



## 283 Too Little, Too Late

HADES 1

"Tell me where she is, Kael," I said, my voice low but sharp enough to carve through the hallway's silence.

Kael didn't even glance back at me.

He just kept walking, his boots striking the marble in even, measured steps toward the suite. My suite.

No—not mine. Ours.

What was a room without her in it? Nothing but a tomb with a prettier view.

"Kael," I growled again, harsher now, my feet scraping against the polished floor as I hurried after him. "You have to tell me."

Still, he moved like I was a ghost howling behind him. Like the words couldn't touch him anymore.

A desperate knot twisted deep in my gut.

The Flux stirred, feeding on the panic clawing up



my throat.

I couldn't do it.

I couldn't walk back into that room alone.

I couldn't bear the silence.

The empty air.

The scent of her already beginning to fade from the sheets.

Something inside me cracked wide open.

I lunged forward, grabbed Kael's shoulder harder than I meant to.

Hard enough that something popped.

Kael hissed sharply, wrenching away, his arm falling limp at his side for a moment. He spun toward me, his face flashing with shock before settling into something heavier.

Disgust.

"You broke my damn collarbone," he said, voice raw with pain.

I barely heard him.



The blood was roaring too loud in my ears.

"You have to tell me," I rasped. "Please."

Kael shook his head, jaw tight.

"I made a promise," he said. "To her. Not you."

I bared my teeth, the growl rumbling out before I could stop it. "You took away my tracking on her! How could you—"

"Because it was the right thing!" Kael snapped, finally shoving me back with his good hand.

"Because it was loyalty. Trust. Things you spat on the moment you made her bleed for your own damn pride." 1

I staggered back a step, breathing hard, the hallway tilting for a second.

Kael wiped the back of his hand across his mouth, glaring at me.

"You don't deserve to know where she is," he said. "Not yet."

I gritted my teeth so hard my jaw clicked. "I need her. I can't—"

"You can't what?" Kael cut in, stepping closer,



voice rising. "You can't sleep without her? You can't think? You can't keep the Flux at bay without using her as a crutch?"

I said nothing.

Because it was true.

Kael let out a breath, rough and shaking.

"You're afraid," he said softer now, studying me like I was some broken creature he didn't know how to fix. "You're afraid of Elliot. Of walking into that room and seeing yourself in his eyes."

I swallowed hard, throat burning.

"You're afraid that you're gonna fail him," Kael continued mercilessly. "The way your father failed you."

I pressed a hand against the wall, bracing myself.

The Flux was louder now. A low, pulsing throb under my skin. Mocking. Smirking.

"You think if you find her, it'll fix everything," Kael said, his voice ragged. "But you don't get to chase her down and demand forgiveness like a spoiled prince anymore."





I lifted my head, breathing hard. "I have to find her. I have to—"

"You have to be better first!" Kael shouted.

The sound cracked through the corridor, echoing off the stone.

"You have to prove you're worthy of her finding you," he said, quieter but no less vicious. "You have to earn the right to stand beside her again." 1

I staggered a step back.

Kael raked a hand through his hair, pacing a few steps away, trying to calm himself.

"You don't get to fix this by bleeding," he muttered. "Or by breaking something. You fix it by living. By doing better." 1

He stopped, turned, meeting my eyes.

"You fix it," he said steadily, "by starting with your son."

The word hit like a whip.

Son.

Ours.



Elliot.

I let my head fall back against the cold wall,  
closing my eyes.

The thought of facing him—of seeing all the pain  
I had caused written in his small, haunted face—  
terrified me more than any battle, any Flux  
storm, any nightmare.

I had failed him already.

I would fail him again.

The silence stretched between us, heavy and  
suffocating.

Then Kael moved closer, until he was standing  
right in front of me.

"Go eat with him," he said, voice firm but not  
unkind. "Put him to bed. Sit with him. Remind  
him that not every person who touches his life  
will leave him broken." 2

I swallowed against the lump in my throat.

Kael placed his good hand on my shoulder—light,  
but anchoring.

"And tomorrow," he said, softer, "you meet me in



your office. We'll go over the footage of Eve's retrieval."

I blinked at him, confused.

"You said..." My voice cracked. "You said if she was innocent, you'd resign."

Kael's face twisted—pain flashing there so nakedly it nearly undid me.

He exhaled slowly.

"Your wife," he said, "made me promise to stand by your side." 2

His voice thickened. His fingers tightened on my shoulder.

"So don't," he said, smiling bitterly, "make me break my oath."

He squeezed once.

Then he turned and walked away, his limp barely noticeable but there.

Leaving me standing there.

Alone.



With the weight of everything pressing down on my chest until I could barely breathe.

The door to the suite loomed ahead.

Silent.

Waiting.

I shoved off the wall and staggered toward it, every step feeling like it cost me a year of my life.

When I pushed it open, the room was dark, the only light the faint glow from the bathroom left slightly ajar.

And there—on the bed—curled into a tight, defensive ball, was Elliot.

He was awake.

Wide, watchful eyes stared at me from across the too-big mattress.

He didn't say a word.

He just stared.

And in those eyes—





Gods.

Kael had been right.

I saw myself.

Not the man.

Not even the monster.

I saw the boy I had once been.

Terrified. Alone. Abandoned by everyone who  
was supposed to protect him.

I took a shaking step forward.

Then another.

I sat on the edge of the bed, careful not to startle  
him.

Careful not to crush what little trust might still  
be salvageable between us.

I rubbed a hand down my face, swallowing  
against the burn in my throat.

"I'm sorry," I whispered. 3