



481 Just A Word

Hades 1

We had our work cut out for us, but Cain joined the fray the moment he returned. Sophie was still asleep, tired after the eventful night I had spent with her, trying to assuage her fears and worries.

Relief was an understatement for the emotion that coursed through me now. Nothing could describe it, knowing that my niece still had her father. I could already see her face when she would wake up and see him.

The thought made the tiring day more bearable.

Cain brought in his men to assist in any way they could—be it in the Tower itself as assistants to Cain and his now allotted responsibility as a council member, or for hundreds to be spread evenly in the completion of construction of the new safe houses for the already incoming fugitives.

More were still being guided out of the tunnels around the clock, with more of his men ensuring their safety.



"We poisoned Darius's gammas to get the people out safely. There was tight patrol—any other way would have been bloody and ineffective. Good thing they all like booze." Cain chuckled. "They may or may not wake up." 1

I could only look at him over the torrent of never-ending papers. "We saw the patrol when we were escaping," I muttered quietly. "They're in the outskirt towns mostly, the underdeveloped ones compared to the large cities closer to the Lunar Heights. It was one of those places that we picked Thea up."

"You picked up a random werewolf?" He sputtered, raising his head from his work just to look at me with wide eyes. "Just like that. She got to ride you before I did." He slammed his fist in feigned rage. 2

I chuckled, momentarily catching myself in this moment. Despite it being over war planning, despite the decades of our falling out and then conflict over the throne that Leon left behind, we had somehow found ourselves back to where we used to be.

Banter, jokes, and a sense of brotherhood I never thought I wanted back. It took almost losing Kael and being captured by Darius's gamma, staring



death in the face as we escaped only to be captured by so-called foes, to find ourselves again.

In a clamor, the unending cacophony and uncertainty, we were able to break free of the shackles of animosity. Everything WAS fate after all, the moon goddess and her games.

The paper in my hand had orange light shining on it. The color of dusk. I turned around to see the sun almost setting.

Eve should be getting back by now, and as if on cue, my comm on her frequency rang and I picked it up.

My wife's voice filled my ears. "We have the fugitives situated and identities recorded."

"Was there any problem?" I asked.

"None that was noteworthy. It went as smoothly as it could have. I checked on the Arrays. I have the reports of the test on the first domes. It's everything we hoped it would be. They'll soon start assembling the second one." A pause. I could hear her panting. "I'll be home soon."

Thank the Gods. "I'll be waiting at the office with Cain. We'll soon be done here too."



"See you soon," she murmured, but didn't cut the call. I knew what she was thinking.

"And about Ellen. The reports and tests just came in an hour ago. She's sleeping and she's fine."

She was quiet over the line before she murmured a quiet, "Thank you."

I raised my head, only to see Cain staring oddly at me, though his gaze was distant.

"What is the matter?" I asked. "Thinking of another joke to torture me with?"

He smiled then, but it was not his usual obnoxious smirk. It was... tender and sad.

If I had seen it in a video, I would believe it was doctored, but seeing it in real time was rattling.

"What happened?" I asked.

"I thought you would end up like Father—alone and consumed by your ambitions. Pushing and driving away the only woman who could love you. Love you not only for what you were but what you could be. Like Father did with your mum."

I froze. I felt my mind peel back repressed layers of memory. Ones that had been shoved down to make way for the unfeeling puppet, the monster



that my father needed to fulfill his lifelong agenda.

Even now, the cold hand of dread clutched my heart at the simple desire to recall her scent or her touch. Like my father still had his hands on the chains around my neck beyond the grave.

"Luci," he murmured, and my gaze snapped to his face. My heart sprang into a wild sprint. "You don't remember her, do you?"

I shook my head. "Why are you bringing her up now?" I asked, finding that my voice had gone strained.

He smiled—wry, remorseful, a slow curl of his lips, his eyes rimmed suddenly with grief he never seemed capable of feeling.

"It seems that even after all this time and the man you have become in spite of Father, his voice and his commands remain entrenched in your psyche without you realizing it." There was no gloat nor condescension in his tone. "Even if your eyes are the blue they used to be and your dimpled use every excuse to show themselves now."

I had nothing to say to that. Being defensive would just prove his point.



"Freddie told me you called Sophia 'little star.'"
He said. "That was what your mother used to call
you before she left. Escaped, actually."

My head started to ache. "Cain... stop." This was
not the time.

"When I heard you called my daughter that... I
knew the Lucien she had to leave behind had
come back. The man that Lucas tried to smother
and erase had risen fully even if you didn't
realize it."

"It is just two words. They came out of nowhere."

Cain looked at me like I had shot him, and I
instantly filled with regret.

"Hades does not know those words. Only Lucien
does. I remember the first time I called you
Lucien after Danielle, Father, and Leon died. You
actually tried to kill me for it. For a name. For
just a word."