



306 An Unwanted Son

Hades 1

The silence that followed Silas's outburst was brittle.

Like bone under too much weight.

Across the table, Eve had gone still—her face unreadable, but her hand had curled into a fist in her lap.

I didn't flinch. Didn't even blink.

Instead, I leaned back in my seat slowly, deliberately, like I was weighing a man's worth by how fast he could hold his tongue.

"You seem troubled, Ambassador," I said coolly. "Would you like the entity currently riding shotgun in my skull to clarify the implications of that name?"

The temperature in the room dropped.

Montegue's brows twitched. Kael went tense again. Silas paled a full shade—his lips pressing into a thin line of regret.



"I—" he began.

But I raised my hand.

"No?" I offered mildly, my tone mocking the civility he'd clung to moments ago. "Then I suggest you let the matter lie, before your curiosity courts something far less diplomatic than I am."

Silas stiffened. The others shifted. No one volunteered to back him up.

He cleared his throat, gaze flicking away. "Never mind."

"Good," I said flatly. "Let's get back on track."

Montegue raised a brow. "Then we need to agree on the parameters. The Rite isn't something we improvise. There are conditions."

Cain leaned in, voice low but steady. "It has to be performed where the original bond was first enacted."

Silence fell again.

Cain didn't blink. "Eterna Noctis."

Eve looked up, confused. "I'm sorry—where?"



Montegue answered. "The burial grounds of Elysia. The first Matriarch. The place where the moon touched earth. It's protected by legacy rites. No one outside of the Stravos bloodline has stepped foot there in over two centuries."

Gallinti stood, jaw tight. "And now we're letting a werewolf desecrate it?" **2**

"Watch your mouth," I said, the words sharp enough to cut glass.

He froze.

I didn't raise my voice, but the threat was there —coiled, direct, inevitable.

"She's not desecrating anything. She's upholding the legacy Elysia died for," I said, my eyes locked on his. "If that's a problem, say so now. Loud enough for me to hear."

No one did.

Cain broke the tension with a shrug. "Then it's settled. The Rite will be performed under the next full moon. At Eterna Noctis."

I looked at Montegue. "You'll handle logistics. The site is to be sealed. No press. No spectators."



Council only."

"Understood," Montegue replied.

And just like that, it was real.

We'd set the date.

We'd named the place.

And now, all that was left... was to survive it. If she would survive it, especially not being a lycan but judging by visions, I highly doubted that Elysia's spirit would mind. 5

The flux spoke now, uncharacteristically quiet.
>"She is her reincarnation after all."

>"That is not my child!" The flux's tone was acidic as soon as my eyes fell on Elliot, the moment I stepped into the room.

The words hit like acid in my chest.

I froze in the doorway.

Elliot was asleep, small and quiet, one arm flung over his head like he didn't have the weight of an empire dragging behind his blood.



But I did.

And now... so did he.

> "Get out," I hissed internally. "This has nothing to do with him."

The Flux laughed. Cold. Crooked.

"Everything has to do with him. He is the proof, isn't he? The mistake. The consequence of your infidelity. While Elysia's bones lay beneath Eterna Noctis... you bred with another. Now that I have found her reincarnation, there is a chance..." His words escaped my mouth filled with venom. 1

I staggered, one hand bracing the wall as the pressure in my head built, molten, relentless. My claws cracked through the skin of my fingertips unbidden. I hadn't summoned them.

Elliot shifted in the bed. A small sigh.

I bit back a curse.

> "I won't let you touch him."

> "You already did," it cooed. "You let him live. That was your first mistake."



A pulse of rage shot through me, hot and blinding.

> "I will right your wrongs," the Flux promised. "I will get rid of the mistake myself."

"No!" I barked aloud this time, staggering toward the bed, muscles twitching with resistance.

My hand—mine, not mine—raised, claws glinting under the overhead light.

"How can you ever be hers again when the proof of your betrayal breathes under your roof? If he didn't exist, none of this would've happened. Eve would not have been implicated. She wouldn't have had to suffer. You wouldn't have had to hurt her. You hurt her for that thing and that woman, that Danielle." He spat her name like a curse, the words like poisoned on my tongue. 2

The words flayed me open.

> "Don't you see?" the Flux whispered. "We would still have her." 2

"No—no," I whispered, shaking, trying to pin my traitorous hand to my chest. "He's just a boy."

> "He's your sin made flesh. And I won't let him



take her from us again."

My knees hit the floor.

I crawled the rest of the way, until I was beside Elliot's bed—panting, clawed fingers gouging the tile as I fought the urge. As I fought myself.

He made a soft noise in his sleep.

And that was what broke me.

Tears—real ones—spilled past my lashes, mixing with the sweat and blood.

"I won't let you harm him," I growled, voice cracking. "You want her? You want redemption? You do it through me. Not him. You don't touch my son." 1

> "Then you are weaker than I thought," the Flux snarled. "And you will lose her. Again."

"Then I'll lose her doing the only thing left that matters," I whispered. "Protecting the part of me that's still worth saving." 1

The pressure eased—just slightly. But I could feel it retreat, curling deeper into my bones like a coiled viper waiting to strike again.



This wasn't over.

But for now...

Elliot was safe.

And I was still his father.

Even if everything else was broken.

The moment the pressure eased, I collapsed onto my side like a marionette with cut strings. My body was shaking, sweat and blood clinging to my skin like a second, rotting layer. But I didn't let myself rest.

I couldn't.

A sickness was clawing up my throat—foul, thick, unnatural.

I scrambled to my feet and staggered into the adjoining bathroom, hand on the marble counter, vision swimming. My reflection was a ruin—black veins pulsing beneath my skin, my corrupted eye half-lidded with restrained madness.

Then it came.

I dropped to my knees before the sink and



retched.

The sound was raw.

Violent.

Black tar spilled from my mouth in waves, sticky and steaming as it clung to porcelain and metal. It hissed like something alive, like it didn't want to be outside me. My stomach convulsed again, a fresh rush of darkness hitting the bowl with a thick, sickening splatter.

> "You're rejecting me," the Flux whispered, soft and smug. "But I've already rewritten you."

"Shut up," I rasped, dragging the back of my hand across my mouth.

I pushed away from the sink, breath hitching, fury tangled with shame.

And then—

The silence cracked.

I heard it.

Footsteps.

Light. Small.



No—

I shoved the bathroom door open, nearly tearing it off the hinges.

The room was empty.

Elliot's bed was vacant, sheets tossed aside in a tangle of little limbs that should've been there.

The door to the hallway was wide open.

He'd heard and he had ran. 

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