

“Thieves in the Night”

They came in the night, silent and wraithlike, out of crevices draped in shadow and sin. Like demons, wicked and without conscience, they laid siege upon us—innocent victims of a war soaked in blood and corruption.

Swarming like angry locusts on judgment day, they ripped through steel, wire, and leather, burying their searing, lead fangs into our flesh without warning or care. The violent wounds left behind, drained the light, love, and life-giving liquid from our bodies like broken casks of wine, baptizing the streets in an unholy communion.

Through the tolling of the bells in my ears, I heard my father’s voice in the distance, wet and thick, pleading with me to live. “Don’t give in, Elena,” he begged. “Fight. Fight death and live for mamma and me, for your brothers, and for your future—your moments of glory that have yet to come.”

Then, only silence and the sound of one, final, rattling breath—a sound like dry bones scraping the sides of a jar—hung in the air around me, as the Reaper ushered my father and mother to distant shores.

The screams of a thousand, nameless, faceless souls—all raging against the injustice and horror of this night and hundreds of others like it—welled-up inside me, clawing at my throat, desperate for release, but they never reached the surface. Instead, I tamped them down, and slipped into a numb silence, storing my waning strength like a miser with his gold, clinging to the remnants of life—fighting to honor my father’s dying wish.

I would not let these demons—these monsters from the bowels of hell—steal my life like thieves in the night. I would live for my father and mother, to honor their memory, and for my brothers who needn’t suffer the pain of losing a sister along with their parents. And I would live

for myself and my future, swimming through the oceans of pain, guilt, and sorrow until I found peace. I would thwart the thieves of shadow and sin who'd tried to unravel our family, flaunting their failure like a scarlet letter with every breath, every achievement, every moment of my future until my last, dying breath