

Chapter 15

Angie and Nat came inside my room. Angie was a tornado; Nat a calm storm—for now.

I stared at them, unable to speak, my heart breaking under the weight of guilt.

"Don't you dare shut us out," Angie said angrily. "You came back unconscious and covered in blood. Laurel, she—"

Her voice faltered, unable to say it aloud.

"Where was her funeral?"

"Your silence is scaring us," Nat nally said, her voice gentle but rm.

"The less you know," I said quietly, "the better."

I jerked Angie's hand o my arm. "I'm moving out."

"What's wrong with you?" Angie yelled.

"It's better if you two stay away from me." I turned back to my packing.

"Ana—"

"Leave me alone," I screamed. "Please!"

"You're not being fair," Angie whispered.

Nat called after her when she stormed out of my room. "Goodness, we are not kids."

She looked at me apprehensively. "I know you need space. But I hope you understand every decision comes with consequences."

The consequences were already crushing me.

"We're here for you," Nat said quietly before leaving.

As the door closed, the facade shattered, piece by piece, with every tear that slipped down my face.

*How could I tell them there was no funeral?* Laurel vanished like ashes before my eyes.

I could only watch helplessly. I couldn't punish her murderer who stood there, covered in her blood.

I barely remembered anything after that. Who brought me home and how—I didn't know.

Angie and Nat found me outside our apartment. I wanted my friends more than anything, but I couldn't risk their lives.

Fear gnawed at me. Exhaustion weighed me down.

I was lost, broken—and utterly alone.

I never realized that some relations could be stronger than blood. Laurel gave me everything—safety, love, protection from enemies I didn't know existed.

*What did I give her in return?* Nothing—only pain.

And now...she was gone.

I steeled my nerves and walked out of my room.

Angie and Nat were in the living room. They stood up abruptly when they saw me with my bag.

"Keys to my room and apartment." I extended them toward Angie. "I know I'm being a bitch. I—"

"Just leave," she cut in, turning away. "Save the gibberish you cooked to outweigh your sel shness."

I left quietly without proper goodbyes.

*It's for the best.* I kept reminding myself as I walked away from the only home I'd ever known.

I didn't know where I'd go or what I'd do. I only hoped for things to turn better.

But the real misery began the moment I stepped out. Doors closed on me from every direction. Cain's shadow lingered on every answer. No opening for a job. No vacant apartment.

It was a blatant lie.

I threw my phone on the table after ending the call and held my head with both hands as I stared at the crossed list.

I knew this was coming when I walked out of The Alicere.

Cain had blacklisted me from the industry—every door slammed shut in my face.

I couldn't believe he was resorting to such despicable mortal means to mess with me.

*Thank God he's keeping the monsters inside—for now.*

I didn't know what I would have done if Cain had decided to switch to his inhuman powers. The thought was bone-chilling.

I was scared, but what he did to Laurel outweighed my fears. I was not going to let him live peacefully with it.

Someone knocked on the door to my hotel room. I got up unwillingly to answer.

I looked between the three members of the hotel management.

"I'm sorry, ma'am, but you need to check out," one of them said, avoiding my gaze.

It was not even surprising.

I slammed the door in their faces and stormed to the bed. I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe that bastard.

I packed and left from there, dragging myself along the dark roads of the city until I found an empty bus stop.

*He'd thrown me out at this hour. What a true man he was!*

I looked at the dark sky when it rumbled. It was going to rain any minute.

I let out a wry chuckle when a single tear slipped out of my eye.

"I'm miserable, aren't I?" I whispered hoarsely. "I wonder how long this will go on?"

My sight blurred. "I put you through so much. If it wasn't for me, you would have been alive." I wiped my eyes.

I was not at liberty to cry.

The sky raged and thundered. The wind howled in the silence of the night.

The gloom of the weather at this hour made me feel ten times worse. I was scared to be alone on the street.

No place was safe for me.

"I'm going to become food for hoologans and shadowed beasts," I muttered.

"You should've known better." His voice rumbled behind me, low and lethal.

I tried to calm my pounding heart when Cain appeared before me out of nowhere.

"For how long do you think you can survive?" he derided.

"Don't know," I muttered o handedly once I regained control over my senses.

I gasped in pain when Cain grabbed my arms and pulled me up roughly.

"What are you doing?" I screamed.

"You're too arrogant." He pressed our bodies together. "Too stubborn for your own good, Anastasia."

"Aren't you torturing me enough? Why are you stalking me?" I responded bitterly. "I wasn't expecting you to go as far as asking people to shut their doors in my face."

"I won't call this torture," Cain retorted coldly. "If anything, I'm being too gentle."

"Aren't you a caring one?" I jeered. "God knows how disgusted I am to have you this close to me. You murderer!"

I wiggled in his hold to break free.

"You're a true monster. You have shown me every bit of it." His hold became deadly. "Get o!"

"You don't cherish the lives of your friends, huh?" he threatened calmly.

I glared back, un inching.

"Murderer?" he whispered, brushing my hair behind my ear. "Yes, I am."

He cupped my jaw.

"And I'll be far worse if you keep testing me."

For all his threats, his touch was almost gentle.

"It's quite simple." Cain let me go suddenly. "Obey me and have their pretty necks saved."

"What do you want me to do?" I asked calmly.

"Stay with me," Cain said, raising a nger to stop me. "If you want, of course. No coercion, love." He smirked wickedly.

"Anything else?" I asked incredulously.

"Let's leave it at that. I don't want you dying out of shock," he said sarcastically. "Not until I am done with my part."

"Your wing, that is," I said atly.

"You thought de ance was free?" I clenched my sts when Cain closed in on me again. "You've just started paying, love. Do something against my wishes, the outcomes will impact your beloved."

Every threat was re ected in the darkness of his eyes.

"You have only seen a glimpse." Cain caressed my cheek with his knuckles.

That sealed my fate and lips.

I didn't ght him when he grabbed my arm and led me to his car.

The ride to his mansion was thick with silence, heavy with dread.

I had walked into the enemy's den willingly, but I knew I wouldn't leave unless he wanted me to.

Cain left me as soon as I entered the room he opened the door to.

No word. Nothing—just silence.

"At least he's not locking me in the basement or something," I muttered to myself.

I never expected him to make my stay comfortable.

But the silence in this vast place didn't bring peace—it made the stillness unnerving, the quiet unbearable.

*Sleep won't be coming.*

My senses prickled at a faint rustling outside my room.

I didn't stop to think. I bolted out, running blindly through endless hallways, checking rooms upon rooms.

*They can't enter his lair, can they?*

I came to the other side of the estate.

No signs of Cain.

*Why do men like him need so much space?*

Exhausted from searching endless oors and rooms, I reached for the last door—

It opened before I could touch it.

Cain eyed my frozen left hand in the air. Then his eyes dropped, slowly, trailing down the length of me.

Nightdress. Pillow clutched like a child's shield.

I'd let him glimpse my vulnerability. He could use it against me.

But Anima or Cain? The choice was clear.

"You need something?" his tone was clipped, annoyed.

My eyes roamed from his face down below his neck. I stopped at the sight of his chiseled chest teasing out of his half-unbuttoned shirt.

*Stupid, Ana.*

I pushed past him before he could catch my ogling and climbed onto his bed.

"Let me sleep here." I cleared my throat. "It's a stupid favor, I know, but I can't sleep anywhere else."

It was so humiliating, but better to su er his presence than be alone in that room.

Cain crossed his arms over his chest and smirked. I could feel the heat intensifying in my cheeks.

"I—It's—" I dgeted under his watchful eyes. "I don't have my pendant—" I mumbled. "They don't bother me when you are near. Anima."

"I thought you abhorred being near me."

"I do," I admitted, honest and bitter. "But you gave me a room on the opposite end of the estate. There's no one there."

Cain went to the couch, settling in with arms sprawled across the headrest. His hawk-like eyes were xed on me.

"Can I sleep here or not?" I snapped.

"That's not how you ask a favor," his voice was crisp, eyes narrowing.

*Even dressed in silk and silence, a monster's still a monster.*

Cain gestured to his bed.

"Thanks." I crawled to the middle.

I looked around in awe while u ng up the blanket. His room was decadently dark—lavish, gothic, masculine. Everything screamed wealth and danger.

I hated myself for depending on him.

Cain was out to kill me—yet here I was, seeking refuge from a few hours of agony by choosing the lesser evil.

He sat across the room, downing glass after glass of alcohol, eyes itting between his laptop and phone.

Watching him do human things was weird.

I rubbed my left wrist softly. Nothing. Just a false sense of safety pulsed under my skin.

Cain didn't need brute force—he had cruelty down to an art. If I gave him an inch, he'd devour the whole of me.

The spell was my only shield—a fragile hope. *For how long?*

I just prayed a miracle would save me from this looming death.

My lips thinned as I continued watching him. I was sure he loathed every second of sharing air with me.

"I can take the couch," I said after some time. "I don't want to impose any more than I already am."

Cain smirked and poured himself another drink, downing it in one smooth go.

"Sleep before I change my mind," he said. His threat was oddly polite.

I got under the blankets and lay facing away from him.

"You're not turning o the lights?" he asked—almost softly.

"I've never slept with the lights o," I whispered back. "You'll be here all night?"

"If you want," he murmured.

His words were going to give my cheeks permanent red marks.

Every light except the lamp by the couch side suddenly turned o.

Panic hit me full force and I pushed myself up, looking around wildly.

"They won't come." His deep voice sliced through the darkness like sweet poison. "Just sleep."

I lay back reluctantly and turned the other way.

My heart wouldn't slow. My nerves refused to settle.

His scent—musk, oud, and cold smoke—clung to the room like a warning, pressing against my skin.

Against all odds, I fell into a deep sleep.