



AUTHOR PROFILE

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## Curse

My family came from a rare bloodline. White. Because we were rare, they tried to wipe us out. My family disappeared before my eyes.

They risked their lives to protect me — the last remaining heir of the White Clan — and now my only duty is to protect the White Clan.

As the last heir of the White Clan, I must protect the lineage my family entrusted to me, and honor the members of the White Clan who risked their lives to keep me alive.

I am Zerq.

My uncle was from the White Clan. I want to explain why they want to destroy us...

There are many different clans in the world — the Alpha Clan, the Sun Clan, and many more. But our clan... we are different. We are stronger than most bloodlines. And most clans hate our power.

We come from a hybrid lineage between Alpha and Angel. That is the reason they want to erase us.

But I will revive our legacy.

Zerq accepts this burden because he wants to reunite the clan that was torn apart.

These are their reasons for wanting to destroy us... but I will revive his legacy.

Zerq takes a deep breath.

A new life. A new beginning. Let's see who I meet today.

Zerq sets out on a journey, walking for an entire week without rest. Eventually, he finds a city where people are being transported from the "Resting Place of the Sun," though Zerq does not understand what this means.

Back then, Zerq said, "The people here are strange... what is that mark on their shoulders?"

Then he sees her.

A young girl with golden-blond hair, emerald-green eyes, and radiant pale skin. Zerq is fascinated and surprised by her beauty. At that time, Zerq was worshipped like a god or goddess...

The young girl notices she is being watched. She turns around. Zerq notices too, but he doesn't care and continues walking.

"Hey, boy!" she calls out.

Zerq turns around. "What do you want?"

She doesn't like his tone. She walks closer. Zerq suddenly steps back in surprise. The girl lifts Zerq's chin with her hand.

"What's your name?"

Zerq gets angry and pushes her away.

"Don't even try to touch me," he adds, noticing the mark on her shoulder.

The girl notices his gaze. "My name is Essia. What's yours?"

The girl with emerald eyes looks into Zerq's glowing red eyes. It suddenly grows darker.

"If you want, you can stay with us for a while. You don't seem to be from here anyway. Don't worry... I won't eat you," Essia says.

Zerq accepts the offer because he wants to reunite the shattered clan.

Although I was the heir of the White Clan, I carried a heavy burden.

When we arrived at Essia's tent, everyone looked at me strangely. I didn't have bright golden hair or glowing skin like they did. My eyes were ruby red, and my hair was black as the deepest darkness.

Oh, and most importantly... my mother used to cut my hair. Since her death, it has grown down to my waist. I've been too lazy to cut it.

While Essia was showing me everything, I unknowingly got lost in my thoughts. She suddenly turned toward me, and without realizing it, I bumped into her. Just as I was about to fall, she caught me.

"Lord Zerq, what do you think about it?" Essia asked.

"I apologize, madam. I will be more careful."

Out of curiosity, I asked, "Do you live alone?"

Essia lowered her head.

"My family... was wiped out."

Out of curiosity, I asked, "Do you live alone?"

Essia lowered her head.

"My family... was wiped out."

Hearing that made my chest tighten. Essia and I shared the same fate. My family died protecting me. Only a few members of our clan remained, and years ago they had departed on a mission. The only thing my mother ever told me...

When I found those clan members and kept the White Clan alive, I was once again overwhelmed by emotion — and by emptiness.

But right before my eyes, Essia began to cry.

Her beautiful emerald-green eyes filled with tears — yet they were not ordinary tears. They were the color of golden rust.

When I saw her like that, I wanted to pull her into an embrace immediately. But I was afraid that hugging a stranger would be misunderstood. So instead, I gently took her by the arm and guided her to sit down.

“Essia... I don’t particularly like you...” I said.

She lifted her head and looked at me carefully with those emerald eyes.

And that was when I noticed something strange.

For some reason, I couldn’t move.

That wasn’t normal.

Before I realized what was happening, I lost consciousness.

So what do we learn from this?

Trust no one — especially not Essia, the emerald-eyed girl from the Sun Clan.

When I woke up, I was lying in a bed. All my belongings were gone. Especially the ring with the white ruby — an heirloom of my ancestors, bearing the name of the White Clan.

Essia looked at me with sadness in her eyes.

“What do you want from me?” I asked coldly.

“Why didn’t you tell me you were from the White Clan?” I added.

“What would it have changed if I had?” she replied.

Essia stood up. Her golden hair seemed to change color depending on her emotions. As she looked at me sadly, its bright gold faded.

“Do you know which clan I belong to?” she asked, as if I should care.

“Hm?” I responded flatly.

“You’re not stupid, are you? Isn’t it obvious, Zerq?”

“As if I care, Essia. Are you finally going to say it?”

She snapped, anger flashing across her face.

“Of course I belong to the Sun Clan, you idiot!”

I paused.

“Is there even a clan called the Sun Clan?” I muttered.

That only made her angrier.

“You might not be alive right now, Zerq, but I pitied you. Yes, the Sun Clan doesn’t have many conflicts with the White Clan. There are no real problems between us. But you come from a different region than we do.”

I perceived that as a threat.

My inner spirit began to reveal itself. A cold aura surrounded me.

“Are you threatening me?” I asked.

As I spoke, I realized my eyes betrayed me. Traces of my clan’s spirit reflected across my face.

Essia flinched when she saw it.

“Are you... the last heir?” she asked quietly.

“Yes,” I answered.

Essia added, “Zerq... I will keep you alive.”

Those words both relieved and intrigued me.

“What happens if I stay here?” I asked her.

Essia looked at me quietly.

“I’m sorry, Zerq. I told you before — anyone who is not from our clan will do everything in their power to take your abilities and destroy you.”

I had to accept it. We belonged to different clans. We carried different powers. Each clan possessed its own unique traits.

“Essia... are you truly alone?” I asked.

She nodded.

I took her hand. “Will you come with me?”

Her faded hair turned golden again, and she smiled — truly smiled. But it lasted only a few seconds.

I heard footsteps.

Essia immediately looked at me, fear written all over her face.

“You need to hide.”

Before I could ask why, she locked me inside a room.

I heard the footsteps grow louder.

“What are you doing here?” Essia asked sharply.

A voice answered, irritated and proud:

“Stop talking to me like that! I outrank you — you do know that, don’t you?”

My curiosity grew. I moved closer to the door to listen — but my arm hit something.

The sharp sound of shattering glass echoed through the room.

I froze.

The footsteps approached my door.

“Stop! Leave right now, or... or—!” Essia shouted.

“Or what?” the man replied calmly as he stepped closer.

“I’ll tell the Sage,” Essia warned. “Otherwise... I’ll deal with you myself.”

There was a sudden silence.

Then the man spoke again, this time quieter.

“You’re safe. For today.”

The footsteps retreated.

A moment later, Essia opened the door. Fear was still visible in her eyes. She grabbed my hand and returned my belongings.

“Zerq... you must leave. Now.”

She helped me up, gathered my things, and tried to guide me out — but the place was filled with guards. Then I heard it. A faint whisper.

“Psst.”

Essia suddenly stopped. “We have no other choice,” she whispered.

She pulled me into another room. It was pitch dark. I couldn’t see anything.

“Don’t let go of my hand,” she said. Our fingers were tightly intertwined.

Then — a sound.

Someone moved toward me.

Instinctively, I tore my hand away from Essia and stepped back.

An older male voice echoed in the darkness.

“To which clan does she belong?” he asked.

The moment Essia grabbed my hand again, the room grew brighter.

Before me stood a very tall, very old man. His hair was long — more golden than gold itself. Essia stepped in front of me protectively.

“Sage Clay... Zerq is innocent.”

Just as she was about to continue, a chill ran down my spine.

I stepped forward, facing the Sage.

“Which clan bloodline do you belong to?” I asked calmly.

Sage Clay looked at me... and smiled faintly.

“Take a guess.”

He seemed surprised — because he had noticed it. My eyes.

They were ruby-red. The same deep, crimson ruby that only the White Clan possessed. No other clan carried ruby eyes.

The mark of the White Clan’s lineage. The blood of its Chief.

I turned to her. “You’re a hybrid, aren’t you?” Essia looked surprised — perhaps because she hadn’t known.

Sage Clay looked at me calmly. “That does not surprise me.”

“Yes,” the Sage said. “I carry both the blood of the White Clan and the blood of the Sun within me.”

It was the first time I had ever seen a hybrid Sage. Members of the same clan were forbidden from forming families with those of other clans. It was a rule shared by every clan.

“That law applies everywhere,” the Sage added, giving me a stern look.

“What are you doing here?” Sage Clay asked.

“I suppose you don’t know,” I replied. He watched me with growing curiosity.

“Do you know what happened to the White Clan? Or do you know who I am?” I asked.

“I assume you are not merely an ordinary member of the White Clan,” the Sage answered. I turned fully toward him, my voice steady and cold.

"I am Zerq — the Red Wolf. Son of Aamon, Chief of the White Clan. The rightful heir."

His wise eyes widened.

"So... you are Aamon's son?"

Behind his faint smile, I could sense fear.

"You are the Sage of the Sun Clan," I continued. "I assume the people of the Sun Clan don't know what you truly are, do they?"

Sage Clay's eyes narrowed instantly.

"You have surprised me, my son," he said quietly.

I raised my hand, pointing my thumb slightly toward him.

"You will get me and Essia out of here."

"I will help you," he replied slowly, "but Essia stays."

"Do as I say," I answered, my voice darkening, "or you will lose your soul."

Fear and concern were clearly visible on his face.

Behind me, Essia watched silently, astonished.

I wanted her to come with me. She was alone — just like I was. If she stayed here, that unknown man might hurt her again.

Fear and hatred began to rise inside me. Without realizing it, I tightened my grip on her hand.

"Zerq... it hurts!" Essia cried.

I immediately let go. Her hand had turned red from how tightly I had held it.

I turned back to the Sage.

“Well? Will you help me... or shall I take your soul?”

The Sage nodded.

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We stayed in the room he had given us for a few days. Then it was time to leave.

Essia agreed to come with me.

Before we departed, she handed me a detailed map — it showed the exit gate of the Sun Clan territory.

Unfortunately, the only path led through the sacred grounds where the Sword of the Sun Goddess stood — the symbol of the Sun Clan.

You might tell me to turn back.

But it wasn't that simple.

If I retraced my steps, I would most likely disappear.

Forever.

We followed the map. We were almost at the exit — but there were too many guards.

Essia and I walked slowly, trying to appear calm despite the tension in the air.

Suddenly—

She fell.

“My foot!” Essia whispered in pain.

“Essia, are you alright?”

“I’m fine... Zerg. But I don’t think I can walk.”

“No problem,” I said. “I’ll carry you.”

I lifted her onto my back and moved toward the gate using Red Wind — Style Three.

The White Clan possessed its own unique invisible movement technique.

Silent.

Unseen.

I slipped past the guards and crossed the gate.

Essia held onto me tightly.

“Thank you, Zerg... I’m so glad you’re here.”

A faint smile appeared on my face.

Helping someone... felt unfamiliar.

As I carried Essia through the forest, we found a small cabin. I set her down and knocked on the door.

Silence.

Then the door slowly opened.

Although I didn’t trust whoever stood inside, I lifted Essia back onto my back... and stepped in.

Essia looked at me nervously.

“Zerq... are you sure? What if someone lives here?”

“That’s possible,” I replied calmly, “but your foot is injured. We’ll stay here for now. Trust me, Essia.”

I told her to wait while I checked the rooms. She nodded.

The cabin was empty — yet it felt lived in. As if someone had only just left.

I found a wooden box filled with bandages and medical supplies. Returning to Essia, I lifted her gently in my arms and carried her inside, setting her down on a chair.

I began cleaning her wound carefully.

In a quiet voice, Essia said, “Zerq... I caused all of this.”

I looked at her.

“Essia, I wanted you to come with me. And besides... they would have destroyed me if you hadn’t been there.”

She watched me silently while I wrapped her foot.

“You don’t need to apologize,” I added softly. “We’ve both lost things we can never get back.”

For a moment, the cabin fell silent. Only the wind outside could be heard.

Then suddenly, I tensed.

I felt something.

“Someone is here,” I whispered.

Essia straightened in alarm. “Guards?”

I shook my head slowly. “No... their aura is different.”

The cabin door creaked open. A hooded figure stepped inside.

I immediately moved in front of Essia.

“Who are you?”

The figure pulled back her hood.

A woman with silver eyes stood before us.

“I am searching for the last heir of the White Clan.”

My eyes began to glow.

“You’ve found him,” she said with a faint smile. “Do not be afraid. I am not your enemy. The circle between the clans has begun again... and you are the key.”

Essia looked at me. “What does that mean?”

I was silent for a moment.

“It means... our journey has only just begun.”

The woman stepped closer.

“My name is Lyra,” she said calmly. “I no longer belong to any clan.”

I remained cautious. “No one simply belongs to no clan.”

Lyra raised her hand and revealed a faded mark burned into her skin.

“I was cast out. But I know where surviving members of the White Clan are hiding.”

My heart began to race.

“Where?”

“Far in the north, beyond the Mist Mountains. But you won’t reach them without danger. Other clans are searching for them as well.”

Essia glanced between us.

“Then we shouldn’t waste any time.”

The next morning, we set out.

The forest grew denser. The air colder.

As I walked, I felt a new power awakening within me — as if the blood of my clan was responding to the coming trial.

Suddenly, the ground trembled.

A shadow moved between the trees.

“Too late,” Lyra whispered. “They’ve found us.”

A group of armed warriors stepped forward, their clan marks glowing under the sunlight.

“Hand over the heir,” their leader shouted. “And we will spare you.”

I stepped forward.

My ruby-red eyes burned like fire.

“Come and take him.”

But there were too many arrows flying through the air. I grabbed Essia and jumped to the side as the arrows struck the tree behind us.

"You can't protect everyone!" the leader laughed.

I growled. "We'll see about that."

My eyes burned, and I released the power of the White Clan. A cold pressure filled the air, and the warriors hesitated. I struck—one kick, another blow—two more enemies fell.

But suddenly I felt pain. A blade grazed my shoulder.

I turned around. Blood dripped, but I smiled. "Now it's your turn."

With Red Wind Form One, I vanished from their sight and reappeared behind the leader. I pressed my hand against his throat.

"Enough," I whispered.

The remaining warriors lowered their weapons. Essia ran to me. "Zerq, you're bleeding!"

I breathed heavily but nodded. "Just a scratch. We have to keep moving."

Because deep inside, I knew—this was only the beginning.

We continued through the forest, but the air suddenly grew heavy. I stopped.

"Essia... do you feel that?"

Before she could answer, the sky darkened. A man stepped out of the shadows—taller than any warrior before. Black armor. Eyes like burning coals.

"At last, I've found you... Heir of the White Clan."

I narrowed my eyes. "Who are you?"

"General Vaelor of the Alpha Clan."

His aura pressed down on me like a storm.

I attacked—but he blocked effortlessly and hurled me against a tree.

Pain shot through my body.

For the first time... I was at a disadvantage.

Essia called my name, but I could barely hear her. Something inside me broke—or awakened. My vision turned white.

I heard the voices of my ancestors.

“Stand up.”

My eyes shone brighter than ever before. Power surged through my veins.

“New Form... Awakening of the White Wolf.”

The ground beneath my feet shattered as I moved. I appeared before Vaelor and struck him with a shockwave of light and wind.

He staggered back, surprised.

I breathed heavily. “This... is my true power.”

Vaelor smiled despite his wounds. “Good... this is exactly how the war should begin.”

Then he disappeared into the shadows.

I stood still. The power faded.

Essia caught me before I fell.

"Zerq... you've changed."

I looked at the sky.

"No... I remembered who I am."

I woke up hours later. My body felt heavy, but something was different. The air around me reacted to my thoughts.

"Essia... I can feel it."

I closed my eyes and focused. A faint white wind swirled around my hand.

"This is the gift of my clan," I murmured. "The awakened White Wolf."

I began to understand my new abilities:

White Wind (White Movement)

I can move silently and faster than the eye can see.

Spirit Sight

I can see auras, intentions, and hidden powers of others.

Light Burst

I gather energy in my hand and unleash a shockwave of pure clan light.

Ancestral Resonance

In moments of danger, the voices of my ancestors strengthen me.

Essia looked at me in awe. "You're becoming stronger and stronger."

I stood up and smiled faintly. "I have to. The war has begun."

I looked into the forest.

"And Vaelor is surely already waiting for our next encounter."

The next morning, we set out. The map Lyra had given me showed a path leading toward the Mist Mountains.

"There could be survivors there," I said.

Essia nodded. "Then we'll find them."

The journey was long and silent. But as we moved deeper into the mountains, my Spirit Sight began to react. I stopped.

"We're not alone."

Suddenly, a figure appeared between the rocks, blade drawn.

"Stop! Name your clan!"

I stepped forward. "I am Zerq... son of Aamon."

The figure froze. Slowly, they lowered their weapon.

"The heir... you're still alive?"

More people emerged from the mist—exhausted, but with the same ruby-red eyes. Members of my clan.

My heart began to race.

For the first time in years... I wasn't alone.

"We've been waiting for you," one of them said. "The White Clan needs its leader."

I glanced at Essia and then back at them. "Then let's rebuild the clan."

We reached a hidden camp between the rocks. A small fire burned as several members of the White Clan gathered around me.

A tall warrior stepped forward. "My name is Nahel. I was once one of your father's guardians."

Beside him stood a slender woman with calm eyes. "I am Zey. I can use the healing arts of our clan."

A younger boy shyly raised his hand. "Cylix... I'm still training."

I nodded to them. "From today on, we will no longer stand scattered. We are a clan again."

In the following days, the training began.

I practiced my new power—the White Wind—while Rahel sparred with me.

"Faster!" he shouted.

I moved silently and appeared behind him. For the first time,

I could control my speed.

Essia watched us with a smile. "You'll be a good leader."

I looked into the distance. "I have no choice. Vaelor will return."

I could feel it—the war was drawing closer.

A few days after training, Nahel pulled me aside.

"Zerq, there is a technique that only heirs can learn."

I looked at him carefully. "Then show me."

He led me to an open clearing.

“This technique is called Heart of the White Storm. You must calm your mind and listen to the voices of your ancestors.”

I closed my eyes and focused. The wind began to swirl around me.

“Don’t control it... feel it,” Nahel said.

Suddenly, energy exploded out of me. White light swirled around my body like a storm.

I raised my hand, and the wind gathered into a blade of pure light.

Nahel smiled. “You’ve taken the first step.”

I breathed heavily. “This is... my own technique.”

Essia stepped closer. “What will you call it?”

I looked at the glowing energy.

“Ruby Storm Slash.”

The war was approaching.

And I was ready to face it.

That night, I couldn’t sleep. The wind moved the leaves softly, and the fire was almost burned out.

Essia sat a few steps away.

“Zerq?” she said quietly.

I looked at her. “What’s wrong?”

She hesitated for a moment, then came closer and sat down beside me.

“Since we met... I don’t feel so alone anymore.”

I was silent for a moment. “Me neither,” I answered honestly. “Normally, I keep my distance. But with you... it’s different.”

Essia smiled faintly. “You always seem so strong. But sometimes I see sadness in your eyes.”

I looked into the fire. “Strength doesn’t mean not being afraid.”

A gust of wind rose, and Essia shivered slightly.

Without thinking, I placed my cloak around her shoulders.

She looked at me in surprise. “Thank you.”

Our hands touched briefly. Neither of us pulled away immediately.

In that moment, I knew:

No matter how dark the path ahead of me was, I didn’t have to walk it alone anymore. The night was quiet—

until the air suddenly grew heavy. I felt it immediately. A dark presence.

A cold laugh echoed through the forest.

“Zerq... Heir of the White Clan.”

I jumped to my feet. “Show yourself!”

A figure stepped out of the shadows. Black cloak. Cold eyes.

“My name is Vaelor.”

In that moment, my blood began to burn. My vision blurred. My powers spiraled out of control.

“Disappear...” I growled—but it was no longer only my voice.

The ground beneath my feet cracked open. Wind swirled violently around me. My eyes glowed a deeper red than ever before.

Essia stepped in front of me. “Zerq, stop!”

“GET BACK!” I shouted harshly. I could barely control myself.

Vaelor smiled. “Yes... show me your true nature.”

My energy exploded—

until suddenly...

...Essia grabbed my hand.

Warm. Steady. “Zerq,” she said softly. “You’re not alone. Come back.”

Her voice cut through the noise in my head.

Slowly, the storm began to fade.

My breathing was heavy. The red glow in my eyes dimmed.

Vaelor only watched us.

“Interesting... she keeps you in balance.” He stepped back into the darkness.

“We will meet again, Heir.” And he vanished.

I sank to one knee.

“...Thank you, Essia.”

I was still sitting on the ground, my heart beating fast.

“What... was that just now?” I asked quietly.

Essia knelt beside me. “Your power.”

I looked at my hands—they were trembling slightly.

“No... it was more than that. I lost control. What if I had hurt you...?”

Essia calmly placed her hand on my shoulder. “But you didn’t.”

I stayed silent.

For the first time, I was afraid of myself.

“If that power loses control again... I could become worse than our enemies.”

Before Essia could respond, the sky darkened once more.

A voice echoed through the wind—Vaelor.

“Doubt suits you, Heir.”

I jumped to my feet. “Show yourself!”

His figure appeared only as a shadow between the trees.

“You don’t understand your powers. And that is exactly why I need you.”

Essia stepped closer. “For what?”

“Centuries ago, the balance of the clans was destroyed. The White Clan was the key to it. Your hybrid power

connects worlds.”

My gaze hardened. “And what do you want?”

“I want to break the balance... and create a new order.” The wind howled as his figure faded.

“Grow stronger, Zerq. At our next meeting, you will have to choose.”

And once again, he was gone.

I stood still.

“...He’s after my power.”

Essia looked at me.

“Then we’ll learn to control it. Together.” The next morning, training began.

Mist still lingered between the trees as I focused.

“If I can’t control my power... it will destroy us,” I muttered.

I closed my eyes and let the blood of my clan flow.

The wind began gathering around me—faster, sharper.

“Red Wind... Style Four.”

The air sliced through the forest, leaving marks in the ground.

But this time, I didn’t lose control.

I stopped. Essia smiled. “You did it.”

She stepped forward and raised her hand—golden light appeared. “Now me.”

Solar energy gathered around her, warm and bright.

A radiant beam struck a rock—it shattered.

I looked at her, impressed. “So you’ve been holding back...”

Essia grinned slightly. “Most of the time.”

High above, on a rock, a dark figure watched them—

Vaelor.

“They’re growing faster than I expected...” he whispered.

His eyes rested on me.

“Soon he will be forced to choose.” Then he disappeared silently into the shadows. Suddenly, I felt a chill.

“...We’re being watched.”

Essia nodded. “Then we’ll become stronger.” I looked toward the horizon.

“At our next meeting... I’ll be ready.”

Zerq and Essia sat by the fire while the others slept. The wind was calm, and for the first time in a long while, Zerq felt peace.

“You don’t always have to fight alone,” Essia said softly.

Zerq looked at her and was silent for a moment.

“I’m afraid of losing someone... again,” he finally answered.

Essia smiled gently. “Then don’t fight alone. We are your clan.”

Suddenly, the ground trembled. A dark presence filled the air— Vaelor had appeared.

Zerq's eyes glowed red.

His aura exploded—wild and uncontrollable.

"I WILL DESTROY HIM!" he roared, losing control.

His energy became destructive and dangerous—even to his friends.

Essia stepped in front of him and placed her hand on his shoulder.

"Zerq... listen to me. You are stronger than your anger."

Slowly, his aura began to calm. His breathing steadied.

He looked at Essia—clear-minded, himself again.

"Thank you... Essia."

In the distance, Vaelor smiled coldly.

"Grow stronger... Zerq. Our battle has only just begun."

I sensed it again—the presence of someone.

Shadowy mist rose from between the rocks. A strange creature appeared, and as the shadows dissolved, Vaelor stepped forward.

"Show me your strength, little Heir!"

I gathered all my power with a sarcastic smirk and took a deep breath.

My entire strength surged through my body—I was like a fireball. I launched the first strike. The earth and

rocks crumbled, but Vaelor blocked it.

He smiled. "Is that all you can do, Heir?"

He laughed, and my hatred only grew stronger. My eyes trembled with rage.

While I was lost in my thoughts, Vaelor struck and slammed me to the ground.

I stood up immediately, though I was covered in wounds.

Essia called out to me. "Zerq, please... please be careful!"

Vaelor countered every blow I delivered. I was thrown from place to place.

Essia looked at me in fear.

I looked back at her—I could see the fear in her eyes.

Just two seconds of distraction— and Vaelor attacked again.

"NO!" Essia screamed.

I was completely exhausted and badly injured.

Essia ran toward me. This time, Vaelor aimed his attack at her.

"You're finished."

"NO, DON'T DO IT!" I shouted. My body trembled, but I forced myself to stand.

My gaze fell on Essia—she was directly behind me. Vaelor's attack was aimed at her.

"If you want to destroy someone... then take me," I said in a rough voice. Every breath burned in my chest, but I did not step back. Dark energy gathered around me, as if fueled by my own hatred.

I lifted my head and looked Vaelor straight in the eyes. "I won't let you hurt her."

He only laughed.

His presence pressed heavily against me, but I tightened every muscle and attacked again.

Pain shot through my body, but I ignored it.

I struck—this time without hesitation, without fear.

I charged forward. My fist collided with Vaelor's defense, and the shockwave tore the ground apart beneath us. Rocks shattered. Dust filled the air.

He countered immediately. A blow hit my side—I was thrown back and crashed into stone.

For a moment, I couldn't breathe.

But I forced myself to stand again.

"You're learning... slowly," Vaelor said coldly.

I clenched my teeth and attacked again.

This time I unleashed everything. Energy blazed around me like flames.

Our attacks collided—each movement made the earth tremble.

Suddenly, someone stepped in front of me.

"That's enough," Nahel said calmly.

I blinked. "Nahel...?"

Beside him stood Zey, her eyes fixed sharply on Vaelor.

"You are not alone, Zerq," she said.

New strength flowed through me.

I straightened up and stood beside them.

"Then we fight together."

Vaelor only smiled, as if this was exactly what he had been waiting for.

I took a deep breath and stood next to Nahel and Nira.

Our eyes met—we didn't need words.

"Now," I murmured.

Nahel leapt forward. As his sword swung, energy ripped through the ground.

Vaelor tried to defend himself, but Zey struck from behind, shaking him.

Now it was my turn.

I inhaled deeply.

The fire within me ignited—every ounce of my power awakened.

I struck with all my strength, but Vaelor endured.

Our attacks clashed, interfering with each other, and we were both forced back at the same time.

I poured in all my remaining power—my hands and body trembled.

But Vaelor remained unharmed.

Nira and Nahel were injured from the impact.

In that moment, I realized— this war had only just begun. And I would have to win it. I turned to Essia. “Stay back and trust me.”

Essia smiled at me, then pulled Zey and Nahel away, retreating so that only Vaelor and I remained.

I clenched my fists. Retreat was no longer an option. I straightened up, ignored the pain, and stepped forward. My energy gathered again—darker and hotter than before. “Vaelor!” I shouted. “This war does not end today—and certainly not with my fall.”

He only watched me, as if the shadows obeyed his command.

They seemed to wait for my first move.

I trembled.

We both stood motionless. Essia watched us closely. I took one last deep breath and gathered all my strength into my legs.

Vaelor’s falcon-like eyes were fixed on me.

I lifted my foot and slammed it into the ground with full force.

The earth split open. Mist and smoke filled everything.

I closed my eyes and focused on sensing movement instead of seeing. Then—

a shift. I stood face to face with Vaelor. With a single strike, I sent him flying to the other side. I knew I could not defeat him alone.

But I also knew this: As long as I was standing, I would keep fighting.

Because I had something to protect. And something to win. This battle... was far from over.

From Essia’s perspective:

Zerq was still fighting Vaelor; with every blink, he took another hit.

“Zerq... please, please hold on.” I thought.

Zey and Nahel lay unconscious nearby.

We, the members of the Sun Clan, are primarily healers. My family served the clan leader directly—my older brother was his protector, my mother was a healer, and my father was a guardian. In short, we were the protectors of the Sun Clan.

One day, the leader fell ill. The medicine my mother gave him did not help, and soon after, he passed away.

My family was blamed.

And then... their souls were taken, and they disappeared.

After the death of the Sun Clan’s leader, his uncle, Lord Kenz, took his place.

He was the one who killed my family.

And what about me?

When I was still with my family, I was the clumsiest member. I had powers, yes—but I couldn’t use them like the others could. Still, I trained day and night to become stronger, to be as good as them.

One evening, while I was practicing, my father came to me.

“What are you doing, Essia?”

“Papa...”

He stepped closer, placed his hand on my shoulder, and said gently,

“You don’t have to be the best. Just be yourself. That doesn’t mean you must carry everyone else’s power.”

His voice was warm and calm—as if it could quiet the storm inside my heart.

I lowered my gaze. “But I want to protect you... I don’t want to be the weakest.”

He smiled softly.

“Strength is not measured by how much power you possess, Essia. It is measured by how steady your heart remains.”

I never forgot those words.

Now, as I watched Zerq fight, my heart pounded just like it had back then.

He staggered, struck again, almost fell—yet stood back up.

“Zerq...” I whispered, my hands trembling.

I knelt beside Zey and Nahel and gathered my energy.

Golden light flickered around my fingers—still unstable, still weak... but there.

I closed my eyes.

“I am no longer that clumsy child.

I will protect them.”

Slowly, healing energy spread, wrapping around their bodies like warm sunlight.

And for the first time, I didn’t feel the need to chase after someone else’s strength. I was simply myself.

And that was enough.

My hands began to grow warm. Nahel and Zey murmured softly.

“Essia...”

I stood up. Zerq and Vaelor were still fighting.

I walked toward them and climbed onto a large rock.

The moment Zerq saw me—

“GET AWAY, ESSIA!” he shouted.

The earth trembled as Vaelor hurled Zerq aside. My hands shook. My heart raced. I had never tried this before. I closed my eyes.

“Say my name, Zerq... Repeat my name. Count me—count my name.”

“ESSIA!” he shouted.

The golden light barely held. I felt the power pulling at me, but I refused to let it fade. From the dust, Zerq lifted his head. His voice was rough, weak—but clear.

“Essia...”

I smiled faintly.

Then the air twisted.

Vaelor’s attack burst forth—dark and cutting, like a storm of shadows. I closed my eyes, took a deep breath... and began to sing. Softly at first—almost a whisper. But the melody carried warmth.

“The sunlight that created the forest,

Give him strength and healing.

Bless him with your power.

Protect my beloved until my strength fades and my soul grows weary.

O crown jewel of the sun, hear my voice,

Call to the angels,

Protect this being,

Grant him strength, grace, and healing!”

With every note, the light grew stronger.

It wrapped around Zerq, healing his wounds, while a shimmering shield formed before us. The darkness struck it—and halted. I kept singing. My voice trembled—but it did not break.

The energy flowed through me, not wild—but calm, guided by the song.

“You may be shattered or wounded, Zerq... but as long as I am here, you will stand—until my final breath.”

My voice grew clearer.

With every note, something inside me grew—not just power...

but understanding.

The light around me began to pulse, as if it had its own heartbeat.

Vaelor growled.

The shadows around him thickened and lunged forward, trying to silence my song.

The pressure hit me like a wave—my breath faltered. But I kept singing.

“Sun, awaken—guide my light,

Break the night—do not let it remain...”

My power had tripled now—healing and protection shining together around Zerq.

As I continued, my angelic power awakened.

Golden wings unfurled. My emerald eyes radiated healing and protection. Zerq looked at me “I’m with you,” he said. I smiled at him.

As I sang louder and stronger, Zerq grew stronger.

Vaelor was pushed back step by step, weakening— but we could not give up.

My voice reached the sky.

The air grew heavy—an immense force filled it. This was not normal.

My power began to fade—not because I was weak.

There was another reason... but I did not know it.

Zerq and I looked at each other.

We were both under pressure. Vaelor rose again. His gaze was hard and cold.

“Enough games. Face reality.” Dense shadows surrounded him, spreading and consuming everything. The ground cracked open. I tried to keep singing—

but my voice faltered. It wasn’t working. Zerq came to me and took my hand. “Trust me,” he said. I nodded. I continued until my voice nearly failed—but the melody grew stronger, spreading everywhere. Solar energy wrapped around Zerq like protection. My melody followed him—

“The melody follows the wounded soul.”

Our powers merged. The shadows shattered and vanished. Only Vaelor, Zerq, and I remained. My breath caught—but I forced myself to stand.

The ground trembled again. Vaelor's form twisted. Shadows wrapped around him like living chains.

His presence grew darker, heavier—endless. "You think... that is enough?" His true form emerged.

Wings of darkness. Eyes glowing like cold stars. Even the air seemed to flee from him. I felt fear—deep inside me. But I did not let it win. I kept singing. But this time, my voice changed. The melody became brighter, stronger—and took form. Golden light gathered above us, forming a radiant seal.

"Sun Hymn—Divine Light!"

The light descended, strengthening Zerq, shielding us, burning against the darkness.

Zerq stepped forward.

His energy condensed—wild and focused. He raised his hand—ready for the final strike.

"Then let's end this."

I held the note—giving him everything I had.

He charged.

Light followed him. My hymn guided him.

His attack struck— one single, overwhelming burst of power and sun.

For a moment, the light consumed everything.

And I did not know...

whether it was the end— or only the beginning.

We stayed there for a while, and it was wonderful. Nahel told silly but captivating stories, while Zey kept scolding and teasing her. Essia treated Cylix like her mother and never let her out of her sight. Everyone was laughing about it, but then I saw runes on the ground; they were glowing so brightly, and that wasn't normal. I felt an intense, overwhelming power, so strong that my nose began to bleed. Nahel noticed what was happening.

"Vaelor?" Zey gave me a piece of cloth; Essia and Cylix were frightened. "Already? Oh, this Vaelor is so annoying."

Nahel took a deep breath, Zey put her hand to her forehead, and Essia looked after Cylix so she wouldn't be afraid. "Let's get ready, we're heading out as soon as possible."

Zey and Nahel nodded in agreement, then I went to Essia. "Essia, get ready, we're leaving. Cylix, go to Nahel and help her."

Cylix nodded and hurried to Nahel. Essia looked at me worriedly; I understood what she meant by her expression. She couldn't stand the seal; as she came closer, I understood everything from her look. Essia, I swear, we will be happy. I looked into the fire. The fire was about to go out, but what caught my attention again were the runes; they were glowing excessively bright.

Nahel approached me with a sigh. "We're ready, let's move on." Zey sighed, took Cylix's and Essia's hands, and we set off. Essia looked at me.

"Are there any tracks?" I pointed to the runes.

"They point north. And... there's something else." I hesitated for a moment.

A name was on the tip of my tongue, heavy as a shadow.

"Alucard," Nahel said to me harshly. Silence spread. Even the fire stopped crackling. "If he is connected to Vaelor, we'll find answers with him," Nahel said. Zey hesitated for a moment; Essia didn't know what was going on, and I... the name sounded familiar, but I couldn't remember from where. And... noble?

How did Nahel know that? I asked Nahel. "Do you have any information about him?" Nahel lowered her head.

"I would tell you if I knew, but I only know that he is very powerful." Zey jumped in. "Isn't Alucard a legend? I thought it was just a story." I was so curious; what if it's connected to Vaelor? My head was spinning. The morning came cold.

We set out early, following the trail of runes to the north. The landscape became quieter, more barren, as if nature itself were holding its breath. No one spoke much. Everyone felt it: we were approaching something. Hours later, we reached a valley shrouded in mist.

I raised my hand and stopped the group. "Here." The air was heavy, infused with an alien energy.

Then the mist moved. A figure emerged. Tall. Calm. Unnaturally serene. His eyes rested on us, knowing. As if he had expected us.

"So..." he said quietly, "the ones who disturb Vaelor's chains." I tensed.

"You are Alucard." A slight smile. No confirmation needed. He took a step back, and the mist swallowed him again. "Seek me if you want answers." And then he was gone. I stood still, staring at the spot. That was no coincidence. That was an invitation. I stood for another moment, then exhaled slowly. "We don't follow him blindly," I said calmly. Nahel crossed her arms. "Finally, you're saying something sensible." Cylix stepped in. "I will protect you." Essia smiled. Zey knelt down and examined the ground. "No direct tracks. That was intentional." I nodded.

"He wanted to be seen." Essia stepped beside me. "So, is it a trap?"

I looked into the mist. "Maybe. Or a test." I turned to the group. "We don't split up. We go prepared. If Alucard is watching us, then he shall see that we are not careless." A faint smile flickered across Nahel's face. "You don't like him, huh?"

"I don't like opponents who play games." The mist moved again, barely visible. Yet I felt it. Someone was watching us. Essia was still laughing quietly. Nahel tried to act as if nothing had happened.

Then... Clap. Clap.

Slow. Calm. Individual claps. Everyone froze. From the mist, a figure stepped out. Tall. Calm. Self-assured.

“Impressive,” Alucard said with a crooked smile. “The dreaded members of the White Clan... fighting against a rabbit.” Nahel growled. Zey tensed.

I took a step forward. “You could have shown yourself sooner.” Alucard tilted his head slightly. “And take away this... heartfelt moment? I am no monster.” His eyes glided briefly to Essia, then back to me. “You’ve become cautious, Zerg. Good. That makes it more interesting.” I met his gaze.

“Don’t play with us.” He only smiled.

“I am not playing. I am waiting.” And with the next breath, he had vanished back into the mist.

The mist literally exploded apart. Nahel was the first to move.

“He’s on the right!” Zey shouted: “No—that’s just a shadow! He’s testing us!” Essia’s voice was different. Calmer.

“He’s provoking you, Zerg... He wants you to act without thinking.” Too late. Alucard was suddenly standing right in front of me. So close I could feel his breath. His blade flashed. I dodged—barely. He leaped back and laughed quietly. “All right then, Zerg...” He looked pointedly at my empty hands.

“Where is your sword?”

For half a second, there was absolute silence.

Nahel screamed: “DO YOU REALLY NOT HAVE YOUR SWORD WITH YOU?!”

I breathed in calmly. Then I raised my hand. Black energy began to gather. “I don’t need one.” The ground beneath us tore open. Energy shot from my hand like a blade of light and shadow. Alucard’s smile widened.

“Ahh... now it gets interesting.” My energy blade met Alucard’s sword. A blinding strike. Sparks of black and silver light exploded between us. He was fast. Too fast. “Not a bad technique,” he said calmly while blocking my attacks. “But technique alone is not enough.” I pushed forward.

“You talk too much.” He vanished. Instinct. I turned—too late. His blade grazed my shoulder. A searing pain. Nahel attacked from the left. Zey let several shadow traps spring from the ground. Cylix did her best to

attack.

Essia's voice rose behind me—clear, bright, strong. She sang. The light around me grew warmer. My wound stopped burning. My strength... rose. Alucard's eyes narrowed.

"Ah. Support." I seized the moment. My energy blade changed shape—grew larger. Wilder. I struck. This time, he didn't dodge completely. A cut hit his side. Silence. He touched the blood on his hand. Looked at it. And smiled.

"Good..." The mist began to swirl around him. "Then the game ends now." The mist stopped just moving; it began to breathe. Alucard stood at its center. No longer relaxed. No longer playful. His eyes now glowed a faint red. "You have earned... the right to see more," he said calmly. The ground beneath us vibrated. The shadows Zey controlled began to submit to his mist. "He's taking over the environment!" she cried. Nahel jumped back as black cracks split the ground. Essia's voice remained strong—her song became higher, more powerful. The light around us fought against the darkness. I felt my energy blade grow heavier. Not weaker. Denser. Alucard's cloak dissolved into smoke. From his back, dark, sharp structures formed—not wings, but rather... broken shadows. "That is his true form..." Essia whispered. He moved. Not a step. Not a jump. He was simply suddenly in front of me.

His blow hit head-on. My blade caught it—but the pressure was massive. The ground under my feet gave way.

"Zerq!" I heard Nahel call. I pushed back. My arms trembled. "You rely too much on raw power," Alucard said quietly. "You fight as if you're trying to prove something." His words hit deeper than his sword. I grit my teeth. "Maybe I am." He increased the pressure. Cracks spread through my energy blade.

Then—

Essia's song changed. It was no longer just healing. Not just protection. It was memory. Images shot through my head. Our first training. The White Clan. The promise I had made. My blade stabilized. I let the energy explode. A burst of light and darkness threw Alucard back. For the first time, he visibly lost his balance. Nahel seized the moment and attacked with full force. Zey bound his shadows with her own. Alucard landed, knelt briefly—and laughed. Not mockingly. Not coldly. Honestly. "Yes..." He stood up slowly. "Exactly what I wanted to see."

Alucard stood completely upright again. No more mockery. No more games. Only gravity. "You think I am

your enemy," he said quietly. "But you don't understand what is coming." The mist suddenly pulled upward—like a curtain revealing a stage. The sky was no longer dark. It was... broken. Cracks of black light streaked through it. Zey whispered: "This is no normal phenomenon..." Alucard looked at me directly.

"The White Clan was not founded to protect."

Silence.

"It was founded to seal." My heart gave one hard thud. Essia's song went silent for a moment.

"Seal... what?" Alucard's gaze grew heavy.

"You."

The air vibrated. Images forced their way into my head—old runes, a circle of light, four warriors... and in their midst: a black, formless energy. "The White Clan," Alucard said, "is the prison. And you are the keys." Nahel stepped forward. "That's madness!" "No," Alucard said calmly. "That is history." The sky tore further open. From the rift crawled the same energy I carried in my blade. I felt it respond. Alucard raised his sword. "If you don't become strong enough, this seal will break." He took his stance. Energy gathered—denser than before. "So show me, Zerq." The ground shattered. A storm of mist and shadow exploded. This was no longer a test. This was his lethal blow. I called upon all my power. Essia's song returned—stronger, brighter. Nahel stood on the left. Nira connected our energies with shadow bands. I raised my blade. "If we are a seal..." The energy around me began to glow. "...then we decide for ourselves what remains locked away." I charged. Our attacks collided. Light against darkness. Seal against destruction.

The sky shattered in a white flash. And for a single moment, everything was still. The sky was almost completely split. It was madness; I didn't know what to do. The darkness broke in like a storm. While I was distracted, Alucard attacked with all his might. Nahel dodged the attack. Zey's attempts to apply pressure were fended off behind the scenes. Essia had embraced Cylix and was trying to protect her. I parried Alucard's blows, but it wouldn't last; we wouldn't be able to withstand this. When I turned to Essia again, she was staring at me intently, her gaze fixed on me. Alucard and I were on the battlefield. Zey, Nahel, and I fought against Alucard.

Suddenly, a sound.

The battlefield is illuminated...

That voice belongs to Essia. Not just strong. Not just clear.

Infinite light broke out of her—so bright that even Alucard took a step back.

“Essia, stop!” I shouted.

But she sang on. Her song pierced the sky. Pierced the rift. Pierced the darkness itself. The black energy began to disintegrate. Not exploding, but dissolving. Alucard’s attack shattered in the light.

“You...” he murmured softly, almost in awe.

Essia’s feet lifted slightly off the ground, surrounded by pure white. I felt it. She was going beyond her limit.

“Enough!” I screamed.

But she only smiled in my direction. “It’s okay,” she whispered between the notes. The light became even more intense.

Then—with one last, pure sound, the sky closed. The darkness vanished. The mist dissolved. Silence. We had won. Essia’s light went out. Her body fell forward. I caught her.

“Essia... stay with me... please...”

Her eyes were still open. Weak. But warm. My hands trembled.

“No... no... that wasn't the price...”

A tear fell on her face. With her last strength, she raised her hand and touched my cheek.

“Zerq...”

Her voice was barely audible. “We have won.” I shook my head.

“Without you, this is no victory.”

She smiled. Gently. "You will live on..." Her gaze grew softer. "And... I will always be with you."

One last breath.

"I love you."

"No!"

I held her tight as her light began to fade. Not suddenly. Not violently. Like a candle slowly going out. Her body turned into fine particles of light. She dissolved in my arms. I remained kneeling. The battlefield was silent. We had conquered. But the price lay in my empty hands.

"This isn't over yet."