



## 251 Her Only Hope

Hades 1

"We could do it, Hades," Kael murmured, his tone hesitant. 1

I stopped in my tracks and let the silence drench us both. "What?" I asked quietly.

He took a step toward me, his footfall unsteady. "We should let Elliot undergo a paternity test like... she said. It would clear—"

My head snapped toward him, silencing him. "You believe her crap, Beta?"

The use of that official title made his shoulders bunch. He swallowed, glancing away briefly before his eyes returned to meet mine, filled with uncertainty. "The evidence against her is immense, but it's..."

"Eve?" I cut him off, taking the name straight out of his mouth. "Because it is Eve, isn't it?" I asked.

He said nothing. The hallway's tension was like a noose around our necks.



"You haven't answered me. You want me to toss away evidence because she is... Eve?"

"No..." He gulped again. "But I... you know her..."

"I don't know her. A couple of weeks ago, I didn't even know she was Eve. A couple of weeks ago, I didn't even know she was the cursed twin—or a Lycan for that matter."

"Jules tried to tell you..."

My gaze darkened enough for him to stop speaking. "But *she* didn't tell me. Time and time again, her dishonesty has been highlighted." 1

"But you forgave her—because she had her reasons. After all she had been through. You empathized with her because her family's actions had made her paranoid..."

"I never forgave her," I cut him off, the statement feeding the darkness that had started to fester beneath the heartache.

He startled, his expression morphing to one of confusion. "But you..."

"I simply let it go because it didn't matter who she was, the type of creature that she was, or



what her goddess-forsaken name was. In the end, she fit right into my plans. It didn't change the fact that she would be useful. The marker in her blood still remained. Her name didn't change that."

Kael turned ashen. "You don't mean that. You wanted her to be THE Luna."

"A crown on her head would not erase the marker in her blood."

"No, Hades, I know you are hurt..."

Hurt. That word was a gross understatement.

"I know what she did. She said herself that she wasn't in control."

"Probably another lie," I dismissed.

"Probably..." he echoed. "There is still a possibility that she didn't lie."

"Yet her credibility is in hell. I am not the leader that lets his sentiments lead. The evidence is glaring, and its implications are clear as crystal. Only a fool would dismiss that." 2

"Still... you wouldn't do that to her. You wouldn't





extract everything..."

Only then did I smile and turn away from him.  
"Watch me, Beta. Watch me."

I walked away, giving him the choice to follow or turn away.

The Montegues were farther down the hallway, waiting for me.

Soon, we reached them.

Lucinda stood prim, her hands folded like this was a formality. Felicia's skin was still pale, even after she had been cleaned up. Montegue himself stood in the middle, unmoving.

"Hades," Montegue greeted, voice rough. "We want the Princess turned over. To us."

Kael's posture shifted behind me, stiffening.

Felicia stepped forward, tone too smooth. "She murdered our kin. She attacked me. The punishment should be ours to deliver."

"No." My voice sliced through the space, firm.

Montegue's brow lifted. "You would protect her?"



"I didn't say that." I kept my gaze locked on him.

"But she is not yours to punish."

"And why is that?" Lucinda's voice cracked like ice.

"She killed my father and brother—you seem to have forgotten that little detail—and because the Fenrir's marker is still active in her blood," I said coldly. "And it will be harvested."

The air thinned.

Felicia's smile cracked.

"You mean to desecrate her instead?" she said sharply, her voice rising with a veneer of righteous horror. "As if that justifies sparing her from a punishment she deserves?"

"She killed my family too," I said, low and unshaking. "Leon. Danielle. My unborn child. Don't speak to me of justice as if you carry more grief than I do."

Felicia reeled like I'd struck her, but it was Montegue who took a step forward, his eyes burning with the fire of a man who had already buried too much.



"She took our blood," he growled. "Ripped our lineage apart. You talk of value, but what value remains when honor is lost? When our dead are nothing but... samples to be dissected?"

"She is still bound to something ancient," I replied. "The marker in her blood is rare—perhaps one of the last. Its extraction may serve to protect what lives are left. To ensure no other kingdom suffers the fate of ours."

"You would turn her into a resource," Lucinda whispered, horrified. "After holding her as your Luna?"

"She was never Luna," I said sharply. "A crown never graced her head. And whatever bond we shared—whatever illusion I allowed myself to believe—it ends today."

Kael looked away, jaw clenched, grief warring with disbelief.

"Do you even hear yourself?" Felicia snapped. "You speak like she's a thing. A weapon. Not a person." 3

"She became a weapon the moment she slaughtered them," I said, voice hardening. "You



want her punished. I want justice. But I will not hand her over to a grieving house with vendettas. She will be stripped down to what makes her dangerous. And what makes her useful."

Montegue stared at me, his expression unreadable.

Then, slowly, he stepped forward—until his breath nearly brushed mine.

"You better mean it," he said, his voice low and shaking. "Because if you falter—if you flinch when the time comes—you won't just lose your title, Your Majesty. You'll lose everything." 1

My eyes didn't leave his. "I won't."

He leaned in, barely a whisper now. "Don't fail Dani twice."

That name.

That name was a blade to the ribs every time.

I stood still long after they'd gone, their footsteps fading behind me.

Kael hovered nearby, watching. Waiting. But I



said nothing.

Because I had already made my decision.

The doors groaned open as I stepped through. The lighting was dim—fluorescent, clinical, and cold. The silence here was different. Not like the halls of Obsidian Tower, where secrets waited behind every corner. No—this place held no secrets.

Only truth.

And the monster that always lingered behind it.

A handful of scientists looked up, startled. They hadn't seen me in this wing for years.

Dr. Tavin stood quickest. "Your Majesty...?"

"I want more of the Vassir's Vein," I said, calm and brutal.

The room stopped moving.

"My lord," Tavin said slowly, "you haven't used the Vein in years. The side effects—"

"I'm aware."

"It changed you. Last time, it took weeks to





stabilize. Your body—your mind—"

"And now you're telling me you believe I've stabilized?" I snapped, a bitter laugh in my throat. I let her in. I let her lie. I let her make me believe in a future that never existed. So no—"I don't need stabilization. I said what I needed."

One of the assistants dropped a vial behind the counter. The glass shattered.

"Get it ready," I ordered. "I want a double dose."

Dr. Tavin hesitated. "Hades, please... let us think this through—"

"I have thought it through." I stepped closer, eyes blazing. "And the next time I face her, I will not hesitate. I will not break. So get me the godsdamned Vein."

No one moved.

Until I growled, low and feral.

"Now."

And as they scrambled into motion, I stood still, heart pounding, feeling the heat of the pain she left me with swell beneath my skin.



She made me weak.

And I would burn that weakness out of me if it was the last thing I did.

Kael had not followed me. It was better than him seeing me do this. 3

The lab fell into motion like a graveyard waking.

Assistants scrambled, unlocking drawers that hadn't been touched in years, pulling on reinforced gloves and hazard-grade eyewear.

The lights dimmed further as a red strip flickered to life above the doorway, marking the lab as a restricted zone.

A steel container was wheeled in from the vault chamber—its locks hissing as they disengaged. Cold fog spilled from within as the lid lifted, revealing a blackened, pulsating mass suspended in a magnetic field.

The Heart of Vassir.

The heart of a vampire prince who had been drowned, burned, impaled, and still didn't rot.

It throbbed faintly. Alive in death.



The room grew colder with its presence. Not from temperature, but from something more ancient. Something primal. The kind of dark power that bent worlds.

"Don't do this," came the voice inside me. 3

Cerberus.

My wolf's tone was deeper than usual—low, mournful.

"She has already taken enough from us," I told him silently. "This will ensure she never takes more." 1

"Or it will ensure we lose the last pieces of ourselves she hadn't touched," Cerberus growled.

A needle, thick as a child's finger, was attached to the extraction chamber. Tubes connected. The black fluid began to fill the vial—slow, viscous, lethal.

"We swore to never take another full dose," Cerberus whispered. "You remember what it made us do. Who it made us become."

"I remember," I said aloud, surprising the



scientists who paused mid-prep. I stared at the heart. "And I remember who I lost."

Dr. Tavin looked at me, almost pleading now. "The moment this touches your bloodstream, your empathy will dull. Your instincts will sharpen, yes, but your restraint—your control—it will suffer."

"I don't need restraint," I said. "Not for what's coming."

Cerberus snarled in protest. "You don't mean that."

"I do." My voice was a whip through my own soul. "I need to stop loving her." 5