

170 Liar

Hades 1

I had to keep my expression carefully neutral as she relayed all that happened. I gritted my teeth so hard that I had to hope that I was the only one that heard my molars grind.

She told me the whole story, the message and the literal written letter that he had left her on his only fucking visit since her arrival here. 1

That fucking ass...

I craned my neck, relieving the tension with crack but barely had an effect on the growing whirlwind of wrath that tore through my restraints.

When she was done, silence and the sanguinous scent of blood cloaked us. "You didn't tell me," I murmured, words that came out like a whisper in the tense silence. I did not let even a pint of accusation seep into my voice. I had just won her back with half lies and truths, I couldn't I push her away by antagonizing her especially after all she had been through today. 1

Her gaze lowered, she sank her teeth into her lip.

It still sounded like an accusation.

I pinched her chin gently, raising her face so she could meet my eyes, to see that there was no ire behind my question.

Her eyes were moist and I was afraid that they would never dry. How much more would she cry? How much more times would she be betrayed? How many more times would she be a victim of the machinations of others? This question clouded my mind, attacking me, ripping into me, the way that I would rip into her. 2

The Flux whispered in the back of my mind, a dark murmur that coiled around my thoughts like a serpent. It pulsed with a possessive hunger, a primal need to claim, protect, and consume. It reveled in the torment she endured, feeding off the cracks in her spirit like a vulture circling a dying beast. 3

The corruption had come closer to the forefront, closer than it had ever been before. The mate bond was pulling it closer, it seemed as though my simple acknowledgement of the truth had reduced the effectiveness of the inhibitors. 2

I fought against it, clenching my jaw so tightly that the muscles ached. I couldn't afford to let it



take control. Not now. Not when she was looking at me with those wide, weary eyes—eyes that carried too many ghosts and too fragile trust.

It wanted her.

"*You want her,*" it almost taunted, countering me.

"You didn't tell me," I repeated, my voice softer this time, almost coaxing. My thumb traced the curve of her chin, a silent plea disguised as tenderness.

She blinked rapidly, a tear slipping free before she could catch it. "I—" Her voice wavered, and I saw the way she struggled with the weight of everything, the burden of truths she wasn't ready to share. "I didn't know how."

Didn't know how to tell me? Or didn't want to?

My stomach twisted with something I refused to name. I had spent so long constructing this web of deception, pulling her strings with careful precision, and yet... here she was, unknowingly unraveling everything I had built with a few whispered words and a single hesitant look.

"Cain," I murmured, tasting the name like poison on my tongue. My hand slid down from her chin, curling into a fist at my side. The bastard had

dared to reach out to her—to plant seeds of doubt in her mind.

I forced a breath through my nose, forcing control back into my voice. "He wants to turn you against me," I said, letting the bitterness seep through my words like venom. "You know that, don't you?" It made sense she would not tell me during that time, we were not exactly tolerating each other back then.

She nodded slowly, but there was still hesitation in her gaze, a sliver of doubt that twisted deep inside me.

The Flux seethed, urging me to take action—to show her why she couldn't trust anyone but me. My fingers itched to pull her closer, to whisper words that would bind her to me irrevocably, to rewrite every doubt in her mind with promises she couldn't resist.

Instead, I stepped back, giving her space she didn't ask for but needed. It was a dangerous gamble, but I had learned long ago that control wasn't always about force; sometimes, it was about restraint.

"You think I would hurt you, Red?" My voice was low, laced with just enough pain to make her



second-guess herself. 2

She hesitated, chewing on her lower lip, but I caught the slight shake of her head. "No," she whispered. "I don't."

The relief that surged through me was almost shameful.

Almost.

I nodded, reaching out to tuck a stray strand of hair behind her ear. "Then don't let Cain's words poison you." My fingers lingered at the nape of her neck, a possessive touch disguised as comfort. "I'm the only one standing between you and them. You know that." I lied. I was no shield. I was her hunter.

Her eyes met mine, searching, weighing the truth wrapped in my lies. And then, after a long moment, she exhaled and nodded.

I had her.

But deep inside, where the Flux coiled and writhed, I couldn't shake the feeling that the cracks were spreading faster than I could mend them. And if I wasn't careful, she would see through the carefully woven deception—and once she did, I wasn't sure even the Flux could



bring her back to me, no matter how hard it tried. The foreshadowing made my blood turn to ice. 2

"Rest," I , brushing my lips over her forehead.
"We'll deal with Cain... together."

She closed her eyes, leaning into the touch, and I allowed myself the briefest moment of weakness —of wanting her trust, her warmth, in ways I never should. She was scared of being alone.

So are you.

Without a word, I stepped forward and scooped her into my arms. She stiffened, eyes wide with shock as she instinctively grasped at my shirt, but she didn't fight me. Not this time. Her weight felt too light, too fragile against me, as if she might shatter with one wrong move.

"Hades—" she started, her voice barely a whisper of protest.

"We have to wash you up," I cut in, my tone brokering no argument. "I already called a Delta to heal that shoulder of yours." My arms tightened around her as I carried her toward the bathroom. "You're covered in blood."

Her silence was unnerving. She usually fought,

even when she was too exhausted to win. But now, she simply rested her head against my chest, letting the quiet seep into the spaces between us. The scent of dried blood clung to her like a second skin, and I knew the sight of it—the feel of it—was digging into her deeper than she'd ever admit. 3

Once in the bathroom, I set her down on the stool near the tub and turned on the water, letting it run until the steam rose thick and heavy around us. The crackling of the water was the only sound between us.

She sat there, unmoving, staring at her blood-streaked hands like she didn't recognize them.

"Red." I crouched in front of her, my fingers gently brushing over the bruises on her arm, where Cain's words and the horrors of today had left their mark. "Let's get you clean."

She nodded once, her motions mechanical. I peeled away the torn remnants of her clothes, the fabric stiff with dried blood and dirt, until she was bare before me. The sight of her wounds—some still raw, others scabbed over—made something primal in me rage. But I swallowed it down, focusing on what needed to



be done.

I guided her into the water, the warmth enveloping her as she sank into the tub with a shudder. Without speaking, I took the sponge and began washing away the grime, my touch careful, deliberate. Her skin, once vibrant with life, was now pale and marred by the events of the day. She didn't flinch under my touch, didn't react when the water ran red.

It was unsettling.

By the time I finished, the Delta arrived, she didn't say a word as she approached her, placing a gentle hand over her injured shoulder. A faint glow emitted from their palm, and I felt the slight shift in the air as their power worked through her, knitting bone and muscle back together.

She didn't even blink.

She should have screamed, should have flinched from the pain that accompanied the healing process, but instead, she sat there, staring past us, hollow and empty. 5

"She should feel something, your Majesty," the Delta murmured, a trace of concern slipping into their voice.



I dismissed them with a sharp glance. "She's fine."
They hesitated, but with a nod, they left us alone
once more.

She stood at the edge, her eyes flicking to me
once before she turned away. Without a word,
she reached for the linens folded neatly on the
chair and began laying them on the floor.

I watched her for a long moment before silently
taking the other end, helping her smooth them
out. We moved in perfect sync, as if this was
something we had done a thousand times before
—as if lying on the cold, hard ground instead of a
luxurious bed was the only thing that made
sense. 1

Once the makeshift bedding was in place, she
settled onto the ground, her movements slow
and careful, and I followed, stretching out beside
her. She didn't protest when I reached for her,
turning her gently until she was curled against
my chest.

Her body was tense at first, rigid with unspoken
fears, but then, slowly, she melted into me, her
fingers clutching at my shirt like it was the only
thing keeping her from drowning, not knowing I

was the very tempest that would take her under. Her breath hitched, and then the sobs came—quick and quiet, pressed into my chest as if she wanted to suffocate them before they could escape into the world.

I stroked her hair, each pass of my fingers a silent promise I could never voice. "I'm here," I murmured, my voice low, threading through the darkness around us. "You're not alone, Red."

She didn't respond, but the way she clung to me said enough.

I held her as she cried, as the weight of everything she'd endured finally broke free. I let her fall apart in my arms, knowing that when the tears stopped, the walls would come back up stronger than before. 5

But for now, in this fleeting moment of raw vulnerability, I held her tighter, anchoring her to me as if I could somehow protect her from everything—even myself. 3