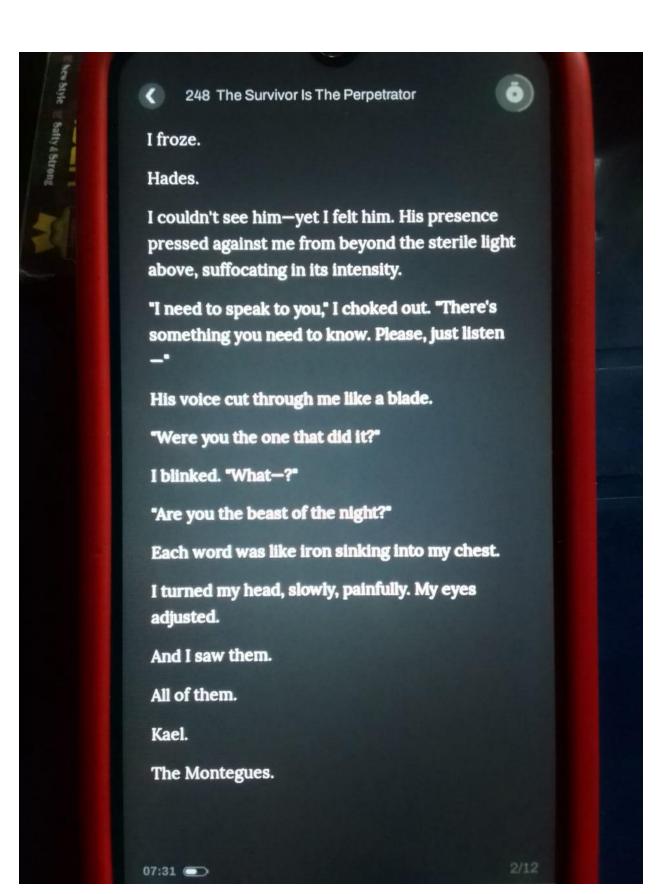
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"Answer the question, Eve," Kael said quietly.

I looked at him. His face was blank. Closed off.

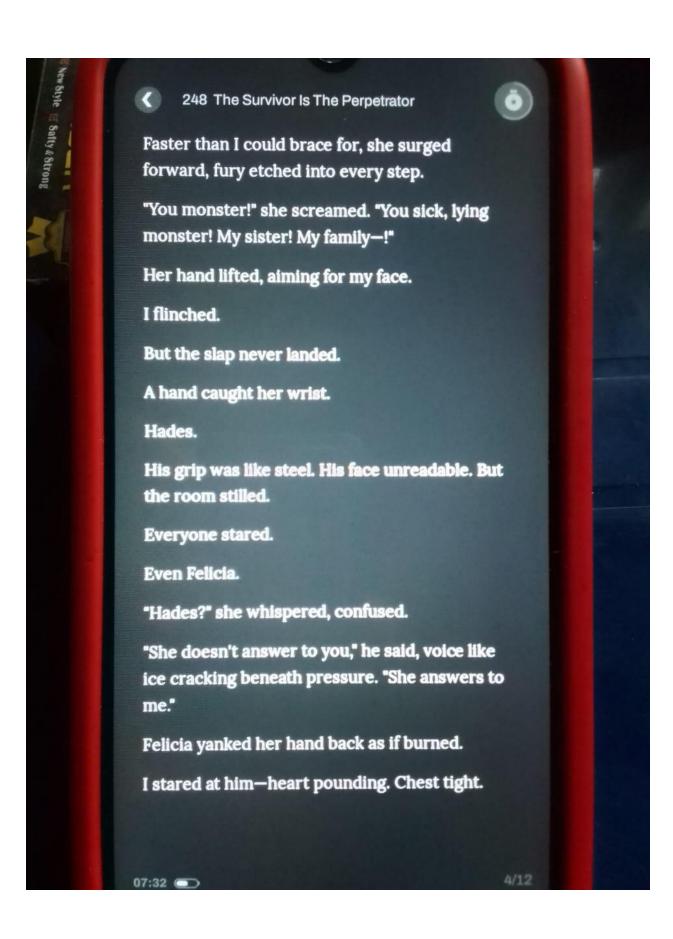
"I am the beast of the night," I confessed. "I was the one... responsible for the carnage of that night." I whispered. "But I didn't know who I was -I didn't know what I was. I didn't even know what I was capable of until-"

"So you admit it."

Felicia's voice rang out like a whip.

A beat of stunned silence followed.

Then she moved.





He wouldn't meet my eyes.

I swallowed the scream rising in my throat.

He'd stopped the slap.

But not the sentence.

And I didn't know which one hurt more.

The silence fractured like thin glass.

Montegue stepped forward, his voice cracking with tightly wound grief.

"She was my daughter... ripped away from me.
Do you think this is justice, Your Majesty?
Letting her confess and still shielding her?"

Lucinda's breath hitched, but she didn't speak. Her eyes shimmered with restrained tears.

Felicia, trembling, stood behind them, her hand pressed to her chest like she needed to hold in the scream still trapped in her throat.

"I know what I saw that night," Montegue went on, his voice rising. "I saw what she did. I have not been able to bury my daughter because I wanted justice. This—" he gestured toward me like I was filth, "this thing doesn't get protection."



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Hades didn't even blink.

But when he spoke, the weight of his words suffocated the room.

"She was my wife," he said, the edge in his tone slicing the air. "It was my child. And I have not forgotten."

The pause that followed could have shattered bone.

"I can never forget," he snarled. "So don't you dare stand there and tell me what justice looks like."

Montegue stiffened.

"She is a traitor!" he barked. "A murderer! You saw it, you heard her! She confessed!"

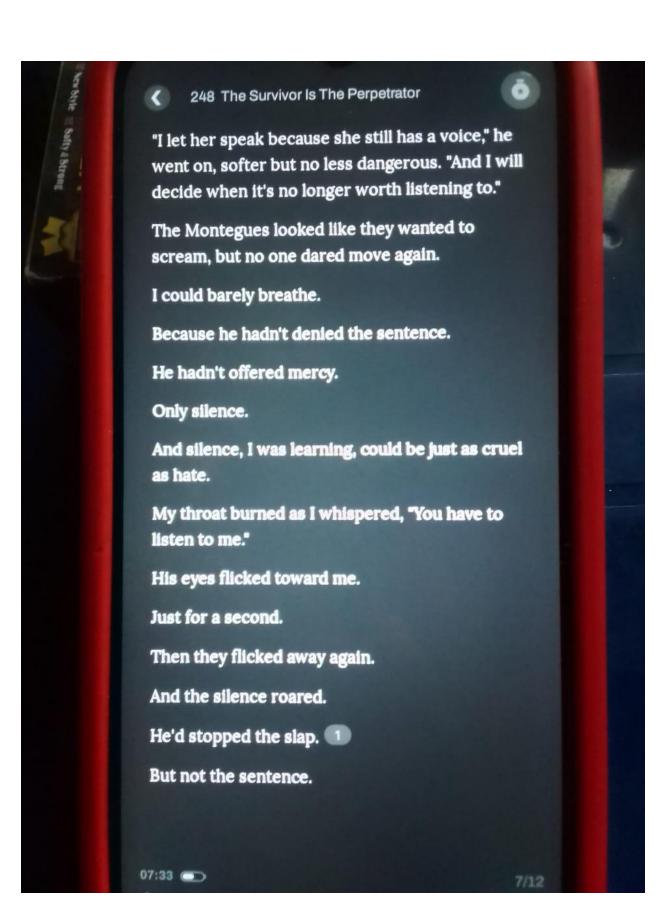
"I heard her," Hades growled, turning to him now.

"And yet she stands here alive, which is more than I can say for Danielle."

His voice cracked then—just slightly—but it was enough.

Enough to make Kael flinch.

Enough to shut everyone up.



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And I didn't know which one hurt more.

My pulse thundered in my ears as the silence stretched—so sharp it could've sliced skin.

Then, finally, Hades said it.

"Speak," he ordered. "Tell me what you have to say."

I swallowed hard.

This was it.

I took a breath, but it caught halfway. My throat felt like it was closing.

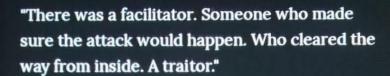
"I am not absolving myself," I began, voice low and uneven. "I did it. I tore lives apart that night. I saw blood on my hands, and I felt bones crush beneath my claws. I can't undo that. I wouldn't even try to deny it." My voice trembled.

I looked around the room, at the eyes watching me with suspicion and disgust and silence. I didn't care. Not anymore.

"But the massacre—it wasn't just me."

The room tensed.





"You are the only traitor here, you bitch!" 1



Felicia's scream split through the air, venomous and unhinged. She lunged again, but this time Lucinda was faster-grabbing her, wrapping her arms around her daughter, hissing something in her ear. 5

Felicia thrashed, her eyes burning into me like she could set me aflame with just hatred alonebut her skin had gone pale.

But I didn't look away.

I turned toward Hades.

And I dropped it.

"It was Felicia that did it."

Everything stopped.

The lights seemed to flicker. The room tilted. Even the air shifted, as though the space itself couldn't quite comprehend what I'd just said.

No one moved.

No one breathed.

Then-

Montegue let out a single, bitter laugh. He clapped once. Twice. The sound echoed with mockery.

"Well played," he said, striding forward, voice dripping with derision. "You butcher a girl, you admit to the murder of a royal family, and now—now—you point fingers at a grieving sister? That's your grand defense?"

He turned toward Hades.

"You see it now, don't you? She's just like every other traitor. No remorse. No shame. Just more lies."

Felicia shook with silent fury, her hand still clenched into a fist. Lucinda's face was a mask of controlled horror.

I looked at Hades.

He hadn't moved.

He hadn't spoken.

He just watched.

