

93 Busted

Hades 1

After a long day buried in royal duties, I finally stepped into my study, the door shutting behind me with a heavy thud that echoed in the silence. The dim light of the desk lamp cast a warm glow over the piles of paperwork still awaiting my attention. Trade agreements, defense proposals, diplomatic correspondences—all meticulously stacked but untouched. They demanded my focus, my decisions, my signature. Yet, no matter how hard I tried, my mind wasn't on the intricate web of politics or the kingdom's affairs.

It was on her. Ellen.

I dropped into my chair with a weary sigh, leaning back as my eyes wandered to the stack of letters marked urgent and the thick financial reports I had barely skimmed this morning. Normally, I'd have been consumed by the intricacies of balancing the kingdom's budget or negotiating trade routes. But today, even the most pressing matters couldn't hold my attention.

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Instead, all I could think about was the way she had looked at breakfast this morning—radiant and self-assured, a far cry from the vulnerable woman I was accustomed with. The coral lipstick, the faint blush when Kael had spoken to her, the way her laughter had filled the room—it was maddening. She'd barely looked at me, and when she had, it was with cool detachment, as though I were nothing more than a figurehead in her life.

I clenched my fists, the leather of the armrests groaning under the pressure. Cerberus stirred restlessly beneath my skin, his frustration mirroring my own. She was punishing me. I should have laughed, because it was funny. 2

My gaze drifted to the window, where the night stretched endlessly, the moon a sliver in the dark sky. What was she doing now? Still in the library, surrounded by those damn books that seemed to offer her more comfort than I ever could? Or perhaps she was with Jules again, sharing those quiet smiles and hushed conversations that were beginning to feel like shards of glass between my ribs.

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I exhaled sharply, dragging a hand down my face. This wasn't envy. It couldn't be. I was the king. I had no reason to feel threatened by my second-in-command or a damn library. But the memory of her leaning toward Jules, her laughter soft and genuine, refused to leave me.

I leaned forward, picking up the topmost document on the stack in a futile attempt to distract myself. It was a treaty proposal from the Northern regions, outlining terms for an contract. But as I scanned the neatly typed words, they blurred together, meaningless and hollow. The image of Ellen's guarded smile, her defiance, her damn independence—it consumed me.

Cerberus growled low in my chest, a primal sound of frustration and agitation.

With a growl, I shoved the papers aside, sending a few fluttering to the floor. My patience was razor-thin, and my thoughts were a tangled web of anger and confusion. I couldn't let this spiral continue. I needed answers. Or at the very least, I needed to see her—to confirm she was where she said she'd be.

Crossing the room, I activated the screen on the wall, a panel that controlled the CCTV feeds across the Tower vicinity. The gym should have

With a few taps, the cameras flickered to life, showing empty hallways, and finally, the gym. My jaw tightened as I cycled through the feeds.

Nothing. No sign of her.

The pristine training space was exactly as it should have been: dumbbells neatly racked, machines untouched, and not a single soul in sight. My fists curled at my sides, the leather of my gloves creaking as Cerberus growled louder in my chest, his frustration feeding my own.

She lied.

The realization settled heavily, like a lead weight in my stomach. Ellen had lied to me. It shouldn't have mattered. I had a pack to rule, an endless stream of problems to address, and yet... the betrayal felt personal, sharp enough to cut.

I checked the cameras in our shared bedroom but of course it was empty.

I lit a cigarette after that I could take a breath and began to pace the room, my mind racing. Where was she, then? And with who? My thoughts circled back to her kidnapping, an anvil easy forming in my gut. I shook away the suspicion. It was impossible. I had doubled security and changed every key card. She was

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"Why does it matter?" I muttered under my breath, though the words felt hollow. It mattered because she mattered. Because, despite the walls she had built around herself, I had grown accustomed to breaking through them, to seeing the vulnerability she tried so hard to hide. And now, she was shutting me out.

Cerberus clawed at my control, a deep growl vibrating through me. I couldn't sit idle, not with the possibility that she was somewhere—anywhere—with someone else. My hand hovered over the screen again, ready to search the other cameras, but I stopped myself. What was I doing? Was this jealousy? Or paranoia? 2

My breath came hard and fast as I fought to center myself. I wasn't the type to be consumed by irrationality. But the idea of her out there, laughing and smiling with someone who wasn't me, felt like a slap to the face. Not like she did much laughing with me yet 1

Wherever she was, whatever she was doing, she wasn't here. And that fact alone was enough to drive me mad. Then suddenly, it popped into my head. She wanted to learn to fight, but I had disallowed it. Was she defiant enough to go behind my back? To do exactly what she knew would provoke me? Of course she was. That stubborn fire was as much a part of her as the defiant tilt of her chin or the quiet strength in her eyes. 1

Cerberus growled again, his restlessness feeding mine. I tapped on the screen, switching the feed to the training ring just beyond the gym. It was rarely used, but if she were there, it would explain her absence.

The screen flickered, and then the video came to life. My breath caught as my suspicions were confirmed. Ellen was there—but she was not alone.

Far from it.

She stood in the center of the ring, her crimson hair pulled into a messy braid, her frame small but fierce as she squared off against a sparring partner. The man was shirtless, his body taut with muscle as he circled her like a predator. He moved with fluidity, faintly mocking her stance,



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Kael.

My jaw tightened, a low snarl escaping me as I watched my second-in-command grin at her, his expression infuriatingly casual. He lunged, and Ellen dodged with surprising agility, her movements hesitant but determined. She was learning—and she was learning from him.

I leaned closer to the screen, my eyes narrowing as I took in every detail. The way Kael stepped back after every move, speaking to her, coaching her. The way she smiled—and laughed even hit him playfully on the shoulder.. It wasn't the polite, guarded smile she gave me. It was something softer, something uncomfortably intimate. 2

Damn him. Damn her.

My fists slammed against the desk, the sound sharp in the silent room. Cerberus roared within

I should have stormed down there. Should have torn Kael away from her and reminded him who he answered to. But I couldn't tear my eyes away from the screen.

Ellen dodged again, this time attempting a counterstrike. She was slow—too slow—and Kael caught her wrist with ease, spinning her around and pinning her arm behind her back. She let out a frustrated huff, wriggling in his grasp.

I leaned closer to the screen, my breath caught in my chest as Kael dipped his head, his lips moving close to her ear. Whatever he said made her relax slightly, her frustration melting into something... softer. She turned her head just enough for me to see her face—flushed, eyes wide with a spark of determination. Her lips parted as she responded, and Kael chuckled low, his grip on her arm loosening.

And then, to my utter disbelief, he placed his hands on her waist, shifting her position. His touch lingered, steadying her, guiding her as he spoke again. Ellen nodded, her brow furrowing in concentration, completely at ease with him, as though this kind of closeness was natural.

Too natural.

Cerberus roared within me, his fury bubbling dangerously close to the surface. My nails bit into the desk as my control began to fray.

Kael shifted behind her, his hands moving up her arms, adjusting her stance. From where I stood, the scene was maddeningly intimate, as though they were sharing a private moment only they could understand. Ellen bit her lip, nodding again as Kael's voice dropped lower, instructing her. Her laugh—light and genuine—echoed in the room as she stepped forward, mimicking his movements.

It was just sparring. Just training. I knew that. Rationally, I knew that.

But the way he hovered so close to her, the ease with which she allowed it, the laughter I hadn't heard from her in weeks... It was too much.

Cerberus clawed at my control, his growl rumbling deep in my chest. My vision blurred at the edges, my breath coming faster, harder. 5

Kael moved again, catching her off guard. She stumbled back, and he caught her, his hands on her shoulders, steadying her with infuriating care. Ellen tilted her head up, meeting his gaze, her lips quirking into a sheepish smile.

It was nothing. A small, innocent exchange. But to me, it was the final straw.

"Enough," I snarled, slamming my fist against the screen. The monitor flickered, but I didn't care.

My chair screeched as I pushed away from the desk, my rage too volatile to contain. My steps were heavy as I stormed toward the door, Cerberus growling his agreement.

I wasn't sure what I would do when I got there. I only knew one thing: Kael was about to learn the price of overstepping his bounds. 7

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