



383 Compulsion

Eve ¹

Silence followed her last words.

They hung in the air like smoke—heavy, clinging, choking.

Montegue's hand remained frozen near her cheek, as if his mind couldn't quite catch up with what she'd just said.

"My daughter works for the enemy."

Then Lucinda started shaking.

At first, it was her hands. A light tremor. Almost subtle.

But then her whole body followed.

Her mouth opened as if to say more, but nothing came out. Her eyes unfocused, staring past us at something we couldn't see. That blank look, that eerie stillness—it hit me in the gut like a stone.

"Lucinda?" I tried, shifting Elliot slightly to step closer.



Her jaw tightened.

"Lucinda, look at me. What happened when you visited Felicia? What did she say? What did she do?"

She blinked once. And then again, slower this time.

Her lips moved, but no sound escaped.

Montegue crouched beside her. "Luci," he said softly, using the nickname that cracked something tender behind his voice. "Please—"

Suddenly, a thin stream of red began to drip from the corner of her mouth.

Montegue flinched, pulling back slightly. "What...?"

More blood.

It slipped past her lips and ran down her chin.

I stepped forward instantly, my heart leaping into my throat. "Monte—"

"Oh gods," he breathed. "She's biting her tongue."

"What?"



"She's trying to stop herself from talking—she's severing it."

He turned sharply. "MEDICS! NOW!"

Lucinda's body jolted as he reached to steady her. Her eyes were still open, still far away, like she was watching something from deep inside a well she couldn't climb out of.

Her limbs convulsed, hands twitching violently as blood poured more freely now.

"No no no—Lucinda, stop! You don't have to say anything! Please," Montegue pleaded, his voice cracking, panic rising.

I handed Elliot to one of the guards without thinking. "Hold him. Keep him calm." 1

I knelt and placed my hands over Lucinda's arms, trying to restrain her gently. She thrashed under our hold with surprising strength. Her mouth was clenched shut, locked tight as more blood bubbled between her lips.

"She's under compulsion," Rhea hissed in my mind.

Montegue swore under his breath, cradling the

back of Lucinda's head while blood soaked through his gloves.

The doors burst open and two medics stormed in, each with a kit in hand. One quickly assessed, the other moved straight to sedate.

"Now!" Montegue shouted.

The needle pierced her arm, and slowly, agonizingly, her body stopped resisting. Her jaw loosened. The tremors subsided.

Her eyelids fluttered, her gaze clearing for just a moment. And in that moment, she looked at me.

Terrified.

And then she mouthed, soundlessly:

"Sorry."

And slipped under.

As the medics pulled her onto a stretcher, it struck me then—I had seen this before. At least a version of it.

Yes, the scene played out in front of me like it had more than two months ago.



When I had mentioned the prophecy being a lie—the way he abruptly got up and tried to speak, panicked and desperate, before she suddenly went silent—like Lucinda did before she...

It was the same thing.

"Do you think?" Rhea muttered in my mind.

She was...

I got up, running for the stretcher that was already being wheeled down the hallway.

"Wait!" I called, my voice ringing through the corridor.

The medics froze.

I caught up to the stretcher, Rhea pacing in my chest like a wild animal finally finding the scent it had been chasing.

I looked at the medic, my hands gripping the rails. "We need to check her. Now. There's something on her body. Look for a mark."

The medic blinked at me, confused. "A... what?"

"A mark," I repeated. "Something carved or branded. She's under compulsion. Someone's



pulling her strings."

Montegue caught up, his face pale and drawn. He looked like he hadn't taken a full breath since Lucinda collapsed. "Eve... what are you saying?"

I turned to him, shaking. "This isn't the first time I've seen this. Someone tried to speak once before and went still—just like Lucinda. Just like this. It's not coincidence. It's control."

He stared at me, the words seeming to cut through the fog of his grief.

"Where?" he asked, hoarse.

"Start with the chest. Near the sternum or collarbone. Maybe under the ribs. Wherever they think we won't look."

Montegue hesitated for only a breath before nodding to the medics. "Do it. Gently."

One of them pulled down the collar of Lucinda's bloodstained blouse. Nothing.

Then the other reached toward the hem of her tunic and slowly lifted.

And there, just over her heart, etched in a



delicate, curling pattern like something burned with care, was a mark.

An ornate M.

Thin black veins spidered out around it, subtle but visible now that we were looking.

The medic flinched. "What in the—"

Montegue went still.

"That's not magic from here," I said quietly.

He looked at me, his voice strangled. "Do you know what that is?"

I nodded. My hands were cold.

"It's Malrik's symbol."

Montegue staggered back a step, like the ground beneath him had shifted.

"My wife..." He croaked. His voice broke. "Who..."

I had gone into autopilot, forcing my horror down like the bitter bile that it was. We had no time. If the mark of Malrik was imprinted on someone so close, there was no telling how far we had been infiltrated—or how deep.



Darius was not just steps ahead of us. It was far more than that.

"She said she visited Felicia. That was where this..."

I gestured to the brand, to the black veins threading out like a curse too old to be healed.

"...started."

Montegue's eyes were still locked on Lucinda's chest, but I saw something shift in him again—grief curling into fury. Into action.

I turned to the guard who had taken Elliot. "Get Communications. Now. I want access to the logbook—every authorized and unauthorized visit to Prisoner 1207." 1

The guard blinked. "1207?"

"Felicia Veronique Montegue," I said, louder this time, making sure everyone within earshot heard the full weight of her name.

"Go."

He ran.

I turned to the second guard. "We need the exact



day Lucinda last saw her—every second of that interaction. If there's surveillance, I want the footage. If she lingered in the hallway, I want timestamps. If she made a call afterward, I want the recipient."

"Yes, my lady."

"Start with the day she signed into visitation," I continued, brain moving faster than my mouth could keep up. "Then work your way forward. Look at her movement logs. Who did she speak to? Where did she go? When did her sleep patterns change? Her appetite? Her everything."

Montegue's voice was low behind me. "You think it happened that fast?"

"Compulsion doesn't always break the body," I muttered. "Just the soul. Once they crack open the door, all they need is time and the right trigger. We have to find the point of contact."

He flinched like the words physically hurt.

"She didn't even know what was happening, did she?" he asked.

"I think... she fought it," I said softly. "She fought



it with everything she had. She didn't fail, Montegue. She just didn't win fast enough." 1

I took Elliot back and rocked him gently, trying to soothe the sleep that had not fully worn off his eyes.

"We don't have time to wait. It will be relayed. We need to get to your Manor."

I apologise for the horrible delay in updates, I suffered from an infection from my surgery and antibiotics are a bitch (IYKYK). I had an ORIF done years ago but I ended up with a piece of metal in my leg, I had it removed and ended up with an infection. I am telling you this because, your payment for my book, paid for the surgery and most of the subsequent treatment.

Thank you all. 6

