

## His Highness's Second Wife Chapter 13 - Tips

The servants returned a couple of minutes later, carrying a big tray of meat. The smell was different from what Ka.ssian was used to, so he stared at it with suspicion. It was also cut in bites and it was floating in some kind of brown sauce. Another tray with vegetables was served, along with a few other side dishes that he had never seen before.

"This looks delicious," Blaine said politely. His attentiveness was acute, as always, and Ka.ssian was glad he'd brought him along. He hadn't planned on eating or drinking anything, so he hadn't brought his tester, and now they were in a predicament. "What is it?"

"It's a beef stir-fry with honey and pepper sauce!" his wife said excitedly, grabbing her fork and stabbing one of the pieces. While everyone at the table watched, she gobbled it up, closing her eyes and sighing in pleasure. "My favorite!"

"Mistress, mind your manners!" her maid scolded her again, then turned to him. "Please forgive her, Your Highness. She loves to eat. Would you like me to serve you?"

"That's not necessary," Ka.ssian said, putting some of the food Raena had just tasted on his plate. The maid filled his wife's plate, then her own, finally offering some to Blaine. Before the maid was finished, Raena was already digging hungrily into her portion, moaning quietly. Her servant tried to scold her a few more times, although she didn't exactly break table etiquette apart from not sitting straight and showing exactly what she thought of the food. Eventually, even the maid let her be, silently focusing on her food.

Ka.ssian glanced at Blaine and noticed he was sitting frozen, eyes closed, clenching his knife and fork. When he opened his eyes, he had a weird expression on his face — one that Ka.ssian had never seen before.

"Your Highness, this is the most delicious food I've ever tasted!" Blaine said with his eyes gleaming, turning toward Raena. "Did you bring the cook from your home?"

"I liked her cooking!" Raena smiled after she swallowed another bite. "I'm so happy you like it! You should come to eat here again! It's so boring with so few people around! And they are too busy to play!"

Ka.ssian stabbed one of the bits with his fork, taking a hesitant bite. It was expected for the Imperial family not to show their preferences when it came to food, since it could easily be used against them even with testers around. Be it great or terrible in taste, he had to keep a straight face no matter what he ate. And it hadn't been that hard, considering that food tasted the same and its primary function was to keep the body healthy and provide energy.

The moment the bite touched his tongue, he froze. The flavor was strong without being overwhelming, and the meat almost melted on his tongue. He could taste the honey in the sauce, but it wasn't overly sweet.

"It looks like His Highness likes it too!" Raena chuckled. He glanced at Blaine who gave him an understanding look, then toward his wife who was smiling from ear to ear. There was a drop of sauce just above her upper lip and for a second he was tempted to reach out and wipe it. Then he came back to his senses and raised his napkin, wiping his own mouth.

"It's good," he said in a noncommittal voice. He reached for another bite.

"You should leave some space for dessert!" his wife said, craning her neck toward the door where the servants had disappeared. "I love desserts the most!"

"I don't like sweet food," Kassian said, taking a sip from his water. They had poured it from the same jug and everybody had tasted theirs, so it had to be safe to drink. He felt Raena's eyes on him and when he looked at her, she was wearing a heavily disappointed expression. At that moment, her beautiful face seemed even more childish and that irritated him. He sighed. "Just a bite."

Her lips curved into a breathtaking smile and she clapped her hands. The door opened and the blonde girl from earlier entered. Kassian stared at her as she clumsily took the empty plates away. Their eyes met for a second and she froze, looking away hastily. She tried to walk away quickly, but tripped on her skirt and dropped the plates. She apologized quietly, picking up the pieces with her bare hands. Not so surprisingly, she cut herself almost immediately.

"Elene, it's fine," Raena spoke and for a moment her voice sounded completely different, not a trace of the childish glee from before. "Kara." Her maid left the table and helped the girl up, excusing them, and heading toward the door. "Kara! Bring the desserts!" His wife shouted, turning toward them with her grin back on. "Sorry, Elene is really bad at housework! But she is great at drawing! She taught me how to draw bunnies the other day!"

"Your Highness, how many servants do you have here?" Blaine asked.

"Mmmmm... Seven, I think. Including Kara," she said after a short hesitation.

"Seven?" Blaine repeated, glancing at Kassian. "Why so few?"

"My sister-wife said they are the best and I won't need more." Raena shrugged. "And I brought Zen, Elene, and Davin since they looked like they would be fun to play with. They are really nice and help Kara a lot!"

Ka.ssiian felt the anger return as he leaned back in his chair and rubbed his forehead. He knew Sarea wasn't happy about him bringing a second wife into the household and she was still bitter after the physician told them she was infertile, but he didn't expect her to stoop that low. Asserting her position or even giving his second wife the cold shoulder was one thing, but demeaning her like this when she knew how important his connection to the Prime Minister was, was more of an attack on him. It was time he put her in her place.

"Blaine," he said and his aide perked up.

"Yes, Your Highness?"

"We're going to go to the East Palace after this. Speak with the maid and see what they need for the renovation of this place." He glanced at Raena, only to find her looking with a confused expression, biting her lower lip. "Have you met with your father recently?"

"No." She shook her head. "But I met with my brother."

"What did you talk about?" Ka.ssiian asked.

"Oh." She shrugged. "Just about my life here — if I am treated well, if I eat well, if I need anything."

"And what did you tell him?" She looked awkwardly at her lap and Ka.ssiian tensed. He glanced at Blaine, who looked just as on edge. "Well?"

"I said... I said that His Highness was a wonderful husband," she said, still looking down. Ka.ssiian stared at her in surprise. "Kara told me that most husbands are not nice to their wives, and that I am lucky. She said that if I mind my manners and not bother His Highness, I will be rewarded."

"You have a smart maid," Ka.ssiian said with relief. He had to check further into that maid's background. If he could gain her loyalty, he would have full control over his second wife since the maid seemed to be the one managing the girl. And if he could control his wife, he could use her to gain even more favor from her father.

Thankfully, Sarea's petty games hadn't ruined his plans.

"Blaine, we're leaving," he announced, pushing his chair back. His aide was already on his feet.

"Already? But you said you would try dessert!" the girl exclaimed, getting up. "Did I say something bad? I'm sorry!"

"You didn't." Ka.ssiian reached out and patted her head, only realizing what he was doing as her silky hair caressed his fingertips. She kept staring at him with those eyes, a

different smile forming on her lips. For a second she looked pleased, then the expression changed.

"I'm glad!" she laughed, and he quickly pulled his hand away. "I hope Your Highness will come to play when you have time."

Ka.ssian's step faltered as those words reached him, but a second later he continued toward the door with Blaine in tow.

That's right. She might have looked like a beautiful woman, but she was still a child in her mind. How was he supposed to make her bear him an heir without seeing that childish gleam in her eyes or that innocent smile? And she looked so small and weak. Even thinking about it made him shudder.

"What do you think?" he asked Blaine as they exited the mansion.

"I think we are lucky, Your Highness," he replied. "And it would be a wise idea to establish a good relationship with the maid. She could be useful." Ka.ssian nodded, not at all surprised Blaine had caught on to that. He had been his aide for over five years, and Ka.ssian could easily say he was one of the smartest people he knew. Being a noble from a prominent family and well-educated definitely made him invaluable.

"And about my wife?"

"Her Highness is indeed a beautiful woman and... a very interesting person."

"Speak freely." Ka.ssian sighed.

"She does seem to be as you said, Your Highness, but..." He hesitated and Ka.ssian looked at him. "Maybe it is just my imagination, but at times it seemed like her eyes were too sharp and her reactions were a bit forced."

"So you think she was pretending?" Ka.ssian asked. There was indeed something that didn't quite match her behavior, but it was not like he had dealt with other people with her condition.

"I dare not speculate, Your Highness," Blaine replied awkwardly. "Maybe she was just nervous and tried to look happy to please you. And it was just for a moment, so I could have imagined it." Ka.ssian nodded in agreement. "Since His Highness asked me to speak freely, may I ask what you thought of her? I've never seen you pat anyone's head before. And you were uncharacteristically gentle with your words."

"What was that supposed to mean?"

"His Highness can be quite blunt," Blaine laughed, pushing the gate of the North Palace open and letting Ka.ssian go out first. "And you rarely hold back on account of anyone."

“I’m not blunt with children,” Ka.ssian said defensively, and immediately regretted it. He didn’t need to give explanations. “Let’s just hurry to the East Palace.”