## THE KING'S LOVER

## Chapter 26: Delphine



Rose didn't reply to this. Clearly, no one would believe her, but she couldn't help but say it. She had spent the entire day preparing for tonight. She knew the crown prince wasn't the least bit patient. She was angry, in severe pain, and tired, but it was a little sad that all she could think about was that she was happy he had directed his anger at her and not her father.

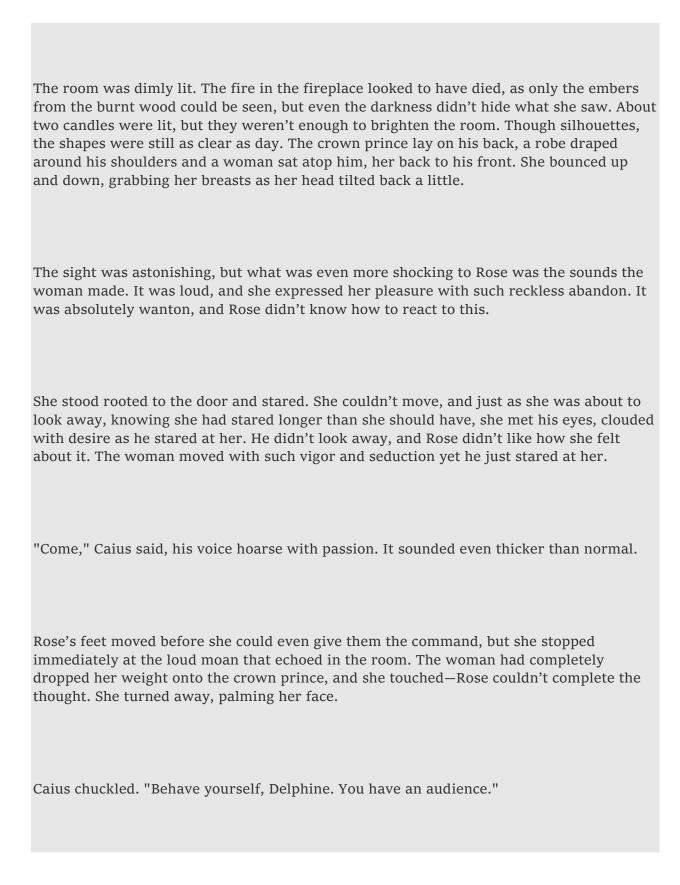
"I can stand by mi'self," she said to Edna, who didn't seem to want to let go of her. She stood next to Rose, holding her arm.

Edna nodded and slowly pulled her hand away. Rose took a step forward and another, wincing with each step, but she had to at least act strong. Edna wasn't lying when she said they cleaned her up. Not only that, but they had also changed her clothes. They had to, the last one had been ripped by the whip.

She tightened the robe around her body as she walked out of the room, not even glancing in Martha's direction as she marched out. She made her way to the crown prince's wing. At this point, she could find it in her sleep. The path felt longer than usual, and all she could think about was if the crown prince was expecting her to lay with him while she was in such a state. Her back hurt, and her legs were still sore from all the walking she had to do to find her way out.

Rose grabbed the wall as she took a breather. The balm was taking a little too long to work, and the dress rubbing against the open skin with every step was enough to have her rolling in pain. But Rose pushed through it, and soon enough, she got in front of his chambers.

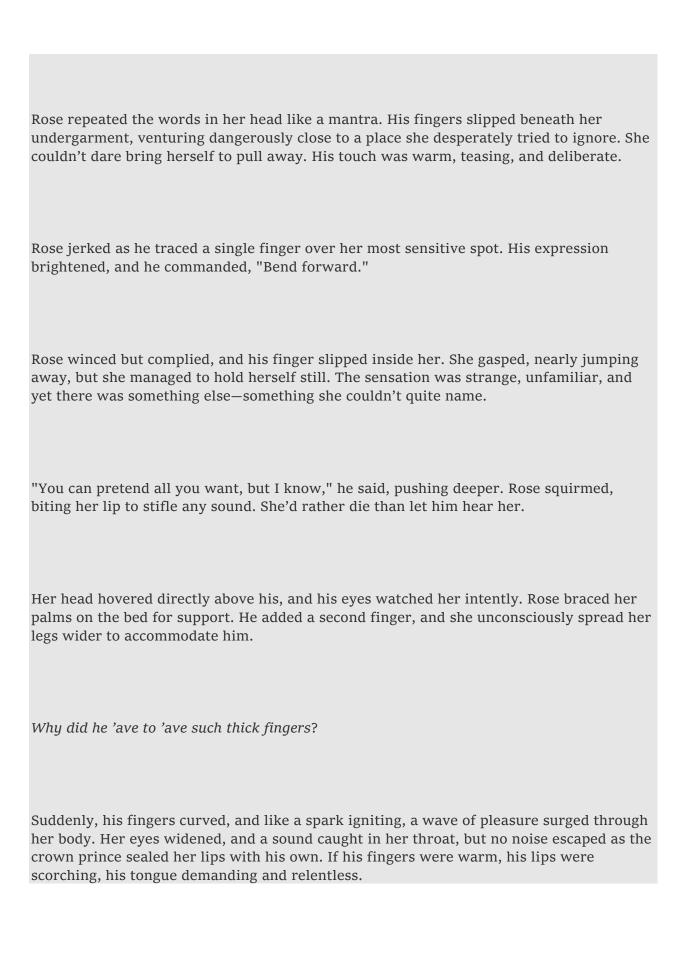
As though they were waiting for her, as soon as she appeared, the guards opened the door. Rose took a step inside, and the door was immediately shut behind her. The loud unexpected sound was a shock to hear but it was nothing compared to what was going on in the room. Rose had to clamp a hand over her mouth to stop from screaming out at the sight in front of her.



"I am sorry, Your Highness," she whispered, slurring her words a bit. Her half-lidded eyes glanced in Rose's direction, and she let out a small smile. The woman didn't sound annoyed. Rose didn't think she could stand the thought of another person watching.
"Come," Caius repeated. "This is not for you, Delphine."
The way he said her name grated on her nerves. He rolled it around his tongue; it was alluring and casual, almost personal. Rose hated the next thought she had, but no matter how much she hated this, she had to do as the crown prince requested. She turned around slowly, making sure to keep her eyes on her feet as she walked to him.
Rose shut her eyes and wished she could shut her ears too as she heard the woman go, "Your Highness, I just came, I need a moment," followed by another loud moan.
Rose locked her eyes on her toes. She didn't want to see, didn't want to know, and didn't want to be a part of this. At least, that was what she repeated in her head as she slowly walked to the prince. Delphine was already screaming, and by the sound of skin hitting skin, she could guess that another round had commenced. Rose stopped beside the bed.
"Take off your clothes," Caius ordered.
Chapter 27: Take Off Your Clothes
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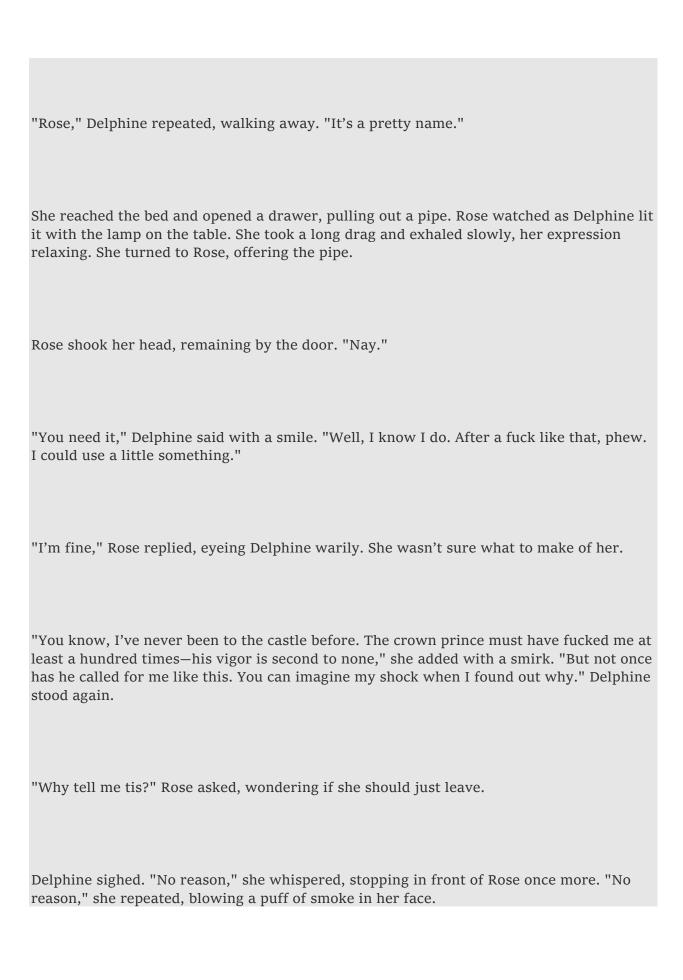
"Take off your clothes," Caius ordered.
Rose's eyes flew open. Surely the order couldn't be for her—but unfortunately, she was the only one actually wearing any clothes. She raised her head and immediately regretted it. She tried to lower it again, but Caius slowly shook his head, his gaze straying to her chest before returning to her face.
Rose undid the ropes around her waist and let the robe fall, leaving her in an undergarment that hid very little. She fought the urge to wrap her arms around herself, her nipples pressing against the thin fabric.
Caius took a sharp breath, cursing under his breath, but his words were cut off as Delphine touched her chest and gasped. "Did your highness just get bigger? Is that even—Aah!" she cried as Caius grabbed her waist and slammed her onto himself.
She froze, trying to recover, but Caius pulled her hair back sharply. "Don't you dare stop moving."
Delphine obeyed, though the strain on her face was obvious. Rose was snapped back to reality by a hand sliding up her leg. She looked down to see the crown prince watching her, his other hand resting behind his head. He was daring her to move away. Rose clenched her fists and met his gaze with defiance. He raised a brow and smirked, his hand continuing its slow exploration, his fingers trailing her inner thighs as their eyes remained locked.
Don't move. Don't move.

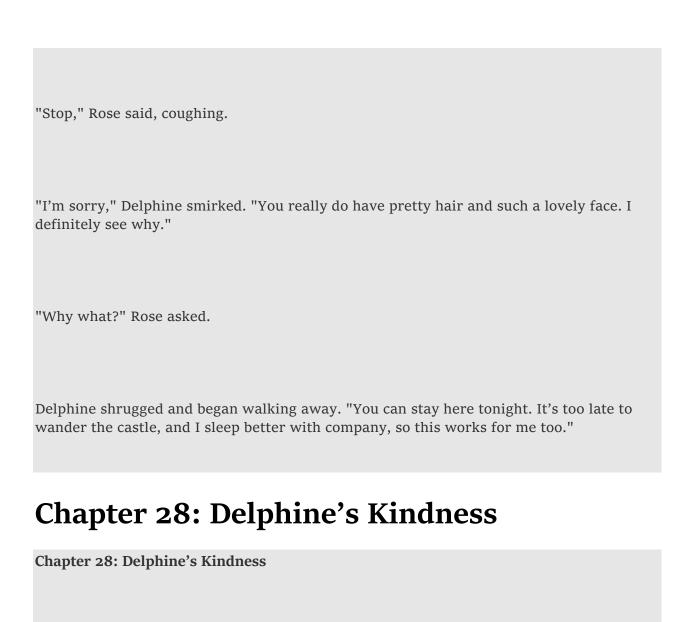
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The kiss was nothing like Ander's, where he had allowed her to take the lead. The crown prince was in complete control, his movements primal and unyielding. Rose struggled to keep up, her legs trembling as the strange sensation built within her. She tried to pull away, but his hand behind her head held her firmly in place as he ravaged her mouth.
A soft moan escaped her throat. Her hands gripped the bedsheets as his fingers moved relentlessly. She was close—she didn't know to what, but she was close—until the crown prince abruptly broke the kiss and withdrew his hand. Rose collapsed to the floor, breathing hard, her head resting against the bed.
"Get off," he growled, his voice strained with pain.
Delphine moved away just as he spilled onto the sheets. The entire time, his eyes remained locked on Rose. He smirked. "Did you want to finish?" he asked.
Heat flooded Rose's cheeks, and she looked away, unable to meet his gaze.
"Leave, both of you."
Rose scrambled to her feet, grabbing her robe and hastily draping it over herself. Her backstill ached, and the events of the last few moments left her feeling raw and exposed. She secured the robe and fled the room with Delphine close behind.

Rose looked around the unfamiliar room. She wasn't sure how she had gotten here, but as they were leaving, Delphine had grabbed her and led her to this space. It was still within the crown prince's wing, and it was clear the room had been prepared for Delphine. The bed was similar to the one in the crown prince's chamber, though half the size.
The room lacked chairs but featured a desk, a shelf filled with books, a large wardrobe, and a dressing area. Despite its simplicity, it was far grander than any room Rose had ever slept in. Perhaps that was why she wasn't bolting for the door—or maybe it was curiosity.
Delphine stood uncomfortably close, inspecting her. "You know, when I heard the crown prince had brought a little plaything to the castle, I could scarcely believe my ears."
"Playt'ing?" Rose asked, horrified. "Tha's not what I am."
Delphine raised a brow. Her robe hung loosely over her shoulders, her breasts barely concealed. Her folded arms were the only thing holding the robe in place and it also featured as a support for her breasts.
"Then what do you call yourself?" Delphine asked with a smirk. She was at least ten years older than Rose, with pale skin and luxurious black hair that cascaded over her shoulders
"Rose," she replied.

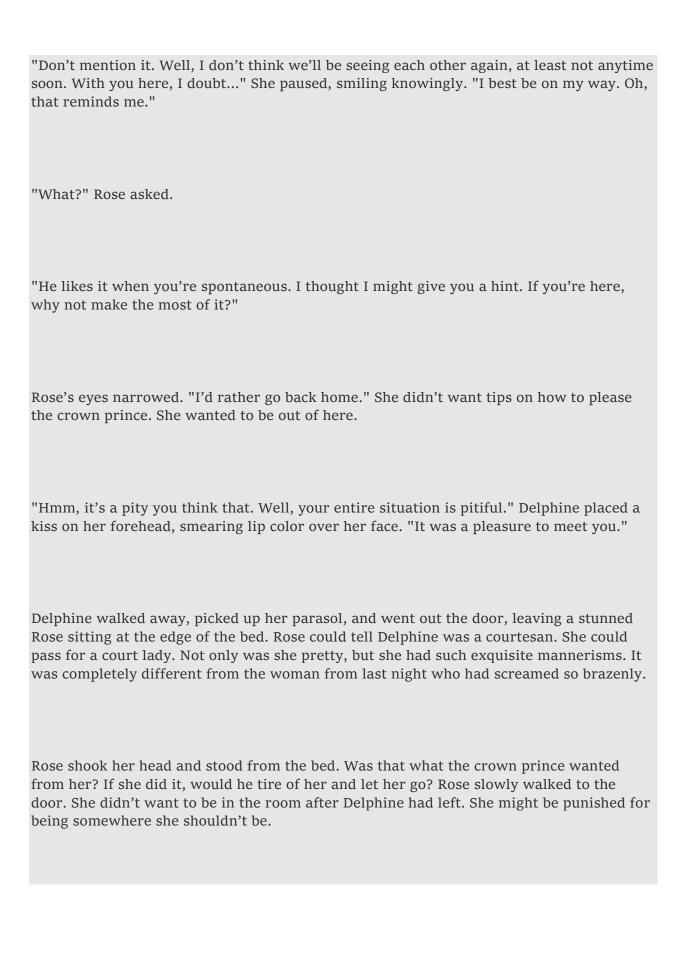




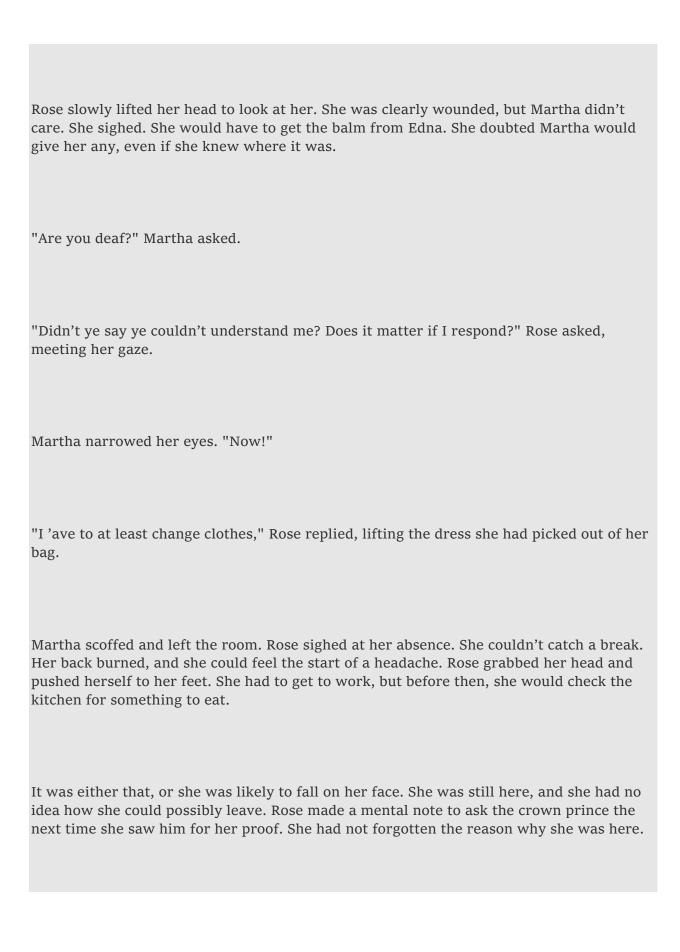
Rose fell asleep faster than she wanted. She could hear Delphine speaking in the background, but for the life of her, she couldn't understand a thing she was saying. She didn't want to think about what had happened. She just wanted to forget it, and the soft bed being so soothing against her sore back was just what she needed.

The sound of rustling woke her up. She opened her eyes to see Delphine by the dresser, a powder puff to her face and a candlelight beside her. She turned to see Rose looking at her and smiled. Rose realized Delphine had been wearing makeup last night—no wonder her face had seemed oddly pale.

Delphine stood up and rushed toward Rose, gathering her dress in her hand. "I have to be out of the castle by dawn. You can still sleep some more if you'd like."
She was dressed completely differently from last night. Instead of just a robe, she wore a full dress, a corset tied around her waist, and a skirt so voluminous it looked like she was hiding at least two people under it. Her hair was also done, tied up to expose her shoulders. A simple necklace rested on her neck, drawing attention to her collarbones—or perhaps two other things.
"Nay, thanks," Rose replied with a smile as she moved to a sitting position. Her back was sore, but at least it didn't hurt as much as it would have if she had slept on the hay bed.
"How's your back?" Delphine suddenly asked.
Rose's eyes widened, and she lifted her head to meet Delphine's gaze. "Ye knew."
Delphine shrugged. "There was a commotion when I arrived. I might have asked around."
"Thank ye," Rose said softly.

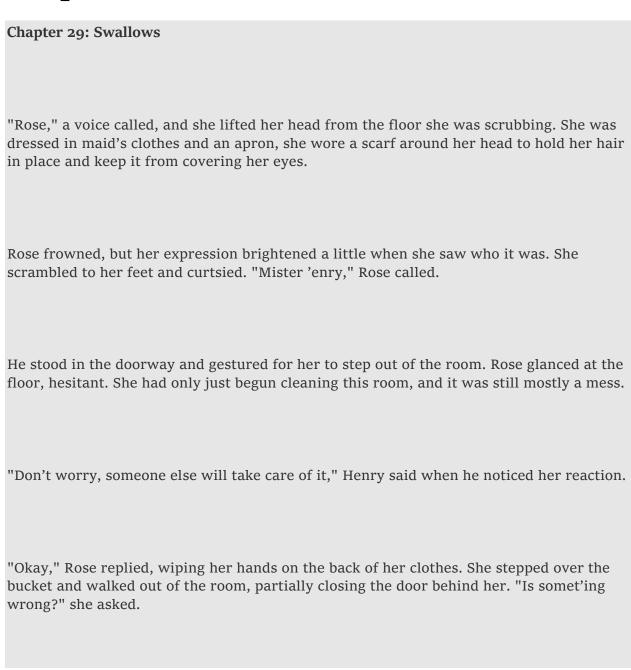


Rose made her way to the servant quarters without much incident and arrived at the room she shared with Martha, only to find it locked. She knocked once, twice. She inspected the door. It was clearly locked from the inside. Rose tried again but didn't get any response.
Some servants were already awake and going about their duties. She didn't know how long she had before she would get assigned something to do. She would have liked to at least change out of these clothes. She wrapped herself tighter.
"Mart'a," Rose whispered and knocked. "Mar—"
The door was pulled open. "Never call my name like that," Martha said, glaring down at her.
Rose rolled her eyes and walked past her. "Next time, it'd be nice if ye opened the door—"
"What was that? I can't understand you. Maybe when you learn how to speak."
Rose sighed and didn't reply. She just walked to her bed and sat down, mindful of her back. She sat upright, avoiding resting her back against the wall. She searched the satchel that held all her belongings and found a good enough dress.
"Also, we need water. Edna and I used all the water trying to get you cleaned up twice in one night. Fetch some!" Martha ordered.



She didn't know if her father was done with her wedding present yet, but if he knew he had to send it to her here, he would finish it as fast as he could. She felt a pain in her chest. It was only two days until her wedding, and it was pretty clear she was not going to make it.

## **Chapter 29: Swallows**



No, some things arrived for you."	
Rose frowned and noticed he held a bag. However, she didn't say anything and just wai	ited
Here," he said, handing the bag to her. "You can take a break for now while you check His royal highness insisted that I make sure you go through the items as soon as I give hem to you."	it.
Rose accepted it and nodded, her breath catching in her throat. She didn't know what s would find inside, and she was almost scared to check. "Thank ye," she replied.	he
Henry shrugged and walked away without another word. He didn't have to bring it nimself; he could have sent a servant to hand it to her but the crown prince's order making deliver it himself. Rose tore her gaze from his retreating back and turned her attention to the bag. It was a little heavy, but not too much.	de
She held back her curiosity and slowly made her way to the room she shared with Mark she unrolled the hay bed and sat on it. It was either that or she would have to sit on the pare floor. Rose undid the bag and frowned. It was a bit of a mess, and she wondered in ad been ransacked before Henry gave it to her. It slightly upset her, but she figured hings that came into the castle tended to be checked.	e
nstead of delicately pulling out the items one by one, Rose overturned the bag on her band the contents spilled out. There were some clothes, her favorite scarf, some snacks, her flute—Rose's eyes widened when she saw this—and the wedding present.	

As soon as she laid eyes on it, she knew. It was small—not too small—but she knew it was smaller than her father would have originally made it. It was also incomplete. Rose felt tears welling in her eyes as she held it in her palms. It was a pair of birds on a branch, her favorite bird, the swallow.

They stood side by side on the tiny stick, but one was visibly missing a lot of features. There were no eyes, just a beak, and while there was a shape for wings, there were no carvings for the feathers. It also faced away from the other swallow, while the completed swallow's gaze was locked on it.

Rose held it to her chest, and tears spilled down her face. It was certainly her father's work, and she knew what he meant. Her father hated incomplete works. He had to finish them, no matter how long it took, no matter the interruptions that might occur. But he had clearly sent her this one. Rose could only interpret it to mean he believed he would one day complete it.

Rose lifted the carved piece to her face before slowly setting it down. Her father was alive, and not just that—he also had faith that she would return. Rose thought so too. The crown prince couldn't keep her here forever. As soon as he had what he wanted, he was sure to let her go. She just had to give him what he wanted.

What if that wasn't enough?

Rose squashed the thought and began putting away the things brought to her. She was glad she had more clothes to wear. Leaving abruptly had been so chaotic and had left her disheveled more often than not. She arranged everything in the bag. The satchel had been a little too small, but at least she had something bigger now.

She kept the carved piece underneath the other items. It wasn't that she didn't trust the maids, but she'd rather avoid any unnecessary accidents. Besides, she was sure Martha might do something to spite her.

Her hand touched the flute, and Rose instinctively brought it to her lips. She closed her eyes as she played a simple tone. It was something her mother used to hum. She quickly placed the flute back in the bag, deep in the corner, wondering why her father had sent it. She doubted she would be able to play to her heart's content here. However, Rose was happy he had sent it.

She was a little sad that there was no message from Ander. It wasn't like she could read, but Ander could write a little, even if it was just a word he wrote. It would have meant the world to her. Her parents couldn't read or write either so sending her a letter was out of it. Besides, even if they did send her a letter, she would probably just stare at it.

Satisfied with the arrangement, Rose tied the bag. The crown prince had done exactly as he had said he would, and she hadn't exactly done her part. Rose staggered to her feet. Something told her he would take his end of the bargain soon enough. She adjusted her dress and retied the scarf around her head.

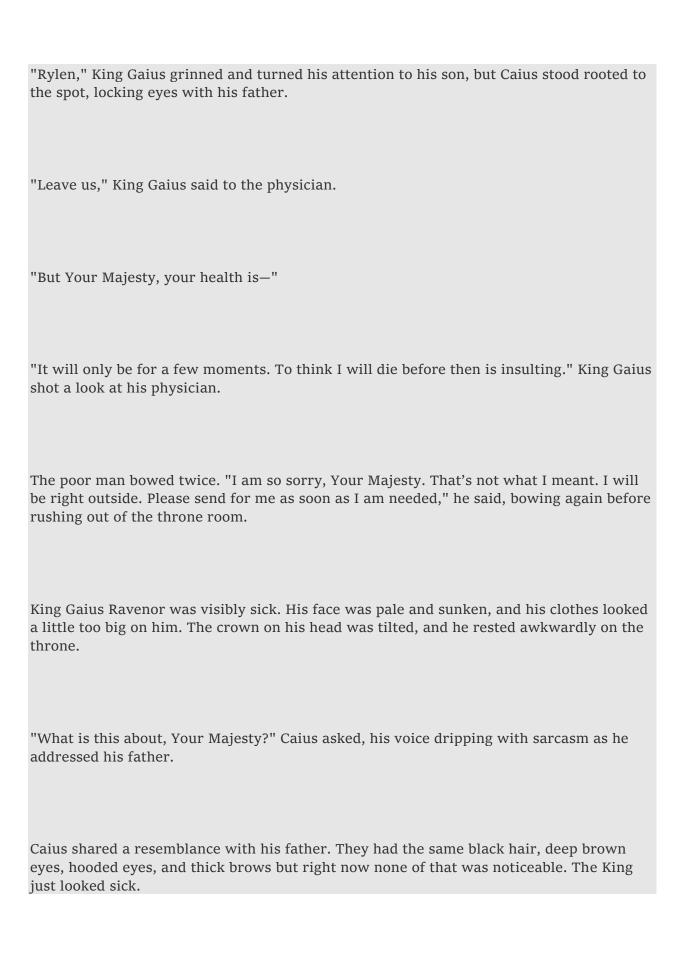
Her back didn't hurt as much as it had the night before, but it was still a little sore. Edna had said it was healing nicely and, at this pace, should be completely healed by the end of the week. Rose had wondered if she was just trying to be nice, but wounded or not, she had run out of chances. She'd best prepare for the night.

## Chapter 30: The King

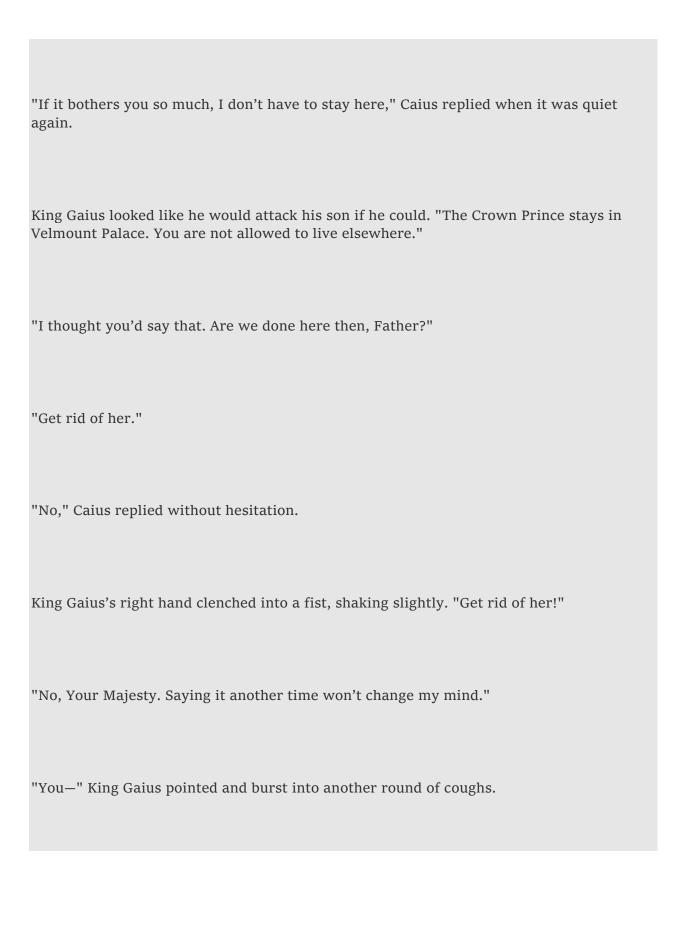
Chapter 30: The King

Caius walked with long strides toward the throne room. Rylen walked beside him. If it weren't for his cousin, he wouldn't have responded to the King's call.
"You haven't visited His Royal Majesty since you returned," Rylen said as they walked through the hallway.
"It was on purpose. I'm sure you've relayed everything that transpired during the journey to the King. My input would be unnecessary."
"His Royal Highness has requested your presence twice. It has nothing to do with your travels. You should see your father when you return to the castle."
Caius stopped walking and slowly turned to look at Rylen. His gaze was sharp as a blade. "You should be the last person saying that."
"His Royal Majesty is very sick, Your Grace."
"And?" Caius asked with genuine nonchalance.
"Well-"

"I'd prefer it if you left matters with my father alone. You should know better than anyone. Don't do more things that would piss me the fuck off, Rylen!"
Rylen flinched slightly. Caius was angry—he usually didn't call Rylen by his name without his title in public. "I apologize, Your Grace, but His Majesty insisted that it was imperative he sees you today."
Caius turned away and continued walking without saying another word, while Rylen trailed after him. He reached the front of the throne room, and the mahogany doors opened. The doors were at least twice his height, and a guard held one side open.
As soon as the door opened to reveal him, activities inside the throne room ceased, and the King lifted his head from the scroll one of his advisors held. "Leave us," he said, his raspy voice carrying across the room.
The advisor bowed and rushed down the stairs. He bowed to the crown prince, offering his respect, before walking past him. Caius faced his father, standing at the bottom of the stairs while his father sat on his throne.
The physician stood beside the King and he bowed to the crown prince. "Your Highness."
"Your Majesty," Rylen said, bowing as low as possible.



King Gaius narrowed his eyes. "You haven't seen me in nearly a month, and this is the first thing you say."
Caius didn't respond to this. He just looked at the King with a bored expression on his face. Rylen, on the other hand, looked to be at a loss. He glanced from father to son, deciding there was nothing he could do about the situation, and kept his lips shut.
"What's this I hear about you bringing one of your many whores into my castle?" King Gaius asked.
Caius didn't respond to this either. He just rested a hand on the hilt of the sword attached to his waist.
"Answer me!" King Gaius said angrily, then burst into a fit of coughs.
"Your Majesty," Rylen called, rushing forward. Caius didn't move an inch.
King Gaius held out a hand, stopping Rylen. "It's only a cough," he said.
Rylen was reluctant to step back, but when the King stopped coughing, he returned to his position beside Caius.



The sound echoed in the hall, loud enough to shake the pillars. King Gaius gripped the armrest as the coughs forced their way out of him, the veins on his neck bulged, ready to burst. Rylen rushed up the stairs to help just as the door burst open.
"Your Majesty," the physician and one of his advisors rushed inside.
Rylen stepped aside for them to do what they needed, while Caius slowly turned around and started walking away.
"Don't you dare leave!" King Gaius called out to his son while gasping for breath.
"I don't think you're in any position to talk, Father. You should take care of your health," Caius said and continued walking toward the door.
Rylen looked from the King to the Prince. He knew he couldn't do anything for the King and decided to go after the Crown Prince. He walked a step behind him as they stepped out of the throne room.
Caius's grip on his hilt was tight. No sooner were the doors to the throne room shut than Caius turned around and threw a punch straight at Rylen. The latter was frozen and could only stare, but Caius didn't hit him. Instead, he punched the wall.
A gasp echoed in the hallway from the guards, and they immediately pretended they hadn't seen what just happened.

"Never do that again!" Caius said, enunciating each word. He slowly pulled his bloodied hand from the wall, completely unfazed. There was a dent in the wall, even though it was made of pure granite.
Rylen leaned against the wall, still in shock. He didn't know the extent of what the King had done to his son. Caius didn't like to talk about it, but Rylen had hoped the crown prince's hatred for his father would thaw as time went by. Instead, it only seemed to have gotten worse.
Caius turned away, and as he was leaving, he said, "Get her to my chambers now."
Prince Rylen slowly bowed to Caius's retreating back and gestured toward a guard. "Get Rose."