

Upon delivering their acts of retribution, The Church's attendants sealed off the chapel, and abandoned there the bloody disease that is I; a creature of the moon.

Too weak to free myself, with no hope of regaining any strength, I closed my eyes.

Until a draft carried the sweet scent of life to my nose;

Instinct opened my eyes, which met a gaze for the first time in what I counted to be three centuries.

I remember the heaving in my chest, the nauseating hunger that drew forth pools of spit and dribble;

A voice broke the silence.

"I will save you, vespertilio. You don't need to convince me."

As I tried to call to the figure, I found that I could not.

With unfathomable power, she tore the silver pegs from my hands and feet, those that bound me to the crucifix.

Her cold hands cupped my face, lifting my chin to meet her eyes.

"I won't leave you here like this. You'd fare no better on the ground than on that cross."

She offered to me a vial of red, fresh blood, the sight of which I'd been blind to forever

"To you, in need of comfort and care, I offer myself; I long for a wife to cherish, all I ask in return is your obedience. With that we may build a life of lasting love."

I do

"In sickness and in health, Selene"

She carried me away, our honeymoon ripe.

When I next awoke, I found myself in a dimly lit room. The scent of candle wax and wood in the air was warm against the cold stone walls. My bed was grand, canopied, *and, I began to cry.*

I felt unfamiliar with the heat in my chest. *Cared for, this must be what it feels like to be cared for.*

“There’s nothing to cry about.” She spoke, I didn’t see her in the corner.

The woman sat in a chair inappropriate for her scale. It faced the bed.

“Selene, come here,”

I remember struggling to stand, but I felt I had to

“Do these belong to you?” She showed me a black box, in it, a cloak and a dagger.

“They do”

“Oh My sweet Selene, if you’re curious just say so— no lies necessary.” She took the box from my hands and turned to leave the room. I became frustrated,

“I’m telling the truth.”

“You have no use for them, They can’t possibly be yours.”

She walked out of the room, I tried to follow but the door was shut in my face

I swung it open

She stood before me, unamused

“I’d like to inspect that box if I may-”

“You may not. Return to your bed”

A chord of fear struck me as she spoke, I took a step back into the room as she shut the door on me once more. I waited in the stone room, it was windowless and dark, the dressings’ wine and coal. The ceiling in this room seemed to stretch, so did the time. Both were full of *nothing*.

How could someone who had shown me much care be so cold? I mused, how could I be so stricken with fear when this woman has done nothing to make me fearful? She hummed a soft tune while her heels clicked down the hall, she approached the door once more.

“Come,” she said softly, “It’s time you play your part.”

I listen to her. She began by brushing my hair, which I could see had grown quite long. Her fingers touched my skin like it was hers. She slid a garment over my head, smoothing the fabric over my body. It was fitted unctuously, hugging my frame in a girlish position. I cannot reasonably call myself opposed to women’s clothing, but to be dressed in them by someone else made me uncomfortable.

“What’s the matter?” she asked.

“I... I’d rather wear something else,”

“And why’s that?”

“Perhaps because I’m not—”

“Not what, Selene?” her voice was low “What but the best is my wife to wear? You mustn’t realize how perfect you look. Come with me.”

Taking my hand, she led me through the halls of her opulent manor. A dizzying spiral staircase was the centerpoint of the mansion.

We went down a floor or two-

Through two or three doors

Past three or four other halls

And arrived at a final door, secured by an ornate keyhole that's trim matched the gold filigree of the door.

She shifts through a keyring with at *least* fifty keys, pulling one that obviously matched this door. She pushes the door open and gestures, I step in.

Within the room stood a tall mirror, a magical one, that shimmered faintly

“Look,” she said.

I must've hesitated, because a cold hand on the back of my neck shunted me into position in front of the mirror.

I cannot recall my appearance.

That being said, I did not expect the face that stared back at me to be so haunted.

“My beautiful wife... oh how the moon pales in your pallid splendor.”

Her massive hands crawl across my body, touching the cross shaped scar on my chest.

“I *could* make you whole again, Selene.”

The gown's low neckline revealed the top of the jagged scar on my chest, a remnant of a life I couldn't remember. I didn't know what to think. It was like gazing at a stranger— at least a *pretty* one. The woman stood behind me.

“You see now, don't you?” she whispered, her voice velvety smooth. “All that you lack?”

Her cold hand slipped down, her fingers tracing my chest. In her other hand she held a light violet gem, the shape of which was like a steak.

“Stop,” I pleaded

“I One hand tangled in his hair, yanking his head backward before slamming it against the cold glass of the mirror. The other hand grasped firmly at his waist, pulling him closer to her in a cruel embrace. She leaned over his shoulder, her breath cold against his ear as she whispered;

“That’s not what a good wife says.”

Her lips brushed the corner of his neck before she sank her sharp fangs into his flesh. Selene gasped, his entire body shuddering as Lamia fed on him. He struggled, fingers clutching the edge of the mirror as his strength ebbed away, but the weight of her body, the hunger in her bite, made resistance impossible. His vision blurred with weakness. Lamia's possessive grip made him feel as if, no matter how degrading or terrifying her embrace, he was at least worth holding onto. He let his eyes close and dropped his head.

No matter how she may hold me... at least I'll always be held, he thought fleetingly, a desperate solace in the chaos of her control.

After what felt like an eternity, Lamia withdrew, her lips stained with Selene's blood. She tilted his face back toward the mirror, forcing him to meet his own reflection. Tears streamed down Selene's cheeks, his breaths ragged and shallow, each gasp of air a struggle. The sight of his broken, vulnerable form seemed to amuse her. She ran her fingers through his hair, petting him like a prized possession.

“See how happy you are?” she cooed softly, her voice dripping with false kindness. “If not for me, you’d be alone. Forever.”

Selene's heart pounded painfully in his chest. The tears flowed freely now, mixing with the blood on his neck. Lamia's gentle stroking felt like a mockery of comfort—her way of reminding him that everything he had, even his suffering, was hers to control.

She whispered in his ear, her voice soft as silk, "I promise you'll never be alone again."

The words hung in the air, heavy with the weight of his new reality.

A month had passed, and under Lamia's twisted affection, Selene had made a full recovery. With his strength restored, he found himself aimlessly wandering the opulent mansion, taking in every intricate detail of the grand rooms and shadowed halls. Aimless as he appeared, his exploration had a purpose; he was searching for that black box, the one Lamia had so briefly shown him. Lamia, of course, knew exactly what he was up to. She had shown him the box for a reason. Watching Selene tiptoe through her home, sneaking glances over his shoulder as he rifled through drawers and peeked into cabinets, amused her greatly. To keep the game going, and to heighten his frustration, Lamia played along, leaving red herrings that kept his hopes flickering. Random keys strewn about, carelessly tossed onto tables or deliberately tucked behind picture frames. She would 'forget' to lock a cabinet, leaving it ajar just enough for Selene to pry it open, of course it would be empty. The game was cruel, but Lamia

reveled in it. Every time Selene's hopeful eyes met another disappointment, her smile grew a little wider. She could play this game forever, savoring each moment of his futile search. To her, the longer it lasted, the sweeter Selene's inevitable fall would be.

She began to shape him into being her 'perfect wife'. She was relentless in her 'lessons,' drilling into him what she considered the essentials. Her instructions were commands, and her word was law. Each order was an unspoken test of obedience, and Selene learned quickly that defiance, even unintentional, would not be tolerated. The consequences were swift and merciless, often delivered with a smile that sent chills down his spine.

"sit up straight," so he would, immediately adjusting, shoulders pulled back, spine perfectly aligned. If he faltered, even slightly, her eyes would narrow. She would have him sit with his legs crossed elegantly, never with the unseemly sprawl of a man.

"smile," she'd demand, her voice sweet but loaded with expectation. Selene would force his lips into a cheerful expression, even when his insides churned with dread. To have shown him his face just to prove her mastery over it was cruel.

Every day was a list of requests: "speak softly," "keep your eyes down," "laugh like you mean it." Each order chipped away at whatever was left of Selene's sense of self, slowly reshaping him into the image Lamia desired. When Selene hesitated or failed to execute her orders to her satisfaction, she would punish him in ways that were sure to sting. Sometimes it was a biting remark that made him feel small, other times a cruel withholding of affection, leaving him alone in that enormous, silent house to stew in his own guilt and fear. On the worst days, she'd tighten her grip, her sharp nails digging into his skin. This was another game to be savored—a slow, deliberate molding of her prey. She knew that each

command was a small cut, but over time, even the smallest wounds could bleed someone dry. For Selene, the line between playing along and losing himself entirely blurred more with each passing day. He didn't know how it was possible to lose a self that wasn't even there, but the hint that he *was* someone was enough to make him cling onto whatever fragments of his identity he had left.

A year had gone by. A single year that, had felt longer than the hundreds of years Selene had slept for. Time moved differently now, it was agonizingly slow. Almost every day was the same, Lamia's sweet poison seeped deeper into Selene's soul. He had grown nearly perfect in his compliance, his every gesture and expression carefully curated to meet her exacting standards. Yet despite his efforts, he was still frequently punished for the smallest of perceived slights. On the days when Lamia chose to treasure him, there was warmth, a false, twisted kind of comfort, but warmth nonetheless. She would hold him close, whispering soft words of adoration as though he were the most precious thing in the world. In those moments, Selene almost believed it, allowing himself to sink into the brief reprieve of her affection. He had grown to crave those fleeting moments, even as he loathed the dependency they created within him. When Lamia's touch was gentle, when her voice carried the sweetness of a lover rather than the bite of a master, it was easy to forget the darkness lurking beneath. Selene would bask in the warmth, his aching heart soaking in every drop of kindness, no matter how fleeting it was.

“Selene,” Lamia’s voice rang out in its usual commanding tone.

“Yes, Lamia?” Selene replied, standing attentively, with a gentle smile.

“We’ll be having guests today.” Lamia’s words were unexpected. She stepped closer, her presence overwhelming as she pulled him in, close enough for him to feel the chill of her breath on his skin. “Be sure to be on your best behavior. I have no doubts in you, my beloved.” Her hand rested heavily on Selene’s shoulder, the weight of her touch was a reminder that defiance was never an option. The word “guests” sent a strange thrill through Selene. Guests were new—a break in the suffocating cycle of isolation he had come to know so well. But now, the prospect of having others around, even if just for a moment, felt like a reprieve. It was a chance, however small, to be seen by someone else, to be

acknowledged by eyes other than Lamia's. For Selene, it was a sign of life—his life—one that had been overshadowed by Lamia's relentless control.

What would they think when they saw him, dressed in Lamia's image of perfection, playing the role of the devoted wife she had built him as

Lamia's grip tightened on his shoulder, and her piercing gaze told him everything he wanted to avoid.

"Of course, Lamia. I won't disappoint you," Selene murmured, his voice steady. As Lamia turned to leave, Selene's smile remained fixed, just as it was meant to be, but this time, it was genuine. What Lamia didn't know was that Selene had a secret: he had found the black box. It had been hidden in a dusty alcove behind the heavy drapes in Lamia's study, an overlooked corner she hadn't bothered to lock away. Not only had Selene found the box, but he had also managed to steal back its contents—the familiar weight of the dagger in his hands and the scent of the cloak offered him a strange, bittersweet comfort. He felt capable with them, as though holding onto fragments of a self that was slipping away.

Now, with guests coming, Selene saw his chance. He wasn't sure exactly what he'd do—escape, perhaps, if the opportunity presented itself. Or maybe he could convince Lamia to trust him enough to let him leave on his own, even briefly. A good wife could run errands, after all. And if he left and returned, maybe, just maybe, Lamia would love him for it. The thought filled him with a trembling, desperate hope.

"Lamia?" he called out suddenly, his voice wavering as she was about to pass through the doorway.

"What is it, darling Selene?" Lamia turned to face him, her gaze piercing and expectant.

"Might it be helpful for you if I, possibly... left the house to gather a favor for the guests?" Selene's voice shook, and he tried desperately to keep his composure, to remain perfect. Lamia's eyes narrowed, and

Selene's heart sank; for a moment, he was sure she would unleash her wrath upon him, lock him away for daring to ask. But then, to his utter disbelief, Lamia's stern expression softened into a smile.

"That's a wonderful idea, Selene."

His eyes widened in shock, his smile growing so wide that his teeth showed—a display he quickly covered with his hand, stumbling over an apology for his sudden, improper joy.

"Don't apologize for being happy," Lamia said, her voice sweet but with a chilling undertone. "That's all I want for you."

What?

Before he could respond, Lamia continued, "You wouldn't know how to get to or around town, of course. But you can wander the grounds and gather a bouquet from the foliage. Something beautiful for our guests."

"Yes, Lamia," Selene replied, bowing deeply in gratitude. It wasn't exactly what he'd hoped for, but it was more freedom than he'd tasted in seemingly forever. He clung to the victory, knowing he had to play his part perfectly. Selene stepped outside, the cool breeze of the winter evening brushing against his skin. He roamed the surrounding fields and woods, savoring the brief taste of solitude. He wasn't foolish enough to take too long; he knew better than to abuse the rare kindness Lamia had shown him. He picked wildflowers with delicate care, arranging them into a bouquet as nicely as he could. His mind never strayed far from the hidden dagger in his room. As he reentered the house, Lamia was nowhere to be seen. Slightly unnerved, he set the flowers down on the table and went upstairs. His door was left slightly ajar, not as he left it. He enters the room and quickly scans, checking over his shoulder as well. He slides over a candelabra and lifts a floorboard, His hands trembling as he frantically searches the now-empty hiding spot, his fingers brushing over the cold, bare surface where his belongings had been. He stood

there, mortified, trying to muster the composure that Lamia demanded of him. The game had shifted, and she was always ten steps ahead. He could hear Lamia moving about downstairs now. The faint clink of glass and the hum of her voice—preparations for the guests, no doubt. Her presence lingered in every shadow, every flickering candle. He felt naked, exposed, like she could see through walls and watch him crumble.

What now?

He hid away in his room, festering in fear and desperately trying to manage his thoughts. And then it was time to entertain. The dining room was bathed in warm, flickering candlelight that cast delicate shadows on the dark wood walls. A large table stretched through the center, draped in a deep red tablecloth, adorned with crystal goblets, and the bouquet of flowers that Selene had carefully gathered earlier. The air was thick with the faint scent of aged wine and something floral, mingling with a sweet undercurrent of decay. Selene stood in the corner of the room, trying to have as small of a presence as possible. He was dressed beautifully, as Lamia had insisted, his hands folded neatly in front of him, every inch the picture of poise that she had commanded him to be. The delicate gown flowed hung nicely around his slender frame, he had braided some of his hair, leaving most of it out to frame his pale, anxious face. Lamia enters with her guests following close behind. There were three of them, all tall, imposing figures draped in dark, elegant attire. Their eyes, sharp and knowing, immediately zeroed in on Selene, inspecting him like a curious artifact in a gallery. Each had an aura that radiated power and centuries of existence, much like Lamia.

“My beloved, my wife.” She gestures towards Selene, the callout made him jump. She moved closer, wrapping an arm around Selene pulling him slightly closer possessively.

The guests regarded him with keen interest, their expressions ranging from amused to indifferent. One of them, a man with silver hair tied back neatly and piercing black eyes, took a step forward. His smile was thin, almost mocking.

“It’s a pleasure to finally meet the one who has captured Lamia’s... heart. Tell me, what is your name”

Selene’s breath caught in his throat. He could feel Lamia’s gaze burning into him, expectant and sharp. He opened his mouth to respond, but the words stuck. It felt wrong. His eyes flickered to the floor for the briefest moment as if searching for some anchor, some fragment of his true self that had slipped through the cracks.

“My name is...” he started, his voice barely a whisper. A rush of panic surged through him. The name felt foreign on his tongue.

Lamia’s grip tightened around his waist, her nails digging into his skin just enough to pull him back into the present. She leaned in, her breath cool against his ear.

“Go on, my dear. Tell them who you are.”

Selene swallowed hard, forcing himself to meet the gaze of the guests again. His cheeks flushed faintly, his hands fidgeting with the fabric of his gown. “I... I am Selene,” he finally managed, though his voice wavered slightly, betraying his uncertainty. The words felt brittle, almost as if they might shatter the moment they left his lips. The silver-haired man raised an eyebrow, intrigued. “Charmed,” he said, his tone laced with something mocking. The other guests exchanged glances, their smiles small and knowing, as if they were in on some private joke. Selene could feel Lamia’s eyes on him, sharper than any dagger. She watched him intently, savoring every flicker of his discomfort. Then, as if on cue, she smiled—a slow, devilish curve of her lips that sent a chill down Selene’s spine. She squeezed his waist gently, a silent reminder of her control.

“You did wonderfully, my sweet Selene,” Lamia purred, though the subtle menace in her voice did not go unnoticed. “It’s so good to see you embracing your role.” Selene nodded stiffly, his heart pounding in his chest. He stood straighter, the perfect obedient figure Lamia had crafted. But beneath his serene facade, turmoil churned. He had faltered, even if just for a moment, and Lamia had seen it all. She would never let him forget it. The guests continued their conversation, exchanging pleasantries and barbed compliments, but Selene’s mind was elsewhere. The name, the identity, the life he was being forced into—it was all just a twisted game that he was bound to lose. As the evening went on, Selene played his part flawlessly, smiling when prompted, laughing on cue, and nodding along to whatever was said. But each time he caught Lamia’s eye, her wicked smile struck him. Selene knew that Lamia was savoring every second of his struggle. The heavy door creaked shut behind the departing guests, the soft click of the latch sealing Selene’s brief glimpse of outside connection. He stood with his back to Lamia, his posture composed, His breath was steady.

Without warning, a swift, brutal strike landed between his shoulder blades, sending Selene crashing to the cold floor. Pain shot through his body, and his vision blurred momentarily as he struggled to process the sudden violence. The air was knocked from his lungs, and his cheek pressed against the unforgiving stone, his carefully controlled demeanor shattered in an instant. Before he could even attempt to rise, Lamia’s sharp, cold voice cut through the silence like a blade.

“It appears I’ve been far too lenient with you,” she said calmly, her tone devoid of warmth. The monotone nature of her voice was far more terrifying than any shouting could have been.

Selene’s breaths came in ragged gasps, panic seizing his chest as he felt Lamia’s hand tangle in his hair, yanking his head back viciously. She dragged him across the floor with little effort, his legs scrambling uselessly as he tried to gain footing. He clawed at her grip, but her strength was unyielding.

Selene's cries echoed down the empty hallway, his voice breaking into desperate, pleading sobs that he could no longer be held back.

"Please! Lamia, I—I'm sorry!" he choked out, tears streaming down his face as he was dragged through the corridors, helpless against her fury. His cries reverberated off the walls, raw and unrestrained, a guttural release of the fear and despair that had built up inside him for so long. He let himself break, allowed the flood of terror to pour out in wails and screams, knowing that in this moment of punishment, his weakness would be overlooked. Lamia didn't respond. Her expression remained eerily calm, almost bored, as she continued to drag him, his nails scraping uselessly against the floor. She hauled him into the room with the mirror, the door slamming shut behind them. The familiar, oppressive space loomed around them, the stained glass windows casting fractured, distorted colors across the walls. Lamia flung Selene to the ground in front of the mirror, his frail body crumpling in a heap. He clutched his head, fingers tangled in his disheveled hair, eyes wild and glassy with tears. The mirror loomed above him, reflecting his disheveled appearance—his bruised cheek, his trembling frame, the raw, red eyes that stared back at him with a mixture of shame and fear. She knelt beside him, her grip unrelenting as she grabbed his face, forcing him to look at his own reflection. Selene's sobs quieted into uneven breaths, his eyes fixed on the image before him. The fragile, broken figure staring back at him. "Look at you," Lamia whispered, her voice smooth and laced with cold disdain. "This pathetic display is unbecoming of my beloved wife."

Selene's lip quivered, but he said nothing. He was too exhausted to speak, too broken to resist. He simply watched as Lamia's eyes narrowed, a faint, twisted smile curling at the corners of her lips.

"You've grown too comfortable, Selene," she continued, her grip tightening around his jaw.

"Smile"

And so he did. He forced a smile, so weak it was barely visible. She slammed his head against the mirror, the glass rattling as Selene's vision blurred again, pain radiating from the point of impact.

"Please..." he whimpered, the words tumbling out between shaky breaths. Silvery red blood leaked from his nose, it trickled to his mouth, the metallic taste stung.

"Silence." Lamia's command was absolute. She dropped his head and stood, towering above him.

Selene lay motionless on the floor, tears mingling with the sweat on his brow as he gazed up at her. His entire body ached, but it was nothing compared to the crushing weight of Lamia's presence. She watched him with that same chilling calmness, savoring his defeat.

"Remember, dear Selene." she whispered, bending down to run a cold hand through his hair with mock tenderness. "The life you lead prior has no room here."

She stood and turned, leaving Selene to crumble further, staring at his reflection as his tears blurred the image once more. He stayed there for a long time, trembling on the cold floor, the words she had spoken echoing endlessly in his mind.

Days had passed. Selene wore his new look openly—the look of defeat. The skin around his waist and on his shoulders was often littered with small bruises. They healed within a day, but stung all the same. He confined himself mostly to his room, careful to keep out of Lamia's way without drawing suspicion.

On a whim, Selene reopened the hiding spot, the one he had searched so desperately dozens of times before, always finding it empty. But today, something was different. He spotted a folded slip of paper wedged against the rough stone walls of the hole. His heart raced as he reached for it, fingers trembling with a mix of excitement and fear. What if discovering something about himself only made his

life more difficult? A good wife wouldn't hesitate to burn the note, to destroy any trace of disobedience and remain devoted. But Lamia was right about one thing—he was no good wife. Selene unfolded the paper carefully, as if it might crumble to dust in his hands. The parchment was old, yellowed, and brittle at the edges, the ink faded and smeared by time. He squinted to read the scrawled handwriting, but the words slowly became clear, unraveling a truth long buried:

Tobias Faeryl

(1295 - 1320)

It was an obituary. His obituary. The weight of it sank into Selene's chest, suffocating him with the realization that he had been dead for a much longer time than he thought. The name Tobias echoed in his mind, a distant, almost foreign sound that felt right. It was more than a name; it was a tether to the person he once was, a man whose life had been cut short and forgotten, only to be resurrected into this twisted existence. Selene clutched the paper tightly. He continued to search, but not for his belongings; he had accepted that those were lost to him. Instead, Selene began to search within himself, sifting through the thick fog that clouded his mind. Fragments of who he might have been felt odd in his current reality, like whispers of a life lived in another body. The tightness of confined spaces set his heart racing, and barred rooms filled him with an unshakable dread. Lockpicking came naturally, almost without conscious thought—muscle memory, perhaps, from a life before Lamia. He was swift and silent in his movements, and incredibly deft. But no matter how quietly he crept, he was always under Lamia's watchful eye. She could sense him, feel the faint ripple of his presence, and the knowledge of it kept Selene perpetually on edge. Every step, every breath was a careful calculation—a delicate dance to keep Lamia's wrath at bay while he quietly pieced together the fragments of himself that still remained.

On a new day, Lamia's footsteps approached. He scrambled to appear normally. As she entered the room, Selene bowed his head. Lamia moved closer, her presence overwhelming. He was never more than an arm's reach away from her, always within her control.

"How is my dear Selene today?" she asked.

"I'm well, Lamia," Selene responded, his words careful, polite, the way she liked.

She took his hand and kissed it softly, pulling him into a dance-like embrace. "I'm so glad to hear that," she murmured, her eyes gleaming. "Today, we're going to town. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

Selene fought to contain his excitement, masking it behind a demure smile. He knew this was to be another test. He showed just enough joy to satisfy Lamia but kept his true emotions tightly controlled. It was cold outside, and while neither Selene nor Lamia felt the chill, they needed to blend in just a bit.

Lamia always took meticulous care in dressing Selene, even for the simplest occasions, and today was no exception. His hair was pulled back into a slightly messy bun. He wore boots with a slight heel, the typical dress was traded for a skirt and shirt that had a more modest neckline. Lamia left the room briefly, and when she returned, she carried something unexpected, as she often did. This time, it was the cloak.

She draped it over his shoulders, Selene stiffened under the familiar weight. It had a beautiful shape, with a scalloped contour and a large bow tied at the back. The thick hood muffled sound well, And the scent— Earthy, metallic, faintly sweet—like old memories buried beneath the dust. The smell flushed his senses, and he couldn't help but close his eyes, savoring it.

Lamia's eyes gleamed with satisfaction, watching him indulge in the cloak's presence. She had known exactly what it would mean to him. "Perfect," she whispered, adjusting the hood over his head.

"You look perfect, my dear Selene." He glanced up at Lamia, being sure to put enough affection behind

his gaze so that it would not be taken the wrong way. There was some truthful gratitude he was trying to convey. As their eyes met, Lamia's smile softened, and she leaned forward, placing a delicate kiss on the top of his head. They left the mansion together on foot, the grand doors closing behind them with a heavy thud that echoed through the still air. The path stretched out before them, winding through the mist-laden landscape, and though they moved quickly, Selene found himself holding back. His instincts urged him to go faster, his body could do more than it had been, but he dared not outpace Lamia. To do so would be seen as a challenge, a subtle defiance that would not go unnoticed.

Perhaps she would like to be challenged..

Selene clung closely to Lamia as they neared the bustling outskirts of town. His senses flooded with stimuli—voices, scents, the rhythm of life pulsing all around. It was intoxicating and overwhelming. excitement flickered in his eyes; the sheer number of people, the opportunities, the possibilities—it was almost too much to contain. His gaze darted toward a woman in a flowing dress, her coin purse hanging loosely from her belt. The temptation was immediate, almost reflexive. A single swipe and he'd have it. He readjusted himself, fighting back the urge, but his attention shifted again, landing on a man lingering alone in a shadowed alley. He could feel a hunger gnawing at him, an instinctual calculation unfolding—how easy it would be to drag the man further into the darkness, to feed, to feel that rush of stolen vitality. Every person they passed became a mark, every alley a potential escape route, every step a strategy waiting to be executed. These thoughts came unbidden, like annotations scribbled in the margins of his mind, each one whispering the quickest way out of every situation. It was second nature, but the thoughts developed for self preservation now made him anxious. He worried that Lamia would sense it—the flickers of his true nature, the longing, the impulses. Selene watched Lamia as she moved through the crowd, her posture perfect, her expression serene and unbothered by the world around her. He wondered if she had any thoughts behind that cold, calculating

gaze, any warmth in her heart for him. What did she truly think of her “beloved Selene,” her little prize, reshaped and renamed to fit her desires. Was he just another possession to keep her entertained through the endless days and nights? *Certainly*. He recalled her moments of affection, those small, tender touches and the way she smiled when he behaved just as she wanted. Was it genuine? .. *possibly*. it must have all been merely another game to her. Selene’s mind raced with questions he dared not voice, each one circling back to the same, burning uncertainty. Lamia was his captor, his creator, his world—yet she remained an enigma, a figure cloaked in mystery and menace. she did care for him, but in a way that made it as though she was caring for herself. He was just a reflection of her own vanity, something to dress up, to control, to display as proof of her dominion. They arrived at a shop, a clothing shop. The woman behind the counter welcomed them in.

“It’s good to see you again, Miss lamia.” she said. “And welcome to you too.” , extending the greeting to Selene. He bowed and felt Lamia’s cold hand on his back, pushing him down ever so slightly. He straightened only when Lamia allowed, his smile as composed as ever. The shopkeeper’s eyes lingered on him with polite curiosity, her smile warm and inviting, a stark contrast to the cold presence beside him. Carmine’s gaze shifted back to Selene, and he could feel her trying to size him up, her interest lingering on his unusual features. Her smile remained pleasant as she asked, “And what was your name?”

The question hit like a sudden, sharp jolt, tearing through Selene’s composure. Panic gripped him almost as hard as his possessor.

“M-my name is Tobia—” he stammered, his voice catching before he corrected himself. “Selene. My name’s Selene.”

He had stepped off a cliff, and was plummeting with nothing to break his fall. His stomach twisted violently, the certainty of his mistake sinking in. He dared not glance at Lamia, but he could feel her cold

gaze burning into him. He knew, in that instant, that he was undone, betrayed constantly by the mind that refused to remember, or forget.

“You’re quite lovely. Miss Lamia certainly knows how to choose the best company.”

Selene’s cheeks flushed faintly, though whether it was from the compliment or the creeping unease, he couldn’t quite tell.

“Thank you,” he replied softly.

“Selene’s been such a joy,” Lamia said, her tone dripping with a possessive pride that sent a shiver through him. “I’d like to see her in something a little... finer today.”

Carmine nodded eagerly. “Of course! We’ve got some lovely new pieces that just arrived—perfect for someone as elegant as Miss Selene.” She turned and gestured to a row of outfits, each more elaborate than the last. Selene’s eyes flickered over the fabrics and designs, overwhelmed by the excessive display.

Lamia leaned closer, her breath cold against his ear. “Do you like any of these, Selene? Choose carefully; You know how I want you to look your best.” Selene hesitated, his fingers trembling slightly as he reached for a garment—a deep midnight blue dress with intricate silver embroidery. It was beautiful, delicate, and yet heavy with an air of expectation, much like the life he now lived. He glanced at Lamia, searching her expression for approval, but her face remained unreadable. Carmine watched the interaction closely, a flicker of something like pity crossing her features, though it disappeared as quickly as it came. “You have excellent taste,” she said. “That will look stunning on you.” They purchased the garment, Selene found it hard to remain composed, he had already committed a great atrocity.

What was there worth saving?

“Do you like what you picked out?” Lamia’s voice was smooth, but there was an edge to it.

“I do,” Selene replied, bluntly.

Without warning, Lamia’s hand lashed out, striking him sharply across the mouth. The force of it stunned him, not just from the sting of pain but from the sheer shock of being hit in public. Selene’s eyes darted around the street, but no one dared to react.

“Take the tone out of your voice and tell me again,” Lamia said, her voice low and controlled, but seething with displeasure. Selene’s face burned. He forced himself to swallow the pain, composing his expression into something pleasant. “I... I like what I picked out,” he said, his voice soft and obedient, devoid of any hint of displeasure. Selene followed Lamia through each shop, his nerves fraying with every step. Lamia’s casual cruelty only heightened his anxiety; her snide remarks, and sharp laughter pricked him like needles. He tried to keep his expression blank, but inside, he was a mess.

Lost in his thoughts, Selene stumbled, his foot catching on an uneven stone. He tumbled forward, landing hard on the ground. The chatter around them hushed as Lamia’s voice cut through the air, sharp and mocking.

“My idiot wife!” she jeered loudly. “A bumbling little thing who can’t even walk straight. What a foolish bitch you are. Get up.”

Selene’s face flushed as people turned to watch. He scrambled to his feet, trying to regain some semblance of dignity, but his heart was pounding, the embarrassment choking him.

“Lamia, I—”

“Hush.” Her words sliced through his, silencing him immediately. She leaned in close, her smile predatory. “We’ll speak later,” she whispered. Selene bowed his head, swallowing down the rising lump in his throat as he fell back into step beside her, every fiber of his being willing him to disappear.

Why wouldn't someone help him?

After a while longer, they returned to the mansion. Selene almost couldn't bring himself to step through the doorway, but he would rather come on his own than be ordered to.

"We'll try something new today." Lamia said, taking out selene's dagger. His eyes were immediately fixed to the familiar purple jewels that dangled from its pommel. She placed it on the table between them, stepping back until she was an equal distance away from the weapon as he was.

"Pick it up."

Selene obeyed, his eyes never leaving Lamia. His hands trembled as he reached for the dagger, and when his fingers wrapped around the hilt, a surge of recognition shot through him. He held it cautiously.

Lamia's eyes glinted. "Come now. Like you mean it."

Selene adjusted his grip, holding it more uniformly, but lacking conviction. His body shook with an unsteady mix of fear and rage.

"Try," her voice echoing through the vast room, a challenge that lingered in the air.

Try. The word reverberated through Selene's mind. He was always trying—trying to endure, trying to remember, trying to please. But what did she want him to try now? To strike at her? To escape? Every possible action felt futile, another move in a game he could not win.

But try he would.

Selene's movements were swift and fluid, the years of practice buried deep within him finally breaking the surface. He launched himself off the ground, slipping into the shadows behind the nearest piece of furniture—a tall, ornate chair draped in velvet. The room fell into a tense silence, the click of

Lamia's heel was the only disturbance. The dagger had silenced his steps, amplifying his awareness of the space around him. He knew Lamia had seen him dart behind the sofa, but staying out of her direct line of sight was the only advantage he could cling to. Lamia's laughter filled the room, a dark melody that sent shivers down his spine. "No wonder I found you in such a pathetic state. What a cowardly creature you are." Her voice was sharp, slicing through the silence with cruel amusement. She knew he was hiding, and she knew exactly how to draw him out. But Selene wasn't just hiding—this was his game now. He would wait, watch, and strike the second he could.

Carefully, Selene shifted his weight, positioning himself behind the thick drapes that hung by the windows. Keeping his movements as controlled and quiet as possible, he climbed, pressing his back flat against the heavy fabric, inching up with practiced agility. Before long, he was perched among the rafters, high above Lamia's line of sight. He clung to the wood like a shadow, his breath steadying as he looked down at her.

Lamia prowled the room, her eyes scanning the darkened corners and furniture. She didn't bother to hurry; there was no rush. She had all the time in the world to toy with him. Selene watched her every movement, biding his time, waiting for the perfect moment when her gaze would shift just enough for him to make his move.

There it was!

Selene dropped from the ceiling with silent precision, the weight of his descent crashing into Lamia's chest. His hand gripped her face, fingers digging into her skin. The dagger in his other hand was frozen, caught by lamia's claws. He pushed off of her, taking the dagger with him and landing on the ground lightly. Lamia chuckled. She raised her hand, her lips moving in a soft, sinister murmur. Before Selene's eyes, a longsword materialized, shimmering into existence as if pulled from thin air. She gripped it with one hand, her movements effortless and commanding.

He would try again, darting forward with determination. He moved swiftly, ducking behind Lamia and glaring at her back, the flickering moment stretching long in his mind. His dagger shot forward, but the shrill clang of metal meeting metal shattered the silence. She blocked it effortlessly. Without pausing, he leapt backward, vanishing into the shadows once more. Lamia had lost sight of him for the moment, though it hardly seemed to concern her. Selene took a deep breath, silently praying that this strike would land. He measured the distance carefully, then hurled the dagger through the air. A flash of silver followed by a thin line of crimson. The dagger grazed her shoulder, drawing blood. Lamia's eyes widened with momentary surprise, but her amusement only deepened. She touched the wound lightly, watching the blood drip slowly down her arm.

"Good, Selene, But you know this isn't over."

Selene darted to where the dagger had fallen, his movements swift and fluid like a shadow in the dim room. His steps were light and silent, but he knew he couldn't stay hidden forever—the thrill of the fight had worn thin, and the reality of Lamia's power weighed heavily on him. When he looked back at her, the wound he'd inflicted was already healed. Only a tear in her shirt remained, a faint mockery of his fleeting success. He gripped the dagger, knowing deep down that this fight wasn't worth fighting. Still, for the first time in what felt like ages, he had the chance to move, and to feel like he was doing something.

As was customary, the idea of freedom was torn away from him before he could fully grasp it. In the midst of a hushed step forward, Selene's body gave out beneath him. He collapsed with a thud, confusion overtaking him as pain registered only a moment later. The sword, now hovering eerily beside him, dripped with silver blood that shimmered faintly in the dim light.

His breath stopped and held in his chest as he looked down, his eyes widening in horror. His left leg—severed at the upper shin—lay beside him in a pool of his own blood. He gasped, shock flooding his

senses, he scrambled, trying desperately to get away. Lamia stood above him, her gaze cold and pitiless, the sword floating idly by her side as if it had barely been used. Selene—wounded, broken—was still playing. His breath was ragged, each gasp a struggle against the searing pain that coursed through his body. His usually placid, smiling face was twisted with a mix of agony and desperate determination. His trembling hands clutched his severed leg, trying to maintain some semblance of poise, but the pain was all-consuming. He pressed his back against a nearby piece of furniture, the cold surface grounding him as he tried to gather his strength. He could hear Lamia's footsteps drawing closer, slow and deliberate, like the ticking of a clock counting down his fate.

When she was near enough, Selene made a last-ditch effort, throwing himself at her feet. His hand snaked around her ankle, slashing at her tendon with a quick flick of his blade. For a moment, hope surged through him—perhaps, just maybe, he could bring her down to his level.

But it only created an opening.

Lamia, unshaken, saw her opportunity and took it. The sword plunged down with a deadly precision, the cold steel piercing through his back and driving into his abdomen, pinning him to the floor. His body jolted with the impact. Time stood still. His head drooped to the floor, his vision blurring as his life flickered like a candle in the wind. He stared at the floor, eyes wide and unblinking, as adrenaline surged through his body, keeping him conscious in his final moments.

Lamia would not let him rest. She commanded the blade upwards, the tip withdrew from Selene's battered body.

"Get up,"

Her voice cut through the haze of pain, cold and unrelenting. Selene tried—he begged his body to respond—but nothing happened. His limbs felt heavy, disconnected from his mind. Blood pooled

beneath him, his strength draining away with every passing second. His head lolled to the side, eyes half-lidded, and despite the agony, a faint, almost serene smile tugged at the corners of his lips. It was instinctive, a trained response—a final, automatic attempt to please her. Even now, even in this moment of near-death, his body betrayed him, performing the role she had forced him into for so long.

But there was no movement. No rise to meet her command.

Selene felt lamias claws tangle in his hair. She picked him up by the head.

“That was a precious attempt. I appreciate your effort. You really do try so hard to please me”

She chucked him to the side, his body crashed to the ground. He was barely able to see as he watched Lamia turn her back and leave him there to slip into unconsciousness. Of course, he awoke. To a hauntingly familiar sight and feeling, the dimly candle lit room, with dark red wallpaper and a canopied bed. He cried again, crushed by the defeat. He lifted the cover he was under, his leg was reattached and mostly healed, the hole in his chest had been healed to a similar degree. He hated it, being already dead but refusing to die.

Perhaps it was less refusal to die, and more being forced to live.

The woman entered the room. Her usual haunting smile and cruel gaze felt less striking.

“It's the dusk of a new day, Selene. You'll keep going.”

A smile stretched across his face, and a hollow laugh escaped his lungs. a mix of something true and false.

“Yes, Lamia.”