

His Highness's Second Wife Chapter 91 - Tips

0 10 minutes read

"They are back." Morlag's voice announced and Zen lifted his eyes from the blade he had been playing with for the past two hours. The group that was supposed to eliminate the crown prince never showed up at the rendezvous point and, after waiting for twenty minutes, Zen had ordered everyone to disappear. There was going to be a backlash from the Empire's nobility, but as long as their biggest enemies were dead, that didn't matter.

All those nobles were inconsequential – parading with power when they had none, and praising their names and their bloodlines where their biggest achievement was getting born into the right family.

Pathetic.

Zen jabbed the blade into the wooden box he was resting his feet on, then got up and strode towards the door. The abandoned warehouse that was currently serving as a safe house had only two rooms that were turned into sleeping quarters – one small space for him alone on the second floor and another, bigger room where everyone who survived was already resting after the taxing night they had.

His room even had a proper bed brought in – Raena was supposed to be in it right now, but she had slipped away.

Mistakes. Too many mistakes.

He had already had to punish those who had failed to accomplish their tasks and his own hands were hurting from all the beatings. But they knew what they did wrong, and they knew that a second mistake might cost them their life.

He had been forgiving though – he hadn't killed a single one of them, despite their failures. They had lost too many already – especially in the banquet hall where the chaos and the drug should have rendered most of the people helpless. But at least they had hurt and killed enough nobles to cause heavy friction between the parties and deviate the attention of the soldiers from the real targets. And with Rissen's death, the Imperial Palace had to be busy with their own problems to chase after them with all their might.

At first, he just wanted to kill the bastard for being so useless and annoying, but then he realized his death could be much more beneficial. If Raena had really learned of their plan from that prostitute, then she was bound to come with some counter-measures. But if he did something that wasn't in the plan initially, she wouldn't know what to do. The same applied for that darn crown prince- with an Imperial death on his hands, there was little he could do to protect his brother.

Zen reached the steps leading to the ground floor of the warehouse and his eyes immediately stopped on the group of people dressed in black. There were only three of them when there should have been fifteen. His eyes stopped on the woman on the front just as she was pushing out of her face the strands of blonde hair that had slipped out of her braid. She had a few deep cuts over her hands and chest, her shadow uniform torn in several places. The other two with her looked to be in a worse condition – one of them was barely standing up.

Zen's feet took him to the ground floor in a few seconds and by the time he stopped in front of Elene, she was already staring at him with cold, empty eyes.

"Is it done?" Zen asked, his body tensing.

She pursed her lips as if contemplating her answer, and he waited impatiently as the seconds dragged.

"He survived." She muttered, looking away from him. "There were too many shadows and he had his guard with him. The third prince showed up too, so we had to flee."

Rage exploded in Zen's chest, spreading through his body and reaching his head in an instant. Her aloof tone and the fact that she barely had any serious injuries infuriated him even more.

And when she completely ignored him for Davin, who had just appeared to check on the newcomers, Zen's hand balled into a fist.

"Davin, oh my gods!" Elene exclaimed, rushing towards her brother with a terrified expression. Her twin smiled through the bruises and the swelling on his face, catching her hands before she touched it. "What happened?"

"It's nothing I didn't deserve," Davin said in a weak, hoarse voice. "I made a few mistakes tonight, so I suffered my punishment. Don't worry, next time I will not make any mistakes, sister. How did you do?"

Elene spun around with an enraged expression, ready to scream at Zen when he raised his fist and punched her in the face. She staggered and fell to the ground, instinctively raising her hand to protect her head. Zen kicked her exposed side before she could crawl into a fetus position and she grunted, quickly bringing her knees to her chest a moment later. Zen stepped over her body, hovering above her, then crouched down, forcing her back and striding her waist. She tried to push him off, but he was faster, wrapping his hands around her neck. She could probably throw him off or hit him back harder, but there were many people watching them and most – if not all – were loyal to Zen.

He was the last heir of the Craidal royal bloodline, after all. Those who didn't follow him for his skills, followed him for his blood – the only useful thing his father gave him.

"Say, Elene," Zen said, tightening his hold on her throat. "It seems that living in the North Palace and playing my beloved sister made you grow quite arrogant." He said, keeping his arms straight and his face out of her nails' reach. "You know the rules. Mistakes are paid in blood and failure is paid in..." Zen turned around and looked at Davin, raising an eyebrow.

".. in death." David finished with a hesitant voice, his eyes darting between Zen and Elene. "She'll do better next time, brother, I'm sure of it. You know how good she is."

Zen turned to look at Elene, whose face was turning bright red, her hands hitting his in an attempt to break his hold. Zen loosened his grip, allowing her to breathe again. While she stared at him with teary eyes, he leaned down, whispering in her ear.

"Next time you make such a big mistake, Davin will share your punishment. Siblings should always share, didn't our mother say that?" He pulled his hands away from her throat, getting to his feet. "Clean yourself up and rest. Tomorrow you're going back in to finish the job. Don't mess up again."

"Nobody is allowed in." The guard said with a scowl, barring Blaine's way as they tried to go down the stairs leading to the dungeon. "His Majesty's orders."

"I am sure that does not include his wife," Blaine said stubbornly, motioning for Raena to come closer. She stepped next to him, pulling down her hood to reveal her most pitiful expression.

They are allowed to say their last goodbye in case things don't go well for him tomorrow, are they not?

The guard looked at her awkwardly and Raena sniffed loudly, rubbing her eyes. She didn't have the time for much, but she made sure to brush her hair and put on some makeup Marden's butler dug up from somewhere. She didn't want to go back to resorting to her face to do the hard work, but she was desperate and she was ready to do anything to see him.

"Five minutes." The guard said after a long pause. "And she goes in alone."

"You want to make a young lady go alone inside that filthy dungeon?" Blaine said in an angry tone and Raena barely held back her surprise. She didn't know Blaine could sound anything different from calm or exasperated.

"If you don't like it, sir, leave." The guard said without hesitation. He then raised an eyebrow as if asking, What's it gonna be? and Blaine looked at her. She gave a small nod and followed the guard, who headed down the stairs. His partner remained on his

spot, keeping an eye on Blaine as if planning to stop him if he so much as breathed across the invisible line he wasn't allowed to cross.

Raena held her skirts up, stepping carefully down the slippery stairs until they were at the base. The guard picked up one of the torches from its bracket on the wall and continued down a narrow, dark corridor. Raena shivered as she followed him, her eyes darting left and right, but all she could see was darkness. The only light came from the torch he was carrying and the other one that was hanging by another door at the end of the corridor.

He unlocked the door with a heavy set of keys and opened it, going in first. The smell of blood, sweat, and shit hit her nose even before she crossed the threshold, and she had to focus really hard to hold the contents of her stomach in.

She looked away from the light, trying to let her eyes adjust to the annoying darkness, and soon she could distinguish the bars running from either side of the path they were walking on.

They hadn't even locked him up in a separate cell, but threw him down with the actual criminals. Bastards, Raena thought, gritting her teeth. This was just like in the damn book.

"Over there," the guard suddenly said, and his voice made her jump just as something skittered across the floor next to her feet. Using all her willpower, she stopped herself from making a sound. "Hurry up. I'll wait here."

"Thank you." Raena said in a small voice, moving further along the path as her eyes searched for where 'there' was. The light from his torch barely reached the outer walls of the chamber where most of the bodies had piled up. Raena took a calming breath before calling Kassian's name.

For a second nothing happened, then hurried steps made her turn just as he reached the metal bars separating them.

"Raena?" He said with a husky voice, almost like he didn't want to believe it was her. She stepped towards the bars and his eyes filled with surprise, which quickly turned to anger. "What the hell are you doing here? Where is Blaine? I kill him."

"Calm down, we don't have much time," Raena whispered, catching the bars with her hands and bringing her face to them, despite the sticky layer of god-knows-what. "Come here."

He gritted his teeth, but moved closer, his hands sliding over hers.

"They are looking for... her. The Empress knows your identity and others might have figured it out. You have to get away from here. I can't have you involved as well. Stay

back home, keep your head down. Whatever happens, I'll deal with it." I hissed, his face turning worried in an instant. "I've given Blaine the token and he will pass it to you. Whatever happens, feign ignorance and cling to that tablet. Even if..."

"Shut up already." Raena interrupted him and blinked in surprise. "I know all of those things. I also told you that I picked your side and I am going to stick to it even if you don't like it." He opened his mouth to say something, but she pulled one of her hands away, setting it over his and squeezing tightly. "Right now, I am here as your poor, scared wife who thinks her husband might die. I couldn't exactly go to your brother directly with everyone watching, so I figured once he hears I was in the palace, he'll find an excuse to see me. We're going to figure this out."

"You warned me, didn't you?" Ka.ssiian suddenly said, reaching out and caressing her cheek. "You told me that I will die for treason and my brother will die from poison. And here I am." He leaned his head on the bars, closing his eyes. "Until recently, I didn't care if one day I would be accused of treason for something I didn't do – just like my mother. But now I do. Now I don't want to die because I want to do so much more. With you want to love you and hold you and make you smile every day. I want to build a family with you, share a whole damn life. Something I never wanted with anyone else." He paused, a sad smile appearing on his lips. He caught her chin and pulled her towards the bars, pressing his face against them so he could reach her lips. She kissed him back, forgetting for a moment about the urgency and seriousness of the situation. "But if that doesn't happen, I'm fine with it. Because I got to spend time with you and tell you how I feel. And the fact that you feel the same is enough to get me through this. But you must do everything you can to make sure my brother doesn't die from poison. He will take care of you even if I am gone – as long as he is alive."

"Nobody is going to die," Raena said with more confidence than she felt. "I won't allow it."

"I know, I know." Ka.ssiian suddenly smiled, tugging on her face again as if waiting for another kiss. "I have you and Yulien on my side. If you two don't figure it out, nobody will. Just be careful. You can't be found out. If they do, run. Get on that ship and never come back..."

"Time is up." The guard called from the side, his steps bringing him almost next to them. The light he was carrying fell on her and Ka.ssiian, and both squinted their eyes. "We need to go back. Now."

"Go," Ka.ssiian whispered, pulling her head and planting a quick kiss on her forehead. "Be careful."

Raena looked back at him, her chest tightening as he gave her a reassuring smile. The flame of the torch revealed a man standing in tattered, bloody clothes with one hand pressed against his body and a shoulder bandaged in a hurry. His face was pale too, eyes hollow and tired.

“Now, Your Highness.” The guard insisted and Raena finally tore her eyes from her husband, following the light back the way they had come from. As they climbed the stairs leading out of the dungeon, Blaine met them with a tense expression and stiff shoulders. Raena’s eyes darted to the four soldiers standing a few steps behind them and she quickly put on her scared, pitiful expression.

The guard that had escorted her froze on the last step, staring at the soldiers in panic as if expecting them to arrest him. Nobody paid him any mind, though. One of them just walked to Raena, bowing his head before locking his cold eyes on her.

“Please follow me, Your Highness. The crown prince would like to have a tea with you.”

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“I’m glad to see you alive and well, Your Highness,” Raena said as she curtsied. She could feel Yulien watching her, but he said nothing, and she dared not raise her head. Pretending to be stupid in front of him was one thing, but now that her cards were on the table, she wasn’t sure what to expect.

“Rise,” Yulien said in a warm, soothing voice, and Raena straightened her back. She forced herself to look at him – the crown prince was sitting leisurely behind a decorative garden table set in one of the pavilions in the Imperial garden, his head tilted to the side as he studied her. He gave no signs of distress or tension as he watched them, as if everything that happened last night and what happening now, was just as he planned. But the fact that they had met so many soldiers along the way and there were even more in the garden, told her a different story. “Blaine, go take a walk. I plan to entertain my dear sister-in-law by myself.”

Blaine hesitated, but when Yulien switched his attention to him, he tensed. “She’ll be fine. “I’ll call for you once we’re done.”

Blaine shot her a glance, then turned, walking away with a heavy stride and stiff shoulders. Yulien raised his hand and the soldiers that had escorted her left after Ka.ssian’s aide – only the crown prince’s bodyguard remained standing on the opposite side of the pavilion, his hand and head bandaged, but his eyes looking around sharply.

“Sit,” Yulien said, motioning towards the chair by his side. Raena strode to it and sunk into the big, comfortable cushion without looking away from his eyes. “How’s my brother?”

“Injured and locked in a dungeon,” Raena said with a forced smile. “I’d say he’ll feel much better when we get him out of there.”

Yulien chuckled, rubbing his finger over his lips before reaching out and tapping the edge of the chessboard that was lying on the table next to him. The figures had already

been moved like he had been playing with someone, and judging by their position, the two sides were in a stalemate.

“Would you join me in a game of chess, Raena?” He asked, his dark eyes moving to her again. Raena could almost hear the cogs in his head turning, even though she had barely said a word. She wasn’t sure she could win against him – or that she should even try. But most of all, she didn’t have time to play game.

“No, thank you.” She said politely, looking away from the chessboard. Yulien’s smile widened.

“Didn’t take you for a coward with all the bold moves you’ve been pulling. Afraid you will lose this time?” He asked, eyes flashing with a dangerous glint.

“With some opponents, the only way you can win is not to play their game at all,” Raena replied, holding his gaze. Genuine amusement appeared on Yulien’s face for a moment, then he sighed, pushing the chessboard away and intertwining his fingers in his lap.

“Alright, no games then. What is your plan? I assume you have one if you dared come here considering Madam Lydia’s predicament.” He asked, his smile dropping and his face turning serious in an instant. For a moment, Raena wondered if she looked the same to Kara when she finished playing the dim-witted noblewoman and switched to her normal self. It was unsettling seeing it from the side.

“It’s about Madam Lydia, actually.” She said, taking a deep breath. She had considered all options on the quiet ride to the palace – anything she could do to help, any additional information she could give them that could help exonerate Kassian.

But she had already given them all she had gathered, and she didn’t have much power beyond that. She only had one thing left. “Let’s make Madam Lydia the villain” Yulien stared at her with a blank expression, blinking a few times as if to make sure he heard correctly. She almost smiled at the thought of taking him by surprise.

“Explain.” He said simply.

“Madam Lydia is already a wanted person for the part she played in last night’s attack. And while we know it’s all a setup, there is no way we can clear her name without revealing the truth.

Because of my negligence and naivety, they have set me up real good. Several weeks ago I had Kara go over the books at the restaurant- previously I had Davin, one of the Craidal slaves, help me with them since he is very good with those things. She found a lot of mismatches and money gone missing. In any other situation, I would have thought somebody was filling their pockets at the restaurant’s expense, but considering the circumstances, I think I might have funded the rebels.” Yulien continued to watch her

silently despite the pause she made for him to make a comment, so she licked her lips and continued.

Many people have also seen Zen at the restaurant and a lot more know Madam Lydia's connection to him – if it becomes known that he is from Craidal, that's another nail in the coffin. And if I am outed as Madam Lydia, it wouldn't be just my head that goes off."

"So what is it that you think you can do about that?" Yulien asked. There was absolutely no change in his expression, so even after everything she had said, she wasn't sure what he was thinking.

"Control the narrative," Raena said, raising her chin. "Paint her as a lying, manipulative, unscrupulous person who not only helped fund a rebellion under everybody's nose, threatened and controlled the wife of the third prince by installing agents around her, but also worked with the second prince in scheming to assassinate you and the Emperor. Draw a clear line between Madam Lydia and Raena Magrath and set them against each other."

"And who is going to paint her like that? You? With what evidence?"

"We don't need evidence," Raena said. "All the evidence around Ka.ssian's charges is circumstantial. The nobles need someone to blame for what happened, and he is the only one available. All we need to give them is another option – if they decide to dig into Madam Lydia, they will find more even more suspicious things. And it's easier to blame it on a commoner than a royal."

Yulien licked his lips, smiling, then bent forward, leaning his hands on his knees.

"How far can you go to convince the Emperor and everyone else of your story, Raena?" He asked quietly, his pupils so big, he almost looked like a cat that was about to attack an unsuspecting bird. "I know you can lie and pretend. But are you able to cry? To beg? Can you fall to your knees in front of everyone? Can you keep it together if things go wrong and the Emperor orders your own death along with my brother's? Because all of this can happen in an instant and I might not be able to do anything to save you." Raena swallowed the lump in her throat, licking her lips.

"Yes," she said clearly, holding his gaze. Yulien's smile widened.

"How amusing." He laughed suddenly, leaning back in his chair. "You and my brother are well matched." Raena frowned in confusion, but he just chuckled, waving with his hand. "Your plan still has one major flaw, though. Even if you make Rissen into a villain, he is still dead and Ka.ssian is still his suspected murderer. Even if you claim my brother killed Rissen because of him committing treason, he still killed him without trial.

There are witnesses saying so. It's going to be your word against theirs and you weren't even at the party."

Raena opened her mouth to say she hadn't figured that part yet, so he was welcome to help when a loud thud made them both turn to look at the source of the noise. Yulien's bodyguard had dropped to the ground by the edge of the pavilion where he had been standing eyes wide with surprise and panic. There was something small, with tiny black feathers sticking from his exposed neck over the collar of his uniform.

"What the..." Yulien murmured, preparing to get up from the chair. Raena glanced at him instinctively, her eyes catching the sight of a figure standing behind him with a knife raised, as if preparing to stab him in the back. She hadn't heard them approach at all and neither did the guard, considering how he ended up.

"Watch out!" Raena shouted in panic, reaching out and grabbing Yulien by the shirt. She yanked him towards her with all her might and they both tumbled to the ground while the blade cut through the air where his head used to be seconds ago. Raena's eyes widened as she met Elene's calm gaze. She was wearing an attendant uniform, her hair pulled into a bun on the back of her head, revealing a face with a nasty bruise on the cheek and several cuts on her neck and hands. Her expression was one of pain, though. "Elene, no.

"Move," Elene barked, pointing the dagger at Yulien, who was just trying to get to his feet. He helped Raena up and tried to push her behind him, but she dug her heels into the ground and spread her hands in front of him to shield him with her body.

"Stay behind me." She said, not letting Elene out of her sight.

"Shouldn't I be saying that?" Yulien said with a tense voice.

"No. She is here for you and she won't hurt me." Raena said confidently, taking a step back as Elene took one forward.

"Raena..." Yulien said and his hand touched her shoulder as if he was preparing to pull her back, even if it was against her will. She shrugged him off.

"They had many chances to kill me, but they keep trying to take me alive," Raena said, a smile appearing on her lips. "You can't hurt me, Elene. Zen wants me alive, doesn't he? So lower your weapon before the guards come. Cooperate with us and I promise you, you won't be harmed."

The sound of concerned voices and hurried steps carried from the path leading towards their position, and Elene's eyes darted in their direction before returning it to Raena.

“Your biggest problem has always been your unwavering conviction that you somehow know what is going to happen,” Elene said with a hoarse voice. A second later, she stepped forward, catching Raena’s arm and pulling her abruptly.

Raena sensed Yulien trying to grab on her shoulder, but his fingers slipped and she slammed into Elene’s body, losing her balance. Elene swirled her around, and a second later, the blade pressed against Raena’s neck. “That bastard definitely wants you alive. I, on the other hand, don’t particularly care if you live or die” The blade pressed harder against her skin and Raena instinctively rose to her toes, trying to put some more distance between her neck and the metal. “so I’d suggest you don’t move, Your Highness, or you’d be responsible for her death.”

Yulien raised his hands in surrender just as the small pavilion was surrounded by soldiers. He gave them a sign to stay still, his eyes still locked on Elene.

“You’re that fake shadow that tried to kill me last night.” He said, looking Elene over from head to toe while she kept retreating. “And Raena’s maid. You really must be desperate to come here so soon after your failed attempt.”

“Yeah. Very desperate.” Elene replied dryly.

“Tell your men to back away. We’re leaving.”

“You won’t be able to leave the palace with her.” Yulien pointed out, his face going back to its usual calm mask.

“Who knows? I shouldn’t have been able to get in with everyone being on high alert, but here I am” Elene scoffed. “But if you’re nice enough to remove your men before I lose my patience, I might let her go once we’re away from here. You owe her as much, don’t you think? She literally saved your neck today.”

Yulien’s eyes moved to Raena, and she forced herself to nod. His jaw tightened, but he gave a sign for the guards to lower their weapons. Elene kept retreating to the other end of the pavilion, pulling Raena along while holding her tightly, as if expecting her to fight. Raena let herself be dragged until the pavilion was almost out sight. She could feel Yulien and the guards’ eyes on them, but nobody moved long after they put a considerable distance between them.

When the trees and bushes of the garden hid them from view, Elene pulled the blade away from her neck and grabbed her forearm, forcing her into a run. For a moment Raena thought they were going back towards the palace, but the trees, flowers and ponds seem to be endless. Elene took another unexpected turn, yanking Raena’s hand and stepping among a bulge of cherry trees that were throwing a shade over a small clearing that would make a perfect picnic spot.

“Elene,” Raena called once her head started spinning so much, she felt like she will throw up. What is your plan, exactly? You couldn’t kill Yulien, so you’re taking me back as a consolation prize?”

Elene finally stopped, letting go of her hand. Raena forced herself to look up and meet her eyes. The clearing was quiet, but even with the blood thumping in her ears, Raena could hear the sounds of guards shouting not too far away.

“I could never escape with a deadweight like you, stupid,” Elene said with a frown. Elene looked around as if to make sure there was no one coming, then sighed loudly. She opened her mouth to speak, but nothing came out. Raena waited patiently, trying to focus on the woman’s hesitant expression. In the end, Elene took a deep breath and let it out, her face immediately smoothening.

“The guy they caught last night during the attack, he won’t talk no matter how much they torture him.” Elene suddenly said, locking eyes with Raena. “Not unless you tell him the trigger – Mistakes are paid in blood and failure is paid in death” She said, sheathing her weapon. “He knows who you are. They all do. Use the power Zender gave you.” Elene took a step back, then another. “Consider this repayment for the kindness you showed me and my brother. I hope I never see you again, Raena, because if I do, it probably won’t end well for you.”

Raena opened her mouth to speak when Elene turned her back on her and sprinted between the trees. Raena took a step after her, but her tired leg buckled and she landed on her knees, breathing heavily. When she looked up again, she could no longer see Elene, but the voices of the guards sounded extremely close.

“Over here!”

The sound of feet made her turn just as a group of soldiers appeared behind her, their weapons drawn and ready. They stared at her for a moment, then spread around, a few of them disappearing in the direction Elene had taken.

Yulien arrived a couple of minutes later and she watched him as he crouched next to her in the grass.

“Are you alright? Did she hurt you?” He asked as his eyes inspected her from head to toe. He looked angry but also relieved, and as their eyes met, he looked away.

“No, I told you she wouldn’t,” Raena said, trying to get to her feet. Yulien offered her a hand, and she took it, allowing herself to be pulled up. She glanced at the trees again before turning to him and lowering her voice. “But she might have given us the missing piece we needed to make my plan work. Please let me see the fake shadow you captured last night. I think I can make him talk.”

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Raena took a deep breath, turning the handle and pushing the door open. She forced a calm expression on her face, stepping into the gloomy, windowless room with a slow, unhurried step. There was a torch hanging from the wall by door, which was the only source of light in the small space, but it only seemed to make the atmosphere more morbid.

The room was almost entirely empty save for the person sitting in a metal chair attached to the floor in the middle of it, manacles pinning his feet to the ground and his hands to the chair while a thick rope encircled his chest. His black clothes were tattered and torn, and the smell of sweat and blood coming from him was strong enough to make her gag.

She made sure not to react as she closed the door and turned to face him. He raised his head, leaning it on the back of the chair while his eyes followed her every movement. His face was a mess of bruises and cuts, but he looked like he barely noticed or felt any of it. His eyes seemed tired and blurry and he wore a foredoomed look, like he was waiting to be executed any second.

"I see they went easy on you, I'm? No doubt hoping you'll talk, am I right?" Raena said, crossing her arms and leaning on the door. His eyes focused as soon as she said those words, shoulders tensing as he studied her from head to toe. "What's your name?"

He continued to stare at her, saying nothing, so Raena pushed herself off the door and stopped in front of him, leaning her hands on her knees so she could look him in the eyes. Up close where she could see beyond the dirt, blood, and wounds, she realized he was much younger than she thought, maybe even younger than her body.

But he held onto his composure with an impressive will and his mouth remained firmly shut. Raena stared at him for a minute, trying to keep her smile on despite knowing what she was supposed to do next.

"That's a good boy," Raena smile, patting him on the head and slowly circling his chair. He kept his eyes forward, but she noticed he tensed when she disappeared from his sight. She took out the pocket knife Yulien had given her, releasing the blade and turning towards the chair.

She took a deep breath and stepped behind it, grabbing the man by the hair and yanking his head back while pressing the blade against his exposed throat. He winced as if preparing himself for what's to come, eyes firmly shut. Raena stood like that for a while, trying her best to keep her hand still.

"Mistakes are paid in blood and failure is paid in death." She whispered in his ear and watched him as he squeezed his eyes harder, jaw tightening. "Do you think you made a mistake or failed?" The man's eyes opened abruptly, and he looked up at her. Raena

held onto her cold expression, moving the edge of the knife up to his chin and then across his cheek.

“Answer me.” She said, pressing the blade to his cheek. The skin broke and a small cut appeared under his cheekbone, a few droplets of blood slipping down his dirty face.

“.. I failed” He said with a trembling voice, swallowing hard.

“So you’re saying you want to die?” She asked, raising an eyebrow.

“.. n-n-no. But I- failed. I deserve my punishment.” He said, licking his lips nervously. Raena continued to stare at him without saying anything, letting him battle with his thoughts.

Finally, she let go of his head, slowly circling the chair to stand in front of him again.

“So what if I tell you your failure could be considered a mistake- one which you can atone for by helping me do what you failed to do?” She asked, giving him a bright smile. “You do know who I am, don’t you?” The guy nodded slowly. “And you do know how important I am to your leader?” He nodded again.

“Did you also know that the reason he was able to execute his plans so easily is because of me? The weak, feeble girl everyone was looking down upon did more for your rebellion than you could ever hope to do. And last night, you were supposed to get me out of here.” Raena stepped towards him, grabbing his chin and forcing it up so he had to look her in the eyes. “The group that was supposed to ‘kidnap’ me, failed. Now they are dead and I am stuck here, being watched day in and day out, and any minute now my dear husband or his brother might figure out what I am up to, and then I’m dead. And because of your group’s failure, I now have to finish your job too, or all this effort would have been for naught. Do you know how annoying is that?”

“I... didn’t know.” He said hesitantly. “I thought.. You...”

“Do you know how hard it was getting me this time with you? Do you realize what kind of risk I am taking? It would have been so much easier to just kill you. But then I will still be suspected and killing the crown prince would be impossible.”

Raena snarled angrily. He licked his lips as if contemplating what to say next and Raena prayed that this charade would work. She prayed that Zen didn’t tell them she was just a toy he had grown fascinated with since none of what he did could have been called love; she prayed that they knew all of the things they were framing her for so she could use that against them. She prayed this gamble would work. It had to.

"I-I will help you if I can. I will make up for my mistake." He said hesitantly at first, but his confidence quickly built up. He straightened up in his seat, straining against the ropes.

"I hope so." Raena smiled, squeezing his chin. "Because I am tired of cleaning after you people." The guy nodded again, his eyes gleaming with renewed determination.

"What is your plan? What do you need me to do?" He asked and Raena tensed, trying to hold back her smile. She frowned instead, giving him a long, thoughtful look. "If you release me, I..."

"You will be dead before you could even leave this floor." Raena interrupted him. "I can't do anything for you now, not before eliminating the crown prince and my husband." She sighed in what should look like annoyance, striding back to his chair and looking down at him with her most superior expression. "The first thing you need to do is tell me what went wrong last night. And then, you need to help me win their trust again."

"How?" He asked, frowning.

"By talking." She said, and a shadow of suspicion crossed his face. "Not about Zen's plans or the rebels. I would never ask you to betray Zen. But I need you to tell them something else. I need to tell them.."

Yulien stood with his hands crossed, back against the wall next to the door leading to the room where they kept the fake shadow. The voices inside were low, but he could still hear them clearly if he focused hard enough.

Vyn was leaning on the wall opposite from him, silent as the dead and just as pale. It turned out the dart was not dipped in poison, but some substance that caused muscle paralysis, so after a while he had been able to get up. He still looked stiff and his movements were slow and awkward, but he refused to go and rest.

Distant voices filled the quiet corridor and Yulien turned to look at the group of soldiers at the end of it that were looking at him. The biggest two moved to the side to reveal Blaine standing behind them. Yulien gave them a sign to let him in and Blaine headed towards him with long, hurried strides. His eyes stopped on Vyn and then searched the rest of the corridor as if looking for Raena. As he drew near, he opened his mouth to say something, but Yulien raised his index finger to his lips, pointing at the wall next to Vyn. Blaine took the assigned place with a perplexed expression, glancing at the guard with a frown. Vyn continued to scowl at the floor, scratching his neck where the dart had pierced and occasionally shaking his hands or legs as if to wake them up.

Yulien leaned his head back to the wall, focusing his full attention on the conversation inside.

He had figured long ago that Raena smarter than she pretended to be. He had figured she was an excellent liar and could fool people into doing her bidding, sometimes even

making them believe it was their idea. And she had her looks on top of that, making her a scary adversary. But what made him nervous to be in her presence was her adaptability. Coming up with military plans or convoluted plots that could control trade, politics or even people was hard. But drastically adjusting your plans according to the situation was not something anyone could do.

Such a shame, he thought, smiling lightly.

Such a shame I married her to my brother, of all people. But who would have known she'd turn to be a figure that would hold the power of a queen instead of a pawn? In any case, she was going to be valuable to have close, especially after taking the throne. He had never doubted his brother's loyalty. but now it was going to be even more important to keep him happy and by his side. Because if Ka.ssian ever turned against him with his influence among the military and the loyalty of so many soldiers, and Raena to whisper in his ear, he could be a real threat to Yulien. Much bigger one than the Empress and Rissen ever could be.

There was a pause inside, then Raena spoke with her voice so cold and commanding, Yulien smiled. She truly was an amusing Woman.

Yulien slid a step away from the door, making both Blaine and Vyn look at him expectantly. He said nothing, just waited until the door opened and Raena walked out, her eyes stopping on each of them before she slowly, unhurriedly, closed the door. The moment the mechanism clicked in place, she let out a long sigh, leaning her back on the door.

When she finally opened her eyes, Yulien nodded towards the other end of the corridor and she pushed herself to catch up with Blaine and Vyn following close behind.

"Did you hear?" She asked quietly, giving him a look full of caution. She had been doing that a lot – it was like she was afraid of him and trying to figure out what was going on in his mind. He had thought that smiling and looking pleasant would put her at ease, but she stared at him like she expected him to pull a knife and stab her with it. He was getting more and more curious about just what made her so wary of him when all he had ever been to her was amiable.

"That was better than I expected," Yulien said with a smile, stopping when they were too, for anyone else to hear. "Do you think he'll do it? He might say he will now, but if he changes his mind tomorrow..."

"We'll find out tomorrow," Raena said, throwing her hands in the air. "I did all I could to convince him I am on Zen's side and my goal is to kill you."

"Yes, I heard" Yulien chuckled. "I almost believed you myself. You do have a way with words. Her smile dropped again and Yulien had to hold back a sigh. She had asked him to listen in to the conversation so he knew exactly what she was saying, as if she still

thought he didn't trust her. She wasn't leaving any chances. She really was trying hard to make herself look trustworthy. He wondered if this was because of Ka.ssian or her survival instinct was making her do it. Either way, she was leaving little space for doubt.

"So we're doing it?" She asked, biting her lower lip.

"We're doing it." Yulien nodded, glancing towards the other two men who were watching them with confused expressions. "Blaine, take her back home and make sure she is thoroughly protected. I don't care if you have to put every guard around the North Palace or move her to the Main Palace. She must arrive safely tomorrow for the trial. Is this clear?"

"Yes, Your Highness." Blaine nodded readily. "I would have done it even if you didn't say it"

Yulien chuckled. She had to have done something to get Blaine on her side too. Smart girl. She probably helped him with his work or gave him a few extra days off. Even Yulien could tell Ka.ssian was overworking him in the past few weeks.

"Prepare yourself for the show of your life, dear sister-in-law." Yulien smiled at her. "A great deal of our plan will lie on your shoulders tomorrow." Raena nodded, freezing when Yulien reached out and patted her head. "Watch your backs, both of you. Now go."

Raena and Blaine shared a quick look, then both excused themselves and left down the corridor, their heads gathered together in a hushed conversation. Yulien stared after them for a bit, then turned to Vyn, his smile dropping.

"Let's go. We have work to do to make sure tomorrow goes smoothly, starting with silencing a few birds that know too much."

His Highness's Second Wife Chapter 94 - Tips

0 14 minutes read

"Let's go, Your Highness." The shackles clicked around Ka.ssian's hands and the soldier pulled his chain, leading his way from the room where they let him wash up and change. The moment he stepped into the corridor, a group of soldiers surrounded him without saying a word, each of them avoiding his eyes.

The Captain of the Imperial Guard was waiting in front of the doors of the Judgment hall along with the Minister of Justice an old man with a surly expression and long, drooping eyebrows that made him look like he was literally always judging you. Ka.ssian almost smiled – he and Yulien used to mock the old minister all the time when they were younger.

As the doors opened, Ka.ssian moved forward on his own, glancing around while trying to hold back his scowl. The Judgment hall was even more crowded than usual, with dozens of nobles sitting or standing in the boxes rising on both sides of the room. A platform with several chairs stood in front of the space where the criminals were usually tied, one of the chairs rising higher than the others and currently holding the frail body of his father.

The Emperor looked like a shadow of himself, pale and unhealthily thin, with limp hair that looked like it was going to fall off any second and eyes foggy with sickness ever.

Yulien sat on his right with a reserved smile on his face while the Empress fidgeted on the left, eyes red and puffy despite the heavy makeup.

Her usual calmness was replaced by a mask with so many cracks, even Ka.ssian could see how close to becoming unhinged she was. The fire in her eyes, fueled by her grief and anger, burned brighter than away.

The guard made him stop in the middle of the room, attaching his chains to the metal bar rising from the floor. Once he was done, he flashed Ka.ssian a quick, apologetic look and walked

The Minister of Justice walked a few steps in front of Ka.ssian, tapping the floor with his walking stick. Everybody reluctantly quieted, and he faced the Emperor, bowing as low as his ancient body allowed him. The Emperor waved with his hand sluggishly, giving him a sign to continue. He barely looked awake, let alone interested in what was going to happen. He probably had already decided Ka.ssian's fate and this entire fiasco was just for show.

Ka.ssian moved his attention to his brother, who flashed him a quick smile before focusing on the Minister who had resumed the trial. The old man's frail, breathy voice filled the room effortlessly as he summarized the witnesses' accounts they must have heard before bringing him in. Apparently, the two witnesses claiming to have seen him murder Rissen were a maid and a guard both stationed at Rissen's chambers that night. The guard who somehow survived the me by pretending to be dead, and the girl who had the time to hide under her master's bed and not make a sound while people got butchered in front of her, both claimed he personally killed the second prince.

After the Minister finished recounting the testimonials for his benefit, even though they all painted him as a scrupleless murderer, he glanced towards the Captain. The latter strode to the table that had been brought in by one of the stands, picking up something from it. Ka.ssian immediately recognized his sword even before the Captain brought it before him.

"Is this your sword, Your Highness?" He asked, raising the weapon high enough for Ka.ssian and everyone else to see it.

“Yes,” Ka.ssian replied stiffly.

“This weapon was found in Prince Rissen’s room.” The captain announced, turning his back on Ka.ssian and facing the Emperor. “However, my conclusion is that this weapon was not used to k!ll His Highness. The wound on the body suggests smaller, thinner blade that sunk into the neck from the side,” he raised his hand and pointed with it to the side of the neck. A few nobles winced, as if imagining the wound appearing and bl00d gushing everywhere. “So we concluded that a dagger of a sort was used to murder His Highness. We haven’t found the weapon yet.”

Ka.ssian almost scoffed. Why would he need a dagger when he could snap Rissen’s neck just as easily with his bare hands? These testimonies had so many holes in them, it was a miracle they were still talking. When he looked towards the Emperor and saw his expression, however, he was reminded that it didn’t really matter what all those witnesses said.

“Do you have anything to add, Your Highness?” Ka.ssian opened his mouth but noticed Yulien shaking his head barely noticeably. The Minister of Justice waited for a while, then nodded and turned towards the Emperor. “If this is the case, then you have heard everything we’ve gathered, Your Majesty. Please, give us your fair judgment.”

The Emperor perked up for the first time since Ka.ssian had walked in, straightening up in his seat. He was just about to speak when the Captain cleared his throat.

“Apologies for the interference, Your Majesty, gentlemen, but there is a new development since this morning. And another witness.” He said.

“May I report?” The Emperor scowled but, after a brief consideration, gave him a sign to continue. On the night of the attack, we were able to apprehend one of the rebels, alive. He refused to talk at first, but after extensive questioning, he cracked. The two investigators, His Highness, The Crown Prince, and I, all bore witness to the confession.” Ka.ssian blinked in surprise. Confession?

From a rebel? So far, every single one of them refused to talk no matter the manner of questioning or t0rture and sooner or later ended up k!lling themselves or getting silenced. How was Yulien able to make this one talk?

Ka.ssian looked at his brother, who kept his eyes on the Captain. He couldn’t have made up the statement, that was too risky for him. He could never take sides or show favorability and siding with a criminal now could be detrimental to his position. Or was he thinking that with Rissen gone and Ka.ssian behind bars, the Emperor would let him do whatever he wanted just because he didn’t have any more legitimate options for an heir?

“The rebel confessed that the goal of the attack was to take the whole Imperial family out in one go. They knew they could not get to His Majesty, but they could hurt him by

hurting his sons – and weaken the Empire so their next attack would destroy it completely. They were supposed to kill Prince Ka.ssian in the commotion while he was drugged by the champagne, but he proved himself a harder opponent to handle, so he managed to escape them. They also sent a smaller group to the crown prince since they didn't expect much resistance considering his poor health condition.

Prince Rissen's death was supposed to be tying a loose end."

"Tying a loose end?" The Emperor asked in a hoarse voice, his brows furrowing.

"Yes." The Captain nodded, taking a deep breath. "The rebel claimed that Prince Rissen and Her Majesty had been working with them for the past year, providing information as well as financial support that was used to fund the uprisings and help infiltrate the capital through bribes, threats, and murders."

"Preposterous!" The Empress shouted, jumping to her feet. "Not only are you smearing my son's name days after his murder, but the lies you're spewing are so otherworldly, nobody is going to believe something so stupid!"

"I am just relaying his words, Your Majesty." The Captain said with a calm tone. Ka.ssian glanced at the Emperor who was frowning, then to Yulien who looked like he wanted to smile but was forcing himself not to.

Don't react, Yulien had warned him before the trial. Seeing how the Empress was so quick to defend herself, even he could tell she looked suspicious. With everything that had happened and this sudden development... she was slipping.

The Empress's gaze stopped on Ka.ssian, and he allowed himself a slight smile. Her eyes widened and her fists balled into fists.

"My son is dead!" She shouted, pointing at Ka.ssian. "And he is responsible! He should be his way to the gallows, not looking this smug! This rebel must be one of his men, twisting the truth to slander me!"

"Your Majesty, please calm down and allow me to finish the report." The Captain said with a cold tone, looking at the Emperor. The latter seemed even tenser than before, tapping with his fingers on the chair's armrest. He looked at his wife and she slowly sat down, still fuming. The Captain continued. "The rebel also said they had agents planted in the castle among which several maids and guards which regularly fed them information."

The crowd started to whisper again, and the Minister knocked on the floor with his walking stick to quiet them. "He named the two witnesses from earlier as two of them."

The whispers returned, but this time, amount of knocking made them stop.

“Quiet!” The Emperor shouted, falling into a coughing fit immediately after. The hall quieted, everybody staring at him while he struggled to catch his breath. When he finally did, his eyes were bright red and his hands were shaking. He returned his attention to the Captain. “Are you saying that the rebels are trying to frame Ka.ssiian for Rissen’s death?”

“This is what the rebel said, Your Majesty.”

The Captain replied politely. “After not being able to eliminate him on the spot, this was their plan B.

“So you expect me to believe a foreign criminal, one that is clearly an enemy of the Empire, just because he could string a tale and lie well enough to fool you? Where is the evidence? It’s just his word against my own subjects. Give me proof or don’t bother prolonging this trial with useless things.”

The Captain pursed his lips, glancing around as a wave of discontent made its way to people’s faces, but nobody dared to speak this time.

“Yes, Your Majesty.” The Captain nodded. Bring in the last witness.”

Ka.ssiian frowned, looking over his shoulder as the soldiers by the door pulled it open. Two figures were standing outside, waiting, and as he recognized them, his eyes widened. Raena walked in first, her expression one of nervousness and fear.

She was wearing a flattering white dress and her hair was carefully arranged in waves falling over her shoulders, making her look so innocent and fragile that he took a step towards her without realizing it. The chains rattled in the quiet room and her eyes darted towards him, hardening in an instant. She quickly looked away, stopping by the Captain and giving him a fearful look. He gave her an encouraging smile and Ka.ssiian narrowed his eyes at him while Raena turned towards the platform, curtsying with shaky feet. Blaine stopped a couple of steps behind her, hugging a big pile of papers as he bowed.

Ka.ssiian realized his mouth was dry and even when people started talking, he couldn’t look away from those thin shoulders trembling under the pressure. She shouldn’t have been there, not with the danger of her other identity exposed, not with the Empress, who knew her secret sitting right there. He looked up at his brother, prepared to glare at him, only to find Yulien staring him down with a tense expression.

Keep your mouth shut, his eyes were saying louder than the voices around him. He focused his attention back on Raena, who had just started speaking, her voice cracking now and then. Despite her uneasiness and fear, the words coming out of her mouth sounded confident and carefully picked.

“A few months ago, while I was on a walk with my maid in the city, a woman approached us.

She didn't look like she knew my real identity and she just offered us to taste her food. I agreed and the food she made was better than anything I've ever eaten. She suggested we opened a restaurant so more people could eat the food and because it was going to be a great success. I thought it was a good idea and gathered the money and bought the place. She said she'll take care of everything. All I need to do is eat great food whenever I want and spend the money however I want. She even gave me servants – three Craidal slaves that promised to play with me and keep me safe at all times.” She stopped, looking down at her hands before taking a deep breath. “At first all was great, and I really liked it, but then every time I would go to the restaurant she would ignore me because she had meetings and most of the people were really scary-looking, so I didn't say anything. I would complain to the servants she gave me – they came to live with me but they would defend her and say I should be a good girl and do as I am told.”

Raena stopped again, making a longer pause this time

“I went to the restaurant one time without telling anyone, and I saw her talking with a group of men about some kind of plans in the palace. She said that she had arranged everything and that all that remains was for them to do their jobs and kill everyone in the palace. They caught me listening in and she threatened to kill me and my whole family if I ever said anything to anyone.” Raena looked up towards the stands, her eyes searching until they landed on her father and brother, who were sitting on the front row in one of them. Ramor looked like he wanted to jump down and shield her while her father was pale and tense, staring between him and Kassian with an unreadable expression. Raena looked back at the Emperor. “The servants she gave me changed, too. In front of the others, they were quiet and obedient, but they watched me all the time and every time I tried to get close to someone and ask for help, they would interfere and hurt me afterward.”

The sound of sniffing came from Raena, and Kassian continued to stare at her, wondering if she was really crying.

“I was scared, really scared.” Raena sobbed. “I tried to ask for help from my husband several times. The first time they told me to ask for a divorce or they will kill my brother. The second time they attacked our residence and started killing people and even tried to kidnap me.”

Raena dropped to her knees out of a sudden and a few people gasped in surprise as she kneeled, putting her head to the ground.

“I was scared, Your Majesty, I was very scared! But if I had found a way to say anything, maybe those people wouldn't have been hurt” She continued in a muffled voice. The urge to go pick her up from the floor made Kassian squeeze his hands into fists, glaring at the chain. He knew she was pretending, and he knew most of her words were a lie-

just like about anything in this stupid trial – but he still didn't want to see her kneeling in front of those people or shedding tears for them.

They didn't deserve any of that, and she didn't deserve to humiliate herself for him.

He looked up at the stands and realized with surprise that most of the noble's faces had softened, their eyes just as angry but no longer looking at him. Her brother even looked like he was about to cry himself.

"Raise your head." The Emperor said and Raena hesitantly sat up. "So you're saying this Madam Lydia orchestrated everything? The woman with the veil?"

"Y-y-yes, Your Majesty." Raena sniffed. "I don't know how much she was involved in exactly, but she said she had connections everywhere, so even if I was at the Imperial Palace and I tried to say something, there were powerful people there who would kill me on sight." She raised her hand and wiped her eyes. "After the attack, she fled, and so did the servants she gave me. I went to sir Blaine immediately and told him everything. He had been spending this whole time going over everything Lydia had access to, and he said she was right in the middle of it and that it wasn't my fault, but."

Raena lowered her head and started sniffing again, so Blaine moved forward, offering the pile of papers to the Captain.

"This is everything I could find – all the money Madam Lydia had swindled from the restaurant she managed, all the correspondence we found from her to other people including people in the palace." He looked up and for a moment Kaessian thought he was looking to the Emperor, but then realized he was not. "Including Her Majesty, the Empress."

All eyes turned to Tassia as she trembled in her chair.

"Impossible! I never had anything to do with Craidal, let alone having secret correspondence with that woman! I barely knew her!" she snapped, turning towards the Emperor. "Those are lies! They are trying to frame me!"

"Among those papers is Her Majesty's special permission for the name of the restaurant as well as a document making Madam Lydia and"

Her Highness's Secret Place' sole caterer for the Imperial Palace's events. There were several other favors given by the Empress, including permission for hiding her identity when visiting the palace. Why else would Her Majesty go out of her way to help a woman she didn't have a close relationship with?"

"I didn't!" The Empress hissed. "It's all her!" She shouted, pointing her finger at Raena who flinched and curled up as if the Empress had brandished a whip at her. "I know Madam Lydia's identity and it's her! That little witch is actually Madam Lydia! She is

playing you all! My son was murdered because of her! She is in allegiance with the rebels, not me!”

“Didn’t you say you weren’t that close, Your Majesty? How come you know her identity?” The Captain asked, frowning. “And if you knew her identity until now, why haven’t you shared it with us? We’ve been looking all over for her but since we don’t know her face, it has been impossible to find her.”

“My son was murdered!” Ta.ssia shouted. “Excuse me if I had something else on my mind! The fact remains is that those two,” she pointed at Ka.ssiian and Raena, “are trying to frame it on me when they are right in the middle of it! And it’s all because of this man!” Her finger moved to Yulien, who reacted with a confused expression.

“It seems the case might be a lot more complicated than we thought, Your Majesty.” The Captain said while the tension in the room continued to grow. “Perhaps you should hold back your judgment until all the facts have been gathered.”

The Empress opened her mouth as if to object when the Emperor started coughing again, his body shaking heavily and eyes opening so wide, they looked like they were about to fall off their sockets.

“Get a doctor!” Yulien shouted, crouching by the Emperor’s chair. “Quickly!” The doctor, along with several guards, arrived almost immediately and carried the Emperor out with Empress following after them almost immediately. The nobles in the room started talking one over another, making the whole place buzz with their voices.

“Quiet!” Yulien shouted after turning to face them. “Sentence will be postponed until the Emperor is well enough to give it. Trial dismissed.”

He didn’t wait for a reaction, but instead turned on his heel and disappeared through the door behind the platform. Ka.ssiian tore his eyes from the door, searching for Raena just as Blaine was helping her to her feet.

“I’m sorry, Your Highness,” the Captain of the Guards whispered while releasing his chain from the metal bar. “Wait just a bit more. Everything went according to plan.”

Ka.ssiian’s eyes remained on Raena, who glanced at him as she passed by him. Her eyes were red from the crying and her cheeks were pale, but he could swear she gave him a pleased smile before turning towards the doors where her father and brother were already waiting for her. Ka.ssiian shook his head and turned to look at the Captain, who gave him a weak smile.

“Don’t worry. You’ll be a free man soon.”

His Highness’s Second Wife Chapter 95 - Tips

09 minutes read

Raena sighed in annoyance, rolling onto her back and staring at the ceiling. When they had returned at the residence, Blaine had immediately gone back to the Imperial Palace and promised to send word as soon as there was news.

It was past midnight already and no word or a messenger had come, making her fidgety and unable to even close her eyes without seeing the scene from the book where Kassian was executed.

She had played her part the best she could and she could tell it garnered the intended response, but they hadn't planned for the Emperor to collapse then and there. After sowing the grain of doubt about the legitimacy of the charges and giving the spectators a villain easier to hate and blame, the Emperor had to reconsider condemning his son on the spot or risk losing support from his nobles. And with his condition as it was, he was already too weak to afford that.

He was supposed to declare Kassian's charges insufficient or order further investigation. And the more they dig, the easier would be to exonerate and push everything onto Madam Lydia.

Raena had destroyed everything she could think of that could show a connection between Madam Lydia and her any further than what she claimed it was. Yulien had said he'd take care of everyone who knew of her identity and even promised her not to kill them as she wrote the names for him. Seeing how Kara was perfectly fine, fussing over her all day, he might have been honest about that.

Raena got up from the bed, striding to the table and lighting a few candles. It was obvious that she wouldn't sleep, so she could just as well get up and find herself something to do. She carried one of the candles around the room, lighting more of the candelabras until the chamber was drowned in a soft orange glow.

She wanted to see Kassian safe and sound. She wanted this nightmare to end already.

There was no word or mention of Zen or the others, and there were more guards stationed around the North Palace and within the residence than she had seen in the Imperial Palace. She got a few letters from Marden too, saying that everything around the city was quiet and the Imperial Guard were turning every stone in search of insurgents.

Zen was gone. Elene was gone too, and Davin. With their plan failing, they had to be, at least until they could figure out something else to try.

This could have all been avoided if Raena had made a different choice from the start, a better choice. But who would expect a plot after a plot, one backstory more twisted than the other? Things really...

A loud knock came from the door, and Raena frowned, glancing towards the window. It was perfectly quiet and calm outside and if it was someone dangerous, they wouldn't be banging on the door like that, so it had to be Kara. She probably saw the light coming from the room and came to check on her.

Raena strode to the door, opening it slowly while preparing for a lecture about how she needed rest and not sleeping wasn't going to help anyone.

The words never made it past her lips as Raena's eyes landed on the tall figure looming in front of her, his chest rising and falling rapidly, like he had been running all the way to her room.

"Kaessian?" She whispered in surprise and his name seemed to flip a switch in his head because, just like he was standing frozen on the spot, he took a step forward. "How did you?"

His lips crashed against hers before she could finish and a pair of strong hands wrapped around her, squeezing her so tightly, she could barely breathe. She pushed at his chest in an attempt to break the kiss, but he growled in annoyance, kissing her even harder. Raena quickly gave up her struggle, wrapping her hands around his neck and leaning into him.

She felt him relax against her, his hands traveling up her back before sliding down to her ass. He picked her up effortlessly, wrapping her legs around his waist and kicking the door closed without even looking at it.

He climbed on her bed with her still in his arms, and placed her down on her back, finally breaking the kiss so he could discard the same jacket he wore to the trial earlier.

"What happened? How are you here? Did we win? Is the trial over?" She asked, pushing herself to her elbows just as Kaessian hitched the edges of his shirt and pulled it over his head. The muscles on his hands and chest flexed at the movement and for a moment her eyes stopped on the bandage wrapped around his shoulder and running across his chest.

His eyes locked on her as the shirt dropped on the ground with a soft rustle and Kaessian bent forward, leaning his arms by her shoulders, his face stopping inches away from hers.

"Are you nervous? Do you want me to stop?" He asked, holding her gaze. The look in his eyes wasn't of a man that planned to stop, but still, he waited for her response. "Hmm? Tell me what you want. Do you want to sit and talk right now or do you want to finally appreciate the fact that we are both here, now, safe and sound and nobody is going to bother us for a while? I'm not going to do both."

Raena scoffed as she studied his face, touching the few days old's stubble and the cut running over one of his cheeks.

"You don't look like you're in the mood for talking." She pointed out, and his smile widened.

"I'll do anything my wife desires." He whispered against her lips. "So please choose the right answer."

"Fine. Tell me everything tomorrow." Raena said, catching his face and removing the distance between their lips. Ka.ssian moaned in approval, his body grinding against hers as he slid his tongue into her mouth without wasting time, stealing her breath and chasing away all unnecessary questions.

His hand slid over her leg slowly, the rough skin on his fingers running all the way from her ankle up to her thigh before sliding under her nightdress. Everywhere he touched, goosebumps rose on her skin, making her heart beat faster and faster.

He pulled his hand away suddenly, running it over Raena's arms that still rested around his neck. He caught her wrists with one hand, pinning them above her head. His mouth moved to her neck, kissing and sucking hungrily while he shifted himself, his knees opening her legs further apart.

He ran his fingers along the inside of her thigh, slowly making their way to her center while her body shuddered under the touch. Raena moaned as his teeth tightened on her neck while his hand settled on her most sensitive spot, teasing it gently.

Raena squeezed her eyes shut, her body arching in search of more contact. Ka.ssian's hand tightened around her wrists and his fingers grew bolder as her breathing sharpened and her moaning grew louder.

She felt him slide a finger inside and tensed, waiting for her body to get used to the pressure. Ka.ssian barely gave her a moment to adjust before sliding another one, his thumb still rubbing on her weak spot.

Raena squirmed, trying to free her hands, but Ka.ssian didn't let her. Instead, his fingers started to move even faster.

"Relax, it's still really tight." He whispered in her ear, biting in the earlobe.

"What do you expect from a virgin?" Raena whispered distractedly, her body growing hotter and harder to control with each passing second.

"Haven't you been with a virgin before?"

"You're tight even for a virgin." He said with a note of amusement in his voice.

"Is that so? Maybe it's just your fingers that are too big." Raena said the first thing that came to mind, the tension in the lower part of her stomach growing to a point where she felt like she was going to go crazy. It had been a long time since she had felt that way, it was almost a foreign feeling. One she dearly missed.

"If that's the case, I have bad news for you." Ka.ssian laughed, his mouth covering hers. Raena thrashed against him as she came, but he held her down with a pleased smile, kissing her on the face until she settled down, panting heavily. He pulled back while she tried to catch her breath, unbuckling his belt. "Take that off." He nodded towards the nightdress and Raena sighed, wiggling out of it. By the time she got it off her head, she felt Ka.ssian's hands press on her stomach, sliding up over her chest until he reached her face. The hunger in his eyes and the lust in his smile made her shudder excitedly as he lay on top of her.

His mouth found hers again, and he kissed her hard while his member impatiently pressed at her entrance. Raena tensed as he slowly made his way in, gritting her teeth as the pressure intensified to the point she wanted to scream. His mouth kept distracting her from the pain, covering her face and shoulders with kisses and bites.

She hadn't realized she was making a funny face until she heard him chuckle, and a moment later he kissed her cheeks. Raena opened her eyes, finding herself nose to nose with his handsome face, his eyes staring down at her with such an intense feeling, she forgot about the pain.

"I love you," he whispered unexpectedly, and Raena's eyes widened. She opened her mouth to respond when he suddenly thrust all the way in and a cry escaped her lips.

"You little." Raena gasped, trying to blink away the tears as she felt him start to move.

"I love you." He whispered again, leaving a trail of sloppy kisses on her neck. "I really love you in a way I've never loved anyone before. And I'm so happy right now, I am terrified that this might turn out to be a dream." He continued whispering against her bristling skin, his face hidden in her hair. "So hold on to me and don't ever let go, alright? Don't you dare disappear."

He finally lifted his head to look at her, his eyes full of desperation and hope. Raena smiled, caressing his cheek.

"I won't." She whispered, placing a quick kiss on his lips. "Now switch because I don't trust you to go easy on my back after the stunt you just pulled" Ka.ssian made a confused expression, but let her roll him on his back and settle on top of him.

His hands slid to her hips as she started moving them, while his eyes kept devouring her naked body.

The pain had dissipated and every movement now brought her pleasure that was slowly building up, making her body feeling hotter than fire. Her fingers tightened over the hard muscles on his chest, his abs growing even more defined as he tensed underneath her. Kaessian closed his eyes, his jaw tightening while his fingers dug into her hips. Raena smirked, increasing her speed while her hands slid down his abdomen.

For a few minutes, the only sounds in the room came from their heavy breathing and the moans of pleasure that escaped her lips, when Kaessian sat up abruptly, his hands wrapping around her as his mouth reached for hers.

"I'm sorry." He whispered against her lips, his hands running up and down her back. "I'll let you do whatever you want some other time, but tonight I can't handle this slow teasing." Raena's back hit the bed and Kaessian slammed into her, his movements growing faster and more powerful with every next thrust. Raena arched her back as the pleasure reached new heights again, leaving herself to his tireless lips and hungry hands.

Her mind grew dizzy with desire and need as she clung to him desperately, begging for more. He happily obliged, his own groans growing louder.

"I love you." He whispered in her ear again, pushing her hair off her shoulder, before trailing kisses on her back until he reached her neck. His hand tightened around her waist as if sensing her legs were about to give out, his fingers intertwining with hers while hands shook. "Hold on for a little longer, alright?"

Raena lowered herself to her elbows, burying her face in the wrinkled sheets as her body shuddered from another wave of pleasure. She felt his fingers dig into her hips again and a few moments later, he came with a loud groan, his hold around her loosening.

Raena's legs gave in and she fell onto her stomach, letting out a tired sigh. Kaessian gently gathered her in his arms and locked her into a warm embrace, so she could neither move nor speak, even when he whispered something.

She felt him hug her tighter, placing a kiss on her head and Raena smiled before her mind shut down and she surrendered to the most blissful sleep she had had in months.

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0 10 minutes read

Raena opened her eyes, immediately squinting as the sun blinded her. She tried to push herself into a sitting position, but her muscles cried in protest and she gave up, burying her face in her pillow.

Running a hand over the space next to her, she forced one of her eyes open again. The sheets were empty and cold and she was most definitely alone in her bed.

Last night couldn't have been a dream, could it? She definitely remembered Ka.ssian showing up at her door and then spending the night with him. And stiffness of her body and the dull ache in her lower back were positively real. But where was he? He couldn't have just gone back to his place after getting his fill, could he?

Sliding to the edge of the bed, Raena wrapped the sheet around her body and got up. She had barely taken two steps when her knees buckled and she helplessly crashed on the floor with a yelp. She cursed under her breath, squeezing her thighs to wake them up when the sound of steps made her look up. She expected to see Kara appearing from the other room, scolding her for overdoing it, but then she realized that the figure that emerged through the door was much bigger than her and already half-naked.

Ka.ssian stopped by the edge of the bed, barefooted and without a shirt, tilting his head to the side as he stared at her. There were traces of bites on his neck and shoulder and a set of red marks on his chest that she didn't remember leaving.

"What are you doing down there?" He asked, a smirk making his way to his face. "Need any help?"

"Wipe that smirk off your face or I'll make you regret it" Raena grumbled, looking away to hide her embarrassment. He chuckled quietly before stepping closer and crouching down. Reaching out, he caught her chin and raised it so he could kiss her. She thought about not kissing him back as payback for that mocking smile, but the warmth of his lips and the gentle way he caressed her cheek dispersed those silly thoughts. Ka.ssian reluctantly pulled away and then picked her up without warning.

"Come on. I've had the servants draw a bath. It will help with the sore muscles." He said, placing a quick kiss on the top of her head as he walked into the spacious bathroom. The big bathtub in the middle of it was full of steamy water and the smell of the scented oils Kara usually put in it was hanging heavily in the air. There were no servants present, which was a first, but this time she was glad, considering how she was being carried around like a helpless kitten.

"Can you stand?" Ka.ssian asked as he stopped by the bathtub.

"Not likely" Raena murmured, remembering her failure to do that just a few minutes prior.

"We really should work on your stamina." Ka.ssian scoffed. "Drop the sheet."

"Or you should learn to hold back," Raena murmured, sliding the sheet off her body and holding onto his neck as he bent down to lower her into the tub.

"I was holding back." Ka.ssian chuckled, tapping her nose before getting up. The water enveloped her, burning hot at first, but her body quickly got used to it. A movement

caught her eyes, and she turned her head just as Ka.ssian kicked off his pants and took a step towards the tub.

“Ahem. What do you think you’re doing, Mister?” Raena asked, raising an eyebrow. Her eyes traveled up to his face, and she had to try really hard to keep a straight face. Seeing him in the dark with just the light of the candles illuminating their bodies was one of thing, but staring at his jaw-dropping physique in broad daylight was another feast to the eyes entirely. “There isn’t space for you here.”

“I beg to differ, so move. And if you find it uncomfortable somehow, you can always sit in my lap.” He smiled, reaching for her face.

“Smooth.” Raena scoffed, dodging his hand. “But not happening.” Ka.ssian crouched next to the tub, leaning his hands on its edge and then setting his chin on top of them.

“If you want to know what happened yesterday after you left, make space for me. Otherwise, you can wait for the official announcement from the palace in a week.” Raena narrowed her eyes at him for a second, then slid forward with a sigh. “Good girl.” Ka.ssian chuckled as he slipped behind her, splashing some of the water out as he adjusted comfortably and leaned his head back. “This feels nice.”

Raena lay back over his chest and he immediately wrapped his hands around her, kissing his head. She had to admit that he was much more comfortable than leaning on the hard tub. Not to mention his presence somehow made her feel even more relaxed than the water.

“So?” Raena asked, leaning her head on his good shoulder so she could look at him. “I got no message from Blaine so I figured the Emperor was still unwell and they didn’t know what to do with the trial.”

“The Emperor is dead,” Ka.ssian said with a straight face, his fingers massaging her arms gently. Raena tried to turn to look at him and make sure she heard him correctly, but slipped and sunk under the water. He pulled her up immediately, Wrapping his hands around her waist and locking her between his long legs so she wouldn’t fall again. Raena wiped her face and looked at him, but his expression didn’t change.

“Did you just say the Emperor is dead?”

She asked. “And you didn’t think that was important enough to mention last night?”

“No.” He replied without hesitation, reaching out and pushing a strand of wet hair out of her face. “It had nothing to do with us.” He wiped the droplets that were still sliding down her cheek, then smiled. “Well, apart from the fact that with him dead, Yulien gained more power and released me, ordering a proper investigation into Rissen’s murder and

the Empress's involvement with the rebels. That viper is currently under arrest in her quarters, but it's only a matter of time before they find her guilty."

Raena continued to stare at him with her mouth open, trying to remember how to speak. Kassian laughed – a relieved, carefree sound she hadn't heard before. He looked relieved, happy, and entirely relaxed.

"If we knew he was going to die this soon, Yulien would have just delayed the trial and waited it out. It was more than clear during the trial that those charges won't stick. Especially with your performance." Kassian's smile dropped, and he gave her a disapproving look. "Don't ever lower yourself like that again. The only people you should be kneeling for are the Emperor and the Gods." A playful smile appeared on his lips and he leaned towards her, his eyes lingering on her lips. "And your husband occasionally, if you're so inclined."

Raena sucked in a sharp breath as she watched him move closer and closer, her mind warning her that with that look in his eyes, she would find the bath neither quiet nor relaxing.

Dodging his lips, she turned her back on him again, assuming their previous position. For a second he stood still, as if surprised by the silent rejection, then she felt his hands tighten around her again.

"So Yulien is now Emperor?" Raena asked.

"The only thing standing in his way to that throne now is a pile of paperwork and a few bothersome nobles who insist he is not ready to assume the title" Kassian said, his hands returned to massaging her arms and Raena felt herself relax.

"There is a protocol to be followed when the Emperor dies, which is why Blaine couldn't send you any news. Nobody knows about the Emperor's death apart from the immediate family and a few elected officials. And it would remain like that until preparations for Yulien's ascension are made. But with Rissen dead and me not being interested in the throne in the slightest, Yulien's position is all but secured. Once he gets rid of that woman, we'll finally be able to breathe easily." His hands suddenly stopped and one of them caught her chin, turning it aside so she could look at him. "And since when are you on a first-name basis with my brother, hmm?"

"It's much easier to use his name instead of calling him 'His Highness' when he is not even here, is it not?" Raena laughed, reaching out and cupping his cheek. "What, you're jealous of your brother now?"

"Yes. Because you're mine." Kassian whispered, leaning down and pressing his lips against hers. He tried to deepen the kiss, but Raena quickly broke it off, turning her back on him and relaxing in his arms again. She heard him sigh quietly, but he said

nothing, just returned to massaging her arms, sending a tingling sensation all over her body.

“So it’s over?” Raena asked, running her fingers over the surface of the water that was starting to get cold. His hands moved from her arms to her legs that she kept bend to her body. At first, a dull pain spread through her muscles as he squeezed them, but quickly she felt them relax, the tension dissipating. “We’re no longer in danger?”

“There’s still Craidal.” He said, his fingers suddenly tightening on her thighs. “But they won’t dare try another attack now and when they do, we’ll be ready. I might not have approved of the way conquered their kingdom, but after everything they’ve done, I’ll be happy to wipe them out with my own hands.”

“They are not all bad, you know,” Raena said, and his hands paused for a second. “There are a lot of innocent people there just trying to survive. Not all of them deserve to die.”

“There were a lot of innocent people here, too. And none of them deserved to die.” Kassian said in a sharp, cold tone. He pulled his hands away and kept silent for a while, so Raena closed her eyes, holding back a sigh. It was too soon, too soon to have this conversation. She shouldn’t have said anything.

She shifted in the tub so she could face him, only to find his head leaning on his hand, eyes locked on the other side of the room. The unfocused look in his eyes and the tense expression on his face told her he wasn’t entirely there with her. He ignored her stare – or maybe he was so lost in his thoughts he hadn’t noticed her moving at all – so she allowed herself a quick look at him. There were several already healing bruises over his chest and arms, few dark ones around his wrists where the shackles were hanging. His bandage on the shoulder seemed to have been changed and his face was now cleanly shaven, with a small cut on the chin.

When he finally turned his head, the look he gave her was distant and thoughtful, like he was still thinking of something else. His eyes were darker too, anger and hate surging through them.

She wondered what changed his mood so abruptly, what he could have witnessed. Vega’s death, even Sarea’s, were probably among the things floating in his mind, but she doubted that was all of it. Still, now wasn’t the time to ask.

“I’m sorry” Raena whispered, running her hand over his chest and tracing the wet bandage until her fingers were resting on his shoulder.

Holding him for balance, Raena slid closer to him, striding his legs until she was staring directly at his face. He still hadn’t moved. “I picked your side and I’ll stand by you no matter what you decide. I just don’t want you to increase the burden on your shoulders.” She wrapped her hands around his neck, pressing her lips to his neck. She felt him

swallow and his body tensed. "I can't carry that burden for you, but I can give you a place to rest from it." Sarea's words rang in her head, and she smiled, tightening her hands around him. "Let me be your refuge from the craziness of this place where you don't have to think about war and death and betrayal."

She felt him move, finally, and his hands wrapped around her, pressing her closer to him. He buried his face in her neck, his hot breath tickling her ear. She could feel his heart quicken.

"Is this your way of saying I can do whatever I want with you as long as it makes me happy?" He laughed, his hands moving down to cup her a.ss.

"You're an idiot" Raena murmured.

"Wait, are you blushing? Show me!" He said excitedly, trying to break her hold around his neck and look at her face, but she refused to let go. "My, you sure got your strength back, huh? Back to bed then."

"What? No!" Raena said in a panicked voice as he got to his feet along with her. She clung to him to make sure he didn't drop her as he stepped out of the tub, then tried to climb down from him, but this time his hands stopped her. "Hey! I'm not doing it!"

"Then run away." Ka.ssian laughed, continuing towards the door while leaving wet trails behind. "Oh, wait, you can't even walk..."

"This is cheating!" Raena said, hitting his back, but that only made him laugh. They reached the bed and he finally set her down on her back.

She tried to push him and wiggle away, but he effortlessly caught her hands, bringing each on to his lips and kissing it.

"You can't climb into my lap and say such sweet things and not expect me to get turned on. You brought this on yourself." He leaned down for a kiss, but Raena stubbornly pursed her lips.

"I will literally die." She said pleadingly.

"I will never let you die" Ka.ssian whispered, kissing her gently on the shoulder and making his way over her collarbone until he reached the middle of her chest. He then raised his eyes to meet hers. "I'll be very gentle this time, I promise." His mouth moved down to her stomach, moving further and further south.

"Ka.ssian." Raena said, trying to keep her heart under control. Her body was already turning hotter than when she was in the warm water and she could feel her arguments just calling it a day and leaving her entirely at his mercy. He raised his head after

placing another gentle kiss on her hip, giving her the most pleading look a man his size and age could give.

“Alright.” He sighed in defeat, shoulders dropping. “I’ll stop.”

“If you’re not gentle, I swear I’ll castrate you while you sleep.” Raena said just as he was about to drop on the bed next to her. His eyes widened for a second and the smirk returned to his face. He moved up, reaching for her hips, and Raena wrapped her hands around his neck.

“Anything you say, my sweet refuge.” He whispered against her hips right before kissing her deeply, shattering completely any thoughts of running away.

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0 10 minutes read

Raena smiled as she slid her fingers over Kassian’s naked back, running circles over his hard muscles and tracing the line of his spine all the way to the sheet that was barely covering his firm ass.

She had been doing that for the past ten minutes and he hadn’t moved at all – he lay on his stomach with a head turned away from her, his chest rising and falling slowly as if he was sleeping. She suspected he was pretending, but so far he hadn’t reacted so she was enjoying the peace and quiet, thinking how happy those few days had been, unburdened from the problems of the world and the mess that awaited them outside that door.

She didn’t realize when her hand had stopped moving, but she almost jumped when something wrapped around her fingers, pressing them against his back.

“Don’t stop,” Kassian murmured in a sleepy voice and Raena focused on his hand, which was guiding hers to his back. She laughed and started caressing him again while he turned his head towards her, smiling. “Good morning.”

“It’s way past noon.” Raena pointed out with a smile.

“It’s morning somewhere,” Kassian murmured, closing his eyes as if planning to go to sleep again.

“Can we get up and leave the room now?” Raena asked, sitting up. “I thought about getting up for breakfast and leaving you to sleep, but then I remembered how that ended up last time...” She added with a sour smile, looking down at the fading bruises on her wrists where he had tied her up to the bed when she tried to slip out. She noticed him smirking and hit his back, but he just laughed.

“Five more minutes.” He mumbled, wrapping his hand around her waist and pulling her down next to him. He hugged her tightly, burying his face in her hair and inhaling deeply. “I haven’t rested this much in years.”

“I haven’t exercised this much in years,” Raena murmured, running her fingers through his hair. It had grown a little in the past few weeks, so she could actually grab him by it if she wanted to.

She felt his lips press against her neck, sucking it gently, then he ran his tongue over it as if to soothe the tender skin. “We can’t stay in this room forever.”

“I know. Just five more minutes.” Kassian whispered in an unhappy tone before kissing her neck again. “We’ll go for breakfast, but then..” A loud knock came from the door, and Raena turned to look at it. For a moment, she thought it was Kara who had come to ask if she had any plans for the day, but that had been too loud for her maid. While her hands were much better, hitting them against something so hard would definitely hurt her.

Kassian mumbled, frowned in confusion.

‘Oh, no’ and she “Your Highness, are you awake?” Blaine’s voice came from the other side after he knocked one more time. There was no way anyone could have continued to sleep after that banging, Raena thought. “Your Highness, I am sorry to bother you, but there are urgent documents that need to be reviewed and signed, and I cannot process them myself. It’s just a few hours’ work, but I really need you to do it if we want to meet the deadlines.”

“No way, I’m on leave.” Kassian snapped in annoyance, his hands tightening around Raena. “Come back in three days. You’re on leave from your service to the crown prince, not from your work for your own household,” Blaine pointed out from the other side of the door, a note of frustration present in his voice as well. Raena barely held back her laughter, wondering if this was a normal occurrence between the two. Both Blaine and Kassian seemed so serious and responsible all that time that imagining the aide trying to wake his master in the morning and Kassian murmuring ‘five more minutes’ before turning to the other side, cracked her up. When she laughed, Kassian gave her a dirty look.

There was some incoherent whispering on the other side of the door and another knock followed, calmer and much quieter. Raena knew what was going to hear even before she heard the words.

“Mistress, please get up. I had breakfast prepared and there is work waiting for you as well.” She said in a much more respectful tone than she usually used. Raena glanced at Kassian, who shook his head. “Mistress, if you don’t take care of the restaurant’s problems right now, the place will go under you’ll never be able to get it back on its feet.”

Raena winced. Sometimes she wondered if Kara's superpower was finding people's weak spots and punching them there until they cried.

"I'm getting up," Raena shouted, pushing off the sheets, "He is getting up, too. Get that breakfast ready." Raena turned to look at him since he hadn't moved, only to find him making a disgruntled face. "Five minutes are up. Let's get dressed."

"How can you be so excited about paperwork?" He murmured as he rolled off the bed while she got up and stretched. She took a couple of shaky steps but her legs didn't betray her this time so headed for the adjoining room that held her wardrobe and pulled one of her light, easy-to-put-on dresses she had at hand when she had to dress herself. She heard Ka.ssian stride in after her and she glanced at him through the mirror.

He headed towards one of the chairs by the wall where a set of male clothes sat neatly folded and picked up the shirt. Considering she didn't have any men's clothes in her room, Raena figured Kara must have come in earlier to prepare them.

Her maid was two steps ahead, as usual. Once they were ready and stepped into the corridor, Kara and Blaine were waiting for them impatiently. Ka.ssian closed the door and rubbed the sleep out of his eyes while the two waited expectantly.

"Erm, wel." Raena said awkwardly, looking between Ka.ssian and his aide before settling her eyes on Kara. "I'll have my breakfast at the office. Are you two staying for breakfast or heading for the Main Palace right away?"

"There is enough space in your office, right? I can read from anywhere." Ka.ssian said while Blaine's face darkened.

"But all the documents are.." the aide started. Ka.ssian must have given him some kind of sign because he stopped himself mid-sentence and sighed. "I'll go bring them now." Raena glanced behind her, but her husband just smiled innocently.

"I'll walk sir Blaine out and come back with your breakfast," Kara announced, following Blaine down the corridor. Raena stared after them for a second before heading towards her office. She glanced at Ka.ssian as he followed, but he seemed too busy looking around to notice. It was after she opened the door that he focused on her.

"This is the first time I see this place in broad daylight. It has changed a lot." He pointed out as he let his eyes roam around her office, stopping at the library on one of the walls and over to the furniture they had carefully picked for the place. "In a good way. It looks warm and cozy."

"Well, it's definitely better than the condition I received it," Raena said without thinking.

She glanced at Ka.ssian, who winced, running a hand through his hair. “No need to apologize. We’re all been young and stupid.”

He raised an eyebrow with an amused look on his face, then took a few steps towards her, wrapping his hands around her shoulders. He kissed her head, then leaned his chin on it, looking out the windows.

“I actually meant from the time before – when my mother and I used to live here. This place never felt this inviting even then.”

Raena looked up at him, but he was still staring outside with a thoughtful expression. A knock came from the door and then it opened even before Raena could call for them to come in. Kara stepped inside, followed by two maids carrying an assortment of foods, which they carefully placed on the coffee table in the corner. After a quick curtsy, they tiptoed out of the room and Kara moved to follow, saying she will be back with the documents.

Raena headed towards the table, reaching out to grab one of the fluffy croissants while her stomach grumbled. She was just about to bite into it when Ka.ssian’s hand caught her wrist. She looked up at him, only to find him frowning.

“How can you be so careless after everything that had happened? Where is your taster?” he asked, his frown deepening.

“Kara was there, which means she made the cooks taste the food before bringing it up. It’s fine.” Raena sighed, trying to free her hand, but he tightened his grip.

“No. Call your taster.” Ka.ssian insisted. Raena stared at him, half-expecting for him to fold under her displeased glare, but she was sourly disappointed.

She ended up calling the taster, who confirmed the food was fine. They ate in silence, with Raena chewing without the previous hunger.

Soon after, Kara brought her the documents she needed to go over and Blaine returned with a huge stack, which he dumped on the table in front of Raena’s desk. Ka.ssian had refused to take the desk, saying he only needed somewhere to sit and made himself comfortable in one of the sofas.

Minutes turned into hours and before she knew it, she was so absorbed by numbers, complaints, and reports that she completely forgot Ka.ssian and Blaine were there. Kara kept coming in and out of the room to bring refreshments and snacks, which often remained untouched, and the only time anyone talked was to decline them.

Ka.ssian and Blaine conversed in hushed voices when the former asked about something he read, but most of the time the only sounds were coming from the bird’s

nest that a pair of swallows had made by her window or the servants talking in the garden while tending to it.

“And done.” Raena sighed, slamming the last paper on the top of the pile and slumping back into her chair. Ka.ssian glanced at her, giving her a smile, then returned to his reading. Blaine shifted in his seat as if for the first time in hours, picking up small stack of scrolls and getting to his feet. For a moment she thought he’d leave to take them wherever he was taking the rest of the work Ka.ssian finished, but to her surprise, he walked towards her desk and set them down in front of her.

“If you’re done with your other work, Your Highness, please take a look at those.” He said respectfully while Raena straightened up in her seat.

“What is this?” She asked, picking up the scroll on the top and unfolding it.

“Those are matters related to His Highness’s harem. Allowances, repair requests, extra funding, and anything related to the cubines residing within the residence.”

Raena’s smile dropped, and she glanced at Ka.ssian, but his attention seemed to be completely absorbed by what he was reading. Frustration sneaked into her mind, so loud and annoying, she couldn’t put it down.

“No,” Raena said, dropping the scroll on the pile with the others.

“No?” Blaine repeated with a confused expression. “Are you denying all the requests without reading them?”

“No. I’m refusing to deal with this. It’s not my harem, so it has nothing to do with me.” She added, forcing a smile onto her face. She locked her eyes on Ka.ssian and waited until he finally looked at her. “If you want a harem, deal with it yourself.

Otherwise, get rid of it.” Raena said, surprised at her own biting tone. Just a few weeks ago she probably wouldn’t have said that and would have just smiled and done the work Blaine asked her to do. But after spending all this time with Ka.ssian and after all the other hurdles they had just been through together, just the thought of him lying in bed with another woman made her want to punch something. Especially if that woman was Lara.

But this was the world she now lived in, and some of those women, like Hetti, had no fault in this situation. And it didn’t feel right to tell him to get rid of them because she got a little jealous.

“Fine,” Ka.ssian said with a completely unbothered tone, returning his eyes back to the paper he was reading.

“But Your Highness, this is your wife’s responsibility..” Blaine sighed, his complexion turning paler. Under any other circumstances, Raena would have laughed – the poor guy probably just didn’t want to deal with all that work himself since she doubted Ka.ssian would actually do it himself. But right now, she didn’t find it particularly amusing.

“You heard her,” Ka.ssian said in the same uninterested tone. “Just get rid of it.”

A heavy silence filled the room and nobody moved while Ka.ssian continued to read, casually taking another sheet of paper. Blaine glanced at her with a half-opened mouth before looking back at his master.

“Get rid of what, Your Highness?”

“The harem,” Ka.ssian replied like it was the most obvious thing in the world. “Disband it. Give them enough money to live comfortably and find them somewhere else to stay.” The look on Blaine’s face was priceless, but Raena couldn’t even enjoy it since she was pretty sure she was wearing a similar expression. Ka.ssian signed the papers he was holding, adding them to the others. “And done. These were the last ones, right?” He finally looked up at them, raising an eyebrow. “What’s with the faces?”

“Erm... are you sure?” Blaine asked, shooting Raena a glance. “It’s no small deal..”

“Yes,” Ka.ssian replied, getting from his seat with a grunt and stretching his hands above his head. His eyes moved to Raena, and he smirked.

“I won’t be needing them, right, wife?”

“Um.. right” Raena muttered, trying to compose herself. Her heart was thumping so hard in her chest that she was afraid both of them could hear it. She got to her feet, so she had something to do while Ka.ssian turned to Blaine.

“Is there anything else?”

“Gerrin wanted to see you at your earliest convenience,” Blaine said with a defeated voice.

He should be doing inspection right about now and later he will be training the new recruits if you want to find him.”

“Understood.” Ka.ssian nodded. Blaine stood still as if wondering what to do, then walked to the table and gathered the papers, bowing and leaving without a word. Ka.ssian glanced after him then turned towards Raena with a small smile.”

Well, this took longer than I expected. I’m starving. Do you want to order some...”

He didn't get to finish since Raena strode to him, grabbing his shirt and yanking him down so she could kiss him. He returned the kiss with a smile, his hands pulling her closer to him.

"If I knew something like this would make you this happy, I would have done it sooner." He said as she pulled back for breath and wrapped her hands around him. Raena leaned her chin on his chest, staring at him thoughtfully. "I didn't..."

"I love you."

Kassian's words trailed off and he stared at her with a surprised expression that turned into a happy smile a moment later.

"I definitely should have done this sooner."

He whispered before claiming her lips again.

His Highness's Second Wife Chapter 98 - Tips

0 10 minutes read

"What do you mean the Empress escaped the Palace?" Kassian asked through gritted teeth, slowly rising from the desk while his eyes remained locked on Gerrin. His second-in-command stood perfectly still as if already expecting that reaction, just slowly raised his hands as if to calm down an angry animal.

"Before you start shouting at the wrong man, let me finish." He said carefully and Kassian straightened up, trying to rein in his anger. "From what the Crown Prince told me, he knew she was about to try to escape before her trial, so he let her."

Kassian's eyes widened, and Gerrin raised his hands even higher, taking a step forward. "Wait, wait. He has people tailing her from a safe distance. He wants to find out where she'll go so that he could condemn anyone who helps her instead of spending months digging into their pasts and dirty deals."

"He thinks she'll be stupid enough to go directly to her allies?" Kassian frowned.

"He thinks she is devastated, desperate, and scared and she might not think properly like before, so she'd make a mistake," Gerrin explained quickly. "He also disbanded those shadows, or whatever you call them, and unmasked anyone among them who was still alive. He said he plans to make them his personal guards, but without hiding their existence. I saw a few of them – they looked ordinary, I wouldn't have noticed them if he wasn't standing among them. And there were women among them too!"

"That might be for the best, considering everything that happened" Kassian murmured, sitting down in his chair and rubbing his forehead.

His week wasn't even up and it already felt like those blissful days he spent with Raena were just a sweet dream. "Is there anything else?"

"Well, um.." Gerrin said, suddenly sounding hesitant. Ka.ssian raised an eyebrow as he watched the other man scratch his head. "I am not sure if this is something concerning, but I thought you ought to know."

"What is it, Gerrin?" Ka.ssian sighed.

"Well, it's about your wife.. and that brothel guy that got stabbed." Ka.ssian tensed in his seat, his eyes narrowing. "I am not sure what their relationship is, but when we were lying low in his house after the Anniversary Bal, they looked pretty close. Close enough for her to nurse his wounds and change his bandages. Close enough for them to call each other by their first names." Ka.ssian gritted his teeth, closing his eyes and taking a big, calming breath. "I am not trying to start something."

The gods know everybody here wants you to be happy, but I don't want you to be blinded by your feelings either. Especially since I heard you're planning on disbanding your harem.

"Alright. Ill keep that in mind" Ka.ssian said, rubbing his forehead.

"That's it?" Gerrin's surprised voice reached him, and he opened his eyes to look at his friend's concerned face. "That's all you have to say?"

"What do you want me to say? Until I figure the nature of their relationship, it's pointless to do anything to that guy." Ka.ssian said, getting to his feet. Despite the reasonable words he forced out of his mouth and the calm expression he struggled to hold, his insides were boiling. He knew that the count had a close relationship with Madam Lydia, but his mind refused to believe that what they had was more than friendship. He knew she hadn't shared his bed for sure, since she was definitely a v!rgin when he made her his, but even the thought of Marden or anyone else touching her or k!ssing her was making him see red. "I'll deal with it. You can go if you don't have anything else to report."

Gerrin gave him a long, thoughtful look, then nodded, heading towards the door. Once alone, Ka.ssian sighed, leaning on his desk and rubbing his temples. Why did he have to go and say all of that? He knew Gerrin was only concerned, but now that he put that thought in his head, the damn thing refused to leave.

They had a good thing going with Raena – she had even told him she loved him yesterday. She was witty and funny, sweet but unyielding when she wanted something; she was smart and competent when it came to her work, smarter than him probably, but she didn't rub it in as Yulien did sometimes. But she was also too outspoken, too open-minded, too free-spirited. Even if Marden was just a friend, how could she touch other

men so casually when she was married? And the way Madam Lydia dressed and acted before...

Ka.ssian shook his head, trying to get rid of those thoughts. Nothing good could come from lingering in the past and thinking over things he didn't have all the facts about. They had kept enough secrets and deceived each other long enough. The best thing would be to confront her directly about it. He just had to find the right time.

Angry shouts came from outside the corridor and Ka.ssian raised his head, frowning.

"What now?" He sighed, pushing himself up and heading towards the door. Before he reached it, the said door opened and Lara stormed in with two of his attendants on her heels.

"You can't just barge into His Highness's quarters, Lady Lara!" One of them hissed with a terrified expression, then his eyes landed on Ka.ssian. The attendant doubled down immediately, his voice coming out even more panicky. "Please, forgive us, Your Highness! We tried to stop her but she wouldn't listen! Do you want us to call the guards to have her removed?"

Lara snarled at the man, then her angry eyes locked on Ka.ssian.

"It's fine, you can go," Ka.ssian dismissed them, and the two attendants quickly walked out. He moved his eyes to the woman, turning his back on her and striding to his desk. "Say what you came here to say and leave."

"You can't do this!" Lara barked in a tone laced with threat and desperation and not at all like the sweet, seductive voice she usually used around him. She looked different somehow – her clothes were just as tight and flattering and her dark hair was just as shiny and intricately arranged, but now when he looked at her all he felt was pity and guilt.

It was almost funny how just a few months ago that same face and body would bring him pleasure and comfort when he needed it while now the thought of her n.aked in his bed and ready to submit to any of his whims didn't stir a single emotion in any part of his body.

"Can't do what?" He asked coldly. He didn't want to be mean to her because, for all her flaws, she had been by his side for such a long time, but he knew that if he only gave an inch, she'll sink her teeth even deeper in him. "Choose what to do with my own harem?"

"You can't just toss me aside because you found a newer, shinier toy to play with!" She shouted. "I've been by your side for years! I gave up everything for you – my family, my

position at court, my youth, and now even my beauty! If you cast me aside, "I'll have nothing! I'll be nothing!"

"You'll all be taken care of," Ka.ssian said with a sigh. "And if you want to re-enter high society, I will arrange that. If there is anything else you need, say it."

"Let me stay," Lara said in a small voice, circling his desk and kneeling next to him, her hand resting on his knee. "I won't get in your way or your wife's. I won't complain about anything. And once you grow tired of her, I'll always be there to welcome you into my arms. That's how much I love you and I want to be with you. I know everything about you, what you like and dislike, what interests you and what bores you. I know how to satisfy you and make you relax, I know when to be quiet and when to talk. I.."

"For god's sake, Lara, have some pride. If I were you, I would have slapped him senseless by now." A familiar voice said and Ka.ssian raised his head, staring at Raena, who was leaning on the doorframe, rocking a small basket in one hand. "And while you're at it, please remove your hands from my husband's crotch, will you?"

"She is not touching my crotch," Ka.ssian said quickly, catching Lara's hand and pushing it off his knee. He got up from the chair and circled it while Lara rose to her feet, her previously teary expression turning almost feral. Raena continued to watch the other woman with a smile on her face, still swinging the basket from her finger as if waiting for something.

"All packed?" Raena asked, her smile widening. Ka.ssian could almost hear something break in Lara's head and a second later she took a few steps towards Raena. He prepared to intercept her, but then noticed the warning look Raena sent him and stopped. His wife returned her attention to the other woman, who was just preparing to speak.

"This is all your doing." Lara spat, venom dripping from her words. "You greedy, two-faced, violent...witch! You disrupted the peace of this place and threw everyone into chaos! Because of you, people are dead or badly hurt! Even now you're lying to everyone, even him! What, your guard boy couldn't satisfy you, so you decided to go for the bigger fish? Didn't you say you're not interested and I could have him for all you cared?"

"Things change, Lara. Try to keep up. Raena said in the same friendly tone, but there was nothing friendly in her eyes. "Oh, and by the way, it wasn't my idea to disband the harem. Well, not entirely. But I really won't be all that sad to see you go." She glanced towards the open door as if saying 'Now!' then returned her eyes to Lara. "Make sure you don't forget any of the gifts you received from His Highness. We wouldn't want anyone to get beaten for touching those by mistake."

"This isn't over," Lara said through gritted teeth, her hands balling into fists. Ka.ssian tensed, but Raena's calmness kept him in place.

"Yes, it is." His wife said, stepping away from the threshold, so she wasn't in Lara's way when she decided to leave. "Unless you want me to rearrange the other side of your face as well."

Lara's shoulders tensed and her hands shook as if she was holding herself back. She suddenly looked at Ka.ssiian, her eyes brimming with angry tears, then ran out the door, her steps echoing in the corridor. Raena stared at the door for a few seconds, then turned to him with a smile that looked like a mix of satisfaction and annoyance.

"Having some last-minute fun, for old time's sake?" Raena asked, raising an eyebrow. She strode to his desk and carefully put the basket on it, then turned to him again. When she raised an eyebrow, he realized he hadn't replied.

Ka.ssiian strode to her, reaching out and cupping her face. He ran a finger over her lower lip, gently forcing her mouth open, then leaned down and kissed her. She returned the kiss eagerly, wrapping a hand around his neck.

"I have eyes only for the future now," Ka.ssiian whispered as he pulled back. "Haven't I proven that already? What else do you want me to do?"

"I was teasing you." She laughed awkwardly, caressing his cheek. "I trust you." Ka.ssiian returned her smile, his eyes stopping on the basket.

"Alright, what's with the basket?" He sighed, reaching out and lifting one of the lids.

There was a box with a lid inside, as well as a metal flask. He raised an eyebrow, looking back at her.

"I figured you're working late, so I brought you strong coffee and non-sweet cookies made by yours truly." She said with a proud smile, pointing at herself. "I'm such a thoughtful wife, you should reward me."

"I should, shouldn't," He smirked, stepping forward and forcing her to back up to the desk. His lips found hers again and he slid his tongue into her mouth, reveling in that strange sweetness that made her taste so unique. Ka.ssiian picked her up and placed her on his desk, moving between her legs while his mouth explored the soft skin of her neck.

"Not that I am complaining, but that's not the reward I had in mind." She chuckled as he gathered her skirts up and slid his hands over her slender legs.

"Mmm? What do you want then?" Ka.ssiian asked distractedly, reaching out for the ties on her back.

"I want to go out." She said with a hint of caution in her voice. Ka.ssiian froze for a second, then pulled back to look at her. "I know you said it's still not entirely safe, but I

need to go to the restaurant and fix things on the spot. After being blamed for assisting the rebels, the restaurant's name and reputation are shattered. They need to see a new face and new management taking over or the place might as well crumble. And I need to help Marden get the brothel back on track or that business will go under too. He said he'll be able to meet me there since he is now mobile, and we have a lot to go over."

"No," Kassian said without thinking. She gave him a pleading smile, running her finger over his chest.

"I'll take as many guards as you want me to. It's just that I need to be there. I did all I could do from here. Besides, you said so yourself- the rebels would have escaped by now and would be reorganizing. Now is safer than it would be later on when they can do something." She continued with that pleading look, her fingers running circles over his chest while her legs kept rubbing against his.

His body betrayed him, desire stirring with every touch and growing by the second, but his mind remained surprisingly clear. And one name kept echoing in it louder and louder.

"What's your exact relationship with Count Robick?" He asked before he could stop himself and her smile froze on her lips, her eyebrows rising.

"Marden?" she asked and Kassian's jaw tightened. "We're friends and business partners. Nothing more."

"Are you sure?" He asked, studying her face for even the hint of hesitation or deceit. Her eyes were calm, but she wasn't smiling anymore.

"Yes, Kassian, I am sure. There has never been anything more between me and him." She said with a sigh. "You don't have to be jealous of him or anyone else." She jumped off his desk, wiggling out of his hands before he could stop her. "Should I assume the answer is no?"

"It's too risky. Wait some more time." He said turning to look at her. She stood with her back to him, facing the door, until she nodded. "Don't try to sneak out. It really is not safe."

"Got it." She said, still not turning. "Drink the coffee while it's still warm."

"Raena.." He sighed, taking a step towards her, but she headed towards the door as if she didn't hear him, disappearing into the corridor without another word.

Kassian groaned in frustration, looking back at the basket and the pile of scrolls waiting for him before heading towards the desk.

His Highness's Second Wife Chapter 99 - Tips

0 9 minutes read

“Are you sure you don’t want to get in with me?” Raena asked as she sunk into the pool to her chin, looking at Kara, who was lying comfortably on one of the sunbathing chairs. Her maid had declined the offer to wear one of the extra swimsuits Raena had made for guests, saying that they were too revealing for her, and was now lying in her dress with her skirts lifted to her knees and a serene expression on her face. “It’s one of your last chances. Fall is almost here and soon it would be too cold for the outside pool.”

“I’ve survived over twenty years without using an outside pool. I’m sure I’ll manage.” Kara murmured without opening her eyes and Raena scoffed, turning her back on her and swimming across the pool. The water was cool and refreshing and if it wasn’t for the wind that picked up from time to time, the weather would have been perfect.

It’s not like she had anything to do and sitting still in the mansion was driving her crazy. She had even finished her other work ahead of time.

“His Highness hasn’t been around that much these days,” Kara said suddenly after Raena had crossed the pool a few times. Raena swam to the edge, catching herself on it and wiping her face before looking at her friend. Kara was watching her now, a thoughtful look on her face. “A few days ago you were practically joined at the hip. Is everything alright between you?”

“What are you, a psychic?” Raena grimaced. “We’re fine. I think.” Raena leaned her hands over the edge of the pool, resting her chin on them. “I think he is annoyed that I insist to go back to the restaurant and every time I mention a man’s name, he gets this look like he is imagining me having sex with them. What am I supposed to do, sit here for the rest of my life as a houseplant and bask in his light whenever he sees fit to shine on me?”

“Well, that’s a very unappealing way of putting it, but most women don’t mind. Besides, it’s not like there is nothing to do the whole residence needs running, noble ladies are expected to host social events and attend such. You can also pick out a hobby like embroidering or do some drawing, or even learn to ride a horse. Don’t look down on others just because you prefer a different lifestyle.”

“I didn’t mean it like that...” Raena sighed, pushing herself off the edge and submerging herself under water. When she swam up, Kara was sitting up and still watching her. “I just don’t do that for myself. I enjoy running a restaurant and I enjoy being among people. And I don’t want to change that – which I have told him. And I am not interested in other men – which I have also told him.”

Kara gave her a smile full of pity and Raena rolled her eyes, twisting around and preparing to do another lap when the sound of approaching steps made them both turn. The steps stopped right outside the of the cloth surrounding the space and a woman cleared her throat.

"Your Highness, you have a visitor." The servant announced.

"Who?"

"It's. um, His Highness, the Crown Prince."

The servant said with a shaky voice. Raena forgot to keep kicking with her legs and sunk down, but quickly swam up and spat the water that had invaded her gaping mouth. She glanced at Kara, who seemed equally surprised, then looked back at the spot where the servant was staying.

"Did he say why he's here?" Raena asked, swimming towards the edge and climbing out of the pool.

"He said he would like to have a conversation with you." The servant replied. "He also said he is curious to see your outdoor pool since he had heard so much about it."

"The heck?" Raena muttered, accepting the long robe Kara offered her and wrapping herself tightly in it. She wiped her face and glanced towards the water, then sighed. "Fine. Bring him here."

"Do you think this is such a good idea?" Kara asked in a hushed voice.

Raena spread her hands and turned towards her.

"This thing covers more than my dresses do. And he is Kassian's brother, if he is jealous of his own brother, there is something wrong with his head." Raena said, and Kara gave her a pointed look before raising her hands in surrender.

They waited for a couple of minutes until the sound of steps returned, this time of three people. The cloth was pulled aside and one of the maids stepped in, holding it up. Yulien lowered his head as he stepped through, smiling brightly as his eyes took in the surroundings before stopping on Raena. She noticed his bodyguard trailing behind him, but the scary-looking man remained outside.

The maid stepped out as well, leaving them to stare awkwardly at each other.

Kara cleared her throat and Raena quickly curtsied, feeling entirely foolish in doing it in a bathrobe.

"There is no need for that," Yulien said quickly, waving his head. "There are no other people here, so we can discard the formalities."

When Raena raised her head, he was moving around, eyes inspecting everything with wild curiosity as if he was making measurements and calculations in his head. He stopped by the sunbathing chairs and stared at them before looking at Raena with a raised eyebrow.

“You lie on that and sunbathe. You can get a nice tan and relax under the sun.” She explained and he nodded in understanding, glancing towards the clear afternoon sky. He then crouched down by the water and dipped his fingers into it.

“The sun warms it.” He said, smiling at her approvingly. “But I guess it will be too cold soon “

“Yes, this is a summer activity.” Raena nodded, glancing towards Kara, who just shrugged her shoulders. “May I ask what is the reason for your visit, Your Highness? You must be really busy at the Imperial palace with... everything.”

He flashed her another tight-lipped smile, then got up and shook the water off his hand. He wiped his fingers on his pants then looked back at them.

“Can I try this?” He asked, pointing at the pool. Raena’s eyes widened.

“Are you serious?” She asked without thinking.

“Yes, I find new ideas fascinating and as you said, this can only be done during the summer.” He said, throwing his hands in the air. “If you find it uncomfortable, I understand.”

Raena hesitated, glancing towards Kara whose eyes screamed ‘NO! loud and clear. What Kara didn’t know, though, was that they stood in the presence of the future Emperor and they couldn’t Just say no to him.

“Kara, please bring His Highnessa bathing suit” Raena said, hoping she wouldn’t regret her decision. Kara didn’t move for a second but then quickly disappeared out of the encirclement. When Raena looked back at Yulien, he seemed confused.

“It’s something you wear when you swim. I can’t really have you here naked, can I, Your Highness?”

“of course not.” He said with an incline of his head, then continued to look around until Kara returned. Raena stepped outside while he changed, glancing at his guard, who regarded her with a silent nod of the head. A loud splash came from behind her and a moment later Kara lifted the cloth, giving her a hard look before stepping out.

“I’ll go bring you some refreshments, Mistress.” She said in a bitingly polite tone, walking away before Raena could tell her to send some of the other servants nearby. Once she lost sight of Kara’s back, Raena took a deep breath and stepped on the other

side by the pool, gaze stopping on the figure in it that was running his hands through the water with almost childish glee in his eyes.

"This is nice." He said while she made her way to one of the chairs. "I'll have them make one in the Imperial Palace if you don't mind."

"You can do whatever you want when you become Emperor, Your Highness," Raena said, crossing her legs and making sure her robe was covering them. Yulien glanced at her with a mysterious smile, then returned to playing with the water. His long, dark hair was falling down his back, sticking to his neck and shoulders. "Why are you here, Your Highness? Are you looking for Ka.ssian?"

"You're calling each other by your first names now, that's cute." He laughed. "I did go to the Main Palace first, but I was told he was out following a lead on the Craidal insurgents. So I dropped by to see you instead. I have something want to discuss."

"With me?" She asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Alright, what is it?"

"I want you to come work with me," Yulien said without hesitation, making his way towards the edge of the pool where she was sitting. "To make the Empire better, I need smart people with new, fresh ideas and a lot of courage to stand for them. I need people who won't bend when offered money or break when pushed against the wall. I believe you're such a person. You also seem to have an acute knowledge of business and trade and you are good at making opportunities for yourself. Also, you have a way with people and you can work a man into doing whatever you want – and that would be helpful for you since most of the people working for me right now are men."

"I don't think your brother would like that very much." Raena pointed out with a sour smile.

"Probably not." Yulien chuckled, looking away. "He'll probably even get angry at me for offering you this, but my duty is to my country first and to my family second. And missing on utilizing a good asset is practically a crime in my book."

"Is that how you view people? By how useful they could be to you?" Raena asked, leaning her head on her hand.

"For regular people, judging people through the prism of their emotions and moral values may be normal, but the higher your position is and the more people you're responsible for, the less those emotions and values matter. It doesn't matter if a man beats his wife every night or gets pleasure from watching people cry in pain as long as he can lead men into battle and come back victorious or create a solution to a problem others find unsolvable. It might sound ugly to you, but when you're in my position, you

see a lot of ugly and evil things. And sometimes you need to pick to the lesser evil to win against the bigger evil. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Yeah," Raena murmured, scratching her forehead. "It's still a very sad and lonely way to live

"True." Yulien smiled, completely undisturbed by the pity in her eyes. "That's why I keep amusing people like you and your husband close by. It was entertaining to see how your drama unfolded, almost like watching a play."

Raena had to try really hard not to scowl or roll her eyes.

"You're making it really hard to like you sometimes, Your Highness." Raena pointed out.

Yulien laughed, pushing himself off the edge of the pool and heading for the other end.

"So?" He asked when he returned. "What is your answer?"

"I politely decline, Your Highness," Raena said, meeting his eyes. "For one, I do not see people the way you do. If I learn someone is beating his wife every night, I might have his balls cut off, no matter if he is the strongest commander of the army or the smartest person in the world. And also, you pushed my husband to pick up on an occupation for which he clearly doesn't have the mindset. I think he needs me here way more than you do there."

Yulien stared at her with a smile, then shook his head.

"To think I'll be jealous of my little brother." He sighed, chuckling to himself. "My wife will most definitely leave me if I wasn't next in line for the throne."

"Then maybe give your wife another reason to stay." Raena shrugged. "Looks fade and power isn't everything."

Yulien laughed, glancing towards the chair next to her. Raena followed his gaze to the neatly folded towel, then she got to her feet, picking it up.

Yulien hoisted himself up and Raena covered her mouth, trying to hold back her laughter. When she met his confused eyes, she lost it, bursting into laughter. His confusion seemed to grow as she covered her eyes, handing him the towel.

"What?" He said impatiently.

"I'm sorry, this." Raena kept laughing trying to catch her breath. "That's really not a good look on you. Especially since my maid must have made a mistake and given you a bottom that is supposed to be worn by a woman."

“That explains why it was so tight,” Yulien said, thoughtfully while wrapping the towel around himself with an exasperated sigh. Raena burst into laughter again, her attempt at composing herself turning utterly unsuccessful.

His Highness's Second Wife Chapter 100 - Tips

3 9 minutes read

Ka.ssian rubbed his stiff neck as he walked the path leading to the North Palace, his mood worsening after tripping for a second time, wondering if he had ordered these stupid roads to be fixed already. The walls needed fixing too, and it wasn't going to be a bad idea to make a second gate closer to the North Palace, since the distance to the main one was too big. But making a second gate meant creating a second access point, which wasn't ideal when it came to protection.

Maybe he could just make Raena move into the Main Palace with him so everything was closer. She'd probably refuse since she seemed to like the North Palace after its renovation. She seemed comfortable there, happy.

“Your Highness.” The guards at the gate greeted him, saluting in unison, and he was just about to walk in when he noticed the group of men waiting nearby. They weren't his guards because they didn't wear his colors, so it took him a minute to recognize Yulien's crest on their chests.

Frowning, he stepped through the gate, his pace quickening as she made his way to the mansion. The front door opened and a pair of maids stepped out, so taken by their conversation that they didn't even notice him approaching.

“Do you really believe that?” One of them said in a small voice. “The Crown Prince?”

“I didn't see it with my own eyes,” the second one replied with a shrug, “but Mera came into the kitchen just a few minutes ago and said the Crown Prince arrived unannounced and now they are both in the swimming pool together.”

Ka.ssian felt his chest tighten, his head turning scarily light before filling with anger to the brim. The two maids finally noticed him and their faces paled, eyes widening with panic. They both bowed down, mumbling a greeting that pulled him back to reality.

“Get out of my way.” Ka.ssian snapped, and they quickly jumped aside, clearing his way to the door. He stomped past them, his treacherous mind painting vivid pictures of Raena in that revealing white swimsuit in the pool with his brother. He had never doubted Yulien's orders or advice before, but he never expected his brother, who had everything a man could wish for, to cross the line and reach for something that was his.

Ka.ssian burst through the door leading to the back garden and ran down the stairs, trying to keep a steady pace without running like an idiot.

The closer he got to the small group of trees, the quicker his steps became until he was between the trees and the sound of Raena's happy laughter was ringing in his head.

He took the distance in a few seconds, ignoring the small group of servants as well as Vyn, who was standing outside the encirclement of cloth, eyes darting in every direction as if expecting danger. When he noticed Ka.ssian, the guard tensed, but didn't move to stop him.

Ka.ssian pushed the cloth out of his way, balling his hand into a fist so he couldn't reach for his sword. His eyes scanned the place for a second before settling on Yulien and Raena standing next to each other – him with nothing but a towel around his waist and her with just a thin robe around her slender body. Both turned to look at him as he appeared. Raena's eyes were teary from the laughter, cheeks flushed from staying in the sun too long – or maybe from enjoying herself too much.

Yulien looked his usual poised self, even half-naked and dripping wet.

The anger boiling inside of Ka.ssian erupted with full force, his vision blurring from all the emotions brewing inside of him. Yulien's smile dropped.

"What the hell, Yulien?" Ka.ssian asked with a trembling voice, staring at his brother with disappointment for the first time in his life. "I can't believe you."

"First off, calm down," Yulien said, taking a step away from Raena. "Second off, we were just talking. Nothing happened here."

"Is that why you're both naked?" Ka.ssian spat.

"We're not naked," Raena said defensively, crossing her arms. "And we were..."

"Shut up." Ka.ssian interrupted her, and her eyes widened, hurt and offense appearing on her face. A small voice in his head told him he really needed to calm down, but the other voices kept whispering of scenarios that made him shudder and each of them ended with Raena leaving or being taken away from him. For his twenty-five years of age, he had never really wanted or needed anything; he could part with his family, his residence, his concubines, and his wealth in an instant, and he could continue on living without a problem. But ever since she came into his life and forced her way into his head and heart, the fear of losing was born. And it was scarier than any enemy he had ever faced on the battlefield.

"Hey!" Raena spoke again, her voice trembling with anger. "Let's talk for a moment. Your Highness, please excuse us."

Yulien nodded. Raena strode to Ka.ssian and grabbed his hand, pulling him away. He thought of resisting for a second, throwing his brother another angry look, but then he let her drag him past Vyn and through the trees until the pool was out of their sight. She let go of his hand and turned to face him, her anger almost as devastating as his.

“What the hell, Ka.ssian? You looked like you were going to attack your brother! The future Emperor! Are you out of your mind?” She hissed, throwing her hands in the air. “He was just here to...”

“Am I out of my mind?” He interrupted her, gritting his teeth to stop back the storm of hurtful words that were threatening to spill. “Raena, you’re half-naked in the presence of another man! What were you thinking? Does our marriage mean that little to you? Am I a joke to you?”

“What are you talking about?” She shaped, spreading her arms. “I’m covered from neck to ankles! What more do you want? And we were talking! About you! And this is your brother, not some random man!”

“My brother is also a man!” Ka.ssian shouted.

“I know that! But just because he is a man doesn’t mean he wants to do anything to me or me to him!” She screamed back. “Can you get it through your thick head that I have no desire to cheat on you with anyone! But I also have no desire to be locked away in a pretty house waiting day and night for you to fill my day with something to do!”

“I never said.” Ka.ssian growled, but she stepped towards him, pointing a finger at his face.

“Don’t!” she shouted. “I agreed not to go out because it was unsafe, but I’ve sent servants out for days and they report there is absolutely nothing out of ordinary happening in the city! There are more guards than usual, the streets are being patrolled, there is curfew! How much safer does it have to be for me to go out? Do you need to evacuate the whole capital? And since when does your aide need to babysit me when I meet with Marden and other business partners? And if that is not enough, don’t think I haven’t noticed that half of my male workers are replaced by women! I get a little jealousy is healthy for a relationship, but you’re looking like a maniac!”

“How am I supposed to trust any word you say when you’re such a good liar!” Ka.ssian shouted without thinking. The moment the words left his lips he regretted it, seeing the shock on her face that gradually gave place to a calm, expressionless look. He closed his eyes, pinching the bridge of his nose and cursing under his breath. When he opened them, she was still looking at him, but her eyes were cold, withdrawn.

“Well,” she said in a barely controlled voice.

“At least now we know where we stand.” She forced a smile on her lips, but there was no joy or affection in it. Kassian shuddered. “Now that you’ve had your fill of the body you have been lusting over for months, you see things clearer, huh? Well, good for you! It’s also so lucky that you still have Lara around since, apparently, she is too sick to leave right now. Unbelievable...”

She turned to leave, shaking her head, but he reached out and grabbed her hand. She spun around, glaring at him and pulling her arm, but he refused to let go.

“I have nothing to do with Lara and she will be leaving the moment she gets better. And we’re not done talking, you can’t just leave.” He said harshly, tightening his grip when she tried to wiggle her hand out of his hold. “Stop. You’ll hurt yourself.”

“Let go!” She said in a small voice, stubbornly trying to break free. Her eyes remained on their hands, and as he looked closer, he noticed tears swelling in them, which she was desperately trying to hide. His anger disappeared in an instant and just as he loosened his grip, she yanked her hand back, almost pulling it free. Kassian gritted his teeth, catching both of her wrists.

“No. We’re going to talk this out.” He said, much calmer than before. The bitter taste of regret lingered on his tongue.

“No, I don’t want to talk to you right now. Let go” She squirmed, thrashing against him. “Kassian, I swear, if you don’t let me go this very instant I will file for divorce today and if your brother is half as bad as you think him to be, he will give me permission to leave you!” Kassian froze, his blood slowly turning to ice. His fingers opened, and she stepped back immediately, staggering a few steps before finding her balance. She rubbed her wrists, glaring at him.

“A partnership without trust has no future.” She said quietly while blinking rapidly, as if to stop her tears from spilling down her pale cheeks. “Please leave. I don’t want to look at you right now.”

She turned around while he fought to find the right words to stop her, and she ran towards the mansion barefooted. Kassian balled his hand into a fist, bumping his forehead a few times in hope that would help him get rid of all the stupidity that had piled up in there. He had let his emotions get the best of him again and made another mistake.

Nothing he had said was a lie, but still, he shouldn’t have said that. Especially that he didn’t trust her.

“Argh!” He cried angrily, pulling out his sword and swinging it at the nearest tree until the blade sunk deep into the trunk. He tried to pull it out but his hands were shaking too much and the weapon refused to move, so he just left it there, leaning on his knees and trying to catch his breath.

“Ka.ssian.”

Ka.ssian froze, staring at the blanket of leaves on the ground before slowly rising and turning to face his brother. Yulien had dressed already, but his hair was still falling wet around his shoulders. He wore a serious expression, and his eyes were full of disapproval.

“I don’t need a lecture right now…” Ka.ssian said in warning.

“You’re too old to be lectured,” Yulien said without a hint of amusement. “But you’re still acting like a spoiled child sometimes.” Ka.ssian was about to snap at him when Yulien raised his hand, his eyes hardening. “All I am going to say is this: I came to the North Palace to offer Raena a job at the Palace, but she refused. She said her husband needs her help more than I do so her place is here.”

Yulien took a few steps towards him and Ka.ssian noticed Vyn trailing close behind, his hand casually resting on the hilt of his sword. “I am not saying you should trust her in all things considering your past, but I can tell you one thing. Your jealousy is unwarranted. That woman loves you and she is not interested in anyone else. The only way you can lose her is if you keep pushing her yourself.”

Ka.ssian lowered his eyes to the ground, gritting his teeth. Yulien stopped next to him, placing his hand on his shoulder.

“Give her some space to cool down, then apologize. I’m sure you’ll work it out.” Yulien squeezed his shoulder, but Ka.ssian didn’t react. “I know you may not be in the mood right now, but come with me. I need to discuss something with you. It’s time to hit Craidal back.”