



256 Your Punishment Is Truth

Hades 1

"I'm thinking clearer than I have in weeks," I said, jaw tight. "And I know what must be done."

"No, you don't," Kael growled, stepping forward despite his bonds. "You're not you. Not fully. That thing—it's twisting everything inside you. It wants to use her, not punish her. You think Vassir cared about justice? No. He only ever cared about revenge. You know what happened to him. He is vengeance incarnated."

I turned toward the door, ignoring the way the flux buzzed beneath my skin in agreement.

"You're going to kill her," Kael said. Not a question. A statement. "You will do the same thing her parents did." Realization dawned on him and I saw the moment, it fully sank in.

My chest constricted as the stricken expression settled on his features. "That's why you are calm, you finally did it. You did what that old bastard wanted."



I paused, hand on the seal, shoulders tense.

"No," I lied. He was not wrong, this was a goodbye.
And I had lay it unto him gently.

But my voice wavered.

Kael's eyes widened.

> "Claim her soul," the flux crooned. "Make her
yours, truly. You don't need love to keep her. You
only need power."

Kael lunged, the chains yanking him back with a
brutal snap, but it didn't stop him. His voice
thundered after me, raw and furious.

"You're not Hades anymore, much less Lucien," he
shouted. "You're just a shell he left behind. And
when she sees you, she'll know. She'll know what
you've become! You are such a fucking coward,
you could not stop loving her so you had to let
that thing do it for you."

"Goodbye, Kael," my lips twitched in a smile that
was somewhat genuine. "In 72 hours you will be
released."

Kael stared at me as I walked towards the exit.



As the door was pulled open for me, Kael spoke. "I will pray to the goddess that when the real truth is revealed, however way that happens, that she will forgive you," he paused. "Because I know that I won't. I will resign as your Beta." 3

The door sealed shut behind me with a hiss when I stepped out.

And for a second, I leaned against it.

Not because I was weak.

But because I was tired.

Tired of the war inside me.

Of loving someone I had to destroy.

Of destroying someone I couldn't stop loving.

> "Don't worry," the flux whispered. "Soon, you'll feel nothing at all." 1

I stood straight.

Clenched my fists.

And headed toward the white room.

Because there was no turning back now.



Eve

Footfall made my heart lunge out of my throat. It had been two days since the last time our eyes met.

By heart, I knew the sound of his footsteps. Tentatively, I raised my head. I had been transferred to chair where my arms were clamped to the arms.

My heart stopped when my eyes met his. The room seemed to dissolve into oblivion. His skin lacked its slight flush, in its place was an unhealthy eerie marble like complexion.

His skin lacked its usual warmth, replaced by a pallor that shimmered like stone under moonlight—cold, cracked, inhuman. The veins beneath his skin were darker than before, etched like black ink beneath glass. But it wasn't just his appearance that made my chest tighten.

It was his eyes.

They were different.

Not empty—but too full of something else.



A storm. A stranger.

He stopped a few paces from me, his shadow stretching long across the floor. The white room, sterile and bright, didn't soften him. It amplified him. Made him look like a walking monument to wrath barely restrained.

I felt the pressure in the room before he even spoke.

The door shut behind him with a soft click. No one else followed.

Just him.

And me.

And whatever monster he'd dragged in with him.

"Hades?" I whispered.

He didn't respond.

Not with words.

He took another step closer.

My mouth parted. I wanted to say something. Anything. To plead, to reason, to scream. But my voice caught.



His gaze landed on my bound wrists, then slowly rose to meet mine. No softness. No warmth. No trace of the man who once told me I was safe.

But there was something else behind it.

Something cracked.

Something bleeding.

"Lucien?" I tried again. 1

He flinched.

It was barely perceptible—but I saw it. A twitch at the corner of his jaw. The tremble in a breath he didn't mean to take.

His voice, when it came, was rough. Hollow. "Don't call me that."

My lips trembled. "I am sorry."

He didn't answer.

Instead, he crossed the space between us and crouched at my side, just out of reach. His eyes stayed on mine, unblinking.

"Your punishment will be slow," his voice was monotone with another voice speaking beneath it.



"Your punishment will be slow," he said.

But it wasn't the words that hollowed me out.

It was how he said them.

Like a machine reciting a fact. Like it didn't matter. Like I didn't matter.

His voice held two tones—one familiar, the other foreign. One belonging to the man I loved. The other... something ancient. Twisted. Hungry.

I stared at him, willing myself not to cry.

"Hades," I whispered, "you don't mean that."

He tilted his head, almost in curiosity, like I was a puzzle he was trying to reassemble. Like something inside him was watching for where I would crack.

Then, he smiled.

Not kind.

Not cruel.

Empty.

"The first time I knew of your existence," he began,



"you were nothing but a complication in my father's plans, the night you were born, my torment began at the age of eight, too young to understand, too little to comprehend why was being punished."

I stiffened. My heart slammed against my ribs.

"I had no idea who you really were. Just another stray girl, a mutt. But then the prophecy unfolded before me, the pieces shifted, and suddenly... you were useful."

His gaze dipped to my bound wrists again. He didn't touch me. He didn't have to.

"Marrying you was never about peace between our packs," he continued. "That was the excuse. The mask."

His eyes flicked back to mine.

"I needed access to your blood. And the only way to do that without alerting the other kingdoms... was to bind you to me."

I couldn't breathe.

Every word was a knife. And he was cutting slowly—methodically.



I had not been the only one hiding things, and now his truth was my punishment.

"You thought it was fate," he said, almost amused. "You thought the Goddess had granted you some long-denied love, a second chance. But it was strategy, Eve. Nothing more. It's time you knew the full extent and depth of my plans for you." 3

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