

286 His Only Companion

Hades 1

I was still as the words he spoke to her melted into jargon that faded into the background. My eyes were on Eve's wolf, her ear drooped exhaustion, I watched as shivers crawled over her large form. She looked so worn.

The monochrome tiles displaying crimson evidence of the injury she had endured, her hind leg mangled, bone jutting through the flesh.

Kael said nothing as he stood beside me, arms crossed over his chest. But I could feel the tension radiating off him.

I couldn't breathe.

The screen showed Montegue stepping forward. His lips moved—the audio picked it up a beat later. Still I could hear what he said, all I could see was despair and resignation as she close her eyes, ears twitching as she swayed, preparing to die.

My entire body knotted as I myself braced even



though I knew exactly what happened next.

I didn't blink, didn't exhale nor inhale as it happened. It had to be one thousandth of a second, that was within the time frame it happened. One second the firearm was powering up to make the hit, with the same moment IT raced in at an unfathomable speed.

My stomach twisted, my cell in my body denying what I was witnessing as I watched IT, me but it was not my three head wolf form. No, it was a creature straight of history tomes in restricted archives.

Because that wasn't me.

That thing—that creature—was nightmare made flesh.

One gnarled, uneven horn jutted from the side of its skull. Its scalp was raw and bleeding, peeled in places like it had shed a layer of itself in the transformation. Its body was red and sinewed, muscles exposed and veined in a way that made it seem skinned alive. Black tendrils pulsed beneath the surface, spidering through every limb like rot-infested lightning. 1



Its wings were massive—leathery and bloodstained, tipped with talons like a second set of hands. They twitched and flexed as it landed between Montegue and Eve, shattering the tile with the force of its arrival.

And its face—

Gods.

It was mine.

Not distorted. Not corrupted.

Mine.

Fangs extended. Eyes void-black and gleaming. Jaw twitching with fury barely contained.

It was familiar in the way a dream about drowning feels familiar—the kind you wake up from choking.

Kael whispered, "That... that's what you've become."

I couldn't speak.

Because I saw it now. The way the sun had started to sting. The way my body no longer ached the same way. The pulse I'd begun to feel



in my throat at night. I thought it was the Flux.

But this—

This was vampirism.

The Flux hadn't corrupted me.

It had claimed me.

> "Starting to look like me," it had said once. I hadn't thought it literal.

I thought I was just borrowing its power.

I hadn't realized I was becoming the vessel.

I had been resisting it, fighting it. But suddenly it all seemed futile in the eye of all that I was now witnessing.

Kael's voice rose beside me, now urgent and grim. "The Flux doesn't just feed on emotion and strength anymore. It's using you. Molding you. Preparing you. If we don't find a way to extract it, Hades, it will finish nesting. And when it does, you won't be a king. You won't even be a man. You won't even be you. It will be Vassir."

The Flux whispered in my skull, smug.



> Oh, come now. Don't pretend like I forced my way in. You let me in. You opened the door. Remember why?

I gritted my teeth.

> Because you wanted to stop loving her. You wanted to feel nothing for your precious mate. I helped you. I gave you numbness. Power. Clarity. I did everything you asked.

Kael didn't hear it—but he saw my twitch. My clench-fisted stance. He stepped away, hands dropping to his sides, watching warily.

> And now that she's innocent, now that the guilt is crawling back under your skin—you want to purge me? How very Hades of you.

The creature on the screen turned, blocking the weapon's blast fully.

I watched as the beam hit its chest—my chest.

The impact exploded through the frame.

The screen went white for a moment.

Then it cleared.

A hole gaped in the monster's torso—clean



through, straight through the sternum. Exposing organs. Bone. Spine.

And then—

Before my breath could even hitch, the hole began to close.

Black mass filled it like smoke becoming solid. Muscle and tissue knitted together, a grotesque ballet of regeneration.

Not healing.

Reforming.

Perfectly.

Instantly.

> There is nothing we can't do, you know,

The Flux whispered, almost lovingly.

> Even tracking down our mate.

I squeezed my eyes shut.

> Have you wondered? Maybe she won't come back. Maybe she's done. Maybe—

"STOP!" I roared, spinning on my heel and



slamming my hand into the wall so hard the panel cracked.

Kael startled beside me, one foot sliding back instinctively.

"I will rip you out," I spat through clenched teeth.
"Even if it kills me, I will tear you out of my fucking soul."

The Flux chuckled low and dark.

> Oh, I believe you.

Kael stepped in slowly, voice low, steady.
"Hades... are you—"

"Play the rest," I said, my voice jagged as broken glass.

And Kael, jaw tight, pressed play.

The screen resumed. And I watched.

Watched the monster I had become.

Watched as Eve looked up into my face—and recoiled.

Not from pain.



Not from confusion.

From horror.

From me.

And that, more than anything the Flux could whisper, was the blade that cut deepest of all.

I watched her hopeful face fall as I disparaged her, the way despair held her down as she was finally dragged away just as I ran to Elliot. The dull metallic clank of the clamps around her wrists echoed in my skull, louder than the Flux ever had.

She didn't resist.

She didn't fight.

Not because she was guilty—

—but because she had given up.

Because I had drained her.

I had broken her.

The screen flickered, the scene slowing into a crawl as Eve disappeared from view, her wolf form limping, tail dragging, head lowered as



though even the weight of her own breath was too much to carry.

I could barely stand.

The chair behind me creaked as I collapsed into it without grace, my knees too weak to support what remained of me. My chest heaved in uneven jolts, my breaths like blades scraping the inside of my ribs.

And still—

The Flux smiled.

> You saw it, didn't you? That flicker in her eyes? That second before the guards moved in?

I clenched my fists, nails biting into skin.

> She wanted you to stop it. Just one word from you, and she might've fought. But you didn't speak.

I squeezed my eyes shut.

> She looked at you like salvation... and you looked back like the executioner.

My jaw locked.



> Tell me, little king... how does it feel to know she gave everything—and you gave nothing?

The silence that followed wasn't silence at all. It was the howl of shame. Of loss. Of what I could never get back.

Kael remained quiet beside me. Perhaps out of mercy. Or perhaps even he knew that no words could dull this.

> You thought you could hurt her and still have her waiting at the door? You thought pain was a language she would always translate into forgiveness? 1

I shook my head, murmuring, "Stop."

> She left because she knew you'd never choose her. Not truly. Not when power, vengeance, and self-pity were so much easier.

The room tilted. My stomach twisted, bile rising fast.

> And now she's gone.

> And she won't be the one to return this time.

My breath hitched.



> Maybe she finds peace. Maybe she finds someone who doesn't look at her like a weapon. Someone who holds her like a blessing, not a burden.

I gripped the edge of the table so hard the wood splintered beneath my hands.

> You're the villain in her story now.

I opened my eyes—and hated the man staring back at me in the dark reflection of the blank monitor.

Not a king.

Not a mate.

Not even a man.

Just the ghost of what power cost.

The Flux coiled tighter inside me, feeding, smug, certain.

> But don't worry. She is still ours. Our property. We controlled her fate before, and we can do it again. She will have to bow. All mutts do. 1