



## 116 Mercy Dies

### Hades 1

I leaned back in my chair, glaring at her in disbelief. "You've got to be kidding me."

Her smirk widened, her eyes glinting with something that made her look a bit less dead.

"I'm dead serious. Open up, or this train's about to crash into your face."

"Red, don't you dare—"

The fork edged closer. I could feel the tension in the air, a challenge wrapped in her playful mockery. She wasn't going to back down. And the worst part was I wasn't sure if I wanted her to.

With a low growl, I grabbed her wrist, halting the fork's approach. "You think this is funny?" 2

Her expression didn't falter. "No, I think it's necessary. And if humiliating you a little is what it takes to make you eat, then so be it. If the Hand of Death needs to be the spoonfed then so be it."

I stared at her, trying to summon the anger that usually came so easily. But instead, there was

something else—something warmer, more unsettling, curling in my chest. I hated how she managed to disarm me with her sheer stubbornness. Hated it, and yet... couldn't look away.

### *Mate*

I shook my head. No, no, it was anything but that, the index would show just that. I could not get carried away, it was scientifically improbable. "Fine," I snapped, releasing her wrist. "Give me that." I snatched the fork from her hand and shoved the bite of steak into my mouth, chewing aggressively as if I could destroy her resolve with sheer spite. 1

Her laughter, soft and quiet, slipped through the cracks in my armor. "See? That wasn't so hard, was it?"

I swallowed and glared at her, but the bite lacked venom. "You're insufferable."

"And you're predictable," she shot back, reclaiming her seat. She folded her arms again, her gaze never leaving me. "But I'm not going anywhere until you finish."

"Of course you're not," I muttered, stabbing another piece of steak with unnecessary force.



Her persistence was maddening, but there was no denying that it worked. The food might taste like ash, and my stomach might churn with every bite, but at least I was eating. *For her.*

The thought settled uncomfortably in my mind. Why did her opinion matter so much? Why did she matter so much?

The silence stretched between us, but it wasn't hostile. It was... heavy, charged. I could feel her watching me, feel the weight of her concern pressing against the walls I'd built around myself. She didn't pry, didn't push for answers I wasn't ready to give. She just... stayed. And somehow, that was worse.

When I finally set the fork down, leaving a few stubborn bites untouched, she leaned forward slightly. "That's all you've got?"

"That's all you're getting," I replied, my tone sharp but tired. My body ached in ways I didn't want to acknowledge, and the Flux gnawed at the edges of my mind like a beast waiting to strike. But I knew for a fact that it was over, for now.

Her eyes softened, and for a moment, I thought she might argue. But then she nodded, her lips curving into a faint smile. She picked up the fork





and picked up the piece of food. She eat it and picked up another one. She brought it to my mouth. "You are almost there, Hades," 1

"Red," I growled.

She feigned a frown like a mother trying to mimick a child. "Hadey Wadey." 3

"What in the goddess' name was that?" I snarled.

"Your new nickname if you don't finish this food." She brought the food closer. "So come on."

I glared at her, her eyes damn near boring holes into her face but she did not react to my scrutiny. I opened my mouth and she fed me. She did not gloat after I eat it instead, she picked off the rest of the food and fed me until she got what she wanted. Until the plate was empty. 1

"Now, we are done. You can go and play outside--- I mean we can go and train."

I wanted to smile but I scoffed, pushing the plate away. "Don't let it go to your head, Red. I didn't do this for you."

"Sure you didn't," she said, standing up, she picked up the napkin and wiped my face. She was so close again, honey and lavender

Her closeness sent a ripple of something I



couldn't quite name through me. The faint scent of honey and lavender clung to her, intoxicating in a way I didn't want to admit. My jaw tightened as her fingers brushed my cheek while she wiped away a stray smear of sauce. 2

I wanted to pull away, to reassert some semblance of control, but instead, I stayed still, frozen under her gaze. She was focused, her brows furrowed slightly as if the act of cleaning my face was a matter of utmost importance.

When she finally stepped back, a triumphant smile tugged at her lips. "There. All better. Now you won't embarrass yourself in front of Our pack." 1

### *Our*

I narrowed my eyes at her. "You're enjoying this way too much."

"Only because I won," she shot back, crossing her arms as if to remind me that she had, indeed, gotten her way. "And because you actually look a little less like death."

Look at who was talking. "Don't push it," I warned, though my tone lacked its usual bite. I was more confused than angry.



She tilted her head, studying me with an expression that made my chest tighten. It wasn't pity, thank the goddess, but something softer.

"Well," she said after a beat, stepping toward the door, "since you're fed and watered, we can train now. But don't think I'll go easy on you just because you finally listened to reason. And I haven't gotten rusty over the week."

I got Intel from Kael that despite my absence that she was always up before six to train. "Reason?" I echoed, standing to my full height as I loomed over her. "You call this reason? Forcing me to eat like some stubborn pup?"

"If the shoe fits," she quipped, smirking up at me.

I growled low in my throat, but it wasn't the menacing sound I intended. Instead, it came out as something closer to amused. Goddess help me, she was driving me insane. I had so many unanswered questions that should have put me more unedge but here I was biting back a laugh.

As she turned to leave, I reached out on instinct, grabbing her wrist. She froze, her eyes snapping to mine, and for a moment, the world seemed to stop.

"Red," I said, my voice rough, quieter than I





meant it to be. "Why do you care so much?"

Her lips parted slightly, surprise flashing across her face. But she recovered quickly, her expression softening. "Because someone has to," she said simply. "And because whether you admit it or not, you need someone to."

"And not because you want to distract me?" I questioned, my gaze hardening.

The softness of her featured morphed into confusion. "Distract you?"

I pulled her to me with more force than intended, her body snug against mine. I trapped her, caging her and she was looking up at me, her expression a mix of shock and something I couldn't quite place.

"What did you mean by you are cursed?" I asked her.

I watched as colour drained from her face, her breath catching. "I---never said---that."

But the quiver in her voice betrayed her. She tried to take a step back.

I wrapped my arms around her waist, making it impossible for her to escape. My hold was firm, but not harsh. She was trapped, and we both



knew it. Her hands instinctively pressed against my chest, a weak attempt to create space, but she didn't push me away.

"Red," I said, my voice low, "don't lie to me. I heard you." My gaze burned into hers, searching for the truth she was so desperate to hide.

She looked away from me, as if she could not bare my gaze. "I don't know what you are talking about." She insisted, but she was shaking and squirming.

My hold turned harsh and bruising. "I think you have forgotten," I grabbed her jaw, forcing to face me. I tightened my grip on her waist, pulling her flush against me as her gaze darted around, desperate for a way out. My voice dropped to a low, menacing growl, the kind that could shake even the most stubborn of souls.

"Red," I said, my tone as cold as the grave. "You think you can keep hiding from me? You think I'll just let this go?"

Her body tensed, her lips parting in a shaky breath. "I—I told you, I can't—"

"No," I interrupted, my grip tightening just enough to make her gasp. "You won't. There's a difference." I leaned down, my face inches from





hers, my eyes locked on her wide, frightened ones. "But let me make something very clear: if you keep hiding this from me, there will be consequences. And not just for you."

Her breath hitched, and her hands pressed against my chest as if to push me away. But I didn't budge.

"Hades—"

"No," I snapped, cutting her off again. "You don't get to speak. Not until you understand exactly what's at stake here. Do you have any idea what I've sacrificed to keep this alliance intact? What I've done to keep your pack safe? How many of my own people I have disposed of for opposing this deal?" My voice dropped lower, the threat in it unmistakable. "If you keep playing games with me, I will burn it all to the ground." 1

Her eyes widened, her lips trembling as my words sank in. "You wouldn't—"

"Wouldn't I?" I snarled, the darkness in me surging forward. "You know exactly what I'm capable of. All the blood, all the deaths—civilians, Gammas, children—it will all be on your hands. Every scream, every life lost, every ounce of chaos... all because you decided to keep secrets."



Her breathing quickened, her eyes filled with tears. "No," she whispered, her eyes wide with horror and disbelief as if she could not imagine me doing such. It seemed like I had let her forget who I was.

"Yes, Red." My lips came down to brush her ear.

"You may think you can push a wolf and walk away unscathed, Red, but don't forget—I'm not just any wolf. I don't growl to warn; I bite to kill.

And when I do, mercy is the first thing to die." 1

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## 117 Lies, Lies, Lies

Eve 1

Fear settled into my gut, as heavy as lead. I had let it slip in the heat of the moment like a fool. My legs turned liquid.

I shook me, pulling me violently out of my reverie. "So tell me, Ellen," he growled. "What are you hiding me from me?" 1

My mind spiralled with lies that I could spew, it he continued to pry, he would find the deception. Just like I had feared, there would be hell to pay if he ever found it and everything that he had just promised reiterated just proved that without doubt. 3

Dread and horror coursed through me, my tongue tied for a long while. I swallowed thickly, trying to steady my breathing, but my chest felt tight, my lungs refusing to cooperate. Hades' grip was unrelenting, his eyes burning with a mix of fury and something darker—something primal. Every fiber of my being screamed to run, to fight, to escape, but there was nowhere to go. I was trapped.

"I'm not hiding anything," I said, my voice shaking





even as I tried to keep it steady. "You're overreacting."

He tilted his head, his gaze narrowing like a predator watching prey that had dared to speak back. The low growl that rumbled in his chest sent a shiver down my spine. "Overreacting? Funny choice of words, considering you look like you've seen a ghost. Or perhaps..." His lips curled into a slow, predatory smirk. "A truth you didn't want me to uncover."

My heart raced, my mind scrambling for a way out. His grip on my waist tightened just enough to make my breath hitch. I tried to push against his chest, but his strength was impenetrable, his body a wall of heat.

"You're imagining things," I said weakly, my hands pressing against his chest in a futile attempt to create distance. "I don't know what you think you heard, but—"

"Don't lie to me, Ellen." His voice was quiet, but it held the weight of a storm about to break. His free hand slid up to my jaw, his thumb brushing along the curve of my cheek in a way that sent an involuntary shiver through me. The contrast between the gentleness of his touch and the harshness of his tone made my head spin. "I can



smell your fear. It's intoxicating. But what I want is the truth."

His thumb paused, pressing just under my jaw, forcing me to look up at him. The proximity was unbearable. His breath was warm against my face, laced with a faint, sanguine scent that clouded my thoughts. He leaned in closer, and I could feel the heat radiating from him, wrapping around me like a suffocating blanket.

"Every time you lie to me," he murmured, his lips barely brushing my ear, "you make it worse for yourself. Do you really want to test my patience?"

Desperation clawed at my throat. "I swear, there's nothing—"

"Enough." His voice snapped like a whip, sharp and cold. His grip on my waist turned bruising, and my pulse quickened as he pulled me even closer, until there was no space left between us. "You're a terrible liar, Red. You think I haven't noticed the way you flinch when I bring up the curse? The way your heart races when I mention anything about your past?"

"I..." My words faltered, and panic surged through me. His closeness, the weight of his



presence, the way his eyes bore into me—it was all too much. "I don't know what you're talking about."

His lips twisted into a cruel smile. "Don't you?" His hand left my jaw, trailing down my throat, his fingers brushing lightly over my pulse. "Your heartbeat tells a different story. It's like a drum, Red. And I'm listening to every beat."

A shudder ran through me as his fingers lingered on my neck, just above my racing pulse. My mind screamed at me to think, to come up with something, anything, to distract him. But his presence, his voice, the way his body caged mine—it was impossible to think clearly.

"Hades," I whispered, my voice barely audible. "Please."

"Please what?" His voice was velvet, laced with menace and something more dangerous. "Please stop? Please let you go? Or..." His eyes darkened, his grip softening just enough to let his thumb trace a lazy circle on my waist. "Please keep going?" 1

My breath hitched, and his smirk deepened. He leaned down, his nose brushing along my temple as he inhaled deeply. "Honey and lavender."





Always so sweet, even when you're trembling. But tell me, Ellen, how much of that sweetness is real? And how much of it is a mask?"

I swallowed hard, unable to tear my gaze from his. "You think you know me," I said, my voice breaking but tinged with defiance. "But you don't." It was feigned, a farce. My heart was in my throat.

His grip on my waist tightened again, a dangerous glint sparking in his eyes. "Then show me who you really are. Tell me what you're hiding. Or should I force it out of you?" His lips brushed the shell of my ear, sending a shiver down my spine. "Because make no mistake, Red, I will find out. And when I do, there won't be anywhere left for you to run."

"I don't know what you want from me!" I blurted. He had an inkling, only that and nothing more. Because he is he knew anymore, he would not be here threatening the truth out of me. I would be on a cell, clamped down to a chair, getting prepared to be tortured until i was nothing than a shell and Silverpine...

I squeezed my eyes tight against the scenario playing in my head. The slums had been nothing, when Hades was done with Silverpine, it would



be nothing but a ash heap of ruin, and every single soul there would burn under his wrath. The mere thought of it sent ice shooting through my veins. I couldn't let it happen. My secrets, my past—whatever pieces of myself I had left—were the only thing standing between him and Silverpine's destruction. If he knew the truth, it wouldn't matter that I was trying to protect them. He would see it as betrayal, as deceit, and he would unleash hell without hesitation.

I opened my eyes to find his piercing gaze still locked on me, his expression unrelenting. "Stop playing games with me, Ellen," he said, his voice a low growl. "If you think I'll stop at words, you don't know me at all."

I forced a shaky breath, the effort it took to calm my pounding heart almost unbearable. "And if you think threatening me will get you the truth, then you don't know me either." Lies, lies, lies. I had almost told Jules the truth just a week ago. I wished Kael was here to save me now.

His grip loosened slightly, enough to make me think I'd gotten through to him, but then he laughed. It wasn't a warm or kind sound—it was dark, cold, and laced with disbelief. "You've got fire, Red. I'll give you that. But don't mistake my



patience for mercy."

His hand moved again, trailing down my side, each touch deliberate and slow, sending a strange mix of fear and something far more unsettling coursing through me. "You think you're protecting them, don't you?" His voice was softer now, almost mocking. "Silverpine. The slums. Your people." He leaned in closer, his lips brushing against the shell of my ear again, and I shivered despite myself. "But here's the thing, Ellen. Every second you resist me, every moment you waste lying to my face, you make it worse for them." 1

My throat constricted, and I shook my head, panic clawing its way up my chest. "I'm not lying —"

"Enough!" His roar was sharp and final, cutting through the air like a blade. His grip turned punishing again, yanking me flush against him, and I gasped. "Every denial is another match waiting to light the fire. Every heartbeat that tells me you're holding back is another reason for me to destroy them all."

"Don't," I breathed, the word slipping out before I could stop it. My voice cracked, my desperation bleeding into the single syllable.





His eyes narrowed, a spark of triumph flickering there. "Then tell me, Ellen. What did you mean when you said you're cursed? What are you running from? Who are you protecting? What are you hiding from me!" He was so close to the truth that bile rose in my throat.

"I..." My voice caught in my throat, the weight of his questions and the impossibility of answering them crushing me. I couldn't give him what he wanted. I couldn't. But the way his eyes burned into mine, the way his body pressed against mine like a cage—I didn't know how much longer I could keep this up.

"You're mine, Ellen," he said, his voice dropping to a dangerous whisper. "And that means your secrets are mine too. You don't get to keep them from me."

I flinched at his words, my chest constricting until I could barely breath. My thoughts were in a whirlwind of chaos, cold sweat sliding down the back of my neck as the weight of his words pressed on me like a suffocating force. He wasn't going to stop. He wasn't going to let this go. And every moment that passed felt like the walls I'd carefully built were crumbling brick by brick under his relentless pressure.



"I'm yours," I said, the words barely a whisper, my voice trembling with fear and a weak attempt to placate him. "I am all yours."

A devilish smile crawled its way to his lips. "I love this," he growled. "Another beautiful strategy by my wife. Defiance did not work, and now you've switched to submission. Clever, Ellen. But not clever enough." His grip on my waist tightened as he leaned in, his face mere inches from mine. The dangerous glint in his eyes burned brighter, his lips curling into a smirk that sent chills down my spine.

"I'm not playing a game," I said, my voice cracking despite my efforts to sound resolute. "I'm telling the truth."

"The truth?" he repeated, his tone dripping with mockery. "The truth is that you think you can manipulate me with your trembling voice and doe-eyed innocence. But here's the thing, Red." His fingers trailed up my side, his touch both infuriatingly gentle and suffocatingly possessive. "I see through you. Every lie, every crack in your armor—I see it all."

My breath hitched as he pressed his forehead against mine, his eyes boring into me with a ferocity that made it impossible to look away.



"And now," he whispered, his voice dangerously soft, "you're going to tell me what I want to know. Not because you're mine, not because you think you can control me with submission, but because you're afraid of what I'll do if you don't."

I felt tears prickling at the corners of my eyes, the weight of his words and the proximity of his presence suffocating me. "You think this makes you strong?" I choked out, my voice trembling. "Threatening me, breaking me down? You think that's power?"

His lips twitched, his smirk fading into something darker, more dangerous. "Strength is knowing exactly how far you're willing to go to get what you want. And trust me, Ellen, I'll go further than you can imagine."

My heart pounded in my chest, a wild rhythm that seemed to echo in the silence between us. His grip softened slightly, his fingers brushing against the small of my back in a way that sent a confusing jolt through me. His gaze flicked to my lips for the briefest moment before returning to my eyes, and I hated how that fleeting look made my stomach twist.

"You want to protect Silverpine," he said, his tone eerily calm now, almost tender. "I understand






that. But if you keep holding out on me, I'll tear it apart piece by piece until there's nothing left to protect. Is that what you want, Ellen?"

"No!" I blurted, panic flooding my voice. "I don't want that."

"Then stop lying to me," he growled, his voice cutting through the air like a blade. "Stop hiding."

"It was Eve!" I screamed, and felt him flinch. 

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