



142 Dancing On Knives

Eve 1

The wine had really hit its mark, later rather than sooner. Yet, my skin still itched with anxiety, every nerve on edge as Hades closed the door behind us. He had not said a word to me since he escorted me back to the car, but I would have been dense not to notice the wary glances he cast my way.

He shrugged out of his shirt as he sauntered towards me, where I unhooked my earrings—or at least tried to. I was trembling, my hands shaking.

His eyes searched my face as he stood before me and narrowed. My pulse jumped when his hand came up to my ear.

"Let me," he murmured.

I hesitated for a moment before my hands dropped, and I let him. To my shock, he was very deft with the task as he cradled my face with one hand and released the earring with the other.

He rubbed circles on my cheek with his thumb. He did the same with the other one.



"I want a phone," I told him.

He stilled. "All of a sudden?"

"I just feel vulnerable without one," I lied.

"Uhhh," he mused.

"I had the perimeter swept for signs of the Beta, James Hale," he revealed. His brows drew together. "There was no sign of another werewolf. No infiltration."

I swallowed, not trusting myself to speak, especially with the memory card burning into the skin of my leg. I avoided his eyes, but he tilted my head so that I was looking up at him.

"Would you go with him?" There was a dreadful glint in the depths of his eyes. His voice pitched with an uneasy softness—one that felt more menacing than if he had snarled outright.

I froze, the question filling that space between us with even more unbearable tension. "I..." I tried to take a step back.

His grip tightened ever so slightly—a warning; I am not letting you go. 1

"Hades..."

"Red..." A muscle in his jaw ticked. "Tell me. If you



were given the chance today, would you have run away with him?" His eyes were bleary and hard, but his voice told another story. His tone was almost... beseeching. I could smell the wine on his breath. It had a trace of a sanguineous scent.

"I would not," I said, breathlessly.

His eyes flickered, his gaze searching. "Why?" His head tipped toward mine.

Words tangled in my throat, leaving me unresponsive.

"He was your lover, your fiancé, until me," his lip twitching into anything but a smile. "So why not leave?" **3**

"The alliance," I blurted.

But his eyes darkened only further. "The alliance," he whispered harshly. For a moment, he looked hurt, gutted and even. Not angry. **1**

As if his emotion had a direct consequence on me, my chest tightened—but only for a moment before I remembered. I was forgetting again. Forgetting my place in his life, like I had done when I asked him to call me "his Red." He was no longer branding me—I was branding myself. He



had no right to look at me like I had betrayed him. 2

"Yes, the alliance."

Hades' hand dropped from my face as if I'd burned him. The warmth of his touch vanished, leaving a coldness between us that I wasn't sure I could bridge.

He stepped back, his gaze shadowed with something darker than disappointment. He ran a hand through his hair, his movements suddenly less controlled. He was intoxicated—far more than he was letting on. 1

"Right," he said quietly, almost to himself. "The alliance."

I should have left it there. Let the silence swallow whatever thread of emotion hung in the air, but I couldn't.

"You forget," I murmured, keeping my voice steady despite the weight pressing against my ribs. "That's all this has ever been."

His head snapped toward me, sharp eyes narrowing.

"That's what you tell yourself to make it easier, isn't it?" Hades' voice carried the kind of quiet



rage that hummed just below the surface. "To pretend this isn't something more." 2

My breath hitched, and I forced myself to hold his stare.

"I don't pretend anything," I replied. "I know my place. I know about the other woman." 5

He blinked, his entire body going still as if the words had struck him harder than any physical blow. For a moment, he simply stared at me, eyes narrowing as if trying to decipher whether I was serious or delirious from the wine.

Then, to my utter surprise, a low chuckle escaped him. It was humorless at first, just a breath of disbelief, but it grew—a rough, rumbling sound that filled the room in a way that made the hairs on the back of my neck rise.

Hades dragged a hand down his face, laughter still rippling through his chest as if I had just told the most ridiculous joke.

"Other woman?" he echoed, shaking his head. His eyes glinted, sharp and dangerous, as if he found some twisted amusement in the accusation.

"Gods, Red. Is that what you think?"

I crossed my arms, trying to stand my ground



even though my heart was battering against my ribs. "I don't think. I know."

He stepped closer, the laughter fading into something darker—something less playful and more intimate. The space between us evaporated in an instant, and I could feel the heat of him as he leaned down, eyes locking with mine.

"I am a lot of things," he murmured. "A murderer, a narcissist, a sadist, hedonist," his gaze dropped to my lips. "Obsessive. But I am not a cheater." 1

I shook my head, like I could shake off the genuineness that I wasn't ready to accept. His words felt too sharp, too deliberate, as if they were meant to cut through the walls I'd carefully built between us.

"You're lying," I whispered, though even I didn't believe it. "You are all of those things, but you draw a line at infidelity."

Hades tilted his head, watching me the way a predator watches prey before the strike. His hand lifted, brushing the hair away from my face with a gentleness that felt out of place.

"Why would I lie about something like that?" he asked softly, his breath warm against my skin.



I swallowed hard, but the knot in my throat refused to dissolve. "Because it would make things easier. For you. For the alliance. For whatever this is."

I should have been anxious to find out what was on the memory card, but here I was again, entangled with him.

His gaze flickered, something dangerous surfacing just beneath the calm exterior.

"You think I'm keeping another woman because of convenience?" He laughed again, but this time there was no humor—only simmering tension.

"I don't do convenient, Red."

"You are throwing words now."

"You are so clueless, Red. I brought you here with the full intention to break you, to mould your fragments into a tool," he slurred a bit. 4

My throat closed up, the alcohol-induced haze relenting.

"The blessed twin in my grasp, and you think I need another woman?" Hades' voice dropped lower, the dangerous edge returning with brutal clarity.

I stiffened, feeling the shift in the air. The haze of



wine was fading fast, sobering me in the worst possible way.

Hades' hand lingered at his side, clenching and releasing as if fighting some internal battle he couldn't win. His eyes burned into mine, molten silver darkened by something more dangerous than anger—something raw and unfiltered.

"I didn't plan for this," he said, his voice hoarse, almost as if admitting it pained him. "I wanted to break you, Red. Mould you into something I could control. But you—"

His gaze dropped to my mouth, lingering there before flicking back to my eyes.

"You're shattering me." 2

I swallowed, the weight of his confession pressing against my ribs, making it harder to breathe.

Hades took a step forward, closing the distance until the heat of his body seeped into mine, smothering any space that might have existed between us.

"You were supposed to be a pawn," he murmured, tilting his head just enough that his lips brushed against my temple, featherlight but



deliberate. "A tool for the war. A means to an end."

War?!

His hand came up slowly, fingers threading through my hair as he cupped the back of my head.

"But now," Hades whispered, his breath hot against my skin, "you are both my salvation and my damnation." 1

The words sank deep, curling around my chest like a vice.

His hold on me was possessive, but there was a tremor in his grip—barely perceptible, but enough to make me realize the weight of his words wasn't just poetic. It was real.

"You think I hate you?" Hades continued, pulling back just enough for our eyes to meet. His thumb traced the line of my jaw, a touch that contradicted the storm building behind his gaze. "I don't. I hate what you do to me." 1

I forced myself to stay still, even as my heart slammed against my ribs.

"You undo me," he rasped, his voice dropping lower, almost dangerous. "Piece by piece."



I felt the tension crackling between us, thick and suffocating, yet I couldn't look away. His intensity pulled me in like gravity—dark and inescapable.

"You make me reckless," Hades confessed, brushing his lips against my ear in a whisper that sent shivers down my spine. "And I despise it."

My breath hitched as his hands tightened around my waist, fingers digging into the fabric of my dress.

"But I can't stop," he added, almost as if the admission was dragged out of him. "No matter how much I try."

The weight of his obsession wrapped around me like a chain, unbreakable and suffocating, but somehow, I didn't pull away.

His grip tightened further, and for a moment, I saw it—the flicker of something feral behind his eyes. The realization that I had looked at someone else, even if it wasn't James, with the kind of recognition that mirrored longing, had ignited something violent inside him.

When it was Kael, he had been jealous and sober, but now he was both jealous and intoxicated.



The thought of me believing, even for a second, that another man I once loved could still hold the pieces of my heart made him unhinged.

"I wanted to kill him," Hades whispered, his voice shaking with restrained fury. "Even if it was just a ghost in your mind."

I swallowed thickly, my pulse quickening beneath his hand.

"You should let me go," I whispered, knowing full well he wouldn't.

His lips curved into something faint, something that wasn't quite a smile. It was bitter anger—it didn't reach his eyes.

"I have to confess," Hades replied, his thumb brushing the curve of my lower lip. "Only your blood can intoxicate me." 1

I swallowed, heat curling low in my stomach as his eyes dipped down to follow the movement.

"You don't belong to the alliance," he said, the softness in his tone twisted by the possessiveness lurking beneath. "You belong to me." 2

