for him to exit the car and hurry to his own door, opening it and helping him out for product inspection.

If I remember correctly, the woman standing here should be known as Themis, and should I not present well, I won’t live to make it to Jupiter’s home.

Bowing his head in recognition of his station, Mayar listened carefully to Markins, who presented him. “Themis, this is the mighty gift that I bring to finish erasing the damage done by the Freed. Ares had tracked him down and knew that he possessed this lovely Broken, one who’d rightfully belonged to him through a transaction with Medusa. May I present to you, Inspector, the beautiful Eros.”

“Eros? Truly? Pantheon thought him lost entirely upon the murder of Medusa,” Themis clipped. Crossing to Mayar, she gripped his chin and lifted up his head to brush his right eyebrow with one fingertip. Mayar knew she searched for the scar given him at age twelve, when he’d fought with one of Lenore’s “teachers,” refusing a lesson. “Well, then, dear Eros, I welcome you back to the fold. Jupiter will be pleased to see you... *after* inspection.”

“I welcome the chance to serve in Jupiter Optimus Maximus’ court,” Mayar replied, his voice steady and low. Pride surged through Mayar as he realised that he’d made it through the inspection as Themis called for a cloak.

“Get him on the plane. We must leave quickly in order to make it back in time.” Wrapping the heavy cloak around him, she smiled at Mayar. “Orpheus and Eros. Jupiter will be a most happy god.”

Aiden leaned his face against the cool window pane. He saw neither the rain flowing in rivulets down the outside of the glass, nor did he hear the thunder rumbling the heavens above them. Curling his knees up to his chest and wrapping his arms around them, he sighed and forced Mayar from his mind, choosing instead to focus on the things that had happened since he’d killed Ares. He thought about the pain of the brand on his arm, but the physical torment of Jupiter’s possession didn’t touch the agony blossoming in his soul at

being unable to present the black wedding bands to Mayar. Aiden turned his mind towards Jupiter's insatiable need to have him, and it hadn't even been twenty-four hours.

Mayar has to be goin' completely out of his mind.

A soft, warm blanket spread across him as a kiss pressed to his hair and a low voice came next to his ear, "Dominus requested I keep you company, Magnus Orpheus, in attempt to calm your frayed nerves."

"It's nae me nerves that be frayed, but I thank ye for yer offer." He curled tighter around himself, knowing the Broken would crawl into the window seat behind him, afraid to defy Jupiter's order.

He felt the edge of the seat depress before fingers ran through his short hair and a question floated on the air. "So you're Scottish?"

"Once upon a time." *Weel... this helps keep me brain from tormentin' me.* Taking a shaky breath, he added, "I was taken by Jupiter when I was but a bairn."

"Bairn?"

"A child." Aiden jumped at the loud crack of thunder from above, but the calming fingertips did not stop their comforting circles on his scalp. "A child of thirteen. I was chattel then, a servant at best. I only became a Broken when me brother couldn't deliver. Jupiter closed the door for me to return home, instructing me brother to follow the terms or he'd forfeit his life. Me family believes me to be dead."

"Rumours have it that you had a lover—"

Aiden pushed himself into a sitting position, withdrawing from his companion's touch. "It's legal to marry in London now. He'd have been my husband if we'd been given one more day together."

"Ye know they dinna know that ye're the only reason I still breathe, that the very heavens would tremble were I to lose ye."

"You know that I would raze all the planes of existence were I to lose you, Aiden. I would send this world into a bloodbath not seen since the days of Spartacus and his battle against the Romans!"

"Is he why you fought for the title of Freed?"

Aiden turned his face to the Broken behind him, finding the slip of a youth, eyes bound, to be wearing a tiny smile on his lips. Knowing Jupiter, the Broken

likely wore the blindfold because he was not to look upon Aiden's naked emotions. He shook his head, turning his eyes back to the storm outside the window. "Nae... once upon a time, I wished to return to me family, to see me mum and da again, but... the terms and conditions of me freedom prevented that, sae I took the name of me great-grandda and moved to London."

"At least you were free... that's more than any of us Brokens have ever entertained." The boy sighed. "Magnus Orpheus, forgive my seeming inability to comfort. Truly I do not embody my newly given name."

Aiden made a noise that resembled a single dry laugh. "And I do, lad? What about me is mighty? I'm a possession, a cow that needs bear a brand for fear I'll wander off and end up in someone else's field and must be returned. Orpheus... he was a poet and singer in love with someone he'd never be able to actually grow auld with, and though he challenged Death for her, the lass could nae follow instruction and sae she was lost to him. *Forever.*"

Mayar felt his eyes light with anticipation as Markins took hold of his arm. When one of Themis' guards tried to take hold of him, Markins stepped in front of Mayar, his voice as cold as ice when he spoke.

"I don't know if you're new or if you're just stupid, but *no-one* touches that which belongs to Jupiter Optimus Maximus if they value their hands." He looked down at the hand wrapped around Mayar's upper arm. "Remove it or lose it. Your choice. If your grip doesn't leave a mark, you might even get lucky enough to live to tell the story of your lost appendage."

Sufficiently startled, Themis' man loosed Mayar's arm, choosing only to accompany them to the door of Jupiter's inner sanctum. The plan had been to serve up Mayar to Jupiter with the hope that he'd eventually be left to his own devices, *and* to bide their time while Markins watched for the opportune moment to take Jupiter down. They'd never even entertained the *idea* that their chance could present itself the day of their arrival.

When Markins opened the door to Jupiter's private chambers, Mayar heard him chatting to one of the Brokens about the ceremony he'd planned for himself and Magnus Orpheus. Mayar's jaw twitched as Jupiter mused aloud for a better title to bestow his reluctant lover than that of Prince-Consort.

Mayar saw red and bowed his head to cloak his rage. The plan changed in that very moment. Markins favoured him with a sidelong glance and a tiny nod

to signal he'd follow Mayar's lead before he swept into the room, intentionally interrupting with a bold announcement, "Dominus, may I present to you a mighty gift? I give you Eros... returned from the shadow of oblivion also known as Orpheus' care."

Jupiter advanced, sliding one hand over Mayar's smooth hair before flinging his other hand across Markins' face hard enough to send him to his knees. "How dare you burst into my chambers as though you belonged in them! Gift or no gift, you announce your presence and give me the option to accept! Arrogant soldier, you know better!"

As he whirled away, he fluttered his hand at Mayar. "Help him to his feet, Broken. I will tend you later, for now I am focused solely on my husband to be." Jupiter did not stop to look as he directed his next words at Mayar's partner in revolution. "Markins, bring Eros and follow me. We will see him to his chambers, but first, I must stop by and see how Orpheus is feeling. I fear he is not himself today." Jupiter chuckled. "It took a while for him to acclimate to my affections last time, but he was a Broken then. Now that he is to be my consort, I shall forever need him at my side... and he shall be my partner in all things."

Mayar's jaw twitched again at Jupiter's words as he sank down to Markins, who mouthed silently, "At my hip. Take it. Hide it in your cloak. Take it as we stand." Mayar's eyes flicked to the knife hilt protruding from his companion's side. His blood boiled and he smiled darkly.

Oh, yes. I will have my bloodbath, starting today!

"My name is Silenus. I was instructed to provide companionship, comfort, and words of wisdom." His words trembled on the air, evidence of his fear of Jupiter.

"Ye keep me from losing meself in me ain mind." Aiden turned his gaze to the lad's face. "I suppose I do embody part of Orpheus' tale. I did fall sae desperately in love with a wee god of a man... he is me entire world. I would challenge Death for him."

"Would you now?"

Both of them whirled to face the door, Aiden's eyes widening when he saw Jupiter filling the lighted portal. His face wore a mask of rage, his eyes glowing hot with a betrayal Aiden didn't understand, and he moved to protect young Silenus. Swallowing his own fear, he nodded, answering, "Dominus—"

“I am your *husband*, Orpheus—”

“No, you’re not!” Aiden exploded. “I belong to a wee god, one who likely has gone out of his mind since me disappearance! I *promised* him I’d come home and I dinna. I *promised* him I’d never leave his side and ye stole me from it. I *promised* him he’d never be alone and ye forced me, Dominus, to lie to him. None of those moments belong to *you!*” Aiden shook as he shouted, “*You* are not me husband!”

“Orpheus, I—”

Jupiter’s words halted as blood spilled from his lips and a *crunch* preceded the tip of a blade’s emergence from Jupiter’s chest. Aiden put Silenus more fully behind him, wishing almost audibly that he had his knife to protect them both. Aiden’s ears caught a quiet suction sound as blood sprayed the wood door and Jupiter fell to the stone floor.

Markins stepped through the doorway with no weapon in hand, his face softening as his eyes found them at the window, and his lips spread in a smile. “I would like to present to you, Aiden Gillespie, the true head of Pantheon, and it is not Jupiter Optimus Maximus, though he’d have liked for you to have believed it.”

Aiden blinked slowly. “What?”

Chapter 7

Mayar smiled brightly as he pushed the large knife he'd used to reap his vengeance on Jupiter into Markins' hands. Not caring that Jupiter's blood still covered his face and chest, his eyes searched for and found Aiden in the dark bedchamber. He bodily protected another youth, as he had once done when Mayar first set foot upon this path. Noticing the window seat behind Aiden, Mayar's heart warmed when he realised that his lover had sought comfort in the same place where he'd once taken his own solace. Moving into the room, he stepped over Jupiter's body, thinking only of Aiden as he crossed to him, his hands reaching for the face he now knew he'd never seen without shadows. Tears spilled from Aiden's large cerulean eyes as he slid from his perch and hit his knees before Mayar.

Aiden buried his face in Mayar's belly, his large hands sliding up Mayar's back as he wept for a long moment. "I—I have *prayed*—I've prayed for this moment... and now that it's here, I—I dinna understand—Markins—"

"He called me the true head," Mayar murmured, running his fingers through the russet curls of Aiden's hair. "For that is what I am now."

"I dinna understand," Aiden repeated, lifting his gaze, the joy in it swelling Mayar's heart. "What does that even mean?"

"You were not the only one to keep secrets, Aiden. Remember that I told you when we met that my family was dead?" At his lover's nod, Mayar pressed a kiss to Aiden's brow and knelt before him. "My grandfather took the name of Uranus when he began Pantheon. Its face to the world was a rehabilitation of homeless youth. Some of the ones that joined—Jupiter and Medusa—were crueller than others, but at ten, I walked in on my grandfather and father doing horrible things to my brother. It was that day that my grandfather sold me to Medusa, the cruellest other than Ares, and he sold me to her to silence me. During the long flight to her home, I began to make my plan."

"Your plan?" Aiden whispered, burying his face in Mayar's neck.

"To take it over and dismantle the entire organisation. Admittedly, the execution of it took years, and at times, I almost forgot who I was and what I strived for, but at that critical moment when I thought all was lost, that surely I would die—" Mayar brought Aiden's gaze to his own once more, his hands framing his lover's face. "—the Fates saw fit to bring me to you."

"But ye... ye were sae—me wee god, ye weren't able to function—"

Mayar smiled up at Aiden, whispering, “No, I wasn’t. I still have very real nightmares and very powerful triggers, but three heads of the Pantheon hydra are taken and together, we can take it down altogether. Then we can make Pantheon into a company that does exactly what the world believes it does—”

Aiden’s lips turned up at the corners as he whispered, “We’re going to save them.”

“All of them,” Mayar clarified, lifting a kiss to his lover’s smile. “And so that you know, Aiden?”

“Sae that I kent what?” Aiden’s eyes widened when Mayar took the black band from his thumb and slid it onto Aiden’s left ring finger.

“I will marry you, Aiden Gillespie, and our passion will crack the earth in two and what was it you said before?” Mayar held up the black band that went on his own hand, biting his lower lip when Aiden took it and reached for his left hand.

“I said the verra heavens themselves would tremble were any to try and take ye from me.” Aiden’s mouth found Mayar’s in a searing kiss, one that marked both men as belonging to one another. “I swear it! I would see them all—”

Mayar pressed a kiss to Aiden’s mouth, his unique eyes sparkling as he murmured, “I know.” Wrapping his arms around his partner’s shoulders, he finished, “When Markins told me what had happened, I was so afraid, Aiden, and I realised that I’d reached my boiling point a second time. After you rescued me and took me to your home in London, you treated me with such gentleness and *love*, I’d decided to abandon my former plan.” He took a deep breath. “I abandoned it because all I found myself wanting was just to *be* yours and to live in the sunlight, and gods, you and I had such a beautiful life! I kept trying to pretend that I’d not come from such ugliness, that it wouldn’t follow me, that you were a soldier and that’s what all those scars were from, and then they took you from me. They took *you*, beautiful, precious, strong, and perfect you—they took you from *me*.”

“This is no the first time that I’ve—”

Mayar smiled up at him. “Aiden... the Orpheus to my Oceanus... it will never happen again. We will make Pantheon a place that will erase any memory of pain and suffering we lived through.” Pressing kisses to Aiden’s incredible blue eyes, Mayar nuzzled his nose. “And there it is: we *lived*... and so will they.”

Aiden stretched, wrapping tighter around Mayar's slender body, pressing kisses across his shoulders, his fingertips touching the bandage on his husband's right arm, his lips upturned at the modification to the brand underneath it.

In the timespan of a month, all of the corruption in Pantheon had been obliterated. Markins, under direction of Oceanus and in command of a team of mercenaries, had rid the five other branches of slave traders and put in place of them, what was known as a Titan. Mayar, known now as Oceanus, ran the Greece-based Pantheon and his ideas were changing hundreds and hundreds of lives. When they retired to bed each night, lost in one another, Mayar always fell straight to sleep afterwards, his head pillowed on Aiden's chest. Aiden watched his lover sleep until he couldn't keep his own eyes open.

It was remarkable to watch his wee god transform into a titan! Aiden woke up excited every single day, and he'd never felt so good... never felt so *clean!*

"What are you thinking about, mo chéile?" Mayar's words were airy, but he was awake enough to be cognitive. "Your gears are so loud..."

"I was thinking about us." Aiden kissed the crook of his lover's neck. "I was thinkin' about how brilliant our life is, how proud I am to be yours—"

"We'll be husbands later today."

His heart skipped a beat and nothing could stop his smile. "Aye, and it'll be brill. I cannae wait to say me vows to ye! Cannae wait to put the ring on yer finger, me wee titan!"

Mayar rolled onto his back, lifting a kiss to Aiden's waiting lips. "Will my beautiful Orpheus be singing? I remember that you mentioned in passing that you might be putting your vows to music."

Aiden blushed, stretching out across Mayar's body, his hands finding beloved smaller ones and threading their fingers as he brought them up next to Mayar's jet head. "I had thought to and decided that I just dinna have the voice for it. I dinna want ye to remember our wedding as the day that I caterwauled through me vows."

Mayar laughed loudly, loosing Aiden's hands to wrap his arms around his neck. "I can't wait to hear them. Did Markins tell you yet?"

"Tell me what?"

Mayar's copper eyes danced. "He located the island."

Aiden blanched as he whispered, “The island?” He blinked a couple of times. “The one from—the one I—*that* island?” When his lover laughed as he nodded all the way through Aiden’s stumbling speech, it sent a wide smile over the taller man’s face and he shook his head, running his fingertips through the warm waves of Mayar’s hair. “I never thought I was coherent enough to—”

“You always dream about it. If you weren’t having nightmares, you were dreaming about it. So I started writing down the things you’d say about it.” Mayar pressed kisses to his face. “After we found you and I found these—” He brought Aiden’s left hand to his lips, kissing the black band that sat on his fourth finger. “—I decided that I’d go through my notebook cataloguing the facts I knew about the island and enlist Markins help when I could... and Markins found it quite by accident.”

“What do ye mean?” Aiden couldn’t move and hardly dared to breathe as he watched Mayar’s expression.

He found it. He found the island. I’ve only been dreaming of it me whole damn life. I dinna think it truly existed... but he found it. Markins found the damn thing.

“I gave the journal I’d made to Markins to check it all out, and I told him to take photographs, but he said no, that he wanted to do us one better.” Mayar’s hands framed his face as he searched his eyes. “He suggested that be where we took our vows and he said that he wanted to be the one that married us.”

Aiden slanted his lips over Mayar’s in a tender, worshipful kiss. “It’s strange, ye ken, to think about how things were just over a month ago. Out of us two, I was the one who appeared the stronger, and ye were meek and mild. Now I’m the butterfly and ye’re the dragon.”

Mayar’s lips curled up towards his ears. “Ah, but mo chéile, even the wings of a butterfly may make the heavens tremble!” Raising up on his elbows to bring his lips to Aiden’s, he murmured, “And even as the world fell down around me, your butterfly exploded into a dragon to defend me... and I’ve been able to do the same for you.”

Aiden sank into Mayar’s kiss, dissolving entirely into his lover’s embrace as he held to Mayar, breaking the kiss only to breathe. “Never will I stray—”

“Nor I—”

Rolling them to their sides, Aiden did not close his eyes as they kissed, memorising the contours of Mayar’s body beneath his hands, branding the feel

of his lover onto his very soul in much the same way as Jupiter had branded his skin. The mark was one of possession, and it was a mark that Mayar had put upon his own body in the same place, but for a different reason. He'd taken the mark as a visible symbol of his love for and devotion to Aiden, promising him that never would there be a time when his world would not revolve around "*Just Orpheus.*"

And now... I'll never forget that I belong to Mayar, to me wee god. In another world, another life, I used to be Jupiter's Orpheus, but that time has passed. Orpheus dinna allow Jupiter to break him a second time, but did instead triumph over him.

"Maya—"

"Aye?" his lover imitated, sending a smile over Aiden's lips. Aiden's eyes glossed as he tried to find the words, and when he was unable to do so, Mayar slid his hand over the brand on Aiden's arm, whispering, "You are not *his*. You are marked *mine* and I am marked *yours*."

Aiden nodded. "Orpheus rising."

Mayar smiled proudly. "You are the centre of my world and there exists nothing if I do not have you." Kiss. "Nothing."

The End

Author Bio

M. LeAnne Phoenix would tell you that the worst time of her life was the two years that she attempted to take off from writing. If you asked her to explain exactly why she did such a thing, you would most likely get the mad attempt to arch an eyebrow like her dad and then a shake of the head as she told you it was unlucky to speak of such things. Suffice it to say, it will never happen again!

Born and raised in Fort Worth, Texas in the mid-1970's, Ms. Phoenix was young and wild (and even free!) during the crazy wondrous decade known as the 1980's and the even crazier but now grungy decade of the 1990's. Music is second only to the muses that live and breathe to fill her mind with beautiful men, and music always helps them to tell their stories. She is never without her iPod or her computer no matter where she goes, although, she does like to hike and take pictures of the sky and the moon, and even the occasional shot of the sun through the branches of a tree.

An avid cat lover, Ms. Phoenix has been owned by many throughout her life, though her current owner is one Lily-Rose, who really would like for her to step away from the keyboard and pay her some attention! After all, hasn't she earned it?

Also by M. LeAnne Phoenix: [World's End](#), [Butterflies are Free](#), and [Never See the Light](#)

Contact & Media Info

[Email](#) | [Website](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#)