

Chapter 32

Angie finally sat down after exploring Cain's estate for the fifth time, whistling as she eyed the grand living hall. She wanted to sneak into his room—I stopped her, warning her it was o-limits.

I told them he didn't like anyone in his personal space. Their response—why was I there?

Their teasing lit my ears, neck, and cheeks on fire. But I stood my ground.

I was his captive. A treasure he needed to protect. Nothing more. Nothing less.

But nothing could deter them. So, I kept spinning the conversation in different directions to shut them up.

I finally succeeded when Angie mentioned Scott's wedding—her brother. It was in two months, and how she broke the news had us laughing.

She was happy, yet her expression said otherwise. I understood. Her mother had gone full Spartan over every detail.

Angie would be dragged through the chaos—and we were being dragged along with her. I was to design Diana's bridal dress.

I couldn't wait to start. I had just set their beers on the table when Angie veered into her supernatural obsession again—worsened after learning about Black's identity.

"I came across something really creepy and interesting," she started.

"Which one is it?" Nat asked. "Creepy or interesting?"

"Shut up and listen," Angie said, clutching a cushion in her lap. "Birthmarks—they say they show how you died in your past life."

"What nonsense?" Nat scoffed.

"It's true," Angie said earnestly. "I did thorough research. The mark is the remains of where you were stabbed or shot. If you were killed in your past life, you will have one."

I handed them their bottles. They noticed I was empty-handed.

One of us needed to stay sober. "She's losing her mind," Nat muttered.

Just then, Aeron and Xic walked in. Xic wore his usual cool mask, but his eyes gave him away.

"How is it going, ladies?" he asked.

"Boring," Nat said. "Why are we locked up?"

"Because you two make excellent bait," Xic replied smoothly. "Bear with it, sweetheart."

De nitely something o , Aeron told us that Einar was returning and he would stay until their return.

They were going to Acreoterra, Angie's voice was light. "Are you—to hell?"

Amusement flickered across Aeron's usually stoic face. "It's not that bad down there," he said with a smirk.

"I'd still never go there." She hugged her cushion. "Can we party?"

"Without guests? Yes," Aeron said strictly. "Don't cross the threshold at midnight. Not until Einar is back."

"Why?" Nat asked.

"There occurs a time-lapse between our realms at midnight when every barrier and spell disappears or weakens for a moment," Xic explained. "Our enemies can slip through."

"Charming," Angie muttered.

"Stay inside," Aeron retorted smugly. "Nothing will happen."

They vanished.

I was skeptical about our safety, but I remained calm for Angie and Nat. If Cain said we were safe, we were.

We spent another hour in the living hall after dinner. Angie and Nat were wasted.

I took them to my room with Sibyl's help. They were out the moment their heads hit the pillow.

I returned to Cain's room. Changed for the night.

I wasn't sleepy, just... adrift. I settled on the couch, not his bed.

I couldn't. Not after seeing Serra.

The couch was huge and super comfy. It smelled like him, his warmth and presence still lingered in its softness and the air.

But that wasn't why I chose it. No. It was only because I couldn't sleep on his germ-ridden bed.

Yes, *that's it.* I absently rubbed my wrist, the skin tingling where his grip had once lingered.

"How many days until he comes back?" I murmured.

I looked toward the curtained glass door as faint footsteps echoed outside. Silence fell—then came a soft thud.

The terrace door rattled. I rushed to the middle of the room, heart pounding, eyes locked on the terrace door.

The glass door knocked again, making me jump. I went forward on trembling legs.

My hand reached for the curtains reluctantly and I pulled them apart. "It was—" I screamed, falling on my butt when a shadow jumped out of nowhere.

"It's Clary." She removed the cloak. "Tone it down, girl. I'm going deaf here."

"What're you doing here?" I asked, breathless.

"Why do you think so?" she snapped. "I'm your guard tonight until my husband's arrival," she said coldly. "Bored out of my skull, but I'm stuck with you."

It had to be Clarissa... didn't it? Still, something in her eyes twisted my stomach.

I stood and opened the door. "Sorry," I mumbled.

"Save it." She sat on the couch and poured whiskey. "Your friends?"

"Asleep." I sat beside her slowly. "I thought you went with Aeron and Xic."

She scoffed, pouring another drink and sliding it to me. I didn't want to, but I took a sip. The taste burned more than usual.

"Cain is returning," she informed me casually.

"When?" I asked, restless.

Clarissa eyed me as she refilled her glass. My body felt... o . Heavy. Light. Dizzy.

It hit me at once. Clarissa grinned, vicious. "Don't worry, *Anastasia*, it'll be over before he's back."

I woke in darkness. My vision swam. My head throbbled.

I was in a dungeon with many cloaked shadows hidden in the darkness.

"How was the nap?"

Clarissa. Chains clanked around my wrists and ankles as I tried moving. I was tied to an altar.

"What's going on?" My voice cracked.

Clarissa leaned in, eyes cold. "Still unclear?" she hissed. "Part of our plan, sweetheart."

"Let go!" I screamed, yanking at the chains.

The cloaked figures moved closer to the altar.

"All because of the wing," she spat. "The care, the attention—"

I screamed when she twisted my wrist in the iron cu .

"I'm going to rip it out of you."

"No!" I yelled, thrashing violently.

The cloaked shadows now loomed over me. Guttural and hungry... this is what I felt on my skin.

I couldn't see their faces or eyes. But I could feel their hungry gazes leering at my body.

Clarissa hissed, "I haven't forgotten anything, Omisha."

The name rattled my bones.

"You're the reason everything is falling apart," she snapped. "Greedy, manipulative—just like before."

She kicked a fire barrel across the dungeon. I was scared for more than my life.

"You seduced him. Left him ruined." Her eyes burned with madness. "I picked up the pieces. Waited centuries. And now you return like nothing happened?"

"No... please..." I wept.

"I'll make Cain happy," she growled. "Only I and no one else. I'll rip his wing out of your soul."

A blade shimmered in her hand.

"You'll pay for your sins, Omisha."

"Don't—Don't come near me!"

I closed my eyes when she raised the blade in the air, aimed at my chest.

"Too easy," she whispered, leaning close. "I want it to be excruciating, Omisha."

"I'm not Omisha!" I screamed.

Clarissa slapped me so hard my vision blanked.

Blood filled my mouth.

"You know what?" she said, smiling manically. "I've decided how to start."

Her voice dropped to a twisted purr.

"I'll rip you o your purity," she said with a grin. "Let's see if he still wants you once your soul's been defiled."

She caressed my hair.

"No—Don't—"

I shrieked as she slashed open my nightgown.

The fabric tore from my skin. Chains rattled even harder with my struggles.

Those cloaked shadows now breathed on me.

Everywhere.

I thrashed. Screamed. Sobbed blood.

"Scream louder," Clarissa laughed. "These are demons with insatiable sexual hunger, starved for a century."

My blood turned cold.

"They prefer pure women," she sneered. "You, my dear, are a perfect feast for my pets."

"Clarissa—please," I begged.

She leaned in close.

"Don't stop until I say so."

Their guttural breaths drowned my screams.

Their hands touched what should never be touched.

Clarissa laughed. "This is spectacular."

I wanted to die.

I would've slit my throat in my nightmares.

"Make her scream hard and loud, boys."

Fear gripped me from every side when one of them got on top of me.

His cloak slipped and I came face to face with something I would've never wanted to see.

Horrendous. Disgusting. Rotten. Formless.

"CAIN!"

The way I screamed his name—I had never wanted him with me more than I did at this moment.

"CAIN!"

I wanted my pain to reach him.

Clarissa snarled, "What are you waiting for? Fuck her—"

She was whiplashed across the dungeon.

The shadows burst to ashes in the whirlpool of bluish-black flames—including the one on top of me.

The shackles broke.

I was wrapped and secured in a warm, anchoring presence.

"Ana!"

His heavy voice pierced the darkness.

Cain pulled my face up by my chin.

His eyes were ablaze as he wiped my cheeks and hugged my trembling form close.

"You've got some nerve to play nasty tricks, Serra," he said.

I turned in his arms.

Two Clarissas.

One was on the ground with a leash around her neck.

The other was standing on top of her.

Cain forced me around and buttoned up the coat.

It covered me to my toes, but it couldn't erase the ugly memories. I felt dirty.

"Hold it," Cain warned Clarissa.

"I'm only warming up," Clarissa replied.

Serra screamed when she tightened the leash around her neck. Her form shifted.

I buried my face in Cain's neck when he carried me in his arms.

A swoosh—and everything fell silent.

"Your friends are here," Cain whispered near my ear. "Ana!"

"Leave me alone," I croaked.

I waited for him to put me down, but he didn't.

"I said—"

"I can hear you just fine, Ana," Cain cut me o calmly. "You want me to leave you alone? You look at me rest."

I couldn't. I only tightened my arms around his neck.

"I'm taking you to the bathroom," he said.

I didn't say anything.

Cain put me down once we were inside and unlocked my arms from around his neck.

I kept my eyes on the floor between our feet.

He left and returned with my clothes. He placed them on the vanity and left again.

I turned on the shower and took o the coat hurriedly.

I rubbed at my body furiously.

I choked on my sobs.

The thought of what could've happened stabbed like poisonous thorns.

I couldn't wash o the feeling those entities left on me.

I fell to the cold floor and cried loudly.

"Ana!"

I buried my face in my knees, curling into myself as much as possible.

The shower turned o and I felt the towel around my shoulders.

"Leave me alone," I hiccupped. "Go away."

I held the towel tightly around myself when he pulled me up and held me by my arms.

He handed me the clothes silently and faced the other way.

I wiped my cheeks and put on the clothes, grateful that he brought me a pair of full-sleeved pajamas.

Without a word, he carried me again and took me back to the room.

"Don't take me to the bed," I protested in his arms.

"Nothing happened—"

"I don't care!" I screamed.

"This bed a problem?" Cain asked angrily. "Fine!"

I gasped loudly when the bed was engulfed in the same blackish-blue flames.

A new one appeared in its place, more luxurious and grand.

"Happy?" he said. He laid me down on the soft mattress and sat by my side.

I tried not to inch when Cain cupped my cheek. "Sleep."

"You think I can sleep?" I screamed, pushing his hand o my face. "Sorry for not being heartless. I'm only human."

"Let me—"

"Stop!" I broke down into sobs. "Let me heal on my own."

"Nothing happened."

I looked at him, hurt.

I should have known better than expecting any sympathy from him.

"Alright, that was insensitive," Cain admitted. "It's normal to be shaken."

I sni ed, looking into my lap.

"Ana?" Cain shook my shoulder.

I made the mistake of looking into his eyes.

My tears came a hundredfold stronger.

"It's all because of you," I cried loudly. "You ruined my peace, Cain."

I hid my face in my palms. I was crying like a child in front of a man who wasn't human.

Could life be any more unfair?

I looked at him through my tears when he patted my back awkwardly.

"Cry until you feel calm," he said gently. "Though I don't get why—"

I buried my face in his chest and hugged him tightly.

"Only because she hated me," I wept loudly. "It was so scary, Cain. I was so scared."

I stee d his shirt.

"Why did you leave me alone? Why did you go?" I punched his back.

"Why did I have to suffer for someone else's doings?"

The pain in my chest was unbearable.

This was my breaking point.

I couldn't be strong anymore.

"I'll die, Cain. I don't want this to happen again."

"It won't," he whispered in my ear. "Nothing can happen to you on my watch."

This made me cry harder.

"Stop crying. You will fall sick."

"I want to get rid of this pain," I murmured. "This is too much."

"I will erase every ounce of it." Cain pulled back and cupped my face.

He wiped my cheeks with his thumbs.

"This was the last time you saw Serra."

"You said the same thing before leaving," I sobbed. "You lie."

"I don't lie, love," he whispered. "You can hold me to my words."

He patted my cheek.

"Sleep," he said, pushing me down gently. "Leave your nightmares to me."

I grabbed his hand.

"Don't go," I said, my voice cracked.

I threw my arms around his shoulder and broke down again. Another t of crying hit me—harder than before.

I was tired. Really tired and so defeated.

I blinked through the tears when something warm uttered against my cheek.

A blue butter!

It ew away when I raised my head from his shoulder.

There were hundreds of them. Those glowing blue butterflies were everywhere.

They uttered around me, kissing my tears and leaving their warmth instead of pain.

One of them landed on the back of my hand, making me smile faintly.

I gasped when I found myself in the heart of a valley.

"Mirage," Cain whispered, caressing one of my bruised cheeks with his knuckles.

"They're not real?" I asked, surprised.

He shook his head.

His lips slightly curved upward at the corners as he watched me with warmth in his eyes for the first time.

I looked around in a daze. The starry sky, the cool breeze, the soft grass beneath me...and the butterflies. It all felt real.

Cain got behind me and pulled me back into his hard yet warm frame. He pressed my head to his chest sideways.

His heartbeat was slow and steady under my ear, drowning out the noises of the world.

"I'm here," he whispered in my hair. "I'll protect you."

His promise—it welled my eyes with new tears.

He tilted my face slightly and kissed my forehead. His gaze, devoid of cold hatred, kissed my soul.

"Don't cry anymore," he whispered, rubbing his thumb under my left eye.

The fear and restlessness vanished as he held me in his arms under his magic.

I buried my face in his chest when he held me protectively. I closed my eyes and surrendered myself to his presence.

Something I never dreamt of doing.