



## 389 Slipping Through My Fingers

Eve 1

I still had Elliot in my arms as I watched them try to restrain Lucinda. Gammas had been deployed to hold her, and each tried their best to clamp her limbs down without hurting her.

Her growls, howls, and sobs created a painful harmony that made my stomach tighten into a hard knot.

"Take their children." But her voice was masculine, booming—enough to send a shiver down my spine.

Monte knelt beside his wife, his frail frame quivering from the weight of watching her battle with compulsions.

"Lucinda, please, if... you... can hear me."

His voice was unstable, his face etched with so much grief and hopelessness that I had to look away from him.



It pulled me back to a time when I had begged Hades to snap out of the devilish haze that the Flux had dragged him into. Begged him to come back to me...

Watching someone I cared for have to go through the same was gut-wrenching.

Even though it seemed it wouldn't be possible, the clamps were put in place and Lucinda was bound. Yet she continued to growl, glaring at us like she didn't recognize us.

I walked over to Monte, resting a hand on his quaking shoulder.

"Get up," I whispered. "She will be fine."

I lied. Because the goddess knew I was just as clueless as everyone else.

Monte rose slowly, and I wrapped an arm around his shoulder to steady the old man as the medics, who had been too scared to come any closer, finally stepped out of their hiding place.

"You should not sedate her?" I asked.

"The sedatives and tranquilizers worked at first," the medic said, voice hushed, eyes fixed on the



jagged red mark pulsing on Lucinda's collarbone like a second heartbeat. "She'd go under. Sleep for a while."

Monte's head turned, straining to listen.

"But then she'd wake up again," the medic continued. "And every time, it was faster. Shorter. Like her body was adapting. Fighting it."

I felt Elliot's tiny fingers curl into my shoulder, his cheek pressed against my neck, warm but tense. He could feel the energy too—dark and charged, like the crackle before a storm.

The medic's gaze flicked to me. "If we keep forcing it, her nervous system could go into shock. Permanent damage. Maybe even organ failure."

Monte's knees nearly buckled again. I held him tighter.

"She's not just resisting," I murmured, watching Lucinda as she snarled at the Gammas, her eyes shimmering with unnatural light. "The mark is adapting quickly to anything that might hinder its command."





The medic nodded slowly. "That's what we're afraid of. It's like the more we suppress her, the more it pushes back. The stronger it gets."

"And the angrier," I added grimly.

Because the mark wasn't just active—it was furious.

"What can be done?" I asked, already dreading the answer.

The medic's face fell, shoulders slumping. "I doubt there can be anything that can be done. At least in our sphere of medicine."

"Then we get the Deltas," I blurted out, adjusting Elliot on my hip.

Monte finally spoke. "Deltas," he echoed, his voice distant, cracking under the weight of too many memories. "Deltas are healers. Not just in body, but in soul. They were trained to mend broken wolves." He paused, dragging a trembling hand across his face. "But they don't undo commands. Not living ones."

My brow furrowed. "What do you mean, living?"

Monte's throat worked as he tried to find the



words. His eyes never left Lucinda, who had begun to gnaw at the edge of her restraints like a starved thing.

He swallowed hard. "Because the command isn't just embedded—it's alive. It's a force threaded into her spirit, not just her mind."

My heart sank. "You're saying she's... possessed?"

"No," he said, shaking his head slowly.

"Possession fades. This is worse."

He looked at me, and there was a flicker of the historian in him, buried beneath all the grief.

"In the age of the Vampire Wars, there were commands like this. Mind-shackles carved in blood and anchored in the soul. The only way to end them—truly end them—was to kill the one who gave the command."

I stiffened. "Are you saying someone did this to Lucinda?"

Monte nodded, almost imperceptibly. "A Delta can soothe it, slow it... maybe even help her reclaim parts of herself. But unless we destroy



the source—whoever marked her—she'll never be free."

He turned back to Lucinda as her body spasmed, her mouth frothing from exertion.

"Lycans were made for war. For fire and ruin. But vampires... they were architects of will. Every whisper, every drop of blood, had purpose. Control."

A chill swept down my spine.

"And this?" I whispered. "This isn't just a scar. It's a leash."

Monte's eyes watered. "One that tightens every time she resists."

Monte's lips began to move faster, his voice thinning into a ramble as his gaze fixed on Lucinda like he was watching her vanish in real time.

"I should've seen it—I should've known. The nightmares. The confusion. The mark didn't just appear. It grew. Slowly, like ivy winding around her spine. And I... I thought it was stress. Just stress—after everything we've lost..."





"Monte," I said softly, trying to pull him back to the moment. "You need to breathe—"

But he wasn't listening.

"I told her to rest. Told her to eat. I thought if I could just be strong for both of us—"

"Monte," I repeated, firmer this time. "Look at me."

"But I wasn't strong," he hissed, chest heaving. "I was blind. Like I was with Calen. Like I was with —"

"Monte!"

He gasped. His hand flew to his chest, clawing at the fabric of his shirt as his knees gave out.

"Shit!" I dropped to the ground with him, still holding Elliot in one arm as I cradled Monte with the other. "Help! Now!"

The medics scrambled forward at last, one diving beside me with a medical scanner, another fumbling for a pressure injector.

Elliot's scream cut through it all like a dagger.

"Grandpa!"



His tiny voice was raw, desperate, terrified.

Monte's breathing was erratic, shallow. His fingers trembled as he gripped the front of my shirt, his haunted eyes flicking between Lucinda and Elliot. And then to me.

"They keep..." he gasped. "They keep slipping through my fingers."

I swallowed the lump forming in my throat.

"My family..." he whispered.

And then, like something shattered inside him, his head lolled back.

"No, no—no, stay with me," I begged, heart pounding as the scanner beeped erratically.

"Monte, please! Stay with me!"

Elliot sobbed into my shoulder, his cries small and broken as the medics worked frantically around us.

And somewhere in the background, still shackled and snarling—

Lucinda watched, her eyes wild and unseeing.

And the mark burned brighter.





"Move!" the lead medic barked. "Get him on a stretcher—now!"

They hoisted Monte's limp body onto a collapsible gurney. One medic pressed a defibrillator patch to his chest, another slid an oxygen mask over his mouth. The scanner in her hand was blinking red—rapidly.

"Cardiac arrhythmia. His heart's overworked and unstable. He's going into neurogenic shock."

"What caused it?" I asked breathlessly, staggering to my feet with Elliot still clinging to me like a second skin.

"Probably grief," she said without looking at me. "Everything—trauma, adrenaline spikes, emotional collapse. His nervous system just gave out."

Elliot was trembling in my arms, his little hand still outstretched as if he could reach his grandfather, still whispering, "No... no..."

"Push one amp of noradrenaline. Now!"

The medic's voice was razor-sharp as they slammed the emergency injector into Monte's



arm. His body gave the faintest jolt. The heart monitor screamed one long, terrible note—flatline—before stuttering into a disjointed rhythm. Not stable. But not gone.

"Still in neurogenic shock," another medic murmured, sweat glistening on his temple as he attached a secondary IV line. "BP's crashing. If we can't get his pressure back up—"

"Then we lose him," the lead finished grimly.

I stood there like a ghost in the wreckage, arms wrapped tightly around Elliot, my legs moving only because they had to. The scent of sterile saline and fear filled the hallway, burning the back of my throat.

They had placed him gently on one of the infirmary beds, right there in the same room. His body was limp, chest barely rising.

A monitor was hooked to his finger. IV fluids ran slowly into his arm.

He was alive.

But only just.

Elliot's face was streaked with tears. 1



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He hadn't said a word in minutes, just kept his eyes on Monte, like he could will him to wake up.

His little hand trembled as he reached forward.

"Grandpa," he whispered. "Not you too."

His voice shattered before he buried his head in my shoulder, sobbing, his words melting together in his pain.

I rubbed his back, the lump in my throat too hard to swallow for me to even console him.

We were all alone now.

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