



## 222 Whispers

Hades 1

"Morrison's health has deteriorated," Governor Gallinti informed, looking through some documents I had distributed. "His wife says that he has not been able to step out of his room. He has been talking about the 'voices,' so to say."

Everyone tried to remain casual as the words hung heavily in the air, but I could see their eyes darting clandestinely toward me—except Kael, who scoffed in amusement.

I cleared my throat, tossing that unneeded discussion out the window. "On to the topic of today's discussion."

"The Valmonts are gone..."

"And they won't be back for a long while if all goes to plan."

A collective breath was let out.

"The donor remains with us, then," Ambassador Silas sighed.



The title of donor grated against me, my jaw clenching so I did not give Morrison a friend.

"Yes, she stays."

"So there is no need for the coronation," Governor Gallinti said. "She remains with us until the process of maturing the Fenrir's Vein is over."

I almost laughed. "The plan remains the same."

The table froze, but no one spoke.

"Or are you satisfied with not being granted the serum she will be donating? This is your choice. This Council was becoming a tad bit overcrowded."

My ear caught Governor Gallinti gulping.

"A werewolf has a Luna," Silas remarked, trying to sound casual, but the edge in his voice was unmistakable. "I wonder what Elysia would think."

"Goddesses have better things to do than concern themselves with mortal affairs," I replied smoothly, though the weight of Silas' words pressed against my patience. His challenge was



deliberate—a test to see how far I was willing to go in defying tradition.

Kael smirked, drumming his fingers against the table. "So it's decided then. The princess stays, the coronation proceeds, and we finally get what we've been waiting for."

Silas' fingers twitched, betraying his unease. "And if she resists?"

I leaned forward, my gaze sweeping across the gathered council. "She won't. She thinks she is dying. Her getting poked with needles will be chalked up to me searching for a cure."

The flux surged forward, and I fought a wave of disgust. I wanted to rip out my tongue. The mark at the base of my neck burned so hot I was surprised I did not burst into flames. I swallowed the bile and continued. "Everything is under control."

"Of course you do," Montegue's oily voice slithered into the conversation, laced with its usual blend of cunning and quiet assertion. He was becoming his old self again—measured, deliberate, always speaking in carefully crafted half-truths that left room for doubt and





speculation.

"Except for that one time..."

"But there have been some whispers."

Montegue let the words hang in the air, a baited hook waiting for a reaction. I didn't give him one.

Kael, however, was less patient. "Whispers," he repeated, amusement dripping from his tone.

"Since when do we entertain the words of cowards who lack the spine to speak plainly?" He knew where this was going and how detrimental it would be to the plans for him to pull this before the council. I headed the council, but I had long since learned that no mortal being could be invincible in the face of many oppositions.

Power was like a taut rope—one could pull, bend, and manipulate it, but stretch it too far, and it would snap, leaving even the strongest to fall into the abyss.

I was not weak. But even kings knew when to loosen their grip before the rope frayed beyond repair.



Montegue smirked, his fingers steepled together. "Since those whispers began to align with suspicions that some of us have had for quite some time." His eyes found mine, dark and sharp with unspoken intent.

I exhaled slowly. "Speak your mind, Montegue. Or shall we continue this game of riddles?"

He tilted his head slightly, as though considering his next move. "The princess has changed."

Silas shifted uncomfortably, and Gallinti kept his gaze firmly on the documents before him, unwilling to involve himself in whatever was about to unfold.

"So?" I said flatly.

Montegue's smirk deepened. "So, she is stronger, faster. The restraints on her recovery should have kept her docile, and yet..." He chuckled. "Felicia learned the hard way that the princess has quite the temper."

"Felicia has a habit of getting in people's faces," Kael said lazily, leaning back in his chair. "It was only a matter of time before someone threw her through a wall."



Montegue ignored him, his gaze never leaving mine. "The whispers, Your Majesty, suggest that her strength is unnatural. That something... has accelerated the process. The marking has been done."

There it was. The true purpose of his words. He could not get the truth out of me last night, so he needed an audience.

I met his gaze without flinching. "And what exactly are you insinuating, Montegue?"

His smile was slow, deliberate. "I'm saying that if the Fenrir marker has already begun to mature in her blood, we may need to move up our timeline. We can have her in the lab by tomorrow." 1

I leaned forward, resting my elbows on the table. "Or," I said coolly, "you are simply looking for an excuse to justify your impatience."

The room went still.

Montegue studied me, searching for cracks, for tells. I gave him none.

"Careful, Your Majesty," he murmured, voice low.





"Secrets have a way of unraveling at the worst possible moments."

"Then I suggest you keep your curiosity in check," I countered, my voice like steel. "For your sake."

Silas cleared his throat, breaking the tension.

"The plan remains unchanged. The donor stays. The coronation proceeds." Trying to lessen the tension. No one would want to see ex-in-laws in a battle of wills.

I didn't miss the way Montegue's lips curled slightly at the word donor.

"Then we are done here," I said, pushing back my chair. "Unless anyone else has more whispers to share?"

Silence.

Montegue, for all his cunning, said nothing.

I glanced at the bags in my hand and adjusted my tie for the thousandth time since I received the package I ordered.

Princesses were picky eaters. They wanted to keep their figure and burn calories, but I hoped I



knew Eve well enough to be right.

I had to pamper her. Her coronation was set for next month, but before then, she would have to gain some wonderful weight.

The image flashed in my mind—chubby cheeks and a tummy that I could tickle.

A smile slithered its way onto my lips, and I felt even more sure. I turned the knob and walked in.

"Afternoon, love," I greeted, smiling.

She was by the dresser, and she twisted toward me, her eyes blown wide in shock. "Hades... you are early..." She gulped audibly, sweat on her brow, hiding something behind her back.

Confusion was the first thing I felt before instinct took over, my eyes zeroing in on her.