

510 Second Wave

Aegis 1

45:50:50

Ellen finally stabilized after some of the longest minutes of Cain's entire existence. It made it worse that she could not be laid down to rest or the already unstable shield above them would be affected.

Cain's throat closed up each time she whimpered or groaned in pain and discomfort. It was hard to watch know that they were just barely a day into the three that she would have to continue holding it if the civilians were survived. 2

Even vaccinated, he could still feel the effects of the radiation each time it touched him, that sweltering, dry heat that made your skin itch before it eviscerated the membrane only to wreak havoc at the cells. Twisting men women and children.

Dread lodged into his throat, a lump he could not swallow. And all that crushing weight was on her. Cain was certain that Ellen's body gave out and shield gave out completely; she would not



forgive herself if she ever recovered. She would be haunted by that failure for the rest of her life. Nothing that any one would say would ever sway her from the path of self loathing and self destruction. 1

So Ellen had to keep on carrying the moon. 1

The haze over her eyes cleared, her eyes rimmed red, her breathing laboured. Cain wiped at the blood dripping out of her nose. "You are loved." He whispered as the deltas returned to their positions.

Ellen blinked, her tired eyes flaring wide into shock and confusion. "Who?" 2

He needed to distract her away from the despair that ate away at her so he smiled, leaning on one side of the satellite dish, a smirk playing on his full lips. "You." He replied. 1

He turned to her so they were only mere inches away. "You know that?" He asked.

Her eyes still widened, her mouth moved but no words came out.

His smile widened and he hoped she could see the tension on his face,hoping that he tucked it away well enough. "You must have not heard her

during your testing in that lab. Watching you unravelled her, she wanted it to stop. She loves you so much."

Her eyes dimmed slightly. "She loves. Eve always loves. Seeing the flicker of the best in people is enough for her to believe there is good there. It is not always the case."

He frowned. "You are not a burden. Not to her. Not to me." 1

The shield trembled, Ellen swayed.

Cain steadied her, voice low. "You're fading. Stay with me."

Her lashes fluttered, breaths shallow.

"You're loved," he whispered again, desperate. "And you're not alone."

Cain cupped the side of her face, forcing her to meet his eyes. "Breathe. Anchor yourself to something real."

Her pupils were blown with pain.

"Ellen," he murmured, brushing the blood from her lip, "tell me something good."

Her brow furrowed.

"Tell me," he breathed, "a story of you and Eve. From when you were children."

As though sprinkled with faerie dust, her eyes sparkled. "Let me tell---about the unicorn---" 1

38:23:02

Dawnstrike

Twelve hours later, the lull thankfully persisted. Eve was healing gradually, her beating heart grew stronger with each hour that passed by. Hades could tell that her health was improving even as the deltas only came every three hours after healing gammas.

He could tell because the faintness he left when he first came and she was in critical condition had started to recede. Breathing was no longer labour and he knew it because she was no longer on the brink of death. 1

The passive exchanges out on no man's land have waned to few and far between. But Hades could feel it like the fading chill in his bones and melting ice in his veins that another wave was coming very soon.

Both Aegis and Frostfang had reported waves



that were easily repelled and resulted in minimal casualties. That was six hours ago and half a day ago respectively.

As far as they'd come, Ironwall was yet to be attacked and the thought knotted Hades' stomach. That much silence and inactivity was always a foreshadowing in times like this

Darius was regrouping and he would hit again soon. It was only a matter of time.

Hades broke out of his thoughts as he heard his wife mutter in her sleep.

He smiled, stroking her hair.

—
36:00:25

Frostfang

There was a rumble that shook the camp.

Maera did not need the radar to know that the second wave had come. Silas had geared up, his voice carrying as he coordinated the gammas. Maera took her place, leading the second group of gammas. 1

They both glanced at each other, silent words exchanged as the wave made its appearance.

Maera's heart ceased its beating, her stomach suddenly in knots as she took in the figure that led the wave of gammas, flanked by the largest wolves she had ever set her eyes on. It was the size of the monstrous wolf that went out of control on that 'execution of Eve Valmont' five years ago. The same one that had killed dozens. 3

But that was not the thing that made tears prickle her eyes.

Because even from a distance, her wolf howled, recognizing her pup. 1

In full Silverpine tactical uniform, a lopsided smile like her late husband's but her brown eyes. The heated blade that slid between her ribs was agonizing.

Her knees buckled, almost.

She could feel Silas glance at her, despite the cold sweat formed on her brow.

She gritted her teeth against the torrent of emotions that churned within her.

Then he spoke. In the distance, with unnerving silence, his voice carried. "I see you, Mother."

The words barely registered before James raised his hand.

510 Second Wave

+5

The ferals launched.

"OPEN FIRE!" Silas roared.

Gunfire erupted—a deafening wall of sound. Muzzle flashes lit up the snow. Bullets tore through the charging line.

Three enemy gammas went down immediately.

Four. Five.

But the ferals kept coming.

Too fast. They dodged the bullets like frisbees, they could see them coming before they even left the gun. Even with so many shots, the bullets found their mark only a handful of times. The times they did hit, these ferals healed ten times faster than any usual feral or gammas.

There was a reason this breed of ferals were not as many, to create a living weapon as powerful as these breeds would have not been an easy task.

One reached the line—massive, grotesque, the Mark of Malik burned into its hide. It crashed into Frostfang's front ranks, jaws snapping, claws ripping through a gamma's throat before anyone could react.

"SHIFT!" Silas bellowed, already mid-transformation. "CLOSE QUARTERS!"

510 Second Wave

Maera shifted—bones cracking, fur erupting. Her rifle hit the snow as her wolf form surged forward.

She hit the feral from the side, claws tearing into corrupted flesh. It howled—wrong, distorted—and threw her off.

She rolled, came up snarling.

Around her, chaos.

Frostfang gammas engaging in brutal close-quarters combat—wolves against wolves, claws against teeth. Gunfire still cracked through the air as those with clear shots took them.

Maera tore through an enemy gamma, blood hot on her tongue, then—

There.

James.

Still in human form, moving through the battle. He raised a pistol, fired twice—two Frostfang gammas dropped.

Maera's wolf snarled.

She charged.

James saw her coming. Didn't move.

Just smiled.

"Mother," he said, almost conversational. Then he shifted—bones snapping, his wolf form larger than she remembered, darker.

They collided.

Teeth and claws. Mother and son.

James was strong—stronger than he should be. His jaws snapped at her throat. She twisted away, claws raking across his shoulder.

He didn't flinch.

Just attacked again.

They broke apart, circling.

Blood dripped from Maera's muzzle. James had a gash across his side, but he was still smiling—even in wolf form, that twisted smile.

"Did you mourn him?" James's voice was a growl, barely words. "Father? When he died? Or did you not have time since you were out committing treason."

Maera didn't answer.

James laughed—a broken, bitter sound. "I held the blade. Looked him in the eyes. He said your name."

Maera lunged.

Their wolves collided again—brutal, vicious. No technique. Just violence.

James's teeth caught her leg. She yelped, twisted, bit down on his ear, ripped.

He howled, threw her off.

She hit the ground hard, scrambled up—

James was already moving. He slammed into her, driving her into the snow. His jaws closed around her throat—

Not enough to kill. Just enough to hold.

"You left me," James snarled against her fur.

"After everything. You left."

Maera couldn't speak. Couldn't breathe.

Then—

A gunshot.

James jerked, blood spraying from his shoulder.

He released her, staggering back.

Silas stood twenty feet away, rifle raised, expression cold. "Get up, Maera."

Maera scrambled to her feet, gasping.

510 Second Wave

James shifted back to human, blood streaming from the bullet wound, his face twisted with rage. "You shot me?" 2

"And I'll do it again," Silas said flatly. He fired.

James dodged—barely. The bullet grazed his ribs.

"Retreat!" James roared at his forces. "Fall back!"

The enemy gammas disengaged, the new ferals following. Within seconds, they were melting back into the trees, dragging their wounded.

James stood at the edge of the tree line, staring at Maera.

"This isn't over," he said quietly. 1

Then he was gone.

35:56:00

Maera shifted back to human form, breathing hard, blood streaming from the wound on her leg.

Silas was at her side immediately. "Can you walk?"

"Yes."

"You hesitated."

510 Second Wave

Maera looked at him—this man who'd just saved her life. "He's my son."

"He killed his father," Silas said, his voice hard.
"And he'll kill you too if you let him."

Maera said nothing.

Because she knew he was right.

Around them, Frostfang gammas were regrouping. Casualties: eight dead, forty seven wounded.

The new ferals had done damage. With injured Gammas the next wave would be brutal, especially with those new ferals.

"Next time he comes," Silas said quietly, "you need to be ready. Because next time, I might not get the shot."

Maera nodded slowly.

She looked toward the tree line where James had vanished. 1

"I know," Maera whispered.

And she did.

Next time, one of them would die. Maera shook off the thought and gaze up at Silas. "We have to

510 Second Wave

inform the Alpha of the new development. Those
ferals are not the usual kind."

He nodded, clicked on his comm.

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