



103 Double Edged Loyalty

Hades 1

"Something about her twin?" I echoed. "You are saying she is hiding something about her twin?"

Jules nodded. "Yes, your majesty."

"Can you back it up?" I asked leaning forward and steeping my fingers.

"I talked about Eve Valmont with her just yesterday. Her reaction was viseral, first she froze but schooled her expression to appear as if she was not affected."

"Of course, her reaction was viseral. Eve attempted to kill her on their eighteenth birthday at that." I dismissed already irritated. Everything else that she had relayed have been inconsequential at best. I knew she had nightmares, had vivid dreams that she could not seem to remember, she feared looking at her own reflection. I knew all that, I was not fucking blind.

"You are obviously not cut out for this task." I took a puff my cigarette, my eyes flickering



"You are obviously not cut out for this task." I took a puff my cigarette, my eyes flickering over her.

Her expression fell like a puppet with its strings cut. She clenched her jaw, struggling to keep her composure, but I could see the telltale quiver in her hands.

"Forgive me, your majesty," she said, her pleading. "but this is bigger than you think. Ellen Valmont is hiding something monumental and it is linked with her twin sister. I am sure of it."

The room fell silent at that. I let the smoke curl from my lips, watching Jules carefully. Of course, Ellen would not have a positive reaction towards any talk of Eve, that was a given. The thought of my brother did not make me want to skip around a garden in a frilly dress either.

"Explain," I said, leaning back and letting the cigarette rest between my fingers, its ember burning like the frustration inside me. This has been a mistake.

"She shouted at me," She said, her eyes wide like she expected me to understand.

I only smirked, the thought of it sending a



I only smirked, the thought of it sending a thrill of amusement. "Did she now?" So Red finally saw through my spy's bullshit. I knew she was not dimwitted.

"She did!" She paused, her hands gesturing animatedly, clearly trying to make her case.

"But it wasn't just anger, Your Majesty. It was fear. A fear so deep it felt... primal. She wanted me to drop the subject, to leave her sister out of it. She said and I quote 'You know absolutely nothing' ." Jules hesitated, like she was afraid of how ridiculous she might sound next. "It wasn't just her words, it was the way she said it. Like she believed speaking about her twin destroyed her, like pain is raw and festering."

I chuckled lowly, the sound reverberating through the dim office. "And you think that means something? People who are traumatized often react irrationally when their wounds are poked. Doesn't mean there's a grand conspiracy behind it."

Jules's lips pressed into a thin line, but she didn't back down. "This is different. Eve's name has power over her, Your Majesty. And not just emotional power—there's something else at play. Something dark. Something that



Jules's lips pressed into a thin line, but she didn't back down. "This is different. Eve's name has power over her, Your Majesty. And not just emotional power—there's something else at play. Something dark. Something that has the power to shatter her."

"Her sister was executed for being not only the cursed twin but for also trying to murder her. There is no healing from that." I knew that too well. **1**

"It's been ...five years, and yet Ellen still behaves like it happened yesterday. The nightmares, the way she avoids mirrors, even her refusal to speak about that night in detail—it's all too... fresh. If she is not hiding it on purpose, her mind is trying to shield her instead. People heal, or at least they learn to mask it better. But Ellen hasn't. It's like she's caught in a loop, unable to move forward. And I think that's because there's more to Eve's death than we know." **2**

I narrowed my eyes at her. "You're suggesting Eve's execution wasn't the end of it?" My tone was sharp, cutting, and Jules flinched, but she nodded anyway.

"Yes, Your Majesty. I don't know what exactly, but Ellen's behavior screams of



The ember of my cigarette burned low, threatening to scorch my fingers. I stubbed it out in the ashtray, leaning forward to meet Jules's gaze head-on. She walking a dangerous line. If she wrong, she had wasted my time. If she is right, then she had uncovered something that could destabilize everything. Either way, the stakes are high. "If you are wrong, you do know I am not lenient."

"I understand, Your Majesty." Her voice was steady now, determination hardening her features. "But I believe the truth about Eve Valmont is tied to whatever is happening now. Ellen knows it, even if she won't admit it. And if we don't act on it soon, it could be too late."

I let her words hang in the air, the weight of them pressing against my chest like a lead stone. Eve Valmont—dead for five years, or so the story went. But if Jules was right, if there was something more lingering in the shadows of Ellen's past...

"I'll allow you to continue your investigation," I said finally, my voice low and measured. "But tread carefully, Jules. If

"I'll allow you to continue your investigation," I said finally, my voice low and measured. "But tread carefully, Jules. If you bring me another half-baked theory, I'll personally ensure you regret it. Understand?"

"Yes, Your Majesty." She bowed her head, relief flooding her features.

As she left the room, the scent of smoke and tension lingered in the air. I sat back, staring at the ember's ghostly trail in the ashtray. Eve Valmont was supposed to be a ghost of the past—a cursed twin, executed and gone.

But ghosts had a way of clawing their way back when you least expected it.

The door of my office was suddenly opened again and Jules walked in. "Your Majesty, there is something else."

Why did she not just speak before? I thought in irritation. "What is it?" I demanded.

"Ellen Valmont speaks ill of you," she revealed. 1

I blinked before pinching my brows together and letting out a sigh. She speaks ill of me in my fucking face. Was this information supposed to be considered new. "So?"

She stilled like she had been caught with her hand in my wallet. "She--she called you a tyrant." She blurted.

That pale in comparison to all the other names she had called. "Alright?" My voice hardened.

"She called you an Egotistical bully."

"Egotistical bully," I fought back the urge to grin. The expression was redundant because bullies were egotistical. I would know that because I was indeed a bully. In world I lived in, if you did bully, you would be the bullied.

"Your Majesty?" She looked at me pale in the face. "This woman does not respect you, not in the slightest. She defies your authority with every breath she takes. She's dangerous, Your Majesty, and if we don't deal with her—" 1

Who the hell was 'we'? "Enough," I cut in, my voice like the snap of a whip. "Ellen Valmont has been defying me since the day she first set foot in my territory. Her disdain for me isn't news. If anything, it's predictable." I leaned back, a smirk tugging at the corner of my lips. "But you, Jules... you've become tedious." 1

Her face paled further, and I could see her fight to keep her composure.

"Let me make one thing clear," I continued, my tone low and lethal. "Ellen's rebellion amuses me. Her defiance keeps her alive because it shows she still has spirit. A beaten dog is useless, Jules. Ellen, for all her insolence, is far from beaten." I leaned forward, letting my eyes bore into hers. "You, on the other hand, seem intent on bringing me scraps of information you think will incite me. I'm not so easily swayed."

"But—" she stammered.

"Enough," I said again, this time with finality. I stood, towering over her as the weight of my authority pressed into the room. "If you wish to keep your position, Jules, you'll focus on uncovering the truth about exactly she is hiding. Leave Ellen's petty insults to me. Do I make myself clear?"

She swallowed hard, nodding quickly. "Yes, Your Majesty."

"Good," I said, dismissing her with a flick of my hand. "Now get out."

Jules hurried out, leaving me alone once



Jules hurried out, leaving me alone once more with the fading scent of smoke and tension. I poured myself a drink, the amber liquid swirling in the glass as I turned the name Eve Valmont over in my mind.

Eve Valmont.

The cursed twin who should have been nothing more than a tragic footnote in my kingdom's history. But if Jules's claims held any weight, her shadow loomed larger than ever, threatening to entangle Ellen—and perhaps me—in its grasp.

I swirled the drink in my hand, letting the amber liquid catch the dim light. The memory of Eve's execution replayed in my mind: the cold, calculated trial, the iron chains, her screams as she was dragged to her fate. It has been televised and Ellen had overseen it personally, ensuring that justice—or what passed for it—was carried out swiftly. 3

And yet, five years later, her name still had power. I would have honestly loved to have met the cursed twin. 5

