



261 Lies, Lies and Lies

Hades 1

The council chamber was silent as the truth dropped like a judge's gavel. "Both the cursed and blessed twin are alive. The person we have now is not Ellen but her supposedly executed twin, Eve Valmont." My voice betrayed nothing as I spoke, the room echoing like it had never done before.

The revelation fell like a heavy dust cloud leaving every single person seated, stunned and utterly speechless.

I continued when no one spoke. "It was a conspiracy by Silverpine. The execution that I myself witness was just a show. After which Eve was handed to us when she had been hallowed." I paused as all eyes remained on me, wide and filled with shock. "But me being her fated mate, derailed their plan. I was able to reverse the Hollowing and now we have the Fenrir's marker. But now we have a problem. The second twin spoken about in the prophecy, the blessed twin is most likely still in there gasp,

unlike our initial belief that none of the twins are with them. This gives them an advantage, unfortunately, leveling the playing field that I had believed was tilted in our favour. While an investigation had been launched, weeks ago on the present location of the blessed twin, I am going to move forward with our plans concerning the cursed twin."

It was deafening.

It only intensified the chill that had settled in bones. The flux laughed, the sound grating. "Their jaws are on the floor."

I ignored the voice that had only grown louder.

Montegue had paled a bit but it was not shock on his face but restrained rage. He believed that out of everyone at the table, he was the most informed, only to find out that he was dead wrong that truth ran far deeper. He did not react, not outrightly but the ways his eyes bore into him was sign that he had much to say.

Surprisingly, it was Gallinti that reacted first. The younger council member rose from his seat. "You mean to tell..." He gestured to the whole table. "...that Operation Eclipse was a mission in

which we knew nothing of its true detail. You mean..." the normal polished man, ran his hand through his hair. Gallinti's voice cracked with disbelief. "Lies after lies after lies..."

He dropped back into his seat like the weight of everything had suddenly settled on his shoulders. "Do you understand what this means?" he asked no one in particular, eyes darting. "We weren't just kept in the dark. We funded the dark." 4

The murmur began.

Not chaos.

But the kind of simmering unrest that bred fractures.

Silas—older, sharper—cleared his throat, though his voice when it came was frigid. "Alpha Hades, this chamber has been built on the assumption of transparency—especially when it comes to matters of such devastating consequence." He leaned forward, his cold eyes narrowing. "You knowingly withheld the identity of a Valmont heir. You tampered with our judgment and our funding. And worse—you made unilateral decisions concerning the cursed twin that affect

every stronghold seated at this table."

"I had reason," I said simply, though I didn't move from my place at the head. "And I stand by them."

Gallinti scoffed. "So we're just supposed to swallow this now? That the cursed twin is in your custody, that she's been living under your roof this entire time—and we're only now hearing of it? You want my trust after that?"

Montegue said nothing still, but the pulse at his temple betrayed his restraint. His silence was louder than any outburst.

And yet... it was Silas who leaned forward again, fingers laced. "I will not pull steel on my Alpha in front of the council," he said, slow and controlled. "But I expect an explanation beyond vague references to prophecy and betrayal. I want the full truth, Hades. All of it. Or I walk."

Gallinti's gaze slid toward Silas, then toward me. "You won't be the only one."

I exhaled slowly.

The flux stirred inside me, almost giddy. > "Look at them. Fickle little things. You should tear them



apart."

I ignored it. And in a rare moment—one that Eve had unknowingly taught me—I lowered my head slightly. 1

"I apologize."

The chamber went still again, but this time with a different weight.

Even Montegue's brows twitched upward.

"I should have told you sooner," I said, my voice calm but raw-edged. "But I thought I knew better."

> "You thought you were in love," the flux hissed. "You wanted to protect her."

Yes.

I did.

I still did. 4

And that truth burned like wildfire through my chest, even now.

"She was hollowed. Fragile. Dangerous. I believed if I could protect her from the council,

from herself... I could change our fate. I believed I was the only one who could make the decisions necessary for us all. I miscalculated."

The council members exchanged looks—wariness still thick in the air—but something else stirred.

Understanding.

Silas didn't smile, but his posture shifted, fractionally. "We've all made selfish choices for those we care about," he said. "But you look half-dead, Hades. Whatever you've done... you're bleeding from the inside."

"Your skin's gone ghost-pale," Gallinti muttered, quieter now. "You don't look like yourself. And frankly, I don't know if you even sound like him anymore."

I allowed myself the smallest smile. A bitter one.

Eve, I thought. Even now, you win. You still seep through me like a scent I can't scrub off. You softened the steel in me—only for the truth to harden it all over again.

> "Pathetic," the flux spat. "She made you weak."



No, I thought. She made me human. 1

But being human had cost too much.

"We move forward," I said, straighter now. "The extraction protocol continues. The investigation into the blessed twin will accelerate. And Obsidian will remain the heart of this alliance. If any of you wish to step away, do it now. I will not beg."

No one moved.

Not even Gallinti.

Not yet.

But I could feel the shift. The ripple of something cracking open again—not the same trust as before, but something else.

Something they could carry together.

Silas nodded once. "Then we stand. For now."

I sat back, the weight in my chest a little heavier.

Even when you lose, you win, Eve.

But too bad it was a facade all along.

> "She played you," the flux whispered gleefully. "And now we get to play her back. I always liked toys."

I said nothing.

Silas leaned back in his seat, his fingers drumming once against the obsidian table. "The civilians," he said, his voice more cautious now, "believe she's Ellen Valmont. A loyal daughter of Silverpine. The one who risked everything to save Montegue's grandson."

The silence that followed was heavier than before.

Montegue shifted, his posture finally straightening with quiet steel. "She plotted the whole thing," he said, voice low and firm. "Fed intel to Silverpine from within our walls. She staged the kidnapping of Elliot. All of it—just to gain our favor. So her ascension would be seamless." 4

The words gutted me, though I said nothing.

Because deep down—I believed him.

No matter how much I wished I didn't.

"She let us believe she was a victim," Montegue continued. "And the moment she saw the tide turn, she made herself a hero."

Gallinti let out a dry laugh, bitter and sharp. "Of course she did. A werewolf crowned as a savior in a lycan kingdom? That's the perfect ploy. And we all bought it."

"No one's more at fault than me," I said quietly, my voice like ash. "I let her in."

> "She played you," the flux hissed. "Like a fiddle. Just as I said she would."

I didn't reply.

Not to them. Not to it.

But the hollow ache in my chest pulsed like a warning.

"She won the people's hearts," Silas muttered. "If they find out Ellen Valmont is really the cursed twin... the daughter of the Alpha who butchered thousands..." 1

"They'll burn her alive," Gallinti said simply. "And maybe they should."

A surge of something twisted rose in my throat—grief, rage, guilt—but I swallowed it.

"She's already condemned," Montegue said. "But publicly? She remains Ellen. The hero of Obsidian. The girl who risked her life for my grandson."

I nodded once, slowly. "Agreed."

> "She will not remain in your heart," the flux whispered now. "I'll flush her out. I'll burn her out. Until you remember what it means to be whole." 1

A small part of me still fought back, still clung to the memory of her laughter, the softness of her voice.

But it was fading.

And the flux was feeding.

"Silverpine still has the blessed twin," I said, straightening my spine. "They hold the other half of the prophecy. We cannot let that stand. I'll increase the search. We will find her."

Silas nodded after a moment. "Then we move."



Montegue said nothing more, but his silence was approval.

Gallinti looked between us, then gave a clipped nod. "For the survival of Obsidian."

I lingered a moment longer as they began to rise, my gaze fixed on the empty center of the chamber. On the echo of her name in my mind.

Eve.

Even now, some broken piece of me whispered that she hadn't meant to do it.

That she had loved me.

But love... didn't look like betrayal. 2

And I was done lying to myself.

> "Good," the flux purred. "Let me in. I'll make you clean again." 3

I turned from the table.

And left to begin the first of many ends.