



## 529 Running Out Of Time

She thought of Hades. 1

She thought of their pups, safe inside her, depending on her to survive.

She thought of her gammas, fighting and dying around her, trusting her to lead them.

And something inside her shifted, again

Her body convulsed, muscles spasming violently, and she felt herself growing. Not slowly, not gradually—suddenly. Her frame expanded, her limbs lengthening, her mass increasing by a quarter in the span of seconds. The pain was excruciating, her bones creaking and reshaping, her muscles tearing and rebuilding, but she didn't stop. She couldn't stop. When the transformation finished, she was massive—larger than any wolf on the battlefield, larger even than the Prime Ferals, a towering behemoth of fur and fury. 1

The battlefield seemed to pause for a moment, every eye turning toward her.

And for the first time, Felicia looked \*scared\*. 3

She turned toward Malrik, her voice rising above



the din of battle. "My lord! The vampires! Deploy them now!"

Malrik's expression didn't change, but he raised one hand, and the two vampires flanking him spread their wings and launched into the air. They descended on the battlefield like twin nightmares, their red skin stark against the sky, their claws gleaming, their eyes fixed on Eve. The first one dove toward her, claws extended, and Eve met it head-on. She caught it mid-flight, her jaws closing around its wing, and she slammed it into the ground with bone-crushing force. It shrieked and writhed, trying to escape, and that was when Eve noticed it.

The vampire's skin was coated in something.

It was wax like but she had no doubt something else would have been added in.

That was how it could be in the sun. The wax protected it from the light.

Eve didn't hesitate. She clawed at the wax, tearing it away in chunks, exposing the red skin beneath, and the vampire's shrieks turned to screams of agony as the sunlight touched its flesh. It began to smoke, then to burn, and within moments it was nothing but ash.



But the second vampire was already on her—and it had learned. It struck from above and behind, talons sinking into her shoulders before she could turn, and it immediately lifted, staying out of reach of her snapping jaws. Eve twisted violently, trying to grab it like she had the first, but her body was slower now, her movements sluggish from blood loss and exhaustion, and the vampire's grip was iron.

"NO!"

The comms exploded.

"LUNA!" Victoriana's voice, raw with panic.

"Get her down!" Kael, abandoning all pretense of calm. "Shooters, target the vampire, NOW!"

The entire battlefield erupted into chaos. Every Obsidian wolf who could see what was happening broke formation, instinct overriding training, pack bonds screaming at them to save their Luna. Gammas abandoned their positions and charged toward Eve's airborne form. The coordinated defense shattered into desperate, individual attempts to reach her.

And Silverpine's forces were ready for it.

"Now!" Felicia's voice cut through the chaos,



sharp and commanding. "Cut them off! Don't let anyone through!"

Prime Ferals surged forward like a living wall, intercepting the charging Obsidian wolves. Silverpine gammas flooded the gaps, turning the space between Eve and her forces into a killing field. It wasn't a coincidence. It wasn't luck.

It was a trap.

They'd planned this.

Silas was the first to reach the perimeter. He barreled through two gammas, his massive gray form bulldozing them aside, his eyes locked on the vampire carrying Eve higher and higher. He was close—so close—when three Prime Ferals hit him from different angles. The first one caught his foreleg, snapping bone. The second tore into his flank. The third went for his throat. Silas roared and fought back, but he was outnumbered, overwhelmed, and within seconds he was buried beneath snarling bodies, driven back and away from Eve.

"No!" The sound seemed to cut through even the roaring, hellish cacophony of the battlefield.

Montague appeared from the west, still bleeding and barely healed, his russet form seeming to



materialize from thin air in a blur of desperate speed. Fate be damned, he could not lose another daughter. He dodged through the chaos, leaping over bodies, weaving between combatants, his eyes never leaving Eve. He was suddenly faster, more agile, and for a moment it looked like he might make it—

The vampire climbed higher.

Montegue's hind legs coiled and he launched himself into the air with everything she had, claws extended, reaching—

His claws brushed the edge of Eve's fur.

Inches.

He was inches away.

Then gravity, tampered with his own still wounded body failing him, took him and he fell back to earth, landing hard and rolling. He scrambled to his feet immediately, panting, looking up, and the vampire was already twenty feet higher. Out of reach. Gone.

"Shooters!" Kael's voice cracked with feral urgency. "Someone get a clean shot!"

Gunfire erupted from the elevated positions. Bullets tore through the air toward the vampire,



but it twisted and spun, using Eve's massive body as a shield, and the shooters couldn't risk it. They couldn't risk hitting her. One bullet grazed the vampire's wing, another tore through empty air, and the creature just kept climbing, kept moving, shaking Eve violently to throw off their aim.

Below, Felicia's black wolf form raced across the battlefield, tracking Eve's position, staying directly beneath her. Waiting.

The vampire suddenly dove lower, descending just enough, and Felicia struck.

Her wolf form launched into the air, she shifted, whipping out daggers—gleaming silver in the sunlight. Eve could smell it, so corroding her stomach lurched violently.

She went straight for Eve's belly, raking across the exposed flesh once, twice, three times in rapid succession, each strike targeting the same vulnerable area, tearing through fur and muscle. Eve roared and kicked out, catching Felicia square in the jaw and sending her sprawling to the ground twenty feet away, but the damage was already done.

Deep gashes crisscrossed Eve's abdomen, and

the silver of Felicia's blades burned its way into her bloodstream. Eve's body worked frantically to seal the wounds, to protect the pups, pouring all her healing into her belly while everything else—the torn ear, the shredded shoulders, the dozens of cuts—bled freely. She was weakening with every passing second.

Felicia hit the ground, rolled to her feet, and looked up at Eve with her teeth bared in something between a snarl and a smile, blood dripping from her muzzle. She paced below the vampire, circling, waiting. But Malrik's voice cut through the chaos, quiet and absolute. "Enough," he said. "Bring her to me."

And then Kael had frozen on his weapon, watching it all unfold like one horrible dream. He lost it and jumped into the fray of hell fire. The chances of rescue were slim but not zero.

He was weakened, his body was healing, his hands still shook and his vision still more than occasionally blurred or darkened around the edges.

It didn't help that he was far away, way too far but in that moment it made no difference.

He raced down to her