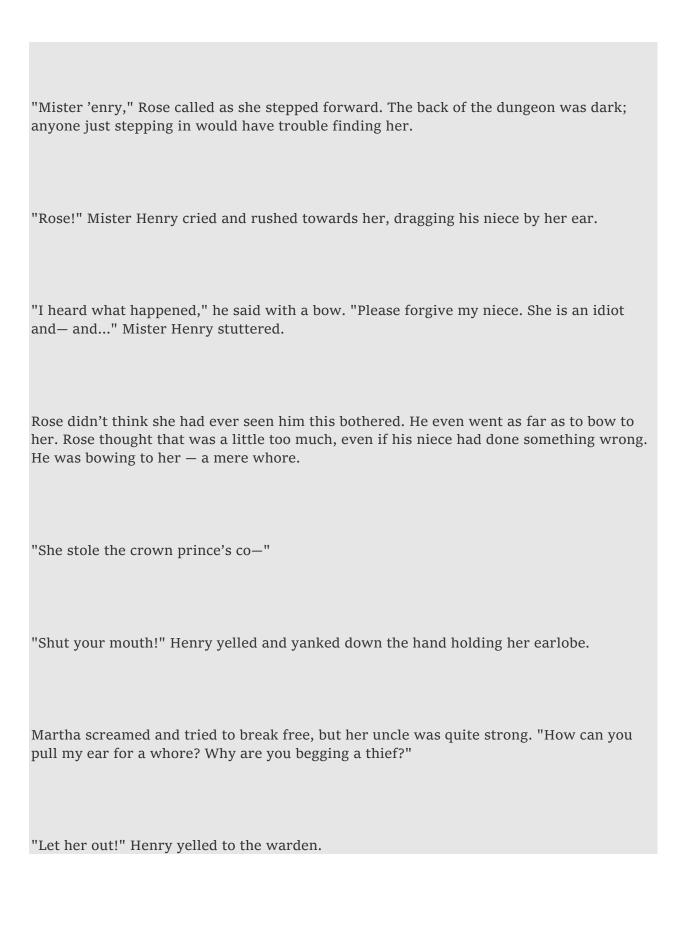
THE KING'S LOVER

Chapter 36: The Dungeon.

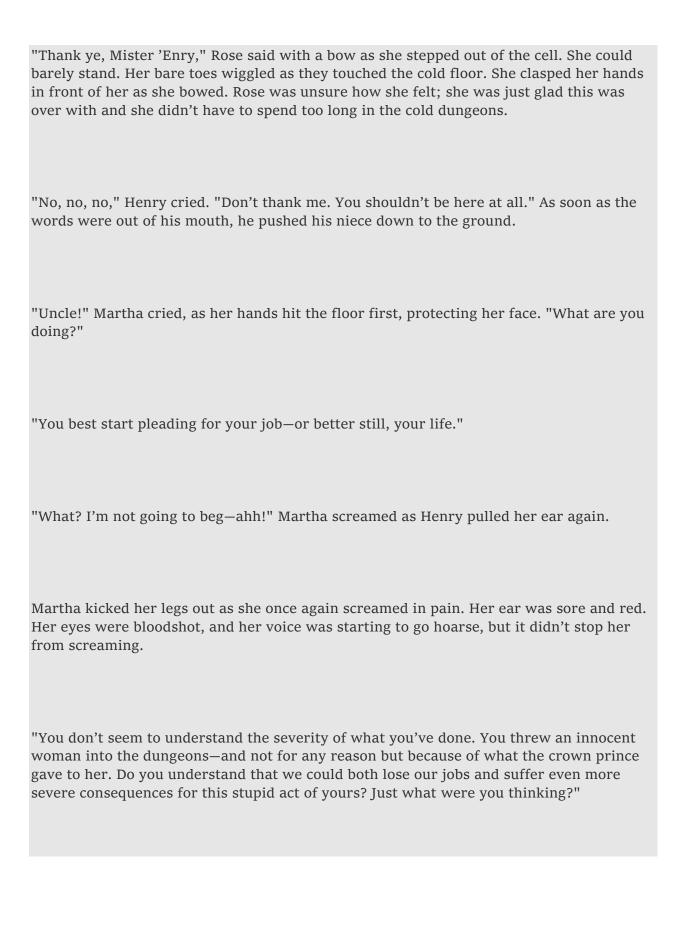
Chapter 36: The Dungeon.
Martha didn't leave immediately. She said a few other distasteful words and called Rose names. When she was finally satisfied, and she saw that Rose would neither beg nor indulge her, she turned around and left.
Rose lay on her side, protecting both her back and her side that had been kicked. At this point, she was wondering if she should have just let the Queen's ladies-in-waiting strip her naked, as she wouldn't have had to go through this if she had just walked without any clothes to her room.
Could she make a request? However, she doubted a mere servant could call on a steward, and Mister Henry was the only other person who knew that was at least low enough for her to call upon. There was no way she could request for Prince Rylen let alone the crown prince.
Rose couldn't help but find it a bit odd that Martha had this much power to throw her in the dungeons. At least one of the heads would have been involved — or was she that hated?

She could blame the guards; the proof was right there on the bed. Even Edna didn't believe her when she said the crown prince gave it to her. The crown prince should have just let her continue on her journey with her ripped dress. It was his fault.
Rose sought sleep, but it was far from her. At least she could find some solace in her dreams, but even that didn't want to give her peace. How long would they leave her here and how long before anyone who could do something about it would notice? Rose didn't know, but maybe if she stayed here, she would be free from the crown prince.
This almost seemed better than what had transpired this afternoon. She shut her eyes. Why couldn't she fall asleep? She thought as tears ran down her face. She didn't want to think about all these thoughts.
"Hey!" the same old man called to her.
Rose didn't like that his cell was right next to hers. There were at least a dozen cells, and she had to be locked next to a creep. There was someone in the cell with the man, but he just stayed in the corner with a hood over his head.
Rose ignored the creep and kept lying down until she felt a hand try to grip her leg. Rose had never moved away so fast. She rushed to the other side of the cell, not caring about the pain that burned through her body at the sudden movement.
The man smiled at her, and Rose wanted to throw up. She buried her head in her legs as she whispered over and over again, "Let me out of 'ere, please. I promise I didn't steal anyt'ing."

Rose must have dozed off because she woke up to a loud noise as someone rushed down the stairs, pulling a screaming girl. Rose was startled awake, cleaning her face streaked with tears as she tried to figure out what was happening.
She wasn't the only one who was shocked. The warden stood up from his table with the little lamp. It was the only source of light in the whole dungeon. Even though it was bright as can be outside, the dungeons were darker than night. The men in the next cell also looked up, and Rose slowly stood to her feet. As much as she was curious, her feet didn't move closer to the bars.
After what seemed like an eternity of screaming, someone appeared at the bottom of the stairs. It was Mister Henry, and the screaming lady was Martha. She had good reason to scream too, as Mister Henry had a locked grip on her earlobe and he pulled her down the stairs with it.
"Where is she?" Mister Henry asked when he got to the bottom of the stairs.
"Steward," the warden said with a smile. "We don't see you around these parts often."
"I don't have time for this. Where is she? The young woman my stupid niece brought here!" Henry pulled her ear again as he asked this question, and Martha started another round of screaming.
"Would you shut up?" he yelled right at her. "Best pray His Highness doesn't find out about what you just did! Now answer me, warden, where is she?"

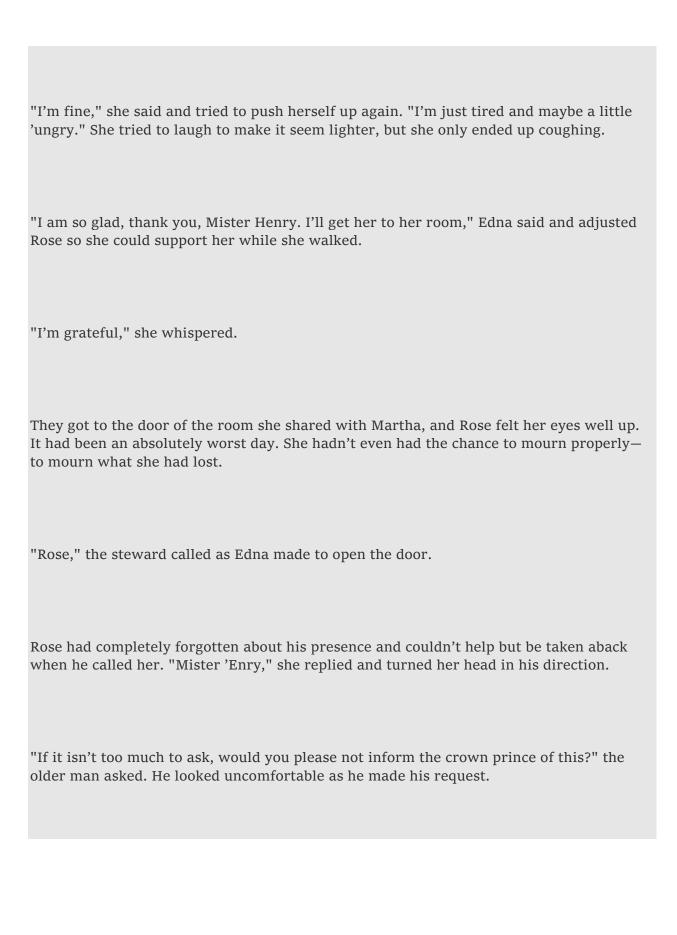


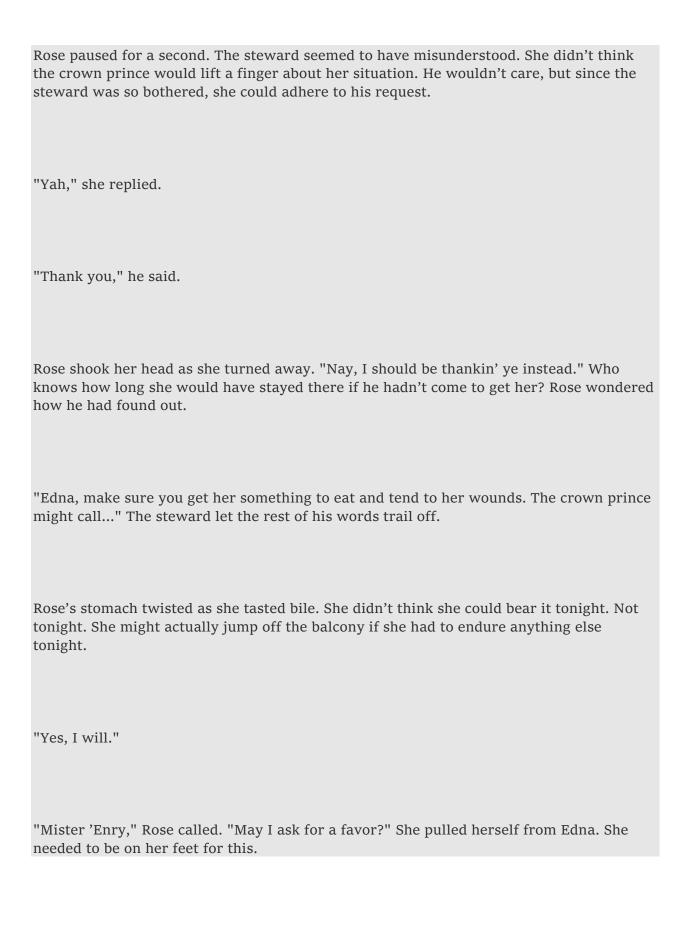
Though with a little hesitation, the warden finally stepped forward and took the key from his waistband to unlock the door. He slowly opened it, letting Rose out. She stumbled out, almost falling forward as she walked out.
weeping and trying to break free, but her unele wouldn't let go.
The warden looked very confused, but he could clearly see the panicked look on the steward's face and the way he kept brutally pulling on his niece's ear. The girl was weeping and trying to break free, but her uncle wouldn't let go.
"Are you sure, or did my niece here tell you that? Do you think anyone would be insane enough to steal from the crown prince? And even if they did, why in the goddess' name would it be a coat? Wouldn't it be something more valuable? Now let her out this instant."
"Yes, she stole from him!"
Henry raised his head and glared at the warden. "Then I suppose you don't mind explaining to the crown prince why you won't let her out."
"I am not letting a thief out," the warden retorted.



"It's not wrong that I reported a crime, Uncle," Martha screamed as she cried her eyes out. "Why would the crown prince give her his coat in the first place?"
"That is none of your business. Now apologize to her!" Mister Henry yelled.
"I'm sorry," Martha said, but the apology didn't sound genuine, and even her uncle didn't buy it.
"Apologize properly. You aren't fooling anyone with that half-assed apology of yours," Mister Henry yelled at his niece.
"I'm sorry, Rose," Martha said with a sniff.
"It's okay," Rose finally said. She just wanted to go back to her room and get some sleep. She was just happy this got resolved in time.
"No, it's not," Mister Henry said and bowed. "Please forgive my stupid niece. And should she bother you again, let me know instantly, and I will put her in her place."
Rose nodded and grabbed the wall as she started to move up the stairs. "Thank ye for gettin' me out of 'ere," she said as she slowly went up the stairs.

"Let me escort you to the servants' quarters," the steward said with a bright smile.
"Nay, ye don't 'ave to do that," Rose said as she continued up the stairs. "I'm fine. I'm sure the steward has far more important t'ings to attend to."
"Nothing is more important than this," Henry said and rushed after her, abandoning his niece on the floor, not caring whether she got on her feet or not.
It was clear how Martha had been able to call guards on Rose. Martha's uncle was the steward. There was no resemblance, and if she hadn't found out today, she never would have guessed—not even their personalities were alike.
She got to the top of the stairs to see Mister Henry behind her. Rose barely spared him a glance and just continued walking as carefully as she could toward the servants' quarters. Just as she was about to take the turn that would lead her there, Edna appeared.
"Rose!" she cried and rushed toward her. "You're out."
Rose gave her a curt smile, but when the maid got close enough, she couldn't help it—she put all her weight on the poor woman. "Mister 'Enry got me out," she whispered against her.
"Rose!" Edna screamed.





Henry looked hesitant, but he knew he couldn't refuse—not after what his niece had done to her. "If it's within my power," Henry replied.

"I don't t'ink I can see the crown prince today," Rose said with water in her eyes. "Would it be too muc' to ask ye to help me with that?" she asked.

Chapter 38: Stolen

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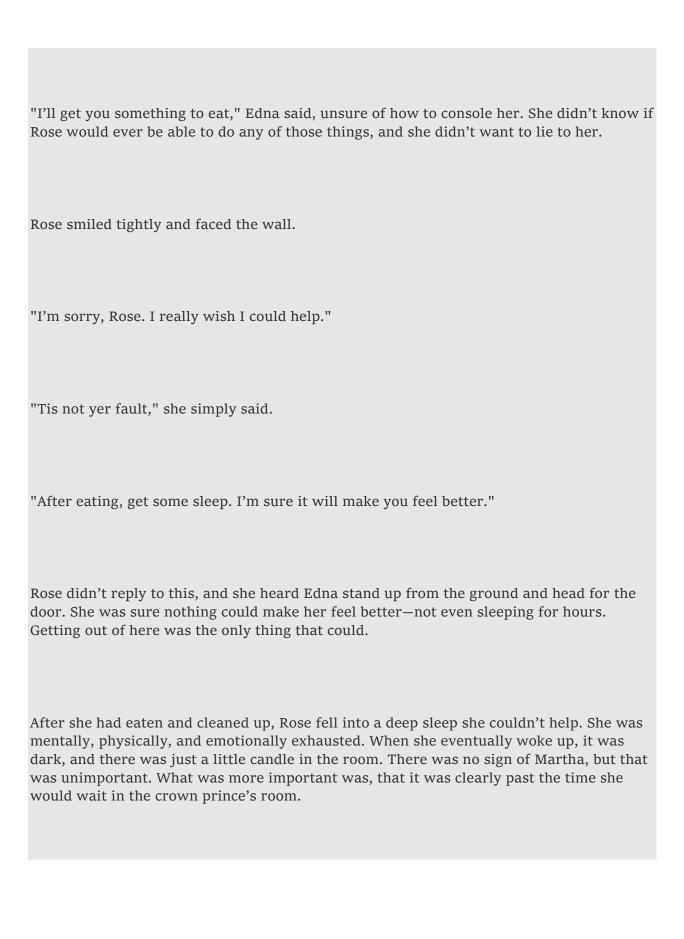
Mister 'Enry lost all the color in his face. "I can't, I'm sorry," he said, lowering his head. "If His Highness calls on you, you will have to respond."

Rose nodded and wiped her face. "I figured," she said with a dejected look on her face and turned toward the door.

"Get enough rest. You don't have to do any duties for the rest of the day," Mister Henry said.

Rose slowly nodded as she walked into the room. She knew she would scrub as many floors as possible if it meant she didn't have to deal with the prince tonight, but that was clearly not going to happen.

The bed was exactly as she had left it, but her bag was in a different position. Rose wondered if she was imagining things. The guards had forcefully dragged her out of the room—it might have moved then. Besides, she didn't have time to think about it, as all she wanted to do was lie down.
Rose dropped onto the bed with a loud thud and groaned in pain. She had landed a little too hard on her side, the one that had been kicked. She immediately rolled onto her front. Though it was a little uncomfortable to lie on her chest, it was currently the only position she could lie in that didn't hurt so much.
"Are you in pain?" Edna asked.
Rose merely grunted in reply.
"I'll get you some water to clean the wounds and some balm to help with the pain."
Rose nodded and started to cry again. "I want to go 'ome, Edna. I don't care about anythin' else. I just want to see mi mother, mi father, and Ander again. I want to get married and live wit' him. What did I do wrong?"
"I know. You did nothing wrong. It was just a series of unfortunate circumstances."
"Why did it 'ave to 'appen to me?"



Rose's eyes opened wide, and she felt relief flood her body. Did something happen? She didn't care. Didn't want to know. If he had someone else to do that with, Rose couldn't be happier. As long as it didn't involve her.

She lifted herself to a sitting position and pulled her bag closer to herself. The prince's coat hadn't been returned to her after the guards took it. She didn't know what had happened to it and hoped it wouldn't cause more trouble later on. Rose could hear sounds outside the room. Servants were clearly moving up and down the hall, but she didn't step outside to find out what was happening. If they would let her sleep, Rose intended to sleep for however long she could. She wouldn't leave her room unless she was called upon, and she wasn't hungry. Edna had been quite generous when she gave her some food before she slept.

Rose frowned as she realized something was missing. She wanted to rearrange her bag, as she wasn't able to do that after she returned because she was so tired. However, as soon as she poured out the contents of her bag, she knew some things were missing.

At first, she thought it was just her wedding present, but even her flute was gone. Rose's gaze darkened. She had had enough. There was no other person who would take such obvious things from her.

She stood to her feet, and Rose almost fell on her butt as the world spun. She managed to grab the wall to save herself, but she needed a few moments for the spinning to stop and her vision to clear. She picked up the light and marched to Martha's section. She wasn't even going to ask her. She knew Martha would lie about it. The only way she could get her things back was if she found them herself.

Rose felt her heart squeeze. Martha was cruel. She could do something as evil as breaking them or burning them—or, yet again, she could accuse Rose of stealing them. Rose walked to the dresser and pulled out the drawers. She saw a few trinkets and some makeup, but nothing that looked like the flute or the swallows.

Rose pulled out the second drawer and also came up empty. She checked under the dresser, and yet again, nothing. Then she moved to Martha's bag. It was more than five times bigger than hers, and it would take her a while to check it.

Rose didn't hesitate as the idea came to her head. She just flipped the bag over, pouring the contents onto the floor. As soon as the bag overturned, the door opened, and Martha walked in. She had a neutral look on her face until she saw the mess in the room.

"You riffraff! How dare you search my things?" she yelled as she rushed toward Rose, ready to hit her and push her away from her belongings.

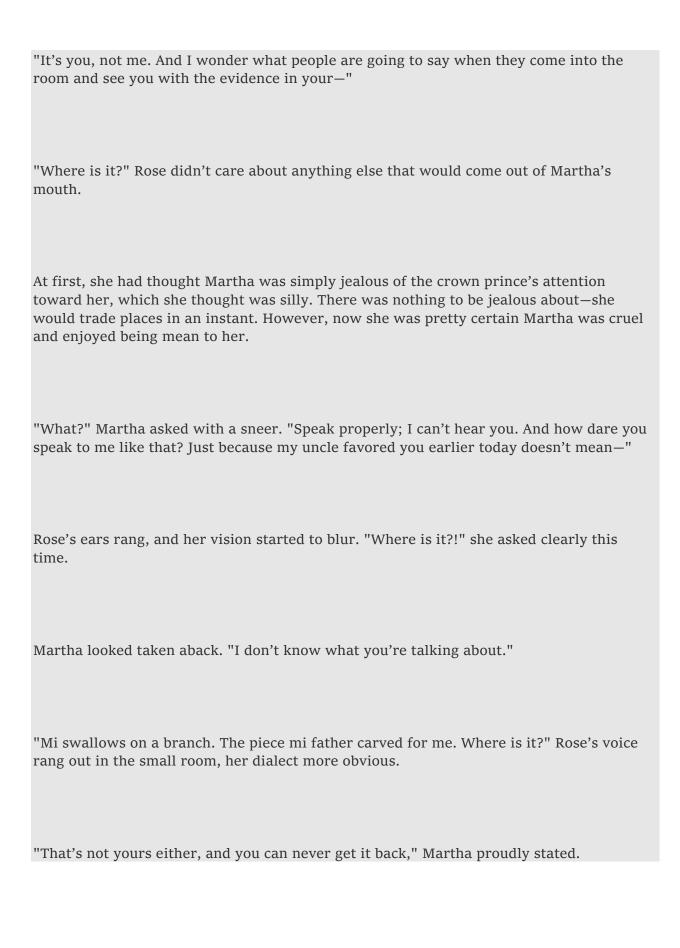
Chapter 39: You Thief

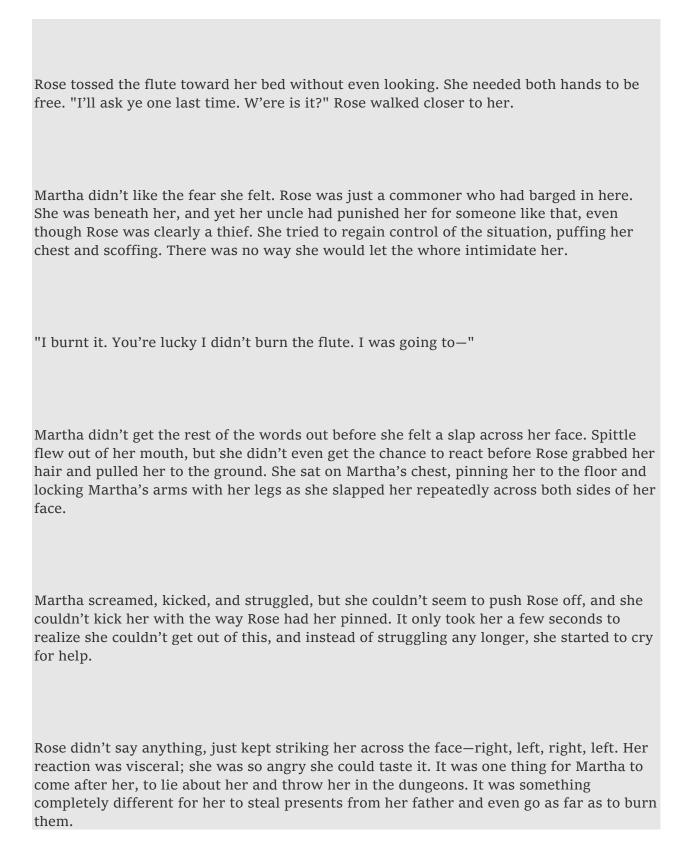
Chapter 39: You Thief

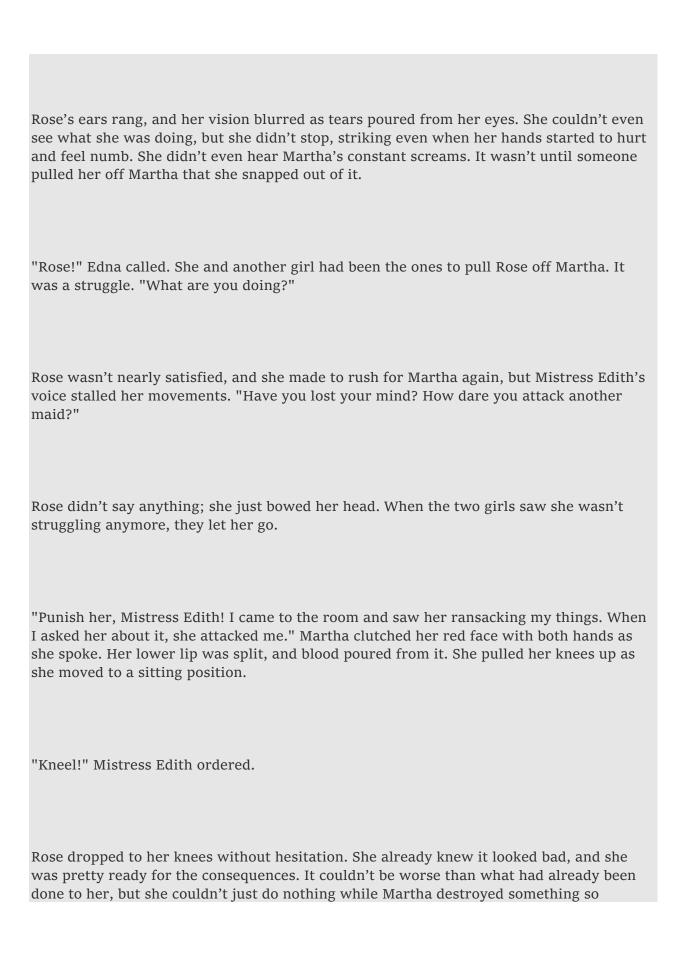
"You t'ief!" Rose shot back, turning around to face Martha with her flute in hand. "Is this yers?" she asked, anger blazing in her eyes.

Martha stopped in her tracks immediately. "No, but I'm pretty sure you stole it, it doesn't belong to you, she scoffed. "You had no right to go through my things."

"I could say the same t'ing about ye. Ye stole from me. After accusin' me, ye are the thief."



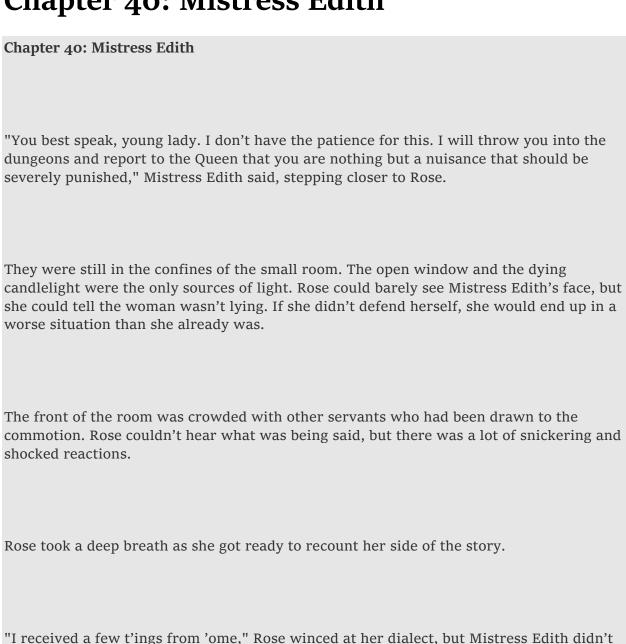




important—something her father was to complete when she returned. She shot a glare in Martha's direction, and the woman jerked.
"Has the crown prince's favoritism gone to your head?" Mistress Edith's voice thundered through the room. "Surely, you don't expect this to go without punishment?"
"I think Martha is lying," Edna blurted out. The girl next to her looked shocked, as though she didn't expect Edna to say anything.
"What are you talking about? Can't you see her clothes are scattered everywhere, and she was clearly attacking Martha when we came in here?" Mistress Edith asked Edna with a stern look on her face.
"Yes, I know, but Rose wouldn't attack Martha needlessly. Even when Martha threw her into the dungeons on false accusations, she didn't try to hit her. Martha must have done something she couldn't absolutely forgive."
"What do you have to say for yourself?" Mistress Edith asked.
Rose didn't reply. The way she spoke made it harder for people to listen to her, and Martha had been here longer. Not only that, but her uncle was also the steward, so she was likely to gain more favor.

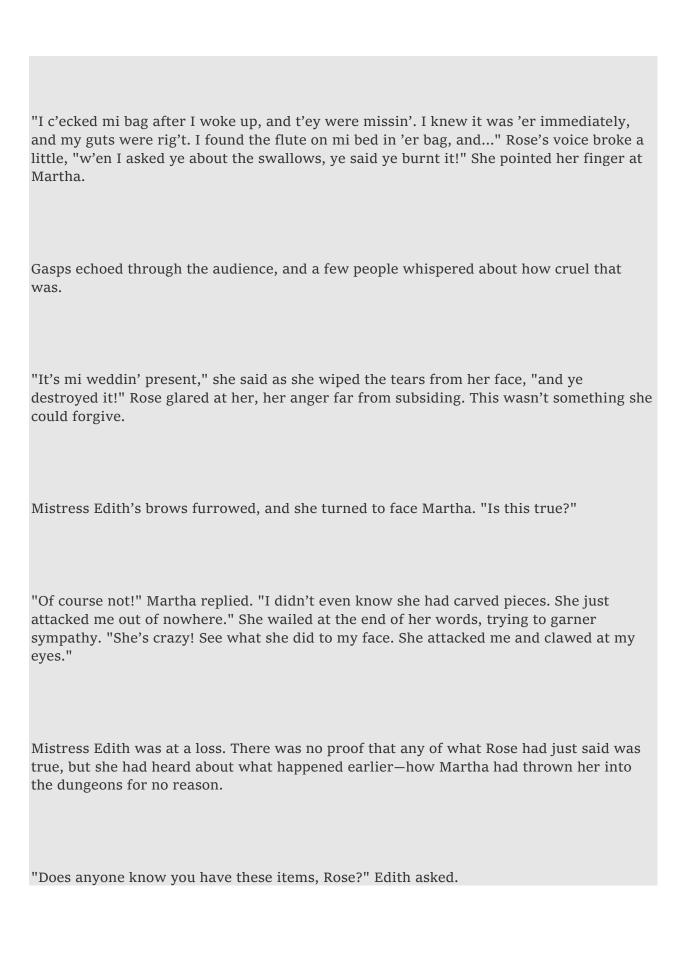
"You best speak, young lady. I don't have the patience for this. I'll throw you into the dungeons and report to the Queen that you're nothing but a nuisance that should be severely punished."

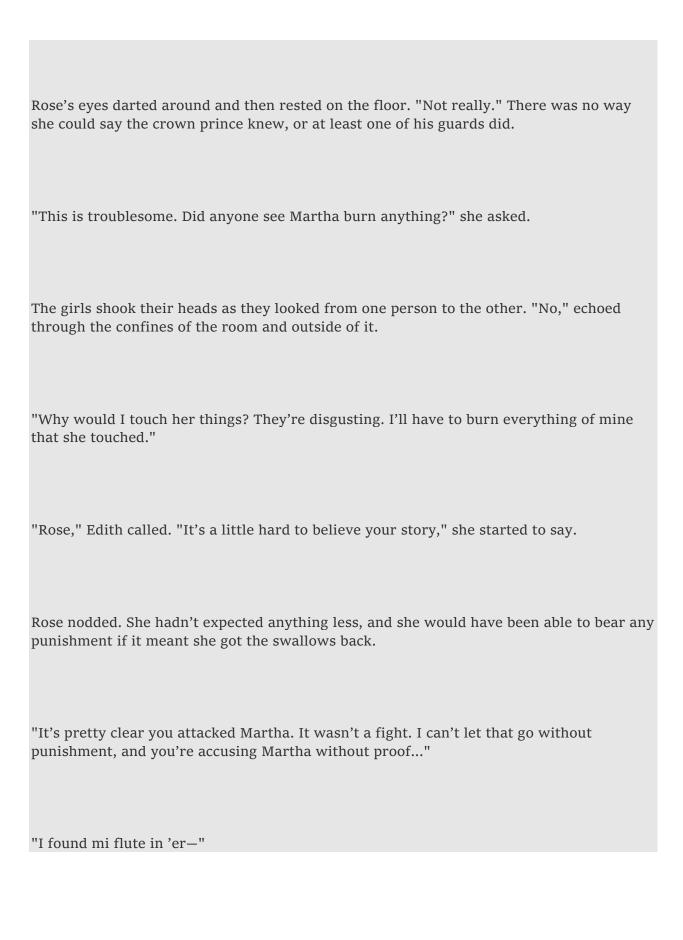
Chapter 40: Mistress Edith

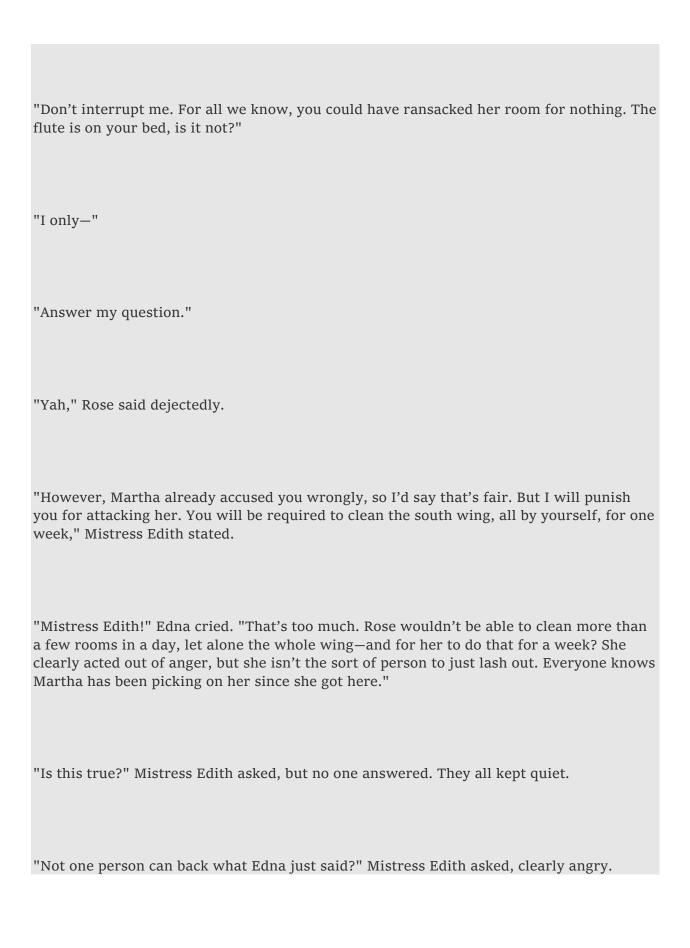


even react. "A few clot'es and two carved pieces. One is a flute—I've 'ad it for a few years. The second is two swallows on a branch. Mi father made t'em for me. 'E's a woodwrig't. Martha took t'em from mi bag w'en I was in the dungeons." Rose's eyes pooled with tears

as she spoke, but she didn't let them fall.







Whispers could be heard floating into the room, but none of the words were clear enough to understand.
"I will assume that there is almost no truth to what you've just told me, Edna. Rose, you will be required to clean the wing. Any of the maids who want to help, can, and if they refuse, you must make sure all the rooms are clean and the halls spotless. I will come around to check, and next time, you'll think twice about attacking another maid. Should anything happen, inform your superior."
Rose nodded, and Mistress Edith walked out of the room. The girls scrambled out of the way. "If I hear one more thing about you girls fighting tonight, you'll sleep under the night sky."
Rose stood to her feet and walked to her bed. Martha fearfully got out of the way when she came close. She picked up the flute and carefully placed it into her bag.
"Thank ye, Edna," she said. "Sorry for draggin' you into this."
"What are you talking about? Sorry I couldn't help much." She turned to Martha. "How can you do that to Rose? Has she ever done anything to you?"
Martha glared at her. "How dare you support an outsider? You think I'd ever touch her things?"

Martha crawled to her section as she tried to salvage her clothes. She muttered as she put them in her bag. "I can't believe she got away with such an easy punishment. Look at what she did to my face. It is going to scar."