

Chapter Fifteen



Cassius pulled her into their bathing chamber. He shut the door, his back to her, dirty fingers splayed out against the surface. Blood crusted under his nails.

Thalia didn't want to look in the mirror to see how she fared.

Cassius jerked his chin to the tub, an indication for her to sit. She did as he asked.

He grabbed a rag, wetting it before coming before her. He knelt, his face harsh, and took her hands in his. Thalia swallowed as he began to clean the blood and dirt from her fingers.

"What was that thing?" Thalia croaked, breaking the silence that'd fallen. Cassius didn't look up, swiping the rag over her palms. "Cassius?"

Maybe it was the slight plea in her tone that had his gaze meeting hers. "A sick Vampyr."

Thalia stared at him. "What do you mean, sick?"

"Vampyr's get sick just as humans do."

Thalia couldn't interpret his words. "That doesn't make sense. That—that thing was insane."

Cassius shook his head, his dark hair sliding with the movement. He broke her gaze, his attention returning to her hands. He began to dig out the slivers of splinters from her flesh as he said quietly but not weakly, "There's a sickness that's been spreading. But we've kept it contained."

“Have you?” She hissed in pain as he dug out a particularly large sliver.

Cassius paused his ministrations, and Thalia glanced at him. “The sickness spreads easily amongst our kind. Which is why those who are found sick are removed from society until they are better. This sickness is not one that concerns you.”

“It should concern me considering that thing nearly killed me!”

He didn’t answer, just wrapped a strip of bandage around her palms, quickly and efficiently.

“Are there more who are sick?” Thalia asked when he still refused to speak.

“A few, but it is being handled.” Cassius tied the bandage tight, and Thalia hissed again. “What the fuck were you doing out there?”

Thalia lifted her chin, cradling her bandaged hand to her chest. “I told you before, I saw something. Since no one was inclined to tell me anything, I went to go see for myself.”

“And you didn’t think there was a reason we aren’t telling you things?” Cassius sneered.

“Fuck. You.”

She stormed out of the bathing chamber, her anger as palpable as the creature Cassius had killed.

“Oh no you don’t.” Cassius grabbed her arm, halting her in her tracks before she could leave the room. “You don’t get to storm away just because you’re pissed off.”

“Let go of me before I put my dagger through your heart. Again.”

“You mean my dagger?”

“If you want it so badly, feel free to take it,” she crooned.

Cassius smirked. “If you think I’d disarm you so readily, you mistake me greatly.”

“Mistake you?” Thalia scoffed. “I don’t think I’ve mistaken you, not for a moment.” She jerked out of his grip.

She moved to the door, but Cassius was there, hand splayed out on the wood. Damn him and his speed. “You’re not leaving this room.”

Rage bridled her tongue. “Oh no? And are you going to stop me?”

Cassius flashed a cruel smirk. “It won’t be hard.”

Thalia stormed over to him. “Move out of the way.”

“No.”

“I outrank *you*. Considering how much you care about your position on the prince’s council, it would be unwise to refuse me.”

“Your rank means nothing when you put yourself in danger.”

“Danger?” she scoffed. “I decided to leave the castle, as I am free to do as *princess* of this House.”

“You decided,” Cassius snarled, “to nearly get yourself killed.”

“Then you should have let that creature do it. I’m sure it would have saved you the headache.”

Cassius’s eyes darkened. “The prince will return soon, and I’d rather not be the one to get staked because you got bored.”

“Bored?” Thalia gawked. “Have you ever thought about what it’s like for me? To be here? To be surrounded by monsters who’d rather see me dead? Who no doubt picture ripping out my throat every waking moment?”

“So why did you seek one of us out?”

“So I could escape you!” Thalia screamed. “So I could get a moment’s peace away from *you*.”

Cassius’s face was stone, his fingertips digging so hard into the door the wood groaned.

“When will you accept the fact that I’m still me and not some monster you’ve conjured up?”

Thalia stared at him in shock. “Still . . . *you*?” The muscle in Cassius’s jaw flickered as she took a step closer. “You are nothing like the man I knew.”

“And the man you loved?”

Thalia’s heart twisted as if he’d just shoved his dagger into it. “He died on the rug in my bedroom.”

Cassius’s eyes roved over her face, the blue so stark it faintly glowed. He took a step closer to her. “Do you want to finally know what happened that day?”

Thalia’s rage spiked. She shut it down. Shoved it under the sea of whirling regret in her stomach. “I know what happened.”

Surprise flared in Cassius’s eyes before it was gone. “What happened?”

She tilted her head. “You chose the coward’s path.”

Cassius shook his head, his burnished hair brushing against his shoulders. “I chose to *live*.”

Thalia’s face twisted. “Live? As this?”

Cassius’s face darkened. “It was either that or dying.”

“Then you should have died!” Thalia’s chest heaved. She knew she should be quiet. Should be cautious of the other Vampyrs in the castle who could no doubt hear her, but emotions bombarded her senses, overwhelming her nerves as she stared at the man who’d ruined himself. “You are pathetic. A worthless, immoral creature who should have done the honorable thing and died before turning into one of *them*. But you were a coward. A weak, dishonest piece of shit who should have just turned his blade toward his own heart—”

He moved so fast Thalia didn’t realize what was happening until slight pressure on her throat made her freeze.

Cassius had pinned her against the door, his blood-crusted hands gripping her arms as his teeth pressed against her artery. Not enough to draw blood, but with enough force that she couldn’t move.

Her heart was a riotous beat in her chest. Her pulse fluttered like a bird caught in a cage. She could barely think as Cassius slowly released the pressure on her throat, but he didn’t move.

Didn’t so much as shift backward as he said lowly, “Pathetic? Worthless?” Thalia swallowed, and Cassius’s lips trailed her throat. “An immoral creature?”

Thalia began to tremble. She wasn’t sure if it was from fear or from his nearness. His very presence consumed her, engulfing her like a flame. She wished she had air in her lungs, only so she could gasp as his nose skimmed the sensitive skin of her jaw.

“I have morals, Princess.” He let out a dark chuckle. “Should we talk about them? Do you know what my morals tell me? They tell me to ignore all the wicked things that I imagine in my head.”

His hand traveled up her arm, scorching her collarbone as he brushed a strand of hair from her neck. “My morals tell me that I shouldn’t give in,” he said lowly. “That despite the fact that I can *feel* your blood as it runs through your veins, I have to ignore it. But it calls to me like a song. It begs for me to get a taste. Your heart *beats*

for me. And being in your presence, the idea of tasting your flesh again, it's driving me insane."

Thalia gripped his arms, hardly breathing as he tilted his head. "Do you know what else my morals say?"

She couldn't speak, could barely give an acknowledgment as his lips brushed ever so slightly against the place he'd bitten.

"My morals tell me to let you go. That you are now bound to someone else. That you belong to *him*."

"I belong to no one." Her words were breathless; they didn't hold the weight she intended. Cassius pulled back, his burning eyes going straight to her parted mouth.

"You have no idea what it's like to be near you. To feel your hatred. To burn in it."

And she did hate him. But the words to shred him apart didn't form on her tongue. Not as the burning in his eyes deepened, his gaze flicking to the bruised spot on her neck.

Something flashed in Cassius's eyes. He let go of her suddenly, cold air rushing between them.

Cassius ran a hand through his hair, seeming to compose himself, his change in behavior more shocking than being doused in ice. "You are to stay in the castle until further notice. You may outrank me, but as hand, I speak on behalf of His Highness, who outranks *you*." He met her blazing stare. "This world is a dangerous place, Thalia. You'd be wise to heed its warnings."