

To ruin an Omega

Chapter 272: Man in the Mirror 2

CIAN

The girl was still for a moment. Then she nodded, a small dip of her chin.

"Thank you," she said.

She swallowed. The movement of it was visible, the way her throat worked, and something shifted in her expression. The almost-smile faded. Something else took its place. Something careful. Something that had been sitting behind her teeth, waiting.

"Before," she said. "Before something attacked me for looking. Before everything went dark." She stopped and drew in a breath. "I did catch a glimpse."

I went still.

"Of who?"

"The person who tried to kill your wife."

My chest tightened. I didn't move. I couldn't breathe for a second. I just sat there, locked in, every bit of my attention narrowed down to this girl on this cot in this quiet room.

"Tell me," I said.

"She's young," the delicate said. "A girl. I believe she is being controlled by someone. I didn't feel her choice in any of it." She paused, her brow creasing slightly beneath the edge of the bandage. "I saw the person I believe owns her. It was a man."

Owns. The word landed hard and stayed.

"I touched something old," she continued. Her voice had gone quieter now, more careful, like she was picking through the pieces of what she'd seen and trying to find the ones that held up. "For seconds. That's all I had. But it was there. She was a trafficked child."

The room went very quiet.

I stared at her.

"But?" I said.

She tilted her head, just slightly. Her fingers curled once against the sheet.

"I am not sure how exactly I am certain of this," she said. "But your perp. The girl who attacked your wife." She stopped and then she swallowed again. "She wasn't a witch."

I felt something shift in the back of my mind. Something cold and sharp, like a blade turning.

"What was she, then?" I asked. "If not a witch?"

"I do not know." The delicate's voice was flat now; from honesty. "I have not felt something like that before. Not once. Whatever she is, it is something I have no name for."

I sat with that for a long time. Long enough that the silence between us filled up and settled. I turned it over. Looked at it from every angle. A girl. A trafficked girl that was being controlled and powerful enough to nearly kill Fia. But was not a witch.

That part lingered the most. Because the smell of magic had been an important aspect as to why I had chosen to bring a delicate here and now I was hearing there was a high chance the perp was not a witch.

It didn't make sense. But I wouldn't question it. There had to be a piece we still weren't seeing.

I nodded, even though she couldn't see it.

"Thank you," I said as I stood up. The chair scraped back against the floor. "Once your eyes are fixed, I want you to draw me a picture. Of the man. The one you saw. Can you do that?"

"Yes," she said. "I can try."

I held it there for a second longer. Then I turned and looked at Maren, who had been standing near the door the whole time, quiet and watchful.

"Keep taking care of her," I said. "I'm going to go talk to Madeline." I paused and rubbed the back of my neck. "And I hope she doesn't hate me enough yet to do me another favor."

Maren's mouth did something that might have been a smile in another life. She nodded.

I walked out.

The corridor was dim and cool after the warmth of the infirmary. The doors swung shut behind me with a soft, final click. I made it three steps before Ronan was there, falling into pace beside me, matching my stride like he always did. Like gravity.

"What did she say?" he asked. He didn't bother pretending he wasn't desperate to know. His voice was tight, wound up, and I could feel the weight of need to be informed behind every word.

"She saw glimpses," I said. "That's all. A few seconds before it hit her. She got a look at the girl who attacked Fia. She got a look at something else. But she said it was all shadowy. But she believed the girl was being owned and trafficked."

The words I said were meant to throw him off. But still hold a little fragment of truth in them. Just because I wanted to see how he would react and what step he would take.

"Owns her," Ronan repeated.

"Well... the would be killer was apparently trafficked," I said. "The delicate thinks that anyway. So this must indeed be an enemy of mine. Who else but uncle Gabriel would be responsible for this?"

Ronan went quiet. His jaw worked. I could see the muscle jump beneath the skin.

"And the girl herself?" he asked. "The one who attacked Fia. Do we know her identity?"

"No." I kept walking.

"Fuck"

"Tell me about it."

I gave him nothing concrete. Still there was truth to most of it. I had scraps. He had scraps too. Mine were a lot more coherent. But not enough. All I really had at the end of the day was pieces of a picture that didn't fit together yet. A young girl. A man who owned her. It wasn't enough. Not even close to enough.

But it was more than I had an hour ago. And if Madeline could fix the delicate's sight, then I could have a picture from memory. That would help a lot.

"Excuse me," I said.

Ronan looked at me. I saw it cross his face, the thing he wanted to say, the frustration and the fear and the helplessness of it all, and for a second I thought he might push. But he didn't. He stopped walking, effectively letting me go.

"I'm sorry," he said.

I gave him a nod. The kind that said I heard him and it mattered and we'd deal with it later.

Then I turned the corner and kept walking. Toward Madeline. Toward whatever favor she might or might not give me.

That was what came next.