



Prologue

“Come on, get up and stretch your legs,” a male swan prompted to a female one. In a nest of reeds and moss, she sat on her egg. A cygnet, or a baby swan, squirmed at her side.

“No!” the she-swan looked horrified. “How could I leave these two all alone? I would never forgive myself if anything happened to them.” She drew the newborn even closer to her, and wrapped it in the security of her wing.

“Nothing will happen,” the male murmured soothingly. “Our other daughters will look over them. They’re almost full-grown. They’re responsible enough, and I’m sure they would never forgive themselves either if anything happened.”

“I suppose you’re right,” she sighed. “But I can’t help but worry.”

“Of course you do. And I do too. But they’re going to be okay.”

The two swans took off into the air. Sunlight dappled their wings with gold. Towering, bushy trees were nothing more than countless specks in the distance. The view was amazing. It felt like they ruled the world.

Suddenly, the male halted in the air. His carefree eyes hardened as he turned to his mate. “More swans are getting killed every day,” he told her abruptly. “Our species can’t afford these losses.”

“Yes,” she agreed, her voice slightly out of breath from being out of practice. “That’s why we should head back now and take care of our babies.”

“I’m serious.” He raised his voice louder in frustration. “How can we raise our cygnets in a place like this? Hunters are getting closer and closer to the lake everyday. What will happen then?”

Her dark, beautiful eyes shone in the light. “We move. It would be hard with them, but we could do it. We still have plenty of time before it gets cold.”

He moved closer to her, their wings beating in rhythm so they wouldn't overlap. "I'd do anything with you."

"And we would do anything for our cygnets. It's not about us anymore. It's all about them."

"Of course." He shrugged off her comment casually, though inside he felt the sting.

Suddenly, three loud bangs echoed throughout the sky. Hunters! Their eyes met for a moment, their fear reflected in each other's. They were clearly visible and vulnerable in the sky. It would be safer hiding in the trees.

With an unspoken agreement, the two swans made a sharp dive toward the forest. Another bang went off. He let out a painful honk and his left wing went limp. In desperation, he tried to fly with the other wing, but it was of no use. A small dark scarlet hole stood out in his feathers. His icy white wing began to get soaked in blood as he helplessly plummeted down, down, down...

"No!" She dived down after him, but it was too late. As she reached the trees, she watched in horror as Hunters picked up her wounded mate, who was well alive but hurt, and shoved him into a metal enclosure before leaving.

He was gone.