

102 The Girl In The Mirror

Eve 1

I winced as Jules pressed into a tender spot on my shoulder.

"Too much?" she asked, her tone full of concern.

I rotated my arm, letting the knots in my muscles painfully unravel. "It's fine," I lied.

"You do know you can go to the spa," Jules offered. "I'll escort you and stay there, just in case."

"Jules," I cut her off softly. "I'm okay. It's all part of it. I'll heal."

She was silent as she began kneading my arm, alternating between deep strokes and lighter ones. I gritted my teeth as she continued, unwilling to let out another sound.

As brutal as he thought he was with his training, he didn't know the whole truth. My pain tolerance was something I could actually be proud of. If not for that, I might have slammed my head into the concrete wall of my cell years ago, just to put myself out of my misery.

She brushed my hair away from my neck, and I

She brushed my hair away from my neck, and I felt her stiffen. "You... have a bruise... here," she muttered, her voice shaky.

Bruise? Realization dawned on me as the memory of Hades' mouth there flashed in my mind. "It's... nothing," I said, my face turning scarlet. For a moment, she did not move or speak, then she seemed to recover. I had a feeling she knew. What else would the bruise be if not a hickey? She was old enough to understand.

"I'm surprised you're still standing," Jules chuckled as she moved to my other shoulder. I bit my bottom lip to stop myself from crying out. "His Highness is—"

"A tyrant?" Or more like an egotistical bully. 1

I wasn't bitter because he refused to ease up on me; I was furious at the things he said as he flung me around like a rag doll. He could have at least been respectable. After one session with him, I already missed Kael as my trainer. I missed his humor, while Hades' left much to be desired.

Hades' humor was as sharp as his claws—biting and deliberately insulting. He wielded it like a weapon, cutting into me with precision. Each jab was delivered with a smirk so smug it made my

Hades' humor was as sharp as his claws—biting and deliberately insulting. He wielded it like a weapon, cutting into me with precision. Each jab was delivered with a smirk so smug it made my eye twitch in frustration. His humor wasn't meant to lighten the mood or build camaraderie—it was designed to mock, to remind me of my place beneath him. 1

I missed Kael. His humor had been disarming, filled with exaggerated jokes that made me laugh even as he pushed me to my limits. He was tough but knew how to ease the tension. Hades, on the other hand, seemed to revel in creating it, coiling it tighter around my chest until I felt like I couldn't breathe.

Jules laughed, but it sounded forced. Regardless of my feelings, Hades was her king. I couldn't risk getting her implicated in treason.

"His Majesty is an intense man," she said carefully. "You have to be, to rule over Lycans after the former Alpha's assassination." Her voice remained light, almost cheerful, but her strokes grew deeper, rougher. Pain flared hot and fast, but I held my own against the ache.

"From being the Alpha's enforcer, his Beta, to carrying the heavy mantle of leadership while mourning the deaths of the family you loved," she



"Fighting off bastards who wanted to claim the throne you sought to protect for the good of your people. Watching friends turn into foes, family into nemeses..." Her teeth ground audibly as she kneaded harder. "And on top of that, having to bury the woman people say you worshipped..." 3

A whimper escaped me from the intense pain, but I was focused on her words. 1

"You were all alone in the darkness of the Obsidian royal court, trying not to go feral because some king decided to rip away all you loved."

Then I heard a crack.

We both stilled as blinding, white-hot pain lanced through my shoulder. My breath caught in my throat, and Jules immediately pulled her hands away.

"Shit," she whispered, her voice trembling. "Ellen, I think I—" 1

"It's fine," I rasped, though the edges of my vision were swimming. The pain was unbearable, but I wasn't about to let her spiral into guilt. "Just... a dislocation. Nothing I can't handle." 1

Her hands hovered uncertainly over me, unsure



Her hands hovered uncertainly over me, unsure whether to touch me again or not. "Ellen, I—" "Jules," I interrupted, meeting her worried gaze. "Pop it back in." I said, my voice filled with urgency. The faster she put it back, the better it would heal by tomorrow morning. It was not too much, just a very slight deviation.

Her eyes widened. "I can't. What if I make it worse?" 2

"You can't make it worse," I gritted out, forcing myself to sit up straighter despite the agony. "Just do it. Now."

She hesitated for a heartbeat too long, so I grabbed her wrist with my good hand. "Jules, please."

She swallowed hard, her usual confidence replaced with doubt, but she nodded. "Okay. Hold onto something."

I braced myself against the edge of the bed as she positioned herself behind me. Her hands were steady despite her apprehension.

"This is going to hurt," she warned.

I laughed bitterly. "What's a little more pain at this point?"

With a swift, practiced motion, she wrenched my

With a swift, practiced motion, she wrenched my shoulder back into place. The blinding pain peaked, and a strangled cry escaped me before it subsided into a dull, throbbing ache.

"There," she said, her voice shaky. "It's back in. Are you okay?"

I exhaled shakily, sweat dripping down my temple. "Define okay."

Jules sat back, her hands trembling as she wiped them on her pants. "I'm so sorry. I didn't mean—"

"Don't apologize," I interrupted, slumping back into the chair. "It wasn't your fault." 8

But her earlier words echoed in my mind. The weight of what she'd said about Hades and the life he had endured clung to me like a shroud. The hatred I'd harbored for him wavered, just a fraction, as I thought of the loneliness and pain he'd endured.

It didn't excuse his cruelty, but it made it... easier to understand.

Jules cleared her throat, breaking the heavy silence. "You need to rest, Ellen. Training tomorrow can wait."

I gave her a weak smile, though it felt like my

I gave her a weak smile, though it felt like my face might crack from the effort. "Tell that to His Majesty."

Her lips twitched, but for a fleeting moment, her expression darkened. When I blinked, it was back to normal. The pain must be making me hallucinate.

"I'll try," she said lightly.

"Never thought I'd be popping a princess' shoulder back in place," she chuckled. "You're tougher than you look. You are one tough cookie."

"What can I say?" I shrugged, though the pain made me grimace. "I've been wrestling wild wolves my whole life."

Jules raised a brow, her amusement softening into something like admiration. "More like wrestling with kings, I'd say."

I huffed a bitter laugh. "One and the same, aren't they? Both bite hard and rarely let go."

Her smile faltered briefly, but she covered it quickly. "You know, for someone who claims to hate His Majesty, you've got a lot in common with him."

I stiffened at her words. "What's that supposed to mean?"



"You're both survivors. Both stubborn as hell. And neither of you knows when to quit."

I opened my mouth to counter but found no words.

"And you have your own Cain Obsidian. The parallels are riveting."

I frowned. The name of the king's illegitimate son, the one I'd encountered at that fateful breakfast, came to mind. "What do you mean I have my own Cain Obsidian?"

"Cain betrayed Hades too. It was ugly... and bloody. Hades was the only one in the royal family who treated Cain like blood. He preferred him to the late King Henry, the one who was serving as his beta."

I raised a brow. "And my Cain is...?"

"Eve Valmont. Your twin sister."

My stomach dropped, my mind racing as my heart pounded like a drumbeat. I stared at Jules, barely able to process her words. Did she know? Was this some cruel test, or had I slipped up without realizing it?

I forced a shaky laugh, though it sounded hollow and brittle. "Eve Valmont? My Cain? That's..."

I forced a shaky laugh, though it sounded hollow and brittle. "Eve Valmont? My Cain? That's... dramatic, don't you think?"

Jules tilted her head, her expression thoughtful but unyielding. "Is it? She betrayed you, didn't she? Nearly killed you and turned out to be the foretold monster. Sounds like betrayal fit for a Cain to me."

Her words pierced a wound I'd tried desperately to forget, pressing against an old, tender bruise.

I bit the inside of my cheek to keep from reacting, my lips trembling as I forced them into a thin, controlled line. "We all have scars, Jules. Betrayal is nothing new in the Silverpine Court—or any court, for that matter."

Her gaze softened, but her words didn't. "True. But not everyone carries it the way you do."

I turned away, pretending to adjust my position, needing to hide the tears threatening to fall. "I don't know what you mean."

Her voice grew gentler but no less piercing. "You never look in a mirror, Ellen."

I froze, my tongue suddenly too heavy in my mouth.

"You see your twin sister, don't you? You see Eve when you look in the mirror. The sister you would

"You see your twin sister, don't you? You see Eve when you look in the mirror. The sister you would have stood by no matter what, who stabbed you in the back, stares back at you. She haunts you like a gho—" 1

"Stop talking about her! You know absolutely nothing!" I yelled, the force of my voice startling even myself. 1

Jules flinched but didn't back away. She looked at me with wide eyes, surprise flickering there but also something else—pity. What had I done?

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