

401 Wish You Were Here

Hades 1

I watched her scribble down the name.

Ellen Valmont.

Meeting my wife's sister nothing like had ever imagined. Ages, gray and frail-- utterly unrecognizable. Surreal was the only word that would fit.

Cain had gone quiet, watching Maera as mumbled to herself.

"How come?" She whispered for what was probably the ten time since Ellen decided to stop speaking and without annoucemt, return to her bed to sleep. As mush as I wanted to believe that it could not possibliy the true I know what I had seen. The glimpse of turquoise in gray.

"Maybe she will be up for another questioning tommorrow," I suggested.

"My thoughts too," And the she stopped in her tracks and turnd to me. "You will be the on to do it. You will question her, your majesty."

I stopped too. "Me ?"

"I think it will be for the best. It is very obvious she will only willingly talk to you. We can use that fact to our advantage. She is a goldmine of information. No captured gamma could possibly have more tell than she does." He turned to face Maera. "He will do it," He assured her like he could force me.

But I could not ignore that fact that they were right but before that...

I held Maera's gaze for a long moment, searching it for even a flicker of smugness. There was none—only that unwavering steadiness she wore like a crown, the same composure she'd had when she dragged us out of Silverpine with death at our backs.

"You've risked more than you should have," I said finally, the words heavier than I meant them to be. "For me. For Cain and our men." My jaw tightened. Gratitude wasn't something I offered freely, but this one had teeth to it, and it had been gnawing at me since the night we arrived. "So I'll say it now—thank you, Maera. For the rescue. And for the sanctuary you've given us since."

Her lips curved, not into a smile, but into something softer that somehow made the scar



that marred her face less jarring. "It wasn't charity, your majesty. You know that, I don't rescue people I can't use."

Cain made a low sound, halfway between a laugh and a scoff. "She's telling the truth, you know. If she'd thought you were dead weight, we would be minced meat by now."

I let out a short breath, somewhere between amusement and curiosity. What the hell did she mean by that? I opened my mouth to ask when hurried little footsteps cut me off.

The hurried little footsteps echoed down the corridor before I could speak. Sage appeared, practically vibrating with excitement, her curls bouncing as she beamed.

"Your handsome beta is awake!" she announced, like the news was a gift she'd been dying to unwrap in front of me.

My heart lifted so fast it was almost painful. I barely had time to process before she closed the distance between us, eyes fixed on me—only for Cain to move like lightning, scooping her up with one arm and balancing her easily on his hip.

"Lead the way, little girl," he said, his voice gentler than I'd heard in years. 6



Sage blinked at him, startled, and then grinned like she'd been handed a crown. She raised her hand high, pointing down the hall with the exaggerated seriousness of a commander.

I couldn't move for a moment. Hours ago, Cain had stood frozen, tears in his eyes, just watching her walk away. And now... now he carried her without hesitation, like she wasn't a stranger at all.

His free hand shot out, gripping my arm and tugging me forward. "Come on," he said, with the faintest curve of a smile. "Let's see your beta."

Behind us, Maera laughed—an actual, unguarded laugh. "Go," she waved them on. "All of you. Before the poor man decides to fall asleep again."

I let myself be pulled along, the sound of Sage's delighted chatter ahead of me, Cain's uncharacteristic ease at my side, and a strange, tentative warmth blooming in the cold edges of my chest but even now something was lacking

I wish you were here, Eve with Elliot... I thought as I let my brother pull me along, pushing back the fact that I had just met Eve's aged twin sister. That could wait.

The infirmary doors swung open to the sound of



chaos.

Kael was on his feet—barely—snarling like a cornered wolf, shoving against two Deltas who were doing their best to keep him in bed.

"Where is he?" His voice cracked, raw from disuse, but the force behind it made even the healers flinch. "Where the hell is he?"

"You need to rest—" one of the Deltas started, but Kael tore his arm free, staggering as his knees threatened to buckle.

"You're evert—" another tried, only to be silenced by the look in Kael's eyes. He wasn't hearing them. Couldn't. The fight was all instinct, born of fear.

Maera stepped forward, raising a hand in a silent command. "Let him go."

The Deltas hesitated, but obeyed, stepping back just in time for Kael to lurch forward. His balance failed him halfway across the room, and I didn't think—my body just moved.

I caught him before he hit the floor.

For a second, neither of us spoke. His weight was solid, shaking in my arms, the tension in him so tight it felt like it might snap. And then he



broke.

"I thought I'd die," he choked out, gripping the front of my coat like it was the only thing keeping him upright. His voice was wet, thick. "I was so scared. I—" He shuddered, the words spilling faster now. "I would've never forgiven myself if—"

A short, unexpected laugh escaped me. "You would've been too dead to forgive anything."

He let out a noise that was half a sob, half a huff of disbelief, pressing his forehead to my shoulder. I tightened my hold, steadying him as his weight sagged.

"Still," he muttered, voice breaking, "I mean it."

I didn't answer, but my grip didn't loosen. Not until the tremor in him began to fade.

Cain's shadow loomed in the doorway before his voice followed.

"Well, look who's back from the dead," he drawled, arms folding. "And here I thought you'd finally found a way to sleep through the war."

Kael lifted his head from my shoulder, eyes narrowing, though the redness in them dulled the effect. "Missed you too," he muttered, voice



still hoarse.

Cain smirked. "If I'd known all it took to get you to shut up was a near-death experience, I'd have arranged one sooner."

Kael rolled his eyes—slow, exaggerated, like even that movement was costing him energy. Then his gaze caught on the small, curly-haired figure perched comfortably on Cain's hip. "And... who's the kid?"

Before I could answer, Cain tilted his head toward her in mock formality. "You want to tell him, or should I?"

Sage's grin spread like wildfire, and before I knew it, we all spoke at once—Cain, Sage, and me—our voices overlapping in perfect, accidental unison.

"The queen."

Sage giggled, delighted with herself, while Kael blinked, his confusion melting into something halfway between disbelief and amusement. "Of course," he muttered under his breath. "I wake up and the world's upside down."

Cain chuckled low. "Get used to it. Things change fast around here."

I just shook my head, but the corner of my mouth betrayed me, curving faintly. For the first time in days, the air didn't feel quite so suffocating.

Kael's shoulders tensed suddenly, his breath catching like he'd just been jolted awake. "I—" He gripped my arm, eyes darting between me and Cain. "I have so many things to tell you. That place... Hades, you don't understand. I heard them talking about Ellen. They said she ran away." His voice pitched higher, urgent. "And there's this thing—"

He faltered, shuddering, like the memory scraped something raw inside him. "He looked dead. Dead, but young. But fucking scary. Pale as bone. Not a Lycan. Not a werewolf. I don't even think he was—" He broke off, words tumbling into breathless fragments. "I heard him ranting, muttering about—" 1

"Kael." My voice cut clean through his spiral. He stilled, chest heaving.

I held his gaze. "We have Ellen here."

His head snapped up. "What?"

"Ellen's twin," I said, letting the weight of the truth land between us. "The rebellion rescued



her. She's here, in the compound. Alive." 2

For a moment, Kael just stared at me, as if trying to decide whether I was mocking him. Then something in his face shifted—relief, disbelief, and a sliver of fear, all tangled together. "You're serious."

"I wouldn't joke about this."

"How could she manage that?"

"Manage what?"

"Escaping,"

"You don't seem to believe she did,"

"The thing, it was... I could feel it. He is the marker."

"Marker?"

"Darius is not marking people on his own. He uses this creature. He uses the horn. They planned to mark me. He planned to imprint, the mark of Malrik on me."

My stomach dropped as he turned his back. On him was what looked like a tattoo, but it half of what I could only recognise as a letter M. 5