

# 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.

"Mot'er," Rose called again, dropping to her knees. "'Ere's some water." Mother shook her head, but Rose wouldn't let her decline. "Please, Mot'er, ye 'ave to drink this. It'll 'elp wit yer coughs. The physician said I 'ave to give it to ye every time ye cough."

Mother took a drink and almost spat it out, pushing the cup away from her face. "Tha's not water," she rasped.

"I know, Mot'er, but if I tell ye, ye won't drink it. Ye 'ave to finish it."

Silence.

"Please," Rose added.

Mother closed her eyes and slowly nodded. Rose smiled in relief and brought the cup to her mother's lips. She drank the contents and then pushed the cup away, lying back breathless.

"Ye did very well, Mot'er," Rose praised.

"Don't treat me like a child, Rose."

Rose smirked at her mother. "Truth be told, ye is. I've been takin' care of ye all this time." As she spoke, she pulled the covers up over her mother.

"I birthed ye. Don't ye even dare call me a wee thing."

Rose laughed. "Aye, aye, Mot'er. Ye ain't a child, so ye can stay alone while I fetch water from the well at the town's entrance."

"Wha's wrong wit the well in Emma's compound?"

"Muddy," Rose explained. "Everyone's usin' it since most of the wells are dry."

"But 'tis not dinner time yet," her mother said.

"Aye, but if I go now, I can fetch the clean water before it gets muddy. Don't worry, Father will be home soon, and I'll tell Emma to keep an ear out."

Her mother scoffed. "Who's worried?"

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

was young, fully dressed in armor, and had a cape. He had a proud grip on his sword as he towered over her; it was sheathed around his waist. He was clearly royalty—just the way he carried himself made it clear. Rose wondered if he was a knight.

"Did you hear me?" he asked, staring down at her with a sneer.

"Yah, sorry. Thank ye," she mumbled as she scrambled to her feet.

"Tch," the knight said and started walking away.

Rose quickly followed behind him, holding her buckets tightly, one in each hand. She kept her head low as she walked; she knew better than to make eye contact with anyone. They were closer to the tree now, and suddenly, all the hair at the back of her neck stood on end. Someone was staring intensely at her. Was it the crown prince? Rose knew better than to raise her head and take a look.

She bowed again, dropping to her knees and lowering her head to the ground before rising and walking to the well. She also knew better than to speak. She climbed the stone and almost tripped, but she gripped the edge of the well for balance. That pair of eyes was dangerous. It was odd how everyone was staring at her, but the one she could sense made her uncomfortable.

There was a wooden frame right in the middle of the well with a pail attached to a rope. Rose pulled on the rope as she started to fetch water—all the while quite aware of the set of eyes that wouldn't leave her back.

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."



"It's rare to see you swear, Prince Rylen. I know you think I'd fuck anything in a skirt, but worry not—even someone like me has taste."

He turned his attention back to the redhead, and she was done fetching the water. Carrying the water in both hands, she bowed again and practically fled the scene. Caius watched her until he couldn't see her anymore.

"Shouldn't we be going into the village?" Rylen asked.

Caius groaned. "Not yet," he said and put the wet cloth over his head.

Rose was breathing hard when she appeared at the back of her house. She could not believe she had run all the way here, the same way she could not believe she had seen the crown prince. Well, she didn't really. She had been too scared to look, but she had caught a glimpse of his black hair. She couldn't wait to tell Emma—her best friend would lose her marbles.

"Rose, Rosie! Is that ye?"

"Fat'er!" Rose squealed and ran up into the house. She went through the back door to see her father sitting in the room. "When did ye get back?" She sat on the bench with him, grinning at him.

"Just now. Ye mama is asleep," her father said and gestured to the straw bed where soft snoring was coming from. "Where did ye go?"

"I went to fetch some water. We don't 'ave any."

"Wha' about Emma's well?"

"Too muddy." Rose shook her head.

"Aye, aye," he said, and then his voice turned serious. "Did yer mot'er cough too much today?" He rubbed his hand across his face.

Rose shook her head. "Nay," she replied. "Took the herbs—must be why mot'er is asleep."

"Tha's good," he said and put his hand under the bench, pulling out a big rabbit. Its neck had been sliced, and blood stained some parts of its fur.

Rose's eyes widened in delight before she let out a soft squeal, mindful of the fact that her mother was sleeping. "Tis huge."

"I caught five of them, and the baron let me keep one," her fat'er announced proudly.

"Wow! I will make rabbit stew. Mot'er would like tha' very much."

"Yah," he replied and smiled tightly at her.