

Too Close to the Son

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“Lo, ‘tis I, archangel Ralaziel. I have come to bless thee with holy foresight.” Isaac bellowed, or at least tried to. The ridiculous feathered mask he was wearing made it quite hard—his father loved to overdo it on the costumes.

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The ropes attached to his belt pulled uncomfortably taut as he was lowered down from the catwalk above the stage. In moments he’d be in full view of the audience. It was his first time as the archangel, and he had been dreading this moment. He didn’t particularly fear heights, and normally he loved making his entrance onstage, but he hated the thought of wobbling down in front of the audience in this gaudy costume and these clunky false wings. His father, who usually played Ralaziel, and who ran the theatre and wrote the play, had assured him that no one would laugh, but he ~~he~~ Isaac wasn’t convinced. He loved to feel in charge of the audience, to dazzle and dance for them, but the costume had thrown him off. It didn’t help that his father had also enigmatically told Isaac to prepare for “something magical” when ~~they~~ the audience all saw him for the first time.

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A paranoid little voice in his head kept telling him it was obviously some horrid practical joke. He knew his father loved him, but since his mother died, his father had always tried to impress Isaac in strange and often humiliating ways, presumably to bond or to compensate or something. It was hard for Isaac to feel grateful if he was the one being laughed at.

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As his face cleared the curtain above the stage and he could see the audience for the first time, Isaac pressed the button on his concealed harness that ~~un~~bound his wings.

With a snap, the wingsy unfurled to their full length, loosing a few feathers which fell rather quickly and undramatically to the stage. Isaac waited for the inevitable laughter.

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The audience didn't seem to care. As the wings sprang open, an audible susurratation of gasps and whispers drifted up from the auditorium. Immediately, Isaac's perspective shifted—he was the archangel, come with power and knowledge. His wings were divine art, not feather and paper imitation; his face was a terrible beauty, he worewearing no mask—such things were beneath an archangel. *All* things were.

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Isaac loved performing. It was the one good thing about living with his father. He had grown up amongst actors and jugglers and absorbed their enthusiasm. There was something intoxicating about being the center of whatever little world was created on the stage. The audience could only look in, but he was a part of it. Without him it wouldn't work.

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He was feeling it now. The audience was a mesmerizsing toy for him to play with.

Ralaziel drifted down with heavenly authority, his wings fluttering a little.

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"Look upon my visage of grace; know me as you know the sky." Isaac boomed. The dialogue could do with some work, he thought to himself.

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"Mercy, great one! We are but humble worshippers," warbled Ed, his fellow cast member, supplicating melodramatically.

"Nay! I bring only truth. Mercy must be earned." The audience seemed as entranced by Isaac as he was by them. Without thinking, he reared up, pointing a finger to smite his cowering believers with the terrible knowledge they sought. At the same moment,

he realized that he shouldn't have been able to raise himself in such a way, given how he was dangling from ropes and not actually flying. For now, it didn't matter. He was Ralaziel.

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“Thou art the chosen! Our lord has deigned to burden thee with sacred duty. You must . . .”

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As Isaac rattled through his monologue he noticed his voice sounded strange, as if it had been deepened and sharpened. An echoing timbre that evoked power and authority had sprung, miraculously, from his still-developing sixteen-year-old throat. It sounded powerful and a little alien, which he knew should have put him off, but there in the moment it just spurred him on. The audience was rapt. Through the slits in his mask, Isaac could see ~~them the people~~ leaning forward ~~with~~ avid attention. He had convinced them that he was the archangel.

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And so he was.

Ralaziel flew with powerful intent, cutting through the air as a figure of judgement and awe. His wings quivered, a shimmering white glow spreading across their magnificent length. About his head ethereal light began to shine. His reverent flock gasped and shifted uncomfortably, caught between awe and fear in the face of his divine power. Isaac looked on from somewhere deep within the archangel's mind, ~~astonished with astonishment,~~ ~~W~~what was happening?

He soared through the sky, his every proclamation a thundering truth, his every movement an example of perfect grace. Upon his wings, he flapped and swooped over the heads of his congregation, unfettered by mortal realities. He would smite the . . .

—The ropes were gone. The ropes were gone! Isaac’s astonishment briefly cut through whatever strange force was making him dream he was Ralaziel. The ropes that were supposed to suspend him in the air had detached from his harness! He could see them in the corner of his vision being reeled back up to the catwalk like writhing snakes. Yet he was still hovering ten feet above the stage, his wings glowing unnaturally. How was this possible?

Just as Isaac froze in terror and confusion, there was a fresh gasp from the audience, a wave of suspended disbelief, and he was pulled back into the Ralaziel dream-state.

—“Now be about your task lest you face the displeasure of the sea, sky, and earth!” With that, he flapped his impressive wings once and shot back up to the catwalk, out of sight. Around him, the ropes lay neatly coiled—slack, detached, and useless.

—Another small human stood there, grinning inanely at the archangel. Before Ralaziel could react, ~~it~~ the human reached out and tore his face ~~from his head off~~. No... his mask. Isaac’s father had removed his son’s mask. Isaac stood there, bewildered. ~~W~~ what had just happened? He could hear the play below; the audience were presumably still deep in fantasy. He fingered the prop wings he wore—still very much props, nothing more than cheap paint and rotting feathers. Yet they had been glowing; he had flapped them! Had he... flown?

—“Father, what...”

—“Enjoy yourself?” his father ~~said~~asked, his grin widening.

—“What just happened? The wings moved! And the shone like torches! The ropes...”

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Commented [SU5]: Change OK? Changed so that the next sentence didn't make the reader get confused and think that the human "tore his face from his mask."

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