

## The Selection: Bride Of The Dark Dragon Chapter 76 - Tips

It takes Dargen a few good seconds to catch up with what is really going on and he lets go of me, screaming in rage, "What the actual chaos?!"

He tries to put it down but the dark fire only gets bigger. Flames spreading all over the sleeve of his fancy frockcoat.

"Can I help?" I mumble as music stops and so does everyone else.

"Do something!" he grits through his teeth and I summon water element at once, putting the fire down, but slightly overdo it, so Dargen is definitely wetter than he is supposed to be and looking at me as if he is about to murder me himself.

"Oh, gods, your Highness!" I curtsy, "I apologize!"

He measures me with a furious gaze but says nothing.

"Go change, cousin," I hear Derrien's voice right behind me, "You are the face of the Empire now and cannot stay looking like this. Do not worry, I'll take care of your favourite and we wouldn't start without you."

He says it calmly but it seems like mocking and everybody around us is silent. Because in a situation like this the wrong word could cost you a life.

"Lady Miradora," the prince bows slightly, clearly displeased with the whole situation, "I'll be right back. The archduke will keep you company."

"Thank you, your Highness," I curtsy and he disappears in a cloud of dark smoke. It immediately gets easier to breathe for everyone.

I turn to look at Rien and there are five girls practically hanging on him, which annoys the chaos out of me!

He smirks meeting my gaze and says to them, "Excuse me, ladies. I am afraid I have an official task now and have to leave all of you indefinitely."

"But," one of the girls mumbles but he looks at her sharply, dark magic flashing for just a second in his eyes but this is enough for all of them to step away in horror.

Lady Mira,“ he offers me his hand, which I accept, and the music starts again. He leads me confidently, as always, and neither one of us is able to look away. I notice that butterflies on my dress started to live on their own – flapping their wings, flying away as I twirl, and then coming back again. Magical.

“So, to how many girls exactly have you sold me to?” he asks me with a face that shows no emotions at all. Which I know now only means trouble.

“Well,” I squeak.

“Mira!” he snaps, pressing me tighter.

“Rien!” I mimic him and roll my eyes, “What do you want me to say? You said it yourself that I can promise them anything if I need to bribe them.”

“AnyTHING,” he corrects me, “Not anyONE. I remember clearly that I told you to be reasonable.”

“And I was! A few dances for a clue is not that bad!” I retort, “You can survive spending time with a few pretty girls.”

“Well, at least that’s true that they are pretty,” he chuckles and I step on his feet. Hard.

“Oh, pardon me. I feel so clumsy today!” I give him my fakest smile.

“That’s quite all right”, he smirks, “I like it when you are jealous.”

“Me? Jealous? You are confusing reality with your desires, lord Derwood!”

“Oh, lady Freyn, you would find out everything about my desires if we meet inside the portal,” he whispers into my ear as the dance finishes and bows to me while I curtsy.

“Let’s see IF that happens,” I clench my lips, and sparks of dark magic start dancing in his eyes, making me feel guilty for my words.

“Let me be honest,” he says suddenly, “If I don’t see you there... It would all be over. I would not pursue you anymore.”

“I can tell you the same thing!” I snort but flinch inside.

“By the way, where is my locket?” he asks after looking me up and down once again, “I thought I was clear that you need to wear it at all times.”

“I am wearing it,” I smile and take a goblet of wine from one of the servants.

“Well, I do not see it!” he says grumpily.

“Well,” I look into his eyes and smirk, “That’s probably because it’s hidden in a place not everyone is supposed to see – somewhere under this beautiful dress.”

Sparks again. I love it that it’s this easy to make him react to my words in this way.

“Mira,” he groans and there is so much hidden meaning inside the sound of my name on his lips.

“Rien”, I take a sip of the wine as he leans lower to my ear.

“Don’t forget what kind of wine is served at the events here,” he chuckles and I immediately spit everything back into my glass and put it away, only making him laugh more. I cough a few times and then clear my throat, pretending that nothing happened.

“So, what do you think about Alexandra?” I change the subject, popping a grape into my mouth.

“I think there is a good possibility that she is involved in all of this. But I don’t want you to be involved in all this anymore. I’ll take it from here.”

“Now that’s just not fair!” I object, “I was helping you all the way and now you want to exclude me?”

“I want to protect you!” he interjects and we both have more to say but stop talking once a cloud of dark smoke appears next to us and Dargen comes out of it. He looks us both up and down and then orders, “Derwood, a minute! Mira, have some wine while I am gone!”

Both men walk away and start talking in the far corner of the hall while I pretend to sip the drink I was brought by one of the servers. No way I am taking it in for real, knowing what effect gerdian wine had on me the last time I

consumed it. I bet this is exactly what Dargen wants – a very drunk and agreeable me. Disgusting.

Music starts again and the Crown Prince marches towards me, dragging me to the dancefloor, clearly still furious.

“I hope you are ready,” is all that he says to me.

“As ready as one can be for something like this,” I say and praise the gods for the fact that in this dance we are supposed to change partners. So, just in a few seconds, I am rid of Dargen and his sour mood. The next gerdian I dance with is unfamiliar to me and we don’t even say a word to each other. But when the time comes to change partners again, I gasp as I land in Tristan’s hands.

“Oh, gods,” I mutter to him, “Are you even supposed to do this?”

“It doesn’t matter,” he says firmly, “Mira, remember. When you go in, don’t think about any of them. Think of home, think of where you belong.”

“What the...,” I start saying when Brandon Seville gets me next.

“And what was that all about?” he raises his brow, “Conspiring with your ex?”

“Of course not!” I snap, “Why do you always assume the worst about me?!”

“Because you always prove me right,” he sighs, “Derrien deserves a shot at happiness and he needs someone who wouldn’t bring him trouble! And that’s definitely not you!”

“Well, if you don’t like me this much why don’t you send me an empty jewellery box?” I roll my eyes.

“I already did!” he smirks and I want to step on his foot too.

“Then be a good boy and tell all your gerdian friends to do the same!” I hiss.

“I will!” he nods and it’s time for us to part.

A few gerdians later I finally reach Rien but we don’t say anything to each other anymore. There is no need. However, right before it is time to pass me on to Dargen, he whispers, “I will be waiting for you!”

I feel uncomfortable in Crown Prince's hands and he grits through his teeth, "I hope you know what to do! Do not disappoint me, Mira! You would not like the consequences!"

I say nothing to that. I know if I will see someone, it most definitely won't be him.

Everything is so hectic, mad even. And I start to feel dizzy when the music suddenly stops. Men bow to their women and Ryden kisses my hand before walking away to the other side of the room.

Lady Cecilia and Tristan come to the center – at both sides of the huge arch and touch crystals mounted into it. The arch begins to shine with transparent blue light, separating men from women on different sides of it. And even now I see Derrien's eyes sparkling with dark magic.

"My lords and ladies!" Cecilia says, "The time has come! Enter the portal of desires and you will find out if your feelings are reciprocated!"

A few girls start moving and I see a few gerdians entering the portal first. Dargen also strides resolutely into the unknown. I walk slowly and before I touch the blue light, I see Derrien right opposite of me. We look at each other for just a second and take a step each...

It feels like gerdian transportation. But it definitely takes more time. Finally, I step out on green grass in the forest. What the chaos? Where am I?

Suddenly, I recognize the place. It's the glade in front of the mountain hut where Rien and I... And that's when I realize that he is not here... I look around, then again and again... but I am completely alone in this place.

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MIRA

I turn around one more time to make sure that it's not my imagination. I am alone here. I read about it in the book with the rules for the Selection. If the person your heart desires to see doesn't feel the same then you will get to a place of significant importance to you and spend your time there alone. And that's what is happening to me. I gave myself to Derrien Derwood in that hut...

It is an important place for me. And now it is mocking me. Silly Mira, who thought that a man like him could fall for her...

Derrien doesn't want to see me. He doesn't want me... He doesn't choose me...He doesn't love me!

I lean with my back on a nearby oak tree and gradually slide down to the ground, tears rolling down my cheeks as I give out a loud lonely sob. He doesn't love me... No, it can't be! It can't!

A creaking sound makes me lift up my head. The door of the hut opens and Derrien walks out on wobbling feet, holding onto the wall of the hut. He looks so pale... As if something terrible just happened. For a minute there I don't even understand what is going on.

And then it gets to me. He is here! And so am I!

"Ri...RIAN!" I scream for him in a broken voice and he flinches, looking up and seeing me for the first time. His lips part and I jump to my feet and run to him as fast as I can, slamming into his hard chest, still crying as I do.

"Mira!" he exhales heavily as his hands wrap around me and he squeezes me tighter than ever. Then I feel him kissing the top of my head, my hair, my face many times, noticing my tears and wiping them away with his thumbs.

"Rien!" I sob, "I thought you weren't here!"

"I know," he kisses my tears away, "I thought the same. I thought... I was going to die! I love you, Mira! I love you so much!"

For a second it feels like I stopped breathing. He never said anything like this to me before! He never confessed like that!

"Rien," I smile through my tears, "I love you too! You are the only one for me!"

His lips cover mine, greedily, possessively, making me forget how to breathe again. I look up into his face and see flames, his dark magic is ready to burst out any moment.

"Mira, I can't hold back anymore," he groans into my neck.

"Then don't!" I reply and wrap my hands around his neck, as he lifts me into his hands and steps inside the hut. But what I see next I do not expect. We

are definitely not inside that little mountain house built by a hunter anymore. If anything, the room he brought me to looks like it is inside of a castle. And I think I've been here before... A fireplace, a dark sofa... A desk near the window... A door to a bedroom... One of our dreams, we've already been here.

"Where are we?" I ask Derrien as he carefully places me on the bed.

"My chambers in my castle," he smiles at me, "I think I know what happened now. We wanted to see each other, but we had different significant places. You had the hut in mind for obvious reasons. And I was thinking of these rooms. Because... Because, Mira, this is where I want to bring you as my wife."

I gasp and he lowers himself to kiss me, not letting me to say a word.

"Don't answer now," he mumbles, leaving wet trails of kisses on my neck.

"Answer what?" I whisper, pulling his coat off his shoulders, "You didn't ask me anything..."

"I'll ask you right after I take you out from the Selection", he says, taking away a lock of hair off my face.

"You will?" I almost sit up, but he holds me in place.

"Yes, Mira," he lowers so that his lips are almost touching mine, "For you the Selection is over. You've been selected. Congratulations."

"But you are not a part of..."

"I already am", he chuckles, "Emperor allowed me to join officially, over a week ago."

"A week?" I am lost for words.

"Right before you put on Dargen's ring," he raises his brow, "By the way..."

He takes my hand and removes the ring, throwing it to a nearby fireplace. And when I look at him questioningly, he smirks, "You are not going to need it anymore!"

“If you say so,” I smile and he slams his lips into mine. I feel his fingers unbuttoning my dress at the back and notice how tiny magical butterflies fly away from it. “Derrien, but if you’ve been a part of the Selection since then... then why did you not tell me or...”

“I wanted to, but you’ve been so angry with me. And then you put on that damn ring and I decided that I need to know for sure that this is what you want. I needed to see that you can truly love me.”

“And if we didn’t see each other here? What would you do?” I ask, a bit afraid to hear the answer.

“I don’t know,” he says truthfully, “Probably still take you as mine. Dragons are very possessive creatures. But it wouldn’t be the same for me, you know? Somewhere deep inside me, I need to know that you want me as much as I want you. I need your love. My dragon needs it too.”

“You speak of him as if you are two different persons...”

“We are. And at the same time, we are one. He doesn’t speak much and I don’t know much about dragons. My father left before I was born and I am the only dragon I know. There was no one to teach me what to do and how to control him. I had to learn blindly...”

I brush my palm over his cheek gently, feeling prickles of his light stubble, “Considering how hard it must have been, you’ve done well.”

“Mira!” he whispers and we connect in the most passionate and frantic kiss...

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MIRA

He relieves me of my dress and I stay almost bare for his touch. And this time we are not in any kind of hurry, his eyes are not flashing with dark magic anymore and we don’t need to go anywhere, no one can find us here... Inside the portal, we have all the time in the world. Days here would be just seconds in reality. I know this and so does he.



“So, you didn’t lie about wearing the locket I gave you,” he smirks when he sees his gift attached to the belt that is holding my silk stockings on, “Inventive!”

He carefully gets it and places it back on my neck, not forgetting to “accidentally” brush over my breasts. Then he slowly rolls off one of the stockings, and then another... not breaking the eye contact with me even once. Then he lowers himself in between my thighs and rips off the belt with his teeth... and my underwear follows the same path. The only thing I feel now in my core is his hot breath. And then a butterfly touch of his tongue, light and soft... and then, again and again, getting stronger every time, awakening the tension deep inside of me and bringing it back to the surface. His fingers go deeper into my flesh as he brings me closer to his face burying himself in me. And in a matter of minutes, I have my first release in his hands, shaking wildly and moaning his name.

I am trying to catch my breath when he sits up on the bed. Not losing any time, I kneel next to him and start unbuttoning his shirt with trembling fingers, biting my lip at the same time. Derrien is just watching me do it, no extra emotions on his face except for that tiny smile in the corner of his lips. I raise slightly to help the shirt slide off his torso and feel his breath on my breasts, his hands caressing my back, bottom, and thighs, gently and slowly. He explores my body, inch after inch, paying attention to every part of it, finding my core at the same time... And I explore him... His muscles look as if they were carved from a stone, a perfect sculpture of a perfect man. There is his tattoo on the back, the one that helped me realize once that my dreams are not just dreams... And the face that has to belong to some kind of deity – immaculate, masculine, beautiful. And those brown eyes with a reddish tint that always look right inside my soul. Gods, I love this man so much. And I want him. Only him.

He lifts me up by my thighs and I slowly slide onto him all the way down, feeling his hardness and heat at the same time. I start moving, supported by his strong arms. Arching my back and moaning as I do. With him I can forget about everything. There is nothing else at the moment – no Selection, no murders, no Crown princes, just me and him. Perfectly happy together.

I pick up the pace and arch my back even harder as I c\*\*\*\*x in his hands, not being able to control the sounds that I make anymore. “Rien, Rien, Rien...” is all I say in agony and only hear pleased growls in response. My movements become sloppy and uncoordinated as I lose myself to the pleasure he gives me.

“Mine,” he groans as he buries his face in my chest and I feel some kind of burn right where the Dark mark is, grasping his back with one hand and tugging onto his hair with another. He places me on my back and starts pounding into me as if he has lost any type of control, bringing in new waves of pleasure to me. I dig my nails into his back, not being able to hold back anymore. We c\*\*\*\*x together and he stills, pressing his body tight against mine as he fills me with his seed, covering me with kisses at the same time.

I look at him, covered with crystals of sweat, breathing heavily on top of me, and smile. “I love you, Rien,” I repeat and he covers my lips with his.

“It’s good, Mira, because I love you too. And now you are wearing my personal mark,” he says trying to restore his breath.

“What?” I look at where his eyes do and see that the Dark mark has changed its shape. It now looks exactly like the tattoo on Derrien’s back – a dragon flying in a circle with only its wings protruding out of the circular shape. But it’s significantly smaller and shines with the colour of the magic that I so often see in his eyes.

“Do you like it?” he asks, hesitantly.

“I do,” I admit to him and it makes him smile and kiss me again. Which I accept gladly. “But what does it mean? The mark?”

“That means that you are mine, Mira. I have accepted you and so have my magic and my dragon. For us, there wouldn’t be anyone else. This is the most sacred thing for gerdians. By doing this I promise that there wouldn’t be anyone else for me. Just you.”

“Rien,” I feel tears building up in my eyes, “I wish I could give you something like this as well...”

“Everything has its time, little mage,” he gives me a soft kiss on my forehead, “Don’t think about it now.”

“But I want to know more!” I cuddle under his arm as he lies next to me, “And what about the Dark Mark? Is it forever gone?”

“For you, yes. I told you – the Selection for you is over. The Dark mark could only be changed by a personal mark. When it happens, the girl is chosen and the couple leaves the Selection. This is what we are going to do.”

“But what about Dargen?” I ask and feel him flinch under me.

“What about him?” Derrien asks darkly.

“He is still the Crown Prince and...”

“I’ll deal with him,” he interjects, “I promised you I would and I will. After the ball today you will pack your bags and I will take you to my real bedroom. And we are not going to leave it for months!”

“Oh my!” I chuckle and hide my face in his broad chest, “I wouldn’t mind that!”

“Your mark is the same as your tattoo,” I say after a while, “Is that...”

“That’s my symbol. And it’s not just a tattoo, it’s a sign of my dragon. It appeared on me when I first shifted. And since then I made it my mark and the emblem of my house.”

“Oh, really?”

“Yes, Mira, my father wasn’t a gerdian. I hated my stepfather. So, I chose to have my own emblem and I am the first of my name, the first of my new lineage which our children would continue. We’ll be blessed with many.”

“You say as if you already know that,” I smile.

“I do. How do you think the brides are selected? Most women, including our own, cannot tolerate the dark magic that lives in us. Thus, we can’t have children with them. But some of the human women can. Not everyone, just about one in a hundred. And you are one of those. Genetically, you are perfect for a gerdian. But sometimes even with the brides problems may occur and she wouldn’t be able to tolerate the magic of a specific gerdian. But again, this is not our case, as you accepted my mark. It’s shining on your chest and it was easy to place it. We are perfect for each other, Mira.”

“Somehow I knew that for a while”, I admit and close my eyes, drifting off to sleep.

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Maybe it’s been days, maybe just hours, but we have spent the whole time enjoying each other in the depth of the portal. But all good things come to an end and we both realize that it’s time for us to go back.

I sit at the dressing table next to the bed, which, apparently, Derrien prepared specially for me back at the castle, and try to recreate my hair for the ball. The mark shines brightly on my chest. Nothing would help me hide what we were doing here.

“We don’t need to hide anymore,” Rien kisses the tip of my head as if he was just reading my mind, “Let’s go. The sooner we do it, the sooner you are in my real castle.”

“All right,” I smile at him and take the hand he is offering me. He opens the door of the bedroom and we take a step and find ourselves on the glade before the mountain hut.

In the nearby forest, I see some dull blue light – the portal. We walk to it, holding hands and enter together.

But I get out of it alone and I am slightly shocked with that.

“What took you so long?!” Dargen growls and grabs me by my wrist.

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Dargen is smiling but his look does not deceive me. He is furious and one can see it in his eyes. And when those eyes go down to my chest and he notices the dragon mark on me... chaos breaks loose. His fingers grip my wrist so hard that there is no doubt that there are going to be bruises tomorrow.

He starts pulling me towards the exit roughly and I notice how the room went quiet. I look around but Derrien is nowhere to be seen.

Suddenly, Brandon steps in front of the Crown Prince and with a friendly smile says, “Come on, Ryden! It’s just a woman. Just pick someone else and ...”

He gets a blow of dark magic right into his stomach and almost falls. Morgan hurries to him and for a second there I feel that Seville really doesn’t want her this close now.

“Just a woman?” Dargen hisses to the marquis, “Maybe I should take yours then? It’s just a woman, right?! And you can pick someone else!”

Morgan shrugs hearing his words and Brandon steps in front of her, not saying anything anymore, and just lets the prince drag me away. We pass Tristan and he moves forward but lady Cecilia blocks his way and shakes her head. No one is going to help me now.

“Please,” I say when we are alone in one of the long corridors, “Stop! You are hurting me!”

“Hurting you?!” he chuckles darkly and then slams me across the cold stone wall, “Oh, Mira, I haven’t even started?!”

He grabs me by my neck and leans forward so that his face is right in front of mine.

“Your Highness!” I say in a broken voice, trying to bring him to his senses. But it’s no use. His eyes become as black as soot.

“I am going to claw that thing out of your chest!” he growls, “And if it doesn’t help, I’ll burn it out! This is NOT staying on MY woman!”

“That’s good that it’s not your woman then,” I hear Derrien’s voice and feel a surge of relief.

“How dare you?!” Ryden lets go of me and throws a ball of dark energy at Rien, but he blocks that easily, smirking. He takes a step forward and Dargen turns to me with a clear intention to grab me by my neck or hair but this time his hand doesn’t reach me as I dodge him quickly. Rien is next to me in no time and places me behind him, squeezing my hand quickly in the most intimate and reassuring gesture.

The prince is so pissed, he looks like a complete madman! He prepares balls of dark magic in both his hands and is ready to attack.

“This is treason!” he growls, “My title is higher than yours! I have the right to choose first! She is mine!”

“Forget it, Ryden!” Derrien snaps, “You can’t have everything! Right now you can have the crown and the Gerdian Empire as well as any other girl except for Mira. I only need her. But if you do not agree – I will have to take everything away from you! I will personally kill you and take the Empire, which I don’t even want. So, don’t make me!”

“Traitor! This is treason!” Dargen roars, spitting, “You should be beheaded for treason!”

“Oh, yeah? Run that idea with the Emperor! That you want to k!ll his nephew, best general, and the dragon who won wars for him! And see how that goes for you!” Derrien smirks, “Ryden, even when you become the Emperor. You would need me and my dragon more than you need a queen. So, deal with it! I will be your loyal subject, I will bow to you and serve to you. But only as long as you never even touch Mira again. And the same rule goes for our future family. Think about it. I only make this kind of offer to you once.”

The Crown Prince disperses the dark magic in his hands. He looks at me and then at his cousin. It is obvious that he is nowhere nearly calm but he takes himself under control.

“We will see about it! See what the Emperor says!” he spits and disappears in a cloud of dark smoke.

“Oh, gods!” I exhale heavily and Derrien turns to me, pulling me into a warm hug and k!ssing the top of my head.

“It’s all right, you are safe! Everything is going to be fine!” he whispers into my hair. And I trust him.

“I know,” I smile, “Now that you are here! Where were you by the way?”

“He cast a spell for me to appear in a different place when I come out of the portal. I guess he saw it coming!”

Interesting...

“Mira,” Rien brushes his hand over my cheek, “I need you to go to your room and pack your things. I’ll go and speak with the Emperor. He would agree for us to be together, of that I am sure. But I need to make sure that Dargen doesn’t twist any important details. When you are done packing, go back to my room and wait there. All right?”

“Of course,” I stand on my toes and wrap my hands around his neck, bringing him closer for a k!ss, “I’ll wait for you here.”

“I love you,” he whispers into my l!ps.

"I love you too," I reply and touch his soft and warm lips gently. The next moment he presses me with all his might into his body and kisses me as if it was our last time. And when we are done, he disappears in the flames of dark magic.

I decide not to lose any time and hurry to the gerdians' floor to my room. But when I pass one of the stairwells, I notice a tiny female figure in a pale pink dress walking somewhere with a fire pulsar in her hand. What the... I've never seen any of the other girls doing elemental magic before. Just what is going on here?

I take off my shoes and follow the figure quietly. I don't do this for long when I realize that it's Alexandra! Isidore's minion and roommate, the one I have been suspecting for the last few days, the one who claimed not to possess any kind of magic. And now she has created a fire pulsar and is walking somewhere alone right in the middle of an important ball and really far from her own chambers.

Finally, I see her enter a room that I do not recognize. For a few seconds, I just stand there, thinking of what to do next. I wish I could call Derrien back now. He would know what to do.

On other hand, Alexandra is a human mage. And so am I. And a battlemage at that. I can take her down for sure. Considering she is alo...

Someone put a handkerchief to my face, holding me in place, and I recognize the sleeping potion that's been poured onto it. My head feels heavy and my eyes close... This is so not how it's supposed to be...

## **The Selection: Bride Of The Dark Dragon Chapter 80 - Tips**

MIRA

I come back to my senses in an unfamiliar room. It's still the Selection castle, I am sure of that as I recognize the unique stone used for its walls. But everything else bothers me. This is neither the gerdians rooms, neither the girls'. I am unfamiliar with the place I am in.

“Finally!” I hear Alexandra’s voice and turn my head to see her stand next to a fireplace. I flinch and only now realize that my hands are tied. And with a magic blocking rope of all things! I am in deep... trouble!

“Alexandra!” I try to fake a smile, “What is going on? Why am I tied up? And where are we? Could you help me and...”

“Oh, drop the act, Mira!” she rolls her eyes, “I know you suspected me for a while!”

“I did”, I follow her advice and admit, it’s no use to pretend with this cold-blooded murderer! I just need to get her close to me and knock her out. Luckily my legs are still free and it looks like a possible task.

“Well, clever you!” she chuckles, “Although it doesn’t help you in life much, does it?”

“How did you guess?” I snort, “Was it the rope? Or that time you knocked me out?”

“That wasn’t me,” she grins and I hear steps behind me. I turn my head but do not see the third person in the room. So, she was not alone. That would explain a lot!

“And to whom do I owe the pleasure to?” I raise my brow and hear a heavy sigh.

“That would be me,” Xia steps in front of me, and I gasp with shock. No! No, no, no! She can’t be one of the murderers!

“You?!” I almost feel tears in my eyes, but anger overwhelms me. I wouldn’t cry! Not in front of the two of them!

“Sorry, dear,” my ‘friend’ smiles weakly, “I had no choice...”

“You had no choice to knock me out? Or you had no choice to k!!! Bella and Fawn?! And the first girl...”

“I had no choice in any of those,” Xia sits in front of me and gets something from the cleavage of her red dress. I don’t show any emotion when I see the amplifier artifact in the shape of a ruby flower hairpin that Derrien and I were looking for all this time.



“People always have a choice!” I retort.

“Not if they are battlemages, Mira,” Xia smiles softly and I can’t help but choke on her words. Battlemages. They are both battlemages! Just like me!

“Why on heavens would battlemages do something like that?!” I ask still not believing what I am hearing.

“King’s orders, of course,” Alexandra chuckles, “Or what – did you think that battlemages get only the noblest of tasks and never dirty their hands? I have news for you, Miradora Freyn, we get all sorts of missions from our superiors. So, be careful what you wish for! This job is not for everyone!”

“Why would King Bendor want for you to k!!! innocent girls? What’s the point?” I ask and Alexandra rolls her eyes, clearly annoyed with all my questions.

“No one wants to k!!! innocent girls,” Xia replies, “Definitely not the king! And neither do we. But our Kingdom comes first, Mira!”

“What does our Akyrian Kingdom has to do with anything?”

“Everything!” Xia’s eyes sparkle with the reflections of the flames in the fireplace, “Mira, look at what the gerdians are doing! They are behaving as they own us! You of all the people were screaming it first when you arrive! You feel exactly what we feel. And the King feels the same. He’s been looking for ways to put an end to this for a while, planting “wives” he chose for the top-ranking gerdians. So that we have information and control. But this year is the most important year. Because Ryden Dargen takes part, the future Emperor himself. Getting him a wife who is one of us was the most important task!”

“All this because you want to marry Dargen?” the disgust must have shown on my face as Alexandra rolls her eyes once again.

“Of course!” she snorts, “Having our hands on the Emperor of the Gerdian Empire could have been the best thing that ever happened to our Kingdom! But you messed everything up for us. Honestly, I don’t see what all the fuss is about...”

“And that’s why you couldn’t land him in the first place, even after spreading your legs for him,” Xia retorts, and I see that although they are working together they are not friends. Good. Maybe I can use that.

“So, why the murders though?” I remind them of our main topic.

“Well, the first girl...” Xia sighs, “We needed her place. Unluckily, they didn’t choose our third agent and we tried to get her in. She was supposed to be next. Her body is very responsive to the dark gerdian magic and this is their main criteria for choosing girls for the Selection. But something went wrong and they choose you instead. It was a big miscalculation on our part.”

“Miscalculation? It cost a girl a life! Her name was...” I start talking, but she interjects.

“Mira, these were orders... What could we do?” Xia doesn’t look happy with the whole situation.

“But what about Bella? The Selection hasn’t even started when you used Crystal Shard to k!!! her!”

“You were the one to figure that out, weren’t you?” my ex-friend smiles sadly, “Yes, this wasn’t the plan. She saw something she was not supposed to see. Right before that dinner, she walked into the wrong room and saw me getting important artifacts from my superior. She didn’t get what was going on. But she was not supposed to see that... and our mission is too important to risk it... I had to do this one and it felt horrible. She seemed like a nice girl.”

“She WAS a nice girl!” I feel a single treacherous tear roll down my cheek, “And what did Fawn see for you to k!!! someone you called your friend?”

“That wasn’t me!” Xia snaps and looks at her accomplice furiously, “That moron over there was sure that if she is out then Dargen would crawl back to his one-night stand! i\*\*\*t! Unfortunately, I found out about it when it was already too late. Leaving her hanging there till morning was one of the hardest things for me...”

I clench my lips. I can feel that Xia is genuinely sorry. But that doesn’t change anything anymore... I hate them both!

“It would have worked!” Alexandra almost yells, “If you didn’t come into the picture! Dargen got obsessed with you for some reason!”

“So, I was next on your list?” I snort, but inside I am scared.

“I wish!” Alexandra gr0ans, “They wouldn’t let me!”

“They?” I raise my brow and that’s when the door opens...