



### Chapter 4

Each chime falls over us like a bucket of cold water.

Mom grabs Abigail's hand, and my father offers me his arm to walk.

Silas stands to my right and opens the door, letting in a gust of freezing air.

We all seem to hold our breath for a second and then begin to walk.

The street is empty, although dozens of pairs of eyes watch us from their windows.

Every full moon is an event that everyone watches from the safety of their homes, with goosebumps and aching hearts, because every time one of us enters the Red Auction, it reminds the others of what will one day come to their own homes.

Many other auctions are taking place tonight in hundreds of cursed villages like ours.

We walk in silence, hearing windows close and the meow of a stray cat.

"If you ask me now, I'll take you out of here," Silas whispers.

"We'll run away from the village, go into the forest, and with the money I've saved, we'll cross the ocean."

My heart skips a beat, I look around, hoping no one is close enough to have heard his boldness.

"Don't say nonsense." I grit my teeth. "Don't even think of suggesting something like that again. It would be treason."

He tries to speak, but a single look from me is enough to silence him.

## Sold to the Night Lord



He can't be serious about this.

Going against the rules and the system is treason.

They'd kill our whole family—or rather, drain them like pigs in the village square.

The world has changed; we're no longer the cruelest living being. Now they are.

They let us dream of a world where humans ruled everything, and crushed that fantasy with a simple wave of the hand.

"There doesn't seem to be much of a crowd at this auction," Mom comments from behind, worried.

Fewer people at the auction means more chances of being bought.

I swallow with difficulty, trying to dissolve the knot in my throat.

The peaked roof of what used to be a church is already visible at the end of the street.

After the vampires' arrival, everything related to religion was burned and destroyed—except churches.

They found it ironic to use them for auctions.

As if to say: "Look, God, here's where I buy your beloved children to treat them like animals, to feast on them and break their souls."

What they don't know is that their arrival sparked, for many, a deeper need to believe—to cling to a merciful being who watches over us.

The church doors are wide open, and from within, an intense orange light spills out.

We stop walking and look at each other, knowing they can't follow me any further.

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Once again, Mom begins to cry and throws herself into my arms.

"I'll pray every night for you to be safe, healthy, and strong."

"Mom..."

"Darling, don't scare our daughter anymore," says Dad, wrapping his arms around Mom as she tries to hide in him.

"She's strong and will fulfill her role. She'll manage to write to us and bring us words of relief, right?"

I nod.

"Sister, show them how tough the Vosses are."

"You got it," I smile.

"Don't encourage your sister to do anything reckless," Mom scolds.

"Daughter, you must be submissive—even if they promise not to hurt you beyond... well, you know their word doesn't mean much. They could still hurt you."

"I know, Mom," I say, even though I'm more than willing to be reckless. "I'll be good."

"That's my girl."

I kneel down, aware that my skirts are getting stained with dirt.

I kiss Abigail on the crown of her head and whisper something silly in her ear to make her laugh, then hug Silas, and finally wrap both my arms around my parents and hold them rightly.

"I'll be fine, I promise."

"We love you so much, daughter."

I give them each a loud kiss on the cheek and, clutching my skirts, I head toward the entrance of the old church.

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I don't look back—their sad faces would break me.

I quicken my steps and cross the threshold of the door.

The cold inside steals my breath for a moment.

Despite being inside a church, little remains of its original contents.

It looks nothing like the images in books.

Everything that could have had religious meaning is gone.

Where the baptismal font should be, there's a pyramid of goblets filled with crimson liquid; the walls bear no saints, only portraits of pale faces.

The Pure, the elite among vampires, the highest authority.

The pews have been replaced by luxurious armchairs, the altar is now just another table, and a few crosses remain in place, turned upside down in mockery.

A woman with an oval face, dressed in a red velvet gown, approaches me when she sees me enter.

"Your Libris, please."

I search in the small pouch hanging from my wrist and pull out the book that contains all my data.

The woman opens it and reads with a clear look of boredom.

She observes me briefly from under her lashes, evaluating me.

"Follow me."

She starts walking down the aisle, and before we reach what was once the altar, we veer toward a small door.

I start hearing my own heartbeat.

The cold is still painful, and I wonder how she shows no signs of discomfort.

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She's human—the blush in her cheeks and her lack of pallor confirm it.

We emerge into a room dimly lit by candles, and other faces stare back at me.

There are several girls and boys, all with wide, fearful eyes.

"Take off your dress and put that on," says the woman, pointing to a red cloth.

I look around, searching for a screen to change behind.

"There's no..."

"Modesty and shyness are things you can no longer afford from now on," she cuts me off. "Get changed quickly, they're about to arrive."

I take the red silk garment and, glancing quickly at my companions, I see that it does little to cover our nakedness.

The men's chests are bare, and they wear a strange piece of clothing from the waist down.

I blush and quickly avert my gaze.

Everyone avoids eye contact, gripped by shame.

I try to undo the laces of my corset.

"One last question," the woman in the red dress says before disappearing down the hallway. "Is your virtue intact?"

I blink.

"What does my virtue have to do with any of this?"

"They like the taste of virgin blood," her tone is haughty.

"Your virtue will increase your price."

"Damn pigs..." I mutter.

"The answer is simple: yes or no."

She arches an eyebrow at me, impatient. I square my shoulders and lift my chin.



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"Yes, my virtue is intact."

She nods as if pleased with my answer and disappears.

Just a few minutes have been enough to classify her as someone I dislike.

With difficulty, I bring my hands to my back and try to undo the dress. It's hard, but obviously no one is going to offer to help. When I loosen the corset, I allow myself a deep sigh and let it fall to the floor. I slip off the dress and remain in only a thin undergarment.

I hug my body before taking that off as well, leaving me naked. I stare at the wall, pushing aside the shame, and without letting myself lower my gaze, I pull the red silk over my head, which falls softly and clings to my body.



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