

Atlas & Penelope

The Auran Chronicles Bonus
Content

Wendy Heiss

This chapter can be read right after book 3 (Season Warriors and Wolves), or before or even after Autumn Queens and Shadows. The chapter is set between book 3 and 4.

This is actually just a little taste of what's actually to come in Summer Heirs and Fires. I'm planning on doing more of these bonus chapters for my newsletters (yes, Anastasia, there will be more Visha and Elias. And more Pen and Atlas, too.)

Pen's Adventures With An Atlas

Penelope

Returning back to Adriata after many gruesome months in Eldmoor was the sweetest treat to someone's mood. There was nothing that bright coloured flowers, the warm sun and the soft spring breeze could not fix. All except one thing. The hole that had been dug up in my chest the day I swore into the Red Coven, accepting my title as not only a Delcour Crafter, but as possibly the next in line to receive the title of Grand Maiden. Or even perhaps as the one who'd be whisked away by the son of the Death God.

The future was the most unclear it had ever been, and everyone agreed on it, as did my clairvoyant grandmother who had not been able to foresee not a single thing ever since the *Battle of the Guardians*

nearly six years ago now. Whatever Snow had done, whatever the fates had decided on, it had been entirely erased or hidden.

Once magic had entered the equation, my life had already altered its course entirely. Now with all this in the mix, there was too much at stake, too much to lose, too little to spare.

Yet, I had not made my peace with this one last thing. Even years later, I still refused to let this one thing go. I'd clung to it with all I had. So unlike me. So selfishly.

Making my way down the Amaris castle gardens, I headed towards the temple where he spent most of his hours, sometimes teaching, sometimes thinking, at other times waiting—waiting for me.

Perhaps today I'd tell him to wait no more. Perhaps today I'd gather what little courage I had been born with and tell him to not wait for me anymore and set him free.

As always, my heart had a habit of reacting faster than my mind, forcing my steps to falter only a few feet from where he was. Bracing my shoulder against a blooming cherry tree, I leaned against it for a few moments, almost chewing my thumb to the bone in an attempt to hold my tears back. Treacherous tears that always betrayed me in every situation that my even weaker heart ordered them to pour at the first thought of a life where he wasn't part of it.

"What are we looking at?" someone whispered in my ear, and my scream was cut off by his hand coming over my mouth.

My body immediately relaxed when the most familiar laughter rang from his chest and when he pressed a few kisses to the crown of my head.

I melted into his hold when his arms came around my waist, holding me as if I were to run away and disappear. "Do not scare me like that."

"I'm sorry, but you were wasting precious minutes."

"I don't have to go back to the Red Coven until the weekend."

"I have you for three days?"

I nodded despite what I'd come to agree to in my head just a few moments ago. All thoughts seemed to vanish when he spun me to face him, and I saw his bright smile. *Maybe not today either.* Lifting up the basket I was holding, I said, "Picnic?"

He took the blanket I had on my other hand and laid it down, letting me sit first and then laying down with his head on my lap.

"Don't sleep just yet," I half-heartedly whispered, brushing my fingers over his eyes, knowing he had probably not slept a blink since last time I had seen him. He had the most complicated relationship with night and day, he had never found enough comfort to trust either and fall sleep. Not unless there was someone else with him to hold him through the moment he felt most vulnerable. "I made you some food."

That had his eyes open within seconds and sitting up, waiting for me to dish out the little sandwiches I'd made.

One thing about Atlas, he loved food. At least the one I made for him. His eating habits on the other hand awfully reminded me of Snow's. He inhaled everything so fast before I could blink. He was insatiable. Possibly why he was still growing taller by the day even at twenty-four. At this point, he'd reached Kilian and was starting to hunch over when he spoke to people which wasn't good at all for his poor back that he was always rubbing these days.

I snorted, hiding my laughter behind a hand when he stuffed the last sandwich in his mouth and then craned his neck to check inside of my basket for more, giving me a betrayed look when he found nothing else inside of it.

"I left some cake baking in the kitchens," I said, sparing him the littlest bit of heartache, and he nodded full of appreciation.

Putting the basket away, I laid down, staring at the canopy of pink flowers that had bloomed from the cherry tree flying away into the quiet wind, devouring the serenity of that moment with every single one of my senses.

He laid on his side beside me, lifting a hand above me to put shade over my eyes from the bright sun, still determined not to set despite the late hour. Not a word had been said in almost an hour, but I felt my cheeks heat from the way he was looking at me.

It had not taken me long to figure out why he went quiet in happy and sad moments. The emotions overwhelmed him to the point words were stolen away from him. That was why his silence often told me more than his words. And I knew every thought that was crossing his mind when I smiled back and his cheeks turned just the slightest shade of pink. A habit he was unfortunately growing out of. One which I very much liked.

His fingers circled my face, over and over, sending warm goosebumps spreading all the way down my spine. "You should have just let me marry you already."

Scooting a little closer, I put a hand to his chest, feeling what I already knew I would feel. "I've taken my vows as a Crafter, and you know that any other vow I will ever take will always come after them. My coven will have to come first, my sisters will have to come first. We still don't know what fates will decide. If they will change as Snow's did. If it will still be Visha, or me, or Lilith. I won't do that to you, Atlas. I won't. You deserve to be put first. You deserve someone who will put your first." He out of everyone deserved so much more.

"It won't be you."

"You don't know that. How would you know that?" How could I tell him that my heart had half made its mind up to protect the baby girl I'd held in my arms after I had killed her mother. How could I tell

him that if my fate was to truly repay the debt my bloodline owed, I would take it. I would not let Visha, nor Lilith take the fall. Not when I was disposable. It had to mean something, for someone as meaningless and small as I was to inherit this fate, it had to mean something. There had to be something greater involved.

“Because you’re mine.” He put his brow to mine, taking one deep shaky breath. “How can you be anyone else’s but mine?”

I shook my head. “My dreams—”

“Are just dreams.”

They were not and he knew better. “You out of all do not really believe that.” They weren’t just dreams. Nor nightmares. They were almost like memories, like I’d lived through them once before. Plagued with signs of doom and dread. The moment I woke, I felt like I’d just lived through them a second time. When I’d confided in Alaric about them, he’d only confirmed what I feared. My father had dreamt the same dreams. And no Crafter simply just dreamt.

“I chose to believe it this time. So just marry me. Have me anyway you wish to have me.”

“I’m easier to forget if I’m just a friend. A wife is not.” I could almost see what I’d wished most all my life, it was so close I could almost, almost touch it. To have my own family. To belong to someone. But things had become too complicated after so many hidden truths had come to light. Part of me wished I’d never known, that I could let myself belong to someone as much as I wanted to belong to him.

“You’re not just a friend. You’ve never been just a friend,” he said, leaning to kiss me in the way that reminded me why I’d given him all my firsts and why he’d also given me all of his in return. “You’ve not been *just* my friend in a while. I think I’ve been enough times inside you to over qualify me for that position.”

I ran my hand down his chest, feeling his breaths quicken. “An improper friend then.”

“I’ve done nothing improper to you. All of it has felt proper,” he said, twisting a strand of my hair between his fingers.

“My mother would have begged to differ. She would have said you have ruined and dishonoured me.” At some point I thought she might rise from her grave to tell me just that and die a second time. Especially when I’d let him strip me naked inside *his* temple the other week and have his way with me, not once, not even twice, but three whole times. All in one day.

“Here I am, asking to take responsibility for it.”

My teeth dug on my bottom lip to hold back my smile. “I can’t take responsibility if I break your heart.”

“You don’t have to. It’s yours to do whatever you want with it.”

I buried my face on the picnic blanket just so I wouldn’t have to look at him or say something stupid back.

His soft chuckles made me take just a little glance. Pushing my hair away from my face that was still half hidden, he said, “An ancestor of yours might have been an ostrich.”

That made me straighten right back even though I was sure I’d gone every shade of red and probably had become one with my hair. “Don’t know what you mean.”

“How long are you going to let me pretend?”

“Pretend about what?”

“That I’m not in love with you.”

I sucked in a breath. “Atlas—”

“Because I am,” he said, “I am in love with you.”

Immediately, my heart sprung to action, issuing orders she shouldn’t be issuing, and his face disappeared behind the glaze of my tears. “Why would you say a stupid thing like that?”

He lifted a flower between us, tucking it in my hair. His finger slid past my jaw and under my chin, gently lifting my face to his as he leaned in to kiss me. "I'm fine with waiting. Time will pass anyway. My only wish is that we could let it pass together."

Giving me a big smile as he always did when he wanted to reassure my doubting heart and mind, he grabbed my hand, lacing our fingers together. "It's getting dark and you're probably tired."

"Just a little."

When we reached the castle steps, he let go of my hand.

"What is it?" I asked.

"I-I don't want to upset you."

I pressed my hand to his chest, stepping closely to him. "You aren't upsetting me, Atlas." But I had upset him. In the worst ways I could. All he's ever wanted was to be loved. I was denying him his greatest wishes, too.

It broke my heart when he forced a smile. "I might," he said, that smile wavering, "and I don't want to do that. I can't see you upset. My room is yours tonight, I will stay at the temple."

"I don't want you to do that," I said, clinging into his sleeve, feeling each and every single breath burn in my chest. "What about the cake I made? I have so much to tell you. I even brought things to show you."

He cupped my face and pressed his lips to my brow for a while, just holding me there. "Another time."

"Wait," I said just as he turned to leave. I held onto his shoulder and went to my tiptoes to whisper in his ear, "I love you, too."

When I pulled back, he opened his mouth to speak, only to be interrupted by a loud screech.

Baby Rain ran in my direction with her drunken little feet that she'd just started learning how to use, almost landing face first on the ground had I not reached to grab her.

She screeched again, grabbing my face and my hair and my nose and just about everything in her sight, trying to dig her two pathetic little teeth on my shoulder and squealing from frustration when the damage was below minimal.

Kilian was following shortly after her, a sleeping Sam hung over his shoulder and an even sleepier Snow dragging her feet by his side, her eyes half hooded and her hair all over the place.

"They'd been napping under the big willow tree," Kilian said, chuckling. "No one is about to get any sleep tonight." He came to my side, taking his little feral beast from my arms with his free one and murmuring, "Seems we've interrupted at the wrong time."

"I told him I love him," I whispered back to him, and his brows hiked up. "I don't know what to really say after that, so the interruption was welcomed."

My attention went to Atlas laughing at something Snow said and I sighed, grateful that whatever part of his soul I'd broken or would break if fates would stray, he would always have them to fix it. He won't be alone.

"You're too young to sigh like that," Kilian said. "And you're definitely too young to be feeling all that," he added. "You know he can see it, too."

"Then can he see that I love him, right?"

He shook his head. "All is too shadowed by doubt. It almost looks like regret when those two colours mix. Love and doubt." Looking over his shoulder at Snow, he said, "Come, my heart. Let's leave them to enjoy this night."

Snow patted Atlas's cheek. "Good night, my first born." She threw me a wonky wink as she yawned and took Kilian's arm. "Don't do anything I wouldn't do."

"Which is what?" I asked, laughing.

“Exactly,” she said over her shoulder. “I’d do everything. As we all should. We all should do everything while we can. Because you never know if we can ever have that chance again.”

And like that, my smile vanished.

“Minus murder!” she shouted from inside the castle. “So says Kilian.”

I snorted and Atlas joined me.

“Did you really mean it?” he asked after a long moment of painful silence.

Swallowing down the knot in my throat, I said, “With all my heart. And if the fates and Gods will spare us, I *will* marry you, Atlas.” I extended a hand to him. “I don’t want to spend any night I have with you alone. Ever.”

He took my hand, bringing it to his lips to press a dozen kisses all over it and then drawing me close. “Then I won’t ever leave you to spend them alone.”

Afterword

Yall have better strapped your boots for Summer Heirs and Fires, I have a bunch planned. And most importantly, for Lilith's and Ezekiel's book!!!!!! It has indeed been finalised as a decision and I will definitely write it at some point after I'm done with all the projects in line for this year.

***Solstice Witches and Vows** (hopefully 2025)*

A standalone short novel which will be part of both The Auran Chronicles and Daughters of Chaos, about a Prince of Hell and a witch bound by a bargain older than time.

It will be written to either be read as part of either series, both or just as a standalone. But it will be considered **A *The Auran Chronicles and Daughters of Chaos* Novel.**