

A Jaded Vampire
A Hall of Blood and Mercy Short Story
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Rupert hated humans.

They were obnoxious, reproduced like rabbits, and were *fragile*.

He put humans far behind himself as a vampire when they started dying off, forever leaving him alone.

He had a number of human friends—every one of them had left him feeling holes in his heart from their lost friendship. But the deciding factor that made Rupert vow to ignore humans forever was a young lady—beautiful, kind, and with the laugh of a fresh spring breeze.

She listened to him with a startling intensity and offered her clever thoughts and intelligent observations, smiled at him with warmth burned by love, and even though she knew what he was...had reached for him without hesitation.

With her, the world seemed a brighter place brimming with possibilities and joy. She was everything to Rupert. He knew it with his entire being that she was his *one*!

Then she died.

And she died *young*.

She passed away in a freak horse-riding accident just a few scant years after Rupert first met her. Although she was his sun in the sky and laughter in his heart, he'd had been helpless to save her.

He would have sacrificed anything to protect her, but in the end her human fragility was too great to overcome, because they died too easily. He lost her—and her laughter, and her voice, and her smiles, and her sweetness, and everything that made him think life was wonderous.

And Rupert realized his cold, vampire heart would never recover.

He'd been lost and broken when the Elder of the Cotelleon Family, tracked him down.

Rupert had previously resisted joining the Cotelleon Family, even though he'd been turned by the Cotelleon Elder himself. But after losing *her*...their insufferable superiority and constant mind games were a welcome change to the ache in his heart.

Their derision towards humans meant they only kept them as servants—and for their blood, of course.

Rupert didn't mind—it meant he didn't see daily reminders of what he'd lost forever.

But the wound of losing his *one* never really healed...it festered in his heart. And so as he lived with his Family and the years turned into decades and the decades became centuries, Rupert came to despise humans for what he decided was their weakness.

Then the Cotelleon Family Elder made the biggest mistake of his immortal life, and began plans to overturn the Regional Committee of Magic.

Rupert heard whispers of it and knew it was a gloriously stupid plan.

Sometime over the last century, the age of the vampires had passed. Vampires had to join forces with the werewolves, shifters, and fae just to *survive*. The idea that they could plot against the Regional Committee, when the upper echelon of the Cotelleon Family rarely left the inner sanctuary of their manor, was laughable.

Even so, he'd never betray his Family. So, he took care to travel away from France—his home country. He lingered in Britain and visited parts of Asia and Russia. He was just considering looping back to Scotland when Rupert was summoned before his home Regional Committee of Magic for the trial and execution of the *entire* Cotelleon Family.

Rupert was told that he'd be spared, but he'd have to be adopted. As the sole survivor of a Family that had turned on supernaturals, he was too dangerous to leave Unclaimed. But now he was also a pariah. Who would *want* him?

It was then that Rupert met Killian Drake, Elder of the revered Drake Family that had once torn Britain asunder, and was now the terror of America.

Killian wasn't yet the Eminence of the Midwest, but it was fairly obvious the charismatic vampire had plans. By taking in Rupert, Killian received a fairly large chunk of land in France, as well as all remaining Cotelleon resources. Rupert assumed that was the purpose of his adoption—to obtain these things.

And it was. Except Killian surprised him.

"Celestina will draw up a training schedule for you. Sword fighting, martial arts...you'll probably need a beginner's class in gun safety and handling. Unless...?" Killian's unsettlingly black eyes rested on Rupert, who willed himself not to shiver.

"I have never handled a gun, Sir."

"Of course. What Family would bother to learn the weapons of modern society?" Killian Drake eyed Rupert's clothes—reminiscent from the early 1800s. "Josh will need to take you to the tailor for appropriate clothes."

Rupert tensed under the gaze of his new leader. "What is wrong with these, Sir?"

Killian sighed and looked very put out. "I'd worry that you are an idiot, but the rest of our kind are just as blind and ignorant as you. What's wrong is that you look like a carnival renaissance actor, that's what. No member of *my* Family is going to wander around with a wardrobe that will embarrass me. Now leave."

Killian was beyond brisk or blunt—he was beyond *rude*.

But when a very shocked Rupert was shot during his third gun safety session because he wasn't paying attention, he realized Killian Drake didn't mean to adopt him in name only. He was going to be enfolded into the Drake Family whether he wanted it or not.

The Drakes did things differently. They trained.

In fact, they trained *all the time*.

Rupert used to live a life of leisure—mens' clubs, billiard games, glittering socials in the darkness of night with the other noble vampires. After his adoption into the Drake Family, he didn't have a moment to ponder more than the night's training schedule.

This, more than Killian Drake's vast power, inspired Rupert's loyalty.

Killian wasn't content to let the vampires fade into obscurity. He was going to forcibly take back power, and crush those who opposed him.

He was the kind of vampire the Cotelleon Family had dreamed of. Killian was hard, deadly, and cunning. He became the Midwest Eminence in record time, expanded the vampire base of power in the region, and was well on his way to becoming legendary.

And then Hazel Medeis waltzed in.

She stank of magic, was far too brave considering she was just a breakable, useless wizard, but the worst part about her was that she was *personable*.

She cracked jokes and ran around like a yipping dog while taking every bit of training the Drakes threw at her.

It was awful.

Didn't anyone realize how easy it was for her to die? Didn't they realize the hours of training they were sinking into her were going to be useless? Hadn't it occurred to them that in a few short decades she'd be gone? There was no point in training her, no point to investing anything in her at all!

Worse yet, Killian seemed weirdly *fond* of her. More so than any of the Drakes had realized, because when Rupert crossed a line and inflicted more damage on Hazel than was deemed necessary, Killian half killed him.

He probably would have just offed him, if it wasn't for that wretched puppy squeaking around Killian's ankles and asking for mercy on behalf of Rupert. (When he had just knocked her unconscious! Surely only humans—wizards included—could be that stupid.)

That occasion only gave Rupert more fodder for his comfortable hatred of the Wizard. It also meant the Drake Family stopped trying to push Rupert into training the smelly human—another blessing.

Rupert resolved to hunker down and ignore her whenever possible. It wouldn't be long until she'd leave. Or die.

But the yappy puppy's seemingly useless sniffing helped her bag Solene—the Unclaimed vampire that had been killing vampires and humans alike. And instead of telling a vampire about it and then scurrying to safety like a good human, she flung herself face first into a fight with Solene, even though she barely had the battle instincts of a rabbit.

Rupert would have felt vindicated in his assertion that she wouldn't be alive long, except not only did she sacrifice herself for the Drake Family's sake, she *won*! And she unsealed her magic! And it turned out, with magic backing her up, the puppy had some serious bite to her.

Rather, she could be downright *deadly*.

Rupert blankly watched Hazel Medeis electrocute a Drake vampire half to death with a sizzling bolt of lightning.

She's a menace, and we're teaching her how to effectively fight against and kill us. This can only end poorly.

And then the Wizard went and sacrificed her House signet ring, for Killian...and for Rupert.

She'd fought to claim it, and she *needed* it to free her family and get her House back. And she threw it away, destroying it to save Killian and Rupert from powerful and deadly magic that certainly would have killed Rupert.

He saw her later that night, red faced and puffy eyed, but she smiled when she saw him, and she never showed any signs of regretting her actions.

Rupert didn't know what to think after that.

And he didn't know how to react when Killian—acting by instinct—had her thrown from House Drake in an effort to cut her out of the impending fight between the Night Court and the Drake Family.

Obviously, the Eminence still cared for her—a veritable parade of vampires was sent to watch House Medeis and its scrappy Adept to guard it and report any signs of the Night Court.

One afternoon not too long after the Wizard's exile, Rupert was sent in Julianne's place when the beautiful vampire was forced to stay home to deal with some unexpected paperwork.

It happened to be the day of the Wizard's Ascension ceremony, which officially bonded her to her House.

As Rupert watched, the magical House changed from a quaint mixture of a French Chateau and a Victorian home, to a hulking behemoth of a building that had the same architecture, but somehow gave off the feeling of a fortress.

Figures.

When Hazel approached him with the obvious intent to shoo him off, to Rupert's surprise he disobeyed a direct order from the vampire he most respected—and feared—in the world, and *told* her why Killian had kicked her out, and how the Drake Family had then raided the Night Court to keep the fae distracted while she settled with Mason.

Even as he told her, he wondered if he had lost his mind and what possessed him to—in a way—betray his leader. For a *human!*

He didn't even like her!

(He didn't.)

It had to be because of Killian. The Eminence appeared to be...*fine* since Hazel's departure, but no one in Drake Hall sincerely believed this was the truth.

Yes, he told her for the sake of the Eminence. That had to be it.

But a small, tiny part of Rupert whispered that perhaps it was because although Hazel smiled and laughed, when she met his eyes he could see the pain and hurt in her eyes.

Rupert immediately snuffed the thought out.

Humans were beneath him. There was no point in fraternizing with them, no use in becoming fond of them. They only died on you in the end.

Weeks later, Rupert stared gloomily at the monstrosity that was House Medeis.

No one had found out he'd disobeyed Killian and told the smelly Wizard that the Eminence had sent her off for her own safety.

...but no one had found out because nothing had changed!

The Wizard, apparently, had a head of rock! She hadn't made any attempt to approach the Drake Family, or even message Killian Drake.

Perhaps a good smack would cure her bout of stupidity?

But Rupert had seen her drill her people on more than one occasion, and he wasn't actually sure he could even beat her anymore. (It hadn't been a fluke when she beat him back at Drake Hall, but Rupert had been confident he could still best her at least half the time. Now? Not so much.)

Rupert stuffed his hands in the pockets of his tailored slacks and wanted to whine.

He was a high-ranking member of the esteemed Drake Family. What was he doing, kicking up his heels on a street corner, peeking at noxious-smelling wizards?

Besides, when one of those Wizards finally got around to telling Hazel that he was here, she was going to shoot lightning at him again.

Rupert sulked and wondered if he needed to be more obvious.

Killian was still solid, and his manner hadn't changed...except that he had gone back to rarely laughing.

Although Drake Hall smelled markedly better, apparently one yappy wizard produced a lot of noise—and opportunities to be laughed at.

Across the street, a wizard of House Medeis—the female black-haired one that was friends with Hazel—peered curiously at him from the sidewalk.

When Rupert boldly met her gaze, daring her to go tattle to Hazel, the young woman gave him a sunny smile and waved to him.

“The Adept is doing fine!” the woman shouted to him. “She might be overworking herself a bit, but she’s having fun razzing the Wizard Council!”

Rupert was mildly insulted on behalf of all vampires and their aura of mystery that a *wizard* had figured out why he was there.

The feeling faded away as impatience jockeyed for the front—if the dark-haired wizard *knew* why he was here, why wasn't she harping at Hazel?!

The wizard had the audacity to *wink* at him before she swung the sidewalk gate open and hopped onto House Medeis land.

Rupert scowled at her back.

Yes, Rupert hated humans.

No other supernatural could match them in terms of obnoxiousness, fragility...and, perhaps, heart.

But, seemingly unlike his revered leader, there was no way he was reckless enough to let them back into his life. There was no way he'd ever allow himself to become friends with them again.

Another House Medeis wizard waddled down the sidewalk—this one an ancient woman with silvery hair blazed with a colored stripe. When she saw him she smiled and waved. “Hello, dear! Hazel is in fine health these days!”

Yes.

Not. A. Chance.

The End