

65 Loyalties

Hades~ 1

My ears were ringing as I watched the footage. This was probably the fifth time I had replayed it. My security cameras were state of the art—why wouldn't they be? Yet, right in front of me, the videos of Ellen had no audio. None at all. 1

"What the..." Kael muttered, shock shading his voice. "This doesn't make sense."

Like hell it didn't. She was on the phone, clearly agitated, tears gathering in her eyes, her knuckles white from gripping the phone so hard. She was clearly upset, but I couldn't hear a single thing she was saying. From what little I knew of lip-reading, it looked like she was speaking with her mother.

A flash of hurt crossed her face, like Queen Lyra was saying something very unfriendly. That was all I could deduce as my mind raced through possibilities and probabilities.

"How could the audio be deactivated?" Kael turned a threatening glare on the security officials, who were kneeling on the floor.

"I...I have no... no idea," one stammered, looking to his colleagues, who appeared equally lost, as though his world had come crumbling down. Maybe it had. "We were... monitoring," he promised. "Nothing was... odd... or out of place." He continued, trembling.

My skin crawled as the realization sank into my bones. We had been compromised. Infiltrated. This had never happened before. It only started with... Ellen. Her phone had been bugged, and intel couldn't be collected. When I found out, I destroyed the phone. She had been present when the bomb went off. Even the security cameras hadn't picked up any audio in her room.

My skin prickled as I ordered Kael to pull up footage from my room after Ellen was moved into it. The security team scrambled to access the files, already sweating under the weight of my gaze. They knew the stakes.

"Go back to the beginning. Every call she received. Play it again," I instructed, my voice low with barely-contained anger.

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The footage flickered as we rewound to moments when Ellen had been on the phone. But each time, every recording was the same—mute. Completely stripped of sound. No static, no distortion, just impenetrable silence.

Kael clenched his jaw, turning to me, his unease mirroring my own. "This doesn't feel like a simple malfunction," he muttered.

"Malfunction?" I laughed, the sound hollow.

"State-of-the-art technology, Kael. Security so tight even I wouldn't have expected a single flaw. And now, this." My voice was cold. I looked at the trembling team, who had gone back to kneeling. "How could you let this happen?"

The head of security swallowed, clearly desperate to keep his composure. "We... we monitored everything, Your Majesty. There were no signs, nothing that would indicate interference. It was as if—"

"As if someone disabled the audio without touching a single switch," I finished for him, my tone deadly calm. "Without any evidence left behind." My fist clenched, tension building within me. The control I'd always commanded felt as if it were slipping through my fingers.

Kael shifted. "We're being toved with."

I nodded, my mind racing, trying to hold onto that control. Someone had slipped through our defenses as if they knew every blind spot, every vulnerability. Someone was watching, listening, and I couldn't reach them. The very thought made my jaw clench. 1

This had never happened. Not even when Silverpine and Obsidian were at loggerheads. It was a completely outlandish situation.

"It's obvious what's happening here," a feminine but firm voice said from the doorway. I didn't need to turn to see who it was or how her perpetually red lips would twist into a sneer.

"And what might that be, Felicia?"

"It's the mutt." 3

Cerberus reared his head at the mention of the slur.

"Think about it, Your Majesty," she continued, her heels clicking on the marble tiles as she walked into the room. "None of this ever happened until she came." Her voice took on a thoughtful tone. "Her 'saving' my son was a front. She did this, and what better way to keep suspicion off yourself than by making the perpetrator appear to be the victim? I searched the security cameras myself,



"Think about it, Your Majesty," she continued, her heels clicking on the marble tiles as she walked into the room. "None of this ever happened until she came." Her voice took on a thoughtful tone. "Her 'saving' my son was a front. She did this, and what better way to keep suspicion off yourself than by making the perpetrator appear to be the victim? I searched the security cameras myself, too. One moment my Elliot was just on his own; the next moment, he had a bomb around his neck." Her voice trembled slightly, but not from fear—she was angry. "That girl is a damn spy. As if Darius would ever make peace, especially after what he did." Every syllable dripped with venom.

My jaw clenched. She was being logical, her words making sense. Still, something held me back from fully embracing the reality.

I'd met plenty of complicated characters in my time. It wasn't that she had complex goals and morals—I would have known if that were true. But it was like she was two completely different people at once. One moment, she'd be sadistic, almost maniacal; the next, she was the epitome of empathy and self-sacrifice, riddled with unresolved trauma. 1

"Everyone leave," Felicia ordered. The security officials scurried away like rats. Kael shot me a

I turned around to look at her. Brown hair dyed a stark black, eyes like emeralds, and clad in a designer suit, she still looked like the Luna she once was. The authority in her voice remained. She was nothing like Danielle's soft nature. It still sometimes stunned me that she was my Danielle's elder sister. Apart from their nearly identical looks, that was where the similarities ended. Elliot had taken after Felicia, with brown hair and doe-green eyes, slightly downturned.

Maybe that was why it hurt to look at him at all. He looked like Felicia, and in a cruel twist of fate, he looked like Danielle too. Our child would have looked like Elliot.

"That mutt is clouding your logic. For God's sake, Hades, you're going soft for... her!"

My eyes narrowed. "You're not making any sense," I said coolly, despite the heat rising in my blood.

"Am I now?" She scoffed. "You can't admit it because you know the implications of what's happening. She was never supposed to have a room or be taken care of by a maid. The moment she entered this place, she was supposed to be put into a cell, tortured until she lost her senses and awakened what needed to be awakened. She

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My hands clenched into fists, every instinct screaming at me to shove her out, but Felicia was beyond stubborn. She had a point, several of them, but the bitterness in her words and the way she spat every syllable of "her" made something primal rise in me.

"Watch your tone, Felicia," I said quietly, though my voice held a warning. "You have no right to speak of her that way in my presence."

Her lips twisted in disbelief. "No right? Have you forgotten how Darius sent assassins for your family? Not even a silver bullet—he sent a beast because he deemed them nothing but meat." Her voice dropped to a trembling whisper filled with

A headache pounded at the base of my skull as I met her glare. I couldn't deny the facts piling up. Ellen's arrival had come with one disruption after another, each with a meticulousness that pointed to betrayal. But something in me, some instinct I couldn't understand, resisted.

"I don't need you to question my judgment," I finally replied, my voice sharp. "I know exactly who she is. And if she is indeed Darius's 'tool,' as you say, then I will deal with her in my way."

"Your way," she muttered bitterly. "By trusting her? Letting her into your room, your mind? Giving her exactly what she needs to destroy you? Wake up, Hades." Her voice dripped with disdain, but her eyes were almost pleading.

"You're losing yourself because of that mutt, and the worst part is, you don't even see it."

I took a steady breath, the effort to keep my rage in check gnawing at my control. I wouldn't give her the satisfaction of knowing she was getting to me.

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Felicia's eyes softened, just for a moment. "I'm not saying this out of hate, Hades. But you cannot let your emotions compromise everything we've worked for. If you allow yourself to become vulnerable, Darius will tear through every weakness he finds." She straightened, brushing her hands along her jacket as if clearing away her own anger. "I only came to warn you. Remember who your true allies are—she is not one of them."

"I believe I can come to that conclusion myself."
What was I saying?

Her face hardened, her scowl deep

Her face hardened, her scowl deepening. "Don't forget Danielle because of a mutt's cunt." 3

I stilled at her words. Every bit of logic told me she was right. But then, why did it feel wrong?

"I won't forgive you if you betray my sister for her killer." 6

With one last withering look, she turned on her heel, her heels clacking with every calculated step. She left me in a silence that hung like a curse, every word she'd spoken echoing through my mind, stirring up the chaos already brewing inside.