

469 How Times Have Changed

Hades 1

The manufacturing of the domes was in full swing by the time we left the last plant. We'd been promised all five would be completed within four weeks.

As the car zoomed toward our next location—Freddie directing our chauffeur from the front seat—Lucas Stavros's voice slipped through my thoughts like a ghost. Which, I supposed, he was.

"They taught us to count the years of injustice like coin. I learned to count them as a debt that must be paid in full. Only then, I told myself, would the world be made even."

He'd been referring to the werewolves.

My father's plan had been absolute: complete elimination. The blueprint he'd designed for Silverpine's destruction had been inherited by my brother Leon, who'd refined it, expanded it, made it more efficient. Then it had passed to me when I took the throne—this legacy of revenge disguised as justice, of genocide disguised as survival.



Each Stavros who came before me had died with that vision unfulfilled, but the hatred endured. It survived like a virus, passed down through blood and oath, waiting for the Alpha strong enough to finally execute it and the perfect time to initiate the full offensive.

The infrastructure had been built for that purpose. The Arrays. The domes. The technology. All of it designed to ensure that lycans would flourish while werewolves would be made extinct.

And now I was using it to save them.

The irony wasn't lost on me.

Instead of plotting with governors and ambassadors about how we'd divide Silverpine's territory after the werewolves ceased to exist—how we'd extend our reach, claim their resources, loot what remained and call it spoils of war—I was sheltering their refugees.

Cramming them into domes meant to protect lycan civilians. Offering them our serum. Integrating them into our quadrants.

My ancestors would call it betrayal.

Eve would call it redemption.

I didn't know what to call it.



The weight of it pressed against my chest—generations of Stavros hatred, centuries of injustice on both sides, and here I was, the one who'd decided enough was enough. The one who'd looked at that legacy of revenge and said *no.*

Not because werewolves were blameless. They weren't. The injustices my ancestors counted like coin were real—lycans hunted, persecuted, treated as lesser for generations. The scars ran deep on both sides.

But genocide?

That was where I drew the line.

Eve had drawn it for me, really. She'd looked at me with those eyes that saw through every defense I'd ever built and asked a simple question without ever speaking the words themselves: *What kind of Alpha do you want to be?*

It was in the way she looked at me when I told her of my plan all along—like she couldn't believe I, the man she had grown to love, would ever choose to be a genocidal maniac. She'd been warned time and time again about me, but she refused to choose another side.



It was like she had seen something in me that not even I saw. She stripped away what my father's training and indoctrination and corruption had done to me and looked at the man within. She bound herself to me and used it to pull me out of the corruption that ate away at my darkened soul.

She didn't give me a heart, for I was heartless. She shared hers with me.

And somehow, as if it had been woven in the threads of fate and moonlight, it was enough.

She loved fiercely, even when it was used against her. Saved Kael from my wrath. Saved Elliot from Felicia. Saved me from myself.

She promised Cain a world where his daughter would not have to hide for the races that her mother and father were.

So I chose the Alpha I wanted to be.

Not what kind I was supposed to be. Not what my brother, father, or grandfather had been.

What kind **I** wanted to be.

And the answer wasn't the one Lucas Stavros would have given. It wasn't the answer written in blood and passed down like a sacred text.



The answer was this: the kind of Alpha who broke cycles instead of perpetuating them. 1

Even if it meant compromising everything my family had built. Even if it meant eight thousand werewolf refugees sheltering in infrastructure designed for their extinction. Even if it meant facing my ancestors' ghosts and disappointing every single one of them.

Let them be disappointed,* I thought, watching the landscape blur past the car window. *I'd rather disappoint the dead than become them.

Beside me, Eve was quiet, her hand resting on my thigh—a small anchor keeping me grounded. She knew what I was thinking about. She always did.

"You made the right choice," she said softly, without looking at me. Like she had been reading my mind.

I covered her hand with mine. "My father would disagree."

"Your father was wrong."

Simple. Direct. True.

I squeezed her hand. "Revolution always looks like betrayal to the old guard."



"Then let them call it betrayal." Her eyes met mine now, fierce and unwavering. "We're building something new. Something better."

Something better.

That's what this was, I realized. It was building something new from the ruins of hatred.

The car turned down a narrow road, and I saw Freddie gesture ahead. The tunnels. Whatever secrets Cain had been keeping, whatever this mysterious garden was—we were about to find out.

But for now, in this moment, I let myself sit with the weight of what I'd chosen.

My family's legacy of revenge would die with me.

And maybe, just maybe, that was the greatest thing a Stavros could ever accomplish.

We took a final turn and the road narrowed instantly, until the verdure on either side of the little line of paved road could almost touch us.

Eve's brows furrowed. "He really didn't want anyone just finding the tunnels."

I agreed. "And Cain was always good at hide and

seek."

The path continued to stretch, and as it did, it narrowed more and more until the woods truly began to brush against the car. Our chauffeur's face remained neutral, but the sweat beading his brow told a different story.

Then suddenly the path began to widen as we swerved to take yet another turn. It was so instant it was mildly jarring—but that wasn't what made my breathing seize, nor what made Eve's breath hitch.

It wasn't from fright. Our reactions were born from awe.

The land we now entered was unlike anything I had ever laid eyes on in real life. The colors were so overwhelming that my head began to spin, the air so clean and fresh my body seemed to fight to adapt.

We drove through a field of flowers that shouldn't exist—not in this climate, not in this season, not all together like this. Violets bloomed beside roses. Sunflowers towered over beds of orchids. Wildflowers I couldn't name cascaded in waves of color that hurt to look at directly, like staring at a sunset too long.