



## 427 Two More

Hades 1

It was so out of left field that I froze, and so did Kael—but still he shrugged, turned. "Feeding us gossip. How original."

She grew desperate, perhaps believing we didn't care—that was because she wasn't aware of our identity. "You want to get to Obsidian Pack?" she asked. "I doubt you crossed border on your way in."

Kael crossed his arms, raising a brow. "Reason?"

"You simply can't," she said flatly. "If it's not the war side, every other part is guarded heavier than you can imagine. And that was before they started hunting for Lycans inside the border. Now? Triple the surveillance. Flying won't help you. They'll shoot you out of the sky."

Kael's jaw tightened. "We can manage. And even if we couldn't—I don't trust you."

Her grip on the boy shifted, but her stare didn't waver. "I've seen it. That was where my parents were killed."

Both Kael and I raised a brow.

"You said your parents died because they were conscripted," Kael pressed.

Her lips thinned. "That was the simplified story. They survived conscription. But after they left the front, they knew what was coming. Survivors like them didn't last long. The ones who showed promise were forced into Darius's main army. If they refused, they—and their families—vanished. Taken to Cauterium." Her voice caught, but she forced it steady. "So we ran. And they were gunned down for it."

I believed her. Maera had told me the same—Gammas who lived long enough to prove their strength rarely walked free. Darius consumed them or erased them.

"Then how are you still alive?" I asked. "I doubt Darius had mercy."

She scoffed. "Mercy? Darius has no such sentiment. He spared us because of my older sister."

My chest tightened. "Why?"

Her eyes darkened, something fractured lingering there. "Because she resembled Eve Valmont. He executed her in Eve's place... and let us walk." 5

The world rocked beneath us, her words sucking the air from our lungs. Still, we somehow managed not to react outwardly.

Her expression fell, realizing she was losing us. "I have proof," she blurted, reaching into her blouse and retrieving a picture. "Lily looked like Eve." She offered it to Kael, who accepted it. I angled my neck so I could see.

It was the image of a family: father, mother, a little boy, and two girls.

My eyes widened as they zeroed in on the taller daughter. Blonde hair, but her face... the same slightly angled features tempered with softness. Her eyes were blue, but other than the hair and eyes she was Eve's doppelgänger. A little dye, a pair of contacts—and she could have passed for a third Valmont daughter.

Her hand trembled as she held the photo out. "Do you believe me now?"

Kael studied it, jaw set. I could tell by the furrow in his brow that he believed enough to be unsettled.

She pressed on, desperate but steady. "I'm not as ignorant as you think. I can be useful. There are better routes—routes you don't know—to reach



Obsidian. I can help you get there. All I ask is that you save me and my brother. If you can't forgive me for threatening you... then leave me behind after. Just take him to safety. Take him to Obsidian."

Kael's head snapped up, eyes narrowing. "Why? Why would you trust Lycans over your own kind? And why the hell did you say Darius must have him?"

Her grip tightened on the boy. She swallowed, meeting his stare without flinching. "Because you saved us. Because I'm still breathing after holding a knife to your throats—that has to count for something. And because..." she hesitated, her voice thinning to a whisper, "...you're not bad. Not like him. Not like them."

The words hung there, fragile, but true.

Then she drew in a sharp breath, as though ripping open something she had kept buried. "When they spared us, they didn't let us walk free. They dragged us first to the Dome."

Kael's posture stiffened. "The what?"

"The Dome," she said, voice dropping to a rasp. "A fortress. A prison. Modern, clinical... built for holding prisoners that never come back out."



That's where we were taken."

Both Kael and I knew she was talking about the Cauterium.

"That's where they noticed Lily looked like Eve Valmont." Her voice cracked, but she forced the words. "They made her play the role. And when it was done... she was gone."

The boy whimpered in her arms, and she hushed him softly before continuing. "Micah was five. He saw everything. He saw her die. And not long after... the stress broke him. Weeks later he shifted. Too young." 7

Kael swore under his breath, face hardening. I didn't need to look at him to know the fury simmering under his skin.

"Children that shifted too early were conscripted. Everyone knew it." Her arms shook as she clutched the boy tighter. "I've been trying to keep him hidden ever since. That's why we were so far from home when you found us. He'd run again. I ran after him."

It clicked. The distance between the school and where we'd found her wasn't a coincidence. She'd chased him across half the district, risking curfew and patrols, because she knew what



would happen if he was caught.

And for the first time, I understood the fear that had driven her every step.

I would have done the same. Worse.

Kael's eyes met mine, a silent conversation. The inclination to help was there—but the stakes were high enough with just the two of us, let alone adding another and a child.

"We'll have to leave this place before the patrol rotation," she urged. "Even if you don't take us. You have to keep going now. But please—pass the—"

"You can come," I cut her off.

She was so stunned all she did was stand there as Kael grabbed the kid and tossed him easily on top of me before climbing up behind them.

"To the skies," Kael prompted, like I was some flying mule.

"I hope your Alpha will be lenient for bringing werewolves over—"

But she yelped as I launched myself into the air and straight into the clouds. We had to pass over Halem before morning. 4

