

## Book 2 Dragon King's Forbidden Love Chapter 41 - Tips

I hesitated slightly before opening the box. Yet then I pulled the ribbon with trembling fingers and took the lid off. Inside, there was a small black envelope with golden edges on top of golden tissue paper. My name was written on it with beautiful gilded letters.

I got out a little card from the inside and read:

Lady Larissa Artess of White Archipelago,

His Majesty Emperor Demir Darmerion Derwood requests the honour of your presence at the Royal Masquerade Ball to be held at the Royal Gerdian Palace on the 7th day of Ferrorsun month.

The festivities will start on the 7th hour and every guest is required to wear a mask. All masks will be off at midnight.

Biting my lip, I removed the shiny tissue paper and gasped when I saw the main gift. A beautifully crafted white mask with feathers, pearls, and diamonds was laying on top of a matching white dress. Gerdians weren't wearing white too often, so I knew that these were made especially for me. It was a gesture. And I appreciated it.

I still didn't know what to think about everything though. It was a bit too much information for me... Dragons, soulmates, red dragons... Everything felt as if it wasn't happening to me.

Just then dark flames appeared right next to me again and I see a book with a little note attached to me. Oh, he didn't dare!

"I am sure you will like this one more", the note said and I checked the book. The title was "The Duke's Favourite Maid."

Well, at least it wasn't "Armenia's Flame"! That one turned out to be not what I expected at all! I needed to take my mind off things, so I took the book and went to sit on my favourite chair on the balcony.

It started off really sad, with the poor maid being mistreated by everyone including her own family. She worked hard but no one appreciated the effort. I couldn't stop. Life was so cruel for the maid and she decided to change things for herself. At this time the old duke died and his only heir arrived at the

estate. The poor maid went to his room to talk to him about her possible promotion and the new Duke, luckily, was very eager to help the young girl out and invited her in at once...

I closed the book, feeling how red my cheeks were!

The audacity of that man! To give me another book that... that... Unbelievable!

I threw it away, almost hitting Lisa that was bringing in fresh tea.

"My lady?!" She looked at me with her eyes wide, "You didn't like the book? You've been reading it for hours! I thought you were enjoying it Senco you looked so invested..."

It was embarrassing to admit that I read every single chapter of that... that...

"Anything new?" I decided to change the subject trying to calm down.

"Yes," the maid smiles, "Everyone is talking about the masquerade. It is so unexpected! The Emperor usually doesn't like such entertainments, so we don't get any balls except the ones for his and the princess' birthdays. And also the change of years one."

"You have a nice dress," Sandra came out with snacks. How did she even see it? I didn't unpack it yet. "It will be easy to spot you. But then again, maybe that was the idea behind the gift," she sneered. Lisa and she had very different attitudes. While one seemed nice and generally happy to tend to me, another seemed like the job was beneath her and she was forced to do it in the first place.

Yet she had a point. If I go in white, everyone's attention will be on me. And I wasn't sure I would be comfortable with that.

"By the way," I asked, "Has the lady from the boutique returned? She was supposed to bring accessories today. I think I would like to speak to her."

"She is actually waiting for you to be done with your snacks," Lisa smiled as she poured the tea.

"Oh, then let her in!" I suddenly became agitated with my newest idea, "I have something I need to discuss with her!"

One of the assistants that Demir and I met at the shop in the capital came in, trembling. By now she knew that the guy she was drooling over was the Emperor and me... I think she had certain ideas about who I was. She wasn't wrong though, now that I was thinking about it.

I looked at the accessories and asked the maids to take them away to the wardrobe room. And as soon as they were gone, I pulled the poor girl to the balcony.

"I have something else I need from you," I said in a conspiring tone as her eyes went wide.

"H-how can I help you my lady?" she mumbled.

"You see, I have a masquerade to attend," I smirked.

In the evening, I was invited for a dinner in the garden. Demir was already there when I arrived, and I was so happy to see him. We didn't see each other for just a few hours but it felt like it was forever.

He moved my chair for me and I sat down, noticing how he took in the dress that I was wearing. The lightweight silver off-shoulder thing with a cape at the back. And I was ready for a pleasant evening together when he suddenly said, "Lara, today I received another message from your brother..."

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LARA

"Gideon Artes can be persistent," the gerdian emperor looked at me, waiting for my reaction.

I did not expect to hear Gideon's name today. In all honesty, I wasn't even thinking about him at all lately. And the realization made me feel guilty.

What was wrong with me? He must have been so worried there, looking for ways to get me back, trying everything... And here I am, enjoying life at the Gerdian Palace, reading questionable books and thinking of the man who practically kidnapped me!

“Lara,” Demir stretched his hand and covered mine with his calloused palm, “Your brother requests a meeting with you on the border in the mountains. If that’s what you want, then...”

“Will you let me?” I looked at him in surprise, not even realizing how our fingers entwined.

“Yes,” he sighed and closed his eyes before saying, “I’ll take you there myself if that’s what you want. I don’t like it but I will do it. For you.”

“And if I’d want to go back home with him, what will you do?” I raised my brow.

“I’ll be a very sad dragon,” he looked at me with surprisingly big eyes in which dark flames were dancing sadly, “And Smoke will be devastated...”

“I thought your dragon’s name is not Smoke,” I chuckled, and he smiled a bit with the corner of his lips.

“If you stay with me, you can call him whatever you want,” his grasp on my hand got a little bit tighter but I didn’t mind.

“Well, I promised to stay here for a month, remember?” I smiled and felt his thumb caressing my skin, making me feel all kinds of things that I wasn’t supposed to feel.

“And what if I want you to stay longer than that?” he asked me carefully as if he was afraid to scare me off.

“How long would that be?” I couldn’t bring myself to look at him.

“Ideally?” he snorted, “Forever. You are my soulmate, Lara. I want to live my life with you.”

This was too much, and I felt how my cheeks turned red. Yet I wasn’t scared. If anything, I liked his words.

“How about this,” I took in a deep breath, “I’ll stay for that month and I will tell you my decision at the end.”

“That’s... something,” he smiled and brought my hand to his lips, kissing it gently.

"I thought that you aren't supposed to touch me," I smirked and he returned the favour.

"I am just being polite," he looked straight into my eyes, "But if you don't like it, just tell me to stop."

We sat there, staring at each other. And I said nothing. Which made him grin at me and this time he placed my palm on his cheek, brushing his short stubble over my delicate skin.

"I want to meet with Gideon," I said out loud and the magic spell between us was broken. Demir let go of my hand and leaned to the back of his chair, exhaling heavily.

"He wants to meet you tomorrow at sunrise," he sighed, "I'll take you there."

"Thank you," I smiled as our food arrived, "I would really appreciate it."

"Yeah," he stabbed his meat to the point that I was afraid his plate would c\*\*\*k. The dinner continued but the conversation died a slow and painful death. The Emperor of the Gerdian Empire was far away from me and I couldn't help but feel disappointed.

After the meal, he offered to walk me back to my room. We strolled in heavy silence and when we were almost at my door, I stopped, forcing him to look at me.

"Demir", I bit my lip, "I need to talk to him. To give him peace. You love your sister, right?"

"Not the way your brother loves you," he chuckled darkly.

"And still, if she'd even be kidnapped or disappeared, would you be able to stay calm and happy?" I asked.

"Lara," he brushed a lock of hair behind my ear, "If someone ever kidnaps Prim, I would send him my deepest condolences. That girl is a menace."

"I am being serious here!" I jabbed him lightly with my elbow and he caught it, pulling me closer.

"I... I also need him to explain a few things to me," I confessed, "You know what I am talking about."

"I do," he agreed, nodding, "But I still don't like it."

"Gideon is a good man," I tried to persuade him, "Trust me."

"I really hope that you are right," he leaned lower, so low that our faces almost touched.

"Brother!" we heard a voice behind our backs and turned to see princess Primrose, glaring at us with her eyes glowing gold, "Would you spare me a minute or two of your precious time?"

She tapped her tiny foot in a golden shoe and her hands were crossed on her chest. There was no chance in chaos of her leaving us alone.

"Siblings!" Demir sighed in annoyance, "Aren't they great?"

He gave me a wink and a little giggle escaped me.

"Good night, lady Lara," he kissed my hand instead, looking me in the eyes the whole time. And in those eyes I saw dark fire dancing wildly.

I went to my room and closed the door behind myself, leaning over it and closing my face with my hands. There were too many feelings and I had no idea how to deal with them.

All night I tried to fall asleep but I just couldn't. Thoughts were circling in my mind about Demir and about Gideon. One thing was for sure, Deon would not be happy that I was staying in the Gerdian Empire for a month. And when he'd learn that possibly I'd be staying even longer...

Restless, I stood up from the bed and decided to get ready. I chose a beautiful white dress to wear with golden detailing and the most luxurious fabric. I wanted to show my brother that I was treated nicely here.

"My lady," Lisa appeared in dark smoke next to me even though it was the middle of the night. She was the responsible one. "Let me help you with your hair," the girl got the brush ready and got to the job after my approval, creating another simple yet elegant masterpiece.

I felt him arrive without anyone needing to tell me. It was as if his dark flames were tickling my skin even at the distance. When I walked out of my dress room, he was already standing at the balcony in his armour.

It was the first time I saw him wearing something like this. Shining black metal made him look even bigger and I noticed a helmet with two horns reminding of a dragon's head that, I was sure, was sending a terrifying message to his enemies on the battlefield.

"Do you feel that this was necessary?" I asked, my hand touching the cold plates on his chest as I couldn't help it.

"That's a requirement made by my sister," he chuckled, "Prim is worried."

"She probably hates me for all of this," I sighed.

"She doesn't hate you," he smiled and brushed his palm over my cheek, "It's just... complicated."

His eyes wandered up and down my body when he breathed out, "Chaos, Lara, you looks so beautiful!"

"You don't look too bad yourself," I blushed as he pulled me closer. It was so strange to feel the cold metal through the thin fabric of my dress. Yet I still felt comfortable.

Demir put on the helmet and closed me in the ring of his arms. Dark flames surrounded us and in a blink of a moment, we appeared on top of a mountain, where the sun was already rising over the horizon.

"Lara!" I heard Gideon scream and turned to see him, still trying to adjust to all the light.

He was in his battle attire as well, the golden armour of the Commander of the Warriors of Light. His wings spread when he saw me in Demir's arms.

"Let her go!" he growled and his handsome face contorted in a grimace of anger.

Behind him, other Warriors of Light stood. I recognized Fabian and some of the others. They all were ready for battle. And Demir was alone. Yet, in just a few seconds, clouds of dark smoke started to appear behind us and I saw gerdian warriors appear. Ryker, who played the role of the ambassador was there as well.

The gerdians looked relaxed while the Warriors of Light were tense.

"I said let her go!" Gideon didn't look like himself and I glanced quickly at Demir, who removed his helmet with a smirk on his face...

"I don't follow your orders," he informed my brother, "And I suggest you stop throwing them at me, boy!"

I cringed at the words. Did he really have to do this?

"Demir," I hissed at him, "Just stop it. I want to speak to him."

He looked at me softly and a vague smile touched his lips as he brushed his palm over my cheek and then let me go.

I was about to step away when he took my hand and moved it closer to his face for a kiss.

"I am only doing it because my soulmate wants this!" he threw at my brother who already seemed furious enough.

"And may I ask who the hell you are?!" the young Artes demanded.

"That you may," the gerdian chuckled, "I am Demir Darmerion Derwood, the Emperor of the Gerdian Empire and the one who your SISTER is destined to be with."

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LARA

I gave him an angry look. Couldn't he at least try and be nice when he met my family for the first time? It wasn't that hard!

But Demir slowly kissed my fingers, without breaking eye contact. And I just shook my head and sighed. That... gerdian!

The smirk on his face let me know that he knew everything that I was thinking. And he was enjoying that.

I turned away and started walking in the direction of Gideon. It did not escape my eyes how tense all the men were. Each of them had their hands close to their weapons. And it was my job today to make sure that these were not needed today.



“Lara!” Gideon spread his arms and I ran up into his embrace. Whatever happened, he’d always be my brother, the one I spent most of my life with. We shared so much over the years and I missed him badly.

He gave me the warmest hug, pressing me hard against his body and I felt how my eyes became teary. It was at that moment that I realized that my biggest wish was for the two of them to find a way to coexist in my life.

“Deon!” I smiled, “Did you get my letter?”

“Yes,” the smile on his face faded, “Do not worry, Lara, I know that they made you write all those words.”

I felt a pang of guilt in my heart.

“Well,” I looked at his beautiful golden eyes, “Actually, I wrote all that out of my own free will.”

“Lara,” he brushed his palm over my cheek and I noticed something new in his eyes, something I had never seen there before, “they influenced you somehow. But it’s fine. I will get you home and you will forget about all this. I promise.”

I bit my lip, catching myself on the thought that I didn’t want to forget anything of what happened recently. I looked down and Gideon cupped my chin, making me face him again.

“Did he...,” he gritted through his teeth, “Did any of them... Lara...”

I saw the desperation in his eyes and understood where he was going with this.

“No,” I hurried to put him at ease, “Deon, no! I was treated as a guest here, no one hurt me or did anything to me. What I wrote in my letter was the truth.”

“You don’t seriously think that he will let you go after the month is over, Lara?” my brother’s grip on me tightened.

“He will not hurt me,” I said with confidence and was surprised to hear my own words, “Not in any way. If I’d want to leave – he will let me go.”

“What do you mean if you’d want to leave,” Gideon’s face changed as the wind whipped his silver hair.

"It's...complicated," I sighed. I wasn't sure that it was the right time to talk about dragons and soulmates, "Actually, Deon, there are a few things that I want to ask you."

There was something new in his gaze again. I didn't know what that was but I didn't like it.

"What could be more important than..." he started talking.

"What was that letter that you sent to the Emperor, Deon?" I interjected and he clenched his lips so hard that they formed a thin white line, "I saw it and I don't know what to think about it. There was even the blessing of the temple of Brighta. Tell me that it's fake, Deon! You can't go back on those things!"

"Lara," he pulled me even closer and I heard a sound resembling a growl from behind my back, "It's...it's not fake."

The words sounded like thunder on a calm day.

"What do you mean? Explain it to me!" I felt a lump forming in my throat.

"Lara, do you love me?" he asked all of a sudden and I was taken aback.

"Y-yes," I mumbled, "But..."

"There are no buts in love, Lara," he said and tucked a strand of hair behind my ear, "It's the only thing that matters. You know very well that you are not my sister and I am not your brother."

His words were cutting through my heart like a sharp dagger.

"What are you saying?" I whispered.

"We are not related in any way," he continued, not releasing me, "But we love each other, we are a family already. This is just the next step..."

"Deon...", I felt tears forming in my eyes, "How...?"

"When Father saved you and brought you to our house and I saw you for the first time, I knew that you were the one for me, Lara," a vague smile touched his lips, "You were so beautiful with your golden hair and big eyes. I gave you a hug and you cried in my arms. You were so tiny, tired, and scared... Back then I already knew that I'd devote my life to protecting you, to keeping you

safe. A few years later Father called me into his office. He informed me that one day I'll be marrying you and I felt so happy when I heard that. There were no doubts for me. I had strong feelings for you, Lara. None of them were brotherly. Father told me that he intended for us to marry from the first day but we were too young back then, so he took you in as his adoptive daughter. In that way, we insured that you could stay at the White Archipelago."

I had no words. This was too much. I felt like it was happening to someone else!

"On the next day, Father took us both to the Temple of the Goddess of Light," Gideon continued, "Do you remember? The priestess asked us in turn if we really loved each other... That was the first time I hear those words from you, Lara. And they changed everything. That was when our engagement was complete. And I became the happiest man alive, knowing that one day..."

"Gideon!" I couldn't hold back tears anymore, "This is... I was too young for decisions like that!"

"I know," he smiled, "Father wanted us to marry when you were fifteen. But he died before that and the decision was on me. I watched you play with swords every day, training and having fun with Bri. I knew you were not ready back then and decided to postpone it. I thought that... that we had all the time in the world. I was going to prepare you gradually this year, I wanted to give you time to adjust to the idea... But first Fabian strolled in with his proposal and then the gerdians struck. And here we are... But Lara, none of this changes anything. By the laws of the Goddess of Light, you are mine already. No one can separate us."

He brushed his thumb over my lower lip and leaned down... But when our lips almost touched, I flinched back.

"No," I said, not even bothering to control my tears anymore, "I can't do this!"

"Lara...", the painful expression on his face hurt me too, "Please, just let's go home today and we can think about everything there. I'll give you as much time as you need..."

"Gideon," I closed my face with my palms, "I love you very much. But not... in this way."

“Whatever way you love me, it’s enough for me,” he said unexpectedly coldly and I looked at him again, “But your rightful place is at the White Archipelago. By my side. We came here for you and we are not going back without you.”

His grip on me became painful and he pushed me harshly against his chest as his wings made of pure light spread again – the sign that he was about to fly off.

“Deon,” I struggled against him, “No, don’t! I need... I need to think about everything. This is... too much!”

“You’ll think about it at home!” he cuts me off and prepares to push off when dark flames cover my body. I don’t feel any pain, just light tickles, and tingles but Gideon screams and jumps off me. I noticed a few burn marks on him and gasped. But before I could do anything, everything disappeared...

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LARA

I opened my eyes and found myself in the dragon’s arms.

“I think it’s enough of this family reunion,” Demir growled, pressing me harder against his body.

“You have no right to take her away!” Gideon stormed towards us but a few Warriors of Light ran up to him and hold him back.

“I am not taking anyone,” the gerdian emperor sounded like he was angry, “Lara told you right now that she was staying here with me. Accept it.”

“I did not hear those words from her!” Deon scowled.

“I think you need to listen to your SISTER properly next time,” the gerdian smirked, “You miss a lot with that bad hearing of yours!”

Gideon tried to charge at him again but this time even Fabian joined in restraining him, throwing one quick glance at me.

“That’s enough!” he said, “Don’t forget what we agreed to! You found out that she is fine! We do nothing else!”

“Lara,” my brother looked straight into my eyes, “Please, come with me right now. I promise, you will never regret choosing me! I... I love you so much. Just come with me now!”

Pain stabbed my chest. I couldn't see him like this but also I couldn't respond to him the way he wanted. It was too much, and I turned away.

“I am sorry, Gideon,” I sighed, “I can't!”

“Lara!” he shouted, and his voice echoed in the mountains while dark flames surrounded me again. I didn't even notice how we were back on my balcony at the Gerdian palace and burst into tears.

“Shhh,” Demir pulled me closer and started to stroke my hair gently while I tucked my head into his cold armour. But soon it disappeared in the dark flames again and I felt the soft fabric of the shirt that he was wearing underneath. I felt him kiss the tip of my head and did not want to push him away. I needed him more than ever, I needed the comfort he was giving me right now.

“It's going to be fine, Lara,” he murmured.

“How?!” I mumbled somewhere into his chest and felt him rub his cheek over me.

“He'll sober up and get over it,” he stated. And I wanted to believe him. But more than anything, I wanted to forget. Forget the betrayal of my own family, forget the disturbing feeling in my chest... I wanted to replace it with something good.

I lifted up my face and looked at Demir, who looked concerned. Not thinking twice, I lifted on my toes and reached for his lips, wrapping my arms around his neck. I kissed him softly and he dug his fingers in my hair, holding me closer. The gentle kiss turned into a greedy one within seconds, both of us losing ourselves in the heat of the moment.

A moan escaped me and Demir broke the madness, distancing himself from me.

“Lara,” he breathed unevenly, watching my every move, “We'd better stop!”

"I don't want to," I admitted, panting and tried to pull him closer for a k!ss. But he didn't let me.

"No," he said, "Not today. Not like this."

"Fine!" I got angry, "Do you want me to say it out loud? You win and I lose! I want you to k!ss me! I want you to make me... forget of...of everything!"

"And I hear you loud and clear, Lara," he said, holding me by my shoulders, "You have no idea how much I want to do what you are asking me to do. And more."

I felt my cheeks flushing red and gulped.

"But this is not how I want it," he continued, and I bit my l!p, making him gr0an painfully, "You are my soulmate, Lara. It's sacred to me. I don't want to use you when you are vulnerable! I don't want to take advantage of your momentary weakness. I want you to accept me when you are not shaken when you had time to think about it...When you truly saw me! Lara, don't you get how I feel about you?"

I felt slightly guilty at this moment when I looked at his sincere eyes. And something new appeared deep inside of me at that very moment. Something sweet and warm, something light. It felt right.

I brushed my hand over his cheek and smiled, blinking off tears from my eyes, "Thank you for this, Demir."

He let out a sigh and pulled me into a tight embrace, which told me more than thousands of words could. Slowly, I h.ugged him and relaxed my body into his.

"Demir," I said, "I do not want to stay alone today. Could you stay with me?"

"Whatever you wish," he smiled and leaned down to place one last k!ss on my l!ps, teasing me slightly. And then he lifted me in his arms and took me to bed, taking off his boots and getting next to me.

"Weren't you the one who turned me down literally moments ago?" I raised my brow as he pulled me onto his c.hest.

“Don’t remind me, Lara,” he snorted, “Trust me, it was the hardest decision of my life as of now. Don’t tempt me to go back on my word. Because if I do, there will be no turning back.”

I tried to hide my smile. It was unbelievable how comfortable I felt next to him. How calm I’ve become within seconds of being in his arms.

“You need to get some sleep, Lara. You look exhausted,” he told me, and I knew that he was right. My eyes closed by themselves and I saw a beautiful dream about us flying together. I had wings made out of light and he was a dragon. But it was the most beautiful dream ever...

We were spending every day together, talking, playing, reading... None of us was saying anything about that day. None of us dared to mention Gideon. Even when he was sending new letters to me, maids were bringing them and leaving them on my little desk. And I decided that I wasn’t ready to open them yet after everything and hid them in one of the drawers. It could wait.

But what couldn’t wait was the Masquerade Ball that was approaching fast.

When the assistant from the shop arrived with the new dress that I ordered, I asked them to let her in at once. I was nervous that they wouldn’t manage to do everything in time. But they did. And they even surpassed my expectations. I still didn’t know if I’d get enough courage to pull the stunt that I was planning. But I really wanted to.

I was waiting for Demir in the garden, sitting on a blanket under a thick tree, when I heard a bunch of ladies laughing.

“The emperor is a real beast if you know what I mean!” one lady giggled, “He always tires me so much that I need a week’s rest after our...encounters.”

A lump formed in my throat.

“Camelia!” another one giggled, “Is that the necklace that he gave you?”

“One of them,” Camelia Watford snorted, and I prayed for them not to notice me, gathering my dress so that nothing is poking out.

Their voice became quieter, letting me know that they were far enough, and I was able to breathe again. But their words still stuck in my head.

“Surely, you are not buying that,” I heard someone from a different side and jumped to my feet, fixing my dress. Princess Primrose, however, looked as perfect as ever in a silver dress with her fiery red hair cascading in waves down her shoulder and below her waist. Sometimes I wondered if she could ever look imperfect.

“Your Highness,” I curtsied before her and she smirked.

“I already told you last time,” Primrose stepped closer, “Camelia Watford is married. And that usually signifies the end of the relationship for Demir. He marries them off when they are down.”

I swallowed. I didn’t know that side of Demir at all. And I wasn’t sure that I wanted to know.

“He hasn’t been with anyone for months if that worries you,” the princess continued and I felt like I could breathe again.

“Why are you telling me that, Your Highness?” I asked and she clenched her lips.

“Because, Lara, it shouldn’t matter anymore since I found your wings,” she looked at me with a dare in her eyes.

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LARA

The gerdian princess looked at me expectantly and for some reason, I felt broken. It was more painful than listening to those girls discussing Demir just a moment ago.

“So?” the fiery redhead shot up her brow, “Aren’t you going to thank me at least?”

“Thank you so much, your Highness,” I curtsied again and she frowned. It was as if she could read my mind.

“You don’t look too happy,” she sighed and waved her two maids to step aside, which they immediately did, “Did you change your mind?”



“No,” I protested at once and then added quietly, “Not really. It’s just... A few things changed since the last time we spoke.”

“Lara, as a person who helps you I want to say something,” the princess slipped her hand over my elbow and pulled me further into the garden for a walk, “You and Demir... It’s only good if it is temporary.”

I wasn’t naïve. I knew pretty well that Primrose only wanted to help me since she needed me out of the picture. I wasn’t sure why but her intentions were clear. On the other hand, that was the way I preferred it. At least she wasn’t pretending or lying to my face. She was honest and respectful with the exception of how we met each other for the first time. And I had to admit that in spite of everything, I still liked the gerdian Princess. But it was interesting why she opposed us being together so much.

“Could you please elaborate on that, Your Highness?” I looked at her, trying to catch her reactions. But she gave me none. Her perfect face still remained perfect as if we were discussing pastries and not her beloved brother’s love life.

“You see Lara,” the girl gave me one of her most charming smiles, which I was sure made men turn their heads over heels every time she mastered it on them, “There are things that we gerdians do not share with the outer world. I’m sure a girl from the White Archipelago could understand that better than anyone. You have your secrets too.”

That was true so I just nodded, feeling slightly disappointed. But she squeezed my hand lightly and I looked at her again.

“A gerdian cannot have children with just anyone,” she sighed, “Our reproduction is very complicated.”

I felt my insides clench at her words. This wasn’t something that I was expecting.

“What do you mean?” I asked her bluntly.

“Except for other gerdians, only a few people can give birth to our children. Almost no males can make a gerdian woman pregnant and only certain girls can bear a child for a dark one. You see, gerdians are creatures of dark magic. It’s in our veins and everything in our life depends on it. Sometimes we find girls in other races who can become suitable to become a life partner for

a gerdian. We give them dark marks and invite them for The Dark Selection. It is an annual event where gerdians who are looking for a couple meet girls that could potentially become their brides.”

“Only girls?” I snorted, “How about boys for the Gerdian females?”

She got my sarcasm; I could see it in her eyes. Yet she just gave me a vague smile and continued, “Gerdian women are rare and usually marriages for them are arranged while they are still young.”

“You seem to be of age,” I noticed, “Why aren’t you married?”

“I’m different!” She cut me off, the sadness in her eyes did not escape me, “I am a Princess and a dragon! A golden one at that!”

“And what is the difference?” I insisted even though she looked slightly annoyed.

“You are off the topic, Lara,” Primrose rolled her eyes and dragged me into a more secluded area of the garden, “The thing is that only a girl who is capable of accepting dark magic into her body and soul can give a child to a gerdian. In all other cases, there will be no offspring. In some rare instances, the girls die at labour and the children don’t live that long either. So guardians don’t practice that anymore. A girl who cannot accept dark magic can only be a mistress, nothing else.”

“Demir never told me any of this,” I said quietly.

“He is infatuated, Lara,” the Princess looked at me with some kind of newfound pity, “He likes you a lot and at the moment may even think that what you have might be enough. But in the long run, he needs an heir. And since you are a creature of pure light, you will not be able to give him one. Ever!”

Her words felt like a slap even though she clearly did not intend it this way. She looked at me with sadness, which was sincere. Yet there was also something else in her gaze which I didn’t miss. Some part of her was glad to see that I took her words to my heart. I guess she really wanted me gone ...

The thought of me and Demir never being able to create a normal family felt like a stab in the back. Maybe I was cursed and never would be able to have that. The only family I knew did something horrible to me and now the last hope that I had also was shattered.

“But,” I wanted to say something, to oppose what she just told me in some way yet I couldn’t think of anything... The other thing that worried me was that we wouldn’t even be able to marry properly. According to the laws of the White Archipelago, I already had a man. And that man was Gideon. I swore my love to him in a temple and we received a blessing from the Goddess of Light. There was no going back from that. So, no matter how I looked at it, my relationship with Demir was doomed from the very beginning ...

I did not remember how I came back to my room. I did not remember if I even said goodbye to the Princess. And to be honest I did not care.

But when I saw the wings lying on my bed, I felt like crying. I took them and pressed them against my heart, going to the balcony. Once a symbol of freedom for me, now they felt like the end of everything. I wasn’t sure that if I left now I would ever be able to get over what I felt towards the Emperor. But maybe it was for the best...

I felt tears running down my cheeks and didn’t even try to stop them, letting all my pain out.

Just then dark flames appeared right in front of me and Demir stepped out of them with a smile on his face which faded as soon as he saw what I was holding.

“What the chaos, Lara?!” He growled as his eyes filled with dark magic.