



179 The Beast From Her Nightmares

Hades 1

I entered our shared bedroom, Ellen already taking her position on the ground. She shot up at the sound of my footsteps, her eyes wide and bleary.

"Hades..." she murmured, getting up, slightly groggy.

Every other damning, dreadful thought evaporated at the sound of her voice.

My heart clenched at the hoarseness of it, and I momentarily glanced at the easel in the corner—used to paint—only to stop dead in my tracks just as I enveloped her in my arms.

She had painted today. It should have been good news, seeing that she was falling back into her routine so soon, despite all the signs that pointed to the contrary.

She buried her head in my chest, her frame smaller—probably because of how little she ate. The Flux tried to escape, to curl around her as my arms did, but I didn't let it. These days, it was



just insufferable.

But even as I held her, my eyes remained glued to the canvas and the insidious depiction of a wolf-like creature that made my hairs stand on end.

I rubbed slow circles into her back, feeling her melt into me. I buried my face in her hair, drinking in the scent of her while planting a kiss on her head. Yet, my eyes lingered on her latest work, dread coiling in my gut like a tightened spring.

"Have you taken a shower?" I whispered, trying not to scare her with any loud tones.

She nodded against my chest without saying a word.

"Let's go to bed, then," I told her as I scooped her into my arms.

And still, as we made our way to the linens that had been laid down on the ground, I could not help but watch the painting, every nerve on edge as I all but waited for the whirls of black, red, and specks of silver to come to life.

It was menacing, arcane, with fur that seemed to shift from a bottomless black to dark red, as if it



had been stained with blood. Its canines elongated beyond the upper jaw in a way that neither werewolf nor Lycan could. Its eyes were neither red nor amber but an eerie pale silver without pupils.

It was watching me.

I knew it was just a painting—oil and pigment smeared across canvas—but something deeper, something primal within me, screamed otherwise. The beast's silver eyes, empty yet brimming with something ancient, seemed to peel back layers of my mind, as if it were dissecting my very being.

I lowered Ellen onto the makeshift bedding, but my gaze never left the painting. The Flux slithered inside me, curling and uncoiling, agitated, its presence prickling against my skin. It wanted out. It recognized something.

Ellen stirred in my arms, a soft sigh escaping her lips. Her body, fragile as it was, radiated warmth, grounding me in the moment. I brushed a stray lock of hair from her face, watching her features relax, exhaustion claiming her once more.

Yet the painting remained. And so did the feeling.



I shifted my grip on Ellen, carefully tucking her into the blankets, but the unease only grew. The longer I looked at the wolf, the more it changed. The strokes of black and red seemed to ripple, shifting just at the edges of my vision. The silver eyes—unblinking, inhuman—gleamed faintly, as though something within the painting was aware of my scrutiny.

The Flux knew this creature. Feared it. 1

I forced myself to tear my gaze away, though every fiber of my being resisted.

"What is that?" My voice came out steady, but I knew Ellen would sense the tension thrumming beneath it.

She stirred but didn't open her eyes. Her breathing, slow and even, told me she was slipping into sleep. I wanted to wake her, to demand an answer, but I didn't. Not yet.

A long silence stretched between us, broken only by the slow, steady rise and fall of Ellen's breath. Just as I thought she had fully succumbed to sleep, she murmured, her voice barely above a whisper.

"It was in my nightmares."



A chill snaked down my spine.

I had expected something vague, something dismissive. Maybe she had seen a creature in a dream and, without much thought, put it to canvas. But the way she said it—soft, distant, as though even speaking about it risked summoning it—unsettled me.

I shifted beside her, watching the curve of her face in the dim light. "Tell me," I urged, my voice barely a breath.

Her eyelids fluttered, but she didn't open them. "I keep seeing it... watching me. It stands in the dark, just past where the light reaches, but I always know it's there." Her fingers twitched against the blanket. "Sometimes it moves closer. Sometimes I feel its breath on my skin." She inhaled sharply, as if recalling the sensation at that very moment. "But it never touches me. It just... waits and watches." 1

The Flux coiled tighter, reacting to her words. I clenched my fists against the urge to let it loose.

I glanced at the painting again, and the sense of unease surged tenfold. That thing—it wasn't just a figment of her imagination. I knew that now. Maybe it was what her trauma felt like to her, a

menacing presence that could rip through soul and spirit or...

Ellen exhaled a slow, trembling breath. "I thought painting it would help." She swallowed, curling slightly into herself. "But now it feels worse." Her voice was distant, as if she were far away. She was still half asleep.

Of course it did.

She had dragged something from her nightmares into the waking world. Given it shape. Given it presence.

"You've seen it before," I said, not as a question, but as fact. Because I knew she had. Maybe not in life, but in whatever space her mind wandered when she dreamed.

Her lips parted, but no sound came out at first. Then— "It knows me." she whispered, her voice fading as she did.

The Flux surged, a violent wave of dread rolling through my gut. Maybe it was the mate bond reacting to a real interpretation of her trauma, it would explain why the painting seemed to threaten to lash out at me.

I didn't know what the hell she had dreamed of.



What had burned itself into her mind so deeply that she had unknowingly created something that made even the Flux—an ancient, corrupt force—afraid.

But I would find out.

Even if it meant stepping into the darkness myself. I had an inkling. I had to meet Felicia.

The ringing permeated into my already uneasy slumber. I sprang to my feet, grabbing the phone as Ellen stirred from the sound disturbing her sleep.

I picked up the call, "What are you calling for at this time of the night?" I drawled into the phone. "Ellen is sleeping."

Kael was quiet for a moment as if caught off guard. "It's very important, Hades." There was another pause as I heard another voice in the background.

The unease that had been growing inside me like a thick, oppressive fog suddenly hardened into something sharper—more tangible.

"What's going on, Kael?" I pressed, my voice losing its usual calm, something darker creeping

into my tone. Ellen shifted beside me, still too drowsy to fully wake, but her body stiffened at my rising tension.

Kael's voice cracked through the line again, low and urgent. "It's an unauthorized aircraft. It's been circling the Obsidian Pack's airspace for the last thirty minutes, Hades. The patrols are unable to identify it. The usual signal checks are coming back as... blank."

I rose from the bed without a second thought, my grip tightening around the phone as my eyes snapped to the canvas once more. The wolf's eyes glinted like silver, and I felt that same malevolent presence prickle at the base of my skull.

"Where is it now?" I asked, my voice steady but with an edge that made even Kael pause.

"It's hovering near the northern border," Kael replied, his voice still thick with confusion. "It's not responding to any attempts at communication, and we've lost visual on it. It's still there, though—we've got multiple reports coming in from the air team."

I strode toward the window, my fingers clenching around the phone as I processed



Kael's words. An unauthorized aircraft, no signals, circling our airspace for the past thirty minutes. My mind spun through possibilities at a blistering speed.

Cain? No—if it were him, there would be no secrecy. He'd announce his arrival with chaos and blood. He was always flamboyant.

Insurgents? Unlikely. The Obsidian Pack was too fortified, our defense systems too precise to allow a simple incursion.

Terrorists? Maybe. But even then, what did they hope to accomplish flying over my territory in the dead of night?

I inhaled sharply, my gaze shifting to Ellen. If this was an attack—if anything happened—I knew exactly what a disaster would do to her. She was still healing, still fragile.

And I would burn the entire world down before I let it touch her. 1

Kael's voice cut through my thoughts. "It's not a Lycan aircraft."

My pulse hammered. "Then what is it?"

Kael hesitated. "It's a werewolf."

A beat of silence.



"What?" I demanded.

Kael exhaled sharply, frustration laced in his voice. "It's from Silverpine."

I stiffened, the name settling like a lead weight in my stomach. A joke. This had to be some sort of absurd joke.

"Silverpine?" My voice was ice. "Are you telling me Alpha Darius is playing pranks on my airspace in the middle of the night?"

"We're still investigating," Kael admitted. "But the drones are getting clearer visuals now." He paused, and for the first time in a long time, I heard something in his voice that sent a slow, simmering unease through my veins.

It wasn't frustration.

It wasn't concern.

It was disbelief.

Kael's next words were slow, deliberate. "It's the Silverpine Monarchy, Hades." 1

I felt my breath still in my chest.

"The Alpha, the Luna, and the Beta." 1

The words rang hollow for a moment, refusing to settle, as though my mind outright rejected



them.

Ellen's parents.

Her family.

And her ex.

I turned back to where she lay, her breath slow and even, unaware of the storm brewing just beyond these walls.

I had no doubt that she hadn't seen them in months? They had simply not come as if they had forgotten all about the daughter that they had sold off for peace.

So why now?

And more importantly—

What the hell did they want?