

His Highness's Second Wife Chapter 9 - Tips

Raena turned in the direction of the voice, her eyes stopping on the small crowd that had gathered around a makeshift stage. There was a mountain of a man standing on top of it, yelling his lungs out with a wolfish smile on his face.

A younger man was kneeling at his feet, a thick rope binding his hands behind his back before winding over his chest and neck. Dirty, tattered pants was the only thing he wore, with the ropes pressing over the well-defined muscles of his chest. Still, it was his hair that caught Raena's eye first — it was such a light shade of blonde that it looked almost silver in the fading light of the day.

Despite his tired and pitiful appearance, the young man stared at the crowd with defiance, biting on the dirty rag that was stuffed in his mouth. His chest rose up and down quickly, arms flexing as if he was fighting against the bonds.

"This one is in excellent condition — he is young, strong, and extremely handsome! He can do heavy labor, he can fight, and he can please a lady all night long!" the speaker shouted, moving back to the younger man and catching him by the hair. His words were met with laughter and excited whispers while the tied man shook his head in an attempt to free himself from the grip.

"Is this...?" Raena asked, glancing toward Kara. She was aware that slavery was a thing in the book — Elene was supposed to be a slave girl that gets saved by the third prince, after all, but seeing it with her own eyes made her insides boil.

"Slave market," Kara said with disgust, glaring at the people that were pushing around to get a better view of the stage. "Disgusting!"

Raena turned her attention back to the stage, staring at the young man. He couldn't have been much older than her, and the look in his eyes told her that, slave or not, he wasn't used to keeping his head bowed. Their eyes met, but then someone blocked her vision, hiding the stage from view.

"We'll start at ten tharas. Do we have ten?" The speaker bellowed, and a few voices rose from the crowd. "Twelve? Fifteen? Twenty, oho! Twenty-two? Alright, here I see twenty-five!"

"Thirty-five!" Raena shouted, raising her hand. The crowd quieted and the speaker's eyes searched through the spectators until they landed on her. "Thirty-five," she repeated, stepping from behind the tall man in front of her.

"Thirty-five tharas from the gorgeous lady in the back. Anyone else?" the speaker shouted with the brightest smile. Raena could feel the silver-haired guy's eyes on her, and as she met his gaze, he tensed, a line forming on his forehead.

She couldn't just let him be sold like a pig for slaughter when there was so much fire in his eyes. Whoever bought him might beat him to death when he refused to obey their orders or tried to attack them. She had seen it happen on the street a few weeks ago, but Kara had stopped her from interfering. She couldn't remember what had happened with the slave, but when they passed by his master later, the slave was lying on the ground without moving.

"Are you crazy?" Kara hissed in her ear. "Slaves? Really? I didn't know you were that kind of person!"

"Sold to the beautiful lady in blue!" the speaker announced. "Please come to the back to receive his papers and pay for your boy!"

"I'm not!" Raena whispered, turning toward Kara. "But this is the only way we can make sure he is not mistreated. Besides, we need workers in the mansion, don't we? He can work there until he pays me back the thirty-five tharas and then he'll be free to leave. Come on."

She pushed her way through the crowd, ignoring the hungry looks she received from the men around, and soon they were at the back of the stage where another stocky man was preparing the next slave to be auctioned. He pulled the rope tied around the silver-haired guy's body and he fell face-first on the hard ground.

"Hey!" Raena shouted, rushing toward them. She glanced down at the slave that was just getting to his knees, then glared at the man behind him. "How do you expect me to pay if you damage him?"

"Apologies," the slave trader said with an annoyed sigh, grabbing the silver-haired guy by the neck and pulling him to his feet. "He is fine, see? Pay up if you want him."

"Kara," Raena said without looking away from the slave trader so he couldn't do anything else. As Kara dug into her purse and started counting the money, Raena stepped forward. "Give me your knife," she said, extending her hand toward the trader.

"I don't recommend untying him until you train him properly," the slave trader said. "Or at least until you have a few guards with you. He can be violent. Or he can run away — we don't do refunds if he runs away after you have claimed him."

"And go where?" Raena raised an eyebrow. "Knife!"

The slave trader gritted his teeth, but eventually handed her the dagger. She took it carefully, crouching behind the young man and sliding the blade under the rope that ran from his hands up his neck. It took her a minute to cut it, then she proceeded with the knots around his wrists. As the last of the rope fell, she noticed that the chafed skin was red and bleeding.

Raena looked at the slave's face as he rubbed his wrists, only to catch him glancing at the dagger in her hands.

"Don't," she whispered, and his eyes moved to her face. "You won't get far, and they will kill you. Nobody wants a slave who is willing to hurt their master."

"Here are the papers," the slave trader announced, handing them to Kara. "Move along, the other customers will soon come to claim their merchandise."

"Can you stand?" Raena asked him as she got to her feet. She extended a hand toward him, and he stared at it suspiciously. "I won't force you to come with me. But if you don't, I can't guarantee your safety."

He reached out and took her hand. Raena tried to help him up, but realized she had overestimated herself. Instead, she stumbled forward at his pull, almost landing on top of him. He caught her by the shoulders, straightening her up and then getting to his feet on his own.

"So, will you come with me?" she asked, smiling at him.

He nodded. She turned to leave when she noticed he wasn't following. Raena spun around, opening her mouth to ask why he wasn't moving, when he abruptly bowed from the waist down. She shot Kara a confused glance, but her maid looked just as startled.

"My lady," he spoke in a thick accent. "I beg of you, please buy my brother and sister as well. I'll work hard and do anything you wish to pay you back!"

"We can't buy more slaves!" Kara protested, clenching her purse.

"Shush," Raena scolded her. "Which ones are they?"

The silver-haired guy stood up and pointed somewhere in the middle of the line of slaves, toward a pair of blondes — a girl and a boy around her own age, both wearing the same tattered rags. They were already looking at her with hope in their eyes. Despite their wretched appearance, they seemed healthy and strong.

Raena sighed.

"Hey, you!" she called the slave trader from earlier, who was just accepting the payment from another man. He strode to them with a scowl. "How much for those two?" Raena asked, pointing at the blonde pair.

"Seven each starting price," he spat, looking down at her. "But you have to bid."

"I'll give you thirty if you sell them to me now," Raena said, and the guy licked his lips greedily, glancing toward the two as he weighed his options.

“Fine,” he grumbled. “Prepare the money.”

Raena looked at Kara, who opened her purse with a tortured expression. The slave trader brought the other two along with their papers, dumping them at Raena’s feet before he counted the money Kara gave him. He turned his back to them and walked away without so much as goodbye while the silver-haired guy was helping his siblings out of their ropes. Once the three were free, they stood in front of her with tense expressions.

“Thank you,” said the silver-haired guy. “I’ll repay my debt.”

“What are your names?” Raena asked, glancing at each one of them.

“My name is Zender,” the silver-haired guy spoke again. Hoarse at first, his voice now sounded a bit stronger and firmer and that strange accent added a really nice ring to it.

“Davin,” the blonde boy said with a shy smile while rubbing his wrists. Unlike Zender, Davin was really slim. His hair was longer too, and just regular blonde. He could have passed for Raena’s brother if it hadn’t been for his dark eyes and a slightly wider nose.

Raena looked toward the girl, her heartbeat quickening. Behind the dirt on her face, the shabby clothes and tangled hair hid a beauty with mesmerizing hazel eyes and delicate features. Her eyes were cold though, and she didn’t smile as she spoke.

“Elene.”

Raena’s heart skipped a beat as the name rang in her ears and she suddenly felt dizzy. Of all the people in this world, of this city, and in this story, how did she end up running into her? This was not supposed to happen. Elene was supposed to be bought by another noble who would treat her badly. Then the third prince, who was fighting to abolish slavery, would save her from her wretched fate, thus establishing the beginning of their sad love story.

“Shit,” Raena whispered as she stared at the most dangerous person in this entire world.