

200 Hello ²

Eve ¹

As I felt heavy hands settle on my shoulder, I was pulled back from the visions.

"Little by little, Evie. It will all make sense soon," Rhea assured ominously in my mind. Still, I could not fight the wave of dread that sent a chill running down my spine.

"Red," Hades' voice fully brought me back. But it was slightly panicked. "You're having a nosebleed." He took a handkerchief to my nose as the ringing in my ears subsided. He twirled me so I could face him, his brow furrowed, his expression wrought with worry. "Are you okay?" he whispered, wiping at my nose.

I managed a shaky smile, trying to grimace. I'm alright.

I turned my attention back to Elliot, only to find him staring between me and his mother, who remained on the floor.

Felicia's gaze remained glued to me as if anticipating me lunging at her once again. She paid no mind to her son.



He had that unreadable expression as he stared at the scene. As though he were analyzing the situation, there wasn't even a hint of surprise on his face.

Hades stepped towards Elliot first, sidestepping Felicia to get to him. Hades crouched down smoothly, his sharp features softening as he looked at Elliot. His large hands, so often drenched in violence, rested lightly on the boy's shoulders.

"Hey, kid," he murmured, his voice warm in a way I had never heard before. It was the first time I had seen him speak to a kid. "Bit of a dramatic entrance, don't you think?"

Elliot blinked up at him, unfazed. He shook his slowly.

Hades huffed a short laugh, then—without warning—lifted Elliot off the ground with ease, settling him on his hip like he weighed nothing. "You've gotten heavier," he mused, bouncing him slightly. "Have you been eating bricks?"

For a moment, just a fraction of a second, Elliot almost smiled. Almost. He glanced at me like he knew something that he shouldn't know.



Suddenly, his eyes flickered fully to the man who carried him, but not on his face—on his ear, on the singular drop of emerald that hung from his left ear. I noticed then...

They were an almost perfect match with his own eyes. My stomach lurched a little, my breath hitching, the ringing in my skull momentarily returning before fading. As though both my mind and body felt something was amiss, there was something I was missing. My body knew, but my mind was too slow to grasp the signals. 4

"Rhea?" I whispered, my voice in my head drowned almost entirely by the waves of chaos in my tangled mind. I knew she felt it too.

"All in due time, my dear," Rhea howled softly in my mind. "The truth is patient. One piece at a time."

I took a small step forward, tilting my head.

"Hello, Ellie," I greeted, raising a hand in a small wave, offering him a smile.

Before he could respond, Felicia's head snapped toward me with a ferocity that sent a jolt of warning through my bones.

"Don't you dare speak to him!" she spat, rising to



her feet with renewed rage. Her voice was like a whip, sharp and venomous, her entire body coiled with aggression.

The way she moved—the way she reached for Elliot—was instinctive, desperate.

She yanked him from Hades with a grip so tight that Elliot barely reacted, as if used to it. She clutched him to her side, her fingers digging into his small frame as though she feared I would snatch him away. 3

Her head jerked back toward me, her breathing uneven.

"Stay away from my son," she seethed. "You don't speak to him. You don't look at him. You don't—"

"Felicia," Hades cut in sharply, his expression darkening. "Stop."

Her glare flickered to him, but he stood firm, his silver eyes steely.

"These outbursts," he continued, voice measured but firm. "You'll scare him."

Felicia flinched. It was the barest reaction, so quick I might have missed it, but it was there.

Her grip on Elliot tightened just a fraction before



200 Hello



she forced herself to loosen it. Slowly, carefully, she exhaled, smoothing her hand over his small back as if to soothe whatever damage she had caused.

But Elliot wasn't trembling.

He wasn't crying.

He simply watched.

Watched me.

Watched her.

His unreadable green eyes flickered between us all, absorbing everything, analyzing, as though he were collecting data for something bigger than any of us could understand.

There was so much that he wanted to say, I could see it in the way his lips twitched, but there was no way he could do it.

And when his gaze finally landed on mine, I felt a shiver run down my spine.

Because there was recognition there.

Something knowing.

Something unnerving.

I swallowed hard.



Hades took a slow step forward, his tone gentle for Elliot but insistent. "Let him go, Felicia."

Felicia's jaw tensed, her muscles locked. She glanced at me before looking back at Hades. "This will come crashing down soon," she growled out of nowhere. "All of it," then her head snapped to me. "I will be your fucking demise, you Valmont bitch."

"Language," Hades and I chided at the same time, the synchronicity catching me off guard.

Felicia let out a bitter laugh, her grip on Elliot ironclad as she took a wary step back. Her eyes still lingered on me too long. She twirled on her heel and made her way to the door.

A sudden movement caught my attention. Elliot turned slowly, his eyes meeting mine once more. But this time, there was something different in the way he looked at me. A subtle shift in his gaze, a moment of silent communication that I hadn't expected.

Without warning, his hands moved, fingers twitching in a familiar pattern. I blinked in confusion as he signed, his movements smooth and deft. He wasn't speaking, not in the traditional sense, but his hands formed a clear,



precise word. One that I understood.

"Hello."

He was signing to me.

Soon, he disappeared with his mother down the hall.

I turned to Hades. "Elliot can sign?"

Hades looked down at me, seemingly confused at what I had asked. He swallowed nervously.

"You..."

"About Danielle?" I asked, feeling the lump in my throat harden but keeping my face clear of the anxiety that ran amok within me.

He swallowed again before nodding shakily.

I clasped his hand. "You had a life before me, Hades. I do not fault you for that. I could never," I squeezed his hand gently. "Danielle deserves a place in your heart. That is all we can give those we have lost: remembrance." I reached out and pressed my palm to his chest. "But you deserve closure. She loved you, and I know she would have wanted the same." I managed a shaky smile. Despite my words sounding logical, it was still hard to fight the twisting feeling inside me. My



heart ached for him, and yet, a part of me felt that same sharpness in my chest that I could never fully understand—this strange gap between us, even as I tried to bridge it with my words.

Suddenly, he pulled me flush against his chest, wrapping himself around me tightly. "I don't deserve you," he whispered against my neck, where he buried his face. "I will live the rest of my life trying to be worthy of you."

I returned the embrace, hoping that now, with my secret out, there would be no more obstacles for us.

"Be ready, child. Stay strong," Rhea said ominously in my mind.

"Why?" I asked, dread coiling in my stomach like a snake.

"I don't remember. Our memory is distorted, but I sense a storm coming."