

## 381 Sage

Hades 1

But...

There were no windows. Even cells had windows.

I detected the door and moved toward it. I surveyed it—no handle, no hinges, just an outline in the wall.

I pressed a palm to it, tentatively...

Click.

I jumped back, shifted instantly—hackles raised, claws ready for an assault.

My heart remained in my throat as another click shattered the serene but eerie air of the windowless room.

It was obvious: I was about to meet the people responsible for putting me here. I wasn't taking any chances. I would go out swinging like a madman.



Some part of me knew that despite the adrenaline, grief over Kael was clouding reason. I didn't even have what was left of him here. Only Fenrir knew what these people... had done to his body.

I had failed so many times, in so many ways—pathetically and inexcusable. I could already imagine Elliot's face when I'd have to tell him his uncle Kael was dead and there was no body to lay to rest. Or the way the flecks of blue and green in Eve's eyes would shatter... not with anger, but something worse. 3

Disappointment.

Not in the mission.

In me. 1

Another click. A hiss.

My ears twitched. Air vent? No... too direct. This was a seal. A pressure lock.

Another click. A hiss.

Then it hit me.

Scent.



Subtle at first, then gut-punch strong.

Not blood. Not sweat. Not sterile citrus and steel.

Food.

Real food. Warm, fresh—spiced meat, something roasted... bread?

My body moved before thought could catch up.

A low growl tore from my throat as I lunged toward the door. The scent didn't match the chill of this place, didn't make sense in this void of warmth and color. But my instincts didn't care. They were starved. Grieving. Ready to rip apart anything that dared bait me with comfort.

The light beyond the threshold flared, a shape moved—

I pounced.

Fangs bared, claws out, a snarl ripping through the silence—

Then I stopped.

Mid-lunge.



Because it registered.

Pigtails.

Short height.

A dull, faded flowery dress with lace at the hem.  
A small metal tray wobbling in her hands, the  
scent of food now overwhelming.

And a little smile.

A child.

A little girl. Maybe six? Seven? No older than  
Elliot.

She didn't flinch. She didn't cry. She simply  
looked up at me like I was some kind of  
oversized, confused puppy who'd knocked over  
a vase.

I froze, inches from her, arms braced against the  
doorway. My breath was ragged. My claws still  
extended.

She tilted her head.

"Are you going to eat me too?" she asked, voice  
like a soft bubble in the silence.





What the hell—

I backed away slowly, one trembling step at a time. My claws retracted with a reluctant twitch.

The girl walked in, completely unfazed, and set the tray on the corner table. The scent followed her like a halo—smoked meat, stewed roots, warm bread. Real. Tangible. Kind.

She turned back to me, hands folded neatly in front of her. "You looked hungry."

My mouth opened. No sound came out.

She blinked up at me. "They said I should be nice to you. But not too nice."

I found my voice then, hoarse and broken.  
"Who... is they?"

She smiled wider. "My people. I am a queen, you know. At least, that's what the commander calls me." 1

At the mention of a higher authority, some part of my shock fell away, replaced by apprehension.  
"I want to see him..."

She crooked a brow, hazel eyes flashing with



wariness and curiosity. "You want to hurt him, don't you?"

I blinked, but she answered quickly.

"Your friends are okay," she told me.

And no matter how much I tried to read into her words, they sounded genuine.

"Kael..." I found myself blurting as I turned from her to make my way to the door.

"The blonde pretty one was in bad shape. They say his heart stopped. You won't be able to leave this room, by the way. It's locked again," she added, like she was talking about the weather forecast.

My head snapped back. "Is..."

Hope was a wickedly devastating thing, lodging itself in my throat.

"The Deltas told me he is stable. They barely saved him." 5

At the mention of Deltas—healers—my shoulders momentarily relaxed before tensing again. She could be lying. She reminded me of Elliot, but



while my son was quietly observant and kept his powers hidden, this little girl let it be known she was watching, assessing, waiting—while dropping just enough information to keep you distracted and desperate for more.

That commander had been on point calling her queen.

"You should eat. Or should I feed you?"

This girl... GIRL... turned her back to me, picked up a piece of bread, and reached it out.

My eyes widened to the size of saucers. "Aren't you afraid of me? I am dangerous."

She dropped her hand in an instant, her eyes flickering with something akin to rage before her brows scrunched, making her look even younger. "You're dangerous, I know. But you cannot hold a candle to Alpha Darius Valmont. I doubt anyone can."

The way she spoke said she had had a personal encounter with the tyrant Alpha... and it had scarred her. Changed her, fundamentally.

It was like Elliot all over again—except his





monster had been Felicia. Hers had been Darius. It was slowly making sense why she was so fearless.

"What is your name?" I asked.

"My mother named me Sage," she replied easily. "My name was the last thing she said before they made her drink platinum. It burned through her. Melted her from the inside."

Her eyes told me that was just one in a long list of horrible things she had had to witness. For what, exactly?

I simply let her talk.

Her little hands clenched into fists that turned her knuckles white, standing out against olive, but slightly pale, skin. It looked like Vitamin D deficiency; I would know.

"You successfully infiltrated the Alpha's secret facility, The Caulterium. No one has ever been successful. You caused quite the ruckus, from what we heard from underground. So that makes you an enemy to Darius. But an enemy of my enemy is my friend. So that makes you our friend."





She spoke nothing like a child. Her cadence was too precise, too rehearsed, like she'd been trained to wield her words like a weapon. No, not trained. Tempered. Sharpened by cruelty.

"So that makes you our friend," she repeated, brushing her palm down her dress like it was a speech she'd been practicing her whole life.

My throat clenched. I had no words. Only the echo of our friend pounding through my skull.

She looked up at me again, this time with a strange softness that did not belong in the eyes of a child who had watched her mother melt from the inside.

"Any questions, Your Majesty?"

"So you know what I am?"

"A Lycan..." She seemed surprised by my question. "You have fangs. They're pretty, by the way."

The hell—

"I am a Lycan."

"I'm aware."



It just wasn't... landing. Not really.

She sensed my confusion. "You expect me to hate you. We are not like the others. We see beyond the... propag—ganda." Her lips quirked up a bit at the use of the big word, pride flashing in her eyes like she'd nailed a test. "We know who our true enemy is. And he is no Lycan. He is a werewolf. We are not fooled, my people and I."

"Who are your people?"

Her lips quirked up, pride flashing in her hazel depths. "We are the Eclipse Rebellion. We know of the Blood Moon—and I'm sure you do too." 1

