

Chapter 6

Elara

The revelation falls upon me, chilling the blood in my veins. The silence is such that the air leaving my lungs in a ragged gasp seems to echo throughout the room. All eyes are on me. I dig my nails into the palms of my hands, holding back the urge to scream at everyone to stop looking at me as if I were already dead. Until my heart says otherwise, I'm very much alive and ready to fight. I won't let them destroy me so easily.

What nonsense am I thinking? For God's sake, he's a vampire. He could break all my bones with a simple movement of his hand.

Other doors swing wide open and instead of allowing in a new member of our club of newly purchased lambs, a rather large group of women bursts in. Their dresses look expensive, made of the finest fabrics by the finest tailors, surely, with lavish necklines and sleeves ending in cascades of lace. The excessively red shade of their lips is the first thing that puts me on alert, followed by the cold touch of a hand on my elbow.

"Come," says one of them without barely looking at me. "We must prepare you for him."

They tug at me without any delicacy. My feet anchor to the ground for a second, the time it takes to remember the situation I'm in, and then I let them lead me away. I cast one last glance at the others before the doors shut tightly behind me. I observe the woman and the rest of the entourage. All of them have faces white as alabaster, smooth skin without imperfections and lips as red as poppies. Vampires, all of them are.

Sold to the Night Lord



A shiver tiptoes down my spine.

"Hurry." She pulls harder on my arm. "It's better if you don't make him wait too long. You won't like the consequences."

Another one steps forward and pulls aside a thick curtain of shiny red velvet that conceals a bathtub with enormous golden feet.

Several hands begin to roam over my body, getting rid of the silk that covers me. I am naked within seconds, and their lack of control over their strength makes their grip painful. I suppress a whimper as they force me to walk and immerse myself in the water.

What I can't suppress is a moan of pure relief when my skin touches the hot water. They scrub my arms with such force that they quickly turn red. They make me feel as though I had walked all my life with a layer of filth on my skin. They scrub and scrub, while other hands massage my hair and rinse it with water.

With the same strength as before, they make me stand and wrap me quickly in a silk robe.

"A tied-up hairstyle will be the best option," says the same woman as before. "It will help mask her scent a bit."

I don't miss the way she wrinkles her nose as she says this. I stare at her, captivated by her beauty. Are all these monsters this beautiful? Her hair is the most intense red I've ever seen, and its exceptional shine creates an incredible contrast with the paleness of her angular face. She has eyes the color of summer meadows and voluptuous lips.

The rest obey the orders of the one I'll now consider their leader. They pull at my hair, making my eyes water more than once. They brush, shape, and arrange the strands to their liking. They examine my hands, file my nails, and smear ointments on them.

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"The master wants her to wear this dress," says another, bringing the garment wrapped in tissue paper.

At the same time, other hands begin to roam my body, sliding fabrics that even my fingers hesitate to touch for fear of damaging them. I don't know how much time passes under the attention of these women, but eventually, the woman with the intense green eyes uncovers a full-length mirror where I can see my appearance.

My hair is gathered in elaborate braids ending in a low bun at the nape of my neck. I'm not wearing a corset or anything like that, and I feel strangely free. My back tingles with cold and a glance confirms it is completely bare down to the curve of my buttocks. I blink in disbelief. This dress is nothing like the ones we wear in the village; it's different.

The sheer fabric is a grayish blue, with cords tied around my neck. I can't see my feet, hidden by the hem of the wide skirt. They place high heels in front of me and quickly put them on me. Everything seems to have been chosen in my size. They throw a black cloak over my shoulders and deft fingers tie it at my chest.

"We've done what we could."

"Let's hope it's enough."

"The appearance of his bloodmaids is very important."

I don't know if they're talking to me, among themselves, or just voicing their thoughts aloud.

"Come, we must go."

They grab my elbow again, forcing me to walk so quickly that I stumble and bump into the red-haired woman's back. She gives me a severe look and bares her fangs in warning. I stare back at her, refusing to lower my gaze. She doesn't yield either, staying in the same position until another of the entourage touches her shoulder soothingly and urges us to

Sold to the Night Lord



continue.

As soon as we pass again through the velvet curtain, a large, broad-shouldered man walks by us. He moves quickly, with a regal bearing, and his body language makes it clear he's not pleased. I keep staring at him and it seems like his eyes meet mine as he passes.

In his irises, I find the coldest blue I've ever seen.

I lose my breath, and the others seem to mimic me.

"Master," they whisper in unison.

I look around, not understanding anything.

"Hurry," they scold me. "The carriage is waiting."

I do as I'm told and exit through the back door of the church. In front of us rests a carriage in the shiniest black with intricate silver carvings. A coachman opens the door for me, but I can't enter without first looking back. I know it's foolish, I know no one I know will be behind me. Still, I do it, as if my family were watching.

My eyes fill with tears when all I see is the empty street and the light from inside the building reflecting on the ground.



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