

## 375 Hideout

Hades 1

Shift.

Muscle tore. Skin split.

Cain's howl ripped the air as his bones cracked outward and his body morphed. His wolf burst forth—silver and ash, taller than most, eyes glowing molten bronze. His claws hit the ground like steel. His breath fogged the air as he came to stand beside me, braced and ready. 2

All around us, Obsidian wolves burst from the undergrowth—dark shapes weaving through the mist with fangs bared and eyes alight. Every one of them positioned. Every one waiting for the call.

I gave it.

Cerberus reared back, all three heads unleashing a roar that shook the forest. The trees swayed.

Then we scattered, escaping. Fighting would be foolish if Kael was to live.



Through the mist, through the thorns, through the hail of bullets that started to light up the dark like cursed fireflies.

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Commands blared through the speakers from within the facility, the goal clear in the panicked voice laced with venom and desperation.

"This is Central Command. Facility has been breached. Repeat—Facility has been infiltrated by enemies of Silverpine. Multiple units compromised. Suspected leader is King Hades Stavros."

Static buzzed. Then another voice came on—clearer, louder, male.

"They're headed for the hidden extraction route—Sector 9 east ridge. Repeat, they're using the east ridge tunnel. All units intercept. Engage on sight. Bring them back dead or alive."

Cain's ears twitched. He glanced sideways at me as we ran. I caught his meaning without a word.

They'd figured out our route.

But too late.



We were already halfway down the sloped ridge, weaving through dense brush and low canopies. Obsidian wolves were flanking, pushing faster now, leaping over rocks and fallen trees, clearing the path ahead. I kept Kael steady on my back, adjusting my gait to cushion every jolt.

Cain darted ahead briefly, his silver form crashing through vines, then circling back to take point beside me again.

The woods thinned.

We broke into the clearing.

Cain let out a short bark.

Signal received.

The wolves flanking us didn't hesitate—they surged forward, overtaking us and veering off into a wide arc. The first branch of the plan: a diversion. They would draw the facility's Gammas into a forward chase, loud and deliberate, like a wildfire charging through a dry forest.

Cain ran close to me, our strides aligned, our breathing synchronized. He didn't need to say it.



We both knew what came next.

Find cover. Break line of sight. Double back.

But not yet.

We had to time this perfectly.

I could feel Kael's heartbeat against my spine—faint, fragile. Every second mattered.

The terrain dipped again, the ground slick with moss and shadows. Behind us, the howls had multiplied. Gammas—at least thirty now—were gaining. Not fast enough to catch us, but fast enough to pressure the pack into maintaining full sprint. Good. That was the plan.

Then I saw it—up ahead, through the underbrush. A small ridge with a thick rock formation shaped like a collapsed tunnel, half-swallowed by earth and vine. Natural cover. Reinforced base. Hollow beneath.

I growled once—low, sharp.

Cain heard it.

His silver head snapped toward me. He saw it too.



That's the one.

We kept running for a few more strides—then I let out the signal.

One guttural snarl—cut short.

Followed by two sharp, stuttered howls.

The coded rhythm.

Scatter point.

Explosion.

Double back.

Within seconds, my wolves responded. You could feel it in the air—the way the wind changed, the footsteps shifted, the direction of force snapped like a snapped whip.

Boom.

Boom.

Boom.

Three quick blasts behind us—bright, disorienting flashes tearing up the forest floor. Not meant to kill—just to dazzle, confuse, blind.



Then the fourth came—larger, louder.

The final shell hit the ridge behind the chasing Gammas, dropping a thick cloud of dust and smoke that split the terrain in half.

It was all we needed.

I banked hard left, Cain following me step for step as we doubled back into the trees, deeper into shadow, using the blast shockwave as cover.

My men peeled away in different directions, darting like ghosts into the foliage. Silent. Disciplined. Years of training sealed into their muscles. They all met us in our found hiding place, keeping quiet instantly.

We slipped beneath the overhang just as two Gamma units sped past above us—completely unaware. Their shouts echoed into the distance, chasing the ghost trail of wolves they'd never catch.

Cain shifted back just enough to speak, breath heaving. "We hold here. Just until they clear the grid."

I nodded.

He moved quickly, sweeping the perimeter. Then crouched beside me, hand pressing against the cold stone for heat signatures.

"Three minutes," he said. "Maybe four, if they fall for the decoy paths."

Kael stirred faintly on my back, a twitch of pain visible in his brow. I crouched lower, letting his body rest against the moss-covered wall as gently as I could manage in this form.

Cain pulled out a patch injector from his tactical band.

"Pain relief. Short-term nerve stabilizer. It won't heal him, but it'll keep him from crashing. I only have one dose, never expected we would find ourselves here or I would have brought more."

I gave a low grunt of agreement and shifted one arm back enough to let him access Kael's side. He pressed the patch down, watched it seal, then looked up at me.

"We made it," he said quietly.

"For now," I muttered. "But they'll sweep back. And next time, they'll bring more than Gammas."





Cain leaned back, resting his head against the stone. "Then we hit them first."

I didn't answer.

I was already thinking about the next move. About Eve. About what they did to Kael. About the horn—and what it stirred inside me.

About the part of me that still didn't know if I had been in control back there.

My claws curled against the earth.

The silence was heavy.

With restraint.

I could hear every heartbeat in the shelter—mine, Cain's, the men crouched in the shadows beyond the overhang. Even Kael's—irregular, too shallow for comfort.

A twig snapped somewhere above.

Cain's eyes opened. "They're looping back."

I growled low, just enough for the men to hear it. Hold position.

Cain shifted fully again, his silver form silent





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now. His eyes locked on mine, waiting.

And then...

Nothing.

Just the wind.

Leaves rustling like ghosts. No footsteps. No howls. The Gammas had moved past.

For now. 1

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