



## 369 A Piece Of Her

Hades 1

We slowed our pace.

The corridor ahead curved left, then descended, blinking red with deeper access points. The further in we went, the colder it felt—like the walls themselves were warning us. Every movement, every breath, felt like it echoed under surveillance.

Cain dropped his voice. "We lay low. No sudden moves. No bluffs unless I call it."

I didn't argue. My pulse still thundered from the encounter. My hands were still twitching, claws wanting to emerge.

"We're running out of time," I said.

"And we'll lose all of it if you pounce too soon," he countered. "We don't know how many levels are watching. If the AI catches an emotional spike or movement deviation, it'll lock the sector. We're not walking out of that."



I ground my teeth but nodded once.

Cain tapped the corner of his eye, pretending to wipe sweat. "There are ten cameras in this hall. Only three are obvious. The rest are built into the overhead grid. Micro thermal lenses." 9

I glanced up—what looked like ordinary lighting panels pulsed faintly in a rhythm I hadn't noticed before. Watching. Tracking.

"You've done this before," I muttered.

Cain smirked. "Sweetheart, I've built compounds like this before. Not this scale, but the principles are the same. Black sites, ghost-labs, organ farms, data brokers. You name it, I've passed through it. Run some. Burned others to the ground." 1

I gave him a look. "You ran labs?"

"I ran markets," he corrected coolly. "The labs belonged to others. But I know how their minds work. Everything here is orderly—obsessively so. That means schedules. That means patterns. What we need isn't more weapons or more rage. We need a disruption window."



I glanced at the surveillance grid. "So we wait?"

"We blend." Cain jerked his chin toward the next hallway, where two men in blue-trimmed lab coats were scanning a sealed crate. "We listen. Watch. Someone will leave a door cracked open. They always do."

I wanted to argue, to move, to fight—  
—but I forced myself still.

My father had never taught me patience. Only dominance.

But Cain had spent his whole life in the shadows of power. Not building thrones—breaking them from underneath.

"What are we looking for?" I asked finally.

He smiled thinly. "A crack in the system. A tired tech. A faulty badge. A shuttling crate headed toward Theta. Something that buys us thirty seconds of blind spots."

"Thirty seconds," I echoed. "To get Kael."

"To find Kael first," Cain corrected. "Then we improvise."



I drew in a slow breath, letting it burn down my throat like fire controlled.

This wasn't a battlefield.

It was a game board.

And we were the pieces that didn't belong.

But Cain—Cain knew how to move unseen.

He didn't fight the current. He bent it.

And for now, I would trust him to guide us.

Even as the air turned colder.

Even as another scream, distant but raw, echoed faintly from somewhere far below, my stomach twisted again but I swallowed the lump.

The hum of machinery faded behind us as we slowed near a wide corridor intersection marked with security glyphs and mirrored panels. Cain nudged me subtly, and we stepped into the shadowed recess of a half-open storage alcove. It stank of copper and sterilizer.

He tilted his head.

I listened.

Two voices filtered down the corridor, clipped and tense—scientists, judging by their jargon, their brisk cadence, the way they kept looking over their shoulders as they spoke.

"...he gave the order this morning. Isolation of the Marker will proceed. Doesn't matter that the donor hasn't been located."

"That's insane," the other hissed. "Without a living host, extraction stability drops to under nine percent. We're talking cellular collapse, not containment."

"Tell that to the King. He doesn't care. He's furious. Said if we can't find the girl, we replicate her."

The girl.

My thoughts sharpened.

They couldn't mean Kael. Or Felicia. There was only one "donor" whose Marker would matter that much.

Ellen.

The second daughter of Darius. The one the prophecy named. The one immune to the Lunar



Cataclysm—just like Eve.

They weren't waiting for a cure.

They were harvesting it.

Which meant Darius had turned on her too.

And now that she'd vanished... their king was getting desperate.

"Special Gamma units have already been dispatched," the first man added. "King wants her back alive. The branding failed that night, but the mark's still active. She won't get far. No one can fight the pull for long—not with the mark etched that deep."

The mark...

Rhea's mark.

The mate tether.

The words settled like glass in my spine.

Cain muttered low. "They're hunting her. Like prey."

A deep, thrumming clang echoed down the corridor.

We stilled.

As if on cue, the corridor's atmosphere changed.  
Like something cold passed through.

And then we saw them.

Six figures in matte obsidian armor emerged  
from the side elevator shaft—taller than most  
guards, movements perfectly synced. They wore  
no insignias, no badges. Only the telltale  
shimmer of the Gamma unit crest embedded  
into their breastplates.

Everyone cleared the hallway instantly.

No orders given.

Just fear.

Palpable. Thick. The way blood smells right  
before a slaughter.

Technicians scrambled out of their path.  
Scientists backed away with heads lowered.  
Even the security checkpoints blinked green in  
advance—autoprocessing them through.

But there was no red-haired girl being dragged  
behind them.





No glimpse of a prisoner.

No Ellen.

Cain leaned closer. "You feel that?"

I nodded.

"Anticipation," I said. "They expected to come back with her."

He flexed his jaw. "But they didn't."

Which meant she was still out there.

Still free.

And they were getting angrier by the hour.

I stepped back from the edge of the corridor, forcing stillness into my bones.

Because if they were hunting Ellen—

It was only a matter of time before they came for Eve.

And if they branded her once...

They'd try again.

The Gamma unit didn't just march through—they





glided, like a blade slipping through flesh. Every step was calculated. Every corner swept by retinal sensors embedded into their visors.

But it wasn't their precision that caught my eye.

It was the sealed box one of them carried.

Black. Reinforced. Covered in biometric runes. No markings—except for a faint, pulsing light at the center. The kind of artifact that didn't open with clearance.

It bypassed it.

Cain noticed too. He gave a low whistle. "That's not standard issue."

"They're heading to a restricted wing," I murmured, eyes narrowing.

"And they're carrying the key."

Cain's grin was grim. "Then we're going in."

I adjusted my collar and let my pulse slow to a crawl. Patience. Precision. One wrong move and the whole compound would lock down.

"Cause a distraction," I said.



Cain raised a brow. "You sure?"

"I want that box."

He didn't argue.

He moved.

With rogue-slick speed, Cain cut left into a technician's blind spot, snagging a stack of crates and sending them crashing to the floor in a deafening clatter. Alarms didn't go off—but every head in the corridor turned. The Gamma at the rear barked something and the group tightened into a defensive cluster.

And that was my moment.

Silent, I slid behind one of the smaller Gamma operatives—barely shorter than me. One swift blow to the throat. Another to the kidney. He dropped before he could sound an alert, and I dragged him into the shadows of a low-level utility alcove. His armor hissed as I peeled it from his frame, locking it over my own in segments like shell plating. His helmet slid on last, syncing with my vitals after a sharp override pulse from Cain's stolen datapad.



By the time the others recovered, I was already marching in step with them.

No one questioned it.

No one looked twice.

We passed through two sealed doors—each blinking green at the presence of the black box.

Then into darkness.

The lab on the other side wasn't like the rest.

It was cold. Silent. The air stale, like something ancient had been sleeping here.

The head Gamma stepped forward, setting the box on a steel table before a cluster of waiting scientists—two men and a woman, all wearing thick gloves and biometric shrouds.

The lead Gamma spoke. "We only found this."

He opened the box.

And silence fell.

Inside was an arm. 1

Slender. Pale. Bruised but intact.



I felt the breath freeze in my lungs.

The Gamma flipped it over.

Etched into the wrist like a brand was a jagged symbol—an M, cracked down the center.

The Mark of Malrik.

"She cut it off," one of the scientists whispered.

The Gamma nodded. "She was fully synced with the control bond. But this..." He tapped the severed limb, his voice unreadable. "She's free now. The connection's severed. That's why we couldn't track her. That's why the mark failed. She burned through the tether—and fled."

The woman cursed under her breath. "How long was she under?"

The lead Gamma didn't answer.

Didn't need to.

Because I knew.

Too long.

Long enough that escape meant mutilation.



She didn't just run.

She tore herself free.

Literally.

My fists clenched behind my armored gloves.

Cain had been right. They weren't just hunting her like prey—they'd caged her. Branded her. And she'd suffered in silence until her only option was amputation.

I stared at the mark—cracked and lifeless now.

And I wondered...

How much pain had she endured before choosing to destroy her own body to reclaim her will? 2

"Obsidian Pack might have her," the leader said, his voice tainted with venom. "Was the little Prince secured? The bargaining chip?" 1

Faces fell as the scientist spoke. "No, but we got the beta. Kael Orlov, Hades's right hand man." 1

The leader laughed, "Oh, this is going to be good. Have been aching for a good extraction session." 5

