

## 74 Mercy

Hades~ 1

Rook's mouth hung open. "What?"

I lit a cigarette and took a relaxing puff. "She wanted me to spare you."

Rook's expression was one of pure, stunned disbelief. His mouth opened slightly, the shock freezing him in place. He looked at me, a dawning horror in his eyes as he grappled with the reality of what I'd just said.

His hands fell limply to his sides, the gun slipping from his grasp and landing on the cold floor with a hollow clatter. He blinked, shaking his head slightly, as if hoping the movement would dispel the words that still hung in the air.

"The... princess?" he whispered, barely able to form the words. "She... she wanted me spared?"

I took a long drag of my cigarette, letting the smoke curl upward, obscuring my expression as I watched him. "Did you think I would spare you out of kindness?" I asked, my voice low and edged with disdain. "No, Rook. If it were up to me, you'd have been dead before you ever set

I took a long drag of my cigarette, letting the smoke curl upward, obscuring my expression as I watched him. "Did you think I would spare you out of kindness?" I asked, my voice low and edged with disdain. "No, Rook. If it were up to me, you'd have been dead before you ever set foot back here."

He stared at me, his expression shattering into something desperate and fragile, like a man whose last anchor had just been severed. He had thought he understood me—thought he understood the nature of my justice, my ruthlessness. And now, in one moment, he was faced with a truth that tore all of that apart.

"But... why?" His voice cracked, barely above a whisper. "After what I did... why would she..." His voice trailed off as he stared at the floor, his face twisting with the weight of the realization.

"Because she is foolishly compassionate," I replied, a sneer tugging at my lips. "She's naive enough to believe in mercy and forgiveness." I leaned in closer, my gaze hard and unyielding. "If she had left this decision to me, I would have been the devil you deserved."

I unlocked the barrel of the gun and showed its contents to him. "Fate might have also saved you,"



The room seemed to close in around him as he absorbed the words, each one hammering against him with the weight of shattered illusions. I knew this because a part of me had had the same reaction to her words last night.

His shoulders slumped, his entire body sagging as he struggled to reconcile what he thought he knew with the reality that stood before him.

"You look surprised, Rook." I let out a short, mirthless laugh. "Did you really think I'd risk my pack's integrity, my own rule, for sentiment? No." I exhaled, watching the smoke twist in the dim light. "It was her decision, her foolish plea that stayed my hand. But don't think for one second that I share her weakness."

He stared at me, his eyes hollow as he finally began to understand the depth of his reprieve. This wasn't my mercy—this was the princess' intervention, her misplaced compassion. And if it hadn't been for her... he would have already been dead.

"So," I continued, my voice dropping to a dangerous whisper, "take that second chance she's so kindly granted you, and make it worthwhile. Because next time..." I let the silence linger, my gaze burning into him, "next time,

Rook's head bowed, a fresh wave of shock and grief contorting his features. The very foundation of his beliefs had been ripped out from under him, leaving him shaken and raw. His lip quivered as he whispered, "She is a werewolf."

"Thanks for pointing that out," I said dryly.

I tossed a piece of paper at him. "Here is the location of the bomb I had planted here. If you still have the will to leave, get rid of it."

Rook paled further, his hands shaking as he looked down at the paper and around the room.

With that, I turned around and left him kneeling, weeping quietly.

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Eve~

Mrs. Miller redressed my wounds and changed my bandages. I tried not to wince at every touch, but it was hard not to hiss every once in a while.

"You have to eat so you can take your medicine," she told me. "And I am under strict orders from His Majesty not to allow you to eat on your own." She said this as I reached for the spoon.

I paused and took my hand back, nodding.



She began to feed me. Each time I unhinged my jaw to eat, my head throbbed harder. The silence was tense, as if there was something unspoken hovering between us.

I cringed when a particular pulse made me clutch my head.

"Dear," Mrs. Miller set the dish aside and moved closer to check my head. "The physician said you might experience some discomfort," she murmured, her gentle fingers pressing lightly along my temples, as if soothing the ache could chase it away. "You've been through a lot, and recovery won't be easy."

I blinked at her reaction. It was as if she had been holding herself back before.

I exhaled slowly, trying to relax under her care, but the pain had me clenching my fists in frustration. "How long did he say?" My voice came out more strained than I'd intended, betraying the weariness gnawing at me.

Mrs. Miller sighed, brushing a strand of hair back from my forehead. "He didn't give specifics. Said it depends on your strength, your will. His Majesty has ordered the best care for you... though I wonder if that's as much for your own

Mrs. Miller sighed, brushing a strand of hair back from my forehead. "He didn't give specifics. Said it depends on your strength, your will. His Majesty has ordered the best care for you... though I wonder if that's as much for your own health as for his peace of mind."

Her words caught me off guard, and I looked up at her, a flicker of surprise showing despite the fatigue. "His peace of mind?" I echoed softly, confused.

She hesitated, then gave me a sympathetic smile. "I think there's more concern behind those stern orders than he lets on. The king may not show it, but... he is watching over you, dear. In his own way."

I looked away, unsure how to process that. Hades and concern weren't two things I usually paired together. And yet... flashes of memory from the night before came back to me—the way he'd lingered at my bedside, held me close, the faint worry buried in his hard gaze, barely visible through the walls he kept up around everyone, even himself.

Danielle.

But I shook the thought away. If Hades was watching over me, it was because of duty.



"Mrs. Miller..." I started, my voice quiet, "what's expected of me now? After... everything?"

She met my eyes with an expression of understanding, her fingers still gently brushing along my temple. "For now, just heal. Take things one day at a time."

I nodded as slowly as I could and took a deep breath. But when I glanced up, I noticed a question lingering in her eyes.

"What is the matter?" I asked quietly.

She was quiet again, as she usually was.

And I decided that I had misread.

"I heard what you did," she finally spoke, averting her eyes.

I looked up at her, confused. "What?"

"The Thetas," she whispered. "You asked him to spare them."

I bit my bottom lip. "It's not like he will listen to me."

Another contemplative silence. "Still, what they did to you..."

"Does not warrant mercy?" I asked. I smiled wryly to myself, looking down at my hands. "Maybe

"Does not warrant mercy?" I asked. I smiled wryly to myself, looking down at my hands. "Maybe that's why it felt right to ask," I murmured, half to myself. "I've seen what vengeance does to people. I don't want to carry that." I lied. The reason was not as noble. It was born out of trying to preserve what I had lost but seen through the Thetas—a bond between siblings. One between twins. <sup>1</sup>

My brow furrowed as his words replayed themselves in my head.

*"It's your fault... this is me avenging him,"* His face contorted with both hatred and despair. Pain etched into every line of his ragged face. He had not even been smug when I woke up; he looked like a man haunted.

A pang hit me in the chest. Even if his hatred was misplaced to some extent, I understood his actions. I was a mortal enemy anyway. There was a time when I would have done the same for Ellen, and despite everything she had put me through, a tiny part of me would still do the same.

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It touched me that the bond between Lycan twins could be so strong and filled with heartache, even if mine was wrought with nothing but betrayal and lies. A bond like that deserved a chance; it deserved to be preserved a little longer. Rook had hinted at Ryder dying, and I recalled how my heart had lurched.

I couldn't imagine what punishment Hades had dished out to them. I had promised to do something, and I hoped Hades had honored my request.

"He spared them," she said.

I snapped out of it and raised my eyes to her. It took a minute before the words sank in. "He did?" I asked, a bit too loudly, making me grimace.

The edge of her lips twitched up slightly, her eyes softening as she fed me another spoon. "He listened, dear."

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