

## 528 Do Not Falter

### *Dawnstrike* 1

Eve threw back her head and howled—a rallying cry that tore across the battlefield, a declaration that they would not fall, that they would stand and fight until their last breath. The sound reverberated through the air, primal and commanding, and behind her the divisions answered. Ironwall's forces came thundering in from the east, Kael leading the charge with his massive gray form cutting through the space between the armies. Frostfang arrived from the north, Shadowhunt came from the west.

The faces she saw, Kael, Maera, Montegue, Silas...

Seeing them alive, filled Eve with a renewed hope even if they looked like they had all been through hell,

The convergence had arrived.

Malrik raised his hand, and the Silverpine army surged forward like a breaking dam. The collision was immediate and catastrophic. Ferals hit the front lines first, their twisted forms moving with unnatural speed and ferocity, and



Obsidian's gammas met them head-on. The sound was deafening—snarls and roars, the crack of bones, the wet tearing of flesh, the sharp reports of gunfire from the elevated positions where Kael and the other shooters were stationed. Blood sprayed across the ground, turning the dirt to mud. Bodies fell on both sides, mostly the Silverpine's feral but the Silverpine forces kept coming, wave after wave of coordinated assault.

Eve leapt into the fray, her size dwarfing most of the combatants around her. Victoriana and Gallinti flanked her immediately, moving in tandem to protect her as she tore through the enemy lines. A feral lunged at her from the left, and she caught it mid-leap, her jaws closing around its throat before she flung it aside like a ragdoll. Another came from the right, and she crushed its skull beneath her paw without breaking stride. The ferals were easy—mindless, predictable, driven only by hunger and rage. She cut through them like wheat before a scythe, leaving a trail of bodies in her wake.

But then the gammas came.

They were harder—trained, coordinated, fighting with purpose and strategy. Eve had to work for

each kill now, dodging attacks, reading movements, exploiting weaknesses. A gamma lunged at her side, and she twisted to avoid it, her claws raking across its ribs as it passed. It yelped and stumbled, and Victoriana finished it with a precise shot to the head. Another came from behind, and Gallinti intercepted it, his own shifted form slamming into the gamma and driving it to the ground. They worked together, a well-oiled machine, protecting their Luna as she pressed forward.

Above them, Kael coordinated the shooters from his elevated position on one of the watchtowers. His voice crackled through the comms, calm and steady despite the chaos below, directing fire, calling out targets, adjusting angles. Prime ferals soon joined the chaos, massive and intelligent, moving with some sense of direction rather than rage, and Kael's voice sharpened with urgency. "Prime Feral, sector three! Eyes only, repeat, eyes only!" The shooters adjusted their aim, and a bullet tore through the creature's left eye. It shrieked and staggered, disoriented, and three Ironwall gammas descended on it, tearing it apart before it could recover.

Because according to what Frostfang had reported, they healed fast, almost as swiftly as

Eve. They could not simply incapacitate them and hope that they bled out and died. They had to be ripped to ribbons. Their bodies are too damaged for spontaneous cell regeneration.

But there were so many more.

Eve could see them now—Prime Ferals scattered throughout the battlefield, coordinating attacks, backing the lesser ferals and gammas with terrifying efficiency.

It was like with every open door, another large stronger door stood in their way.

They were the real threat, and she could feel it in her bones. The normal gammas couldn't do enough damage to them, and the ferals were useless. It was up to her. She charged toward the nearest Prime Feral, a massive beast with dark fur and eyes that gleamed with unsettling intelligence. It saw her coming and braced itself, and when they collided it was like two mountains crashing together. They rolled across the ground, claws tearing, teeth snapping, each fighting for dominance. Eve's size gave her an advantage, but the Prime Feral was strong and fast, and it took everything she had to pin it down. She sank her teeth into its throat and ripped, and black blood sprayed across her

muzzle. The creature went limp, and she released it, panting, her body aching from the effort.

She barely had time to catch her breath before another came.

And then another.

And another.

The ebbing in her bones spread quickly into her muscles, morphing into fire that made her body boil from the inside out.

She wanted to cradle her belly, but not while she had her jaw clammed around a head, crushing it.

*"I am so sorry,"* she muttered in her mind hoping they would hear her. *"Forgive me."*

*>"They are fine, Eve. I am here."* Rhea promised.

*"You three will survive."* 1

The battlefield was chaos. Obsidian's forces fought with everything they had, but Silverpine's coordination was overwhelming. James commanded the right flank, his sandy-furred form moving through the battle like a predator among prey, his gammas following his every command. Felicia led the left, her black wolf form a blur of motion and violence, her green

eyes gleaming with vicious satisfaction. And behind them all, Darius—Malrik—watched from atop his Prime Feral, flanked by the two vampires, observing the carnage with cold detachment.

Eve tore through another gamma, her claws raking across its side, and then she saw him.

James.

He was moving toward her, his movements were almost languid, and when he was close enough he shifted partially back to human, his voice carrying across the space between them. "Well, well," he said, his tone dripping with mockery. "The great Luna of Obsidian. I expected more of a challenge, to be honest. You look tired, Eve. Maybe you should sit this one out. Leave the fighting to those who can actually—" 1

Eve moved before he could finish.

She grabbed him by the throat mid-sentence, her massive jaws closing around his neck with crushing force, and slammed him into the ground so hard the earth cracked beneath him. His eyes went wide with shock and pain, blood spraying from his mouth, and she released him with a contemptuous flick of her head. He rolled

to the side, gasping, clutching his throat, and scrambled back toward his own lines. Eve didn't pursue. She had made her point. She wasn't here to play games.

The battlefield shifted around her, and she caught sight of movement on the left flank.

Montague.

He was fighting Felicia, his gray wolf form smaller and older but still fierce, still fighting with everything he had. But Felicia was younger, faster, vicious in a way that Montague couldn't match anymore. She darted around him, her claws raking across his side, his legs, his face, drawing blood with every strike. Montague fought back, but he was slowing, his movements becoming sluggish, his breath coming in ragged gasps. Felicia circled him like a predator playing with wounded prey, and then she lunged, her jaws closing around his shoulder, and he went down hard.

Eve's heart stopped.

"No!" she roared, and she started toward him, but she was too far, there were too many bodies between them, and Felicia was already going in for the kill—

A voice crackled through the comms. Kael's voice, sharp and commanding. "Rescue team, sector five! Now!"

Three Ironwall gammas appeared from the chaos, and they hit Felicia from three sides at once, driving her back. One of them grabbed Montague by the scruff and dragged him toward the rear lines, and the others covered his retreat, snarling and snapping at Felicia as she tried to pursue. Kael's calm voice guided them through the extraction, directing their movements, and within moments Montague was out of immediate danger.

But Eve had seen it.

Him, broken and bleeding.

Her stride faltered, just for a moment, and that was all it took.

A Prime Feral hit her from the side, its jaws closing around her left ear, and it ripped. Pain exploded through her skull, hot and blinding, and she felt the ear tear away completely. Blood poured down the side of her face, soaking her fur, and she staggered, her vision swimming. The Prime Feral released her and darted back, preparing for another strike, but Eve barely

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noticed. Her body was screaming at her to stop, to fall, to give in, but she couldn't. She wouldn't.

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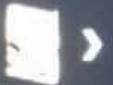


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