

## Chapter 224 So these are the rulers

The next morning, William woke Doris with a gentle nudge. She opened her eyes slowly to see him looming over her already dressed in his kingly attire. He looked as if he just walked out of her dream of princes.

“I need you to get dressed.” He said. Doris groaned and closed her eyes. Sleep was the only thing she wanted—nothing in the world sounded better than sleep. Her body even begged her for it.

“What is it?” She whispered. Slowly, she opened her eye just to peak at him and he was already crossing the room to dress Alec. Her mind wanted to scream at the defeat—she knew she had to get up.

“The rulers of Eldon are almost here. They requested to meet you along with me since you are my one and only lady.” He said over his shoulder as he lifted Alec from his crib.

Doris sat up to watch him. It always made her stomach flutter when he did fatherly things. It made her want to bring him back to the bed and make another baby immediately just so could watch him be like that all the time. ④

Now she understood why some wolves had so many children. ⑤

"I better be your one and only." Doris teased as she forced herself out of bed. She caught the small smirk that pulled on his lips at her words. She loved it when he smiled—especially when she was the cause of it. ②

It didn't take long before they all were making their way down the wide halls. Doris opted for a mauve gown that flowed to the floor. She may not have been a queen yet, but William constantly reminded her that she should always dress like one in case someone wanted to underestimate her.

Doris stood tall with her chin high and baby close to her chest. With William at her side, she felt as if she could take on the world. All desperation for that taste of power were forgotten. At least for now.

The king and queen were gathered in the main dining hall. The moment the doors opened for William, the rulers stood from the long table to be greeted.

"King William." The woman bowed. She was old enough to be his mother and looked down at William as if she knew it. She held out a perfectly manicured hand for William to kiss, but all he did was shake it. "Charmed. I'm —"

"Queen Pearl and King Sail. Yes, I know." William said as he looked them both over. The husband was more friendly. His face broke out in a wide grin when William said his name. The wife softened a little as if she remembered that she had to. Within seconds she wore a

new face—now much nicer than the one before. ②

Doris watched each move they made closely as they spoke with William. It almost made her stumble over herself when she noticed the man that stood behind them with his hands clasped behind his back. He watched her with a curious tilt of the head and a smile that pulled at his lips—Daemon. What was he doing here? Doris thought he was just a messenger boy—normally they would be far from royal dinners.

Doris quickly looked away when he smiled openly at her. His suit was crisp and expensive. Emerald green with gold tones that matched his rulers attire. He didn't look like a simple messenger boy anymore. ③

“...We're honored you came all this way for a visit.” William was saying. Doris forced herself to listen and ignore the boy that stared. If he had any brains at all, he would stop that before William saw it and threw him out of this palace.

William turned to Doris with a ghost of a smile. He touched her back lightly and brought her closer to his side. “This is my future Queen, Doris and our baby Alec.”

“Oh my, how lovely!” Pearl cooed. She peered down at the baby in Doris's arms, but didn't take a step closer. “I do love children. I wish I could have had more but my patience ran out.” She laughed.

William cleared his throat and gestured to the chairs.

“Please, sit. I'm sure you're hungry after that long travel.”

Doris placed their baby in a high chair between them before she took her own seat. Pearl watched Doris with a sharp eye that almost made her feel uncomfortable. When the woman realized she had been caught staring, she cooled her features into a kindness that wasn't there a moment before. ①

"Well," William looked the two rulers in their eyes. Back and forth he switched his gaze to peer at them both. He knew that usually intimidated even the toughest opponent. "I have to say, you are the first kingdom that has requested to visit since I became king."

"Oh, how rude! Normally it is customary to visit a new king when he is settled on the throne. Especially one so young." Pearl placed her hand on her chest in a mock concern as she looked across at William. "We wanted to show our respect with our visit. We hope you don't mind our intrusion." ②

"Of course not." William said. He sat straight, even as the food was served before them. He tossed a look at Doris. "We welcome any visitors here."

King Sail gave him another smile filled with what Doris could only describe as cheer. Lines formed around his eyes as he smiled. Doris couldn't take her eyes off either of them. She wasn't sure why something felt... off. ③

"We think you're going to be a fine king, my boy. It's been a long time since we've seen the beginning of change in a kingdom. I hope you don't mind if our stay is a little

longer than expected.”

“My kingdom welcomes your own with open arms. I know my father didn’t try to have a relationship with Eldon, but I am not against our peace.”

Pearl’s mouth lifted a little, but it soon dropped as if it was never there. “We admire your kindness, your majesty. So many surrounding kingdoms usually use their kindness as a pawn for whatever game they have in their mind.”

“I’m not interested in games. I plan to rule this kingdom with more peace and acceptance than my father did.”

King Sail laughed and gripped his round stomach. He glanced over at Doris before his gaze settled back on William. “I don’t think we’ve heard words like that in years, have we love?”

Pearl’s smile reminded Doris of poison. She tapped her long nails against the table slowly but didn’t touch her food once. “No. It’s like a breath of fresh air.” ①

The dinner felt endless to Doris. She was only let free of it when Alec woke from his nap and refused to stop crying. She couldn’t shake the strange feeling that the rulers of Eldon were...strange to say the least.

Daemon stood in the shadows against the wall the entire time. His gaze was like prickles across her skin—she could always feel it.

“Doris?”