

Chapter 37

I stared at the gigantic black wing recoiling slowly from around me. His painful grunts pulled me back to the present, and I screamed, reaching for him when he stumbled backward.

"Cain!" I held his arms when they loosened around me. "No—"

Blood coozed out of his mouth and from where the spears pierced his body. Dark. More black than red—blue.

*He protected me...with his life.*

I inched every time the Blue Bloods tugged the chains connected to the spears pierced in his body.

"Stop—" I screamed when they unleashed another round of spears on him. "Stop it—please—Stop."

His pain was killing me. I couldn't see him like this.

The feeling—seeing him hurt—was beyond my comprehension.

"You forgot your only weakness, oh great *Dalazar Daemnone*?" Sorush sneered. "The Black Phoenix ashes."

I fell to the ground with him, my trembling hands reaching for him reluctantly.

He breathed heavily, his body convulsing because of the poison in his veins.

I wanted to take it all away—the pain. But I couldn't. I didn't know how to.

I couldn't touch him. His body had more spears piercing it than I could count.

He was in this predicament because of me. He came for me, and he was hurt because he protected me.

"Don't hurt him," I sobbed. "Stop hurting him."

Next attack—if it came—would take his heart and head.

"Why did you come?" I said, reaching for his face. I had no right to touch him.

"Cain—"

The bleeding was worsening.

"Go. You need to leave."

"I'm ne," he rasped, getting on one knee. "Get back."

I shook my head in denial.

"Ana, just get back. You'll get hurt if you stay close to me."

"No—never," I wept. "I'm not letting you do this anymore. You are hurt so badly. I'm sorry—"

Cain put his finger on my lips, silencing me.

"Stop crying," he hissed through the pain. "No amount of Black Phoenix ash can stop me from taking you from here."

I grabbed his hand on my cheek.

"You touched the ring, love," he smirked, "that was your call—and nothing in this world or the next could've kept me away."

My heart thundered in my chest.

"They can bring as many as they want, clone themselves to trillions—nothing is stopping me—"

He pushed my face closer to his.

"From taking what's mine." His words were possessive. "This is not enough to take me down. Trust me."

I nodded.

Cain smirked, brushing my cheek with his thumb. "They don't want me gone for nothing," he whispered. "Now step back and let me take care of everything. I promise it'll be over soon."

I let go of his hand reluctantly and kept moving backward...until he signaled to stop.

I stead my hands over my heart when Cain staggered to his feet. His form shifted before my eyes.

The wing appended—the eternal came in it burning stronger.

"Your attempts make me laugh, Sorush," Cain said, gripping the chains around the spears.

"Seize him!" Sorush yelled.

I cupped my mouth to keep in my screams and sobs when they unleashed another round of spears on him.

Logan and his cavalry charged at him at the same time.

The sky shook and the earth cracked open when Cain roared.

The wind stirred into a cyclone of death, sweeping their aerial forces o the peak. They were sucked in by the pit of hell he opened without lifting a finger.

With a growl that shattered the sky, he tore the spears from his flesh as though they were nothing but splinters.

Blood poured, yes—but so did his wrath.

He whirled their lines toward their holders, made a chokehold around their necks, and sent them flying toward Sorush.

Their bodies—like withered petals—fell around him.

The clouds stirred and painted the sky in impenetrable darkness, spitting fire and lightning everywhere.

Turning mountains to dust and trees to ashes.

Cain's wrath wasn't vengeance. It was a prophecy. And every soul that dared raise a hand against him became nothing but an echo in the inferno.

I remained unharmed...untouched...watching the terror that was this man before me.

Yet, I felt no fear from him. Just an ache.

"CAIN!"

Sorush lunged forward amidst the chaos.

But Cain didn't stop to engage him.

He came to me—like lightning.

I wound my arms around his neck and buried my face in his shoulder.

His hold on me was the opposite of what he unleashed on his enemies.

The last thing I saw as he plunged us into the rift was Sorush's scythe swinging at his back.

For a breathless second, we existed nowhere.

Suspended in darkness—before the world slammed back into place.

I grunted in pain at the impact on my back.

The landing was brutal against the cold, hard floor, especially with him on top of me.

His weight was crushing me.

*We made it.*

I exhaled in relief as I stared at the unfamiliar ceiling.

*It was not his home.*

"Cain?" I touched his head.

He was too still.

I couldn't feel his already slow heartbeat against my chest.

Panic hit me full force. My blood turned cold.

"Cain?" I shook his shoulder.

I tried to move him, but he didn't budge an inch.

"Cal—"

My hand touched a vertical wound on his back as I tried to wiggle out from under him.

I froze when the warmth of his blood coated my palm.

*He was struck...*

"No—"

I somehow succeeded, only to be hit by another dread.

He lay there...still. Eyes closed.

His condition was deteriorating.

There was so much blood. He was not healing.

Someone was ripping my heart out of my chest.

"Wake up," I patted his cheek. "No—Cain. Please—Help!"

I looked around wildly as I hugged him to my chest.

"Please—help—someone!" I sobbed loudly as I placed my head on his chest.

There was no heartbeat.

"Don't go...please, don't go—Cain!"

"Anastasia!"

Aeron and Xic rushed toward us with Clarissa and Einar.

"Stabbed—" I hiccupped. "He was stabbed—his back—"

Einar knelt by his side and began healing him with his magic.

"Black Phoenix," he said grimly. "His body is overloading with it."

He turned him over to examine the wound on his back.

"They—spears," I couldn't control my tears. "Their spears pierced his body."

"Bastards," he snarled, pouring all of his magic into healing him.

Nothing was working.

"Do something," Clarissa yelled. "Don't let him die."

Xic pulled her back and held her in his arms.

The guilt became a hundred times worse.

"He never listens. I told him not to go alone," Clarissa screamed. "I told him he would get hurt."

I couldn't meet her eyes.

"Calm down, love," Einar said, trying to soothe her. "He's not going to die."

His silent gaze assured me.

"Shift him to the crypt. I'm going to bring the necessary ingredients and potions to make Auras—the life-binding elixir. I don't have enough in my storage here," he said.

Aeron and Xic lifted Cain.

"Don't take too long," Aeron said, his voice strained.

"I won't," he assured. "Keep pouring Auras on his wounds and in his mouth. The stock will last until I return."

Aeron and Xic vanished with Cain.

I wanted to go with them, but I couldn't.

Not after what I made him go through.

Clarissa wanted to accompany Einar, but he refused her, saying she needed to stay with me.

She didn't want to, but he made her see reason.

I was in *Acreterra*. At *Thunder Dominion*. Cain's Castle.

This was not a place for humans.

They couldn't leave me alone, no matter how much they loathed me at this moment.

"It's not her fault," Einar said.

Clarissa's look could kill.

I lowered my head when he palmed my head.

"Stay in Cain's room," he said. "Take it easy until I come."

He disappeared into green flames.

I stood across from Clarissa in awkward silence.

"Clarissa—"

"Shut up," she snapped. "I don't want to listen to your nonsense."

She looked away as if the sight of me burned her—but behind the fury, something in her eyes trembled.

"One fucking moment—for one fucking moment I thought you could be different." A lone tear rolled down her cheek.

It was enough to shatter the misconceptions in my head—if any remained.

*She loves her brother.*

"You did what you said you would never do," she hissed. "Hurt him."

"I'm sorry, Clary," I snided. "I didn't know—"

"Cain's room is at the end of this hallway," she cut me off, pointing to the left. "Just stay there if you can manage. Don't trouble my brother anymore."

She vanished, leaving me alone in the dark, cold hallway.

I choked on my sobs as I dragged myself to his room.

Once inside, wrecked by his lingering warmth and scent, I broke down completely.

I fell to the floor and cried loudly.

The pain piercing my chest—it was unbearable.

I couldn't breathe.

I couldn't let any other sound out of my mouth except for sobs and screams.

I prayed for his life.

I prayed for his safety.

I prayed for his return.

I didn't want him to go away. I didn't want to lose him when he wasn't even mine.

*He wasn't mine.*

I counted every second as I stayed in his room, glued to one spot on the couch.

I didn't dare even peek out of the doors.

Just as he said, it rained endlessly, with nonstop thunder.

Every time lightning flashed across the sky or thunderclaps rattled the windows and terrace doors, I trembled.

I was cold despite the warmth.

My stomach twisted into painful knots with worry and waiting.

I wanted to see him, but I didn't know where to look—who to call.

No one came to me.

It was just darkness and loneliness.

I stood from the couch when the door knocked briefly.

Tears pooled in my eyes again when Einar entered.

His brows furrowed when he saw me.

"You didn't sleep?" he asked as he palmed my forehead.

"How is he?" I asked impatiently. "I didn't want him to get hurt. Please—how is he—"

The words came out in a hurry.

Einar pushed me down on the couch and sat next to me.

"Answer a few questions, okay?"

I nodded.

"Did they give you kazaar?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered honestly. "They were feeding it to me through the tea three times a day. I don't know if they were adding it to my meals."

"When did you break free?" he asked another question.

"I don't know that exactly, but—" I shook my head. "Sorush came to my room and asked me to have dinner."

It hurt to remember.

"I dropped the cup when he left. Then I overheard his conversation outside my room."

Einar listened quietly.

"It hurt so much, Einar, when the effects wore off. I thought I would die."

"It's not over, kiddo," he said grimly and palmed my forehead. "Kazaar is one of the cruelest things ever crafted. It doesn't just control you—it unravels you. Mind, soul, memory—it poisons them all."

My head began to pound—like hammers on nails.

"You are temporarily out of its influence," he said gently. "We need to take it out of your system completely."

I gripped the armrest when the pain increased.

"Einar—"

"Bear with it, kiddo." His voice was strained as his magic worked on the remnants of kazaar inside my body. "I need to take it out or it will kill you."

I pressed my lips tighter to keep in the screams. I was on thorns and fire.

Then nothing.

I fell limp on the couch, gaze unfocused and breaths—uneven.

"You did great," he said proudly. "Sleep. You will feel better."

I nodded weakly.

"You've passed two days without it. Any more and your body will break."

"Two days?" I asked, shocked. "But I thought—it was just two hours—"

"Day and night don't exist in *Acreterra*," he chuckled as he informed me.

My heart felt heavy.

*Cain lived here? Alone? For over a thousand years?*

Einar healed my feet.

But I stopped him when he reached for the one on my neck.

He nodded, understanding the plea in my silence, and procured a medical kit.

"Patch it up at least," he said, getting the disinfectant and bandages out of the box.

I sat quietly as he worked on my wound.

I wanted to inquire about Cain's condition, but my tongue was not ready to cooperate.

Two days—

"We barely made it in time." Einar said as if reading my thoughts. "I managed to extract the Black Phoenix ashes out of his body."

He paused.

"His healing process is paralyzed."

Another dagger to my heart.

"I've never seen him sleep so deeply before," he muttered darkly.

I grabbed his hands desperately.

"It's my fault," I sobbed. "But please...make him heal."

Tears flowed uncontrollably.

"I didn't trust Logan. I didn't choose him, Einar."

I wept like a child.

"I never wanted him to get hurt. For me. I'm sorry—"

Einar palmed my head.

Looking at him made me think about what having a father would have been like. It made me cry even harder.

"It's not your fault," he said, patting my hair to calm me down. "Cain is out of danger. He needs rest. He'll wake up soon."

I nodded.

"Aeron and Xic will bring him to the room soon. You can see him then."

His gaze softened when he saw me.

"Everything will be fine, Anastasia," he said. "I'll find a way to break this curse so none of you get hurt."

He stood to leave.

"Do birthmarks tell how a person died in their previous life?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "It's just a myth. It holds no truth."

His brows furrowed at my expression.

"Why do you ask?"

I just shook my head and tried to smile.

Einar didn't push the topic and left.

My hand went to my abdomen with a sinking heart.

Einar returned after some time with Aeron and Xic. They carried Cain to the bed and laid him down.

I moved to a corner and watched them tend to him.

Einar left first, leaving the brothers behind.

"His bandages need to be changed every hour," Aeron said without looking at me. "I'll—"

"I'll do it," I said quickly, stepping forward.

I would have felt much better if they had lashed out at me like Clarissa. They left without a word.

Aeron returned with a trolley full of different ointments, bottles, and bandages. He instructed me on how to change his bandages.

Once he was sure that I got everything right, he left.

I watched Cain from a distance. I couldn't bring myself to go near him.

His body was wrapped in black, soaked bandages.

I was responsible for this—for his condition—

The doors knocked again. Aeron entered.

"Here," he said, extending my phone and a strange-looking clock. "The time now is different here. You will need it."

I took them silently.

"Do you want me to arrange your meal?" he asked.

"No," I refused, looking at the needles of the clock.

They were ticking faster—almost twice the speed of a minute.

Aeron didn't press and left.

I dragged the chaise lounge near Cain's bed and sat on it.

My hands shook every time I applied medicine to his wounds. They were acid to my soul.

His still form kept adding daggers to my heart.

"I'm sorry," I whispered to his sleeping face. "I never wanted this for you."

A single tear rolled down my cheek.

"Give me a chance to explain. I didn't betray you," I sobbed quietly.

I tucked my hands under my head as I lay on my side facing him.

"I want to talk to you. I want to tell you everything. I will do anything you say."

*You touched the ring, love.*

I closed my eyes when his words echoed through the haunting silence of my soul.

"Please...just come back to me."

I nodded.

"Aeron and Xic will bring him to the room soon. You can see him then."

His gaze softened when he saw me.

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