

60

Milo's POV

"You were right, Bronx. You made things more stressful for her and it triggered a vision. We have a lead on his next move. I have a team going to stakeout the dress shop to see if he shows and the team on the northern border has been given instructions to leave a gap in patrols. It's only a matter of time," I say, reading of my tablet.

Bronx takes a drag off his cigarette as he paces like a caged wolf and with all things considered, he is. He has been intentionally keeping himself away from Kas. He had a theory that unfamiliar, stressful situations would trigger one of her visions and he was right. The night he told me about his theory, we stupidly decided to use a version of an interrogation tactic we used in the military on POWs. Basically, we slowly took away things that mattered to Kas and made her uncomfortable until she broke down. Aside from the obvious

broke down. Aside from the obvious danger to her mental health, the other problem is, it was also breaking him down. ③

We started by taking away Bronx. Limiting the time he spends with her. It was his idea. It was tough on both of them, especially since Saint and Lex had both just came back. It's tough watching your best friend try not to self-destruct. I had seen him at his worst after he was discharged from the military, but this was different. To offset what he is going through, he throws himself into work and personally oversees all interrogations of rogues breaching pack territory. He is a little sick in the head that way. ②

Next, he told Mrs. Miller he doesn't want Kas in the kitchens. He used the excuse that he needed her to focus on other things. If Mrs. Miller needed more assistance in the kitchens, he would assign more omegas to her staff.

After that, we took away her personal connections. Bronx sends the entire pack a mind link telling them that Kas has been stressed out and they need to steer

been stressed out and they need to steer clear of her to avoid upsetting her further. She is not to assist with any work, not even if she volunteers. We don't even tell Ashley or Lenora. The whole pack loves her so much, they will do anything to make sure she is alright. The only exception is Delilah. Bronx assigns her to keep Kas busy during the day. She doesn't like deceiving her friend but it does help her keep an eye on Kas's mental state. That way we know we won't take it too far. She says Kas seems a little sad and frayed on the edges, so the plan is working. Thank Goddess, because the next step was to take Delilah away. I don't know if I would have let Bronx go that far. It would have been too cruel. ①

Since the fire, the number of rogues trying to get on pack territory has skyrocketed. We're now arresting three or four a day. Most refuse to tell us why they're trying to trespass. A few are too scared and cave. They insist they are after the Luna, but they don't know her name or even what she looks like. Even still, they won't tell us who sent them regardless of how badly Bronx tortures them. They're a diversion but we don't know what for only exactly. One of them slips some

only exactly. One of them slips some information about breaching our Northern border but that is all we get before he dies of blood loss. Bronx and I set up a war room in the conference room, trying to predict where attacks would come from and what was near those areas outside the territory.

"Listen Bronx, now that Kas has had a vision and we have a semblance of a plan, go spend time with her. Remind her how much she means to you. Besides, it's Valentine's day. Don't spend it with a bunch of smelly rogues in an interrogation room. It's already nine p.m. Lenora's flight just landed, so we are going to a late movie."

"What?"

"What, what? What part did you not hear? It's Valentine's day. Go spend time with your mate."

His eyes widened, "Valentine's day?"

"Yeah, maybe you heard of it. Hearts, chocolates, baby angels shooting arrows at your ass, you know...love," I even make little fluttering motions with my hands to get it through his thick head. 4

put it through his thick head. 4

"I lost track of the days. She made dinner...Fuck."

Without another word, he picks up his keys and sprints out of the room.

"Love you too, Bronxy!" I call out as his footsteps pound down the hallway.

Bronx's POV

I pull into the parking lot of the closest grocery store. There are three scraggly bouquets and a few boxes of sampler chocolates. I grab one of each and rush back out. 2

Fuck fuck fuck. When I first met Kas, I told her as long as I didn't fuck up, she would be Luna of Blood River. Welp, this is it. This is the part where I fuck things up. She is never going to forgive me. This is supposed to be our first Valentine's day and I forgot.

I make my way as quickly as possible up to my apartment. I stand at the door with the flowers and chocolates. My palms are sweaty. Why am I nervous to go into my own apartment?

"Cause you know you fucked up. That's

own apartment?

"Cause you know you fucked up. That's why," Saint snarls at me.

"Uh, Alpha, I think I heard her crying earlier but she didn't come out and ask for help, so I left her alone like you said to," Marco informs me. He looks guilty for not doing more for her.

"Thanks, Marco," I sigh and crack open the door. I don't see or hear anything so I go in and quietly close the door behind me. I look at my watch, almost ten o'clock. The bedroom door is closed.

Other than a binder and a few bridal magazines on the coffee table, the place is spotless. If she made dinner, she cleaned it up hours ago. I walk over to take a peek at the binder. Something sparkles, catching my eye. Sitting on top of the bridal magazine next to the binder is Kas's engagement ring.

What the Hell? Why did she take it off?

Oh shit. Fear and regret suddenly fill my chest, making it difficult to breathe. I set the flowers and chocolates down.

the flowers and chocolates down.

"See what you did, dummy? She hates us now!" Saint snarls again, pacing in my head.

I sigh and rub my hands over my face. I'm such an idiot.

I pick up the ring and place half way down on my pinky finger so I don't lose track of it until I can convince her to put it back on. I open the door to the bedroom to find Kas lying fast asleep on the bed snuggled with her old green and gray blanket. Her nose is red and her eyes are puffy from crying herself to sleep. 2

I gently sit down beside her and brush her bangs out of her face. I'm completely torn on whether to let her sleep in peace or wake her up and beg for forgiveness. I roll the dice and kiss her cheek, hovering closely over her as she rolls toward me and slowly opens her eyes.

I immediately see the pain in her eyes and I feel it in my chest.

"I'm sorry I'm late, Baby. I should have called," I apologize quietly brushing my nose against her cheek so I can breathe in her fresh rain and lilac scent.

her fresh rain and lilac scent.

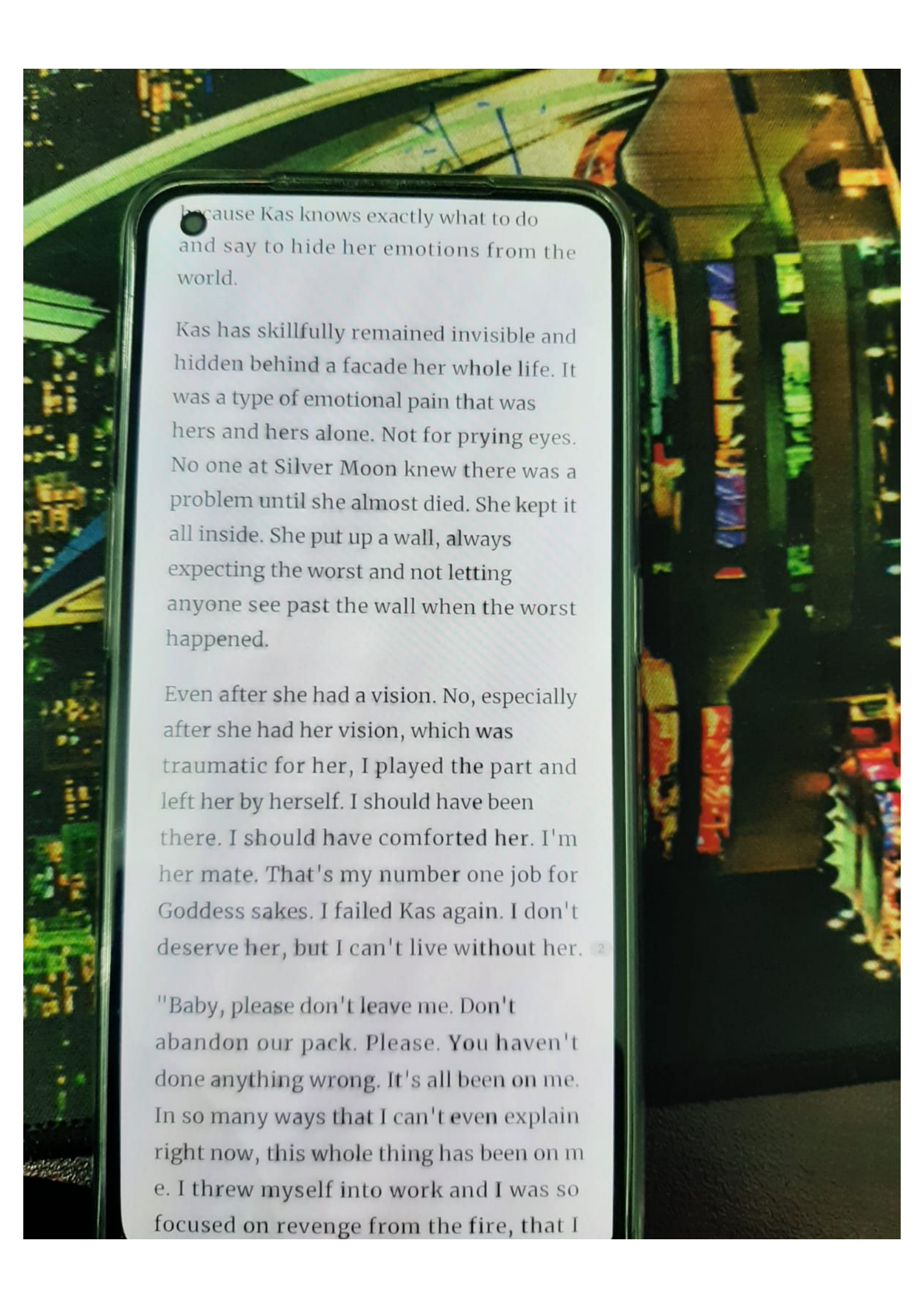
I feel a wet tear touch the tip of my nose. I sit up and see she is crying again.

"Bronx," she sits up and hiccups as she tries to speak, before I realize it, she turns hysterical, "In the morning, I'm going to ask Ashley to assign me a house in town and I'm going to get a job off territory. No one wants me here. You don't even want me here and-and I'm sorry I couldn't be the mate to make you happy. I'm sorry I couldn't be the Luna that Blood River deserves. I can search for a new pack. I don't want to be a rogue but I'm just as useless and weak as Alpha Graham always told me I was. I-I..."

She says more but she is sobbing so hard I can't understand her. Her skin is glowing brightly now, I scoop her up and cradle her in my lap letting the glow surround us both.

I'm so fucking stupid. I should have known, her mental state was way worse than anyone could have ever imagined. She had years to practice and perfect her camouflage. Delilah could have never known the pain lurking under the surface because Kas knows exactly what to do



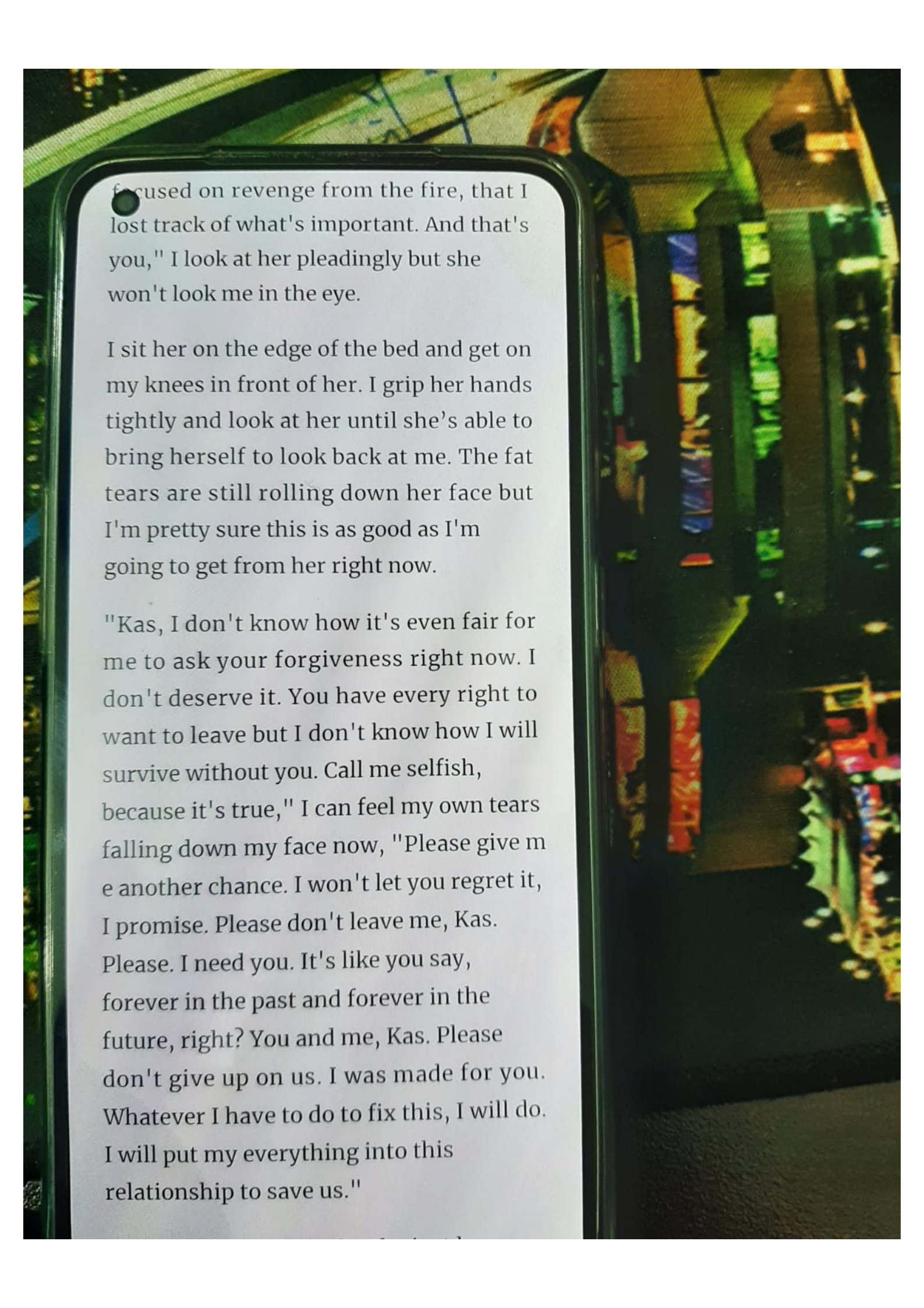


because Kas knows exactly what to do and say to hide her emotions from the world.

Kas has skillfully remained invisible and hidden behind a facade her whole life. It was a type of emotional pain that was hers and hers alone. Not for prying eyes. No one at Silver Moon knew there was a problem until she almost died. She kept it all inside. She put up a wall, always expecting the worst and not letting anyone see past the wall when the worst happened.

Even after she had a vision. No, especially after she had her vision, which was traumatic for her, I played the part and left her by herself. I should have been there. I should have comforted her. I'm her mate. That's my number one job for Goddess sakes. I failed Kas again. I don't deserve her, but I can't live without her. 2

"Baby, please don't leave me. Don't abandon our pack. Please. You haven't done anything wrong. It's all been on me. In so many ways that I can't even explain right now, this whole thing has been on me. I threw myself into work and I was so focused on revenge from the fire, that I



focused on revenge from the fire, that I lost track of what's important. And that's you," I look at her pleadingly but she won't look me in the eye.

I sit her on the edge of the bed and get on my knees in front of her. I grip her hands tightly and look at her until she's able to bring herself to look back at me. The fat tears are still rolling down her face but I'm pretty sure this is as good as I'm going to get from her right now.

"Kas, I don't know how it's even fair for me to ask your forgiveness right now. I don't deserve it. You have every right to want to leave but I don't know how I will survive without you. Call me selfish, because it's true," I can feel my own tears falling down my face now, "Please give me another chance. I won't let you regret it, I promise. Please don't leave me, Kas. Please. I need you. It's like you say, forever in the past and forever in the future, right? You and me, Kas. Please don't give up on us. I was made for you. Whatever I have to do to fix this, I will do. I will put my everything into this relationship to save us."

relationship to save us."

● She doesn't have words. She just has pain. I can feel it. Saint can feel it too. For the first time in almost two months, he isn't angry. He just howls in pain in the back of my head. 3

"Please, Kas." I pull her hands toward me and she easily slides off the bed, back into my lap. She doesn't have words. Just pain. She sobs until she falls asleep against me. As our glow fades, I lean against the bed and fall asleep holding her tightly against me.

## Kas's POV

Coffee and dark chocolate. Mochaccino. I smell it before I open my eyes. Bronx. My mate. He came home. He asked me not to leave. I have a pounding headache from crying but I feel myself being calmed by his scent. I clutch his shirt tight and pull it closer to my nose breathing in deeply. I feel his hand gently rubbing my back.

"You awake, Baby?" I hear his rough voice from outside the cocoon he has me wrapped in. I nod my head and he opens up his large arms, so he can look at me.

"You ready to talk?" He asks gently, as he brushes my bangs out of my eyes.

"I don't know," I tell him honestly, "I don't want to cry anymore."

Bronx sighs deeply and shakes his head like he's not sure what to say. He rubs his hands on his face before he continues, "Kas, I-I have some confessions to make and I'm sure you're going to be mad but I need to tell you."

need to tell you.

"Confessions?" I squeak out.

"Oh my Goddess, is he seriously about to say he has been cheating on us?!" Lex starts to growl, "How did we not smell another she wolf on him?!"

I feel myself stiffen at Lex's revelation, bracing myself for whatever Bronx is about to say.

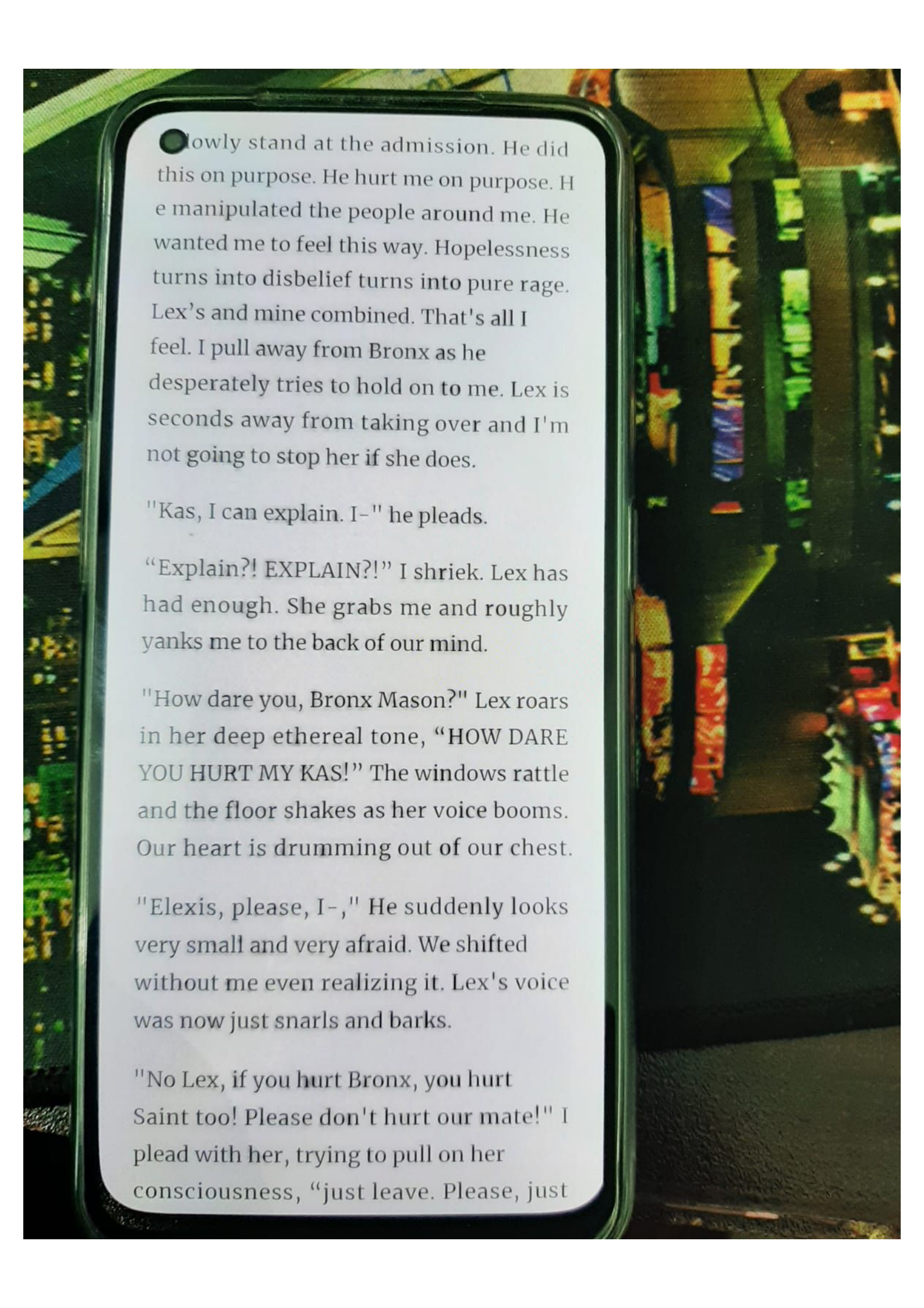
"Kas, I intentionally distanced myself from you in hopes you would get upset," he flicks his eye up from the ground to look at me.

"What?" No, like seriously, what the fuck? I think I would have rather he told me he was cheating on me, "W-why would you do that, Bronx?"

He doesn't answer my question. His eye darts around, avoiding my glare, as he gulps hard and continues to speak.

"I also ordered the pack members to exclude you from helping around the packhouse," his voice cracks and he clears his throat, "except for Delilah. She has been keeping an eye on you for me."

I slowly stand at the admission. He did



●lowly stand at the admission. He did this on purpose. He hurt me on purpose. He manipulated the people around me. He wanted me to feel this way. Hopelessness turns into disbelief turns into pure rage. Lex's and mine combined. That's all I feel. I pull away from Bronx as he desperately tries to hold on to me. Lex is seconds away from taking over and I'm not going to stop her if she does.

"Kas, I can explain. I-" he pleads.

"Explain?! EXPLAIN?!" I shriek. Lex has had enough. She grabs me and roughly yanks me to the back of our mind.

"How dare you, Bronx Mason?" Lex roars in her deep ethereal tone, "HOW DARE YOU HURT MY KAS!" The windows rattle and the floor shakes as her voice booms. Our heart is drumming out of our chest.

"Elexis, please, I-," He suddenly looks very small and very afraid. We shifted without me even realizing it. Lex's voice was now just snarls and barks.

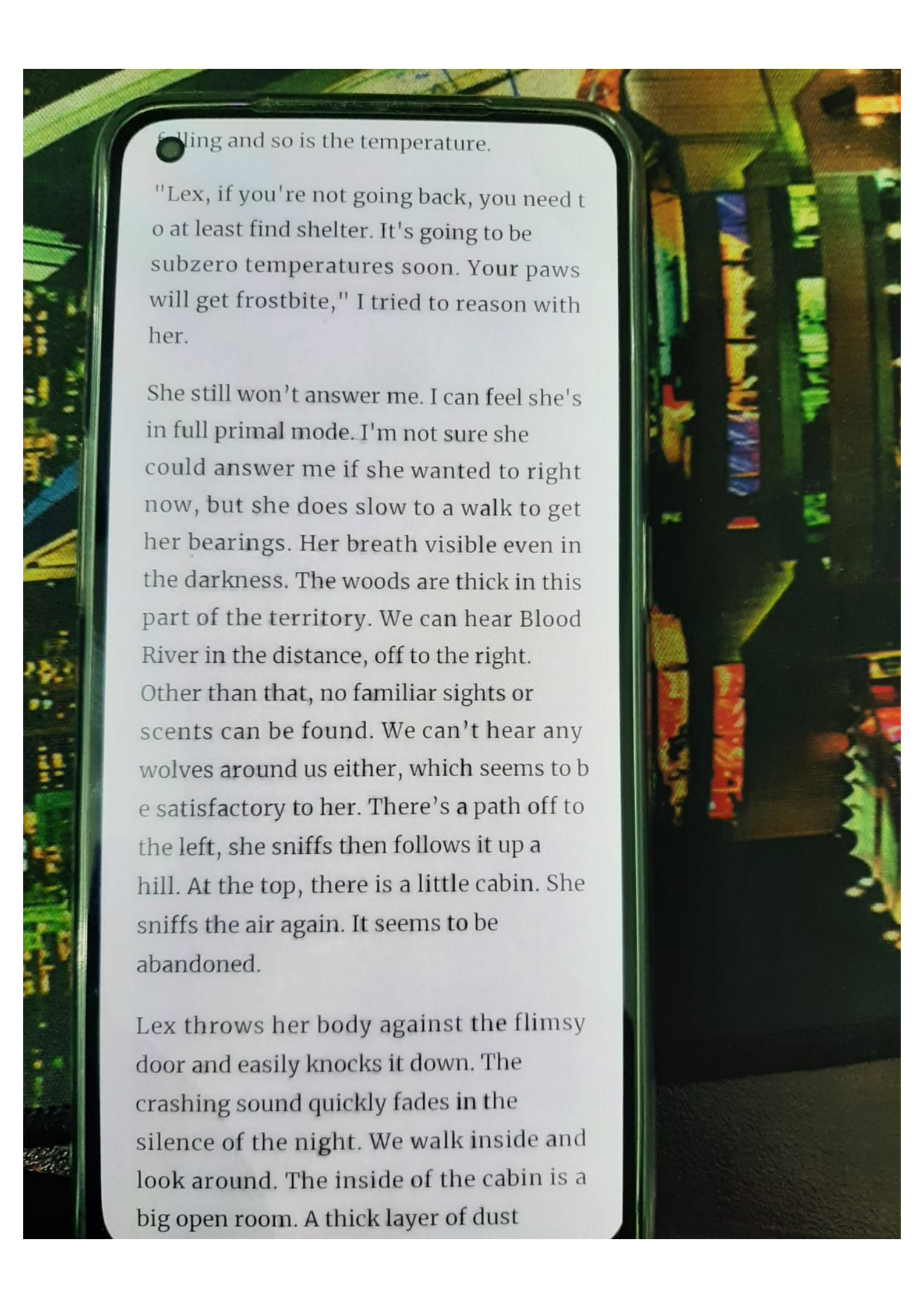
"No Lex, if you hurt Bronx, you hurt Saint too! Please don't hurt our mate!" I plead with her, trying to pull on her consciousness, "just leave. Please, just

consciousness, "just leave. Please, just leave. That is what we planned to do anyway."

I hear the door to the apartment crash open and James comes running in to see what the commotion is. He stops in his tracks when he sees Lex, nearly feral, towering over Bronx.

Lex doesn't answer me, she just howls and charges full speed out the bay window. Breaking it into a million pieces as she crashes through. She lands easily from the third story, running without a break in her stride, straight into the woods. I can hear the thundering paws of Saint behind us, along with at least two or three others, presumably James and Marco right behind him. Lex is bigger and stronger than all of them and she hasn't been allowed out in weeks, so she has energy to burn. The further we run, the farther back the chasing paws sound until I can't hear them at all.

The snow is falling heavily now. I'm glad we are in wolf form because Lex's fur is the only thing keeping us warm. She is deep into the woods and night is quickly falling and so is the temperature.



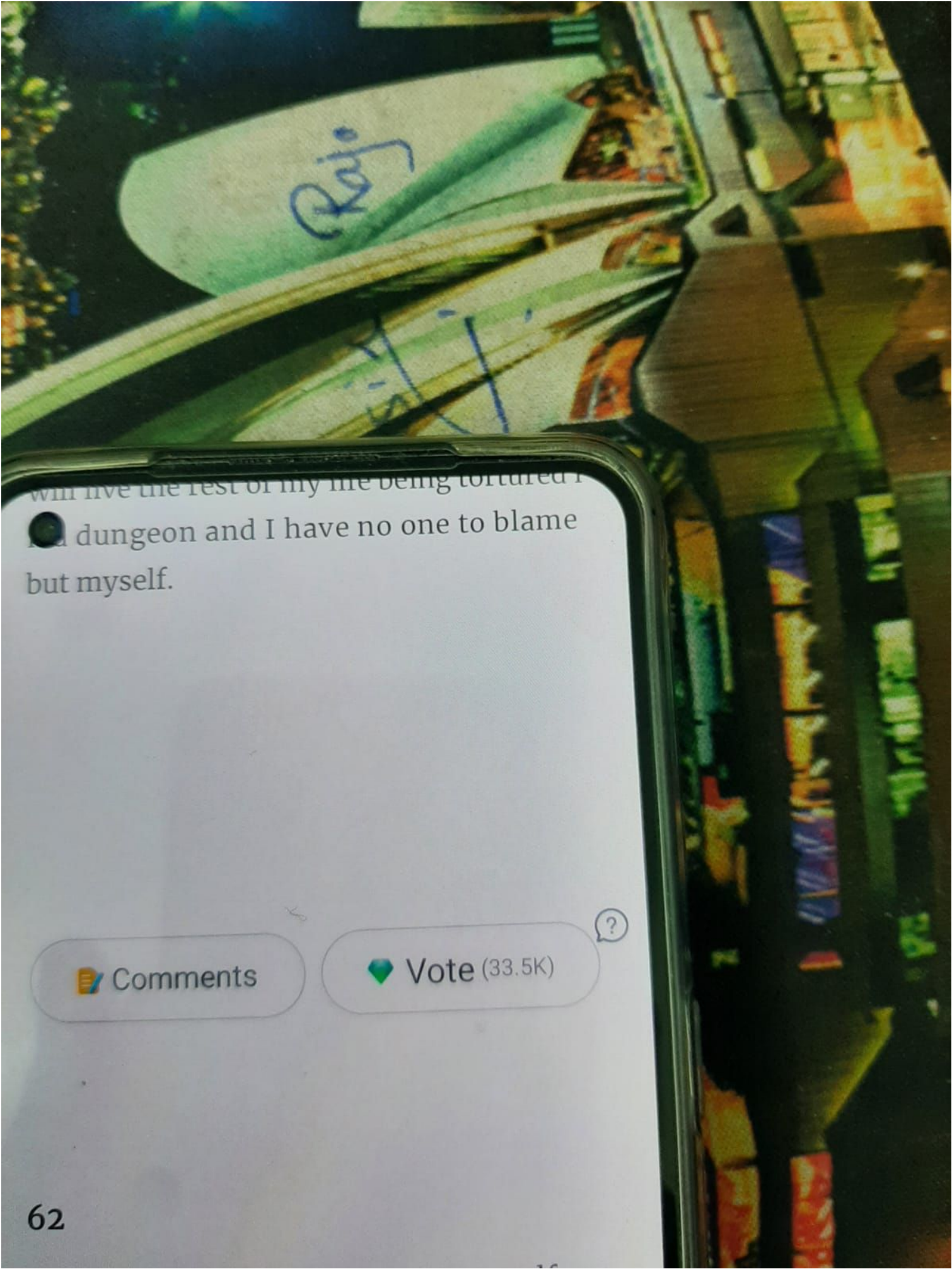
falling and so is the temperature.

"Lex, if you're not going back, you need to at least find shelter. It's going to be subzero temperatures soon. Your paws will get frostbite," I tried to reason with her.

She still won't answer me. I can feel she's in full primal mode. I'm not sure she could answer me if she wanted to right now, but she does slow to a walk to get her bearings. Her breath visible even in the darkness. The woods are thick in this part of the territory. We can hear Blood River in the distance, off to the right. Other than that, no familiar sights or scents can be found. We can't hear any wolves around us either, which seems to be satisfactory to her. There's a path off to the left, she sniffs then follows it up a hill. At the top, there is a little cabin. She sniffs the air again. It seems to be abandoned.


Lex throws her body against the flimsy door and easily knocks it down. The crashing sound quickly fades in the silence of the night. We walk inside and look around. The inside of the cabin is a big open room. A thick layer of dust







Raja

will live the rest of my life being tortured in a dungeon and I have no one to blame but myself.

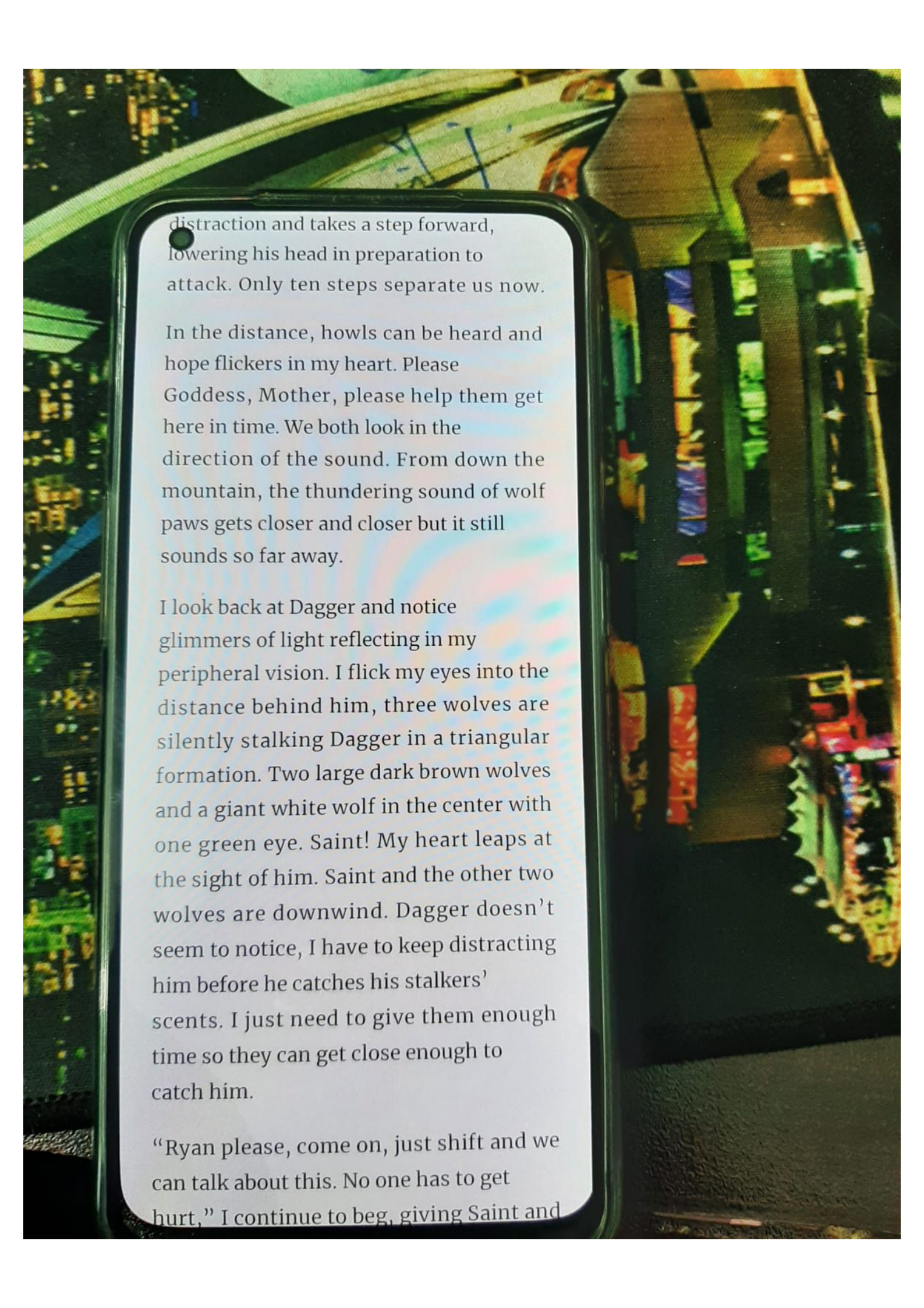
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I crouch down and try to make myself look as small as possible. I feel a lump of tears in my throat but I refuse to let him see me cry, as I plead again, "Ryan, please don't do this. You don't want to do this."

My teeth chatter and I shiver as the frigid wind swirls around me. I look over the side of the deep ravine. The river at the bottom is raging dark red in the moonlight with giant chunks of ice and snow swirling in the current. Blood River. If I try to jump, I'm going to die on the rusty rocks just below the surface. If I were in wolf form maybe I would have a chance. Maybe. That's not an option now. I turn back around to face my fate.

"Please! Please don't do this, Ryan! Dagger, please let me talk to Ryan!" I beg for mercy. The wind gusts hard against my bare skin, chilling me to the bone. I am shivering violently, wishing I was somewhere warm. I hug myself, in a hopeless attempt to protect my naked body. Dagger takes advantage of my distraction and takes a step forward,

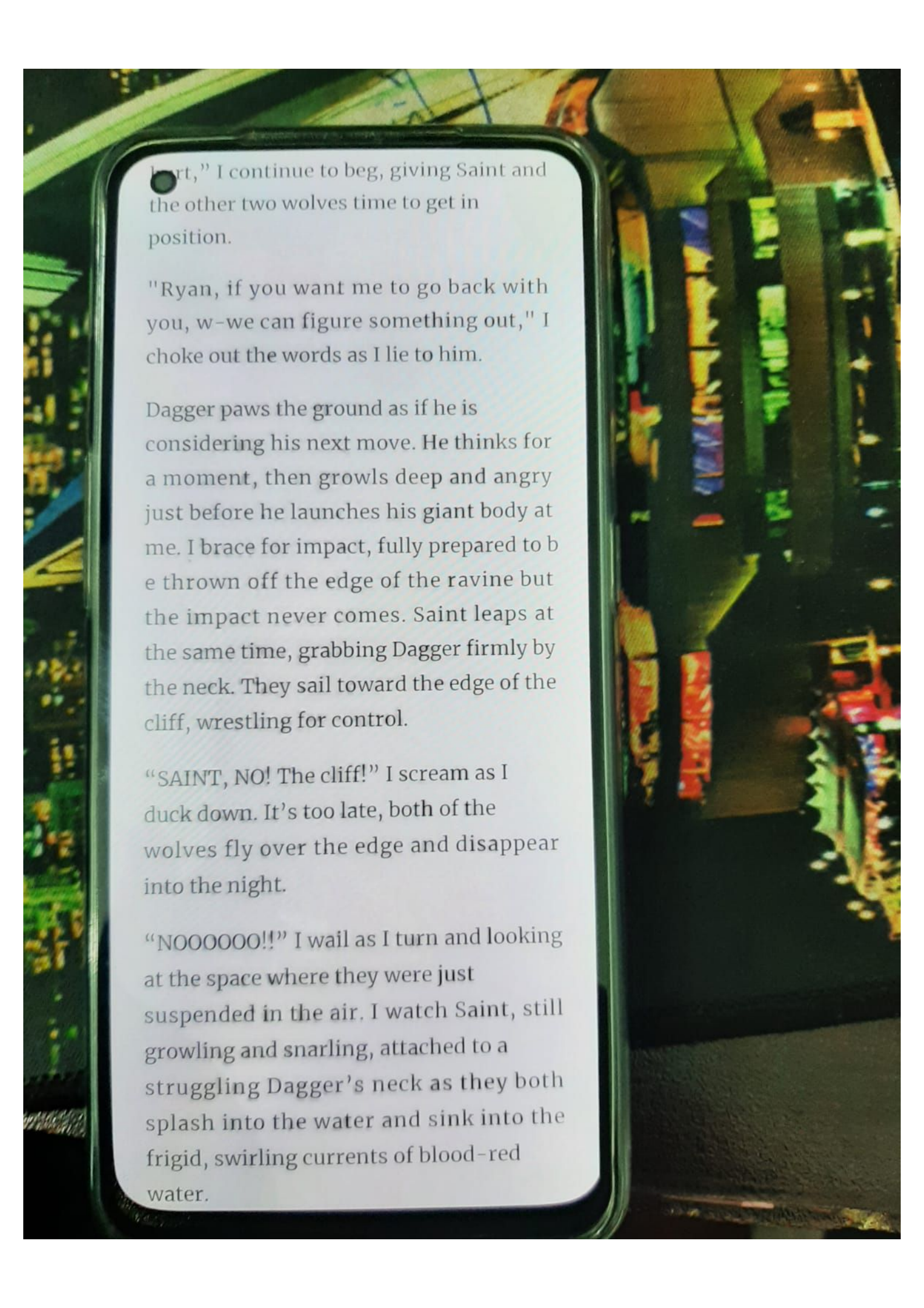


distraction and takes a step forward, lowering his head in preparation to attack. Only ten steps separate us now.

In the distance, howls can be heard and hope flickers in my heart. Please Goddess, Mother, please help them get here in time. We both look in the direction of the sound. From down the mountain, the thundering sound of wolf paws gets closer and closer but it still sounds so far away.

I look back at Dagger and notice glimmers of light reflecting in my peripheral vision. I flick my eyes into the distance behind him, three wolves are silently stalking Dagger in a triangular formation. Two large dark brown wolves and a giant white wolf in the center with one green eye. Saint! My heart leaps at the sight of him. Saint and the other two wolves are downwind. Dagger doesn't seem to notice, I have to keep distracting him before he catches his stalkers' scents. I just need to give them enough time so they can get close enough to catch him.

"Ryan please, come on, just shift and we can talk about this. No one has to get hurt," I continue to beg, giving Saint and



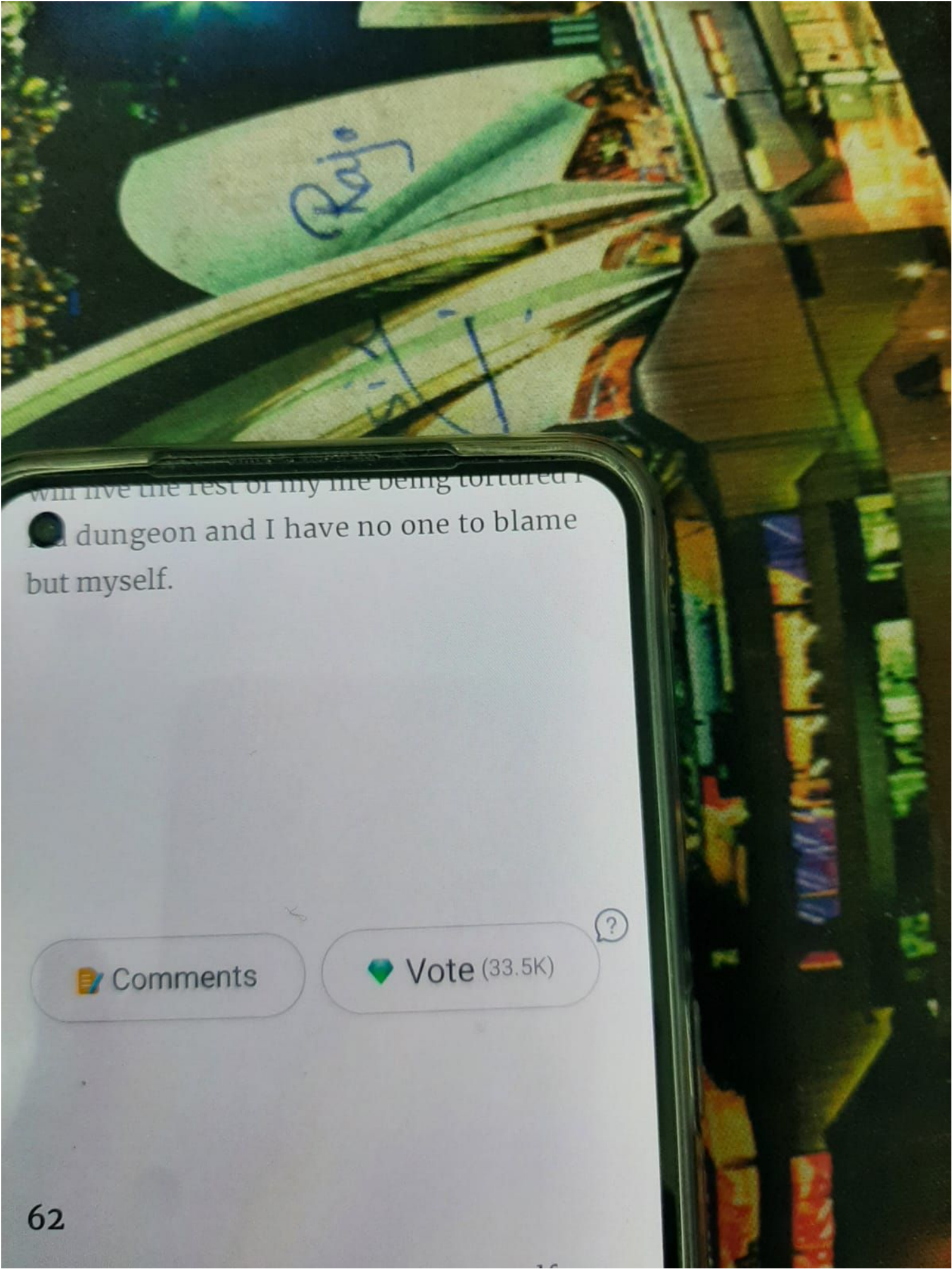
ort," I continue to beg, giving Saint and the other two wolves time to get in position.

"Ryan, if you want me to go back with you, w-we can figure something out," I choke out the words as I lie to him.

Dagger paws the ground as if he is considering his next move. He thinks for a moment, then growls deep and angry just before he launches his giant body at me. I brace for impact, fully prepared to be thrown off the edge of the ravine but the impact never comes. Saint leaps at the same time, grabbing Dagger firmly by the neck. They sail toward the edge of the cliff, wrestling for control.


"SAINT, NO! The cliff!" I scream as I duck down. It's too late, both of the wolves fly over the edge and disappear into the night.



"NOOOOOO!!" I wail as I turn and looking at the space where they were just suspended in the air. I watch Saint, still growling and snarling, attached to a struggling Dagger's neck as they both splash into the water and sink into the frigid, swirling currents of blood-red water.



Raja

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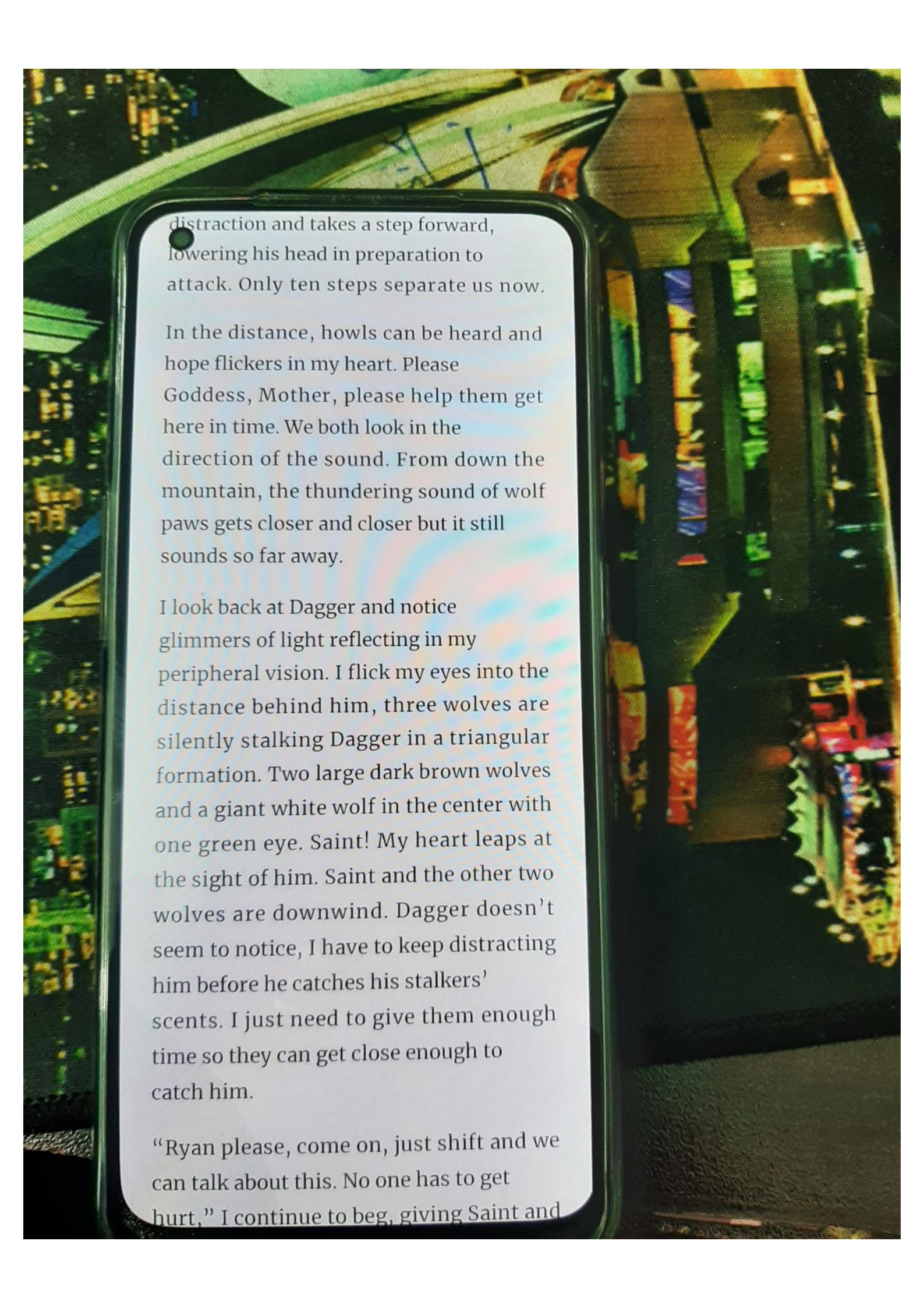
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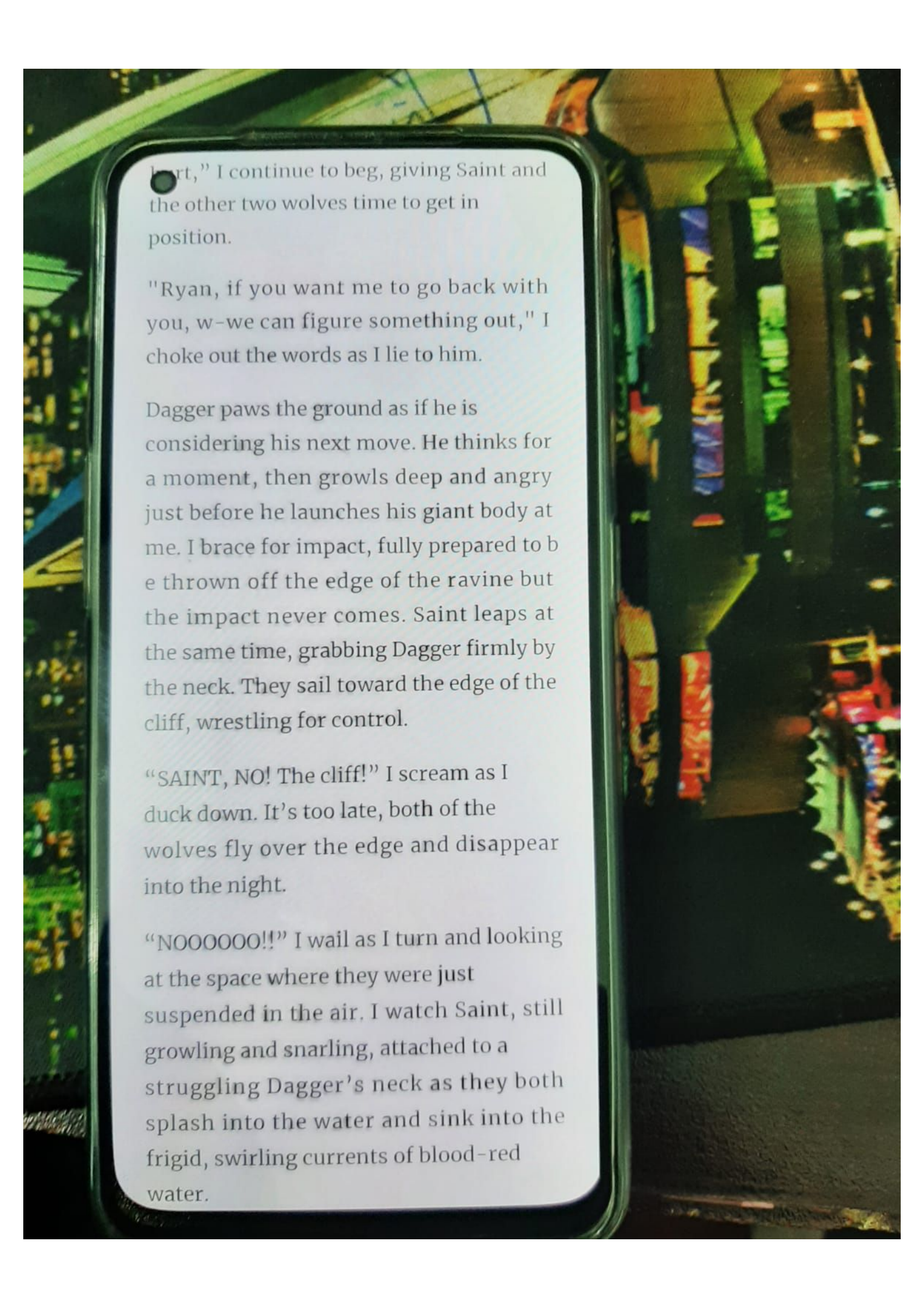


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My heart suddenly feels like it's being ripped in a thousand pieces. An endless hole opens up inside of me and starts to swallow me whole. The pain of the mate bond breaking is excruciating. It feels like it will never end.

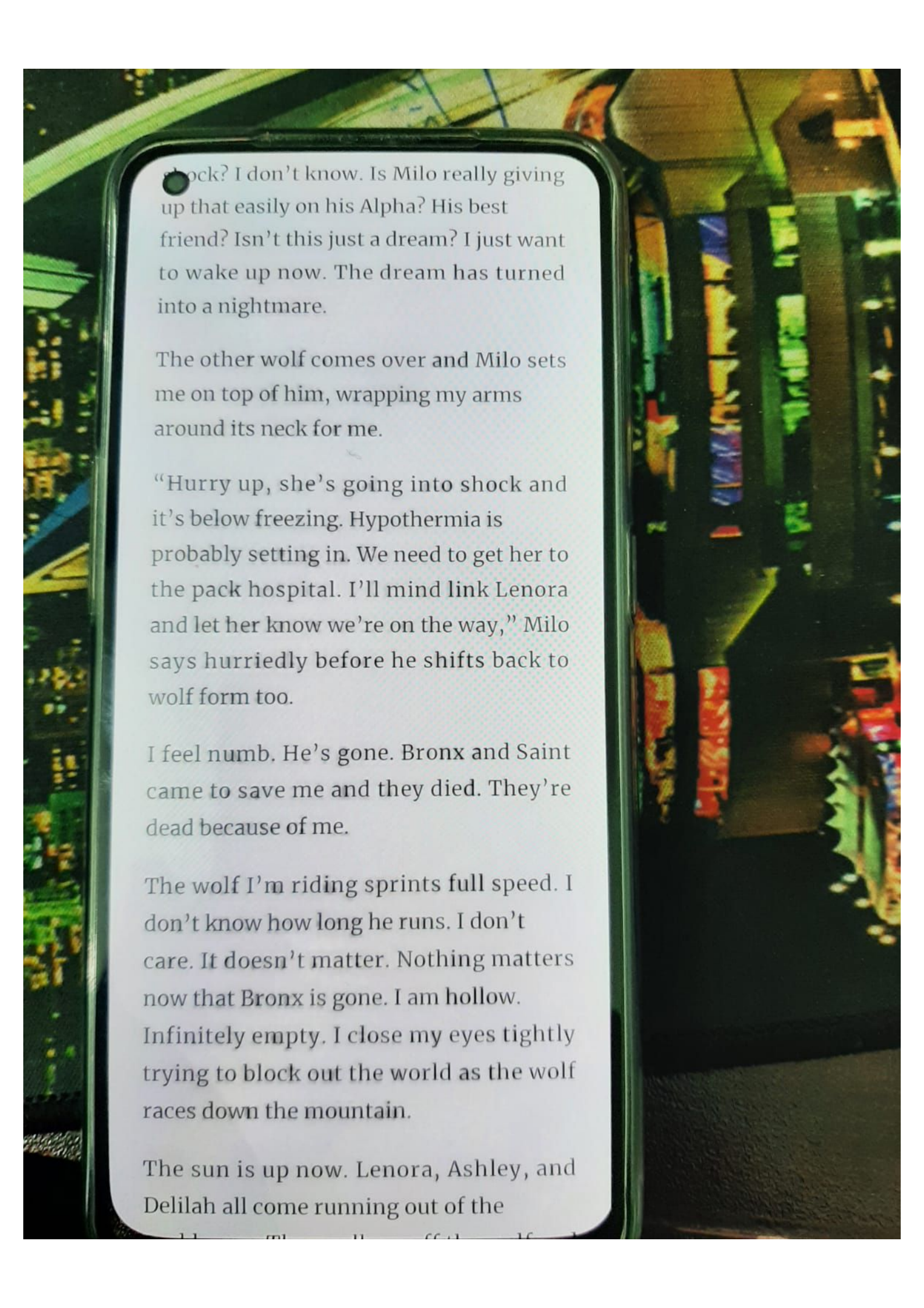
“SAIINNNTTT!!!! BROONNX!!!” I howl at the top of my lungs. I start to run forward.

“Kas! No!” Milo grabs me roughly around the waist before I'm able to throw myself off the cliff after Saint. ①

“Milo let me go, let me go! I have to help him! Don't just stand there! We need to go after them. We have to save Bronx,” I cry hysterically and growl as Milo drags me away from the ledge. I hopelessly try to fight my way out of his strong grip.

“No, Little Sister. No, we are not cliff jumping tonight, come on, we have to get back down the mountain,” his voice is firm and calm. How can he be calm right now?! ①

My arms start to go numb and I can't talk. Is it from the cold? Is it from the shock? I don't know. Is Milo really giving



Shock? I don't know. Is Milo really giving up that easily on his Alpha? His best friend? Isn't this just a dream? I just want to wake up now. The dream has turned into a nightmare.

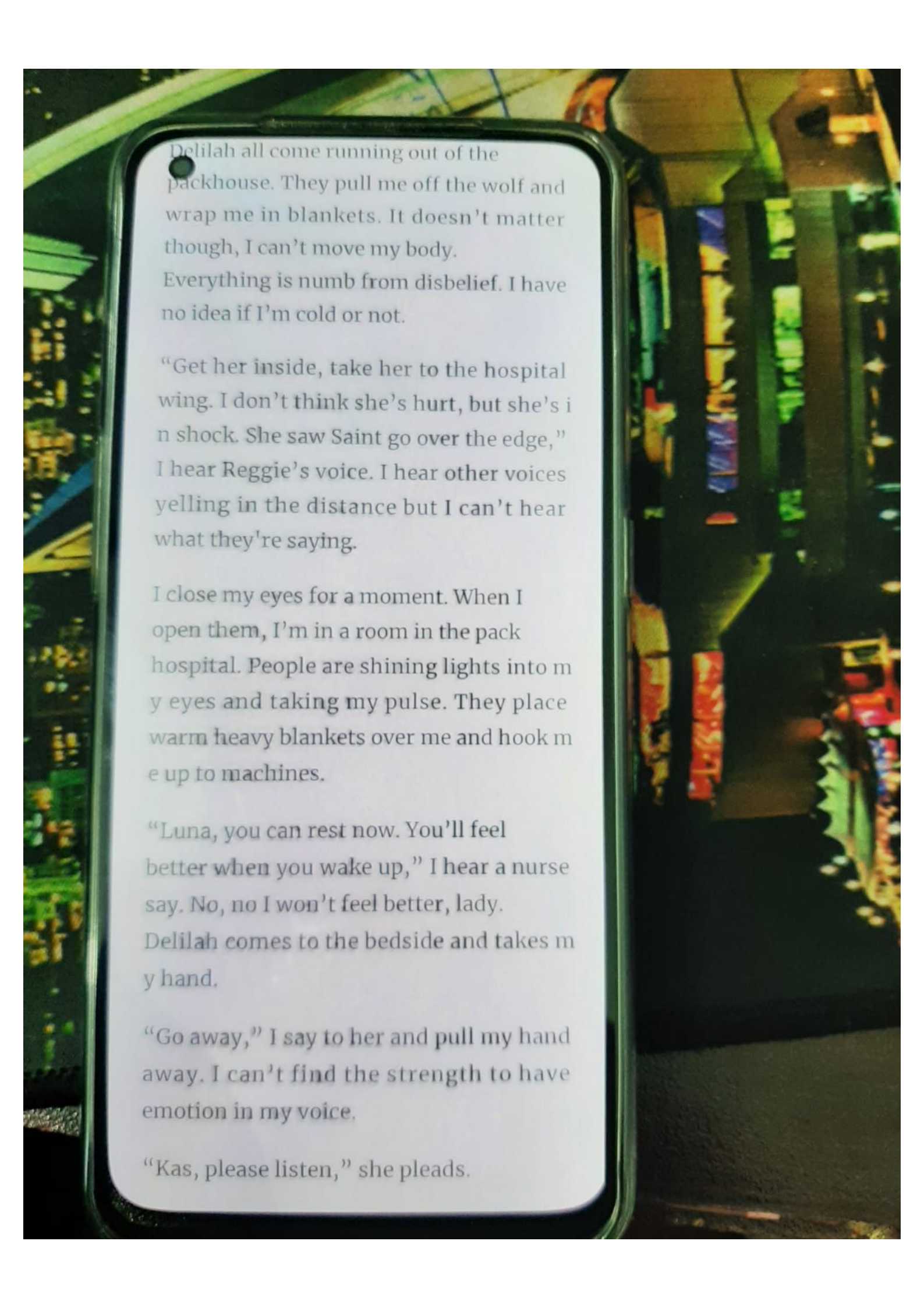
The other wolf comes over and Milo sets me on top of him, wrapping my arms around its neck for me.

"Hurry up, she's going into shock and it's below freezing. Hypothermia is probably setting in. We need to get her to the pack hospital. I'll mind link Lenora and let her know we're on the way," Milo says hurriedly before he shifts back to wolf form too.

I feel numb. He's gone. Bronx and Saint came to save me and they died. They're dead because of me.

The wolf I'm riding sprints full speed. I don't know how long he runs. I don't care. It doesn't matter. Nothing matters now that Bronx is gone. I am hollow. Infinitely empty. I close my eyes tightly trying to block out the world as the wolf races down the mountain.

The sun is up now. Lenora, Ashley, and Delilah all come running out of the



Delilah all come running out of the packhouse. They pull me off the wolf and wrap me in blankets. It doesn't matter though, I can't move my body.

Everything is numb from disbelief. I have no idea if I'm cold or not.

"Get her inside, take her to the hospital wing. I don't think she's hurt, but she's in shock. She saw Saint go over the edge," I hear Reggie's voice. I hear other voices yelling in the distance but I can't hear what they're saying.

I close my eyes for a moment. When I open them, I'm in a room in the pack hospital. People are shining lights into my eyes and taking my pulse. They place warm heavy blankets over me and hook me up to machines.

"Luna, you can rest now. You'll feel better when you wake up," I hear a nurse say. No, no I won't feel better, lady. Delilah comes to the bedside and takes my hand.


"Go away," I say to her and pull my hand away. I can't find the strength to have emotion in my voice.


"Kas, please listen," she pleads.

“Kas, please listen,” she pleads.

“No. Go away. Leave me alone, Delilah. You’ve done enough.”

She looks around the room for a moment then turns and walks away. I’m pretty sure I hear her crying before she leaves the room but I don’t care. The room is quiet now, except for the rhythmic beeps of the heart monitor. The sound is soothing. A deep dreamless sleep comes quickly.

 Comments

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