



## 83 His Liability

Eve~ 1

I watched him laughed at me, my face burning hot. His laughter was intoxicating; smoky and deep, like a melody that danced along the edges of my embarrassment. But it was also infuriating and hurtful.

"You're such a jerk," I muttered, shrinking further into the water as his laughter finally began to subside.

Hades wiped his eyes, his smirk lingering as he crouched again, holding the drenched book in his hand like it was the most amusing artifact he'd ever found. "Red," he said, his voice husky, laced with genuine curiosity. "There is no need for that." His gaze turned dark with a promises of murder. An expression that always made a chill run down spine. "What happened today will never happen again."

I blinked up at him. "You know?"

His brows scrunched up, his mouth curving downward in disgust. "Why would I not know what happens in my tower?" He asked, offended.

I looked down. "It's Kael's family."

"So?" He asked. "They are still my subjects and you are not allowed in the left wing ever again." He stared in a tone that brooked no argument.

"I just keep hiding?" I asked.

His gaze hardened, his jaw tightening as he regarded me. "This isn't about hiding, Red," he said, his voice low and clipped. "It's about staying safe."

I bristled, the lingering sting of humiliation mixing with frustration. "Safe?" I repeated, my voice rising slightly. "Safe from \*what,\* Hades? Words? Disapproval? I can't live my life tucked away in a corner because people don't like me."

"You don't know what my people are capable of," he shot back, his tone sharp. "Have you not learned from what Felicia did, she---"

"tortured me," I interrupted, glaring at him now. "And I could do nothing but call for a wolf who could not hear me." Tears stung my eyes but I forced them back. This was not time to show weakness. I was not backing down. Watching a wolfless woman like me defend me had been an eye opener. I lost Rhea but it did not mean I had to be vulnerable and useless. A liability.

He leaned in closer, his shadow falling over me as his eyes bored into mine. "You don't need to fight your battles alone. That's what I'm here for."

"That's not the point!" I snapped, slamming my palms against the surface of the water. The sound echoed through the bathroom, silencing us both. My breaths came fast, my chest heaving as I tried to collect myself. "I don't want to be just another problem for you to solve, Hades. I want to be... useful. Strong. Like Jules. She doesn't have a wolf, but she doesn't let that stop her. And neither should I."

He stared at me, his expression unreadable, his shoulders bunching.

I pressed on, my voice quieter but no less firm. "You think you're protecting me by keeping me locked away, but all it does is make me feel small. Helpless. Like I'm not even worth fighting for because you won't let me fight for myself. You said it yourself, I am a liability." I tossed his words right back at him, with more venom than I thought was possible.

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The silence between us stretched, the air heavy with unspoken tension as I sat there, my chest rising and falling as the tension between us grew. Hades' gaze darkened, his jaw set in a way that warned me his next words wouldn't be kind.

"You think learning from a book will make you strong?" His voice was cold, slicing through the warm steam lingering in the bathroom. "You think Jules' strength comes from martial arts alone? She fights because she's been hardened by years of pain and experience. That's not something you can mimic. And if you try, you'll only end up hurt." 1

His words were like daggers, each one cutting deeper than the last. I swallowed hard, willing myself not to cry, but the lump in my throat refused to budge. "So, what? You're saying I'll never be strong enough?" My voice cracked, betraying the storm of emotions churning inside me. "That I'll always be the weak, helpless liability you think I am?"

His eyes flicked to mine, and for a moment, I thought I saw something softer, something almost regretful, but it was gone as quickly as it came. "You don't understand the world you live in, Red. Strength isn't something you can borrow or wish for. You either have it or you don't."

"Don't cry," he murmured, his tone softer now, though it still carried that edge of frustration.

I stiffened as his fingers brushed against my cheek, wiping away a stray tear. His touch was tender, gentle—at odds with the harshness of his words. I hated that it made my heart flutter, that it stirred something warm in me even as his dismissiveness stung.

"I'm not crying," I muttered, even though we both knew it wasn't true.

He didn't respond. Instead, he grabbed a cloth from the side of the tub, dipping it into the warm water before wringing it out. My eyes widened as he leaned closer, the heat of his presence nearly as overwhelming as the bath itself.

"Hades—"

"Stay still," he ordered, his tone leaving no room for argument.

I froze as the cloth touched my shoulder, his large hand steady as he began to wash me. The warmth of the water and the soft drag of the fabric against my skin were soothing, but the intimacy of the act left me breathless.

"This isn't necessary," I whispered, my voice

"This isn't necessary," I whispered, my voice trembling.

He didn't answer, his focus unwavering as he worked. His touch was methodical, almost clinical, yet there was a gentleness to it that made my skin tingle. He washed me down slowly, his fingers brushing over my arms, my collarbone, my back. When he reached my hands, his grip lingered, his thumbs tracing circles over my damp skin. 2

I shivered, and not from the cold.

When he finally finished, he stood, his imposing frame towering over me. Before I could react, he reached down, his arms slipping beneath me.

"Hades, no—" I protested, but he ignored me, lifting me from the water as if I weighed nothing.

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