

Chapter 26

I took my time getting to the kitchen as I had made myself moderately presentable. I told myself a thousand times that I didn't have to do this right now. I had suffered enough. I deserved to take a day to just wrap my mind around everything I had learned. There was no shame in licking my wounds and dealing with this as best as I could by myself.

But I wanted more. I didn't know why because my heart surely felt like it had taken a beating, but it wasn't enough. a³

Hades was digging around in a cabinet when I saw him. He had also changed out of his damp clothes and had presumably had a shower as I was sitting in the muck to keep me warm. I could almost feel those strong arms around me now and smell his subtle scent on the jacket he had put over me.

I swallowed hard and averted my eyes, not entirely sure how I should feel. a⁵

I wanted to hate Caleb and I knew that in time I would. But, right now, it didn't feel like a switch that I could just flip. I had loved him for so long, it was impossible to reject years of feelings in a matter of hours. But I was still so disgusted by him, appalled by what he had done to sweet Abby. He didn't deserve to live and he certainly didn't deserve having me in his life, but part of me was still in denial that he had done it despite all of the evidence. a⁵

And then there was Hades. I had loathed him for as long as I had known him. He had taken away my best friend and I was shunned from my family because of him. But he had done what he had needed to for the sake of justice. And every time I pushed him and shouted at him he took it with patience and grace. He had even apologized to me, though it was me who had acted wrongly. But, there was still so much about him that I didn't know and the animal was always lurking just beneath the surface of those amber eyes. a¹⁰

He sensed me moving in the kitchen and I saw him standing, but he didn't face me until I had seated myself on a stool at the counter. When he finally looked at me I saw how I felt written all over his face. A thousand emotions, none stronger than the other and each one of them confusing in their own way.

"You shouldn't be walking on that leg too much yet. I was going to bring breakfast up to you," he muttered, not meeting my eyes.

"You've done enough." a³

I saw his shoulders tighten and winced at how it must've sounded, though I had meant it to be positive. He said nothing in response and pushed a cut up apple and some crackers towards me. It wasn't exactly what I would call a gourmet or even balanced breakfast but I wasn't going to complain. a⁴

"I'm going to assume that Ethel isn't here because she would kill you if she saw you giving that to me," I said, chewing on an apple slice. a⁴

"I told her that it would be better for her to stay home. I felt like we might have a lot to talk about and it might not all be wonderful. She doesn't enjoy conflict and I didn't want her getting involved if she didn't have to. I know that she would fight for you to stay for my sake, even if you didn't want to."

"She cares about you very much."

"She's been an incredible friend through all of this, a constant when few people could be," he agreed.

But I hadn't come to the kitchen to talk about Ethel. There was too much to cover to hide behind his relationship with that sweet woman.

"So this is why you are so indispensable to the royals, isn't it?" I asked. "You clean up morale messes."

"Yes, I see things they can't and I'm strong enough to do what needs to be done, even if others are resistant to it." a³

That statement, though small, felt like a lot for me to unpack. I took a deep breath and stared down at the plate in front of me, thinking of all the things he wasn't saying. Some things I needed to understand right now and others could wait until I was in a better head space.

"How did you know what Caleb did to that little girl?" I asked, the words alone were enough to make me feel ill.

Hades swallowed hard. "I'm sure that you've heard me at night. I have these visions when I sleep. I see what these people do, I am forced to watch them when they think they have no eyes on them. It's always as if, like we're giving them a chance to rethink it and stop themselves so I can't prevent anything." a⁸

"But, I saw the silver. Why would you stop yourself from going to do what needs to be done?"

At that Hades smiled a little, the corner of his mouth twisting up, though it was a little cruel looking. "When I was given these...abilities I was really only given two things: the god awful visions and an incredibly strong wolf that overrides my humanity. When I first started seeing things like this the wolf would take over and the rage would fuel me. In the middle of the night I would be running through the woods in wolf form with no idea where I was going. But my wolf would never let me stop, so driven to accomplish justice. I would run until I would pass out from exhaustion and by that point word would travel that I was on the hunt. I would be even further behind than I already was. The silver keeps me in my human form until I can come out of the vision on my own. When I wake up I undo the silver chains and document everything. It helps me figure out where these wolves are and if they need to die or if they just need a warning, a reminder that I exist and I know what they have been doing." a⁹

"I see," I choked out, unable to look at him as my shaky hands pushed around a cracker. I could so easily recall those red eyes staring at me and I felt my stomach flip.

"I'm sorry this must be a lot for you to process," he murmured.

"It is." I rose from the stool, still careful to keep the majority of my weight on my good leg.

He was at my side in a moment, seeming to be ready for a disastrous accident that would lead to him supporting me. Then, he seemed to realize what he was doing with his arms coming towards me to offer support. His arms dropped and he took a step back.

No, coming forward with the truth wouldn't fix everything. I still had a lot of things I didn't understand about his world and there were many things that I needed to apologize for, but this was a start. And, whether I liked it or not, he was all I had right now. a⁹

My trembling fingers reached out and brushed the back of his hand. I watched the movement for a moment then forced my gaze upwards to meet his eyes. They were that shade of amber, the one that told me he was in control.

"Thank you for coming to get me last night," I whispered. "And thank you for everything that you did before and after that." a⁸

His face broke into the most lighthearted smile as I slowly hobbled back to the safety of my room. a⁵¹

~~~Distraction Section~~~ a<sup>2</sup>

Hello everyone and welcome to the first surprise update since we decided on a schedule! Are you excited about all of this sweet progress because I am! Tell me the truth did you secretly know Hades was good all along or did you hate him at the beginning? a<sup>8</sup>

Question of the Day: How long were you in quarantine? Are you still in lockdown? a<sup>81</sup>

My province is slowly coming out of our lockdown. As I said before I've been working the whole time, going into the office everyday, so I was never really locked down. I went to the mall for the first time in months yesterday and it was nice to be coming back into normalcy, even if half the stores were still closed. a<sup>8</sup>