

Chapter 16

Flashback

Omisha bunched her skirt and ran up the hill excitedly. I steadied her when she stumbled.

"Why are you always in a hurry?" I asked, brushing stray locks from her face.

"I can't control my happiness," she replied shyly. I smirked as her cheeks flushed.

I pulled her into a fierce kiss, grabbing her sides and deepening the contact. Her sweet moans ignited a fire within me.

"Cain!" Omisha said breathlessly. "Stop," she added, pushing me back again.

I tried to kiss her again, but she pushed me back once more.

"We are not alone."

I raised a questioning brow.

"Come," she called behind me. "She is my best friend. I wanted to introduce you, but she was scared."

"A Blue Blood?" I asked.

"No." Her smile dimmed. "She is an Enchantress. Still learning, but incredible."

I looked at the young woman approaching, eyes downcast, fidgeting with her hands.

"It's okay, he doesn't bite," Omisha encouraged.

"Cain, this is Lyra," she said. "Lyra, this is Cain—the one everyone talks about."

"Hello!" Lyra greeted shyly. "It's nice to meet you."

"Not scary, right?" Omisha smiled. "Hope you two get along."

End of Flashback

"I wasn't expecting her to come." Xic's voice pulled me to the present. "It wouldn't have surprised me if she would have opted for the streets instead."

"Are you sure she is Omisha's reincarnation?" Xic chuckled. "This one is a walking spitfire. Omisha was more docile."

"Can you be considerate?" Aeron snapped.

Xic ignored him and busied himself with his drink.

"What is that?" he asked, pointing to the key in my hand.

"A gift from Lyra," I said darkly, twisting the key.

"That symbol..." Aeron frowned. "I've seen it somewhere."

"We will find out about it, brother," Xic snickered. "It must be related to the curse somehow."

"What about Anastasia?" Aeron said. "You can't use Lyra's death to your advantage forever. If you want Anastasia closer, make her hatred disappear. What if Lyra spoke the truth?"

"Not your concern," I said darkly. "As long as she doesn't know the truth of her death, I can use it to my advantage for as long as I want."

"And the Blue Bloods? You think they will sit quietly?" Aeron scooped. "They have also been waiting for the prophecy to be fulfilled."

My only response was a raised brow.

"Larc will come for her," Aeron said darkly. "You are powerful, we get that. But don't be conceited. He could brainwash her, be her knight in shining armor."

"I despise that bastard," Xic hissed. "Why didn't you kill them all?"

"Death was an escape. Life won't be. They should suffer their immortality for what they did to us." The replace roared.

"Let them watch their loved ones ripped apart. The final price will be claimed when nothing's left."

"Well, I'm glad you called the servants back. It'll make that poor girl's stay more comfortable."

"Clary's coming," Xic said after a brief pause. "Keep your doll away if you want your wing intact. If she knows who Anastasia is... That's another hell."

"Don't let Clary stay here as long as Anastasia is living with you," Aeron added. "You need to make her come to you, not scare her away."

"And Serra," Xic said bitterly. "Her father is determined to keep the promise. Tying the two families by marrying you."

"I'll handle it," I said, brushing off his concern. "Serra won't return unless I call her. Her father can't defy my word."

"He's a great Marquis of hell, favored by our father. His daughter was chosen for you. He won't stop until she stands beside you," Aeron warned. "They won't disobey you, but they won't spare the girl if things go wrong," he sighed. "Serra's obsession is—" Aeron left it hanging. "Aren't we enough nightmare for Anastasia?"

"Aeron, the kind-hearted demon," Xic teased. "Why so much empathy for mortals? You make me sick."

"Fuck off," Aeron jerked his arm away and looked at me. "Nothing gets through your stubbornness, but try to be a little gentle for a change."

"Get out," I snarled.

"Just saying," Aeron said, raising his hands. "Humans crave what they're denied most. Your case isn't different. Give her what she wants, and she won't stop."

They vanished.

I locked the key in my drawer beside Omisha's pendant.

"I will know."

I looked toward the door, waiting for Sibyl to make her entrance.

"I appreciate your services as well as keeping a check on other servants." I smirked when she smiled.

"It's my family honor, Master," she said, palming her heart. "Our generation swore loyalty to the Black family until our dying breath."

I waited for her to speak about the real agenda.

"It's about the young miss," she said worriedly. "She's locked herself in her room."

I leaned back in my chair. I had put her back in her own room after that first night. She had protested, of course, but I needed my personal space. Being in her vicinity... Her scent alone was enough to throw me off balance.

"It's over a week now," Sibyl continued. "She is not sleeping as well. I hear screams from her room at night. She sounds"—she paused—"terrified."

"Is the dinner ready?" I inquired while getting up.

She nodded.

"I will bring her myself. I'll accompany her to the dining table tonight."

I left my study for the opposite wing where she was residing.

As expected, her door was locked.

"Anastasia!" I knocked twice. "Open the door."

I tasted her dilemma and fears in the air.

"I'm being polite. Open the door," I threatened calmly.

Her stubbornness subsided in under a minute and she opened the door.

"Can't I even sulk here?" Anastasia spat.

I grabbed the door as she tried to slam it and forced my way inside her room. I saw what Sibyl meant. She was withering.

"You look near death," I said.

"Save the concern," she bit back.

I grabbed her arm and pulled her close.

"Listen!" I hissed, looming over her intimidatingly. "I can chain you in the crypt if you are so keen on the thought."

"I will be a captive either way," she spat fire despite her frailty.

I dragged her to the door but she jerked free, making my jaw twitch.

"I won't ask."

I carried her thrashing form out.

"Put me down," Anastasia screamed, scratching. "You asshole! CAIN!"

I roughly put her down. I was going to gag her first if it ever happened again.

Her tantrum was put on hold by Sibyl's arrival.

"Shift her luggage to this room, Sibyl," I commanded without looking away from Anastasia. "Is the table set?"

"Yes," Sibyl replied, then left us alone.

"She knows your truth," Anastasia said incredulously. "And they are still willing to work for you?" Her voice was laced with disgust.

I opened the door but she held her ground. Her defiance was admirable.

"I can force you in, or you can make it easier," I said calmly.

"You think I need an upgraded cell?" Anastasia gestured to the room.

"Those Anima won't bother you here, Anastasia," I said, losing my patience. "It's closer to my room. You'll be safe."

She kept watching me silently.

"What?"

"I can't do this anymore." Her shoulders slumped. "I'll go crazy. Let me go out."

"Out of the question," I refused coldly.

"I'm not running away. I just want to work. I want to put my mind somewhere."

I crossed my arms, watching her.

"Let me live freely until—" She looked away. "This is the least you can do to make me feel less miserable."

The desperation was etched on her face. Her vulnerabilities lay bare.

"Where do you plan on working?" She looked up at my question.

"I'll open a studio boutique." Her eyes lit up with hope. "I don't want to work for anyone after you."

I snorted at her contemptuous response.

"You will need a place first," I muttered sarcastically. "Want me to lift the ban on you?"

I smirked wickedly when her cheeks reddened with anger.

"I can if—I raised my finger—"you agree to some rules."

I motioned toward the room, and she immediately entered.

Her submission over something so trivial amused me to no end.

Aeron was right.

"Will you really lift the ban?" Anastasia asked me with dubious hope.

"I don't lie, Anastasia, nor do I go back on my word," I said as I extended my hand.

She looked at it for a beat before shaking it.

"Excellent."

"What do you want?" Anastasia asked cautiously.

"Nothing complicated," I answered casually. "Do what you want. I need you back by the end of the day. If you run late for some reason, encounter anything uncanny or unusual, you tell me. No lies or mind games."

"I can work with that," she said with a smile. "That's it?" She tilted her head to the side.

My eyes stayed on her longer than needed.

"Don't give headaches to my servants," I added strictly and turned to leave.

"Cain?"

Her soft voice made me clench my fists.

"I will listen to you only because you are letting me breathe," she said softly.

I glanced at her.

"But I will never forget what you did to Laurel." The venom returned to her voice.

I closed the door and went downstairs.

"This is going to be taxing."