

K Lover 251

Chapter 251: Lustful Lunatic

Rose got ready earlier than she needed to, eating only a little of her dinner because she was too anxious to eat—but more importantly, because she wanted to get ready well ahead of time.

The best time to check for maps or anything that would help her get away from the crown prince would be before he came to the room. If she left earlier than normal, she would have even more time to search the crown prince's bedchambers.

After she was all dressed, Rose made her way there. She didn't miss the stares the guards gave her, but she was here on a mission. Their stares hadn't bothered her before; they didn't bother her now. She was more concerned that they would stop her from entering, but they didn't turn her away as she had suspected.

When the door closed behind her and she knew no one else was in the room but her, Rose headed for the shelves filled with books. She didn't know what she was looking for, but she scanned through them, going through rolled papers, books, and documents.

Words, words, and more words. Nothing made sense to her, and the more she scanned through pages, the dizzier she got. One thing was certain though—nothing looked like a map.

Rose had to work carefully, which took more time. The crown prince didn't knock when he entered the room, which meant she only had a very short time from the moment she heard the sound of the door opening.

As soon as she was done with a book, Rose was quick to return it. She even went through the drawers but came up with nothing. She searched, looking to the door every time.

When the doors opened, Rose was exhausted from going all over the room—through shelves, drawers; she would have checked the wardrobes and under the bed if it would help—but it didn't take her long to figure out that what she was looking for wasn't in here.

She stood with her arms around herself, hoping she didn't give anything away. She glanced back, but nothing seemed out of place—she had made sure of that.

Mister Henry walked in first, and Caius wasn't too far behind him. Rose's jaw tightened as her gaze rested on him. He caught her gaze immediately, and it felt like time slowed.

The crown prince was dressed casually—a coat over his tunic, breeches, and high boots. He was missing the gold band, but Rose knew he didn't wear it unless there was an occasion.

He moved a hand to his beard, and the corner of his lips lifted. Rose realized she was staring.

"Your Majesty," she said with a curtsey, locking her eyes to the floor.

She'd rather be elsewhere, but Rose didn't want him to know anything was amiss. She didn't want to upset her plan before she even had the chance to execute it.

"Henry," Caius called, interrupting the steward's words. "You're dismissed." He handed his coat to the older man

Henry didn't even look shocked as he accepted the coat. He just glanced at Rose and nodded his head. He bowed and quietly left the room.

Rose stood to her full height, clutching her dress, but she didn't lift her head to look at the crown prince. She heard his footsteps and could feel him come closer.

She closed her eyes so tightly her lids started to hurt. He stopped in front of her, not saying a word still. Rose got even more anxious—she didn't think she had done something wrong, but why was there this overwhelming feeling to apologize?

Unable to take the suspense anymore, Rose lifted her gaze and was met with Caius's intense stare. She was so startled she almost lost her footing, but Caius grabbed her waist and pulled her to himself.

Rose placed her palms on his chest, more for support than anything else—but it might have looked like she was trying to push him away. The way his eyes darkened made her realize he had misunderstood.

Rose wanted to rectify this, but it immediately occurred to her that his actions didn't make any sense. She was the one who wasn't allowed to see her sick mother—why was he the one acting terribly offended?

Rose tried to take a step back, but she couldn't—not with the crown prince's tight grip on her waist. It was also unsettling how he still hadn't spoken to her.

He pressed her closer to his body, and Rose couldn't help the jolt of horror she felt. How was he already hard? He had the look of someone who could kill, but he was still just a lustful lunatic.

It was truly all she was here for—to satisfy his never-ending lust. She knew that, but it was still very depressing to have clear proof. The crown prince saw her as nothing more than that.

His other hand gripped the back of her head, and he kissed her, crushing her arms between them. It was the same oppressive kiss—the one that left her out of breath. Not just that, but it made her feel like her lungs had been pulled out of her chest.

Rose struggled against him when her lungs could no longer handle the lack of air. When he finally broke the kiss, Rose took a deep breath, her face flushed. It almost felt like she was breathing for the first time.

Caius moved his lips to the side of her neck and kissed her hard. Rose squirmed at the sensation. She hated how her body was already reacting, as though anticipating what was happening next.

Suddenly, she was lifted and tossed onto the bed. Rose bounced, the pillow supporting her head. She didn't even get the chance to get her bearings before she heard the sound of the crown prince unbuckling his belt.

Rose's vision blurred. She suddenly felt queasy.

"Your Majesty," Rose called.

Caius blinked, as though snapping out of some trance. He gritted his teeth and hovered over her. He kissed her again, and Rose felt the queasiness start to fade.

Chapter 252: What Did He Want?

Caius stood up from the bed. Rose lay with a dazed look on her face. Her face was flushed, and her lips were red. Caius was starting to think that perhaps red was his favorite color—or Rose just wore it well. Be it her hair, the freckles on her cheeks, or the red marks he left on her skin after their lovemaking.

He frowned at this odd thought because, no matter what she looked like during sex, he knew she wanted nothing more than to leave. She didn't want to be here in the first place.

He was out of it and certainly not satisfied, even after he had his way—but he knew it was best to stop now. More for his sake than even hers.

He had thought she wouldn't come to him, and then when he came close, she tried to push him away. Caius had completely lost it then. It was hard to put into words how he felt, but he was suddenly reminded of times he didn't want to think about.

She blinked and pushed herself to a sitting position, pulling her legs to herself. She wrapped the robe around her, and Caius didn't miss her body language.

It reminded him of the first time. He hadn't cared then—he could take her whenever he wanted. That was what he wanted after all. But now it was hard to ignore the tight feeling in his chest, as though it was hard to breathe.

He wanted her—there was no doubt about it—but he didn't think it was in the simple way he thought. Having her here no longer seemed to be enough.

What did he want?

He knew he didn't want to let her go. He could give a lot of reasons for that. No one turned him on as much as she did, and he knew he could never get enough of her.

However, there was more—which was as surprising as it was annoying. He enjoyed playing chess with her, the way she furrowed her brows when she concentrated, how hard she tried even though she could never beat him.

He had seen her smile a little, but Caius realized he didn't know what her laugh sounded like. He ran a hand through his hair.)

What was he doing, standing here having these thoughts? What did these thoughts have to do with anything?

Caius turned away from the bed and walked to the washroom. He didn't turn around even once.

Rose lifted her head and watched the crown prince retreat. Was he done? she mentally asked herself. It didn't matter—if he was leaving, she wasn't going to wait around to find out if she had been dismissed.

When she could no longer see him, Rose got off the bed. She winced as she stood to her feet. At least it was the bed this time. It was only a few days, and she would be away from him. It didn't mean she would escape him forever, but a few days to see her mother was all she needed.

She made her way to the door and out of the bedchambers. Rose got to her room and cleaned up. She felt exhausted as she climbed into bed.

Today was futile. Welma was truly her only hope, but she doubted the maid would be able to find anything useful. She buried her face in her pillow. She didn't even have the energy to cry.

She recalled what Welma had said about the Queen trying to get Caius to marry. Rose knew exactly how she felt about this. Perhaps, if the crown prince married, she might be free of him forever.

It was great news. Perhaps he would be too busy with his wife to come after her when she escaped. It was wishful thinking but it brought a smile to her lips.

Rose glanced at the fireplace—the fire was dying out. The weather was getting much colder now. It felt like any day now, it would start to snow. Rose knew it would be harder to travel once the ground froze.

With her thoughts going all over the place, it was particularly hard for her to fall asleep. When she eventually did, she didn't wake up until the girls brought her breakfast the next morning.

Chelsy and Isla didn't knock for too long before they walked into the room. Rose was still fast asleep, buried deep within the covers as her fireplace had died the night before, and she had covered herself as much as possible to keep warm.

"Shh," Isla scolded as Chelsy dropped the tray. "You don't want to wake her up."

"We have to wake her up to eat breakfast. What are you talking about?" Chelsy replied, glaring at her sister.

"That's different from waking her up by banging the tray on the table."

"I didn't bang the tray on the table," Chelsy replied. "Try setting your tray down and see if it won't make a sound."

"Of course it won't," Isla replied and walked toward the table—just as Rose groaned.

She lifted her head from all the pillows and moved to a sitting position, grabbing her head. There was an ache. She was not surprised, with how long she had stayed up thinking. At least the headache was bearable.

"Rose," Isla called excitedly, then turned to glare at her sister. "You woke her up!"

"You're the one who started arguing about how the tray was too loud."

"Good morning," Rose said with a smile as she rubbed her face. She didn't think her head could handle their usual arguments.

"Good morning, Rose. I'm sorry that my sister woke you up," Isla replied.

Chelsy's eyes widened and she opened her mouth to protest, but Rose spoke first.

"Don't worry about it. I shouldn't have overslept," she whispered and forced herself out of bed.

Isla got a glimpse of Rose's neck, where the crown prince had left a bright mark. She blushed and turned her gaze away. Chelsy had tried to explain the sort of relationship Rose had with the crown prince, as the younger sister wouldn't stop asking.

Every time she would see something that indicated it, she would react in this manner. Rose hadn't noticed yet and Chelsy prayed it would remain so. The sisters excuse themselves so Rose could eat her breakfast.

Chapter 253: Escape Him Forever

Rose looked at Welma with furrowed brows as she concentrated on what the maid was saying. It was almost time for dinner, and when she had heard the knock, she thought it was her dinner—rather, Welma had appeared.

"What are you doing here?" Rose had asked. There wasn't any anger in her question, rather it was curiosity, as the maid had a serious look on her face.

Welma stepped forward and she didn't start speaking until she was close to Rose. "Mister Henry called for me, and he told me the crown prince wouldn't want you to go to him for the next couple of days," Welma said carefully, like she was rephrasing the words.

"Days?" Rose asked. "Did he say how long exactly?"

Welma shook her head. "But he added that you should not forget that you leave with the crown prince in three days."

"As if I can forget," Rose replied.

Her gaze darkened. Did the crown prince plan to avoid her for three whole days but still take her with him? If he was going to do that, he should let her go back home. She didn't care that he didn't want to see her. She wasn't exactly missing out on anything.

She also already had the chance to check the crown prince's bedchambers, and she came up with nothing that would help in her escape plan. She doubted this would change, but it was a shame she would not be able to find out.

"Is there anything else?" Rose asked.

Welma shook her head. "That was all Mister Henry said."

"That's not what I mean," Rose replied and lifted her head to look at Welma, her eyes squinting. "Did you find anything for me?"

Welma shook her head. "I'm afraid what I was able to find out wouldn't help much."

Rose's face brightened a bit. "But you heard something. I'll take anything at this point."

Rose didn't know a single thing about Futherfield, and with the crown prince isolating her, there was no way she could find out anything on her own now.

"I know Futherfield is to the south. That is all. I tried to ask if it was close to Edenville, but all of the servants I asked didn't know. They have all lived in the capital all their lives, and I have to be mindful about who I ask questions."

Rose was surprised she didn't fall to the ground at this news. "South," she mumbled. What could she possibly do with this information? It didn't mean anything to her.

"I'm sorry," Welma said at Rose's expression.

"It's not your fault," she managed to say. There was only one person to blame here.

"I could try to ask again," Welma replied.

Rose glanced at her, but she knew the maid wouldn't find anything. Rose's brows furrowed as she thought deeply. She couldn't dare ask Thomas—that would be pushing it. Mister Henry wouldn't even speak to her.

She would have to seek her answers outside of the castle. Rose's eyes widened for a bit. The crown prince did say she could leave the castle—but would he let her now? She had to find out. She didn't have much choice.

"Thank you, Welma, but I don't think it will change."

"Are you giving up?" the maid asked, worried.

"I couldn't even if I wanted to. I'll just have to find out what I need some other way," Rose chewed on her thumb again.

Welma frowned a little. "Is there anything I can do to help?"

Rose shook her head. "I don't think so. It all depends on a certain person's mood."

Welma nodded. "If it's any consolation, I haven't been called by the Queen or her ladies-in-waiting."

Rose couldn't care less about them. The only thing she cared about was the marriage. If the Queen really did as she said, she might be able to escape the crown prince forever.

"Thank you, Welma," Rose replied.

The latter nodded and left Rose with her thoughts. She was still deep in thought when the sisters brought her breakfast. Thankfully, Chelsy was quick to notice Rose's mood, and she dragged her sister away before she started rambling as usual.

After dinner, Rose got into bed early, but she knew she wasn't going to fall asleep anytime soon. The crown prince didn't want to see her, and as impatient as she was, she knew it was a bad idea to go there too soon.

She knew there was no way to decide how this would go. It all truly depended on whether the crown prince would let her out of the castle or not. But she was almost certain she would find her answers—and not just that, she could also get as much information as possible. She couldn't believe she hadn't thought of this before now.

Rose heard voices—Mister Henry's voice was as clear as day. He was discussing something with the crown prince. Rose couldn't exactly understand the details.

She suddenly tensed up when she could see shadows under the doors of her bedchamber. Rose almost thought one of them slowed down, but she knew it was simply her mind playing tricks on her.

Soon enough, she heard nothing but silence. Rose rolled onto her side. The room was warm, and it smelled a little like smoke, but the warmth was all that mattered.

She wondered how her mother was doing in the cold. Winter was a terrible period sometimes. She wondered if they had been able to save enough food. Hunting was harder in the winter, and plants didn't grow—neither did trees bear fruit.

Rose was worried, but she was sure they would have help. The villagers were pretty nice, and Emma's family was right next door. There was no way they would let her parents starve to death.

Then there was Ander—he was like a son to them. She knew she could count on him. She wanted to see him, she wanted to see them. A huge part of her was scared, though—she was scared of a lot of things. But Rose was never one to let her fears hold her back.

Chapter 254: Summoning Thomas

Thomas followed the maid. He didn't care for her name, but she was the same maid who came to get him three days before. Thomas touched his neck—the wound had healed completely, but he knew he hadn't recovered from the crown prince putting a sword to his throat. Not just any sword, his own.

This was a bad idea, but he had turned the maid away three times, and each time she came back, desperately pleading. Rose should just ask the crown prince—he wanted nothing to do with this—but yet here he was, making his way to her bedchambers to hear what the issue was.

Thomas decided he wasn't going to do whatever she wanted. He would sternly tell her no and be on his way. He also needed to tell her she couldn't keep summoning him like this.

Chelsy stopped in front of the room and knocked twice. She could feel Thomas's glare on her back. He didn't say anything as she led him here, but his stare was enough to make her tremble in her boots.

When she went to call on him for the fourth time, she was certain he would strike her down, and if Rose didn't seem like it was a life-and-death situation, she wouldn't have tried again.

Chelsy doubted he was that much older than she was, but he terrified her. It was also the plain fact that he could be very cruel—he would punish her if she so much as looked at him wrongly.

As soon as the door to Rose's bedchambers opened, Chelsy bowed to him and fled the scene. She didn't care to wait to see if Rose needed her. She would return, but for now, she needed a moment away from the lord.

"Lord Thomas," Rose curtsied, watching Chelsy flee from the corner of her eye. Seeing her run was so funny Rose had to hold back a laugh.

She couldn't blame the child. Every time she sent her back to Thomas, she would return looking paler and paler. She felt bad sending Chelsy back and forth, but today was the last chance she had.

Thomas narrowed his eyes as he stared at the top of her head. He had seen her face before she bent her head. She didn't look like she was getting enough sleep, and she looked pale. Not the kind of pale gotten from being indoors—it was something more.

"What do you want?" Thomas asked with a scowl as they stood outside her door, right between the guards.

"I apologize for calling on you when you're so busy," she whispered, her tone filled with sarcasm.

Chelsy had told Rose that she had found Thomas in his room, and the field was empty since they were embarking on the journey the next day—there was no training. At least, that was what Chelsy suspected.

"What do you want?" he asked again, his tone sharper.

Rose lifted her head to look at him and was met with shadowy eyes. It was hard to say what she saw in them, and usually, she would have flinched at such a gaze. But Thomas wouldn't be here if he didn't care.

He would have stopped Chelsy properly and asked the guards not to let her get to his room, but each time she had unrestricted access, and he would answer the door just to tell Chelsy no. If she weren't in such a hurry, she would have teased him a little.

"Please, come in. It's private." Rose stepped to the side to let him in, but all she got was a glare that could melt ice.

"I am leaving," he said and turned.

"No, please wait," Rose said in panic. He didn't seem to have any issues coming into her room the day before. "I need to leave the castle. I'd like to pay a visit to Lady Delphine before we leave for Futherfield tomorrow," Rose blurted, and he stopped in his tracks.

She didn't know if she should be saying it outside, but she had seen the look in his eyes—Thomas would have left.

He turned only his head, and his face showed just how shocked he was. "You're coming with us?" Thomas asked.

Rose knew just how close Thomas was to the crown prince. He had been with him in Edenville; it looked like she wasn't wrong in assuming he would also be coming along.

Rose nodded her head, and Thomas's gaze darkened. He turned his entire body and looked her up and down. Rose didn't know what he was thinking, but she thought he was getting angrier.

"Where did you say you wanted to go?" he finally spoke.

Rose sighed so heavily, she needed to grab the wall for support. "I told Lady Delphine I would try to visit her. Moreover, I haven't left the castle in days, and I've been stuck in my room. It would be nice to step out."

"Have you asked His Highness for permission to leave the castle?" Thomas asked.

Rose's face fell. She had hoped she would be able to bypass that. "I didn't think I would have to, as the crown prince gave me permission to leave before."

Thomas looked at her as though she were stupid.

"I also haven't seen the crown prince in nearly four days now." It was just two nights, but Thomas didn't need to know that. "Since I can't go to him unless I'm called on, I can't ask him."

His face softened—but only briefly—and then it was back to the same glare. He turned around without replying and started walking away.

"Lord Thomas," she called after him, but he didn't turn around.

Rose looked to the guards, but they kept their gaze straight. Rose was at a loss. What did his actions mean? She couldn't run after him—Rose knew better than to roam the castle without an escort. Free picking for the Queen.

Should she ask the crown prince? The last message she heard from him was from Welma, who had run into Mister Henry. It was suddenly like he didn't want anything to do with her.

This wasn't unusual, as the crown prince would not see her for days in a row—she was used to that. However, if it was boredom, he should let her go.

Rose didn't even know if she could go to him or call for him. He was the crown prince; she couldn't exactly summon him as she had Thomas.

Besides, the only reason she could summon Thomas now was that he was starting to like her. Before now, he would have definitely found a reason to throw her in prison for a peasant like herself daring to summon him.

The crown prince was completely different. She couldn't figure him out—but her life literally hung on his whims.

Chapter 255: An Affair To Discuss

Thomas stood in front of the crown prince's study. What was he doing here? His Highness had already warned him about meddling, but yet here he was. He moved his hand to the healed cut on his neck again. He must have been hexed—or worse.

Thomas swore. He had lost count of how many times he had told himself this was a bad idea. If the crown prince was in a foul mood, he could really end up without his head this time.

Thomas knocked once. He was already here. He should have just declined and told her to go back inside—that he was not her nursemaid or coachman to take her wherever she wanted.

The door to the study opened, and a servant stepped to the side to let Thomas inside. The servant was clearly on his way out. He bowed while holding the door open.

"Thomas," the crown prince called. He sounded both shocked and curious.

"Your Highness," Thomas said as he stepped into the room. He bowed just as the servant slipped out and shut the door behind him.

"Hmm," Caius said and leaned back. "What are you doing here?"

Thomas walked forward. "Your Highness, I have an affair to discuss." Thomas ground his teeth at the end of his words.

He stopped a mere two feet away and bowed to Prince Rylen. "Prince Rylen," he greeted, and Rylen waved at him.

"What is this affair?" Caius asked with a puzzled expression.

Thomas turned his gaze to the crown prince and stood as stiff as a board. He had to proceed carefully, which led him to question why he was doing this.

"Rose would like to leave the castle briefly," Thomas began. He didn't miss the way the crown prince's gaze darkened as he mentioned her name. "She would like—"

"Rose?" Caius interrupted, tilting his head to the side.

"Yes," Thomas said, fighting the urge to shuffle on his feet. It felt like he was walking barefoot on hot coals. He had to be careful, or he might lose his feet—or, in this case, risk another slash.

"Her name," Caius repeated, raising his brows. Thomas was unsure what he should say to that, but the crown prince immediately added, "Carry on. What would Rose like?"

The smile that appeared on the crown prince's face sent a chill down Thomas's spine, and he once again asked himself what he was doing here.

"She wants to visit Lady Delphine and requests your permission to do that," Thomas said.

"She asked you to ask me?" Caius asked.

Thomas knew he had messed up. He started shaking his head. "She seemed to think she could leave the castle because you said she could, but I haven't received any such order."

Thomas watched the crown prince's expression change, but it was not aimed at him—rather, at the situation.

"Are you asking me to say no?" Caius asked, narrowing his eyes.)

Thomas shook his head. He wasn't asking that—but if the crown prince disagreed, he could tell Rose the crown prince had refused.

"If I refuse, she'll simply think I didn't want to take her," Thomas tried to explain, hoping to phrase his words in a way that wouldn't anger the crown prince.

"So you came here to confirm if indeed I don't want her to leave the castle?" Caius asked, a dark look in his eyes.

Thomas squinted. It sounded wrong the way the crown prince said it. "Yes—to know if she has permission to leave or not," Thomas rephrased.

"No. Did she say why she wanted to go there?" Caius was annoyed that he had to ask this.

"Yes. We leave for Futherfield tomorrow, and she would like to see Lady Delphine before she leaves. I do not believe this part, Your Highness. I think it is just some excuse on her part. The expedition to Futherfield is dangerous. There is no way—"

"It's not an excuse," Caius said absentmindedly.

"What?" It was Rylen who reacted. "You're bringing her with us?"

Thomas had the same thought. He didn't care what happened to her, but it was completely different to take her to Futherfield. The journey itself was dangerous. Lord Leopold had not come with his wife to the capital because of how dangerous it was.

"Yes," Caius said with a bored expression.

"What are you thinking?" Rylen asked.

"Are you suggesting I leave her here?" Caius shot a dark look at Rylen.

"No—send her home." Rylen adjusted in his seat at the glare Caius sent him. No one moved. No one even breathed.

"Forgive me, Your Grace. I spoke out of turn," Rylen quickly apologized.

Only after his apology did Caius turn away from Rylen. Thomas stared in disbelief. He knew the sort of relationship Rylen had with the crown prince but the crown prince had still looked at Prince Rylen with death in his eyes.

If he had been the one to utter such a thing, he could only imagine what could have happened. This was not the woman to meddle with, but no matter how many times he told himself that, he couldn't seem to look the other way.

"Thomas," Caius said—his voice sounded drawled. "Take her to where she wants to go. Don't let her out of your sight, and tell me everything."

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

He turned to look at Rylen, who now had a defeated look on his face. "Prince Rylen," he said with a bow and left the private study.

"Do you ever intend to let her go?" Rylen asked as the door closed.

"I told you to drop the subject, Rylen. I do not see how this is your concern."

"You're right, Your Highness. It is not."

Caius narrowed his gaze and turned to look at his cousin, but the latter had already turned his attention away from him and had his eyes on the map spread out in front of them.

They had been deciding the best path to follow. Caius, as always, thought there was no reason to hide and that they should follow the most dangerous roads. If they were attacked—even better—they wouldn't have to look for the bandits.

Rylen disagreed. He didn't think the bandits would be stupid enough to attack them, and rather, they would just be giving the bandits time to run away. And now that Rose was going with them, Rylen was determined to take the safest path.

Chapter 256: To The Manor

Rose paced her room. She forced herself to stop biting the nail of her thumb. The poor thing was sore as chipped but it was hard to do when her only plan had just come crashing down on her face.

Thomas would have been nice to even properly refuse her, not walk out on her—but she didn't expect anything less from the pompous, spoiled lord. He was somewhat nicer now but he was still an annoying brat.

She wrapped her arms around herself. She was out of time. Tomorrow, they will leave for Futherfield. Things had been awfully quiet, and she hadn't seen the crown prince in a while.

Should she go to him? Was that really her only option—to rely on the jerk? Rose sighed. She could do it, for her mother. It wasn't that she couldn't, but who was to say he wouldn't tell her no just to spite her?

He had already refused to let her see her mother, and now he wouldn't even call for her. What was another refusal to him? Rose tried to convince herself that even if he would refuse, she wouldn't know unless she asked and this matter was too important not to confirm.

She was still in the middle of contemplating this when she heard a knock. It was loud, impatient, and it startled her. "Yes," she said as she walked to the door.

Rose pulled the door open to Thomas's scowling gaze. Her first thought was that if he kept scrunching his face like that, he would start to look older than he was. Her next thought was What was he doing here?

"What are you do—"

"Let's go," Thomas said before she could even finish the question.

"Go?" Rose asked, puzzled as she looked around. But it was just Thomas in front of her, excluding the guards.

He glared at her. "Should I assume you are no longer interested in leaving the castle?"

Rose's eyes widened, and her face broke into a smile. "Really?" she cried happily and would have jumped on Thomas if she weren't certain he would push her hard enough to slam her head into the wall.

"Tch," he said and turned around.

"Wait," Rose cried and rushed back into the room. She quickly picked up a scarf. She didn't have a coat or a hat, and it would be suicidal to step out in such weather without any covering.

Rose returned and expected to have to run after the young lord, but he was only a few feet from her door, waiting. He has his back to the wall and his gaze in her direction. Rose smiled when she saw him and walked toward him. She didn't even reach him before he started walking again.

Rose didn't try to converse with him, mostly because she feared someone might stop her and tell her she wasn't allowed to leave the castle because the crown prince had changed his mind, so she just quietly followed Thomas.

They got out of the castle, and the same carriage that had taken her to the wedding was right outside. Rose thought the coachman looked the same, but she didn't have the time to look at him—she was too anxious.

They got into the carriage, and Rose didn't move. It wasn't until they had gone over the drawbridge and past the castle gates that she could finally breathe easy and start smiling again.

Thomas gave her an odd stare as he sat across from her, but when she met his gaze, he looked away.

"Lord Thomas," Rose said sweetly. "Did you ask the crown prince for me?"

Thomas looked at her as though she had lost her mind, then scoffed and turned his head away. "Shut up."

It was brief, but Rose had seen it. Besides, the glares and scowls he sent her way seemed too forced, as though he was trying hard to compensate for something.

"Thank you," she whispered as she rested her head against the carriage. "I wouldn't be out now if it weren't for you."

Thomas glanced at her, his eyes lingering just a moment longer than necessary. Then he folded his hands and turned away. Rose smiled to herself when she saw the tip of his ear redden as he looked away.

She knew he liked praise and made a mental note to find something to praise him about whenever she could. She never would have thought a day would come when Thomas would be partially on her side. She didn't think he was all the way there just yet, but she was fine with this.

Rose wrapped the scarf around her neck. It was noon, but it was still chilly. She knew the weather would only get worse from here. She tucked her hands by her sides by wrapping her arms around herself. She should have worn gloves, but she'd barely had enough time to grab a scarf.

The journey to Lady Delphine's manor wasn't too far. She was sure she would get there before she froze to death. She had chosen noon as she knew the house would be awake now.

She wondered if Lady Delphine would be happy to see her. What would the lady say when she heard of Rose's plan? She felt really bad dragging her into this, but she didn't have much of a choice.

Thomas occasionally glanced at Rose. The fact that she seemed cold was not something he could easily ignore. She rubbed her arms, her palms, and then blew warm breath on them.

His first thought was to give her his coat, but it wasn't his fault she didn't think to bring one. She was heading out of the castle. What did she think was going to happen?

Rose turned to look at him and smiled when their eyes met, and Thomas glared at her.

Did she always smell like flowers?

He turned away. He was just taking her to the courtesan's manor. Her state of well-being was not his concern.

Chapter 257: A Crazy Teenager

Rose adjusted the coat over her shoulders as she exited the carriage. It was a little high, but Rose was already used to getting down herself. Her feet hit the ground with a little force as she jumped, but she didn't lose her balance.

Thomas stood in front of her with a scowl on his face. He was left in his doublet after giving her his coat, but it seemed to be a decent covering, as he didn't look like he was cold. Not that Rose cared she was sure she needed the coat more than him.

Rose pulled the coat closer. It smelled like the young lord, and for some reason, she remembered when Caius gave her his coat. Rose gripped the lapels even tighter. There was no reason to have thoughts about the crown prince.

Rose would be lying if she said she had been shocked when Thomas tossed his coat on her head while they rode here. He was so disrespectful, but she was too cold to be mad and had worn it. She didn't say thank you, though.

"We are here," he said.

Clearly. But Rose didn't say this out loud. Instead, she nodded her head. They had entered the manor's compound without any difficulty. She wondered if it was because she rode in a royal carriage. It wasn't as glamorous as the rest, but it still had the crest of the royal family.

Rose looked past Thomas and her gaze rested on the manor's main entrance. Not much had changed since she left. She smiled, and out of the corner of her eye, she saw Slade approaching them. He bowed to Lord Thomas, then turned his attention to Rose.

Rose stiffened at his piercing gaze. "I am here to see Lady Delphine," she explained.

"Does my lady know you're coming?" Slade asked, his tone flat.

"Does that matter? Shouldn't you be informing her that she has guests?" Thomas snapped as he stared down at Slade, who was still hunched from bowing.

Slade did his best to hide his reaction, but he did a terrible job. However, they all knew he couldn't go against a knight, and Thomas was also a lord.

Thomas rested his palm on the hilt of his sword when Slade looked a little hesitant to move, and Rose couldn't help but panic. She looked from one person to the other. They were the worst personalities to clash.

Rose heard the sound of something opening and looked up to see Esme slowly opening a window, a floor above them.

"Aha, I knew I heard voices. Rose!"

"Esme," Rose said with a smile that reached both her ears. .

"Slade, what are you doing? Get out of the way. Better yet, I am coming down."

She bolted away from the window, and Rose heard a voice ask, "Who is that?"

"Rose is here," Esme giggled. "Tell Lady Delphine."

Slade stepped back and walked toward the doors of the manor to let them in, but Esme beat him to it, opening the doors wide as she fled out, almost hitting him. Thankfully, Slade got out of the way in time.

Esme didn't slow down, not until she wrapped her arms around Rose, crying excitedly. She pulled back and looked at Rose's face. .

"When Lady Delphine said you promised to visit, I told her she was lying. I never thought you'd come to see us so soon. It's so good to see you. You look good—have you been sleeping well, though? I can't wait to see Lady Delphine's reaction when she sees you." She giggled again.

Rose laughed. She had forgotten how much Esme would talk. She was happy to see her. The young woman was as giddy as ever. She wasn't wearing revealing clothes, and the dress was pretty normal—it wasn't business hours yet.

"It's good to see you again, Esme," Rose whispered.

Esme smiled, but it suddenly froze on her face as she turned to see Thomas glaring at her. Esme pulled back immediately and curtsied.

"I apologize, Lord Thomas. I was too excited to see Rose."

Thomas scoffed and turned away, walking toward the door. "Where is Lady Delphine?"

"Inside. Kali is letting her know of your arrival," Esme said to his back.

Rose was surprised at how casually she spoke to him, as though this wasn't their first conversation. She even knew his name.

"You know him?" she whispered to Esme.

"Yes, of course. Lord Thomas comes often with His Highness."

Rose put a hand over her mouth as she gasped exaggeratedly. "Lord Thomas!"

Thomas turned around to look at Rose. "It's not what you think!" he said with a glare and turned away again, his face red as a beetroot.

"Esme," Rose whispered, not ready to drop the subject. "Do you know if Lord Thomas is as fiery as he is in—"

"Shut up! Would you rather return to the castle?!" he yelled out without turning around.

"No, I apologize, Lord Thomas," Rose said, doing her best to hold back her giggles at his red ears. It was definitely not the cold.

Esme looked at Rose and nodded, then she whispered, "Like a crazed teenager!"

Thomas turned to face them, and Rose feared he would swing his sword at them this time. However, Kali appeared at that exact moment, ending the exchange.

"Rose," Kali called from the open doors.

"Kali!" Rose cried and rushed forward, past Thomas. She was very happy for the interruption. It looked like she might have pushed Thomas a little too far.

She rushed to Kali, going through the open doors, and stopped in front of her. "It's good to see you, Kali."

Kali smiled at her. "I can't believe you came to visit. Lady Delphine should be here—or better still, I will take you to her."

"There is no need for that," a voice said.

Rose turned, and Lady Delphine stood at the top of the stairs with a fur coat around herself. Not a single hair was out of place, and there was a little makeup on her face. She truly looked like the lady of the house.

"Lady Delphine!" Rose cried and rushed towards the stairs.

Chapter 258: Not Just a Visit

"Child, no need to run," Lady Delphine said as Rose came up the stairs, lifting her dress to make it easier to run.

But Rose didn't stop until she got in front of her, taking the stairs too quickly causing Lady Delphine to wince as she feared Rose might fall. She got to the top of the stairs and curtsied, making Lady Delphine chuckle.

"My lady," Rose said with a smile as she bent her knees.

"Look at you, showing off what I taught you," Lady Delphine replied. Rose stood to her full height and took a step closer. Lady Delphine lifted her hand and lightly touched Rose's cheek. "How have you been?" Her expression changed from amusement to seriousness.

Rose's smile faltered for a moment, but she quickly composed herself—though Lady Delphine's eyes didn't miss this. The older woman watched her like a hawk.

"Just fine," Rose replied, but it was clear Lady Delphine didn't believe her.

Her face showed concern, and then her gaze softened and she gave Rose a little smile. "Come join me for lunch," she offered.

"I already had lunch but thank you for the offer," Rose replied.

"Who cares? If you're too full, you can just opt for some snacks and tea instead. I'm sure we can find something you'd like."

"Very well, Lady Delphine," Rose replied, smiling back.

"Good, good," Delphine grinned and took a step to the side so she and Rose could walk side by side.

"Esme, Kali, bring lunch to my room and bring some snacks for Rose," She called from the top of the stairs to the girls who were still downstairs. Rose noticed Thomas walking to the stairway.

"Yes, my lady," Esme and Kali said simultaneously.

"Come," Lady Delphine said and slid her arm around Rose's, gripping her through the coat.

Inside was warmer, but Rose didn't see the need to take off the coat just yet. Besides, if she returned it to the owner, there was a high chance she wouldn't get it back—and she would certainly need it then.

As they walked, Rose could hear footsteps behind them. She glanced back and met eyes with Thomas. She smiled, hoping her expression didn't give anything away, before she turned and continued with Lady Delphine.

"So how was that dance?" Lady Delphine asked.

"Dance?" Rose frowned at the sudden question as she struggled to figure out what Lady Delphine was talking about.

"The ball. The dance with the crown prince," she further explained.

Rose turned to look at Lady Delphine with wide eyes. "You saw that? I thought you left."

"And missed the chance to see you dance? Not a chance. I stayed till the end—and you did dance very well, might I add."

"Thank you," Rose smiled stiffly, recalling how that also got her in trouble. "Did you get home fine?" Rose asked.

"Yes. As soon as you finished dancing, I left with Slade. And if you're worried about the Lord, he didn't bother me anymore."

Rose already knew this; he was too unconscious to. She wondered if Lady Delphine knew this, but she didn't want to discuss Lord Elrod further, as she knew it made Lady Delphine uncomfortable.

"I haven't forgotten any of the things you taught me," she said, changing the subject.

"I can see that," Lady Delphine said with a smile as they got to her room.

They walked in, and Thomas attempted to go in with them. Lady Delphine blocked his path with her body, and he had no option but to step back.

"Just what are you doing, Lord Thomas?"

Thomas glared at her. "I am not to let Rose out of my sight. His Highness's orders."

"That's why you'll stay behind the door, where you can see where she went in," Lady Delphine replied.

"Absolutely not," Thomas said stubbornly. "She must be in my sight at all times."

"I won't let a man enter my private quarters," Lady Delphine said.

"Then you can have your lunch outside!" Thomas stated.

"Absolutely not," Lady Delphine stated, throwing his words at him. "I always have all my meals here, and Rose has joined me during mealtimes several times. I won't change that because you disagree. Besides, what are you trying to insinuate? That I would betray the crown prince? Did you forget the part where I found her and brought her to His Highness? Or perhaps you have some other ulterior motives, and you're simply using the crown prince as an excuse?"

Thomas was fuming as she spoke, and he looked ready to attack at any given time. But at Lady Delphine's last question, Thomas was visibly taken aback. It didn't help that Rose covered her face with her palm as she tried to stifle a giggle—and failed woefully.

"No, that's not it. Of course not," Thomas tried to say, but the more he spoke, the guiltier he seemed.

Rose whispered something to Lady Delphine, and the older woman laughed. He didn't hear what she said, but something told him it might have something to do with what one of the courtesans had said earlier.

It annoyed him to no end—especially when Rose seemed amused about it. He didn't get why it was so embarrassing, and that pissed him off even more.

"Any funny business and you'll have me to deal with!" Thomas said and slammed the door.

Rose looked at Lady Delphine in disbelief. "I can't believe you were able to do that. He is as stubborn as a mule."

Lady Delphine laughed. She had noticed how stiff Rose got against her arm when Thomas said he was going to come in with them. She had also seen her smile falter every now and then. Something told her this was not just a visit.

"Have a seat," Lady Delphine said, pointing to the opposite chair as she sat down.

"Now, what is this about?" Lady Delphine asked once Rose was comfortably seated.

Rose's eyes widened in slight surprise, but it wasn't completely unexpected that Lady Delphine noticed. "I can't hide anything from you, can I?"

Lady Delphine smiled. "I wouldn't say that, but this isn't just a visit, is it?"

Rose slowly shook her head.

Lady Delphine's expression soured. "What's wrong?"

Chapter 259: I Need A Map

Rose slowly shook her head in response to Lady Delphine's question. She pulled the coat closer, suddenly feeling cold even in the warm room with the burning fireplace. She was scared and worried. This was her last option. What if Lady Delphine couldn't help her?

Lady Delphine's expression soured. "What's wrong?"

Rose opened her mouth to speak but was interrupted by a knock on the door. She instinctively jerked, and Lady Delphine gave her a sad look.

"Sorry," she said, trying to calm Rose. "That should be our lunch. You can tell me all about it while we eat."

Rose nodded and looked to the door. It opened, and Esme walked into the room with Kali right behind her. Rose could see Thomas's grumpy face as he tried to peek into the room, but when their eyes met, he immediately looked away.

Rose tried not to laugh, but the young lord's reaction had her chuckling each time. He was so easy to mess with. His actions also made her forget the sort of dilemma she was in.

"Cake or muffin? I wasn't sure which you'd prefer, so I brought both," Esme said as she placed the tray in front of Rose. "There is tea too. Let me know if there's anything else you'd like or if the tea isn't to your liking. I can bring something different for you to drink."

Rose shook her head. "No, this is fine. Thank you."

Esme smiled and stood to her full height. She looked like she was about to speak more, but Lady Delphine glanced in her direction, and the smile on Esme's face vanished.

"Please enjoy your meal," she said and started towards the door. Kali also took the hint, and after they both curtsied to Lady Delphine, they went out the door, shutting it.

This time Rose didn't catch Thomas, nor did she see him, but she knew he was right outside the door, just out of sight. It was weirdly comforting which was odd as she could stand him sometimes.

"You should eat. Whatever it is, I will make sure to help you."

"Thank you," Rose said and took a sip from the cup, but it tasted foul, and she set it back down. She knew it wasn't the tea—rather, her taste buds. She wouldn't be able to enjoy meals until she found a solution.

Rose watched Lady Delphine eat. She was unsure how to begin, but instead of beating around the bush, she decided to say exactly what she was here for.

"I need a map, Lady Delphine."

Lady Delphine's eyes nearly bulged out of her skull, and she looked like she might choke. She gulped a significant amount of water before she spoke.

"A map?" Lady Delphine yelled in whisper tones. "What do you need a map for? Are you trying to escape? That is not a good idea."

"No, it's not what you think. If I wanted to get away from the crown prince, I would have done it a long time ago. But this is for a different reason. My mother is worse, and I worry that I might not see her before..." Rose let the rest of her words trail off. She didn't have the heart to say it out loud.

Lady Delphine's eyes widened, and then she placed her palm over Rose's hand. "I'm so sorry. But I don't think escaping is the right thing to do."

"I know," Rose said and pulled her hand away. She grabbed the coat and pulled it closer to herself. "But I don't have a choice."

"Have you asked the crown prince?"

Rose gave Lady Delphine a look. Why did everyone think the crown prince was benevolent? Which was a bit ironic because she knew they were all terrified of him, but every time she had a problem, this was the first thing she heard. He wasn't nicer to her—he was as nice as one would be to a pet.

"I did. It was the first thing I did when I got the letter," Rose said with a sigh, hating that she was recalling the incident and what happened after.

"He refused?" Lady Delphine asked in horror.

"Worse. He's never letting me go home. Ever. I don't have a choice but to do this, Lady Delphine."

"B-but how can you escape the castle? It's dangerous. You won't even make it to the gates with the number of guards."

Rose shook her head. "Not from the castle. The crown prince is embarking on a journey to Futherfield tomorrow. I intend to escape on the way or when we get to Futherfield."

Lady Delphine couldn't hide the shock on her face. She knew the crown prince was leaving the capital—she didn't know it was so soon, though. There was a part about her job, when the lords were well satisfied some of them tended to get really chatty.

It was one of the reasons she was particularly close to the crown prince. He wasn't just good for her business, but she always made sure to tell him any important information she came across.

"Futherfield is dangerous, especially with the bandits. It would be better to escape from the castle."

"I will be careful. That's why I need a map. I just need to know the roads. I won't do anything I'm not sure of."

"I worry, Rose," Lady Delphine said. "Are you sure you won't ask the crown prince one last time?"

"The next time, he might lock me up in a dungeon and throw away the key. This is my only option."

Lady Delphine sighed, distress clearly written on her face. "I have a map, and thank goodness it is recent, but I don't know the roads the bandits have taken over. You'll need to know that to be able to even leave Futherfield safely, let alone get to Edenville."

During her stay with Lady Delphine, Rose had shared some of her life with the courtesan, just as Delphine had shared hers with Rose. She knew enough.

"I know. Right now, I just need a map and how to read it. I promise I won't do anything reckless."

Chapter 260: Last Resort

Lady Delphine didn't believe Rose's words, but she saw the look in Rose's eyes. The young woman was willing to take the risk. If Delphine were to refuse her, she would put Rose in even more danger. Her chances would be worse without a map.

Lady Delphine folded her arms around herself. She took off the fur coat after she came into her room, she didn't need it in the warm room.

Rose looked at her and she could see the pleading in her eyes. Delphine sighed and unwrapped her arms as she picked up the cutlery once again. "Eat," Lady Delphine said.

Rose nodded her head and tried to take a bite of the cake, only to please Lady Delphine. She couldn't taste it. She tried the muffin—it was similar. She couldn't taste anything.

"I will get you a map after eating," Lady Delphine started to say as Rose ate, "but I truly do think there is a better way to go about this than doing it this way. It's dangerous."

Lady Delphine gripped the spoon a little tighter than she needed to, staring at Rose with as much intensity as possible just to convey how dangerous it was, but she knew as she looked in Rose's eyes that it was a waste of time to try and convince her.

"I know," Rose said with a sad smile. "But it is a risk I'm willing to take."

Lady Delphine sighed. She was worried for several reasons. Other than Rose getting away from the crown prince, Delphine didn't want to think of what would happen if Rose was kidnapped again—or worse.

She was also worried the crown prince would not be happy to hear of her involvement, and Lady Delphine would rather have nothing to do with this. But she knew there was no one else the poor child could turn to, and Delphine didn't have the heart to abandon her.

"Promise me one thing," Lady Delphine said.

Rose nodded as she eagerly listened. "I promise, as long as you're not asking me not to go."

"No," Delphine replied, shaking her head. "You will only do this as a last resort. You must promise to try your hardest, and then—if that doesn't work—you can then escape on your own."

Rose nodded immediately. "I promise."

She had already tried her hardest. This was truly her last resort, but Lady Delphine didn't need to know that, and she felt very bad for dragging the lady into this. But Rose had no other option.

"Good," Lady Delphine said and resumed eating.

Rose nodded, and the rest of the meal was quiet. She didn't miss the occasional frown that would appear on Lady Delphine's face. Rose couldn't help the uneasy feeling she felt.

After they were done eating, Lady Delphine stood up from the table and walked towards the shelves in her room. She searched through some rolled-up papers, and after a few moments, she returned.

She stacked the empty plates on each other to make enough space on the smaller dining table that could only hold two chairs. Then she unrolled the map and spread it on the table. It was bigger than Rose thought, but she could still carry it around.

"This is the most recent map I have. The others are not as recent," Lady Delphine paused, and Rose could see the hesitation on her face.

Rose wasn't about to let her give in to her doubts when the map she was looking for was right in front of her. She looked down at it and frowned at the drawing of the landscape—rivers, mountains. She could see writings, but she couldn't even guess which was her hometown.

"How long would it take me to get to Edenville from Futherfield?" Rose asked.

Lady Delphine blinked and looked at the map. She traced her fingers over it. Rose watched closely and then looked up at Lady Delphine's face. Her expression darkened.

"Four to five days by carriage, and maybe two by horse," Lady Delphine said, looking at Rose.

"That's not too far," Rose said, counting her fingers. The journey from Edenville to the castle had taken around the same time. She had been worried it might take her a week or worse. A week on the roads was no small feat.

"Three days of traveling by yourself is dangerous," Lady Delphine cried.

"I know," Rose said and stared at the map. "That's why I'm going through the map to find a good route."

Lady Delphine sighed and looked at the map. "There are three major roads out of Futherfield, but only two lead to Edenville. Look at this," she said, pointing at the map.

Rose looked at where Lady Delphine was pointing. It looked like a town.

"This is Futherfield, and the other side is Edenville."

Her hometown was much smaller on the map than Futherfield. There were also a few towns between them.

"I would advise going through towns, as that would be slightly safer, but I doubt they would let you through—and that's if you can get out of Futherfield," Lady Delphine sighed and looked at Rose again, but she was simply nodding and staring at the map with wild eyes.

"Avoid major roads like the Stonefield Pass. This one. This is a road that would lead you right to Stonegate..." Lady Delphine paused and looked at Rose. "You know Stonegate, right? You couldn't have reached the capital from Edenville without going through Stonegate."

Rose nodded. "I know. We spent the night in the marquis's manor."

Lady Delphine nodded. "The royal family has a very good relationship with the Harringtons. It's no surprise."

Rose nodded again. She remembered most of the roads they had used on their way to the capital, but it was also hard to say, as all the roads had looked the same. But the most concerning part was that they had definitely only used major roads—roads she couldn't use now.

"Leaving Futherfield will probably be the hardest part of the journey. I haven't heard anything about attacks on the roads. You might not need to completely avoid the major roads after leaving Futherfield. This is a lesser-used path—it's pretty rocky—but if you want to escape Futherfield without getting caught or running into anyone, this might be a good bet. But be careful," Lady Delphine said as she pointed to a small road on the map.