



253 Love Cannot Be Dulled

Hades 1

Montegue left Kael's punishment up to me, but I could see his patience waning. I couldn't be blind to the fact that he had been gracious despite the gravity of the incidents and actions perpetrated.

Then again, the vow that I made was that I would bring the head of the beast—not Montegue. It was the final promise to Danielle.

Kael was deflated as he was taken, flanked by two men, still bound, his eyes dim. My fingers twitched at my sides as I watched him that way. He didn't look me in the eye as he was led away to wherever I would order him to be placed.

>"Lock him up," the flux commanded, slithering into my mind. I froze slightly. "I know you want to," it growled.

The flux was complex, born out of the essence of a vampire who had been unjustly killed after watching his mate die. It had been left behind—a convoluted mass of nothing but rage and decay. 1



It hadn't spread fully yet. It took longer than a few hours to corrupt me—especially considering that I was better equipped to fight off its more... insidious effects.

My lineage. My training. My bond with Cerberus. 5

All of it made me more resistant to its pull—but not immune. Never immune.

It was like ink dropped in water. Slow. Spreading. Staining.

And I could feel the stain spreading now.

Every heartbeat echoed like a drum in a war I hadn't meant to start. Every breath felt heavier. Not from exhaustion—but because the part of me that once knew how to feel regret was dimming.

>"Lock him up," the flux repeated again, softer now. More coaxing than commanding. "He doubted you. Betrayed you. Broke the order. And for what? A traitor's tears?"

I shook my head. Just once. Enough to quiet the whisper.

Not silence it.



Never silence it.

The guards paused at the end of the hall, waiting for my verdict.

Kael's head remained lowered, blood crusting at the corner of his mouth. His body was slumped—not in defeat, but in disappointment.

>"He thought he did the right thing," I countered, the voice too loud to ignore. "He's on my side."

>"Like our mate was?" it mocked.

My stomach twisted violently at the mention of the woman I was trying to keep out of my mind. My heart rate surged until I had to fight the urge to clutch my chest.

"You will always love her. You should have simply claimed her like I wanted. But no, you had to give her your non-existent heart. Pathetic." The entity cackled. "Did you really think injecting me into your veins would dull the treacherous emotions?" 2

Its voice slithered through me like rot through old wood—quiet now, but cruelly intimate.

>"You're a coward. But that could change..."



I closed my eyes.

Just for a second.

Not to escape—but to anchor myself.

To remember who I was before the flux began its
whispering campaign in my bones. 4

But there was no memory clean enough to hold
onto.

Not anymore.

The hallway was too quiet.

The guards waited.

Kael waited.

And the flux?

It laughed—low and guttural—like something
buried beneath a thousand years of broken
promises.

>“You could’ve broken her in the cell, ripped the
truth from her mind. You could’ve drained the
blood from her neck and pulled the marker raw.”

It hissed with hunger.



"But no. You hesitated. Just like you are now."

I shoved down the echo of the voice that had grown too loud.

"Take him to the holding wing," I said finally. My voice was cold, clipped. "Solitary. Reinforced warding. No outside contact."

The guards bowed and moved.

Kael didn't protest.

Didn't plead.

Didn't beg.

I stood there for several more seconds after they disappeared, my eyes locked on the space they'd left behind. The paternity test results still in my hand, heavy and painful.

But maybe... it was a mistake.

I would know soon enough.

As I stepped out of the office, the results still burning in my hand like an iron brand, I didn't expect her.

Felicia.



She moved fast—too fast for someone who'd barely looked me in the eye since all this began.

"Hades," she called, breathless. "Wait—"

I stopped. Not because I wanted to, but because the flux growled with anticipation. Hungry. Restless. It didn't like her. Not even a little.

She reached for me, placing a hand on my arm.

"Take it easy on him," she said softly. "He believed he was doing the right thing. He didn't mean to—"

The second her fingers touched my skin, I recoiled.

Violently.

My body jerked back like her touch had burned through flesh to bone. A sickening hiss unfurled inside me—the flux spitting venom through my bloodstream.

Don't touch me.

The words didn't leave my mouth, but my face said enough.

My vision darkened at the edges. The light dimmed. Her face contorted through a veil of



distortion.

Her scent—too close.

Her pulse—too loud.

And the flux?

It reacted like it wanted to rip her apart just for laying a hand on me.

Felicia froze, instinctively stepping back, her brows knitting in confusion—and something close to fear. She didn't speak again. Didn't dare. And I didn't move.

Behind her, Lucinda had already turned away. Her cloak swayed with the stiffness of old royalty—aloof and cold.

But Montegue?

He lingered.

He stared.

Long and hard.

That old wolf had seen enough battles to know when a man was slipping—when the monster inside was growing too loud. He didn't say



anything. Not yet. Just watched. Judging.
Weighing.

A silent warning in his eyes.

Don't lose control.

Not now. Not when you're this close.

He read me like a book. He had an idea what I had
done, what it was already doing to me,
compounded with fiasco. Who wouldn't notice?
There were black veins creeping out of the sleeves
of my shirt and neck.

Then Montegue turned, walking away with the rest
of his bloodline.

The hall fell quiet again.

But the silence was no longer still.

It was ticking.

A quiet clock winding down toward something I
could no longer outrun.

Not the plan.

Not the promise.



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Then my phone chimed.

And my stomach dropped instantly...

It was now or never.

Eve, please... 4

The flux only laughed, louder than I had ever heard it.

My migraine only grew worse. 1

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