



348 Ordinary

Hades 1

"It's the same," I muttered as the live feed played for us for what felt like the thousandth time.

"Nothing has changed." I took in the movement of guards with weapons almost every entrance, servants milling about carrying out their duty and the royals, the Valmonts moved around occasionally.

My eyes subtly darted between Eve and the live feed we were getting straight from the Lunar Heights, the place she used to call home. Her expression was inscrutable, her eyes so piercing that it could have melted a hole in the monitor.

She was just finding out that we had eyes on the inside all along but she did not seem to have much of a reaction, for now.

Kael flashed me a nervous glance as we all watch what we all knew. Nothing would happen, nothing at all. It seemed like nothing ever happened in Lunar Heights, even though the contrary should have been true.



The hairs on my arms rise when I saw the beta walking beside Darius, talking about a budget.

Everything looked... ordinary.

Too ordinary.

"Domestic," Kael muttered beside me, almost under his breath. "It looks domestic."

He wasn't wrong. The live feed flickered from corridor to corridor, room to room—each one so polished, so routine it made my skin crawl. Guards posted at their usual points. Servants bustling about with folded linens and silver trays. Council aides adjusting robes as they discussed sector budgets.

It was like watching a beautifully curated lie. ¹

Fifteen months until the Bloodmoon, and not a single sign of escalation.

Not one flicker of urgency.

No feverish war preparations.

No Gamma soldiers guarding high-risk zones.

No signs of containment labs where a horn capable of turning the war on its head would be.



Nothing but normal. Like it had been for all our month of careful surveillance. Nothing had changed.

Eve stood motionless beside me, arms folded, gaze sharp—too sharp. Focused like a blade honed to kill. She hadn't spoken in ten minutes. Hadn't blinked in five. I could feel the tension radiating off her like heat from a forge.

The silence in the surveillance chamber was dense. Even the techs were too afraid to shuffle.

They switched the feed again—Sector E, then the east labs.

I leaned forward.

"Pause."

The footage froze. A lab tech was adjusting a set of vials while humming. Beside him, a researcher read off data from a glowing tablet. There was a soft laugh. Background chatter. Flawless. Clean. Too clean.

Where were the test subjects?

Where were the Gamma enforcers?



Where were the hidden wings we knew existed?

The places you couldn't access without a retina scan and a sealed blood contract?

Where was the damn horn?

Kael exhaled through his nose, frustrated.

"They're wiping everything before transmission. This is curated." It was just another speculation like the hundreds that we had over the months..

"Exactly," Eve said, her voice low but lethal. "This isn't surveillance. This is a stage play."

She stepped closer to the screen. "They're putting on a show... for us."

I looked at her then.

The way she held herself.

Still. But coiled.

I'd seen her bloodied, broken, half-feral, laughing through pain—but I had never seen her like this.

Like silence had teeth. Like she was waiting to eat whatever came next.



"They know," she said, almost to herself. "They know we're watching."

My chest tightened.

"How long?"

Eve didn't answer.

She just stared.

Eve stepped forward.

Her eyes narrowed, scanning every detail with frightening precision. She tilted her head slightly—only slightly—but I caught it.

Her breath caught for a fraction of a second.

"That," she whispered, pointing to the monitor, "is not right."

Kael leaned in too, following her line of sight.

"What?"

"The coffee," she murmured. "Beta James. He's drinking black coffee."

Kael blinked like it was meaningless, but I didn't.

She turned toward us slowly, her voice just



above a breath. "My father hates the smell of black coffee. He says it clings to your throat and makes your words bitter. James has been making him honey-brewed green tea since I was thirteen."

I looked back at the screen. James stood beside Darius, sipping calmly from the black mug like it was routine. Comfortable.

Deliberate.

Too deliberate.

"Switch the feed," Eve said, coldly. "Room twelve. Queen's west quarters."

The technician glanced at me, unsure. I gave him a single nod. The screen flickered, pixelated, and then snapped into a new scene.

Queen Lyra sat on a velvet chair surrounded by noblewomen, all of them draped in silk and lace, laughing softly over champagne and embroidered invitations.

A party.

They were planning a godsdamned party.



Eve went still again.

I could see it happening—recognition tightening her posture, memory slicing through composure.

I knew no one else in this room could read her the way I could. No one else knew that the woman in lilac was her cousin Rhiannon. That the greying lady touching Lyra's shoulder was her old governess. That the woman in red once braided her hair for banquets.

That this was her family.

And she was watching them like a wolf watches sheep before the break.

The room fell silent again.

I could hear the soft clink of glasses through the feed. The laughter. The ease.

Too smooth.

Too symmetrical.

Too damned perfect.

"They're performing again," Eve said, low and sharp. "No one drinks during planning hours, not



in Lyra's court. And look at the floor."

Kael squinted. "What about it?"

"Too polished," she replied. "It's reflective. My mother hates that. Said it gave away leg placement for dominant body language." Her eyes flickered to the figure of the governess. "She hates that lady. She would never let her breath near her."

My throat tightened. "So they're doing this... intentionally?"

Eve didn't look away from the screen.

"They know we're watching," she repeated, voice colder this time. "And they're taunting us."

She turned, the weight of her gaze falling on me like thunder.

Eve's eyes didn't waver as she spoke, her tone clipped and clinical, but laced with something deeper—cold, quiet dread.

"Do we have access to every room?"

Kael straightened slightly, hesitating only a breath. "Every room that has a camera."



"And do all rooms have cameras?"

He nodded once. "They should. We input the virus during our only access—when Hades came to take you. The techs said it was enough. Everything connected to the central system is feeding us live, even if it's delayed by a few seconds. Nothing should be off-grid."

Eve's jaw tensed.

She turned back toward the monitor, arms folding tightly across her chest, but I could see it—the flicker. The doubt. The faint line of worry that cracked through her rigid expression.

"Then switch to Faculty Fourteen."

Kael froze.

So did the techs.

I blinked. "What?"

"Faculty Fourteen," she said again, slower this time, as if she was testing our reaction.

