



## 302 The Rite

Eve <sup>1</sup>

"Twice in a day, huh, princess," Cain's voice reached my ears. <sup>2</sup>

I swallowed, my tongue too thick to speak. Tears had not stopped gathering behind my eyes. My skin still prickled from the thoughts and echoes of the sensations I had just had to endure.

"Cain..." My voice was too brittle to be mine.

I could practically hear the amusement wither away, and the sound that made me believe he was sitting up in bed filtered through.

"What is the matter, princess?"

I tried not to sniffle.

"Nothing..." I replied.

Silence.

I pushed back the waterworks, each damned moment replaying in my scrambled mind. I could still feel the ghosts of his intrusive tendrils in my



head, in experiences that shaped me. Bile rose in my throat.

"You don't lie well, princess," he finally spoke again, worry coloring his voice. "What happened? You sound like you're about to cry."

"It is nothing," I replied too quickly.

Cain let out a sigh as I tried to rearrange the things I wanted to say in a way that would be coherent and not sound like the pathetic rambling of a scared woman.

Maybe I just didn't want to be alone. I needed a voice on the line as I tried not to regurgitate all that I had eaten, which wasn't much to begin with.

"Eve," his voice turned soft, coaxing. "Tell me."

I should have melted there and then, desperate to unload the weight of the recent events on a man that I still wasn't sure I trusted—and worse, Hades' stepbrother. I would have to join my first council meeting tomorrow. I had to brace myself, and that would mean hardening for what was to come. 2



"There will be a meeting tomorrow. A council meeting," I blurted out.

"I know. I've been informed by the beta. But that's not why you called." His tone was knowing. "You can tell your ally if something is worrying you. I am a safety net for both your physical and mental well-being, remember?" 2

I closed my eyes, swallowing the tight ball of nausea in my throat.

Ally.

Safety net.

I didn't know why those words nearly unraveled me.

Maybe because they were offered so gently.

Maybe because he didn't demand to be trusted—he simply was.

Why couldn't you do that, Hades?

I inhaled shakily.

"Something changed tonight."

Cain didn't speak. He didn't have to.



I pressed the heel of my palm into my eyes.

"Not with the war. Not with the council. But..."

My throat tightened. "Hades and I—we've crossed a line. One I can't uncross."

Another pause. Then, softly,

"I see."

"I won't give you details," I said quickly. "Not yet. But it's... shifted things. The way we move forward. The plans we made."

"So it made you think, didn't it?"

"Yes, it did." I took a moment. "I've come to a decision."

"One you think he might not like..."

I didn't say anything to that.

"Or completely oppose?" he offered.

"Yes." We were already in a precarious relationship. But this had exacerbated it all.

His voice lowered, careful.

"You think he'll turn against you fully. Against



your plans?"

I didn't answer right away. I had begged for trust. He couldn't give it. I asked for space—it had been impossible. And now this...

But I could not compromise on my safety. If he had been successful, Silverpine citizens would have returned to the chopping block with no one to oppose him, and I would return to being some property.

Then, honestly:

"I think if it comes down to me or control—he'll choose control."

Cain exhaled, slow and deliberate.

"Then we adjust accordingly."

I let my head fall back against the pillow.

"You'll still stand with me?" I asked, quieter than I meant to.

"Princess," he said dryly, "I put my name behind yours. You don't undo that just because your husband forgot who you are."

A breath of something like relief escaped me.



"Thank you," I whispered.

"Don't thank me yet," he muttered. "Tomorrow, you face the council. The rest? We'll handle it when it tries to bite."

"But we have to turn the tables. The governors and the ambassador might fear my influence and power, but not Hades. He is still the Sovereign, after all. There is a reason my kingdom is underground, cloaked by shadow. He owns the surface—and the surface is where this will take place. We need a card. A trump card. One as powerful and as dangerous as Hades' thirst for control—and turn his power against him."

I frowned, tension returning. It sounded like he was speaking about some fairy tale elixir or miracle. But his tone said this was real.

"Two centuries after the Moon first fell, after Elysia and Vassir were gutted by Malrik Valmont, Silverpine swept across the continent like a plague. They offered no alliance—only submission. One by one, the scattered Lycan packs—Ferox, Draal, Varkun, even the reclusive Gai—began to realize the truth. Unity or extinction. This was before the Obsidian Pack



ever existed."

"We didn't trust each other. We had blood feuds older than time. Mates murdered. Elders skinned. Children taken. There were more reasons to betray each other than to stand together."

"So we made a choice. A dangerous one."

"A rite," he added, voice low. "Old magic. Forbidden magic. Something older than Elysia. Even older than Fenrir himself."

My stomach tightened.

"What kind of rite?"

"One that bound Alpha to Alpha—not by loyalty, but by consequence. If one turned on the other, the pain would be mutual. If one lied in council, the truth would rot their tongue. If one killed the other outside the Rite's sanction... their bloodline would wither for three generations." 1

Silence stretched.

"You created... a noose," I whispered.

"Exactly," he said. "A mutual one."



I sat up straighter.

"And you want to bring this back?"

"You'll be facing Alphas tomorrow, Eve. Reluctant allies. Some of them are praying you fall so they can return to the old way—carve up the world in the name of peace. But if they take the Rite, they'll be bound. And so will you."

My heart thudded.

"I thought you said you were my safety net," I murmured.

"I am," Cain said. "But this will be your sword. If you want power in a room of rabid wolves, Eve, don't waste time taming them. Give them something to sink their teeth into—and make sure it's each other."

My heart thudded. But would this work? Would I survive this?

But Cain wasn't finished.

"There's one more thing."

The edge of his voice had changed—no longer cold and calculating. It was delicate.



"The Rite doesn't just punish treachery. It rewards endurance."

"If the bound uphold their oath to the end—if no one betrays, if no one strikes outside the pact, if you all bleed and die together with your honor intact..."

He paused.

"Then the Flame grants a boon."

"A wish."

The room seemed to darken as he spoke the word.

"Not a trick. Not a game. One wish. Each participant. The magic is ancient enough that it listens. But only once. And only if the bond is unbroken to the end."

"It is said Fenrir himself—chained and rabid—gave it as a final mercy. A gift for those who chose unity over conquest. So in the end, you get one wish. And it won't matter what Hades wants or tries to do—because this time, you will be backed by Fenrir himself. Not only will he not be able to oppose you while you restore balance



but in the end you still get what exactly you want no matter how impossible." 6

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Silas and Gallinti looked like they would rather be anywhere else as they introduced themselves with the stiffness of men choking on pride. Their voices clipped. Polite, but only because the room demanded it. Even after they sat, their expressions remained sour—like the air itself had soured when I entered.

The silence that followed the formalities was deafening.

Until Montegue, ever the architect of calm chaos, cleared his throat and rose to his feet. He gave no smile, only the ghost of one. And even that didn't reach his eyes.

"Welcome, Eve of Silverpine, to the Obsidian Council."

A murmur passed through the chamber. I didn't flinch.

"However unorthodox your entrance may be," Montegue continued, "your admission is,



nonetheless, an admission. Voted. Sealed. Witnessed. Your seat is yours, until you lose it—or abandon it."

A flicker of disdain crossed Silas's face. Gallinti made no effort to hide his sneer.

"It is not tradition that brought you here," Montegue added, eyes now fully on me, "but necessity. That makes you dangerous. That makes you... important."

He gestured slowly to the obsidian-etched seat at the crescent table. One carved with symbols I didn't yet recognize, but felt—deep in my marrow.

"Take your seat, Lady Eve. Let the first meeting commence."

I stepped forward.

My legs felt steady.

But inside, Rhea stirred—low and quiet like the growl of a storm behind glass.

As I took my place, Cain shifted in his own seat just beside mine, nodding once in a motion meant only for me. His presence alone grounded



me, but it was the tension in the air that confirmed it—

This room was a den of wolves.

And I was about to throw blood on the floor.

Hades was already seated.

His presence was quiet—but far from absent.

It pressed against the edges of my awareness like a vice. Heavy. Suffocating. Sovereign.

He sat with his head bowed, hands clasped before him like he was in mourning. Mourning what, I didn't know—his power? His wife? His control?

The lines of his jaw were steel, unmoving. Not a glance. Not a flicker of recognition. Not even when I passed him.

I forced myself not to look too long.

I couldn't afford to.

Not when he was still grieving the version of me that stayed silent. The one he could shape and salvage. That girl was gone. Or perhaps she had never truly existed to begin with. 1



Montague's voice sliced through the quiet.

> "We've been informed," he said, folding his hands across the table, "that our newest council member has come bearing an announcement."

Every head turned.

Even Hades.

And for a split second, the silence took on a different tone—expectation.

Cain didn't move.

This was my moment.

My choice.

And so I rose.

Slowly. Deliberately. The hem of my black coat whispering over the stone floor as I stood.

"I do," I said, my voice low, but clear. "An announcement. And a proposal."

A pause.

In light of recent events that I will not be detailing. I have come to realize that even as I sit



here. I am not safe not from ambition. Not from betrayal. And neither are any of you."

Murmurs rippled across the chamber.

I met each gaze without blinking.

"We rule beasts. We are beasts. Bound by instinct, driven by hunger. And yet we pretend that alliances made with parchment and posturing are enough to hold this realm together."

A pause.

"I invoke Fenrir's Chain."

The air recoiled, the words hitting the chamber like death sentence. Every head snapped up, eyes wide.