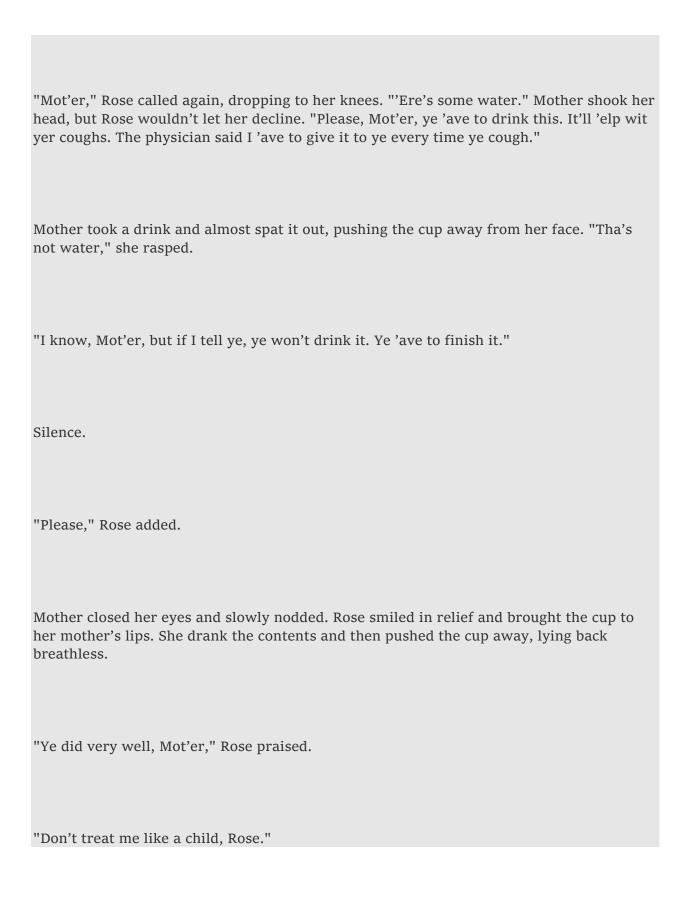
THE KING'S LOVER

Chapter 1: Rose

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Coughs.
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"Mot'er," Rose called, speeding out of the kitchen with a cup of some liquid. The liquid was slightly discolored, and pieces of leaves floated at the top of the drink.
Mother was an older woman sitting upright on a straw bed laid directly on the floor. She had ginger hair with streaks of white. There were wrinkles around her eyes, forehead, and the corners of her lips, which were even more visible as she coughed violently.
Her chest heaved as she coughed, her shoulders shook, and her face was red from the force of the coughs. As soon as the wave passed, she fell back, her energy depleted, and her chest rose and fell as she tried to catch her breath.



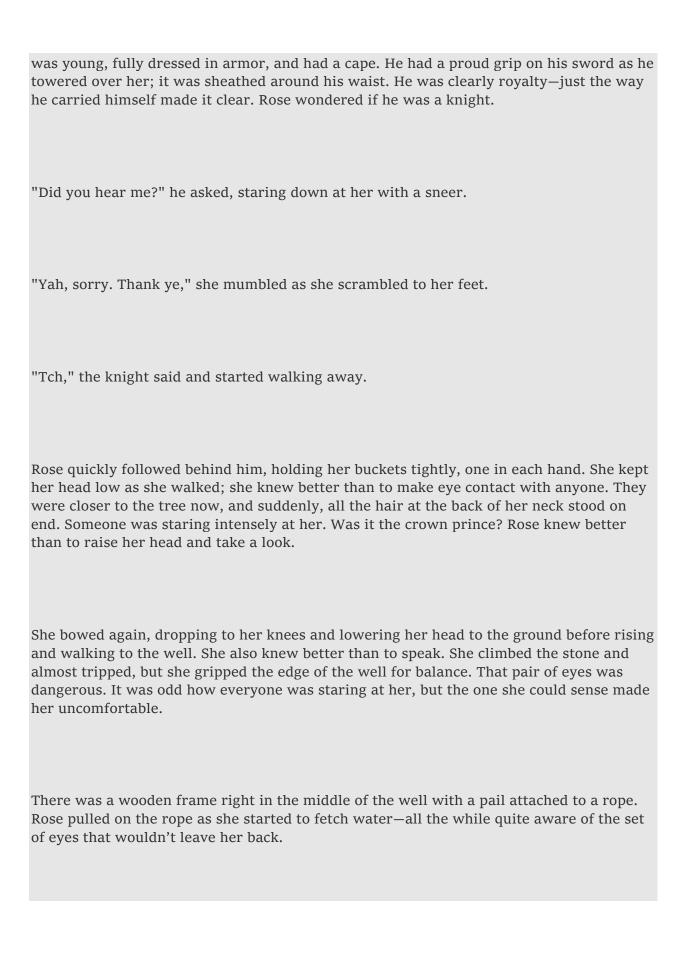


Rose smiled, leaned down, and kissed her mother on her forehead. "I will be back."
"Shoo," her mother said when Rose lingered at the door.
She chuckled and walked out of the room, making her way to the kitchen. They lived in a small cottage with two rooms. Hers was at the back; it also served as the storage room, and it was the smallest of the rooms. Her parents stayed in the main room, which served as the sitting area, the cooking area, and the dining area. They also had a front door and a back door, but Rose rarely used the front door. Her activities in the house centered around the back of it, and since she could go outside from her room, she almost never used the front door.
Rose picked up two buckets, one in each hand. "Mot'er," she called as she stepped out. "I will be right back." Her mother didn't respond, and Rose smiled but didn't stop walking.
Rose stopped abruptly as she looked down the path. She blinked, wondering if her eyes were deceiving her, but they weren't. Around the well were royal guards. She knew they were royal guards because of their attire. Should she go any closer? Unfortunately, she needed the water. Her mother was ill—she couldn't afford to use muddy water for her meal.
She swallowed and walked closer. They had already noticed her. A few of them gathered under the huge tree close to the well while others were scattered around. She didn't miss one of them who was seated on the ground with a cloth over his head and a hand under his head, but Rose didn't stare much—she knew better than to do that.

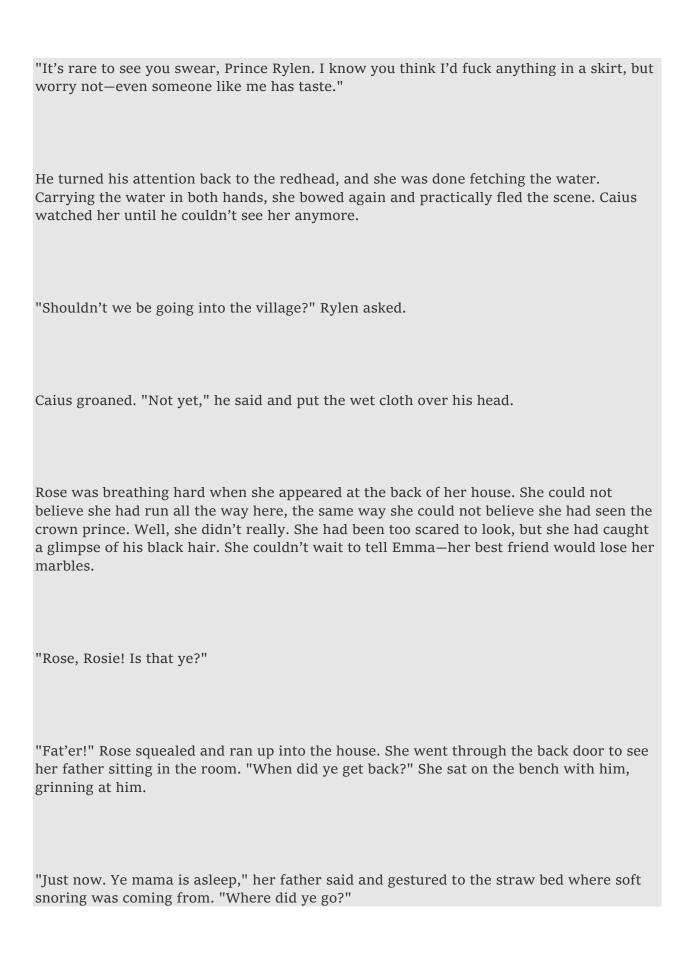
Horses could be seen eating grass, and a few of the men were pouring water over themselves. Rose understood—the heat recently had been just terrible. That's why the wells were drying up so fast, and Edenville didn't have any rivers.
"Who are they?" Rose mumbled to herself. She was only fifteen paces away now, and everyone had taken note of her presence—even the horses lifted their heads from the grass to look at her.
A few of the men moved forward, their aura menacing, and Rose dropped to her knees, kowtowing on the grass. She didn't say anything, just bent in that position as she waited for permission to fetch some water.
"Your Grace," a voice interrupted Caius' short nap.
"What is it, Prince Rylen?" he asked with clear irritation.
"A peasant girl wants to fetch some water."
"Huh?" Caius pulled the wet cloth away from his face. "And you needed to interrupt my nap for that?" His nose lifted in a sneer.
"Well, she's not moving any closer," Rylen replied.

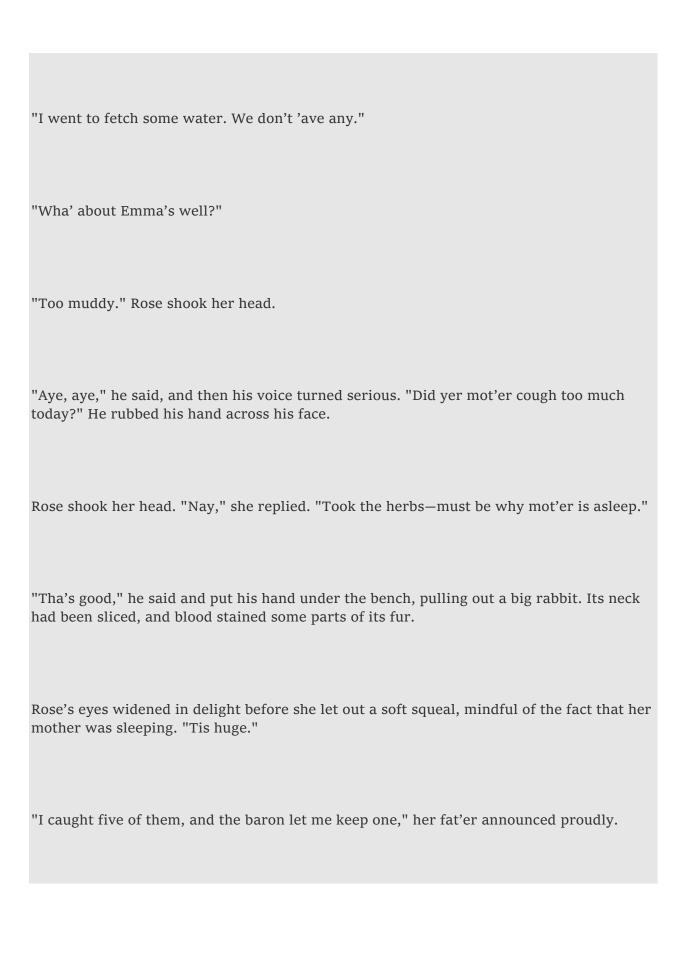
Caius turned his head in the direction Rylen pointed, and the only thing he could see was red hair. It gleamed as the sun hit it. Caius had never seen such red hair before, and for some reason, he wondered what it would feel like if he ran his fingers through it.
"You," he pointed to a random member of his group. "Go tell her she can approach."
Chapter 2: Plump Rump
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Rose heard footsteps moving closer, and her stomach knotted. It was both from the guard approaching her and a memory that had just popped into her head. Emma had told her a few days ago that the crown prince was coming to Edenville. She had dismissed it as wild talk; however, if she was indeed interrupting the crown prince while he was at the well... Rose shut her eyes in horror. What was he even doing in Edenville? "You," a voice said. "Yah," Rose replied but didn't move. "Raise your head," he said. "You can fetch water. His Royal Highness, the crown prince, has allowed a commoner like yourself to pass." Rose felt dizzy—she was almost about to pass out. The crown prince was really in Edenville and right in front of her. She slowly lifted her head. The guard in front of her



Caius didn't even blink as he stared, taking her in. She was pretty, he would say that, but something about her called to him, and by the discomfort he felt, it wasn't just his eyes that were interested. The first thing he noticed when she stepped closer was her freckles. He wanted to keep staring, but then she had kowtowed and turned her back to him.
The next thing he had noticed was the god-awful dress. It was no less than a piece of rag and had several patches of different materials. The dress was also worn out. The next thing he noticed was how slender she looked in the nasty dress.
He wanted her to turn around so he could get a better look, but no matter how hard he stared, she didn't turn. His eyes moved downward. She had a plump rump, and Caius had a flash of it lifted in the air for him. His forehead furrowed at the vividness of it.
"Don't even think about it," Rylen said.
Caius reluctantly tore his eyes from the redhead and turned to his cousin. It was crazy they were related—they looked nothing alike. While Caius had sleek black hair, his cousin had platinum blonde hair and blue eyes. Their characters were also very different. Rylen liked to play by the rules, whereas Caius was chaotic.
"Think about what?" Caius asked with a smirk.
"You know what I'm talking about. You're only in Edenville for three days—don't fucking think about it."





"Wow! I will make rabbit stew. Mot'er would like tha' very much."
"Yah," he replied and smiled tightly at her.