



280 Blackmail?

Hades 1

The footage jolted again.

A shadow moved at the edge of the smoke.

A small, slight form creeping closer.

I leaned forward, heart hammering.

It was a wolf—small, fawn-colored, its paws light
on the bloodied ground.

It padded closer.

Closer.

And then the light caught its face.

Not Eve.

Not another beast.

Felicia. 1

Felicia in shifted form, slipping through the
wreckage like a carrion bird, while her sister
bled out alone.



The room stayed silent.

No one breathed.

No one moved.

Because somehow, impossibly, what had seemed like the end was only the beginning.

And everything we thought we knew...

had just been obliterated or it immensely more horrible that we could have been able to comprehend.

The footage stuttered again.

The fawn-colored wolf stalked closer, circling Danielle like a vulture scenting weakness. Danielle didn't notice at first—she was too focused on her newborn, whispering soft, broken words as she wrapped him tighter against her torn dress.

But when the wolf growled—low and sharp—Danielle's head jerked up.

Confusion first.

Then fear.



She tried to move, but her legs buckled beneath her. She shifted, trying to crawl backward, shielding Elliot with her body.

The fawn wolf bared its teeth.

Danielle screamed—a sound that flayed me alive as it cut through the speakers—and tried to shift, bones cracking under the strain.

But she couldn't.

Not after labor.

Not bleeding out.

She was trapped. Defenseless.

"Please!" Danielle gasped, holding Elliot close, her body trembling from head to toe. "Felicia, please, not him. Not—"

The wolf lunged.

It struck her hard enough to knock her flat on her back, Elliot slipping from her grasp. Danielle cried out, scrambling toward him, but the wolf snapped at her shoulder, dragging her away by the fabric of her dress.

Lucinda's hand flew to her mouth with a wet



choking sound.

Onscreen, Danielle screamed again—higher, more panicked—as she fought to crawl back to her child.

But Felicia didn't go for the baby.

Not at first.

She shoved him aside like he was nothing, a tiny wriggling bundle that tumbled into the scorched grass.

Then she turned back to Danielle.

The camera caught everything—the snarl, the gleam of teeth—before Felicia struck.

She went for Danielle's torso, ripping through flesh and bone with wet, sickening sounds that filled the lab with the stink of horror.

There were no words.

No dramatics.

Just the noise of it.

The tearing.



The crunching.

The desperate, ragged gasps as Danielle tried to scream through the agony, her legs kicking weakly against the dirt.

The camera jolted, and we only caught flashes—blood against charred grass, the white of Danielle's eyes wide and terror-stricken, the pitiful whimpers escaping her throat.

Lucinda gagged beside me. Fell to her hands and knees and vomited onto the sterile tile.

Montegue stood frozen.

Stone.

There was no saving his dignity now. His shoulders shook—once, twice—then he crumbled to the floor beside his wife, hands pressed uselessly to his face as if trying to block out what he had just seen. 1

Danielle's body jerked once more.

Then went still.

Until, I had found her.

She has held out despite the attack for me.



The fawn wolf circled her, nosing at the torn fabric around her ruined abdomen, before tearing a strip free and pawing furiously at the blood-smeared dirt—as if trying to erase something.

The truth that he had been born by Danielle.

I couldn't feel my hands anymore.

Couldn't feel my heart beating.

Because everything Eve had tried to tell me—everything I called her a liar for—was right here. In the blood. In the dirt. In the silence that followed Danielle's last broken breath.

Even some parts Eve had been completely off the mark about. Felicia's Deception had been such a convoluted web that even Eve, the other living person present, was not aware of the full truth.

She has not made Elliot motherless.

She had not killed Danielle.

Not even attempted to hurt her.

It had been Felicia.



She was both the facilitator and a murderer.

Yet Eve blamed herself just last night, not
knowing how deep the conspiracy ran.

And Felicia—

Felicia had murdered her.

Not a mindless beast.

Not a prophecy.

Not a curse.

Family.

Her own sister.

The feed crackled again. The fawn wolf shifted
back into human form—naked, blood-slick,
barely distinguishable from the ash and smoke—
staggering toward Elliot's tiny, shivering form. 3

Her face was twisted.

Not in rage.

Not in grief.

In calculation.



As if she was already weighing the next lie she would tell.

Already plotting how she would spin this.

How she would survive it.

The footage flickered—then cut out.

Black screen.

Silence.

A silence, so total it roared.

The maximum security cell was too bright.

The white walls, the reinforced glass—they reflected the overhead light too perfectly, making the room feel sterile, almost ethereal.

Felicia looked small inside it.

Small and neat, her hair braided down her back, her hands folded primly in her lap. Her eyes—clear, steady—lifted as the door hissed open.

The moment she saw them—Montegue, Lucinda, Kael, and me—her face lit up. 1



A tremulous smile bloomed, fragile and bright.
Like a daughter relieved to see her family at last.
"Mom? Dad?" she breathed, standing up so
quickly the chair scraped across the floor. "You
came." 1

Her voice cracked, perfectly, like she'd been
barely holding herself together.

She pressed her palms against the glass.

"I knew you would," she whispered.

None of us answered.

The silence didn't deter her.

If anything, she drew strength from it, mistaking
it for hesitation—concern.

Love.

"I know it's all so confusing right now," she
continued, voice trembling just enough. "I know
how it looks. But I can explain everything."

She pressed a hand to her chest, as if steadying
her own heart.



"They threatened me," she said softly. "Silverpine. Their Monarchy. All of them. They said if I didn't help, they'd come after you. After all of you." 1

Her voice broke again—perfectly imperfect.

She had gotten enough time to craft a story, a tall tale.

"I couldn't risk it. I couldn't lose you."

Lucinda's hands twisted tightly in front of her skirt, her knuckles white.

Montegue didn't move at all—just stared at his daughter like she was slowly slipping through his fingers and he couldn't catch her. 2