



## 313 Choose

My knees buckled beneath me. 1

It wasn't the sound of his voice—or its voice.

It was the way he said my name.

Like it had been waiting.

Longing.

Like the world had simply stalled until I arrived  
to witness its rebirth in him.

I stared, frozen. My hands trembled where they  
hovered near his blistered face, the smell of his  
blood sharp and metallic between us. My vision  
blurred, not from rage, but from the kind of  
sorrow that cracked open bone.

"Stop," I whispered. "Stop calling me that. He's  
not gone—he's not."

I said it again, but my voice was smaller this  
time.

More to convince myself.

Tears spilled, as his words hit me like a freight



train to the chest.

"EVE!" Kael's voice split the air like thunder. My head snapped to his direction. "LOOK OUT!"

I turned, too slow.

A sickening, wet rip tore through the silence—and the back of Hades' body opened.

Red.

Slick.

A pair of monstrous, fleshy wings erupted from between his shoulder blades, unfolding with the sound of sinew tearing from bone. The edges were jagged, veined with darkness, pulsing with energy that didn't belong to this world.

And they moved.

Too fast.

A tendril-shot wing lashed toward me like a serpent, its barbed edge gunning for my throat.

But Kael—Kael was faster.

He dove in front of me.



"No!" I screamed as the wing snapped around his neck like a noose.

There was a sickening crack.

His body convulsed midair.

His claws slashed out instinctively, raking the wing, but it didn't flinch—it only tightened, lifting him off the ground like a rag doll.

His feet kicked.

His eyes rolled.

The sound he made—

It was wet. Gurgling. A death rattle fighting to stay unfinished. 1

"Kael!" I lunged forward, fury flooding my veins, my wolf howling in a corner of my soul. "Let him go!"

But the thing—Vassir—only grinned through Hades' mouth, blood still dripping from his lips.

"Always the sacrifice, that one," it said. "Loyal. Disposable."

Kael's limbs twitched, choked screams





escaping him

Here's the chilling continuation of the scene,  
deepening the horror and emotional stakes:

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Kael's limbs twitched, choked screams escaping him as the wing constricted tighter, muscles shredding under the pressure.

"Let him go!" I cried again, shoving forward—but the tendril flared outward, knocking me back into the blood-slick wall with a thud that jarred my bones.

Vassir's smile widened, monstrous in its madness. His voice came slower now—dripping with venom, laced with something raw and cracked beneath the surface.

"What is he to you, Elysia?"

The question wasn't curious.

It was bitter.

Poisoned with jealousy.

"Why does he throw himself before you like that? Why does he get your trembling hands?"



Your tears? Your voice?"

Kael choked again, a soft, agonized sound—and my horror multiplied.

"Stop! You want me? Then take me, just let him go!"

"No," Vassir said, tilting his head slowly. "No, I want to understand. Because I waited. I waited, Elysia. Through centuries. Through ash and ruin and rebirth."

The rig around him groaned as he strained against it, metal bending with every twitch of his shoulders. The tendrils twitched like they hungered.

"Do you know how many faces I've scanned?" His voice fractured, trembling with something other than rage. "How many vessels I carved through with my own claws, peeling open their minds to find you?"

Kael's feet barely touched the floor now.

His claws dangled limp.

My eyes darted to him—his skin was paling too quickly.



"Please!" I shouted. "He has nothing to do with this!"

"He has everything to do with it!" Vassir roared. "You look at him the way you used to look at me. Before the gods stole you. Before that bastard Malrik scattered your name across time."

His wings trembled with fury. The rig finally snapped, and he dropped to the ground with a metallic crash, standing—nude, bleeding, trembling—with those infernal wings unfurled behind him.

He looked at me, not like Hades ever had.

Not like a man in pain.

But like a god denied.

> "Not my stolen horn. Not the Onyx Throne. Not even Malrik himself will keep you from me again."

"Kael..." I whispered, crawling to my knees. "Hold on."

He couldn't respond.

His mouth opened, then closed—his eyes glazed,





but still faintly aware.

"Get reinforcements!" I yelled at the guards that had come up to me to watch the horrifyingly macabre scene unfolding

"Ye--yes!" They echoed before retreating.

>"Rhea..."

>"We can't shift, any sudden movements and he will snap his neck. I know him."

Kael's body twitched again, but barely.

And Vassir was still staring at me.

Smiling.

Waiting.

> "Choose," he said. "Him... or me."

And I realized—

This wasn't just corruption.

It was obsession.

Twisted.

Timeless.



And now fully unleashed.

My throat was raw.

"What do you want from me?" I rasped, every breath scraping like glass in my lungs. "You said his name. You looked through his eyes and smiled. What is it that you want from me?"

Vassir's smile twisted—too wide, too cruel. The blood trailing down his jaw glistened like oil in the lab light.

"Acceptance," he breathed. "Devotion. Your will, bent to mine, the way it used to be—before you forgot me. Before they made you forget."

Kael's body convulsed again in the air, choked gasps barely audible now. The wing coiled tighter. One of his feet dragged against the floor.

"I don't—" My voice cracked. "I don't remember any of that. I'm not her. I'm Eve."

Vassir's eyes narrowed. "You are Elysia. You are mine."

"I am not."

"But you have say it," he hissed, stepping





forward, dragging Kael's body with him like a dangling offering. "Say you want me. Say it, or I will erase him."

Every instinct in me screamed to fight, to kill, to tear him apart—but one wrong twitch, and Kael would die.

So I did the one thing that made bile rise in my throat.

I nodded.

And whispered, "I... want you."

The words felt like poison in my mouth.

My body trembled.

But Kael's wing noose loosened ever so slightly.

Vassir blinked slowly. "That's not enough."

I choked back a sob. "Please. You said—"

"No," he said, smile gone. "Words are wind. I want proof." 5