

Book 2 Dragon King's Forbidden Love Chapter 31 - Tips

DEMIR

In my life, I rarely didn't know what was going on. But since I met Lara, there were more and more occurrences like that. And although it excited me at first, I was starting to like it less and less. Especially since it brought danger to her!

What happened? Why did dark flames transport us here and not to the castle as I originally planned? My dark fire never failed me before. So why did it happen now out of all the times?

Did it have something to do with how angry I was watching those red dragons look at her with their lustful eyes? Even that a**ole Sean Sarn seemed interested and he never cared about anyone in his entire life. Chaos, what was it about that woman that drove men crazy?

She was my soulmate and no one else was needed in that picture.

Or was it her Light that brought me off the course? There was so much of it and it was so blinding... It was an attack and I felt it too even though it was not intended for me. Yet somehow I felt that it drained me. As if it... dissolved my darkness...

I tried to summon my power but only my dragon flames were responding. And even those seemed weaker than usual. I couldn't even be sure that day would be enough to transport us out of here. Chaos, I wasn't sure that I would be able to shift into my dragon. Not that it would be a good idea to try that now since we were alone in the middle of nowhere and Reds could be lurking nearby. If they attacked us now then it may end badly for us.

"Why did you do it?" Lara looked into my eyes with condemnation.

"Me?" I was still holding her in my arms without even realizing it, "You are the one who threw me off the course!"

It was probably a bad move to release this information to her.

"How in heavens would I do that?" She didn't give up.

"I think your Light affected me", I confessed. I had to explain it to her somehow. Even though it was risky.

“So,” she looked at me impatiently, “What are you waiting for? Take us to a safe place!”

“If I could you’d be there already! In your bedroom, tied to a bed and unable to escape! I can’t believe you tried to run away when I was dealing with people who wanted to harm us.”

“Was that what you were doing?” she raised her brows at me, “I thought you went for a walk and forgot all about me. I’ve been alone at the shop for a long time, you know?”

“And you couldn’t wait for more?” I chuckled, “What were you thinking? That I wouldn’t find you if you walk a couple of streets in my city? Lara, I can smell you for miles!”

A slap on my cheek came hard and I saw my soul mate exhaling loudly through her nostrils with her cheeks flared.

“How dare you?!” her eyes were throwing daggers at me, “I don’t smell! Unless you mean one of those awful gerdian oils that your maid kept pouring over me!”

Seriously, how could anyone be so adorable and annoying at the same time? I’m now starting to see that prophecy in a whole different light! That woman could be the end of me simply by driving me crazy. In a good sense and in the bad.

I gave out a laugh, “I didn’t mean that you smell. I can feel your scent. The sea breeze and jasmine.”

“Oh,” she squeaked as I drove her closer and buried my face in her hair, right next to the crook of her neck that was so tempting to taste.

“And this scent is divine!”, I whispered into her ear and immediately felt her whole body trembling in my arms. She left her cape in the capital and it was pretty chilly here. Wherever this “here” was. Although I wasn’t sure that it was the only reason. And I like that thought very much. Sooner or later she would start feeling that bond too. According to my parents, my human mother was denying the connection for a while. But in the end, even she had to give up. You can’t stop love. Especially the one that was destined to happen.

“L-let me go!” she insisted, pushing on my chest and I couldn’t help but feel disappointed that she was rejecting my closeness. Letting go of her, I had to remind myself, that she simply needed more time than I did.

Meanwhile, I was ready to devour her. But I couldn’t.

“So,” she cleared her throat, looking around, “Where the chaos are we?!”

She pretended that she wasn’t cold and at one moment of time I was debating with myself to make her ask me for my cloak. But when I saw goosebumps all over her skin visible thanks to her backless dress, I started to feel heat where I really didn’t need it at the moment. So, without wasting any time, I came up to her and wrapped the warm fabric around her delicate shoulders. Lara flinched yet the shivering stopped.

She looked at me through her lashes and I didn’t take my hands away. I simply couldn’t. The desire to touch her was immense. So, I started rubbing her shoulders.

“Erm,” she mumbled, her cheeks blushing slightly, “Thanks, but I…”

“Yeah, yeah,” I chuckled, “You don’t need anything from me. I know. But you are turning blue and I can’t watch it and do nothing!”

“It’s,” the blush became more obvious and even reached the tips of her ears, “It’s very kind of you.”

“You are welcome,” I leaned down and breathed in her scent. I thought everyone was exaggerating when they said that inhaling the scent of a soulmate helped calm down any dragon’s nerves. But apparently, they weren’t!

I distanced myself and decided to pay attention to something else for a change. Anything to distract me from thinking about claiming her here and now. That woman was too tempting.

“I think we are in Akyria,” I informed her after examining nearby trees.

“Really?” she gasped, “How do you know that?”

“Those trees are called Bronze Oak,” I smiled, looking at her curious pretty face, “They only grow in Akyrian Kingdom.”

“I’ve never been here!” she started to look around with more interest than ever.

“Well, you are here now. Enjoy!” I snorted and she clenched her lips.

“Way to ruin everything,” Lara crossed her hands on her chest. But then this mischievous spark appeared in her eyes. And I knew that it wouldn’t bring us anything good.

She smiled at me and for a moment I thought that I was wrong. But then the damn girl turned on her heels and started walking away. Fast and firm.

“What do you think you are doing?” I shouted at her back.

“Well, we are not on your territory and you can’t transport us anywhere anymore. You said that I can influence your magic, so I am taking my chances and escape from you!” she responded proudly.

“And you think that’s a good idea because...?”

“Because I can find normal people now and ask them for help! And at the moment you can’t do anything about it!” she giggled. Oh, the little fox was enjoying it. “How does it feel, Demir, to not be in control for once?!”

“Not great,” I admitted and started walking after her as she was taking up her pace, “Are you seriously going to leave me alone in the woods after you took my cloak?”

“You gave it to me!” she kept walking as if nothing happened, “I didn’t even ask for it! But thank you so very much!”

“You are welcome,” I smirked but of course she did not see it, so I added calmly, “Just so that you know it’s the Bronze Forest. For obvious reasons. It goes on, and on, and on, and on...for miles. It may be days before you meet any people.”

“Doesn’t matter!” she blurted out but slowed down a bit.

“Good,” I fake-sighed, “But beware of the beasts. I heard they have wild basilisks here. And griffons. Probably even chimeras.”

“I can take care of myself,” she waved me goodbye but her voice didn’t sound so sure anymore, “I already proved it!”

“Sure!” I couldn’t help but laugh, “And since you are going to travel a few days in those shoes, I am sure you’ll also have no trouble protecting yourself while you sleep. I am also sure you are great at hunting and can feed yourself.”

“I see berries!” she pointed her index finger at some bush with triumph.

“Those are poisoned,” I tried to say as calmly as I could even though all I wanted was to burst out laughing, “As well as most of the mushrooms in these lands. But I am sure you are an expert on that too.”

She stopped and I knew I already won. But I also knew that she couldn’t admit defeat.

“Like it or not, we have better chances together,” I said walking closer to her, “Besides, I’ll restore fast and find you anyway. You promised me that month and I am going to get it.”

She groaned desperately, clenching her fists, and it was the best sound in the world for me.

“I hate you! Do you know it?!” she finally turned to face me. And although her words hurt, I didn’t see the hate in her eyes.

“We both know you don’t mean that, Angel,” I smirked and took her hand, “And now let’s go. We need to find a place for the night.”

“Wh-what?” she stared at me with her clear blue eyes, “You don’t mean that...”

“I mean exactly what I mean,” I chuckled, “We need to either find a safe place or make one. By the morning I should restore and I’ll take us back home.”

“Back to your home,” she corrected me and I decided not to push it.

“Yes, back to the castle,” I nodded, “Where you promised to stay for a month.”

“And you promised not to touch me.”

“Unless you ask me.”

We stared at each other for a good minute until I just continued walking. There was no need to dwell on that.

After a while, I spotted a nice place by a huge rock, where we would be able to hide from the wind.

"This looks good," I told Lara and she had to agree, "Stay here and I'll find some dry moss and twigs to make fire."

"I'll help," she disobeyed me of course and I just rolled my eyes. I actually didn't mind her staying so close to me.

She was picking twigs while I was gathering big pieces of thick dead moss that would make this night much more comfortable.

"How do you know so much about Akyria?" Lara asked me and I noticed her interested gaze on me.

"My mother was Akyrian," I explained, without giving too many details, "I used to spend a lot of time here during my childhood. She taught me everything about local nature. And the culture."

"I heard akyrians are a very peaceful and intelligent nation," she bent down to get another fallen branch, unknowingly showing me more of her cleavage. I swallowed without even realizing it.

"They are," I stood up as I got everything that we needed, "And so are the gerdians."

Surprisingly, she didn't say anything to that. And I decided to call that progress.

It was getting dark fast and we made a fire to warm up. She stayed to keep it and I found us some food. Mostly mushrooms and berries, thankfully there was enough of those. Not a feast but a filling meal. And the juice from the berries could replace water for now.

I felt that I could summon the Water element already. Maybe even transport us. I could definitely shift. But Lara didn't need to know about that. This was nice and I didn't want to ruin it.

“What do you do at the palace?” she asked suddenly after the silence was hanging between us for too long, “I mean, what is your actual job?”

“I do a lot of things,” I decided to go for the truth without naming it, “I deal with the problems in the Empire, I create laws and revise them, I meet with people and find out their needs, I go to wars and fight when needed.”

“Wars,” she sighed, picked a twig, and started to move coals in the fire, “How many wars did you take part in?”

“Enough to know that it’s best to avoid them,” I admitted and for the first time, she looked at me directly. Her eyes were sad. The desire to calm her grew in my soul.

“I read a book about war once,” she told to no one in particular, “It was rather...sorrowful.”

“I bet it was. What’s the name of it?”

“The path of a warrior,” she named one of the greatest manuscripts ever written by the ancient people.

“You really finished it?” I chuckled, “It’s long. And... not what girls usually prefer to read.”

“It was amazing though,” Lara looked at me again and a vague smile appeared on her lips.

“I agree. It’s one of my favourites.”

We didn’t notice how it was the middle of the night already. The discussion about books turned into a full-blown conversation. We were arguing a lot but we were also finding some common grounds. And it felt amazing.

“You should go to sleep”, I advised her as she yawned for the fifth time, “Lie at the moss. It should be comfortable.”

“And what about you?” she asked as she was trying to settle on the improvised bed.

“I am fine. I’ll keep guard,” I smiled. It was nice that she thought of me.

“You’ll get cold,” Lara stated plainly. She was still wrapped in my cloak and I loved knowing she was wearing my clothes. Kind of.

“I’ll be all right,” I was about to tell her that I never get cold when she untied the cloak and opened it for me.

“It’s enough for the two of us,” she said, trying not to meet my gaze...

I sat there for a few good minutes simply looking at her and couldn’t believe that she was saying it for real.

“I’ll change my mind in five, four, three...”, she started the countdown and within a moment I wrapped her in my arms, with the cloak over the two of us.

So, this is how heaven feels...

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LARA

I didn’t know what I was doing! And why... He didn’t look cold. We had a fire. Brighta, Goddess of Light, why did I offer him to share his damn cloak?!

And he was even worse than I imagined. I thought that we’d turn backs to each other and use the fabric to cover ourselves. Yet he grabbed me into his hands, pressed me against his body, and wrapped us much tighter than it was needed.

So tight that I could feel his warmth. And scent. Forest after the rain...

Suddenly the realization that I actually asked him to touch me hit me and I tried to jump back to my feet but he held me in place.

“What’s wrong?” he asked as if he was really concerned.

“That’s not... I didn’t...”, I mumbled hectically.

“Calm down,” he chuckled and pulled me back, “This doesn’t count. Let’s say that you were saving my life.”

“Uh-uh”, I settled back on his chest, feeling slightly more comfortable and relaxed. At first, I didn’t know how to sleep being held like that, so wriggled here and there a bit finding the right position for me.

“You’d better stop it,” he said in a strangely husky voice.

“Stop what?” I turned to look at him and met eyes filled with dark magic, “I thought your magic was gone...”

“It was drained,” he cleared his throat and turned elsewhere, “I am trying to restore it. Now, sleep.”

He hugged me even tighter and I sighed. It wasn’t like I could do anything anyway. And also I was tired.

His warmth coated me, his breath became slow and I didn’t even notice when I started to fall asleep. Before I drifted off to the land of dreams, I heard his voice again.

“Lara, when we come back, I’ll take you to my library. There are thousands of books in there... From all over the world. You are going to love it...”

“That would be great,” I whispered still not sure if that was a dream or reality...

DEMIR

She slept peacefully in my arms and a part of me wanted to stay like this forever. A big and significant part of me. The part that longed for her and her only.

But the other part of me was thinking. The part that was ruled by logic and my obligations to the Empire. The part that was responsible for so many lives...

She struck me with her Light and it dissipated my dark magic. I never heard of anyone being able to do that. And that, unfortunately, makes Lara very special. The gerdians we’re always the most powerful species because no one could do anything about our dark powers. The darkness was unbeatable. The people from the White Archipelago could never do anything of this sort. Or at least I never heard about it. I knew I would have to do good research when I come back to the palace. But at the moment, this seemed to be a unique occurrence.

That made Lara even more dangerous. I couldn't ignore the prophecy anymore. She didn't seem aware of her abilities but it looked like she was capable of bringing me down. One strike and even transportation didn't work properly. She didn't even aim at me. And what would happen if she was aiming at me?

The more I was thinking about it the worse the situation looked. Even if she didn't want to hurt me personally, someone could use her against me. And depending on what kind of power that was, they could even utilize it against the whole Empire.

I urgently needed to find a way to protect myself from her Light.

She wriggled again and mumbled something in her sleep, not having the slightest clue how those movements made me feel. How my whole body ached for her. I wanted to touch her in a different way, I wanted all of her.

There was another problem with her newfound powers. When gerdians find out about what she could do, the target on her back would shine even brighter than now. They would never forget about the prophecy and would spend all their strength trying to get rid of her. Maybe I could reason with Prim and Ryker but what about the rest? The dark Lords would never forget, the dark Lords would never forgive. That was their way of life for centuries.

Even as an Emperor there weren't too many things that I could do to protect her. My instincts were telling me to hide her in the tallest tower of my castle. So no one would ever see her. Except for me. But unfortunately, I knew that she would never be happy with that. And I desperately wanted Lara to be happy. With me.

I smiled when I remembered how she noticed the dark magic in my eyes just an hour or so ago. It was not supposed to come back so fast. That was strange, but I felt better and better every minute. It was as if... someone was replenishing my energy.

I looked at the girl who was sleeping peacefully on my chest. Was that her? How was she doing it?

What exactly is she?!

Did the people back at the White Archipelago know about her special abilities? Was that why they tried to keep her there at all costs? If that was the

case then they would most definitely try to get her back. She could be used as a weapon. Thanks to all the gods the red Dragons did not get her. If they knew then the whole empire would most definitely be in danger.

But what if she could also replenish magic? That would make her even more valuable.

Could she do it for me only because we were soulmates or could she charge anyone?

One thing for sure, no one should know her secret. I needed to find a way to protect her.

The fewer people knew about her, the fewer people I'd have to kill.

I spent the night next to her, breathing in her scent and trying to calm down. As well as thinking of what to do next. I couldn't let her go now. And also I did not want to. She was mine and the dragon inside me felt the same way.

By the morning it all became clear to me. The only thing I could do was to marry her. It was convenient that what my heart desired coincided with what had to be done. As soon as the title of an Empress would be bestowed on her, all the Dark Dragons would have to act as her protectors. They gave an unbreakable oath to protect the royal family of the Gerdian Empire.

She mumbled something unrecognizable and wrinkled her nose. I knew that she was about to wake up and this nice moment between us would be over, so I carefully brushed my palm over her cheek, taking away strands of golden hair from her eyes.

Her lashes fluttered and she looked at me, blinking a few times.

"Morning," I greeted her and her cheeks became that lovely shade of pink. It suited her. She reminded me of some kind of delicate flower.

"Morning," Lara echoed and tried to stand up.

"Easy," I told her, "I'll help."

We were on our feet in the blink of the moment, stretching sore muscles and pretending that we didn't spend the night cuddling.

“How is your magic today?” she asked, trying to fix the creases on her dress when the silence got too awkward.

“Much better,” I chuckled, “I feel like new.”

“I wish I could say the same,” she smiled unexpectedly and stretched her neck, “All my body aches.”

“That’s fine,” I came closer and she didn’t seem to be willing to step away, making me happy, “At the castle, I’ll order the maids to prepare the best bath for you. There are potions that will make all the pain go away.”

“How useful!” she smiled and bit her lip when wrapped my cloak around her once again. I wanted her to wear my clothes. Anything. It was bringing me a very strange feeling of satisfaction.

“I wouldn’t mind a good breakfast as well,” she confessed and it felt so nice that I forgot about everything...

“Well, I promise you the best breakfast ever,” I said with a smile, “I owe you one breakfast with Emperor, right? Today you’ll find out...”

Her face changed so fast that the words stuck somewhere in my throat.

“Lara, what’s wrong?” I asked her but her lips clenched and she frowned.

I stretched my hand to her but she stepped away.

“Lara,” I tried to touch her but in the next moment, a wave of light knocked me off his feet.

It wasn’t as bad as the last time, my magic wasn’t drained at all. And I had no idea why.

Lara, however, looked as if she was ready to kill.

“You,” she gritted through her teeth, “How could you be so...”

At that moment, clouds of dark smoke, as well as dark flames, started to appear here and there. And soon Ryker was standing right before me, guarding me with his body as usual.

“Seize her!” he shouted and two soldiers ran up to Lara, grabbing her hands and I growled in rage. But also in frustration because I knew what was to follow and this was not how I wanted to tell her. “She tried to assassinate His Majesty!”

Lara’s angry face changed when she looked at me again, her lips parting in shock...

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LARA

“Seize her!” the ambassador shouted and two brutes grabbed me, almost throwing me to the dirty ground, “She tried to assassinate His Majesty!”

A loud growl emerged from Demir. Earthshattering and primal. It did not sound human at all! And I looked at him in shock!

“Protect the Emperor!” someone of the newly arrived gerdians ordered and they separated us from each other within seconds.

The Emperor?! Did I just mishear them?

“Stop it!” Demir’s voice sounded again and it made me shudder, bringing me back to reality, “Whoever touches her is going to lose a hand! Or two!”

“But Your Majesty,” one of the men who held me stumbled.

“Demir!” the ambassador that visited the White Archipelago turned in shock, “I saw her attacking you! She...”

“We were playing!” the gerdian stood up and glared at his... I didn’t even know what they were for each other anymore, “She is my future fiancée!”

A lump formed in my throat and I couldn’t say anything.

Was he the Emperor? The ancient one? The one that insisted on marrying me? And it was HIM all this time?

“I said let her go!” he growled and his eyes flashed dark magic. His voice sounded like thunder and echoed through the Bronze Forest, making the men around me step away and bow respectfully.

“What happened to you?” the ambassador was the only brave one there, “You disappeared and Primrose could only locate you now! Almost a day later!”

“Long story,” Demir brushed him off as he was walking towards me. Before I could say anything, before I could give him the look that could kill, he pulled me into his arms and dark flames surrounded us.

We appeared in an unfamiliar room. I knew far too well that it wasn't mine as it looked more like a spacious reception room. Dark tones of it made me completely sure that we were back at the Gerdian Palace. There was a huge fireplace, sofas, tables with expensive decorations, bookshelves, a huge desk, pictures in golden frames... But I didn't care for any of that.

“Lara,” Demir touched my chin with his warm fingers to make me look at him and I pushed him away as hard as I could.

“You!” I hissed and didn't even recognize my own voice, “How dare you!”

“Lara, it was a...”, he wanted to say something but I interjected.

“I know very well what it was!” I looked him straight in the eye, “One of your sick Gerdian games! Well, I hope you had fun making a fool out of me all this time, Your Majesty!”

His facial expression changed at once when he heard the title. And I wanted to hurt him more.

“Just in case you were thinking that as soon as I find out who you really are it'll change my desire to marry into the Gerdian Royal Family, you thought wrong!”

His whole body tensed and I knew I somehow hit the right spot.

So, I continued, “Now that I know that you are the Emperor of this...awful Empire, I know for sure that I don't want anything to do with you! I hate you and your games! I am sick of it and I would never be able to live here!”

“Lara,” Demir tried to touch me again but I managed to wriggle out of his arms, “I understand that you are angry. I wanted to tell you...”

“No,” I shook my head, “You wanted to have fun with the silly girl from the White Archipelago! I can’t believe I almost bought into your lies! I’ll tell you this just once and I hope that you will be able to hear me loud and clear! I hate you! I hate you so much! I will do everything to not marry you and leave this place as soon as possible!”

His eyes started glowing the cold purple colour of the dark magic and I knew that now he was angry too.

“Oh, really?!” he chuckled darkly, “Are you ready to marry your precious brother then?”

He looked at me with a challenge and I held his gaze, narrowing my eyes at him.

“You don’t get Gideon into this!” I gritted my teeth, “He is one thousand times nobler than you’ll ever be!”

“Just a thousand?” he snorted, “Considering how low you think of me that doesn’t seem much, does it?! If you are so sick as to marry your own sibling then go for it!”

“Stop that nonsense!” I shouted, “Gideon only said that to protect me! After YOU pressured him! He’ll do everything for me.”

“That he will,” the gerdian seemed properly furious by now, “He’ll do everything to have you for himself! To put you in his bed and...”

I didn’t let him finish as my hand connected to his cheek again. I was probably the only person in the world who managed to hit the Emperor of the Gerdian Empire twice. As well as insult him and stay alive.

When he looked back, his eyes were empty and I gulped without even realizing it. I was crazy to offend him like that. He could throw me out of the window that very moment and no one would object to him. If anything, everyone here would be happy.

However, I faced him with dignity and raised my chin.

“I will not let you manipulate me anymore,” I announced proudly, “I will not believe in your lies about my own brother! Just so that you know, it was just me and him for years! And we were happy! So, yeah, I’d gladly leave this

place and spend the rest of my life living exactly as we used to at the White Archipelago.”

“Careful, Lara,” he said coldly, “You might awaken the beast you had no idea about. And who knows if your precious White Archipelago would be still standing when I am done with it. A bunch of islands! I can ruin it within a day.”

“And why am I not surprised that you would say something like that,” I clenched my fists, “I assure you, our people would surprise you!”

We stayed standing and looking at each other for I didn’t know how long. So many thoughts were circling in my head. I felt bitter. I hated that he played with me so easily and I was falling for it every single time. I hated that some of the moments in his games...I liked. The memories of our k!ss, our dreams, and lof ast night made my heart beat faster.

“You still have to spend one month here”, he said finally.

“And not a day longer!” I replied, “And you would have to let me go after that.”

“I always keep my word,” Demir turned away and I let out a little laugh. Was he serious?

“Go now,” he sounded spiteful, “Enjoy your stay at the palace!”

“As if!” I rolled my eyes, “And I don’t even know where to go!”

Without any additional words, he waved his hand and dark flames surrounded me. One second and I was back in my room. Alone.

I was fuming. I was angry. I was sure that the lying bastard would make my life in the palace unbearable and would force his company on me.

Yet the next day I didn’t hear from him. And the next. And the day after that.

I wasn’t going to humiliate myself by asking about him and none of my maids mentioned anything. My meals were brought to me on time and I read book after book from what I found on my bookshelf. Most of those were romance stories and somehow they didn’t make me feel better.

Anger was dying down and confusion became my frequent visitor. More days passed and yet Demir wasn’t there.

Not that I wanted to see him. Of course, I didn't. Why would I?

But it bothered me still. Why was he keeping me here then? What was the plan? I really hoped that he wasn't planning to destroy the White Archipelago as he claimed. There was no need for that.

"Oh, really?!" he chuckled darkly, "Are you ready to marry your precious brother then?"

I thought about Gideon. I passed a letter to him when we went on that awful trip but since everything went crazy there I wasn't sure that my letter was ever sent. I could only imagine how my brother felt!

Yet at night, Gideon wasn't the one I was thinking about. I tried not to sleep. I still didn't know how our dreams were working but I did not want to see Demir there. It worked. And when I was finally falling, I had no dreams whatsoever. Probably because of how exhausted I was.

On the fifth day, I was sitting on my balcony when an unexpected visitor came. I rose at once when I saw her. Demir's sister. The beauty with ginger hair looked like she walked out of a painting.

"Your Highness," I curtsied and she gave out a little laugh.

"Oh, it's Your Highness now?" she chuckled, "You even not going to hit me with your magic?"

"I am sorry," I sighed as I rose without receiving her permission to, "Last time I had no idea who you were. But in my defense, you were clearly trying to k!!! me."

"Nonsense!" she snorted, "If I wanted to k!!! you, you'd be already dead. Trust me."

"I am sorry, Your Highness, but given my history with your brother, it's really hard for me to put my trust in you," I tried to smile politely.

"Feisty, aren't you?" she smirked, "Such a shame you can't really be with Demir."

"Well, I'd have to disagree on that," I sighed, "It personally makes me really happy that I am soon going to be leaving this place."

She looked at me with her piercing green eyes as if he could see through me, And then the princess smiled.

“Good,” she nodded, “You seem like a nice girl, Lara. But it could never work between you two.”

“I absolutely agree,” I said and she looked pleased with that.

“I was looking for your wings everywhere,” she pretended to examine at one of her beautiful diamond rings, “But it seems like Demir has them. Or he destroyed them.”

I wanted to break things. Those wings were the most beautiful gift I ever received. Yet I had to stay calm. To survive.

“That’s all right,” I shrugged my shoulders, “As long as I get home soon.”

“I’ll personally see to it,” the princess said, “My name is Primrose, by the way. You can call me that. Or Prim.”

“Lara Artes,” I introduced myself as well since we were sharing. I knew that we wouldn’t be friends. But this was better than her trying to kill me.

She nodded.

“Well, I’d better be going,” she informed me and when she was at the door, turned to me and asked, “Is there anything that you need?”

Luckily, I knew one thing I wanted.

“Yes,” I looked at her, “The Emperor promised to grant me one wish. Could you please tell him that I wish to see Smoke?”

“Smoke?” Primrose looked at me surprised.

“He knows who that is,” I smirked and the gerdian left after giving me a polite nod.

In the evening my maid Lisa arrived with a smile on her face.

“We have a surprise for you!” she announced, “Please, follow me to the garden.”

We were walking for a while through the corridors of the palace and finally walked out into its outer grounds. Sweet floral scent was in the air and I admired the diversity of plants they had there. There were statues and structures, summer houses and arches entwined with roses. Yet we didn't meet a single soul and I was already starting to get worried when I saw him...

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LARA

As if he felt my presence from afar, the dragon lifted his head and turned to look at me with mesmerizing eyes.

"Smoke!" I recognized him at once and ran to him. Somehow, he felt like the closest creature to me in this damn palace. I leaned over his head and stroked him with my hand, resting on his warm rough skin. For some reason, it felt even better than I thought and Smoke closed his eyes enjoying our little reunion too.

"I am still angry at you, you know," I said to him and clicked his nose. He probably didn't even feel it. But I had to make a point. "For bringing me here," I stressed out.

He snorted a bit of smoke emerged from his nose right before I managed to move away.

"Because of you I now have to deal with that arrogant, impossible, overbearing and... and... absolutely impudent man!" I made sure to make my point and the dragon let out a strange sigh.

"When this month will be over, would you be the one to take me back home?" I asked him, placing a hand on one of his wings as I talked. And then I paused, bringing myself to ask what I really needed to know, "Do you think he'll keep his word and let me go?"

My voice was shaking slightly and the dragon looked at me with pity. Or at least I thought he did. He lowered his wing for me as if he was inviting me and I stepped on it, prepared to be lifted like this time in the cave. He helped me up and I nestled between his spikes, grabbing tightly one of them. For some reason, the dragon growled loudly. The dress I was wearing wasn't too comfortable for dragon-riding, so I tore it mercilessly to create a slit and

clenched my thighs to keep myself in place better. Another growl emerged and it made me laugh.

“I think you like it, don’t you?” I giggled.

I looked at the maid that brought me here and she wasn’t bothered that I was about to fly away. They probably trusted Smoke this much.

He spread out his wings and charged for the sky, kissing the clouds and bathing in the sunshine. Just what I loved to do when I was flying with my wings, so enjoyed it immensely. I still remembered the first time Gideon took me to the sky secretly. Our father was against it but we still snuck out to the mountains and he took me up in the sky in his arms. I wasn’t flying on my own and yet it was love at first sight! I didn’t know back then that I wouldn’t be allowed to become a Warrior of Light and would never have my own wings... And when I learned that years later it was too late. Flying still was the one thing that I wanted the most. So, Gideon made the very first pair of wings for me and taught me how to use them. He was modifying them every time and making them better. And now even the ones who weren’t chosen to become Warriors of Light could still be warriors with wings and protect our Homeland.

Smoke made a twirl as we flew through another cloud and I screamed in excitement. It was the best feeling in the world and it felt like he knew exactly what I wanted. It was also much warmer today. Just as if someone made a barrier around me. But dragons couldn’t do that. Or at least I didn’t think they could.

Hours later, I leaned lower, hugging his spike, and whispered, “Take me home now.”

Of course, I hoped that he would take me back to the White Archipelago. But the dragon took a few circles around the capital and I noticed a few other dragons in the sky. None of them had people on though.

We landed back at the same garden and it got to me that they had this big clearing in the middle of it exactly for those purposes. I was tired but I still didn’t want to get back. And luckily Lisa wasn’t around as well. So, I just clung to Smoke and stayed like this.

I didn’t realize when the darkness consumed me but today I was dreaming about Demir for the first time in a while. He was carrying me in his arms to my room and placing me on my bed gently, caressing my cheek but not doing

anything else. Not even a tiny kiss on the forehead and somehow that left me feeling disappointed when he left.

I woke up back in my room, not really sure if what I saw in the dream was reality or not. Lisa and Sandra walked in and gasped when they saw me and immediately dragged me to take a bath. They seemed to be in a hurry today and I didn't know why. Nor did I care. I was remembering my wonderful flight with Smoke and how great it felt...

I could swear the maids tried harder today, stressing about my dress and hair. I let them choose what to wear as long as it was something that arrived a few days back from that shop Demir and I visited in the city.

They picked a light lilac dress with golden embroidery all over it. A bit luxurious for sitting in my room one day. And I wasn't planning to leave it until the month was over. Even though I had no restrictions on my movements here.

A knock on the door made the girls jump and I just rolled my eyes. It was probably lady Lucille with her usual daily visit, checking that I have everything that I need.

"Your Majesty!" I heard Lisa and Sandra say in unison and I almost fell off the chair I was sitting in with my book.

Turning my head, I met with two eyes filled with flames of dark magic. He looked different. Thinner, tired, dark bags under his eyes.

"Leave us!" he brushed his hand through his already disheveled hair and I notice an envelope in his hand. White with a broken silver seal on it. I knew where that letter came from and stood up to my feet even before both servants managed to leave the room.

Smoke made a twirl as we flew through another cloud and I screamed in excitement. It was the best feeling in the world and it felt like he knew exactly what I wanted. It was also much warmer today. Just as if someone made a barrier around me. But dragons couldn't do that. Or at least I didn't think they could.

We stayed alone but none of us was saying anything. So we just stood like that for a while, watching each other.

“You,” Demir cleared his throat, “You look so beautiful.”

“Thank you,” I replied dryly as I put my book to the little table next to me, trying to hide how strongly my fingers were trembling, “A visit of the great Emperor after so long! I feel honoured!”

“I thought you hated me and didn’t want to see me,” he replied in a similar manner, “I tried to fulfill your wish.”

“Oh, how kind! I just wish you did it with my other wish,” I chuckled, “The one where Smoke takes me home.”

He looked as if someone just made him eat a lemon, “His name is not Smoke!”

“He responds to Smoke just fine!” I retorted, “What do you want, Demir?”

“I need to discuss a few things with you,” he sighed and went straight to the balcony as if he needed more air. I followed him quietly. All I wanted was to see this letter.

“Actually,” he turned to face me, “I have plenty of things to discuss with you. Plenty of things to tell you.”

“I bet,” I gave out a little laugh, “So, start already.”

“Lara,” he looked at me with his beautiful eyes and for a moment there my heart skipped a bit. But I muffled that feeling and pretended not to care. “Your life at the White Archipelago... it would never be the same. I know that you don’t like me talking about your brother but he is not what your think he is...”

“Oh, please!” I snorted, “And who in the chaos made you the best judge of character?!”

“Do you...”, he frowned, “Do you really want to live him? Marry him?”

He looked as if he was in pain when he asked that and I decided to be honest.

“Gideon is not going to marry me!” I splashed my hands, “He had no choice as to say that to protect me!”

“Is that what you really think?” he looked at me with some kind of new feeling in his eyes, that I could only identify as pity and I didn’t like it.

“Of course,” I said although I probably didn’t sound so sure. The envelope in his hands bothered me.

“Lara, I have so much to tell you. About me, about y country... I don’t want to force you into anything and when our bet is over, I’ll get you wherever you want. But I think you really need to see this.”

He handed the envelope to me and once again I made sure that the seal was real. It was addressed to the Emperor of the Gerdian Empire, so was already opened. And when I got several pieces of paper out but started with the first one. I bit my lip as I recognized the monogram of the Artes family. I recognized Gideon’s handwriting as well...

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Book 2 Dragon King's Forbidden Love Chapter 35

LARA

To the Emperor of the Gerdian Empire Demir the First Darmerion Derwood,

While pretending to be on a peaceful mission, five of your subject visited our capital and were welcomed by our people as dear guests. However, they relayed our kindness with a gruesome crime and kidnapped one of our own. They claimed that the girl in question was chosen to be your bride yet we regretfully have to inform you that she was already engaged years ago. Moreover, the future marriage was blessed at the shrine of the Goddess of Light Brighta, meaning that Larissa Artes would never be able to marry anyone else but me, Gideon Artes. She was taken to our family as my bride and will remain a part of it until the day she dies. Our family is one of the five High families of the White Archipelago hence we are not intending to let it go. You have ten days to return Larissa back to us, otherwise, we will have no choice but to announce war.

The Commander of the White Archipelago Army,

Duke Gideon Artes.

With trembling fingers, I looked at the next piece of paper and gasped when I saw the monogram of the temple of Light. Silver L with rays coming out of it...

On the day of Summer Solstice 5432 Gideon Artes, future Duke Artes accepts lady Larissa Artes as his future wife and promises to share her wings and heart with her... The Goddess of Light Brighta blessed their future union with the Kiss of the Sun and promised them a prosperous and happy marriage. Larissa Artes is an adoptive daughter of the family and Duke Adrian Artes confirms that she is not blood-related to Gideon Artes, so the Temple of Light approves the union as well...

There was no point to continue reading and I put my hands down, dropping to the nearby chair.

The Kiss of the Sun was the kind of an unbreakable blessing that was given once in a lifetime for one union only... If it was already given to me and Gideon, none of us would ever be able marry anyone else under the laws of the White Archipelago... Father and brother... Just why did they do it?

"Lara," Demir called my name and I remembered that I was not alone here, quickly wiping away tears that were forming in my eyes, "I didn't want you to find out like this..."

"It's fine," I lied. I wasn't fine at all. "I am sure there is an explanation to all of this."

"Seriously?" he looked disappointed, and I bit my lip, "He asked for the "Kiss of the Sun" for you two! What more prove do you want?!"

"That wasn't him," I shook my head, "There's our father's signature and name. I was around twelve by then..."

"Do many girls of that age get engaged at the White Archipelago?" he crossed his hands on his chest and lean on the rail of the balcony we were at, pretending to admire the view.

"No," I admitted, accidentally dropping the pieces of paper to the floor. The wind caught them up and started playing with them, taking them outside, tossing and turning, dancing in the air. And I did not care because I did not want to see that letter and that document ever again...

"So, what now?" he asked me and I looked away, not really knowing what to respond. I didn't know what to do next.

“I think I need to talk to Gideon,” I said, not quite sure of it myself, “He’ll explain...”

“He’ll close you in that room of yours until the day of your marriage,” the Gerdian Emperor snorted, “For Gods’ sake, he is ready to start a war for you!”

“And are you?” I raised my brow with a challenge in an attempt to make him feel silly. But the determination in his eyes made me shut my mouth. He was thinking about it, considering it...

“I could,” he said after careful consideration, “If you gave me a reason to.”

“I will not give you the reason to k!ll my people”, I snorted and stood up, coming closer to him, “Don’t even think about it.”

“Fine,” he agreed, “But if they attack us first, I’ll k!ll every single one who dares cross my borders.”

His words made me shudder slightly. If Gideon was to bring Warriors of Light here... That would be terrible. But he wasn’t reckless like this! He’d never do it!

“It will never happen,” I shrugged my shoulders and met with two eyes glowing dark magic.

“It’s fine,” I lied. I wasn’t fine at all. “I am sure there is an explanation to all of this.”

“Your crazy sibling could do it,” he said spitefully.

“You don’t know that!” I snapped at him, “You don’t know Gideon at all!”

“Oh yeah? And you do?” he smirked, “All those times that he was looking at you, touching you, spending time with you... You didn’t know his true intentions! How stupid are you?!”

“Apparently, very!” I exhaled through my nostrils loudly, “I decided to talk about my feeling with you, and look what happened!”

“Lara!” he tried to calm himself down but, by the looks of it, wasn’t very successful, “You have no idea what even thinking about him touching you make me feel! Chaos, my bl00d is boiling!”

“So, take a cold bath,” I turned away, wishing for nothing but staying absolutely alone.

“As you wish!” I hear the sound of receding steps yet somehow it didn’t bring me relief. If anything, staying without Demir made me feel lonely and sad.

I was thinking about thousands of options of why Father and brother would do that to me. The most obvious reason could be in me being a foreigner at the White Archipelago. I knew very well that they didn’t want me there in the first place and Father had to ask them to test me for the power of Light to let me stay. But what if he also had to promise them that I’ll stay in the family forever? Could that be the case? And Gideon sacrificed himself willingly to protect me?

That made sense. Or at least I wanted it to make sense... I wanted to believe that this was it. All that everything was done for my protection.

Stressing all day, I was completely exhausted by the time the night came. And when I was lying in my bed that night it wasn’t Gideon that I was thinking about. It was Demir. He stopped coming to my dreams so I had nothing to be afraid of anymore. Now my dreams were free from certain emperors... And I wasn’t disappointed at all! Not a bit!

I closed my eyes and remembered that cave and his eyes...

The eyes that were looking at me once again as we stood neck-deep in the water in the subterranean river... Naked...