

Chapter 30

I let out a triumphant yell as I lifted the book in my lap. No way was I returning this to the shelf.

This was a hard find, something I discovered while skimming through endless shelves. Red cover. Archaic. The script resembled Laurel's diary—ancient, indecipherable.

But the illustrations captivated me.

I hugged it to my chest and skipped to the poolside.

I wasn't sleepy and I didn't want to encounter something *unwanted*.

*As if Clarissa was not enough, I got Serra on my plate.*

I dipped my feet in the water. *Nice and cool.*

"If only I could read these..." I murmured, skimming through the yellowed pages.

A ripple broke the surface. My heart slammed in my chest as someone emerged.

Cain.

He slicked back his wet hair, eyes locked on mine.

He swam over, arms bracing on either side of me, cutting off my escape. His abs pressed against my calves, making my body react involuntarily.

My toes accidentally grazed a place they shouldn't. Every muscle in my body lit up in warning.

*He caged me—without touching me.*

"I didn't know—" I stammered. "I'll leave."

"What are you doing with this?" Cain asked, tapping the book.

"I found it in the library." I relaxed slightly when he backed off.

"Is this book a description of some place?"

"Yes," he said, swimming another lap.

*Why was he distracting me with that wet, sculpted form?*

I moved to the loungers.

"Acreoterra," he said behind me.

I didn't look up when he got out of the pool. *His drenched trunks left little to the imagination.*

"Seen enough?" he teased, drying his hair.

I blinked. Once. Twice. *God—how long had I been staring?*

I lowered my gaze in a panic, cheeks ablaze.

"Acreoterra has five lands." He sat across from me and flipped a few pages. "This is *The Thunder Dominion*, the heart of Acreoterra. My castle."

"You have a castle?" I asked incredulously, looking at the monstrous gothic structure.

"The picture doesn't do it justice," he smirked.

"The sun never rises in Acreoterra. It's always evening or night. Thick clouds hover with endless rain and thunder. There are four moons." He opened another illustration. "Blue moons."

"What do people do in such conditions?" I asked, tracing the moons.

"There are no people in Acreoterra," Cain chuckled. "Only I live in *The Thunder Dominion*."

Every time he spoke, my heart went gaga in shyness.

"This is the ethereal forest, *Whispering Redbud*. It is home to Wenix." He flipped the next page.

"Wenix are offspring of pixies and Erking."

"Pixies are real?" I asked excitedly. "Are they really this small?" I emphasized with my index finger and thumb.

"Wow!" I mumbled when Cain nodded.

"What is an Erking?"

"King of fairies," he explained.

"Don't be awed." He tapped my chin, closing my slightly parted lips. "They aren't what you read in books or watch in movies." Cain combed his wet hair.

"They are unwelcoming and vicious."

"I thought fairies were nice." I frowned at their illustrations.

"Wenix are not fairies, Ana. They entrance their prey with their singing and dance. Once trapped, they suck their life."

"I wouldn't want to go there." I shuddered.

"Their area is off-limits," Cain said offhandedly. "But now you know what you will be walking into if you did."

"You are scaring me, aren't you?" I pouted. "What's this?"

"Seisc," Cain replied. "Result of Pontianak and ghouls union, one of the most frightening creatures of the Underworld. They prey on both Anima and humans."

"They look human," I pointed out the illustration.

There was one man and one woman. Though just a colorless illustration, they were extremely beautiful, especially their long, sleek-looking hair.

"They don't look scary."

"Do you know anything about Pontianak?" Cain inquired.

I shook my head.

"It's the spirit of a dead pregnant woman."

"A ghost? A ghost bore and gave birth to these?" I tapped the picture. "A ghost?" I repeated.

Cain leaned forward.

"A pale creature with long hair and red eyes. She can transform into a beautiful woman to trap her prey," his voice dropped to a hush. "She appears on the full moon and feasts on human organs."

"Scary." I couldn't help the shiver. "How do you tell them apart from humans?"

"They have no smell," Cain said, opening the next illustration. "*Ochelas* is their territory. They are the guardians at the *The Abyss Sea*."

"The containment for Anima?" Cain looked at me when I said that. "Shae told the executioners there was no joke."

His gaze was penetrating my soul. I had to look away.

"I could have never known the world was limitless," I murmured in wonderment. "What is this place?"

"*Stubarat*," he replied. "Home to Nukgales. They are offspring of Leprechauns and gorgons."

"They don't mind anyone but they can be quite deceptive."

I looked at their illustration.

"They can control thunder, lightning, and water," Cain continued. "There is one more. Naxoris, children of Nymphs and Kelpie. Greedy creatures."

"Their territory." He tapped the picture. "*Essorus*."

Something about his tone was suspicious. It was like he was enjoying an inner joke.

"Acreoterra came into existence with my birth. These creatures came to me when *Blue Bloods* hunted them. Their existence was forbidden."

I nodded silently, absorbing this new knowledge.

What's more surprising—he educated me with patience.

"Acreoterra," Cain muttered. "It's a reservoir of unlimited power."

His gaze captured mine suddenly.

"Why are you awake?"

"The soundproofing isn't exceptional," I said with a straight face. "I don't want Serra's unwanted moans penetrating my privacy."

"You don't shy away from saying anything, do you?" Cain asked, amused. "I told you, didn't I? I don't bring anyone in my personal space."

"She is *your* fiancée," I pointed out. "She can come into your personal space."

"She is not *my* fiancée," Cain imitated.

I pouted.

"Were you engaged to her before meeting Omisha?" I dared ask, looking in his eyes. "Did you sleep with other women?"

"I wasn't committed to Serra," he answered. "She was chosen by my parents, not me."

"And yes, I slept with other women. I owe my loyalty to no one."

"And Omisha?" I asked bluntly.

"Aren't you too comfortable talking about *Omisha*?" he asked, his tone ruthless.

"She is another person." I shrugged. "Why would I feel uncomfortable?"

Cain snatched the book from me.

"Stop running your head over a treadmill." I held my breath when he brushed my hair back, his fingers grazing my left shoulder.

"Mosquito bite." I stood abruptly. "There are so many mosquitoes these days. Ha ha?"

Cain rose as well, one eyebrow arched in amusement.

"I've been noticing," he murmured huskily, stepping closer. "You are extremely flustered. You look like you want to run away at the mere mention of my name."

"Why wouldn't I run away?" I stammered over my words like my steps. "I'm supposed to run away. I always do."

My back hit something hard.

I didn't notice when he controlled my course toward the wall.

"You are invading my space," I said, pressing back when he reduced another inch between us.

"You don't want to prove me wrong?" His words—a hot whisper against my skin—forced my eyes low. "That's disappointing."

Cain put his index finger under my chin and tipped my face up.

"I was looking forward to some excitement."

"Go find Serra," I bit back. "I'm not your entertainment."

Cain smirked when I pushed his hand away.

"Get away—"

"And if I don't?" he challenged, pressing his body against mine.

"You want me to faint?" I raised my left arm. "It's—"

Cain grabbed my wrist and kissed it fervently.

"What are you doing?" I screeched.

"What am I doing?" Cain murmured against my wrist.

I closed my eyes when his nose rubbed my cheek.

"I know you remember everything," Cain whispered in my ear. "Sweet attempts, but you can't hide anything from me."

His fingers drummed against my left breastbone.

"What are you talking about?" I decided to play dumb.

Cain chuckled deeply and pulled back slightly.

His face was only a breath away from mine.

"Should I revive your memories?" Cain suggested.

His eyes twinkled with sinister mischief.

I tried running, but Cain grabbed my waist and spun me in his arms, my back to his chest.

"Aren't you a sly little thing?" he whispered seductively, skimming his nose along the length of my neck.

Each stroke of his lips on my flushed skin made me throw my head onto his shoulder.

"Is this how you want to play?" he purred, nibbling my earlobe.

My breath hitched when he turned me in his arms.

"Want to make a bet?" His words caressed my trembling lips.

I was a breathless mess.

I tried looking away, but he didn't let me.

I'd rather die than admit it. ~

For the first time in my history of getting drunk, I remembered everything.

I was so ashamed that I wanted to die.

It was a mistake I made in a moment's weakness and confusion.

"L—"

"There is another creature," he murmured. "Oroboros, a dragon with its tail in its mouth. You know what it does?" Cain teased my right cheek with his lips. "It eats itself."

"Eww!" I said, pushing him away. "That's so gross."

"He is the guardian of the gate of *Iashodell*," Cain said, pinching my scrunched nose. "Don't be caught by him while crossing the realms of hell."

"Why would I even go there?" I tried swatting his hand away.

He didn't budge.

"Who knows?" Cain said, letting go at last. "You never know where you will end up." His words were cryptic. "Oroboros likes to toy with his prey."

"You are so evil." I punched his chest with my fists. "You are scaring me."

Cain caught my hands on his chest.

"I didn't sleep, let alone look at any woman."

*He was not lying.*

His turquoise pools swam in sincerity.

"Nothing mattered. She only saw evil." Cain released me and stepped back.

His expression became cold.

"Go and sleep. I have plenty of room for my pleasures." Cain brushed past me.

"One more thing." I looked at him questioningly.

"Try saying Oroboros."

"Oroboros?" I repeated.

"Lock your windows before sleeping." His eyes gleamed wickedly. "Oroboros visits those who call his name."

I was horrified.

"That's not fair. Cain!"

I screamed in frustration as he left, whistling merrily.

I shook my head in disbelief.

"Hot and cold."