

The Selection: Bride Of The Dark Dragon Chapter 31 - Tips

DERRIEN

What am I even doing here? She is long asleep and I am just sitting here and watching her chest go up and down, up and down with my pendant on it... and this is pure torture!

I should have just taken her then and there while she was offering it herself... I shouldn't care what she would feel later. It'll happen to her sooner or later... I am just postponing it, but in the end, nothing changes for her...

Just why do I care how she feels? Why am I so stuck thinking about her? Why is my fucking dragon raving and raging inside of me every time she is near? Does he think her fiery hair is some kind of treasure? What is wrong with us?!

My eyes come back to her chest again. Fuck! I'd better throw some sheets on her or I wouldn't be able to hold myself... I can't fall so low as to take a lifeless body!

Since I have sworn to stay here all night, I need to take some measures.

Like a cold shower.

Yes, that should work wonders.

Throwing my clothes to a chair near the bed, I take the last glance at her and... I shouldn't have done it. Her pretty pink lips look so seductive... and the silly girl is not even remotely aware.

I pass the bath where I have played with her just recently and the memories only bring more pain to my poor member. I turn the tap and activate the water crystal, setting it to the coldest water possible. It's almost icy and also brings pain to my body, but it's the best option for now.

I probably should have fucking that brunette and made Mira jealous and ready for me. But seeing her with Dargen was just too much. Why? Why haven't I left them alone?! After him, she would have accepted me gladly... Why was I sorry for her?! Why was my dragon so furious to see her with someone else? He never cared for any of my women. And Mira isn't even mine yet. So, why is he so hung up on her?

When the freezing water takes care of my problem, I come back to the room and make my flames bring my black silk pyjama pants. I usually don't wear anything to bed, but if she accidentally touches me... there... Well, it would be the end for her. And the cold shower would be for nothing.

Lying down to the other side of the bed, I close my eyes and feel her sweet scent... She smells like... spring morning. When the flowers start blooming and a fresh breeze blows... No perfume... Just her... Well, and also the wine. But I guess she didn't lie about her tolerance and the alcohol has faded significantly.

Such an unusual girl she is... I imagine what would have happened if I didn't stop, how I would have touched her, how I would have made her want me even more... How I would have made her call me...

"Rien!", she says and I flinch. I turn to her and create a fireball to see her face better. She is still deeply asleep. Why did she call my name then? And most importantly the name only close people can call me... How did she even know?

Close... I haven't been close to anyone for so long...

Her hand falls on my bare chest and I freeze, destroying the fireball immediately. Just what is this little mage doing? She is really testing my patience!

A second, and she turns fully to rest her head on my chest as well, her hand sliding further and hugging me. And then her leg.

Gods, this girl has not got a fear bone in her body!

Her scent is more intense now, but somehow my dragon feels calmer. And I realize how exhausted I am. It's been a long week with all those murders.. And this... this is nice. She is so warm and soft, her skin is like rose petals... I fix her position a bit, so that my blood can flow through my body and wrap one of my hands around her waist to create a bit more support... She wriggles her nose against my chest and continues with her sleep. And after looking at her a little bit more, I join her.

MIRA

Sunrays are playing in my eyelashes and that's how I know that it's time to wake up. My pillow smells of fresh mint and I take a deep breath. It feels so nice that I want to sleep longer. Maybe I should just skip the stupid breakfast?

No. Not a good idea. Because then I'll have to go to lunch or even dinner... And I'd better not.

And that's when my blanket hugs me tighter... Wait, what? What the chaos is going on?!

I open my eyes and freeze. I am lying with my face on Derrien's bare chest! His hands are wrapped around me and mine – around him. Why? How? What on... Gods, I need to get out of his grasp!

I try to wriggle my way out of it, but he only pulls me closer. However, when I look closer at him – it seems to me that he is still asleep. I try to get out again, but this time his hand lands on my bottom and squeezes it with feeling!

"If you keep moving like that, we'll finish what we almost started yesterday!", he says, eyes still closed.

Memories of the night before start gushing into my mind and I feel my cheeks flush red. Oh, gods! OH, GODS!

Derrien, however, still looks asleep even when I calm down. I carefully wave my hand in front of his face to make sure, but he catches it and moves it to his cheek, opening his eyes, and finally looking at me properly.

"Still thinking that I am handsome?", he chuckles and I try to take my hand back, but he presses it against his lips and kisses it lightly.

"I don't remember saying anything of the sort!", I lie.

"Oh really?" he smiles, "And what do you remember then?"

"I remember that you gerdians spiked the wine you served at the ball yesterday!", I groan, "What is wrong with you people?!"

With that, I send a little magical impulse into his body and, using his momentary shock, escape to the bathroom and lock the door behind me.

But when I turn, dark flames surround me and throw me back into his hands...

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MIRA

Gods, I wish he was dressed because my face is right back where we have started a minute ago – his n.aked c.hest!

“That’s better!”, he says lazily and adjusts my position on top of him.

“Excuse me,” I grit through my teeth, “Just what do you think you are doing?!”

“Sleeping”, he mumbles into my hair.

“Like this?!”, I gasp and try to lift up my head, but he pulls me back in immediately.

“This is the best way”, he chuckles, “Warm and smells nice.”

“Good for you!”, I retort, “But I am going to be late for breakfast!”

“So?”, he asks indifferently.

“So I am hungry! I need to get ready!”, I wine and as if to prove my point, my tummy rumbles loudly. Gods... this is embarrassing!

“I see,” Derrien signs and suddenly rolls on the bed so that my body is under his now. He looks at me intensely and brushes his fingers over my cheeks and neck as if checking something.

“You’ve been missing dinners, Mira”, he states calmly, “Why is that?”

“I don’t like to eat at night”, I say the first thing that comes to my mind.

“Lier”, he snorts, “You didn’t want to meet with the gerdians. Anyone in particular?”

“No”, I blush.

“Maybe you didn’t want to see me?”, he raises his brow.

“I didn’t want to see any of you”, I give up, “Every time I come in contact with the gerdians it ends up badly for me...”

“You’ve lost weight”, he raises my chin, and says with a very serious face, “This is no way to go on!”

“Don’t men love slender ladies?”, I chuckle because this is so not him! I’ve never seen him like this before. For a moment I even forget that we are both half-n.aked, in bed, and waaaay too close to each other.

“Men like healthy women”, he smiles, “And you look like you are about to faint, little mage...”

“Then why don’t you roll off me and let me go to the breakfast?”, I smirk and he chuckles at that.

“You win, Mira”, he says casually and stands up from the bed, “And from now on I want you to be present at every meal they serve here! You do not need to worry about other gerdians anymore. As long as you wear my necklace, no one would dare touch you. For us... this is like a sign of belonging. Only a gerdian of higher status could do something about it, but no one here is currently higher than me.”

“Even Dargen?”, I look up at him, trying to hide how scared his cousin makes me feel sometimes.

“At the moment – yes”, he says calmly.

“At the moment? It could change?”

“Well, he is a duke and I am an archduke. If the emperor bestows him with a higher t!tle or at least equal then...”

“How likely is that to happen?”, I interrupt him. Now Ryden’s words back at the ball start to make sense to me. When Derrien said that his rank is higher, Dargen said “Not for long...”

“There is a possibility, Mira”, Derrien tells me honestly, “Our emperor has no children, no heirs of his own. Sooner or later he would name Dargen the crown prince. And after that, he’ll pass the crown and the Empire to him.”

“And why not you?”, it slips out of my tongue faster than I manage to bite it!

Lord Derwood looks at me tensely for a few seconds and then says calmly, “Because I have already declined.”

“You declined?”, I jump on my feet forgetting how indecent I look, “You declined the whole empire?”

“I would always serve the Empire. But the ruling is not for me.”

“Oh my Gods!”, I snort and almost choke with laughter, “Are you kidding me? All you do is command everyone around you! You would be perfect!”

“Little mage”, he almost growls in a warning tone and takes a step in my direction, “Since when are you so interested in me? Is that a title you are looking for?”

“Gods, no!”, I splash my hands at him, “Who says I am interested in you at all?! But Dargen! Are you seriously planning to leave the Empire to someone like him? Imagine what he would do with all that power! No offense, but your cousin is a bit... well, to put it nicely, evil...”

“He already has loads of power in the Empire, Mira, and everyone is doing just fine! And what’s that about you not interested in me?”, he comes closer and grasps me by my hands, pulling me closer, “That’s not what you’ve been saying yesterday...”

“After you made me drink the poisoned wine, you mean?”, I raise my brow at him.

“That wasn’t poisoned,” he smirks, “It’s just a very special kind of wine.”

“Uh-huh”, I snort, not impressed with the explanation, “So special it makes the girls here behave like idiots!”

“So special it makes you say what’s really on your mind!”

“That’s what any wine does!”, I retort, “But what you’ve been pouring yesterday made more than that! Why would you even give us something like that? Don’t you want to see who really has feelings for you? What I am trying to say, you are choosing wives here. The ones who would be by your side forever... Don’t you want your future wife at least to like you?”

For a few seconds there he doesn't say anything. Just looks at me. Strangely. Sparks of magic appear and die down in his eyes, but I am sure now that he is not angry. What is it then?

"Go to your breakfast, little mage", he says finally and turns away, "After you are done there, I will need to talk to you about something important. Come to my chambers."

"To be honest, I have no idea where your chambers are, lord Derwood...", he flinches at my words.

"It's the next room on the left," he says and flames of dark magic consume him.

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MIRA

Did he just say the next door on the left? As in the only other door in this part of the hallway? Did he bring me to live right next to him? Can this be a coincidence?

However, my tummy rumbles again and I hurry to take shower and change. I dry my hair quickly with magic and go to the wardrobe room to choose a gown for today. First, my hand goes to one of my usual dresses, but then I look at the pendant that Derrien gave me yesterday. This is my safety net here. As long as I wear it no other gerdian would dare to touch me. So, I'd better wear it at all times. Even if that would mean that I "belong" to Derwood. Judging by my yesterday's interactions, he is definitely not the worst choice here.

And speaking of yesterday, hopefully, at least some of the empty boxes would arrive today... After all, I risked my life for those!

I decide on one of the dresses that Derrien sent me – A cream elegant piece with black thread embroidery at the sleeves, skirt, and neckline. The round pendant matches it beautifully.

When I walk into the dining hall I feel everyone staring at me once again. Oh gods, what now?!

I sit at my usual table and look at my friends, who have all already gathered here.

“You’re late”, Xia smiles coquettishly, “Long night?”

“Don’t even start”, I roll my eyes, “Definitely not in a way you imagine. Why is everybody staring?”

“Well,” Morgan starts, “When you left yesterday, it wasn’t the end of the show!”

“Or really?”, I ask politely, while putting food to y plate from the dishes served to our table. Eggs and bacon! My favourites!

“Yes, the duke came back!”, Fawn whispers, “And he was furious when he realized that you were already gone!”

“Another gerdian tried to approach him and was hit by his dark magic! It was almost as horrible as when he killed the man who touched you...”, Desirae continues.

“After that, he just grabbed a girl and disappeared together with her!”, Morgan shrugs her shoulders.

W-who did he take?“, I shrug, knowing what could happen to the poor girl all too well!

“Alexandra!”, Fawn whispers.

I look back at Isidore’s table and see Alexandra alive and well. She is giggling happily and holding her head high... Maybe she was lucky and escaped after all...

But the next thing I notice on her are bruises... All over her neck... I would have had the same if Derrien hadn’t saved me and given me the ointment! However, Alexandra seems happy and touches her neck all the time, blushing.

“Well, she seems alright”, I say slowly.

“That’s because she is not that bright”, Morgan snorts, “She thinks that now he is going to marry her. A duke!”

“Maybe he will?”, Fawn suggests.

“Hardly”, Desirae smiles sadly, “He didn’t care whom he was grabbing. He just needed a release... and she provided him with it.”

“That’s her problems,” Xia changes the topic of our conversation, “Our Morgie had been lucky as well yesterday!”

“Not in that way!”, my friend blushes, and everyone chuckles.

“But that lord who asked you for a dance has spent the rest of the night with you”, Xia smiles, “And I’ve heard he is a marquess!”

“Really?”, Morgan smiles to herself, “I didn’t know that. His name is Brandon Seville and ... he seems nice.”

“Not psychotic for sure”, I add, “I’ve seen him a few times as well. For a lord he behaves... like a normal person.”

“True”, the brunette agrees, “Xia, but what about you? You danced with several lords yesterday. I’d even say that you were the most popular lady at the ball!”

“I had a few admirers yesterday,” the southerner giggles, flapping her beautifully long lashes, “But we’ll wait and see. It was just an introduction, who knows where everything goes.”

“And what about you, girls?”, I ask the last two ladies.

“I dance with a few people as well, everybody did,” Desirae says, “But I wouldn’t say that there was anything special about the experience. They are all so handsome, tall and well-dressed... But most of them are not talkative. Some even looked like they were bored...”

“That’s normal for them. Their ego and their attitude are the two worst things about them”, I say and take a few grapes for dessert.

“I guess I hoped for something... magical, you know?”, Desirae looks sadly at her plate, “Every one of us is going to marry one of them. I just hoped that it would be more special...”

After that none of us say anything for a while. We all hoped for something like that... Well, not me. I hope to escape. But I know that that's how every girl at the Selection feels.

"We need to hurry", Fawn says, "Today lady Cecilia will be telling us about the talent show! We'd better not be late!"

"Well, actually I have to go", I say, wiping my lips carefully, "Lord Derwood asked me to see him straight after breakfast. Tell lady Cecilia that I had no choice over the matter."

"As this would help you", Morgan snorts again.

"Thanks, friend!", I roll my eyes and stand up from the table.

"You know", Desirae looks at me, "I am glad that at least one of us has something special here..."

I don't find what to say to that. It would be cruel to disappoint her even more... She needs hope to survive all this!

So, I just smile and leave, "See you later, ladies!"

I hesitate before knocking on the door. Funny how I never realized that just one wall separates his chambers from mine.

I raise my hand to knock, but the door opens itself and I hear a familiar voice, "Come in, Mira!"

Derrien is sitting on his sofa. The one I saw in my dreams. The realization makes me blush. He is already fully dressed and freshly shaven. Looking better than ever. And, more importantly, not taking his eyes off me...

"Beautiful dress, Mira", he says, "I see you get accustomed to our fashion. Do you want a drink?"

"No, thank you, lord Derwood, I think I had enough drinks from you," I shrug remembering the spiked wine and the Somnium Nox potion.

"It's understandable!", he chuckles, "Alright, I asked you to come here for a reason. Remember that tiny spec of the spell you found in the chambers where your roommate was killed?"

“Very well, my lord”, I nod.

“Mira... let’s drop the formalities. After I’ve spent the night in your bed it just seems a bit...fake anyway. Be open with me.”

“Are you sure this is what you want?”, I raise my brow.

“Let’s say no one would buy that you are under my protection if you are this distant with me... So, it’s in your interest...”

“Is that the only reason?”, I suddenly ask. I don’t know why.

He looks at me for a second, without saying anything, and then says, “Do you want there to be another reason, Mira?”

“Does it matter?”, I roll my eyes.

“Do you always answer with a question to a question?”, he steps closer.

“Did you forget why you called me in the first place?”, I step back.

“How do you know this is not why I called you?”, he continues to get closer.

“And what is this exactly?”, I almost whisper, because he is now so close I feel his breath on my face.

“Something unexpected,” he says, bewildered by the situation. But he quickly comes back to his senses and clears his throat, “Well, Mira, I called you here, because I want to ask for your help with the investigation of your friend’s death. I need a human magic expert and you seem to be not so bad. Would you be interested to help me find the murderer?”

“Hmmm,” I say slowly, even though I am excited on the inside, “Lord Derwood, if you really need my help, then I have a very important condition!”

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MIRA

“What condition would that be?”, he looks amused.

“Honesty!”, I say firmly, “I want you to be honest with me at all times! If I ask you a question – you tell me the truth! Always! Whatever I ask!”

“I don’t need your help that desperately, little mage”, he chuckles.

“Then, lord Derwood,” I stress out how officially I address him, “I am going to my lessons now. Lady Cecilia says it’s a very important day today!”

I turn on my heels and walk to the door, I grab the handle secretly cursing myself for not just simply agreeing to help him. I want to find Bella’s murderer badly! But I feel like I blew my chance right now...

“Wait!”, Derrien’s annoyed voice stops me, “I have a counter-condition. If I have no right to answer your question or simply don’t want to, then I don’t. Take it or leave it.”

Well, this is not bad. At least in this way, I would be able to trust the words that come out of his mouth...

“Alright, but you will take a magic vow!”, I say quickly.

“I am afraid, little mage, you will have to trust me as it is. Human magic wouldn’t work on me. And gerdian magic would allow me to break the vow anyway,” he chuckles.

“Deal?”, he offers me his hand.

“Deal!”, I take it, but I feel that I am making the deal with the chaos itself!

“Great!”, he walks to his desk briefly.

“First question!”, I stop him and he turns to look at me, “Did you just tell me the truth about the magical vow not working on you?”

He looks at me for a while and smirks, “I choose not to answer this question!”

THAT. GERDIAN. SON. OF. A. HARPY!

“Ok, now tell me everything you can about this speck of magic”, he gives me the bottle with the tiny leftover of the spell that killed Bella.

“I need to examine it first!”, I say, “I have some equipment in my room...”

“Equipment?”, he raises his brow.

“Yes”, I nod, “We prefer to know everything about our magic. Every little detail helps hence we spend years testing it and doing research, It helps us to get the best results.”

“So do we”, he crosses his hands on his chest, “But I haven’t found anything significant here...”

“Well, now it’s my turn,” I smile at him and dark flames surround us, bringing us into my rooms. It’s funny how I already got used to this kind of transportation. As if it is completely normal, I go to my wardrobe room and get one of my leather suitcases and then walk to my desk.

I get my equipment out of the suitcase -flasks, test tubes, magnifier, restrainer, beakers, herbs, potions, dropper, and all other materials – everything Dereck found and packed for me in the Academy.

I create a fireball to add more light to the room and take the spec with special forceps, taking a look at it with a magnifier that is attached to my head now like glasses. Changing to magical vision, I finally can take a good look at what has killed Bella. It’s just a tiny fragment, the flaw of the spell used, so, unfortunately, it is too small to hold a part of the aura of the killer. However, it can give me some other information. And I smile victoriously when I find it!

“What is it?” Derrien asks and I look up at him before I switch off my magic sight. What I see startles me once again. The dark magic around him is strong. It’s part of him and easily goes in and out. And again, like the last time, a lot of it gathered behind him in the shape of huge wings... I wonder why...

“Switch it off!”, he commands me immediately after realizing that I am examining him.

“Yes, sorry”, I go back to my normal vision and smile apologetically, “It’s just I had no prior experience with the dark magic and it is still fascinating for me...”

“It’s rude to look at someone like that,” Derwood snorts, “Almost the same as to look at a naked person without their permission.”

“Well, then we are even,” I roll my eyes, “You’ve seen way too many of my body parts and haven’t asked permission once!”

“Don’t remind me, little mage, or I may want to repeat it,” he chuckles, coming closer to me and standing behind my chair, “And now tell me – what did you find?”

“How do you even know I found anything?”

“I know”, he puts his hands on my shoulders and his fingers brush slowly over the fabric of my dress, sending shivers down my spine. Gods, why do I react this way to his touch?!

“Alright, I did find something”, I confess, but he doesn’t take his hands away.

“Speak”, he says still massaging my shoulders softly. What is this?

“Y-yes”, I mumble, “W-well... It’s too small to hold any part of the k!ller’s aura...”

“I know that, my assistant checked it personally for me,” Derrien says indifferently.

“But there is a little trace on it”, I say, “The k!ller has been in close contact with a herb called Sideria.”

“Sideria?”, he stops massaging me suddenly, “Never heard of it.”

“That’s not surprising”, I smile, “Sideria is very rare. It doesn’t grow anywhere except our Akyrian Kingdom. And even here there is only one place that it grows – the Silver Mountain chain. And even there, there is so little of it that the King prohibited to gather it because it is almost extinct. You cannot buy it even on the black market!”

“You sound so sure about the black market...”, Derrien chuckles again.

“Erm, I’ve heard about it from a friend,” I lie. I am a frequent visitor to the black market. If anything, Derreck and I were there far too often, getting ingredients for our battle experiments. Academy was giving us so little truly useful stuff and you can’t buy any of it until you are a licensed magician. Which we are both still not. And now I’ll probably never be...

“Of course you did”, the lord smiles, “You are full of surprises, Mira!”

“Erm, thanks”, I say even though he was clearly mocking me right now.

“So, how does one get that precious herb?”, he walks away from me with a tense face.

“Illegally”, I shrug my shoulders, “Probably just by going to the mountains themselves and stealing it. Although with all the protection used, this shouldn’t be easy. It is very heavily guarded.”

“Alright, Mira, only one last question”, he says looking into my eyes, “What is this Sideria herb used for?”

“Well”, I sigh, “That’s probably the worst part. It is used to influence people’s minds.”

“In what way?”, he looks surprised.

“In any. You can make someone believe in whatever you say, or make them do what you want... There were even stories that it has even been used to make people fall in love... or at least believe that they are in love...”

“Hmm, what a useful herb at the Selection, don’t you think?”, Derrien smirks and I shiver at the thought.

“But will it work at the gerdians?”, I ask him.

“Who knows... But it most definitely works on humans if what you say is true...”

“So, you are suspecting a gerdian?”, I jump off my seat.

“Not really”

“But it would make sense! Use it on a girl and she is yours!”, I say.

“Mira, if we want a girl she will be ours anyway. No use to complicate things. But maybe some of the girls decided that she can influence a gerdian? That is far more likely... And one of you would be more likely to kill that girl because she was a competition.”

“It was a bit too early on the date to call anyone a competition. Lords haven’t paid much attention to any of us back then.”

“That’s not exactly true, she was favoured and so were you...”, he sits on the sofa and throws his back, looking at the ceiling.

“That’s overly exaggerated”, I roll my eyes and start taking away my equipment, “Something like that is not enough to take a human life!”

For a second, he looks at me in surprise.

Of course... They kill whenever they want to kill. He wouldn’t understand.

“Mira, I am going to take you for a trip tonight”, he says after minutes of silence.

“A trip?”, I gasp, “Where?”

“That Silver Mountains Chain,” he smirks, “You are going to be my guide.”

“No one is allowed to go there!”

“That’s why you will keep it a secret, little mage,” he stands up and walks to me, leaning to breathe into my ear, “And if you dare to tell anyone I will have to punish you harshly...”

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MIRA

It’s really hard to listen to lady Cecilia after everything that I have just found out! She goes on and on about the talent show that we soon have to be a part of, but all I am thinking of is the trip that Derrien is taking me to.

Wham I going to do even? Gods know how long we are going to be there... alone... just me and him... Oh, somehow I don’t feel that it’s such a great idea anymore.

“Lady Miradora!”, our strict teacher is standing right in front of my desk, “It’s wasn’t enough for you to be late? You also decided to not pay any attention to the lecture?! Do you think that you have already succeeded to get yourself a husband? Because I still don’t see a wedding bracelet on your hand, lady!”

It’s like she spits poison in my direction and Isidore, Alexandra and Ariadna giggle at what she says.

"I apologize, lady Cecilia", I smile politely, "I was just thinking about how to get this bracelet sooner. Isn't that what we are here for?"

She feels my sarcasm and presses her lips in an ugly smirk, "To get the bracelet you need to be a little bit more than a bed-warmer, lady Mira. To interest a gerdian you should..."

"How would you know?", I interrupt her and the whole room goes quiet.

"Excuse me?", she gasps, looking shocked.

"It's not like you have the bracelet yourself... How would you know what gerdian lords truly like?"

"I have been working at the Dark Selection for years!", she almost shouts at me, "So many girls..."

"So many girls have received the bracelet, but not you personally. And Gods know what the girls were truly up to, because here, at the Dark Selection, no one would ever share anything that would actually work," I smirk at her, "At the moment I broke every rule you taught me and it only brought more attention and interest to me."

"It makes sense", I hear a girl whispering behind my back, "They were even fighting for her even though she was offending practically anyone she saw at the ball!"

"True", someone else says.

I turn to have a look at our class and see that even Isidore looks as if she was stricken by lightning. My job here is done.

"Back to class!", lady Cecilia yells and everyone goes quiet again, "You have a whole weekend before you, girls! Enjoy the dates that the lords have prepared for you! But on Mondays, I want to know what each of you have prepared for the Talent Show! Class dismissed!"

"Sometimes I think you, my friend, have a death wish!", Morgan giggles as soon as lady Cecilia hurriedly walks away, "She is the last person I would like as my enemy here!"

"Same for me", signs Fawn, "Mira, she can turn your life into hell if she wants."

“My life is not heaven as it is”, I roll my eyes, “And somehow she never really liked me. So I don’t think I lost anything much right now.”

“True”, Desirae agrees with me, “I think you hit the point with her today. Girls after girls after girls marry the gerdians she adores so much, but they probably never even looked at her. You know why women come to work here – they hope that they would get noticed as well. At her position, which she does hold for many years, she can have almost unlimited contact with the lords... And yet she is still here. Too old now to be noticed...”

“Maybe it’s true”, I shrug my shoulders, “But it doesn’t make it our fault! She shouldn’t make our life hell just because her’s is not great either. If it’s too much for her, she should just leave the Selection!”

“Let’s change the subject!”, Xia takes me under my hand and smiles, “What do you, ladies, have planned for the weekend? Any dates?”

“Not me”, Fawn signs, “I guess I wasn’t impressive enough even in that beautiful dress...”

“Not true!”, I say, “You looked amazing!”

“I’ve been asked by lord Brandon Seville”, Morgan blushes for the first time since I’ve known her, “He didn’t say what’s it going to be, though. But I am very excited.”

“You should be!”, Xia nods, “A marquess is such a good catch! I am going out with a marquess as well. On Saturday. And on Sunday with a Count.”

“You really didn’t waste any time at the ball”, I snort, “Wouldn’t they be angry when they find out?”

“How would I know?”, Xia giggles, “I am just an innocent girl who is too frightened to say no to strong and powerful gerdian lords!”

“Oh, my!”, Morgan chuckles, “You are a scary woman Xia Dart!”

“Thank you”, she shows us her pearly whites, “But I am just following Mira’s footsteps! That fight was so enthralling!”

“Oh, please!”, I can’t hold back a laugh, “It was creepy, to say the least!”

“By the way, what about you?”, Xia remembers, “Did the archduke invite you to a real date?”

I hesitate because I can't tell anyone the truth. I guess a date would be a great legend as to why we left the Dark Selection's castle, “Yes, he did. But it's also a surprise, so I don't know much. What about you, Desirae?”

“I have received an invitation as well. Just before the class started,” she says, “But the problem is I am not sure which one of the lords it is. Some of them didn't even introduce themselves to me, so the name on the card I received means absolutely nothing to me...”

“Oh,” Fawn covers her mouth, “And what is the date?”

“It kind of said meet me in the garden,” the girl signs.

“Yeah, that's bad”, Morgan says out loud what we all thinking, “There will be plenty of dates in the garden. If you don't recognize the man, he might get angry...”

“They are so impulsive”, Xia continues.

“What's the name?”, I ask, “Maybe we could find out something about him before Saturday?”

“Sir Rickon Odeir”, Desirae says hopefully, “If you could find out...”

Our conversation is interrupted when dark smoke appears right in front of us and an envelope hangs in the air.

“What is that?”, Xia takes it and reads, “Fawn Ritton.”

“Really?”, Fawn looks as white as snow, “Are you sure?”

“I read since I am five”, Xia chuckles, “Yes, I am sure!”

“It's...”, suddenly Fawn looks even whiter.

“What is it?”, Morgan asks.

“It's from lord Ryden Dargen!”, the poor girl gasps.

“Lucky you!”, Xia smiles, “A duke!”

“What’s wrong?”, I ask, because I see that my friend is not jumping with joy.

“H-he... He says to come straight to his room after dinner,” a tear rolls down Fawn’s pretty face, “He also says to wear the same dress I wore to the ball...”

I come back to my room, lost in feelings and sadness. We all know what Dargen wants from Fawn... And however much Xia told her that she can turn the situation to her advantage, a girl like Fawn doesn’t look like a seductress or a gold-digger who can enjoy an experience like that...

“Little mage, why are you still not even started preparing?”, Derrien appears in flames.

“Sorry”, I mumble, “I just came back from my lessons.”

“Were they that terrible? You don’t look too well,” he says coming closer to me.

“It’s the dates...” I forget who I speak to.

“Little mage, no one would invite you for a date! You can absolutely forget about it!”, he says firmly and a bit angry even, “You are considered my woman now. No one would dare...”

“Do I look like I want a date to you?!”, I snap at him, “It’s my friends, Derrien! One of them received an invitation from Dargen!”

“And you feel jealous?!”, his eyes flash with magic.

“Are you?”, I retort furiously and he grabs me by my waist, pulling me into his rock-hard body, slamming my lips with his in a greedy kiss...