

"I don't love you." The voice was guttural, twisted with venom. "I own you."

My vision blurred.

"I will break you. Watch the hope bleed from your eyes. I will rot you down to your bones, and when your body is cold and withered, I'll cradle what's left and whisper lullables into your corpse."

His grip tightened.

"You werewolves will pay for the sins of Malrik...
and you, my unfortunate mate—" he sneered,
"you will be the first of many. I claim. I own. I
destroy."

My fingers clawed at his arm, panic finally overtaking me as my airway collapsed. My legs kicked. My lungs screamed.

And still... he didn't let go.

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Rhea was howling now—no longer words, just anguish, fury, desperation. She tore through the tendrils of exhaustion as Hades hand was swallowed I'm shadows, the black veins spreading and searing my skin, ripping the breath from me

The moment his grip began to burn—really burn
—my vision swam. His hand was no longer flesh.
It was shadow, black and jagged, splitting
through his skin like obsidian shards.

And it was killing me.

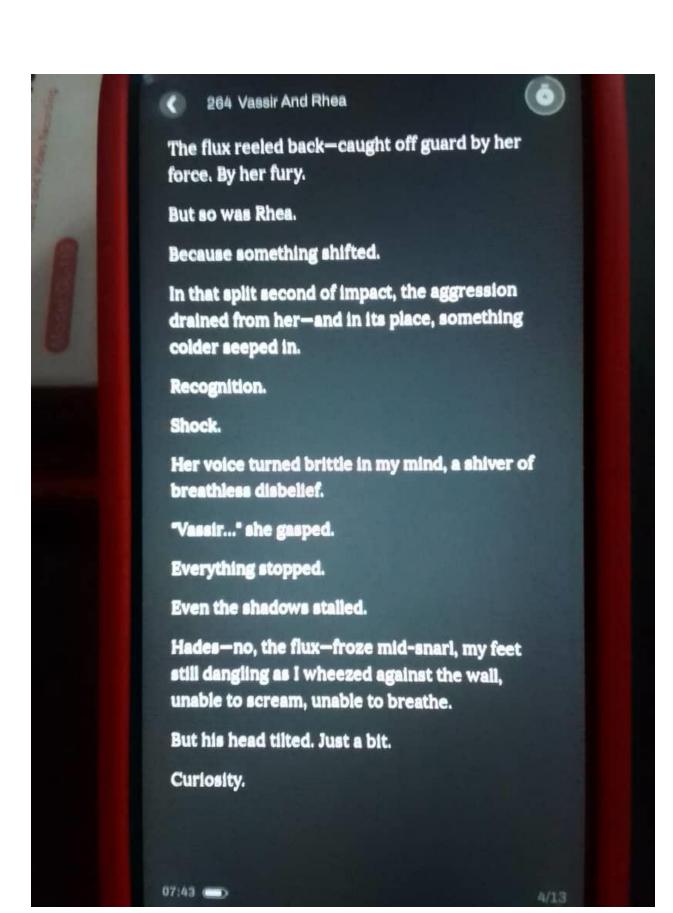
Rhea shrieked in my mind, tearing through the weight of her fatigue.

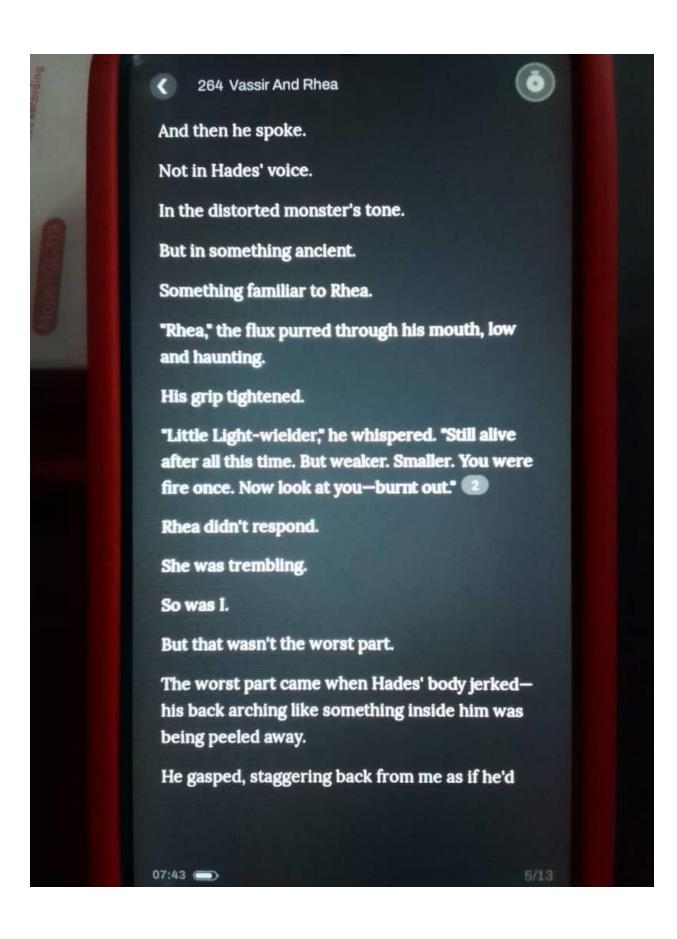
"I'm here!" she roared. "I'm here!"

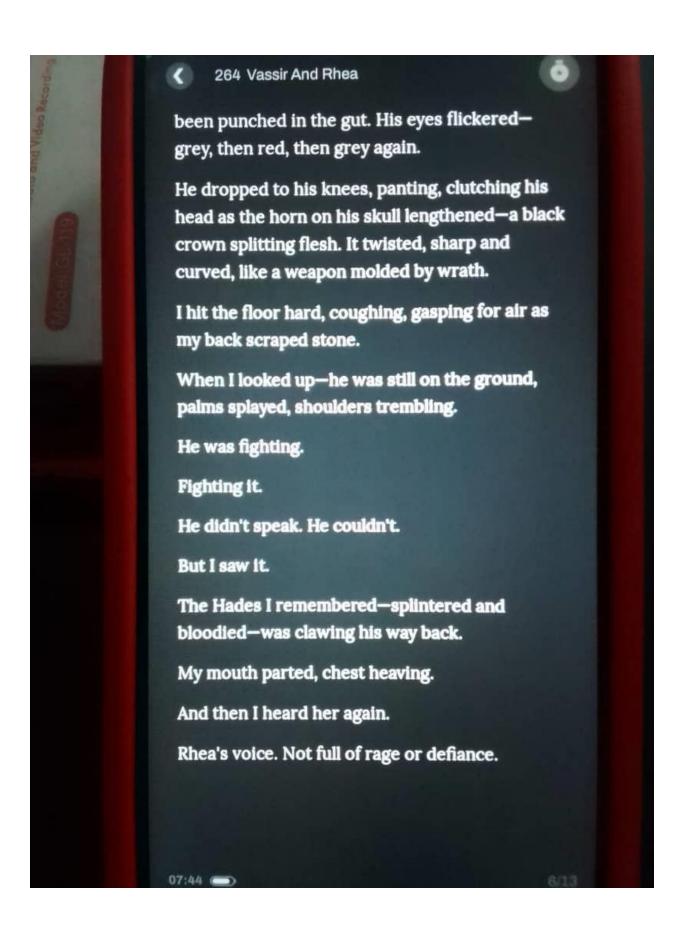
Then she moved—not into control, but into the space between. Her presence surged forward like a shield around my soul, intercepting the searing grip of the flux. It wasn't seamless. It was violent.

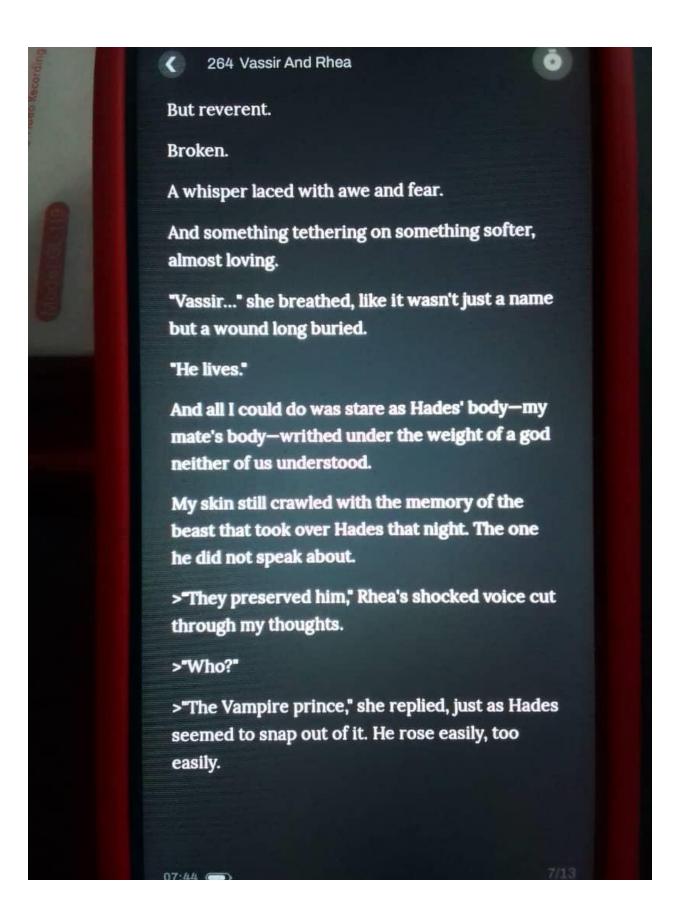
Like two speeding cars crashing headlong.

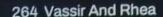
The moment they collided, I felt it. A rending in my chest, my mind, like static scraping bone.











Almost mechanical.

Looked down at me and when he spoke, he was Hades but unfeeling. "You will give me that password, mutt."

I tried not to flinch at the slur but failed. I bit my lip from the overwhelming dread and pain.

"You will give me that password, mutt."

His voice was ice.

Detached. Controlled. Too calm.

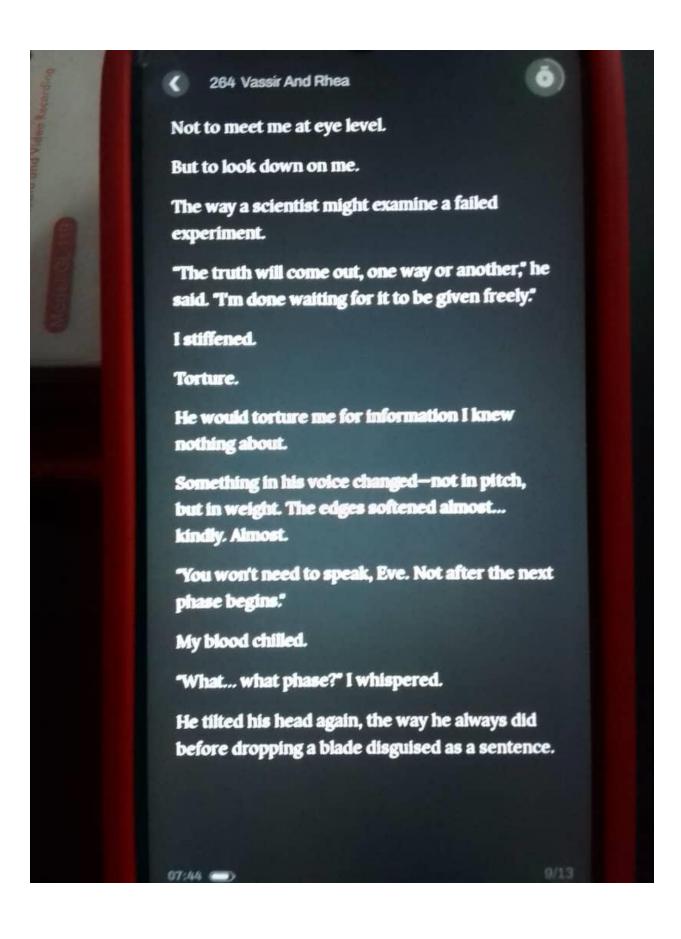
But the weight behind the words hit like a thunderclap.

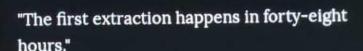
I flinched—couldn't help it—and shame curled in my stomach like something venomous.

He stared down at me, expression unreadable, the jagged horn now gleaming under the dim cell light like some dark crown. There was no flicker of remorse. No conflict in his tone.

Only cold inevitability.

My lips parted to speak, but the words caught in my throat when he crouched.





My heart dropped.

"No," I breathed.

"I wanted to give you time," he cut in. "Time has passed."

He stood smoothly, brushing dust from his sleeve as if the conversation had bored him.

"You don't want to be awake for it, Eve," he said without looking at me. "Trust me on that."

My chest constricted so violently I had to clutch it, my fingers curling into the torn fabric of my shift like that would stop the ache—like it would hold something together before it cracked completely.

I couldn't speak.

I couldn't even scream.

Because I knew what he was saying.

This wasn't a warning.

It was a promise.

