



482 Seraphina

Hades 1

I recalled the incident—the first meeting we had after the throne had been left vacant. I thought he had been mocking me. Maybe in a way he had, but I was starting to realize that he might have been trying to draw out the boy he knew from the monster that I had been shaped into. But that had not been the only time I had lashed out because of the name I no longer bore. I had hurt Kael too that time when I became triggered concerning Eve all those months ago. He too had been trying to reach me.

But when Sophie had called me Uncle Luci, I felt none of the rage. Only that a name that Lucien would know and remember had slipped out from my mouth in the most natural way. "Little star" would have never touched my lips if a part of me did not remember who I used to be.

My defenses were down, hackles lowered, and the—

A tear slipped down Cain's face. 1

And the world screeched to a stop. "Cain..."



"Lucien died, Hades, and I mourned him for years. Lucien would never have hated his name, or hated me, or forgotten his mother. Lucien was a kind little boy that saw me as more than the illegitimate older brother—not like Leon. He was alive." His lips quivered as my elder brother cried. "I wanted to hate Hades. Because Hades took Lucien. But I couldn't, so I stuck around like a tick that never let go no matter how much you whacked it." He chuckled, looking down at himself, still crying. "Fuck, I am almost forty, crying like a little girl." 1

I rose before I could stop myself and rounded the table.

As if on cue, he rose too and grabbed me in a crashing embrace. "You're back," he whispered. "You came back, brother."

For the second time this very day, I hugged him back. 1

"I wish your mother got to see this," he murmured. "I wish she..."

"Seraphina," I whispered, my whole body locking up as flashes slammed into me like a tidal wave. But they were too many and too fast to discern. "Her name is Seraphina." My words were



breathless. I did not see her face, nor smell her scent, nor feel her skin or hear her voice. I only knew her name because...

"SERAPHINA!"

My mind was ripped through with the sound of my father's roar. I clenched my eyes closed but saw nothing—only the voices, like a phantom, incomplete memory.

"HE IS MY SON, MY FUCKING BLOOD, MY LEGACY." I could hear him growl, and the soft weeping of a woman. "You were nothing but his incubator! The next time you try to steal my son, I will have you passed around my council like the backstabbing whore that you are!" 1

"He is mine to use, to carve, to wield. He is fucking mine. I am his Lord, his creator. You are nothing of consequence to him. And I will make sure of that."

Then there was the sound of choking, and a yelp from a dog—a puppy.

"Hades!" Cain snapped me back to the present, and my eyes found focus again.

Relief bled into his features. "I thought I lost you for a second there." He smiled, still uncertainty



lingering in his eyes.

"I'm okay," I murmured, clasping his tense shoulder. "Just felt something."

"Us too,"

Both me and Cain ripped away from each other like we had been electrocuted, seeing Kael and Eve standing there, more shocked than we were.

"Two hugs in a single day?" Kael exclaimed, his eyebrows climbing toward his hairline. "Should I alert the historians? This is unprecedented."

"We have a new record," Eve added, though her eyes were scanning my face with that concerned intensity that told me she'd felt something through the bond. The flashback, the panic, the memory tearing through me. She knew.

Cain wiped his face roughly with the back of his hand, that cocky smirk sliding back into place like armor. "What can I say? I'm irresistible. Even Hades can't keep his hands off me."

"Please don't phrase it like that," I muttered, though the corner of my mouth twitched despite everything.

Eve crossed the room to me, her hand finding mine immediately. Her touch grounded me,



pulled me fully back into the present. "Are you okay?" she asked quietly, for my ears only.

"I will be," I said, and meant it this time.

Kael looked between us, his usual levity dimming slightly. He'd been there. He'd seen me at my worst, tried to reach me when I was too broken to be reached. "What did we miss?"

"Just some overdue family bonding," Cain said lightly, though his eyes were still red-rimmed. "You know how it is. Tears, hugs, declarations of brotherhood. The usual."

"The usual for literally anyone else," Kael said flatly. "For you two, this is apocalyptic."

"Well, we are in the middle of preparing for war," I pointed out.

"Fair point." Kael moved to the desk, scanning the papers we'd been working on. "So while you two were having your emotional breakthrough, did you actually get any work done, or—"

"We got plenty done," Cain interrupted, his tone returning to its usual cocky assurance. "No worries. I didn't distract your Alpha. I helped out. My men are still in the archives sorting some things out."



"So," Kael said slowly, his gaze bouncing between Cain and me with obvious curiosity. "What exactly prompted the... emotional watershed moment? Because I've known you both for decades and I've never seen—"

"Freddie has a big mouth," I said abruptly.

"Freddie told you something?" Eve asked, her Luna instincts sharpening.

"That I called Sophie 'little star,'" I said quietly. The words felt heavier now, loaded with meaning I was only beginning to understand.

Kael's expression shifted, something like recognition flickering across his features. "That's what—"

"Papaaaaaaaaaaaaa!" I recognized that voice anywhere, it was all thought just as Sophie burst through the office door with Elliot and Micah on her tail. I guess work was done for the day. 1

Cain looked at me, giving me a look that said we still had more to discuss at a later time, just as I watched Eve pick up Elliot and Kael ruffle Micah's golden hair.

Cain picked up his daughter and twirled her around, she shrieking in excitement as we all

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smiled at the reunion. 1

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