

443 Lily, is that you?

Eve 1

The phone chirped on my lap, cleaving through the taut silence of the car.

I flinched, Victoriana glancing at me through the rearview mirror, Montague's gaze cutting to the phone still demanding attention.

My hands shook as I quickly picked up the call, and the squad leader's voice rang through the receiver, his tone heightened with anxiety and shock. "There is a woman with the creature. She seems violent—she won't let us near the creature. She seems to be protecting it. But she's injured, missing a foot, and she is not backing down." 3

In the background through the receiver, a piercing female voice filtered through. "Stay away from us!" she snapped, her tone feral.

"We are close by. We will be there in ten minutes," I promised. "Make sure to contain the situation. Don't hurt her or give her a reason to hurt you. Wait for my orders. We are on our way."

I cut the call and tried not to spiral as the next few minutes to the border felt like the walk up to a guillotine. What would we find? Was the report of some nightmarish creature just after we had been educated on a specimen called a Hybrid Primus just a coincidence, or...

I shook my head as if trying to shake off the thoughts themselves. I swallowed the painful lump in my throat, gripping the leather of the car seat for dear life as we slowly approached our location. The border was waiting, and so was the creature. 1

The border checkpoint came into view, but it was unlike anything I'd ever seen. Our guards had formed a wide perimeter, their weapons drawn but pointed down—a defensive stance rather than offensive. Even from a distance, I could see something massive and dark sprawled on the ground, with a smaller figure crouched protectively beside it.

As we pulled closer, the scene became clearer and more terrifying. The creature was exactly as Dr. Blackwood had illustrated—crimson membrane stretched over a massive frame, those terrible bat-like wings spread across the frost-covered ground. But it wasn't moving.



My breath caught at the overwhelming magnitude of its size, my chest constricting. Even as the Gammas surrounded it, aimed and at the ready, the sheer size of it dwarfed them all. It looked like bullets could never work.

Then what the hell could have had the capability to bring it down?

The car stopped, and we all exited the car with a shared urgency. The scene before us heightened my terror as we ran closer.

The Fenrir's chain around my heart tugged so painfully, breathing became a hassle.

When the Gammas noticed us, they stepped closer to the creature, ensuring we were protected in case there was a reaction from the creature that could harm us.

Immediately, the same shriek rang out from within the circle of armed men.

"No, stay away from us!" She growled. "Don't touch them." She screamed, as if the ragged words tore their way up her throat. "Don't you dare."

I raced faster as Gammas came to meet us, handing me a weapon but I refused it as we

approached the scene.

The last thing I needed at this moment was a gun that could mistakenly go off in my currently unstable, clammy hands.

The barricade of Gammas made way for me as I tried to reach the front, the creature's unmoving form already looming before I could even get to it. My heart pounded, thunderous in my chest.

Sweat beading on my brow, hands too clammy, my legs brought me closer to hope or despair that would be too great to bear. The Gammas made way for me, their faces blurring to the background of the chaos that wrecked my mind and body.

At my final step, my legs stilled as I took in the impossibility I gazed at.

The monster... one that somehow called my name.

>"Rhea?" I muttered, my voice trembling, unsure even in my own mind.

>"I know you feel it too, dear," She had grown very quiet since Hades' departure, she had slowly receded into herself for reasons that I understood as well as she did. But now, her

voice quivered in my head, mirroring the fragile flame of hope in our shared heart.

"Don't touch them," the woman's voice ripped me out of my head.

I finally let myself notice the person I had heard over the phone.

My eyes caught her movements in the dim light of the early morning, how she limped around the creature, her stance not offensive, rather defensive and desperate.

"Leave them!" She screamed, as she came back around to where I stood, just as I took another step towards the creature that still lay unmoving.

Her expression was etched with a deep sorrow but layered with a savageness that I found myself able to relate to.

I stopped dead in my tracks as her eyes met mine, chest heaving, her blonde hair partially caked with dirt. Her body seemed to freeze up, her eyes widening to saucers as if she recognized me though I didn't recognize her.

For a long time, we simply stared, everything else fading.

I watched her face, as her lips quivered and

suddenly her shoulders slackened as if all her strength had fled as she moved towards me, her steps uneven, something akin to horror, awe and hope flashing in her watering eyes.

I moved towards her and in response she limped faster towards me. "Lily," her words cracked. "Is that you?" 2

I did not show my surprise at what she called me, I closed the distance between us.

I could hear the panicked voices of the Gammas around but I let her take me in her arms, her body ice cold as our skin touched. She gripped me, tremors coursing through her slight body.

"Lily, you didn't die. You came back like you always do," she held me, squeezing me like a lifeline. "I am sorry, I didn't save you from Alpha Darius. I am sorry, I am so sorry," her voice dissolved to sobbing. "Please, forgive me."

The mention of my father's name made me stiffen, but she didn't seem to notice.

I kept my eyes on the monster she had been guarding, my heart picking up pace as the Fenrir's chain around my chest pulled tighter with each second. The massive crimson form lay motionless, those leathery wings spread across

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the frost-covered ground like a fallen cathedral
of nightmare and power. 1

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