

406 The Wielder

Hades 1

Her words landed like a quiet verdict—the kind that didn't need to be shouted to carry weight. For a moment, I could only hear the steady hum of the light overhead, the faint creak of the cell's old hinges, the measured rhythm of her breathing.

Ellen's gaze held me in place, the air between us thick with something I couldn't quite name—recognition, maybe... or resignation.

"She loved you," she repeated, softer this time, almost to herself, before straightening. "How many months, by your calculations, before the Bloodmoon?" she asked.

Of course she would know about it—but I didn't know why the question settled in my chest like a stone. Maybe it was the way she asked it, as if the answer would weigh more than the asking.

My voice came out low. "Why are you asking me that? You promised information, not that you'd take more of it from me."

From his place near the doorway, Kael spoke, his



tone sharpened with suspicion. "You and your father would know. You'd be monitoring it as much as we are. So why do you need our calculations? Or is this so you can slip a nice little update to Daddy dearest?" His words dripped venom, and I knew exactly why—the things he knew Ellen had done to Eve were enough to stain his every syllable.

Ellen turned her head toward him, her expression unreadable. "You hate me."

Kael didn't flinch. "Yes." 2

"Not more than I can hate myself," she said. No theatrics. No self-pity. Just a plain truth laid out in a voice that was too level to dismiss.

Whatever he saw in her then made him close his mouth and say nothing more.

Her gaze returned to me, unblinking. "How many months, Hades?"

I held her eyes and lied. "Sixteen."

In my head, the real number rang loud—thirteen.

Her eyes narrowed, a small curl of knowing tugging at her mouth. "You're lying. An Alpha with a pack like yours doesn't miscalculate. And the current timeline you're working with..." Her

voice thinned into something that carried both certainty and warning. "...Is thirteen months."

The air in the space tightened—the kind of quiet that wasn't empty but brimming, like the moment before a wire snaps.

I took a step closer, my voice low. "If you already know, why did you ask?"

Her answer came without hesitation. "Because calculating the moves of an enemy is what my father does best." She leaned back slightly, but her gaze never wavered. "And manipulating those enemies once he's predicted their steps? That's his art form."

She paused, letting the words settle before continuing, her tone as precise as a blade. "He lets them think they've taken the lead... that they've outpaced him in the race. But the path they're running is one he's already mapped, and just before the finish line, there's a hole waiting for them to fall through. One they never see coming."

Her lips curved—not in amusement, but in grim acknowledgment. "If I know the exact number of months you've been working with, I can know exactly where in the race you think you are. And

if I can know that... so can he."

The heat in the space rose as I assessed her.
"What is the information you have, Ellen? I passed your test."

She opened her mouth slowly, but it was not what I expected. "Under the full moon's silver gaze, twins shall be born. One brings blessing, hope, and light, the other a curse, shifting as a Lycan, destined to bring ruin and darkness to the pack," she said—the prophecy that was responsible for bringing us all together here today.

But that was just the first verse.

"Yet when the blood moon bathes the earth in crimson fire," Maera took over.

"Neither shall fall," Kael continued from where she stopped.

"One shall wield the moon's fury as their shield, unbroken by its curse," Little Sage spoke next, like she had spoken the words a million times.

"The other shall walk within the shadow's heart, where no light nor affliction may reach," Cain finished.

At that, Ellen smiled. "Eve is the Cursed Twin."



"And you are the blessed one."

Her lips quivered. "Eve was meant to bring ruin and darkness to Silverpine."

"But you are meant to bring light." My voice had more malice than I thought I could muster at the moment. "You bless the pack." I laid the mockery on thick.

She laughed. "This isn't about me."

Her smile lingered, but it was thin and brittle at the edges.

"Silverpine isn't a fairy tale kingdom, Hades—it's Darius'. Malrik's. And if she—Eve—brings ruin to the pack, then she brings ruin to his empire. Without that empire, he's nothing." Her voice hardened, each word deliberate, shaped to cut.

She leaned forward, shadows curling in the hollows of her face. "She will dissolve his kingdom. His pack. The place where his subjects are hunted for sport, subjugated without mercy, stolen from their homes and forced to fight in a war they never chose."

Her eyes flashed—whether defiance, I couldn't tell. "That is Silverpine. That is the pack. And she is meant to bring all of it down to rubble. Eve is a



curse to Darius' pack, yes—but she's also the only one meant to free his people from their tyrant. She is a curse to Darius' empire... a curse to Darius himself."

Suddenly, more of the prophecy made sense. I had concentrated on the part that said she would be immune to the Bloodmoon. I had pushed that to the back of my mind. "So why didn't he just kill her?"

"There are two ruins to his pack—the Bloodmoon and Eve. But Eve also happens to be immune to the Bloodmoon."

"But you are immune to the Bloodmoon too. The prophecy said so."

She laughed—bitter and sharp. "I am not immune. The prophecy says I can wield the Bloodmoon like a shield, and be unbroken by its curse. I can wield the Bloodmoon... like a whip," she finished, the words snapping in the air between us.

Her gaze cut through me, not with triumph, but with the weight of someone who'd lived too long knowing exactly what they were made into. "A shield to survive it. A whip to weaponize it. That's my role in the prophecy. It's not immunity,



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Hades—it's obedience to the moon's fury. I can bend it, drive it, turn it on others. But the curse still touches me. Every time I wield it, it leaves its mark. Slowly."

She looked down at herself. "As you can see." 5

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