

Raw Wounds

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Summary

The first installment of a series of Cain/Roslin fics that operate under the supposition that Cain is leading the fleet rather than Addama. They will be part of a general arc, but won't necessarily be posted in chronological order.

Laura had no idea what the hell Admiral Cain could be wanting from her at this particular moment. She had no interest in knowing, either. While she had been forced to admit that Cain occasionally surprised her with occasional glimpses of depth, her style was raw, quick on the trigger, ruthless, and they had locked horns on more than one occasion. Laura was not in the frame of mind for that sort of interaction. All Laura wanted tonight was to be left the hell alone with a book, a blanket, and a cup of something hot to drink. She'd tried to brush Cain off until morning, but the woman was infuriatingly insistent.

Her security detail stood at attention in the corridor as she knocked on the Admiral's door.

Cain opened the door. "Madam President," she greeted her with a deferential nod. "I hope you don't mind leaving the brute squad outside."

Laura arranged her face into what she hoped was a polite smile. "Of course." She nodded toward the men. "At ease, gentlemen." She stepped inside, walked over to the table and sat down, crossing her legs, and looking expectantly at Cain, who seemed herself to be waiting for something.

"So?" she finally asked. "What's so damned important? If you're looking to discuss our decision to let that ship go, I'm not interested in the conversation."

"Hardly," Cain chuckled dryly. "We can argue about that tomorrow." She walked over to a tall cabinet and pulled out a bottle and two short glasses. She walked back to the table and sat next to her. She was economical in her movements, looking steadily at Laura as she poured two glasses of amber liquid that smelled like-

"Scotch," Cain supplied helpfully. "Real stuff too, not that crap that Tigh brews in his closet."

Laura raised an eyebrow, giving her a mildly surprised look over the top of her glasses. "I won't ask how you came by it."

Cain smirked. "Honestly, I promise."

Laura waved dismissively and sipped from the glass. She didn't really care where it came from. The drink was real, alright. It left a slight burn on her lips, but it didn't make her feel as though her insides were being dissolved, the way most bootleg hooch did. And it was strong. "So, then?"

Cain raised her glass. "Well, I thought you could use a stiff drink and some company this evening," she said frankly.

Laura peered curiously at her. "Is that right?" She had to admit, it beat a cup of tea.

"That's right."

"So this is personal?"

"I guess you could say that."

Laura scoffed quietly. "I thought we were clear on our relationship." She couldn't deny that Cain had a kind of toughness that she could appreciate in the abstract, but when Laura found herself attracted to women, that tended not to be her type. She liked softer, more demure women who would let her take charge.

Of course, she also couldn't deny that after accidentally interrupting one of the Admiral's workouts and noticing those muscular shoulders of hers, she may have half-intentionally tried to interrupt her workouts once or twice more.

Cain smiled. "Good guess, but that's not it either."

Helena Cain had, on a few occasions earlier in their acquaintance, been clearly engaging in some macho preening to capture Laura's attention, and in the interest of keeping things simple, Laura had calmly and frankly dumped a bucket of cold water on whatever budding notions Cain might have had about wooing her. Cain took it gracefully and everyone had moved on, pretending that nobody had embarrassed themselves and nothing had happened.

"What, then?"

Cain took a breath. "You know, I'm sure, what I lost, to the Cylons. Everyone does."

Laura nodded, and they drank during the ensuing pause.

"My sister was my best friend. She was also... my only friend."

Laura frowned, but said nothing.

"Yeah. Don't believe what you hear about how I'm such a hard-ass because of losing my sister," Cain said with a wry smile. "Nobody liked me before that either."

Laura chuckled, but didn't say anything.

"But," Cain went on, "it's probably why I'm... selective... about who I allow into my inner circle."

Laura sipped her drink. "If you don't love someone, then it doesn't hurt when you lose them, right?" she challenged.

"Right. No vulnerabilities."

Laura shook her head. She still didn't understand why Cain had been so insistent that she come here for a drink or what was so important about this conversation. "Safe, I suppose," she acknowledged, "but lonely. And..." she added, swirling a bit of the drink around in her mouth before finishing, "a species of weakness. Insidious one, too, because it looks like strength."

Cain's jaw tightened and Laura instantly regretted her words.

"I'm sorry, that was... Inappropriate of me."

Cain shook her head. "No, it's fine. You're not exactly wrong, you know. I just raise the bar so high, nobody gets in. It works pretty well, actually."

Laura shifted. "Nobody? Not even lovers? Partners?"

Cain shook her head. "No, not much to speak of there."

Laura didn't believe her. Cain wasn't an unattractive woman; objectively speaking, one could appreciate her large, dark eyes and strong features, and she was absurdly fit. "Come on, there's been nobody?"

"Oh," Cain chuckled bitterly, "there have been a few nobodies.". She paused, seeming uncharacteristically awkward for a moment. "Laura ... What were your sisters like?"

Laura peered at her, confused by the sudden subject change. Curiouser and curiouser, she thought, taking a moment to formulate her answer. "One was bright and gifted and would have been a writer if she'd had more time. She would have been a great mother, I think. The other was a little depressed... Sort of a lost soul, but still so very funny and smart. So much curiosity about the world. We grew up close, got in trouble together, you know... I was looking forward to being an aunt..." She broke off, shaking her head. Her eyes were feeling dangerously warm and a bit glassy. She didn't want to go to pieces around Cain; she didn't seem like she'd have patience for it. "I'm sorry... We've all lost someone, right?" trying to dismiss her own sadness and move the conversation along.

Cain nodded and topped Laura's glass off. "Yes. But it's entirely appropriate for you to talk about it. I asked."

Laura continued sipping at the glass, feeling the warmth creep from her stomach into the rest of her. "Why?" she finally wondered out loud.

"Because," Cain answered. "I know what today is. And I know I'm not going to turn into a shrinking violet if the president needs to remember her family today."

Laura met her level gaze for a moment, then closed her eyes, overcome with... what? Grief, yes, but also a sense of relief at being given permission to take a moment to grieve. Today was the anniversary of losing her family to a drunk driver, a fact that she'd discussed with nobody, mostly out of some noble desire to maintain what little morale there was to be had around here. She wondered how much homework Cain had had to do to find that information out.

She wiped a tear from the corner of one eye and looked at the woman sitting next to her. She surely didn't look like she was in danger of losing spirit; Cain had once or twice referred to herself as a razor, but just now Laura was struck by the thought that she seemed more like a torch, incandescent and impervious to any wind or weather that would seek to extinguish her.

"Thanks," Laura sniffled, gathering her composure. "Why didn't you tell me that's what this was about?"

Cain, looking pleased with herself, answered, "Because you wouldn't have come."

Laura laughed too long and too hard at the truth of that. Cain knew. Good Gods, but she knew.

They drank and talked for the next two hours. Laura sometimes laughed, sometimes wept, remembering family camping trips, the hydrangeas and tomatoes in her mother's garden, the time her sister tried to cut her own hair. She talked about her poor father's chagrin at catching one of her sisters in the closet with a boy they knew when they were young teenagers, and his befuddlement at catching Laura herself a week later in the same closet with a girl: "Well, at least you won't get pregnant," he'd sighed with resignation, and stalked away without shutting the door.

Helena Cain proved to be far more human than anyone gave her credit for, including Laura herself. She talked about a lifetime of laying responsibility for humanity's fate on her own shoulders, and wryly remarked that this made her a lot of fun at parties. How most of the potential lovers she saw as equals were usually too intimidated to date her, how she'd resigned herself to a life of sacrifice instead of building a family of her own, how she'd have liked to danced more when she was at the academy but it had been hard to find a partner. How she used to love boats, and climbing trees, and rainstorms.

Laura suddenly saw the fragility that all of those spikes were protecting, how isolated it had made her to project so much strength. And yet, it was Helena Cain who understood Laura's grief, and more than that, had taken it upon herself to make a space for her to acknowledge it, to remember it... to be human.

Laura looked at the time, and then back at Helena Cain; she was tired, bleary, feeling wrung out, but also feeling a good deal lighter than when she'd walked into this room. "I ought to go," she sighed with more than a little regret. She stood up.

Her drinking partner stood and smiled. "If you have to."

"I do. But... Thanks. Really. You have no idea how much this meant."

"Well, you know, I expect something in return."

Laura refrained from rolling her eyes. "What's that, exactly?"

Cain took a small scrap of paper and scribbled something on it, then stuffed it into Laura's hand. Laura opened it and saw a date written on it. "What's this?"

"The date that I'll need you to insistently summon me to your quarters and break out a bottle of booze. And you are not to take no for an answer."

A pact. A promise to relieve one another of the loneliness of command, at least two days out of the year.

Laura smiled with relief, half laughing at herself for expecting something nefarious. Impulsively, perhaps recklessly, she put her arms around Helena, and embraced her tightly. Helena's arms went around Laura's waist and she found herself feeling a stir in her chest at

how strong they were, how firm her body was. "Done deal," she sighed over Helena's shoulder.

But then she didn't let go. She held on, because it felt good to hold onto someone solid who wanted to hold her back. She held on, because strange as it was, Cain (Helena, she reminded herself -- would she ever stop thinking of her as Cain?) had made her feel understood, cared for. The warmth of it welled up in her stomach and made her tighten the embrace before she realized, with a slight flush in her cheeks, what she was doing.

She pulled back enough to see the admiral's face, looking at her with a softness she hadn't seen in it before. We both need comfort, we're both just human, she thought.

And, on another slightly reckless impulse, she rocked up onto her toes, and lightly kissed her on the lips, something lighter than a butterfly wing, just enough to connect for a moment. Just enough to be surprised by how soft her lips were, such a contrast to hard strength of her body. Laura's eyes closed, and she stopped thinking. Being held, kissing someone again, it was... pleasant. It didn't need to be more than that. It could just be a moment. It could just be a quiet hello, a soft thank you, a small secret passed between them, small enough to fit in a pocket or the palm of one's hand.

But Helena's strong arms drew her tighter. Her mouth pressed harder against Laura's. Her harmless little kiss was turning electric, their lips parting, tongues tasting each other's mouths, teeth nipping each other's lips, hands roaming and grasping handfuls of each other's clothes and hair. Laura felt her whole body waking up, suddenly wanting to be closer to Helena's. She moaned softly into Helena's mouth at the thought of being wound up in her muscular limbs and feeling her skin. Helena moaned back.

Laura pulled back and looked at her, how she was smoldering. She looks as hungry as I feel, she thought.

"Sure you can't stay?" Helena asked breathlessly.

Laura paused for a moment, seriously contemplating it. She wanted to, or at least, a particular part of her did. But if this was going to happen, a liaison between the goddamned president and one of the top admirals in the fleet, it damn well wasn't going to happen like this. She took a breath. "Maybe next time."

Helena's eyebrow lifted. "Next time?" She didn't let go of Laura's waist.

Laura nodded slowly. "Next time." She couldn't help feeling amused at the look on Helena's face as she tried to process what that meant. She ran a hand over Helena's hair. "I'm not saying I don't want to do this. I'm just saying that I'm not interested in being another nobody."

"You couldn't if you tried," Helena answered fiercely.

Laura summoned all her willpower, gave her best breezy smile, and sighed, "Well, we'll see, won't we?" She kissed Helena again, savoring it for longer than she probably should have if she was really intent on leaving.

But Helena let her go, if reluctantly, promising that they would indeed see.

Laura woke from her dreams that night, blushing furiously. They featured quite a lot of Helena Cain.

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