

## **The Selection: Bride Of The Dark Dragon Chapter 46 - Tips**

MIRA

I flinch and summon fire magic to the tips of my fingers, not knowing what to expect, but Derrien puts his hand on my shoulder to calm me down.

“You can trust him,” he says and I see lord Brandon Seville, the one whom Morgan likes, getting out of our carriage with an amused face.

“And here I am worried sick for my best friend!” he chuckles eyeing us both up and down, the huge embarrassing torn slit of my dress that I’ve made yesterday during fighting doesn’t escape his gaze, “And there you are, not giving a care in the world.”

“We got into a trap,” Rien steps in front of me, delicately covering my dress.

“Then I guessed that right!”, the other gerdian smirks, “Poor souls! Piles of ashes everywhere tell me that somehow you managed just fine. Maybe even overdid it a bit.”

“They used a dome barrier that suppressed our magic, Bran. I didn’t have choice but shift.”

“Really?”, the man looks shocked, turning his gaze from Rien to me and then back.

“Mira knows everything, quit the circus, Bran. I have a task for you!”, Derrien says and the other gerdian’s jaw almost drops to the floor.

“You told her...”

“I’ve shown her. There wasn’t any other opportunity to save ourselves.”

“Of course there wasn’t”, somehow lord Seville’s reply is full of sarcasm, which is not missed on me.

Was there another way to save ourselves? Or maybe he means that Derrien could leave me alone and just survive alone, yet keep his secret? Because right now I am sure that him being a dragon is a secret!

“Have you found out what they used here to create that dome?”, my companion asks.

“I didn’t know I have to look for something like that when I arrived”, his friend replies, “But, luckily, I found something else.”

Out of a corner of his coat, he gets the pendant that Rien gifted me back at the Selection castle. I must have dropped it during the attack without even realizing it.

“Let me help you, my lady”, Brandon steps closer, but Rien grabs the pendant out of his hands.

“The lady will manage without your help, Bran”, he then puts it around my neck and I notice that the chain near the clasp is broken. Derrien connects the two broken golden ends together and I see him warm them up so much they are in an almost melting state, making them merge. He then carefully cools down the metal by his dark magic and only after that fixes the whole thing on my neck.

“Thanks”, I mumble.

“Never lose it again, little mage”, he winks at me while his friend doesn’t see and I almost giggle at that.

“I never thought that I would see the day...”, Seville is clearly trying to hold back a laugh.

“That’s clearly because thinking is not your strong point, looks like talking is!”, Derrien snaps at his friend.

“Who attacked you?”, the gardian suddenly looks serious.

“Some kind of human assassins and I really hope that Mira here would finally put some light on that matter.”

Both men look at me now and I swallow.

“W-well”, I shrug my shoulders, “I am pretty much sure that these were the Invisibles...”

“And they are?”, Brandon doesn’t seem impressed.

“A group of assassins, you can recognize them by tattoos on their wrists. It’s a circle that starts with a strong ink but then fades away... More like a crescent even.”

“Why make the tattoo if they can be recognized this easily by it...”

“Well, usually, the ones that see that tattoo do not survive the day. It’s the whole point.”

“Charming”, Rien rolls his eyes, “How do we find them?”

“It’s next to impossible... They find you. They say that even the royal family uses...”, I bite my lip.

“The royal family uses their services?”, Derrien sighs, “This is getting interesting.”

“I am sure that’s not them, though”, I squeak, “They wouldn’t...”

“Of course”, the two men smile understandingly.

Damn it. Tell me it’s not the royal family. They have no interest in the Selection since they are the ones who agreed to it in the first place. Members of their family could never be taken, so they shouldn’t care much...

“Anyhow”, I clear my throat, “The nobility uses their services. And the cost is incredibly high. That should at least make the list of suspects shorter.”

“I see,” Derrien nods, “Definitely not the commoners then.”

“And not aristocrats from impoverishing families”, Brandon agrees, “By the way, that locket is not my only find! While I was waiting I found this little trinket here in your carriage.”

He produces a little brooch out of his pocket and throws it at Derrien.

“A tracking device!”, the gerdian smirks, “How interesting!”

“It was under one of the seats, very weak magic. I didn’t sense it, just found it when was doing hand search around the carriage just in case.”

“I see. Good job then, any aura on it?”, Derwood asks bluntly. |

“No, it was cleaned as soon as it was attached. The aura only had traces of you and lady Freyn there, which brings me to the thought...”, Brandon pauses awkwardly, looking at me.

“She is not under suspicion!” Derrien grits through his teeth, “If anything she is helping me with the investigation.”

“Well, I’m just saying... The girl who doesn’t like us, who is a strong mage, who was the roommate of one of the victims and who’s “help” brought you right into a trap that almost k!lled you...”, the gerdian looks at me with a raised eyebrow.

Did I ever say that Brandon Seville was nice? I take that back!

“I will repeat this only one time, Bran, and you’d better get me straight. Mira is NOT under suspicion. She was with me during the time her roommate was k!lled and in that “trap” she risked more than I did. No one was going to spare her life there.”

“It doesn’t mean anything”, Bran snorts.

“And does my order mean anything to you?!” Derrien voice almost sounds like a growl of the dragon itself.

“Alright, suit yourself, just be careful with her”, his friend sighs.

“Go take care of the dome. I need all the information and I will take care of this little thing,” Derrien twirls the brooch in his hands.

“May I have a look?” I step close to him.

“It would be best not to...”, Brandon starts.

“Sure”, Derrien interrupts him and hands me the trinket.

“Thank you”, I smile and change to my magical vision, “Well, it’s true that it’s clean of anyone’s aura. But it’s easy to do with Aspen’s artifacts since they are made to be discreet.”

“Aspen’s artifacts?”, Seville asks.

“Oh, he is a famous artefactor from the capital”, I say nonchalantly, “Look here. Here is his stamp – a snake curled around a rose. It’s tiny but he puts it on all his creations. For the word of mouth purposes.”

“And you know all this how?”, lord Brandon starts to get on my nerves, but I don’t show it.

“Everybody knows it. He is the best there is in the Akyrian Kingdom, second to none,” I roll my eyes.

“And have you brought anything from him? Ever?”, the annoying gerdian implies something again.

“Anyone who is from at least a little bit noble family has bought things from him! He supplies artifacts of the highest quality. They are not cheap but they serve you a lifetime.”

“That’s quite enough with the interrogation, Brandon. Off you go to perform the task I gave you. I am still your commander, remember?”, Derrien snaps, “And Mira and I would have to make a little detour to the capital of this wonderful kingdom.”

“Really?”, I gasp.

“Yes,” he chuckles at my reaction, “But first you need to change. You did take another dress with you, right? Go, I’ll wait for you here.”

“Of course”, I nod and hurry to the carriage.

Inside, I find my bag and get out what I need. Before closing the curtain on the windows, I look at the two men talking. They both seem calm enough. Probably they decided that even if I am dangerous, I am not dangerous enough to be afraid of me.

I sigh and take off my clothes, putting on the new dress which is all in tiny creases, of course, so I get to smoothing it out with fire magic to make it look decent.

Quite happy with myself, I get out of the carriage and catch Derrien’s eyes on me, sparks of dark energy circling in his eyes. Somehow, this reaction of his, which is not new at all, makes me blush.

“Alright, then I see you two back at the castle”, Brandon smiles friendly as if he wasn’t just accusing me of at least one murder a few minutes ago.

“Lord Seville”, I call him before he manages to disappear in dark smoke and he stays, “May I ask you if you know anything about my friends?”

“Depends on who they are,” he smirks.

“Morgan Rattleton,” I say quickly and I could swear he almost choked.

“Lady Rattleton is very well”, he smiles modestly, “I will see her tonight again if I finish here early.”

“I see”, I chuckle at the suddenly shy gerdian, “And maybe you know something of lady Fawn Ritton?”

“She is surprisingly well as well”, he replies with a calm face.

“Surprisingly?”, I shrug at the words.

“She is lord Dargen’s new favourite, lady Freyn. And the duke is not everyone’s cup of tea. But lady Fawn seems more than happy in her new role.”

“Thank you”, I reply politely, a bit startled with what I’ve learned.

Are Fawn and Dargen happy? Really? I mean, it’s good if it’s true... But also, could it be true at all? Considering how gentle Fawn is and how psychotic is Ryden... I don’t know.

Brandon disappears in black smoke and Derrien comes closer.

“No reason to be sad”, he says, “Your friend is fine. Unless you are disappointed that Dargen pays attention to somebody else now...”

“Oh, please!”, I roll my eyes and he pulls me into his hands roughly.

“Mira,” he takes my chin into his hand and lifts it up, “You can forget about any other men while you are mine!”

While... Did he just say “while I am his”?

His lips cover mine in a possessive kiss and dark flames consume us...

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MIRA

We land in some kind of side street and I recognize the architecture of the Akyrian Kingdom's capital – Astera. Whitestone houses, red rooftops, flowers everywhere... I am home...

"Are you alright, little mage?", Derrien brushes his palm over my cheek and I realize that I am still in his arms.

"Oh," I try to push him away.

"What's wrong?", he asks.

"What if someone sees us?" I blush.

"And that would be terrible because..." he looks at me questioningly.

"It is not appropriate behaviour," I lie. His last words are still circling in my mind. I want to ask him what he meant. Yet somehow too afraid to do it... I don't want to seem petty... or clingy... And yet the phrase bothers me.

"Don't worry about anything", he smiles at me, "Look at the shop window behind you."

I turn and look at the said window, not quite understanding what he wants me to see. But gasp as soon as I realize that it's my reflection. I look different. Pitch black hair, plumper lips, dimples on cheeks that I don't have, cute little snub nose... The girl in the mirror could be my sister.

And Derrien... Brown curls, light blue eyes, bigger facial features, but still handsome. I wouldn't recognize him, though.

"Illusion?", I turn back and see gerdian's usual appearance, "But why do I still see you as normal when I look at you directly though?"

"Because I want you to see the real me. And I want to see the real you. Always," he pulls me by my hand into his warm embrace and kisses gently, making me forget about everything. He breaks our kiss reluctantly while breathing heavily. "Gods, Mira, I can't get enough of you..."

I reply nothing to this, just look away, biting my lip. I feel the same, but there is no need for him to know that now.

"Aspen's shop is not far from here", I smile at him.

"We'll go there later," Rien offers me his hand, "First we need to get new clothes and then eat. You must be starving by now since we had nothing to eat in the hut..."

"True", I look down pretending to fix creases on my dress but in reality, I just remember that food was the last thing on our mind back at the mountain hut.

We start walking and I prepare myself to give my companion a tour of the capital, but to my surprise he knows exactly where he is going, navigating around the busy city streets just perfectly.

"If you want to ask something just ask", the gerdian smirks, "You know I cannot lie and you look like you are about to explode."

"How on heavens do you know the city so well?! I mean, I know you've been here as you picked me up from the Academy. But you seem to know your way around pretty well!"

"That's easy", he chuckles, "I come here often. For work."

"You mean as a spy? You? Really?", I can't close my mouth at all – that's how shocked I am at the news.

"Not as a spy", he chuckles, "I am a representative of the Empire when one is needed here. Your king knows about it very well. And sometimes I was coming here just to enjoy myself."

"Huh?", I look at him surprised. What does he mean exa... "Ewe!", I shrug as soon as I realize, "Do you mean what I think you mean?"

"Yes, Mira, you asked and I answered honestly. You already know about the lack of women in the Empire. So it became common practice for our men to come in disguise and live a healthy life with human women from time to time..."

"I get the idea, thank you!", I almost yell, not wishing to hear the rest. It makes me so angry for some reason, although, of course, by the way, Derrien is in



bed, I knew pretty well that there was no chance that he didn't have previous experience with women. Somehow he didn't give me a virgin vibe at all. If anything, he knows exactly what to do... Oh, gods! How many women has he been with before me exactly? I... I must seem like such a fool to him.

A rough pull on my hand turns me to face him and he takes my chin into his hand, lifting it up so that I look into his eyes.

"My little silly mage, I now feel the urgent need to inform you that it has been a long time since I came here for pleasure purposes last time. I was young and foolish and had to experience things. And I did. What you and I have is very different, though. You are special to me, Mira."

"Uh-huh", I look away, "I am sure you never told it to anyone."

"That's true. I never told it to anyone else," he admits nonchalantly and turns me to look at Lady Sen Court Boutique, "We are here!"

I know that place far too well. The most expensive and exquisite shop in the Kingdom, where you have to stand in the queue for months to get an appointment. I was only getting one when my mother was mentioning that I am Tristan's fiancée.

"That's not the best idea, Derrien", I look at the gerdian in disguise.

"Killian", he says firmly, "Right now call me Killian. Killian Krauten, count of Rochland"

"Oh my gods! You even have a title!", I gasp.

"Tsss, little mage", he puts a finger to his lips and opens the door for me, "After you."

I walk in and at once an assistant gives me an unhappy glance. The shop is famous for its arrogant workers. And it's incredibly hard to get into their good grace. Miradora Freyn is treated well here, but at the moment I am just some unknown girl to them.

"I am sorry, we are incredibly busy today and do not accept any new customers", the girl – a blonde with all her hair in a tight bun – says.

"Are you sure?", Derrien smirks at her and she turns pale.

“L-lord Krauten”, she curtsies in front of him, “I am sorry, I haven’t noticed that the lady is with you.”

“The lady needs a dress and a cape plus all accessories, I need a suit. And we are in a hurry,” he drops his coat to a nearby sofa.

“Yes, my lord!”, she curtsies again. Even though one time was more than enough.

“What did you do with them here?”, I whisper to him, shocked to my bones.

“Let it be my little secret”, he winks at me with a playful gaze.

This man is full of surprises.

In just a few minutes I am taken to one of ladies’ changing rooms – spacious and luxurious. The assistant, whose name turns out to be Rose brings multiple dresses for me to choose from. Any colour, any design... I almost settle for a teal one, when I hear a familiar voice in the hall next to me.

“And now that Freyn is out, the next ball would be to live or die!”

“I don’t think he would be choosing a new fiancée so soon, though”, another familiar voice.

I open the door a little bit and look at the two women through the gap, recognizing my social friends Amalia and Elenora. And I call them social friends because we only interact at social events. We are not friendly at all... If anything, they despise me. And the feeling is mutual.

“I am telling you now that Mira is out of the picture, you’d better not lose time and seal the deal!”, Amalia insists, “A man like Tristan would not stay single for long! You need to act fast!”

I roll my eyes. No, I always knew that every girl in the Kingdom wishes to become Tristan’s fiancée and secretly wants me to disappear. But to hear them speak about it so coldly...

“Miradora is lucky, though”, Elenora continues, “First she had Tristan, and now she is about to marry a gerdian lord! That’s what I call lucky!”

Lucky is so not the word that I’d use in this situation. Although, remembering about Derrien...

“I know! So not fair!”, Amalia chimes, “There is nothing special about her, and yet she gets the best men. I’ve heard that she wanted to become a battlemage. Can you imagine?”

“Gods, no!”, the girl giggles ugly, “I bet she went to that department only to seduce more guys!”

I roll my eyes. This is getting annoying. Another assistant walks into their room and brings out a burgundy dress. And a stunning one at that.

“My lady”, Rose appears out of nowhere, looking at me a bit terrified, “Is everything alright? Did you like anything?”

“Rose, from one to ten,” I smirk, “Just how much are you scared of lord Killian?”

She turns pale and stutters, “T-ten.”

“Good”, I bite my lip, “Then I want that burgundy dress. Get it for me!”

I feel a bit guilty when the girl disappears with this terrible task I gave her. And when the door opens, I turn to apologize to her for making her do this but it’s not her who is looking at me expectantly.

“Having fun?”, Derrien walks in wearing a gorgeous outfit that fits him like a glove and raising a brow at me.

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MIRA

He looks breathtakingly, wearing human fashion clothes. Not that his usual black and grey ones didn’t suit him. But this novelty makes me blush for some reason.

“Tell me it’s not about that ex-fiancé of yours”, he grits through his teeth, sparks of magic in his eyes.

“You mean the dress?”, I bite my lip again.

“Yes, Mira, I mean the dress,” he crosses his hands on his chest.

“Of course not”, I am trying to hold back a laugh, “It’s about them talking behind my back. And not in the best of ways.”

“You know, Mira”, he steps closer and pulls me into his arms, holding me by my waist, “I will buy you the whole shop if you want it, but I wouldn’t tolerate you thinking about others.”

“Well, then it’s good that I am not,” I chuckle and he slams his lips into mine. He is kissing me as if he is proving something, pressing me tight into his body, grasping the back of my head so that I can’t break the kiss even if I want to. Which I don’t.

When he releases me his eyes are filled with dark magic. So much that I gulp at the thought of what is going on inside him at the moment.

“Oh! Excuse me!”, Rose squeak as she barges in with the dress and I step away from Derrien as he clears his throat.

“That’s fine!”, I smile at the assistant who is clearly shaken by the whole situation, “Come in!”

The poor woman places the dress on a rack next to us and curtsies again before leaving in a hurry.

“I’ll wait outside”, Derrien says abruptly and then looks at Rose, “Make sure she is happy with everything.”

He opens the door to walk out and almost bumps into Amalia and Elenora, who are leaving angrily.

“This is outrageous!”, one of them says, “I’ve been waiting for this dress for months!”

“I am not coming back here! Ever!”, another says, fuming.

Derrien turns and gives me another playful glance before finally walking out and I bite my lip.

I feel guilty, but not too much. It felt too good.

Gods, geradians influence me in the wrong way...

After Rose has helped me with the dress, shoes, and found a light summer cape, I walked out into the main room and met Derrien's thoughtful gaze. He doesn't say anything, just offers me his hand and we leave the shop.

He leads us into one of the best and most expensive restaurants in the capital. I am not surprised anymore when people recognize him there as well. But when they lead us to the private royal box at the very top of the building, the one where even Tristan and his family couldn't get in on most days, I am lost for words.

We sit down and Derrien creates a barrier around us. To my surprised look, he simply shrugs his shoulders, "Waiters can come and go, but no one outside of this will be able to listen to our conversation. I want to speak freely to you."

"I see", I look at the menu briefly and close it like nothing has changed there and I know exactly what I want. After we have ordered and the waiter brought our drinks, I take a sip and look at my companion. It should be a crime to be this handsome,

"You are going to burn a hole in me with those green eyes of yours", he smirks.

"I don't think it's physically possible to burn a hole in a dragon", I retort, putting my glass down, "So tell me. What exactly did you do that everyone is so terrified of you?"

"Nothing much," he shrugs it off, "I am filthy rich and demand respect at all times. It's enough."

"I really don't think so," I smile at him, "Otherwise most nobles would get the same kind of treatment. And they don't."

"Alright, I am having dinners with the king here, when the need arrives. Once or twice a year. So, of course, the word spread among the local establishments. And also I am filthy rich and spend a lot here by your standards."

"That's more like it", I chuckle, "One mystery is solved. But why have I never heard of Killian Krauten before?"

"I am here not often, I don't go to noble gatherings and don't participate in anything. I don't own any land and my title is just a title, nothing more. There is no reason for you to hear about me."

"Makes sense", I agree as the waiter brings in our appetizers. We both destroy them one by one pretty quickly as, let's face it, by now we are both starving. And when our first course is brought, we also don't speak much just enjoying the warm delicious food.

"One thing that I like about your Kingdom, Mira," Derrien says in the middle of our second course, "Is the cuisine. It's always exquisite."

"That's only because you are eating in the best restaurants. You should have tried a meal at the Academy! I wonder what you would say then!", I giggle.

"Still, there are things to enjoy here in Akyrian Kingdom," he says as he looks straight at me and not at his food.

"So", I change the subject quickly, "When are you going to tell me that there was more than one murder at the Selection?"

"So, you guessed", he smirks.

"Not really", I confess, "You just "murders" and not "murder" in front of me once, and I kind of started analyzing it from there. And it made sense. Considering that I have joined the Selection later than everyone else. I am a replacement for someone, right?"

"Yes, Mira", he nods slightly, "That's right. Another girl was supposed to be in your place, but she was killed before she even arrived at the castle."

"So, I could have avoided all that if she was alive?", I sigh and meet a tense gaze.

"Do you still wish you haven't come to the Selection?", Rien raises his brow.

"I prefer not to answer this question at this moment in time", I grin at him, using the excuse he used on me before and it makes him snort.

"You are really something, little mage!"

"So, tell me. What exactly happened to that girl and who was she?", I come back to the topic that really interests me.

“Her name was Yana Belfour, the countess of...”

“I know who she is”, I interrupt him, “She was the only heiress of her family and had a carriage accident. Her horses went wild on a bridge and her carriage fell down into a lake! She couldn’t get out... It was the talk of the capital a month ago.”

“As you probably already realize, that wasn’t an accident. And she couldn’t get out because her doors were sealed with magic,” the gerdian says calmly, “She was trapped.”

“Oh, gods!” I cover my mouth, “But why? What could be the reason for someone to start k!lling the girls?”

“There may be very many reasons, Mira. Revenge, hatred, jealousy. It could even be one of the brides getting rid of the compet!tion,” Derrien suggests.

“Well, isn’t everyone gets married in the end?”

“True, but maybe not everyone wants to see certain girls in the Empire?”, the gerdian sighs.

“Well, have you checked if Bella and Yana had someone in common at the Selection?”, I ask.

“Well, they both had you”, he says emotionlessly and I almost spit out my drink.

“You are not serious!”, I meet his gaze.

“Well, you would be my prime suspect if you haven’t joined later than everyone else and if I haven’t been with you during the time of your roommate’s murder,” he then smiles at me, “And if I didn’t get to know you personally...”

“Uh-huh”, I blush, “And how did it happen that you know all the best restaurants and shops but have no idea about Aspen’s artifact?”

“I needed clothes and food, but I have no need for any artifacts. Besides, ours are better anyway,” he replies bluntly and I roll my eyes. Of course, human magic is far too weak for them to pay any attention to it. What was I thinking?!

We walk out of the restaurant an hour later, both in a surprisingly good mood and that's when I bump into him...

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Dereck looks at me with an empty gaze and I try to hide my surprise and look away, tucking hair behind my ear.

"Excuse me, my lady", he bows politely and gives me the way.

"Thank you, sir", I squeak and hurry up, but he catches me by my wrist and I turn to look at him in surprise. I am wearing an illusion! He is not supposed to recognize me!

"I am sorry, my lady, do I know you?", Dereck doesn't break the eye contact with me and doesn't let go.

"N-no," I flinch, "I do not think so."

"Are you sure?", he looks tense, "Have you by any chance been to Larinia?"

Larinia... Larinia is our password of sorts. Our physical training coach took us there once for a race. And it was so brutal that for the rest of the year we were making jokes about it and sending each other "to Larinia" on different occasions.

"I don't think so", I say after I hesitate for just a moment. But he still does not let go.

"I think the lady was clear that she doesn't know you", Derrien intervenes, "Take your hands off her or I'll make you lose them. Both."

"I apologize", Dereck lets go of me and bows politely, "My mistake."

He walks away and I look at the seriously furious gerdian.

He offers me his hand again and I slide mine in, smiling apologetically, "That was close."

"Your friend has a good eye, Mira", Rien states coldly, "Regular people can't see through dark magic illusion, not even a little bit. Unless he is not just a



friend, of course... Is there anything you want to tell me about your relationship?"

"He is just a friend", I bite my lip, "Are you jealous by any chance?"

He pulls me behind a building and into a side street so quickly that I don't even manage to realize it before my back is pressed against a wall and his lips cover mine in a possessive kiss.

"Mira, when this is over, I am taking you to my castle and you are not leaving until I say so!", he growls into my lips.

"Oh my! How terrifying!", I chuckle sarcastically.

And he bends to whisper into my ear with a smug face, "Alright. I heard you."

I blush and slide out of his grasp, "Aspen's shop is this way. Let's go, he is not working till late, so we need to hurry."

I bring him to the artefactor by the shortest road that I know. When we enter the small shop, surprisingly, there is no one inside. Although this is for the best, considering that what we came here for.

Old Aspen is sitting behind a wooden counter in his glasses and clearly working on something. We come closer and I curiously look at what he is doing. Artificerics was never my favourite subject back at the academy, but Aspen is a legend and it's fascinating to see him working on a design of one of his future creations.

"Ah, lady Freyn!", he smiles at me and I gasp. I am pretty sure that I am still wearing the illusion Derrien has created. I look at the gerdian and know that he is surprised as well, but there is not a single emotion on his face to show that.

"How did you know, master Aspen?", I ask.

"You didn't really think you can trick me, did you?", the artefactor chuckles, "I have installed anti illusion crystals in the shop years ago. After all, I have all kinds of people come here. And not people as well." He looks at Rien and I see gerdian smirking at the words.

“Well, then it’s even easier for us since we don’t have to pretend anymore”, Derwood says, “We need information about one of your customers.”

“You are not from here so you don’t know”, the old man shrugs his shoulders, “But the policy of my shop is that every purchase is confidential. I never disclose names of any of my customers.”

“You do realize who you are dealing with and that there are other ways for me to make you talk”, Derrien comes closer, his eyes shining with the cold purple light of dark magic.

“Rien, please!”, I step in front of him and touch his hand, “There is absolutely no need for this here! Master Aspen is a reasonable man!”

“That’s what I am hoping for”, the gerdian smirks not looking at me, “I would hate for lady Freyn to witness something ugly today.”

“Oh, gods!”, I roll my mind and turn to the old man who is watching the scene curiously, not worried even one bit, “Master Aspen, the thing is, that the person who we are looking for is k!lling innocent girls. And we need to find him or her before other people are suffering even more. Could you, please, help us. This person is using your artifacts...”

“Oh my!” Aspen Ludwig is clearly shocked by what he has heard, “This changes everything. But to make sure, I would need you to give me a magical vow...”

“Is the word of a gerdian lord not enough for you?”, Derrien growls.

“Oh for heaven’s sake!”, I roll my eyes and stretch my hand to Aspen, “I am ready to swear this very moment!”

“No, Mira, not you!”, Rien grabs my hand and j.erks me so that I land in his arms, breathing heavily.

The artifactor’s eyes travel from me to the gerdian and then to me again. Before a smile spreads across his face.

“Lady Freyn’s word is enough for me”, he finally says, “So, who are you looking for?”

Derrien gets the brooch that was found in our griffin carriage and hands it to the man.

“Ah, I see”, he nods, “This was a special order.”

“Tell us everything!”, Derrien commands and, after I secretly kick him with my elbow, adds unhappily, “Please.”

“A lady came and put a huge order. She needed many things and the deadline was tight. Most of the artifacts she ordered were common ones but two were custom orders made especially for her. She wanted me to make them into jewellery pieces. The one you have here is paired with a necklace. The brooch is a beacon and the necklace can project the brooch’s location on a map. And the other artifact she ordered was an amplifier. I made it into a ruby hairpin. It looks like a red lily flower with golden leaves around it.”

“Who was that woman, master Aspen?”, I ask the most important question.

“I do not know”, the man shrugs his shoulders, “She was wearing a cape and a mask the whole time. But she had blonde hair and blue eyes. Of that I am sure. Young and beautiful. I am sorry, but this is all I can tell you. She was very discreet.”

“Thank you”, I smiled at the man, “Would it be possible to ask you to write down all the things that were included in her order? And if you could do a quick sketch of the necklace and the hairpin that would be amazing as well.”

“Of course, lady Freyn”, the artifactor smiled and got to work.

When we got out of the shop, it was already getting dark slowly. Light and fun sounds of music somewhere near came to my ears and I realize that this is the first weekend of summer already. Which means...

“Oh, gods! The summer festival has begun!”, I exclaim and look at the gerdian next to me excitedly.

“Is that so?”, he chuckles and I realize that it means absolutely nothing for him.

“Oh, just why are you gerdians so boring?!”, I roll my eyes.

“Boring?”, dark magic flashes in his eyes, “Mira, you would be surprised to know that we could be called a lot of things but boring is not one of them.”

I grin at him and pull him by his hands in the direction of the main square, “Then prove it!”

## **The Selection: Bride Of The Dark Dragon Chapter 50 - Tips**

MIRA

I drag him in the middle of a crowd, laughing on the way every time I see his shocked face. The gerdian did not expect that at all.

My first stop is the fire show, but seeing how bored Derrien is I realize that it would take a lot more than a traveling uneducated human magician to impress him. If anyone should be performing fire tricks here – it’s Derrien himself.

For that same reason, I am not taking him to any of the carousels. The man can fly for gods’ sake.

My next attempt is cotton candy. Who in their right mind wouldn’t like cotton candy?

“It’s terribly sweet”, Rien notices after I forcefully shove a piece into his mouth and I roll my eyes at the remark.

“You don’t go on many dates, do you?”, I snort, enjoying fluffy sweetness.

“No, I don’t. Why, Mira, do you go on many dates?”, magic sparks in his eyes.

“I’ve been engaged since I was 15,” I chuckle, “I haven’t been to a proper date even once! But if I did – I would want it to be it. A date at a summer festival is every girl’s dream.”

“Give me another piece,” he smirks and I tear a little bit of my delicious pink cloud, bringing it closer to his lips. He opens his mouth and I carefully put the candy inside – the next second his teeth close on my finger.

“Ouch!”, I pretend that it hurts although it doesn’t. He smirks and licks my finger, letting it go slowly. The whole motion makes me feel so hot even though it’s a chilly evening.

"You know what, this isn't bad after all," he smirks and brings me to him by my waist, covering my lips with his, "Mmm... So delicious."

"Stop it!", I blush, even though I know that I don't look like myself.

"Alright, little mage," he smiles at me and brushes his hand over my cheek, "What is next?"

We walk to the main square and the music is very loud there with people dancing happily in circles, holding each other's hands and singing our folk songs. I look up at the gerdian next to me and for the first time ever he looks like he is terrified of what he is seeing.

"Don't worry, I am not going to make you do that!", I giggle until tears appear in my eyes, "Look, there is something that's going to be more of your kind of entertainment."

I bring him to a shooting range and pay a coin to the young man with freckles who is managing it.

"What are the rules?", I ask him.

"Hit three goals, my lady, and choose any prize to your liking!" he answers, smiling happily.

"Alright", Derrien smirks, and immediately the three wooden duckies are destroyed with blazes of fire. The flames catch quickly on the fabric wall behind the targets and the boy starts running around, trying to put it down.

"Gods, Rien!" I hiss at my companion, "You are supposed to do it with those balls! Not your magic!"

"My bet", the gerdian waves his hand, and flames disappear, leaving holes in a festive tent, "Hope this is enough."

He throws 10 golden coins to the table and then bends and grabs the biggest bear there is. But after twirling it in his hands, he puts it down and grabs a wooden sword at the other side, wincing at the boy.

"Th-thank you, my lord", the seller collects all his coins happily, but he is still clearly shaken by the whole situation.

“There you go”, Derrien hands me the sword, “You would probably like it more than the stupid soft toy.”

“Oh, you know me too well!”, I flatter my lashes and accept the gift.

We walk through different stalls, looking at what people are selling this year and trying different delicacies, not taking our eyes off each other.

When I see a small boy crying because his mother cannot buy candy for him, I do it instead of her and also give him the wooden sword with Derrien’s permission.

But what happens next – I do not expect. When a famous sweet melody starts, Rien grabs me by my waist in the middle of the square and I recognize his position from one of the gerdian dances they taught us at the Selection. I put my hand in his and we start to move. Step, step, and turn. I turn my head to look at him from behind as his hands slide over mine, soon grabbing me tightly and turning back to face him. Step, step and he lifts me in the air and then puts down slowly, not breaking the eye contact. Step, step, I turn again and only then realize how many people are standing around us, watching our dance and clapping along with the music. I feel how even the tips of my ears get red and at that moment Derrien pulls me back to him and slams his lips into mine while the crowd is raving with excitement. And everything around us seems so magical...

When we get out of the crowds, he pulls me closer again.

“Time to go back, little mage”, he whispers, his voice on the verge of breaking.

“But the most important part is before us”, I say quickly and he sighs.

“What is it?”

“The boats! We make paper boats and put tiny candles inside,” I start explaining rapidly, “Young men send them off on one side of the lake and girls do it on the opposite bank... And if two boats meet then it means that the couple is destined to be together.”

“Do you really believe in this?”, he chuckles, brushing my cheek.

“Of course not!”, I smile, “But it’s fun and it’s an important tradition. ”

"Then we just have to do it!", he kisses my nose.

After we make our boats, I pick a little pink flower in the nearest flower bed and put it inside, "Look, now you can recognize my boat!"

Derrien whispers something and his paper boat turns black, "Now you can recognize mine."

We separate at the bridge and go to different banks of the lake. I walk a bit to get to a place that is not crowded and when I get close to the water I see Rien on the opposite side. I wave at him and he nods.

"Look!", I hear a voice right next to me, "What a handsome lord! I wish my boat touches his!"

A pretty blonde almost pushes me away to send her boat in Derrien's direction. I hold back a laugh and carefully place mine into the water, blowing at it gently to send it off. Standing up, I see hundreds of lights gliding across the smooth water. My boat is right next to three others. And I see at least five coming from the guys' direction. A perfectly white boat almost crashes into mine when it suddenly starts burning and disappears within seconds. I look up at Derrien and see him smirking as his black boat sticks to mine as if they were glued together. A young man next to him swears loudly as it was probably his boat that just got destroyed.

I wave to the girl and gesture that I will meet him back at the bridge.

Turning away, I try to get out of the crowd of girls who wish to send off their own boats. Suddenly, in the middle of all this craziness I bump into someone, and looking up I gasp.

"Talk to me when you can!", Dereck says and puts something cold and metallic into my hand, walking away quickly.

Just how did he recognize me?