



295 Die With A Smile

Hades 1

The silence collapsed in on itself.

Cain took a step closer to Eve but kept his gaze locked on mine.

"You don't get to vouch for her now just because you remember how to feel."

I wanted to rip his tongue out. To shut him up before the room remembered too clearly the sins I hadn't yet paid for. But the worst part?

He wasn't lying.

The Flux screamed to strike, to rend, to silence. But I just stood there, watching Eve—begging her with my eyes to say it wasn't real. That this was some elaborate punishment. That Cain was a temporary wound. A ploy. Something I could outlast.

But she didn't say anything.

She didn't look at me.



She didn't have to.

Because I knew.

No...

She couldn't do this.

Cain turned back to the council.

"She needs someone in this room who won't flinch when the tide turns. Who doesn't look at her and see a ticking bomb or a blood sample."

"You have no authority here," Montegue snapped, voice clipped. "You are not in council."

Cain smiled without humor.

"Ah, but that's the funny part, isn't it? Just because I don't sit in your leather chair doesn't mean I don't control a seat."

His voice dropped, but the weight in it made Silas go pale.

"Do you want me to list what I control?"

He turned to Gallintl.

"I know your Eastern trade routes are backed by



silver-mined goods smuggled through Hollow's Point. I know your chief enforcer is siphoning off ammunition and selling to the Black Tier Pack quadrants. I call the shots on that front—and you know it."

To Montegue:

"Your daughter facilitated the death of the late king. I have the ledgers. The timestamps. The communications."

He smirked, fangs gleaming in the dimly lit room.

"Her own husband, as well as her father-in-law. If I wanted to see your empire burn, I'd just have to leak a single article."

He turned, gesturing to Eve.

"I have a witness. Eve Valmont of Silverpine—her father's unwilling weapon in a massacre that your daughter took part in."

My breath stilled in my lungs.

She told... him.

She trusted him enough to reveal something that



took months for me to find out.

Four days out of the tower and she had spilled it all—allowing him to weaponize it against the council. 3

Silas stood up.

"This is treason."

Cain's grin widened.

"This is leverage."

He faced the room again. Calm. Measured. Deadly.

"I know who she is. I know Felicia is the facilitator. I know the Obsidian bloodlines are cracking at their seams. But I am not sworn to silence. Not bound to your codes. Which means, if I want to make her seat valid—I can. And if you try to double-cross her... I will destroy her." 2

He turned to Eve.

"You have my allegiance. Not as a prince. Not as a councilman. As an ally to the savior of Obsidian."

She inclined her head once.



And for the first time in a long time—I felt powerless.

Because Cain wasn't just protecting her.

He was legitimizing her before the council using his influence over their trade and knowledge of their secrets.

Our secrets.

And this—Eve had facilitated.

And there was nothing I could do to stop it without destroying her all over again. Without losing her all over again, if I hadn't already.

Every nerve and cell sang with the hum of betrayal at what she was now doing, and within a second, I had torn Kael's grip off my arm, buzzing with apprehension as I made my way to her.

The room fell into a tense hush, rapid footfalls the only sound that echoed as I reached her.

"What are you doing?"

I should have sounded like I felt—vulnerable, desperate, and hurt—but my voice was a growl

laced with incredulous fury.

"What the hell is this?"

The distance between us was a single breath, and I wanted nothing more than to pull her to me. But when she finally lifted her gaze to mine, my pulse stuttered.

The distance was far more than I could have ever comprehended.

Up close, it was akin to staring into the eyes of a stranger.

Those turquoise orbs—whirls of bright marine blues and sage greens—had dimmed completely.

I killed something in her.

She was a corpse. Cold, but breathing.

It was Danielle all over again.

But even Danielle's skin had been warm in that damned capsule.

From where I stood, it was not only her gaze that was cold—her body emanated a chill that sank into my bones.



I felt the surprise of the Flux.

"Interesting," it murmured, voice soft—its astonishment and intrigue wrapped in mockery.

"Tell me, Eve,"

My hands clamped onto her shoulders, pulling her toward me, forcing her to look only into my eyes. Maybe she would waver. Deter from the path she was taking now.

"What is this?"

I tried not to shake, tried not to frighten her.

But judging from her complete lack of reaction, I doubted I would have that effect, even if—by some accursed fate—I had slapped her instead.

She didn't pull away.

"Insurance," the simple word slipped past her lips, cold and monotone. "Insurance for my people."

"I could have given you that."

Her eye twitched...

It twitched.



"Insurance from you is equivalent to giving a wolf a leash and hoping it doesn't bite." 4

Her voice didn't rise. Didn't crack.

But it landed in me like a lash.

"You protect things until they scare you. Then you cage them. Or bleed them. Or both." 2

I flinched.

Gods help me—I actually flinched.

The room around us didn't matter anymore.

I could feel Kael watching. Montegue judging. Silas sneering.

But they were static—white noise behind the roaring in my ears.

"Eve," I rasped.

But she didn't stop.

"You offered me safety once," she said, softer now. Not kinder. Just... quieter. "And then you drugged me. Shackled me. Turned me into a prisoner. And promised to harvest what made me that way."

I tried to speak.

Tried to tell her it hadn't been like that—

But it had.

And she wasn't finished.

"You don't get to promise me anything anymore," she said. "Not when I had to crawl out of the wreckage of your protection to find my own."

I felt the Flux stir, not with rage this time—but hunger.

*"She doesn't fear you anymore," it whispered.
"How deliciously tragic."*

My grip on her shoulders faltered. I let go.

Because if I didn't—

I would beg.

I would break.

And I think—I know—she wouldn't stop me.

Not out of cruelty.

But because it wouldn't matter.



Cain didn't move, didn't speak.

But I could feel him watching.

He knew he'd won this hand.

He didn't even need to gloat.

Eve took one small step back. Not much.

Just enough to feel like a chasm.

She looked at the others again.

"The only thing I want... is a seat that doesn't
come at the cost of myself."

She paused.

"If you can't give me that, then Cain can.

And I'd rather owe him than trust you again."

"Why not me? Why him?"

I all but screamed into her face, my grip
tightening to the point that I was sure I'd leave a
bruise.

But I couldn't let go. Not now—not when she was
slipping through my fingers.

Silence.

And I watched as pain carved her face, grief made flesh—for a second—before coldness took over again.

"Because I love you," she said. 1

"I would unravel myself, thread by thread, if it meant keeping you whole. I would suffer every cut, every lie, every silence—if it came from you. I would fall apart in your hands and call it love. And if my death meant you would survive..." 2

She inhaled. Exhaled.

"I would die with a smile." 4