

491 All Their Grievances

Hades 1

I watched Sage and Sophie cry as they bid him goodbye along with the rest of the regiment. I noticed the girls were holding hands as if trying to console each other. I had expected some type of jealousy from Sophie's side as an only child, but it seemed that as a kid who had been isolated for most of her life for her own safety, she had a penchant to be open to new people and form relationships.

She had no qualms about Sage, especially after being told a more child-friendly version of what the girl had been through. She had accepted Sage instantly. And it helped that Sage had teeth like Sophie.

I watched the armed men, all in their shifted forms. With the Bloodmoon now a mere fifty hours away, they had to reach Lunar Heights before it rose. Ellen, knowing the layout of the tower, would lead them to the satellite platform at the roof—where she'd be strapped in for the next 72 hours. 1

The mobile forces would scatter throughout the



still-inhabited inner cities, armed and ready with comms to radio in for instructions or relay developments. The outer ring would secure the capital city around Lunar Heights where Ellen would be mounted. The inner ring would hold the tower itself.

Cain would remain at Ellen's side as command center, mobile when needed but always her first line of defense against aerial attacks. The medical team would feed her, monitor her vitals, and heal her when necessary. The Delta who had strenuously regrown her arm would be present and responsible for her care. 5

Each part of the brigade carried rations and water for the journey to Silverpine, with plans to acquire sustenance from abandoned supermarkets and supply centers as the war raged on.

Aegis was ready to move.

Everyone said their goodbyes. Cain knelt before his daughters; if he survived this, I was sure Sophie was getting a new sister.

I embraced Cain as well. "If you die, you are screwed," I whispered before letting him go.

He smiled. "The same goes for you, chump."



I watched Eve and her sister as they spoke in hushed tones before sharing a final long hug. Ellen was able to use two arms again.

Cain kissed his girls, then approached Eve and Ellen. He promised to take care of her.

And they were off through the tunnels.

The pounding of large paws echoed through the space as they all disappeared from view into the darkness.

With the countdown at the 48-hour mark, strategy already plotted and memorized, every player knew their place. All weapons were at the ready. All we had to do was wait. Shifted Aegis would have Ellen mounted and ready within 24 hours. I had already gotten intel that the mobile forces had begun their formation.

Patrols weren't as thick or hectic—Darius's gammas had abandoned their stations, leaving the civilians to die. The remaining patrols, I hypothesized, had been absorbed into Darius's cannon fodder army.

In the meantime—

The door opened, revealing Kael. "You needed me?"



"Yes," I replied, gesturing to the seat opposite mine.

He sat down, waiting. "Every item has been checked off the list. We are in the clear."

I noticed his humor had died down since he was abducted. He barely joked anymore, not like he used to. Like he had been altered by the experience. I knew we'd been preparing for war, but Kael made jokes no matter the situation. And I could not help but feel responsible.

"I am sorry," I muttered, stopping him short.

He stilled, his confusion evident. "What for?"

I sighed deeply, running my hand over my face. I let the words flow. "For everything. For my violent tendencies, for pushing you away, for not being a good friend, for being dubious of you at times even when you've never done anything to warrant suspicion, for dismissing your loyalty, for almost killing you more times than I can count, for putting you in harm's way—"

"For breathing, for eating, for existing, for living, for having better hair, for having dimples when I don't—"

I blinked, struck and perplexed. "I am sorry, I



didn't mean to—"

His laughter cut me short.

I stared at him, bewildered, as Kael doubled over, clutching his sides.

"Are you—are you seriously apologizing for having dimples?" he gasped between laughs. "Hades, that's—that's not how apologies work!"

"I know that," I said, defensive. "I was being serious and you—"

"You were spiraling," Kael corrected, wiping his eyes. "Listing every perceived slight since we were kids. Next you'd be apologizing for the time you ate the last cookie at the pack feast when we were seven."

I blinked. "You remember that?"

"Of course I remember. You looked so guilty afterward." He grinned—the first real grin I'd seen from him in weeks. "Hades. Stop. I forgive you. For all of it. The violence, the suspicion, the almost-murders—yes, plural—all of it."

"But—"

"No." Kael's tone turned serious, though his smile remained. "You're my brother. You've always



been my brother. Even when you were being an ass. Even when you didn't trust me. Even when you threw me across rooms." He paused.

"Especially then, actually. Very therapeutic."

Despite everything, I felt my lips twitch.

"Therapeutic."

"Builds character," Kael said sagely. "Besides, you're forgetting something."

"What?"

"I'm still here." He leaned back in his chair. "After everything—after the abduction, the torture, the war, the chaos—I'm still here. Still your Beta. Still your friend. That should tell you something."

It did.

It told me I didn't deserve him.

But I was grateful for him anyway.

"Thank you," I said quietly.

"For what? For not having dimples?" Kael's grin returned. "You're welcome. It's a burden I bear with grace."

I threw a pen at him.

He caught it, laughing.



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And for the first time in weeks, the war room felt lighter.

The door opened again and Eve stepped in. "Why do you look so flushed?"

Kael sat up straighter, composing himself. "Your husband was just apologizing for my devastatingly handsome face."

Eve blinked. "What?"

"Specifically the dimples," I added flatly 2

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