



279 Who Killed Her?

Hades 1

Without waiting for permission, she reached across me and tapped the screen.

A file appeared on the terminal.

Muzzle Cam Footage.

My breath caught.

The screen flickered.

Then—

The video began to play.

At first, there was only static—faint, broken, and distant. Then came the sound. A scream.

"Please, no!"

Not any scream.

Danielle's.

It struck me like a blade between the ribs, sharp and immediate, stealing all the breath from my



lungs. I gripped the terminal tighter as the feed fought to stabilize, my heart hammering against my ribs, a tremor tearing down my spine. The footage sharpened just enough to make out the scene, and nausea curdled in my gut.

The Royal Convoy was in ruins. A car—no, what remained of one—stood mangled at the center of the frame. Glass glittered across scorched asphalt. Metal was peeled open, torn like paper. Blood streaked the windows, and in the distance, fire licked at the night air, casting the carnage in a sick, pulsing light.

Felicia lay on the ground just outside the wreckage, crawling weakly, leaving streaks of blood in her wake. But the creature—if you could call it that—paid her no mind.

It was perched atop the car, a massive, hulking shape snarling and clawing at the shredded roof. Its fur was matted and smoking, muscles straining as it ripped through the steel. Even distorted by blood and rage, the shape was sickeningly familiar.

Eve.

Not Eve.



The thing they made her into.

A low, animalistic growl rumbled from the speakers, and another scream pierced through the air—higher this time, frantic. Danielle.

"Please!" her voice cracked, frantic and broken. "Please don't hurt my baby. Please—please, not my baby!"

The camera shook, the angle slipping, but through the broken door frame, I saw her. Danielle.

Bloodied. Curled over her swollen stomach, arms shielding the life inside her. Tears streaked her face, mixing with ash and soot. She was trying to protect Felicia even as death clawed closer. ¹

She wasn't begging for herself. She was begging for Elliot.

The beast didn't hear her—or didn't care. Its claws dug deeper into the roof, the metal shrieking as it peeled back under its weight. I could barely breathe, watching as the gap widened and the creature snarled, jaws snapping.



Another sob tore itself out of Danielle, raw and desperate, and in the room around me, someone gasped. Maybe Lucinda. Maybe Kael. Maybe all of them.

I didn't move.

I couldn't.

Then the beast lunged forward, tearing open the last of the car's defenses.

In one brutal movement, it seized Danielle through the wreckage in one deadly snap of her jaw.

Screams rang out all around me in response to what was to come...

But there had been no injury to Danielle's face...

The beast pulled out its catch but it was not Danielle's flesh, not her throat that was clamped within the jaws...

It was the back of her torn dress as she yanked her out of the wreckage. She dangled for a moment, limp and terrified, before the beast set her down on the ground just beyond the smoking vehicle.



The convoy exploded behind them a heartbeat later, a flash of fire lighting up the sky. Shrapnel and flame burst outward, but the creature—Eve—threw itself over Danielle, shielding her with its own battered body. 1

The footage shook again, the image shuddering with the aftershock of the explosion. Through the static, through the smoke, I saw Danielle's hand—bloody, shaking—reach up to the beast's. A soft, fleeting touch. Gratitude. Trust and confusion. 1

The screen flickered again, the view tilting wildly with the jostling of the camera from the force of the explosion.

In the distance, the low, rhythmic beat of helicopter blades cut through the smoke. A dark shape blurred above the treeline, spotlights sweeping over the carnage.

Then—

A whistle.

Sharp. Shrill.

Almost imperceptible beneath the chaos—but I



heard it.

Not with my ears.

With something deeper.

The beast froze mid-snarl, head jerking toward the sound. Its shoulders heaved with every breath, blood streaming from a dozen gashes along its side.

It hesitated—just for a second—then turned and began to limp away from Danielle's crumpled form. One step. Then another. Then it was gone, swallowed into the smoke and the ruin. 2

That was when Eve had been retrieved.

When they came for her.

When they tore her away and buried her truth beneath chains and blood and lies. 1

I thought the footage would end there.

I thought that had to be the end.

But the screen kept playing.

The static wavered—and through the haze, I saw her.



Danielle.

Still alive.

Still breathing.

Still cradling her belly.

She was crying now, raw, gasping sobs that punched through the smoke. Her hands scrabbled against the scorched earth, her knees drawn up instinctively.

Then—

A scream tore from her throat.

Agonizing.

Gut-wrenching.

She was in labor.

Too early.

Too alone.

I gripped the terminal tighter as I watched her convulse on the ground, her body wracked with pain.

Lucinda collapsed to her knees beside me with a



broken sob, her hands clawing at her mouth as if to physically keep the sound inside.

Montegue caught her, held her—but his own shoulders shook under the weight of it.

On the screen, Danielle's nails dug into the dirt, blood smearing across her thighs as she struggled. There was no one to help her. No one to guide her. No one to catch the life fighting its way out of her.

Felicia was nowhere to be seen.

Felicia had abandoned her the moment she needed her most.

Another scream.

Another surge.

And then, in a final, desperate push, a small, wet form slid into her trembling hands.

A child.

A boy.

Tiny. Fragile.

Alive.

Elliot.

Danielle sobbed in relief, clutching him close to her chest, wrapping him in a torn shred of her dress, cooing soft, broken words I couldn't hear over the roar in my ears.

She kissed his head. Rocked him gently against her breast. Shielded him from the ash falling like snow.

She fought to live.

She fought to protect him.

And I had buried her under lies and assumptions.

My vision blurred. My hands shook. I felt myself breaking apart cell by cell, watching the woman I failed do everything I couldn't—alone, terrified, bleeding out in the dirt.

But even through the tears, even through the horror—one thought cut through:

Danielle was alive.

She survived the explosion.

She survived Eve. 1

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Then—

Who killed her? 2

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