

# TO RUIN AN OMEGA

## Chapter 356: Paternal Bond 2

FIA

I left the infirmary with Thorne and Maren trailing behind me. The hallway stretched ahead in silence. My mind was moving around in circles.

A sentinel stood near the stairwell. His posture was rigid and formal. I recognized him from previous patrols.

"Excuse me," I said.

He turned and bowed slightly. "Yes, my lady?"

"Do you know where Cian is?"

"The Alpha is in his study, my lady."

"Thank you."

He bowed again and I moved past him toward the west wing. Thorne and Maren split off somewhere along the way. I heard their footsteps fade down a different corridor. They probably had their own concerns to deal with now.

The study was at the end of the hall. The door was closed but I could hear voices coming from inside. They were low and urgent. I slowed my pace and stopped just outside.

A male voice carried through the wood. It wasn't Cian's voice. This was deeper and rougher. But it was very familiar.

"You should not have agreed to a trial. You should have just killed him there."

My hand froze on the doorknob.

Then Madeline spoke. Her voice was unmistakable.

"I agree with my father. Give Aldric an inch and he runs a mile."

I knocked before I lost my nerve. The voices inside went silent immediately. I waited a beat and then turned the handle.

The door swung open.

Cian stood near his desk. Madeline sat in one of the chairs by the window. And beside her was that man. He was tall, with his hair pulled back with gel. His eyes were sharp and calculating. He looked at me the moment I stepped inside.

The silence hung heavy between all of us.

Cian moved first. He crossed the room in a few strides and stopped in front of me.

"Hey," he said. His voice was soft. He was very concerned about me being here. "Is something wrong?"

He leaned down and kissed my forehead. Then his hands came up to frame my face. His thumbs brushed against my cheeks. He studied me carefully.

I looked past him at the supposed stranger.

The man's eyes widened. He stared at me like he had seen something impossible. Like I had walked in wearing someone else's skin.

I couldn't tell if he was reacting the way Pauline had. The way they seemed to keep seeing Athena in my features. Or if it was something else entirely. Something more complicated.

I favored the former.

I pulled my gaze back to Cian. "I thought you would be alone. I wanted to know what you have planned."

Cian's expression shifted. Understanding flickered across his face. He glanced back at the others and then looked at me again.

"Are you worried about the trial too?"

He turned halfway so he could address everyone in the room. His hand stayed on my shoulder.

"It's been quite the discourse."

I swallowed. "I cannot help but be worried. Your uncle is dangerous. You have to be three steps ahead of you want to beat him and even with that... You never know."

Cian's grip on my shoulder tightened slightly. He wanted to reassure me.

"I assure you," he said. To me and to it is a weeding."

I blinked. "A weeding?"

"I intend to cull all traitors at once."

He turned fully toward Valentine and Madeline. His expression hardened.

"Your worries are clearly selfish," he said. "But I don't blame you."

Valentine didn't flinch. He just watched Cian with a look that felt unreadable.

"I do assure you though," Cian continued. "My uncle might want to be a vindictive bastard. But his hands are tied currently. He and his right hand are

imprisoned. And if there is even any way they can get your fleshcraft business out there, they will not. Because it will not be trusted. Not completely."

The word hit me like a fist to the stomach.

Fleshcraft.

The same thing Athena had suffered. The same horror that evil man had put her through. The same twisted practice that had destroyed her.

My eyes snapped to Valentine.

He sat there. Calm and composed. Like he hadn't committed the worst of atrocities.

Was Cian helping him get away from paying for his sins?

The thought of it...

Rage flooded through me. Hot and immediate. I wanted to scream. I wanted to drag Valentine out of that chair and hurt him. I wanted to him to know that I knew every detail of what he had done. Who he had hurt. That Athena and even my mother had been one of his victims.

But I couldn't.

Cian didn't know much. He didn't know what I knew. He didn't understand the depth of this man's cruelty. So of course he was helping him. Even if the thought of it pissed me to no end.

So I kept it bottled in. For later.

"You get off the hook regardless," Cian said to Valentine. "So just hold on for one whole day. You will be safe and we all win."

Cian turned back to me. His hand found mine and he laced our fingers together.

"It will be fine," he said. "It will be alright."

I forced myself to meet his eyes. "I believe you."

"Does that settle your heart?"

"It does."

He kissed me. His lips were warm, careful, like he was afraid the moment might break if he moved too fast. Heat spread through my chest before I even had time to think.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Madeline move in her chair. The soft scrape of the legs against the floor made me glance her way.

She had already turned toward the window.

Her shoulders were stiff, and the light from outside caught the side of her face. Her jaw was tight, her expression strained, like she was forcing herself not to look back. There was something in it that made my stomach twist. Maybe it was the pain she was trying, and failing, to hide.

Cian broke the kiss and pressed another to my forehead.

"You should go," he said quietly. "I have business to attend to."

He walked back to his desk and I stood there for a moment. Uncertain. Unwilling to leave but not sure what else to say.

Cian looked at Valentine and Madeline. "You two as well. I need to prepare against any of my uncle's antics."

Valentine stood slowly. He smoothed the front of his coat. Then he paused.

"Before that," he said. "I have something to offer you. Something great. Something important. But I want to break the soul kiss."

I froze halfway to the door.

Soul kiss? I had never heard the term before but I was curious about what it could mean? Some kind of bond maybe? A magical contract? Something worse?

Cian leaned back against his desk. He crossed his arms over his chest.

"Out of the question," he said. "Unless of course I know what you have to offer. Only then might I consider it. And I truly mean consider it."

Valentine smiled. It was slow and calculated. Like he had been waiting for this moment.

"Oh," he said. "I think you will like it very much."

Cian didn't move. "Then spill."

Valentine took a step forward. His hands were loose at his sides. It felt casual. But his eyes were sharp. There was just something unnerving about them.

"I've always been trying to one up that bastard," he said. "But there was just nothing about him that I could hold. He likes portraying himself as clean when he is not. He is damn good at it too. You would know. You were his victim once upon a time too. But I finally have something. Someone."