

## 23 By His Terms

Hades- 1

I moved quickly through the work, narrowing the sight of her bleeding and dying in the tub. I had seen numerous deaths, but this was different. For a moment, my chest tightened, and time seemed to slow to a crawl as I plunged my hands into the crimson water. I checked her pulse, and where there should have been a heartbeat, I didn't feel a flutter beneath my fingers. My stomach dropped, desperation tangled with rage inside me.

"You can't fucking die on me," I growled. I carried her out of the water and straight to the bed.

Kael came in at that moment, his face falling as horror took over his expression.

"I will get the Delta," he said before walking out again.

I checked her pulse once more, and this time I felt its flutter. Faint and barely there. I pressed my hands onto her chest and began compressions.

"Your Majesty."

I raised my head to see Kael with my Delta. She made her way to Ellen's unconscious form, her hand already glowing.



I took a few steps back to give her some space to do her job. I watched as she mended the gashes in Ellen's wrists. She closed her eyes and placed her glowing palms on Ellen's chest.

The seconds dragged on like an eternity as I counted down every last one. Kael clasped my shoulder to ground me.

A few minutes after the Delta had begun attempting to save her, she stopped, panting and turning to us.

"She is stable now, but she will require a blood transfusion. She has lost a lot of blood."

"Alright," I replied, my eyes not leaving Ellen's form.

"I will be back," she said, walking out.

Silence engulfed the room as I stepped closer to Ellen. Her mouth was slightly parted, her chest rising and falling so subtly that it was barely noticeable. Her skin was paler, her lips chapped, and her hair still wet from the bathwater.

All I could do was fucking watch her. She had a peaceful expression on her face. The tightening in my chest returned as anger coursed through me.

Time slowed as I took her in. Just when I believed I had her figured out, she pulls this on me. She was a ball of everything that I hated—

unpredictable, deceptive, and complicated.

What was she fucking thinking? Was this supposed to be her final act of rebellion? Did she want to show me that I had no control over her? It seemed that I had underestimated her. I wouldn't repeat that mistake.

She could not escape me.

Not like this.

Not unless I fucking allowed her.

Cerberus prowled beneath my skin, restless and waiting. "She is not going anywhere."

Our eyes fixed on her, following the shallow rising and falling of her chest. She had thought she could end her life on her own terms, defy me in the only way she thought possible. But I wasn't going to let her die. Not when there was still so much unfinished.

The Delta moved swiftly as she returned with the blood bag. I watched in silence, my pulse thrumming in my ears as she hooked Ellen up to the IV. The room was heavy with tension, the air thick with the scent of blood and something else—something darker, more visceral.

Once the blood began to flow into Ellen's veins, the Delta turned back to me, her expression grim. "It will take time for her strength to return, but the worst has passed."



I gave a curt nod, but my eyes never left Ellen. "Ensure everything is stable," I ordered. "I won't take any risks with her life."

The Delta nodded and returned to her work, placing her glowing hands on Ellen's chest again. The soft glow of healing energy filled the room, illuminating Ellen's still form. I watched closely, the tightening in my chest easing slightly as the Delta worked.

Minutes passed like hours. Then, I sensed something and took a step forward. Her eyelids fluttered, her lips parted, and with a soft gasp, Ellen's eyes opened, and immediately, they locked onto mine.

For a moment, neither of us moved. Her gaze was hazy, disoriented, but there was something there—something defiant, even in her weakened state. Like she knew how perplexed I had been. How angry I still was.

"Leave us," I said, my voice cold, the command laced with barely restrained anger.

The Delta hesitated for a split second, her eyes flicking to Ellen, but Kael placed a hand on her shoulder, urging her to follow him out. The room was empty in moments, the door closing softly behind them, leaving only the two of us in the oppressive silence.

I stepped closer to the bed, my eyes boring into hers. She lay there, fragile, broken, and yet still so maddeningly stubborn. She had tried to escape me, but I had dragged her back from the brink. And I would do it again and again until she had fulfilled her purpose to me.

I lowered myself into the chair by her bedside, my gaze never leaving hers. "What were you thinking?" I muttered, the rage and something else—something deeper—surging inside me. "Did you really think you could defy me like this? That you could end your life and escape me?" I could have cackled if not for the temptation to snap her neck like a twig.

She didn't answer. Of course, she didn't. Her lips trembled, but her eyes never left mine, and in that moment, I saw the fire still burning behind them. Even now, after everything, she still had that spirit in her. That damn spirit. I believed that our last conversation would have already doused it by now.

"You belong to me," I said, my voice low, dangerous. "You will live, and you will die on my terms."

Her breaths were shallow, her chest barely rising and falling, but the challenge in her eyes was unmistakable. She still believed she had some semblance of control, some way to fight

back.

I leaned closer, my voice dropping to a whisper. "You will live, Ellen. And you will face what's coming. I will make sure of that."

For a long moment, neither of us spoke. And as I watched her, the knot of anger inside me began to twist into something else—something dangerous.

I stood, turning away from her before I could say something I wasn't ready to admit. She was mine, and nothing—not even death—would take her from me unless I gave her over myself.

Not until I decided it was over.

"Kill me."

I stopped in my tracks and turned back slowly to her.

"Kill me then," she said again, her voice cracked, not from emotion.

The rage that I had been reigning in rushed to the forefront, Cerberus growling. In a single motion, I pulled out my revolver and aimed it right at her. She did not even flinch.

"Come closer... Hades. Your... shot might not kill me at that distance."

I clenched my jaw, coming closer to her just to show her how damn serious I was. When I was



close enough, she managed to sit up and held the barrel of my gun.

"Go on... pull the trigger," she murmured, pressing the gun to her own forehead.

I pulled the gun away from her grasp, grabbing her by the neck, my anger simmering so fucking hot. I gripped her neck tightly, feeling the rapid beat of her pulse beneath my fingers. My grip was firm, but not enough to choke her—yet. Her eyes never left mine, still burning with that maddening defiance, even as she struggled for breath. She wanted this, wanted me to snap and give in to the rage boiling inside me. She was far more manipulative than I gave her credit for.

Leaning in, I brought my face inches from hers, my breath hot against her skin. "You want me to kill you?" I whispered, my voice dripping with venom. "That would be too easy for you. Death is an escape, Ellen. And I don't give my prisoners an escape."

She blinked, and then she began to laugh. But the sound was hollow, and no mirth reached her eyes.

I froze. I knew that sound all too well. It was a laughter that replaced weeping because it was the only sound left to make when the soul had been crushed beyond repair. It was laughter born out of despair, of hopelessness so deep

that even defiance became a twisted joke.

Her laughter echoed in the quiet room, each hollow chuckle grating against my already frayed nerves. I held her throat a little tighter, just enough to remind her of her place, but not enough to stop her breathing. She wanted me to lose control, to snap and end it for her. But I wouldn't give her that satisfaction.

"You think this is funny?" I growled, my voice low and dangerous.

Her laughter quieted, her eyes meeting mine again, but now they held a different kind of fire—one that was almost dead, but still clinging to something. "It's all... so pointless," she rasped, her voice hoarse and broken. "You. Me. This... game." She swallowed hard, her lips curling into that bitter smile again. "What's the difference, Hades? Between living like this... or dying?"

"You can only die if I allow it."

She smiled. "Then we'll see how much of me you can take before you put a bullet in my skull." 3