



267 A Sound?

Hades 1

Elliot had fallen asleep before I even realized it.

Somewhere between the cautious silence and the low hum of the ceiling vent, his little body had slumped against my chest, the tension in his spine slowly uncoiling until he was just... still.

Peaceful.

Like a child again.

I hadn't meant to stay so long. But when I'd lifted him to wash his face, he'd clung tighter, nestling against me with that same quiet insistence I'd seen earlier. A wordless request.

Don't leave.

So I hadn't.

Now I sat on the edge of the sleek, navy-upholstered couch in the room he shared with Felicia, one hand still curled protectively around his small form. His head rested on my shoulder, his breathing soft and even against my



neck. My cold skin did not seem to bother him now. The faintest smell of cling to him—pear blossom, probably from whatever had been used to wash his clothes with. It reminded me of a nursery I once built but never filled.

I brushed a hand over the back of his hair and exhaled through my nose.

Something in me had cracked.

Not shattered—but cracked wide enough to bleed. 1

I shifted slightly, careful not to jostle him as I laid him down against the plush mattress. He whimpered once, but I pressed a hand to his chest and murmured something low—nonsense, really—and he settled.

Only when I was sure he was fully asleep did I stand.

Straightened.

And turn.

Felicia sat in the armchair by the door, legs crossed, a tablet balanced loosely on her lap, though her eyes weren't on the screen.



They were on me.

Watching.

Measuring.

I wasn't sure how long she'd been there.

I cleared my throat softly and kept my tone quiet. "Thanks."

Her brows lifted. "For?"

"For not throwing a fit about me staying. He wouldn't let go."

She smiled—thin, perfectly painted, not quite reaching her eyes. "He gets attached. Quickly."

"Or maybe he just knows who listens." The words slipped out before I could stop them. I didn't look at her when I said it. Just adjusted my cuffs and stepped toward the door.

"You're surprisingly good with kids," she said, voice light. "For someone who threatens to burn half the continent on a bad day."

I stopped, half-turning, a wry smirk tugging at my mouth. "Well, I haven't lit any fires in front of him. Yet."



Felicia chuckled, but I could hear the sharpness beneath it. "Let's keep it that way."

I nodded. "He's special." I found myself saying without thought. I had distanced myself from the child that survived the massacre, grief filling my heart too much to feel relief that the child that was not mine had survived.

The situation had been made more complex when it seemed like I was drawn to the child. It had been instinctual, from the moment I heard him cry out for the first time. 1

I had taken some distance then, guilt and grief melding together, wishing that my brother's son was mine. Wishing he would become what was left of Danielle but it was me being selfish.

When I met the boy again, all the feelings of possessiveness that had seemed to make breathing hard had dissolved, faded away like they had never existed. He was my nephew and I, an uncle.

But maybe Eve's disproven words that made the feelings return, even just a little bit.

Felicia posture stiffened—just slightly. "He's



fragile. And I don't want him caught in the crossfire of... whatever's happening between you and the girl downstairs."

I let the silence stretch before answering.

"Neither do I."

Then I opened the door.

"And about her," Felicia's words stopped me dead in my tracks. "I do hope do what you promised."

Her voice was hesitant, testing.

I reached for the threshold, "That's why you and your family are living in the tower, isn't it? To keep an eye on me and her."

She said nothing for a while, letting the silence raise the tension that remained tangible in the air.

"You have to understand... the word can see how much she affects you. We cannot take chances." 1

"You think I will let her escape?"

Silence

Again.

That was all the answer I needed.



And she was not wrong.

"I understand," I simply said.

"So...tell me what are your plans for her," Felicia whispered her voice carrying a conspiratorial edge.

I let my thoughts settle a little.

There had been a development from the memory card she had found. Some truth that the Silverpine pack or who ever set encryption wanted Eve to know. One that Eve had not unlocked before it was found.

I bit my tongue on that one, keeping it to myself.

"Extracts will be begin soon. In the next 72 hours." I replied. "My team will begin harvesting her markers." 3

Felicia's lips curled ever so slightly, and for a moment, she looked satisfied. "Good," she said softly. "I assume you'll keep me updated on the progress?"

I didn't answer immediately. I only glanced back at her, my jaw working for a second before I said, "There will be a recovery window between each



extraction."

Her brow arched, curious. "Recovery?"

"To allow her body time to stabilize," I said, voice flat. "If she burns out, the markers denature. There's no use in killing the source before the supply line runs dry."

Felicia's expression twitched with something too fleeting to name. Then: "And if she dies anyway?"

"There's a high probability she will," I said simply.

The words hung in the air like smoke.

And then—

A small, sudden sound.

A strained wheeze.

Felicia and I both turned.

Elliot.

Still curled in bed.

But his eyes... weren't fully closed.

I stepped forward, carefully, watching him. His little hands were tucked under his chin, his



breathing shallow. Controlled. Too controlled.

I knelt beside the bed, brushing my fingers
lightly over his wrist.

His pulse was quick.

Too quick.

Faster than it should've been for someone
asleep.

He was pretending.

I looked at him closer, the scent of pear blossom
still clinging faintly to his skin.

His heart rate had spiked.

Fear.

The kind a child didn't show unless they were
terrified of what they might have just overheard.

My voice dropped to a whisper. "Elliot..."

He didn't move.

But I felt it.

The tremble in his fingers. The shiver that ran
through his spine.



Behind me, Felicia stepped forward. "He's just dreaming."

I didn't respond.

Not right away.

Because I knew what a nightmare looked like. I knew what it felt like. The body tossed. The breath caught and gasped. But Elliot... Elliot wasn't tossing. Wasn't crying. He was listening.

Pretending.

Perfectly.

And that terrified me more than anything else I'd seen in years.

But I said none of that aloud.

Instead, I leaned back, smoothed my hand over his curls again and murmured, "Maybe... maybe it's a sign."

Felicia paused. "A sign?"

"He made a sound," I said, my voice even. "Not a full word, but... noise. A reaction. Something. He might find his voice." 2



Felicia froze. Just for a moment. The kind of stillness you only caught if you were watching. 1

Then she smiled. That same practiced, soft thing she wore like perfume.

"I still have hope," she said gently. "I can't imagine his condition being permanent. He's so bright. So full of life."

But something in her gaze didn't match her words.

There was a flicker—one that vanished too quickly. Not hope.

Worry.

Her fingers curled slightly against the armrest. Her shoulders stiffened the way mine did when I was anticipating bad news. Or worse—truth.

I looked back at Elliot. His lashes were still low, his breathing steady like he was trying to fool even his own heartbeat.

Then I looked at Felicia.

And I knew.

It wasn't just Elliot I'd have to watch.



It was her too. 1

Whatever this boy carried—whatever truth was in his silence—he wasn't just protecting someone.

He was surviving something.

And I wasn't about to look the other way again. 2

Not this time.

> "Two cages," the flux murmured. "One below, one above. Which will you open first?" 1

I didn't answer.

But I knew which door I'd be watching from now on.

I woke with a gasp.

My sheets tangled around my legs, sweat cold against my back. The room spun in slow, sick circles as I sat up, every nerve ending thrumming with something close to panic—and something closer to hunger.

Not the kind food could touch.



My mouth was dry. My gums ached. My chest throbbed with a tension that hadn't eased even in sleep.

I dragged a hand through my hair and stumbled toward the window, needing something—air, light, clarity, anything to remind me I was still tethered to something real.

With a groan, I drew the curtains open.

Sunlight spilled through the glass in a golden, sharp wave.

And then—

Pain.

White-hot, instantaneous, unforgiving.

I screamed. A raw, guttural sound ripped from my throat as I stumbled back from the window, clutching my face and forearm. The sunlight hadn't just burned—it had eaten me. 2

My skin blistered in an instant, red-black welts rising where the light had kissed me.

I stared at my arm, breath stuttering in my chest.

No healing. No soothing shift of regeneration.



Only agony.

Only decay.

> "You took a vampire's essence," the flux purred in my skull. "What did you expect?"

I staggered to the wall and slammed my fist into it, snarling as the pain flared higher. "That wasn't part of the deal."

> "You don't even know what the deal was." 1

My knees buckled. I crouched in the shadowed corner of the room, shaking, trying to catch my breath. 1

This wasn't just about the injections.

Or the loss of control.

Or the grief.

This was corruption. The kind that rewrote your biology while whispering sweet promises of power into your bloodstream. 1

I curled my burned hand toward my chest, pulse skittering like a trapped moth.

I'd always walked in darkness.



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But this—

This was the first time the sun had turned
against me.

And I wasn't sure I could walk back from it.

Not now.

Not when it was already inside me.

> "Your light is fading, Lucien," the flux
whispered. "And you're starting to look like me."

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