

# Sold to the Night Lord

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### Chapter 121

She looks first at me and then at Elara. Her gaze is sad and her flames remain dim, as they were before—not their usual bright red

“Have you found anything out?” ask

She **shakes** her head slowly

“There must be someone who knows a way to bring her back.

“No one

one is known to have a gift like yours.” She jumps from the flame and hops until she’s near Elara.

“And no one like her is known either, I knew she was special from the first time—I didn’t imagine how much. She is the person your mother hoped for you.”

“Not the time to talk about that, Ank.”

She wants to continue her mouth is open to argue—until the loud banging of the doors slamming against the wall silences her. I snap to my feet, knocking her to the floor in the process. I barely have time for anything before Ciro Amery bursts into my room.

“What the hell are you doing here?” I bark.

His arrogant smile has **never** annoyed me as much as today. He shows those perfect teeth before answering triumphantly.

“I’ve come for my new satiator.”

At first I stay silent—not for long. The laugh escapes me in torrents. Ciro frowns, saying nothing, allowing me my moment.

“**You** must be on some hallucinogenic mushrooms if you think I’ll let you have one of my satiators.”

“Oh, this won’t be just any—I want her.”

He points with his chin to Elara, who doesn't flinch at his words. I can imagine what she would've done if she were healthy-she'd have sat up abruptly throwing her hands up and screaming, probably cursing both of us, insisting she isn't a possession.

"Over my dead body."

"I'd prefer not to ruin my favorite vest," he says boastfully-"here you go."

"What's this?" I pick up the paper with two fingers, as if it were plague-ridden.

"The clause in the Treaties that guarantees me the right to compensation and authorizes me to claim Elara. Also-consent from the rest of

the Committee."

I scan the words quickly, to be honest, they dance in front of me as nervousness runs through my body.

"Nonsense." Islam the paper against his chest. I won't let you take her-choose someone else."

"Just like you chose someone else when I begged you?"

"Your reasons aren't mine-I **saved** her. You don't want to see it, **but** she was playing you, she never loved you."

"I had to see it myself, not you." He raised his chin and puffy out his chest in confidence.

"Now tell **me** what would you give for her?"

"What do you want?"

"Beg me, beg for her, on your knees."

Ank, still in the room, gasps in surprise. I fix Cirn with a look that promises death, while I think of my options. Beg on my knees for **a** human? | would never have done that. Never-until now. I clench my fists and bien my tongue as drop to my knees, lift my bow my head.

"Don't take her. Take someone **else**, but not her."

"Why? What does she mean to you?"

"That's not the **deal**."

determined not to

“Alright.” He licks his tongue. “Which of my gardens do you think Elara will like? I need to choose which quarters to give her

I grit my jaw.

“Because she’s the only one who isn’t afraid of the monster I am! Damn, because she makes me want to be better, makes me find mercy.

because I think I could love her!”

The silence that follows is almost suffocating. It lasts long enough to shelter hope—and then it vanishes the moment I see his smuggin

again.

“I’m doing you a favor.” He pats my shoulder. “You’re softening—and you’ve always hated humans, remember? Don’t come now acting like you’ve grown attached to one.”

He gestures over his shoulder and two men enter the room heading straight for the bed. I step in front of them and show my fangs.

“Are you going to sully your parents memory by going against something they themselves wrote? Already **you’ve** seen I’m in my right, Cassian. Don’t make things harder, You should’ve bothered to study the Treaties before messing with what was mine. Now you have to face the consequences of your actions. You’re not untouchable—the rules don’t change for **you**.\*\*\*

“If you say so.”

“You’ll thank me in time.” He looks toward the bed. “By the way—what kind of love is that? What have you done to **her**

?”

“Nothing that’s any of your concern”

“Of course it is. Elara is mine.”

Before I even realize it, I’m on top of him—my body astride his on the floor. I grasp his throat with my hand and trace his windpipe with my

thumb.

“The sun would have to rise in the west, the ocean stop wetting, and my heart start beating again before she would be yours, you damned

fool

Before I do something crazy and perhaps start an internal Pure war, Drystan appears behind me and grips my shoulders, pulling me off Ciro. That's when I notice Elara **is no** longer on her **ped**—and I haven't even realized it. They've taken her.

“You'll see her again soon, Cassian,” **says** Ciro, adjusting his vest. “Maybe throw a welcome par

I remember to send an invitation.”

I growl with rage and Drystan once more holds me back. A few minutes pass—the calm before the storm—because when I glance at the empty space on the bed, I finally lose control. Everything at hand gets broken beneath my hands. I thrust splinters **and** shards of glass into myself, and still nothing hurts enough to relieve my torment.

**2/3**

Just when I thought nothing could go worse, life surprises me once more

“You'll get her back, you always do,” assures my friend. “We'll find a way to make her who she was again—and bring her home where she belongs.

I sink my fingers into the wooden back of the only remaining chair and it begins to splinter beneath my grip I don't contradict my friend's words—even though they refer to something I believe I'm incapable **of**, despite having thought it myself I take a deep breath that doesn't fully calm me.

“Her place is **with** me, and mine is with her. I'm not going to let you have her.” It's a promise

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When everyone seems drawn to nie, offering flirty smiles and shameless eyelash Butters, finding someone capable of resisting the force of my gift is something extraordinary.

When someone stands up to me and acts as if kissing me isn't their life goal, I can't just sit around and wait – I have to act.

And I did.

I pulled her from the hands of a villain, possibly only to become that very man in her eyes, but I'm patient, be her friend. I'll show her that we can feel, unlike what **Cassian** might make it seem. We do have feelings- I do. I'm not frozen, maybe my heart has ever beaten, but I'm not dead. I feel with the same intensity, if not more, than a human. For her to see that, she has to come back. That's why I'm watching Cassian right now, standing next to the bed in the chamber that's been assigned to her, looking at Elara with a gullt that's impossible to

ignore.

"You could give us some privacy," he growls.

"I don't see why I should," I say, crossing my arms over my chest and leaning back against the wall. "After all, she's my feeder

"Elara is not your feeder."

"Why do you want privacy?" I ask, ignoring his previous comment. "Planning to do something immoral, Cassian?"

I can't help the amusement in my **voice**.

"Worried about my morals, Ciro?"

"As if you had any left..."

His gaze darkens **as** soon as the words leave my mouth. A mantle of guilt settles over him that can't be ripped off I know what he told me isn't entirely true. Elara's condition isn't an accident. Yes, Cassian has a terrible temper, but he has fucking iron control. He only loses it when he wants to-during bloody spectacles usually meant to inst fear and cement his dark reputation. However, none of those acts have been due to a lack of control-except when it involves her, Elara. Even so, I don't think this was an accident. There's more, things **he's** not telling me, and I intend to find them out.

I knew Elara was special the moment her eyes didn't look at me with sick desire. No, her eyes sparkled for someone else.

"I can give you space if that's **what** you want, but you know perfectly well your words aren't safe,"

I spin on my heel and head for the exit. We both know I'll hear everything he says. I won't go far, not with someone like **him** near Elara, and my hearing allows me to catch even the faintest whispers. I lean against the wall outside the doors of the room, from where I catch the soft rustle of sheets, the sound of Elara's breathing, and the slow flutter of her lashes.

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She's awake—sometimes she is and watches us without really seeing. I had seen the effects of Cassian's gift before, always with a certain detachment... until it happened to her. When someone shines so brightly and radiates fire from every pore, seeing her like this chills **the** blood and shakes the bones.

re entering the Red Auction, that

eyebrow in surprise – I never would

“You're probably regretting what you said that day, when you told me you tried to take your life day **you** thought you didn't belong there and were really made to drive me **mad, to**

fight with me.” Larci have imagined Elara on the verge of doing something like that. “Now I'm the reason you're like this. If you hated me before, I think we should come up with a new word for what you feel now. There's none that covers the hate you must feel. Don't worry, we'll find one.”

I hear the sound of skin brushing, the clashing of fingers—maybe he grabbed her **hand**. I clench my jaw.

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“Because you'll come back, no doubt, ruby queen. That's my promise, even if it means nothing to you.”

The sound of a short, chaste kiss fills the air, and that's the moment I choose to return, I open the doors, cross the small siding area, and in Cassian next to Elara, his lips resting on her forehead, narrow my eyes, not entirely sure if this is the first kiss I've heard.

“I think it's time for you to leave,” I say, locking eyes with him. “You must have mail matters to attend to. The Council meetings are approaching”

“Yes, I'm sure you're very worried about the incertings.”

I smile and shrug, refusing to give him a real answer. He rises reluctantly, hesitating to let go of Elara's pate, skeletal fingers. He looks at her the way no vampire would look at a mere human,

"You want her?"

"Of course

"I'm not asking if you want her like an object to possess." I lick my lips, taking my time. I enjoy making him impatient. "I'm talking about love, Cassian. Do you love her?"

"I don't love." His words sound strange. "You know that better than anyone."

And then, with nothing more to say, he walks away.

Once I'm alone, a small smile appears on my lips. He's an idiot. He doesn't even realize what he feels. The human has him eating out of her hand, brought him to his knees without knowing it, made him terribly vulnerable.

Cassian loves her, and I'm fascinated by her too—though I fear this wouldn't be the first time we fight over a woman

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Cassian

Your fingers intertwined with mine feel like fragile twigs on the verge of snapping. Despite my frozen skin, I can sense your own chill—lately, you've always been so cold. The pad of my thumb strokes the back of your hand over and over, refusing to lose contact with you. Your hair spills across the pillow in soft waves, dotted with daisies tangled in the strands, No doubt Ciro's doing, though I know your favorite flowers are wisterias, I don't know why—I just do. Maybe I've always watched you more closely than Het on. I told myself it was just to keep you in check, to monitor the enemy. The truth was far from that. Unknowingly, the little beast wandering my castle had borrowed under my skin. I don't know if I'm ready to admit it.

Something shifts in the air—or maybe it's just my imagination—but when I lift my gaze from your pale, slender fingers, your eyes are open, less vacant than before. I don't want to feel hope swelling in my chest, but I do. I squeeze your hand gently, and the moment I feel you squeeze back, I rise abruptly from the chair, sending it clattering to the floor.

it happens in slow motion, Your eyes find mine, and I don't need words to see the recognition in them. My grip tightens

"Elara? Can you **speak**?"

Now, erasing all doubt, your fingers curl around mine and squeeze back. I collapse onto the bed beside you, my body suddenly too heavy with relief. I pull you close, drinking in your face before burying **mine** in the curve of your neck, inhaling your scent. Now that you're back, the distinct notes of it have returned too. Where before there was only the faintest trace of wild berries, now they're so strong I could swear they're bursting on my tongue.

"Where am I?" you ask, your voice rough from weeks of disuse.

"Ciro's estate." I pull back just enough to frame your **face** in my hands. "The idiot thought he could take you with him. Don't worry, we're going back to the castle. You won't stay here any longer.

It was a miracle Ciro even allowed me these visits, claiming I was the only one who could pull Elara from her catatonia. Maybe that wasn't entirely false, but it was nothing short of divine intervention that she chose to wake during one of them. How? That's something I hope to ask once we're far from here.

Confusion flickers in your eyes

reyes, and you shake your head.

"No." The word chokes you. "I'm not **going** with you."

"I heard you that day in the garden. I know **you** were starting to like the castle—maybe even starting to like me. How can you say no? Do you prefer staying with him? Here? You won't be safe."

"I'm not safe with you either," you snarl "You did this to me."

You gesture at yourself, and the ashen hue of your skin sends a shudder through me. Your eyes have always been gray, but never empty—not to me. Now, there's no trace of their usual fire. Your lips are cracked and pale, like you're already half-dead. I swallow hard, watching as your eyes track the movement of my throat.

"I had no **choice**."

"You did. You could've let me kill Ragna. I almost had her."

"No." I shake my head. "She was toying with **you**, waiting for you to exhaust yourself—or worse, destroy yourself. You were out of control."



“And this is better?”

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The bitterness in your voice makes me look at you again, horrified by how fragile and helpless you seem. The side of your head, your neck begins to crack, and for a moment, I glance at the window, searching for a sun that isn't there. Night has already fallen when (Dir back, your skin splits further, revealing the tissue beneath veins pulsing with blood, exposed to the air.

“What's happening?” I shout into the emptiness, as if someone could answer me. “No, no.

“it's your fault,” you whisper. “You can't break something and expect it to just fix itself

his shouldn't be happening”

The tremble in my fingers tells me I'm close to losing control—not against you, but against myself. Because you're right. This is my fault, and I don't know how to fix it. I don't know how to stop it. I watch, utterly powerless, as Elsa unravels before my eyes, her face—or what's left of it—twisted in pure, unfiltered rage.

I jolt **awake**, slamming my forehead against the desk. At some point between flipping through one book and the next, most have succumbed to exhaustion. The pages of the last book I was reading are now crumpled under me. Belief floods me—just a dream.

A nightmare. I blink away the heaviness in my eyes and, when my vision clears, find Drystan's immaculate face staring back at me. His expression is pitying, and I don't think he realizes how much I hate that look. His lips press into a thin line.

“You look terrible.”

“Lucky for me, my ego's too big to need your coddling.”

My remark doesn't soften his expression. If anything, it darkens further,

“I'm serious, Cassian.” He steps closer to the desk. “You're not eating. You're not sleeping. You don't leave this room unless it's to raid the library or argue with Cira.”

“I was sleeping just **now**,” I point out.

“You collapsed from exhaustion. That doesn't count.”

“What do you

you want, Drystan!”

“To help you.”

“You are helping”

“Helping also means telling you when to stop.” He sighs as he sees the defiance in my posture. “I’m not saying stop searching for a way to bring her back. I’m saying rest. You won’t achieve anything if you starve yourself to death.”

“You know I can’t die.”

“**You** know what I mean, he mutters, rolling his eyes.

I lower my gaze to the desk, where crumpled pages and scribbled notes litter the surface, Ink, stains, a cup with dried blood from my last leeding—when was that? A week ago?—the taste of it still lingers, metallic and lifeless. My clothes are wrinkled, stained, a disgrace. If i looked in a mirror, I doubt I’d recognize the man staring back.

I clear my throat and stand, ignoring the slight, dizziness. The irony isn’t lost on me—Cassian Draven, feared by all, even my own kind, reduced to a hollow shell, crumbling under guilt.

“Til take a bath.”

I move through my study toward my chambers, where the bed remains untouched. Sometimes I think if I don’t disturb it, the imprint of Elara’s body will still be there, her scent clinging to the pillow. But the truth is, all traces of her vanished within days. Now, weeks later, **there’s** nothing left.

“I’ll have a feeder prepare a pitcher for you. He hesitates. “Or if you’d prefer one to come personally

“**No.**”

Without another word, I enter the bathroom, where steaming water already waits no doubt Ank’s doing. I strip clumsily and sink **into** the bath, the flickering candlelight my only company, When I’m done, I drag on a pair of black leather pants, shaking the excess water from my hair as i stride back into my room. True to his word, Drystan left a pitcher on one of the few tables haven’t destroyed, pour a glass of the thick liquid and down it without thinking. It tastes like death.

I’ve always taken pleasure in feeding. Never out of necessity—always for sport. For indulgence.

Islam the glass down and head for the door. All I want is to keep searching, to find a way to end this As I pass the wing where Elara once stayed, I feel the pull to go inside, to walk

among her things and find something—anything—that still smells like her. But ignore it and keep moving toward the library.

Inside, Evanora and Silas sit across from each other, noses buried in books, the only sound the turning **of** pages. I drag a chair out, sit, and grab one of the stacked tomes. **Silas** finches, shooting me a fleeting **glance** before looking away.

Our relationship is... tense, to say the least.

“Any updates from Clarissa and Nalda?”

I forced Ciro to take Elara’s handmaidens, insisting no one else could tend to her needs. Needs. As if she could feel anything but that suffocating emptiness. If a flame touched her skin, her lips wouldn’t even twitch. She’d remain still, hollow.

“The same,” I reply without looking up.

They send me regular reports or deliver them in person when Ciro allows me to see Elara. He only permits it because he wants her restored. I didn’t tell him everything—just spun a tale of rebel attacks gone wrong. I’m not a fool; I know Ciro won’t ignore the gaps forever. But for now, it’s enough.

“When can I see **my** sister?” Silas asks

“Ciro wants me there tomorrow to keep working with her.”

“Can I come?”

“Can you last two hours without grating on my nerves?”

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My comment makes the banshee part her lips with a small laugh. My glare silences her immediately, if we already had our differences before, now that I know everything she kept from us, the abyss between us is completely unbridgeable let her stay only for whatever help she might provide and for Drystan. I don’t know what’s going on between them, and I’m not going to dig into it either.

“And you?” I ask. “Have you gotten any information from Naja?”

Evanora has been communicating with her through her fork tongued pet. She closes the book she’s reading and looks at me with her **loy eyes**.

“Nothing we didn’t already know.”

What do we really know? Because I haven’t felt this lost in a long time. I don’t know how to bring her back. I don’t know how to handle her if she does return, because not even the books have recorded something like this. She’s unique, utterly alone in whatever she’s become—and I’m not sure there’s anything more terrifying than that. Not knowing your abilities or your weaknesses, not having anyone who truly understands **what** you are

\*Remind me again what you knew.

She sighs, tired of having this same conversation every day.

“Lilith appeared to Naja eighteen **years** ago and told her that one day, a girl would come to her who carried the Vold within. Her duty would be to help her reach her full potential.”

Void.

As if Elara had ever been empty.

“How?”

She scoffs at my question, clearly fed up

“You **already**

know how. That day, whatever had been suppressing her true nature and her gifts broke. She had been rebelling against her **chains**, that’s why she kept getting sick. Her body was begging to awaken. She had probably already started manifesting her powers without even realizing it.”

“Why does she resist mine?”

She **raises** an eyebrow and looks **at** me with condescension.

“You already know. Elara was made for you. Do you really think Lilith would make her lesser? She lived through that mistake herself—she wouldn’t repeat it with her daughter.” She taps her fingers on the book cover. “Still, we’ve confirmed she’s not completely immune. You broke

**her.”**

My teeth grind together, jaw clenched so tight I could shatter my own fangs.

“Keep looking,” I snap. “Everything that’s done can be undone. Isn’t that one of the core principles of magic?”

“In theory,” the banshee mutters.

We dive once more into turning the pages, letting our eyes—and occasionally our fingers—drit across the ancient lines scribbled on yellowed parchment.

wer like **this**. And if someone **had** no record of it remains,

None of them mention my gift, because no one before me **has** ever manifested a power nor of how to manage its consequences. There’s no information on anyone like Elara either. We both seem to be alone in this. Hoonet mehow to undo what **I’ve**

done. And no one can guide her through what she is.

When she returns—because I will bring her back we’ll have to focus on her powers, on learning and exploring them. What someone the her can do is both wonderful and terrifying. To extinguish the soul—the one thing everyone clings to with hope for a life after death, if Dest possibility disappears, only fear will remain. Not to mention, we’ll need to address the fact that someone could try to use her for our extinction, just like Ragna hoped.

Her tears didn’t kill me, I tasted them, savored them on my tongue—and I’m still here. Her blood isn’t just the wildest, most exquisite thing I’ve ever tasted, it also grants immunity to powers. Every part of her is astonishing, untamable—and I intend to uncover every place of her when I bring her back.

The candle wax is nearly spent, plunging the three of us into darkness—xcept for one candle that remains ever borning, enchanted by the little fire salamander, I extinguish the wick of the nearest candle with my fingertips, signaling the end of this search, at least in their company.

“Tomorrow morning, first thing, we leave for Cira’s villa. Don’t make me wait,” I say to Elara’s brother

Though on second thought... they’re not siblings. And I’m not sure whether that should worry me. I know a yearning look when i see one and Silas’s eyes speak of a love far beyond the fraternal. Has he always known? Or is he just a sick bastard? Either way, I don’t want this little shit pestering me for access to her, so for now, I’ll let him come along—but once she’s back, things will change.

Heave the library via the stairs with no intention of returning to my chambers, where the scent of desperation and chaos await me. Instead, i veer to the left of the entrance hall, ignoring the grand staircase, and stop before a half-hidden little door. I open it, hearing

the hinges protest. I descend the dusty stairs until I stand before the long comidor full of cells. My guards patrol the area—one every few meters—and two specifically posted at either side of **Ragna's** cell, the prisoner I'm most eager to kill and yet continue to keep alive. Her death does not belong to me.

I glance inside; seeing her disheveled, filthy, and emaciated eases the itch in my chest.

"Careful, vampire. I'm starting to think you're obsessed with me."

"Maybe you're not wrong. I'm obsessed with the sound of your screams when I torture **you**."

Her mismatched eyes—one gold, one green—are dulled. She doesn't want to show how truly tired and drained she is. I gesture with my chin toward my men. One of them opens the cell and steps inside, lifting Ragna by the arm and seating her in the chair where I've enacted her worst nightmares

"Did

I you make her scream like this too?"

Her provocations are her way of showing she isn't broken—that no matter how much pain inflict, he will can endure it. I don't care. I'm **like** the sea pounding against the rocks, wearing them down over time. I'm not patient, but I can try. Maybe long enough for Elara to return and

**end** her.

"Interested in your torturer's sex life?"

"Well, that would be the case if I thought she ever felt any desire for you. But we both know she hated you."

She deliberately uses past tense to talk about Her—she knows it makes me clench my jaw.

"You'd be surprised how quickly hatred turns to desire."

"Are you going to desire me, Cassian?" Her voice purrs like a cat

"I'd have to hate you first—and all I feel **for** you is disgust." I grip her chin. "Besides, trying to seduce me doesn't suit you. We both know that Stop insulting me by pretending otherwise."

"Oh, now you think you know me?"

"It's not that hard—you're a harpy. Basic. Hollow inside

She laughs, though it sounds more like a dry cough, the result of her dehydration

“You’re funny, I’ll give you that. How are you coping with Elara being with Ciro? A little birdie told me he’s always wanted revenge on you. Women are dangerous, aren’t they? We seem like the weaker sex—dull, easy to manipulate... but wars are waged over us. What’s more powerful than being the reason behind a massacre?”

I clench my teeth, feel my fangs snap together.

“Shut your mouth.”

Before the guard **leaves** the cell and gives us privacy, he tears open the back of Ragna’s tattered dress. The welts from my last flogging **are** healing. I don’t enjoy cruelty toward women just for the **sake** of it—but I’ve never made a distinction when it comes to revenge, and I’m not

about to **start** now.

I reach for my favorite object of the past few weeks. Open my palm. Embrace the weight of the barbed whip grip the handle, feel the leather creak under my gloves—and for the first time today, I know I’ll be able to case a bit of the **rage** burning in my chest. I lick my lower lip and watch **as** fear trickles into Ragna’s eyes, even if she tries to hide it. We’re all victims of fear, whether we admit it or not.

“Tell me, Ragna—**where** are the rest of your men?”

“Tell me, Cassian—where do you think Elara is now that she’s just an empty shell?”

My grip on the whip tightens, trying to ignore the fact that she knows things despite her captivity. Maybel should kill all my guards just to be sure none of them are talking. I crack the whip in the air, grazing her skin—softly, compared to what’s coming. Other men might hesitate to torture her. But I’m no man. I’m a monster with manners, dressed in a suit—sometimes.

Her death is not mine. But for now, I can settle for her screams.

Elara than before.

I snap the whip again—and with it, lose a little more off my sanity. I don’t feel any closer to **El**

**AD**

Comment

# Sold to the Night Lord

I've been walking through this place for hours, days, maybe even weeks. There's no day or night here, no sun or cars Just an infinite stretch of barren land

I **walk** and walk, draining all my strengths until i collapse lo my i

y knees on the ground, hoping to reach that pale light stretching across the horizon, to find something more than this endless nothing. Again and again, I end up exhausted, passed out on the ground until regain enough strength to take another step. The curious thing, I don't feel hunger, thirst, or sleep. It's as if my body has a limited charge that runs out and recharges every time Haint

Nothing seems different this time or so i thin

til in the distance, breaking the horizon, I see the unmistakable silhouette of a woman.

No matter how much I want to move faster, my steps remain agonizingly slow, I don't know how much time passes—likely *far* more than think before I get close enough to see her more clearly. She seems completely unaware of me.

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Suddenly, she clutches her chest as if in pain and lets **out a** thunderous scream that would split the sky—if there were anything like that here.

I stumble on my feet, startled by such a display of agony. I fall on my backside and dig my nails into the dead soil surrounding me. The woman, still clutching her chest, screams again into the air, **and** the sound shakes me from head to toe. Her hair is the color of flames. cascading down to her waist in wild curls. Despite the pained expression on her face, she is beautiful.

A movement between her legs catches my attention, and with genuine horror, I watch as something I cannot name forces its way inside her. It has no face or shape—it's a dense darkness that enters her and makes her scream in agony

“I will not bend, I will not bend,” the woman cries **out** between screams.

Though her body twists in pain and that thing forces itself into her, she doesn't fall, doesn't bend. She places **one** hand on her back and the other on her chest, breathing heavily. Sweat bedds on her forehead, **and** that vivid red hair clings to **her** cheeks. Her eyes look in my direction, but nothing suggests she actually sees me.

A new faceless creature appears, shaped like a serpent, and coils tightly around her leg, tearing her skin **until** blood pours out. The woman screams again in torment. I'm filled



with helplessness. I try to stand and run to her aid—unsuccessfully. It’s as if an invisible weight is pressing down on me, holding me in place

More of those creatures appear, so many it’s painful to look at. Meanwhile, the woman screams, but she does not fall, does not bend, does not kneel. She looks upward, at what should be the sky—though all we see above is red—and **gives** it the most defiant look I have ever witnessed.

“One day, my children will populate your beloved land, and I will make their purpose the slaughter of yours. Blood will be their feast, and screams, their lullabies. **Today**

you’ll have my cries and bears—only today. Never again.”

Then, six scarlet tears slide down her cheeks and fall to the ground, watering the earth with blood. A sound erupts so loud the ground beneath my hands trembles. My heart races in fear. From the earth, the blood, and the filth, a body begins to form. I know it is a body—can distinguish arms and legs, hands and feet.

The astonishingly beautiful woman watches with a mix **of** awe **and** torment as what appears to be a full-grown human takes shape before her Little by little, what looked like soil becomes pale skin, the grime gives way to black hair, sharp maits, toned arms, and a grin full of white teeth and pointed fangs.

A man—naked, devastatingly attractive, **and** fully formed—rises there, between her and me. He drops to one knee, bows his head to hide his **face**, and **his** voice caresses my ears likervelvet.

“Mother, Fam here, to serve.”

**1/2**

11:32 Frl, 8 Aug

One by one, live more beings join him. Three men and three women in total, who, when they turn around, seem so lock their gaze a Their undeniable beauty makes it clear what they are,

The firstborn children of Lilith.

**AD**

Comment

## Sold to the Night Lord

## Chapter 126

Cassian

I haven't slept a single minute knowing I would see Elara again after several days without hearing anything from her. The dream (had disturbed me, and now I can't get it out of my head. The image of her disintegrating between my fingers, that ashen cracked skin, and her eyes—those damn gray eyes—looking at me with blame. So it doesn't surprise me that when i mach the gates of the Amery villa, i ruch Inside like a desperate man. I don't need any servant to guide me know exactly where to go. My feet have walked the same path for weeks, with: hope that deflates every damn time.

This time is no different. Ciro is leaning against the door to Clara's chambers.

Correction: Elara's temporary chambers.

Soon take her back with me.

"I hope your efforts yield better results this time. I can't wait to spend some time with her."

The leather of my

gloves creaks as i clench my fists tightly.

"Stop provoking me."

"Am I?" Ciro replies, raising an eyebrow

Silas's clumsy and rushed footsteps distract me from my rage for a moment and probably prevent me from starting a fight Ciro isn't really a rival—his strength can't compare to mine. The problem is the conflict it would cause with the others. I don't think it's the right time to trigger an internal war, though every day it feels more impossible to avoid.

It's **just** a matter of time before one of my moves sets off alarms. Elara is mine—she has been from the moment my eyes landed on her, maybe even since **her** first breath—and I won't let either vampires or the Treaties take that from me. I curse the day my parents decided to add that fine print: that the owner of a feeder must be compensated monetarily or in kind.

In kind. That's what they are to us.

see you've brought the brother." Ciro nods his chin in recognition. "How

considerate of you."

I literally growl, I can't help the primal, animal instinct rising to the surface. I pass by him, Silas close behind me, and before Ciro can say something else that tests my patience, I slam the door shut, Clarissa and **Naida** clutch their chests at the noise and stifle a gasp when they

"Your sister is in there. I nod toward the room across the small sitting area. "You have a few minutes."

"But

"No buts."

From here, I'll be able to hear perfectly everything Silas says, and at the first **suspicious** sound, I won't hesitate to be at his side. I don't trust him—not now, especially now that I know there's no true familial bond between them. I cast a final glance in the direction he disappeared and walk toward Elara's maids.

"Any news?" I whisper into both of their minds..

They share a significant look before the older one, **Clarissa**, scribbles a few words on a piece of paper. We communicate this way to avoid curious ears—or rather, Ciro's supernatural hearing. I don't want him knowing more than necessary.

What she's written makes me frown,

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"Are you sure?" I whisper again.

They both nod in unison.

If what they say is true, there might still be hope.

They claim Elara has been dreaming, moving, and speaking in her sleep and though it might not seem like much, none of the victims of the Shattering have shown the ability to dream, let alone speak while unconscious. Once again, Elara defies all expectations.

"And him? Is he getting too close to her?"

Clarissa writes again, informing me that Ciro visits Elara a couple of times a **day**, always keeping his distance—or at least trying to act the gentleman I'm not. I know that won't last long if Elara manages to wake from this catatonic state. He won't be able to resist her, the wild scent of her blood, the furious heat of her gaze. Not even I could.

I nod and hesitate for a moment. I feel that my next question is unlike me, but out of loyalty or duty to Elara, I must ask it.

“Does he treat you properly?”

Their eyes widen. It takes them a moment to break from their stupor and nod. I nod back and walk away, letting them return to whatever it is they do when not beside Elara. I pace the small sitting room, covering the short distance that separates me from her chambers. Just as I’m about to cross the threshold, I take a deep breath. I know my nightmare isn’t real. Even so, when I look toward her bed, I brace to see her gray, cracked **skin**.

Silas **is** holding her hand, staring at her while Elara looks at the ceiling, oblivious to him and everything around her. There’s no trace of my nightmare—at least not the one I feared—though Elara lying there is **a** nightmare in itself, one I cannot escape.

“Clarissa and Naida will prepare you some tea **while you** wait,” I say as a farewell.

I know he wants to argue by the way he presses his lips and **glares** at me, but he knows well that nothing he **says** will make me change my mind. I watch him kiss Elara’s forehead, and I have to clench my jaw to stop myself from shoving him away. I’ve never felt this for anyone, and I need a moment to bury the sensation deep within me.

Once we’re alone, I sit on the edge of the bed and brush a stray lock from her cheek, my knuckles grazing the skin that has lost its warmth since that day, if I lifted her upper lip, would I find fangs? According to her maids, no. Apparently, something in Elara fights to hide her nature.

“They told me you spoke **in** your sleep,” I say into her mind, hearing my own words echo through the empty walls that now form her mind. “Do you hate me so much that you **won’t** even gift me the sound of your voice? You used to be incapable of staying quiet in my presence. You always had something to say. Always wanted to contradict me. Want to know a secret? I used to look forward to those moments. When everyone else bows at your feet, finding someone like you is refreshing. Of course, I don’t settle for just a breath of fresh air. I want it all. So I’ll bring you back and steal **it**, Elara, Your tears, your smiles, your words, your touches, your means. Everything”

I fall silent for a while, knowing I won’t get a reply, and yet I still hold on to a sliver of hope. Tired of this, I get to work. I try applying the new things **I’ve** discovered, reciting small chants Evanora prepared for me, in case one might work. One after another, I put them to the test

without success.

I squeeze Elara’s hand tightly—her fingers are thinner. I see the IV bag connected to her arm, which doesn’t seem to be enough to maintain her normal weight. She’s thinner, slowly disappearing into the sheets.

Maybe that’s not what she needs...

I don't think much before acting on impulse. I sink my fangs into my wrist and let a few drops of **blood** fall onto her slightly parted lips. I watch them slide inside her mouth. If my heart beat it would probably stop now. To the human eye, the slight movement of her pupils and the faint shift in her throat might go unnoticed—but not to me. I see it clearly, and a small smile tugs at my lips.

I let more drops slide between her lips, and with each one, I see small signs—details that reveal something is still there. Something I cannot

**2/3**

access, but that keeps Elara tethered to life. A Broken One wouldn't dreams, much less eat. They are condemned to a slow, prolonged, and certain death. I don't know how long I wait before deciding she's had enough blood lean over her, staring into her lost gray eyes as m mouth lowers to hers. I taste the remnants of my own blood on her lips, which I slowly lick away to erase any trace of what I've done Cita

doesn't need to know

The kiss lingers, and without pulling back completely, I whisper against her mouth:

"It must be fate's joke that of all people, you're the one who holds the key to saving us. You, who hate me, who hate what I am. I wish I could say we're the same now, but we're not. You're extraordinary..

"Maybe a kiss will bring her back—just like in the fairy tales"

Far from pulling away or showing surprise, I take my time separating from her and facing Ciro. His face shows no sign that he heard us or paid attention to what I whispered. Even so, I stay on guard.

"What do you want?"

"Results," he replies with a shrug. "Though I see I won't get what I want today, I'll settle for watching you leave."

## Sold to the Night Lord

### Chapter 127

graze **Elara's** cheek one last time, drinking in her image. Her cheeks seem a little more flushed, her lips fuller, Without rush, Trise from the bed and square my shoulders. I make sure my clothes are smooth and walk until I'm face to face with Ciro. My nose brushes his as rock eyes

with those pink, bisexual

“You think you’re something now that you have Elara under your roof. But I guarantee that will end and every single one of your insults will come back to haunt you. You cling to my parents’ Treaties now, but remember my name well—and the insults you hurt at it. Neither you nor the entire Council will protect you from my fury I’ll decide to end you.”

“Only your fear speaks,” he replies smugly. “Because you know that when she wakes up, she won’t want anything to do with you. You’re her worst nightmare.”

“And you think you’re so different?”

“Let me tell you something.” He leans his face even closer to mine. “It’s not just your nature she hates—it’s everything you represent. You tore her from her home, locked her in the cage that is your castle, and condemned her to be alone and cast aside. You’re not just the vampire who bought her—you are her ruin.”

“I’ve never pretended to be anything else, and she knows it.”

I slowly form a smile that reveals my fangs, and I step away from him—but not without casting one last look at the body on the bed. I cross the sitting room and see the maids whispering with Silas, who lifts his eyes the moment he feels me enter the room. With one gesture, I signal him to leave, and with another, let the maids know I’ll return soon. As I reach the hallway, my body collides with another, and expect to see the frightened face of one of Ciro’s servants—not that of Aeron, followed by his feeder, Walter,

\*What are you doing here?”

“Let’s talk for a moment,” Aeron says, grabbing my shoulder

I see his feeder vanish in the direction I just came from, and for a few seconds I stand still, doing nothing, rethinking whether I like him being

**near** Elara.

I let Aeron keep his grip on my shoulder as he leads us to a secluded **corner**

, away from curious ears. He sighs, as if gathering courage. I know I’m not the easiest person to deal with right now—not when I’m this irritable. Then again, I’ve always **had** a volatile temper

“What do you want to tell me?”

“Isn’t there anything you want to tell me?” he counters.

“No, not that I know of.”

He scoffs, almost mockingly, before looking at me again with a grimace.

“A month ago, you **disappeared** with men and ships, and came **back** with many of them dead.” He raises an eyebrow and crosses his arms. “Don’t think I don’t know what’s going on. I might not know the details, but I know that whatever it is you did, it cost us men. Loyal Diluted died because of you—because of a cause you haven’t shared with any of us.”

“They’re my Diluted—I pay them. So they belong to me.”

“You’re right; however, you should be more careful when our situation is this delicate. The number of rebel Diluted is growing, and we can’t afford to lose even a single life.”

“Oh, really?” I reveal my fangs in a biting smile. “Did you care about Ciro’s life when the Council—yourself included—agreed to let him steal my **feeder**?”

**1/3**

“You’ve seen what the Treaties say he’s entitled to compensation for the damage you caused. An eye for an eye, Cassan-

“And a tooth for a tooth,” I declare. “You’ve now caused me damage. Perhaps I should claim compensation myself. What do you say i

Walter?”

“He’s just a human, Cassian. You can have as many as you want,”

i think your answer makes it clear not all humans are the same. Elara is to me what Walter is to you, isn’t she? isn’t his blood more exquisite Don’t your eyes follow him around the room? Don’t your dreams grow deeper when you sleep beside him? What would happen if I took him from you? How many men would you send to their deaths to get him back?”

My words press relentlessly, and my body follows, coming Aeron against the wall until our chests almost touch.

“It she meant to you what Walter means to me, you wouldn’t have done what you did, Cassian. She’s gone. You’ve condemned her to something worse than death.” He swallows Hard. “You don’t love anyone. You know it. You don’t feel like the rest of us do

“You’re wrong.” I grab his neck, and the leather of my glove doesn’t stop me from feeling his skin cold as marble. “I feel so much more.”

I squeeze tightly, and it’s the whimper behind my back that **makes** me release him. Walter looks at me with wide, terrified eyes and doesn’t even try to hide his relief when I step away from his master. He runs to him, but Aeron recovers quickly and gestures for him to

stay back. I – don't know why he bothers trying to keep his distance—everyone knows their relationship crossed the line of the merely physical years ago. I fix my gaze on him one last time, with the unspoken promise that I'll make him pay for all this one **day**.

The Council has been trying to speak to me for **a** month now; Aeron is the most persistent, but I have no interest in listening to any **of** their problems or concerns. Not when my mind is consumed by something else entirely.

Outside the mansion, Silas is waiting for me, already mounted on his horse. If it weren't for him, I'd run all the way home and be there in minutes. Instead, we ride on horseback for hours and reach the castle deep into the night.

I don't stop to speak to anyone. I dismount and let one of the servants take the horse to the stables. I ignore every stare thrown my way as I head directly to the dungeons. The guards are surprised to see me but they try to hide it. My boots make enough noise to wake my captive

from her sleep.

Ragna is sitting on her cot, knees drawn to her chest, chin resting on them.

**"You** don't look pleased."

"Shut up."

I signal to one of the guards to hand me the key to her cell. I insert it into the lock and twist it under her watchful gaze

"Don't you hear it?" she asks with a tone far too cheerful for my liking

I step into the cell, the darkness not enough to hide the stains of dried blood on the rags that were once a beautiful dress just as the shackle around her neck clinks as she tilts **her** head to study me curiously.

"Don't you hear the songs, Cassian?"

\*Shut your damn mouth."

I reach into the shadows for my barbed whip.

month ago.

"I see you still haven't brought her back, she sings mockingly. "Maybe she doesn't want to come back. Not when **she** knows eternity with **you** awaits. That is, if **you** survive."



I crack the whip in the air—menacing—and grab her jaw in my hand. I squeeze with such force I can feel her teeth pressing **against** the ligde

Chapter **127**

of her cheeki.

“The one who won’t survive is you if you don’t shut up right now

“You won’t kill me. My death isn’t yours to claim.” She smiles despite my grip. “Don’t you hear the songs?”

“What songs?” I finally play along

“The songs of war. They’re here already. They’ve come for me”

“You’re insane.”

“Maybe,” she purrs. “But the truth is I’ll be leaving this place, Cassian, Islip through your fingers le sand, and you won’t be able to stop it.”

“You’re delirious”

“I have very powerful people on my side. There’s nothing you can do. It’s just a matter of time—and your time is running out. Tick,tock, fic, tock, Cassian. Tick...tock.”

**AD**

Comment

Send gift

## Sold to the Night Lord

Chapter **128**

Elara

At some point, my body must have given in. Now, getting up from the floor that serves as my mattress, look around, I’m still in this shadowy place; however, there’s no trace of what I saw before. The red haired woman, who I now know for sure is Lilith, is no longer here. Horre those she called her children.

Where does that leave us? Are they my siblings then? My heart turns over in my chest at the thought. Lilith is my mother. I lower my gaze to my hands, expecting to see my fingers stained with the sin that runs through my veins; however, there's nothing

My heart aches as I relive the loss I felt upon discovering the truth. My family was never really mine. I have hated with all my being not only my true family but also what I am, Will I ever be able to reconcile with that? Will I be able to look at myself in the mirror and not hate what I

5007

With those thoughts weighing heavily in my heart, I begin to walk, I don't know where to go, but standing still will drive me insane. So I walk toward the horizon line, hoping this vast nothingness will end soon, I want to go back-anywhere-but I want to stop being alone. I'm afraid I'll disappear if I stay here. **What** is this **place**? Maybe I'm dead, and I'm wandering in limbo, or worse, maybe this is the Underworld. My eternal punishment to wander this dead land, with my thoughts gnawing at my insides and the certainty of being forgotten.

Alight shines brightly in the distance, and I am desperate for something-a clue, anything-to get out or understand where I am, I run toward it. It grows more intense as I approach. I squint and try to shield myself with my hand. A great flash of light bursts, and then, before my eyes, I see a man. His dark hair brushes his shoulders, and he stands with his back to me. His clothes are black with metal accents that clink as he walks. He looks muscular beneath all that clothing. A purple trail follows him, and immediately I know he isn't just a man.

"Hey," I say, not quite sure if I should try to get his attention,

if he hears me, my words fall on deaf ears. He keeps walking, and I realize our surroundings have changed. Not enough to be pleasant, but at least I see water. There's a lake-its water doesn't look clean-but a woman is bathing in it. Not just any woman Lilith

"Did you call me?"

The man's voice **is** deep, far too deep. I feel it down to my bones. However, it's not unpleasant; on the contrary, it gives me goosebumps in the most delightful way. Lilith reveals part of her chest as she rises from the water. Her hair, now a dark blood-red, falls soaked, covering her

**breasts.**

"Our time is running out," she **says.**

I used to think smiles couldn't be **sad**. I was wrong. The one tugging at Lilith's lips is devastating. Full of sorrow and anguish she still tries to disguise. The man, still without a

name or face, takes a step toward her. Then another, and another, and finally, he has her in his arms.

ne, as if someone were holding my cheeks

I feel I should look **away**, stop watching this private moment; yet my eyes remain fixed on the scene, and forcing me to watch.

“I can fix it.”

“You can’t.” She shakes her head. “I knew they find me. They always do. They claim to be enemies, but I’m sure he whispers where I am so they’ll **find** me

“I can’t stand you being with him.”

Lilith holds the man’s face in her hands and looks at him with a gaze overflowing with intense emotion.

“He only has my body. He will never have my mind or my hearL”

Her smile softens. “We’ve done something rentarkable, something that’s going to change history”

He turns his face away, as if looking at her causes him physical **pain**.

“Do you hate me?”

“I should,” he says, “You made me love you, and now you’re going to go with him. It doesn’t matter that it’s not you me light. In an Ancient God, Lilith.”

“We can’t take the risk. You must take care of her

you should let

At that moment she steps fully out of the water, revealing a swollen belly. The man’s hand rests on it, caressing the skin with his thumb. Lith smiles as she places her hand over his, so small in comparison, Looking at her, she doesn’t resemble the woman I saw in my delirium at all. She looks like an innocent girl—who would ever think she’s the mother **of** vampires? Time has hardened her, except with him. She looks him as if he were the one responsible for hanging the stars in the sky.

The breath that escapes my lips does so in ragged gasps as I realize what I’m seeing. That’s me, inside Lith, and the hand caressing her belly belongs to Ataroth. The God of everything in between—of what’s neither good nor bad, black nor white, life nor death

I stumble slightly as the reality of the scene hits me.

“She needs her mother. She needs **you**. I won’t be able..

“We’ve talked about this. You must stop being afraid. You’ll love her just as you love me.”

“You’re the exception, Gods can’t love; it’s not in our nature.”

“Nonsense. You must love in order to reward loyalty with kindness.”

While resting one hand on her belly, Atarothz caresses her cheek with the other. I can’t see his eyes, the way he looks at her, but I’m sure I’d see raw emotion.

“My dear, that’s why we’re not good. We are cruel. Don’t fool yourself into thinking there’s goodness in our hearts.”

“You’ll watch over her, right?” Lilith asks urgently

Atarothz doesn’t answer with words; he only **nods** and draws her into his arms. He doesn’t care that his clothes are getting wet—he just wants to be close to her. Lilith rests her cheek against his chest **and** seems to calm

I take a step back to distance myself from the scene—my true parents. In that moment, Ataroth **turns** his face in my direction, and for the first time since I’ve been in this place, someone seems to see me. I lose my breath when I meet his eyes. They’re a brilliant gray, and they’re looking right at me. I part my lips to speak, and then he brings a finger to his own lips in a gesture of silence.

Now that we’re face to **face**, I wouldn’t use any other word to describe him but perfect. Perfectly beautiful, perfectly terrifying, perfectly lethal. His cheekbones are high, his jaw sharp, and his **lips full** and pink. I can’t stop looking at him, and without realizing it, two trails of hot tears slide down my face.

I bring my fingers to my cheeks, confused by the emotional explosion inside me. Looking at him, I’ve seen my features in him, his features in me, and I’ve felt **less** alone.

“Do you see me?”

It’s a stupid question; however, when he silently nods, a small, timid smite spreads on my lips. I don’t let dark questions take root in my mind just yet, like: Where has he been all this time? Why didn’t he keep his promise to watch over me? Why didn’t he want to **be** my father? Why didn’t he take me with him? Why did he let my **colors** fade?

2/3

2. FM, & Aug

“Later,” he answers.

He moves his fingers, and the purple mist surrounding him stretches toward me, embraces me like a father would his child, everything fades away

# Sold to the Night Lord

## Chapter 129

Cassian

Just like the silence that precedes a natural disaster, silence spreads through the cell. Neither of us breathes or looks away. The first to do so, loses. I hear the vibration of the ground, **as** if a cavalry were approaching the castle gates at full speed, then the growls, and finally the **dull** thud of the main doors swinging wide open, I would recognize that sound anywhere it was the same one that started the night my soul was

infected.

“You lost, Draven.”

I still refuse to be the first to break our staring duel, so I reply with a clenched jaw and eyes stabbing into Ragna like daggers.

“All you’ve done is bring your people to their deaths.”

I signal with my fingers above my head, calling one of the guards. Ragna smiles, showing me her sharp lower canines. Her lack of energy prevents her from completing her transformation, she tries more than once, but only manages to make her eyes glow unnaturally. She blinks, as if trying to shake off the rage surging through her body.

Turning my gaze from her, I back away without turning my back and glance at the guard standing by the door awaiting my orders.

“Keep watch over her. Don’t leave her side no matter what happens.”

pear in the main foyer in seconds. As I imagined, the doors are wide open, He nods, and driven by the sounds of battle, I rush out and appear letting in cold gusts of air. At the foot of the stairs, vampires and shapeshifters are fighting. Drystan runs toward me as soon as he sees me.

“They came out of nowhere,” he explains. “I think they used some kind of spell that cloaked them until it was too late.”

I scan the outside with an analytical eye. I see corpses on both sides, though **the** shapeshifters are more numerous. Seeing those bloodied beasts decorating the stairs doesn’t leave me indifferent.

“What’s the situation?”

“They don’t outnumber us,

s, and although they’re strong, they don’t seem trained. The odds are in our favor

y move with agility now that they’ve shed their sun-protection suits. I lift my eyes to the sky,

**dark as** a I glance once more at our men. They bottomless pit. Everything is in our favor—we are creatures of the night. This is our element. The moon stains no part of the sky, absent, abandoning her children who seem to feel stronger in her presence.

One of them throws one of my men at me, and his body crashes just inches from my feet. The nearly tom soldier stains the floor with his blood. Slowly, I lift my eyes to return my enemy’s gaze, accepting his challenge. I launch myself at him, trying to reach him before he crosses the castle doors. We meet with the burst of a lightning bolt splitting the sky with fury. He clings to my throat, and i to his shoulders. He tries to sink his sharp nails into my flesh, aiming to rip out my throat, that’s when I reveal my true strength and twist his arms into an unnatural position, tearing them away from my neck. He falls to the ground with **a** howl of pain, tries to transform to heal his wounds, but i won’t allow it. I straddle his body and shove my hands into his mouth, gripping his jaws tightly. His eyes fill with panic, trying to escape. I know the smile that curls my lips as I soak in his terror is chilling. Slowly, the skin, muscles, and tendons of his face give way under my strength. The sound of tearing flesh is music to my ears. With a savage and swift yank, I end his **agony** and tear his head in two.

“the distraction to finish him off. I

Anyone would think **this** was a

I hurl what’s left of his head at the feet of another of my enemies, and one of the guards takes advantar turn just in time to see one of them leaping at Drystan. He seems to be handing it well, but I join him stroll through the park, judging by our appearance. We’re barely winded, and our clothes are immaculate—slightly rumpled, maybe.

You okay?”

“Yeah, and you?” He blows a strand of hair from his forehead. “You’re a bit pale.”

“I’m better than I should be under the circumstances.”

I haven’t fed well this past month; I think I can count on my fingers the number of times I’ve done it—and each time it was because he forced

me to.

Amid the frenzy of the fight, it should have gone unnoticed, but something inside me fortifies me to look into the distance, where a familiar masculine figure stands authoritatively, I feel more than see his arrogant smile.

“You’re in command,” Isay

“Wait, **Cassian!** You can’t go alone!”

Too late. I dash toward my new target, closing the distance between us in less than the blink of an eye. He **doesn’t** inch, his smile grows wider. Though he cannot see, he knows exactly where I am.

“Long time no see, Draven.”

**and** ign

I clench my fists and scan our surroundings, looking for more of his kind that might pose a threat. I sharpen my hearing and ignore the sounds of battle behind me, listening for the heartbeat of another lying in wait.

There’s nothing

“Surrender, Rhory. You’re few—you’ll all die here. Ragna won’t set foot outside these walls. I won’t allow it.”

A deep, grave laugh escapes him, making my blood boil. My mind screams at me to attack now and end **it** all.

“You speak with too much certainty for a man who hasn’t been able to protect the people he loves, don’t you **think!**”

“Shut up.”

He tilts his head, looking at me with those milky eyes.

“Do you know how I died? I suppose not,” he says without losing that smile that shows his fangs, longer and sturdier than mine. “It wasn’t an honorable death. I didn’t fall in a great battle **or** sacrificing myself for another. No, I died in an alley, among cardboard boxes and dog piss. I died of hunger—the kind that makes your stomach hurt so much you think it’ll start eating itself just to be filled with something. The years before Ragna’s grandfather died were filled with pain, hunger, and disease. No one was going **to** replace the leader until he took his last breath, and he wasn’t strong enough to keep us afloat. I died not long after my parents. I didn’t see the Lands Beyond or the Pits of the Underworld, only saw darkness and heard icy whispers in my ear. When I came back, it felt like I had been

dreaming, but I returned with the darkness still in my eyes and a gift death gave me without asking.”

I flash a smug smile while keeping a relaxed pose.

“A touching story.”

“Not as much as yours, from what I hear.”

A sensation I’ve never experienced awakens inside me. I’ve heard my gift feels like fingers plucking the strings of an instrument **inside your** mind—a silent threat. But right now, inside my head, I feel a knife trying to make me bleed from within.

“Do you see her?”

At first, I don’t understand what he means, until the scenery around us vanishes and I’m once again inside the castle—but not as I remember it. No, this seems to be from centuries ago. A scream echoes through the halls, pulling **me** completely out of my scrutiny. The voice is **Elara’s** however, everything reminds me of a night in the past, one when I lost a large part of my soul I run, heart in my throat, and upon entering the grand hall, I see shattered chairs strewn across the room, broken dishes on the floor, and the floor stained with blood.

11:33 Fri, 8 Aug:

“**Cassian!**”

## Sold to the Night Lord

### Chapter 130

I hesitate a few seconds before lifting my gaze and facing my greatest nightmare. Yet, my need to save her is much greater. I lock eyes on what lies before me—on the Elarat I remember so well—leaning over the table with her hands behind her back and her face pressed against the surface. Some shards have embedded in her cheeks. Behind her, a faceless man lifts the skirt of her dress.

“You couldn’t do anything for her, Cassian,” Rhory’s voice whispers

I try to find him, but I’m alone, facing a scene that could be a nightmare and yet is a memory that has haunted me for centuries.

“Son, leave!”



Elara's face changes, revealing traces of my mother's features. Slowly, they blend together, confusing me. It becomes harder and harder **to** distinguish what is part of my memory and what isn't. I bring my hands to my head, shaking it from side to side to drive away the image and it happens. The feminine screams are replaced by the groans of combat, and the castle's smell by the scent of the forest, mingled with blood and sweat. I look around for the shapeshifter, more than ready to make him pay and break his mind. I fail. He seems to have vanished as quickly as the memory he brought to the surface.

We retrace our steps and return **inside** to Drystan, who looks much more exhausted than when I left. A new tremor shakes the ground—not from the countless enemy footsteps this time, but from something much bigger. The chandelier sways back and forth, making its crystals tinkle. I look **up** and then at my friend, communicating without words. That was a damn explosion, and something tells me I know exactly where it happened

“Wait here.”

“No way you're going down there alone.”

He completely ignores what I've said and runs with me, assigning responsibility to one of the better-trained guards, I know the battle outside **is** won—now I worry about what the hell is happening in the dungeons. I descend the stairs recklessly, blinking through the clouds of dust. My boot hits something soft. I look down and see what appears to be a severed arm, Drystan and I exchange glances before moving on. My ears ring as we continue forward. Rage blinds me when I see the cell doors **hanging**

loose and chunks of stone fallen. I approach and burn with fury when I see the massive hole in the wall. A tunnel opens outside the castle, loose dirt still falling from it. Of course, Ragna is gone— but it's not too late to catch her.

Without thinking, I run into the tunnel, followed by my right hand. It's irresponsible of us to go alone, without reinforcements, with no one knowing where we're headed. We run at full speed. I try to sharpen my hearing as much as I can, but I don't hear her footsteps. She can't be far—there hasn't been much time since the explosion. I catch a scent. I've come to recognize during her weeks of captivity. I stop and sniff the air more carefully, it's strong here,

“Do you smell it?” I ask.

“She **can't** be far,”

But minutes **pass**, and we find nothing. Ragna's scent grows weaker, and when we backtrack, we smell it strongly in the same spot—but there's no one there. We frantically examine every inch of the tunnel. We reach the exit. No one. Not even footprints on the ground, which makes everything stranger and more complicated.

Rage takes over. Involuntarily, I make the ground tremble beneath our feet. Drystan pats my shoulder in an attempt to calm me

“We caught her once, we’ll do it again.”

I grind my teeth.

“Her capture cost us dearly. I won’t pay such a high price again.”

“You won’t.” He grips my shoulder tighter. “Things will get better, I’m sure. We’ll face this, and you’ll come out strong

I take a deep breath, blink to disperse the rage, and then face my friend, trying to flash corks smile

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“Are you saying I’m not strong enough?”

Drystan bursts out laughing

“That’s what you got from my motivational speech?” He shakes his head, amused. “You won’t be if you keep starving yourself and never sleeping. If you want to be strong for her, you need to change your attitude.”

I don’t know how to explain to him that I don’t want to feed on anyone but her. I’ve become an addict. Everyone else’s blood tastes like copper. They don’t have that wild note roaring in their veins. I can’t sleep either, because in my dreams, I see her. Sometimes she’s in her bed, just like in real life; other times **she’s** on the edge of a cliff, jumping again and again into the roaring waves, and in my worst nightmares, she’s just as I remember her her hair shines, her smile is shy, but she’s not with me. She’s in someone else’s arms, offering him her blood and her smiles. I’m selfish because I want her with me. I **want** her to look at me and smile because she wants to—because I make her happy I want her to give me her **blood** because she enjoys the ecstasy of feeding and being fed as much as do. I want to give her my blood in return. want her to be mine, body and soul. Maybe I want to belong to someone too—I don’t know.

“Come on, let’s go back. There’s nothing more we can do here.”

We return to the castle. Assess the situation: the dungeons are mostly destroyed, the gardens have suffered some damage, the main stairs show partial collapse but otherwise, everything is fine. Nothing a few days of repairs and cleanup can’t fix. Bloodstain removal is a specialty here. I **order** Mavka—miraculously still alive after the disaster—moved to one of the guest rooms now that the dungeons are destroyed.

Evanora is at the foot of the stairs leading to the upper floor, watching the aftermath of the massacre from the safety of the indoors. The wind whips her **face**, and her eyes seem lost in nothingness.

“We **need** to talk,” I say curtly,

**She** blinks out of her trance, and both she and Drystan look at me incredulously, aware of my opinion of the banshee.

“What do we need to talk about?” she asks.

“Is it possible Naja is helping the shapeshifters?”

She frowns.

“I don’t think that’s possible.”

I take a step closer to her, and from the corner of my eye I see Drystan’s movement. He tries to approach the banshee, thinking there’s a chance I might hurt her. Despite the differences I may have with her, I wouldn’t do anything to Evanora if it meant hurting my friend. I’m a monster—but even monsters need at least one person who sees them as more than something despicable. That person is Drystan to me.

“it’s not enough for me that you don’t believe it’s possible. I want you to be completely sure.”

“Why?”

He completely ignores Drystan’s protective closeness.

“They got past the protective spells that suffound the grounds.

Also, we didn’t feel or hear their **presence** until they were practically on top of us. That’s not possible, not without magical help.”

“It wasn’t Naja,” she states. “I’m sure

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“Are you?”

She bites her lower lip, shifting her weight from one foot to the other. For a moment, she avoids our gaze and shares off into nowhere, deep

thought.

“Just like I have my own reasons to be wary of you,” she says, at which I raise an eyebrow in slight surprise. The past few weeks made it clege that her wariness doesn’t include Drystan. I’m sure they’ve grown closer. “Naja has something against them. She doesn’t like them. F’in pure she didn’t lend them her magic.”

“And what if it was Eleazar who got them the help?”

She shakes her head.

“Eleazar didn’t ask for that kind of spell.” She sighs heavily. She has dark circles under her eyes, and the mask she usually wears to hide the scars around her mouth has been forgotten somewhere. “Eleazar wanted a different kind of protection.”

“What are you talking about?”

“He wanted us to take someone in,” she **says** with resignation.

“Who?”

She hesitates to answer, and that makes my blood boil. It’s **as** if she holds some kind of loyalty toward him, and I won’t tolerate anyone feeling that toward that traitorous bastard. We may have our differences, but helping the shapeshihers? Those rabid dogs would destroy Drystia if given the chance.