

431 The Execution

Eve 1

"If the letter is so damning, why not lead with that? Expose the threats from Silverpine Pack and tell them that they should stay indoors in case not submitting to Silverpine's demands makes them trigger-happy and creates victims among the populace," Gallinti asked. "Why the roundabout way? It feels convoluted." Genuine curiosity colored his voice, as though he was actually giving me a chance to change his view on my plan.

I began to speak, just as Victoriana took over. "I will enlighten him, Luna. I see what you see," her voice was assuring.

Victoriana turned to Gallinti fully, her presence filling the chamber more than it already had.

"There are two outcomes if we reveal those letters too soon," she said, her tone even but edged like steel. "First, the people are already agitated. If we show them proof that Silverpine threatens us, they will scatter like startled birds, desperate to flee before the trap closes. And second, suspicion. Doubt. They will whisper the



council forged the words—that we created fear to tighten our grip. Either way, panic and mistrust will spill into the streets."

Her voice deepened, deliberate. "And while we are busy choking on that chaos, Silverpine will strike. They will not waste the opportunity—our civilians unshielded, our leaders distracted, reasoning corroded by fear. That is exactly when they will cut us open."

The chamber stilled under her words.

"That," she continued, "is why we do not lead with the letters. We put the people in safety first. We distribute provisions. We build defenses around them. Then—only then—do we allow the media to burn itself out with their conspiracies. An online riot is a contained fire. Smoke, but not death."

She turned her gaze briefly to Eve, then back to Gallinti. "And once the fire is controlled, we drown it. We release the letters. Not as panic in the streets, but as water poured on smoldering embers. The truth will smother the lies because it will arrive at the right moment—when the people are safe enough to believe it."

Her jaw tightened, and she inclined her head



slightly toward Eve. "Forgive my bluntness, Luna, but strategy must be spoken plain." 1

Then her gaze swept the chamber again, sharp as a blade drawn across whetstone.

"If you pour water on a blaze, it hisses and flares hotter. But on a controlled fire? It is extinguished in an instant. That is the difference between survival and ruin. That is why this plan stands."

"It does?" I blurted out in surprise before I could catch myself.

Victoriana faced me again, this time a smirk split her lips. "Who exactly am I to refuse my Luna?" she asked. "It's a brilliant, well-thought-out strategy, and for our current predicament, I highly doubt any other plan can work." Her gaze shifted back to the spectators. "That is unless anyone else has complaints or questions?"

This time, only one hand was raised by a lesser Alpha seated. "I have no complaints nor questions about the plan," he hesitated. "It's about the Alpha. We all know about the rescue mission probably gone awry, so what do we do about his absence?"

That was it.



The elephant in the room.

The lump in my throat, the ache in my chest, the bitterness that lingered on my tongue. Though I had faith, it was a little balm to my nerves—but for now, it was enough. It had to be.

"A rescue of the Alpha and his men has been underway since the first day," that had been protocol. "And our trackers are working on getting a signal on the devices they took with them. But the comms are off, so for now we remain in the dark." I tried to detach myself from the dreaded words of the report I had gotten back, refusing to show just how much his absence affected me.

A low murmur rippled through the chamber at my words, sharp with unease. The mention of the Alpha's absence was a wound they all tried not to touch, but one they felt bleeding beneath every strategy, every order.

The lesser Alpha who had spoken lowered his gaze, but his voice still carried. "With all due respect, Luna... the civilians will not wait long before they start to wonder if he is gone for good. And if that seed grows..."

I straightened, spine taut, forcing my voice into



steel though the ache in my chest threatened to drag it down. "That seed does not get to grow. Not here. Not now. The Alpha is not gone. A rescue mission is underway, and until proof exists otherwise, we speak as though he still leads. Because he does."

The words scraped my throat raw, but they held. They had to.

Victoriana stepped forward, her presence commanding enough to smother the chamber's murmurs. "You heard your Luna," she said, voice resonant. "Our Alpha's absence is temporary, nothing more. The enemy would revel in us doubting, fracturing, turning on ourselves before a single blade is drawn. And I, for one, will not hand Darius that victory on a silver platter." 1

"Daddy will come back," Elliot squeaked from the front. "I know he will." His eyes shone with hope as his gaze grounded me. 1

I smiled at him, a thank you.

"You heard the Luna and of course the princeling." Victoriana's eyes swept the chamber, pinning each Governor, each Ambassador, each Alpha in place. "If you have doubts, bury them. If



you have fear, sharpen it into readiness. But if you let it fester into weakness, then you are already his pawn." 1

Silence fell again, heavier this time. The kind of silence that came not from indecision, but from reluctant agreement.

I drew in a breath, steadying the tremor that wanted to betray me. "Our Alpha will return. Until then, I will ensure Obsidian stands. With or without him."

Montegue's gaze caught mine across the chamber, unreadable, but the faintest incline of his head told me he understood the weight of what I had just claimed.

Victoriana broke the stillness, her tone final. "Then it is decided. The plan moves forward. The lockdown. The provisions. The Gammas. And the broadcast when the time comes."

432 Barricade

Eve 1

The command screens lit up in front of me, the live feeds flickering into a collage of quadrants. At the top, Obsidian's central district—streets cleared, Gamma banners unfurled, the civilians ushered back behind locked gates.

The Royal Gammas moved first, their vehicles loaded with provisions and crates of food, each convoy guarded by disciplined ranks. Behind them, the Military Gammas marched in unison—black armor, silver insignias glinting under floodlights. Their formation was heavier, more deliberate, and the sound of their boots rolled through the speakers like distant thunder.

Every quadrant mirrored the same rhythm: distribution followed by deployment. Where the Royal Gammas gave supplies, the Military Gammas gave presence. A balance of provision and power. Shield and sword.

My gaze shifted down to the second panel of the feed—tabloids, live broadcasts, social media banners running like wildfire across the pack's communication grid.

It hadn't even been an hour since the dispersal, since the announcement, and already the words martial law burned across every headline.

The press spun chaos as only they could:

"Military floods Obsidian streets."

"Tower passes emergency law without statement."

"Civilians brace under silence."

Speculations overlapped with grainy videos of Gamma columns, shaky handheld footage of convoys rolling past corner shops, commentary running wild. Every anchor, every commentator, every anonymous feed scrambled to frame the same thing: control. Silence from the Tower. Punishment for dissent.

And through it all, I could see the citizens in the background of the shaky clips—faces pale, bodies pressed against windows, clutching bags of provisions as though they were shields.

I sat back, hands tightening on the edge of the console.

The press had their narrative. For now.

But soon—soon, we would have ours.

"I hope it all goes to plan dear." Monte's low voice snapped me out of it.

I raised my head to meet his eyes and the sadness whirling underneath. His trembling thumb stroked Lucinda's pale weathered hand softly. "You need this win."

My lips twitched but I could not manage a smile. "We all need this. We just have to wait." I murmured, rocking Elliot gently as he slept. The Infirmary was quiet, save the beeping of the machines that Lucinda was hooked to.

The gray roots of her hair aged her, made appear fragile, her collar bones stuck out, her lips thinner as if pursed. Under her hospital gown, I knew was the blighted mark. The thing that managed to put her in this condition, had Kael kidnapped and Hades... and Cain...

"The Deltas have tried three times now," he murmured, gaze fixed on her frail chest. "Each time, the same answer. This is no ordinary wound. It clings to the skin, yes—but deeper than that, Eve. It binds the soul, the mind, the very things that command the body. Thought, will, even breath."

He exhaled shakily, his shoulders sagging under



the weight of truth. "If it had been her arm, or her leg, they could have cut it away. Amputation. A terrible choice, but a clean one. But the mark lies here—" his hand hovered briefly above her chest, just shy of touching the fragile rise and fall. "Too close to her heart. There is no cutting this out. No severing its grip." 1

His voice cracked, rough and raw. "It is killing her slowly, in ways no blade or salve can reach. And I—" his throat bobbed, the words straining as he forced them out, "—I can only sit here, and watch her fade."

Montegue's voice faltered into silence, but the weight of his words lingered like a stone in the room.

I felt it crush me.

Hearing it said aloud—hearing the truth carved into sentences instead of whispers behind closed doors—made it real in a way it hadn't been before. My throat tightened despair digging deep where no hand should reach.

Lucinda's breaths were so fragile I could barely see them. The steady rise and fall of her chest looked more like the flutter of a dying bird's wings, too slight, too shallow to belong to



someone who had once been fire. Once been life.

And Montegue, with all his poise, all his unshakable strength, was unraveling beside her. The tremor in his voice wasn't just grief—it was helplessness. The kind of helplessness that burned worse than any wound.

But apart from Lucinda, I watched Monte, his eyes dark with sadness, body weighted down by... guilt.

My voice came out sharper than I wanted. "Stop it, Monte,"

His gaze shifted to me, surprise flaring mildly in his gaze as if the sorrow tampered every other emotion that he felt. "What?"

"You know what," I replied, still sharp. "I know you better than you think. I know that look. You are blaming yourself again."

His mouth opened to deny it, only to shut again as he tore his eyes from me. He smoothed back Lucinda's hair, smiling faintly though his lips trembled. "She is a vision, isn't she?" He whispered, like he was not speaking to me, but to someone I could not see. "She always said her nose was too small, like a button. She wanted a



strong nose, one with character." He pitched his voice just a little higher, with flamboyant flare of the words mimicking her. He chuckled to himself, but his voice cracked. "But she had enough character, the flare, the radiance of a queen. When she entered a room, you were tempted to bow."

His voice turned brittle, his fingers trembling as they lingered near her hollow cheeks afraid to press too hard as if she would shatter beneath his touch. "I Swore no harm would not to her as long as I lived. And yet here she lies..." His voice frayed. "Marked, broken, used against those she loves, now fading and I left with nothing but vows I could not keep."

There was more he did not say. The man had lost so much; his daughter, killed by his second daughter who abused his grandson and now his wife seemed to be in at the brink. It was more loss than most could fathom.

I walked up to him, chest tight.

"Monte," I said gently, "you love her more fiercely than anyone else ever could. That's not failure—it's devotion. What's happening to her is not because you didn't protect her. It's because Silverpine used the foulest thing they could find



to hurt her... and to hurt you. No vow could have stopped that."

His jaw tightened, his eyes darting away.

"You feel guilt because you swore to shield her, but guilt isn't truth. Truth is that she's still here because you've fought for her at every step. Truth is that she needs you strong now more than ever, not broken under a weight no one alive could carry." 1

I crouched nearer, my voice soft but unyielding. "If you let this guilt consume you, then you let Silverpine win twice—once by harming her, and again by taking you from her. And she deserves more than that. You both do."

"Luna, Governor," he panted, bowing quickly before offering me the device. "Live feed from Silverpine. The rescue party—news just came through." 1

My heart jolted.

I set Elliot gently down, my hands already reaching for the tablet. On its screen, flickering images came into view—comms reactivated at last. The signal was shaky, the audio crackling, I recognise the location.



The border. They were reporting from the border.

But not as I remembered. It was crawling with armed Gammas, faces hardened and the posture taut.

From the looks of it, this wasn't simply a checkpoint—it was a fortress. Floodlights carved the night into harsh slices of white and shadow. Armored columns stretched in disciplined rows, weapons at the ready. Watchtowers rose at intervals, bristling with snipers.

And the gates... my stomach knotted the moment I saw them. I knew that design. Not built to shock, but to kill. Voltage enough to burn flesh from bone, to leave nothing but char and smoke.

The mines were worse. Buried in the expanse before the gates, their faint metallic glint visible only because of the high-res zoom. A field of death, laid out like bait, waiting for the first careless step.

It wasn't just defense. It was entrapment.

From above, the whole perimeter stretched like a scar across the land, mile after mile of steel and firepower. A wall not to keep enemies out—but to lure prey in.



The realization sank like stone in my gut.

And though it looked impossible, though every instinct screamed that no one could pass through that unscathed, one thing was certain—Hades and the others had not been captured.

If they had, there would be no need for this kind of theater.

The only clear space was the sky and even if by some miracle they could fly over the barricade and traps, they would be shot out of the sky.

My wiped my clammy hand on my clothes, skin tingling from apprehension.

Montegue spoke. "At least now we know that their claim was bull. They don't have them--- but for how long." 2