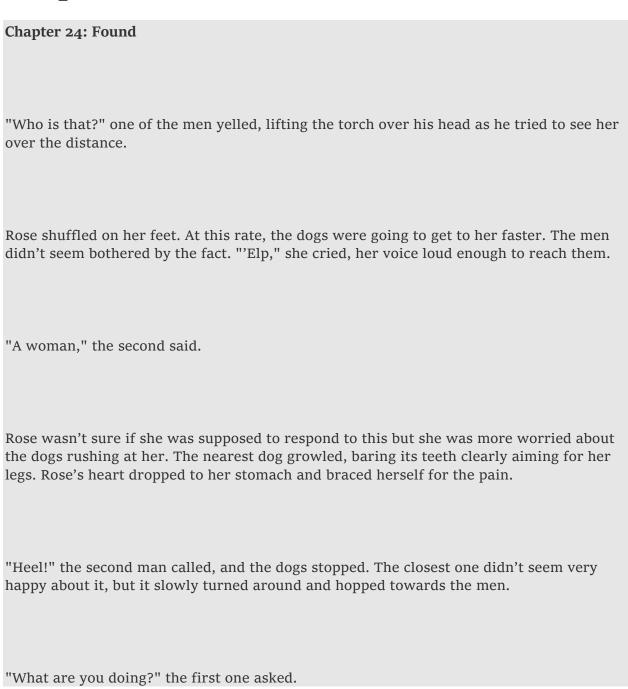
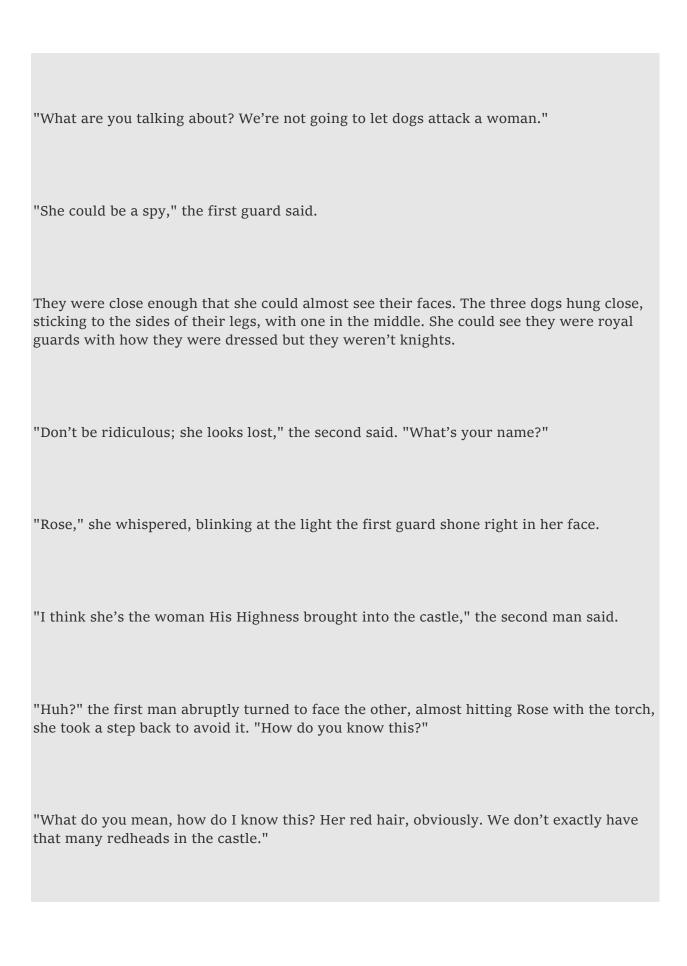
THE KING'S LOVER

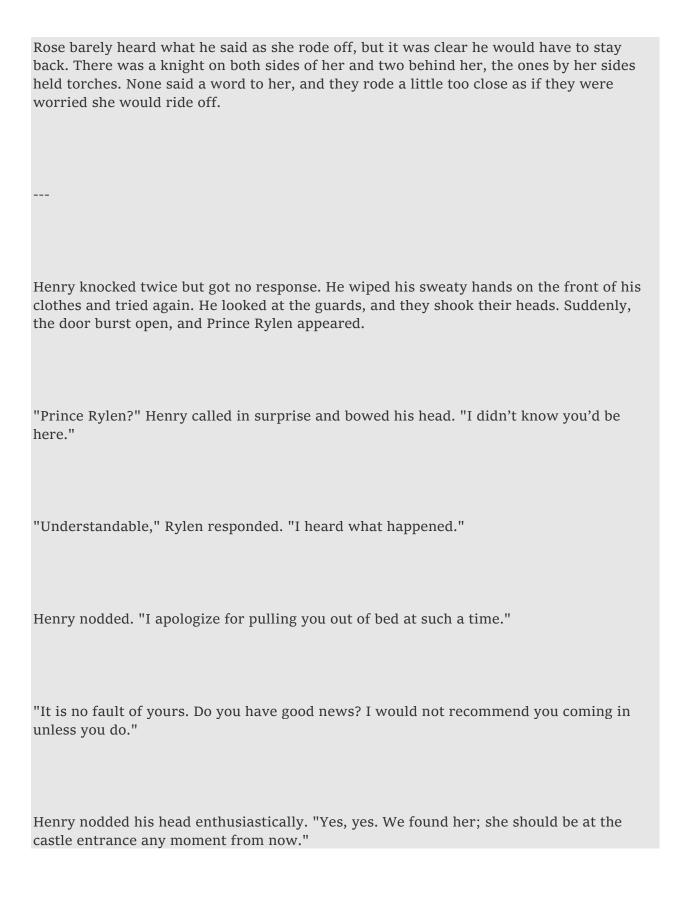
Chapter 24: Found





The first turned to face her again, scrunching up his nose. "What's so special about her?" Then his eyes glinted. "Maybe I can find out."
"Get a hold of yourself!" the second man scolded, pulling him backward. Rose was grateful; there was a weird stench coming from the first guard.
"What are you doing here?" the second guard asked her.
Rose didn't miss the sword around his waist. She wondered if they were guards patrolling this area. "I don't know. I fell and followed the walls and it led me 'ere," she mumbled.
He narrowed his eyes, unconvinced. "Don't roam so far at night, especially around here. The dogs attack anything they see. Come, I'll take you to the" The rest of his words were drowned out by the sound of horses approaching them.
"What's that?" the first guard asked.
"Knights," the other whispered.
"What's going on here?" one of them asked as they stopped the horses abruptly, raising dust into the air.

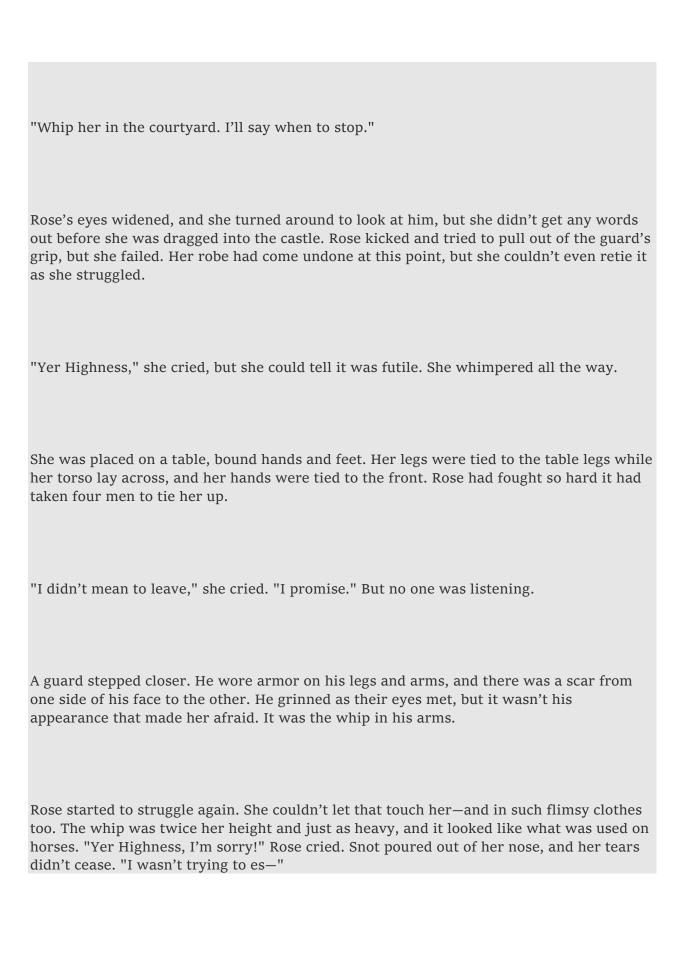
"You!" a familiar voice yelled, jumping off his horse.
"T'omas," Rose whispered under her breath.
"Have you lost your mind?" he yelled as he grabbed her arm, pulling her toward the horse and completely ignoring the guards standing next to her.
Rose didn't fight it. She just let him pull her. She could count at least five of them. Did the crown prince send them out to look for her? Well, then it was a good idea she didn't think of escaping. There was no way she would outrun knights on horses.
"Get on!" he yelled.
Rose pulled her arm from his grasp and lifted herself upward. She almost screamed at the pain that jolted through her shoulder, but she managed to keep it in by biting the corner of her lips. She safely got on the horse, and Thomas smacked the rear of the horse.
Rose yelped as she jerked backward; she would have fallen off if her grip on the reins hadn't been tight enough. She quickly regained control and adjusted on the horse even as it kept galloping away.
"Take her to the castle now! I will find some way to get there."



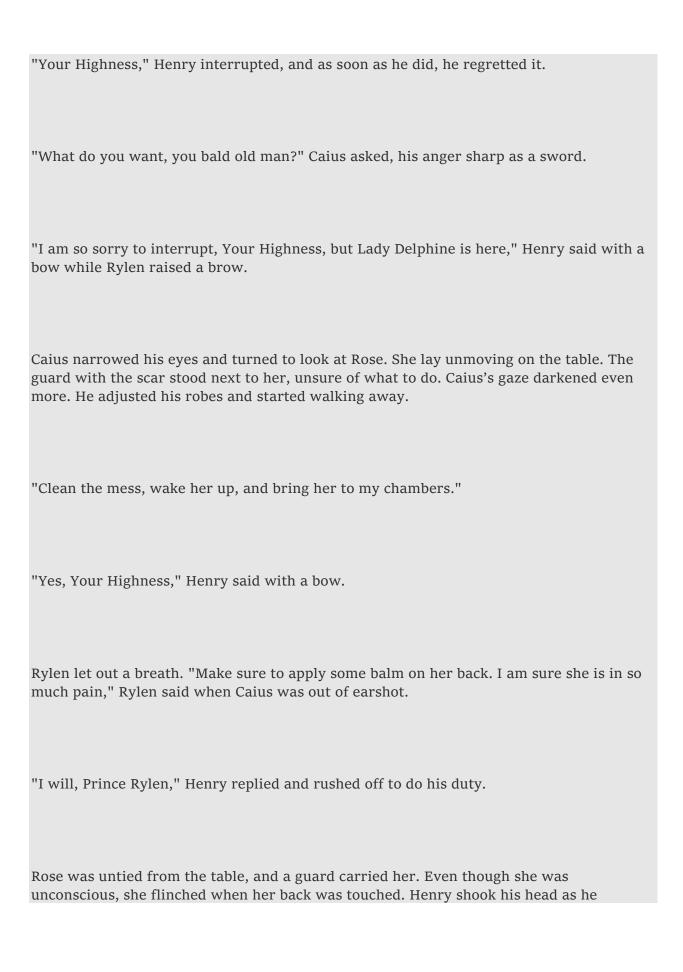
"What did you say?" a louder voice asked. Caius slowly rose to his feet.
"We found her," Henry repeated, his eyes glued to his shoes.
Caius stretched out his hand, and Henry knew exactly what he meant. He moved quickly, picking up the crown prince's coat and carefully draping it over his shoulders. Henry took a step back and bowed.
Caius marched out of the room, and Rylen let out a sigh behind him. He would rather go to bed, but something told him it would be best to accompany his cousin. He had a more sinister look than when he came up with the rule that almost got the poor girl's father killed.
He could tell the crown prince had no plans to let her off easy, but Rylen still couldn't comprehend why the crown prince had such an interest in her. At first, he had thought he was simply angry that he had been refused, but to bring her all the way to the castle was completely different situation.
They walked down the stairs, out of the wing, and toward the main entrance. None said a word the entire time, with Henry leading the way. The guards straightened their backs as the crown prince approached, and even before he got close to the entrance doors, they were thrown wide open.
Chapter 25: It Hurts

Chapter 25: It Hurts Rose was getting down from the horse when the doors opened. Suddenly, a hand yanked her by the wrist and pulled her forward. It was one of the knights that had rode with her. He pulled her unnecessarily hard even though she wasn't resisting. He let go, and she fell to the floor, hitting her elbow on the hard ground. A cry of pain escaped her lips. It was the elbow of the shoulder that hurt. She lifted her arm and was about to inspect it when she felt pain in her scalp as someone pulled her hair upwards, lifting her off the ground. Rose grabbed her hair immediately, tears pooling in her eyes as she fought the urge not to scream right in the crown prince's face. His gaze was dark as he locked eyes with her. The scar on the side of his chin gave him an ominous look in the dark. Rose felt chills all the way to her toes. The tears that had been hanging on her lashes fell down her face. Caius smiled, but it didn't reach his eyes, and his smile was even scarier. Rose opened her mouth, but she found that she couldn't speak. It didn't help that his grip around her hair tightened. Unable to contain the pain anymore, Rose tried to free herself from his grasp, but his grip only tightened. "I told you the next time you'd pull such a stunt, you should be ready for the consequences," Caius said and tossed her onto the ground. Rose landed on the side of her face. She couldn't move her hand in time to protect herself.

Her head bounced as it hit the floor, and she tasted blood. She had cut herself.



Rose gasped, sealing the rest of her words as the whip landed on her back. But that wasn't all—the tip went underneath the table and onto her back again. Rose screamed. She had never experienced such pain in her life. It was like she had been seared. It burned, it hurt, it felt like she had been split open.
But the guard wasn't done. He lifted his hand again and brought it down. Rose screamed, but no sound made it out. Her eyes were bloodshot, and her clothes ripped in places the whip touched. He lifted his hand again, and Rose thought she might die here. There was no way she would be able to take another.
"That's enough!" a voice called out, but it wasn't the crown prince.
Rose's eyes rolled upward as she lost consciousness.
Caius shot dark eyes at his cousin. "Prince Rylen," he whispered under his breath. "What do you think you're doing?"
"If you break her, how would she do what you want, Your Grace?" Prince Rylen asked, his blue eyes sharp in the night light.
"What I do is none—"





A scoff came from the corner, and a voice said, "Serves her right! Next time, she will know better than to try to escape."