



## 296 Why Him?

**Hades** 1

Her words ripped the air from my lungs, stole the strength from my muscles, and filled me with an entirely different kind of shock.

"I would take it all from you if it were only my life on the line." She took a breath, and I watched her expression harden, her eyes darkening like thunderclouds. "Alas, it's not. The stakes are higher than me... than us. On the line are citizens who were kept in the dark about my family's conspiracies—and the doom the Blood Moon will bring."

Her voice faltered, just for a heartbeat.

"People with lives. With loves. Families. Dreams. And aspirations. The same innocents you reduced to statistics—acceptable losses in your grand operations."

Her voice cracked.

"My people are not statistics. In this court, in this council, I will vouch for them."



The fire in her eyes flared, and I could feel it scorching across my skin.

"I might not have a title. I might not have a crown. But I have scars, and blood, and truth—and I will use every damn inch of it to defend them."

"You have me," I said, voice rough and trembling. "Let me make this right. Let me help them—for you. I'll protect them if it means protecting you."

Her eyes flicked back to mine.

And for a moment, the weight of her grief softened her face.

But it didn't last.

"That's exactly the problem," she said, quietly. "You'd only protect them because of me. Not because they matter to you. Not because their lives matter. They are nothing but mutts to you." 2

It slapped me without having to raise her hand. 2

She stepped back again—fractional, but it felt like an entire world shifting out of reach.

"Your humanity is... conditioned, Hades. Skewed.

You calculate value in bloodlines and usefulness.  
When you love, you love ferociously—but."

Her voice didn't shake—but mine nearly did.

"...if there's another misunderstanding, another lie, another spark of anger or vindictiveness... they'll be the first to bleed," she said. "Because your love, Hades, is just that—fragile. Conditional. Explosive. It scorches everything that isn't strong enough to survive it." 2

She took a breath, but it wasn't to steady herself.

It was to deliver the final blow.

"And I love you too much to stop you when I have to choose between you and them."

I blinked. Swallowed the ache rising in my throat like bile.

"Eve—"

"I know you want to change," she cut in. "And maybe you will. But I can't gamble with their lives while you figure out how to be... good."

Her voice lowered. Almost intimate.

"I already tried loving the monster in you. Now I





have to love the people who can't survive him."

"Why Cain?"

"It's better this way," she said, almost to herself—but the whole chamber heard it. "To stand beside someone I don't love. Someone I don't owe the softest parts of me. Someone like Cain, who is cruel in ways I understand but... stable in ways you've never been." 3

"You don't understand," she went on, each word scraping against the hollow inside my ribs. "Cain and I—we have an agreement. No strings. No sentiment. No twisted bonds hanging over our heads like a guillotine. No convoluted love that destroys all in its path."

My voice finally ripped out of me, hoarse and cracked. "What agreement?"

She looked at me, but there was no triumph in her eyes

Only resolve.

Then she turned, shared a glance with Cain—silent, ironclad, unreadable—and faced the chamber again.



"Our terms remain between us," she said flatly. "But the end goal is the same. We want to win the Blood Moon War. We want to destroy what's left of the Valmont Monarchy. We want to unearth every lie they've buried in the name of legacy and vengeance. And above all—" her eyes flashed, voice rising, "we want to protect the citizens caught in a war they never chose." 2

She faced me fully now. "Something you can't assure me. Something I can't trust you with."

I opened my mouth—but nothing came out.

Because deep down, she was right.

I'd made her doubt her safety.

Cain had convinced her, one way or the other, that he was more trustworthy.

The less of two evils. 2

The one who had not plotted the annihilation of all werewolves turned on her when suited his thirst for revenge.

In the game of survival, love was a luxury she could no longer afford. Not when lives that weren't her own were at stake.

Montegue was the first to break the silence, his voice low, calculated. "And if we allow this... alliance to stand? If we grant her a seat—what assurance do we have that she will not use it to dismantle us from within?"

"She already is," Silas snapped, eyes flashing. "With Cain at her back, she doesn't need a crest to burn us to ash. She's holding a blade to our throats and calling it negotiation." 1

Gallinti grunted. "This entire chamber's turned into a circus. One girl with a tragic story and a bastard prince with a grudge—and suddenly we're rewriting centuries of council law?"

"She's not just one girl," Kael said sharply, stepping forward. "She's the reason might all the standing when it all comes." 2

Montegue's gaze narrowed. "And if we allow her this seat, and she decides we're no longer useful?"

Eve spoke before anyone else could.

"If you were that powerless, then I wouldn't need a seat to ruin you."

The room went still again.

She didn't raise her voice. She didn't posture.

She just meant it.

Cain's lips curved, just slightly, his eyes meeting mine fully.

And in that moment, the balance of power shifted.

Eve was no longer asking.

She was staking claim. 1

Montegue's eyes swept the room. Cold. Controlled. Calculating.

"Then let the matter be brought to vote," he said. "Seat or no seat. Nay or Aye. Let the record reflect who stands for this... disruption."

A pause.

Kael stepped forward first.

"Aye," he said clearly, chin raised. "For Silverpine. For what she's done. For what she's survived."

No hesitation.



No shame.

Eve didn't look at him.

Montegue sighed—low and sharp.

"Aye," he followed, like the words weighed him down. "We cannot afford another war of ego. Let the girl have her seat. But she answers to the council."

Gallinti scoffed, shaking his head. "Nay. This isn't governance. This is guilt dressed in politics."

Silas rose slowly, venom laced in every syllable.

"Nay. A seat born of pity is a seat that rots this chamber from within." 5

Two against. Two for.

And then—

The room turned to me.

Every gaze.

Even hers.

And suddenly, I was no longer standing in the chamber—I was drowning in it.



Memories surged up like bile.

The first time I caged her.

The first time I lied.

The sound she made when I shoved the needle in.

The way she looked at me after I said she was a threat.

And now... she stood there, untouched by the ghosts that still clawed at me. She'd become something I didn't know how to fight. Something that didn't need me anymore.

Something I might have helped create—and then failed to protect.

> "You've lost her, boy."

The Flux hissed in my mind, curling like smoke through the fissures of my guilt.

"The leash is broken. Your little mutt is loose. And now... she's in the way."

I closed my eyes for a breath.

It wasn't rage that lived inside me anymore.



It was rot.

Shame.

A graveyard full of choices I thought I'd made for the right reasons.

She had begged me once—not for power, not for vengeance. Just for a name. For a chance to exist beyond the cage I built around her.

And now, when she no longer needed that name—when she no longer needed me—I was being asked to cast the vote that would decide whether she rose or fell.

Or maybe... whether I did.

"I remember the girl they dragged." I said, voice quiet.

The room stilled.

"I remember how she screamed when they threw her in the White Room. How she bled. How she begged." I swallowed, the words scraping up my throat like splinters. "I told myself I was doing the right thing. That if I held the knife, I could choose how deep it cut."

Eve's expression didn't change.

But her eyes shimmered—just for a second.

"I don't know if I deserve forgiveness. Or if she'll ever give it to me."

My gaze drifted over the chamber, then back to her.

"But she deserves this."

The silence was absolute.

"I vote Aye."

The word felt like both a burial and a benediction.

And just like that—Eve won.

Cain's smirk was subtle. Kael's shoulders eased.

Montegue nodded once, sharply.

"The vote is passed. Effective immediately. Seat granted."

And Eve?

She didn't thank me.

Didn't even glance my way.

She just stepped forward, shoulders squared,  
into the seat carved from centuries of blood and  
betrayal.

And she made it hers.

> "Fool."

The word slithered through my skull, silken and  
venom-laced.

> "You let the mutt off her leash. Gave her a  
crown for biting the hand that fed her."

My knuckles whitened at my sides.

> "Do you think she'll keep her fangs sheathed  
now? That because she wears a title, she's  
tamed?"

I said nothing. Couldn't. My voice had been spent  
on a vote that tasted like ash on my tongue.

Eve sat now, in the chair once reserved for kings  
and killers. She didn't fidget. She didn't shrink.

She ruled.

And the Flux?





It seethed.

> "Let her bask. Let her stand tall in the light she thinks she earned."

"We'll see what burns first—her pride or her precious people."

A pulse beat hard behind my eyes. I stared at her, and for the first time since she came back into my life, I didn't see the girl I tried to love. 1

I saw a future I was no longer a part of.

And the Flux saw a threat.

> **"She will kneel,"** it rasped. **"One way or another. They all do. Obedience is inevitable. Pain is patient."**

I staggered a breath, nausea curdling low in my gut.

I could feel its hunger crawling closer now, like a hand around my spine.

> **"You may be soft, Hades. But I'm not. And I do not bow to werewolves."**

My jaw clenched.

< 298 Why Him?



> "So let her have her moment in the sun," the Flux whispered.

"Even flowers bloom before they rot." 5

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