



467 A Safe Haven

Eve 1

One of the largest rooms in the castle had been converted into every child's dream. The colours filled every spot—pastels and brights competing for attention—and stepping into it actually lifted my mood despite the weight I'd been carrying from Hades's office.

Freddie was a statue in the corner, he bowed as he noticed us.

We returned the greeting.

There were three beds, each one claimed by its occupant with stuffed animals, blankets, and the precious chaos only children could create. Sophie's bed was against the far wall, draped in purple and pink, a small mountain of plush wolves piled at the foot. Elliot's was nearest the door, covered in a star-patterned quilt, his collection of toy soldiers arranged in careful formation on the nightstand. And Micah's—Thea's little brother—was by the window, modest and neat compared to the others, as if he still wasn't sure he was allowed to make himself at home. 1



A bookshelf overflowed with stories. Art supplies scattered across a low table. A rocking horse in the corner. Drawings taped to the walls—some showing families of wolves, others depicting castles and forests and things only a child's imagination could conjure.

It was safe. It was bright. It was everything the world outside these walls wasn't.

It was beautiful, Hades expression told me he shared my thought.

Sophie sat cross-legged on her bed, braiding Elliot's hair while he squirmed and complained. Micah watched from his own bed, a book open in his lap but his eyes on the other two, a tentative smile tugging at his mouth.

They hadn't noticed us yet.

"Hold still," Sophie ordered, her tongue poking out in concentration as she worked. "You said you wanted to look like a warrior."

"Warriors don't have braids," Elliot protested, but he stopped squirming.

"Some do," Micah offered quietly, glancing up from his book. "I read that some ancient packs braided their hair before battle. It kept it out of



their faces when they couldn't shift."

Elliot perked up at that. "Really?"

"Really," Micah confirmed, and I watched Sophie shoot him a grateful look.

My chest tightened. These three children, caught in a war they didn't understand, had somehow found each other. Had somehow created their own small pack within these walls. 1

Sophie had joined just this evening, yet by how quickly she'd warmed up to Hades, she would have no problem building rapport with the others.

Sophie finished the braid and tied it off with a purple ribbon. "There. Now you look scary."

Elliot touched it experimentally, then grinned. "How do I look?" His eyes were bright with childlike delight.

A sob bubbled up in my throat, my eyes watering as I watched him be a kid. I'd always wondered when he would be allowed to be a child, but I'd finally got my answer, and watching him be as he should have been filled me with joy so overwhelming my chest ached.

"It brings out your eyes," Sophie said



matter-of-factly. "But you still look like you."

That's when Elliot spotted me in the doorway. His face lit up instantly. "Mummy, Daddy!:

He launched himself off the bed and crashed into us, wrapping his arms around our waist. I caught him, stumbling slightly, my hand automatically going to his hair—to the careful braid Sophie had woven.

"Hey, little warrior," I murmured, pressing a kiss to the top of his head.

Sophie was already sliding off her bed, more dignified in her approach but no less eager. "Aunty Eve! Uncle Luci! Are you done with the boring grown-up stuff?"

"For now," I said, opening my other arm so she could tuck herself against my side. Over their heads, I met Micah's eyes. He was still on his bed, uncertain, as if he wasn't sure he was included in this. "You too, Micah. Come here."

He hesitated, then carefully set his book aside and crossed the room. When I pulled him into the embrace, he went rigid for just a moment before melting into it, his small shoulders shaking slightly.



Hades has no qualms about it.

He was quiet.

I looked at Micah, his story playing back in my mind. His parents had died. He'd been running for his life through hostile territory. This type of security must be jarring, even though he was a couple years older than the other kids. It was obvious that malnutrition had left its mark on him. 1

"You're all safe here," I said quietly, meaning it with every fiber of my being. "I promise."

"We know," Sophie said, pulling back slightly, she looked up at me with those too-old eyes. "You and Uncle Luci are going to fight the bad people, right? The ones who hurt everyone? Elliot told me."

Elliot nodded with pride and winked with both eyes.

My throat closed. How did I explain to a six-year-old that war wasn't that simple? That there were no purely good or bad sides, only people making impossible choices?

"We're going to protect everyone we can," I said instead. "Including you three."



Micah pulled back slightly, his small hands still clutching my sleeve. His voice was barely above a whisper when he spoke. "Can I... can I see big sister?"

My heart squeezed.

"She's in the lab right now, sweetheart," I said gently, smoothing his long blonde hair back from his forehead. "She's working on something very important that's going to help keep everyone safe."

His face fell, and I watched his bottom lip tremble. "But... but I haven't seen her all day. She promised she'd tuck me in."

"I know, she didn't forget about you. She just—"

A knock at the door interrupted me. Kael stood in the doorway, and I noticed immediately that he was carrying a tablet. His expression was soft and when his eyes found Micah, they gentled even further.

"I thought this might help," he said, stepping into the room. "Your sister is still in the lab, but..." He crouched down to Micah's level, offering the tablet. "She wanted to see you too."

Micah's eyes went wide. "Really?"



Kael nodded, tapping the screen. Within seconds, the video call connected, and Thea's face appeared. She was still in her white lab coat, exhaustion evident in the dark circles under her eyes and the way her hair had started to escape its bun. But the moment she saw her little brother, her entire expression transformed.

"Hi, Mickey," she said, her voice warm despite the fatigue.

"Thea," Micah's face lit up like the sun breaking through clouds. He grabbed the tablet from Kael, clutching it close. "You're wearing the white coat!"

Thea smiled, though I saw it waver slightly. "I am. I'm doing real science tonight."

Micah reached out, his small fingers touching the screen where her coat was visible. "It reminds me of..." His voice trailed off, and his lips began to tremble. "It reminds me of daddy's."

The air in the room went still.

Thea's composure cracked. Her eyes filled with tears she was clearly fighting to hold back. "Like daddy," she whispered, her voice breaking on the words.



I felt Hades's hand on my shoulder—I hadn't even realized he'd moved closer. We stood there, witnesses to this moment of shared grief between siblings who'd lost their father.

"He would be proud of you," Thea continued, her voice steadier now but thick with emotion. "So proud. You're being so brave, Micah. So, so brave."

Micah wiped at his eyes with the back of his hand. "Are you coming back soon?"

"I'll see you first thing in the morning," Thea promised. "And I'll snuggle with you until you fall asleep again, okay? Just like always."

"Promise?"

"I promise." She leaned closer to the camera, as if she could somehow reach through the screen to touch him. "Tell me about your day. Did you... did you make new friends?"

I heard the stammer in her voice—the worry of an older sister who'd been torn away from her brother, who couldn't be there to protect him, to make sure he was adjusting.

Micah glanced at Elliot and Sophie, then back at the screen. His voice dropped to a whisper, as if

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sharing a secret. "Elliot has pointy teeth."
Beside me, Elliot touched his own teeth
self-consciously.

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