

Chapter 38

I stirred awake and glanced at the clock. *Five hours.*

I sat up, rubbing my face. I couldn't believe I'd actually fallen asleep.

Adjusting the strap of my nightgown, I ran my fingers through my hair. I was grateful to Clarissa. She was angry, but still thoughtful enough to bring me clothes.

*Though the sleepwear was...provocative.*

Only an inch or two below my hips. I was very much naked under it.

I switched on the lamp and faced the bed. Blood rushed to my head as I stood too fast.

*The bed was empty.*

"He woke up!" I whispered breathlessly as I rushed out of the room.

"Why didn't he tell me?"

I ran through the hallways wildly. Endless doors. Endless corridors.

His wing was a maze—and Cain was nowhere. *He didn't leave, did he?*

The thought stung as I wandered like a lost child, reaching a more secluded part of the room—spacious, open...but empty.

Only moonlight spilled through the archways with rain and thunder. I stood before the strange-looking doors. The place was his—but unfamiliar, unwelcoming.

I didn't want to stumble into more trouble with the first one still unresolved. Yet here I was, searching every corner for him.

I was sure to lose my way back. But I wanted to see him.

Badly.

I reached for the brass knobs. They were icy—matching Acreoterra's cold.

The doors groaned under their weight as I pushed them apart. I stepped into a vast, roofed veranda lit by torchlights lining the pillars.

My gaze scanned the semi-darkness until it landed on a lone figure sitting in what looked like a hot spring, right in the center.

"Cain?" I called softly. "It's you, right?"

No response. No movement.

I approached on quiet steps, my guard slipping the moment I saw his side profile.

He sat in purplish water, steam rising around him in glowing ribbons. The surface shimmered like silk.

He rested with his back against a rock at the edge of the spring. One knee bent, the other leg stretched beneath the glowing water.

His sword lay languid in his hold, submerged in the magical pool. *He was in his other form.*

Yet I felt no fear.

In fact...my pulse stuttered.

My gaze traced his form. The bandages were gone—no wounds, no marks remained.

The silence stretched.

He didn't look at me—didn't acknowledge my presence.

"Sorry for disturbing," I whispered, unable to hide the pain in my voice. "I'll leave—"

"Come here," Cain said, his voice gruff.

My heart skipped a hard beat.

I obeyed quietly, climbing to him slowly. He caught my hand, steadying me before I could even trip.

Just as I was about to sit on the rocks, a velvet cushion appeared beneath me. Soft. Warm.

Why was he always so concerned about my comfort? *Just for his wing?*

I wasn't sure I believed that excuse anymore.

He released my hand once I sat.

"What're you doing here?" he asked, still not looking my way.

*Even a glimpse would've been enough.*

"You weren't in bed," I murmured, tugging at the hem of my nightgown.

"It's not safe to wander here alone," he said. The weight in his voice sent shivers down my spine.

"Stay. I'm almost done."

I nodded and stared at the water.

"What is this?" I asked.

It glowed strongly wherever it touched him. The blade of his sword was absorbing it.

I leaned forward, curious—

Cain grabbed my hand before I could touch the surface.

"Don't," he warned. "It'll consume you."

"Why?" I asked.

"It's better if you don't know," he said, standing.

I froze.

He was completely, unapologetically naked.

Heat rushed to my face, burning down my neck. I looked away so fast, I almost gave myself whiplash.

*Because he's inhuman, right?*

I clenched the fabric of my nightgown when he sat beside me.

My heart wouldn't slow down. My lungs were no help either. I was going to die of Cain-stroke before the curse.

I forced my eyes around the veranda. *Think pure thoughts, Ana—gods, what is wrong with me?*

Cain pulled my face back by cupping my jaw.

"Why didn't you ask Einar to heal it?" he asked, brushing his fingers over the wound on my neck.

He was wearing loose trousers—thank heavens.

"It's not that deep," I mumbled.

Though truthfully, I wished he'd heal it with his lips instead.

Cain peeled the bandage off and tilted my neck gently.

"You were stupid," he muttered.

"You were reckless," I shot back.

His eyes pierced mine through stray locks of his damp hair.

Those electric blue orbs stripped me bare.

"You're not scared?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"Why?"

"Because it's not scary."

The memory of that drunken night drifted through me.

My breath hitched when he brushed my hair behind my ear, his hand cradling my neck.

His face inched closer.

"I'm sorry," I whispered.

"For?" he asked.

My lips brushed his coarse mouth.

"I didn't trust Logan. I didn't go with him because I wanted to."

"Then?" His voice was quiet, his lips hovering near mine. "What was it?"

"You don't know?" I murmured, searching his eyes. "You didn't come after me. Why?"

His gaze shattered my defenses.

I was unraveling in his arms...slowly...completely...willingly.

"You didn't call me, Ana," he said, voice low and unreadable. "The state you were in—you weren't mine to claim. It would've hurt you...and my wing."

His rationality cut deeper than any blade.

"Don't trust me?" he asked, almost amused.

*Must he ask?*

Cain brushed my cheek with the back of his hand. "What makes you think I'm angry?" he asked. "Aren't I after the same thing?"

He cupped my face, making me meet his eyes.

"Why choose me?"

"Maybe...because you never hide your intentions behind sugar-coated lies," I answered honestly.

His eyes darkened.

"I'm a fool to believe that you've started seeing me in a different light. That you'll find a middle ground for us."

His hand fell from my cheek.

"I haven't forgotten anything," he muttered.

The word stabbed clean through my heart.

The silence embraced us. Thick. Unwanted.

Suicidal.

I didn't want to look at him. But I peeked from beneath my lashes anyway.

He was a marvel.

I was captivated by the ashy blue skin over the hollow ridges. *I wanted to touch him.*

The words slipped out before I could stop them. "I want to touch—"

His jaw clenched, but he said nothing. I reached out, my fingers trembling as they explored his torso.

Clammy palms. Shaky breath.

My body felt like a volcano—brimming with restless molten heat.

I ran my fingers along his right hand. "It's like an armored glove," I whispered in awe.

He stopped me, gripping my hands firmly.

There was so much I still didn't understand. So many truths sealed behind his silence.

"What happened to Hannah?" I asked.

"I killed her," Cain said softly. A taunt.

"She wanted to talk to us," I said firmly.

"I didn't like what she said," His sneer dropped my hands with a jerk. "Don't push your luck too much."

I stood to leave, unwilling to fight.

But he yanked me back and pulled me close, pressing me against his chest.

"Damn you, Ana," he growled low in my ear.

His fingers tangled in my hair, tugging me closer. Rough—yet achingly gentle.

Right before my eyes, his monstrous form faded.

And there he was. Human, again.

"Damn you to hell," he murmured, burying his face in my neck.

The feel of his lips—burning, feverish—against my skin made my stomach twist in knots.

"Please—" I moaned.

His lips trailed up my jaw, pausing at the corner of my mouth.

"I want to know," I whispered, tugging at his hair.

"Catsya got to her," he said against my lips. "Harold and Blue Bloods are working together."

"What?" I breathed. "Why? What did Laurel and Hannah ever do to them?"

A shadow passed his eyes.

"It's only the beginning," he said, pulling back.

He wasn't telling me everything.

"Whatever Hannah wanted to reveal...they didn't want us to hear it."

I frowned, a frustrated sigh escaping me. First Laurel. Then Hannah.

Both silenced before they could speak.

My lips pressed in a thin line. I looked up to speak—

Cain was watching me. Devouring me with his eyes.

Hungry. Possessive. Wordless.

My gut twisted when he guided me to straddle his lap, setting my knees onto cushions that appeared out of nowhere—just like the first one.

But comfort was the last thing on my mind.

Because nestled between my thighs was his growing hardness—hot, rigid, and unapologetically male.

A blush crawled down from my cheeks to my chest.

I could feel every twitch of him through the thin fabric. "Cain—"

"Didn't you say you'd do anything I asked?" he murmured against my ear.

He slid down the strap of my nightgown and latched onto my left shoulder—kissing and biting.

The one Logan leaned and breathed on.

"When—" I stammered, the heat in my face rising hotter. "You were listening!"

"I told you," Cain whispered as he kissed behind my ear, "I never go into deep sleep."

"So...that blue butterfly was yours, huh?"

I asked softly, more to the air than to him.

He was there.

The thought tickled... then pinched.

"As I said," he pinched my chin, "I couldn't use force unless you called me. I couldn't overstay my welcome."

He brushed my hair behind my right shoulder and lavished it with the same intense attention.

"He didn't touch me here," My voice was biting.

I felt his smirk.

"Is this your guilt speaking?" he asked, lips dragging against my skin.

I dug my nails into his shoulders when the front of the nightgown slipped lower.

His fingers traced the slope of my collarbones and down over my breasts.

"L—" My voice broke. "That—"

I collapsed into his shoulder, breathless, when he cupped my right breast and squeezed.

"Was that not enough?" he hissed, his voice possessive. "Should I go back and mutilate him beyond repair?"

I shook my head furiously. Just the thought of him returning to their land—facing them—lled me with dread.

"Is it guilt, Anastasia?" he asked again, this time firmer.

He didn't wait for an answer.

"Leave."

One word.

Cold. Final.

I scrambled to fix my gown and stepped out of his arms.

Tears blurred my vision as I returned to his room—alone.

*I was not that shallow.*

But he would never understand.

He still saw her in me.

I gasped in surprise when I was suddenly lifted off the floor—bridal-style.

*With one arm.*

"You came barefoot," he muttered, carrying me back. "Can you be any more reckless?"

He could've teleported. But he chose to be human, if only for a moment.

I thought the intensity between us would snap.

But it didn't.

It sharpened instead—so fierce, so unbearable, it carved through my restraint like a blade.

"What's with this nightwear?" Cain asked without looking at me.

"It's Clarissa's," I mumbled.

His eyes narrowed.

"Avoid taking her clothes...nightwears to be specific."

We reached his room.

He dumped me on the bed—not gently, not cruelly,

Just...firmly.

"Why?" I glared up at him, defiant. "What's wrong with it?"

He looked down at me, shadows dancing across his face.

He mistook my question as a challenge.

I didn't even get the chance to explain.

One moment...he was standing. The next...he was between my legs.

"They're an invitation—" he purred, his voice like velvet and sin, tracing his hand slowly up my thigh.

I whimpered, clinging the sheets as his fingers slipped beneath the hem of my nightgown—claiming, exploring, igniting.

"For the beast," he whispered, "to a divine feast."

And he feasted.

With his hands and mouth.

With hunger and reverence.

Until my body trembled, shuddering under his touch.

A gasp tore through my throat when he cupped my left breast, his thumb circling over the peak until I cried out his name.

"Have you ever been touched, Ana?" he murmured against my skin, his fingers sliding deeper into the slick heat between my thighs.

Teasing. Tempting. Torturing.

"Once," I gasped.

"By whom?" he growled.

"You," I moaned. "That night—by you."

My body arched. My legs quaked. I was unraveling beneath him.

"Cain!"

I clung to him, pulled at his hair, and clenched around the pleasure he stirred so ruthlessly inside me.

"So, you *remember*," he chuckled darkly, brushing the trembling skin he worshipped with his lips.

*I was on the verge—so close I could feel the fall.*

But then—he stopped.

His fingers withdrew from my warmth, leaving me dripping and undone.

I stared at him—lost.

He lipped me with dizzying ease, my chest pressed into the mattress. *Where was my nightgown? He was naked too.*

I moaned when he began kissing his way up my spine—slow, deliberate, reverent. Taking his time. Claiming every inch.

Not just touching—but worshipping.

"Is it guilt?" he asked again, lips grazing my nape.

"No," I sobbed, feeling every inch of him settle over me.

I wanted him to paint me in his scent, his warmth, his touch—until nothing else remained.

Cain turned me over and pinned my hands above my head.

"You want me to stop?" he whispered, kissing the side of my neck.

Never. Not when he kissed me like this.

Not when I was unraveling under every stroke. It was too much and not enough. Heaven and hell.

"Cain..."

The way I said his name made him pause.

"Can I hug you? Just once?"

His eyes narrowed at my request. But he said nothing—only let me.

I pushed myself up and threw my arms around his neck, burying my face in his shoulder.

"Never go away," I whispered the prayer into his skin.

His body tensed—but only for a moment.

He cupped my nape and pulled my head back.

"You want this?" he asked, his gaze piercing my soul.

I dug my nail into his back when he kissed my face, my neck—everywhere.

He held onto him as he devoured my lips.

"Tell me you want it," he murmured, tugging at my bottom lip.

"Yes," I gasped.

Cain kissed me again—deeper, rougher.

I let my eyes drink in every inch of him. He was breathtaking. Sinfully divine.

"Fuck, Ana," he growled, guiding me onto his lap.

The friction made my head spin as I rocked against him, wetness coating his length.

His hands and mouth roamed my body with growing hunger.

Cain grunted when I pushed him back and lavished him with wet kisses and love bites.

I was in awe of my boldness. But I didn't stop.

I explored him like he was mine. And he let me.

Tears sprang to my eyes as I pressed my fingers to his lips.

It hurt. Looking at him hurt.

Because this meant nothing to him. But everything to me.

Cain grabbed my hand and kissed my wrist, then the hollow of my elbow, and right below my shoulder.

He grabbed a handful of my hair, yanking my head back.

"You want to play?" he purred, nipping my chin as he controlled my hips.

He rolled over and crushed his mouth to mine.

"Let me show you what happens when you play with death."

Everywhere he touched me ignited a fire. A fire that didn't burn—it transformed.

Until nothing remained but this desperate, consuming need.

"Tell me if it hurts," he whispered, kissing my left wrist.

He entwined our fingers and pinned them beside my head.

"Do you want it?" he asked again.

I kissed him.

I felt him settle between my legs—hot, real, and heavy.

The fear came fast and fleeting.

*There would be no going back after this.*

I knew it. Still, I chose him.

Regrets? There were none.

He saw everything in my eyes.

Because when he kissed me again, it was different.

Different from every other kiss we'd shared.

Willing. Devoted. Desperate.

"Let me rearrange your pieces, Ana," he said, brushing my cheek with his thumb. "