



218 The Fire Beneath My Skin

Eve 1

I blinked, dazed by the state of the office—the cracked walls, the shattered wood, the lingering pulse of something dark and violent in the air.

The air carried the coppery scent of blood and I braced myself for a reaction.

"It's blood, Evie. You are stronger than that." Rhea's held back the bile and fear. I could think clearly.

Hades stood in the center of it, rigid, his shoulders tense with the kind of restraint that made my stomach knot. His shadows were still curling at his feet, writhing like living things trying to claw their way back out.

Felicia was across the room, pressed against the edge of his desk, her breathing steady but sharp, like she had just been through hell but refused to show it.

And the blood—her blood—was smeared across her lip, trailing down her arm where a wound had been only seconds ago.



I swallowed.

I wasn't stupid. I had walked in on something dangerous.

Something that felt like it had been teetering on the edge of breaking apart.

Elliot stirred in my arms, letting out a small, sleepy sigh, completely unaware of the storm I had just stepped into. I adjusted my hold on him instinctively, my fingers tightening around the soft fabric of his shirt.

And then, I forced my voice to be light, calm, even as my pulse pounded in my ears.

"Hades," I said slowly, watching the way his name seemed to drag him back. "What happened here?"

Hades' gaze snapped to me—quick, sharp, like a predator that had just realized he wasn't alone.

And for a moment, I didn't recognize the look in his eyes.

Dark. Wild. Hollow.

It made something cold slither down my spine.

But then—just as quickly as it came—it was gone.



His expression shifted, the dangerous edge retreating, locking itself away behind a practiced mask. His shadows stilled, withdrawing back into the depths where they belonged.

"It's nothing," he said, his voice even. Too even.

Felicia let out a sharp, amused breath, dabbing at the blood on her lip with her sleeve. "Nothing," she echoed, voice laced with mockery. "Right. Because you always redecorate with your fists."

I glanced between them, my stomach twisting.

They had fought.

No—Hades had fought.

But not just physically.

There was something unspoken sitting between them, something heavier than just bruises and broken furniture.

Something deeply personal.

I exhaled, shifting Elliot higher on my hip before setting my gaze back on Hades.

"Why is there blood?" I asked, quieter now.

Hades' jaw ticked.

Felicia smirked.



And that was what made my heart sink.

Felicia was enjoying this.

Enjoying the fact that whatever had happened had shaken Hades to his core.

He was trying to hide it, trying to be composed, controlled. But I had spent enough time with him to see past the walls he built around himself.

He was unraveling.

And Felicia had something to do with it.

I took a slow, careful step forward. "Hades," I said again, softer this time.

His gaze snapped to mine.

And just like that, his expression shifted again—less cold, more raw.

Almost like... like he was afraid.

Not of me.

But of what I had just walked into.

Felicia hummed. "Go on, Your Highness," she drawled. "Tell her, or should I?"

Hades' entire body went rigid.

I frowned. My grip on Elliot tightened. "I was not

speaking to you," I said quietly, without glancing at her, my eyes solely on Hades.

I heard her let out a huff.

His gray eyes said a thousand things that I could not decipher, especially with the suffocating tension in the room.

His throat worked as he swallowed. "Red..."

"We were talking about the wife he can't seem to let go. The one he can't face since you"—her voice took on a venomous edge—"since you took her place."

The words landed like a slap to the face, cold and deliberate, slicing through the thick tension with razor precision.

Took her place.

I hadn't thought much about Danielle.

I knew her name. I knew the ghosts she left behind, the shadows that still clung to Hades. I knew her death had carved something irreparable into him. But for the first time, the weight of it pressed against me, suffocating, relentless.

Like I had trespassed somewhere I didn't belong.



Like I was just filling a void.

The air around me grew thick, my skin prickling as something restless stirred inside me.

"A few gashes won't hurt, Evie."

Rhea's voice slid into my mind, sultry but laced with something almost sympathetic. She knew that I was hurt; she was hurt too. My pain bled into hers.

"Let it out."

My breath came out shaky, uneven.

I knew what was happening.

I could feel the shift, the way my pulse slowed, the way the edges of my vision burned gold.

Felicia's words had done more than cut—they had unleashed something.

Something feral.

Something not quite me.

I felt it before I saw it—the glow of my own eyes reflecting off the broken glass on the floor, flickering like embers waiting to devour.

Felicia saw it too.

Her amusement vanished.

In a blink, she staggered back, her body betraying her as her instincts took over.

Fear saturated her features, her usual smug expression cracking as her hands trembled at her sides.

Her breath hitched. "You—"

A tremor ran through her entire body, something primal setting in as she took another step back, nearly stumbling against the desk.

She looked at me like I was a monster.

Her fear was palpable, saturating the air between us like a thick, cloying fog.

For the second time since I'd met her, she looked truly afraid.

Not amused.

Not calculating.

Not smug.

Afraid.

It should have satisfied me. Should have made me feel some sense of victory.



But all I felt was rage.

Not at her—at myself.

Because for that moment, for that one moment, I had let her words burrow under my skin. I had let her poison fester inside me, let it turn my pain into something feral, something uncontrollable.

Something I swore I would never become.

I was not the monster my family called me, even if James' parting words still lingered in my mind, like a distant echo.

But before I could drown in it—before I could spiral any further—Hades moved.

Strong arms wrapped around me, firm but careful, pulling me into his warmth. Into him.

I stiffened, still trembling from the fire burning beneath my skin.

And then—his lips brushed against my hair, his voice a low murmur.

"She lies."

His hand traced soothing circles on my back, pulling me back.

"You know that."

I clenched my eyes shut, my breath shuddering out of me.

"I have my soul and my heart."

My body froze.

The fire in my chest stumbled, faltered—then extinguished, doused by something heavier than pain.

Guilt.

I let out a slow, unsteady exhale.

Felicia had wanted this. She had wanted me to unravel, wanted me to become something I wasn't.

And I had almost let her.

I wasn't her.

I wasn't this.

I had nothing to prove.

Slowly, I let my arms slip from where they had tensed, bringing them around Elliot's small body, adjusting him against me. His head lolled to the side, still deep in sleep, his breath even, his small fingers curled into my sleeve.

Felicia hadn't moved.

Not since my eyes had glowed.

She was still staring, stiff, pale, her back nearly pressed against the desk, her fingers curling into the edge like she needed something to hold her up.

I took a slow step back from Hades, adjusting Elliot on my hip, letting him fully rest against my shoulder, wrapping my arm around him securely.

Felicia flinched. "You..." she whispered again, taking another step back. 1

"This can't be."

