

527 The Nobles

Cain

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I raced up the tower, the families safeguarded within the Lunar Heights. I got up onto the roof and froze dead in my tracks. I had to hold my chest to tame my heart. The roaring in my head was my mind running through every hair-raising scenario.

The Deltas were in the tower attending to the gammas and civilians. So there was no one there but us. There should have been no one but us.

But when I rounded the satellite dish, all I saw was a hole in the metal hollow circle. The place where she had been had been melted by the sheer amount of heat that her absorbing the Bloodmoon's rays had generated.

The odor of charred flesh hit me in the face like a punch, leaving me reeling from the impact. I knew her scent even when it was burnt. I doubled over gagging. Still, through the tears forced out of my eyes, I kept my sights on the now-empty dish.

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She was gone.

But there was no body—even a burnt one, or a glowing one. There was just nothing.

My eyes darted around, looking for answers, a clue, anything that could give me some much-needed answers.

The silence and utter emptiness of the roof mocked me. I took a deep breath, only to take another lungful of the fumes of charred flesh.

I retched.

I rose with my hand over my mouth, mind spinning with possibilities of what the hell could have happened. If she... died, she should have been here. Where could she have gone?

I turned to face the edge of the roof, a lump forming in my throat.

Unbidden, the image rushed at me: she would have been in so much pain, trying and failing to find respite, only to...

I did not wait for the scenario to play out to completion before I ran to the edge. I did not hesitate when I reached there. I looked over and... nothing.

I clutched my chest. Relief—only for more worry to sink in. Everyone had been occupied with

rescues. She had been alone. The Deltas had told me she'd told them to go and help once the Bloodmoon had passed. She had been left alone for fifteen minutes.

The world whirled around me. Nothing made sense.

Had she been taken?

My heart sank.

Or had she gone on her own? In her condition?

I clicked on my comm.

"This is Commander Cain. Has anyone seen Ellen Valmont? I repeat—has anyone seen Ellen Valmont?"

Static.

Then—

"Negative, Commander."

"No sign here."

"Nothing at the medical tents."

My jaw tightened.

"Keep searching," I ordered. "Expand the perimeter. Check the shelters, the evacuation

routes—everywhere. She couldn't have gotten far."

If she's even alive.

I didn't say it. Couldn't.

But the thought hung there.

Heavy. Suffocating.

I looked back at the melted dish. At the charred remnants.

Ellen.

Where are you?

Hades

I flew at superspeed—wings beating with renewed strength, Orion's power surging through me.

Below, the landscape blurred. Trees. Rivers. Mountains.

Then—

There.

The Malrikian Eden.

At first, it looked like nothing. Just dense woods.
An ancient forest untouched by time.

But I had Orion's memories now—and Thea's
previous vague directions.

I knew! 1

I focused, letting the exhaustion fall off my
weary bones after the journey. The speed had
taken its toll, but I had a reservoir. Orion's
absorbed horn.

And the illusion flickered—like a door had
unlocked in my mind, exposing me to the true
form of the space beneath.

The woods shimmered. Dissolved.

And revealed the city beneath.

Gold and gossamer.

Towers of shimmering crystal. Streets paved
with obsidian glass. Walls carved from white
marble veined with gold.

The Malrikian Eden.

Malrik's stronghold.

My eyes locked on the highest tower—the
central spire, rising above all others.

There.

I could feel it.

The Chalyx. Vassir's horn. My horn.

I let the tether pull me like a yanked string. I could feel it call, and I had no doubt that it was what was left of Orion beckoning me closer to where I ought to go.

I had only one chance at this. Everything hung precariously on me being successful in this mission. Even at the speed I'd flown past Dawnstrike, Darius's army had dwarfed ours by five to one—and by then there were still more coming, filtering through the border of Obsidian.

It had taken all I had to keep flying.

I let air rush into my lungs, letting Orion lead me.

I could see the flashes of an interior—clues. A painting of Malrik in red garments like the leader of some insidious cult. A statue of pure onyx in his figure. A dark room, fortified with a heavy door, locked, guarded by... a person.

But I could feel the Chalyx. It called, pulsing with stolen power, calling me.

I folded my wings and dove.

Straight toward the tower.

I did not think to pause, to recalibrate—even as alarms started to blare, deafening, loud enough to shatter eardrums.

But I could not even feel my own head pounding as gammas poured out of their positions, taking aim at me with weapons.

I wove through the rounds launched at me, adrenaline and desperation driving me like hard drugs in my system—as thrilling and terrifying as my first taste of Eve's blood.

I could still hear the echoes of the vows we made to each other. It was the haunting melody that played in my head as the first round buried itself in the thick column of my tail.

Something shrieked.

It took a moment before I realized the sound had come from me.

But still my wings did not stop flapping.

Another round hit—tearing through my left wing. The membrane shredded. Pain exploded.

I faltered. Dropped ten feet. Twenty.

No.

I roared—not in pain, in fury—and beat my wings harder.

Blood streamed behind me, painting the air red.

But I climbed.

Higher. Faster.

The tower was fifty meters away. Forty. Thirty.

More rounds.

One caught my shoulder. Another my ribs.

My vision blurred.

But through it—through the pain, the blood, the agony—

I saw her.

Eve.

Standing in Dawnstrike. Facing an army.

Protecting our pups.

Waiting for me.

My jaws unhinged.

And I howled.

The sound tore through the air—raw, primal,

infused with everything I had left.

Chalyx.

Vassir's power. 2

My power.

The gammas below convulsed!—clutching their heads, dropping their weapons, falling to their knees.

The compulsion shattered.

For just a moment.

I drove my way into the tower through a window already shattered by gunfire. The entire column of the tower fell apart at the impact of my violent intrusion, my blood spraying across pristine marble as I landed.

I knew I was on the right floor.

The first thing I saw was the unnerving painting. The vision came back—a confirmation I was indeed not far from what I sought.

I blinked back the vision.

And suddenly, the room was filled with wolves—all growling and snarling at me.

With my body a map of wounds and still

conserving my power to maintain my strength, I might have been larger, but even a hill of ferocious ants could take down a bird.

I let out the same disarming howl.

But this time it had no effect.

Confusion rippled through me as I eyed all of them, then the path ahead that I was supposed to take. In the distance, I could see what looked like the silhouette of a statue.

But they were everywhere. They littered every corner.

And that was when I noticed the sheen of their hides.

They looked groomed. Clean. Like they had never fought a day in their lives. Like they lathered their fur with shampoo and expensive scented soaps. There was not a scar, not a nick on any of them.

I came to the realization as to why they were impervious to my howl.

They were not marked.

Why would they be?

They did not need compulsion if they were

voluntarily in on Malrik's plan.

They were the chosen ones. The worthies that Malrik had ensured would live while the rest of the world perished. While they enjoyed the utopia built just for them.

They were Silverpine nobles. The politicians. The wealthy. The conglomerate owners who knew how this would all go down and accepted it.

Now, they were standing between me and my goal—all so they could defend their stolen paradise. And they looked ready to stop me at all cost, holding me back from what they knew held the fragments of their fates together.

This fight would be steep and bloody.

I had no time.

Then the world turned red again.

Crimson light bleeding in from beyond the windows.

My heart sank.

No.

The Bloodmoon—

It was back. 8

