



334 Running Through The Ruins

Eve ¹

The earth was unravelling behind me, but I didn't look back.

Every crack in the pavement, every collapsing wall, and every shuddering groan of this broken city reminded me that time was against me. The Fenrir's Marker wasn't slowing down—it was accelerating. Cleansing, yes. But not gently. Not with care. It wasn't looking to save.

It was looking to finish.

I shifted mid-run, my bones rearranging with a tight snap that no longer shocked me. Fur rippled across my spine, claws scraped over fractured stone, and my vision sharpened just enough to catch the warping terrain before I fell into it.

Even then, I stumbled.

This place wasn't built to be navigated. It wasn't built at all. It was crumbling thought—shattered memory, and corrupted soul compacted into



something barely holding together. Each step forward was like forcing my way through a collapsing dream, one heartbeat away from folding in entirely.

> "Rhea?"

My voice was rough, distorted by the shift. But the silence answered first.

Then her voice came, thin as a thread.

> "I'm here. I'm with you."

> "Where is he?"

> "Close. But you need to hurry. The Marker doesn't know the difference between corruption and vulnerability. If it reaches him like this..."

She didn't finish. She didn't need to.

I picked up speed, claws skidding over ruined marble.

A wave of heat rolled through the ruins behind me, and I knew the Marker had entered the lower levels. It wasn't chasing with malice—it wasn't chasing at all. It was purging.

And if I didn't get there in time...



My own pulse began to sync with the tremors around me. The deeper I ran, the worse it got—walls folding, doors morphing into mirrors of dead faces I didn't have time to name. I snarled and leapt over a torn chasm in the ground, barely landing. 2

I wouldn't make it on foot.

And the Marker knew it.

Suddenly—pain.

A flare of silver heat latched onto my spine and yanked me backwards, off my path and into the air. I landed hard, sprawled on my side, disoriented and panting.

> "What the hell was that?"

I looked up.

There was no one.

Then—growling.

Low. Familiar.

I turned my head, and there he was.

Cerberus. 3



Hades' wolf.

All three heads baring teeth, the middle one staring straight at me while the left and right growled into the surrounding ruins. His body was coated in soot, deep gashes scored across his flank, but he stood like a fortress.

I blinked.

He was real.

> "Cerberus?" Rhea's voice cracked—this time with emotion. "He found us."

The three-headed wolf didn't wait for an invitation. He crossed the distance between us in two strides, dipped down, and nudged me once with his snout.

Then jerked his head.

Come.

I didn't hesitate.

I climbed onto his back, burying my claws into his thick fur, and he surged forward. The ruins passed in a blur, and for the first time since the Rite began, I wasn't struggling against time—I



was outrunning it.

Cerberus didn't hesitate, didn't glance back.

Cerberus didn't hesitate, didn't glance back.

He ran like he knew.

Not just the path—but the danger behind us, the fractures ahead, the blind turns where time bled sideways and space threatened to collapse. His paws struck the ground with surety, claws catching on surfaces that barely held together beneath my weight. I clung to him tightly, my legs locked around his torso, but I couldn't stop looking over my shoulder.

The Marker was coming.

Not fast. Not loud.

But steady.

A low, rhythmic pulse that shook the foundations of this mindscape like the beat of a god's drum. It wasn't chasing us—it was claiming territory. Erasing the rot. And it didn't care what was caught in the purge.

> "Cerberus, faster," I whispered, but he was



already accelerating.

He moved like the world wasn't falling apart under him. Like he remembered every inch of it—not as it was now, but as it had been before. When it was still whole. When Hades still ruled it with clarity and power.

He leapt through a shattered gate just as it collapsed in on itself, took a sharp right where a burning staircase had bent inward to form a pit. At every turn, he anticipated the next collapse before it happened. His left head barked once—warning—and his middle head adjusted course a heartbeat later, dodging a falling spire that would've crushed us both.

I held on tighter.

Not because I didn't trust him—but because I did.

Because if he was running like this, if he was afraid, then I had every reason to be.

The Marker wasn't behind us anymore. It was around us. Threading through the veins of this broken world, reaching for something vulnerable. Reaching for him.



> "Rhea," I panted, "How much longer?"

No answer.

Just static.

I gritted my teeth.

We passed through what looked like the ruins of a throne room, then a chamber filled with mirrors that cracked as we flew past, each one reflecting a different version of Hades—young, furious, broken, corrupted. My breath caught as one of them turned to look directly at me.

But Cerberus didn't stop.

He dove into a tunnel I hadn't seen at all, just a jagged gash in the floor that should've led nowhere—but it did. The slope was sharp, the air colder. The light dimmed until there was none.

Only his breath. My heartbeat.

The hum of the Marker just above us.

I closed my eyes and pressed my forehead against his spine, whispering a single plea through clenched teeth.

> "Don't let him be gone. Not yet."



Cerberus slowed—just slightly—then veered left.

And I heard it.

A sound.

Barely there.

A voice, not calling out—but writhing.

Pain blooming in the dark ahead like a storm
waiting to swallow us whole.

He lunged one last time, and then we were
swallowed by darkness, but the voice was
louder, closer, and as achingly familiar as
anything had to right to be.

Hades'.

Cerberus had found him. 4