

407 Two Months

Hades 1

Was that why she was old? Was it taking her energy—therefore her youth?

"What does that mean?"

She ignored the question.

Her fingers twitched, almost unconsciously, as if remembering the ache of something unseen.

"Eve... she doesn't just survive it. She's untouched by it. No mark. No toll. That's the difference. And Darius knows it."

"Then why did he let her go?"

"...Over the years, he's stocked up on her blood, marrow—anything that might be used to replicate her immunity. He kept her alive because, as long as he had her, he had the key to his own survival."

Her voice didn't waver, but there was something in it that made my jaw tighten.

"It wasn't enough to just bleed her," Ellen said.

"The cells he needed weren't always present in high enough concentrations, even with the



wolfsbane he had her injected with twice a day—so he learned to force them."

I stared, not yet understanding.

"In medicine," she went on, "there's something called a granulocyte harvest. You stimulate the body into overproducing a certain immune cell, flood the bloodstream with it, then extract it at peak concentration. That's what he did to her. Except instead of growth factors and controlled environments, he used pain. Prolonged, calculated, escalating pain. The body responds by producing not just immune cells, but hyper-adaptive ones—cells that learned, over and over, to counter the lunar affliction."

Her fingers tightened into a fist. "It took him five years to find the threshold—how much agony she could take before the cells reached the potency he wanted without killing her. That was when her blood became... perfect. Not a cure, but potent enough to distill into a serum that could hold the Blood Moon at bay for weeks at a time. With that serum, they might as well be wearing full armour."

The room blurred for a moment because red had filled the edges of my vision. My hands had clenched into fists without my permission, nails



biting into my palms.

Ellen's eyes flicked to me, reading the change in my breathing, but she didn't stop. "They have enough stored now to keep his inner circle safe until the endgame. But the rest of Silverpine? Let them suffer."

Kael spoke. "Lunar Cataclysm." His voice sounded far away through the roaring in my ears.

I didn't need to turn around to know that Maera was as white as bone.

I realized only then that my teeth were grinding together hard enough to ache. The image of Eve—broken and restrained—came unbidden, and the sound of her screams followed before I could shove them away.

"And then they rise," Ellen's voice lowered to an eerie whisper. "And feast."

My eyes focused on her. Her gaze was glazed over, like she was looking into somewhere far away.

Kael's head snapped toward her, his tone low and deliberate. "Who will rise, Ellen?"

Her eyes stayed on the floor, the shadow of



whatever she was seeing flickering across her face.

"Who will feast?" Maera's voice was barely above a whisper, but it held the tremor of someone who already feared the answer.

For a heartbeat, Ellen didn't move—her gaze distant, lips parted like she was listening to something only she could hear. Then, slowly, her head tilted, and she spoke with the hollow calm of someone uttering prophecy.

"The streets will run with their hunger... the ones left starving will take their due. Malrik will rise as lord over them." 2

It sent a cold weight straight through my spine. "Malrik?" I pressed.

She didn't answer—not in the way I expected. Her eyes blinked once, twice, before her focus snapped back to us. Whatever haze she had been under seemed to burn away in an instant.

"What?" she asked, genuine confusion softening her tone.

Kael's jaw tightened. "You don't remember what you just said?"

Her brows furrowed faintly. "I haven't said



anything since you asked about the serum."

The silence that followed wasn't comfortable—it stretched, taut, over the tension in the air. Maera's grip had whitened on the bars of the cell, and I couldn't tell if the pounding in my ears was mine alone or everyone's.

"You have not told us anything worthwhile, Ellen," I growled. "Talk to me. If you know something, you have to talk to me."

Her stump lifted slowly, the ragged edge of old scar tissue catching the light like something half-healed and still raw in memory.

"I am telling you why he made me stay," she said, voice like ground glass, "and why he gave Eve back to you when he was done—when he was sure she would be useless to you. How he is steps ahead of you."

The air seemed to constrict in my lungs. "Tell me," I demanded, every muscle in my jaw straining.

Her gaze didn't flinch. "I wield the Blood Moon, Hades. I can pull it to me. Feel its path, its movement, even now. And Darius... Darius made sure you believed you had time. While you've been looking for your opening, he's been

shortening the distance. The Blood Moon is coming faster than you think."

Something coiled tight in my gut, cold and vicious. I stepped forward, grabbing her shoulders, the bones sharp under my hands. "Tell me," I growled, my voice low but trembling, with the dangerous edge to it.

She only looked at me, and there was something almost pitying in her expression. "It's the reason I've aged, Hades. Why I look like this. I pulled the Blood Moon closer once before. I had power over it. But it takes something from you every time—years, life, strength."

My hands froze on her shoulders. "How many months?" The words left me before I could think.

Her answer fell between us like the first crack of a fault line giving way.

"You have less than two months before the Blood Moon—that is, if he does not find a way to pull it even closer." 5

Maera let out a choked sob and Sage began to cry, Cain trying to soothe her.

And all I could do was look at her.

