

## Chapter 21 Leave her

No, don't admit it!

Doris silently begged Melody not to say a word about the tip. If she admitted it was hers, Prince William wouldn't want her anymore. And Doris needed him to want her. Lady Jane told Doris he tested Melody to see if she would grow impatient and bribe his valet to get into his favors, she had—but Doris stopped it for Melody's own good. Didn't she realize that she helped her in the end? The gold didn't matter one bit, but it was no use trying to defend herself. Melody would always see the wrong in everything Doris did, even the things that weren't true. It was fine, Doris would let her believe she was a thief. Perhaps she might be lucky enough to be released back into her old position at the library.

The pain made her almost dizzy, she couldn't part her lips without it vibrating through her very bone and making her groan from agony. It was no use, nobody would listen to her now even if she tried.

"Yes it's mine I gave it to her to tin

Peter for all the kind help he has offered to me. I didn't expect her to take it for herself!" Melody's eyes grew wide and innocent as she looked up at Prince William. Doris laid her head back against the floor when it felt was too heavy to keep up. At least Melody knew how to think of a quick excuse, Doris only hoped Prince William wouldn't see right through the shimmering lie.

The room almost darkened when his rage seeped through. Everyone tensed and threw nervous glances at each other. He turned his sharp glare on Doris, in his eyes she could practically hear his words ring through her head. You lied to me. So what if she had? Nothing mattered anymore, Doris would be lucky to see the daylight break tomorrow. His anger was the least of her concerns when she laid in her own blood.

Melody stepped forward cautiously, her hands shook a little when she raised them towards him as if she were approaching a beast. Which wasn't very far off from the truth. "Your majesty, I'm so sorry this has disturbed you. I will get her out of here."

"I don't care how you treat your servants."

He spat, Doris flinched as a bloom of a new sort of hurt pierced her chest. "But this disgraceful scene—don't ever let me see you act that way again. This is not how a lady acts."

"Y-yes, of course your majesty." Melody bowed her head, her cheeks pink. Doris hoped she was at the very least embarrassed for what she'd done, even though Prince William didn't seem to care one bit what happened to Doris.

"I came here for a reason." Prince William said calmly, his back straight and eyes dark as he looked down at Melody. "As my lady, you're responsible for hosting Luna Queen's birthday party this year."

"Oh! Yes, of course!" Melody's face brightened as she clasped her hands excitedly. "Thank you, your majesty. I won't disappoint you." Doris closed her eyes for a moment as they spoke. It was obvious why Melody was so excited, it meant her ladyship was finally being recognized in the Golden Palace by assigning her this task. Doris was relieved, even though she shouldn't be. Melody didn't deserve anything good happening to her, but if she stayed on

his good side—Doris would be free in a few months. That's all that truly mattered.

If she could stay alive that long, at least.

Before William stepped out, he stopped in front of Doris. She flinched a little as if she knew he was there, but didn't want to open her bruised eyes to look up at him. She didn't want a lick of pity from the prince, or anyone for that matter.

"You need to get our mate a doctor," Waylon growled, his anger roared through him. "I'm gonna rip that woman in half for what she did to her." ①

William ignored the rage and left without another word. ①

Doris was sent to the medical ward, though she couldn't really remember much about her journey there. The only thing she remembered was the feeling of soft sheets against her aching skin before she saw darkness.

When she finally woke the next morning, the pain still lingered. Her hand was bandaged and her gown was clean—a relief considering she was certain she would wake in a pool of her own blood

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again. Doris always knew her life meant little here at the golden palace, she'd never forget how true that was after last night. It didn't make sense why she even cared that Prince William had no regard for her life, it shouldn't have come as a shock when she knew that was the case all along. He'd seen the mark that he left on her the night he tore her dress off, hadn't he? Or maybe he hadn't—It didn't matter, Doris was only glad he still wanted Melody and not her.

Doris slowly tried to sit up and saw Beth seated by her bed with concern on her features. She looked terrified to see Doris like this.

"Beth, you're here!" Doris said weakly, Beth quickly made her lay back again.

"Easy there, Doris. The doctor just came by and demanded you get a proper rest." Beth stood. "I made your favorite meal."

"They allowed you to come visit me?" Doris spoke quietly, her throat hurt too much to speak any louder. Everything hurt, if she was honest.

"I heard what Melody did to you and asked for a leave to come visit you. You know how fast gossip travels here " Beth

said gently as she prepared a plate. Doris wasn't sure if she would be able to eat any of it, but would try for her friend. It did smell awfully good.

"Thank you, Beth. It means a lot that you came to visit me." Doris tried to smile.

"Oh please! I know you would do the same for me in a heartbeat." Beth set the steaming plate on a tray as she eyed Doris from top to bottom. She frowned as she took in the sight of all the bandages and bruises. Doris could see the sadness in her eyes. "You must be in so much pain."

Doris looked down at her bandaged hands and swallowed. She realized that the only person in the world who truly cared for her wellbeing was here with her. For that, she was grateful.

"I knew from the moment Melody demanded you to be her Lady's Maid that she was going to use every chance she could to abuse you." Beth set the tray by her table and crossed her arms. "She is the absolute worst—" 1

"I suppose you can't blame it all on her, since she thinks I stole her money." Doris said bitterly grateful to have at least one

person on her side. Her heart swelled for a moment when she realized how much she missed Beth. She missed sharing a room with her and hearing all about the latest gossip while she minded her own business. She missed her life before Melody forced her to become her lady's maid and made her life even worse than it already was.

"I just—I feel so terrible when I see you like this." Beth leaned down to grip Doris's hand gently as tears formed in her eyes. "Is there anyway you can go back to your old job and leave her? I'm terrified she will punish you to your death the next time she gets mad at you." A tear dropped from Beth's eyes, "You promised we would leave the Palace with me, together."

Leave Melody? There was nothing more Doris wanted, but now she knew Melody would never let that happen. As a maid, she didn't get to decide her own fate. She didn't get to decide where to go or what to do, it was all chosen for her. Melody was the lady of Prince William, she had so much more say that Doris would ever have in this Palace. All she had to do was say a simple no and any request Doris had would be shut down officially, there

was no one that could help her.

"Beth, I know how worried you are about me—especially seeing me like this. But we both know there is no way anyone can get me out of here if Melody wants me to stay. I'll try my best to survive this place and walk out of here one day with you." Doris gave a light squeeze of her hand and almost gasped from the pain.

Beth became silent for a moment, slowly she stood and looked a little defeated that she couldn't do more to help her friend. Suddenly, a light lit up her face . "Doris! What if I talk to Prince Martin? I'm sure he would help!"

"Prince Martin?" Doris asked with wide eyes, shocked at her friend's suggestion.



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Beth's grin widened at her own suggestion, but Doris only stared at her as if she had lost her mind. "We can't ask Prince Martin for help, Beth! What are you thinking?" There was no way Prince Martin would be able to help her, let alone care where she ended up. He had more important things to worry about than a maid who was being mistreated. He was the crown prince, after all. Doris bet she never even crossed his mind since she'd left the library. Why would she?

"I saw Prince Martin in the library the other day," Beth lowered her voice and neared Doris with a quick glance over her shoulder to make sure no one was listening. "He looked as if he were hoping someone might show up, and I think he was hoping it was you." ①

Doris furrowed her brows at her friend and would have laughed if her ribs didn't hurt. Beth did love her gossip, but this was ridiculous. "Perhaps he was waiting

for his lady to join him, Beth. Don't be silly."

"In the library? I've never seen her go anywhere near there, let alone with Prince Martin!" Beth said. "I don't know, Doris. Perhaps he misses your company and was hoping you would return. If that's the case, he would be more than happy to help you relocate from Melody!"

Doris didn't want to break her friend's hopefulness—but she knew Prince Martin wasn't standing around waiting for her to show up at the library. He was kind to her in the past, but he was always a kind man to everyone he'd met.

Doris knew how much Prince Martin enjoyed the library, it wasn't odd to hear he'd been there looking lost when she was sure it was most likely because he couldn't find the right book he wanted to read. Doris herself had caught that lost look on his face many times before. She briefly wondered if he was still writing small notes in that same copy of *Moon Rising* he loved.

Doris offered a small smile. "I don't think he was hoping for me, Beth. Why would he waste his time hoping a maid would

come by to visit him?"

"Doris, I saw the way he looked at you that one day." Beth crossed her arms over her chest. "I think he misses having you there to talk to, the very least."

"He is a kind man, Beth. That is all. He's not going to help me with Melody."

"Will you at least consider asking him?" Beth pleaded, Doris let out a small sigh.

"Yes, I'll consider it." Doris knew she wouldn't change her mind about the subject, but Beth wanted some sort of hope to hold onto. She was grateful for her friend that cared so much, but it wasn't as simple as she thought it was.

Doris moved to get up, but Beth made her lay back again.

"Oh no you don't, you still need to rest. Don't worry, I won't go anywhere." Beth seated herself by Doris's bed and opened a small book. "I brought something to read to you, I know how much you love stories and I thought this fairytale might help you feel a little better."

Beth stayed with Doris for hours, never once hinting that she wanted to leave. It

wasn't until Doris felt she had enough strength to make it back to her own room that she allowed her to finally stand and dress. Even then, Beth tried to convince her to sleep for another few hours before she even attempted to leave, but Doris was tired of laying for so long in the same spot.

"Are you sure you don't want me to walk you back to your room?" Beth asked as they passed her room—Doris's old room.

"I'm positive, there's no need for you to go back and forth, I'll make it there just fine." Doris offered a smile and squeezed her friend's hand lightly before she turned away.

Each step was its own small agony. She felt the pain shoot up from her feet and vibrate through her body—right to the areas Melody kicked her the hardest. The doctor wanted her to rest more, and Doris wished she was allowed to fall into bed and sleep for days until it all went away. The only thing that stopped her from doing so was the thought of Melody forcing her from her rest just to shine her shoes or some other useless task. There was no point in hoping Melody would leave her be until she fully recovered, it

was only a matter of time until she was summoned.

Doris moved slowly down the emptied halls, at least no one else was around to see her this way. As she rounded a corner, she bumped right into David and swallowed her thoughts. His scruffy hair and charming smile were on full display when she looked up at him. He reached out to steady her and his touch shot a lick of pain right through her. His smile faded when he saw her wince and looked down to see her bandaged hand.

"Did you burn your hand again?" He reached for her arm, Doris pulled it out of his grasp before he saw the rest of her marks. At least he hadn't seemed to hear the gossip about her—yet. She didn't exactly feel like telling anyone about it either. Did that mean only the maids spread gossip? Or did David just not pay attention to any of it as it swirled around him?

"Yes," Doris lied quickly. "I was making tea and some of the water splashed over."

David shook his head with a ghost of a smile on his lips. He reached into his pocket and pulled out the small tube of

ointment. "I'll tell you what, why don't you keep this one since you seem to have a habit of burning yourself. I have a ton in my room."

"Oh! I couldn't—" Doris flushed, he must think she was so clumsy.

"I insist, my lady." He gave her a cheeky grin, she almost rolled her eyes at him calling her a lady. A foolish boy. What if a real lady had heard him say that? Another thing that would get them both in trouble.

Doris glanced over her shoulder and saw the hallways were still empty around them. Slowly, she turned back to him and bowed her head a little. "Well, I appreciate this, thank you." She smiled a little as she slipped it into her pocket to put on later. She wasn't sure it would help with the type of injury she had, but it was worth a try. He truly was a kind boy, even if he also happened to be a bit reckless.

"Don't mention it, truly." David smiled and brushed a bit of hair from his light eyes. "I was hoping I would run into you, actually."

"Oh really? And why's that? Were you

hoping I had another strawberry cake?" Doris teased.

David scratched the back of his head and forced a smile, he looked a little nervous. "No, but I wouldn't turn any dessert away if you did happen to have any." He blew out a laugh and cleared his throat. "I was just wondering if you were going to be attending Luna Queen's birthday party? Since your lady is hosting it, I just was curious if you'd be working it."

Doris almost flinched at Melody's name. She looked down at herself and bit her lip. "No, I won't be working the party. My hand is too injured to be any good for it."

Doris looked up to see the tension in David deflate, he grinned at her normally again. "Oh, it's a shame but I'm glad you're putting yourself first over a silly party."

Doris almost snorted at his comment, but it wouldn't have been appropriate. It wasn't her choice to have been so injured, she doubted Melody would want Doris showing her bruised self anywhere near the party. A bigger part of Doris was glad to have the excuse. It meant she wouldn't have to be around Melody or

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Prince William that night.

"I'm sure it'll be one big bore." David started walking backwards down the hall with his eyes still on her. "I've got to get back to my duties, but I'll see you later. Perhaps next time with some cake." David winked before he turned and disappeared out of sight.

Doris laughed a little to herself as she watched him leave. It was a wonder how he of all young men had been selected to protect somebody as cold as Prince William, but she was happy to see such a kind face at the Palace.

Doris started towards her room once again, but stopped in her tracks.

Why did he seem so happy she wasn't going to be there?



## Chapter 23 At least William is capable of one

The day of the party had the hallways buzzing with rush. Doris could hear the servants through her door as they hurried past, shouting orders to others along the way. Doris released a small sigh as she brushed her fingers through her long hair, at least she hadn't been summoned by Melody yet. Her bruising had finally gone down and was easier to cover with whatever makeup she had at the bottom of her drawer.

Doris carefully dabbed each mark that could be seen when she wore her uniform, and then dotted a bit of rose onto her cheeks and lips. It helped her appear less pale and more...lively. Ever since she returned from the medical ward, she looked as if she were drained of life. It was about time she took some of it back and allowed herself to take care of herself for once.

There was no point in moping around, no one was going to see her tonight anyway. Doris moved her hair behind her

shoulders to lay in waves down her back while she clipped half of it up. She lined her eyes lightly and put on her best uniform that almost made her look as if she were attending the party as well. Even though the pain lingered a little whenever she moved, she wanted to look her best for herself. She would not let Melody take her down, she was still here.

A knock startled Doris, she glanced at herself once more in the mirror and blushed before she opened the door a crack. Another maid stood with wide hazel eyes and a bandaged hand, she looked a little ghastly.

"Doris, I'm so glad to see you're doing better!" The maid exclaimed, Doris recalled her name as Peony though she didn't think they'd ever had a conversation before.

"Oh, hello. Thank you." Doris's eyes flickered to her hand. Blood had started to seep through the white fabric. "Are you alright?"

"I—no, actually. I'm not." Doris opened the door a little wider and furrowed her brow.

"You must get to the medical—"

"I will!" Peony interrupted. "I will, I just—"  
"She swallowed, her face pained. "Oh, Doris. You have to help me. The party started minutes ago and I was meant to be there to help serve the royal party. But—I cut my hand really bad in the kitchens when I heard the chef yelling and... Now they'll notice my spot is empty and there's no one else around to help—"

Doris felt her heartbeat thunder when she knew what was coming next. Peony continued, "Will you stand in for me, Doris? I can't help with the party while bleeding all over their food."

Doris's lips parted, she wished she could say no. She wished she was the type of person to close the door and pretend she hadn't been asked for help. She wished she could lay down and sleep until the party was over.

But she wasn't that sort of person at all.

"Peony, go to the medical ward and treat your wound. Don't worry about the party, I'll take your place."

Peony's eyes brightened at Doris's words. "Oh! Thank you, Doris! Truly!" She

turned and rushed down the hall before Doris could change her mind.

Her palms started to sweat, now that her door was opened she could hear the distant music from the ballroom. Doris wet her lips and quickly made her way there before Peony's absence was noticed. Just before she arrived, she remembered how she dressed herself today. It was one of the first times in forever that she wore makeup and a more form fitting uniform. She even left her hair unbound, but there was no time to go back and change.

"What're you doing here?" Mr. Carson asked, startling her. He eyed her appearance but didn't say a word about it. "I thought you were resting."

"I was," Doris wiped her sweaty palms on her skirt. "But Peony injured herself and asked me to step in."

Mr. Carson let out an annoyed huff and placed a platter in her hands. "Go place this by Prince William and stand off by the wall until someone gives you another order. Refill any glasses that need it and tend to their needs, but stay out of the way." He demanded.

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Doris nodded and carefully carried the silver platter of appetizers in through the grand doors. Chattering and music filled her ears, she felt the burn of curious stares as she made her way towards Prince William's table once she spotted it.

She almost gasped when she took in the party, she didn't want to admit how beautiful a job Melody did—but it was rather extraordinary. Silver and gold was splashed in elegance across the room. Golden tablecloths and vases with white roses and silver plates. A bit of red made its appearance along the edge of the floors and up the ceiling. Large bouquets of Luna Queen's favorite flowers were placed on almost every surface. The guests were all seated and dining at their own tables—a bit away from the royals. Not one of them looked unhappy, grins stretched upon their faces as they feasted.

The Alpha King Charles sat tall in his golden throne, her eyes immediately found him before anyone else and the sight made her swallow. This was the man that might free her one day. He wore a dark blue velvet suit with his dark

hair neatly combed back beneath his crown. It'd been a long time since Doris had been in the room with him, she was silently thankful he had his own servants attending to him so she wouldn't have to.

Luna Queen looked stunning in a silver gown that hugged her curves. Her blonde hair was pinned back with silver jewels along the crown of her head. Lady Grace was seated next to her in her own gown made of shimmering silver, her eyes were entirely on Prince Martin who sat handsome as always in his white assemble. Doris almost lost her footing when she realized his green eyes were on her. He smiled when they locked gazes, she offered a small one back and looked away before Lady Grace saw her. At least it seemed he remembered her, she pushed away the thought of Beth's suggestion to ask him for help.

Doris still felt the burn of someone watching her. It wasn't until she finally dragged her gaze to Prince William that she discovered why. He was the only one who wore black to this bright party, he stood out for more than just his handsome features and rogue title. His presence demanded attention and Doris

swallowed when she realized his had been on her. Probably since the moment she entered the room.

His gaze betrayed none of his emotion. He watched as she carefully placed the platter in an empty spot before she moved off to the side against the wall. Melody hadn't seemed to notice her yet, she was too busy staring at the Luna Queen to make sure she was pleased by the party. Doris let out a breath and wished she could just blend into the wall until this night was over. If she was lucky, she would do just that. There were enough servants on the floor to tend to the needs of the royals, perhaps she would go unnoticed for the rest of the evening.

Doris glanced around the room and picked at her nails. She looked anywhere but Prince William. She wasn't sure if he was still watching her, but someone else definitely was now. Her eyes locked with the icy stare of the Luna Queen herself and Doris felt her heart stop for a moment. Luna Queen tilted her head curiously as she glanced from where William was seated and back to Doris. She made the gesture for Doris to come closer.

"Who are you?" She asked with a smile that didn't reach her eyes.

"Oh, my name is Doris. I work for the Palace, my lady." Doris said nervously as she curtsied. Several more sets of eyes followed her movements now that Luna Queen was talking to her.

Luna Queen looked Doris up and down as if assessing her, her eyes flicked to Prince William once more with distaste before they landed back on Doris. "Well, Prince William has always been good at picking beauties for the castle. Even the maids are pretty. Isn't she, Jack?"

Doris slid her gaze to the man next to Luna Queen that she hadn't noticed before. He was seated back lazily in his chair as if he wished to be anywhere else. He had long, blonde hair like his mother but startling turquoise eyes. He looked Doris up and down slowly. Doris couldn't help but glance at Prince William to see his jaw tense and eyes almost murderous as he watched Jack take her in. Doris could practically feel the tension through the air between them. It was as if Jack knew every breath he made annoyed Prince William and he made sure to take his time. Doris felt her





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cheeks flush, she stepped back against the wall again as the two men glared at each other.

“She is. At least William is capable of one thing.” Jack finally responded.

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"I fancy girls, unlike you." Prince William's words were laced with poison as he held Jack's glare.

Jack's cheeks turned red, he cleared his throat. "I suppose you would find pretty maids more important than becoming responsible enough for your own territory. It's no wonder the Alpha king doesn't trust you enough to become a leader."

Prince William's blue eyes darkened into a storm, he looked as if he were about to jump across the table and rip out Jack's throat. He slowly began to rise from his seat before someone slammed their fist down hard against the table. Doris flinched and saw the alpha king himself throw them both a murderous warning.

"That is enough. This is not the time for your pathetic arguments." King Charles spoke calmly. He never needed to raise his voice to be heard.

The room stilled when they heard the king speak. Prince William seated

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himself again and flicked a spec off his shoulder as if it never happened. Several people threw nervous glances at each other before their conversations cautiously started up again when the king didn't say another word.

Luna Queen glanced over her shoulder at Doris, an unkind smirk on her red lips. "Look what a mess this maid has caused. You seem to have taken all of the attention from my birthday party."

"Oh! My lady, I'm so sorry—" Doris started, Luna Queen held up her hand to silence her before she turned away.

Doris deflated a little. For a moment, she was worried Prince William and Jack were going to go at it with one another right in the middle of the party and it would've all been her fault. Somehow.

Doris hadn't really witnessed much of the royal affairs up close. Usually, she heard things second hand from Beth or other maids in passing. She knew that Prince William and Jack Anthony had never really gotten along, but she'd never heard the reason why. Perhaps they were both hot heads and couldn't seem to see eye to eye.

Melody's own glare could have scorched Doris into ash if it was fire. Doris pretended she didn't know Melody was openly glaring at her and looked down at her hands. It was a small mercy that they were in public, Melody couldn't harm her in front of all these people without someone interfering.

Doris decided it would be best to keep her head down for the rest of the party. Then, she would at least be less likely to lock eyes with another royal. There were more than enough servants attending to their every need, Doris doubted they would have even noticed Peony wasn't here. Mr. Carson most likely would have, but no one else. Perhaps she would have reason to leave soon—

"Speaking of girls..." Luna Queen said a little loudly. Doris glanced over curiously. "When are you going to find a lady for yourself, Prince Daniel?" Luna Queen asked. Prince Daniel? Doris hadn't noticed the youngest prince was in attendance today, she must have missed him when she was looking over each royal. He was one of the best warriors in the kingdom and led one of the biggest packs among the princes. He rarely

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stayed at the palace, Beth told her he usually only came back for events so it shouldn't have been a surprise he was here today. Doris honestly wasn't entirely sure what he looked like, she hadn't seen him up close before. He was always off with the royal military or taking classes. They had never really crossed paths before since he didn't venture near the library when she worked there.

"Ahhh... well..." The boy spoke quietly. Doris couldn't see him from where she was standing. She was about to move—

Melody appeared at Doris's side and pinched her arm so she would look at her. "What do you think you're doing here?" Melody whispered. She plastered a fake smile on her face so those that looked at her wouldn't think she was being cruel to her own lady's maid. Though, Doris was sure most of the people had already heard what Melody did to Doris, so she wondered why Melody even bothered pretending.

"I was asked to stand in for another maid." Doris clasped her hands in front of her. She refused to fake a smile to someone so awful.

"Which maid?" Melody hissed, a threat in her eyes.

"I didn't catch her name." Doris lied. She wasn't about to throw another maid under the bus and let her be mistreated by Melody like Doris had been. Even if she hardly knew Peony, nobody deserved to be on Melody's harsh end. Besides, Melody already saw Doris as a liar and a thief. Her reputation couldn't get much worse.

Melody narrowed her eyes at Doris before she quickly cleared her throat and plastered on another smile before one of the royals noticed. Doris only blinked at her. "Stay out of the way and stop interfering with the royals."

Doris nodded silently and looked down at her hands again as Melody returned to her seat. It was hopeless trying to defend herself to someone that would never see her as anything but wrong. Doris smoothed down her skirt and took a deep breath before she lifted her eyes back to the crowd. Everyone still seemed to be enjoying themselves well enough. Wine was flowing and laughter was loud. Many people kept glancing at the table of royals as if they were princes or part of the

entertainment. They all looked as if they couldn't believe they were in the same room as them.

"Prince Daniel, sit up!" Luna Queen demanded. Doris glanced over to their table but couldn't see the boy still. Luna Queen sounded more than annoyed, she rolled her eyes to the ceiling and let out a breath of irritation. "I asked when you were going to get a lady for yourself? Your brothers have already accomplished that. Surely you'll be following their footsteps soon, hmm?"

Prince Daniel cleared his throat. "I hadn't thought about it much." He answered. Something about his voice was rather familiar, but Doris couldn't exactly pin it down. Perhaps she'd heard him speak before and just didn't remember when.

"Haven't thought about it? You're almost twenty years old, I'd say it's a good time to start." Luna Queen lifted her chin and took a sip of her wine. Doris wanted to slowly move over to catch a glimpse of Prince Daniel for herself, but there was already another server stationed by him. He must have been slouching quite a bit for her to miss him.

Doris gave up trying to see the prince and looked over at the other ones. Prince Martin had his head bent in conversation with his lady. As if he felt her eyes on him, he looked up and smiled at her. Doris smiled back kindly and bowed her head to the prince. He looked as if he wanted to say something to her, but she was too far for her to hear it. Doris was glad to see he was just as kind as she remembered him being. It'd been a while since she'd last seen him in the library, she wondered if he'd found another poetry book to write his thoughts on or if he was still fond of Moon Rising.

Doris moved her eyes over him and accidentally locked gazes with Prince William again. She held her breath as he tilted his wine glass back and took a long sip with his eyes still on her. Why was he looking at her? His gaze felt like a caress as his eyes traveled down her form, she forced her eyes away from him and stopped herself from touching the mark on her neck. He was nothing but a rotten, emotionless man that didn't care for anyone but himself. He must have been extremely drunk already, that was most likely why he wouldn't stop looking at her. She hadn't seen him since she laid bloody at his feet



When he did nothing but confirm she wasn't worth anything to him or this palace. He didn't care what Melody did to her, he only cared that Melody act more like a lady and not punish her out in the open. Doris swallowed as she remembered the way it felt to be kicked so hard she could barely see. Her voice left her from screaming so much, her skin under her dress still had large bruises from where she kicked her the hardest. For a moment, it hurt when she realized he didn't care if she lived or died—but then reality settled back in and she remembered he wasn't worth her pain.

Doris refilled several empty glasses as they sampled some of the appetizers. Luna Queen was still trying to wring answers from Prince Daniel who only seemed to want to disappear from the conversation.

"What are you doing down there!" Luna Queen hissed at the prince. Doris glanced over to see the top of a dark head duck under the table. "You are a Prince, you should not be crawling under a table!"

"I dropped my fork!" He said, Doris tilted her head a little and tried to place where she'd heard his voice before

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"What are you doing down there!" Luna Queen hissed at the prince. Doris glanced over to see the top of a dark head duck under the table. "You are a Prince, you should not be crawling under a table!"

"I dropped my fork!" He said, Doris tilted her head a little and tried to place where she'd heard his voice before

"They will get you a new one! Are you mad?" Luna Queen tried to keep her voice down, but several people had already turned their gazes towards the table to see what was happening. Doris pressed her lips together to keep in her laugh. She knew she would get thrown out if she laughed at the royal party, but it was so silly to see a prince acting this way. It was like he was trying to hide under the table to get out of his conversation with Luna Queen, not that she blamed him. The woman was quite intimidating.

"Get up. Now." Luna Queen demanded. The talking lowered a little in the room, but didn't silence completely. Slowly, Prince Daniel gripped the table and brought himself up. Doris almost dropped the wine when their gazes locked.

It was David—

David was Prince Daniel?

He lied to her.

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Doris's eyes were wide as she stared at David—or Prince Daniel. This whole time he had been pretending to be a royal guard for the castle. He even claimed he was a personal guard for Prince William! Didn't he? Or, he didn't correct her when she assumed. He did say yes when she asked if he was a guard. He'd even told her he had to participate in the search for Prince Daniel when they heard other guards calling his name. Why did he tell her his name was David?

This whole time she thought she'd made a friend with someone who worked for the castle like her.

Doris slowly lowered the wine bottle back on the table as they stared at each other. She knew he could see the hurt in her gaze, he quietly shook his head as if trying to plead with her. As if to tell her not to be sad. Luna Queen had seemingly lost all her interest in him, she turned her attention back to her son Jack and spoke quietly with him instead.

She was—confused more than anything. Did he even care to be her friend? Or what was any of his kindness for if he was lying about who he was the whole time? Maybe he thought she would treat him differently if she knew, and of course she would. She would have never been so calm and casual around a royal member! Her entire life here had taught her to only be proper and attend to their needs. Maids weren't meant to be friends with princes.

"I didn't mean to lie!" He mouthed to Doris. His light eyes held so much emotion, she didn't know how to feel about any of it. Especially when she finally felt like she'd made another friend at the castle, one like Beth. She supposed she hadn't after all.

Doris turned her gaze away quickly when Luna Queen looked back at her. She didn't want her to think she was involved with the prince, clearly he didn't even want her to know he was royal. Her eyes found Prince William's again, he looked as if he'd seen the whole exchange with the way his eyes narrowed slightly. Doris didn't need him thinking anything either. Not that she

cared what he thought about her or what she did. It was obvious he already had his set thoughts of her and what she was good for.

Doris sighed and moved to clear a few plates and glasses away. It was almost time for the first course, next was the main and then dessert before she was free to go. Unless they made her stay late and clean up, too. Which wouldn't surprise her, Melody would probably laugh as she followed Prince William back to his room to spend the night. Doris shivered a little. Anything was better than standing outside their door again as they made love, that was perhaps the worst thing she ever had to do at the palace.

A large silver cart was pushed out from the kitchens, it held dozens of bowls of soup to be served to the royal members. Doris inhaled the scent of freshly cut vegetables and broth, it made her stomach grumble a bit. She was glad the crowd was loud enough to drown out the sound of her hunger. How long had it been since she'd eaten last? Beth had brought leftovers to Doris but she hadn't had a chance to eat them before she'd left her room. Ever since she had been

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beaten by Melody, everyone for the most part had left her alone enough to heal. Doris was fully prepared to stay in bed and rest with all that food, but now she had to watch everyone else enjoy themselves as her stomach continued to grumble.

Mr. Carson instructed servers to clear and clean the tables in front of the royal members. Doris quickly stepped forwards and grabbed empty glasses before she replaced them with new ones. She carefully refilled each glass with a slightly shaky hand. She silently cursed herself for her nerves. She wished they wouldn't stare at her as she passed. Especially the monster with blue eyes that haunted her dreams. His mouth lifted a little as she bent to pour wine in his glass, she quickly straightened herself when she realized he was staring down her dress.

Doris's cheeks flamed, she blew out a breath of air and pushed her loose hair behind her ear. She really, really wished he would stop trying to intimidate her in public. Or ever. She looked down her nose at him as he lifted his glass for more, his eyes darkened a little and she finally turned away once she was done.



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Clearly, Melody was not his main attention tonight. Perhaps it was due to the way she couldn't stop fidgeting to see if Luna Queen was enjoying herself or not. It was obvious she was, Doris had seen a smile on her face for most of the night.

Prince William must have been desperate for a distraction from all of this, it was obvious he wished he was anywhere but here. Jack Anthony seemed to wish the same. He kept sending distasteful glances in his direction as if his very existence was bothering him. Doris could agree with that, his existence also bothered her as well. But for entirely different reasons, she assumed.

"Doris, please help serve the soup to the royals." Mr. Carson said as he passed by her. Doris followed him to the tray of soups and began to set each bowl in front of the intended guest. The kitchen left small name plates next to each bowl, she glanced up to see the rest of the servants had moved on to another tray and left her alone to finish delivering the soups herself.

Doris sighed when she picked up Prince William's bowl, she carefully brought it

over to him and managed not to meet his gaze as she placed it in front of him. She knew he was watching her every move, she could smell the wine on his breath. It gave her a nasty flashback of the night he attacked her. He reeked of alcohol, she'd never forget that smell on his breath. It made her want to put as much distance as she could between them in case he got any urges to recreate that night. He wouldn't find her alone outside again, she'd make sure of that.

Doris moved on to Lady Grace and Prince Martin. He thanked her with a smile as she placed the bowl down, his lady said nothing as she picked up her spoon.

Prince Daniel sat up straight when she came to set his bowl down, he smiled at Doris widely and thanked her loud enough for everyone to hear. Doris blushed when several people turned to look at her and turned back to the cart and continued on. He obviously was sorry, but she only wished to know why he lied to her.

When it came to Luna Queen's bowl, Doris hesitated. It looked like there was a purple flower that appeared similar to Aconitum in her soup, and everyone

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knew Luna Queen hated Aconitum. Doris had heard she was highly allergic, the kitchen shouldn't have even been allowed to serve it if she was in the castle.

Just to be safe, Doris gave Melody's bowl to Luna Queen since it smelled normal and didn't seem to have a trace of flowers in it. She finally set the last bowl of soup in front of Melody and turned to wipe the cart clean.

Melody lifted the spoon to her lips delicately as she sipped her soup. The polite chatter continued in the room as everyone enjoyed their meals, Doris glanced over to see the servants already cutting the cake to be served. Hopefully this night would be over soon and she could return to her room.

A choking sound silenced the crowd. Doris looked over to see Melody's hands on her throat as she coughed loudly. Her face turned a little purple before she fell right out of her seat—

And didn't move again.