

69 Her Blood

Hades~ 1

The red dot on the GPS continued to blink. Every muscle in my body was wound like a spring ready to snap. I drummed my fingers on my thigh, blood boiling hotter with each passing second.

"We're almost there," Kael informed me.

But I already knew we were exactly fifteen minutes from her location. Embedding a tracking chip in her scalp had proven useful, just as I had expected.

As we neared the mansion, its grandeur loomed ahead, casting long shadows against the fading light. The façade was imposing, a blend of elegance and intimidation, with manicured gardens flanking the entrance. But it was the men in suits that caught my attention, watching our approach like hawks.

I could feel Kael's anticipation beside me, a silent agreement that the time for subtlety had passed. As we pulled up to the entrance, the men immediately straightened, their eyes narrowing as they recognized who had arrived.

"Your Majesty," they murmured in unison, stepping aside to create a path for me. The need to reclaim what was mine overpowered all other thoughts.

I stepped out of the vehicle, the gravel crunching beneath my boots as I scanned the area.

"Let's go," I instructed Kael, my voice low and steady.

He nodded, a muscle in his jaw tightening as we approached the grand entrance. I reached for the door, and it swung open automatically, revealing a lavish interior that stood in stark contrast to the tension in the air.

Inside, chandeliers hung from the ceiling like jewels, casting a soft glow over the opulent furnishings.

"Where is she?" I demanded, my voice echoing against the marble floors.

The guards exchanged glances, their expressions a mix of fear and compliance. "Follow us, Your Majesty," one of them replied, his tone trembling slightly as he gestured for us to enter deeper into the mansion.

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The guard led us down opulent corridors. As we approached a set of double doors, he paused, casting a wary glance my way before pushing them open to reveal an elegant sitting room bathed in soft, golden light.

In the center of the room sat a woman, her posture straight and refined, her every move calculated. The fragrance of her perfume—a blend of vanilla and dark amber—hung heavily in the air, mingling with the scent of polished mahogany and leather. She had an undeniable allure, a timeless elegance that only sharpened with age, yet her beauty was like fine crystal, delicate but dangerously sharp.

She looked up, her painted lips curving into a smile that didn't reach her eyes. "Your Majesty," she greeted, her voice smooth as silk but laced with an edge. She gestured toward a nearby chair, her manicured fingers poised as if she were conducting a symphony. "Please, take a seat."

I didn't move. My gaze hardened as I took in her demeanor, every part of me railing against the charade of civility. This woman thought she held some kind of power over me, over this situation, and the very idea made my blood simmer hotter because it was true in a way



"Lucinda," I murmured. "You do know I am not one to be trifled with."

Her smile flickered for a brief moment, a hint of tension surfacing in her perfectly maintained expression. "All in due time," she replied, gesturing to the empty seat once more. "But first, let's discuss... terms."

My eyes narrowed, but she didn't flinch; if anything, she seemed amused, as if toying with a predator who thought it was the hunter.

Her eyes lingered on me, assessing, calculating. She wanted a game, wanted me to play along. I didn't sit at anyone's table—not for games, and certainly not for negotiations. Yet, I sat down.

"It's been a while, hasn't it?" she asked.

"Sure," I replied smoothly. "What do you want to discuss?"

"First, let's have a drink," she gestured to her servant. "You must be parched."

I said nothing as a bottle of wine and a glass were placed on the table for me. It was served, but my eyes didn't leave Lucinda's. The sweetly sanguineous scent of blood wine filled the space, heady, strong, and seductive.

Lucinda cleared her throat. "I've been informed of some alarmingly heartbreaking things," she said. "Your mutt of a wife is causing problems already."

"That's for me to decide," I replied plainly.

She smirked, but it was shaky. "You don't believe it? That she's responsible?"

"Nothing is assumed until there's evidence."

She narrowed her eyes. "The girl is good, it seems. Is it the sex? She must be skilled."

My jaw locked. "I would advise you to choose your words carefully around me."

She blinked at my tone, actually taken aback. Her expression turned somber. "You've been alone for years now, since...Danielle. I know we Lycans...our sex drive is like our bloodlust—insatiable." Her mouth curled into a sneer. "But a werewolf?"

"It does not concern you what I choose to do with my wife."

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The room filled with a simmering tension as Lucinda's accusation hung in the air, her poised exterior barely concealing the agitation beneath. She kept her expression carefully composed, her hands resting on the table, fingers intertwined as if in quiet contemplation. But I could sense the anger, the slow burn she was trying to mask with a controlled tone.

"Danielle was my daughter," she said, her voice softer but steady, a restrained force in each word. "I am well within my rights to question where your loyalty lies now. You choose to stand by her killer, yet expect me to remain silent?" Her eyes locked onto mine, a calm fury radiating from within.

I met her gaze, my expression impassive. "So you thought taking what's mine would be the answer?" I asked, my voice carrying an edge, each word a deliberate strike.

Lucinda's lips twitched, her usual arrogance tempered but still present. "It wasn't entirely my decision to take her," she replied, her voice smooth yet laced with thinly veiled reproach. "But she doesn't belong in this world. A werewolf among Lycans?" Her tone was measured, almost pitying. "How long, Hades, before she turns on you? Or becomes a liability rather than an asset?"

I leaned forward slightly, my eyes narrowing. "It seems to me you're the one pressing a blade, Lucinda, not her."

She blinked, her calm exterior wavering for a fraction of a second before her composure returned. Her gaze held, unyielding, calculating, yet a hint of frustration flickered there—a reminder that she was used to being in control.

"You should've never brought her into our world," she continued, her voice barely above a whisper, as if speaking aloud might shatter the careful control she'd imposed on herself. "She doesn't understand our loyalty, our way of life. You're inviting a storm into your domain, Hades, and expecting it not to rain."

"Enough," I said, my voice low, the weight of my authority unmistakable. "I've let you say your piece, but understand this: she's under my protection now. If any harm befalls her, the consequences will be far beyond anything you're prepared for."

Lucinda's expression remained calm, but her hands tightened slightly on the armrests. She inclined her head in acknowledgment, her voice a touch softer, though the bitterness lingered. "For your sake, I hope she's worth it."

She would be, but I could not afford to show how desperate I was to have Ellen back. I first had to calm myself, so I brought the glass to my lips, the rich, dark liquid slipping onto my tongue with a taste that caught me off guard, making me pause. The wine was heady and intense, a luxurious blend of flavors that unfurled in layers —notes of dark cherries and spiced plum, woven with a hint of smoke and something deeper, more elusive. It was smooth yet complex, a seductive, almost forbidden sweetness tinged with the faintest metallic bite. There was an unmistakable allure to it, a flavor so rich and tempting that, for a moment, I almost lost myself in it. 1

The wine's taste lingered on my tongue, each layer drawing me further in as if it held a power of its own. It wasn't like anything I'd had before, yet it felt dangerously familiar, as though I had tasted its essence somewhere in the depths of my own nature. I took a second sip, slower this time, savoring the complexity of it. 2

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Lucinda's eyes flickered as she watched me, a slight curve to her lips. She looked pleased, as though the wine had delivered precisely the reaction she'd intended. "It suits you," she murmured, her voice as smooth as the wine itself. "A rare vintage... one crafted with immense care."

I set the glass down, meeting her gaze, aware of the subtle challenge within her words. "It has a certain charm," I replied, the edge in my tone not quite masking my intrigue.

Her gaze lingered on me, sharp but with a hint of satisfaction. "I knew it would. The taste—intoxicating, isn't it? Each drop is made from the purest essence, aged in a way that brings out something... primal. Something one can't fight. It was prepared not too long ago."

My eyes narrowed. "Where is the princess, Lucinda?"

"The werewolves are right about one thing," Lucinda said, ignoring my question. "Our hybrid nature can be frightening. Our lust for blood is a major contributing factor. You know the myth: the blood of our mate tastes the best. It's ambrosia to our kind."

I glanced at the wine.