

46 I Dare You

Eve~ 1

I froze.

The caretaker's face twisted into a sneer, her voice dripping with contempt as she quickly deflected. "It was this ableist bitch. It was her," she hissed, pointing an accusing finger at me. "She's the one who called your son impaired."

My mouth fell open in shock, but before I could speak, Felicia's glare hardened, her red lips twitching. "A mutt calling my son names already? How dare you?" she drawled, her voice low and dangerous.

I shook my head. "No. I would never say something like that, Your Highness. It was the caretaker—"

"Enough." Felicia's voice cut through mine like a blade. Her gaze, sharp as a predator's, turned to her son. "Tell me the truth, darling. What did the woman say to you?"

The boy hesitated, glancing between me and his mother, his small hands trembling. For a second, I thought he might defend me, that he would tell the truth. But then, his tiny hand shot out, pointing directly at me before he buried his face into Felicia's side, hiding from my view.

My heart sank, and I could feel the burn of tears threatening to rise, but I blinked them back, trying to keep my voice steady. "I didn't say it. I swear—"

I never finished the sentence. The sharp crack of Felicia's palm against my cheek silenced me, my head snapping to the side with the force of the blow. My skin stung, but the shock of the slap numbed me more than the pain. For a brief moment, everything was quiet.

"Don't you ever speak to my son again," Felicia hissed, her voice laced with venom. "You think just because you're Hades' prisoner wife, you can disrespect my child?"

I swallowed the bitterness rising in my throat, my hand instinctively reaching for my cheek as I tried to speak, but the words stuck. I wanted to defend myself, to make her understand I would never hurt her child like that, but the burning disdain in her eyes stopped me cold.

Then, from the corner of my vision, I saw Hades approaching, his eyes narrowed dangerously as he took in the scene. The room seemed to chill as his presence filled the space. His jaw clenched, his gaze sliding over the caretaker, the boy, Felicia, and finally, me.

"What's going on here?" His voice was low, but it carried a weight that made everyone stand a

little straighter.

Felicia's grip on her son tightened, and she turned to face Hades, her expression shifting as she looked at him. "Your wife insulted my son," she said, her voice trembling. "She called him... impaired. And when I confronted her, she dared to deny it. She even blamed his caretaker."

Hades' eyes flicked to me, cold and unreadable, but there was something darker lurking beneath the surface. My heart raced as I met his gaze, struggling to find the right words to explain, to make him see the truth.

"That's not what happened," I said quietly but firmly. "I didn't say that. She's lying."

Hades took a step closer, his towering presence making everyone around him shrink back. His eyes locked onto the caretaker, then Felicia, and finally, the boy. "Is that true?" he asked, his voice calm but with an edge that promised consequences for deceit.

The boy, still clinging to his mother, peeked up at Hades, his eyes wide. Felicia said nothing, her lips pressed into a thin line as she waited for her son to confirm her story.

But Hades didn't wait for an answer. He turned to the caretaker, who flinched under his gaze.

"Leave," he ordered, his tone final.

The woman's eyes darted between Felicia and Hades before she nodded quickly and scurried away without another word. Felicia opened her mouth to protest, but one look from Hades silenced her.

"Take your son and go, Felicia," he said, his voice leaving no room for argument.

Felicia's lips quivered with rage, but she gathered her son in her arms and quickly left without looking back. The tension in the hall seemed to ease, but only slightly.

Now, it was just me and Hades. He turned to me, his expression unreadable. I wasn't sure where I stood with him.

"Stay away from my family," he drawled. "Don't think you have any right to speak as you please to them." He was protective of what and who were his, but his blame was misdirected.

"I did not say that," I said quietly. "I interfered—"

"Don't," he cut me off. "It is none of your concern."

"I did nothing wrong," I defended. "The caretaker was lying."

He gritted his teeth, the lines of his face turning harsher. "We've known her since Elliot was born—"

"And I'm a fucking imposter," I completed for him. "So of course, I'm not to be trusted." I didn't know why my heart was twisting as I spoke. Some foolish, idiotic part of me trusted that he would believe me. And why? Because he had helped me out of my painful and delirious haze yesterday? I should know better.

"It's not that. I just know for a fact that you are lying," he snarled without hesitation. "I know the type of person you are, Ellen Valmont, so don't try and do shit or attempt to deceive me." 2

A hollow laugh burst out of me. "So it's no longer 'Red,' it's Ellen Valmont now?"

His eyes darkened even more.

"Good, keep it that way. I can't stand you trying to be civil with me, not when I know exactly what you think of me."

His jaw clenched. "Stay out of my family's way," he finally said, his voice colder now. "You might be forced into this marriage, but that doesn't give you the right to interfere in their lives. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly," I replied with the same coldness. So much for living my life as I used to. The old Eve would have stepped in and done something, but it seemed I couldn't be that person anymore. Not here. I turned to my door.

And Hades crossed his arms, standing there like a warden waiting for a prisoner to enter their cell.

I opened the door and slipped in, but before I closed it, I addressed him again. "And Hades?"

His lips twitched.

"I dare you to check the security cameras." With that, I slammed the door. 2

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