

K Lover 271

Chapter 271: After Dinner

Rose didn't think Lady Deana was just being nice as she led Rose to the room. She couldn't help but feel there was a reason for this, and as they got farther away from the dining room, that feeling grew even stronger.

"Where are you from?" was the first question Lady Deana asked.

"Edenville," Rose replied without hesitation. She was sure this was the buildup to more questioning, but she couldn't guess what exactly the lady wanted from her.

"Edenville?" Lady Deana asked in shock. "I would have sworn you were more down south." She turned to face Rose, a small smile lingering on her lips.

Rose shook her head. "Has your Ladyship ever been to Edenville?" she asked.

She shook her head. "I've heard enough. We do a lot of business with Edenville."

Rose nodded, not knowing what to say to this. The conversation was increasingly getting awkward, and as much as she appreciated Lady Deana being nice, she would prefer if she just said what this was about.

"What do you think about Futherfield?" Lady Deana asked, glancing at Rose as though she genuinely cared about what she was about to say.

"It's huge," Rose replied without thinking much about it, and Lady Deana laughed.

"I suppose it is bigger than Edenville, but I wouldn't call it huge," she said, still chuckling about the comment.

"It is," Rose agreed easily.

Edenville wasn't big at all. Rose could count all the members of the village, and there wasn't a name she didn't know or she knew someone who knew them. It was a pretty small town.

They were closer to the room now, and Rose could see servants standing in front with their heads bowed as though waiting for her.

"I apologize for my husband's behavior," Lady Deana said before they got within earshot of the maids. "He likes to tease. I promise he meant no harm by it."

Rose almost lost her footing. Did Lady Deana think she had been bothered by the conversation about Caius's betrothed?

"There's no reason to apologize, Your Ladyship. It was a wonderful dinner," she said with a bright smile.

Lady Deana studied her as though she didn't believe her, then politely nodded. "I'm glad," she said with a smile. "Please don't hesitate to ask the maids if you need anything."

"Thank you," Rose replied. "I'm grateful."

Lady Deana smiled. "I'll let you get some rest. I'm sure the journey here must have been strenuous."

Rose nodded, and Lady Deana withdrew while Rose was led into the bedroom and prepared for bed. After the maids were done, they excused themselves, and Rose finally had some alone time.

She bolted out of the bed the maids had tucked her in and, with her flowy nightdress, ran around the room looking for the bag. It had been moved from where she last saw it, and it didn't take her long to figure out that it had been unpacked.

Rose was mortified and frantically started to search for what they could have possibly done with the contents. If they had opened the map—even if the maids didn't know how to read—they would have immediately figured out what it was.

She checked the wardrobe, but it wasn't there; the shelves, the drawers—but found nothing. Rose was about to lose her mind until she checked the drawers in the dresser and found it.

She not only found the map but also the letter her father had given her. The maids had properly arranged them for her, and it didn't look like they had been tampered with.

She held it to herself as relief flooded her chest, but only half of her problems had been solved. She needed to find a safe place to keep it. At first, she thought about leaving it in the drawer, but that was too risky.

She couldn't keep it on her person as she didn't trust the crown prince—especially when they would be sharing a room—but nowhere looked good enough to hide it.

Suddenly, Rose had an idea, and she rushed to the wardrobe. She probably didn't have a lot of time until Caius walked through the doors, which meant she had to move fast.

She opened the wardrobe, found a dress with a lot of layers, and hid the map within the skirt of the dress. She secured it properly, making sure it wouldn't fall out even if someone moved the dress.

Satisfied that no one would find it here—or even look—Rose returned to bed and shut her eyes. If the crown prince wasn't here yet, she could at least get some sleep before he arrived.

Shockingly, Rose fell asleep faster than she had expected. She thought the new space and the anxiety about getting caught would stop her from falling asleep easily, but it seemed to have the opposite effect.

She slept peacefully, not dreaming about a thing, and it wasn't until she heard the sound of the door opening that her sleep was interrupted. But Rose didn't open her eyes rather she pretended to keep sleeping.

She heard voices other than Caius's, but it wasn't really much of a conversation. She was too scared to open her eyes, she was afraid he might discover she was awake. She figured the other voices were simply servants helping Caius undress for the night.

Everything soon went quiet, and Rose felt the opposite side of the bed dip, as though Caius got into the bed. Rose hoped it was him, as the person moved close enough that she could feel his breath on her neck.

Caius knew Rose was only pretending to sleep. She had slept in his bed before, he knew what her breathing was like while she was asleep but here she was pretending otherwise.

He wanted to shake her and demand that she stop pretending but at the same time, he felt something hold him back. He had tried to look at her face while Lord Leopold spoke about his betrothal but she wouldn't look at him.

Caius was infuriated but for now, his focus was on the bandits. He would deal with this when that was over.

Rose released the breath she was holding when Caius just rolled away from her. She closed and tried to sleep but it completely eluded her.

Chapter 272: Lady Deana

Rose didn't sleep a wink after the crown prince returned to the room. She hated how she was aware of his presence—every turn, every deep breath, every movement—and no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't fall asleep.

She was glad when the sun rose. At least she no longer had to be in the same bed with him. He barely spoke to her and it was pretty awkward even as they headed for breakfast together.

Breakfast was uneventful, and the air seemed pretty tense. Rose didn't know much about Caius' plans, but he obviously planned to go after the bandits today.

Lady Deana had smiled at her as soon as she walked through the dining room doors, and Rose had curtsied in return before taking her seat. Conversation was non-existent. Caius and Rylen looked too serious to speak, and Lord Leopold didn't even try to start anything.

Breakfast was barely over before the three of them left the room, leaving Rose with Lady Deana once again. Her children had also finished breakfast just as quickly and had rushed out to do their tasks for the day.

"Did you rest well?" Lady Deana asked.

Rose's first instinct was to reply truthfully, but she quickly suppressed the urge and nodded her head. "I did, thank you very much."

Lady Deana smiled again. "Do you have any plans for the day? I don't know how today might go, but don't hesitate if you need to do anything."

Lady Deana stopped eating for a moment to look at the door and unconsciously rubbed her arms, her face etched in worry.

Rose could understand how Lady Deana felt. This situation was dangerous. She didn't know much about it, but if they were going to battle bandits, there was a high chance of it going wrong and a lot of people getting injured. Rose could understand her worry.

"Thank you," Rose started to say. "Would it be alright if I took a look around?" she asked.

If this were a normal situation, Rose might have been content staying indoors all day, but that wasn't possible today. She had to move fast. If the bandits were dealt with sooner, there would be no chance for her to escape—she had to do it as soon as possible, and to do that, she had to move around and see exactly what she was dealing with.

Lady Deana tore her gaze from the closed doors. "Look around?" she asked with a frown.

Rose shook her head. "I apologize, I spoke out of turn. I've just never been to a town this big before, and while I was in Hearthgale, I never left the castle. I just thought it would be nice to look around town for a little while."

Rose knew she was being audacious, but Lady Deana had done a few things to show she was nice—or at least nice to her because of the crown prince. It would be careless of her not to take advantage of this.

"Yes, you're right," Lady Deana cried, some of the tension on her face easing. "We could go to the market. I need to buy a few things for the house and some fabrics. I could send Beatrice, but going out will help. I also need some air."

Rose smiled back. "Is it okay if I come with you?" she asked.

"Of course," she grinned. "This is your idea—it would be unfair if I left without you."

Rose was taking advantage of the situation, but she couldn't help feeling strange. She started to wonder if Lady Deana didn't know she was a commoner.

However, even as she had this thought, she had no plans to correct the woman. She needed to leave the estate and check around the town to know which route was best and also ask questions. This was not an offer she could refuse.

Rose smiled at her and continued eating. She didn't think she had a lot of time left. If she knew her way around, she would have left today, but she also knew it was too soon and couldn't try something so dangerous without enough preparation.

"You can find your way to your room, right?" Lady Deana was asking her after breakfast was over.

"Yes, I can. It was a wonderful meal. Thank you."

Lady Deana smiled. "You don't have to thank me for every little thing. It is my pleasure. Now, take a few moments. I will send for you when it is time to leave."

Rose curtsied one more time and started for her room. A few servants bowed to her as she walked past them, and Rose couldn't help but smile. There was no way she would be treated in this manner in the castle. If only she could revel in it for a bit.

She got to her room and immediately locked the door. She rushed to the wardrobe and quickly searched for the map. Rose laid it out and went through it, recalling the names as best as she could. It was more memorization than reading.

The map was certainly smaller than the territory actually was, but that was expected. She traced her hands along the path. She was able to trace the roads they had taken while coming to Futherfield. It was a major road that, if they had kept on it, would have led to Stonefield Pass.

Rose knew this was the road she was supposed to avoid, but what was on the top of her list to do was to get out of Futherfield. Rose could see some paths leading out, but she couldn't just blindly choose one. There were bandits to worry about, which made the marketplace such a great place.

She was bound to hear gossip between traders and learn which roads the bandits weren't attacking, while also figuring out how to escape Futherfield unnoticed.

Rose was still intensely staring at the map when she heard a knock. She got off the bed like a projectile and bolted for the wardrobe. Returning the map to where she had kept it, she walked to the door and opened it.

Chapter 273: The Marketplace

Rose climbed into the small carriage with Lady Deana, sitting beside her. Rose grabbed her hat as a light wind blew past just as she got into the carriage.

Lady Deana had been nice enough to give her a peach-colored hat, which she tied around her head. Rose appreciated this as it was a decent protection from the cold.

As soon as she got in the coachman closed the door and soon enough rode out of the estate.

Beatrice rode behind them with the servants' cart, already holding the empty baskets they would fill at the market. Some servants had already been sent ahead on foot. Rose was informed that the marketplace wasn't too far from the estate.

Rose tried to look around as they went. The road was different from the one they used while going to the estate, and Rose kept her eyes glued to the road as she didn't want to miss anything. But surprisingly, Lady Deana wanted to have a conversation with her.

"Where did you meet His Highness?" she suddenly asked after a few casual conversations.

Rose froze and slowly turned around to look at the lady. "Edenville," she replied.

"His Highness went there?" she asked.

Rose nodded. Now that she thought about it, she didn't exactly know why the crown prince came all the way to Edenville. And that wasn't all—he went to her faraway town with more men than he did to Futherfield.

"Yes. About two months ago," she replied, staring at the woman. Was this why Lady Deana wanted to get closer to her? For information?

Lady Deana nodded. "I'm just curious. My husband came back from the castle, and he wouldn't stop talking about how His Highness wouldn't let him see the famous redhead in the castle," Lady Deana said with a soft laugh. "I'm sure what he did during dinner last night was to get back at the crown prince."

Famous! Rose didn't think that.

Rose simply nodded, wondering why she was being told this information. The Futherfields seemed to have a decent relationship with the royal family. At least Caius didn't seem hostile to them, even when Lord Leopold kept talking about things he didn't like.

"Oh look," Lady Deana said with a squeal, "we are here."

Rose turned her attention to the window as the carriage was drawing into the market. She could hear several voices as traders yelled their goods to draw in customers.

The marketplace was huge, but the goods seemed fewer. A few stalls were locked, and overall something seemed odd. Hawkers walked about selling snacks. A woman was positioned not far from the entrance selling roasted root vegetables. Rose was instantly reminded of her mother's favorite snacks.

The carriage stopped not too far from the entrance, and the coachman was quick to open the door. Rose got down first, then Lady Deana with the help of the coachman.

Rose doubted his job was simply riding Lady Deana around. He looked to have a very important position, and Rose didn't miss the sword around his waist.

"I like to walk from here," Lady Deana said. "I hope you don't mind."

Rose shook her head. She preferred to walk too. So far, it didn't feel like she was getting any information, and she was afraid to ask Lady Deana. The lady might seem nice, but Rose doubted she was on her side.

"My lady," Beatrice said and came up to them.

Beatrice was an older woman, and if Rose had to guess her age, she would probably say she was slightly older than Lady Deana. She was petite with a round face that gave off the feeling she was nice.

Rose didn't think so, but so far, Beatrice hadn't acted hostile towards her, nor had she tried to be overfamiliar.

"Let's start with the bakery, Beatrice. I want to try the bread you wouldn't stop talking about," Lady Deana said.

"I only mentioned it once, My Lady," Beatrice replied. "And you can always ask the cook to bake it," she whispered.

"Where's the fun in that? Besides, if it's the talk of the town, I'm sure there must be something special about it."

"Yes, my lady," Beatrice replied.

"I'm glad you agree. After that, we'll stop at the butcher's stall and then finally the fabric shop."

Beatrice nodded again, and so did the two young maids behind her. They each held a basket.

Lady Deana turned to look at Rose. "If there's anything you'd like to buy, don't hesitate."

"No, I'm fine."

Lady Deana narrowed her eyes and moved closer to Rose. "We are at the market. It would be wrong not to buy anything. You don't have to choose right now, but if you see something you like, I'll get it for you."

"Thank you," Rose said, even though she had no intention of taking Lady Deana's offer.

They headed for the bakery first. The baker was absolutely astounded that the Lady would come to him, and he almost didn't want her to pay, but Lady Deana insisted, and he told her a price that Rose knew was less than half the original price.

She didn't miss the stares that were thrown their way. No one approached them, but Rose found that she couldn't tell if the stares were hostile or not.

After the bakery, they went to the butcher's stall. Beatrice walked in front, while Lady Deana was right after her, and Rose was only a foot behind her side, while the remaining two maids were behind.

"Don't we have enough meat at the estate? They can slaughter a cow, sheep, or even a lamb if Her Lady requests it. Why do we have to buy meat?"

"Shh!" the second maid scolded. "You don't ask questions."

Rose turned around to look at the girls, and they both immediately acted as though they had been caught in a crime, but she didn't say anything—just turned her attention to the front.

The same thing happened at the butcher's stall. Lady Deana bought meat at less than half the price after the butcher didn't want to sell it to her. Rose wondered if it was because she was the Lady of the town or because she was Lady Deana.

It wasn't until they got to the fabric shop that Rose heard anything useful. The shop owner was discussing how he lost some expensive fabrics because his carriage of goods was attacked. But as soon as he caught sight of Lady Deana, the conversation ended, and the customer left after bowing to the Lady.

"Thank you for coming to my humble shop, Your Ladyship," he said with a bow. "What would Your Ladyship like to buy?"

"Silk," Lady Deana replied immediately.

The shop owner's expression soured. He was a man in his late thirties with a stomach that was more than half his width. He wore a robe that dropped onto his shoes and a small cap on his head.

"Is that all, Your Lady?" he asked.

"Some cotton, but most importantly, silk."

"I'm afraid I do not have silk at this time, but I should have some tomorrow before noon. But cotton, I have as much as you'd like."

"Tomorrow," Lady Deana said with a frown.

"I can—" Beatrice started to say, but her words were cut short.

"Would it be okay if I came to get them?" Rose asked.

Lady Deana looked at her with surprise. "You'd do that?" she asked.

"Yes. I'm already familiar with the way, but I don't want to do anything you don't—"

"No, no. This is wonderful. She will come to pick it up tomorrow. Pack up a blue color..."

Rose turned away as she calculated. She just found a reason to leave the estate, but she still had her original problem—which was the path to take. Would she have to trust her gut on this one? That would be too risky.

"Rose," Lady Deana called.

Rose turned her attention back, and the maids all had baskets full of the items they had bought.

"Let's go," she whispered.

Rose nodded and started walking in the direction of the carriage. It was all the way at the front of the marketplace, and they had gotten deep into the market.

"Are you sure you don't want anything?" Lady Deana asked, not letting it go.

Rose had completely forgotten at this point, but just before she could refuse, her eyes caught trinkets laid out on a small mat.

Her eyes caught something familiar, and without thinking she walked closer to it. There was no way she was mistaken—but to think it had reached Futherfield was a shock.

"Do you want me to buy it for you?"

"No," Rose replied immediately. "I just thought it looked familiar."

Lady Deana nodded. "All the more reason to buy it," she smiled.

Rose wanted to refuse her offer, but as she picked it up and took a closer look, she knew there was no way she could leave without it.

Chapter 274: Can You Play?

Rose stared at the woodwork in her palms. There was no doubt about it—this belonged to her father. However, she was sure this was not something she had seen him make, and it didn't look too old. It must have been made in the past two months.

"You have sharp eyes," the old man who seemed to be the seller finally spoke.

Rose had been oblivious to his presence until he spoke. She jerked a little, lifting her head to look at him. He was pretty old and used a stick to walk. His clothes looked bigger than he was, and he looked like he had just wrapped fabrics around himself rather than wearing clothes.

"Where is this from?" she asked the man.

"Edenville," he said, and scratched his white beard. "It was difficult to get it here, not with the bandits on the way."

Rose heard whispering again, but as before, no one approached them. She looked at the carved object. It was a swallow. Swallows were her favorite birds. They were small and a little difficult, especially if she wanted to get all the details but it was something her father did easily.

Rose flipped it as she stared. There was no way she could be wrong. There was an almost identical one sitting in the drawer of a dresser in the estate.

"It's pretty," Lady Deana said and leaned in for a closer look. "You sure you don't want me to buy it from you?"

"I hear it is from a famous woodworker," the old man said, further advertising it.

Rose tried not to show any expression at this. Her father was pretty well known for his work in Edenville, but she was certainly surprised to hear someone call him famous.

"Did you bring it from Edenville?" Rose asked. She knew without a doubt who made it, but she was more curious about how this old man, who didn't look like he could walk far, made it to Futherfield.

"Yes, the main roads are dangerous. It took me almost two weeks for a journey that wouldn't have taken more than a few days."

Rose nodded, grateful that he was pretty chatty. This was the most information she had gotten about the roads. It wasn't useful, but it confirmed that she could get to Edenville safely if she followed the right path.

"Would you buy it?" Lady Deana asked.

Rose internally swore. She knew she was taking a lot of time to decide if she wanted to buy the swallow or not, but she couldn't just leave without asking him the path he took. Still, it would certainly be suspicious if she went ahead and asked.

"Yes, please," she reluctantly said.

"Wonderful!" the old man said with glee. "That would be one silver coin."

"What? That's too expensive!" Rose yelled. Her father had never made anything that expensive. To sell a single swallow for that amount was practically robbery.

"Yes, but this is a rare swallow and can only be found in Edenville. The roads are dangerous and I had to struggle..." he paused as he showed his limp.

"It's fine," Lady Deana said and reached for the purse one of the maids held.

"No, it's not," Rose said and started to drop it.

The old man had called it rare. It wasn't that rare—she had one sitting inside—and she thought it was annoying that he was selling her father's work this expensively when her father didn't even make that much from it.

Lady Deana grabbed her hand and smiled at Rose's face. At the same time, she noticed the friendly smile on the trader's face get even wider. Rose was annoyed, but at the same time, she wanted it.

"Are you sure it is really from Edenville? You could be lying. How did you get here?"

The old man immediately looked offended. "I wouldn't dare lie about something like that. I came through the rocky path and it was especially hard. It made my limp worse. The main roads are dangerous, especially at night."

"Rose," Lady Deana called, impatience in her voice.

Rose knew she couldn't stall for information any longer. She was sure she seemed absurd and didn't want Lady Deana to have weird thoughts about her. She made a note to properly explain on the ride home.

She nodded and said, "Thank you, Lady Deana."

The woman smiled at her and handed a single silver coin to the old man. His eyes twinkled as the coin fell on his open palm. He looked like he had never seen a silver coin in his life.

"We should go," Lady said.

Rose nodded and started to walk away, the swallow in her hand. It was a finished work, unlike the one sitting in the dresser. She didn't know why she wanted it. The swallow wasn't even sitting on a branch, nor was it taking flight. Rather, it was simply resting on its claws, its wings closed.

The walk to the carriage was quiet, and if Rose wasn't in deep thought about what the old man said, she might have thought Lady Deana was angry with her. But she was too busy trying to consider what rocky path he was talking about.

She wished he had given her more information, or at least a name. She was heading out tomorrow, and there were still a lot of things she didn't know.

"It is a pretty bird," Lady Deana said, breaking Rose from her thoughts as they rode in the carriage. "I can see why you don't want to let go of it."

Rose looked down and realized she was squeezing it to herself. "It's not just that," she mumbled. "This was made by my father. I haven't seen him in a while."

"What?" Lady Deana asked. "Are you sure?"

Rose was shocked by her reaction and obvious interest. "Yes."

"May I?" she asked, stretching out her hands.

Rose nodded and handed it to her. Lady Deana took it and moved it closer to the window to the light to get a better look.

"It's such great craftsmanship. Are you sure about it?" she asked, glancing at Rose.

Rose thought about it for a moment but decided it was fine to show her. "Yes, I have a very similar one. My father made it for me." There was no reason to say why, so she skipped that part. "Placed side by side, you'll see the similarities."

Lady Deana's eyes twinkled. "Can you show me?" she asked.

"Of course, I brought it with me."

"Wonderful," Lady Deana replied with delight, still holding onto the swallow without any intent to give it back.

Rose realized she didn't mind much. If Lady Deana wanted it, she could have it. She had bought it more for comfort than anything else. The letter was the only sort of communication she had had from home. Seeing her father's work had been relieving. Knowing that he was still able to carve, even while taking care of his wife too, gave her a little joy.

As the carriage pulled to the front of the main house, Lady Deana bolted out without waiting for the coachman. Rose was worried she might fall, but she was surprisingly agile. She followed after her, and Lady Deana briskly walked towards the house. Rose could barely keep up with her.

Beatrice ran forward past Rose. "My lady," she cried.

"Tell the cook to start preparing lunch. I don't know if the men will be back on time, so for now, just make lunch for me and Rose."

"Yes, my lady," she said and glanced at Rose.

"Rose," Lady Deana called as Beatrice headed in a different direction with the rest of the maids. "Where is it?"

Rose blinked. She didn't know if Lady Deana was actually interested or perhaps liked to indulge in gossip, but it wasn't as though it mattered. She had no aversion to showing the gift to her.

"In the room," Rose replied.

Lady Deana nodded excitedly, the swallow still in her hand. She glanced down at it and walked in the direction of the room.

They got to the front, and that was the only time she seemed hesitant. Rose realized she didn't want to go into the room—it was the crown prince's private quarters. Rose could understand why. However, she didn't give Lady Deana a chance to hesitate.

"It's right inside," she said and stepped forward in a way that made Lady Deana walk into the room with her.

Rose walked into the room and gestured for her to come towards the dresser. She opened it, and the Lady looked at it with wide eyes. She dropped the swallow she held at the top of the dresser and picked the ones on the branch.

"You're right," she said, then her expression fell. "Is something wrong with this one? It's missing some features."

"It's not complete. When next I see my father, I think he will finish it," she said with a smile, but Rose couldn't help but flinch at the pain in her chest.

Lady Deana looked at her for a few moments and looked like she was about to say something, but the flute in the drawer caught her eye. "Is that also yours?"

Rose looked down and saw what she was pointing at. She slowly nodded as the twinkle was back in Lady Deana's eyes.

"Can you play?"

Chapter 275: Distance Between Them

Caius and his men didn't return to the castle until sunset. Rose was seated with Lady Deana, watching the snow fall as she played the flute. Lady Deana had taken a liking to it as she had done the swallows. Rose had her spend a significant portion of the day together.

A servant rushed to the side of the mansion where they sat in the loggia. The loggia overlooked the frosted gardens, its arched openings framing the gentle snowfall, creating a scene Rose couldn't stop looking at.

"My Lady," the servant said with a bow as they approached. "His Highness and the Lord have arrived."

Lady Deana was on her feet immediately. She glanced at Rose, and it was the first time Rose glimpsed how worried the lady was. Lady Deana had completely avoided the subject while they conversed, but it was clear it wasn't because of a lack of interest—rather, she had wanted to distract herself from her worries.

Rose stood, clutching the flute to her side. She smiled at Lady Deana and nodded, trying to tell her she understood wordlessly.

"I apologize, but we'll have to cut this short. Hopefully, you'll play some more for me tomorrow. I absolutely enjoyed watching and listening to you play. I don't think I've heard anything that good in such a long time."

Rose couldn't help the smile that appeared on her face. She couldn't remember the last time she was praised so much, and all she did was play an old tune.

"Thank you for your kind words, my lady, but I'm not as good as you say. I'm honored that you quite like it."

"Quite?" Lady Deana exclaimed. "I love it." She started walking, and Rose was quick to follow after her. "I would listen to you play all day if I could."

"Just let me know," Rose said truthfully. "I'll play whenever you like." She winced at the irony of her words but she did mean it.

Lady Deana nodded and slightly increased her pace as she followed the servant who was leading them out of the loggia and toward the main part of the mansion.

"I'd like that," she replied to Rose and didn't speak further on the matter, but Rose noticed the way her palms opened and closed as they walked.

The main entrance was thrown open when they got there, and Caius walked in side by side with Lord Leopold and Prince Rylen. Lady Deana called from the top of the stairs, drawing everyone's attention.

"Lady Deana," they all said simultaneously as they looked up, but Rose didn't miss the fact that Caius looked past Lady Deana and his gaze rested on her.

She kept her gaze down, holding onto the flute. She shouldn't have come, but it seemed like the thing to do and by the look on Lady Deana's face, she had expected Rose to accompany her.

Lady Deana rushed down the stairs; her husband rushed toward her. With the speed she ran, Rose was worried she might trip. However, Lady Deana got to the bottom just as her husband reached the stairs.

He grabbed her, and she collapsed into his arms. "There, there," he said as he steadied her.

She took a deep breath and composed herself. "How did it go?" she asked softly, resting against him.

"Not very well," he whispered.

"I'm glad you're back home safe," she mumbled and stood by herself, stepping away from him. "All of you."

Lord Leopold grabbed her wrist. "Come," he said, and started pulling her away. "I'll see you during dinner, Your Highness."

"Very well, Lord Leopold," Caius replied.

It was quiet for a bit as Lady Deana was led away by her husband. Rose could hear whispers of him trying to console his wife as they walked together.

"Prince Rylen, Thomas—take care of things. If there's anything that needs my attention, let me know. Tell the men we'll set out again tomorrow. They should get enough rest. Hopefully, we'll have better luck this time."

"Yes, Your Highness," Prince Rylen replied.

Caius walked toward the stairs where Rose still stood. He took the stairs two at a time, and she scooted closer to the wall. With every blink, he got closer and closer to her.

Caius was dressed in armor that covered his chest, arms, and thighs. His hair was windblown, and his face was red. Rose wondered if it was all the riding in the cold.

"Your Highness," she said with a curtsy. It was not her concern what he did. "Welcome back."

Caius simply glanced at her and walked past. Rose didn't know if she was relieved or annoyed. Perhaps it would have been better if she had stayed away.

She stood to her full height and saw Thomas look away from her. She would have liked to ask him how it went, but Rose doubted she could do that.

"What do you think you're doing?"

Rose turned her head to see Caius a few feet away, staring at her. "Your Majesty," she called with a frown. Was she supposed to go after him?

He narrowed his eyes at her, but instead of speaking, he continued walking. Rose internally sighed. She only had to bear this for one more night. Tomorrow, she would be on her way to Edenville. By the time he returned, she would be long gone—and he would have his hands too full to come after her.

Caius didn't glance back the entire time. He just walked straight ahead. They got to the room, and he walked in first. Rose followed right after, closing the door behind him.

It was hard not to notice they were alone. No servants had accompanied them, and Rose shuffled on her feet. She didn't want to lift her head immediately; she could tell he was staring right at her.

Suddenly, his feet turned to face her, and Rose instinctively took a step backward. But there was nowhere to go as he was still in front of the door.

Caius took just one step forward, his armor clanking as he moved. He closed the gap between them and lifted her chin with his hand. His gloves were cold, and Rose looked up to see his brown eyes looking down at her.

"Do you intend to keep ignoring me?" he asked.

Rose was left speechless at this. There was no doubt about it—the crown prince was certainly not right in the head.

"I wouldn't dare ignore Your Majesty," Rose simply replied.

It was strange. She didn't feel the slightest twinge of fear as she stared up at him. It was something else, but Rose didn't think it was important enough to dwell on.

His eyes moved to her lips, and his hand on her chin slid down toward her neck. His pupils dilated, and the lustful look was back in his eyes. Rose couldn't help but think the crown prince thought only with the thing between his legs.

He bent his head, and a loud knock caused Rose to jump. She was grateful for the interruption—and by the look on the crown prince's face, he noticed.

He glared at her and pulled his hand away, while Rose didn't waste any time stepping away. She could have left the room if she could, but that was clearly out of the question.

The servants came to tell them dinner would be ready and to help the crown prince prepare. Rose sat on the bed all through this, her gaze on a spot on the wall.

She still had a lot of thinking to do. The last thing she was worried about was whether the crown prince was upset with her or not. She didn't care what he thought, as long as he didn't take out his anger on her.

Rose heard footsteps walking toward her, and she turned around. Caius was dressed in dinner clothes. The armor was gone, his face looked slightly refreshed, but it was hard to say with the glare he sent her way.

"Stand up," he said, even though she was already getting to her feet.

Rose nodded and walked out of the corner. Caius didn't step out of the way; he just stared at her while she looked at her feet.

What did he want?

He was keeping her away from her mother. Yet, he had the guts to act as though she were the one doing something wrong. She didn't understand him. Besides, it would be a waste of time to try.

The crown prince was not someone to spare such thoughts on. He was nothing but selfish, and all he cared about was what he wanted. That was all she needed to remember and see—not the slight sad look in his eyes as he glared at her.

Rose told herself she was just seeing things. The crown prince didn't care for anything other than what he could get from her. He had made that clear many times over.

Suddenly, he turned and walked toward the door. Rose closed her eyes briefly and walked after him, making sure to keep some distance between them.

Chapter 276: Keep It That Way

Caius could feel her presence behind him. Her footsteps hit the ground softly, but he didn't need to hear them to be aware of her. Rose didn't even have to speak. As long as they were in the same space, he was constantly aware of her.

He was annoyed and irritated. Lady Deana had looked absolutely relieved when her husband returned, but Rose didn't even look in his direction. Rather, he had caught her looking at Thomas as though it was him she was worried about.

Things between them felt heavy. Caius usually wouldn't care about things like that and would completely ignore it, but it was hard to do so when it felt like he couldn't breathe when she was close.

Rose seemed completely unbothered by this, and she looked as if she would prefer never to see him again. He hated that part, and he hated how clearer it was each day—but it didn't matter. Right now, she was with him and he intended to keep it that way.

He stopped in front of the open dining room abruptly, and she bumped into his back. Caius had done this on purpose. He turned just his neck and top half to look at her, and Rose quickly stepped back.

"I am sorry, Your Majesty," she said and curtsied.

Caius narrowed his eyes and turned away. She didn't have to jump that far away. He turned his attention back to the open doors and continued walking.

"Your Highness," Lord Leopold called.

The Lord started to get on his feet as he spoke, and the rest of the people at the table did the same as they paid their respects. Caius took his seat, and Rose came up beside him, curtsying before she sat down.

"Rose," Lady Deana said with a smile as Rose sat down.

"My lady," Rose replied with a friendly smile.

Caius remembered seeing them together when he returned. He was not surprised they had become friendly. Lady Deana wouldn't care if Rose were a commoner or not.

Prince Rylen was mostly quiet during the meal, and Caius could guess why. They had not been successful during the day. It was like the bandits had vanished, or perhaps they had gotten news beforehand that the crown prince was coming and had made themselves scarce.

They found a few hideouts, but they were empty except for a few worthless stolen items. That was the only indication that they had come to the right place. They had arrived too late.

The rest of his men had also turned up empty, but they had no plans to give up. Caius planned to broaden their search tomorrow. He was certain the bandits were still in Futherfield. He was worried that with the weather getting worse in the coming days, they would be harder to find, which meant they had to move faster.

Rylen was quiet because he was angry. He seemed to believe Caius following the main road had tipped the bandits off. Caius didn't think so. There was no indication that his carriage was the royal carriage.

Besides, unless they had been tipped off that he was coming, there was no reason for the bandits to be cautious. Caius didn't even see any sign of them, let alone them running off at the sight of his carriage.

Lord Leopold also mentioned that their activities in the last few days had dwindled, which wasn't good. Perhaps he should have come sooner.

"Your Highness," Lady Deana said with glee halfway through the meal, pulling Caius out of his deep thoughts. "You didn't mention that Rose could play so well."

Rose raised her head, and Caius didn't miss the look on her face. She was clearly not happy that Lady Deana was talking about this. Caius, however, wanted to know everything.

"Play?" he asked with feigned ignorance. He knew exactly what Rose could play. He had also seen the flute in the drawer along with the letter.

"Yes," Lady Deana said with a nod. "You didn't know?" she asked, looking from Rose to Caius.

Rose smiled tightly as Lady Deana glanced at her, and even though she could feel Caius' gaze on her, she refused to look in his direction.

"Know what, Lady Deana? Pray tell me what it is Rose can play," he said.

"The flute. She is so good. And guess what? She taught herself to play the flute. Isn't that impressive?"

"Indeed it is," Caius said with a slight nod of his head. "If only I could have heard it. I am sure it is as good as you say."

"Have you never heard her play before, Your Highness? I promise it is the most marvelous thing."

Caius shook his head. "I am afraid not," he said without hesitation. "I haven't had the pleasure of listening. I didn't even know she could play."

Rose couldn't take it anymore. She turned her head in his direction and couldn't even be surprised when he was looking at her. He raised a brow, as though daring her to counter what he just said.

"Really, Rose?" Lady Deana said with disbelief.

Rose slightly nodded her head. She couldn't exactly say the crown prince was lying. She didn't know what he was getting at or if this was one of his many ploys to mess with her as always.

"If only I could have heard it," Caius said with a voice that made Rose want to claw her ears out.

Lady Deana's eyes widened, and she looked from her husband to Caius, then Rylen, and finally Rose. There was a sheepish look on her face as she stared at Rose, and even before she opened her mouth to speak, Rose already knew what she was about to ask.

"Rose," she said softly. "Would it be too much to ask that you play the flute after dinner?"

Rose closed her eyes briefly. She could feel Caius' gaze on her. This was exactly what he wanted, and Lady Deana was playing right into it. She smiled and nodded.

"Wonderful," Lady Deana squealed. She turned to her husband. "Wait till you hear her play. It will be the best thing you ever heard."

Chapter 277: One Last Time

Rose sat on a stool with her legs crossed at the ankles. The skirt of her dress pooled around her hips to the floor. She sat on the stool with her back straight, her arms lifted and bent at the elbows, holding the flute to her lips as she played a tune.

Her red hair fell across her shoulders, a few strands rested on her face but that didn't bother her. The fireplace crackled and sparkled behind her. The fire gave a glow as she played the flute.

Rose's fingers moved over the holes, closing and opening to change the notes. Her head tilted left and then right as she lost herself in the music. Rose's eyes were closed as she played, memories flooding her mind. Some good, some bad.

It was easy to forget her audience, who listened with rapt attention. Rose was never one to shy away from playing. She would play the flute as often as she could, especially when there was someone to listen—and even if there wasn't, it didn't make much difference to her.

Rose played elegantly. The way her fingers moved as she played was one of experience. The tune flowed beautifully, and more than a few heads bobbed and shook to the rhythm.

At the end of the music, Rose slowly opened her eyes and brought her hands down. She smiled softly as she looked around. Lady Deana immediately started to clap.

"That was wonderful," she cried and Rose could tell she meant her words.

The rest of the room nodded their heads in approval. Only one person didn't look like he shared the same thought.

"Thank you," Rose said softly, gripping the flute as she placed both hands on her lap.

They had moved to the private drawing room. It was a cozy little room that was one-third the size of Caius' room. It didn't hold a lot of things. There was a fireplace, some furniture which mostly included a table, some stools, two long chairs, and some regular cushioned chairs.

Lady Deana sat on one of the long chairs with her husband. He held her close, and even while she clapped, he didn't let go of her. Prince Rylen sat on one of the single chairs while Caius lay on the chaise lounge.

Caius was to her right, Rylen directly in front of her, while Lady Deana and her husband sat to her left. Rose sat in front of them, right in the middle of the room with her back to the fireplace.

The light in the room cast a shadow on the crown prince's face as he stared at her, and Rose got an ominous feeling. It was easy to ignore his stare while she was playing, but now that nothing distracted her, it was all she could feel.

"Thank you for playing, Rose," Lady Deana said softly. "We absolutely enjoyed it."

"Indeed," Rylen replied with a nod of his head.

Rose couldn't help it. Her face lit up immediately, color rising to her cheeks as she smiled. "Thank you," she grinned as she slowly bent her head.

"Do you think you c—" Lady Deana started to say but was interrupted.

"That's enough for tonight," Caius said and got out of the chaise lounge in one swift movement.

Lady Deana was about to protest, but she wasn't given the chance as Caius lifted Rose off the stool with just one hand and placed her on her feet.

She had to grab him to steady herself. It was funny how this was his idea, yet he was getting annoyed. She let go of him as she steadied herself and curtsied to the room.

"Goodnight, Rose," Lady Deana said. "Thank you for tonight," she smiled at her.

"It was my pleasure," she said. "Goodnight, Lady Deana."

Rose felt a strong arm around her waist, and she was pulled toward the door. Her eyes widened, and she bent her head down in embarrassment. He didn't have to be so obvious. It didn't help that Lady Deana giggled to her husband.

Thankfully, he didn't drag her in that manner the whole way, just to the door. He stepped out first, and once again Rose was left walking behind him. She tightened her grip around the flute. It felt warm, but it wasn't as warm as Caius' hands on her.

Rose moved her fingers to her temple at this odd thought. She must be exhausted from all the thinking and the things she needed to do before sunlight. That was the only explanation for this thought.

They got to the room, and Caius was quick to dismiss all the servants standing outside with their heads bowed. He then pulled her into the open room and shut the door behind her.

Rose gripped the flute tightly as the crown prince closed the gap between them, pinning her to the door with his body. He easily towered over her and looked down at her with a strange expression.

Rose didn't need any warning about what was about to happen. She already had an inkling from how restless he had been. She kept her gaze down as she wondered if she should indulge one last time.

Caius lifted Rose's chin, and she was forced to look at his face. Rose could barely see his expression; all she could see were the whites of his eyes and the way his nostrils flared as she met his gaze.

He pressed his body against her and Rose couldn't help her shock. How was he already hard?

He held her chin tight as though he didn't want her to move, but Rose had no intention of doing so. He only held her gaze for a few moments before he crushed her lips with his.

Rose didn't push him away. Her body stilled for a beat, her breath caught somewhere in her throat, and then slowly she melted into the kiss. Her hands clutched the flute tightly, as if it were the last thing keeping her tethered to reality.

Chapter 278: Divine

Caius half expected some resistance when he tried to kiss Rose and was pleasantly surprised when he got none. He wasted no time taking her lips, just like a man dying of thirst being offered water.

Her lips were just as soft as he remembered, the way she often hesitated to kiss him back with tongue. Caius didn't care; he wanted every inch of her, and he intended to get it.

He pressed against her, his hard-on threatening to rip out of his pants. He had held on too long, and as always, he was starting to wonder why he had stayed away in the first place. She tasted divine. He knew he could never get his fill of her.

Caius lifted her as they kissed, and Rose wrapped her arms and legs around him. Caius internally swore. He wanted to plunge into her right now, to feel her slick, tight walls around him. The thought was enough to make him lose his footing, and his pants felt even tighter.

She rubbed against him, tightening her grip around his waist, and Caius pulled on her hair, breaking the kiss. He was trying to hold on to control, and here she was making him forget what that even meant.

She looked down at him, her arms around his neck, and held his gaze. Her hazel-green eyes stared intensely at him. Caius felt his heart skip a beat, but it must be all the excitement.

Her chest heaved as she stared down, her bosom rising and falling. Her face was flushed, and some of her hair fell onto her face. Even in the night light, he could see just how beautiful she was.

Caius moved in quick strides, barely looking at the way as he carried her. Rose rested her head on his shoulder as he grabbed her behind, squeezing more than he needed to.

He walked to the bed and placed her on it, hovering over her as he started to kiss her again. He trailed her skin, and she shivered with every touch. He wanted to rip off her clothes, but he held back.

Rose, however, was impatient. She was used to him being as hasty and right now, she would prefer that. She didn't want to savor, didn't want to drag this any longer than it needed to be.

She deepened the kiss, tightening her arms around his neck as she moved her hips. Caius swore against her lips, and Rose felt a thrill. If there was one thing she knew, it was that the crown prince couldn't resist her, and she intended to use that knowledge to her advantage.

The skirt of the dress gathered around her waist, and she knew it would be a hassle to get out of the dress, but clothes had never stopped them before.

Rose's legs were in full view. She wore white lacy stockings and moved seductively her waist against Caius. Suddenly, she broke the kiss and reached for his belt, moaning his name.

Caius swore and splayed her legs. Her flimsy underwear never stood a chance. He undid his pants, and Rose's eyes widened as he slipped out. It didn't matter how many times she saw it—it still shocked her.

Caius noticed her stare and smirked while staring down at her kneeling between her legs. Rose didn't have the time for this. She grabbed his top, pulling him down so they were kissing again.

He was right by her entrance, and Rose pushed down. He slid in easily with barely any resistance. Caius broke the kiss, burying his head against the side of her face as he mumbled profanities.

"Your Majesty," Rose whispered as he pulled out and thrust right in, grabbing onto him.

Caius planned to torture her with pleasure, have her whimpering before he took her. However, all it took was her hand to his belt, and he threw all that out the window—and there was not a single regret in his mind.

Inside her felt just as wonderful, even better than he remembered. Her tight walls sucking him in, and with each pull, it felt like she was begging him to thrust right back in.

He could listen to the way she moaned all day. The way she panted and whimpered at every thrust. He couldn't get enough. Her nails dug into his back, and the pain didn't register.

She cried out and held onto him as he moved in and out of her. He kissed her, crushing her lips with his once again, and she kissed him back just as hard.

Caius broke the kiss and lunged in even harder this time, leaving Rose gasping for breath as she called him.

"Your Majesty," she cried, holding him tightly.

Caius knew when she was close. Her walls contracted against him. The already snug fit got even snuggier. Caius swore into her ears, and she came apart, calling his name. He followed right after, spilling his seed into her.

Rose felt Caius kiss her neck, not immediately pulling away, and reality hit her like a ton of bricks. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath.

She couldn't believe it. They were still in their clothes—only their shoes were off, and Rose couldn't even remember taking them off.

"You act as though you don't want me, then do this," Caius smirked in her ear, licking it.

Rose almost screamed that she didn't want him, but there was no way she could say that. His weight suddenly felt more than she could bear, and she wanted him off, but she knew he wasn't nearly done.

As if to prove her point, he started to kiss her neck again. Rose's body reacted almost instantaneously, and she almost smacked herself. The crown prince's disease was certainly contagious. She didn't trust herself around him—not when her body betrayed her so easily, not when her thoughts blurred the moment he touched her.

He was dangerous in every way, and tonight had only reminded her of that. It was a good thing she would be away from him soon.

Chapter 279: Uncultured Swine

Rose didn't know how long they stayed awake frolicking in the sheets, but when the servants came the next morning, all she wanted to do was sleep for half the day. However, she couldn't afford to be lax—she didn't have time to waste. She only had the morning to get ready.

Caius was surprisingly calmer, and there was a smile on his face every time he turned in her direction. It was annoying that they shared a room; at least if they didn't, she could run to her own space after they were done.

The crown prince stood in front of her after they had dressed for breakfast. He wore linens, and the collar of his shirt was loosened. His breeches were tucked neatly into his boots, but the armor had yet to be strapped on. After breakfast, he would don armor and set out from the estate.

She lifted her eyes from his chest, and Caius had a hint of a smile on his lips. Rose hated his cheeky face, but at the same time, she didn't really hate it. It was nice to see him in a good mood—it didn't happen often.

He was only an inch away from her—any closer and they were bound to touch. He moved his hand to her face, his touch softer than she had expected. His gloved hand felt cold against her skin, a stark contrast to the night before.

Caius smirked, as though he had picked up on her thoughts, and Rose entertained the thought of smacking him.

"Did you sleep well?" he asked her with that knowing look on his face.

"Yes," Rose replied without hesitation, holding his gaze. She didn't want to give him the satisfaction.

"Hmm," he said, tilting his head slightly, his hand still on her face. "That's too bad. I had hoped you wouldn't be able to use your legs for the rest of the day."

The servants!

Rose internally screamed. For a royal, she couldn't help but think the crown prince acted like an uncultured swine.

Rose smiled tightly at him. What else could she say? Besides, it wasn't like the people didn't know exactly what she was here for.

"This shouldn't take much longer," he said, still caressing her cheek. His hand moved lower to the corner of her lips. "My business in Futherfield will be over before you know it."

Caius held Rose's gaze. He could still see the bliss from the night before, even though she wanted to act otherwise. It was funny how he couldn't suddenly remember what he was so angry about—and he knew nothing could ruin his good mood.

His hand lightly grazed her lip, and he was moving his head closer before he even thought about it. He saw her eyes widen, but Caius didn't really care. He wanted to kiss her, and that was exactly what he planned to do.

Rose closed her eyes as their lips met. She should have seen it coming, but surprisingly, the kiss wasn't bad. It was almost like he was telling her he would be back.

He pulled away, and once again had that annoying smirk on his face. Rose was convinced she had lost her mind to think something like that.

"We should go," he said, as though she were the one keeping them there.

Rose hid her lips and nodded. Caius glanced at her, then reluctantly turned around, walking toward the doors. Rose didn't miss how the servants didn't look her in the face.

She did her best to ignore them. She was already used to the crown prince's public antics; the servants were the least among the list of people he endlessly displayed in front of.

Caius walked at a steady pace in front of her as they made their way to the dining room. Rose curtsied before taking a seat just as Lady Deana called to her.

"Rose, good morning," she said with glee.

Rose smiled, returning the greeting. She could tell that the crown prince had his attention on her, but his stare wasn't as grating as before—there was a gentleness to it.

"Did you get enough sleep?" Lady Deana asked, while her husband choked on his water. She turned to him with a worried glance, and he nodded to show he was fine.

"Yes, thank you," Rose replied.

"Thank you for last night," Lady Deana was quick to say, and Rose nodded.

It wasn't like she had much choice in the matter, but to be honest, she didn't completely hate it. She glanced at Prince Rylen, and he seemed quiet. It wasn't that he was loud, but Prince Rylen was polite and usually joined in conversations. Today, he seemed to be avoiding them.

The conversation shifted, and soon enough, Caius was discussing plans with Lord Leopold. Rylen joined in only to agree or disagree—he didn't offer much.

Not long after, breakfast ended, and Rose walked side by side with Lady Deana, accompanying the men to the entrance. Lady Deana wanted to wave them goodbye, and it didn't seem like Rose could decline, so she agreed.

Caius turned to look at her with an odd expression as they got to the exit. Rose closed her palms, worried that he might try to kiss her again in such a public place.

The doors were wide open, and men in armor sat on horses. The front yard was filled with them. Rose could see Thomas through the open door.

"May you all return safely," Lady Deana said.

Rose was relieved when Caius looked at Lady Deana as she spoke. "Thank you," he said, and accepted his sword from a servant.

"I will rid Futherfield of this problem soon enough," he said, and turned around, walking out the doors.

Lady Deana waved at them as she stepped forward, and Rose found herself doing the same.

Caius mounted his horse and glanced at her before turning the horse around and heading for the gates. Rose stood there with Lady Deana until all they could see was the dust the men left behind.

Chapter 280: The Woods

Rose sat atop a brown horse. The mane was long and the horse looked well taken care of. She couldn't help but run her finger across its coat. The horse grunted in satisfaction and moved forward and backwards as she adjusted on the saddle.

Lady Deana looked up at Rose with a worried expression as she watched her climb onto the horse. Lady Deana grabbed the sides of her dress nervously, and Rose worried that she might really stop her.

"Are you sure about this, Rose? I can send you in a carriage—you don't have to ride to the market. And you can also take a servant or two with you. I don't feel very comfortable sending you off alone."

"The market isn't so far off, and I remember the path, my lady. You have nothing to worry about. Riding would be faster, and I'll be back before you know it," Rose said with the best smile she could muster, trying to assure Lady Deana.

She didn't want Lady Deana to panic. Her entire plan revolved around this. This was her only way to get out of the estate undetected, and she also needed Lady Deana to be calm so the lady would take longer to cause a stir when she wasn't back.

"Well then, let me send a servant that can also ride along with you," Lady Deana pressed.

Rose smiled again, doing her best to make sure it didn't look as if she had ulterior motives for going alone. "I ride pretty fast, Lady Deana. It'll be quicker this way, and the marketplace isn't so far off. You have nothing to worry about, I promise."

The lie rolled off her tongue easily, and Rose didn't even hesitate. She felt bad, but it didn't compare to going to her sick mother, and she wouldn't change her mind about this.

Lady Deana held her gaze for a moment. As if seeing what she was looking for, she softly nodded and took a step back. "I'll be waiting for you."

Her smile made Rose's heart squeeze, as all she was about to do was break Lady Deana's trust. She had no intention of going to the market. She planned to veer off into the woods, find the rocky path, and take the route out of the town that wasn't fenced.

As long as she stayed away from the Stonefield pass on her way to Stonegate, she should be fine. After Stonegate, it was smooth sailing from there, and she would be in Edenville in less than a day.

Rose nodded and tightened her grip on the reins, ready to lead the horse toward the gate.

"Wait," Lady Deana cried, as though recalling something.

A servant rushed towards the lady and handed her a small skin bag with a string tied around the mouth. Lady Deana stepped forward one more time and stretched out the bag to Rose.

"Here you go. That should be enough to pay for the silks—and you can get whatever you like," she smiled at her.

Rose's eyes widened. It was the one thing she had been worried about. The crown prince only moved around with gold coins, and she couldn't take that without anyone noticing.

Besides, it was better to have no money than to have a gold coin. She was bound to draw unnecessary attention if she ever tried to spend it.

"Thank you, Lady Deana." Rose was really grateful, but she couldn't say that—she was worried she might give away too much.

Lady Deana lightly touched Rose's arm and stepped away. Rose pulled the reins and spun the horse while Lady Deana stood with a few servants, waving at her.

Rose smiled as she turned away. The horse moved steadily, and Rose could feel the muscles underneath. She sped through the gates, taking the long winding path that led to the market, just to be safe.

Rose didn't plan to see it through. She had checked the map well enough to know where to make the turn that would lead her into the woods and then out of Futherfields. As long as she could get out of Futherfields, the rest should be easy.

Rose glanced backward to check if she had ridden a significant distance from the estate and to also see if she was being followed. Certain she was safe, she turned her attention to the road.

If she kept on this path, she would come upon the market. Houses lay on both sides of the path. It was still morning, so it was quite busy. Voices echoed through as people roamed the street, and she had to swerve her horse a little to the side to avoid a fast-moving carriage. There were quite a number of them—she expected nothing less from a town as big as Futherfield, only second to the capital.

The path suddenly separated, and Rose took the turn without hesitation. She made the horse pick up the pace, but not so much that she would draw attention to herself. The houses remained unchanged, but Rose knew the closer she got to the woods, the fewer the houses.

Rose could already make out the trees, and soon enough, there was nothing but an open field that led into the woods. Rose had been worried she wouldn't make it this far without being stopped, but so far, all she got were stares. Perhaps she had no reason to worry, as it was daylight.

She got to the entrance of the woods and didn't slow down—rather, she rushed right into it, speeding through the path. There was a cleared trail that ran straight through the woods.

It was this path that Rose used, and it led her further into the forest. Rose hoped she would find the rocky path. The terrain was a little different from the map, but Rose didn't feel as though she was lost just yet. She had brought along the map, and as soon as she needed it, she would be quick to use it.