

## 198 I Said "No"

Eve 1

"Extend your claws," Hades whispered against my ear, his breath sending a pleasurable chill through me. "They are there, you just need to find it, my love."

I took a deep breath, concentrating.

"Rhea..." I called hesitantly, dreading the silence that I had become accustomed to. 1

"Right here, Evie." She murmured in my mind.

"They are right within your reach."

"Let the nerves between you and Rhea connect." Hades instructed. He squeezed my hand, reassuringly. "I know you can do it."

I exhaled slowly, closing my eyes as I focused inward. I could feel Rhea's presence, warm and steady, like a pulse beneath my skin. The bond between us was there, just beyond my grasp—like the whisper of a dream slipping through my fingers.

"Feel it, Evie," Rhea urged. "Your body is ours to command. The power is there. Let me guide

you."

A deep hum vibrated through my bones, a strange warmth spreading from my fingertips to my wrists. I gasped as a prickling sensation raced beneath my skin, sharp and electric. My fingers twitched involuntarily.

"That's it," Hades murmured, his voice laced with pride. "Now, let it manifest."

I clenched my fists and focused. A sharp sting followed, like something tearing through the surface of my skin, but there was no pain—only a sense of becoming. A deep, primal part of me stirred, awakening.

Then, I heard it. A faint snikt.

I opened my eyes, my breath catching as I stared at my hands.

Curved, onyx-black claws extended from my fingertips, gleaming under the dim light of the room. They looked deadly—sleek and sharp, as if they could cut through steel.

A rush of exhilaration surged through me. I did it.

Hades chuckled lowly, tilting my chin up so I met



his gaze. "Beautiful," he murmured. "Now, let's see what else you can do." He dropped a kiss on my forehead.

"Brace for it, darling," Rhea whispered in my mind, her voice filled with pity.

One moment, my claws fully extended, and then violent jolt shot through my skull.

Pain.

No, not pain—something worse. A tidal wave of memory, raw and blistering, crashing into me like a wrecking ball.

A flash—

A crushed SUV, its frame twisted beyond recognition. Glass shards glittering in the firelight, reflecting the orange glow of hungry flames. 2

The sickening scent of gasoline clung to the air, thick and suffocating.

A headlight, shattered but still flickering weakly, illuminating a figure sprawled on the pavement.

And then—

A scream. High-pitched, raw, shredded.

"Leon!"

The voice was ragged with desperation, cutting through the chaos like a blade. My pulse thundered in my ears, my vision splitting.

More flashes—

The screech of tires. The scent of burning rubber.

Blood. So much blood.

Something inside me ripped. My breath hitched. My claws twitched.

The world around me warped, turning dark at the edges, as if I were being pulled back, sucked into something deep and endless—

A pair of arms wrapped around me, strong and grounding. A presence, steady and real.

"Eve."

The voice was deep, urgent.

Hades.

I gasped, my body convulsing as the visions shattered. Cold air rushed into my lungs, and the suffocating scent of gasoline vanished, replaced by the faint, smoky spice of Hades' presence.



My legs buckled. He caught me before I could collapse, his grip firm as he pulled me back against his chest.

I was shaking.

"I'm fine," I rasped, swallowing against the rawness in my throat. "I'm fine."

Hades didn't loosen his hold. Instead, he tilted my head back, his golden eyes sharp and assessing. "Are you?"

I frowned. "I—"

His thumb brushed against my cheekbone, his expression darkening.

"Your nose is bleeding," he murmured.

I blinked, my fingers rising to touch the wet warmth dripping down my lip. Crimson stained my fingertips, stark against my pale skin.

Hades' jaw clenched. "It must be your body adapting to the reversal of the Hollowing," he said, voice laced with concern. "Your system is trying to expel the remnants of the wolfsbane."

I sucked in a shaky breath. My body felt wrong—like something had been excavated from me, and now it was struggling to put itself back together.

Rhea's presence stirred weakly in the back of my mind.

"We are healing," she whispered. "But the damage runs deep, Evie. The memories..."

My stomach twisted.

I wiped at the blood absently, my mind still reeling from the images burned into my skull.

Leon.

Who is Leon?

I forced myself to take a slow, steady breath, pushing the memory down—locking it away before it could swallow me whole. Now wasn't the time to unravel. I had come too far for that.

Hades watched me closely, his golden eyes unreadable, but I could feel the tension in his grip. He was worried. He never showed worry, but it was there, lurking beneath the careful control of his expression.

"That's enough for today," he finally said, his voice gentle yet firm. "You are making the most beautiful progress." His hand cupped my jaw, his thumb tracing a slow, reverent line against my skin before he dipped his head and pressed a



lingering kiss against my lips.

Warm. Grounding.

I melted into it, letting his touch tether me to the present, to him. The memory still lingered, a ghost in the back of my mind, but I ignored it, focusing instead on the taste of Hades—dark spice and fire.

But then—

A sharp, frantic banging shattered the moment.

I jerked back, heart hammering as the heavy wooden doors rattled beneath the force of the blows.

And then—

The doors slammed open, crashing against the walls with a force that sent a gust of wind through the chamber.

The scent of overpowering, sickly-sweet perfume choked the air, clinging to my throat like poison.

And then she was there.

Felicia. 1

Her stiletto heels clinked ominously against the



marble floors as she stormed into the room, her sheer black gown fluttering around her like a shroud of smoke.

Her venomous presence suffocated.

Her face was twisted in a mask of rage, her crimson-painted lips curled into a snarl. Her violet eyes burned with unhinged fury as they locked onto Hades—then me. 1

"You want to make a mutt our queen?" she screeched, her voice raw with hysteria. "A fucking werewolf?"

Her words struck like a whip.

The sheer disgust in her tone sent a cold shard of fury through me, but before I could react, Hades was already stepping in front of me, his posture dangerous.

His eyes flickered with restrained power, but his expression remained calm—too calm.

"Careful, Felicia," he said, his voice a deadly purr. "You forget your place."

Felicia let out a sharp, humorless laugh, her nails digging into her own arms as if restraining herself from lashing out. "My place?" she spat.



"Oh, I know my place. Do you? Because from where I'm standing, you've gone mad."

Her wild gaze snapped to me, filled with unfiltered loathing.

"You let her corrupt you." Her voice wavered, teetering on the edge of derangement. "You let her ruin you." 1

I clenched my jaw, my claws still extended, my blood still thrumming from the aftershock of my transformation. I should have felt intimidated—should have feared the sheer, burning malice rolling off her in waves.

But all I felt was... exhaustion.

Felicia's hatred was nothing new.

I had spent my entire existence being despised, hunted, reviled for what I was.

And now?

Felicia's gaze snapped to me, her lips curling into something that was almost a sneer—almost a smirk.

"There it is," I thought. That satisfaction. That twisted sense of power she gets when she thinks she can break me.



She took a slow step forward, her green eyes glinting with something cruel, something sharp.

"Remember what I told you when you first arrived here?" she murmured, her voice deceptively soft, yet laced with venom. "When you began your degenerate shenanigans, playing queen in a kingdom you do not belong to?"

She cocked her head, her gaze running over me like I was something filthy.

"You will refuse the Obsidian Crown," she continued, each word deliberate, measured. "You know what you are. You cannot rule. They will tear you apart."

Her voice dipped into a whisper, but it felt louder than a scream. 1

"Use your senses, unlike your husband." She glanced at Hades, her expression flickering with something close to desperation before her gaze found mine again. "Decline this. Decline him." 1

Hades moved, his presence a storm about to break, his lips already parting to cut her down—

But I spoke first.

"No." 1



The word was quiet. Steady. 1

Felicia froze, her pupils shrinking into pinpricks.

"No?" she echoed, as if the concept was foreign to her.

I took a step forward, letting the sharp click of my claws against the marble punctuate the air between us. 1

Felicia's expression twisted, something dark flashing behind her green eyes. She took another step forward, her presence crackling with barely restrained fury.

"Say that again." Her voice was low, dangerous—a challenge wrapped in venom.

I didn't move.

Didn't flinch.

Instead, I tilted my head, studying her like she was something... unremarkable. 1

Like she was just another voice in the long, endless chorus of people who had tried to tell me what I couldn't be.

Another desperate soul clinging to a reality that no longer existed. 2



"I said no,"

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