

## 262 Seven Letters to The Truth

Hades 1

It tasted like... nothing. The food was unpleasant ash on my tongue, and swallowing it was as easy as gulping down a boulder. My skin crawled as the cooked steak scraped its way down my throat.

Nausea seized me the moment it hit my stomach, my hand slamming down on my mouth as I gagged, the force of disgust making my whole body lurch.

I dropped my utensils in frustration, the clattering resounding through the room. My hands remained shaking from the hunger. Appetite for food had evaded me since the truth had come out, and now not only did food taste unappealing—it had turned completely inedible.

I craved something else, a craving that had been there before due to a lycan's hybrid vampiric nature but had now accumulated immensely into a visceral ache that echoed in every nerve: bloodlust.



I needed blood. Not bloodwine. Blood unfiltered and unaltered, straight from the source. 7

My migraine had grown worse with each fucking second. My fingers twitched as I reached for my head, the spot where the bony foreign appendage had grown even more. It was pointed and sharp. Like a horn.

The door knocking snapped me out of my spiraling thoughts before the door opened and Felicia stepped in... Elliot in her arms.

Guilt hit me like a truck. Him being left with caretakers could not be possible, especially with the extensive information the enemy had about him and his schedule. Until this was taken care of, there was no way he would be safe.

The enemy knew too much about a child that could not defend himself.

Felicia was polished, her signature red lip discarded and replaced with something more subtle that made her resemble her late sister. 4

She tucked hair behind her ear as she sat, Elliot planted on her lap. Elliot's eyes were what drew me in—they were not wandering, but remained



focused on... the seat that Kael used to occupy.

Kael had been released but asked for some time to himself.

Elliot's gaze seemed to almost pierce the seat.

He seemed to be looking for Kael. 1

Felicia cleared her throat. "I just wanted to say thank you."

My stomach turned and I pushed the food farther away from me. "What for?"

Her lips twitched into a grateful smile. "For being objective, rather than subjective. It was a surprise that you believed."

"Given the evidence, why would I not have believed?" My voice was low, a brow quirked. 5

"Oh come on. You loved her. Even more than you loved Danielle." Her expression turned somber.

"But thank you for taking my side."

My chest was constricting, but my countenance remained calm. "I didn't take your side. I just made a judgment based on the evidence," I replied, before settling on my elbows and leaning forward. "I have some questions."





"Ask away," she tried to sound casual, but the way her voice shook betrayed her.

"How did you come by the memory card?" 1

> "Still looking for cracks. Maybe you should run her through a polygraph too and full spilt on Danielle's unburied corpse while you're at it," the flux purred.

Felicia blinked at the question, caught off guard by my sudden shift in tone.

"I... found it," she said carefully. "I saw her toss something out the window one night. At the time, I didn't think much of it. But unlike you, I was watching her. Closely."

I grit my teeth. The sharp sting in my skull returned, pulsing behind my eyes.

"I assumed it was nothing. But curiosity got the better of me." Felicia adjusted Elliot in her lap, smoothing his hair like nothing about this moment was wrong. "It had landed in a flower bed. Wasn't damaged. I kept it. For the right time." 1

"For the perfect moment," I corrected, eyes



narrowing. "You sat on the information."

She looked down, her face shadowed by guilt—or what she painted as guilt. "I wasn't sure what was on it until I plugged it in. And by then, things were already... delicate. I didn't want to cause more harm."

My stare didn't waver.

"And you didn't think bringing it to me immediately would've been helpful?" I asked, my voice low but dangerous.

Felicia's lashes fluttered. "You were... compromised, Hades. You were sleeping with her. Defending her. You wouldn't have believed me then."

> "She's got you cornered, and you're still trying to find the seams." The flux cackled, delighting in my slow decay. "Maybe she's the liar. Maybe they both are. But you want a reason to keep one alive, don't you?"

No.

I didn't want anything.

Not anymore.



But I had to be sure.

I had to ask.

"Why keep it at all?" I pressed. "Why not destroy it?"

She swallowed visibly. "Because it felt too important. And Danielle was my sister. If Eve had anything to do with what happened that night..." She looked up at me then, eyes bright. "She deserves everything that's coming to her."

I exhaled slowly, leaning back.

Her voice, her eyes, her answers—they all lined up. Not too polished, not too perfect. Just messy enough to be true. 13

And still, doubt crept in through the seams of my mind like smoke.

Because I knew Felicia. 2

Her morality had always been flexible.

Her grief, performative at times. Real at others.

But Danielle... Danielle had been hers to protect. They were sisters. But when had that meant anything, it hasn't meant anything for Leon.





I studied her face once more, then turned my gaze to Elliot. He was now staring at me. Not blinking. Just watching. 1

Somewhere inside, the ache deepened.

The hunger. The splitting pain of restraint. The flux licking at the edges of my consciousness.

> "Just say it," it whispered. "You believe her. You want to. That's enough. She's blood. Family. And the other? She was just a beautiful little lie." 2

I stood, jaw tight.

"I have what I need," I said stiffly. "You can go."

Felicia rose slowly, nodding with an air of careful triumph. "Of course."

She turned to walk away, Elliot tucked safely in her arms.

I watched them go—watched the child she claimed to protect, watched the woman who may have orchestrated more than she admitted—and still I felt... hollow. 1

Not victorious.

Just... hollow.



As the door clicked shut behind them, I pressed my palms to the table and braced myself.

Danielle was her sister.

Maybe that made her incapable of betrayal. 1

But I'd thought the same about Eve.

And look where that had gotten me.

> "One left you. The other buried the knife deeper. But don't worry, Lucien..." the flux hissed, giddy with the thrill of my collapse. "I'll burn the love out of you. I promise."

And for the first time...

I didn't fight it.

Then the phone rang

The phone rang.

A sharp, mundane sound that cut through the room like a blade.

I blinked at it, my vision still tinged red at the edges, heart thudding with something that wasn't quite rage—or maybe it was. I reached for it with a reluctant hand and answered.





"Hades."

"Your Majesty, it's Maya. From the forensics lab," her voice came fast, laced with urgency but anchored in control. "There's been a development."

I straightened, instincts flaring. "Go on."

"You need to come down here. Now. It's about the memory card." 1

The words sent a jolt through my spine.

"What about it?" I asked, voice dropping.

"We decrypted the visible files—the footage, audio logs, the ones you already saw—but something else was buried in the metadata. Something heavily encrypted. Hidden under three layers of anti-tamper protocols. We almost missed it."

I was already standing, blood thrumming through my veins.

"How secure?" I asked.

"It's locked behind a seven-word passphrase," she said. "Full sentences. Not just a keycode. Our

systems can't bypass it. Not without months of brute force, and even then, the risk of data loss is high."

I didn't hesitate.

"I'll be there in ten."

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The elevator ride down to the forensics wing felt like eternity in motion. The migraine had only worsened, the horn-like protrusion now throbbing with a pulse of its own. I clenched my jaw to keep from tearing at it.

When the doors opened, Maya was already waiting, clipboard in hand and eyes shadowed with unease.

She led me down a corridor and into the cold glass lab. The card had been mounted into a secure reader, and a screen hovered above it, the decryption log still blinking.

"It's real," she said, motioning toward the terminal. "The encryption is military-grade. Not Silverpine's usual protocol—this was embedded by someone with serious clearance."



"And the content?"

"We don't know yet. It's locked behind this."

She gestured to the black screen displaying a simple prompt in glowing text:

ENTER PASSPHRASE TO UNSEAL SECURE  
MEMORY FILES. SEVEN WORDS. ONE TRUTH.

> "One truth," the flux mused in my ear. "Oh, wouldn't that be delicious?"

I ignored it, reading the prompt again. Seven words. One truth.

Maya shifted beside me. "If we're right about what's buried in there... It could change everything. The camera angle from the visible footage doesn't match the metadata's origin log. That means the memory card was tampered with—possibly edited." 2

My eyes snapped to hers.

"So what I saw..."

"Could be only part of it," she confirmed. "Or even a planted layer. We won't know until we get past this passphrase." 1





My throat tightened. The ache in my skull was now unbearable.

Seven words.

One truth.

The weight of it settled deep in my chest, heavier than guilt, denser than grief.

I stared at the screen as Maya stepped back to give me space.

> "Go ahead," the flux purred. "Let's see what truth she buried. Or didn't. Let's see which one of them truly loved you... and which one pulled the string."

I didn't speak.

But I would.

I would find those seven words.

Because if there was even a sliver of truth left to unearth—

I had to know.

What else was Eve hiding? 2

