

THE KING'S LOVER

Chapter 31: To His Chambers

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Trigger Warning: The latter part of this Chapter includes a scene of coerced sexual activity. Please proceed with caution or skip if needed.

Rose had just finished arranging her newly acquired items when she heard loud and insistent knocking. She rushed toward the door and was met with Edna who had a distraught look on her face. Martha could be seen coming up behind her.

"I told you to just open the door," Martha said. "You wasted time knocking."

"Come," Edna said instead of replying to Martha. She grabbed Rose's hand and pulled her out of the room.

"Wha's goin' on?" Rose asked, confusion written all over her face. Her stomach squeezed as she wondered if she was in trouble. Mister Henry had said she could leave the job half done.

"We have to get you to His Highness's chambers right now," Edna hurriedly explained.

Rose frowned, realizing it was a completely different situation. "Ye can't be serious? 'Tis just past noon!" Rose exclaimed.

Edna turned to look at her. "I am, and we don't have any time." Noticing the apron, she pulled it off Rose's body. She wrinkled her nose. "You can go."

"Wha's ye talkin' about?" Rose asked. "Go w'ere?"

"The Crown Prince's chambers. Go now!" Edna replied, pushing Rose forward. "I don't know what would happen if you're late. The guard said the crown prince is in a bad mood and that he almost hit Prince Rylen. That has never happened before. The two of them are tied at the hip. They don't even fight."

"Why are you telling her all that? She's only here for one thing, and she should be ready to do it whenever the crown prince asks," Martha mocked. She folded her arms as she stood in the corner.

"Pay Martha no mind. Just go. Now!"

Rose nodded and, gathering her dress, she sped down the servants' quarters to the main section of the castle. She took the long hallway that led to the crown prince's wing, went up the stairs, and got to the path leading to his chambers.

She ran past the guards. No one looked at her oddly as she rushed past them. They were used to her coming and going at this point. She reached the doors, and the guards in front opened them. Rose hesitated. She had run all the way here and was out of breath, but she didn't get a chance to recover when a hand grabbed her wrist and pulled her in.

The doors shut, and Rose was slammed against the closed doors. She winced as her sore back hit the hardwood, but her mind quickly shifted from the pain to the person in front of her. His deep brown eyes almost looked red in the sunlight. His hair was disheveled, and he wasn't dressed in his usual royal attire—just a plain tunic and some pants.

There was a look in his eyes that left her confused. She didn't care about the crown prince's feelings and she certainly didn't care if he was having a bad day.

The hand on her wrist didn't let go; rather, it tightened as his body locked her in place. The crown prince studied her face, and Rose shut her eyes, but they were forced open when she felt a hand on her chin. Her nice scent drifted to her nose and Rose fought the urge to push him away.

Caius lifted her chin and mashed their lips together. Rose squirmed, trying to move away, but he was pressing her against the door. There was no way she could escape, especially with his hand on her chin and wrist.

It felt like she was drowning, and the crown prince was vicious, holding her in place so she couldn't move away. His tongue invaded her mouth and he twirled their tongues together. He sucked and prodded until Rose was absolutely overwhelmed. When he pulled away, she was flushed and out of breath.

The crown prince smiled and looked at her. "Take off your clothes—all of it!"

Rose blinked as she tried to register his words, but her ears failed her. She was still dizzy from the kiss as she rushed to fill her lungs with air. Caius narrowed his eyes and a brow raised. He lifted his right leg, and she heard something unsheathe.

Rose's breath hitched, and her eyes widened as she caught sight of a dagger. It reflected the sunlight, and for a moment, she thought the crown prince was going to cut her with it. She had heard all about the royals' sick preferences, but this was too much for anyone to handle.

Caius brought the knife to her chest, and she winced at the coldness of it, shutting her eyes tight. But instead of pain, Rose heard the sound of her clothes being cut. The dagger was so sharp that the instant her dress made contact, it gave way.

Caius cut it all the way to her waist, exposing her pale skin and not just that, her breasts. Rose's first instinct was to cover up, and she almost fought the thought, but his eyes made her lose the battle. It was the way he stared—it made her both uncomfortable and something else. Rose didn't want to think of the word.

Caius tossed the dagger aside. "Take your hands away."

He spoke softly; there wasn't a hint of threat in his words, but Rose's hands fell to her sides, and she shut her eyes tight. She couldn't see, didn't want to see. He cupped her breasts, each fitting perfectly in his palms. He ran his thumb over her already hardened nipples, and Rose's eyes flew open.

Caius raised a brow. "You know, I was going to savor our first time, had you done as I requested. It wouldn't have come to this." She heard a sharp sound as the rest of her clothes were ripped, falling to the floor. "Turn around."

It was a simple command, but Rose knew better than to disobey. She slowly turned around, but the crown prince never fully took his hands from her chest. His left hand remained on her breast while his other hand started to slide down her back. He lightly traced the marks, mostly avoiding them and just tracing the edges.

"I'd rather not do this again," he whispered. "You have such pretty skin."

Rose had to dig her fingers into her palms to stay still. She wasn't ticklish—not in the slightest—but his fingers sent tingles all over her body. Rose hated that she didn't hate the sensation.

"Bend forward," Caius commanded, his voice raspy as he spoke, sounding on the edge of control.

She obliged, and he took his hand away from her chest, lightly pinching as he pulled his hand away. Rose held back a strange sound and gripped the door handle for balance,

hoping it wouldn't open and she would be on full display for all to see. She shut her eyes at the horror of this imagination.

"Spread your legs." Though he gave her the order, his hands were already moving to separate them.

This time, there was no teasing. He went straight for her most sensitive part. Rose jerked, trying to pull away from his hand, but his left hand had moved to her waist, holding her in place.

"You best hold still. This is more for you than it is for me."

Chapter 32: Don't Fight It

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Trigger Warning: This Chapter includes coerced sexual activity. Please proceed with caution or skip if needed.

He spread her apart, rubbed back and forth before slipping his finger in. Rose had to put her hand over her mouth to keep from screaming. The Crown Prince had shoved two fingers right into her. Her other hand gripped the door for her life.

This was nothing like the night before. His movements were aggressive, almost like something had happened. Rose shook her head; she was just making excuses for him. The Crown Prince was cruel and ruthless, and he stopped at nothing to get what he wanted.

He pulled his fingers out, and Rose felt something smooth and slick at her entrance. She was unsure if the slickness was from her. Her eyes widened, and she tried to pull away. It was really happening. It wasn't Ander behind her. It was someone else. She groaned in protest, her hand over her mouth while the other still held the door to keep her from falling on her face.

"Tch," the Crown Prince said, irritated, and Rose felt a sharp pain as the Crown Prince smacked her buttock yet again. It was just as loud as the first one, but this time, it was on her bare skin.

She was too stunned to move, and he pushed right in. Rose's vocal cords that had been sealed were released instantly. Rose's cry echoed through the chamber, sharp and raw, but it was quickly swallowed by the oppressive silence of the castle walls. Her knees buckled, but the Crown Prince's grip on her waist tightened, holding her upright. She clawed at the door, her nails scraping against the polished wood, desperate for something to anchor her. Tears blurred her vision, but she refused to let them fall. She wouldn't give him the satisfaction.

"Quiet," he hissed, his breath hot against her ear. "Unless you want the guards outside to know exactly what's going on here."

Rose clenched her teeth, biting back another scream. Her body trembled, torn between the instinct to fight and the paralyzing fear of what might happen if she did. She gripped the

door tighter, putting all her strength into holding herself up and bearing this until he was done.

He moved again, and Rose's breath hitched. He was certainly bigger than she could take. Rose could feel herself being stretched thin. She didn't focus on that; she focused on the cold wood beneath her fingertips, the faint scent of tung oil from the wood her face was pressed up against—anything to keep herself from shattering.

"You should be honored," the Crown Prince muttered, his voice dripping with disdain. "Not every commoner gets this kind of attention from their future king."

Rose's stomach churned. She wanted to spit in his face, to scream that she would never be his, but the words caught in her throat. She was trapped, not just by his strength but by the weight of his power. He was the Crown Prince, the heir to the throne, and she was nothing—a pawn, a plaything, a whore. Her thoughts raced to Ander. Where was he? Why wasn't he here to save her?

The Crown Prince's grip shifted, his fingers tightening on her hips as he leaned closer. "You're hiding in your head," he said. "Do that again, and I'll ram this up your arse."

Rose's eyes flew open. She knew he wasn't speaking lightly. He was brutally moving in and out of her, her face slamming against the door with each push. Her walls were sore from the constant assault, and her legs were running out of strength.

How long would this go on? Ander didn't take this much time ever, and yet he would—

"I said don't space out!"

Rose couldn't keep the sound in as he thrust in, even deeper. There was more of him, she realized in horror. Rose's breath hitched as his hand moved, his fingers brushing against where they were joined. She flinched, her body instinctively recoiling, but there was nowhere to go. The Crown Prince's grip on her tightened, his other hand pressing her firmly against the door. Her cheek was pressed to the cold wood, his lips to her ear.

"Your father is alive, isn't he? Or did you not like your wedding present?" he asked, his voice low and mocking.

He had checked the contents of the bag. She had thought it was simply protocol, but the Crown Prince himself had looked at the contents of the bag.

"Answer me," he muttered, his voice dark in her ears.

"E is," she voiced out. "Mi Fat'er is alive."

She understood his underlying words. He had kept his end of the bargain; it was her duty to do the same.

The Crown Prince's movements grew more deliberate, his touch calculated to elicit a reaction. Rose bit down on her lip, drawing blood, as she fought to keep herself from crying out. She focused on the pain, on the sharp sting of her split lip—anything to distract

herself from what was happening. But it was no use. Her body betrayed her, trembling under his touch. A strange sensation started to grow, one even the pain couldn't conceal.

Rose bit deeper into her lip, but it didn't help. He didn't slow down; rather his movements steadied while his hand moved from her waist to her chest, squeezing, rubbing, flicking, and pulling. However, it was the fingers on her clit that were the real problem.

Rose's breathing changed, and her hips started to move on their own, matching his rhythm. She tried to stop herself, but the more she tried, the itchier she felt, and only—Rose couldn't dare complete the thought.

"Don't fight it," he groaned into her ear. "Might as well enjoy it."

Easy for him to say, Rose wanted to say, but her body wasn't listening to her, it was listening to his husky voice. She heard a sound that didn't sound like hers at all. It sounded similar to what she heard Delphine make. She hated it, but she couldn't fight it. She was mush in the Crown Prince's hands; he knew exactly what buttons to press.

The same sensation from last night started to build up again. It felt as though every single pore on her skin was on fire. Rose gripped the door until her knuckles turned white. She was so close. Rose felt an urgency she couldn't describe. Suddenly, there was silence, and she came apart like water bursting out of a dam.

Her ears rang, and her throat felt hoarse. She heard a satisfied sound, and the Crown Prince let go of her. Rose slumped against the door like a sack of potatoes, her legs barely able to hold her. She didn't turn around, didn't want to see the smug look on his face, but more than that, she was appalled by the wetness she could feel trickling down her legs.

She heard him adjust his clothes, his footsteps echoing as he walked away from her. "Get yourself out," he said dismissively as if she were nothing more than a stain to be wiped away.

He walked to the table, slipped into his coat, and walked back to the door. She scrambled away from it. He merely glanced at her before leaving the room, the door slamming shut behind him. Rose fell to the ground, curled into a ball, and wept.

Chapter 33: Keep Her Shame?

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Rose lifted her head, wiping her face. She couldn't remain on the floor. She didn't know how long she could stay in his chambers, but it was best not to push it. She also couldn't let the crown prince catch her here. She gathered herself but mentally and physically, even though she'd rather the ground opened and swallowed her.

Rose stood to her feet, using the wall for support. She bent down to pick up her dress. It was a mess, having been slit right through the middle. The ends were in even worse shape, as he had ripped it. How could he do that to her clothes? How was she supposed to leave his room now? Did he not consider that?

Rose looked around, but she knew better than to pick anything from the wardrobe or the room. Right now, a pillowcase would do better than the clothes she had on, but unfortunately, the torn dress was all she had.

She picked up the dress and wrapped it around her body as best as she could. Where she could tie it, she tied; other parts, she gripped with her hand. Satisfied that the dress would make it to the servants' quarters, Rose slowly made her way out the door.

The guards were polite—or perhaps they just didn't care. Neither mattered; she was just glad they had the decency not to stare. She walked briskly, keeping her head down and avoiding eye contact. She did her best not to think about the marks on her body that wouldn't let her forget what had just transpired. Rose got to the stairs and would have taken them two at a time if she could open her legs a little more.

Aside from being sore, she had wrapped the dress in such a way that it was tight—the only way she could cover up the rip. It wasn't much of a dress at this point and just looked like she had wrapped a piece of cloth around herself, but at least it was better than walking through these halls naked.

Rose heard voices as she got close to the bottom of the stairs. She raised her head a little to see who it was and where they were going, as she didn't want to bump into anyone. Rose tripped. She lost her footing, miscalculating as she took the next step. With only one hand free, she couldn't catch herself in time and fell forward, landing face-first on the Queen's shoes.

"You!" she heard, followed by a kick aimed at her face.

Rose only managed to avoid this because she was already scrambling to her knees as fear, horror, and dread bubbled up, tasting like she drank a cup full of bile. "I am so sorry, Yer Majesty, I tripped," she tried to explain.

However, even as she apologized, Rose feared the worst. Martha had said something about being whipped and thrown into the dungeons. Rose wanted neither. She doubted she could bear any of it. She had only just been whipped the day before; her back was still very sore, and now it wasn't just her back—her entire body burned, with the worst pain concentrated in her core.

She put her head to the floor, seeking mercy, and that was when she realized she had spoken directly to the Queen. In her panic, she had addressed the Queen. Rose's eyes watered. Did she do something in her past life that would warrant this much suffering? She couldn't seem to catch a break.

A hand gripped her hair and pulled upward. Rose silenced the scream that almost escaped her lips. She instinctively reached for her hair with her free hand, but another hand yanked her arm away.

"How dare you touch the Queen with your filthy body? You whore!"

It was one of the Queen's ladies-in-waiting, and the person holding her hand was the second one. The ladies who followed the Queen everywhere. As soon as Rose met eyes with her, she was smacked across the face. "How dare you look me in the eye?"

"Does she think she's special because the crown prince brought her here? You're nothing more than a peasant. Know your place!"

The two women shared a smile, and the one who held her arm reached for Rose's poor attempt at a dress. Her intent was obvious. Rose's eyes widened in horror. "No, please don't," she cried, trying to stop them.

"It's what you get for being disrespectful to the Queen of Velmount," the one still pulling her hair said.

The Queen stepped back, neither stopping nor furthering the situation, but it was clear she approved. The little smile on her face was unmistakable.

Rose didn't care about the burning pain in her scalp anymore. Saving what was left of her dignity was far more important. She wrapped her arm around herself, but the woman pulled her hand away, and Rose was already too weak to struggle, coupled with the pain from her scalp.

The lady-in-waiting was vicious, and she grabbed a part of the cloth and pulled. Rose felt the dress slip out of her hands. There were guards all around them. She was already in a revealing state, and now she was about to be put on display for all to see. Couldn't she at least keep her shame?

"What is going on here?" Caius asked as he strode into the space with Rylen by his side and the steward in front of him.

"Son!" the Queen cried, walking toward him. "I was looking for you."

Rylen and the steward both had horrified looks on their faces. The ladies didn't stop what they were doing and seemed to enjoy the fact that they had more of an audience.

Caius brushed his mother aside and asked again, his voice laced with anger. "What is going on here?"

"Oh, the commoner you brought into the castle was disrespectful to me."

Caius glanced at his mother. He didn't believe a word she said, and he doubted Rose had been disrespectful. She had tears spilling down her face, and he knew she couldn't stand him, but right now, she was looking at him like he was the angel who would save her. No, she was looking at Rylen. Caius couldn't understand why that annoyed him.

"Let her go this instant!" he commanded.

"Son," the Queen said. "Are you going to let her be disrespectful to your own mother?"

He walked to where Rose knelt on the floor, and the ladies-in-waiting scattered, releasing her hair and her dress. He stopped directly in front of her and stared down.

Rose was scared. The Queen had just accused her of being disrespectful. There was no way she would get off with just a warning, and now she had dragged the crown prince into it. She clutched at her ripped dress. The only person she hoped would come to her rescue hung back.

Chapter 34: Stolen Coat

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Rose's hands twisted around her dress, scrambling to gather what was left of it. She leaned forward, trying to hide the parts she hadn't been able to save from the court lady's grip. She hid her face as she couldn't bear to see what was about to happen.

This was not only so embarrassing but humiliating, to be reduced to this state in front of so many eyes. She didn't do anything wrong. The crown prince was now standing so close to her, and the fact that he wasn't saying anything unnerved her even more.

"I'm sure whatever she did is pardonable," Caius said.

Rose could scarcely believe her ears, and she almost lifted her head to see what was happening. Why would he say something in her favor?

"No, I want her punished," Queen Violeta insisted.

"And she has been. Wasn't she slapped and almost stripped naked, Mother?" Caius asked darkly, staring down at the ladies beside the Queen.

"What? She was already in this state when I found her," Queen Violeta retorted.

Caius narrowed his eyes, but instead of speaking further on the issue, he abruptly changed the subject. "Henry told me you were looking for me. Here I am." He spread open his hands.

"Yes, I was," The Queen admitted.

"Why?" he asked.

"I had a few matters to discuss."

Caius pulled his coat off his shoulders and dropped it on Rose. "Then shall we?"

"What are you doing?" she asked in horror, but Caius was already leading his mother away.

The ladies-in-waiting looked back and forth, and having no other option, rushed after the prince and his mother. Only Rylen and Henry were left with Rose.

Rose watched them go as she held the coat in her hands. She had wondered what had dropped on her head and was surprised when she saw what it was.

"You can use that to cover up," Rylen said at her hesitation.

"Can I really?" she asked, looking from the steward to Rylen.

"Yes."

Rose nodded and threw the coat over herself. It smelled familiar. She stood to her feet. She wasn't going to ask too many questions. It clearly wasn't an accident that he dropped his coat, but she'd rather ask than make a mistake.

The coat was bigger and taller than her. The ends touched the ground, but all that was irrelevant; getting out of the wing was her priority. Rose bowed to the two men before bolting in the direction of the servants' quarters. She didn't stop walking until she got to the door of her room.

As soon as she pushed open the door and shut it behind her, Rose fell to the floor and sobbed. She covered her face with her hands as she cried. She would have sat there longer if she hadn't suddenly felt a sharp pain from the door being hit.

Rose stood to her feet and walked toward her side of the room, making way for the door to open. Martha didn't seem very happy that the door had been blocked, so she hit it even harder to get it to open, and it crashed against the wall, almost flying off its hinges.

"Why did you lock the door?" Martha asked as she walked into the room and carefully closed the door.

"I didn't," Rose said without looking at her as she busied herself with her bag. She was looking for a change of clothes.

Martha gasped as she stepped forward for a closer look, her eyes squinting as they rested on Rose. "Did you steal the crown prince's coat?"

"No," Rose replied, exasperated. Of course, Martha would say something like that.

"Then why are you with it?" Martha asked, stomping toward her.

Rose didn't answer, and Martha stretched out her hand as if to pull it from her. Rose jerked her head in Martha's direction, not caring that her face was red and streaked with tears. Her eyes were also red from all the crying and her nose was sore from sniffing.

She didn't have the energy to deal with Martha. If the royals were going to beat her down and she couldn't do anything about it, the last thing she would condone was bullying from a maid who was no different than her.

Martha looked taken aback and instantly withdrew her hand, but then her face hardened, and she tried again. Rose didn't hold back; she smacked Martha's hand before it could reach her.

"If ye t'ink I stole it, report it. Now leave me alone!" she yelled right in Martha's face, then turned around and continued searching through her bag.

"You just wait and see," Martha said, rubbing her hand. "That's exactly what I'm going to do!"

Martha stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind her with a force that made the walls shudder. Rose flinched but didn't turn around. Her hands trembled as she looked through the bag. She finally found a clean dress buried at the bottom and quickly changed, tossing the prince's coat onto her bed.

The fabric was rich and heavy, a reminder of the world she didn't belong to—a world that had just torn her apart and left her to pick up the pieces. She stared at it for a moment, her mind racing. Why had Caius given it to her? Was it pity? Rose shook her head, pushing the thoughts aside. She didn't have the luxury of dwelling on it.

She wiped her face with the ripped dress, trying to erase the evidence of her tears, but her eyes were still red and swollen. There was no hiding what had happened, no pretending she was okay. She wasn't. And she didn't know if she ever would be again.

The door creaked open, and Rose tensed, expecting Martha to come barging back in. But it was only Edna. She paused in the doorway, her eyes widening as she took in Rose's disheveled appearance and the prince's coat lying on the bed.

"Rose...?" Edna's voice was soft, hesitant. "Are you alright?"

Rose forced a smile, though it felt brittle and foreign on her lips. "I'm fine," she replied curtly and turned her attention to the coat. She didn't know what she should do with it. Should she keep it? Wash it and return it? What was she supposed to do with it?

She had no intention of acknowledging his actions. It didn't count. She hated his guts and everything that had to do with him, and she knew she didn't want any reminder of what had transpired.

Edna didn't look convinced, but she didn't press further. Instead, she stepped inside and closed the door gently behind her. "Martha's in a rage," she said, her tone cautious. "She's telling anyone who'll listen that you stole something from the crown prince."

Rose wasn't even fazed. She had expected nothing less from the maid. She still couldn't understand why Martha disliked her so much to go out of her way, and she discovered she didn't care to find out. "Let 'er talk."

"Are you sure? Isn't that the crown prince's coat?" Edna asked, a little worried.

"Yeah, but I didn't steal it. 'E gave it to me."

Edna looked at her with disbelief, but she didn't counter Rose's words. "Okay. Are you going to give it back?"

Rose nodded. "I want to clean it first," she replied.

"Yes," Edna nodded, agreeing with her. "That's a good idea. I'll show you where."

Rose knew Edna found it hard to believe her words, but the maid was still going along with her. "Just a moment," Rose said and slowly lay on the bed. "I just need a little rest. I'll feel better by evenin'. I just really need to lie down."

Edna paused for a bit, as if contemplating, then blurted, "Would you like me to wash it for you?"

Rose thought she might cry again. "You would?" she asked.

"Of course. If you have any other clothes that need cleaning, just give them to me. I'll help you wash them while you rest," Edna smiled at her.

"Why are ye nice to me?" Rose couldn't help but ask.

"I know what happened. We all do. I'm engaged. I'll get married just before winter. Liam is currently traveling the kingdom, but he'll return before the wedding. I couldn't imagine how devastated I'd feel if I found out I couldn't marry him or if I was taken away from him." Edna's expression was genuine as she spoke. Her eyes lit up when she mentioned Liam.

Rose gave Edna a sad smile, and just as she was about to reply, the door burst open again, and Martha marched in, her face flushed with triumph. Behind her stood two guards, their expressions stern and unyielding.

"That's her," Martha said, pointing an accusatory finger at Rose. "She's the one who stole His Highness's coat."

Rose was in disbelief. Martha had actually found a bunch of guards. She wasn't sure if Martha was that dumb or if the maid just utterly despised her. There was clearly no way she could have stolen it. She literally had to pass through dozens of guards to get here. At least one of them would have noticed the coat.

Chapter 35: Not A Thief

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"That's her," Martha said, pointing an accusatory finger at Rose. "She's the one who stole His Highness's coat."

"What are you doing, Martha?" It was Edna who spoke first.

"Isn't it obvious? Catching a thief. Peasants truly only ever act like this."

Rose stood her ground, her chin lifting defiantly. "I didn't steal anything," she said, her voice steady despite the fear clawing at her chest.

"Yes," Edna agreed with her. "There's no way she could have stolen something like this without the crown prince noticing. And why would she even steal it in the first place?"

"Thieves don't need reasons to steal. Or are you supporting the thief?"

"I am not a thief!"

Martha burst out laughing. "She can't even pronounce it right. It's 'thief,' not whatever you just said. Look at the coat there!"

The guards stepped forward, their eyes narrowing as they took in the scene. One of them reached for the coat, picking it off the ground. "Is this yours?" he asked, his tone cold.

"Nay," Rose said easily, but before she could say anything more, the guard grabbed her by the wrist and pulled her out. "I didn't steal anything," she said, trying to fight him off, but the second guard grabbed her other arm.

"Martha!" Edna yelled. "Shouldn't you at least confirm before you accuse her of stealing?"

"Confirm what? She's clearly in possession of the crown prince's coat. What other confirmation is needed?" Martha asked. "Take her away."

The guards nodded and moved obediently, dragging Rose, who was struggling to get out of their grip.

"You're acting a little unfair!" Edna stated as she watched them drag Rose away. Then she rushed after the guards, who were cruelly pulling Rose.

"You can't take her away," Edna cried, trying to pull Rose back.

"I wouldn't advise that," Martha said, disturbingly close.

Rose was tired of fighting, and she just let them drag her to wherever they wanted to take her. As long as it didn't include whipping or anything of that sort, she was sure she could take it. She didn't have any energy to fight, and it was pretty clear the guards weren't listening to her.

"You can't do this," Edna cried.

"I'm not doing anything. I simply reported a thief. I wonder what Mistress Edith would say about this—and better still, the crown prince. Clearly, she hasn't learned her lesson from last time," Martha proudly stated. "She'll learn this time."

The guards dragged her all the way down, pulling her across the ground as Rose refused to walk. It wasn't that she didn't want to, she didn't have the strength to. She had stopped expecting her luck to change, and right now, she was just waiting for this to pass.

"At least carry her properly," Edna begged.

"How is it your business?" Martha asked.

Rose couldn't believe the two maids were still following her. Right now, she couldn't think of who would come to her rescue. None of the guards would inquire if they saw them dragging her around. Everyone would assume she had done something to deserve it.

"How can you be so cruel? Her legs have been scraping over the floor, and it's not like she's fighting," Edna scolded.

One of the guards seemed to have had enough of Edna's protests as he stopped walking and turned. "Go away, unless you want me to lock you up too as her accomplice."

Edna was shaken by this threat, and Martha smirked at her. "You should listen to the guard."

"I'm sorry, Rose," she said.

Rose neither responded to this nor acted as though she heard. Not long after Edna spoke, her footsteps could be heard retreating.

Rose looked around. They were now in a secluded hallway. It was darker than the rest of the house, and there was no window in sight. Rose didn't need anyone to tell her she was being taken to the dungeons, and she knew the castle dungeons were usually underground.

Not long after this thought, a stairway appeared, and Rose tried to stand to her full height. If she were dragged across the stairs, she was sure to get enough bruises, and even if she didn't, the pain on her shins would be too much to bear.

However, the guards didn't let her. They dragged her down the numerous stairs and tossed her to the bottom. Rose rolled, and her back hit the bars. She cried in pain as the wounds from last night made contact. Rose gathered her legs to herself. She had lost her shoes during the process of coming here, and right now, her bare soles lay on the rough floor.

"Who is this?" she heard a voice ask.

"A thief," Martha announced proudly. "She stole the crown prince's coat."

Rose heard footsteps, and some stopped in front of her. "You've got some nerve, eh? Clearly, you'd like to lose a few fingers." His voice sounded like he had phlegm stuck in his throat. Rose thought it was absolutely disgusting.

"Who is this beauty?" she heard an even more disgusting voice say, and someone tried to touch her hair.

Rose screamed and quickly scrambled away. She looked back to see an older man with a lot of missing teeth snickering at her. Rose almost threw up. Did she really have to stay here?

"Hey, warden! Put her with us," he sneered.

"Shut up!" the warden said—it was the man with the disgusting voice.

She heard the unlocking of a door, followed by a kick to her side. Rose screamed in pain and fell to the floor. "Get in!" the voice said.

It took a while for her to push herself up as tears filled her eyes. The pain in her side was crippling. Rose grabbed it, but try as she might, she couldn't stand on her feet. Instead, she crawled into the space, and the door closed behind her, almost catching her leg.

"Next time," she heard Martha say, "you'll think twice about stealing."

Rose didn't look up. She just retreated to the corner of the cell. It was pretty dark, and it smelled damp, but other than that, it was decent. The floor was hard, but she had slept on harder surfaces. Curling up into a ball, Rose closed her eyes and tried to fall asleep.