

Chapter 10

I bolted upright, gasping, pushing against the arms trying to hold me down.

"Ana! It's me." Laurel's voice cut through the fog.

She had aged. Her ash-blonde hair was now gray, her once-youthful glow dimmed by the relentless march of time.

I buried my face in her shoulder when she hugged me. She was my home, after all.

I jerked my head up, heart racing. "Nat..."

"She is ne." Laurel cupped my cheek. "Angela is with her. Natalie doesn't remember anything."

"Nat doesn't remember *anything*?" I repeated.

"Her memory is..." Laurel hesitated. "Altered. She believes she was in an accident. There's no trace of Harold in her mind."

I blinked in disbelief. My world was being turned upside down, and my mind did not know how to keep up. Memories could be altered. Demons were real. And Cain was one of them. Somehow, that last one was the easiest to come to terms with.

"Please tell me what is going on." My voice trembled with shock.

Laurel nodded calmly. "I will tell you everything, Ana."

She helped me get out of the bed. "Go freshen up and join me in the living room."

"You look so much like your mother now," she said when I sat down on the couch next to her. "So beautiful."

"You never told me anything." I looked at her, searching her face.

"Aisling was my best friend. We grew up together, did everything together. She was kind, gentle... A lovely soul." Laurel's face softened with the memory.

"She married Cyrus—your father. He adored her. I still remember the joy on his face when she told him she was pregnant with you."

Her smile faded. "I know," she said softly. "Nothing was left of your home. The re destroyed everything. The fact that you survived... It was a miracle."

I wish I had at least one picture, just to see the faces of the people who brought me into this world.

Because...her story never sat right with me.

Laurel never told me what caused the re. But when I opened my mouth to ask, she turned my world upside down once again.

"Your mother wasn't entirely human, Ana."

My head snapped up.

"She carried Blue Blood from her mother's side," Laurel continued. "But unlike most Blue Bloods, she didn't have any powers."

I frowned in confusion.

"Your great-grandmother went against the rules by marrying a human. She was stripped of her powers and cast out. Her descendants, though born with Blue Blood, had no abilities."

Laurel paused, letting me digest it.

"My father?" I asked.

"Cyrus was a human. But he knew everything about Aisling." She took a deep breath.

I looked at her quizzingly, and she took a deep breath.

"There was a time, eons ago, when demons roamed free and chaos overwhelmed the world. In order to restore balance, divine forces created a bloodline—a fusion of the death angel Azrael's and reapers' blood. *The Unseen*. The Blue Bloods. They cast the demons back to their own realm, trying to bring back peace."

I had never heard anything of the sort.

"The demons, in return, retaliated. They created something unnatural. Something evil."

My heart thundered in my chest.

"Cain." Laurel looked me dead in the eye. "Cain is that abomination. He wasn't meant to exist. His birth meant the death of everything."

I couldn't breathe.

"Cain wasn't born normally. He was *constructed*. Conceived by a greater demon, Eriik, and Efah, the goddess of death. They extracted him from her womb, fused him with the corpse of an unhatched being, and placed him into the womb of a dead Blue Blood."

My stomach turned, and it took everything to hold on to some semblance of composure.

"For a hundred days, the grave was fed with the blood of Azrael, Eriik, and Efah, and powerful magic. Until a baby cried," Laurel continued. "No one knows how they got Azrael's blood. But however they did it, they succeeded. When Cain was born, he was already stronger than any being."

"Cain is—"

I couldn't say it.

"There is a name for him." Laurel's voice dropped. "*Dalazar Daemonne*. The black ame of doom."

"Efah and Eriik's greed tipped the balance of life and death. Cain's not just demonic. He has Azrael's and Efah's blood. He is between realms. He exists between the realm of good and evil."

It was impossible to imagine. Even more impossible to believe it to be true. And yet...something about it made sense. Although my brain screamed that none of this could be real, that Laurel must be making it all up for some reason, my gut had known all along that something was o. That the world was a di erent place than everyone made it out to be. That the shadows I saw were just the tip of the iceberg.

"What is my link to him, Laurel?" I asked at last.

She took my hand, raising my wrist.

"You have his wing. That symbol—it's a cursed mark. His left wing is bound to your soul."

I froze.

"His gigantic black wings," she whispered, "are made of eternal ames. They are the symbol of true power. That's why you can see the dead. Anima."

"Why? Why me?"

Laurel reached out to me. I fought to keep the tears at bay.

"Take it out of me." I scratched my wrist violently. "It ruined everything for me."

"You would die if I tried to take it out." Laurel's voice rose a notch. "It's bound to your soul. It would kill you."

Laurel touched my pendant. "The pendant will protect you."

I looked at the moon crest as well.

"The pain you felt near Cain, it was the pendant's protection. He can't harm you—not while you have his wing."

"Why?" I asked.

"One Blue Blood injured him with a dagger coated in black phoenix's ashes. She couldn't kill him, but she managed to put a spell on the wing. He cannot take it from you by force. Only you can return his wing willingly." She caressed my cheek. "I will protect you, I promise."

I looked at the woman I had known all my life. Who had taken care of me, raised me. Who had hidden me away from the rest of the world.

Now I understood why.

"You are not human, are you?"

Laurel smiled faintly. "I'm an Enchantress. I can open rifts. Time travel, in a sense. But I will always be your Laurel."

She held my hand and squeezed it. She looked into my eyes.

"Ana. Stay away from Cain."

I was going to run at the rst letter of his name.