



## 189 Not fated But Fated

### HADES 1

I stared at James, my face an unshaken mask of control, but inside, the thought of letting those bastards near Ellen made my stomach churn. My fingers twitched at my sides, aching to tear him apart, to make him bleed until his arrogance washed away in a flood of his own regret.

Instead, I exhaled slowly, stepping forward, letting each movement feel deliberate, a slow tightening of the noose around his throat. The tension in the corridor stretched unbearably thin, my presence smothering the air, pressing down on everyone like an invisible vice.

James swallowed. His smug little smirk faltered, just slightly, before he regained his composure. He thought he had won something here. Thought he had maneuvered me into a corner.

"Over. My. Dead. Fucking. Body." 2

The words dripped like poison from my lips, quiet but absolute.

A flicker of hesitation passed through his eye, but he caught himself, straightening. "You would

really put fellow Lycans—your own subjects—in danger for a shell of a woman?" His tone sharpened, condescending, a sneer curling at the corner of his lips. "Or, like your people love to say... a mutt?" 2

Something inside me snapped.

Rage detonated through my veins, turning my vision a deep, bloody red. The Flux surged, and my body responded before my mind could rein it in. Shadows pulsed at my fingertips, curling, twisting, expanding into something far more monstrous than flesh.

The hallway darkened as the air crackled with the unnatural, the hungry tendrils of my power stretching toward him. James' face flickered with something I hadn't seen before—not smugness, not arrogance, but genuine, bone-deep fear. 1

I was going to kill him.

I was going to carve him apart, piece by wretched piece, until there was nothing left but a warning.

And then—

A door creaked open.



A soft footstep.

A familiar scent, fragile but unwavering, slipping through the suffocating tension like a knife through silk.

I froze.

My shadows trembled, wavering for the first time.

Ellen.

She stood in the doorway, her hair tousled, dark circles beneath her eyes, her exhaustion carved into every delicate line of her face. But her gaze was steady, fixed on James with a quiet, unshakable resolve.

"I accept your terms," she said, voice firm despite the weariness pressing against her. "My family will be granted a private audience." 3

The words landed like a cold slap.

I turned to her, stunned, disbelief tightening in my throat. No. No, she couldn't be serious. She couldn't—

"But," she continued, her gaze never leaving James, "it will be on my own time. And make sure your Alpha does not touch a hair on the head of





my subjects." 1

James' lips parted slightly, but whatever he saw in Ellen's gaze stopped him from speaking.

I couldn't breathe.

This wasn't right.

She wasn't thinking straight.

"Red," I started, my voice low, a warning, a plea. 1

She turned to me then, her expression softening —but only slightly.

"Come on, darling." She reached for me, her fingers brushing my wrist, grounding me in a way nothing else could. "You need to get some sleep." 1

Sleep? How the fuck was I supposed to—

"Good night, Kael," she added, her voice polite but distant.

Then, before I could argue, before I could rip her away from this madness, she pulled me into the room with her and slammed the door.

Silence.

I stood there, my breathing unsteady, my blood still roaring in my veins, the Flux still clawing at



me from the inside out.

Ellen turned away, walking toward the bed as if this was just another night, as if she hadn't just made a decision that would crack open a thousand dangers waiting in the shadows.

I exhaled sharply, forcing myself to move, forcing myself to push down the unbearable weight pressing against my ribs.

She was not ready, she had to know that. She had her back turned to me.

"Red..." I took a step towards her.

"I am not ready," she whispered and I halted at the tremor in her voice. I could barely hear her.

"I am not ready to face those people alone. Not without you. I am not strong enough." Sorrow bleed into her voice was the most potent poison. 3

I all but ran to her, wrapping my arms around her shaking slender frame, pulling her my chest.

"You are the strongest woman I know."

"You don't know a lot of women," she tried to joke but her tone remained tainted by dread.

There was barely any joy. She could not even feign it. 1



"It doesn't change anything, Red. Weak is the last thing that you are."

She laughed, hollow and mirthless. "I am dying, Hades. He is not wrong I am shell and I do not know..." She paused. "I am deteriorating, Amelia told me, the hollowing is killing me and now Jules is gone and I can't help but feel responsible, now while I am being torn apart by forces that do not exist anywhere but in my mind, she family make their entrance. They...want...me back." Each syllable was a strain. "They want to complete what they started." Her voice cracked on the last word, fragile as glass, and something inside me shattered. 2

I tightened my grip around her, pulling her closer, pressing my lips to the top of her head as if that could shield her from the agony unraveling inside her. The way she spoke—so broken, so resigned—ignited a helpless, seething rage that I didn't know how to contain. 1

They had done this to her.

They had taken a girl with fire in her soul and hollowed her out until all that was left was this—this trembling, exhausted woman, clinging to whatever pieces of herself she had left.



I swallowed hard, forcing the words past the suffocating weight in my chest. "They will never take you back, Red." My voice was low, steady, a vow carved in blood and bone. "Over my dead fucking body."

She trembled against me, a breath escaping her like she was trying to hold back something too heavy to contain.

"I don't know how to fight this," she whispered. "I don't know how to stop it."

"You don't have to do it alone."

She exhaled sharply, a bitter sound. "I don't have a choice. This is happening, Hades. The Hollowing—it's eating me alive, and I don't even know how to stop it. I can feel myself slipping, like I'm—" She turned around, her fingers curled into the fabric of my shirt. "Like I'm fading." 2

My grip on her tightened as her words sank into me like a slow, twisting knife.

"I have never been whole, Hades. Not since them." 2

Something inside me cracked.

I had seen her bleed, seen her fight through pain



that would have broken any other person. But this? This was different. This was a resignation that chilled me to my fucking core.

She wasn't just hurting.

She was giving up.

My jaw clenched, rage curling through my chest like a wildfire desperate to burn everything in its path. I wanted to tell her she was wrong. That she was whole, that she was still here, still breathing, still Ellen. But I couldn't bring myself to lie to her. Not when the truth was staring me dead in the face. 1

She was slipping.

She knew it. I knew it.

And I would burn the world to keep her from falling. 1

"You would really let Lycans die because you don't want me alone with them?" Her voice was barely a whisper, but the accusation behind it struck like a blade.

I stared at her, my throat tight with the weight of what she was asking of me.

"You have no idea," I murmured, my voice low,





dangerous, "No fucking idea what I would do for you." 4

Her lips parted slightly, her breathing uneven, but she didn't look away.

"But a king does not let his people suffer," she said softly, her fingers tightening against my chest. "Especially if there is another way. You are not that king, and I won't let you become one for my sake. I will speak to them." 4

The words ignited something dark inside me.

My jaw flexed, the tendrils of the Flux writhing at the edges of my vision.

I grabbed her chin, tilting her face up, forcing her to look at me. "You are not a bargaining chip, Red." My voice was ice, my grip firm but careful, as if I was holding something precious that I couldn't afford to break. "You don't owe them this. You don't owe them anything."

Her eyes softened, but there was something there—something resolved, something I knew no amount of rage could shake.

"I owe myself this," she corrected. "I need to see them, Hades. On my terms. Not theirs. Not yours. Mine."

"Red,"

She shushed me with a finger. "I am weak, my body is weak, so is mind. If see them as I am, I will not just lose, I will break and that is exactly what they want. The hollowing is the main culprit as I have been told so it must therefore be reversed."

"How..."

"You must mark me Hades, you are powerful enough to draw out Rhea. You might not be my fated mate but this, us, we are fated." 2

"Red..."

She took a shaky breath, her fingers gripping my shirt like she was holding herself together. "I know what I'm asking, Hades," she whispered. "I know what it means." 4

I searched her face, my pulse a war drum in my ears. "Then why?"

Her eyes flickered with something raw, something stripped bare. "Because it's the only way."

I opened my mouth to argue, but she pressed a hand to my chest, silencing me. "Because Rhea



will recognize you." Her voice trembled, but the conviction in it was unshakable. "Because I recognize you." She swallowed hard, her next words barely more than a breath. "Because I love you." 6

The world stopped.

It had long since dawned on me that she possessed my soul. But tonight, I learned something far more dangerous—she had given me her heart. 3

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I do hope the first confession was not underwhelming 5