

## **The Selection: Bride Of The Dark Dragon Chapter 21 - Tips**

“No!”, I scream, “No, no, no!”

But it's useless – all my things are gone again. Another thought hits me... Just how did they know? I quickly run to the wardrobe room and grab a silver silk dressing-gown and put it on quickly. Of course, under so much stress, I can't even get with my hand into the right hole and almost fall down. But then I realize that it's too late. And if somebody is here – he or she (but probably he) has already seen me!

I breathe out and hold my head high and back straight, putting on the dressing gown slowly and carefully and tying it at my waist with a silk belt. Breathe, Mira, breathe!

I carefully walk out and look around. But the room is empty. I am most definitely here alone. Then how did they...? Or maybe it's just some kind of spell that someone placed on my room to destroy anything that might make me at least a little bit happy?

I patrol around my rooms once again and ... nothing. I am on my own here. Signing, I take my battle daggers with me to bed. Not that they can help me a lot here, but I just feel more comfortable with at least some kind of weapon next to me.

Originally intending for a bath, I take a quick shower instead. And then I am forced to pick another piece of underwear from a vast collection that Lord Derrien purchased for me. And to top this off – I slid into a very revealing lacy nightgown in black silk – with deep slits on each side. It hardly covers anything, if I am completely honest. So I put the dressing gown from before on top of it. Shame the nightgown Bella gave me has disappeared as well.

I take a quick glance at the mirror as well and put on the nightgown, climbing onto the bed with my babies – my daggers. It's been an exhausting few days and I haven't slept the previous night, so the darkness consumes me fast.

I stand in front of Derrien's door, debating whether to knock or not. I haven't seen him for so long and I miss him. I need him!

The door opens on its own and I hear a low chuckle, "I knew you would change your mind, little mage! Come in!"

I walk into his spacious rooms and see him! He is sitting on top of his black sofa wearing nothing but his pants. Everything else is off somewhere... I gulp as this is the first time I see him man half-naked. My cheeks flush but I am unable to take my eyes off him. Because I like what I see! He has so many muscles- oh, gods! I thought he is just big and strong, but the relief of his muscles tells me that he works out daily. Hard! Dereck and the guys from the Academy worked out too, but no one had results similar to Derrien Derwood's!

Wait, did I really just think that? I should get out of here immediately! What am I even doing here? How did I get here? I have no idea where his room really is, so how in heaven did I get here?

"Come here, little mage", Derrien gestures for me to join him on the sofa. No, no way! I am not going!

And yet I do. It's as if my body doesn't listen to me anymore. Something else controls it. Is it him? Is it another sick way of his to humiliate me?

When I am right next to him, he pulls me by my hand and I end up on his lap.

"Gods, Mira," his hand slides across my shoulder and to my waist when I realize that I came to him in that provocative lacy nightdress and the silk dressing-gown, "You are definitely here to tempt me!"

"Lord Derrien", I flap my eyelashes and look down. Something is forming right under my thighs.

"Tell me, Mira, why did you come to me at this hour wearing next to nothing?", his husky voice tickles my ear.

"I...I couldn't sleep. I was thinking about you the whole time", I say. But not really. That's not me. That's just my body behaving on its own. And I am really just a witness inside. What the chaos?! I can feel everything she feels, I can hear her thoughts, but it's like we are two different persons!

"You told me that you don't want anything to do with me", he turns away from me but that other me grasps his face in her hands.

“I was afraid!”, she says, looking into his eyes where dark magic flashes already, “I’ve never felt this way about a man! I’ve never...”

“You never what?”, he raises his brow, pulling a lock of hair off my...her...our face.

“I’ve never wanted a man like that!” she spills and flashes red.

“Good”, he chuckles, “And now apologize properly little mage”.

“H-how?”, she is afraid to look at him and so am I.

“Like that”, he takes her chin and slams his lip into hers, plunging his tongue inside. The me that is not really me, entwines her fingers in his hair and moans loudly into his lips.

“Derrien!”, she calls his name as he starts showering her neck with kisses.

“Rien”, he says in between, “Just call me Rien.”

“Gods! Rien!”, I almost shout when he pulls the belt of my silky dressing gown and then pushes it lightly off my shoulders, and taking in what he sees, trailing my forms with his fingers.

“You are so beautiful, Mira”, he whispers at the same time as he removes one of the two straps that hold the whole thing on me, “So beautiful and all mine... Say it!”

His kisses get lower and lower, making me lose my mind.

“I am yours, Rien!”, I say and arch my back in his hands.

He grabs me by my neck, “What did you just say?” The angry voice echoes around my room when I realize that it’s not Derrien. Lord Ryden Dargen holds me firmly against my bed, pressing me into the mattress by my throat.

“How dare you, Mira?! How dare you?!”

## **The Selection: Bride Of The Dark Dragon Chapter 22 - Tips**

MIRA

Gods, what is going on even? He is going to k!ll me!

His grasp on my neck is so strong, I try to pull his hand away, but Ryden Dargen is not even flinching at that.

“Please!”, I hiss in my already hoarse voice and, trying, to struggle, accidentally kick the sheets off. The man’s eyes fall on my body and he eases his grip, letting me breathe at least a little bit and I greedily gasp for air.

“You angered me, Mira!”, Ryden says finally, now his thumb stroking my neck soothingly.

“W-why, lord Dargen?”, I bring myself to ask although I am not sure I want to know.

“What you just said...”, he moves his hand to grab my chin and force me to look at him, “It’s absolutely unacceptable!”

“W-what did I say?”, I mumble, “I don’t remember...”

He stays quiet for a while and then I literary feel that he smirks, even though I don’t see it.

“Good”, he is now brushing his palm over my cheek, “It doesn’t matter anymore. I overreacted a bit, Mira...”

Overreacted? A bit? The man is insane! He almost k!lled me!

I carefully slip my fingers under my pillow and feel the cold metal of my daggers. It’s not the time to use them now and I doubt that they would help against a gerdian lord who possesses dark magic, but just knowing that they are there helps me to keep calm in this absolutely crazy kind of situation.

My eyes adjust to the darkness and I can finally see Ryden’s face. His eyes are traveling up and down my body and I am just happy that I decided to put the dressing gown on top of my very provocative nightdress.

“I think it’s time for us to get to know each other better, Mira”, he says, pulling the belt and untying my silky gown, moving it away and leaving me lying down in front of him with only a thin layer of lace covering my most precious parts.

“L-lord Dargen,” I try to crawl to the very back of the bed, away from him, “If you would like to know me better, we can talk tomorrow morning...or evening... or...”

“Oh, we will talk as much as you like, Mira”, he chuckles, starting to unbutton his shirt, “But first thing first. I’ve been thinking about you these past few days. And now that my annoying cousin is out of the picture...”

“Your cousin?”, I ask, trying to pull a sheet onto myself.

“Derrien Derwood – the control freak who imprisoned you here,” Ryden is done with his shirt and throws it to the ground next to us, “Don’t worry, once he loses interest for a woman it’s final. He wouldn’t bother us anymore.”

Somehow I just wish he does bother us again! The sooner the better!  
Preferably even now!

The man sits back at the edge of my bed and grabs me by my waist to pull me closer. I try to push him away, but he only pins my hands on both sides of me.

“What is the problem again?”, he growls at me.

I notice how the room suddenly has become darker. It looks as if it is filled with black smoke. I guess this is how Ryden’s magic looks like. There is absolutely no way out for me...

“I...I...”, stuttering doesn’t help, I need to come up with something.

“You what, Mira?!” the gerdian starts to look annoyed.

“I am not ready!”, I say the first thing on my mind, “I’ve never... I mean, I was kind of hoping that something like this would happen only after I am married...”

He looks at me startled, “You’ve never... You mean to tell me that Derrien hasn’t even tasted you?”

“Of course not!”, I say firmly, “No one has!”

A smirk spreads across Dargen’s handsome face, “Mira, you are making me very happy today!”

He lets go of my hands and brushes his thumb over my lips, making them part.

“W-would you let me go?”, I ask him hopefully and he breaks down, laughing hard.

“Of course not!”, he slides his hand to my neck, “I’d make you mine before everyone else can! I’ll be honest with you, Mira, there is something about you... I have already tried a few of the Selection girls and they all seemed ... bland... But with you, it already feels different and I haven’t even started...”

With that, he slowly gets on top of me, now holding me in place with his body weight.

“Please,” I sob, “Let me go!”

“Calm down, Mira!”, he whispers while kissing my cheeks, my earlobe, my neck, “In just a few minutes you will be begging me for more!”

“I highly doubt that!”, a familiar voice breaks through this horror.

Dargen shrugs and shifts away from me to look at the intruder. Lord Derrien Derwood is standing in my bedroom’s doorway with his hands crossed at his chest, wearing nothing but pants... That looks suspiciously similar to the ones he had on in my dream!

But why is he here exactly? He said that he wants nothing to do with me anymore!

“What the actual fvck are you doing here, Derwood?”, Ryden snaps at his cousin.

“The emperor wants to see you”, Derrien answers indifferently, not changing his position.

“I’ll go when I am done here”, I try to sit up, but Dargen’s hand is on my neck again, squeezing it harshly, “Can’t you see I am busy?”

“I see, busy taking a girl against her will because you know that she would never spread her legs for you willingly”, Derrien chuckles, “Pathetic as ever.”

“She didn’t spread her legs for you either!”, Ryden smirks, “Is that why you took away your protection? Your ego couldn’t handle a girl that doesn’t fall to your feet like everyone else?”

“No”, he answers slowly, “I lost my interest in her. She is one of those things that shine bright but on the inside, there is nothing... interesting. Or worthy of my time. So maybe she would be suitable for you after all. Two empty shells...”

I have a lump in my throat at his words. I don’t even know why... But his words hit me more than Dargen’s hand that almost strangles me...

“You are bluffing”, Ryden chuckles.

“Believe in what you want”, his cousin rolls his eyes showing just how really bored he is with the whole situation, “The emperor waits for you now. And the longer he waits the bigger the county he takes away from you will be...”

“sh!t”, Dargen throws me back to the bed and bends to pick up his shirt, throwing it on quickly, “I’ll see you at tomorrow’s event, Mira. And we’ll continue where we stopped.”

He caresses my cheek as if he wasn’t almost killing me just a moment ago. And then dark smoke consumes him and he is gone.

I sit up, rubbing my neck and closing my dressing gown, waiting for lord Derwood to leave. He and his cousin are the last two people I want to see right now!

However, he seems to have other ideas. He confidently walks to my bed and I shrug at the thought that everything would repeat... He sits next to me and takes my chin into his calloused hand, turning it to one side and then the other. And then carefully touching my neck with his fingers.

“Does it hurt?”, he asks coldly.

“I’ll survive”, I turn away from him and hear him sign deeply.

“That’s not what I asked, Mira!”

“I am absolutely fine, lord Derwood!”

“Amazing!”, I feel dark flames rise right next to me and turn to see what happened. On my bedside table, a small jar of black glass appeared. Derrien takes it and quickly opens. It smells like mint and some other herbs I don’t know... He takes the ointment on his fingers and starts rubbing it onto my neck. I look at him in surprise, but he doesn’t react in any way continuing with his task.

“W-why are you doing this?”, I ask and feel him flinch just for a fraction of a second.

“I do that so that you don’t have bruises tomorrow and don’t scare other girls to death”, he says and I just feel how my eyes are almost full of tears...

“And we wouldn’t want that, would we?”, I say bitterly, “Some empty shell scaring perfect full-fledged brides!”

“Since when what I say bothers you so much? Are you suddenly jealous, little mage?”, he chuckles.

“Are you?”, I raise my brow challenging him, “Or your emperor really has insomnia and doesn’t sleep at 3 o’clock past midnight?”

Tiny specs of magic flash in his eyes.

He doesn’t say anything and starts rubbing the ointment more harshly, his hand most definitely gets lower than needed, almost massaging my b.reast.

“He didn’t hurt me there”, I mumble.

“Better be safe than sorry”, he smirks...

## **The Selection: Bride Of The Dark Dragon Chapter 23 - Tips**

MIRA

I am seriously suspecting that there was something in the ointment he gave me. I thought that I wouldn’t be able to sleep after everything, but in reality, I dozed of probably even before Derrien left my room...

Which is awkward. Since when do I trust him so much? I really don’t! Of course, I am not! Probably it’s just the stress!



Anyway, I would never forget what he has called me yesterday... Unless, of course, he wanted to save me... Which is unlikely. Gerdians are gerdians. And those two definitely have some rivalry going on between them. So, it's probably just that. He doesn't want to lose to his cousin...

Which brings me to another problem! If Ryden is the nephew of the Emperor then so is Derrien. Or worse – he might be the emperor's son! I don't think their emperor has sons, but who knows... what if he does. And that would be bad! Bad, bad, bad! Bad to get their attention, bad to be hated by any of them, bad to try and escape and fail – because those two and their huge egos would never forgive me for something like that.

But the good news is – there is a way out! Empty jewellery boxes! I just need to accumulate 50 of them from all the participating lords and that's it! After that, I would be considered unworthy and they'll send me back in disgrace... And by that I mean that I am going to be free!

Yes, from now on this is my plan A. And Plan B would be my escape. But it's so unlikely that I'd better pray to all the gods that plan A works fine...

I walk into the classroom finally wearing a simple human dress. Modest, covering most of me. Gods, it feels so good! But, of course, the girls start to whisper as soon as I arrive and Isidore is louder than anyone.

"I think they took their gifts away from her", she giggles with her minions, "Or maybe it was a mistake in the first place and they delivered everything to a wrong person!"

"Maybe!", I turn to her and smile, "Have they delivered it to you already? Or are you just daydreaming?"

The whole room goes quiet, but then I hear a few giggles here and there. Yes, I am not the most favourite person here. But neither is Isidore.

Morgan and Xia wave to me and I take a seat right next to them.

"You, my friend", Xia smirks, "Have a very sharp tongue and I like it!"

"I think we all appreciate it", a girl on my right adds. She has beautiful hazelnut colour straight hair tied into a complicated plait. She is wearing a very simple dress that has seen some life already. So, I guess, she is a commoner. "I am Desirae Berton, " she introduces herself.

“Miradora Freyn”, I smile at her, “But you can call me Mira.”

“I know”, she giggles, “Everybody here already remembers you, Mira. You’ve made some noise.”

“Not that I wanted to”, I mumble.

“Still. You are going to be the main talk here for a while!”, another girl that sits next to Desirae says. She is also definitely a commoner, judging by her clothes. But an incredibly pretty one. Thick curly brown hair and light green eyes, plump lips and rosy cheeks – she is a picture of perfect health and beauty. “Fawn Ritton”, the girl offers me her hand. The nobility doesn’t greet each other like that, but I take it and shake it a bit. I have enough enemies here and it would be nice to have a normal conversation sometime.

I want to say something, but lady Cecilia walks in and I am definitely not getting on her bad side. But she looks at me with so much cold in her eyes that I realize that I am probably already there!

“Ladies,” she starts, “Today, we train your gerdian etiquette skills as well as dancing again. As tomorrow night we are going to have our official introduction ball! Isn’t this exciting?!”

Yeah, as exciting as the plague...

“Do you have any questions about tomorrow?”, she looks around the room, “We don’t have much time to prepare and I would prefer to cover everything now.”

“Can we not attend?”, slips off my tongue and I bite it immediately. Why? Why did I just say that?

“Only if one of the lords already proposed to you and you are leaving with him to the Empire!”, lady Cecilia replies coldly, “Anything else?”

“What do we do if we don’t have a dress for the ball?”, Fawn asks, looking embarrassed.

“Don’t go!”, one of Isidore’s minions laughs, the brunette whose name is Alexandra if I am not mistaken. They all giggle, covering mouths as if they don’t mean that. But they do.

“We have a few gowns stored from previous years, you can look in those!”, our mentor says.

“Will we be able to talk to the lords?”, another girl asks, I am unaware of her name.

“Of course”, lady Cecilia smiles, “But only if they speak to you first. Do not embarrass me by hanging on their necks before they have shown interest in you. Do not throw yourselves at them!”

“Will there be dances?”

“Just a few, this is a small event designed for you to mingle with the lords. Usually, after the Introduction Ball some girls start receiving first presents...”, lady Cecilia points her finger to the ceiling with dreamy eyes. Gods, she should be one of the brides! She would have been perfect if she was younger!

Everybody starts signing and daydreaming. And I just roll my eyes. There is only one thing I want for a present... Speaking of which...

“Do any of the ladies receive empty jewellery boxes?”, I ask loudly, and the whole room gasps. Everybody is staring at me, even my friends.

“Why? Have you already received one?”, Isidore’s second minion, Ariadna, starts laughing and the whole room explodes with whispers.

When the room gets quiet, lady Cecilia comes to my table, “Lady Mira, you indeed have some unusual questions! It’s rare for a girl to receive an empty jewellery box. Usually there is no need. And for sure not after the Introduction Ball!”

Damn it!

“I see”, I nod, “And another question. What happens if two lords like the same girl?”

This time the whole class is quiet.

Lady Cecilia smirks, “Still haven’t read the book of rules, I see?”

“I am somewhere in the middle”, I lie.

“Well, if two lords like the same girl, the one with higher title and status gets her. And if they are of the same status, they can fight in a duel. But that rarely occurs as well.. I think it’s enough questions, let’s start today’s lesson!”

“Have you been asking for yourself?”, Morgan snorts.

“For a friend”, I wink at her and all five of us giggle quietly.

“With your suitors everything is decided”, Desirae says, “Ryden Dargen, the one who protected you the last time is a prince! I don’t think there is a title higher than that.”

“He is from the Royal family, yes”, I agree , “But he is not a prince. Moreover, there is someone else here from the royals of the Empire...”

“Are you serious?”, Xia’s eyes become wide, “Who?”

“Girls!”, Lady Cecilia almost shouts at us, stopping our chitchat, “Attention, please!”

After exhausting lessons, we go to lunch and this time Fawn and Desirae join Morgan, Xia and me at our table. The company around me is finally nice and I manage to even relax a little bit. And after we are done we decide to go to the Selection’s main wardrobe room together with Fawn, as she really doesn’t have any suitable dresses for the ball. Even if it is small.

“Don’t be embarrassed”, I whisper to her on our way, “Just a few days ago all I had was my travel costume. And I am sure we are going to find something beautiful for you here!”

“Thanks”, she smiles.

But, gods, was I wrong! The room is full of the ugliest dresses that ever existed! Puffy, cheap, shiny, tasteless... Poor Fawn walks between the hangers, clearly depressed, and I see that Desirae’s face is tense as well. I guess she needs a dress as well.

“Oh, my!”, Xia takes one of the gowns, “I think my grandmother wore something like this once. To a funeral.”

“Maybe we can take those and redesign them a bit?”, Morgan suggest, “I have my needles and sewing supplies with me here.”

“We can try”, Fawn agrees weekly.

“Look, we are almost the same size”, I say suddenly, “And I just got my things back from the academy I attended. There is a ton of ball dresses that I wore just once. Maybe you would like to have a look at those?”

“Can we?”, Fawn smiles, hope in her eyes.

“Of course!”, I nod.

“Is it true that you live on the same floor with gerdians?”, Desirae asks eagerly and I laugh at that.

“Yes, so brace yourselves, ladies. You are in for a not so pleasant surprise!”

In my room, the girls are a bit upset at first as we haven’t met a soul on our way here. But they soon forget everything as I unpack one of my bags full of dresses. I uncreased them with magic and they look as good as new. Mostly because they are new. My mother never allowed me to wear the same ball gown twice since I was Tristan’s fiancée and had to be on his level. So, now our engagement is off and I end up with a pile of dresses that are too flashy to wear in everyday life.. But at least now I have some good use for those. Maybe I should even take a few of to that horrid wardrobe room, so that other commoner girls had a chance?

“They are so beautiful!”, Fawn twirls around the mirror holding two dresses at once. One is bright red and the other is light green. “Green is more of my colour. But this red one is so amazing! Where does one even gets dresses like that in the Kingdom?”

“I think it was a present from my ex-fiancé”, I say, taking a look at the dress, “His family seamstress made it to match his outfit... It’s actually one of a kind...”

“You had a fiancé?”, Desirae flaps her eyelashes, “And they still chose you to participate?”

“Yeah, I don’t think they care about stuff like that...”, I shake my shoulders.

“Do you miss him?”

“She has no opportunity to!”, Morgan snorts, “Her ex is Sir Tristan and he is here!”

“Oh, gods! You were his fiancée? How... how was it?”, Fawn gasps almost dropping the dresses, her cheeks flush red.

“Pretty boring actually”, I chuckle, “It was supposed to be an arranged marriage...”

“Can I take this dress?”, Fawn points at the red one, the one Tristan gave me. She looks excited.

“Sure”, I smile at her, “You can pick anything except for the gerdian ones. Because they would kill me. And probably you too. So we’d better not risk it!”

“And which one would you be wearing?”, Xia asks, “You have quite the choice here.”

“I don’t know”, I shrug shoulders, “They are all dark and equally beautiful, so there is not much difference really...”

And right when I say it, flames of the dark magic rise, and a new huge box appears on my table. I take a step towards it and black smoke appears, bringing another box. For chaos’s sake!

“Uh-oh”, Morgan gasps, “You are in trouble again, my dear, aren’t you?”

## **The Selection: Bride Of The Dark Dragon Chapter 24 - Tips**

MIRA

After the girls have left, I sit at my desk for a while staring at the two boxes. I know very well who are they from. And that doesn’t promise anything good for me. First, I open the one that appeared in flames of dark magic, the one from Derrien. And the first thing I see is a note saying: “Wear this to the ball.” And that’s pretty much it. A simple order to a girl who is just a piece of property.

The dress inside is of a rich wine colour, I get it out and, surprisingly it is not over the top with all its openness. Strange... Or maybe I had a completely

wrong idea about the gerdian fashion? I come to the mirror and press the dress against myself. The rich fabric flows in gentle waves to the floor, the sleeves with slits from the shoulder also go down to the very bottom of the dress with an even more delicate fabric, creating something like a cape and covering bare arms. The bust is strewn with small gems to match and embroidered with a gold thread. Fine workmanship, tasteful, expensive. The dark colour beautifully emphasizes my hair, making it look like strands of fire.

Signing, I put the dress away and go back to the second box. This one appeared in black smoke, signaling me that it's from lord Dargen. Remembering our last encounter makes me shrug with disgust. Close, so close! If Derrien didn't arrive on time... I am afraid to even think about it!

First thing first, the dress is black. I cringe a bit. At the Kingdom, we only wear black to funerals or when we are mourning. I know that gerdians, on the contrary, love this colour and it symbolizes their might and the power that dark magic gives them... But I am just not ready for something like that. However, remembering that Ryden is a psycho, I'd probably better wear his dress... I get it out and gasp – a huge slit at the front – from shoulders to bellybutton... How would my breasts even stay inside in a dress like that?! Maybe it's the back? No, definitely not...

There is no way I can put on something like that! Signing, I sit down.

Think, Mira, think!

But no good ideas come to my mind. Tired, I am so tired! I'll think about it tomorrow!

I put up a barrier on my door. I know it's not nearly as good and strong as the one Derrien made me once, but he hasn't put protection on my room yesterday, so it'll have to do. At least it has a calming effect on me.

I go to the bathroom and fill the bath with warm water. Looking at the bottles provided for us, I find one filled with small golden balls saying foam on them. There is no instruction on what to do with them exactly, so I just throw one into the water and see it hissing and gurgling, expanding into a beautiful golden foam. Just enough for that huge beautiful marble bath.

I undress in the bathroom, remembering that my room might be watched, and quickly wrap myself in a soft and luxurious towel, pick up my dress from the floor and walk back into my room to put it on the bed. I'll clean and take care of it later. Right now I am too tired and only want to relax.

Back at the bathroom, I put my hair up, drop the towel off, and lower myself into the warm water. Gods, it feels so good! Just what I needed after these last couple of crazy days that I had!

I put my hand onto the edge and close my eyes, smiling, letting the water soak my skin properly. The foam tickles my forehead and I giggle at the feeling. Sometimes these simple things are just the best!

It so warm and nice, the room definitely feels hotter for some reason... Suddenly, I feel a thick shade fall onto my face and open my eyes, screaming at the dark figure in front of me, "Aaaaaaa!"

I sit up in the bath, covering myself with my hands and looking at him with huge eyes.

"You know, for a battlemage, you are not that brave!", he chuckles and sits at the edge of the bath.

"You know, for a lord you have very questionable manners!", I retort when I get back to my senses. Anger is boiling inside of me. First, he intrudes and then insults me! How dares he!

"I am not doing anything that I am not supposed to be doing", he says and his fingers brush lightly over my wet and naked back. Not intense, barely touching even, but enough to send shivers all over my body.

"This kind of thing, lord Derwood, should only be done with your wife!", I snap at him.

"Is that a proposal lady Mira?", he chuckles, standing up and walking back to the sink. He looks around in the little bottles and when he finds what he is looking for, he comes back to me and grabs a sponge.

"N-no," I say slowly, watching his every move, "Men are supposed to propose, not women."



“Oh really?”, he talks to me as if I am a clueless child again, taking a sponge next to me and pouring some of the liquid on it and squeezing it, creating even more foam. The floral scent hits my nostrils. “Do you want me to propose to you, lady Mira?”

“Do gerdians even do that?”, I roll my eyes.

“Is that what you want?”, he looks at me intensely.

“N-no”, I stutter and he smiles, lowering himself to his knee next to me, “W-what are you doing?!”

“Helping”, he says, rolling up his sleeve.

“I...I..I can do it myself, thanks!”, I say quickly, trying to grab the sponge away from him, but he catches my hand, pulling me closer to the edge. Magic sparkles in his eyes when I realize where he is looking... I am not covering my b.reast anymore due to the little struggle. Luckily, all the most important parts are still covered with foam, and yet you can see the forms, the way they bounce after he moved me... “Lord Derrien!”, I squeak, covering myself with the free hand again and the magic in his eyes fades. I pull up my knees and hug them with my arms. And then I feel the wet sponge on my back. One circle, another, then lower... I am afraid to breathe next to him, and I am afraid to look at him, to see those sparks in his eyes again... I don't even notice how I start breathing heavily...

“So soft,” he comments, but it's as if he is talking to himself... I feel his fingers brush over my skin every time the sponge touches me. My cheeks flush! I have never been touched like that! How embarrassing!

“Mira!”, his breathing is on my cheek and I feel the sponge trailing down my spine, all the way down to the very end of it.

His second hand brushes over my chin, making me turn my head towards him.

“I want you, Mira”, he says slowly, looking into my eyes, “Be mine tonight...”

## **The Selection: Bride Of The Dark Dragon Chapter 25 - Tips**

MIRA

I gasp for air at the sudden offer... Or maybe that's an order even?!

However, Derrien accepts this as an invitation and bends lower to kiss me. His tongue enters me greedily, as always, fingers pressing into my chin and the second hand, that apparently lost the sponge already, is sliding up my spine and stops at the waist. I am shaking in his hands although I am not cold... Just what is this strange feeling? And why is it so hot in here? I feel steam around us lifting up to the ceiling...

I push him roughly, "Stop it!"

"Again?!", he looks at me startled and I hurry to cover myself, "What's wrong again?!"

To say that I am in shock is to say nothing. He doesn't KNOW what's wrong?!

"You... you... why do you keep doing that?", I look at him breathing hard, "You bulge into my private bathroom without permission, you touch my naked body without permission, you kiss me again and again – not even bothering to ask for PERMISSION!"

"Permission?", he stands up, "You know very well what you are here for!"

"How can I forget? You remind me of that all the time!"

"And?", he raises his brow, "Only because you forget all the time! Or are you willing to be with someone like Dargen? Enjoyed yesterday a lot?"

I press my lips, "Since I am here I don't enjoy anything!"

"Oh, really? So every time I touch you, you don't enjoy it...", he lifts up his chin, looking expectantly for my answer.

"N-no", I say weakly. Why so weakly all of a sudden? What's wrong with me? I need to stand my ground!

"No," he repeats meditatively, and then looks at me again, "So, what exactly do you want, Mira?"

"Currently I want only one thing", I press my knees tighter to my chest, "And that's freedom!"

"You know you are not getting that... You are at the Selection!"

“There is a way!”, I almost yell at him, “I know that you lied to me and there is a way...”

“Elaborate, please”, he crosses his arms on his chest, still looking at me and it begins to bother me that the foam starts to die out...” I don’t know of a way a girl can leave the Selection!”

“Then, clearly, you haven’t read the book with your own rules!”, I snort, “If a girl receives an empty jewellery box from all the gerdian participants then...”

I don’t get to finish as he starts laughing. He laughs so hard that I see tears almost forming in his eyes. He is hysterical, hitting the marble sink next to him with his hand at every fit. Gods, I hate that man.

“That’s your plan?”, he rubs his forehead trying to resist another urge to laugh.

“Y-yes!”, I look at him firmly.

“Gods, Mira, you are an interesting girl indeed!”, he clears his throat and comes back to his usual serious self, “You do know that we have an urgent lack of females in our Empire, right?”

“I do”

“You do know that the Selection takes place only once a year, right?”

“I know”

“And you do know that it’s considered an honour to be here, not everyone gets a chance to pick or even have a wife at all!”

“Well, I didn’t know that...”

“Oh, then you are in for a surprise. Although the highest lords can come to the Selection any time they want until they have a wife, for lower-ranked lords and knights, not to mention the commoners – it might be an opportunity of a lifetime! And there are 25 of you and 50 of us...”

“There is 24 of us...”, I add, remembering dead Bella once again.

“Even worse then, Mira. The men who only get this one chance wouldn’t get out of here without a wife, no matter who is left. And you, Mira... you are not just anybody. You attract us.”

“W-why?”, I look up at him and for a moment it seems as if I shouldn’t have asked.

“For many reasons,” he chuckles, “So, Mira there is no chance for you to escape and...”

“Oh, trust me, I will!”, I interrupt him, “I can manage to make 50 men with enormously huge egos send me those damn boxes!”

“You know what,” he smirks, “I would like to see you try. Moreover, if you manage to get 49 boxes from other gerdians, I will give you my own and personally take you back to the Academy you love so much!”

“Really?”, I swim to the edge of the bath and look at him as a child who’s been promised a big present for his birthday.

“Yes, Mira, really”, he comes closer again and brushes fingers over my cheek, “If you don’t change your mind, of course...”

“I won’t!”, I say eagerly, not even bothered by him touching me again.

“Let’s make it a bet!”, he smirks again, “If you win and until the end of the month you get 49 boxes – then I will give you mine and set you free. But if I am right, and you don’t get enough, you... You fulfill one wish of mine. Any wish. Deal?”

“Deal!”, I can’t believe my own luck and stretch my hand to him for a handshake to seal the agreement. He looks at it strangely and then accepts it, but in the end, turns my wrist and kisses me at the top of it. Longer than needed. And very gently...

“Don’t forget, that you can change your mind anytime and just...”

“I will not!”, I interrupt him.

“Of course”, he chuckles darkly and then smirks at me, “Sweet dreams, Mira!”

Dreams? Remembering my last dream makes me shrug... but not with disgust... Oh, Gods, let me forget that dream once and for all.

I return my head back to the edge of the bath and close my eyes. The water is still nice and warm because the room is definitely hotter than it should be. But, oh, well! Tiredness gets to me... That was a long day... So long...

I hear footsteps and know exactly who came back... A hand brushes over my cheek and neck and I hear his husky voice, "Did you miss me?"