



319 Songbird

Eve **1**

My heart wouldn't stop pounding. The boy I had held, the boy who had never said a word, had spoken.

And not nonsense.

He had spoken like he'd seen something. Felt something.

Something important.

Something real.

Kael stood slowly, visibly shaken. "This changes things."

I didn't answer.

Not because I disagreed.

But because deep in my gut, a new thought had started to take root.

A possibility I had buried out of bitterness. Out of grief.

I swallowed it down like poison, but it was
already burning through me.

Felicia.

We would see a doctor for Elliot's condition and
Felicia.

If I wanted to understand what was happening to
my son—if I wanted to understand what was
coming—

I was going to have to talk to her.

Whether I wanted to or not.

The next day bled in like a bruise.

My eyes burned from the strain of no sleep, lids
dry and heavy, but I couldn't close them. Not
even for a second. Not after last night.

Not after his voice.

The memory of it had looped in my head all night
—soft, halting, real. A string of fragile syllables
that shattered the silence I had grown used to.
Loved, even. Because it was the only thing about
him I understood.

Elliot was mute. That had been a truth as solid as

stone.

Until it wasn't.

Now I had questions. A thousand of them. But none I could bring myself to ask.

I was just... glad. Glad he could. That maybe—maybe—he would again.

My chest tightened at the thought. Then, just as quickly, the guilt followed.

I'd been falling him.

Even before Hades.

I'd let myself believe that silence was safety. That because he didn't cry, didn't scream, didn't beg, he was okay. 1

I should have taken him to someone. A specialist. A healer. Anyone.

But everything had happened too fast.

The Flux. The war. Hades.

And I had kept telling myself I'd fix it when it was over.



But now? Looking at his small back as he sat in the bath, arms folded over his chest, cheeks flushed from the warm water, skin fragile and wet and real—

I knew that wasn't good enough anymore.

"I'll do better," I whispered, more to myself than to him. "I swear, Elliot. I'll do better."

He didn't react.

He usually didn't.

I dipped the sponge into the basin and ran it gently down his arm. His fingers twitched, but he didn't flinch. He rarely did.

But then I said it.

"Last night... you spoke in your sleep."

His body went rigid.

The change was instant.

His spine locked straight. Shoulders drawn tight. His head, which had been tilted peacefully toward the rim of the tub, jerked upright in a way that was too fast, too instinctive to be anything but fear.



I froze.

"Elliot?"

He turned his face toward me—

And he was pale.

Ghost-white.

His eyes were wide, panicked. And then—

He shook his head.

Violently.

His hands lifted out of the water, sloshing some
of it over the edge as he began signing
frantically.

No.

No.

Never.

He glanced toward the door.

Once.

Then again.

Then a third time, like he was expecting



something to come through it.

"Elliot," I said again, trying to keep my voice calm. "It's okay. No one's—"

His hands shook as he signed.

"She will find me."

My blood ran cold.

I didn't understand what he meant.

But something in his eyes—something ancient and terrified—told me that he did.

That someone, somewhere, had taught him to fear his own voice.

And last night, he had broken the rule.

Now he thought she was coming for him.

I reached for him carefully, slowly, wrapping the towel around his shoulders and pulling him close.

His heartbeat thundered against my chest like a trapped bird.

"It's okay," I whispered, kissing the crown of his



damp head. "You're safe."

But the lie curdled in my mouth.

Because I didn't know if he was.

He had to be speaking about Felicia.

That woman had put the fear of gods into a child
who couldn't even scream.

He didn't talk because he was taught not to.

He didn't make a sound because she was always
listening.

The silence he lived in wasn't born of trauma
alone—it was trained. Conditioned.

And now, after all this time, after everything—he
thought speaking, even in sleep, meant she'd
find him.

That she'd come for him.

She would find me.

The words echoed like a threat against the walls
of my skull.

I stared at him, rocking him gently, but my mind



was already moving. Fast. Sharp. Cold.

Felicia.

I needed to know what she had done. What she had said. What she had whispered into my son's ears when no one was listening.

I needed to know everything.

Even if it meant walking into the deepest pit of what remained of her.

The elevator descended in silence, the hum beneath my boots the only sound. The datapad in my hand trembled once—I didn't know if it was my grip or the elevator itself.

Below the Obsidian Tower, where the light didn't reach and sound never echoed right, was the maximum security holding sector.

Felicia's cell was the last.

The guards didn't meet my gaze. They unlocked the gate and stepped aside like they didn't want to be part of whatever was about to happen.

I didn't blame them.



They had seen what she'd done.

They had seen what I had become because of her.

The door hissed open with a thick mechanical breath, revealing the chamber beyond.

Cold. Dim. Sealed in layered light-sigils and nulling runes.

Felicia sat against the far wall.

Pale. Shackled. Still beautiful in that too-sharp, ageless way that made her look like a memory that refused to fade properly.

Her wrists were cuffed in wolfsbane silver, eyes half-lidded, lips cracked from dehydration or disuse—I didn't care.

She looked up when I stepped in.

And smiled.

Not wide. Not wild.

Just enough to curdle something in my gut.

"Come to play warden?" she rasped. "Or has your monster finally asked for me?"



I didn't flinch.

I walked to the edge of the rune boundary. Close enough to see the hollowness behind her eyes.

"I'm here," I said softly. "Because of Elliot."

That got her attention.

Her head tilted, slow.

"Elliot," she repeated. The name tasted wrong on her tongue.

"You did something to him," I continued, voice flat but taut as wire. "Something that made him terrified to speak. Even in his sleep."

Felicia blinked. Once. Twice.

Then leaned forward, the silver cuffs grinding against the stone.

"Did he speak?" Her voice sharp, alert. "Did my little songbird sing?" 1