



## 466 Deaths You Cannot Prevent

Eve **1**

My eyes burned. Hades's voice was a low, steady rumble—gravelly and somehow still soothing—and all I wanted was to curl into him, close my eyes, and sleep.

But the maps spread across the office desk kept me anchored. Strategy markers. Quadrant divisions. Enemy positions. I couldn't afford to drift.

I glanced up just as Hades said something that stopped me cold.

"The casualties will be high in Silverpine. I hope you know that."

His voice carried a solemn note that pierced through me like a heated blade.

I blinked. It wasn't shock I felt—I wasn't naive. As someone raised to one day take the Silverpine throne as its Alpha, I'd been taught the stakes of all-out war. I knew the brutal arithmetic: sons would lose mothers, daughters would lose fathers, entire families would be wiped out. War fed on violence. There was no version of this



where everyone survived.

But Silverpine's population was different.

There was no contingency laid out for their survival. If Darius got what he wanted—if he kept hiding the truth of the prophecy from them—they wouldn't die from bullets or aerial bombardment. They'd die from the radiation. The Blood Moon's corruption seeping into their bones, turning them feral or killing them outright.

They had no protection.

No domes. No Arrays. No composite shielding.

Nothing.

It would be genocide. A holocaust of an entire race in a single night.

My throat tightened. "How many?" I asked quietly, though I wasn't sure I wanted the answer.

Hades's jaw worked for a moment before he spoke. "Without intervention? Ninety percent casualties, maybe more. With what we can manage..." He paused, his finger tracing a route on the map. "Seventy-five percent."

Seventy-five percent.

The number was a crushing weight in my chest.

"That's not war," I whispered. "That's extermination."

"I know." His voice was rough with something that might have been grief. "But there is something we can do. It won't save everyone, but—"

"Tell me." I leaned forward, desperate for any thread of hope.

Hades tapped the map where a thin line connected Silverpine to Obsidian territory. "The tunnels. The same route Cain's team used. We can bring people through—evacuate as many as we can before the Blood Moon rises."

My heart stuttered. "How many?"

"A few thousand. Maybe five, if we're lucky and move quickly." He met my eyes. "We'll send the Eclipse Rebellion members through first. They know the territory, they have contacts among the dissidents. They can identify who's genuinely fleeing Darius versus who might be spies."

"And once they're here?" I asked, my mind already racing through the logistics.

"Those with military training—we offer them the



serum, equipment, a place in our Gamma forces if they want to fight." Hades gestured to the quadrant markers. "The rest we distribute among the four quadrants. Civilian shelters. They'll be cramped, but they'll be alive."

It was something. Not enough, but something.

"What about more shelter capacity?" I pressed. "Can we build another safehouse? Expand the domes?"

Hades's expression darkened. "We're already building one. On the outskirts, in the eastern perimeter—the farthest point from the Iron Quarter." He rubbed his face, exhaustion evident in every line. "It'll be rushed. Weaker than the others. But it should shield a few thousand more."

"Should?" The word felt like ash in my mouth.

"The composite material takes time to cure properly. We won't have that time." His voice was flat, factual. "It'll hold against radiation, but if Darius's forces breach that far into our territory and hit it directly..." He didn't finish the sentence. He didn't need to.

I looked down at the map, at the tiny markers representing hundreds of thousands of lives. The



numbers swam before my eyes.

"So we save five thousand through the tunnels. Maybe another three thousand in the emergency safehouse." My voice was hollow. "That's eight thousand out of a population of—what? Sixty thousand? Eighty thousand?"

"Closer to a hundred thousand," Hades said quietly.

A hundred thousand people. And we could save eight.

Eight percent.

"Ninety-two thousand people are going to die," I said, and the words felt like they were being carved out of my chest with a dull knife.

"Ninety-two thousand of my people—"

"Eve." Hades's hand covered mine on the desk. "We're stretched beyond our limits as it is. The domes are at capacity. The Arrays are running continuously. Every Gamma we have is deployed. Every resource is allocated." His grip tightened. "If we try to save more of Silverpine, we risk our own people. We risk failing everyone."

I knew he was right.



I hated that he was right.

"They don't even know," I whispered, staring at the Silverpine territory on the map. "Most of them have no idea what Darius is planning. They think they're fighting for their pack's survival. They're going to die because he lied to them."

"If we can get word across the border—warn them somehow—"

"We can't." The certainty in my voice surprised even me. "Darius controls everything. Communications, information, movement. Anyone who speaks against him disappears. The Eclipse Rebellion is already risking everything."

The maps blurred before me. I wasn't crying—I refused to—but my vision wavered anyway.

"The projections," I said, forcing myself to ask the question I dreaded. "After the Blood Moon. If we win. What percentage of Silverpine's population survives?"

Hades was quiet for a long moment. When he spoke, his voice was barely above a whisper. "Fifteen percent. Maybe."

Fifteen percent.

Eighty-five thousand dead. Fifteen thousand



alive.

An entire generation, gone. Families erased. Children orphaned or killed. The Silverpine I'd known—the pack I'd been born into—would cease to exist.

"I can't save them," I said, and my voice broke on the words. "I can't save my own people."

Hades stood, moving around the desk to pull me into his arms. I didn't resist, pressing my face against his chest as his hand came up to cradle the back of my head.

"You're saving who you can," he murmured into my hair. "That has to be enough."

But it wasn't enough. It would never be enough.

Still, I pulled back after a moment, straightening my spine and wiping my eyes roughly. There was work to do. Plans to finalize. Five thousand people to evacuate through tunnels that might collapse. Three thousand more to cram into a rushed safehouse that might fail.

It wasn't enough.

But it was all we had.

"When do we start the evacuations?" I asked, my voice steadier than I felt.



"Tomorrow night. After we return from the Iron Quarter." Hades's expression was grim. "The Eclipse Rebellion is already spreading word to those they trust. We'll have forty-eight hours, maybe seventy-two, before Darius notices the population drain."

"And if he notices sooner?"

"Then we save fewer people." His jaw tightened. "But we save some. And we make him pay for the rest."

I looked at the map one last time. Silverpine territory, marked in red. Obsidian, in blue. The thin line of the tunnels hopefully connecting them—a lifeline for eight thousand, a tombstone for ninety-two thousand.

"We make him pay," I repeated, and the words felt like a vow. "For every single one of them."

Hades nodded, his eyes hard as stone. "We will."

I turned away from the desk, from the maps and the impossible numbers. Somewhere beyond our borders, a hundred thousand people had no idea they were already dead.

But eight thousand would live. Fifteen thousand, if we won.



It had to be enough.

Even if it would haunt me forever.

A knock cleaved the already terse air and when it creaked open, Lucinda stepped.

My lips curved into a smile just looking at her, her colour has returned and she no longer hunched as if in constant pain. She looked apologetic as she met our gazes. "I know you must be busy, apologise for the intrusion."

I rose, "No, no, don't say that," I moved towards her, searching her slightly weathered face for any signs that something was wrong. "What is the matter."

"It's the kiddos, they want to see you. And that guard that you brought..."

"Freddie?" Hades offered.

"Yes, him. He won't leave until Sophie gets what she she wants and sleeps. And that is you."

