



239 Suspicions That Wither

Hades ¹

I cuddled up next to her, drained and... afraid. I took in her scent—the same lavender and honey that had become my lifeline. She was asleep... or so I thought, until she stiffened.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to wake you," I murmured, burying my face in her neck—only for me to stiffen. Her pulse was pounding, as loud as war drums.

"Eve?" I whispered, raising my head.

But she did not look me in the face, her body stiff and twisted away from me.

I let the silence permeate the air fully, waiting to see if she would look at me on her own.

"Love?" I called again, tucking her hair behind her ear so I could see some part of her face.

"What happened?"

Just when I thought I was not going to get through to her, she finally shifted, moving and



facing me. She didn't reply to my question.

I swallowed, made even more uneasy by her strange behavior on top of everything else that had just happened. All that Felicia had said. The memory card that was now with the forensic team—to see whether or not she had handled it, as Felicia had claimed.

Suspicion bloomed like a poisoned flower in my chest, twisting and spreading until I could barely breathe.

"Eve," I said again, more gently this time. "Talk to me. Please."

Her eyes finally met mine, glossy with unshed tears, her lips parted as though words were on the tip of her tongue but refused to come out. I could see the war behind her gaze—fear, guilt, and something else. Something I couldn't name.

"I just..." she started, then trailed off. Her hands fidgeted in the sheets, twisting the fabric between her fingers.

I took her hand in mine, stilling them. "Whatever it is, you can tell me."



She shook her head slowly, then blinked, letting a single tear roll down her cheek. "Hades..." Then her eyes flicked to my ear, and her mouth snapped closed.

Instinctively, my finger went to my ear, where the emerald earring still was, dangling like it had been for five years.

I caught the way her face fell, but she covered up her pain with a nervous smile. She wiped her tears. "It's nothing. Just a nightmare," she whispered.

But for whatever reason, every cell in my body recoiled from the lie. I had seen her after her nightmares—the worst of them. The ones after Jules had died. The ones where death still haunted her. I had been a witness to all of them. But this...

This was different.

The way she almost couldn't meet my eyes for more than a minute before they darted away. The way she was unconsciously pulling away and not melting into me for warmth.

It reminded me of how she had acted in the past



whenever questions were raised about lies she'd told, secrets she'd kept—only to later confess her true identity.

Bells began to ring—deafening and dreadful—echoing in the deepest corners of my mind.

Still, I didn't let it show. I exhaled slowly, brushing her hair back from her face again like I always did. Like everything was fine. Like I didn't feel the ground beneath us quietly splitting open.

"Alright," I said softly, forcing a smile I wasn't sure reached my eyes. "Just a nightmare."

She nodded—too quickly. Too eagerly.

I pulled her closer, wrapping my arm around her waist, trying to ignore how tense she was, how unnatural it felt. For a moment, we just lay there in silence. But it wasn't the kind of silence we used to share. It wasn't peace. It was avoidance.

I rested my chin against her head, closed my eyes. Pretended.

But inside, my thoughts raced. Every word Felicia had said was playing on loop. The



memory card. The blood. The strange, trembling way Eve looked at me now.

I wanted—needed—to believe her. That it was just a nightmare. That nothing had changed.

But something had.

There was a shift in the air between us—subtle but suffocating. Like winter had crept into the room without us realizing, icing over the warmth we'd fought so hard to build.

She wasn't holding me the same way.

She wasn't breathing the same way.

And I wasn't believing the same way.

I kept my grip gentle, my voice low as I whispered, "I've got you, Eve. I'm right here."

Even if everything in me screamed that the truth would rip us apart.

Or maybe I was just projecting. I had hidden things too—things I was starting to believe were better left unspoken until I knew definitively that Eve had no more secrets.

"About Felicia..." I whispered into her copper



locks.

Before I could continue, I felt her heartbeat speed up. She was afraid...

Or was it something else?

"What about her?" Eve tried hard to sound calm, but her voice was so high it cracked.

"What happened between you?" I asked, recalling how she had been levitating, sucking everything into a void I could barely get out from.

It made me question things now. Why did Felicia's accusations—which should have been just nonsensical ramblings of a narcissist—have such a profound effect on her?

Only for Eve to wake up and begin acting odd.

The rose color from my world was slowly receding, no matter how much I tried to hold on to it.

I kept telling myself that it was nothing.

It had to be nothing.

The truth would be revealed soon—but Eve had no idea of that. So this was just me, testing...



The lump in my throat hardened as I waited for her to tell me the truth.

Tell me about what Felicia had accused her of, moments before her bizarre reaction.

The silence that followed tugged painfully at something deep in my chest.

The silence wasn't passive. It was strategic. Calculated.

Eve was thinking—measuring.

Not how to share the truth, but how to manage it.

How to navigate me.

And that realization crushed me more than any confession might have.

It pulled me back to the night I had asked her why she had called herself cursed when the Flux took over.

The image of her wide-eyed as she spilled lie after lie of an elaborate story replayed in my mind like a requiem.

"I—" she started, her breath hitching in her



throat. "You know how she is. Probably her old tricks."

Her voice was feather-light, wavering at the edges as though she herself didn't believe the words coming out of her mouth.

"Probably her old tricks," she repeated, weaker this time. "Always trying to hurt what we have with questions and riddles."

But what we had was no longer the unshakable truth I once held onto like gospel. It was a delicate thing now. Fragile. Fractured.

"Is that all it was?" I asked, my voice calm—too calm—the kind of calm that precedes a storm.

"Just Felicia... playing games?"

Eve nodded, still avoiding my eyes. "Yes."

Another lie. I felt it like a bruise pressed too hard.

"What exactly did she say?" The hammer was raised, aiming for the final nail in the coffin.

"Don't you remember?"

I waited with bated breath.

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She shrugged. "It's a bit fuzzy. I don't really remember."

The hammer made its mark.

And something in me that had begun to live again... withered. 6

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