

To ruin an Omega

#Chapter 271: Man in the mirror 1 - Read To ruin an Omega

Chapter 271: Man in the mirror 1

Chapter 271: Man in the mirror 1

CIAN

Ronan understood without needing it spelled out. At least, he tried to. Any other time, if I did not know what I knew now, I would have thought it was simply one of his traits, that uncanny ability to read a room the way some men read a battlefield.

But when Maren's hand came up, flat against his chest, he did not argue. He did not protest. There was a shadow in his eyes all the same, something dark and restrained, even as his expression gave nothing away. He stepped back, offered me a single nod, and stayed exactly where he was.

I walked past Maren into the infirmary.

The room was quieter than I expected. The healers had done their work in a fast and clean fashion. The stretcher was gone. In its place, the girl lay on one of the narrow cots near the back wall, the white sheet pulled up to her collarbone, her hands resting at her sides like someone had placed them there carefully. Someone had. Her hair had been brushed back from her face and the worst of the blood had been cleaned away. The skin along her forehead and cheeks still looked raw and wrong, swollen in places, shiny in others, but it was the bandages that drew my eyes. The thick, white, fabric was wrapped tight around her face from her forehead down to just below her nose. Over where her eyes were. Both of them were completely covered.

I stopped walking.

I turned to Maren.

She was already looking at me. She knew the question before I asked it. I didn't have to say a word. It was all in my face, in the way my jaw had gone tight the second I saw those bandages, and she knew.

She shook her head.

Just once. But it spoke in numbers.

"We tried," she said. Her voice was low, careful, the way it always was when the news was the kind that didn't get easier no matter how many times she had to give it. "Both of

us worked on her as best as we knew. But the tissue was too far gone, Cian. The fire, whatever it was, it didn't just burn the surface. It went deep. Deeper than anything I've seen do that kind of damage in that short a window of time. By the time we got to her to help, there was nothing left to save."

The words settled into me like stones dropping into water. I felt each one land.

"Nothing," I said.

"Nothing." She held my gaze and didn't flinch. "I'm sorry."

I stood there for a second as the weight of it sat. Then I breathed out, slow, through my nose.

"Madeline," I said. "I'll talk to Madeline."

Maren nodded. She didn't say anything else. She didn't need to. We both knew what Madeline was capable of. We both knew, too, that asking her for a favor right now was its own kind of gamble after what I had done. But it was the only card left on the table, and I was going to play it.

I turned and walked toward the girl.

She didn't move when I approached. She didn't flinch or shift or tighten. She just lay there, still, her breathing shallow but steady, her bandaged face turned slightly toward the ceiling. She looked small on that cot. Smaller than she had in the garage. Like the fight had drained out of her and left nothing but the frame.

I pulled the chair up beside her and sat down.

"How are you feeling?" I asked.

Her head turned toward my voice. The movement was slow, deliberate, like she was orienting herself by sound alone. Which, I realized, she was.

"I see only darkness," she said.

Her voice was quiet. Thin. But steady. There was no tremor in it, no crack, and that surprised me more than it should have.

I looked at her for a long moment. At the white bandages. At the raw, burned edges of skin that peeked out beneath them. At the way her hands lay perfectly still at her sides.

"I'm sorry," I said. "This is my fault. I pushed you too hard. I told you to keep going when you said it was hurting you, and I shouldn't have."

She was quiet for a beat. Then the corner of her mouth moved. It wasn't quite a smile. It was something close to one. Something quieter.

"No," she said. She shook her head, just barely. "I wasn't powerful enough. That's what this was."

She paused. The almost-smile stayed.

"If anything, this helps me."

I didn't say anything. I waited.

"I don't have to see it anymore," she said. "The ugliness. The way people look at me when they think I don't notice. The greed they get from using my gifts." She swallowed once. "The disappointment when I don't deliver. I'm sure my handler is very disappointed right now. I won't be as marketable as I once was."

There it was. Sitting right there between us, plain and unhidden, the ugliness she was talking about. I thought of the handler. Of the way his face had rearranged itself outside those doors, the numbers clicking over behind his eyes like tumblers in a lock. I thought of every other person in her life who had probably looked at her the same way.

Not that I was any better. The system that trapped her benefited me a ton.

But here she was. Lying in a cot with her eyes burned out of her skull, and she was telling me she was fine.

"I'll be fine," she said, as if to confirm it. As if she could hear the thought forming in my head.

I leaned forward and rested my elbows on my knees.

"I have a witch," I said. "She's talented. Gifted, actually, when it comes to healing. Her name is Madeline. I'm going to ask her to help you." I held the girl's gaze even though she couldn't see it. It felt right to do it anyway. "You will see again."