

202 Planning Phase

Hades 1

"So when do you propose the meeting should be held?" Someone asked.

I snapped out of my thoughts to find everyone staring at me, concerned.

"Yeah, I...um..." I ran my hand down my face.

"We lost you there for a second," Kael looked concerned despite his light tone. I was not the type to get distracted, especially with a case like this one.

"Are you alright?" Eve asked, worry making her brows bunch.

"Peachy, my love," I replied.

"Oooooo," Kael teased. "I like the ring of that one. Red will always be classic, but my love?..." He kissed the air "is exquisite." 2

I rolled my eyes as Kael waggled his brows, clearly finding amusement in my response.

Before he could say something snarky, he placed his hands together, eyes looking up at the ceiling dramatically. "Goddess, I have seen what you



have done for others—"

I swatted him upside the head before he could finish.

"Ow!" He yelped, rubbing the spot where I hit him. "That was uncalled for, you brute!"

Eve let out a genuine chuckle, the sound light and unrestrained, filling the room like a breath of fresh air. It was rare, these moments of ease, and I found myself relaxing ever so slightly at the sound.

Kael grinned despite his supposed suffering. "See? At least Eve appreciates me. Unlike some people."

I sighed, shaking my head. "This is a serious discussion, Kael. Try to act like you have some level of decorum."

Kael placed a hand over his heart, feigning offence. "I am nothing but the picture of professionalism." It had been a while since this side of Kael had shone through.

Eve laughed harder, and for a moment, I could pretend that things were normal. That there weren't threats waiting outside these walls, that we weren't preparing to face the very people



who had destroyed her.

But reality was a cruel thing.

Amelia cleared her throat, drawing us back to the matter at hand. "So, when do you propose the meeting should be held?"

The weight of responsibility crashed back onto my shoulders. I exhaled sharply, running a hand down my face.

"We need to move fast," I said. "The longer we wait, the more control they believe they have. We set the terms, and we set them now."

Eve's smile faded, but she nodded. "Tomorrow. No more delays."

Kael whistled lowly. "Straight into the lion's den. Alright then. I'll make the arrangements." Trying to lessen tension.

Amelia hesitated before nodding. "Eve, I want you to check in with me before and after the meeting. No exceptions. The fact that you want to do this without any prompting tells me your body is ready, but the fear remains, but despite fear, creatures--"

"Still walk forward," Eve finished softly.



Amelia gave her a small, approving smile.
"Exactly. Courage isn't the absence of fear, Eve. It's moving forward in spite of it. But you need to be mindful of how much you push yourself. Just because you're ready doesn't mean you won't feel the weight of it later."

Eve inhaled slowly, absorbing her words. "I understand."

"Good." Amelia leaned back in her chair, tapping a finger against the table. "And what about safeguards? If things go south, what's the plan?"

"I'll be outside the door," I stated firmly, leaving no room for debate.

Eve sighed, but she didn't argue. She knew I wouldn't budge on this.

Kael nodded. "I'll have the entire perimeter secured. If they try to pull anything, we'll know before they do."

"New cameras will be installed in the room, and motion sensors will be present as well. Even if they manipulate footage, who knows what those bastards have up their sleeve, they cannot get anywhere near you. The position you assume at the beginning is the one you will assume till the



end."

Amelia looked unconvinced. "And if they try to manipulate her? Psychological warfare is their best weapon. We all know that."

Eve squared her shoulders. "I have Rhea. We will work as a team. I won't be alone."

Something dark flickered in her eyes, and then something resolute. A glimpse of her wolf through her eyes.

I hated that she had to fight this battle at all, but at the same time, I had never been prouder of her.

Kael exhaled, rubbing the back of his neck. "Tomorrow, then. Just promise me one thing, Eve."

She raised a brow. "What's that?"

"That you remember who the hell you are. You're not the girl they locked away anymore. You're Eve Stravos—and you don't belong to them."

I felt my heart swell at the sound of her name with mine. It rang right and true.

Eve blinked at him before giving a small nod. "I promise."



Amella studied her for a moment before pushing back her chair and standing. "Then that's settled. Eve, we'll meet in the morning before the audience. Rest tonight. Your mind needs it just as much as your body."

Eve sighed but didn't protest.

Kael stood as well, stretching. "Guess that means we're dismissed." He shot me a mischievous grin. "Unless, of course, Hades wants to keep giving us his best brooding glares."

I rolled my eyes, but before I could retort, he clasped my shoulder dramatically. "Goddess, I have seen what you've done for others," he murmured in mock reverence.

I swatted him upside the head again.

"Ow! That was undeserved!" he whined, rubbing his scalp.

Eve chuckled, her laughter light and genuine, and just like that, the weight in the room lifted slightly.

She looked at me then, something unreadable in her expression. "Stay with me tonight?"

"As if you even have to ask," I murmured.



Kael groaned. "Alright, alright. I'm leaving before this turns into some tragic romance moment. I have things to do, people to threaten. You know how it is."

"Yes, professionalism at its finest," I muttered dryly. "Thank you," I mouthed to him. I knew he was trying to cushion the weight of the pressure on Eve with his silliness, and it worked. If I did not need him so much, I would have let him become a stand-up comedian like he wanted to be when we were kids." 1

Kael winked. "Always." With that, he strolled out, whistling.

Amelia shook her head at him before nodding at Eve. "I'll see you in the morning."

Eve nodded. Amelia tossed me a heavy look before she walked out as well. I knew what it meant. She wanted to talk.

I reached for her hand, squeezing it gently.

"Tomorrow, no matter what happens, you are a Stravos now."

"I know," she said softly, but there was something else in her gaze—something heavy.