

# THE KING'S LOVER

## Chapter 19: Summoned

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Rose made her way to the servants' quarters as quietly as she could. It wasn't as busy as when she left, but some servants were still awake, and a few gave her odd stares as she approached. Rose clutched the robe she was wearing a little tighter. It was flimsy, and the night was a little cold.

There wasn't any sign of Edith or any of the maids she had seen earlier. Not knowing what to do or where to stay, she made her way to the kitchen and sat on one of the benches. She pressed her knees together under the table and placed her head on the table. She didn't know if she could stay there, but since no one asked her to leave, she would take that as a yes.

It took her a while to fall asleep. She was exhausted from the journey, but she was worried. She was certain the crown prince was angry, but all he had done was chase her out. Rose grabbed her head. He wasn't that forgiving; she was certain she would pay for it one way or another. She just hoped it would be her and not her father.

"Wake up!"

Rose jerked, but her body was sluggish, and her eyes didn't open immediately. They flew open the instant her hair was yanked, lifting her head off the table. Rose looked eyes with Martha, who let go of her hair.

"I said wake up!" she stated.

Rose rubbed her eyes, trying her best not to react to the stinging pain at the back of her head. The kitchen was quite busy; a servant was cooking by the fireplace, and others were rushing in and out of the kitchen. Rose still felt drowsy, so she knew it wasn't that she had overslept—they just woke up pretty early.

"Edna, give her some dishes to wash. If she's here, she might as well make herself useful."

"Are you sure?" Edna asked. "Her back must still be sore from last night."

This caused snickers to erupt from the rest of the maids. Whispers echoed in the small kitchen, and all Rose could do was pretend she didn't hear them.

"That's not your concern," Martha said, cutting the whispers short. "If she's here, she will work."

"Well, I don't know about that," Edna replied. "If Mister Henry asks, I'll say it's you."

Martha narrowed her eyes at her, and Edna turned her face to Rose. "Come here, Rose. If you don't start now, you won't finish the dishes in time for breakfast."

Rose slowly rose from the chair and made her way to Edna. It was no lie; there was a mountain of dishes to wash, but it didn't look like she had to do it alone. Rose didn't hate it; if she had chores to do, at least she wouldn't think of her other failures.

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Rose sat at the foot of the well at the back of the castle, close to the servants' kitchen. She was still dressed in her clothes from last night. They were wet and sticking to her body, mostly around her legs. After she was done with the dishes, Martha didn't think it was enough and had asked her to fetch water too.

She squinted her eyes as she stared at the sky. It was dawn not long ago, and she could see the sun peeking over the horizon. The heat was nice. She closed her eyes as she took a deep breath. Was this how she was going to live from now on?

Rose had lost count of how many times she had taken water to the kitchen, and the drum she was filling didn't seem to be getting close to the top. She was tired, famished and a nice bed to lie on would be nice. She had only just sat when she heard a voice. Rose sighed; she couldn't catch a break.

"What are you doing here?" Martha asked as she marched over.

It was pretty clear what she was doing, so Rose didn't bother to dignify Martha's question with a response. She didn't answer to the little lady. She only did as she said because what else could she do? She was in a strange place, didn't know the rules, and couldn't even speak because the maids always snickered whenever she did.

"I am speaking to you," Martha said with a glare. She walked closer and pulled on Rose's arm, lifting her.

Rose pretended to stagger, being close to the well, it looked like she might fall in. The sheer panic and fear that appeared on Martha's face gave her some respite from the hellish duties she had to endure this morning.

She used the edge of the well to support herself. "I am ex'austed. I am only takin' a little break. I will get back to work soon enough."

"I am not calling you for more duties," she said. "The Queen has summoned us to the courtyard. We are to go there now."

Rose met Martha's eyes. "'Ow does that concern me?"

"She said everyone in this household. You're in this household, Rose. If the Queen calls, you come running."

Rose looked at her clothes. She couldn't appear in front of the Queen like this. It was the Queen of Velmount. It would be disgraceful and disrespectful, but before she could comment on this, Martha grabbed her again and pulled her into the castle.

"Wait," Rose cried, but they were already through the side door.

"Whatever it is, it can wait. If the Queen gets to the courtyard before the both of us..." She turned to look at Rose. "I like my head on my neck."

Rose swallowed the rest of her words. If Martha didn't think there was anything wrong with her clothes, then it must be fine. She let the maid lead her toward the courtyard.

The courtyard was located in the middle of the castle. A huge oak tree stood in the center. Its branches stretched until they almost touched the walls. The huge oak cast a shade over most of the open space in the courtyard. There was a fountain at the right edge of the courtyard. The rushing water was the only other sound besides the chirping of birds coming from the oak tree.

The maids and manservants lined up. The men on one side and the women on the other. Martha placed her at the extreme end and rushed up to the other side. Rose tried to stretch her neck to see where Martha was headed, but the steward announced the presence of the Queen.

## Chapter 20: The Queen

Rose didn't see him walk into the courtyard, and it wasn't until he spoke that she noticed his presence. "Her Royal Majesty, Queen Violeta Ravenor."

Rose thought it was weird that the steward had to announce her. Everyone knew who was coming, but maybe this was one of the things about royals she couldn't understand.

The Queen didn't walk in alone. There were three ladies with her—one on her left, her right, and behind her. They were dressed differently from the maids, and it was clear they were nobles. They walked with their chins in the air and stared at the maids with contempt.

Rose immediately copied the movements of the servants, bending her head and her knees. She did her best to hold her dress up but failed woefully, so she just kept her hands at her sides. After the curtsy, she noticed the maids took their hands from their sides and held them in front while keeping their heads down. None dared to make eye contact with the Queen.

Their clothes bothered Rose. They were dressed impeccably. Though worn, their dresses were clean, and each had an apron on. Compared to what she had on, Rose was embarrassed. It didn't help that the duties she did that morning had made the edges of the robe wet and dirty. Rose shut her eyes and tried to make herself appear smaller. She stepped backward a little, hoping she could hide behind the maid next to her, but she noticed it gave the line a strange curve, so she stepped forward again. The maid next to her shot her a look but didn't say anything.

The gravel made a crunching sound as Queen Violeta stepped on it. She approached the maids' line with her ladies-in-waiting surrounding her. The space suddenly felt hot, and

all Rose wanted to do was flee. However, she managed to hold back and stayed rooted in her spot.

Suddenly, the Queen stopped only about three feet in front of her. This was too close for Rose, and she could feel sweat trickle down her back. She swallowed as she waited. The tension was eating her up. She had hoped she wouldn't be noticed, but with the way she was dressed, it was highly unlikely.

"Who are you?" Queen Violeta asked. Her voice was soft, but she spoke at an annoying pitch that felt too sharp for the ears.

Rose waited for a moment, knowing she wasn't supposed to speak, but when no one said anything she spoke, after all the question was addressed to her. "Yer Majesty, my na—"

The sound echoed through the courtyard, scaring the birds off the trees. Rose's eyes watered, and she held her stinging cheek. She didn't need anyone to tell her it was red. The Queen had slapped her. Rose's head churned with this.

"Henry," Violeta called. "Who is this thing that dares to speak directly to me, and what is it doing in my castle?"

Violeta narrowed her eyes at the young woman who bowed in front of her. She knew exactly who she was; Henry had told her everything as soon as she was awake, and she was the reason she had called all the maids and manservants to the courtyard. She wanted to see who the prince had brought in.

Violeta was not only disappointed by how she appeared in front of her, but all she needed was one look to know this was nothing but a peasant. Caius had brought a peasant into the royal castle. Violeta wanted her out, and she would make sure that happened.

Henry rushed forward. "I am very sorry, Your Majesty, but Rose here is unaware of the rules, and she is only here because of the crown prince."

"I don't care. Get her out of my sight and out of the castle." Turning to one of her ladies-in-waiting, the Queen said, "Wipe this filth off my hand."

Henry looked torn. "Please have mercy, Your Majesty," Henry said with his head bowed even lower. "I will discipline her properly so that this won't repeat itself, but the crown prince has given orders not to let her out of the castle."

Queen Violeta's eyes narrowed. "Get her out of my sight."

"As you wish, Your Majesty." Henry bowed and turned to Rose, who still had her palm on her face with a dazed expression. "Come."

Rose moved like a puppet on strings, following behind Henry. He led her out of the courtyard and toward the servants' quarters. It wasn't until they got there that he stopped and turned to face her.



"Are you out of your mind? I understand that you grew up in the backwoods, but I'm sure it is not completely devoid of nobles. You were in the presence of the Queen of Velmount. You should know not to speak to the Queen directly."

Henry paused and pulled out a handkerchief to wipe his forehead. "You're lucky she only slapped you and didn't ask that you be whipped in the courtyard. You're not to speak to the Queen, even when asked a direct question. Don't look at her; just curtsy and obey every order she gives you. Do you understand?" Henry asked.

Rose nodded slowly. The slap had hurt, but even more so was the humiliation. "I didn't mean to be rude to 'er Majesty," Rose said.

"I know," Henry said. "And I know you'd rather not be here, but if you do what the crown prince wants, you'll be out of here in no time."

Rose gave him a puzzled look. Did he know about what happened last night? However, she didn't ask; she simply nodded.

"Also, what are you wearing?" he asked in horror.

Rose looked down. "I only brought the clothes on my back. I don't have anything else to wear, and I—"

"I get it," Henry interrupted. "I will speak to Edith and Martha."

"And a bed would be nice," Rose added. If Henry was listening to her requests, she might as well make the most of it.

"What are you talking about?" he asked.

"A bed," she mumbled. "I 'ad to sleep in the kitchen last nig't. Mart'a didn't like that tis morning."

"You weren't given a place to sleep?" Henry asked darkly.

Rose's eyes widened as she realized. It wasn't an order or anything like that; the maids just didn't tell her where she could sleep. "W'en I returned, I didn't see Mart'a or Edna, so I just stayed in the kitchen," Rose replied as she tried to diffuse the situation. The girls already hated her; she didn't want to give them more reasons to.