

## 470 Field Of Flowers

Hades 1

"This isn't possible," Eve whispered.

"No," I said quietly. "It shouldn't be."

The road beneath us had changed—no longer cracked pavement but smooth stone, polished by time or care. The trees that had pressed so close before now stood back at a respectful distance, their branches arching overhead to form a natural cathedral.

The field stretched on for what felt like miles, though I knew it couldn't be. Each section seemed to hold different flowers, different colors, as if someone had taken every beautiful thing in the world and planted it here in defiance of nature itself.

"Cain did this?" Eve asked.

Before I could answer, the car slowed. Through the windshield, I saw her.

Sophie

The child was dressed simply—a white dress that seemed to glow against the riot of colors around



her—and she was staring directly at our approaching car with an expression I couldn't quite read. Not quite sadness. Not quite joy. Something in between. Something ancient in a face too young to hold it.

The chauffeur stopped the car. The engine's rumble seemed obscenely loud in this place of hushed reverence.

Freddie opened his door, the sound of it closing behind him sharp as a gunshot. He came around to open mine, then Eve's, his movements precise despite the sweat still beading his brow.

I stepped out, and the moment my feet touched the ground, I felt it. A pulse. Like a heartbeat, but not mine nor Eve's. It was a serene utopia, a cut out from a different world that seemed to breath on its own.

Eve moved to stand beside me, and I heard her sharp intake of breath. She felt it too.

Sophie walked toward us.

"You came," she said simply.

"You came?" I asked, chuckling a bit before picking her up. I thought she would stay in the tower.

She nodded, her small hand gesturing to the field around us. "I want visit mami, and you can't see the tunnels without seeing Mami's garden first."

\*Mami's garden.\*

The words from last night, spoken in half-sleep.

"Your father built this?" Eve asked gently, crouching down to Sophie's level.

Sophie's expression flickered—something complicated passing over her young face. "Papa built it for the tunnels. To hide them. To protect them." She turned, looking out over the impossible field. "He planted the first flowers with mami, around the entrance, years and years ago. And then it grew. It kept growing and growing after went to the moon, and he kept caring for them. He brought workers here, people he trusted, to help make it beautiful. For me. So I'd have somewhere beautiful to visit."

She looked back at us, and I saw tears gathering in her eyes.

"But really, it grows because of her. Because of Mami."

The air seemed to hold its breath.

"The climate here," I said slowly, looking at the

tropical orchids blooming next to arctic roses,  
"shouldn't allow this."

"No," Freddie said quietly, stepping forward. "It shouldn't. By all laws of nature and science, this place shouldn't exist, especially on this scale." He paused, his voice dropping. "But it does. Because of her."

"I don't understand," Eve said.

Freddie's expression was carefully neutral, but I saw the grief beneath it. "The flowers grow here—literally and metaphorically—because of what she was. What she gave. What she..." He stopped himself, jaw tightening. "Only Cain has the right to tell you the full story, Alpha. It's not mine to share."

Sophie's small hand slipped into mine, startling me. "Mami's tomb is in the tunnels," she said matter-of-factly, as if discussing the weather. "Papa found her there, after she escaped. That's where he buried her. That's where she rests now." 1

\*After she escaped.\*

The words hung in the air like a death knell.

"Escaped from where?" I asked, though part of

me already knew. Part of me had known the moment Freddie's expression shuttered.

Freddie met my eyes. "The Cauterium." 1

I froze.

The Cauterium. The collection of torture chambers. Darius's secret operation that we'd only learned about and only just shared. Information that was classified, known only to myself, Eve, the council members. I knew that Cain had his ways for information, but it was way to fast for something that didn't happen outside of the tower.

"How do you know about that?" My voice came out sharper than intended. "That information was shared in a closed council meeting. How does Cain—"

"Cain has always known about the Cauterium," Freddie interrupted quietly. "Because she told him. She told him about her time there." His voice cracked slightly. "About what they did to her. What Darius did to her."

The world seemed to tilt.

Sophie's mother. A werewolf who'd somehow crossed the border into Obsidian territory.



Who'd met Cain. Who'd given birth to a half-lycan, half-werewolf child.

And before all that, she'd been a prisoner. A victim. One of Darius's experiments in that place of torture and horror we'd only just discovered existed. He didn't give himself away, or what he knew.

She escaped," I said slowly, pieces falling into place. "She escaped the Cauterium and made it here. To Obsidian. To Cain."

Freddie nodded. "And for a time, she was free. For a time, she had happiness. She had love. She had Sophie." His hands clenched at his sides. "But what they did to her in that place... it didn't let her go. It never let her go."

"She had no chance but to die," Sophie said softly, and the adult resignation in her young voice made my chest ache. "Papa tried to save her. He tried everything. But the Cauterium..." She paused, tears now flowing freely down her cheeks. "It takes more than just your body. It takes pieces of your soul. And eventually, there's nothing left."

Eve made a choked sound beside me. I reached for her hand, finding it trembling.



"The flowers," he said. "They grow because of what she suffered. Because of what she became."

Freddie's jaw worked, like he was searching for words that didn't exist. He gritted his teeth, looking down at his hands. "It's hard to explain. It's very..." He trailed off, then met my eyes. "Maybe it's why I cannot harbor hate—when I know the truth, or at least its distant cousin, of what their so-called Alpha does beyond the border."

His gaze shifted to Sophie, voice thick with emotion. "The little miss wasn't safe there. Neither was she here, where she'd be called slurs because her canines weren't the correct length or sharpness." His voice broke. "I watched her grow, love, and learn like I would have watched my own little girls. There was no difference."

Sophie's lip began to quiver. "Don't cry... Freddie," 1

He sniffled and grinned at her. "What ever you say, little miss," he assured. "I won't cry." He assured.

He raised his head, his voice still strained from emotion. "Let's go to the tunnels, we are going



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down.\*

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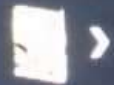


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