

110 Intercepted

Eve 1

We stayed like that for a moment, letting the grief settle. I tried to keep my eyes dry and collect my thoughts. To put up a brave and bright front after all she had been through felt like a betrayal to the depth of her pain, so I let myself mourn with her. Mourning not just the years of suffering she endured, but the innocence stolen from her, the love she was denied, and the freedom that had always seemed just out of reach. 1

Finally, Jules pulled back slightly, wiping her face with trembling hands. Her cheeks were streaked with tears.

"Thank you," she whispered, her voice raw and hoarse. "For listening, for... not pitying me. I hate pity. It makes me feel small."

I shook my head firmly, meeting her eyes. "You are not small, Jules. You are monumental."

She gave a watery smile, the barest hint of a flush returning to her freckled cheeks. "I don't feel extraordinary."

"You are," I muttered, my voice losing some of its zest. You are not like me, I said in my head.

"Thanks for bearing some of the weight for me," she murmured, "but I know I'm not the only one who needs help with the burden their past has left them." 2

I stilled, my throat working with a swallow. I hesitated.

"You don't need to be afraid, I promise. It does not matter how small or big your scars might be, I want to lessen their weight, and it will stay between us." She intertwined her fingers with mine. "I am your friend, and I'll stand by you, no matter what." Her voice was soft yet steady, a quiet reassurance that sank deep into my chest. 4

I looked down at our intertwined hands. Her grip was tight despite the tremble in her fingers. It was hard to believe someone who had endured so much could still offer comfort so freely.

I wrestled with the impulse to pull away, to bury my own pain and truth as I should. Yet, the sincerity in Jules's eyes disarmed me. 1

"You don't have to say anything if you're not ready," Jules added, her tone soft. "I just... I want you to know you don't have to carry it alone. Not

with me." Her expression was earnest as she gazed into my eyes.

The lump in my throat hardened, and my pulse thudded in my ears. Jules's earnest gaze pierced through me, stripping away the layers of defense I'd meticulously built over the weeks I had been here. The warmth of her hand in mine was soothing, but it also ignited a panic deep inside me, a flicker of fear that if I let her in, everything would unravel. 1

She wasn't looking at Eve, the ghost clinging to life in the shadows. She was looking at Ellen, the facade I'd constructed, the lie that kept me safe. If I told her the truth, the walls of this fragile world I'd built would crumble, leaving me exposed.

"I..." My voice cracked, and I swallowed hard, forcing myself to meet her gaze. The words hovered on the edge of my tongue, threatening to spill out. *Tell her. Tell her who you are. Tell her why you're here.* But the weight of the consequences pressed down on me, suffocating. What if the truth reached Hades? I glanced around the edges of the room, looking for the cameras that I knew were hidden. It only served to make the room more unnerving. At least the



ones in the hallways were in plain sight.

I could whisper it. I glanced uneasily at her, sweat forming on my brow, the ground-breaking truth on the tip of my tongue.

I am supposed to be dead. I am Eve Valmont.

Jules's grip on my hand tightened, her expression softening with concern. "It's okay," she said gently. "You don't have to push yourself.

Whatever it is, whenever you're ready... I'm here."

It could have been a trick of the light, but her eye twitched. I blinked, shaking my head nervously. 1

I was losing it. My chest tightened as I tried to regain my composure. I had buried Eve that day or so I thought. But standing here, with Jules offering her firm support, I felt Eve stirring inside me, begging to be acknowledged.

"I wish I could," I whispered, the words escaping before I could stop them. My hand twitched in hers, but I didn't pull away. "I wish I could tell you everything."

"Then why don't you?" she asked softly, her voice laced with care and an edge that made me feel even guiltier. She had bared her deepest, darkest



wounds to me, but I couldn't even let her see a sliver of mine. There was too much at stake. My mind went to the bomb Hades had tried to make me activate in the middle of a city square because I had crossed him. Recalling it still made a shiver run through my bones. How many more of those did he have planted all over Silverpine? How many seconds would it take for him to detonate all of them? Killing thousands when he found out he had been duped. Even if there was the slightest chance the prophecy was a lie, why would he listen to me? **3**

I forced a weak smile, shaking my head. "Some truths are heavier than others, Jules. And this one... it's just mine to carry."

Her brows furrowed. "You're saying your past is heavier than mine?" The tone was laced with acid that took me aback. **1**

My heart lurched, and I quickly shook my head. "No, Jules, that's not what I meant." My voice was hoarse, defensive, as if I'd been caught in a lie. Because I had, in a way. "It's not a comparison. I'm not trying to belittle what you've been through."

Her gaze narrowed, searching my face for cracks in my composure. "Then what are you trying to

say?" she pressed, her voice trembling with frustration. "Because to me, it sounds like you're hiding something and maybe it's because you don't trust me enough to share it."

The accusation stung, and I flinched, guilt pooling in the pit of my stomach. "It's not about trust," I said softly, though the words felt hollow. "It's about safety. Yours as much as mine." And the safety of Silverpine.

Jules's grip on my hand loosened, and she leaned back slightly, her expression clouded with confusion and hurt. "Safety?" she echoed. "Ellen, what are you talking about?"

The weight of her name on her lips, the name that wasn't mine was suffocating. I couldn't look her in the eye, so I stared at our hands instead, the way hers trembled slightly in my own. *You're going to lose her trust completely,* a voice in my head warned. *But if you tell her the truth, you'll lose everything.*

"I can't explain," I murmured, barely audible. "Not now. Not yet."

Jules let out a shaky breath, pulling her hand free from mine. The absence of her touch felt like a sudden chill in the air. "You're hiding something



big," she said, her voice tight. "And I'm not going to force you to tell me. But don't stand here and pretend like you're protecting me by keeping me in the dark. You are hurting me." 2

I opened my mouth to respond, but no words came out. How could I explain that my life and the lives of countless others could be destroyed if even a whisper of the truth reached the wrong ears? How could I tell her that Ellen was just a mask, and that beneath it was a woman who had died and been resurrected in the shadow of a dingy cell just shy of two months ago?

Jules stood and zipped her uniform, brushing her hands on her pants as if she needed to shake off the weight of the conversation. "I've trusted you with everything, Ellen. I thought you could do the same." Her voice cracked, but she didn't let the tears fall. "I guess I was wrong." 4

I stood as well, panic clawing at my throat. "Jules, please—"

"Don't," she interrupted, holding up a hand. "I need some air."

My heart shriveled and turned to dust in the face of her coldness. Her shoulders were slumped, her eyes heavy. This time, I had not been



betrayed, I had been the one to betray her. I clenched my hands into fists, gritting my teeth as she made her way to my bathroom to get it ready. 1

But my desperation won out. I reached out and grabbed her arm, my mind whirling with the dire decision I had to make. "I will tell you. I will tell you the whole truth," I blurted. 6

She turned to me, her hollow eyes lighting up faintly. "Are you sure?"

I swallowed thickly and nodded, my blood roaring in my ears. "Yes, I am. I—"

Suddenly, the door swung open, and the scent of mint and ocean breeze reached me before piercing green eyes met mine.

"Kael?" I offered him a genuine but tentative smile. "Morning."

"Good morning, Your Highness. I would like to have a word with you," he said, his voice calm but carrying a hint of authority. 2

His eyes shifted from me to Jules, and a hard edge crept into his tone. "Alone." 5