

In the Dark

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“Are you afraid of the dawn?” she asks, watching him with a half-smile on her face as he scrambles around the room, frantically pulling down the curtains. The new darkness bathes them both in soft candlelight. It smoothes out her angular lines and eases the sharpness of his jaw. But even gentle light cannot take the edge off a soul, and he grinds his teeth, while her nails tap out a nervous rhythm on her wine glass. “I’m afraid of what comes after the dawn,” he replies softly. The smile remains frozen on her face, but it’s forced. Because she’s afraid too; afraid of being afraid, which says more about her than it says about their situation. Swigging back the last dregs from her glass, she glides over to him as he rests his back against the wall. Ethereal in her beauty and spiritual animation, her soft presence at his feet makes him feel as if he has a ghost with him. A ghost, yes, but a ghost of possibilities and of future. Ghosts represent the dead, but she symbolizes what could have been. “I’m afraid too,” she mouths, lower lip poking out. Oh, but she’s so exquisite and perfect. This is the kind of girl who drives men to madness. This is the face which launches a thousand ships; this is the soul that has poems – lives – dedicated to it. This is the heart that his beats for. “Fear makes us weak.” “Fear makes us human,” she counters. But he’s not human. He’s something else, something transcendent, something both less and greater than humanity all at once. He’s a monster, but he’s a monster inside of a god, who takes the shape of a man. Yet the things he dreams about are enough to drag souls much stronger than his to their knees. “I’ve never been very good at being human, Eleanor,” he reminds her. And, in the simplest of ways, he is right. Humanity is defined by society, and he’s never been someone who fits in. Society is a reaching, spiraling, twisting puzzle with a million pieces and a million colors, and everything clashes but in a mesmerizing way. It creates a mirage of hope and love and power. But he’s the square peg in the round hole; he’s the shade of yellow which is just a little too dark, a little too faded. Given enough time, his faults become blindingly apparent. “You can prolong the inevitable, Ian,” she says. “You can force the sun to never rise.” “Even the longest night of the year ends.” “But it’s not over yet. You can make it forever.” He smiles. “I am a man, not a god.” “You’re my god.” “Don’t say that.” She slithers on top of him. “You’re my god, you’re my religion, you’re my reason to live, you’re the reason I’m here right now and not trying to survive on lost dreams and forgotten pain. You’re the reason I live and the reason I love, you are...” He shoves her off, barely noticing her wince at his rejection. “I’m broken. I’m shattered glass and you can’t put me back together. You can tape me up, you can glue me back together, but you can always see the cracks that make me who I am. If I could change it, Eleanor, I would, I swear. But life is not about

what we can change, it's about what we can't." "I can't change the way I feel about you." "You can't, but time will. Time already has." "Fight it," she growls. "Fight time." His mouth quirks upward into a mirthless smile as the candlelight shudders and a gentle breeze whips through the room. "If I could," he whispers. "You won't even try," she says, voice clipped and emotionless. "The night ends." "But we don't have to." Oh, but the way she says it, with those cold green eyes that snap onto his, her conviction as strong as any mountain. Her soul is laid bare for him to cradle, to plunder, to destroy, to wreck. For a minute, he envies the American Dream. Its quaint possibilities seem almost achievable. Anything is possible under the cover of the longest night of the year, as the clock strikes midnight and the moon gleams high from its perch. Perhaps he too has a chance at a white-picket fence, 2.5 children, and the green eyes of a woman who makes the word "love" seem obsolete. Love. To say he loves her is meaningless. She entrances him, enchants him, enthralls him, demolishes him. Instead, he loves her in other languages and gestures, not words. He loves her in thoughts, deeds, dreams, emotions, blood, and midnight memories. He loves her in the dark, during the longest night of the year. And then, as quickly as his heart soars, it drops, and he is left with the knowledge that he is made to break. Everything ends, and they are no exception. A solstice ends, history crumbles to dust. When he kisses her, it's sad and slow and poignant and sweet. It's everything they're not. A reminder of sorts: hate and love are both born of the same emotion – passion – and happily ever after only exists for princesses and kings, not for the beasts who hunt them. "If I could make the night last forever, I would," he murmurs, drawing back and searching her with his eyes. If it's enough, he'll never know, because the candle snuffs out and all he can see in the inky blackness is the story they will never write.