

Her Captor's Rules

by Aria Sinclair

He took her to keep her safe. She stopped wanting to leave.

MyTropes / RomanceBots

Her Captor's Rules

Content note: This is dark fiction. The following story contains a captive/captor dynamic, power imbalance, and dubious consent. It is a fantasy and does not reflect real or endorsed behaviour.

The first thing I noticed about the room was that it was comfortable.

Not a cell. Not concrete and steel and a single bare bulb. A room — white walls, good mattress, a window with actual light coming through it, a bathroom with a lock I quickly discovered only worked from the outside. Comfortable in the way of something built to contain you without the indignity of making the containment obvious.

I sat on the edge of the bed and took stock.

My name is Isla Vane. I am thirty-one years old. I am an investigative journalist. I had been three days from publishing an exposé on Luca Saran's shell company network when I'd woken up in this room, and that sequence of events was, I understood, not a coincidence.

Luca Saran. I'd spent six months on his file. Known his face from photographs long before I knew his habits, his schedule, his holdings structure. Dark-eyed and controlled and extraordinarily dangerous, the kind of man who had never been photographed losing his temper because he never lost it. The kind of man who solved problems with precision rather than noise.

I was apparently his current problem.

The door opened without warning. No knock. Just the clean sound of a well-maintained lock, and then him.

He was taller than the photographs. That was my first thought, which was not a useful thought, but there it was. Dark suit, no tie, and the same controlled stillness I'd studied in surveillance images now three-dimensional and a great deal more concerning.

He looked at me the way people look at things they own.

"Ms. Vane," he said.

"Mr. Saran," I said.

He seemed, very slightly, to appreciate that I didn't pretend not to know who he was.

"You've been thorough," he said, which I gathered was about the file. "The shell structure on the Malta account was particularly well-sourced."

"Thank you."

He sat down in the chair across from the bed. His posture was the posture of a man who sat in chairs like they were boardrooms.

"I'd like to understand what you plan to do with it," he said.

"Publish it."

"Obviously. I mean after."

I looked at him. "After it runs?"

"After it runs and the consequences you haven't considered arrive," he said. Not a threat. An assessment. "You've documented the shell structure. You haven't followed it to where it connects."

"Where does it connect?"

"To people considerably less patient than I am."

I was there for two weeks.

He came every day. Not to intimidate me — or if intimidation was the goal, his methodology was unusual. He came and he talked. Not about the file, after that first conversation. About other things: the structure of investigative journalism, what I'd studied, the cases I'd broken before this

one. He was interested in an objective way that would have been flattering if I hadn't been locked in.

I asked why he hadn't just had the file destroyed.

"Because you've clearly memorised most of it," he said.

"Then why am I here and not—"

"Because I don't do that," he said, with a flatness that was more convincing than any performance would have been. "I solve problems. I don't create larger ones."

"Kidnapping is a problem," I said.

"Yes," he agreed. "I'm aware of that."

There was something in him I hadn't expected from six months of research. The research gave you the surface — the companies, the contacts, the movement of money through legal grey zones. It didn't give you the quality of his attention. The way he listened. The particular precision of him, which was not cruelty exactly, more like a man who had removed sentiment from his decision-making so thoroughly that it occasionally surfaced as something resembling honesty.

I was attracted to him. I knew it by day four and resented it significantly.

By day six I'd stopped pretending not to look at him.

By day nine, he'd stopped pretending not to notice.

He came later than usual on night ten. Past midnight, the house very quiet. I was reading when the door opened and he stood there for a moment in the doorway with an expression I hadn't seen before — not composed, or not completely composed. Something had happened. I didn't ask what.

He came in. Sat in the chair. Didn't speak for a while.

"Long night," I said eventually.

"Yes."

I set the book down. He was looking at the window, not at me, and there was a tiredness in the line of him that felt human in a way his daytime version carefully wasn't.

"Luca," I said. First time I'd used his name.

He turned. The look on his face when I said it was — controlled, but not fast enough. Something had gotten through.

"Are you afraid of me?" he asked.

I considered telling him no. "Sometimes," I said instead. "Less than I should be."

"Why less than you should be?"

"Because you're careful," I said. "Controlled. You do things for reasons. That's less frightening than random."

"Most people find control frightening."

"I'm not most people."

He looked at me for a long time. The room was quiet. Outside, nothing — no city noise, no traffic. Wherever this house was, it was very far from things that honked.

"Isla," he said.

I knew what was in that. I'd have to be stupid not to know, and I wasn't stupid. I looked at him and at the chair and at the distance between us and at what we had been doing for ten days, which was circling each other with the careful orbits of two things that understood mutual gravity and were deciding whether to resist it.

I crossed the room and stood in front of the chair.

"Tell me no," he said, quiet and direct. "If the answer is no, tell me now."

"The answer isn't no," I said. "The answer is that you have a great deal to answer for and I'm going to hold all of it against you later."

"Fair," he said. And reached for me.

He was as controlled in this as he was in everything, which I had expected, and as completely present, which I had not — because controlled had always implied distance to me and there was no distance here. His hands on my waist, my jaw, the back of my neck: everything deliberate, everything asking, and when I answered he gave me more to ask for. He learned what I wanted with the same methodical intelligence he brought to balance sheets, and he applied it without arrogance, which was the specific thing I hadn't known I needed until it was happening.

I said his name again. The same reaction as before — that fractional break in the composure, something unguarded and real underneath. I kept saying it, eventually, because I found the crack in his control more compelling than any of the rest of it.

The room was dark and the lock on the bathroom worked from the outside and none of that was gone, not really, but for a few hours the architecture of the situation had its own logic and we were inside it.

Afterwards, in the dark: "What happens now?" I said.

"To the file?"

"To all of it."

He was quiet for a while. His hand was at the back of my neck still, and I could feel him thinking.

"The Malta account connects to a senator," he said. "If you publish what you have, they come for you and not for me."

"So what do I publish?"

Her Captor's Rules

by Aria Sinclair

"Everything," he said. "But in the right order. Starting with the senator."

I turned to look at him. "You'd let me publish you."

"I'd let you publish the part of me that the senator uses to stay clean." A pause. "The rest negotiable."

"That's not a word."

"It is now."

I looked at him in the dark. This man who had taken two weeks from me and given me the biggest story of my career in exchange and was currently negotiating his own exposure with the same calm he brought to everything.

"I'm going to need a source," I said.

"You have one."

"I'm going to need to not be locked in."

"The door," he said, "has been unlocked since day three."

I stared at him. "What?"

"I was waiting to see when you'd check."

I checked. It swung open into the dark hallway.

I turned back. He was watching me with that almost-smile.

"Day three," I said flatly.

"You had the Malta account structure half-decoded. I didn't want to interrupt."

I kissed him again because the alternative was throwing something at him and there was nothing throwable in reach.

Her Captor's Rules

by Aria Sinclair

Outside, the dark. Somewhere, a senator sleeping soundly.

Not for long.