

Book 2 Dragon King's Forbidden Love Chapter 16 - Tips

LARA

The dark fire is so different from the usual one that everyone can create. Its flames look cold to the human eye, glimmering with purple and white shades, reminding me more of a storm than of fire. It's fascinating to watch Demir walk out of it but I am not fooling myself by thinking that I can touch it. I've read the stories about how deadly it is as a child and have no desire to experiment with burning my skin.

"It was nice of you to greet me," he smirks and I blush, remember how he saw me at once when I came to take a peak.

"Aren't you supposed to look after that ambassador of yours?" I cross my hands and lean on the nearby wall, my eyes not leaving the gardian for even a moment! Right now I am sure that he is spying since he knows that I am Gideon's sister. And because of me, he has such easy access to our house.

"That man can protect himself, trust me! Besides, he has the other guys with him. There is no need for me to be there right now in his appointed chambers and I have a few hours for myself now," he answers lazily, walking around again and coming to the table with the unicorn figurine again.

"Don't touch!" I feel the blood rushing to my cheeks, "That's very delicate and..."

"Oh, Lara, trust me, I am very good at handling delicate things. You'll see."

My lips part at the audacity of his comment because at that moment he was clearly looking at me, eyes traveling through my body. And yet again I felt that the fabric of my dress is too thin and almost transparent to talk to him.

"What are you doing here, Demir?" I give up and roll my eyes, "If somebody sees you here..."

"That's sweet, now you are worried for me!" He chuckles and steps closer.

"No," I furrow my brows and push him inside, "I am worried for me! I don't want people here to hate me even more..."

I regret it the moment I say it and Demir's face changes in an instant.

“What do you mean hate you?” He asks and I avoid looking him in the eyes.

“It’s nothing,” I let go of him and turn away. How embarrassing! “Just why did you come? Answer me!”

He is silent for some time and when I turn to see what he is doing, he is looking at me with something strange in his gaze. And at that moment I really hope that it’s not pity. I hate pity even more than I hate hatred. I honestly shouldn’t care what he thinks yet it would be a lie to say that I don’t. For some reason, it is important to me what this gerdian thinks of me.

“Do people here mistreat you, Lara?” He asks in a serious tone that probably signifies that it’s not a joke to him. Or is it what I want to think about it?

“This is my home, Demir!” I try to sound as firm as I can, “All sort of things happen here but I would never complain on my own people.”

For a minute or so we are just staring at each other and the smirk appears on his lips again. And, Brighta, I don’t like that smirk.

“Fine, I hear you,” he says, “Luckily, I know the perfect place for us to talk where no one will see us!”

And before I even manage to squeak, he pulls me close by the waist so that my face almost tucks into his chest in the black jacket of a bodyguard. I lift up my head to look at him in shock and notice sparks of dark magic in his eyes again. Does it happen on a whim or is there something triggering those sparks?

But what happens next makes me forget all the questions. He presses me hard against himself and dark flames appear all over him. My first instinct is to push him away but his grip on me is too strong. And I want to scream when I see the flames catching on my clothes and hands... Yet I don’t as I feel no pain. Only tickling and tingles...

My lips part as I look at him again and see a vague smile on his face as everything around us turns dark. And the next second we are both standing at the wisteria hill. The wind delicately touches the branches, making tiny petals curl and dance in the air. The gerdian lets go of me, leaving only goosebumps all over my skin from the contact that we’ve just shared.

“What was that?” I ask him.

“Transportation,” he explained in one word. I sighed as I knew that no details would follow.

“D-did you just use dark magic on me?” I mumble in shock.

“And you are alive and in one piece, aren’t you?” he chuckles, “The skies haven’t fallen on your head and all that.”

“That’s so typical of a dark one to say!” I exhale loudly through my nose.

“Seriously, what do they tell you about us here?” he asks, “You seem so... repelled by the whole idea of someone with dark magic.”

“And why wouldn’t I be? You know very well that I have Light inside of me. Light and Darkness are incompatible!”

“Only because Light is merciless,” he retorts and I look at him in shock.

“It’s the darkness that destroys things, what are you even talking about?”

“Name one thing that darkness destroys!” he raises his brow and for one hundredth time today, I am shocked with the audacity of his way of thinking.

“Plants!” I name the obvious.

“Don’t their seeds need darkness to germinate?” he gives out a laugh and I don’t find what to answer to that, “Besides, there are plenty of things that grow without sunlight.”

“What are you trying to say exactly, Demir?”

“I am trying to say, Lara, that there is no light without darkness. And the darkness is what we all come from in the first place. Even the Light. There is the place for both in the world, moreover, the world needs balance. But unfortunately, you, light ones, still do not get it. That we can coexist in peace. And live happily ever after together.”

“So, why did Smoke came here? To coexist together?” I snort seeing how he cringes at the dragon’s name.

“He was worried for you, Angel,” Demir says suddenly and comes closer, brushing a palm over my cheek. Which creates the very same tingles...

“Why?” I whisper, not being able to push him away for some reason.

“That’s a very interesting question, Lara,” he says, lowering his head so that I could feel his minty breath on my skin, “Maybe he was intrigued... Or maybe he was worried about you...”

“I thought dragons don’t do anything without their master’s orders...” I mumble, feeling how his hands wrap around me. Possessively, greedily...

“They don’t,” he whispers in a husky voice and touches my lips with his. Delicately, like a fluttering wing of a butterfly at first, barely touching... But then again, more confident and even slightly demanding... And so sweet that I close my eyes from all the new sensations... My breathing gets hectic and I part my lips to get more air. However, that’s not going to happen as the arrogant gerdian deepens his kiss, now probing me with his tongue... And, oh, Brighta the Goddess of Light, I feel like I am flying... Better even...

A weak moan escapes me and Demir growls in approval, pressing me harder against himself. His hands are roaming my body and caressing me at the same time.

“So sweet,” he mumbles as if he was in a daze...

I don’t know how much time passes but after a while I forcefully break the kiss, panting and taking deep breaths of air that I need so much right now!

And that’s when I notice them... Dozens of shining lights in the sky! Warriors of Light!

“Oh, Goddess!” I whisper, looking at them and Demir follows my gaze.

“What’s going on?” he suddenly sounds serious and not playful at all. And I realize that I am slightly disappointed that he gathered himself so fast...

“I think... they are looking for me,” I confess, “I was locked in my room and...”

“Who dared to lock you?” the sparks of dark magic appear again in his eyes and they look like they are about to leave his body and explode.

“My brother, but he is doing this for my protection!” I try to explain to him but he doesn’t look too convinced.

“That’s not a way to protect a woman,” he says and I stay silent. Because for the first time ever I probably agree with him.

“Go,” I say, “They’ll see us from the sky and you will be in trouble. And so will I.”

“They will not see us,” he smirks, “I put up a barrier around us. They wouldn’t see a thing here.”

I have to say that this is impressive. I didn’t even notice how he did it!

“But staying here is still a bad idea,” I shudder slightly from the cold air and in less than a second, his jacket is wrapped around me.

“I can take you back to your room,” he says.

“No,” I reply way too quickly, “Gideon already knows that I am not there... Can you, maybe, take me to my friend’s house?”

“I am afraid not,” he admits, “I need to know the place to be able to transform you there...”

“Then... Then take me to a corner of the main square,” I suggest, “You have already been there, right?”

“Right,” he nods and steps closer, his hands pulling me into his embrace much slower this time. As if he is savouring it. I look in his eyes as dark flames surround us again and in seconds we appear in the darkest corner of the square.

“Thanks,” I say, even though I don’t know really what I am thanking him for. He is the one who got me in trouble in the first place? Shouldn’t I be at least a little bit angry at him? Or have I lost my mind because of one stupid kiss? Even if it was the very first time I was kissed like that...

I want to step away from him when a familiar voice sounds behind our backs, “There you are!”

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Fabian crosses his hand on his chest and tilts his head to look at us, the expression on his face is unreadable to me.

“Lara, are you all right?” He asks carefully, eyeing the gerdian behind my back and Demir wants to step forward but I stop him by touching him gently, and, surprisingly, he obeys.

“I am absolutely fine, Fabian, “ I smile innocently and feel a prick of guilt somewhere deep inside, “I just went for a walk and met sir Demir here.”

“Demir?” the warrior of Light’s lips twitch slightly, “I thought your name was Rien...”

“It is,” the gerdian answers calmly, “Rien is my family name and Demir is my forename.”

“Sounds unusual,” the guy says still looking at us with suspicion in his eyes.

“Well, Fabian Marten is unusual for us,” the gerdian smirks, “Sounds a bit...feminine. Although I have to say it suits you just fine.”

The light one clenches his fists but says nothing. He is a son of a politician and knows what to say and when to stay silent.

“Anyway, what were you doing here? Aren’t you supposed to guard your master?” Fabian takes my hand and pulls me over to his side, “And just how did you come to meet my fiancée that everyone is looking for right now?”

Demir’s eyes spark with the dark magic and I feel Fab’s grip on me tighten. Just as if he was preparing for a fight.

“The lady never mentioned that she has a fiancé,” the gerdian says calmly but the aftertaste of his words is menacing.

“That’s because the lady doesn’t have one,” I give out a little laugh, “Fabian is joking!”

My brother’s friend looks at me with a slight disappointment but adds nothing to what he already says. Neither he denies it.

“Anyway,” he suddenly sounds friendly again, “Everyone is waiting for us at the fest in honour of your ambassador. Why don’t we go there together?”

“Yes, you both should definitely go,” I stretch a smile on my face, “And I need to come back home.”

“Oh, no, Lara,” Fabian chuckles, “I am not letting you go alone. Besides, I have nobody to accompany me today. Why don’t you do it if I was so lucky as to save you for the second time this week.”

Oh, no. Not this saving me crap again.

“There was nothing to save her from,” Demir interrupts him, “The lady was perfectly fine with me. Moreover, she was so fine that she was helping me to find the way back to the tower you appointed for us.”

I look at the gerdian gratefully as the last thing I need is another debt to Martens. They seem to be piling up out of nowhere even if I do nothing.

“Look at the sky, my friend,” Fabian snorts, “Everyone is looking for Lara, her brother must be going crazy.”

“That’s true,” I say, “Gideon probably worries about me, so it’s best if I go home and...”

“He has to be at the feast, Lara,” the light one smiles, “It’s his duty today above everything as my father’s advisor. That’s why I am taking you there.”

“No, please, I am not even dressed to go to an event like that!” I protest.

“Then let’s stop at my sister’s first,” the guy smirks and I feel like I fell into some kind of trap right now. Fabian practically drags me and when I look at Demir, he follows us with a grim face. All of this doesn’t feel right to me at all...

“Lara! There you are!” Bria runs to me and gives me the tightest of hugs, “I was worried sick! You disappeared into nowhere and no one could find you! I wanted to go look for you but father ordered me to stay and prepare for the feast. I have to entertain the ambassador tonight together with your brother...”

“I am fine, I was fine this whole time!” I try to reassure her, “It’s a long story...I just need to get home.”

“Oh, no!” she pulls me into her wardrobe room by my hand, “Fabian told me to not let you go! You are going to the feast with us! We have already sent a messenger to Gideon. I am sure he will be happy to see you there.”

"I highly doubt it!" I sigh, "Lately he prefers it if I stay home."

"The more reason for you to use this chance and have some fun with us! Have you seen the gerdians? I mean, I know that they are the dark ones and all that... But, oh, Brighta, the Goddess of Light! They are something, right?! I've never seen such a... brutal male beauty before!"

"Me neither," I bite my swollen lip that still tastes like Demir.

"You've just met one, right? How was it?" my friend asks as she pushes me to a chair and starts braiding my hair.

"Nothing special," I lie not for the first time today. And all thanks to one man. Gerdians are a terrible influence! No matter how I look at it!

"And look what I have for you!" Bria brings out the most beautiful silver dress, with corsage embroidered with the finest pearly beaded patterns and fabric of the skirt flowing to the ground in several waves.

"That's a beautiful dress," I gasp, "Bria, but I have never seen you wearing it..."

"That's because it's not mine," she giggles, "Fabian ordered it especially for you, Lara. That's one of the gifts he has planned to send to your house when asking for your hand in marriage."

"Tell me he is not serious..."

"On the contrary, Lara, he is very serious. I've never seen him like this before and you know what?" Bria looks at me with a mischievous smile, "I think it is going to be good for both of you."

"Love for you will make him a decent Warrior of Light and as for you... he will give you an official status. No one would dare to say a word to you if you will become his wife."

Yeah. In theory. And still, not the best reason to marry someone.

"Bri," I sigh, "We are so different..."

"And that's why you will make the best couple!" she says as she ties the dress on my back, "Honestly, Lar, you don't have to marry him tomorrow! Just give

the guy a chance to prove himself! He is so in love with you that it's painful to look at him!"

"That's what you were telling when he was 'in love' with Tatiana and Naria," I giggle.

"Are you kidding me? That was nothing!" she snorts, pulling the strings tighter, "He never mentioned marrying any of them. But with you, he actually prepared for it!"

"Shame he forgot to ask me first," I give out a little laugh.

"You know men!" my friend rolls her eyes, fixing the threads of beads on my shoulders, "They want to be the ones to decide! I wish you knew how bad it is within the Warriors of Light! No equality for the female fighters at all!"

It sounds sad, but I wish I could actually experience it...

"There," Bria brings me to a mirror, "Beautiful, isn't it?!"

And this time I have to agree with her. Never in my life have I looked as good as I do today. The dress fits me perfectly, beads shimmering in the evening lights, strands of it are covering my hands and hair, rich red locks fall beautifully to my waist, creating the perfect contrast with the garment.

"One more detail," Bria smiles as she clasps a silver pearl necklace on my neck.

"This is too much!" I touch the cold stones.

"Nonsense!" she snorts, "It's all yours anyway! And now, let's go! I am dying to show off both our dresses! Tatiana, Naria, Feridea – they are all going to die of jealousy!"

"That's not Brighta's way," I remind my friend and she rolls her eyes.

"Who cares?!" she giggles, "Tonight we can blame whatever we do on the gerdians! Let's go!"

We walk to the grand hall of the Martens' house together and all the way I am hoping that Fabian is already at the feast and has forgotten about me. But no such luck, as he is waiting for us not far from the entrance.

“Larissa,” his lips part and he looks breathless, “You...You...”

“She looks wonderful tonight,” Bria helps him out, fixing sapphire strands that fall from her necklace to her pale blue dress, “Isn’t that what you wanted to say, brother?”

“Of course,” Fabian smiles and offers me his hand, “I was just lost for words... I am definitely the luckiest man tonight.”

“Yes, you are,” his sister chuckles and steps into the room first.

“Lady Brianna Marten!” the herald announces her arrival.

And next is our turn...

“Lord Fabian Marten, The Knight Commander of the Order of Warriors of Light, heir of Marten dynasty together with his fiancée lady Larissa Artes, daughter of the deceased Duke Adrian Artes.”

And all eyes are on me...

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LARA

My eyes lock with Demir’s as he is the first person I notice when I enter the hall. It’s hard not to notice the black spot in the sea of white and silver. And even among the five gerdians, he is especially hard to miss since his eyes are glowing with dark magic. More than I have ever seen before. Right next to him is my brother and for the first time ever his face looks like he is about to kill.

I try to get my hand from Fabian’s grip but he adds another one to it and brings my fingers to his mouth, kissing them gently.

“Happy to see you in our house, Lara!” Keatar Martel snickers and somehow it makes my blood boil.

“I am happy to be here too, Lord Marten,” I smile charmingly, “But I am afraid your herald got a little bit mistaken. Either that or he knows about my life more than I do myself. As far as I am aware just a few hours ago when I left my home, I was still unattached. So, unless my brother decided my fate without me present...”

“Of course, not!” Gideon stands up and walks to our group, “I was as shocked as you, Lara. The herald must have taken you for Fabian’s real fiancée if he was so sure. My friend, is that true? Are congratulations in order?”

We both stare at the younger Marten expectantly and as always, Fabian laughs it off.

“No more wine for the herald tonight!” he shouts and a group of his supporters bursts out laughing and clapping. Perks of being the favourite of the crowds. But then Gideon turns and gives them his famous look and all the laugh dies down. Perks of being the most feared. And my brother is by far one of the best warriors, wisest advisors and the strictest of all commanders. Not many people are willing to go against him.

“Lara, since you are here, why don’t you join us?” Deon offers me his hand and I accept it gladly. I shouldn’t have listened to anyone and should have just gone home. But since I am here, it’s best to stay by his side. All those talks about marriages and alliances of families make me nervous. “Amba.ssador, dear guests, let me introduce to you lady Larissa Artes,” Gideon says and I almost choke. One thing that slipped my mind is that he was sitting right next to the gerdians. And now when I look at it, he brought me right to the place where Demir is.

“That’s an honour for us,” the Amba.ssador smiles politely and then asks all of a sudden, “You have such beautiful colour of hair, Lady Larissa! May I ask if that’s the shade you’ve been born with?”

I could swear that I heard a kicking sound under the table and although the amba.ssador keeps smiling, his eyes seem teary now...

“Is lady Lara your sister?” Demir asks unexpectedly, and I want to fall through the ground right this very moment.

“Larissa,” Gideon stresses the formal way of addressing me, “Is all the family I have left.”

“But she is your sister, right?” the gerdian asks calmly yet I feel a certain aura of danger coming out from him.

“Of course, my lord,” Bria appears out of nowhere, “They are the famous Artes siblings!” She smiles brilliantly, shining the sapphires on her white dress and

radiating beauty, "It's just that lord Gideon is sometimes so protective of Lara, please, forgive him."

"He is forgiven," Demir smirks, "Lady Bria, is it?"

I feel an unexpected pang somewhere in my chest at the way he is suddenly interested in my friend. It's not surprising, she is considered to be one of the most beautiful women on all the islands. But still...

"Yes," she giggles playfully, and I feel slightly sick, wanting to leave that place. Somehow I don't want to see the two of them flirt with each other.

"Why don't you sit here, right next to lord Gideon. In that way, he will have another beauty to protect and his little sister can have a drop of freedom for a few hours?" the gerdian suddenly suggest, pointing to one of the chairs. And if Bria takes it, then she will separate Deon from me, leaving me right next to Demir...

"How naughty!" Bria giggles again but jumps at the opportunity, turning to my brother, "Gideon, you wouldn't mind, right?"

He doesn't reply to her at first but then an unfamiliar sneer appears on his handsome face.

"You know," he chuckles, "I am feeling so selfish today. Why don't I arrange myself two beauties for protection today?"

And with that, he moves the chair that is the closest to Demir, offering it to Bria. She gracefully sits in it and Gideon moves another chair for me, which I also take. And he takes the one in between.

I feel slightly disappointed again. But why would I? So, we kissed. Once! That doesn't mean anything. And looking how now he is sitting there, just two chairs away from me and talking cheerfully to Bria, I guess there is no difference for him with whom to flirt. He just met me first and that was the only reason he paid attention to me. And now he is here, at the White Archipelago. He'll see that there are many girls much more beautiful and attractive than I am. And he'll forget all about me...

"Why so sad?" Gideon's warm hand touches mine and I force a smile for him. Honestly, how selfish am I to distract him when this is clearly a political evening? I should excuse myself and escape to our home.

“Parties are really not my thing,” I smile at him and he looks pleased with my words.

“I am the same. Too many people and I don’t want to see most of them,” he adds, lifting up my palm and covering it with his second hand, trying to warm it up, “You also seem so cold...”. He leans down and blows some hot air to my fingers, making me smile. He always does it on chilly evenings...

“Our dear friends from the White Archipelago!” the Ambassador stands from his seat all of a sudden and raises his hand, “On such a beautiful evening we want to give you the gift of gerdian traditional music and dancing. In honour of our new friendship! Please, do not refuse!”

“Of course, my friend!” Keatar agrees at once, nodding in approval.

The gerdian then produces a small beautiful box and opens it. An absolutely unknown to me but very beautiful melody starts playing, enhanced by magic and all five gerdians stand up from their seats. The Ambassador invites Bria, who blushes and apologizes to Gideon for leaving him. One of his bodyguards invites my friend Naria, other two go to some unknown to me ladies...

But soon a huge dark shadow starts lingering over me and I turn to see Demir with an expressionless face.

“Lady Lara, allow me to invite you for this dance,” he offers me his hand and I want to put mine into his when my brother catches it in the air...

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DEMIR

Lara is looking at me with her huge doe eyes as if I offered her what I really want to offer her. And the desire to pull her to that dance floor now becomes overwhelming. I have spent half of the evening pretending that I am not interested in her not to arouse any suspicions. But I am done pretending. I tried it but it’s definitely not my things.

I already know that I am going to take what I want. The only problem is that I still haven’t decided how to do it.

Since that crazy kiss happened I know one thing – Lara Artes is mine. And I am not wasting any time, playing games.

“My sister doesn’t know the steps of gerdian dances,” her fake brother says with a polite smile which I can only take as mockery.

“Nobody here except for us knows them, Lord Artes,” I smirk, putting all my inner strength not to break the hand with which he dared to touch me, “Isn’t that the whole point?”

“Lara is very shy,” the prick insists and I only grin wider.

“That’s why let’s not put her into the situation where she has to insult a foreign guest. In the Gerdian Empire, it is considered a great offence to refuse such a simple request from a guest. And, of course, the White Archipelago is not known for its hospitality but I thought that there are some basic manners at least. Was I wrong?”

I can see that the silver prick wants to say something snarky again but this time Lara brushes her gentle fingers over his hand. Only making me want to kill him even more than I already do.

“Gideon,” she chirps like a bird, “Lord Demir here is right. It’s just a dance. I’ll be back in no time, brother.”

It doesn’t escape me how he cringes at her last word. But she doesn’t seem to notice it and rises quickly to her feet, placing her small palm into mine. I lead her into the centre of the improvised dance floor and pull her closer when we are there. She looks at me, clearly shocked. And a smirk forms on my lips. I like when she reacts like that. I like it too much!

“What are you doing?” she furrows her brows, “We don’t dance like that!”

“Oh, Lara,” I chuckle, “I saw you dancing. If a girl danced like that at the Gerdian empire, she’d be taken at the very spot!”

“Taken where?” she flaps her lashes and I just can’t... How did she get to be so naïve living among such vicious creatures? Ever since I got in here I have this strong feeling that we landed in a den of snakes.

Oh, wait. I remember how. Her “nice and kind brother” is keeping her locked in her room together with books about how righteous all light ones are. The desire to take her away from here grows with every minute that passes.

“Never mind,” I chuckle, wrapping my hands around her tighter. Gods, it feels so good. And the blush on her cheeks makes me smile. She is so tiny and pure... But there is also this fire within her! She is full of surprises.

“What are you doing?” she hisses at me when I take her hand, brushing my fingers all over her delicate skin and put it on my shoulder.

“This is how the dance goes,” I smirk and make sure that there is no gap between our bodies. It feels incredible and she wouldn’t know that this is outrageous even by our standards. “I’ll lead,” I inform her, “Just follow everything I do and we will be fine.”

I start moving slowly, there is no need to take up the speed. But my little angel has no problems with her movements. It’s a common trait for air mages to be as light as a feather and move with elegance no matter the circumstances. But Lara makes them all pale in comparison. There is so much grace in her. She was definitely born to be a queen. But I already know that.

The blush leaves her cheeks as she gets more and more confident, circling through the room in my arms. And I have never been so sure in my life before. She is the one for me. The only one. That explains perfectly my dragon’s obsession with her and why I can’t stop thinking about her... That explains everything!

Her red lock falls beautifully onto her shoulders when she curtsies and her chest is going up and down. As if it was calling for me...

But the dance is over and I bring her fingers to my lips for a kiss. Tonight I know for sure, this woman will be my wife.

“Thank you for the dance, lady Lara,” I smile at her and can tell that she enjoyed all that as much as I did.

“Thank you, my lord,” she almost whispers but I hear every word.

Claps here and there appear and I bow to her to demonstrate respect.

“What a wonderful showcase of your traditional dances!” their leader raises his glass, “That was very original and interesting to see! Thank you!”

I take the angel back to her seat and notice just how her “brother” and that douche from earlier look at me now. They both know that I am a threat.

Good.

The dinner continues and Ryker does his best to maintain the image of the ambassador. I have to give it to him, I never thought that this guy made of stone and ice is capable of acting like that.

“And now start talking about what we discussed earlier,” I tell him through our minds and he doesn’t look so confident anymore.

“Demir, are you sure?” he asks, “It all seems to be too fast. You don’t know much about this girl and...”

“Was I asking for your opinion?!” I growl at him, giving him the look full of dark flames. And he nods respectfully.

“Keatar, my friend,” he smiles charmingly, showing off his pearly whites, “We enjoy our stay here and it feels like our nations can benefit from a tight friendship!”

“Indeed!” the leader of the Glowing Citadel agrees, sipping his wine, “What do you have in mind?”

He looks like a friendly man who definitely looks younger than he is. But one thing for sure, Keatar Marten is not that simple. I can sense the lust for power coming from him.

“The most common thing that two Kingdoms can do to form an alliance,” Ryker chuckles lightly as if everything isn’t depending on the outcome of this conversation, “Marriage!”

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LARA

I am still breathless after our dance. Which I will probably never be able to forget. It felt strange to be so close to a man and I probably should be ashamed of myself for not detesting it and even liking it. Yet I don’t.

The men start talking and Demir is not looking at me anymore, so I try my best not to look again. Honestly, this man starts to drive me crazy, and I need to put my guard up as soon as possible. Otherwise, I am risking making a fool of myself.

The men are talking about something when I clearly hear the gerdian amba.ssador say the word that makes everybody turn their heads, "Marriage!"

What was that just now?

Gideon's hand immediately lands on mine and I look at my brother questioningly. He, however, is not looking at me. All his attention is on that amba.ssador.

"Lord Krast," Keatar seems surprised as well, "What are you proposing exactly?"

"A marriage alliance of course," the gerdian in question smiles, "Our emperor still doesn't have an empress..."

"How unfortunate," the leader of the Glowing citadel gives a fake smile to our guests, "I have heard that he doesn't want to get married and that's the only reason. Has he, perhaps, changed his mind?"

"He did," the amba.ssador replies but I can tell he is not entirely happy about all this, "More than that, since we really want to form an alliance with the White Archipelago with one of our closest neighbours, the Emperor decided that he would like to choose a wife from here."

"Incredible news," Keatar's face stretches into a grin, "I am sure any noble family would be honoured to become a part of the Gerdian Royal Family."

"We are happy to hear that," the amba.ssador smirks.

"The emperor is welcome here anytime to pick a...", our leader starts saying.

"Our Emperor has put this responsibility on my shoulders," Demir says suddenly and I flinch, "And a bride for him has already been chosen."

It's suddenly so quiet in the room that when someone drops a fork it sounds like an earthquake.

"May I ask who you have in mind?" Fabian exclaims in a grim tone all of a sudden and Gideon's hand squeezes mine tightly.

My eyes meet Demir's and a smirk appears on his face, a shiver goes down my spine at this moment.

“Lady Larissa Artes,” he announces coldly and my lips part in shock.

How could he?! All this time when I was thinking about him and we met in our dreams he was thinking that I would be a great couple for his master?

Brighta, the Goddess of Light, help me! Because I feel like murdering people right now. And this is not the way of Light. But then again, gerdians aren't exactly people, right?

“It's impossible!” Fabian shouts in anger.

“Out of the question!” Gideon pronounces simultaneously.

Now I am actually thankful to the two of them. But my blood is still boiling. I've heard terrible things about the gerdian emperor! First of all, he is ancient already. Second of all, he is ruthless and cruel. He has no problem starting a war or killing people. Living with a monster like this would have been torture!

“Lady Artes...,” Keatar looks like he meditates on this, “This is not ideal... Her marriage alliance with someone else is almost formed already... But you can choose any other unattached girl. My own daughter Brianna would make a great wife even for an emperor. She is considered to be the most beautiful...”

“Lady. Larissa. Artes.” Demir stresses every word in a dead tone, “She is the one chosen for our emperor. No one else!”

I feel a lump in my throat and a desire to come up to him and give him the slap of his life! How dares he?! What is he thinking?! It was appalling enough when he mentioned it the first time after our dreams, our kiss, our dance... But to insist on it with such eagerness! I wouldn't tolerate it!

“I am not sure this is possible,” the oldest Marten is taken aback, which is a rare occurrence to him, “She is almost...”

“She is not married, neither is she engaged. That makes the lady free, and our choice is made!” Demir insists and I try really hard not to summon light to the tips of my fingers and hit him with it this very moment. I always lacked self-control but right now it's almost unbearable!

“Lara is already taken!” Gideon's voice sounds like a thunderstorm in the middle of a quiet day. But his words take me by surprise.

“Oh, really?” Demir leans to the back of his chair with a sneer on his face and crosses his hands on his chest, “Elaborate on this, please. If it’s a fake statement, you would be responsible for lying in front of the representatives of the Gerdian Emperor.”

“There is no need to lie! Lara’s engagement papers were signed years ago!” Deon says and my heart skips a beat. What is he talking about? Right now, I was sure that he is bluffing to protect me. But he doesn’t even flinch when he says all that. Is there an engagement that I had no idea about? Is this even possible?

“And who is her fiancé, may I ask?” Demir suddenly looks terrifying with dark magic dancing wildly in his eyes. And Deon doesn’t say anything for a while as if he is thinking if it’s worth revealing the truth.

“So I thought,” the Gerdian smirks and looks back at Keatar Marten, “So, about the...”

“I AM!” Gideon stands up and the room suddenly fills with gasps.

And one of them belongs to me.

What is he saying?! Is he crazy?!

“And how is that possible?” Demir grits through his teeth.

“My father took Lana into our family as a child,” Gideon says in a calm tone, “He gave her our last name. But he intended for her to become my bride from the very beginning. So, when she was ten, he signed papers at the registrar to make it official. We are not connected by blood, the law permits a union like ours.”

I look at the whole scene in shock. What are they all doing? What are they all saying?! This can’t be real! I must be dreaming, and this is some kind of nightmare...

Gideon is not looking at me and a little throbbing feeling appears inside of my chest...Not a good one.

“My Lords,” Keatar Marten stands up from his seat as well, “This is a very serious conversation and why don’t we take it somewhere else. Follow me, please.”

The gerdians stand up, and so is Fabian, Gideon walks out of the table and nods to our knights who appear at both sides of me.

“Go home, Lara,” he says dryly, “I’ll be back as soon as I can. Wait for me.”

I look at my sudden escorts in a daze. How is this? They all left to discuss my destiny and I am the one not invited for the conversation? None of them even bothered to ask my opinion!

“Deon!” I call for my brother angrily, but he waves his hand, telling me to go where he already sent me. The knights step closer implying the same thing.

Too many eyes are on me and I know that this is not the time and place for a scene. My eyes meet with Bria’s and there is an unfamiliar expression in them. She is not happy with everything that is going on, but there is no reassurance in her eyes either. Just what is this?

I am walking back home still feeling that everything around me is surreal.

In my room, I go to the balcony at once, because I feel sick from everything that happened today. And I need some air.

A sudden thought comes to my mind and I go back and find my new wings, putting them on and summoning the power of Light to help them attach.

When my mood is this bad only one thing usually helps me – flying!

I step on the rail of my balcony, ready for a jump when I feel a strong wind blowing straight into my face and raise my head to check what is going on.

But the sight of a huge black dragon, spreading his wings right in front of me, makes me speechless...