



PASSION ALWAYS
COMES WITH A PRICE.

Deromancist

SEVEN FORBIDDEN ARTS #2

CHARMAINE PAULS

Aeromancist

**Seven Forbidden Arts
Book 2**

Charmaine Pauls



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For Melani

Chapter One

The air in the flat was thick, not cool like when he was around. It had been two weeks since he had left her, and Katherine White swore she had lost her ability to breathe. All she wanted to do now was be sick. Fittingly. Her body was in withdrawal. What she needed was Lann Dréan's touch. But she had signed a contract not to contact him after thirty days. That was all he had promised to give her. A month of the most incredible sex of her life.

"Come on, Kat," Diana said, "you've been cooped up in here for two weeks. Come out for dinner with us. It'll be fun."

Kat swallowed down bile, trying not to vomit.

"Enrico won't mind."

"I'll just stay here with my head in the toilet," Kat said, not looking at her roommate.

"Kat..." Diana crouched down next to her on the bathroom floor. "You haven't been well since ... well, since you know when." She wiped Kat's hair from her wet forehead. "I'm just trying to help."

"I'm in no condition to go out, never mind eat. Besides, I've got to work. I'm behind with my research."

Diana straightened and rested her hands on her hips. "Is that maybe because you haven't been back to *his* library?"

Kat rolled her eyes at Diana's determination not to speak Lann's name, as if that was going to prevent Kat from missing him.

"There are other libraries, you know," Kat said.

"Yeah." Diana gave her a condemning look. "But not with the same material. Not with what you need. Besides, you haven't been to any of those other libraries either. You haven't been anywhere since *he* left."

"You and Enrico go and have fun. I—"

The wave of nausea Kat had been fighting broke. She emptied her tummy,

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the little of what she could stomach at lunch, into the toilet.

When only dry heaves remained, Diana handed her a wet wipe and patted her shoulder.

Kat supported her back against the bathtub. "I've never had a tummy bug that lasted for seven days."

"Kat?" Diana's voice was soft. "I think you should consider an alternative reason for your condition."

"Like what? Can't be food poisoning. It doesn't last this long. And I don't have a fever."

Diana sat down next to her. "I was thinking along the lines of doing a pregnancy test."

Kat looked up quickly. "Impossible. I told you he's infertile."

"You haven't had your period, Kat."

"I'm never regular. Lann wouldn't lie to me. I trust him. Utterly."

Diana shrugged. "Then it can't hurt to do one."

"That's crazy. Impossible."

"Alright." Diana got to her feet again. "Tell you what, I'll stay in with you tonight. I'll heat up some tomato soup, as that's all you seem to tolerate these days, and we'll watch a movie on TV. But before that, I'm going to the pharmacy."

* * * *

Half an hour later, Kat sat on the closed lid of the toilet. She stared at her reflection in the mirror and didn't recognize herself. Her usually tanned skin was pale now, making her eyes appear bluer than normal, and her red hair was a tangled mess that fell to her waist. This wasn't the girl who had welcomed Lann into her life just over a month ago. That person was in charge of her life, knew what she wanted and where she was headed. What looked back at her, this washed-out version of herself, was the woman he had walked out on.

Diana touched her shoulder. "Kat?"

She trembled. "It can't be. It's wrong."

"Girlfriend," Diana took her hand, "you've done two tests. They can't both be wrong."

"But why would he have lied to me?" Kat jumped up. "He isn't like that."

"Maybe he's not like you think he is," Diana said sternly. She hugged her friend. "Come. We'll work it out. First things first. Let's go make you something to eat. You must be starving."

In the kitchen, Kat took a seat by the table, her head in her hands, while Diana heated a tin of tomato soup in a casserole on the stove.

"What will you do?" Diana said, her voice sympathetic.

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“I have to do a blood test to be sure. If it’s positive, I’ll have to tell him.”

What Kat didn’t say was that she didn’t need the blood test to be sure. Deep down, she already knew the truth she tried so hard to deny. She was pregnant. It didn’t make sense, and yet, it did. They hadn’t used protection because Lann told her he was infertile. If he only wanted a thirty-day fling, why would he lie?

“You could just say nothing if you never want to see him again,” Diana offered.

Kat shook her head. “No. He has a right to know. And I have a right to answers.”

She didn’t go back on her word or break her contracts, but this was an exceptional condition. She picked up her phone.

“What are you doing?” Diana said.

Kat dialed Alfonso’s number. Lann’s butler answered with, “Miss?”

“Alfonso, I need to speak to Lann. Can you please give me his number in New York?”

This wasn’t something one did over the phone, but given the circumstances, she didn’t have a choice. He was probably having a good time back home. Maybe he had already offered another woman a thirty-day trial with a no-strings-attached clause.

“In fact,” Alfonso said slowly, “sir will be back here on Friday, just for a couple of days, if miss wishes to see him.”

Her mouth fell open. He was coming back? Without telling her? He wanted to slip in and out of Santiago without her knowledge. How could he?

“Thank you,” she whispered.

“Shall I give sir a message?”

“No. No, thank you.”

She ended the call.

“You’re better off staying away from him,” Diana said, pointing the wooden spoon at her. “He’s trouble of the kind that can destroy a girl’s life.”

Too late. If Diana only knew... Kat was already in way over her head.

Chapter Two

From the expression on Lann's face, Kat knew he hadn't expected her. Alfonso hadn't warned him of her visit. Lann sat behind his desk, very similar to the first time they had met, but this time he was in the library, and not in his office. He had probably been working on the restoration of his ancient books, because he wore his glasses. Removing them, he immediately got to his feet. The air felt lighter, as it always did in his presence. Wisps of her hair lifted as if to an invisible caress, but Lann didn't acknowledge the subtle dance of molecules this time.

As always, he looked impeccable in tailored pants and a white dress shirt. He stood immobile, exerting calm, waiting for her to make the first move. Kat had never been fooled about the latent danger that lurked under his quiet sophistication and intellectual air. There was a raw energy about Lann that hinted at his wildness, even as his exterior was polished civility.

"Alfonso showed me in," she said.

"Katherine." His lips lifted in the corner, exposing his dimple.

Her heart broke at his smile. It was the one he reserved for other people. Never for her. It was automatic, a practiced social stance, and she hated it.

Hers was faint in return. She glanced at the students who were handling his books with protective gloves. "May we speak in private, please?"

He frowned. "Let's go to my office."

He led the way. At least he hadn't thrown her out on sight. She was walking the familiar path she believed she'd never walk again. The air gathered around his ankles as he moved, lapping at her feet as she followed in his wake. She had never felt it stronger, and yet, it should have been the reverse. She was supposed to be cutting the tie, not strengthening it, dammit.

Inside his office he almost took a military stance, his shoulders straight, his arms behind his back, as if keeping them there would prevent him from

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touching her. But his eyes were filled with warmth and concern.

“Katherine, I didn’t tell you I was back because I didn’t want to make it harder on you.”

He didn’t owe her an explanation. She’d agreed to his terms. With her eyes wide open.

“I came back to take care of the money,” he continued. “When Alfonso told me you returned everything—”

“I don’t want your money.”

“You can live in comfort. Why struggle, if I have enough to share?”

“Because it wasn’t part of our agreement,” she snapped. She took a calming breath. “Because it’ll make me feel like a prostitute.”

His expression was incredulous as he considered the statement, but after a moment, he inclined his head. “Of course. I respect your decision.”

“Lann...” She chewed her lip, thinking of the best way to tell him. Hadn’t she practiced her line a million times? “I wouldn’t have broken our agreement if it wasn’t necessary.”

He stared at her expectantly. There was no easy way to break the news.

“I’m pregnant.”

He froze. The heat evaporated from his gaze. His upper arms flexed as he clasped his hands behind his back. She couldn’t tell if he was mad or disappointed. Either way, neither was the reaction she was hoping for.

The silence stretched between them. For a while, he seemed incapable of speaking or moving. Only his eyes lowered and rested on her abdomen.

“It’s impossible,” he finally said.

She opened her handbag, retrieved the blood test results and offered it to him shakily. Lann lifted one hand from behind his back and took the piece of paper. Kat watched him closely as he read it. His eyes widened and narrowed again. She presumed he was looking at the age of the child growing in her belly, doing the calculation in his mind. Emotions she couldn’t place played across his face. Was it sadness, envy, anger that made him press his lips so tightly together? Finally, he lifted his head. She didn’t like the way he looked at her.

He handed her back the report. “Congratulations.” His voice was impersonal. “Who’s the father?”

The words punched the air from Kat’s lungs with the same ferocity as when he had cut her airflow during lovemaking. Then it had given her an earth-shattering orgasm. Now it caused her pain, with the same intensity. She couldn’t believe he said that. Hurt and anger blurred her vision. She drew back her hand, and before she could stop herself, she slapped him. She took a step away from him, biting back the tears. The trace of her fingers lay red across his

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pale cheek. Lann accepted her abuse with a stoic expression, without uttering a word.

“You bastard,” she whispered. “You needn’t feign your innocence by insulting me. Are you afraid I’ll ask you for child support? Do you think I expect you to play an unwilling role in this baby’s life? Maybe you think I’ll try to emotionally blackmail you into marrying me.” She clutched her bag to her chest like a shield. “I didn’t come here expecting anything from you. I want nothing. I only came because you had a right to know.” She took a ragged breath. “And to ask why you lied to me.”

When he still didn’t speak, she nodded slowly, the unwelcome tears threatening to find their way to her cheeks. He wasn’t going to offer any explanation, any solace, any excuse.

“I see,” she said. “Then we have nothing more to say to each other.”

She turned for the door, but Lann’s voice halted her. “Please stay. You’re upset. I’ll take you home when you feel calmer.”

To her dismay, a small gasp escaped her. Did he honestly think she’d stay after what he just said? Not looking back, she ran downstairs, not caring that Lann called after her loud enough for the building to hear, or that the students were staring at her from the library window.

The security men who had been following her since day thirty were waiting outside. Lann had said it was for her protection. Now that she wasn’t involved with Lann, she didn’t need them. She didn’t want them or anyone else to witness her humiliation and hurt. She walked in the direction of the bus stop, breaking into a run long before she got there. When she passed the fresh food market, she went inside, snaking her way through stalls. Looking over her shoulder, she could see the men held up by the heavy flow of shoppers. They pushed forward, searching for her. She ducked low and made her way to a side exit. Outside, she ran for two blocks before she realized they weren’t following her any longer.

She didn’t stop until she was home, in the safety of her own flat. Kat fell down onto the sofa, one hand on her tummy and the other claspng her mouth. She couldn’t stop shaking.

Diana appeared from her room, shifting her weight from one foot to the other. “It didn’t go well, did it?”

Kat shook her head and wiped a hand over her face. “He didn’t tell me why. He didn’t even try to lie himself out of why he deceived me.” She looked at the ceiling. “He insinuated that he’s not the father.”

Diana gasped. “That son of a bitch!”

“You know what? I’m actually glad. Now I can just get on with my life. He knows. I’ve done my duty. At least he’s not going to be a part of my future,

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constantly hurting me every time I have to look at his face.” Kat was tired. All she wanted to do was go to bed and sleep forever.

“You shouldn’t have told him,” Diana said crossly. “I knew he was going to upset you.”

“He had a right to know. How he deals with it is his problem.”

“He’s a first class asshole and I’ll give him—”

The sound of the doorbell made them both jerk.

“It’s Enrico,” Diana said on the way to the door. “We were going out. I’ll tell him I’m staying.”

“You don’t have to. I’m fine. Really.”

Diana opened the door and cursed loudly. “You arrogant bastard. You have some nerve showing up here.”

“I need to speak to Katherine.”

Lann. The throbbing of Kat’s heart echoed painfully in her throat. She couldn’t face him, not now.

Diana’s voice rose from the foyer. “Get the hell out of here. You’ve upset her enough. Don’t you know how bad it is for a woman in her condition?”

“I’m not leaving until I’ve seen her. And this is between Katherine and me. I don’t remember inviting your opinion.”

Lann was losing it. His voice was controlled, but Kat knew the anger that bristled under that tone. She got to her feet wearily and walked to the door. “It’s alright, Diana.”

Diana spun around. “If you don’t want to talk to him—”

Kat shook her head. “It’s fine.” If Lann suddenly decided he had something to say, sooner was better than later. “Please give us a moment.”

Diana looked like she was going to argue, but then nodded. “I’ll go out for a while. I’ve got my mobile.” She glared at Lann. “Call if you need me, Kat.”

When the door slammed behind Diana, Lann approached slowly, his eyes fixed on her tummy with a strange mixture of sadness and envy. Kat turned from his burning gaze and led the way to the lounge.

“Can I offer you a drink?” she said. “I suppose something strong. I wouldn’t have minded something stronger than coffee myself, but...”

“No, thank you.” He crossed his arms. His yellow eyes seemed haunted. “I came to ask you two things. And to beg you to give me honest answers.”

She gaped at him. *He* wanted honest answers? Why was he acting like the martyr?

“My first question is why you broke our thirty-day exclusivity agreement? Why Katherine?” His deep voice vibrated with pain, his Russian accent stronger than ever. “And my second is,” he paused to look at her beseechingly, “who is he?”

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Kat blinked. He was playing his role so well he honestly believed he couldn't be the father.

She licked her dry lips. "I can't do this. I can't play this game. You have to go."

"I'm going nowhere until you tell me."

"Are you crazy?"

"Katherine," his hands went to his hair, "you're killing me. Just tell me."

There was honest confusion in his tone. It didn't make sense. Hysteria threatened to overwhelm her.

"I didn't break our agreement, Lann. There was no one but you." Not able to stand the disbelief in his eyes, she turned away. "I had a question too, one you haven't answered. Tell me why you lied. Why did you tell me you're infertile?"

Instead of answering, he moved to the window and stared outside.

Kat waited for him to gather his thoughts. When he still didn't speak after several seconds, she said, "It hurts that you can even think that. That I would have done something like that."

He swung around, looking at her with a plea in his eyes. "That time I was away, when I had to leave for business, you conceived during that week."

"Oh no." She shook her head. "Don't you dare." She was close to tears again, fighting to contain them. Damn hormones. "Listen, I've done what I believed was right. I've told you the truth. I couldn't ... wouldn't ... hide if from you. I'm not asking you for anything. I don't need your money and I don't need you to play a role in my baby's life, so stop acting as if I'm holding responsibility like a gun to your head." She barely stopped herself from breaking down. "Just tell me the truth. Please."

He reached for her. "I don't know what's going on. I don't know what to think. I want to believe you. I *do* believe you. But I've never lied to you either. I've tested infertile. You're welcome to confer with my doctor. Whatever the fuck is happening," his Adam's apple moved as he swallowed, "you need to have an abortion."

His words were like an ice pick jammed into her heart. She took a step away from him, shaking her head. "I can't believe you just said that." Disappointment and shock had her trembling. "Please go. Get out."

He grabbed her shoulders, his eyes frantic. "I want tests done."

It was clear he didn't trust her. It was even clearer that Lann didn't want to be a father. This was a road she'd have to walk alone. She made the bed ...

Her heart was breaking all over again. What did she expect? Did she think he was going to give her an explanation and confess his love? He'd only promised her thirty days. Nothing more. And she'd agreed to his terms.

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“I’ll handle this,” she said. “I’ve got it under control. Just go.”

He shook her lightly. “Like fuck you do. You will have an abortion, do you hear me?”

She tried to back away, but his fingers dug into her skin. It was too much. The stress of the last few days boiled over. She fought him, frantically slapping at him. “Get away from me! Don’t touch me!”

The air was gone again. That beautiful cocktail of pine forest and summer breeze she felt like an aura of perfume around him evaporated. She couldn’t breathe. Her chest heaved. Air. She needed air.

“Katherine,” he exclaimed, “breathe.”

She gulped. She tried to draw oxygen into her lungs but the simple action she had always taken for granted was ineffective.

“*Bella*, let me help you,” he said, his eyes wide.

She pushed him away. She didn’t need his help. She could do this on her own.

“Kat!” Suddenly Diana was there, her face very white. “What have you done to her? I knew I had to come back.” She took hold of Kat and moved her to the couch. “Sit down.”

Kat obeyed. In and out. Easy. In and out. Slowly, her lungs filled again.

“Get out!” Diana said. “Get out or I’ll call the cops.”

Lann walked to the couch, but Diana placed herself in front of Kat. “Can’t you see what you’re doing to her?”

Lann looked indecisive for a second, but then turned and left. The door shut quietly behind him.

Diana sat with Kat until she had calmed down. Her friend went to the kitchen and came back with a glass of water.

“Drink.”

“No thanks.”

Diana left the water on the table. “Shit, Kat. You scared me. What happened?”

“We had a disagreement. I got upset.”

Diana sighed. “Remind me to never let Enrico knock me up.”

Kat lay back onto the sofa. “What a grand mess.”

“We’ll figure it out.” But even Diana who was always sure of everything sounded uncertain.

* * * *

Kat’s phone rang early. Wiping her hands over her eyes, she looked at the screen. It was an unlisted number. She pulled the pillow over her head, deciding to let it go onto voicemail, but it started ringing again five seconds later. Maybe

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it was a die-hard journalist, hard up for a story that was now like old food warmed up. Changing her number had helped, but some reporters still managed to get it. Facing the breakup with Lann through the gossip columns had been hard. It wasn't easy being dumped in public, in front of a whole country. That's what you got for dating a mysterious millionaire.

She took the call with a wary greeting.

"Katherine, please don't hang up."

She sat up. "How did you get this number?" Did she really have to ask? It was Lann, after all. "Never mind. I don't want to know."

"How are you?" he said, sounding genuine.

"Tired." Lately, that was all she was.

"We need to talk."

"We have nothing to say to each other. You said it all yesterday."

"Please, Katherine, this is important. Let me come over, or let me fetch you and bring you here."

"Lann," she groaned, "it's alright. I already told you, you've got nothing to fear. I'm not expecting you to—"

"What I need to say can't be said on the phone."

"There can't be more to say."

"There is."

She rested her hand on her forehead. "Fine. I'll listen to what you have to say if you say it calmly. But I don't have to agree."

"I'll be over in a few minutes."

"Give me an hour," she said grumpily.

* * * *

"You can't face him again," Diana said.

"He's a dangerous ass," Enrico chipped in.

They sat in the kitchen of their flat, Enrico eating cereal and Diana sipping coffee.

Kat sighed. "He's got a right to say how he feels and what he wants. I can't deny him that. This baby's half his."

Diana snorted. "He gave up those rights when he acted like an asshole. I don't like this."

"Just give us a few minutes. This has to happen. If not now, I'll have to face him later."

Diana left her mug on the table. "You call me if he stresses you again." She took her bag. "Come, Enrico."

He looked at his breakfast. "I haven't finished."

"We'll have croissants at Fornos." Diana gave Kat a peck on the cheek.

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“Are you sure about this?”

Of course she wasn't sure. She smiled anyway. “Thanks for understanding. Sorry for kicking you out of your own flat, but I simply don't have the energy to go somewhere else.”

Lann arrived as Diana and Enrico left. Diana gave him a measured look. When Lann and Kat faced each other alone, he tried to hug her, but he dropped his arms in a defeated gesture when she pulled away.

“Come in,” she said.

He walked into the flat and stopped in the lounge, his hands in the pockets of his pants.

“You look pale,” he said.

“Wow, thanks.”

“It wasn't an insult. I'm worried.”

“Don't waste your worries.” Kat didn't sit down or offer him a seat. She just wanted him to have his say so that she could start living again, planning her life without him. She lifted an eyebrow. “You said you had something to say.”

“I couldn't finish our discussion yesterday.”

“Was it a discussion? As far as I remember you accused me of cheating on you while we were supposed to be together, expecting another man's baby, and then you told me I have to have an abortion.”

“And you do.”

She exhaled in exasperation. “Are we back to that again? I can't do it. Ever.”

His eyes suddenly looked too much like the haunted eyes of Saint Thomas, his favorite painting. “You don't understand. If you *are* carrying my baby, Katherine, you are going to die.”