

PRIMAL OF BLOOD AND BONE

JENNIFER L.
ARMENTROUT



The Primal of Blood and Bone A Blood and Ash Novel By Jennifer L. Armentrout

Copyright 2025 Jennifer L. Armentrout ISBN: 9781963135480

Published by Blue Box Press, an imprint of Evil Eye Concepts, Incorporated

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BOOK DESCRIPTION

The Primal of Blood and Bone

A Blood and Ash Novel, Book 6 Jennifer L. Armentrout

In the shadows and flames, Primals will fall...

And from the blood and ash, new gods will rise.

What was dreamt.

Poppy was never meant to awaken, and the consequences are devastating and far-reaching, stirring ancient powers from their slumber and transforming Casteel and Kieran in ways even the Fates couldn't have foreseen. But what that means is the least of their concerns. For now.

What was foreseen.

The Blood Crown has fallen, but what has risen is a far greater danger than they've ever faced. From flesh and fire, the Great Conspirator has returned to the mortal realm, and he wants only one thing. They must stop the true Primal of Death before he regains his strength, and it won't be easy. Even weakened, his influence is undeniable. His power, unthinkable.

Has come to be.

While the future of the realms rests upon them, they won't stand alone. The gods have awakened—each harboring their own blood-soaked secrets. But they must navigate an unbalanced realm, where every choice—past and present—has the potential to not only undo everything they've fought for but also destroy the very bonds that have Joined them together.

For the Harbinger and the Bringer of Death and Destruction has risen.

ABOUT JENNIFER L. ARMENTROUT

#1 New York Times and #1 International Bestselling author Jennifer L. Armentrout lives in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. All the rumors you've heard about her state aren't true. When she's not hard at work writing, she spends her time reading, watching really bad zombie movies, pretending to write, hanging out with her husband, her Border Jack—Apollo, Border Collie—Artemis, six judgmental alpacas, two rude goats, and five fluffy sheep. In early 2015, Jennifer was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, a group of rare genetic disorders that involve a breakdown and death of cells in the retina, eventually resulting in vision loss, among other complications. Due to this diagnosis, educating people on the varying degrees of blindness has become another passion for her, right alongside writing, which she plans to do for as long as she can.

Her dreams of becoming an author started in algebra class, where she spent most of her time writing short stories...which explains her dismal grades in math. Jennifer writes young adult, paranormal, science fiction, fantasy, and contemporary romance. She is published with Tor, HarperCollins Avon and William Morrow, Entangled Teen and Brazen, Disney/Hyperion, Harlequin Teen, and Blue Box Press; and PassionFlix recently made her Wicked series into a feature film. Jennifer has won numerous awards, including the 2020 Goodreads Choice Award in Romance for her adult fantasy, *From Blood and Ash*. She has also written Adult and New Adult contemporary and paranormal romance under the name J. Lynn.

ALSO FROM JENNIFER L. ARMENTROUT

Fall With Me Dream of You (a 1001 Dark Nights Novel) Forever With You Fire in You By J. Lynn Wait for You Trust in Me Be with Me Stay with Me The Blood and Ash Series From Blood and Ash A Kingdom of Flesh and Fire The Crown of Gilded Bones The War of Two Queens A Soul of Ash and Blood Visions of Flesh and Blood: A Blood and Ash/Flesh and Fire Compendium The Primal of Blood and Bone The Flesh and Fire Series A Shadow in the Ember A Light in the Flame A Fire in the Flesh Born of Blood and Ash Fall of Ruin and Wrath Series Fall of Ruin and Wrath The Covenant Series Half-Blood Pure **Deity** Elixir

> <u>Apollyon</u> Sentinel

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Shadows
               Obsidian
                Onyx
                Opal
                Origin
              Opposition
               Oblivion
           The Origin Series
           The Darkest Star
         The Burning Shadow
         The Brightest Night
          The Dark Elements
          Bitter Sweet Love
            White Hot Kiss
          Stone Cold Touch
          Every Last Breath
         The Harbinger Series
            Storm and Fury
            Rage and Ruin
           Grace and Glory
           The Titan Series
              The Return
              The Power
             The Struggle
            The Prophecy
          The Wicked Series
               Wicked
                 Torn
                Brave
The Prince (a 1001 Dark Nights Novella)
The King (a 1001 Dark Nights Novella)
The Queen (a 1001 Dark Nights Novella)
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The Lux Series

Gamble Brothers Series

Tempting the Best Man

Tempting the Player

Tempting the Bodyguard

A de Vincent Novel Series

Moonlight Sins

Moonlight Seduction

Moonlight Scandals

Standalone Novels

Obsession
Frigid
Scorched
Cursed
Don't Look Back
The Dead List
Till Death
The Problem with Forever
If There's No Tomorrow

Anthologies

Meet Cute

Life Inside My Mind

Fifty First Times

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Visions of Flesh and Blood
Special Thanks

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This is the first book where a name will be missing from the acknowledgments. MJ Rose. Melisse. Without her, the world of Blood and Ash and Flesh and Fire wouldn't be a thing. I hope she knew how grateful I was—am—and I hope all who read this know how important she was—and remains to be—to the worlds she published.

I would like to say a special thank you to the team at Blue Box Press (Liz Berry, Jillian Stein, Chelle Olson, Kim Guidroz, Jessica Saunders, Tanaka Kangara, Hang Le, and the amazing editing and proofreading team) and Simon & Schuster for putting up with me as I wrote this book, along with the team at Brilliance Audio. I'm pretty sure they all wanted to wring my neck at one—or multiple—point(s) throughout this process. Sorry? *awkward giggles*

I would also like to thank my agents, Kevan Lyon and Taryn Fagerness; my assistant, Malissa Coy; shop manager, Jen Fisher; and the hardworking team behind ApollyCon and more: Steph Brown, along with Vicky, Nita, Vonetta (and Mona Awad for moderating JLAnders), and Matt. Then there's Steve Berry for a long-overdue story time, JR Ward for helping convince me to write this series in the first place, and many friends and family. And, of course, a huge thank-you to you, the reader. None of this would be possible without you.

Some books are easy to write. Others are harder. Sometimes, the difficulty has little to do with the book itself and more to do with what is occurring in the world beyond the pages you just read. At the very least, I hope TPOBAB provided you with a much-needed escape, just as writing it did for me.

DEDICATION

For Melisse.

Without your support, the world of Poppy and Cas wouldn't exist. Without your wisdom, fewer people would've discovered their world.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The Primal of Blood and Bone contains material that can be perceived as passive suicidal ideation and/or suicidal ideation and mentions of assault that may be triggering or distressing to some readers. Please take care of yourself while reading.

If you are struggling, you are not alone, and help is available:

In the United States, you can dial or text **988** to connect with the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline for free, confidential support 24/7.

If you are outside the U.S., please visit https://findahelpline.com, where you can find international hotlines and resources in your region.

If you've experienced assault or need support, you can call the **RAINN National Sexual Assault Hotline** at **1-800-656-4673** (U.S.), or use their online chat at https://rainn.org.

MAP



To see a full-size version of the map, visit https://theblueboxpress.com/books/blood-and-ash-map/

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Characters

Aios – AYY-ohs

Alaric – AL-uh-rik

Alastir Davenwell – AL-as-tir DAV-en-well

Andreia – ahn-DRAY-ah

Antonis – an-TOE-nis

Arden – AHR-den

Attes – AT-tayz

Aurelia – au-REL-ee-ah

Aydun – AY-dun

Baines – baynz

Baron Torian – BAIR-uhn TOR-ee-uhn

Basilia – bah-SILL-ee-ah

Beckett – BECK-et

Bele – bell

Blaz – blayz

Bram – BRAHM

Brandole Mazeen – bran-dohl mah-ZEEN

Braylon Holland – BRAY-lon HAA-luhnd

Britta – brit-tah

Callum – KAL-um

Casteel Da'Neer – ka-STEEL DA-neer

Clariza – klar-itza

Commander Centren – kuh-MAN-der SEN-trun

Coralena – kore-a-LEE-nuh

Corvin – KOR-vin

Coulton – KOHL-ton

Crolee – KROH-lee

Da'Silva – duh-SIL-vuh

Dafina – dah-FEE-nuh

Dain – DAYNE

Daneal La'Zeer – duh-NEE-uhl lah-ZEER

Daniil – da-NEEL

Davina – dah-VEE-nuh

Delano Amicu – dee-LAY-no AM-ik-kyoo

Diaval – dee-AH-vuhl

Dominik Na'Lier – DOH-mih-nik nah-LEER

Dorcan – dohr-kan

Dorian Teerman – DOHR-ee-uhn TEER-man

Duchess and Duke Ravarel – duch-ess and dook RAV-ah-rell

Dyses – DEYE-seez

Ector – EHK-tohr

Edmund Hawley – ED-mund HAW-lee

Effie – EH-fee

Ehthawn – EE-thawn

Elashya – eh-LASH-yuh

Eldric Ashwood – EL-drik ASH-wood

Elian Da'Neer – EL-ee-awn DA-near

Elias – el-IGH-us

Elijah Payne – ee-LIE-jah payn

Eloana Da'Neer – EEL-oh-nah DA-neer

Embris – EM-bris

Emil Da'Lahr – EE-mil DA-lar

Erlina – Er-LEE-nah

Ernald – ER-nald

Eryx – EH-riks

Evander – eh-VAN-der

Everett – EH-vuh-rit

Eythos – EE-thos

Ezmeria – ez-MARE-ee-ah

Gemma – jeh-muh

General Aylard – gen-ER-al AYY-lard

Gianna Davenwell – jee-AA-nuh DA-ven-well

Goffry Beric – GAWF-ree BER-ik

Griffith Jansen – grif-ITH JAN-sen

Halayna – hah-LAY-nah

Hanan – HAY-nan

Harland – HAR-luhnd

Hawke Flynn – hawk flin

Heath Purcell – HEE-th PUR-sell

Helenea – heh-LEH-nee-uh

Hisa Fa'Mar – hee-SAA FAH-mar

Holland – HAA-luhnd

Ian Balfour – EE-uhn BAL-fohr

Iason – IGH-son

Ione – IGH-ohn

Ires – EE-rehs

Isbeth – is-BITH

Ivan – EYE-van

Jacinda Teerman – juh-SIN-dah TEER-man

Jadis – JAY-dis

Jaeden Va'Leir – JAY-den vah-LEER

Jasper Contou – JAS-per KON-too

Jathen – JAY-thun

Jericho – JERR-i-koh

Joshalynn – josha-lynn

Kastor Vasilis – KAS-ter vuh-SIL-iss

Kayleigh Balfour – KAY-lee BAL-fohr

Keella – KEE-lah

Kieran Contou – KEE-ren KON-too

King Jalara – king jah-LAH-ruh

King Saegar – king SAY-gar

Kirha Contou – k-AH-ruh KON-too

Kolis – KOH-lis

Kyn – kighn

Lady Cambria – lay-dee KAM-bree-uh

Lailah – LAY-lah

Lathan – LEY-THahN

Laural Hawley – LAWR-ul HAW-lee

Leopold – LEE-ah-pohld

Lev Barron – lehv BAIR-uhn

Lirian – LEER-ee-un

Lizeth Damron – lih-ZEHTH DAM-ron

Loimus – loy-moos

Lord Ambrose – lohrd AM-brohz

Lord Chaney – lohrd chay-NEE

Lord Gregori – lohrd GREHG-ohr-ree

Lord Haverton – lohrd HAY-ver-ton

Loren – LOH-ren

Luddie – LUHD-dee

Lyra – lee-RAH

Mac – mack

Madis – mad-is

Magda – mahg-dah

Mahiil – ma-HEEL

Maia – MY-ah

Malec O'Meer – ma-LEEK O-meer

Malessa Axton – MAHL-les-sah ax-TON

Malik Da'Neer – MA-lick DA-neer

Marisol Faber – MARE-i-sohl FAY-berr

Millicent – mil-uh-SUHNT

Mira – MEE-rah

Mycella – MY-sell-AH

Naberius – nah-BEHR-ee-us

Naill – NYill

Nektas – NEK-tas

Nerina Ma'lin – neh-REE-nuh muh-LIN

Nithe – NIGHth

Noah – noh-AH

Nova – NOH-vah

Nyktos – NIK-toes

Odell Cyr – OH-dell seer

Odetta – oh-DET-ah

Orphine – OR-feen

Peinea – pain-ee-yah

Penellaphe – pen-NELL-uh-fee

Penellaphe Balfour – pen-NELL-uh-fee BAL-fohr

Perry – PER-ree

Perus – paehr-UHS

Phanos – FAN-ohs

Polemus – pol-he-mus

Preela – PREE-lah

Priestess Analia – priest-ess an-NAH-lee-ah

Pulus – POO-loos

Queen Calliphe – queen KAL-ih-fee

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Queen Ileana – queen uh-lee-AH-nuh
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Raina – RAY-nah

Reaver – REE-ver

Regis – REE-jis

Renara – rih-NAH-rah

Rhahar – RUH-har

Rhain – rain

Rolf – rollf

Rune – roon

Rylan Keal – RYE-lan keel

Sage – sayj

Saion – SIGH-on

Sera - SEE-rah

Seraphena Mierel – SEE-rah-fee-nah MEER-ehl

Setta – SET-uh

Setti – SET-ee

Shae Davenwell – shay DAV-en-well

Sotoria – soh-TOR-ee-ah

Sven – svehn

Talia – TAH-lee-uh

Tamsin – TAM-zin

Taric – tay-rik

Tavius – TAY-vee-us

Tawny Lyon – TAW-nee LYE-uhn

Thad – thad

Theon – thEE-awn

Thorne – THOHRN

Tulis [Family] – TOO-lees

Uros-OO-rohs

Valyn Da'Neer – VAH-lynn DA-neer

Varus – VAY-rus

Veses – VES-eez

Vikter Wardwell – VIK-ter WARD-well

Viktoria – vik-TOHR-ee-uh

Vonetta Contou – vah-NET-tah KON-too

Wesley - WES-lee

Wilhelmina Colyns – wil-hel-MEE-nuh KOHL-lynz

Places

Aegea – ayy-JEE-uh

Atheneum – ath-uh-NEE-uhm

Atlantia – at-LAN-tee-ah

Barren Plains – bar-uhn pleynz

Bay of Bones – BAY uhv BONEZ

Berkton – BERK-ton

Callasta Isles – cah-LAS-tuh eyelz

Carcers [The] – KAR-serz

Carsodonia – kar-so-DON-uh

Cauldra Manor – kall-drah [manor]

Chambers of Nyktos – cheym-berz of nik-TOES

Cliffs of Sorrow – KLIFZ uhv SOHR-oh

Cor Palace – kohr pal-is

Croft's Cross - KRAWFTS KRAWS

Dalos – day-lohs

Elysium Peaks – ihl-LEES-ee-uhm peeks

Evaemon – EHV-eh-mahn

Garden District – GAHR-den DIS-trikt

Harrowfeld – HAHR-oh-feld

High Hills of Thronos – hie hilz of THROH-nohs

House of Haides – howz of HAY-deez

Hygeia – high-JEE-uh

Iliseeum – AH-lee-see-um

Ironspire – EYE-urn-spire

Isles of Bele – IGHelz of BELL

Kithreia – kith-REE-ah

Lasania – lah-SAHN-ee-uh

Laurasia Continent – law-RAY-zhuh KON-tih-nent

Lotho – LOH-thoh

Lowertown – LOH-er-town

Luxe – LUHKS

Masadonia – mah-sah-DOHN-uh

Massene – mah-SEE-nuh

Mountains of Nyktos – MOWNT-ehnz of nik-TOES

New Haven – noo HAY-ven

Niel Valley – nile valley

Oak Ambler – ohk AM-bler

Padonia – pa-DOH-nee-ah

Pensdurth – PENZ-durth

Pillars of Asphodel – [pillars of] AS-foe-del

Pinelands – PINE-lands

Pompay – pom-PAY

Saion's Cove – SI-onz kohv

Seas of Saion – SEEZ of SIGH-on

Sirta – SIR-ta

Skotos Mountains – SKOH-tohs MOWNT-ehnz

Solis – sou-LIS

Spessa's End – SPESSAHZ ehnd

Stygian Bay – stih-JEE-uhn bey

Tadous – TAHD-oos

Temple of Perses – TEM-puhl of PUR-seez

Temple of Perus – TEM-puhl uhv PEH-roos

The Three Jackals – thuh three JAK-uhlz

Three Rivers – three RIH-verz

Thyia Plains – THIGH-ah playnz

Triton Isles – TRY-ton IGH-elz

Undying Hills – UN-dy-ing hillz

Vathi – VAY-thee

Vita – VEE-tah

Vodina Isles – voh-DEE-nuh IGH-elz

Western Pass – WEST-tern pass

Whitebridge – WIGHT-brij

Willow Plains – WIHL-oh pleynz

Terms

Arae – air-ree

aru'lis - uh-ROO-liss

aru'sòl - uh-ROO-sohl

basalt - buh-SAWLT

benada – ben-NAH-dah

bloodsteed - BLUD-steed

ceeren – SEE-rehn

changeling - CHAYNJ-ling

chora – KOH-rah

Cimmerian – sim-MARE-ee-in

dakkai – DAY-kigh

Deminyen – deh-MIN-yun

demis – dem-EEZ

eather – ee-thohr

graeca – gray-kah

grul - grewl

Gyrm – germ

imprimen – IM-prim-ehn

kardia – KAR-dee-ah

kiyou wolf/wolves – kee-yoo [wolf/wolves]

lamaea – lahm-ee-ah

laruea – lah-ROO-ee-ah

Liessar – LEE-sahr

liminite – LIM-ih-nite

lyrue – LIR-oo

meyaah *Liessa* – MEE-yah LEE-sah

nota – NOH-tah

notam – NOH-tam

oneirou – oh-NYE-roo

sekya – sek-yah

Senturion-sen-TOOR-ee-un

 $signam-SIG\hbox{-}nam$

sirtian – SUR-tee-un

so'lis – SOH-lis

sparanea – SPARE-ah-nay-ah

syhkik – SIGH-kik

thanion – THAY-nee-uhn

tulpa – tool-PAH

vadentia – vuh-DEN-chee-uh

vellá – veh**-**LAH

vellám – veh**-**LAHM

wivern - WY-vehrn

Language of the Ancients

Kha thren loru – KAH THREN LOR-oo

Rha lali mi – RAH luh-LEE mee Unia eta eram – YOO-nee-uh ET-uh ER-um

THE PRIMAL



I floated through the nothingness, surrounded by darkness.

I had a distinct feeling I'd heard voices. *His* voice. Talking to me. Telling me stories. Pleading with me as a glimmer of light appeared in the dark. But then, the pain came. I remembered that. Intense, searing pain accompanied by suffocating dread that snuffed out the light.

I...

I did *something* to stop it.

But I couldn't recall what the voices told me, what had caused the pain, or what I'd done.

Now, I drifted.

Wherever I was, there was no sensation of pleasure or pain. No feelings of fear or excitement, hate or love. It was as if I had been emptied of all emotion and purpose. Whatever my identity had once been, it no longer held any significance.

I was a part of the nothingness that surrounded me, and stayed like that until a light flashed, sending out streaks of silver that pierced the darkness. A pinprick of sapphire-blue appeared as the light faded, growing brighter. Bolts of stunning emerald spun from its center and twisted around the blue. Warm, rich brown followed, curling itself around the blue and green. And in the center of it all was the beginning of *everything*.

It started with an explosion that left behind small, pulsing lights of raw energy—pure essence.

That energy rippled outward, molding barren lands and mountains where nothing had existed before, and all those small, pulsing lights twinkling in the skies above were stars. Bright, brilliant stars that began to fall, descending upon lands no longer barren. They crashed into the earth where great winged creatures ruled, and in other lands separated by vast bodies of water to the west and east. Those stars embedded themselves deep

within the ground, where trees sprouted from the land above them, nourished and grown by the star's essence below. As the trees grew strong, so did the stars hidden beneath, each nurturing each other until they rose from the earth.

As I saw them with eyes that mirrored their beginnings and features and skins that seemed to change on a whim, I heard their names whispered through all the realms, through all time. Gods. Benevolent guardians. Wrathful prosecutors. The watchers of man. Elementals. The Fair Folk. Fates. The first gods. The Great Creators.

The Ancient Ones.

And I saw their wars, first with the great winged beasts that ruled the lands, and then with their creations.

Because they had begun to dream of what was to come.

Ten of the Ancients.

The dreamers.

The protectors.

I saw their flesh turn to fire as they burned off their essence to create the first Primals and understood why. They were desperate to ensure the balance of power remained untainted because their dreams had warned them of what would happen if it didn't. A faint warmth sparked inside me and spread as creation *changed*. Gods were birthed from Primal unions—gods that would one day Ascend to Primalhood.

And those ten Ancients dreamed. They saw what was coming.

The beginning of the end.

And *I* saw that the end started with its very own beginning. The birth of a young god, born of two Primals and Ascended into Primalhood.

The true Primal of Life.

His insatiable thirst for life and curiosity led to the first being of duality, strengthening the truce between those who walked the land, and the winged beasts who owned the sky.

But I saw what the Primal could not. He hadn't created them in the ways of the Ancients. He'd given the beasts a choice. And from that singular act, something unexpected happened. For the fierce beasts felt beyond the physical, and that quality was passed on to the first being of duality.

Free will.

And free will led to choice. And from choice, emotion was born.

The warmth surged into heat as I saw the Primal of Life digging into soil soaked with a mixture of the blood of the very first draken and his. And I knew he'd spent centuries tending to the fragile life he was cultivating with his breath and will. I saw him lift a babe from the soil, their eyes a shining crimson that turned into a brilliant blue, then shifted into a mosaic of all the colors in existence before settling on a soft brown as he gazed upon the Primal. And I knew what was unknown to the Primal. That the free will from the winged beasts, which had been passed on to the draken, had then been bestowed upon the mortal.

But the ten who dreamed knew.

Even as they marveled at the tiny life he held. Even as they rejoiced, full of awe and pride, they knew it was the beginning of the end.

And I *understood* as the warmth pulsed in my chest and silver light wrapped in crimson and gold flashed behind my eyes. Because, for them, nothing was more miraculous than the creation of *life*. They cherished even their most nightmarish creations. Loved them just as deeply as they did the beautiful, elemental beings they designed.

Until they didn't.

Until their benevolence turned to apathy. They watched as the Primals grew closer to the mortals, and the first Primal fell in love—just as the ten had dreamed. They stopped seeing the beauty in creation and began to only see the grave cost of unrestricted growth as the number of mortals grew and spread, overtaking the land and destroying it in the name of new creation.

And I *understood* what the Ancients could not. That when they saw the Primals now unbalanced by emotion and decided to take back everything they'd created, they *too* felt.

I *understood*, as the Primals rose, and the Ancients either retreated into places of peace or were sentenced to the ground, what the ten who had dreamed only realized after it was too late.

That everything done to prevent what was coming had only ensured that it would.

Without the capability to love and hate, rejoice and mourn, gain and lose, there could be no balance. For every hardship, there must be prosperity. Hate could not exist without love. There could be no joy without knowing grief.

As the essence flowed through me, I *understood* that there must always be balance. Life must continue, and death must always come. Because I saw

what the ten Ancients dreamed—what they saw when balance was irrevocably disrupted.

I saw Ancients who had gone to ground and ones yet to Awaken claw their way free, shaking the realms. And I knew they were no longer the great givers of life and the anchors that kept the essence of the realms stable. They were the end that erupted mountains and turned days into endless nights, toppling cities of steel and drying oceans. I saw them rise, full of ruin and wrath.

But I also saw more.

Because in the center of those swirling colors, I saw the desperate King with the golden crown of laurel the ten Ancients had dreamed—the man who had descended from that tiny babe the true Primal of Life had held in his hands. I saw it all: the great power that rose as heir to the lands and skies; *she*, the first Chosen to fail, who was the true Primal of Life; and what the union between the bringer of life and the bringer of bone would unleash.

Two daughters.

Two Kings.

And the Great Conspirator.

It was inevitable.

The end would come.

But I *understood* what was threaded through those dreams and existed in the whirling colors as they faded into the crimson-streaked darkness.

Every beginning has an end. But for every end, there must be a new beginning.

That's what the ten dreamed.

The fall of ruin and wrath.

And the rise of blood and bone.



CASTEEL

Thunder rumbled in the distance as the wolven next to me stood rigid, his hands balling into fists as what I'd said about the Revenant sank in. He'd sung the very same disturbing rhyme that had haunted Poppy—my wife, my Queen, my *everything*—since she was a child. But it wasn't just that it was fucked up and triggered a violent storm of emotions in both of us.

It was also what that Rev—now in bloody pieces strewn across the floor—had insinuated: that *he* had been waiting a long time for what was his.

It took no leap of logic to know the Rev meant Kolis. And what he wanted was Poppy.

Kieran's jaw clenched. "Absolutely fucking—"

A low rumble shook the floors and walls, causing objects in the bathing chamber to fall over.

Kieran looked at me. "That can't be another god waking up." I agreed.

A sudden surge of energy filled the air, making the hairs on my arms stand up.

Stone cracked beneath us. A thin fissure appeared next to Kieran, quickly spreading in a circle around us and the bed. Another fracture formed at the foot of the bed, and more at the head and along the sides.

Kieran stepped back as yet another shallow rift split the floor beneath the bed. "What the—?"

Silver light sparked and spread along the cracks in the stone. It pulsed and held, revealing a circle with an overlapping pointed cross inside.

We were staring at an old Atlantian symbol—two symbols, actually. The circle with the line through it meant life, and the one at the top meant death.

Combined, they stood for life and death.

Blood and Bone.

As the intense brightness faded and the rumbling ceased, we both looked at Poppy. Eather emanated from under her skin, illuminating the intricate network of veins that ran throughout her body.

"My gods," Kieran whispered.

Hope and fear I'd kept in check this whole damn time crashed together, making me sway.

She will know herself.

She will recognize us.

Those words were like a prayer to the no-longer-sleeping gods as I repeated them over and over.

"Please." My voice cracked.

The glow faded from her veins as a mass of silver-streaked shadows gathered beneath her flesh like storm clouds in the summer. They rolled down her chest and ran over her arms and legs.

Poppy's fingers twitched.

My legs went out from under me. I landed beside the bed on my knees, watching as Kieran pitched forward, catching himself with his palms on the bed.

She will know herself.

She will recognize us.

A spasm ran through her arm, and her knee bent slightly. Picking up her hand, I shuddered as I felt the change. "Her skin is warm. See?"

Placing his hand over hers, Kieran exhaled roughly. "It is."

Relief left me fucking weak as her left arm jerked and her chest rose. I could've sworn ours did the same.

"Poppy," I whispered, leaning toward her.

A heartbeat passed, and then her fingers tightened around mine. Kieran gripped our clasped hands, and my cheeks dampened.

She will know herself.

She will—

All I could hear was Kieran's shallow, quick breaths as her lashes fluttered and her eyes opened.

There were no pupils. No discernible irises. Framed by thick lashes, they were orbs of pure molten silver, brimming with the essence—the eather—of the Primal gods.

I no longer felt the stone beneath my knees. Neither Kieran nor I moved.

She will know herself.

She will remember—

The air in the chamber became stagnant, and I had the distinct sense that time had ceased to function properly. Heart pounding, I inhaled, suddenly smelling the fresh, delicately sweet scent of...spring. Renewal. Life.

Lilacs.

Kieran stiffened, and because his hand still gripped ours, I saw tiny bumps rise along his forearm.

A new, slightly musty scent filled the chamber. It was like...stale lilacs. Or fallen leaves in autumn.

"Death," Kieran murmured, a tremor coursing through his hand.

He had always picked up that faint scent on her, but we'd never understood why.

Now, it made sense.

The breath I took halted as the grip her fingers had on mine loosened, and her hand went limp.

My throat was dry, and my voice was a coarse whisper when I spoke. "Poppy?"

The back of my neck prickled a heartbeat before unfettered power flooded the chamber once more.

But it was different this time. Stronger. I could feel it pressing on me and watched as Kieran staggered, going down on one knee. What felt like a charge of energy rippled from Poppy's hand into mine and then Kieran's. Hot and intense, it traveled up our arms, a silver glow tinged with gold and...shadowy crimson that lit up the veins.

"Fuck," Kieran rasped as fawn-colored fur sprouted on his arm before disappearing in a wash of light.

Every muscle in my body tensed as Poppy's veins once more lit with eather. Somehow, I knew. I *knew* what was coming. "Oh, shit."

Essence erupted from her, tearing her hand from ours and lifting her toward the ceiling. She was in the same position she had been in while in bed, her hair now flowing down like a waterfall of dark-red wine. Her gown rippled around her as tendrils of crackling essence arced from her and slammed into us.

The realm turned silver for the briefest moment before I flew backward, the power flinging Kieran to the opposite side of the chamber. I didn't hit the wall. Neither did he. Through the pulsing strands of eather, I saw him suspended in midair.

Pressure built in my skull and then spread, clamping down on my lungs. I didn't know what was happening. And, fuck, I couldn't think with the heated essence racing up my back and running over my shoulders.

Then, I felt it.

A quake began in the center of my chest, where the faint essence that all Atlantians carried within them resided, eather flowing into my abdomen. The energy ramped up, expanding and growing within me until the corners of my vision turned silver, shaded with gold and crimson. Raw, burning pain seized my heart as the eather soaked my flesh, drenching every vein and entrenching deep in my bones.

The power flowing through me felt unending and inescapable. Old. Inevitable. And I could sense it changing every part of my being. *That* was the source of the white-hot pain: the essence shattering bones in one breath before rebuilding and fortifying them in the next. I clenched my jaw as every vein in my godsdamn body collapsed and then expanded, strengthening as the essence wrapped itself around each organ. I bore the agony of my flesh catching on fire and then hardening, starting at my feet and traveling all the way up. As it reached the base of my skull, pain exploded in my head, shorting out every sense. My hearing. Sense of smell. Sensation was the next to go—thank the fucking gods. Right before it took my vision, I saw Primal mist seeping from Kieran's outstretched arms, swirling gold and silver.

And then I saw the mist churning around my arms in a dizzying rush of shadows and crimson.