

K Lover 165

Chapter 165: Deliberate Mistakes

The day passed so slowly that Rose couldn't count the number of times she fell asleep. She was sure she slept twice before lunch and then thrice after lunch. By dinner, she was exhausted from sleeping too much. Rose hadn't thought that was possible beforehand.

She never thought a day would come when she would look forward to seeing the crown prince, but that was how she felt. As long as they played chess, even though the entirety of the game came with only losses on her end, Rose didn't mind. She would welcome any activity at this point.

When the time finally arrived, Rose found herself in front of the crown prince's room, the guards opening the door to let her in. It bothered her how nervous she felt whenever she was to walk through the doors, even though she had done it countless times already.

She walked into the room and immediately knew the crown prince wasn't in. It didn't look like he had been in the room for quite some time. The fireplace was dead, almost like it hadn't been lit for the entirety of the day, and with winter coming, there was starting to be a chill in the air.

The windows were closed, so it wasn't too cold. Rose wrapped her arms around herself. It seemed she would be waiting for him. She preferred this, but the times he was here before her always caught her off guard.

She walked into the room and saw that the chessboard was still exactly where she had left it, which was practically impossible unless the crown prince had requested it to be so. The servants would have cleaned it as soon as they got there, but it didn't look to have been touched.

Rose dropped down to the carpet, her eyes on the board. The chess pieces weren't even out of place. It was exactly as she had left it the night before—the crown prince's queen capturing her king.

Rose's brows knitted in concentration as she picked up the pieces and started to place them in their respective positions. She remembered clearly—the rooks to the corners and the king in the middle. Rose was just about to place the pawns when the door was thrown open.

She jerked up to her feet to welcome the crown prince, but it wasn't him. It was two young servants walking into the room with wood to light up the fireplace. They looked a little shocked to see her, but they both nodded before turning their gazes away.

Rose stepped out of the way and watched from the corner as they moved with practiced ease, pulling aside the iron grate and setting down the kindling: dry twigs, curled wood shavings, and a twist of linen scorched into char. One of them drew a piece of flint and a curved striker. Sparks leapt with each stroke until the tinder caught, smoldering into life with a thin thread of smoke. Carefully, they fed the flame, coaxing it until the fire took hold.

Rose watched every movement with keen eyes, and as soon as they lit the flames, it didn't take long for the room to grow warmer. The light smell of smoke filled the air. The servants closed back the iron grate and walked out of the room without saying a single word, while Rose just stood in the corner.

She stood there for a bit before walking back to the chessboard. She picked up from where she left off and didn't bother lifting herself off the floor. She just sat down with her arms crossed. She knew the crown prince would be here soon—since the servants came to light the fireplace, he would likely be here any moment.

She wasn't wrong because not long after she had the thought, the door was opened again, and Rose rushed to her feet. She stepped out a little, as the chairs stacked around this section kept her a little hidden.

She curtsied even before her eyes fell on the crown prince. He was surprisingly alone. "Your Majesty," she said.

He didn't say a word. All she heard were footsteps, and Rose lifted her head, standing to her full height as she was unable to beat the suspense. She kept her gaze on the floor, but she could still clearly see him walk to her.

Caius stopped in front of her and lifted her chin with his finger, forcing her to look him in the eyes. Rose stood frozen, and though all the crown prince did was study her face with intensity, it was still unnerving.

He slowly let go of her chin and walked past. Rose stood rooted to the spot until he had passed her completely. He stopped, and without turning, he whispered, "Come."

Rose nodded and slowly turned around to see him staring at her. He was missing his coat, and the deep blue tunic he wore underneath clung to his body. There was a dark leather belt around his waist. His breeches were well-made and tucked into high boots.

Rose nodded and walked forward as though being pulled by a string. However, he didn't wait for her as he walked to the chessboard and dropped to the carpet. Rose was a bit shocked the crown prince would sit on the floor, but he didn't just sit, he lay on the ground.

He lay on his side, propped up on one elbow, legs stretched out and crossed at the ankles—the picture of ease. After getting comfortable, his eyes lifted to her. She was still on her feet. Rose dropped down immediately and knelt by the chessboard, opposite from how he lay.

Her nightdress pooled around her legs, the soft material easing her knees as it pressed against the soft carpet. Rose rested her hands on her legs as she waited.

"I see you already arranged these," he whispered.

Rose nodded. His voice was thicker for some reason. The bass tone reverberated in the space. His short hair was cleanly cut, and the dark color drew attention to his face.

Rose noticed his stubble also looked neatly shaved, but she rarely studied his face, so she couldn't say if this was a usual occurrence or not. His scar was still prominent—even in the dark, one could not miss it.

Suddenly, his lips tugged into a smile, and she realized she was staring. She quickly looked down at the chessboard.

"Shall we begin?" Caius asked, his tone amused.

Rose nodded. This was weird, wasn't it? But here she was, acting as though it was nothing out of the ordinary. She moved a pawn. The crown prince always let her move the first piece. She didn't think it was generous of him; she didn't think anything he did was generous.

His expression didn't change, and he moved a pawn two paces forward. It didn't look like he was paying attention to the game, as she could feel his eyes locked onto hers.

"What did you do today?" he suddenly blurted after her third move.

Rose frowned and jerked her head upright in shock. She almost snapped something. "What?" she asked. She heard him, but she couldn't quite believe her ears.

"Hmm," he said and tilted his head back, watching her closely. "I asked what you did today," he repeated.

"Not much," Rose said. It wasn't that she replied out of spite, but she truly didn't do anything worth mentioning, and he would know.

She was also concerned that he was trying to have a casual conversation with her. It felt a little weird and almost awkward.

Caius narrowed his gaze at her response, obviously displeased. "What did you eat, then?" he asked. "I am certain your meals have been very good recently."

Rose didn't like the knowing tone in his voice. Did he expect her to say thank you? She wouldn't be surprised. "Yes," she replied easily, but didn't add more information.

Caius's gaze darkened at her curt response, but Rose wasn't here to answer his questions. Besides, she couldn't figure out what his goal was in trying to get her to speak more.

"That's my win," he said.

Rose nodded. It was longer than usual. He often tried to win in the shortest moves, but she made thirteen moves. Rose would know—she was counting.

"Yes, Your Majesty," she replied, her voice free from emotion.

"Would you ever get better?" he asked condescendingly.

Rose nodded and started to rearrange the pieces. She wasn't even angry. It was funny he threw a tantrum even though he was the one winning. When they were in their proper positions, she pulled her hand away from the chessboard.

"Make a move," he said. His voice sounded a bit annoyed.

Rose made a move, and she saw his eyes widen in shock. It was something she had thought of during the day. She didn't think it would help her win, but if she was going to lose anyway, there was no reason not to make deliberate mistakes she could learn from.