111 Trust No One

Eve 1

Kael was almost glaring at Jules as she walked out of the room. He closed the door behind her, and I watched as some of the tension that had bunched his shoulders eased. He sighed deeply, as if bracing himself to do something nerve-wracking.

"Kael?" I called out tentatively, worry gnawing at my gut. "You said you wanted a word?"

When his eyes met mine, his brows were knit together. He looked torn, as if trying to make a decision about something that concerned me. His eyes flicked to the sling on my arm, and his forest greens morphed into a dark teal. 2

He stalked toward me until we were a few yards apart. "Ellen..." His voice was rough. "How are you?"

At the first question, a bit of relief seeped into my system. I managed a wry smile. "I'm as good as I could possibly be," I replied.

The corner of his mouth twitched up. "Your arm?" he asked.

"It's a bit uncomfortable, but the physician says I'll be better in a few weeks." I tried to assure him.

He glanced at the door before turning back to me. He curled his hands into fists and released them again. "Jules did that to you." 1

It was not a question; it was a statement. "It was a mistake."

"Was it?" he deadpanned, barely waiting for me to finish talking. "Was it really?" 2

It was now my turn to be confused. I furrowed my brow, a question in my gaze as I looked at him. "What else could it have been?"

"What exactly do you know about Jules?" he asked, his voice hard on the utterance of her name.

I chuckled nervously. "Oh, come on, Kael," I tried to lighten the tension in the air. He was probably just on edge because of my arm. "I know enough, and I know the Tower is thorough. You wouldn't have missed anything in her screening. Hades wouldn't have assigned her to me if he wasn't sure she could be trusted." 1

His face contorted into an expression that was

achingly familiar—guilt. I had seen the same expression on Hades.

This time, the uneasiness didn't simply gnaw at my gut; it twisted it. "Is something wrong? Is there something I don't know?"

Kael's throat jumped. "You trust her?" he asked, his voice small.

"Yes," I replied without hesitation. But evidently not enough, because I hadn't trusted her with my biggest secret. Her hurt face still haunted me, and her cold voice still suffocated me.

"You shouldn't," Kael said curtly. "Trust no one," he murmured. "Trust absolutely no one." 3

I blinked at him. I didn't know which surprised me more—the gruffness of his voice that I had never heard before or his words.

"Is something the matter?"

He glanced at my arm. "People are like glass," he muttered, his voice barely above a whisper. "Fragile, easy to shatter... and sometimes, what's beneath the surface is sharper than you expect." His gaze flickered to mine, heavy with unspoken meaning.

I frowned, my heart beating a little faster. "Kael,

you're scaring me. What are you trying to say?"

He exhaled sharply, running a hand through his light hair, the tension in his frame coiling tighter. "What I'm trying to say, Ellen, is that trust is a dangerous luxury. Even the ones closest to you can cut the deepest." 1

I took a step closer, my injured arm throbbing faintly, though I ignored it. "Are you implying something about Jules? What did she do?" 2

Kael hesitated, his forest-green eyes stormy, the teal still lingering in the depths. "It's not just about what she did. It's about who she is."

"Who she is?" My voice was low, wary. "Kael, if there's something I need to know, just tell me. Stop speaking in riddles." 1

His jaw clenched, the muscles working as if he were chewing on his words. Finally, he spoke, his tone resolute but pained. "Jules isn't just some stray Hades decided to take in. She's a reminder —a walking piece of the past that we've all tried to bury. And the thing about the past, Ellen, is that it never stays buried for long."

A chill crawled down my spine. "What are you saying? That she's dangerous?"

"She's more than dangerous," Kael replied, his voice cutting through the air like a blade. "She's a ticking time bomb. And if you're not careful, she'll take you down with her."

I stepped back, my breath hitching. "But she—she's been nothing but kind. She shielded me, Kael! How could someone like that be a threat?"

Kael closed the distance between us, his gaze piercing. "Because loyalty doesn't erase what's inside, Ellen. It doesn't change what she's capable of or the scars she carries. The same scars that might one day turn her into your greatest enemy."

I shook my head, refusing to believe it. "No. That's not true. Jules isn't like that." But a part of me, to my horror, agreed.

"Maybe not now," he admitted, his voice softening, though his eyes remained hard. "But people change. And you—" He pointed to my arm. "You're already proof of how quickly things can spiral."

I stared at him, the weight of his words sinking in like lead in my chest. "Then why hasn't Hades warned me? Why hasn't anyone said anything?"

Kael laughed bitterly. "Because Hades thinks he

can control her. That he can keep her tethered. But you and I both know what happens when someone's pushed too far, don't we?"

I looked up at him, lost, my thoughts in a knot. "What do I do now?"

And for the first time since he walked through the door, a genuine smile crept onto his face. "Trust your instincts," he muttered. "Don't go against them in a bid to satisfy your sense of loyalty or fairness. Instincts don't lie. They're primal and raw, and usually the only thing keeping you alive when all else turns to shit." 3

I swallowed thickly, my tongue growing heavier in my mouth. "You think she'll hurt me? Or herself?"

Kael's expression softened. "I don't think she knows the damage she's capable of. But that doesn't make her any less dangerous. If anything, it makes her more."