



# *To Love a Fire*

J.k. Phan

Mystery, Romance

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She was smoke, he was rain, and when he touched her she dissolved, when she touched him he turned to steam. I will kill you, she told him when they met, their hair tousled and unadorned. Go ahead, he told her, the girl wearing nothing but vengeance and death, with a knife poised above his breast. Who he'd let into his bed. Who he'd let into his heart. Her face had been shadowed the whole time by her mane of curls. He didn't know her yet. The bedsprings creaked as she shifted and he closed his eyes, waiting for the kiss of the steel to cool the imprints of the kisses that she'd left. It didn't come. She was gone in a seeming haze of smoke and ash and fire, or tried to be, but he caught her hand. He moved the mass of curls away from her eyes and looked into them, eyes that threatened to spill over and swallow him. And swallow him they did. Then she really was gone, that girl of smoke and ash and fire.

She was ash, he was a flood, and when he touched her she was swept away, when she touched him he was darkened and filthied. I will kill you, she told him when they met, their eyes locking, this time with a crown on his head and a tiara on hers. Go ahead, he told her. She bit her lip, those soft lips that he remembered all too well. They danced, the flame and the storm, elemental forces battling for dominance in a fight they knew all too well. Her hand resting on his chest, though empty, seemed poised to pierce. I let you go, she said, why? He had no answer, and they danced amidst swirling lies and courtiers, an inferno and a hurricane watching them with hooded eyes and closed hearts. Then she was gone, in a seeming haze of smoke and ash and fire, or tried to be, but he caught her hand. The mass of curls were pinned back with care this time. Your name? He whispered it, begging for the secret. Hera. She handed it to him with an open hand and a closed heart. Then she really was gone, that girl of smoke and ash and fire.

She was fire, he was a rain, and when he touched her she was extinguished, when she touched him he burned away from within. I will kill you, she told him when they met, a veil over her head and a crown over his. Go ahead, he told her, slipping the ring onto her finger. She returned the gesture, and he felt the weight of the cold steel kissing his finger. Those eyes still enveloped him, still consumed him in the tainted soul that was Hera and it was bliss. He carried her away to their palace, and they became one once more among its ruins, the ruins that were the price of their kingdom. Her curls were down once more, wild and free, every inch exposed to him, her soul bared for the first time. She made no move to leave, that girl of smoke and ash and fire. For the first time, she stayed.

She was a burnt-out coal, he was blackened water, and when they touched it was a toxic drug. Power and love fought and warred and mixed and blurred the line until it was impossible to tell where Queen ended and Hera began, and where he stood. I will kill you, she told him when they were in the ruins of their bed once more. I need an heir. Go ahead, he told her. I need you. And they had what they needed, and she kissed him one last time, a fiery kiss full of burning steel that made his heart turn to steam and blood. Then she really was gone, that girl of smoke and ash and fire that he loved.

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