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The Immortals: Blue Moon

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Every man has his own destiny;
the only imperative
is to follow it, to accept it,
no matter where it leads him.

—Henry Miller

one

"Close your eyes and picture it. Can you see it?"

I nod, eyes closed.

"Imagine it right there before you. *See* its texture, shape, and color—got it?"

I smile, holding the image in my head.

"Good. Now reach out and touch it. *Feel* its contours with the tips of your fingers, *cradle* its weight in the palms of your hands, then combine all of your senses—sight, touch, smell, taste—can you taste it?"

I bite my lip and suppress a giggle.

"Perfect. Now combine that with feeling. *Believe* it exists right before you. Feel it, see it, touch it, taste it, accept it, *manifest* it!" he says.

So I do. I do all of those things. And when he groans, I open my eyes to see for myself.

"Ever." He shakes his head. "You were supposed to think of an *orange.* This isn't even close."

"Nope, nothing fruity about him." I laugh, smiling at each of my Damens—the replica I manifested before me, and the flesh and blood version beside me. Both of them equally tall, dark, and so devastatingly handsome they hardly seem real.

"What am I going to do with you?" the real Damen asks, attempting a disapproving gaze but failing miserably. His eyes always betray him, showing nothing but love.

"Hmmm . . ." I glance between my two boyfriends—one real, one conjured. "I guess you could just go ahead and kiss me. Or, if you're too busy, I'll ask him to stand in, I don't think he'd mind." I motion toward manifest Damen, laughing when he smiles and winks at me even though his edges are fading and soon he'll be gone.

But the real Damen doesn't laugh. He just shakes his head and says, "Ever, please. You need to be serious. There's so much to teach you."

"What's the rush?" I fluff my pillow and pat the space right beside me, hoping he'll move away from my desk and come join me. "I thought we had nothing *but* time?" I smile. And when he looks at me, my whole body grows warm and my breath halts in my throat, and I can't help but wonder if I'll ever get used to his amazing beauty—his smooth olive skin, brown shiny hair, perfect face, and lean sculpted body—the perfect dark yin to my pale blond yang. "I think you'll find me a very eager student," I say, my eyes meeting his—two dark wells of unfathomable depths.

"You're insatiable," he whispers, shaking his head and moving beside me, as drawn to me as I am to him.

"Just trying to make up for lost time," I murmur, always so eager for these moments, the times when it's just us, and I don't have to share him with anyone else. Even knowing we have all of eternity laid out before us doesn't make me any less greedy.

He leans in to kiss me, forgoing our lesson. All thoughts of manifesting, remote viewing, telepathy—all of that psychic business replaced by something far more immediate, as he pushes me back against a pile of pillows and covers my body with his, the two of us merging like crumbled vines seeking the sun.

His fingers snake under my top, sliding along my stomach to the edge of my bra as I close my eyes and whisper, "I love you." Words I once kept to myself. But after saying it the first time, I've barely said anything else.

Hearing his soft muffled groan as he releases the clasp on my bra, so effortlessly, so perfectly, nothing awkward or fumbling about it.

Every move he makes is so graceful, so perfect, so—

Maybe too perfect.

"What's wrong?" he asks, as I push him away. His breath coming in short shallow gasps as his eyes seek mine, their surrounding skin tense and constricted in the way I've grown used to.

"Nothing's wrong." I turn my back and adjust my top, glad I completed the lesson on shielding my thoughts since it's the only thing that allows me to lie.

He sighs and moves away, denying me the tingle of his touch and the heat of his gaze as he paces before me. And when he finally stops and faces me, I press my lips together, knowing what's next. We've been here before.

"Ever, I'm not trying to rush you or anything. Really, I'm not," he says, his face creased with concern. "But at some point you're going to have to get over this and accept who I am. I can manifest anything you desire, send telepathic thoughts and images whenever we're apart, whisk you away to Summerland at a moment's notice. But the one thing I can't ever do is change the past. It just *is*."

I stare at the floor, feeling small, needy, and completely ashamed. Hating that I'm so incapable of hiding my jealousies and insecurities, hating that they're so transparent and clearly displayed. Because no matter what sort of psychic shield I create, it's no use. He's had six hundred years to study human behavior (to study *my* behavior), versus my sixteen.

"Just—just give me a little more time to get used to all this," I

say, picking at a frayed seam on my pillowcase. "It's only been a few weeks." I shrug, remembering how I killed his ex-wife, told him I loved him, and sealed my immortal fate, less than three weeks ago.

He looks at me, his lips pressed together, his eyes tinged with doubt. And even though we're merely a few feet apart, the space that divides us is so heavy and fraught—it feels like an ocean.

"I'm referring to *this* lifetime," I say, my voice quickening, rising, hoping to fill up the void and lighten the mood. "And since I can't recall any of the others, it's all I have. I just need a little more *time,* okay?" I smile nervously, my lips feeling clumsy and loose as I hold them in place, exhaling in relief when he sits down beside me, lifts his fingers to my forehead, and seeks the space where my scar used to be.

"Well, that's one thing we'll never run out of." He sighs, trailing his fingers along the curve of my jaw as he leans in to kiss me, his lips making a series of stops from my forehead, to my nose, to my mouth.

And just when I think he's about to kiss me again, he squeezes my hand and moves away. Heading straight for the door and leaving a beautiful red tulip behind in his place.

two

Even though Damen can sense the exact moment my aunt Sabine turns onto our street and approaches the drive, that's not why he left.

He left because of me.

Because of the simple fact that he's been after me for hundreds of years, seeking me out in all of my incarnations, just so we could be together.

Only we never got *together.*

Which means *it* never happened.

Apparently every time we were about to take the next step and consummate our love, his ex-wife Drina managed to show up and kill me.

But now that I've killed her, eliminated her with one well-placed though admittedly feeble swipe to her rather compromised heart chakra, there's absolutely nothing or no one blocking our way.

Except me.

Because even though I love Damen with all of my being, and definitely want to take the next step—I can't stop thinking about those last six hundred years.

And how he chose to live them. (Outlandishly, according to him.)

And *whom* he chose to live them with. (Besides his ex-wife Drina, many others have been alluded to.)

And, well, as much as I hate to admit it, knowing all of that makes me feel a little insecure.

Okay, maybe *a lot* insecure. I mean, it's not like my pathetically meager list of guys I've kissed could ever compare to his six centuries' worth of conquests.

And even though I know it's ridiculous, even though I know Damen has loved me for centuries, the fact is, the heart and mind aren't always friendly.

And in my case, they're barely speaking.

Yet still, every time Damen comes over for my lesson, I always manage to turn it into a prolonged make-out session, each time starting out thinking: *This is it! It's really going to happen this time!*

Only to push him away like the worst kind of tease.

And the truth is, it's exactly like he said. He can't change his past, *it just is.* Once something is done it can't be undone. There's no rewind. No going back.

The only thing a person can ever really do is keep moving forward.

And that's exactly what I need to do.

Take that big leap forward without hesitation, without once looking back.

Simply forget the past and forge toward the future.

I just wish it were really that easy.

"Ever?" Sabine makes her way up the stairs as I run frantically around my room, trying to straighten it up before plopping in front of my desk and scrambling to look like I'm busy. "You still up?" she asks, poking her head inside. And even though her suit is wrinkled,

her hair limp, and her eyes a little red and tired, her aura's hanging in there, beaming a nice shade of green.

"I was just finishing up some homework," I say, pushing my laptop away as though I'd been using it.

"Did you eat?" She leans against the doorjamb, her eyes narrowed and suspicious, as her aura reaches right toward me—the portable lie detector she unknowingly carries wherever she goes.

"Of course," I tell her. Nodding and smiling and doing my best to appear sincere, but the truth is, it feels false on my face.

I hate having to lie. Especially to her. After all that she's done for me, taking me in after the accident when my whole family died. I mean, it's not like she had to do that. Just because she's my only living relative didn't mean she couldn't say no. And believe me, half the time she probably wishes she had. Her life was way less complicated before I arrived.

"I meant something besides that red drink." She nods, motioning toward the bottle on my desk, the opalescent red liquid with the strange bitter taste I don't hate nearly as much as I used to. Which is good since, according to Damen, I'll be sipping it for the rest of eternity. Though it's not like I *can't* eat real food, it's just that I no longer want to. My immortal juice provides all of the nutrients I could ever need. And no matter how much or how little I drink, I always feel sated.

But still, I know what she's thinking. And not only because I can read all of her thoughts, but because I used to think the same things about Damen. I used to get really annoyed watching him push his food around and only *pretend* to eat. Until I found out his secret, that is.

"I, um, I grabbed something earlier," I finally say, trying not to press my lips together, avert my gaze, or cringe—all of my usual dead giveaways. "With Miles and Haven," I add, hoping it will explain the lack of dirty dishes, even though I know that providing

too many details is bad, like a flashing red light signaling LIAR STRAIGHT AHEAD! Not to mention that Sabine being a lawyer, one of her firm's top litigators, makes her incredibly good at spotting a phony. Though she pretty much saves that particular gift for her professional life. In her private life, she chooses to believe.

Except for today. Today she's not buying a word of it. Instead, she just looks at me and says, "I'm worried about you."

I swivel around so I'm facing her, hoping to appear as though I'm open, ready to address her concerns, even though I'm pretty much freaked. "I'm fine," I tell her, nodding and smiling so that she'll believe it. "Really. My grades are good, I'm getting along with my friends, Damen and I are—" I pause, realizing I've never really talked to her about my relationship before, haven't really defined it, and have pretty much kept it to myself. And the truth is, now that I've started, I'm not sure how to finish.

I mean, referring to ourselves as boyfriend and girlfriend sounds so mundane and inadequate once our pasts, presents, and futures are taken into account, because clearly all of our shared history makes us so much more than that. But still, it's not like I'm going to publicly proclaim us as eternal partners or soul mates either—the *ick* factor on that is just way too high. And the truth is, I'd really rather not define it at all. At the moment, I'm confused enough as it is. Besides, what would I even tell her? That we've loved each other for centuries but still haven't made it past second base?

"Well, Damen and I are—doing really good," I finally say, gulping when I realize I said *good* instead of *great,* which may be the first real truth I've spoken all day.

"So he *was* here." She sets her brown leather briefcase onto the floor and looks at me, both of us fully aware of how easily I fell into her professional litigator's trap.

I nod, mentally kicking myself for insisting we hang out here, as opposed to his place like he originally wanted.

"I thought I saw his car whiz past." She shifts her gaze to my rumpled bed with the haphazard pillows and disheveled duvet, and when she turns back to face me, I can't help but cringe, especially when I sense what's about to be said.

"Ever." She sighs. "I'm sorry I'm not around all that much and that we're unable to spend more time together. And even though it feels like we're still sort of finding our way with each other, I want you to know that I'm here for you. If you ever need to talk to someone—I'll listen."

I press my lips together and nod, knowing she's not finished, but hoping that by staying quiet and complacent, it'll be over with soon.

"Because even though you probably think I'm too old to understand what you're going through, I do remember what it was like at your age. How overwhelming it can be with the constant pressure to measure up to models and actresses and other impossible images you see on TV."

I swallow hard and avoid her gaze, cautioning myself to not overreact, to not go all overboard with defending myself since it's much better for her to believe this than to suspect the real truth.

Ever since I got expelled, Sabine's been watching me closer than ever, and when she recently loaded up on a stack of self-help books, everything from: *How to Raise a Sane Teen in Insane Times Like These,* to: *Your Teen and the Media (And What You Can Do About it!),* it's gotten a gazillion times worse. With her underlining and highlighting all of the most disturbing adolescent behaviors, and then scrutinizing me, checking for symptoms.

"But I want you to know that you're a beautiful girl, far more beautiful than I ever was at your age, and that starving yourself to compete with all of those skinny celebrities who spend half their lives checking in and out of rehab is not only a completely unreasonable and unattainable goal, but will only end up making you

sick." She gives me a pointed look, desperately wanting to get through to me, hoping her words will penetrate. "I want you to know that you're perfect just as you are, and it pains me to see you going through this. And if this is about Damen, well then, all I have to say about that is—"

"I'm not anorexic."

She looks at me.

"I'm not bulimic, I'm not on some crazy fad diet, I'm not starving myself, I'm not striving to be a size zero, and I'm not trying to look like an Olsen twin. Seriously, Sabine, do I *look* like I'm wasting away?" I stand, allowing for an unobstructed view of me in all of my tight-jeaned glory, because if anything, I feel like the opposite of wasting away. I seem to be bulking up at a pretty good pace.

She looks me over. And I mean *really* looks me over. Starting from the top of my head and going all the way down to my toes, her eyes coming to rest on my pale exposed ankles I had no choice but to display when I discovered that my favorite jeans are too short and rolled them up to compensate.

"I just thought . . ." She shrugs, unsure of what to say now that the evidence presented before her so clearly points to a *not guilty* verdict. "Because I never see you eating anymore—and you're always sipping that red—"

"So you just assumed I'd gone from adolescent binge drinker to anorexic food avoider?" I laugh so she'll know I'm not mad—a little annoyed maybe, though more with myself than with her. I should've faked it better. I should've at least *pretended* to eat. "You have nothing to worry about." I smile. "Really. And just so we're clear, I have no intention of taking and/or dealing drugs, experimenting with body modification, cutting, branding, scarification, extreme piercing, or whatever else makes this week's *Top Ten Maladjusted Behaviors to Look for in Your Teen* list. And for the record, my sipping that red drink has nothing to do with trying to be celebrity

skinny or trying to please Damen. I just happen to like it, that's all. Besides, I happen to know for a fact that Damen loves me and accepts me exactly as I—" I stop, knowing I've just started a whole other topic I'm unwilling to explore. And before she can even get to the words now formulating in her head, I just hold up my hand and say, "And *no*, that's *not* what I meant. Damen and I are—" *Hooking up, dating, boyfriend and girlfriend, friends with benefits, eternally bound.* "Well, we're together. You know, committed, like a couple. But we *aren't* sleeping together."

Yet.

She looks at me, her face as pinched and uncomfortable as I feel inside. Neither of us wanting to explore this topic, but, unlike me, she feels it's her duty.

"Ever, I wasn't insinuating—" she starts. But then she looks at me, and I look at her, and she shrugs, deciding to just let it go since we both know she most certainly was.

And I'm so relieved that it's over and that I got off relatively easy, that I'm completely taken by surprise when she says, "Well, since you really seem to care about this young man, I think I should get to know him. So let's schedule a time when we can all go to dinner. How does this weekend sound?"

This weekend?

I swallow hard and look at her, knowing exactly what she's after, hoping to kill two birds with one meal. Having found the perfect opportunity to watch me scarf down a full plate of food, while putting Damen on the stand so she can totally grill him.

"Well, that sounds great and all except that Miles's play is on Friday." I fight to keep my voice steady and sure. "And then there's supposed to be an after party—and that'll probably run pretty late—so . . ."

She nods, her eyes right on mine, her gaze so uncanny and knowing it's making me sweat.

"So it's probably not going to work," I finish, knowing I'll have to go through with it eventually, but hoping for later rather than sooner. I mean, I love Sabine, and I love Damen, I'm just not sure I'm going to love them together, especially once the interrogation begins.

She looks at me for a moment, then nods and turns away. And just when I'm able to exhale, she glances over her shoulder to say, "Well, Friday's clearly out, but that still leaves Saturday. Why don't you tell Damen to be here at eight?"