



## 268 Escape Plan

Eve 1

Rhea was becoming stronger with each day. I could feel her growling in my mind each time the thought of Hades crossed it. 2

"You are going to escape," she told me, bristling. "I promise."

Weakness wrecked my body. My mouth was so dry I could barely speak—because I realized it was being laced. They were drugging me to keep me weak, to make me sluggish, too slow to think of escaping.

I opened my eyes, dry from dehydration, staring into the void of darkness. I had to get up. I had to do something. People would die. I had foolishly fallen in love with a genocidal tyrant. That was my fault. But I had to get up—for the innocents who would suffer if I didn't act.

I rose from the hard bed, feeling my joints creak like they needed oil. My stomach felt like it was eating itself as I braced against the bed, using it as an anchor.



It was either starvation or a drug-induced psychosis that would do me in, but I chose neither.

"Get up, Evie," Rhea's voice was firmer than it had been in days. "I know you can. You've been here before. But now you have me." 2

I gritted my teeth and staggered toward the door in an almost drunken daze, only to be yanked back by the chains.

I grimaced at the pull but reached out in the darkness to grasp the heavy links. By the weight and feel, it was the platinum alloy kind I'd been chained with in Silverpine. Designed to keep me weak. But this—this was different. It didn't suppress my strength.

This wasn't meant to subdue me.

It was meant to weigh me down.

A subtle cruelty. A psychological chokehold.

I could still move... if I used enough strength.

They weren't trying to poison me. They wanted me alert enough to walk.



They just didn't want me fast enough to run.

The chains were anchored to the bed. I could feel the tension stretch every time I moved—the weight dragging behind me like a corpse I was shackled to. But if I could pull the bed...

If I could drag it—

> "Then you can move," Rhea said sharply, catching on. "You can move with it. Use it. Let it clank and scream all it wants—we only need one shot."

One shot.

I turned toward the wall where the bed groaned against the cold floor and gripped the frame. My palms burned, muscles protesting. But it moved. Just an inch. Then another.

"Fuck," I muttered—the sound foreign in my dry throat.

> "They'll come soon," Rhea said. "To take you to the White Room."

I stiffened.

Of course.





The White Room. That torture chamber dressed as science. They'd drag me in and pry me open, trying to extract secrets I didn't have. Trying to crack me until I confessed to a lie I'd never told.

Until I gave them something I hadn't even swallowed.

> "They're not after truth, Evie," Rhea growled. "They want something to justify what they've already decided to do. Drain you. Then let your people die while they celebrate your silence." 1

I clenched my jaw.

Their sacrifice.

"For what?" I croaked, dragging the bed another half foot across the floor. "Why do you care what happens to werewolves?"

Rhea hesitated. Then her voice softened, almost smiling.

> "Because your empathy leaks into me, idiot. I love who you love. I hate who you hate. And I would die for who you'd die for." 2

Then, a snort.



> "And gods help anyone who tries to harm you. Even if it's your bone-headed mate with daddy issues and a god complex." 2

I huffed a laugh. A broken one—but real.

My hands were shaking. My body screamed. But I kept pulling the bed. Inch by inch, toward the door.

"Alright," I whispered, my breath shallow. "We make them pay for underestimating us." 1

> "At least your self-defense lessons will be of some use," Rhea added. "At least that man was good for something." 2

She was trying to cheer me up like a long-time girlfriend by shitting on an ex—but underneath the sarcasm, I felt her heartache like it was mine.

Because it was mine.

She loved Cerberus, like I loved Hades. Three-headed and all. 1

I shifted the frame until it was just beside the door, the chain slack enough to let me crouch and press my back against the cold wall, hidden by the angle. The next person who stepped in



would see a seemingly empty room—maybe even think I'd collapsed somewhere deeper in the dark.

But I'd be there.

Waiting.

And the moment they crossed the threshold—the moment I saw the glint of that key?

Rhea would take over.

> "We'll be fast," she promised. "You won't even have to blink. Incapacitate them. Get the key. Let me out. Just this once. I'll do the rest."

I closed my eyes.

Felt the heat building in my limbs again. The whisper of power curling through me like a breath I hadn't taken in weeks.

Let them come.

Let them take me to the White Room.

Let them try.

I turned my head toward where the bulb would've been.





I had adapted better to the darkness since they stopped giving me light.

It was enough. Enough to give them the illusion of control. To blind them with it.

I shuffled forward, the bed scraping softly as the chains pulled taut.

My fingers found the base of the switch, ran up along the cold wall. The wiring was old—probably not designed for a full outage. But I didn't need a full outage.

Just darkness.

I pressed my fingers to the baseplate.

Crack.

The switch snapped under the force of my palm, breaking into the wall. Sparks fizzled faintly, and then—

Nothing.

The light sputtered once.

Then died.

Complete darkness swallowed the cell.



But I'd already adjusted.

I'd been here long enough to feel every inch of this space like it was a part of me.

> "Smart girl," Rhea murmured with pride. "Now breathe. Get low. Save your strength."

I slid back into position, pressing myself tight against the wall beside the door, the chains coiled carefully in my lap. My muscles ached. My body was still a far cry from full strength. <sup>3</sup>

But I wasn't planning to win with brute force.

I just needed timing.

And darkness.

Time crawled.

My head dipped once, twice—lulled by silence.

And then—footsteps.

Echoing down the corridor.

Low voices. The static crackle of comms. The squeak of a metal cart.

Two. Maybe three. Coming for me.





My hands curled tighter around the chain.

> "They'll be armed," Rhea warned. "But not ready."

I smiled bitterly.

They never were.

I caught snatches of conversation as they approached:

"...light's been flickering for days—no one bothers to fix shit anymore..."

"...don't care, long as she's sedated..."

"...says here she's still on suppression..."

The sound of a key fumbling into the lock made my heart still.

I held my breath.

Waited.

The bolt groaned. The door creaked open on poorly oiled hinges.

One voice cursed. "What the hell? Light's out."

That was all I needed.

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I struck.

The chain snapped forward first, sweeping low. It caught one of them at the knees, a metal thud followed by a grunt as he went down. 1

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