

Sold to the Night Lord

Sold to the Night Lord

Chapter 111

Drystan stands before me, breathing heavily, his eyes anxious.

“Not long now,” he says eagerly. “We’ll be at the coast in a couple of hours.”

frown, confused.

“How long has it been since we last saw each other?”

“Day and a half?”

“Day and a half?” I repeat in disbelief. “It didn’t feel like that long...”

I glance one last time inside the cabin and close the door. I feel confused, even disoriented. To me, the visit to Elara lasted barely a couple of hours, not a full day. I don’t think she even felt we were together that long. Most of the time, she just slept, and the rest we simply looked into each other’s eyes.

“Some men are wondering how we should proceed.”

We head up to the deck, where several of them are already gathered and awaiting my orders. I clasp my hands behind my back and walk

among them, meeting their eyes without showing how unsettled I feel.

“They know we’re coming. In fact, it’s likely a trap. They’ll expect us to attempt a distraction, but in this case, I believe we should focus on repelling the threat rather than trying to toy with it. We’ll go in head-on.”

“Will we attack or wait?”

“I’m fairly certain that confrontation isn’t our enemy’s first choice. They’ll try to carry out their plan with the fewest casualties possible, so we’ll maintain peace as long as we can.” I look at each of them. “However, the moment there’s any sign of conflict, I want you prepared and willing to do whatever it takes. Remember, one second of hesitation can mean death—and maybe some of you have lost respect for that idea, but everything can die, including us.”

“What exactly are we up against?” another asks.

I take a breath of fresh air.

“Shapeshifters. Their numbers have grown significantly. Apparently, even in the Wasteland they’ve managed to multiply. They’ve been joined by rogue Diluted, led by Eleazar. He’s there too.”

I study the faces before me, especially those of the Diluted among us, looking for any suspicious reaction. I know my fellow Purebloods are doing the same—just not as overtly. I wait a bit longer, and when no one asks anything else, I signal for everyone to return to their posts. It’s night again and everyone is busy, fulfilling their duties until we reach land.

I look ahead, waiting for the moment I glimpse our destination. As Drystan informed me, maybe a couple more hours pass before I finally see the line of coast where, indeed, we are expected. I spot eight men, all strong and middle-aged, carrying torches that turn them into points of light in the dark night. I raise my hand to signal my men to stop and prepare a boat. I’m not taking all of them with me just yet; I’ll communicate mentally with one of them if needed.

In minutes, everything is ready and with Drystan and a few men, we descend until the boat hits the water and they begin to row. I can’t stop thinking about Elara and how she must be right now in that hole, with the cold, hard ground against her body and that damn thing that deforms her skin more with every passing second.

We’ve barely reached shore when they move toward us like hungry dogs. I refuse to let any of them lay a hand on me, so I get out of the boat, soaking my boots and part of my pants in the process.

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Here I am.” I say defiantly. “Now give me who chime to!”

A man steps forward. The torchlight illuminates his face—Black hair and eyes altered by blindness.

“Ragna is waiting for you,” he simply says.

“don’t give a damn about this Ragna,” I spit. “Elara. She’s the one I care about and I want to see her now.”

“That’s not possible,” he replies calmly. “My lady wishes to speak with you, and none of your requests will be heard before that.”

I take a step forward, undeterred by the threatening stares of those around him. I get so close that the fabric of my shirt brushes his chest, and I don’t break eye contact as I speak.

“I don’t give a shit what your lady wants.”

“If you care about the girl, you’ll come,” he threatens.

“If you care about your life, you won’t say something like that to me again. I’ll kill you.”

He doesn’t hesitate even a second. Instead, he steps aside, as if inviting me to walk ahead of him. I do so, reluctantly, because I want to get

this over with as quickly as possible. It won’t be easy, so better to start now. We walk along the beach for a while until we reach a building

that crumbles like a child’s sandcastle. Its walls are the golden color of sunlight, but that’s where the similarities end. There’s nothing

dazzling about it—it’s simply a structure that looks ready to collapse at any moment. I test my gift by making a small rock in the rubble

shatter and nearly vanish into the air.

I smile to myself and continue following the black-haired man through corridor after corridor. Two guards watch a door that they open without hesitation when we arrive. It doesn’t take a genius to guess where we are: high ceilings adorned with paintings, heavy tapestries on

the walls, vases that once held fresh flowers—and in the center of it all, a throne of misshapen fangs and claws.

The woman seated on it returns my gaze, golden and green, radiating deep hatred. I stop in the center, waiting, scanning all possible exits in case I need to flee. I’m certain I will—nothing good can come from us being in the same space. I search for Elara with my eyes. I know she isn’t

here, and yet I search.

“So, I finally meet you, Cassian Draven.”

“Sorry, you are...?”

She flashes a fake smile of white teeth.

“Seems no one taught you to be less arrogant when negotiating.” She lifts her chin. “I’m Ragna Vortigern.”

I recognize the surname as belonging to the lineage that has ruled the shapeshifters for over a millennium. Still, I show no sign of

acknowledgment.

“Are we negotiating?” I ask innocently. “Well, then no one taught you that screwing over the person you want to negotiate with isn’t a good

start.”

She uncrosses her elegant bronzed legs, the gold bangles on her ankles clinking. The skirts of her dress part, revealing more of her skin, and I look away before she thinks her filthy tricks might work on me. There’s nothing about her that interests me—and I’ve never been a man of weak will, except with one woman in particular.

“I’m only looking out for my people,” she says calmly. “For too long, your kind punished us unjustly, exiling us to this land where nothing grows. It’s time for that to change.”

“And what do you propose?” I want her to think I’m genuinely interested.

“Our exile is over,” she replies bluntly. “We will be welcomed back into Drystia, new agreements will be signed granting us what we deserve?”

“You think the people of Drystin will just accept you?” I smile cynically. “Your nature makes you territorial and always ambitious no agreement would ever satisfy you, and we’d be right back to the same wars. Do I need to remind you of all the humans you killed? You’re not

Jai from rabid dogs when anger clouds your minds.”

“Don’t pretend you’re doing this for the humans,” she spits.

“You’re right. I’m doing it for selfish reasons for one human. The same one you’re going to return to me if you don’t want to end up twisted between the fangs of the throne you sit on.”

Her eyes glisten with animalistic rage, but we’re both surprised by the sound of the doors opening and closing. First, I smell apples, then I see him walking calmly, as if he weren’t the bastard who laid hands on her and threw her to the wolves—literally.

Drystan, who until now has remained silent and a few steps behind me, tries in vain to stop me. In the span of a blink, I move toward Eleazar, who doesn’t seem too surprised to see me on top of him. I grab him by the neck, feeling his muscles tense beneath my fingers.

“You wanted the best for your people?” I growl inches from his face. “With what you’ve done, I’ll make sure your rebel Diluted die on their knees, screaming.”

“This is your fault. Your delusions of grandeur,” he says with effort.

I squeeze until I feel the column of his throat beneath my thumb. The urge to apply pressure and hear the bones crack beneath my fingers is

overwhelming.

“This is your inferiority complex,” I hiss back.

I feel several pairs of eyes on us, and I know everyone is paying close attention to our exchange. Gripping tightly, I pull him toward me and then slam him to the floor with a quick motion, cracking the marble beneath. Eleazar rolls his eyes as he hits, but I know it’s not enough to kill

him. I pin him down with my boot on his neck, holding him there. I raise my gaze to Ragna, who watches the scene with anticipation, her

hands on her throne’s armrests.

“Now, if you don’t mind, tell me what you really want,” I demand. “Or I’ll start looking for what I want now—leaving a trail of corpses behind.

Your choice, Ragna.”

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Sold to the Night Lord

I confuse reality with my delusions. For a while I feel a body against mine and forget that it’s Cassian until I manage to come out of unconsciousness and see him there, by my side, watching over my sleep. Words get stuck in my throat and want to come out, but it’s impossible. My lips are sealed, and not in a metaphorical way—but a painful and very literal one. The warmth of his kiss on my forehead faded a while ago, and in its place remains only the embrace of cold that keeps me trembling without end. My whole body aches.

My vision is not clear; there’s a haze that prevents me from seeing what’s in front of me. I suppose my body is fighting against the magic, and my energy dwindles with every second I spend here. I believe at some point they entered my cell and connected an IV to my arm to feed me, though it does little if at the same time they’re extracting bags of blood from my other arm.

There seems to be a woman in front of me—is she really there, or is it just a dream? My eyelids are heavy, and it takes a great effort to open them as I try to focus my vision. Whoever she is, she notices my difficulties and moves closer, becoming more visible. Any doubts I might have had vanish when a woman with hair red as flames and a slender, curvaceous figure stands in front of me. She crouches until her eyes are level with mine—they are the most intense green I have ever seen, framed by thick lashes. Her hand, with pale, delicate fingers, brushes the part of my cheek left exposed by the muzzle.

“My poor girl...” Her touch is as soft as velvet. “I suppose your stubbornness is something you inherited from me. You shouldn’t have fought so hard against the inevitable. Look where it’s gotten you.”

I pull away, moving my battered body toward the wall and frown at her words. She stretches the corners of her red-painted mouth into a faint smile, but she doesn’t give up trying to maintain some point of connection between us. She takes my hand between hers and caresses it with

her thumbs. Emotions that can only be hallucinations of someone as exhausted as I am cross her face. That affection on her face can’t be

real.

“It’s time you learned the whole truth, that you know where you come from.” She studies my face. “I know you were raised in a religion that hides me—they prefer to act as if I never existed, they prefer to ignore me rather than admit they are monstrous and go against everything they preach.” She tucks a lock of my hair behind my ear. “I know you know things about me. I’ve watched you all this time. You already know how I made my first children, and though they were close, they’re not perfect. They have weaknesses their enemies discovered long ago and used to destroy the females capable of bearing offspring. I couldn’t watch my children perish and vanish, so I thought of creating you. Deep down, you’re a miracle that shouldn’t have happened. I’ve never been able to give birth—until you. You’re not tears or anything else—you are the fruit of my union with your father, Atarothz.”

My frown deepens, and I try in vain to free myself from her grasp.

“You carry his gifts and qualities that make you stronger than a Pure—that was his gift—but you also share a good part of the nature of those like Cassian. You are capable of helping the bloodline survive, perhaps even strengthen it.” I shake my head repeatedly. I feel the information drowning me. I don’t think I’ve truly thought about everything that’s happened until this moment—and the sensation is suffocating. “Yes... Yes, Elara! It’s time you accept it! You were never human. Everything until now was an illusion, one we had to maintain until you were in the right hands. You had to remain hidden among humans, so my enemies—and those of my children—wouldn’t notice until it was time *for* you to mature. Imagine...” She cradles my cheek, and the heat of the burning muzzle seems not to affect her in the slightest. “You and Cassian are my finest creations. He has unmatched gifts that

thousands dream of, and you... you are the greatest terror they could ever imagine, You have the ability to devour their soul, to annihilate existence—even in the afterlife. Your blood is exceptionally special. And there are many things even I don't know. No one knows the magnitude of what you might become, but I'm willing to find out. You just have to wake up, Elara. You have to break the last threads that bind you to this illusion of humanity."

I want to scream and I can't. In my head I repeat over and over that I want them to leave me alone, that I am nothing of what they claim I am –but deep down I know all of this is true, and I think that's what's truly exhausting. The certainty that a normal life, that freedom, was never a real option. And then there's my family, who really aren't my family at all. Just thinking about it makes my soul burn. My mind can't process that everything has been a lie, and worse yet, doubts consume me. Did they really love me, or did they just see me as the perfect chance to

save their real children from a fatal fate?

I scold myself for thinking that way about them.

In the distance, the sound of someone descending the stairs and dragging their feet can be heard.

"Atarethz will want to meet you someday, dear," the woman says hastily. "But for that, you must wake up. If not, I'm afraid you'll die now" Something resembling red hot shackles begins to materialize around her wrists. "Where I am, I can't help you and he's been gone for a while. You're alone, Elara. You only have yourself. Stay close to Cassian. He is your destiny."

And as quickly as she appeared, she disappears, leaving behind wisps of smoke that vanish in a matter of seconds. I'm granted no rest. I've just been subjected to an avalanche of information when the black haired, blind eyed man appears in front of my cell. He pulls out a ring of keys and selects one to open my cell door. He enters completely confidently, kneels beside me, and with a delicacy no one would associate with someone like him, removes the IV from my arm. I can't help but stare at him and wonder if I was wrong to say he's blind—he doesn't seem blind at all, moves with an ease uncharacteristic of someone with that disability.

"Stop looking at me." I flinch at the sound of his voice and wonder how he could know what I was doing. "Get up, walk, and don't you dare try anything stupid. Blindness doesn't make me incapable of breaking your neck."

#I could open my mouth, I'd tell him that I don't believe for a second that he has the authority to end my life—not if I'm as valuable as everyone seems to think. I can't speak, so I remain silent and obey. Before we leave the cell, he makes sure to place two thick shackles on my wrists, and once that's done, he gives my shoulder a light push to get me walking.

We walk the same corridor of cells, from which sunken eyes look back at me. We climb the dusty stairs and cross the desolate foyer, where parts of the ceiling are missing and windows are broken. As we go deeper into the place, it appears less abandoned and crumbling. The hallways are covered in rugs and some sculptures try to breathe life into the space. Men are posted every few meters, but their human appearance no longer fools me—I know what hides beneath their skin: great beasts with fangs and claws that wouldn't hesitate to tear my

throat out.

We turn corner after corner until we reach a hallway that ends with two doors I recognize from the last time. The window beside me shows a starless, pitch-black night, and I don't know if such darkness is a sign of what's to come. I breathe deeply through my nose and let myself be led forward. Two men open the doors, revealing the interior just as it was before—only with more people present.

Cassian has his boot on Eleazar's neck, but his eyes are fixed on me. The air leaves my chest in ragged bursts, and I wonder if it's another dream—if he's really here. I don't know if my heart has forgiven him—I only know that in a world where freedom doesn't seem like an option for me, I'm certain who I want my villain to be.

I spare only a fleeting glance at the man who betrayed me and brought me here. I feel, somehow, disappointed that I was right to think he was no different from the rest. When did it become so easy to expect the worst of people?

"Elara," Cassian exhales my name.

The final letter of my name hasn't finished echoing in the air when he's already beside me. His speed stirs a breeze that brushes the hair from my face. We look into each other's eyes, unable to stop. His eyes speak of blind fury and blood-soaked floors—and then, almost imperceptibly to anyone else, a warm feeling softens his gaze and melts the lakes within them.

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Chapter 113

He brushes my cheek, and I almost want to close my eyes, cry, and pretend I'm back at the castle, in his bed, with him at my side, enjoying forbidden caresses and feeding emotions I never intended to feel

"Someone separate those two," says Ragna aloud "They're so sweet I feel like vomiting."

"Maybe you'll choke on it if we're lucky," Drystan remarks, knowing everyone can hear him.

Ragna's feline gaze turns toward him, ignoring us for a few seconds—which Cassian uses to take my hand, lean in, and whisper in my ear “With you until death”

frown, but before I can say anything. His hand is ripped from mine and I'm forced away from him. My bones tremble as full to my knees, forced there by the black haired man—Rhory.

“Tell me, Elara.” Ragna makes a small dramatic pause. “Have you thought about my offer?”

The smile on her lips makes me sick. She laughs at me with questions I can't answer. Even so, I don't let that stop me and I nod

“And?” she asks

I look down at my hands, both burdened with heavy shackles that chafe my skin, and slowly lift them to chest height. Everyone is watching to see what I'll do and the moment I raise my middle finger high enough that her eyes can't miss it, I can feel Drystar's smile behind me and the slight tremble at Cassian's lips.

I didn't expect anything less from you, his voice whispers in my mind.

I cling to that like driftwood in a stormy sea.

Ragna's neck veins bulge—she can't hide the outburst of rage growing inside her.

“You stupid girl!” She spits the words with fury. “use you and your blood until nothing is left of you—and then, I'll let my men have fun with you and tear you apart

The ground beneath us trembles at her words, and I don't need to look back to know it's the vampire's doing.

“Careful with what you say, Ragna,” Cassian hisses. “You won't use anyone—especially not someone connected to me

“Oh, I think I will,” she replies arrogantly. “You know perfectly well that you're at a disadvantage—you're at my mercy. There's nothing you can do, and using your gifts on me will be useless.” She settles into her twisted fang throne. “Earlier, you asked me what I really want—and I'm afraid it's her, I won't give her back.”

“You're insane if you think I accept that.”

“No. I don't think you'll accept it without a fight, in fact, I'm dying for you to try

The ground shakes again, **dust** falls from the ceiling and settles in my hair, forcing me to close my eyes. Ragna's melodic laughter fills the hall and manages to rise above the noise. Small cracks open in the floor **before** Cassian stops.

"Keep this up and **you'll kill** her," Ragna **says**, pointing at me. "Or **have** you realized already that your other gifts have no effect on me?"

I glance between Cassian's tightly clenched fists and the poblet resting a few feet from her. Realization hits me all at once. The blood bags they took from me had no other purpose **but** this. Cassian's jaw trembles from sheer effort and restraint. Ragna's laughter **grows louder**, grating on everyone's nerves. **Drystan** steps **forward** and places a hand on his friend's shoulder, who continues shaking with rage.

"You can't hurt me without putting her at risk," Ragna lifts her chin, "We outnumber you, and your other gifts are useless. Do you know why Because of the person you came for Her words are poltonain—they make me feel like everything inside mis on Herodis exceptionally special"

Cassian

lets the rage lade—or at least appear to and then flashes a cocky smile of white teeth.....

in that case, I'm afraid we're even." He places his hands in the front pockets of his pants. "You forget—she's my feeder. I'm quite familiar with her blood."

"I know for a fact that you haven't fed from her in a while."

Ragna makes a slight motion with her head, and two of the men stationed beside her descend the steps that keep her elevated above us

"The effect isn't permanent. It fades with time. That's one of the reasons I can't let her fall into your hands"

The men try to grab Cassian, **but** he resists, steps back, and bares his fangs.

"if you resist, your friend will pay the consequences for your actions."

The woman curls her upper lip in a sneer that can only be described as evil.

"Or is he also familiar with your feeder?"

I look at Drystan, whose face pales. I try to open my mind, project myself toward **Cassian** and speak to him. I find that he was already waiting for my intrusion.

What will they do to **him**? I ask

“See the blind man?” He pauses before continuing. “I heard rumors decades ago **of** a shapeshifter who returned from the dead—and with him, brought a piece of hell. Apparently, he can trap you inside your worst nightmare.”

A strange sound comes from my chest. Under other circumstances, it might be a whimper, but now it’s something that can’t **be** described with words—all because of this stupid thing that seals my lips and tears me apart every time i try to separate them. The tingling of Castian’s gaze on me makes me look at him.

“When we project ourselves into each other’s minds, it’s real, Elara, You made me bleed, and I’ve tasted your blood in that cell and in my room. Right now, it’s inside me.”

I blink as I understand what he means. Ragna and all her followers believe Cassian and I haven’t been near each other for some time, and therefore that he hasn’t fed from me. Although technically he hasn’t, he has tasted slight drops of my blood—are they enough to make him immune to Rhory? Deep down, that doesn’t matter right now, and he knows it. So when the two men approach again and try to place shackles on him—shackles that look anything but normal—he doesn’t resist. He makes a slight grimace.

I’m fine. I’m pretending.

If I could. I would smile

“Wise decision, Cassian Draven.”

Ragna turns her attention from him to focus on me.

“By now, you must have noticed that what seals your mouth is enchanted by witches—just like those shackles.”

She gestures toward them with her chin.

“That way we avoid unnecessary trouble, right? it wouldn’t be pretty for you to pull off your little trick—what would **you** call it?”

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Chapter

pat on the forehead

ou can’t speak. I guess we’ll have to invite the last person missing to understand all this.”

ore her tasteless jokes. No-one needs to explain to me what I do. I devour souls—erase existence beyond death. There is nothing a

suld inve to scream it to the four winds, to proclaim myself the monster undoubtedly

Instead, I remain silent, waiting for the next

there are

are no doors opening from one of the side balconies above the hall where Ragna sits, a man emerges whom I recognize as dragged by the hair, comes Evanora, tears of rage in her eyes. Her mask is gone, revealing the

the scar faced shapeshiker—and behind

ross her mouth. Out of the steps in his way He scoffs, though he does hvincible – but they're nothing more than

These don't feel like

of my ty. I see Drystan make a move toward her, but one of the men watching Cassian iromidated. They think they're too powerful now that they believe my blood makes them restrained, what would I be capable of? The very idea makes my

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Chapter 114

“What raw beauty,” Ragna says with feigned admiration. “I’d heard of the White Banshee, but knowing you’re immixed in this makes it all the more fascinating. Who were you running from with such desperation, dear

Evanora’s gaze lingers for just a second on Drystar’s before she looks **away** quickly Ragna doesn’t miss it—she watches everything with twisted amusement. She almost seems to think we’re performing a tragedy just for her.

She grabs Evanora’s face with one hand and lifts her off the ground by sheer brute strength.

“They wanted to hurt you, didn’t they? Always so cruel to those who are not like them...”

While one hand digs her nails into Evanora’s skin, the other strokes the side of her head, tangling her fingers in her white h

“You must hate them so much for what they did to you... and yet that witch forced you to help Elara reach her potential. You no longer have to do anything for them, White Banshee. Now you can get your revenge—by my side.

Evanora bares her teeth in a feral grimace and tries to break free of her grasp.

“They disfigured you, they beat you, they raped you.”

The words strike the banshee like sledgehammers.

-You

deserve revenge—and I can **give** it to you. All you have to do is tell me what I want to know.”

Troll my eyes **as** I hear her same tired speech about vengeance **and** alliance again.

“Revenge?”

The question leaves Evanora’s lips strangled.

“At whose expense? I don’t want vengeance soaked in innocent blood.”

“Elara is not innocent,”

“You don’t know anything”

Seeing that Evanora won’t fall for her cheap tricks, Ragna lets her poisoned smile twist into something darker. Her beautiful face disappears, and in its place remains the image **of** someone on the brink of madness. She lets herself be consumed by rage and hurls the banshee away from her. The impact of her body against the ground, the crunch of bones breaking, chills my blood. A sharp breath echoes through the hall- I know it’s Drystan without needing to look, but when I do, I see the face of a man who wants blood.

Evanora’s cries of **pain** take a few seconds to arrive—but they do, and they are some of the most gut-wrenching sounds I’ve ever heard.

Ragna rises from her throne and looks down on all of us from her position of power,

“Do you want all your sacrifices to have been in vain, White Banshee?” she spits. “I know what matters to you—and I won’t hesitate to take it from you to get what I want. If you won’t join me willingly, fear will make you do it”

A smile that reveals her wolf-like **fangs** spreads across her face.

“She has your eyes, by the way”

The banshee's face, until now hidden beneath a curtain of hair, is revealed, covered in terror. She locks eyes with Papna, and the hurt earlier is gone. Now there's only despair, fear, pleading.

"Just tell me what I **want** to know."

The shapeshifter doesn't let her eerie smile fade.

"What must be done for her to reach her full potential? I don't want her half human

I hate how they talk about me like I'm not even here. And that's even more that can't do anything about it. I feel the urge to dig my nails into this thing on my mouth and tear it off—even if it takes my skin with it. I glance toward Cassian and Beystan—both of them seem on the verge of madness. Neither handles powerlessness well. They're tied hand and foot right now—anything they do could mean the end for one of us. Maybe not for me apparently I'm too valuable—but I know Cassian would never take that risk.

A new cry pulls me from my thoughts, and I see Evanora trying to rise from the floor.

"How do I know you'll keep your word?" she asks, her voice choked with pain.

word."

"You have my

"I don't believe in anyone's word.

"Then you'll have to have faith," Ragna answers mockingly.

The words seem like a joke to the banshee, who tries to laugh, but instead a strange cough comes out. What spills from her mouth looks too much like blood, and her hands on her side make me think her ribs might be **the** problem. I look at her, begging her to give Raga what she wants and save herself. She helped me escape—what does it matter if she knew something I didn't? She gave me a chance to free from my

fate.

"She needs to kill her human side," she finally

"How?"

Straight to the point

"There isn't just one way—it's not something we know for certain."

She pauses for a few seconds to catch her breath.

“An emotion too strong could be a trigger.”

“How strong?”

“As strong as possible—it must be something that destabilizes her.”

“Then I think I have something that will help.”

Her attention turns to some of her men, who need **and** disappear—to bring with them the people I least expect first. I only know it breaks my heart to see them.

“Elarat Abigail shouts.

She tries to escape her captors without success. They’re strong and won’t let her move freely.

1. d. I don’t know who to look at

“I suppose this is a good time for a little reunion with your parents, Elara. I’m sure you all have **a** lot to talk about.”

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I **can’t** breathe.

In fact, I think that even if could, I wouldn’t want to. When I look at the faces of those who have been my family all this time, I feel so many emotions at once that it becomes suffocating.

Dad and Mom wear gags and have their hands tied behind their backs. Silas is the tame, only his rebellious nature makes him resist being held, and they’ve ended up pushing him to the ground. Then there’s Abigail, whose mouth remains free

Hook at Ragna and see someone calculating, someone who knows how to play with human emotions in the worst possible way. Of course she’ll use Abigail to get whatever she needs from me. No one needs to tell her that that little girl is my weakness—you only need to look into my eyes to know

Her coppery hair is a mess, and her eyes look like she’s been crying for a long time.

“I don’t understand how you didn’t notice,” Ragna **says** in her lofty tone. “You must have looked like an ugly duckling in a nest full of swans. Look at you.”

She extends the palm of her hand toward me and then toward them.

“All blond with honey eyes, and you with that black hair that absorbs all the light and those lifeless eyes.

Every time I looked at myself in the mirror, I wished I looked more like them and less like myself. Sometimes, why I was different, and they always justified it by saying I resembled my grandparents

when I was younger, I asked

Now I know none of it **was** true. There’s no resemblance between us because there was never any blood relation.

Mom’s eyes—she’s not Mom, screams my mind—are full of tears, and she shakes her head as if it’s not too late to deny the truth

to one of the men guarding my family. “Remove her gag—I want to love family drama; it’s my favorite,” Ragna says, shrugging and turning her head to hear the story of how Elara came into their lives. I’m sure she’s curious too.”

Tam, though thankfully my inability to speak spares me from having to agree out loud.

They remove Mom’s gag in the roughest way possible—do they really expect me to believe they’re any less tyrannical than the vampires”

Truth is, I don’t see the difference

“Tell us how did Elara come into your lives?” Ragna demands.

“Speak, woman,”

My mother’s chest rises and falls with barely contained sobs. Her frantic gaze bounces from my face to my siblings, and I know all kinds of thoughts are flooding her mind.

At her silence, Ragna:

she sighs in exasperation and snaps her fingers, commanding one of her men to kick Silas. His body **curls** on the floor, but he doesn’t bow his head—he lets **us** all see the barely disguised fury in his **eyes**.

If he weren’t gagged, I know what he’d **say**.

We may not be siblings by blood, but there are things that can’t be erased—like the connection we share.

“Start talking or that little copper haired darling will start screaming soon.”

I notice the movement in my mother's throat as she swallows, and I don't even wonder how I can see things in such detail.

Sold to the Night Lord

Chapter 115

"She was left at our doorstep," my mother chokes on a new sob. "We thought it was a mistake we expected some mother to come long for her lost baby, but no one came. A few months later I found out I was pregnant

She covers her mouth, genuine panic carved into her features.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, daughter. We didn't know what to do. We were so afraid of what could happen to our baby, and you arrived like a blessing. We didn't think we'd end up loving you the way we did... but by then it was too late. To the world, you were already our firstborn daughter"

Questions pile up in my mind one over another.

The strain of trying to speak only causes more blood to ooze from my lips and drip down my chin, forming trails along my neck.

Even so, I don't think this pain compares to hearing that the people I've considered my family all this time saw me as the easiest solution to problem

I was the sacrificed baby, a child from the street who came to save their biological child.

Deep down, I can't blame them-though it doesn't make it hurt less.

I blink away the thin layer of tears that has formed in my **eyes** and nod in understanding

"Didn't they leave anything with her?" Ragna presses. "They just left her at your doorstep and you took her in, just like that?"

"She was left just as she came into the world. Nothing came with her, and no one asked about her whereabouts."

"And I think Mrs. Voss has made it quite clear that the reasons they kept Elara weren't exactly selfless," Cassian interrupts.

His voice drips with contempt in every syllable he utters, and his eyes are daggers locked onto the figure of my mother.

This feeling building between us is overwhelming. I can't believe he of all people is the one defending **and** protecting me right now, if someone had told me this months ago, I'd have called them insane.

Despite how surreal all of this is, my heart flutters inside my chest seeing him like this—especially now, when I feel lost, abandoned, orphaned.

They took me from my life on a full moon night, but now I feel they've burned all my roots.

"How cold-blooded one must be to sacrifice an innocent baby," Ragna sneers. "I suppose that clears my conscience a bit for what I'm about

to do."

I tense immediately.

Everything happens so fast I can't react until it's already done.

My mother's heart now rests in the hands of the shapeshifter leader, who licks her lips while watching the threads **of** blood drip from her fingers onto the floor.

Abigail's scream tears through the air—and it's what triggers mine.

it rises in my throat and gets trapped in my mouth, burning my insides.

Silas, pinned to the ground, writhes beneath his captors' hold to no avail

11:30 Fri, 8 Aug

My father stares into my mother's lifeless eyes, trying to catch her body before it hits the floor.

At last, my eyes stop holding back and I feel my fears overflow like a cup filled to the brim.

I don't know if it's mercy or just another way to feed her twisted side, but Ragna allows my father to reach his wife's body.

He **cradles**

her in his arms—and without touching her, I know she is limp and lifeless.

Abigail doesn't stop crying, in a way that strangles my

“Isn’t this enough for you, Elara?”

heart

Ragna’s eyes meet mine **as** she walks around my father, who is oblivious to everything but her.

“How much pain do you need to feel?”

Make me out of pain and I will only know how to give it back, screams my mind.

I swear it’s **as** if she reads the words inside me, and her **eyes** fill with challenge.

Cassian’s teeth grinding echoes through the hall and draws all my attention.

“Look at me, Elara—just look at me.”

Why?

“Because I’ll lose you if you don’t.”

I frown, dive into his eyes—and once again, I’m surprised to see the tiny black veins in the center of his iris even from this far away.

A **pull** inside me makes me look elsewhere, and understand **a** lot as I do.

Ragna’s smile is diabolical as she looms **behind** my **father**.

His expression is soft, clouded by a sadness that may not only be for Mom.

His eyes speak without words.

They ask me for forgiveness.

I fight against my shackles and against Rhory.

I try to stand with the little strength I have left—and I do.

I begin to run on trembling legs, more pathetic than a newborn animal learning to walk, but I don’t care—I just want to reach my father **and** be his **daughter** again, his girl, even if everything is a lie.

I’m almost there, but like **a** house of cards collapsing with a breeze, my hope vanishes.

Ragna’s hands rest on each side of my father’s head. He closes his eyes—I see a tear fall—and before n

I don't look away when his neck falls into an unnatural position.

The sounds coming from Abigail are not of this world. They are the cruelest kind of suffering that can exist

I change my course and rush toward her—and no one stops me.

ers **can** reach him, he's gone too

Tembrace her, let her face sink into my chest, and her tears soak me.

"Elara"

ignore the Cassian speaking in my head

I num my f

fingers mechanically through my little sister's curls, in a completely catatonic

I don't want to—but the memories of my father play through my head uncontrollably.

I remember his remorseful gaze the day entered the Red Auction, and the days before that.

The kisses on my forehead every morning and night, the little taps on my head whenever I got rebellious with Mom, the slices of plene gave me in secret, the way he lovingly said my name when he spoke, or his calloused hands holding mine when the cold was too much.

He tried to make up for what they had done.

Would I have done any different in his place?

The solis rising in my throat choke me, and the tears

over my cheeks until they fall from my chin.

Silas keeps struggling on the ground to no avail-

kick and a blow that splits his eyebrow. Blood stains his face, forming

He looks at me with anguish and deiquair etched into his faci

And these are the people who fill mine.

How could

(they're traning my whole life awa

It's not just blood

They're tak

Hy eyes mert kapun

jone dry one, for something i dont understand--something might be able to control if I only had more time.

s my pride writhes inside me.

Herdisdain couldn't be more apparent,

sperata

her hand between mine, surprising her, though she hides it well,

My eyes beg for something

Life has been cruel to me from the begin suffering

know it by the way her mouth curves maliciously, pleased by my

I look down, an

hose hands clutch my tattered clothes and soak them with tran

I put a protective arm wound her and catch movement out of the corner of my eye

They've forced Silas to his feet.

I shake my head again

pain and again, begging the

what i think is going to happen won't

My tears pour even more violently from my eyes, and the water evaporate

Douches the muzzle, now dangerously!

Etara," Ragna drones. "if only you'd stop holding

don't have to |

They he nothing to you”

11:30 Fri, 8 Aug

Nothing to me?

They are everything I’ve known up to now.

uplepe

Not Lilith, not Atarotha—they are my family.

G

Sold to the Night Lord

Chapter 116

It doesn’t matter what brought us together what matters is that I felt we were

And in their place, maybe I wouldn’t have acted differently.

I was a stranger who arrived in their lives like a gift for their son and if I think about it, wouldn’t I have sacrificed myself anyway?

The day I almost ended my life, I chose this because i didn’t want it for them.

The dagger at **Silas’s** neck was a distraction—what they really wanted was to take Abigail from me. And they succeed.

It feels like they’ve torn a limb from my body, and the sensation only worsens when her honey eyes look at me as if I were her heroine—who **just** abandoned her.

my feet an

I rise to my

and fight the man holding her, but he slaps me across the face, knocking me to the ground.

My bones tremble from the impact, and still find the strength to try again.

The scene repeats

I get up.

I struggle.

A slap.

Back on the ground.

Cassian's almost animal growl tears through my ears with each failed attempt I make.

His voice is in my head—shouting, pleading, **begging** me to stop

Would he stop?

Did he, when he stood where I am now and saw his family die

He, more than anyone, should understand that I can't stop fighting

Not until I am physically unable

Maybe I'll keep trying until then.

I get up again, try to take Abigail from her captor's arms.

She kicks and scratches at any patch **of** skin she **can** reach, but when I get close, another slap lands across my **face**—this time clouding my

vision in black.

The shapeshifter leader's laughter echoes off the ceiling, and the sound makes me want to vomit

My muscles tremble—they scream at me to stop.

"You have such a resilient spirit, dear," she coos, "but everyone has a limit—and I intend to find yours."

My limit is a little seven-year old girl with a gapped smile and the biggest, most beautiful eyes in the world.

1/5

11:30 Fri, 8 Aug†**OD**

Chapter 116.

The storm around me doesn't stop—no, it won't spare me this pain. Instead, everything seems to slow down so I don't miss a what will now haunt every one of my nightmares

Ragna licks her nails, which by now look more like animal claws, and gives me a look whose meaning I already know death

“Don’t look, Elaral Don’t look!”

It’s too late for that—I don’t think I would have looked away even if I could have

The claws cut through the air with inhuman speed, much like a vampire’s, and where once there was soft, velvet skin, there are now strips of bloodied flesh. Abigail’s face becomes unrecognizable in seconds, and Ragna has made sure her claws reach the neck, from which blood now pours endlessly.

The scream that claws its way up my throat is uncontrollable.

I hear cracking sounds, and for a moment I think it’s me—breaking from the pain.

It’s not. Instead, heavy chunks of metal fall at my feet, and I feel air filtering between my blood soaked lips and lighter wrists.

My scream makes the walls tremble.

A strong body I would recognize with my eyes closed steps between us.

With his hands still restrained, Cassian tries to hold my face

I look into his eyes—icy and blue—but it’s as if I don’t really see him.

All I can think about is vengeance.

“This is **what** she wants,” he whispers in my mind with the softest, sweetest tone I’ve ever heard from him.

“If you give it to her, she will have won.”

She can’t win if she’s dead.

His gaze drops, as it he’s beginning to realize there’s nothing he can do or say to stop me. In fact, I know something inside me has already

changed.

He **steps** out of my way—I know it takes effort for him to appear weak.

My legs feel stronger from the adrenaline and from the barely hidden **surprise** on Ragna’s face at seeing I’ve freed myself from her pathetic

toy.

I approach the man holding my sister's body like a rag doll and before he can even **think**, I return all his slaps with **a** single one—strong enough to send him flying across the room.

I catch my sister's body before it hits the ground and cradle it in my arms like the fragile, precious person she has always been to me.

I brush the hair from her face with trembling fingers and eyes blurred with tears

I blink

tink them away.

The torrent of blood at her neck has stopped and I can now distinguish different nuances in its scent

I look at her chest—I'm well **aware**

I won't find any movement there, but I need to check.

I keep my eyes fixed on her still torso, and that's when i hear something else break

This time, it's me.

My sanity, my restraint, whatever makes me human is shattering inside me, pouring liquid fire into my veins in the process

A memory flashes—us walking through the castle gardens, how beautiful she looked in a place like that, as if she had been born to the among beautiful and luxurious things

When she asked me if we'd go back to Ravag, I think she, in her young age, saw things I couldn't.

When I told her I was starting to belong, there was no discontent in her eyes, no reproach—she just looked happy.

Thinking of her, her bright eyes, her innocent smile—it tears me apart.

Someone behind me chokes on whatever was about to come out of their mouth—it sounds a lot like a sob.

My head whips around like a lash cracking through air, and I see **Eleazar** standing, looking at me as if seeing me for the first time.

I pull my sister tighter against me, afraid someone might separate **us**.

I hear footsteps and my body shields Abigail's, until I recognize **Silas's** hands and allow myself to move slightly

His face is colorless just as lifeless as my sister's body,

His features twist when he sees our little sister, his hands clench into fists, and I swear I've never seen such pain on his face.

"No....no..."

He shakes his head like that could **make** it less real

My lips tremble as I try to hold back the sobs that only grow when Silas reaches us and takes Abigail from my arms.

He touches her curls just as t did and presses her against his chest, staining himself with blood.

I hear something snap, and when I look for the source, I realize I've broken a finger from clenching my fists too hard.

It doesn't hurt—I think something deeper inside me hurts more.

Ragna's rea

eyes catch the moment and the comers of her mouth stretch into a satisfied smile that finally shatters my sanity

if she thinks she's won herself a new toy—she's very wrong

"It's happening, isn't it?"

The question isn't directed **at** me it's to Evanora, who remains on the ground, half-sitting with an expression of constant pain.

She nods slowly and instead of looking at Ragne, she looks at me, as if begging something **of** me.

"You're doing so well, Elara. Just a little more"

This time she is speaking to me.

At first, I don't know what she means—untill see one of Ragna's men heading for the last family member have lett

My vision clouds, my reason disappears completely.

A growl escapes my throat that makes everyone hold their breath—even her men.

Without knowing how, I move as fast as one of them and position myself in front of the man who intended to kill Sites.

Driven by instinct. I grab his throat and lift his body off the ground.

His eyes widen with surprise.

I don't think much before forcing my thumb in and crushing his windpipe.

Not satisfied with the sound of bone cracking I keep pressing until my finger disappears into his flesh.

Blood splashes across my face and the similarity to Abigail's death does nothing to soothe my pain.

In front of me see two eyes rolled back and a chest no longer rising

I drop the corpse—none of my body feels strained after holding him aloft.

In fact, my broken finger is now perfectly fine.

I turn toward Ragna, ignoring Silas's terrified face and the others' concerned expressions.

Cassian's eyes burn into the **back** of my neck.

I take a few steps toward the shapeshifter and tilt my head as I look at her.

Does she really think I'll obey?

How stupid can she be?

Her muzzle is broken, her magical shackles too—does she think she can restrain me?

Nothing will

“You shouldn't have done that.”

My voice is hoarse from disuse.

“I'm going to make your screams my lullaby, you rabid bitch.”

Thousands of thoughts rush through my head, crashing into one another—

the lies, the betrayals, the faces of my lost family

Everything seems to exist solely to feed my rage, and without knowing whether it's me or something from Cassian, the entire hall starts to tremble and collapse over our heads.

Ragna's neck veins bulge, and where there once **was** a slender figure, now stands a beast greater and more majestic than the rest of the shapeshifters,

"Elara!" Cassian shouts

"Don't let yourself be consumed."

A laugh escapes me.

"I don't think you're the best person to talk about that.

I don't raise my voice I know he can hear me.

"You, of all people, should understand me."

I glance over my shoulder at him, and when our eyes meet, something happens that hadn't before

I see myself through him,

Through his **eyes** I see something I definitely am not

My skin is covered in white veins that run all over me, my hair floats

ts around me defying gravity, my eyes have turned completely white, and

my face is twisted by vengeance.

I don't recognize myself.

I see nothing of who I am.

I don't see the human Elara.

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Sold to the Night Lord

Chapter 117

Cassian

I had forgotten how distressing fear could be, but when I look at Elara i again feel like that powerless young man who watched his entire family be annihilated—who endured humiliation over and over without being able to do anything

Now I look at Elara and feel the same way; it seems whatever I do will harm her, and I can no longer deny my feelings.

I worry for her.

Do I love her? I'm not sure I'm ready to accept the feeling that begins with “,” but I'm certain what I feel resembles it. Since she came into my life, she's left small parts of herself in me, Alling the empty shell my heart has been. That's why, when I see her transformed into the most beautiful and lethal **creature**, I feel terror, Who will she be after this? I'm afraid I've lost her irreparably.

The weight of the shackles on my wrists is only physical—they have no true power over me, thanks to Elara's blood in my system,

So far, I've kept up the charade; however, I don't think the events unfolding will allow me to continue.

I don't think she's even aware of the chaos she's causing around her. The hall keeps shaking, the columns are cracking, **and** the ceiling above us won't hold much longer. Ragna **has** proven to be a power-hungry lunatic, an idiot who believed she could dominate the storm, embrace the **ocean** with her arms, stare at the sun without damaging her eyes.

Thear **a** noise in the distance, and it doesn't take long to discover why.

The attack outside has begun, so I slip into the minds of some of my men and give them very concrete orders. We will fight to kill—no

Maybe I hadn't come with a desire to shed blood, but not after the recent events. I can't do that when Elara's family's blood stains these floors and the innocent eyes of a little girl stare at me empty.

“Elara

, you have to calm down to control your new abilities,” I say, in the tone a lion tamer might use to soothe wild beasts. Dumn, I never

imagined her nickname would be so fitting.

“You want to protect Silas, yes—but if you don't stay calm, you'll hurt him.”

The ground under my feet stops shaking and I **think** I've gotten her to listen until Ragna barks orders to her men. They try to seem confident, but I see their fingers tremble. Not that they don't have reasons—because as soon as the first man lunges at her, all appearance of calm vanishes, and Elara defends, grabs the man by the wrists—and what I see takes my breath away. Something like water vapor escapes the man's mouth and enters Elara's nostrils. She doesn't seem disturbed at **all**; I'm not s

His body collapses at her feet and she looks at the rest challengingly

So **su**다.

The shapeshifters **want** to flee, but their leader throws them **a** look promising death anyway. Die fighting, or die as cowards, while she waits

in her animal form for a miracle that won't come.

By my side, Drystan uses the confusion in the hall to fight his captor and emerge victorious. It barely takes any effort for me to deal with mine; I don't need to use my powers—I finish him with my own hands. I press my thumbs into his eye sockets until I hit soft, viscous tissue. I drop him and yank the shackles apart with a single pull

My attention goes to the leader **intend** to **go** after her until I see Elara is surrounded and can't hold them all ofL

Drystan holds unconscious Evanora in his arms and I wouldn't trust Eleazar to keep her **safe**, so I join Elara

I grab the neck of the man approaching her from behind—he's mid-transformation—and break it before he fully takes his wolf form.

11:31 Fri, 8 Aug O

Mongside me, Elara drops another corpse.

Our fingers touch—lear courses through me at the thought of losing her entirely but she returns the touch and Heel sparks at my **fingertips**.

“Are you still my little beast, Elarat

She turns slowly—those **gray** eyes gone, replaced by completely white irises. She bited her lower lip a

pas she looks at me.

Out of the corner of my eye I **see** someone approaching us, and this time I use my powers hoping there isn't a drop of her blood in him.

Bingo. In seconds, whatever was **once** a man becomes a mountain of organs, muscles, and skin.

“I feel like I’m going **crazy**”

Her voice doesn’t sound like herself.

“I can’t control it—my blood roars more,”

“Screw it all,” I say, **grabbing** her cheeks while I extend my power around us, preventing anyone from approaching without dying in the

attempt.

“You faced me when you thought you were human—you of **all** people can handle this, I’m the only one who can make you crazy, do you hear me? I won’t let **you** lose yourself”

“I think it’s too late.”

“It hurts.”

Her appearance flickers, giving me a fleeting glimpse **of** Elara with gray eyes and flawless skin. The moment ends as quickly as **it** came—the white eyes and thin white veins **return**.

“I never give up, least of all with you.”

I bring my lips to hers.

Fuck fate, fuck Lilith, fuck them all.”

My eyes would have noticed her in any life because it was her hatred, her desire to stay away from me, her shrewd tongue that obsessed me with her—and in no way will let my mind believe that was the result of forces beyond our control. This is her, raw and unfiltered.

She leans into me, and when her lips leave mine I see the furrow of worry o

Ragna calls **our** attention with a stomp of her robust paw.

“Please, Viktor—my brother...”

yon her brow.

I understand what she’s asking before the sentence finishes. I look toward her brother, standing in a corner holding the little girl’s body. He looks around with **red**, wild eyes.

I try to **split** my attention between him and Elara.

She's taken a warrior's stance, ready **for** battle. When I hesitate, she nods toward her brother.

Reluctantly, obey and leave her alone in danger

I hurry toward Silas, who bares his teeth like a frightened wild animal

דול

I don't stop—I stand between him and the girl and try not to sound too harsh, though I don't forget our last encounter.

"Your sister wants me to get you out of here

"I'm not leaving without my family." He points to the bodies,

"I will get them out," I assure him, "but you need to go first. You still might lose your life."

I know I've uttered words with shards of glass that could tear him apart—but it's the truth.

He stands, still clutching his sister's body, trying harder for his legs but they hold under the weight. The dried blood on his brow in no time every blow he's taken has to be catching up to him now.

"Lean on me

"Leave me alone I don't want your help. All this is your fault."

My teeth feel them grinding and have to take a deep breath so I don't explode.

Out of the corner of my eye I see Elara fighting Ragna—the gold-haired wolf looming over her, trying to crush her with a paw. Elan clings forcefully, resisting. She now has a strength no one could have fully imagined. Her face twists with effort, but she persists—and I hear the sound of bone snapping.

The wolf's howl of pain is confirmation enough, though it doesn't reassure me. She'll heal quickly

Frustrated, I turn back to Silas—stopping myself from yelling in his face takes every bit of patience I have

AD

Sold to the Night Lord

Chapter 118

His sister is fighting a wolf twice the size of any shapeshifter and four times his sister's size—and he chooses this moment **to refuse** my help.

My fingers dig into his arm and I glare at him.

“The fault lies with the one fighting your sister—and if we don't hurry, it might cost her her life too. So you decide: do you want to keep arguing, or do you let me get you out of here so I can go back and help her?”

He takes longer than I'd like to respond.

I force him to grab onto me while still clutching his sister's lifeless body.

I find it hard to look at the little girl—apart from her sister, she's the only Voss I ever tolerated—because I'm one hundred percent sure Silas and I will never get along.

Casting one last look toward Elara, I start running with her brother.

No one stops us on our way out. Most of the shapeshifters are outside battling ours—and the number of corpses on both sides shows that neither has the upper hand.

The castle, already in ruins, continues collapsing under Elara's uncontrolled power. Being inside isn't safe, so I take Silas outside, to the blood-stained shore.

I scan the area for somewhere distant and hidden enough to keep him safe while the battle unfolds.

I don't hesitate when I see some rock formations—I drag him with me and hide him behind them.

“Do you feel that?” I ask once I let him down.

I extend my power toward him and whisper my thoughts into his mind.

His face is unreadable except for a slight furrow between his brows.

“Every few minutes I'll do that again, and I want you to respond so I know you're still in one

piece.”

“What was that?”

“That’s my gift, human. One of them.”

I step back. “Do you understand?”

He doesn’t respond, just nods and looks away..

When I retrace my path and re-enter the interior, everything looks even more shattered. Maybe I was outside **for** five minutut **there’s** barely any time left for this place. Parts of the ceilings have fallen onto the stairs in the foyer, and as I follow **the corridor** le hall, I see it’s full of obstacles.

I kick open a door and find Drystan with Evanora in his arms. Eleazar lies nearby, unconscious amid the debris.

“What happened?”

“She’s getting more and more out of control.”

back

to that

He **doesn’t** need **to** say her name for **me to** know who he **means**. **The stairs leading up to the throne are mostly destroyed, the floor is open i**
n

1/3

multiple places, and a glance down them makes me think that if I fall, I could reach the center of the Earth the mou Wriking the vi throne itself, where Ragna writhes with one of the fangs that form it sticking out of her belly. Her animat form **has** vanished, ed i can bau ke white teeth stained red.

“You can’t kill me.”

I listen closely.

“I will.” Elara’s voice is not of this world.

“Even if it’s the last thing I do, I will drag you to hell with me.”

“Are you taking me to your mommy?” the wolf-lady laughs.

Elara's fists clench, turning white, but whatever she's trying to do doesn't happen—surprise flashes across her face, then frustration. She bares her teeth—I can see her fangs, long and sharp, not at all human. Another column falls, splitting the hall in two and knocking me **of** balance.

"You need to do something, Cassian," I read in Drystan's mind.

"I have to get Evanora out of here—but like this, it's impossible. She's going to bury us alive."

I look at Elara again. He's right. Whatever is happening to her is beyond her control. I step over shattered stones, look up hoping nothing will fall on Elara—at least long enough to reach her. I approach and see Ragna's wound is starting to close around the fang, but Elara has her arm

over it, preventing her from pulling it out.

Saliva drips from her mouth—she looks entirely feral.

"I underestimated you, thinking I could restrain you with a bit of magic," Ragna admits.

"Still, you can't tear out my soul, can you? That's because I don't have one, dear."

A growl rises from deep in Elara's chest—and with another collapse, Drystan yells my name. Stones fall near me, but I dodge them and **pull** Elara with me before they can crush her. She falls on top of me, writhing in my arms and snarling in my face.

"We will find a way for you to get your revenge, but right now you need to be yourself again, Elara."

I gently shake her shoulders.

"Please, you're not seeing what you're doing to yourself."

It's true—her fingers are clenched and broken from her own strength, her fangs have torn part of her lower lip, and there are many wounds on her face and arms that haven't stopped bleeding. This isn't about what happens to us—she's destroying herself.

"What good is all this if *you* die in the process?"

My words don't reach her; instead, they unleash her further. She lunges at me and sinks her fangs into my neck. I remain **utterly** still, feeling

as ever fed from me like her absorb my blood. In another time, this would've been even erotic for me—but now I'm just stunned. No **wo** this—I've never been the one being bled from

I don't fight; I grab her hair and let her take what she needs if it calms her. When she withdraws **her fangs, she becomes** Elara **again for a few** moments. Her black hair shines brighter than ever, her eyes are storm-gray again, and her lips are stained **red. Then she disappears once** more, giving way *to* the raging creature Ragna helped create.

She leaves me there like a rag. My attempts *to* stop her fail—she's focused only on killing Ragna, and **Ragna continues to**

heal her wounds. If she truly has no soul, Elara can't destroy her like she would others. If her blood wasn't in Ragna's **system, it would be as easy as breaking** her

כ"ו,

12:17 **Fri, 8 Aug**

mind...

"Cassian..." Drystan repeats.

I look back and see Eleazar—somehow he escaped. The doorway is now blocked by rubble—we'll die here if Elara doesn't **stop. I stand up the** moment Ragna twists Elara's arm, attempting to break it. I rush forward and with one

blow slam Ragna to the other side of the **hall-into** a still-standing column. I offer my hand to Elara, but she, consumed by madness, repels me. She raises invisible barriers around her, keeping me at bay while everything falls apart.

"I can't do anything," I tell Drystan.

"I refuse to die here."

"She won't let me reach her," I protest.

"You can—already know how."

A silence falls and I lock eyes with my friend—he looks at me with iron determination and anguish. I shake my head and step back as if his words hit me in the stomach.

"I can't do that."

"You can and must. Evanora and she will die if you don't. What I'm asking still gives you some hope—if she dies, that, **my** friend, is irreversible."

AD

Sold to the Night Lord

Chapter 119

I shake my head, trying to shut his words from my mind. I turn back to Elara—she’s looming over the unconscious wolf-wonuit, i as if daring her to rise again. When I approach, Islam into the force that refuse’s my presence

“Elsa?”

She doesn’t react—too last in her thirst for vengeance

I understand **she’s** been consumed for

or years, and at first I couldn’t even look at her without remembering what she was a part of

“Elara, im talking to you.”

She looks at me without **really** seeing me—her gaze is distant.

“Shut up,” she growls.

“This isn’t you.” I swallow hard.

“You have to stop.

“I don’t want **to** stop—I want her dead.

”

“it’s useless to kill her if you lose yourself completely in the process. **You’re** killing yourself—don’t you see?”

It’s clear she hasn’t noticed the blood coming from her ears and mouth—not only is she destroying this place, she’s destroying herself from

within.

“I don’t care.

“I do.” I step forward again—still repelled by her aura.

“Your life is fucking mine and I’m not going to let you end it. Can you hear me? Don’t force me to do things I don’t want to do—because I’m willing if it means keeping you in one piece.”

A deranged, inhuman laugh escapes her. She turns her attention away from me, as if my words and threats meant nothing. I check—bermind is wide open to me. I’m speechless when I see the messy beauty inside her mind. With other people, thoughts, ideas, and memories are neatly compartmentalized, waiting for my fingers to open the drawers. But in Elara—they’re all tangled together like a patchwork quilt; finished, it’s beautiful and endearing. Without a doubt, Elara is the most beautiful disaster I’ve ever had the pleasure to witness. Everything that makes her who she is is connected by fine silver threads.

Textit her head and look at her—**give** her one last chance.

“Please, Elara. Don’t let Abigail’s death have been **in** vain all this.” I point to the floor, to the battered and unconscious **Ragna**.

“We’ll find a way for you to control your powers, I’ll teach you, and then we’ll talk about revenge.”

“Her wounds heal fast,” I add, “you’re not going to kill her easily—especially if your blood still flows in ber veins. Let me help you. You know better than anyone I know **cruelty**—I don’t show mercy to my enemies and I’ll show **you** when you’re safe.”

I emphasize “safe”—all that matters now. Everything else can go to hell as long as she’s okay.

For a second, hope fills me I think my **words** have reached her. But it dies when she turns her gaze away and keeps beating Ragna

I swallow hard—uncomfortable, almost desperate at what I’m about to do. I look for Drystan—he nods and encourages me, knowing this is

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the only way. I can’t get close to her with words, the worst thing bould do remains.

I close my eyes.

“Forgive me.”

I dive into her beautiful mind, seeing her memories, worries, feelings all that makes her who she is. There is a black sphere consuming nearly everything, from which silver threads connect to everything else. It’s her rage, tainting her being I close my eyes tighter and clench my fists—and it feels unreal what I’m about to do. The invisible fingers of my power extend before me and then I start cutting. Thread after thread, I cut. When I’m

done, I don't dare open my eyes—though the muffled snap tells me it worked. I wish I hadn't succeeded. I wish Elard hadn't lost complete control letting me enter her mind. Fuck—I hate it.

I slowly open my eyelids and see what I expected: Elard, her eyes empty, on the floor like a rag doll.

The hall has stopped shaking. Everything seems normal again—like **seconds** ago this place wasn't about to bury us and become our grave. I step forward, kneel, and hold her in my arms like fragile porcelain—easy to break, as if she wasn't responsible for this destruction.

I brush the hair from her face and look into her eyes. I've always longed for her to see me, to recognize me—now I can't stand this empty gaze.

"Forgive me," I repeat.

*There **was** no other way"

I've done this so many times, never feeling even an iota of remorse—but now I feel sick.

Elara is a quebrada. **Just**

thinking it makes me want to vomit.

Drystan's hand on my shoulder doesn't make me look away

"You had no choice."

I know—but I still feel I could've done more.

"**Are** you sure?"

"She **was** out of control."

1." He p

pauses.

"She is very powerful, Cassian—and that makes her dangerous"

"I've always known she was." I try to smile sadly.

"My fierce human."

"We have to leave."

I finally look at him and see he carries Evanora in his arms. She's unconscious but her wounds seem to have stopped bleeding, I guess she's healing with her own magic—if only she'd told us earlier, if only I hadn't let myself be such an idiot

I extend my power to whisper thoughts into the minds of **those** still standing outside.
Survivors com

Shifter—still unconscious—**and** ward us and begin lifting away much

of the rubble blocking the entrance, Drystan is the first to step out with the banshee. I glance at th order my men to take her prisoner. Then I scoop Elara up in my arms. I'm not surprised I don't hear her protest. I know the effect of my powers—I know how awful it is.

Elara is no longer herself. Now she is empty I have severed every link that held her together.

“We're going home, Elara,”

Uplace a kieron her forehead.

“And the naked your come bar

Sold to the Night Lord

Chapter 120

The return journey took place in complete silence, partly because no one dared speak to me, and because I had nothing to say, I hit myse in my cabin with Elara at my side, not leaving her for a single second. Seeing her in this state—gone, empty—is like having shards of glass in my heart. As soon as we arrived at the castle, I ordered that she be moved to my chambers, I wanted her nowhere else.

“What should we do with Ragnal Drystan asks from behind me.

Several **days** have passed since our return, but everything has stayed the same, frozen in time. I admit that on the first day, I nearly went insane with rage. Seeing everything unchanged, as **if** nothing had happened, with Elara on my bed as if she were just sleeping and would open her eyes at any moment with one of her sharp remarks, drove me mad—because reality is different. Elara opens her eyes, yes, but she doesn't speak sharply. Her gaze remains fixed on the ceiling and she watches the sun's rays traverse their **usual** path, until night **falls and** she **closes** her **eyes** again. Like this, every cursed day.

“We'll keep her alive until she comes back to herself,” I say, pointing at her with my gaze—
“Ragna is her matter, not ours.”

“Have you managed anything?”

He doesn't need to continue for **me** to know what he means. I've spent days trying everything, hoping for a miracle that doesn't **happen**. If believing in God and praying could help, I think I'd try it. Every time I plunge into her mind, I find nothing to grasp, nothing to mend, nothing to fix. **It's an** empty room with smooth walls and frigid air. I've spent so much time in her head, searching for a way to reverse what I did, that I realize there are **marks** on **these** empty walls—marks left **by** a picture that had once hung there. They're there, telling me that before, there were things filling this place: Sierra's mind. There was color, clutter, beauty. There were memories, like photos hung on **a** wall—butlerased

them all.

Sometimes, when it's just the two of us, here in silence in the dead of night, I wonder is this my punishment for everything I've done? is this the twisted way destiny has chosen to make me pay for my actions? Because giving me something to desire, something to fight for, and then taking it away like this—it's cruel even for me. I know I'm partly responsible; I'm just looking for someone to share this weight with because carrying so much is drowning me. This feeling of guilt is new to me.

“There's nothing,” I finally say, “What if she remains like this forever?”

“if there's one thing we know about magic, it's **that** there's always a way to reverse it,” Drystan responds, “no matter how extreme the form.”

“No one has ever returned from this st

No one has stopped being a Broken and you know it.”

“Only death is irreversible, and even **then**.....

He leaves the sentence hanging because we both know there are those who have returned from death. I want to fill myself with that hope he has, but I can't in these moments.

“**And** Evanora?” I ask to **change** the subject. “How is she?”

I admit my relationship with the banshee isn't the best, and I hold some resentment for her not telling us the truth earlier. Maybe it would've changed something. What it would change, we'll never know. Still, I see in my friend's eyes that she's important to him, and I owe him at least some empathy since he's the only one who feels it for me. I don't forget either Elara's laughter when she and Evanora got up to mischief together. Ligned them, let them do as they pleased, just because it made Elara happy. I was a fool then for not realizing how she was changing me—and I'm a fool now for not entirely accepting it.

“Sleeping most of the time. Her internal wounds are more severe than I thought. It’s taking her tim

“That’s good.”

“I’ll speak with her when the time is right,” he **says** in an attempt to reassure me-“maybe she can help us.”

Inod, lost in my self-pity

“**Do** you want me to stay for a while?” he **asks**.

I look **again** at Elara, whose lost eyes regard the ceiling. I sigh, full of resignation, and nod. It’s not that I want to leave her, but sometimes diving into her mind is too much-it reminds me of what I briefly saw and then destroyed. Drystan takes my seat and assures me repeatedly he won’t move. I leave, not to rest, but to continue searching for a way to bring her **back**. I descend to the dungeons and walk through the **cells**. I pause only briefly at Ragna’s, guarded by my men, then continue until I reach Mark She remains as I last saw her,

lost in that

catatonic state

People must think I’m a monster-and they’re undoubtedly right.

I enter the cell, though I keep some distance. I extend my power toward her and enter her mind, as deserted as I remember. It seems like an empty pantry, full of cobweb-filled nooks. I try to find something to grasp, something to connect, something to weave the web of her mind again. It’s not that I want her back-she touched something she should never have but if I find a way with her, maybe....

I sigh, frustrated. It’s been a while and the smell of dampness has sunk deep into my nostrils. I leave, closing the cell behind me, climb back up, and head to my wing of the castle. I feel eyes on me; the rest of the satiators are as afraid as they are curious.

“**Sir?**”

I stop in the hallway.

“Do you need one of us to feed you?”

I almost forget that small detail. When was the last time I drank! I don’t even remember, I glance over my shoulder at the girl with a heart- shaped face and golden curls-I don’t recognize her name.

“No,” I say sharply.

“But sir, you

“I don’t usually take ignorant satiators, I thought you knew the meaning of “**no**,”

I seize the moment to resume my walk, disappearing down the next corridor.

She falls silent immediately, **swallowing** a small sound, and I s

I encounter no more interruptions on my way. On entering my chambers, the warmth of the fire greets me. Beside Drystan are Elara’s maidens, who have just finished washing h

“Any news?” my friend asks, standing and giving me his seat.

“Everything’s the same.”

His shoulders slump, as do mine. He stays by my side for a while, but I **guess** it’s uncomfortable for him to be exposed so long to the aftermath of my powers. Elara’s maidens speak to her as if expecting an answer, and I notice their sidelong glances. They’re not happy with

me

The

without **radual**