



297 What Remains When Love Rots

Hades 1

"I need space." Her words drifted through the air like feathers. A whisper—soft, tender—but they landed like a blow to the chest.

I watched the workers pulling her clothing items out of our shared closet and placing them carefully into baskets before exiting the room for her old quarters.

With everyone out the door, the burning ache in my chest grew. I clenched my fists, jaw locking as I took it all in. She stood off to the side, monitoring them—arms crossed, her short hair lightly tousled.

The urge to walk up to her and beg collapsed before I even took the first step. She seemed so rigid, so unwilling to bend—for us... for even a chance of us. 1

How were we ever going to fix what I had broken when we wouldn't even share a bed? It

Silas scoffed. Loudly. The sound jarred against the quiet like metal grating over bone.

"Deserves?" he spat. "She's not even a Lycan. She holds no crest, no title, no claim. She isn't Obsidian, nor royal, nor anything but a... genetic advantage."

Gallinti folded his arms. "We're not a council of mercy. Our chamber is blood-forged. There are legacies in these seats, not pity projects." 2

Eve didn't flinch.

She let them speak. Let them sneer.

And still—didn't look at me.

Silas leaned forward, eyes narrowing at her like he was trying to incinerate her with disdain. "You now understand, I hope, why you were married off to him," he said, gesturing toward me. "It was never for an alliance, Never even strategy. You were a pawn. A temporary creature. Never meant to wield power—especially not in a room soaked in centuries of bloodline."

And I—I wanted to gut him.



The reaction was instant. Her shoulders stiffened, color bleeding from her cheeks and neck.

It felt like a lifetime ago that I had called her that. The name almost sounded foreign.

Slowly, her head tilted up toward me.

"What is it, Hades?"

Monotone. Emotionless.

I swallowed, my palms clammy.

"We could work this out. You and I don't have to sleep on the same bed. I can sleep on the floor if you want me to."

"No." The reply came curt, clipped.

I flinched, watching her take a deep breath like she wanted to be anywhere but near me.

"We have to focus on the issue at hand. No distractions." She bit her lip to keep it from quivering.

"We are too..." she hesitated, biting down harder, her teeth imprinting the soft flesh.



"...tangled."

The word fell between us like a verdict. A guillotine—not swung in anger, but in quiet, mournful finality.

She blinked, slow and long, before her gaze dropped back to the floor.

"If we stay like this—half in, half out—we'll only get in each other's way. You won't be able to lead. I won't be able to breathe."

"Breathe?" My voice cracked—low, wounded.

"You can't breathe around me?"

She didn't answer. She didn't have to.

The silence said it all. 2

"We've both made choices," she continued, steadier now.

"And we're still making them. The Blood Moon is coming. The council is watching. Every day feels like a blade pressed closer to our throats. I can't afford to slip... not because I let myself get too close to you again."

I shook my head, inching closer like a man



clinging to the edge of a cliff.

"Then don't get close. Just stay. Just exist near me. Please."

"I can't." Her voice was soft. Crushed velvet.
Final.

"Because near you, I forget who I'm supposed to be. I forget the plan. I forget the pain. And I can't afford to forget either."

Her eyes...

And they weren't angry.

They were broken.

Tired.

Loving, still—but not enough to hold us together anymore. 1

"This isn't about punishment, Hades. Or revenge. This is about survival. And right now..." she paused, the words tearing themselves out,

"...surviving means letting go."

Her hands flexed once at her sides—like she was resisting the urge to touch me.



Then she stepped past me.

And this time, I didn't stop her.

Because I knew—

She was right.

And she was slipping through my fingers like sand I had tried too hard to clench.

> "Right or not, she still belongs to us."

Tears—blood, thick and ready to fall—gathered behind my eyes as I took in the room that now taunted me with its sudden emptiness.

The first glob of crimson forced its way through my lashes...

> "You will not weep for her!"

The Flux's monstrous voice tore through my skull.

And then it hit.

Ripping into me.

> "You will not shed bloody tears for that mutt. The same mutt that turned her back on her



leash. After all you did for her. Protected her from her own damned blood, her so-called family. You gave her shelter. You were her savior once. Now—you will be her scourge."

My knees buckled.

My fists clenched, bones grinding and cracking, inky veins spreading. The horn in my head tore through my skull, pain shredding through me like shrapnel beneath my skin.

Pain didn't bloom.

It detonated.

And with every throb, my mind echoed the same word.

Mine.

Mine.

Mine.

Blood roared behind my eyes, drowning out the silence she left behind.

I scrambled forward, crashing into the dresser, reaching for something—anything—to anchor me. Something solid. Something real. But the



moment my hand touched it, it splintered beneath the pressure. Wood shattered. Glass cracked.

I couldn't hold anything anymore.

Everything I touched either slipped away or broke.

Just like her.

Just like us.

A guttural sound tore from my throat—low and feral—half rage, half grief, all ruin.

And then it came.

The pain.

White-hot. Vile. Unforgiving.

My vision blurred as something tore beneath the surface of my skull, bone cracking like lightning under my skin. The horn—longer now, jagged with ridges—forced its way from my temple like it was clawing out of me, tearing flesh and sanity with it.

> "Do you feel that, boy?"

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The Flux purred.

"That is power. That is what remains when love rots. When loss becomes strength." 2

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