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"I mean you no harm your highness a figure said, his two hands raised in the air. 1

"King Richard" I looked at him, surprised. "what are you doing here?"

"Please just Rich is fine." His smile radiated under the sun, "no need for such formalities" his voice sounded genuine.

"mmmm." I nodded, "What are you doing here?" i wondered.

"Heard you training, sharp ears"

"That's weird. No one stays this close to Aragon's cave."

"Vampires have the sharpest ears amongst all creatures, once upon a time we could hear the thoughts of others"

"Really?" I gasped, awed. "That sounds so cool, can you hear what I'm thinking now?"

"Unfortunately that was a long time ago. When the royals still lived. Sadly I'm the last of my bloodline. The last pure vampire royal alive."

"I'm sorry about that. Didn't mean to bring up painful memories"

He chuckled, "Don't worry about that princess, I've lived for a very long time, I'm used to it. But for the record, I no longer listen to people's minds."

"Let's take a break" I mind linked Aragon.

"Be fast" he huffed "and stabilize your emotions"

I sat on the grass, resting my back against the cave walls, "I wonder what I will do if I could hear what others think"

He sat beside me, "It's not worth it if I'm to be honest" he shook his head, "Leads to unnecessary rivalry" his voice turned sombre, eyes distant like he was reminiscing.

I shrugged, "You never can tell. You look very young for someone that has lived for centuries.

What does it feel like living for so long?" I asked

"Vampire genes can be quite deceiving" he shrugged, "but I stopped aging at 18. in your world I'm 33 years old, but in my world I'm 1000 years old"

"Woah, so old?" my jaw dropped.

"Surprised?"

"Are you kidding me?" I shot him a look, "That's fucking awesome" I giggled, "It would be fun if i could live that long."

"In my experience, celestial beings live even longer. You've lived even longer than me" he said casually, like this was an everyday talk.

Sigh.

"Eros did say you knew quite a lot." The suspicion rose at the back of my mind, I fixed my gaze, "But how does a mortal know so much about the celestial realm?" I asked, "Don't bother lying,"

He smiled sadly. "I've had a hunch for quite a while. But I won't lie, I'm not aware of the full story, but this current incarnation of yours just confirmed my suspicion."

"What suspicion"

"Your last incarnation was as my sister, the last two were born among the dryads, the previous, a mighty Golem warrior, then a fae, a fairy even," he pointed them out. "At some point it became a pattern, just trace it and I got the idea."

"How is that even possible, how sure are you of all these?"

"Eighty percent," he sighed, "I traced your history back to the first time a hybrid was born among the fairies, a tiny thing that couldn't even flap her wings. But then you were never a twin, your twin appeared for the first time seven hundred years ago, 300 hundred years later and you were born to my parents" images flashed through my mind as he spoke.

"Still doesn't prove anything," I insisted

"No, but when a vampire gives birth to twins, it begs quite a question as to how. It led me to a myth, about the twin goddesses of the celestial realm. Punished to exist in the mortal realm by their mother until they redeem themselves." he stopped then continued,

"And each time they reincarnate, they always had the same face. Silver hair, silver eyes, one with flaming hands, one with mysterious powers no one understood."

"Of course that didn't prove much. But then I learned that the older twin was punished separately, thrown somewhere by her mother before being sent to join her twin in the mortal realm. Surprisingly it all matched, the time frame between when your twin first showed up, always following you. Protecting you, no matter what creature you had both emerged at.

But then something always puzzled me"

"what?" I asked.

"You both always end up dead. Each time, without fail, on your 25th birthday, you both die, heart ripped out of your chest, organs pulled out and stripped of the very last essence of your power. Every single time."

My heart skipped a beat, a scene of I and Lilith fighting a figure shrouded in mist flashed through my mind, "Him" I muttered

"Do you remember who he is?" he sounded agitated,

I shook my head, "It's not clear"

"ok. A step at a time then." he sighed regretfully, "I fought him the last time, he came as soon as the clock struck 12, I fucking tried but still he took you both away from me" he laughed self mockingly.

"A king protecting so many species and yet failed to protect my only family. I failed mum and dad."

"It's not your fault" I squeezed his shoulders.

He suddenly went on his knees, he eyes

moist face long with regret and guilt. "I failed. Can you forgive me? Shirley"

Images slammed into me immediately I heard the name, I saw it all, a different version of me, Lilith and him all playing in the winter, wondering if one day we would ever leave the northern lands.

"Ahh" a blood curdling scream left my lips, i clutched my head as a wave of information i was never meant to have crashed in.

"Aella, focus on my voice,"

"Big brother" I cried out, tears streaming down my face, my lips quivering

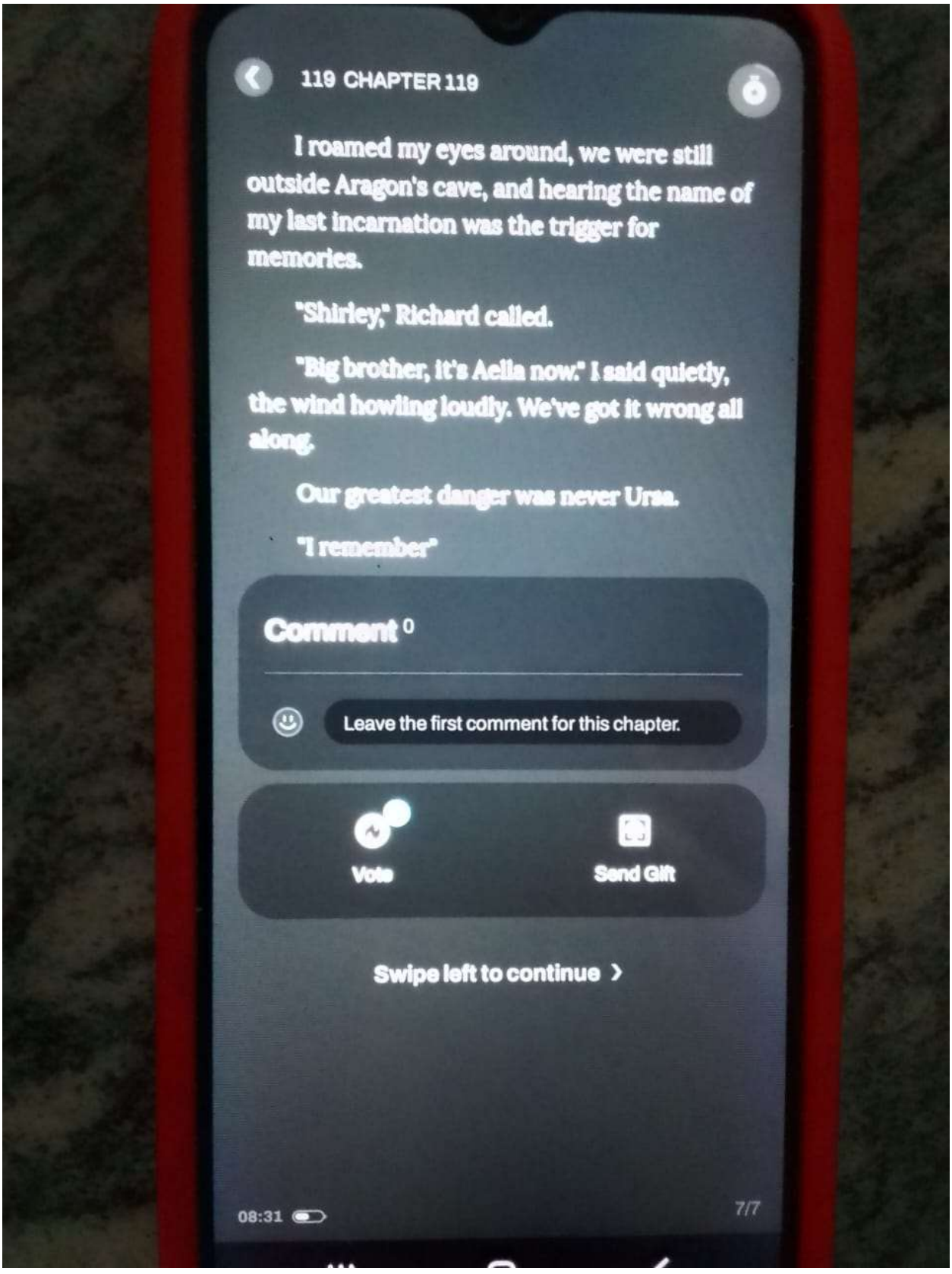
"Big brother will protect you, just breathe. Focus on my voice."

"It hurts" I whimpered, I felt him wrap me in his hands.

I saw it no, felt it once more, that figure draining us of our powers and ripping us apart why we only watched helplessly, unable to do a thing.

"It's all in your head," a voice whispered, "Don't let him win, you can do this"

I shut out the image, soon the pain stopped, my breathing steadied.


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I roamed my eyes around, we were still outside Aragon's cave, and hearing the name of my last incarnation was the trigger for memories.
"Shirley," Richard called.
"Big brother, it's Aelia now." I said quietly, the wind howling loudly. We've got it wrong all along.
Our greatest danger was never Ursa.
"I remember"
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