



459 Eavesdropping

Hades 1

The moment Eve lifted Sophie into her arms and disappeared down the hallway, the temperature in the corridor dropped by several degrees. The guards' professional masks slipped.

"I guess you'll want to have a quick discussion," I said, raising a brow. I could force the information out of them, but I wasn't going to do that—to Cain or to Sophie.

They looked at me, expressions tense. They tried to keep their faces inscrutable, but to no avail.

"I'll give you some time and privacy to think about what you want to do," I lied. Not about the time part—but definitely about the privacy part.

Heightened sight hadn't been the only quirk that came with adapting to hybridism; my hearing had also improved—significantly.

I walked away from them, not too far, but far enough to give them the illusion of the privacy I had promised.

The moment they believed I was out of earshot, I heard soft and harsh muttering. With my hands

in my pockets, I tilted my head slightly, letting my ears catch and focus the sound.

"What the hell are you doing, Freddie?" one of them hissed, his hand moving instinctively toward his concealed weapon. "You just compromised everything the Don has been protecting for years."

Freddie's winter-blue eyes didn't shift. "You heard the intel. Two werewolves brought across the borders by the Alpha himself—or what they believed was him. It's hard to believe the flying-nightmare story, but he was gone for weeks, and then he reappears. If the Don informed the Alpha personally about the young mistress, that has to count for something."

"It could be a trap," another guard cut in, his voice sharp with suspicion. "The Don could've been captured—tortured for information. We can't just assume—"

"Enough," a third voice interrupted—older, steadier. "We all saw the crash landing. Two werewolves, just like Freddie said. The Alpha's story might be credible—if he's suddenly grown some empathy for werewolves. Have you seen the way he treats his wife? Mind you, she is one of them. He doesn't have her nailed against the



wall."

I stood perfectly still, staring at nothing in particular.

So Cain had eyes and ears in the military ranks. Of course he did. My brother had always been thorough when it came to intelligence gathering. He wouldn't have this much power and loyalty without a sense of omnipresence. The real question was how deep his network ran—and how much control he maintained in his absence.

"The Don has been gone for weeks," the suspicious one continued, his voice dropping lower. "Do you know what's happening in the lower ranks? Marcus is already making moves, talking about taking over operations. Viktor's faction is stockpiling weapons. We're barely holding this together."

Ah. There it was. The internal power struggle I'd suspected. Cain's syndicate was organized, disciplined, efficient—but only because he was the iron fist keeping everyone in line. With him gone, the structure was fracturing into factional warfare.

They were devolving into a headless organism—just waiting for someone to take control or for

everything to collapse entirely.

"Which is exactly why we need allies," Freddie said, his voice cutting through the tension. "The Alpha has resources. Military backing. And clearly, he cares about the young mistress—or he wouldn't be here playing Uncle Luci."

The words hit harder than they should have. Playing Uncle Luci. Except it hadn't felt like playing. When Sophie had looked at me with those bright eyes, when she'd shrieked with joy and thrown her arms around my neck—that had been real. More real than anything I'd felt in decades.

"But can we trust him?" another guard asked, the question hanging in the air like smoke. "His rivalry with the Don has been unending since the Alpha throne was up for grabs after the killing of the late Alpha."

"You've forgotten why the Don was adamant about getting the Alpha throne," someone else countered. "He wanted to protect his barely one-month-old daughter—especially after he witnessed his brother devolve into insanity when his wife was murdered by Silverpine werewolves. The very thing his daughter is."



Another agreed. "It wasn't greed—it was desperation. The Don knew what his brother would become. He saw Lucien die in that black room and Hades emerge. Then his wife died, and with whatever shit Alpha Lucas pumped him full of, he became a ticking bomb—nothing but cold-blooded payback. He knew that if the Alpha discovered his daughter's existence, she'd be executed without question."

"And yet here we are," Freddie said quietly. "The Alpha didn't execute her. He smiled at her. Called her little star. Held her like she was precious." He tried to hide the softness in his tone, but failed miserably. He clearly cared deeply for Sophie.

"Once," the suspicious one countered. "He did it once. That doesn't erase decades of hatred and half a decade more of bloodthirsty revenge for what Silverpine took from him."

"No," the older voice agreed. "But it's a start. And right now, a start is more than we have. Marcus will tear this organization apart within a month. Viktor will turn us into a glorified weapons cartel. And the young mistress will be caught in the crossfire of whatever power struggle follows. I don't—"

Silence fell, heavy and deliberate.



"The tunnels," Freddie said finally. "If we show him the tunnels, we're betting everything on his word—on the idea that Uncle Luci is still somewhere inside Alpha Hades."

"And if we don't show him," the older one replied, "we're betting everything on our ability to survive without allies, without the Don, and with internal collapse imminent. Which sounds like the better gamble to you?"

More silence followed. I could hear them shifting, weapons clicking softly as hands moved away from them.

"We verify first," the suspicious one said. "Code word from the Don. Proof of life and mental faculty. Then we consider showing the Alpha anything."

"Agreed," Freddie said. "But we move fast. Every day the Don is gone, we lose more control. And if what the Luna announced is true—if there's a war coming—we can't afford to be divided when it arrives."

If only they knew how close the Bloodmoon was...

I heard footsteps approaching and straightened, turning to face them with an expression that



suggested I'd heard nothing at all.

Freddie stopped a respectful distance away, his winter eyes meeting mine without flinching.

"Alpha, we need to verify the Don's status before we can share any sensitive information. I'm sure you understand."

"Of course," I replied smoothly. "You'll get a picture of your Don in a Silverpine facility within the day."

They froze.

"We escaped—you don't have to worry. And the quicker you give me the coordinates to the tunnels, your Don will be back before the week is done."

They exchanged dubious but tentatively hopeful glances. Then Freddie turned back to face me.

"Of course, Alpha."

"In the meantime," I said, "Sophie comes with us to Obsidian Tower. She'll be safe there, and Eve will make sure she's comfortable. If the proof isn't convincing enough, you can take her back—no interference from me."

It was ironic that the picture that had come with the letter from Silverpine would now serve as



proof that Cain and I had been on the mission there.

The guards exchanged glances, but Freddie nodded. "But I'll be coming with her."

He waited for a reaction from me—a refusal, discomfort...

I simply nodded. Sophie would need a familiar face in the overwhelming tower. She was used to a simple environment; the Tower could be jarring for her.

We already had Elliot, Micah, and now Sophie. It made sense to keep them all together—and with Lucinda already doing the babysitting, it would be perfect.

"You have yourself a deal, Freddie," I replied.

His eyes narrowed. "I'm thankful for your willingness to compromise. But Alpha—if anything happens to her..."

"Then I take full responsibility once my brother returns."

The other guards didn't speak, but their eyes said enough. They had questions—many of them—but preferred not to voice them.