



## 338 It Is Over

Relief flooded my veins, as I released the breath that I had known I was holding. Hades' grip tightened around Elliot, his eyes holding the boy that he probably did not know was his son. 1

"I am like you," Elliot's voice a little more than a breath, as though he knew not to starter Hades. But after all Felicia had told me about him and all the attributes he had shown, I was sure he really did know not to scare his father. He knew his father was fragile like glass, yer he could cut if not handled well. 1

He glanced at me, as I gaped at the scene that filled me with hope. His gaze was steady and reassuring like he knew how panic and horror had gripped me just moments ago.

"Did he hurt you too? Is that why you watched?" Hades asked, his voice reflecting tentative glimmering that shone in the depth of his eyes.

Tears sprang in my eyes.

Elliot shook his head. "Do you want me to show you?"



Hades blinked. His bunched shoulders slumped. He looked smaller somehow, when he was inflated with rage and the desperation not to appear weak. He swallowed, his whole body seeming to shake with the simple action. His eye flickered towards the oppressive figure in the corner, still watching, still Vassir.

When his eyes met Elliot's his answer was immediate, desperation bleeding into his voice. "Yes,"

Elliot's lip curled slightly and something about the the gesture seemed to disarm Hades who took another step closer to Elliot.

With that Elliot, turned to look at me before leading Hades out of the bleakness of the scene, his steps sure, Hades still retaining their hesitation.

A growl tore through the air just as the destruction creep closer, Cerberus appeared, lowering his body for Elliot who let Hades climb first, before Hades gave his hand to assist him up on Cerberus' back.

Without a single look back, Cerberus bound into a leap and disappearing into an exit I did know



know existed. But I knew Hades would find his way back with his son and wolf.

I turned—slowly.

The air behind me had curdled. Thick with ruin, raw with ancient power. I knew even before I faced him that he was no longer hiding behind a borrowed face.

Vassir was shedding the illusion of Hades' father—and becoming himself.

What stood before me was not a man.

Not anymore.

The skin split down the center of his chest like parchment unraveling, revealing pale flesh laced with ink-black veins that pulsed in time with the chaos. His eyes—no longer just cruel—shone with crimson ruin, glowing like coals dredged from the deepest pit. One horn curled from his temple, not majestic, but gnarled—wrong. Asymmetrical. A scar, not a crown. And from his back unfurled wings, if they could be called that—fleshy, unnatural things like torn membranes trying to remember how to fly.





He was beautiful in the way disasters were beautiful.

Terrifying in the way gods were terrifying when they no longer cared who saw them bleed.

And he was staring at me.

> "So that's it," I said, my voice hoarse. "No more masks."

He tilted his head, the bones in his neck cracking audibly. His wings twitched behind him, and the chaos in the walls surged again—but not toward me. Not yet.

He stepped forward once, and the world cracked beneath his foot. Literally. The stone beneath us groaned and crumbled, dissolving into ash midair.

The room was collapsing. No—not collapsing.

Unmaking.

The ceiling splintered upward, disappearing into ink. The sigils burned out one by one, bleeding light before vanishing entirely. Soon, the walls faded too, their memories peeling off in strips, until only darkness remained—an endless void of

space and smoke and stillness.

And us.

Floating.

> "So this time truly die?" I whispered, the words barely leaving me.

He blinked slowly, that single horn casting a warped shadow over his face.

> "Yes," he murmured.

His voice was no longer smooth. It was layered. Multiple tones, some too old to be usual, braided into one. It echoed where there were no walls.

Then his expression shifted—just slightly.

Something passed over it.

Sorrow.

And—strangely—pride.

> "You surprised me," he said quietly. "I thought you would lose. Lose him. Lose yourself."

> "You tried," I breathed.

> "Yes. I tried." He tilted his head again, this time



with something closer to curiosity. "You chose love. Foolish. But strong."

A shiver passed through me. The void around us pulsed with heat and cold, time and timelessness.

> "Is that why you're here?" I asked. "To judge me?"

> "No," he said, and for the first time... he looked tired.

Old.

Even with his monstrous form, the weight dragging at his shoulders was too humane to miss.

> "I am here," he said slowly, "to witness."

I frowned.

> "Witness what?"

> "The end of everything I built."

He looked past me then—toward where Hades and Elliot had gone, though no such path remained. Just a void. A tear in the veil of this fractured realm.





> "He was never meant to break free," Vassir said softly. "None of you were."

> "Then why create it at all?"

His eyes locked with mine.

> "Because even gods are curious," he said.

"Because sometimes... we want to see if the cage we forged can unmake the prisoner. Or the prisoner the cage."

> "And did it?" I asked.

He didn't answer.

But the smile that touched his lips was not cruel.

It was quiet. Almost... admiring.

> "He still chose you," Vassir said, voice tinged with something I couldn't name. "Even at the brink. Even soaked in me. Even when he took me in, he fought against me. My hate, my vengeance, my malice, my wickedness, all the things that made my essence alive despite all the centuries that passed. Things that not even I could resist."

"Because you're his ruin. And his salvation."

His wings spread wide behind him—not to fly,



but to surrender. They curled like a closing book, veiling the void in silence.

> "This is not over," he murmured. "But it will never be the same."

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