

# My Husband Chose Her Over Me Novel

## Chapter 8

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“You really should be more careful with your things, Lady Elara.” Kaela’s voice dripped with false concern as she stood over me, an empty inkwell in her hand and a smirk dancing across her perfect face. “Black is such an unforgiving color.”

I stared down at my ruined ceremonial robes, the ones I’d spent hours preparing for today’s court session. Midnight blue ink bloomed across the intricate silver embroidery like poisonous flowers. The delicate threads that had captured constellations now disappeared beneath dark stains that would never come out.

“How clumsy of you,” I replied, keeping my voice steady despite the rage building inside me. “Though I suppose accidents happen when one is... desperate for attention.”

Her emerald eyes narrowed. “You should watch that tongue of yours. It might get you into trouble.”

“More trouble than I’m already in?” I laughed, the sound hollow even to my own ears. “I doubt that’s possible.”

“Lady Elara.” Queen Arinelle’s voice cut through the room like ice. “You’re expected in the Great Hall in ten minutes. Surely you don’t intend to appear before the court looking like... that?”

I turned to face her, this woman who had orchestrated so many of my miseries since arriving at the palace. She stood in the doorway, resplendent in crimson and gold, her crown catching the morning light. Beautiful and terrible.

“Your Majesty,” I curtsied, the movement mechanical. “I was just about to change.”

“See that you do.” Her gaze flickered over my stained robes with calculated distaste. “We can’t have you embarrassing the crown. Again.”

“Of course not,” I replied. “Heaven forbid anyone should outshine your own performance in that arena.”

The queen’s smile froze. “Careful, girl. Remember your place.”

“Which place would that be? Political hostage? Royal scapegoat? I have so many roles these days, it’s hard to keep track.”

She glided toward me, each step measured and deliberate. When she reached me, she leaned close, her perfume cloying and suffocating.

“Your place,” she whispered, “is wherever we decide to put you. And if you continue to forget that simple fact, you may find yourself stripped of that title you seem to value so little.”

With that, she swept from the room, Kaela following in her wake with a triumphant backward glance.

It was quite obvious now that none of them knew about the letter in the King’s chamber. If they did, they wouldn’t treat me this way. Apparently, Caden didn’t know too and I was glad I didn’t end up mentioning it to him when he suspected I took something from the King’s chamber.

When they were gone, I sank onto the window seat, hands shaking as I tried to control my breathing. Outside, the palace gardens bloomed in riotous color, a beauty I was permitted to observe but rarely experience. Much like everything else in this gilded prison.

“Trouble with the queen again?” A soft voice came from the doorway.

I looked up to see Marielle, one of the few ladies-in-waiting who hadn’t succumbed to the court’s poisonous gossip about me.

“Is it that obvious?” I asked, gesturing to my ruined robes.

“That, and the fact that Her Majesty looked ready to order an execution.” Marielle closed the door behind her and hurried to my wardrobe. “Let’s get you changed. I think the silver and blue gown would be appropriate for today.”

“Does it matter? They’ll find some way to humiliate me regardless.”

Marielle’s hands stilled on the gown she’d selected. “You can’t give up, my lady. That’s exactly what they want.”

“What they want,” I said bitterly, “is for me to disappear. Or better yet, for me never to have existed at all. This marriage was never about alliance or peace. It was about control.”

“Your husband—”

“My husband,” I interrupted, “is as much a pawn as I am. The difference is, he doesn’t see the strings.” I hadn’t seen Caden in three days. He was always conveniently occupied with “urgent matters of state” ever since I asked him for a divorce.

Marielle helped me change in silence, her nimble fingers working quickly to arrange my dark hair into an acceptable style. When she finished, she stepped back, her expression serious.

“The court is watching, my lady. Always watching. Remember that.”

“As if I could forget,” I murmured. “Thank you, Marielle.”

If I were to consider what the court would say about me, I wouldn't have asked him for a divorce. I was a nobody anyway, but now that I'd seen that there was a high chance that I was truly King Dorian's daughter, I didn't know what to do.

I wanted to make my findings too before I take any further actions.

The Great Hall buzzed with conversation when I entered, but a noticeable hush fell as eyes turned to assess me. I kept my head high, ignoring the whispers that followed in my wake.

I took my place at the far end of the royal dais, as distant from the king and queen as protocol would allow. Caden wasn't present yet. Another "urgent matter," no doubt.

"Quite the entrance," murmured a familiar voice beside me.

I turned to find Marcus, one of the few courtiers who still dared to speak to me openly. His family's lands bordered my own, and we'd known each other since childhood.

"Marcus," I greeted him with genuine warmth. "I was beginning to think you'd abandoned court life altogether."

"And miss all this intrigue? Never." His smile faded as he studied my face. "You look tired, Elara."

"Diplomatic as ever," I replied with a wry smile.

"It's why you value my company," he countered. Then, lowering his voice: "Is it getting worse?"

I glanced toward the queen, who was watching our interaction with undisguised suspicion. "Let's just say I'm beginning to understand why they call it a 'royal court' and not a 'royal home.'"

Marcus followed my gaze and grimaced. "They can't break the alliance. Your father would never—"

"My father," I cut in, "was the one who arranged this farce in the first place. He knew exactly what he was sending me into."

The realization had come slowly, pieced together from overheard conversations and documents I wasn't supposed to see. My marriage to Caden wasn't about uniting our kingdoms in peace; it was about my family maintaining control over territories they'd long coveted.

"Marcus," I said suddenly, remembering the letter I'd found hidden in the King's chamber three nights ago. "Is there a king higher than Caden's father? Someone who would outrank him?"

His eyes widened slightly, and he glanced around before answering. "Why do you ask?"

"I just need to know. Please."

He hesitated, then nodded almost imperceptibly. "There is. King Dorian of Verdana technically holds sovereignty over several kingdoms, including this one, though the arrangement is largely ceremonial these days."

My heart raced. The letter had mentioned Verdana, and something about my true identity. If I could just find out more—

“Why do you want to know about King Dorian of Verdana?”

The deep voice froze us both mid-conversation. Slowly, we turned to face the speaker, and my blood ran cold.

Standing before us, his crown gleaming in the hall’s torchlight, was the king himself.