

## Hades 1

I stirred awake, the sun burning my eyes, making them water. I let out a yawn just as footsteps approached me from behind.

"Finally," Kael's voice invaded the haze as I rose. "You slept like a baby."

I faced him to see an easy smile on his lips. I raised my head to gauge the time. Through the canopy of trees, the sun peaked through. It was at its climax meaning by my estimation, it was noon.

Like I expected, immediately after clearing Harlem just as the sun peeked through the horizon and we had landed in the woods of the outskirts of the Silverpine pack's industrial city—I was knocked out cold from exhaustion and the strenuous exertion.

Two rescue missions in one night during our escape mission had taken its toll.

I yawned again as Kael handed me a bottle.

My stomach churned at the simple thought of chugging water down my parched throat. I



needed something more—blood.

I already made the gesture to refuse the bottle when Kael cut me off by turning the cap.

I stilled, red haze flaring in my vision as I finally actually looked down at the contents of the bottle he had been holding out to me. Red thick liquid that sent my mouth into a watering frenzy.

I grabbed it and chugged it. It went down like poorly refined beer but satisfied an itch that nothing else could.

"We can't have you ripping into the necks of our passengers," he stated like I was gulping down bloodwine and not game's blood. There was no point hiding from Kael, not when he would simply adapt. Even when I didn't want him to.

"How are they?" I panted once I had drained the contents of the bottle.

"They have both eaten," he informed, kicking at a dried, brown leaf. "Made sure they ate light so they don't break your back tonight."

A rumble reached my ears and my eyes sharpened on him. "Have you not eaten?" I asked.

His expression did not shift even as he lied to me. "I ate just a little but you know how much of



a glutton Ajax can be." The lie slipped out of his lips like they were lubricated with oil.

My eyes narrowed. "Kael..."

"About the route that she talked about, the one we have to use tonight if we are going to get to Obsidian before daybreak," he effortlessly spun the conversation to a different topic.

I knew what he was doing and he knew that I knew what he was doing. For a moment, we were locked in a stare before I relented with a sigh. I would force some food into him later before nightfall.

"What did she say?" I asked. "What secret path don't we know about?"

The casual easiness of his posture bled out as his expression turned serious. "You have to hear this yourself. Maybe the reason our spy network has been unable to uncover anything substantial for almost a decade from his residence, the Lunar Heights. She knows a lot more than we could have ever anticipated. I'm starting to think it was fate that brought her across our path."

Without another word, he turned around and walked away and I followed. Apprehension breathing under my skin as I tried to prepare for





what we were about to learn.

We reached the camp site, both of them—the boy and his sister—huddled together. They raised their heads as we approached.

The woman instantly paled, pulling the boy in closer. Then her expression shuttered as if she caught herself, and she spoke. "Good afternoon," she muttered, her voice shaking slightly.

There was nothing good about the afternoon. But I nodded in acknowledgment of her greeting.

The boy blinked up at me seemingly unaffected by my presence. "Hello," he greeted as I sat with Kael doing the same beside him.

"Hello," I returned.

"You look like that bad Alpha on the television," he remarked, the woman gasping and slamming her hand on his mouth.

I smiled, knowing well that there was no bad ruler who didn't use propaganda. And he was not wrong. What felt like a lifetime ago, I wanted the entire population decimated.

I had changed. That was what I wanted to believe. Thanks to Eve.



Longing stirred anew, the dull ache in my chest sharpening. "Maybe we look alike," I offered.

Then my eyes met the woman's. "State your name, your real full name." The words were a threat wrapped in something softer.

She braced her shoulders, swallowing thickly. "My full name is Theadosia Weiss, Thea for short."

Both Kael and I stiffened where we sat as the name went off like a grenade. The surname was familiar to me, it was one I would never forget.

Kael glanced at me like he knew what I was thinking. Weiss was somehow not that rare but still, could it all be a coincidence?

Colonel Victor Weiss had been one of the most ruthless in the last war that I had ever coordinated with Leon when he was still alive. He had gained a reputation amongst our Gammas for his strategy and the masterful art of surprise as a military tool.

But that was until he simply disappeared soon after the stalemate between our packs two years before Leon died. He seemed to just vanish, never to be seen again on the field.



Thea's face was suspicious too as she assessed us. "Yes, Colonel Victor Weiss was my father."

We both blinked, but I found my tongue quickly. "But the man in the picture you showed us looks nothing like him."

"The wars changed him, twisted him until he couldn't recognize himself anymore," she blurted, her voice hard like we had offended her. "He wanted to come home to us, but..." Her lips trembled but she bit them. Hard enough for her face to darken. "I will give you the full story."

"We are all ears."

"Soon after Micah was born, my parents were forced to conscript or they would face consequences. They both left home and served the three years together and survived. It should have ended that way until my mother's battalion was in trouble and my father shared a strategy that turned the tides in our favor."

He might as well have painted himself neon green. "That put him in the sights of the higher-ups."

She nodded, clenching her hands until her knuckles turned white. "Lily was sixteen and they promised him she would be exempted from





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military service if he served as Lieutenant Colonel and with his good OER, he was soon promoted to Colonel."

I could attest that his Officer Evaluation Report would be impeccable. He was one of the best military officers in Darius's Gamma regiment. "He would keep rising in the ranks but he didn't want that."

"Yes, but it was impossible by then." Her face turned grave. "He was invited by Alpha Darius himself."

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## 434 Steroid?

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He had not just been noticed by the high-ups but by the supreme commander himself. There was no escaping the military then.

"What happened then?" Kael asked.

Sweat beaded her forehead now as she held her brother tighter. "The meeting was not at the Alpha's residence, the Lunar Heights. It does not even have a place on our maps, nor yours, I'm sure. My father knew nothing about this place."

I straightened.

"It was a secret city. Alpha Darius called it Malrikian Eden. His paradise. His utopia. The city for the Worthy—that was what the people there were called."

I exchanged looks with Kael. As much as I wanted to dismiss it as the outlandish story of some war-scarred colonel, Ellen had spoken about Darius' inner circle and how they would be protected. They must be the ones called the Worthy. That much was clear. I had expected a safe house—but a safe city? The bigger picture





was forming, and I was starting to suspect that our ending up in Silverpine was fate.

"Alpha Darius told him about the final war with your pack. My father said he spoke of it like prophecy, like he had no doubt in his mind. He promised my father he would be promoted to general."

"That's quite a jump," Kael remarked.

"My father thought so too. But Darius said if he survived the war, he and his family would join the Worthy in the city. That was only half the visit. They led him to a laboratory and tested a serum on him. They said it was a classified steroid for the Gammas, and that he was being honored with the chance to use it. My father had no choice. But nothing happened to him. He was even given a dose of the serum as some kind of keepsake."

"So your father had a bad feeling after the visit," Kael offered.

"It was worse than that," Thea whispered, her voice barely above a breath. "My father immediately knew there was no way he'd be let off the hook after being exposed to so much classified information. So he tried to run with his

family."

Kael leaned forward. "That's how he died with your mother," he said, raising a brow. "But if he knew about this other route, why take the more dangerous path that led to both their deaths?"

Thea's grip on her brother tightened. "Because the other path was over the hidden city—Malrikian Eden."

Both Kael and I stared at her like she'd lost her mind. Hope gave way to painful despair.

"Wouldn't the security of a hidden city be even more intense, since it has to stay hidden?" I asked.

But Thea only shook her head. "There's a reason the city is technically non-existent and not on any map. Because it simply isn't there—not to the naked eye, anyway. The city is protected by an illusion that makes it impossible to see. You see endless woods, but the city is right there. There aren't heavy patrols, just minimal guards. The only things close to frightening are the stone statues my father said looked like petrified creatures—no actual Gammas. To them, they're safe. Why guard something that technically isn't there?"



"Nothing is more hidden than something in plain sight," I murmured, stunned but still dubious. Our planet was small—how had satellites missed something like this? But then again, if we were talking about Darius...

Thea must have read our doubt on our faces. "There's a route there—a straight line from the border, directly opposite Obsidian. It's like crossing the border without anyone shooting you down. No eyes watching. No guns at the ready."

My eyes narrowed. "Why didn't your father take that path then?"

She swallowed hard. "They would be alerted to any movement at ground level. So moving through or around the invisible city would've been suicide. Flight was the only option, but if our family had procured an aircraft after that visit, it would have been the same as announcing their escape."

Understanding dawned slowly. "But since I can fly silently enough to catch a Gamma off guard..." I said, the pieces clicking.

"You can discreetly fly over the city," she finished with a nod. "No one expects what they can't see,





especially above something that doesn't exist."

I leaned forward, suspicion sharp in my voice.  
"How do you know the route if the city is invisible and hidden?"

Without flinching, Thea reached down and pulled off her metal prosthetic foot. She twisted something at the ankle joint, and it popped open like a container. From inside, she drew out a thin case.

"My father made a map," she said simply, opening the case with careful fingers.

Inside, nestled in faded velvet, lay a folded piece of parchment and something else—a glass vial containing a clear, pinkish fluid that caught the dappled sunlight filtering through the trees.

The moment I saw it, Eve's scent hit me like a physical blow, wafting through the air and nearly cleaving me in half. My eyes sharpened on the vial as every muscle in my body went rigid. The familiar ache in my chest throbbed with renewed intensity.

Kael took the map, but I snatched the vial before he could reach for it. I uncorked it with trembling fingers, and Eve's scent flooded my senses completely—honey and lavender and

something uniquely hers that nearly knocked me backward. The longing that had been a dull ache erupted into something raw and desperate.

"What is this?" I demanded, my voice harsher than I intended.

Thea blinked in confusion. "It was the serum souvenir my father kept after his visit to the hidden city. The one they tested on him—"

"What is it?" Kael asked, looking between my stricken face and the vial.

I stared at the pinkish liquid, pieces falling into place with sickening clarity. "This was extracted, isolated, and distilled from Eve's blood."

Kael's eyes widened as the truth struck. "The so-called steroid is—"

"It's the Fenrir's Marker from her blood," I finished, my voice barely a whisper.

Kael let out a low whistle. "Fate has a cruel sense of humor," he said, his gaze shifting to Thea and her brother, who had both paled again, clearly baffled by my violent reaction to what they'd thought was just some old military experiment. He clapped my shoulder, grounding me while I was still spiraling. "We're getting home by



morning, at this point. It's written in the stars." 1

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