



314 Sunlight

He turned his torso slightly, revealing his back—blood-slick and punctured with a grotesque row of small ports, still slick with the residue of injections. 1

"Order the scientist to give me the last vials," he said, voice low and heavy with finality. "All of it. Every last drop. Then, and only then, will you have me—fully. No more fragments. No more Hades. Just me. Vassir, your first love."

My heart stopped.

He was asking me to kill him.

To erase Hades—forever.

And I saw it in his eyes.

He meant it.

He wanted the last of Hades burned out.

For me.

Or—

He raised Kael higher.



The wing tensed.

His claws extended.

"No," I gasped. "Don't—don't you dare—"

"Choose." Vassir snarled. "Prove your loyalty. Or lose the only thing left that still dares to stand between us."

Kael managed a single noise—half-choke, half-growl. His eye found mine.

And in it, I saw peace.

Resignation.

Love. **1**

Tears fell from my eyes, unstoppable.

I turned to the broken scientist who lay shivering on the floor, clinging to a half-crushed syringe.

"Don't." I mouthed. Begged.

But Vassir saw.

And his face went cold.

"I warned you."



And then—

With a single sickening snap—

He ripped Kael's head from his body. 8

Blood arced through the air like a halo, painting the lab in crimson. His body crumpled to the ground with a wet, lifeless thud.

A scream tore from my throat.

But it didn't happen. 2

The blood never came.

Kael's head never fell.

Because it wasn't real. 1

It was a vision. 3

A flash.

A poisoned promise of what would happen.

And it broke me.

I gasped, stumbling back, clawing at the air like I could tear the horror from my mind. My heart slammed against my ribs like it was trying to escape my chest.



It wasn't real.

Not yet.

But it would be if I didn't act.

Kael sagged in the wing's hold, unconscious now—his pulse flickering so faintly I almost thought it was gone. His body swayed with each of Vassir's breaths, limp, fragile, defenseless.

I couldn't do this.

I couldn't let Kael die for Hades.

I couldn't.

My hands trembled as I turned toward the quivering scientist, who stared up at me with wild eyes. The remaining vials clattered in a tray beside him.

"I'm sorry," I whispered.

Then louder, firmer—"Do it."

The man flinched. "I—he'll kill me—"

"I know," I sobbed. "Just—do it."

When he didn't move, I dropped to my knees and



grabbed the syringe myself.

It slipped in my grasp.

My hands were slick.

From blood or tears—I didn't know.

The moment I touched the needle, everything in me screamed.

Visions rushed through me like floodwater breaching a dam.

Hades at the Lunar Gala, his hand at the small of my back as we danced in a circle of stars.

His voice in the ring as he trained me, a hand at my hip, guiding. Correcting. Taunting.

His lips pressed to mine in the dark. His laughter rumbling against my skin.

Him holding me.

Kissing my scars.

Marking me.

Kn—kn—

I broke.

"I love you," I whispered, voice barely audible as the needle trembled between my fingers.

Then I pushed it in.

One.

Then another.

The syringe hissed as it emptied into his skin.

He flinched.

His wings shivered.

And the last fragments of Hades began to slip away—erased by my own hands.

Because I couldn't let Kael die.

Because I couldn't lose both of them.

And so—

I chose.

Even as it tore me apart. 3

Vassir laughed.

Laughed like it was bliss—like my suffering was a symphony he'd waited centuries to conduct.



With a twitch of his wings, he released Kael.

The body fell with a sickening thud.

I dove forward with a cry, syringe still clutched in my fist.

But I wasn't fast enough.

Kael hit the floor in a heap of limbs, his neck at an unnatural angle, his pulse barely there.

"No, no, no—" I sobbed, crawling to him, cradling his head in my lap. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry..."

Vassir towered above us, back arched with tremors of pleasure as the injections took root. His veins pulsed with molten black, spreading down his chest like a parasite unshackled.

"You did it," he rasped, his voice now doubled—two tones, layered. "You chose."

I wanted to scream.

I wanted to die.

But all I could do was hold Kael.

The second vial hissed empty.



Then the third.

I stabbed the fourth in through the scorched
flesh on Vassir's shoulder. 2

He grunted, wings twitching violently.

With every injection, he changed.

Bones cracked. Skin stretched. The last scraps of
Hades' form bent under the corruption curling
around it like ivy made of rot.

> "Come back to me," I begged through tears.
"Hades, please. If anything's left... fight."

But there was no answer.

No flicker in his eyes.

Just Vassir—ecstatic.

Hungry.

Claiming the flesh for his own.

I stabbed the next. And the next. My vision
swam.

By the twelfth vial, I was screaming. Sobbing. My
hands coated in his blood. 1



The thirteenth shattered in my grip.

The fourteenth slid in like surrender.

The last one trembled in my palm.

> "This is it," Rhea whispered in my mind,
shuddering. She could barely speak.

I didn't hesitate.

Because Kael would die if I didn't.

And I couldn't let that happen.

Even if it meant losing Hades.

Forever.

So I drove it home.

The fifteenth vial clicked.

Hissed.

And emptied into him.

Vassir's body convulsed—arched back, mouth
open in a silent roar. Wings flared wide,
shuddering with unnatural light.

Then—



Stillness.

I turned from him. Collapsed beside Kael.

Held his head against my chest, my hand pressed
to his sternum.

Thump.

Thump.

So faint.

But there.

The door behind us blew open with a bang.

Boots stormed in. Dozens.

Weapons drawn.

Helmets on.

Their eyes locked on the monster that stood
where Hades used to be.

At the front—

Montegue

Face grim.

Armor black as the void.



A weapon slung over his shoulder—
long-barreled, rune-etched, glowing with
charge.

"Stand down," he barked. "NOW!"

But Vassir only smiled.

The last of the injections still dripping from his
spine.

He turned—

And spread his wings.

Montegue didn't hesitate.

"Eve—duck!"

My body dropped on instinct.

A deafening blast split the air, the kind that made
your teeth ache. Not at Vassir. Not at me. But at
the ceiling—right above him.

The rune-bolted projectile hit with surgical
force. Stone, steel, and insulation exploded,
raining down in chunks as if a god had hurled a
spear through the heavens.

For a split second, Vassir only blinked, confused.



Then he screamed.

Light poured in.

Not moonlight. Not electricity.

Sunlight.

Blazing. Purifying. Unforgiving.

It speared through the wrecked ceiling like a blade from above, piercing the shadows that clung to him like a second skin. His wings sizzled at once, curling like paper in flame.

"NO!"

The voice that erupted from him was neither Hades' nor Vassir's alone—it was something older, howling in agony.

His skin blistered. Cracked.

Steam poured from every wound.

He tried to leap backward into the shadows, but Montegue was already there, raising the weapon again. More guards stormed through side access halls, breaching adjacent rooms and firing into the interior walls.

Each blast was targeted—not at him, but at the structure.

More sunlight. More heat.

Vassir reeled.

His wings faltered, limbs seizing under the burning. He staggered toward the hallway, but a cluster of Obsidian guards had already circled behind him. Bullets laced with reflective silver and blessed ash pounded into the walls around him, ricocheting light in every direction.

There was nowhere to hide.

No shadows deep enough.

He tried to shift, to blur, to vanish—but the light bound him like chains. And still, I held Kael, sobbing, his heartbeat faint beneath my palms.

"You should've stayed dead," Montegue muttered, his weapon steady. "This realm doesn't belong to you anymore."

And he fired again.

Straight into the heart of the monster wearing my husband's face. 5