

56 Who Is She?

Hades~ 1

Kael entered my office. A bit of agitation threatened to bubble up to the surface at the sight of him, but I pushed it aside. There were far more important things to discuss.

I gestured for him to come forward, towards my desk. I shifted the sketchpad to him. He picked it up, and his expression became solemn.

"Danielle," he murmured, his voice quiet. His eyes shifted to mine. "I didn't know you could sketch so well. The detailing is—"

"I didn't do that," I interrupted, my voice more biting than it needed to be.

His brows rose. "Who?"

"The princess."

He blinked, as if it took a minute for it to settle in.

"Princess Ellen of Silverpine?"

"Which other princess do we have in the tower?"

I asked dryly.

His eyes moved to the sketch again, as if seeing it for the first time. "That's impossible," he



His eyes moved to the sketch again, as if seeing it for the first time. "That's impossible," he breathed. "Danielle never appeared on TV. We don't have her pictures around. Ellen and Danielle could never have met. She never could have seen her picture," he rambled on. "But—"

"She sketched her out like Danielle had been right in front of her. Every detail is accurate, down to her mole. Even the earring I gifted her."

Kael was silent for a long moment, staring at the sketch with wide eyes. His fingers tightened around the edges of the paper as though it might reveal some hidden secret if he looked hard enough.

"How does she know?" he whispered, his voice low, as if speaking the question too loudly might bring unwanted consequences.

"I don't know," I replied, standing and crossing my arms. I paced to the window, staring out at the thick walls of the tower. "But it's not just this sketch. The princess knows things, Kael. Things she shouldn't know. The question now is: How the hell does she know?"

Kael's skin turned pale, and he ran a hand through his hair. I knew he was suspecting the same thing I was.



But Kael's eyes widened, and he cut me off. "I doubt it," he gasped. "It can't—"

My eyes narrowed. "You don't believe she was privy to the attack on their vehicle that day? You're telling me you don't suspect she possibly planned it with Darius and had a direct hand in it?" I was growling, more enraged by the moment.

I tossed the cigarette I had been smoking and slammed my hands on the table, making him flinch. "Answer me!" I roared. "You're telling me she didn't have the audacity to orchestrate the attack?" My voice echoed off the walls, the force behind it barely contained. Kael flinched but held my gaze, his expression conflicted.

"I'm telling you," he began slowly, his voice unsteady, "there's no evidence. Darius, yes. But Ellen? She's the Silverpine princess! She was barely an adult when the attack happened." He shook his head, as if trying to dismiss the very idea.

I stepped closer, looming over the desk between us. "And yet," I hissed, "she drew Danielle. Perfectly. Down to the last detail. This isn't a coincidence, Kael. Either she was there, or someone told her. Someone who knows too

I stepped closer, looming over the desk between us. "And yet," I hissed, "she drew Danielle. Perfectly. Down to the last detail. This isn't a coincidence, Kael. Either she was there, or someone told her. Someone who knows too much."

Kael's throat bobbed, and he dropped his gaze back to the sketch.

"Don't tell me she's already manipulating you too." The realization was thawing my last fragile nerve. "First Amelia, then you?" Cerberus rose, craving to sink its teeth into flesh. "What exactly about her has made you so fucking gullible?"

Kael stiffened at my accusation, his jaw tightening as he set the sketchpad back down on my desk. His eyes flashed, but he held himself back. "I'm not being manipulated, Hades," he said, his voice cold and steady. "I'm just trying to see things clearly before we make a move. You think Ellen planned it all? Fine. But we don't have proof."

"Proof?" I scoffed, pacing away from him. "We don't need a signed confession, Kael. Everything points to her! The sketch, the knowledge of Danielle, her connection to Darius—"

"Yes, her connection to Darius," Kael interrupted,

I stopped dead in my tracks, turning slowly to face him. "What did you say?"

Kael held my gaze, unflinching now. "You heard me."

Cerberus stirred within me, my rage barely contained. "Careful, Kael," I warned, my voice low and dangerous. "You forget who you're talking to."

"Hades," his tone became more tentative. "Don't you feel it? We believe we know everything about her, but things aren't consistent. She is nothing like you could have imagined. I know you, Hades. You don't just fact-check, you watch, you study. We can't jump to conclusions about her involvement. If it turns out to be true, it would change everything. And what if it's not? She has come so far from where she once was."

That was it. In the blink of an eye, my hand was around his neck, pulling him off his feet and up into the air. "Why the hell do you fucking care how far she's gotten? Why do you dare care so much? Is there something you're not telling me?" I roared. 1

He gripped my hand, struggling against my hold. "Hades..." he choked. "Take... the reins. You've... come so... far. Don't go... back." My hold did not

He gripped my hand, struggling against my hold. "Hades..." he choked. "Take... the reins. You've... come so... far. Don't go... back." My hold did not relent. "Lucian," he whispered with the last breath he had.

I blinked as the name hit me in the chest, loosening my grip and letting him go. He fell to the ground, coughing as he massaged his neck.

"Leave, Kael. Before I hurt you again." I took out a cigarette and lit it.

Kael did as I ordered but, as expected, he lingered at the door for a moment before finally leaving.

I stood there, the smoke from my cigarette curling in the dim light of the office, my mind racing. Lucian. That name still had the power to shake me, no matter how deep I'd buried it. Kael was right about one thing—things weren't adding up, not in the way I wanted them to. But I couldn't let myself believe I was losing control. Not now.

I walked to the sketch again, my fingers tracing the outline of Danielle's face. It was uncanny, the way Ellen had captured her, as if she had known her intimately. But she hadn't. She couldn't have. She shouldn't have—for her own good. If she was

She would suffer a worse fate than Darius. I could still smell the scent of blood. The cold breeze that death brought. It had been a red river that day. I could still see it, seeping through the cracks in my memory. Dark, viscous, pooling beneath her as I held her broken body. The stench of iron filled my lungs, suffocating, drowning me in the weight of what had been lost. The sharp scent of rain mixed with the salt of tears—mine, hers—mingling in the dirt. I could hear the distant screams, not of terror but of something more primal. Pain. Loss. Rage. Danielle had been the last to die in my arms, a large hole where her stomach should have been, our child ripped out from it. 7

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