



327 The Child In The Corner

Hades 1

"You do understand why this is necessary?"
Father said, watching as the Deltas scanned my
body.

"I do," I replied.

There was no need for further explanation. He
would give it anyway.

"You were never meant to be ordinary. The birth
of the twins changed everything. A shift foretold.
A balance undone. You know this."

I did. Everyone did. It had been ten years since
the prophecy had awakened Obsidian's darkest
fears—and ten years since I had last seen
sunlight. My first step out of the Black Room
since the age of eight had been the day the twins
were born. 6

That alone told me something monumental was
coming.

Even my sixteenth birthday hadn't spared me.



That gift—if one could call it that—had been the surgical removal of my dimples. A soft feature, they said. A weakness. It had been done without anaesthetic. My screams were considered part of the process. Proof that I could endure. That I deserved to keep my name. 1

But the truth was, that name had already been taken.

I wasn't Kael anymore. 4

I was Hades. 1

A new identity, a tailored vessel. I had learned piece by piece what I'd signed up for in his stead. Why it had to be me, not him. Why I was the one Father chose.

One of the Deltas placed their palm flat against my chest. Another lowered a tube laced with mirrored sigils and slid a needle the length of my forearm into a pressurized vial. It hissed faintly, venomous and alive.

"The power that will be bestowed upon you," Father continued, as though narrating a rite, "will challenge and counter that of the twins. Vassir's Vein will be our weapon. And you—our



deliverance."

My jaw stayed tight. I didn't need to reply.

The Deltas continued their scanning in silence, murmuring findings to one another—heart rate, temperature, nerve condition. Making sure the vessel was sound before it received the plague it had been bred for.

Then Father asked, "Is your body ready to take the Flux?"

Not are you ready. Not do you understand the cost. Just the body. The shell. The meat suit trained to become more than human.

I knew the answer he wanted. I gave it.

"Yes."

He nodded. "Good. You were built for this."

I wasn't sure if it was comfort or condemnation.

The Vassir's Vein had consumed every test subject before me. Old. Young. Skilled. Gifted. It didn't matter how slowly they were dosed, how strong they had been. The Flux twisted them into living nightmares, then burned through



their minds until only screaming husks remained.

That was why I had been prepared the way I had. Sculpted like a war artifact.

My name had been erased. My voice—retrained. My eyes, once a soft, disarming blue, had been tampered with—dimmed to ash-grey, void of warmth or mercy. Even the smile that once made people lower their guard had been carved from me.

No softness. No edges.

Just steel.

Just purpose.

The contraption descended from above—a harness of metal, bone, and old tech laced with runes older than memory. It hissed as it locked into place around my ribs, pelvis, and spine, lifting me slightly off the floor so that my feet no longer touched it.

I didn't flinch. I couldn't afford to.

Pain was expected. Screaming was weakness.



I clenched my jaw as the restraints tightened, pins sliding into nerve clusters along my back to keep my spine aligned. I felt them bite through skin, then muscle, then deeper. My arms were strapped out wide—Christ-like, Father once joked.

It was no joke now.

The Deltas murmured their final preparations, and I saw one of them—small, younger than the others—hesitate as she handed over the core vial. She was trembling. 1

Father took it himself.

"Three doses," he said calmly. "Into the spine. Direct feed to the essence core."

My vision flickered.

The first injection hit like fire—like hot oil spilled through my nerves. It rushed down my back in a flash flood of agony, crackling into my legs, my skull, my teeth. My vision whitened. My knees jerked, but the harness held.

I screamed through gritted teeth, the sound barely escaping.



The second shot followed. It wasn't heat—it was cold. Numbing, burning cold, like I'd been shoved into ice water and filled with shattered glass. My back arched involuntarily. My ribs strained against the harness.

Then came the third.

This one felt different.

Not pain.

Invasion.

It didn't rush. It crawled. 1

I felt it moving through me like a worm of molten lead—sliding between ribs, up my spine, behind my eyes. My heart seized. My breath caught. 1

And then I heard it.

A whisper.

Not a word. Not a voice.

Just a sound. A presence.

The Flux.



It didn't speak in language yet—only in intent.
And that intent was hunger.

For a moment, it paused—like it was tasting me.

Then it surged forward again, slipping behind
bone and through thought.

A glowing capsule sealed around my upper
spine, locking the core of the Vassir's Vein in
place. The sigils on its surface pulsed to life—
silver, red, black. The runes sizzled. I could feel
them etching into my bones.

My body went rigid.

Then it began to fry me from the inside out.

I didn't scream.

Not because it didn't hurt. But because I refused.

My eyes rolled. My body shook. Blood ran from
my nose, my ears. My skin turned hot, then cold,
then grey.

Still I didn't scream.

All around me, I knew they watched. Deltas.
Father. The scientists behind the glass. The ones
who had bet against me. The ones who were



counting on me to be the one who didn't shatter.

My vision pulsed. My thoughts blurred.

And still, somewhere deep inside that rising,
screaming noise of nerves and fire and
resonance—

I felt it.

The Flux.

Settling in.

Claiming its throne.

And whispering

Then the voice vanished, folding into the static
that was now my nerves.

Everything hurt. Everything buzzed. I was barely
holding onto the edge of consciousness when I
saw him.

The boy. 1

He stood just beyond the containment glass, not
behind the Delta team or the monitors, not
among the scientists. Alone. Unnoticed.
Unmoving.



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Maybe five years old.

Too young to belong here.

Too still to be alive. 2

He didn't flinch as he looked at me—didn't blink.
His skin was pale but not sickly. His lips pressed
in a firm, unreadable line. And his eyes...

His eyes were green. A piercing, almost
luminous green, emerald. 1

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