



243 A Monster's Proof

Eve ¹

I blinked, her words sinking deep—like a balm and a wound at the same time.

I was not the girl I was before.

I had a voice now. I had strength. And even if no one ever gave me the benefit of the doubt, I would give it to myself.

When Amelia returned from the bathroom, she found me sitting a little straighter, my breathing even. I still didn't know what I was going to do—but I knew I had to at least ask.

She sat back down with a warm hum, folding her legs beneath her. "Better?"

I gave a slight nod. "Trying."

She waited. Patient. Unpressing.

"Can I ask you something?" I said finally, voice hoarse. "Something weird."

Her brow rose. "You may. And weird is sort of my



specialty."

"I've been thinking," I murmured, watching the way the light hit the screen of the phone. "About evil."

Amelia glanced at me, her expression unreadable. "That's a loaded topic."

I gave a dry smile. "Isn't it?"

She didn't interrupt, so I went on, voice low, slow.

"What if there are two evils in a story... and one of them steps forward to expose the other? Does the second evil still count if it's the first one doing the talking?"

Amelia leaned back slightly. "You're being very poetic."

"It's just a question."

She studied me. "Well... if we're being pragmatic, it would depend on what they're exposing. The world doesn't care about who's worse. It cares about who's useful, and who's right."

I nodded slowly. "So even if the first one is



already condemned—already stained—they could still matter, if what they say is true."

"It's possible."

"But would they be believed?"

A pause.

"Only if what they say can't be ignored."

I looked at her then. Carefully. "And if exposing the second evil makes the first one's sins... lighter? Would that be convenient? Or truth?"

Her smile flickered, just slightly. "That would be... very convenient. And convenience, Eve, tends to make people suspicious."

She leaned forward, folding her hands. "If evil wants to speak, it better come with more than just words. Otherwise... words from the mouth of evil stay just that. Words." 3

Amelia's words sat with me. Heavy.

If evil wants to speak, it better come with more than just words.

Otherwise, it's just noise.



I stared at the floor, my thoughts turning in slow, spiraling circles. What was proof, anyway? What counted? Who decided?

And then Amelia spoke again, softer, like an afterthought.

"In cases of two evils," she said, lifting her eyes again, "things of substance tend to reveal themselves more easily than most believe."

I frowned, lifting my head. "What does that mean?"

She smiled faintly. "It means... truth has a strange way of clinging to the edges of things. The quiet things. The forgotten things. A misplaced thread. A sound you didn't notice until it wasn't there. The train in the background. The partial photo on the wall in the captured image. That is how murderers and kidnappers are caught—when a little detail blows everything wide open."

My own heart slowed in my chest.

"A what?"

Amelia shrugged, sipping calmly. "The world is made of patterns. And it's the disruptions—those



tiny, wrong details—that say more than confessions ever could." 1

Then it clicked in my formerly panicked mind, like that one perfectly timed note in the chaos of a broken song.

That heartbeat.

A heartbeat.

Strong. Singular. Small.

I'd heard it. Recalled it—it was so clear that the echo remained now. I was too wrapped in grief, in blood, in the heat of guilt and fear. I hadn't thought to question it fully. I knew the significance, but the full implication hadn't settled in the way it should have.

The heartbeat was from Danielle—but not Felicia. Only one of them was pregnant at the time I attacked.

Elliot could be Hades' child. 1

That heartbeat had belonged to Danielle's child—Hades' child.

Not Felicia's.



I felt my stomach twist so violently I nearly doubled over.

She lied.

Of course she did.

Damn, I really needed to stop letting my emotions drown my fucking common sense. 2

I was somewhat relieved—to the point that I could have laughed. I was so focused on Felicia, "the only other living person in the incident," that I completely pushed thoughts of the other "witness" away.

He was not a passive character.

His paternity was all the proof I needed.

If Danielle had died pregnant... and that baby survived... and Felicia had claimed him...

It was more than betrayal. It was possession. It was strategy. She'd built her credibility on the back of grief she hadn't earned and a child who wasn't hers.

That child is your proof.

Rhea's voice was still and sharp in my mind.



"It's not just a detail—it's a disruption. The pattern is wrong. And the wrongness is loud enough to tear everything down."

I felt the pulse in my ears, the heat rising in my skin.

I had something now. A place to start.

But I couldn't let it show on my face. Not here. Not yet.

Not with Amelia.

Even if I was imprisoned, just my questioning of Elliot's paternity was all I needed.

Hades would be hurt and shattered but... he would listen.

We did not go through all this for nothing. He would do it just to be sure.

I looked up, feeling slightly lighter about the conversation that I would soon have with Hades. I was still afraid, but I was sure the full truth would see the light.

"This was what you meant?" I asked Rhea. "Open my ears."



"Glad you caught on. Not fast enough." She replied. "I needed you stable before you could come out with an accusation like that without sounding like a madman. You needed to recall it yourself."

"Thank you."

"All in a day's work. Brace yourself for the confrontation, and stay alert. I am here when you need me."

My gaze settled on Lia again—her smile hadn't shifted. But her eyes were... quiet. Focused.

I smiled, slow and soft, just to keep her from seeing the gears whirring inside me. "You're good at this, you know."

"Therapy or philosophy?"

"Both." I stood. "Thanks for the insight."

She rose too, brushing down her skirt.

"Sometimes the truth just needs the right crack to slip through."

