

# GREEN LANTERN

## AGAINST EVIL'S MIGHT



# Chapter One

## Hal

My dad was a pilot, and to me, that was the greatest job in the world. He flew for Ferris Air, working alongside his good friend Carl Ferris, and I wanted nothing more than to follow in his footsteps. I used to sneak out of school and slip under a loose section of the fence at the airfield, just to watch him fly. He always knew I was there, I could tell, but he never called me out on it. Maybe he figured I was learning more out there than I ever would in a classroom.

Unlike my brothers, I was the only one who shared his love for the sky. Jack, my older brother, took after our mother always cautious, always worried. And Jim? He was too young to have an opinion about anything yet. But my dad saw it in me, the same passion he had. And for an eight-year-old kid, knowing that meant everything.

## 13 Years Later

The planes screamed across the sky as I pulled into work at Arden Aeronautics. Most people hear jet engines and think of noise pollution, I hear freedom. That high-pitched roar, the sheer power behind it, was music to my ears, more beautiful than Beethoven. Every morning, watching those jets take off reminded me of why I belonged here.

Inside, I flashed my ID badge and made my way to my locker, getting ready for the day. As I suited up, Laminski, one of the pilots, walked by with a grin. "Jordan. Are we ready to fly today?"

I smirked. "We'll get her in the air, don't you worry."

Arden was test-flying a new line of jets: fast, sleek, with enough kick to make your stomach drop. Exactly the kind of plane I lived for. I headed straight to the hangar, climbed into the cockpit, and ran through the pre-flight routine like it was second nature. Gauges, check. Systems, check. Everything up to code.

Then, I sat there, hands on the controls, imagining the moment I'd push this beauty past Mach One. I could almost hear the sonic boom, feel the thrill of the sky opening up around me.

Oh, the sound she would make, it would be fantastic.

Laminski's voice snapped me out of my daydream. "Jordan! What the hell are you doing in my cockpit? Dawdling? You and Pieface still need to check the fuel levels."

I exhaled sharply, dragging myself back to reality. Pieface. His real name was Tom Kalmaku, but the guys in the hangar had stuck him with that nickname in part because he was half Eskimo and half Asian, and mostly because they thought they were clever. They weren't.

"Wow, Laminski, real original," I muttered, climbing out of the seat.

"Well, you're pretty dumb for a wannabe pilot," he shot back. "Is my plane ready or not?"

I clenched my jaw, grabbed my tools, and got to work. "Almost done with the final checks."

It stung, but it was the truth. I wasn't a pilot. Just a mechanic.

I finished the final checks with Tom just as Laminski roared into the sky, leaving twin trails of vapor in his wake. I shielded my eyes, watching the jet disappear into the blue, the rumble of its engines settling deep in my chest.

"Do you wish you were up there?" Tom asked, his voice pulling me back to the ground.

I let out a breath, my eyes drifting down. "Every damn minute, Tom."

"So why not? Wasn't your dad best friends with Mr. Arden?"

I laughed dryly. "That's the only reason I even have this job. I didn't know a damn thing about mechanics when I started, you taught me everything. I just wanted to be near the planes. That was the favor, Tom."

Tom hesitated, then shrugged. "Well, maybe you can talk to the new owners. I hear Arden's selling out to Ferris Air."

I froze mid-step. "Ferris Air is buying Arden Aeronautics?"

"Yeah, heard it through the grapevine. Arden's looking to retire, and business isn't what it used to be. Carl Ferris came along with an offer he couldn't refuse."

My hands clenched into fists. "Well, if Ferris is in, I'm out."

Tom frowned. "That's a lot of hate for Ferris Air. Yeah, their safety record isn't great, but that doesn't affect us."

I turned to him, my jaw tight. "My dad flew with Carl Ferris and later for him. And those safety records? That's exactly why I'll never work for them."

## 12 Years Earlier

Carl Ferris was one of my dad's old Air Force buddies. They built Ferris Air together from the ground up, with my dad as their top test pilot. Carl always said he wouldn't trust his planes with anyone else. My mom hated it. She worried constantly, but my dad? He never did. He'd just smile and say, "It's a job someone's gotta do. Good thing I love it."

I loved it too.

That day, like so many before, I snuck onto the airfield, crawling under the same loose section of fence I always used. But this time, Dad spotted me.

Instead of taking me back to school, he walked over, shrugged off his worn, brown flight jacket, and draped it over my shoulders. It smelled like oil, leather, and the sky.

"Keep it warm for me."

I stared up at him, stunned. This wasn't just any jacket—it had our name JORDAN stitched right onto it.

"You got it, Dad." I beamed, holding it close like a treasure.

Then he left for the hangar, and I wandered to the tarmac where a small crowd had gathered. Carl Ferris stood near the front, talking with investors, so I figured I'd blend in there. A girl about my age peeked out from behind Carl's leg. Dark hair, sharp eyes, way too confident.

"My dad owns that plane," she said, chin high.

I grinned. "Well, my dad gets to fly it." That shut her up.

We both turned to the sky as my dad took off. My dad never just flew a plane, he pushed it. The jet carved through the clouds like a blade, rolling, climbing, diving. A true master at work.

Then, the radio crackled to life in Carl's hand.

"Carl, come in. Something's off."

Carl pressed the radio to his ear. "What is it, Martin?"

A low rumble bled through the speakers. Not a good sound.

"She's not handling right. I'm getting warning lights all over the dash. I'm gonna bring her down, away from the crowd."

Carl tensed. He pulled out a pair of binoculars, scanning the jet. "There's no external damage. Everything checked out before takeoff. We've got investors watching, Martin. Keep her in the sky."

I remember the way my dad's voice changed, just slightly. "No can do, Carl."

My dad tried to pull up for one last loop, but the plane jerked violently. The nose tilted, the jet spiraled. I heard gasps from the crowd, but I couldn't move. Couldn't breathe. The plane was falling.

Then, somehow, he caught it.

With a level of control that only a handful of pilots in the world had, he straightened out, guiding the jet toward the landing strip. I exhaled for the first time in what felt like forever. The wheels hit the tarmac. Sparks flew. But he'd done it. He'd saved everyone.

The canopy popped open, and through the smoke and heatwaves, he locked eyes with me.

Everything was fine.

Then...

BOOM.

The jet erupted into fire. The explosion swallowed everything: flames, heat, a deafening roar that tore through my skull. I remember hitting the ground hard, the world spinning, my head ringing. Then nothing.

The first thing I felt when I woke up was pain. The second thing was Jack's palm slapping me across the face.

"Are you an idiot?"

I blinked, still dazed. "What?"

Jack's face was red, furious, but his eyes were wet.

"I said, are you an idiot? First, you sneak out of school and make Mom worry sick. Then, she hears you got caught in the explosion that..." He stopped himself, his voice cracking. "That killed Dad."

The words hit me like a hammer to the chest.

"Dad's dead?" I whispered, blinking hard, waiting for my brain to catch up.

Jack scoffed, voice sharp as glass. "No, he survived a goddamn fireball."

Then he punched my arm, hard. "Yeah, of course, he's dead, you moron."

When Mom came in later, she was shaking and not with grief, but rage. She yelled at me for sneaking off. For scaring her half to death. For making her live through the worst day of her life while also having to worry about me. Jim, still just a kid, clung to her leg, wearing earmuffs to drown out the shouting.

Jack and Mom were always on the same wavelength. Blame first, grieve later.

Then came the final blow.

"You are never going near Ferris Air again," she told me, her voice steel. "Do you understand me, Hal? Never."

That should've been the end of it.

But I'd heard the radio. I'd heard Carl Ferris tell my father to stay in the air when he knew something was wrong. Seconds. A few seconds. That was the difference between my dad walking away from that crash and my dad dying in a fireball. And Carl Ferris took those seconds away. I would never forgive him.

But I couldn't stay away from the planes. I needed them. So, I found a new way in.

Arden Aeronautics became my secret. It wasn't Ferris Air, so I wasn't technically breaking Mom's rules. But I had to be near the sky. It was the only way I could honor my dad. But that wasn't the only reason. One day, I was going to fly. And one day, I was going to prove that I would never make the same mistake Carl Ferris did.

# Chapter Two

Hal

Present Day

I threw open the office door without knocking, my pulse hammering in my ears. "Why are you selling out?"

Mr. Arden looked up from his desk, startled. He looked older than I remembered, more worn, more tired. Lines creased his face like an old flight map, and for the first time, I saw the weight of the years he'd spent running this place.

"Hal?" His voice was calm, but his eyes flickered with something, guilt maybe.

"You're selling to Ferris Air? After what they did to my father? After what they did to your friend?" My voice rose, but I didn't care.

Arden exhaled slowly and leaned back in his chair. "Hal, I'm getting older. This place isn't doing as well as it used to. I wish I could keep up, but it's a young man's game. I'm cashing in my chips."

His voice was steady, but it only made my blood boil more. "So, is Carl coming here?" I demanded.

A new voice, smooth and self-assured, answered from behind me.

"Actually, my father won't be joining us today."

I turned and a woman stood in the doorway, one arm tucked under a neatly folded file of papers, the other resting casually at her side. Her black hair fell just to her shoulders, sleek and perfectly styled. She wore a sapphire-blue blazer and matching tailored pants, the color standing out like jet metal against the dim office light. She looked like someone who belonged in boardrooms, not airfields. She was polished, poised, and in total control.

Arden stood, motioning toward her. "I'm sure you remember Carol, Hal. Carl's daughter."

Carol Ferris. I did remember her, but only barely, a flash of dark hair peeking out from behind Carl Ferris's leg, her voice smug as she told me her dad owned the plane my dad was flying. She had been just a kid then, all wide eyes and entitled air. Now, there was nothing childish about her.

Her air of spoiled privilege had been replaced with something else, confidence. Authority.

She stepped forward, extending a hand. "Nice to meet you, Hal. I'm Carol Ferris. I'll be taking over for Mr. Arden."

She didn't remember me. Not the way I remembered her.

I ignored her handshake. "So, Carl won't be joining us here?" I said, blunt as ever.

Carol withdrew her hand smoothly, unfazed. "My father leaves the day-to-day operations to me. He likes his golf games too much. I couldn't get him away from Palm Springs if I wanted to." She chuckled slightly, as if it were funny.

It wasn't. I turned on my heel and walked out without another word.

I wouldn't work for Ferris Air. That was never an option.

So, I started looking for other jobs. So did the rest of the crew. At first, I thought they were leaving for the same reason I was—some kind of unspoken grudge against Carl Ferris. But I was wrong.

They weren't leaving because of him. They were leaving because of her.

It wasn't about loyalty, or principle, or justice. It was because they couldn't stomach the idea of working under a woman. They didn't believe Carl Ferris would actually hand his company over to his daughter.

"Flying's a man's job," I overheard one of them grumble in the breakroom. "What the hell does she know about running an airfield?"

Sexist pigs. The whole lot of them.

I wasn't going to let their reasons stop me. I had my own. My righteous anger was all I needed.

As I made my way toward Carol's office, I could hear her on the phone, her voice strained but steady.

"Laminski, I know you've been here for years. I'm willing to offer a signing bonus, extra PTO, whatever it takes to"

She paused. I could hear it in her voice, the hope that maybe, just maybe, she could keep this place from falling apart.

Then she sighed. "I see. Well... thank you for your time."

The line went dead.

She had picked the wrong pilot to beg. Laminski was probably the biggest sexist in the hangar. If she thought he'd ever work under her, she was wasting her breath.

Before she could even set the phone down, I stepped inside and placed my resignation on her desk.

She looked up at me. Her face was tired, but her expression was unreadable. "I'm sorry, Hal."

I frowned, thrown off. "What for?"

She ran a hand through her hair, exhaling slowly. "For pretending I didn't know you before. I'm sure neither of us has forgotten that day on the tarmac. I just thought it would be more professional not to bring up our baggage."

I scoffed. "Personally, I have nothing against you, Carol. But I can't work here knowing the Ferris name is on the building." I tapped my resignation. "I quit."

For a second, she just stared at it. Then she pushed it back toward me. "Then fly for me. Not my dad. Fly for Carol."

I let out a dry laugh. "I can't fly, Carol."

She leaned forward, arms crossed and arched a knowing brow. "Your time in the Air Force tells a different story."

### 3 Years Earlier

My mother hovered like a rescue chopper my entire childhood, always watching, always sheltering, always pulling me back to the ground. She lived in constant fear of losing another part of our family, and she made damn sure her sons never took risks. Never strayed too far. Never got too close to the sky.

So, the night before my eighteenth birthday, I packed a bag and left home.

I didn't bother saying goodbye.

I camped out in front of the Air Force recruitment office, my duffel slung over my shoulder, waiting for the doors to open. The moment they did, I was ready to sign on the dotted line. Ready to finally get my chance to fly.

But then they told me I wouldn't ship out for a few months.

That was a punch to the gut. I had planned for this to be clean and quick—sign up, ship out, and never look back. Instead, I had to crawl back through my window before dawn and

spend the next few months pretending like I hadn't already made my escape. Counting down the days until I could really leave.

The morning, I was set to leave for basic training, I left a note on the kitchen table. It was short. To the point. No room for argument. "Mom, I'm an adult now. I have to do this. You can't stop me. By the time you see this, I'll already be gone."

By the time she saw it, I'd already be enlisted. There'd be nothing she could do to stop me.

Basic training was hell.

Brutal. Unforgiving. Grueling.

I learned two things about myself very quickly one, I was damn good in the air. And two, I had a problem with authority.

Drill instructors? Didn't like me. Superiors? Tired of me five minutes in. Turns out, when a guy doesn't know when to shut his mouth, the military has a way of breaking that habit.

But I pushed through. I earned my way up and when the day finally came, the day I climbed into the cockpit for real, when my hands closed around the controls and my feet hit the pedals. It was like everything clicked into place. I wasn't meant to be on the ground. I never was.

Every time I took off, it felt like I was shedding all my baggage on the runway. Every worry, every memory, every chain tying me down was gone. For the first time in my life, I was free. Those were the best days of my life.

I never heard from my family, though not once.

I figured my mom had found the note and made good on her promise to keep me out of danger, by pretending I didn't exist. Jack probably hated me. Hell, he already did before I left. Cutting me off completely would've just made his life easier.

But Jim? I worried about Jim.

Growing up, he idolized me. Followed me around like a shadow. I told myself he'd be better off without me, that he had Jack and Mom to look after him. But deep down, I knew the truth. I left him behind.

And if he held a grudge? I couldn't blame him.

So, I told myself they'd never talk to me again and that was okay.

Until one day, Jim showed up. Parked right outside one of the bars where Air Force guys liked to kill time, waiting for me.

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I stepped out of the bar into the cool night air, rubbing the exhaustion from my eyes. That's when I saw him.

Jim, my brother who I hadn't spoken to in years.

He was leaning against his car, arms crossed, his face pale and hollow, like he'd just seen a ghost. I had no idea how long he'd been waiting there, but something in his stance—the stiffness, the heaviness in his eyes—told me this wasn't a casual visit.

"Jim?" I called out, walking toward him, ready to pull him into a hug.

He lifted a hand. Stopping me cold.

"It's Mom, Hal." His voice was thin, shaking. "She's really sick. The doctors say she doesn't have long."

It felt like my stomach had dropped out of my body. I reached for the door handle of his car without thinking. "Then let's go see her. What the hell are we waiting for?"

The door was locked.

Jim let out a slow, unsteady breath. "I'm not supposed to be here."

I turned to him, confusion giving way to anger. "What are you talking about?"

"Jack doesn't think you deserve to know."

My blood ran hot. "Screw Jack."

Jim winced at my words, but he didn't argue. Instead, he shifted on his feet, like standing still physically hurt him. "I'm sorry, Hal. But... I agree with him."

That knocked the wind out of me worse than the news itself.

"What?"

Jim's voice cracked. "Mom's condition is fragile. The doctors say any undue stress could make it worse. And you—" He gulped, the weight of what he was saying breaking him apart from the inside out. "Mom always stressed about you leaving. You showing up now, after all these years, after everything? It'll just make it worse."

His words settled into my bones like a knife twisting in slow motion. I did this. I killed her.

I tried to say something, but the words wouldn't come.

Jim's throat bobbed as he swallowed, his own pain raw in his expression. "I thought you had a right to know... but you can't come back. Not unless you put this obsession with planes behind you."

I felt the world tilt sideways. I had never agreed with my mother's fear, her suffocating parenting, her paranoia. I had spent my whole life running from it. But the thought of her dying?

I wasn't ready for that. Not even close.

"Uh... uh, thanks for telling me, Jim." It was all I could manage. My voice felt foreign, detached, like I wasn't really in my body anymore.

Jim nodded, the sorrow in his eyes too much to face. "Of course, Hal." Then he climbed into his car and drove away.

Everything after that was a blur. The trip back to base. The walk up the stairs to my room. The silence that crushed me from the inside out. I couldn't quit. Flying was in my blood, my bones, my DNA. But I couldn't see my mother unless I let it go.

So, the next morning, I did the only thing I could think of, I got up early, suited up, and took a jet out on a joyride. If I couldn't quit, I'd make damn sure they kicked me out.

I flew like it was my last time in the sky. Because it was. The engines roared. The jet cut through the clouds. I pushed it to the limits—higher, faster, past everything I was supposed to do. I wanted to feel it, every second of the air, every inch of the sky. And when I finally landed, there was a whole squad of soldiers waiting for me.

My commanding officer stood in the center, his expression hard as steel. He stepped forward. "Jordan, you just lost every privilege you had. But I'm not kicking you out."

I blinked. Not good enough.

Before he could say another word, my fist was already flying. I felt the crack of knuckles against his face, the shockwave rippling up my arm.

That did the trick. Dishonorably discharged. All my certifications revoked. No more flying. I had thrown everything away.

I sat at the bus stop, watching as it pulled up, its doors hissing open. I stepped inside, knowing exactly where it was taking me.

The hospital.

Jack spotted me the second I walked through the doors. His expression darkened. Then, before I could brace myself, he shoved Jim aside and stormed toward me.

"You're not welcome here," he said, voice low, seething.

I clenched my fists, my voice still raw from the wound I had just torn open in myself. "I just got myself kicked out of the Air Force, Jack. Don't make me fight you too."

Before he could respond, movement exploded outside Mom's hospital room. Doctors shouting. Nurses moving fast. A crash cart wheeled past. I tried to move toward it. Toward her.

Jack blocked me. "You think that fixes the years of heartache you caused?"

I didn't care. I tried to push past him. "Get out of my way, Jack."

He held firm. His body was a damn wall in front of me.

"She is dying because of you, Hal." His voice was breaking now, but his fury didn't waver. "Because of a lifetime of worrying about you. You ran off, and she spent every single day afraid you'd end up like Dad. And it ate her alive."

I barely heard him. I could see through the doorway—the heart monitor. The line went flat.

A doctor stepped out of the room, solemn, quiet, professional. "I'm sorry... but your mother just passed away. Her body couldn't fight any longer."

My breath caught. I turned back to Jack, my vision blurring, my fists tightening. I wanted to say something. Scream something. Punch something.

But there was nothing to say. Nothing to fight. Just a hollow ache in my chest swallowing me whole.

So, I did the only thing I could. I walked away.

I was ruined. Everything I had built my life around, every dream, every ounce of purpose was gone. The Air Force had been my entire world, and now I had nothing. The days blurred together as I struggled to get my footing, trying to convince myself that I wasn't completely lost. But the truth was, I didn't know who I was without the sky.

I searched for work anywhere I could, chasing down leads, making calls, but being dishonorably discharged from the Air Force didn't exactly look good on a résumé. No one wanted to take the risk on a disgraced pilot. Every job I applied for, every door I knocked on slammed shut before I could even step through it.

Desperation set in. I burned through every resource, every contact, every scrap of goodwill I had left. And when there was nothing else, I turned to the past.

I pulled out my phone and dialed the number of one of my dad's old friends. Nathaniel Arden.

I had already applied to Arden Aeronautics as a test pilot, but they never called back. Maybe if I reached out to the man at the top, I could get something moving. Maybe he'd remember my father. Maybe that would be enough.

The phone rang. Once. Twice. Then, a familiar gravelly voice answered.

"Hal Jordan. Been a long time, son."

I forced myself to sound confident. "Mr. Arden, I applied for a position as a test pilot at your company, but I never heard back. I was hoping..."

"Hal." His voice was firm, but not unkind. "You know I can't hire you as a test pilot."

I felt the words like a punch to the gut. I knew it was coming but hearing it out loud made it real. My throat tightened. My pride screamed at me to just hang up, to stop humiliating myself, but I wasn't ready to let go.

I switched to pleading. "I don't care about flying anymore. I just... I just need to be near the planes."

There was silence on the other end of the line. Then, finally, a sigh. "You willing to work as a mechanic?"

The question caught me off guard. "A mechanic?"

"You'd train under one of my best guys, Tom Kalmaku. You'd be on the ground, in the hangar, working with the machines. It's not flying, Hal, but it's as close as you're gonna get."

I closed my eyes. It wasn't what I wanted. It wasn't even close. But it was something.

"I'll take it," I said, gripping the phone like it was the last lifeline I had.

Even if I never flew again, at least I wouldn't be completely cut off from the one thing that still made sense in my life.

# Chapter Three

Hal

Present Day

"Hal? Hal, did you hear me?" Carol's voice cut through the fog of my thoughts, snapping me back to the present. I blinked, pulling myself out of the memories that had been clawing at me. She was watching me expectantly, her hands resting on her desk, fingers drumming anxiously.

"I need you to stay on," she repeated, more firmly this time. "So, I'm willing to offer you a test pilot position."

I stared at her, stunned. A test pilot position. My mind stalled on the words, like an engine refusing to turn over. "Even with my record?" I finally asked.

Carol exhaled, looking down, rubbing her temple like she was trying to fight off a headache. "Hal, I don't know if you've noticed, but I am hemorrhaging pilots." She looked back up at me then, her eyes sharp, determined. "I know you're good. One of the best even. You're just a little... reckless at times."

I snorted. "Not saying yes, but... how soon could I be back in the air?"

"You'd have to be re-tested and re-certified first," she said. "That means time in the simulators, proving you can handle it. But if all goes well, we could have you flying again soon."

I let the words roll around in my head, weighing the offer. This wasn't Carl. This was Carol. And she was giving me the one thing I thought I'd never get again, the chance to tear open the sky. The chance to be where I belonged. That alone was worth anything.

"Okay. Deal."

Carol let out a breath she had probably been holding since she made the offer. "Good. I'll send in the paperwork now. Tomorrow morning, we'll get you started in the simulator."

"Yes, ma'am."

I grabbed the resignation letter off her desk, crumpling it in my fist as I turned and strode out of the office.

The second I stepped outside, I tilted my head back, staring up at the endless stretch of blue. The sky had never felt so close. I was going back. My life was finally getting back on track, and nothing could stop me now.

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The flight simulations were a joke, it all kicked back in like muscle memory, instinct, or second nature. I knocked them out one after the other, each one just another box to check before I could get back where I belonged. Every morning, I was the first one in, strapping into the simulator before most people had even had their first cup of coffee.

The cockpit may have been fake, the screens and controls nothing more than a high-tech illusion, but it didn't matter. The motions were real. The feeling of acceleration, the way my hands moved over the controls, the split-second decisions. It all felt right. Like slipping into an old, well-worn flight jacket.

And then came the morning of my final test.

I woke up before my alarm even had the chance to go off, adrenaline already pumping. This was it. The last step. The last hoop to jump through before I could really fly again. I had been clawing my way back to the sky, and now, with just one more flawless run in the simulator, it was finally within reach.

I stepped into the hangar, inhaling the faint scent of fuel and metal, a smell that had been burned into my senses for as long as I could remember. Everything in me knew that today was going to be perfect.

## Abin Sur

Flames roared around me, the heat pressing in from all sides as my ship plunged through the atmosphere. The hull screamed in protest, metal warping and cracking under the pressure. I fought to keep control, but it was no use. The sky was a furnace, the ground rushing toward me faster than I could react.

The impact was violent. My ship ripped into the Earth, carving a deep, fiery wound into the land. The force shattered the canopy, sending shards of glass and metal slicing through the air. Smoke curled up in thick plumes, a signal of my destruction.

I barely felt it.

The pain had settled in long before the crash, a cold weight pressing against my chest. My vision blurred as I looked down at the deep green of my uniform, the fabric soaked in red. The wound was bad. Too bad. My breath came in sharp, ragged gasps. This was the end.

I lifted my hand, my fingers trembling as they brushed against the ring on my finger. The emerald light pulsed weakly, mirroring the slowing beat of my heart. There was no time.

I swallowed the pain and whispered, "Find one that is worthy. Choose well."

The ring pulsed once in response. Then, in a flash of green light, it shot from my hand, streaking into the sky.

I exhaled slowly, my body growing heavier, the darkness creeping in. My duty wasn't finished. But someone else would have to bear it now.

## Hal

As I strapped into the simulator, I flicked on the radio and grinned. "You know, Carol, to celebrate getting one of the best test pilots back in the air, we should go out for drinks. Strictly celebratory, of course."

Static crackled for a moment before her voice came through, crisp and unimpressed. "Hal, this is an open channel. Let's keep the chatter down. And besides, I don't get drinks with my employees."

I chuckled, settling into the cockpit, flipping switches as I ran through the checklist. "Oh, darn. Maybe I need to get fired then?"

"Don't even joke about th..." The line went dead.

I frowned, tapping the radio. "Carol? Carol, you there?" No response.

Sighing, I muttered, "If I have to fly this fake cockpit again, so help me!" and started unstrapping myself. I pushed open the simulator door and froze. The ground wasn't there.

Instead, I was suspended hundreds of feet in the air over Death Valley, surrounded by an eerie, pulsating green glow. Wind rushed past me, my heart slamming against my ribs as I clung to the simulator's edge. This wasn't right. This wasn't possible.

I wasn't in Ferris Air anymore.

The simulator was moving. Being pulled. The green energy dragged it toward a thick column of black smoke rising in the distance. As we got closer, my stomach twisted—because now, through the haze, I could see what was at the center of that smoke.

A ship. An actual spaceship.

The energy carried me closer before gently setting the simulator down on the desert floor. Then, as if it had a mind of its own, the glowing green light streaked toward the wreckage, disappearing inside.

I hesitated only a second before following it.

Twisted metal and scorched debris littered the ground. The ship had been torn apart, as if it had fallen from the sky at full speed. I climbed over the wreckage, ducking beneath a jagged piece of the hull. The green glow flickered just ahead, leading me toward something, no one.

A figure lay sprawled on the ground. He was humanoid but not human. His skin was pinkish, his features sharp, angular. His suit, a deep emerald green, was torn and stained with blood. The glow flickered from a ring on his hand.

And then, he spoke. "Hal Jordan, you have been chosen."

I froze. My name. He knew my name.

"Uh... what?" My voice cracked as I took a cautious step forward. "Do you need help?" His wound was bad, his blood pooling beneath him. I moved to help him, but his breathing was shallow, strained.

"My name is Abin Sur," he rasped, pressing a hand to his wound. "And I am beyond your help. That is why I sent for you."

"You sent for me?" My mind struggled to keep up.

"I am a Green Lantern, a member of an intergalactic peacekeeping force. We are responsible for policing the universe and maintaining order." His voice wavered, but he pushed on. "I was wounded in an altercation and crash-landed on your planet. The succession process was initiated." His fingers twitched, and suddenly, the green ring lifted from his hand, hovering between us. "It seeks one worthy of the ring... and it has chosen you."

I couldn't speak. I couldn't move. This was insane. This was impossible.

"This is a great responsibility," Abin Sur continued, his voice weaker now, his energy fading. "And a great honor. Do you accept?"

I swallowed hard. Every logical instinct screamed no. But something deeper, something louder, a part of me I had never truly understood knew.

This was my destiny. This was what I was meant for.

"I accept." The ring dropped into my palm.

Abin Sur's breathing hitched. He pointed weakly to a lantern-like object, fastened near what remained of the ship's flight controls. "That is your battery. You must recharge the ring every twenty-four hours."

I barely nodded, my mind still spinning.

His body trembled, and he coughed up blood. The pain was overtaking him. Yet, he managed a small chuckle, shaking his head. "An Earthman... who knew?" Then he fell still.

I hesitated before checking for a pulse or where I thought a pulse would be. Nothing.

Reality slammed into me all at once. The ship. The alien. The ring now burning in my palm. The last twenty minutes of my life had rewritten everything I knew.

"Guardians? Space police? What is happening?" My voice barely sounded like my own.

I slipped the ring onto my finger. The second it touched my skin, a pulse of heat shot through my body. The energy exploded outward, knocking me back. I hit the ground hard, landing near the lantern.

The green light rebounded off the ship's energy core and the second the blast struck it, alarms inside the wreckage blared to life. The ship began to shudder, cracks forming along its already-ruined hull. The ground beneath me trembled. I grabbed the lantern and ran.

The second I made it outside, a translucent green dome formed around me. Behind it, the ship and Abin Sur's body disintegrated into nothing.

Gone. Just like that.

My heart pounded as I stared at the empty space where the wreckage had been. *Great. Now I'm stranded in the desert*, I thought.

Before I could even process my next move, the ring on my finger hummed to life.

"BEGINNER PROTOCOL ACTIVATED. NEW SPECIES ARE TO BE ESCORTED TO OA BY THE NEIGHBORING SECTOR GREEN LANTERN. MESSAGE SENT TO TOMAR-RE OF SECTOR 2813. TERRESTRIAL VEHICLE RETURNING TO POINT OF ORIGIN."

My eyes widened as the simulator lifted off the ground.

"Wait, wait, wait!" I scrambled toward it, grabbing the door and hauling myself inside just before it climbed too high.

As I caught my breath, I realized it was heading back toward Ferris Air. I leaned back against the seat, staring at the glowing ring still pulsing on my finger. How the hell was I supposed to explain this?

As the ring guided the simulator back toward Ferris Air, I could hear the muffled commotion below. A crowd had gathered, their voices blending into a distant hum as I descended. The ring pulsed with energy one last time before the voice returned, cold and mechanical.

"Return trip success. Await further instructions. You will be sent for."

Then, with a heavy thump, the simulator touched down, and the glow of the ring faded into nothing.

I exhaled sharply, slipping the ring off my finger and tucking it into my pocket. My fingers were still tingling from the energy, the weight of what had just happened sinking in like a slow-moving storm. Before I could process it, I grabbed the lantern, glancing around before shoving it into the shadows by the door. Out of sight, for now.

The simulator door swung open before I could take another breath. Carol stood there, frozen in place, her expression a mix of shock and simmering frustration.

I met her stare with a lazy grin, forcing a playful, feigned ignorance.

"So... did I pass?"

Her brow furrowed. "What the hell happened?"

I sighed, already prepared. I had crafted the lie on the way back, rehearsing it over and over in my head until it sounded like the truth.

"I honestly have no idea," I said, keeping my voice even and casual. "I was running the simulator, chatting with you, then everything went dark. No warning, no power failure. Just blackout. I tried the radio, but nothing. I tried the door, but it wouldn't open from the inside." I gestured at the now-open hatch. "Not until you opened it just now."

Carol exhaled sharply, rubbing a hand through her hair.

"Ugh. Well... I'm glad you're okay," she muttered, though she still looked suspicious.

"Would hate to lose my new test pilot the day before he's supposed to start."

She bent down, grabbing a duffel bag from the ground.

"But, unfortunately, we can't count that test. Whatever happened, it wasn't a clean run."

She tossed the bag to me without ceremony. "Gonna take some time to get this thing fixed anyway, so... take some time off."

I barely caught the bag before she turned on her heel and walked away.

I unzipped it, recognizing my clothes from my locker. My jaw tightened.

Carol was pissed.

She wasn't letting me back inside, not right now.

I glanced toward the simulator, then to the hidden lantern. With one last look at Carol's retreating form, I shoved the lantern into the duffel bag and slung it over my shoulder.

Without another word, I walked off the airfield, the weight of the ring still heavy in my pocket.

# Chapter Four

## Hal

Back at my apartment, I pulled the ring from my pocket, turning it over in my palm. It was small, unbelievably so for something that held so much power. The smooth metal felt cool against my fingers, yet it pulsed with an energy that hummed beneath the surface, like a barely restrained storm.

Then, I reached into the duffel bag and pulled out the battery, the lantern. Seeing it in the open, away from the wreckage and the chaos of the crash, I finally got a good look at it. The dark green housing surrounded a brilliant core of shifting emerald light, pulsating like a living thing. It wasn't just glowing. It was breathing. It was alive in a way I didn't understand, and I found myself mesmerized by it.

Then, the ring spoke.

"Green Lantern Tomar-Re of Sector 2813 on descent."

The words snapped me out of my trance. My mind flashed back to Abin Sur's ship, still picturing the wreckage in the desert.

"Where is he landing?" I asked, half-expecting another crash site.

"A Green Lantern needs no spacecraft to fly."

Before I could process that, the ring blinked twice.

"Lantern 2813 has initiated rendezvous mode."

The glow flared up around me before I could react. I barely managed to grab the lantern before the energy yanked me into the sky.

Wind rushed past as I was lifted from my apartment, my body enveloped in the green light once more. I barely had time to orient myself before I realized we were heading back to the desert. It seemed as good a place as any to meet an alien.

As I descended, I spotted him immediately, a figure clad in a green uniform similar to Abin Sur's, but distinct. The cut of the fabric, the design, it carried the same authority, but it wasn't identical. But what stood out the most was his face. His beak.

He wasn't humanoid like Abin Sur. He was avian, his head sleek, his eyes sharp, his features refined yet completely alien.

The alien raised his two-fingered hand in greeting. "Greetings, Hal Jordan of Earth. I am Tomar-Re. Your neighbor, you could say."

My eyes widened as the words came from his beaked mouth, perfect English.

"You. You speak English?" I asked, taken aback.

Tomar-Re chuckled. "And you speak Xudarian." He gestured at the ring on his hand. "The ring acts as a universal translator. You hear me in your language, and I hear you in mine."

I nodded, still wrapping my head around everything. "That's... cool."

"Yes, very cool." He gave a slight nod before his tone grew more serious. "Hal, you should know, no human has ever been chosen as a Green Lantern before. Most planets are aware of the Corps, of extraterrestrial life. But your world... your world is so primitive, you still believe you are alone in the universe."

He studied me carefully. "Yet, despite that, the ring chose you. Abin Sur was a dear friend of mine. I came to retrieve his body, to take him back to Oa and entomb him in the crypts of the Corps."

I swallowed hard, guilt creeping in. "I... I'm sorry," I said. "His body disintegrated when his ship blew up. I barely got out alive, the ring put a barrier around me."

Tomar-Re's brow furrowed, his head tilting slightly. "Abin was in a ship?"

"Yeah. He crashed not far from here; you can still see the crater."

"Curious." Tomar-Re seemed genuinely puzzled. "A Lantern needs no such vehicle."

"I know that's what the ring said," I admitted. "But I saw it with my own eyes. He crashed hard, and he was bleeding out when I found him."

The alien's expression remained unreadable. "This is... troubling. But it must wait. You have an appointment with the Guardians. Are you ready?"

I nodded. "Yeah. I think so." And then I just... stood there. I didn't know what I was expecting some kind of Star Trek transporter beam? A portal?

Tomar-Re tilted his head. "Where is your suit?"

I blinked. "My what?"

"Your uniform," he clarified. "It identifies you as a member of the Corps, protects you, and helps regulate your temperature. The green stays hot, the black stays ice cold."

I glanced down at myself, still wearing my flight suit. "I didn't know I got a suit. Thought maybe it was a rookie thing."

Tomar-Re chuckled, gesturing to the emblem on his chest. "No. Not having the symbol is a rookie thing." His fingers traced over the glowing Green Lantern insignia. "You earn this after training. But you'll need a uniform before you can wear it."

He stepped closer, placing his scaled hand over my ring. "Feel the power inside. Let it manifest. The default uniform will form around you."

I closed my eyes and focused. The energy surged through me, heat washing over my body as vivid green spread across my skin. Then, as if a switch had flipped, a sudden chill followed as black filled in the rest.

When I opened my eyes, I was wearing the uniform. White gloves covered my hands, green boots anchored my feet to the ground. On my chest, where Tomar's insignia was, a blank white circle remained.

No symbol. I still had to earn that.

Tomar-Re inspected me briefly before nodding. "Good. Now, I'm going to link our rings. Long-distance travel takes practice, and I'd rather you not get lost in space on your first day."

He tapped his ring against mine, and before I could even brace myself. We took off and the Earth vanished beneath me.

We shot into the atmosphere, climbing higher and faster than any plane I had ever flown. The sensation was unlike anything I had ever experienced—like pure speed, unburdened by engines, gravity, or limits.

As we left Earth's orbit, we accelerated even faster. Stars streaked across the black void, stretching out like they were being pulled apart.

Then, just as suddenly as it had begun, we lurched forward and slowed.

Floating ahead of us was a massive planet, glowing with an emerald aura. Even from space, I could see hundreds of figures moving below, different species, all wearing the same glowing rings.

"Welcome to Oa," Tomar-Re said as we drifted toward it.

I stared, mouth slightly open. As we descended, I got my first real look at the people of the Corps. Some were humanoid, like Abin Sur, but others... others weren't.

I saw a being made entirely of crystalline facets, reflecting light like a living diamond. Another looked like a walking inferno, molten lava rippling beneath its skin.

In the span of a few hours, I had gone from believing aliens didn't exist to standing among hundreds of them.

We soared through the skies of Oa, the emerald glow of the atmosphere surrounding us like a living energy field. Below us, the alien city stretched out in all directions, an intricate network of towering structures, floating platforms, and glowing walkways. And at the very center of it all stood a massive green lantern, pulsating with an overwhelming power that I could feel, even from the air.

I couldn't take my eyes off it.

"So, what's with all the green?" I asked, still mesmerized. "And what's the deal with the giant lantern?"

Tomar-Re kept his flight steady beside me, his posture as composed as ever. "Green is the color of will," he explained. "It is the strongest force in the emotional spectrum. Willpower fuels the Green Lantern Corps, and that" he gestured toward the massive structure "is the Central Power Battery. Every act of will, from every sentient being in the universe, feeds into it. And in turn, it supplies power to your personal battery, which then charges your ring every twenty-four hours."

I let out a slow whistle. "So, all of the will in the universe flows through that thing?"

"Yes. It is the foundation of our power."

"So... it can do anything I want it to?"

Tomar-Re nodded. "In theory, yes. Your ring allows you to create anything you can imagine, shaped by your will. The stronger your will, the more powerful your constructs."

I grinned. "Sounds like a dream."

His voice took on a more serious edge. "But there is a limitation. The ring cannot affect the color yellow."

I blinked, completely thrown. "Wait. What?"

"There is an impurity in the Central Power Battery," Tomar explained. "It renders our rings ineffective against yellow."

I let out a laugh, trying to wrap my head around the idea. "So, you're telling me... if someone painted themselves completely yellow from head to toe, you couldn't touch them?"

Tomar-Re nodded, unbothered by the absurdity of it. "That is correct."

I chuckled again. "Well, that's just stupid."

"Indeed," he admitted with a sigh. "But there are ways around it. While you cannot directly affect yellow with the ring, you could, for instance, grab a rock with your construct and throw it at them."

I shook my head, still laughing as we began our descent. "A cosmic force of limitless creation, and its greatest weakness is a bucket of yellow paint. That's rich."

"You are not the first to find it ridiculous," Tomar said dryly.

We touched down in front of an enormous structure, a building that looked ancient yet alive, its architecture laced with the same glowing energy that pulsed through the entire planet. The air here felt denser, heavier, as if I had stepped into something far larger than myself.

Tomar led the way inside, the doors sliding open seamlessly as we stepped into a vast hall filled with holographic displays and ranks of glowing screens filled with alien text that shifted too fast for me to make sense of. At the center of it all sat a figure, a pink-skinned alien with four arms, each one tapping at separate screens with mechanical precision. His narrow, white eyes flicked toward us as we approached, his expression unreadable.

Tomar turned to me. "This is Salaak. He is a senior Lantern and the Guardians' administrator. He hails from the planet Slyggia."

Before I could say anything, Tomar addressed the alien. "Lantern 2813 to present new recruit 2814 to the Guardians."

Salaak barely reacted, his attention shifting between screens before finally settling on one in front of him. He scanned it, his voice flat and emotionless.

"Your return trip to Oa took an extra ten minutes longer than allotted, Tomar-Re."

Tomar-Re remained stoic. "I was ensuring the recruit's safe arrival."

Salaak barely acknowledged the response. "Your reasoning is noted. Recharge your ring at the Central Battery and return to your sector immediately." Then, his attention turned to me. "Earthman, follow me. Do not fall behind."

And just like that, Tomar-Re was gone. I was alone, trailing behind the four-armed alien as he led me toward a set of massive doors. Each step I took forward felt heavier than the last. Whatever was behind those doors... was going to change my life forever.

I followed Salaak as the enormous doors slid open, revealing a grand citadel bathed in emerald light. The air felt charged with power, humming with an energy I couldn't quite place. At the center of the room, hovering above a circular platform, were tiny blue-skinned figures, their robes flowing weightlessly around them.

I tried to school my expression, to keep my focus, but my first thought was... they look like Smurfs. I bit the inside of my cheek to keep from laughing.

Salaak, as emotionless as ever, gestured for me to step onto the center platform before addressing the floating figures.

"The Earthman from Sector 2814."

One of them, standing slightly ahead of the others, turned to acknowledge us. His voice was calm, authoritative but distant, almost mechanical.

"Thank you, Salaak. You may go."

Without a word, Salaak turned and exited, leaving me standing alone. Silence filled the chamber as the small blue figures turned toward one another, their expressions unreadable as they seemed to be communicating without speaking.

Then, finally, one of them addressed me directly. "Earthman, describe the events that led to you receiving this ring."

The bluntness of the request caught me off guard.

"What's there to explain?" I said, folding my arms. "Abin Sur was dying. He told me the ring had chosen me as his successor. Then, next thing I know, I'm standing on an alien world, surrounded by aliens."

The Guardians remained silent for a moment, their glowing eyes assessing me before one spoke again.

"The Green Lantern Corps is a great honor, and never before has a human been chosen. Each Lantern is responsible for policing one of the 3,600 sectors of the universe. A commitment that your species may not be prepared to handle."

I straightened, my voice steady. "I promised Abin Sur with his final breaths that I would take on this responsibility. I can handle it."

Another Guardian turned toward the first, speaking as if I wasn't even in the room. "Brother, you can see how strong-willed he is. Regardless of his origins, he has the heart of a Green Lantern."

The first Guardian gave the slightest of nods before speaking again, "We shall take a vote. All in favor of the Earthman retaining his ring and beginning his training."

For a moment, nothing happened. Then, one by one, the Guardians' eyes glowed green. I wasn't sure if I had just been elected or sentenced, but before I could process what had just happened, the lead Guardian spoke again.

"The vote has been taken. You will begin training immediately, Rookie 2814."

I turned, assuming that was my cue to leave, but they weren't finished yet. "But first—this council wishes to know how Abin Sur was injured."

I hesitated, turning back. "I don't know," I admitted. "When I found him, he was already bleeding out. He barely had the strength to tell me who he was, let alone explain what happened."

The Guardians exchanged glances, the glow in their eyes flickering slightly. "This is concerning. But for now, you are free to go. Salaak will escort you to training."

I gave a half-nod, not sure how to properly address them. "Yes, sir," I said automatically, then realized I had no idea what their gender was and stumbled out a clumsy, "Or... ma'am."

The Guardian's expression didn't change, but their tone grew even colder. "You will refer to us as the Guardians. Nothing more, nothing less."

I clenched my jaw. No names. No individuality. Just... the Guardians.

"Uh... okay," I muttered, turning on my heel and making my way out of the chamber.

Even with all the aliens I had seen today, the Guardians were the strangest yet. They were cold, emotionless, detached. There was no warmth, no real sense of leadership.

I could already tell. I was going to have a problem with them. I made my way back down the hall, the weight of everything that had just happened still settling in. I had come to Oa as an outsider, a fluke in the system, and now I was officially in training. The idea of being a space cop still didn't feel real, but there was no turning back now.

When I reached the end of the corridor, Salaak was seated at his desk, completely absorbed in his work. His four arms moved with impossible precision, tapping at different holographic screens in front of him. I hesitated, waiting for him to acknowledge me, but he didn't so much as glance in my direction.

I stood there, shifting awkwardly. Was I supposed to say something? Announce myself? He had literally just sent me to the Guardians, he knew I was standing here.

Several moments passed before he finally looked up, his narrow eyes flicking toward me before shifting to another screen. With a quick press of a button, a bright green energy beam shot up from the floor, stretching out beyond the walls of the citadel.

"Touch your ring to the beam," he said, his voice devoid of emotion. "It will transport you to the training area."

And just like that, he was done with me. His attention snapped back to his screens, his hands moving over the controls as if I had already left.

I resisted the urge to roll my eyes. Salaak was almost as robotic as the Guardians. No small talk, no acknowledgment, just a job to do and back to work.

I sighed and held my hand up, pressing the ring to the beam.

Instantly, the energy tethered to me, much like when Tomar-Re had guided me to Oa. My body lifted off the ground, pulled along a glowing pathway that stretched out across the city.

As I soared above Oa, I finally had a chance to take it all in. The buildings, the streets, the technology, it was breathtaking. A world built entirely by the Green Lantern Corps, pulsing with their energy, powered by will itself.

But something struck me as odd. Everything was yellow. Every building, every structure, the entire city was made of a color that Green Lanterns couldn't even affect.

Huh.

I narrowed my eyes as I passed over vast plazas, training grounds, and towering monolithic structures. They did this on purpose. The thought clicked into place. If everything was yellow, then constructs couldn't damage the city. It was a safeguard, a way to prevent new recruits from accidentally leveling the planet.

Clever. Stupid, but clever.

The beam carried me further, speeding toward an open expanse where several rookie Lanterns stood in formation. Each one had the same white circle on their chest as I did, no insignia, no symbol. They hadn't earned it yet.

I barely had time to process what was happening before the beam cut out abruptly, and I dropped out of the sky, landing hard in the middle of the group.

Right in front of a towering, alien pig.

His skin was rough and pink, his broad chest covered in the same Green Lantern uniform, though his insignia was fully formed, glowing bright against the fabric. His eyes were small but sharp, and his posture was one of authority, strength, and absolutely no patience for nonsense.

I had a feeling I had just met my drill sergeant.

"What's this poozer doing?"

I barely had time to lift my head before a giant, pig-like alien loomed over me, steam snorting from his massive nostrils as he took a step forward.

"Stand to attention!" he bellowed, his voice shaking the very ground beneath me.

I scrambled to my feet, but the thick, muddy terrain fought against me, clinging to my boots, dragging me down. My legs trembled as I tried to stand tall, but it was clear I was already on this guy's bad side.

His black, beady eyes swept over the rest of the rookies, sizing us up like we were the lowest of the low.

"Now listen up, poozers," he growled. "My job is to make sure none of you sorry excuses for Lanterns get yourselves killed out there. Your ring is the most powerful weapon in the universe, but only if your will is strong enough to use it. And you poozers? You don't know a damn thing about will."

He paced in front of us, his massive frame casting a shadow over the line of rookies, his presence radiating pure authority.

"You will address me as 'sir' or as 'Kilowog, sir.' Got it?"

"Sir, yes sir!" the rookies shouted in unison.

I said nothing. Kilowog's thudding footsteps came straight for me. His hot breath blasted against my face, and the ground seemed to vibrate with each step.

"How 'bout you, poozer?" he snarled, towering over me. "Do I make myself clear?"

I barely flinched. I'd seen this act before back in the Air Force, with every drill sergeant who thought screaming in my face would break me. It was all the same. Bark, bluster, intimidation.

I smirked. "I know this trick. You act mean and tough, but it's all an act, isn't it?"

Kilowog's expression didn't change. But something in his dark, unreadable eyes sharpened.

Then, he turned to the rest of the rookies. "Congratulations, poozers!" he barked. "We just got our first example for Ring-Slinging 101!"

Before I could react, Kilowog raised his ring to the sky. A low rumble filled the air, and suddenly, massive boulders wrenched themselves from the ground, suspended high above us and then they started falling.

"Defend yourself."

Instinct took over. I threw my arm up, and a glowing green shield formed above me just as the first boulders came crashing down. The impact sent shockwaves through my arms, my boots sliding backward in the mud. I could feel the weight of each rock as they slammed against the construct, my mind racing to hold it together.

The shield cracked. I grit my teeth and grabbed my arm with my other hand, forcing every ounce of my will into reinforcing it.

Then something slammed into my side. I staggered, nearly losing my balance as I turned, just in time to see Kilowog hurling glowing green disks at me, one after another.

I shifted, adjusting my stance, trying to keep the shield above me while also firing back at the disks. One by one, I blasted them out of the air, my ring sizzling with energy. Then, one slipped through.

The glowing projectile tore straight through my blast and slammed into my face. Pain exploded behind my eyes, and my vision blurred for half a second, just long enough for me to lose my focus.

The shield shattered. The boulders came crashing down. I barely had time to roll out of the way, the ground shaking as they slammed into the mud beside me.

Kilowog stalked away without even looking at me, addressing the other rookies instead. "A Green Lantern needs to be focused at all times. This poozer forgot that and almost got himself flattened."

I wiped the dirt from my face, pushing myself up onto my elbows. My gaze flicked to the disk that had hit me. It was yellow.

Kilowog turned back to me. "Rookie 2814 forgot that his ring can't affect yellow. But he could've adapted and tipped his shield, let the boulders roll in front of him, used them as a barrier against the disks."

I blinked, the realization sinking in. That actually made sense. I exhaled sharply and pushed myself up, getting back in line with the other rookies.

Kilowog's voice rang out again, gruff and unrelenting.

"Never forget the yellow impurity, poozers. Your enemies won't. They'll use it to trap you, to turn your greatest strength into a weakness. That's why we train. That's why we adapt. That's why I'm here—to knock some sense into you before the universe does. You will get hurt. You may get maimed. But it will all be in service of the Corps."

He clasped his massive hands together, the sound echoing across the field like thunder.

"Now let's run through some drills. I've only got you for a week."

I exhaled sharply. Just like that, it was basic training all over again. And I already couldn't wait for it to be over.

...

Boot camp with Kilowog was like spending a week in hell, only hell probably had better accommodations and less yelling.

He put us through every imaginable situation and then invented a dozen more just to make us suffer. We trained on hostile planets near Oa, each one a nightmare environment meant to break us. One day, we were thrown onto a world with blistering heat that could boil water in seconds. The next, we were dumped into a frigid wasteland where the air cut like razors. If we weren't fighting against hurricane-force winds, we were flying through toxic gas clouds, trying not to pass out before we reached the other side.

And the gravity drills? Pure agony.

Kilowog had us train in both low and intense gravity fields, forcing us to fly under pressure, move under strain, and fight against forces that twisted our bodies in ways they were never meant to bend. And just when I thought we had hit our limit, Kilowog simulated a black hole.

A black hole.

"You poozers think you're ready for space? Let's see how you handle being stretched into atoms!"

It was like flying through molasses made of pure terror. The gravitational pull ripped at my body, my muscles screaming as I fought against it. Every second felt like I was being dragged into oblivion, my ring straining to keep me in one piece. I had survived intense G-forces in the Air Force, but this? This made those feel like a gentle breeze.

By the end of the first few days, I couldn't even tell where my body hurt anymore because the answer was everywhere. Every muscle, every joint, every part of me ached in ways I didn't know were possible.

But it didn't stop there, Kilowog didn't believe in off time.

Any moment we weren't actively getting our asses kicked, we were expected to study at the Book of Oa, a vast repository of knowledge connected to our rings. The only problem? Kilowog would lock us out of our rings.

"You poozers think you can just depend on the ring to spoon-feed you everything? Think again! You gotta know your sectors, know your threats, know the damn universe!"

So, we had to pull data from the Book of Oa manually, flipping through ancient records on our home sectors, memorizing planetary histories and political conflicts like we were cramming for the most brutal test in existence.

And just when you thought you had survived the day, just when you dragged yourself back to your quarters, aching and half-dead, you'd open the door and there'd be a miniature black hole waiting for you.

I learned real fast never to let my guard down.

One time, I walked half-asleep toward the mess hall, barely keeping my eyes open, only to turn a corner and find the entire corridor lined with yellow spikes.

"What now?" I had groaned, ready to throw myself off the nearest balcony.

Kilowog's voice boomed from seemingly nowhere. "WHAT NOW? WHAT NOW?! YOU POZERS THINK YOU GET A BREAK?! IN THE REAL WORLD, YOUR ENEMIES DON'T CARE IF YOU'RE TIRED, DON'T CARE IF YOU'RE HUNGRY! THEY DON'T CARE IF YOU NEED TO STOP AND CRY! YOU ADAPT, OR YOU DIE!"

And that was how we lived.

Every hallway, every doorway, every moment was a trap, another test, another lesson in survival. It was Kilowog's twisted way of preparing us for the real world.

I thought Air Force training was brutal. This though? This was a hundred times worse.

At the end of the week, what was left of us rookies, the ones who hadn't washed out, broken, or fled stood in formation inside the vast central hall of Oa.

The space was colossal, its ceiling stretching so high that it felt like the stars themselves could fit inside. The walls pulsed with emerald light, casting a glow over the rookies lined

up beside me. The exhaustion of the past seven days still weighed on me, but there was an energy in the air, a tension humming through every single one of us.

We had survived. Now, we were about to become something more.

Hovering above us, for the first time since my arrival, the Guardians themselves had emerged from their citadel, their small, blue forms floating silently in the sky. Their presence alone should have been intimidating, but after a week of getting beaten to hell by Kilowog, I wasn't sure anything could shake me anymore.

Still, it wasn't the Guardians who led the ceremony. Kilowog stood before us, his massive arms crossed, his expression as unreadable as ever. His voice, however, was as thunderous as always.

"Poozers, you came here soft. Weak. Thinking you knew what it meant to have will. But will ain't some fancy ideal. It's what keeps you standing when everything else tries to knock you down. It's what separates the survivors from the corpses."

His black eyes swept across us, his tone gruff, but not without pride.

"I broke you down so you could rebuild yourselves stronger. And now, you're Green Lanterns."

A murmur ran through the crowd, a subtle shift in posture as we all stood a little taller.

The Guardians descended then, their voices soft yet absolute, like a command woven into the very fabric of existence. "We welcome the new recruits to the Green Lantern Corps. You are now a beacon of will and peace in the universe. May it ever shine bright."

"As we award these new Lanterns," one of them intoned, "please join me in the Oath."

I lifted my ring, pointing it toward the sky, and so did everyone else. The chamber exploded with emerald light as we chanted in unison, our voices carrying across the hall, across the planet, across the very fabric of space itself:

"In brightest day, in blackest night,  
No evil shall escape my sight.  
Let those who worship evil's might  
Beware my power—Green Lantern's light!"

As the final words left my lips, my chest burned. I looked down, heart pounding as the empty white circle on my uniform began to glow. The fabric beneath it shifted, transformed, and suddenly the Green Lantern insignia was there, emblazoned on my chest, pulsing with energy.

I had done it. I wasn't just a recruit anymore. I was a Green Lantern.

# Chapter Five

## Hal

The next morning, I was back on Earth.

I hadn't expected re-entry to feel so... mundane. One second, I was soaring through the stars, a newly minted Green Lantern, standing on an alien world surrounded by the greatest warriors in the universe. The next, I was in my apartment, staring at the same four walls that suddenly felt a hell of a lot smaller.

It was strange. Everything was exactly as I had left it, but I wasn't the same.

I tossed my duffel bag onto the couch, running a hand through my hair. The silence was almost deafening after a week of constant orders, drills, and near-death experiences. No Kilowog barking in my ear, no alien terrain trying to kill me, no surprise black holes waiting behind my door. Just... my apartment.

I headed into the bedroom, peeling off my uniform for the first time in days. I hesitated before tossing it onto the chair—would I ever look at normal clothes the same way again? Shaking the thought, I grabbed a fresh set, stepped into the shower, and let the scalding water wash away the grime, sweat, and exhaustion.

By the time I finished, I felt almost human again.

As I towed off my hair, a sound I hadn't heard in a week made me freeze. My phone.

It rang loudly from my nightstand, an intrusive reminder of my previous life. After an entire week with no calls, no messages, no distractions, the vibration felt foreign. Almost annoying.

I glanced at the screen. Carol.

I smirked and answered. "What's up?"

The response was immediate.

"Really, Hal? Really?" Carol's voice came through the line, sharp and unimpressed. "'What's up' is all you've got? You ghost me for a week, and that's all I get? You're lucky I need you as much as I do."

I leaned against the doorframe, grinning. "Oh, Carol! You were worried about me. That's adorable."

"When my only test pilot disappears off the face of the planet without so much as a text, yeah, I get a little worried."

My smirk faltered slightly. "Yeah, uh... crazy thing. My phone broke, and it took me a bit to get a new one. Sorry about that."

She let out a frustrated sigh but didn't press. "Well, whatever. The simulator's finally fixed, and we need to put you through one last test before you can fly."

Something inside me twisted with excitement.

I had been flying through the depths of space, dodging asteroids, soaring past black holes, moving faster than I ever thought possible. But this, getting back in a real cockpit, feeling the weight of a jet, hearing the roar of an engine under me?

That was something I hadn't stopped craving.

I grinned. "You got it, boss."

The moment I stepped into the hangar at Ferris Air, something felt off. It was too quiet. The usual hum of activity, the clanking of tools, the murmur of mechanics, the distant roar of jet engines. It was gone. The air felt heavy, like the whole building was holding its breath.

Instinct kicked in. I slid my ring onto my finger. Kilowog's training had drilled it into me, always be ready.

I moved forward carefully, my footsteps echoing in the silence. Then, I saw them. People. They were slumped over, unconscious, scattered across the hangar floor. Engineers, technicians, pilots. All of them out cold.

My heart pounded. This wasn't some freak accident. Something, or someone did this. I didn't wait for confirmation.

The uniform enveloped me in an instant. Green and black crawled over my body, wrapping me in protective armor. And for the first time, a green mask materialized over my face, concealing my identity.

I hovered off the ground, scanning the hangar. Nothing moved. Then a scream. I didn't think. I just moved. I rocketed forward, blasting out of the hangar and onto the tarmac.

And that's when I saw her. Carol was floating but not on her own. She was being held in the air, without anyone touching her.

A man stood beneath her, his body rigid, his lifeless eyes glazed over like he was somewhere else entirely. His forehead was grotesquely swollen, veins bulging and pulsing beneath the skin.

Then I heard his voice, but his lips never moved. "Now, who could this be?"

Pain ripped through my skull, like knives stabbing into my brain, twisting, searching.

I staggered in the air, gritting my teeth against the intrusion. He was inside my head, digging.

"Ah... Hal Jordan." His voice slithered through my mind, dragging my thoughts to the surface like they weren't my own. "You've been to the stars. You've seen so many wonderful things."

I willed my arm to move. It felt like I was pushing through molasses, my muscles struggling against an unseen force. But I fought through it and lined up my ring with the man and blasted Carol out of his grip.

She tumbled through the air, falling but I was already on it. I shaped a green construct beneath her, catching her before she hit the ground.

"Oh, Hal..." His voice coiled back into my skull, amused. "That was really naughty."

I barely had time to react before white-hot agony exploded in my head. A brain blast slammed into me, and suddenly I wasn't in my body anymore.

My vision blurred. And then I was somewhere else. I wasn't looking through my eyes anymore. I was seeing through his. He was showing me his memories.

Flashes of his childhood raced before my eyes, sharp and unrelenting. I wasn't just seeing them, I was feeling them. Hector Hammond, a boy who grew up feeling small. Dismissed. Overlooked. Constantly belittled and put down. Every failure, every insult, every moment of rejection left a mark on him. It simmered, growing into something he refused to acknowledge.

Then, I saw him as an adult, a stark contrast to that beaten-down child. He had awards lining his office walls, his name plastered across scientific journals, government reports, classified projects. He was respected, renowned, and a leader in his field. But it wasn't enough.

I could feel it like a dull ache, his need to be the best, to have the best, to be recognized. But underneath it all, no matter how much success he piled up, he was still that scared little boy.

Then, I saw what happened when Hector didn't get what he wanted.

He sat at a conference table across from Carol. I knew her in an instant. Her posture, her confidence, it was definitely Carol.

They were discussing a potential partnership, Hector's expertise in rocket propulsion was exactly what Ferris Air needed for its government contracts. He was brilliant, no question about it.

But then, his true motive crept in. "I'll sign on under one condition," he told her. "You go out with me."

Carol laughed it off, shaking her head. "I'm not really the dating type, Hector."

He smiled on the outside. But on the inside, I felt the heat flare inside him, saw how her rejection seared into him like a brand. But he didn't let Carol see.

Instead, he went back to his office and lied to everyone. He told his colleagues, his staff, anyone who would listen, that he and Carol were dating. That she had been charmed by him, impressed by him, drawn to his genius.

What a creep.

The memory shifted again, this time to the moment everything changed.

Hector sat at his desk when his phone rang. A call from the highest levels of the government. They had found a meteorite. Something otherworldly. Something they wanted him to analyze for possible propulsion properties.

Hector jumped at the opportunity. He knew, he just knew, if he cracked this, if he made one more breakthrough, Carol would finally see him for what he was. A genius. A success. Someone worth wanting.

He rushed into the lab, eager, reckless, blinded by his own self-importance. In his excitement, he didn't put on his helmet and the radiation washed over him, unseen, unnoticed until it was too late.

At first, it was just whispers. Faint. Flickering. The stray thoughts of his colleagues leaking into his mind.

Then, it became a flood. Their voices burrowed into him, every passing thought, every buried opinion, he could hear it all. So, he excused himself, stumbling out of the lab, his head pounding.

At home, standing in front of the bathroom mirror, he saw the first signs of transformation. His forehead swelled, veins bulging and twisting beneath his skin. Carol would never love him now. Not like this.

But then, a new thought crept in. He stared at the objects floating in the air, levitating by his sheer will. He could make her love him.

The memories slammed shut like a steel door, and I was ripped back into my own body. The tarmac spun around me, my head throbbing like I had just been hit by a freight train.

Hector loomed over me, his grotesque, pulsing forehead casting eerie shadows under the Ferris Air lights. His eyes gleamed with something far beyond obsession now.

"Don't you see, Hal?" His voice was silk and steel, laced with raw emotion. "I never got what I deserved... so now I'm taking it."

Then, my head throbbed again, like a hammer against steel. Hector's powers had already shredded through my mind once, but this... this was different. I wasn't just seeing his memories; he was forcing me into someone else's.

I pushed against it, tried to fight him off, but his voice slid through my skull like oil seeping through cracks.

"Oh, Hal," he crooned inside my head. "I saw something while I was in yours. That deep, burning hatred you have for Carl Ferris. So much anger. So much certainty."

His footsteps echoed on the tarmac as he walked toward me, his swollen forehead pulsing with veins stretched tight like cords. I gritted my teeth, still clutching my own head, trying to block him out.

"Do you want to see something that will break everything you know?"

Before I could answer, BAM. Another mind-shattering blast.

My vision snapped away from Ferris Air, and suddenly I wasn't me anymore.

I was standing inside a modest house, light filtering through a window that overlooked the Coast City skyline. I recognized it instantly. I had seen this view my whole life. But then I caught sight of my own reflection.

It wasn't mine. It was Carol's. I was in her memories.

She walked down a quiet hallway, her steps soft, hesitant. Her hand reached for a doorknob and pushed it open, revealing a small bedroom that had been converted into a hospital room.

A frail man lay in the bed, his skin sallow, his breath shallow. I nearly choked on the realization. Carl Ferris. Carl was sick.

He wasn't off playing golf in Palm Springs. He wasn't running Ferris Air from the shadows. He was dying in a bed, tucked away from the world.

Carol sat beside him; her cheeks wet with tears. She wasn't the unshakable businesswoman I had known, she was just a daughter watching her father fade away.

Her voice was quiet, fragile. "Everyone's leaving at Arden, Dad. No one wants to work under me. No one trusts me like you do."

Carl's eyes barely opened. His voice, when it came, was weak, strained. "This was always going to be hard, Carol." He coughed, his whole-body trembling. "Tell them I'm sick... maybe it'll give you more authority."

Carol shook her head and buried her face in her hands. "No," she whispered. "That would only make it worse. Right now, people just think I'm doing what you say. But if they knew you weren't really involved..."

Her voice broke. She started to cry.

Carl reached out; his hand was weak but determined. "Is... Hal Jordan still at Arden?"

Carol wiped her eyes and nodded. "Yes, but I'm sure he's going to resign. He hates you. And in turn, he hates me."

Carl let out a shuddering sigh. "He has every right to hate me."

My breath caught. His next words felt like they slammed into my chest.

"I took his father away from him." Carl's voice was strained with regret, like the memory itself caused him physical pain. I was so stupid. I should have been more worried about my friend. But no. I needed the investors to see what we could do."

He coughed again, this time harder, it sounded ragged, painful even. "No amount of money was worth that. Every day, I wish I could go back. Poor Hal... I took his father from him. I don't deserve to keep on living."

Carl reached for the tubes and wires keeping him alive. He was trying to pull them out.

Carol lunged forward, grabbing his hands. "Dad, stop!" She reconnected everything with a practiced precision, like she had done this before. "We've talked about this! Nothing can change the past!"

Carl let out a weary sigh.

"You dying won't make up for it," she said softly. "Your guilt has already brought you down this far. Don't let it take you all the way."

I felt numb. Carl Ferris wasn't the man I had built up in my mind. The anger I had carried for years, the resentment that had driven me, the righteous fury that had shaped my life. It was worthless. Carl wasn't the monster I thought he was. He was just a broken man.

His voice, weak but urgent, pulled my attention back. "Do something for me, Carol."

She hesitated. "What?"

"Help Hal get back in the air."

Carol stiffened. "Dad, he doesn't have the best record. We can't take risks right now."

Carl pushed himself up slightly, his frail body trembling, but his eyes sharp stronger than I had ever seen them.

"Get Hal back in the air, Carol. I don't care what it takes." His voice cracked, but his will didn't. "Flying was the only connection he had left with his dad. And he lost it. Maybe if I can give it back to him... we can both feel a little peace."

The memory shattered. I was back on the tarmac. The sounds of Ferris Air rushed back in, but my thoughts were a tangled mess.

I felt like my mind had just been torn apart and stitched back together wrong. Nothing made sense anymore. Carl Ferris, the man I had blamed for everything, the man I had spent my whole life hating, had been trying to make things right. All the rage, the bitterness, the grudge I had carried for years. It was hollow.

Hector loomed over me, his eyes gleaming with satisfaction. "We all believe we have righteous anger," he murmured, his voice dripping with condescension. "But it's always misplaced. You're more like me than you think, Hal. Spreading lies. Hating for no reason."

His lips curled into something akin to a smile. "So tell me, Jordan—what's left to live for if you don't have your righteous anger anymore?"

I understood now. Hector thought I would break. That without my rage, my reason for fighting would be gone. He was wrong. My anger had been a bottle, a dam, a weight holding me back and Hector had just released it.

For the first time in my life, I wasn't acting because of rage. I was acting for myself. The weight lifted and my will surged.

Hector stood over me, certain that he had won.

I moved before he could react, instinct guiding my will. A green bubble snapped around his head, sealing him off from the world. I could feel him pushing back, his telepathic tendrils

slamming into my mind like jagged knives, slicing, tearing, trying to break me down. But he had already lost.

I gritted my teeth and forced the construct to hold, ignoring the searing pain behind my eyes. Hector's body jerked, flailed as the oxygen inside the bubble thinned. His attacks grew weaker, more desperate. He clawed at nothing, his lips moving in silent screams.

I made the bubble shrink. I didn't want to hurt him. I just needed him unconscious. His movements slowed and his mind blasts faded into nothingness. Then, finally, his body went limp.

I released the construct, and Hector collapsed to the ground, unmoving but still breathing. For the first time since I had stepped into that hangar, my mind was still. No whispers. No crawling thoughts that weren't mine. Silence. Peace.

Carol stirred, groggy and disoriented. She blinked up at me, still half-dazed from Hector's attack.

"Who... who are you?"

I hesitated. I could have told her. She would have believed me. But for the first time, I wasn't just Hal Jordan, washed-up pilot trying to find his place in the world. I was something more.

I let the glow of my ring pulse softly in the dark. "I'm the Green Lantern, ma'am."

Then, before she could respond, I blasted off into the sky.

The wind rushed past me as I soared over Ferris Air. I found a hiding spot behind a row of thick bushes, touching down lightly on the ground. The moment my feet hit the dirt, I slid the ring off my finger. My uniform faded, leaving me in the same wrinkled civilian clothes I had started the day in.

As soon as I had settled, my ring's voice chimed softly in my head.

"WOULD YOU LIKE TO PLACE AN ANONYMOUS CALL TO THIS PLANET'S LOCAL AUTHORITIES?"

I smirked. "Yeah, let's get them here. Alert them that the suspect has mind-control capabilities and may require advanced tech to dampen it."

"REQUEST MADE."

With that handled, I slipped the ring into my pocket and stepped back out onto the tarmac, throwing on my best 'what the hell is going on' face.

Carol was still sitting on the ground, shaking off the last of her daze.

I jogged over, brows furrowed in confusion.

"What happened here?"

She turned toward me, blinking hard as she took me in. "Uh... what?" She looked back at Hector's unconscious form, then shook her head. "Oh. Hi, Hal. Yeah, you missed it. Some freakzoid brain-blasted all of us... but then a real-life superhero came and stopped him."

I raised a brow, crossing my arms. "Wow. Like Superman? Darn, fun stuff always seems to happen when I'm not around."

Carol let out a dry chuckle. "Yeah, like Superman but greener. But maybe if you actually showed up on time, like the rest of us, you'd get to experience it firsthand."

I smirked. "Okay, Ms. Ferris. Taking shots at my tardiness even after surviving a telepathic nightmare? That's cold."

Before she could respond, sirens wailed in the distance. I turned as the flashing red-and-blue lights raced toward the airstrip. My ring had done its job. The cops were already here.

Carol sighed and pushed herself up, brushing the dust from her pants.

"Well," she said, "once we deal with all of this, we can finally get you in the simulator."

I glanced toward the sky, my fingers brushing against the cool metal of the ring in my pocket. A week ago, all I had wanted was to fly again.

Now? I had the entire universe waiting for me. But first, I had a jet to take into the sky.

# Epilogue

I stepped into the Guardians' grand citadel, the chamber bathed in an eerie green glow. Their small, blue forms hovered above me, their expressions as unreadable as ever. Even after all these years, I had never grown used to their presence.

One of them finally spoke, their voice echoing through the vast space like a whisper laced with steel. "Welcome, Lantern 1417."

I crossed my arms, barely concealing my impatience. "Guardians, what is this about? Every moment I spend away from my sector is a moment where chaos threatens to spread. Order must be enforced."

The Guardian's glowing eyes met mine without hesitation. "We are aware of this, and yet, a more pressing matter requires your attention."

That piqued my interest. Something greater than the stability of my own sector?

The Guardian continued, unbothered by my reaction. "You may have already heard of Abin Sur's death."

Something sharp twisted in my chest, but I refused to let it show. My jaw tightened. "Yes. The death of my mentor is not something one simply misses." My words were clipped, controlled, but the bite in them was unmistakable.

Abin had been one of the greatest among us. He was disciplined, methodical, unwavering in his duty. His loss had been a blow, not just to me, but to the Corps itself.

"His ring has chosen a successor." The Guardian's voice remained eerily even. "An Earthman."

I had expected many things. That was not one of them.

"Earth?" I repeated, the name foreign and weightless in my mouth. "A backwater world that barely comprehends its own place in the universe? That Earth?"

"Correct."

A pause stretched between us. I had met many warriors across countless worlds, but never one from Earth. They were a primitive people, isolated and unaware of the cosmic forces that surrounded them. And now, one of them had been given a ring that he could never possibly understand.

"And you wish for me to mentor him."

"Yes."

"You would have me train him as Abin trained me?"

"That is correct."

I exhaled slowly, my fingers flexing at my sides. "What is his nature?"

The Guardians did not hesitate. "Reckless. He acts first and thinks second. He is strong-willed, but undisciplined."

Of course he was. That alone told me everything I needed to know. A man without order. Without control. He would be a danger to himself and to others if left unchecked.

"Very well." I nodded, my voice like stone. "It will be done."

The Guardians gave a small, synchronized nod before drifting away, their glowing eyes disappearing into the dim light.

"That will be all, Sinestro."

I stood there for a moment, alone in the grand chamber, the silence stretching around me like a noose. This Earthman had no idea what was coming for him.