

Chapter 25

I shot Xic a warning glare when his amusement echoed around my study once more. He couldn't stop laughing despite my threats and his endless apologies.

He could never be serious.

"But it was hilarious," Xic said, breathless from his fits. "Anastasia swung the IV stand at you, Cain. She just went—bam."

I shut my eyes, trying to tune out his nonsense. My blood was already boiling—I didn't need another reason to reduce this place to ash.

"You revealed your true form," Xic snickered. "But Anastasia didn't seem frightened. Omisha didn't come near you for a week," he continued, drawing comparisons between past and present. "Maybe she isn't Omisha after all."

Aeron shook his head.

"When will he learn to read between the lines?" he asked, looking at me. "What are you thinking?"

"You are worried about your doll, aren't you?" Xic answered his question.

I twisted the rings on my right hand. Things weren't proceeding as I anticipated.

Disclosing Omisha's truth stemmed into undesirable lapses. Anastasia didn't recall her past life.

Her response to Larc's approach was sour. It was clear that he unnerved her.

She was crushed, but not groveling. I saw pure hatred in her eyes for her past—when she smashed the portrait.

*Is she acting like she used to?*

"It's all because of you, Clary," Aeron reprimanded her.

I wanted to rip her open and tear her to pieces. *She ruined everything.*

"Don't preach, Aeron," Clarissa snapped.

"Shut up," my voice shook the walls of my study. "Not another word out of your god-damned mouth, Clarissa."

"But—"

I grabbed her throat, slamming her into the pillar. "I won't care if you are my sister. Dare hinder me again, I'll shove you in *The Abyss* with my hands."

The marble and her bones cracked under my force. She choked in my hold.

"You coddled her when you should have ended this farce," I growled.

Aeron and Xic stepped in and stood before me defensively, to keep me from killing her. Their bravery was laudable.

"Don't start again, you two," Einar said, appearing through a vortex.

"You knew it could damage her soul. Why did you decide to add fuel to the fire?"

"Ask your wife," I spat.

I went to the bar and poured myself a drink. "Are you powerful enough to piece her back if I soil the floor with her gut?"

I downed the glass. Alcohol didn't affect me. I just liked the bitterness it left.

"You will kill me? For her?" Clarissa screeched behind me.

Einar caged her in his arms as she tried to lunge forward. "I cannot believe you, Cain."

"Calm down, love," Einar tried to pacify her. "This is why half-truths are more lethal than full lies."

I glared at him through my periphery.

"Nothing wrong in admitting that you acted out of your emotions," Einar said smugly.

I hated his two-way sarcasm.

"Everything became my fault?" Clarissa asked.

"Yes," Xic replied. "What if she hadn't called Cain? Xoran would have taken her to Harold."

"It's better not to incite things," Einar said to Xic.

"Her soul was already in tatters. Anastasia suffered massively by the sudden revelation. That's why the mark didn't disappear right away."

The glass exploded in my fist. My wrath seeped into the walls, cracking marble, warping the air.

*Every part of me ached to destroy something.*

But it wouldn't change the fact— She slipped further from me the more I tried to keep her close.

"Every blow on her body, mind, or heart—" Einar grimaced. "Psychological, emotional or physical, will affect your wing. I told you time and again."

I clenched my fists. "My magic can heal her physically. It cannot fix her soul."

"What do you want me to do?" I smashed the glass on the floor.

I gritted my teeth. "I gave her everything she wanted. I even let her go back. This fucking curse doesn't let me near her and now she knows the truth of that fucking Larc. Who do you think she will choose?"

"She called you," Einar answered calmly.

I looked away from him.

"You cannot extract your wing by procuring a few sublunary aspects. You are not even close to reckoning what that poor soul wants."

"He doesn't want to know purposely," Aeron added.

I glared. "Clary is only partly at fault. You are equally accountable."

"Serra and Amon have gotten wind of things because of Harold," Xic informed us. "They are shadowing those girls all the time. Serra is more of a threat to Anastasia than Clarissa, Cain."

"Why do you think I asked you?" I bit back. "Watch the two. Anastasia's safety is my concern."

I poured myself another drink.

"You are hazardous to her," Einar retorted. "Heal her soul if you want your wing. The nature of the curse is more complicated than you can imagine."

"What?" Aeron and Xic asked simultaneously.

"What complications now?" Xic raked his hair wildly.

"The wing has become part of her soul. Severing it now will destroy it," Einar looked at me. "There's a chasm between coercion and consent, Cain. You pushed her to remember. The consequence is now carved into her soul."

I gritted my teeth.

"She is a human, but from the *Blue Bloods* lineage. It makes her more or less like us in twisted ways. And you know how the union of two beings is in our world," Einar said gravely.

"Unless you rule her heart and mind..."

"If Cain doesn't become part of her soul, the wing will perish the moment he severs it," he looked at me. "You hate the thought of her near you? It is working vice versa."

The marble cracked when I gripped the counter. The windows shattered, and everything rattled and trembled under my wrath.

"Cain!"

I grabbed the arrow between my index and middle finger.

"That's—" Aeron spat venomously. "How dare they?"

It morphed into a blue parchment.

I faced my kin. Apparel switched, they were in defensive stances, waiting for my command.

"The great Sorush is seeking me out?" I chuckled.

My attire switched when I rose. The dimension shifted when I stepped forward.

I stood at the edge of the mountain and confronted my archenemies across the river on the opposite end.

This place was *Nihility* between our realms. This was where I fought Omisha for the first and the last time.

My blood thumped with malice when I recognized a few faces. I saved them for the last.

They will endure a doom worse than death.

"To what do I owe this pleasure?" I mocked.

Sax and Larc stepped back to let Sorush pass.

He didn't change. His aura still reeked of his so-called supremacy.

"Judging by the ensemble, you didn't come here to talk," I taunted, summoning my Ashrune.

"Still cloaked in arrogance, Salazar. Time has taught you nothing," Sorush said as he stopped on the precipice.

Nothing changed about him, except for his long hair tied back in a ponytail.

"Your dogs still shadow you?" I sneered, switching my sword between my hands.

"Larc!" Sorush stopped him with a raised hand.

Xic and Clarissa stepped back when I tilted my head in warning.

"They are a bunch of abominations," Sorush spat. "Don't stoop to their level and soil your hands."

"I didn't infect someone's dwelling and slit their throats in my sleep," I taunted. "Talking about principles when you envy my power." I laughed.

"You even used your daughter—"

"CAIN!"

The sky thundered when my *Ashrune* clashed with his scythe.

Sorush gritted his teeth. "I will show you in due time who is the real monster between us."

I leaped over his head when he swiveled his scythe at me.

"What hurts your ego the most?" I poked where it hurt.

Sorush curtailed the attack, and our blades immersed in another macabre.

"That I have angel blood like you?" I grinned viciously when his eyes narrowed into slits. "Or my creation involved the most powerful spell of the forbidden curses?"

We recoiled to our respective sides.

The air shifted and changed its course when my powers surged to the surface.

My eyes switched from turquoise to electric blue.

The sky turned dark, and lightning struck the river, cutting it open in halves.

The earth tore to its core when I swung my blade in the air.

They went airborne when the mountain crumbled under their feet and turned to dust.

I extended my sword to the left and it disappeared.

"Even if you get my wings, you won't even stand equivalent to a grain of my vehemence."

Aeron and Xic appeared at my side. Clarissa and Einar got into stance behind us when Larc charged forward.

"I will kill you," he said.

His scythe was blocked by Sorush's. Sax pulled him back when he tried to lunge forward.

"Sorush!" he yelled.

"She is my daughter, Cain," Sorush said arrogantly. "She will heed my call and follow my command when the time comes. That's how much she loves me."

"Adorable!" I mocked. "It will make everything more thrilling when I cut you open and tear you to pieces before her eyes." My laugh was evil.

"Her screams will be music to my ears."

"Only time will tell—who will cry blood—and dance to the symphony of death."

They vanished like true cowards.

"Get me to the astral realm," I hissed. "Every answer lies there."

I faced them. "And you, Clary." I glared at her. "Stay away from Anastasia."

"They won't sit still," Aeron said. "They are going to take Anastasia one way or another."

"I will deal with those mutts," I muttered spitefully. "Take care of the Underworld. Make sure no more pests step out of their craters."

He nodded.

"And Xic." I looked at him. "Keep a close eye on Harold."

"You want me to seize him or just track him?" he asked.

"Keep your eyes on him." I walked past them.

The dimension veered once more.

We were back in my study and in our human clothes.

"Leave," I commanded, going to my bar. "Clarissa."

"This is my home—"

"And I am *Dalazar Daemonne*," They knelt before me. "Don't push me, little sister."

"Come on, love." Einar ushered her out. "You have plenty of properties. Don't be stingy."

He looked at me. "I'm going to Acreoterra tonight. The *Wenix* bear knowledge about the forbidden curses. We may find something through Erlking."

I went to my table once they left.

I retrieved Omisha's locket from the drawer.

Not out of sentiment—no.

I kept it for one reason only: as a reminder of the mistake that destroyed everything.

The flames engulfed the locket in my palm.

I gave it to her, but I felt nothing as I destroyed it.

"You hold no place in my memories anymore."