

220 The Deal

Eve 1

"Felicia, leave now."

His voice was dangerously levelled.

Felicia twisted her face in disdain before stomping past us, Elliot still on her hip. I watched them go, my eyes shifting to Elliot as she made her way to the door.

His lips were quivering, his eyes glazed over.

My chest constricted, an almost foreign and visceral emotion churning in me.

The hallway was silent.

But my heart wasn't.

It pounded in my chest, a brutal, erratic drumbeat against my ribs.

I barely heard Hades as he stepped closer, his arm wrapping around me, his presence warm, grounding—trying to anchor me.

"Don't listen to her," he murmured, voice low,



steady.

I didn't respond.

I couldn't.

Because my mind was still racing, my vision still locked on the empty space where Felicia had just disappeared with Elliot.

His lips had been quivering.

His eyes—glazed over, unfocused, too distant for a child his age.

"There is far more to that poor child."

Rhea's voice slithered through my head, soft and maternal but edged with something grim.

Something I didn't want to acknowledge.

Something I didn't want to feel.

But I did.

And it burned.

Suddenly, my feet moved before I could think, before I could breathe.

I broke into a sprint.



Hades didn't question it.

He just followed.

The halls blurred past me, the air sharp against my skin as I pushed forward, ran harder, ignoring the way my legs ached, the way my body still buzzed with the raw energy of what had just happened.

By the time we reached the lowest level of the tower—the parking lot, dimly lit, the scent of fuel and damp stone thick in the air—I was gasping.

But I didn't care.

Because there, just beyond the heavy glass of the tinted car window—

Elliot.

His tiny face was turned toward me, barely visible through the sheen of reflected light.

My breath caught.

Felicia was in the driver's seat, her grip tight on the wheel, her shoulders stiff, her expression unreadable as she prepared to leave.

But Elliot—



His eyes found mine.

And then—

His small hand lifted.

Pressed to the glass.

Fingers curling, then flattening again.

A sign.

A plea.

"Save me." **1**

It happened so fast I almost didn't catch it.

Almost.

But I did.

And my blood turned to ice.

A hollow sound lodged itself in my throat, thick and unbearable, my pulse roaring in my ears.

I stepped forward, my breath uneven, my hands trembling—

The car started.

The engine growled, headlights cutting through

220 The Deal
the dim, and just like that—

Elliot was gone.

I stood there, frozen, watching the taillights
vanish into the night, my body locked in place,
my lungs refusing to work.

A hand curled around my wrist—Hades, silent
but solid.

I barely felt him.

I barely felt anything at all.

Except for one thing.

A terrible, gut-wrenching certainty that
something was going to go wrong.

"He plots to carve out your heart and drain your
blood. The truth is in the memory card. When
you accept this, call for help."

James' warning.

"I will expose you. And we will see," she
continued, her voice silk and venom, "if he will
not carve your heart out and spit on your
corpse."



Felicia's threat.

"Save me."

Elliot's silent plea.

Hades knew and accepted. My family had returned to Silverpine. Rhea was with me now. Yet...

A sinking, hollow weight settled deep in my chest, a slow, creeping terror slithering through my veins, curling around my ribs like cold, suffocating tendrils.

Just when I thought I was out of the tunnel, when I could finally breathe—when the light had flickered on the horizon, promising something close to peace—

The darkness returned.

It clawed at the edges of my sanity, whispering, laughing, lurking in the spaces I had convinced myself were safe.

I had believed—foolishly, desperately—that I could escape it. That I could sever myself from the chaos, the danger, the tangled web of lies and blood and fate.



But now, standing in the dimly lit parking lot, my pulse still stuttering, my body still trembling from the ghost of Elliot's touch against the glass —

I knew.

It had never left.

The darkness had simply waited.

Waited for me to let my guard down.

Waited for me to believe that I was free.

And now, just when I had started to breathe, to hope, to think that maybe—just maybe—I could reclaim control...

It was here.

Again.

Coiling around me, unseen but felt in the marrow of my bones, in the icy dread spreading through my gut.

A sick sense of déjà vu gripped me. The feeling of inevitability. That I was running in circles, desperately clawing toward a freedom that would always remain just out of reach.

That I was never meant to escape.

I could feel Hades' gaze on me, his fingers still curled around my wrist like an anchor. But even his touch—his warmth—couldn't banish the creeping cold sinking into my skin.

Because the truth was undeniable.

The storm was coming.

And this time, I wasn't sure I would survive it.

But that was what James wanted. To make me doubt, to make me stray. I would not fall for it. I would rather destroy the memory card. It could be doctored "evidence."

Rhea's calming voice echoed in my head, maternal but ominous. "Fractured are our memories, distorted are our truths. But the past never stays forgotten, Eve. It only waits."

The words slithered through my mind like a prophecy, wrapping around my ribs like iron chains. My breath hitched, the weight of them pressing down, suffocating.

Green eyes—emerald reflections in my memories, locked away. The scent of gasoline,



smoke, and blood had me clutching my chest.

Hades' grip tightened as the memories assaulted me again.

"Red..." His voice was laced with growing panic. He turned me to face him, attempting to pull me back, but the barrage of images and voices from the now-familiar nightmare scene pulled me into the abyss.

A sharp, searing pain lanced through my skull, white-hot and unrelenting. My vision warped, tilting at the edges as a thick, metallic scent filled my nostrils.

No.

Not here. Not now.

I gasped, my hand flying to my face as the warmth of blood trickled from my nose, dripping onto my lips, staining my skin. The parking lot flickered, shifting, distorting—the present unraveling around me like threads of a fabric I couldn't hold together.

And then—

A flash.



Gasoline. Smoke. Blood.

A different place. A different time.

And the voice—

"This wasn't the fucking deal!" 1

The words were laced with rage, edged with betrayal, cutting through the fog like a blade to the throat.

The voice was familiar, very familiar 2

The world around me wrenched violently, yanking me deeper, dragging me under, forcing me to see—to remember.

A hand, rough and calloused, pulling me into his arms. We were moving. Hades was running.

A scream.

Fire licking at the edges of my vision.

Then darkness.

Cold, empty, and absolute.

Somewhere in the distance, I heard my name. A voice I knew, familiar, desperate—



"Eve, please—"

Hades.

The tether snapped.

Then darkness.

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