

48 Apologize

Eve~ 1

As usual, my heart is in my throat as I follow the blond man, who I'm starting to realize is Hades' beta or second-in-command. We walk through a familiar path that I know all too well by now. My hands grow clammy with sweat, but I don't back down or stop. I'm done showing weakness, yet every instinct tells me to turn around and run. It looks like I'm going to get punished yet again. The king had been too much of a coward to look at the CCTV footage and see who exactly was at fault.

I keep my chin up as we enter the preliminary chamber before the white room itself. I avert my eyes from the one-way mirror that would allow me to look into the white room. I step inside, and I feel his presence immediately—his cologne already filling my senses before I even set my eyes on him. But when I take in my surroundings, it's not Hades in his black shirt rolled to his elbows, with harnesses strapped to his chest and accentuating his muscular form, that makes me freeze. It's the person strapped to the surgical table.

The caretaker is held down on the table, her eyes frantic with a gag in her mouth. My skin immediately begins to itch.

"Welcome, Red," Hades' voice pulls me out of my daze. He's calling me by the nickname again. I snap my head to him as he approaches. I swallow as he adjusts the black gloves on his hands.

"What... is this about?" I mutter.

His lips lift in that damn self-satisfied smirk that he always seems to wear. He comes overwhelmingly close to me, the emerald earring dangling from his left ear glinting in the overbearing whiteness of the room.

His heat radiates off his body, seeping into me, and suddenly I can feel the ghost of his forbidden touches from that night. I take a step back, folding my arms in front of me to prevent them from shaking. "Answer me," I say more firmly, glancing at the caretaker still strapped down.

"I wanted to give you a gift."

My brows raise in confusion. "Gift?" My uneasiness grows.

He gestures at the woman. "I found out what she

did." A muscle in his jaw ticks from obvious agitation.

It dawns on me then why she's now in this position. "Oh... that's great," I reply. "I'm honored you told me." I try to keep the sarcasm from my voice. "I guess I can leave." I don't wait, moving toward the exit.

Hades' hand shoots out and grabs my arm. I turn back, shocked by the sudden contact. This is the first time he's touched me since the night I can never seem to get out of my mind... or my dreams. My usual nightmares have been replaced by dreams of him in my bed again—caressing me, kissing me, fucking me... Those gray eyes glinting silver with lust as he plunges and thrusts into me. 3

For a moment, the world stands still as I'm suddenly all too aware of him. I can tell by the way his hand tightens slightly and the way his eyes widen just a fraction that I'm not the only one who feels it. It's illicit electricity. His mouth morphs into a harsh line, and he lets go of my hand. Immediately, my body foolishly mourns the contact.

Hades steps back, the coolness in his demeanor returning, though a flicker of something darker

lingers in his stormy eyes. "I thought you might appreciate the opportunity to repay a debt," he says smoothly, as though this were just a normal exchange of pleasantries. He nods toward a side table, where a gleaming tray of sharp, cruel-looking tools sits neatly arranged. My heart lurches as I take in the sight—knives, pliers, things I can't even name.

I swallow hard, my stomach churning with disgust. "You think I'd want this?" My voice is low but steady, despite the horror coursing through me. I force myself to look away from the tools, turning my gaze to him instead. His cold expression gives nothing away, as if what he's asking is completely reasonable.

"I think," he replies, his voice dangerously soft, "that this woman wronged you. And I'm offering you the chance to make her pay for it." He gestures to the caretaker, who whimpers beneath the gag, her eyes wide with fear.

I take a step back, shaking my head in disbelief. "I'm not going to torture someone, Hades." My voice cracks slightly, but I hold my ground, refusing to let him see how deeply unsettled I am by this whole setup. "I'm not like you."

His brow furrows slightly, genuine surprise

flickering across his face for the first time. "Not like me?" he echoes, as though the concept were foreign to him. He steps closer, his towering frame casting a long shadow over me. "You were wronged, Red. This is justice."

I shake my head again, more firmly this time. "No, this is cruelty." I glance at the tray again, bile rising in my throat. "I won't do it."

Hades watches me for a long, tense moment, his eyes searching mine as though trying to comprehend something that doesn't quite fit into his understanding of the world. Finally, he straightens, a strange, unreadable expression settling over his features. "I don't know what you want."

"You could apologize," I almost snap.

He blinks as the beta shifts uncomfortably on his feet. "Apologize?" he echoes the word like it's another very foreign concept to him.

I raise a brow. "Oh... or the great Lycan king can't apologize? He doesn't have the ability to do so?"

"I can do anything," he mutters, his face hardening.

I don't back down. "Then let's hear it, your

majesty. Say you're sorry for blaming me for something I didn't do."

"I... am," he mumbles.

I come closer. "I can't hear you."

Hades' eyes narrow, his jaw tightening as he stands there, obviously unused to being challenged. I can see the conflict warring within him—his pride clashing with the situation. The room seems to grow smaller with the weight of his hesitation. His chest rises and falls, his breathing shallow, and for a split second, I think he might actually explode with anger.

But then he speaks, each word clipped and sharp. "I... am sorry."

I blink, genuinely taken aback. He said it, but the way it slips past his lips, as though it physically pains him, makes me wonder how much of it is genuine. He stands there, rigid, his eyes burning into mine with a mixture of frustration and something deeper—something I can't quite place.

"See? That wasn't so hard, was it?" I say, my voice laced with bitter satisfaction, though my heart still pounds in my chest.

His gaze hardens, the vulnerability from moments before disappearing behind the cold mask he wears so well. "Is this what you want? An apology? Will that erase what she did to you?" His voice grows colder, sharper, the intensity behind his words making the air around us crackle. "I thought you wanted justice."

I look at the woman on the table, her terrified eyes darting between us. Every fiber of my being wants to walk away from this room, from Hades, from all of it. But his words linger, like poison seeping into my thoughts. Justice. That's what I've always wanted, isn't it? To be seen. To be heard. But not like this. Not with cruelty.

"No," I say, my voice steady. "I don't want this kind of justice. I'm not you, Hades. I don't need to hurt people to feel whole."

For a moment, something flickers in his eyes—hurt? No, that can't be it. But it's gone as quickly as it came. His expression closes off again, his lips curling into a tight line. "Then you're a fool, Red."

"Maybe." I meet his gaze, unflinching. "But at least I can live with myself."

His eyes harden further. "Red..." His voice is a

low growl.

I ignore it. "I want something else."

He raises a brow. "What?"

"I want her to apologize to Elliot."

"What about you?" he asks, stalking closer. "You don't want an apology from her?"

"Me?" I chuckle and glance at her. "I know she could never mean it. But that boy still needs to have faith in people and she better make sure he believes it or I might have to take you up on your offer." 1

With that I leave.

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