

## CHAPTER 40

Chapter 40

XANDER'S POV

"You're smiling."

"No, Nifra, I am not smiling."

"But you are. You've been in a good mood all day."

"I'm not smiling. It's not my style."

"I have a mirror here."

I raised my head up and looked at Nifra. She burst out laughing, her face shining with mirth.

I felt glad seeing her laugh in my presence. It was harder to hide my smile now. "That was very funny." I said with a shake of my head. "And no, I'm not smiling"

"So I guess something happened at the festival?" She asked, dabbing tears of laughter from the corners of her eyes.

My mind drifted back to the festival. And true to her words, I felt a smile tugging on my lips. "Nothing happened." I stated simply. "It was just as every normal festival. The pack members are happy, and the goddess is merciful in our harvests. Everything was normal" "For one, I wish I had attended this one."

"Perhaps you should have. But you didn't."

"Festivals aren't my thing, Which I'm sure you'll understand as smiling isn't also your thing."

"Get out." I said, my tone light and without any real bite.

She did an exaggerated curtsy. "Of course, your majesty."

A normal festival huh? That wasn't the truth.

Yesternight's festival was the best one I've seen in all my years of attending them. Surely, everything was perfect. But seeing Sabrina made it even better. Even if she was with Caldan for the entire evening.

Seeing her all dolled up, smiling without a care in the world. It really stuck with me how she reacted to the child running to her in tears. How she was able to comfort the child, and her own tears. I wanted to comfort her too. And of course, there was Caldan. Hey stuck by her side, scaring away anyone who tried to get too close to her. Thinking about it made me shake my head. If only he weren't there with her, and it was just the both of us.

"I must be losing my mind."

What am I thinking?

A knock sounded outside my door. I knew who it was before I invited him. Caldan walked in, the look he gave me one of displeasure before he bowed his head. "Your majesty. He said, and when he raised his head up he had fixed his face.

"I didn't summon you, Caldan." I said.

"Yes, you didn't. There's a matter I just discuss with you. The last days, you've been very occupied and I had to wait for an opportunity.

"Why didn't you bring it up last night?" I leaned on my desk, my chin propped on my fist. "You were certainly very mouthy last night"

He grit his teeth. "It's a private matter, your majesty. I didn't want any prying ears to hear."

"Have a seat then, if this is so important to you."

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He nodded stiffly and obeyed. I noticed how stiff his posture was. He was probably still annoyed from last night.

n with it." I said.

"Well, on wit"

"Very well. I would like to buy Sabrina off."

I stilled. The faint smirk of amusement vanished off my face. I sat up straighter, the air in the room became heavy. "What did you just say?"

I would like to buy Sabrina off. As your slave. I want to buy her."

I waited a few seconds. For him to say it was a joke, laugh it off and tell me exactly what the problem was

"Buy Sabrina"

"Yes."

The nerve on on him.

I remembered, just before the festival. He and Sabrina, kissing. The rage I had felt that evening. The fact that it no longer registered to me that this was my brother. The way every inch of me wanted to rip him off her and toss him across the room. She's a slave. And better yet, a tribute. She should be free to do whatever she wants with anyone, right?

And yet it doesn't feel like that.

I stared at my brother, and it filled me with so much anger that he had touched her.

And now he wants to buy her?!

"That will never happen." I said.

"Brother please! She deserves her freedom! She can't remain locked up in here forever! Let me buy her freedom."

"I will allow no such thing! My voice raised, an octave deeper. I closed my eyes and inhaled deeply to calm the rising storm inside me. I opened my eyes and stared blankly at him. "Sabrina will remain my slave until I deem it fit to give her back her freedom" "You're punishing her for nothing. She's not who you think she is. Sabrina is kind and doesn't have a single bone of evil in her body,"

"And you think you know that?"

"Yes. Yes I do. I have taken the time to know her better."

"I will be the judge of that."

Caldan sighed, his brows furrowed. "You don't know that."

"You're a child. Caldan. And no matter what you say, my word is final. You will not buy her!

"Please. I beg of you."

"No. If that's all you have to say, then leave."

"I'll do anything you ask of me. Anything at all, just please, grant this one request.

"I ask nothing of you, Caldan. My answer is final"

No one will take Sabrina away from here. I will never allow it. She's my slave. My tribute. And that will never change.

Sabrina wiped down the last of the marble tiles with a heavy sigh. She rose to her feet and took a few steps back, gazing at the sparkling floors.

"I'm getting real good at this," She said to herself, disdain lacing her tone.

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It's surely evening yet. And on paper, she's done with her duties for the day. And on paper, I should allow her to return to her

I stepped into the room and made my presence known. I didn't miss how she flinched, even before she turned around and met my give

"Your Majesty," She bowed, her head raised quickly.

Last night she looked like a fairy put of a fairytale. I couldn't get enough of looking at her, even before I walked up to her. And today, she's back to the drab grey gown the servants wore. Perhaps I should order her to do her duties in that pink dress. "How are you this evening?" I asked.

She paused. And she looked behind her.

An uncomfortable silence descended over our heads. She didn't just double check if she was the one I was talking to, right?

"I'm fine." She said, a faint dusting of pink over her cheeks. "Thank you."

"I see you've done the last of your tasks."

"Yes, your majesty. I just finished"

It's too early to let her go. And Caldan...I bet he's just waiting for her to walk out of here.

"I have one more task for you." I said. Her face fell and she frowned. "But before that, I have a question for you."

"Okay"

"Are you in love with Caldan?"

She froze. "I beg your pardon?"

"Didn't you hear me the first time?"

"No, I did. It's just....."

"Then I'm sure you can answer me.

She pursed her lips, a look of discomfort flitted across her face. "Well...um... that a personal question, your majesty. I unfortunately cannot give you answer. What does that mean?"

Has she fallen for him? If she hasn't, why would she need to hesitate so much? Why is her gaze shifting across the room, and her hands fidgeting with each other? "That's not answer." I said, my calm tone betraying the storm of emotions inside of me

It can't be.

She bit her lip so hard her teeth indented on the flesh of her lip. "... well [...

"Your majesty!" The door burst open and Nifra hurried in. I turned to her, annoyed that she has interrupted. She bowed, urgency in her mannerisms. "Your majesty! The left gates have been breached!" A breach. And at the worst timing ever.

"Thank you for informing me. I shall see to it right away." I said.

She nodded curtly but made no move to leave. I turned to Sabrina. And the sigh of relief she let out didn't go unnoticed by

You're retired for the night!" I said to her.

She bowed, "thank you, your majesty and goodnight. She wasted no second gathering her cleaning things and racing out of

the room.

5:04 PM σ

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I realized after she had left that she didn't give me an answer to my question.