

To ruin an Omega

#Chapter 228: Mutually assured destruction - Read To ruin an Omega Chapter 228: Mutually assured destruction

## **Chapter 228: Mutually assured destruction**

### **MADELINE**

I pulled Wilhelm off the floor and dragged him to the bed. His body was dead weight in my arms. Blood kept pouring from his nose, soaking into his shirt and spreading across his chest. His eyes were still rolled back, still showing nothing but white.

"Will, come on." I grabbed a cloth from the nightstand and pressed it against his face. The fabric turned red almost instantly. "Wake up. Please wake up."

His breathing was shallow. Too shallow. Like his lungs couldn't remember how to work properly.

I wiped the blood away and it just kept coming. My hands shook as I tried to clear his airways, make sure he could breathe. The seizures had stopped but he was so still now.

Too still.

"Don't you dare die on me." I grabbed his shoulders and shook him. "Wilhelm!"

There was nothing. Horror climbed over my skin.

I pressed my hands to his chest and felt for his heartbeat. It was there but weak and irregular. Like it might give up at any second.

The smoke from the burning book made my eyes water. I could smell the leather turning to ash, could feel the heat of it even from where I sat on the bed. But I couldn't leave him to put it out. I couldn't risk letting go.

I started whispering. Old words my mother taught me. Healing words that were supposed to help with pain and injury. My magic pushed out from my palms and into his chest, searching for the damage, trying to fix whatever had broken inside him.

His body jerked once. Hard enough that I almost lost my grip.

Then he gasped.

The air rushed into his lungs like he'd been drowning. His back arched off the bed and his hands came up to clutch at my wrists. His eyes were still white but there was

movement behind them now. Like he was trying to come back from wherever that attack had sent him.

"It's okay." I kept my magic flowing, kept my hands pressed to his chest. "I've got you. You're safe."

He gave another gasp and this time, his fingers dug into my skin hard enough to bruise.

"Breathe, Wilhelm. Just breathe."

He did. Slow and ragged at first, then more steady. The white in his eyes started to fade. Little specks of color broke through the blankness. His pupils came back in pieces, dilating and contracting like they couldn't quite remember what size they should be.

"Mads?" His voice was barely audible.

"I'm here."

He blinked several times. His vision cleared slowly, focusing on my face then losing focus then finding it again. Blood still covered the lower half of his face and dripped down his neck.

"What happened?" The words came out slurred.

I grabbed a clean cloth and started wiping the blood away properly this time. "You tell me. One second you were watching Aldric, the next you were on the floor having a seizure."

Wilhelm tried to sit up. I pushed him back down.

"Stay still. You almost died."

"Almost?" He laughed but it turned into a cough. Blood flecked his lips. "Felt like I did die."

"You didn't. But whatever hit you hit hard." I kept cleaning his face, kept checking to make sure he was really okay. "Do you remember anything?"

His eyes circled the room. He took in the smoking remains of the book in the bowl, the blood on the floor, the general mess we'd made of my space. His breathing was still slow and heavy but getting better with each inhale.

"There was a protective barrier." He touched his nose gingerly and winced. "Very anti spying."

"I figured that much out."

"It didn't just repel me." He looked at me and something dark moved behind his eyes. "It tried to kill me. That wasn't a warning. The goal was to take me out."

My stomach dropped. "You're sure?"

"Positive." He pushed himself up on his elbows and this time I didn't stop him. "I've encountered magical barriers before. They push you out, maybe give you a headache if you're stubborn about it. This one went straight for lethal force."

I sat back on my heels and processed that. Aldric had put up a barrier strong enough to kill anyone who tried to spy on that room. Which meant whatever was in there was important enough to murder for.

"He was two steps ahead again." I ran my hands through my hair.

"No." Wilhelm shook his head and immediately regretted it based on the way his face twisted. "No he's not."

I stared at him. "How is he not? He nearly killed you."

"Because now we know something we didn't before." Wilhelm sat up fully, ignoring my protests. "For starters, if magic is blocking us from that space, then it's certain he has something big to hide over there."

"We already knew he had secrets."

"Not like this." Wilhelm grabbed my arm. His grip was weak but insistent. "This isn't about hiding documents or covering tracks. This is something else entirely."

I waited.

"Before I was violently repelled, I did see something." He wiped at his face again, smearing the remaining blood. "There was a cage in that room."

The words hung there for a moment while my brain tried to make sense of them.

"A cage?"

"Yeah. Big enough for a person. I think someone was inside too. I only caught a glimpse before everything went to hell but I saw bars and I saw movement."

"What..." I couldn't finish the sentence. "Are you sure?"

He nodded. "Yes."

"Why would he imprison someone?"

"Who cares?" Wilhelm's voice went sharp. "What's mostly important now is that we get to that estate and get to that person."

I started to protest but he cut me off.

"Listen to me. The whole reason Aldric has a noose around our family's neck is because he has concrete evidence of the crimes against supernatural society that father has done." He leaned forward and his eyes were clearer now, focused with the kind of intensity that meant he was planning something. "We reveal who he is to Skollrend and we'll most likely not be believed. He throws it back on us by exposing our sins."

"I know that already."

"But if this person is some sort of key or something we can dangle against Aldric to protect ourselves, then I say we fucking take them." His words came faster, more urgent. "It would be mutually assured destruction afterward. Aldric stays off our back and we stay off his."

I thought about it. About everything that could go wrong. About what it would mean to break into Aldric's estate and free whoever he'd locked up down there. About whether that person even wanted to be freed or if they were dangerous themselves.

"I don't know."

"Yes you do." Wilhelm grabbed both my arms this time. "If you still care about Cian truly and you're tired of being Aldric's pawn even if it is to protect our family, then we have to do this."

His words hit harder than I wanted them to. Because he was right. I was tired. Tired of dancing to Aldric's tune. Tired of watching him manipulate everyone around him while we just stood by and let it happen because we were too scared to fight back.

"How would we even get in there?" I asked.

"I'll figure that out." Wilhelm finally let go of my arms and leaned back against the headboard. "I'll tell father what I found here once I leave tomorrow. We'll come up with a plan."

"And if the plan fails?"

"Then we're no worse off than we are now." He closed his eyes and exhaled slowly. "At least we'll have tried. At least we'll have done something instead of just rolling over and taking whatever Aldric decides to dish out."

I stood and walked to the window. The moon was slowly coming out, painting the sky in shades of blue. Somewhere out there, Cian was probably with Fia. Or searching for her

if something had actually happened. And here I was, plotting against the man who'd made both our lives miserable.

"Okay." The word came out quieter than I intended.

"Okay?" Wilhelm opened his eyes.

"Okay." I turned to face him. "We do this. But we do it smart. No rushing in. No mistakes."

He smiled despite the dried blood still caked on his skin. "We got this."

I wasn't sure if I believed him. But I wanted to. I needed to believe that there was still a way out of this mess. That we weren't completely powerless against Aldric's schemes.

Wilhelm struggled to his feet and I moved to help him. He was steadier now but still weak. The barrier had taken a lot out of him.

"You should rest before you leave tomorrow."

"I will." He headed for the door and paused with his hand on the knob. "Thanks for not letting me die."

"You're my brother. What else was I supposed to do?"

He left without answering. The door clicked shut behind him and I was alone with the smoking bowl and the blood stains and the weight of what we were about to do.

I walked over to the scrying bowl and looked at what remained of Aldric's book. It was now ash and charred leather.

I'm just hoped he didn't notice it was gone now.

## **Chapter 229: Bandid**

### **CIAN**

The trees blurred past the windows. Ronan's hands gripped the steering wheel so tight his knuckles had gone white. I couldn't stop staring at the road ahead, willing it to end, willing us to get there—wherever there even was—faster.

My chest still felt hollow. Empty. Like someone had reached inside and carved out something vital. I kept reaching for the bond anyway, over and over, hoping each time would be different. That maybe I'd been wrong. That maybe the connection was just weakened somehow.

But I got nothing. Every single time, there was nothing.

The speedometer climbed higher. The engine roared. None of it was fast enough.

Then I saw it.

A column of smoke rising into the night sky, illuminated by flames at its base. It cut through the darkness like a beacon.

"What the fuck is that?" The words came out strangled.

Ronan leaned forward, squinting through the windshield. "I think there's a fire."

My stomach dropped. No. No, no, no.

We weren't even close yet when it happened.

Light exploded across the entire space ahead of us. Not orange or hungry red like the fire we just saw. This was a brilliant blinding blue that swallowed everything in its path. It expanded outward like a shockwave, racing toward us faster than anything I'd ever seen.

"Shit!" Ronan jerked the wheel.

The car swerved. Tires screamed against asphalt. My shoulder slammed into the door as we veered off the road. The world tilted sideways. Trees loomed in the headlights. Then we hit dirt and gravel, the car bouncing violently before Ronan wrestled it to a stop.

The blue light died just as quickly as it had come.

Silence crashed down around us. My ears rang. My heart hammered so hard I could feel it in my throat. Ronan's breathing came in sharp gasps beside me.

Then I felt it.

The bond.

It flickered back to life like someone had lit a match in total darkness. Weak at first but there. Then it started burning through me with an intensity that nearly made me gasp. And underneath that burn was something else. Something vital and unmistakable.

She was alive. My Fia was fucking alive.

"What the fuck was that?" Ronan's voice sounded distant, as it was muffled.

I didn't care about the light. I didn't care about what had just happened or why the car was half in a ditch. I turned to look at him and the words tumbled out before I could stop them.

"I can feel her again." My voice cracked. "She's close. Drive, man. Drive."

Ronan didn't hesitate. He threw the car into reverse. The engine growled as the tires spun, kicking up dirt and gravel before finding purchase. We lurched backward, then forward as he yanked us back onto the road.

The smoke grew thicker as we got closer. The smell hit next. Burning rubber, melted plastic as well as something so acrid that it made my eyes water. Then the wreckage came into view.

There were two cars. One was burned beyond recognition, caved in on itself like a crushed can. The other had crumpled badly, the front end twisted and mangled. Metal jutted out at wrong angles. Glass littered the road, catching the light from the flames.

Both cars were ours.

The realization hit like a physical blow. Those were Skollrend vehicles. This was an accident. Fia had been in an accident.

My eyes swept the scene frantically. Past the flames. Past the twisted metal. Then I saw them.

Garrett. On the ground. And beneath him, barely visible, was Fia.

I was out of the car before Ronan even brought it to a complete stop. My feet hit the pavement and I ran. Every second stretched into eternity. The distance between us felt impossible, like I was running through water, through concrete, through something that wanted to keep me from reaching her.

Then I was there, dropping to my knees beside them so hard I felt the impact jar through my bones.

"Fia."

She lay motionless on the road. Garrett hovered over her, his hands pressed to something dark and soaked. His sentinel robe. He'd wadded it up and used it as a makeshift bandage. Blood covered it. So much blood.

But when I looked at Fia, really looked at her, there was nothing. There were no cuts. No bruises. Not even a scratch. Her skin was pale but unmarked. Like the blood covering Garrett's hands belonged to someone else entirely.

I reached out with shaking fingers and pressed them beneath her nose. Warm breath ghosted across my skin. Relief hit so hard it nearly knocked me over.

I leaned down further, pressing my ear to her chest. Her heart beat was steady beneath my cheek. Slow but strong.

"What happened?" I looked up at Garrett.

He stared at me. His eyes were wide, unfocused. If there was a word I could use, I would say he was shell shocked. Behind me, I heard Ronan approach. Garrett's gaze shifted past me to where Ronan must have been standing.

"I'm not sure." Garrett's voice came out hoarse. "We were coming and she said she saw someone on the road. Someone I couldn't see. She forced the wheel off the road and that was when the accident happened."

I looked back at the totaled cars. At how far Fia was from the wreckage. At the way her body was positioned, roughly, like she has been tossed out of the car and somehow landed there. There was also Garrett's condition. He was covered with bruises while she was not and perhaps the glaring ones; the blood that should have been hers but couldn't be because she had not a wound on her and how the bond had disappeared for a long minute.

I'd felt her dying. Then that blue light had swallowed everything. And now she was here, breathing, her heart beating like nothing had happened at all.

Something had happened here. Something impossible. But I couldn't think about that now. I wouldn't think about it. Garrett would have a lot to answer for later. A lot of questions to face. But right now, the only thing that mattered was getting Fia home.

"Are there any other survivors?" Ronan's voice came from behind me.

Garrett shook his head slowly. "No. They didn't survive." He paused. His eyes went back to Fia and stayed there. "How we did was even a miracle, I'm sure."

I slid my arms beneath Fia carefully. One under her knees, one supporting her back. She weighed almost nothing. Or maybe the adrenaline made it feel that way. I stood, cradling her against my chest.

"Come on," I said. "Let's go."

I carried her to the car. Ronan had already opened the back door. I slid inside, settling onto the seat with Fia in my arms. I shifted her carefully until her head rested in my lap. Her hair spilled across my thighs. I brushed it back from her face with trembling fingers.



Garrett climbed into the passenger seat. Ronan got behind the wheel and pulled out his phone. I heard him talking, giving instructions to others at Skollrend to come and retrieve the bodies, the cars and also clean up the scene. His voice sounded distant.

I couldn't stop staring at Fia.

She looked like she was sleeping. Just sleeping. Her chest rose and fell in easy, peaceful breaths. Not labored. Not struggling. Like she hadn't just been dying on the side of the road.

I took her hand in mine. It was warm. The bond hummed between us, stronger now.

I'd been so terrified. The feeling of her slipping away, of that connection severing, had been the worst thing I'd ever experienced. Worse than any physical pain. Worse than anything I could have imagined. The emptiness had threatened to swallow me whole.

But she was alive. She was here. Her heart was beating and she was breathing and that was what mattered.

I fixed her hair again, smoothing it back. Making sure nothing was in her face. Ronan started the car and pulled back onto the road, heading toward Skollrend.

That was when Fia's eyes opened.

Slowly. Like it took effort. Her gaze was unfocused at first, wandering before finally landing on me.

"Cian?" Her voice came out hoarse. Barely a whisper. "Is that you?"

I nodded. My throat felt tight. I took her hand and brought it to my lips, pressing a kiss to her knuckles.

"It's me."

She blinked. Still dazed. Still somewhere between consciousness and whatever place she'd been. "I'm sorry." She paused and swallowed. "For almost dying."

The words hit like a punch. My throat closed up completely. I tried to speak but nothing came out. I coughed, clearing it forcefully, only then could I manage to get the words out.

"No, don't be. You're fine. You're safe and that's what matters."

Fia smiled. Small, tired but genuine all the same. "I met her, you know."

My entire body went cold.

Her.... Was she was talking about her late mother? Had Fia been that close enough to death to see her on the other side?

"Well," I said carefully, fighting to keep my voice steady. "I'm glad you didn't choose to stay with her just yet."

Fia's smile widened slightly. "She told me she loved me."

Then her eyes drifted closed. Her breathing evened out and she was back to that deep, peaceful sleep.

I stared down at her. At the peaceful expression on her face. At the way she looked so fragile and so unbreakable at the same time.

I couldn't lose this woman.

## **Chapter 230: Powerless 1**

### **HAZEL**

The infirmary door swung open and Delta came bouncing in like a puppy who'd spotted its owner. Her smile stretched too wide, showing too many teeth.

"I'm so glad you're alive!"

I stared at her. Really looked at her. Delta had always been beneath me. Always. She existed in my periphery the way furniture did—useful when needed, invisible when not. But now we were the same rank. Both Omegas. The word tasted like rot in my mouth.

Her enthusiasm felt wrong. Plastic of you would. Like one of those dolls with the painted-on grins that never quite reached the eyes. She stood there waiting for me to say something, anything. But all I really wanted to do was claw that smile right off her face.

Instead I pushed myself up straighter against the pillows. My body ached in places I didn't know could ache.

"I just want some peace of mind right now." The words came out flat. Emotionless. "Where's my grandmother?"

Delta's smile flickered but held. "She is spending the night. She'll leave tomorrow."

I nodded. Good. I would ask her about the Fia situation tomorrow morning.

"What about Baruch?"

"He's been around."

Of course he had been.

But he hadn't come to see me.

I reached up and fixed a knot at my neck where the hospital gown I had under my gown had twisted funny. My fingers worked at the fabric while my mind worked at something else entirely. I needed to destress.

I needed to feel something other than this hollow rage that kept threatening to swallow me whole. Baruch's body could provide that. His hands on my skin could make me forget, even if just for a little while, that I'd lost everything that mattered.

I swung my legs over the side of the bed. The floor felt cold under my bare feet.

"I'll head to my room." I looked at Delta without really seeing her. "Call him up."

Delta's expression shifted. Something like concern crossed her features and I hated it immediately.

"Is that smart?" Her voice went soft. Careful even. Like she has the right. "You just faced a trial and I'm sure you're weak with exhaustion, Mistress. To have that sentinel in your bed—"

The slap cracked across her face before I'd consciously decided to move. My palm stung. Her head snapped to the side and stayed there for a heartbeat, or maybe two.

The whole infirmary went silent. Conversations died mid-word. Footsteps stopped. Even the scratch of pen on paper ceased.

But nobody said anything. Nobody moved to intervene.

Which was smart.

"I'm sorry?" I kept my voice level and controlled. "When did you become my mother?"

Delta's hand went to her cheek. Her eyes were wide and wet but no tears fell. Not yet.

"I just thought—"

I laughed. The sound came out harsh and ugly.

"You thought. Since when did I give you that permission?" I stepped closer. She stepped back. "You are my servant and that is all. When I make a demand, you ask how high and how far. Understand?"

Delta nodded in slow rounds.

"I don't hear you speaking." My voice rose. "Do you fucking understand?!"

"I do, Mistress Hazel."

I turned to leave. I even got two steps away before something in her words snagged in my brain like a burr. So I stopped.

"Wait." I turned back. "What did you call me?"

Delta looked around the infirmary like she expected someone to help her. Like she was surprised I had more problems to pick with her. Her mouth opened and closed.

"I'm sorry, did I say something wrong?"

"When have you ever referred to me as Mistress?"

The silence stretched between us. I could see her thinking. Calculating. Trying to figure out which answer would hurt less.

"Oh." Understanding bloomed across my chest like poison ivy. "Because I've been demoted by the goddess and fallen down several ranks, you think you and I walk the same lives now?"

"No." Delta's response came too quick. Too desperate. "Of course not. I call you that sometimes but if you're feeling sensitive about it maybe I'll just call you Luna. If it pleases you, of course."

Sensitive.... This bitch just called me sensitive.

The word detonated inside my skull.

"Sensitive? I'm sensitive?"

Delta dropped to her knees so fast I heard them crack against the tile floor.

"Forgive me, Luuuunnna Hazel."

The way she dragged out the title even if she just trying to prevent a stammer, made something in my chest twist. She was afraid. I could smell it on her, sharp and acrid. The other Omegas in the infirmary had started whispering now. Low voices that carried anyway in the too-quiet space.

I wondered what I looked like to them. A wolf without teeth? A bully desperately clinging to former glory? Someone to pity? The thoughts made me want to scream.

I ground my teeth together until my jaw ached.

"Just get me Baruch."

Then I stormed out. I didn't look back. I didn't wait for her response either. My heart hammered against my ribs like it was trying to break free. My hands shook and I shoved them into the pockets of the thin robe I'd been given.

I really thought I could handle this. I thought that with time the fall from grace would sting less. That I'd adjust to being powerless. That I'd find a way to exist in this new reality where I was nothing.

But it was spectacularly bad. Worse than I'd imagined in my darkest moments lying in that hospital bed. I felt small and so weak. Like I had something to overcompensate for with every breath I took.

Two Omegas rounded the corner ahead of me. They saw me and immediately bowed. I walked past them. Then I heard the chuckle start the second my back was turned.

I stopped.

"What's so funny?"

They looked at each other then back at me. One of them bit her lip.

"Oh, she just told me something."

I laughed. Let them hear how it sounded. How little humor existed in it.

"Really? What did she say?" I took a step toward them. They didn't move. "Was it about me?"