

TO RUIN AN OMEGA

Chapter 314: The tragedy of honor

CIAN

"What are you going on about?"

The words were barely out of my mouth before I heard myself and stopped caring. I held up a hand.

"You know what, I really don't give a shit."

She looked at me like she wanted to argue with that too. Like she had a right to.

"I know you think I'm the worst right now." Her voice had that quality again, the soft careful one. But it wasn't landing the same way it used to. "But I did want to fight back. I promise you."

I said nothing.

"The only reason Aldric was so cocky," she continued, steadying herself, "is because of the dead man's switch. He knew I could hurt him at any time. Hell, he knew how dangerous threatening either me or my father was. But he was never scared. He never batted an eye. Because he knew we couldn't figure it out. Who his closest ally was."

She exhaled.

"In no world would I have ever guessed that Aldric and Ronan were working together." She shook her head slowly. "Doesn't his mother hate Aldric?"

Something moved in me at that. Something I didn't want. It came up fast and warm before I could stop it. A memory of her, younger, sitting cross-legged in the summer grass behind the estate asking questions like that with her hair pulled back and a piece of fruit in her hand. The way she would figure things out sideways. The way she always noticed the things everyone else missed.

I took had thought about that Ronan situation. But since she was the one bringing it up in hopes of getting fucking cozy, I buried it before it could breathe.

Because this was not that. She was not that girl. Or maybe she always had been exactly this, and I had chosen not to see it.

"Knowing about the dead man's switch changes nothing," I said. "You worked in bad faith against me. Against this pack. Against your own kind."

"You think I enjoyed it?" She looked up at me. "Killing her?"

"How the hell would I know?" The words came out harder than I meant them to. "I don't know you. I thought I did. But I fucking don't."

She closed her eyes. Her chest rose and fell. She held the breath a moment, then let it go.

"What do you plan to do now," she said quietly. "Imprison me?"

"Yes."

The word landed clean and she didn't flinch from it.

"Here's what happens," I said. "When you face the elder's circle, I will not bring up the fact that you killed Ophelia. I will not touch your father's fleshcraft situation. In exchange, you testify against Aldric. I want him cornered. Something he cannot talk his way out of. What I have already will most likely fail on its own. You, however, will not."

"I want to help," she said. "I do."

I almost smiled. I caught it before it reached my face but it was there, that old reflex. The way she said things like that and you believed her even when you knew better.

"But."

"But what? Tell me."

"Your uncle is vindictive." Her voice dropped. "If he's going to crash and burn, he'll take my family down with him. My father needs to go down, you said it yourself. But he will not be the only one to suffer it. The Primrose Coven will suffer for what their supreme did. My family will suffer too. I cannot help you if that will happen."

I looked at her for a long moment.

"You seem to be mistaking what I just told you for a suggestion," I said. "It is not. You have no say in this matter. You do what I say. I'm just trying to give you a choice within the very limited ones you have left."

"Please." Her voice cracked. "Cian. For old times sake. You have to understand. Please."

The word hit something that wasn't soft, not anymore at least. All that remained in the space was hollow where it used to be full.

"I can never. I will never."

I turned away from her. I felt it then, the hot sting at the back of my eyes, and I hated it. I hated that it still lived in me. I kept my back to her and I said what I needed to say because I had been carrying it long enough and maybe I needed to put it down.

"I loved you, Mads." My voice didn't shake. I was proud of that in a distant way. "I tortured myself for you. I swore it would be you and no one else. And throughout all the years that I loved you, I know, I know that I would never have done what you did to me." I stopped. "Not once."

"I know what I'm asking for is selfish," she said behind me. "And I deserve nothing from you. But Aldric scares me. He'll have some trump card of a trump card."

"He will not."

"Even if he doesn't," she said, "burning my family to the ground is something I cannot allow." A sharp breath came from her. "Cian. I am sorry."

I turned back around.

"You still choose them," I said. The observation wasn't even angry. It was just tired. "Even now."

"None of this would have happened," she said, and something shifted in her voice, the grief hardening into something with an edge, "if you had just let go of that stupid ruling Alpha seat."

The air in the room changed.

"Excuse me?"

"We would still be together," she said. "Safe. Away from your psychopath uncle."

"Fuck you." The words shot out of me clean and fast. "How is any of this my fault?"

"Because we would have been fine," she said, and I could hear her breaking even as she pushed forward, "But no. You didn't want what we had. It wasn't quite enough. I mean... you did too. You chose your family."

"I wanted to honor my father!"