

415 Flight

Hades 1

The ground fell away beneath me.

The first few beats of my wings were violent, each downstroke a thunderous clap that rattled loose stones, tugged at clothes. Air surged under me like a living thing, fighting and yielding in the same breath. My body strained against gravity, every muscle burning, but then—suddenly, impossibly—it gave.

We rose.

Unsteadily at first, my legs still reaching for the familiarity of the dirt.

I gritted my teeth, pushing back the instinct to stay close to the ground and letting the air beneath my wings carry me. My chest constricted momentarily, the cavity suddenly too tight from my hammering heart.

The village shrank below, a patchwork of pale faces and flickering light. Gasps followed, fading with the ground itself, until there was only the roar of the wind, the whip of my wings, and Kael's grip tight against my shoulders.



He laughed. Gods, he actually laughed. It burst raw out of him, half-disbelieving, half-elated, the sound scattering into the night like a broken hymn. "Hades—do you feel this?" His voice carried in the rushing air, wide-eyed wonder cracking every word.

I did.

The wind screamed against my ears, sharp and cold as it carved across my skin. The pull of the earth slackened, replaced by the wild, trembling freedom of weightlessness. Each beat of my wings shook the night, and the stars seemed to bend closer, as if they, too, were startled to see me among them.

Kael leaned forward, hair thrashing in the gale. His hand pressed more firmly to the back of my neck as though he could anchor himself in the impossible. "You're flying," he breathed, reverent, his voice stolen half by the wind.

The horizon unfurled—an endless expanse of black forest broken only by the silver veins of rivers glimmering under moonlight. Every scent rushed sharper, every sound clearer, as if the air itself was showing me secrets it never trusted the earth with.



Beyond it were cities, lights from buildings illuminating the way. I knew to avoid flying directly overhead, since the last thing we needed was attention from civilians who might notice something strange in the skies.

I tilted, testing the pull, and Kael swore behind me, clutching tighter. His laughter pitched into a startled shout. "Warn me before you do that!" But his voice shook with exhilaration, not fear. He was clinging for his life, yet his eyes shone like a boy at a festival.

I banked again, slower this time, and the world rolled beneath us. Mountains rose dark and jagged on the horizon, their crowns kissed with mist. Wolves might run the forests, but this realm—this endless sweep of open air—was mine.

Kael's breath was warm against my ear. "I thought it would be grotesque," he admitted, softer now, words almost carried away. "Ugly. Wrong. But..." He looked out over the vast night, the moon catching in his wide green eyes. "...it's beautiful. You're beautiful like this. Maybe being a hybrid was always meant to be."

The words cleaved through my nonexistent heart sharper than the cold wind.



And as the air cradled me, as the stars swam closer, as Kael held fast to me in awe—I realized this wasn't only survival. This was power. Novelty. Liberation. 1

I had become something more than monster.

I had become sky.

Eve

My sleep was troubled, filled with mostly twisting and turning. Every minute, my arm squeezed around Elliot's back, spasming with instinct to make sure he was there. Even as I knew that Montegue was just outside the door, watching us with the force of our Gammas.

We were safe.

But for how long?

Was Hades safe? Kael? Cain? The Gammas would have accompanied them.

I rose slowly, a headache still rippling through my skull in painful pulses that made it hard to think and harder not to cry.

I stroked Elliot's hair, the soft waves and curls grounding me against the torrent of my own



amplifying dread.

Elliot stirred instantly, rising with me and reaching for my hand. "Mummy?" His voice was still groggy with sleep. "Where are we going?" he asked.

It pierced me, hearing him ask that the moment he woke up. There was no relaxation—the situation was fraught, and he knew it.

I cradled his soft cheeks as he tilted his head toward mine.

"I love you, you know?" I muttered in the darkness.

There was no reply from him for a minute that seemed to stretch endlessly.

"Do you want to leave because I am broken?" His voice was fragile. 1

I froze, his words slicing through the quiet like a blade. Broken? The horror in my chest made me clutch his face tighter, my thumbs trembling against his warm skin.

"Elliot," I whispered, my voice shaking, "don't you ever say that again. Don't you ever think it." I kissed his forehead, pressing my lips hard enough to anchor us both. "You are mine. My



heart, my blood, my everything. Nothing you do —no shift, no secret, no shadow—could ever make me leave you. Not now, not ever. I would burn the whole world before I let it take you from me."

His lashes fluttered, catching the moonlight. A tiny furrow pulled between his brows, too heavy for someone his age, but then he nodded slowly, as if sealing my words into his bones.

"We need to finish it, Mummy," he whispered, voice small but steady. "Daddy. Uncle Kael. Then... then we can be complete. Then you won't hurt anymore."

My throat closed, but I forced the smile anyway, fierce and trembling. "Yes," I breathed, leaning my forehead against his. "Yes, we'll finish it. Together. We'll make it right."

Hand in hand, we pushed the door open.

Montegue stood in the hallway, pale as candle wax yet steadier than before. The sallowness cast to his skin had faded to something healthier, and he wore a tired but genuine smile. His men carried trays into the room, dishes clattering softly as steam curled into the air.

Nausea hit me like a gut punch.



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"You should eat," Montegue said, his voice low but carrying, a thread of command woven through. His gaze lingered on Elliot with surprising gentleness. "Strength is needed for what comes next. And you, little one..." He bent slightly, letting his smile crease softer. "...you'll need to be strong enough to find your father."

Elliot pressed closer to my side, his small fingers tightening around mine—but his green eyes never looked away from Montegue's. "Yes, grandpa."

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