Pecking Order

Summary

In a world where everyone has wings, seven extraordinary children grow up, same as everyone else.

(aka the wingfic that only i wanted)

Notes

chapter one is short and boring because i cant write luther

- Inspired by Some only live to die, I'm alive to fly higher by Drhair76
Golden Eagle

One’s wings started developing first. He never said a word about it- the others probably wouldn’t even have known if it was for the way his down feathers started coming out in clumps, leaving trails wherever he went.

Six had picked up a pile of the small yellow feathers and presented them to Grace with a frown. “I think One’s sick,” he had said, and Grace just laughed, gathering all the children to explain what the sudden molting meant.

“Your wings have been developing all along,” Grace explained with a smile, “but around this age, the process speeds up, shedding the remains of your childhood plumage and replacing it with your adult feathers. This usually completes within a year.”

“Is it painful?” Seven asked softly.

“The old feathers falling out is painless, but as new flight feathers start to grow in, it can get uncomfortable. It’s just like any other molt, but a bit longer ”

Everyone turned to One, who now sat with a grimace and his patchy wings pulled close to his body.

“Well, One?” Two started snarkily, managing to not trip over his words. “Does it hurt?”

One got up and walked away, not giving it a response.

(Later, after One became Luther, and his wings finished developing, the teasing of his childhood would be forgotten- after all, everyone usually opted to stare in stunned silence at his shimmering primaries.)

Learning to fly turned out to be a totally different story. He found himself comparing it to learning how to walk- it wasn’t hard, mostly instinct, and he got the hang of it pretty quickly, but he was wobbly at first. Plus, it was pretty embarrassing when he flapped his wings and generated no lift.

“Number One, you’ve got to push off the ground with your feet,” Reginald scolded, watching from the sidelines. “Don’t rely on just wingpower to take off. Your legs are just as crucial.”

One nodded and tried again.

“A lovely golden eagle,” Pogo had classified him as. Luther wore the title with pride, right under ‘Number One.’

Even so, he wasn’t showy with his wings, seeing them as just a convenient tool rather than something to be admired. He was strong enough that he could fly while carrying two others, which often resulted in his siblings (Klaus, mostly) grabbing onto his shoulders and hitching a ride from the ground to the rooftop.

Then Ben died. And the Academy disbanded.

Luther continued with his work.

He continued putting on the domino mask and going out on mission for Reginald, never once hesitating or questioning anything. It was in a situation like that, one where Reginald
underestimated the danger (or, perhaps, overestimated Luther’s capability to handle it on his own), and the eagle came back covered in wounds, feathers missing in places.

The worst part of becoming… whatever is was he became, Luther discovered, was losing the ability to fly.

A lot of factors contributed to that factor- the sudden shift in body shape and size, mainly. His wings were large, but not scaled to that.

He never stopped training, but he did it less now. Everytime he did, he’d get distracted staring out the window, or just up. Up at the sky, the blue sky. He missed it. He missed the feeling of the air rushing past his feathers, the adrenaline of a dive that went closer to the ground than strictly necessary, just the joy of soaring over the city.

He had never realized just how much he loved flight- how much he took it for granted- until he lost it.

It was worse on the moon, Luther noted, the longing to be flying. But at least the low gravity allowed himself to have the illusion of fluttering through the air.

It was never the same.

Eventually, maybe he’d stop having the burning, aching- that yearning for flight.

(He never did.)
Loggerhead Shrike

Chapter Summary

And Diego promised to make up on his slower start in flight by becoming the best damn flier in the family.

Chapter Notes

take chapter two as well cause chp 1 SUCKS lmao

The first time Two tried to fly, he fell wrong and broke his wing.

His wings had finished developing soon after One’s and, in his eagerness, Two tried to teach himself to fly before his feathers had stopped aching. He’d climbed up to one of the platforms Reginald had set up around the training field and spread his gray shrike wings.

Four, Five, and Six watched from the ground, the first with a grin, the second impassively, and the third with a worried expression. “Two, I-I don’t think this is such a good idea,” Six stammered.

Five smirked. “Wow, you sound just like him.” Four barked a laugh and Two growled, more determined than ever to prove himself.

He wasn’t used to the intricate movements of his feathers, of the new shift in balance his wings provided. He’d flapped them a few times and pushed himself off the platform.

It didn’t work.

He’d crashed to the ground, one wing twisted beneath him with a sickening crack.

Four started laughing, Six started crying, and Five gave a smug “told you so” before spatial jumping away, presumably to get Grace or Reginald.

That put a halt in Two’s training, and he vibrated with rage as he watched Four- Four!- twist around in the air before Two could.

Well, at least he got a twisted sense of satisfaction knowing that he’d be healed before Five’s wings finished developing. At least he’d be flying before that brat.

Then Five disappeared, and Two became Diego. And Diego promised to make up on his slower start in flight by becoming the best damn flier in the family.

He took advantage of his smaller wingspan, flitting and twisting around his enemies. He figured out how to do rolls and flips at high speeds, throwing knives in the midst of his stunt. He dived off rooftops, pulling up just before he hit the ground, using the momentum to take him up, up- and then twist backwards and fall down again, flapping his wings to propel him in a sharp turn.
The crowd would always gasp in amazement, and Diego would grin. (Sometimes he’d misjudge and clip his primaries on the wall, skin his knee on the ground. But he moved too quickly for anyone to notice, so he just kept going.)

He never would’ve considered himself flashy, but maybe he was, if only out of spite. Allison and Ben always said it was going to get him into trouble. It never did.

Or, it didn’t, until he started police academy.

There was a leg of training that involved running the course with their wings bound. Diego didn’t expect to have any trouble with it- it was part of training in the Umbrella Academy, after all. And it was fine, for the most part. He crawled under bars, swung across monkey bars, and ran up the scaling wall, grabbing the rope just once to haul himself up. He planted a foot on the top of the wall- but his boot must’ve been muddier than he thought, because he found himself tipping forward (he refused to believe it was just his own sense of skewed balance). Instinctively, he tried to flare his wings to fix his balance, to catch himself, to do something, but they just strained uselessly against the rope around around his body, and he fell-

The rope must’ve had more give than he thought, cause he ended up collapsed on the ground, one wing twisted beneath him.

And that was the end of police academy for him. Whatever, he thought to himself. He would’ve probably ended up getting kicked out anyway.

So, instead, Diego ended up as a vigilante. His talents were much better suited to that anyway, in his opinion. And, once his wing healed (again), he found great pleasure in his ability to taunt folks and fling himself backward into the air at the last second. (Some part of his mind noted that it seemed a very Five thing to do. Diego wondered how Five had adapted to flight, wherever he ended up.)

And sweet, sweet Eudora Patch. That starling was going to be the death of him, Diego claimed. She seemed inclined to agree. But they got along well enough. She, at least, would noticed when his feathers brushed against the ground during one of his stunts, and wince in sympathy. At some other point in his life, Diego would’ve scoffed, with some line about how he didn’t need her sympathy. But now it just made him grin wider, push harder, just to please her, because her smile lit up his day.

If he couldn’t make his family proud with his stunts, then maybe at least he could bring Patch a little joy. (it probably wouldn’t last for long- nothing ever did.)
Chapter Summary

"I want to fly, dad."

"Then say the words."

Three rather liked her wings as they started developing, the fluffy, matted down giving way to pristine canary feathers. The striking yellow, dusted by brown along her coverts.

She wanted to fly like any of her siblings, getting instructed through the wingstrokes by her flock. So, when she thought she was ready, she approached Reginald.

“I want to fly, dad.”

“Then say the words.”

_I heard a rumor I knew how to fly._

_I heard a rumor I could make this turn._

_I heard a rumor I figured out this flip first try._

_I heard a rumor-_

She thought nothing of it. It tested her limits, just like any other part of her training. She learned to fly quicker than any of her siblings, so it was okay, no matter how much the others desperately claimed she was missing a part of her childhood.

Six was always hesitant to fly with her. “It’s weird,” he’d always murmur, “Not natural.”

She always tried to brush it off.

“It’s a lazy way out,” said Five once, shortly before he disappeared. “I bet you would’ve been the last to figure out how to fly if it wasn’t for those damn powers of yours.”

Three never listened to him, but Allison thought about it a lot.

“Tell me what it’s like,” she begged Ben, shortly before he died. “Tell what it was like to learn to fly.”

So he did, the best he could. He would’ve made a good author, she thought. He’d read those books so much as a child, nothing was stopping him from writing his own.

But he never did. The first thing Allison did after washing the blood out of her feathers was pack her few belongings into a duffel bag she found under her bed. She tore the clothes from her closet, pried the posters off her walls, and made everything nice and tidy. She was the first to leave the Umbrella Academy.

Reginald watched her as she walked away- walked, not flew, like Diego and Klaus did.
Maybe that’s why she became an actor. To pretend she wasn’t all that different from her peers. She promised herself she’d never use her powers for something as petty as learning to fly again.

Then she did.

Again, and again, and again…

Then Claire was born.

Allison told herself she’d never use her powers on Claire. Not ever, under any circumstances.

...But just this once couldn’t hurt, right? Or maybe once more? To get her to stop crying, to stop complaining about her feathers, to stop...

Before long, she’d forgotten her promise to herself. Every time she used her powers on her daughter, she told herself it would be the last time. It usually wasn’t.

Until it was.
Klaus discovered early on that flight was one of the few things that could make him smile without fail.

Four was the second of the Hargreeves siblings to learn how to fly- Two’s little stunt that resulted in a broken wing didn’t count, of course. He picked it up the same way he picked up everything: tons of failures, a lenient laugh, and a hidden, burning determination. He could circle the training field within his first day, with Six cheering him on from the ground.

To be quite honest, Four loved his magpie wings. He loved the size- not as small as Five’s, not as big as Luther’s. Small enough to twist between his siblings, large enough to glide easily. He loved the shape- perfect for simple, relaxed gliding, just how he liked. He loved the color- the black secondaries and coverts that, in the right lighting, shimmered blue and green and purple.

He got ahold of some feather dyes, once, and dyed his white feathers the color of the rainbow. Reginald had gotten mad enough to send him to bed without dinner, but Four thought it was worth it. (Later, when he was Klaus, when he didn’t have Reginald watching his every move, he’d keep dying the white feathers, with different colors every time he molted or the colors faded out.)

After Five disappeared, everyone’s demeanor seemed to shift. Four- Klaus, now- just kept flying. He hoped that’s what Five was doing. Soaring high on those little wings of his, darting away from any problems that arise.

Ben gave Klaus a funny look one day, cradling a book he’d just found in the back of the library. A book of rhymes, if the title was anything to go by. “Have you heard the poem about magpies?” Ben asked. His gaze kept shifting to Klaus’s magpie wings.

Klaus hummed as he flopped onto the couch beside his brother. “No, I don’t think I have.”

“It’s supposedly what it means when you see a certain number of magpies.”

The magpie motioned for Ben to read, and he did.

“One for sorrow, two for joy,
three for a girl, four for a boy,
five for silver, six for gold,
seven for a secret that must never be told.”

Klaus considered that. After all, the only magpie he’d ever come in contact with was himself. Instead of pointing that out, however (besides, Ben probably already figured it out), he just laughed. “Sounds an awful lot like our family.”

Ben raised the book to hide his smile.

Klaus discovered early on that flight was one of the few things that could make him smile without fail, especially after nights spent in the mausoleum with his wings bound. He loved the feeling of wind rushing past, messing with his hair and he tilted into a wide turn, twisting his body into a
spiral.

(Flying—especially in populated areas—while intoxicated wasn’t exactly safe, but that wasn’t about to stop the magpie.)

Ben always said that Klaus could probably be one of those show fliers if he wanted to, the ones who attach ribbons to their limbs and draw shapes in the air with smoke machines.

Then Ben died.

Klaus didn’t fly as much, after that. He didn’t like flying alone. He liked knowing there was someone to catch him if he fell, someone to watch as he pulled off stunts he’d never tried before. Even when Ben reappeared as a ghost, it wasn’t quite the same. Especially when, at first, Klaus just laughed and blew cigarette smoke in the ghost’s direction, refusing to believe it.

(He accepted it eventually, even if some days he buried his head in a pillow or threw himself off a building into the air to ignore talking to the spectre of his brother.)

Ben could still fly, even in his ghostly form, and every so often he’d look up from his ghost book and ask, “Do you want to go flying today, Klaus?”

Klaus didn’t always agree.

But more often than not, the answer was yes.
Five wasn't in any hurry to grow up.

It was strange, to him, how eager his siblings were to get their adult plumage. Four happily ranted for hours about what he planned to do once he was able to fly, and Six meticulously counted and measured the new, larger feathers starting to peek out from his down.

But Five was different. Maybe because he was distracted by the prospect of time-travel, but he regarded his molting with nothing more than a hum.

“You'll have to have separate flight lessons from the others, Five,” Grace had informed him cheerily. “Hummingbirds fly a bit differently than other birds.”

Five snorted. As if he'd need many lessons- he was convinced it was mostly instinct. He'd get it down, no problem. (Though, that didn't stop him from borrowing Six's book on flight.)

He stabbed the knife into the table, amused as everyone's wings fluffed up in surprise. Feathers scattered everywhere. Five's own wings (soon, he'd be able to fly soon) fluttered against his back as he looked up to Reginald. “I want to time-travel.”

Feathers scattered off his wings as he ran down the street outside, pushing himself into little jumps that were more fluttering than actual flight. He grinned at the rush of energy as he jumped through the seasons- a little further, now. He moved his hands forward, as if parting the veil of time-

And that's how he got stuck in the apocalypse.

Five ended up teaching himself how to fly, with a bit of encouragement from Delores. He managed to more or less figure it out, having to take off his coat so that his wings had a full range of movement. But keeping that movement going was exhausting. (He remembered Six's book said something about hummingbirds having a high flight cost.)

So he didn't fly, not very often. He didn't have the resources to keep himself sustained, so he just tucked his wings in and relied on good old fashioned leg power to get him around. His molts were lonely and painful, leaving his wings tender. He'd pulled a blood feather on accident once, and was more cautious with his preening from that point on. At least he made use of the feathers he shed.

Pillows, blankets, quills, decorations- Five found a use for every feather from every molt. And there were a lot of feathers, over the years.

He nearly laughed when the Handler arrived. She had dove wings. Pristine, delicate things, not a speck of dirt on the perfectly aligned white feathers. So he went with her because, really, what else was he meant to do?

Then he opened a rift, back to 2019.
“Hey, is it just me, or is that little Number Five?” Klaus asked airly, wings twitching and not really resting perfectly against his back. His white feathers were dyed magenta, yellow, and indigo this time.

The worst part of being 13 again, in Five's opinion, was his wings. He'd body was exactly as it was the moment he left 45 years ago, so he didn't quite have his adult plumage. It made tracking him a bit too easy, with all the green and red feathers he was shedding.

“It's okay,” Vanya said softly, when she saw him gently carding his feathers. “I'll help you learn to fly.”

Five almost said something like “I don’t need your help.” But she would’ve ignored that- he’d already told her about his lack of flight in the apocalypse, his bet was that she didn’t think he’d ever learned to fly.

So, instead, he just smiled a bit and said, “Sure, ‘V.”

Hopefully he could hold her to it.
Chapter Summary

Six was used to being the baby of the family, even if he was born at the exact same moment as his siblings. Still, it didn’t stop them from thinking of him as the youngest, the last of the Hargreeves. (Completely ignoring Seven, which Six thought was a bit rude.)

But, they were justified. He was the last in everything. The last to discover his powers, the last to gain some semblance of control over them (still working on that), the last to finish growing his adult plumage.

(At least he wasn’t the last to learn to fly.)

(Sorry, Seven.)

His sooty owl wings were large- larger than any of his siblings, besides One. He didn’t really mind.

When Four came back from training shaking and crying, Six would cover him in his wing, holding him close until he calmed down. “Your wings are really soft,” Four would always murmur, gently preening Six’s feathers. Six never knew how to respond to that, so he’d just hum and compliment Four’s own wings.

Six cried for a while when Five ran away.

“It’s okay,” Four tried to say, though his shaking voice usually gave away the fact he didn’t believe himself. Then, as if proof made it any better, he’d say, “He’s not dead.”

Six would stare out the window for a minute, then finally reply, “He never learned how to fly.”

In any case, Six wasn’t entirely sure where to start with learning how to fly. It reminded him of training with his powers- he didn’t know where to start then, either. At least this time, Four grabbed his wrist and dragged him outside, showing him which feathers did what, what motion to make with his large wings.

(With the help of a few books and a bit of instructing from Reginald, Six even figured out how to fly silently, like owls were known for.)

One thing Six never enjoyed was using his powers. He never quite figured out how to use them in flight, much to Reginald’s disappointment, but he did discover that blood had a tendency to stain his lighter under feathers. Four would help him wash it out, blabbering about some magazine he read while they worked. It was a nice distraction from the task.

Then Six became Ben. The name change didn’t really affect much, but Ben kinda enjoyed having something to himself. The number had never really seemed personal.

“What do owls symbolize?” Klaus asked one day as he went back and forth between preening his
own feathers and Ben’s, genuine curiosity in his voice.

“Depends what culture,” Ben replied smoothly, one of his wings laid out across Klaus. “Wisdom and stuff, but Dad always makes sure I remember they also represent ill omen.”

Klaus snorted. “Well, he’s a bastard.”

Ben looked around, as if Reginald was going to walk in at any moment. (He wasn’t, he was overseeing Allison’s training.) “Don’t talk like that,” he hissed.

“I’m right and you know it.” Beat. “I’m gonna get us out of here, one day,” Klaus whispered, conspiratorially. “Dad can’t keep us cooped up forever. One day, we’re gonna take off together, okay? Then you can tie as many ribbons to my arms as you want, and we’ll just fly around in open, fresh air forever.”

Ben thought that sounded pretty good.

A shame they never got around to it before he died.

He had hoped that his death would cause his siblings to step back, to regroup. But it seemed to have the opposite effect and, before long, the Academy (aside from Luther, that stubborn eagle) was gone.

Klaus even tried to ignore him, at first. But Ben could still fly, even easier in this ghostly form, and he’d just follow Klaus. It wasn’t like he had anything better to do.

Finally, finally, that magpie looked directly at him and asked, “Do you want to go flying?” Ben eagerly accepted.

It was the best day of his death.
Seven’s wings developed quietly. Her down blended with her siblings’ along the floor, and no one commented on the state of her brown-gray pigeon wings. It didn’t take too long for the molting process to complete itself, all things considered, but no one approached her to show her how to fly.

She waited, quietly hoping someone would lead her outside. Hoping someone would say “hey, Seven, come fly with us!” Or even, “Seven, do you want to come learn how to fly?”

But no one did.

There wasn’t enough space in her room to teach herself, she discovered after knocking her lamp off its place on the dresser. So, really, she felt she was justified in following her siblings to their training sessions, hoping she’d get a chance to feel what flight felt like.

Reginald wasted no time before scolding her and sending her back to her room.

She cried herself to sleep, and was woken up in the middle of the night by Five, fluffy little wings fluttering against his back. “Do you want to learn how to fly?” he’d asked her. She’d simply nodded, grabbed her coat, and followed him outside.

He was a surprisingly good coach for not having yet developed flight feathers himself, and he instructed her well enough that she could glide on her own as long as she had something to jump off of by the end of the night. He’d grabbed her arm and teleported the two of them to get donuts as some sort of reward.

Their conspiratorial flight school sessions continued, every other night, with donuts or peanut butter and marshmallow sandwiches after each “class.”

Then Five disappeared. Seven cried herself to sleep that night, too.

Seven- or, Vanya now- didn’t get any more late night lessons after that. She left the light on because.. well, what if he was flying and couldn’t tell which house was theirs from way up above? She left out sandwiches, because hummingbirds have a very high flight cost, you know, and Five would want something to regain his energy when he returned.

Father caught her one day, sneaking out in the late hours of the evening to practice flying. She
cowered, squeaking in fear as he dragged her back inside by the wing, scolding her the entire time. He made her sit on the bathroom floor, rummaging through a drawer until he pulled out a pair of large scissors.

“W-What are those for?” she couldn’t help but ask, frightened by the sight.

“I’ve told you time and time again, Seven, that you are not like your siblings. I don’t want you getting hurt flying around. This is for your own good.”

He forced her to spread her wing and set the scissors against her primaries. Vanya shuddered. It didn’t hurt, but it certainly felt weird. And seeing the stubby remains of her feathers made her feel sick. Her feather grew back during every molt, and Father clipped them every time.

She read the book Five had given her until the cover fell off, but its instructions on flight were useless now.

Vanya had always enjoyed playing the violin. It was the only thing she felt she could be even somewhat good at. She took at it with a renewed vigor once she found herself grounded. (Her fully developed wings were still smaller than she’d thought a pigeon’s should be.) She compared the music to flight, though her siblings never understood.

Her fingers hit the strings along the fingerboard with the same precision of adjusting feathers to follow the winds, each stroke of her bow like a flap of her wings. And when she closed her eyes, she could imagine soaring above the city, riding the swell of the music.

Still, she knew it wasn’t the same, and it was always over far too soon as she hit the double bar marking the end of the song.

When Allison left, Vanya followed, eager to get away from the man who had oppressed her for so long. Her feathers grew back, and for the first time in a long time, she found herself on the roof, enjoying the way the breeze felt on her wings.

She knew she’d have to relearn how to fly. It would take a while, and she wasn’t sure she even could. But it was alright; she had the book from so many years ago, and an idea for a book of her own. She’d get through this.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!