

Caged Royalty

The door is the first thing that greets me.

Not gently, but cold and unforgiving.

Stone scrapes my cheek as my body hits it, thrown forward with enough force to rattle my teeth and knock the air clean out of my lungs. Pain blooms—sharp, immediate—and before I can even gasp, the doors slam shut behind me with a deafening crack.

The sound echoes too much like memory.

Too much like childhood.

Darkness swallows me whole.

For a second—just a second—I'm eight again. Small and barefoot.

Standing in a long marble hallway that smells of incense and cold authority. My father's shadow stretching across the walls like a monster in the dark.

He never hit me back then.

He never needed to.

Not when he had other ways to break a child.

He used to lock me up in rooms just like this—alone in silence until my sobs burned out. He said it was discipline. Training. Control.

"Don't cry," his voice whispers through my mind now, that same calm cruelty that always felt sharper than any slap. "Fear makes it worse. You will learn to control yourself. Tame that power of yours."

And then the door would close.

Again.

I blink hard, dragging myself out of the memory. Back into the present. Back into the dark. My breath comes shallow and uneven, my chest tightening before I can stop it.

And I hate it—hate that after all these years, the dark still claws at me. Hate that it creeps into my bones like it owns me. Hate that after everything I've survived, this still gets to me.

I press my forehead to the cold door and force myself to breathe.

In.

Out.

Again.

When my vision finally adjusts, I take in the cell.

It isn't a dungeon.

No rusted chains.

No bloodstains.

No tortured screams bleeding through stone.

That almost makes it worse.

Silver lines run through the walls like veins—etched carefully, glowing faintly, alive. Suppression magic. Old. Ruthless. The kind you don't use unless you're terrified of what's inside.

Of me.

My gaze drops to my legs.

Silver restraints wrap around my ankles, humming with a suppression spell that sinks into my bones. Another band circles my neck, cool and deceptively elegant—like jewelry to anyone who doesn't know what it really is.

A collar.

I let out a soft laugh that scrapes my throat raw.

He didn't just lock me away.

He caged me.

"So that's it," I murmur into the empty room. "You're afraid."

Afraid enough to build a prison just for me.

A narrow bed sits against one wall, barely wider than a cot. The toilet sits shamelessly in the corner, with no wall and no curtain. Just another reminder: you are not meant to be comfortable here or have dignity.

Two guards stand outside the bars—stiff, silent, watchful.

No escape.

Not even the illusion of one.

"So," I whisper, voice hoarse, "this is what fear looks like."

Time slips strangely in places like this. Minutes. Hours. They blur.

Eventually, food arrives—if you can call it that.

A bowl shoved through the bars, skidding across the stone like something tossed to an animal. No plate. No spoon. Just thin stew and stale bread.

I stare at it.

My stomach twists—not with hunger, but disgust.

I swing my leg and kick the bowl hard.

It clatters loudly, tipping over, stew splashing across the floor.

"Oops," I say sweetly. "My leg slipped."

One guard mutters a curse.

"Eat," the other snaps. "Or you'll regret it."

I look him dead in the eyes and smile slowly.

"I already do."

I turn toward the wall.

I'd rather starve.

Sleep drags me under without warning—heavy, sudden, suffocating.

When I wake, hands are already on me.

Rough.

Impatient.

Cold fingers dig into my arms as I'm yanked upright.

"Up."

My body is lifted like I weigh nothing. My feet barely skim the floor as the guards drag me out of the cell, silver restraints clinking with every step.

"It's time, Your Majesty."

The title feels like a cruel joke.

They drag me into a room.

My room.

My old room—preserved like a shrine to obedience. Clean. Elegant. Untouched. As if no one was ever punished here. As if no one ever cried themselves hoarse begging to be let out.

Six maids wait inside, lined up like statues—faces blank, eyes lowered, hands folded. Dresses laid out like offerings on the bed. Jewelry. Makeup.

A ritual of prettiness meant to hide the violence beneath.

"No," I say immediately, twisting out of the guards' grip. "Get your hands off me."

They don't.

They throw me onto the bed.

The restraints stay on.

Hands swarm me—tugging, pulling, pinning. Fabric is forced over my skin whether I want it or not.

"Stop," I snap. "I said stop—"

A corset tightens around my ribs until my breath breaks in my lungs.

Another maid jerks my chin up and dabs powder on my cheek, pressing too hard as if my face offended her.

I feel like an object.

A doll.

A sacrifice being prepared for the altar.

Hot anger spreads through my chest—burning, choking.

"You're hurting her," one maid whispers, barely audible.

"Dress her," another snaps through her teeth. "Unless you want all of us punished."

I bite my tongue until I taste blood.

Then the door opens and the room goes silent.

I don't need to look; I feel him.

My father's presence hits like a cold wind—heavy, merciless, suffocating.

The Alpha King.

The maids bow and scatter instantly, fleeing to the corners of the room like startled birds, leaving me alone with him.

He studies me the way one studies a disappointing investment—calculating, cold, already weary of my existence.

"Must you resist me at every turn?" he asks. "Your life would be much easier if you stopped fighting."

I laugh softly.

It sounds wrong even to my own ears.

"You lock me in a magical silver cage," I say, lifting my gaze to meet his. "Cuff my hands and legs like a dog you're trying to break... and you're surprised that I fight?"

His jaw exes.

"This ends when you choose a husband," he says at last. "Your freedom depends on obedience. You are not special enough to defy destiny."

Something inside me shifts.

Clicks into place.

I lower my eyes.

I smile.

"You're right," I say quietly. "I've been a bad daughter."

He blinks once.

"I've embarrassed you," I continue gently. "Deed you. I see that now."

Suspicion creeps slowly across his features like a shadow.

"I hope," he says, voice tight, "that you have truly come to your senses."

Oh, Father.

If only you knew.

I have come to my senses—just not the way you think.

He hates defiance, yes.

But he hates humiliation more.

And I am going to drown him in it—right in front of his elders.

The guards are summoned.

The throne room doors open.

And for the first time in history, a woman steps inside—one who was never meant to be here.

Even though I have stood behind those doors and listened a thousand times, walking into it feels different.

Power hums up my spine.

My head lifts, chains and all.

The air shifts the second I enter.

Hundreds of men line the hall—Alphas, warriors, monsters dressed in silk and arrogance. Their gazes claw over me, stripping me bare, weighing me, judging me.

Like meat.

Their hunger crawls across my skin.

I lift my chin anyway.

A smirk curves my lips—slow, sharp, dangerous.

So this is the auction.

I take my place beside my father, seated as his princess, his prized possession. Traditionally, my mother should sit on the other side.

Her throne is empty.

My teeth grind.

Of course she's being punished too, just as he has said. And knowing my father, mercy was not part of it.

I lace my fingers together, smile wider, and feel their greedy gazes cling to me—these men hoping to be my king.

Let them hope because I'm about to make this unforgettable.