

## The Selection: Bride Of The Dark Dragon Chapter 81 - Tips

MIRA

I did not expect this. I did not expect this in millions of years! But to be honest, I am not even sure which one of us is surprised more. Tristan looks at me as if he has seen a ghost.

“I told you I would get her myself!” he growls at the two girls, “And why the chaos is she tied to a chair?! Explain yourselves!”

My heart sinks. He is their leader. He is their superior that they mentioned... Oh, gods! Tristan was taking part in all those murders! He...he...

Now that I think of it, it makes so much sense! The Sapphire Knight of the Akyrian Kingdom wouldn't lower himself to supervise the Dark Selection. The task is well below him. And yet he is here. The naïve me have thought a few times that he might be here because of me. But no. That's not the reason. He is here because of King's orders because he needed to help to plant the spies in the Empire. And the higher the better.

“She saw that i\*\*\*t Alexandra walking in here,” Xia rolls her eyes, “Since we were going to take her out today anyway, I decided not to risk it and knocked her out.”

“You knocked her out?” Tristan looks furious and I can only think of the words that they were going to take me out today. Was I really the next to be killed or...

“Mira!” Tristan kneels in front of me and I flinch at his touch. The move only makes him upset, “Mira, you don't have to be afraid of anything.” He smiles and brushes his hand over my cheek.

“Well, sir Ragnard,” I look him straight in the eye. I find it extremely difficult since I am, you know, brought here by force and tied up with a magic blocking rope! Not to mention that you managed to murder three ladies that I knew personally!”

For a second there he contemplates. I know him well enough to know that look. But when he sighs heavily, I understand that he is not going to untie me. At least not now.

“Mira, please,” he pleads, “I would need you to trust me this once. You are safe and no one is going to hurt you. ”

“Uh-huh,” I want to roll my eyes but he leans forward and kisses me on a forehead throwing me off my trail of thought completely, “Wh-what do you think you are doing?!”

“Mira,” he smiles, calling my name for the hundredth time, “You are going home tonight. I found a way to save you from all this! Everything would get back to normal between us. Our families are already aware, our engagement is back on track and we can get back to where we were interrupted!”

I am speechless. No, I really mean it, I am lost for words and just sit there and gape like a fish thrown out of water. I look around and notice Alexandra roll her eyes and Xia clenching her lips tightly.

“Tristan,” I sigh finally and look at him, “We can’t get back to where we left off. Everything is so different now... It’s just...”

“Leave us!” he growls at the girls and they obediently walk out into the adjoining room without saying a word. Tristan looks at me with pain in his eyes and takes my face into both his hands. “Mira, I know things... happened while you were a part of the Selection. It’s all my fault that I let it happen to you in the first place. But trust me, I would never hold it or anything else against you. We would never speak of this. It’s... none of this is important to me. All I want is you. I want you back, I want you as my wife and the mother of my future children. I would never lose you again. We will...”

“Tristan,” I close my eyes in the most desperate move, “I am not embarrassed about what happened here. It’s not that... It’s... Well... I fell in love with someone else... You and I... I am afraid it’s too late for that. Please, Tristan, just let me go. I promise I would be quiet about everything, considering it’s my own king’s orders and all... I...”

“Stop,” he says harshly and stands up back to his feet, pacing back and forth in front of me. He is clearly thinking about something, rubbing the bridge of his nose from time to time.

“Tristan?” I call for him after a while, “Please, I am so sorry that...”

“That’s not Dargen, right?” is all he asks.

“No,” I shake my head, “Gods no! He is a psycho! It’s... it’s Derrien Derwood...”

A groan comes out of the Sapphire Knight of the Akyrian kingdom as he closes his eyes and starts breathing heavily. He walks to the fireplace and shoves a few pieces of wood in the flames vigorously. For the always reserved Tristan, this is as furious as it gets. I know that he is fuming inside.

But finally, he exhales heavily and comes back to me and kneels again. He stretches his hand to my cheek and I flinch once more, making him even sadder.

“It all right, Mira,” he says softly, “I am not angry.”

“You are not?” I raise my brows, “Are you sure?”

“Of course,” he smiles, “Mira... Gerdians...they are... they have this charm to them.”

Well, it’s true. They do. But I wonder where he is going with this.

“What do you mean?” I ask.

“Mira, their dark magic... We’ve been researching it for a while. It is captivating, it makes you look differently at the person who possesses it. It’s out of your control. But once you don’t interact with it anymore, you will feel much better. I promise.”

Oh, gods. He thinks that it’s magic and not the person.

“Tristan, I assure you, Derrien’s magic has nothing to do with it. He and I...we’ve been through a lot together and...”

“And so have we!” he snaps, “And we will be together through even more! Mira, don’t you get it? They are the enemies! Not friends! The Empire and the Kingdom are on the verge of war! You are an Akyrian battlemage for gods’ sake!”

It’s true. And it cuts through my mind like a knife through a cake. But nevertheless... we might be enemies with Rien, but we are also in love. And I am sure we can make it work! If he dealt with the Crown Prince, I am sure this wouldn’t be such a problem after all...

“It doesn’t matter,” I say, “I am sure we can find a way out of anything. Just, please, Tristan. Let me go!”

He stands up again, clearly disappointed by my words. He looks somewhere behind me and nods decisively. Xia joins him in just one second and gives him a little bottle. I don’t like where this is going. This is bad! Really bad! Are they going to poison me now? Should I have lied and accepted Tristan to run away later? Is he going to k!ll me like all those other girls?!

“Mira, just trust me,” he smiles softly as he takes my chin into his hand, “Everything is going to be all right. Your friends from the academy already waiting behind the gates to take you to my castle, where you would be protected even from the gerdians! Time will pass and this feeling you have now would go away like a charm that it is. It’s not real! You’ll see...”

“And what if I don’t?” I look him straight in the eye.

“You’ll see!” he says firmly and forces the liquid from the bottle down my throat. Somnium Nox... The potion that can take down a horse! That’s bad...

I feel how my heavy head starts to fall and strong hands catch me, ropes that were tying my hands are cut, but it’s too late as I am too weak. Tristan lifts me in his hands and starts walking to the exit.

“Remember that the order was to deal with it today but they both must be there,” I hear my ex-fiancé’s words.

“We know,” Alexandra chuckles, “How convenient such an order is for you! Two of your competitors in one blow...”

What do they mean exactly...

I want to ask them, but the darkness consumes me...

## **The Selection: Bride Of The Dark Dragon Chapter 82 - Tips**

MIRA

Clatter of horses’ hooves... Shaking at a steady pace... Strong arms are holding me carefully and help me to stay in the saddle...

For a second there I don't even realize what is going on. Opening my eyes I only see the darkness around me. Until my eyes adjust to the moonlight and I turn my face to see Dereck concentrated on the road. Two horses next to us, probably Nort and Rick covering in case of an attack.

"Stop," I whisper and nobody hears me. They just continue their way. "Stop!" I yell in a hoarse voice and feel Dereck flinch at that. He pulls on the reins and stops the horse, our teammates are doing the same.

"Mira!" our leader exclaims, "Thank gods!"

"Di!" my friends say almost in unison.

"Guys!" I cough, my throat is too dry, "Guys, please, I need to get back!"

Their faces change. And something in that change bothers me...

"Mira," Dereck's fingers press into me harder, "Everything is all right! You are safe and we are taking you home..."

"No, you don't understand!" I almost want to cry, my whole body feels tired, broken even, "I don't need to go home! Well, not anymore. I need to get back to the Selection castle. Guys, it's hard to explain and we have no time... but I really need to get there as soon as possible! It's important, it's..."

They are silent and none of them moves. Only Nort's horse makes a circle around us... Their faces... something is not right.

"Guys?" I say one more time, "I really need your help! Please!"

"Of course we are going to help you, Mira," Rick smiles softly.

"Oh, thank gods!" I exhale loudly, "I knew I could count on you!"

"Of course you can," Rick nods, "Mira, we are your friends. We are your battle partners. We would do anything for you. You know that, right?"

"I do," I smile.

"We will help you even if you don't realize you need help," he continues and I shrug at his words.

"Wh-what do you mean?" I ask as my smile fades.

“Mira, sir Ragnard warned us that...,” Dereck starts talking and stumbles.

Oh, no...

“Tristan doesn’t know what he is talking about!” I interject, “You have no idea what he is doing there! He...”

“It doesn’t matter what he is doing there!” Nort snaps, “Look at you! What happened to you, Di?! Just a few days ago you were crying and practically begging us to take you away! And now what? You suddenly fell in love and can’t live without the gerdian who forced you into all this in the first place?! It’s not you!”

“He is right,” Rick adds, “This is not a normal change! And you... you just wouldn’t fall in love with a gerdian! You hate them and you hate the Selection. Haven’t you forgotten?!”

“It’s their dark magic,” Dereck says dryly, “Everything is because of it. They bewitched you. Your bl00d must be intoxicated with their darkness!”

“Oh, gods!” I rub my forehead, “You got it all completely wrong! Tristan.. he...he doesn’t know what he is talking about. And also, you have no idea what kind of business he himself has there! Guys, it’s absolutely crazy!”

“It is crazy,” Dereck agrees, “Everything you say sounds crazy and...”

“Oh, come on! ” I yell, “I fell in love! That happens! And I think that he is in danger! I need to get back to that damn castle now!”

I really hope that they would listen to my authoritative tone and do as I ask but no such luck!

“Right,” my friend sighs, “Listen, Mira. It’s next to impossible to kll a gerdian, so I am sure the love of your life would be absolutely fine! In the meantime, we need to make sure that you are all right! And for that we need to detoxify your bl00d and energy! And we can only do that at home!”

“Detoxify?” I shrug, “Are you crazy?”

“He is not the one crazy here,” Rick snorts. I look at my friends’ faces one more time and see determination. Unfortunately, I know very well what it means. All too well!

“If you do this right now, I would never forgive you!” I scream the sentence that I thought I’d never tell my friend. This is my last card. But none of them seems impressed.

“Then it means we would have to live with that,” Dereck says calmly, “But at least we would know that you are safe and sound. And that you are where you belong.”

“Ugh!” I roll my eyes. Why does he have to be such a righteous person! Everything is by the book! Always! I know that he thinks that he is doing the right thing here. And that’s bad. It only means that it’s impossible to persuade him to do what I ask! Because he truly believes he is saving me from the evil gerdians right now!

“Listen,” I start talking, carefully choosing the words, “Out of the four of us I am the only one who had an opportunity to get to know the gerdians. Could you just trust me on this one? I am telling you – they are not that bad! And some of them are even good.”

“Save your breath, Di”, Nort interrupts me, “The war is coming. It doesn’t matter if they were good or bad to you. Soon they’ll be our enemies. All of them. You are a battlemage, you know what it means! We follow our orders and fight for our country! That’s the only thing that matters!”

“And what if I can help to stop the war?” I raise my brow, “What if...”

I don’t finish my thought as a loud noise rumbles like a thunderstorm, shaking the ground. We all start turning our heads and that’s when I notice the light far away. It takes me a while to know what I am seeing.

“Explosion!” I exclaim, slightly shocked, “What is this? Where is this?”

“Mira,” Dereck’s arms wrap tighter around me, “This is the Selection Castle. It is gone...”

## **The Selection: Bride Of The Dark Dragon Chapter 83 - Tips**

MIRA

No, it can't be! I look at the flames and I cannot comprehend what is going on. It's fireworks. Or Derrien came out to play in his dragon form. It's most definitely not the Selection castle in flames. No! No, no, no... That's not it!

"Mira," Dereck puts his hand on my shoulder and I turn to look at him. I've been standing like this for some time I guess. "We need to move."

"Der, I need to get there. To the castle!" I plead with him, "There are people inside! Girls! Gods, who did that?"

"I told you, Mira, we are at the beginning of a war," he says, sadness in his voice. And that's when I realize everything.

"Tristan did this?! Why?!"

"I don't know all the details," Dereck admits, "But whatever he does there – he does on the King's orders."

"Is the King mad?" I yell, tears streaming down my face, "There are at least twenty innocent girls there! Akyrian girls! Our own!"

"What can I say, Mira?" my friend shrugs, "We are lucky we could get you out! If not for Ragnard – you would be one of those girls there! And as selfish as it sounds, I am happy that at least we still have you with us! There are two important gerdians inside that had to be killed. I believe this is done now. And the sooner we get to the capital – the better. As the capital would be shielded the most."

"Shielded from what?" I feel the worst headache of my life and it's incredibly hard for me to concentrate. Everything is blurry.

"From the gerdians' response. They wouldn't leave it like that!" Rick joins us, coming closer and wrapping his cloak around me.

"So why the chaos are we doing that? We have already been at war with them and we lost miserably! You have no idea what kind of power they possess! We stand no chance..."

"Everything changed," Nort interjects, "Our artifactors have been experimenting for a long time and found a way to make us stronger. So now we can fight them! And we can be free of them! And no girl would have to experience what you have experienced!"



Oh, gods! What have I done?! The experience wasn't that bad for me, but the boys are sure that it was a nightmare.

"Guys, it wasn't that bad!" I try to reason with them, "If anything, I did manage to fall in love and..."

"Oh, Mira...", Rick sighs, "Tristan told us everything... It's going to be all right..."

"It will all go away as soon as you are home," Nort smiles, "It's an illusion. It's not a real feeling..."

"Gods, that's not even important now! Can you just help me get to the castle? We need to help the survivors! The girls..."

"It's out of the question," Dereck says firmly, "We are taking you to the Sapphire Castle and that's it. We've been riding for more than an hour now. Even if we wanted to come back – by the time we get there it wouldn't make any difference."

"You speak about it so calmly!" I exclaim, "Those are real lives out there! Real people! People that I know!"

"That's not perfect. But this is what war is like, Mira," our leader says, "This is what we all have been training for. And right now our country needs us the most! We need to go back and help whenever we can! It's our job as battlemages! And as for those lives... They are sacrifices. The gerdians that were killed right now were worth it. Without them, the Empire would be weakened!"

Wait... two gerdians who are important. It can't be...

"Who are those gerdians you are talking about?" I look Dereck in the eye but he avoids my guess. "Who are they?!" I shout as loud as I can and by the look on his face I know that Derrien is one of them.

No, no, no, no, no! No!!!

"Give me your horse!" I growl.

"No," he answers way too calmly for my liking.

"Dereck Ashterton, to chaos with you! Give me your damn horse!" I scream.

“Rick, Nort,” he nods at them and they start moving. And I know all too well what that means.

I summon fire to the tips of my fingers. Never have I thought that I would have to do this to my friends.

Nort and Rick charge at me, clearly fearing the fire coming out of my hands, creating shields to protect themselves, and coming closer. And that’s when I hit the ground forcefully with my foot, summoning my earth element, and the ground cracks open as if from a strong earthquake, throwing both mages away in different directions by the power.

Dereck stretches his neck and moves forward, not wasting any time and bringing out his own fire. Fire is his strongest element. And so is mine. One of the reasons we were so good at training together, we could test each other to the maximum. That’s why he knows all my weaknesses and I know his. And we both know that chances are almost equal. Almost. But not quite. Our fire waves meet in the space between us and the struggle begins. I am weaker than usual today, but so is he. I guess he had a long journey after all. All I need is to throw him back for a few seconds and get to his horse! I do that and I can flee.

Suddenly, a strong gust of wind throws me off my feet. Rick is back. I want to attack him quickly, but that’s when Nort catches my hands and twists them behind my back.

“Stop it!” I yell at them. Chaos! There are three of them and just one of me.

“One day you will thank us for bringing you home!’ Dereck sighs and gets a familiar bottle out. Damn it, that’s the one Tristan had, the one that contains Somnium Nox, the potion that can put down a horse! Gods, I hate that potion!

“No, please!” I beg, “You don’t understand! You don’t even listen!”

“Mira, it’s over,” he pours the bitter liquid down my throat, “You are going home!”

I notice how every time I drink Somnium Nox it takes longer to lose consciousness. Here, on a top of a hill, in my friends’ arms, I look at the flames of the Dark Selection castle. My heart hurts for Derrien. We’ve been so happy just a few hours ago! And now I don’t even know if he is alive. I don’t

know if Morgan and Desirae had time to get out. And I know for sure that Isidore back in the dungeon definitely didn't. So many victims!

Suddenly, I notice another flash of fire in the sky. And then again. And again. Something creates fire...in the sky. Just like a...

"Dragon!" my teammates say almost in unison...

## **The Selection: Bride Of The Dark Dragon Chapter 84 - Tips**

MIRA

Dragon! Dragon in the sky! Oh, thank you, gods! He is alive and breathing...fire. I want to chuckle but I am too weak for that.

"Nort! Invisible barrier! Rick, hold the horses!" Dereck commands.

Damn it! He is too good at all this. A perfect battlemage and for the first time ever I regret it.

A shadow covers us all, as I lie in Dereck's arms and all my friends are looking up in the sky, not saying a word. He is so close!

"Rien!" I whisper as the strength leaves my body and I feel one single tear roll down my cheek. A huge dark dragon circles right above us. He is so close that I can almost see his scales. And then he flies higher and higher, breathing out fire to the sky.

"He is looking for something," Nort whispers.

"Or someone," Dereck looks at me as if he understands something and then mumbles to himself, "A freaking dragon! Who could have thought..."

Then he notices something and I feel him pulling the chain on my neck, tearing my locket off me.

"No, please," I whisper as my eyes start to close. I try to blink, try to keep them open... I see Dereck throw the locket with force off the hill we are at. This is bad...

The dragon flies away. He is searching for the signal, he doesn't know that I am here. My last hope is gone...

And that's when the darkness consumes me...

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It's been days. I am not sure how many though. Every time I am awake, 'healers' pour something down my throat and I go back to sleep. Sometimes I wake up for very short amounts of time. I see my mum or my brother next to me, or some maids I do not recognize. I never saw Dereck, Rick, or Nort again. Not that I want to... Traitors!

There is only one person I want to see but I wouldn't be able to see him here and I know it!

I open my eyes carefully and check what is going on around me. And for the first time, I am alone in the room. I listen carefully to make sure that no one is behind the doors, that no 'healer' would arrive to drug me again! This has to stop!

Throwing back the sheets that cover me, I put my bare feet down on the cold marble floor. Marble... That can only mean one thing! I am at the royal palace! But why? Why would I be here of all the places? Not my family castle? Not Tristan's – after all, that's where they have been taking me. Why the palace? The room is spacious and luxurious, something like that is usually offered to important guests. And I am just not one of them. So what exactly is going on here?

On shaking legs I walk to the glass wall and look outside. Busy. Everyone is so busy, guards are hurrying around, maids running in different directions with baskets in their hands, mages of all sorts everywhere... This is not the usual scenery here. Usually, this place is elegant and tranquil. Well, not anymore...

I don't even notice how the door behind me opens.

"Mira!" Tristan sounds happy, "You are awake! Finally!"

I try to turn to look at him but my trembling legs fail me and I almost fall down. However, he is right next to me in just seconds and catches me in time, lifting me in his arms and giving me a proper princess carry.

“Where do you want me to take you?” he smiles, showing off his pearly whites.

“Selection castle,” I say spitefully, “Oh, wait! It’s been blown up! And, I guess, by you?”

His smile fades and he takes me back to the bed, placing me carefully as if I am going to break if he makes a wrong move.

“Yes, that was me. That was my final task,” he sighs, “This is not something I am going to be proud of for the rest of my life. But we had to try.”

“You had to try and do what exactly?” I raise my brows, “Kill twenty innocent girls?”

“Kill two heirs to the gerdian throne. Kill the two key figures in the Empire. Kill the Crown Prince and... the Archduke/General,” he says truthfully and at least I can respect him for not lying anymore.

“And how did that go?” I can’t help but smirk, knowing that at least Rien is alive.

“We are still not sure,” he shrugs his shoulders, “We tried to evacuate whoever we could and none of us had an opportunity to check if we have succeeded.”

“Who did you manage to save?” I ask.

“Iliana, Ariadna, Celeste, Maxine, Erica, and most of the staff that worked at the Selection.”

“I see,” I turn my face away from him. I just can’t look at him anymore.

“How are you feeling?” he changes the subject and brushes his hand over my cheek.

“How do you think?” I snap at him again, “For how many days exactly have you been drugging me?! And what the chaos am I even doing at the royal palace? Surely I should be back at my own house.”

“You are here because you are important,” he answers and I notice how he is now holding a lock of my hair, playing with it as we speak.

“How so?” I snort.

“As my fiancée,” he says and I gasp for air.

“What do you mean? It’s been annulled when I was sent to the Selection!”

“But you are not there anymore,” he smiles softly, “You are back and our engagement is back. I have already told you that. You must have forgotten.”

“Yeah, it could have slipped my mind after being drugged for so many days,” I roll my eyes, “Tristan, this is not going to happen! It’s not...”

“Mira, let me speak first,” he interrupts me, “I am sorry, but I feel like I need to explain everything in more detail. We are at war, Mira. With the gerdians. There will be no more Selections. Ever. Unless they win, of course. But then they’ll just be able to take any woman they like anytime. They would even be able to take children if they would want to. This is what they wanted from us in the long run. They need us to fill their gaps. Women, children, and men for hard labour. And they would stop at nothing to get what they want.”

“They won the last war but only requested some land and the Selection,” I retort.

“And now they realized that they want more,” my self-proclaimed fiancé says, “It would be even worse if Dargen becomes the Emperor. You know him, you can imagine...”

Well, I can’t argue with this one.

“So, what is the big plan?” I ask, “You know very well how powerful they are. They will crush us in a heartbeat.”

“There is a way to become just as powerful,” he smiles and touches my cheek again, while I try to distance myself, “You see, Mira, there is a reason why they were choosing specific girls for the Selection. Not everyone will do and this was the most helpful clue we ever had about them. You! And women like you. You are the key!”

“A key to what?” I don’t even react to his hand on my face.

“To obtaining the dark magic warriors!” he says and I sink back into the pillow, “With the blood of women like you and some amplifiers we can match their strength!”

“Are you going to bleed me to death now?” I raise my brow.

“Of course not,” he chuckles, “Gods, what kind of ideas you have? It’s a bit complicated procedure that needs to be done but long story short – if we mix just one drop of your blood with someone else’s bloodstream and add some dark magic to the mix, that person would be able to possess dark magic for up to 24 hours. Then it fades but it’s all right. But the best part is that someone like you doesn’t need any amplifiers. Just add some magic and it will stay with you. Forever. That’s why they needed you, girls, as their brides. You can accept dark magic, live with it, and bear their children in your wombs. A regular human would die.”

Interesting... Derrien never told me that. Not that I asked. At least I don’t think I did...

“He didn’t tell you, did he?” Tristan turns my face so that I look at him.

“No,” I say.

“Of course he didn’t. That’s their biggest secret. That’s their weakest point. If we fight back and stop giving them our women – they wouldn’t last for long!”

“I see...”

“Yes, Mira, with the time you will see everything. Trust me. You would feel so much better with a clear head.”

“I guess so...” I yawn, there isn’t enough strength in me to do anything anymore...

“Sleep, my love, “ he leans down to me and kisses my forehead. At that moment I see the door open and my mother comes in...

## **The Selection: Bride Of The Dark Dragon Chapter 85 - Tips**

MIRA

“Oh, I am so sorry!” my mother looks embarrassed, “Did I interrupt the two love birds? I just...”

“Mum!” I say weakly and Tristan helps me up a bit so that I could see her better.

“Here!” he says softly and I want to hit him. But I don’t have enough strength for that.

“Oh, dear!” mum says as she sits next to us on the edge of the bed, “I would have scolded you two for being so inappropriate but considering the circumstances...”

I follow her gaze and realize that I am wearing just a thin white nightgown with an embroidered front that’s almost see-through. And nothing else.

I urge myself to cover myself with some sheets but mother passes me the shawl she was wearing and Tristan wraps it around me carefully, leaving his hands on my shoulders and making me lean on him. Again, not what I want but I am too weak to make a scene right now. And somehow I want to spare mother from this. She looks... not her usual self. If anything, she looks older and... tired.

“I am so happy to see the two of you together again,” she smiles, “And you are home, Mira! This is the best part! After we found out what happened at the Selection...”

Her voice breaks and I want to give her a h.ug.

“It’s all right, Maxine”, Tristan says soothingly and I flinch at that. Just when did he start calling her by her name instead of the title? “She is here now and she is not going anywhere!” he continues and now I just find strength and turn to look at him questioningly. Has he lost his mind?

“Thank Gods for you and for your friends, Mira!” mum says with teary eyes, “They really wanted to come and see you but we all decided that it would be best to give you some time to recuperate. What those gerdians did to you...”

She starts crying but then quickly regains herself. Gods, what does she think happened exactly?



“Mother, I am fine,” I say weakly, “Nothing bad happened to me there. Trust me!”

“Of course not!” she gives me the smile she usually gives to sellers who try to deceive her, the fakest one in her arsenal of smiles, “No one could do anything to a daughter from house Freyn!”

Oh, gods...

“And where is Father?” I ask, “I think I’ve seen Colton here, but I never saw Dad.”

Mum’s face is changing and I know that something is wrong. Tristan’s hands are suddenly squeezing me tighter.

“Maybe it’s enough for today?” he says, planting a kiss on the top of my head, “You need more rest...”

“What is going on?!” I roar. Funny, because seconds ago it felt hard to even lift a finger.

They are both silent. And now I know I am onto something here.

“Where is Dad? Did something happen?” I yell.

“Dear,” Mum says carefully, “He is sick. When he found out about what happened... he... his heart... he...”

“Oh, gods!” I try to stand up but that’s when strength leaves me and Tristan catches me on the way to the floor, “I need to see him! Take me to him! Where is he?”

“Mira!” Tristan sounds firm as he puts me back to the bed, “If he sees you like this, it would only make him feel worse! Besides, it’s too late and he is sleeping now. I’ll take you to him tomorrow when you will be stronger and healthier. And dressed.”

“He is right, dear,” mum chimes in, “I have told him that you have returned alive and well. I have told him everything and it made him so happy! It would be best if he sees you full of life and pretty! You can wait till tomorrow, right?”

“Right,” I agree quietly. Dad is sick. Because of me. Oh, Gods!

“We will leave you for now,” Tristan raises and so does my mum, “The maids will help you prepare tomorrow and the healer will have a look at you as well. If you are good to go, I’ll take you to him after lunch. Would that be fine with you?”

“Yes,” I mumble. He leans down to me and it looks like he is about to kiss me, but I give him a death glare and he nods in understanding, just brushing his palm over my cheek instead.

“Sleep well, my love,” he smiles and I hear mother gasp in delight.

They both leave and I look at the window again. The sun is going down...

Maids brought me dinner and afterward helped me to take a bath. Rubbing oils into my skin and hair and taking care of every part of my body. Unusual experience. After a few years at the Academy, I am not used to the help anymore. They are silent, not saying a word unless spoken to, and treat me as if I am made out of thinnest glass. Whatever they do, they avoid touching the mark on my chest. And when one of them looks at it, I notice that she holds back tears. Just why is that? What are they thinking? What is going on here?

Every minute that passes helps me to recover. The maids helped me to change into fresh underwear and a new nightgown, also white but with even more lace and embroidery work on it. Luxurious.

It makes me think again about why I am at the palace. Even if I am considered Tristan’s fiancée again, I should be in his castle or my family home. But instead, we are all here. At the palace.

I mean, Tristan is a son of a duke and the Sapphire Knight of the Empire, but it still doesn’t explain anything! He is of royal lineage but he rarely stays in the palace... And I am not even his wife yet! And, in all honesty, I will never be.

When the maids left, I feel too weak to do anything again.

I need to check on Dad and find out what is going on here! And I need a way to speak to Derrien. The fastest that I could think of is our dreams. I lay on the bed and close my eyes. The darkness consumes me slowly but inevitably...

I open my eyes and realize that I am still in the palace and its morning. The maids return with the breakfast tray and help me up.

And that's when I realize that it didn't work! I couldn't see Rien. I saw nothing during the night! I couldn't connect with him.

"Is everything all right, my lady?" the maid asks, "We've brought you "The Eye of Akyria" as well in case you would like to catch up with the latest news."

"yes, please," I quickly nod to her and accept the newspaper.

My lips part in huge surprise when I see the cover. That – I did not expect!