

His Highness's Second Wife Chapter 1

“Ah, man, this is so boring!”

Raena dropped back in the enormous bed, staring at the baldachin that hung over her head. Thin layers of semi-transparent white fabric embraced the four-poster bed from all sides, supposedly to give the loving couple some privacy. Or maybe it was just to create an atmosphere for their first night together since it really didn't do much in terms of concealing anything.

It had been four hours since they had escorted her to the bridal chamber. She was instructed to wait for her husband in her ceremonial gown since, according to their traditions, he was supposed to be the first person to take her wedding veil off and gaze upon her face. He hadn't shown up, of course, not that she expected him to.

A knock echoed through the room, and Raena sat up with a sigh. Grabbing the veil lying next to her on the bed, she threw it over her head, no longer caring that it tilted to the side. Every half an hour, they would check on her to make certain she wasn't asleep, then they would leave her alone again. And every time, they said the same thing:

“Your Highness, please be patient. His Highness will come soon.”

“Yes,” she replied as the palace maid turned to leave. “Wait! Send my maid in.”

The young girl froze for a moment, glancing up and then bowing down immediately as if afraid she'd be punished for doing so.

“Yes, Your Highness,” she murmured before disappearing through the door.

Raena took the veil off again, tossing it on the bed as she slid to the floor. The ceremonial attire included a thin, long underdress of shimmering cream color, covered by a richly embroidered, gem-encrusted gown that seemed to weigh a ton. Being the Prime Minister's only daughter and all, her family had gone overboard in showing their wealth and status.

Raena started pulling the hairpins out of her long, blonde hair and throwing them on the vanity table in front of her. Staring at the still unfamiliar reflection in the mirror, she had to remind herself that she was no longer Lydia Myles, a university dropout and an overworked waitress at her mother's restaurant. She was Lady Raena Magrath now, a noblewoman by birth and a princess by marriage, but most important of all — she was currently living in the body of a fictional character in the worst romance book ever.

It was still difficult to believe that this was really happening, so every morning when she woke up, she would rush to the nearest mirror to look at herself, at this new reality that insisted she was there, inside that damn book. And every morning, a pair of baby blue

eyes would stare back at her with utter disbelief until acceptance flooded her frail, new body, calming down her racing heart.

A month had passed since she woke up in this world. The last thing she remembered before that was finishing a long shift at her mother's restaurant and heading home in the early hours of the morning. Drowsy and distracted, she hadn't seen the blade before it was too late. Then the pain came, the darkness and the voice. She still couldn't remember what the voice had said.

Waking up here, alive and without so much as a scratch on her stomach, she had thought that she was dreaming. Perhaps she was in a coma back home and her brain was keeping her occupied while her body fought to repair the damage. It had to be that. What else could it be?

Days passed, then weeks, but she still didn't wake up back in the real world. So she accepted she was stuck in this place — maybe forever — and spending her days in idle chatter and boring walks wasn't how she wanted to spend this lucid dream or whatever was happening to her.

More shocking than realizing she was no longer in her own body was the fact that this new world was actually familiar. At first, the names sounded strange, and the places she had never been to before looked vaguely familiar, but she couldn't quite put her finger on it. It was like a word on the tip of her tongue, but she couldn't remember what it was.

All of that had changed when she learned her own name and her own fate — to become the second wife of the third prince of the Empire, Ka.ssian Etrobia. Then it clicked.

The book. The stupid book that lay abandoned on her nightstand with coffee stains on the cover. The places, the names, the people — everything was like in that book!

The door opened with a quiet creak, and someone strode in, barely making any noise.

"You called?"

Raena turned to look at her personal maid, only to find her standing right behind her. Kara's dark hair was gathered into a thick braid that brushed past her shoulder and barely reached her collarbone, her bright eyes staring at Raena with what she could only describe as a calculating expression.

"Don't you have to bow or something?" Raena scoffed.

"Why? There is no one else here," Kara replied quietly, glancing at the door as if to make sure what she said was true. "Don't worry, I will be perfectly respectful and obedient in front of other people. I won't taint my mistress's reputation. After all, you're officially a princess now. If I show you any disrespect, I might be beaten to death."

Raena smiled. Telling Kara her secret — or at least part of it — had been a huge gamble, but it had paid off. No matter how much she knew about this world from that book, she needed someone to help and guide her if she were to survive and succeed in her plan — a plan that was going to allow her to exit the main storyline and live a happy, pleasant life as a rich, single lady. Away from the drama, the fighting, and the death which would soon befall this place.

“I won’t let that happen,” Raena assured her, stretching her arms. Without so much as a word, Kara began loosening up the ties on the back of the gown. The pressure around Raena’s chest decreased as the dress slipped down to her ankles, leaving her in just her thin undergarments. As she stepped outside of the circle of cloth, Kara quickly gathered it, setting it carefully on the bed.

“Your position may give you power outside, but within this household, you hold very little of it,” Kara muttered, returning to her side and fumbling with her hair. A few more pins disappeared inside the maid’s pockets and Raena ran her fingers through the thick locks, wondering if she ever had such nice hair in the real world. “So let’s make sure we both survive.”

“Don’t worry, my plan will work.” Raena smiled confidently. It had to work, it must. After all, she had an unfair advantage over everyone here. She just had to be smart about it. “Why is there no food here?”

“The bride should not eat or drink anything throughout the wedding day and night, so she is clean and ready to receive the seed of her husband. It is believed the chances of conception are much higher that way,” Kara explained as she fussed over the ceremonial dress, making sure there was no damage or wrinkles on it.

“What a bunch of nonsense!” Raena murmured, pressing on her rumbling stomach.

“People like traditions. It gives them a sense of stability and assurance. Not everybody likes change.”

“But how does that even make sense? Do people realize how hard it is to sit still for hours at a time? Not to mention that getting dehydrated is a real thing! And to top it all off, if we are to have sex, we’d need energy. If I don’t eat or drink all day, how am I supposed to have any strength to do it? Or am I supposed to just lie on my back like a dead fish, spread my legs open, and wait to ‘receive the seed of my husband’?”

Kara closed her eyes, her lips pressing into a thin line as if she was fighting to stop the words that were urging to get out.

“Really, I never know what will come out of your mouth!” she said at the end. “Please be mindful of what you say.”

“Yes, yes. I’m shutting up,” Raena sighed with exasperation. Kara touched her arms, and Raena lifted them, patiently waiting as the maid helped her put on a simpler dress that slid around her legs in several layers of satin and gossamer. The pale blue gown brushed lightly against her skin as Kara adjusted the open sleeves and moved behind her to take care of the b.uttons that ran to the middle of her back. “Where are we supposed to stay after tonight?”

“The third prince has given you the North Palace. The other servants should be arriving there tomorrow,” Kara replied as she finished with the b.uttons.

“Tomorrow? That won’t work. We are going there now.”

“What?” Kara exclaimed, stepping in front of her so she could look her in the eyes. “You’re supposed to stay here until morning, even if your husband doesn’t come! What if he comes and he finds you gone? We’ll both get in trouble!”

“He won’t come, so I have no intention of waiting any longer,” Raena said confidently.

“How can you be so sure?”

“The stars told me!” Raena grinned.

She had decided not to tell Kara the part where their world was an exact replica of a book she had picked up in a second-hand bookshop a few months ago. Moreover, that same stupid book turned out to be an epic bore where the main characters were one-dimensional while the plot ran away from the author halfway through the story. The writer seemed more interested in describing every single detail of the world, including its history, political struggles and parties, and even social customs and events, instead of focusing on the love story or even the inevitable war she was hinting at from page one. But now all those little details, like the fact that the third prince didn’t visit his second wife’s chambers even once during their marriage, were finally worth something. Raena just wished she had forced herself to read until the end of the book instead of abandoning it halfway.

“The stars, hm?” Kara asked, pulling Raena back from her reverie.

“You’ll soon find out the stars have a lot to say.” She smiled. “Let’s go.”

“I still think we should stay here. If you leave now, all kinds of rumors might start…”

“Well, then,” Raena said as they reached the door. “It’s a good thing everybody already thinks that the Prime Minister’s daughter is just a beautiful girl with the brain capacity of a pumpkin. I can totally play this role! Prepare yourself to be amazed!”

“With everything I’ve seen so far, I am sure you’ll exceed my expectations,” Kara deadpanned, turning the handle. “After you, Mistress.”

She opened the door, bowing down as Raena moved past her. The four guards outside froze, staring at her with surprise, but it was the three maids next to the opposite wall who shook their stupor first. The oldest of them moved to block Raena's path, bowing down and keeping her eyes on the floor as she spoke.

"Your Highness, please return to the bridal chamber. You must wait for His Highness." When Raena didn't reply, she allowed herself a look up, only to catch Raena's gaze. The maid bowed her head immediately, her back stiffening, and Raena smiled. She might have been a second wife in a place full of much more powerful women, but she was still a princess and these people had to listen to her. They all knew that.

"But it's so boring!" Raena gr0aned, making a pouty expression. "And I want food! I'm so hungry! And cookies!"

"Her Highness mustn't eat food on her wedding day," the maid continued, her voice less confident now. She held her hands in front of her and Raena could see her squeezing them together in a mix of helplessness and frustration. "Why don't you..."

"But I want to eat now!" Raena shouted, stomping her foot. "And I am not staying in that room, I don't like it! It's dark, and it's boring!" The maid lifted her head, but this time, she held her eyes no higher than Raena's chin. "Do you know who I am? I am the daughter of the Prime Minister and the wife of the third prince! If you keep pestering me, I will tell my father and my husband! And then they will scold you and spank you!"

The maid's eyes widened in confusion until the realization slowly took over. Seeing the opportunity, Kara stepped forward.

"Please excuse my Mistress, Head Maid," she said in a timid, apologetic voice. "It's past her bedtime, and she is tired. His Highness seems to be busy with important matters, so please allow us to retire to the North Palace."

"I want warm milk!" Raena interrupted, turning toward Kara, who just stared at her with an expression that almost made Raena break character and laugh. Kara composed herself, giving her a very believable smile.

"Yes, Mistress," she replied before turning back to the Head Maid. "Please, excuse us. This way, Mistress."

Kara led them past the older woman and Raena looked over her shoulder, half-expecting the maid to try to stop them again. Luckily, she didn't.

They didn't talk until they cleared the long, heavily decorated corridors of the Main Palace and stepped into the garden that Raena had spotted earlier from her window. The full moon rose high in the sky, generously showering them with light so they could walk without tripping or worrying about their surroundings.

The garden was much grander than the Prime Minister's, overflowing with ponds, trees, and all kinds of flowers whose fragrance filled the air like a perfume made by the most skilled artisan. It was a bit chaotic, though, as if more than one person was tending to the place and they clearly disagreed on the arrangements of the flowers, the paths, even the decorations.

"My, my, I married well!" Raena chuckled as they passed another fountain that was as big as her apartment back in the real world. The waters reflected the moonlight, disturbed only by the light breeze that rippled through the air.

"Yes, the prince has been very well off ever since the end of the war. The Emperor bestowed on him many gifts and lands for the role he played in the Empire's victory," Kara explained, looking around. Raena knew that already, she knew more than Kara could ever imagine, but she just nodded. She had already used her luck when her new friend agreed to work with her. She didn't want to push it. "But since you're only the second wife, you'll get a fixed monthly allowance. The first wife takes care of the harem and the household expenses."

"Meaning she controls the money," Raena said, and Kara nodded. "Doesn't matter! We'll manage somehow until our business takes up. I'll figure out a way to get more money from my sister-wife too."

"You're quite optimistic for someone in your position. Didn't you say the world you came from favors monogamy?" she asked.

"Well, yeah." Raena shrugged. "But this is fun, and it's not like I plan to stay married for long. Once the prince divorces me, we'll focus on the business. Who knows, I may even get married again if I find some guy with a nice face and a fun personality!"

"Fun personality?" Kara grimaced. "Is this what you look for in a husband? How is that going to help you in life?"

"If I am going to get married, why choose someone with an ugly mug that will bore me to death?" Raena grimaced. "Besides, once our business is up and running, we'll have enough money to sustain ourselves, so we won't be getting married to be taken care of. So a fun personality is a must!"

"I don't know where this confidence is coming from." Kara shook her head. "You can't predict the future, can you?"

"Ha, that would have been sweet!" Raena laughed, raising her hand as they moved past a tall bush with big yellow flowers, and she ran her fingers over the smooth petals. The weather was perfect for an evening stroll and the quietness of the place relaxed her. If only she wasn't so dead tired from the whole wedding ordeal, she would have really enjoyed it. The Prime Minister's residence was too lively and busy all the time. "I just know a thing or two about running a business, so we'll be fine. And I can read the stars!"

Kara snorted, which made Raena smile.

Finally, the years she spent working in her mother's restaurant would be of some use. Considering the food she had tasted in this world so far, there was no way her venture was going to fail. It was just a matter of making the right first impression and getting people through the door. And she already had a plan for that.

"Oh, my!" a male voice spoke, and both of them halted. "What do we have here?"