

K Lover 83

Chapter 83: No Escape

Esme nodded and rushed in the opposite direction to do as Lady Delphine had asked, while Delphine turned her attention to Rose. Rose couldn't meet her eyes; she had her gaze glued to her knees.

Lady Delphine didn't have to ask her directly—she couldn't do it. She was already having a hard time with the crown prince; adding other strange men would be the death of her. The thought of it made her want to hurl up the lunch she had just eaten.

It wasn't any disrespect to Lady Delphine and the girls; she just couldn't. She had never thought she would be with anyone else other than the man she loved. The worst part was that she was thinking about him less and less these days, and she hated that.

Esme returned swiftly, handing the lit pipe to Lady Delphine. She accepted it and walked to the long chair. There, she settled and got comfortable, then inhaled deeply, allowing the smoke to curl around her lips before exhaling with a sigh.

Rose watched silently, her fingers gripping the hem of her dress. The tension in her body had not eased. Every word Lady Delphine had spoken only confirmed what she already feared—there was no escape.

"Would that be all?" Esme asked, a jolly look on her face.

Lady Delphine nodded and dismissed her with a wave of her hand.

Esme smiled and glanced at Rose with a concerned look on her face, but Rose didn't return her gaze. Esme didn't seem bothered by this as she walked to the table, taking the dishes with her on her way out.

"So," Lady Delphine said, at last, her voice softer than before. "Now you know where things stand."

Rose nodded hesitantly. "Aye... I do."

"Yes, you do," Lady Delphine corrected.

Rose looked up at her. "Yes, I do."

"Good," Lady Delphine replied. She closed her eyes slightly as she let out a puff of smoke.

The smoke wafted toward Rose. The smell was hard to place—it carried hints of tobacco and something else. Herbs, perhaps? Rose wasn't sure.

Eventually, Lady Delphine opened her eyes and rested her gaze on Rose. "So will you go back to His Highness, or will you stay here?"

"I can't go back to the castle," Rose said. "I'd be punished, and there's the matter of the debt—I could never pay that."

Lady Delphine looked confused for a moment. "What are you talking about? Even if you stay here, you couldn't pay all that. You'd have to work six times more than everyone else to be able to make that in two years, and that is practically impossible. You can't even handle the crown prince," she said, crossing her legs, "let alone thirty men in one night."

"Thirty men?" Rose almost bolted out of the chair. "In one nig't?!"

Lady Delphine gave her an unimpressed look. She leaned forward and adjusted the hem of her dress, her legs angled sideways. Then she leaned back and folded her arms, the pipe still in her palm. Her bosom rested comfortably against her arms.

"It would take my girls a full year to earn me that amount, not counting their share. And that includes gifts and tips. You do understand the value at which you were sold?"

"Yes," Rose said, nodding. "I know."

Lady Delphine smiled at her. She knew it was no fault of Rose's, and she wouldn't have been sold at such a high price if it wasn't because of Lord Wolf. However, Lady Delphine had been determined not to lose her, even if it meant spending more than she could afford.

"I will take that as you can't do it. Well then, I shall inform the crown prince of your presence here and get my money back."

"The crown prince isn't goin' to pay," Rose said.

Lady Delphine looked taken aback. "What makes you so sure?" she asked.

"Why would he?" Rose didn't think he had any reason to, and more importantly, she didn't want to owe him anything. She already owed him her father's life—which was his fault, to begin with—and now this? She might end up having to pay for it for the rest of her life.

Besides, why would the crown prince do anything to make her life more convenient? All he cared about was having her at his beck and call. If she couldn't comply, he made sure she was punished, whether by whipping or humiliation. Why would he pay off her debt other than to ensure she could never leave?

"Why not? Thirty thousand gold pieces is nothing to the crown prince. He can afford it, and he wants you back—he would pay. Or..." Lady Delphine paused as an unpleasant thought passed through her mind.

"Or?" Rose asked eagerly.

"I will be forced to hand you over, whether or not he pays. I'd rather not do that. If I inform him before he gets wind that you're here, it will be more beneficial for both of us."

"I don't want to go back," Rose said, on the verge of tears.

"I know," Lady Delphine said with a sad smile. She laid her pipe on a small table next to the chair she sat on. "Come, sit," she called to Rose, tapping the seat next to her.

Rose moved quickly, and Lady Delphine wrapped her arm around her. "You have to. I know I tried to offer you a job, but I can't even keep you here, even if I wanted to."

"Can't ye let me run away?" Rose asked, her eyes brimming with tears. She knew it was a great demand, one she shouldn't be making, but the thought of going back to the crown prince made her desperate enough to say even the worst things. "I will pay ye back by findin' some other way to work. I don't take yer help for granted."

Lady Delphine lifted her face and wiped her tears. "I couldn't. If the crown prince is as serious as I have heard, he won't stop searching until he finds you. And if he doesn't, he'd go after your family."