

Chapter 13: Going to School?

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"Elira..."

I twitched in my sleep. My fingers curled against the linen as the voice called again.

"Elira..."

It was gentle and melodic.

Neither male nor female—just... familiar. A voice that seemed to echo from my bones, from somewhere older than memory. It wasn't frightening. It was pulling me.

In the dream, I stood in a field of silver grass under a sky of violet dusk. The moon was huge—too close—and the stars pulsed like heartbeats.

"Who's there?" I called.

No answer.

Just the wind.

Then, the sky shimmered.

I turned, and standing at the edge of the field was a woman cloaked in white light. Her face was blurry, but her presence felt like home and thunder.

"You must wake up," the figure said. Her voice echoed in layers like many versions of her were speaking at once.

Wake up? From what?

"From t-this dream?"

"No. Wake up, Elira. Truly. Remember who you are."

I took a step closer. "I don't understand. Who are you?"

She lifted a hand and pointed behind me. I turned—and saw nothing but darkness, spreading fast like a tide swallowing the stars.

"The curse they fear is the gift they do not understand. You are not what they say. The fire was never meant to burn you—it was meant to awaken you."

The light shattered.

Darkness rushed in.

And then—

I gasped awake, chest rising and falling as though I'd been running. My heart pounded. My hands were trembling.

But... why?

I looked around. Everything was quiet. Still.

I tried to recall what I'd seen—where I'd been—but it slipped through my fingers like smoke. The more I chased it, the more it scattered.

All I remembered was a voice.

And a strange warmth in my chest.

But just like that, it faded, leaving only the ache behind.

I closed my eyes again, thinking that if I slept again, I might remember what happened in that dream.

But then I stirred when I felt it.

The warmth beneath me was too foreign to be comforting. My fingers clenched soft sheets—sheets I didn't remember lying on.

My eyes flew open.

The bed.

I was in the bed.

I scrambled upright, confused. I hadn't slept here again. I couldn't. It was too big, too soft, like a trap disguised as comfort. Last night, I remembered curling near the window again, trying to keep my distance from everything this room represented.

So how...?

Before I could piece together the answer, a sudden knock made my heart jolt.

I stiffened.

The door opened, and I sighed in relief when I saw Dianne. But she wasn't wearing the same dress she wore yesterday. The one she had on now was... familiar.

A uniform.

Lorelei used to wear one just like it when she came home from school—smug and untouchable—while I scrubbed floors.

Dianne looked at me with that blank expression again.

"Good morning, Miss Elira, I'll prepare your bath now. We need to hurry or we'll be late."

My brow furrowed. "Late? For what?"

She turned to me casually, like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

"For school, of course."

My stomach dropped.

"S-School? What? Why?"

A voice answered before she could.

Sharp. Familiar. Cutting.

"What do you think school is for?"

I turned around—and there he was.

Darius.

He stood in the doorway like a shadow I couldn't escape, Sorin a silent presence behind him. Sorin looked worried, wanting to step in, but Darius raised a hand to stop him.

"Darius—" Sorin tried.

Darius didn't even glance at him.

His golden eyes burned straight through me. "Answer me, Elira."

"I... I don't understand," I whispered.

He scoffed. "Don't play dumb. You already know what this is about."

I shook my head. "I swear, I don't—"

"Oh, but you do." He stepped forward.

"You told my mother you wanted an education. You fed her some sob story—tugged at her heart. Poor little omega. No schooling. No books. Just dirt and chains."

"What? No, I didn't—"

"Then what did you mean?" he snapped, eyes narrowing.

"Did you think you could cry your way out of your place? That my mother's kindness would protect you?"

His words felt like open palms against my face—not physical, but sharp enough to leave me raw.

"If this is what you wanted, Elira, fine," he spat. "You'll get it. All of it."

He turned to Dianne.

"She's to attend the Capital Academy. Effective today. She'll receive an intensive education—combat training included."

I blinked, stunned. The room seemed to tilt.

"And if she doesn't perform well," he added coldly, "don't feed her. No one eats for free here."

Dianne bowed her head.

"I understand, King Darius."

My mouth opened to speak and explain, but Darius didn't wait.

He walked out without so much as a glance back.

The door slammed shut behind him—the final word in a conversation I never got to finish.

I stood there, dumbfounded, hands shaking at my sides.

He never even let me speak.

But does that even matter?

He wouldn't have listened anyway.

School.

I'm going to attend school?

I don't have any idea what's going on.

Queen Selene told me to find my strength and my purpose.

She never told me she was going to send me to school...

To give me the education I had been craving for so many years.

I'd once dreamed about it—sitting in a room full of books, raising my hand to answer questions, feeling like I belonged somewhere other than in chains.

But now, with it handed to me like a punishment rather than a gift, it

didn't feel like any of that. It felt like another battle I didn't ask for.

I sighed heavily.

Should I talk to Queen Selene—?

No. I won't do that.

It would only make Darius angrier.

What if I fail this?

I'm not scared of missing a meal. But I don't want to disappoint Queen Selene.

I don't know anything. I can barely read. I've never held a sword or fought anyone in my life—unless you count the times I had to defend myself with whatever I could grab before being beaten again.

What if... I mess this up?

Dianne's voice snapped me out of my reverie. "Miss Elira, your bath is ready."

I nodded and stood up from the bed. But I froze mid-step when I saw what Dianne was holding.

The uniform... for me.

It was exactly like the one she wore: a crisp, long-sleeved white shirt dress, a dark blue vest, and a pleated skirt that fell just above the knee.

It looked perfect—but would it even suit someone like me?

I shook my head, trying to silence the spiral of negative thoughts.

I should remember everything Queen Selene told me last night.

And I'll use that... to fight, live, and find my purpose in this cruel world.

