

## 75 The Room Behind The Wall

Eve~ 1

It was late when Lia came in for my session. She paled the moment her eyes fell on me. I averted my eyes from her horrified expression. I hadn't dared to look in the mirror, but I knew I looked like I'd been run over by a truck.

She recovered, and we started our session, carefully avoiding the topic of my recent kidnapping and beating. It wasn't that she didn't want to talk about it—it was me who didn't want to discuss it. Especially because I would have to confront feelings I wanted to ignore, feelings stirred by what I'd learned from Felicia.

"So, about your dreams... what are they about?" Lia asked.

I thought long and hard. "I barely remember them, but I know they're nightmares. I wake up screaming."

Lia continued to watch me thoughtfully. "How do you feel afterward?"

I stared into space for a moment. "I feel dread. Like the nightmares are pointing to something,

I stared into space for a moment. "I feel dread. Like the nightmares are pointing to something, trying to tell me something, a warning." I wasn't fully lying. I knew they were fragmented memories, lost somewhere in the void of my mind. But I was afraid that would reveal too much of the trauma that Ellen Valmont, the blessed twin, would never have endured. Looking into Lia's kind eyes, I realized I could never be truly honest with her, no matter what.

It made me feel more alone. I sighed deeply and clenched my fists. There was no point in speaking about them when I had to lie at every turn.

So we continued, with me never fully disclosing the truth. Lia's questions kept coming, each one gentle yet probing, as if she could sense the hesitation I didn't want to admit. I offered shallow answers, carefully choosing words that hinted but never truly revealed anything beyond what was safe to share. I told her about small, manageable fears, avoiding the weightier darkness that churned in my chest.

"Have you tried keeping a dream journal?" Lia asked at one point, her voice as gentle as the look in her eyes.

I nodded, but it was half-hearted. I had tried

I nodded, but it was half-hearted. I had tried once, but putting pen to paper felt too vulnerable, too exposing. There was something terrifying about seeing those dreams materialize in ink—about confronting the blurred images and fragmented whispers that haunted me. It felt as though writing them down might give them more power, more reality than they deserved.

But the silence stretched between us, thick and almost suffocating, until Lia finally spoke again.

"Ellen," she said, leaning forward slightly, her tone soft but steady. "I know you may feel alone in this, but remember, you don't have to face it all by yourself. I'm here to help you—no matter how difficult it feels to share."

My heart jumped. It was like she was seeing straight through me. I wondered what she suspected.

Her words hit harder than I expected, striking at the raw loneliness I'd been trying so hard to bury. The reminder of support, of someone willing to listen and understand, felt both comforting and stifling. I was grateful, but the shame of hiding so much gnawed at me. Being Ellen was killing Eve. I would never fully heal. The realization was daunting, but I swallowed it

"Thank you, Lia." I gave her a faint smile, knowing it didn't reach my eyes. "I appreciate it."

We wrapped up the session soon after, and I left with a mind that felt more tangled than when I'd arrived. The weight of my secrets pressed down, even more isolating now that I realized how much I held back, even from someone as kind as Lia.

"Try journaling your dreams again," Lia urged as we reached the door. "It might be hard at first, but it will help you process everything, even if you never share it with anyone." Her voice was gentle, reassuring, but there was a subtle insistence in her tone, as if she sensed how deep the roots of my silence went.

I managed a nod, though I knew the journal would stay empty. The things I needed to confront were too dangerous to face alone. The trauma, the darkness—I knew that putting it all on paper wouldn't bring the peace I craved. It would only invite the memories back in sharper detail.

"Take care, Ellen," she said with a small, compassionate smile as she walked out.

I pressed my back against the door and took a

I pressed my back against the door and took a shaky breath. The large room felt ominous, and I felt cold. My skin sizzled with the memory of Hades' arms around me. I craved the heat, yearned for his presence. In a way, he was the only thing that made sense in the sea of confusion and heartache that had become my life.

He hated me, but he was the only one who truly saw me—not just Ellen Valmont, but the real me, buried beneath the layers of lies and the weight of secrets. In his hatred, there was something raw and honest, something that felt more genuine than simple compassion.

I sank onto the settee, clutching my arms as if I could hold myself together. My body ached with bruises, but it was the emptiness inside that hurt more. Hades had been a storm in my life, tearing through all my walls, leaving me exposed and vulnerable. Yet, in that destruction, there was a twisted comfort. I knew he wouldn't look away from the broken parts of me, wouldn't flinch from the darkness I tried so hard to bury. Because despite all the nightmares, not once had he complained—unlike the men who guarded my cell at night. 3

And though I'd convinced myself I could face this

And though I'd convinced myself I could face this alone, part of me wished he were here now, his presence filling the void that stretched endlessly within me. Hades was dangerous, maybe even cruel, but there was a strength in him, a fire that made me feel alive. I craved the burn. 1

But he hated me, and I knew that no amount of longing would change that. My fists clenched as I fought the ache of wanting someone who saw me as an enemy. He had his reasons, and my chest ached at the truth.

*Danielle.*

But I couldn't help wondering: if he knew the truth, if he saw me for who I really was, would he still hate me? Or would he understand the broken, fractured person beneath Ellen Valmont's mask? Would he still call for the destruction of all werewolves for my father's deception after he had already taken his wife away?

The questions hung in the silence, unanswered and painful. And as I sat alone in the empty room, I couldn't shake the feeling that the answer might be the only thing that could save me—or finally destroy me.

A faint gleam caught my eye, drawing me toward



A faint gleam caught my eye, drawing me toward the far wall, where a single painting hung, partially illuminated by a sliver of moonlight sneaking through the curtains. As if in a trance, I got up and turned on the light, the soft glow casting a warm, steady light over the artwork.

It was a breathtaking oil painting of a stormy sea, waves crashing against unseen rocks with a fury so vivid I could almost hear the roar. Every stroke was intricate, masterfully capturing the swell and churn of the water, as though the storm itself had been frozen in time. It was the kind of art that took years of experience and a level of devotion that bordered on obsession. Or love...

But what caught me wasn't just the scene's beauty—it was the lack of any protective glass over the canvas. I found myself moving closer, almost daring to reach out and feel the textures under my fingers, as if I could touch the tumultuous waters themselves. The absence of protection seemed odd, given the obvious care taken in every brushstroke. As if whoever owned this didn't just display it but somehow wanted it to remain raw and vulnerable, exposed to the elements.

For a moment, I wondered if this was Hades'



For a moment, I wondered if this was Hades' work. The thought startled me, yet there was something hauntingly familiar in the chaos of the waves, the darkness that danced in the depths of the water—a rage that mirrored the turbulence within him. The gray accents and the silver moon reminded me of Hades' intense gaze. My heart fluttered like a butterfly was trapped within it.

I continued to stare at the masterpiece, my hand itching to touch it. Finally, I gave in to the temptation, rose to my tiptoes, and reached out tentatively.

My fingers brushed lightly over the textured waves, each stroke feeling as if it had been etched by a restless spirit. I traced the lines carefully, breathing in the faint scent of paint and oil. Then, as my hand moved over the painted moon, something unexpected happened—a slight give beneath my fingertip, like a hidden button embedded in the canvas.

A chill shot through me, and my heart began to pound. I hesitated, but curiosity and something else—a strange pull I couldn't resist—urged me to press down fully. A soft click sounded, and then the silence was broken by the creak of shifting wood.



The entire wall began to move, the painting sliding to the side, and my heart lurched. I stepped back, eyes wide, as an opening revealed itself—a hidden room, cloaked in shadow.

The dim light from the main room spilled into the entrance, illuminating just enough to make out the edges of shelves and the glint of something metallic. I held my breath, pulse racing as I took a cautious step forward, the thrill of discovery battling the warning bells ringing in my mind. 2

I took another step into the shadowed space, my senses on high alert.

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