



188 Another Beautiful Diplomatic Disaster

Hades 1

The scene that greeted me made my skin prickle with unease, every nerve on edge. My security personnel's surrounded James in a circle, some had their claws extended, fangs elongating, watching warily, the rest had their weapons aimed straight at his head.

Yet, the beta did not look intimidated, even had blood oozed from a fresh wound in his face, his left eye has been clawed at, leaving a ghastly mass of torn flesh and blood and seeping out his face, down to his attire.

I glanced at the claw of one of the security personnel to see his claw marred with blood. 2

Of course, this was exactly what I needed, a diplomatic disaster, on top of everything else on my fucking plate. This was the problem that Kael had been referring to. 1

I glanced at the door, my blood boiling when I noticed the claw marks on it. It had really wanted enter. At least it was constellation that



he had not been able to reach Ellen. I fought back the urge to enter our room, to assure her that everything was okay but I had to deal with this first. 1

I proceeded forward as I assessed the situation, As I stepped forward, the thick tension in the hallway crackled like a live wire. Every gaze flickered toward me—my guards standing resolute, James panting heavily, his one uninjured eye seething.

I stopped a few feet away from them my expression a carefully composed mask of control. "The rest of you, leave," I ordered.

The personnel scrambled away leaving Kael by my side. "Beta James," I said, my voice low and cold, "you have exactly ten seconds to tell me why the hell you thought it was a good idea to force your way into the princess's chambers."

James spat blood onto the marble floor, his breathing ragged. "I want to talk to the princess?" he replied calmly "Alone."

I fought back another wave of loathing. "Why?"

"I want to give her chance to speak her truth while you are not there manipulating her and breathing down her neck." He arched a brow. "I



believe I should at least allowed that.

A slow, simmering rage curled in my chest, but I kept my expression impassive. I exhaled sharply through my nose, my fingers twitching at my sides, aching for violence.

"You believe you should be allowed that," I echoed, my voice eerily calm. My guards tensed at the dangerous edge beneath my tone. "And tell me, Beta James, did you truly think clawing your way through my doors like a rabid animal would grant you this... privilege?"

His uninjured eye flashed with defiance. "She's not yours to keep like a prisoner, that was not in the contract

I took a slow step forward, and despite his bravado, I saw the way his muscles tightened, the subtle flinch he tried to suppress. "She is my chosen mate," I reminded him, voice dangerously low. "And I will protect her from anyone who threatens her well-being. Including you."

James scoffed, shifting his stance, ignoring the blood dripping down his face. "I don't threaten her. You do." His voice gained an edge of urgency. "Look at her. Really look at her, Your majesty. She's breaking, and we both know why."



He took a shallow breath. "Let me speak to her.
Let her decide." 2

James was pushing boundaries, testing limits,
gambling on some shred of humanity in me.

I let the silence stretch until it was thick enough
to choke. Then I exhaled and tilted my head.

"You believe she hasn't already chosen?"

James clenched his jaw. "She hasn't had a real
choice. Not with you hovering over her,
controlling every move she makes."

I let out a quiet, humorless laugh. "And you think
bursting into her chambers like a deranged beast
is giving her one?"

A flicker of uncertainty crossed his face, but he
held his ground. "She deserves to hear the truth
without you poisoning it."

My patience thinned to a knife's edge. "You're a
fool if you think she doesn't already know the
truth," I said, voice dangerously even. "Ellen is not
a pawn to be moved as you see fit." I stepped
closer, my power rolling off me in slow,
suffocating waves. "She is a queen in her own
right. And you—" my gaze flicked to the deep
gashes on his face, "—have just proven yourself



an enemy to her safety." 1

James stiffened. "I would never hurt her." 1

"No?" I gestured to the door, to the deep claw marks marring the wood. "Because this looks like the actions of a rational, trustworthy man."

"Her parents, the Alpha and Luna of Silverpine want a private audience with their daughter and I as Silverpine's beta attempted to carry out my duty."

"So, in essence, you decided to bypass protocol, disregard the authority of this kingdom, and force your way into the chambers of a woman who has made it clear she does not wish to see her family." My voice was razor-sharp, slicing through the thick tension.

James straightened, his chin lifting defiantly. "Her family has the right—"

"They lost that right the moment they broke her," I cut in, voice quiet but lethal. "Do you think I'm blind to what they did to her? Do you think I don't see the way she flinches at their name, the way the ghosts of her past choke the life from her?" I took another slow step toward him, watching the way his muscles tensed. "You can dress this up as duty all you want, Beta, but you



and I both know what this really is."

James exhaled sharply through his nose. "And what do you think this is?"

"A power play," I murmured, tilting my head. "Silverpine is grasping at control they no longer have. And you—" I let my eyes drag over him, the blood smeared down his face, the barely restrained fury in his stance, "—are just another desperate hand reaching for a leash that has long cut." 2

"You cut that leash, that was not in the agreement we made for the betterment of the relationship between our two packs."

It was my turn to raise a brow. "So there indeed was a leash then?"

"Cut out the misplaced morality, your soul is blacker than any of us in this game."

"So your soul is indeed black?" I tossed back.

His uninjured eye twitched. "The Silverpine Monarchy have right to a private audience with their own daughter, no matter what you perceive above us or our ways. Those bear no consequence."

I let James's words settle, weighing the



arrogance in his tone, the stubborn defiance etched into every inch of his battered form. He truly believed his so-called duty justified his actions. That Silverpine's outdated monarchy still held the power to claim Ellen as theirs.

How utterly naive.

I exhaled through my nose, shaking my head. "You speak of rights as though they are absolute. As though you can demand them without consequence. But let me make something very clear to you, Beta James."

I took another step forward, closing the distance between us. The weight of my presence pressed down on him, on everyone in the corridor, like an invisible hand tightening its grip.

"Whatever was written in that agreement, whatever politics once tied our packs together, no longer applies here." My voice dropped to something sharper, something more dangerous. "The moment they hollowed their own daughter, the moment they sacrificed her for their own gain, they forfeited the right to call her theirs." 1

James's jaw locked. "That is not for you to decide."

I laughed. Low and humorless. "Isn't it?"



His eye twitched again, but I saw it—the sliver of uncertainty creeping into his rigid stance.

I continued, my voice nothing but quiet steel. "Ellen is not a political asset. She is not a tool for you or her parents to wield at your leisure. She is mine." I let the words settle, watched how they landed, how James bristled but said nothing. "And unless she chooses to speak with them of her own free will, they will not see her. They will not touch her. They will not so much as breathe the same air as her."

James's breathing had grown heavier, but he forced a mocking smirk, shaking his head. "You're a tyrant."

"No," I corrected smoothly. "I'm a king."

A muscle ticked in his jaw, "You were one a beta like me, an enforcer, a torturer, a killer." He spat, then he lowered his voice, in a conspiratorial lilt "That does not just change with a crown, you are still the monster that your father created." 2

I froze for a second, every muscle bunching a slip second, a red gaze contaminating my vision.

They knew. 2

It dawned on me.



If James knew, then the Silverpine Monarchy knew. Did they know everything? My stomach turned, violence being my first instinct but I forced the instinct down, gripping the rage before it consumed me. Violence would only confirm their accusations, would only feed into the narrative they wanted to spin. I could kill James where he stood. It would be easy—too easy—but that was the reaction they expected.

Instead, I straightened, smoothing the tension from my stance, masking the sudden rush of something colder, more calculated.

James saw the shift. His smirk widened. "Ah," he mused, his voice dripping with false sympathy. "Touched a nerve, didn't I?"

I tilted my head slightly. "No," I murmured. "You just signed your own death warrant." I whispered.

He took a step forward, testing me. "Let me remind you of something, Your Majesty." The words dripped with mock respect. "I came here as a diplomatic representative of Silverpine. And yet, here I stand—wounded, brutalized, nearly executed at the doorstep of your mate's chamber." 1



I exhaled sharply, my patience thinning to a sliver. "That wound was self-inflicted the moment you tried to force your way in."

"Ah, but that's not how the Silverpine Monarchy will see it." His smirk deepened, victory flickering in his gaze. "They will see their Beta—their voice in this fragile alliance—attacked within the heart of your kingdom. Tell me, Hades, how do you think they will respond?" 3

He was clever. I would give him that.

I didn't react, didn't let the irritation show, but he was already pressing forward.

"The alliance between our packs is already brittle," he continued, voice smooth, deliberate. "You know it. I know it. The only thing holding it together is the hope that Ellen might be reason enough to maintain peace." He tilted his head, watching me with calculated amusement. "But if Silverpine declares your pack as hostile? If they claim their Beta was assaulted—maimed—while carrying out his duties? If they frame this as an act of war?" 1

A muscle in my jaw tightened. He was pushing the stakes higher, testing how far I would bend before I snapped.



"I don't think I need to remind you how many Obsidian citizens are just now within your borders. Their parents, their brothers and sisters." James continued, his voice dipping into something lower, more insidious. "What do you think happens to them if war is declared? What do you think happens to the innocent lives caught in the crossfire of your choices. Could you make Ellen Luna then? The flames will be stoked so high then that you will all burn. It almost breaks and Ellen will be returned to us by fire or my force, permanently."

My stomach twisted, and I clenched my fists at my sides, restraining the overwhelming urge to rip his throat out.

"This can all go away," James said, his voice soft now, coaxing, his eye gleaming with sharp, ruthless intelligence. "All it takes is half an hour. Thirty minutes. A private audience with the princess. Let her speak to her family—alone—and I will return to Silverpine with news of continued peace." He arched a brow. "Or... you can refuse. And we both know what happens then." 3