

## Symphony of Death

### Chapter 3

Every day after that night felt like a battle. Nothing remained untouched.

Cain Black had turned The Alicere upside down. Every day brought a new chaos—and it was exhausting.

There was no place for nonsense in his perfect world.

Nothing pleased him. Nothing fazed him.

I wasn't even halfway through the first set of inhuman changes he ordered, and he dropped a fresh load of demands. I was constantly arguing with Hannah.

This morning, I walked in and got hit with another bombshell.

The event was moved a week up, the venue changed, and even the media house swapped. Any guesses?

Who else—The Moonlight and the DS-con.

It wasn't even funny anymore.

The office looked like a war zone, everyone running like headless chickens—all because of one man.

I didn't want to go to the hotel, but Hannah shoved me inside her car with my team and escorted me herself. She warned me not to say anything stupid to the boss.

That thought soured my mood.

*Cain was waiting for me.*

Wasn't he supposed to rule from his throne in the sky? Why was that man everywhere?

I wanted to run, but I still walked toward the doom waiting on the floor.

My wrist tingled again.

"Are you done with the changes?" he asked the moment I entered the room.

*Hello to you too.*

"Yes," I said, looking around.

The room was spacious, windowless, and dim—too dim.

I handed him the designs.

"You'll be working here for the next three days. The show will be on the floor above," he said while flipping through them. "Easy to move props and dresses."

He went still.

"What?" I asked, unnerved by the sudden silence.

Without a word, he ripped the designs and let the pieces flutter to the floor.

"They're rubbish."

His words slapped harder than his actions.

"Hannah spoke highly of you," he continued. "But I disagree."

"What's wrong with them?" I stared at the shredded remains. "I redid them exactly as you told me."

"You didn't." His tone was a blade.

"How much darker do you want it to be?" I snapped. "Your suggestions aren't meant for living. They're for demons and the dead."

His jaw twitched.

"What am I getting wrong?"

"The designs are bland. The cuts outdated. The color scheme is off. They contradict the idea. Did you even get the concept?" Cain sneered.

I stared, stunned.

"Do I need to draw them for you?" he mocked.

The tingle in my wrist turned to a painful throb as he loomed over me menacingly.

He didn't need to raise his voice—his presence and gaze were daunting enough.

"I need more lights inside this place if you want me to see what I'm doing," I said, avoiding looking at him directly. "I can't work in this gloom, no matter how gothic the theme."

He walked out on me without answering.

I didn't like it—but had no choice. I rolled up my sleeves and knotted my hair into a battle bun.

I worked for three days without proper breaks. I was going to shove his insults back in his face with my dresses. I was a woman with a mission, ready to go on the rampage.

If crazy was the new motto of The Alicere, I was going to live up to that.

This event was going to be a big breakthrough for us.

I did not know Cain's motives, but I was not going to let it fall through.

After three days, I had finished all dresses, except for one.

This one had a pretty long train. I had to keep it on a high platform to keep it from damage.

This was my masterpiece. The showstopper.

I started mounting the butterfly on the left side of the waistline.

*The skeleton of a butterfly.*

"Ah, damn." The packet slipped and all the pearls scattered on the floor.

"Damn pins." I scowled at the floor for no reason, then turned to get on the ladder to pick the pearls from the floor.

"Oh, fuck!" I lost my footing.

My eyes widened in dread when the ladder almost collided with the dress.

*Doomed.*

He appeared out of nowhere.

I could only gasp as Cain caught me by the waist and lifted me on the ladder.

He balanced both the mannequin and ladder effortlessly—without even shifting his stance. It was like I weighed nothing.

My heart rocketed as he held me close. I didn't dare move; he didn't let go.

"Careful." His voice, like his eyes, was ice. "You wouldn't want to cause unnecessary trouble."

*There was something wrong with this man.*

I hadn't sensed him until he held me—and that action just now was inhuman.

Cain pulled me into his body. One arm wrapped tight around my waist, holding me still.

He wasn't using force, but the power behind that grip was unmistakable. My heart thundered in my chest when his demeanor shifted.

He was still well in control—but I felt it. That subtle, dangerous change.

His eyes locked onto mine—dark, unreadable. His pupils dilated, swallowing the beautiful turquoise.

He looked...menacing.

"Mr. Black?" I made a feeble attempt to break free. "Please, let go."

"Listen to the poor girl, brother."

Cain let go of me with a jerk.

"Look how afraid she is of you," Xic mused while looking between us. "Or am I interrupting something?"

"What are you doing here?" Cain snapped at Xic.

"It's my territory, brother," Xic retorted arrogantly. "Your guest has arrived."

Cain left in a heartbeat.

"You should go home, babe. It's late." Xic's voice dripped with arrogance.

Heat crept up my neck. "Later."

For the rest of the day, I remained engrossed in my final piece.

I had to make it worth it. Make it worth my time, efforts, and faith. And I did.

*It was finally done.*

This dress had drained me to the bone—but it was the ultimate bomb of the show. I'd poured myself into it—rage, dignity, the fragments of my pride he hadn't yet trampled.

It wasn't a mere dress. It was a scream stitched in silk.

The theme seemed too dark at first. But now, seeing the dresses materialized, everything seemed extraordinary.

"Admiring your work?" His voice came—low, hauntingly—from behind.

I didn't want to see him. Not after earlier.

"Kind of," I replied, still staring at the masterpiece that had cost my blood, sleep, and sanity—and wondering why his voice made my chest tighten instead of my fists.

Cain circled the dress, silent. Each second scraped against my nerves.

"Something wrong?" I asked.

"You tell me." He finally faced me, unreadable.

"It's perfect," I said, firmer. "Do we need to move this now?"

"No," he replied curtly.

I moved past him, adjusting the last details.

"You can leave," he added. "The others are gone."

I rushed to my phone.

"Damn!" It was past nine. I wouldn't be able to go alone.

*I need to call Nat or Angie.*

Cain left.

"No courtesy," I muttered, placing my phone on the table. "Let's wrap—"

The lights blew out.

A beat of silence followed—tense, suffocating. The still air trembled with a low hum, a tear through space.

My heartbeat thundered in my ears, and then...I heard it. The voices returned—one low and guttural, the other a soft sob.

I crashed back into the table. Everything fell to the floor with me.

My hands slapped everywhere in search of my phone. "No," I whispered, crawling. "I can't see."

*"Anastasia!"*

The voices closed in on me.

*"Help me."*

I palmed my ears. My breathing turned shallow, and my heart felt close to exploding.

My back hit something hard. I stilled when I felt a cold hand on my shoulder.

*"I can see you."*

My eyes opened against my command and I found myself face to face with the last thing I ever wanted to encounter again.

The switch in my eyes brought a painful burning sensation. I whimpered, covering one of them.

I was alive when they first appeared. When I told Laurel, she never let me sleep with the lights on.

Laurel never let me out of her sight for a second after that, and things kept getting worse. Still they came—invisible to everyone but me, whispering sorrows, secrets only I could hear.

Until the night I saw them for what they really were.

Those smoke-like entities... They weren't monsters from the stories.

I experienced the essence of death and being near the dead that night. The moment the light turned to dark, the whole world shifted around me. It was not just the world of the living anymore.

*Not for me, at least.*

They were everywhere. Pale eyes. Bony and bluish hands.

Ashen forms. *Whispering. Screaming. Wandering.*

I could see them around us. Among us.

*"And now you see me."*

I trembled as its bony hand reached for my face.

*"You have it, Anastasia. You don't know."*

It pointed to my eyes. Pale irises. Black cross for a pupil.

Whenever it was dark, the dead appeared. Whenever they were near, my eyes changed.

"Leave me alone!" I screamed. "Please. Go away."

Their cold whispers and presence were choking me. They surrounded me, like the dark truth of my life that could never be lightened by any amount of lies.

*The darkness wasn't empty.*

*It never had been.*