



298 Dissipated Guilt

Hades **1**

I dropped to my knees.

But not from weakness.

From fury.

From the sheer weight of what I was becoming.

I could still smell her in this room. Her scent—
honey and lavender—clung to the walls like
memory. The closet hung open, barren. Hollow.
Mocking.

"You gave her everything," the Flux cooed. "And
she chose Cain. She chose pity over power.
Loyalty over love."

Black veins crept up my throat now, blooming
like thorns. My mouth tasted of ash and regret.
My nails sharpened without permission. My
muscles spasmed, my back arching as the
corruption tore further down my spine.

"She was supposed to be mine," I rasped.



"She *is* yours," the Flux growled. "You marked her. Claimed her. Bound her. She is part of your blood now. She can't run far."

"Then why," I choked, "does it feel like I'm dying?"

"Because you are."

A beat of silence.

"But what crawls from the grave you've made will not be so easily broken." 3

I dragged myself to my feet, spine hunched, horn still dripping crimson, breath sawing out of my lungs like razors.

And in the mirror across the room, I saw what I'd become.

Eyes that no longer looked human.

Veins like rivers of tar.

Grief stitched into every inch of my monstrous skin.

And underneath it all—a heart still aching for the girl who had chosen to walk away.

But love had failed me.



And the Flux was patient.

"Let her have her space," it whispered now. Cold.
Sure. Triumphant.

"Let her have her moment in the sun."

A pause.

"It will not last."

Eve

Empty.

Hollow.

That was how the room felt, mirroring my
feelings.

His haunted gaze still bore into me, weighing
like a ton of bricks, despite my efforts to pretend
otherwise.

The red rim around the grays I knew so well had
grown. They swallowed his stormy irises,
tainting them with crimson flecks that promised
nothing but ruin.

Dread was a wet blanket on my shoulders as I
settled onto my old bed—the one I had been



given when I first crossed the border into
Obsidian.

I touched the new bedsheets...

It felt like a lifetime ago. Before he rescued me
from Felicia. Before he taught me to fight, wore
that ridiculous onesie, took me on that date.

I had cherished those moments... with
trepidation... but cherished them all the same.

And yet, he had been plotting.

I lowered myself onto the pillow that was
entirely too cold without his strange warmth—
the kind that burned just a little.

I had been here after Jules died. After Hades
held me through the mental storm that followed.
He stood by me when my parents came for me.
He did all that, and yet it was all tainted...

By what his true intentions were.

And I was a fool, eaten alive by guilt from the
secrets I shielded from the light.

Afraid of him hating me.

How the tables had turned...



I closed my eyes. Darkness and silence watched, but did not console me.

And then there was Danielle, and— 1

A knock on the door ripped me from my reverie. I was at the door in a blink.

I twisted the knob and opened it.

Green, solemn eyes met mine. A little hopeful smile tilted the corner of his mouth.

"Eve..." he said, my name laced with hesitation.

I tried to offer a smile in return, but I couldn't mold the emptiness into something it wasn't.

"Hello, Kael," I replied hoarsely. I stepped aside to let him in, which he did with some uncertainty.

He cleared his throat as I gently closed the door. "I wanted to show you something important."

I raised a brow. Dread coiled in my chest.

"What?"

"It's about the encrypted video file you gave us a password to," he murmured, eyes narrowing as he gauged my reaction.



The dread burned hotter. The passwords had been something Ellen and I shared. Which meant one thing...

It was from Ellen. And that could only mean it would be to my detriment.

I swallowed.

"It might surprise you, Eve," Kael muttered, pulling out the tablet and unlocking it. "It surprised me. Surprised all of us."

I gulped in air. "Hit me," I whispered, unable to hide the tremor in my voice.

"Your wish is my command." He clicked *play*.

I held my breath as the scream burst from the speakers, searing the air with a haunting pitch that ripped into me.

I knew that scream even before the video cleared.

It was hers.

I had heard it—in slivers and snippets. Broken echoes that had haunted me in the weeks before everything came together in one horrific vision.



It was Danielle.

My eyes widened. The massacre site played out on screen. I knew it like my own reflection—branded into me.

The footage shook—but there she was.

Danielle. In the car.

Bleeding. Screaming. *Alive.*

I watched, frozen, as the beast—me—ripped through the wreckage.

For her.

Then came her voice again:

"Not my baby. Please—"

I lurched forward, breath caught in my throat.

Then the beast grabbed her.

I flinched—until I saw it.

Not her throat.

Her *dress.*

Lifted. Dragged. Set down.



My lips parted, soundless.

The explosion swallowed the car.

The beast—I—threw myself over Danielle.

Shielded her.

Took the blast.

My hand flew to my mouth. My lungs locked.

I hadn't attacked her.

I hadn't hurt her.

I had *saved* her.

Then came the whistle.

The beast froze. Turned. Limped away.

Gone.

That was when they came for me.

That was when they buried this.

But the video didn't end.

Danielle on the ground. Sobbing.

Her legs shook. Her hands cradled her swollen



belly—

She was in labor.

My vision blurred. I staggered.

"No..."

Danielle screamed—alone, in the dark—until
Elliot slipped into her arms.

A baby's cry sliced through the silence like a
blade.

She kissed him. Rocked him.

Loved him.

And I watched. Shattered.

Then—movement.

A shadow.

A fawn-colored wolf.

Small. Steady. Predatory.

Slunk toward her through the smoke.

And I knew.

Even before the screen sharpened.



Felicia.

Danielle looked up. Confused. Then terrified.

"Please—Felicia, not him—"

The wolf lunged.

I screamed.

Danielle fell. Elliot was knocked from her arms.

The wolf shoved him aside.

And then—*ripped* Danielle open.

Flesh. Bone. Blood.

I dropped to my knees, gagging.

"No. No, no, no..."

Danielle reached for her son.

Felicia tore her away.

And then—stillness.

Danielle stopped moving.

The wolf circled her. Sniffed like she was nothing.



Then shifted.

Felicia.

Naked. Blood-slick. Cold.

Stared at Elliot.

Not with guilt.

With *calculation*.

Weaving the next lie.

Setting the next trap.

My scream never came.

Because I couldn't breathe.

I hadn't killed Danielle.

Felicia had.

And every ounce of guilt I buried myself in—

And Rhea... Rhea didn't even know.

She blamed herself.

Still carried the weight.

I dropped the tablet.



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The crash barely registered.

"I didn't do it," I whispered. "Felicia did."

Rhea was silent.

Stunned.

My shoulders trembled.

And for the first time... I allowed myself to break. 5

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