

Kalona's Fall: A House of Night Novella (House of Night Novellas, 4)

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FROM WARRIOR AND LOVER TO ENEMY AND BETRAYER, THE TERRIBLE SECRETS OF KALONA'S PAST ARE REVEALED He was laughing with her as he spread his wings and lifted her from the ground, twirling her.

Nyx gasped and clutched his neck. Kalona tightened his arms around her. "Trust me, Goddess. I would never let you fall."

From the Sun and from the Moon, two winged brothers are born: golden Erebus, playmate and friend, and mysterious Kalona, Warrior and lover, companions of the Goddess Nyx.

From the first, Nyx loves them both deeply, but differently. With Erebus, she can talk and laugh and dance, and take joy in the games he plays among the humans of the Earth. With Kalona, the fire in her body burns bright, and she can rest in the solace of his strength and protection. But for Kalona, Nyx's nights are not enough. Every second he is not with her he is filled with doubt and longing, and every time he fails to please her, he cannot forgive himself. Ruled by anger and jealousy of his brother, and consumed by his love for his Goddess, Kalona seeks the power to prove his worth, and to claim once and for all that Nyx eternally belongs to him.

And at the edges of the Earth, a Darkness is stirring, waiting for its chance, for the doorway in through a heart that it knows will welcome it...

With more than 12 million books in print, rights sold in almost forty countries, and more than three years on The New York Times bestseller list-reaching as high as #1-the House of Night series is an international publishing sensation. Now, the excitement continues as the Cast mother-daughter duo shares the back stories of a few of the House of Night's most important-and mysterious-characters. In Kalona's Fall, the shadows in Kalona's past will finally come to light.

P. C. CAST is a #1 New York Times and USA Today bestselling author whose novels have been awarded the prestigious Oklahoma Book Award, as well as the PRISM, Booksellers Best, Holt Medallion, and more. She currently lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma. KRISTIN CAST teams up with her mother to write the House of Night series. She has stories in several anthologies, as well as editorial credits and is currently working on her first stand-alone novel.

1.

INTRIGUE BEGAT CURIOSITY, AND CURIOSITY BEGAT EXPLORATION …

Once upon a time, long, long ago, there was only the Divine Energy of the universe. Energy was neither good nor bad, light nor dark, male nor female-it simply existed, a maelstrom of possibilities, clashing, joining, and growing. As Energy grew, it evolved. As it evolved, it created.

First came the creation of the realms of the Otherworld-endless vistas filled with the

dreams of Divinity. These realms were so beautiful that they inspired Energy to continue creating, and from the womb of each of the Otherworld realms great solar systems were born, tangible reflections of the Otherworld Old Magick.

The Divine Energy of the universe was so pleased by its creations that it began to shift and change as vortexes of power within itself, mothlike, were drawn to the different universes. Some Energy was content and rested, eternally existing in a swirling orbit of stars and moons and beautiful, but empty, planets.

Some Energy destroyed its creations, more content with itself than with possibilities.

And some Energy continued to change, evolve, and create.

In one Otherworld realm the Divine Energy was particularly questing and precocious, restless and joyful, because more than anything it desired companionship. So, from within the verdant groves and sapphire lakes of the Otherworld, the Divine fashioned fabulous beings and breathed life into them. The breath of the Divine carried with it immortality and consciousness. The Divine named these beings Gods, Goddesses, and Fey. He granted the Gods and Goddesses dominion over all the Otherworld realms, and tasked the Fey with being their servants.

Many of the immortal beings scattered throughout the endless Otherworld realms, but those who remained pleased the Divine greatly. To them the Divine gifted an additional dominion over all other immortals, that of the stewardship of one particular planet in their system—a planet that intrigued the Divine Energy because it reflected the green-and-blue beauty of the Otherworld.

Intrigue begat curiosity, and curiosity begat exploration, until finally the Divine could not resist stroking the surface of the green-and-sapphire planet. The planet awoke, naming itself Earth. Earth beckoned to the Divine, inviting it within her lush lands and her sweet, soothing waters.

Filled with wonder, the Gods and Goddesses watched.

Enchanted by his own creation, Divine Energy joined with Earth. She pleased him greatly, but Energy cannot be long contained. Earth understood and accepted his nature, never loving him less for that which could not be changed. Before he left her to rove the universe, seeking more companionship, Divine Energy gave the Earth his most precious gift—the magick that was the power of creation.

Young Earth, fertile and sultry, began to create.

Earth sowed the lands and the oceans with her gift of creation, and from them evolved such a magnitude of creatures that the Gods and Goddesses from the watching Otherworld began to visit her often, reveling in the diversity of the living Earth.

Earth welcomed the immortals, children of her beloved Divine. She loved them so fondly that she was inspired to design a very special creation. From her bosom, she formed and then breathed life into beings that she fashioned in the very image of the Gods and Goddesses, naming them humans. Though Mother Earth was not able to gift her children with immortality—that was a gift only Divine Energy could bestow—she placed within each of them a spark of the Divinity that had been shared with her, ensuring that even though their bodies must always return to the earth from which they had been made, their consciousness would continue eternally in the form of spirit, so that they could be reborn again and again to Mother Earth.

Created in their image, Earth's children enchanted the Gods and Goddesses. The Gods and Goddesses vowed to watch over them and to share the Otherworld with the Divine spirits within them when the inevitable happened, and their mortal bodies died.

* * *

At first all was well; humans prospered and multiplied. They were grateful to Mother Earth, each culture holding her sacred. The Gods and Goddesses visited Earth's children often, and humans revered them as Divine.

Mother Earth watched, noticing which of the Divine's children were benevolent, and which were impetuous. Which of them were forgiving, and which were vengeful. Which of them were kind and which were cruel.

When the immortals were benevolent and forgiving and kind, Mother Earth was pleased, and showed her pleasure in fertile lands, quenching rains, and crops aplenty.

When the immortals were impetuous and vengeful and cruel, Mother Earth turned her face from them and there was drought and famine and plague.

The impetuous, vengeful, cruel deities became bored with drought and famine and plague and stopped visiting the living Earth.

Mother Earth was satisfied, and she retreated within herself, resting from the strain of creation, sleeping for eons uncountable. When next she awoke, she looked for the children of the Divine, and was hardly aware of their presence at all.

Calling Air to her, Mother Earth sent a message to the Otherworld, beseeching the children of her beloved to remember their vow, and inviting them to return to her.

Only one immortal answered her plea.

The Goddess manifested during a clear night when the moon was almost full, on a rugged isle yet to be named. As Mother Earth became conscious of the Goddess, she saw the immortal sitting before a grove, her delicate hand outstretched toward a curious wildcat.

"Where are the other children of the Divine?" Mother Earth's voice was the sloughing of hawthorn leaves in the grove.

The Goddess lifted her shoulder in a gesture that Mother Earth found surprisingly childlike. "They have gone."

The ground trembled in response to Mother Earth's surprise. "All? How could they all have gone?"

"They said they were bored and became restless." The Goddess shook her head and her long, fair hair glistened in the moonlight, changing from blond to silver.

The leaves of the grove trees shivered. "So like their father," Mother Earth whispered sadly. "Why must they all leave me?"

The Goddess sighed. "I do not know. I do not understand how they could ever be bored here." She stroked the wildcat that had curled lovingly around her feet. "There is something new every day. Imagine, just yesterday I did not know this wonderful creature existed."

Pleased, Mother Earth warmed the breeze that carried her voice from the grove. "You must have been formed from one of his more tangible dreams."

"Yes," the Goddess said wistfully. "I just wish more of his dreams had been like me. It is…" She hesitated, as if unable to decide whether to continue.

"It is what?" Mother Earth prompted.

"Lonely," she admitted softly. "Especially when there are no other beings like me."

Mother Earth felt the Goddess's sadness and, taking pity on her, she called awake the grove, where from the moss and dirt, leaves and flowers, Mother Earth took tangible form.

The Goddess smiled at her. As beautiful as the gossamer wings of a butterfly, Mother Earth smiled back, asking, "What is your name, Goddess?"

"Humans are calling me many names." The Goddess gave the wildcat a final caress and then straightened, spreading wide her arms. "Some call me Sarasvati." Her body shifted in form, changing skin from light to dark, hair from fair as moonlight to the black of a raven's wing as another pair of slender arms suddenly appeared. Still smiling, the Goddess continued, "Nidaba is the name some of your children whisper in their prayers." Again, the Goddess shifted form, growing wings and replacing her feet with talons. "And not far from this very island, they have begun to know me as Breo-saighead, bringer of fire and justice." With that pronouncement, the Goddess took the form of a beautiful woman with hair the color of flame, her white skin decorated by brilliant sapphire tribal tattoos.

Delighted, Mother Earth clapped her hands, and sleeping butterflies awoke to cavort

around her. "But I know you! I have watched these Goddesses for countless ages. You are kind and benevolent and just."

"I am. I am also alone." The fire faded from her hair, and once again the Goddess looked like a fair-haired maiden, innocent and sweetly sad.

"Which name would you have me call you?" Mother Earth asked, wanting to distract her from her melancholy.

The Goddess considered, and then answered, rather shyly, "There is one name I like more than the others-Nyx. It reminds me of night, and I do so love the peacefulness of night and the beauty of moonlight."

As she spoke, Mother Earth saw that her form changed only slightly. She still looked young, but she had lifted her chin, smiling up at the moon, delicate, filigreed tattooing glowed silver and sapphire over her skin making her look mysterious and incredibly beautiful. With hardly a thought, Mother Earth called magick from the night sky and scattered it on the Goddess, so that it settled upon her as a headdress of glistening moonlight and stars.

"Oh! That is lovely! May I keep it?" the Goddess said, twirling around girlishly.

"You are lovely Nyx. And you may keep it on one condition-that instead of following the others, you do not desert my children and me."

Nyx went very still. Her girlishness fell away from her until Mother Earth was looking into the eyes of a mature Goddess who wore wisdom and power as surely as she did the mantle of moonlight. When Nyx spoke, Mother Earth heard within her voice the power of Divinity. "You need not tether me here with bribery. Such tricks are not worthy of you. When you created humans I vowed that I would watch over them and make a place for that within them that remains eternal and Divine. I never break a vow."

Slowly, Mother Earth bowed her head to Nyx. "Forgive me."

"With all my heart," Nyx said.

Mother Earth stood, and with the rustle of wind sweeping through a meadow of tall grass, she moved to Nyx and cupped the Goddess's face between her verdurous palms. "And now I freely give to you a gift-one that is worthy of us both. Henceforth from this night, I grant you command over my five elements: Air, Fire, Water, Earth, and Spirit. Call on any, and they shall answer, doing your bidding eternally." Mother Earth bent and kissed Nyx on her forehead.

From the center of Nyx's forehead a perfect crescent moon appeared, and on either side of her face, spreading down the Goddess's beautiful body, a filigree pattern appeared, bearing signs and symbols that represented all five elements.

Nyx lifted her slender arm, studying her new Marks in appreciation. "That is as special as are each of the elements. I will treasure your gift eternally." Nyx's girlish smile returned. "For that I also thank you with all my heart. After tonight I do not feel so alone, nor so frightened."

"Frightened? But whatever could frighten an immortal created by the Divine?"

Nyx brushed a strand of silver hair from her face, and Mother Earth noticed her hand trembled.

"Darkness." The Goddess whispered the word.

Mother Earth smiled as she sat beneath the hawthorn tree nearest Nyx. "But you just spoke about the peace and beauty of night. How, then, could darkness frighten you?"

"The night could never frighten me; it is not literal darkness of which I speak, but an intangible in which I sense a seeking, growing power that knows nothing of peace and joy and beauty-that knows nothing of love." Nyx spoke softly but earnestly. "It has not fully entered the Otherworld yet, but I have sensed it often here, on the mortal realm. I think it grows stronger the longer I am alone."

Mother Earth considered her words carefully before she responded. "I sense the truth in your fear. That this Darkness has worsened with your loneliness tells me that what has happened to you is affecting my realm-and quite possibly it will spread to your Otherworld. Goddess, I am afraid our realms have become unbalanced."

"How shall we restore what has been lost?"

Mother Earth smiled. "I believe our first step has already been taken. Let us agree to be friends. As long as I exist you shall never truly be alone again."

Nyx flung her arms around Mother Earth. "Thank you!"

Mother Earth returned her embrace. "Dearest child, you have brought me much joy this night. Will you meet me again? Here, in this grove, three nights hence when the moon is full?"

"It would be my pleasure." Nyx stood and inclined her head regally to Mother Earth before, grinning, she bent and scooped the wildcat into her arms. In an explosion of glittering silver stars, she and the beast disappeared.

While she watched the trail of stars fade, Mother Earth rested against the skin of a hawthorn tree, thinking … thinking … thinking …

For three days and three nights Mother Earth did not move.

On the third day the grove was so infused with the magick of her presence it drew such bountiful sunlight that the brush covering the little island began to bloom purple with joy.

Mother Earth smiled upon the sun, and the sun quickened in response.

As night fell on the third day, the moon, drawn to the grove by the magick of her presence, beamed so fully on the little island that the rugged clumps of rock that dotted the landscape changed color permanently, reflecting the white of moonlight, infused with the magick of night.

Mother Earth smiled upon the moon, and the moon quickened in response.

With a small sound of satisfaction, Mother Earth knew what she must do for this last, this only, this most special Goddess, Nyx.

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Other Books

Abraham Kauffman Family History, Abraham Kauffman of Walnut Creek Twp., Holmes County, Ohio.

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