

Her Unwanted Mate On The Throne by Caroline Chapter 71

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The man seemed dazed and confused when William shoved him against the tree. It took a few moments to register what was happening before his eyes widened in pure fear and recognition. "I

William slammed his head back against the tree and dragged the man further into the woods. Doris hesitated and looked around to see no one was nearby before she followed him. Patrick was already there by the time Doris found them again. The man was shoved on the floor between William and Patrick, he had his hands up as if he could ward off their blows. but even Doris knew it was no use acting helpless. "Who are you and why were you targeting the prince?" Patrick demanded. He quickly stepped on the man's hand when he tried to move away from them. Doris cringed at the sound of his bones cracking. It brought her right back to the

room with Jack when he did the same to her. She took a small step back and wrapped her arms around herself. There was a bit of clarity in his eyes when he looked at the men that towered over him. Perhaps the dose of cure was already working in his system. A shame it wouldn't really matter soon. "I-I don't know what you guys are talking about" Patrick kicked the man in the face, Doris looked away. "That's not what we asked. We know you were part of the group of wolves that tried to assassinate the prince." Patrick kneeled down and gripped the man by his chin to force him to look at him. "Who sent you?" "I don't know what you're talking about!" The man shouted and tried to pull away from Patrick, but he held firm. It brought back horrible memories of the palace... did they all torture people for information? "Where are you from, then? Why did you come for the prince?" Patrick asked, his patience running thin. "Alright, alright! We came from Life Pharmacy! We heard the prince was

nearby and we knew he couldn't be trusted. The royal family has been our enemy for decades. We were gathered and came up with a plan to follow his carriage and attack at the right moment." William shifted a little. He glanced back to make sure Doris was still close by before he looked back down at the man. "I knew I felt someone following me. How long?" "Three days. You were never alone, the fight at Enzo's camp was the perfect *opportunity*." "Who owns Life Pharmacy?" Patrick asked. The man started to move away again and Patrick forced him back in place before he smacked him. "Did you hear me?" "Enzo does." ; The group froze. Patrick and William shot looks at each other but Doris couldn't see William's face. There was no way Enzo had anything to do this, Doris knew that. "Did Enzo ask you to kill me?" William asked with a drop of venom in his voice. "Our pack decided amongst ourselves." The man spat. Doris flinched, it wasn't

going to end pretty for him if he thought it was wise to talk back to them. "Who else is in your group? What are their names?" Patrick asked. The man started to laugh suddenly. He laid his head back in the snow and closed his eyes. "I'll never

rat my brothers out. You might as well kill me now." "You heard the man." William said as he turned towards Doris and took her arm to lead her away. "Kill him now." "Wait! No!" The man screamed. A loud smack sounded behind them as they walked out of the woods. William gripped her arm hard enough so she wouldn't look back. She knew that he was already dead before they even got out of earshot. It was strange to think that only a few weeks ago she had never really been around death. Now it was everywhere she turned. They walked in silence back to the horse. The streets were deserted and quiet, she imagined everyone was already asleep and warm in their own beds. Safe and cozy, how she longed for that instead of being here. He said nothing as he lifted her on

the horse and got on himself. She knew a hurricane was brewing in his mind and she couldn't help but wonder if he had a new suspicion about Enzo. They rode back hard and fast, even with the growing wind. Part of Doris worried a storm was coming, but William acted like one was already here. He didn't stop once until they reached it back to the camp in record time. Her mind briefly wondered if Patrick had already disposed of the body and was on his way back too. He steered the horse into the stables and slid off before he helped her off. He barely looked at her, only turned and made his way out into the snow. And right towards Enzo's cabin. Doris quickly followed even though she knew she could never stop a fight between them. "You don't think he honestly ordered your murder, do you?" Doris said to his back, He turned and she stopped dead in her tracks. His face had been taken over by a rage that chilled her bones and made her wish she could suck her words right back "Do not try to defend him to me, Doris.

You don't know who he is or how dangerous he is." William said, each word almost made her flinch. "You may be daft enough to trust every kind man, but I'm not." He turned without another word, but Enzo was already standing there with his hands behind his back. It was empty of other villagers who must have already been asleep. Otherwise she knew they would have loved to see this scene play out. "I wouldn't underestimate how smart our Doris is, prince." William's jaw tensed. "She's not your anything." Enzo smiled at Doris over William's shoulder and offered a shrug that said, can you believe this guy? William growled. "Why did you send your men to assassinate me? I thought you claimed peace in this land." I Enzo looked taken aback by his words. His brows furrowed in confusion. "You mean when your pack attacked ours?" "No, I mean Life Pharmacy," William's hands clenched into fists at his sides.

"I take it your little plan worked, then." Enzo said with a nod. "I only wonder why you think I would encourage it if I had anything to do with the man you sought out." "Life Pharmacy is owned by you." William stretched his fingers and clenched them again. "That may be so, but I didn't put out an order on your head. Even when you tore through a few of my villages looking for your girl." Enzo flicked a piece of dirt off his suit. "Whoever did so was not granted my approval-not that I would have ever given it to them unless it was under self defense." "Then who would have took it upon themselves to hunt down William?" Doris asked. She eyed William as she stepped up. "When we came, there was a decoy carriage that was taken down the second it passed through the north. Perhaps it's the same people who did that." Enzo looked thoughtful. "It could be. I wasn't aware you were coming to the north until you were here. Is there anyone from the castle that might have

fed information to someone at Life Pharmacy?" William and Doris shared a quick glance but said nothing. Enzo only smiled. "Ah, we all got our secrets. Perhaps it's not wise to keep so many when your life is at risk. But, nonetheless, I would like to know who is conspiring behind my back. Killing a prince is enough to bring a war on our land and something I would never risk." "I wouldn't worry too much about a war. My family isn't known for their love in me." William said bitterly and walked by Enzo. "Think what you will, prince, but I know even the smallest insult can bring a kingdom down." Enzo watched William across the snow. "How about this," William slowed his steps. "I set up a meeting for you two to visit the pharmacy as normal guests. You might be able to uncover some answers if they don't recognize you." William turned back with a look of annoyance on his face. "And how do you figure people wouldn't recognize me?" Enzo laughed. "You can easily be

disguised from people who have never seen you up close. To them you're just a myth that walks around a palace, they have no idea what you look like when you dress like one of us." "He's right." Doris said. "In the market, no one looked at you twice. The only reason you were sought out is and found is because they knew where to look for you." William narrowed his eyes. "How far is this place?" "Not far. I like to keep my things close to me. You'll have to give me a few days to set up something believable for your visit." Enzo turned a smirk on Doris. "I suppose you can pretend you're married a little longer."

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Doris watched the men wander back to their cottages without a single glance back at her and stood frozen in the snow. She watched as her breath form clouds of fog in front of her but made no effort to move towards warmth. "It won't be hard for you to pretend." Said a voice in her mind. Doris glanced around to make sure it hadn't come from someone else. "What?" Doris asked out loud. Her voice sounded so small in the breath of wind. "That's our mate, it'll be say for you to pretend to be his wife." Doris realized she was speaking to her inner wolf. She'd heard it speak a few times before, but both times she had been in a fever dream state where she wasn't focused enough to understand what was happening. Now that she was more aware, she realized how strange it was to have something inside her speak to her like this. It sounded as if it knew

more than she could ever hope to, perhaps it did. But not about this. "He's not our mate." Doris said silently. She could have sworn the voice scoffed at her words. "Melody is his mate." "We both know that's not true. She faked her mark to take your place. Everyone knew he was looking for a mark." "Doris?" A voice called from behind her. Doris turned to see Patrick standing a few feet away, his hands still stained in blood. Or perhaps she was imaging it again. She blinked and his hands were clean again. "What're you doing out here?" "Oh, I was just... thinking." Doris wrapped her cloak tighter around herself. The wolf inside her retreated and she knew they were done for now. Would it always be this way? Would the wolf inside her always come out to say its opinions even when they're

wrong. Patrick shoved his hands deep in his pockets. "It's quite an odd place to be doing a thing like that. You'll freeze to death."

Doris nodded and went to back up a little towards her cabin until a thought stopped her. "How come the man

couldn't heal himself with other Werewolf blood?" Patrick raised his brows at her question as if it was the most ridiculous thing he'd heard all day. "What do you mean?" "I mean, William was able to heal me with his. He didn't need a cure, how come the man didn't have someone just do the same? Patrick laughed a little, she frowned. What was so funny about her question? It had been on her mind ever since she saw how sick he was. Why didn't he just ... have someone give him blood like William did? "A normal werewolf's blood can't heal like William's does. His blood is rare and not many can do what he does." Doris's lips parted a little. "Oh... is it because he's royal?" "He's royal, he's an alpha. He's not like any other wolf you'll meet. No one can cure something as deadly as what you went through. He hoped it wouldn't have resorted to you needing the blood because of the horrible coma it puts you in once you drink too much but he had to risk it." Patrick shrugged and looked

up at the sky. "The cure doesn't completely extract the poison like his *blood* does, so that's why he didn't consider it. It could have left you sick for months." Patrick laughed again when he saw the stunned look on her face. "It won't all be so confusing once you learn more about it all. Listen, you should get some rest. It's been a long day." He was right, she did need rest. But how would she sleep after what she just learned?

The next morning, William was no where to be found. She woke up to an empty room and the sun had just barely started to come out. He was already asleep by the time she returned the night before after talking with Patrick, she wondered if he loathed the idea of pretending to be married to her and perhaps this was his attempt at avoiding her. Perhaps he even got another room so he wouldn't have to share hers anymore.

The idea of it left her feeling... uncomfortably sad. She had no right to

feel that way. In fact, the other half of her felt relieved that he would want to finally get his own room. That was exactly what she wanted to happen. Right? Yes, of course. He was one of the most awful men to have a conversation with. Everything she said made him mad at her for no reason. Doris shook the thoughts out of her head and took her time dressing for the day. She let her long hair stay down and dressed in warm pants and a sweater before she pulled on a pair of knee high boots. When she finally stepped out into the snow, she instantly felt as if someone was watching her. Not someone everyone. She hadn't even fully closed her door before she noticed it. People snuck glances at her as she passed them to get a plate of food. They whispered behind their hands and she swore she heard her own name more than once. It was so obvious, she wondered if they thought she was truly dumb enough for her not to notice. Eliza came up from behind Doris with a

small smile on her face. It didn't read her eyes, which told Doris she knew exactly what everyone was saying about her. "How're you doing, love?" "Fine... I notice

everyone is staring at me." Doris whispered. Eliza hummed to herself and jerked her chin to the side. "Come with me, there's something you should see." Doris pushed aside her half eaten plate and followed Eliza down the snowy path. She led her to the very end of the row of cabins and motioned for Doris to stay quiet. Doris pressed her lips together and stepped over the snow carefully. "Listen." Eliza mouthed to her before she turned and walked back up the path without another word. What on earth was she supposed to be listening for? Doris almost turned and followed her until she heard the voices. "...and that's not what I came here for." Said a deep voice. William's voice? Who was he talking to? What did any of this have to do with her "We never know what we want until we see it." A female voice said, her tone low with a drop of lust. "Let me help you

relax...." "You said you had information on Life Pharmacy." Prince William snapped. Doris crept towards the door and strained to hear more. "I say a lot of things, but I'm offering you a temporary escape from all the stress." She could hear the sound of a bed creak as if someone had just sat upon it. Doris's stomach turned in disgust. "Go in there and rip her apart! She's seducing our mate!" The voice screamed inside her. Doris had to hold her breath to keep from gasping at the sudden sound. A bubble of jealousy bloomed inside her chest. Who was this girl? Is this where he ran off to in the morning? Not that she should ever care. They were nothing to each other, her wolf was wrong. She was wrong for even wanting to hear any of this. "I'm not interested in what you're offering. I wanted information." William growled. She heard the sound of his stomps near the door and Doris hurried to crouch on the side of the cabin near the windows that were too high for her to see into, but perfect for her to hide

under. "Wait! Aren't you bored of that servant yet? You're a prince, you can have any woman you want. You don't have to settle for her." It sounded as if the *woman* stood again. Lighter footsteps hurried after his own. "I won't tell if you won't." Doris had the sudden urge to go in there and strangle the girl until she was blue in the face. Her wolf hummed in approval at her dark thoughts. "If you touch me again, I'll rip off your arm and feed it to my horses. You're lucky I don't do that just for you lying to me and misleading me." William threw open the door so hard, it banged against the wall of the cabin. He stepped out into the snow, Doris peered over the side to watch as he closed his eyes and inhaled. She quickly hurried away from the cabin before he could stomp across the snow and find exactly where she was. He knew her scent well. Doris took the back way up to the main area again and tried to hurry. By the time she arrived, she was a little out of breath and William was already there.

Seated at a back table with Patrick and a few other guards, his eyes instantly found her and she looked away before he caught her staring "Did you find what you needed?" Eliza asked quietly when she came up to Doris. Doris swallowed. "I'm not sure."

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When were you going to tell me you were lovers Doris tried not to stare, she tried not to look for the girl who matched the voice that wanted to lure William into bed. But she couldn't seem to focus on anything else. Her wall kept whispering in her ear about the woman, but she wasn't entirely sure why she even cared. It wasn't her business to care what he did with anyone. She was on this trip to serve him and that was it. But still, her curiosity had gotten the better of her and made her waste a full day in the cold Doris lingered around the main camp where everyone spent most of their time catching up with each other before they went on with their days. She watched as gossip was shared and warm drinks were passed around but not one of them had that voice. Not one of them offered for her to join them, either. She supposed she wasn't entirely liked or trusted here yet and she didn't blame any of them for it. It was hard for her to trust anyone too. William had gone off with Patrick and Erizo and he didn't so much as say a word to her since the day before. Why did he always make her feel as if she did something wrong? She didn't, she reminded herself. She did nothing wrong. Doris just wanted to see who the girl was, she didn't want to rip her apart like her inner wolf wanted so desperately for her to do. Some sick twisted part of her just wanted to see what William was offered. It took hours in the cold, but she finally heard it. "There!" Her wolf hissed. Doris sat up straighter and clenched her drink that had gone cold long ago. A tall, thin woman with long blonde hair passed by her with a man close by. Their heads were bent in conversation and she recognized the voice immediately: "What are you going to do to her for trying to seduce our mate?" "Nothing!" Doris whispered and quickly looked around to make sure no one heard her. "He's not our mate." "You can't deny it forever. Sooner or later it will kill you to see him with someone else. You know he would tear the head off anyone that looked at you the wrong way."

don't care about anything he does." Doris insisted and turned her eyes away from the beautiful woman. If he wanted her, he could have her. She cleaned up her mess and headed towards her cabin to find a bit of warmth and a nap. "You think I would ever be foolish enough to believe that? I know your heart better than you. Admit he is a good man to you." "I would never." Doris whispered as harshly as she could manage. She hadn't gotten used to replying in her mind yet, which she really needed to work on. "Imagine him with that girl. Imagine him how he was with Melody and tell me you don't care." The voice taunted. Doris tried to block out the memories. She didn't need Melody's over exaggerated sounds haunting her dreams again. "I don't know what you think you're doing, but it's not going to work. He's a prince, I'm just his servant. We're not meant to be." Doris hissed, she clenched her fists at her sides as she tried to quicken her steps to her cabin where no one would stare at her if she started shouting at her inner wolf. And she was very close to doing just that: "Go on, picture him on top of her like he was on top of you in your dream. How did it feel to have his mouth all over you? Did you wish it was real? Did you let yourself—*" "Stop it!" Doris shouted. Several eyes turned to look at her as if she was insane. She felt a bit

that we you dag total me you v OVE . insane, if she was honest. She closed her eyes tightly as if it would make them all disappear around her but of course, they didn't "They were still all there, staring at her as though she had just dropped her mind on the floor in front of them. "Sorry!" Doris said before she slammed the door shut to her cabin behind her. She couldn't even remember how she got here, it was all a huge blur as she raced across the snow for some privacy. Having a wolf was a lot more annoying than she ever thought it would be. She had truly never

considered what it would be like to have something inside you pick a fight to prove a point that was so utterly wrong. "What do I call you, anyway?" Doris asked as she slid off her jacket and went to start a fire Her wolf laughed. It was such a divine sound. Doris was sure she wasn't going to answer." Cordelia. I'm a bit embarrassed you didn't know that already." "The name sounded familiar, as if it had already been on the tip of her tongue. She didn't have the slightest idea to how that was possible. "Why would I ever know that?" "You've had many dreams of me, I suppose you've only forgotten." Cordelia made a sound of disapproval.. Doris moved to the window and glanced out the curtains. Luckily, no one was staring at her cabin. "You made them all think I'm insane." "They already thought that, my dear." She laughed. Doris rolled her eyes. "They've all been where you are once before. Perhaps when they were younger or recently. It's normal to be afraid." Doris wanted to object and demand that she wasn't afraid, not one bit. But that wouldn't have been the truth. She was terrified. Was it possible to never change into her wolf again? Her eyes caught on William as he walked across the snow with Patrick: He was hard to miss with his height and sharp features that were hard to look away from. His face was twisted in a fit of anger, but Doris thought he always looked that way. The blonde woman from before stopped him in his tracks and Doris strained to hear what they talked about, but she was just too far. She slammed the curtain closed before she turned away and headed straight for the bed. She didn't care. She knew she didn't. At least she didn't have to listen to their noises here. This wasn't the palace, he couldn't make her stand out in the snow just to hear his pleasure. It had to be a while since he had last spent the night with someone romantically. It was only a matter of time before he gave in to the offers and advances. Good riddance, at least it wasn't her he was pawing at. Her angry thoughts dimmed as she let it lure her to sleep. At least her wolf silenced enough to let her escape from it all.

"Doris?" A soft voice gently pulled her awake. A large hand gripped her shoulder and the sweet smell of cinnamon made her eyes open wide. Enzo stood above her with a look of concern. "I heard you had a bit of an outburst today. I brought cake, if that helps." Doris slowly sat up and rubbed her eyes. She was so distracted by her anger, she'd fallen asleep in her snow clothes. He wasn't lying about the cake. It was oozing with icing and cinnamon, she could have devoured the entire thing in one bite.

... I was talking with my wolf outside, not having a breakdown." "Ah, I figured that." Enzo sat on the edge of her bed and set the plate on the table next to her

"You know how rumors go, they always get more dramatic by the time you hear them." Doris smiled a little and hugged her knees to her chest. "I've been trying not to talk out loud when I respond, but"

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You're done. "What?" Doris knew she heard him wrong, there was no other explanation for what he just said. Enzo just raised in brows in mild surprise. He stood and William crossed the room in three long strides to grab him by his throat and slam him against the wall "William!" Doris stood quickly. her heart tried to slam out of her chest. "What are you doing? We're not lovers!" His eyes were wild with rage and a sort of jealousy she didn't understand. "Everyone knows it, don't lie to me! I told you what would happen if you lied to me!" He spat at Doris. Enzo looked entirely unbothered from William's outburst. He watched them both as William held him pinned to the wall. "She's not lying. Surprisingly, we haven't even kissed." Doris narrowed her eyes at him and wished she could smack him, he wasn't helping. William tightened his grip on Enzo and Enzo gripped his arm and started to twist it. William winced and dropped him, but immediately slammed him into the wall again. "I knew you wanted her as your own. Tell me I'm wrong" + "You're wrong." Enzo said simply. William punched the wall by his head and Doris flinched. Enzo remained calm. "I don't know who has been feeding you lies at this camp, but Doris is my friend. I would never go after another man's... interest. As you can see, the results always end so tragic and I'm not interested in it." William stared at Enzo for what felt like hours before he loosened his grip and stepped away. He eyed him as if he didn't believe a word he said and was ready to grab his throat again if he needed to. Enzo straightened his suit and looked them both over before he headed to the door

"I don't like drama in my village, try to keep it to a minimum." He said over his shoulder before he closed the door behind him. William stood glaring at the door for several long minutes. He breathed hard, in and out, as he curled and uncurled his hands into fists. Doris hesitated before she stepped up to him. "Why would you think... We were lovers?" William turned his sharp gaze on her. It made her want to step back, but she was tired of cowering away from people. "I heard it around the camp, everyone's talking about it." Doris furrowed her brows. Eliza hadn't mentioned anything about that. When she brought her to the cabin, Doris thought she wanted her to know what William had been up to. Was that why they were all staring at her? "It's not true. He hasn't touched me, nor I him." "I see him touch you all the time." William hissed. He stepped closer to her and she had to lean back a little just to look up at him. "It makes me want to rip his arms off for touching you so easily. For looking at you and making you smile." Doris swallowed and glanced around the empty room. There was no where for her to run or hide, all she could do was face him and his jealousy. Did he hate the idea that someone wanted something he owned? Did it make him murderous to see someone take interest in her when he didn't?

"I have no interest in Enzo. I promise you that." Doris said calmly. She forced herself to look him in the eye. He would not make her shake from intimidation-not anymore. He breathed hard through his nose, his face was inches from her own and she couldn't remember when he Chad gotten so close to her. She could feel his every breath against her face. "I don't like liars." He said.

"I'm not one: Not ever again. Dans whispered. His eyes flickened to her mouth and she dared herself to do the same. To imagine what it would feel like for his desires to be an her because she wanted it not because he forced it. Why why would she ever even consider having those sort of thoughts! After another moment, he stepped back from her like their moment never happened. He turned away and left out the door and didn't return the entire night Her mind let her wonder where he went, but most of her already knew. He was most likely in the

bed of the blonde that wanted him so badly and might have said anything about her just to have him.

Why didn't you just kiss him? He would have devoured you—"Shut up! I'm not going to kiss him, not ever!" Doris shouted to an empty room in the middle of the night. She locked the door and put on her nightgown before she crawled in bed. William wasn't a part of her future and he never would be. Once they returned to the castle, the amnesty would have already been signed and she would be free. He wouldn't follow her, he wouldn't be able to control her or find her ever again. They weren't anything to each other and and her wolf couldn't force her to think otherwise. So, if he was in another woman's bed tonight, good. It didn't bother her one bit.

The next morning. Doris woke to a loud knock. She grudgingly got out of bed and threw on a cloak before she pulled the door open. Enzo stood there with a bored look on his face and it almost distracted her from the shouting behind him. "Truly, if you can't control your dog, you're gonna have to have him leave." "What?" Doris said as she rubbed her tired eyes. "It's too early for riddles, Enzo."

I love a good riddle, but alas this isn't one. Your prince is picking fights with the townspeople. I think he got into the stash of alcohol and helped himself to all of it." Enzo moved out of the way to show William shoving a large man across the clearing. Doris quickly pulled on her boots and hurried out the door. She didn't have time to process the fact that he had been drinking. She hadn't been around him drunk since the night he attacked her and she hadn't planned to be ever again. # you think you can come here and tell us what to do? You're not in your territory!" The man shouted so violently, spit Dew from his mouth. William's guards stood close by with their arms crossed over their chests as they watched closely. He must have ordered them to stay to the side, otherwise she knew the other man wouldn't be able to get even a foot close to him. William must have wanted to trouble. "You think you can come up here and control us like you do in your kingdom? Or wait your father doesn't even trust you enough to make those sort of decisions, does he?" The man taunted, he even had the nerve to smirk at William. Did he have some sort of death wish? William threw a punch hard against his jaw and sent the man stumbling back. His shirt was

didn't seem to be responding to any of the man's jabs, he just wanted something to hit. The man threw his own punch and Doris winced when it hit him right in the nose. She watched as his guards stepped closer when blood poured from his nose. He threw up his hands to ward them off and they immediately stepped back and let their prince act wild. "Nobody likes you here, why don't you get that?" The man spat blood at William's feet and raised his fist for more: "Nobody here is gonna trust you or do what you want no matter how hard you try to threaten us." He dodged a messy punch William intended to land. He was a little unsteady on his feet and she wondered if he drank all night to still be this drunk in the morning like this. It was absolutely foolish and absurd. "You can leave that girl, though." The

CHA TO E dd man grin ned, a hasty sort of look that made William freeze for a moment to listen. "I'll take care of her for you. Anything she wants or needs. I got it for her." A cord in William snapped and they could all see it the moment it did. He roared and tackled the man to the ground like an animal before he started hitting him as hard as he could. Doris couldn't count how many punches he gave,

but they all hit one after the other with a crunch that made her gag. The man's face was coated in so much blood, Enzo finally broke up the fight and dragged William off him but the man still laid still in the bloody snow. Doris didn't think anyone else would have been strong enough to do that. His fists had blood dripping from them. Doris took in the sight of his miserable appearance-he was almost unrecognizable with his ripped and bloody clothes and wild eyes and hair. William tried to shove Enzo off him but he held him in a chokehold. "You're done." Enzo said before William went unconscious in his grip.

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William was carried and left right in her bed of all places. Doris noted how many empty cabins there were but he was still brought to her every time. She knew she shouldn't be surprised, she was here to serve his needs after all. But what if he was still drunk when he woke? The thoughts made her nervous and she tried to shake them from her mind. She wanted to be there for him like he was for her when she was sick but-it was hard to swallow the bit of fear that tried to pull her down when images of his drunken state still ran across her mind almost nightly. She promised herself she would never be around him when he drank-never again. Doris took off his shoes carefully and covered him with two blankets before she went to clean all the blood off his face and hands. She set a glass of cold water by the bed as well as a bit of bread in case he was hungry when he woke. Doris remembered Beth telling her how ravenous some of the princes would be after a night out, perhaps she should get more food-no. She had to stay by his side like he did for her. She'd never forget his kindness, even when she knew he wouldn't want her thinking of it that way. Doris pulled up a wooden chair to rest in near the bed he slept. It was a wonder how his guards allowed Enzo to knock him out so easily without even attempting to stop it before it happened. She supposed even they knew he had gone too far and needed to be stopped before he killed someone. Still, the other guy must have been some what drunk to think it was smart to taunt a prince. Especially one like him. Doris read through almost half of the book he had gotten her before he finally woke. Her eyes were starting to feel strained from how many words she took in at once. When she lowered the book, he was watching her with a bit of a dazed look. His hair was going in all different directions and her fingers itched to fix it for him. To run her

fingers through his black hair and feel just how soft it would be under her touch. "Oh," Doris quickly stood and helped him sit up. She set down her book and handed him the glass of water and bread. "How are you feeling?" She asked cautiously. His eyes looked tired, but alert. He didn't say anything as he downed the glass in seconds and ripped apart the bread with his teeth. She glanced around for more food, but they didn't have much else. Doris cleared her throat and moved the chair back across the room. "Is there anything I can get you? Are you hungry?" She asked. She didn't know what else to do with her hands so she started to pick up things that were out of place. He simply watched as she moved back and forth but refused to answer her simple questions. Why couldn't he just tell her he was hungry so she could have an excuse to leave for a moment and

catch her breath? Didn't he realize how hard it was for her to have him watching her like that? After a few moments, she stopped in front of the bed and rested her hands on her hips. "Are you okay?" She tried again and did her best not to sound as annoyed as she felt. He even dared to look amused at her frustration to try and get him to talk to her. Was this some new sort of punishment? She knew her place, even here in the

north where she had a choice to be whatever she wanted to be. Even with all they had been through, she knew she wouldn't yell at him or demand anything of him. And he knew that too. He knew she would only ever be a maid to him and it infuriated her more than she wanted to admit. "You know, they're not as bad as you think." Doris said suddenly. His brows raised, she tried not to let her gaze dip lower towards his bare chest. He was the only man she had seen up close without a shirt. It had just become more and more frequent lately. "The rogues. They're not as bad as I thought they'd be. I thought we would both be dead by now." He snorted and looked at the wall behind her head. "How do you figure they're not bad? Because their leader likes you?" "They... they just want to be free. Isn't that what we all want?" Doris said with a bit of longing in her voice. His eyes snapped back to her when he heard it. "They came here to be free in life. Not to start problems everywhere they go. They came here to build a life for themselves where no one could hurt them." "Have you forgotten all the stories you've heard of them? of all the things they've done?" "That's just it, they're stories. We never truly know what the truth is until we see it ourselves. Being here has opened my eyes to how they are." Doris gripped the post on the edge of the bed as she looked at him. "I know some are bad, but that's true everywhere you go. There's always going to be bad people." "They kill for sport, Doris. Don't let them blind you to their true intentions." William said as if he was talking to a child. "You may have been fooled by their illusions, but I'm not." "I heard the story of why they came here, William. Of why this place even exists. The kingdom treated them horribly because they were poor. They couldn't live among the rich without being stepped on or killed." Doris let out a small breath. She knew he didn't want to hear anything good about them but she would at least try to make him see it. "They kill outsiders that come for them and their safety. They only want to live freely out here, can't you see that?" William narrowed his eyes. "I see they have you under their spell already. Who knew it would be so easy to sway your charm?" "They haven't done anything to charm me. They told me their story." "And you believe it? You believe this story and expect everything they say is the truth?" William sat up further. "Have you ever considered that they're lying to you?" "I have, of course I have. But I believe them. I believe they want peace and freedom here." Doris brushed her hair behind her ear. "They don't want to be touched by the rules of the kingdom because they knew the kingdom doesn't care what happens to them. They had to come here to start new." "I suppose that's what you want, too. Freedom." He said with a hint of bitterness in his voice. Her hands curled into fists at her sides. How dare he tease her about that? "Of course I do. Who wouldn't wish to be free?" Doris said quietly. He watched her

closely as he leaned back against the headboard. "Have you forgotten that several of the men have kidnapped you here and tried to take advantage of you?" William snapped. "Of course I haven't forgotten that! I live in fear every night I'm here-worrying who will be next to try and get rid of me. But I know not all of them are like that." "They wouldn't touch you if they knew what was good for them." William said instantly. Doris closed her eyes for a moment and took a deep breath. When she opened her eyes again, his face wasn't as hard as it was a moment before. "Why are you really here, William? What do you want from the

rogues?" Doris picked at her nails as she watched him carefully. They both already knew who poisoned Melody. Why else would William not investigate the spice stand at the market? Because they knew they were sent on this trip by Luna Queen. He knew it long before it was even decided. Who had bought the poison for her no longer mattered. It was her, it had to be. William clenched his jaw and looked down at his hands. She followed the line and felt as if she would cut her mouth on a jaw like that if she ever dared to taste it. She looked away quickly and felt her cheeks heat in shame. "I have a plan." He said. Doris wanted to roll her eyes—but she didn't. Why couldn't he just tell her what he meant for once? "What sort of plan?" Doris asked with only a bit of hesitation in her voice. She wanted to know. More than anything, but at the same time... did she want to know what he had been up to? "I'm going to be the next king." He said suddenly. Doris blinked a few times as if she hadn't heard him. "What?"