



## 353 The Council, Exposed

Eve **1**

The war room was colder than usual.

Not from temperature. From tension.

The air crackled with it, thick and bristling, as if even the walls of the Obsidian Council Tower could sense that the next move might break more than alliances—it might unravel the realm itself.

The obsidian conference table was ringed with shadows and sleepless men. Kael stood stiff, Silas and Gallinti flanking him like dark pillars. Cain leaned back in his chair, arms crossed, face unreadable. And Hades—

Hades hadn't looked away from the screen since it started.

I hadn't either.

The live feed continued to play across the council chamber's curved projection wall. Governor Morrison sat smugly in his tailored



grays, broadcasting to every device in the realm.

"—The people deserve to know what really goes on in that castle," Morrison's voice echoed, low and solemn. "What happens behind the marble columns and reinforced labs. What kind of king strikes his mate—what kind of mate stays."

The video flicked.

Footage of Hades—half-feral, blood in his eyes, shoving me into the wall.

I didn't move.

Neither did Hades.

But I felt his hand twitch under the table. Like a soldier resisting the urge to draw a blade.

Morrison's voice returned. "The only reason she's still alive is because she carries the cure—the Fenrir Marker. You see, the Blood Moon is no myth. It's a ticking curse. One that will tear through our people like a storm. And the king knew. He always knew. She is the beast that killed our king and his father as well as his late wife, it makes you think,"

The camera cut to another clip: A footage of

Hades glaring at me as I begged in the white room. As he screamed obscenities against me, words that still make me flinch.

Hades seemed to feel the same, as she clenched his hand into a fist until it turned white.

Gallinti shifted. "Where the hell did he get this footage? This is post-expulsion."

Silas muttered, "Someone fed him. Someone still inside."

My fingers tightened in my lap.

Morrison's voice cut clean again. "And here's the twist, the part the crown doesn't want you to know: Ellen Valmont—the so-called blessed twin—~~isn't~~ Ellen at all. She's her sister. Eve. The cursed one. The one they claimed was executed."

A murmur rippled around the table.

Cain let out a long breath through his nose. "This isn't a leak. It's a stage play. A perfect one."

"He's not even sweating," I murmured.

Hades turned to me slowly. "You feel it too."

I nodded. "It's... too clean. Like we're watching





Act One of a longer script."

Morrison was still talking. Still unspooling truths. Or versions of them.

"He wasn't chosen by the gods," Morrison continued. "He made himself king by taming Vassir's corruption, he knew he could not take the pressure like our late humble king Leonard. But he couldn't contain it, not even after injecting over a dozen subjects to test his tolerance. Not even after forcing the Flux into his own veins."

Lies, maybe not utterly lies but still lies all the same. It was a horrible misconstrued version of the truth, the time line was off but it was true many died before the vassir found a suitable a host, but Hades was his reincarnation that was why it worked to begin with, or else Hades would have joined the other husks that his father had mass produced all in the mission of finding the perfect weapon.

The video flared again.

More footage. Screaming children. Lab doors slamming. Kael cursed under his breath.



My heart rammed against my ribs, the wind getting knocked out of me as I the scene played out. Even I had not seen this and it was truly horrid.

Bile rushed up my throat, a cold chill seizing my spine.

Cain leaned forward. "We block the satellites now, we halt the infection."

Gallinti snapped, "And prove him right? If we jam the feed now, the people won't question—they'll believe."

Kael looked to Hades. "You can cut it. Just one command. You have five seconds before rebroadcast."

My voice sliced through the debate. "Don't."

They turned.

I stood, my chair scraping against the stone.

"We can't silence him. Not yet. If we do, we lose more than our narrative. We lose our soul."

Kael blinked. "Eve, he's lying—"

"But with just enough truth to bleed us dry. And

if we shut him down, it won't matter if we're innocent. People don't remember silence. They remember who pulled the plug."

Silas scrubbed a hand over his face. "She's right. The people need to see us, not a polished statement."

Cain scoffed. "Then we sit here and let him fillet us live?"

"No," I said. "We let him finish. And then we fight back—with fact, with transparency. We tell them everything. Not some fairy tale. The real story."

Hades finally looked away from the screen.

His eyes locked onto mine—haunted, heavy with the kind of exhaustion that didn't come from lack of sleep. This was the weight of a world cracking beneath his boots.

"He's not just trying to destroy me," he murmured. "He's trying to unravel everything."

He was right.

Because this wasn't just political slander. It wasn't just bad optics.



It was a strategic detonation.

And it was working.

Kael's tablet vibrated. Once. Then again. He glanced down.

Froze.

"...Oh, hell."

"What?" Cain asked sharply.

Kael didn't answer immediately. His fingers moved, pulling up a secure stream, encrypted black and blinking red. "I requested a background sweep on Morrison after the last leak," he said. "Institutional records came back sealed—until now."

He looked up, face tight.

"He was institutionalized. Not long ago. Psychotic break after his mate's death. Heard voices. Saw things. Claimed 'a god' was showing him visions."

Silas cursed under his breath.

Kael went on, "He disappeared. Reemerged cleaned up, organized, with a plan. A following.



He's not a whistleblower. He's a messiah figure with a martyr complex."

Cain leaned forward. "You're saying this isn't politics. It's religion."

"It's worse," I said, stepping forward. "It's belief built on pain. And pain like that spreads faster than truth."

The live feed behind us flickered. The video changed again.

This time, it wasn't violence. It was grief.

Clips of civilians in Silverpine mourning their infected children. Packs crying over burned villages. A montage, set to Morrison's trembling voice.

"You were never meant to suffer. But the crown needed war. And war needs monsters."

The room dropped ten degrees.

"We lose them now," Silas said slowly, "we don't get them back. We can't conscript civilians. We can't call Gammas. Command fractures. Then the regional packs break. Then we get coups."



Cain scoffed darkly. "Then we get martial law."

"No one wants that," Gallinti growled. "No one wants soldiers patrolling their streets."

"They'll think we're silencing them with guns," I added. "And once they start calling the Fenrir Serum a cleansing tool? They won't just refuse it. They'll burn it."

Kael's voice was low. "Anti-Marker riots have already started in three cities."

My stomach dropped.

"They think it's a purification serum. A way to decide who lives and who doesn't."

"It's already mutating," Hades said, jaw tight. "From a public broadcast to a cultural infection. If we don't respond now, our truth doesn't matter."

Cain rubbed his eyes. "We'd be better off if he'd just declared war."

Silas muttered, "At least then the enemy would be outside the walls. But of we are fighting a war from within and still trying to keep Darius from ripping our ass and still trying not get killed by

bloodmoon, what exactly are our chances at winning?"

Kael's comm buzzed again. He turned, answered.

His face paled.

Then hardened.

He cut the call and spoke without preamble. "Security detail just confirmed something... disturbing. Morrison had a visitor one week ago. An unlisted man. No name. No fingerprint record. Facial scan returned nothing—no match in the Obsidian census, not even a failed ID. Whoever he was, he was scrubbed before he walked in."

"Then someone let him in," Cain said. "Someone high."

Hades' expression darkened like a closing eclipse. "This isn't just sabotage. It's orchestration."

Silence fell again.

But it wasn't the thoughtful kind.

It was the kind that bloomed in the pit of your



stomach when the puzzle pieces didn't just not fit—they bled when you tried to push them together.

Kael was still staring at the wall, like he could burn through time if he glared hard enough. "The man came in through diplomatic clearance. Level Ten. That's restricted to Council heads, monarchs, and—"

"Blood-linked royalty," Gallinti finished grimly.

All eyes turned to Hades.

He didn't flinch. But something in his jaw ticked.

"I didn't authorize anyone."

"No one's saying you did," Cain said quietly. "But someone did. Someone with enough access to open the gate, scrub the records, and ghost a visitor past the Tower's heartbeat sensors."

"The moment he entered," Kael said, "Morrison changed. Everything—from tone to timing. That visit wasn't casual. He came to hand him the script."

"But how," I asked, stepping forward, "did Morrison go from institutionalized to



orchestrating a realm-wide scandal like a seasoned politician? His records said catatonia. He couldn't even hold a spoon. And now he's speaking in perfect cadence, weaponizing footage, stirring the realm like a born orator?"

Kael didn't answer right away. Neither did anyone else.

Because we all knew.

That kind of transformation wasn't natural.

"That visit," Silas said darkly, "wasn't just a briefing. It was a reconstruction."

Cain's voice was low. "He was broken... and someone rebuilt him, healed him."

I didn't even need to ask how Cain would have known about Hades essentially using the flux to render him crazy. Kael had only just briefed, but I trusted Cain to be one it the moment he heard that Morrison could no longer function.

"Even His Majesty was also lost to the influence of that thing. How could he return to sound mind within a week after a suspicious visit?"