



## 342 For Him

Hades 1

I watched them sleep.

Or maybe I just watched her.

Eve lay curled around Elliot, one arm slung over his tiny frame, her other hand still tangled loosely in mine—as if letting go would undo everything that had happened. Her breath was soft, measured, but her brow still furrowed slightly in sleep. Even now, she didn't rest easily.

Elliot had fallen asleep almost instantly, warm and boneless between us like the world had finally allowed him peace.

I didn't deserve this moment.

And yet I couldn't stop staring.

At the rise and fall of her shoulders.

At the slight wrinkle in Elliot's nose when he dreamed.

At the faint burn in my chest that wasn't pain—



but something older. Something... alive.

The silence pressed in, thick and sacred. I didn't want to disturb it. Not with words. Not with movement. Not even with breath.

But I remembered everything now.

The Black Room. The purge. The shadow of Vassir coiled through every crack in my soul.

I remembered what I had become.

What I had done.

What she had done—to bring me back.

And I remembered the boy. My son. His voice, small but defiant, reaching me when nothing else could. Not rage. Not power. Not even her.

Only him.

"Daddy..."

I closed my eyes.

That word had cut deeper than any blade.

Because it had meant something. Because he had meant it.



I'd spent so long trying to sever my humanity to become what the kingdom needed... only to find the one thing that saved me was the softest part I'd buried.

Elliot.

And Eve.

I turned my head toward her again, taking in the curve of her lips, the smudge of dried tears on her cheek.

She looked so strong when awake.

So tired now.

So breakable.

And yet, she had held the world together in my absence.

She had chosen me—even when I was monstrous. Even when the Flux was rotting me from the inside out.

Even when it nearly cost her everything.

I swallowed hard, the lump in my throat thick with everything I hadn't said, couldn't say—not yet. Not like this.



But I would.

I would.

Because she came for me.

And because he called me Daddy.

Because this—this was our second beginning  
before the end to come.

I shifted just enough to brace myself on one  
elbow, careful not to wake either of them. Eve  
stirred but didn't wake—her lashes fluttered  
against her cheek as though she were still  
fighting something even in sleep.

She was always fighting. For me. For him. For  
everyone.

And I—gods, I had done nothing but take.

I brushed a stray curl from her face. Her skin  
leaned into the touch like it remembered me.  
Like it forgave me.

I didn't deserve that either.

Still, I let myself look at her longer than I should  
have. Let myself want something I had no right  
to want. Her warmth. Her trust. A version of us





that existed beyond blood and prophecy and the poison of our past.

The bond between us was ticking now.

Not in agony, but in inevitability.

Every second we had was a borrowed one, sand slipping through the neck of a narrow hourglass. The Fenrir's Chain had sealed more than just power. It had sealed our time.

And yet, somehow... this moment was soft.

I wanted to keep it.

Even if it wasn't mine to hold.

"I'll be what you need," I whispered, my voice nearly catching. "For as long as you'll let me."

Support.

A shield.

A friend.

A lo--

The word caught in my throat before I could finish it.



I reached out again, tucking another strand of hair behind her ear.

She looked peaceful now. Almost innocent. It broke something in me.

"You deserve more than this," I murmured. "More than fate's shackles. More than me."

More than a man who almost became a monster.

I swallowed hard.

"When the time comes," I said softly, more to myself than to her, "I'll let you go. If that's what you want. If that's what sets you free."

Even if it kills me.

Especially if it saves her.

Because if this was all I ever got again—one night beside her, one whispered promise, one miracle in the shape of a boy curled between us—I would carry it.

Even into the fire.

And when I looked down again...

Eve was awake.



Her eyes were open.

And she was watching me.

---

Eve

I hadn't meant to wake.

But I'd felt it—his gaze. Like a touch before it  
ever reached my skin.

When I opened my eyes, he was already  
watching me.

Not startled.

Not ashamed.

Just... still.

As if he were afraid that if he blinked, I'd vanish.

I didn't say anything at first.

The weight of his words still lingered in the air  
between us—things he hadn't meant for me to  
hear. But I had. Every syllable. Every crack in his  
voice. And gods, it hurt—how gently he was  
holding me in his mind.



How certain he was that I wouldn't stay.

My throat felt tight. But I reached for him anyway.

My fingers found his cheek, tracing the faint hollow there like I was memorizing him again. "How are you feeling?" I asked, my voice low and raw, like it hadn't been used in days.

He didn't answer right away.

His eyes flickered to mine, then lower, down to where Elliot lay between us like a bridge we hadn't known we'd needed.

Then he looked at me again.

Not the war-weary king.

Not the wrathful god.

Just the man.

His lips parted. "Lighter," he rasped. "But only because you're here." His voice was the softest I had ever heard it. His voice cracked like he had forgotten how to use it.

I swallowed thickly. My thumb brushed just beneath his eye, where the shadows still





lingered like ghosts not yet ready to leave. "You scared me," I whispered. "I didn't think you'd—come back."

He didn't flinch. Didn't deny it.

"I am sorry," I whispered. "I chose to save Kael back there."

He did not pause. "I would have the same. I did it before, and I would do it again."

I had braced for some hurt, but he looked almost proud.

Instead, he reached up, his fingers brushing lightly against the ends of my hair.

"You're growing it out again," he murmured, almost to himself. "It's longer. Almost touches your shoulders."

I blinked at him.

He said it like it mattered.

Like he'd been keeping track in some part of him even the Flux couldn't reach.

"It got longer while you were asleep," I said, half a laugh, half a sob. "Everything did."



His fingers lingered in the strands. "It's soft."

"So are you," I teased, but my voice broke around the joke.

Because he wasn't. Not really.

And yet in this moment—in this bed, in this sliver of stillness—he was.

I didn't pull my hand away. He didn't ask me to.

We just stayed there, watching each other like the moment might slip.

Like we couldn't afford to talk about us—because us was too fragile, too tangled with everything we'd already lost.

So I didn't ask what we were now.

Instead, I said, "The Rite... wasn't just for saving you."

His fingers paused, still threaded in my hair.

"I know," he murmured.

"It was to make sure we stayed on the same side. No matter what."



A small nod. Barely there.

I shifted slightly, glancing down at Elliot, his small frame tucked between us, his breath steady and safe.

"We can't afford to second-guess each other when the next lie comes," I said. "When the next truth twists things."

His jaw clenched.

"Because it will."

He didn't argue.

There was no promise that we'd always be honest. Or that we wouldn't be hurt again. We were too past that. Too weathered.

But we had something else now—something less fragile.

Anchor.

Agreement.

The kind forged in fire.

"The Rite was a chain, yes," I continued quietly.

"But it was also a vow. That we'd think clearly.



Move as one. Not let our pain... or love, or guilt...  
cloud what matters." 1

His eyes met mine again.

Sharp. Present. Unflinching.

"What matters," he repeated. Not a question. A  
statement.

I nodded. "Darius. The Blood Moon. Stopping it."

His throat worked around something he didn't  
say. But I could feel it.

We both knew the real reason we couldn't fall  
apart now.

Elliot.

He was still dreaming, unaware of the war we  
were crawling back to. Of the monsters that still  
wore crowns and the bloodlines itching to burn  
the world clean.

"We have to win," I said. "Because he deserves  
more than this. More than choosing silence over  
safety. More than learning to love in ruins."

A beat passed.





Then another.

And Hades—quietly, almost inaudibly—replied,  
"He deserves to live without needing to be brave  
all the time." 1

I looked at him.

That... that was it.

Not the politics. Not revenge. Not legacy.

Just that.

We both looked down at Elliot again.

And for once, neither of us said anything.

Because we didn't need to.

