

# THE KING'S LOVER

## Chapter 24: Found

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"Who is that?" one of the men yelled, lifting the torch over his head as he tried to see her over the distance.

Rose shuffled on her feet. At this rate, the dogs were going to get to her faster. The men didn't seem bothered by the fact. "'Elp," she cried, her voice loud enough to reach them.

"A woman," the second said.

Rose wasn't sure if she was supposed to respond to this but she was more worried about the dogs rushing at her. The nearest dog growled, baring its teeth clearly aiming for her legs. Rose's heart dropped to her stomach and braced herself for the pain.

"Heel!" the second man called, and the dogs stopped. The closest one didn't seem very happy about it, but it slowly turned around and hopped towards the men.

"What are you doing?" the first one asked.

"What are you talking about? We're not going to let dogs attack a woman."

"She could be a spy," the first guard said.

They were close enough that she could almost see their faces. The three dogs hung close, sticking to the sides of their legs, with one in the middle. She could see they were royal guards with how they were dressed but they weren't knights.

"Don't be ridiculous; she looks lost," the second said. "What's your name?"

"Rose," she whispered, blinking at the light the first guard shone right in her face.

"I think she's the woman His Highness brought into the castle," the second man said.

"Huh?" the first man abruptly turned to face the other, almost hitting Rose with the torch, she took a step back to avoid it. "How do you know this?"

"What do you mean, how do I know this? Her red hair, obviously. We don't exactly have that many redheads in the castle."

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.

"Thomas," 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."

Rose barely heard what he said as she rode off, but it was clear he would have to stay back. There was a knight on both sides of her and two behind her, the ones by her sides held torches. None said a word to her, and they rode a little too close as if they were worried she would ride off.

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Henry knocked twice but got no response. He wiped his sweaty hands on the front of his clothes and tried again. He looked at the guards, and they shook their heads. Suddenly, the door burst open, and Prince Rylen appeared.

"Prince Rylen?" Henry called in surprise and bowed his head. "I didn't know you'd be here."

"Understandable," Rylen responded. "I heard what happened."

Henry nodded. "I apologize for pulling you out of bed at such a time."

"It is no fault of yours. Do you have good news? I would not recommend you coming in unless you do."

Henry nodded his head enthusiastically. "Yes, yes. We found her; she should be at the castle entrance any moment from now."

"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 a 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

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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.

"Whip her in the courtyard. I'll say when to stop."

Rose's eyes widened, and she turned around to look at him, but she didn't get any words out before she was dragged into the castle. Rose kicked and tried to pull out of the guard's grip, but she failed. Her robe had come undone at this point, but she couldn't even retie it as she struggled.

"Yer Highness," she cried, but she could tell it was futile. She whimpered all the way.

She was placed on a table, bound hands and feet. Her legs were tied to the table legs while her torso lay across, and her hands were tied to the front. Rose had fought so hard it had taken four men to tie her up.

"I didn't mean to leave," she cried. "I promise." But no one was listening.

A guard stepped closer. He wore armor on his legs and arms, and there was a scar from one side of his face to the other. He grinned as their eyes met, but it wasn't his appearance that made her afraid. It was the whip in his arms.

Rose started to struggle again. She couldn't let that touch her—and in such flimsy clothes too. The whip was twice her height and just as heavy, and it looked like what was used on horses. "Yer Highness, I'm sorry!" Rose cried. Snot poured out of her nose, and her tears didn't cease. "I wasn't trying to es—"

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—"

"Your Highness," Henry interrupted, and as soon as he did, he regretted it.

"What do you want, you bald old man?" Caius asked, his anger sharp as a sword.

"I am so sorry to interrupt, Your Highness, but Lady Delphine is here," Henry said with a bow while Rylen raised a brow.

Caius narrowed his eyes and turned to look at Rose. She lay unmoving on the table. The guard with the scar stood next to her, unsure of what to do. Caius's gaze darkened even more. He adjusted his robes and started walking away.

"Clean the mess, wake her up, and bring her to my chambers."

"Yes, Your Highness," Henry said with a bow.

Rylen let out a breath. "Make sure to apply some balm on her back. I am sure she is in so much pain," Rylen said when Caius was out of earshot.

"I will, Prince Rylen," Henry replied and rushed off to do his duty.

Rose was untied from the table, and a guard carried her. Even though she was unconscious, she flinched when her back was touched. Henry shook his head as he

watched the guards carry her. It was such an unfortunate thing she had caught the attention of the crown prince.

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Rose's eyes flew open. It felt like her soul had been shoved into her body with enough force to break bones. She turned her head to the side, coughing. Something strong had been held up against her nose.

"Finally, she is awake."

Rose stopped mid-cough as the pain registered. Her eyes watered, and she let out a small scream. "It 'urts! It burns!"

"I know." She felt a hand against her cheek. Rose looked up to see Edna looking down at her. "The guards brought you. We don't have much time. You have to get to His Highness's chambers now. It took some time to wake you up."

Rose looked around. She was in her room, on her bed. There was a lamp on the ground, but it didn't brighten the room enough.

"We already cleaned you up and put some balm on your back. It will take a while for it to take effect, but bear with it for now," Edna said and stretched out her hand.

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