

His Highness's Second Wife Chapter 18 - Tips

0 6 minutes read

“Speak,” Ka.ssian commanded as he stepped into the room connected to his bed chambers. He rarely used it for anything other than receiving reports from his Shadows and having private conversations with his staff or his brother. There were no windows and the walls were twice as thick as the rest of the Main Palace: the door itself was specially made so it would fit the space perfectly, muffling almost all sounds coming in and out.

The Shadow stepped away from the wall, bowing down. Ka.ssian urged him to get on with the report, and the man clad in black straightened up.

Only the white of his eyes was visible in the dim light of the candle Ka.ssian brought, the rest of him blending perfectly with the darkness around.

“In the past week, the second prince has been frequenting a certain brothel called The Dollhouse.

Apart from entertaining himself with the men and women there, he met with three men that were not part of the staff. We identified one of them as a former noble of the Rowen kingdom that was assimilated into The Empire ten years ago. We were unable to get close enough to hear their conversation, but one of the Shadows spotted the Rowenian giving the second prince a scroll.” The Shadow paused for a moment, his eyes looking down. “The second prince burned the scroll immediately after reading it.”

Ka.ssian cursed under his breath, rubbing his forehead. A throbbing headache was beginning to form from all the pent-up frustration and the lack of sleep.

The second son of the Emperor had become a busy bee in the last six months, meeting with all kinds of people in the strangest of places. But even though he didn't know of the existence of the shadows only Ka.ssian, Blaine and Yulien did that son of a bitch was being so careful, he never left any tangible evidence behind. It was clear what his endgame was, what the current Empress's endgame was – to steal Yulien's position and put Rissen on the throne. Ka.ssian had sworn that he would never let that happen.

He couldn't allow that greedy, degenerative excuse of a half-brother to lead the Empire to ruin.

Not after all the sweat, blood and sacrifices he had made to unify it. Yulien might not be much of a warrior himself, but his intellect and level-headed nature were going to make him a good ruler. He could leave all the fighting to Ka.ssian.

“Anything else?” Ka.ssian asked, realizing he had grown quiet.

“Yes,” the Shadow nodded. “We have intercepted some letters sent by the Empress to her relatives in Jensen, but they seem to be written in code. We were unable to crack it without the keyword, so I’ve brought them for you to examine.”

He extended his hand and Ka.ssian took the small bundle, turning them in his hand. The Shadow shifted again, and Ka.ssian’s eyes rose back to him.

“There’s more?”

“It’s regarding the new task His Highness assigned- to monitor your second wife,” he said and Ka.ssian froze, his treacherous brain bringing back flashes of his dream. He tried to chase them away, giving him a sign to continue.

“She hasn’t had any visitors in the North Palace in the last week, nor has she sent any messages out. However, almost every day she leaves her home early in the morning and comes back after dark.” Ka.ssian frowned. What was a girl like her doing out all day long? He hadn’t heard of any social gatherings which she had attended, and she didn’t look like the type to be interested in sitting still and watching a play. Especially all day.

“With her maid?” Ka.ssian asked.

“No, with a man with silver hair. He wears a weapon when they go out, so we assumed he is her guard,” the Shadow replied quickly. Ka.ssian’s frown deepened. “We tried following them, but they kept slipping away, so for the time being, we have been unable to find out where they are going or coming back from.”

Ka.ssian blinked in surprise and the Shadow must have noticed that because he looked at the floor as if ashamed.

“You’re telling me a feeble woman and a foreigner slipped my most experienced Shadows?” Ka.ssian growled, taking a step toward him.

“Yes, Your Highness,” the Shadow said in a tense voice, falling to one knee even before Ka.ssian could say anything else. “The fault is mine! Please punish me for my incompetence!”

“Get up,” Ka.ssian said coldly. “And next time, do your job properly or I will fulfill your wish.”

“Yes, Your Highness.” the Shadow replied readily, getting to his feet and disappearing through the door with his unusually quiet steps. Ka.ssian had realized long ago that all those noises the Shadows made like the steps, the loud breaths, the rustle of clothes and even the screeching of the doors were all intentional. Even his half-brother hadn’t figured out he was being followed by them – he only thought he was avoiding the obvious tails Ka.ssian had put on him, giving him the sense of security once he ditched them.

There was no way Raena could slip anyone her appearance could easily make her stand out and her cheerful, loud nature could hardly keep her unnoticed. So was it her so-called guard? Ka.ssian already regretted letting her keep the three slaves, but she had probably grown attached to them by now, so if he took them away, she'd cry and raise tantrums to the sky.

Ka.ssian growled in frustration, rubbing his face.

"Your Highness?" Ka.ssian looked up, only to realize he had walked out of his quarters and was standing in the reception room with his night attendant in front of him, "How may I assist you, Your Highness?"

Ka.ssian hesitated, looking back at the door leading to his empty bedroom. He had to get her face out of his head so he could think clearly. If he went back to bed alone, he wasn't sure she wouldn't haunt his dreams again.

"West Palace," Ka.ssian muttered, heading toward the front door. The West Palace, or the Concubine Palace as they started calling it in the past few years, was where most of his concubines' residences were. Nobody wanted to live in the North Palace and the East one was given to Sarea, so the West was the only place he could put them.

"Are we going to Lady Lara's place?" the attendant asked as he caught up with him. Ka.ssian hesitated. That was where he usually went when he was in the mood for company, but after the last time she had pestered him with questions about Raena, he didn't want to risk it. He wanted to forget that stupid dream and that stupid woman, and if he heard her mention Raena even one time, he was going to lose it.

"No," he replied, "Vega's place."

Even if he seemed surprised, the attendant didn't show it. Instead, he nodded and took the lead. As they finally crossed the garden and entered the West Palace territory, his attendant veered to the left and continued through a small path between the buildings. It had been a long time since he had visited Vega he had made her his concubine after rescuing her from a group of roadside thugs while she was running away from her town at the border with Craidal

He had been suspicious of her at first – with her mother being a Craidal subject and her father one of the Empire – but the year she had spent following him from one battlefield to another had earned her his trust. For that alone, he had promised to take care of her until she died or chose to leave his residence.

"Please wait a moment while I alert the lady" his attendant announced, letting himself into the big house that stood perfectly dark in the early hours of the morning. In just a couple of minutes, light appeared in one window after window until the front door opened again. His attendant led him in with a maid standing by his side.

"Your Highness," the maid bowed, avoiding his eyes. "Please follow me. Lady Vega will receive you now."

"I'll wait for you here, Your Highness," his attendant said with a bow of the head. Ka.ssiian followed the maid without a word, climbing the stairs to the second floor while she almost ran ahead of him. She opened the door to one of the rooms at the end of the hallway, lowering her head again as he moved past her.

It had been months, if not an entire year, since the last time he'd visited this place and nothing had changed. The walls were still painted in vibrant colors and the furniture pieces were all beautifully made, but greatly mismatched in size and style.

A movement caught his attention and he turned his eyes to the figure that stood up from the bed, smiling at him. His gaze stopped on her long blonde hair, slightly ruffled from the sleep that seemed to have a firm grip on her despite her attempt to look fully awake.

"My, my, I thought you forgot about me, Your Highness!" Vega chuckled. Her voice was deeper and slightly coarse, not at all soothing for his growing headache. "Do you want me to order something to drink or to eat?"

"That's not what I'm here for," Ka.ssiian said bluntly.

The edges of her lips twitched upwards, and she raised her arms, shrugging off her dressing gown. The thin red cloth fell at her feet, leaving her shamelessly naked in front of him.

"Well, then," she said invitingly, motioning at him with her finger.