

Symphony of Death

Chapter 9

My eyes opened to a place I didn't recognize, where only darkness and dense mist surrounded me. It clung to my skin like wet silk, cold enough that my breath crystallized in the air.

I wrapped my arms around myself, shivering violently.

"Ana!"

That brush of ghostly touch now held my shoulder and blew my hair. My sterted hands shook when the guttural hoarseness of its heavy breaths echoed in my ear.

Its presence was so ominous.

I hissed and raised my left arm, my eyes going wide with fear when I saw the symbol burning on my wrist. I could see it now—what it was.

"Don't let him know."

I woke up gasping and drenched in sweat. I was paralyzed with fear for the longest moments of my life before I could actually move.

If it was just a dream, why was my skin frozen sti ?

I sat up slowly and looked at my wrist. It was tingly and the mark was visible on my wrist just like in my dream.

I took a few deep breaths. My body was calming down, but my mind was not. Something was wrong, and I needed answers.

"You won't believe it," Angie said excitedly when I walked into the kitchen a few minutes later. "Nat got herself a man."

I looked at Nat for conrmation and found it in her blushing face. I high-ved Angie. "Wait—is it the club guy?"

"Yes," Angie answered. "I wasn't expecting that breezy meeting to turn steamy."

"You met him?" I asked Angie.

"Nat's being stingy," Angie accused, clearly feeling betrayed. "I only saw his back when he asked her to dance—now she's keeping him a mystery."

Nat crossed her arms. "We have only talked on the phone since the party. He asked me out just last night. I'm not sure if I should go, though."

"Just go," Angie said with a grin. "The date will tell you if he's the one. We'll help you decide if he's worth sailing further for."

"Do whatever feels right, Nat," I said, and stood up.

"Where are you going?" Angie asked.

"To call Laurel," I replied.

They both nodded, a mix of understanding and something like pride in their eyes.

I went to my room, grabbed my phone from the bed, and stared at her number for some time before pressing the call.

"Ana."

"Hey," I greeted, my heart feeling heavy with so many things.

"How are you, Ana?" Laurel sounded worried. "I've been trying to reach you."

"I'm sorry. I was just so busy with work."

"Can I come? I won't take much of your time."

I was quiet for a moment.

"I'm sorry for leaving you alone all the time," Laurel continued. I clutched the phone tightly. "I know you are angry at me for a lot of things. You might hate me too. But I did everything to protect you."

I knew she wanted to protect me, but she killed my childhood in doing so.

"Ana? Did your wrist hurt?"

There was a pregnant pause.

"You need to tell me, Ana. Are you wearing the charm I gave you?"

"All the time." My hand went to the pendant around my neck. It was a small silver crescent moon on a delicate chain. "You never told me why I have to wear it."

"I will tell you everything, Ana. Everything." There was something di erent in her tone. "If you feel anything, tell me right away. I will be there in a day or two."

"Okay."

"Stay safe, Ana. You don't know how precious you are to me."

She ended the call.

I sat down on the bed and leaned back on my palms, repeating the conversation in my head.

She asked me about the pain in my wrist.

How could she know about that?

I realized my phone between my ear and shoulder and held les with both hands as I walked out of the elevator. I was on a call with Nat. She was going on her date and wanted a last-minute boost of courage.

I entered my cabin and rushed to my table. I breathed in relief when I dumped the les and dropped my phone on the table.

I was massaging my hands to relieve the ache when the door knocked.

"Ana?" Chris popped his head in. "Go to Hannah's o ce."

There was no break to it.

I knocked on the door twice and entered.

"You called—" The door closed behind me with a soft thud.

I looked around with a burning face, but there was no Hannah.

"I called you here," Cain unbuttoned his jacket and sat on the couch. "Sit."

I sat on the couch to his right and clasped my hands in my lap.

God, his presence was sti ing.

"You're going to Germany for the upcoming shoot," Cain dropped the bomb without warning.

What?

"I'm well aware you are eager to leave." His tone was sardonic. "But until the end of the month, you're still obliged to do as asked."

"If that is all..." I stood to leave. "I've got some last-minute packing to do."

I rushed toward the door.

"Do I intimidate you?"

I froze.

My heartbeat spiked with every step he took toward me.

"I asked"—I held my breath when Cain grabbed my arm and turned me to him—"do I scare you?" His gaze drilled into mine, cold and commanding.

My heart was not just pounding—it was trying to rip its way out of my chest at his proximity.

I couldn't understand the root of my fears toward this man.

I didn't know if what I felt was fear in its true form—or something far more dangerous.

"Does it hurt?" Cain whispered—too softly to be innocent.

Was this seduction? Or something darker cloaked as desire?

I stood still, sts tight, as he caressed my cheek with his knuckles.

"Is it hurting?" He cupped my jaw, forcing my eyes to stay on his. "Is it that hard to answer, Anastasia?"

His body pressed into mine.

He was too close.

I shoved him back and ran out of Hannah's o ce, my heart hammering in my throat. I reached my cabin and collapsed into my chair.

"What's wrong with him?" I hissed, clutching my pulsing wrist. "Fuck it."

I grabbed my stu and left the o ce.

My phone rang and I answered without checking the caller.

"Anastasia Grace?"

I pulled the phone away to see the number.

"This is my friend's phone," I said, frowning.

The man laughed. "She was pretty dolled up for her special night."

"Where is Nat?" My voice rose. "Don't you dare touch her."

"Rooftop of Rose Raven Hotel," he said coldly. "Don't try to be funny, baby. You won't want to receive your friend in pieces."

The line went dead.

The moment the taxi stopped, I jumped out and ran inside the hotel.

I hurried straight to the elevator, pressed the button to the rooftop and dropped Angie a text about the whole situation.

"Please be okay, Nat," I whispered, watching the oor numbers tick up.

My phone buzzed—Laurel.

I declined the call and tucked the phone back in my pocket. I ran out as soon as the doors slid open. I climbed the stairs to the rooftop and pushed past the door. I froze right when the door closed behind me.

"Nat?"

It was darker than I expected.

"NATI!" I looked around frantically. "Nat, where are—Nat!"

She was lying motionless on the cold oor.

"Hey!" I knelt next to her. "Nat, wake up. Please."

"She won't."

I turned violently.

"Not unless I want her to."

He stepped out of the shadows.

He smiled wickedly. "Told you we'd meet soon, Anastasia."

"Why?" I looked at him warily when he came closer. "Who are you?"

He chuckled, shaking his head. "Forgive me. Harold Crawford. The charming date your friend was so excited about."

My eyes widened.

"Did I surprise you, dear Anastasia?" His smile twisted into something cruel. I held Nat protectively.

"Wake her up."

"My!" Harold started laughing. "Trying to be brave when you're scared shitless? How admirable!"

He crouched before me. "But the real fun begins now."

My breath caught as hundreds of those entities appeared behind him.

"You can see them, can't you? Anima?" Harold rose slowly. "Ever wonder why you can see them? Did Laurel ever mention the secret behind...them?"

He pointed toward my eyes.

I cupped them when they switched, peeking through the gaps between my ngers—at him, and the entities now gliding toward me.

I crawled back as their formless arms reached forward, their spine-chilling whispers clawing at the air.

"This world is not what your fragile mind weaves it to be," Harold said, raising his hand, ames. "It's much darker and uglier than you can even imagine."

I blinked, trying to parse what my eyes were observing. It boggled the mind.

"You are—"

"Not human," Harold laughed. "I am a demon, dear Anastasia. You'd be surprised to know how many of us walk among you petty humans every day."

A dark aura rose from the oor and surrounded him.

"And you, dearest, have something that doesn't belong to you. Something I've been looking for for quite some time. Something your dear Laurel twisted in a web of lies to keep hidden."

How did he know Laurel?

He stepped closer.

Then, something even more unbelievable happened. Space...slashed open. Ripped. It looked like a black hole covered in re.

A gure stepped out from the black hole. I couldn't believe what I saw, and yet...I wasn't quite surprised.

Cain.

His brothers stepped out of the same rift and stood behind him. The crawling, ghostly entities shrunk back immediately.

"You unleashed them again." His cold voice made me shiver uncontrollably. "Haven't you learned enough?"

"You wound me," Harold replied coolly, standing up. "I'm merely trying to help your cause."

I held my left arm when Cain looked at me over his shoulder.

That glance was enough to chill my blood.

"Don't mess with my end unless you wish to be ripped apart limb from limb," Cain warned him. He turned toward Xic and nodded. Xic lifted Nat in his arms at his command.

"No, wait! Where are you taking her?!" I stopped when Cain looked at me.

I couldn't do anything against them. They were not humans. Their presence was sti ing and reeked of evil.

"They're just pawns in the uprising your father started." Cain remained impassive to his instigations. "I don't care how they mess with Blue Bloods."

"Fair enough," Harold turned toward me. "Sorry, baby. Change of plans."

I was forced back a step. I couldn't even look at what was waiting behind me.

The precipice of death.

His expression turned malicious, and so did his eyes. I was once again stumped when they changed color to glowing orange.

"Unless you fall, I won't rise."