



## 178 Blood Of The Beast

**Hades** 1

Long after Amelia was gone, my mind was still whirling with all that had been discussed. Every thought and stake seemed to strangle me, and I was finding it hard to inhale.

I clutched my chest, the truth and choices pouring cold water over me.

A chill licked up my spine as I clutched my head, staring off into space.

This couldn't be happening. This was the worst thing that could possibly happen. I was being drawn in multiple different directions, left torn between duty and desire, between what was right and what was necessary.

I let out a ragged breath, my pulse hammering, the Flux gnawing at my insides like a starved beast. It didn't care for my hesitation. It only knew one truth—Ellen was slipping, and it would do anything to keep her from being lost.

I stared at my hands, flexing my fingers, watching the way the veins pulsed beneath my skin. They had held her together, had soothed

her when the nightmares clawed through her mind, had wiped away the silent tears she didn't think I noticed.

And yet, for all my efforts, for all the ways I'd tried to shield her, I was failing.

I could lose her.

The thought wrapped around my throat like a vise, strangling the breath from my lungs. It was unbearable, inconceivable. A nightmare worse than any I had ever known.

I pressed a trembling hand to my temple, willing my mind to clear, to focus.

Options. I needed options.

I couldn't sever the last fragile link she had to her wolf. That would be irreversible.

I couldn't let her hollowing continue, not when I could see the toll it was taking on her, not when every day she looked more and more like a ghost trapped in a body that wasn't entirely hers.

And I couldn't—fuck, I couldn't force the bond.

But what if she wanted it?

The thought sent a shudder through me.

I shook my head, forcing myself to pace the



length of my office. It was reckless to even consider. She was vulnerable, fragile. If I so much as nudged her toward the bond, how could I ever be sure it was truly her choosing it and not her desperation for something—anything—to hold onto?

I needed her wolf.

Not for the pack.

Not for some grand plan.

But because, without it, she would break. What if she was kidnapped, tortured? What if she was pulled down into the abyss by yet another harrowing incident? 1

How much longer would the drugs work before she became just a vessel?

The fact that she had survived the hollowing had been a miracle on its own, but now she was a building with no proper foundation. Even without being bulldozed by another trauma, she was falling apart.

The drugs would not be a permanent solution. They would simply be slowing down the inevitable.

I gritted my teeth, frustration curling through





me like smoke.

There had to be another way.

I needed to reach her, to remind her who she was, to pull her back from the edge before it was too late.

And maybe—just maybe—if she chose me, if she wanted to complete the bond of her own free will, it wouldn't feel like a sin.

I stopped pacing, inhaling sharply.

That was it.

She had to choose.

I couldn't force the bond.

But I could make her want it.

I turned toward the door, the decision solidifying in my chest.

I would remind her who she was. I would give her something to hold onto.

And I would make damn sure she chose to stay.

Even if it meant offering her every piece of myself in return.

Even if it meant surrendering in ways I never had before. 4



I was not yet fully sure how I would do it but she needed me and I knew it. If it was to be with her every waking second I would. I would give myself in every way I could. 1

These were the ramblings of a delusional, desperate man and I knew it but I found myself getting pulled back to her.

She need me.

You need her.

I exhaled slowly, the weight of it all pressing against my ribs.

I opened the door, only to freeze when I came face to face with Montegue. 2

I blinked, taken aback by the fact that he was here at this time. He was never here unless there was a compulsory meeting with the council or a new revelation.

"Ambassador," I murmured, my voice hoarse from screaming at Amelia. I could not even recognize it. 1

"Hello, Your Majesty," he replied. He looked me up and down, and even though he tried to mask it, I could see the concern in his veneer of neutrality. "Is anything the matter?" he asked. I



must have looked like an assault victim if it incited this level of concern.

I swallowed, the action painful as if I had not drunk water in twenty-four hours. I had not eaten either, but the hunger pangs were numbed.

I ran my hand through my hair for what was possibly the one-thousandth time. "What brings you here?" I asked. "At this hour, Ambassador?"

His eyes lingered on my face before he cleared his throat. "May I come in?" he asked quietly.

I blinked before shaking off the haze. "Of course, Ambassador." I moved out of the way and allowed him entry.

He stepped in but did not bother sitting down. I closed the door behind me before turning back to meet his gaze.

He spoke before I could ask what he came for. "You did not visit Danielle," he said. 1

It was like I had been shot again today—I had to clutch my chest. I felt a migraine blossoming in my head. I had planned to, but taking care of Ellen had taken my time, not to mention getting her help and a prognosis. I ran my hand through





my hair. "I—"

"I heard about the princess," he said simply. "It's no news since the therapist was here today, looking to be in a hurry nonetheless, and then I see you looking as if you were dragged through the Underworld and back."

Montegue's gaze was sharp, but his voice remained even. He was always careful with his words, never one to show his full hand, but there was an underlying edge to his tone now—one that suggested he wasn't just here for pleasantries.

I exhaled slowly, tilting my head back as I let the weight of his words settle.

Danielle.

I had forgotten.

No. I hadn't forgotten—I had neglected to go. And now, Montegue was here, standing in my office at an ungodly hour, reminding me of yet another obligation I had let slip through my fingers.

I dragged a hand down my face, feeling the exhaustion seep into my bones. "I meant to go."

Montegue arched a brow. "And yet you didn't."



I let out a dry, humorless laugh, shaking my head. "You have no idea what my day has been like, Ambassador."

His expression didn't change. "Try me."

I met his gaze, something dark coiling in my chest. He wasn't wrong to push, but right now, I didn't have the patience to entertain his scrutiny.

Still, I had no choice.

I pinched the bridge of my nose before letting out a slow breath. "Ellen had an episode. A bad one." My throat felt tight just saying it out loud. "Amelia believes the hollowing is worsening. If we don't act soon..." My jaw clenched, my teeth grinding together. "We might lose her."

A part of me wanted to rant to the man who had been like a father to me when my own father had been my warden.

Montegue studied me for a moment, then nodded. "I see." His tone was inscrutable. "The girl has been through a lot. It's no surprise that she's falling apart."

Silence.

He looked down. "I feel sorry for the werewolf princess. It's a pity." His voice was soft, but when



he raised his eyes, they were intense. "It seems the mate bond is really at work here," he said, watching me carefully. "You're unraveling just as much as she is." 1

I stiffened.

Montegue was perceptive—always had been. But the way he said it, the quiet certainty in his tone, made something inside me coil tight.

"I'm not unraveling," I said, my voice flat.

Montegue gave me a look that told me he didn't believe a damn word of it.

I exhaled sharply, dragging a hand down my face. "This isn't about the mate bond."

He hummed, unconvinced. "Isn't it?"

I scowled. "This is about..." Her.

How could I say that to Danielle's father? I wasn't even ready to admit it fully to myself.

His lips twitched, almost like he wanted to either grimace or smirk—or maybe both. "And yet, here you are. Neglecting everything else. Pacing like a caged animal. Torn between choices you would have never hesitated to make before."

I ground my teeth together. "If you came here



just to lecture me—"

He cut me off with a shrug. "I did not come here for that. I am just voicing my observation. I came here to tell you that I did not only hide where I kept Danielle from you."

My pulse hammered as I straightened my spine. "What else is there, Ambassador?"

"You know I took over Danielle's autopsy?"

"How could I forget?" Green bitterness blossomed on my tongue. He was her father, and he had made me forfeit control over her body, taking the final say over what was to be done. I had relinquished control, partly out of respect, partly because I knew I had no right to demand otherwise.

Montegue nodded, as if reading my thoughts.

"Then you also know that I had access to the full report. Every detail." His voice was steady, but there was something in his expression—something tight, unreadable.

My stomach twisted. "Why are you bringing this up now?"

Montegue exhaled, his fingers curling at his sides. "Because there was something on her



body, Hades."

Thick, suffocating silence wrapped around us.

"What?"

"It was blood. When it was tested, it was neither Lycan nor werewolf. It was something mutated. It was blood that belonged to something—an entity truly arcane. Something that shouldn't exist."

"It was the blood of—"

"The Beast of the Night." 7