

## 169 In The Darkness She Shall Remain <sup>1</sup>

Hades <sup>1</sup>

Her words slammed against my chest, stealing the breath from my lungs. The suffocating silence stretched between us, and for the first time, I was stripped of control—vulnerable and exposed. My carefully crafted facade must have shifted because her eyes widened, as if the realization that she was onto something sank in.

"You received a message?" My words came out slowly, dragged down by something foreign—hesitation. I never hesitated; it was against everything I was taught.

*"Strike sure and true."* My father's voice slithered into my head so vivid that I could almost feel his shadow looming behind me.

But today, I was left unguarded by a single sentence.

*"Tell me the truth, Hades."*

"Hades?" She pulled me back from the depths of my shock. "It is true?" But it was not a question; it was a statement. The clarity in her cadence



made the anvil in my gut heavier.

"You have not answered my question," I countered, my voice harsher than I had intended, and by the way her face fell, the knife in my gut twisted painfully.

I was so close to everything I needed from her. It was all coming together. Barely a day ago, I discovered that I was the key to unlocking her power and all the resources we would win in the apocalypse to come. And now this? The Flux within me roared, a silent tempest that threatened to consume rational thought. It clawed at the edges of my restraint, urging me to take control, to twist the situation in my favor—to protect her. 2

We both knew the truth, but we wanted different things.

I couldn't afford to falter now. Not when I was so close.

It was simply an unfortunate coincidence, a miracle, that I was the bastard the Moon Goddess chose to be her mate. She was meant to be sacrificed for my pack; this had been the plan from the beginning. This was the reason I changed my tactics in dealing with her—so I



wouldn't need to force her into submission. I wouldn't break her until it was truly time, when she needed breaking.

*Nothing has changed.*

*Nothing had changed.*

*Nothing has changed.*

I recited the words like a mantra, yet Kael's words earlier today wrapped around my throat like a noose.

***"I thought you had fallen in love with her."***

***Love.***

I felt the Flux pulse in my chest, inciting an ache that I had to control—my expression remained neutral, though I had to resist the grimace of agony. Two emotions waged war within me: protectiveness and purpose.

Protectiveness, an instinct buried deep within me—primal, unyielding—fought against the cold, calculated purpose that had driven every decision I made regarding her. One was an unwelcome intruder, the other an old companion, and yet, in this moment, they blurred into something dangerous. Something I couldn't afford to feel. 1



My teeth clenched, the pressure grounding me as I forced my thoughts back to the plan. To the necessity of all of this.

A slow breath filled my lungs, heavy and measured. I tilted my head, letting the shadows in the dimly lit room swallow the tension tightening my jaw. "Who sent you that message, Red?" My voice was smooth, calculated—but she wasn't fooled. Of course, she wasn't.

Her gaze, usually wary but malleable, now held a sharpness that scraped against my defenses like a silver dagger. "You didn't answer mine," she countered, her words laced with something that was no longer uncertainty but quiet accusation. 1

Damn it.

I studied her, forcing myself to hold the silence between us, to let the weight of it press against her shoulders like a carefully applied vice. If I let her think I was unaffected, she might doubt herself just enough to let me regain control. But the way she stared back at me—unrelenting, raw, and so painfully stubborn—made it clear that wouldn't be happening tonight.

She was digging, deeper than I had anticipated. And worse—she was starting to find the cracks.



My grip on the back of the chair tightened, the wood groaning softly under my fingers. "And what if I told you the truth?" I finally said, my tone dangerously soft. "Would it change anything?"

Her lips parted, her breath hitching ever so slightly, but she didn't retreat. "It would," she whispered, and for a fleeting second, I almost believed the lie hidden beneath the trembling hope in her voice. "It would change everything, Hades."

I felt something bitter curl inside me. She thought she wanted the truth, but the truth wouldn't set her free—it would destroy her. It would break her in ways I couldn't put back together, and that... that was something I couldn't allow. Not yet. Not until I had what I wanted. **1**

A muscle ticked in my jaw. "The truth is rarely kind, Red," I murmured, leaning closer, allowing the shadows to frame my face, my voice turning into something almost... tender. "And you aren't ready for it."

Her shoulders stiffened, her fingers curling into the fabric of her ruined clothes. "Stop deciding what I'm ready for," she snapped, fire flashing



through her voice despite the exhaustion weighing her down. "I deserve—"

"What you deserve," I interrupted smoothly, a dark smirk curling at the edges of my mouth, "is the truth." I completed it for her. "I will tell you."

I blinked, her turning to me caught off guard.

"I wanted to use you to destroy your father," I continued. It was not a complete lie, nor was it the whole horrible truth. I raised my hand to her face and wiped a bloody tear from her cheek. The wounds of grief were still raw; she was weakened. If I pushed away her question and she asked me again when she was much stronger, I would regret it. I had to put her doubts to rest now. 1

"The plan was to manipulate you," I said, my voice low and deliberate, each word a calculated blow. "To mold you into something I could use against your father. To take everything from him... through you."

I watched her, waiting for the blow to land, for the betrayal to bloom behind her eyes. And it did. Her lips parted, a sharp intake of breath, and the flicker of hurt that flashed across her face twisted something deep inside me. But I couldn't



stop now. I had to see it through.

"I was never meant to..." I trailed off, fingers brushing against her cheek, lingering for a fraction too long before I forced myself to pull away. "Care."

There. The final nail in the coffin. The truth—wrapped neatly in a half-lie.

Her throat bobbed as she swallowed hard, her eyes searching mine for something I couldn't let her find. "So... that's it?" she whispered, the words brittle and raw. "I was just a means to an end?" Her lips quivered. 3

I fought back the urge to kiss her despair away.

I forced a smirk, hollow and cruel. "You always were." The truth had to be harsh and painful, just as Jules had revealed, so she would believe me. The real truth was much more sinister, and indeed, it would shatter her.

The silence stretched between us, thick and suffocating. I could see the war raging in her mind—the fight between what she wanted to believe and the reality I had just fed her. Her hands trembled slightly, but she clenched them into fists, forcing herself to stay still, to stay strong.



I hated that I admired it. 3

"But now," I added, my tone softening just enough to reel her back in, "things have changed."

Her gaze snapped up to me, suspicion and hope flaring in the watery depths of her bloodshot eyes. "Changed how?" 1

I leaned in, close enough that she could feel my breath ghosting over her lips, close enough that my presence alone would blur the lines of doubt and truth. "You changed me, Red," I murmured, threading my fingers through her hair with a gentleness that belied my words. "You made me rethink everything." 1

Her breath hitched, the uncertainty wavering in her eyes like a flickering flame. She wanted to believe me—needed to—but doubt still clawed at the edges of her resolve. She wouldn't be who she was without her defiance, even when she was falling apart.

"And that's why you need to trust me," I pressed, letting my voice drop to a whisper. "Because whatever you think you know, there's more. So much more." Another truth.

Her brows knitted together, conflict warring





across her face. "And the message I received? What was that? It said you wanted to kill me." 1

I exhaled sharply, a calculated sigh, as if weighed down by a burden only I understood. "Someone wants to turn you against me, Red," I said, my thumb tracing slow circles along her jaw. "They know what we could do together. They fear it."

The Flux within me coiled, thrumming with dark satisfaction as her expression wavered. Planting doubt was easy, but keeping it there required finesse. The juxtaposition of its darkness and its protectiveness over her was a new thing I had never explored. It had always been there, but I had suppressed it until the truth came. 2

"Then tell me," she whispered, her voice trembling. "Tell me everything so I don't have to listen to them."

It was a plea. A fragile, desperate plea.

She was so afraid.

She had lost a friend.

She didn't want to lose anyone else, even if it was me—the monster that would be her ultimate undoing. Her fate, her ruin, the creator of her desolation. 1



I smiled, slow and deliberate, victory curling in my chest like a satisfied predator. "In time," I said, pressing a lingering kiss to her forehead, a promise laced with deception. "Trust me, Red." 2

She closed her eyes, exhaling shakily, and for a moment, I saw the fight slip away, exhaustion taking its place.

I had won—for now.

But deep down, beneath the carefully crafted lies, the truth simmered. The Flux within me raged against it, hating and craving the weakness and comfort she carved into me with every breath she took.

*"Nothing has changed."*

But even I couldn't believe that anymore. "So who sent you the message,"

There was a heavy silence, before her hesitant voice broke it. "Cain." 9