

A movie poster for 'Nafishur: Praeludium Dariel'. The central image shows a dragon breathing fire over the Earth, with a large amount of debris floating in the air. The title 'NAFISHUR' is written in a large, stylized font, and 'PRAELUDIUM DARIEL' is written below it. The name 'MARY CRONOS' is at the top. The poster has a decorative border.

MARY CRONOS

NAFISHUR

PRAELUDIUM

DARIEL

READING
EXCERPT



Imprint

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NAFISHUR

Praeludium

Dariel



excerpt

PROLOG

“Trice! Run!”

I stared bewildered at the two men fighting, rolling around on the dirty ground of the dark alley.

This wasn't just a simple attack. This was life or death. The stranger was obviously faster and stronger – almost supernatural. But still he didn't quite manage to eliminate his opponent. What was that flashing in the dark? Something sharp...

“Damn! Run!”

I couldn't move. I was frozen in shock. What the hell was happening? Was I really seeing... fangs? And those eyes. Black as night. How could I leave him with such a... creature?!

“Damn it, Trice! I'll be fine! Run!”

I stared at the sharp teeth, that kept snapping for him. “How is that even possible...”, I whispered horrified. I shook my head, trying to get rid of these pictures. *Let it be just a dream. Just a bad, bad dream.* I heard a wild growling.

I was hoping the rest of our family was safe by now. And I wanted to be safe as well. I wanted to survive, to flee and get help, I wanted to do more than just watch my husband fight for our lives.

What would happen if I never saw Jacques again just because I left him now?

“Please Trice...” Suddenly he didn't sound like a fighter anymore. He sounded tired. He rarely said please. The last time I remembered him saying “please” was when our daughter was born, when he wanted to hold her for the first time. *Millie! We had to survive – for her.*

Finally I was able to move again. Being scared for my daughter made my feet move backwards until my back hit a cold, hard wall. I carefully let my hands slide backwards against the wall, but found nothing. I couldn't take my eyes off the fight, but kept my hands moving until I grabbed hold of something. Leather... Buttons... A belt.... A *coat?!*

My heartbeat sped up so fast I almost couldn't feel it anymore while my hands were still searching around. A person! Help! Finally someone was helping us! I almost smiled with relief.

I was about to turn around to ask him why he wasn't helping my husband when I felt two arms wrapping around me, pressing my back against whoever was standing behind me.

They were strong and ice cold – just like everything else about him. Chills ran down my

spine and I shivered. *He wasn't going to help us. He was like the other one.* I tried to flee while panic flooded through me. His arms didn't move at all. I wanted to scream but no sound left my mouth, though the stranger wasn't even holding my mouth shut. Just being this close to him paralyzed me. Breathing was a task for me right now. I panicked and fought as hard as I could to escape him. He calmly laid one of his arms on my throat and locked around it, like an iron shackle, forcing my view straight ahead. I froze instantly. It felt as if I wouldn't be able to breathe anymore if I even moved a muscle. I closed my eyes but I couldn't escape the horror I was facing. There was nothing I could do. Reluctantly I opened my eyes again. I didn't have a choice. I had to witness my beloved husband fight for us.

“Watch closely...” a cold voice whispered into my ear. “This is what happens to small, unimportant humans when they don't mind their own business...” I could feel his breath on my skin. Then there was something wet on my face. Rain? *Non...* tears. They rolled down my cheeks quietly. How did we end up here? What did my “small and unimportant human” do, night after night? Was this what he has been drilling into *his* mind day after day as well?

“Tell your *dear* son and all of his “colleagues” that this is what happens when they don't stay out of *her* way.” the voice whispered. His calm, cold laugh made my blood freeze. “But before you do....”

Just then the monster threw Jacques on the ground. A sharp cracking noise ripped through the air like bone was shattering. I winced and found my voice again.

“Jacques!” He whirled around to look at me, forgetting about the fight he should be concentrating on. His eyes widened in horror.

“TRICE!”

“How heartbreaking. Now let your dagger fall or I might just take a sip of this excellent vintage...”

“You damned monster! Don't you dare—hmng.” His opponent covered Jacques' mouth with one of his hands and smashed his wrist on the ground so hard that he had to let go of the dagger, which was chinking on the ground. His other arm was twisted weirdly beside him.

“These empty threats... don't you think that you are in no position to talk like that?” Mock and irony lied in every word he spoke. “You know.... Just for that little stunt of yours... I will do this now...”

I heard a weird noise next to my ear, kind of a hissing. Then the hand holding my neck bent my head. The other arm was wrapped around my waist, holding down my arms at the same time. I was trapped. My heart was in my mouth. I could only hear him and my husband's muffled screams and closed my eyes. Would this monster break my neck now?

“Aaaaah... what a delightful sound... Her blood is screaming in panic... and I want to taste her...” My blood?! There was the cold, quiet laugh again. ”This is how you imagine us to speak, isn't it?”

He tightened his grip and the next second I felt two stings in my neck. I winced and tried to fight back. But he was holding on too tight for me to escape. Then, there was this burning and heat spread from my throat through my entire body – until an almost comforting numbness set in. All I felt were those two stings on my neck and the warmth that spread from them. I heard nothing but the quiet sucking sounds. Everything felt easy now. *Just let go.* I just wanted it to end...

“...ce!”

I didn't want to know anymore what was happening around me.

“...ice...ease...”

This numbness was so much nicer, so much better than the fear....

“TRICE, PLEASE!!!!”

Suddenly the stings were gone. My consciousness returned all at once: the light, the loudness of main street, Jacques' screams, the quiet, cold laugh next to my ear. I blinked. Then I recognized him. Jacques. He was alive! And the other one?! Where had he gone? He seemed to have disappeared.

“You shouldn't have done that...” The cold voice behind me had a different tone now. It sounded even more insensitive, if that was at all possible. “Now let's see how you really feel about my kind...”

The arm around my waist slipped away but the hand around my neck held me in place. I felt weirdly weak. Almost as if the only thing that was keeping me up was the hand that was holding me. Then there was a strange noise again. As if someone was biting in flesh, as if something was being torn. I recognized another noise and even without looking I knew, it was the gentle clicking of a gun unlocking. It sounded just like it did in movies.

I stared into Jacques' furious and shocked eyes. Then I let my gaze slip to the weapon in his hand. Its muzzle was directed straight at me, *non* – at us.

“Ah, ah, ah! Think about what you're doing. You will hit *her* as well...and I will have snapped her neck faster than you can pull the trigger.” A bloody arm appeared in my field of vision. “Just watch and enjoy the show...”

The next moment, this monster was pressing his bloody arm on my mouth and nose so that I couldn't breathe anymore, let alone talk. I tried to pull the arm away from me with my now free hands but it didn't budge.

“Oho! We have a little fighter here. She will be a wonderful companion for me.” I felt my tormentor's chest tremble with laughter. I could taste my salty tears mixed with the metallic taste of his blood. I gagged and coughed and started shaking. My whole body was feeling strange. Almost like I felt before, with the two stings in my neck. Surprisingly I also heard Jacques' wild rants faintly.

“Jacques...” I whispered weakly. My arms fell down to my sides. My hands couldn't hold on to his arms any longer. “Don't let him... Don't let him get away with this...”

I wasn't sure he could hear me. I wasn't sure I had been speaking at all. Maybe I had just thought it.

Then I heard a shot. It pierced the night hollowly. I hardly felt it. I just felt how I fell.

And fell....

and fell....

...*Je t'aime....mon grand petit...*



CHAPTER I

»Dariel! Come on! Get up!«

The rain felt good after the sticky day. It cooled. And it showed me that my body could feel something more than just pain. The shirt and jeans stuck to my skin, weighed heavily on me. I was tempted to linger on – even if that meant that I lay in the mud. I kept my eyes shut. All was quiet around me. I heard nothing but the raindrops pattering continuously on the terrace roof and the surrounding trees and shrubbery. It was almost peaceful, if there hadn't been that one thing ...

»Good-for-nothing! Don't sleep! Get up! We're not done yet!«

The voice was cutting, cold. It didn't sound like family and there was nothing heartening about it. It was just meant to effect obedience. Obedience and revenge. I was meant to finish what he couldn't finish anymore.

»I am talking to you! Get up.«

The voice didn't shout. It didn't have to. It could have been a whisper and I would have obeyed. And again a wooden stick jabbed into my side.

Just like a huntsman nudging his prey to find out whether it was still alive. *Maybe I should just play possum ...* No. I knew that I didn't have any choice.

»Get up.«

I never ever had a choice.

»Get up!«

My way was clear-cut – always had been ... and the voice was just a whisper now. Close to my ear. My chance. The hunter was near enough, self-confident and not cautious. I pulled my arm up and blindly grabbed the source of the voice. I forced him to the ground by the collar of his shirt, sat up halfway and, breathing heavily, stared down on him – my fists clenched, I still held him down. The checkered shirt – lumberjack-shirt-type – covered his upper body, which was scarred from many fights and still very functional for his age. My opponent's face was tanned by the weather, his chin was proudly stretched and his hair, which once had been full and black, was now tinged with gray and thinning out slightly. Two ice-blue eyes stared angrily at me. An aged reflection of my own appearance.

»Get up yourself.« The sound escaping my throat was rather a hiss, not accurate words. I let go and straightened up. Slowly he too, got up. Anger was still blazing in his eyes, when he looked me over silently.

»Are we done now?« I withstood his glare. He could make demands on me and train me until I was completely done, but he hadn't yet been able to break my will. I was proud of that. We had found a way to get along with each other. A compromise. I didn't follow all of his rules, but heeded enough to survive. I was not the hunter he had wished, but he knew that in spite of all resistance I would follow his way. I had my own stimulation to fight – and to win. All he had to do was keep me fit. Hunting was a thing I would do of my own volition. None of these creatures deserved to live. They were cold; they were heartless and dead. And I would see to it that they behaved like the dead should.

»We aren't done for a long time yet, son.« He narrowed his eyes and again gave me his derogatory glare. I knew what was going on in his head. *He's not good enough. He will never be good*

enough. He won't suffice. Why didn't he take him instead of her? He always thought the same thoughts. I couldn't hear them, but I could see them – in his empty, cold eyes.

»Are you sure about that?« I turned around slowly – away from him. I knew him well enough to know that he would attack me from behind, if I tried to go into the house. Nevertheless I provoked him. To attack someone from behind was an act of cowardice and unfair, but it served its purpose – it was effective. And in our fight against these monsters there were no conscience and no rules – apart from one: no mercy towards them!

I pretended to go, my eyes turned to the sparsely illuminated terrace of our little house. The rain formed threads that gleamed in the porch light. However, while pretending to be inattentive, I focused on every sound. At first, there was only the low swoosh of the trees and shrubs in the garden, of the rain on the leaves. A car passing behind the high walls, that screened us from curious eyes.

However, I stuck to my guns and concentrated on the noises that were important.

There! A low whoosh! A draft! I turned around just in time. His shin was just centimeters from my head – it pressed against my left ell. Quickly, I changed my grip and clasped his leg. I wanted to fling him away, but he was faster than me. Two seconds later I lay on the ground again.

»Damn!«

»You can say that again! Lack of concentration and arrogance are a bad mixture! If you can't even succeed against me, how can you ever succeed against them?«

»How *can* I do that?! You rather mean how *did* I!«

»Oh, come on. That was sheer luck. How many have you managed to finish off since then, eh? Ten? Twenty?«

»187. And you know it exactly, because you count them just as keenly as I do.«

»Nevertheless you are lying on the ground and it's my foot that is keeping your chest down – and not the other way around.«

The foot ... *one* foot ... At the next moment I knocked his *one* supporting leg with both my legs and immediately he lay beside me. I laughed.

»Thanks. Good hint ...«

Within a fraction of a second I stood up and got into a defensive position. He should not detect the same fault in my posture as I had found in his. To my dismay, he detected another one instead.

He straightened up slowly, without haste. We both knew each other too well. Even though my opponent was already down, I did not place my boot on his torso. In his eyes, this was an unforgivable weakness.

»How often shall I repeat it for you? No weakness, no mercy! This will be your ...«

»My death, I know, I know.« This sermon was something I heard about three to five times a day.

»Then finally change something, get rid of that weakness! Eliminate it!«

What was frustrating about that sentence was: I knew that he was right. In what we did, there were no fights won or lost. There was victory and there was death. No second chance. Because the enemy was not able to feel compassion or any similar weaknesses. But however, well I knew it – I did not want to become just as cold a machine as them. I was human and I wanted to remain human. Not

just on the outside or due to my beating heart; I wanted to remain human in what I thought and did. What would be the difference, otherwise, to be like us or like *them*?

»You know well that this will never happen.«

Even if that will be the death of me some day.

»We will see. Double schedule program tomorrow. I will drive that nonsense out of you someday.« He picked up the towel and rubbed it over his smudged face. A good moment for an attack. The enemy had blinded himself and blocked his hands. However, I did not attack him. This was just a training, it was not a question of life or death – at least I hoped so, every day anew. He lowered that towel and looked at me, scowling. His gaze showed nothing but contempt.

»Pushover. We'll call it a day.« He started to go towards the house and I followed him in silence. However, I kept a safe distance. *Don't trust anybody*. That was the first rule I had learned from him. Do not trust anybody – not even your own father.

I was to be proved right after all. Split second later, I reacted instinctively: he spun around, the

blade pointed to my face. I dodged back into a backbend and with a well-aimed kick catapulted the knife out of his hand. It landed a few centimeters away from my face, with the tip sticking in the earth. The ivory handle vibrated strongly and the fleur de lis at its haft became blurred before my eyes.

»That was imprudent! You don't need enemies, if you scalp yourself. Dodge to the side, block! No circus acrobatics!« I sank to the ground and lay on my back. The slamming backdoor was probably the last I would hear from him this evening. At least I hoped so. Better that way. I would not have been able to stand more of his meat man pieces of wisdom today.

Don't trust anybody. No mercy. Use every chance. Death doesn't grant a second chance.

I stared into the overcast sky and blinked into the rain. For almost twenty years he had been training me now. Since I had been five years old. *In view of that, 187 victories might indeed not be a reason to celebrate.* However, it was not my fault if I encountered none of the creatures when I was on

the prowl. Even if, maybe, I did not always choose the most perfect places for hunting ...

At a young age I had come to the conclusion that interacting with people was a strain on me, while reading seemed fun. The logical conclusion: to steel into the library in the evenings and read there in secrecy. During the day there were too many people there, and reading books at home was not an option either: my father would not have liked seeing me wasting my time with useless trash such as Wilde or Shakespeare. So I always sneaked into one of the nearby libraries of Paris at night. Of course they were well secured, but with years I had found means and ways. Nowadays I even possessed a duplicate key to the national library. I did not want to imagine what my father would do to me if he knew that on several nights the hunt had been unsuccessful, because I had not gone to a deserted park or an overfilled club, but to a closed library.

However, I wanted to read and I wanted to learn. I did not want to become such an embittered, quixotic hunter as *he* was. Furthermore, I believed that this way I could honor my mother's memory in

a better way than just by sheer fighting and killing. And the secret visits to the libraries were my only chance. He did not allow me to attend a university nor rent my own apartment. Train and fight. That seemed to be the only things that my esteemed father had envisaged for my future. At first I had tried to rebel against his dictate. Then I had found my own way to ... stretch ... his rules a bit. Our aforesaid compromise. If I showed up on time for my daily training and came up with results every now and then, he did not ask questions.

Of course my father scoffed at my 187. He had already spent decades hunting. I often asked myself how many *he* had disposed of. He had never mentioned a figure in my presence. Why would he not boast with a figure? Officially he only trained me and did not hunt himself anymore. I was not sure, however, whether he had really retired as a hunter. Of course he was not as fit and strong as before – he was 58, after all, and his right arm had not healed correctly after a hard fight. But there was still a strong fighting spirit in him and an even greater hatred for these monsters. The same hatred drove me. We had both lost someone. The

one who had always preached the positive to us. When she left us, it changed both of us. My visits to the library had become less frequent. Since then I had fought more doggedly, more determinedly.

While I was lost in memories and got soaked by the rain, my father probably washed the traces of our training off his face. My little sister Emile would come home soon and she was supposed to grow up without fighting. Only the men in our family were hunters. Emile was fifteen years old and incredibly intelligent. I admired and envied her for the life she could lead. She was the poster child of the family. I was the tool of revenge. Everyone had his or her fixed role in our family theater. When our mother died, my training began to strike root. She was the calming influence and her death became my impetus. My only motivation before that had been to survive my father's attacks and up to my fourteenth birthday I had never encountered a vampire. Even after that it was rather a duty than a pleasure. That had changed five years after that birthday: my mother had not merely died. She had been murdered brutally. To this day the police

have been searching for her murderer... but in vain. So did I... but not in vain. After her death I begged my father to send me hunting more often. He indulged my plea and was clearly satisfied with the way I developed. Two months later I had found the culprit and had sent him into the night. I had almost been a little too fast with it. He should have suffered more ... maybe that was the reason why I was that generous with stabbing his fellows. They could all suffer ›along with him‹ and *for* him.

The thought that even one monster was running around freely and sprightly, while my mother had to die by their bloodthirsty bite ... no. They did not deserve to live. Not a single one!

This probably was an egoistic and narrow-minded reason and maybe it sounded far-fetched. If she had been overrun by a car, I would not have been able to burn off all cars that I came up against. And still. It was enough of a reason for me. And my father could be very sure that that reason would continue to be motivation enough for me.

The death of his beloved Trice – Beatrice – changed him as well. He got tougher. I never thought that was even possible. He had always been strict. But with her death I didn't just lose my mother, I also lost my father. The only thing he was for me now was a trainer, a killer.

Sometimes I asked myself, what would happen to him if Emile also left. She was being kept in the dark about everything. He loved her, therefore he kept our family intact. Because of her we played our Father-Son roles. She was probably ashamed of me. Officially all my scrapes and scars came from fights in the neighborhood. Nobody seemed to care that I didn't talk with the kids in the neighborhood, let alone fight with them. It was the easiest explanation for everyone. It's astonishing how easily people swallow lies, if they are just easy enough.

I got up slowly and checked my body for new injuries. Not more than usual. A few bruises and scrapes. My left side was hurting a bit. I probably bruised my bone. But other than that I did a good job. The backyard also looked fairly normal and didn't get messed up too bad. Some of the furniture outside was still standing in one piece, even the rain barrel that we had to replace often because it

somehow always got attacked by big animals – in the middle of Paris... was intact.

I lost track of time. My daydreaming cost a lot of it. I had to hurry up if I wanted to look somewhat normal when Emile got home. Our training sessions were perfectly timed. My dad dropped her off at ballet while I was warming up. He got home and we started our training. Then we cleaned up and prepared dinner. If I got lucky I was in the bathroom when she returned. If I wasn't fast enough I had to play the role of her beat up brother.

As if any teenager could even bruise me in a fight. You wouldn't even be able to call it that – fight. I would just need one hit. And I was sure Emile already knew more than she let on. She was way too smart to believe the charades. But she was probably smart enough to not let us know what she knew. But her looks... They let on that she had questions and wanted answers.

I cleaned up my dirty hands and set the table as quickly as possible, when I heard the key turn in the front door lock. Quickly I ran upstairs to my room. Father was still in the bathroom and I didn't have anywhere else to hide. I closed the door behind me and leaned on it from the inside. I tuned

attentively, with closed eyes to find out if I had a chance of getting to the bathroom unseen.

You could hear a clear, female voice downstairs. “Bonsoir! Papa? Dariel? Are you here? I am home. Training was really horrible today...”

Not just yours... I rather said nothing at all. Who knew which excuse my father would come up with this time. I heard noises coming from next door and then I heard my dad's voice. It was louder than usual – not just because he was closer – but there was warmth swinging with it, when he spoke to her. He didn't seem to have that when he talked to me.

“I'll be right there, my little one. Sit down at the table.”

With these words, he walked downstairs. I jumped up and used this opportunity to run into the bathroom and closed the door behind me as quietly as possible. Just as fast I took off my dirty shirt and threw it away. I couldn't save it anymore anyways. I stared at the mirror. It was still foggy from my father's shower but I was still able to see the blue color around my right eye and my bloody lip. I didn't notice my lip splitting open. I licked the blood away quickly. *Gross*. How could this metallic liquid taste good to them?

Luckily I wasn't as pale as these monsters. I was outside training too much for that. This way my discolorations were hidden a bit more. My black hair was all over the place right now. More than usual. The rain did the rest to make me look bad.

I was listening to the voices downstairs. Another one of his rules: *Never feel safe.*

“You can start already, dad. I have to run to the bathroom real quick. I am all sweaty.”

I froze. She wanted to use the bathroom. While she was still talking I could hear her walk up the stairs. She was going to see me. No matter how fast I was.

“Where is my lovely brother anyways? Getting into trouble again?” I looked through the trash, getting my bloody, ripped shirt out. That's better than her seeing my almost broken ribs. I looked in the mirror again. How was I going to explain this? The door handle moved. Her voice was right outside. “Papa, he isn't gone. He's in the bathroom. You should have noticed that.” She laughed. Quickly I put the dirty shirt on and opened the door.

She almost fell on me, when I opened the door. “Dariel!” For a short moment her blue eyes darted around my appearance. We had the same eyes.

You would recognize us as siblings looking at our eyes. “Did you get into a fight again?” She stared at me. Her voice was quiet and sounded a bit ironic but her eyes showed pure horror – and they looked a bit scared too. I was right. She did know something. I was ten and in the middle of my training when she was born. She was there from the beginning. I wish I knew how much she was aware of. I couldn't look into her questioning eyes. She would have just had more reason to suspect something was up. I preferred her thinking I was a loser rather than her knowing the truth.

Without a word I pushed past her. I had to get away. Outside would be best but not looking like that. I chose to go to my room.

Once the door was closed firmly behind me, I allowed myself to breathe again. I didn't turn the light on. I didn't need to. There was nothing to see in my room. Instead I saw the worried, asking face my sister just had. The big eyes with the sad shimmer, her long hazelnut brown hair that framed her heart-shaped face... Emile couldn't know. She didn't need to know about these monsters, she didn't need to know my story. She should have the future I never had. School, ballet, friends, parties – her own future. I would do anything to give that to

her. Every single extra training and killing each and every vampire with a stake.

END OF EXCERPT
NAFISHUR PRAELUDIUM DARIEL



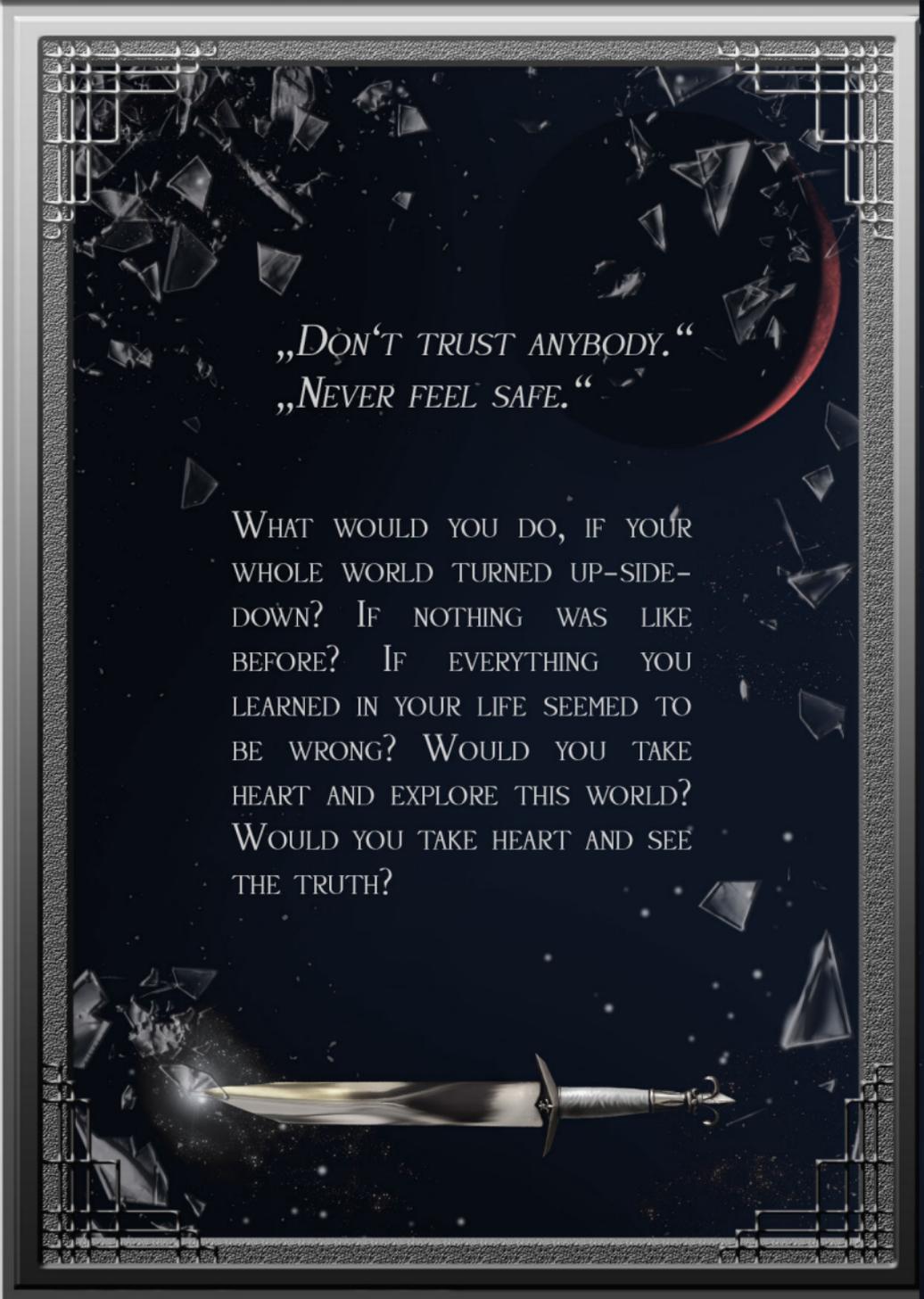
Dear Reader,

I would love to publish my novel in English too. Therefore I need your help. Soon I will start a crowdfunding project and I am counting on you to fulfill my goal and get enough money for a good translation.

Please feel free to catch up with me on my blog <http://cronos-post.de>, via newsletter (sign in on my websites <http://mary-cronos.de> or <http://colors-of-cronos.de>) or in Social Media.

Sincerely



The background is a dark, textured space filled with numerous sharp, translucent glass shards falling from the top. A thin, glowing red crescent moon is visible in the upper right. At the bottom, a sword with a silver blade and a dark hilt lies horizontally. The entire scene is framed by a decorative, metallic-looking border with corner brackets.

„DON'T TRUST ANYBODY.“
„NEVER FEEL SAFE.“

WHAT WOULD YOU DO, IF YOUR WHOLE WORLD TURNED UP-SIDE-DOWN? IF NOTHING WAS LIKE BEFORE? IF EVERYTHING YOU LEARNED IN YOUR LIFE SEEMED TO BE WRONG? WOULD YOU TAKE HEART AND EXPLORE THIS WORLD? WOULD YOU TAKE HEART AND SEE THE TRUTH?