

## 30 Change In Strategy

Hades- 1

"You are the reason why she is like this," Amelia said. "You scare her."

"Don't I have that effect on most?" I wasn't bragging; it was an objective fact.

"You are backing her into a corner," she continued, ignoring my tone.

"So? Is that really news?" I asked. "A blind person can see that." 2

She took an exasperated breath as if steeling herself from not losing her mind. "I know you want her to submit because it has worked on others, but she is different."

I scoffed. "She is just like all the rest. She's not the first to try this rubbish."

"I am pretty sure she is the first to put your gun to her own head and tempt you into pulling the trigger."

"She's just being dramatic." I shrugged it off.

"Theatrics."

"You and I both know damn well that isn't true," her voice was harder now.

My eyes narrowed. "Don't tell me you're pitying

her."

She readjusted her glasses on the bridge of her nose. "Don't be silly." But her voice was strained.

I could have laughed. "It seems that the princess is already manipulating you. You do know what she is. What she does to her own people. Do you think, if you were at her mercy, she would hesitate to send you to hell?"

"I am well aware of what she did," she said. "But everyone has a story. Monsters are not born, they are made." Again, she gave me that pointed look as though she was not only speaking about the princess. "You should understand that more than anyone."

"I would remind you to watch yourself, Miss Taylor," I said coolly. "I am not the patient here."

"I apologize, Your Majesty," she muttered quickly. "In essence, what I am saying is that you could treat her better."

"Treat her better, how exactly? Bake her muffins or perhaps rethink putting a shock collar on her?"

Her eyes widened, mortified. "A shock collar?" she gasped. "You're joking."

"You know I'm not the type to joke."

Her face turned pale, her lips parting in shock. "A

shock collar? Can you hear yourself?"

I shrugged, indifferent. "What else can be done? She has done nothing but cause trouble and resist me since she got here, and I am not in the business of playing games."

"Resist you?" Amelia echoed, incredulous. "Maybe she's resisting because all you've done is treat her like an animal, a prisoner. What did you expect, Hades? What the hell did you think would happen?"

"How should I have treated a werewolf like her exactly? Like she was not born of deception and treachery? Like she is not Darius Valmont's daughter?" I gritted my teeth. "If you believe that she deserves better, you are fucking deluded."

"Yet you need her for your plans," she countered. "You need her, essentially, whether you like to believe it or not, on your side. You want to use her, don't you? You have to nurture her first. You just don't want to admit it because that would mean letting go of this image you've built of yourself—the unbreakable king who bends others to his will."

My patience was wearing dangerously thin. "You are crossing that line, Miss Taylor," I gritted out.

"You need to rein in that hatred of yours before you lose the edge you have just acquired in the

war to come. You need her. You have to remember that. She doesn't need you."

My hand twitched, but I held myself in check, my voice lowering dangerously. "You forget who you are speaking to."

"I have not," she replied. "I know who I stand before. I am before Hades Stavros, the Hand of Death, and not before Lu—"

"Don't," I cut her off. "If you're smart, you will not utter that name."

"I am sorry, but just take my advice—"

"Leave," my voice clipped.

"I... Hades..."

"It's Your Majesty to you," I reminded her. "Mrs. Taylor. Leave now."

She did as I had ordered without another word.

The door clicked shut behind Amelia, and silence engulfed the room. I stared at the space she had vacated, her words still ringing in my ears.

*You need her. She doesn't need you.*

The thought irritated me, but there was a seed of truth buried in her statement. I couldn't ignore it, no matter how much I wanted to.

I ran a hand through my hair, exhaling sharply as frustration coursed through me. Amelia's

audacity had grated on my nerves, but the problem was, she wasn't wrong. Ellen was no ordinary opponent; she was different. There was a fire in her that I hadn't seen in others—resistance, yes, but it was more than that. It was defiance rooted in something deeper, something I hadn't yet uncovered.

But I needed her. I needed her to bend, to submit to my will, to become an asset in the war that was looming. I had fought too long and sacrificed too much to let her defiance get in the way of victory. Victory at all costs—that was the vow I had made the day I lost everything.

Victory... no matter the cost.

I had vowed, in the ashes of everything I ever held dear, that I would become stronger. Ruthless. Unbreakable. That I would never allow myself to feel weak again.

And yet here I was, being told I needed to nurture the very thing I had sworn to dominate. To hate.

But Amelia was right about one thing—Ellen wasn't like the others. She wasn't someone I could simply crush into submission with fear and brute force. She was too complex. If I continued on this path, I'd lose her completely. And if I lost her, I'd lose my edge in the war to come.

I couldn't afford that.

My gaze flickered toward the wall, where my father's rifle hung—a symbol of the life I'd chosen, the path I'd taken. I had made promises to the dead. I had sworn vengeance. I had promised to protect my people, no matter the price. I couldn't let my hatred for Darius Valmont, for the werewolves, cloud my judgment.

If I truly wanted to win—if I truly wanted Ellen to bend the way I needed her to—I had to take a different approach. I had to become something else. Not weaker. No. I would never allow myself to be weak. But strategic. Calculating. I had to play the long game, just as I had done in battle so many times before.

A soft chuckle escaped me, bitter and hollow. It was almost laughable, the irony of it all. I had built myself into a man who inspired fear and respect through force, and now, to bend the one person I needed most, I had to let go of that very force. I had to make her believe there was something more to me than the monster she saw.

I paced the room, my mind racing, thinking through every interaction I'd had with Ellen. Her fire, her resistance—it wasn't something to crush. It was something to mold. And if I was

going to succeed, I had to learn how to wield that fire, how to turn her strength into my strength.

The truth was, I couldn't afford to lose Ellen. She was more than just a pawn in this war—she was the key to my victory. And if that meant putting my hatred aside, if that meant learning how to gain her trust, then I would do it.

*Anything to win.*

I stopped pacing, my jaw tight, my decision made. I would bend her, not with force, but with strategy. I would make her believe I was something she could trust, something she could rely on. And once she was mine, once she trusted me enough to let her guard down, I would shape her into the perfect weapon—my weapon.

I had to be willing to do whatever it took.

Even if that meant pretending to care. 1

With a final glance at the rifle on the wall, I turned and strode toward the door. It was time to take a different approach.

Victory demanded it.