

The Selection: Bride Of The Dark Dragon Chapter 1 -

MIRA

“You are fighting like a girl!”, Derek chuckles and immediately gets a pulsar into his face. Not big, not strong, but enough to shut his mouth before I launch my next attack, which swipes him off his feet and lets me put a blade to his neck.

“You were saying?”, I smirk at my sparring partner and notice in the corner of my eye Rick and Norton laughing. Big mistake. As this is when Der knocks me down with a masterful kick on my legs and is on top of me in seconds, breathing heavily.

“Every freaking time!”, he wriggles his eyebrows and he is definitely much closer to me when he should be. That’s why it’s so easy to kick him on his jewels and push him off.

“Every freaking time!”, I mimic him as he rolls on the floor.

“Still my win, this is a prohibited move”, he gr0ans through the pain.

“Who cares, you know far too well that in real life situation the win would be mine”, I snort and give him a hand to help him up.

He bounces quickly and holds his head high. And this is why he is the leader of our tiny team. Always under control, always ready to fight. Again and again. And also because he is open-minded. When I just got into the Royal Academy of Magical Arts and joined the faculty of Battle Magic, no one wanted to pair with me in fights or even in classroom experiments. I was an outcast. A girl who dared to dream of being a warrior. It wasn’t unheard of, but usually, the girls who joined were the bigger and stronger ones. And I was a girly girl. The one with long red locks and a slender frame with curves where needed, the one wearing pretty dresses and make-up. So, yeah, no one was happy and they all thought I’ve just made a mistake and would drop out soon enough. Until one day Derek personally chose me as a member of his battle team and his sparring partner. Everyone thought that he was crazy or just wanted to date me. But nope, none of those things. I personally thought that he took me in out of pity. But considering that he hasn’t shown mercy on me in battle even once I don’t think that it was that either.

But when our team outperformed everyone at the Academy's most important yearly tournament and not without my help it became clear – he is just a natural-born leader and has a good eye for warriors. As he told me later, he saw that I was the Diamond in the rough. And that's how Diamond or Di became my nickname in the team. But oh well. I guess it could be worse.

The four of us went to get some water and take a well-earned rest when a sharp pain pierced through my heart. I dropped my flask and screamed, the pain was unbearable. Hot, so hot!

“Di! Di!”, Derek tries to shake me and looks at me with horror in his eyes, “What happened? Does it hurt? Mira, please say something! Was it me? Did I break something?”

Mira... He almost never calls me that...

Unable to breathe, I tear off the top buttons of my training costume trying to get to the source of my pain. I notice how the boys' faces flush red at my action and Derek, who still holds me in his arms doesn't look like he is able to breathe...

Heart, my heart is on fire. Something is there. Something that shouldn't be and I want to claw it out!

I finally get to it, the area just above my breast and see the eyes of my teammates looking in there... with horror and shock.

“Mira!”, Derek pushes me into him and embraces me tightly. His voice sounds as if he was in...pain? Why? What happened? What did he see?

Slowly, my pain goes away and I am able to breathe normally again. But it's a while till I come back to reality and realize that Derek is still holding me in his arms. What the hell?

I push him away slightly and see the faces of my friends. They looked like I am dead already... Why? Why would they...

I quickly look at the area that still stings a bit and freeze. It can't be! It just can't! Not possible! No!

And yet the Mark of The Dark ones is there, shining dark purple light – the dark magic... The pattern is known by anyone in the Kingdom. The sign that

takes away my freedom forever. With that, I just lost everything and I will have to leave the Academy without even graduating. And what's worse, I will have to enter the one thing I detest more than anything – The Dark Selection. The infamous event where the dark Lords of the neighboring Gerdian Empire, will be choosing their brides among human girls. And the girls have no say in anything that is going on there. As soon as the mark arrives, they become the property of the Empire. Dolls, destined for one purpose only... creating offsprings for the Dark ones and looking pretty by their side.

"It can't be...", I mumble and look at my friends again, met with dead silence. Der and Rick are looking at me with sadness in their eyes, while Norton simply turns away and hits the wall next to him.

"Do you want to take part in that?", Dereck asks me after a while.

"Do I look to you like someone who would enjoy something like that?!", I s****m and finally come back to my senses.

Derek then quickly comes to me and takes a scarf off his neck, wrapping it around me to cover the mark.

"Hide it then", he hurries, "Rick, Nort, make sure no one saw us now. Check the corridors behind the training room."

The guys follow his orders and I just watch them absentmindedly.

"Mira", the leader takes my face into his hands and turns me to look at him, "It's going to be ok. We will hide you and get rid of the mark. They will have to take someone else instead of you. We are mages, after all, I am sure we can figure something out!"

"They will find me!", I almost cry.

"No, you are not alone. We are a team, Mira, and we are going to protect you! Now, let me walk you to your room. Sit there until I come back. Got it?"

"Yeah", I sigh.

Back in my room at the dorm, I am still distressed. I take a shower, trying to bring my thoughts into order. Standing in front of a mirror, I take a look at the mark. For a second it feels that it suddenly gets darker in the room and harder

to breathe. I notice a strange shadow in my window and run towards it. But nothing... Nothing is there...

“It’s just your imagination, Mira!”, I say to myself trying to calm down once again, changing into my silk nightgown and getting into bed.

For a second it seems that if I get to sleep this nightmare would be over once I am up. And at that thought the darkness consumes me...