



187 Highly Convenient

Hades 1

"I know what you are doing," was the first words of Montegue's mouth, the moment he sat in my office.

"What is that supposed to mean?" I asked, already more than slightly agitated, putting into the consideration how many things had managed to go wrong within so little time.

Ellen's mental spiral, the Valmonts were now guest's in the Obsidan Tower and the media had caught wind of it. Everyone was on edge and to add to the equation, Ellen's official coronation would have to come soon; I simply could not let them take her away.

I could still taste her fear on my tongue; bitter and striking and so achingly familiar. In so many ways, I had lost, that was a fact. One made even more convoluted by the fact that, during my endeavor to see straight through this woman, I had been given a mirror instead. I saw myself in her; in the fire that blazed in the glaziers of her eyes and in opposite as well; the fear that seemed to eat away at our souls.



Ellen was afraid of her own family, she had been scarred by this people to the point that I, the man that sought to use her became a solace. Her fear of her family was visceral enough for me to ...understand it, to feel it echo somewhere deep inside me, where old wounds never fully healed. 1

I had been afraid once too. Afraid of those who shaped me, who broke me down piece by piece and built me into something else—something meant to serve their needs, not mine. That same fear was in Ellen, raw and visceral, coiled around her like a serpent, sinking its fangs deeper every time she so much as breathed the same air as them.

Montegue watched me, waiting, assessing. He always had that look—like he already knew my answer but wanted to hear me say it anyway.

"You think I want to keep her here for my own gain," I said finally, my voice even, but there was something dangerous simmering beneath. "She has to be here for our plans to work. I am her mate which means we are now close to the end game. If she taken and hollowed again, we lose." I could never let Montegue no that the plans had long since derailed the moment it fully sunk that



though I had taken her, she had my heart in her possession.

Montegue exhaled a quiet laugh, leaning back in his chair and then he nodded. "I know, why else would I have supported you before the council. I see what they refuse to see but you do know what this means."

I swallowed, sweat coating my brow. "Of course," I replied.

I nodded again. "I see your dilemma and I understand your intentions. For the sake of this pack, you will kill two birds with one stone by doing something truly heretical." His voice was low, conspiratorial and for the first time I saw the glimpse of the cunning, shrewd ambassadors he had been before Danielle's death.

My gaze flickered fully to his, my eyes narrowing. "Two?"

For a moment he was quiet as if counting the moments that went by and leaving me apprehensive to gauge me.

I held my breath, waiting, the air charged with tension that made my hairs rise. "Ambassador..."

Finally, I saw his eyes widen slightly. "The



second bird is now you have no choice but to mark her. The stakes are heightened because unlike the hypothetical danger she might be in because of the hollowing and her subsequent spiralling mental health, her family trying to take her back, even for the "so called a little while" is something far more tangible, far more ...imminent."

Montegue's words settled like a noose around my throat.

Mark her.

The weight of it sent a sharp pulse through my chest. Not because it was unexpected, because now, it was no longer a choice. It was a necessity.

My fingers curled against the polished wood of my desk, knuckles whitening as I processed what he was truly saying. 2

Marking was sacred. It was absolute. It was a bond that could not be undone without dire consequences, a claim that would override all others—a declaration before gods and mortals alike that she was mine.

And I was hers.



And yet, even knowing all this, Montegue continued as if it were the simplest thing in the world.

"Her family will not stop, Hades," he said, voice smooth, calculated. "They are biding their time, waiting for an opening. And if you do not close that door—permanently—they will rip her from this kingdom with or without your permission. They have the right. You had all the cards before, almost three months ago, but we both know that your hold is slipping because they know just how far Ellen is losing herself—due entirely to your own faults."

A cold, dark rage curled through my chest. "It was Felicia," I said, standing abruptly, slamming my fist on the desk, but Montegue didn't even flinch. "She was the one who sabotaged me. Your daughter did this." 5

His eyes darkened, his expression suddenly pulled taut, but he didn't say anything. He locked his jaw before taking a deep breath.

"I call it fate," he finally said. 1

I stared at him, my chest rising and falling with barely contained fury.

"Fate?" My voice was sharp enough to cut stone.



"You call this fate?"

Montegue held my gaze, his expression unreadable, but I saw it—the flicker of something dangerous beneath the surface. A knowledge he wasn't ready to share.

"Yes," he murmured. "I do. It's all so highly convenient." 1

Silence stretched between us, thick and suffocating. The audacity of his words nearly sent my wolf lunging forward, but I forced it back, grinding my teeth together.

"You think this was inevitable?" I said lowly, my voice a razor's edge. "You think Felicia acting like the enemy of the state, Ellen's collapse, the hell she has endured—was fated?"

Montegue sighed, rubbing his temple as if I were the one being unreasonable. "Hades, don't mistake me—I'm not justifying what Felicia did. She had her own agenda, her own reasons. But what she set in motion was merely the hand of destiny moving forward." 1

"That's a load of horseshit," I snapped, stepping closer. "Do not mistake my patience for tolerance, Montegue. You let your own daughter sabotage my plans and now you're standing in



my office telling me it was meant to happen?"

"Yes," he repeated—calmly, maddeningly.

"Because now, you have no choice but to act."

"Mark her, awaken what is needed, and let us move forward. It's that simple." 1

But it was anything but simple. It was the most convoluted thing I had ever had to accept and wrap my mind around.

Nothing was ever simple with Red.

Montegue suddenly tilted his head, watching me.

"What happened to you?" he asked, catching me off guard. "When did you become this person? This type of king?"

Montegue's words cut deeper than I wanted to admit.

I should have ignored him. Should have dismissed his question as irrelevant. But something about it sank into me like a barbed hook, dragging up things I had long buried.

When had I become this kind of king?

The kind who sat in darkened rooms, weaving impossible choices into palatable fates? The kind who held power, but not enough to save the things that truly mattered? The kind who had to

mark his mate to keep her from being ripped away—while also dooming her, slowly leading her into a snare.

I clenched my jaw, unable to say anything.

Everything had changed.

With my plans, with the Flux. I couldn't even recall the last time I felt Cerberus's presence. Something had shifted in me. And things were about to change in the pack too, once the truth came out. 1

And there was only one common denominator.

Red.

I should have hated her for disrupting my plans, but instead, all I could see was *her*.

Not as a pawn. Not as a strategic move. Not as the key to securing my reign.

Just her.

Her sharp, fire-lit eyes that had stared me down in defiance when she had every reason to break. The way her voice wavered, but never faltered, when she spoke her truth. The weight of her fear—so raw, so familiar—yet despite it all, she still stood.



I was still reeling from the fact that she had made an appearance when her parents came in. Her words, spoken with poise and just enough bite. That beautiful mind—beautiful, like everything else about her.

Defiant until your last breath.

She should have shattered.

Instead, she had become the one thing I could not ignore.

And that terrified me.

I turned away from Montegue, unable to meet his knowing gaze.

"I am the king I need to be," I muttered, gripping the edge of my desk until my knuckles turned white. "Nothing more, nothing less."

Montegue laughed. "I love these games—the discordance of the royal court, the secrets, the ploys. It's a symphony, Hades. And you—" he gestured vaguely in my direction, his smirk deepening, "—are the conductor."

I stiffened.

The conductor.

The one who kept the chaos from unraveling

into madness. The one who made sure every note of deception, every whisper of power, played in perfect harmony.

A king who controlled the orchestra of war.

I hated how inaccurate it was now.

I exhaled sharply, pushing away from my desk. "And what does that make you?" I asked, my voice quieter now, laced with something colder.

Montegue tilted his head slightly, considering.

"The violinist, perhaps," he mused. "The one who plays a single, mournful note that lingers long after the symphony has ended."

My eyes narrowed.

The door swung open and in walked Kael.

My heart skipped when I saw his face.

His eyes were wide, his expression stricken.

Red.

I moved toward him. "What happened?"

He ran a hand through his hair. "It's the Silverpine Beta. He's trying to get access to the princess in her room—despite security." 3

"He can't fucking enter," I barked, already making

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my way to the door.

Kael's voice stopped me.

"That's not the only problem now." His voice was grave. 1

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