

Legend of the WindKeepers

IN THE TIME OF THE GODS, the terrible vices of lust, anger, pride and greed were assigned to the cardinal winds for safe-keeping. But the terrible monster, Typhon, wanted them free to plague the world. He created the *Venti Tempesta*, the Tempest Winds: evil, violent demon winds to infect the world with the vices.

The gods assigned four human brothers as WindKeepers to the cardinal winds, to give the wind form and to fight the *Venti Tempesta*. But the WindKeepers had a flaw: they were susceptible to the call of the vices. The gods, seeing the WindKeepers' struggle, created the *Aurae*. Women who were keepers of the seasonal breezes, women able to calm the greed, lust, pride and anger.

The WindKeepers succeeded in trapping the Tempest Winds in the bodies of horses, imprisoned in the stables of the immortal Keeper of the Winds. All was calm. The WindKeepers kept watch, the *Venti Tempesta* plotted from their prison and the *Aurae* died out.

But now the Tempest Winds have escaped and a new battle has begun...

Auster, Keeper of the South Wind battles Africus, the Southwest Wind and the vice of pride
Favonius, Keeper of the West Wind wrestles Corus, the Northwest Wind and the vice of lust
Aquilon, Keeper of the North Wind combats Caecius, the Northeast Wind and the vice of anger
Vulturnus, Keeper of the East Wind fights Apeliotus, the Southeast Wind and the vice of greed

Chapter One

She was the virgin sacrifice for a greedy wind god.

Skye Santini clasped her hands together and tried to wrestle her nerves into some sort of submission.

She was failing. Big time.

Swallowing hard, she stared up at the beautiful villa. A cool, brisk wind blew in from Lake Como and tossed her hair around her face. She scraped it back. She could do this. She *wanted* to do this. Besides, she wasn't exactly a virgin and the male locked inside wasn't exactly a god. He was a man. A man who usually ran the finances for the successful company he and his brothers had built, Venti Enterprises.

Oh, and he was a WindKeeper on the verge destroying the entire world.

"This is insane. Skye, you can't do this!"

Skye turned and watched her sister storm up to her. Rayne never held back from saying what was on her mind. She was also a trained Aerae warrior and the best big sister in the world.

"Rayne, I'll be fine—"

"Fine?" Rayne gestured wildly. "The man has succumbed to his vice. He has no memory of who he is, no idea of his power, and no clue about the danger lurking close by."

Skye looked again at the building. Vines climbed up the side of the cream-colored villa.

Windows overlooked the manicured gardens that reached down to the lake. It was beautiful and she imagined, on most days, peaceful.

Today it was nothing of the sort.

The water of the lake churned, whipped into a frenzy by the wind. Storm clouds cluttered the sky. And she felt a darker force looming nearby, watching her, watching the house, like a large, crouching beast.

Yes, Apeliotus, the last remaining *Venti Tempesta*, was close. Desperate not to lose his freedom.

That made it even more important that Skye do this. “Rayne, he won’t let his brothers in and we’ve sent in other Aurae warriors. He booted every single one of them out. It’s time to try something different.”

And Skye was as different as possible. She was no warrior. She was nothing, just a woman who’d hidden away from the world for far too long. Who’d let her stronger, loving sister protect her.

Now Skye needed to do something worthy. It was time to stop letting her past keep her from having a future.

“No.” Rayne lifted a stubborn chin.

“Rayne.” A deep male voice.

A handsome, imposing man climbed the last few steps and stood beside Rayne. It still amazed Skye that her sister had linked herself to this...angry man.

Luca Venti. Keeper of the North Wind. And it’s vice of anger.

Oh, he kept it leashed. Skye could see that. But still...she wrung her hands. She was good at assessing a man’s capacity for rage.

“Remember,” he said, “you once told me we have to trust them to stand on their own?”

Rayne’s jaw tightened. “I didn’t mean for my baby sister to be some sexual sacrifice to your brother!”

Luca touched the nape of her neck and Skye saw a flash of emotion in his face. The way he looked at Rayne, and the way her sister softened for him, it made Skye a little envious.

“I know. I didn’t want this either. But we have to do everything we can to save Soren before Apeliotus gets to him.”

Right, which meant Skye, who had very limited experience with men, had to entice the WindKeeper. Her stomach roiled. Legend said that the female keepers of the seasonal breezes, the *Aurae*, could soothe the vices of the WindKeepers. *Aurae* blood ran in her veins.

Her gaze cut back to Rayne and Luca. The man certainly seemed calmer whenever he was around her sister. Skye stared at the windows of the villa, her thoughts turning to the WindKeeper who’d locked himself inside. He had no memory, and was dangerously close to losing himself forever to the vice of greed. She wondered if he was looking down on the people trying so desperately to save him.

A long time ago, she’d prayed for someone to save her. She hadn’t needed a crowd. Just one person able to see past her silent suffering to a girl too afraid to talk. Just one person willing to reach out.

In the end, it had been Rayne who’d saved her, who’d forced their mother to see the monster she’d invited to live in their house.

Skye pulled in a long breath.

Butterflies winged through her belly but she forced one foot in front of the other. She was tired of always being afraid. She wasn’t a traumatized young girl anymore.

“I’m going in.”

Rayne’s hands clenched. “Why?”

Skye faced her sister. The one person she’d always counted on to look out for her. Neither of them had ever strayed from the roles. Rayne continued to protect her from the world, and Skye kept letting her. “I have to do this. It’s time I do more than hide and cower.”

“You don’t cower—”

“Rayne.” Skye grabbed her sister’s hand. Love was a fierce tangle in her throat. “You can’t protect me forever. I need to take some risks, live, do something for myself. It was never your fault. You have nothing to make up for.”

Her strong sister’s lips trembled but she firmed them quickly. “I love you.”

“I know.” Skye reached up for a hug and was yanked into a fierce embrace. “Now, I’m going in.”

Rayne stepped back, her reluctance obvious in the way she dragged her feet. But she stayed quiet as Skye turned to the building.

“Good luck,” Luca said. “And *grazie*, for trying to help my brother.”

He thought she was going to fail. Skye saw it written in his eyes. But even though it was buried deep, she also saw hope.

She walked up the steps and pulled the door open. She stepped inside.

The door slammed shut behind her.

Her heart hammering in her ears, she forced herself to move. Her footsteps echoed down the long hall.

The inside of the villa was as beautiful as the outside. The rich wooden floor was polished to a high sheen and antiques graced the shelves and walls. She stared into an ornate mirror, catching

a glimpse of her pale hair and paler face.

There was no sound. No tick of a clock, no humming appliances, just eerie silence. And despite the fact it was early afternoon, the gathering clouds outside made it dark inside. She swallowed. She hated the dark. Bad things lurked in shadows.

Skye continued walking. She wandered through the massive house until she stepped inside a conservatory. The glass walls and roof were fogged by the humid air rising off the heated swimming pool. Greenery was everywhere. Plants hung from the roof and others rose up from pots on the floor. An indoor jungle. It was gorgeous.

She reached out to touch the bright green leaf of some tropical plant. Out of the corner of her eye, she caught a glimpse of movement.

Her heart leaped into her throat and she spun. A wind rippled through the plants and twirled around her. She stayed still, but the fingers of one hand curled into her palm. The urge to use her own power rippled through her. But she knew it was useless. She hadn't been able to use her breeze since...well, since she was young.

Another flash of movement. She spun again. Her pulse hammered through her veins.

As the warm, humid breeze ruffled her hair and made her skirt ripple, she stiffened her spine. She wasn't going to stand here and let the WindKeeper intimidate her.

She took a step forward. "You can come out now."

There was a brush of someone passing through the foliage. Then a man stepped out.

Skye's breath caught in her throat. He was ridiculously good-looking. Tall, lean, muscled. Dark hair curled around a face that was razor sharp—firm jaw, knife-edged cheekbones and hawkish nose. She felt a lick of appreciation inside that shocked her.

"They sent a *coniglio* this time."

He had a deep, melodious voice to go with the looks. And she knew enough Italian that his words stung. “I’m not a rabbit.”

“Little rabbits like to run.”

Her lips firmed. “I haven’t run.”

He tilted his head. “Not yet.”

She swallowed and looked past the handsomeness. Power radiated off him. A ragged blast that surrounded him like a black aura. Lines cut into his cheeks and his eyes were a turbulent gray that made her think of storm clouds.

He was a man who’d slipped over the edge and was barely clinging to the cliff. He was out of control, his power threatening to consume him—and if he joined his Tempest Wind, they would be capable of wreaking destruction on the entire planet.

To distract herself, she looked away and spied a brilliant red flower. She fingered the edge of it. It was beautiful, exotic. Like the man. “You don’t scare me.” She wouldn’t let him.

Suddenly he was in front of her. His gaze burning into her.

She fought not to take a backward step.

“You’re a liar, little rabbit.”

He stared at the woman.

The small crowd gathered outside had been sending in tall, toned women. They’d come promising to help him, help him remember. They’d wanted to save the world. And they’d watched him with wariness, like he was a weapon about to go off.

This little wisp of a thing stared up at him with big, sad blue eyes, her pulse fluttering in her throat.

She was...different.

Whispers poured through his mind, tearing into him, as they had for weeks. *Take. Take everything you want. Take it all.*

His fingers flexed. He wanted to be back in his office, on his computer, trading stocks, checking his bank balance. He needed the addictive thrill of making money, collecting wealth and riches, every minute of every day.

“Are you here to save the world like the others?” he asked. “To do your duty?”

The woman chewed on her lip. “No.”

That single word made him pause. “No?”

She shrugged. “I’m not here for the world or for you. I’m here for me.”

He liked her crisp, British accent. She didn’t smell of greed but here she was telling him she was acting on selfishness. It intrigued him. He let his gaze slide over her slim build. She had the most delicate wrists he’d ever seen. Her long hair was the pale gold of fine champagne and her clothes were shapeless and simple.

“What’s your name?” For some reason, he needed to know.

“Skye.”

It suited her.

“And yours is Soren,” she added. She watched him carefully. “Soren Vulturinus Venti.”

He frowned. Soren. It sounded right. But he didn’t want to know any more. All he wanted was to focus on what he desired and collecting everything he could. “And who are you, Skye?”

She shrugged. “I’m no one special. Just a woman. Timid, shy.” Her big eyes flashed. “I’m broken and I’m tired of it.”

Her words were quiet but they speared in under his skin. Her honesty was refreshing. He

blinked, unable to take his gaze off this intriguing woman. He circled her, pulling in the scent of her. She smelled like the promise of a spring storm. “Why are you here, little rabbit?”

“I want to be strong. I want to do something that matters.”

“Helping me matters?”

She nodded.

He leaned in, his lips brushing the delicate shell of her ear. “Greed beats deep in my veins. I take everything I want.”

She shivered but she didn't back away. “Are you going to toss me out like the others?”

For a reason he didn't understand, he wanted this woman close by. She didn't back down and she didn't push against him like the others who'd blazed in here ready to do battle. She fascinated him. And right now, any distraction was welcome.

“You stay.”