

# Sold to the Night Lord

# Sold to the Night Lord

## hapter 141

### Chapter 141

“You **can be** jealous.”

He curves his lips into a mischievous smile.

“**In** fact, I love that you’re jealous.”

We stay in each other’s arms just a little longer until he sets me back on my feet, and as I lose some of his warmth, a shiver runs down my

spine.

“I’ll find a way to bring you back to me.”

“There is a way,” I say, and at his expectant silence, I continue. “I’m not human—in fact, I’m part Pureblood. I’m one of yours. Therefore, I could stop being anyone’s feeder the moment I expose that truth.”

“You know what would happen.”

“I know. That’s why we should wait.”

I take a deep breath.

“I need to understand myself better, know what I’m capable of, control my abilities so I’m prepared in case everything spirals out of control.”

He opens his mouth to say something, but quickly closes it. We both fall silent, and then I hear what made him stop. Footsteps. Far off, but without a doubt heading this way.

“It’s **Ciro**,” he says, his eyes already scanning the room. “Don’t let him into the room. He’ll smell me. Open the door and get him away from here. We’ll meet at the ballroom.”

“He’ll smell you on me,” I clarify.

“You’ve always smelled like me. Even when you’re with him.”

His words stir a painful pleasure low in my belly. I glance quickly at the mirror, checking that everything is as it should be. I apply some lipstick and a little perfume, all under Cassian's attentive gaze. The steps are getting closer—it's only a matter of seconds before he's here. I rush to the door, but before I reach it, he brushes my hand to stop me.

"What does he want?" he asks.

The footsteps stop in front of the threshold and a few knocks echo in the air. I look away from him and hurry to open it. At the same time, I force open the tightly sealed doors in my mind and slide a thought through them, hoping he'll hear it:

"He wants me to fall in love with him."

I open the door, trying to appear calm. Ciro stands radiant, confident, wearing a white shirt and one of his perfectly pressed vests. He offers me his hand with a smile.

"You look stunning."

He kisses my knuckles as I accept his hand

"Red is definitely your color, Elara."

I smile shyly and take a step outside, wanting to put distance between Cassian and Ciro as quickly as possible. He grabs my hand and places

## Chapter 141

**It over his forearm.** I turn to close the door behind **me**, subtly searching **for any sign that** might reveal the presence of the other

**the room**, but everything is just as it was before—no sign that he is of was there, much less of what **we** did. **I have to suppress** a sigh of rel **as**

**I shut** the door and face Ciro again. I let him lead me down the hallway, and the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end when a slips into my head:

"Will he succeed?"

I bite my lip to avoid smiling. I don't need Ciro suspecting that I'm now having private conversations with the man he hates most. I **won't** lis

argue over. But the connection between my desire took possession of me back there, and I know we have many things to talk about, many to a us **is** undeniable. From the start, there was something pulling us toward each other, no matter how much we claimed to hate one another. Our bond is stronger—something beyond limits, something divine.

“Are you afraid?” I tease him.

We reach a pair of oak double doors that open without being touched. Beyond them is an explosion of faces—some familiar, others completely unknown to me. There are women in various states of undress—some engaged in sexual acts, others dancing or serving blood from jars they balance on their heads. Ciro slides his hand to the small of my back, showing us as close for the others. His grip tightens for a fraction of a second, and I understand why when I see from the corner of my eye a figure entering with an authoritative stride, wearing a suit as black as night and eyes so blue they freeze you.

To see him, no one would guess that just minutes ago he was inside me, and that now I have his essence sliding between my thighs. As if he can hear that thought, Cassian throws a mocking smile in our direction.

“I hope his presence won’t be a problem,” Ciro whispers in my ear.

“Why should it be?”

“I don’t know if his feelings are returned.”

“I thought I’d made my feelings toward you both very clear.”

Contrary to what I expected, he doesn’t lead us toward the group of men that includes Cassian. Instead, he takes us to the dance floor, where the gazes directed at us are anything but discreet. We draw everyone’s attention. All eyes shift between us and the vampire watching with **ice-** cold eyes. I think people are holding their breath, expecting a murder. Ciro loves a good show, so he smiles proudly at all the attention. With his hand in mine and the other on my waist, he guides us across the floor to the rhythm of the music.

“I hope those feelings might change.”

“What makes you think I could see you differently in a month? I lived under the same roof as Cassian for almost two months.”

“I’m not a monster.”

I stop avoiding his gaze and focus on *those* mesmerizing pink eyes. He says he’s not a monster, but I fear none of them can help it. It’s their ruthless nature. That nature now runs in my veins too, and I’ve felt its madness up close—the thirst for blood. It doesn’t matter how good your intentions are; there’s always something stronger than that, stronger than your values: the hunger.

“We’re all the monster in someone’s story.”

I glance over his shoulder, toward my own monster. His gaze is so cold and merciless it steals the breath from my lungs. His face is **etched** with rage. Ciro's grip on me tightens, but I don't care if he's caught me looking at him.

"I'm not afraid, Elara. The one who should be is him. He doesn't know that you are the thin thread holding my sanity **together**," Cassian whispers with a lover's softness.

## Chapter 142

# Sold to the Night Lord

## Chapter 142

## Chapter 142

Elara

I stopped feeling my feet a while ago. I've been passed from one pair of arms to another constantly—many men, Purebloods, have wanted to dance with me. Unlike Cassian, Ciro doesn't act possessive, except when it comes to him. At no point during the evening have we been near each other, and yet I've felt his gaze on me the entire time, burning my body, awakening every cell.

**The** one I hope is my last dance of the night ends, and I run to a nearby wall, placing my hand on it to soothe my aching feet.

"I was worried sick about you."

I turn around abruptly at the sound of Walter's voice. I don't even have time to look him in the eyes before his arms are already wrapping around me in a warm hug.

"You have to tell me everything," he says beside my ear.

I pull away, hands resting on his arms, and look at him. He has a smile hanging from his lips, and his brown hair falls over his eyes. He looks

radiant.

"What exactly do you know?"

"Oh, well, nothing much. One night you appeared at a ball hanging off Cassian's arm, right after there was an attack, and later the only thing I know is that you became Ciro's feeder, apparently Broken by none other than your former master."

His eyes darken with concern.

“I thought he... cared about you.”

and I don't jump to his defense. I won't deny that part of me still isn't sure about everything. Cassian confuses me. One moment he hates me, the next he worships my body as if it were the most precious thing to ever fall into his hands. My head can't forget that before me, his lips had touched another. It's foolish of me—I've seen women on their knees offering him attention, I've seen him surrounded by lovers before. But knowing there was a human before me undeniably makes me jealous. I've never been special, and thinking that he, among all of them, wasn't strong enough to resist his desire for me made me feel different. I don't know what to believe—how much of what has come from his lips is true. I can't blindly trust anyone.

“I told you many times you were misinterpreting things,” I finally say.

“His gaze was easy to misinterpret, I swear.”

The corners of his mouth twist into a sad smile.

“I don't understand how he could do that to you.”

4 respond by imitating his smile.

“You know what? I'll talk to Aeron. Maybe there's a way to visit you so we can catch up. Things are very tense.”

A memory from one of my last conversations/with Ciro floods me. If his words are true, I'm not a captive here—I can come and go whenever I please.

“Maybe I can come to you. I don't think Ciro would object.”

“Seriously?”

the

11:36 Fri, **8 Aug** – O D

Chapter **142**

**He can't** hide his **surprise**. I nod.

“That would be fantastic. Truth is, Aeron's been really busy lately and it's been hard for him to find time to bring me...”

“I **think** it's sweet that Aeron still brought you to visit.”

I quickly look for the vampire and find his eyes on us. He can't hide his interest in Walter.

“If he’s trying to hide the two of you, he’s not being very discreet, is he?”

“I think he’s starting to notice.”

He lowers his voice.

“We’ve been the source of quite a bit of gossip lately.”

“Is that bad?”

“Apparently, most vampires find it quite dishonorable to have an intimate relationship with your feeder. Of course, you can drink their blood, even have sex if you want—but feelings? That’s absolutely unthinkable.”

The irony in his voice doesn’t go unnoticed.

“They’re a bunch of hypocrites. Aeron wants to keep a bit of distance in public.”

“And what do you think about it?”

His gaze shifts toward him, who has stopped watching us and is now focused on a conversation with another lower-ranking Pureblood. I study my friend closely, and it’s impossible not to notice the shine of love in his eyes.

“I don’t want anyone to be ashamed of being with me.”

“Walter...”

“I don’t want anyone to hide me. I’m not a mistake.”

My hand seeks his, we intertwine our fingers, and I’m thinking of what to say to comfort him when another presence joins us. Ciro’s expensive scent wraps around me easily, and the warmth of his palm settles at the small of my back.

“Would you mind accompanying me for a moment, Elara?”

I face him, narrowing my eyes and wondering if I really have the option of saying no. With Cassian, I could only obey—especially in public. Nothing and no one could question his power.

“Where to?”

“I think there’s someone you need to see.”

He leans down to whisper in my ear: /

“I suppose you’ll want to say goodbye.”

He’s very sure this has caught my attention, so he grabs my hand and pushes me across the room to a door that leads us away **from the joy of** the celebration. I glance over my shoulder at Walter, who gives me a farewell wave. The doors close, and despite the darkness flooding **the** hallways, my vision is better than it was months ago. We turn through several corridors until I hear a door handle and **the next thing I see is** the interior of a room—elegant like the rest—and Cassian standing in the middle. The fire in the hearth **illuminates**

his **features**.

11:36 Fri, **8** Aug

“What is this?” Lask.

My voice trembles. For a moment, I fear that Ciro has discovered the truth—that he knows that no matter what he tells me, I will eventually return to Cassian. I chose my villain a long time ago. I’d rather fight him than face beautiful faces and sweet words that might be more poisonous than a serpent. Or maybe he’s discovered something worse. Maybe he knows the truth about what I am, what I could mean for his race. That thought chills my blood.

“I thought you two should have a chance to say goodbye, considering you lived together for several months and he seems to have grown fond of you.”

“I don’t think that’s necessary,” Cassian says coldly. “After all, I’ll still see her as your escort at parties and gatherings.”

“That’s true.”

Ciro raises an eyebrow.

“Though I don’t think you’ll be able to be as close as before. You’d do well to accept my little offering.”

“How considerate of you.”

Sarcasm drips from every word leaving the vampire’s mouth, accompanied by a tight smile. Ciro doesn’t let it affect his perfect and calm image on the contrary, he smiles and nods before stepping out of the room and closing the door.

“He’s listening to us,” Cassian whispers in my mind.

“I guess this is goodbye,” I say coldly.

“I’m afraid it is.”

He matches my tone.

“I’ll find a way to get close to you.”

“How?”

“I don’t know.”

“At least I won’t bother you anymore,” I say *to* give Ciro something to hear. Cassian’s gaze sharpens and he raises a challenging eyebrow.

“Ciro told me I’m not his prisoner. I can come and go as I please.”

“He’ll still have people watching *you*.”

He steps closer and brushes his *knuckles* against my cheek. His eyes fill with desire.

“Surely there are others who could play *your* role better.”

He watches me, gauging my reaction—and I won’t lie, even though I know it’s just an act, it still hits my heart. His knuckles don’t retreat; instead, they seek to touch me more, as if to comfort me for his words.

## Sold to the Night Lord

Chapter 143

**Chapter 143**

“Good thing I’m good at sneaking into places.”

He winks.

\*I’m sure you are. At least now I won’t have to be near you.”

“Act tough all you want.”

There’s a wicked smile on his mouth as we look at each other with a mixture of amusement and challenge.

“Don’t let him find out, Elara. We’ll find a way to get you back to the castle—where you belong.”



“I don’t belong to you.”

“No, but I know you’d rather be there than here.”

His nose brushes mine.

“Besides, maybe I’m the one who belongs to you.”

“What does that mean?”

“That you drive me insane, Elara. I hate you for it—but not more than I desire you.”

He brushes his lips against mine before stepping back.

“If you have nothing else to say, I’ll leave you here to fulfill your duties with your new master.”

I hold my breath as I watch him walk away from me. He gives me one last look, and the ghost of a smile appears and disappears from his face in milliseconds. The blue of his eyes is so intense that it’s hard to hold myself together. My hands itch with the impulse to run to him, grab his suit, and slam his body against mine. I don’t do it. I just watch him open the door and slip out.

“I’ll come back for you. I always will.”

Those last words twist my stomach in a way I can’t quite understand. Ciro reappears, adjusting his vest, and gives me a once-over. I’m sure he’s searching for something. This was just one of the many tests I’ll have to pass to earn his trust.

“If it’s alright with you, I think it’s best I escort you to your quarters so you can rest. The night has been long, and I’d like to introduce you to your new handmaids tomorrow.”

“My new handmaids?”

“Clarissa and Naida belong to Cassian. I must assign you new ones.”

“No, please.”

Unconsciously, I grab his clothing.

“I don’t want to be without them.”

“Elara, they work for Cassian. I can’t have them under my service.”

“Haven’t I gone through enough changes already? I want familiar faces around me.”

## Chapter 143

I see all the protests piling up in his mouth. He opens **it**, then closes it again—but finally nods **and**

covers **my hands**, still **gripping** his mothes.

with **his** own.

“I’ll see what I can do.”

His thumbs gently stroke my hands.

“It won’t be easy to negotiate that with him. I doubt he’ll be very compliant considering he feels I stole you from his hands.”

“Didn’t you?”

“No. I followed the law. That’s not stealing.”

His eyes glint with mischief, and that’s the moment I realize how close we are. I take a step back.

“Come, I’ll escort you to your chambers.”

I let him pull me along and lead me through his home, which I have to pretend is mine as well. At least for a month. I know he hopes my feelings will blossom, but I don’t know if that will be possible while I’m still fighting others that have grown without permission.

We stop in front of the doors to my chambers.

“I’ll come get you tomorrow. I’ll see if I can bring you good news.”

He lifts my hand to his lips and kisses my knuckles.

“Get some rest. The night has been far too exciting.”

I’m about to ask him if I could visit Walter, but I think I’ve asked for enough tonight. Tomorrow, when the sun rises, it will be a new day, and I’ll try to gain a bit more ground. I smile and murmur a soft “good night” before locking myself in my room.

I run to the mirror—I need to look at my reflection and check if I look as different as I feel. I seem like the same Elara as always, except for *those* two gray strands in my hair that everyone must think are the result of psychological trauma. I think of Cassian, of all his words, of what we did, and my heart races to the point of pain. I press my palm over the

pounding and, looking into my own eyes, I promise myself to understand who I am, to master my nature, and to get out of here.

I will take control of my life and be only myself. Not a feeder, not the key to saving a race—just me.

## Sold to the Night Lord

### Chapter 144

Elara

Sleep doesn't hold me for long—I wake up before the sun has even risen. I light the candle beside my nightstand and **try to** entertain **myself** with **a** book for a while, but soon give up. I get up and go to the balcony. I step outside, and the cold air makes my skin bristle. I look over **the** vast gardens surrounding the villa, just as majestic as those at Cassian's castle.

A noise catches my attention below. I narrow my eyes and distinguish the figure of an animal. I move a little closer until I see that **it's a** bird. The creature is trying to flap its twisted wings in vain. There's a small puddle of blood beneath it. I hesitate *to* pick it up, so I leave it on the ground while I watch it. As the minutes pass, the bird's strength fades.

Surprisingly, I can feel deep in my bones the thin thread of life still keeping the creature breathing. It grows weaker and weaker, and without realizing it, I extend my hands and hold it between them. Something twisted and dark awakens inside me, urging me to squeeze that **thread**. I try to resist; my fingers tremble, the heat in my body rises sharply, and the pressure in my temples becomes unbearable. That's when I **stop** resisting and let it take over.

The sensation is warm, even though it's obvious that death is with us now. I close those invisible hands and squeeze the heat slowly until it turns cold. The flapping stops, and the small sounds of distress vanish. A cloud of gray smoke rises from it and enters my nostrils. I don't need anyone to tell me—I know I've just stolen another soul.

A few seconds of silence pass before I truly realize what I've done, and when I do, my horrified gaze flickers between my hands and the animal. The thought that I might not be able to control this new side of me overwhelms me. Bile rises in my throat, and I have to press the back of my hand against my mouth to avoid vomiting. The cold becomes secondary. My eyes can't leave the small lifeless body before me.

I wonder if I'm something worse than what I've spent all these years fearing. If I'm not so far from being a soulless monster like them.

A return inside, one more stolen soul on my shoulders. I sit at the vanity and search my face for traces of the monster I feel like right now. I lift

my upper lip, looking for fangs. They're not there, just as I expected. My skin is slightly paler than usual, but if I press my palm against my chest, I can feel the steady beat of my heart. Still, I wonder if that twisted craving will eventually sink its claws into the organ and stop it completely.

I close my eyes. I think of what I told Cassian: I have to learn what I am and control it before this happens again and my impulses are the ones controlling me. I picture myself with that perpetual, inhuman beauty. I imagine my power coursing through my veins like a raging river.

"Come on..." I whisper.

For a long time, nothing happens. In fact, I'm about to open my eyes and give up. I've been an idiot to think I could do it. My veins don't roar, don't heat up, don't fill with any mysterious power. No, they remain as always, carrying my blood to my heart—I don't feel power.

I change focus. I concentrate on thoughts of anger, **on** images I wish I could forget. Then I feel a prick on my lip. The air gets trapped in my lungs for a long second while I process that maybe I did it. I open my eyes, afraid of disappointment—but no. When I see myself, a gasp of astonishment catches in my throat.

My

My fangs have sharpened. My skin has taken on a strange sheen that reminds me of poisonous animals luring prey with their bricolours, and my eyes have turned completely white. No iris, no pupils. I trace the small power-filled veins around them with trembling. My fingers end in sharp nails that look more than ready to tear flesh down to the bone.

A small smile crosses my face, and a sense of victory settles in my stomach.

The doorknob rattles. Panic grips me—I'm going to get caught. It's too late to run and hide. Clarissa is already opening the door and **walking**

in with a smile on her lips. It doesn't fade when she sees me, and I realize, looking at the mirror, that I'm back to my usual self.

"Well, I see you're up early today."

11:37 Fri, **8 Aug** 10 1

Näida walks in behind her.

“I suppose I can tell you the good news.”

“What news?” I ask, still recovering from the little scare.

“The Lord has agreed to let us stay here with you.”

“Really?”

“Yes.” She leans in, conspiratorially. “He doesn’t think we’ll be here much longer-any

of us. That includes you. The Lord will get **you back.**”

I say nothing, though as they get me ready to go down for breakfast with Ciro, I can’t help but smile. I know this is a concession he made for me. He knows how much my handmaidens mean to me.

“Are you angry with him?”

“Him?” I raise an eyebrow.

“Cassian.”

“Why do you ask?”

“He was sure you’d blame him for everything that’s happened. You didn’t see it, but he came as much as Ciro allowed and did everything possible to bring you back.”

Honestly, there are gaps in my memory from that day, except for the harshest, cruellest parts that refuse to leave me. I know I lost control—I probably would’ve killed us all. I can’t deny the bitter aftertaste of having lost my chance for revenge, but I trust I’ll have it again. And next time, I’ll be a thousand times more cruel. I hope by then I’ve mastered my powers.

If I think about it, upon waking, what my body yearned for was to be with Cassian, to be near him. I think that’s why Ciro’s words hit me so hard. The cold water of betrayal soaked me when I found out he had been with another human and lied to me, while I was aching to be by his side. I remember Lilith told me we were destined for each other. I want to believe that’s why I reacted that way. This is something we’ll have to address later—I don’t want some so-called marked destiny to dictate my feelings.

“No, I’m not angry,” I finally answer.

At least I don't think I am right now. There are more important things that require my full attention. Unconsciously, I bring my fingers to my lips and run them gently across, imagining phantom kisses.

"Oh, I see." Clarissa tries to hide a smile while Naida finishes the final touches on my hair. "We'll accompany you to the dining room."

I rise from the stool and glance at my reflection. The whitish strands have been styled to hide beneath the rest of my black hair. Naida **notices** what I'm looking at and winks at me.

"This way."

Clarissa leads the way as if she's already very familiar with the place. I don't stop to admire the *decor*—I already know **it'll**

match **the owner's** style: elegant and exquisite.

We arrive at a dining room with large windows, where Ciro is already seated at the head of the table. In **one** corner, there's **a cage** where a small monkey clings to the bars and makes funny sounds. The room is filled with flowers, perfuming the air.

"Good morning, Elara. Did you sleep well?"

His smile is dazzling, as always. I see him swirl the deep red liquid in his glass. Dozens of plates of food **surround him, all for me he can't eat**

11:37 Fri, 8 Aug••

**84%**

any of it. Hesitantly, I sit to his right, and for a few seconds, I just stare at the food. I also glance at his cup full of blood, surprised once again that I don't gag at the sight of it. Before, I would've squirmed. Now I feel a morbid fascination, even able to perceive the different notes that make up its scent in the air.

"Are you okay?"

I blink, snapping out of the trance.

"Yes, I'm fine." I don't even try to force a smile.

"So? Did you have a good night?"

"Yes, I slept well. Thank you."

“I suppose you’ve already noticed you’ll get to keep your handmaidens. I hope that makes you happy.”

“Very much.” I narrow my eyes. “And what did he ask in return?”

“Surprisingly, nothing.” He mimics my expression. “Apparently, he wants you to be happy.”

Laughter bursts from me uncontrollably at that thought. Who would’ve told me, on the night my life completely shattered, that the vampire who bought me would care about my happiness? And even funnier, that the vampire would be none other than Cassian Draven, who prides himself on hating humans with passion. It’s ridiculous—but part of me is starting to suspect it might be true. Things have changed.

“What’s so funny?”

“Everything,” I reply with a huff.

“Well, I’m glad *you* find everything so amusing.”

AD

Comment

## Sold to the Night Lord

### Chapter 145

He sets his glass down and interlaces his fingers under his chin.

“Now, how about we focus on getting to know each other a little better?”

“I thought we already knew each other.”

“Nonsense.” He waves a hand. “I only know what I’ve seen from the outside. We haven’t had many chances to talk—much less to truly know one another. I just know you’re scandalized by parties and that you hate my kind with fervor.”

“And that’s not enough?”

“Not even close.” He reaches for my hand. “I want to know even the tiniest things: What’s your favorite color? Do you play any instruments? What side of the bed do you like to sleep on?”

For a second, I think his behavior is a little unhinged, but I don't say it aloud. Instead, I answer his questions directly and concisely.

"Red. No. And why does the side of the bed I sleep on matter?"

"I need to know for when I have the pleasure of sleeping with you. I wouldn't want any awkward situations."

The food in my mouth goes down the wrong way, and I cough over my plate.

"You're very confident, aren't you?"

"I always believe in my chances."

"And you? What's your favorite color? Do you play any instruments? Bed side?"

"Green, of course. I play the violin. And the left side—though I can adapt."

He winks at me after saying this. He looks at me with those playful pink eyes while I continue with my breakfast. The food is good, juicy; however, I feel like something's missing. I push that thought to the back of my mind and focus on watching my table companion. He studies me with interest. I do the same to him, unafraid of looking too much, because I know his deceptive gift has no effect on me. His beauty is

exquisite, but it doesn't enchant me—at least not like it does others. He's clearly attractive, but I won't go crazy over him.

"Can I ask you something?" I say to break this moment of intense staring.

"I'm dying for you to do it."

For a second, I think I blush.

"Could I visit Walter?"

"Walter?" He raises his eyebrows. "Walter, Aeron's feeder?"

"Yes, Aeron's feeder. We're good friends, and I was wondering if I could pay him a visit."

"Are you asking me for permission?"

"Should I?"

He slowly draws a smile from ear to ear, with a flirtatious and wicked air. His hand covers mine and gently strokes **my skin, tracing along it**



until he plays with my fingers. I don't pull away.

Rd **Aug**

"I think I was quite clear when I told you that you're not a prisoner. You're free to make your own decisions. **If what you** want is to **visit** your friend, do it."

"Just like that?"

"Were you expecting to pass a test or something?"

"No, it's just that..."

"You're not used to it."

I nod, ashamed of having been such a submissive person all this time. The day I set foot in Castle Draven again, there will be a few things Fil need to make clear. Cassian has to see me as an equal; otherwise, none of this will make sense. He says he respects me, but I **need** more than

words.

"I only have one condition," he adds.

"What condition?"

"Take one of my men with you." He pushes his chair back, as if the conversation is nearly over. "The outside world isn't safe—especially not for a human like you."

"A human like me?"

"Too pretty for her own good."

If I hadn't blushed before, I'm sure I have now. I nod, mirroring him as I push myself away from the table. It takes more effort than one could imagine not to go running down the halls, screaming with joy. Behind me, I hear Ciro's laughter. An hour later, they inform me that my carriage is ready to depart. When I set foot outside the villa, I can't help but smile. I savor this small taste of freedom, though I can't help but glance to my side and wish someone in particular were here with me. I only hope he can sense this feeling blooming in my chest and won't try to clip my wings—because I fear I'm no longer the person who came into his life before. I still have a sharp tongue, but now fangs and claws have grown in, and I'd be capable of killing for my freedom.

## Sold to the Night Lord

## Chapter 146

Elara

I watch the world outside through the small window of the carriage.

I'd much rather be on horseback, feeling the breeze on my cheeks, the birdsong around me, and the sun kissing my nose. In here, I can't shake the feeling of being trapped. Luckily, the ride isn't long, and when I step out, I feel like I can breathe again. I try to retain as many scents

as I can.

The man assigned to watch me -no matter how much Ciro insists he's here purely for my safety offers his hand to help me down. I'm **not** surprised to find myself in front of a huge and flamboyant mansion. The three representatives of the founding families - Draven, **Amery**, and De'ath-possess great wealth. Their homes, of course, are proof of that.

I don't let the place's beauty dazzle me and keep walking, very aware of Ciro's man behind me. Between two majestic columns flanking **the** entrance of the mansion stands Walter. He's smiling broadly and bounces on the spot with childlike excitement. When I'm within reach, **he** grabs me by the shoulders and gives me a tight hug.

"I honestly didn't think they'd let you come," he says enthusiastically. "Seems Ciro is far more decent than Cassian. Actually, not even Aeron would have let me visit you without him."

"I have something like a...

bodyguard," I murmur.

Walter glances behind me and curls his lips into something like a wicked smirk.

"You could always find another use for the man." He winks at me. "From here, he doesn't look half bad."

I haven't stopped to look at him properly, and his hood doesn't reveal much anyway. I just know that, had this been with Cassian, he would've chosen his ugliest guard. Scratch that-he would've come himself. When I don't answer, Walter continues.

"Unless you're planning to give Ciro Amery a chance?"

He raises and lowers his eyebrows playfully, earning a smack on the arm from me.

"I'm not thinking about that."

“You’re not? No one would blame you for wanting to have a little fun with the man you’ll have to see and serve for the rest of your life.”

Only that, if his word means anything, I won’t spend my life serving him. One month separates me from freedom, though deep down I know that’s wishful thinking. I won’t be free as long as so many threats hang over my head. And more importantly, will Cassian ever see me as an equal?

“Well, let’s go inside.”

He pulls me without warning, and I’m surprised to see Walter greeting all the staff with nods of the head. The truth is, back at Castle Draven, everyone is so afraid they never lift their gaze from their tasks, let alone talk to each other. It’s a castle full of ghosts obeying the will of the villain who rules them.

Of course, I had to go and get attached to him.

“Are there more, aside from you? You know...” I ask as he leads me into a small sitting room where a table and two steaming tea **cups await**.

“I’m the only feeder for Aeron.”

“Just you? And how do you... I mean, isn’t that exhausting for you? It might even be bad for your health.”

Walter flops into the chair and suppresses a chuckle. He looks out the window into the gardens, eyes sparkling **with** amusement

“**Not** all of them are like Cassian, Elara. Aeron only needs to feed once a day, preferably at night, and he doesn’t take much **just enough** to quench his thirst without knocking me out.”

Cassian really was starving at my side. I never truly fulfilled my duties. He only drank from me a handful of times, and most of those moments had more to do with sex or intimacy than feeding.

The memory of us in the library, with him between my legs drinking my blood as I climaxed, makes my cheeks flush.

I clear my throat, as if that could erase the vivid image from my mind.

“The other night you mentioned the situation was tense. What did you mean?” I ask, trying to steer the conversation.

Walter sighs and lifts the teacup to his lips.

“It’s all a huge mess.” When I don’t respond, he continues, “See, the Council isn’t happy with Cassian. Tensions have been rising for a while, but I think the loss of the Diluted because of him was the last straw.”

“Because of him?”

“Cassian told the Council there was an attack and he had to defend himself, sending many Diluted to what was practically certain death. Several Purebloods were also injured. Look, Elara, aside from the three founding families, there are smaller houses—some still wealthy, others ruined by time. Many of the ruined ones pledged servitude and have since served as guards for the founding families. Usually, it’s **the** Diluted who take on those roles, thanks to the armor Aeron crafted centuries ago that protects them from sunlight.

Now’s not the time to lose more of them, especially with the rebel Diluted growing in numbers. I’m sure you’ve heard of the reproduction issues they’re facing.”

“I’ve heard a bit.”

“Aeron’s leading the experiments to create new Purebloods—experiments Cassian has openly opposed many times. All of this has led to widespread discontent. Not to mention how annoyed he is that you’re now Ciro’s feeder. Things are heating up—and that’s an understatement.”

“And what are those experiments about?”

A cold sweat slides down my neck. The threat of what could happen to me if any of them discover what I really am, and what I could mean for their species, hangs over me like the sword of Damocles.

“I don’t really know much. Aeron doesn’t share too many details with me.” He glances at my untouched teacup. “They’ve tried altering the genetic makeup of other species, injecting higher amounts of Pureblood DNA into humans or Diluted, but it doesn’t seem to **be** producing positive results.”

“Don’t you think it’s wrong?” I ask, trying not to show my revulsion. “They’re hurting other people.”

“They’re desperate, Elara. You have no idea what desperate people are capable of.”

“Cassian wouldn’t do that,”

“He’d commit many horrible acts for the things he cares about. The thing is, he’s lived far too long to care about **the** survival **of his**

**own race.** He tilts his head and studies me curiously, “Since when do you defend him?”

“I’m not defending him, I just think those experiments are wrong.” I lick my lips and swallow, hoping **the bitter taste in my mouth will** disappear. “What’s Ciro’s stance in all this?”

11:37 Fri, 8 Aug

84%D

+38)

“Oh, you know.” He waves his hand dismissively. “Ciro’s the golden boy. He doesn’t worry about much beyond his appearance, parties, and witty remarks.”

“Don’t you think he’s fooling all of you?”

“What do you mean?”

“Maybe he uses that image you all have of him—your habit of underestimating him to do much more behind your backs than you think. Ciro could be like those brightly colored frogs—pretty, but highly poisonous.”

“Do you know something I don’t?”

“It’s just a thought I had.” I shrug. “If everyone underestimated me and called me a ‘pretty boy, I’d definitely use it to my advantage.”

Walter gives a small nod, as if my comment had earned me even more of his respect. He crosses his legs elegantly, and for a few minutes, we simply finish our tea and avoid looking at each other too much.

A small thought slips into my mind. It’s clear that Walter has a weakness for gossip, and who knows—maybe he could be a good source of information, in addition to being a friend. His close relationship with Aeron seems to grant him access to many inner workings the rest of us don’t know about.

AD

Comment

## Sold to the Night Lord

### Chapter 147

“Can I ask you something?”

“Of course.”

He gives me an eager smile.

“What do you know about Neera, Ciro’s former blood bearer?”

“Jealous?” he replies with a mischievous grin. “Neera’s tragedy happened long before I was in Aeron’s service—long before either of us were born, really. You could say that Ciro stealing you from Cassian was a long-awaited revenge the sly little fox had been nursing. Vampires still whisper about that tragic love story when they think no one’s listening.”

“But you do hear them.”

He nods, clearly amused.

“Young Ciro fell hard for Neera. In fact, they say he never even bought her—she offered herself to him. He wasn’t immune to her beauty, ironic, isn’t it? They were involved, everyone could see it no matter how much they tried to hide it. Their glances were knowing. I’ve heard that when the young vampire looked at her, his eyes shifted from their usual pink to the blackest depths of desire.”

“And what happened?”

“Cassian Draven, dear.” His lips curl slyly. “In all his centuries of life, Cassian has disappeared many times, apparently bored with his own existence. One night, at a ball held in this very mansion, he reappeared after years of who-knows-where. Neera changed that night. Her eyes no longer searched for Ciro—they couldn’t look away from the blue-eyed vampire. It didn’t just happen once; it repeated every time they shared the same space until he noticed. And I think you know just how cruel he can be—especially when someone displeases him. No surprise that the cheerful, carefree attitude of the other vampire irritated him, when he seems perpetually angry at the world. So, he returned Neera’s glances and smiles, seduced her, took her to bed, and just as Ciro caught them, he tore her throat out before his eyes.”

He watches me as he finishes the tale, which, unfortunately, isn’t some fireside legend—it’s real. Or at least, partly. I suppose I’ll never know the full truth since one of the main players isn’t here to share her version. I only have the accounts of two men who hated each other for completely idiotic reasons—and still do.

“I’d heard Cassian wanted her too,” I whisper. “Isn’t that what Ciro believes as well?”

“Like any story, there are many versions. I’ve chosen to believe the one where a young woman was dazzled by the wrong vampire and was brutally murdered for it.”

My knee hits the table and one of the saucers crashes to the ground in pieces. I quickly kneel to gather the shards.

“Sorry, Walter. God, I’m so clumsy.”

He mimics me, kneeling as well to pick up some pieces. He gasps quietly, and I see blood begin to well up from his fin

Whatever is happening inside me kicks in instantly. My tongue floods with saliva. My nostrils flare, catching all the nuanced **notes in his** blood. I clench my fist tightly, chanting silently that I must stop. I’ll be in danger if anyone suspects what I am—especially Walter. His **love for** Aeron is dangerous. As he said, you’d be surprised what desperate people can do, and I fear Walter might be desperate to win Aeron’s **love** completely.

“Are you alright? You look a little pale.”

I clear my throat, praying to rid myself of the thirsty sensation burning in my mouth and throat.

**11:37 Fri, 8**

**Aug D**

“I just need to use the bathroom for a moment.”

“Of course, right over there.”

He points the way, but I don’t get far before my new bodyguard intercepts me, grabbing my arm.

“Miss, we have to leave immediately.”

It’s the first time I hear his voice—gruff, masculine, but not unpleasant.

“What’s going on?”

“I can’t explain right now. Please, come with me.”

It’s not like I have a choice. I don’t even manage a word before he’s firmly gripping my arm and dragging me toward the exit.

I pass Walter, whose eyes are wide with surprise.

“Sorry, Walter. I have to go.”

The coachmen already have the carriage door open, and before I realize it, I’m pushed inside. I hear the lock click shut. I reach for the handle and try to open the door, just to confirm what I feared—I’m locked in.

I peer out the small window, trying to make sense of it all. The horses neigh as the drivers whip their flanks to get moving. Walter is still watching from the mansion entrance, and he looks genuinely concerned. I'm still trying to figure it all out when our carriage meets another on the path: black with silver trim.

I freeze at the window, palms pressed to the glass. The two carriages pass so close they almost brush—and then I see him.

Two cerulean eyes and a hand holding back the curtain to stare at me.

Cassian is watching me with interest and mischief, lips curved in a teasing smile.

“Surprise, surprise, little wildcat.”

AD

## Sold to the Night Lord

### Chapter 148

Cassian

His gray eyes acquire a glint that reminds me of the moon. We vampires are usually tied to the night, dark and full of monsters, **but** I could entrust my life to that satellite for eyes like his. My guards quickly intercept Ciro's weak and pitiful security, allowing me to **step out of the** carriage and open the door of hers. She remains completely still in place, frightened—or rather—stunned. I smile and extend **a** hand **toward** her, inviting her to come down. She looks at my hand with a certain skepticism.

“Stop! Step away from her!”

I turn to see a hooded, burly man. From beneath the hood, a few strands of light brown hair escape, and that characteristic color makes me recognize immediately who's hiding under it.

My smile widens.

“Abraxas, I think you know me well enough not to do anything stupid.”

“My orders are clear,” he replies. “I won't let you take her,”

“Who said I'm taking her?” I lace my voice with some mockery. “I'm just here for a meeting with Aeron. It was a surprise—a pleasant one, if you ask me to find Elara here. I just want to share a few words with her. Seems normal, doesn't it?” I arch a brow. “After all, she was my bloodbride for a few months and we shared... moments.”



Out of the corner of my eye, I see Elara's cheeks flush.

"You have no right to be near her," Abraxas snaps.

"I'm not asking for permission, Abraxas. I'm giving you the chance to live."

I don't need to see his face to know he's gone pale under the hood. The fingers of my gift are already plucking at the strings of his mind like a harp, composing a melody that foreshadows a grim end. I don't let my roguish smile fade for even a second. I'm willing to tear apart anything

that stands between me and what I want.

"So what's it going to be?"

He glances behind him, seeing that Ciro's men have already been easily restrained by mine. I'm not only the most powerful due to my gift and bloodline, but because over the years, I've managed to gather the most brutal and loyal men. I rule with an iron hand—but I reward well.

Abraxas mutters something under his breath, but eventually steps aside. I grab Elara's hand in mine, and without waiting for her to speak—or for her newly assigned bodyguard to change his mind—I pull her with me toward the forest that borders the road. I drag her far enough to be away from unwanted gazes, although I know avoiding ears is much more difficult. Still, I settle for having her pinned between a tree and my

body.

"Have *you* lost your mind? You shouldn't have done that."

"What? Come to a meeting I was invited to?"

Her eyes study mine, just as I study hers. She looks pale and shaken. I sense a slight tremor in her fingers.

"Do I need to kill someone, Elara?"

She doesn't respond right away, which coming from her is more than enough of a sign that something's **wrong**. She **avoids my eyes, her gaze** drifting into the woods. I give her a few precious seconds I'd rather spend tracing her neck and mouth with **my tongue**. **When it** becomes obvious she won't share what's bothering her, I grab her chin, demanding but not hurting.

1/3

11:87 Ffl, 8 Aug

“Did he hurt you? **Is** that it? Tell me.”

“**It** has nothing to do with **Ciro**,” she finally says in a low voice that seems to stroke every hidden corner of my mind. “**I’m changing, Cassian**”

“That, I already know, little beast. I can see it.”

Gently, I turn her face from side to side, spotting again those pale grayish locks. It’s one of the most visible changes, aside from others that might go unnoticed to someone who hasn’t watched her as closely as I have. It bothers me to admit it, but ever since I first saw her at the **Red** Auction, my eyes have been drinking in her image without restraint. Now her skin is a bit paler, letting me glimpse her veins more easily. However, the rhythmic beat of her heart draws all attention. No one can question her human nature as long as that heartbeat is so strong

“When I see blood, I can distinguish every single note that composes its scent—I go mad, Cassian. I could be a danger to others.”

A low laugh rumbles in my chest. I stroke her cheek, trying to make her focus *on* me and stop avoiding my gaze.

“I’ll help you control the thirst once we’re together again. You share much of our nature, it’s no surprise you feel frantic around **human** blood. Luckily, you can still feed on their food, unlike us.”

“I don’t want to hurt anyone, Cassian. I don’t want this.”

“You won’t hurt anyone, Elara.” I smile, trying to offer her some reassurance. “I know better than anyone, believe me, that you have **a** will **of** iron. Your attempts to hate me speak for themselves. So relax—I know you can control the thirst.”

“Is there any chance that... I’ll die if I don’t feed like you do?”

“I don’t think so. You’ve spent most of your life feeding like a human and that hasn’t had any major consequences—though maybe drinking blood will help with your powers and strength.”

“I don’t want to feed on humans.”

“Don’t even think for a second that I’ll let you drink animal blood. That’s... disgusting.”

I don’t need a mirror to know I’m wrinkling my nose in pure disgust.

“Then what other option do I have?”

I can feel the desperation in her voice. I wet my bottom lip as I remove one of my gloves under her scrutiny. I slip my hand under my jacket and pull out my claw-shaped ring. With all her attention on me, I slowly slice open my wrist. The blood begins to flow quickly, and her nostrils flare as she catches the scent that will become her most addictive drug.

“I’ll help you with your thirst.”

I bring my wrist to her lips and, though she hesitates for a few seconds, she soon grabs my wrist with trembling hands mouth. Her tongue gives a tentative lick that draws a groan from me. She opens her eyes in surprise at my reaction.

“In time, you’ll understand the eroticism of feeding and being fed by your partner.”

fts **it** to her

I don’t realize the word that’s slipped from my lips until it’s too late to take it back. Still, Elara doesn’t seem to pay much attention to **it**. She returns to the wound, covers it with her mouth and sucks to draw out more blood. The tingling sensation that spreads through my body **is** almost unfamiliar. I’m not one of those vampires who freely offers their blood—I’ve always been a selfish lover in that regard. However, **with** her, I find myself more than willing to share every drop in my veins just to feel what I’m feeling and hear her soft whimpers.

Her tongue occasionally runs along the wound and the edge of her fangs pricks my skin, though it’s far **from painful**.

She **pulls my wrist** closer, forcing me to press harder against her. Our bodies are completely in sync. Without realizing it, *her* hips **are rocking, seeking friction**. A few more minutes and no one will be able to stop this—we’ll be lost in a bubble of ecstasy where both **of us will want to be inside the other**. In every possible way. I smile, though she doesn’t see it, and slowly free myself from her grip. She lets **out a small whimper of protest**. I hush.

212

11:37 Fri, **8 Aug**

her, tapping her chin lightly.

“Don’t be a greedy little thing, little beast.” I smile, flashing my fangs, matching hers. “Soon we’ll have time for this—and for all the perversions I’ve been dying to do to you.”

The flush of her cheeks is amusing against the pallor of her skin. I lean in and lick the remaining blood from the corner of her lips. I taste myself, unable to experience the same ecstasy. That will only come when I feed on her.

# Sold to the Night Lord

84%

## Chapter 149

Soon, I tell myself. I close my eyes, inhale her wild scent, and caress her cheeks before opening them again.

“We must return,” I say, feeling the unrest of the others.

“Do you remember our meetings when we were physically apart?”

“In the dreams?”

“That’s right.” My lips brush hers fleetingly. “Find me.”

Without another word, I grab her hand and bring her back to the path, where her bodyguard awaits with a sullen stance. He still hides his face under the shadows of his hood.

“Here she is, in one piece.”

Abraxas grumbles and pulls Elara along with him. I observe every small movement closely. Her hands have stopped trembling; she grips the folds of her dress and climbs into the carriage. The door thuds shut. Her eyes seek mine, and though I remain still, I try to convey all **the** promises I intend to keep later. She tries to keep her lips from trembling in a smile, but nothing escapes my thorough scrutiny.

“Let’s go,” I say to my men as soon as I see Elara’s carriage resume its journey.

We’re nearly at the mansion’s doors, so the rest of the ride is trivial. I jump from the carriage, expecting no grand welcome. Adjusting **my** suit jacket, I walk into the mansion with purposeful strides.

Aeron’s feeder, Walter, watches me with barely concealed interest.

“Can I help *you* with something?” he asks, tinged with sarcasm.

“Highly unlikely,” I respond, matching his tone.

I take a step toward him. Though I try not to be overtly threatening, I must fail, judging by how his shoulders shrink a bit. I’m not foolish enough to think I can harm him without

inviting his master's wrath—especially considering his attachment to him. Still, Walter doesn't seem

to realize that.

"You seem offended," I say mordantly. "Let's skip the pretense and just tell me what you have to say, human. I don't have time for trifles."

"Elara is a trifle?" he raises a brow, defiant. "If she means anything to you, let her go. Let her be happy—even if it's not with you. You don't

make her bloom; you wither her. You block out the sun she needs to grow."

Tsummon calm not to succumb to disproportionate fury.

"Mind your own business," I reply, tilting my head like assessing potential prey. "After all, I don't meddle in your tragic I really think Aeron would stand up for you to hush the ugly rumors? Oh, mortal, he will never defend you."

"You're only saying what you'd do."

1. ry. Do you

"You're quite wrong if you think they're that different. Watch closely—we're all hungry for something. **C**iro is hungry for love, and **y**our precious Aeron? For power. If you become a pebble in his shoe, he'll crush you in an instant. That's the appeal of mortal life for us—**h**ow easily

**i**t can be snuffed out."

The chill triggered by my words shakes him head to toe. Perhaps I exaggerated a bit to scare him. I can't say for certain whether Aeron **w**ould choose him, but I do know the man feels a strong pull toward the human.

1/3

A throat clears behind me, interrupting the satisfaction **o**f

unsettling the loudmouth. I flash **a** cutting smile and **w**alk past **h**im **t**o **f**ace **h**is master, who's watching us both with displeasure. He casts a fleeting glance at his feeder and lover, then motions **w**ith his chin for **m**e **t**o follow.

We reach his study. I sit across from the desk and wait for him to take his seat.

"Why did you want to see me?" I cross one leg over the other. "I have better things to do than talk *to* a traitor."

Aeron scoffs.

“We’ve already talked about this. It’s in the Treaties. It’s law.”

“And your loyalty? I’m your proclaimed leader, and you stabbed me in the back.”

“We’re not discussing this again.”

“I could kill you if I wanted,” I declare.

“You won’t, because you’re smart, Cassian. You know chaos rarely brings good, and killing every Pure who defies your wishes would only

bring more trouble than we already have.”

“You say that like I care whether we live or die.”

“Maybe you don’t care about yourself, or us—but I know someone whose survival does matter to you. Or am I wrong?”

I narrow my eyes in a feral stare.

“Spit it out already.”

Instead of speaking, he hands me what appears to be a letter. I take it with my gloved hands and examine the writing closely.

“When were you planning to tell us the shapeshifters are stronger than we thought?”

My eyes trace every curve of the letters as I bite my tongue to stop the growl rising in my throat. This was clearly written by shapeshifters- possibly Ragna herself—which only fuels my rage.

“When I deemed it necessary.”

Aeron exhales, exasperated.

“It says here, quite clearly, that they want her.” He rubs the base of his beard. His shoulder-length silvery hair glows in the light from the window. “You asked about my loyalty. Well, here it is. I won’t tell anyone about this letter—or more specifically, about the demands written here. As you understand, we must warn our people of the impending threat. However, I won’t mention her.”

“Why?”

“Because, much to my surprise, I’m starting to believe she may actually matter to you.”

I want to laugh in his face.

That she means something to me? She means everything right now.

“Don’t take me for a fool,” I say. “What do you want, Aeron?”

“I won’t deny I’d love to know the secrets you’re hiding, and why she seems so important to the shapeshifters. But I **know you won’t say** a word about her, so how about you let me keep working on our survival?”

**11:38** Fri, 8 Aug.

“You want to continue your experiments.”

“That’s right.” He nods. “After your actions, our forces have dwindled. With the Diluted rebels rising, the chances of war are high. Add this new threat... I hope you see the necessity.”

The desperation in his voice confirms once again that I cannot let Elara’s secrets come to light. I swallow and ponder for a moment whether there’s another way out of this mess—but I quickly realize there isn’t. I sigh with restrained resignation.

“Fine.” I rise, adjusting my jacket and leaning toward him. “But let me be clear: if your mouth utters her name—even to say how beautiful she looks that day—I swear I’ll do the cruelest, most unimaginable things to your weak little lover. You’ll wish you’d never known his name.”

I watch his Adam’s apple bob as he swallows my explicit threat. He nods. And with a cruel smile, I leave. I walk away with the iron determination to learn more about Elara, to help her understand herself and master her gifts—because I don’t know how much longer her secrets will remain hers alone.

**AD**

## Sold to the Night Lord

### Chapter 150

Elara

The trembling in my hands has disappeared; however, the taste of Cassian still lingers on my tongue. His blood is as seductive **as his** appearance. If darkness had a flavor, it would undoubtedly be this one.

I step down from the carriage with the help of my newly appointed bodyguard, whose eyes I can't see due to the shadows cast **by** the hood of

his cloak, though I can see the tension in his jaw. Despite his clear anger, he doesn't say a word. With a gesture of his hand, he invites me to move forward, where I see **Ciro** leaning against one of the wings of the main door. His smile and playful gaze welcome me.

"How was your visit, Elara?"

"It was pleasant," I reply halfheartedly.

I can feel **Abraxas's** eyes on the back of my neck. He clears his throat, calling **Ciro's** attention, whose gaze shifts from me to him.

"Yes, Abraxas?"

"I think we should speak privately for a moment."

I hold back the urge to roll my eyes. He says it as if he doesn't know exactly what he's going to talk about. The vampire's lips press into a thin line, and he nods. He focuses on me again and runs his eyes quickly over my body. Maybe he already knows what **Abraxas** is going to tell **him** and is looking for some kind of sign on my body to confirm it?

"Dinner is about to be served. If you like, go ahead—I'll join you shortly."

give a small nod, knowing that refusing dinner might raise suspicions about what happened between his rival and me. If I want to get out of here, I must pretend I'm genuinely trying to open my heart and hate **Cassian**.

I head to the dining room, where, just as he said, dinner is being served. I take a seat to the right of the head of the table and wait patiently, passing the time by adjusting the silverware again and again at the same distance from each other. When he walks into the room, nothing in his expression shows he's upset. He wears the same cheerful look as always. He sits next to me and briefly examines his goblet. Maybe because I drank blood earlier, the smell doesn't seem exquisite to me or make me salivate.

"How did **Abraxas** behave with you? I must admit he doesn't have the best manners; however, he is the person I trust the most."

I blink, looking at his face, surprised by the direction of the conversation. I wet my lips and grab the fork between my fingers.

"Are we going to ignore the obvious?"

"We can, if you wish."



“You’re not angry with me?”

He finishes a sip from his cup, wipes his mouth with the cloth napkin, and raises his eyebrows *in* surprise.

“Should I be?” He continues when I remain silent: “It’s not like I didn’t expect these things from someone like him. He’s incapable **of** obeying laws, no matter how much they’re on my side. Still, I’m surprised he insists so much on you. After all, he’s never stopped saying you’re just a simple human—weak and disposable.”

He’s right. Cassian has boasted about his disdain for me many times, though that didn’t make him any less territorial. One of his rules **was** that no one else but him was allowed to drink from me, *if* memory serves. I don’t know when things changed so much. What I do **know is that** his feelings for me aren’t the same as before. Neither are mine, no matter how much I try to fool myself,

412

11:38 Fri, **8 Aug** J O

“So no, I’m not angry. In fact, if you tell me that being with Cassiah is what you want, I’ll take you to him myself **when** the month end-

“Really?” I ask, narrowing my eyes.

“**Yes.** I only ask for one sincere chance.”

I watch him for what feels like minutes until I finally answer.

“I suppose I can do that.”

I take a bite while chewing on my own thoughts. Something tells me giving him a real chance is impossible. Cassian stormed into my life, planted a flag in my heart, and even if my blood pools beneath his boots, my foolish heart does strange things when he’s near—unaware that he’s a ruthless conqueror who claimed us without asking.

“So, has Abraxas been kind to you?”

“He’s a man of few words,” I say.

Laughter shakes his chest.

“Oh yes, very different from me.” I frown, still looking at him. “Abraxas is my brother.”

Now I understand why he says he’s the one he trusts most, though blood sometimes means nothing.

“He’s certainly not as vain as I am.”

“Why does he hide under a cloak?”

He raises his cup to his lips again, staining them crimson.

“Perhaps it’s under my orders, so his beauty doesn’t trap you.”

“Is that so?” I raise an eyebrow at him.

He laughs again, as if everything I say is the funniest thing he’s heard in years. Which, considering how many years he likely has behind him, is no small thing.

“No, I haven’t told him to hide his face.” He smiles, showing me his sharp fangs. “It’s just a personal preference.”

I cross my arms, knowing my tongue is about to form a bold and impertinent question.

“Does he have a grotesque scar? Is he missing an eye? A wart on the tip of his nose?”

“I understand his lovers quite appreciate the appeal of his face.”

“Does he also have the gift of beauty?”

“He’s lucky to be attractive to the eye, but no, he doesn’t have the gift that I possess.”

I don’t miss the slight tinge of sadness in his voice when he talks about his gift; more than a blessing, it seems like a curse he’ll never shake

**off.**

“Why haven’t I seen him before?” I continue asking to quench my curiosity.

“He doesn’t like parties or events that involve being around people. In fact, the fact that he agreed **to be your bodyguard whenever you step** outside the villa already feels like an achievement.”

11:38 Fri, **8** Aug

“I haven’t seen him around here either.”

“That’s because maybe he doesn’t want you to see him.” He clasps his fingers beneath his chin. “I apologize in advance for his rough demeanor—he’s not one for softness.”

A

