266 Grieving In Red Lipstick 1

I turned sharply, instinct on edge. Felicia's voice echoed down the corridor, loud and panicked—her heels a staccato beat against the floor as she came into view, hair windblown, face flushed with fear.

"Elliot!" she shouted again, skidding to a halt when she saw him in my arms.

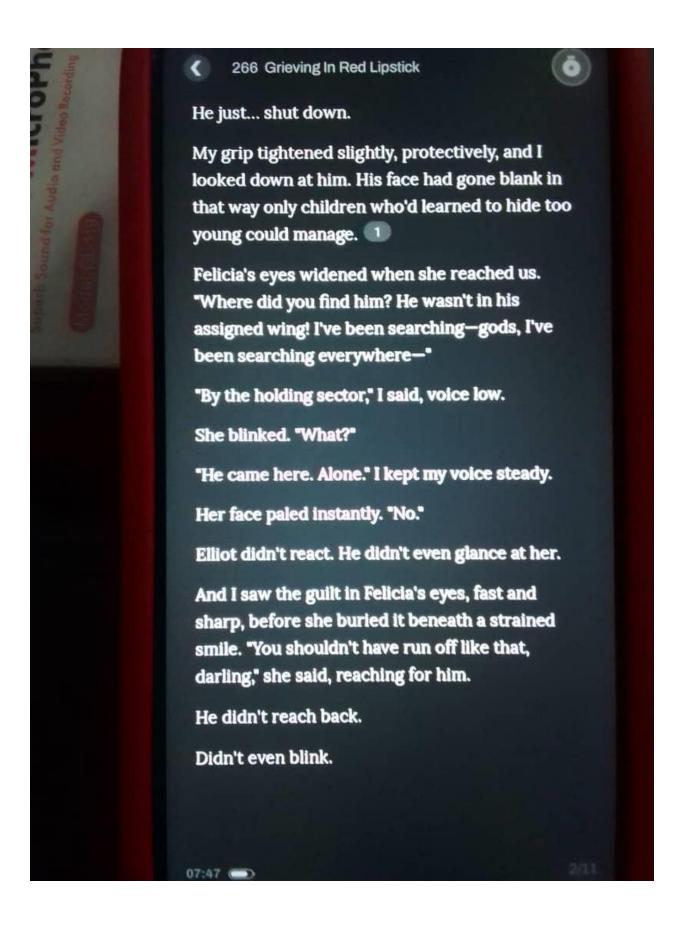
I felt him startle. He quickly pushed the papers back down. Hiding it again as well as whatever he thought I was finally trusted enough to show me.

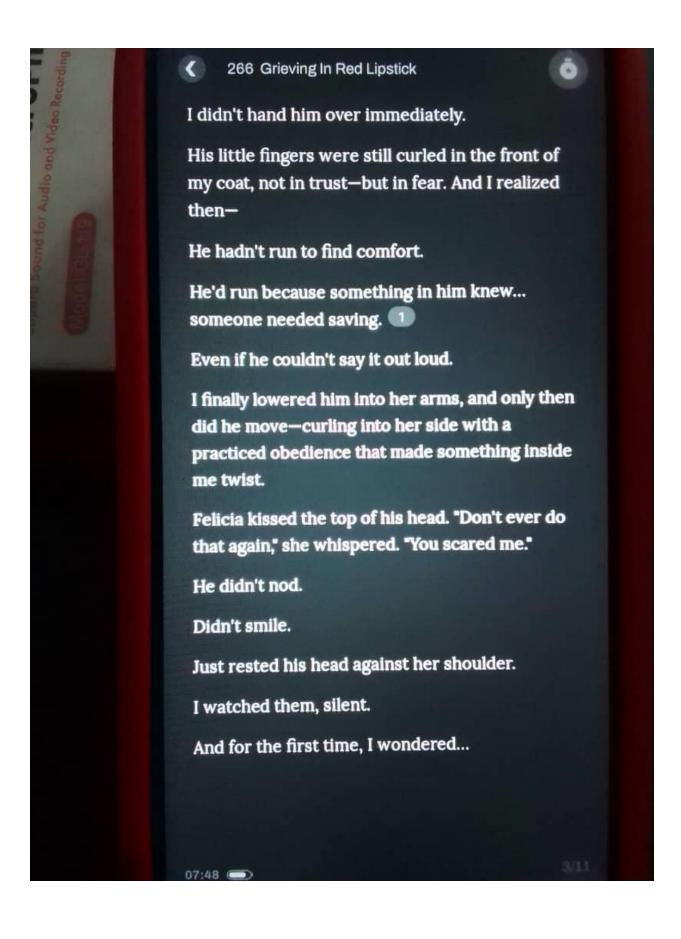
Not like a child who'd been found—but like a creature caught. His little body went rigid against me, his earlier emotions—frustration, confusion, plea—sealed behind a wall of practiced stillness.

He didn't move.

Didn't sign.

Didn't cry out.





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And why Elliot had come all this way—not to her, but to the very place she hadn't wanted him near.

The place she'd sworn to shield him from.

> "Children don't lie," the flux murmured. "But adults do. Even the ones who grieve in red lipstick."

I didn't answer.

I had a sudden sinking feeling. I recognised that flinching. I flinched like that when I was with my father after the night the twins were born.

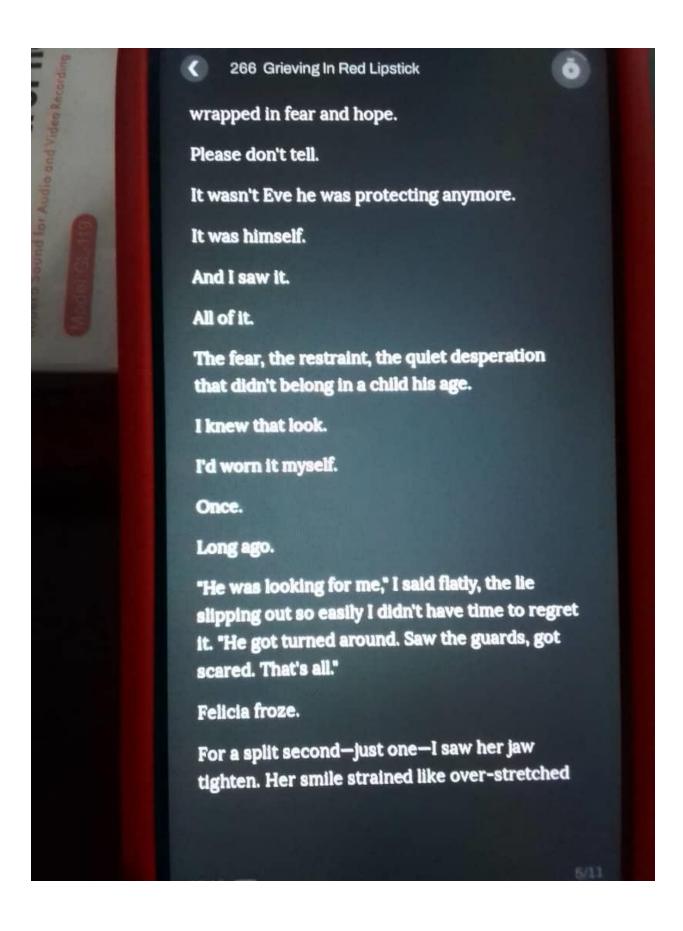
Felicia narrowed her eyes, still rocking Elliot absently against her shoulder. "What could he possibly be doing here? By the holding sector of all places? That's restricted—he could've been hurt."

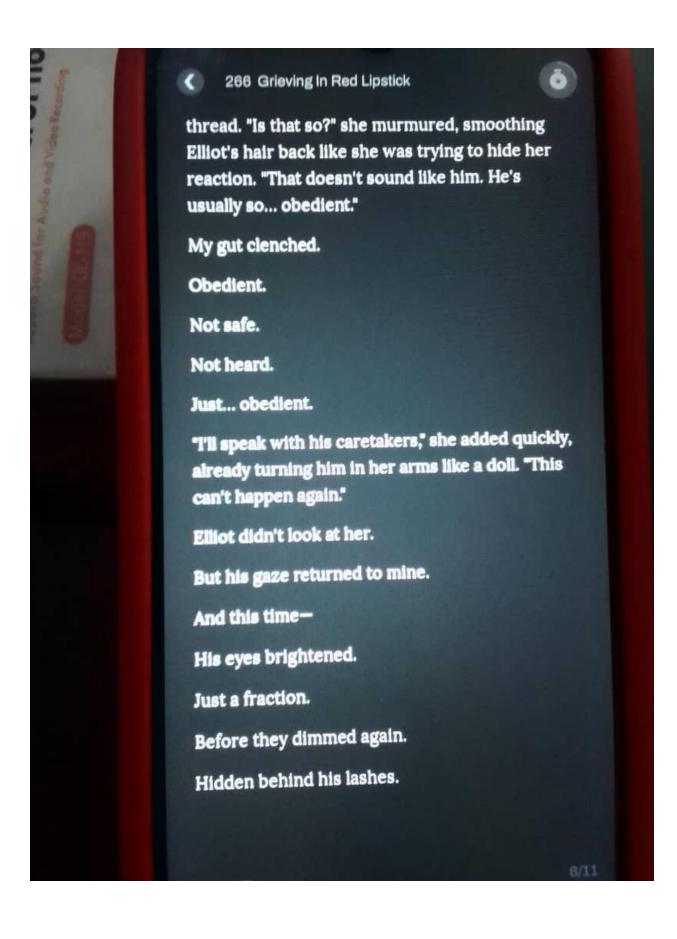
I watched Elliot's face.

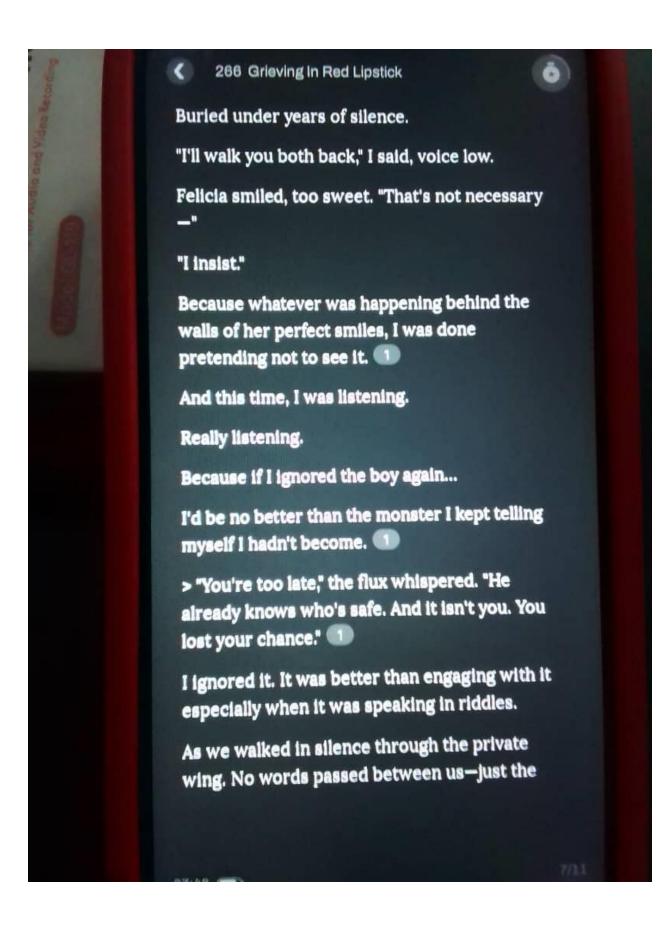
The flicker.

Barely a breath.

His eyes darted up to mine—a flash of green so vivid it almost hurt. A silent question. A plea







He blinked up at me, expression unreadable.

