

His Highness's Second Wife Chapter 11 - Tips

Raena sat with her elbows propped on the table and stared at her three new servants. She had returned their ownership papers and gave them the option to leave once they paid back the money she'd spent on them. She couldn't really stop them now that she didn't even own them, so she was relieved when all of them said they'd like to stay and work for her.

It had already been a week since the auction, and she had barely seen them. Still angry for spending so much money, Kara vented her frustration on them by making them do all kinds of jobs from sunrise to sunset. The good part was that the whole mansion was cleared of all old or damaged furniture, threadbare carpets, animal corpses, and other junk. It felt empty and deserted as she strode through the bare rooms, but it was better than tripping on discarded trash or wondering if her chair would crash down the moment she sat in it. She had already let the rumor spread that she had taken money from her brother, so it wouldn't be long before the first wife or the prince reacted.

"So." Raena smiled. "How is life in the North Palace treating you?"

They exchanged a silent glance, and Raena raised an eyebrow. They were all wearing servant uniforms — dark blue pants and a vest matched with a white shirt for the men; a simple ankle-length dress for the women. Elene was wearing an apron over hers that was already stained in a few places. With her face cleaned and her hair pulled into a meticulous braid, Raena could see why she would make a perfect female lead. She was pretty but not overbearing, slim but also strong, and she was able to easily complete any task she was assigned like she had been doing it all her life.

"We're being treated fairly," Zender replied. "Thank you, Your Highness."

"Ugh, no need for that when we're alone," she sighed, waving her hand. "I called you today to make sure we're on the same page regarding your position here." Zender met her gaze head-on, not even blinking, while Davin glanced nervously at her. Elene just stared past her as if her mind was somewhere else. "But before we do that, I want to ask. Do any of you have any particular skills?"

"Particular skills?" Zender asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Yeah, like fighting. Or singing. Or cooking. Or flying. I don't know. Anything you're good at," Raena explained. Her gaze constantly went to Elene, so she had to remind herself not to stare too much. Apart from her beauty, the book noted that Elene was good at horse riding, archery, and painting. The combination made no sense, but it was possible that by the end of the book, which Raena never reached, it became clear why the author gave her those specific traits. Or maybe they were just convenient for the plot and the author was too damn lazy.

However, her siblings were a wild card. She didn't remember either of them being mentioned anywhere, which was strange since they were blood relatives of the main character. On one side, that was good because interacting with them wouldn't affect the main plot. On the other hand, since she didn't know them, she had to risk trusting them without knowing their past, their motivation, and their real goals.

"I'm good with the sword," Zender said first.

"I'm good with numbers," Davin joined with a hesitant smile. They were just four years apart, but Davin looked nothing like his brother. He was a head shorter, almost as slim as his sister. His hair was light blonde instead of silver, and when he smiled, he looked like an adorable child. Zender had this aura of restraint around him and even when he smiled, it felt distant and serious. "And with people," Davin added as an afterthought.

Raena smiled back, switching her attention to Elene.

"I can... paint," she said dryly. Raena waited for her to add something else, but she remained silent.

"Great." Raena nodded, trying to sound enthusiastic. "I'm sure I'll find something suitable for each of you. Now, on to the real reason, I asked you here." She got to her feet and circled the table, looking at each of them. "As you might have figured, this is not a normal household, and I am not your normal mistress. You'll see some things that may appear strange to you, but I need you to play along. If anyone asks you about me, I'm a sweet, good-natured girl who loves to eat, play, and sleep a lot. Do you understand?"

All three nodded, but she could clearly see the confusion on their faces.

"I also suspect that one or more of my other servants may be a spy for the other wife, so mind what you say in front of them, too. If you hear or see anything suspicious in or out of the North Palace, immediately report it to Kara."

"Why are you telling us this?" Elene asked with a frown, glancing at her brothers. "You don't know anything about us. How do you know you can trust us?"

"Beggars can't be choosers, Elene," Raena shrugged. "I am alone in enemy territory, just like you. I don't have any other choice but to trust you. You're the only ones I chose to bring in, so I know nobody sent you to spy on me. I'll do my best to be a good mistress, so you have no reason to betray me," she said with her sweetest smile, and even Elene looked surprised for a second. Zender was the first one to compose himself.

"We are in your debt," he said, meeting her eyes. "We'll do what is necessary."

"That's good to hear," Raena smiled at him, meeting those stormy gray eyes that watched her with such intense curiosity, she found herself quickly looking away. "You

should go back to your chores before Kara finds out I stole you away.” They nodded and turned to leave. “Zender, please stay a moment.”

The other two sent their brother a glance, then left, closing the door. He turned, squaring his shoulder as he caught his hands behind his back, looking every bit the soldier she needed.

“Zender, I’m going to put my life in your hands,” Raena said, dropping her smile and putting on a serious expression. “Depending on what you do, I might win a lot of money and secure a good life for myself and anyone under my care, or I might get into a lot of trouble.”

“Your Highness…”

“Please, if you’re going to say something about loyalty, don’t. Giving your loyalty to a person you barely know is stupid.” She interrupted. “So let’s postpone that conversation for a later time. For now, I need your discretion. Kara will provide you with clothes, a wig, and a sword, and you’ll accompany me to the city today. There, I’ll introduce you to the person you’ll be guarding from now on.”

“I won’t be guarding you?” he frowned, his eyebrows knitting together.

“Well, it’s complicated. I’ll explain later. In any case, you…”

A knock came on the door and Raena called for them to enter. Kara stepped inside with her usual serious expression, glaring at Zender before turning toward her mistress.

“All the ingredients arrived. What do you want to do with them?” She glanced at Zender again and added, “Mistress.”

“Oh, finally!” Raena laughed, clapping her hands in excitement. “It’s time to create the best menu this city has seen — no, this empire!” She grinned while Kara and Zender looked at each other, their expressions matching for once. “Give him the clothes. We’ll go to see our future partner after I’m done. I bet he’ll be waiting by the window all day.”

“You’re confident,” Kara pointed out, the edges of her lips curving up almost as if she was about to smile. “Let’s hope he’ll bite.”

“Oh, he’ll bite,” Raena smirked, heading for the door. “Also, I’ll need an extra pair of hands and a mouth, so I’m borrowing Zender today. Come on, let me blow your mind.”



“So this is called caramel custard,” Raena explained, scooping a spoon out of the now-cooled dessert. “Open your mouth.” Zender looked at it with suspicion but obeyed

nonetheless. She pulled the spoon back, watching for his reaction when his eyes widened and he covered his mouth. "What? What! Does it taste bad?"

"No," Zender mumbled, letting his hand fall. "It's... it's... it's sweet, but not too sweet, and it melts in your mouth. And then the taste lingers on your tongue. Is this a traditional Etrobian dish?"

"Ha, as if!" Raena snorted, filling another spoon. "Here is one more, this time with more caramel. I can't believe they haven't figured the caramel out yet! Such a waste."

Zender accepted the spoon readily this time, closing his eyes as he swallowed. He lowered his head for a moment, taking a deep breath before he opened his eyes and looked at her with a hunger that made her heart flutter.

"More."

Raena grinned, handing him a cup of water.

"Drink this and I'll give you something else to taste." He gulped the water quickly, leaving the cup, and turned to her. Raena almost laughed — the serious, cold expression was now replaced with almost childish impatience. "Have you tried chocolate before?" He nodded, glancing at the small bowl in her hands. "This one is called chocolate mousse. It's more subtle than the first one and not as sweet."

He opened his mouth even before she was done filling the spoon, then gobbled it up with a moan of approval.

"Which one do you like best?" she asked.

"I need one more spoonful to decide," he said, looking down at the bowl. Raena obliged, watching him as he marveled at the taste. "The first one is more to my taste, but this one is great too."

"Somebody has a sweet tooth, I see! Stand still." Raena noted with a grin, wiping the edge of his mouth with her thumb. His body stiffened as she touched him, making her painfully aware of just how hard he was staring at her face. She glanced at his eyes, curious to see what she'd see there when somebody cleared their throat.

"Ahem." The two of them turned in the direction of the voice only to find Elene standing at the door. Her eyes lingered on Zender for a moment longer before she shook her head, stepping further into the room. "Kara sent me to tell you that you should prepare to leave soon."

"Not yet," Raena replied, stepping away from the man. "The roasted meat is still not done yet. Tell her we'll depart in an hour," she said and Elene nodded, turning to leave. "Wait, Elene! Come here. Taste this and tell me what you think!" Raena scooped some

of the caramel custard, raising the spoon in anticipation. The blonde girl stared suspiciously at her hand.

“No, thank you,” she replied, looking at the door. “Can I go?”

“Sure,” Raena said, holding back a sigh. She hadn’t expected Elene to be so cold and reserved. If she remembered correctly, in the book Elene was much more smiley and bubbly, which showed Ka.ssian that no matter how hard she had it, she was always positive and looking forward to the future. He had liked that about her. She smiled a lot too. Raena remembered that since Ka.ssian kept thinking about how beautiful her smile was. Then why was she Miss Grumpy now? Or was it just that she didn’t like Raena and that was why she acted coldly toward her?

Raena released the sigh she was holding, raising the spoon to her own mouth. It tasted good, although she should have left it for another two minutes for a better crust on the top.

“Does your sister ever smile?” she asked, turning to look at Zender. He was still staring at the door, but when he sensed her eyes, he glanced down at her.

“She has been through a lot. The journey here wasn’t easy,” he replied. “She just needs more time to adjust.”

“Well, it’s none of my business, anyway.” Raena shrugged, not wanting to dig into that. She kind of skimmed through the chapter where Elene spoke about her hardships as she revealed them in front of the crown prince, who was more than eager to console her. The third prince had died by then and in just a few chapters, his older brother was going to share his fate. “But if you get any crap for your nationality from the other servants, let me know.”

“You are a peculiar woman, Miss Raena,” Zender said, smiling. Raena was surprised at how quickly he was able to switch to using her name. Even Kara, who knew who she really was, needed longer to get used to not calling her ‘mistress’ or ‘lady’.

Raena looked at him and her breath caught in her throat. The sun peeking through the windows behind him was falling at just the right angle, basking him in its light almost as if he were glowing. His sharp features turned softer, making him look even more handsome. There was something new in that smile too, not the usual reservation, but a genuine enjoyment that made him even more striking.

“Why, thank you!” Raena forced a laugh, turning away from him so she could calm her racing heart. She had to remind herself that she was currently married, so drooling over a handsome servant who was just released from slavery was not a good idea. “Alright, one more. This one is called crème brûlée.” She prepared the spoon and he obediently opened his mouth. Just as she was about to feed it to him, Nola burst into the room, panting heavily.

“Mistress, Mistress!” she shouted, dragging herself to the table. “You told me to warn you if anyone is heading our way.” She took a deep breath, trying to catch her breath. “Mistress, His Highness is coming!”

“Shit!” Raena cursed, putting the bowl of crème brûlée down and removing her apron. “How long do I have?”

“No more than five minutes, Mistress,” Nola replied.

“Do we need to run?” Zender frowned, looking around as if checking the exits of the place and preparing for an attack.

“Nope!” Raena pulled the ribbon out of her hair, letting it fall free around her shoulders, then ran her fingers through it, messing it up. “Nola, find Kara and let her know. Everybody should keep out of sight unless Kara or I call you. Hurry!” The little girl nodded, sprinting out of the room.

“Do you need me to do anything?” Zender asked, looking around awkwardly.

Raena hesitated.

“Yes, come with me.” She grabbed his hand and dragged him through the corridor until they were in front of the mansion. She stopped at the steps, letting go. “Sit down here and wait. Once they come in through the gate, get up and bow. Whatever happens, be quiet and look obedient. I’ll take care of the rest.”

“What are you going to do?” Zender asked, staring after her as she stepped into the knee-high grass. Raena turned to look at him over her shoulder.

“Let my inner child have some fun, of course!”