



426 She Was Not Executed

Hades 1

The name raised the tension but not necessarily in an averse way.

Kael spoke first. "What did he do?"

She actually chuckled, a bitter sound dredged from the darkest part of her heart. "What hasn't he done?"

Kael stayed level-headed, probing for more. "We've got time."

That was a lie, but I knew better than to interrupt. I doubted her name was even Dallah—not like I believed her from the start.

"Why would it be your concern? You're Lycans. The enemy."

Though the last part lacked conviction.

"I doubt the enemy would've rescued you and brought you to find your... kin."

There was no comeback for that fact.

"Your constant border-breaching Gammas are the reason there's conscription. Your people



could have backed off years ago, but you refuse." Her voice wavered slightly, though the venom in her tone remained.

"Did you lose someone to Darius?" Kael asked.

She didn't speak. That was answer enough.

She swallowed, her eyes clashing with mine. "I just need answers. No lies, no secrets. We're tired of walking in the dark."

And not knowing what you're walking toward. Perhaps I'd become sensitive enough to others' emotions that I could read what was on her mind. Eve changed me for that, I realized. The longing in my chest sharpened enough to cut, but I kept my voice plain. "I'll tell you what you want, and you let him go."

But I knew Kael could easily overpower her. She had a child in her arms, looked inebriated, hungry. I'd heard her stomach growl at least three times in the past thirty minutes. So though she tried to act tough—she was tough, with the way she had maneuvered around Kael—that strength was worn thin by desolation.

But I'd sprouted empathy, it seemed, because I doubted I'd be able to look Eve in the eye knowing I harmed a confused, ignorant,



misinformed victim of Darius's tyranny. That would be yet another win for the foul excuse of a creature.

Her shoulders slumped slightly. "Are we going to die?" She forced the words out like a growl but they fell flat, dissolving into something akin to a whimper. "The second verse of that damn prophecy—is it true, or is it propaganda to rile us up?"

I hesitated, still watching her. Just as I opened my mouth—

She pushed on, as though convinced I wasn't ready to give her what she wanted. "Every day's already a fucking struggle. Job doesn't pay shit. I work my ass off for scraps, just hoping one day things get better. I'll go back to school, get a degree, finally give us a life worth living after conscription took our parents." Her voice wavered before hardening to steel. "Then I'm hearing whispers of a fucking apocalypse. Some Blood Moon shit. And God forbid I cut my foot for nothing."

Menace gleamed in her glare, tempered with fragile hope. "Tell me the truth. Is this all for nothing? Are we going to die?"



"Yes. You're all going to die."

Kael ripped the words out of my mouth.

A strangled gasp escaped her, her hold slackened—but just the barest bit—and Kael dove into action.

He moved before the echo of her gasp died. His body snapped forward, shift rippling through him mid-step, and by the time she blinked, his claw was hooked just beneath her jawline, the sharp curve grazing her throat. The boy whimpered, but Kael didn't flinch. His voice dropped, guttural, edged with iron.

"Yes. You are going to die."

The words landed like a blade, cruel in their precision. Her knees almost buckled, but he leaned in, forcing her to hold his gaze.

"But not because of us," he bit out. "Because that's what Darius wants. Every last one of you rotting in the ground. He hid the truth of the second verse because he doesn't need you prepared. He needs you ignorant. He needs you helpless."

Her breath hitched, shallow, uneven.

Kael pressed the point of his claw just enough to



draw a bead of blood—just enough for her to feel it. "When the Blood Moon comes, every unprotected, unknowing fool in these cities will suffer. Your bones will crack from the inside out, your veins will riot against you, every cell in your body tearing itself apart. Death will come like a mercy—swift only if you're lucky."

Her eyes widened, her lips parted, but no sound came. She trembled, the knife in her hand shaking.

"And that," Kael whispered harshly, his breath hot against her ear, "is the truth you're begging for."

The strength bled out of her legs. The blade slipped from her fingers and clattered against the gravel. She sagged against him, the boy clutched between them as though he were the only anchor she had left.

Kael let her slump, but his claw remained at her throat, unyielding, his voice low but seething.

"You want the truth?" His words cut sharper than the talon pressing her skin. "Then hear it. The Eclipse Rebellion is for Silverpine. Every drop of blood they've spilled, every risk we've taken—it's for your people. The only clan of werewolves that still gives a damn whether you live or die."



Her lips trembled, her breath uneven, but she couldn't look away.

"And everything you've been told?" he snarled. "Every whisper of treachery, every story of border-breaching monsters and conscription made noble? Lies. Twisted until black looks like white. Darius painted us as devils so you'd never question who the real butcher is. He needs you misinformed. He needs you docile. He needs you... falsely relieved."

Her grip on the boy faltered as though the words themselves weighed her arms down.

"That is the truth you've been clawing for," Kael growled, the edges of his voice raw with conviction. "You wanted to know why the world feels like it's rotting beneath your feet? Because it is. And he's the one holding the shovel." 2

Kael being harsh was rare, but it was never cruelty.

For a long moment, she said nothing. Only the sound of her ragged breathing filled the air.

Finally, Kael eased the claw from her throat, though the shadow of it lingered as heavy as his words.



Kael moved away from her and let her slump. He turned to me. "Let's go."

But the woman moved, standing. "Take us with you."

Before I could even react, Kael whipped his head back in her direction, his neck damn near snapping. "Brilliant. Let's haul a starving stray and her pup through enemy lines. Should we paint a target on our backs while we're at it?" 3

She blinked, expression downcast, but her brow furrowed with determination. "I have information. I'm not useless."

"Is the information as credible as all your words tonight have been?" Kael countered.

Guilt crossed her face, answer enough.

"But I know something." Her voice firmed. "The Cursed Twin, Eve Valmont was not executed that day." 2

