



421 Pivotal Analysis

Eve 1

Montegue's cane cracked once against the marble, drawing every eye. His voice carried steady, rich with disdain.

"They are not loyal to treasonous fools who bicker like children while enemies claim our borders." His eyes swept the room, contempt sharp enough to flay. "They are loyal to what you abandoned long ago—order. Unity. Strength."

The chamber fell silent again. Only the sound of labored breathing filled the air. Those still pinned to the marble twitched in futile resistance.

"If you have more insightful words to share, you may speak. But after that, I will speak." I did not hide my disdain.

I had no time for this.

Silverpine was scrambling. On edge. It was clear as day with every word in that accursed letter from James. Something had gone wrong—far more wrong than they were willing to admit.

Even now, the words flickered before my eyes.



And with them, the cracks.

James had always remained smug—even when brought to his knees, even with a claw to his throat. Self-assured. Prideful to a fault.

But he was slipping.

James, who never admitted defeat—who wrapped cruelty in polished arrogance—was now listing his losses like a desperate gambler. The ink told me more than his words. The gouged lines where his calm cracked, the pet names turned sour. He thought this letter would break me. But all it showed me was that I'd already broken him.

I didn't even need to lift a finger.

My eyes swept across the room, measuring the tension in the air. A tough crowd. Hackles raised. Chests heaving. Ready to strike—but none spoke.

I shifted in my seat, glancing at Elliot on my lap. He was watching too. Alert, as always. Shoulders bunched, ready to defend or protect.

I raised my gaze, now sharpened. "Sit," I ordered, my voice cracking like a whip.

They glanced at one another before hesitantly



obeying. One by one, they sat—Silas and Gallinti at the front. Neither had spoken a word since I entered. They were more stoic than most, their gazes watchful, only flicking to me when they believed I wasn't looking.

I cleared my throat.

"I'm sure you've all received the memo. The letter from Silverpine."

I could feel Montegue's eyes on me. He didn't understand why I would expose something like this—especially when it so clearly alluded to the history between James and me.

But I bore not an ounce of shame. Not a speck.

There was no space for such a feeble emotion in the state of things.

There was gnawing helplessness. Raw fear. Crippling anxiety. Creeping dread that only continued to spread.

Shame for a relationship that no longer held any bearing over me? It didn't even register.

"You must have read it a thousand times," I continued, my voice flat but cutting. "Praying it was a prank. Hoping it was a mistake. But as you can see—" I gestured to Hades' empty seat. "—it



is neither of those things. The Alpha of Obsidian is absent and has been for four days. He left on a rescue mission... for his Beta, Kael Orlov."

Still, no one spoke.

But their haunted expressions spoke volumes. To see so many powerful figures pale at once was telling. It was a testament to how heavily this council relied on Hades. An incompetent ruler would never trigger this level of fear.

I let my gaze linger on each of their faces.

"The letter alludes to his capture by Silverpine. It outlines a threat: me and my sister... or him."

"He's gone," one Alpha rose, glancing around at his colleagues. "She'll never surrender. We need to begin dividing—"

My Gammas were already on the move, but surprisingly—

"Alpha Jameson, you are out of turn," Gallinti said coolly. "You will be promptly removed."

Even I was surprised. The rest of the room straightened as the offending Alpha slowly sank back into his seat, face flushed with humiliation.

"We are listening," Silas said.



I nodded. "It is a cause for alarm," I continued. "And of course, we should scramble to meet their demands."

I paused.

"That is what I would do..."

Relief flooded the room like a tide. Shoulders relaxed. Air returned to lungs.

"But I will never do that." 1

The air vanished again—sucked from the chamber like an unseen force had torn it free.

Just then, Montegue pressed the button that activated the monitor, and a Gamma stepped forward, handing me a laser pointer. The monitor flickered to life.

Onscreen was a scanned copy of the letter I'd received. Not retyped. Not transcribed. Scanned—intentionally. Because if I was going to keep these fools united until Hades returned, they needed to see what I saw.

They needed assurance.

Forcing submission would only cause infighting. And we already had enough enemies across the border. By the time these chamber doors



opened again, we needed to be on the same page. A unified front with no weak links.

I rose, bracing myself.

"We were lovers, the Beta of Silverpine and I. I'm sure some of you see it as a nick. A tear. A scrap on my armor. Perhaps it is. But in the case of this letter—" I turned on the laser and gestured to the screen "—it is the key to a code."

"What code might that be, Luna?" Silas asked, leaning in. "Something tells me you've already cracked it."

"You're not wrong, Governor," I replied, gesturing to the first line. "The Beta has always prided himself on the art of charisma. Disarming with little effort. In this case, he used a jaded pet name of mine." I pointed to the word crimson.

The chill down my spine came not from longing—but from disgust.

I read aloud the lines that followed.

> "I know it must come as a surprise, especially after our little spat—five or, I don't know, six years ago? We never really got to talk about it. I know it's late, but is it ever really too late to get some much-deserved closure?"



I turned back to the room.

"He makes light of the day everything changed. He dangles something in front of me—" I gestured to the word closure "—as if what we had still holds sway. He tries to lull me into nostalgia."

Some of the Alphas leaned in. Montegue smirked, already catching on.

> "I know my decision still weighs heavily on that beautiful mind of yours. Yet it still hurts that you decided our enemy would be the one to replace me in your heart. Your father was none too pleased by that."

I explained, "Here comes the guilt. The second phase of his strategy. He opens the wound, revisits a choice I made under duress, during war—when love itself was weaponized."

I stepped closer to the screen.

"Then he offers a balm. Closure. As if this letter is some long-overdue olive branch."

A beat of silence.

"And then he twists it." My voice dropped. "He doesn't let the illusion settle. He yanks it away. Reminds me I chose the enemy. That I'm the



betrayed. That this—" I pointed again at heart "—
was treachery. That I brought shame."

"All this for what?" Gallintl asked, voice edged
with curiosity.

"To destabilize me," I answered. "So I would walk
willingly into their hands. So I'd make the rash
choice... and surrender."

There was a collective shift. Some eyes widened.
Others began murmuring, quietly but urgently.

Gallintl nodded, and I turned back to the screen. 3

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