

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

JORY STRONG  
**DIVINE**  
*Redemption*

ELLORA'S CAVE **Quickies**®

## **Divine Redemption**

[Jory Strong](#)

*While a standalone, Divine Redemption is a loose sequel to Death's Courtship.*

Their connection was instant, their attraction intense. Reincarnated souls reunited though neither consciously realize the depth of their bond. Temperance and Demetri love each other. Lust after each other. But a third waits, someone who will complete an already near-perfect union.

Thanos wronged them in a previous existence and, as the mortal son of Dionysus, was punished for it by the Fates. He's had lifetimes to repent, eons to witness the rebirths and deaths of the two people who have come to mean everything to him.

Now the Moirae have finally reunited the three of them, giving Thanos a chance to rekindle an ancient flame. For their part, Tempe and Demetri must choose him freely. While Thanos must avoid retracing old steps – and betraying his lovers once again.

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Divine Redemption

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# ***DIVINE REDEMPTION***

**Jory Strong**

### *Dedication*

A cyber-toast for my new editor, Kelli Collins: *Here's to a long and prosperous partnership. :)*

### *Trademarks Acknowledgement*

The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of the following wordmarks mentioned in this work of fiction:

Lamaze: Lamaze International, Inc.

## Chapter One

Hot water struck Temperance's tanned flesh. It flowed over slick skin and feminine curves in a hot caress that never failed to harden Demetri's cock.

She knew he was there, watching through the steamed glass of the shower stall. She'd known the moment he stepped into the bathroom, though she hadn't turned her head or acknowledged him.

It'd been like that from the very first with Temperance, the connection between them instant, intense. She'd come into the club where he worked as a bartender at night to support his real passion, his art, and he'd looked up immediately, known something important was about to happen. And it had.

In the packed room their gazes met and held. Electric attraction and pulsing need. Two souls recognizing each other even if the bodies housing them were strangers to each other.

In that instant he'd known he wanted to be with her forever. Later, when she was stretched naked on the futon in his studio, she'd said their meeting was fated. Told him about going with a friend earlier in the day for a tarot reading and drawing The Lovers card from the deck.

It had to be fate, he agreed, painting her flesh with colors meant to be licked and kissed away. Following the trail left by a swirling fingertip with his lips and tongue, worshiping her in a way he'd never done before with a woman.

Not that there hadn't been women. There had been. His looks and the bartending gig drew them, and if that didn't, the *artist* label did. But until Temperance, he'd never wanted to be with a woman more than he did another man. He wouldn't again. She was his one very permanent exception when it came to the female sex.

Demetri shrugged off his tank top and unbuttoned his shorts, letting them drop to the floor. On the other side of the shower stall she turned her back to the water then smoothed soapy hands over her breasts, played with dark, beautiful nipples.

She teased them into sultry pouts, at the same time teasing him into curling his hand around the hot length of his erection. He laughed at her antics, a sound that was equal parts amusement and gasp of sexual pain as he tightened his grip on his hardened cock.

In a minute he'd join her, replace her hands with his mouth and then kiss downward. But for now he'd torment them both by delaying.

His gaze traveled from her breasts to the hint of darkness at the apex of her thighs, the small triangle of pubic hair pointing to her clit. He couldn't see the swollen knob through the steamy glass but he knew it would be erect, flushed, the hood pulled back to expose a tiny, smooth head.

Demetri shuddered with need, his cock pulsing in his hand. He loved being inside her, but he loved sucking her clit almost as much. It probably came with being bi, closer to gay than straight. Then again, he loved everything about her.

He closed his eyes to shore up his resistance. Otherwise he'd be on his knees the moment he joined her beneath the spray of hot water.

Another laugh escaped. Why did he bother when they both knew he was her slave when it came to pleasure?

Unable to withstand the call of her body to his any longer, he went to her. She gave him a mischievous smile when he opened the shower door and stepped in.

"I thought maybe you'd decided being with a woman didn't do it for you anymore," she said, wrapping her arms around his neck and a shapely leg around his hip so her clit pressed to his cock, sending a bolt of pure desire straight through him.

He forced her backward against the wall. Pressed his cock hard against her swollen clit. "Does this feel like I've lost interest?"

"I'm not sure. I think I need convincing."

"I can do that."

He leaned in, kissed her shoulder, her neck. Found her earlobe and tormented it with his tongue until she moaned and pushed her hands between them, her fingers going unerringly to his nipples.

He returned to her neck, biting, sucking, the pain he gave coming back to him through her fingertips, spiking from his nipples to his cock so his penis jerked, adding pre-cum to the water that had already left it wet.

"Convinced?" Demetri asked, struggling for breath.

"Close," Temperance said, aching with the need to have him inside her, her mouth hovering just above lips so kissable they should probably be outlawed.

Men and women both hit on him, whether she was with him or not. His looks drew them, the dark-angel face and shoulder-length hair proclaiming he had an artist's soul in a totally fuckable body.

She teased along the seam of his mouth with her tongue. When he opened for her, she took his bottom lip, sucked and felt a shudder go through him. He moaned, grinding his cock against her pussy, her clit.

Her channel spasmed in anticipation, her clit throbbed. She knew what he wanted. To go down on her. He loved to bury his face between her thighs. Loved it even better when she had his cock in her mouth, sucking as he sucked. Laving as he laved.

Liquid hunger pooled in her cunt lips, parting them so she was open for him. Ready for his tongue and the hard length of his penis.

She brushed her thumbs back and forth over his tiny nipples. Followed it with twisting pinches meant to blend pain and pleasure.

Before being with Demetri, she'd never played sex games. She'd never trusted anyone enough to let them tie her up. Then again, Demetri easily switched roles so he



was often the one tied to the bed, the one on the receiving end of carnal discipline and sensual torment.

Arousal slid from her opening, heated like the water striking flesh. Anticipation pounded through her in time to the race of his heart against her palm and the throb where his cock pressed to her mound and clit.

His tongue tangled with hers. Stroked and rubbed and twined. His fingers speared through her hair, pinning her to the slick tile.

With a moan he lifted his lips from hers. "Say it."

Her nipples tightened in response. Her pussy fluttered.

Sometimes he made her beg. Sometimes he ordered her to pleasure him. But this time, the tone of his voice told her he was in the mood to prove he belonged to her.

"Get down on your knees," she said. "Put your mouth on me."

She reinforced the command with a hard squeeze to his nipples. Felt the jerk of his hips, the spasming of his cock.

He panted and closed his eyes in an instant of ecstasy before obeying, kissing downward, stopping to lick and suck her nipples. To bite them, returning the pain to her.

Her fingers tangled in the long strands of his silky black hair, tightened on them. Need rippled from her breasts to her cunt and her channel clenched, opening and closing, hungry for his tongue, his cock, even his fingers.

Heat filled her belly, making her cant her hips to rub against him.

"Just like a cat," he teased, "a pussy that wants attention."

She retaliated by tugging on his hair, pulling him lower.

He went, leaving a heated trail with his tongue, a stinging path of nips across her abdomen. Playful until he reached her mound and draped one of her legs over his shoulder for better access, and then all amusement left him.

"Beautiful," he murmured, his voice holding more than a lover's appreciation, holding that of an artist's as well.

The way he said it, the way he stared made Temperance feel feminine, desirable. Powerful in her nakedness. Unashamed and free of worry about imperfections of body.

She was bare except for a tiny triangle of pubic hair. She'd left it for him because he asked her to, because he loved the play of lines and shapes, curves and textures when she was his model.

Demetri touched his lips to the smooth skin of her labia. Ran his tongue through her slit.

"More," she pleaded, thrusting against his face, rubbing slick folds over his lips, her hands clenching and unclenching in his hair.

He fucked his tongue into her slit, retreated. Did it again. And again. Tormented her with the promise of a release kept out of reach until she asked for what she needed in order to come. "Suck me."

He latched on to her clit and icy-hot shards of pleasure spiked through her, radiating from her swollen knob. Her hips jerked in time with his sucks, arousal sliding from her slit with each hard pull of his lips, each rasp of his tongue.

She closed her eyes and leaned over him, hands on his back, fingernails scraping over his skin as her reality narrowed to the ecstasy centered in her clit. He stopped sucking, making her cry out and dig her nails into him.

His mouth was a tight seal around her stiffened clit. His tongue flicked and rubbed over the naked head in a demand she couldn't refuse. She straightened enough to fuck through his closed lips, her clit a tiny penis.

Whimpers blended with the sound of her rapid breathing. Sensation built, need and pleasure layering, sharpening and becoming too much to bear.

"Please," she begged. "Please, Demetri."

He answered by sucking her again and it was all she needed. Her head tilted back and she screamed as orgasm crashed through her, almost taking her consciousness with it.

Demetri stood and lifted her. She put her arms around his neck and her legs around his waist, though she felt languid, boneless, caught in a sexual haze, a euphoric high that was better than drugs or alcohol.

Satisfaction pounded through Demetri at having made her scream, at knowing she'd nearly passed out from the pleasure. He guided his penis to her opening and was rewarded by the hot clenching of her slick channel on his cock head.

Desire shuddered through him. He was desperate to be sheathed in heat and the tight clasp of internal muscles but he fought against pushing into her in a quick, hard thrust. He wouldn't last long. He was too close to coming.

There'd been times, when lust and love and gender didn't completely mesh, when he'd had to close his eyes in order to become aroused enough to fuck a woman. That never happened with Temperance. He only had to think of her and the need for intimacy arrived, demanding he seek her out or at least hear her voice over the phone.

Touch or intercourse, he craved both when it came to her. Love and desire for Temperance were as tightly intertwined as their two bodies during sex.

Temperance licked her lips, a siren call for him to lean in. The slumberous post-orgasm look was gone and in its place was the fuck-me expression of a born seductress.

"Do you want me to beg?" she asked.

Her tongue darted out, caressed his lower lip before she took it in her mouth and bit down gently. He felt her shiver with decadent pleasure at tasting herself on him.

"Sex with you has got to be a sin," she whispered.

There was no resisting the call of her body to his. His mouth claimed hers as he thrust hard and deep.

His arm around her buttocks and the wall against her back kept her just where he wanted her. Allowed him to use resistance and angles to his advantage as he pistoned in and out of her.

She came on a keening cry. Her channel clamped down on him mercilessly, with a force that demanded his total surrender.

He gave it to her. Panting her name. Words of love escaping as shudder after shudder racked his body in lava-hot rushes of seed and searing ecstasy.

Temperance unwound her legs from Demetri's waist. Her feet touched the wet tile and she laughed when he sagged against her dramatically.

"What's that term they use on those cop shows you love?" he asked.

She reached over and turned off the shower before the hot water ran out and they got blasted with cold. "Circling the drain."

"Yeah, that's the one. That's how I feel right now."

She laughed and bit his lower lip in a playful rebuke. "Not very romantic. Especially for an artist. You should be speaking in French, talking about *la petite mort*. The little death."

"That'd describe it too. I need a nap now."

"Poor Demetri."

"Believe it or not, I came in to tell you something. But then I got sidetracked by the sight of your naked body and what you were doing with your hands."

"So you're saying sex was the last thing on your mind when you stepped into the bathroom?"

Demetri pressed his mouth to the place where her neck met her shoulder. He smiled against her skin. "I'm taking the Fifth, except to point out that I *am* a guy, Tempe."

She curled her fingers around his semihard cock. It pulsed against her palm and started to swell. "Yeah. Definitely a guy."

He gave her a love bite and said, "Rudy called. That's what I came in to tell you."

"About Steven?"

"He's heading for another breakup."

Which meant he'd come back to Demetri.

She didn't need her hand wrapped around Demetri's cock to know he still cared about Steven and the thought of being with him sexually was arousing. She'd seen them in the same room together, and even though she'd been with Demetri and Steven had been with his current boyfriend, the attraction was still there.

It would be easy to feel jealous. Insecure. She might have, except she liked Steven. He was funny and sweet, flamboyantly gay and proud of it. He was also sensitive, needy, very high maintenance and always surrounded by drama.

Temperance brushed her thumb over Demetri's cock head and he thrust reflexively. They'd talked openly about his bisexuality. She'd accepted it from the start, knew that, contrary to what those who thought homosexuality was a sin wanted to believe, sex with a woman didn't cure the desire for other men. It didn't suppress the need that could only be satisfied by being with another man.

Her channel spasmed as she imagined watching Demetri and a male lover together, as she thought about being part of a ménage where all three people were intimately and physically connected. It'd been a fantasy of hers since she first started to daydream about sex.

She could still remember her first crushes and the two boys she'd wanted to grow up and be married to, though at eight years old it hadn't occurred to her that the boys might be married to each other as well.

Her hand tightened possessively on Demetri's cock. "I can't share you with him."

She'd end up feeling excluded and left out. Even if Steven were bi, he couldn't be more than a friend. The attraction wasn't there.

"I know." Demetri punctuated his words with a quick kiss. "The right guy will come along. For both of us. Until then it's just you and me forever, Tempe. And if you kill me off with the great sex, we'll just do it as ghosts."

A shiver went through Temperance. She used to joke about feeling the presence of ghosts, but she'd never actually been scared of them until the old bookseller had started manifesting in the building she rented from her gramps.

The ghost haunting her vintage clothing store was gone now, thanks to Bryn. And thanks to the stuff they'd discovered the ghost was guarding—including an ancient alchemist's book Ava was buying on behalf of a client—there'd be enough money for a lot more inventory.

She could also help others be successful at doing the things they loved. Like fronting the money so a friend's band could go on tour, and putting on an event showcasing not just Demetri's work, but some of his friends'.

He hadn't wanted her to at first, but she'd finally talked him into letting her do it for him—for *them*. He'd believed in her, told her she had what it took to own her own store despite the fact she'd been barely old enough to go into the bar and order a drink when they'd met. He'd convinced her that true failure was having a dream but being too afraid to go for it.

"I love you," she said, the feeling welling up inside her, sharp and intense and forever.

"I love you too." He hugged her to him one last time before reaching over and opening the shower-stall door. "I've got to get dressed and head to the club. It's my turn to do inventory. After that I'm filling in for Mark while he's at Lamaze class with his girlfriend. You going back to Vintage Threads?"

"Yes. Atticus brought his brothers by this morning. They wiped me out of 1920s and '30s stuff for men. Bryn's coming this afternoon to look at wedding dresses. She loves the idea of wearing vintage. It's perfect for her, considering she really *is* a ghost

buster, even if she doesn't call herself that. Toward the end of the day Ava is stopping by to pick up her bridesmaid dress and give me the check for the book."

"Come to the club after you're finished?"

"Yes."

Demetri stepped out of the shower. He tugged Temperance after him, grabbing a towel as he did. But instead of drying himself off, he crouched in front of her, cock hard against his belly, his testicles hanging in a potent display of masculinity.

He placed the soft material on either side of her ankle. Drying her skin. Slowly moving upward, over her calf and knee and thigh, stopping with his hand between her legs.

Her labia grew flushed as heat and need arrowed downward, swelling her woman's folds. "I thought you were in a hurry to leave."

Demetri leaned in, lapped his tongue over her clit. She was a sweet temptation he couldn't resist. "I'm never in too much of a hurry to take care of you."

"Let's use the bed this time."

He laughed and looked up at her, saw her hands on her breasts, fingers on her nipples. Squeezing. Making his cock jerk and leave a wet lick of arousal on his abdomen.

"*Circe*," he murmured against her heated mound, speaking Greek to her, naming her temptress, enchantress. Nymph and witch. Feeling the same sense of expectancy settle around him as he had the night he met her, the same knowledge that something important was about to happen. Not just in his life or hers, but *theirs*.

## Chapter Two

Awareness returned to Thanos, conscious existence. It occurred only when the amethyst he was bound to came into the possession of one of those he'd slain thousands of years earlier. His wife. His male lover.

In the darkness his body formed around him, insubstantial wisps of spirit. And his heart beat in painful anticipation, no less real despite the lack of a true physical form.

The pull upward followed his return to awareness. The force of it enabled him to cross the river Styx and leave behind the realm ruled by Hades.

He moved toward the mortal world and the amethyst. Traveled in shadow until emerging in blinding sunlight.

A blink and he found himself standing in front of an occult shop.

The gemstone drew him, its call undeniable. He stepped forward, passing through the building wall only to come to a frozen halt at the sight of the old crone.

Though her face wasn't fully visible to him, he knew the Fate despite the human flesh she clothed herself in and whatever name she might call herself in this time and place.

*Clotho.*

It was Clotho who'd listened to Demeter's request when the goddess decided to answer the prayer of a worshipper who'd named her son Demetrius. It was Clotho who'd acted on the plea for justice after learning Demetrius had been slain by his lover, a mortal son of the god Dionysus.

The Fate wasn't alone in the store, but the woman she spoke to wasn't the wife Thanos had murdered so long ago when he'd discovered her in bed with Demetrius. This woman's soul didn't recognize his.



Instead of relief at thinking this change might mark the end of his punishment, fear spiked through him. For centuries he'd returned to this world to witness the life and death of whichever lover had the gemstone. He'd watched unseen, a shade trapped in an endless cycle of repentance and regret and longing. And with each reincarnation, each lifetime, he'd hoped more fervently that one day he would be granted a second chance.

Had there been a god or goddess who might listen to his prayer and intercede, he would have uttered it. But even Zeus feared the Moirae, and Dionysus, while acknowledging him as a son, had no desire to interfere and draw the attention of the apportioners.

Clotho placed a piece of paper on the counter, saying, "This should cover the cost of the alchemist's journal. Neither my sisters nor I mind if you look through it while it's in your possession. One of us will come around to collect it as soon as we're back in town."

Thanos had no time to speculate on what fate the Moirae planned for the unknown woman for worry over his own when Clotho pulled a delicate silver chain from her pocket. The deep purple amethyst his spirit was bound to hung from it like a teardrop.

"Is this the necklace you keep dreaming about, Ava?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I thought it might be when you described it."

Clotho reached across the counter, taking Ava's hand and dropping the pendant onto her palm. "It's very old and valuable, but my sisters and I consider ourselves guardians only. Please find a way to give it to the woman you saw wearing it in your dreams. It's hers until death carries it to another."

"I will. Temperance adores old things. I know she'll love it."

*Temperance.* The name wrapped around Thanos like a beautiful fragrance. He'd known her by many different names, a new one each time the gemstone came into her

possession, unlike Demetrius who, because of his tie to Demeter, always bore the same one.

Clotho laughed. "Temperance. How fitting. The word amethyst comes from ancient Greece. It means 'not intoxicated' and possession of the stone was thought to protect its owner from drunkenness."

She closed Ava's fingers over the gemstone. "May this protect your friend, not from the intoxication that comes with love, but the tragedy that can arise when jealousy and anger whisper in the mind of a drunken fool."

Thanos heard the words as a curse. A rebuke. The naming of his weakness and crime. But from the sudden fear in Ava's eyes, she heard them as prophecy. Her hand covered Clotho's, holding it against the necklace. "Is Temperance in danger? Should I warn her? Her boyfriend works part-time as a bartender."

The hag patted the hand covering hers. "Forgive an old woman for dredging up ancient history. My words weren't meant to frighten you. Please, give the necklace to Temperance."

"I will," Ava said. "I'm meeting her at Vintage Threads in a few minutes to pick up a dress and get the alchemist's journal from her."

"I'll leave then so you can be on your way."

A final pat to Ava's hand and Clotho pulled away. She turned, merciless eyes meeting Thanos', and he fought the urge to step backward, to turn and flee.

Clotho's lips didn't move yet her voice slid into his mind like an icy spear. This time the choice will be theirs. Unless they willingly tie their fates to yours, when their lives end, your soul will no longer be bound to the amethyst or to theirs.

She moved past in a frigid blast of air that continued to chill even after she exited the store. But then it dawned on him what her words signified, and he warmed in a rush of hope and excitement.

Clotho had said *they*, implying that for the first time in thousands of years, his wife and lover had been reunited in the same lifetime. She'd spoken of *their choice*.

His heart thundered in his chest. For them to make a choice they must be aware of his presence. And unless they were to pass judgment on him as a ghost, then Clotho's words meant he would once again walk in this world as a flesh-and-blood man instead of a shade.

Desire swept into him with thoughts of Temperance and Demetri. His cock hardened. Throbbled at the prospect of reuniting with them.

He glanced downward at the thick erection pressed to pants he recognized as jeans, though he didn't curl his hand around his organ. Centuries of frustrated longing had broken him of the act. Part of his torment was to feel need yet have no way of finding fulfillment or comfort, no way to experience touch, even by his own hand.

Every moment it took for Ava to close the shop was agony. His impatience stirred the air, causing a breeze that made her glance in his direction several times.

Finally she locked the door and began walking toward a small car parked along the curb. A dirty flyer advertising the opening of a restaurant caught his attention.

Thanos paused to look at the date. It had been twenty-nine years since he'd last been in this world, when he'd witnessed Demetri's life on that occasion, and his death.

Grief and anger pressed in on Thanos. Fresh, raw emotions accompanying memories of a dark alleyway and the act of violence that left Demetri bleeding and dying as a filthy, drug-addicted scavenger stripped him of his wallet and stole the amethyst ring he'd worn since adulthood.

Thanos cut the memories off. Demetri's suffering was over and part of a past he had no knowledge of, just as Temperance's last reincarnation and violent death were part of a forgotten history.

Only the present mattered.

He hurried to catch up to Ava, sliding into her car directly behind her. She started the engine and pulled into the street.

Thanos leaned forward to glance at the newspaper headlines on the seat next to her, then sat back to look around as they traveled, to gather clues as to modern dress and behavior.

Ava's eyes returned again and again to the rearview mirror, making him wonder if she caught glimpses of him or was merely psychic and sensed his presence.

"Is Temperance's boyfriend named Demetri?" he asked.

Worry lines formed between Ava's eyebrows in answer. She reached toward the dashboard, touching her fingertip to a button.

Music filled the car. Another touch and it changed to talk about increasing violence in the city and the terror evoked in home invasions.

They reached Vintage Threads and Thanos exited the car before it stopped completely. Impatience made him rush ahead of Ava.

He came to an abrupt stop when he reached the end of his invisible tether. But the physical pain that accompanied being that far away from the amethyst barely registered as he saw Temperance through the shop window.

A fist clamped around his heart. His throat constricted. Had he needed breath to exist, he would have struggled to gain it. It was as if she'd been reborn in her original body.

Desire slammed into him, not just the craving of the flesh for pleasure, but the lust to possess something exquisite and beyond compare. It had been that way from the first moment he'd seen her, the daughter of a merchant accompanying her father as he strolled through the marketplace, trailed by slaves carrying bolts of fabric.

This day she wore a dress similar to one he'd seen her in before, when she was another woman, a free spirit coming of age in the 1960s. It'd been called a wiggle dress then, ivory silk covered in purple and green embroidery.

The thin spaghetti straps left her skin exposed. Begged a man to press his lips to her neck and work downward, pushing the miniscule strips of fabric off her shoulders so the garment would fall to the floor.

He wanted to be that man. To be able to caress and worship her body with his as he'd once had the chance to do.

Somehow it seemed fitting to find her in a shop of her own, surrounded by clothing worn decades earlier. As he watched, she hung a dress he recognized from the 1950s next to three wedding gowns placed side by side on hooks set in the wall.

Her face was alight with enthusiasm and happiness. It magnified the beauty he now understood resided as much in her soul as it did in her physical body.

He hadn't been the only one to notice her that day so many centuries ago. Heads had turned as she passed.

His drunken companions had all opined on her flawless face and feminine curves. His half brother Alkaios, also a mortal son of Dionysus, though on a lowborn woman, had lifted his cup of wine and wagered Thanos couldn't bed her.

It was a challenge Thanos gladly accepted. Victory a given.

Was he not a god's son? His mother well placed in society?

He had no memory of ever being denied anything he wanted, though with few exceptions, once he'd obtained the thing he sought, his interest waned.

Objects were given away or placed in his home and forgotten, only admired when some visitor took note of them.

Beautiful women and handsome young men were set aside. The beds he'd been so eager to gain growing cold with his absence as his attention moved on to someone else.

Demetri was the exception. He never tired of Demetri though he'd scoffed at taunts from his companions that he'd fallen in love with the young artist he'd sponsored and then seduced.

He could never bring himself to share Demetri with others, even with Alkaios who often joined him in bedroom games. Even with Temperance. But then he hadn't loved the woman she'd been in that life.

Possessing her had been an obsession, and the price of it marriage. It'd been no hardship to make her his wife. He found pleasure in her body, and eventually he would gain a legitimate heir as a result of it.

If his actions were fueled in part by pride and his desire to win the wager with Alkaios, then what of it? He was the son of Dionysus.

Thanos shook off memories of the past. He was not the same arrogant drunkard, the same self-absorbed man he'd once been. He'd had hundreds of lifetimes to fall in love with the woman he'd once married.

The metaphysical leash holding him in place slackened, as if whatever reservations Ava had about following through on her intention to see Temperance had been dealt with. He moved forward when she did, chafing at the slowness of her pace.

One step. Two.

A pause that sent frustration screaming through him.

A third step. Then a fourth, finally allowing him to pass through window and wall and into Temperance's presence.

## Chapter Three

Temperance lost her train of thought as her pulse sped up without apparent reason. It reminded her of the way she'd felt the day she was at Ava's shop, just before she'd pulled The Lovers from the tarot deck.

She shivered, partly in inexplicable anticipation and partly at the sensation of a phantom touch to her cheek, as though someone had run the back of a hand over her skin.

The door opened and Ava entered the shop. "Perfect timing," Temperance said. "I just got your bridesmaid dress back from the seamstress a few minutes ago."

Ava joined her in front of the dresses. But rather than reach for the gorgeous 1950s black velvet and cream shantung cocktail dress with a jersey bodice that she would be wearing to Bryn's wedding, she reverently touched one of the wedding gowns.

Temperance saw longing in the gesture. It made her hope something good would happen for Ava, or more accurately, *someone* good.

"Did Bryn choose one yet?" Ava asked.

Temperance gently grasped the skirt material of the dress on the far right and held it to the side. "Yes, she and Atticus came by a little while ago. She picked this one. It's from the '70s. I knew it was perfect for her the minute I saw it."

"It's beautiful," Ava said, brushing her thumb over the lace on the dress that had drawn her attention. "They all are. And well preserved. Like they've been kept for a daughter or granddaughter, because the memory and the marriage remained good."

"Exactly!" Temperance said. "That's what I love about vintage clothing. It's about more than a time period in history. It's about individual people and *who* they were, their stories in a way."

Temperance released the skirt with a satisfied sigh. Matching people to the vintage clothing that brought out the right attitude and made them feel empowered was her talent. It was her calling, in the same way Demetri's art was his.

Ava stroked the fabric of the dress in front of her again, and Temperance just *knew* the wedding dress was *meant* for Ava in the same way she'd known Bryn's when she saw it at an estate sale. Impulsively she reached out, giving Ava's arm a squeeze. "That dress is yours too. Keep it until you need it. Then we'll do a fitting."

Surprise registered first on Ava's face. On its heels a look that made Temperance think *premonition* and sent a surge of satisfaction through her. She'd done it again!

"Do you want to try the bridesmaid dress on before you take it?" she asked, even though the alterations had been minor.

"I'm sure it's fine. What if I try it on after I get home?" Ava laughed. "Actually, I'm anxious to take possession of the book and browse through it."

"It's stashed in the cabinet beneath the cash register. Let me get the dresses ready then I'll get it for you."

It took only a few minutes. Temperance hung the garment bags on a stand next to the counter before going around it and retrieving the book. She handed it to Ava in exchange for a check.

"To tell you the truth, I'll be more than happy to get rid of the book. It gives me the creeps, and not just because the old bookseller might have gotten murdered right in this store because of it. It's started showing up in my dreams, begging me to open it. And other times I swear I hear it whispering to me. Only I think if I *did* open it, it'd be a *huge* mistake. How's that for an overactive imagination?"

"I don't think you're imagining things at all. And I definitely believe it's a good thing you didn't give in to temptation and open it."

"Because it's kind of like Pandora's box?" Temperance crossed her arms and rubbed her hands over the goose pimples that were suddenly there.



“Not quite that bad, at least for people in general. But for an individual... Maybe.”

Ava slipped the book into her purse. But rather than immediately pull her hand out, she hesitated as if mentally struggling with a decision. She looked around just as Temperance felt a phantom touch, like lips pressing kisses just beneath her ear.

“I want to give you something,” Ava said, finally taking her hand from her purse and opening it to reveal a necklace with a tear-shaped amethyst that made Temperance’s breath catch and her heart turn over in her chest.

“This is a thank-you for the wedding dress,” Ava said. “And for letting me buy the journal on behalf of my client when you could probably have gotten a lot more money if you’d gone the auction route.”

Temperance couldn’t say no to the gift, or stop herself from taking the necklace and putting it on. Heat flooded into her as soon as the gemstone touched her skin, so close to being sensual in nature that she blushed as her nipples firmed into very noticeable points against the front of her dress. “I don’t know what to say except thank you. I love it.”

Temperance thought she saw a hint of worry in Ava’s expression and hurried to reassure her. “Seriously, I love it. It feels like it was meant for me. It even matches the purple in my dress.”

“Okay then, I better get home and put the journal in a safe place.” Ava took the bagged garments off the stand and left.

Thanos was swept from the store in her wake, sucked from the building despite the amethyst his soul was bound to being in Temperance’s possession.

Panic seized him. But before he was completely in its thrall, his spirit body became a real one and he was overwhelmed by sensation as sights and sounds and scents bombarded him.

He turned back toward the shop, compelled by the desire to rewrite the past and not because he was bound to the gemstone. He’d had hundreds of lifetimes to regret his selfish possessiveness, the way he’d held his heart closed to his wife and refused to

acknowledge his love of Demetri—all so he could boast and drink and carouse with Alkaaios and the others.

He remembered that first surge of jealousy when Demetri, who'd never been interested in any of the female courtesans or bed slaves he would have willingly shared early in their acquaintance, had hardened the instant he'd been introduced to the woman who was now Temperance. And she'd been attracted to Demetri as well.

How easy it would have been to woo her to the idea of sharing her bed with two men. Instead he'd wrapped himself in pride and possessiveness, in the arrogance of a god-son, and treated them both as exclusively his, to be enjoyed solely by him.

Slowly he'd alienated them. Driven them into each other's arms to lessen the loneliness. To find solace while he was gone, his attention focused on making another meaningless conquest.

Temperance stepped into view and the throbbing of his cock drew his hand downward. Even muted by the clothing he wore, the first touch to it in thousands of years nearly doubled him over.

Need poured into his bloodstream. Lava-hot and narrowing his focus to one thought, one goal—making himself known to her.

She stood on the other side of the glass door of her shop, turning a sign so it read *Closed*. His heart thundered in his chest, bringing with it a fear that tasted of nightshade and ash, one he'd never known until this moment—the fear of being rejected.

Her gaze lifted and met his. Surprise showed on her face, but in her eyes he glimpsed something more. Desire. Acceptance. The flickered greeting of one soul to another as if in recognition of the possibility of love, the very thing he'd seen so long ago and failed to cherish for the gift it was.

He reached the door and she stepped back, allowing him to enter the shop despite the sign and her intention to close. In hundreds of lifetimes he'd thought of what he might say to her should she ever become aware of his presence, and yet now his throat was too tight and his mouth too dry to speak.

*I want him*, Temperance thought, unable to take her eyes off the man in front of her. It was the same pulse-pounding need she'd felt the first time she'd seen Demetri.

She felt as though she should ask if they'd met before. But she knew they couldn't have. He wasn't someone she would forget.

"Can I help you?" she asked instead, blushing at how breathless she sounded, at the way her nipples had hardened further against the thin material of her dress.

She reached up and closed her hand around the amethyst. His gaze followed the movement then lowered, caressing her body before lifting to collide with hers again.

"I saw you through the glass and wanted to meet you," he said. "I hoped you'd allow me to buy you a drink somewhere and get to know you better. My name is Thanos."

His voice poured liquid heat into her belly. He had the same accent Demetri did after spending any amount of time around his elderly relatives.

Thanos held out his hand and she gave him hers. Shivered in reaction to the first touch of skin to skin. "I'm Temperance."

The mix of hope and desire in his eyes called to her. Her gaze dropped unconsciously to the bulge at the front of his jeans and she caught herself licking her lips.

Heat flamed through her cheeks. That and his harsh exhale had her hastily looking up.

"I've got a boyfriend," she blurted, feeling totally out of control.

Thanos stepped closer, surrounding her in masculine pheromones and his unique scent. He cupped her face, his palm warm, commanding yet gentle. "What's his name?"

"Demetri."

Thanos' eyes closed, as if to hide the longing in them, as if the name meant something to him. "Do you know him?" she asked.

"Not your Demetri." He met her eyes again. "Will he share you?"

Her heart did a crazy flip-flop in her chest. She knew with absolute certainty Demetri would want Thanos. Believed at her core Thanos could be the right one for both of them. It seemed destined, like drawing The Lovers and meeting Demetri that same night.

"Yes," she answered, adding on a whisper, "but he'd expect to share completely. He's bi."

Thanos' smile made his features more perfect than they already were. "Good, so am I."

He rubbed his thumb over her bottom lip. Her tongue darted out to taste him before she took him into her mouth.

His breathing hitched and he moved closer. Rewarded her with the feel of his hand cupping her breast and his erection pressed to her belly.

He leaned in, mouth caressing her cheek, seeking out her ear as if he knew it was a devastating erogenous zone for her. "You're the first person, male or female, that I've touched sexually in more years than I care to remember."

"Why?"

He laughed, a sound holding bitter regret. "Because I was a fool and I've paid the price for it with abstinence and loneliness."

She believed him. Despite his being a stranger.

Temperance leaned back, wanting to see his eyes as she asked, "Are you looking for just a night of fun? Or something more?"

"More. I think it's fair to say you'll have a hard time getting rid of me. I hope you won't want to."

His hand cupped her hip. The heat from it burned through her dress. He touched his mouth to hers. "You're beautiful, but I imagine Demetri tells you that daily."

She smiled against his lips. "And I imagine men and women both throw themselves at you. In another time you could have claimed to be a god from Olympus and been believed."

"A god's son maybe. Never a god."

"What god?" she teased, knowledgeable about Greek mythology because of Demetri.

"Dionysus, though being his son would most likely have landed me in Hades for my excesses and hubris."

His words touched her, and though he joked, she heard remorse underneath them, a sorrow that matched his earlier admission to having been a fool and paid the price.

She wound her arms around his neck. The dress and nearly nonexistent strapless bra did nothing to hide her response to him.

Her channel clenched when his hand moved around to stroke her buttocks, when the thumb of the other brushed over her nipple. Her body tightened in an agony of need and her lips parted in an invitation to kiss.

He accepted, taking his time to savor and taste, only sliding his tongue into her mouth when she whimpered in a feminine demand for a deeper connection, a symbolic penetration.

If her arms hadn't been wound around his neck, her fingers tangled in midnight black hair, she would have lifted her dress and begged him to unzip his pants and rub his hot length against her mound and clit.

Kissing. Letting him touch her breasts, making him come outside her body. She could go that far without feeling as though she'd cheated on Demetri. She could accept Demetri engaging in the same heavy petting without anal or oral sex, if he met a man he felt sure she would desire too. One he thought might become part of a permanent threesome.

Desire rode Thanos, unshakable need heightened by the press of Temperance's body to his and the sweet sounds of pleasure she made as he kissed and touched her. He'd die if he didn't come soon. Not the quick flash into nothingness he'd experienced repeatedly for thousands of years, but a slow, pounding agony centered in his cock and testicles.

Want was too tame a word for what he felt as his tongue delved into her mouth, tasting her, his lips eating hungrily at hers, gorging on sensation, on yielding softness and feminine responsiveness. This was the true ambrosia of the gods, a banquet feast for one, though had Demetri been present, Thanos would have willingly shared it.

He wanted to strip her bare and touch his mouth to every inch of skin. To bury his face between her thighs and lap at swollen, opened folds before rising above her and bathing his cock in the wet juices of a woman made ripe and ready for her lover.

She smelled of honeysuckle and aroused woman. Felt like liquid fire in his arms, burning him where he stood.

That they might be seen through the glass by someone passing the store only added to the urgency. He welcomed the prospect of someone bearing witness to his claim on her.

His cock spasmed in warning, in screaming protest at being ruthlessly confined in pants tight enough to strangle. His hand dropped away from her breast and with quick, desperate movements he freed himself, only to pant and shudder when skin touched skin for the first time, even if it was his own.

He took himself in hand, knowing that if her fingers were curled around his length instead of his own, he would come, wetting her dress with seed.

The vision of it was enough to test his control. He hung on to it by tightening his fist on his erection. Fought to stave off release even as he tested and tormented himself further by using his free hand to gather the hem of her dress and jerk it upward.

The fabric settled beneath her breasts, trapped there by the returned press of his body to hers. The touch of his cock head to her smooth belly, the feel of miniscule

panties against the back of his hand nearly stripped away the small measure of control he'd managed.

He grasped the silky waistband of her panties, intending to tug them downward so he could hold her against the counter as she wrapped her legs around his waist and welcomed him into her body.

Her hand covered his before he could bare her. "No, not until Demetri is with us," she said, stopping him and stripping away his pride.

"Let me find release with you. It's been so long I nearly came with the touch of my own hand."

His admission went straight to Temperance's head. It filled her with an incredible sense of her own femininity and power, heightened the lust that had made her wet and swollen with the first glimpse of him.

"Step back. Just for a second," she told him.

She thrilled at the effort it took for him to do as she asked, though he only separated himself from her by mere inches. His expression reflected a need she'd only seen when one other man looked at her — Demetri.

Temperance collected the hem of her dress and pulled it over her head. The bra followed.

Thanos' harsh breathing was her reward. As was the way he kissed her swollen breasts with reverent intensity, pausing to suck and bite her nipples until her back arched and her breath was as short as his.

Lust streaked through her, moving like molten lava from the places his tongue and lips touched to her flushed labia and rigid clit. When his hands swept down her sides in a prelude to removing her panties and entering her, she didn't want to deny him, didn't want to stop him. She ached to feel him inside her, filling her, claiming her. But nothing had changed.

She wound her arms around his neck. Used her upper-body strength to enable her to wrap her legs around his waist.

“Like this,” she said, hoping it would be enough to take the desperate edge off both of them and keep her from violating Demetri’s trust.

Thanos was lost the moment she pressed arousal-soaked panties to his naked cock. He turned toward the counter, using it to brace her buttocks as his arms locked her lower body to his.

Once it would have shamed him to take a woman this way, but desire for Temperance left him willing to accept anything she gave him.

“I could spend a lifetime pleasuring you,” he said as he fucked against her mound, his cock wet and the foreskin pulled back.

Each thrust was carnal torment. A trial of endurance that made him shake with need.

He kissed her feverishly. Lips. Neck. Ears. Finally taking her mouth as her whimpers turned into a cry of release he was helpless against.

His hips jerked frantically. An urgent, mindless rush that ended in nearly unbearable ecstasy.

He came, grinding against her. Wetting her belly with seed.

And hardened again when she said, “We should get cleaned up so I can introduce you to Demetri.”



## **Chapter Four**

Colorful lights flashed in a darkened room packed with bodies. Music pulsed, a primal beat riding underneath the modern rhythms and sounds.

The smell of beer and sweat and sex surrounded Thanos, overwhelming his senses so it took him a moment to notice how much the world had changed.

Men danced together, arms entwined and mouths locked in passionate embrace. Women did the same, while scattered among the same-sex couples were heterosexual ones, as well as those in which one member dressed in clothing at odds with their true gender.

Thanos followed Temperance into the crowd, his hand on her back, not to avoid losing her but because he needed to touch her. Memories rooted in their shared past interspersed randomly with images from the lives that had come afterward, flickering as wildly as the lights flashing above the dance floor.

Pleasure and pain wrapped around Thanos' heart like a tightened fist with the first sight of Demetri. He looked as Temperance did, as if he'd stepped from the days of ancient Greece.

Need shuddered through him, a lust every bit as potent as what he felt for Temperance. A desire that intensified when Demetri looked up and their eyes met over Temperance's head.

Thoughts of sex flooded Demetri's mind. Raw and graphic and without the tender emotions that accompanied lovemaking with Temperance.

It was a base, carnal reaction, though by the time he left the area behind the bar, a kind of surreal *déjà vu* had merged with the lust. This was like the night he'd met Temperance. Only tonight she was with another man.

He never worried she would cheat on him. Even now, when she reached him smelling of sex and allowing a stranger's possessive touch.

Demetri pulled her into a hug. His bare arm brushed against the hand on her back and sent a spike of icy-hot desire straight to his cock.

"Are you off work?" she asked.

"Yeah. Mark's on. I was just hanging out behind the bar until you got here."

"This is Thanos," she said, loudly enough for it to serve as an introduction. Then leaned forward, her mouth close to his ear for a more private message. "I think he's the one. Ask him to dance with you."

He took her earlobe in his mouth and gave it a small suck before biting down. It was a claim and a challenge at the same time.

Thanos met it by boldly placing a hand on Temperance's hip. The gesture was possessive but the nearness of his hand to where Demetri's erection pressed against his cut-offs had his cock throbbing.

Demetri flicked his tongue into her ear canal and she shivered, her nipples hard points against his chest.

"You've been with him," he said.

"A little bit. Not all the way." Her arms tightened and she rubbed her mound against his cock. "I want to."

A fast song merged into a slow one. Demetri took his mouth from Temperance's ear and stepped out of the hug. "Dance?" he asked Thanos.

Thanos lowered his gaze to where Demetri's cock was a noticeable bulge against the front of his shorts. "I think I can manage it."

Demetri wasn't sure he could.

That didn't stop him.

They reached the dance floor and Thanos' hands went to Demetri's hips. Demetri returned the favor, his hands settling in about the same place on Thanos' body.

Despite the eagerness and anticipation stretching taut between them, they didn't immediately press their bodies to each other's. They drew out the moment, only slowly closing the distance between them.

Even with the barrier of clothing separating them, Demetri shuddered in pleasure at the first touch of cock to cock. Thanos' low moan said he was equally affected.

He didn't think he'd be able to wait until they got home before having sex. "It's been a long time," Demetri said, "not since I met Temperance."

"It's been a long time for me too."

Demetri believed him. He'd been born with a pretty good bullshit meter and working as a bartender had honed it to perfection.

He closed his eyes and gave in to the rub and press, the building of need that came with scent and sound and movement. Music was like art—it called to his soul, anchoring him in the moment, the here and now, intensifying emotion and sensation.

He was aware of Thanos leaning in, stopping close enough his mouth was only a breath away. And then Demetri was the one to moan as Thanos' lips touched his, masculine in contrast to Tempe's feminine, his tongue a bold invasion, a call to sensual battle that would determine who dominated and who submitted.

He fought to keep his hips from pumping in the same rhythm as the thrust of Thanos' tongue. He fought against coming in his pants like a virgin making out for the first time.

His hands tightened on Thanos' waist. He sucked Thanos' tongue, eliciting a moan accompanied by the hard thrust of cock against cock.

Demetri could feel Temperance's eyes on them and it heightened the desire. He didn't need foreplay. Didn't care whether it was pure lust or something that could lead to love, not with the images cascading through his mind.

This felt right, like destiny arrived, the same as meeting Temperance had. He opened his eyes and asked, "What did you and Tempe do together?"

“Not enough. I wanted to put my mouth on her and taste her. I wanted to shove myself into her slit. But she wouldn’t do more than take off her dress and bra then let me fuck against her silky panties until I came on her smooth belly.”

Demetri nearly came imagining it. “When the song ends, there’s a room we can use here. It’s one of the perks of being an employee. I won’t risk Temperance. You’ll have to wear a condom.”

“If that’s what it takes, it’s acceptable to me until you come to trust me when I say there is no chance of contracting anything from me.”

Thanos leaned in, touching his lips to Demetri’s. His hand cupped Demetri’s cock, slid up and down the hardened length. “Before the night is over, I’ll put my mouth on you. Would you like that?”

Demetri managed a *yes* before they kissed again, hands roaming freely now.

Temperance lifted the drink she’d ordered. She took a sip though the slide of liquid down her throat did nothing to cool her off as she watched Demetri and Thanos.

It was easy to imagine them naked. Lips and hands wandering. Hardened cocks touching, glistening with arousal.

She’d never thought of herself as a voyeur before, never been turned on watching as couples, mixed or same sex, did everything except fuck on the dance floor. But it sent a rush of heat straight to her labia to see Thanos touch his mouth to Demetri’s, to imagine their tongues twining as they ground against one another in time to the throbbing beat of the music.

She clamped her legs together. It only intensified the need to touch and be touched. She was more than ready to act on the desire she felt for Thanos, and to see Demetri do the same.

A man claimed the stool next to hers, sitting so close the invasion to her personal space forced her to turn her head and look at him. His gaze roved her body, undressing her, and she slid to her feet, her dislike of him instinctual.

He tilted his head in the direction of the dance floor. "They look good together. But then my brother has always chosen only the most exquisitely formed to be his bedmates."

Her pulse sped up and her chest went tight. She took a step and his hand was suddenly on her wrist.

"Dance with me. Perhaps then the four of us can find pleasure together. In the old days Thanos often shared his lovers with me. My name is Alkaios. Do you know it?"

Temperance gave a quick tug to her arm and gained her freedom. "No," she said, both to his suggestion and his question, though his words had doubt creeping into her thoughts like a slow poison.

She abandoned her drink in favor of joining Demetri and Thanos on the dance floor. They pulled apart then drew together again with her held between them.

"What's wrong?" Demetri asked, sensitive to her emotions.

The heated need that had coiled in her belly only moments earlier was now a seething mass of nerves and self-doubt, of worry she'd been a gullible fool to believe Thanos.

She hugged Demetri then turned in their arms so she could see Thanos' face. She'd rather confront him now than talk herself into letting her fears go. "Your brother wanted me to dance. He thought maybe you were arranging a foursome because you often share your lovers with him."

"Alkaios is here?"

Thanos' surprise seemed genuine. He immediately glanced toward where she'd been sitting. When his eyebrows drew together, she looked and found Alkaios gone.

"Is what he said true?" she persisted. "Are you hoping for a foursome?"

Thanos' attention snapped back to her. His gaze was intense, as if every fiber of his being was focused on her. "I haven't seen Alkaios in years. The last time I was in his company, a night of excess ended in the destruction of my marriage and my losing

someone I loved. I've changed since then, though Alkaios hasn't witnessed it. What I said to you in your store is the truth—I am looking for something more, and I believe I can find it with you and Demetri."

He leaned in, touched his lips to hers. "Trust me, Temperance. Please give me a chance."

Temperance melted. The knots in her stomach turned into heated need once again. She pressed a soft kiss to his mouth as Demetri said, "Let's go somewhere private."

They left the dance floor and headed toward the stockroom that had a small bedroom built off it. With each step Temperance's cunt lips grew more swollen and flushed. Her nerves felt stretched taut by the time they reached the bedroom.

Demetri picked up a sign lying on a nearby shelf and slid it into a holder on the door. It read *Fucking in Progress*, his boss's idea for making sure there were no interruptions.

They entered the room. She'd been there before with Demetri, though not often. Most of the time they went home and made love all night long rather than go for a quickie at the club.

Demetri's boss used the room far more often than any of his employees, probably because the music drowned out the sounds of whips and floggers striking flesh, and men begging to be allowed to come.

A king-sized bed dominated the room. The restraints looped neatly over the posts were the only clue as to what kind of things went on in it. The rest of the toys were locked in a huge wooden chest.

Demetri went to the closet. Along with emptying the trashcan of used condoms, covering the mattress with a sheet was an absolute rule for using the room.

Thanos knelt in front of her. His hand curled around her ankle and the heat from it wound around her leg and made her pussy clench in anticipation of having him touch her there.

He removed first one sandal and then the other. Demetri joined them, shedding his clothing, his hand circling his cock as Thanos' palms glided upward, caressing her calves before sliding beneath her dress.

His fingers curled around the waistband of her panties, tugged so they slid downward and fell to the floor. He gathered the hem of her dress next, lifted it, baring her to his view.

The way he looked at her cunt, feral intensity and masculine hunger, made her shiver and part her legs in invitation.

He answered by leaning forward. Putting his mouth on her. And it was sheer bliss.

Demetri kissed her neck, heightening her need by sucking on an earlobe then dipping his tongue into the canal. "Take your dress and bra off, Tempe."

She complied and he rewarded her by cupping her breasts and tugging at her nipples as the length of his cock pressed against her buttocks.

She tangled her fingers in Thanos' hair and held him to her. Moaned as his tongue fucked into her slit then left to swirl over her clit.

His hand caressed her buttock before curling around Demetri's cock and making him pant with pleasure.

She wanted Thanos' mouth to stay between her legs forever, it felt so good. But she'd already been with him, while Demetri hadn't.

Somehow she found the strength to urge Thanos upward, away from her mound and swollen clit.

He kissed her belly. Licked over a nipple. Paused for a series of sucking bites before taking her lips in a carnal sharing.

Demetri's hands left her breasts and unbuttoned Thanos' shirt, parted it and pushed it off his shoulders so it joined her dress on the floor. She shivered at the feel of his chest against hers, at the feel of Demetri's fingers rubbing over her nipples and then doing the same to Thanos'.

"You're still wearing too many clothes," she said, kneeling, conscious of the two of them kissing as she undid Thanos' jeans.

His cock sprang free and she couldn't resist the temptation it posed. She took him in hand, loving the way he was so aroused that the foreskin was pulled back, revealing the wet head.

He'd already kicked off his shoes. A tug and his jeans slid down.

He stepped out of them and she steadied herself with a hand to his thigh. Beneath warm skin the muscle was rock hard, making her think of statues of Greek gods even as tiny tremors were a testament that he was made of flesh and blood, not stone.

She touched her lips to his cock and he cried out. His fingers tangled in strands of her hair, carrying it to her face as he caressed her cheek, subtly encouraging her to take more of him into her mouth, to suck him. She did as he wanted, as they all wanted. And thrilled at how he gave himself completely to her, not hiding how desperate he was for her touch or how much he enjoyed it.

Demetri's hand joined Thanos', tangling in her hair, a restraint rather than a silent plea for her to suck harder, faster. "Don't make him come, Tempe. Make him wait until he's inside you."

Thanos could barely think under the onslaught of sensation. Of Temperance pleasuring him with her mouth as Demetri's cock throbbed against his palm, pulsed as he moved his hand up and down its thick, heated length, as one kiss melded into another.

His buttocks clenched against coming. Yet he made a sound of protest, panted and thrust reflexively when Temperance's lips pulled away from him, leaving his cock glistening from where her mouth had been.

"Let's get on the bed," she said, and he was only too happy to comply.

It seemed perfectly natural to have Temperance lie between them. Once he couldn't have imagined sharing her this way, but now there was only joy in kissing her and



seeing Demetri do the same, of interspersing the touch of male lips to female with that of male to male.

Their hands roamed. Caressing her breasts and sliding over her flat belly. Cupping her mound. Fingers dipping into her wet slit until Demetri said, "Take her first while I watch you do it."

## **Chapter Five**

Thanos' cock jerked at the prospect of being inside her, the foreskin pulling back farther. He rolled on top of Temperance, wanting to sink into her heated core before Demetri remembered the conversation on the dance floor.

Demetri's hand was there before he could penetrate her. Stopped him with fingers wrapped tightly around his length as he said the word Thanos dreaded. "Condom."

Every muscle went rigid in protest at having any barrier between him and Temperance. Thanos' eyes met hers and he thought she might side with him.

He nearly asked her to. But his own words to Demetri on the dance floor came back to him, reminding him that he was the one who needed to prove himself trustworthy.

Thanos shuddered as he forced himself to lift his lower body away from Temperance's. It was penance, but the painful throbbing in his cock and testicles was pleasure compared to the aching loneliness and agony of witnessing their deaths over and over again.

He would have moved off her completely but Demetri's grip on his penis prevented it, delivering erotic punishment with the tightening of his fist.

"Let Temperance put it on you," Demetri said, reaching behind him for one of the condoms that lay next to a tube of lubricant at the corner of the bed. Passing the see-through packet to Temperance.

Thanos bit off a moan as she tore it open, licking her lips as her gaze went to his penis. Once again he fought against pleading with her to forget about placing a barrier between them.

His cock spasmed in protest at Demetri's hand leaving it, in anticipation of Temperance's impending touch. Arousal beaded on the tip and then there was no holding back a mixed sound of pain and pleasure.

He was intensely aware of Demetri watching, hand fisted on his own cock. Stroking up and down. And yet he couldn't look away from what Temperance was doing.

It was slow torture having her roll the condom downward. Encasing him. Confining him.

He was mesmerized by the sight of her hands on him, sheathing him then guiding him to her entrance.

She lifted her hips and took the first inch of him inside her.

Thanos shuddered at the intensity of the pleasure.

He lowered himself onto Temperance again. The feel of her lush breasts against his chest was pure delight. The feel of her skin to his a blessing, a gift more valuable than gold or gems.

He thrust in reaction to feminine curves and softness. Going deep. Stretching her. Filling her as he touched his lips to hers and tried to stave off the moment when primal instinct would control his movements, turning a slow savoring into a fast, hard taking.

One kiss merged into another. Each one punctuated the rise of Thanos' hips, each stroke allowing Demetri to see another man's cock taking the woman he loved.

It was a torment for all three of them. A torment Temperance ended by wrapping her legs around his waist, her sheath rippling against him, squeezing mercilessly.

Thanos lost the battle with restraint then. Changed the angle with an arm under her buttocks so he could strike her clit with each thrust.

She moaned for him.

Writhed for him.

Came for him. Her channel clamping down in a ruthless demand that he join her in orgasm.

Thanos had no will to oppose her.

Semen jetted through his cock in hot spasms of ecstasy, leaving him feeling lightheaded, boneless, as if he were once again composed of spirit wisps.

He made a sound of protest when her legs fell away from his waist. Grunted when Demetri nudged him off her.

He felt sated, barely able to keep his eyes open until he saw Demetri lie down on top of Temperance and guide himself to her entrance, his cock flushed and wet, bare of protection as he pushed into her slit.

As if Temperance wanted him to see what it was like with Demetri, she didn't wrap her legs around his waist or offer a protest when he guided her hands to the mattress and held them against it.

Thanos hardened watching them, watching Demetri's buttocks clench and flex as he pleased Temperance. Watching Demetri's cock move in and out of her, slick with her juices.

It was beautiful to see them together, to hear the sounds of their passion. Flesh against flesh. Moans and whispered pleas for more. The small cry signaling she'd come again, so responsive, so quick to surrender to the men who wanted her, who worshipped her body with theirs.

Demetri's orgasm was prolonged, the release of a man who knew there was no rush because pleasure was always close at hand and never denied him. He collapsed on her as Thanos had done, but rolled to his back, cock still semirigid, and Thanos couldn't stop himself from laying his body over Temperance's and putting his mouth on Demetri.

Demetri moaned as renewed lust surged into him in a bolt of searing desire. It had been so long since he'd known another man's touch that his hips jerked in reaction, in a desperate attempt to fuck deeper into Thanos' mouth.

He was helpless against his need, uninhibited and unable to hold back the breathless plea. "Suck me."

More words followed in a rapid flow of Greek. Raw, graphic phrases. Entreaties that somehow sounded less like begging when not spoken in English.

Thanos gave him what he wanted but refused to hurry. Tormented him in the same way Temperance often did.

Demetri tried to keep his eyes open but it was impossible. Every drop of blood felt as though it resided in his cock, leaving only a roar in his head and a thundering, throbbing beat in his penis.

He cried in protest when Thanos' mouth left him, only barely kept himself from humping air. He took himself in hand, cock leaking when Thanos asked Temperance, "Do you wish to see me mount him?"

Temperance's *yes* was a husky sound enabling Demetri to force his eyes open. She had her hand between her thighs, the fingers wet with arousal and semen.

The sight of it was nearly enough to make him come. He rolled to his knees, one hand on the mattress while the other continued to grip his penis.

Thanos reached for a condom and the tube of lubricant, preparing himself first.

Demetri's buttocks clenched at the feel of cool lubricant against his anus. Relaxed when heat followed as Thanos used his fingers to stretch and prepare a place that hadn't known a cock since Temperance.

He nearly began begging when Thanos pressed the tip of his penis against the lubricated opening. And then fire spread through Demetri, pain and pleasure that made it impossible to keep his head raised.

He surrendered on a moan as Thanos reached around, intensifying the ecstasy of being with a male lover again by grasping Demetri's cock as he worked his own deeper into Demetri's anus.

Temperance couldn't look away. It was beyond erotic watching Thanos take Demetri.

She'd seen it before, the times she'd watched gay porn with Demetri. But there was no comparison between actors having sex and watching Demetri engaged in it with a man she desired and believed she could come to love.

Demetri's hair pooled like black silk against the white of the sheet. His posture was yielding, yet there was nothing feminine about him even when compared to Thanos' sheer masculine beauty.

Like an erotic piece of art capturing the act of one man penetrating and claiming another, the muscles on their arms and thighs, backs and buttocks were well defined in sculpted perfection.

Her gaze shifted from the sight of Thanos taking Demetri to the sight of his hand on Demetri's cock. She took her clit between her fingers. Pumped and squeezed, worked it though she knew they'd orgasm before her.

Their movements became more frantic.

The sounds of their lovemaking filled the room.

The bed shook as they climbed to an ecstasy that ended with Demetri's cry, with semen jetting from his cock and wetting his chest as Thanos' body went taut with his own release.

Temperance closed her eyes then. Her reality centered on her clit, trying to find what they'd found.

"I'll make you come, Tempe," Demetri said, nudging her hand away. Replacing it with his mouth and tongue.

"We'll make you come," Thanos murmured, fingers taking possession of a nipple as he took its twin between his lips, began sucking as Demetri did the same to her clit.

Erotic fire spread through her. An inferno that had her fisting the sheet and canting her hips, spreading her legs wider and whimpering as they delivered on their promise.

She came in a hard clenching of her womb. Screamed as release crashed through her, demanding her complete surrender to it, and this time she let consciousness disappear in a vortex of pleasure.

The pounding, wall-shaking throb of music drew her back, though it didn't lend itself to lounging in post-coital bliss. Next to her, Demetri laughed, knowing she wouldn't be able to stay in the small room much longer. She never could.

"Why don't you and Thanos dance while I wash up then get the room squared away," Demetri said.

She wanted a hot shower and a quieter, more comfortable place to spend time together. She wanted to go home but thought maybe Demetri wanted to talk to her privately first since he hadn't suggested they leave.

Her gaze met Thanos' in a silent question. "I'll do whatever pleases you," he said.

Incredible warmth filled her at his answer. It was impossible not to melt. "Let's dance."

She left the bed and went to where her clothes lay on the floor. Thanos joined her, tugging on his pants but leaving his cock exposed until the very last.

"Tease," she told him as he finally zipped up.

His smile was a flash of brilliance. A comet hurtling through the sky.

"Perhaps. Having found you, I don't want you to forget me."

She laughed. "Somehow I don't think I ever could."

They left Demetri, and though no one would care whether or not she looked and smelled as though she'd been well and truly fucked, when they reentered the public area of the club, Temperance said, "I need to visit the ladies' room."

"I'll wait for you by the front door."

He gave her a long kiss before letting her go. She waded through the crowd and entered the short hallway composed of two bathrooms and an emergency exit.

She passed by the men's bathroom just as two guys came out and another went in. It might as well have had a revolving door it was so popular, far more popular than in a club catering to straight men.

Some of the popularity stemmed from the patrons having to settle for quickies where they could take them without fear of being expelled. But a lot of it had to do with the added thrill of anonymity that came from having stalls with holes cut in them at waist height.

Temperance wrinkled her nose. That was part of being a gay guy she did *not* get—giving a blowjob, or getting one, from some nameless, *faceless* stranger. But at least one advantage to a club catering more to men, even if some of them were in drag, was that there were no lines, no waiting to use the women's restroom.

She was steps away from it when a heartbreaking sob sounded behind her. Temperance turned and found Steven, the one serious boyfriend who still had a claim on Demetri's heart.

With his spiky eyelashes and his mascara running, Steven was the picture of abject misery. She opened her arms and he went straight into them, burrowing his face against her neck and sobbing, "I need Demetri. I love him so much and he's the only one who can make me feel happy again."

Temperance rubbed her hands over Steven's back in a soothing gesture, letting his dramatic pronouncement go unchallenged. She trusted Demetri and there was no reason to add to Steven's suffering by making sure he knew that being with Demetri as anything but a friend wasn't going to happen.

"I'll take you to him," she said, thinking Demetri might want her there to help with Steven.

Steven sobbed a thank-you, wetting her skin with his tears and clinging for a moment before finally letting her end the hug. She took his hand, squeezed it in reassurance as she led him down the hallway.

At the edge of the dance floor she glanced toward the entrance. She intended to find Thanos and tell him to grab a drink and wait by the bar instead, but when she saw he and his brother had found each other, she decided he'd be okay until the crisis with Steven eased.



“Alkaios,” Thanos said as his brother drew near. Despite Temperance’s having encountered Alkaios earlier, it was still a shock to see the man who’d once been his near-constant companion. “You live again.”

They hugged in greeting and Alkaios said, “I live, but this is a dangerous world, Thanos. While you were occupied in your carnal pursuits, I enjoyed my own and secured weapons for both of us so we wouldn’t be separated from life so easily.”

Alkaios pulled away and pressed a gun into Thanos’ hand. The weapon felt cold against his palm, alien in his grip.

His impulse was to return it. But as his thoughts went to the radio talk about increasing violence in the city and the horror of home invasions, as he remembered Demetri dying alone in an alleyway, the victim of a drug addict, he pulled his shirt up and tucked the gun in the waistband of his jeans.

Alkaios stepped back and Thanos glanced around, frowned at not seeing either Temperance or Demetri. Surely one of them should have joined him by now.

“If you’re looking for the woman who bears an uncanny resemblance to the one you once married, she passed through moments ago, holding hands with a blond man and leading him in the direction of the bar.”

Thanos’ heart contracted in his chest as fear and doubt crept in. Without it being a conscious decision, he retraced his earlier steps.

Pain speared through him when he saw the door closed, and the sign, *Fucking in Progress*, in its slot, indicating the room was in use. Before he could stop himself, he opened the door and found Temperance and Demetri inside, standing with a pretty blond man between them, held tightly against their bodies.

Agony overwhelmed Thanos, its intensity leaving him breathless as the past overlaid onto the present and he was standing in the doorway of a different room, seeing his wife and lover in bed, limbs entangled.

At his side, Alkaios said, "It seems as though I'm to bear witness to your being betrayed yet again, Thanos. Mete out the punishment they deserve and let's leave this place."

The exhortation to violence matched the one Alkaios had uttered so long ago. But where once the words had coaxed anger and pride into a murderous rage, fueled Thanos' fury so he drew his sword, this time rather than reach for the weapon at his waist, Thanos' hand remained pressed above his heart where it lay in a vain attempt to ease the terrible ache there.

He turned from the doorway and left the club.

The night air brought clarity, a realization that despite how much he'd suffered in repeatedly witnessing their lives and deaths, it was not for him to absolve himself of the crimes he'd committed against them so long ago. It wasn't for him to say when he'd been punished enough. And while the amethyst was in Temperance's possession, time remained for him to court the two of them, to be their true choice.

He jerked to a halt, stopped by the metaphysical binding to the gemstone, though the pain accompanying it was nothing compared to what he felt at imagining Demetri and Temperance taking another man as their lover.

Unbidden, Clotho's words returned, temptation like a glittering jewel. This time the choice will be theirs. Unless they willingly tie their fates to yours, when their lives end, your soul will no longer be bound to the amethyst or to theirs.

As if Alkaios also heard the words, he said, "If they're dead and the gemstone is in your possession, then we will both be free."

Thanos recognized the envy in Alkaios' voice then, where he hadn't when they'd lived before. The gleefulness at once again having the opportunity to keep him on a dissolute path, a squandering of life and opportunities for happiness.

With the haze of pride and arrogance cleared away, Thanos could look back and see clearly how Alkaios' hand had subtly directed him, like the playwright of a tragedy though it was a work savored by an audience of one.

In his mind he could hear the sly insinuations, the comments that had led to his returning home and murdering his wife and lover in Alkaios' presence.

Yet in the end, the blame and the chance for redemption rested fully on him.

Thanos pulled the gun from his waistband and handed it to Alkaios. "It's time for us to part company for what remains of our existence. This is my chance to love others as I would be loved in return."

Alkaios' expression reflected shocked disbelief. He sneered, saying, "They are nothing and you are the son of a god. Do you mean to say you will spend this mortal life tethered to them like a dog on a leash, begging for table scraps of affection if they won't allow you to feast at their sensual banquet?"

"Yes. And Fates willing, if I can't convince Temperance and Demetri to love me in this lifetime, perhaps I can in the next one."

Alkaios' image blurred, the sneer replaced by panic and fear, and then he disappeared, as though returned to Hades' realm by the Fate who stepped into Thanos' view.

"You have earned freedom from your punishment," Clotho said. "Only the desire of heart and soul and body hold you to your companions now."

She disappeared as the door behind her opened and Temperance emerged from the club. At the sight of her relief at finding him, of her coming toward him, worry in her expression at whether or not he would welcome her, Thanos' chest filled with heat and uncertainty, anticipation and hope.

He took the steps necessary to close the distance between them. Pulled her into his arms as hers went around his waist in a hug that reached his very soul.

"He's a friend going through a bad breakup," she said, lifting her face to his. "Come home with me? Spend time alone with me while Demetri does what he can for Steven?"

Thanos laughed, filled with a joy that made his spirit feel as light as the ethereal wisps that had once formed his body. He brushed his lips against hers. "Spending time

alone with you is no hardship. Yes, I'll go home with you. It's the only place I want to be."

## About the Author

Jory has been writing since childhood and has never outgrown being a daydreamer. When she's not hunched over her computer, lost in the muse and conjuring up new heroes and heroines, she can usually be found reading, riding her horses or hiking with her dogs.

Jory welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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