



ETHEREAL AFTERWORLD

Book 2 *in* The Ethereal Chronicles

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Ethereal Afterworld

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1.

Chrysanthe

A soft rumble and a deep exhale woke me up from my slumber. I smiled as I turned over on the mattress, opening my eyes slowly to sunlight streaming through the window.

I turned my head slightly; that was when I saw Caliya looking at me with piercing, amber eyes.

“Hey there, sweetie,” I said, grinning as I extended my arm out, scratching behind her ear; she moaned happily, shutting her eyes in contentment. “Hi.”

She just continued to lean into my hand, shifting her bodyweight into mine, even though I was still in bed. I laughed; my voice was still thick with sleep.

“Aww, Caliya. I’m okay, girl.”

The tiger opened her eyes back up to look at me; and blinked, a deep rumble echoing through my bones as she watched me eagerly.

“I guess it’s time to get up, isn’t it?”

I looked around the treehouse that I was in; sunlight drenched the inside of it, confirming the fact that I needed to get out of bed.

“Alright; time to get up,” I said, stretching for a moment before throwing the sheets on the mattress back, making my way off it.

Caliya watched me silently as my feet hit the wood floor, before she yawned; her canines were razor sharp as she extended her legs out in front of her, stretching.

But I just smiled; I wasn't scared of her at all, even though she was a tiger.

I had taken care of her ever since she was a cub, after her mother had been killed; she'd been given to me so that I could raise her to adulthood.

Given to me by an Oracle, who, when I was younger, had trained me to become the Protector of the Earth.

The same Oracle who had yet to return from her journey; she hadn't come back from bringing Altheda, a fellow Celestial Being, back to her Realm.

The Realm of the Flowers, it was called.

The Oracle though, named Sybella, she hadn't made her presence known.

For several mornings, and nights.

It wasn't like her to just disappear though, especially for long periods of nightfall.

I tried my hardest not to worry, for the shapeshifting Being that was once my mentor would be back.

The sound of a soft moan brought me back to myself, and I glanced down, only to see Caliya rubbing her head into my stomach.

I smiled at her as our eyes connected, and I brought my flower-tattooed hand to Caliya's ear, stroking it.

She closed her amber-colored eyes before opening them back up, a relaxed expression radiating throughout her entire body.

Caliya automatically calmed down, and I laughed at how she looked.

The tiger appeared to be completely tension free.

"Aww, sweetheart," I said, gazing into her face, "you're alright. You're alright."

I brought my attention to the rest of my treehouse.

“Now, I just need to clean up before I go outside,” I said, looking at my unmade bed. “I am going to fix you.”

I quickly got to work, making the bed and tidying the room.

I found my hairbrush afterward, bringing it up to my scalp and then getting the tangles out of my blond hair.

When I was done, I quickly changed clothes; a completely blue dress which matched my tinted mane.

My hair had been dyed by Altheda, who had said it would help defeat Thana.

It had, but now I had a permanent hue to my mane.

I stretched when I was done getting dressed and fixing my treehouse. The sunlight warmed me as I smiled, welcoming the sensation.

“Okay,” I said as I petted Caliya, who was right beside me. “Time to go outside.”

I sighed as I came out of the forest, making my way into the clearing.

My Fate Tattoos on my left wrist, as well as my bare feet, glittered in the sun, and I could feel my face getting warm from the illumination.

I just knew by the feel on my face that my peacock feather tattoos near my eyes were brightening.

It made me feel incredibly relaxed, like I was who I was destined to be.

To be the Protector of the Earth.

To take command of the weather, and control and heal nature. I could also mend wildlife injuries and regenerate plants.

I absolutely loved my talent, as well as my Fate Tattoos.

Everything regarding the imprints was amazing, as well as the obligations they represented.

I was the Protector of the Earth, and I absolutely loved my power.

Barefoot as always so my abilities would work, I walked over the bright green grass that was incredibly healthy.

It was all so amazing, how the landscape appeared.

I had helped it become that way, by defeating the Queen of Death, and by using my fated abilities.

The Queen of Death, Thana, who also had been my twin sister.

Thana, or Calla, which had been her birth name.

She'd tried to destroy the Earth, releasing Hell onto it.

I had been the one to stop her, trapping her in the Abyss, but unfortunately, I still had an ache in my gut from the fact that I had gone up against my *own sister*.

It made me feel terrible, but also relieved, since the threat was gone.

Now, though, I had to save my parents, who had been tormented by Thana.

That, and I had to figure out how to get rid of the scar that had become intermingled with the tattoo on my right arm. The tattoo of my World.

The scar was bothersome, and I needed to figure out how to get rid of it.

To save my parents, as well as myself.

I would have to speak with my former mentor, Sybella, so I would know what to do.

A breeze blew through my blond hair, bringing me back to myself.

I blinked, shaking my head slightly, before I petted Caliya's striped body that was right beside me.

She was staring ahead of her, gazing into the landscape that surrounded us.

Her tail swatted the air, and I realized she was watching a creature. A creature that was flying toward us.

I gasped as it approached.

It was a barn owl. But not just any barn owl; it was the shapeshifting Being known as Sybella.

She had returned.

2.



The barn owl screeched as it got closer to me, before it threw its body forward, landing on a tree branch.

I took a deep breath, and then spoke.

“Sybella? Sybella, is that you?”

The owl looked directly at me, clacking its beak almost knowingly, and that was when I knew, in fact, that it was my former mentor.

She looked at my face, before she abruptly left the branch; Sybella flew toward me.

A few moments later, a white light engulfed her.

Within a split moment, Sybella had transformed into her Being self.

Vines and multicolored flower patterns cascaded down both her arms, while there was a peacock feather tattoo on the back of each of her hands.

Both intricate Fate Tattoos were illuminated in the bright sun, appearing almost hypnotic; Sybella looked at me as her imprints danced.

Her light blue eyes studied my face, her blond hair hung long; and she was wearing a turquoise blue dress.

She watched me for several moments before speaking.
“Hello, Chrysanthe,” she said.

I smiled, nodding at her. “Hello, Sybella,” I said back. “Did you have a great trip? Did Altheda make it back alright?”

“Yes. Yes, she did, Chrysanthe.”

Sybella, the Oracle, seemed to fidget a little; her eyes drifted away from me, and that was when I knew something was wrong.

My eyebrows automatically creased in worry.

“Sybella, what’s wrong?”

The Oracle sighed, before looking into my face again.

“Chrysanthe, the Ethereal City is under attack.”

I stood in front of the Oracle in shock, not fully taking in what she had just told me.

I blinked several times, trying to comprehend her statement.

Finally, I spoke. “What?” I asked, incredibly confused. “What?” I repeated.

The Oracle just looked at me. “The Ethereal City is under attack. Somehow, when Thana had the Empyrean Blade, a Being from Hell got loose. He flew up to the Ethereal City, where he has been terrorizing everyone ever since. He also released the Minotaur your sister had. The beast she trapped in the Abyss escaped. Both the Being and the creature have been terrorizing the City ever since.”

My heart skipped a beat painfully.

My twin sister had a Minotaur?

“How do you know this?”

My former mentor just stared into my face. “I was told by Celio,” Sybella stated.

I blinked, my mind whirling from all this information.

I stood in front of Sybella, confusion and surprise engulfing me.

There was so much I wanted to ask; I just didn’t know where to start.

Celio. The Minotaur. The Being from Hell. The Ethereal City. The fact that the Being had released the Minotaur.

All the things that Sybella had said were just whirling around in my skull; I was unable to pick a topic for several moments.

I cleared my throat finally, and opened my mouth to speak.

“Wh...what?” I asked. “What?”

The Oracle stared at me; her blue eyes were steady on mine.

“How... how is Celio?” I asked.

Celio. My love who had gone back up to the Heavens, where he lived as the Guardian of the Spirits.

“Is Celio okay?” I asked again.

“Yes. Right now, he is. He is still in the Afterworld, but the other Archangels, as well as him, have been watching the destruction and terror plaguing the Ethereal City.”

I nodded in understanding.

My breathing slowed. But then another thought occurred to me.

“The Being from the Abyss,” I started, “he released a Minotaur? Which my sister had?”

I shook my head in bewilderment.

Not only was Thana the Queen of the Underworld, she was the Queen of Death. Not only did she have control of the Cloaked Spirits, also known as the Wraiths... She also had control of the Banshees, the Ghosts, the Goblins, and... and... a Minotaur.

A Minotaur.

A Minotaur.

My twin sister had had a bull-like creature while she was in Hell.

Sybella could see how taken aback I was.

“Chrysanthe,” she said, “the Being is causing harm to the City, and is letting Thana’s creature destroy everything in its path. Since you defeated Thana before, you are the only one that can go up against the Being from the Abyss.”

I tried to regulate my breathing as she continued.

“You have been scarred, but there is a special incantation that I have learned long ago, one that can help you be protected in the World Beyond. Chrysanthe, you will have to go there to get help, so you can defeat the Minotaur, as well as this other Being.”

“What is the other Being’s name?” I asked.

Sybella looked me straight in the face before she answered.

“Acanthus. The Being’s name is Acanthus.”



3.

“Acanthus?” I repeated, unfamiliar with the name.
“Acanthus?” I said again.
“Yes,” Sybella said, nodding. “He is wreaking havoc on the City; he needs to be stopped.”

“And I’m the only one who can defeat him, and Thana’s Minotaur?”

The Oracle looked into my eyes.

“Yes. You won’t be alone, though. Celio will be there to help you too, among some other Beings, and the Archangels. They will support you, but only *you* will be able to *defeat* the threat.”

My insides squirmed at the mere thought.

Even though I had ended the threat to the Realms, which had been my *own sister*, I still had to deal with a Being and a creature that she had, partly, unleashed into the Ethereal City.

Even though she was gone, I had to deal with everything she had left behind.

It made me upset and anxious.

Thana always had to make everything worse.

I sighed, looking at the Oracle again, before I spoke.

My thoughts had drifted to what she’d said a few moments ago. About the incantation that could save me, even though I’d been scarred.

Scarred by the Empyrean Blade, when I’d gone up against Thana.

“So, there is an incantation that can help me? I know I need to save my parents as well, since they were poisoned and blinded, but you said I would need to go to Heaven to find a cure. The incantation, can it help me?” I asked.

The Oracle nodded.

“That is correct, Chrysanthe. The spell will protect you from the Everlasting Light of the Afterworld; if you were to go there without the incantation, you would burn up, since you have been touched and scarred by the Empyrean Blade and your sister. You would burn up, as well as your parents, since they were harmed as well.”

My parents, Viro and Thera, now couldn't be in the Afterworld. Not without my help.

I had to save and protect them again.

I guess that answered the question as to if Celio would need help saving them.

I'd told Celio before he had gone back to Heaven that I would ask the Oracle if I could help.

Apparently, he would need assistance.

Sybella spoke again, breaking me out of my thoughts.

“The incantation though, it can only work for a few mornings and nights; it is not long-lasting. You will have to come back to Earth so I can repeat the spell.”

I nodded, trying to comprehend everything.

“How long does the spell last?” I asked, curious.

“It only lasts for about fourteen mornings and nights. After that, you will have to return to Earth, before your scar starts to hurt. Your scar hurting means that the incantation is wearing off, and that you are going to soon succumb to your injury. You would burn up in the Everlasting Light.”

I gulped, and Sybella saw my face, my scared expression.

“If you feel anything from your scar, go to Earth immediately, stay out of the World Beyond, and I will be able to cast the spell again.”

The Oracle just watched my eyes with her blue ones, checking to make sure that I was soaking up all the information I could.

I was, but it all made me terrified, everything that I was learning.

The Minotaur. The Being known as Acanthus. The scar that could cause me to burn up in the Everlasting Light. My parents.

It was just *a lot* to take in.

And only I was going to be able to do this. Defeat the threat.

I would have help, but this all would be up to *me*.

I stood on the grass in my bare feet for several moments, gathering everything up as the sunlight illuminated my surroundings.

My former mentor stared at me, and then spoke again.

“Chrysanthé, you will also need the Empyrean Blade; you will need it once you get to the Afterworld.”

The all-powerful Blade that had scarred me when I defeated my twin.

“I need that as well?” I asked, feeling dumbfounded.

Sybella nodded, and then moved her hands to her chest.

Sure enough, there was a tattoo above her heart; one that was the Empyrean Blade.

She grazed her fingers along her skin, and then pulled the Blade out from her flesh by the handle.

It shone magnificently, a white light flashing on the Blade edge; the Oracle gave it to me.

I took it gingerly, before glancing up at her.

Sybella’s eyes met mine, and she nodded encouragingly.

Go on, she seemed to say, even though she hadn’t said a word.

I took a deep breath, steadying my shaking hands before I positioned the Empyrean Blade over my heart, glancing down at my own chest.

The enchanted weapon soaked into my flesh, and I felt a powerful sensation as I did so.

It's the Blade. It's making me feel this way, I thought.

It was that powerful.

I closed my eyes for a moment, and opened them back up to see Sybella looking at me.

Her stare was steady as she saw the change in my demeanor.

The Empyrean Blade's power and strength was intense.

My back straightened up as I saw the Oracle's stare, and she took a few steps toward me, holding out her arm so her tattooed hand grasped mine.

Exactly where the scar was, intermingled with the tattoo of my World.

She placed her hands gingerly on my skin, and closed her eyes.

She said the incantation, murmuring words of a different tongue; I knew those words would protect me while I was in Heaven.

Afterward, Sybella opened her eyes, peering into mine.

"Now, Chrysanthe, you are all set to go to the Heavens. You will *have* to leave by nightfall; as I said, the spell won't last forever, so you have to get going tonight. You can say goodbye to Caliya for now, but you must go to the World Beyond by sundown. I will get Maximus for you, but you *must* be in the Afterworld when the stars come out."

I nodded my head automatically.

"Alright," I said.

“The Winged Horse will help you get to the Afterworld,” Sybella repeated, referring to Maximus. “He will help you on your journey.”

I gulped.

It seemed like this was going to be a bigger task than when I defeated Thana.

Bigger, and more dangerous.

I was willing to take the chance, though.

To save the Ethereal City. To save my parents.

I was willing to take the journey to the Afterworld.

I looked at the Oracle. “Alright,” I said, taking up the challenge. “What else must I do?”