



446 Buckling Knees

Hades 1

At the mention of Lucinda, my first reaction was confusion, accompanied by my stomach plummeting, weighed down with dread.

I turned to Eve, the question clear on my face.

She held my gaze, and the anguish there told me all I needed to know. Something truly horrible had happened while I was away.

"It's a long story..." she began, only for her words to be cut short when I started to rise from the bed.

Immediately, she had her hands on my chest, searing my skin, trying to sit me back down. "You are too weak," she protested, her voice firm but tinged with horror that she could not fully hide. "You are going to need extensive treatment. You broke every single bone in your body from that fall. The fact that you are alive..." Her voice wavered when I refused to go down, her breath catching with emotion. "You need to rest. That is an order."

I stopped, everyone in the infirmary looking on

with widened eyes. "Red..." I muttered.

Her hands on my chest relented as I caught her lips tremble a little. "I almost lost you..." she whispered. "I just got you back, and I want to keep it that way."

I could only stare up at her, my bones still rattling from the pain that pulsed through every nerve ending. "You will never lose me," I murmured, only to her. "I just want to take care of you. We don't have time to waste. I don't have time to rest, not with what I've found out."

Her eyes flickered, flaring with something like dread. "There is so much I have to tell you too, but we still have time, we can..." She gestured to the medics on standby to attend to me as she tore her gaze away from mine—like it was the most impossible thing she had ever done.

She avoided my eyes and stroked Elliot's fur.

She was leaving.

She had to attend to the emergency, and she wanted me to sit here and get treated, thinking there was still time to allow me to recover.

But what she didn't know was that time was the last thing we had.



"Speak about this the moment I return..."

The lack of her presence was already felt, compounded by the truth of just how little time we had.

She didn't even glance at me as she headed to the door. Her shoulders bunched as if she were bracing herself.

The words forced their way out before I could stop them. "The Blood Moon is coming in less than two months." My lungs burned.

Eve didn't freeze—she flinched, her head whipping in my direction.

Her eyes widened, shock rippling across her features like I'd just delivered a physical blow. "What did you say?"

I used her momentary paralysis to push myself up from the bed, adrenaline overriding the screaming protests from my shattered bones. "The Blood Moon," I repeated through gritted teeth. "Ellen—she's alive, Eve. And she told me everything."

"Hades, no—" Eve lunged forward as my legs buckled beneath me, her arms catching me before I could crash to the floor. The impact sent



white-hot agony through every nerve, but I held on, using her shoulder for support.

"Medic!" Eve called out sharply, never taking her eyes off me. "Wheelchair. Now."

The doctor was already moving, wheeling over the chair we'd discussed earlier. Eve helped lower me into it, her hands gentle but efficient, though I could see her mind racing behind her turquoise eyes.

"Ellen is alive?" she whispered, her voice barely audible over the bustle of medical staff. "My sister... my twin is alive?"

"Very much alive," I confirmed, wincing as she adjusted my position in the chair. "And she's been manipulated by Darius this entire time. Eve, everything we thought we knew about the prophecy, about the Blood Moon cycle—it's all wrong."

Maybe sensing the gravity of the situation, Elliot padded over and leaped gracefully onto my lap, his small wolf form curling against my chest. His presence was comforting, despite my earlier dread about him shifting.

Eve began pushing the wheelchair toward the door, her movements quick and deft. "Tell me

everything," she demanded, her voice taking on that commanding Luna tone I loved—and that stirred something in me, even now. "Start from the beginning."

"Ellen has been pulling the Blood Moon telekinetically," I began as we moved through the corridors, the wheelchair's wheels clicking against the polished floor. "According to the prophecy she shared with me, she has some sort of hold on it—a connection that Dartus has been exploiting for a while now."

Eve's grip on the handles tightened, but she said nothing, letting me continue.

"He's been using that connection to his advantage, making her accelerate its path toward us while we stayed completely oblivious. It was all part of his strategy to catch us off guard when we're least prepared."

"How long has this been going on?" Eve asked, her voice tight with controlled fury.

"Months, Eve. And it's been destroying her." My hands clenched in my lap as I remembered Ellen's frail form. "The manipulation takes everything from her—her strength, her youth, literally days of her life. I saw her grow grey and



old before my eyes. The Blood Moon took parts of her in return for bending to her will."

I paused, knowing the next part would hit Eve like a physical blow. "She's also marked."

Eve's steps faltered for just the briefest moment—so brief that anyone else might have missed it. But I knew she understood exactly what kind of mark I meant.

"She had the mark of Malrik on her," I continued grimly. "That was until they completely removed her arm where the mark was, after she escaped her father's hellhole—the place they call the Cauterium."

"What is that?" Eve asked, though there was something in her voice that suggested she already suspected.

"That's where Faculty 14 is located." The words tasted bitter in my mouth.

Eve flinched, her hands going rigid on the wheelchair handles. "Then you know what that place is for."

"I do now." The images flashed through my mind—the cells, the laboratories, the distant screams. "And Ellen wasn't the only victim. Silverpine




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people are being held there, forced to undergo experimentation. The ferals that kidnapped Elliot? I found hundreds of them there. And I know Darius has even more people he's twisted into monsters in his arsenal."

For a long moment, Eve said nothing as she wordlessly wheeled me toward the other wing of the tower. We reached the elevator, and she jabbed the button with more force than necessary.

"That pig," she gritted out between clenched teeth. 

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