



240 Corrupted Files

Eve **1**

The glimmer of Danielle's earring on his ear mocked me.

It pulsed like a warning beacon, a cruel reminder that some truths couldn't stay buried forever. And that maybe... maybe I was never supposed to outrun mine.

Hades held me tighter in his sleep, murmuring my name like a prayer—and it shattered me.

Because he trusted me. Because he loved me. Because he had no idea what I'd done... or what I might still be capable of.

My breath hitched. I stared up at the ceiling, counting the shadows that shifted with every passing second. Anything to keep myself from thinking. From remembering the way Felicia had screamed. The way her rage had transformed into terror.

Her hands, clawing at the air. Her voice breaking.



"I am not the fucking target!" 1

There were targets—ones that Felicia knew about. Which meant Felicia had a hand in the incident that night. 3

I recalled my father's mocking parting words: "And one last thing—help me thank Felicia. Her second time assisting me, but I will always be grateful."

The second favor had been relaying my mental deterioration. 1

But the first... had been facilitating the assassination of the king and his father.

I could still perceive the scent of blood from the vial in the briefcase.

How could Silverpine have the blood of not just any Obsidian civilian, but of members of the Obsidian royal family—unless it had been given by an inside source?

Every finger pointed to none other than Felicia. 1

Everything was falling into place now that I had calmed down—reasoning taking over panic and letting me see and recall all I needed to in this



convoluted situation of betrayal and smoke-screened loyalties. The chaos had once clouded my mind, made me question everything—but now, clarity was cutting through the fog like a blade.

Felicia had played her part.

But I...

I was responsible for the death of three people.

Three integral parts of Hades' life.

I could still feel the sickening wetness of blood on my hands, the crushing of bones and the ripping of flesh.

That left me in a moral debate—how could I, the murderer of his wife, his brother, his father... even think of confessing?

How could I reveal the truth of Felicia's hand in it without sounding like a coward, twisting the truth to wash my hands of guilt?

Without it sounding like desperation... like I was trying to turn the finger away from myself and pin it on someone else?



Because who would Hades believe?

Me?

The woman who destroyed his family.

The woman he held while she cried, not knowing
she was the reason for his tears.

Or his sister-in-law—his ex-wife's sister—who
had buried them side by side?

Would he see Felicia for what she truly was?

Or would he see me for what the world had
already branded me?

A traitor.

A murderer.

A curse.

I recalled the time I was accused of poisoning my
own sister. Five years of screaming into deaf
ears. Five years of begging to be believed.

And no one listened.

Not my mother.

Not my father.



Not even the sister I was trying to protect.

They took everything. My name. My place. My dignity.

They took my voice.

And now I lay in the arms of the only person who had ever made me feel like I had one again... and I was going to lose that too. 1

I turned to face him.

His lashes were soft against his skin, lips slightly parted in sleep. So peaceful. So innocent. So unknowing.

My hand moved on its own, brushing against his cheek, following the sharp line of his jaw, the warmth of his breath fanning across my wrist.

Would he still fall asleep in my arms after this?

Would he still call me Red?

Would he still love me?

The coward in me screamed.

Screamed at me to stay silent. To bury the truth deeper. To never say a word.



Because if I did, I might lose everything again—
my freedom, my name, my love.

I wanted to cry, to fall apart right there, but I bit
it back. Because I wasn't sure I'd be able to stop.

Because tears would change nothing.

I leaned forward and pressed my lips softly to
his. Just once. Just long enough to brand the
memory of it into my soul, in case it was the last
time I'd ever be allowed to do it. 2

And then I made a vow.

This time, I wouldn't be caught off guard.

This time, I wouldn't fall to my knees and beg to
be believed.

This time, I would gather every thread of truth
and weave it into a noose for the real monster.

This time, I would be tactical. Resourceful.
Prepared.

Because the truth needed more than a voice.

It needed proof.

And I would find it.

"Don't worry," I whispered into the quiet, my fingers still resting on his cheek.

"You will know the truth soon. I promise."

Even if, when that time came, he couldn't love me anymore.

"He deserves the truth, Evie," Rhea's voice wove into my painful thoughts. "The whole truth."

"He will get it. I will give it."

Hades

"The princess' fingerprints were found on the memory card. They're the most recent set. She was the last holder before it was discovered."

My blood chilled instantly. Still, I forced myself to speak. "So... this is indeed hers?"

It was the stupidest question I could have asked. The answer was predictable.

But I needed to hear it.

I needed it to rip through me like lightning.



Maybe then I'd feel something besides this dull, choking disbelief.

"Yes, Your Highness," Mara replied, voice clipped and sterile. "The evidence is irrefutable. Her fingerprints were the most recent. We also found traces of other werewolf fingerprints—linked to an already identified male."

The image of the other werewolf flashed on the screen.

Brown eyes. Sandy hair. Fawn skin.

A smug countenance that never failed to make my blood boil.

"Beta of Silverpine," I muttered, hissing.

James stared back at me from the screen.

My mind reeled, racing through every possibility. How had she gotten a memory card from James? They never had time together alone when he visited. The only window of possibility was—

"When the CCTV cameras were down..." I whispered to myself.

That was when it happened. The exchange.
Hidden in the blind spot.

And Eve... had never told me.

"There was also, strangely, another substance
found on the card," Mara added, tapping a few
more keys.

I braced myself. "What kind of substance?"

She hesitated. "Bloodwine, Your Highness. Dried
traces—less than a drop, but enough to be
identified."

Bloodwine.

My stomach twisted.

"The exchange could have occurred at a
restaurant."

My jaw clenched. My thoughts thundered.

And then—

It clicked.

Sharp. Instant.

The dinner.



The dim lights.

The way she had picked at her food, barely meeting my eyes.

The moment her hand trembled slightly when reaching for her glass.

And most damning of all...

The name she'd whispered, barely audible under her breath as the wine glass paused at her lips.

"James..."

She had said his name.

The Bloodwine.

The memory card.

Her scurrying off to the toilet.

The exchange.

And Eve—my Eve—had said nothing. 1

It had happened before Jules died. Even in the chaos and fragility of that time, she had chosen silence. She needed to hide it.

The threads began knotting into a noose, slowly



tightening around my ribs. My breath shortened. My hands curled into fists against the chair.

"I want to know what's in it. Find out now."

"It will take some time," Mara replied carefully.

"We've already sent the footage for deep reconstruction and decryption, but whatever was on it has been partially corrupted—intentionally. Someone didn't just want it hidden. They wanted it gone."

My fingers dug into the arms of the chair, the fabric groaning under the pressure.

Intentionally.

The word echoed like a siren. Someone had tried to erase it. Someone with knowledge, access, and fear.

I stood abruptly. Mara flinched but stayed firm.

"Prioritize it," I said, my voice low and dark. "I want it. I don't care what programs you need to run or what specialists you need—just get it done."

She nodded. "Understood."



I turned toward the tall windows of the war room. Rain began to streak across the glass, smearing the outside world into a blur. My thoughts mirrored it—messy, tangled, violent.

Eve.

James.

The Bloodwine.

The card.

The silence.

The lies.

Why hadn't she told me?

She had sworn I'd know the truth.

Was that the truth she meant to give me?

Or the one she'd planned to rewrite?

I had miscalculated.

And I would correct all my mistakes.

Starting with the woman I called my wife. 2

No—the woman I thought I knew.



The one who had once stood before me covered in ash and blood and secrets... and still managed to make me believe she could be redeemed. The one who now curled up in my bed, her body pressed against mine like a promise she never meant to keep. 1

I clenched my jaw, forcing my heartbeat to steady. Because if I didn't, the rage simmering beneath the surface would boil over. And I couldn't afford that. Not now.

I needed control.

Not vengeance.

Not heartbreak.

Truth.

The blood test would be the final nail. The Montegues were waiting in my office. 7

