



## 371 We Take Their Children

Eve 1

No one answered.

I didn't expect them to.

I adjusted Elliot in my arms, brushing a soot-stained curl from his brow as I stepped further into the chamber's center. The echo of my boots across the marble floor was the only sound now—like a countdown. Like judgment.

"If Kael could fall, what makes you think any of you are untouchable?" I asked, softer this time, deadlier for it. "He was Obsidian's blade. Its shadow. Its wall. And still... they found him. Took him. Vanished him."

A few of them looked away.

I kept going.

"You think I'm the threat because I bear my father's name? Then what threat do you think Darius Valmont could pose to your pack."

Montegue looked up at that—sharp, calculating.



I turned back toward the table, gaze sweeping across every man who'd tried to silence me tonight.

"You don't need to like me," I said. "You don't even need to trust me. But you will listen to me. Because whether you accept it or not, I'm the only one still standing between you and extinction."

Silas scowled. "You speak as if we are powerless —"

"You are!" I snapped, loud enough to cut him off. "You've grown fat on your own pride. Blinded by titles and tradition while the world burns around you."

I pointed at the scorched map display still blinking red behind them. "They bombed us. They breached the wall. They took your Commander's second, almost took his son. And you're worried about whose blood runs thicker?"

Silence.

"This war isn't about blood anymore. It's about survival. And right now, you are losing." 2



I reached for the nearest datapad on the war table—one of the many reports they'd been too busy posturing to read—and tapped the cracked screen.

"Let me show you how."

The central map projection hummed to life, flickering with red zones marked for damage, and blue trails showing the last known troop movements.

"The bomb detonated in the common hall at 02:16. That was never the real objective—it was a distraction. A misdirection designed to draw our forces outward, to trigger lockdown protocol and flood the east quarter with smoke and panic."

I swiped through the next screen. An overhead blueprint of Obsidian Castle bloomed life, corridors now marked with time-stamped surveillance gaps and interference zones.

"They used the chaos to breach the private wings. Whoever they were—whoever sent them—knew our defenses too well. They moved with precision. Cut every feed. Masked every scent. They weren't improvising—they followed a plan."





I pulled up the security overlay, pointing to a cluster of red pings along the servant corridors.

"This is where Kael was last seen, trying to subdue one assailant in his Majesty's room before they could take Elliot. We believe he was drugged. And then taken through one of three possible exit tunnels."

Gallinti frowned. "But all three tunnels were sealed off hours before the blast."

"Exactly." I turned toward him. "That means someone opened one. From the inside."

Murmurs rose—but now they sounded like strategy, not outrage.

"Every scanner was tripped except for one—the passage beneath the greenhouse tower. A place no one had authorization to enter."

Silas shifted. "That route was decommissioned."

"It was supposed to be," I said coldly. "But the lock logs were erased. Every trace. And you know what that tells me? It tells me someone not only knew where to strike—but how to cover it up."



A harsh silence.

"They infiltrated us," I continued. "Not as brutes. As ghosts. And they left without a trace."

Montegue's voice finally returned, hoarse but steadier. "We searched every tunnel, every freight lift, every gated wing. Dogs couldn't pick up a scent. Drones lost heat trail after three clicks."

I met his gaze. "They vanished."

Montegue's throat bobbed again, his hand slowly falling away from his chin. He leaned forward—past the layers of tension, past the barrier of fear and pride—and for the first time all night, his voice carried weight again.

"If they infiltrated with that level of precision," he said slowly, "then the explosion wasn't just a distraction."

His eyes dropped to the map. Then to the datapad. Then... to Elliot.

"Was it a message?" Gallinti asked, quieter now.

Montegue shook his head. "A message doesn't require this much risk. They didn't just come to

prove a point." He paused. "They came for something. Or someone."

He looked directly at me.

"Was it Elliot?"

The question cracked through the silence like a thunderclap.

My spine stiffened, arms curling tighter around my son. He stirred slightly, sighing in his sleep, his lips brushing the fabric of my shoulder.

Montague's gaze didn't leave him.

"He's five," he whispered, almost to himself.

"Barely five."

His voice broke on the last word.

And then—as if summoned by that tremble—  
Elliot shifted again. His lashes fluttered, cheeks still flushed from dried tears and sleep. He mumbled something I almost didn't catch.

Almost.

"...Uncle..."

Montague inhaled sharply. His fingers clenched



into fists against the table as he slowly looked back up.

I felt it too. The nausea. The weight.

Because if Elliot was the objective—if they risked everything for him—then this wasn't about war.

"He's just a child," Montegue said, more to the room now than to me. "So why would they want him? What could he possibly possess that makes him worth this kind of breach?"

I felt a sharp pressure behind my ribs. Like Rhea tensing inside me.

"I don't know," I answered honestly. "But they didn't come to kill him. They came to take him."

Silas rubbed his jaw, unease finally replacing arrogance. "If this was about ransom or leverage, why leave a sigil? Why leave nothing else?"

"Because it wasn't about negotiation," I said. "It was about claiming something. About owning something. Someone."

Gallinti's face darkened. "Then we're dealing with more than a rogue cell."



"No," I said quietly. "We're dealing with something calculated. Coordinated. And cruel."

Before anyone could respond, a small voice broke through the tension like glass beneath a boot.

"Ellen..."

The word was barely a whisper, but it shattered me.

I looked down.

Elliot's eyes were open now—dull gold and fogged with exhaustion, but aware. Blinking up at me as if surfacing from a dream that wasn't his.

My blood ran cold.

"Elliot?" I whispered.

He blinked again, then slowly turned his head—first to Montegue, who went rigid, and then to the room. To all of them.

"They said... Ellen Valmont..." His voice was fragile, strained, like repeating something he shouldn't remember. "She still hasn't been



found..."

My stomach dropped.

Montegue pushed away from the table and stepped forward. "Elliot... who said that?"

Elliot's eyes flickered between us. He looked so small, so tired. But his voice was clear.

"The masked man," he said. "He had something in his ear... a little black thing. He was talking into it. Said..."

He paused. Swallowed.

"Said... we can use the little Prince as a bargaining chip."

Silas stood fully upright. "What?"

Elliot pressed his face closer into my shoulder, but his words didn't stop.

"I am sure the hybrids gave her sanctuary," he murmured, voice hollow now—mimicking. Repeating.

Repeating a memory he'd never forget.

"They took the donor... we take their children..."



Montegue sat down hard.

My legs buckled slightly.

I didn't even know I'd started crying until I tasted salt.

"They were never after Kael," I said slowly, voice low with dawning horror. "They were after Elliot. As leverage. They think... they think we have Ellen."

The name echoed through the chamber, heavier than prophecy. Heavier than blood.

Ellen.

My twin.

I blinked, struggling to breathe past the realization clawing its way up my throat. "But that means... Ellen left them," I murmured. "She left the Valmonts. She left Darius."

Montegue straightened with a quiet breath, shaking his head.

"No," he said. "She escaped."

I froze.



"What?"

He met my gaze squarely. "You said it yourself—they weren't after Kael. They wanted Elliot. That means they believe Ellen is still alive. That she defected. And that we've hidden her."

I shook my head slowly. "But why would they think she'd come here of all places? This is enemy territory to them. We're not allies to werewolves much less her."

Montegue's voice hardened. "Exactly. That's what makes it all the more telling. Think, Eve. Why would they believe Ellen sought sanctuary in the lands they claim to hate? What would drive a royal-blooded daughter to vanish into the arms of her family's enemies?"

Silas exhaled heavily. Gallinti looked visibly ill.

Montegue's voice dropped, quieter. Steadier. More deadly.

"Because even they know what Darius Valmont truly is."

I went still.

He continued, slow and deliberate. "A man like





that isn't a father. He's a tyrant. And tyrants don't tolerate disobedience—not even from their blessed children. Especially not from the one tied to prophecy."

My throat dried.

Montegue leaned forward, eyes blazing with realization. "What if Ellen tried to break away? What if she rebelled, fled—only to realize there was nowhere safe for her but the enemy's den? That's the only logic that makes sense to them. The only reason to believe she'd be among us."

Silas muttered, "And they think Obsidian is shielding her?"

Montegue didn't answer immediately. He didn't need to.

The silence was enough.

Thick. Settling. Absolute.

"They think we've harbored her," Gallinti murmured, "and that Elliot would be an easy bargaining chip. That we would release Ellen to them no matter what."