

209 Her Double.

Eve 1

I clenched my jaw so tightly, I was sure I would chip a tooth. But I kept my expression indifferent as the video began to play.

I knew this meeting was going to be challenging, but they were already pulling this—less than five minutes in? I would be foolish to say I was completely surprised, but even expecting their worst had done nothing to staunch the wave of dread that washed over me.

"Deep breaths, dear," Rhea's voice wove through my mind, reminding me that I was not completely alone. A fact that they, themselves, did not know.

I had not been at the mock execution. And for a long time, I had been grateful for that—grateful that I had not witnessed my own death.

Especially when it meant that somebody else, someone who looked like me, had died in my place.

The footage was crisp and clear as it began, of course, with a speech from my father. I kept my

eyes on the screen as he preached about the evil that would be vanquished that day.

My stomach turned as they brought a girl forward. Every fiber and muscle in my body locked in place as I stared at her.

She looked exactly like me.

There was no difference—none at all. If we had been placed side by side, even I wouldn't have been able to tell us apart.

A memory surfaced.

The day before the execution.

After a routine procedure the monstrous scientists called "the extraction," they had told me they had found a girl. One that looked just like me, but with a minor impediment, they had said.

The only thing left to sell the story was for a Delta to perform a painful, face-altering procedure—to shift the muscles and bones of her face until she was perfect.

Her.

They had taken a girl, an innocent girl, and warped her into my mirror image.

Bile rose in my throat, but I forced myself to keep my expression cold, indifferent. I would not give them the satisfaction. Not now. Not ever.

On the screen, my father continued his speech with the same practiced charisma he always wielded—a serpent cloaked in righteousness. He spoke of justice, of cleansing our world of traitors, of the honor of sacrifice.

Lies. All of it.

The girl—my unwilling double—stood there, her body trembling, but her chin lifted. Her face was empty, her eyes glazed as though she had been drugged.

My heart clenched at the sight of her.

She knew.

She knew she was not going to walk away from this.

I could feel Rhea stirring inside me, her rage simmering beneath my skin like a coiled serpent.

"Monsters," she hissed.

James leaned forward, studying me as if searching for the cracks in my mask. "Do you remember this part?" he asked, feigning

curiosity.

I tilted my head slightly. "As I said, I was there," I repeated, my voice unwavering. "I don't need a replay."

He smirked. "Oh, but you missed the best part."

On the screen, the girl lifted her chin, her gaze scanning the crowd.

Then, for the briefest moment, she looked directly at the camera.

And she just stared.

Not completely present.

The room around me seemed to constrict.

I gripped the edge of the table, my nails pressing into the wood.

She had known.

Somehow, she had known I was still out there.

That I would see this one day. That I would remember.

"You're awfully quiet, dear," my father noted, his voice silky with amusement.

I blinked, forcing myself to relax, to exhale slowly. "Am I?" I murmured. "I was simply

thinking."

His brows lifted slightly. "About?"

I met his gaze evenly, my voice as smooth as glass. "How you are wasting my time and almost ten minutes of yours."

James hummed at my response, clearly entertained, but my father only offered a tight-lipped smile.

He was reading me, searching for any sign of weakness, for any flicker of emotion he could exploit. But I wouldn't give him that satisfaction.

Not now. Not ever.

The footage continued.

The girl—my double—stood still, her vacant eyes locked onto the crowd. Even drugged, even altered, something in her gaze sent a sharp pang through me.

A piece of me wanted to believe she was aware, that she knew this wasn't right.

And then the scene shifted.

A familiar figure emerged from the shadows of the stage.



My breath stalled.

Ellen.

My twin sister.

Dressed in full ceremonial regalia, her golden hair pinned in an immaculate twist, her uniform pressed and pristine, she moved with purpose.

She looked the same as I had always known her —poised, perfect, utterly ruthless.

The golden daughter.

The pride of our father. □ □ □ □

□ □

The executioner of his will.

My nails dug into my palms, but I forced my expression to remain indifferent, my breathing slow and measured.

On-screen, Ellen stepped up to the platform beside the girl.

She regarded my double with an eerie sort of detachment, tilting her head as if admiring the scientists' handiwork.

I felt a shift in the air.

Even through the screen, I could hear the



murmurs of the gathered crowd—the silent, almost reverent anticipation as my sister reached for the holster at her hip.

A gun.

A single sleek platinum pistol.

My lungs burned, but I kept my face unreadable.

I already knew how this ended.

But seeing it—witnessing it now, in perfect clarity—was different.

Ellen lifted the gun, pointing it at my double's head.

For the briefest second, the girl swayed.

Her drugged mind sluggishly trying to process what was happening.

There was no fear in her body, no struggle.

Because she had already been taken from herself.

The realization sent a slow, creeping sickness through me.

They hadn't just stolen her life—

They had stripped her of her mind.



Her will.

Her self.

Ellen didn't hesitate.

She pulled the trigger.

The crack of the gunshot split through the air.

My double's head snapped back.

She crumpled.

A limp, lifeless doll.

Blood pooled beneath her in slow, sickening ripples.

The screen flickered for a second. Then—silence.

I felt nothing.

I had to feel nothing.

But inside—inside, something was breaking.

Something sharp and vicious clawed at my ribs, a wound that couldn't be seen, couldn't be stitched.

Rhea was utterly still inside me, her presence a quiet, seething storm.

I forced myself to blink. To breathe.

James leaned back in his chair, stretching lazily. "Dramatic, wasn't it? I swear, you had a talent for these things. Clean, efficient, no theatrics. Father was so proud. Where did it all go so wrong?"

He glanced at a camera before turning back to me.

I ignored his question. "That must be all, so—"

"No, no, no," my father interrupted smoothly. "It is far from over. Don't you remember? You weren't just an executioner that day. You were a hero to Silverpine, after what Eve did to Silverpine's citizens that day."

My ears perked up.

But... she was dead.

I had watched as they slammed the doors shut, carrying her bloody corpse away.

Then—

A roar.

I snapped my head toward the screen.

The doors in the footage were wrenched from their hinges.



A beast emerged.
I stilled.
But she had just been killed.
Yet that wasn't what made me tense.
It was the fact that it looked like the beast I had
painted.
The one from my nightmares.

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