

Sold to the Night Lord

Sold to the Night Lord

I brush one **of** the stones with my fingers

“I want you to wear it tonight, ruby queen.”

His hands vanish completely from my body, and in the blink of an eye, Cassian is gone—leaving me with a racing heart, swollen lips, and **my**

naked body sitting on the vanity

I stroke the ruby again between my fingers and turn to look at myself in the mirror pale where the explosion of color decorated **my neck**.

I don’t have much time to think about what just happened, much less to regret it.

Naida and Clarissa burst into my room, as always ready to work their magic with their hands on me.

I’m sure Cassian has everything to do with this.

“Good morning, miss,” Clarissa sings.

I see her with her lips pressed into a trembling line and her cheeks flushed from trying not to laugh.

“What is it?” I ask...

She bursts into laughter, and Naida—more animated than the last time I saw her—approaches me, making faces and odd hand gestures.

“Oh, I’m Cassian’s enemy! I hate that wicked vampire!”

I cover my face with my hands and stifle a groan of frustration

The whole damn castle knows, and no one plans to let it go

“Did you hate him before **or** after he carried you through the castle?” Clarissa accuses.

“I’m not going to talk about this with you two.

They look at each other and shrug, unconcerned.

“You’ll come to us eventually.”

“Is that a threat?”

“It’s a fact—women talk,”

Naida gives a playful tap on my shoulder.

“And the experience with a vampire is one worth sharing.”

“Do you happen to know something about that?” I reply accusingly, narrowing my eyes.

Her cheeks flush, and she looks away.

Suspicious

Clarissa comes to the rescue, sends **Nalda** off to the wardrobe, and takes her **usual** place behind me.

M

Thank goodness she gives me a bit of time to cover up again,

She wears a smile full of warmth, and despite the embarrassment just felt, I know neither of them is going to judge me

They probably, more than most, understand that there are things you can’t fight and when your life is going to unfold permanent these walls, you can’t help but live and seek out the experiences you would have if your life were fully your own.

That makes me wonder—what twists in my chest, is it real, or just something born of the need to feel?

I fear the answer is clear.

Under normal circumstances, Cassian and I would have always been enemies.

“Seems like tonight is going to be a little special for you,” Clarissa comments

“What do you mean!”

“I have the feeling that Cassian doesn’t intend to take you as just a feeder.

I’d dare say you’re going as his companion.”

“What makes you think that?”

“I quote, directly from his mouth: “Elara **already** shines on her own, but tonight I want her to blind everyone who looks at her. Can you make that happen?””

“Well, that doesn’t have to mean anything.”

“Silly girl,”

Clarissa rolls her eyes and resumes her task,

Between the three of **us**, a comfortable silence settles, only interrupted by small comments about my preferences for tonight and the soft clatter of their tools.

They slide a beautiful white **dress** over me, pull the laces in the back until my breasts peek generously, and I’m surprised to see it’s one of the few dresses that isn’t as flowy as the ones I wear daily

They cover my hands with gloves that go above the elbows, fasten matching earrings to my ears that go with the blood-red ruby necklace, and before I leave, they drape a white fur cape over my shoulders.

A quick glance in the mirror reveals that everything is designed to make the red of the jewels pop.

“It’s... beautiful,” I manage to **say**

I’m completely captivated by the shine of the gems and the contrast with my skin, my hair pinned up to reveal my neck, **and** my gray eyes that seem to hold the clouds of **a** storm.

“You’re beautiful—will you believe me now?”

“**Maybe** another day.”

I smile and wave goodbye to them, then clutch the cape to my chest.

I descend the steps carefully and am surprised to see Cassian at the foot of them, waiting for me.

10:15 Wed, 6 Aug

He always waits inside the carriage.

“I see your maids took my words very seriously.

He bites his lower lip with a lang

“You look like the sin I’d commit over and over again, Elara”

I don't need a mirror to know the color of my cheeks right now

I try to suppress the small smile threatening to curve my lips and slide my gloved hand over his

He doesn't take his eyes off me—not when he helps me into the carriage, and not when we begin the ride.

We've been bumping along the road for a while, sitting across from each other.

I don't know if it's that or the dress that's making it hard to breathe.

"You can't breathe, Cassian says, as if he read my thoughts.

"I'm fine." I smile faintly to downplay it.

"Will you tell me what's expected of me tonight? Where exactly are we going?"

"Tonight there's a celebration hosted by one of our kind—a Pureblood of lower rank, but known for throwing great parties"

: "Is there a special **occasion**?"

"You don't know?" He arches a brow, his eyes never ceasing to warm my skin.

at marks the signing of the Treaties.

Tonight

It's been... four hundred years? Or was it five hundred? I've lost count."

"That still doesn't answer my first question."

"You're my companion, therefore I want you with me.

"With you?"

"All night.""

That means he won't vanish from my side at the first opportunity, leaving me alone among people I don't know, nor will he only come looking for me when he needs a sip of my blood.

"Have you grown tired of ignoring me?

"I told **you**

I never ignored you,” he huffs. “I **was** doing what I had to do to keep my sanity.”

Again, that breathlessness.

I think it **has** more to do with him than this beautiful but uncomfortable dress.

“Turn around.”

“**What?** Why?”

10 15 Wed, 6 Aug

“Just **do** it.”

I look at him suspiciously before turning on my seat to face the carriage wall.

I hear the sound of his clothes shifting and his breath—cold as death—tickles my nape.

His fingers move quickly and skillfully: he undoes the knot of my cape, reveals the dress beneath, and without asking, starts loosening the laces at my back.

“I’ve always hated these things,” he mutters.

“Why?”

“Because they restrict.”

Without meaning to, a little piggle escapes me.

“What’s so funny?”

my mouth with my hand and take a moment to compose myself.

I cover my m

Feeling the cold leather of his hands on my back doesn’t help.

“Sorry.

It just seems funny that you, of all people, hate something that restricts.”

“I must’ve played the villain in your story a little too well.”

His breath slides down my back, and I feel his nose tracing a part of my spine.

As quickly as he appeared behind me, he disappears and returns to his seat.

I press the dress against my chest with my arm, now without the earlier discomfort.

“Thank you,” I whisper

“No need to thank me.”

e crosses one leg over the other in a masculine pose

Hex

“I prefer when your breath catches because my hands are on your throat.”

Despite the amusement on his features, it’s not a joke.

I know he anime it he loves it and I’m afraid I’m screwert

θ

Comment

breath

AD

Send gift

Sold to the Night Lord

Chapter 82

We made a brief stop so I could relieve myself at a small tavern that stood in the middle of absolutely nowhere.

Needless to say, the stares weren’t lacking for a single moment.

My outfit was far too flashy for a place like that, and at that moment i felt like a traitor for wearing **such** glamorous and expensive clothes

My family has never had more than enough to buy what’s necessary and like day to day.

When I got back to the carriage, a small basket with food was waiting for me, which I devoured in silence while avoiding looking at Cassian in case he was able to read my thoughts once again just by looking at my face.

Only for a few seconds did I wonder if he might be hungry or if maybe his absence this morning was because he had gone to feed on another

feeder.

The thought sent a stab to my chest.

He said he never bit us, but he did it with me—what makes me think I’m the only exception?

Now that I know how intimate the act can be, I don’t want him to share something like that with anyone.

Hypocrite, because I haven’t exactly offered myself willingly to give him my blood either.

The few times it happened, there were lustful thoughts clouding my mind,

We ended up stopping in front of the gates of a gothic-looking mansion, **where** there was no lack of colored stained glass windows and wine- colored rose windows.

There were a few more carriages from which guests were stepping out.

Cassian got out first and helped me do the same.

This time he didn’t disappear, but instead intertwined his arm with mine.

We took the first steps, and I couldn’t help but lower my gaze bit at the sensation of dozens of pairs of eyes on me.

“They’re staring **at us**,” I whisper.

“I know,” he admits. “I would too if I were them.”

“Maybe you should go in alone, like you’ve always done until now.”

His **hand**

, now gloved in his usual leather gloves, rests over mine and applies just the right pressure for me to get the **message**.

He’s not going **anywhere**.

“I don’t care if they look, if they admire you. They’ll never be me, nor will they ever have you hanging from their arm.”

He walks with his gaze fixed ahead, undisturbed by anything

“I’ve never cared about them, I’m not going to start now.”

“Well, I do care,”

510:15

“Why do you care?”

We finished walking toward the doors, where a perfectly dressed man bows his head when he sees us and whispers Cassin’s sign of recognition.

Cassian doesn’t bother to respond, walking past him as if he owned the place.

Some heads turn in our direction, and I see a few Diluted women widen their eyes in astonishment and try to hide their expressions behind

their fans.

“You haven’t answered my question,” Cassian whispers in my ear

I can’t help but glance again at the others, whose eyes are still fixed on us.

I feel my cheeks heat up,

I know the image we’re projecting, and I know he’s aware of it too.

“They won’t stop looking at me. I don’t like it,” I reply so low that even I can barely hear my own **voice**.

But he does he always seems to hear everything, even the voice in my head.

“They’ve always looked at you,” he admits. “You were just too busy showing the whole world how much you hate me to realize it.

Every time you’ve walked into a room, everyone’s eyes focused on you, and every one of those ti

eyes.”

ep aside, opening a path

rath for us

While he speaks, he guides us through the hall as people step:

I hear the rustling of my skirts against the floor, which by the looks of it has been recently polished.

I glance sideways at Cassian and realize that his eyes are also on me.

s I've seen the greed in every pair of

If I stopped to look at them better, I could see that there's a fire burning inside that melts the ice in his blue eyes.

"Well, well... my special guest has **finally** arrived," Ciro's sweet and at the same time seductive voice reaches my ears.

"And you come with the best company."

He makes his way through the crowd to appear before us, wearing black leather pants and a blood-colored shirt tied carelessly, leaving part of his chest exposed.

He holds a glass full of red liquid between his fingers.

When I look into his eyes, I see that **his** gaze is also on me, with small wrinkles at the corners born from his amused expression.

"You say the same thing every **year**," Cassian says, **bored**,

"Except for the part about the best company, of course."

He winks in my direction.

"Elara, I'm glad to see you here. I hope you have fun, and please, don't forget that you owe **me** a dance."

"She doesn't owe you anything." Cassian hisses.

O AU

"Find someone else to bothe"

"Don't forget, Elata You, me, and one slow dance later"

He bids farewell with **a** hand gesture and disappears into the crowd.

Cassian is tenser than usual—it feels like I'm resting against a piece of marble, hard and impenetrable.

I remember his answer to my question from earlier and can't help a mischievous smile

“Is Ciro the low ranking Pureblood who throws big parties?”

He nods, without separating his lips from the firm straight line they’ve formed.

“Cassian, Ciro is part of one of the original three families—I wouldn’t consider that low-ranking”

He looks at me and takes a step forward, closing the distance between our bodies.

He leans down and brings his lips close to my ear,

His breath raises goosebumps on my skin.

“Good girl. I see you’ve studied our history”

I swear I can feel his lips curl into a wicked smile.

“But Ciro isn’t a Draven, so he’ll always be beneath me.”

He steps back a few paces, and his gaze drifts above my shoulder, analyzing the people around us

My fingers leave his arm, and a human woman dressed in servant clothing appears with her head lowered, softly murmuring that I should hand her my cloak.

Once it’s no **longer** covering my arms, I feel a bit naked, with my neck and the curve of my breasts exposed.

Fou purset.

Cassian’s hand rests at the small of my back, and I think I feel him playing with the threads of my

It seems someone catches the vampire’s attention.

He starts guiding me through the room with his palm

I try to ignore all the stares directed at us, though it seems impossible.

The women look at me with burning eyes, furrowed **brows**, and lips pressed into a fine line; meanwhile, in the eyes of the men I see a very different fire, one that promises a good dose of sin.

Aeron greets Cassian by raising his **glass**, and he stops with his usual serious and bored expression,

Walter is next to his lord and looks at me with the same astonishment as the others, although he quickly replaces it with a radiant smile and a playful wiggle of his eyebrows.

I don't know if Cassian noticed—if he did, he didn't give it any importance.

"I almost thought

t **you** weren't coming," says Aeron, taking a sip from his **glass**

Chapter 83

Sold to the Night Lord

Chapter 83

Chapter 83

"I can imagine the reason for your delay."

I swear he sniffs something in the air, and suddenly the memory of our earlier conversations overwhelms me.

Right now, I'd give anything to have one of those fans I've seen to cover my cheeks.

Certainly, I'm not ashamed of what I did with Cassian—or at least I think I'm not but it's something else entirely to be pleased that everyone can smell it on me.

"The road to Ciro's villa is long," he excuses,

Noti

"Not if you used some of your gifts."

He winks and I frown.

What does he mean by using some of his gifts?

Does that mean I haven't yet seen everything Cassian is capable of?

"Ah, I see, your dear one doesn't know that we're not just strong

We're also very, very **fast**."

"She's not my dear one," **Cassian** growls.

“And I don’t think carrying her in my arms the whole way would be the wisest choice.”

“Are you sure that’s the reason? Aeron asks with a sideways smile.

I draw a fake smile on my lips and look at Walter with a pleading expression.

“Would you mind accompanying me for a drink, Walter?”

He nods as soon as he looks at Aeron, and the latter gives a sign of approval.

For a moment, I worry that Cassian might offer or prevent me from moving away from his side, but he does none of that.

He simply stays there, brooding, and lets me leave without looking back

We’re both prudent enough to wait until we’re far away y to speak—though surely it makes little difference in a room where everyone seems to have a highly developed sense of hearing

We a

approach a table where a Diluted one is serving drinks with a punch ladle.

Upon seeing the thickness of the red liquid pouring from the ladle, I realize there’s nothing here for me.

Same goes for the small snacks on the trays.

They look far too alive and bloody for my liking.

“Should I congratulate you?”

I turn

to look at Walter, who remains behind me with his **hands** clasped behind his back and an amused expression on his face.

10:15 Wed, 5 Aug

“For what exactly?”

“You’ve entered on the arm of the most coveted vampire, Elara.”

“Is that really so strange?” I reply, feigning boredom,

Walter steps toward me, squishes my cheeks and speaks very close to my face, as if the words might soak in better that way.

“Let’s see, my friend, how can I explain this

The thinks for a second.

“Cassian never comes with someone clinging to his arm. And when I say never, I mean never ever.

Oh yes, he fornicates at these parties, that’s a fact—but always after a thorough screening, and after he’s finished, he makes you feel like dirt under his shoe.

Oh, and I almost forgot—his lovers never include humans.”

“You talk like you know what it feels like.”

“I talk as someone who’s been to enough parties to know **your** vampire’s **behavior**

“He’s not my vampire.”

“Keep lying to yourself, friend.”

I cross my arms and he smiles, feeling like the winner of our little debate.

He offers his hand with a small bow of his torso, acting like a complete gentleman.

“Would you forgive me if I danced with you?”

“I don’t know—are you going to keep pestering me?”

“I can’t promise much.”

Troll my eyes and slide my **hand** over his

Many throw glances our **way** when they see two humans dancing on the floor, and I know that in their minds, they’re thinking we shouldn’t be doing this.

To them, we shouldn’t even be **alive**.

And if we are, it should be with a chain around our neck to **keep** us close to our buyers.

Walter is a good dancer—you can tell he’s been attending these balls for a long time, and even more so by how easily he ignores all the stares and keeps smiling.

“How do you do it?” ask.

“How do I do the what?”

“Turn elegantly, dragging me and my clumsy feet with you.”

“ignore them.”

A rough laugh rumbles in his throat before he looks at me with something I refuse to call sadness—yet it resembles it too **closely**.

10:15 Wed, 6 Aug

“I’ve gotten **stares** my whole life, Fara Tlike men, sleep with them, kiss them, fuck them. There’s always been a pair of eyes questioning what

esticks up their asses are unhappy that I’m human and dancing among them, I couldn’t care less.” I do and who I am. If a few pale stiff s wi

I know those around us have heard him, and I can’t help but smile at that, I try to move to his rhythm, forcing more confidence into my steps. Surprisingly, I find that when I trust myself a little more, I enjoy it more, I spin when Walter’s body guides me to feeling the strands of my updo fighting to break free, rebellious against the world. Haugh when my foot accidentally steps on his, and again when we catch a Diluted woman recoiling at our presence.

I pull away from Walter’s chest, lace our hands together, and spin endlessly across the floor laugh until my stomach aches, pausing to catch my breath, clutching my middle. This dress will be the death of me. A tap on my shoulder makes me turn expecting Viktor’s eyes—but instead, I’m met with a pair of pink ones

“Elara,” he replies, “is now a good time for that dance?”

I glance back for Walter, but he’s gone. Traitor,

Focusing back on Ciro, whose expression betrays his certainty that I won’t refuse, I give a weak nod. He places a hand on my waist, the other holding mine. The musicians begin a slow song, as if answering Ciro’s wishes directly. Wouldn’t surprise me.

He steps forward: I step back, matching his rhythm.

“How has life in the castle treated you since I last saw you?”

“Fine, thank you for asking.”

We turn, and his grip on my waist tightens, stealing my breath. I try not to look at him—and fail spectacularly. Up close, his eyes aren’t just pink. Violet clings to the iris, the edges a deep red. They’re the strangest, most beautiful eyes I’ve ever seen.

“Did you think about my offer?”

I swallow hard. The motion catches his attention, his gaze lingering on my neck for painfully uncomfortable seconds. I'll never get used to the weight of his eyes on my skin, knowing any of them could give in to the urge to tear open my throat. I clear my throat.

“Yes.”

He tilts his head slightly, raising an inquisitive brow.

“And?”

“I'm afraid I must decline.”

A laugh escapes him, devoid of amusement

“Are you declining for yourself, or does it have to do with someone else?”

I can't help but wonder about this tension, this competition between them. There are better things to fight over than a mere human. And yes. I'm reducing myself to something worthless because to these beings, I'm not valuable. Just skin and fragile bones, a heart pumping the blood that feeds them. Nothing more.

“It's my own decision.”

Something tells me that's the answer I should give. I don't want to explain my arrangement with the vampire—in fact, I'd rather never have a conversation involving him, afraid I'd spill details about what's happened between us. It's my secret. Even as his scent wraps around me like a bubble, I won't let anyone steal the admission from my lips.

Meu o

“I have faith that one day you'll regret this, Elara” His hand escapes my waist, thumb brushing my cheek “You'll come back with your heart bleeding through your fingers. I know it. He almost sounds genuinely regretful. “He doesn't know how to love, and you're too soft for your own good.”

“You don't know me.”

“I know hearts like yours.” His gaze traces my skin as if memorizing it, paralyzing me. “You don't want to give more, but it's too late. I've seen how you look at him.”

“You don't understand how deep my hatred runs.”

He laughs as the music stops. With a gasp from me, he taps just above my heart.

“Hate is too strong to contain forever. It cracks. Aren’t you afraid love will seep through?”

His eyes flicker over my head, and the prickle on my neck tells me blue eyes are locked onto me. Ciro smirks, kisses the back of my hand with

a flourish, winks, and vanishes. The scent of night-blooming Jasmine and damp earth envelops me, dulling my senses—and possibly my

survival instinct. Hands settle on my hips, and when I try to turn, they hold firm. His chest presses against my back.

“He wants you for himself.”

My breath catches. Maybe the lack of air is frying my brain. It takes me too long to process his words and respond.

“Why does that matter?”

“I don’t lose. Not to him.”

“I’m not a competition.”

Sold to the Night Lord

Chapter 84

Idig my nails into his hands—not that it hurts him—but he releases me anyway. My eyes sting, and I don’t want him to see how his words- affect me. I weave through dancing bodies and disdainful glances, searching for solitude to collect myself in the books **used** to sneak, the said a woman’s first man marked her, I always thought it was nonsense. I still want to believe it is. I don’t want to think Cassian is carving marks where I can’t erase them.

My hand finds a doorknob, and I push inside without checking if it’s occupied. Luckily, it’s empty—though that would’ve been less shocking than this. The room is lined with mirrors, reflecting me from every angle. I step hesitantly to the center, where I can see myself fully.

“Guard the door. Let no one in. Do it well, and you’ll get another bag like this when I leave.”

Cassian’s unmistakable voice slips under the door, and I tense as he enters. He followed me, never escape him.

Tit a hand.

“Stop. Don’t come closer”

He ignores me, stepping into the center of the room. Our eyes meet in the mirror. I try to look away, but another reflection traps me. There’s no escaping the drowning depths of his gaze.

“You’re not a competition to me,” he says. “You are to him.”

“He’s not the one who had me in his bed last night, using me for power games,” I snap.
“Respect me, damn it”

A flash darkens his eyes.

“I think we both know you don’t want respect. I think you want me to do very disrespectful things to you.”

“You won’t touch me again.”

I hear the hiss of air between his clenched teeth before his face is inches from mine, wrists locked in his grip. My chest heaves against his suit jacket.

“I respect you. I don’t want to, but I **do**, damn you.” Fire burns in his gaze. “You’re the only one who challenges me enough to drive me mad. It doesn’t matter if I throw you to the wolves—you’d tame them and turn them on me. I hate you for it. But above all, I respect you more than you can imagine.”

-If your

you respect me, tell me why is **Ciro** competing with you over me? Don’t lie. I want the truth.”

“I owe him a feeder,” he mutters.

“Why?”

“Because I killed his.”

“Why?”

He exhales sharply.

“She was a liar. A lying human.”

“Why does **Ciro** care?”

The silence thickens like honey. I almost ask again, fearing **he didn’t** hear

He loved her

I gasp. **Ciro** loved a human.

“You couldn’t stand one of your own loving a fragile, mortal woman,” I accuse.

“You don’t understand.” He shakes his head. “She conspired against him, tried to pry our secrets using his love. When she realized he wouldn’t fall so easily, she tried seducing me. The idiot didn’t know I could slip into her mind—and i did. She would’ve killed him once she learned how, I saved him.”

“Then why doesn’t he believe you?”

“Because it’s easier to think I killed her out of hatred for what her kind did to my parents than to accept his beloved was a deceitful whore

“And that’s why he wants me as his feeder?” I let out a hollow laugh. “You don’t even care about me. Let him have me if it soothes him. He can’t be that bad a jailer.”

“No.” His grip on my wrists tightens. “You always say you’re not an object, a possession. Prove it now. I won’t hand you over like a damned vase. If you insist on being one, I’ll shatter **you** before he gets you, Elara.”

“So romantic and charming.” I say, tugging free.

With an animalistic growl, he crushes me against him, closing the distance between **our** lips. He swallows my gasp. My knees buckle, but he holds me up, kissing me recklessly. I kiss back, tangling my tongue with his like I’ll die without it.

A rough groan vibrates in his throat as he fights to pull away. He turns me, my back to his chest, breath hot on my neck. A glance in the mirror sets my skin on fire. His fingers trace the embellishments of my dress, teasing the edge of my bodice before cupping my breast.

“They fit perfectly in my hands,” he rumbles against my skin.

My toes curl in my heels, my body aching for his touch, for relief from the heat pooling between my legs.

“Cassian, please...”

“Hmm?”

He tugs my nipple between thumb and forefinger, drawing a moan from me.

“Touching you like this isn’t very respectful or gentlemanly of me.”

“Don’t stop, I beg.

He sucks the skin behind my ear—definitely leaving a mark—then licks down to my collarbone. One hand teases my nipple; the other loosens my dress until it pools at my hips. In the mirror, his gaze makes me feel like I’m made of colors, not just gray.

I arch as he palms my breasts, my arms reaching back to fist in his hair, dragging his mouth to my neck.

“Up.”

Only when his hand wraps around my throat lifting me, do I understand. The dress falls completely, **leaving** me in heels, lingene, and elbow gloves. He strips his own gloves slowly, eyes locked on me. The sound of them hitting the floor feels like a filthy promise.

“Turn around,”

That’s how pliant I become when my body’s needs take over. His commanding finger spins me, and I obey, facing the mirror—naked except for scraps of lace, while he remains fully clothed. He grips my chin, tilting my neck, his other hand trailing down my stomach.

The chill of his skin isn’t like the leather he wears. This is the burn of ice against too long exposure

“I suppose it’d be even more disrespectful to leave you unsatisfied, wouldn’t it, Elara?

I might’ve answered, but I’m not sure not when his fingers **steal** all coherence. They circle my navel before dipping lower, agonizingly slow. His knee presses behind mine, forcing me down, seated between his legs, my sex on display in the mirror

“Does it hurt?”

He parts my folds, the sight making me flush. His fingers glide through my slickness, collecting it. My pink, glistening center stares back at me. Cassian sucks at my pulse point, leaving a red mark when he releases me with a lewd sound.

I’ve never watched myself like this— and there’s something thrilling about doing it with him. He pinches my swollen clit, the pressure just shy of painful, making me hiss and slump against him.

“Don’t close your eyes Look Look how wet you are for the person you **hate** most”

Two fingers slide inside me with **a** sound I’ll never forget. I want to shut my eyes, but morbid curiosity keeps them open, watching his fingers move in and out. My body resists at first, remembering he took my virginity only hours ago, his cock stained with my blood. It stings briefly before adjusting

“Has anyone ever touched you like this, Elara?”

His tone warns against ignoring the question. His fingers slow, torturing me. I rock against his hand, chasing release.

“I was a virgin.

“That doesn’t mean a man couldn’t have fingered you. You’re not that naive.”

A hint of jealousy in his voice sends power rushing through me. Power over a being who’s had centuries of pleasure, with men and women, with creatures beyond my world. And yet, I feel a pang too-knowing I’m just a drop in the ocean of his experiences.

His fingers scissor inside me, striking a spot that makes me arch. He stops just before I tip over

“Tell me how many?”

“How many women?”

“How many humans.” My voice is ragged.

His lips brush my ear.

“You’re the first.” He nips my lobe. “And you’re so fragile, I feel like I’ll break you if I push too hard.”

He thrusts his fingers to the knuckle, tearing a cry from me—half pleasure, half pain. His thumb circles my clit.

“How many men have had their fingers in you, Elara?”

He speeds up, dragging me toward madness. The wet sounds of my arousal fill the room. I watch myself in the mirror—body arched, legs spread, his fingers pumping, his gaze black with hunger. The image alone could undo me.

“N—none”

“I want to be your first in everything.” He curls his fingers just right, stealing my sanity. “I want to be your fucking ruin.”

pleasure crashes through me, my body seizing Cassian kisses my neck—not biting, as if his lips could soothe my racing heart. The

I scream **as** ple

intensity is too much, i collapse against hir

(him, a boneless, swedly mess,

I feel and see his fingers withdraw, glistening Instead of shame, heat colls low in my belly

“Good girl.”

He licks my wetness from his hand and stands, leaving me on the floor like a discarded doll. When I meet his eyes, thought I was cold, frozen inside and out—but now, I crave the burn. My fingers clutch his pants, urging him to stay.

“You said you wanted to be the first in everything.

“It doesn’t have to be now.”

“This isn’t about what you want. “I tug harder. “It’s about what I want. Now”

“You think you can take it all?”

“Show me the worst.”

“It hasn’t even been a day since I was inside you, and you’re already corrupted to the core. His fingers undo his pants like it”

I lick my lips, watching from below as the fire in his eyes flares—and with it, my power over him.

θ

Sold to the Night Lord

Chapter 85

Cassian

Kneeling before me, her face inches from my erection, sends waves of pleasure down my spine. I’ve always known there’s **a sadistic side** to me, and now it’s lighting to rise to the surface. I want her lips wrapped around me, her tears streaking her cheeks as she struggles to the me fully into her mouth. I want to lick those tears away.

She isn’t afraid of me—those fearful glances vanished long ago, replaced by ones blazing with fire. I want her to fear me. I want her to retreat in this game, to return to where we began. Instead, she meets my garn defiantly and, with unsteady fingers, undoes my pants.

My cock stands hard and ready before her lips, throbbing with need. Elara studies it with curiosity before daring to wrap her hand around me, her thumb swiping over the wetness at my tip.

A curse slips from me at the softness of her touch.

“Don’t you dare stop now,” I growl.

“Are you going to beg?” she murmurs, her lips hovering near my cock. “I think I’d **like** to hear that, Mr. Draven.”

“Don’t play

ay with the devil, Elara. You’ll be the one begging me to stop.”

Without breaking eye contact, she lowers herself slowly, her soft lips brushing the head of my cock. At first, it’s light **as** a butterfly’s wing, but something in my expression emboldens her. Her tongue flicks out, tasting the first drops of precum. My hand tangles in her wild hair, pushing her down, deeper into the wet heat of her mouth,

She fights me, pulling back with a gasp, strands of saliva clinging to her lips.

“No, Mr. Draven. We do **this** at my pace, or not at all.” She gives me a teasing lick “Surely you can be patient...

“Don’t talk to me like that, Elara,” Isnarl

“Like what?”

Then she takes me

deep, **so** deep I disappear into her throat. My teeth clench against the groan clawing its way up.

“Like I’m some old man you’re doing a favor.” My fingers dig into her chin, forcing **her** eyes up to mine—unsteady me. “You want this.”

The fire in her gaze is confirmation enough. Elara is far more than she first appeared. Calling her a beast **was** never far from the truth. The first time I saw her, naked under the **glow** of the Red Auction’s lights, I knew I had to take her with me. She’s the challenge I’ve spent my life searching **for**.

Elara was a dying ember, smoke curling from her remains—but slowly, **she’s** reignited. Now her fire burns so bright the world can’t help **but** stare, aching to feel her scorching presence. A fire that, with the storm in her eyes, promises devastation.

Thinking like this only proves I'm in danger. I should let her go before she burns me completely.

The fury of that realization drives me to thrust deeper, filling her mouth until she gags. Her eyes water, but no tears fall. Her hands slide up my thighs, bold and teasing.

"You **told** me to show you the worst," I **rasp**, voice thick with need. "Relax your throat."

She murmurs something unintelligible, her tongue working me with slow, filthy strokes. Watching her like this steals my breath—how can she look so sinful? I've ruined her, corrupted her to the core.

My fingers tighten in her ink black hair. I'm close, so close, and she knows it. Her licks turn Wicked, her hand pumping when I reach. The mirrors around us reflect her on her knees, my cock buried in her mouth, her fist moving relentlessly. It's the most erotic thing I've ever seen.

Pleasure coils down my spine like lightning. I thrust deep, hitting untouched parts of her throat, and my release crashes over me. My jaw locks, but a groan escapes anyway. Her eyes gleam as she swallows, her throat working around me, pulling me back to the edge.

"My little beast is bolder than I **thought**."

A cold sweat slicks my

my nape as I pull out, smearing my release across her lips. I drag my thumb through the mess, pressing it back into **her** mouth. Her tongue curls around me, greedy.

"Fuck... Elara."

Before she can react, I yank her up, crushing her against me. My mouth claims hers, teeth cutting into her lip. She moans, and I swallow the sound. We're a tangle of limbs, teeth, and blood—a chaos of hunger.

ices beyond the door.

Then I hear voices

Despite bribing one of Ciro's staff to keep this room private, I trust no one. So I pull away, leaving Elara dazed, her lips swollen and bleeding.

I fasten my pants and, before she can protest, move behind her to loosen her corset. If she's surprised, she doesn't show it.

"Meet me outside when **you're** ready"

One last glance at her wild reflection in the mirrors, and I slip out, tossing a bag of gold to the stunned attendant. The party's eyes follow me

some lustful, others hungry for power.

"So, someone finally made you **break** your
your own rules."

Ciro appears beside me, grinning like he's drunk. His collar hangs open, revealing bite marks and scratches.

"I don't know what **you** mean." I turn away, but Ciro never lets go

"Oh, come on. It's hard to admit you desire **a** human, especially after opposing them for so long."

"Why don't you entertain your guests and leave me alone!"

"Where's the fun in that?" He smirks. "You'll never love her the way humans **need**. There's something dead in you—not like the rest of us. A

real shame."

"How **tragic**

for you," I deadpan. "But she doesn't want human love from me."

"You sound sure."

"Eyes talk, Ciro. And hers have spoken."

"And what did they say?"

"That you should shut the fuck **up** unless you want to choke on your own intestines."

He laughs, **raising** his glass in mock salute, Around us, whispers rise. I wait longer than I should before impatience gnaws at me.

Then a familiar scent cuts through the crowd—forest, blood, damp earth.

Elara's absence sharpens into dread.

10:16 Wed, 6 Aug

I storm back to the mirror room. Her ruby collar lies discarded on the floor—a taunt. I follow her trail, past chattered mirrors, to a hidden door

smearred with blood. Hers

Rage surges as I plunge into the dark, busting her scent through winding tunnels. A broken gate leads outside, where ten shifters stand in a clearing. One holds Elara, his claws at her throat. Blood soaks her white dress.

“Long time no see, the shifter mocks, licking his claws.

I don’t recognize him—golden eyes, fanged maw, sand colored hair. A well, judging by his build,

“Should I?” I shrug. “You all look the same.”

“Arrogance doesn’t suit you,” he sneers. “Not when I could snap her neck

Elara’s head tolls, but I catch the faint pulse at her throat.

“What do you want?”

“Nothing you can give.” He yanks her against him, “I already have it.”

I bare my teeth. “A human is what you want?”

“I want a human—if the human means anything to you,” he replies mockingly.

“Then take her.” I wave my hand dismissively. “I’ll find a better one. After all, human women aren’t my type—especially not **such** a sickly one

“Are you sure?” He brushes his lips against Elara’s cheek, and though she’s unconscious, her body rebels. Her face twists in disgust, a convulsion wracking her frame. “I think she’s a fighter, I think that’s what turns you on, isn’t it?”

The shapeshifter’s nose **trails** down her cheek, burying itself in the curve of her neck. The sight enrages me, and I hate that. My hands clench into fists so tight the leather of my gloves creaks. Or maybe it’s the ground. My power seeps through my fingers, tearing the earth beneath us like paper. The other shapeshifters cry out in shock, scrambling for cover. One dares to lunge at me—a single glance, a flick of my wrist, and he’s torn apart. His guts splatter my clothes, his blood spraying his companions.

“Let her go, or I’ll get creative with how I rip you apart,” I growl,

Sold to the Night Lord

Chapter 86

The one holding Elara laughs, ignoring my warning. With a jerk of his head, he sends the rest of his pack in their deaths, the ground trembles **beneath** us, a minor of my unrestrained fury. They come at me one by one, and one by one, I shred them. One manages to sink his teeth into my shoulder from behind. I grab his hair and hurt him over me, relishing the crack of his bones on impact—but it's not enough. Shapeshifters heal quickly. His eyes widen in panic as my hand twists in his direction. I savor his agony, the way his tendons snap, his skin splits, his organs spill in seconds, he's a bloody heap on the ground.

Their numbers dwindle with every precise motion of my hand, I carve my path forward, leaping onto stable patches of earth, crushing enemies beneath me. Each one meets a gruesome end—yet they keep coming, Loyalty Pathetic,

I toss the last one into a chasm I've torn open, watching his body vanish into the abyss. Then I lift my gaze to my final target. The golden-eyed shapeshifter smirks at me, **scars** twisting his face.

“Impressive.” His grin widens. “Bravo, Quite the spectacle.”

“Let Her Go. I won't ask again”

“Are you sure?”

He grips Elara's **jaw** and the crown of her head, applying just enough pressure to make the threat clear. Her **eyes** flutter open—normally gray. now smoke filled. Her gaze drifts until it **lands** on me. I see the exact moment she realizes something's wrong. Her eyes drop, her mouth opens in a silent scream at the sight of the blood. Her hand flies to her throat

I don't know what finally snaps my patience, but once I'm sure the ground beneath Elara is stable, I raise my hand toward the shapeshifter and clench my fist. I expect his body to explode.

It doesn't

“Surprise,” he sing-songs.

I try again. Nothing. His laughter echoes through the forest, shattering the **last** shred of my control. Elara's eyes widen in horror, her lips forming two words: “Let go.”

She's insane if she thinks I'll back down.

I don't waste the time wondering why he's immune. That's a problem for later. Right now, I need to get her out. Manipulating the environment is something he can't counter easily—but shaking the earth again risks Elara's safety. No guarantee this bastard won't drop her.

I'm weighing my options when a breeze carries a scent I know. The shapeshifter notices too—but not fast enough. Before he **can**

react, Ciro's fangs are buried in his throat. He releases **Elara**, and before her knees hit the ground, I catch her in my arms.

Ciro tears out his throat and spits a chunk of flesh onto the dirt.

"Take her," he snarls. "Til handle this."

"We'll talk about this **later**."

My tone isn't friendly. I can't ignore that this happened at one of his parties, under his rool Coincidence? I trust no one. I lear

young

"Elara, hold onto me." I murmur.

at lesson

I pull her tight against me until her arms loop around my neck, **her** head resting in the curve of my shoulder. Then I move, using my speed to put distance between us and the **camage**. When we're far enough, i sit with Elara in my lap, examining her wounds. She's unconscious again,

Chapter 86

her face troubled even in sleep. I lick her neck not to feed, but to seal the gashes, I repeat the motion until m

The journey that took hours by carriage is now a thirty minute sprint,

The castle is silent. Good, Noise makes it hard to think. Ecarry her to her chambers, wasting no time in tearing her dress away, inspecting bare skin for more injuries. The only damage is to her throat. I wet a cloth in the bathroom, wiping the blood from her neck. She stirs is i brush her hair back.

Despite her protests, Elara is strong. That wound should've killed her, instead, she clings to life like a feral thing.

"What happened?"

I glance back at Evanora, standing in her usual gray blue dress, her hair braided, her albino serpent coiled defensively.

“Shapeshifters.” I answer.

“How? They’re nearly extinct—the few left were banished beyond the ocean.”

“Seems they’re good swimmers,” I mutter

She approaches the bed where I’ve draped a sheet over Elara. Evanora adjusts the pillows, brushing hair from her forehead. Magic hums in the air. I don’t interfere—whatever she’s doing, I allow it as long as it doesn’t harm Elara. Purple sparks dance at her fingertips, and from the banshee’s frown, I know drawing even this small magic is harder than it seems.

Elara sighs in her sleep, **and** Evanora pauses as if that’s the sign she needed.

“What did you do?”

“Eased her pain.” Her skin glows faintly. “You can close wounds, but the pain remains. I can mend that.”

Inod. “**Good.**”

“Luck hasn’t been kind to her.” Her lips curve in a sad smile as she strokes Elara’s hair. “It’s tragic—someone so young enduring so much. We’ve had decades to live, suffer, love... Her time **is** so short. For her to suffer like this feels like a curse.” **She** looks up at me. “If she asked you -truly, from her heart—would you let her go? Would you give **her** life back?”

“What if there’s nothing waiting for her?”

“Her family waits. They always will.”

“She doesn’t fit with them. She knows it.”

“Then she’ll find her place.” She clicks her tongue. “That doesn’t answer my question.”

Damn it.

“The answer is no.” My voice is steel. “The Treaties stand. No exceptions.”

The banshee’s sad smile deepens, her pale blue eyes seeing too much. She sighs, stepping away from the bed. One last glance at **Elara**, ensuring she’s not in pain, and then she’s gone—silent as she came.

ner skin

I watch **Elara** sleep, mesmerized by the rise and fall of her chest. My enhanced vision lets me see what human eyes never **cou.** knitting itself back together. Without realizing it, I've stretched out beside her, studying the shadow of her lashes against her cheeks, the pallor of her lips.

She's lost too much blood.

"Cassian..

Elara twists in her sleep **to** keep her from hurting herself, I cup her face, holding her neck straight. then contract. The gray of her eyes is even paler now almost white.

The contact wakes her Her pupils dilate,

"Don't go," she whispers.

I'm here

I stroke her temple, feeling her body relax under my touch. It shouldn't be like this. She shouldn't melt when someone like me touches her Her survival instinct should scream at her to run-not unravel under my hands.

"Stay with me. Please. I don't want to be alone." I'm not sure if she's still dreaming. "I've always been alone. I don't want to be anymore

so dark here."

frown. "Where, Elara?"

"In my head."

Her words tangle with my conversation with Evanora. I lean against the headboard, letting her curl into my side while I wonder what Elara's life might've been in another world-one without me. My hand drifts down her back, satisfied when she finally stills

She's a disaster for me. A beautiful disaster.

"Elara, you..." Lexhale sharply. "You make me want to feel pity"

I let the words hang in the air, knowing only I heard them. The warmth of her body seeps through my clothes, and for once, I allow myself to

Telax.

I don't want to be merciful. I don't want to imagine her existence without me. I don't want to watch her smile like it's sunrise. I don't want what she makes me want. And I know she hates herself for this. I know she hates the monster I am

I close my eyes, **locking** all of it away—ensuring I won't forget when I wake.

θ

Sold to the Night Lord

Elara

I swore I wanted to keep my eyes open, but exhaustion was winning the battle, only caught fragments of what was happening—Cassian carrying me, being laid on my bed, Evanora's face hovering above me. I know I managed to say something. After that, everything went dark, and I only woke when I felt movement beside me.

My eyelids weigh a ton, but somehow, I force them open. First, I see long legs crossed at the ankle boots still on. As my gaze drifts up, I find Cassian's chest rising and falling with increasingly ragged breaths. His back is propped against the headboard, as if he'd fallen asleep unintentionally. His eyes dart rapidly beneath closed lids, and the faint gasp tearing from his throat tells me whatever he's dreaming is tormenting him.

It takes every **ounce** of strength left in me to lift my hand to his face, brushing the jet black strands from his forehead. His lashes flutter, and I hold my breath, expecting him to wake. He doesn't. Instead, he seems to relax, his breathing steadying. I lower my hand, studying him—the sharp angles of his face, the arch of his brows now smoothed of tension, the full lips that perfectly hide the marks of his nature. My gaze drifts to where my blood has stained his cuffs

One of his hands rests on the sheets, fingers slightly curled, as if searching for something to hold. Hesitant, I reach out, skimming my fingers over his. He doesn't stic. I **lace** our hands together. His skin is cool, smooth,

I fall asleep like that, too tired to fight it. When sunlight spills into the room again, I open **my** eyes—and he's gone. In his place, Drystan sits in a chair beside the bed..

“You're finally awake.” He leans forward, “How do you feel?”

I'm too groggy to answer,

“Here.” He grabs a glass of water from the nightstand. “You lost a lot of **blood**. Hydrate.”

I can't mov

move much, so Drystan helps me sit up, his hand steadying the back of my neck as I drink. When the glass is empty, he adjusts my pillows, satisfied.

“Evanora’s itching to see **you**, but I wanted to talk first—**about**

last night.”

I glance at the door, half-expecting to see Evanora glaring through it, impatient. I’m sure Drystan’s the reason she hasn’t barged in yet.

“Where’s Cassian?”

Shadows flicker across his face. He blinks once, as if to erase them, forcing a smile.

“Dealing with what happened. That’s why I need you to tell me everything”

I remember most of it—that’s the problem. Including what happened before I was taken. My cheeks burn at the memory.

“I was in the hall of mirrors when the scarred man stepped out of **one**.” I swallow hard.

“From what he said, **he’d** been waiting. He grabbed me when I was alone. I fought—uselessly. He dragged me through the mirror”

Drystan nods. “Did he say why he wanted you?”

“Wasn’t I just bait?” I counter. “He might’ve mentioned someone else wanting me. Or maybe I imagined it.

His lips thin, Silence stretches.

“Why did he cut your throat?”

I close my eyes, my fingers instinctively finding the wound—**now** healed, but marked by three raised lines. A **whimper** escapes m

scarred.

“I fought back.” My voice is raw with something I can’t name. “I kicked free, but he grabbed my shoulder, spun me around. He looked at me like—like something twisted inside him. Then he struck. I didn’t even realize the warmth soaking my hands was blood until I passed out. When I woke, I was in that creature’s arms, facing Cassian.”

Drystan’s hand covers mine, pulling it from my throat—where I’ve started scratching without realizing

“That’s enough.” His eyes soften with something close to affection. “You’re exhausted, I’ll let Evanora in

I nod, suddenly wordless. He stands, the chair creaking in relief. At the door, he pauses.

“Rest for a few days. Let us know if you need anything.”

Then he’s gone, leaving the door ajar. Evanora sweeps in immediately, fussing over me, chattering about her latest squabbles with Drystan. pretend to listen, but my mind is far away, fixated on one thing:

Drystan never said Cassian would visit.

I wasn’t wrong

A day and a half in **bed**, regaining my strength—and not once has Cassian appeared. I tell myself I don’t care, but I do. It feels like being a discarded toy, tossed aside after the novelty wore off. Cassian confuses me, and I’m tired of it. He can’t touch me the **way** he did, whisper those words, then act like it never happened. He makes me feel the way I did before coming here—invisible. And I hate it

“What’s with the frown?” Evanora lowers her book.

I stifle a sigh. “Nothing. Can you help me to the bathroom? I feel disgusting!”

She nods, sliding an arm behind me for support. The blood loss still heaves me dizzy when I move too fast. We shuffle to the bathroom, where I brace myself against the counter.

My reflection stops me cold.

Pink scars stripe my throat. I trace them, wincing—they ache like fresh wounds. Evanora watches me, understanding in her gaze. No one knows **scars** better than her.

I’ve been staring too long. A steaming bath waits, no doubt her magic at work. She helps me undress, and I sink into the water with a groan.

“It’s not too late to make them disappear,” she offers.

I look up. “Why didn’t you remove yours?”

Silence. Then, softly: “Mine weren’t from one moment. They kept cutting my lips open, stitching them shut again, making the holes worse each time. By the time I was free, I **was**

too weak to heal myself. And when I finally **could**... It was too late.” Her albino serpent slithers from her hair, nuzzling her cheek as if to comfort her. “I kept them. At least this way, no one would call **me** pretty enough to torment.”

“You’re beautiful, Evanora. If you saw yourself through my eyes, you’d know you shine like the moon.”

“The moon only shines **because** it reflects the sun.”

“I don’t care why it shines. It’s just as beautiful. How many songs praise the sun? A few. But artists worship the moon—its craters, its scars. No one calls it broken smile. “So why would you?”.

Her eyes glisten. For once, her smile is real

10:16 Wed, 6 Aug

Remember what Naja said? That you weren’t special?” I nod. “She lied, You are special, Elara Everyone near you knows it. You fill the hollow spaces in people. You shine where it’s darkest

“Funny. Someone as empty as me filling anyone else.”

“You’re not empty. You’re so full, you can’t separate what you feel.”

Her words settle deep, drawing a genuine smile from me. She stands, ending the moment, and begins washing my hair. She doesn’t offer again to crase my scars. I don’t ask.

Later, at the vanity, she braids my hair into a crown, the rest drying down my back. My gaze catches on the ruby necklace I’d thought lost, blood still crusting the gems. Instantly, I think of him—his fingers brushing my throat.

“I can fetch you new books,” Evanora says. “You’ve finished the ones here. Who knew the library had such...passionate romances?”

I’m not listening. My thoughts have wandered—and she notices.

“Evanora.”

“Yes?” Our eyes meet in the mirror.

“What’s happening with Cassian?”

“What do you mean?”

She can’t fool me. I’ve gotten too good at spotting lies. I don’t miss the way her gaze flickers, the tremble in her smile.

“You know what I mean.” My voice hardens. “He hasn’t come. Not even to annoy me, like he used to.”

“He’s busy. Tracking the ones who attacked you.”

Sold to the Night Lord

No Ads

Chapter 88

It sounds hollow, I drunt my fingers on the vanity, Impatient. When she finishes my hair, I stand abruptly, dragging the stool with me Track 2 loose black dress from the wardrobe—something I can manage alone—and belt it tightly. Flat shoes next, then I’m striding for it

What are you doing?

Sering for myself how busy he is.”

She grabs my wrist. The world tits, but I won’t back down.

“Don’t go.”

“Why?”

“Just don’t.”

I click my tongue, angry—not at her, at myself. Now I see it: pity in her eyes. My fault. I’ve made people pity me.

I wrench **free** and storm out, knowing exactly w Cassian, about my sanity—I don’t care.

where to go. Saci whisper as I pass, but I ignore them. Let them talk. **About** my scars, about

Cassian’s wing is colder, darker. I march past doors, around comers, until I reach the long hall leading to his chambers. My fist is raised to knock—when the door swings open.

A young woman, maybe my

age, with

golden waves cascading over **her** shoulders, blinks up at me with bright blue eyes. And just behind her,

towering over her slight frame—Cassian.

“Oh, **Elara**. I suppose no one told you.” Cassian’s voice drips with mock surprise. “**Your** services are no longer required.”

I look up at him, confused.

“This is Maryse,” he continues, gesturing to the golden-haired girl beside him. “My new feeder. From now on, she’ll be the one to sustain me.”

I don’t understand.

The girl shifts uncomfortably, her dress rustling as she adjusts her weight.

“Maryse, if you’d retire to your chambers,” Cassian says smoothly. “I’ll see you at dinner tonight”

Dinner?

The girl nods:

his lips.

stiffly, c

, offering me a tense smile before slipping past. I don’t watch her go. My gaze is locked on Cassian—on the smirk twisting

“What the hell is this?” I finally snap.

“What’s what?”

“You’re replacing me with her?” My laugh is jagged. “And since when do I offer my services? You’ve always taken what yo

asking.”

“Since when are you so particular about wording, Elara?”

“I’m not.” I tilt my chin up. “Just wanted to know what was stealing your time. Now I do”

ited without

I turn sharply, already walking away when his voice lashes out—cold, deliberate, designed to lay me open.

“Don’t tell me you came here begging for my attention.” A cruel chuckle. “This is why I don’t involve myself with humans. So emotional

Iwhit on him, serpent quick despite the dizziness clouding my head. My teeth grind together, fire scorching my veins. I want to break something. Him. My nails bite into my palms, drawing blood—I know it by the way his nostrils flare, scenting it.

“I’m Elara Voss, I don’t beg. Ever. My name might not be as grand as yours,” jabs a finger at his chest, “but mark my words—one **day**, you’t be on your knees. And I be there to watch.”

“I’ll wait with **bated** breath, little **beast**

“Rot in hell, Cassian.”

“Oh, Elara,” he murmurs. “We’re already in it,”

I stare at him one last time, disgusted with myself for ever believing he wasn’t the monster I first thought. Wrong, I was just a game to him. Worse a toy, outgrown and easily replaced by something shinier. His gaze burns into me, but it don’t care anymore. I walk away before shatter and give him the satisfaction.

Now I understand the whispers. Everyone knew. Even Evanora.

When did this happen? Yesterday? While I was recovering from an attack by his enemies, he was out finding a new pet to torment.

It shouldn’t matter.

Islam into my room—empty, thankfully—and the door rattles **in** its frame. **Pacing** like a caged animal, I glance at the balcony. Not caged

anymore.

The cool air does nothing to soothe me. My hands tremble; I clench them, praying the shaking stops when I open them again.

I **was** a fool to think any of this meant something to him. Covering my face, I curse myself for letting him touch me, for believing his lies about

respect.

The horizon taunts me. Freedom, My eyes burn, but I refuse to cry. One tear would crack the dam.

A dangerous thought takes root. The balcony isn’t that high. With a makeshift rope....

“I won’t die here,” I whisper.

Decision made, I tear sheets from the bed, knotting them into a rope. I yank it taut—strong enough.

I'm leaving. Let his fury come. Maybe his indifference will save me—after all, what's one lost human to him?

The door creaks open. Damn it. Evanora slips in, unsurprised by the scene.

If you let me plan—

“I knew this would happen,” she says. “Don't rush. If you

“I won't trade one cage for another”

“With us, you'd never be caged,” she snaps.

A hollow laugh escapes me. “Don't lie. You live in that camp like a cult—**rutés**, suspicion, no outsiders.”

“We're family.”

One I don't belong to.”

She steps closer, hesitant, as if I might hurt her. The Iramy stings.

“And what will you do out there? Die? If Cassian doesn't find you, something else will

“I stay, I die anyway. At least this way, it's on my terms:

Evanora grabs my hand, squealing. “This is a game, Elara. He's provoking you—and it's working.”

“I don't care.” My voice cracks. “I should've left sooner. I'm a prisoner.”

Her face softens. Resigned, she pulls a wrapped bundle from behind her back.

“I'd hoped to take you with me,” she admits. “Here. Food—not much, but enough for a few days.” She tucks it into my bag. “Run fast, far. The woods are dangerous, but the roads worse, Cassian will send hunters.”

“I know.”

She hesitates. “Find Eleazar,”

“What? Why?”

“He’s Cassian’s enemy. And at the camp... he noticed you. He’d protect you.”

“I won’t be another vampire’s pet.”

“His faction fights for change. It’s an option.”

I shake my head, but she catches my face, pressing her lips to my forehead. A strange warmth tingles through me as she murmurs in an ancient tongue.

“A temporary veil,” she explains. “You’ll **be** unseen. Use it well.”

I nod, hurrying to the balcony. The sheet-rope unfurls into the dark. Evanora watches, jaw set,

“Thank you,” I whisper. “I won’t forget **you**.”

Her smile crinkles the corners of her eyes. “Nor I you. Now run.”

I descend, the fall at the end just short

t of bone-breaking. A stumble, but I land upright. When I glance up, the rope is already gone.

Run. Run Run.

That’s my life now. Better than **a** gilded cage, better than letting the castle devour me alive. How stupid I was to think this place made me feel

alive.

I don’t know **how** far I’ve gone when phantom fingers brush the walls of my mind. I shake them off.

“No,” I tell the empty air. “I’m done playing fate’s game. I’m *my* fate now, Goodbye, Cassian.”

All I needed was a **push** to see the truth.

At least he had the decency

cy to shove **mo**

Sold to the Night Lord

The forest seems endless, I'd never stopped to observe just how vast and expansive it could be until now. My legs ache and my lungs bar if each breath draws in fire. Some branches have torn my dress, but thankfully haven't reached my skin. Blood would only make nē a target.

Cassian's hands keep pounding against my mind, growing more insistent with each attempt, but every time I've kept the foundations of my thoughts firm. Now I have control over my mind, and I know that infuriates him immensely. It's the dead of night, and occasionally the flapping of nocturnal birds and the sound of insects make my heart race. Every little noise unsettles me.

I open my bag, rummage through the provisions Evanora gave me, and find a small water flask, I drink, trying to restrain myself from finishing it all. I grip the letter opener I brought with me tightly. I'm tired—that's a fact—as my legs constantly remind me when i try to move again. I look around, weighing my options, I know I should rest, even if just for a moment. The trees are too tall for someone untrained **and** unskilled to climb. I keep moving, scanning my surroundings until I spot a tree with a hollow, rotten trunk wide enough to hide in. I on the cold ground, tucking part of my body inside the trunk and pulling my knees to my chest to preserve warmth.

I rest my chin on my knee and try not to think about **what** will happen if Cassian catches me. He won't ril die first. Dead, he'll have no reason **to retaliate** against my family, if he captures me alive, he'll make me suffer, **and** he knows the only thing that truly hurts me is my parents and siblings. I hear the snap of a breaking branch and go on high alert. I hold my breath for nearly a minute, terrified, gripping the letter opener's handle, until I see a small rabbit pass by.

"Just a rabbit, Elara, Relax," I tell **myself**. "Cassian won't find me."

I try to convince myself, though I don't succeed. Cassian will **easily** catch my scent—if he hasn't **already**. Could Evanora's spell mask my scent too? It's possible, but not something I should blindly rely on. I clench my jaw, knowing I regret this later, and pour **a** little water onto the dirt. I dig my fingers into the mud and begin smearing it over my face, neck, arms, and every visible inch of skin, hoping it might throw him

off

He's a predator, a born hunter. I'm his **prey**, and he won't stop until he finds me.

After that, I'm so exhausted that—foolishly—I decide to close my eyes just for a moment, thinking I'll be able to open them again, Mistake. When I do, the sun is rising, and my surroundings are far more visible and less terrifying. With my heart in my throat, I stand up, swallowing a

whimper of pain.

“Shit,” I mutter,

The mud has dried on my skin. I repeat the process to be safe, then set off again. I can’t help **but glance** over my shoulder with every step. I pick up speed once fully awake, and when my lungs demand I stop, I take no more than a couple minutes’ rest.

At times, I swear I feel a presence behind me, but when I turn, I find the forest exactly as it was seconds before. I tell myself **it’s** just paranoia. I drink from the flask several times until it’s empty, adding another worry to my list: I need to find a river to refill it

The sun slowly makes its journey, reaching its zenith. The heat beating down directly on my head is unbearable, so I end up tearing more of my dress, I rip off the hem and use it to bandage my bruised hands.

“I’m going to make it,” I repeat to myself over and over.

ery hair on

I spend hours walking at a brisk pace, leaping over large rock formations, sliding down crumbling slopes, dodging logs and protruding roots **I take special** care to avoid letting any stone or branches break my skin. I’ve almost allowed myself to relax when I hear a h my arms stands on **end**, and my hand flies to the thick scars on my throat.

I summon strength from nowhere to force my legs to run. Maybe it’s just an animal, a wild dog—though that’s overly optimistic **side** down a small slope, scraping my backside, and keep running. The **sound** of footsteps grabs my attention, and when I look back, my blood turns to ice in my **veins**. Enormous **wolves of** varying coat colors are charging toward me. With fists clenched and weapon in hand, I pick up speed, though I know it’s futile. They’re much faster than me, I can feel them behind **me**, the ground vibrating with the force of their paws.

hear the sound **of** water and think that maybe Insanely—crossing a river might deter or delay them, I use my i

Sound. The vegetation thins, and the path opens as approach. A spark of hope flares in my chest—the worst thing that could happen. because when the vegetation finally clears, I see it’s not a river waiting for me, but a cliff dropping into the sea. The Corrupted Wars:

My knees give out. I fall face first, scraping my skin. It doesn’t matter now I’m going to die. Instinct forces me to crawl backward for the edge, delaying the inevitable. I glance behind me at the water violently crashing against the rocks.

“Stop resisting. You must come with us.”

I tremble at the enormous wolf’s voice. It sounds like it comes from the depths of hell itself, reverberating in my very bones.

“I’m not going anywhere,” I manage to respond.

“We won’t harm you... unless you refuse.”

A hysterical laugh escapes me.

“Won’t harm **me**?” I point to my neck. “Then what’s this?”

The brown-furred wolf with golden eyes takes a step toward me, revealing its massive, threatening paw. The scars covering its muzzle look eerily familiar, and after a few seconds of doubt, I realize he’s the one who gave me these wounds. His ears twitch as he cocks his head, a curious animal inspecting its prey.

“I apologize for my.... temperamental behavior,” he says in that hellish voice.

I wrinkle my nose in disgust and take another step back, dangerously close to the edge. Just a few more inches, and I could let myself fall. Death would be better than being a captive of another merciless creature. That’s not living. I’ve made my decision when a sudden gust of wind whips my hair into my eyes. I close them reflexively, and when I open them again, a massacre unfolds before me,

Sold to the Night Lord

Cassian

I want to convince myself that this is the right thing to do. My enemies seek me out more and more frequently, and they use her as a weapon against me. I can’t afford it, not someone like me. She is a weakness I must eliminate, like a bad splinter. That is why I’ve acquired a new feeder, I don’t need her, but I know this will hurt Elara, and that’s what I’m after.

The differences between them are very noticeable one has black hair, the other golden. She has an angelic face that steals your breath. Nothing like Elara’s raw beauty, a melancholic beauty that absorbs color and turns it grey. Soft features against sharp ones. Sky blue eyes versus absorbing grey eyes

I pour myself a glass with the new feeder’s blood, and as I bring it to my lips, it tastes like all the others. The door opens without knocking, and I know immediately who it is. Behind the haze that clouds my vision every time I feed, I can see Drystan with his arms crossed over his **chest**, his black hair brushing his shoulders, and his lips pursed in disapproval.

“You shouldn’t be doing this, Cassian.”

“I stopped taking orders a long time ago, my friend.”

“It’s not an order. It’s advice,” he says with emphasis.

“Oh? Do tell me more,” I reply mockingly.

He sighs, visibly tired of my behavior.

“We’ve already made her suffer too much by tearing her from her home. Her life has been shit her entire existence, always thinking about the moment one of us would take her. She seemed to be starting to fit in here, to enjoy herself—why make her suffer again?”

“I’m tired.” Ishrug. “You know howlam.”

“Precisely because I know w how you are, I know these past weeks haven’t been meaningless to you,” he scoffs. “You’ve never gotten involved with humans, but she’s different, isn’t she? Even I feel different around her—she makes me appreciate life a little more. It’s pleasant having

her nearby.”

“Stop spouting sentimental nonsense, Drystan. I thought you were serious”

“You’re going to regret this,” **he**

declares. “I just hope it won’t be too late by then.”

He doesn’t wait for me to dismiss him; he leaves the room as silently **as** he entered, leaving me alone with myself and my decisions. Someday the weight of them will fall on me, but now is not the time to think about that. Between shapeshifters and rebellious Diluted, I have too many things on my hands. Elara cannot be a distraction—much less a weakness.

As dinner approaches, I go down to the hall where used to meet with her. I take my usual seat and wait patiently for Maryse. I must admit that when she sits beside me, I feel nothing—not even the urge to torment her. She doesn’t react when I cut her wrist with my ring and fill my cup with her blood. Her wound begins to heal when I pass my tongue over it, and soon we’re both absorbed in our thoughts. She eats in silence while I run my fingers along the rim of the cup.

It’s then that I feel a sudden chill—something I’m not used to. I don’t feel temperature changes the same way a human would feeling that makes me dive into my powers and search for Elara’s mind, but it’s locked shut. I push my chair back and plant my hands on the table, startling Maryse. I say nothing as I leave the hall and head swiftly to Elara’s room.

The strange sensation of absolute cold lingers in my chest. I brush my fingers over the doorframe, hesitating to enter, thinking about what I’ll say if my suspicions are wrong.

Deep down, I know they aren't. I'm not someone who is driven by feelings–this is something else.

I open the door and find everything empty, I know she's not there even before heading to the bathroom to confirm it with my **fingers**, and throw several items to the floor–perfume bottles, bath essences. No one comes **to** check what **zared** t no one wants to risk their life at this moment.

“Elaral” I shout, knowing I won't get an answer.

The improvised rope tied to the bedpost mocks me from its place. I bite into my own fangs from clenching my jaw so hard, furious. **With** **thru** clenched, I leave her quarters, knocking over the stool at her vanity and making the doorframe tremble as i slam the door **shut**. At the end of the hallway, around the corner, I catch a glimpse of the unmistakable pale hair that has settled among us these past few days. I run toward determined not to let her escape. I quickly reach her **back**–her haste tells me she's not eager to see me. I grab her by the **nape** and turn her around to face me.

“Where is she?”

“Where is who?” she replies through clenched teeth.

“Don't play dumb with me, banshee.” I narrow my eyes as I tighten my grip. “You've never given me a good feeling–I know you helped her”

“Is it so strange to think she might have left on her own, by her own will?”

He let out a sarcastic laugh.

“Talk now, before I break every bone in your body and then enjoy tearing your mind apart just for fun.”

“I hope she's far away from you,” she spits.

I squeeze so tightly my knuckles turn white and I feel the skin stretching painfully over bone. The banshee's jaw trembles, but she never lowers her gaze.

“Where is she?”

“I don't know.” She shrugs. “And I hope you never get **your** claws on her again–i don't care what fate **says**.”

“Evanora, you're going to regret this.”

The invisible fingers of my gift are already toying with the strings that make her mind hers and not an empty shell I pluck them like harp strings. She trembles beneath my

hand—she knows what I’m going to do, yet she doesn’t step back or beg for mercy. I’m about to strike when Drystan steps in.

“Stop, **Cassian.**”

I turn my face toward him, unable to believe he’s challenging me.

“**Leave,**” Isnap

“No.”

“You’ll never **have** her, Drys.” I curl my lips into a malicious smile. “Do you think you’ll earn her favor by saving her from my wrath?”

ming her The seconds we spend staring each other down are what Evanora needs to gather her courage and risk my gift going wild irreparably. She doesn’t seem to care, not if she opens her mouth. I know what’s going to happen before it does. Her scream tears through the air, the walls tremble, and my ears feel like they’re about to burst. I squint, take a step back, and she uses the opportunity to slip away. I want to catch her again, use her **as** a target for my rage, but her scream is powerful and keeps me frozen in the hallway. Kneeling, Drystan covers his ears as if that would make any difference. A hot liquid trickles down the side of my neck—without touching it, I know it’s blood