

## My dear friends,

I know not where you are as I write this, but it is my heartfelt wish that you return in good health. Had I your strength things would have turned out differently, but alas I must face this world of nightmares in my own way.

Darkness and Despair have surrounded me since I was a girl. The people from my dying home have long tried to protect me from these horrors, but who can protect a person from the very air she breathes? When the dark lord found me for the first time, everything changed. One look in his eyes had me enchanted, my actions no longer my own, and he made it clear that, if he wanted, there would be nothing I could do to resist. Not long after that meeting, I encountered you all. Darkness and Despair gave way to two new elements: Hope. And Death.

My father's death was no accident. The lord of the valley wanted me to understand that as long as I resist, those who protect me, those I care about, they will all be doomed to die. My father's constitution could not withstand the assaults, and although he died of a heart attack I know that the devil took him from me. I found strength in Vallaki with Father Lucian - he too would be condemned along with those around him.

He could have taken me at any time, but what good are magical charms to a man like him? To break someone, to truly own them, they must give you their soul with their own free will. Even now, as I pick up the pieces and shelter those who were orphaned by the attack, his message has been clear: as long as Death is my shadow, no one around me will ever be safe.

Let my last act of my own free will be to protect them. Though it fills me with dread, there is only one way to truly keep them safe from his grasp - I will go to Ravenloft and bargain with the devil.

I pray I have the strength to face him.

Ireena Kolyana