



323 Manipulated Flesh

Eve 1

The hallways of the Obsidian Tower were dim and quiet, too quiet for what trembled in my arms.

Elliot didn't move.

He hadn't spoken, hadn't even blinked since I pulled him into my arms and told him we were going somewhere safe. His body was stiff, unnaturally still, like he was bracing for impact that hadn't come yet—or one he knew was coming.

Kael walked ahead of us, silent. Tense.

He didn't look back, but I could see the flex of his jaw, the way his fingers curled at his sides with every step. He was angry. Not at Elliot. Not at me. At everything.

I understood.

I was angry too.

The elevator hissed open as we reached the



lower sectors. Not the cells. Not the armories.
But deeper still—beneath the heart of the tower,
where the walls breathed softly with warmth and
the scent of sterile herbs hung in the air.

The Delta Wing.

Where healing began. And sometimes... where
the broken were remade.

Kael stepped aside, finally meeting my eyes.
"They're waiting," he said quietly.

I nodded once and shifted Elliot in my arms.

He didn't resist.

Didn't cling.

Just... allowed it. Like he always did.

Like he'd learned resistance meant pain.

My throat burned.

We stepped past the sigilled threshold, and
immediately, warmth embraced us. This part of
the tower was different—lit by soft, golden light
that glowed from within the walls. No harsh
stones. No iron bars. No reminders of cruelty.



A few Delta healers lifted their heads as we entered. No one spoke.

They saw him.

They knew.

Kael said something low to a robed woman near the center chamber. She bowed her head and gestured us through a corridor veiled in trailing vines of bioluminescent ivy—grown not for beauty, but for calm. For comfort.

I stepped inside.

The room was quiet. Circular. One wall was carved entirely from translucent quartz that hummed gently with stabilizing energy. A cot rested near its center. Smooth stones circled the base like a protective ward.

"This is where he'll be examined," Kael said from the doorway. "Gently. No force. No triggers."

I looked down.

Elliot's hands were curled in his lap now, his fingers twitching faintly.

I crouched and laid him down on the cot,



brushing a hand over his cheek.

He didn't flinch.

But he didn't look at me either.

His eyes were on the quartz wall—glassy, unreadable.

"I'm here," I whispered, leaning in. "I promise you. Nothing will happen unless you want it to. Do you understand?"

His throat moved. A slow swallow. Then, a nod. Barely there.

Kael stepped in again, voice softer now. "The Deltas will check the scarring around his vocal cords. Just to confirm what we suspect."

I turned to him slowly. "You mean what she did."

Kael's jaw ticked. His eyes didn't waver.

"Yes."

A silence stretched between us—thick, hot, bitter.

I looked down at Elliot again, watching the way his chest barely rose with each breath. "Why



didn't anyone check before?" I asked, voice like glass grinding underfoot. "Why didn't anyone see it?"

Kael exhaled sharply through his nose. "Because we trusted her."

He didn't hide the disgust in his voice.

"Because the trauma made sense. Because he never screamed, never whimpered. He just... existed in that silence. And we thought he chose it. We thought it was the only thing he could control."

I closed my eyes for a beat.

"And Felicia played into it," I said hollowly.

"She reinforced it," Kael muttered. "She kept records. Brought in speech therapists. Dismissed them all when they suggested it might be psychological mutism. Said she didn't want to 'pressure him.'"

His voice cracked with something dark—remorse, fury, guilt.

"I should've known. I should've—"



"Kael," I said quietly, "this wasn't your fault."

He looked away.

I turned to the Delta healer as she stepped forward—robes soft and gliding, face unreadable beneath her calm professionalism. Her eyes drifted over Elliot with the kind of care that made something in me loosen, then tighten again.

"I need you to look at his throat," I said. "His vocal cords. Felicia admitted she tampered with them."

That got her attention.

She blinked once. "Tampered how?"

"She said she didn't cut him," I said, my voice thin. "She didn't sever anything. She moved the muscles. Rewired them. Just enough to silence him."

The Delta's face shifted, barely.

"I know it sounds insane," I added quickly. "But she said she wanted to make sure he couldn't expose her. That he couldn't repeat what he heard. What he remembered."



The Delta stepped closer, scanning Elliot's face gently before brushing her fingers against his throat. Her touch was light, reverent, like she was asking permission from the body before continuing.

Elliot didn't resist.

He just blinked—slow, unreadable.

"I'll be quick," the Delta murmured, more to him than me.

Kael stood beside me, arms crossed, tension rolling off him in waves.

The Delta reached into her satchel and pulled out a glimmering diagnostic wand etched with sigils that pulsed faintly at the tip. She pressed it against Elliot's throat, just beneath the jawline. A glow spread across his skin—soft and golden at first, then shifting into a hazy blue.

She inhaled sharply.

"What is it?" Kael asked, stepping forward.

The Delta didn't look up.

"Scarring," she said quietly. "But not from injury."



It's... more complicated than that."

I moved closer. "What do you mean?"

She tapped the wand again, and the projection shimmered—a translucent image of Elliot's vocal structure hovered above his chest, gently rotating.

"Look here," she said, pointing at the laryngeal muscles. "These should sit in alignment with the vocal fold, allowing vibration when air passes through. But they've been displaced."

"Displaced how?" Kael asked tightly.

The Delta's lips parted—then pressed shut again, like she was weighing the weight of what she was about to say.

Finally, she whispered, "These muscles weren't cut or cauterized. They were coaxed into new positions. Grown into new alignment."

I went cold.

"What does that mean?"

"It means," she said slowly, "that this wasn't surgical. This was manipulative regeneration."



Someone shifted his soft tissue using energy-based restoration techniques."

She looked up at us at last, her face pale.

"That's Delta work."

Kael straightened sharply. "What?"

"No other class can do this," she said. "This is high-order, focused cellular persuasion. And it was done with precision. Just enough to disrupt vocalization without disrupting breath or swallowing."

She pointed again.

"A doctor would've seen this and assumed it was congenital. A rare natural deviation. Because it looks natural now."

The room spun slightly under my feet.

"So you're saying one of your own did this," Kael said darkly.

She nodded once.

"And here's the worst part," she added. "If a Delta changes tissue like this... only that same Delta can return it."



Silence exploded between us.

"What?" I breathed.

"It's a resonance issue," she explained grimly.

"Every Delta leaves behind an imprint. A signature in the way flesh heals and energy settles. Reversal depends on that same frequency. Without it, it's like trying to unknit something without knowing what pattern was used. It could cause more damage. Collapse his larynx entirely."

The silence that followed was a different kind of brutal.

Kael stood still as stone, and the Delta looked between us, her brow furrowing tighter and tighter.

Only the same Delta could fix what had been done.

Only she—whoever she was—could give Elliot his voice back.

I looked down at my son.

And something in me broke.



"He spoke," I said, quietly.

The Delta blinked. "What?"

I straightened, forcing the words out before they could tremble. "Last night. In his sleep. It wasn't babble. It was clear. Pleading. Words that weren't his."

The air shifted.

"He said, 'Don't hurt my baby,'" I whispered. "He said, 'Please, Felicia... not my child.'"

The Delta stepped back, visibly shaken. "That's not possible. With the vocal distortion he has—"

"I heard him," I snapped. "So did Kael. So did the godsdamn walls."

Kael nodded slowly, eyes hollow.

"It shouldn't have happened," the Delta muttered, more to herself. "The muscles wouldn't allow it. Unless—" Her eyes widened. "Unless it wasn't physical. Not fully. Not then."

"Then what was it?" I asked.

The Delta looked stunned. "A breach in memory. In resonance. If he spoke despite the damage..."



then something stronger wants him to speak."

My voice was low. "The Flux."

The Delta paled.

I reached for Elliot's hand, holding it between mine.

He didn't react.

His voice was barely more than a breath. "He has Flux in him too."

I looked up, and Kael was staring at Elliot like he was seeing him for the first time—like he couldn't reconcile the child on that cot with what he'd just said.

Kael ran both hands through his hair, pacing a slow, bitter line beside the quartz wall.

"A child..." he muttered. "But it was in Hades. It's in him too."

He stopped, shoulders hunched forward like the weight of it had finally caved him in.

"There were no signs," he said. "Nothing that screamed it. But that explains it."



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My heart stalled.

"Explains what?" I asked.

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