

90 Living My Life

Hades 1

She was giggling when she stepped into the room. The moment her eyes met mine from where I stood smoking by the window her amusement faded. Something twisted in my gut at her sudden change. Like her laughter was not meant for me. 2

Her eyes widened before she seemed to calm herself, her expression turning carefully neutral. "Welcome back, you are back early." She commented, her voice carried no emotion, it was almost monotone. For some reason, it annoyed me.

We had not as much as spoken a word to each other since the time that I had been devilishly drunk on her blood. I was up before she even stirred from sleep and she was asleep by the time that I returned to the room. Tensions had been mounting but for the first time she did not initiate any discussion to quell it. It was almost as if she did not care. And now she was coming back from somewhere giggling like a school girl.

"Where have you been?" I asked as plainly and

"Where have you been?" I asked as plainly and causally as I could manage. 2

"Out," she replied, before heading for the bathroom. I rarely used my acceleration but I cut off her path in the speed of light. I looked her over. I raised a brow at how she was dressed. In legged that hugged every sacred curve and her top that could have been sheer. She reeked of sweat and she had a towel on her shoulder. Her face was slightly flushed.

Her eyes snapped up to mine, startled but not afraid. That annoyed me even more. I was used to her being defiant but now? Now she looked at me like I was nothing more than an inconvenience. A fucking housefly that she wanted swat away. 1

"Move, Hades," she said, her voice calm but firm, a direct challenge that made something dark stir in me.

"Not until you tell me where you've been," I said, leaning closer, my tone sharper than I intended. "And why you look like you're... dressed to tempt a legion of fools." Who else would have seen her like this? 1

Her jaw tightened, but she didn't shrink back.

"Why does it matter to you?" Her voice was laced

Her jaw tightened, but she didn't shrink back. "Why does it matter to you?" Her voice was laced with ice, and the venom of her words cut deeper than I wanted to admit.

I stepped closer, so close I could feel the faint heat of her skin. "Don't play coy with me. I'm not blind. I know you're trying to provoke me."

She laughed, a bitter sound that made my chest tighten. "Provoke you? You think everything revolves around you, don't you? Not everything I do is about you, Hades." She crossed her arms, tilting her head defiantly. "And for the record, I've been out living my life. You should try it sometime."

Her words struck like a whip, and I could feel my carefully maintained control slipping. I hated the way she made me feel—like I was unmoored, uncertain, vulnerable. The hunger I had felt for her blood that night had been insatiable, yes, but it wasn't just that. It was her. Her fire. Her defiance. And now, her coldness. Every side of her a temptation, a *weakness*.

"Tell me, Red," I murmured.

Her hard expression softened a fraction. "Is it not obvious?" She pinched her brows with her fingers. "I was working out."

"Since I decided that I didn't want to become moldy and useless sitting around here," she finished, her tone sharp. "Believe it or not, Hades, I don't exist just to brood in a corner waiting for you to notice me." 2

Her words hit like a slap, and for a moment, I could only stare at her. The heat of her defiance was intoxicating, yet it stung because she was right—I had treated her like she was orbiting around me.

"Working out," I echoed, my voice low. My gaze dropped to her flushed face, the sheen of sweat on her collarbone, the towel slung over her shoulder. The image of her, focused and determined in some dimly lit gym or training ground, ignited something I couldn't quite name.

"Yes," she said, her voice clipped, brushing past me. "You know, exercise? The thing people do when they want to stay healthy? Not that you'd understand. You probably haven't lifted anything heavier than your ego." 15

I barked out a laugh, the sound sharp in the room. "You've grown bold, Red." More like utterly audacious but it was better than nonchalance. 1

"And you've grown predictable," she shot back,

"And you've grown predictable," she shot back, spinning on her heel to face me. Her hair whipped around her face, the flush on her cheeks deepening, but I couldn't tell if it was anger or exertion. Maybe both.

"You think I'm predictable?" I asked, stepping closer, looming over her. I was used to her fighting back, but this was new—this edge of carelessness in her defiance, as if she no longer cared about the consequences of challenging me or at least pretending to.

"I think you're stuck in your ways," she said, tilting her chin up to meet my gaze. "You push people away, you brood, you drink, and you glare at the world like it owes you something. It's exhausting, Hades. You're exhausting." She was not just frustrated, she was actually mad at me for whatever reason. What horrible thing had I done that she had uncovered? There was a long list, it was hard to guess.

But her words were fire, warming me from within with a sting that lingered. Like alcohol. Like *bloodwine*.

"And yet, here you are," I said, my voice dropping into a growl. "Still here. Still pushing me. If I'm so exhausting, Red, why haven't you walked away?"

"And yet, here you are," I said, my voice dropping into a growl. "Still here. Still pushing me. If I'm so exhausting, Red, why haven't you walked away?" Not like she had a choice but pushing her to the wall happened to be my favourite hobby. 5

Her lips parted, but no words came. For a moment, the air between us was heavy, charged with unspoken truths and tangled emotions. She searched my face, her own expression wavering between frustration and something softer—something that looked like pain.

"I don't know," she said finally, her voice barely above a whisper. "Maybe I'm just as stubborn as you are." I knew she did not mean walking away on a literal sense but withdrawing herself from what ever it was that had grown so convoluted between us. It was a like a tangle of thorny vines that would be too prickly to untangle.

Her words hit me harder than I expected, and for a fleeting moment, I wanted to close the distance between us, to break the barriers we kept raising. But I didn't. Instead, I stepped back, giving her the space she seemed to want.

"Fine," I said, my tone neutral but tight. "Go live your life, then."

Her eyes lingered on mine for a beat longer

I stood there, staring at the closed door. She might have walked away, but her fire lingered, searing its mark on me in ways I couldn't shake. It felt intoxicating but damn did it sting like a bitch. 3

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