



309 I Am Not Her

Eve ¹

I watched them load up Elliot's belongings as he sat perched on my hip. He refused to let me out of his sight since he woke up. I fed him, and he fed me—the best he could.

My eyes traced the new items that had been brought for him by Hades when it had been decided that he would stay with me. Too bad new items didn't mean new beginnings.

Too bad toys couldn't erase trauma.

Too bad a brand-new sweater couldn't warm a child's soul where it had already gone cold from fear.

The duffel was filled with carefully folded clothes, books he didn't read, puzzles with missing pieces—just like him. Just like me.

Elliot's small fingers clutched the fabric of my top tighter, as if sensing the direction of my thoughts.



"It's just for a while," I whispered, brushing my lips over his temple. "No one's taking you anywhere."

He didn't respond with words. He just nodded—tiny, solemn—his face half-hidden against my neck.

There was no tantrum. No crying. That was the part that broke me.

He had learned too well that silence was safer than sound. 1

And I... I hated that he'd had to.

A soft knock came at the doorframe. Hades walked in and Elliot didn't have to turn around to brace as though waiting for an explosion.

"I thought it was agreed that you would vacate while I got his things for him?" Instinctively holding him tighter to me.

Hades lips were pursed into a hard line, jaw clenched as he marched towards me without a word.

Only when I took a step back, did he stop. He still emanated death and decay, his skin so pale



that I sure if the sun shined on him, he would be translucent.

Hades didn't speak at first.

He just stood there—still as a statue, tense as a coiled wire. His fists were clenched at his sides, nails half-mooned into his palms like he was trying to keep something caged. Maybe it was the Flux. Maybe it was himself.

"I want to apologize to him," he said finally, his voice low, hoarse—like it scraped his throat on the way out.

Elliot whimpered against my collarbone, body locking up.

"Hades—" I started, but he held up a hand.

"I can't make him forgive me," he said quickly, eyes flicking between me and the trembling boy in my arms. "I don't expect that. I don't deserve that. But he deserves to hear it. Even if he never wants to see me again."

I searched his face. There was no arrogance there. No edge of command. Only a kind of exhausted desperation.



I looked down at Elliot, still curled into me like a shadow. "Hey," I whispered, rubbing gentle circles into his back. "Can you look at me?"

It took a while, but he did. Just barely.

I smiled, small and soft. "He wants to say sorry. That's all. He won't come close unless you want him to. You can stay right here with me. I won't let go."

Elliot didn't sign anything. But after a beat, he gave the faintest nod. Barely a movement. But a yes.

I turned back to Hades. "Keep your distance. Speak from there."

Hades nodded once. His jaw trembled, but he didn't step forward. His voice, when it came again, cracked under the weight of guilt.

"Elliot... I don't know if you can ever understand how sorry I am. For everything." He swallowed, the motion shaky. "I wasn't myself. But that doesn't excuse it. I let something inside me hurt the person I swore I'd protect. That I was supposed to protect." 1



He exhaled, and the sound was broken. "You were never a mistake. Never something I wished away. You were—are—my son. And I didn't see you. I saw my own failures and let them speak louder than your voice."

Elliot didn't move. But he was listening. I felt it in the way his breathing had changed—shallow, but still. Present.

His voice dropped to a whisper. "I love you. That hasn't changed. It never will."

I waited for Elliot to respond. He didn't. He only turned his face away and tucked it back into my shoulder.

Hades nodded like that was the answer he expected.

Then he turned around, shoulders sagging under the weight of what he hadn't gotten to fix. "This would be so simple." His voice had changed, his tone had dropped so low I could feel the revibration in my gut. My heart lurched in my chest.

The Flux.



Just as another worker walked for another round of items, I made my way out with Elliot or at least I tried to...

His hand snapped out and clamped around my wrist.

"Elysia..."

The sound of it—how he said it—made my stomach turn. It wasn't Hades. Not the man I'd once loved, not the broken thing who'd just begged our son for forgiveness.

It was the Flux.

His eyes were too dark now. Too hollow. Like something ancient and festering had pushed Hades aside again, slithering into the space behind his ribs.

"You keep clinging to the boy like he's the key to your redemption," it said through his mouth. "But he's not. He's the chain. The reason we lost everything. He will only hold us back."

My blood went cold.

"Let him go, Elysia," the Flux rasped. "We can still be whole. We can still reclaim what they took



from us all those centuries ago. Our love. Our kingdom. Our vengeance. But not with him between us. Not with that tongue-tied thing holding us back."

Elliot shuddered violently in my arms.

"You vile thing," I whispered, my voice trembling—not from fear, but fury. "You dare speak like that? About a child? Your child?"

His grip on my wrist tightened.

"He is a mistake," the Flux snarled. "A reminder of what was stolen. Of what you gave away. This lifetime—this weak, broken existence—it's not ours. He's not ours. But you... you still are."

The words hit like rot seeping into my bones.

Elliot whimpered against my chest, his tiny hands clutching at me, his whole body trembling as he felt every vile syllable. He didn't need to understand the words. His heart knew.

And that—

That was it.

Crack.



My hand flew before I could stop it.

The slap rang through the air like lightning cracking open the sky.

Hades reeled, his head snapping to the side, a streak of red blooming from the shell of his ear. Blood.

He blinked, stunned—but not because I'd hit him.

Because someone had.

Someone who wasn't Elysia.

"I am not her," I growled, my voice shaking with rage. "I am not your goddess. I am not your fantasy. And I am sure as hell not your second chance at whatever deranged crusade you've invented in that corrupted mind of yours."

He stared at me—no longer godlike, no longer monstrous. Just a man bleeding from the ear, lost in the wreckage of what he'd become.

"You want to drag me back into some ancient war we already lost? Into a love that died with every child who never got to live it?" I shook my head, cradling Elliot tighter. "That story is over. It's been over for centuries."



His lips parted slightly, but no sound came out.

"You don't get to rewrite it now. And you don't get to speak about him like that," I spat. "You don't get to call yourself anything but what you are—a coward. Who let a child pay for his rage."

Elliot looked up at me through wet lashes, eyes wide with something I couldn't name. Relief. Pain. Maybe both.

I turned my back on Hades—on the Flux—and walked toward the door.

"I'm done letting you poison what's left of my life," I said over my shoulder. "And if you ever reach for him again..."

I paused, turned just enough to meet his gaze—what was left of Hades behind the storm of the Flux—and let my voice drop to a vow.

"I will vanquish you. Even if it means destroying the vessel you now inhabit."

That stilled him.

Like a thread pulled taut. Like death itself had been named and dared.



His eyes widened—no longer fully Hades, no longer fully the Flux. Just a fusion of horror and disbelief.

"You wouldn't," it rasped. "You love him."

"I did," I said coldly. "And maybe part of me always will. But if you make me choose, I will not hesitate."

The silence stretched long and brittle.

Then, softer than breath, it whispered, "Elysia..."

But I didn't flinch this time. I stepped forward, voice sharp as a blade.

"That is not my name."

I said it slowly.

"Elysia is dead."

He looked like he'd been slapped again—only this time, not by hand but by truth.

"Her time is over. Her kingdom is gone. Her gods are dust. And if you think you can resurrect her through me, you're mistaken." I turned fully now, standing in front of the door with Elliot wrapped tight in my arms. "I'm Eve. If you loved Elysia as



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little as that black heart of yours can manage, ...
you will accept that she's gone. That I am not
her, and I do not want what she had. Not her
throne. Not her tragedies. And certainly not you."

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