



365 Montegue Manor

Hades 1

The ride to Montegue Manor was brutal.

Not for its pace—but for what it meant.

Two flanks. Two Alphas. One purpose.

My Gammas rode in coordinated units, vehicles sleek and soundless. Cain's operatives followed in looser formation, silent and alert—rogues in customized gear, the kind built for smuggling, not politics. Yet here we were, converging on the ancestral estate of one of Obsidian's founding bloodlines.

The manor rose ahead. Not decayed or abandoned like I once believed—but pristine in a way that was deliberate. Restored in vintage-modern elegance, with sleek security systems tucked under ivy-draped gables and clean-cut stone. It looked untouched by the wars we fought. Hidden in plain sight.

Of course it was.



I brought the satcom to my ear.

It didn't ring.

Montegue answered on the first pulse.

"Alpha Hades."

"I assume you know about the explosion," I said flatly.

"It's already on the feeds. I've issued statements, worked damage control with the Communications Guild and three of the civilian blocs. The Council's calling an emergency session in thirty."

I scanned the estate as our units fanned out, surrounding it with trained efficiency.

"I know you went with the Gamma deployment," Montegue added quietly. "We saw your movement logs. I figured you'd follow the trail yourself."

His voice dipped on the last words—not out of fear, but shame. Montegue was never a man to wear guilt, but now it hung from his throat like a noose.



I didn't offer comfort.

"They're gone," I said. "No trail. No scent. No displacement. Like they dissolved into smoke."

A beat of silence passed between us, heavy and bitter.

"I have Cain with me."

Montegue exhaled, the sound sharp and disbelieving. "You called in the rogues?"

"I didn't call him. He came. We're aligned, for now. His men know the veins under Obsidian better than anyone alive."

"And still nothing?"

"Not a damn footprint."

"All hands are on deck," I said, voice low. "But it's like they were never here."

Montegue didn't respond for a long moment. Then:

"She planned this with them."

"Yes."



"She had time."

"Yes."

"She used me."

I didn't answer that one.

Because we both already knew.

"She's not just running," I said. "She's mobilizing. Consolidating. Every step has been surgical."

Montegue's voice came through again—this time hoarse with restrained fury. "Then I'll brief the Council. Full transparency. You'll have my full support."

"You'll give me the damn clearance, Montegue. Not just support."

"You have it. Anything you need."

"I need your manor," I said, voice clipped. "Full access. No delays. No secrets."

A pause.

Then, "My—what?"

"Montegue Manor," I repeated coldly. "That's the



place I need clearance for."

I could hear the shift in his breath. Not shock. Not outrage. Just that brief stutter of a man connecting the last dots—and hating the image that formed.

"You think my estate was part of this?"

"I think it's the only place close enough to the Tower, fortified enough to hold them, and old enough to be off modern surveillance," I said. "And it's yours. Which means it was the one place Felicia could walk into without raising a single alarm."

"Hades..." Montegue's voice was lower now. "Do you really believe she used my estate for this?"

"I don't believe, Montegue. I know."

I motioned to my Gamma Beta as our convoy rolled to a halt in the gravel courtyard. Cain's vehicles parked beside ours—sleek black shadows against the pale façade of the manor. My boots hit the earth just as the first defensive grid lit up faintly across the estate perimeter.

"She had access," I continued, pacing toward the



wrought-iron gates. "She had history. She had every reason to believe no one would check here —because even you forgot about it. Or wanted to."

"She wanted to see her childhood room when I helped her escape. I didn't know why," Montegue admitted over the line, voice raw. "

"Of course you didn't," I snapped. "That's the point. This place was her fallback. Quiet. Off-record. Close enough to Obsidian for a retreat, but far enough to regroup. You said it yourself—she's consolidating."

I stopped before the door and looked up at the crest above the arched entry.

Montegues.

Still proud. Still etched in stone.

"Then take it," Montegue said at last. "Whatever is mine—consider it yours until this is done. I'm sending my override codes. You'll have full clearance. Every room. Every vault."

A soft ping sounded in my earpiece—access confirmed.



"Good," I said.

I ended the call.

Cain emerged from his car, cracking his neck as he surveyed the manor with a low whistle. "It's a beauty."

"Stick to the mission," I hissed, already signaling the breach units forward.

Within seconds, the main gates clicked open with a hiss. Lights flickered on across the entry terrace—vintage glass sconces, modern wiring. Every aesthetic touch was intentional. Every blind spot, now suspect.

"Move in," I ordered, voice like gravel. "Sweep left and right sectors. Cain, take the western wing."

"My men already have schematics," Cain said with a smirk, tapping his comm. "We'll sweep clean. If Felicia's hiding rats in the walls, we'll drag them out."

The teams flowed in—black and silver armor, boots in sync. Rogues and Gammas, working like they'd done this a thousand times, even though



their allegiance to each other was held together
by a thread and a threat.

But for now, we were unified.

Because Felicia had made her move.

And it was our turn to make hers unravel.

The manor opened to us like a house that
wanted to be found—but only just.

Vintage elegance met cold intelligence in every
corridor. The walls were lined with
hand-restored paneling, ornate with Montegue
heritage, but threaded beneath that charm was a
different beast—smart sensors, optical relays,
false walls on magnetic hinges.

It was a house built for pride.

And for secrets.

We swept the eastern wing in tight formation.
My Gammas operated with silent precision,
helmets interfacing with sonic scanners
calibrated to detect hollow resonance—
subfloors, false backs, concealed stairwells.

We weren't admiring architecture.



We were on borrowed time.

Kael was missing.

Felicia was running.

And if we didn't find them fast, the next body we recovered might be his.

Behind the old wine rack—a drop chute,
disguised as a defunct dumbwaiter.

Beneath a velvet chaise—a trapdoor, leading to
an archival bunker sealed behind biometric
encryption.

Every discovery wasn't just proof of deception.

It was proof of planning.

Felicia had mapped this escape.

This wasn't a hideout.

It was a launchpad.

And we were always five steps behind. 1

By the time we cleared the top floor, we had
uncovered six potential cache points, three
sealed communication nodes, and an embedded



dampener in the library ceiling meant to jam
long-range comms in the entire east quadrant.

Still no Kael.

Still no Felicia.

Every second ticking by pressed tighter against
my lungs.

Where was he?

Where the hell was he?

I descended the central stairwell just as Cain
emerged from the west wing, his expression
uncharacteristically grim. He didn't speak, just
shook his head once.

No sign of them.

But we both felt it—this wasn't over.

It was close.

His men flanked him, silent as shadows. My
Gammas tightened behind me.

Both sides had found the same thing—

Nothing.



Which made what came next inevitable.

We stopped in front of the only door that hadn't opened automatically with Montegue's override codes.

A steel-bound relic, set deep into the wall behind a mirrored column. It didn't match the rest of the manor's modern upgrades. No biometric pad. No scanner. Just a manual lock disguised as a decorative brass sigil—an old Montegue family rune for "remembrance."

I stared at it, heart pounding.

Cain stepped up beside me.

His voice was low. Tense.

"This the one?"

I nodded, jaw tight.

He didn't joke this time.

Didn't smile.

Both our forces fell into a silent, unified stance behind us.

Because whatever was behind that door—wasn't



just locked.

It was kept.

And if Kael was on the other side, bleeding... or worse—

Then we were already too damn late.

The lock gave after a tense, mechanical click—ancient, but recently oiled.

I pushed the door open.

Felicia's room greeted us with... silence.

Not the silence of secrecy.

The silence of nothing.

No barricades. No false floor. No scorch marks or blood. No signs of struggle. No Kael.

Just a room.

A vintage canopy bed sat untouched, draped in pale silks. The walls were the soft beige of old parchment. A single desk. A mirror. A dresser. The kind of place a girl might've cried in once, then left behind forever.



Too perfect.

Too quiet.

Cain moved beside me, his mouth thinning as he scanned with his device. "Nothing. No hollow resonance. No feedback. Nothing behind the walls. Just... walls."

I turned in a slow circle, pulse rising in my throat.

Every other room in this manor had something—a code, a crawlspace, a hidden path, a game. Montegue built this house like a cipher.

But this room?

Flat.

Clean.

Normal.

Wrong.

"Why is this the only room without a feature?" I growled.

Cain didn't answer.



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Neither did my Gammas.

I stepped to the mirror. No hinges. No dust rings. No residue. I yanked the drawers of the dresser. Empty. Desk? Clear. Carpet? Standard weave.

"I want molecular scans on the walls," I barked. "Thermal, chemical, spatial. This doesn't make sense. It's the odd one out—why? Why build an entire house full of games and leave one square untouched?"

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