

Font of Fertility Chapter 18 Beta

By BreaktheBar

The following is the Beta Draft of Font of Fertility Ch 18. As a Beta draft, this is not the final work and may see changes prior to final posting out in the wide world.

=====

All Characters are 18 years or older.

This story is a continuation of the Font of Fertility series. I would suggest reading Chapter 1 if you have not already. This chapter includes lots of magic shit.

Jeremiah and Lauren go to the Council of Threes.

=====

The breakfast table was full, and everyone was jamming down cereal, eggs and toast at an alarming rate.

Lauren and I were the ones who needed to go, but everyone else was helping Stacey clean up all traces of the party before my parents got home. Jay had ended up crashing with Clarissa in my room - I still wasn't sure how I felt about the fact that he'd had sex on my bed. Clarissa was a sweet girl with a bit of a funny accent that poked its head up when she said words like 'about' that came out sounding like 'aboa' when she was talking fast. She really was from Alberta, she really did live on a farm, and she really did like Jay.

Jordan was eating with us, talking and joking with Stacey when she wasn't eating or rubbing my leg lightly under the table. She was dressed in a loose tank top under an equally loose and baggy sweater, her 'starving artist student' vibe strong even if she wasn't starving. Another couple of Stacey's old high school friends were there, and we'd found a couple of mine and Lauren's classmates passed out down in the basement in a tangle of couch cushions and discarded clothing because someone had thought it would be fun to have sex in a pillow fort. Lauren knew them better than I did, so she wrangled them into helping clean in exchange for parental alibis if needed along with breakfast.

"OK, we need to go," Lauren announced after slurping down the last of her cereal milk straight from the bowl and standing.

"We do," I nodded in agreement. "Thank you so much you guys for helping with Stacey. I hate that we need to scram like this."

"Where *are* you two going in such a rush again?" Jay asked, a piece of toast half in his mouth.

"It's a secret," Lauren said. And apparently, that was enough for everyone.

I gave Jordan's leg a squeeze back under the table before standing, then gave Jay a fist bump and a promise to hang out before Clarissa went home, and hugged Stacey from behind and gave her a kiss on the cheek since there were a lot of eyes around that didn't know about us. She hugged me back from her sitting position by raising her arms up and backwards and scratched the back of my neck with her fingers as she held me for a moment. We'd already talked briefly that morning and she'd wished me luck and given me as long a kiss as she could without us getting caught in the busy house.

I followed Lauren to the front door since we had to make it look like we were actually leaving, but footsteps followed me into the hallway.

"Hey," Jordan said, grabbing my hand as I turned back to her. Then she planted a kiss on me that took me a half-second to react to before I kissed her back. "Get my number from Lauren, OK? We need to hang out for real in the next few days and talk writing."

"I'd like that," I grinned and kissed her again with a peck. "When do you leave?"

"I fly out in four days, so don't take too long," she smirked.

"He won't," Lauren said. She'd gotten her boots on and came over, taking Jordan from my arms and kissing her firmly herself. "Last night was a lot of fun."

"It was," Jordan chuckled. "And you're pretty good with your 'tools' for a newbie."

Lauren blushed a little as she grinned. Jordan was clearly using coded language for the fact that Lauren had fucked her with a strap-on last night. "Thanks," she said. "See you around?"

"Definitely," Jordan nodded.

I'd gotten my own boots and coat on and now I leaned in and kissed the redhead goodbye one more time quickly before Lauren and I went out the door.

"Concubine number six?" Lauren asked me with a teasing smile.

"There's only four of you right now," I pointed out, avoiding the question.

"We're talking with Angie tonight. You really think she's going to say no?"

"Jordan is going to school multiple states away," I countered as we got into Lauren's car.

"You can teleport anywhere you want," Lauren shot back.

“Not that she knows,” I said. “Which brings up an important question - how much are we telling Angie? Because she already knows about the multiple relationships, but she doesn’t know about the literal Harem part or the really big elephant in the room that is Magic.”

“I think that’s your decision, babe,” Lauren said as she started the car and pulled out of the driveway. “But if she’s in, I think she needs to be *in*. If we need to have a Concubines Only chat and a ‘Concubines who know about Magic’ chat, things are going to get messy really quick.”

I sighed. “You’re right, but what if that’s the thing that breaks it?” I asked. “What if she can handle poly stuff, and the weirdness of Stacey and I being raised together, and the weirdness of you and Lindsey, but not that.”

“Jerry,” Lauren said, reaching over and taking my hand. “Seriously. You’re overthinking it. And you’re doing it because you’re nervous about what comes next.”

“Well, obviously,” I sighed.

Lauren pulled into a strip mall parking lot. The stores were closed for the day since it was New Year’s, so we had the place to ourselves. “You ready?” she asked.

“As I can be,” I said. “You?”

She nodded. “I love you, and anything you decide I’m behind you 100 per cent.”

“I love you too,” I said, grabbing her hand and squeezing it. “Thanks for everything.”

“Last night was fun,” Lauren smirked.

“I meant everything,” I said. “Everything in the last few weeks, and everything before that too. You know Aidra thought about getting with me back in the 10th grade but she knew you and I were supposed to be together so she didn’t?”

“Really?” Lauren asked with her eyebrows raised. “She didn’t say anything to me.”

“I think we owe her one,” I said. “I hate to think what would have happened if I didn’t have you.”

Lauren beamed and leaned over to kiss me, and then she turned off the car. “So how do we do this?” she asked.

“I think I’m starting to understand what it’s like for a proclamation to go out,” I said. “I didn’t hear it in my head or anything, I just know what to do when I feel that tug.”

Lauren nodded. “OK. So let’s do this.”

“See you on the other side,” I said.

“Love you, dorkus,” Lauren grinned.

I closed my eyes and focused on the Summons as I gripped Lauren’s hand, and everything went white.

* * * * *

The chamber was massive and went on for years. That wasn’t a measurement that made any sense to my brain, but I somehow understood how it made sense. We weren’t inside a physical space, or at a specific moment of Now. This place, the Council chamber, sat somewhere... Else. Somewhen else.

Somehow else.

So the chamber went on for years, and it dissolved into a darkness that faded into walls of foggy light at the far edges. There was no sky and instead was topped by a vaulted ceiling of immense intricacy that looked like the vaults had vaults, which had vaults of their own. It was a web of construction that formed intricate patterns I immediately recognized as likely being, or at least hiding, runes in its construction. But the complication of it all made me wonder if even Lindsey could begin to discern anything useful out of looking up at it.

We didn’t step out of a doorway like when I teleported - instead Lauren and I just sort of... started existing in the space. There was no fanfare, no puff of smoke. We just *were*.

I squeezed Lauren’s hand as we looked around. The space was empty except for nine sets of stone chairs. Each set was organized with two lower seats and one higher one behind. They were in a perfect circle, all equidistant from the centre and their neighbours, and I could feel the pull of the summons in my chest calling me towards one of the seats.

“This one,” I said, gesturing to it.

“How do you know that’s not someone else’s?” Lauren asked.

“I just do,” I shrugged. “I am a Seat, after all. I think I’d know where I’m supposed to sit.”

“Lame, Jerry,” Lauren smirked as she shook her head.

The floor, if you could call it that, was made of nothing. No brick or dirt or concrete. It just sort of was, and walking on it felt like I was stepping through a puddle.

“Hello, Jeremiah Grant,” Adama said, making Lauren and I jump as she appeared behind us. “Welcome to the Council.”

We both turned to look and Adama seemed the same as she always did, though she was smiling serenely like the cat that ate the canary.

“No one else is here?” I asked. We hadn’t waited too long into our hour-long timeline for the summons, but we weren’t exactly early.

“No, but they will be shortly,” Adama said. “The Council Chamber works through ancient traditions - for a regularly scheduled meeting like this, the youngest of the Seats always arrives first, then the next youngest, and so on allowing the Eldest to arrive last.”

“When do they show up?” Lauren asked.

“Once we take our seats,” Adama gestured towards the same stone thrones that I had indicated. “Each Seat sits on the right, and their Prime sits on the left, while I and Patrons like me sit behind and bear witness to the proceedings and offer advice as required.”

“I’m just happy Lauren doesn’t have to jerk me off to have you here with us,” I said.

“Are you saying I give bad handjobs?” Lauren asked.

“What? No, that’s not-”

Lauren broke into a grin. “Babe, you really need to be a little less gullible right now.”

“Shit,” I laughed. “Now isn’t the time, Laur.”

“For jokes or a handjob?” she smiled, reaching towards my fly like she was happy to whip me out right there.

“Both,” I said, catching her hands and pulling her close as she grinned playfully and then kissed me.

“Well, if we’re not having fun with this, I think we should sit down,” Lauren suggested.

“Don’t tempt me,” I said.

We went over to our seats and as I slid onto the right-hand throne it felt cool to the touch even through my clothes. Lauren sat next to me, reaching over the wide armrests to grab my hand again.

Adama perched above us on the smaller, higher throne and then cleared her throat before calling out in a booming voice, "Jeremiah Arthur Grant, Fifth Seat of the Council of Threes, Lord-Sorcerer of the Great Order of Fertility Shamans, sits in attendance by the will of the Mother."

"Lord-Sorcerer?" I asked.

"It's the honorary title of the Fifth seat," Adama explained, dropping her announcer voice to a regular volume.

The next Seat became. She didn't enter the space in any discernible way, and it happened without any sort of warning. One moment it was just Adama, Lauren and I, and the next I was entirely aware of another person having *become* in the space.

She was imposing, but not because of any sort of strange size or anything. She was, physically, built a little like Lauren was in terms of being athletically fit without being big or muscled. At the moment that's where the comparisons between Lauren and her ended though because the first thing I saw was that this woman was daubed in the face paint of a decorative skull - highly detailed and decorated with gemstones, but clearly a skull. She had withered flowers in a crown on her head over a messy, roughly-dyed pink mane of jaw-length hair. She wore a slimming black corset ribbed with white rib bones and a long, flowing skirt of gauzy black that looked more like mist than it did cloth. She was barefoot and wore beaded jewellery on each ankle, her feet were caked in dried mud, and her arms were covered in intricate tattoos from her bare clavicle and shoulders down to her fingertips. Her wrists and hands jangled with an eclectic mass of bracelets and rings. In one hand she held a skull by its eyesockets, a metal conquistador helmet seemingly attached to its top.

The woman looked at Lauren and I, and the skull facepaint turned her smile sinister. "Hello, Jeremiah Grant," she said, the tone of her voice full and bearing a Spanish accent. She stepped towards us, her black-mist skirt seeming to cling to the ground and pull away behind her before dissipating, but also never leaving her legs bare.

"Hello," I said, eyeing this... person up and down. I'd had two encounters with Seats so far, both anonymous; one had sent me a warning basically not to trust anyone including them, and the other in the fight over George Stoker. This woman could be either of them. "This is my Prime-"

"Lauren Baxley," the woman said with a broad grin, looking at Lauren. "Yes, I know. Society couldn't get enough of you in those first few days before your Seat realized the need to protect your image."

Lauren flushed a little. "Well, a little attention never killed anyone."

The woman barked a laugh and then snickered lightly as she shook her head. "Perhaps not," she said.

“And your name?” I asked.

The woman raised an eyebrow and turned on her heel, padding on her bare feet over to a set of thrones across the circle from me. I felt... awkward, noticing that she had a pretty nice butt under that misty skirt.

First, she set the skull she was carrying down on the seat for her Prime and it began to raise up and float, the faint outline of a man taking form around it. The Seat wasn't done with her oddities yet and she seemed to open her mouth wide, her jaw unhinging like a snake, as she reached inside herself and then pulled a grotesque, amorphous *thing* out of her mouth and tossed it up onto her Patron seat. It landed without a sound and slowly bubbled and jostled and congealed into a vaguely humanoid form that phased in and out of existence.

Then the woman sat in her seat, and her set of thrones changed - or, maybe they had always been that way and I just hadn't noticed. But that didn't make sense.

As she sat, her throne became reminiscent of an ancient stepped pyramid, with black-leaved plants and grasses sprouting up from the corners while a dark liquid began to flow like a waterfall down from the Patron's throne in sluices built into the pyramid seat, all pouring to pool at the feet of the woman, and I realized it wasn't mud on her feet but old, dry blood.

“Esmerelda Romero, First Seat of the Council of Threes, Lady of the Dead City, Saint of the Lost Peoples, Daughter of the Blood Rite of Death's Dominion, sits in attendance by the inevitability of their will.” The Patron, whatever it was, spoke with a clear voice that sounded like something crossed between a bullfrog and the growl of a motorcycle.

Esmerelda, for her part, leaned over and whispered something to the ghost-skull-thing that was her Prime but didn't take her eyes off of Lauren and I.

“Adama?” I muttered. “Want to explain what I'm seeing?”

“Esmerelda's Prime is her deceased father,” Adama said quietly. “All Death Seats ascend when their Prime dies, always by unnatural causes. Her Patron is Gragfasnbinn, whose form is that of a poltergeist.”

“Great,” Lauren said. “A hot necromancy ghost lady.”

“Really?” I asked. “Hot?”

“You see those tits in that corset?” Lauren asked.

I had, but I wasn't going to say it.

We didn't have time to say anything more as another Seat *became*.

He was short and somewhat squat and walked with an odd gait. He wore intricate leather armour that would have been better suited to a video game than seeing it in real life, including a wide-brimmed helmet with a chain-link neck guard, embossed pauldrons and an array of blades sheathed on his hips, along with a revolver in a holster. Unlike his armour, he also wore sleek snakeskin cowboy boots with spurs jingling as he shifted. He was vaguely Asian in heritage, though he had such a bushy beard it was hard to see all that much between it and the helmet.

In contrast to the squat warrior, his Prime was stunning. She was tall, also of vaguely Asian descent, and curvy in a way that spoke of child-bearing hips and life-sustaining tits. She was also flawless, her skin smooth like silk and her long black hair hanging loose and shimmering almost down to her ankles. She was dressed in a sleek and sexy modern ballgown that showed off a swathe of her impressive cleavage.

"Ah, the fresh meat is here at last!" the man said, his accent strangely off to my ears in a way that I couldn't place. He immediately started strutting towards Lauren and I, eyeing us up and down. "Stand up, boy. Stand up. Let's see what you've done with yourself."

I glanced at Lauren, and she shrugged slightly.

"Good to meet you," I said, standing up and offering him my hand. "I'm Jeremiah."

"Temüjin greets you," the woman said with a soft smile and a nod.

"Is that...?" I asked, glancing between the two of them.

"It's me," the man said. "What, you think I would be attached at the hip with a woman who speaks in the third person?"

"I, uh-" I stammered.

"Hmm, slow to gain power *and* slow to pick up on things," Temüjin muttered. Then he turned and eyed Lauren. "You are exquisite, however." He looked back at me. "I would have her. You may take a turn at mine if you think yourself man enough while I have my way with yours."

"Excuse me?" Lauren said.

"Stop," I growled, taking a half-step to put myself partially in front of Lauren and glaring down at the shorter man. "If you ever speak like that towards anyone associated with me, I will not hesitate to reprimand you."

"Reprimand, he says," Temüjin sighed, looking at his own Prime. "At least he has *some* balls to stand up for what he wants." He turned back to me. "Your jealousy is noted, boy. If you think you

could stop me, you have things to learn, but I will respect a fellow Seat. You have a long way to come though - by your age, I was already raising empires. My descendants number in the millions. You are too soft. Too emotional. I can see it written on your face.”

He turned and stalked towards a set of thrones spaced two down from me.

“I am Khaltmaa,” the woman smiled softly, her beauty like a radiance compared to the roughness of her Seat. “It is lovely to meet you. Please forgive Temüjin, he was good friends with Ezekiel and has missed him sorely these last eighteen years. I am sure he will regret this first meeting and come around. He always does.”

“You are absolutely lovely,” Lauren said, standing and offering her hand to Khaltmaa. “I’m Lauren.”

“It is nice to meet you,” Khaltmaa said. “Do you do the Facebook? We should stay in touch.”

“I have it,” Lauren nodded. “Let’s just trade numbers and we can figure it out from there.”

I just shook my head as Lauren traded contact info with the gorgeous, busty woman and then sat back down and grinned at me. I could see the wheels in her head turning - she thought Khaltmaa was gorgeous and sweet, and wanted me to have sex with her.

There was no fucking way that was going to happen, no matter how hot the lady was.

When Khaltmaa joined Temüjin at their thrones there was a thrumming sound of cantering hooves and then a goddamn centaur apparated in the middle of the circle. He was big, probably as big as the largest of horses, with a human portion to match. He was also shaggy with thick body hair and a long trail of hair in a mohawk on his oddly bestial-but-human head. He was also very obviously *male* what with the giant horse cock hanging out below him.

He jumped over Temüjin and Khaltmaa, landing perfectly on his throne, and the three seats suddenly *were* a wooden construction of elaborately carved thrones. Each piece of wood was dark and polished smooth, carved into the likenesses of couples having sex. Shields hung over the heads of both Temüjin and Khaltmaa bearing strange sigils I didn’t recognize, torches casting their fiery light down onto the pair, and plains grasses sprouted around them.

Where Esmerelda’s throne gave me the distinct feeling that I was looking at her sitting atop a great, dark pyramid in a jungle, when I looked at Temüjin it was like he was sitting on his throne at the top of a windswept plains hill.

Speaking of Esmerelda, I looked over at her and found that she was staring at me. She didn’t look away, just smiled softly and met my gaze. Even from this distance, I could see she had emerald green eyes.

“So...” Lauren started, and I could hear her thoughts on Khaltmaa in her voice.

“Not a shot,” I said.

“You sure? She’s-”

“A Prime,” I finished for her.

“Fine,” Lauren sighed. “You know-”

“Temüjin, Fourth Seat of the Council of Threes, Horselord, Grand Conqueror of the World, Father of Fathers, Khan of Khans, Lord-Militant of the Great Order of Fertility Shamans, sits in attendance by the will of the Mother.”

“Did that centaur just say Khan of Khans?” I asked. “Does that mean-”

“Is that fucking Genghis Khan?” Lauren asked.

“Oh, yes, I believe that’s one of the names he adopted early on,” Adama said quietly. “He and Ezekial had a good relationship, not that that needs to mean anything between you and him.”

“Good enough that he knew where the Sanctum was?” I asked.

“I... don’t know,” Adama admitted.

One of the Fertility Seats, most likely, had been the one to pilfer everything from my adopted Sanctum. If I could, I wanted to figure out who it was as one of my goals for the Council meeting. I also needed to do that quietly.

“Holy shit,” Lauren muttered. “Why the fuck would he conquer and kill so many people with armies if he was a Fertility mage?”

“The reverse question is equally valid,” Adama said. “Why isn’t Jeremiah doing that?”

“I... because it’s wrong?” Lauren asked.

“Is it?” Adama asked.

The conversation cut off because another Seat *became*.

He was huge and dressed in a three-piece suit made of gold cloth that stood out from his nearly coal-black skin. The suspenders for his pants were belts of bullets, and his teeth shone like diamonds as he glanced around and then settled his gaze on me. Behind him loomed an

immense beast, a male lion that stalked in a circle and revealed that its head, from the mane down to its snout, was just a skull with some scraps of flesh on it.

The man eyed me over, and then eyed Lauren, and barked a laugh and shook his head before heading towards his seat. The lion-zombie paced after him and got up on the Prime throne, sitting for all the world like it was just a giant housecat and not a terrifying spectacle. The man's shadow then detached itself - and I realized that no one else was casting a shadow in this place without a light source. The shadow slithered up the seats and then cast itself over the Patron throne. As the three settled, the thrones turned to bone, a pile of skulls, RPG rockets, AK-47s and belts of bullets strewn around them. He reached below his throne and pulled out a golden machete, laying it across his knees as he started chuckling.

"Marcel Mboyo, Second Seat of the Council of Threes, Warlord of the Dark Continent, Devourer of All Peoples, The Great Subjugator, Son of the Flesh Rite of Death's Dominion, sits in attendance by the inevitability of their will." The shadow-thing proclaimed.

"We don't like that guy, right?" Lauren whispered. "He looks like he's the person who came up with child soldiers."

"We don't know that," I said.

"Ezekial didn't have many relations with him, as far as I remember," Adama said quietly. "But I do remember there is some tension between Marcel and the final Fertility seat."

"Guess we can always ask," I mumbled.

"Hello, friends!" a new Seat said as he *became*.

I had been starting to feel... under-dramatic in my presentation, considering how the last three Seats had appeared. Now I felt like I might be over-dressed.

He was tall and somewhat willowy but had a long, thick beard of black curls and was shaved bald. His eyes were bright and his expression somewhat playful, his big bushy eyebrows expressive as he looked around and grinned. He was wearing an orange Hawaiian floral shirt, some sort of swim trunks, and flip-flops. Standing next to him, looking slightly annoyed, was a gorgeous raven-haired woman wearing a business pantsuit.

"Anna," the man said, "I am so happy you made it."

"I can't *not* make it, Yaroslav," Anna sighed. "When you show up, I am forced to show up, you bastard."

"Is not my fault!" Yaroslav said. They both spoke in thick Eastern European accents. "I did not make these rules, yes? But I am still happy to see you, my darling."

“You always say that, and I always buy it,” Anna sighed. “And then in a week you’ll have pissed me off *again* and I’ll be flying back to my company. Again.”

“It can be different this time, my love,” Yaroslav said, grabbing her hand. “I promise this. You are always most important in my heart.”

“You know what I think of your promises,” Anna said.

“Anna, please. You are embarrassing me in front of our new friends,” he said, gesturing towards Lauren and I.

Anna rolled her eyes and then pulled her hand from Yaroslav, walking over to Lauren and I. “Hello, Jeremiah Grant,” she said, nodding to us. “Lauren Baxley. I think I must apologize for the work of one of my companies. I own many of the modern news organizations from our world, and one of my magazines was... overzealous in their coverage of your rise without at least asking for comment.”

“That was you?” Lauren asked, frowning.

“One of my companies,” Anna clarified. “Though the buck stops with me, as you Americans say. I would like to offer you compensation for the slight; yours is the first ascendance in some time, Jeremiah Grant, and I had not realized the impact it would have on my organization.”

“It’s-” I started.

“I’ll be happy to discuss that with you,” Lauren said, squeezing my hand softly to keep me from talking. Again I found myself shaking my head in chagrin as Lauren traded contact information with another of the other Seat’s Primes. Anna wasn’t quite as unearthly gorgeous as Khatmaa, but she was still very hot.

“Hello, Jeremiah Grant,” Yaroslav said, sliding around his Prime and offering me his hand. “It is good to meet you, yes? Let me cut to the chase - I own Australia. It is mine. I party down there, so unless you want to come have some party fun, you stay away, yes?”

“I- Sure,” I said.

“Good!” Yaroslav grinned, slapping his thigh. “We understand each other. Is basis for healthy relationship. Anna and I-”

“We’re not together,” Anna said. “Don’t talk like we’re a couple.”

“Oh, my little *milaya*, don’t say such things. We are the greatest of love stories,” Yaroslav said.

Anna sighed and tucked her phone back in her suit jacket pocket, then took Yaroslav by the shoulder and started pushing him towards the seats next to you and Lauren. "In private, Yaro," she grunted.

As they sat down I realized that a big, grey wolf had silently been stalking across the centre of the circle, and it hopped from one throne up to the Patron seat just as Yaroslav and Anna were getting settled. Their thrones became reminiscent of the onion-domed churches and historical buildings I'd seen in pictures, colourful and crowded with spires, but strangely I got that feeling again that I was looking at them like they were... on a beach?

The wolf spoke, which was weird to watch it mouth the human words. "Yaroslav, Ninth Seat of the Council of Threes, Lamplighter, the Mad Monk, Father of the Rus and the Slavs, the Great Builder and Breaker, Grand Priest of the All-Being, sits in attendance by the joy of Creation."

"Can you stop planning for me to have sex with other people's Primes?" I muttered to Lauren under my breath.

"She wants to apologize," Lauren said. "How else is someone supposed to apologize to a fertility Seat?"

"With words?" I asked.

Lauren shrugged. "Just trying to make sure you get every ounce of power, baby."

"And likely antagonize another Seat in the process," I pointed out.

"Fine, fine," Lauren agreed.

The next seat *became* with little fanfare. He was a tall Chinese man wearing a black suit, his chiselled jawline broken by a small goatee and his hair cut severely short. The thing that was weird was that there were *two* of him. Oh, also the serpent-like dragon that slithered out of thin air and pirouetted around the two men in a whirling display.

They didn't say anything, simply moving as one over to the seat on the other side of me and Lauren from Yaroslav. As they sat their thrones became concrete structures that looked like severe skyscrapers, but then bright neon lights lit up and down their length spelling things in pinks and blues and greens like a busy city at night.

"Xi Zuang, Eighth Seat of the Council of Threes, Curator of the Imperial Dynasties, the Grand Architect, High Magister of the All-Being, sits in attendance by the joy of Creation."

"Creepy," I mumbled to Lauren. Both of the duplicate men were scanning the room with the exact same movements.

“How is he his own Prime like that?” Lauren asked.

“They are twins,” Adama answered.

“That doesn’t explain the copycat routine,” I said.

Another man *became*, and this one was different. So far each of the Seats had something in common - they were all physically fit. It had been one of the earliest things I did with my magic, so it made sense that if any of them weren’t happy with their own aesthetics they would change themselves like I had. This guy, apparently, didn’t give a fuck.

He was tall, I’d give him that, but he was fat. He had a gut that hung on him like a heavy sack, and even his finely tailored suit couldn’t hide that fact. He leaned heavily on a silver-capped cane and smirked from behind a thick white moustache as he doffed his tophat. “Cheerio, friends,” he said.

Entering with him was a much younger-looking woman, blonde and pretty in a severe sort of way. Her hair was back in a braid and physically she looked like she could probably rip a guy in half. She was jacked. “Father,” she said, looping her arm in the man’s. “Socialize or sit?”

“Just a moment of socializing, my dear,” he said. “We should greet the new member of our little society.”

“Of course,” the muscled woman nodded and then started leading her Father over to Lauren and I.

They made a good pair, putting on their act, but I wasn’t buying it for a second. What Seat would let themselves get fat, let alone require leading or direction or a cane?

I stood to meet them, Lauren joining me.

“Good day, sir,” I said, offering my hand. “Jeremiah Grant, and my Prime, Lauren Baxley.”

“Good day to you too, lad,” the man said, puffing out his chest and smiling kindly. “Uwe Ernhardt, and my daughter Ima. Please tell me none of these roughians has put the screws to you yet, have they?”

“Just a little verbal sparring here in the chamber,” I said, keeping a smile on my face even as I was trying to figure out if hiding behind this persona was one of the Seats I had already ‘met.’ Based on the slight raise of one of his eyebrows, I think he caught my ‘very specific’ truth.

“Well, welcome to the Council,” Uwe said.

"It is so good to see one of the empty seats finally get filled again," Ima nodded. "When we lost Ezekiel it was a blow to Order in the magical world."

"Well, I hope I can fill those shoes," I said.

"Oh, no need to worry about that, lad," Uwe said. "No one has any big expectations of you for the first hundred years or so at least. You need time to learn and grow - new Seats are like oak trees - they don't become Great unless they are given space and time."

"That's very kind of you," Lauren said, mirroring Ima as she looped her arm through mine. "But Jerry really does want to be a *working* Seat."

"Hmm, well, my best advice would be not to rush into things," Uwe said. "Look before you leap, as they say!"

"I'll try my best," I nodded, wondering if that was a coded warning that I'd done just that with George Stoker.

"I'm sure we'll find time to chat," Uwe said. "But we really shouldn't hold up our last arrival. Ndia does make quite the entrance. Enjoy your first meeting, lad."

Ima led him away after we said our goodbyes, heading over to their seats.

"Another nice pair," Lauren said, settling down. "I'll need to get Ima's number-"

"Lauren," I warned her softly.

"Not for that," Lauren scoffed. "Or... not unless she asks. I just think it's a good idea to have some ways to do backdoor communicating if things are tense magically. And having a Life Seat on board would-"

"Baby, I don't think he's a life seat," I said.

As they went to sit, Uwe had pulled the silver head from his cane and unsheathed a claymore worth of broadsword from it, and it looked like it was made of pure bone. He set it up on the Patron throne, and then sat down with Ima and their thrones turned into a thing of gears, smoke, and war. Missiles rose from behind them, and wings of fanned machine guns spread from the backs of the thrones. Bullets, millions of bullets, rained down from the sky around them until they were up to their shins in brass. And then blood began to seep up from below the carpet of bullets, mingling with the brass in a horrible display of passive carnage.

"Oh," Lauren said.

The voice came from the bone sword, but I wasn't exactly sure how. "Uwe Ernhardt, Third Seat of the Council of Threes, Lord of War, The Great Forge, Father of Technology, the Gravefiller, Son of the Bone Rite of Death's Dominion, sits in attendance by the inevitability of their will."

"Don't judge a book by its cover," I sighed.

"Fuck me," Lauren said, and for the first time in a few weeks it wasn't a literal request.

"It's time," Adama said with a weird reverence in her voice

"For what?" I asked.

"Her," Adama said, beaming proudly.

The woman *became*, and I understood. She was black, with skin almost the colour of charcoal, and beautiful in a savage way. She was naked except for whorling runic patterns painted onto her skin in orange-red clay. She was bald but there was no arguing her femininity - her breasts were large and her nipples engorged, and her belly was swollen as she was heavily pregnant.

Other than the starkness of her being naked and pregnant there wasn't anything particularly dramatic about her, but with her came an aura of.... *Old*. Old power. It was like she almost had a personal gravity to her.

With her was an equally naked black man, a massive slab of muscle that made even the other big black man in the room Marcel, the Death Seat, look average. He was also sprouting a ridiculously huge erection.

They were like the living embodiments of African fertility idols and I might have been tempted to laugh if not for the heavy reality of the situation.

"Jerry," Lauren muttered while looking at the pair. "I do not ever, ever, want you to make your dick that big."

"Wasn't planning on it," I murmured back. That guy could probably club someone over the head and kill them with that fuckstick. It might have been a foot and a half long and thick as his big wrist.

It was ridiculous.

And it was pointing right at us.

"Jeremiah Grant," the woman said as she approached, waddling slightly behind her pregnant belly. "Welcome to the Order of Fertility Shaman. I am Ndia, and this is my husband Beno. We welcome you."

“We thank you for your welcome,” I said, standing and bowing slightly without really knowing what I was doing. I felt like she had almost a royal presence, but also a resistance to that feeling, knowing that we were... equals?

“To give thanks for your ascendance, would you like to impregnate me?” Ndia offered. “I am certain it would please the Mother greatly to see two of her favoured children coming together in such a way.”

“Um,” I said too loudly. “That- Ah-”

“Ah, yes, I am currently pregnant already,” she smiled, rubbing her belly. “And you are still young to our ways. If you would like to copulate with me, to both our benefit, I will store your semen away until after the birth of my daughter here and then allow your sperm to impregnate me in the days following.”

I worked my jaw for a moment, not really knowing what to say.

“We truly appreciate your offer,” Lauren said, stepping in to save my bacon. “But we are planning to use the symbolism of Jeremiah’s first fathering of a child for a ritual.”

“Ah, well, I am sure this would please the Great Mother as well,” Ndia nodded. “Perhaps in the future then.”

She bowed slightly to me in return and then snapped to her husband, who hadn’t said anything but did stare at Lauren with that gigantic cock pointing towards her. He moved, and they headed over to their thrones.

“What the fuuuuck,” Lauren hissed softly.

I didn’t know what to say.

When they sat, I somehow wasn’t surprised that Ndia immediately reached over and began slowly stroking Beno’s huge cock. What I was surprised by was the frog-person that seemed to wriggle out of the not-ground like he was raising up out of mud, and then in one big leap he jumped to the Patron throne in their group.

Now it was my turn. “What the fuuuuuck?”

Their thrones had turned into people. I had no idea if they were real people or not, but they certainly looked real. They were twisted and contorted, but somehow formed the thrones, and of course there was a man right under Ndia with a cock that drilled up into her pregnant pussy.

"If I tap my heels three times and say 'there's no place like home' do you think we can get out of here?" Lauren murmured.

"Just try not to stare," I whispered.

"Thank you for not being a freak," Lauren said, squeezing my hand.

"You say that now," I pointed out. "Maybe in a couple of thousand years-"

"Ndia, Sixth Seat of the Council of Threes," the Frog-man droned. "Mother of Civilization, the High Oracle, She Who Shall Birth the Generations, Last Daughter of Punt, the Eternal Matron-Witness, Priestess of the Great Order of Fertility Shamans, sits in attendance by the will of the Mother."

"By rite of the Eldest, I call this Council to order," Ndia said, her voice carrying throughout the space even though she spoke quietly. I was quickly realizing that Intention seemed to have a lot of importance here - if I only wanted Lauren or Adama to hear me, all I needed to do was intend on it. If I wanted everyone to hear me, I just needed to intend that. The space was a reflection of magic, or more likely was made entirely of magic and so followed similar rules.

It was also hard not to notice the empty throne sitting around the other side of the circle. Apparently, mine wasn't the only Seat that had been sitting empty.

"Just for the sake of clarity of order," Uwe said from the unholy shrine of war that his throne had become, "I remind the Council that we are now even-numbered once more, so all votes that are tied will lean to the side that favours less action on the part of the Council as a whole."

"Indeed, thank you, Uwe," Ndia said. "Now, I believe we had several outstanding issues from our last meeting?"

And for the next three hours I felt like my brain was going to melt out of my ears because of how boring and petty every topic was. How could they have *already* talked about the travel permissions of Xi Zuang and Yaroslav through Southern Asia and the Middle East and not come to some sort of agreement? And yet somehow Genghis Khan (I wasn't sure if I'd ever think of him as Temüjin again) was able to string his demands and complaints into almost an hour of back-and-forth bickering of what sort of travel, and magic, could be used in his territory. And just when that discussion seemed to have been agreed upon, Marcel mentioned that Uwe owned factories throughout the region in question and wasn't restricted by any means, which sparked the whole debate again as to why Genghis Khan was so adamant about some Seats but not others being restricted.

Then they tabled the topic and didn't even come to an agreement!

Ndia and Marcel then argued over a series of 'small wars' that were happening across Africa and their mutual influence on the engagements - for Marcel the ongoing bloodshed was a source of power for him so it wasn't surprising he was stoking the flames. What was surprising was that Ndia was doing the same thing, just with different factions. Marcel made demands, and I listened closely and realized he was shifting the goalposts every time Ndia made a concession. The conversation ended with Ndia having agreed to stop her influence on the wars across western Africa, though I noted that she'd worded the arrangement to only restrict her in terms of warfare, while Marcel was banned from all activity in eastern Africa for the next five years.

Then Uwe and Xi Zuang argued over mineral rights, and Genghis Khan petitioned Yaroslav to allow him to usurp Northern Asia since Yaroslav had abandoned it for several decades, but was blocked by both Uwe and Xi Zuang.

Throughout the whole thing I tried my best to listen and narrow down what the other Seats seemed to actually want - and what I got out of it was that they were like listening to anything about politics. They were petty, grabby, jealous and generally didn't want to come to any sort of agreement that would potentially help someone else more than it would help themselves.

One thing I did notice is that no one made any demands or requests of me. Maybe it was because we were still talking about 'old business' and when we moved on I would get inundated as they tried to take advantage of me, or maybe they were taking it easy on me. Ndia, despite her handling of Marcel in a sort of Wing Chun deflective way, seemed to have a handle on directing the conversations as the Eldest and I wondered if she would try and hand-hold me a bit as another Seat of Fertility.

The other thing I noticed, though, was that while the others bickered and argued with each other, Esmeralda Romero was silent and stared at me from across the circle. Every once in a while she would lean over to whisper something to the skull of her father, and nod at whatever she got back, but other than that no one seemed to have outstanding issues with her. Was that because until I joined she was the 'rookie' and had been shielded until now?

"I believe that is the last of our personal outstanding matters," Ndia finally said, cutting off an argument from Xi Zuang that had threatened to go back into the whole Russia/Yaroslav issue. "There are two major issues I am aware of in regards to Our World, but I believe a break is in order. If anyone has anything in that regard they wish to bring to my attention I will add it to our Issues at hand before we bring up New Business."

There wasn't a gavel drop or anything, everyone just sort of... accepted the break and started standing up and stretching.

"Are you as bored as I am?" Lauren asked me.

"God, I feel like my eyes are bleeding," I laughed.

"I didn't realize we were going to be sitting through a Model UN debate team practice," Lauren chuckled. "I should have brought a book."

"Yeah, I was kind of expecting something more..."

"Magic-y?"

"Yeah," I nodded.

"Jerry, sweetie, you need to get to work," Adama said.

"Hmm?" I asked and looked around. A bunch of the Seats and Primes were starting to walk around and mingle, talking in pairs or small groups.

"Holy shit, it really is like a debate club," Lauren said. "What do you think? Stick together as a united front, or divide and conquer?"

"I'm pretty sure Divide and Conquer refers to dividing your enemy," I smirked softly.

"You know what I mean, dorkus," Lauren rolled her eyes and smiled, but held back from giving me her usual punch on the arm.

"Let's split up. See if you can make a better connection with one of the Primes," I said. "I'll see who approaches me."

She nodded. "Good idea. I'll go after Ana - she seems the least connected to Yaroslav and might be more open to spilling some info. Plus if she controls the media of the magical world then she can probably fill us in on a lot of cultural shit we're missing."

"Good thinking," I nodded. "But remember we've got Aidra now, and she comes from a family of Witches, so we have her as a source as well."

"I won't overplay my hand," Lauren nodded and stood up, leaning over to give me a soft kiss. "Ready?"

"Just be careful," I said. "Don't make any promises to anyone."

"I know, babe," Lauren said. "You too." She walked off, confident but looking for all the world like the teenager she and I were amongst a lot of weird and wild adults. I wished I could tell how old Esmerelda was - her outfit made it hard to judge because she could have been a modern-day cosplayer. Was she of our generation, or one or two before? Or was she hundreds of years old? The fact that fucking Genghis Khan was the third youngest in the group... he was around during... the Romans? That far back? Or later?

I was going to need to do some history research.

After taking a breath I stood and straightened out my shirt, looking around. Lauren had inserted herself into a conversation with Anna and, apparently, the zombie lion that served as Marcel's Prime. I was just starting to try and start putting together who looked like they were on friendly terms and who was avoiding other people when I noticed Ima, Uwe's daughter and Prime, was walking over to me with purpose.

She was a statuesque woman, impressively built, and I had the distinct impression that while she doted on her Father she might also be his bodyguard or something. If the 'tottering friendly fat gentleman' act could be believed at all. Ima's clothing mirrored her father's - a tailored suit down to shiny black shoes. The only things she was missing were the cane and tophat, instead her blonde hair was braided behind her neck neatly. Her eyes were boring into me as she approached, but I noticed in the background across the circle that Esmerelda hadn't left her seat to engage with anyone else and she was still staring at me.

"Mister Grant," Ima said, curtsying when she approached my throne.

"Please, Ima," I said. "First names are fine with me if they are with you."

She smiled courteously and nodded. "Jeremiah," she corrected herself. "My father was wondering what you thought of the proceedings of your first Council meeting."

I smiled and shook my head a little as I sighed. "Honestly? So far I've found it dry as hell and more than a little boring."

She smiled in return and nodded. "He thought as much. That's why he's offered me to you for your use as a mid-meeting pick-me-up."

"I'm... sorry?" I hesitated.

"If you would like, you can fuck me," she said, plain as day and as if it wasn't an abrupt and somewhat absurd offer.

"I- that seems like it would be..."

"Inappropriate?" Ima asked. "Perhaps in another setting, but here sex is just another source of magic and experience of life. It is not uncommon for Seats to offer their Primes to curry favour with the Fertility Seats - you are the easiest to provide such a base favour for. See?"

Ima gestured towards the mingling folks, and I saw that conversations had... developed. Ndia was currently standing and talking with Xi Zuang while her husband was behind her obviously slow-thrusting that massive cock of his into her, and she just kept talking like she wasn't

affected. The other Xi Zuang, the twin, was currently on his knees in front of Genghis Khan sucking the squat man's dick. Meanwhile Khaltmaa, Genghis Khan's wife, was obviously flirting with both Uwe and the ghost of Esmerelda's father.

"I see," I said, trying to keep my reaction neutral. There was a big part of me that would be more than happy to get Ima on her knees and sucking me off, or bending her over my throne and sliding into her and pounding her until she came hard. But there was another, small but loud, part of my brain that was repeating all the warnings I had tried to caution myself with ahead of this. I couldn't trust anyone. I couldn't get myself in debt with anyone by making a mistake. I had to blow out a long breath, my eyes darting to the carnal activities going on casually in the space before I looked back to Ima. "Honestly Ima, you are an absolutely stunning woman but I think it best if I don't participate so heavily yet. I have a lot to learn about this place, and I wouldn't want to jump without some patience."

She nodded demurely. "A wise choice," she nodded.

"Out of curiosity," I said. "Is having sex with me something that *you* want?"

"Oh, I don't mind either way. Sex does nothing for me," Ima said.

"Nothing?" I asked, almost feeling like it was a challenge.

"I experience the contact, but don't process the feeling," she said. "I'm dead, after all."

My mouth was open for a couple of solid seconds before any sound came out. "I see. I... hadn't realized that."

"My father has made every effort to help me appear more alive," Ima nodded. "But being dead has its perks."

"Like?" I asked.

She shrugged, giving me a little smile that said they were secrets she wasn't going to share.

"So it really does nothing for you?" I asked. "That seems sad."

"To a Seat of Fertility, yes," she said. "But it is who I am."

I had questions, but I also didn't want to overstep or pry into the affairs of the dead woman and her father. Why not just use magic to give her feelings of pleasure back in her body?

"Well, if you are not interested in using me carnally, I should return to my father," Ima said and curtsied again. "It was nice talking with you, Jeremiah. If you change your mind, you know where I am."

“You as well, Ima,” I said. “And I’ll keep that in mind.”

She walked away and I couldn’t help but glance down at her muscled ass in those business slacks. I had to close my eyes for a moment and concentrate on the fact that she was dead and not the living person she seemed. She was a zombie or something.

When I opened my eyes I nearly jumped out of my skin because I was looking straight into the skull-face of Esmerelda standing barely a foot away from me.

“You turned down the walking valkyrie,” she said.

“It, ah, didn’t seem prudent,” I said.

“That the only reason?” she asked.

“No,” I said. “The fact that she’s dead and wouldn’t enjoy it was also a factor.”

Esmerelda narrowed her eyes, looking me up and down. “And what if I offered myself? I am very much alive, and could enjoy it immensely.”

I swallowed. This close, even with the makeup, I could tell that Esmerelda was attractive under the facepaint. She had a sharp jawline and piercing green eyes, and softly full lips that reminded me a little of Lindsey’s mouth. “I would still think it wasn’t prudent,” I said. “Not without a proper conversation about expectations. And I definitely wouldn’t want to do it here - with a woman like you, I would want to be in private so that we could fully express ourselves and be equals.”

She raised an eyebrow, still glaring at me slightly through those narrowed eyes. Then, without another word, she turned and strutted back over to her throne.

“What the fuck?” I muttered, shaking my head and then sitting down on my throne again.

“Jerry, bunny, it was likely a good decision not to take up the offer from the First Seat or the Sixth earlier, but you had little to fear from the blonde corpse-girl,” Adama said from her seat behind me. None of the Patrons had moved from their places.

“Did Ezekial fuck the Primes of others?” I asked.

“He did. Almost every meeting,” Adama said.

“And what about his Prime? Did she have sex with other Seats?”

“When there was a particularly tense agreement to be made, Ezekiel had asked it of her,” Adama said.

“That will never be me,” I said firmly. I looked across at Lauren, and as if she could feel me looking she glanced around and met my eye and smiled reassuringly. Ima had joined her conversation group, and the zombie-lion had wandered over to talk with Esmerelda though the Seat didn’t seem to be responding. “Lauren is mine, and only mine.”

“You wouldn’t be the first Fertility Seat with a jealousy streak,” Adama said. “It will be a handicap, though.”

“I could give a flying fuck,” I said. “Lauren is mine. So are Lindsey and Stacey, and Annalise and Angie.” There was a part of me that wasn’t sure I should include Angela on that list. I knew she’d been promiscuous, especially the way she and Lindsey got on, but I was fairly certain that since she and I had hooked up she hadn’t been with anyone else. There were also other names that, deep in my gut, I wanted to put on that list. Not everyone I had been with... but a few...

“I know that look,” Yaroslav said as he meandered over.

“Do you?” I asked.

“Overwhelmed,” Yaroslav nodded with a chuckle.

“Not exactly,” I admitted. “Just deep in thought. Introspection.”

“You know what would help with that? Peyote. You ever try peyote?”

“No,” I shook my head. “But I’m still young.”

“You’ll never be too old,” Yaroslav grinned. “Seriously, that shit is like magic. But make sure you do it with proper guide who knows who and what you are. The last thing you want to do is unlock and untether your mind and then start using magic.”

“Noted, thanks,” I said. “Hey, uh, can I ask you a question?”

“Sure, kid,” he nodded.

“You don’t... seem like the others,” I said.

He smirked. “That’s because I realized something a few decades ago,” he said. “Uwe and Ndia say I’m just going through mid-life crisis, but I’m not so sure.”

“What did you realize?” I asked.

Yaroslav leaned in and cupped a hand over his lips as if he were trying to keep his next words a secret from the others. “None of this shit actually matters,” he stage-whispered. Then he stood

back up and shrugged. “Seriously, bro. There ain’t much left in the world that we Seats actually need to do or deal with. Most of our problems are of our own making. I stopped doing Judgements thirty years ago and you know what changed? Absolutely nothing. Do you know how many magic wars have started? None. So now I’m living my best life, partying down in the warm weather, surfing in the mornings. I’ve got a pod of dolphins that adopted me.”

“Do they talk to you?” I asked.

“What? No, that’s silly. Dolphins are idiots,” he said. “But they’re cute A-F. Whales on the other hand? Big cuddly behemoths. They’ve been thankful ever since we sent the sea serpents into their slumber, and when I cut off whale hunting in most of the world. I’d say everywhere but Xi Zuang won’t let me kill it off in China.”

“See, I keep finding these things out that completely change how I see the world, and I don’t even know where to start asking questions,” I said.

“Anyone told you about Atlantis yet?” Yaroslav asked.

“Yes, my Patron did,” I said. “Dark side of the moon.”

“Yeah, the place is a shithole,” Yaroslav nodded. “Total bummer.”

“Any other big historical, mind-blowing secrets you think I should know?” I asked.

“Hah, plenty,” Yaroslav grinned. “I’ll tell you what, one of these days you and I are going to sit down and smoke a bowl of premium weed and I’ll tell you all the wild shit I’ve learned about the world.”

“Seriously,” I said, “That would be fucking amazing.”

He grinned and waggled his eyebrows. “We’ll party like it’s 1978.”

“That’s oddly specific,” I said.

He shrugged with a grin. “Best song ever came out in 1978. Anyways, it looks like we’re getting started here and I need to talk with Anna quickly before we do. Do svidaniya, Jeremiah. Hah! That rhymes.” He walked away, whistling a tune to himself that tickled my brain but that I couldn’t place.

He was right, the other Seats and Primes were starting to filter back to their Thrones like some unheard warning bell had rung, and I saw that Lauren had been on her way back to me but Ndia had caught her up and was speaking to her. Lauren shook her head but kept a smile on her face, and then said something. Ndia replied, and Lauren frowned slightly, then said something.

Ndia shook her head and then rubbed her pregnant belly with both her hands. Lauren replied, and then left the Elder and came back to me.

“Everything alright?” I asked, seeing the look on her face.

“Yeah, fine,” she said. “She just was trying to tell me I should be letting you impregnate women and that it’s important for your magic.”

I took her hand in mine and brought it to my lips to kiss her fingers. “Lauren, *I’m* not ready for that. Magic or not. If it happens, it’ll be a decision we make together and Magic won’t have anything to do with it.”

Lauren smiled and wrapped her fingers around my thumb, squeezing back. “Thank you,” she said.

“How about the other conversation?” I asked.

“Fine, nothing extreme. I’ll tell you about it after,” she said.

I nodded and we looked out around the circle as Ndia stood from her throne. “I call this Council back to session. Our next outstanding topic of discussion is the petition made to us by the Court of the Night to allow their war with the Wandering Lords. Lord Dracula has submitted evidence that the Caininites have been attempting to raise Cain from the dead again and would like to prosecute his war under the same terms as in 1732. I think we can all agree that the last war amongst the Vampyr was a bit over the top and would not be sustainable in the modern environment and we’ll need to come up with new terms of engagement to propose to both clans. I suggest we lean into the Code of War that the Shapeshifter tribes have been warring under - I know the Vampyr won’t like hearing that we’ve borrowed from the shapeshifters, but their laws are tried and tested.”

I looked over at Lauren, and she looked back at me with the same big-eyed expression.

“Okay,” I said quietly to her. “This is more of what I’d been expecting.”

Lauren nodded, and we sat back to try and follow along with the ensuing discussion of how two Vampire families could go to war and murder each other without revealing their presence to the greater world and causing an uproar.

I had so many fucking questions.