

THE KING'S LOVER

Chapter 5: Love Mark

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"Rose!" a voice called.

Rose poked her head out of her house. "Ye're early," Rose said with a smile.

"We 'ave to go to the marketplace, remember?" Emma replied.

"Well, yes, but we don't 'ave to go now. Just admit ye want to 'ear all about it."

"Of course not. I told ye I don't want to know about y'all frolicking."

"Fucking, ye mean," Rose said with a sly smile.

"Rosie!" Emma said with a blush.

Rose smiled and was about to speak when her father's thunderous voice called out.
"Emma, is that ye?"

"Mr. Vallyn," Emma said with a smile. "Good mornin'."

"Good mornin', Emma. How's yer mot'er?"

"She's mighty fine, Mr. Vallyn."

"I'm heading out for the day, Rosie."

"Have a good day out workin', Fat'er."

"Aye, aye."

"Yer fat'er could 'ave 'eard ye," Emma replied.

"Ye're worried about nothin'. Mot'er is still sleepin'. I'll leave some water beside 'er, and then we can leave for the market. I also need to see Madame Razel. She said she 'as a gift for me. Can ye imagine?"

"Wow! For the weddin'?" Emma asked.

Rose nodded. "Do ye want to see Mot'er?"

"No, she's sleepin', isn't she?"

Rose nodded and slipped into the house, returning later with a scarf she used to tie her head and a basket on her arm. "What do ye think?" Rose asked as she gripped the ends of the scarf tied to her neck.

"Looks good," Emma replied honestly.

"Won't ye say somethin' like, 'Ye look very pretty, Madame Rose. Ye look like a farmer's wife'?"

"How's a farmer's wife a compliment?"

"Isn't it? The farmer is the wealthiest after the baron and the merchant."

"Aye, ye're right, but ye don't really care about such things."

"Yes, but ye don't 'ave to ruin mi joke, Emma. Ye're no fun," she said and bumped into Emma, who just subtly smiled at her.

Suddenly, Emma frowned. "Wha's that on yer neck? A mosquito bite? I didn't notice that before."

Rose clamped her hand on her neck and blushed. Emma stopped abruptly. In all the years she had known Rose, she could count the times she had blushed. Rose wasn't the type to get embarrassed easily. Without a doubt, that wasn't a mosquito bite.

Her eyes widened, and she turned around to face Rose. Her mouth tried to say the words, but her face just got redder and redder. She covered her mouth with her hands.

"Why am I the one with a love mark, but ye're redder than a tomato?" Rose teased.

"Don't say somethin' like that out loud!" Emma yelled, looking around. "What if someone 'ears?"

"No one's around, Emma."

"What if someone sees?"

"That's why I am wearing a scarf."

"I could still see it with the scarf," Emma replied.

"Only 'cause ye were staring too closely." She slipped her free arm through Emma's.
"Don't fret, my lady. We 'ave to get to the marketplace."

Emma sighed but didn't fight Rose as she pulled her.

They got to the entrance of the marketplace. There wasn't much of a gate, just two pillars indicating the entrance, holding a huge signboard with words that Rose once heard someone read out.

"Edenville's Marketplace."

"Why do ye always do that when we are standing in front?"

"Pretend I can read?" Rose laughed. "It's fun."

A woman was selling roasted almond nuts directly in front of the marketplace. Rose rushed to her to buy them—her mother loved them.

"Rose," Emma pulled her. "I need to pick up something for my ma. Head into the marketplace, I'll find ye when I'm done."

Rose nodded. "If ye don't see me, meet me at Madame Razel's, or better still, just meet me at Madame Razel's."

"Okay," Emma said and waved.

Rose waved back and turned to the old lady, making small talk as she bought. No sooner did she accept her wrappin' of roasted nuts than she heard the hooves of horses as people cleared the path and dropped to the floor.

Rose didn't need anyone to tell her it was the crown prince. The baron didn't care for this much entourage when he came to the marketplace, and he also rarely came himself. He had more than enough hands to help him. She dropped her woven basket on the ground and kowtowed, as did the older lady selling nuts.

Rose bent her head, expecting the herd of horses to go through the gate of the marketplace or at least pass in front of it, but suddenly they stopped, and she could hear

whispers. Rose didn't even move. Whatever this was, she was sure it had nothin' to do with her.

"You!" a familiar voice said.

Rose slowly raised her head. "Oh, ye," she smiled, seeing the knight from the day before.

He glared at her. "Come," he simply stated.

Rose looked behind her, beside her, and then back at the knight. "Me?" she asked.

"Yes, you! Are you deaf?"

"Why?" she asked innocently. She was sure this was a mistake.

"Don't ask stupid questions, wench!" the knight yelled and grabbed her arm, pulling her up. "You answer me when I—"

"Thomas," a voice said. "Get your hands off her."

"Your Highness," Thomas bowed and immediately let go of Rose.

Rose felt all the air leave her lungs. Riding on the biggest stallion she had ever seen was the crown prince. She could tell in one glance. His black hair was combed back, his eyes sharp, his nose straight, his chin shaved with just a little line of hair at the end. There was a visible scar across his chin, however, that didn't dent his handsomeness; rather, it gave him a roguish look.

He was dressed in royal clothes. White with gold embroidery. His horse was white and sparkling. The men around him were dressed in a similar manner, and they all rode on white horses. So engrossed was Rose in starin' at him that she forgot to bow.

Rose had heard enough tales about the crown prince to keep children awake at night, but she had chalked it up to simple rumors. Yet just one look at him, and she could almost imagine them to be true—especially the part where he was good in bed. Rose almost smacked herself at this—just what was she thinking?

"You were at the well yesterday," he casually spoke to her.

Rose almost lost her bowels. "I'm honored that ye would remember me, yer Highness," she said, bowing her head.

On the contrary, Rose was petrified. She knew what it meant to deal with royalty—they could mess with you however they wanted. The fact that the crown prince had noticed her enough to make a show of it was concerning. She could hear whispers from around her, but none of them dared lift their heads.

"Come closer," he said. His voice was thick, and the air hummed as he spoke.

Rose's eyes darted around, but she slowly stepped forward. "Is there something that ye need from me, yer Highness?" she asked, her voice shaking a little. She didn't think she had done anything wrong. Was he angry that she had used the well? But she had made sure to ask for permission first.

"Perhaps," he whispered. "Lift your head."

Rose was hesitant, but she obeyed, and her scarf slipped off. The love mark she was hiding was on full display. Rose tried to cover it, but it was too late. The crown prince's eyes were already locked on it.

Chapter 6: The Type You Beat With A Stick

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Caius swung off his horse. He knew what he had seen—though she had tried to cover it, it was clear and new too. He had seen her the day before; such a mark wasn't on her neck, he would have noticed. Her red hair was what he had seen first as he rode by. He passed the marketplace and was going around the town in hopes that he would find her, and here she was.

He wanted to go about this in a more gentle manner. He was going to try luring her with gifts and whatnots. Besides, he was the crown prince; he usually didn't have to do much, but this was a village—he wasn't sure how to woo a peasant.

However, the recent developments have changed things. Caius wasn't angry. He found virgins a tad too much. Besides, he liked a woman who knew her way around the bedroom. Caius had to bite back the drool that almost escaped his lips.

"A petal," he said, stepping closer. "Wonderful! I like my women ready and experienced. Not having to break you in makes this easier for me. I could have fun much faster."

Rose has had her share of men coming after her, so she knew the look the prince gave her was nothing less than unfiltered desire. She was disgusted. One would think the heir to the kingdom would have more control over himself, but here he was in the middle of the street, panting like a dog in heat, asking to have a taste of her. The worst part—he wasn't asking, he was demanding.

She had learned a few tricks. Some men you had to smile at and act coy with for them to let you go; others, you beat with a stick. However, nothing in her skill box prepared her for how to deal with a prince—and a crown prince at that. He was powerful and was currently the most powerful man in all of Edenville. She couldn't anger him.

Rose bowed and stepped back. "I am so sorry, yer Highness, but I think ye have me mistaken for someone else. I am engaged to be married in a week."

"Does it matter?" he asked and stepped closer. "Engaged to be married, married—neither matters much to me. All I ask is that you spread your legs for me. I'll pay you handsomely."

Rose's eyes blazed. She would have slapped him if he wasn't the crown prince. He was clearly the type you beat with a stick, but Rose wasn't about to lose her arms just yet. However, she wasn't some roadside whore he could just call upon. This was unbelievable. There were people here—did he not care? Emma would call her shameless often, but she was nothing close to this.

"I beg ye, 'ave mercy, yer Highness. A lowly girl like me could never satisfy His Highness. I ain't got the skills nor the status."

"Didn't I just say none of those things matter?" he asked with an evil smile.

Rose kept her head bent. "I 'ave to turn down ye offer, yer highness. Please, forgive me."

Rose didn't wait for his response before she fled. She didn't stop running until she got to the merchant's wife's store, which was located on the opposite side of town, in contrast to the marketplace.

"Child, what got you breathing like that?" Madame Razel asked as she walked towards her.

"An incubus! The devil!" Rose said without thinking.

"What?" Madame Razel said.

"Never mind," she said. "ye said ye had something for me. I came here as fast as I could." She smiled up at the older lady, happy she could breathe again.

"Oh," she smiled sweetly. "I will go bring it."

She knew better than to tell Madame Razel, the whole town would hear it before nightfall, and it was already bad enough that this happened in front of the marketplace. But what was wrong with the crown prince? All because of a love mark? She tightly wrapped the scarf around her head.

She sat in front of the shop, and that was when she realized her basket wasn't with her. Rose grabbed her head. It was her favorite basket. It was lighter than the rest and also sturdier, and it took time to make as she only used the finest weave—not to mention expensive.

"That damn sack of spoiled lard!" Rose yelled, startling the poor Madame Razel coming out of her store. The items in her hands nearly flew into the air as she jumped in surprise.

Rose's eyes widened. "I am so sorry, Madame Razel." She rushed to the woman. They were imported ceramics that she was going to give Rose in exchange for the table and a wooden hand mirror her father made—and also her gift for the coming wedding. The table was exquisite; the legs had been hand-carved by her father as was the mirror. Rose had watched the entire process.

Rose's father dealt with wood. When he wasn't chopping them and selling them off, he was carving them. He was also pretty good at his job. The problem was, he was a peasant—nobody was going to pay him more than they had to. However, the merchant was always generous to her father.

Rose carefully accepted the ceramics from her. They were quite heavy. Her basket—she almost shed a tear. Now she had to carry them in her hands to go home. "Thank ye so much, Madame Razel."

"Don't mention it. I'm just so happy. It's about time you married yer childhood sweetheart already."

Rose smiled at her and turned to walk away—just for her to see Emma walking through the gates, and in her hand was her basket. "Emma!" she cried. "Bye, Madame Razel."

"Bye, dear. Hello, Emma."

"Good day, Madame Razel." Emma bowed her head.

Rose rushed towards Emma, the ceramics in her hands. "Emma," she called. "Ye saw mi basket and the roasted nuts!" she cried as she inspected it.

"She gave it to me," Emma explained.

Rose knew immediately that she was talking about the woman who sold the roasted almond nuts in front of the castle. "Isn't she so nice?" Rose softly said and placed her plates into the basket.

"She also told me what happened," Emma quietly said.

Rose stopped but then immediately put the plates into the basket. "Not 'ere," she whispered.

She collected the basket and slowly linked her hands with Emma once again, and they walked through the gates of the merchant's compound.

"Did that really happen?" Emma asked as they walked away.

"Yah," she replied.

"And ye turned him down?" she asked.

"What else am I going to do?"

"I know, but people are saying ye is going to be the Prince's whore now."

"And ye believe them? Didn't I just say I turned him down? I'm getting married to Ander. Besides, 'his whore' is a stretch. He is the type that just wants a taste, and he would leave ye hanging. I'd rather die."

"I am worried, Rose. Tis the crown prince we are talking about."

Rose ruffled her hair. "No need for that. I am sure he has forgotten all about me."

"Will you tell Ander?"

"Nay, no reason for that. Besides, look at this. Aren't the plates so pretty? I have never seen such designs before. I hear they are imported from a different kingdom."

Chapter 7: What If She Comes Running?

Rylen walked into the section allocated to the crown prince in the baron's residence. He had a whole section to himself, which was a good thing as it hid prying eyes from his shenanigans. Not that the prince cared. If it weren't that his good actions were more than enough to counter his bad ones, he would have more haters than loyal subjects in the kingdom.

There were two guards stationed in front of the room, each holding a spear. Torch stands were on each side of the guards; since it was still daylight, the

torches were unlit. The guards bowed as they saw him. Rylen simply lifted his hand to them.

Rylen knocked twice and announced himself. "It is I, Prince Rylen, Your Grace."

"Come in," a voice said.

The guards opened the door, and Rylen walked in. The doors closed after him, and he was greeted with the sight of Caius lying on the long chair, a head and legs on each arm of the chair. He was still dressed in the attire he had left the manor with. His armor, his shoes, the cape—even his sword was still around his waist.

Rylen already had a briefing on what happened. Unfortunately, he hadn't been there in person as he had been overseeing what they actually came to Edenville to do while Caius had gone sightseeing. Rylen didn't mind this, as the decisions were usually made by Caius; all he did was be there in person. He trusted Caius with his life, and he knew it was vice versa.

"May I ask what's wrong, Your Grace?"

"Rylen," he groaned as he stared at nothing in particular. Caius often referred to Rylen by just his name when they were in private. "What is my title?"

Without even the slightest hesitation, Rylen started to speak. "You are Caius Ravenor, crown prince and heir to the throne of Velmount," Rylen announced proudly.

"Has any woman ever refused my advances?" he asked and slowly turned to Rylen, who stood behind him with his head bowed.

"Not that I am aware of, and I didn't think Your Grace made advances."

Caius narrowed his eyes at the last part but chose not to dwell on it. "Good. Now explain to me why I was refused."

"According to what I heard, she is engaged, Your Grace," Rylen said.

Also, according to what he heard, he wasn't the only one who had heard this. He still couldn't believe Caius would do something like that in a public place, but compared to half the things he had done, this was almost minimal. The king would not be pleased when he heard, and Rylen knew this was exactly what Caius wanted. However, this was the first time Caius would chase anyone, let alone someone who didn't want him.

"To whom? A lord, a baron, or some royalty?"

"No, Your Grace," he replied.

"Just another peasant, and she dares refuse me. How dare she?"

"Not everyone wants you, Your Grace," Rylen said without missing a beat.

Caius turned to Rylen. "Are you trying to be funny? If you weren't my cousin, I'd have your head."

"No, Your Grace. I understand you're angry." Rylen was completely unfazed; he heard this threat at least once every three days, and his head was still intact.

Caius touched the bridge of his nose. "This only happens when I am playing nice." He kicked his legs off the chair, dropping them to the ground with a loud stomp. "Find out everything you can about her."

Rylen frowned. "Your Grace, shouldn't you just forget her? You'll be out of Edenville by noon tomorrow; the redhead will be completely forgotten by then. There are thousands of women in the capital who will happily keep your bed warm."

Caius smirked. "You should know me by now, Rylen. I always get what I want."

"Even the one that doesn't want you?" Rylen asked.

Caius narrowed his eyes at his cousin. Rylen always found a way to get on his nerves. "What if she's the one that comes running?" he smirked.

Rylen sighed. "As you wish. I will have the information you need before dinner."

"Good, good," Caius said and got to his feet.

Rylen narrowed his eyes. He didn't like how the prince's mood had suddenly improved. Knowing him, he was definitely thinking of something he shouldn't be. He bowed and left the room.

He almost felt bad for the redhead, and what the prince said was no lie—whatever he wanted, he got. When Velmount had been invaded and they lost Redhill, one of the towns at the edge of Velmount, Caius had sworn to get it back, and he did. The battle only lasted a week, and just using brute strength too. He fought for a week without sleeping. After the battle was over, he didn't awaken until the third day. Caius was that resilient.

Caius smiled to himself as he sat for dinner. The dining room was filled with the old baron, his young wife, his first son and daughter from his first wife, and his young son. The latter wasn't older than two, but he sat at the table with them on his mother's lap.

The table was spread out with different delicacies. There was pottage of leeks and herbs, and for the main dish, roasted venison with berry sauce. However, it wasn't until dessert that Caius breached the topic with the baron.

"You want me to close off the forest?" the baron asked in shock. He wasn't the only one—even Rylen was looking at him like he had lost his mind.

"Yes," Caius said as he dug into the desert. "What's this?" he asked.

"Spiced honey cake," the baron replied. "It's a common dessert in Edenville, but it was perfected by my wife."

"Really? It's really good. You could sell this in the capital, and I'm sure it would be bought exponentially."

"Your Highness, we are just a humble town."

"You're more than that. I want the forest off-limits for tomorrow, and anyone who breaks the rule will be beheaded in the town square." Caius switched the topic without hesitation.

The baron gasped. "Such an extreme punishment. Your Highness, I beg that you reconsider a lesser penalty, and there is barely any time to make the announcement."

"Don't worry about that. I'll place guards at all the usual entrances to prevent anyone from entering. You have nothing to worry about." All he needed was to trap a certain person who frequented the forests.

"I see." The baron still looked a little hesitant, but he knew there was absolutely nothing he could do. "Is there perhaps a reason why you'd want the forest closed off tomorrow?"

"Yes, of course."

"Would it be impertinent for me to ask why?" the baron asked.

"No, not at all, but no need to rush—you'll find out tomorrow." Caius dropped the cutlery. "The cake was just delicious, my lady."

She blushed. "I am glad Your Highness likes it."

"Very much." He smiled and stood to his feet. "I will retire for the night. I've had a rough day, you see."

"Of course. I wish you a good night's sleep."

Caius was smiling as he walked away from the table—but not before he saw the look Rylen gave him.