

For Jenny

Enma

Prologue

~

“Sam, get the door.”

The orphan was quick to comply.

Above the door, there was a wooden sign that read: *KINDER ROSE ORPHANAGE*, in cursive lettering.

Sam swung open said door to meet quite a surprise.

Knelt at the doorstep was a pale, raven-haired woman, an unconscious child limp in her trembling arms. They were both dripping with rain and blood.

It was then that Sam gave a frightened shriek. Not at the blood-he was accustomed to that-but there were strange, dark things, nearly invisible in the night, sprouting from either side of the woman’s back. They drooped wearily at her sides. It took him a moment to realize they were wings.

A social worker, Lora, was at his side in a heartbeat. A shout escaped her as well.

“Sam, go inside.” She ordered.

He didn’t move. He could only gape at the dying angel bleeding at the steps. She didn’t press him.

“Please...” the angel wheezed. She inched closer painfully.

The social worker gasped and took a step back. Sam came forward.

“Sam.” Lora cautioned, holding his shoulder. He gave her a defiant look, but stayed put.

“Please...” the angel said again, this time lifting herself sluggishly to her feet. She held the child before Sam. “Help him, I beg you.” Red oozed from her mouth.

Sam looked at the small boy she held. He was pale and raven-haired just like the angel. Rain spattered his cherubic face.

“He is an orphan.”

At this, Sam shrugged Lora’s hand off his shoulder and stepped into the rain. He reached out, wrapping the boy in his arms.

The angel pressed her forehead to the child’s, a motion that seemed to relax her and calm her heart, love in her mismatched eyes.

Before Sam could ask the little one's name, the dark angel had gone, leaving nothing but stray black feathers and the pool of blood which stained the welcome mat.

Twelve Years Later

Orphenn stood in his place around the fire that smelled of the corroding garbage that it burned. The smoke carried the stench with it as it barreled upward out of the metal trash can. Orphenn stared blankly into it, flames mirrored in his red and blue eyes.

He was with a new group today, and he was withdrawn and silent. Not that it mattered—he never spoke to the old group either. And whatever group he joined, there was never anything different. Homeless bums gathered around a garbage fire for warmth. Nothing more about it.

To Orphenn, living on the streets was much more predictable than others made it seem. True, New York alleys were cold and cruel, but what else was new? Also true, Orphenn was probably one of the youngest hobos in the park. But he didn't mind. No one else did much either. Others like him mainly worried about themselves. Though Orphenn seemed to be accustomed to a world without kindness.

He stuffed his hands into his trench coat pockets. He loved his trench coat. It was filthy brown and torn, but it was warm.

The others were talking. The one called Smitty, who wore a flannel coat and a beanie, began questioning the others in the circle.

"Hey, uh, *Maria*," he beckoned to a severely underdressed, middle-aged woman with a fuming cigarette held between two fingers. "What're you planning?"

"Buzz off." She rasped.

Smitty insisted. "No, come on, I mean, what're 'ya waitin' for? When 'ya gonna get yer life goin' again?"

She softened. "Just waiting for a miracle, Smitty. Ain't we all?"

"What 'bout you, R.J.? What you waitin' for?" Smitty asked a dark-skinned man across from him, who looked sullen and distraught. His plump lips quivered. R.J. responded slowly, in a tone that resembled weary excitement.

"I'm waiting. I'm waiting for my princess."

An awkward silence followed, with nothing but the crackling of the fire between them.

Listening to these people, Orphenn realized that every one of them *were* waiting. And that's all they would ever do.

Smitty again broke the silence. "Hey, you. Quiet Guy." He called. "Yeah, you, Silent Bob."

Orphenn's attention was lifted from the fire and he gazed through his long, lank hair at Smitty.

"What 'bout you, huh? What *you* waitin' for?"

Orphenn shook his head. "Nothing."

"Nothing? No hopes? No dreams? No love? Don't got no one? Ain't waitin' on nothing?"

Again, he shook his head.

"Not even a miracle?" Maria chimed.

"No."

"Oh, come on now, Silent Bob." Said R.J. "Everybody needs *somehin'*."

With one last shake of his head, Orphenn turned and left, erasing those words from his mind.

It was dark.

Sleep.

A voice said.

I need you to sleep.

Why? He said. Defiant, as always.

You will see, soon enough.

It was a feathery whisper in the darkness. He thought *what the heck*, and continued to dream.

A face appeared. Fine lips, pale skin, and big blue eyes. It was a woman, her hair as black as the abyss around her.

What is your name? She asked.

What's it to you?

It's taken a very long time to find you.

How do you know I'm who you're looking for?

You had just the right dreams. I know who you are.

Now that he thought about it, she looked eerily familiar. He hated to admit to himself that he was frightened by it.

My name is Orphenn. He relented.

She laughed. She only laughed.

Why are you laughing? Orphenn began to panic. *Why does everyone laugh?*

Her face became puzzled, and then faded back into the darkness, and was gone.

"Why is she laughing. . ."

The last images to dissipate were the woman's raging eyes.

"Why are you laughing?!" He shot awake.

He was back in the alley, where he slept with the stray cats every night, cold brick and cement, tin garbage cans and dumpsters.

He looked out to the street. There was a strange woman there, laughing at him.

“Who’s laughing?” She sniggered.
He must have shouted in his sleep.

Chapter One

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The Criminal

Orphenn was an orphan. At this time in his life, he began to believe that’s all he would ever be. Ten years in an orphanage taught him that much. He was never even placed in the foster system, as so many had been.

No one wanted him. And he knew why.

Every time he saw his reflection, he said to himself: *My eyes.*

Orphenn’s eyes were quite remarkable. One was an icy, Siberian Husky blue, and the other was a crimson red. They were mismatched, but not only in color. The pupil in one iris was a cat-like slit, and in the other, there were three small pupils, as if they had split into thirds from the original. Doctors were amazed he could even see. Though his eyes weren’t the only of Orphenn’s “oddities” as Lora called them.

The other orphaned children spread dozens of rumors about him: that he could talk to dogs, that he could become a ghost and possess someone, that he was from another planet, and even that he had hidden horns. Complete bogus, of course.

So Orphenn could bear it no longer—the ridiculous rumors, the taunting children, and the hundreds of parents who gave him nothing but a disgusted grimace or frightful glare before walking away with a more fortunate orphan in their arms. No family would ever adopt him, he knew. He wouldn’t wait and see either, just in case, for he never was a very patient person.

He made the decision, at fifteen, to run away. He couldn’t stay at Kinder Rose. Not that anyone would miss him.

Thus, for two years, going on three, he was homeless, and now he sits in the alley, his hair long, shaggy and tangled, and his face streaked with grease. He turned up the collar on his trench coat, as if to shield his ears from the laughter of the woman in the street.

“Who’s laughing?” She antagonized the seventeen-year-old.

This woman was dressed in enormous heels, short shorts and a tube top. It was also obvious that a bra was missing from her apparently limited wardrobe.

Orphenn ignored her, and reached for his bottle of vodka. He was underage naturally, but he had acquired a taste for it a while back, after getting past its strong burn. He spun off the lid and took a large, satisfying gulp.

“Stupid hobo.” She spat. She walked clumsily, as if she as well was intoxicated, further into the alley, stopping in front of Orphenn and lifting his chin up with a filthy hand. “But you’re a cute hobo. How ‘bout I take you back to my place?”

Strands of her greasy blonde hair fell into Orphenn’s face. “Much better than sleeping in a trash can.”

He doubted that.

He crinkled his nose. “You smell like a dog.” He scowled.

With a girlish grunt, she put her hands on her hips. “And you would know? Looks like most of your little friends ‘round here are pregnant *cats*.”

Orphenn gave her an intense glare, his red and blue eyes like shards of crystal. “Sure.” He shrugged. “I’ve known a few bitches in my spare time.”

The woman shrieked angrily and slapped him across the face. She spun and stomped away in a huff, twisting her ankle a couple times in the effort.

Orphenn chuckled, and lay back down on the cement with his hands behind his head, and thought about his dream.

It was different from the other ones, which he had almost every night. They were all about angels. Always about angels.

He had a pair of wings himself, which he most conveniently discovered when he fell off the Empire State Building at the annual orphanage field trip. Also quite convenient, was that none of the social workers or other officials happened to look out the window when he fell, nor any of the orphans. All except Sam. Sam was always the observant one. He knew everything about Orphenn. Granted, there wasn’t much to know. Not anymore.

He missed Sam. He was Orphenn’s only friend. He had been adopted years ago, though. Nowadays he’s your friendly neighborhood police officer, patrolling about New York City.

“Orphenn?”

Speak of the Devil.

“Orphenn, is that you?”

Orphenn jolted to his feet and gawked at the squeaky-clean man in uniform standing at the end of the alley. He grew excited, but not before first glaring questionably at the vodka bottle. “Sam?” He said, unsure.

The officer smiled.

“Sam!” Orphenn enthused, as he sped out to the sidewalk to greet his best friend with their secret handshake. Clap right, clap left, double knuckles, snap. “What are you doing down here?”

“What am *I* doing?” Sam jeered. “What are *you* doing? What, did you get pissed off and run away? You should be at Kinder Rose! Not on the streets!” Then

he noticed the bottle in the younger boy's tightly curled fingers. "Oh, Orphenn. Don't tell me you've gotten into *that* again. I thought you quit."

"I had to run away." He defended, twisting the cap onto the bottle and setting it away next to a trash can.

"But why?"

"Because you weren't there for me anymore! I was treated like I was some kind of alien—well I always was, but even more so when you left! There was no one to stand up for me. You're my only friend, Sam."

No one to stand up for me anymore. When Orphenn spoke these words, he realized he was just like the rest of them around the garbage fire, and had the sudden urge to vomit.

"I'm so, so sorry I left." Sam apologized. "And I know I promised I would visit, but—"

"I considered *suicide* Sam!" Orphenn interrupted, leaving Sam speechless. "Something I believed I would *never* do!"

"I never thought you would either." Sam replied after a slight pause. "But I never thought in all my life that you would sleep in a trash can like *Sesame Street*."

"I don't actually sleep *in* the can! Why does everyone say that?"

"I know you're capable of so *much more*, Orphenn. *I know it.*"

At this, Orphenn could only stare at the older man.

"*I've seen it.*" Sam continued. "You may not look like much, I know that! But Orphenn, you can *fly*. No one else can say that. Or do you not remember all those times I covered for you while you snuck out in the middle of the night to use your wings?"

"I haven't forgotten, Sam."

"You could be saving the *world*, or something with the powers you have!"

"No, I couldn't."

"Why *not*?"

"Because I'm not *like* you, Sam!" His face was a mask of envy. "I'm not the kind of person that can accomplish much more than finding something to *eat* every day! You're a *hero*! You're saving *lives* every day!"

"You're ten times more *capable* of it than I am!" Sam countered. "You could use your gifts to help the task force! The Coast Guard, Air Force, Firefighters—the damn Forest Rangers for Hell's sake!"

Orphenn looked down at his weathered boots. "I don't know...That I could do any of that..."

Before Sam could reply, gunshots sounded out in the street.

Sam was in the street with his gun at the ready in seconds. Orphenn couldn't see what was happening—a herd of passerby surrounded the scene, blocking everything from his view.

More shots went off.

“Sam!?” Orphenn called.

He heard shouting and clattering as a firearm was knocked to the asphalt.

A tall shirtless man with baggy jeans broke from the crowd, running down the road as fast as he could. Sam sped after him.

“Sam!” Orphenn called again, picking up his feet to gallop after them. They ran for what seemed like hours. They dodged through a playground like an obstacle course, then the man began to slow down, though he persisted until he came to a bridge overlooking the ocean. He began to stroll across it nonchalantly, as if he were on a brisk weekend walk, rather than being pursued by an officer.

“Sir.” Sam cautioned, Orphenn panting beside him. “Sir, I’m going to have to ask you to come away from the bridge.”

The man gave him a strange smirk.

“Sir. Step *off* the *bridge*.” Sam seemed to realize the command came out wrong the moment he said it.

“Oh, crap.” Orphenn muttered.

The man laughed maniacally and hopped onto the bridge’s steel railing.

“Whatever you say, officer!” And he fell over the edge.

Sam jerked, as if wanting to go after him, but Orphenn had already pushed him aside, got a running start, spread his wings, and dove after the criminal.

He kept his wings close at his sides, shooting down toward the man like a speeding bullet, until he got close enough to touch him. He grabbed his arms around the man’s waist, snapping his wings out to catch the air. He began to ascend again, but it was difficult. Not only was the man heavy, but he struggled and squirmed like a whining kitten.

“Ugh! Cut it out!” Orphenn yelled, flicking him in the head.

The man continued to struggle, but Orphenn managed to wrangle him to the edge of the cliff where Sam waited for him.

Sam’s eyes widened in awe as Orphenn hovered back to land, his wings beating lightly to keep him a few feet off the ground. He socked the man in the head with a fist as strong as stone to cease his wriggling. He was out cold.

It was then that Orphenn noticed Sam’s stricken stare. He tossed the man to the ground, where he lay unconscious, but still breathing.

“What?” Orphenn held his arms out quizzically as he folded his wings and dropped lightly to his feet in front of Sam, wings suddenly gone as if they had never been outspread. “You’re looking at me like I just kicked a puppy.”

Then Sam smiled. He pulled out a walkie-talkie and spoke into it. “All hands on deck.”

“Huh?” Orphenn raised one eyebrow.

“*Aye aye, Captain.*” Buzzed the communicator.

“Oh, it’s our code talk. Between my partner and I.” Explained Sam. “He should be here with the cruiser in a few minutes.”

“Ah.” Orphenn stuffed his hands in his trench coat pockets, feeling a bit jealous that his best friend had a new partner.

“I knew you could do it.” Sam said, catching Orphenn off guard.

“What do you mean?” He clicked his tongue. “Oh that? Flying? It was nothing.”

“Was it?” Sam shook his head. “You captured a murderer.”

“Oh...I guess I did.”

“Not only did you save his life, but you prevented him from escaping and striking again if he survived. You saved other lives, too.”

Orphenn blushed, idly scratching the back of his neck.

The cruiser honked its horn behind them.

After stuffing the murderer in the back seat, and watching his only friend drive away with his new partner, he took a deep breath and began to walk back to his alley.

There was still a mess of people when he arrived. Sam had gotten there before him, and was shooing people away from a dead body.

Orphenn was suddenly regretting only punching that criminal once to knock him out. But at the same time he felt incredibly glad that he was lucky enough to be the one to punch him. *That's beside the point.* He thought. *He's locked away now, forever. That's what's important.*

“So what happened?” Orphenn asked after Sam politely asked a nosy woman to leave the premises.

“Apparently the poor guy was having an affair with the murderer’s wife.” Sam answered.

“I feel bad for the wife.” Orphenn sympathized.

The old friends bid farewell, and separated, one with a job to do, the other with dreams to ponder.

Then, through the crowd, there was a still, dark figure on the other side of the street. As the crowd cleared, he saw it more clearly.

Everything seemed to come to Orphenn’s eyes in slow motion, so stricken with astonishment he was. No sound came to his ears. The remaining onlookers slowly left the street, leaving remnant shadow trails on his retinas.

It was a woman, clad head-to-toe in black, her neck draped with chains. Her jeans were torn and she wore a strapped black leather jacket and matching knee-high boots. Her hair was long, reaching the small of her back, sleek, and the color of obsidian. Her bangs were cut straight across, and shiny sunglasses covered her eyes. She was leaning against an odd-looking motorcycle, arms folded and legs crossed at the ankles.

Her face looked so familiar....eerily familiar, like the woman in his dream before had looked. In fact, she had the same face as the woman in his dream.

Orphenn saw the woman slip her shades off her face and squint in his direction.

She had intense, mismatched eyes.

Chapter Two

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The Angels

Her green and blue eyes shot like lasers beneath the shadow cast over her face. She lifted her chin to the sky, and let the light shine on her features, still gazing intently at the homeless person across the street.

Now, all the people had gone from the avenue, leaving nothing but a stretch of asphalt between the woman and the orphan.

Her face had a new look of certainty.

“Keiran.” She said. She pushed off her motor bike and stepped forward, chains jingling. The air of relief surrounding her and the excitement in her eyes astounded Orphenn. No one had ever looked at him like that.

“What?” He speculated, their contrasting eyes meeting.

The woman reached out to him. He hadn’t realized how close he actually was to her. Had he subconsciously walked slowly toward her? The sense of familiarity she gave him seemed to be drawing him in.

She rested her hand on his neck. He wanted to jerk away, but his legs felt like weak stilts.

She looked deep within his abnormal eyes, as if searching for something hidden inside.

She was a stranger to him, and yet, Orphenn already felt a strong connection to her.

She stared for a bit longer. Then with an unexpected smile, she pulled his face closer, and touched her forehead to his.

Orphenn considered running away like a frightened bird, but it was a far away thought. The woman’s affectionate gesture strangely calmed him. Like it was something he was used to.

“You’ve gotten so tall.” The woman whispered, kissing his cheek lightly.

“Who are you?” Orphenn questioned, nearly dazed, hoping against all hope that this was not an alcohol-induced hallucination.

“You don’t remember, do you? You’re sure? You don’t know who I am?”

Orphenn thought hard for a moment, but shook his head. "I feel like I should...But I don't."

"Oh, Keiran." She lamented. "It's true...You've lost your memory. It must have been that last portal..." she trailed off, rubbing her temples in an effort to remember.

"Portal?"

"What's your name?" She abruptly changed the subject, steepling her fingers. "What did they decide to call you?"

"Orphenn."

"*Orphenn?!*" She gaped, as if he had said his name was Mega-Man. Then she straightened, tapping her chin in thought. "I didn't think they'd take what I said so literally...When I said you were an orphan, I thought they'd at least come up with their own name for you..."

"Who are you?" Orphenn repeated. "Wait, wait, wait, wait, first-How do you know me?"

"My name is Cinder." She answered, suddenly serious. After a pause, she said, "You're my baby brother, Orphenn."

"*What did you say?*" He nearly hissed, grasping Cinder's studded wrist in astonishment. "You mean...I have family?"

She nodded.

"How many?" He demanded.

"There's only the four of us left."

"Only four..." He echoed. *That's more than I've ever had.* "Where are they?"

"You're the only one still here."

"In New York?"

"On Earth." She looked at him expectantly, as if waiting for him to tell her she was a nut job.

Instead he said, "...So you came to get me?"

"You believe me then?" She seemed relieved.

"Hey, I've heard stranger things," he lied. Hearing he had a family out there was the strangest thing that had ever come to his ears. "Hell, I'm pretty strange myself."

"Come on, then." She grinned, motioning to her motorcycle.

"Uhh..." Orphenn hesitated, taking a step back. "Are you sure you wanna take me?"

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm not really...Normal. I mean-I can-I'm..."

"We'll worry about that later, when we get to Aleida." Cinder assured. "Maybe you'll demonstrate your 'abnormality' for me then."

"Aleida...We're going on *that?*" He tilted his head toward the odd motorcycle. Cinder said she was the only family he had on Earth. Did that mean they were going to some other planet? A strange unknown galaxy?

"Yup."

That 'yup' was surprisingly helpful.

At this point, Orphenn was ready to believe anything. Well, almost anything. If you told him Abraham Lincoln was standing right behind him riding a unicorn he might be like 'Wha?' But you get the picture. Anything was better than another night in that alley.

Cinder mounted her bike, slipping her shades back on her nose. "You ready, Baby Brother?"

Warm butterflies rose in his stomach at the affectionate nickname, but he looked down at his boots passively. "How can I be sure you're my sister?"

"Our eyes should be proof enough." She placed a comforting hand on his shoulder, adjusting her sunglasses to look him in the eyes again. Her right eye was watery blue and slitted, and her right was emerald green with a split pupil. Just like his, apart from the color.

Orphenn never believed himself worthy of anything, let alone a family and a nickname.

"Don't worry yourself, Orphenn." Cinder soothed. "Nobody's normal where we're going."

"Promise?"

"Promise."

He hopped on the bike seat behind her, still feeling anxious. Then he recalled the antics of earlier that morning, when he had captured that criminal. He had saved a life today.

He was filled with a new hope as Cinder revved the engine. "There's so much to do!" She enthused. "You have to meet Celina and Sven, and-oh! I hear his *daughter* is about your age now." She elbowed him playfully.

He laughed bashfully. "Who's Sven?"

"You'll see when we get there-he can help you remember."

There was a pause before Orphenn said, "Cinder?"

"Yeah?" She flipped up the kickstand with her heel.

"Um...Yeah, just wondering...What is Aleida?"

"Home."

That's all the answer he needed.

The bike surged forward in a flash, and was gone.

Orphenn could've sworn he saw a rush of space and stars like a Disneyland tunnel ride, but it was gone in a wink.

And in the next instant they were surrounded by white light. It temporarily blinded him, and Orphenn hid his face in Cinder's leather-strapped back. Now he understood why she wore the shades.

He felt suddenly shaky and nauseous, like he'd been set on tumble dry. His breath came in wavered gasps until he was able to calm himself and say, "Where are we?"

"Denoras."

Orphenn squinted, his sight coming back to him.

Denoras was magnificent. Still, as he looked about, everything was white...A white city. The architecture was the most unique Orphenn had ever seen. There

were arches and statues everywhere, and each building looked as if it was carved from swirling marble or granite-almost fragile in its beauty.

The Palace itself was massive, and tall, with many towers atop it in random placement. They could be seen from the outer gates of the capital city. The largest and tallest was a clock tower soared above the others, with majesty that stood out from the rest.

Cinder drove her vehicle slowly (with a much disoriented Orphenn clung to her waist) along the smooth cobblestone-like pavement into the White Square, the heart of Denoras. There was a tremendous monument of white marble in the center of the plaza. Orphenn couldn't quite tell what it was at first, but gasped as they came closer to it. It was a statue depicting two women, with mighty wings blooming from their shoulders, and a fountain spurting at their feet.

He was again reminded of his nightly dreams. But neither this nor the amazing attention to detail that must have gone into creating this work of art was what shocked him-what made his jaw fall open was that the two figures had the same sculpted face-twins, that looked exactly like Cinder.

Orphenn nearly inquired about it, but was interrupted before he had the chance.

"No vehicles beyond this point, ma'am."

Orphenn turned his eyes up to the guard, who was curiously eyeing Cinder's ride. She switched off the engine and come to a halt. The guard's armor almost blended in with all the whiteness around him. Then Orphenn realized there were guards like this one at every corner in the square, hardly noticeable.

The guard lifted the brim of his too big headgear to peer down at the biker and the orphan. "I'll have to ask you for some identification."

Sam popped into Orphenn's head at the sight of this official. In fact, he looked a lot like Sam.

Cinder only chuckled at the guard's request. This seemed to catch the attention of another nearby guard, who came to stand beside the first. "What's goin' on over here? Who's this?" He gave the two on the bike a quizzical look.

"Got ourselves some *criminals*, sir." Warned the apparent neophyte, reaching for his firearm.

"Oh, you're such a drama queen." Sighed the second man, who was obviously much older and more experienced. "We'll just need some proof of ID before entering the palace."

Cinder turned her face to the veteran, tipping her shades down to show her eyes. "How's it goin', Pliley?" She nodded.

Officer Pliley started, nearly jumping. "Lady Cinder!" He jerked to glare menacingly at the younger officer. He jumped too.

"Ah!" The newbie exclaimed, "Lady Cinder! *The Cinder! The Mysterious Drifter! The Renegade Angel!* I've wanted to meet you all my life!" He was bouncing on his heels now. "You're in textbooks! You're famous, you-"

"That's enough, Hollei." Pliley chastised. He shook his head. "Rookie."

Hollei complied, busying himself by glancing at the angel monument, then at Cinder, then back at the monument, then at Cinder again, over and over, all with a goofy smile plastered to his face.

Pliley rolled his eyes at the rookie, then turned again to Cinder. "You haven't been home over three years now, Your Grace. What brings you back?" He asked casually.

"Family business." She answered, tilting her head toward Orphenn on the seat behind her, who was still clutching her zipper-covered jacket and wondering why they all treated her with such reverence.

The guards went dumbstruck at the word 'family.'

"Go right ahead." Hollei gestured, nonplussed.

Cinder advanced, parking her bike at the foot of the palace's wide entry stairs. "Sorry about that. Normally we Enma only have to show our eyes to receive unquestioned entry." She apologized, helping Orphenn off the seat. He limped up the steps alongside his sister, without even enough energy to ask what she was talking about.

"Who's the kid?" Hollei asked, once Cinder and Orphenn were through the great columned entrance.

"I don't know." Pliley admitted.

"He was awful quiet, wasn't he?"

"I suppose...There's been a lot to take in."

Orphenn's irregular footsteps echoed through the alabaster halls. The white columns were high and magnificent, the interior just as breathtaking as the outside of the palace, everything crafted from polished snow-white marble.

"You doing okay?" Cinder glanced back over her shoulder, her own steps jingling throughout the hall. "That trip must have done a number on you."

"I think I'll be fine." He rasped, flattered by her concern. The idea of being cared about was still new to him.

"Cinder!" A voice called from down another corridor.

Cinder's boots stopped, as did Orphenn's. He stayed closely beside her. He gazed at the huge gray and white dome overhead, so big it was like a second sky, and listened to the rapidly approaching footfalls.

Cinder knew she was coming before her voice ever broke the silence, just as she knew Cinder had returned before she ever climbed up the palace steps.

"Celina." Cinder muttered, holding her arms open for the rushing woman in white who was about to be wrapped in them. They embraced, rocking back and fourth like a pendulum.

Celina was dressed all in white-billowing white robes of silk and sparkling linen, and a ribbon that held her raven hair, even longer than Cinder's, from her

face in a large ponytail. She also wore a silver coronet, with a single white jewel embedded in the band where it rested on her forehead; Orphenn came to infer that she had important social standing. Her face, like the two women in the monument, was a mirror image of Cinder. Her eyes were like theirs as well. One was the natural blue, and the other rusty brown.

Orphenn chastised himself for only just realizing that the women in the monument were facsimiles of the twins hugging each other right in front of him. And then once again for realizing that also like Cinder, Celina was his sister too.

It was nearly evening, and the sunlight shone bright through the wide windows, making the hall glisten, just as the twins' smiling eyes did when they pulled away from their embrace.

Cinder lightly winked in Orphenn's direction, and Celina looked to see what she was motioning to. At the sight of Orphenn, she gave a loving smile. Then her face seemed to change slightly. She ran to her long lost brother and clasped his hands in hers. She kissed his fingers and held him in her arms. "Keiran. You've grown."

Orphenn hugged her back. "So I've heard." His throat felt like sandpaper.

He felt an instant bond with Celina, just as he had with Cinder.

"He goes by Orphenn." Cinder stated.

"Orphenn!" Celina held him at arm's length. She looked at him as if she was about to tell him how horrible that name was, but thought better of it when she saw the innocence in his face. "Orphenn, then."

"I-I've lost my memory....She says..." He wheezed.

Cinder touched his shoulder. Celina touched his cheek. "I know." She sympathized.

"Do you think....That you could tell me about everything I've forgotten?" He looked at them both with pleading eyes, still in a state of disbelief. He'd never seen a place so beautiful, seen faces so beautiful as his sisters' whom he already loved deeply-a beautiful feeling he never thought he could feel.

"There isn't much we could tell you about what *you* remember." Said Celina.

"But we can tell you everything we know until Sven arrives." Cinder offered.

"But we will tell you nothing until you've had a bath."

"And a change of clothes."

"And a haircut. It's very unruly."

"And some medication. You look peaked."

"And some food. You're a bit thin."

Orphenn smiled, for the first time since...He couldn't even remember.

Orphenn felt wonderful. He was clean, and for once he didn't smell like an orphanage or a garbage can. Or a feral cat for that matter. Celina lent him a fresh linen bathrobe until his tailored jumpsuit was completed. His hair had been nicely styled-long in the front, short and spiked in the back, with a long rattail

trailing down his back. He was given effective herbs to help his aching head and bones (which were pretty badly battered by his trip through dimensions) and as he sat by the hearth in a cushy wingback chair, he was served a decadent meal by a pair of white-aproned chamber maids.

Celina sat in another chair across from him, Cinder in another beside him.

"How are you feeling?" One of the maids asked politely.

"Lovely," He replied with his mouth full.

"Your suit should be ready by morning," said the other maid, "pity, though. That bathrobe does wonders for you." She winked.

Orphenn swallowed, and cleared his throat, blushing. "I've never felt so pampered." He said. "Your work ethic is definitely efficient."

"Thank you, Young Prince." They said in complete unison with a low curtsy, before hopping out the door, giggling the whole way down the hall.

Celina grinned widely. "You're quite the charmer aren't you?"

Cinder smiled too. "Flirt."

He ignored their mocking and asked, "Why did they call me 'Young Prince?'"

"Well, you are the brother of the Supreme Commander. What else are they supposed to call you?"

Um, how 'bout my name? He thought. "I don't know. Anything but *Young Prince*. I feel like Bambi. Wait..." He pondered. "*Supreme Commander?*"

Celina nodded. "That I am."

So that's what the coronet stood for. Celina was a political leader of some kind. Supreme Commander...Orphenn pondered. *Sounds so...Supreme.*

Orphenn tried to hold back an imminent yawn, but pitifully failed. No amount of herbal tea could hide his exhaustion. He rubbed his eyes.

"Let's get you to your chambers, little brother." Celina said, noticing his drooping eyelids. "Come with me."

"Huh?" He drowsily stood from the chair and began to walk with Celina down the white hallway.

"Goodnight, Cinder." Celina waved.

"Night." Cinder replied. And as Celina and Orphenn exited, she stared reminiscently into the fireplace.

"No, but wait..." Orphenn protested as they padded along the marble. "You were going to tell me..." –A yawn broke his sentence- "...About everything."

The two ascended a tall spiral staircase to the next floor, and trod across the wide open landing to Orphenn's new bedroom.

"All in good time, Keir-Orphenn." She stumbled, remembering his new name. "All in good time." She patted his shoulder, and unlatched the door, easing her brother inside.

The room was decorated fully in white, silver, and ashy gray, with accents of pastel blue. The four-poster bed looked incredibly appealing beneath the half-moon shaped stained glass window, set high on the wall.

"Sweet dreams." Celina wished, softly closing the door as she left.

She stood in the hallway for a moment, until she heard the muffled growl of a motorcycle engine.

Cinder's eyes watered from forgetting to blink while staring into the flames. Her eyelids fluttered as she rose from her seat, and strode out the door, down the hall, and into the night.

When she reached her bike and started it, she took a moment to reach into her jacket. From it, she produced a wooden-framed photo. It was a picture of the Avari family.

Mother and father, triplets, and one other son.

"I never knew you were so nostalgic." Celina noted. She had subtly come to the bottom step, beside Cinder's idling vehicle.

Cinder started, but only slightly. "Celina. I didn't see you there." She stuffed the frame quickly back into her jacket. Then she killed the engine to let Celina speak.

"Why are you leaving again?" She demanded. "For God's sake, you only just got here! Why don't you stay?"

Cinder stammered. "I just-I don't know. I guess it seems kind of like tradition now. Out there on the road, just me and the gang."

"Tradition? To visit for a bit then disappear for a few more years? What about Keiran? Won't you stay for him?" Celina looked ready to cry, even beg on her knees if she had to.

Cinder fiddled with her chains, then gave a relenting sigh. "Okay." She stepped off her bike. "For Keiran."

Celina smiled, teary-eyed.

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