

Expanding Horizons: Enchanted

Chapter 54

Eris was the first to awaken and find the entrance of the cave darkened by a young dawn. She was almost uncomfortably warm, still nestled between Minerva's bust. Pulling herself free caused the sorceress to mumble in her sleep, but she did not wake. Once on her feet, Eris took a moment to appreciate the impressive sight Minerva and her bed-like chest created.

Air chilled Eris from outside her lover's cleavage. Hugging herself, she was surprised to find her body feeling so light. None of the heaviness from the previous day's events was weighing her down. There was still a strange sense of fatigue, but nothing compared to what she'd felt before falling asleep.

"I feel... a little..." Eris looked down, spreading the neckline of her dress open to look at her chest. The blackened mark left by Marci was much smaller. It had shrunk into a tiny spot, far removed from the branching spiderweb of decay she'd featured previously. A gentle smile found its way to her cheeks. "I feel... *better!*"

She stretched, walking around a little to help feel out her mobility. There was still some residual lethargy, but nothing like before. Thoughts could come and go with clarity. She felt she could fill her lungs without her chest feeling like it might shatter. Eager to take enjoy the fresh air, Eris crept away from her snoring companion and stood at the mouth of the cave.

A shiver traced down her spine. Eris hugged herself as goosebumps spread across her skin. The storm had died down, but it only opened the landscape into its full glory. Ice, rock, and snow stretched for as far as she could see. Shades of purple painted the sky from a sun barely starting to rise over the frozen hellscape. Apart from guessing they were likely at the far southern edge of the continent, she had no idea of their location.

"We could be anywhere..." She chewed on her lip, wishing to help in any way possible. "Why would those overly fertile fairies send us here?"

She looked down at the layer of snow covering the cave's entrance. There was something strange that made her stare intently. "What in the--"

Groaning came from within the cave. "Eris...?" Minerva called. Panic took only seconds to latch. "*Eris?! Where are you?!*"

"Here! I'm here...!" she called back, walking back into the cave and Minerva's view.

Relief fell over the sorceress's face. She'd been trying to stand and was wrestling with her giant breasts. Seeing Eris safe, she collapsed on top of her chest with a heavy sigh. Already, the excess inches of warmth were shrinking back, their job for the night done. "You scared me..."

"Sorry, sorry. Just wanted to stretch my legs. Cleavage blankets are nice until about hour six or seven. Then you start feeling sore."

Minerva's breasts withdrew beneath her until she was on her hands and knees. "I think I was sweating all night, and--" Her head shot up. "Wait. *Wait! Are you feeling better??*"

Eris nodded, stooping to help Minerva stand as her bust became manageable. “Mostly! Look!” She bared her sternum. “It’s gone down *a lot!*”

Disbelief watered Minerva’s eyes. She took her friend into an embrace, feeling ready to cry. “I’m-- *I’m so happy... I thought...*”

“I think it was your milk.” They pulled away. Eris’s eyes sparkled with renewed life. “Drinking your milk last night helped combat it, or at least treat the symptoms!”

“S-So, you’re not *totally* better?”

Eris shook her head. “I don’t feel completely fine, but I feel much better than I did. I have energy again! For the time being, anyway... Something tells me it’s only a bandage.”

“Even so... Anything is an improvement.” Minerva wiped her eyes. “I was so worried about you. I-I still am...”

They looked into each other’s eyes before the moment passed. Minerva stepped away, composing herself and righting her dress. “Could you see anything out there? A town? Civilization?”

“No, nothing... But...”

“What?”

“I’m not sure how you could have, given your size last night, or without me knowing, but...” Eris made a puzzled face. “Did you go outside last night? After we fell asleep?”

“...Huh? How could I? You saw me. I was a beached whale.”

“Exactly.” Eris scratched her head.

“What is it?”

“At the entrance to the cave, there’s an extra set of footprints. Three total sets leading into the cave.”

Fear trickled into Minerva’s gut. “Are you sure?”

“I was looking at them when you woke up. It’s a little hard to tell with the fresh snow, but I’m fairly certain they’re as new as ours. Maybe I got up... Do you think my condition made me sleepwalk?”

“I like to think I would have woken up if someone climbed out of my cleavage...”

Eris snorted. “Well, you didn’t a minute ago.”

The joke didn’t ease Minerva’s tension. She looked around the cave and gazed deep into the tunnel extending into the earth. “We should be cautious. But if there is someone else here, they could have harmed us while we slept. I’m wondering why they didn’t.”

“Maybe they’re peaceful?”

“We’re not that lucky.” Minerva shivered and stared down the tunnel. She bristled, her tail swiping across the ground nervously.

“What’s wrong?”

“I still hear that voice...”

“Spooky... Mysterious voices and footprints from a ghost.” Eris followed her gaze. “Should we go deeper?”

“I don’t see much use in exploring the wasteland outside. The Sacred sent us here for a reason, and I don’t think it’s a coincidence that we ended up so close to this cave.”

“Well then, give us a light and lead the way!” Eris positioned herself behind Minerva. “Dragon girls go into the dark cave first, though.”

“*Obviously.*”

Mumbling a spell, Minerva cast several orbs of soft yellow light around the vicinity. They followed the girls like ghostly sentries, guiding the way as they left the surface world behind.

“I thought we were done with caves,” Eris grumbled, hugging Minerva’s arm.

“At least we don’t have to listen to bells and gears again.”

“*Thank the goddess.*”

They followed the cave’s path. Though it branched in some spots, there was a well-defined central tunnel. Many walls featured scapes and chips left by pickaxes and tools. Man-made objects littered the floor, though they looked as ancient as the rock itself.

“Look at this place...” Eris awed.

A slope approached. They paused at the top upon noticing a flight of stairs leading deeper. Each step was carved from the rock. Rusted metal rings lined one side, indicating there had once been a rope railing.

Minerva stared down. “Someone put a lot of work into developing this cave.”

“Lot of work just to live in a world of ice...”

They continued. As the cave deepened, Minerva grew agitated. She scratched at her ears as the incomprehensible whispers tickled her mind. They sounded so clear, yet remained elusive in meaning. She sensed only emotion: rage and a deep longing.

At the base of the stairs, the tunnel curved. The girls stopped.

Eris gazed up in awe. “Whoa.”

Minerva’s lights cast themselves upon a great pair of wooden doors anchored into the rock. Over three times their height, they rose from floor to ceiling with wood over four feet thick. They would have blocked the girls’ path if time hadn’t torn them from their hinges. Now they sagged, never to meet properly again. Darkness waited on the other side.

“Minerva...” Eris said softly, staring at the doors. “I don’t think people lived here. I think this was some kind of *vault*.”

“You think they were protecting something?”

“Why else would you have doors like this?”

“You’re the scholar. You tell me.”

“Should we keep going?” Eris looked around. Shadows were jumping and leaping with strange motions from the light orbs passing over boulders and debris. “This place gives me the creeps.”

Minerva’s horns vibrated with the voice. Its draw was stronger than ever. “I think I have to keep going. Whatever we’re here for, it’s close.”

“We’re... going through the big scary doors...?”

“We’re going through the big scary doors.”

Eris whimpered, but hugged her friend’s arm and readied herself. Together, they passed through the decrepit doorway, weaving around rotting wood and twisted metal.

A sprawling chamber waited on the other side. Darkness spread out, choking Minerva’s lights with its depth. She held one arm out for good measure as her eyes strained. The voice led her blindly.

“C-C-Can we have more light?” Eris whispered. Even her tiny words were enough to cause an echo.

Nodding, Minerva gave more energy to her orbs. They pulsed and throbbed, swelling in size. Shapes emerged from the darkness. In front of the girls, jagged ridges and points came forth.

Teeth flashed. Dull scales glowed. Lying before them, a dragon came forth from the abyss with mouth agape.

“*Minerva! MINERVA!*” Eris shrieked, recoiling and falling back in terror as the jaw came toward her. She raised her arms and waited for death to snap around her. It never came. She dared to open one eye and saw the dragon’s head hadn’t moved. Minerva stood before it with an arm outstretched.

“It’s... It’s dead...” she whispered.

Her lights focused on the enormous reptile. Twice as large as a modest house, its sprawling body filled most of the cavern. The head lay rolled to one side, mouth open in an eternal final gasp. Despite the mighty scales plating its hide, age had taken an obvious toll and left the corpse withered and dried.

“Are you *sure?*!” Eris hissed. Her heart still raced from the sudden human-sized maw ready to bite down.

Minerva stepped closer.

“*Don’t touch it!*”

“It’s... I think... I’m hearing *its* voice...”

“*The dead dragon’s?!*”

Minerva ignored her. Electricity tingled across her body. There was an ethereal warmth between her and the dragon’s corpse.

Eris swallowed but didn’t rise from the ground. “I-I didn’t think there were any dragon bodies left... I thought they had all been hunted and harvested centuries ago...”

“Well, I think they forgot one.” Mouth dry, Minerva stood inches from the dragon’s snout.

“Still, I don’t think we’re going to be getting any blood from it. It looks ready to crumble.”

Minerva breathed. “No... But this is where it’s coming from, Eris... The voice. It’s like it’s... *Pulling me toward it.*” Her hand extended. “I don’t think this journey has been about finding dragon blood. Not for a long time.”

“After everything we’ve been through, m-maybe you *shouldn’t* touch the giant withered dragon body?”

Heat flared in Minerva’s chest. The dragon’s blood boiled within her. Ears drowned by her own heartbeat, she placed a hand on the cold, scaly hide.

“*Minerv--*”

Eris’s voice was flung far and distant. Visions of fire and lava blasted into Minerva’s mind. A land of heat and scorched earth howled and hissed in every direction.

This land was once my home. Together with my beloved, we ruled with absolute power. Our kind commanded the skies.

Titanic wings flapped. Molten earth passed by beneath Minerva’s gaze. Another dragon was with her, roaring through the air. They were happy together and at peace.

Pain flared suddenly. Arrows and ballistas struck Minerva’s wings. A small army had gathered on the boiling ground below.

Then they came.

Fire and blood. Territorial fury screeched in Minerva’s ears as she fought off horde after horde of intruders. Agony seared in her wings. On the ground, blood poured from a fatal gash in the other dragon’s chest. An iron rod pierced his front and exited his back.

They attacked without mercy. We fought. They killed my beloved.

Fury turned to exhaustion. Mighty muscles weakened and wingbeats lost their strength. The sky fell away and the ground rose to meet her with a crash. Wounded body and a wounded heart ached. The invaders took their chances and surrounded her. Chains lashed around her neck and legs.

Greed took me prisoner in my own home. They broke my wings and bound them to my body so I would never feel the heavens again.

The sky vanished. Stone walls encroached, swallowing Minerva’s vision. The world grew dark. Metal boomed and echoed. Agony burned around her legs where shackles held her prisoner to the floor. She fought, but the chains were heavy. Too heavy to fight for very long.

They held me here. Their prisoner. Locked away from my sky. Taking whatever they wanted.

Giant, booming doors opened and closed with a thudding that made her head want to split open. Men came one after another. Knives and swords struck and pierced. Blood drained drop by drop to feed their endless greed. Years, decades, and more, they held her trapped for harvest. Scars lashed down her belly where it was easiest to draw blood. The men opened them again and again without a second thought to whoever was willing to pay their price of gold.

They cut and they cut. I bled for their thirst. But I could not show my fury. Internally, I stoked my rage.

Outside, the molten earth grew solid and still. Without the influence of its rulers, the lava cooled. Ice took hold and snow fell. Fire was snuffed. The land above fell into an eternal winter.

My beloved... My beloved... Though he perished, he remained within me as a final gift.

Rage and hatred boiled. Fear reared its head when pain flared. Even in captivity, love and companionship had borne fruit after years apart.

Secret. Dormant and still. Hidden from their insatiable greed.

Man's visits slowed. Days turned to years. Soon, the doors stopped opening altogether as she was forgotten. Hunger ate away at her until everything turned dark. Darkness swallowed all, until all was forgotten. The doors never boomed again until their collapse. None came down the steps to free her, but the scars they left ached until her last breath.

You will take it.

Take it and give life.

Take it, so my beloved and I may still live.

Minerva gasped, filling her lungs after what felt like hours. Sweat coated her body and her breasts ached. They were throbbing. Milk leaked from her nipples in heavy spurts. She stumbled back, reeling from living countless years in the span of minutes.

"Eris-- E-Eris...!" she breathed, gazing upon the ancient corpse. *"She... She was... They held her here! To harvest blood! FOR CENTURIES!"* There was a pain in Minerva's heart, as if it had been broken. She realized she was crying with a sorrow comparable to what she'd felt when she thought Eris dead. *"And she... She had an egg! She hid it from them! Dormant! All that time! She kept it hidden, hoping it could hatch one day!"* Tears streamed down her face. *"Do you understand?! The blood that fell on me, must have come from her! She's been drawing me here! To find her! T-To rescue her egg! All this time! She's been asked for help!"*

Desperation drove her forward. Minerva wiggled over the dragon's front leg and between its neck. Something oval and covered in ridges met with her hands when she searched beneath the dragon's chest. An egg was pulled free, roughly the size of Minerva's head and with a texture like stone. It glimmered a soft red and held a subtle heat.

"It's here! IT'S STILL HERE!" Minerva cried. *"She wanted me to--"*

"MINERVA!"

She whirled, clutching the egg. Happiness and grief suddenly had to reckon with despair.

Kalzar stood with Eris. Bound in glowing blue cord, Eris was restrained with a knife at her throat.

"Welcome back," Kalzar sneered. *"You look like you've seen a ghost."*

To be continued