255 The Flux Takes Over

Hades 1

The door hissed open and they filed in—five of them, each holding a thick envelope. The scent of sterilized paper, ink, and mild fear clung to them. They kept their eyes down, respectful, cautious, and more than a little afraid of what I might do.
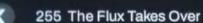
I gestured silently. They moved forward and laid the envelopes neatly on the table between Kael and me before stepping back toward the wall.

Kael's brows drew together. Confusion replaced the fire in his eyes.

I picked up the first envelope, cracked the seal, and slid the papers across the table toward him.

"Go ahead," I said, my voice quieter now. "Read them."

He hesitated—only for a moment—then dropped to his knees beside the table. His bound hands fumbled awkwardly with the sheets, flipping through them. His eyes scanned each line, faster at first, then slower... and slower still.

He grabbed the second envelope.

The third.

The fourth.

By the fifth, his hands were trembling.

All of them said the same thing.

Eve was a genetic match to the Fenrir strain found in the remains of the massacre—the beast of the night. The rogue who ripped Danielle and Leon apart.

And Elliot?

Elliot wasn't mine. 5

Five different labs. Two different regions. All protected, verified, encrypted.

The same results.

Every time.

Kael didn't speak.

He sat back, heavily. The papers in his hands dropped like they weighed more than steel.

His lips moved, dry. "You had them redone?"

I nodded once. "Twice. In five different places."

Silence.

He stared at the papers in disbelief, as if staring hard enough might change what they said. As if sheer will alone could alter the truth he'd bet his life on.

His knees buckled beneath him. He slid fully to the floor, the results still clutched tightly in one hand.

I moved slowly, lowering myself to sit across from him on the cold floor.

For a moment, we were just two broken men—no rank, no throne, no gods watching.

"I was like you last night," I murmured. "Desperate for something to prove me wrong. Something—anything—to justify the ache I still felt when I thought of her."

Kael's throat worked around a sound that didn't quite become a word.

"She lied to me," I said. "Again. And it wasn't just omission. Not this time. This time... she let me believe I was someone I'm not. That Elliot was

mine. That maybe I hadn't failed my Danielle entirely. That maybe, somewhere in this fucked-up story, something could still be sacred."

I looked down at my hands. They were steady now. But empty. Always empty.

"She let me believe that."

Kael didn't respond.

He couldn't.

He was still staring at the truth in his hands. Still praying to whatever hope he had left that it would disappear. But it didn't.

I closed my eyes, feeling the faint rumble of the flux stir again inside me. ①

But this time... it didn't laugh.

Because it had nothing to gloat about.

This was no victory.

Only a loss.

A deep, endless loss.

I placed a tentative hand on Kael's shoulder, it

shook, like mine was. It was a foreign gesture, that flux flexed my hand. "It will be okay," I lied. Nothing would ever be the same again.

His gaze snapped to me, wide eyed with shock. "Are you trying to comfort me with a lie? Why are you so calm? Did you..." His eyes narrowed. "Are you... you didn't rerun the test for her, you are trying to keep me complaint? You don't want me to lose it." [1]

The solemn heavy emotion fizzled away like it was nothing in an instant. It was as though he had slapped me. "I did it because I love her. I still do. It driving me insane!" I spat. "Do you think anything change," I laughed, self deprecating, bitter. "Do you think I slept last night? Do you think I breathed without choking on it? Without seeing her face every time I closed my eyes?"

Kael said nothing, still frozen where he sat.

"I love her," I said again, quieter now. "And I hate that I do. Because loving her feels like swallowing glass every fucking second."

I stood abruptly, the chair screeching behind me, rattling against the floor. The medical staff flinched but didn't move. They'd seen enough to

know I wasn't done.

I started pacing, each step dragging the weight of my rage behind it.

"I ran the tests because I needed them to be wrong," I said, dragging a hand through my hair. "I wanted one of them to come back flawed. I wanted one goddamn lab to tell me I still had something real—something that wasn't built on lies."

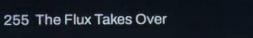Kael slowly pulled himself to his feet, his eyes never leaving me.

"You still think there's a chance they were all wrong," he said carefully.

I stopped.

I didn't answer. The thought made me twitch because of what was to come. What i would have to do...to her.

But the evidence, tests, everything back by Sam's science that had made me to accept that we were mates.

I got up, dusting myself off.

>"Lucien, are you ready to accept me?" The flux drawled. "Claim her, and her soul but wreak her as you had promised." It all but giggled. "I will help you. That's why you wanted more." 1

I twitched, veins traveling briefly, but not brief enough for Kael not to notice. He reacted, taking a step back, his voice pitched with horror.

Kael flinched back like he'd just seen something crawl out of my skin.

"Hades," he breathed, voice sharp and strangled. "What the hell is that?"

I looked down at my forearm—at the black veins pulsing just beneath the surface like snakes writhing under ice. They faded slowly, receding as though shy, but the damage was done.

Kael backed up a step. "No. No—tell me you didn't —"

"I had to," I said flatly, coldly. "I needed strength. Clarity. Resolve."

"Vassir's vein?" he spat, horror overtaking disbelief. "You took a second dose?"

I didn't respond.

My silence was the confirmation.

"Gods," Kael whispered. "You're not thinking straight. That thing... it's not clarity. It's corruption." 1

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