



## 517 10 Hours Left

*Eve* 1

The darkness around me was not ominous. Peace was a constant. I navigated the space like I had walked its halls all my life. I had been walking for a while, just content in feeling out the serenity.

The silence hummed like a song, the air possessing no temperature: neither hot nor cold.

I reached for things I could not see, them reaching out and caressing my fingers in return.

The emptiness echoed in my mind, it too being blank in a way that did not bother me. My soul sang a strange tune that I found myself humming along to.

I lulled my head from side to side, my body pulling toward a point I did not know. The light tugs at my chest were not unpleasant—more like a tickle.

I continued to hum, filling the quiet with a melody I did not know how I remembered.

Suddenly, the melody snapped and dropped.



And just like that, the timeless and formless space I found myself in began to press against me with a pressure that was physical. It went deeper and far more eerie than that.

The dread did not pulse constantly like a beating heart, nor did it ebb.

No, it cleaved through the calmness I had once experienced, shattering the harmony and leaving something writhing through my skin, screaming in my head. 1

I clapped my hands over my ears and tried to will the tranquility back into existence.

The screaming voice was disembodied—a chaotic chorus of which I could not understand.

Then it ceased, like the abrupt end to a haunting song.

Then the humming returned—not from me. In the distance, someone else made the sound.

I was not alone.

So as the panic receded, I took the lead of the stranger and hummed the tune that he knew as much as me. I followed the melody to the voice.

The darkness pulled away, slowly at first, then in



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larger sheets. The light that was a result did not make me squint.

Then I saw the source of the tune, the stranger—but his back was turned to me.

"Who are you?" I asked.

And before I braced, it turned around.

Half his skull was gone. 1

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**10:43:16**

***Dawnstrike***

Eve's eyes snapped open.

She gasped—a raw, violent sound—her whole body jerking.

Pain exploded through her back, her ribs, her abdomen. Everything screamed.

But she was awake.

Alive.

"Eve!" A voice. Close. Panicked. "She's awake! Get the Deltas—now!"

Hands on her shoulders, steadying her.



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Eve's vision swam, trying to focus. The tent.  
Medical equipment. Deltas moving around her.

And beside her—

A gamma. One of Hades's soldiers. His face pale  
with relief.

"Luna," he breathed. "You're—you're back."

Eve stared at him, her chest heaving.

Then she felt it.

The pull.

Deep in her chest. Insistent. Painful.

The Fenrir's Chain.

It was pulling at her. Hard. Desperate.

Like something—someone—was yanking on it  
from the other end.

Hades.

"Where—" Eve's voice cracked. She swallowed,  
tried again. "Where is Hades?"

The gamma's expression shifted. Hesitation.  
Fear.

"Luna—"

"Where is he?"

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The gamma's face crumpled. "Frostfang. He went to Frostfang to help with the prime ferals. There was—" He stopped. Swallowed hard. "There was a bomb. He—"

Eve's heart stopped.

"Is he alive?"

Silence.

"IS HE ALIVE?"

"Yes," the gamma said quickly. "Yes, Luna. He's alive. The Deltas are working on him. But—" His voice broke. "It's bad. The reports say it's really bad."

Eve stared at him.

Then she looked down at herself.

Her body was healed—mostly. The gaping wound in her back was closed, tissue regenerated, ribs rebuilt. But she was weak. So weak.

"Help me up," Eve said, her voice hoarse.

The gamma hesitated. "Luna—"

"Help me up."

He reached for her arms, steadying her as she tried to sit.



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Her legs trembled. Gave out.

She collapsed back onto the cot, gasping.

"Luna, you're too weak—" the gamma started.

"Then I'll crawl," Eve snarled, trying again.

The tent flap burst open.

Gallinti and Victoriana rushed in, faces tight with alarm.

"What the hell is going on?" Victoriana demanded, eyes sweeping over Eve. Then, to the gamma: "Why is she awake and trying to move?"

The gamma flinched. "She—she asked about the Alpha. I just—"

"You told her?" Gallinti's voice was sharp, cutting. "In her state?"

The gamma's face went pale. "I didn't think—"

"Clearly," Gallinti snapped.

"Don't," Eve said, her voice quiet but firm. She looked at Gallinti, then Victoriana. "I already knew."

They both froze.

"What?" Victoriana said slowly.



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"I knew," Eve repeated. Her hand pressed against her chest, over the bond. "I felt it. The pull. Something's wrong with him." Her eyes locked on Gallinti. "What happened to his face?"

Gallinti's expression shuttered.

Victoriana's jaw tightened.

They exchanged a loaded glance.

"Eve—" Victoriana started.

"What happened to his face?" Eve's voice rose, panic threading through.

"A bomb," Gallinti said quietly. "Strapped to one of the prime ferals. Hades broke the compulsion and—" He stopped. "It detonated. Point-blank."

Eve's breath caught.

"His face—" Gallinti's voice was rough. "The left side is—gone. Part of his skull. The Deltas are working on him but—"

Eve moved.

Or tried to.

She swung her legs over the side of the cot, tried to stand—

Her legs gave out again. She hit the ground hard,

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gasping.

"EVE!" Victoriana lunged forward, catching her before she could collapse completely. "Stop! You can't—"

"I need to get to him," Eve said, her voice breaking. "I need to—he's dying—"

"And you'll die too if you don't rest," Victoriana said firmly, hauling Eve back onto the cot. "You're in no condition to go anywhere."

"I don't care!" Eve struggled against her grip. "Let me go—"

"No."

"Victoriana—"

"No, Eve." Victoriana's voice was hard. "You're too weak. You can barely sit up. You think you're going to make it to Frostfang? You'll collapse halfway there and then what? We'll have two critical patients instead of one?" 2

"I'll crawl if I have to!" Eve shouted, tears streaming down her face. "I'll—"

"Think about the pups, Eve!"

Eve froze.

Silence.



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She stared at Victoriana, her breath caught in her throat.

"What?"

Victoriana's expression softened, just slightly.  
"The pups, Eve. You're pregnant."

Eve's world tilted.

"I'm—what?"

"Twins," Gallinti said quietly. "The Deltas discovered it while they were healing you. You're carrying twins. And the fact that you're alive—that they're alive after what happened to you—"  
His voice broke. "It's a miracle, Eve. But it's fragile. If you push yourself now, if you try to move before your body is ready—"

"You could lose them," Victoriana finished. "And we could lose you. Again."

Eve stared at them.

Then, slowly, her hand moved to her abdomen.

Pressed against it.

And she felt them.

Faint. Tiny. Fragile.

But there.



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Two small lives. Flickering. Holding on.

Her pups.

Hades's pups.

A sob tore from her throat.

"No," she whispered. "No, I—I didn't know. I didn't—"

"We know," Victoriana said gently, kneeling beside the cot. "But now you do. And now you need to rest. For them. For yourself." She paused. "And for Hades. Because if you die trying to get to him, what do you think that will do to him?"

Eve's tears fell harder.

Because Victoriana was right.

If she died—if she lost the pups—

Hades would break.

"I just—" Eve's voice cracked. "I need to see him. I need to know he's—"

"He's alive," Gallinti said firmly. "And he's fighting. The Deltas say he's stable. Critical, but stable. And he'll stay that way as long as you stay safe. Understand?"

Eve closed her eyes, fresh tears streaming down



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her face.

The bond pulled again. Hard. Desperate.

I'm here, she thought, sending the words down the connection. I'm alive. I'm safe. Just—please. Hold on.

For a moment, the pull eased.

Just slightly.

Like he'd heard her.

Eve exhaled shakily.

"Okay," she whispered. "Okay. I'll—I'll rest."

Victoriana's shoulders sagged with relief. "Thank you."

Gallinti nodded, his expression softening. "We'll keep you updated. Every hour. I promise."

Eve nodded mutely.

She lay back on the cot, her hand still pressed against her abdomen, feeling the faint flutter of life beneath her palm.

Two pups.

She was carrying two pups.

And Hades—



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Hades was dying.

But he was alive.

And so was she.

And so were their children.

Hold on, she thought again, sending it down the bond. All of us. Just hold on. 1

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*08:54:08*

*Ironwall*

They returned, and the sky morphed from red to crimson, visibility going down more than a notch.

A swarm of vampires, circling.

But this time—

More.

So many more.

Kael stood at the edge of the command tent, binoculars raised, and his blood ran cold.

"How many?" Voss asked, voice tight. 1

Kael didn't answer immediately. He was counting. Trying to count.



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Fifty. Seventy. A hundred.

More than a hundred.

"Too many," Kael said finally, lowering the binoculars. His jaw set. "They're not testing us anymore."

Voss's face went pale. "This is the real assault."

"Yes."

Around them, Ironwall's forces were scrambling—checking weapons, reinforcing positions, eyes on the darkening sky.

The smell hit first.

That same rancid, rotting-blood stench, but stronger now. Thicker. Almost suffocating.

Kael raised his binoculars again.

The vampires were descending.

Lower this time. Closer.

And they weren't just carrying ferals.

Some of them were armed—crude weapons, spiked clubs, blades strapped to their bodies.

"They're engaging," Kael said, his voice sharp. "This isn't a drop-and-run. They're coming down."



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**"ALL UNITS, BATTLE STATIONS!" Voss roared into the comms. "VAMPIRES INBOUND! PREPARE FOR DIRECT ENGAGEMENT!"**

**The camp erupted.**

**Gammas shifting. Artillery swiveling skyward. Rifles raised.**

**Kael's hand moved to his sidearm.**

**The vampires swooped low—twenty feet. Fifteen. Ten.**

**And then they attacked.**

**The first wave slammed into Ironwall's defenses like a hurricane.**

**Claws tearing through flesh. Fangs sinking into throats. Wings buffeting soldiers, knocking them off their feet.**

**Gunfire exploded—a deafening roar as Ironwall fought back.**

**Bullets tore through leathery wings, shredded red skin. Vampires shrieked—high-pitched, inhuman sounds—and fell from the sky. 1**





