

To ruin an Omega

Chapter 304: I want to break free 1

FIA

The darkness that took me was different from sleep.

Sleep had weight to it. A pressure that pulled you down and held you under until morning decided to let you go. This was the opposite. This was something that opened up instead of closing in. Like falling through the bottom of a bowl of water and finding air on the other side.

I landed somewhere.

Not with any force. More like settling. The way a leaf finds the surface of a pond, barely disturbing anything, barely leaving a mark.

I was standing in a corridor.

It had unpolished stone walls and a low ceiling. Torchlight that burned orange and did not flicker the way normal fire did, like even the flames here were careful to be quiet. The air smelled of something herbal and something underneath that, something older and harder to name. Like sickness that had been managed for so long it had become part of the architecture.

My instincts... Those new instinct of mine since the accident... woke before anything else did.

I felt it in my blood before I understood it with my mind. The wrongness of this place. It had nothing to do with the fact that this looked like a dungeon or that this was a sickening feeling dark room. This has the wrongness of somewhere that had seen suffering for so long that the suffering had soaked into the stone and stayed there. The walls remembered things. I could feel them.

I looked down at my hands. They were there. Solid enough. But when I pressed my palm flat against the corridor wall, it was like pressing through something thin and resistant, like the surface of water just before it broke. I was here. But I was not entirely here.

I knew this feeling. I couldn't place my finger on it. But I had been here before.

The thought arrived without any context attached to it, without memory or explanation. Just the quiet certainty of a body that knew a place it has no reason to know.

I wondered... Was this another dream about Athena?

I started walking because standing still felt worse.

The corridor curved gently to the left. The torches passed overhead one by one, each throwing a circle of orange light that did nothing to warm the cold underneath it. My feet made no sound on the stone. I was not sure if that was because of what I was here or what this place was.

Then I heard footsteps.

Real ones. They were careful and practiced. These were the footsteps of someone who had learned that being heard was a kind of invitation for things they did not want. They came from somewhere ahead, unhurried, close to the wall.

A figure appeared at the curve of the corridor.

It was a girl. She looked sixteen, maybe seventeen. Thin in a way that did not look chosen, the thinness of a body that had been given less than it needed for long enough that it had simply adjusted and gone quiet about it. She had dark hair pulled back with the kind of practicality that had nothing to do with preference and everything to do with keeping it out of the way. She moved with her shoulders slightly inward, making herself smaller than she was, a habit so ingrained it probably no longer felt like a habit at all.

She stopped and she looked directly at me.

Then she smiled.

It was tired but looked real. It was the smile of someone who had been waiting for something for a very long time and had trained themselves not to hope for it too openly, so when it arrived, the relief came out sideways as something quieter than happiness.

My heart did something strange in my chest.

I knew that smile. I had seen it my whole life directed at me across kitchen tables and doorframes and the particular quality of early morning light. I knew the shape of it. I knew the way it sat slightly more on the left than the right. I knew it the way you know a sound you grew up with, the creak of a specific stair, the particular knock of someone who has always been home.

But she was not the age I knew. She was younger than I had ever seen her. Young enough that the woman I recognized was still just a sketch underneath, the structure there but not yet filled in, not yet finished.

"Mom?"

The word came out of me before I decided to say it.

She tilted her head. The smile softened.

"Fi." Her voice was younger too. Less certain of itself, as if it had not yet learned how much space it was allowed to take up. "You are here again. Is it time to break the cycle?"

I stared at her.

The corridor felt very still around us. The torches burned without sound. The cold pressed in from every direction.

"What cycle?" I said. "What are you talking about? Where are we? And how old are you?"

Something like me this was an odd dream fueled by the tonic. It was an aftereffect after all. But something about this felt real. Most of it did.

She looked at me the way my mother had always looked at me when I was asking the wrong questions; Patient, slightly resigned as she waited for me to catch up.

Some things never changed.

"You always ask those first," she said. "Every time."

"Every time." I heard the words back. "What do you mean every time? I've been here before?"

"Many times." She turned and started back the way she had come, glancing over her shoulder. "Come. I want to show you something."

I followed because there was nothing else to do. Because my feet moved before my mind gave them permission. Because something in me that was older than understanding already knew to follow her.

The room she brought me to was small.

There was a cot against one wall. A low table with instruments on it that I did not want to look at too closely. A single high window that showed nothing but dark sky, no moon, no stars, just dark. The kind of dark that reminded you that light was a thing that happened to places, not a thing that belonged to them.

There was a woman sitting against the far wall.

Her knees were drawn up. Her arms wrapped around them. She was holding herself together with the focused determination of someone who had decided that falling apart was not currently an option and had simply refused to negotiate with the parts of her that wanted to.

I stopped in the doorway.

Something moved through me that I did not have a name for. Something that I could only refer to as healer-adjacent. A pull, low and instinctive, the same way I felt drawn toward wounds that needed closing or pain that needed locating. But this was not quite that. This was more like recognition. The kind that came from blood rather than memory.

I looked at her hands where they were folded around her knees. The particular way the fingers laced. The knuckles. The shape of the wrist.

They looked like... My own hands.

I looked at the jaw. The way she held her head when she was trying not to let anything show on her face. The angle of the cheekbones. The set of the brow.

I had seen all of it before.

In mirrors.

This felt similar too. It was like looking at a mirror.

Mostly.

"Who is that?" My voice had gone very quiet.

My mother stood beside me in the doorway.

She was quiet for a long moment. The kind of quiet that was not empty. The kind that had too much in it to come out as words right away.

"That's where I came from," she finally said.

The sentence landed simply. It did not try to be more than it was. It just sat there between us and let me look at it.

I looked at the woman against the wall.

I looked at my mother beside me.

I looked at my hands.

Something in my chest started to come apart very slowly, the way ice did in water when the temperature shifted, not all at once, just the edges first.

"She's... She is your mother," I said.

My mother did not answer. She did not have to.