



294 Legitimizing

Hades 1

I didn't speak.

Couldn't.

There was nothing in me but a stunned, reverent silence as I watched her.

Eve.

A name I had spoken in fury, in prayer, in grief—but now I couldn't say it at all.

Because there she stood.

Because she dared.

Because she claimed her place not with a scream, but with a sentence that turned the air in this chamber electric.

And I was rooted. Watching. Breathing her in like smoke I had no right to inhale.

Kael was the first to break the spell. "She deserves the seat," he said, voice steady, jaw tight. "You all know it."

Silas scoffed. Loudly. The sound jarred against the quiet like metal grating over bone.

"Deserves?" he spat. "She's not even a Lycan. She holds no crest, no title, no claim. She isn't Obsidian, nor royal, nor anything but a... genetic advantage."

Gallinti folded his arms. "We're not a council of mercy. Our chamber is blood-forged. There are legacies in these seats, not pity projects." 2

Eve didn't flinch.

She let them speak. Let them sneer.

And still—didn't look at me.

Silas leaned forward, eyes narrowing at her like he was trying to incinerate her with disdain. "You now understand, I hope, why you were married off to him," he said, gesturing toward me. "It was never for an alliance, Never even strategy. You were a pawn. A temporary creature. Never meant to wield power—especially not in a room soaked in centuries of bloodline."

And I—I wanted to gut him.



The words rose unbidden. I slammed my hands on the table, rising so fast the room tilted.

"She bears my name," I growled, each word trembling with something darker than rage. "She is my wi—"

"He's right," Eve cut in. 3

My voice died.

Just like that. Like she'd reached into my chest and stilled it herself.

She turned to Silas, not bothering to acknowledge me. "You're absolutely right. I am no one in your eyes. No council seat. No lineage. No right to speak here."

I wanted to break something. Wanted her to look at me. Wanted her to care that I was defending her. 2

>"Narcisistic much?" The perpetual voice of the flux slithered through my mind. 1

But she was calm. Pragmatic. Cold in the way only truth could be.

"I'm not here to pretend to be what I'm not," she



continued. "I'm here because you want something only I can give. I'm offering a deal, not a delusion. I don't want your throne or your titles. I want influence. I want to ensure I don't become a tool the next time this tower gets nervous." 2

The dagger slid between my ribs. But between bated breath, I made my way to her but as tried to cross the threshold, past Kael, a hand latched unto mine.

I tore my gaze from Eve, my eyes snapping her him, ire rising like a tsunami.

Plastered on his face was an unreadable expression, his grip tightened as he gestured to Eve, where she stood, staring a Governor and Ambassador down. 1

"I have no allies within this tower. Everyone of you have your goals and loyalties alike. Same as me, mine is as simple as yours; I want my people to live."

>"Our toy has lost her mind. Mutts must die."
Lost was the teasingly mocking lilt to its voice.

>"You mate was one of them." I drawled in my



mind.

>"Elysia was the only of them that mattered. She is dead because of them. I have no empathy for their kind.

Silas scoffed at Eve's statement, his lip curling like he was already bored.

"So that is your reason for trying to join the council?" he sneered. "You think you have a say in the outcome of our foes? In war?"

Eve tilted her head, just slightly. Her face remained unreadable.

"I think I have a say in what you do with me," she replied. "And if I'm the weapon you want to wield, I get to choose where I aim." 1

Montegue's brow twitched—approval. Silas turned red. 4

"She thinks she's leverage," Gallinti muttered. "Thinks power comes from being needed." 1

"She's right," Kael snapped. "And you damn well know it."

The air thickened. Magic coiled under the

surface like something ancient pacing just out of view. My fingers twitched at my side—wanting to touch her. Protect her. Claim her.

Then—

A new voice slid through the room like smoke trailing velvet:

"She doesn't need to think it. She is leverage." 1

Every head turned.

The doors creaked wider.

Cain walked in, slow and smooth, as if he'd been waiting for his cue.

His suit was black this time. His smile, sharper than ever.

He ignored everyone else and looked at Eve.

Only Eve.

My Eve. 1

The flux recoiled at the sight, my skin bristling.

"I believe I was invited," he said silkily, then turned to the council. "Or do we deny council



guests when they're inconvenient?"

"Cain," Montegue said, not shocked, just... resigned.

Both He and Kael glanced at me.

I felt my blood begin to burn.

"What the hell are you doing here?" I asked.

Cain's gaze didn't shift. "Ensuring she doesn't walk in alone."

Eve didn't look surprised. But she didn't smile either.

"I represent the entirety of the Obsidian underground," Cain continued, voice maddeningly smooth. "The ones who deal in currency heavier than names and bloodlines. You know this. Which means if she wants a seat, and you require a pillar to legitimize her claim..."

3

He spread his hands, flashing teeth in something that was not a smile.

"I offer mine."

Silas choked on nothing. "This is absurd."



"She has no kin. No pack. No crest," Gallinti barked.

Cain stepped closer to the table, toward Eve.

"She has me." 2

That did it.

I stepped forward, jaw clenched. "You don't speak for her." 1

"I do today," Cain said calmly. "Because unlike the rest of you, I won't let her be turned into a weapon." 1

I stilled.

My throat burned.

Eve finally looked at me.

Just once.

And then looked away.

Like she could not stand the sight of me.

What had he manipulated her into believing? 3

"This is preposterous. She does not need you butting in. I can vouch for my own wife." 1



Cain's voice was like a knife made of velvet.

"Like you vouched for her before, Hades?" 6

I froze.

He turned his head slightly, just enough to let his words hit the room like a thunderclap. "Like when she ran to you—bleeding, hunted, terrified—and you drugged her? Tortured her? Locked her in the White Room like she was something to be... contained? And then you are surprised when your vows mean nothing to her. She finally heeded my warning about you but she learned the hard way. You taught her the hard way." 5