

His Highness's Second Wife Chapter 12 - Tips

Ka.ssian looked around with a frown, taking in the condition of the road and the crumbling state of the walls of the North Palace. It had probably been years since he'd visited this place, but he never would have thought it had become that bad. Every other part of his residence was carefully maintained and renovated every year, but since nobody was using this palace and it was far away from the rest, he had neglected it in favor of more important things.

If the Prime Minister learned that his daughter was living in such conditions, he could make his life very difficult. And why didn't she complain or ask for a better place? Everything about that stupid woman was making him more and more annoyed.

Ka.ssian hadn't planned to meet with his new wife so soon, but after all the ruckus she had been causing over the past few weeks, he felt he needed to have a talk with her — or her caretaker — and put them in their place. He didn't want to hear anything about her unless she was dying or meeting with her father. She had to learn to live a quiet life in the North Palace and not bother him with her nonsense.

As they neared the main entrance of her residence, the sound of joyful laughter rang in the air. It was a loud, strange sound which, surprisingly, didn't annoy him even though he usually hated it when women laughed too loud. There was something about high-pitched voices that immediately put him in a bad mood.

Blaine stopped in front of the closed gate, glancing at him. The door looked like it was going to fall down at the lightest touch, while the hinges had so much rust on them that Ka.ssian was surprised they hadn't crumbled to dust.

He gritted his teeth.

"Zen, look, I got a pink one!" the same voice shouted with excitement. "They are all so pretty! I'm going to make us crowns and we'll be like a king and queen!"

"Stay here," Ka.ssian said to the guards that had been following them quietly, then nodded to Blaine to open the door. The hinges screeched while the door waggled unsteadily.

The moment Ka.ssian stepped through the threshold, he froze. On the right side of the door rose a pile of furniture taller than him, consisting of chairs with missing legs or sunken seats, rotten cushions, or tables broken in two. The space on the left side was covered with grass as tall as his knees, with barely a path left to reach from the door to the mansion.

Anger clenched his chest as he studied the wretched look of the place. Even if it was remote and unused, how could they have let part of his property fall into such ruin? How could anyone even live here?

His gaze landed on the figure in the middle of the grass. She was wearing a pale blue dress, perfectly fitting her slender body without being too revealing. Her hands and shoulders were covered, which was in contradiction with the latest ridiculous fashion, and there was a big bright blue ribbon encircling her tiny waist. Her golden hair was flying everywhere, carried by the wind and her jumping. Her laughter rang through the yard as she twirled around, almost falling to the ground.

As if sensing him looking at her, she pushed the hair out of her face. Her surprised expression held nothing of the childish look from earlier. The lines of her chin, her nose and her cheekbones were delicate and perfectly proportionate; her porcelain skin was clean and unblemished, save for a light blush that covered her cheeks. She had the bluest eyes he had ever seen, graced by long, dark lashes that fluttered excitedly as she met his gaze.

Kassian felt his heartbeat quicken as he watched her open her mouth.

“Husband!” she screamed unexpectedly, taking him out of his stupor. Grinning from ear to ear, she ran through the grass, raising the skirts of her dress above her knees. Her slim, pale legs struggled for a moment as she waded through the greenery until she finally stopped in front of him. She barely reached his shoulder, so Kassian had to look down to meet her gaze. “Welcome!” she said with the brightest smile, stuffing the bouquet of flowers she was holding in his face. “Here, a present for you!”

Kassian closed his eyes, counting to five. He took the flowers from her, pulling them away from his face.

“Thank you,” he said stiffly, receiving an even brighter smile. He looked away from her and back toward the mansion, where he noticed a young woman in a maid’s uniform run out of the door. She slowed down as she approached them.

“Mistress, put your skirt down!” the maid hissed, staring at the girl.

“Oh,” his wife mumbled, letting go of her dress and stepping back. “Sorry, Kara.”

“It’s alright, Mistress,” the maid said with a stiff smile. “Please mind your manners.” The maid turned toward them, bowing down. “Please excuse me for not greeting you properly, Your Highness. And please excuse the mess, we were not expecting you! The fault is all mine, Your Highness, please punish me.”

Kassian stared at her for a moment, then looked at the man that had approached as well. He had noticed him sitting on the stairs in front of the mansion the moment they walked in. He had the usual light hair of the Craidal people, but his was almost silver in comparison.

“It’s fine,” Kassian said. “I was just passing by.”

He felt Blaine's eyes on him and cursed himself. Why did he say something so stupid? Where could he have been going to just pass by this place?

He opened his mouth to say what he'd gone there to say when the maid spoke.

"Would you like to come in, Your Highness? It's almost time for lunch and the cook prepared too much for the Mistress to eat alone." He noticed his wife glancing at her maid and for a moment, he thought he saw anger turn the edges of her mouth sharper. But then she turned to him with the same joyful smile, her entire face brightening.

"Yes!" she laughed, clapping her hands. "Please join us, husband!"

"Mistress!" the maid hissed, and the girl glanced at her before taking a deep breath and suddenly curtsying.

"Your Highness, please join us for lunch," she said in a neutral tone, her eyes staring at his chest instead of looking at his face like before. "It would be our honor to serve you."

The maid looked pleased as her mistress rose back up, keeping her eyes on the ground. Her body looked stiff and uncomfortable.

"Sure," he found himself saying before he realized. Everyone looked at him with surprise, even his wife. "I have something to discuss."

"Please follow me this way, Your Highness." The maid was the first to react, turning and striding toward the mansion. She stopped by the silver-haired man, whispering something to him. He nodded and sprinted back inside while she waited for them to catch up.

Kassian walked slowly toward the shabby building, trying to keep a straight face. The anteroom was bare — not a single painting, piece of furniture, or even a carpet. The rooms they passed by were similar, leaving the impression that not even ghosts lived between those walls. The maid led them to a spacious dining room, which at least had a table with sturdy chairs alongside it, although not all of them matched. The silver-haired man was there, along with another blonde man and two girls. All of them were hurriedly setting the table. When they noticed them entering, all four bowed.

The two blonde-haired ones had to be the other two slaves from Craidal. All three seemed well-behaved, without a hint of hostility in them. They avoided his eyes, but most servants did, so it wasn't that surprising.

"Please take a seat, Your Highness," the maid said, motioning toward the table. "We'll bring the food shortly."

"No," he said just as she was turning. She froze, looking at him with a question in her eyes. "The others can bring it. Sit down."

“Your Highness, I couldn’t possibly sit in your presence!” she said, raising her hands defensively. “I would never...”

“Are you disobeying my order?”

She froze, looking at the table.

“As Your Highness wishes,” she said timidly, turning toward his wife. “Mistress, please, let us sit down.”

She guided his wife to the chair next to the head seat and then lowered herself into the one on her other side. Ka.ssian took the head seat, nodding to Blaine, who quietly joined them.