



399 Liability

Eve ¹

Lia's voice was soft but direct.

"Elliot... how did you stop your grandma from hurting your mummy?"

His brows furrowed, confused by the question.

"I... I don't know."

"Try," Lia encouraged. "Think back to that moment. What were you feeling? What did you do?"

Elliot looked down at his hands again, then at me. He blinked once. Twice. Then said slowly,

"I was scared. She was screaming. Mummy was shaking and crying, and... and I didn't want it to happen again."

He paused, jaw clenching.

"So I shouted. I told her to stop. I told her I was there now. That I'd fight."

"And that's when you shifted?"



He nodded.

"I didn't know what would happen. I just—" He hugged himself tighter. "I just wanted it to stop."

Lia didn't respond right away. Neither did I.

There was nothing to say that could mend what that boy had endured. That he had forced himself to awaken his wolf, prematurely and violently, not for himself but for me... to protect me... because he thought I was too tired to protect him?

That was not strength.

That was damage.

Damage I had caused. 1

I sank into the chair beside him and reached for his tiny hand, wrapping my fingers around his.

"I'm so proud of you," I whispered, trying to keep the tremor out of my voice. "But you didn't have to protect me, baby. That's my job."

He didn't answer—just stared at our hands.

Lia cleared her throat.



"Elliot... has your wolf spoken to you since then?"

He tilted his head.

"Not with words. But I feel him. Like... when I close my eyes, he watches things with me. He doesn't say anything. Just... listens."

"Good," Lia nodded thoughtfully. "That's normal. He's still young. So are you. But he's part of you now, and he'll grow with you."

I swallowed back the lump in my throat.

"But there's one thing I want you to remember," Lia added, her tone firmer now. "You don't have to earn love by fighting for it. You are not a liability. You are not a burden. You are a child. And being a child means it's okay to rely on others." 2

Elliot's lashes fluttered. His eyes didn't rise.

But his fingers tightened around mine.

And I knew that somewhere, deep in that brave little heart, the words were sinking in. 1

Elliot yawned loudly, swaying drowsily.

"Looks like someone wants to go to bed," Lia said



playfully.

Elliot shook his head quickly, turning his gaze up at me.

"I'm not..." He yawned again. "...sleepy, mummy."

The punishing hand gripping my heart tightened painfully as I carried him, cradling him as if he were a baby.

"But Mummy..." he grumbled as he yawned again, his lids fluttering closed.

It was obvious that the session had worked and his wounded body had finally relaxed enough to let sleep in. But still... he was fighting it.

"Mummy..." His eyes snapped open again, focusing on me.

"Shh... shh..." I whispered, smoothing his hair back.

"You can sleep."

My voice cracked, tears forcing their way through no matter how hard I tried to keep them at bay.

I held my breath, watching as he nodded, slowly



letting slumber win as he curled closer into me, snuggling in for warmth and reassurance that I would be there when he woke up.

Soon, his breathing was steady, and both Lia and I let out a breath of relief.

My gaze flickered up to hers—and the lightness in her expression had faded.

"His shifting was caused by years of intense stress," Lia said quietly, her voice steady but grave. "And catalyzed by the precariousness of your current situation. That moment wasn't just a trigger—it was the final break. You told me over the phone that he was in the room when the Beta was taken. That he heard it. The screaming. The struggle."

I nodded slowly, throat tight.

"The feeling of helplessness when Kael was hurt... when he couldn't stop it... and then when you were hurt by Lucinda... it shattered something in him. His wolf responded not just to protect—it was survival. It was the only thing left he felt he could do."

I swallowed hard, blinking back the sting in my



eyes.

"He shouldn't have to survive me."

"No," Lia agreed. "He shouldn't. But he did. And now, he's changed. It's not reversible. Once a child shifts—especially under trauma—it becomes part of their emotional wiring. He'll grow from it. But there will be cracks that need mending."

I looked down at Elliot, small and warm in my arms, his lashes casting faint shadows on his cheeks. He looked so peaceful, so fragile. Like none of it had happened.

But it had.

All of it.

Lia's voice lowered again, gentler now.

"Eve... I'm not telling you this to blame you."

I didn't answer. I couldn't.

Because she didn't need to.

The blame was already in me, anchored, rooted, and festering like rot beneath the skin.



Guilt is a silent clock, ticking in rhythm with your heartbeat.

You don't hear it... until it's all you hear.

"He adores you," she continued. "But he's been afraid for too long. Not of you—but for you. That kind of love? That kind of protective instinct in someone so young? It's beautiful. But it's dangerous too. Because now he thinks he has to be strong for you. All the time. Even when he's breaking."

I let it sink in, swallowing thickly as I looked down at him.

It hadn't even been a full month since we had that slumber party.

There should have been many more by now—but instead, we had this to face.

When would he ever have a chance to be a child again?

It haunted me that I had no accurate answer to that question.

Lia pulled out a file from her bag and flipped through it.



"Right after your call, I had Elliot's comprehensive medical file sent to me."

I glanced at the pages, and every time I spotted the word transplant, I cringed.

"For a child his age, it's not only voluminous... it's deeply concerning. But it's also helped tremendously in painting a fuller picture, allowing me to understand the physiological and emotional nuances that have shaped little Elliot."

My throat tightened. "Yes?"

"So he is a hybrid?"

"Yes. He inherited the Flux from Hades. So he's part vampire."

"Hmm..." she mused, writing something down.

"You mentioned some strange abilities he's exhibited—resonance with Hades, vampiric illusions, breaking mind control..."

I took a deep breath.

"I'll tell you everything. It's a long one."

She propped herself up using one side of her body. 2



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"Talk away. That's why I'm here."

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