

A close-up, profile view of a man's face and upper torso. He is wearing a dark, possibly black, tank top. His right hand is resting on a light-colored, sheer curtain. The lighting is warm and soft, suggesting an indoor setting near a window. The background is a bright, out-of-focus light source, likely sunlight.

# Fire & Rain

*Sweetsbade, Book 2*

Delphia Baisden

Fire and Rain  
*Sweetshade, Book Two*

by Delphia Baisden



FIRE AND RAIN: Sweetshade, Book Two

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Published by Delphia Baisden in the United States of America

Printed in the United States of America

First Edition, 2023

ISBN: 978-1-7320371-4-4 (ebook)

ISBN: 978-1-7320371-9-9 (paperback)

Library of Congress Control Number: *forthcoming*

Cover Art by [selfpubbookcovers.com/BeeJavier](http://selfpubbookcovers.com/BeeJavier)

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*For anyone out there still reading  
my books after my long hiatus*



## One

Abe woke slowly, the sun pouring through the window above their bed. Well, actually, it was still only Sonny's bed until that afternoon. Abe snuggled back against him, naked, in the curve of Sonny's body, and listened to Sonny's even breathing as he slept peacefully.

Though Abe had immediately accepted Sonny's offer of moving in together, the process had been a slow one. First, Abe had to check when his lease was up and under what circumstances his landlord would allow him to break it. Then, they'd decided to get the holidays behind them first. And finally, they had to decide which of Abe's things were coming with him and which would be donated or discarded. They'd compromised or agreed easily on almost everything in question, yet it was still slow going. But that was okay. Slow was good.

Sonny pulled Abe tighter against his chest, nuzzling Abe's hair, murmuring in his sleep.

I've got to be the luckiest guy on the planet, Abe thought. Their courtship hadn't been the smoothest, but after what they'd been through to get here, both separately and together, he'd take Sonny at his worst over not having him at all.

"Sonny?"

"Mhm." Abe could practically see the smile on Sonny's lips.

"You trying to feel me up in my sleep?"

"Not yet," Sonny murmured in his ear.

"Thinking about it, though?"

Sonny snickered. "More often than you'd think."

Abe laughed at that, rolling onto his back. He looked up at Sonny in the early morning light.

Sonny brushed Abe's hair back from his face. "How long have you been awake?"

"Not long."

"Trouble sleeping?"

Abe sighed. "Just excited. How about you? Any stress dreams?"

Sonny bit the inside of his lip, shaking his head solemnly. "None last night."

Though Sonny's nightmares had lessened, they hadn't completely disappeared. Dr. Carmichael said they may never entirely dissipate. "Just because you've processed most of your trauma doesn't mean you've erased it," she'd told Sonny when they'd trickled back in.

The lull in nightmares after Abe's attack had been a short-lived relief. Sonny rarely had the all-out nightmares where he'd wake up in a

cold sweat or worse, but he still had the tossing-and-turning ones. The ones he'd wake up from tense and on edge.

Abe peered up at the forlorn, haunted look on Sonny's face. He reached up and touched Sonny's cheek. "Hey," he said, softer than before.

"It's just scary," Sonny admitted. "If they're still around, what if I have a bad one? What if..."

"We'd get through it, just like we did last time," Abe said.

Sonny cringed.

"Okay, hopefully a little smoother than last time," Abe joked gently, hoping for a smile.

"Or maybe it's worse than last time and I really hurt you..."

"Sonny, look at me," he said, tipping Sonny's chin. Their eyes met. "I'm a grown man, and I'm not made of glass. If you accidentally hurt me, I'd be fine."

"I'd be so upset with myself."

"Well, I'm not saying I relish the idea of it," he amended, trying once more for even just the glimmer of a smile. But Sonny seemed to search his face, detecting the but. "But we'd get through it. We'd talk to Dr. Carmichael, and we'd figure it out like we always do. Right? You didn't give up on me, even when you were struggling to forgive me after Mason..." He trailed off, trying not to get emotional. "I wouldn't give up on you either."

That seemed to break through. They hadn't needed many couples' sessions, but a few here and there to get over the bumps always helped. Abe watched him swallow down what was probably a swell of emotions at realizing Abe wasn't going to give up on him either.

"Right, of course." Sonny nodded, finally managing a smile.

Abe beamed up at him. "Good. Now that that's settled, we need to get started."

Sonny smirked. "It's going to be a very long day if you start with the questionable puns now."

Abe tickled his sides, making him squirm. "Pun not intended, but I'll take the credit for it if it'll keep you smiling."

They dressed, and Sonny made a quick breakfast, finishing it just before Nate called.

"Abe, where're you?"

Sonny buttered Abe's toast and handed it over, along with a travel mug of coffee. Abe leaned over to peck him on the lips.

"Sonny's," Nate snarked. He must've heard the kiss. "Right, got it."

"Hold your damn horses. I'm on my way. Five minutes," Abe said, and hung up.

"You're sure you don't need me to come with you to help?" Sonny asked.

"Nope, you've done enough, and I don't have much to clear out. You just make sure things are ready here, and keep your strength up. That

porch and staircase are going to be the hard parts.”

Sonny saluted. “Yes, sir.”

Abe chuckled. “And keep up that sense of humor too. Moving is frustrating.”

Sonny watched as Abe backed Sonny’s truck out of the driveway while holding his toast in his mouth.

Love of my life. Sonny shook his head. And he’s going to be covered in crumbs by the time he gets to his apartment.

Sonny ate his own breakfast quickly before pushing the living-room furniture to the edges of the room, clearing the way for all the movement of the day. He also cleaned up the kitchen table and set out the coloring books and toys Abe had bought for Janey—Jean and Nate’s eight-year-old daughter. Jean and Nate were both helping with the move, and at first, Sonny had thought they’d get her a sitter. But Abe had insisted she was a smart little girl who wouldn’t get underfoot. Sonny had yet to meet her—chalk that up to leftover tensions over the Mason ordeal—but he trusted Abe’s judgment. He was also charmed by the obvious soft spot Abe had for her.

Ensuring all that was taken care of, Sonny called Tom’s Tavern and double-checked their lunch order. Because how could you ask your friends to help you move and not feed them? Once that was done, he moved Abe’s car onto the street before returning to the front porch to finish his coffee and wait for everyone.

Jean and Janey arrived first, parking behind Abe’s car. Sonny watched somewhat nervously as Jean and the little girl got out of the car. She was the perfect mix of her parents, with Nate’s mischievous, knowing eyes and Jean’s sweet, happy grace. Slightly lighter-skinned than her mother, she had big dark eyes and thick, curly hair.

“Good morning,” Jean said, leading the way.

“Good morning. I have coffee on, if you want any,” Sonny said.

“First, Janey, this is Sonny,” Jean introduced him. “Sonny, Janey.”

Sonny knelt to Janey’s height and smiled, holding out his hand. “It’s nice to meet you, Janey.”

She studied him for a moment before placing her much smaller hand in his, shaking with him.

“You’re Uncle Abe’s boyfriend?”

The question caught him off guard, but he didn’t falter. “I am.”

She nodded. “Mom and Dad say I don’t have to call you Uncle Sonny until I get to know you better.”

Jean sighed, shaking her head. “Sorry, Nate pops out of her mouth every once in a while, and even I don’t know what to do.”

Sonny chuckled. “That’s perfectly all right. I appreciate the honesty,” he said, standing up. “Truly.”

“How about that coffee now?”

Sonny smiled. “Of course. Come on in.”

Inside, Sonny got the coffee as Jean set Janey up at the kitchen table. Janey had her own small backpack of toys and things to keep her entertained, but she took immediately to the coloring books Abe had left for her.

He and Jean waited in the living room, watching for Abe and Nate.

“Nervous?” She sipped her coffee, eyeing him over the rim of the mug.

“A little,” he admitted. “But not bad-nervous.”

“I guarantee he’s more nervous than you are.”

“Oh yeah?”

She nodded, her green eyes full of the secrets of a long-cultivated friendship. “This is a big step for him, you know.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah,” she said, looking at him seriously then. “Don’t hurt him. I trust you, and I like you, and I don’t think you would. But he’s been through some shit in the past.”

Sonny swallowed his smile, realizing how much—or perhaps how little—he truly knew of Abe’s past.

Abe drove Sonny’s truck back to the house, and Nate followed him, the rented moving trailer hitched to his SUV. It was hard to believe everything he owned fit between the two vehicles and trailer, but it did.

Moving day. Moving in with Sonny. Accepting the offer had been a no-brainer. He was in love, and honestly, even when the rose-colored glasses eventually melted away and they had to learn to coexist after the honeymoon phase, he was sure they’d be fine. Better than fine.

And yet, he was absolutely terrified. Every single what-if he could imagine had crossed his mind over the past few weeks. What if Sonny changed his mind? What if Abe panicked and messed up everything? What if Sonny changed his mind? What if something happened to one of them, leaving the other to move on alone? What if Sonny changed his mind? What if Sonny fell out of love with him altogether?

What if Sonny changed his mind?

His hands were sweating just thinking about it. He’d finally gotten everything he’d ever wanted, and the prospect of it falling apart before he could truly enjoy it made his chest feel tight.

And then he pulled into the driveway next to Nate and saw Sonny standing on the porch, watching for him. My tall drink of water. And just like that, the tightness eased. He shut the truck off, climbed out, and fell into step with Nate.

“Should we start with the big stuff?” Nate asked.

“Yeah, probably.” Abe wiped his sweaty hands on his jeans.

Nate ascended the front steps first. “Coffee?”

Sonny smiled. “In the kitchen. Just made a fresh pot.”

Abe was about to follow Nate inside, when Sonny placed a hand on his shoulder, stopping him. Abe looked up, frowning.

“Put your arms around my neck,” Sonny said.



Abe looked perplexed as Sonny bent and scooped him up in his arms. He gasped, wrapping his arms around Sonny's neck as requested. "W-what are you doing?"

Sonny stood to his full height, lifting Abe easily. "Carrying you across the threshold."

"I see that. Why?"

"For good luck, to keep the demons out."

Abe narrowed his eyes and fought a smile, even as he let himself be carried inside. "You mean to tell me we've been letting demons into the house every time I've stayed over?"

"It certainly would explain a lot, wouldn't it?" Sonny murmured in his ear.

The seriousness of the joke passed between them. "It would," Abe admitted softly so only Sonny could hear him. Everything was going to be okay, he could feel it.

"Uncle Abe!" Janey called out from the table. "You look like a princess!"

Nate snorted, only just managing not to spray coffee everywhere.

"Yeah, well, if Prince Charming here would put me down," Abe groused playfully. Sonny placed him back on his feet inside the front door.

"All right, that's enough," Jean said, a smile lingering on her lips. "Time to get to work."

"Yes, ma'am," Abe said with a smirk.

Janey shook her head, returning to her coloring books. "That kind of sass earns you a time-out at my house."

It took them most of the morning to get Abe's furniture and boxes of belongings into the house. After that, Jean volunteered to return the moving trailer and pick up their lunch from the tavern. While she was gone, the three of them brought Abe's bed upstairs and assembled it in the guest bedroom. When Jean returned, they ate together around Sonny's dining-room table.

Sonny unwrapped his veggie burger, the same he'd ordered during his first afternoon in Sweetshade. They'd added vegan cheese to the menu only after he'd started as a tavern employee.

"Wait, wait, wait, what the—" Nate stopped short, catching Jean's look. "What the heck is that?"

Sonny was preparing to spar with Nate when Abe piped up.

"What, you've never seen a veggie burger before?"

"Veggie burger?"

"I, uh, don't eat meat," Sonny said.

"Ever?" Janey asked, clearly surprised.

"Nope."

"But you're like, a big guy," Nate commented.

"No, you're just a little guy," Abe teased.

"So you're like a vegetarian or something?"

Sonny smiled ruefully. "Vegan, actually."

"I didn't tell you that?" Jean asked Nate. She was sharing a cheese pizza with Janey.

"You probably did," Abe snarked, nonchalantly dipping a french fry into the dollop of ketchup next to his club sandwich.

Nate sighed, washing down a bite of hot wing with a drink of cola. "Yeah, you probably did. But still—"

"Why don't you eat meat?" Janey asked. Sonny met her gaze, her discerning eyes sizing him up—not in a disrespectful way, just with the genuine, unbridled curiosity of a child.

"Just for personal reasons," he answered neutrally. He didn't want to scare her or ruin her appetite with even a mild version of the truth. Jean mouthed a thank-you, and he smiled amicably. He looked over at Abe, whose curiosity seemed to match Janey's.

"I don't even think I know why you're vegan," Abe said with a smile.

Sonny returned the smile with a wink before turning back to his burger.

After finishing their meal and cleaning up, Jean and Nate helped move Abe's boxes to their designated rooms, and then said their goodbyes, letting him and Abe have some time to themselves.

Janey gave Abe a big hug before turning awkwardly to Sonny. He knelt down to her height once more.

"It's okay, Janey. My little sister, Leigh, isn't much of a hugger. You know what we do to say goodbye instead?"

"What's that?"

Sonny held up his hand, folded into a loose fist. "Fist bump." Janey smiled, mimicking his fist and bumping with him. "See you later, Janey."

"Later, Sonny. Bye, Uncle Abe."

She followed her parents out and climbed into Jean's car. Sonny and Abe stood on the front porch to see them off, Sonny putting his arm around Abe, and Abe snaking his own around Sonny as they waved goodbye to their friends.

"That had to be the cutest thing I've ever seen," Abe remarked as they began to settle in for the evening.

"What?"

"You and Janey fist-bumping," Abe said, kicking off his shoes.

"I'm not so sure she likes me yet," Sonny said.

"You're just new to her," Abe reassured him, leaning against the doorframe. "Don't worry, just like everyone else, you'll have her charmed before you know it, and she'll fall in love with you too."

"Yeah, or maybe she's got that wariness about her that Nate does."

Abe rubbed the back of his neck. "Hey, why are you vegan?"

Sonny sat on the edge of their bed. "It's kind of a mixed bag, actually. My dad died of a heart attack at forty-six. So, you know, health reasons. But also, I don't know, I had it in my head when I got out of the Army

that I didn't want to do any more harm." He chewed the inside of his lip. "I know how corny that sounds."

Abe reached for him. "It doesn't sound corny. It sounds like you. One part anxiousness, two parts heart." Sonny stood with him, letting Abe take his hands.

"I just didn't know how to say any of it to an eight-year-old without scaring her or making Nate and Jean's parenting more difficult."

Abe wrapped his arms around Sonny, leaning in to kiss him, and Sonny pulled him close. What began as a simple kiss escalated quickly, and for the life of him, Abe couldn't understand it at first. Pressed between the doorframe and Sonny's body, he felt the younger man's interest rise.

"What's gotten into you?" Abe asked between kisses.

"I was just thinking that I should welcome you home properly," Sonny said, moving to Abe's throat, nuzzling the shadow of stubble there.

"If this is the proper welcome home, I'd like to know what the improper one is," Abe said, pushing his hands beneath Sonny's T-shirt. He slid his palms up Sonny's smooth back, then dragged his fingernails down in a light scratch.

Sonny groaned softly. "Come on," he said, pulling Abe toward the bathroom, and Abe let Sonny guide him.

Once in the bathroom, Sonny pushed him against the vanity, facing the mirror, and Abe went with it, knowing by now when Sonny wanted to take the lead.

"Hands up," Sonny said, gathering the hem of Abe's T-shirt in his hands.

Abe lifted his arms, and Sonny removed the shirt, tossing it aside. Suddenly, Sonny was nuzzling his nape, breathing him in, and Abe said, "I'm all dirty—"

"I know," Sonny said, pressing kisses down his neck and over one shoulder. "You smell so good."

Abe shivered, his body coming to life despite the strain and stress of the day. "You know, you'd totally be one of those guys if you were straight."

Sonny caught his eye in the mirror. "One of which guys?"

"You know, a panty-sniffer," Abe said with a smirk. He watched Sonny think it over.

"Probably," he admitted with a shrug.

Abe let out a genuine laugh. "Past the point of trying to impress me with propriety?"

"Past the point of thinking that propriety would impress you," Sonny countered, hands roaming over Abe's chest and belly.

"Touché," Abe said, leaning back into him as Sonny flicked his thumbs over his nipples.

"I know what gets you all hot and bothered, and it's not me trying to hide what turns me on. Like your smell," he said, rubbing his face against Abe's hair, breathing him in. "Or your hair," he continued, "body

or otherwise." He rubbed his palms over Abe's chest hair. "And I know I turn you on." He slid a hand over the front of Abe's jeans, cupping his growing bulge.

Abe reached behind him, gripping Sonny's hips and pressing their bodies firmly together. "Sonny, please."

Sonny's reflection smiled over Abe's shoulder. "Not too tired?"

Abe shook his head.

Without hesitating, Sonny stepped back and stripped off his own shirt. "Then take the rest of your clothes off and get in the shower."

