

27 Broken Piece of A Puzzle

Eve~ 1

I watched as the bird flew about. Something in me ached at the sight. Freedom... It was near yet so far. I looked down at the new phone that I had been given. The numbers that I should have had were already added. My mother's and my father's. Yet, despite having been married off for days now, there had not been a single message, not a single call from them.

I swallowed thickly, emotion clogging my throat. I knew by now that whatever love they had ever felt for me was dead, but still, I craved the voice of someone familiar. I craved it like oxygen.

I swallowed what little was left of my non-existent pride and clicked the call icon. My heart thundered in my chest as the beeping started. I counted each beep until the tenth.

"I am not available at the moment, leave a message after the beep."

I cut the call, biting my lip hard. But it did not stop me from quivering as silent tears fell down my face. I hated myself for this pathetic weakness. But I had lost my strength a long time

ago, and I had just been fooling myself.

A knock pulled me out of my reverie, and I quickly wiped my tears away. If the person wanted to enter, they could. I had no choices here.

"Come in," I said.

The door swung open, and a woman stepped in. Dressed in a white silk shirt and a pair of black trousers, a pair of glasses perched on her nose, and when her eyes fell on me, she waved a bit.

"Hello, princess," her voice was soft yet audible, and I found myself turning fully to her.

"Yes, how may I help you?" I asked.

She smiled. "I just want to talk," she replied.

"Could you help me with that?"

I scrunched my brows, confused as I pointed at myself. "You want to talk to me?"

She nodded, her hands clasped together in front of her lap. "If you don't mind."

I blinked. There was something disarming about her—the way she spoke, moved, and gestured. It seemed natural but practiced all at once. Her hazel eyes were soft, and when I saw her fangs, I was not immediately on high alert.

"I would not mind," I answered after a thoughtful moment.

"Thank you." She came to the bed and sat, patting a space on the bed. "You are not too uncomfortable. Come sit with me so we can talk."

I hesitated before I walked over and sat on the other side of the bed from where she sat.

"My name is Amelia," she said. "But friends call me Lia."

I nodded again, not meeting her eyes.

There was silence for a little while, as though she was waiting for something.

"What did you want to talk about?" I asked finally when I could no longer take the awkwardness.

"Anything," she replied. "But I am most interested in you."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. Tell me about yourself," she asked.

The question was strange from someone that I had never met before, but I found that the company made it easier to ignore the turmoil within me that was tearing me apart.

"L..." I stopped. Then I opened my mouth and tried again. "I am..." My mind went blank all of a sudden. I swallowed, my head aching. Who was I? After five years in captivity, everything had been stripped away. My identity, every shred of who I once was, gone. For five years of my life, I had been kept in a cage, pierced and prodded. I became a simple animal.

I wasn't the person I used to be. That person was long gone, buried under years of captivity, pain, and betrayal.

So I said nothing. I couldn't. It was better that way. Better to stay quiet and pretend I had answers, even when the truth was, I didn't know who I was anymore.

Lia said nothing for a few minutes. "Let's start with your favorite color."

I looked at her. She still had a pleasant expression on her face. She tilted her head at me, to show that she was all ears.

No colors came up in my mind. It was all black. I turned away from her and caught sight of the sky beyond the window, and a color popped up suddenly. *Freedom.*

"Blue," I replied.

"Like the open sky," she murmured. "Mine is green. Like my husband's vegetable garden."

She was not just taking from me, she was giving as well. The feeling it evoked was daunting but pleasant. The corner of my lip twitched. "Green is pretty," I found myself saying.

"It is," she hummed. "What do you do in your free time?"

"I used to sketch," the answer came easier this time.

"You don't anymore?" she asked.

"I lost interest," I lied. There had been no papers and pencils in my cell even when I asked for them.

"Um," she mused.

From there, our conversation continued, and with each new thing I said, she gave more about herself. By the end of it, I didn't want her to leave me alone in my room to wallow in despair.

But just before she walked out the door, she turned around. "I will be back tomorrow."

And for the first time in so long, I looked forward to the next day.

Hades~

"It is not an act," Amelia said the moment she sat in the chair. "She lacks a sense of identity."

I raised a brow. "Which means what exactly?"

"It means," Amelia began, adjusting her glasses and meeting my gaze with unwavering calm, "that she's not pretending. She's been through something that has broken her in ways most can't understand. Her sense of self has been shattered, and she's left clinging to fragments. It's not uncommon in situations like hers."

"A princess of Silverpine is broken?" It sounded like a joke. What could she have possibly gone through?

"Anyone can be broken," Amelia said. "It does not matter what family we are born into. No one knows what is happening when the curtain is drawn." She looked pointedly at me. "You were a prince of Obsidian once too."

I gave her a sharp look.

She bit her lip. "I apologize."

I leaned back in my chair, my fingers drumming on the armrest. "So what do we do about it? Is

she useful or not?"

Amelia's lips pressed into a thin line, and for a moment, I thought she might dare to scold me, but she was too professional for that. "Everyone can be useful, Hades. But she's not a tool. Not yet. She needs to be rebuilt, little by little. If you want her to serve any purpose, you'll need to give her a reason to exist beyond whatever torment she's endured. That starts with giving her control over something—anything."

Control. It was ironic. I'd taken her for the sole purpose of controlling her, of making her a piece in my larger plan. But Amelia was right—broken pieces didn't fit into a puzzle neatly. They had to be put together first. And the princess was far from whole, as it turned out.

"And you think talking about colors and hobbies is the way to do that?" I asked, skeptical.

She nodded. "It's a start. Right now, she's adrift in a sea of confusion. She doesn't know who she is because no one's allowed her the space to rediscover it. The smallest things—a favorite color, an old hobby—they anchor her. Give her something that's hers, that no one can take away. And you—" She paused, her eyes narrowing slightly. "You can't rush this. If you

want her loyalty, you'll have to be patient."

"I don't have the luxury of time," I muttered, my jaw tightening.

"Then you'll lose her." Amelia's voice was firm, leaving no room for debate. "She is not like others you've dealt with. She's fragile, Hades. Push too hard, and you'll break her completely."

My eyes narrowed, frustration bubbling under the surface. "And if she never gets there? If she stays broken?"

Amelia tilted her head slightly, her eyes softening with something that looked almost like pity.

"Then you'll have to decide if she's worth keeping. She still has fight left, buried deep beneath the trauma. It just needs to be coaxed out."

"I have heard all I needed to hear. You can go."

She rose. "You know, as your therapist—"

"Former therapist," I cut her off.

"I have realized something."

I regarded her with a cold look. "What is that?"

"The two of you are alike."

Amelia's words hung in the air, and I felt a



tightness crawl up my spine. *Alike?* The very suggestion was absurd. I wasn't like the princess. I wasn't broken, fragile, or lost. I was in control, always had been.

I didn't appreciate her observation, not even a little. My jaw clenched, but I kept my anger in check, forcing myself to remain composed. A few breaths, a heartbeat, and I felt the cool mask of indifference slide back into place.

"You just reminded me why I fired you," I said, my voice cold, cutting.

Amelia flinched slightly. Then she simply offered me a small smile. "Perhaps," she replied evenly, her tone calm. "But the truth often stings, doesn't it?"

I stood from my chair, turning my back to her. "We're done here, Amelia. You've delivered your assessment. Now go."

She paused for a beat before speaking again. "You might be able to ignore it for now, Hades. But you won't be able to avoid the truth forever. Not when it stares back at you every day." I could feel her eyes lingering on my right ear as she left.

