



423 From The Skies

Hades 1

The sky was starless.

Not dim. Not clouded. Just blank. A hollow lid
over a world on edge.

I flew due east, wings slicing the wind clean.
Kael clung to me, silent, his gloved hands firm at
the base of my neck out of habit.

If that was what he was going to my neck, I could
not dare image how he would handle my horn.

Below us, the cities had gone dark, streetlights
blinking in strange patterns, rooftops dimmed,
intersections deserted.

Obsidian was locking down.

But it wasn't a curfew.

It was a hunt.

We dipped lower. The wind sharpened against
my ears like it was being pulled too tight.

Kael suddenly tapped on my hide. I twisted my
elongated neck to him and he gestured with his
chin to look below.



My head tilted downward.

In the woods we'd just left behind, movement surged—too uniform to be wildlife. Too many to be hikers.

My eyes narrowed, tuning in every detail as I slowed even more. My sharpened sight caught the movement, magnified as I thought I were on their level.

Dozens of shadows moved like liquid through the trees. Black-suited Gammas, sweeping east as we glided west in brutal, disciplined lines.

Kael didn't say it, but I felt the tension in his grip.

"They're combing the forest," he finally muttered, over the wind that we rode, yet my rewired earring caught every word.

"Great thing we took off while we did. I can imagine they would have heart me shifting a mile away," I returned.

"Not to talk of those leather batty wings. We might as well turn on a siren." He chuckled, though his grip tightened.

We broke through a cloudbank, mist curling in my wake. Below, the city stretched like a grid of ash and concrete. Empty streets. No music. No



civilians. Just stillness that felt too careful.

"Lockdown protocol," Kael murmured, tapping something into his wrist communicator. "Grade theta, it full on.

"They're preparing for war," I said. "Just not the kind they're willing to admit to the civilians."

We passed over the western quarters. Even from this height, I could see them—rooftop patrols, uniformed shadows with weapons drawn. But they were all looking down, waiting for the sneaking wolves that would never appear. A watch Tower glared up from the center like an eye. Its floodlights swept the streets in pale, circular motions.

We were too high for them to catch and if not for my keen sight, they would have been harder to detect.

Then I saw movement.

Kael followed the shift of my neck to it.

Small. Uneven. Not military. This was too small and uncoordinated. Desperate.

A woman.

She stumbled from between two boarded



buildings, no coat, just a tattered robe and broken sandals. My eyes zeroed in on her limp, to find one foot was metal. She was an amputee.

Her steps were frantic but slow, like she was too cold to run. She looked over her shoulder twice before stepping out. A patrol caught her instantly.

My stomach churned, skin prickling.

Maera's words about the experimentation on Silverpine replayed in my mind, suddenly an endless loop as I watched it all unfold.

"Stop," a Gamma barked.

She flinched. Raised her hands. "Please—my son. He's out there. He didn't come back last night."

"No one's allowed outside after curfew."

"I know, but—he's just a boy."

I hovered. Kael didn't speak. He didn't need to.

The Gamma moved in, weapon low but not safetied.

"You're a wolf," he said flatly. "That child should know the law."

She shook her head. "He hasn't shifted yet. He's nine. Please."



He didn't respond.

He just grabbed her shoulder, jerking her around.

I slowed, my pulse throbbing as he grabbed her face roughly forcing her to face him.

My ear twitched up as I watched a slow smile curl the large Gamma's lips. Sinister even from where I flew over him, even in the minimal light. "No too bad," he muttered, his expression cruel as he turned her over from side to side as though analysing it. 1

"We've been on this for more two days, I haven't gotten some in a while," his crude words grated on my ears. He pushed her back, his gaze still accessing and predatory as he looked her up and down. 1

I bit the inside of my cheek until it drew blood. She would not be in this situation if not for us. There would not be a curfew that she would have broken. She would have been able to look for her son.

Though I knew no one as at fault for this as much as Darius, it still gnawed heavily on me.

I watched her fear curdle to horror in an instant.



Tremors rans through her body as she began to shake her head. "Sir..." She began to back away, "I can't"

"You don't really have a choice," he muttered, showing all his teeth as he cut off the distance between them. "Just accept it, maybe just maybe you won't be on a one way trip to the Cauterium for breaking law. It's a your choice."

There was no choice here.

My decision came quickly. "Kael, we need a diversion." I said.

He was silent for a minute and I could hear the gears in his head grinding. "Since they are looking for us, let's give them something to chase." 1

"Kael," I said, my voice low but cutting through the wind. "You're going to have to hold on—tight. Horn."

He didn't hesitate.

His gloved hand slid up from the base of my neck and gripped the jagged root of my horn, bracing his legs against my back. His breath hitched but he didn't question me. Not now.

I surged upward.



The cold thinned even more as we tore into the higher levels of the sky. My wings strained, the tips aching from the pressure, but I didn't stop. Couldn't. Not until the buildings below became dots and the night air thinned enough to sharpen my senses like blades.

Then I saw it.

A crooked tree at the city's edge—tall, skeletal, half-dead from drought, but its trunk was thick, roots still holding it in place.

I banked hard, diving toward it.

Kael ducked, eyes squinting against the sudden gust. My claws extended as I descended, the ground racing up to meet us. I slammed into the base of the tree, claws burying deep into the earth as I yanked. The roots screamed in protest, snapping like bone. Dirt exploded in every direction.

The tree came free.

