



277 Decrypted

HADES 1

My breath caught.

No.

No, no, no.

I stood so fast the world tilted. The blood drained from my face, my lungs refused to open. I stumbled toward the bathroom—threw the door open like she might be there, brushing her teeth, frowning at the mirror the way she always did.

Nothing.

I spun toward the closet. Yanked the doors open.

Empty.

Not entirely—but just enough. A shirt. Her boots. Gone.

Gone.

My knees buckled against the frame. I braced myself with a hand on the floor, heaving, trying



to suck air into lungs that had collapsed beneath a single word:

Goodbye.

"No," I rasped. "No, no, no, no—"

—You did this.

The Flux slithered through my ribs. Not loud. Not yet. But present.

You always do this.

I staggered back, ran. Out of the suite. Down the corridor.

I didn't even remember pulling the door open. I just remembered screaming.

"EVE!"

My voice echoed down the long white hallways like a curse I couldn't take back.

Security agents appeared. Stiff backs. Confused expressions.

"Alpha Stavros—"

"FIND HER!" I roared, slamming my fist into the



wall. The marble cracked. "I want my wife found NOW!" 3

They moved. Fast.

Because I didn't look like their king anymore—I looked like a man with nothing left to lose.

And then—

"Enough."

Kael's voice. Sharp. Cutting.

He stepped out from behind the stairwell, eyes dark, lips set in a grim line.

"I lost her," I said before he could speak. My voice was broken glass. "Kael—I lost her, and I can't—I can't—" My hands trembled. "I can't breathe without her. Please help me. Help me find her—"

I turned, staggering toward the elevator.

Kael grabbed my arm.

I whipped around.

He didn't let go.



"I helped her go," he said. 2

The words didn't register at first. Didn't make sense.

"What?" I whispered.

Kael didn't blink.

"I helped her leave."

I froze.

Everything froze.

"She wanted to go. And I helped her."

My blood turned to ice.

"Where is she?" I whispered. "Where the fuck is she, Kael?!"

"You don't get to know that." 1

I shoved him. Hard. He didn't flinch.

"You let her walk into danger?" I snapped. "Her family could come after her. You don't know what—what if she gets hurt?" 1

Kael didn't back down.



"What if someone hurts her?" I shouted again.

Kael's expression twisted.

"Says the last person who hurt her."

The silence hit harder than a slap.

"She begged you to love her," Kael said coldly.

"You played so much with your toy, you broke her." 4

I staggered back a step.

"If she could survive you," he added, "she can survive anything." 2

And that was it.

The last wall caved.

I dropped to my knees.

And I cried.

I didn't wail. I didn't scream.

I just broke. 1

Blood trickled from my eyes again, warm against the cold marble floor.



Kael's breath hitched. For a moment—just one—he looked like the boy I used to play with before that night.

"You're crying..." he whispered, kneeling. "You're actually crying. Even with your tear ducts altered. Hades..."

His voice cracked.

"You don't deserve that woman."

I pressed my forehead to the ground.

"Even from the grave," Kael said softly, "your bastard of a father still won." 2

He looked away.

"You let him win."

Kael's eyes were fogged as he spoke, like each word dragged through him from somewhere deeper than hate.

"It's worse knowing it should've been me," he said quietly. "I should've been the one your father took to that room the night the twins were born. I should've been the broken one. The tortured one. The narcissist."



I looked up, throat raw, body still shaking.

Kael didn't flinch.

"You were never supposed to be his heir, Hades. He didn't raise you to love. He didn't raise you to protect. He raised you to destroy."

He stared at me like he was seeing the boy I used to be—and mourning him.

"Your father didn't want a son. He wanted a vessel." 2

My stomach twisted.

"There were others before us, before you," Kael continued. "Boys. Dozens of them. All trained. All tested. All discarded. Infected, Corrupted, devoured and withered by an entity they could not contain."

I couldn't breathe.

"But you... you stepped in front of me that day. You said you could handle it. That I'd be better fit for the army, for the outside, for the light."

His jaw clenched, his hands fisting at his sides.

"You wanted to be the hero."



A pause.

Then he spat, "And now the hero is the monster. The one who let the only good thing the goddess ever granted him crawl away because he couldn't let go of hate long enough to see love for what it was."

Silence rang like a scream.

Kael stepped closer, eyes sharp with rage and heartbreak. "Do you know what it feels like to hate someone you love? Because I do. Every time I see you like this, I remember the boy who shielded me from a monster, only to become him." 2

I sank deeper.

He crouched again, voice quiet now, bitter as ash.

"You don't get to walk a straight path to her anymore." 1

He leaned close, inches from my face.

"You'll have to crawl through hell to find her. Through your sins. Through everything you destroyed. She doesn't need saving anymore. But



you do." 2

His words hit bone.

And then—

He stood.

"Get up."

I didn't move.

"Get up, Hades."

When I still didn't, Kael reached down—roughly
—grabbed my arm, and hauled me to my feet.

I stumbled. My legs shook. But I stood.

Barely.

Kael let me go and reached into his pocket.

"She left one last thing," he said.

My breath hitched.

"She decrypted the memory card," he continued.

"Said the password was something only she and
Ellen would have understood."

I frowned.



"What was it?" I rasped. 1

Kael met my eyes.

"Mara is waiting." He told me. "Just when you think that bitch couldn't be anymore insidious." 8

"What?" I was still in a daze

Kael sighed like he wanted to smack me. "Eve will return but she needs distance, right now we should be at forensics." 1

He dragged me along but each time I wanted to sprint back...

"I need space, Hades," She had said just last night and who was I but a grovelling mad man who would have to respect her wishes even as the thought of not seeing her made me want to put a bullet in my skull. 1