

Making Assumptions

BOSTON, 1723

"I overheard the cooks talking. Apparently, the princess is meant to be arriving any day now," Matthew said with a roll of his eyes as he took a seat across from James, George, and Andrew.

"Just what we need," James scoffed in frustration. "Another arrogant Lycan ordering us around like dogs."

"What if you're wrong about her?" William asked, his brows raised in question.

James, Andrew, and Matthew turned to look at their friend with twin expressions of doubt. James thought it almost sounded as if William were defending the Lycan princess, which was highly unlikely if not downright impossible.

"What's to say she'll even deign to talk to us?" William clarified with a light chuckle. "It's more likely she'll ignore us all completely."

James and Matthew shook their heads and huffed out laughs. "You're right, Will. I'd wager she's going to walk about with her nose raised in the air so high that she can't even see us low-class peasants," Andrew agreed.

"Maybe she'll be kind," George piped up from where he sat between James and Andrew.

James winced. His brother was only twelve but sooner or later he'd have to learn that Lycans weren't the sort you could call kind.

"She'll be the same as her father," James told George with a sigh. "Lycan royalty won't ever treat us well, George. They think they're better than us."

"Why?" George asked with a confused frown.

"Because they can shift during the day and they're bigger and stronger," James explained with a shrug. Aside from Edward, there were a few Lycan families who'd settled in Boston and none of them had ever treated their werewolf servants with anything but disgust and cruelty. It was just the way it has always been and would always be. Lycans were royalty and werewolves apparently existed to serve them.

"Lycans think they s**t gold," Matthew explained to George bluntly, earning a scowl from James.

"You'd best keep that kind of talk to your quarters," Anna, one of the maids, scolded them as she walked past their table. "If King Edward were to hear you, he'd have your heads on pikes," she warned them.

"Ah, but King Edward would die before coming down here," Matthew shouted after her.

He was right of course. The Lycan had never stepped foot into the kitchens or the small dining hall where the servants of his estate ate. Edward with his silk stockings, embroidered waistcoats, and frilly cuffed shirt sleeves would never mingle with servants so far beneath his royal self.

"Don't you think it's strange that Edward left his daughter in London when he came here?" Andrew asked, his face growing more serious.

"If you believe the cooks, it was because Edward blames his daughter for killing his wife," Matthew told them. It seemed he spent far too much time with the gossiping cooks. "She died giving birth to Princess Isobel, which is why he hates his daughter so much."

James frowned at that. To blame a child for that was beyond reason— even for King Edward.

"What about his son?" William asked. "Why leave him behind?"

"Edward has a son?" James asked with surprise. He'd never much cared for gossip and it was the first time he was hearing that Edward had an heir.

Matthew nodded. "Left him in London to take care of his estate there, I assume," he said with a shrug. "Probably why the prince isn't coming here with Princess Isobel now as well. I heard from one of the maids that Edward ordered him to stay behind."

"You gossip more than Lucy," James said with an amused shake of his head. Lucy was one of the cooks and had been friends with James's mom before she passed two years before. If you wanted to know anything about anyone, Lucy was the one to talk to. "If you spent half as much time training as you did talking, you'd be the best guard in all of Boston."

Matthew pursed his lips in displeasure. "I train enough," he said, and he wasn't wrong— the four of them trained every evening for at least two hours, and they spent most of their day sparring with their staves and swords on the days they were off duty.

"Speaking of which, we should get going," Andrew said, standing up from the bench and picking his empty bowl up from the table.

"Can I watch you train today?" George asked, smiling up at his older brother in a way that James couldn't refuse him.

"Alright," James agreed. "But it's straight to bed afterward," he added with a stern look.

George nodded and shoveled the last of his broth down. James nished the last of his own tasteless broth— he didn't think he'd ever come to enjoy but he'd at least grown used to— and then he, George, and the others followed Andrew into the kitchen, where two cooks were preparing what they could for Edward's breakfast the next morning, and through to the scullery.

"Genevieve," Andrew greeted the new scullery maid with a smile.

"Evening," a blushing Genevieve replied. At seventeen, she was only two years younger than James and Andrew and three years younger than Matthew and William. "Let me," she said as Andrew stepped in front of the already full and steaming sink of water to wash his bowl and spoon.

"We may have to do Edward's dirty work but we don't expect you to do ours," Andrew told her kindly but firmly.

Genevieve nodded and James could see a small smile peaking up the corner of her lips as she continued scrubbing a stain out of one of Edward's ridiculous waistcoats.

"How has your first week here been?" James asked her as Andrew nished at the sink and Matthew took his place.

"Good," Genevieve replied. "I only had to go into the house once though so I haven't seen King Edward yet."

"Trust me when I say you're better off not running into him," Andrew told her. "He's not known for his kindness."

"He hit me once," George explained to Genevieve, sounding as if it were a completely normal thing to admit. "I work in the stables and he was angry because one of the horses bit him."

James clenched his jaw in anger, remembering the bruise that had formed on George's cheek. It had been a year ago but James would never forget his little brother's tear-stained face. Had he been there when Edward had hit his brother, James probably would have tried to kill the man.

Genevieve's hands stilled at George's words and she looked down at the small boy sadly. "Where did he hit you?" she asked him gently.

"Right here," George said, pointing to his left cheek.

Genevieve dried her hands on her apron and bent down to kiss the spot he'd pointed to. George's entire face flushed red as he smiled up at her.

"What was that for?" he asked her.

"To make it better," Genevieve explained with a wink.

"But it was already better," George said, looking confused.

"Some wounds don't stay on the outside," the maid explained with a sad smile as she got back to her work. "Sometimes they sink in and fester inside of you."

George nodded but James could tell he still didn't quite understand.

"She's kind," George said happily as their group walked back through the kitchens.

"She is," James agreed with an amused smile. "What do you think, Andrew?" he asked, knowing his friend had taken a liking to Genevieve.

"Oh, shut it," Andrew said, shoving James's shoulder as an embarrassed smile lit up his face.

"Do you think the princess will be as pretty as her?" George asked.

"Not even close," James muttered.

After all, it didn't matter how beautiful the princess was on the outside. What mattered was that she would be just as dark and bitter as her father on the inside.

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'Kindness in women, not their beautiful looks, Shall win my love.'

The Taming of the Shrew ~ William Shakespeare