

537 Museum Of The Marked

Eve 1

A snowflake landed on Elliot's nose just as we entered the tent in front of the building. I flicked it off as he giggled up at me. "My first snow flake." He whispered, like we were sharing a secret.

I wanted to raise a brow and ask why it was so, he was almost six—I stopped myself as the memory of his 'mama' raced to the forefront of my mind. So I smiled down at him, knowing that Felicia would rot in the underground prison.

She had not spoken since the time she woke up after surviving James's assault. She did not utter a word at the trial either. It was either she had simply relinquished herself to her inescapable fate or it was her final act of defiance. 1

But knowing Felicia, I was inclined to believe it was both.

Hades' fingers tightened around my hand, I met his blue eyes, soft but inquisitive, tempered with worry.

I playfully rolled my eyes. He was reading my

emotions again and he could feel the churning displeasure that the thought of the war criminal incited. "I am fine." I assured him.

His hand found my now swollen belly, like it always did when he was nervous about me. I was just over three months pregnant but I had gotten big enough to look six months. And if it were up to him, I would be in a wheelchair more likely in his arms.

But after a three day war, three months ago, I found myself strangely relishing the simple discomforts that came with my pregnancy. It was the only welcome type of pain after having my back torn out, talon-ed from above and dropped for good measure. My swollen feet and back aches were pains I could contend with—relish even.

The camera lights flashed, pulling me back to the moment and reminded me what he came to Silverpine to do in the first place. 1

Since my pregnancy had progressed, I found myself in my head a lot.

I raised my head, as we took our positions in front of the red ribbon for the opening. I gaze shifted about to all those present for the event.

The council members, Maera with her walker, Kael and Cain. 1

My smile quivered on my lip when I stared at the empty space beside me, where Ellen should have been. I braced myself against the hot rush of grief that spread through my chest. Ellen still had not opened her eyes even after Hades' vampire blood had been administered. Just twitches—that reminded me of Malrik's fluttering heart—struggling to keep him afloat against the tide of death that had come to claim him. 1

My throat constricted.

"She is here," someone whispered to me and I met my mother beside me. Instinctively, I reached for her hand, cold as they were, it doused some of my sorrow. Her eyes were perpetually red now, not the brown I used to know. She was mostly vampire now, different in too many ways that sometimes made me feel like she had truly died in that vault after she had to be ripped apart to get the horn.

It had been nowhere near the fix that we had hoped for but as much as it hurt that a large part of Lyra Valmont was gone, it was better than nothing. She was learning not to bite everything

that moved. 4

Her eyes met mine, widened, imperceptible just for a moment before they fogged up again. Like she was no longer fully there but she did not pull her hand away and somehow, it was enough for the moment.

The press were present along with civilians who had dared to attend the opening by the Alpha of the Pack they had been taught to fear and despise. Those who didn't attend would be in their houses watching the live feed of the monumental event. The rivalry had come with less tentative trust between werewolves and lycans. And those that were present were those who had been housed in the domes during the war. They had more trust than the others.

The cameras clicked and flashed as Hades stepped forward, his hand never leaving mine. He looked out over the crowd—press, civilians, council members, all of them watching with a mixture of curiosity, fear, and hesitant hope.

"Three months ago," he began, his voice carrying across the space without needing amplification, "Obsidian territory was a battlefield. Wolves died there. Both Obsidian and Silverpine. Both willing and unwilling. Both guilty and innocent."

The crowd shifted. Uncomfortable. Because this wasn't the triumphant victory speech they'd expected.

The speech of the Alpha who had won over their Alpha, tyrannical or not. He had been their leader and their punisher

"The Museum of the Marked stands not as a monument to our victory, but as a testament to the cost of tyranny. To the thousands of wolves who were enslaved by Malrik's compulsion. Who fought and killed and died without choice. Without consent. Without mercy."

He gestured to the building behind us. Simple. Clean. Dignified.

"Inside these walls, you will find their names. Their faces. Their stories. Who they were before the marks took their choice away. Because they were not just soldiers in Malrik's army. They were sons and daughters. Parents and lovers. People with dreams and futures that were stolen from them." 1

My throat tightened as I watched the freed Silverpine wolves in the crowd. Some were crying. Others stood rigid, faces carved from stone. All of them bore the faded scars where

their compulsion marks had burned out.

"We turned the Lunar Heights into a museum," Hades continued, "because forgetting is easy. Hating is easy. But remembering—truly remembering the individuals whose lives were destroyed—that is hard. That requires us to see our enemies as people. To acknowledge that the wolf who killed your packmate might have been screaming inside their own head, begging to stop, unable to control their own body."

He paused. Let the weight of that settle.

"This museum is not absolution. It does not erase what happened. But it is truth. And truth is the foundation upon which we build peace."

Hades looked at me then, and I knew what he was asking without words.

I stepped forward, my hand trembling as it found the scissors. The red ribbon stretched across the entrance, bright against the gray stone.

"My sister," I said, and my voice cracked on the word. I steadied myself. "My sister gave everything to stop Malrik. She burned herself alive so that we might have a chance to win by protecting Silverpine from the Bloodmoon that would lay waste to lives in the most horrible

ways. And my mother—" I looked at Lyra beside me, her red eyes distant, her cold hand still in mine. "My mother was one of Malrik's final cruelties. Turned into a living vault. Sacrificed so that tyranny might continue."

I met the eyes of the crowd. So many faces. So much pain.

"But we are here. We survived. And now we remember. Not just the victors, but everyone who paid the price. The compelled. The enslaved. The ones who never had a choice."

I handed Maera the scissors and let her cut the ribbon.

It fell in two pieces, fluttering to the ground like crimson snow.

The doors opened.

Inside, the museum was quiet. Reverent. The walls were lined with photographs—hundreds of them more that would be added over the months and years that will go by.. Individual portraits of wolves in human form, their names engraved beneath. Beside each photo was a small plaque with their biography. Who they were. What they

loved. When they were marked. How they died.

The freed Silverpine wolves moved through the space slowly, searching for faces they recognized. Some found their own portraits and stopped, staring at the frozen image of who they'd been before compulsion. Others found packmates. Family members. Friends they'd been forced to forget, hurt or—kill.

The sound of crying filled the museum. Quiet. Broken. The kind of grief that had been held back for too long.

Elliot tugged at my hand. "Why are they sad?" he whispered.

"Because they're remembering," I told him. "And remembering hurts sometimes."

He thought about that, his young face serious. Then he looked up at me with those too-wise eyes. "Like how I remember mama?" 1

I bit the inside of my cheek but smiled.
"Something like that."

We moved deeper into the museum, past the individual portraits to the main hall where fragments of the horn sat in a display case at the

center. The plaque beneath read: "May we never forget what was done. May we never allow it again."

The crowd had thinned as people wandered through the exhibits, but enough remained that when Hades cleared his throat, the murmur of conversation died. "There's one more thing," he said, his voice quiet but carrying. "As you all know, a month after the war ended, we held an informal vote. Just to get a sense of what Silverpine wanted. Who they trusted. The people who were evacuated first—the ones carted out before the Bloodmoon hit—they voted. And they chose Commander Maera. Leader of the Eclipse Rebellion." He gestured to where Maera stood, leaning on her walker. "So today, I'm making it official. Commander Maera is Regent of Silverpine Pack. Not appointed by me. Not imposed by Obsidian. But chosen by her own people and recognized by the council."

The silence stretched, eyes falling on me like I would protest but Silverpine was stolen before by Malik. Giving it over, even temporarily to someone deserving of the title after all she had done to save as many as she could. There was no better person for the role. I simply smiled, and the crowd seemed to relax as the swearing in

commenced.

"I want a divorce," I finally said. 3

I felt him stiffen behind me. It was like all the air was sucked out of our bedroom. Thank the goddess that Elliot was on a play date with all the other kids including Cain's adopted daughter, Sage.

"What?" His voice hardened and faltered.

"Divorce?"

I spun to face him, forgetting I was carrying two babies in my body but sticking the landing. "You remember the wish I wanted for that Fenrir's Chain, at the council chamber?" 1

It dawned on him, slowly but still hit him like a ton of bricks with the way he flinched. He moved to hold me but stopped himself, his face sullen. It was not fear that was etched into every line of his face, it was horror.

I bit the inside of my cheek, forcing myself to go on. "I want this marriage annulled," Then I broke into a grin. "So you can finally propose with that ring you thought you could hide from me." 3

He blinked and slowly colour flooded his face,

his blue eyes twinkling with relief as pure bliss settled over him. He barely gave me a warning before he crossed the distance between us and got me off my feet. He spun me as his laughter filled the space, hearty and still a little strained. Either it was my weight or the horror still lingering. "Consider the marriage annulled."

He settled me down, retrieving a crystal case from his back pocket.

He went down on one knee, his eyes not once straying from mine. His hands trembled as he opened the case, revealing a ring that caught the light and scattered it across the walls like stars.

"Eve," he said, and his voice was rough with emotion. "You've terrified me, infuriated me, and saved me more times than I can count. You've given me daughters I haven't even met yet and a future I never thought I'd have. You've made me want to be better than I am."

He paused. Swallowed hard.

"I know this marriage started as strategy. But somewhere between the blood and the battles and the endless goddamn challenges, I fell in love with you. Not the weapon I wanted, not the Luna I wanted you to be. Just... you. The woman

who defies and challenges me and argues with council members while pregnant with twins and refuses to be carried even when she can barely walk." 1

A laugh escaped me. Choked, wet and broken.

"So I'm asking—not as some Alpha, not as the father of your children, but as the man who wants to spend every day of his immortal life making you smile—will you marry me? Again. Properly this time. With choice instead of compulsion. With love above all."

He looked up at me with those blue eyes that had seen too much death and too little hope, and I saw everything we'd survived together reflected back.

"Yes," I whispered. "Yes, you ridiculous vampire. I'll marry you." 1

He slid the ring—a silver band with a black diamond that gleamed brighter than any diamond—onto my finger—a perfect fit, of course, because he'd probably measured it while I slept—and stood, pulling me into a kiss that tasted like relief and joy and the promise of a future we'd both fought like hell to claim.

When we finally pulled apart, both breathless, he

rested his forehead against mine.

"Thank you," he murmured. "For not actually wanting a divorce."

"Thank you for hiding the ring so poorly that I found it two weeks ago."

He groaned. "You knew the whole time?"

"I knew the whole time."

"And you still let me panic?"

"Consider it payback for the wheelchair comment and for the other egregious things you hid from me in the beginning of this whole thing."

His laugh rumbled through his chest and into mine, and for the first time in three months, the weight in my chest lifted just a little. "Like you didn't hide things." He scoffed

I shrugged. "Just goes to show, we are indeed a match made in hell."

He laughed hard, his dimples deepening before he grabbed my face and left me breathless with a kiss. I kissed him back.

We'd survived.

We'd won.

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And now—finally—we got to choose what came next. 4

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