



## 241 Countdown To A Tragedy

Hades 1

"Keep an eye on her. I want her every move monitored," I ordered the security personnel watching Eve from the surveillance room. "Every step must be documented. And absolutely no escape." Just in case.

My phone rang again. I answered.

"Hades..." Amelia's voice reached my ears. "I just arrived. I'm on my way to Eve. Are you sure everything is alright? You sound... strange."

It was no surprise that she was suspicious. She was the type to pick up on all these kinds of things.

"I have never asked you for a favour in my life, have I?" My voice sounded grave even to me.

I heard her swallow over the phone before she replied carefully. "Not that I remember, no."

"Today will be the exception."

"Hades... you are worrying me." Her voice did not



reflect that of the therapist she was, but I continued.

I let her calm down, waited until she was able to find her tongue again.

"Tell me, Hades, what do you want?"

"In the bathroom, there's a case," I started.

I could literally hear her heart rate go up, but she said nothing and let me continue.

"Inside is a dose of Nerexylin," I informed her. My own words made bile rise in my throat. Just how much power did I let her have over me for it to come to this? 2

I still hoped and prayed that I was wrong, but if the results said otherwise...

I would need a game plan.

And this was it.

"Continue," she urged.

"When I give the signal, I want you to administer it to her without her knowing."

"You want me to inject your wife with a



psychological poison that could cripple her again?"

"She is not my wife," I replied coldly. The knife in my heart twisted so painfully that I almost halted in my tracks. "Any normal sedative or tranquilizer might not be effective enough on her," I told her, recalling how she had single-handedly slaughtered those ferals and the carnage she had left behind—or the scene after my family's massacre. "She is not to be underestimated. But she trusts you, so you can get close enough to her without her shifting." 1

The silence was deafening.

"What are you doing?" I could feel her brace for my answer.

"What I should have done a long time ago." But I had been busy falling in love with her.

I cut the call before she could speak anymore.

I stepped into the office, the heat that greeted me was an inferno.

All the Montegues were seated, but stood up as I entered.





Lucinda Montegue was the first to speak. "Your Majesty," she greeted. "Long time."

"Good morning, Lucinda." I took in her appearance. She was a vision of calm—or at least she tried to be—but I could smell the anxiety and anticipation from where I stood in front of them.

Kael took his place behind me, saying nothing as more uncomfortable silence reigned.

The family watched me, eyes and stance alert as though they were braced for me to pounce at any moment.

I had always believed that when the time came for the beast to be discovered and incarcerated, a weight would be lifted off my shoulders. I would be able to breathe again. But fate, being the cruel bitch she is, did not make that a reality.

Instead, I was left feeling like I was hanging off a precipice and falling to my death was imminent.

With a single test...

Three months of an unlikely love and everything we thought we knew unraveled like ash in the wind.



"So... the blood test..." Felicia spoke up, her voice slightly high.

Before I could speak, Montegue cut in. "The test will take place at the greenhouse."

My heart sputtered to an almost complete stop as I tried—and failed—to hide my reaction.

Montegue raised a brow. "Is something the matter, Your Highness?" he asked.

I crossed my arms. "No, why would there be?"

I was already coming to realize that I had failed Danielle not only before her death but after.

And now, the test that would determine what the truth was would take place where she was being preserved.

Goosebumps rose on my skin. I crossed my arms tighter to chase away the chill.

"I have the princess' blood sample ready," I announced. Then I turned to Felicia. "But first, I want to hear it all from the horse's mouth—how the princess became a suspect."

"Gladly," she replied. "I was the only survivor. I



saw the beast with my own eyes."

"How come it took you three months to realize? You couldn't detect the beast's aura?"

"I couldn't. At least not until she went berserk on me," she replied. "Her eyes, that growl—it just clicked."

I recalled her tangible fright from that evening, and my stomach sank. "So you believe that it was her based on just those things?"

"No. The Elliots' kidnapping incident solidified it. Annihilating more than forty ferals in under ten minutes, her ability to navigate woods she would have never been in with ease—it made it clear she was not who she claimed to be."

"And?"

"I confronted her, and her reaction told me all I needed to know. You saw it!"

"Why did it take you so long to share your 'findings'?"

"And who the hell would you have trusted? Even now, you find ways to doubt me," Felicia snapped, her voice rising before she caught





herself and bowed her head. "Apologies, Your Majesty... but I kept it quiet because I had to be sure. I couldn't risk the wrong accusation—not with her."

Lucinda placed a steady hand on her daughter's arm, but her own face was pale, strained.

"You must understand, Hades... none of this has been easy for any of us. Especially Felicia, watching her own sister die—pregnant and afraid."

Gone were the conniving women of the Montegue household. In their place were a bereaved mother and daughter. 3

Montegue simply stood watching, but it wouldn't take a genius to know that his mind was anything but calm.

My jaw ticked. I looked around the room, reading each Montegue like an open book.

Kael, at my back, remained silent, but I felt his aura sharpen—he was on edge as well.

"And now you want me to believe all of this



because of a growl? A pair of glowing eyes?" I asked coldly.

"That's not evidence—it's speculation. You felt something, so now she's a beast? I need more than feelings."

Felicia looked up at me, lips trembling just enough to betray the fear she was so desperately trying to conceal.

"Then the blood will tell the truth," she said. "It has to."

"I'm counting on it," I muttered.

The greenhouse.

Of all places... why there?

I knew it was all mind games by Montegue. He wanted the result to settle harder, knowing that Danielle was in the same room as me. Knowing she was taken, unable to be laid to rest until I got her the justice she deserved.

My head was ringing so loud that I was sure I would start to bleed from my ears.

I turned and started for the door.





Lucinda stood. "Hades... please. If she is what we fear, I need to know what happens next."

I paused.

What happens next?

If the blood test came back positive... if it confirmed that Eve was the beast behind the massacre, behind the nightmares I thought I'd buried...

Then I'd have no choice but to destroy the only other woman I ever loved. 1

Have her head for treason, regicide, and the murder of my Danielle and our child.

She would be punished—just like I had promised Danielle.

Debts to the dead... must always be paid in full.

I clenched my fists at my sides, the weight of those words settling like chains around my wrists.

When I spoke again, my voice was low, final.

"She will face judgment."



Lucinda gasped softly, but I didn't turn. Couldn't.

The room suddenly felt too small, the walls too close. I needed air, or I'd drown in it.

We would follow the Montegues in a different vehicle.

Kael followed me out in silence. As soon as we were alone, I stopped and leaned against the cold stone wall of the corridor, my lungs tight.

"She won't run," Kael said finally. "Even if the results come back positive, do you really believe..."

"Yes. And she would have hidden it from me, hoping that I would never find out."

Like a coward.

The woman I loved was not a coward.

She would not be the woman I loved.

"She will not run, Hades. Even if..." He hesitated. I could see the dilemma in the way his shoulders bunched. "Even if she did do it."

I glanced at him. "Because she's brave?"



Kael shook his head. "Because she loves you." 1

I flinched.

Love.

That treacherous word again.

The same word that had gotten Danielle killed.

The same word that now shackled Eve to the edge of a blade she couldn't see coming.

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