

His Highness's Second Wife Chapter 14 - Tips

"More tea, Your Highness?"

Sarea looked at the maid through her fingers, lifting her head from the hand she was leaning on. The young woman shifted uncomfortably, her shoulders slouching as if she had realized her mistake.

"No, I don't want any more tea!" Sarea burst, slapping the teacup off her hand. The porcelain shattered on the ground, the beautiful flowery patterns scattering in the grass outside the pavilion. The servant hurried to gather them while Sarea leaned back in her chair, rubbing her temples in a poor attempt to disperse her throbbing headache.

How could Ka.ssian come here and humiliate her in front of all the servants just because of that little girl? The North Palace was an old, falling apart sh!thole? He had to know that when he approved it for residence for his stupid new wife! And since when did he care how many servants any of them had? Raena hadn't complained, and neither had her maid. What was he doing there, anyway? He hadn't visited Sarea's place in months, but just after a few weeks, he was already having lunch with his second wife.

'Stupid b.rat!' She couldn't even tell him she was doing all of that for him. That stupid little girl would have been fine with just those three if he hadn't interfered. In the best-case scenario, she was going to ask for a divorce and leave this place.

"Please calm down, Your Highness. Stress is not good for your body," Darla, her Head Maid, said in her usual soothing voice. Sarea glared at her, huffing loudly. "I'm sure His Highness was only concerned about word getting out to the Prime Minister. You have done nothing wrong, Your Highness. As the first wife, it is up to you to manage the harem as you see fit."

Sarea sighed, biting back a retort.

It was true that her goal had been to force Raena to leave by herself. She had been against the marriage from the start, especially with that girl's condition. But Ka.ssian had ignored her, just like usual. They had been married for so long already, and while she had given up on expecting love from him, she demanded respect. Her father was the cornerstone of Ka.ssian's support, and she was his legal wife — he owed her that much.

She had said nothing when he kept bringing concubine after concubine or when he had stopped visiting her chambers after the doctor branded her infertile. Still, she'd be damned if she let him treat her as if she was one of his mistresses, no matter the reason.

"Your Highness, you have a guest."

Sarea raised her head, looking at her servant, then at the people waiting a few steps behind her. Straightening her back, Sarea cleared her face from her frustration, plastering a polite smile on her lips.

“Lady Lara,” she said, and the woman in the front bowed barely enough to pass as a proper greeting. Her two attendants mimicked her, then stepped aside, waiting by the pavilion with their eyes on the ground. “What brings you here? We didn’t have an appointment, did we?”

“I apologize for showing up without an invitation, Your Highness,” the dark-haired woman replied in what would have been a perfectly respectful tone if it wasn’t for her staring directly at Sarea with a broad smile. Most of the other concubines were afraid of her position as the first wife since she could literally make their lives hell if she chose to, especially those who had lost Ka.sasian’s interest. But not Lara.

Lara was the only one Ka.sasian had called on or visited in the last few months, and everybody knew that. Her dark beauty and seemingly timid nature made her perfect for Ka.sasian’s short temper. He liked pretty things, but didn’t have the patience to deal with conversations or drama. He had been like that even before their marriage — her father had told her that Ka.sasian had hated women ever since his mother, the previous Empress, had died. He didn’t tell her the reason, though, and she knew better than to ask.

“So, to what do I owe the pleasure of your company?” Sarea asked, giving Darla a sign to pour some fresh tea. Her Head Maid moved to fulfill the command even before Sarea was done raising her hand. Lara waited until the older woman set down a pair of beautiful cups in front of them, pouring some of the steaming liquid inside.

Sarea watched the other woman take a sip, then Lara let out a pleased sigh, smiling.

“Ah, Amrod tea! His Highness’s favorite,” Lara said as if to herself. Sarea stared at her obvious taunt — only Sarea had access to this expensive and rare tea that Ka.sasian had grown fond of from the times he used to visit her. But if Lara could recognize it with just a sip, this probably meant she was now receiving it too. “As for my reason for being here, it is to see how you are of course. Considering…”

“Considering what?” Sarea asked, picking up her cup to hide her hands shaking in frustration. Dealing with Lara and her sense of superiority, just because she knew how to use her god-given attributes to please a man, was vexing. Especially after having that fight with Ka.sasian. What was worse, Lara always acted all sweet and nice when, in fact, she was the same viper as all the other schemers out there.

“Considering how close he is getting to his second wife,” Lara replied with an innocent expression. “I heard he visited her already and even gave orders to renovate her palace and provide her with everything she wanted. For a woman he didn’t want to marry, he looks quite smitten.”

Sarea studied her for a moment. How did she know all of that already? Ka.ssian must have left Raena's residence no more than two hours ago, right before coming to her. When did she learn of his orders and intentions? It was impossible for her to have planted a spy in Raena's residence already.

"Shouldn't you be worried about that?" Sarea asked, raising an eyebrow. "There is nothing she can take from me while she could take everything from you."

"I wonder what you mean," Lara chuckled, taking another sip. "Everything I own belongs to His Highness, including my heart. He is free to do whatever he pleases with it." Her completely unbothered face made Sarea even angrier, but she kept a firm grip on her emotions. "But..." Sarea paused, tensing in anticipation. "But I really do love His Highness, so I am not willing to part with his love and affection so easily."

Sarea wanted to snort but stopped herself.

"I don't think you'll have to worry about that," she said instead, leaving the cup down and taking a more comfortable position. "Raena is... probably not interested in the love and affection you're receiving." Lara just smiled, looking around suddenly. "And Ka.ssian is more interested in her family than her looks. So just ignore her existence as I do. She'll soon turn into another pretty doll tucked away in a pretty dollhouse. Nothing more."

Lara chuckled suddenly, running her long finger over her red lips.

"Did I say something amusing?" Sarea asked, raising an eyebrow.

"If I didn't know better, Your Highness, I would have thought you were trying to protect the girl," Lara said with an innocent expression, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear.

"Why would I protect her?" Sarea scowled. "That idiot is not my responsibility, and it definitely won't be my burden once she makes a huge blunder in front of someone important. If Ka.ssian is smart enough, he'll keep her out of sight, carefully tucked in her newly renovated house, and bring her out only on special occasions to show her off and flaunt his connection to the Prime Minister."

"You are so harsh, Your Highness!" Lara said, making a pitiful expression, but the flicker in her eyes showed she was pleased with the answer. "To think we all mean so little to you! We are all the same though — we love His Highness and all we want is his happiness."

Sarea gritted her teeth. All the same? She was a duke's daughter and a princess, while Lara was merely a count's daughter. They were definitely not the same. At least Raena had the pedigree to say those words, even though she probably didn't have the courage.

To think that she had to indulge Lara... it made her even madder than Ka.sasian's condescending tirade. Still, Sarea had to admit that she was more concerned about what Lara could do than what Ka.sasian would. While Lara never said a harsh word or threatened anyone publicly, Sarea had heard enough hushed whispers and half-confessions from the other concubines and her own spies to know that she should never cross that dark-haired woman unless she had stable backing and ample protection. Right now, she had neither, and they both knew it. That was why Lara dared to be so bold and disrespectful.

"Is there a point coming?"

Lara's lips twitched upward.

"All I'm saying, Your Highness, is that we should support each other." She shrugged. "I don't care if His Highness brings more dolls into the house as long as they stay shelved and out of sight. Don't you think so?"

Sarea licked her lips, picking her words carefully.

"Dolls should be kept in the dollhouse," she said, and Lara's smile widened. "That is if..."

She didn't get to finish because her throat tightened and needles pierced her chest, foretelling another attack. She raised her hand just as she started coughing, trying to clear her throat as she gasped for air. Lara watched her without even flinching, casually sipping from her tea.

Darla appeared by her side, offering her a handkerchief, which Sarea took and pressed against her mouth. When the fit was finally over, she wiped her mouth, staring down at the red stain on the pearl-white cloth. She squeezed the handkerchief, getting to her feet.

"My apologies, but I'm not feeling very well. We should continue this some other time," she said, and Lara got up with slow, unhurried movements, giving her a graceful curtsy.

"Rest well, Your Highness," Lara said as Sarea circled the table, ready to leave. "I shall play a little with the doll until you feel better. You are the Mistress of this house after all."