



## 328 Prisoner 1207

They stared into mine, unflinching even as my body convulsed, even as the capsule hissed louder and the scent of scorched flesh filled the air. <sup>1</sup>

He made no sound.

No movement.

Just... watched.

And just like every other time I'd seen him over the years, no one else did.

The first time I noticed him had been a punishment session at eleven. Bloodied hands. Cracked ribs. I'd thought I'd passed out until I looked up from the ground and saw him, just watching. Not curious. Not afraid. Not even empathetic.

Just present.

I'd looked away then. And when I looked back, he was gone.

After that, he came during moments of



weakness. Pain. Exhaustion. Doubt.

Never during training.

Never when I was winning.

Only when I was bleeding. Failing. Breaking.

And now, as the third dose of Vassir's Vein carved its way through me like divine poison, the boy watched again. His green eyes unreadable, unblinking, unwavering.

I didn't dare speak.

Didn't dare reach.

Because if I acknowledged him—if I said a word out loud—I feared what the answer might be.

That I was hallucinating.

That I was already slipping.

That the Flux had already started peeling my mind apart.

He stayed until the pain reached its peak—until I felt like my soul was about to split down the center and spill out across the floor—and then, just as silently as he came, he turned.



And walked away.

Through the wall.

Gone without a trace.

No door opened. No ripple of energy.

Just... disappeared.

The pain didn't stop. But the terror did.

Because if he was back, it meant the Flux was in now. And something—someone—had been waiting.

I sagged forward in the harness, barely conscious.

Behind the glass, Father said something. A Delta responded. I heard numbers. Protocols. Words like "stabilize" and "monitor cortical decay."

But it was already too late.

Something inside me had changed.

And someone had been watching it happen.

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Eve





### Three Hours to the Rite

I had to prepare for the journey to Elysia's burial site.

Every part of me was fraying—physically, spiritually—but I'd held myself together for one reason: Elliot. He was the thread keeping me sane, reminding me why I had to do this the right way, not the fast way. Not the cruel way.

I pushed open the door to our quarters, already rehearsing the words I'd use to explain things to him, gently, carefully.

"Elliot," I called softly.

Silence.

My eyes fell on the bed—neatly made, the blanket undisturbed.

A ripple of unease curled through my spine.

I crossed the room quickly, thinking maybe he'd curled up beneath it like he sometimes did when the world outside felt too loud. I crouched down and lifted the hem.

Empty.



Not under the bed.

"Elliot?" My voice was sharper now.

I checked the bathroom—door ajar, lights off.

Nothing.

I swung open the wardrobe.

Just his folded clothes and one of the paper drawings he liked to leave for me: a moon, a girl with long hair, a little stick boy beside her.

But no Elliot.

I turned in a slow circle, dread thickening with every breath. The curtains were drawn, the windows locked. No sign of struggle. No smell of blood.

But the boy was gone.

Gone.

I stood still in the center of the room, my pulse thudding so loud it drowned everything else out. He never left without me. Not in this tower. Not with everything happening. And after what he'd been through, after how long it took for him to sleep in this room without screaming...



He wouldn't have left unless—

A tremor passed through me.

I ran to the intercom by the wall, slamming the emergency rune until the warding crystal flared red.

"Elliot Stravos is missing," I said, barely controlling my breath. "Seal the lower levels and check every exit point in the Right Wing. Now."

A pause. Then Kael's voice, clipped and grave: "On it. I'll alert the guards."

I bolted.

Down the hall, ignoring the guards who snapped to attention, barely hearing Kael's voice through the earpiece asking for updates. I didn't answer. My feet carried me faster than my thoughts could form. I tore past the warded doors, past the Deltas' quarters, deeper into the tower's eastern corridor.

I searched the classrooms, the medbay, the atrium near the sanctum doors—every corner that Elliot might hide in.

But he wasn't there.





He was nowhere.

Then—

**BWOOM.**

A deep, resonant tone blasted through the walls.  
Not the emergency rune from before.

A tower-wide alarm. Guttural. Rare.

Then a voice crackled over the central speakers.

> "Security breach. East Wing. Cell 3—Prisoner  
1207. Status: missing. Repeat—Felicia Veronique  
Montegue is no longer in containment."

> "Signs indicate a finessed escape. Possibly  
internal assistance."

> "All personnel: lockdown protocols initiated.  
Subjects are to be considered high risk."

I stopped in my tracks.

My blood ran cold.

Felicia.

Gone.

And so was Elliot.



I couldn't breathe.

The air felt razor-thin as my thoughts scrambled to connect the impossible.

I'd seen Montegue walk out of the meeting earlier. A man who had looked hollowed from the inside. I'd assumed he needed time to grieve, to think. I had let him go.

I had let him go.

Oh gods.

Did he...?

I gripped the wall for balance as the halls turned colder, the alarm still ringing in pulses. My throat clenched tight.

> "Repeat—Prisoner 1207: escaped."

> "Juvenile subject 000-E is also unaccounted for."

Kael's voice finally broke into my earpiece again. "Eve—what the hell is going on? We can't find Elliot. And Felicia's gone."

I didn't answer.





I couldn't.

Because all I could hear was my heartbeat in my ears... and a whisper in my mind that sounded a lot like guilt:

You were so busy preparing for the Rite, you didn't see the escape happen right in front of you.

Kael's voice crackled again in my earpiece, this time firmer, faster. No space for grief now.

> "Both Felicia and Elliot are gone. And I guess we both know who it was."

My heart was already shattering, but he kept going.

> "We have three hours until midnight, Eve. It's a full moon. The resonance won't be this strong again for another lunar cycle. And if we miss that window—"

He didn't have to finish.

Hades would be too far gone.

Too deep into the Flux.

Too... lost.



I swallowed hard, my eyes burning, chest shaking as I fought the rising panic. But Kael's voice steadied me, grounding and relentless.

> "We can't wait. We move now. The Rite happens tonight—with or without them." 1

> "I'll handle the search. Felicia's not stupid—this was coordinated, but rushed. That means they've left a trail. I'll find them."

My breath hitched. "Kael—what if Elliot—?"

> "Then I'll bring him back. I promise."

Silence.

Then his voice softened, but only just. Urgent, raw.

> "But you need to go. The vehicle's waiting in the lower lot. Hades is in the truck behind you—he's sedated, locked down. I triple-checked it myself. The Deltas will escort you to the site. Cain's already en route."

I turned slowly, feeling like my limbs didn't belong to me. A trembling exhale left my lips as Kael gave the final push. 1



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> "Go, Eve. Go now."

I did.

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