

492 The Lonely Beta

Hades 1

"He was spiralling," Kael explained, standing. "Apologising for everything from violence to cookie theft. I had to intervene."

Eve looked between us, her lips twitching despite the worry in her eyes. She put her hand on her hip, though it was shaking slightly. She was worried about Ellen, but she graced us with a smile laced with faked suspicion, eyes narrowing. "Cookie theft?"

"Ancient history," I said.

"Seven years old," Kael supplied helpfully. "Pack feast. Last cookie. The guilt still haunts him."

"I see." Eve crossed her arms, though her smile grew. "And here I thought you two were planning war strategy."

"We were," Kael said. "Then Hades decided to have an emotional breakthrough. Very inconvenient timing, really."

"I'll try to schedule my breakdowns better," I said dryly.

"Please do." Kael moved toward the door, pausing to clasp my shoulder once. "We're good, brother. Stop carrying guilt that isn't yours to carry."

I nodded, throat tight.

He turned to Eve, his expression softening. "Your sister is in good hands. Cain won't let anything happen to her."

"I know," Eve said quietly. "Thank you, Kael."

He nodded once, then left, closing the door behind him.

The silence that followed was heavier than before, but different. Not uncomfortable. Just... weighted with everything unsaid.

Eve moved to the window, her arms still crossed, her shoulders tense. I joined her, standing close enough that our shoulders brushed.

Outside, the sky was darkening. Not from the Bloodmoon—not yet. Just the natural progression of evening into night. But it felt ominous anyway. A reminder of what was coming.

"Forty-eight hours," Eve said softly.

"Forty-eight hours," I confirmed.

She was silent for a long moment, staring out at the horizon. "I sent her to her death."

"You sent her to save seventy thousand lives," I corrected gently.

*"Both things can be true." Her voice cracked.
"She's going to suffer for seventy-two hours,
Hades. Seventy-two hours of agony. And I let her go."*

*"Because she chose to go," I said. "You gave her a reason to survive. That's more than mercy—
that's love."*

"It feels like cruelty."

*"Love often does." I turned to face her, taking her hand. "You made her promise to come back.
That's not cruelty. That's hope."*

Eve's eyes shimmered with unshed tears. "What if she doesn't?"

"Then we honor her by winning," I said. "By destroying Darius. By making sure every person she saved gets to live a free life. That's what she'd want."

"I know," Eve's fingers tightened around mine. "I just—I finally got her back. After five years of thinking she hated me, of thinking she was my

enemy, of believing she was lost—I got her back. And now I'm losing her again."

"You're not losing her," I said firmly. "She's fighting. And she'll come back. Because you asked her to. And Ellen doesn't break promises. Not anymore."

Eve let out a shaky breath, leaning into me. I wrapped my arms around her, holding her close.

"How did we get here?" she whispered against my chest. "How did we go from enemies to this?"

"Fate," I said simply. "Terrible, inconvenient, beautiful fate."

She laughed softly, the sound wet with tears. "I hated you, you know. When we first met."

"I know. I hated you too." It felt like a lifetime ago.

"You wanted me to suffer."

"I did." I pressed my lips to the top of her head.

"I'm glad I failed."

"I'm glad I fought back."

"Me too."

We stood like that for a long moment, wrapped in each other, the weight of the coming war

pressing down on us but somehow more bearable together.

"Hades," Eve said quietly.

"Yes?"

"If we survive this—"

"When," I corrected. "When we survive this."

"When," she amended, tilting her head to look up at me. "When we survive this... what do we do?"

"What do you want to do?"

She was quiet for a moment, her turquoise eyes searching mine. "I want to rebuild. Silverpine and Obsidian. I want to tear down every wall Darius built and create something better. Something where children don't grow up afraid. Where twins aren't pitted against each other. Where people aren't used as resources."

"Then that's what we'll do," I said.

"Just like that?"

"Just like that." I cupped her face in my hands. "You want to change the world, Eve? I'll help you burn down the old one and build the new one from its ashes. Whatever you need. Whatever you want. I'm with you."

Her breath hitched. "You say that like it's simple."

"It is simple," I said. "I love you. Everything else is details."

"I love you too," she whispered. "So much it terrifies me."

"Good." I smiled. "That means it's real."

She reached up, threading her fingers through my hair, pulling me down until our foreheads touched. "Promise me something."

"Anything."

"Promise me we both survive this. That we both make it through. That when the Bloodmoon sets and the dust settles, we're both still standing."

"I promise," I said. "We're both walking out of this war alive. Together."

"Together," she echoed.

And then she kissed me—soft and desperate and full of every unspoken fear and hope. I kissed her back, pouring everything I couldn't say into it. All the love. All the fear. All the determination to keep my promise.

When we finally broke apart, we were both breathless.

Eve rested her head against my chest again, and I held her, watching the sky darken outside the window.

Forty-eight hours.

And then everything would change.

But whatever came next—war, blood, death, victory—we'd face it together.

The way we were always meant to.

—
Kael

I heard them whisper intimately, my chest growing heavier. I took longer strides to get away from them. Knowing that it was not in the card for me, only twisted my gut. 1

Watching Hades' entire life shift because of her, even the same unending challenges, every single beautiful, tragic event had served a purpose in their story, while I stood as a witness to a love bond that would stand the test of time and fate.

And I stood...alone. 1

Knowing that the sky would fall and still I would stand solitary once again.

My longing for a bond had never been this strong until the first time I had held Thea to me and now like a starving rabid animal that had gotten the first scent of flesh, I had become hooked.

All I could do was fantasise about a life where she would look at me the way that Eve looks at Hades.

But that life does not exist.

I pushed open my door and froze. My room was not empty and the scent that filled it made my pulse skitter, Ajax stirring.

Standing by the window, her blonde hair not in the ponytail I was used to, dressed in a night gown.

I blinked, sure my longing was already getting to me enough that I had started to hallucinate. But she remained there, oblivious to the fact that I had stepped in.

"Thea?" I called.

She spun to face me. "Kael?" Her voice was a breathless whisper that caressed my ears.

She moved before I did, only stopping a yard away from me. Her expression, unreadable but

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her face flushed.

"What is the matter---"

She slipped off her dress, and my breath fractured as she stood naked before me. 6

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