



104 The Troubled King

Hades 1

I entered the bedroom a bit late, the results in my hands. Whatever would be found inside, no one else needed to know. Her soft snoring is all I can hear and her scent is all I can smell. I pushed back the urge to go to her first, I had something to do first.

The bedroom was dark but I would not need light to see. I tore the envelope open and slipped out the DNA test results. I unfolded the papers with steady hands, my sharp eyes slicing through the shadows as I scanned the results.

Species Classification: Werewolf

The first line put me at ease—at least momentarily. She was, as I'd suspected, fully werewolf. But the details beneath it stirred unease.

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I frowned, my eyes narrowing at the words.

Heightened energy output. Unusual regeneration. What the hell did that mean? There was no mention of Lycan markers, no confirmation that her blood carried any trace of my kind. But this anomaly... it wasn't normal.

Could it be the reason her eyes had glowed red that night? Why had she fought with a ferocity so foreign for a werewolf?

I shook my head, dismissing the thought. Lycan DNA was out of the question. If that were true, I would have sensed it, would have known it. No, this was something else entirely. A quirk of evolution, maybe. Or something else nature had twisted within her.

I folded the papers sharply, the edges biting into my fingers. Whatever the anomaly was, it wasn't my priority. Not now. The fact remained: she was a werewolf, nothing more, nothing less. The fire in her—the strength, the defiance—was hers



I looked toward her. She lay curled in the sheets, her breathing soft and steady, her face half-hidden in the pillow. She seemed impossibly small, as though the storm of the night had never touched her.

Her scent filled the air, grounding me in a way I couldn't explain. For a moment, I let the report slip from my hand onto the nightstand and simply stared at her.

What was it about her that unsettled me? Was it the fire that blazed through her even in her quiet moments? The contradiction of it all—this anomaly I couldn't place, yet refused to believe was anything other than her own unique nature?

"Ellen," I murmured, the name like a whisper meant only for the shadows. I leaned forward, brushing a stray strand of hair from her face.

Whatever the anomaly was, whatever it meant, I wouldn't let anyone else find out. This secret—her secret—would stay with me. And for now, that was enough. There was an intimacy with secrets even if she was not aware, we shared this part of her.

Suddenly my alarm filled the room. It was so close already. I did not need to check to know what it meant. I had set the seven day reminder



The scent of blood was already becoming more noticable and the black veins had already begun their slow, inevitable crawl under my skin.

I clenched my fists, forcing my breathing to remain even. The Infernal Moon, as I called it, was upon me again. Seven days before it would come again.

The room felt smaller, darker. My senses were amplifying, the mutation stirring within me, feeding on every shadow, every whisper of life. Even asleep, Ellen's heartbeat thundered in my ears like a drumbeat calling me to war.

I turned away from her, dragging a hand through my hair, and reached for the report again. My claws had already begun to darken—just enough to leave faint scratches on the paper as I held it.

I turned on my heel, heading for the far wall where a seamless panel blended perfectly with the dark wood. My fingers found the hidden latch, pressing it. A faint click sounded, and the panel slid open to reveal a high-tech compartment.

The biometric scanner glowed faintly, waiting. I pressed my thumb against it, the slight sting of a needle drawing a sample of my blood. A soft whir

The biometric scanner glowed faintly, waiting. I pressed my thumb against it, the slight sting of a needle drawing a sample of my blood. A soft whirl followed as the retina scanner slid into place. I leaned forward, my crimson eyes glaring into the lens.

The panel clicked again, the compartment unlocking. Inside were rows of neatly arranged vials, syringes, and tools—all part of the arsenal I'd built to manage this curse. At the center of it was a vial filled with a dark, viscous liquid, its color shifting between black and deep red under the dim light. The Suppressant.

I grabbed it along with a syringe, my claws retracting just enough to let me handle the delicate equipment. My hands worked automatically, drawing the liquid into the syringe. There was no hesitation, no pause for second thoughts. If I waited, the Infernal Moon would tear through me faster, and there'd be no stopping it.

I pushed my sleeve up, revealing the black veins that had already spread halfway up my forearm, pulsating with dark energy. With one quick motion, I plunged the needle into my vein and depressed the plunger.



A searing heat spread through my body, as though molten lava was coursing through my veins, colliding with the corruption. I staggered, gripping the edge of the compartment to keep myself upright. My molars ground together, my jaw clenched so tight I thought it might snap.

The veins on my arm flared, swelling and writhing like living things fighting against the suppressant. My claws extended uncontrollably, scratching deep grooves into the wood of the cabinet. A low growl rumbled in my throat, animalistic and guttural, Cerberus was clawing at his enclosure. The suppressants hurt him more than it did me.

I dropped the empty syringe, watching it roll across the floor as my knees threatened to buckle. The suppressant was fighting the mutation, dulling the sharp edge of the bloodlust that was already creeping into my thoughts. 1

"Come on," I growled through gritted teeth, my head tilted back against the wall. The suppressant was meant to delay the transformation, to keep the contamination at bay for a little longer. It couldn't stop it entirely, but it could give me precious days to weaken the effects of what was to come. 1

The pain began to subside, replaced by a dull, throbbing ache in my chest. My breathing slowed, though the air still felt thick with tension. The black veins receded slightly, fading back into the deeper layers of my skin.

I pushed the panel closed and leaned against the wall, my hand braced against it to steady myself. The suppressant had done its job—for now.

My gaze drifted back to Ellen. She was still sound asleep, unaware of the storm brewing just a few feet away from her.

Seven days. Seven days before the Infernal Moon wreaked havoc again.

I would survive it like I did since my youth but I glanced at the sleeping woman in my bed. She would be a problem, the inkling was as distinct as the taste of her blood wine.

Eve

The frightening sound of the growl shook me awake, my mind slightly hazy with sleep. My heart did multiple flips in my chest but I managed to keep both still and calm. What had that been?

The room was heavy with tension, the air thick

The room was heavy with tension, the air thick as though it carried the weight of something dangerous. Through the silence, I heard labored breathing—Hades' breathing. It was ragged, controlled, as though he was fighting something unseen.

I resisted the urge to turn toward him, knowing that moving now would only draw attention. Instead, I lay there, listening intently.

The breathing slowed, the sharpness fading into quiet control. I heard a faint click, like a hidden compartment being closed, and then the soft sound of footsteps approaching the bed.

The mattress dipped under his weight as he lay down beside me. His presence filled the space, scorching and heavy but there was something different about it.

I stayed still, keeping my breaths steady. Whatever was going on, I wasn't meant to know about it.

"Red," He groaned.

I stiffened.

"You will soon get your wish," he muttered, still panting. "I will be punished."

He turned to face me, his breath hot. "I am told

He turned to face me, his breath hot. "I am cold, Red," he muttered softly.

I should have reeled back not only what he said but from the way it came out. The words were laden with vulnerability and a despair that they made my throat constrict. I was sure if I opened my eyes that it would not Hades laying beside me. I was not sure which possibility was more horrific.

He suddenly took my hand and I fought a shiver when he brought it to his own face. "Would you warm your cold husband with your body, Red?" It came as a tentative question. Like he was too afraid to ask and that's why he was doing it while he believed I slept. None of this made any sense, yet my heart lurched at the fragility in his usually hard voice. He sounded so lost and... uncertain. 1

His heat seeped into my skin, despite him saying he was cold. Soon, I heard snoring and I hesitantly opened my eyes. The moonlight from the window casted its silver light on his relaxed face. He had fallen asleep with my hand still cradling his face.

