



530 All Hope, Dashed

Victoriana had seen part of it unfold from her position and forced her away through the tight bundle of bodies. **1**

She was firing at the vampire, shot after shot, her face twisted with fury and fear, and she didn't see the five Silverpine gammas closing in from her blind side. She was so focused on Eve, so desperate to bring down that vampire, that she didn't notice the attack until it was too late.

They hit her like an avalanche.

The first one slammed into her side, throwing off her aim. The second tore the rifle from her hands. The third and fourth drove her to the ground, and the fifth went for her throat. She shifted mid-fall, her wolf form erupting in a blur of gray fur, and she fought back viciously—teeth snapping, claws raking—but there were too many. They swarmed her, pinning her down, tearing at her, and she screamed.

Kael reached her position just as she was being torn apart.

His elevated position gave him a clear view of everything—Eve being carried toward Malrik,



Victoriana being torn apart, his forces scattering in panic. He could see it all, and he understood with terrible clarity that he couldn't save both of them.

Eve was too far. The vampire was too high. Even if he abandoned Victoriana right now and sprinted toward Malrik's position, he wouldn't make it in time. The Prime Ferals had formed an impenetrable barrier, and breaking through would take minutes they didn't have.

But Victoriana—

Victoriana he could save.

If he moved now.

The choice took less than a second.

It would haunt him for the rest of his life.

He leaped from the watchtower, shifting mid-fall, and hit the ground running. His wolf form tore across the battlefield, faster than he'd ever moved, and he slammed into the gammas attacking Victoriana like a battering ram. His jaws closed around the throat of the first one, ripping it away. The second one turned on him and he caught it mid-lunge, snapping its neck with a vicious twist. The others scattered, and



Victoriana staggered to her feet, bleeding from a dozen wounds, gasping for breath.

"Kael—" she started, her voice raw.

"I know," he said, and he didn't look at her. He couldn't.

Because when he turned toward where Eve had been—

The vampire was descending.

It was lowering her toward Malrik's position, slow and deliberate, like an offering. Eve was still struggling weakly, her massive form twisting in the vampire's grip, blood streaming from her torn belly, but she was fading. The silver in her system was spreading, burning, slowing her healing. Below her, Felicia paced back and forth, her green eyes gleaming with vicious anticipation.

All across the battlefield, Obsidian wolves were screaming.

They fought with everything they had, trying to break through, trying to reach her. Montague—wounded and limping—threw himself at a Prime Feral twice his size and was batted aside like a child's toy. James appeared and intercepted



another charging Obsidian gamma, his sandy fur streaked with blood, his expression almost bored as he tore out the gamma's throat. Everywhere Eve's forces tried to push forward, Silverpine's coordination held them back.

They were so close.

So many of them were so close.

But close wasn't enough.

They could not get close enough because this had been the plan. Eve was the trump card Malrik lost, one that was now earning him losses. He was well aware that with Hades nowhere to be seen and Eve captured, no amount of strategy could save Obsidian.

All he needed was Eve and now he had her.

Kael tried one last time. He left Victoriana and charged toward Malrik's position, Victoriana limping after him, both of them running as fast as their broken bodies would allow. They made it maybe thirty yards before the wall of Prime Ferals closed in front of them. Kael snarled and tried to break through, but one of them caught him by the scruff and threw him. He hit the ground hard, rolled, and came up just in time to see—



The vampire hovering above Malrik.

Holding Eve suspended in the air.

Her massive dark form dangling from his claws, he dug his talons so deep into her shoulder, her withers, the fur had been shredded off. The flesh twisted grotesquely from all the vampire's movements and they were not healing.

Having used all her strength during the battling and gaining more size, her body, its abilities and defences were stretched thin.

Her body was healing from the internal bleeding from all the collisions and damage she must have sustained while she fought. It was the reason she was still alive.

Yet her blood was dripping like rain.

The entire battlefield fell silent. Every wolf—Obsidian and Silverpine alike—stopped fighting and turned to watch. The only sounds were Eve's ragged breathing and the steady drip-drip-drip of blood hitting the ground.

Malrik looked up at her, his expression unreadable.

And then he raised one hand and made a single, dismissive gesture.



The vampire released her.

Eve fell.

She plummeted from a sickening height, her body limp and broken, blood streaming behind her like a crimson banner. Kael heard himself screaming—heard everyone screaming—but the sound was distant, muffled, drowned out by the roaring in his ears.

The impact was deafening.

A sickening crack that echoed across the battlefield, the sound of bones breaking, of earth splitting. Dust exploded around her, and for a moment she was obscured from view.

When it settled, she was lying at Malrik's feet.

Motionless. 2

Her fur soaked with blood.

Her breathing was shallow and wet.

The battlefield was silent.

No one moved.

No one breathed.

Kael stood frozen, Victoriana beside him, both of them staring at Eve's broken form. Around them,



Obsidian's forces had gone still, their eyes wide with shock and horror. Some of them were still trying to push forward, still trying to reach her, but their movements were sluggish now, mechanical, like their bodies hadn't caught up to what their minds already knew.

They had failed.

They had failed their Luna.

Malrik looked down at Eve, his cold blue eyes scanning her broken body with clinical detachment, and then he smiled.

It was a small smile. Almost gentle.

And somehow, that made it so much worse.

His voice was quiet, yet it carried as he spoke. "It ends here." He said, as he beckoned the vampire to finish the job.

Kael was still racing there as the Vampire seemed to smile and dove towards Eve's crumpled form, his mouth wider than anyone ever thought possible.

A blinding flash lit the battle field as the vampire burst aflame before it could reach Eve. 4