

## Slipping to Evil

The Narcistní Tvůrce was close. I could feel it. It made my brain hurt, sort of like a horrible migraine. My vision blurred, and I just wanted it to stop. I would have to fight through this pain if I wanted to triumph.

The Narcistní Tvůrce, or Narper, short for Narcissistic Personality Creator, is an invisible creature awakened before the Battle of White Mountain in the Czech Republic in 1620. After the battle was over, it wandered through the world, causing havoc... And now, it was here for me.

Finding a way to overcome the Narper is the only way to conquer it. There is no known way to kill it. However, it only affects those that sit right on the line of good and evil. I could have gone either way, but I chose to be good, unlike the rest of my family. When you grow up in evil, it becomes tiresome. Always scheming. Always trying to find ways to get a leg-up on someone. Killing. I knew at a young age that I couldn't be that way.

After my family painfully tried to protract the evil in me, I ran and never looked back. They knew what I was the moment I was born, and they hated me for it. I knew they'd sent the Narper after me. My power and connections with good reached all over the world. They wanted me back so I could infiltrate those connections to bring them down. I refused to let that happen.

At the moment, I was traveling with a family who needed to be protected. Their child had an incredible destiny. She would be the one to finally eliminate the Narper, but she wasn't ready yet. Bexley is still so young and naïve. Protecting *her* was my mission.

Eventually, Bexley would be able to see the Narper, though none of us knew when that would happen.

"Do you feel that?" Bexley asked.

I looked back at her, confused.

"You can feel it?"

Bexley shrugged her shoulders. "The air feels... Slimy."

"That's not the air, Bex. That's the Narper."

Bex's mother, Isly, put her hand over her mouth.

"Hide yourself, Ezra," I whispered to Bex's dad. "Now!"

Ezra quietly herded the three of them into the darkness of the pines. We'd been through similar situations before. They were calm but alert, and I had to overcome the Narper before it changed me.

"You'll be fine," I heard Bex whisper. "I know it."

I could feel the viscous tendrils of the loathsome creature winding their way around my neck, and I stretched my head away and shivered. The precise line I had to walk to keep from tipping evil attenuated. I closed my eyes and rolled my shoulders. This was a mental battle. No amount of physical strength would get me through this.

"Your desires are fragile, Rhea."

The words slithered off its tongue like a rank violation on my heart.

"Evil will never abate."

I focused on that vitiating line, its thinning causing me to mentally wobble.

The Narper's sticky tendrils crept up my face and entered my ears and nose. The highest ones just touching the bottom of my lower eyelids. I thought of running, but it would do no good. The contemptible creature would only follow. If only I didn't have those defenseless mortals to watch over, this would be so much easier. My nostrils flared, and I sneered at the thought of them.

"Yes," I heard the creature hiss. "That is the way."

The mental line blurred before I realized what was happening. I teetered toward evil before righting myself.

"I'm stronger than you," I whispered as I futilely held my arms out for balance. "You've tried many times and have never triumphed."

"Oh, Rhea," the Narper snickered. "But a part of me stays with you each time."

The tendrils had fully infiltrated my eyes, and I could feel the Narper begin to claw at the only other resistance left. My barrier was crumbling. I would never be able to fall to good, only evil, since I was born of it. I had to walk that line, and my center of gravity was easing to evil.

I heard a step behind me that broke my focus. I turned as I slowly opened my eyes, and Ezra was there. Isly stood directly behind him and leaned around his body, tears in her eyes. My jaw tightened, and I glowered just as I slipped to the left of the line.

A maniacal boom of laughter bounced from the Narper to the surrounding trees, and I was immediately enveloped in cold waves of nefarious temper. My magic charged from my hands and leveled Bexley's parents.

Anger shot through me as I lifted my head and shrieked, "This is because of you!"

Ezra and Isly scramble back toward the darkness of the pines, but with a twitch of my head, I slung them toward the center. I raised my arms as orange sparks burst from my fingers.

"Run, Bexley!" Ezra cried, but with my heightened sense of hearing, I knew she'd gone nowhere. And *she* would be next.

"Do it," slithered the Narper. "What are you waiting for?"

The anger roiled inside me. All the tensions, all the frustrations from 23 years of walking this line... Everything released in one flick of my fingers.

The orange sparks shot from my hands and circled Ezra and Isly. Their bodies shot up in the air and froze. As their skin began to disintegrate, I saw a single tear fall from Isly's face. Evil had won. I had killed Bexley's parents, and there wasn't even anything left to bury.

The Narper's tendrils receded from my mind, and the finite line I'd been walking all these years came back into focus. I realized what I had done, and as I stepped back onto the boundary between good and evil once more, I fell to my knees and cried.

The despicable being was gone from my mind, but I knew it would always be close. I would always have to fight and conquer, but this time, it had conquered me.

I wiped my face with the palms of my hands, and through teary eyes, saw the little girl whom I'd sworn to protect staring at the place where her parents had died. How would I ever explain this to her? How could I ever get her to trust me again? How could I have been so weak?

Bexley turned toward me, and I lowered my head. I couldn't bear to look her in the eyes. I'd been a coward and it had costed Bex her family. I heard Bexley's little feet walk across the forest floor, lightly crunching the straw and leaves that had settled there. A small, trembling hand touched my shoulder and I flinched.

"Rhea," Bex whispered. "It wasn't your fault."

"I was weak, Bex. I lost focus for a second and it was over."

"Look at me," she said.

I slowly raised my eyes to the girl and noticed for the first time how wise and aware she really was.