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Hades 1

I tuned Kael's voice back in.

"Unfortunately, from our calculations and estimated population of Silverpine, subtracting the current already-situated refugees—" He paused, his jaw tight. "We're looking at approximately seventy to eighty thousand casualties from the Silverpine side alone."

The silence was deafening.

Eve's face went from pale to white. Her lips parted, but no sound came out.

"Seventy to eighty thousand," Eve repeated quietly, her voice hollow.

"That's conservative," Thea added grimly from beside Kael. "We didn't count the children."

"They're all going to die."

The voice was weak but cutting. Ellen.

Everyone's attention snapped to Eve's screen, where Ellen had pushed herself upright in the infirmary bed, her remaining hand gripping the sheets.

"Ellen—" Eve started.

"They're all going to die," Ellen repeated, louder now, her voice trembling. "And we're just—we're just going to let it happen. We're going to sit here and watch seventy thousand people burn and—"

"Miss Valmont," Silas interrupted, his tone measured but firm. "We understand your distress, but we've done everything within our power. Each quadrant has accommodated as many refugees as physically possible. We've stretched our resources to the breaking point."

"He's right," Gallinti added, his voice harder. "We cannot sacrifice Obsidian for Silverpine, no matter how noble the cause. Our people come first."

Ellen's face crumpled.

Montague leaned forward, his expression more empathetic. "It's a pity, Miss Valmont. Truly. But there's too little time and no protection for these people. We've exhausted every option."

"We have tried our best," Cain said quietly, his eyes filled with regret as he looked at Ellen through the screen. "But Obsidian's people come first. That's the reality. If we could help more, we

would. But we can't."

Ellen shook her head violently. "No. No, there has to be—there has to be something—"

Her eyes started darting back and forth, rapid and frantic, like her mind was computing something at impossible speed.

"Ellen," Eve said, concern sharpening her voice. "Ellen, stop. You need to rest—"

Blood dripped from Ellen's nose.

"Ellen!" Eve reached for the tablet.

"Wait!" Ellen grabbed Eve's wrist with surprising strength, her eyes wild but focused. "Wait, I have an idea."

"Ellen, you're bleeding—"

"I can do it," Ellen said desperately. "I can save them."

"Ellen—"

"I can wield the Bloodmoon," Ellen continued, words spilling out faster now. "I've had practice. I've done it. If I can wield the Bloodmoon itself, then I should be able to wield its radiation. Repel it. Like a shield."

The room went silent.

"That's—" Kael started, then stopped. "Even if that were possible, Ellen, the scale required to shield all of Silverpine—"

"I wielded the Bloodmoon itself," Ellen interrupted, her voice stronger now despite the blood streaming from her nose. "The source of the radiation. I pulled the whole entity closer. Cut a year down to less than two months. I did the bulk of that work in weeks."

She wiped the blood from her face with the back of her hand, her gaze fierce.

"I can repel it off the whole of Silverpine if I have to," she said with conviction. "For seventy-two hours. Long enough for the Bloodmoon to pass."

"It will kill you," I said quietly.

Ellen's eyes found mine through the screen.

"I know," she said simply. "It's my life. Just one. For thousands. For seventy-two hours."

"No," Eve said immediately, her voice remained stoic but I knew my wife. I could hear that imperceptible crack that no one could. "No, Ellen, you are rambling."

"I can," Ellen said, turning to her sister. "And I will. This is my choice, Evie. Let me make it."

"Ellen—"

"I've killed so many people," Ellen whispered, tears mixing with the blood on her face. "So many. I can't bring them back. But I can save these ones. I can do something good before I—"

She stopped, her breath hitching as Eve began wiping her face, trying to get her back into bed. But Ellen grabbed the tablet from Eve.

"Let me do this," she pleaded. "Please. Let me save them."

Eve's face hardened, shaking her head. A tear slipped past one eye. "There has to be another way—"

"There isn't," Ellen said gently. "You know there isn't."

"Miss Valmont," Montague said carefully. "Even if you could theoretically repel the radiation, the physical toll—you're barely recovered. Your body is already—"

"Failing," Ellen finished. "I know. I'm dying anyway. Slowly. Painfully. But this—this gives my death meaning. This makes it worth something."

"You're not dying," Eve said fiercely. "The doctors said with treatment—"

"The doctors said I might recover," Ellen corrected. "With months of intensive care and no guarantees. But we don't have months, do we? We have three weeks. And in three weeks, seventy thousand people will die unless someone does something."

She looked around at all the faces on the screens.

"So let me be that someone," she said quietly. "Let me save them. It's the least I can do after everything I've done."

Cain exhaled slowly. "If this is even possible—and that's a big if—how would it work?" My brother had gone pale, this face etched with tension. 3

Ellen's eyes lit up with desperate hope. "I'd need to be positioned centrally in Silverpine. Somewhere high. The Lunar Heights would be ideal. From there, I can extend the repulsion field outward, covering the entire territory. It would take constant focus, constant energy. For seventy-two hours straight."

"You'd have to stay conscious the entire time," Kael said, his expression grim. "No rest. No sleep. Just constant exertion for three days."

"I know."

"And if you lose focus even for a moment—"

"The shield collapses," Ellen finished. "I know. But I won't lose focus. I can't."

"Ellen," I said, my voice hard. "This is a suicide mission."

"Yes," she agreed simply. "But it's a suicide mission that saves seventy thousand lives. That's a trade I'm willing to make."

Eve made a sound like she'd been struck, crumbling.

"Evie," Ellen said, taking her sister's hand. "I need you to understand. I want this. I want to do something good. Something that matters. Please. Let me have this."

"I can't lose you again," Eve whispered. "I just got you back."

"You never lost me," Ellen said gently. "I was just... somewhere else for a while. But I'm here now. And this—this is how I come home. By saving the people I helped condemn."

Silence stretched across the video call.

Finally, Silas spoke. "If Miss Valmont is volunteering for this mission, and if it has even a

chance of success, we should consider it. Seventy thousand lives—"

"Are worth one," Gallinti finished grudgingly. "Even I can do that math."

"But we need to verify it's possible," Montague added. "We need experts. We need to understand the mechanics—"

"I can explain the mechanics," Ellen said. "The Bloodmoon responds to intention and will. I've wielded it before. I know how it feels, how it moves. Repelling instead of attracting is just—it's just reversing the flow. Like pushing instead of pulling."

"Just," Kael muttered. "She says 'just' like it's simple."

"It's not simple," Ellen admitted. "It will be the hardest thing I've ever done. And it will kill me. But I can do it. I know I can."

Eve looked close to opening sobbing.

Ellen squeezed her hand. "Let me do this, Eve. Let me be your hero. Just this once."

I watched Eve's face—the war between her love for her sister and her duty to her people playing out in real time.

Finally, she whispered, "Okay."

Ellen smiled—genuine, radiant, relieved.

"Thank you," she breathed.

And the blood kept flowing from her nose, but she didn't seem to notice.

All she saw was the chance to save seventy thousand lives.

Even if it cost her everything.

"Why not push it away then?" Gallinti questioned.
"If you can create a shield."

There was no hesitation from her. "Pulling the moon closer took me months and nearly killed me—and I had the Mark amplifying my power and Father forcing adrenaline through my system to keep me conscious. I was healthier then. Stronger. And I barely survived."

"Pushing it away would be even harder. I'd be working against gravity instead of with it. I'd burn out in days, maybe a week if I'm lucky. And then what? The moon just continues its approach. I'd be dead and you'd be right back where you started, just with a few extra days."

"But the radiation? That's not the moon itself—

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It's the energy it emits. I'm not trying to move a celestial body. I'm just... deflecting its effects. Holding a shield. It's still going to kill me, but I can hold it for seventy-two hours. Long enough for the Bloodmoon to pass. Long enough for seventy thousand people to survive."

"One buys you days and solves nothing. The other buys you seventy thousand lives and solves everything."

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