

The Dark Flame Series

BONUS CHAPTER

A Look Into the Past: *Ren's Secrets*

The doors to his father's study rattled as they slammed closed behind the tall and broad body of Taryn Thepyra. Damieren stood utterly still, his hands clasped behind his back and jaw clenched so tightly that the muscles quivered. Their eyes met within an instant and Damieren didn't flinch when his father's burly fist closed around the lapels of his jacket and pulled him forward.

"I should skin you alive, you slimy little bastard." Taryn growled.

Damieren merely peered at the man he knew to be his father, seeing nothing of himself in the king's face—there was nothing, but evil in those hideous black eyes of his. "Do it. Do it and see if it sates your bloodlust for the evening. Here," he jerked out of Taryn's grip, just enough to grab the knife that Damieren always wore at his side. He withdrew the blade, pressing it to his own throat instantly. "I'll do it for you."

Taryn grabbed the young male's wrist, twisting it until the knife clattered to the floor. Damieren squared his chest and shoved at the male before him—his king went stumbling, but did not fall. He only charged forward and wrapped his hand around Damieren's throat.

"It's not worth the effort to kill you, Damieren. It's not worth the time. You and your mother are only useful for the same things, you know?" He breathed and the smell of alcohol seemed to surround them both. Damieren cringed, but did not falter, did not rid himself of the vicious grin that had already started to form on his face. "Both of you, hiding in the shadows to fuck your whores. Both of you, staring at me with looks that are dripping with hatred while you drink my wine and lay down with your harlots in the beds that I provide—"

There was a ringing in Damieren's ears, his pulse quickening under Taryn's thumb that was tightly pressed into his neck. He sneered and felt himself caving into the unfurling that

was happening inside of him, and he pushed. Not with his hands, but with the hands of the dark beast that lurked in his Core.

The Dark Bringer burst from his body—it's talons sweeping and clawing at the king that was now trying to escape. But it was no use; though Taryn was fast and strong, the Dark-Bringer was too quick and merciless to even begin to grant the pitiful king an escape.

"You can call me every name that you like, Taryn." Damieren hissed, the darkness throwing the king into the wall and sending the pictures and tapestries clattering to the ground. "You can call me a bastard, you can call me a bitch, you can call me a whore." Another slam of the broad body sent a webbed crack up the wall that Taryn was pressed against, Damieren's shadows now curling around his throat.

"But when it comes to my mother," *slam*, "when it comes to Carys," *slash*. Blood dripped from the cheek of the king, spilling out onto the gaudy, silver-embroidered jacket Taryn wore. Damieren took another step forward, assessing the male who was pinned to the wall by the shadows of the angry—the spirits of the fallen. "I don't even want to see you look at them the wrong way. Do you understand?"

Taryn sneered as the darkness uncurled itself from around his throat—allowing him just enough air to speak. "Carys Elletara—" Before the king could even finish the sentence that Damieren was sure to be another slight in his lover's name, the prince lashed out once again. Those talon-like shadows ripping at and hurling Taryn across the room. The male landed on the floor with a thud that seemingly shook the whole manor.

The doors to the study burst open again and upon seeing Carys peering up between the shoulders of his mother and Brynnick's father, Ren harnessed his shadows, his eyes moving to where the others were gaping.

Taryn moaned against the stone under his head as blood pooled between the floor and his face, spilling from a large, gaping wound from his forehead to the corner of his mouth. No one bothered to help their king to his feet, no one bothered to rush to his side to check and see if he was okay. Damieren strode forward, straightening the cobalt-colored jacket he wore before he kissed his mother's cheek and grabbed Carys's hand and began guiding her, wide-eyed and pale, to her room.

“What was that?” Carys breathed, her eyes fixed on him as he closed the door and stalked towards the sitting area, his boots thudding loudly against the floors after he removed them. He stopped short as his eyes moved from the candles sitting on the table, their flames flickering and bobbing against his heavy breaths, and then to her.

“I have to tell you something.” He stated. Carys startled at the tears in Damieren’s eyes, her brow furrowing as she walked towards him, hands outstretched, and took his face into her hands. “I have to tell you something and I don’t want you to be mad at me for keeping it from you. I... I just—” Carys nodded, her hands dropping to his own as she tugged him towards the washroom. He could feel the gentle caress of her heat against his skin as she removed his clothes.

A bath was already drawn for her, which explained why she was only wearing her robe when everyone came bursting into his father’s study. Ren glanced back at her and then turned fully, watching as she slid the robe from her shoulders and let the garment cascade to the floor into a blue pile of silk. They didn’t speak—hadn’t needed to at that moment. It wasn’t until they were both fully immersed in the decadent heat of the tub and up to their shoulders in the bubbles that Ren allowed himself to speak.

“Taryn isn’t my real father.” He sighed.

From the place where Carys rested between his legs, she stilled and then turned herself just enough so that she could see his face, could see the guilt and conviction in his eyes. “Is that a bad thing?” She asked. “You hate him.”

“No, it’s not. But... he’s the only father-figure I’ve ever known.”

Carys let out a sigh, her hand smoothing over her arm as she washed. Of anyone he knew, Carys would understand that. Her mother was horrible, but Carys still strived for her mother’s approval—for a crumb of a cection or the slightest praise. “Who is he, then? Your real father.” Damieren shook his head, eyes dropping to watch as Carys moved her washcloth over her breasts. “I don’t know. All my mother told me was that I didn’t need to worry about passing any sort of evil onto my children—if I had them. She said that Taryn’s bloodline was not my burden to bare.” She passed the cloth over her leg—suds dripping from her calf from where it

was propped on the rim. “When I asked her who he was, all she told me was that she would tell me when the time was right.”

“When did she tell you this?” Carys asked.

He shrugged, taking a single coiled lock of her hair and began mindlessly twirling it between his fingers. “Last month. When I told her about... us.” He hesitated, eyes lifting to look at her for some sort of reaction.

“Us?” She echoed.

“She wanted to know why you were coming here without being called to court.” He stated. “I just told her that you and I were having a little bit of fun with each other.”

The look on Carys’s face changed slightly, her hands clenching around the washcloth. The water suddenly felt a few degrees warmer—or maybe it had been Ren’s imagination—his embarrassment.

“The kind of fun that would make you both start discussing the possibility of children?” Carys grumbled.

“I do believe that that’s a possibility when you have sex with someone, Care.” Ren stated smartly, giving her a pointed look that made Carys make a move to pull away from him, but his arm slid around her waist and pulled her back to him. “Don’t run away, it was just a joke.” He chuckled.

Carys pinched the front of his arm that was pressed against her belly, earning a jolt and another laugh from him. She relaxed again, leaning back into the hardness of his chest as he resumed the twirling of her hair that he still held between his fingers. “Do you think that Taryn knows?” She asked, her voice barely over a whisper.

“I asked Brynnick’s father. He’s closest to Taryn and he told me that Taryn has always been curious, but never sure. I’m sure he’d never admit to it either—that my mother was even capable of deceiving him. It would make him seem less-than in the eyes of those around us.”

“Your mother has always deserved so much better. So have you.” Carys sighed, the look in her eyes causing a sharp pain in Ren’s chest.

He merely pulled her closer, uncurling his finger from her lock of hair and placing his hand on her lower stomach. Carys flinched in surprise, cutting her eyes at him when she felt

the hardness that was now pressing into her back. “As for the thing you saw...” His fingers moved in idle circles directly above the place in her body that was coiling tightly—heat blooming along her cheeks at the feeling of his breath rolling against her pointed ear.

“I’m going to take a wild guess and say that what I saw in that room was your power and that it is also a secret?” She inquired. Ren angled his head, his lips brushing across her shoulder as he hummed in agreement. “Are you alright?”

“Why wouldn’t I be alright?”

Carys glanced at him, her eyes both knowing and telling that things, very much, were not alright. Ren was not alright. And he hadn’t been for a while. She seemingly held her breath as her fingers came up to his chest and traced over the jagged skin just above his heart. Ren closed his eyes and grit his teeth to bite back the sob at the back of his throat.

“He deserves to burn for what he’s done to all of you.” She spoke. Finally. And her words were the start of his unraveling.