

“Saul. Saul. Please wake up, baby. Please wake up.”

Focusing on this far-off voice, I crawl toward it.

Then suddenly like a spike, pain hammers thru the side of my head at a pulsated rate.

I am awake. My eyes flutter.

Chained as if a dog, my body finds no comfort lying on the cold cobblestone. Shackled at the wrists and ankles, heavy chains clank with my slightest movements. The metallic pings pierce my ears.

“Saul? Is that U? Are U alright?”

“Chloe, where are we?” I ask.

“We’re in the chamber next to the tower, I think. She has chained us up in the empty room,” Chloe declares.

“How long have we been here?” I ask.

“A few hours since we last saw each other, I think,” Chloe replies.

“What happen? How did she get U?” I ask.

“I am not totally sure, to tell U the truth.” Chloe declares, “One moment everything was fine and then there was nothing. It’s so strange.

“I was in the field of standing stones, waiting for U. I felt chilled from the wind so I sat down with my back to a contoured stone. It worked well against the wind and I waited. The chill disappeared. But then, there was nothing. It’s like I fell asleep and woke up here. It’s so strange,” Chloe asks. “Saul, do U have any idea why she is doing this?”

“No. I haven’t clue,” I reply.

“Liar!”

I turn in the direction of the muffled scream.

Blinding light floods the chamber as the door swings open. I shield my eyes with my forearm. I spot the silhouette of Melusin  standing in front of me. Down on all fours like a rabid dog, I bound for her.

Perfectly timed, though, Lady Melusin  delivers a devastating blow to the bridge of my nose. With a loud whack, blood spews out from it. Tears cloud my vision. I collapse to the cobblestone. Blood runs thru my fingers as I cup my nose with my hand.

Kicking me in my ribs, Lady Melusin  bellows, “U, miserable cur. U are a mongrel even among men. That’s twice, now, that U have blatantly tried to strike me down with your anger. How dare U? U, pig.”

“Please Lady, leave Saul alone. He does not know what he has done. He’s confused and in pain. Saul simply lashed out.”

“Oh my sweet little Chloe, U have so much to learn about men. They are truly evil. I swear to U on all that U hold holy, they are all self-serving swine.

“Take monsieur Lusingna for example. Just a few hours ago he tried to use your whereabouts as a bargaining tool to save his own pathetic life. Saul plays with people’s lives as if they were dolls that can be discarded when they no longer amuse him.”

As Lady Melusin  finishes, she crouches next to me. Snatching my chin, she forces me to look her in the eyes. She sneers at me.

“Now, isn’t that true, monsieur Lusingna?” she barks.

Defiant, I spray her face with spit and blood. She comes unglued. Infuriated, she releases my chin and backhands me, all in a split second. With the pop of a jealous farm boy, Lady Melusin  sends me sprawling. Drifting out of the explosion of stars, my mind spins from the jolting blow.

Laughing at my cries, she comes to me.

Lifting my chin once more, the cold woman candidly declares, “This can all end. Tell Chloe that U never loved her and promise that U will never speak a word about what U have seen. It’s just that simple, monsieur Lusingna. This is all U have to do to save your miserable hide.”

“Go to hell, witch. I will always love Chloe,” I moan as I lay there bleeding.

“Oh, how noble. That’s easy to say when U don’t have long to live,” she remarks.

Quickly she adds, “I hope U know that by saying that, U have forsaken sweet little Chloe. Obviously, U have poisoned her poor mind with your false feelings. And now, she will be too blind to see what is best for her. I know that when I tell her that U are no good; she will call me a liar. To my own face, no less. This is to the same woman that has allowed Chloe to live in this great home for nearly a year. All of this is too much for me to bear. I have given her so much and U have taken all of that away, in so short of time, in less time than it took with Lilly. Congratulations, monsieur Lusingna, U are getting better at destroying people’s lives. U must be so proud.

“Why do I deserve such treatment? How am I suppose to feel? Have I not been wronged? Saul don’t U have any dignity, no morals? Why do U insist on deceiving and degrading every woman that U met? Are women just some type of quest that U must conquer no matter what the cost?

“For once, do something that is just not for your own personal gain. Release Chloe from your sickness before it consumes and kills her, too.”

“My love for Chloe could never harm her,” I argue, “My love for her shall never die, no matter how much pain U inflict on me, witch.”

“Hah,” she laughs. “Oh please spare me your hero rhetoric, Saul. Don’t try to kid yourself with your pathetic words. U were never much of a man of your word, anyways. Soon, U shall see how your love for your own life shall outweigh your love for anything, including my sweet little Chloe. With your self-serving ways, U shall consume the only pure thing that U have ever known in your entire life. How could U, Saul? I give U a chance to free Chloe and U chose not to condemn her.”

“Don’t listen to her,” Chloe calls out from the dark shadows. “She is simply insane. Listen to how she babbles. She talks nonsense. One moment, she says one thing and then the next she argues something to the contrary.”

“Oh, my sweet little Chloe, U don’t know how deep that hurts me. How can U say such things about the only person that truly cares for U? Don’t worry, though. I have already forgiven U, my sweet little Chloe. This filthy man has perverted U about the truths of the world. It just hurts so much because I have tried so hard to protect U from the evils of this world.

“Oh Chloe, trust is your only fault. Fear not, though, I shall always look out for U, that’s if U just let me. Forget Saul. Forsake him and the world shall finally be thru with him, forever.”

“What has happen to U, dear lady?” Chloe asks. Standing up just outside the long rectangle of light penetrating thru the open chamber door, Chloe adds, “Was the world that U came from so cruel that love was a weakness? Dear lady, U must see the love that Saul and I share. It keeps us strong, ready to face the endless uncertainties of life.”

“Hah! What about the harsh certainties of life, famines, floods and freezing conditions? Are U ready to face them? Saul’s not. He has no real skills. Oh. Oh. He can write and copy other people’s greatness but so what. That is nothing in a world ruled by the sword, Chloe. And Saul’s talent shall always be nothing.

“So please tell me Chloe, who is babbling bullshit, now? I thought I had picked better when I chose U.”

Stepping over me, Lady Melusiné goes to Chloe. Standing still, Chloe eyes Lady Melusiné. Slowly, the woman circles Chloe. She inspects every curve of Chloe. Her nose flares in and out smelling her like a bloodhound. The woman shakes her head in a disappointed manner as if just realizing that her own eyes had deceived her.

Meticulous, Lady Melusiné brushes away a loose lock of hair that hangs over Chloe’s eye. Lifting the girl’s chin with her fingertips, she corrects Chloe’s posture.

With a nostalgic smile, Lady Melusiné remarks, “My sweet little Chloe, I had so many hopes and dreams for us. Unfortunately, U have replaced them with this man’s lies and false feelings. Worse yet, U fail to see that Saul will only bring U misery in the end.”

Gently caressing Chloe’s cheek, Lady Melusiné adds, “Please my dear, I beg U to come to your senses and abandon this lust-driven boy.”

Trying to twist free from her cold iron-grip, Chloe sputters, “U are literally mad, woman.”

Unforgiving as an angry lap cat Lady Melusiné’s nails scratch Chloe’s cheek as she releases the girl’s chin.

All of this, I bear witness thru blood and tears. Lady Melusiné smiles.

As it fades, she asks, “Oh Chloe, can’t U see? Saul is the worst of his kind. For the last time, leave him. Believe me when I tell U his love is all-consuming.”

Stepping back from the light and sitting down the slack in Chloe’s chains clatter on the cold floor.

Calling out, Chloe declares, “I shall never leave Saul.”

Shaking her head, visibly disappointed, Lady Melusiné remarks, “I am sorry U feel that way.”

Snatching Chloe’s arm, Lady Melusiné pulls her to her feet. Producing a key, Lady Melusiné unlocks Chloe’s shackles.

Seeing our moment to act, Chloe pushes at Lady Melusiné as I spring up at her.

We accomplish nothing, though.

Melusiné’s sharp backhand knocks Chloe spinning and her stiff kick to my forehead sends me reeling.

All in that instance Lady Melusiné catches Chloe before she collapses to the floor. Without a word, Melusiné sweeps Chloe up into her arms.

With the loud slamming of the door, they disappear.

After what seems like an eternity, Melusiné returns, alone. Standing in plain view, she stares at me as I sit on the floor, still shackled.

I glare at her.

Smiling, she crouches down in front of me. She holds her hands up for me to see.

At first, I see nothing. But slowly, the flesh at the tip of her fingers split open.

No, this cannot be happening.

Blood streams out from Lady Melusiné’s long slender fingers. Slowly, it runs down the length of her arms. Pin-point bones inch upward forming talon fingertips. Blood echoes like dripping water from her elbows.

*The change* appears excruciating but Lady Melusiné’s closed eyes appear tranquil.

Opening her eyes, she stares off into empty space with a blank look on her face.

“God! This can’t be happening.” I declare. “U’re not real. U’re not real. Somehow, U’ve poisoned me, infected my mind. I know! I know! It’s the wine. It has to be.”

“Hah. Please, Saul. U are so pathetic. I am what U see,” she declares as she stares.

“But what is it that I see? U’re not human.” I sputter.

Laughing lightly as she moves closer, Lady Melusiné declares, “I am a goddess.”

“Hah! U’re not a goddess. U’re the spawn of Satan.”

“Yes but that does not change the fact of what I am. U cannot deny my power, whether it be Satan or God who gave it to me. Ultimately, isn’t God responsible for my existence, anyways? Think about it, boy.”

“Please spare me on how U figure U’re somehow divine. There’s nothing divine about U, Melusiné,” I bark.

“Hah, I have drunk the blood of this world’s so-called divine and only found the thoughts of delusional men. Do U hear me, Saul? Over eight hundred years ago, I drank the blood of your Christ and it was nothing more than any other mortal’s blood. The prophet of Allah was no different than the son of God. What fools they were. What have they accomplished, nothing but chaos. There is no earthly protection in their words. Religion is only a fools’ faith in a con’s lies. A thousand years from now, these religious fanatics will still be killing in honor of their gods.”

“This is real power, though,” she declares as she holds out her claw for me to see.

I stare at her thick sharp nails. They are hawk-like.

Smiling, she slowly drags her nails down the inside of her right arm. Wide and effortless, her flesh splits apart. Her unnatural blood oozes out like slow winter molasses. As though nothing was wrong, Lady Melusiné smiles at me.

I stare into her eyes and see Satan smiling back at me.

Scrambling backwards, I try to get out of her reach.

At the end of my chains, I am still not safe. Pathetic I must appear. With her left hand, she snatches my shoulder and pins my face against the wall. Her nails dig into my flesh.

As if dealing with a snake, her right hand slowly sways side to side. Suddenly without the slightest warning, she strikes.

She slams her talons straight thru the nap of my neck. My flesh splits. Pain cuts thru me. Her fingers pierce deep. Their needle-tipped nails snatch a hold of my spine. Instantly, I am paralyzed.

Soon, a strange numbness replaces the intrusive pain of her fingers.

In one fluid motion, the small-framed woman sweeps me up off my feet. The emptiness of falling fills my stomach. Out away from her body I hang suspended from her hand. The arthritic fingers of a puppet master wiggle and flex. Snapping and dancing, my arms and legs jerk and twitch. I am her doll. She smiles.

Moments later, a dead calm comes over my body. My limbs go limp. Scared of snapping my own neck, I refrain from struggling. I am a dead man hanging. Silence fills the chamber. The silence is deafening. And then, I notice something.

What is that? Is it a draft from the adjacent room?

No. No, it’s... it’s... it’s her. Her small nostrils flare in and out. She’s becoming louder and louder.

Her breathing echoes in the room or so it seems.

*Oh! Good U can hear me already, young lord.*

*What is happening, witch?*

*Oh, I think U know. Death.*

Her words leave a bitter choking taste. I hack and jerk, my body tries to resist.

In an instance, I heave. I gag with her fingers jammed thru the back of my throat. I cough a thick mucus cough. My entrails spew out their contents with an echoing splash.

*Breathe, my child. I grace U with everlasting life. Breathe.*

My breathing falls in sync with her.

Struggling, my eyes crack open. An irritating haze covers them. The tips of my feet dust the cobblestone.

Slowly, though not willed by me, I become flatfooted and stand upright. Arching her wrist, she turns me toward her. She stares thru me with pure evil.

*I taste your soul, Saul. I know all that U have ever known and all that U ever hoped for. And now, U shall never be the same. Only thru me shall U know how to live.*

*I am the absolute. U are lost without me. Only thru me can U understand who U are. I am the hand of god. I am god.*

Without warning, she yanks out her hand from the back of my neck. Fluid and blood stretch out like wet webbing from her fingers to my neck. Staggering slightly, the crimson cobwebs snap away as I collapse to floor into a fetal position.

I lay there, helpless. I feel her poisons seep thru me. My neck burns. My body burns. I cough violently as I try to catch my breath.

The blood slithers up my neck. It tickles. It fills the wounds formed from her fingers.

I feel everything.

Suddenly, without warning, a black stream sprays out from my mouth. Splashing on the floor, the ink-black bile pours out of me in heavy heaves. It looks like the gutter water in the streets of Tours. The stench of it sickens me worse.

God, I am covered in it.

Laughing, she leaves.

Oh! How long will this go on?

I... I can't think straight... Thoughts... Time... They blur together... Nothing... Nothing seems real... All a haze... My thoughts... My emotions... They... They are all so strange, so foreign.

They are not my own... There's something dark... Something primitive... Something evil within me. What is this coldness consuming me? I... I... I have never felt this ever before. What... What is it? It's... It's... It's conscious... it's a calculating... It's Melusiné.

Must resist.

*Ahhh!*

Her dark thoughts attack my mind. Crippled, I lie on the cold floor in misery. Sweat drips profusely. I shake violently. Body-wrenching convulsions seize me. Poison spreads thru me with a needling numbness. It soaks down from the base of my neck thru my arms, stomach and down into my legs.

Slowly soothing warmth fills me. Thoughts become clearer. I remember happy moments in my life to distract my mind.

As I do, though, the memories start to twist and warp. I find fault in everything. Quickly, an inner demon consumes a lifetime filled with wealth and excess.

What is happening?

Reality evades my senses.

Am I dreaming?

Thru the darkness, a faint scent of berries comes to me.

It's Chloe. She's back in the room. I crawl closer to her, as far as the chains will let me.

"Saul? Is... Is... Is that U? Are U awake? How... How... How are U feeling?" Chloe asks.

"Chloe, I... I... I don't know what Lady Melusin  has done to me. I... I... I don't feel right. I... I... I feel someone or something within me. Complete memories of people's past flow thru me as if they are my own thoughts and feelings. Tens of thousands of souls course thru me. They all have some connect to Lady Melusin . They... They range over countless centuries. God, I... I... I remember... I..." I struggle.

"What are U talking about, Saul?" she asks. "I don't understand. U're not making sense."

"That's the thing. It doesn't make sense to me either. What I feel is not possible," Saul declares.

Immobilizing me, the door opens behind me. The light splashes across my eyes like boiling oil. Dropping to the floor, I frantically cover my eyes. Towering over me, Lady Melusin  laughs loudly. Chloe cries in the background.

"Oh Chloe, is this the kind of man U want?" she questions. "U can't be serious. Deny him, and U shall spare yourself a life of misery and heartache."

"I just can't abandon Saul. I love him," Chloe declares.

"His love is poison and U must be willing to bleed your soul of him before it is too late. The emotions and love U feel for Saul are real enough, but his are not. This is not your fault. Saul is incapable of love. He thrives on the quest. And when he gets what he wants, Saul searches for someone new. His kind is never satisfied. Never, Chloe! His love is an empty hole.

"Just ask him, Chloe. Ask him about what he dreamt this morning. Ask him. His mind is perverted by carnal desires and self-serving ways.

"When he was sleeping in your bed, he was dreaming of having sex with four other women, for God's sake. How can U expect a man like that to truly love U? He just can't. He's incapable."

As she preaches, I crawl on my hands and knees out of the light and into the shadows of the chamber. Somewhat relieved, I rub my eyes. I try to wipe away the brilliant blue splotches blotting out my vision. With little slack from the chains, though, the shackles force me to sit with my legs and arms hanging mostly in the rectangle of light.

With my head in darkness, my eyes adjust to the light in the room.

"Chloe, believe only half of anything she says," I declare. "Her words only serve one purpose, her own. Lady Melusin  has been lying to me from the start. She has only brought me here to die."

"Just like always, U are wrong, monsieur Lusingna. I brought U here to teach U a lesson but if U must die to learn it then, so be it," Lady Melusin  cackles.

"So if I must die then, why don't U let Chloe go?" I ask.

"Chloe!?! She can leave this chamber anytime she wants," she declares, "All that she has to do is deny her love for U. And once she emotionally frees herself from U, I will physically free her."

Silent, I stare at Melusin  as she smiles.

As if not possible, Lady Melusin  is more evil than beautiful, her dark piercing eyes, her glass smile. No inner beauty shines from her.

Knowing that she lacks this, Lady Melusin 's casts a cold ugliness from within.

For the first time, I notice that she has on the same black dress that Chloe wore last night when we were together. A calculating craziness consumes this woman. Compulsively, she covers every angle. There is no hope for us.

From the shadows of the chamber, I call out, “Chloe. Please leave. There is no hope if we both stay here. She has changed who I am or, at least, what I am. I know that now. Before it is too late for U, just leave. Please.”

“What are U saying, Saul? U can’t mean that. I know U don’t mean that. U are just saying that to protect me. We’ve been thru so much and grown so close. Don’t give up now,” Chloe declares.

“I know,” I concede. “But baby, I have no clue what she has in store for me. I am convinced that the outcome won’t be good. So don’t stay. Please Chloe, if U truly love me, just leave before it’s too late. There is no better way I can explain it. There is no hope in my heart. She has drained that. I only feel her sick demented thoughts. I only see the death of others, now.”

Shaking her head, Chloe cries, “No, Saul. I won’t leave.”

“I don’t love U,” I declare. “I never really did. I only wanted U for one reason and U know what that was. And what she said is true; as I lay next to U, I hungered to have sex with four other women. Hell, I was calling to the fifth one when she entered. Ha! U didn’t really think that U could completely satisfy me?”

“Noooo! Damn U, Saul. Don’t do this. It won’t work, I know U! U’re just saying that. I shall never leave U, now. U have just proved your love. Now, just believe. Fight her, Saul. Fight her. Please! For me,” Chloe pleads.

“Oh Chloe, no matter how strong our love may be, it can no longer save U from what I have become. Maybe in another lifetime it could have worked out between us. In this life, though, we are star-crossed lovers and if U stay there will only be death. Please Chloe, understand. Leave. Leave, now,” I request.

“I can’t. I won’t. I only have one life to live,” she replies.

“See! See!” Melusiné barks. “I hope U’re satisfied. Your lust has forsaken my sweet little Chloe.”

“What are U talking about, U crackpot! How can U hold me liable for the evil seed that U have sowed within me? This flesh is no longer mine. I share it with... with whatever U have infected me with. I am no longer in control,” I declare.

“Hah! That’s a lie. U’ve never been in control. U have always been this way. Your lust drives U, relentlessly. Look at Lilly, if U don’t believe me.

“So, don’t try to blame your vices on me, dog. Your soul stews in sin,” Melusiné declares.

Shaking her head, she looks over at Chloe and remarks, “This is the last time, my dear. Deny your love for Saul and your soul shall be spared.”

“I won’t say what is not true,” Chloe declares. “Besides, it’s not up to U if my soul is to be spared.”

“Chloe, don’t do this. This isn’t the time for high ideals. Just leave! Please, I beg U.”

“No.” Chloe reasserts. “What am I without U, the salt of the earth? I am not even worth that much. Besides, I’m sure what Lady Melusiné had in store for me is twenty times worse.”

“Do U hear her? I have given her all the chances in the world to change her mind but to no avail. U have done your damage. She is of no use to me, any longer. This is the end.”

“What do U mean, Melusiné? Melusiné!” I boom.

I start to stand up.

In an instance, Melusiné lunges on me. Like an attacking spider, her long legs and arms tie me up and subdue me. And with the ferocity of a lioness, though, she clamps down on my neck. Becoming limp, I collapse like a crippled gazelle.

For several minutes, Lady Melusin  stays locked to the side of my throat, only moving slightly every so often, to get a better grip on my neck.

All the while becoming more distraught, Chloe barks, "Let go of him. Leave Saul alone, damn it! Please! Please, leave Saul alone! Please!"

Paying no heed, Lady Melusin  completes her unnatural metamorphosis. More and more, I become light-headed.

I am dying.

Slowly, she withdraws her fangs. A blood-red cobweb of saliva stretches from her open mouth to my neck. The liquid bond between us snaps, as she pulls away. Sloppily, the remains of the wet webbing slaps across the bottom of the woman's chin. Caring less about the mess, she stares off into the darkness as if studying something on the wall.

All of the actions of the woman seem sedated.

Lazily looking around the chamber, her hypnotic stare stops on Chloe. The mute woman blinks her eyes several times. Gathering her bearing, she looks down on me. Confusion fills her face as if bewildered to find me lying in her arms. She studies me for a moment.

Like dead weight restricting her, though, she pushes me from her lap. Lacking all physical control, my body flops onto the cold cobblestone where Melusin  leaves me lying. Without a word, she stands up and exits the chamber. As she does, she slams the door shut.

Instantly, complete darkness engulfs the chamber.

Chloe's crying sounds like rain as I drift out of consciousness.

Awaking from a timeless sleep, I called out, "Chloe?"

"Aaaah! Aaaah! Aaaah! Aaaah!" Chloe screams.

"Calm down, Chloe! Please calm down! Don't scream. It's me, Saul," I declare.

"Saul? Oh, it can't be U, Saul. I... I... I sa... sa... saw her."

"I know Chloe," I reply. "I know, but it's me or what is left of me."

Shamefully, I ask, "How long have I been out, this time?"

"It hasn't been that long. Maybe an hour by now," Chloe responds.

"Jesus, Chloe, I have really done it, now. It's my actions that have led to our demise."

Laughing lightly, Chloe replies, "Before U go on condemning yourself any further, I must take credit for my own actions. I didn't have to have dinner with U, last night. I did that with my own freewill. Besides, don't lose hope, just yet. U must have faith, first, before it can work."

"Chloe?"

"Yes, Saul," she replies.

"Do U really love me?" I ask.

"Of course, I do. Why do U ask?" she asks.

"I just needed to ask. Reassurance, U know," I reply.

"Okay, if U say so." Chloe replies.

In a concerned tone, she asks, "How are U feeling right now?"

"It's so strange," I declare. "At this very moment, I feel fine. My body feels as pliable as water-filled sacs. Two hours ago, death couldn't have come soon enough."

"What has caused such a drastic change?" Chloe asks.

"It has," I declare.

"It? What do U mean, it?" she asks.

“Whatever she has infected me with. Oddly enough, I am aware of it within me. I can feel it. At times, I try to even fight it. I try to deny that anything has happen. But, I am truly defenseless against *this change*. Once it starts, there is no stopping it from running its course.”

“What is at the end of this?” Chloe asks.

“Death.”

“U can’t be serious.”

“Damn it! I have really screwed this up,” I declare.

“Hah,” she laughs and adds, “Come on, Saul. I can see how U feel that U have screwed up but just think of all the good things that U have been a part of.”

“There is nothing, well except U. Hah!” I add. “Yah, I know that sounds like a line a young man might say to get laid. Truthfully, though, even as we sit here in darkness, chained to the walls smelling my stench, I am glad that I had the chance to feel your love. U’re incredible.”

As the hours of the night pass, my hunger grows impatient, though. Each moment drags on like eternity. My belly moans starvation. Devouring my thoughts, I can no longer ignore *the hunger*.

I *suffer*. Beads of sweat collect and run down my hairline, at first. As it worsens, though, sweat simply drips straight down from my brow. I feel on fire but I shake as if cold.

“Chloe. My sweet little Chloe, are U awake?”

“What did U just say?” she questions.

“Is there something wrong?” I ask. “U seem a little edgy. Have I scared U? I... I didn’t mean it, my sweet little Chloe.”

With a trembling laugh, Chloe scoffs, “Well, I am sorry that I don’t sound happy being locked up in this miserable place with U smelling like U do.”

“Oh yah, now here it comes,” I bark back. “I knew it was coming. I’m the one to blame. Yah! Go ahead! It’s alright. It’s my fault. No sense in holding back, now. Let’s hear it, Chloe! Let’s hear it! It’s not too late for that, now is it? Go ahead and vent your anger. It’s alright. I am everyone’s human scapegoat. Come on. Call me what U will. U can do with me what U want.”

“Saul. Saul, can U hear what U’re saying? That’s not U talking. She is getting to U. She has infected your mind with her madness,” she declares.

“Infected?! Infected?! Now, I’m sick. Oh yah, so is this how U are going to justify leaving me? Huh?! Huh, bitch? ANSWER ME! ANSWER ME, GOD DAMN IT!”

Double-fisted, I lunge at Chloe, repeatedly, as if the chains may break. I froth like a mad dog. After numerous tries, my rage fades. Exhausted, I collapse to the cobblestone.

Time passes by like a leaf on a still pond.