



329 Our Old Life

Eve 1

The Road to Elysia's Burial Ground

2 Hours, 34 Minutes to Midnight

The Vehicle roared against the quiet of the road, tires biting into gravel and dust as the convoy snaked its way through the valley. The moon hung heavy above us—too close, too bright. The air was colder here, thinner, like even the sky was holding its breath.

I sat in the lead vehicle, flanked by two guards and a silent driver. My gaze stayed fixed on the windshield, even though my eyes burned from not blinking.

Behind us, in the secondary truck, Hades lay sedated—contained inside a specialized pressure pod reinforced with obsidian-laced alloy

He was still in there.

But for how long?

My fingers trembled in my lap. I clenched them



into fists.

Cain was already at the site, preparing the perimeter and stabilizing the burial ground's old magic. The land itself—Elysia's resting place—was sacred and volatile. Older than any known Lycan script, it was said to sit on a faultline where the veil between life and spirit was thinnest.

And tonight, that faultline would be cracked open.

The closer we got, the more I could feel it—like static against my skin, like voices brushing the edge of hearing. Rhea, stirred beneath my skin, uneased.

This wasn't just a Rite.

This was a resurrection of memory, of magic, of legacy.

The Fenrir's Chain would be forged here—between the living, the corrupted, and the soul of a goddess who once walked in flesh.

And if we failed...

If Hades rejected the Rite, if the Flux



overwhelmed him, if Elliot wasn't found in time...

I didn't know if it would be enough.

I didn't know if he'd want to come back.

But I would offer it anyway.

Even if it cost me everything.

The vehicle slowed. The driver murmured into the intercom, and the Deltas beside me tensed.

"We've reached the gate," one of them said.

"Cain's signal is confirmed. No breach."

I exhaled. Nodded. And stepped out.

Ahead of me, through the swirling fog and towering shadows of dead trees, lay the heart of the burial ground. The path was lined with ancient stones etched with runes that glowed faintly under the moonlight. The very air felt sacred—tinged with the bittersweet scent of petrichor and something older... something waiting.

The guards made a perimeter sweep while the driver stepped out to help unload the equipment for the outer wards, but they all knew the rules.



Only Stravos blood could cross into the inner sanctum of the burial site. It had been decreed centuries ago, encoded into the very runes etched into the stone.

A law written in magic. A boundary forged in blood.

Once the initial check was complete, the guards returned to the edge of the warded line. The driver saluted silently, eyes careful, before backing away with the rest. They didn't question it. They knew better. The land itself would reject them if they dared trespass.

I stood at the threshold.

Just ahead, Cain waited beside the ancient stone archway that marked the entry into the sanctified zone. His black coat flared in the wind, the gold sigil of House Stravos glinting faintly against the dull shimmer of obsidian-veined stone. He glanced at me once, then turned toward the secondary vehicle where Hades was kept sedated.

"I'll take him the rest of the way," he said, voice low. "We can't risk contamination. If even one outsider crosses the line, the magic might lash



out. And we won't get a second chance at this."

He pressed his palm to the locking mechanism of the truck. The rune recognized him immediately—Stravos blood. The sigils blinked once, then dissolved into smoke.

Cain stepped inside, sealing the door behind him.

I turned back for one last look at the guards—now silhouettes fading into the mist behind the barrier line. None of them followed.

I was alone.

Just me.

Just blood.

Just legacy.

The fog thickened as I moved forward, the moonlight shimmering in pale ribbons across the stones, guiding me deeper.

The inner sanctum of the burial ground wasn't a temple. It wasn't a hall of honor.

It was a cave.



Ragged. Cold. Untouched.

The entrance was hidden behind a curtain of hanging moss and creeping root-veins, a living veil of green and grey that pulsed faintly under the full moon. The earth here remembered her.

This place had swallowed Elysia whole when she died.

Carved into a mountain slope at the edge of the world, it was here that her body had been carried after she was cut down by Malrik Valmont, her own uncle. Betrayed. But not broken. The power she left behind soaked into the soil, wove itself into the air—and even now, thousands of years later, it responded to her blood like a heartbeat skipping in recognition.

And now she—I—was back.

It was almost cruel. To return here, not as a goddess, not as a martyr, but as a cleaver of souls, prepared to sever a bond that should've never been forged.

To perform a Rite meant to purge what remained of my old lover.



I stepped past the final set of runes, my boots crunching over sacred gravel.

The moment I entered, the air shifted.

Heavy.

Expectant.

The walls were lined with sigils that glowed brighter as I passed. A low hum echoed through the cave, the kind that sank into your bones and made your thoughts go still. At the center was a raised altar—stone and vine and bone—surrounded by six carved columns of varying heights. They pulsed with the same rhythm as the moon above.

Cain had already wheeled Hades into position. The pressure pod was set down gently before the altar, still locked, still glowing.

He looked at me. "The ground's stable. The magic's listening. But it won't wait forever."

I nodded, too choked to speak.

Cain moved to the side of the pod and placed both hands against its edges, murmuring an incantation in the old tongue. The locks



disengaged with a heavy click, and the containment seals hissed as they released.

The glass slid open.

Hades lay there—pale, motionless, bare-chested. Runes had been inscribed into his skin during sedation, glowing faintly like embers under the skin. His eyes didn't open.

But the Flux inside him stirred.

I could feel it.

It didn't want this. It didn't want to be banished. It wanted to consume, to tether, to remain.

The ritual hadn't even begun yet and already the air was shuddering around him, heat distorting the edges of his form. Shadows clung unnaturally to his ribcage and spine, like smoke that had learned how to love flesh.

Cain backed away. "I'll remain at the border. The moment you begin the invocation, you're on your own."

My heart thundered.



Sanctum Core

2 Hours, 11 Minutes to Midnight

The pod's locks clacked open with a final hiss, but there was no body to lift—no man to cradle or awaken.

Only that thing remained.

The fleshy cocoon had changed since I last saw it. No longer just a defense, it had matured into a grotesque form of preservation—obsidian-veined flesh pulsing with unnatural heat, wings coiled tightly like armor, the texture mottled like bruised leather and the underbelly of a predator. Its surface flexed subtly, as if breathing. But it didn't open.

It watched me.

Even without eyes, I could feel it.

Vassir.

He was inside—wrapped around Hades' soul like a parasite twisted into a second skin, half-sentient, half-specter. He hadn't spoken in hours, not since the last attempted purge in the tower. But he didn't need to speak. 1



He was listening.

Waiting.

And I knew why.

He was waiting for her.

Not Eve.

Not the cursed Luna.

Not the traitor.

He was waiting for Elysia.

I drew a deep breath and stepped forward, feeling the ancient power of the burial ground settle around my shoulders like a cloak. The moon's glow pierced through the open shaft above the altar, bathing me in cold silver. My pulse slowed.

Rhea stirred inside me.

I quieted her.

And then... I let go.

I straightened, chin high, and shifted the way I carried myself. Slower. Heavier. Timeless.



When I spoke, my voice was not mine alone.

It was hers.

> "Do you remember the way the stars used to look, before the moons split?"

The cocoon twitched—barely. The wing membrane shuddered, almost like breath catching in a throat.

I stepped closer.

> "We used to lie on the cliff above Vaelmoor," I murmured. "You said you hated the constellations. Thought they were arrogant. I told you that was because they looked down on you."

A flicker of heat rippled beneath the surface. The thing that was Vassir... listened.

> "You burned for power. But even then, you still asked me to trace those stars on your back while you slept."

"You pretended not to need me. But I knew the truth."

"I always did."



The cave seemed to hum around me. The runes on the columns grew brighter.

Still, no response.

No voice.

But I saw the tension in the cocoon. The resentment in its stillness. The bitterness of a thing that could not let go—of life, of love, of betrayal.

I knelt before it.

> "You called me 'El' the night before the war. You told me that if we died, we would die in love. That we would find each other again in another age."

My throat tightened.

I had to force the next words.

> "But I found you first, Vassir. And you weren't waiting with open arms."

The surface twitched—spasmed. A hiss escaped a seam in the flesh, like air leaking from a buried wound.

I leaned in closer.



So close my breath fogged the membrane between us.

> "Do you want to know why you failed to break me, Vassir?" I whispered.

"Because you were never just a monster to me."

"You were once the man I loved."

And finally—

A voice.

> "Lies."

Ragged. Wet. Low and ancient.

It came from everywhere and nowhere, vibrating through the stones, echoing down my bones.

> "You left me in the dark. You left me to rot while the moon turned its face away."

I stood, heart hammering.

> "I died screaming your name, Elysia."

> "You died by my uncle's blade," I said softly.

"Because you tried to crown yourself god."

> "Because you refused me," Vassir snarled.



A seam split down the center of the cocoon.

Black-veined flesh peeled slightly, just enough
for steaming shadow to pour through, heat
licking the altar.

He was coming forward.

I kept my voice calm. Familiar.

> "We were supposed to build something
together. Instead, you tried to conquer what we
were meant to protect."

> "And still," his voice rasped, "here you are.
Kneeling before me. Speaking my name like a
lover."

I didn't flinch.

I had to hold this version of him close. Keep him
tethered. Keep him curious.

> "Because tonight," I said, stepping into the
radius of the moonlight, "I offer you a choice."

> "You can fight and die forgotten—twice."

> "Or you can face me as what you once were.
And be remembered."



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The cocoon trembled—splintered at its edge.

A sliver of a figure began to emerge, silhouette
forming in smoke and red flesh.

The clock was ticking.

And if I didn't pull him out of that shell fully
before midnight...

There would be no Hades left to save.

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