

429 High Gamma

Eve 1

My voice came in a croak. "Even while cursed?"

His smile was soft, loving. "Our Cursed Luna—the first of her kind. Because despite every chain placed on you, every cruel fate forced on you, you still rose. Perhaps the curse was always a test. And you, Evie... you've already proved you can rise above it."

The meeting area was the same place I had walked into with a wound on my leg and Argenic on my lips. It was the room where I had first made an attempt on Hades' life; where we had our first deadly kiss.

The memory should have stirred unease, left behind its scars like every wound before it. Instead, it steadied me. It reminded me how far we had come—how far I had come—and how much more we could endure.

It reminded me of Hades.

The door opened finally, and we all turned toward the entrance as a group walked in,



dressed in matte black uniforms with gems on their shoulders, symbols of rank within the Gamma force. They moved like shadows, formation seamless, every step echoing the next.

Leading them was the High Gamma. Her hair, black as tar, was braided from the crown of her head all the way down, strands of white threaded through like lightning caught in rope. Her skin, weathered honey, gleamed with the quiet story of scars. Her eyes locked on mine from the moment the door opened, sharp and unwavering.

I shoved down the flutter of nerves and returned her gaze, mirroring the same inscrutable expression.

The room held its breath, silence broken only by the measured steps of the High Gamma and her retinues.

She stopped before me. For a heartbeat, nothing moved. Then, her voice cut through the stillness.

"Luna Eve."

Not a smile, but her expression was calm, pleasant, edged with the sharpness of a woman still measuring the worth of the one before her. She inclined her head, and in unison, her retinue



bowed.

I inclined my chin in acknowledgment, my pulse steady, waiting—braced for her judgment, for what her greeting meant for the others who watched.

I let my breath steady, then inclined my head once more.

"High Gamma Victoriana Garvagh," I said, my voice carrying across the chamber. "I have heard much about you. I thank you for your years of service and for the strength of your leadership."

Her gaze did not waver. "It is my duty," she replied, her tone firm, dignified, but not unkind. "And my honor."

The words hung in the air like the strike of a bell—measured, exact, heavy with meaning. Then, her expression shifted just slightly, eyes narrowing with a glint I could not place.

"I too have heard much about you, Luna Eve."

I did not flinch. A smile, faint but steady, curved my lips as I inclined my head again. "I only hope what you have heard serves me well."

She did not answer with words, only the subtle sharpening of her gaze. Not hostile. Not

approving. Merely assessing—like a blade drawn but not swung.

Inside, unease pricked, but outwardly I remained pleasant, poised, unbroken beneath her scrutiny.

She didn't frighten me; I had seen my fair share of menacing people during my imprisonment. I only feared that we would not flow well enough for the meeting and discussion for my plans to succeed—and without that, the execution of those plans would fall apart.

I needed her to trust my judgment and my call. We could not do this without the Obsidian military. And I feared that without Hades at my side, she would become a thorn rather than a valuable ally.

Before I could speak, Elliot tugged forward, his small hand reaching toward her.

"I am Prince Elliot," he said in a rush, the words tumbling over each other. "My mummy has a good plan to save our pack. She is so smart. You should have seen her explain the letter."

The High Gamma paused, then lowered her gaze to him. Slowly, she reached out and clasped his hand. This time, her face softened, her eyes crinkling at the edges with the first true smile I



had seen.

"I am sure my meeting with your mother will be very insightful."

Her gaze shifted back to me. "Shall we?" she asked.

"Of course."

We moved together into the council chamber, Victoriana's retinues peeling back to take their places against the walls like a living guard. The chamber itself was stark in its design, stripped of ornament. Its strength lay not in grandeur but in the weight of those who filled it.

At the long board before us, the Ambassadors and Governors sat already arranged in rows, their faces solemn, some unreadable. They were the voices of diplomacy and policy, the ones who would interpret this war not just in blood but in laws, in negotiations, in the sway of civilians. The retinues sat with them.

Behind them, elevated like shadows watching a stage, the lesser Alphas sat in tiers, their arms crossed, their eyes sharp. They had not been given seats at the table, but their presence was undeniable. They would question, probe, and test every weakness when the time came.



Victoriana's gaze swept the chamber slowly, taking in every row, every seated figure, every waiting pair of eyes. Her expression remained unreadable, and the silence that followed her inspection felt heavier than any rebuke.

"At another time," she said at last, her voice cutting clear through the hall, "this would not have been our arrangement. Traditionally, the Gammas would lead from the front, the Ambassadors and Governors consulted after strategy was set, and the lesser Alphas left outside these walls until their orders were already carved."

Her eyes flicked to me, sharp as the edge of a blade yet not unkind. "But these are not ordinary times. And the stakes we face are greater than any protocol." She rested one scarred hand on the board, leaning slightly forward as though to mark her place in the new order. "Even I could not have thought of a better arrangement for all who must stand together now."

The words struck like a quiet verdict, shifting the chamber's atmosphere. Doubt bent beneath her tone; resistance eased, if only by degrees.

I let out a breath I hadn't realized I was holding, the tension loosening from my chest like a cord



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cut free. Across the table, Montegue caught my eye, his mouth curling in the faintest wink. Elliot was perched in his lap, whispering something only he could hear, his small hand clutching Montegue's sleeve.

I straightened, steadying myself. For the first time since the door had opened, I felt the ground beneath me was truly mine to stand on. 5

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