

175 A Reminder Of Her

Hades 1

Her scent, faint beneath the sterile preservation, clawed at memories I had locked away. Laughter, tangled limbs under moonlight, whispered promises meant to last eternity.

My chest burned, a volcano of grief and longing erupting, molten emotions searing through muscle and bone. I pressed her closer, rocking gently, as if the rhythm might summon her spirit back into this fragile vessel. 4

But no tears came. They never did. My father had seen to that, carving out ducts he claimed were unnecessary, believing stoicism equated strength. But pain was not lesser without tears—if anything, it was sharper, a blade honed by the inability to shed it. 11

I ached with a fury that could not be assuaged. A yearning that tore at my soul, leaving it ragged and raw. My gaze traced the delicate line of her jaw, the curve of her eyelashes against her pale cheek. I willed her to open her eyes, to smile, to reprimand me for taking so long to find her. 1

"Danielle," I whispered, my voice a ragged



thread, pulled taut by the weight of her name.

"My moon, my heart." 4

The room was silent, save for the rasp of my breath and the quiet hum of the artificial moon overhead. Each second stretched, elastic and cruel, taunting me with hope that perhaps—just perhaps—she might stir, might speak. 1

Cerberus thrashed within me, a beast denied its mate, his howls echoing in the hollow chamber of my heart. 1

Our mate.

She was here. She had always been here. Hidden away, stolen from us by time and tragedy.

Montegue watched in silence, his gaze an unreadable cipher as I grieved. I should have demanded answers, raged against this mockery of fate, but all I could do was cling to her, absorbing the phantom warmth, letting it seep into the frozen marrow of my bones.

"Why?" My question hung in the air, a fragile plea. "Why bring me here? Why now?" 1

Montegue's expression softened, a flicker of something almost human in his eyes.

"Sometimes, majesty, the dead are not as dead as

we believe. Sometimes, they are simply...
waiting." 1

I ground my teeth, a growl vibrating through my chest. "For what?"

"For the right moment. The right person. Perhaps, Hades, she waited for you."

I swallowed hard, my eyes drifting back to Danielle's serene face. Had she lingered in this twilight existence, waiting for the touch of my hand, the sound of my voice?

The thought shattered me anew, hope mingling with despair in a vicious cycle.

"You told you would let me see her until I brought that beast's head to you."

"I know what I said," his voice was grave. "I could never forget but I could have never foretold that you would be mated to her killer's daughter." 2

I stilled at the mention of Ellen in this sacred place. Even though she was not mentioned by name, a despair instantly ripped through me. The impossibility of it all was not lost on me. I had been holding her yesterday, trying to keep her from falling apart and today I was with Danielle, her body in my arms. The anvil



suddenly weighed more. ²

Montegue's voice was steady, yet there was an undercurrent beneath his words—one I couldn't place, a thread of something deeper, older.

"Love is a fickle thing, we tend to forget who held our heart when someone else takes its place." ¹

The words struck like a lash, sharp and deliberate.

I clenched my jaw, my fingers tightening around Danielle's body as if shielding her from his insinuations. "You think I've forgotten?" My voice was low, but the weight of it was a warning.

Montegue exhaled, the sound a slow unraveling of patience. "No," he admitted, "but I wonder if you wish you could."

I stiffened.

Did I?

I had spent years hunting the beast that took Danielle from me, that ripped through my life with merciless claws. And yet, in my arms now lay the woman who was supposed to be gone, preserved in a glass tomb beneath a greenhouse of illusions.



And Ellen—Ellen had been in my arms just yesterday, broken and trembling, needing me in a way that I had not allowed myself to need anyone in so long.

The weight of it was unbearable.

Danielle was my mate.

Ellen was the daughter of her killer. 1

Cerberus writhed, torn between two opposing instincts, two halves of a soul that were never meant to collide. One part of me, the primal part, howled in grief, urging me to take Danielle away from this place, to keep her safe. The other, the fractured, war-ridden man who had watched too many things die, whispered that it was too late. That no matter how warm she felt, no matter how perfectly preserved, this was still a grave.

"You still haven't answered my question." My voice was tight, controlled. "Why now? Why let me see her after all these years?"

Montegue studied me, his gaze unreadable. Then, finally, he spoke.

"

"Because I need you to remember her." 2



The words slithered through the air, settling into my bones like a whisper from the dead.

Montegue stepped forward, deliberate, measured. "You cannot forget her in all of this. I want you to see her face, to touch her, to remember what was taken from you. What was stolen."

My grip on Danielle tightened instinctively. His words scraped against something raw inside me, a wound that had never closed.

"You think I could ever forget?" My voice was hoarse, brittle.

Montegue's expression was unreadable, but his gaze sharpened. "I think grief dulls with time. I think men like you—men with power, with duty—find ways to bury their ghosts when the weight of the living becomes too much to carry." 1

My fingers twitched. He wasn't wrong.

Ellen.

Her face flashed in my mind, the way her body had curled into mine the night before, trembling, shattered. The way she had needed me.

And now, Danielle—here, in my arms, impossibly warm, preserved in a way that should have been

impossible. 1

Montegue continued, voice steady. "I need you to remember what was done to her. To you. To both of you. I need you to hold on to that pain, that fury."

I exhaled sharply, my nostrils flaring.

Montegue smiled, but it was grim, a flicker of something dark and knowing in his eyes. "War is coming, Hades. And love—love makes men reckless. It makes them weak." He paused, letting the words sink in. "But grief? Grief makes them unstoppable." 2

A slow, cold rage settled into my chest.

I should have known.

Montegue had never done anything without reason. This wasn't a gift—it was a weapon. A reminder. 6

I turned back to Danielle, my gaze drinking her in. Every delicate feature, the soft curve of her lips, the way her lashes fanned over skin that had not aged a single day.

"And yet," I murmured, "you are the one who kept her here. Who kept her from turning to dust. Why?"



Montegue's silence stretched. And then—

"Because I knew you would come for her."

The confession was a blade in the dark, striking true before I even had time to shield myself.

I stilled, muscles locking in place.

"You—" I started, but Montegue cut me off.

"You think I left her to rot?" He tilted his head, his gaze sharp. "No. I preserved her because I knew the day would come when you would need to see her again. When you would need to remember why you cannot afford to soften." 1

My breath came fast, harsh. "You think I need reminding?"

Montegue studied me, his expression cool. "I think you needed to feel it again. To remember what loss tastes like." His eyes glistened with unshed tears, he suddenly looked old again, a graying old man that grief had taken its cruel toll. He took a deep breath. "Once you have avenged her, I want to to move on, love again, live again." 2

His eyes grew soft, painful warmth seeping into his face. "Son,"

I stiffened. He only used to call me that before



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Danielle died.

"Fa--father," I found myself replying. "Why?"

He smiled, a sad little twinkle entering his eyes.

"Because it is what my Dany would have wanted. She loved you too much to let you be buried with her." 7

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