

What has changed?

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Cassian seemed to sense he was intruding. He stood up and said, "I have something urgent to attend to. See you later."

After Cassian left, Alessandro sat on the edge of the bed and placed his hand on Abril's forehead to check for a fever. He had begun doing this every time he returned to their chambers, no matter how much she insisted she was fine.

"How is your wound? Does it hurt?"

"It still hurts."

"I'd like to see it. May I?"

Abril nodded.

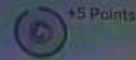
As she still couldn't move very well, Alessandro pulled back the blankets and helped her raise her nightgown. He could see her bare legs and undergarments. He looked at her face to gauge her expression. She seemed calm, with no trace of embarrassment.

"I wasn't expecting this," Alessandro thought as he helped her sit up so he could remove the bandage.

Abril winced as she sat up.

"That hurts," she complained.

What has changed?



"I'm sorry."

Alessandro thought the wound would heal faster due to her powers, but that wasn't the case. It was healing slowly.

"Do your injuries always take so long to heal?"

"Yes, although I think that's normal."

Alessandro applied a fresh bandage and asked, "Do you get sick often?"

"Not anymore, but when I was younger, yes. I always had a fever. I wasn't very healthy. But that changed as I grew up. Now I hardly ever get sick."

As he finished applying the bandage, Alessandro noticed small scars on Abril's legs. He touched them with his fingertips. Abril blushed. That was new to her. Though she didn't seem ashamed to let him see her body, she did blush when he touched her.

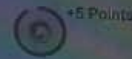
"How did you get these scars?"

"It was when I fell into the rose bushes three years ago."

Alessandro remembered that day. He hadn't helped her. Despite her being injured, he had punished her.

"Lie down," he said.

What has changed?



Abril obeyed, and Alessandro lowered her nightgown and covered her with the blankets.

"You must stay in bed until you recover. Try not to move too much."

"Yes I will."

"If you need anything, ask the maids. And if any of them is rude to you, let me know."

"Alright."

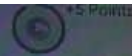
"I must go. Rest. I'll see you tonight."

To Abril, the king's kindness and concern were strange. Perhaps if it were at the beginning of their marriage, she might have thought it was because she was his wife. But after being ignored and forgotten for three years, it was hard to believe. She wondered if it was because of the child she was supposed to give him, but she dismissed that reason as well.

Abril looked at her left hand, where the marriage mark was visible. If she had died, if the king hadn't arrived in time, he would be free from this invisible bond that united them, and he could remarry his betrothed.

Abril sighed deeply and wondered, "What has changed? I don't understand. Until recently, His Majesty wanted me dead. Why is he so worried about me now?"

What has changed?



Abril had so many questions in her mind, so many things she wanted to ask the king. But she was also afraid to ask, afraid of the answer she might receive. She decided it was best to stay quiet and inconspicuous until she recovered.

Alessandro summoned Sirius. When he entered, he asked, "Why is her wound taking so long to heal? When I injured my hand, it was gone in two days. It's been a week, and hers is healing very slowly. Plus, she has several scars. I don't get it."

"Perhaps her magic prevents her from healing her own wounds."

"Healing magic hasn't worked on her either," Alessandro said.

"I believe her magic nullifies all other magic, though I don't know if she does it consciously or unconsciously. That's why magic doesn't work on her. I think that's why, when she went to the temple and touched the sphere of magic, there was no reaction. The sphere is a magical artifact. I think she nullified it, and that's why it seemed like she possessed no magic."

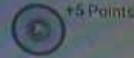
"And now what? Her wound is still not healing. What do we do?" The king asked, looking worried.

"We can only wait, Your Majesty."

"That wound... Will it scar?"



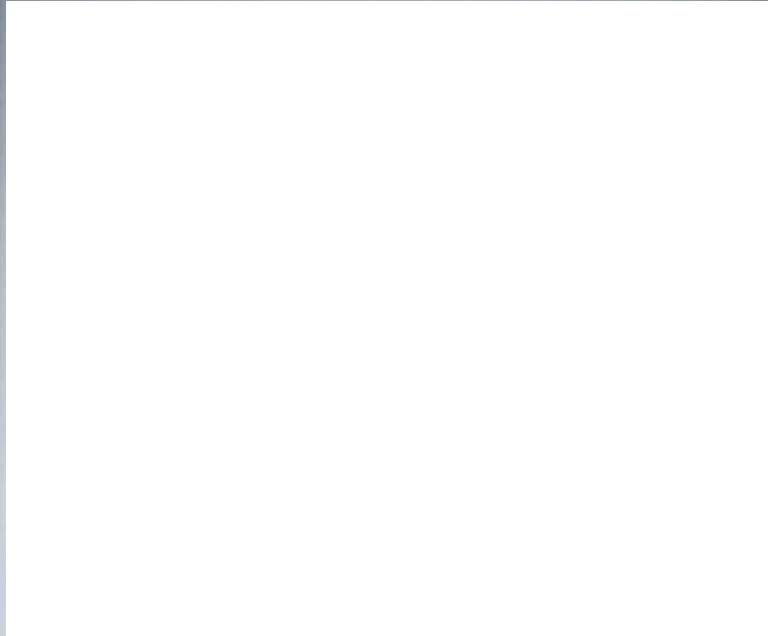
What has changed?



"It most likely will, since healing magic doesn't work on her."

"I don't want her to have another scar because of me. Find a way to prevent it."

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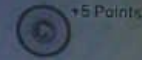
"But Your Majesty, I am a mage, not a healer."

"Well, from now on, you are. So stop wasting time and go do as I have asked."

Sirius left the king's office and wondered what the king had meant by saying he didn't want her to have another scar because of him.

At night fall, Alessandro returned to his room. He

What has changed?



thought Abril would be asleep, as it was quite late. However, she was standing on the balcony, gazing into the distance. Alessandro hurried to her side and said, "What do you think you're doing? I told you not to get out of bed."

Abril didn't answer.

Alessandro moved a little closer, placed his hand on her shoulder, and called her again, "Princess."

Abril still didn't respond. It was as if she couldn't hear him. Alessandro made her turn around and discovered her eyes were closed.

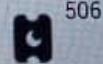
He waved his hand in front of her face and called her again, "Princess, what is wrong?"

Abril remained unresponsive, as if asleep. He shook her shoulder, causing her to wake up. As she opened her eyes, Abril wondered how she had gotten to the balcony and what she was doing there. She looked at Alessandro and asked, "What am I doing here?"

"I would like to know myself," he replied.



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