

## Broken 122

Chapter 122 Destruction CLARA The mirror hated me. Nothing can convince me otherwise. Finished Every morning, it showed me a version of myself I didn't recognize with hollow cheeks, skin pale enough to bruise under candlelight, eyes that looked more sunken than sharp. Still, I painted my lips red. Red was power. Red was control. I could fake strength for one more day. Mark knocked softly on the door before pushing it open. "You didn't eat again." I rolled my eyes in annoyance. His voice that was once exciting to me now frayed on my nerves. "I'm not hungry," I said, adjusting the collar of my robe so he won't see my hollow chest. He sighed, the sound low and tired. "You've been saying that for a week." Because for a week, every bite I took turned to ash on my tongue. Every breath hurt. Every night, the magic that had once filled me now flickered like a dying candle. But I couldn't let him see that. I won't. "I'm fine," I said, turning away. "Don't start." He stepped closer, voice rough with concern. "Clara, you're not fine. You look—" "Don't say it." I warned him. "-sick," he finished anyway, ignoring my warning.

The word hung between us like a heavy bag of poison.

turned, anger flashing sharp. "I said I'm fine! Stop treating me like some broken thing you have to fix." He raised his hands in surrender. "I just want to help." "I don't need your pity, Mark." I sneered. "It's not pity." His tone softened. "It's care. There's a difference." He gently walked the distance

But care had never fixed anything for me. Care didn't erase the memory of Amy's perfect face, or the way everyone had chosen her over me even when I tried to become something greater. "Go home," I said coldly. "I can handle myself." Maybe I can't. But he doesn't need to know. He didn't leave. Of course he didn't. Mark never knew when to stop caring. Later that night, I found him sitting by the fireplace, still in his work clothes, his eyes were shadowed with worry. He'd stayed.. for me. And for a moment, I hated how much I wanted that. I hated how it made me feel. I walked toward him, the silk of my robe whispering against the floor. "You shouldn't look so miserable," I murmured as if I wasn't the same person who was cold and detached earlier. He looked up, startled, not expecting. "Clara, you should rest—" "I'm tired of resting." I moved closer until my knees brushed his. "Do you still want me?" His breath caught. "You know I do." "Then prove it." Before he could speak again, I climbed into his lap, pressing my mouth to his. It wasn't gentle. It was desperate, an ache disguised as passion. I needed to feel alive, needed to believe I could still make someone want me the way he once wanted her. For a while, he kissed me back, hands sliding up my thighs, heat chasing the cold out of my skin. It almost worked until it didn't. Until his voice broke through the haze, rough and low. "Amy..." Everything inside me went still. I pulled back slowly, my pulse turning to ice. "What did you just say?"

His eyes widened, horror dawning on his face. "Clara, I—" "You called me Amy." "It was a mistake—"

I shoved him hard enough that he stumbled backward. "A mistake? You think I don't hear it in your voice? You never stopped wanting her!" "Clara, listen—"

"Don't you dare!" I screamed. The room spun as fury burned through the weakness in my veins. "You look at me, and all you see is her shadow! That's all I've ever been, isn't it? A stand-in, a reminder of what you couldn't have!" Mark ran a hand through his hair, guilt carving lines into his face. "That's not true." "Then say her name again," I hissed. "Say it while you're looking at me and tell me you don't mean it." He opened his mouth, but nothing came out. The silence was my answer. My hand found the nearest object, it was a glass tumbler, and I hurled it across the room. It shattered against the wall,

fragments raining onto the floor like broken stars. "Get out." "Clara—" "I said get out!" He hesitated for a moment, then left, the door slamming behind him. The echo rattled through my bones until I sank to the floor, shaking. The fire flickered, and the room suddenly felt too large, too quiet. My chest ached not from heartbreak. No, this was something deeper and darker. The ritual had failed, but its curse hadn't stopped eating at me. My body was collapsing from the inside, the magic I stole burning through me instead of healing me. I pressed a hand to my stomach, where the pain pulsed like a warning. "It's not fair," I whispered to the empty room. "She gets everything. She always does." A tear slipped down my cheek, then another. I wiped them away angrily, refusing to let them win. "I won't lose to Amy again. No. Not again!" The words came out low and trembling like a promise, or maybe it was a curse. I dragged myself toward the mirror, my reflection warping in the fractured glass. My lips were pale now, the red smudged and fading. My skin glowed faintly under the light, veins dark with poison magic. For the first time, I truly saw the price of envy, the rot of ambition.

But beneath the exhaustion, something else burned in my eyes: defiance. Finished For a long moment I simply stared at the woman in the glass who was not the tired, faltering thing the world expected, but a person who had carved teeth from bitterness and would use them. The sickness clawed at me with every breath, but it also sharpened something that had softened with time: strategy. Anger, I realized, had been a poor map. Plans required steadier fuel. I thought of the ritual itself, all the whispers, the charcoal marks on the floor, the way power had answered me in a voice that tasted like iron. It hadn't been perfect; it had cost more than I anticipated. But cost never frightened me. Sacrifice was currency, and I had spent recklessly. If the magic burned me, then let it. I would bend it into a weapon. I would make mirrors show her face and then show her what lay beneath it. The hard, ugly truth of who loved, who chose, who survived. If people saw Amy with Daniel and thought it was easy, I would make them watch the price paid for that ease. Slowly, painfully, I straightened. My hands trembled, but they still closed into fists. Memory and hunger braided together of old rites, half-remembered remedies, names I hadn't spoken aloud since the first time envy had tasted sweet. I would not be passive while the world gilded the woman who had everything handed to her. "You'll see, Amy," I whispered to the mirror, my voice small and cold. "You'll see me." The firelight caught on my cheekbones, on the faint blue-black veins that traced like maps just beneath my skin. For an instant, the reflection looked less like ruin and more like a war banner raised in a dying city. "You'll see, Amy. Even if it destroys me, you'll see me." I repeated this time with more determination than ever.