



536 Turn Her?

Eve 1

I touched her face, even if there was no face to touch. At the simple contact of my fingertip, her nose crumbled like it was made of dry wood. My stomach lurched and I bit back my tears, trying to hold the broken parts of me together.

She had given everything.

Burned herself from the inside out to buy us time. To save me. To save all of us. And this was what remained—charred bone that disintegrated at the slightest pressure, a body that looked more like kindling than a person.

Her soul was refusing to leave her body, anchoring itself to dying flesh long past the point where any mortal would have crossed over.

"Ellen," I whispered, though I knew she couldn't hear me. Knew she was too far gone to respond even if some part of her was still aware. "I'm so sorry. I'm so—"

A delta knelt beside me, her hands already glowing with healing magic. She reached toward Ellen's chest, where that impossible heartbeat



still flickered, and the moment her magic touched the charred flesh the light went out.

Not dimmed. Not weakened. Just—gone. Snuffed like a candle flame.

The delta gasped, pulling her hands back. Tried again. Same result. The healing magic sparked to life in her palms, touched Ellen's body, and died instantly.

"What—" The delta's voice shook. "I don't understand. There's nothing to—the magic has nothing to hold onto. No tissue to repair, no cells to regenerate. She should be—"

"Dead," another delta finished quietly. She was older, her face lined with exhaustion and too many years of battlefield medicine. "She should be dead. Any other person would be dead."

But Ellen wasn't.

Her chest still moved. Barely. That half-inch rise and fall that defied every law of biology and magic. Her soul tethered tight to life, her life force too strong to simply shut off or be snuffed out like a normal person's would.

So it would go gradually.

I could see it in the deltas' faces. The terrible

understanding of what was coming. Ellen's organs would fail. One after the other. Slowly. Agonizingly. Her heart would keep beating as long as it could, stubbornly refusing to stop even as everything else shut down, until finally—finally—there would be nothing left. Just ash and the memory of the woman who'd burned like the sun to save us all.

My hands shook as I pulled them away from what remained of her face. I couldn't touch her. Couldn't risk crumbling more of her away. Could only kneel there, useless, watching my sister die by inches.

"Eve."

The voice cut through my spiral. Familiar. Exhausted. Alive.

I turned.

Hades stood at the entrance to the medical tent, his vampire form still partially visible—wings torn and dragging, skin pale as death, crimson eyes dulled with fatigue. Cain was on his side and draped across his arms was a figure covered in bloody clothes. Concealed. I couldn't see who it was.

Cain raced to Ellen.



Our eyes met. Hades and I.

For a moment neither of us moved. Just stared at each other across the tent, taking in the damage. He looked like he'd been through hell. I knew I looked worse.

Then we were moving.

I tried to stand, but my legs gave out immediately. Hades crossed the distance in three strides, dropping to his knees beside me, and we reached for each other at the same time. His hands found my face—gentle, so gentle despite the claws—and mine found his shoulders, and we just held on.

"You're alive," he breathed, his voice cracking. "Goddess, you're alive. I felt you die—felt the bond go dark—"

"I'm here." My own voice was barely a whisper.
"I'm here. The pups—"

"The pups." His eyes went wide, frantic, and he pulled back just enough to look down at my stomach. Blood still seeped through the bandages wrapped around my torso, my skin mottled with bruises and barely-healed wounds.
"Are they—"

"They're alive." I caught his hand, pressed it against my belly where our daughters still held on. Still fought. "The deltas checked. They're okay. We're okay."

Something broke in his expression. Relief so profound it looked like pain. He dropped his forehead against mine, his breath coming in shaky gasps, and then he was moving lower. Pulling up the edge of my shirt—careful, so careful not to hurt me—and pressing his face against my belly.

His shoulders shook.

I felt wetness against my skin and realized he was crying. Hades, who never cried, who held everything together no matter what, was sobbing against my stomach. 1

"Thank you," he whispered against my skin.
"Thank you for keeping them safe. Thank you for
—"

Around us, wolves had stopped. Gammas, deltas, even the ones being treated for injuries—all of them watching their Alpha and Luna reunion with expressions that ranged from relief to grief to exhaustion so bone-deep it looked like surrender.

We'd won.

But the cost was written on every face.

I touched Hades's hair, running my fingers through it, and let myself feel the weight of everything we'd survived. Everything we'd lost.

Then I remembered the covered figure Hades had been carrying.

"Who—" I started to ask, my eyes going to the body he'd set down carefully beside him. "Who is that?"

Hades lifted his head, his eyes meeting mine, and something in his expression made my blood run cold.

"Lyra," he said quietly. "Your mother."

The world stopped.

"What?"

"Malrik had her. The horn—" His voice caught. "The horn was inside her body. He turned her into a living vault. I had to—" He couldn't finish. Just looked at me with eyes that held such profound guilt and grief that I understood immediately what he'd had to do.

What it had cost him to get that horn.

My mother.

My mother had been alive.

And now she wasn't.

My eyes wandered to the bloody cloth lump as the deltas picked it up, my throat closing up. "Wait," I whispered, my voice hoarse. "I want to see her."

Hades reacted instantly. "No, not in her state right now." But I gripped his arm.

"Please. I need—"

The cloth launched off.

Not pulled. Not removed. Launched—like something beneath it had exploded outward with violent force.

She rose.

Fast. Too fast. Her body twisted mid-air and she lunged at the nearest delta, the one who'd been carrying her, and her teeth sank into the woman's arm before anyone could react.

The delta screamed.

She didn't make a sound. Just bit down harder, her jaw locked, and the wet sound of tearing

flesh filled the tent as blood poured from the wound. 1

"GET HER OFF!" someone shouted.

Silas was there first. His massive hands closed around her shoulders and he pulled, dragging her bodily off the delta, but she fought him. Thrashed. Snarled like a feral animal, her eyes glowing crimson and fixed on the bleeding delta with single-minded hunger.

Everyone stared.

Because she was moving. My mum whose body had been torn apart to extract the horn pieces. She was alive and fighting and her eyes—

Her eyes were red.

Glowing. Hungry. Wrong.

And her body—goddess, her body—was stitching itself back together. Slowly. So slowly. Flesh knitting over exposed bone, muscle fibers threading themselves back into place, skin crawling across raw tissue like watching time-lapse footage of a corpse healing in reverse.

But it looked like a scene out of a horror movie. The repairs were uneven, lumpy, the new flesh a

mottled gray-pink that didn't match, and parts of her were still just bone, white and gleaming where the regeneration hadn't reached yet.

I reached for her. "Mom—"

"Don't!" Hades caught my wrist, holding me back. "Eve, don't get close to her. She's—"

"You turned her into a vampire." Kael's voice cut through the chaos. Flat. Shocked. He was staring at Hades with an expression I couldn't read. "You fed her your blood. You turned her."

Hades didn't deny it. Just held my wrist tighter as she continued to thrash in Silas's grip, her mouth still working, teeth snapping at air, trying to get to the bleeding delta who'd backed away and was now being treated by two other healers.

"I didn't know if it would work," Hades said quietly. His eyes never left my mother's writhing form. "After I got the horn—after I had to—she was dying. Already dead, maybe. But Maya said my blood could heal, could preserve, and I just—" His voice cracked. "I couldn't let her go. Not after what I'd just done to her. So I fed her my blood and hoped—prayed—it would be enough."

For a heartbeat, I thought she was looking at me. But it wasn't recognition. It was aim. Hunger.

"It was enough," I whispered, watching my mother's body slowly repair itself. Watching her eyes—those crimson, hungry eyes that didn't recognize me, didn't recognize anything except the scent of fresh blood. "But she's not—she's not herself."

"New vampires never are." Hades's grip on my wrist gentled but didn't release. "The hunger takes over. Especially if they died violently. It'll be days, maybe weeks before she's lucid enough to—"

A dart hit her neck.

She went rigid. Snarled once more. Then her eyes rolled back and she collapsed in Silas's arms, unconscious.

Gallinti stood near the tent entrance, tranquilizer gun still raised, his expression grim. "Sorry. Seemed necessary."

The sound of rotor blades cut through the stunned silence.

A chopper. Landing just outside the camp. The side door slid open before it even fully touched down and two figures jumped out.

Thea and Maya.

Thea hit the ground running, her eyes scanning the tent, and when they landed on Kael she made a sound—half sob, half laugh—and threw herself at him. He caught her despite the blood covering him, despite the exhaustion lining his face, and they kissed like they'd been apart for years instead of days.

Maya was more controlled. Professional. She walked into the tent with her medical kit already open, her eyes sweeping over the wounded, assessing, prioritizing. When she saw her unconscious form in Silas's arms, she stopped.

"Hades," she said slowly. "Tell me you didn't."

"I did."

"You fed her your blood."

"Yes."

Maya closed her eyes. Breathed out slowly. "Of course you did." She moved to Silas, gesturing for him to lay my mother down carefully. "Alright. Let me see what we're working with." 1

She knelt beside my mother's partially-regenerated body and began her examination. Her hands moved, checking pulses that shouldn't exist, testing reflexes that

shouldn't respond, cataloging damage that should have been fatal.

After a long moment, she looked up at Hades.

"She'll live," Maya said. "If you can call it living. The vampire transformation is taking hold, but it's fighting against the trauma her body sustained. She's going to be in and out of consciousness for days. Possibly weeks. And when she does wake up—" Maya glanced at me. "She won't be the woman you remember. Not for a while. Maybe not ever."

I stared at my mother's face. At the crimson eyes beneath closed lids. At the slowly-healing flesh that made her look like something dragged from a grave.

My mother was alive.

But she was also dead.

And I didn't know which truth hurt more because my eyes fell to Ellen. "Hades, can you save her by turning her," I tugged at him and gestured to her, where Cain was still just staring, his body shaking, wracked with grief.

His eyes found him, weighed down by exhaustion and guilt. "I am so sorry," He

whispered. "I should have stayed by her." I crossed the room and embraced him. Not saying a word, because I could form one in the heaviness of the moment.

When I pulled away, his eyes shifted back to Ellen before he whipped his head back to me, his eyes widening along with Thea and Maya's.
"What—"

"It is Ellen. The bloodmoon—" Hades began.

But Maya cut him off, cutting through the crowd gathered. "She did it. She really did it but at what cost?" Then she stopped, stilling like Cain, as if just realising what I had just said. "You want him to turn her?" She exclaimed. "You can't mean that —"

1

But her voice was already going distant, her form blurring, I stumbled, the world tilted—blood loss, grief, pregnancy, shock—too many weights crushing the same point in my chest and everything went dark.

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