

374 Escape Plan

Hades 1

Cain's words echoed in the dim corridor, louder than the alarms that never rang, louder than the guards who never moved.

"They recognized you."

Didn't deny it.

Because a part of me—buried deep beneath the scar tissue and rage—agreed.

Something had been stirring since the moment we entered this place. Not just instinct, not just muscle memory—something else. Something older than me.

Older than this war.

Older than this life.

Cain was still watching me. His expression had shifted. He wasn't just suspicious anymore—he was wary.

Of me.



He cleared his throat, voice lower now. "If this place runs on horn residue... and the Flux inside it still lingers..."

I didn't stop walking, but I heard the hesitation in his next words.

"...then are you sure you were the one in control back there?"

I froze.

Just for a heartbeat.

Then kept walking.

But Cain had seen it.

That flicker. That pause.

That crack.

And he pushed. "Hades. Look at me. Are you sure?"

My jaw clenched. "I got Kael out. That's what matters."

"That's not what I asked."

I didn't answer, it had not yet even sunk in that

the horn we sought was in this facility, much less the possibility that it could be interacting with me. Could I even escape this infection?

Cain seemed to sense my discomfort and with a deep sigh, he relented. "Since the horn is here and Eve says we need it, why don't we take it now? When else will we have a chance like this? We could topple the balance of this way in our favour, if we can get the first fragment. At least we can start now. It seems the horn has been shattered."

I glanced at Kael's already broken body. I could still see the trails of his blood. A lump formed in my throat.

"He needs help," I said, voice lower now, rough with something heavier than fury. "They didn't just beat him—they engineered this."

Cain frowned, looking down as we walked, his eyes trailing over the bruising, the blood crusted in his hair, the tremble in Kael's fingers even in unconsciousness.

"He should've begun healing by now," Cain muttered. "Even under sedation."

"That's the point," I bit out. "They used a healing suppressant. I can smell it in his bloodstream—chemical, synthetic, something mixed with wolfsbane. Just enough to keep his system dormant while they..." I trailed off.

Cain finished it. "While they carved him up and waited for him to talk."

I nodded once, throat tight.

"He was never supposed to survive this long," I added. "Whatever they were doing in that room—they were buying time. Extracting what they could before the body gave out."

"They would go," Cain muttered darkly. "Blood markers. Testing thresholds. They were milking him like a lab rat."

I adjusted Kael's weight in my arms, barely suppressing the snarl building in my chest. "And I barely got him back."

Cain didn't answer. He didn't need to. I saw the flicker in his jaw. The rage. The same rage that lived in me like a twin flame. This wasn't just war. This was a message.



"Whatever they learned from him," I said, forcing the words through my teeth, "it ends here."

Cain glanced at the walls around us. "We find that shard, we end more than just this."

But I shook my head.

"Not now."

Cain blinked. "What?"

"I said not now," I growled, my voice a low snarl. "Kael takes priority. We have no medics here. No Deltas. No cryo stasis. Just a handful of operatives and a stolen window of time."

Cain's nostrils flared. "We're not coming back here, Hades. You know that. You felt the horn's pulse—you don't think it knows we're here? Every second we stay—"

"I know," I snapped. "I know what's at stake. But if Kael dies before I get him to Eve, this whole mission was for nothing."

Cain looked at me, quiet now.

Not resisting.

Not agreeing.



Just... watching.

"You want the horn," I said. "I want it too. But I won't risk him for it. Not after what they did. Not when we're this close to home."

Cain looked back the way we came. Then forward to the transport tunnel. Then to Kael.

He nodded once, tightly. "Then let's go. But when this is over..."

"I'll come back," I promised, voice dark. "And when I do, I'll tear this place apart stone by stone until I find it."

Cain exhaled. "Good. Because if Vassir's horn remembers you..."

I finished for him.

"...then it might be waiting."

We stepped through the final archway.

And the storm behind us held its breath, and in an instant space was shredded through with the wailing of alarms. Our time was up but whether or not that was all we needed would be determined by how coordinated we were.



Everyone knew what to do next, hands morphed to claws, noses to large snouts, fur burst out of our skin as shifting instantly commenced, all except for Cain shifted, he had a role to play as his and my men began to race into the dense foliage, surrounding the large facility we had just escaped. As my head enlarged, my skin split like always did, three heads out of one. Six eyes mapping, three large snouts, smelling the incoming Gammas. My fur caught vibrations of them as they ...as they closed in—dozens of them—flooding from the eastern side, their howls syncopated with the alarms, footsteps drumming the earth like war was returning to claim what it lost.

My heads jerked in sync—one growled low, the second flared its nostrils, the third snapped its jaws toward the tree line as movement caught in the periphery. Cerberus had fully emerged now—my Lycan form towering, massive, armored in layers of blackened fur and smoke-threaded scars that pulsed with faint light.

Cain didn't flinch.

Instead, he dropped to one knee beside Kael and moved quickly—expertly—his hands steady even



as the ground trembled beneath our enemies' approach. He yanked the makeshift harness from his back, looped it over his shoulder, and secured the brace beneath Kael's torso with surgical precision.

"Still breathing," he murmured. "Vitals weak, but steady."

He tightened the last strap and gritted his teeth. "Hold still."

I did.

All three heads turned inward, watching as Cain hefted Kael's weight onto my back. The brace locked in with a subtle click, magnetized bands latching onto the reinforced notches in my armor-thick fur. A perfect fit. A perfect plan.

Kael's unconscious body sagged slightly against my spine—but he was secure. Insulated from the shock. Protected.

Cain's gaze swept over my six eyes.

A silent confirmation passed between us.

Then he stood—and let go. 2

