

## His Highness's Second Wife Chapter 19 - Tips

0 8 minutes read

Raena pulled the cloak tighter around her neck, shuddering as the chilly morning wind cut through her thin dress. She missed her warm bed and fluffy covers and deeply regretted having to part with them, but this was the only good time for the type of stroll they wanted to have.

They met almost no one on their way apart from a few patrolling guards and several servants rushing to finish preparations for the day before their masters woke up. The early hour allowed them to go anywhere they wanted and spend as much time looking around as they needed – as Zender needed.

He was unusually quiet and while he didn't look like someone snooping around, he seemed so absorbed that she didn't try to talk out of fear she'd break his concentration. He had said he had a good memory so they wouldn't have to go around again and again, which was a relief, since her feet were already throbbing.

Raena jumped in surprise as something brushed against her cheek, only to realize Zen was adjusting his cloak onto her shoulders. He smiled as their eyes met, then continued to tie the binds before the heavy garment slid to the ground.

"This isn't necessary" she said, reaching out to stop him. Despite looking perfectly comfortable in just his tunic, he had to be cold too. She wasn't going to die from a little wind, contrary to what everybody thought. "Take it back. I can barely walk like this!"

"Would you like me to carry you then, Miss Raena?" he said, finishing the knot.

"Shouldn't you be paying attention to the surroundings instead of me?" she laughed, glancing at the buildings they had stopped by. They had already walked all the paths to and from the North Palace, past the first wife's residence and her extensive gardens, and were now roaming around the West Palace.

The Concubines' Palace, as Nola called it, was like a lesser version of Sarea's place, but with so many new buildings added and paths built that Raena got confused after just a few minutes. The guards' barracks were close to it, located in between the Main and the West Palace, so they took their time as they walked while Zen quietly glanced left and right.

"What are you saying, Miss Raena? Why would you need a guard who can't watch his surroundings and you at the same time?" he said, offering her his hand. She hesitated but ended up taking it, letting him lead her forward.

"Where to next?" she asked, trying not to show her impatience.

“The training grounds are nearby,” Zen replied, his eyes locked on the path that veered to the left, leaving the last of the barracks behind. There were a lot of trees on the West Palace grounds, so most of the buildings were hard to spot until the last moment- and so were the people walking around.

They had run into a pair of maids as they took a sharp turn, scaring the girls, who let out surprised yelps that echoed through the sleeping forest. “We probably shouldn’t go inside the Main Palace we’ll draw attention. We’ll just check the location and setup of the training grounds and get back home. Are we going to the restaurant today?”

“Yes. I need to check on how the cooks are doing. They have to be able to make all the dishes before the opening day and for normal people that might be a little hard to do,” she replied, her mind drifting back to the group of cooks she had tasked Kara to recruit after asking around for recommendations. Most of them were reluctant to switch jobs, especially for an unknown place on Ruby Street, but with some persuading and lots of money, all of them caved in. Raena sensed Zen’s eyes on her and raised an eyebrow. “What?”

“I like how you separate yourself from normal people,” he replied with a soft chuckle, his fingers wrapping around her entire palm. She was just going to say he didn’t need to hold her so tightly when she realized he was probably doing it because her fingers were cold. “Miss Raena surely is not an ordinary person.”

“I hope that is a compliment,” Raena scoffed, her eyes instinctively looking at the installation that appeared almost out of nowhere the moment the trees ended. The path they were walking on stood higher than the training grounds, so it was easy for them to see them, and despite the early hour, quite a few people were already there.

The place was enclosed with a chest-high parapet, making it look almost like an arena. Benches perched a few levels higher on one side and there was even a podium with a few seats that stood empty and forgotten. Dummies and wooden targets with bright red markings on them were tucked away in one of the corners.

Raena stopped, narrowing her eyes at the group. There were three men lying on the ground as if they had been knocked over, and the rest seemed to be ganging up on a tall, dark-haired man wearing just a pair of tight leather pants. Raena shivered from just looking at his naked back and shoulders, but he didn’t seem bothered at all.

Curiosity took over her and before she knew it, she was leaning on the parapet, squinting her eyes.

She was right. All the soldiers were slowly circling the dark-haired one. Instead of real weapons, they were holding training sticks, so it was probably just an exercise, but it was a very unfair one for the man in the middle. She moved her eyes on him – he was standing with his back to her, his well-defined muscles flexing as he moved into a

defensive position, holding his stick with one hand while giving them a sign to attack with the other.

The two soldiers in front of him jumped in without hesitation, one raising his stick above his head while the other thrust his weapon forward as if planning to stab his opponent in the stomach.

Raena held her breath in anticipation, following the dark-haired man who moved with quick, sharp movements, positioning his weapon in a way that he met the one attacking him low first, forcing his stick up to intercept the weapon of his fellow soldier. Before they could initiate another attack, the other end of his weapon landed a blow in the side of one of them while he kicked the other in the shin, sending him toppling to the ground.

The dark-haired man in the center took a step back to reestablish his defensive stance, this time facing Raena.

“Is that...the third prince?” Raena asked in surprise, just as the dark-haired man was saying something to his soldiers. A few of them replied curtly, some even laughed.

“It appears so,” Zen muttered next to her.

Another three soldiers moved forward, this time taking their time before attacking. Ka.ssian’s eyes followed them, his face frozen in sharp concentration. Raena leaned her chin on her hand, unable to tear her eyes away from them. Each man moved with such confidence and strength that the wooden sticks in their hands looked like real swords as they attacked and countered.

Watching Ka.ssian fight was another thing entirely.

She knew he was a great fighter, the author of the book had stressed that often enough, going as far as branding him the best in the Empire, but actually watching him fight was mesmerizing.

There were no excessive movements or overextended swings, no missteps or indecision in his attacks.

After the next three found themselves disarmed or on the ground, Raena thought that maybe there weren’t enough people attacking him after all. His expression showed no emotion, and he displayed no signs of fatigue, even though sweat glistened all over his body.

“Man, why am I so unlucky?” she murmured to herself. “If I was anyone else, I’d totally do him. What else to expect from a male lead?”

“Male lead?” Zen asked, and she jumped. She had completely forgotten he was there, too busy daydreaming of se.xy scenarios that would never happen. Ka.ssian’s face

really did make it hard for a lady to ignore him. Still, she had to stay as far away from the original story as possible, so that the events stayed the same – if they didn't, not only she was going to lose a lot of money and opportunities, but she could find herself in the kind of trouble one might not survive.

That was, if she could die at all – she had no idea what would happen to her if she kicked the bucket in this place. Maybe she'd just wake up in a hospital in her own world and realize this had all been a dream. Even though that was sound reasoning, she was too afraid to test that theory by actually.. dying.

"It's nothing." she said quickly, forcing a smile.

Her eyes returned to the arena below, only to realize Ka.ssian was facing the last two of his opponents. "He is good, right? He knocked out so many opponents."

"He is good," Zen replied with a grimace as if saying those words caused him physical pain. "But those are his men. They were probably holding back."

"They didn't look like they were holding back to me," she chuckled, glancing at the men that had gathered around to watch the final scuffle. The sound of wood clashing against wood filled the air for a couple of minutes, and Raena bit her lip, silently rooting for.

She remembered rooting for him in the book too – at least in the battle scenes and when he got framed and executed for betraying the Empire. But she actually shipped Elene with the first prince.

They seemed to be a better match anyway. Unlike Ka.ssian, Yulien wasn't as possessive and controlling and he wasn't so gullible either. It was a good thing she was married to Ka.ssian since she didn't think his older brother would have been fooled by her theater for long.

"Do you like him?" Zen asked suddenly, and Raena looked at him, surprised by the sudden question. Zen stared back this time, his expression distant and thoughtful. "The prince, I mean. I've heard you mention divorce to Kara, but the way you were looking at him now. I wonder if you actually like him."

Raena tried to stop herself from frowning.

When did she mention divorce to Kara in front of him? She couldn't quite remember. Not that it mattered that much, but she ought to be more careful of her surroundings – if anyone could hear her say such things, this whole charade would be pointless.

She realized Zen was waiting for an answer, so she gave him a broad smile.

"He is not mine to like, so no."

“What do you mean?” Zen asked with his eyebrows knitted together. “You are married to him.”

“Let’s just say it’s complicated,” she scoffed, raising her hand and pushing her hair out of her face as the wind suddenly blew from behind. “Let’s go before they notice us.”

She turned her head toward Zen again, expecting him to be ready to leave at once when she noticed him staring down at the training area.

His eyes shot to her for a second, and a shadow fell over his face.

“It’s too late for that. He is already looking at you.”