

147 Breakthrough

Hades 1

"Are you sure, Red?" I asked, while rubbing slow circles into her back. "That---"

"I am sure," she whispered, the tremor in her voice unmistakable. "I want to find my..." She gulped. "My mate." She spoke like it hurt physically.

I could feel her anxiety and uncertainty since Lia's visit. It seemed that the news had scared her more than I had expected. It was perfect. I continued to rub her back, trying to chase the tension away from her body. But her shoulders remained bunched as if she was prepared for a battle. 1

"It's going to be okay," I told her. "I sent Amelia to tell you because---"

"I understand," she cut me off. She tilted her head up so that she could look at me. "Thank you," she whispered.

My brows knitted. "What for?"

For a little while, she said nothing before she finally found the words. "For everything," she

replied ominously.

My stomach knotted, but I flashed her a teasing, easy grin. "But I thought I was insufferable, and yet you just can't live without me." 1

Immediately, she smacked my arm. "This is why we will never see eye to eye," she grumbled before turning away from me.

My smile faltered as I glanced at the test results lying on the table. The paper was a clever lie, doctored to reassure her fears while keeping the truth hidden. There was nothing life-threatening—not yet. Just abnormal cell degeneration, the kind that wouldn't raise alarms under normal circumstances. But to me, it screamed louder than any prophecy ever could.

Her body was too stable. Stable in a way that no one without a wolf should be. Stable in a way that defied the natural laws of our kind. Without her wolf, she was slowly becoming... something else. The wolf wasn't just dormant—it was being forgotten, erased. And the worst part? Her body was adapting to life without it. The hollowing should have killed her, but now that it hadn't, the effect was like that of a survivor who had endured a terrible illness and emerged not only immune to it but stronger for having faced it.



Her body, instead of succumbing to the hollowing, had adapted. It was as if the process, which should have destroyed her, had acted as a brutal workout, sharpening her system into something more resilient, more efficient—but also far more unnatural. 1

Her cells had recalibrated themselves to function without the wolf, a feat no one else had survived before. It was a paradox: the very process meant to strip her of strength had left her more fortified, but at a terrible cost. Without her wolf, she wasn't just an anomaly—she was a ticking clock. The balance her body had achieved was fragile, artificial, and unsustainable.

If the wolf wasn't awakened soon, her body would no longer recognize it. The transformation would become permanent, cutting her off from her true nature forever. She'd remain alive, but she wouldn't truly be herself—and with that, any hope tied to the prophecy would vanish. All my plans for her would go to hell. I had to make sure she awakened her wolf, even if it meant that I would have to let her mate with some other fucker. 11

I rubbed my temple, the thought itself making my skin crawl, a migraine pulsing behind my



eyes. The thought of her bonding with another man—a stranger—grated on my nerves. Not only because of jealousy—what was mine was mine—but because adding another variable to the equation would complicate things. The bond between mates was sacred, and something like that could affect my plans in unprecedented ways. But for the power foretold, it would be worth it.

Yet, as unnerving as it was, with a single well-thought-out lie from Lia, she would be willing. Because the will to live surpassed all else. Fear was a powerful motivator, and right now, she was clinging to the hope that finding her mate would save her. Perfect. That hope was all I needed. She had no idea the role she was playing in something far greater than herself—a game she didn't even know existed. 2

The prophecy wasn't just some ancient tale; it was a blueprint for power. Her wolf wasn't simply dormant—it was the key to unlocking a force that could tip the scales in ways no one could predict. Without it, she would be another useless artifact in the Obsidian Pack's arsenal. But with it? She could be a weapon, one that I could wield. 7



"Red?" My tone was soft to keep her pliable. "Why did you not tell me you were hollowed?"

She stiffened, and for a little more than a moment, she did not say a word. "I was ashamed," she whispered.

Something in my chest twisted painfully. I reached out and placed a hand on her tense shoulders. "And you led me to believe that you were merely wolfless." 5

She said nothing.

"It must have hurt," I said, feeling her tense further, a tremor running through her body.

"It did," her voice was barely audible over the wild beating of her heart that I could hear.

I blinked, caught off guard. She was opening up. She was vulnerable. Hollowing a princess would have been a scandal, so it was likely that barely anyone knew. She had been carrying the weight of the trauma from the hollowing alone ever since she got here. She had kept her secrets close, but the looming possibility of death had left her craving the possibility of connection, of relief from the crushing isolation she'd endured. She was craving someone—anyone—to shoulder even a fraction of the burden. And right now, she



thought that person was me.

Perfect.

This time, I didn't pull her to me—I moved to her, wrapping my arms around her. "How long was it?"

"A couple of years," she whispered. "The first time was the most agonizing."

I planted a kiss on her forehead and felt her tremors mount as she let go. She began to weep quietly as she held on tighter to me. 1

"It's okay," I said, keeping my cadence soft. "I am here. You can tell me anything." It had taken time, but her walls were breaking down, and I would see all that lay within. By revealing the trauma I always suspected she carried, she was giving me access to the deepest parts of her, the vulnerabilities she'd hidden from everyone else. Her tears weren't just a release; they were an invitation—a door opening for me to step in and take control. 11

A false sense of security was another thing that would draw out her wolf.

It seemed that Jules was no longer needed. After a final report to me, I would cut her loose. The

door had been opened. 2

"It must have been unbearable," I murmured, stroking her back as she clung to me. "To go through that, to endure that pain alone... you're stronger than anyone I've ever met, Red."

Her sobs hitched, her fingers tightening against my shirt as if I was her anchor. She did not tell me anything more before she finally fell asleep. All in due time, I thought to myself.

Finding a mate, she would believe that she was taking control of her own fate. Little did she know that I was the one holding the reins. The feigned report was written with ink as dark as my intentions, and she had no idea. 3

It seemed like I had won the game that had begun on that night of the lunar gala. 6

The ringing shattered the quiet, piercing through the soft sounds of her breath as she finally drifted into sleep. I carefully eased myself away from her, ensuring I didn't wake her. I picked up my phone from the nightstand. I glanced at the screen: Tower Laboratory.

I answered immediately, my tone sharp. "What is it?"



The voice on the other end was calm, but the tinge of urgency was palpable. "Sir, we've had a breakthrough concerning the anomaly in her blood. You need to come down here immediately."

My jaw clenched, anticipation and unease tightening my chest. "I'm on my way."

I ended the call and spared a quick glance at her sleeping form. I adjusted the blanket over her shoulders and stepped out.

The laboratory was on the top floor of the Obsidian Tower, a fortress of secrets and science designed to unravel the mysteries of our kind. The sterile white lights flickered faintly as I entered the lab, the scent of chemicals and sterilization sharp in the air. The head researcher, Dr. Cohen, turned to greet me, his expression tight with excitement. The other researchers bowed low, but I did not acknowledge them.

"You said you had a breakthrough," I stated, wasting no time.

Dr. Cohen nodded, motioning for me to follow him to a workstation where several monitors displayed detailed blood analysis and genetic

mappings. "We isolated the anomaly in her blood, the one we've been tracking since you brought her to us. The anomaly that interfere with the specie test and the LSI test. Initially, we thought it was just a mutation caused by the hollowing process, but it's more than that. Much more."

He tapped on the screen, zooming in on a molecular structure. "Her blood has properties we've never seen before."

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Hades 1

My pulse spiked as the magnified image began to move.

"This is the cell of a normal Lycan. Right now, it is in its active state—acting as a normal cell should, multiplying and performing other functions. But when exposed to an extreme electromagnetic force identical to that of a Blood Moon..."

Suddenly, the cell began to react violently, mutating.

The cell writhed on the screen, twisting into something grotesque. I watched in silence as Dr. Cohen's finger traced along the monitor, highlighting every shift, every mutation.

"Watch carefully," he murmured, his voice tinged with unease.

The simulated pulse of the Blood Moon's electromagnetic force surged across the display. The Lycan cell responded instantly—its membrane thickened, dark veins crackled along its surface, and the nucleus fractured, splitting



into erratic, unstable offshoots.

The thing on the screen wasn't alive. It was a disaster in motion.

"This is the catalyst for the Lunar Cataclysm," Cohen explained, his tone grave. "When exposed to the Blood Moon, Lycan cells undergo uncontrollable mutation. Regeneration becomes excessive and unstable, causing partial, grotesque shifts. Cognitive function breaks down. They lose themselves to rage and madness."

I didn't respond. I didn't need to. My mind was already racing ahead, weighing every detail, every angle. I knew all this before.

"And Ellen?" I asked, sharp.

Cohen's lips twitched in something close to excitement. "That's where it gets interesting."

He tapped the screen, pulling up a second sample—labeled Subject E-001.

"Ellen's blood," he said quietly.

Again, the Blood Moon simulation rippled across the screen. But this time, nothing happened. The cell remained perfectly still. Untouched.

I stared, not trusting what I was seeing.

Shield or Sword.

"It doesn't react," Cohen said, his voice barely above a whisper. "No mutation. No degeneration. Her cells are completely resistant to the electromagnetic force that cripples every other Lycan." 6

My fingers curled into fists at my sides. This wasn't possible. Yet the evidence was right in front of me. A part of me believed in the prophecy but another remained pragmatic. But this...was everything hypothesized.

"And yet," I said slowly, "you look unsettled."

Cohen hesitated, his confidence slipping.

"Because it's incomplete."

My eyes narrowed.

"The anomaly in her blood is only partially developed. It's shielding her, yes, but the protection isn't absolute. It's inconsistent. Right now, it might prevent the physical mutations, but not the neurological breakdown—the madness." 1

Of course. Nothing was ever simple. Yet, I still dared to hope.

"What's stopping it from completing?" I asked,

though I already knew.

"The hollowing," Cohen replied immediately. "When Ellen's wolf was stripped away, it interrupted the natural development of this anomaly. It's as if her body was building a defense, but the process was violently cut short. Now it's dormant. Half-formed. But..."

"But if we awaken her wolf," I finished for him, voice low, "it will complete itself."

Cohen nodded. "Exactly. If her wolf returns, the anomaly should fully mature, granting complete immunity. Not just for her physical form but for her mind as well."

My jaw tightened.

If that anomaly fully awakened, Ellen wouldn't just survive the Lunar Cataclysm—she would be immune. Untouchable. A perfect weapon in a war no one else could fight.

And that weapon would be mine to wield. 5

But it hinged on one thing. Her wolf.

"And if we fail?" I asked, knowing the answer but needing to hear it aloud.

Cohen's face darkened. "Then her body will finish adapting to life without her wolf. The



anomaly will stay incomplete. When the Blood Moon rises, her mind will fracture. She'll descend into madness. And she'll be of no use to anyone."

No use to me. 6

I stared at the flickering screen, at that perfect, unmoving cell. So close to perfection, yet teetering on the edge of collapse.

There was only one path forward.

She had to awaken her wolf.

The lie Lia fed her—the fear, the need to find her mate—it was all falling into place. Ellen believed finding him would save her. And maybe, for once, that wasn't entirely a lie.

But the thought of her bonding with another man, another Alpha, clawed at something primal inside me. It wasn't just strategy. It wasn't just power.

It was possession.

What was mine was mine.

The idea of another male's hands on her, of their bond snapping into place, made my skin crawl. But for this? For the power it would bring me?



I would allow it. I had already.

I would force it, if I had to.

"Keep monitoring the anomaly," I ordered, my voice as cold as ice. "Report every change, no matter how small."

"Of course, Your Majesty."

I turned away from the screen, already forming the next move in this game.

My gaze shifted to the other monitors. "I ordered the infiltration of the LSI database for cities in Silverpine. They should have cross-referenced it with Ellen's sample by now. Has there been any luck finding a probable mate?"

Cohen's face tightened, his excitement fading under the weight of my question. His hand hovered over the console for a brief moment before he sighed and began pulling up another set of data on the adjacent screen.

"We've completed the infiltration of the LSI database as you ordered," he said, his voice clipped and professional. "Silverpine's records were cross-referenced against Ellen's genetic markers, focusing on any potential mate bonds

that could trigger her wolf's awakening."

I waited, eyes narrowing as endless rows of data scrolled across the monitor.

"And?" My voice was like a blade—sharp and demanding.

Cohen swallowed hard. "Nothing. Not a single viable match." 2

The words sank into me like a stone in water. The lab was silent except for the hum of machines, the steady beep of heart monitors, and the faint whirl of automated analysis systems running in the background. All this cutting-edge technology, this empire of science at my disposal, and yet it couldn't give me the answer I needed.

"No match?" I repeated slowly, tasting the words as if they were poison. "After all of this?"

"The results are conclusive," Cohen confirmed, glancing at the screen as if hoping something had changed. "Even after bypassing LSI security and cross-referencing every registered werewolf in Silverpine and beyond, there's no genetic bond compatible with Ellen. Not in their records, at least." 2



My jaw tensed. Of course, it wouldn't be easy. Nothing about Ellen ever was.

"So what are you telling me, Cohen? That there is no mate?" I asked, my tone a low growl.

Cohen shook his head. "Not necessarily. Only that the mate isn't in the existing databases. They could be unregistered, rogue, or dead. Without more leads, we're working blind." 5

Useless. All of it.

I turned my gaze to the sprawling lab around me. The Obsidian Tower's top-floor laboratory was the most advanced facility of its kind—walls of reinforced glass, shelves of genetic samples meticulously labeled, machines worth more than entire cities. Every inch of this place was designed to strip away secrets, to make the impossible possible.

And yet, here we were. Struggling against fate like primitive beasts.

Cohen hesitated before speaking again. "But there's something else."

I glanced back at him, my patience thinning. "Speak."

"We've given the anomaly in Ellen's blood a



designation," he said, his voice steady but carrying the weight of what he was about to say. "We're calling it Fenrir's Marker."

Silence. Cold and heavy.

Fenrir. The name settled in the room like ash.

"You're certain?" My voice was quieter now but no less lethal.

Cohen nodded slowly. "The structure of the anomaly bears similarities to ancient genetic imprints, ones we've only theorized about in history. The resilience, the dormant state, and most notably, the way it interacts with the Blood Moon's energy... it's unlike anything we've recorded. If the legends are to be believed, this could very well be a fragment of Fenrir's own bloodline—or at least something derived from it." 2

Fenrir was a myth. Ellen was a paradox. It was fitting.

Dr. Cohen moved silently to a reinforced containment unit at the far end of the lab. The biometric scanner blinked as it read his palm, unlocking with a soft hiss of pressurized air. Inside, resting on a sterile platform under thick glass, was a vial—small, unassuming, yet impossibly significant.



"Your Majesty," Cohen said, his tone a blend of reverence and unease, "this is the isolated sample of the anomaly. Fenrir's Marker."

I stepped forward slowly, my boots echoing against the polished floor. The vial was pristine, its contents swirling faintly under the sterile glow of the containment lights. The liquid inside was nearly clear but tinged faintly pink, a delicate wash of color bleeding from whatever compounds they'd used to separate it from Ellen's blood. But it wasn't just blood. No, this was something else. Something older.

Something powerful.

I reached out, fingers curling around the cool glass.

The moment I touched it, something tightened in my chest.

It was deceptively light in my hand, but the weight it carried was undeniable. I turned the vial slowly, watching the liquid shimmer, almost as if it responded to movement.

"This is it?" I murmured, more to myself than Cohen.

"Yes. We isolated it a few hours ago," Cohen



answered carefully. "It was dormant, but now that it's been separated, it seems more... reactive."

I studied the liquid closely, transfixed.

Reactive.

There was a subtle hum beneath my fingertips. Not physical, but something I could feel—an ancient, low thrum of energy. Like it was alive.

Fenrir's blood.

Or at least something born from it.

And it was inside Ellen.

My grip on the vial tightened.

And it belonged to her.

Ellen.

I could feel my mind shifting, calculations stacking on top of one another.

If this fragment could be isolated, could it be replicated? Controlled?

Could I harness it without her?

No.

Not yet.



The anomaly was incomplete. Cohen said as much. Without her wolf, this fragment was nothing more than dormant power.

But if she awakened—if the Marker fully matured—then this... this would be unstoppable.

And so would she.

"When did you say it was isolated?" I asked again, my voice low.

"Three hours ago," Cohen replied, watching me carefully. "We used a bio-synthetic reagent to separate the anomaly from her blood. It wasn't easy—the Marker resisted the process. It behaved like a living entity, adapting to whatever we used. But we managed."

"Three hours," I repeated under my breath.

I could almost imagine it. Ellen, unaware that something ancient and lethal was coursing through her veins, adapting to her, waiting to be awakened.

And here I was, holding its heart.

My eyes stayed locked on the liquid, and slowly, a cold smile pulled at the corner of my mouth.

"You said it was reactive. How so?" I asked, lifting the vial slightly, letting the light catch on



its surface.

Cohen hesitated. "It reacts to shifts in temperature, movement, even sound. Almost like it's... listening. Waiting for something." 1

Listening.

Waiting.

The possibilities unfolded before me.

"This Marker isn't just dormant," I murmured, eyes narrowing. "It's alive."

A beat of silence stretched thin in the room.

Cohen swallowed but said nothing.

I turned the vial once more, watching it swirl, considering the weight of what I held.

Then I heard it.

An almost imperceptible crack.

My head snapped up, zeroing in on a containment chamber at the far left of the lab.

Crack.

Crack.

Crack.

The containment chamber held black... blood.



Cohen followed my gaze, paling. "Your Majesty, that is the blood we collected from you during your last Flux."

"I know," I murmured. I recognized the corruption.

Crack.

"How secure is that?" I asked, eyeing the black, viscous liquid swirling in the glass.

"Very..." Cohen trailed off, uncertainty creeping into his voice.

CRASH.

Suddenly, it shattered with a horrifying crack, glass exploding outward as the thick, black blood poured free.

But it didn't spread.

It rose. 1

