



168 Tell Me The Truth

Hades 1

I pursed my lips, letting the silence pass before she spoke again.

"She worshipped you," she muttered, her tone inscrutable. Her brow furrowed. "I don't know why I did not see it." Her eyes grew distant once more, a half-hearted shrug lifting her shoulders. "Because now, in hindsight, the signs were there. I mistook love for reverence."

"It was not your fault," I tried to say, eyeing her still twisted shoulder. It was concerning that she did not seem affected by the horrible state of the joint. It needed attention. But my reports from Kael informed me that she had fought off every Delta. It was like she wanted to prolong the pain, and now, with the words out of her mouth, I knew it was because she believed she deserved the pain she was under.

"I exacerbated it," she countered. "If I had acknowledged it, I would have been more careful. She must have seen the hickey, every lingering touch, every stolen glance. She must have noticed the way I looked at you when I



thought no one was watching." Her voice cracked slightly.

My heart lurched at every vulnerable confession, warmth spreading in my chest despite the situation.

"Mine," the flux snarled in my consciousness. We both hung on to every word.

She pressed on, her expression hardening with self-reproach, twisting the warmth in my chest to ice. It was as though she hated all she was admitting to me, that she wished them to be untrue. "And I ignored it. I let it fester. I fed her delusion without meaning to. I pushed her."

I watched her closely, the tension in her posture telling me more than her words ever could. The bruises lining her collarbone were a stark reminder of the battles she waged—both inside and out. The way she sat, unmoving, as if the weight of her guilt had settled into her very bones, made it painfully clear that no physical wound could compare to the torment she inflicted upon herself.

"She made her own choices," I said, my tone firmer now, though it lacked the bite I usually carried. "You can't control what others feel, no



matter how much you wish you could. It is not your fault, Red."

Her lips pressed together, and for a moment, I thought she might argue. Instead, she let out a slow breath, her fingers twitching where they rested against her knee. She smiled, the gesture lacking mirth. "Everyone tells me that," her grip on the key tightened. "It's never my fault, is it?" Her eyes grew sharp, tears slipping from her eyes, bloody tears falling from the swollen one. "I hate that sentence. It is as if I am not responsible for anything. As if I'm just a victim of circumstance, drifting through life without consequence." Her voice trembled, raw and bitter, and she looked at me then—truly looked at me—with an intensity that stole my breath. "But I know better. I let it happen. Like I let her pull the trigger on herself." 2

I barely held back a gasp of surprise and reached for her, but she didn't flinch this time. The bloody tear traced a slow path down her cheek, and the sight of it twisted something deep inside me. The flux within me snarled again, restless and protective, wanting to claim, to comfort, to destroy anything that dared to harm what was his—ours.



"You blame yourself because it's easier than accepting the truth," I said, my voice quieter now, steady despite the storm within. "That people will believe what they want to believe, no matter what you do. You can't take responsibility for her obsession, Red. That's not on you." 2

She let out a hollow laugh, the sound devoid of warmth. "You were not here. She fought me like she wanted me dead, but when it came time, she chose me over herself. It was like she fought literal demons that she knew she could never win against. She knew I would never have the strength to end her to save myself, so she made the choice for me," she swallowed hard, her gaze distant, haunted. "She saved me by damning herself."

I felt the weight of her words like a punch to the gut. The air between us grew thick with an unspoken grief, pressing against my chest like an iron weight. My hands curled into fists at my sides, a futile attempt to hold onto something—anything—that could make this easier. But there was nothing easy about it. 1

"You think she did it for you," I said, carefully choosing my words, "but that choice was hers alone. You didn't force her hand, Red. She



decided to save you because she loved you, in her own twisted way."

Her eyes snapped to mine, dark and swimming with emotion. "And what if I made her feel like she had no other way out?" Her voice cracked, raw and full of self-loathing. "What if I could have been the one to save her, but I didn't? I—" She cut herself off, her hand flying to her mouth as if to trap the words that threatened to spill out. 2

I exhaled sharply, reaching for her again, this time gripping her wrist gently but firmly. "Listen to me," I said, my tone leaving no room for argument. "You can't live your life asking what-ifs. It'll eat you alive. You did what you could, and whether you believe it or not, you're still here. That has to count for something."

She let out a shuddering breath, staring at where our skin touched. "Does it?" she whispered. "Because it doesn't feel like it."

"It does," I insisted, my grip tightening slightly. "You're here, Red. You're alive. And as long as you are, you have a chance to make peace with this." I paused, forcing her to meet my gaze. "But not if you keep punishing yourself like this." 1

For a long moment, she said nothing, the silence



stretching between us like an abyss. Then, slowly, she nodded, but the hesitation in her eyes told me she wasn't convinced—at least, not yet. She looked down at her fingers, at the dried blood still on them. "Something was wrong with her. Sometimes it was like I was speaking to another person, like one person wanted me dead, the other wanted to save me. It was that part of her that pulled the trigger. It was that part of her that called me a sister. Called me her blessed friend." Pain bled into every syllable. "That part of her that..." She raised her eyes to me, her tears falling faster. "Told me that I should be ready to fight because your intentions towards me were not pure. That the truth will shatter me." 1

My breath hitched.

A tense silence settled between us, heavy with the weight of her words. My chest tightened, my mind racing to decipher the warning hidden within them. Not pure. The flux inside me snarled in protest, a possessive growl rippling through my consciousness, but I forced it down, focusing solely on the woman before me—broken, bleeding, and burdened by a truth she barely understood.



"Red..." I started, but the words faltered on my tongue. What could I say to that? That she was wrong? That the girl who had damned herself to save her was lying? Or worse—telling the truth?

She shook her head, her fingers twisting together in a nervous, frantic motion. "She knew something," she whispered. "I could see it in her eyes. Even when she hated me, she still... cared. She wanted to save me from you."

I stiffened, the accusation slicing through me like a blade, though her tone carried no malice—only confusion, fear, and something far worse: doubt.

"You think she was right?" I asked, my voice carefully measured, but the sharp edge beneath it was unmistakable. 2

She met my gaze, and for a moment, I saw the war within her—the desperate need to believe in me clashing with the seeds of uncertainty someone else had planted. Her lips parted, but no words came, only the silent struggle painted across her face.

"I don't know," she admitted finally, and it felt like a blow I hadn't been prepared for.

I took a step closer, towering over her, but she



didn't recoil. If anything, she leaned into the tension, as if daring me to prove her wrong or confirm her worst fears.

"You don't know," I echoed, my voice low, dangerous. "After everything, after all I've done, you still don't know?" 4

She exhaled shakily, her hand trembling as it reached up to touch the side of my face, hesitating inches away before dropping back to her lap. "I don't know what to believe anymore," she whispered. "She said things—things that made sense in ways I didn't want them to. That I'm just a piece in your game. That you don't care, not really. That I'm... expendable." 2

My pulse thundered in my ears, and it took every ounce of control not to react—not yet. I moved closer, placing my hands on either side of her, caging her in, forcing her to see only me. "Look at me, Red." Her eyes darted to mine, wide and wary. "You think I'm using you?" 2

Her breath hitched, but she held my gaze. "I don't want to think that," she said, her voice barely audible. "But I can't ignore what she said." 1

I leaned in, so close that my breath ghosted against her lips. "I have never lied to you," I



murmured, my tone laced with something dark, something primal. "I won't start now. You are not expendable to me. If you were, you wouldn't be sitting here, alive, breathing, looking at me with those damn eyes that make me want to tear the world apart for you." A part of me was telling the truth. The flux spoke the truth, but I knew better. The plan was set in motion long before we ever met, and it would come to completion even if it meant that she would break in the process. 2

I felt the lie settle in my chest like a weight, a heavy stone pressed deep beneath my ribs. She didn't know the full truth—couldn't know it. Not yet. But her eyes searched mine as if she could find it, as if she could tear past the layers of calculated deception and uncover the raw, ruthless intent buried beneath. 1

"This is not the first time that I was warned about you," her voice was laced with uncertainty. "I received a message on the first day I arrived here. I know that it is hopeless to ask but tell me the truth Hades." 2

