



Chapter 7

I place my foot on the carriage step and, bowing my head, enter. It's dark, but when I lift my gaze, I make out a large shadow, shaped like a man. The air leaves my lungs as if I'd been kicked in the chest. I sit with my back very straight and shoulders stiff. I try not to look directly at the shadow.

"Let's go," he says, knocking on the roof with a calm but strong voice. It's masculine and hypnotic. "I want to get home as soon as possible."

His wish is my command.

The horses neigh as the whip cracks, breaking the night's calm. We speed off, accompanied by the thunder of hooves against the cobbled road. I look out the window, avoiding what truly awakens my interest and my fear.

About an hour passes during which my rear suffers with every bump in the road. The silence is suffocating, but I suppose I can't expect anything else. It's not like this predator-and-prey relationship is going to be friendly and cordial. I shift in my seat to find a better position.

Five minutes later, I shift again.

"Stop moving," he says sharply. "Your scent is coming to me."

"I'm sorry," I whisper.

Now it's he who moves, stepping out from the shadows when the moonlight illuminates his face. It makes him look even paler. It's him. The man from earlier. And once again those blue, cold eyes make the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. There's no life in them, they're empty, dead. He has thick lips pressed into a firm line, high and sharp cheekbones, and a neatly trimmed beard of a few days. My

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eyes can't stop looking at him, completely stunned by his beauty. These monsters truly are beautiful. Beautiful to lure, to hunt, to kill.

I realize during my scrutiny that his eyes are also looking at me and I blush instantly. I look away toward the window. Even so, I feel the weight of his gaze on me. I play with my fingers, count the bumps that shake the carriage, anything to distract myself from him. His presence is so tangible it weighs in the air.

He slides his long, graceful fingers to the carriage window and I see him open it a few centimeters. The rush of cold air that enters makes me cling tighter to my cloak and wrap myself in it. His rigid posture relaxes slightly as his chest deflates with a deep exhale.

Maybe another hour passes before the carriage stops and the coachman's voice reaches my ears. Curiosity pulls at me and I discreetly try to see out of the corner of my eye what lies outside. I can't make out much, only the thick trunks of trees and wild vegetation. A few minutes later we're on the move again, and we pass through gates covered in vines. The carriage tilts slightly, indicating the path is steep. My companion remains impassive, not moving an inch.

As if fate hadn't punished me enough tonight, a series of misfortunes follow: the steep path, a bump, and my clumsiness. The carriage jolts and my body shoots forward, crashing into something extremely hard.

The fingers, more like claws, with how deeply they dig into my shoulders, push me away quickly. My head is far below his, and I lift my gaze, afraid. His eyes stab into me like daggers. My heart skips a beat when I see his hardened expression, flared nostrils, tense jaw, and lips curled in displeasure.

"Wasted rubies."

Sold to the Night Lord



He pushes me away from him as if my closeness were a physical ailment. My back hits the wooden seat and little black spots dance in my vision.

"No one asked you to pay so much for me," I mutter angrily.

"What did you say?"

Keeping silent would be the most sensible option and the one that would guarantee I stay alive tomorrow, but if you think about it, I already tried to end my life once. The suicidal impulse seems to be wide awake within me.

"What I said is that no one forced you to pay such an amount of rubies for me."

He narrows his eyes and tilts his head slightly with a certain amused air.

"The gazelle speaking informally to the lion," he says with a mocking tone. "Perhaps you'll serve me better as a jester than as food."

A flush, having nothing to do with shame, tints my cheeks. I bite my tongue not to speak further, so hard I might even draw blood. My fingers fumble at the seat behind me, looking for support to get up.

"Your heart is beating so fast it's almost like you're begging me to let you taste my fangs..." He leans in his seat, looking down at me from his dominant position while I'm still sprawled on the floor of the carriage. I see his tongue caress one of his sharp fangs. "...on your neck..." His eyes darken until that cerulean hue almost vanishes. "...or maybe on other, more tender parts."

We stop again. This time it seems to be the final stop, as the coachman opens the door and makes a deep bow, waiting for his master. He gives me something resembling a mocking smile and steps out of the carriage. I breathe again when his presence recedes and I exit as well, where the

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group of women from before awaits me.

I place a hand on my heart for a moment, trying to regain my composure.

So that man is Cassian Draven, my jailer and the one in charge of sinking his fangs deep into your neck.

I shake my head at that thought—where did it come from?

The vampires give a small curtsy as Cassian passes without even glancing at them. I see him climb the small staircase quickly and my gaze follows him up... and up...

When I realize what's before my eyes, I can't help but open them so wide they nearly pop out. This isn't a house or a regular mansion—it's a damn castle. The walls are gray stone, impenetrable-looking, the steps to the main entrance worn with time, and stone statues are scattered throughout the garden. I spin around, the gardens stretch beyond what I can see. I hear the sound of water, the caws of a crow, and the rustle of leaves in the breeze.

I focus again on the imposing building before me. There are large arched windows, the cornices are decorated with open jaws, and in the center of the façade is a stained glass rose window. Robust statues are scattered here and there, presiding over the rooftops, and two are stationed on either side of the stairs, as if they were guardians of the main staircase.

"We don't have all day," says the red-haired vampire. "You'll have time to admire the beauty of this place."

"Or not." Says another, covering her mouth to hide a giggle.

My fingers tingle with the urge to slap that perfect face. I'm sure I'd leave visible marks. The idea tempts me far too much.

I try not to show that her words affect me, much less that they awaken my most violent side. I place my first foot on

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the stairs and begin to climb, slowly at first and then faster. I'm not surprised that, upon entering the castle, the atmosphere is as cold or even colder than outside.

"Leave us," the redhead orders. "I'll take her to her chambers."

I look around, not to admire the luxury and beauty of the place, but searching for blue eyes. He's nowhere to be seen, so I suppose I won't see him much.

Only when he wants a quick sip.

Those stupid thoughts again.

I snort, which earns me a reproachful look from the redhead. Once we're alone, she starts walking and I follow her.



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