

Rebel Witch: The Crimson Moth: Book 2

SIXTEEN

GIDEON

THERE WERE NO EXTRA cabins.

They offered Gideon a bunk in the staff quarters, but taking it would ruin the newlywed image that was now firmly in place.

Gideon would just have to gird his loins and continue down the path Rune had forced him onto.

You've pretended to be in love with her before. You can do it again.

But there was that voice inside him again, small and insistent, begging to differ:

How much did you really pretend?

If Gideon were honest, Rune had always enchanted him. He was fifteen the day he met her and his heart first jumped into his throat. Ever since, he'd spent his time insisting he *wasn't* drawn to her, for his brother's sake, and for the sake of his pride—because someone like him could never deserve someone like Rune. She had said as much herself two months ago, when he exposed her as the Crimson Moth.

Standing at the railing on the upper deck, watching the Continent disappear in the distance, Gideon blew out a ragged breath. It was only two more days before they reached port. He could keep up this charade for two more days.

After that, Rune would be at his mercy. The moment they docked, he would arrest the Crimson Moth and hand her over.

It would restore his standing as a patriot, prove his loyalty.

It would burn this weakness out of him.

The salt wind stung his cheeks as he thought back to the cabin. To that officer drinking in the sight of Rune's nearly naked form. Despite the cold air, the rage it ignited still simmered inside him.

After everything Rune had put him through, his first instinct was to protect her. She was like a magnet sending the arrows on his moral compass spinning. Making him forget who he was and everything he'd committed himself to.

But it was worse than that.

As he'd unlaced her dress, Gideon had tried not to admire the swoop of her shoulder blades, or the ridges of her spine. He'd tried to ignore the urge to touch her porcelain-smooth skin, to slide the dress off her shoulders and down her arms. To let the whole thing drop to the floor.

Gideon clenched his hands into fists.

No.

He wouldn't fall prey to her again. He needed to be impenetrable if he was going to stay ahead of her. He needed to keep his distance. The further apart they were, the clearer his head got. And the clearer his head, the better he could focus on his plan.

But how was he supposed to keep his distance in that tiny bed?

The thought of it—of lying next to her—made Gideon feel things he didn't want to feel. Things he'd tried so hard to forget.

He scrubbed his hands over his cold face.

Mercy. What a mess he was in.

The sun was setting on the horizon. It would only get colder from here on out. With a shiver, he turned to make his way belowdecks, but familiar voices stopped him in his tracks.

“If Miss Winters is on the *Arcadia*, they won’t simply arrest her.”

Further up the deck, leaning over the railing side by side as they stared out to sea, were the officers who’d questioned him and Rune. Gideon angled himself closer to a nearby post, keeping himself concealed.

“You think they’ll kill her?”

“Witches are executed on sight in the New Republic. This spy will have the same orders.”

There’s a spy on the Arcadia?

Gideon remembered Harrow’s telegram. *THE COMMANDER NO LONGER BELIEVES YOU’RE THE BEST MAN FOR THIS JOB. HE’S SENDING SOMEONE MORE QUALIFIED TO COMPLETE IT.*

Of course Harrow would plant a spy onboard the one ship barring working Blood Guard soldiers and their witch-hunting hounds. He should have suspected as much.

Under every other circumstance, he would have approved the measure. But if there was a spy in his midst, he couldn't let them discover Rune, never mind assassinate her. He needed her alive to barter with.

Worse: if the spy on board was Harrow's, there was a good chance they'd recognize Gideon. It would look highly suspicious if a report was sent back to the Good Commander's spymaster saying Gideon was returning with a secret wife after failing to assassinate the Crimson Moth. Harrow would assume the worst: Gideon had fallen prey to Rune *again*.

He couldn't—*wouldn't*—let that happen.

Once Gideon figured out who this spy was, he'd stop their interference by telling them his plan. But if they discovered Rune first and killed her, he'd not only be left empty-handed, he'd look like he teamed up with a criminal. He'd be seen as a traitor.

Gideon needed to stop that from happening at all costs.

And Rune ...

Rune.

His chest knotted. What if this spy had already found her?