

The Selection: Bride Of The Dark Dragon Chapter 56 - Tips

MIRA

“I think the lady was clear about her desires! Step. Away.” The Crown Prince materializes out of the dark smoke. There is an ugly smirk on his handsome face, the one that lets me know that he is not a knight in shiny armour who wants to help me. He is just another gerdian that tries to use me. Gods, I hate them. I hate them all! But right now I would prefer the Prince over the one who broke my heart.

“This is a personal matter, Ryden!” Derrien snaps.

“Your Highness”, the cousin corrects him, clearly enjoying the moment, “Don’t forget your place, Derwood.”

“This is a personal matter, your Highness”, Derrien grits through his teeth, “Please, let me and lady Mira finish our conversation without witnesses.”

He doesn’t even look at me when he says that. I am still nothing to him – a thing, a property. How could I be so wrong?! I relaxed and started trusting him and this was my mistake...

“Lady Mira doesn’t seem to want to have any conversations with you”, Dargen smirks again and comes closer to me, “Mira, just tell me what you want and I’ll give it to you.”

“I just want to be left alone”, I say without looking at any of them. Both of them are the same anyway...

“Mira, don’t do this! You are already mine, it’s too late...”, Derrien starts speaking again, furious.

“Do you even have the right to still say that?”, I snap and turn to him, “You are not a part of the Dark Selection, but I am!”

“She is right, you know”, Ryden intervenes, “You played your games while your title was allowing it. But no more of this. Leave lady Freyn alone.”

Dark magic makes a wild dance in Derrien’s eyes, but I just do not care anymore.

“Besides,” I say calmly, “Haven’t you got work to do?”

“True”, the Crown Prince grins at his cousin, “The Emperor is waiting for your report about the last death. And he is not happy with your performance here at all. Instead of entertaining yourself and abusing innocent girls...”

But he doesn’t finish the sentence as Derrien’s fist lands on his face. Hard. Making Dargen fall to the ground.

I gasp in shock while the prince stands up quickly rubbing his jaw.

“You are going to regret this!”, he snarls, “This is treason! You could get killed for this!”

“Hardly!”, Derwood smirks, “You and I both know it!”

“You...”, Ryden grits through his teeth and I see a pulsar of dark magic appearing in his hand.

I quickly step in front of him and curtsy slightly, “Your highness, please, don’t. Lord Derwood is already leaving anyway.”

He extinguishes the pulsar and steps closer to me, “Only because you ask, Mira. I guess it would be wrong to make a mess in your rooms”.

“Thank you, your Highness,” I raise and force a smile. It’s fake, but it works.

“Mira”, I hear Rien’s voice but choose not to turn to him.

“You need to leave, lord Derwood”, I say coldly and take a step to the prince, “Your Highness, you are bleeding. Let me help you.”

“Of course”, Ryden smiles, placing his hand on mine as soon as I touch him.

I feel flames of dark magic behind me and know that Derrien has left already. Finally, I can breathe! Or at least I thought so... My chest hurts so much...

I apply my water element to Dargen’s jawline to cool it down and take away the pain when his hands slide to my waist, bringing me closer. It’s uncomfortable, to say the least.

“Have you thought about the ring I gave you?”, he asks in a husky voice and I realize that I am trapped.

“I am sorry, Your Highness,” I almost stutter, “I didn’t have time... Too much has happened, and...”

“I understand”, he sighs and takes hands away from me, “I was serious about not forcing you and not pushing you to make that decision. But I want to spend more time with you from now on, Mira. Have rest today and tomorrow I would like for you to join me for a walk in the garden.”

I really do not want to. But who am I kidding? He can force me any moment he likes. And it’s best not to get to the bad side of him. Not to mention that as long as I am here, I’ll have to marry one of the gerdians. And if he still wants me then it most definitely would be him... considering his new title...

“Of course, your highness,” I say quietly, continuing my work, “And... thank you.”

“Ryden”, he takes the hand I used to heal him into his and kisses it gently, looking into my eyes, “Just call me Ryden. And drop the formalities. I want you to feel at ease when you are with me, Mira...”

Yeah, like that is going to happen! But out loud I say, “I will try... Ryden...”

“I will leave you for today, Mira,” he says after a pause, “Get some rest. And I guess I will see you at dinner.”

I skip dinner and work instead. Getting out my equipment, I carefully test Fawn’s blood only to find out that no spells were used on her. No, that can’t be right. Fawn couldn’t do it herself. Something definitely happened and someone either forced her or...

The idea strikes my head unexpectedly and I run to get another potion from my collection. Just one drop and I see a pale green substance separate from the rest.

Sideria! That’s what the killer used it for! The drug that can make you do what others tell you! The drug that the one who killed Bella had been dealing with! That explains a lot!

So, I wasn’t mistaken and the murderer does have Sideria in his or her possession. As well as the second part of a tracking device and the ruby hairpin Aspen told us about... Now, if I just find who has those things in the possession, I would know for sure who the murder is!

A knock on the door breaks my trail of thoughts and I hurry to hide everything I have just been working with. This information is way too delicate to share with anybody...

Morgan and Xia are on my doorstep, smiling reassuringly.

"We thought you might need company," Morgan says and I notice a basket in her hands, "You didn't come to dinner and we decided to ring you some!"

"Oh, you shouldn't have", I sigh, "I am way too tired to do anything. And I don't really not in the mood to talk or share..."

"That's why we've brought help!", Xia giggles, getting a whole bottle of wine!

Alright. That changes things!

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MIRA

Half through the night we are all properly drunk. And again, how on heavens did it even happen? My tolerance for alcohol is definitely not that bad. But Xia brought a bottle of traditional wine from her tribe and although it's tastes delicious, it definitely makes me dizzier than I am supposed to be.

I tell my friends everything about Derrien and how he lied to me and tricked me. And we all decide that we hate him from now on. We also all decide that Fawn definitely did not commit suicide. And we swear to find out who her murderer is. Then later we swear that from this day forward the three of us are going to be sisters. And then we swear to help each other when we start our new lives in the Gerdian Empire. THEN the girls swear to help me escape if they can. And THEN I swear to come back for them and rescue them if they want me to. THEN we swear to do the worst numbers possible for the damn talent show just to make a point.

And then we just swear because life is unjust and unfair.

Then, luckily, the wine is over and the girls decide that it's time for them to leave to their rooms.

And when they are gone, I notice that Xia has forgotten one of her gerdian etiquette books, which she claimed is very important to her. Not thinking twice, I grab it and decide to catch up with her and give her back the book.

It must be important and I am a very responsible friend.

I run down the hall and take a turn. And then another one and then one more. Until I realize that I do not recognize my surroundings for the life of it.

Well, this is definitely still the gerdian's floor since the door designs here are more luxurious than anywhere else at the castle. Maybe if I just try to go back and...

"What has a beautiful little bird as yourself forgot at this side of the castle?", I hear an unfamiliar male voice behind me and turn. I see a gerdian that I have met a few times before, but I do not remember his name or title. I think he is one of Xia's admirers so probably a noble at least.

"I am sorry", I squeak, "I am lost."

"I see", he smirks and that smirk does not promise me anything good, "It's dangerous to wander the halls so late at night and completely alone. Come with me and I will help you and protect you."

"You know, I think my memory clears and I remember the way back," I try to step away, but he follows me, "Please, don't bother, my lord, and go back. I will manage on my own just fine."

"Feisty little bird!", he chuckles and captures me into his arms, "I can't let you go like that, can I? Don't worry, I'll be gentle with you..."

I struggle to push him away and breathe out, accepting the fact that I have to hit him with my fire magic as hard as I can and then simply run and pray. It doesn't help that I am still dizzy and a bit disoriented. But...

"Count Freeden", Tristan's voice cuts through my brain, "I see you have found the Crown Prince's new favourite. Thank you so much for your help!"

The gerdian and I both turn to see the Sapphire Knight without his armour for the first time. Tristan is standing in just black pants, boots, and a half-unbuttoned white shirt. His blonde hair is messy and I have never seen him like this in my life.

“Crown Prince’s new favourite?”, the gerdian takes his hands off me in seconds and I almost fall to the ground, but Tristan quickly comes closer and catches me.

“Yes, his Highness takes a special liking in lady Mira here,” my ex-fiancé says firmly, “She got lost and I need to get her back to her room. Thank you for all your help, I’ll be sure to inform the Prince of your role in...”

“Please, don’t, sir Ragnard,” the count says quickly, “There is absolutely no need for the Prince to know of my involvement. I am happy I could help, but now it’s time for me to retire for tonight. Good night.”

The man quickly escapes and both Tristan and I look at each other. And then I burst out laughing. I laugh and I laugh, tears falling from my eyes and I realize that I can’t stop. A fit of laughter engulfs me whole and I bury my head in my ex’s broad chest, not being able to stop. I know it’s hysteria, but the knowledge doesn’t help me one bit.

“Mira”, I feel him whispering in my hair as his arms pull me closer towards him, “Calm down, please.”

“I can’t!”, I laugh more, tears now streaming down my cheeks.

“I see”, he sighs and lifts me up into his arms.

“Wh-what are you doing?” I manage to ask between my fits.

“Taking you to your room. It’s not safe to stay here. What were you even doing here?”, he asks.

“I had lady Xia’s book and wanted to return it. But lost my way somewhere in the process,” I squeak, “Oh, wait! I still haven’t found her! I need to go back!”

“Just leave it, Mira!”, he rolls his eyes, “No one would be reading at this hour at night anyway.”

“Xia could”, I insist.

“Alright, I’ll take the book to her myself. Now, just sit still! It’s hard to carry you when you are like that!”

“Like what?”, I look at his face questioningly and see him smile.

“Drunk and wriggling in my arms”, he chuckles, “Gods, Mira, I’ve never seen you like that!”

“Well, Tristan!”, I try to sound as serious as I can, “I’ve never seen you like THAT!”

“Like what?”, he mimics me.

“So... relaxed,” I say after a pause and touch his hair, making him flinch, “So perfectly imperfect... You were always so...polished...back in the normal times.”

We are at my door and Tristan manages to open it and take me inside. In my chambers, he walks confidently to my bedroom.

“We will have good times again,” he says carefully placing me on my bed, “You and I. You know that, right?”

“No”, I say honestly, my eyes almost closed, “Everything is so horrible now...”

“I am sorry, Mira”, he exhales heavily, “This is all my fault. But I will get you back. Everything is going to be alright. Can you trust me?”

“Your eyes are as blue as sapphires,” I smile, trying to poke my finger into his eyes to check if it feels like a sapphire as well, “Is that why they call you the Sapphire Knight?”

“No, not because of that,” he smiles and suddenly leans down to kiss me. I feel his tongue entering my mouth and his minty breath... And then I feel nothing as I finally drift off to sleep...

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DERRIEN

I crush and burn every obstacle on my training grounds. I have never been so furious in my life! The dragon inside me is roaring with all his might, asking for blood and destruction. We are fuming!

My soldiers wisely do not approach me. And however much I break and burn things, it doesn’t make it better. Mira is driving me crazy. That girl... That tiny

creature with fiery hair and clear green eyes, like the finest emeralds... She is mine! Mine! I have known that for a while already, but only now I realize my mistake. I should have placed that damn engagement bracelet on her hand as soon as I claimed her. Selection or no Selection, this woman must be mine. She IS mine. Both I and my dragon agree on that.

And now she doesn't want to see me... Because I tried to respect her own desires... Stupid girl! And stupid me... I shouldn't have even asked her. She can't belong to anyone else. And definitely not to Dargen among all the men! "He wouldn't have her! Over my dead body!", I growl.

"Derwood!", Brandon's voice distracts me and I grasp him by his neck, lifting him up in the air. The fire inside me desires to get out! I need a few good seconds before I realize that I am holding my best friend in my death grasp.

I let him go and he lands to the ground, coughing, "Chaos, Derwood, you have completely lost your mind!"

"Do you have something important to tell me?", I ask, turning away, "Otherwise I am not in the mood!"

"Don't get crazy, Derrien", he lifts up onto his feet, "Have Dargen placed his bet on your girl?"

I turn to him and he shrugs at this. I know that dark magic is circling in my eyes. Only Mira could calm it down at this point...

"It doesn't matter!", I snap, "He wouldn't have her! Freyn is mine!"

"Listen," Sevill starts carefully, "Calm down and think with a clear head! He is the Crown Prince now. And you are sworn to serve the royal family. If you do something to offend him... it would be treason."

The word cuts through my mind. Treason. I never thought I would be in this place. Even though I knew for a while that sooner or later I would have to serve Dargen as the future emperor. But it was my choice. And I have accepted it.

But Mira... I cannot accept her with him. To chaos with it – I can't accept her with anyone else! My dragon would never...

“Derwood,” Brandon comes closer, “You know there is only one way out of this.”

I look at my friend questioningly. Neither of us wants to say it out loud. The only way out would be to go to my uncle the Emperor and tell him that I agree to become his heir. And if he doesn't want me anymore, all I have to do is kill Dargen. sh!t. I can't believe I am even thinking of this. What has she done to me?!

“Everyone would be better off with you as the Emperor,” Sevill whispers.

“Don't speak of it anymore,” I shake my head, “I need to think. And I need to think alone.”

I transport myself back to the Selection castle to my room. She is right behind that wall... All I want is to go there and talk to her, and then take her again and again, make her forget everything, and make her understand that she is mine and mine only.

But I can't forget her eyes. The pain... and the disappointment. How hurt she was... I need to fix it and I need to fix it fast. Before Dargen creeps into her mind and ruins her soul, before he ruins her and makes her his... The thought of this makes me furious again.

And there is only one thing that can calm me down now. I need to see her...

I pour a glass of wine and sit in an armchair opposite my standing mirror. I swipe my hand across the surface and Mira's room shows. The best thing that happened today is that at least she doesn't know that I was also secretly keeping an eye on her. Although, honestly, I am surprised she hasn't figured that out already. When I burnt all those underwear her “friend” packed for her, she had her suspicions... I was never even intending on doing that. Just needed to make sure she had nothing to do with the second murder. And then I discovered that just watching her sleep peacefully makes my dragon calm. He needs to see her, he needs to know that she is safe and I have no idea why. So these little night observations became a part of my routine... however much I am embarrassed to admit that.

The room is empty and it bothers me. It's too late and she is supposed to be in. I don't hear any sounds from her living room, although, of course, she could have still be working or simply fall asleep on the sofa...

Then I hear some noise and in just a few seconds in comes sir Tristan with Mira in his hands. What the actual fvck?!

I jump to my feet and flames run up my legs, I am ready to transport and kll that damn knight. And then I notice that something is off. Mira is not embracing him. If anything, her movements are clumsy and... Wait, it reminds me of the night she has drunk way too much spiked wine at the Introduction Ball...

"We will have good times again," Tristan promises her, placing her on her bed and my bl00d boils, "You and I. You know that, right?"

"No", she snorts and I feel relieved at that, "Everything is so horrible now..."

"I am sorry, Mira", the knight says, "This is all my fault. But I will get you back. Everything is going to be alright. Can you trust me?"

Someone has a death wish...

"Your eyes are as blue as sapphires," Mira pokes his eyes shamelessly and I hope she picks them out while she is at it, "Is that why they call you the Sapphire Knight?"

"No, not because of that", he says and then he leans down and places his lips on hers. He is a dead man! I am thinking about the hundreds of ways that I could kll him when I hear a... snore.

Gods, that woman is snoring at his face while he just tried to k!ss her... And that's Miradora Freyn for you. A laugh escapes me and to my surprise I see a very disappointed Sapphire Knight covering his ex-fiancée with a blanket and leaving after having one last glance at her. I still want to take his guts out, but also... I can relate. He lost her and so did I. And yet... if I see him touch her like this ever again, he would die that very second.

I sit back in the chair and just watch her snoring for some time. Gods, what has she been drinking that got her to that state, and may I have some? Chaos knows I need it today!

I could steal her out from the castle this very moment and send everything else to chaos. But then she would hate me forever... I need her back. I want her to want me. The way she already did. Knowing how it is with her, I want it all... Just how can I make that little mage all mine again?

But then other thoughts surface. Am I ready to betray everything just to be with that woman? Is she worth it for me to commit treason? Is any woman worth this much?

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MIRA

I wake up feeling like a dozen horses run over me – absolutely broken. Everything hurts, but most of all – my heart. Although my head takes the firm second place. I am never drinking anything in this cursed castle ever again. It never ends well.

I remember our evening with Morgan and Xia. And how I tried to catch up with them later to give Xia her book back and ran into yet another disgusting gerdian. What a repulsive race, honestly! And then I remember how Tristan came to my rescue and how I was absolutely not capable of walking on my own and he had to carry me... And somewhere in that area, my memories disappear completely. But judging by how I am still wearing everything I wore yesterday except for the shoes – he brought me back safely and left. I need to thank him when I see him today.

But I need a shower and something to kill the terrible pain in my head. Looking for the right potion, I open my bedside table, and there they are – two rings – Dargen's and Dereck's. I'd better hide Dereck's better. Or else I could be in trouble. And so could be he.

At breakfast the atmosphere is gloomy. The table above which Fawn was hanging is empty. Actually, if I remember correctly that table belonged to Isidore's group. And Bella was sitting at that same table right before she died. No wonder no one wants to sit there anymore. It's like this place is cursed.

I am not particularly hungry, but I feel that I need to eat something dry to keep what's inside of me. Looking at Morgan and Xia I want to giggle a bit as Morgan is not touching anything except for coffee and Xia is wearing an actual veil that covers the upper half of her face. I do know that this is part of the traditional outfits of her tribe, but I really don't think that they wear it anymore...

“What’s this all about?” I ask her pointing at her headpiece and holding back a laugh.

“Unlike someone, I haven’t secured a proper groom yet,” she replies, “So I can’t let them see me the way I look today.”

“And that is?”, Morgan raises her brow.

“Just look in the mirror, my dear,” Xia sends a piece of sausage into her mouth. At least she hasn’t lost her appetite.

Morgan and I look at each other and nod understandingly. I guess none of us looks like a fresh rose today.

“And how are you feeling?”, I turn to Desirae, “Why haven’t you come to my room yesterday with the girls?”

“I was busy”, she fiddles with her intricate braid, “My number for the talent show is pretty hard.”

You can cut the silence with a knife. As none of us has anything to say to that. Fawn was Desirae’s roommate, they spend more time together than any of us... and she was preparing her number for the talent show on the day Fawn was found dead? Really? How does that work?!

“Don’t look at me like that,” she sighs, “You have no idea how important all this is to me! If I manage to be chosen by at least the lowest of nobles, it would change the life of my whole family! It’s terrible what happened... And I was questioned for most of the day yesterday, losing precious time... I mean... It’s lonely in the room without Fawn... And... And...”

She starts crying.

“Don’t, dear,” Xia puts a hand on her shoulder, “We understand. A lot is at stake here. And I am sure Fawn would understand you like no one else.”

Morgan and I look at each other and say nothing. It still feels wrong to me. Although I guess, it is hard for me to understand. After all, the Selection can change Desirae’s life for the better, and for me, it is the end of the world.

“Lady Xia Dart,” Tristan is standing right next to me and I jump in my seat blushing lightly, remembering how he carried me completely drunk down the halls of the castle. He must be so happy we are not engaged anymore.

“Sir Ragnard,” Xia straightens her back, “How may I help you.”

“I have found a book and I believe it belongs to you,” Tristan smiles, handing the book to my friend and winking at me.

“Oh my! I thought I have lost it! How nice it is of you to bring it to me,” Xia chatters, “And I thought I left it in Mira’s room!”

I cough choking on the croissant I’ve been trying to eat and immediately feel Tristan’s hand on my back.

“Careful, lady Mira,” he bends to me slightly, “You need to take better care of yourself.”

“Uhm, I’ll keep that in mind, Trista... I mean, sir Ragnard,” I look at him and see the most charming smile. Oh, he is doing all that on purpose! The side of my ex that I never knew existed!

“Ladies,” he bows and leaves.

“What was that all about?” Morgan sips her coffee.

“Nothing!” I say way too fast attracting even more attention.

“Something is definitely up,” Desirae chuckles.

“Agh,” I groan, “Alright. He kind of caught me drunk yesterday in one of the halls with that damn book of yours, Xia.”

“Would you be punished?” Morgan asks.

“Well, since lady Cecilia is not here yet, I guess the Sapphire Knight has kept it to himself,” Xia says smiling and then lifts up her veil to look at me with her dark eyes, “Mira, have you ever felt sorry that the two of you not together anymore?”

“I didn’t think about it much,” I admit, “Before I came here I didn’t even know if he was taking our engagement seriously. I thought we would break it off at some point..”

“But now you know that he was serious about you,” Xia finishes for me understandingly.

“Would it change a lot if you knew before?” Desirae asks.

“I don’t know,” I sigh, “Maybe... But there is no sense in talking about it now. You know very well where we are...”

“True,” Morgan finishes her coffee and puts the cup down.

“And yet what a life could it be for you with the Sapphire Knight itself!” Xia says dreamingly, “He is handsome, noble, rich, ambitious... a perfect man!”

“Enough about that”, Morgan shushes us, “If the gerdians hear our conversation it may end badly for all of us!”

I roll my eyes. I don’t care about that. But they do. So I close my mouth and continue torturing the croissant.

The next lesson takes place at a concert hall. This is where the talent show will take place. The stage is not huge, but bigger than what we have back in the dining room. Looking around I note that this place can fit right about a hundred or so spectators. So that would be 50 gerdians plus our teachers and guards.

Lady Cecilia, in an elegant royal blue dress, calls girls in turns to show their numbers and comments on each of them, her critique is harsh but, sadly, to the point. Most girls are singing and dancing. And it becomes incredibly... boring... I wish I could fall asleep here, but judging by the glances Cecilia throws at me from time to time – I’d better not.

Finally, I see Xia come to the stage and wake up as it must be a good show. Yesterday we all agreed to make horrible numbers for the talent show in memory of Fawn and to make a point that we deserve more than just one day of postponing the stupid show. My friend is wearing a very revealing dress with her tribe motives sewn on it, two golden clubs are in her hands, and one of lady Cecilia’s assistants helps her to light up fire on both ends of those. The music starts and she jumps up in the air, twirling those fiery things with ease in her hands. I watch her performance with an open mouth. It can be called a lot of things, but terrible is just not one of them. This is beautiful, amazing, and definitely to gerdians’ taste... However, this is not what we agreed on

yesterday. I feel sad to know that she didn't follow our plan. And when she finishes and bows I catch her apologetic look and smile weakly.

I can't blame her. I mean, I can but I really shouldn't. She wants to get married to a gerdian and she was always clear about that. It was probably not fair from me to propose sabotage... And yet it stings. She smiled and promised but never delivered.

And, yes, we were drunk by then... But still...

Alright, doesn't matter. I am sure at least Morgan would not fail me!

However, I bite my tongue when she performs after a few other girls. She brings a mini-laboratory to the stage and as an expert herbologist, she mixes a few potions and demonstrates their effects. Some of which are very impressive.

She didn't go with the plan as well.

"Lady Miradora Freyn!" Cecilia yells my name and I stand up. I haven't prepared anything and I am not ashamed of it. But before I even reach the stage, she starts talking again, "There has been a change of plan for you, lady Freyn. The Crown Prince has a special request for you – he wants to see you dance for him. So drop your explosion plans and perform any dance of your choice. The prince knows you don't have too much time but he is sure he is going to love whatever it is that you perform. Honestly, I don't think a girl with an attitude like yours deserves such treatment.. But it is what it is. The Crown Prince's word is law within these walls. You are going to dance!"

Morgan, Xia, and Desirae, who was showing a shadow theatre, come up to me with uneasy faces and I feel like everybody's attention is on me. I loathe that feeling. Without saying another word, I turn and walk to the exit.

"Where do you think you are going?!" lady Cecilia shrieks.

"To practice!", I lie and slam the door. I hate this place!

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MIRA

I run through the dark halls of the castle, eager to hide in my chambers and not show my face to anyone else today. Tears are streaming down my cheeks when someone grabs me by my hand and pulls me into a rock-hard broad chest.

“Easy!” Tristan wipes my cheeks, looking concerned, “Mira, what happened? Did someone hurt you?”

“Tristan,” I look surprised at my ex-fiance, then get back to my senses, “N-no, no... Everything is fine...”

“Mira, I think I know you well enough to know for sure when you are not fine...”

“No, really...”, I mumble.

“Mira,” he sighs heavily, brushing his palm over my cheek.

“She said that she is fine!”, Derrien’s voice reminds more of a growl of a beast than the voice of a man.

“Lord Derwood,” Tristan acknowledges him but does not take his hands off me.

“I think you have forgotten your place here, Sapphire Knight!”, the gerdian grits through his teeth.

“On the contrary,” Tristan steps in front of me, “I am here to make sure that everything goes smoothly and the ladies are treated well. In light of the latest events, I need to make sure that no one else would desire to take their life and...”

I realize that he is talking about Fawn and shrug. So, this is the official version for everyone. That she committed suicide. That simple. Only that I know for sure it is not!

“She didn’t do it!”, I say firmly and both men look at me startled.

“Mira,” Tristan smiles sadly and uses a tone you use with a silly child, “I know she was your friend, but...”

“Enough!”, Derrien growls, “Leave us, knight!”

He uses this kind of non-polite for addressing Tristan on purpose and we all know it.

“Lord Derwood, Lady Freyn”, Tristan bows to him and kisses my hand before leaving, which only annoys the gerdian more.

And here we are. Alone for the first time after our break up. At first, I don't even look into his eyes, but then, suddenly, I feel anger rising inside of me. I am not the one who should be embarrassed here! I am not the one who...

I meet his gaze, bold, greedy, devouring. He is not embarrassed for sure. And it makes my blood boil. Because he should be! He should apologize and he should beg... at least, he shouldn't be able to look me in the eye... And yet – here he is, confident as ever!

“We need to talk,” he says calmly, not a single emotion on his face and I want to slap him again.

“We don't have anything to talk about”, I raise my chin preparing to leave.

“About the murders,” he says bluntly and I feel a prick in my heart. So, I am dying here but all he wants to talk about are the murders... Gods, why have you sent this man upon me?! I do not deserve this kind of punishment!

“Oh,” I pretend that I am not hurt at all, “What do you want to tell me then?”

“Actually, I want you to tell me something,” with these words, he is next to me in seconds, pulling me hard into his arms and surrounding us with the flames of dark magic. It is a long transportation this time. Longer than ever. I feel his fingers pressing hard into my flesh and his breath is right into my ear as he lifts me up gently. What is going on here?!

“I miss you...”, I think I hear his voice, but during the transportation it's hard to say. Maybe I am just imagining things... imagine that I hear what I want to hear...

But in reality, this man is cold and calculating... And he doesn't care much about me... And even if he does at least a little bit, I don't think I would ever be able to forgive him for what he has done. Not that it can change anything anyway. He is not a part of the Selection. But I am. And the Crown Prince who wants me is. It's too late for anything...

So, when we are finally in my room, I push him away and fix non-existing creases on my dress.

He clears his throat and I roll my eyes just to demonstrate to him how unimpressed I am with the whole situation.

“Is it really necessary to be this close during the transportation?” I ask, annoyed with the whole situation, and look at him, his face is still emotionless.

“Yes, sometimes” he replies and I see a few sparks of magic dance wildly in his eyes.

“Are you lying to me right now?” I press my lips.

“No,” he chooses his words carefully and I know it. He swore to answer all my questions honestly once and this magic vow is still active.

“Was it absolutely necessary to do it right now?”, I raise my brow.

“Yes,” he answers after a pause.

“Why?”

“The situation required it.”

“What situation?”, I insist.

“I choose not to answer this question”, he turns to the window and that’s what he always does when I discover the truth that he wishes not to share with me.

“Honestly, you...”, I grit through my teeth.

“What have you found?” he asks, “You managed to run your test, did you?”

“Of course I did,” I hold my head high, “Or you thought that I would cry my eyes out and forget about what’s really important here?”

He flinches and I see that gloating inside that at least I can hurt him a bit too. Or maybe I am imagining it... Who knows what is going on inside this cold iceberg of a man.

“I am glad that you are fine,” he says softly, without turning to me, “I would hate for you to...”

"I found Sideria," I interrupt him since I don't want to hear what he has to say about me, "Her blood was cleared, but the hair... whoever did it, they did not think that hair could be checked too. The trace is faint, but it's definitely there. And it would explain greatly why..."

"...there weren't any signs of a struggle", he finishes for me and turns to face me, "Good work, little mage. I really appreciate..."

"I am not doing it for you!", I snap and cross my hands on my chest.

"Of course," he says coldly, "I understand. Still, good job. At least now we know that the two murders that happened here were committed by the same person."

"So, what's next?" I look at him expectantly.

"Well, I am afraid I am going to need more of your help, Mira. Much more."