



275 Death On Its Knees

Eve 1

Hades was still on his knees. But his breath hitched—just barely. Just enough.

I didn't stop.

Couldn't.

"She was pregnant," I whispered. "When I came at her—when the beast inside me didn't even pause to look, to think, to see."

Elliot stirred against my chest, small and warm and trusting. And it made it worse.

So much worse.

"I remember it now," I choked. "She screamed. She tried to shield her stomach. That was the last thing she did. And I—"

I clamped my eyes shut. But the tears still fell.

"I killed her. I made him motherless."

My shoulders shook, but I didn't stop. My voice was fraying now, unraveling like old thread.



"He looks just like her when he sleeps." I ran a hand through Elliot's curls, the pain blooming fresh and raw. "Same nose. Same lashes. Same silence. I recall every detail of Danielle, I can imagine her laughter. And every time I look at him, Hades..."

I lifted my eyes again.

"...I see what I took from you."

He opened his mouth—but nothing came out. His throat bobbed. His jaw locked like it was holding in a scream.

"I see her," I went on, voice barely audible now. "When his hair catches the light. When he smiles. I see the woman I butchered. The woman who died with her baby in her. Your wife."

His hand moved—just a twitch—but I didn't flinch.

Because I wasn't done.

"And you know what's worse?" My lips curved, trembling. "I see her in you too. In the way you breathe when you're angry. In the way you wear her earring like it still holds her heartbeat. And



every time I catch the gleam of that green stone..."

My voice cracked in half.

"I remember her blood on my claws."

Silence wrapped around us, suffocating and holy.

And then I said it—

"I don't want to be forgiven, Hades."

Not when I could not forgive myself.

His breath hitched again.

"I just want you to remember that she begged me. Begged me not to hurt. And I did anyway. Not because I wanted to. Not because I meant to. Because I was gone. Because I was something else."

I drew Elliot closer, burying my face in his hair.

"And I think... I think a part of me wants to protect him not because I'm kind. But because I'm trying to bring her back. Because I think if I love him enough, maybe the universe will let me rewind. Maybe she'll open her eyes and hold him again."



A sob broke in my throat—but I didn't let it out.

"I can't change what I did," I whispered. "I can't give you back what I stole. And I won't ask you to stop hating me for it. Just like I can't forget the words you said to me, the plans you revealed, the genocide you plotted."

"I don't want to be forgiven, Hades." 5

His breath hitched.

And then—

He moved.

Not quickly. Not violently. But like something inside him had broken loose, like the floodgates had shattered and now there was nothing left to hold it all back.

He crawled to me.

Crawled.

His knees scraped marble, hands trembling, jaw clenched so tight the veins in his neck stood out. Every inch forward looked like it hurt—like he was dragging chains only he could feel.

"You're wrong," he rasped.



I blinked.

He was in front of me now, his head bowed, hands curled into fists as if he were holding his insides from spilling out.

"You're wrong," he said again, louder this time. "You didn't do this. You didn't choose it. That thing inside you—it was made to kill. They made you kill. She pushed you to finish the job.

He looked up at me finally—and gods, he looked unmade. 1

"I should've protected you. From this. From me." His voice cracked into something feral. "I see it now. I see everything now and I swear, I swear on the last fucking breath I have in me—you were never the monster." 2

I flinched, not because of his voice, but the truth in it. The desperation. The ruin. 1

He reached up to his ear, slowly—trembling fingers grazing the emerald earring.

My breath caught.

"No," I said, voice sharper than I meant. "Don't."



He paused.

Eyes wide, startled, like he hadn't realized what he was doing until I stopped him.

"You think removing it will fix this?" I whispered.
"You think you can erase her from your body like that? Erase her from mine?" 1

His lips parted, throat bobbing.

"I just thought..." he muttered, blinking fast. "I thought maybe it hurts you to see it. And I—"

"You want to erase it?" I cut in, my voice quiet but seething. "Then will you erase Elliot too."

He went still.

Stone-still.

Because he understood.

Because I meant it.

The earring didn't haunt me. It anchored me. It reminded me of what I did. Of what I took. Of what he lost.

And of what still lived on. 1



He dropped his hand slowly. Shaking. Mouth parted like he wanted to scream but couldn't find air.

"I don't sleep," he said suddenly, his voice hollow. "I haven't slept in weeks. I see you every time I close my eyes. The cuffs. The chains. The blood." He laughed—a bitter, broken sound. "And still, it doesn't compare to seeing you look at me like this."

He touched his chest, over his heart.

"I burned the parts of me that could love you cleanly. I scorched them when I chose vengeance over truth. And now all that's left is this—" he gestured to himself, a trembling wreck. "A man in ruins, who knows too late that he condemned his mate." 1

That word. Mate.

It hit me harder than it should have.

But he wasn't done.

"I told myself I was righteous," he whispered. "That I was honoring my wife. That harvesting your blood was a sacrifice I had the right to



make. But it was just cowardice. I used her memory to hide from how you made me feel."

He leaned in closer, voice unraveling.

"And I still love her, Eve. I won't lie to you about that."

My throat clenched.

"But what I feel for you..."

His voice cracked again, trailing into silence like he'd lost the words mid-thought.

Then he dropped his head, his hands trembling as they clenched the floor. "I don't even know how to say it without it sounding like another excuse. But I swear to you, Eve, I love you. Not the part of you I thought I could use. Not the wolf. Not the prophecy."

He lifted his eyes to mine. They were glassy, wild. Haunted. "You. I love you. Even when I hated you, I was just—trying to kill the part of me that wanted to kneel every time I saw you breathe." 1