

42 Stormy Seas

Hades~ 1

I left her to sleep after her pheromones went down and left her room. I made my way back to my room and took a shower. Still dripping with water, I shuffled toward the painting on my wall. I paused there for a bit, just looking at it.

I reached out and touched the moon painted in. I pressed the hidden button beneath the moon, hearing the soft click as the mechanism released. The painting swung open, revealing the entrance to the room I kept hidden from everyone.

I stepped inside, the familiar scent of old canvas and oil paint greeting me like an old friend. Moonlight seeped through the narrow window, casting silvery beams across the space. Easels were scattered around, each covered with dusty tarps, forgotten remnants of a time when I used to create.

I ran a hand over one of the covered frames, feeling the rough fabric beneath my fingers. For a moment, I just stood there, surrounded by ghosts of what used to be, before everything changed.

It was strange coming back here, a room filled

with memories I wasn't sure I could endure. But I couldn't stay away either. Not tonight.

"Your eyes are like stormy seas."

Her voice rang through my head like a distant bell, soft yet unrelenting. I clenched my jaw, fighting the pull of the memory. The day she gave me the painting that now stood guard over this place, I had felt something then. Something I hadn't allowed myself to feel in a long time.

I turned my gaze to the covered easels again. Her paintings were her eyes now that she was gone, and I could not bear the weight of her gaze. Like a coward, I covered them up. I wasn't worthy of it then, and I sure as hell wasn't worthy of it now.

Her presence lingered in this room, trapped between the layers of paint and forgotten canvases. Every brushstroke, every line, was a reminder of what I lost, of what I had let get destroyed. I closed my eyes, pushing away the thought that I had no right to mourn her. Not until I brought retribution on all those responsible. All those responsible for the deaths that day. The people who sent the beast. Or at least the man: Darius Valmont. I would tear down his pack until it was nothing but dust. There would be no escape for him, or his family, or his council. 4

Every heinous deed would be paid for tenfold. There were no innocents among them, not anymore. Not the children, not the mothers—even the unborn would perish for the sins of their king. The Lycans had been too lenient for centuries, but now I was king, and things would change. There would be no more hostility between Lycans and werewolves because werewolves would simply cease to exist.

I should've left this room behind, buried it like I buried everything else. But something in me wouldn't allow it. I ran my hand over the edge of another canvas, feeling the rough texture beneath my fingertips.

I dragged my hand along the edges of the covered canvas, feeling the grit of dust and time clinging to my skin. I wanted to bury this room, this reminder of a life I could never go back to, but I couldn't. Not while the weight of vengeance anchored me here. Not while her memory was tied to every corner of this space.

I turned away from the easels, the rage simmering beneath my skin, a familiar companion. Darius Valmont. His name alone tasted like ash on my tongue. He was the one responsible. The one who let the beast tear through that night, leaving nothing but blood and death in its wake. I saw her body fall, saw the light in her eyes fade, and I knew—he was

behind it. And his pack, his precious council, they all had their hands in it.

They thought they could hide behind their power, their politics. But I had something they didn't—time. I could wait, watch, and when the moment was right, I'd rip their world apart like they did mine. Piece by piece, life by life, until nothing remained but the ruin of their empire.

My breath came in ragged pulls, the memories of that night playing out again in the darkness of my mind. I could still hear the screams, the snarls of the beast, feel the heat of the flames as they consumed everything. Everyone.

Her face was the last thing I saw. Her eyes—those vibrant green eyes—drained of life.

I inhaled sharply, pulling myself back from the edge. It wasn't time. Not yet. But soon. Darius and his pack would pay, and there would be no mercy when the moment came.

I would do whatever it took to be worthy of that woman, even if she was now dead and buried. Even if it meant I would have to manipulate her murderer's daughter. Slither my way into her heart and possess it as though it were never hers. It would be exhilarating. When it all came together and the foolish girl realized that it had all been a lie, I would watch as the light left her eyes, just as the light left hers five years ago in

my arms.

When I was done and had no use for her any longer, she would slit her wrists once more, and this time I would not stop or rescue her. I would watch as another Valmont perished under the weight of my vengeance. I would watch as blood drained from her wounds until there was no life left. 1

I looked around the room one last time, the ghosts still haunting me from every corner. Maybe one day I'd have the strength to face what was hidden beneath these tarps. But not today. Today, I had to focus.

I turned and walked out, the door sliding shut behind me with a soft click, sealing the room—and the memories—away once again.

There were bigger things to deal with.

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