

## 64 Suspicions

Hades~ 1

"This is getting out of hand," Kael mused. "First the bomb at the stairwell around Ellie's neck and then the one in her phone."

I raised a brow. I agreed with Kael, but I stared at him, a question in my gaze. "Ellie?"

"It's a little nickname that Red gave Elliot."

My jaw locked instantly. He was calling her by the nickname that *I* gave her. But I reined in my anger. Losing control when it came to Ellen was growing more and more unavoidable. It was like she had become a damn trigger. 1

Kael, the ever-observant beta, noticed the shift I tried to put in check.

"Hades, I know we have a case at hand," he gestured to the paper containing the details, design, probable sources, and suspects concerning the bombs.

I didn't like where this was going, but I kept a steady gaze on him. "You have something to say."

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"Quite a few things, if we're being technical." My beta took a deep breath. "What is going on with the princess?" Then he added cautiously, "And you?"

"Ask me a straight question, Kael," I said, my voice low. "What is it that you're asking?"

"There seems to be tension between the two of you, and it's glaringly obvious," he continued. His voice was soft, as though he didn't want to rouse my anger by being too bold, but his gaze remained unyielding.

"There has always been tension, since I first knew of her existence," I replied casually. "Our kinds don't even tolerate one another, not to speak of marriage."

Kael looked anything but convinced, and a small part of me shared in his skepticism of the words coming out of my own mouth. "It's more than that. The way you reacted when I defended her against the accusations you leveled against her," his eyes narrowed as if he was studying me. "It wasn't from anger because I defended Darius's daughter; it was almost from... jealousy." 1

"You're not making any sense, Kael," I drawled. "She is Darius's daughter."

My expression remained carefully neutral. "Don't bring my father into this, Kael," I said, barely holding back my temper.

Kael looked down. "Your knuckles are white, Hades," he murmured.

Kael's words struck like a hammer, and I released a breath I hadn't realized I'd been holding. I unclenched my fists, my knuckles returning to their usual color as I forced myself to relax, though I could still feel the blood thrumming beneath my skin.

"I'm aware," I replied coolly, though my voice felt strained, even to my own ears. "But you should also be aware that whatever it is you're insinuating, it doesn't change the facts. Ellen is dangerous to our kind. That much hasn't changed."

Kael nodded, as if conceding that point, but he didn't back down. "Dangerous, yes," he agreed slowly. "But you know better than anyone that danger has never kept you away. You thrive on it."

I shot him a look, a sharp reminder to tread carefully. "Your point, Kael?"

His gaze softened, and he sighed, a rare show of

His gaze softened, and he sighed, a rare show of emotion from him. "I just think... maybe it's worth asking yourself why this tension is different. Why you let her get under your skin. It's not just because she's Darius's daughter, or even because she's brazen enough to cover your nephew with her body. This is... something else, and I think you know that."

I wanted to dismiss him, brush off his words like dust. But he'd touched a nerve, one I wasn't ready to admit even existed. My jaw tightened again, and I turned away, busying myself with the papers spread across the table, studying the designs of the bombs as though I could will them to provide a solution to all the chaos Ellen brought with her.

"There's nothing to discuss here, Kael," I said, my voice like steel. "Focus on the case. Not... personal matters."

Kael didn't press further, but his silence was a weight in the room, lingering like a shadow. I could feel his unspoken question hanging between us, and it gnawed at me, unwilling to let me slip back into the comfortable cold detachment I'd perfected over the years.

After a moment, he straightened, a faint sigh

After a moment, he straightened, a faint sigh escaping him. "Very well, Hades," he said quietly. "But if you ever decide you want to talk... you know where to find me."

"Her family," I murmured, stopping him in his tracks. "You saw the videos, didn't you?"

He nodded.

"It feels like they moved on too quickly," I continued, getting up. "It's almost like she never lived in Lunar Heights. Even her mother..."

"She was not grieving in the slightest," Kael completed. "It's almost as if they didn't lose anything, especially something as precious as a daughter to the enemy."

"Exactly," I agreed. "Cerberus feels something is not right here. There's far more at play. Secrets left in the shadows." The more I voiced my suspicions, the more it made sense. "Her sleeping on the ground, the nightmares, the way she reacts to blood," I continued listing them without too much effort. Even the way she only ate a little. There were so many signs, ones I'd dismissed as her putting on a show. But it felt real, like mine had been. 2

Kael's thoughtful expression told me he knew



"Someone abused and tortured. Made to sleep in dingy cells with little to eat. Someone held down and tortured until they lose their sense of self and become someone else entirely." 1

"Hades," Kael called me back from the brink. He knew I was speaking about myself now. I snapped out of it. 2

"Yesterday, she was having a nightmare," I said, remembering her shrill screams that filled the room and had most likely leaked to other parts of the house. I needed to soundproof the walls.

"I heard."

"She was saying one thing repeatedly."

"What?"

*"I don't want to hurt them."* 2

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