

# Sold to the Night Lord

## Sold to the Night Lord

### Chapter 151

I don't know why the intonation of that last word makes my cheeks flush a deep red. The heat spreads across my whole face. He seems to notice, narrowing his eyes and drawing a mischievous smile on his lips. I can't say anything in response, so I just nod and keep eating in silence. During the time it takes me to finish my plate, Ciro watches me with interest and a hint of amusement. When I lay my fork on the plate and declare dinner finished, I wipe my lips with the napkin and look at him again, hoping my cheeks are no longer an alarming shade of

red.

"I think I'll go to sleep now. I'm a bit tired from today's outing."

I try to make my words sound flat, so nothing reveals the excitement coursing through me at the thought that maybe I'll encounter Cassian.

The mere possibility of seeing him through the strange bond between us makes my fingers tingle with anticipation.

"Of course." He mimics me, wiping his lips.

He scrapes the chair back, stands, and offers me his hand. I take it, once again surprised not to feel the same cold I used to when touching a vampire's skin. For a moment I worry—has my body temperature dropped enough for him to notice? However, he says nothing and walks me to the door of my chambers, where, as he has before, he kisses my knuckles and wishes me sweet dreams.

I watch him walk away, noting the way the muscles in his back shift as he moves. I wonder if, in another reality—where Cassian didn't exist

and I wasn't the key to the survival of a race, nor torn from my family—there would be an Elara capable of falling in love with Ciro Amery. Not for his beauty, but for the wounded, broken heart hiding behind his vests,

When I wake, I know I'm not in my room and that everything happening will be real. I look down at my feet, sinking into the fur of the magnificent rugs covering Cassian's bedroom floor, and slowly raise my gaze until I see him. He's in bed, shirt unbuttoned, hair tousled, face looking tired. Still, when he realizes I'm standing in front of him, the corners of his mouth pull into a daring smile.

“You came.”

“You asked me to find you.” I stay where I am and tilt my head curiously. “Did you think I wouldn’t?”

“Sometimes I find it hard to believe you don’t hate me.”

“I don’t hate you?” Now it’s my lips that curve into a playful smile. “Then what do you think I feel?”

He leans back further into the pillows, settling himself. Except for the night I gave myself to him physically, I’ve never seen him relaxed. He’s always seemed inaccessible, as if constantly burdened by something, though his smiles try to distract from it.

“Judging by the scent I pick up in the air, you definitely desire me.”

Contrary to what might be expected, I don’t blush or show any sign of embarrassment. At least not with him.

“I could say the same about you,” I reply. “You’ve got the eyes of a hungry man.”

“Maybe I am.”

The blue of his gaze darkens until I can no longer distinguish his irises from his pupils. His hunger becomes palpable, charging the air with an electric current. I notice the whiteness of his knuckles gripping the sheets, as if he’s holding himself back from lunging at me. I don’t know why I find that so attractive and erotic.

“You have many feeders—surely one of them has kept your desires well satisfied.”

I try **with**

**all** my might to keep my voice casual, unaffected. Cassian clicks his tongue while flexing one knee and resting a hand on it. Every part of his body seems deliberately placed so he can’t be ignored. He’s a predator calling his prey. However, I no longer play that role. I’ve realized I have fangs, claws, gifts. I’m as lethal as he is. We’re two predators in the same room, dancing what seems to be a dance of

seduction.

“If by desires you mean drinking just enough of their tasteless blood to survive while I waited for your return, then yes, my desires have been

satisfied.”

“How the mighty fall.” I don’t bother to hide how my gaze roams over his body. “I was under the impression your thirst was insatiable.”

“Believe me, it is.”

He wets his lips, and that slight motion adds more fuel to the fire that’s been burning in me since I saw him. My body isn’t immune to his

charms—I fear it never has been.

“What stopped you, then?”

His deep laugh rumbles against the walls of the room, filling everything with warmth. His eyes shine when he looks at me, and my heart begins to race. My mouth goes dry, thirsty for whatever his lips are about to say next.

“You always stopped me.” He removes his shirt, revealing every inch of his muscled body. Nature blessed him with a dangerous kind of beauty. “Ever since I saw you at that auction, I haven’t been able to think about anything but you. Your blood is the only thing that now nourishes me; the rest has lost its taste. I can’t see colors if you’re not near, music only plays if it comes in the form of your laughter. You’ve

turned me into something I never wanted to be: weak.”

“And do you hate me for it?” I ask, holding my breath.

“Do you think I do? I thought you’d already figured out how I feel.”

“I know you desire me. I know you want to possess me.”

“And will you let me?”

“No.” I take another step toward his bed, contradicting my words. “I want to be your equal.”

“You are.”

“How can I be sure what you say is true?”

“You can’t. All I know is that I am yours, even if you refuse to be mine.” He rises higher on the bed, burning me with his gaze. “And you are my equal.”

“Even if I were still human?”

“Even then.”

“Good, because I wouldn’t come back here to be a prisoner, Cassian. I’d kill you before going back to that.”

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He nods, distracted by my fingers moving toward one of the straps of my nightgown.

“Now, if we’ve made things clear, let me return the favor.”

Under his attentive gaze, I slip one strap down and then do the same with the other, letting the fabric fall and pool around my hips. My breasts are exposed to his hungry eyes. For a few seconds, neither of us moves or speaks. We just stare at each other, our breathing ragged. I

**can** feel the heat in my chest.

“Are you sure?”

I tilt my neck slightly, a silent invitation for him to take from me what we both need. He keeps waiting for my answer, the hunger etched

across his face.

“Completely.”

My confirmation makes him rise from the bed, and in the blink of an eye, he’s in front of me, his hands gently gripping my shoulders. He locks eyes with mine, brushes his lips softly over my mouth, then trails slowly down my jawline, nibbles on my earlobe, and reaches the hollow of

my throat where my pulse is racing wildly.

My fingers don't know what to do; I cling to his hips as Cassian pulls me against him and my breasts press against his chest. I hold my breath as I feel his warm breath against me and close my eyes the very moment he pierces my skin. The pain is fleeting, quickly replaced by a warm

sensation that floods my veins and spreads to every inch of me.

"Cassian..."

hear his moan against my skin. His fingers trail down my sides, raising goosebumps, until they reach the nightgown bunched at my hips and

rip it open abruptly. He tears it from my body, leaving me completely naked and at the mercy of his hands.

Every caress sends shivers through my system, and every pull of his mouth over my skin sets my blood on fire, fueling the blaze that's been building low in my abdomen. I dig my nails into his shoulders just as his fangs withdraw from my skin.

There's no time to recover before his mouth is on mine, kissing me with hunger, without restraint. The taste of wild berries curls around my

tongue.

His hands wander down to grab my thighs and lift me effortlessly to the bed, where his body covers every inch of mine. He lowers his lips

down the line of my throat, across my collarbone, and then kisses the curve of my right breast.

This time the bite doesn't even hurt a little—I think I'm too drunk on pleasure.

"More," I demand.

His growls fill the room, just like his bites cover my body. Right now, there's no worry in my mind—only the ecstasy he awakens in me. He releases my breast from his teeth and gently licks the wound, slowly trailing down my sternum and stomach.

When he circles my belly button with his tongue, a shiver tiptoes down my spine. I'm not wearing underwear, so my arousal is plain to see. My

thighs are wet.

"Looking at you is the greatest privilege of my life... and the least deserved, Elara."

“I want you to look at me.” My fingers sink into his hair. “Only you look at me and know what I am.”

“I couldn’t stop looking at you even if you begged me to.”

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A small laugh escapes my chest, but it’s quickly silenced when his fangs scrape the skin of my thighs and then he bites—**right** where I need **it** most. It sends me straight into a spiral of climax.

I writhe **in** his sheets, a trembling mess. When I finally settle, his mouth leaves my body. He wraps his arms around me and pulls me **to** his chest. I can feel the hardness beneath his pants, but when I reach down to ease it, he stops me.

“Not yet.”

Seeing the confusion on my face, he explains, “When I’m inside you, I don’t want to be afraid that you’ll vanish at any moment. I want to savor every second. I want to be so hungry for your body that leaving this bed will be impossible.”

“Twenty-three days, Cassian.”

“Twenty-three days and you and I will be unstoppable together.”

He kisses my forehead, and I fall asleep soon after, knowing that when I open my eyes again, I won’t be with him.

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Elara

As the days go by, I’ve come to find a routine that, although it doesn’t make me completely happy, makes the passing of time more bearable. Long before the first rays of sun filter into my chambers, I plant myself in front of my vanity and try to understand what I am, to gain control. The defeats outnumber the victories, though I’m no less pleased for having occasionally seen in the mirror the appearance of a Pure—or whatever it is that I am. It’s complicated, once again, not belonging anywhere. I’m not a Pure as they’ve always been known, nor amla

goddess. I'm what lingers in between.

After my attempts to control my gifts—or better said, to catch a small glimpse of them at will—I get ready for the day. I have breakfast with Ciro, and he usually suggests some activity for the afternoon. And if duty calls him, I walk through the gardens. But without a doubt, my favorite part is when I sleep and reunite with Cassian. He continues to keep his promise of not touching me beyond giving me pleasure. The promise that one night we'll be together skin to skin makes the hairs on my neck stand up just thinking about it.

Ciro had to leave to attend a meeting, so I find myself walking, only this time I've strayed a bit from my usual path and ended up in what is without a doubt the training field. It's empty, except for my bodyguard, who is hitting a straw dummy with no mercy. From where I'm standing, I can't see his features, only the light brown color of his hair.

"Can I help you with something?"

I jump at the sound of his voice behind me and clutch a hand to my heart, which threatens to leap out of my chest. I don't think I'll ever get used to the speed of vampires. I mentally note to test on myself whether I can move like that.

"I'm just taking a walk."

"You didn't choose the prettiest place to walk. Here there's only sand and the smell of sweat."

"I heard a noise and wanted to know where it was coming from."

"Now you know." He remains silent for a few minutes, and seeing I make no move to leave, he adds, "Do you know how to fight?"

A light laugh escapes my lips.

"I wouldn't say that, I was more like learning." For a moment, I almost turn to look him in the eye; however, I remember at the last second that it's best not to. He doesn't want anyone to see his face, whatever the reasons may be. "Do you think I could train? You don't have to help me, I can try on my own. I remember some basic lessons..."

I say nothing more. I don't think it's wise to mention who taught me what little I know.

"If that's what you want, I can help you."

"Wouldn't that force you to show me your face? Or are you planning to spar with me while wearing a hood?"

“Something tells me the mystery of my face is what made you stay here longer than necessary.” I hear his footsteps as he circles me until he plants himself in front of me. “Here it is.”

Very slowly I raise my gaze and am surprised not to find grotesque scars or marks that would make him unpleasant to look at. He’s not attractive either, it’s just a... normal face.

“Wow,” I say.

He doesn’t laugh, though the twitch of his lips tells me he wants to.

“Disappointed?” He raises an eyebrow. “What face would you like to see? Maybe I can find something that motivates you.”

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Seeing I don’t quite understand what he means, he shows me leaving me stunned. Before my eyes, his face changes, taking on a totally different appearance. Where there were once sad, ordinary brown eyes, there are now ones of a very familiar blue. His somewhat square jaw reshapes itself into sharp, angular features. Without realizing it, I’m staring straight at Cassian’s face. I bring my hands to my mouth to stifle a

gasp.

“What the hell...?”

“Didn’t Ciro tell you anything about my gift?”

“I’d remember if he had.”

“Well, I guess now you know.”

He turns around without giving it much importance and heads back to the area where he was training. He glances over his shoulder to see if I’m following. This time, his face has changed again and Cassian is no longer the one looking at me. I swallow twice before following.

“Is it just your face, or can you do it with your whole body?”

He gives me something like a smile. His hair is still brown, though his face is once again different. In just a few minutes, his appearance has changed three times. I think I’m getting dizzy.



“Some secrets must be kept if a gift is to remain truly surprising. Not many people even know I can change my face.”

“And why did you tell me?”

“I’m your bodyguard. Would you do anything to harm me when your safety might depend on me?”

I shrug.

“I wouldn’t count too much on that.”

This time I earn a laugh. Hearing it slowly brings a smile to my lips. I recall a bit of my conversation with *Ciro*, the one where he mentioned that *Abraxas*’s lovers found him attractive. Curiosity gets the better of me.

“So, no one knows your real face?”

“I show it more than *you* think. The thing is, no one can know if it’s the real one.”

“That’s kind of sad.”

He moves closer to me. We’re so close I realize how small I seem in comparison to his size. Now the face before me is of slightly more delicate features, almost feminine, with full, rosy lips and perfectly defined lines. His eyes are the same color as his brother’s, and his nose is of an aristocratic shape.

“I’ll tell you a secret.”

“A secret? To me?”

“Yes, to you. You seem like someone who has many and knows how to keep them well.”

For a moment, my heartbeat stutters. Is it possible he knows the truth about me? I’ve tried to be very careful, though maybe not as much as I’d like to believe.

“When my face isn’t real, the one I was born with, my eyes lack the sparkle of life.”

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I focus on his eyes, looking for exactly what he’s described, and indeed, that rosy gaze similar to *Ciro*’s lacks the brightness of a living person. It has a thin film over it that makes it look dull. Almost like staring into the eyes of the dead.

“Are you so ashamed of your looks that you have to take others’?”

“You seem pretty interested in finding out what I really look like. And here I thought you might have feelings for Cassian...” He takes a step back, and I notice for the first time the sword hanging from his hand. “I assure you, I have nothing to envy in anyone. Not even my brother, blessed by beauty.”

“Forgive me if I don’t believe you.”

“How about we make a deal?” I tilt my head, watching him more intently, curious about whatever it is he wants to propose. “You say you received some lessons... good. We’ll meet here every day at this hour, and I’ll teach you even more. And if you manage to make me touch the ground, I’ll show you my real face. Now you know when it’s real.”

“That’s an unfair deal, I won’t be able to make you hit the ground.”

I cross my arms over my chest and for a moment, I think I’m pouting like a little girl who’s been denied something. I quickly erase that expression and try to appear determined and serious.

“I trust you’ll manage.” He moves so fast my eyes barely catch it. I feel his breath behind my ear. “After all, you have two Pures eating out of

your hand. That’s a lot of power for a human.”

I turn around, more than ready to tell him off, but when I do, there’s only empty space. No trace of Abraxas. Damn vampires and their way of vanishing. I spend several more minutes trying to spot him until I give up. Clearly, I’m alone here and he has no intention of coming back. I lift the hems of my dress, which despite being meant for garden walks, is still elegant. It’s a shame to stain the bottom of such a dress. I head back to the mansion, already planning to return tomorrow and start learning to defend myself again. I wonder why Abraxas thinks that’s a good idea. Maybe he plans to use it against me—or his brother—someday. I suppose he thinks that even then, I won’t be much of a threat. He

shouldn’t be so sure of that.

I haven’t even taken a step inside when Ciro bursts into view. Today, he’s not wearing one of his vests. In fact, I’m surprised to see his shirt

wrinkled and the bowtie at his neck undone.

“Well, here you are.” He smiles at me. “I was wondering if you’d like me to show you the art gallery.”

Truth is, I’m not that tired, so I nod with a smile at the idea of having something to do beyond being in my chambers and driving myself mad trying to control—or at least

understand—my gift. He offers me his hand, which unlike Cassian’s, is ungloved. I slide my fingers into his, cold to the touch, though not as much as they were when my supernatural side was suppressed.

“Sorry I wasn’t around to keep you company today,” he says as he leads us through several hallways.

“Don’t worry, I understand. I went for a walk.”

“Anything interesting?”

He might already know I ran into Abraxas—after all, they’re brothers, and according to Ciro, he’s his most trusted man. I wouldn’t be surprised if they told each other everything, although our encounter happened just minutes ago. I choose to be honest; it’s not like I did anything wrong.

“I found Abraxas training and... I didn’t know anything about his gift. It’s incredible and terrifying at the same time.”

Ciro’s laugh sounds like a pleased cat’s purr.

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“Tell me about it. The first time he manifested his gift, I ended up staring at an exact replica of my own face.”

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He opens a door with gold-plated adornments and a sturdy look. When I step inside, there’s no other word to describe what I see but beauty. So very Ciro to have a place like this, dedicated to the praise of beautiful things, whether perfect or imperfect. Like the painting closest to me,— where the artist’s brushstrokes are indecipherable on their own, but together form a piece that, despite being strange, fits perfectly and feels

harmonious.

“There’s not much art being made anymore,” he says beside me, his voice tinged with regret. “Humans are too busy trying to survive, and we’re too busy giving in to our vices.”

I turn slightly to get a better look at him. I wet my lips while giving his appearance a quick once-over.

“I think being a painter would suit you.”

He raises his eyebrows, not even trying to hide his surprise. He looks at me closely and slowly gives me one of his charming, signature smiles. At no point do I feel that his disheveled appearance—disheveled only by his standards, since on anyone else it would look formal—detracts from his attractiveness. I won't lie: maybe his beauty doesn't affect me like it does others, but I'm not blind.

Ciro is a very attractive man, with a dangerously smooth tongue, and if he had a year instead of a month, he might even manage to stir doubt in me. It's not like I don't already harbor other kinds of doubts about Cassian Draven constantly. I'm afraid this may be a fleeting feeling- because then I'll have eternity to torment myself with the memories.

"Why do you think that?"

"I don't know." I shrug. "I guess it's the way you look when you observe this art. You seem a bit... happier."

"Just because I can appreciate art doesn't mean I'm capable of creating it—just like someone who knows how to love isn't necessarily loved the same in return."

It would be easy to let silence settle between us, to be just another person here. Instead, I can't bite my tongue, and for the first time in all these days, I dare to touch on a topic I had forbidden myself from bringing up.

"Do you really think Neera loved you?"

I think neither of us breathes for a few seconds.

"I came to the conclusion a while ago that she didn't love me. At least not with the same intensity I felt for her. If she had, she never would've ended up in his bed, right?"

"Did Cassian admit to sleeping with her?"

"He didn't need to. I saw it with my own eyes, Elara."

"Things aren't always what they seem."

"Sorry if I wasn't able to analyze the scene with exact precision," he says with sarcasm. "I think I was a little too shocked seeing my lover with someone else... and then seeing her dead."

There's a lot of pain buried in Ciro. I know it, I feel it. Still, deep down, I think he knows the truth just as well as I do—if Cassian wasn't lying. And that's exactly why he doesn't want to accept it. Because if he does, the reasons he clings to for hating him will vanish, and instead he'll have plenty of reasons to hate Neera. I think that even though she was unfaithful to him, or clearly intended to be, he finds solace in the fact that she was killed. As if that somehow eased the pain of betrayal—or, rather, covered it up.

“Can I tell you something?” He nods. “I don’t think you loved her as much as you believe. If you truly had, I’m sure you wouldn’t be trying to find the same thing again. With me. Just the thought of being with someone else, of living what you had with her all over again, would hurt you. You wouldn’t be able to do it. I’m not saying you don’t have the right to seek love, but I don’t think you’d be doing it so... hungrily.”

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I smile timidly. “And look at us—you want me to open my heart to you, to see you for who you really are and not just be dazzled by the wrapping. You know the truth. You know Cassian isn’t lying, don’t you?”

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He bites his lower lip and, contrary to what I expected—which was for him to deny it or get angry at my words—he simply reaches out and wraps his hand around mine. It’s almost a confirmation of my question. I let him hold my hand and gently guide me through the gallery, patiently waiting while I take in every brushstroke of every piece. Sometimes small sounds of awe escape me—I’ve never been in front of anything like this. Art isn’t something people like me or my family could ever afford.

Thinking of my family makes my chest ache.

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“Now I understand why Cassian is obsessed with you,” he says as we finish our walk through the gallery.

I want to ask what he means by that. But just as I open my mouth to do so, it’s too late. Ciro has vanished right before my eyes.

I hate that habit of vampires—especially in this family, where it seems to be a custom.

return to my quarters, where Naida and Clarissa no longer wait for me. A few days ago, I told them it wasn’t necessary—I’m perfectly capable of undressing myself. I no longer wear corsets or anything that keeps me from handling things on my own. Still, they insist on coming each morning to help me get ready for the day. At least I’ve managed to claim the nights entirely for myself.

I sit in front of my vanity and begin removing a few pins that hold my hair back. In my mind, I can feel fists pounding impatiently against the walls I’ve built. Every morning I take my time with them, like training. Apparently, I’m better at it than I thought—keeping Cassian at a more than reasonable distance from my thoughts.

A mischievous giggle escapes my lips as I imagine him, hysterical and cranky, unable to get what he wants.

Near the candle on the vanity, a moth flutters. I watch it for a long time, and a tingling stirs in my fingers. I know what it means—I've felt it before, and it scares me. I know what I'll do if I give in to that sensation. I wrap my fingers around my other hand and pull it toward my chest, as if that could stop me from ripping out another soul.

"Looks like you need help."

Startled, I turn on my seat—I know exactly who I'll find. I may not have heard his voice many times in my life, but I could never forget it.

"Atarothz?"

The smile spreads across his face, transforming his already attractive features into something breathtaking. He nods, clearly pleased I haven't forgotten the short time we spent together, and the motion causes that streak of gray hair I share with him to fall into view. He approaches silently, every movement exuding the elegance of a god.

"There will be time to catch up later, but for now what matters is that you learn to control your powers, am I wrong?"

His eyes reflect the same concern that's haunted me since I woke up. I need to learn—and fast. What I'm living now is a brief truce. Sooner or later, the shapeshifters will come for me, and we won't be able to hide my nature from the Purebloods much longer. I'll be caught between two factions that want to own me—each for their own selfish reasons.

None will bother asking what I want—so I won't give them the chance to use me.

"I'm afraid you're right," I say.

"Then let's begin, little soul-devourer."

I remain completely still, unsure of what to do. He mimics me—waiting, I suppose, for me to take the initiative. I close my eyes and the first thing I do is shed this false skin, this false appearance. It doesn't take long to feel the prick of fangs on my lip and a strange electricity

coursing through my veins.

"Why can I do this?" I ask, eyes still closed.

"Why can chameleons change the color of their skin? It's a matter of survival. They blend into their surroundings to avoid predators. You,

Elara, have a second skin for the same reason.”

“I wish I didn’t have to survive... and could just live.”

“You will. That’s why I’m here to help you reach your full potential, so you become the threat, not the threatened.”

“Now you care about me?”

His gaze darkens, and for a moment I regret my words—though I quickly remember every time I felt misunderstood and alone, terrified of my future, ignorant of everything around me and of what I was. He showed no compassion for me back then, so why should I care about his feelings now?

“I can’t undo the past, no matter how much I wish I could. I know I didn’t make the best choices, but at the time, they felt like the right ones. What I can do now is be here—to help you get the future you want.”

I stay quiet, unsure of what to say or even if I want to say anything. He must notice because he blinks a few times, as if trying to shake off his emotions, and squares his shoulders, removing any trace of v

f vulnerability.

“The urge to sever a soul is something you’ll carry for life,” he says. “That need will grow stronger in the presence of vulnerable beings—like that moth you were watching.”

“There’s no way to silence it? Control it?”

“I can only speak from the experience of a god. In my case, I’ve learned to control the impulses, to dull them a bit. But I constantly feel a tingling on my skin. I’d love to tell you it can disappear, but I’d be lying.”

“So how do I control it?”

All I can think about is hurting someone I love because I can’t control what I am. Fear freezes my veins—the idea that I could accidentally

harm Cassian.

“Cassian isn’t weak,” he says, as if reading my mind. “The threads of his soul are strong and know how to hide well from threats like us. If you wanted to sever his, you’d have to concentrate very hard and make a real effort.”

I breathe a sigh of relief.

“As I said, your nature will assert itself in the presence of the weak—we’re still predators, after all.” He circles me as if assessing me. “As for control, much of it comes with experience. It gets easier, but sometimes visualizing your power—giving it form—helps.”

“Giving it form?”

“Yes. For example, visualizing it as a reservoir that’s overflowing and imagining a way to contain it. A jar to pour all your power into and seal it

with a lid. I know it might sound silly...”

“I want to try.”

He nods.

“Good. Approach the moth you were watching earlier.” I do as he says. “What do you feel?”

“A tingling in my fingertips.”

“Tolerable?”

“I wouldn’t say it’s painful, but it’s not pleasant either. I feel like I’m standing at the edge of a cliff, waiting to fall.”

“Anxiety.”

“Something like that.”

“Now do what I told you visualize your power and give it shape.”

Though I know what he means, at first, behind my eyelids, I see only darkness, accompanied by that anticipation that flirts with anxiety. I think for a few minutes about what shape my power should take, discarding all options until it chooses for me.

A flash of light materializes in the dark, and I imagine my hands warming against it. It’s a pleasant sensation at first—but just like in real life, if you stay too long near fire, it burns. I suppress a small whimper of pain, and when I try to pull away, my hands don’t move. Panic sets in.

“What do you see?” Atarothz asks.

“Fire,” I reply, my voice trembling.

He remains silent, and I consider opening my eyes to escape this. But the stubborn, brave voice in my head urges me to keep going. I bite my lip to muffle the pain, and more out of



stubbornness than certainty, I embrace the heat and try to bring my palms together. The flame reacts positively, becoming almost malleable.

Fire—something I can control. Who would’ve thought?

Little by little, the distance between my palms shortens, and the flames shrink, their intensity fading. Along with them, the tingling in my body and the anxious sensation in my gut dissipate. Without realizing it, a small smile pulls at my lips.

Just a little more. As if aware of my intent, the flame resists. I grit my teeth, feeling the wrinkles on my brow from the effort, and a small bead of sweat slips down my temple.

“Come on, come on...” I murmur to myself.

“You control your power—not the other way around.”

His words settle into my mind like a sacred commandment. There’s a small flash of light, like a newborn star, and then—surprising even myself—my palms touch, and the fire disappears entirely. The only sign that it ever existed is a faint trail of smoke.

When I open my eyes, none of it is real. Only Atarothz’s proud, astonished gaze remains.

“Incredible.”

In that moment, I feel like I am.

## Sold to the Night Lord

### Chapter 156

Elara

“So, things with your father are going well?”

My finger trails along the dip of Cassian Draven’s chest as a stupid smile remains stamped across my face.

Honestly, I don’t know what this is, and I’m not even sure I want to find out.

“It feels strange hearing you refer to him as my father.”

“Should I call him His Divine Excellency, or...?”

“Or...?”

“Better we save that conversation for another time.” He catches a lock of my hair and plays with it between his fingers before bringing it to his

nose. “What I like most is that you haven’t lost the scent I perceived on you before.”

“Would it have been that bad?”

“Catastrophic.” My fingers continue wandering freely over his ivory skin. I trace the edge of his nose, surprised that a man can be this perfect, then glide downward, brushing his lower lip. “And you taste better than you smell.”

He pretends to bite the tip of my finger, but I pull my hand back before he reaches it.

Thank you, newly acquired reflexes.

His playful laugh makes the hair on my entire body stand on end—especially my nipples. He notices, and his blue eyes take on the tone of a

raging sea.

“Tell me more about the lessons Atarothz is giving you before I spread your legs and fuck you.”

If my body wasn’t already aroused, his words ignite a ball of fire in my abdomen. I swallow and sit up, supporting my weight on one arm as I

look at him with a flirtatious smile.

“Maybe that’s exactly what I want.”

“Elara...”

I snort as I let myself fall back down, resting my face against his chest. Cassian is proving—if there was still any doubt—that his self-control is unshakable. It’s been days since he fed on me and gave me an orgasm so intense my legs still tremble if I think about him too much. As he promised, our encounters have been limited to caresses—very pleasurable ones—and kisses where our tongues and teeth fight for dominance. However, I haven’t yet felt the full weight of his body over mine. It’s ironic how intensely I now crave that, when a few months ago the thought of even breathing near him made my stomach churn. Thankfully, the time we spend apart keeps getting shorter, I never thought the day would come when I’d want to run to him instead of away from him.

“All right, fine,” I say with a smile on my lips. “Everything’s going great. Little by little, he’s teaching me how to summon my own power. At least I won’t be a danger, ripping out souls without control.”

“Every time you did something like that, you were in danger. I wouldn’t call that losing control.”

“I don’t want to have to be in danger to defend myself.”

His eyes, once full of desire, soften with the closest thing to tenderness a man like him can *show*. “When they come for me, I’ll be ready.”

“I know.”

He lets go of the strand of hair he’d held to his nose, and with infinite delicacy—the kind that disarms me every time I catch a glimpse of it— he strokes my cheek, tracing up along my cheekbone before disappearing behind my ear. He tucks the hair behind it and clears my face so he can look at me without hesitation. For several minutes, neither of us speaks. It’s not necessary. I think we both share a feeling we’re too afraid to say out loud. Maybe if we don’t, it’ll be less real.

“I should go. Atarothz will show up soon to continue the lessons.”

“I’ll see you again when you sleep.” He winks and presses a kiss to my lips that, if it weren’t for him, I surely would’ve deepened into something passionate. “Good morning, little wildcat.”

I close my eyes with the certainty that when I open them again, I’ll be back in my bed, alone. I’ve learned how to leave this little space we share whenever I want. It’s almost like blowing out a candle. Once I do, the connection is broken.

I open my eyes and stare at the ceiling of my room, lingering more than usual. I sit up in bed, swing my legs over the edge, and feel the cold kiss my feet. I reach for a silk robe and drape it over my shoulders as I wait patiently for Atarothz to appear. He doesn’t keep me waiting long—the temperature in the room drops immediately, several degrees. The balcony is closed, and yet a soft breeze stirs my hair.

“How are you feeling?” he asks as soon as he glances at me.

“Wonderful.”

“I thought so.” He tilts his head, observing me, and I arch an eyebrow inquisitively. “Your skin glows more than it did the first time we spoke.”

“Well, considering I was in some kind of limbo...”

Atarothz laughs. His laugh is warm, in contrast to his glacial appearance. More times than I’d like to admit, I find myself staring into his eyes like a fool.

“Let’s begin again with your primary power.”

# Sold to the Night Lord

## Chapter 157

I square my shoulders, close my eyes, and imagine threads extending from my fingers—like a puppeteer. In the few days I’ve been exploring my powers with Atarothz, I’ve learned that my core gift is, as I suspected, the ability to eradicate souls. A power too vast and terrifying, because if a soul ceases to exist, there is nothing after death. What could be more devastating than that? My gift makes me a nightmare for **any** living being. What’s more, my blood is incredibly powerful. The red liquid running through my veins makes me practically immune to any gift turned against me—just as it would for anyone who consumes it. I also have all the abilities of a vampire: speed, enhanced senses, and... immortality. Atarothz says that the moment I broke the threads that hid me as a mortal, I froze in time. This is the face I’ll have forever.

I don’t know if that comforts me or terrifies me.

“Do you see all the threads?” he asks. “Follow the one that leads to the soul.”

The thing is, it’s not as simple as it sounds. From each thread, others sprout—some shining more brightly in an attempt to distract me. The one leading to the soul protects itself as much as it can, planting little traps and distractions to mislead me. Until now, my survival instinct has done what it could—but it wasn’t right. I wasn’t extracting those souls properly—I was absorbing them into myself, attaching them to my own. Now, with the knowledge I’ve gained, I’ll destroy them without needing to absorb them.

Unless I choose to.

“When you find the right thread, your hands will burn. Do you feel it?”

Oh, I feel it. The tingling turns into intense heat that gradually reaches painful levels. I clench my teeth, my eyes, never letting go of the

visualization of those threads.

“The closer you are to the soul, the more heat you’ll feel.”

The hardest part is holding on until the end. A hiss escapes between my teeth as I burn more and more—or at least that’s what it feels like. When I open my eyes, my hands will be intact, but the sensation is no less real because of that.

“What do you see?”

It takes me a moment to respond—I’m still pulling on that thread, getting closer to the source of the heat—until I see it. A luminous, silvery

orb that blinds me.

“Light,” I say.

I visualize my hands cradling that light, feel a more pleasant warmth against my palms. Now all I’d have to do is snuff that light out—bring my hands as close as possible until they touch and extinguish the soul.

Which I can’t do—because the soul in my hands is mine.

I sigh, open my eyes, and the heat fades. I blink several times to adjust to the brightness in the room.

“It would be more productive if we went to the woods and found an animal to practice with.”

“I don’t want to do that to an animal,” I reply.

Again.

“If you want to practice the final step, it’s necessary.”

A bitter taste settles in the back of my throat just thinking about eradicating the soul of an innocent animal.

“Do you know anything about Lilith?” I ask, trying to change the subject.

I catch the surprise on his face. My father—damn, it’s harder than it seems to think of him as a paternal figure—despite being a man with a stoic face and restrained emotions, can’t fully control them when it comes to my mother. I won’t mention again how strange it is to think of that biblical, cursed figure as my mother. The fists of his strong, long fingered hands clench as he tightens his jaw, making the muscle pulse.

“She’s in the Pits, burning, most likely.”

Though his voice is neutral, his face is more than enough to reflect his emotions. Rage is consuming him.

“Burning?”

“Most likely fallen Lucifer is punishing her. He does every time she manages to escape.”

“When did she escape?”

“You saw her in that cell, didn’t you? She told you one day she’d come for you, and that you needed to be ready.” I nod. “Then she came to me –to beg me to protect you, though it wasn’t necessary. I’ve always kept an eye on you.”

“She... begged you?”

“There’s no pride between us, Elara. What we share is far too deep for something so petty to get in the way.”

Hearing those words, my chest swells, and for the first time, I think I feel something close to admiration–mixed with deep sorrow for the two

of them. It can’t be easy for the person you love to be tied to someone else–someone who causes them suffering, who burns them as punishment.

“Do I look like her?”

More often than I’d like to admit, I find myself remembering her image, trying to spot some resemblance between us–as if my mind needs convincing that all this is real, that she truly is the one who gave birth to me...

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## Sold to the Night Lord

“Her lips, the arch of her nose, and your personality.” A sad smile pulls at his mouth. “You resemble her more than you think.”

“I don’t know if that’s a compliment.”

“I’m aware that we both made mistakes as parents. Maybe she was harsher in some ways, but I assure you, being in her shoes was very complicated.” He sits on the edge of my bed, which looks ridiculously small compared to him. “She was born to please a man, given no purpose beyond that, and when she refused to conform, she was condemned to a series of horrors no one should ever endure. She was a girl, just like you are now, with the same hunger to live and enjoy life. They tore it all away before she even had a chance to begin.”

“Do you miss her?” I ask, a lump in my throat.

“Do you miss Cassian?”

Color rushes to my cheeks, and he chuckles when he notices my shyness.

“Love is the most powerful force, Elara. Hatred fades when you reach things like revenge or forgiveness. Love, on the other hand, is infinite.”

I open my mouth to respond, but Atarothz vanishes before my eyes as the sound of the door alerts him. Punctual as always, Naida and

Clarissa enter the room with pitchers of hot water and smiles stamped on their faces.

“Good morning, Miss Elara, it’s become a habit to find you already awake.”

“I guess my internal clock got used to it.”

They smile as they head to the bathroom, where they diligently pour the hot water into the tub. Naida comes closer and helps me undress, as if I weren’t perfectly capable. I step into the bath and feel my muscles relax and release tension after practicing my gifts with Atarothz. I run the sponge over my limbs.

“Do you two feel comfortable here?”

The question takes them by surprise.

“Of course, yes, I suppose so,” Clarissa replies hastily.

I narrow my eyes.

“You suppose?”

“What Clarissa means is that they treat us well here, and we’re happy to be wherever you are.”

“But?”

“But we’re loyal to Cassian.”

Hearing those words brings me too much relief. It lifts an invisible weight I didn’t realize I was carrying. I’m about to tell them this won’t last much longer, but I hold back at the last moment. You never know who might be listening. I finish the bath as quickly as possible, step out of the tub, and let them dry me with fluffy, soft towels. Naida starts heading off for what I already know will be a dress, so I stop her before she

leaves.

“Please; I’d prefer to wear pants today.”

She frowns but nods without protest. Minutes later, she returns with a pair of leather trousers perfect for horseback riding. I slide my legs into the undergarments, then pull on the pants tightly, along with a shirt and a small corset belt. Clarissa, as always, handles my hair, *this* time

braiding it into a fishtail.

“Do you need anything else?”

“No, everything’s perfect,” I respond with a smile. “I guess I’ll see you before dinner.”

“Of course, heaven forbid you show up to dinner improperly dressed.”

Clarissa’s ironic tone makes me laugh. I don’t delay much longer and head straight for the gardens. I reach the training fields without difficulty. I’ve walked this path a few times now. Abraxas stands with his arms crossed over his shirt, which does nothing to hide the muscles beneath. To my surprise, he has chosen a face I’ve seen before. When I get close enough, I notice the lack of light in his eyes, confirming this

isn’t his real face.

“I hope you rested. I’m not going to go easy on you.”

\*I don’t expect anyone to go easy on me.”

He tosses me a wooden sword, and I rely on memory to position myself just as Eleazar taught me. I haven’t let myself think about anything related to him until now. I take my stance, and Abraxas’s gaze seems approving. There’s no countdown or anything like that to signal the start of the training. One moment to the next, Abraxas lunges at me. I dodge the first strike thanks to my reflexes and speed, but I make sure to

block the second with the sword.

“You’re a very good student. I should congratulate your former master.”

“I’d prefer we didn’t talk about him.”

I see curiosity swirling in his eyes. He lets it go—for now, at least—and proceeds with the next thrust. Sweat slowly slides down my back, and my breathing—though not as labored as it would be if I were human—is already becoming difficult. Every now and then, I remind myself to act as if I don’t possess powers and abilities similar to a vampire.

“You’re fast, but you lack muscle,” he points out. “You should eliminate your enemies as quickly as possible before they weaken you with their strikes. It’s only a matter of time before your sword falls.”

And right then, he puts all his strength into a precise blow that, if the sword weren’t wooden, would have been lethal. The weapon falls to the ground, and I clench and unclench my hand to ease the pain shooting from it up to my shoulder.

“Did I hurt you?”



He grabs my wrist before I can respond. His palm wraps around my knuckles and forces me to open and close my hand.

“It’s nothing. The impact just caught me off guard, that’s all.”

“I see.” He watches everything with a kind of curiosity. I don’t know why, but Abraxas sends chills down my spine. I feel like one look from him is enough to see right through me. It’s terrifying. “Tomorrow we’ll work on building up your muscles. That’ll be best.”

I keep my mouth shut, let him massage my arm, and in doing so, he takes away some of that paralyzing pain.

“I’ve heard there’s a party soon. Are you excited?”

“Why should I be?” I ask while watching his fingers massage my palm.

“You’ll get the chance to see Cassian.”

“I thought I’d made it clear I have no interest in him.”

“My brother is far too blinded by his need to love and be loved to realize you never will—at least not him. But don’t take me for a fool, Elara.”

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I swallow and look away, uncomfortable.

“And you? Will you be going to that party?”

“I don’t know.” He finally lets go of my hand. “Normally I wouldn’t, but there’s something in the air that unsettles me.”

And just like other times—he disappears.

## Sold to the Night Lord

Elara

With a huff, I blow away the strand that escaped from my braid.

I’m sweaty and tired. My breathing is growing more labored, and a drop of sweat trickles down my back. I grip the hilt of the sword tightly and adjust the position of my feet on the ground.

“What’s the reason for tonight’s party?” I ask.

It’s been days since Abraxas informed me of the celebration, and during that time, I still haven’t managed to take him down. We’ve increased the hours I spend training; not that I have anything better to do here, though. I don’t seem very pleased about it. Even so, he manages to arrange every meal in my company, and at each one, he manages to draw out an unexpected smile from me. I’ve come to the conclusion that he’s a good person—the problem is that his past haunts him.

\*Since when do they need a reason to throw a party?” he replies.

I don’t miss the way he refers to the other vampires as if he weren’t one of them.

“There’s always some hidden motive.”

“Just like you’re trying to distract me now?”

I let out a growl and lunge at him with all the force I can muster. This time I manage to make him step back a few inches. He raises his eyebrows in surprise and curves his lips into a defiant smile. When I attack again, Abraxas responds to my blows with grace and precision. We enact this dance of swords for so long that I consider stopping, until a noise catches both our attention.

A majestic deer, with antlers like a crown, watches us from the forest undergrowth. I wonder how it got here. The animal bewitches me with its chilling black eyes. I blink to shake off the feeling and realize this is the perfect moment—the one I’ve been waiting for.

I don’t overthink it. I strike as fast as a viper, as silently as I can. Abraxas raises his sword too late, my blow destabilizes him, and afraid I might

not achieve my goal, I jab my elbow into his side. Everything happens with unbearable slowness before my eyes. Abraxas drops his sword

and falls to one knee, hitting the ground hard.

I smile in satisfaction and place the tip of my wooden sword under his chin.

“Looks like I’ve won.”

“Little cheat.”

“I’d rather say I made good use of the circumstances.”

His smile shows no trace of annoyance, more like pride. With my sword still beneath his chin, he looks directly into my eyes..

“I believe they’re waiting for you.”

I glance over my shoulder and see that, indeed, both Naida and Clarissa are waiting at the edge of the training field with pleasant smiles and a parasol.

“First you need to-”

When I turn my gaze back to him, I realize he’s gone, leaving me talking to myself like an idiot. I suppress a string of curses, drop my weapon, and cast one last glance toward the forest—but the animal has vanished too. I head over to meet my handmaidens.

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“Do you have any color preference for tonight’s dress?” Naida asks.

I shrug, still annoyed and unable to believe Abraxas had the nerve to vanish without fulfilling his end of the deal. Sure, I won in a slightly underhanded way—but I won. It’s not cheating to use your opponent’s distractions.

We enter the villa, where the atmosphere is calm and quiet. I’m not surprised to find a wide assortment of dresses laid out across my bed. They help me bathe in record time, and by the time I realize it, my hair cascades down my back and a crown of fresh flowers is woven into it. The result, as always, is magnificent. Every time the two of them work their magic on me, I look in the mirror and wonder if the girl staring back is really me.

“Stunning.”

All three of us stifle a gasp of surprise as we turn toward the door. Ciro leans against the frame, dressed in a perfect suit with no trace of his usual vests. I scan him quickly, stopping on his eyes, still fixed on me.

“You think so?”

I clear my throat and smooth down the dress. Yes, it really is dazzling, with a fabric that fades from a deep crimson around my chest into night-black in the skirt. Around my neck is a collar of obsidian stones, so heavy that no one could doubt their authenticity.

“I don’t think I know it for certain.” He steps into the room. “You take my breath away, Elara.”

Naida and Clarissa choose that exact moment to leave, though I can tell they do so reluctantly. Ciro offers me his arm, and with a few steps, I close the distance between us. Like everything that surrounds him, the carriage he’s chosen tonight is elegant—fit for a king. I suppose having the surname Amery is almost like being royalty. If the distance between Ciro’s villa and Aeron’s mansion is any indication of their relationship, I’d say it’s quite close. No wonder then that Cassian lives the farthest away, though I’m pretty sure

he wouldn't want it any other way. He may radiate charisma and charm, but he's not exactly a social soul.

"Is there anything expected of me tonight?" I ask.

Ciro frowns slightly and gives me a puzzled look.

"Why do you ask?"

"I don't know... I guess I'm nervous."

I don't tell him that most of the nerves are because of my imminent encounter with Cassian and the tremendous effort I'll need to make not to let my heart betray me.

"It's just another party. You don't have to be nervous. Besides, your friend Walter will be there."

## Sold to the Night Lord

### Chapter 160

Truthfully, I haven't heard from Walter since my visit, nor have I tried to visit again. I've been too busy training with Abraxas and practicing with Atarothz at dawn. Silence settles in the carriage, and I don't know if it's the jolting or accumulated fatigue, but I feel dizzy—and starving. Famished.

I hear the horses neigh as they're reined in, and the carriage door opens immediately. Ciro gestures for me to exit first. I haven't yet set foot on the step when a scarred hand offers to help me. I examine the hand first, tracing all the scars with my eyes, then follow the arm upward until I meet an unfamiliar face. I've never seen eyes so pale green. The rest is just as striking: sharp cheekbones, a strong jawline, full lips, a nose that looks like it's been broken, and a scar through one eyebrow that contrasts slightly with his *ivory* skin. Far from diminishing his appeal, it enhances it. The whole image is utterly captivating.

"Abraxas will stay close in case you need him," Ciro's voice announces behind me.

I look again at those eyes—not only are they incredibly green, but they shine. Shine with life, something I've never seen in Abraxas's eyes

until now.

"This is Abraxas?"

Both brothers let out low chuckles.

“So you’ve been toying with Elara, huh?” Ciro murmurs so softly that if I were human, I wouldn’t have heard it.

I’m still stunned. Abraxas does a good job ignoring my expression of shock and, with a sly smile, vanishes, pulling a hood over his head.

“He doesn’t like to attract attention.”

“I don’t think the hood helps much with that,” I comment.

“Don’t worry. He knows how to remain in the shadows.”

Yes, I’m sure he does, I think.

I walk into the mansion on Ciro’s arm. I should be used to this setting by now, having seen it more than once. Naked or half-naked women are everywhere, just like the jugs and fountains of blood where the bolder ones don’t hesitate to dip a finger and raise it to their mouths with ecstatic expressions. From the ceiling hang red silk ribbons, and women I immediately recognize as human dance and sway sensually upon them. Everyone at the party is clustered in little groups and doesn’t hesitate to whisper when they see us enter.

I doubt I’ll ever get used to that part.

No one needs to tell me—Cassian is here. I can feel his presence all over my skin.

“Can I get you something to drink?”

I arch a brow, half curious, half teasing.

“Are you sure there’s something I can drink?”

“You’re not the only human here, remember?”

He winks and walks off to speak to someone I assume is a servant, who nods repeatedly before hurrying away.

You look absolutely exquisite.

I try to suppress the smile forming on my lips.

**Isn’t** that something you say about food?

I think I’ve devoured you more than once your lips, your neck, and a little further down... those lips too...

My cheeks burn. I can feel his voice purting inside my head, like he's toying with the threads in my mind, stroking them until I shudder

Where are you?

Behind you. He picks up on my intent immediately. Don't turn around—I've got a wonderful view from here.

I'm wearing a dress. You can't possibly see anything.

I see the full curve of your back, that pale, delicate skin I'd mark with my lips and teeth if I could right now, and oh, the promise of a perfect ass. I'd say I see more than enough.

If I thought my cheeks were burning before, it's nothing compared to now. I'm sure I'll burst into flames any second.

Ciro's hand keeps me grounded, snapping me back to reality. He presents me with what looks like a bubbling glass of champagne. I take it by the stem and wet my lips under his pleased gaze.

It doesn't take long before he speaks again.

"How about a dance?" He looks at me with hopeful eyes. "I think it's a better idea than standing around getting stared at, don't you **think?**"

"Honestly, I'm tired of all those stares."

"Then let's go."

I slide my hand onto his, and we glide elegantly toward the center, where other couples are dancing far more wildly. In the back of my mind, I

feel Cassian's fingers brushing and a low animalistic growl. I try to mentally shush him—not that it'll work. I can feel his gaze scorching the back of my neck.

Ciro is an excellent dancer—every step full of grace and precision—and I hear the huffs of some women watching him dreamily and me with murderous *eyes*.

"You're very popular among the ladies," I say.

"You *know* why," *he* replies, not even glancing at them. "It means nothing to me. Those aren't the gazes I want."

"What do you mean?"

He twirls us across the floor, his hands firm on my waist and my arms around his neck. The aerial dancers move around us like part of a dream.

“I don’t want lust—I want love. *You* already know that.”

Looking into his eyes, I almost see a boy. A boy desperate to be loved, to belong. I feel a deep sorrow in my chest knowing I can’t give him

what he wants. I know I never will.

“Sometimes love starts with desire,” I suggest.

“Not for them,” he whispers into my ear.

“Then why was it different with Neera?”

“I’m beginning to think I was wrong.” He steps forward and I step back, following the choreography. “Thank you, Elara. I like talking to **you**.”

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You’re wiser than you let on. I’ll miss our conversations.”

The string instruments lower their tempo as a new song begins. He stops, looking at me with those pink eyes, so otherworldly and beautiful. He takes a step toward me, and my heart pounds in my chest—I can taste his sadness. I’m fairly certain he’s about to kiss me, and I know I have to stop him—for everyone’s sake.

I’m more than ready to pull away from his arms when a loud crash draws everyone’s attention—including ours. One of the servants must’ve been startled, sending a tray full of blood-filled glasses flying. Crimson and shards of glass coat the floor.

I search for the cause of the commotion-

And then the blood in my veins begins to boil.

A Pureblood, whose name I don’t know and won’t care to learn once he’s dead, has a dagger pressed to Cassian’s neck.

“Kill him,” I hiss inside my head, full of rage.

“Easy, little wildcat.”

Comment

