



## Chapter 24

My bags were taken from the car and carried inside the house by a large man in a seamless red vest and black undershirt. He didn't speak, not a single word of hello or his name; just a grunt when he closed the trunk.

Come to think of it, nobody had said a word to me since I stepped out of the car. They were all just watching Darian, as though they waited for an order before they could breath.

I looked at every corner, window sill, around the buildings that stood on the property and at the road leading down from the stable where warriors dressed in uniform were getting of their saddles.

There were stairs leading down the side of the castle, they disappeared down behind a trimmed hedge with lilac flowers growing around the rustic railing.

I needed to know that there was an escape route before I entered his house. Once I was inside there was no telling what would happen to me but I needed to know the places where I could hide if I needed to run. Or for when I planned to leave.

Because I would, there was not a chance in hell that I would stay with the devil in his lair. Given how controlling he was outside of his house I could imagine the iron fist he ruled with once we stepped in and the doors closed. I shivered, hearing the doors in my mind closing and seeing him in the darkness with his glowing eyes being the only light to shine through the dark. Would he lock me in a room or chain me to a wall? Would we share a bed? Nothing that my mind made up did anything to calm me down and I turned my foot an inch, wondering what would happen if I ran down that road leading away from the palace.



"Are you ready, puppet?"

I felt my heart sink into my gut and my nerves jumble together in a nest.

I turned back and looked at Darian, his green eyes suddenly reveling something other than rage.

Though I wasn't sure if the amusement I saw in them was much better.

I gulped and nodded my head as I walked towards him. Darian's jaw clenched, he gritted his teeth and I stopped in my tracks.

"Yes what, Hazel?" He walked up to me, closing the distance between us.

everyone passed us like they were on a mission. We weren't invisible yet nobody made an attempt to look our way.

Could he kill me right here and now without anyone blinking an eye? Perhaps someone would come with a bucket of water and a broom to clean up the mess. I would stop existing without anyone here even knowing my name.

"Jeez are you done, you ghoul?"

"Don't tell me you're not having the same thoughts," I snarked back.

"In much less detail, Hazel. Why would he go through the trouble of choosing us, marking us and bringing us here if he was going to kill us before we even reached the threshold?"

"Maybe it's all a part of his twisted game,"

"This isn't a game to him, this is our new life." She said and stood beside me in the front of my mind.



"Remember where you are. You will want to answer me, puppet,"

Every time he said puppet I could see my reflection in his eyes; the way that my head hung and my eyes glossed over as they fought to hide my fear.

"Yes, sir," I said in an exhale with my chest pushed out and my head raised high.

No matter what happened, he wouldn't see me afraid.

At least I hoped he wouldn't.

"Good girl,"

He waited for me to walk before he moved from his spot. I took one shaky step after the other and dragged my body up the stairs and into the palace.

The only positive that came to mind was the fact that I could probably disappear with ease in this place. It was huge and I could only image all the hidden knuks I would find. 2

I was too busy taking it all in to notice the woman strutting into the room with an award winning smile and stretched out arms. It wasn't until I heard the high squeal and her heels clicking into the marble that I turned my head and watched as she threw herself into Darians arms. She grabbed his face and shoved her tongue into his mouth. He opened his eyes and the intense gaze locked on me as his tongue tasted every inch of her mouth. They devoured each other but his eyes reminded on me, so much so that the intensity of his gaze became too much and I had to look away.

"Miss Grey," the older maid who looked like she hadn't smiled in decades stood proudly at the bottom of the stairs.



She stared with a scowl and her wrinkly lips turned down in a frown.

"Yes?" I said.

"Your room has been prepared. Please follow me."

I prayed that the others in this place had more common decency to make the new girl feel at least slightly welcome.

Or maybe they would all see me as the king's puppet and keep their distance. Maybe they didn't expect me to last for very long.

She held one wrinkly hand in the other and it reminded me of my grandmother; her wrinkly hands carrying trays of cookies out into the backyard and us sitting there for hours talking. But then I looked up at the frumpy face.

"Thank you," I started walking towards the stairs when his voice filled the foyer.

"Stop."

I froze and slowly turned. The girl had her tongue back in her mouth but her lipstick was smeared on both their faces and his hand was resting on the small of her back. Scratch that, it was lower and dropping as I turned.

"Aren't you going to introduce yourself?" He asked.

I'd rather die...

She looked about as excited to meet me as I was about meeting her.

"I'm Abby, the king's mistress," she held out her manicured hand, fingers pointing down as though she wanted me to kiss it.



I flicked my braid over my shoulder to give her a clear view of my neck.

"I'm Hazel, the king's chosen mate," I grabbed her hand and watched her lips twitch in a smirk. An odd reaction when I thought she wanted to claw my eyes out.



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