



382 The Secret Visit

EVE 1

When I looked down, I was surprised that I had not worn down the marble I had been pacing on.

Twenty-eight hours had passed since Hades took the Gammas to search for Kael, with Cain coming along as support. And yet... nothing.

None of them had returned, and my dread was mounting with every tick of the clock. I adjusted Elliot in my arms so he could rest properly on my shoulder. He gripped onto me, even now, as he slept. I had not let him go for even a minute since the incident.

I rocked him a little, trying to comfort him—or maybe just myself. Every horrible scenario had played itself over in my mind at least a thousand times. I knew well that I was driving myself crazy with worry. But the emotion had engulfed me fully. Even now, as it was being reported to me that fortunately no one had lost their life during the initial collapse at the press conference, people were still demanding answers.



They demanded to know what the hell had happened, because if the Obsidian Tower could be infiltrated and bombed, how could they possibly be safe in their homes?

They wanted answers, even though they evaded me—someone who found herself in the eye of the storm.

I could see, but I had never felt more blind.

More than five losses with a single strike.

Felicia had been broken out.

Kael was taken.

Elliot was traumatized.

Hades had not returned.

All communication to his end was met with failure, like a blockade.

The people were agitated.

Not to mention that the Obsidian Council was a royal mess.

Everything—and I meant every fucking thing—had been turned on its head.



"Don't doubt yourself, dear," Rhea muttered in my mind. "You have faced much worse."

For the first time, I did not agree with her. What could be worse than this?

The knock that came did not startle me because I had been expecting it.

"Come in," I called.

The door opened, and Montegue walked in. Gone was the old man who looked lost in the Council chamber. Montegue's face was set like he was a man on a mission, his jaw clenched and his shoulders straight as though he was ready to move to the war front.

"My lady," he greeted.

"Monte," I replied in kind.

A flicker. The one I had grown familiar with. The one that showed itself in his worn eyes whenever I called him that.

"Your vehicle is ready," he said. "Everything is secured for your journey to the manor."

Ever since the bombing more than a day ago,



Montegue, though seeming lost in thought, had not left the Tower for his own home. He had stayed here—and with me—as the labs ran forensics of the catastrophe. Though the results yielded little answers and instead raised more questions, having him by my side had helped me stay stable.

After some investigation into Hades' and Cain's whereabouts, and after Montegue informed me that Hades suspected Felicia had used his manor as a rendezvous point, we discovered that the signal loss had occurred in the manor itself.

We had investigated the Tower, but now the manor was our next best bet for answers.

"Thought you would need some help with Elliot." Montegue shifted to make room.

Lucinda stepped in. Her eyes were puffy, rimmed red. Her face was weathered, and her normally impeccable manicure had one nail cracked—but she didn't seem to care. 1

She sniffled as she spoke, her smile sad. "Let me get the little man off your hands... you must be exhausted, my dear." 1



>I smiled, but Rhea felt brittle in my mind.

"What is the matter?" I asked her.

>"Something is not right," she replied, and I could feel her hackles slowly raising.

I surveyed my environment, voluntarily heightening my senses. No strange scents, no rot that came with Vassir. But I could hear a heartbeat. It was racing—impossibly faster than mine. My gaze zeroed in on Lucinda, surprised her heart had not torn through her chest.

"Lucinda," I muttered gently, reaching out to graze her shoulder. "Are you alright?"

I looked deep into the greens that resembled both Felicia's and Danielle's. But now the green was nearly a thin line, most of it swallowed by pupils blown wide.

She blinked, but her eyes didn't change.

Worry grew for the older woman—along with something else that resembled unease.

"Maybe you should sit babysitting out," I tried to keep my voice light.



And Elliot wrapped his arms tighter around me,
as if on cue.

Lucinda's smile didn't quite reach her eyes.

"Oh, don't be silly," she said, her voice softer than
usual. Too polished. "I've been nothing but idle
since this disaster. Let me do something useful."

But her hands... they trembled. Not from age.
Not from exhaustion.

From fear.

And not fear of the moment. No. Fear of me.

Rhea growled low, the sound rolling through my
chest like thunder.

>"Eve," she said again, this time sharper. "She's
hiding something." 1

I gently shifted Elliot to one arm and stepped
closer to Lucinda. Her scent hadn't changed—no
blood, no Flux, no betrayal—but her aura felt
wrong. Heavy. Off balance.

Montegue was watching now too, frowning
slightly.

"Lucinda?" he asked. "Is there something you're



not telling us?"

She blinked. Once. Twice. Her lips parted like she wanted to speak, but nothing came.

Instead, a tear slipped down her cheek. Then another. And then her knees buckled.

I lunged forward just in time to catch her, lowering her carefully into the nearest chair. Montegue moved to her other side, placing a hand on her wrist to check her pulse.

"Lucinda, talk to us," I said softly, crouching beside her. "What happened?"

"I-I-I..." she stuttered. "I visited Felicia, before this all started. Before Morrison... before." Her words seemed to choke her.

Montegue's face didn't harden—it crumbled.

"Why would you do that?"

"I just needed to know. She killed her sister. She hurt Elliot. She..." the rest of her words clogged her throat.

"She confessed," Montegue whispered. "We know the full story. You would just hurt yourself—"



"No!" she screamed. Elliot flinched.

I soothed him, and he relaxed.

"I know my daughter. I knew my daughter. I always suspected..." Her words trailed off as she bit her lips until they bled.

"Dear... no," Montague attempted to cradle her face.

"Yes!" she cried.

"I just refused to see it..." she covered her mouth with her hand, her face contorted in an agony so pure it infected the air around us. "How could I lose a child to another? I failed them both."

"Don't blame yourself—"

She let out a strangled sob.

"Then who should I blame? Because even when she was confessing..." her voice dropped to a choked whisper, "Even when she was confessing, I saw it in her eyes. That cold, hollow place she always hid. She was still lying. She's always been lying. And I let her.

But I had to know... because my daughter works

for the enemy." 1

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