



Excerpt from “The Storm”

Rydan tried to gentle his approach, though it was difficult, considering how irritated he still was. “...You are in my private chambers. My inner sanctum, where *no one* is allowed to go.

“However you got in here, you must leave. Now. I will show you where the others dwell. The Gods may have dragged you here, but it is among *them* that you will find your Destiny.”

Some of her fear receded, replaced by a puzzled quirk of her light brown brows. “You...don’t want to keep me here?”

“No.” Hadn’t he made that obvious enough?

“You...*don’t* want to touch me again?” the woman on his bed asked next. Her fear still lurked, but hesitancy and uncertainty had joined the itch she was sending under his skin.

“No! I told you, I was not myself! I don’t like touching *anyone*,” Rydan added gruffly. That had always made his inner turmoil worse. He gestured sharply. “Now get out of my bed, if you please. Yours awaits you upstairs.” More confusion, this time the meandering creep of exploratory ants against his nerves. “—Just get out of the damned bed!”

Her eyes widened. She slipped off his bed as he demanded, but didn’t move from its side. “Your em—”

“—Go!” Jabbing his finger at the door, Rydan made it fling open with a *crack* as stone met stone. Stone was insulative, cool, still. He had surrounded himself with it, crafting doors and hinges from it rather than going to his twin for help in working wood, when wooden doors would have led to uncomfortable questions about why he needed them, and where they would be hung.

Jumping a little at his sharp imperative, and more at the banging of the magically reinforced door, she hurried out ahead of him. Rydan followed, pausing only long enough to go back to the nightstand and grab his cyslet. Fitting it on his wrist, he pushed back the urge to chase after her, to pull her into his arms and soothe her fears. That was just the damned potion talking, not his true feelings, for which his youngest brother would dearly pay.