

Chapter One

Queen of Tír na Angelus

Milara's footsteps echoed through the catacombs, competing with the sound of a hammer repeatedly striking a chisel. Despite the lack of light, she had no need for a torch or candle. The people of Tír na Angelus were well known as the race with the most magically powerful blood in all the world, and Milara, as their Queen, was the most powerful of all. With the majority of her magic focused on increasing her sight, her pale blue eyes glowed, allowing her to see the dark halls as if they were illuminated by the sun.

The only light in all of the catacombs came from the myriad of braziers and candles in the royal crypt where the sculptor she had brought all the way from Mag Findargate—and thus not of the blood of Angelus—worked.

The sculptor was so engrossed in his work, he didn't notice Milara enter the room. Five new statues filled the crypt, each a masterpiece that was the result of unparalleled skill and meticulous work. Even the Angelian people who could manipulate and shape stones with magic, could not compete with this man's crude hammer and chisel.

"By the gods, Tomen, they look great," Milara said.

The sculptor was so startled to find himself not alone, he fell off his ladder. Milara acted instinctively, and with a perfunctory wave of her hand, summoned a gale of wind. The magic wind rushed through the halls of the catacombs and exploded into the crypt, extinguishing the braziers and candles before it caught Tomen and lifted him back onto the ladder.

"Oh, thank you, Your Grace," Tomen said, breathing hard.

Milara snapped her fingers, and instantly, all the braziers and torches were reignited. "So

sorry for startling you, Tomen.”

The sculptor’s eyes were wide as they flitted from one fire to another. “No need, Your Grace. It was my fault.” He quickly slipped off the ladder and bowed to Milara. “I do hope the resemblances are accurate.”

“Accurate does not begin to describe them,” Milara said. It was, in fact, like the people the statues were based on were actually in the room with them. *Well, technically, mother’s body is really here*, she thought. The other four graves beneath the statues were empty.

On either side of her mother’s statue stood the identical handsome figures of her twin brothers, Marcus and William. The two of them had always been the desire of every girl in Tír na Angelus, with their strong jaws, perfect cheekbones, and gorgeous hair. Despite their identical appearances, their personalities could not have been more different. Marcus had been arrogant, but had hidden it well with his charming smile and personality. William, on the other hand, had been more stoic, bookish, and shy—*and yet both of them nearly destroyed our kingdom*, Milara thought bitterly. The madness of her eldest two brothers had cost her family dearly. It had destroyed her father, led to the banishment of Cain—her only remaining sibling—and was also the reason for the fourth statue in the crypt. That of her husband and the father of her son. Leander had been the love of her life, and it still pained her that he had never met his son, Alexander. He had died in the line of duty, defeating Marcus who had already wiped out three civilizations by that point.

The last of the five statues was the spitting image of Milara’s father, King Able. Like the other male graves, his was empty, not because there was no body to bury, but because he was still alive—*not for much longer, however*, Milara thought. The corruption of a dark curse had been slowly seeping the life from the old king over the last two-and-a-half years, and according

to the physicians, he would not live to see another season. Once he died, the only family Milara will have left, will be her son—and her brother Cain, but no one knew where he was these days. *Wherever he is, I hope he's found peace and happiness at least. He sure as death wasn't ever able to find it here in this city.*

“They’re perfect, Tomen. You truly are the most gifted sculptor in all the world,” Milara said.

“I am pleased that you like them, Your Grace,” the sculptor said, bowing his head.

“I like them so much, in fact, I think I would like to commission another statue from you. But, one a little cheerier and more—” Milara cut off as all her attention snapped into focus on the sudden flash of magic energy that emanated from somewhere near the center of the city. It had happened so fast and been so fleeting Milara wasn’t even sure why her instincts had caused her to focus on it. Seeing as ninety-eight percent of the population of Tír na Angelus could use magic, the city was always alive with spells and flares of power, she was so used to this that she barely registered it when someone used magic, but that aura had been different. It had been like a lightning bolt in a field of fireflies—and it had been near Alexander.

Concerned for her son, Milara said, “I’m sorry, Tomen, we’ll talk again later. I’m afraid something just came up that I can’t postpone.”

Without another word or waiting for the sculptor’s reply, she raced out of the room and down the tunnels of the catacombs, back into the city.

As concerned as Milara was, she did not use magic to sprint to the royal quarters. As queen, it was her duty not to worry her subjects unnecessarily, and there was a real chance that it was only her overprotective maternal instincts driving her. That massive magical aura had only lasted a second and had not returned since, and unless it did, she would act as if nothing bothered

her as she made her way down the golden streets, greeting her people with a warm smile and a nod. The sun had already set, and yet, Tír na Angelus seemed to glow brightly. The silver light of the full moon bounced off the pristine white marble of the elegant buildings—and in several cases, the people themselves. Tír na Angelus’s people, like the buildings, were beautiful and elegant and looked like statues of marble, ebony, or gold come alive.

“So sorry,” Milara said when a man wearing a dark cloak bumped into her.

“It was my fault, Your Grace. I wasn’t looking where I was going. So sorry,” the man said before he vanished down the street.

Milara had never even seen his face, but she suspected she knew him from somewhere; he seemed familiar to her. If it wasn’t for the fact that she was in a hurry to get home, she might have followed the man to ask him where she knew him from, but the only thing that occupied her mind at that moment was her son and the ever-increasing feeling of foreboding. *Something doesn’t feel right about this night. It’s as if my instincts are warning me that something bad is about to happen.*

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Eventually, Milara made her way to the Royal Quarters, a large square building encircled with a forest of golden pillars. She made her way up to the third floor and into her son’s room where her ancient adviser, the septim wizard Dante sat beside the young prince’s bed, looking at him with fondness and love.

“He’s asleep already? Usually this time of night he’s still bouncing off the walls,” Milara said, trying to sound casual.

“The lad has had an exhausting day,” Dante said, a fond smile on his face. His eyes of solid brown that looked like oak glittered as he took in Alexander’s sweet sleeping face. “Did

you feel it? The immensity of his aura?”

“What?” Milara said in astonishment. She looked at her son; it was as if she saw him for the first time. “That massive flash of magic energy, that was Alex?”

“It was,” Dante said. “He managed his first feat of pyroturgy today.”

“Fire magic, at his age?” Milara smiled as she brushed a dark brown lock of hair out of her son’s face. “Has anyone ever managed elemental magic with such power at his age before?”

“Only Marcus. He managed on the day he turned five, beating Alexander by a whole three months.” Dante looked up at the queen and their eyes met for a second as they shared their mutual concern. “But Marcus’s magic aura was nothing compared to what Alexander produce tonight. My Queen, your son will without a doubt be the most powerful Angelian since Angelus Primus himself.”

Milara bit her lip. If history was any indication, such power will come with great strife, she thought. Not to mention a threat of instability. It was Marcus’s immense power that had driven him mad.

As if the old wizard could read her mind, he said, “I don’t believe you have too much to worry about. He may have a power greater than Marcus, but he has *your* heart, Milara.”

“I hope your right,” Milara said. *The heart of every man in my family has fallen to darkness. Marcus slaughtered thousands, William sought to kill our father, my father abused and manipulated Cain to kill our brother, which led to even him falling to darkness and trying to destroy Tír na Angelus. I cannot bear to think about what I would do if Alexander turned out like them.*

Milara kissed her son on the forehead and whispered. “I will always protect you, even from yourself if I have to. But I will never let anything bad happen to you. I swear it on—”

Milara cut off as the entire city shook. The young prince's room was bathed in blinding light as a pillar of magic energy shot into the sky from somewhere in the north of Tír na Angelus. The column of energy screeched and wailed as something pulled it down, devouring it like a drain swallowing a bathtub's water. In a matter of seconds, the immense power vanished.

“Was that what I think it was? The power of one Angelian being passed to another?” Milara asked her adviser.

Dante's eyes were stretched wide in horror. It took him a second or two before he managed to say, “I believe so.” The wizard swallowed. “But not just any merger of power. Magic power of that scale is not common, not even here. Milara, I fear that was your father.”

“I need to go to him right away?” Milara said.

“By the Shepherd King, look,” Dante said, pointing out the window. In the distance, above the northern corner of the city, the shadow of a man with six wings blocked a portion of the moon. The winged figure exploded into motion with a sound like a thunderclap as he flew straight for the royal quarters.

Milara looked at her son in concern. The boy had slept through the commotion. “Protect my son, Dante!” She said and sprinted out the room to meet the challenger. She took the stairs three at a time, and when she reached the bottom, didn't even bother to open the doors. Instead, she magically blasted them off their hinges and into the courtyard beyond where the winged man was already waiting for her.

He had broad shoulders and bulky arms covered in scars. His head was shaven, and his pale blue eyes glowed as they fell on Milara.

A grin creased his face as he said, “Hello, sister.”

“Cain?” Milara said in astonishment. Since the last times she had seen her brother, he had

gained an ugly scar that ran from the back of his head, across the hole that had been his right ear, over his eye, and stopped on the bridge of his nose. “What are you doing here?”

“Isn’t it obvious. I’m here to kill you,” he said in a hiss.

CHAPTER TWO

The Dark Prince

The night was silent as the moon reached the center of the sky above the Zubhra Mountains that surrounded the mighty city of Tír na Angelus. Cain moved like mist through the trees down to the city he once called home. So many years had passed since he had walked those streets with his brothers. But tonight, was the night of his return.

His stomach felt like it was doing summersaults as he reached the giant white gate of the city. It glowed so brightly beneath the light of the full moon that anyone who didn't know of better would swear there was a fire inside the stone.

“Open the gates! Your Prince has returned!” Cain yelled at the top of his lungs.

“Who are you trying to fool, stranger?” a guard yelled from above the gate. “The Prince of Tír na Angelus is a boy of five.”

Cain removed his hood. “I am not Prince Alexander; I am Prince Cain!” he shouted.

“Prince Cain?” the guard shouted in astonishment. “We thought you abandoned our great city.”

“I’ve heard a rumor that my father has grown ill. I’ve come to say farewell before the Shepherd King takes him,” Cain said.

“Of course, My Prince!” the man vanished from sight, and a second later, the gate creaked and groaned as the guards opened it with their magic.

Cain glided forward, turning his body sideways to squeeze through the open gap. He paused for a second to take in the majesty of the city he had once called home before he set off down its streets. No matter how much he despised his family for the wrongs they had done to him, he had always missed Tír na Angelus. There was no city like it all the world. Everything about it was a testament to the greatness of the people of the blood of Angelus. From its golden streets to the buildings so tall they could scrape the bottoms of clouds. Only the flying city of Moondrake was said to have taller buildings.

Cain was still busy marveling at the grandiose city when suddenly there was a flash of magic energy so bright it turned night into day for a few seconds. *Shade is me, was that Milara?* he wondered. *No, it can't be. Not even my overachieving little sister could grow that much more powerful in two-and-a-half years. Unless I'm too late and father has already died.*

With a renewed vigor Cain maneuvered through the crowds of people still hustling and bustling about despite the late hour. He was in such a hurry he almost bowled over a woman with long ashen locks that fell to her waist.

“So sorry,” the woman said in a velvety voice he recognized with a flood of dread.

Cain quickly made sure the hood of his cloak hid his face. Of all the people he could have run in to, he had run into Milara—literally.

“It was my fault, Your Grace,” Cain said, forcing his voice down an octave or two. “I wasn’t looking where I was going. So sorry.”

Before she could inquire about him—his sister had always had an annoying habit of wanting to get to know the people of the city—he sprinted away and around a corner. The unfortunate run-in did at least confirm that the power he had sensed earlier was not Milara, and thus his father was likely still alive.

Good, Cain thought. He would have to visit whoever had produced that flash of energy as well, but not before he saw his father. The old king was at the northern point of the city where The Room of Final Days stood on the cliff that overlooked the ocean. Like the rest of the city's buildings, the ebony of the pillars and door-frames contrasted with the pure white marble walls laced with gold.

Cain hesitated for a second as he reached the front door of The Room of Final Days. He had not expected his sister to waste too many resources to guard a man who was already as good as dead, but he had not expected to find the building completely unattended. It was more than a little suspicious, but in the end, Cain just shrugged and sauntered through the front door. If it was a trap, he felt confident he could handle it.

There were no more guards inside the building than outside. The only person in sight was a beautiful woman carrying a jug out of the bedroom and placing it on the table in the middle of the entrance hall. She was tall and slender with an ample bosom and curvaceous hips. She wore a dress that fit tight to her body and was scandalously short. On her feet, she wore a pair of laced leather boots that reached up to her calves while leaving her toes exposed.

Cain prepared to attack before she could shout for help, but he paused as she looked at him with her piercing blue eyes, a shade that was nothing like the usual ice blue of Angelian eyes. In fact, it was a shade he had never seen before. They were so beautiful and otherworldly.

“You're not Angelian, are you?” Cain said to her, keeping a wary eye on the dagger the

woman had in her belt.

“No, I’m not,” she admitted.

“Where’s everyone else? The servants, the guards, surely it’s not just you here,” Cain said.

“Of course not, your father is here as well,” she said.

“You know who I am?” Cain said, summoning a flame into the palm of his hand.

“Of course, I do. It’s my job to know,” she said with a condescending smile.

“Who are you?” Cain asked.

“Melpomene. But you may call me, Mel.”

“Are you all right out there, my dear?” the King’s weak voice called from his room.

Cain looked in the direction of his father’s voice, and when he turned back, the woman named Mel was gone.

It doesn’t matter at this point. I’ve already won, Cain thought and walked into his father’s room.

King Able’s withered body had deteriorated immensely over the last two-and-a-half years. The corruption from the curse had reduced the once-mighty king to nothing more than bones wrapped in papery skin. He looked at Cain with dull eyes that had once been ice-blue but were now gray.

“Hello, father,” Cain said in a sneer.

“Cain? Is that you, son?” the king asked. Cain stepped closer and Able said, “It is you. My son. I have prayed that you would show up so I can make amends before my death. Thank goodness.”

“Thank goodness? No, *father.*” Cain forced as much malice into the last word as he

could manage. “Nothing *good* has brought me here. The exact opposite, in fact.”

The king looked puzzled, but before he could ask what his long-lost son meant by these words, Cain went on. “I’m here to take what is mine. You might have given her my crown, but the power of the royal line will be mine.”

“This is why you returned?” The King asked with obvious disappointment in his voice. “I am sorry, son. I have already willed them to your sister. When I die, they will pass to her.”

“Ah, but father,” Cain gave another crooked smile. “There are other ways for the power of an Angelian to be passed down. They can be willed, given, *or taken*. All three end in your death, so I won’t be picky. You can either give them to me freely, or I’ll take them.”

“Son, please, I—”

“Times up,” Cain interrupted his father and slammed the dagger into his heart. “By right of conquest, I claim your power. My power.”

King Able blew out his last breath, and with it also came the magic power of the royal line, reaching back all the way to Angelus Primus, the first king of Tír na Angelus.

The magic tore free of Able like a tornado of light that reached a hundred feet into the air. Pain wracked Cain’s body and he screamed as the power entered him and set his being on fire. It was as if his blood boiled and his bones shattered. He had known taking the power by force would be a more violent and painful process, after all, he had taken William’s power in this manner. But that had been worth it, and so too was this. After everything the old bastard had put him through, he deserved to die like this.

Cain had no idea how long it took for him to absorb all the power. It might have been a century or merely a few seconds, but when it was over, the pain that had filled him was abruptly replaced with ecstasy as he felt his new strength course through his body.

Let's test it out, Cain thought as he allowed the wings made from the crystalized disks of his magic aura to take physical form. Cain spread the six wings and shot into the sky. He focused all his new energy on increasing his speed and he flew through Tír na Angelus like a shooting star. He reached the courtyard before the royal quarters in seconds. As he landed, he left a deep gash in the ground.

Strange, Cain thought. *I remembered it being a lot more breath-taking. It seems, smaller, less impressive now.*

Cain stopped moving as he felt his sister's magic presence on the other side of the double front doors of the building. The doors exploded out and smashed themselves to bits behind him. Milara stepped into the courtyard and froze. As her eyes fell on Cain, her intimidating stare faltered, and a look of pure shock fell over her.

Cain couldn't help but smile. "Hello, sister," he said.

"Cain? What are you doing here?"

All right, time for a bit of theatricality, Cain thought before he said, "Isn't it obvious. I'm here to kill you."

"What?" Milara said, clearly unsettled by the casualness of his voice.

"I've already killed our father and taken what belongs to me. Now it's your turn."

"I don't understand. I thought we had made peace." Tears filled Milara's eyes. "Damn it Cain, he was our father. How could you?"

"He deserved it," Cain said. "Just because he was our father doesn't mean his sins are any less real. And how great his sins were. Greater than I ever knew." Cain stopped himself. His sister did not need to know everything. "The last time you and I fought, it was for the crown. You beat me that day, but I'm no longer as weak as I was then. I've been to places your

nightmares can't take you, learned magic you can't even dream of, and now, you are the only person who has the potential to get in my way. Though, just to be safe, I think I'll destroy the rest of Tír na Angelus once I'm done with you."

"You want to kill everyone in the city? Are you mad?" Milara looked disgusted, but still, she refused to attack him.

"Yes, if I kill them all and become the last of the blood of Angelus, no one will ever be able to stop me." Suddenly, something made perfect sense to him. "When I arrived in the city, I sensed someone use some pretty impressive power. Was that your son, what's his name, Allen? I'll definitely need to kill him once I'm done with you."

That did the trick. The blue of Milara's eyes flashed and seemed to transform into something between gas and liquid as she sent a gust of wind at her brother. Seeing this as a perfect opportunity to prove his power's superiority, Cain sent his own gust of wind at Milara. The two invisible walls of air collided, and one swallowed the other before it slammed into Milara and threw her back through the open entrance of the royal quarters. Using his magic to augment his speed, Cain raced to the building and barely managed to stop in time as a blast of flames in the form of a snake shot out at him. The flaming serpent snapped and missed. Cain brought his two palms together in front of his chest and stopped when they were a few inches apart. A wobbly sphere of water formed between the palms of his hands. He thrust it forward, and the water dispersed into a round, hollow sphere he used to cage the fiery snake his sister was controlling from the shadows. Cain closed his left hand into a fist, and the water sphere closed around the snake. Smoke and steam filled the air as the two spells exploded.

Seconds later, the thick veil of steam parted and Milara charged through the hallway vaporized water, head first with both arms stretched out behind her. Water collected in her

trailing hands and froze solid to form two stalactites. She reached Cain and slashed at him with her ice daggers.

Cain evaded every move his sister made. He ducked underneath a stabbing thrust then formed the rune signs of dhaesí magic with his fingers, pressed the fingers to his throat and let go of a banshee scream that stunned Milara for a moment and shattered her ice daggers. With his sister stunned by the scream, Cain flicked his wrist and a stone pillar shot from the ground, hitting Milara with a loud thud and crack as her ribs broke. Cain stepped forward and struck the rock pillar with his fist, sending his magic energy into the stone and causing it to blast apart. The explosion flung Milara through the air and against a nearby wall.

“Those little tricks might have been impressive when we were children, sister, but you’re nowhere close to me now,” Cain said. He came to stand over Milara and saw she was unconscious. *Time to end it.*

Cain held out his hand, palm open to Milara. He concentrated and allowed his magic energy to flow out of him and into his hand where it took the form of a dark blue substance, somewhere between liquid and lightning. The smell of ozone filled the air and Cain shaped the magic energy into a pentacle key, the magic of the septim wizards and their voynich ancestors.

“Now, I will be the last and most powerful being in all of Anarchos.”

“Mom!” The scream came from the door to the royal quarters.

CHAPTER THREE

Royal Adviser

“I can do it, I know I can,” Alexander said. He breathed hard as he threw his hands to his sides in an attempt to physically prompt the magic to take form, but there was nothing.

“Come now, Alexander. You’ve been at this for the entire day without stopping to eat or rest. I’m begging you, please stop,” Dante pleaded with the young prince. “As I’ve told you repeatedly, most Angelians only have enough powers to produce magic once they reached puberty, even then, they don’t train in the use of magic until they reach thaumaturgic maturity at twenty-one.”

“I can do this, Dante. You just wait and see, I’ll show you,” Alexander said through gritted teeth.

“Alex, if you persist with this you could hurt yourself or even damage your magic potential. If you do that, your mother will have me flayed,” Dante said.

“Oh, please, Dante. Mother needs her *great adviser* too much,” Alexander said. “That, and you’re the only man in the world with all that random information in your head.”

“Now boy, at least speak to me with a speck of respect,” Dante said frowning.

Alexander did not answer. He continued to flail his arms about as he tried to get the magic to work. For a second it was like his ice eyes melted, became smoke, and then froze again. The next moment power exploded from the boy and Dante had to shield his eyes from the incandescence of the young prince’s aura. An arc of yellow fire shot from both his hands and slammed into a nearby wall where it melted the sword that had been on display there.

Alexander’s seemingly endless aura of magic power vanished, and he smirked at Dante as he said, “Told you.” The words barely left his lips when he fainted.

Dante swooped in and caught the prince before he hit the ground. He stared at the boy, affection and admiration vying for dominance in his heart. Dante had been in his fair share of magic battles against some of the most powerful beings in all of Anarchos, he had trained countless people in magic, but never had he encountered such a power. The small prince held inside him power so vast it had seemed without limit.

The mental and physical strain of his first-ever feat of magic had taken everything out of Alexander though. He was out cold, and even if he were awake, the wizard suspected his little body wouldn’t be able to move.

Dante stood up with the sleeping boy in his arms and strode out of the room as he whispered, “Time for bed, my little miracle.”

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After Dante had tucked Alexander into bed, he had taken a seat next to him, and watched him as he slept.

“He’s asleep already? Usually this time of night he’s still bouncing off the walls,” Queen Milara said as she entered the room.

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