



358 Truth, Unfiltered

Hades 1

The marble beneath our feet echoed every step like a countdown. Six hours had passed—barely enough time to prep the security detail, summon the press, and drag the Tower into damage control mode. And now, the moment had arrived.

Eve stood beside me, arms crossed as Lucinda offered her the final option: a makeup brush.

She didn't even glance at it. "No."

Lucinda blinked. "You're sure?"

Eve's jaw was set. "Yes. If I show up airbrushed and contoured while people think we've been poisoning their bloodlines, they'll assume I've been coached. Polished. Fake."

Kael's voice cut through the comms. "Cameras are rolling in the adjoining chamber. They're waiting."

But he did not need to announce it. The clamouring of the reporters buzzed like a

vibration through my skin.

Lucinda hesitated. "But just a touch of concealer —"

"I want them to see my fatigue," Eve said. "The scars. The weight. I'm not here to be worshipped."

She turned to me, her profile sharp in the cold tower lighting. "We don't win this with perfection, Hades. You understand that, right. They want the reality, we give them what they want."

I nodded, though a part of me hated it. Hated that she was right. Hated that I couldn't protect her from what came next. But it made perfect sense to let her be formally introduced this way.

The doors leading into the main mall were closed for now. Just behind them, the clamor of journalists, flashing cameras, and whispered conspiracies buzzed like hornets against the glass.

The same hall we had stood in before.

Where she'd pressed her lips to mine, not out of



love, but to deliver the poison. It felt like a life time ago. I glanced at her to see she looked momentarily lost, staring up at space. Her foot nervously tapping like they had been since we got here.

I shifted my weight, arms folding behind my back.

"You remember?" I asked quietly.

Eve looked up at me, confusion marring her face. "What are you talking about?" Suspicion seeping into her tone, anticipating what would come next, courtesy of the joke I had made the previous night to ease her anxiety.

"That kiss nearly killed me."

Her lip twitched, realization filling her expression. "Only nearly."

I looked away before the ache could do more than pulse. She'd kissed me to hurt me. And now she'd speak for me to save me.

No script. No spin.

Just truth.



Montegue approached, adjusting the cuffs of his coat. "Press is ready. They're foaming for it. Just say the word."

Eve turned to face me fully. Her turquoise eyes held something neither of us could name anymore—mutual devastation, maybe. Maybe something more.

"You don't have to walk in with me," she murmured.

"I know," I said. "But I will."

The guards at the double doors nodded once, awaiting our cue.

Kael's voice came over the line again. "Three minutes. You're clear."

Eve's fingers brushed the front of her coat. No armor. No symbol. No crown.

Just the cursed twin the world wanted answers from.

I leaned in slightly. "You don't owe them anything."

"I know," she whispered.

The doors groaned open.

A wave of camera flashes erupted like a second sunrise. Reporters surged forward, restrained only by the black line of Gammas stationed like statues.

Eve stepped forward. I followed.

The cursed twin walks into the fire.

And the king follows the woman who once poisoned him.

Eve

The lights hit like knives—bright, sharp, unforgiving. They washed over me in a flood, reflecting off the marble floors and the chrome podium ahead. The cameras didn't pause. Neither did the flashes. But the noise—that died instantly.

No shouting.

No questions.

No movement.

Just... silence.

Like the room had sucked in a collective breath and forgot how to release it.

Dozens of reporters, officials, recorders in hand and mouths open mid-sentence, simply froze. I could see the whites of their eyes, wide, stunned, as if I'd walked out of a tomb instead of a hallway.

And maybe I had.

I didn't falter. I walked forward.

But I felt their stares as something almost physical. The weight of a thousand questions barely restrained by politeness. By shock. By fear.

I took my seat at the center table. One spotlight burned over me. Another, beside it, on the empty chair Hades would take.

I heard him before I saw him—boots slow and firm. He slid into the seat beside me, his hand finding mine beneath the table. His thumb pressed once against the inside of my wrist. A grounding gesture. A silent I'm here.



But the stillness didn't last.

A murmur began. Low. Then rippling.

"Is that really her—?"

"That's the cursed twin—"

"She's not in chains—why isn't she—"

"Wait, she looks... young. Too young."

"No crown. No branding. What is this?"

I inhaled slowly, eyes scanning the crowd.

Most were stunned. Many were skeptical. Some looked ready to eat me alive.

But not one of them looked away.

Montegue stepped to the edge of the platform and raised a hand. "You will have your questions. But first—hear her. That is the only condition of this press conference. You will listen."

And then he stepped back.

Hades gave my hand a final squeeze and let go.

I stood.



There was no paper in front of me. No script. No perfect opener.

So I started with the only truth I could be certain of. My name.

"My name is Eve Valmont," I said, voice clear but soft enough to quiet them again. "Daughter of Darius Valmont of the Silverpine Pack."

A few pens paused mid-scribble.

I didn't blink.

"Twin sister to Ellen Valmont."

A few gasps now.

I kept going. "And I am also the Cursed Twin of the Prophecy of the Fenrir's Divide."

And just like that, the room exhaled.

Gasps. Mutters. Several chairs scraped back. One of the younger interns covered her mouth like she'd seen a ghost. Another man whispered something furiously into a comm device.

But no one spoke aloud yet.

They were waiting.



Waiting for what would follow.

I gripped the edge of the podium lightly.
"Everything you've heard about me—some of it is true. Some of it isn't. And some of it was never meant to be known at all."

I glanced at Hades. He hadn't moved. But his presence next to me was a wall—firm, silent, immovable.

"Today, I'm not here to spin a narrative. I'm not here to convince you that I'm a hero or a victim or anything in between. I am here to tell you the truth—because it is the only thing we have left."

I looked back at the press. "You will have your questions. You deserve them. But for the sake of clarity... let me begin from the beginning."

The murmurs dulled again as they all listened.

Hades squeezed my hand again and I began.

"It's true," I said softly, "that I am not Ellen Valmont."

A hush fell again, deepening as those words settled like dust.



"I am her twin. The one who shifted."

I saw the confusion knit into their brows. The disbelief. The desperate mental scrambling to match the name Ellen to the face they had memorized from portraits, footage, and reports.

But they couldn't. Because that girl never truly existed.

"I shifted into a Lycan on my eighteenth birthday. Not Ellen. Me."

Gasps echoed. Someone swore under their breath.

"My wolf—Rhea—came through with such force that I shattered the hall floor beneath me. And in the chaos that followed, they accused me of poisoning my sister. Of attempting to kill the 'blessed twin.' But it was a lie. A cover for what they feared more than death itself: prophecy."

I lifted my chin, letting them see me—just as I was.

Fingers flew across datapads. Cameras clicked in rhythm. But no one interrupted.

"They stripped me of my name, of my identity.



They locked me in a concrete box so deep even the moonlight couldn't reach me. And then... they faked my execution."

Several jaws dropped.

"The girl burned at the stake five years ago wasn't me. She was an actress, a sacrificial performance for the Silverpine Pack to save face. To give the world closure, while I rotted in silence beneath their feet."

I exhaled slowly. "Five years I spent there. Alone. Forgotten. No trial. No visitors. Not even a proper mirror. I was experimented on, on Alpha Darius' orders. I was hollowed continuously by Wolfbane.

A grim silence replaced the muttering. The weight of injustice had started to land—and it hurt.

"And then, by some twisted political miracle, I was brought out. Not to be freed. Not to be heard. But to be... wed."

My gaze slid toward Hades for a moment—measured, not sentimental.



"His Majesty was offered my hand in marriage as a peace treaty."

A few voices stirred again, confused and alarmed.

"Yes. The cursed twin, handed over in exchange for negotiations. For image. For optics."

I looked over the crowd.

"And he accepted."

I let that hang there—not as blame, but as truth. Every side in this war had blood beneath their nails.

"I walked into this tower not as a Luna. Not even as a woman. I came as the living ghost of a prophecy no one had the courage to confront."

And now they were confronting her.

Live.

Unfiltered.

I gripped the podium tighter. "That is where this began. And it only gets worse from here." 2