



326 Dilemma

Cain broke the silence first. 1

"We need specifics," he said, voice low but firm. "You said the Fenrir's Chain can purge the Flux if used properly. Then we need to know exactly what 'properly' looks like. No rituals done half-blind."

I nodded, though the weight of it all pressed deeper into my spine. "The Rite will take place at Elysia's burial site. The soil still holds concentrated lunar resonance—strong enough to awaken the Marker in my blood. It's where Fenrir's essence was first sealed. That makes it the most sacred point of ignition."

Silas folded his arms. "And what happens when it begins?"

I met his eyes. "When the Rite starts, the Fenrir Marker in my blood will activate in phases. It'll spread through Hades first—spirit to essence, essence to psyche. Slowly. Like a dye sinking into water."

Gallinti frowned. "And at the midpoint?"



"The Chain completes," I said. "Everything fuses. No more boundaries. By then, if the Flux is still holding dominance over Hades, it will burn with him."

Kael added quietly, "But if Hades is close enough to the surface—if he's still there—then the Marker can target the Flux instead. Separate it. Cleanse him."

"The problem is," I said slowly, "the Rite doesn't pause. Once the midpoint is reached, the energy spike becomes irreversible. If Hades isn't separated from the Flux by then..."

I let it hang.

They understood.

Cain muttered, "Like blowing a house to kill a snake in the wall." 1

"Exactly."

Gallinti looked pale. "And if Elliot intervenes... that fusion of resonance—will he survive it?"

"We don't know," Kael admitted.

I didn't speak. Couldn't.



Because if I did, I might cry.

The silence stretched again.

Gallinti was the first to break the silence, his voice hollow.

"But how do we know Elliot can even do this? He can't speak. He barely reacts. We're placing the survival of the king in the hands of a child who can't even communicate."

"He can," Kael said, more defensive than expected. "He's just... trapped behind something. And we all know who did that."

Silas's jaw tightened. "Even so, how does a mute child reach into someone else's fractured mind and pull them out of a parasitic echo-loop? This isn't some memory retrieval. This is extraction from the depths of trauma. How the hell is a child supposed to do that?"

"We find the Delta who silenced him," someone muttered—possibly Gallinti again. "We force them to reverse the damage before the Rite begins. The Delta healer said it was possible. With the same frequency."



"But we don't know who did it," Kael snapped.
"Felicia never named them."

"Then we drag her back and make her talk,"
Gallintl growled.

"It won't work in time," I said softly. "Even if we
find the Delta, even if they reverse the
manipulation—there's no guarantee he'll
suddenly be ready to do something this...
sophisticated."

Cain finally leaned forward, folding his hands.
"He doesn't need his voice in the spiritual realm.
You all heard what happened—he spoke in his
sleep. He spoke in Hades' psyche. Language
obeys different rules in memoryspace.
Communication happens through resonance, not
vocal cords. Thought. Emotion. Sometimes even
instinct."

Montegue had been silent until now. When he
spoke, it was with the deep weight of grief.

"Thought and emotion aren't enough," he said.
"To reach Hades, maybe. But to pull him back?
That takes more than instinct. That takes
intention. Clarity. Conscious will."



He looked around the room.

"In the psyche, Hades won't appear as a man. He'll be fragmented. Scattered across memories. Maybe even hiding inside his own mind. And worse—he may not want to be found."

Silas murmured, "We're not just asking Elliot to find him. We're asking him to persuade him to leave."

Montegue nodded solemnly. "And if Hades' inner self resists... if the child inside him fights, lashes out, or drags Elliot in with him? Then we lose them both."

Cain's jaw was tense. "But he's already made contact once."

"That was unconscious," Montegue snapped. "A child muttering pieces of someone else's nightmare in his sleep. A sleepwalker cannot rescue a drowning man." 2

The silence tightened again.

Cain broke it. "So what—you want us to back out now? Tell Eve to give up because the odds are steep?"



Montegue didn't answer that.

Because the truth was, none of them wanted to say it.

I swallowed thickly, still holding Elliot's name in my throat like a prayer I hadn't earned yet.

"I'm not asking Elliot to fight the Flux," I said quietly. "I'm asking him to remind Hades who he is. That he's not alone. That he still has something left to come back for."

Certainly—here's the continuation with layered emotional stakes, rising tension, and Montegue's breaking point:

"He'll need to be coaxing. Gentle. Smart enough to outmaneuver a broken mind," Silas repeated, more to himself now. "That's not just communication. That's strategy."

"A child," Gallinti muttered. "We're expecting strategy from a child who was made mute, who's only just begun to respond to the world around him. What if he freezes in there? What if the Flux senses him?" 1

Kael exhaled sharply. "The Deltas said the



resonance gives him camouflage. The Flux won't recognize him as a threat. It won't even realize he's separate—just another ripple in the current."

"But if he touches the wrong fragment," Gallinti added, "or if he panics..."

"He won't be alone," I said quickly. "We'll anchor him. I'll anchor him. I'll be there in the Rite—my soul bound to Hades', and through that link, to Elliot. If either of them slip, I'll feel it. I can guide them both."

"But you'll be undergoing the Rite," Silas pointed out. "You'll be sustaining the energy spike while enduring spiritual fusion. If something goes wrong... if Elliot falters..."

I didn't answer. I couldn't.

Because that was the part I couldn't protect him from.

Cain looked at me sharply. "What happens to Elliot if the Rite fails?"

No one spoke.

The silence was answer enough.



"Even if the Flux doesn't lash out," Gallinti said, "what if Hades does? His inner self—scared, fractured, volatile. What if he mistakes Elliot for the enemy? For a fragment of the trauma?"

My chest tightened.

"He wouldn't," Kael said. "He wouldn't hurt him."

"You can't promise that," Montegue said flatly.

Everyone turned.

Montegue was still seated—but only barely. His hands were clenched on the table, knuckles white. His shoulders trembled with a tension too controlled, too sharp. I could feel it radiating from him.

"You want to use my grandson as a key," he said. "A child who can't speak. Who doesn't even know what this war is about. Who lost his mother to betrayal and cruelty, and then lost his father to the very power that haunts him."

He stood abruptly. The chair scraped back, screeching against the stone floor.

"You're all speaking in theories. Resonance. Memoryspace. Fusion. But has anyone asked



what Elliot wants? Has anyone stopped to consider what happens if he breaks under the weight of it?" 1

"Montegue," I said gently.

He shook his head. "You ask me to sit here and weigh the life of my grandson like it's a currency to be bargained with. I won't."

He turned away, already walking toward the exit.

"Where are you going?" Kael called after him.

Montegue didn't look back.

"To breathe," he said. "Before I do something I'll regret."

And then he was gone, the heavy doors shutting behind him.

The silence left in his wake felt colder than anything the Flux could conjure.

Montegue was far from wrong because I was in a bind as well. All of the discussion was theory but in reality I did not want Elliot any where near Hades mind.

