

## K Lover 311

### Chapter 311: A Knock In The Cold

Rose cleared up the dishes after dinner was over. As much as she would like to wash the dishes tonight, all she wanted to do was get some sleep. She went to get her bed from her room, which was really just a little hay under a piece of cloth.

She didn't sleep in that room during winter as it was too cold. She slept in the same room as her parents close to the fireplace. Rose yawned as she sat down on the bench with her father. Her bed was already made out and she would just spend some time with them before she fell asleep.

Darkness was upon them, it was past evening when she headed out to the Olivers' residence and the sun was setting when she returned home. Rose winced at this thought. There was a time she thought her surname would change to Oliver. Now, that was nothing more than a dream that would never happen.

Her mother was sleeping again, and the two of them just sat on the bench watching her. Rose leaned against her father as she tried to suppress a yawn.

"I hope it wasn't too hard, Fat'er," she whispered.

"It wasn't nearly as 'ard as wha ye 'ad to do," he returned immediately. "We missed ye, but I am sure ye missed us more."

Rose smiled faintly. "Yes, every day. I am sorry I didn't send a letter."

Vallyn shook his head. "I understand. I tried to send a letter at different times. Madame Razel would always write it, but I don't tink ye got any of tha letters."

Rose lifted her head. "You wrote me letters?"

"Just two, but I don't even tink it got to the capital. I 'ave no way of knowin'. We can't read, but I wanted to know if ye were okay. All I knew was mi daug'ter sacrificed 'erself for me and went wit a strange man. We were beside ourselves with worry. Yer letter was so relievin'. It was tha first time we felt better since ye left. I wasn't even sure if ye got the carvings."

"I did, and the clothes. Thank ye." Unfortunately, the clothes had been destroyed, but her father didn't need to know that.

"The flute too," Rose cried as she recalled. "I am sorry I didn't send a letter earlier. I couldn't. A lot of things just kept happ—"

"Don't apologize, ye 'ave nothin' to say sorry for. I owe ye mi life."

"I owe ye mi life too. You're my Fat'er," Rose laughed. "I don't regret what I did, so don't feel sorry for me. Don't look at me like that, Fat'er. Losing Ander and Emma isn't the worst thing. It just hurts more 'cause I lost them both."

Rose lifted her arms towards the ceiling, stretching them. "Hmm. I am tired, aren't you?" she asked her father mid-stretch. "You should get some sleep."

"I will," he replied. "Ye go to sleep first."

"Very well, if you say so. I shall hit the hay first," she chuckled.

As Rose rose to her feet, a knock froze them both in place. Her father turned his head towards the door first, then turned to look at Rose.

"Are ye expectin' anyone?" he asked.

"Nay," Rose said and turned to look at the door.

"I will get it," he offered.

"No, I'm on my feet already, Fat'er, I will get it," Rose said absentmindedly as she walked towards the door.

After her father had chased off the neighbors, only a few of them returned, and he had dealt with them without involving her. She didn't think anyone would return this late, not in this cold.

The knock was also soft, and there was no urgency behind it—almost like they were asking her to ignore it. Rose got to the door but didn't open it immediately, not until she heard another knock.

She pulled open the door and could scarcely believe the sight in front of her. It was Ander, dressed in a thick coat and a hat that covered more than half of his face, but she could easily recognize him anywhere.

"Ander," she said before she could help herself.

Her father heard her, and before Ander could even speak, she heard her father's footsteps behind her.

"Rosie!" he said, sternly. "Come inside."

"Master Vallyn, please let me 'ave a word wit yer daug'ter," Ander pleaded, taking off his hat.

"It's okay, Fat'er," Rose replied. "I will come inside soon."

Vallyn didn't look convinced, but he didn't want to interfere when his daughter had said otherwise, so he backed away—but not before giving Ander a death stare that caused him to stagger back.

Her father left, and Rose closed the door. Resting on it, she folded her arms and glared at Ander.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I-I wanted to explain wha tis is..."

"There is no need," Rose cut in. "You both have my blessings."

"Nay, nay, nay," Ander sounded as though he was on the verge of crying. "It's not wha ye tink."

"Then why didn't you come out when I banged on your gate, and why are you only here to explain yourself when it is late? Am I only fit to be met under the cover of darkness?"

"Rosie," Ander said, pressing his hat to his chest, his voice breaking. "Tha's not true. A lot of tings spiraled out of mi control. I didn't intend to lay with Emma. It was a grave m-mistake. I would never do s-such to ye. I lo—"

"Happy married life, Ander. As I said, you both have my blessing." Rose turned, ready to open the door.

"Rosie, please," Ander said and grabbed her arm. "Let me at least explain miself. Let me ask for yer forgiveness."

Rose pulled her hand away. "What difference would it make? I-I was away for no more than two months." Rose didn't like the way her voice wavered. "You two could have at least told me this was the sort of relationship you wanted to have, I would have given ye both—"

"Nay, Rose, never. I went all the way to the capital for ye after the crown prince took ye. Tis—tis was a mistake. I woul—"

"I don't think your unborn child would want to hear you say that."

"Rose," Ander whined. "Ye hate me, don't ye? Ye keep lookin' at me wit expressionless eyes. Ye really believe I will do somet'ing like tis to ye?"

"I don't hate ye, Ander," Rose replied genuinely. "But ye did marry my best friend. I don't hate ye, I could never hate ye both, and I truly wish ye the best—but I never want to see ye again."

"Rosie," Ander let out a guttural voice. "Don't do tis. I-I just want to—"

Rose reached for the door again. This was getting overwhelming; she didn't want to even think about it, and here was Ander telling her all this, while he had chosen to lay with and marry her best friend.

Ander grabbed her again. "Rosie."

She winced at the nickname. "Let me go," she yelled.

"I will, I-I just want ye to understand. 'Er mot'er was not goin' to—"

"What is going on here?" a familiar voice asked darkly.

She lifted her head to see a figure on a horse only a few feet away, and beside him on another horse was a guard holding a lantern.

"Lord Thomas," Rose called, shocked to see him. She hadn't even heard the hooves of the horses approaching. Even if she was arguing with Ander, it wasn't enough to miss this on a quiet night.

Ander jumped back immediately and bowed. He didn't need anyone to tell him this was an important person—Thomas's outfit and demeanor were more than enough.

Thomas easily got off the horse. "I asked, what is going on here?" Thomas directed his question to Ander, his hand moving to his sword.

Rose's eyes widened, and she knew if she didn't do something, Thomas might really strike him down.

"Lord Thomas," Rose called. "He is leaving and will never return," she replied.

He turned his attention to her, and Ander fled without waiting to confirm if Thomas was going to let him go or not. Thomas didn't even glance back, just glanced down at her wrist where Ander had grabbed her. It was red. Rose tried hiding it behind her back but not before Thomas' eyes narrowed.

"Who was that?" he asked her.

"A childhood friend," Rose replied immediately.

Thomas' eyes accused her of lying. "A childhood friend wouldn't grab you like that."

Rose's eyes narrowed. Was this teenage boy accusing her of something? "He is the man I was supposed to marry, but worry not, he is already married. If you're worried I might sleep around behind His Majesty's back, you have no reason to be so concerned."

Thomas was immediately taken aback, and color appeared on his cheeks. He looked away. "I meant, a friend wouldn't try to attack you."

"Oh," Rose replied and sheepishly grabbed her wrist. She was surprised Thomas even explained. "I am so sorry," she said with a small bow as she held onto her wrist. "It has been a rough day."

Chapter 312: Thomas Understood

Rose's voice rang in Thomas's ears. Her tone was softer than usual, and she was clearly apologetic about her reaction. He didn't understand what was going on with the man who had run off, but Rose was clearly uncomfortable.



He also didn't fail to notice that she had said the man was married, even though she was supposed to marry him. Thomas rubbed his hand across his face. Not many things intrigued him, but this one did.

Her outburst had caught him off guard, especially when she blurted those words, and he had found himself trying to explain and de-escalate the situation before he thought about it. He didn't like that.

Thomas took his hand from his face and looked at Rose, who still kept her head bowed. It was freezing, and she was out here in nothing but a simple dress and no gloves. He frowned; she was always dressed too lightly in outrageous weather. He couldn't keep her out here for too long.

It wasn't like the inside of the house was any better. It was barely warm and Thomas had never seen such a small and cramped space in all his life. As soon as he walked in, he wanted to leave. He didn't believe anyone lived in these conditions. He was worried how any of them would survive through winter like that.

Rose peeked at him by tilting her head to the side a little when he took too long to respond. "Lord Thomas," she called.

Thomas narrowed his eyes again. He didn't like how self-conscious she made him. "We are leaving by dawn."

Rose jerked upright, her eyes wide. "But you only just got here. To embark on another journey so soon— isn't that a little dangerous?"

"We will be fine," Thomas replied curtly.

"What about Lord Paul? I don't think he has gotten enough rest. He can't leave immedia—"

"Paul can handle it," Thomas replied.

After all, this was Paul's idea. Thomas had wanted to stay longer, but Paul thought it was pointless as he couldn't help Rose's mother, his presence would make no difference.

Thomas understood when Rose said she had a rough day. He would say that she was grossly understating the situation.

"Oh," Rose replied, realizing she didn't have more to say to this. "I wish you both a safe trip back to Furtherfield, and I hope His Majesty recovers quickly."

"Okay," Thomas said and took a step back. "If you need anything, ask the baron. He has been instructed to provide you with all you need, including the herbs for your mother."

Rose nodded, even though she had no intention of doing so. It was a different case if Thomas was in the baron's mansion, but for her to ask the baron was laughable. Whether she had the favor of the crown prince or not, she was still just a peasant. Besides, that only made her a harlot in the eyes of the villagers.

Thomas stared at Rose one last time, resisting the urge to toss his jacket at her. She smiled at him and waved. Thomas narrowed his eyes; it was either that or he would do something egregious like smile back.

Thomas marched towards his horse and got on it. He looked at Rose, who still stood by the door but was vigorously waving. "Give my thanks to Lord Paul."

Thomas scoffed as he pulled on the reins of the horse. He was not a messenger. He rode off with the guard behind him without a backward glance.

As soon as the horses turned away, Rose slipped back into the house. Her father was still where she left him, on the bench, staring at his sleeping wife.

"That took some time," he mumbled without turning to look at her.

Rose nodded, even though her father couldn't see her. "Sorry, Lord Thomas stopped by. They are leaving Edenville tomorrow," she whispered as she stopped behind her father.

Vallyn froze for a bit, then slowly nodded. "Okay."

Rose wanted to explain that Paul had important matters to attend to and that the crown prince's life was at stake, but she knew that was not something that should slip out of her lips even by accident. No one should know. Thomas and Paul had told her to be silent about it on several occasions.

"The herbs will last a week. I only have to give her morning and night. I also recognize them and can get them from Madame Carol," she explained to her father.

Rose cautiously stared at the back of her father's head as she spoke. She didn't want him to think the physician abandoned them and rushed away, even though that was clearly what happened— but there was a good reason for it.

Her father scoffed. "We don't even know if it would make a difference," he said.

Rose went around and sat on the bench next to him. She rested her head on his shoulder. "Fat'er, don't say that. Lord Paul wouldn't do anything to make Mot'er's condition worse. I trust him."

Her father looked at her from the corner of his eye, then sighed. "Go to sleep," he said instead.

"What about you, Fat'er?" she asked, relieved that he didn't ask why she trusted the Lord. Rose didn't want to recount more sad memories.

"I'll be 'ere for a while. Don't worry about me," he said.

Rose wanted to argue, but a yawn ripped out of her lips. She was tired, and all she wanted to do now was sleep, especially with everything that had happened.

"Okay, Fat'er," she said through the yawn.

Rose stood to her feet and walked to the bed on the ground. It was warmer by her bed, having gotten ample time to be warmed up by the fireplace. Rose did notice that the wood was running out. She hoped it would at least last until morning.

Rose curled into a ball as she lay down to make herself warmer. Without even thinking about it, the events of the day began to replay in her head.

It was hard not to think about her dying mother when Rose could clearly hear the sound of her mother's shallow breaths by the fire. Rose would be lying if she said she had never thought about it before now.

Her mother had always been sick for as long as Rose could remember, and in recent years, she had gotten bedridden. She knew it would come eventually, but that still wasn't enough to prepare her for it.

Rose wiped the corner of her eyes and folded up some more. Her thoughts drifted to someone else who was also sick— the crown prince. Rose was worried about him. Other than the fact that his death would put her in danger, she didn't want him to die. She told herself, it was simply because it was the right thoughts to have. It would be bad luck to wish death on anyone.

She had tried to keep the crown prince out of her thoughts several times, but he had appeared more often than she would like and once again he was invading her mind. Sleep claimed her at last, the crown prince still lingering in her thoughts.

Chapter 313: Green Wood

Rose woke up to loud knocking. She winced as she slowly opened her eyes, wondering who could be bothering them so early in the morning. She sat upright on her makeshift bed.

She lifted her hand to rub her eyes but only ended up shivering. Rose swore—the fire might as well have gone out. There was only a little coal burning and no wood.

Her eyes widened in horror. She rubbed her palms together and rushed to her mother. Her lips looked more bluish than normal. Rose immediately panicked, and one glance around the room told her all she needed—her father was not home.

"Fat'er," she called, just to confirm, but she got no response.

"Maybe he went to get wood," she muttered aloud to herself.

She adjusted the covers over her mother, but she knew she would have to get the fire burning soon. Unfortunately, except her father had a stash of wood somewhere, the wood her father would bring would be green wood.

She had noticed there wasn't any wood in her room which also served as a store. Usually, her father stored more than enough for winter, and before she left there was still some stacked. There was no way her father would overlook something so important—it was his job—but it was clear he hadn't been able to do that this winter.

Rose swore again. They would have to manage with the green wood or dried twigs and smaller sticks. Green wood would smell terrible and smoke up the entire house, but at least it would still offer warmth, while twigs and small wood would not be enough. Though burning green wood might offer warmth Rose was worried about her mother staying in these conditions.

If things were fine, she would have had no issues going over to Ander or Emma to borrow some wood. They had done it for each other countless times before. Her father always had enough wood for winter.

The bang at the door made her jerk. She had completely forgotten someone was knocking and had been wrapped up in figuring out what to do about the cold.

Rose bit the inside of her cheeks and wrapped her arms around her body as she walked to the door to see who was calling at such an hour. It wasn't exactly too late—she realized she had overslept and wondered why her father hadn't woken her before heading out.

She pulled open the door and narrowed her eyes at two people she didn't immediately recognize. Her first instinct was to close the door, but that would have been rude, especially since the men stood outside with their hands full.

"Rose," a stern voice said. Neither of them seemed impressed to be outside in the snow, especially since Rose had taken so long to come to the door.

"Good day to you, sirs. I think you might be at the wrong house," Rose said but a part of her wished it was otherwise.

She looked from one to the other. They glared at her, but the more they looked, the more familiar they seemed.

"Nay, tha young knig't requested we bring tis. And do ye sleep like tha dead? We 'ave been knockin' since dawn," one of them said rudely.

Rose doubted the last part was true—her father would have seen them if they'd been here that early—but she couldn't dwell on it. She was too distracted by the man's first words.

"Lord Thomas?!" Rose yelled, her eyes bulging. "Lord Thomas asked you to bring this here?!" Her voice rose with each word.

There was a cart that left a trail at the entrance of her house. They had clearly drawn it here and used it to bring a load of items. The men held wood, and she could still see other things piled in the cart.

Something told her all this came from the baron. No wonder the young men looked familiar—they worked in the baron's mansion.

One of them scoffed. He was shorter, but more muscular, with a small scar across his lips. Both wore hats, and though they stared equally, the shorter one's glare was sharper.

"Move out of tha way," he said. "Unless ye want to take all tis in by yerself. Yer welcome to do tha."

Rose shook her head and slowly opened the door wider. She peeked out and saw some of her neighbors shuffling outside. She raised her hand in greeting, but they turned away.

Rose felt her heart squeezed but their actions couldn't dull her spirits. There was wood. She could cry. Did Thomas realize they didn't have enough? But to go so far as to ask the baron to give this to them... wasn't that too much?



She didn't have time to dwell on it. The men dropped the cut wood inside. This must have been from the baron's winter stock. Rose felt nervous about accepting it, but it would certainly be better than the green wood or whatever her father might return with.

The men were still carrying in the wood when Rose began setting some aside for the fireplace. There wasn't any time to waste, and with the door open it was only getting colder. She didn't want her mother's sleep disturbed.

Rose laid the wood diagonally and blew on the dying coals. She prayed it would be enough to catch, or else she'd have to find something quick to burn.

At last, the flame licked upward, first a faint orange glow, then sparks, then a fragile crackle of fire. Rose let out a long sigh of relief and rubbed her hands near the warmth.

The room wouldn't immediately start to get warm but as long as there was fire, they would be fine. She turned her head to look at the men just as she heard a loud sound.

The door had been shut loudly and a lot of items lingered by the front door. Woods were gathered together. The men had not done a decent job, they had just haphazardly tossed the wood. Rose didn't care, just having the wood was a miracle in itself.

Her gaze moved to the other pile and Rose could scarcely believe her eyes. The men hadn't only brought wood.

"Is that a coat?"

#### Chapter 314: Warmth

"Is that a coat?" Rose asked, disbelief in her tone. She rushed to her feet as the fire crackled behind her.

Rose took long steps toward the piles of cut wood. However, the wood didn't hold her attention; the coat did. She noticed it was atop a pile, but it didn't seem like the rest was clothes.

Rose picked up the coat first, and her eyes nearly popped out of her head. It was a black fur mantle. Was this fox fur?

Rose was in disbelief. This would cost at least a few gold coins, maybe more. She turned it around to get a closer look. What did Thomas say to the baron to get him to give her all this?

Rose looked around the house and back at the fur coat, nothing came close to it. If they wanted to purchase such an expensive item, it was likely to cost them everything they owned.

Rose couldn't help it—she was cold, the fire did something but warm clothes would get her warm faster. She slipped her arms into the sleeves and settled it over her shoulders. It was so soft she could lie in it all day. Rose took a deep breath as she felt herself grow even warmer.

The fur was exquisite, expensive. Rose doubted she could go down the street with such an expensive item on her body and not get robbed.

She was still fussing with the coat, when she heard sounds coming from the back door. Rose wasn't alarmed. She knew it was her father returning home.

She didn't take off the coat as she turned, ready to receive him. Her father bent his head as he walked in through the back of the house. He held fresh wood under his arms and a few dry ones but there weren't enough of the dry ones. There was a worried look on his face as he entered the house.

Snow covered his head and broad shoulders. He wore sheepskin, the fur was dirty and coarse, but it served its purpose. It was mainly when he set out to work in the snow.

He stepped into the room and paused. It didn't take him long to notice the difference. "It's warm," her father said, catching eyes with Rose, who stood by the front door.

"Yes," Rose giggled, clinging to the coat.

It felt so nice, she didn't want to take it off. The coat was slightly oversized, and Rose wondered if it had belonged to the baron. She winced at the repercussions that were sure to follow, but right now she was warm, and that was all that mattered.

Vallyn's brows furrowed as he saw the coat on Rose's shoulders, but it was more from confusion than disapproval.

"W'ere did ye get..." The rest of her father's words trailed off as he realized it wasn't only the coat that was new.

"Lord Thomas asked the baron to send these. Can you believe it?"

"The baron?" Vallyn asked with wide eyes, gripping the wood under his arms tightly. He didn't seem pleased.

"Yes, that's where I got the wood from. See," she turned to the pile. "This should last us at least two weeks. If I manage it right, it can last a month. I'm sure we can figure out the rest of winter as time goes by."

Rose didn't think it was right to ask her father why they had run out of wood so early, but she had an idea. He couldn't leave her mother for long periods of time, so his work definitely suffered.

Her father had to do whatever it took for them to survive. It also explained how his work made its way to Furtherfield in that manner. Rose didn't think there was any reason to mention that—the same way she wouldn't mention that it was odd they had no firewood.

"Wait, slow down," her father whispered, walking toward the fireplace and dropping the fresh wood he had brought in close to it to try to dry it. The snow on him had started to melt. Rose didn't hold back while restarting the fire.

He walked to the bench—the only chair in the house and took off the sheepskin as he sat down. "Did ye say tha lord asked tha baron to give us tha wood, tha coat, and all tha to us?" Vallyn asked.

"Yes," Rose smiled, though it wasn't as strong as before.

"For wha reason?" he asked with a frown.

Rose froze, unsure how to explain. But she would be lying if she said she didn't understand his question. Nobles didn't give peasants gifts without wanting something in return.

Rose wondered if she had been desensitized. She was somewhat used to this—she didn't think of the consequences first. Or rather, she did, but shoved them to the back of her mind.

"The crown prince," Rose whispered.

Thomas did have enough power to get the baron to give her all this, but at the same time, the baron could have pretended otherwise. Still, she knew the baron was fearful of word reaching the crown prince.

Thomas was a brat, and half the time she was tempted to smack the back of his head, but she couldn't deny how thoughtful he was. He was the reason she hadn't frozen to death on several occasions, and he had also fought Rylen not to let her go to the castle.

However, Rose didn't know how to explain to her father that the lord was nice—she never thought a day would come when she would think those words about Thomas. It was easier to mention the crown prince.

"Tha crown prince," her father whispered.

Rose nodded and walked past him to her mother. Her lips looked a little less blue now that the room was warm, and the fear in Rose's chest eased—just a little.

Still, no matter how she tried to make this seem normal, she couldn't shake the thought. Thomas had done this. Thomas, who scowled more than he smiled, who dismissed her with curt words, yet still made sure she wouldn't freeze.

Rose lightly touched her mother's cheeks as she still slept. Her mother stirred but didn't wake. She had been sleeping a lot, but Rose wasn't complaining. The more she rested, the less pain she felt.

Rose started to take off the coat. It was warm, but she didn't think she needed it more than her mother, and unfortunately, there was just one.

"Wha are ye doin'?" her father questioned.

"Mot'er needs it more," Rose replied.

"No, yer mot'er does not. Ye don't 'ave any winter clot'es and ye barely 'ave any clot'es at all. Put it on. Ye just got back—it would be sad if ye died from cold instead."

Vallyn stood as he spoke and lifted the coat so it covered his daughter once again.

"Fat'er," she cried.

"I am grateful to tis Lord T'omas," her father said with a stiff smile.

Rose knew how hard it must have been for him to admit it, but it would be ridiculous for him to refuse. Still, she knew he didn't like it. She suspected he felt powerless, the same way he had when she left.

Rose grabbed his arm. She didn't know what she could say to make the situation better, and she doubted there was anything to say, but she truly hoped he wouldn't blame himself so much.

Suddenly, her mother opened her eyes as though she could tell they were both looking at her. She squinted at first, trying to recognize her surroundings, then she smiled.

"Mot'er!" Rose cried and leaned forward to hug her.

"Mi daug'ter," her mother said.

Rose pulled back and stared at her. She didn't miss how strong her voice sounded. "How do you feel?" she asked immediately.

Her mother's eyes squinted some more, and instead of answering, she stared at the coat. "Is tha new clot'es?" Her voice held surprise.

"Yes!" Rose grinned and spun for her.

"It looks good," her mother said immediately. "Brings out yer 'air."

"I knew you'd say that," Rose grinned. "Ah! Breakfast. I'll get to making it and I'll prepare your herbs too," Rose said and rushed off before her mother could even reply.

Her mother chuckled to herself as she watched her daughter speed off, then turned to her husband. "Did something 'appen?" she asked softly.

Vallyn shook his head. "Good mornin'," he said, kissing her forehead.

She closed her eyes and said, "It's warm."

Vallyn wasn't sure if she meant his kiss or the room.

"Elp me sit up," she said.



"I don't—"

"I 'ave enough energy for tha. Let me sit up."

Vallyn nodded and helped her. She sighed into his arms and lingered more than she needed to, but Vallyn wasn't in a hurry to pull away. He would hold her all day if that was what she wanted.

An exaggerated gasp came from the doorway as Rose watched them in that half-hug position. "Fat'er," Rose said, wiggling her eyebrows. "Mot'er just woke up. Won't ye let her have breakfast first?"

Her father slowly pulled away from his wife and laughed.

#### Chapter 315: Accusation

Rose was unsure what she was looking at as she stood outside her house in her thick, warm fur coat. She wrapped it around herself as she stared down at Madame Oliver, who was a little red. It might be from the cold or how angry she looked, Rose was unsure.

However, not just her presence was unexpected, but the accusation and glare in her eyes. Rose was at a loss for words at the woman on her front step, who looked like she might strike her.

It was some time before sunset—the sun already showing signs that any moment now it would be gone from view, leaving only cloudy skies and a crescent moon to guide the night.

Rose had just finished making dinner from the grains the baron had been generous enough to add. There was a bag of rye and a smaller bag of wheat.

Rose couldn't believe her eyes when she saw the bag of wheat. Rye was commonplace, hardier than wheat, and mostly eaten by commoners. Wheat wasn't just expensive—it could be used to make fine white bread, and the baron had given some to them.

Even if it was a small amount, the fact that it was added was unbelievable. If they were to sell it at the marketplace, it would be more than enough to pay for the wood they would need for the rest of winter. But Rose knew better than to do that.

Firstly, she couldn't sell a gift from the baron. Secondly, everyone would know who it came from and would likely either refuse to buy it or report to the baron and get her in trouble. Thirdly—and probably most important—Rose didn't want to give them confirmation.

She was certain news was already flying around. If Madame Oliver was loudly calling her a harlot, who knew what the rest of the town was saying? Besides, though Thomas was helping her, he only made the rumors worse. Rose didn't mind—she'd endure a few rumors if her parents could eat well.

Since it was a special occasion, Rose had wasted no time in preparing some gruel. She had just finished cooking and was serving her parents a plate when she heard the knock.

"Madame Oliver," Rose said as politely as she could. Her eyes quickly scanned around and, of course, a few people's eyes darted toward her direction as they pretended to go about their business. "To what do I owe—"

"'Arlot! 'Ow dare ye? First, ye shamelessly return after spreadin' ye legs all over tha capital, and now ye 'ave decided to do tha same in Edenville. Jealous tha mi son is married to a proper lady, ye resort to tis disgustin' ways!" Madame Oliver barked at Rose, pointing her fingers at her.

Rose's mouth nearly dropped to the floor at Madame Oliver's outburst. She had anticipated a lot of things, but none came close to what she was hearing. She was glad she had closed the door as soon as she stepped out, else her parents would have been privy to such vile words when all they wanted to do was enjoy dinner.

If her parents were spared, the rest of the neighborhood wasn't, as Madame Oliver wasn't the least bit quiet. It was as if she intended to draw as much attention as possible to herself.

Rose tightened the fur coat around herself. At least the good thing was she didn't have to deal with this while freezing her fingers off.

"Madame Oliver, I am sure there must be a misunderstanding. I don't understand what it is you're angry at, and I have no intention of coming between Emma and Ander. I have given them my bless—"

"O, silence! Speakin' to me in tha condescending manner. Ye must 'ave lost ye mind! Tis is yer doin', isn't it? Ye 'ave spread ye legs for just anyone—for trinkets!" She pointed angrily at the coat Rose wore.

Rose frowned. She wasn't surprised that word had gotten to Madame Oliver, but she didn't think it was reason enough to be this angry and accuse her so harshly.

"I am still very confused, Madame—"

"Say mi name one more time, ye 'arlot! I 'ope ye are 'appy now. But ye know mi son will never want ye, and there are many jobs in Edenville. Mi son will just find anot'er one."

Rose's brows furrowed as she tried to understand. Was Ander dismissed from working the stables at the baron's mansion? He had been working there for quite some time and was practically in charge of all the horses. The baron wouldn't suddenly let him go.

Her brows suddenly lifted as she went from less confusion to more understanding. The only reason she could think of for Ander being dismissed was Thomas recognizing him and asking the baron to let him go. But Thomas wouldn't do that—he had no reason to bother himself with such a petty matter.

However, Madame Oliver was glaring at Rose with fire in her eyes, completely convinced she was the reason her son lost his job. Rose realized she didn't feel the slightest pity. It also didn't help that his mother was accusing her of sleeping with the baron just so Ander would be dismissed.

It was ridiculous but Madame Oliver certainly believed so and had come all the way here to scold Rose for it. It hurt. A few months ago, she was going to be married to her son but now, she was nothing more than a harlot who would lie with anyone.

Before this, Madame Oliver had never been mean to her, she could be a little much sometimes as she was particularly close to her son but Rose didn't see it the wrong way as she was equally close with her parents.

"Don't t'ink ye 'ave won! 'Ave ye no shame? Ye left wit'out a word, leaving my poor Ander to wallow in pain, and now ye do tis after taintin' yerself all over tha capital!"

Rose's eyes blazed and how dismissive Madame Oliver was about her father almost being executed. "You say it as if I left on purpose!"

Madame Oliver scoffed. "Someone like ye wouldn't say no to tha crown prince. I 'eard ye stole a 'orse and ran after 'im to the capital. 'Arlot! Tha crown prince is sick of ye and returned yer to Edenville. Now ye want to sink ye claws into tha men 'ere! Leave mi son alone. 'E is married and doesn't want no 'arlot for 'is wife! Tryin' to ruin 'is life and marriage would only bring ye years of bad luck! But ye 'ave already done tha yerself."

Rose couldn't believe what Madame Oliver was spewing about her, but for some reason she was rooted to the spot. She didn't say anything to defend herself, just stared.

Besides, what could she possibly say that would change Madame Oliver's opinion of her especially after hearing the woman completely dismiss her attempt to save her father's life?

There was no way Madame Oliver didn't know what had happened. There was no way she didn't know Rose's father's life was on the line. It was her son who came to tell Rose that her father was about to be executed.