**Elysium of the Shadow:**

**Prologue:**

Elysium. In my homeworld, we studied it a bit in world history when we were covering Greek and Roman mythology. It's the afterlife in a sense, like the Underworld that Hades reigns supreme. Except unlike the Underworld, where supposedly a boatman waits for you to cross the River Styxx, it's supposed to be an endless plain of fields of flowers and nature. The warmth of the sun, without the glare. Quiet, peaceful, where only heroes or relatives of gods were supposed to be sent after they died. I never imagined it actually existed in multiple plains of this world. The earth upon which I stand battered and desecrated with the slaying of man and abomination. While the endless fields of wheat as well as the glowing rays of Sol up in the heavens where I could never reach. A mortal such as myself, a disdained one such as I.

I needed to pull my head out of the clouds, and face my enemy. Battling for survival and the protection of this world that I hated. Summoned here against my will, yet ridiculed and persecuted for the shallow reasons of men. Along with the prides and egos of foolish rulers who have no sense of justice or righteousness as they send young children to die. Whether it was a new world or not, the treatment felt the same as my own. I hated this world. I have no reason to fight other than my own survival. It was selfish to forsake many lives for the small lives of myself and my comrades. But being human, it was my reason all the same. If they judge, I will have retribution.

“It seems we’ve come to an impasse”. She taunted sweetly yet sarcastically. She looked so beautiful, a heroine in raven black. Standing at the center of this painting of Dante’s Inferno, surrounded by fiery rock and scarlet colored skies filled with a millennia with the blood of men who fought and perished here.

“Is it because you know it’ll be difficult for me to strike a decisive blow against you? Or because you have the high ground?” I played along with her game. My conversational skills have only grown because of her. She saved my life, even when I didn’t want to live anymore. Therefore, she needs to take responsibility for her actions. As I looked back on my time here in this god-accursed land, everything that I’ve done, the smallest flame almost snuffed out that was my desire to keep going. Was only kept alive by the beacon of hope in front of me. This woman dressed in all black with her long straight emerald hair and piercing magenta colored eyes.

She saved my life, and for that I will smite her down with the same power she gave me. However painful it may be, I tried to delay it a bit longer playing this game of hers. As she knew it as well, her game, and her time was running out.

“When you first told me about that joke in your home world, I didn’t quite understand how the high ground could be so significant in combat. You’re the first one ever to enlighten me about it. I’m not sure if it’s coincidence, or pure luck. But it’ll be useful all the same, to the end.”

“If I had more time I would tell you a lot more about my homeworld. That jokes been repeated for years.”

“You know what you must do.” Her sweet expression hardened, as she glared down on me from the high ground.

“Yes...I know.”

“You cannot stop it. The cycle of life and death will begin anew, just like it always has for millenia. I’m sorry, but I know your place mortal. You cannot stop the darkness that is to come.” While she sounded so cold and unfeeling with those words. I knew them to be a lie. She was hurting on the inside, the thought of a goddess feeling such mortal heartbreak was probably bizzarre to her. But it didn’t matter anymore, it was time for a disdained one such as myself to bring an end to the one who bound me to this world.

“Sorry, but I’m not letting you go that easily. I’ll go directly for the source of the problem, work my way to the end of the chain just like I planned.”

“You can’t!” She sounded angry as she lifted her blade straight into the air, powerful celestial energy gathering at it’s tip. She amassed an amazing amount of power in such a short amount of time, as expected for a goddess. The celestial force grew violently as it enlarged, threatening to burst at any given moment as she looked at me with hateful eyes. I noticed as a single tear fell from her face as her resolve weakened for just a moment.

“Cursed one! I’ll kill you!” She prepared to launch that massive amount of energy to end my existence. But I wasn’t about to give her the pleasantries of getting out of a mess that she caused. While I was summoned to this world, against my will. That I’ve done nothing but work my fingers to the bone and risked my own life countless times to save people who have nothing but hate and contempt for me. She gave me the power and the resolve to press on. Even if it did cost parts of my body and my sanity, it was still better than giving up and succumbing to the void, I learned sometime after. This was her plight at the source of it all, so I will become the Shadow and break her chains. And Free her from this imprisonment!

“Avarice!” I fueled my body and my power with the celestial forces surrounding me. In this land at the brink, filled with the forces of men slain for millenia, it blanketed the land in a thick red mist of power. Thanks to her training and her mark on me, I could move in the blink of an eye. Of course she knew I would use it on her, we named it together. My signature move I used to finish fights quickly when they were no equal to my power.

“Shadow-Step Flash!” She may have been a goddess, but she was no match for me at the end, here at the brink. Avarice had been training my body and my power since even before I came around in this world. She knew it was futile to stand against me, yet she did so anyway. For she had no choice in the matter. And with that it was done, I had slain the goddess that saved my life with my black blade the same as her own. Now tainted with the blood of a goddess.

We locked eyes for a mere moment as now I had the high ground, peering down on her form that looked as though she was falling so slowly to the hellfire dirt as I was above her in the air. Her black blade shattered into a million light fragments as they danced and floated around the atmosphere surrounding her. While I held my stoic expression, trying not to think about what I had just done too hard before I had to continue. Her hardened expression was softening as she fell. Her gentle smile had returned, and a small stream of tears left her relieved eyes. They fell upon the ground the same time as the blood that had flown from her mouth with my strike. Even from afar, as she lay upon the ground that would comfort her passing. I could tell she was grateful that I could put her down and ended her misery.

It seemed as though the fogginess in her mind had unveiled, and Avarice was herself again. However it was too little too late. Her time in the mortal plane, as well as in the realm of gods and goddesses was coming to an end. Slain by a mere mortal she had brought up herself. It was a betrayal that one could not have foreseen. Neither of us could. But it was mine all the less.

‘I’m not done with you yet Avarice, I promise I’ll come back for you!’ My thoughts sounded so loud as they struck a chord deep within myself. I turned away from her sweet gaze as I peered full of hate toward my new target. The emptiness of the void itself, with no physical body, no face, nothing but a dark hooded cloak and robe floating amiss this empty red sky with Elysium over their head.

My rage, my hatred for this world that fueled my powers all collected as a catalyst to destroy this abomination from this plane of existence. It may have been ethereal, otherworldly as a god. But to me it was nothing but a foul being that needed to be purged. I could physically feel my teeth clenching, crying out in pain from the pressure I had inflicted on them. The hilt of my blade moist with my own blood from the grasp that was fueled by ditestation for this world for which I was forcibly called to. And the burning of my flesh being consumed by the shadows fueled by my own abhorrence for myself and this vile world. All of these negative emotions, all of this contempt finally being properly used to rid the world of this scum.

But not everything goes as planned. My slash came up empty as I drove it across the beings mystical body, only to strike nothing but empty air and dispersed the red mist. While it appeared I did no physical damage, the other worldly being had retreated higher into the skies, it’s red-eyes flashing a harsh stare at my hate-filled defiance of a look.

Suddenly a small girl with a jarring expression appeared behind the figure immediately after it had dispersed and disappeared. Her sun-blonde hair was an interesting match for her magnetta eyes and her petite form. She had conjured a black blade, long and deadly from the mist all the same as the one that Avarice and I carry. With no words spoken between us and no time to react, the only thing I could do was throw up a quick parry to save myself from being cut in two.

Our powers met and pushed back with equal celestial force as the red mist dispersed all around us. Our eyes locked with still not a single word spoken. While her eyes felt cold and merciless, they felt vaguely familiar as well. It was clear we both had the same goal in mind, spirit, and heart. We were both desperately trying to hold on to something precious, protecting something very dear to our hearts that we found to cherish in this world full of vile disgust. It was sacred only to us, and it was worth throwing our lives away. This single spark was worth dying for.

While I struggled to hold my own against her might, it was also clear she was struggling to keep the momentum of her pressing attack. We were locked in a physical and metaphorical stalemate. But I would not back down, not after everything I’ve sacrificed. And neither would she. After this thought raced through my mind as I kept up my defense. Something peculiar was happening.

For a moment I looked down to her chest to see a glowing light coming from her heart. Whoever this woman was, her actions were not fueled by hate or malice. They were fueled with good intentions, even if they were for the lesser good. My own heart began to give a righteous glow, however compared to her resolve it was faint, weak. After looking at her in the eyes again, tears flew up from her cheeks. It was clear she had sacrificed everything to hold onto whatever she felt dear. What have I given in return?

As my resolve crumbled in defeat against her will to continue, her black blade pierced my heart. Strangely enough, I felt no pain. As if everything was falling into place as it was supposed to be.

While my body fell from the heavens I could never reach, my fall to the hellfire was quiet, yet peaceful. I was at peace, even in my own death. Because finally, this hellhole of a world was behind me. I initially thought death was scary, people often fear the unknown. Fear what they cannot understand. But after my time in this world, seeing the cruel acts people are subjected to. Sending children off to a hopeless battle just to die. I would consider myself lucky to be dying this way instead. This was alright, in the end. For better or worse, this is how I die.

“No! This isn’t how it’s supposed to be Avern!” The voice in my head called out to me. Distant, faint, yet familiar, and comfortable as well. Her words were short but clear, She didn't want me to give up. But what choice did I have? My heart was pierced and sliced into two, I could feel my mind distancing off. Into the unknown...

“You gave us hope in a world filled with torment and fear. People are selfish, they’ll use anybody no matter how small or innocent for their own gain. But you...You rallied us together, to fight off the void. You saved my life...for that I owe you everything. And now, I’ll give it all for you!”

I had come so far, but why did I do all of this? This world in which I was brought against my will. Forcibly kept here for others amusement and laughter at my expense. Contempt and ridicule from all just because I wanted to survive. If I’ve been subjugated to all of this and more, then what was my reason to keep going on? What was my reason to fight?

It was...all for her. It was for Avarice, nothing more. And nothing less.

“What will you fight for!?”

My path was clear, and the celestial forces have spoken. This strike would not bring me down. This would not be the end of my path that I have paved myself. With Avarice and others by my side. Mortals are stupid and vile. Cruel, full of hubris and envy. They exploit others for little value or gain. But even in this ugly world you can find true beauty. She taught me that, with her snarky remarks and bad temper. But also with her wisdom and simple look on life as well. Everything to her was a give-and-take relationship. She had given me my life back, a second chance to move on. And now, I would give her everything I have and more to bring her back!

“I only hope you will not make the same mistake again.”

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**Chapter 1: For you, I’ll wait. Even for a 1,000 years.**

**Until Next Time!**

* **Ezrael**