

His Highness's Second Wife Chapter 6 - Tips

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0 8 minutes read

Raena bit her lip, scratching her forehead with the end of her quill. Writing with a quill and ink required some getting used to, but once she got the hang of it, she quickly filled a few dozen papers. Her head already felt lighter after scribbling all of her ideas down.

She separated everything into three piles — the first one held her sketches about the North Palace renovation. Her unfinished university degree was finally going to be put to good use. She had to drop out a year before she graduated since she couldn't pay her tuition and her family's business needed more hands for work, so she hadn't expected to ever use what she learned. Until now.

The second pile held all the recipes that were going to be doable under the current circumstances. While the technological progress of this place — or the lack of such — allowed her to come up with new, ground-breaking ideas, it hindered some of her work too. Still, considering how plain their cuisine was, she could probably blow their minds with something as simple as a juicy burger.

The third pile held several lists of things she needed to check, including all the known spices in this world, details related to table etiquette, and even permits for owning and operating a restaurant.

The door of her room opened and Kara walked in, stopping at the threshold as she stared at Raena sitting on the bed surrounded by her papers. She hadn't bothered to dress and only got up to pull the curtains open before jumping under the covers again.

"You're awake?" Kara asked as she closed the door. "Why didn't you call for me? Are you hungry?"

"I needed some time to work," Raena replied, leaning on the headboard. "Any response from my brother?"

"Actually, yes." Kara stepped toward the bed, handing her an envelope. Raena's eyes glided over the note inside and she smiled, sliding off the bed.

"He agreed to meet for lunch today," she announced, dropping the paper on the bed and stretching. "Let's get ready and go to the restaurant first, then we'll meet with him."

Kara nodded and rushed to prepare her clothes. After helping her dress, she put her hair into a loose braid to keep it out of her face. They decided against jewelry and makeup since the real Raena rarely wore any.

An hour later, they were walking side by side through the bustling streets of the capital, looking around at vendors and street artists who battled for the crowd's attention. They had left the carriage a few streets prior since they didn't want to bring attention to themselves. On the other hand, they couldn't have left the third prince's residence without a carriage because, again, they didn't want to bring attention to themselves.

Having a secret life was complicated.

Raena made a mental note of the location of all the successful stores, restaurants, and pubs in relation to their own place, trying to recall which of them would soon go bankrupt and which ones would successfully bloom. It was going to be a good idea to invest in the ones that were about to hit it big and make some easy money along the way.

"This way," Kara said, pulling her away from the crowd and into a big, almost empty street that veered from the main one. Despite being almost in the center of the city, the street they continued on barely had any people on it, as if hidden by an invisible spell. There were buildings on both sides rising as tall as three floors, well-preserved but dark and lonely on the bright, busy day.

Raena knew that place from the book even before Kara told her about it. It was the infamous Ruby Street — the place where the previous king of Etrobia, before it became an empire, was assassinated over twenty years ago. For some reason, people shunned the perfectly good spot, and the stores and establishments there suffered. That was about to change in the book, so Raena's plan revolved around riding the trend to get more people through the door. In the book, the third prince escorted Elene to one of the clothing stores on Ruby Street and word got out. People soon decided that if the third prince could venture there, they could too. Slowly but steadily, the place bloomed a few months later.

Now all she had to do was set her business up and spread the word.

"We're here."

Raena looked at the building hovering above them. The workers had already painted the outside walls and terraces in pale peach color. The smell of paint and brand-new wooden material hung in the air, overwhelming the nasty odors coming from the street and the narrow spaces between the buildings.

"We'll need to do something about the street too," Kara grimaced.

"Yeah." Raena nodded distractedly, looking at the building next to theirs. It was in stark contrast to the new, freshly coated place she had bought. The walls of their neighbor had been painted dark red some decades ago, but now most of the paint had peeled off, leaving pale yellow blotches behind. The stairs and windows were dark with grime

and cobwebs, and the two women that stood outside and smoked stared at them with derisive expressions. "Let's go in."

Raena picked up her skirts and climbed the four stairs leading to the door of her restaurant. When they stepped inside, a smile blossomed on her face.

The place looked ready. Even the tables and chairs had been delivered, although they were gathered together, stacked one on top of the other in a mountain of lacquered wood.

The workers had followed her sketches perfectly, so the place looked exactly as she imagined. The first floor comprised a few big rooms with high ceilings similar to the ones in her mansion, so she had them painted all in light colors. She had even commissioned a painter to decorate the ceilings with lifelike drawings of beautiful landscapes and fancy evening gatherings. She had let him choose the theme and the content of each painting, which had shocked him at first, but now that she was looking at the work he had already completed, Raena knew she had made a good choice. Three-fourths of the ceiling was still empty, but they had some time before the opening debut, so that was the least of her worries.

"Milady!"

Raena turned in the direction of the voice just as one of the workers rushed to her side, pulling his cap down and bowing. He glanced at Kara — she had been the one dealing with the workers so far since Raena had been too busy preparing for the wedding.

"Miss Kara! I didn't know you were coming!" the man said with his eyes still on the floor. He was in his forties, with a receding hairline that was already turning gray, but he looked healthy and strong. Raena pretended not to notice the group of men hanging around the staircase leading to the upper floor that were staring at them curiously.

"We had some business in the city, so we decided to stop by," Kara explained. "Erkan, this is the owner of the place."

The man looked up at Raena, eyes widening for a second before he bowed again.

"It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance, milady," he said. "I hope our work has met your expectations. We will need another week to finish the third floor as per the plans we were provided. I apologize for our tardiness."

"The place looks great!" Raena smiled, looking around again. "You have two more weeks on your contract, so don't rush yourselves. I prefer quality to speed. Is the kitchen ready?"

"Yes, milady," he nodded. "Would you like to see it?"

She got a quick tour of the place, ending up on the second floor. The third floor, which she had decided to make into something of a VIP room, was deemed too dirty and dangerous for a delicate lady like her, so she agreed to check it next time.

“Erm, milady, if I may,” Erkan said just after he announced he was going back to work. “I know the lady has big plans for this place, considering how much effort and funds you’re pouring into it, but I am not sure if the lady was aware of the situation before purchasing the building.”

“Do you mean the fame of the street?” Raena asked, raising an eyebrow.

“No, milady,” Erkan said. “I am talking about the place next door.”

“What about it?” Raena frowned.

Erkan opened his mouth to reply when someone screamed. The sound was somewhat muffled, as if coming through a wall, but it echoed through the entire floor as the woman kept screaming and urging someone to go faster and harder. Raena looked at the wall connecting them with the other building, listening for the extra loud moans and almost over-the-top praise.

Erkan looked mortified as he stared at her.

“A brothel?” Raena sighed, still staring at the wall. That was going to be a problem. Even if she hired musicians for the restaurant, the screams could be overheard and that would probably put off a lot of customers, especially nobles, who comprised the core of her target group.

“One of the worst ones in the city.” Erkan shuddered. “Only the lowest of scum go there. Please forgive my language, milady.”

“Thank you for your concern, Erkan,” Raena smiled at him. “You can go now. I’ll take care of it.”

He hesitated, but then walked away. Raena stared at the wall some more, the shouts on the other side still going strong, then turned her back on it and headed for the terrace. She could see the entire street from the second floor, and it looked even more deserted from above. Her eyes stopped at the stores on the opposite side — there was a clothing shop, a bakery, and a jewelry shop, their dark windows throwing a sad look at the empty street.

“What are we going to do?” Kara asked. “When we checked this place, nobody said anything about a brothel! The building looks shabby, but that’s no problem considering the current predicament. Even if we do get people to come here, they’ll just leave if they see one of the whores lingering outside or hear that atrocious moaning!”

"Give me a second, I'm thinking," Raena murmured, leaning on the handrail and staring down at a dog that was just shitting on the street.

They definitely couldn't leave things like that. She was low on funds after purchasing this building so they couldn't buy them out, and she wasn't even sure they would sell; she couldn't exactly force them to be quiet and to keep out of sight either. So what were her choices?

Could she use them in some way? Good food went hand in hand with other pleasures. Considering all the work she had put into making the restaurant look like that, that brothel was a hundred steps down. If only...

"I have an idea," she said, biting on her nail. "You're not going to like it."

"What is it?" Kara sighed.

"I'm going to go to our neighbor and convince him to work with us."

"You're right, I really don't like it," Kara said after a short pause. "And it definitely can't be you. What if there is someone who recognizes you? Going into a restaurant is no big deal, but what if a rumor starts that the third prince's wife is visiting a brothel?"

"Right," Raena murmured, turning back toward the street and frowning. "This face is definitely memorable." Her eyes stopped at the clothing shop on the other side just as a man stepped out of it, looking around before turning his head toward their building. He stared for a while, then went back inside. "Kara. I need you to go to the clothing store across from us and buy a dark, tight, revealing dress and a veil."

"This is not going to work," Kara said. Raena looked at her again, grinning.

"You keep underestimating me, my sweet summer child. I'll show you what a modern woman is capable of."