



107 I Am Not Weak ²

Eve ¹

For a moment, any word was stuck in my throat. I could only stare. His scent had morphed; instead of his usual smoky cedar, it was replaced with one that made my stomach turn—blood and ash and decay.

I reeled back, my eyes almost falling from their sockets. My mouth was agape like a fish gasping for water, but as quickly as whatever had taken over him had come, it receded in the blink of an eye.

I was left utterly stunned while Hades quietly guided me out of the ring and out of the room. I could not even resist; I was too shocked to struggle against him.

The walk to the bedroom was silent except for the soft tread of our footsteps against the floor. My heart hammered wildly in my chest, but my body refused to react beyond that. Every part of me was locked in stunned paralysis, replaying what I had just witnessed.

The blackening of his eyes.



The distorted voice.

The overwhelming scent of decay.

It was as if reality itself had shifted, revealing something dark and ancient lurking beneath Hades' surface. From the short time I had known Rhea, I could say that I was somewhat conversant with the aura of Lycans. What I felt this time was different, and it filled me with an insurmountable amount of dread. I recalled my first day here and how he had lit a cigarette with his finger. Pyromancy was not an ability that Lycans possessed. Suddenly, it dawned on me: Hades was not just any Lycan—he was an anomaly.

The decay... He was called the Hand of Death for reasons far less vague than I had earlier thought. He was a creature that didn't just flirt with death but embodied it.

The term Hand of Death was more than a title—it was a warning.

He opened the door to the bedroom and gently ushered me inside. His touch was firm but strangely careful, like he was handling something fragile. I didn't resist, my legs carrying me on autopilot to the edge of the bed.



"Sit," he murmured. His voice was his own again—low, gravelly, but steady.

I obeyed without a word, lowering myself onto the mattress. My gaze followed him as he moved across the room to a tall dresser. He pulled open a drawer, retrieving a sleek black phone.

"Hades," I finally whispered, my voice hoarse and trembling.

He paused, his fingers still hovering over the screen, but he didn't look at me. "Not now, Red," he said softly, though there was an edge of steel in his tone.

I watched as he dialed a number and pressed the phone to his ear, pacing the room with tense, purposeful strides.

"Dr. Kerrigan," he said when the line connected. "I need you at the estate immediately." A pause. "No, not a consultation. I want you here in person. Full discretion."

Another pause. His jaw clenched. "Ten minutes."

He hung up and placed the phone back in the drawer before turning to face me. His expression was unreadable, his usual stoicism now laced with something I couldn't quite place



He hung up and placed the phone back in the drawer before turning to face me. His expression was unreadable, his usual stoicism now laced with something I couldn't quite place—concern? Guilt?

"You didn't have to—" I began, my voice weak. I was talking like I was not in a world of pain, but there was something that distracted me from that agony. Him.

"I did," he interrupted, crossing the room to stand in front of me. His towering form blocked out the growing light from the window, and I had to crane my neck to meet his gaze.

"You're hurt," he said simply, his tone matter-of-fact but carrying an undercurrent of something raw. "And I won't let it go untreated."

My fingers twitched, brushing against the throbbing ache in my shoulder, and I flinched involuntarily.

"That's not what I meant," I said, my voice firmer this time, though my hands were trembling in my lap. "You... what happened back there?"

For a moment, he said nothing. He simply stared at me, his stormy gray eyes searching mine for something. Then he crouched down in front of



I blinked at him like he had grown a second head. In what world did he live? How could I simply forget about that? "Forget about it?"

"Yes. We are even. You have no right to pry when you hide things from me."

His words stung, and for a moment, I couldn't find a response. Touché. But I had an inkling that this would not be the last time I was face-to-face with whatever he was hiding.

The door creaked open behind him, and I jumped, my heart racing all over again.

Hades turned to see one of his guards in a suit peeking inside. "Dr. Kerrigan is here, your majesty"

"Good," Hades said, rising to his full height. "Send her in."

The guard nodded and disappeared, leaving the door ajar. A moment later, a woman in her mid-forties strode in, a black medical bag slung over her shoulder. 2

"Alpha," she greeted, her tone brisk but respectful as she glanced between Hades and me. "What's the situation?"

"She injured her shoulder during training," Hades



"She injured her shoulder during training," Hades said before I could protest. "I want a full evaluation."

Dr. Kerrigan raised an eyebrow but didn't question him further. She set her bag on the nightstand and turned to me.

"Let's have a look, Your Highness."

The doctor gave Hades a fleeting look before focusing on me again. "May I?"

I nodded mutely, allowing her to gently guide me through a series of movements to assess the injury. Every press of her fingers sent sharp pain shooting through my shoulder, and I bit my lip to keep from crying out.

Hades stood off to the side, arms crossed, his expression unreadable as he watched the examination unfold.

"It's a dislocation," Dr. Kerrigan said finally, straightening. "Not uncommon for combat injuries. The ligaments are quite strained too, and it needs immediate attention. I can reset it now, but it'll hurt."

Before I could respond, Hades stepped forward. "Do it."

Dr. Kerrigan hesitated, glancing at me for



Dr. Kerrigan hesitated, glancing at me for confirmation. I gave a small nod, bracing myself.

The next few minutes were a blur of pain and gritted teeth as the doctor reset my shoulder. When it was over, she secured it in a sling and gave me instructions for care.

"She'll need rest," Dr. Kerrigan said, her tone firm as she packed up her bag. "No training for at least two weeks."

Hades nodded curtly, escorting her to the door. As she left, he turned back to me, his gaze softening ever so slightly.

"You should lie down," he said, his voice gentler now.

I shook my head, refusing to meet his eyes. "I'm fine."

"Red."

His tone left no room for argument.

"I know it was Jules," he quietly said. "She was the one who dislocated your shoulder." 1

My heart sputtered in my chest, but I grounded myself, trying to play off my shock and fear.

"What are you talking about?" But my voice was higher than I intended.



"It's almost insulting that you believe I wouldn't figure out that you were trying to protect someone, and who else would it be other than that one person who defended you even if she would be punished for it?"

Hades stepped closer, his presence suffocating. I felt like a cornered animal, every instinct screaming at me to retreat, but I held my ground—or at least I tried to.

"You translate that loyalty into shielding her mistakes," he continued, his voice dangerously calm. "Admirable, Red. But foolish." He remarked.

"Jules didn't mean—" I began, but his sharp look silenced me.

"I don't care what she meant," he said, his words cutting through the air like a blade. "What I care about is you being reckless enough to cover for her, risking yourself in the process. Do you understand what that makes you look like? Weak."

His last word hit like a slap. My jaw tightened, and I balled my fists against my lap. "Weak?" I spat, my voice trembling with suppressed anger. "I've endured things." But I caught myself before I fell. Eve was the one who had endured things.



His last word hit like a slap. My jaw tightened, and I balled my fists against my lap. "Weak?" I spat, my voice trembling with suppressed anger. "I've endured things." But I caught myself before I fell. Eve was the one who had endured things. Ellen had not, and I was Ellen. "I am not weak." If I was, this would have gone differently. I was not the strongest—far from it—but I was definitely not weak.

"And yet you still let yourself get hurt for someone else's mistake," he interrupted, his tone colder now. "You're strong, Red. But strength without sense is wasted." His words were filled with venom strong enough to sting. 1

Jules was not like the others. My sister pushed me in front of a truck; Jules had stood in front of it to shield me. I owed her for the moments she filled in the depressing quiet my life had become, for the jokes and laughter. I tried to protect her like I tried to protect Kael. Like I tried to protect Elliot, even if it meant I would get the short end of the stick. 3